

# HIMALAYAN RESEARCH BULLETIN



VOLUME XIV

NUMBERS 1-2

1994

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Volume XIV

Numbers 1 and 2

1994

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# Himalayan Religions in Comparative Perspective: Considerations Regarding Buddhism and Hinduism across their Indic Frontiers

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## Introduction

In 1987 I heard the story of a diplomatic dinner party in Kathmandu, when a Chinese official, commenting on his country's policies in Tibet, admonished American diplomats present for their country's romantic notions about this land. He said, "Of all the people in the world, you Americans should understand our position in Tibet perfectly well. Look at the map! How could we ever relinquish our western frontier! "

The recognition of frontiers is a very fundamental perception, *a priori* for analyzing regional Asian history. Its applicability extends to micro and macro regions,<sup>1</sup> including the Himalayan zone that stretches over 1500 miles from northern Pakistan to highland Burma. The intention of this paper is to establish the utility of organizing the analysis of Himalayan history in terms of core areas and peripheries and to outline, drawing upon comparative studies, the inter-related sociocultural processes involved in trans-regional religious historiography. I also employ this analytical approach to reflect on the comparative historical destinies of the great Indic<sup>2</sup> religions, Buddhism and Hinduism, on their Himalayan and Southeast Asian frontiers.

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere I have applied frontier theory to understanding the history of Newar diaspora communities in Nepal (Lewis and Shakya 1988; Lewis 1993) and Newar-Tibetan relations in the Kathmandu Valley (Lewis and Jampal 1988; Lewis 1989). In a recent conference paper that came to my attention just as the manuscript was in the final stages of preparation, Geoffrey Samuel discusses the need for comparative Himalayan-Southeast Asian inquiries (1994). He touches upon a number of points developed in this essay, emphasizing the need for Himalayanists to reach out beyond regional preoccupation for important methodological/analytical insight and to contribute to the understanding of larger historical processes. That frontier analysis is of proven heuristic value should not be unfamiliar to western intellectuals, given the discourse of American historians on the role of the west in North American history. (This literature is well-known by Chinese and, I suspect, all modern diplomats.) Indeed, future analysis should be to apply frontier studies of North America (Cronon 1983; Miller and Steffen 1977) and China (Lattimore 1962) to South and Southeast Asian contexts.

<sup>2</sup> I prefer Indic to Indian so as not to project modern state boundaries backwards into history. As explained in the text, Indic includes the land area bounded by the Hindu Kush, Himalayas, and Indian Ocean. One central perspective underlying this paper is the notion that both Buddhism and Hinduism share common developments as traditions and that these affected their historical trajectories as they

Translating former frontier spheres of influence into international boundary lines, a feature of global political modernization, remains the chief cause of continuing intra-nation and international dispute across the Himalayan region today (Embree 1977). Frontier categories and perceptions also shed light on the issue of national integration within modern states: the process of developing a state's inner frontiers and assimilating periphery-dwelling minority peoples with core institutions remains one of the chief contemporary problems facing every Asian nation.

## Part I: The Frontier as an Analytical Construct

### Frontiers

In a vocabulary of cultural geography, civilizations have *culture hearth* zones, or advanced centers that exert influence to surrounding regions (Getis et al. 1985: 17). Surrounding them are territories showing gradations in dominance, and there are limits to each hearth's optimal growth. The territories beyond the zone of the core's full control are termed the *periphery*. The *frontier* is the farthest periphery where the predominant systems of production and rule in the core area(s) have not been fully extended (Lattimore 1962). There are *inner frontiers* within polities that for some reason (usually topographic) have not been incorporated; there are as well *boundary frontiers* that define the outer limits of a civilization. Cultural geographers stress that great micro-regional variability characterizes frontier zones, although a set of common qualities can also be discerned (Miller and Steffen 1977; Lamb 1968).

Edmund Leach views frontiers anthropologically and points out that traditions of the culture hearth can be readily transplanted beyond political boundaries. He defines the frontier as a dynamic border zone through which cultures interpenetrate:

The whole of "Burma" is a frontier region continuously subjected to influences from both India and China and so also the frontiers which separated the petty political units within "Burma" were not clearly defined lines but zones of mutual interest. The political entities in question had interpenetrating political systems, but they were not separate countries inhabited by distinct populations. This concept of a frontier as a border zone through which cultures interpenetrate in a dynamic manner... needs to be distinguished clearly from the precise MacMahon lines of modern political geography (Leach 1961:50).

The Himalayan region can be compared not only to other high altitude zones (Guillet 1983) but also to other frontiers. The often mind-boggling complexity of Himalayan cultures and peoples stems from the mountainous region being a *dual frontier*, a zone of Indo-Tibetan intersection,<sup>3</sup> linked to multi-centric core or hearth zones north and south, and with Tibetan civilization in its formative history (pre-

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reached and adapted to their frontiers. In future studies of Buddhism, I plan on pursuing the periphery and core as areas generating the tradition's innovative or orthodox consolidations, respectively.

As this is a provisional-exploratory paper and for space limitations, I have also not tried to nuance in depth the internal Indic zones. David Sopher's article, "The Geographic Patterning of Culture in India," (1978) is quite definitive although in the view expressed in this paper, it should extend to Southeast Asia in a single socioreligious historical field. Micro-regional analysis relating specific mid-montane centers--Kashmir, Kathmandu, Assam, plus others--to core Tibetan and core Indic core zone(s) is needed in Himalayan studies.

<sup>3</sup>Writing in the present, of course, requires the internationally-recognized designation of "China" in this formulation. During periods when Chinese imperial power was strong and circumstances arose, there were clearly "Sino-Tibetan" influences across the Himalayan frontier. In the history of Kashmir, trade and religious relationships with China began at least as early as the Gupta era (Lewis and Riccardi 1995). Evidence of official Chinese presence in the central Himalayas dates from 636 CE (Levi 1900; Slusser 1982: 36) and is institutionalized intermittently through the tribute exchanges that existed from 1415 until the turn of this century between the Nepal durbar and the Chinese court (Manandar and Misra 1986). Beginning with Tibet's Fifth Dalai Lama (1650), aristocrats and monasteries allied with the Chinese imperium controlled highland society until 1911.

1200) shaped by Indic culture. Leach's comparative framework should be noted in Himalayan studies because it demonstrates a close ethnohistorical parallel: both the Himalayas and highland Southeast Asia were dual frontiers shaped by independent hill peoples resisting or making accommodations with Sino-Tibetan peoples to the north, while to the south expansive lowland centers introduced intensive rice cultivation and Indic traditions of state organization/ideology, Buddhist monasticism, Indic deities, and Brahman ritualists.<sup>4</sup>

### Ecology

Any understanding of frontier dynamics must be founded upon the analysis of ecological processes. An important work demonstrating this is historian William Cronon's *Changes in the Land*; although it is concerned with North America, it is particularly germane since it treats contact along a frontier in ecological terms and as a dialectic between already-settled "tribal" peoples interacting with colonizers:

Our analysis of ecological change must inevitably focus on differences between the human communities that existed on opposite sides: differences in political organization, in systems of production, and in human relationships with the natural world. The shift from Indian to English dominance in New England saw the replacement of an earlier village system of shifting agriculture and hunter-gatherer activities by an agriculture which raised crops and domesticated animals in household production units that were contained within fixed property boundaries and linked with commercial markets. (1983: 161-2)

Cronon illustrates how frontier historiography must account for the changes migrants introduced, demonstrating how more intensive agricultural or pastoral subsistence systems, including imported technologies, transformed local ecosystems.

Pioneering this approach, anthropologist Morton Fried long ago specified three central factors that must be accounted for when investigating zones in which societies meet:

These factors are geography, ecology, and social organization; they do not work singly but always in tandem. Geography, the spatial distribution of natural environmental features about the earth, plays a significant role in setting the place and time of contact. It also conditions the continuity and intensity of subsequent contacts and eventually may offer a source of refuge for the conservative elements of a culture threatened by change from the outside. Ecology, the interaction of man as a cultural animal with his environment through the medium of technology, plays an even more direct part in deciding the broad nature of acculturation. Finally, the forms of social organization, especially as they are expressed in systems of land tenure, are invariably decisive. (1952: 315)

Fried's agenda provides a heuristic starting point in the analysis of Himalayan and comparative frontier ethnohistory: "The critical diagnostic clue is the difference between the ways in which exploitative rights to strategic resources are distributed in the two societies" (ibid.). The eco-geographical constant across the Indic frontiers is a preference for alluvial lands suitable for intensive rice cultivation (Uhlig 1976) and bovine husbandry (Simoons 1970). The logic of settlement and state expansion followed this preference and shaped the history of core Indic and Indicized civilizations (Schwartzberg 1977). This tendency of peoples to settle and subsist in consistent patterns of ecological adaptation (Guillet 1983; Iijima 1964) is the basis for the niche theory of human settlement history that

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<sup>4</sup>Joseph Schwartzberg's definition of the core Indic process can be used to conceptualize frontier history: "Before the beginning of the medieval period [pre-647 AD], most of the more favored alluvial and coastal plains, and the better agricultural lands in general, had been effectively and permanently settled. At such a stage in history a tendency to intensify agriculture on the better lands in preference to clearing forests for new settlements in more poorer environments may have set in. That tendency would lead in turn to a greater density of settlement in the favored areas and a substantial increase in both total population and felt population pressure (1977: 220)."

was outlined by Frederik Barth for the NW Himalayas (1956: 1088; Barth 1969).<sup>5</sup> Resulting migration corridors must be linked to trade networks and the social history of polities as they formed, as these factors shaped resource exploitation, ethnic group settlement, cultural diffusion, and regional history (Messerschmidt 1982). Walter Zelinsky's "doctrine of first effective settlement" would seem apt for examining frontier zone ethnohistory.<sup>6</sup>

### Galactic Polities across Indic Frontiers

Large pan-regional social networks organized frontier history, as such resource connections (material and personnel) to core zones provided for population expansion in many spheres. S.J. Tambiah has used the term "galactic polity" to characterize the formation pattern of Indic and Indicized Asia: an ordered set of geopolitical relationships dominated by a capital center to which are bound a network of sub-centers which themselves replicate the larger order (1976: 102-131). These planetary sub-systems extend the galactic polity of a state down to three or more levels of articulation. Tambiah (1977) underlines the impermanence of Indic galactic states by emphasizing the regularity of systemic "pulsation", i.e. the waves of change that moved across the network with the rising and falling of dominant centers.

Reserving fuller discussion of the mercantile dimension of Indicization (below), for the moment it is important to underline the close linkage between trade diaspora history and galactic state formation among indigenous peoples (Hirth 1978). Writing about Southeast Asia, Paul Wheatley has emphasized:

Both *ksatriya* colonies and mercantile corporations were potentially able to expand and diversify the customary livelihoods and goals of neighboring tribesmen. Those individuals with the most compelling reasons to change the old order of society--presumably those members of the chiefly class who, by acting as spokesmen for their tribes, came to function as intermediaries between the tribe and the intrusive aliens--would have manipulated the new alternatives. . . to achieve some degree of freedom from the restrictive bonds of tribal custom. . . for dealing with seasonal traders. . . the concept of the god-king would have proved especially attractive. . . We have seen that divine kingship. . . also involved a partnership between *ksatriya* and brahman. (Wheatley 1975: 242)

Although the Himalayan frontier's extreme terrain and lower demographic thresholds make the galactic polity more dispersed and less developed than the classical lowland Indic and Southeast Asian ideal, frontier analysis is nonetheless useful for investigating the comparative ethnohistory of the regions (Stiller 1973; Lewis and Shakya 1988; Lewis 1993). Contrary to the edict reputed to D.G. Hogarth--"The Sanskrit tongue was chilled to silence at 500 meters" (cited in Wheatley 1975: 251)--it was less the cold and more the costs of overextending hill conquests by galactic Indic states that limited Brahman migration (Schwartzberg 1977: 223). The long-established Pahari Brahman settlements in the central Himalayas--the mid-montane region to 7,500 feet (Hitchcock 1974)--testify that the logic of kin/state galactic networks--not altitude--shaped the extensions of Indic frontiers.

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<sup>5</sup>The related cultural geography paradigm of "culture area" may also be cited as useful for macro-regional overview. Gerald Berreman has done a definitive culture area mapping of the Himalayan region (Berreman 1963; Iijma 1961). Riccardi and I used a similar "ethnographic region" approach in our overview treatment of the Himalayas (1995). As Berreman points out, however, this formalist approach has limited use for more small-scale analysis and for discerning variable ethnohistorical processes, including the scope of modern changes. The frontier paradigm seeks to link landform and human ecological variables with changing systematic relations that shape ethnic settlement and sociocultural change.

<sup>6</sup>"Whenever an empty settlement, or any earlier population, is dislodged by invaders, the specific characteristics of the first group able to effect a viable, self-perpetuating society are of crucial significance for the later social and cultural geography of the area, no matter how tiny the initial band of settlers may have been." (Quoted in Getis: 154)

From 1200 CE onward, the Himalayas became a dual frontier and a Tibetan polity formed in classical galactic organization. Eventually, it contested with small mid-montane centers for regional political dominance and cultural influence. In a few known instances we see the common Indic conversion process, centered on Mahāyāna Buddhism, being exerted back into the mid-montane zone from the north. The account of the Tibetan state's first contact with the Lepchas of northern Sikkim demonstrates this dramatically:

Later the sons of *zo khe bu* and their families [central Tibetan nobility] came down to Sikkim with their followers, invaded and conquered the country. . . . At that time Lamaism had nearly reached its peak in Tibet, and the second son. . . . introduced it into Sikkim. They collected all the Lepcha manuscripts and books containing the historical records, mythology, legends, laws, literature, etc. of the Lepchas and burned them. They took the ashes to the high hills and blew them into the air and built Lamaist monasteries on the hills from which they had scattered the ashes. . . . and forced the Lepcha scribes to translate the Lamaist scriptures . . . and venerate them (Siiger 1967: 28).

More will be said below about the dual frontier concept--China/Indic--applied to Southeast Asia (Coedes 1964).

### Frontier Penetration by Religious Institutions and Elites

Suitably adapted to the terrain and specific variables, the galactic polity also helps map the expansion pattern of Buddhist and Hindu institutions in their colonizing new territories (Tambiah 1976: 174). Indic pan-Himalayan expansion and the settlement of merchants (Wheatley 1975), Brahmans, Sannyasins, and Buddhist monks (B. Miller 1960; R. Miller 1962) across the region's inner frontiers occurred on the basis of such networks. In certain polities such as Licchavi Nepal (400-800 CE) (Riccardi 1979), in Champa, Burma, and Funan in mainland Southeast Asia (Coedes 1971: 32-5; Aung-Thwin 1985), it was through royal tax-free land grants that Brahmans, *aśramas*, *mathas*, and *vihāras* became new landlords and allies of rulers extending their kingdoms into frontier regions. Hall has developed a nuanced portrait of how temples and monasteries were likewise powerful institutions of frontier assimilation: controlling land, labor, investment, local redistribution, technology, as well as providing symbols of social integration (Hall 1985: 136-168; Aung-Thwin 1985: 27). Patronage and loyalty to these institutions defined "civilized" status and articulated group boundaries. In both cases there is evidence of the Buddhist *saṃgha* accepting the official duty of administering local justice (Riccardi 1979: 271; Lingat 1950; Takakasu 1896).

The early history of prominent Himalayan central places (Kashmir, Nepal Valley, Assam, Tsaparang, Lhasa) conforms in many respects to the ancient trans-Indic frontier pattern (Kosambi 1965; Ray 1986), including coevolutionary ties to traders and the galactic state: "...the royal temple-city was a center of diffusion of Indian customs and beliefs, with the less prestigious foundations of royal scions and aristocratic commoner families functioning as secondary centers of diffusion (Wheatley 1975: 249)." This process of frontier development was simultaneously religious, as the polity's economic system became ". . . one great oblation organized for the appeasement of the gods of the Indian pantheon, and thus designed to maintain that harmony between macrocosm and microcosm. . . [creating] a continuous and massive movement of products from villages towards nodes in a network of ceremonial centers (Wheatley 1975: 252-3)." This pattern is abundantly clear in the Himalaya as well.

Here I must underline that Indic religions--and, in my view, all world religions--must be seen *inter alia* as agents of conversion suited to the reality of frontier interactions (cf. I.M. Lewis 1980: 4-98; Bowden 1982; Hutchinson 1987) on every level implied by the historical term "tradition" (Shils 1981). Doctrinally, both Indic Buddhism and Hinduism represent powerful ideological formulations of spiritual conquest. Texts recount founders converting local deities, and saints conquering indigenous ritualists and demons. Both traditions seek to subjugate indigenous shamanism and shaman cosmological systems, as documented most recently for the Himalayas by Stan Mumford (1989). Reinstating the vanquished divinities (*nagas*, *yaksas*, etc.) as protectors is a common theme in the popular literature of both traditions (Bloss 1973). Such doctrinal and mythic assertions are both metaphors of and prescriptions for

the "civilizing" transformations that the missionary institutions of Buddhism and Hinduism established across frontiers (Falk 1973).

Thus, far from capitals and the large religious institutions of the culture hearth, and far from the grand patrons and ceremonial/scholastic centers where the greatest masters normally resided, religious institutions and practitioners in frontier zones at times made unique accommodations, often quite anomalous to the orthodox.<sup>7</sup> The logic of Himalayan frontier adaptation led Parbatiya-Brahmans (Berreman 1960), Tamang lamas (Holmberg 1989), and Newar *bhiksus* (Gellner 1992) to modify core traditions in their settlements. Both the Buddhist missionary attitude (Lamotte 1988: 78ff) and the Hindu *dharmastras* (Sharma 1992) laud adaptation and compromise to difficult circumstances, seeing that classical orthodoxy and orthopraxy must adapt to the needs of survival.

#### The Frontier's Effect on "Hearth Centers"

This heterodox tendency was not always uniform, however: at certain times and places, frontier areas are known to have been important--sometimes pivotal--areas of historical interaction with the core, or capital zones. Occasionally, frontier settlements were important in the on-going dialectical relationships that shaped the major topics of cultural discourse across the entire civilization.<sup>8</sup> At such times, periphery satellites were more independent-minded and free to develop alternative intellectual formulations or norms of praxis. This phenomenon is clear in the Himalayan and Southeast Asian regions, as biographies of saints and aristocrats<sup>9</sup> recount their movement from periphery or inner frontiers to the center, and back again.<sup>10</sup> Deposed politicians, wandering teachers, forest monks, and

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<sup>7</sup>From within the traditions, such compromises represent a decision that keeping the tradition alive overruled the strict adherence to core rules. The dharmas`a-stra's category of "times of distress" covered the frontier situation exactly.

<sup>8</sup>In North American history, the idea of the "wild west" and the wilderness has exerted such influence in the Europeanization of the continent.

<sup>9</sup>The widespread travels of prominent Buddhist scholars and saints from India and Tibet should be seen as both spiritual outreach and from the perspective of institutional missionizing (Wylie 1964; Lewis and Jampal 1988; Jackson 1984). Tambiah's study of modern Thai saints (1984) demonstrates the same dialectic.

<sup>10</sup>The historical sources reveal such figures entering the Himalayas from both the Indic and Tibetan hearth culture zones. Religious traditions contain many examples of this center-periphery dialectic. Benares, arguably the prime center of north Indian religious civilization, has numerous shrines and cults representing deities from the Himalayas: prominent examples are Assam's Kamakhya-devi- and Saivite sites associated with Mount Kailash. According to Diana Eck's research, the extremely popular Annapurna vrata performed in Benares was secured by a man going from there to Kamakhya in order to bring this deity and her ritual traditions back to Benares (1982: 162-3).

In the first millennium after the rise of Buddhism, Kashmir became a key center of Brahmanical and Buddhist scholarship that influenced the later evolution of both traditions back in the core culture areas. Aspirants from all over India traveled there to learn from highland pandits and returned to their home regions.

Historical references establish core-periphery ties to Southeast Asia as well. The Burmese repeatedly restored and rebuilt the Bodh Gaya shrine after the eclipse of Buddhism in the Gangetic basin (Lamotte 1988: 316). Srivijaya was also linked to Buddhist India: Javanese kings built viha-ras in Nalanda in 860 CE and 1005 (Coedes 1971: 109) and a Buddhist temple on the Coromandel coast, also in 1005 CE (Coedes, 141). Atisa in 1050 AD studied in Srivijaya, became abbot of Vikramas`i-la, then traveled to Nepal and Tibet as a Buddhist missionary.

Central Tibetan history also shows a similar dialectical relationship (Lattimore 1940: 209ff). Individuals from the outer rim of Tibetan kingdoms--Ladakh, Guge, Kham, Amdo--continually appear in all eras of central Tibetan history. Tibetan Buddhist monastic recruitment flowed from periphery to core (Snellgrove 1967). Old traditions banished from the centers are often later re-introduced from the



religious institution builders all moved naturally to their polity's frontier to develop their followings and return.

The core-periphery relations in Buddhist institution building by forest monks meshes with political organization and is fundamental to understanding the frontier dynamism of Buddhist polities, Himalayan and Southeast Asia. As Tambiah states:

Starting as little-endowed fraternities, and locating themselves on forest edges on the frontiers of advancing settlements, the forest monks could act as elite carriers of literate civilization and could serve as foci for the collective religious activities and moral sentiments of frontier settlements. It is an alliance of this sort, a paired relationship between founding kings. . . with expansionist ambitions and the ascetically vigorous forest monks at the moving edge of human habitation. . . that domesticated the local cults and incorporated them within a Buddhist hierarchy and cosmos. (1984: 69)

### **Middlemen and Diaspora Traders**

Across the polities of the Indic frontiers, merchants were another major influence on economic, religious, and political evolution. Peoples from the hearth zones possessing core kin/patron connections and cultural traditions became middlemen, exploiting their dual connections. This is evident in two (often overlapping) elemental areas: merchandisers, carrying in goods from distant sites that were sought for their advanced technology (iron, ceramic, etc.), luxury, or religious value; and lenders holding excess gold/silver/money, for borrowing at interest. (This was a ready vehicle for acquiring local land through loan defaults.<sup>11</sup>)

On the micro-regional level, the need for artisan services also sustained semi-nomadic communities of diaspora blacksmiths and potters, as well as painters, sculptors, and architects (Bue 1985, 1986). In the modern era, entrepreneurial capitalists seeking laborers, British and Indian military seeking mercenary recruits, and government functionaries with access to state institutions (such as the army or the courts) were yet other modes of the diaspora middleman.<sup>12</sup> Thus, migration responded to niches, to use the adapted ecological term, where different societies of middlemen have exploited their intermediary positions.

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frontiers along with new innovations. For example, Bon tradition was spread to the northeast and eastern frontiers and to the Himalayas (especially Mustang and Dolpo) due to its banishment at the time of Padmasambhava (Hoffman 1975: 104-5; Mumford 1989).

<sup>11</sup>The profitable penetration of the frontier by money lenders from the Indic core economy has been documented in the modern period by Wahlquist: "Rapid development. . . in the upper Arun Valley has had the effect of linking peasant households there, in a chain of successive credit relationships, to Indian industrial enterprises, and to the North-Indian capitalist system. This mercantile system, which channels cloth in one direction and money in the other, is, from a formal, structural point of view, of a dendritic type. . . An important feature of this system is that it serves to increase continuously the level of indebtedness of the hills in relation to the plains. . . the people in the hills of Nepal are running a deficit economy, importing far more than they earn in exports, becoming more and more dependent on credit supplied by the plains, and eventually on India and the outside world." (1981: 231). Another analysis of the modern world system's exploitation of Nepalese hill peoples is found in Mikesell (1988).

<sup>12</sup>Another avenue of applied frontier theory that is not taken up here is in the field of international development. In the attitudes that westerners bring to working in Nepal, and in the practices many employ, I would argue that frontier sensibilities and attitudes inform--and thwart--the process (Lewis 1986). It is on the development frontier where many individuals are given opportunities to plan and implement programs they are not intellectually prepared for or credentialed to perform in their home region.

The participation of merchants in the extension of Indic civilization proceeded alongside military and political actions. Profit surpluses from trade could be used to pioneer new sites into the trade network, invest in the extension of crop lands, and for banking (Thapar 1980: 9). Supplying armies was a critical state need and lucrative merchant speciality, as expansion networks of trade and early states were virtually congruent (Lewis and Shakyā 1988). An important contrast between Hinduism and Buddhism in trade must be emphasized: Buddhist ethical codes accepted usury banking, a practice prohibited of Brahmans except "in dire times" by the *dharmasūtras* (Thapar 1980: 9).

Diaspora trade networks, mercantile-entrepreneurial webs of import/export, were often in the hands of single ethnic groups with their own core zones in one, often quite distant, central place (Curtin 1984). Diaspora traders relied on business acumen, shared capital, family partners stationed in strategic venues, and diplomatic skills. This often lucrative livelihood was a pervasive global phenomenon; diaspora trade depended upon the protection of great empires and was weakened by their downfall (Stein 1965: 56-7).

In Southeast Asia, the role of Buddhist diaspora merchants was especially formative in the Indicization process: "Buddhism. . . by rejecting brahmanical ideas of racial purity and the ensuing fear of pollution through contact with *mlecchas*, did much to dispel the Hindu repugnance to travel (Wheatley 1975: 234). "Hindu diaspora merchants of south India did indeed dominate in insular Southeast Asia in later periods (Stein 1965; Sharma 1992). In the Himalayas, too, a wide variety of diaspora trade networks existed. Prominent Kashmiri, Bengali, and Marwari traders figure prominently in Nepal's history alongside Nepalese Buddhist traders of Newar, Thakali, Sherpa and Manangi ethnic backgrounds (Furer-Haimendorf 1976; Lewis and Shakyā 1988). In 1685, there was even an Eurasian Armenian trade network through the region extending up to Lhasa (Khachikian 1966). The interdependence of merchants, Buddhism, and the first Southeast Asian polities must be stressed:

Those who traded with the Chinese and Indian markets in the name of the Srivijaya ruler could claim prestige appropriate to those who came into contact with this great patron of the Mahayana Buddhist school. Buddhism thereby allowed Southeast Asian realms that followed the Vietnam and Srivijaya examples prestige in the channels of communication, raising their status above the "barbarian" image. . . providing the basis for intellectual as well as commercial interaction among the states that participated in the international maritime route. (Hall 1985: 37-8)

#### Indic Law and Statecraft

The role of religious law as guiding principle in Indic civilization has long been emphasized. The *dharmasūtras* and *arthaśāstras* were used by Hindu colonists

. . . and early Hindu states of the Himalayas and Southeast Asia (Coedes 1971: 254ff). Sharma's recent study of the *Manusmṛiti* shows how its doctrine that all peoples were originally part of the caste organization of creation did indeed provide the basis for a missionary Hinduism (1992: 179). The eleventh book of the *Arthaśāstra*, the Hindu guide to statecraft, complements this theory, providing extensive and specific guidelines for "breaking up free, powerful, armed tribes" (Kosambi 1965: 145).

Less well-known is that there were also Buddhist transpositions of these law books put into use in Southeast Asia. Lingat's studies have noted the trans-regional influence of an early Mon code written in Pali, the *Dhammasatthams*. Though mirroring the *Manavadharmasūtra* in organization and general orientation, this Theravada Buddhist-oriented code changes the origin myth (a Chakravartin in a Buddhist cosmos), pronounces less severe judicial punishments, and does not insist upon the necessity of strict caste and marriage rules (Lingat 1950: 293).<sup>13</sup> Indic *pūjas*, however, were still the Brahmanical

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<sup>13</sup>Due to the early debates in Buddhological circles on the attitude of the Buddha to caste, the association of Buddhist tradition with caste practices may seem irregular, but such a view is contrary to the history of the Indo-Tibetan tradition. In fact, there is no inherent incompatibility between Buddhist

prerogative. We have already noted trans-regional evidence for the Buddhist *sam.ghas* administering civil powers in their localities.<sup>14</sup>

One final legal point of great demographic significance on frontiers is both *dharmas`a-stras`* position on ethnic identity in cases of frontier inter-marriage: Indian fathers marrying local women have children who retain the ethnic status of the father (Wheatley 1975: 245). (Other religious issues pertaining to the respective frontier zones adaptations are cited in Part III.)

### Summary of Indicization

Using the terms of frontier analysis, Indicization should be seen as an integrated process that converts and absorbs tribal peoples ecologically, politically, linguistically, religiously, and economically. It suggests a general continuity and expansion, from the ancient Gangetic plains over two thousand years ago until the present. Subsistence tended toward intensification and as thresholds of land use and population were reached, local polities grew, expanded, and divided, all in galactic fashion. As Romila Thapar describes:

As a continuing process in Indian history, in areas beyond the Ganges valley, the pattern of change from lineage based societies to state systems is a recurrent pattern . . . Where clan lands lay juxtaposed with monarchies, clan ownership was eroded by the conquest of the area or encroachment of the monarchical system through the clearing of waste land and the establishment of agricultural settlements. Ruling clans took on ksatriya status and with the breakup of clan-held lands the lesser ksatriya families claimed ownership over private holdings. . .

As local elites emulated the lifestyle of the monarchies and included in this was patronage of courtly literature in Sanskrit, the building of temples, the granting of land to brahmins learned in the Veda, and the encouraging of a new phase of Hinduism reflected in the Puranic texts. Those who were reduced to the condition of peasant tenants were given the rank of sudras as also were those who worked as artisans and craftsmen. Trade in the early stages remained the occupation of the outsider, though gradually the wealthier local families were inducted into this circuit as well. (1980: 11)

Adding the complicating coevolution of Buddhism in both the Himalayas and Southeast Asia, this Indicization paradigm forms the basis of a comparative frontier historiography.

## Part II: Ethnohistorical Processes on Indic Frontier Zones

Himalayan frontier history has been shaped by each sub-region's relationship to Tibet and to India, as well as, after 400 CE, by emerging secondary core areas in the mid-montane zone--Kashmir, Nepal

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doctrine and a caste society. Although there is debate on the hierarchy of aspirant groups, with the Buddhists arguing for the superiority of the *bhiksus* over the Bra-hman.s and the Buddha over all devas, Buddhist traditions, especially on the popular story-telling level, clearly equate high caste rebirth with good karma and the innate proclivity for advanced spiritual attainment. Likewise, those groups at the bottom, especially Chandalas, are looked down upon even by "good Buddhists" in the *Jataka* and other texts (Rhys-Davids 1901: 869) of both the Hinayana and Mahayana schools. Buddhism has existed in Nepal and Sri Lanka amidst a caste-organized society for over 1500 years (Stablein 1978: 532). Even in Tibet, untouchable-like groups were recognized (Gombo 1984).

<sup>14</sup>Evidence for sastras on the frontier is found in scattered sources: for Nepal, see Riccardi 1979 and Hofer 1979; for Kashmir, see Stein 1979; for central Tibet, see Pathak 1974; for Southeast Asia, see Lingat 1950, Tambiah 1976, Sutterheim 1929 and Coedes 1971: 165.

Valley, Assam.<sup>15</sup> Southeast Asia's history as a frontier shows similar chronology and analogous historical patterns, substituting southern China for Tibet in the equation. The dating of each region's first Sanskrit epigraphy yields the following comparison:

Himalayan	Southeast Asian
Kashmir 250 BCE	Burma 500 CE
Nepal 464 CE	Menam Basin 400-500 CE (Modern Thailand)
Assam 400-500 CE	Cambodia 200-300 CE
	Champa (Modern Vietnam)
	Malay Peninsula 300 CE
	Borneo 300 CE
<i>Lewis and Riccardi 1995</i>	<i>Coedes 1971: 36-45</i>

This pattern is likely related to demographic increases in the Indic core zone and continuing out-migrations from there that seem to have led to simultaneous population thresholds reached across the outer frontier zones (Schwartzberg 1977). This synchronicity might also be correlated with the effects of strong Gupta rule in north India, whereby imperial peace and prosperity facilitated maximal merchant and religious travel, prosperity in the periphery satellites, and the need for frontier settlements, at least in the Himalayan zone, to consolidate in the face of the empire's military might (Coedes 1964: 12-13). (Centuries later, the Pala dynasty also fostered similar pan-frontier interactions and trans-regional Mahayana Buddhist developments.)

For the Southeast Asian centers, the role of Chinese imperial forces, especially their ability to intervene on its border frontiers, clearly shaped the emergence of great kingdoms. As George Coedes has noted:

Events in China have had a very definite influence on the history of overseas India. The Chinese have never found the establishment of powerful empires to their liking, from which it was less easy to demand the tribute of vassality and trade facilities. . . and it is a fact worth noting that the periods of apogee of Funan, of Cambodia and the Javanese and Sumatran kingdoms, generally correspond to the weaker periods of the great Chinese dynasties (1964: 13).

In both frontier areas, settlements and petty kingdoms formed where subsistence came easiest. Subsequently, dominant civilizations from the north and south slowly extended their frontiers into the mountains. Established peoples--themselves once migrants that settled, intermarried, and spoke a local dialect--were constantly absorbing and assimilating later immigrants, assisted by the universal religions: state Hinduism and trans-ethnic Buddhism (see below). Drawing upon their core relationships, colonists consciously sought to promote sociopolitical reorganization, trade, and introduce religious systems that, on the ground, meshed with and coordinated material transformations. The summary of Indicization in South India by Burton Stein acknowledges these interlocking historical processes:

These nuclear areas were integrated in administration, particularly during periods of important political and military consolidation. . . ; religiously, through numerous

<sup>15</sup>Nepal was explicitly recognized as early as Gupta times, with kingdoms in the mountains referred to as *pranta*, i.e. border kingdoms outside of full hegemony (Monier-Williams, 707). The peoples of such regions were referred to as *avijiti* "not fully subdued" (Rocher 198 : ms4).

settlements of brahmans, the priestly elite, and through Hindu temples; and socially and economically through caste groups and assemblies. . . Finally, integration was achieved through the activities of merchant organizations and trade. (Stein 1965: 53)

We now turn in this section to historical continuities and Himalayan-Southeast Asian comparisons.

### **Indic/Valley People vs. Hill "Tribals"**

There is a similar historical pattern of interaction between Valley people and mountain people. Demographically, the Himalayas and Southeast Asia showed common stages of historical geographic settlement: until very recent times, both regions had low population densities and settlements were interspersed with large wilderness tracts. Both were also ruled from relatively isolated regional centers and most people in these polities were farmers dwelling in small villages. The trade relations linking Valley intensive- rice settlements with tribal peoples of the hills and forests could be quite enduring (cf. Skinner 1964).

The Indicized kingdoms of Pagan, Dvaravati, Cambodia, and Funan extended their domains up the trade routes and into the larger valleys of their highland northern regions. Edmund Leach has described this process in Burma as the interaction between the "Chinese-related hill people" who maintain local, clan-based social systems and the lowland peoples who were transformed by Indic culture and social norms (1961: 50). Thus, the history of both the Himalayas and Southeast Asia was shaped by independent upland peoples resisting or making accommodations with lowland centers that were organized by Indic-styled states situated in areas of intensive rice cultivation.

### **Indic Civilizations and Ecological Transformation**

Special prominence must be given to the ecological impact of rice cultivation and the introduction of domesticated cattle. The correlation of expansive Indic traditions involved an interlocking scenario: settlements developed in watersheds amenable to intensive rice cultivation where first the forests were burnt and/or cut, deeds extolled by Brahmanical texts. Grazing cattle's role in degrading forest lands peripheral to settlements, while providing both traction and dung for fertilizer on cleared agricultural tracts, continues to transform remaining Himalayan and Southeast Asian "inner frontiers" today. As Simoons summarizes, "The incorporation of tribal peoples into the Hindu religious system alters their traditional reluctance to use milk, and creates a demand for dairy products for religious ceremonies and food. Commonly involved, too, are changes in patterns of agriculture and animal husbandry" (1970: 577) In upper Burma, Hindu Nepali immigrants from pre-British times were instrumental in introducing these changes (ibid. 570). Thus, there is a common history of ecological change: in the mountainous regions of the Himalayas and SE Asia, polities were transformed by intensive rice-bovine subsistence allied with the expansion of Indic traditions: Buddhist monasticism, Hindu temples to Siva and Vishnu, Brahman ritualists, etc. Sylvain Levi long ago noted this ideological-ecological pattern:

Even jungle tribes aspire to possess their own Bramans. The Bra-hman.a, who is brought in through enticement or by raids, begins to recognize in the fetishes of the clan the disguised avatar of his divinities; he then discovers that the genealogy in use by the chief of the clan has a relationship to the epic cycles; in return, he imposes his practices, especially the respect for the cow, the initial article of his credo. . . The adoption...brought in its train the Indian way of life. . .<sup>16</sup>

### **A Note on Himalayan-Southeast Asian Migrations.**

An important hardly-understood commonality between mainland Southeast Asia and the Himalayas is that both regions were likely subject to formative migrations from the SW frontier of China in their very early histories. This inference of related population movements is based on the content of myths

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<sup>16</sup>Levi as quoted in Coedes 1971: 25. 17. In the Ja-takama-la-, the well-traveled collection of Buddhist birth stories, story number seven includes a tale about Agastya, a Brahmin who travels to the island Kara "in the Southern sea" and while still performing his caste rites, including the fire sacrifice, converts to Buddhism (Speyer 1982: 46-55).

and the linguistic affinities between the Tibeto-Burman peoples of the central and eastern Himalayas and upland Burmese and Thai populations. A recent historical-linguistic study has hypothesized population movements in a migration corridor from NW China (the modern Ch'inghai) into both regions (Suwa 1989: 3). Although very little is known from archaeological study about this early and formative epoch, the hypothesis of pan-regional migration corridors still seems plausible and is assumed by linguistic historians (e.g. Genetti 1987). Scattered later historical sources mention several other Himalayan-Southeast Asian migration corridors. One was through Assam, upper Burma, and Yunnan (Coedes 1971: 28-9). A King of Nanchao allied with Tibet to oppose China around 760 CE (Coedes, 95); Mahayana religious influences are evident there and likely were brought to upper Burma in Nanchao's conquest of upper Burma soon thereafter (Duroiselle 1915-6). In a later era, the Thai kingdom of Sukhothai conquered Assam in 1229 (Coedes, 190). Burmese and Thai hermit monk traditions also refer to the Himalayas as sites for spiritual retreat.

### Part III. Topics in Frontier Religion: Brahman and Bhiksu; Mahayana Buddhist Networks

The Himalayas share with mainland Southeast Asia (and Sri Lanka) common traits as cultural frontiers of India, despite differing in their specific religious histories. In the central mid-montane Himalayan region today, Hindu traditions have been ascendant and there has been the gradual extension of caste-based societies; still, Buddhism has endured in the most marginal highland areas (inner frontiers) among Tibeto-Burman peoples, among the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, and quite recently, among Tibetan refugees. In Mainland Southeast Asia today, the reverse situation evolved: the Buddhist viha-ra dominated and Brahmanical caste traditions and Hinduism were subordinated. But the royal and village Brahmins of these polities have also endured. Unlike their counterparts in Nepal, however, the village Brahmins of Southeast Asia (and Sri Lanka) have been integrated but subsumed in the local polities and overall cultural life dominated by Theravada Buddhism. Many Thai Brahmins (called *Prahn* in Thai) even take short-term initiations into the Theravada *samgha* (Tambiah 1970).

This is an especially intriguing difference, since in both places the competing Hindu and Buddhist constituencies still remain in place (unlike in the hearth region, where Buddhism has disappeared). There are several important topics that must be addressed on the way to answering in provisional form this "reversal of destiny" question.

#### Brahmins and Bhiksus.

The record of these religious specialists in frontier history is still not adequately documented. In both regions, Brahman palace ministers were key historical figures and the institution of the Brahman ritualist was established at the capitals and emulated throughout these polities down to the regional and even village level (Tambiah 1970; Esterik 1973). Hitchcock's study of Pahari/Tibeto-Burman contact in the central Himalayas demonstrates the logic of

Brahman and Ksatriya family expansion based upon state patronage, lineage inheritance and land-tenure norms (1974; see also Peet 1978). In Hindu Cambodia, state-allied temples mirrored the forming of the state bureaucracy, becoming the dominant institutions in the early centuries of Khmer rule (Hall 1985). In this way, Brahmanical traditions spread systemically throughout polities of both regions on these kinship networks. Thus, the Brahmanical style in life-cycle rituals defines pan-regional Indicization, although not necessarily a polity's conversion to Hinduism. At court, Brahmins were often political advisors, astrologers, and ritualists who maintained state cults designed to insure the kingdom's prosperity as well as the ruler's legitimacy.

The King's identification with the Vedic god Indra was accepted, with sectarian qualifications, as part of both the Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions (Lehman 1973: 105). Later royal Hindu traditions legitimated Ankor's rulers as *Sivadevaratas* (Coedes 1971: 146) and Javanese rulers as divine Visnu

*avata-ras* (Coedes, 175). The modern Shah dynasty of Nepal draws upon all of these royal Hindu traditions.

Sanskrit texts defined the ethos of colonization and Brahman.

Ritual served the cause of Indicization across the frontier zones. Early ritual texts legitimate the spread of Indic civilization: Agni, the fire deity of the *homa* sacrifice "marches before the Aryans" (Staal 1983); the S'atapatha Brahman (I.4.1 14-16) upholds the virtues of land clearing; later *pura-nas* depict heroic deities (Krisna, Rama) clearing the land and conquering the non-Aryan peoples (Hiltebeitel 1976; Channa 1959). A ritual from the *dharmasastra* the *vratastoma*, could be performed to transform tribal leaders into ksatriyas. A Hindu frontier pioneer of the Rama-yana, the Rishi Agastya, conforms to the patterns assembled in this essay: he clears lands, holds large herds of domestic cows for his *as'rama*, and instigates battles against the forest-dwelling non-Aryans. Agastya was a prominent Hindu saint in insular Southeast Asia (Channa 1959: 113; Fontein 1990)<sup>17</sup> and the Ramayana has spread to every Indic frontier society. Thus, Himalayan and Southeast Asian polities were unified by rulers guided by Indic political and religious ideologies, as well as theories of divinely-sanctioned conquest.

Alongside the Brahmans at court and their kin-based diaspora to the galactic hinterlands, the Buddhist sam.gha was a competing vehicle for the conversion of Indic frontier regions. Forging alliances with royalty at centers of the polity, integrating the teachings with village life, garnering patronage donations that made the *viha-ras* landowners, the sam.gha adapted to many localities, tied to the soil and attracting myriad ethnic groups into its fold. Monasteries sent out monks who would proceed to the non-Buddhist zones and establish satellite institutions of that lineage. This network of "Mother-daughter" monasteries (B. Miller 1960; R. Miller 1962) created all sorts of alliances, religious and otherwise, providing the pattern of institution building found from Central Asia to Bali. While the Bra-hman.a Hindu order was less open to inter-marriage with frontier peoples, the Buddhist monastic order was the opposite, with obvious demographic implications.

The logic of the Buddhist galactic system led to similar patterns of historical adaptation across these frontier zones: close ties with aristocratic/dominant caste families who at times controlled the local *viha-ras* or favored one monastic lineage. In this sense, Buddhist Tibet resembles the Kathmandu Valley Buddhist community and that of upland Sri Lanka.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, the development of "married monks" in Tibet (Nyingmapa), Nepal ("vajra-ca-ryas" and "s'a-kyabhiks.us"), and in medieval Burma (Duroiselle 1915: 87) all reflect the realities of frontier adaptation and the influence of vajrayana ideology. Each regional example also shows strong evidence of ongoing Buddhist effort to effect spiritual conquest versus indigenous traditions (e.g. Mumford 1989).

### Diaspora Mahayana Buddhism

Both the Himalayas and Southeast Asia share the common legacy of longstanding, sometimes intensive cultural connections to the core culture areas of India. Separated by their respective mountain and ocean barriers, these regions for over 1500 years assimilated Indic culture and society on many levels.

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<sup>17</sup>In the *Jatakamala*, the well-traveled collection of Buddhist birth stories, story number seven includes a tale about Agastya, a Brahmin who travels to the island Kara "in the Southern sea" and while still performing his caste rites, including the fire sacrifice, converts to Buddhism (Speyer 1982: 46-55).

<sup>18</sup>Entrance into the Newar sam.gha is now based upon birth into only a few high-caste lineages (Gellner 1992); in Sri Lanka, the dominant Siyama Nikaya is open only to Goyigama caste members (Gombrich 1971). The Buddhist Sakyas and Vajracaryas of Nepal conform to the "Buddhist Brahman" pattern, where adherence to Buddhist tradition is an important and durable principle of ethnic/caste boundary maintenance and group replication. See Clarke (1983) for another Tibeto-Burman case study in the mid-montane region.

The best material evidence of pan-regional cultural relations across the greater Indic-Mahayana Buddhist world comes from clay votive amulets (Tib. *t'sat'sas*) that have been found from Afghanistan to Bali. It is certain that between 400 and 1200 CE, there were pilgrimage networks overlapping the trade routes that connected the regions (Tucci 1973: 114ff).<sup>19</sup> Traveling Buddhist monks such as I-Tsing (690 CE) and Atis'a (1040 CE) also record that there were pilgrims and scholars moving routinely between Southeast Asia, the Gangetic plains, and the Himalayan highlands (Takakasu 1896; Chattopadhyay 1967). The eremitical norm and the great support network of viha-ras (as resthouse refuges) encouraged the articulation and development of strong Buddhist "galaxies".

According to I-Tsing (690 CE), the pan-Asian Mahayana Buddhist pilgrimage network even extended from China to South Asia. By the late Gupta era, Indian monks believed in the celestial bodhisattva Man-jus'ri-'s dwelling on a mountain in Maha-ci-na and that Avalokites'vara shrines existed there as well. Much needs to be done to document this diaspora world that mirrored the universal doctrines of full-blown Mahayana cosmologies (Coedes 1964: 12-13). In 1012 CE, the Bengal-born monk Ati-s'a traveled to Sri-vijaya (Sumatra) to study for twelve years with the a-ca-rya Dharmaki-rti (or Dharmapala); having mastered Mahayana logic and philosophy, he returned to become abbot of Vikramas'i-la monastery (Chattopadhyay 1967: 90-97).

The later "Theravada reformation" of Southeast Asia should not obscure the ancient historical continuities shared by the Himalayan and Southeast Asian cultures of Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>20</sup> Evidence of Mahayana-Vajrayana traditions exist for northern India, Upper Burma including Pagan (Duroiselle 1915-6), Java (Fontaine 1990) and Ceylon (Paranavitana 1928, 1951; Holt 1991). Indeed, there were almost certainly periods of direct historical linkage between the Himalayas and Burma in the transmission of Vajrayana Buddhism:

The evidence of the epigraphic records points unmistakably to the fact that Sanskrit Buddhism. . . was introduced to Burma not later than the seventh century, that. . . votive tablets with legends in Sanskrit .. representing Mahayana divinities. . . [show that]. . . the Mahayana with its allied cults. . . seemed to receive a new lease on life from about the ninth and tenth centuries and continued. . . until the end of the fourteenth century (Ray 1936).

The esoteric Buddhism reported for northern Burma (Mendolson 1961; Ferguson and Mendelson 1978) seems to be a survival of this earlier trans-regional Mahayana-Vajrayana culture.

The analysis of frontier process and history underlines the need to extend the logic of core-periphery modeling to the whole of South and Southeast Asia to address this region's history as a single inter-

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<sup>19</sup>The material culture of Buddhist decoration and devotion--silks, gems, metalwork, amulets--itself became a commodity, as monks and merchants crossed the lands synergistically while cultivating, respectively, converts and new markets (Liu 1988). The alliances and wealth generated affected the entire region, concentrating wealth and creating allegiances between the *samgha* and ruler-patrons (Thapar 1987: 159).

<sup>20</sup>In addition to the general pan-regional contacts mentioned, there are also several congruous Southeast Asian-Nepalese Buddhist traditions including: the special veneration shown to Dipamkara Buddha (Levy 1929:21; Macdonald and Vergati 1979); cults to Bhaisajyaguru, the Mahayana Buddha of healing (Coedes 1971: 176; Bernbaum 1979); the importance of the Kalacakra Tantra system (Coedes 1971: 198-9). The fragmentary evidence on the Mahayana Vajrayana traditions of the Ari of northern Burma until the late thirteenth century reveal some intriguing comparisons: in architecture (Levi 1905, I: 249), tantric sacrifice rituals (Duroiselle 1915: 90), and in the existence of a Sanskrit Buddha Purana that "shows great resemblance to the Kathmandu Valley's Svayambhu- Purana" (Levi 1905, I: 117).

Nepal shares with Java traditions of Buddhist-Shaivite assimilation. Direct Nepalese awareness of Srivijaya may be indicated by a Newar iconographical manuscript, cited by Foucher (1900: 326), that notes a popular Nepalese form of Avalokitesvara as "Lokanatha Srivijaya."



related field. The task for future research is to document the relationships that existed between these zones.<sup>21</sup>

## Conclusions: Indicization and Hindu-Buddhist Relations

The Himalayan and Southeast Asian regions can be analyzed as dual frontiers sharing common historical processes. This model helps to comprehend the ethnic mosaic of hunter-gatherers displaced or absorbed by migrant peoples colonizing sites according to the logic of adapting more intensive subsistence systems to hill environments. This complex process was based upon profound ecological transformations of the land through the valley cultivation of grains, especially rice, and intensive bovine husbandry. This abetted the state-formation process by the expansion of taxable lands. Migrant and/or converted peoples sustained population increases as further outward movements engulfed tribal peoples who to this day retreat from absorption. The rice-centered polities have inexorably pushed against their tribal frontiers. Today, tribal-state (or ethnic-state) relations remain ongoing processes, often violently contested, across the modern states inheriting these long-standing confrontations.

Built on such ecological possibilities were galactic networks of economic, political, and religious organization that linked isolated peoples to regional and core centers. These interlocking networks define history's gridwork and the avenues of cultural diffusion through which peoples from or allied with core centers have impinged on and transformed the periphery. Through this territorial dialectic, the frontier also shaped the culture hearth centers as well.

Anthropologically, frontier history is multi-variant, contended by migrating hunter-gatherers, pastoral nomads, diaspora merchants of diverse origins, missionaries (Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian), pioneering generals, and state officials. There were also ascetics, pilgrims, refugees and, in recent years, international development officials who have been key figures in frontier history.

**Buddhist Expansion and Ethnic Boundary Maintenance.** The usual historical image of Buddhist expansion as a universalistic, missionary tradition assumes the celibate monastic norm, where land-holding monastic networks extend the faith. Across frontiers, I question this as a singular model, as from earliest times onward the monastic guidebooks (Vinayas) recognized the distinction between madhyades'a, the historical hearth of the faith's origins where the rules were rigorously upheld, and the pratyantajanapadas ("frontier principalities") where the rules could be relaxed (Lamotte 1988: 8). The Newar Buddhist diaspora across the hills of Nepal, like the Nyingmapa of Tibet, has been built on the logic of lineages whose acquaintance with the celibate sam.gha norm usually consists merely of short-term monastic initiation (Gellner 1992; Mumford 1989; Holmberg 1989) followed by marriage and life-long ritual service. This works exactly like the lineage "Bra-hman.a-frontier" model articulated by John Hitchcock (1974). Perhaps the householder Mahayana- Vajraya-na sam.gha of the Newars and Tibetans indicates a Buddhist version of the pan-Indic pattern of frontier adaptation: expansion of the religious elite confined within ethnic group and lineage boundaries.

## Trans-regional Networks and Local History.

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<sup>21</sup>Scholarly discourse in Buddhist studies should adopt the "culture area" concept and cease using 'Indian' as a scientific label for pre-modern phenomena. Projecting the modern state boundaries backwards falsifies historical representation since Buddhism endures continuously in South Asia outside the culture hearth zone up to the present: in the north in the Kathmandu Valley and Himalayas; in the far south, in Sri Lanka; to the east in Burma, Thailand, and points along the Indian ocean. The tradition was also preserved far past the twelfth century in small communities lying in inner frontiers: Orissa (Das Gupta 1969) and in port town communities (Tucci 1931).

The more heuristic geographical representation is that Buddhism did survive on the frontiers of the original Indic core zone, a definition of the historical situation that opens up important questions. To say that "Indian Buddhism was extinguished" is poor methodology and, in literal point of geographical fact, false.

The logic of the trans-regional trade/artisan networks affected the evolution of frontier cities. The Newars in the central Himalayas are a case in point (Lewis 1989; 1992) as are South Indian merchants in ancient southeast Asia (Wheatley 1975: 235), and the Chinese in early modern Thai and insular Southeast Asian history (Skinner 1958; Wheatley 1975). This trade/art connection represents an ancient trans-regional pattern: a recent study of Chinese and Kushan merchants has demonstrated that the spread of Buddhist material culture itself motivated frontier trade (Liu 1988).

### **Buddhism and Hinduism on Frontiers.**

Having examined the process of Indicization, we may finally reconsider a central issue in the comparative history of South Asian religion: Why does Buddhism survive as dominant in Burma and Thailand, yet barely in the Himalayas? By looking comparatively at the religious continuities and transformations in both regions, several insights emerge to explain why Buddhism has proven less attached to the subcontinent, while fully orthodox Brahmanical traditions never reigned supreme--outside of royal courts--far beyond their culture hearth territory.

It is first important to note that this analysis sees both Hinduism and Buddhism as sharing a common power and currency: both faced the same early contexts and challenges and both articulated cultural norms that legitimized and directed the full spectrum of "conversion" of frontier peoples.<sup>22</sup> In certain frontier contexts, it is clear that both contributed to a common Indicization process. J.C. Heesterman has recently described this (using "Hindu frontier" for our "Indic frontier"):

Brahmanic and Buddhist establishments appear to fulfil the same function in Indianisation and state development. . . the Brahman and brahmanic establishments are well in line with the 'verticalisation' of relationships in a rising agrarian kingdom, while the spread of Buddhism easily fits in with wide-spread 'horizontal' linkages of an empire based on long distance trade...

[The Hindu frontier] arises in long strings of interconnected Buddhist centres still operating in a rarified sphere. The ensuing agrarian expansion and intensification of the economy favours locally based Brahmanism. Based in areas of intensive and expanding agriculture - especially wet rice agriculture--the 'Hindu frontier' gains immeasurably in substance and power of radiation. In principle, this does not need the Brahman and his establishments. Buddhism can mark the 'Hindu frontier' as well. . . Buddhism. . . did develop temple-like institutions and generally turn outwards to fulfill a variety of functions in court and country. (1989: 10-11)

Differences between Hindu and Buddhist social organization gave each a different trajectory through history. The first distinguishing factor is institutional: with limited demographic multiplication due to lineage purity norms, Brahmanical traditions competing with Buddhist monasticism could not become established across the inner frontiers without firm state support (Inden 1979). The Buddhist frontier institutions were also more flexible in drawing up highly adaptive legal codes<sup>23</sup> and administering localities. Buddhism's universalizing sam.gha created a trans-ethnic identity and its viha-ra institutions accumulated wealth and resources that could easily exceed those of individual families. Once established, Buddhist monasteries contended for dominance with local elites or, in some localities, single ethnic groups came to control local sam.ghas (Tibet; Nepal; Sri Lanka) as part of their larger political

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<sup>22</sup>In both cases, "tantric" traditions were often influential. The relationship between tantric tradition and Indic frontiers is multifaceted. The movement of siddhas to remote locations was a regular feature. The stories of Padmasambhava's and Milarepa's biographies reveal many tribal-conversion episodes. The tantric's power and tantric ritual generally are suitable for subduing opponents of all kinds. In recent centuries, Newar Brahmans, like their counterpart Buddhist Vajra-ca-ryas, came to control tantric initiations, complicating the history of the Kathmandu Valley religions (Levy 1989; Gellner 1992). Did the early scarcity of Brahmans on frontier zones necessitate the development of Bra-hman.a-style ritualism within Mahayana Buddhism ?

<sup>23</sup>See Lingat 1950 and note 13.

dominance. Competing economic factions were at times patrons of different monastic lineages, but in yet other historical instances (Cambodia, Java), factions have supported either the Buddhist viha-ra or the Hindu temple in their competitions for power.

Buddhism's strength through concentrating wealth and human resources was also its historical weakness: viha-ras were vulnerable to the vagaries of state patronage and protection. The case of Pagan shows how kings could shift their support from one ordination lineage to another, thereby fundamentally altering Buddhist monastic history (Aung-Thwin 1985). The early modern state of Nepal provides an example of the imposition of Hindu law and devotional observances to unify the state: It encroached on the earlier Tibetan galactic network across its southern frontiers that reached to Nepal<sup>24</sup> and discriminated against Tibetanized peoples in the law codes. Its network of government centers--military, ceremonial, administrative--promoted Hindu cultural hegemony and undermined clan land holding (Burghart 1984; English 1985). The S'iva linga shrine of the national deity Pas'upati and the yearly cult of Dashara sacrifice were integral elements in the extension of government complexes constructed across the hills where Tibeto-Burman ethnic cults dominated. The Buddhist monastic networks were disendowed in places, ignored in others (Gellner 1986; Lewis 1989). The fall of highland Tibetan centers after 1959 also weakened the Buddhist frontier that was oriented culturally northward. In modern Thailand, there is a Buddhist version of the Nepalese pattern: in government outposts are installed Buddha shrines designed to foster national integration among the tribal peoples.

A second factor in the consideration of Hindu-Buddhist historical destiny concerns the differential attitudes to trade: Buddhism's *laissez faire* attitude to banking and its monastic alliances with traders contrasts with prohibitions against Brahmins' involvement with mercantile practice. Thapar argues for separate resulting historical trajectories for the two traditions based upon the different uses of excess wealth: "The existence of the heterodox religious sects. . . helped to legitimate the grihapatis' [householders] investment in trade, rather than the burning up of wealth in ritual protestations at the sacrificial ceremonies (1980: 9)." However, the appearance of Bra-hman.a traders in Southeast Asia argues against a strict separation by 1200 CE (Hall 1986). Still, Buddhist merchants dominated the diaspora trade world across the Indic frontiers until the coming of Islamic rule to the subcontinent.

A third issue is the enduring adherence to the tribal norm of social equality among frontier peoples. Across the Himalayas and SE Asia, this more egalitarian social ethos worked against the thoroughgoing imposition of a culture centered upon the dharmas`a-stras and supported the Buddhist order. Tied to the state's galactic centers, Brahmanical influences did not depart far from the provincial capitals (Levi 1939: 23). Tribal peoples on Indic frontiers have consistently resisted the imposition of caste hierarchies, the adoption of strict pollution-purity norms, or loyalty to distant "divine kings" in the Hindu Maha-ra-ja-dhira-ja or Buddhist Cakravartin style. Fourth, local ecological variables affected ethnohistorical destinies. The watersheds lands suitable for rice cultivation, and the people subsisting on them, have been oriented to Indic innovations that have dominated, but not totally submerged, tribal cultures. Differential population capacities and settlement densities undermined the viability of non-intensive subsistence peoples who have had either adapt to the encroaching system or retreat. An important comparative subsistence variable across Indic frontiers has been the sacrificial cult of the water buffalo and mithan (Simoons 1968). Meat consumption for Theravada or Tibetan Buddhist monks was acceptable under certain circumstances (Ruegg 1980) and not so for the Bra-hman.a.

A final historical factor is the differential effect of the Mughal conquest across the frontier zones, again linking economics and religion: unlike in northern India and Central Asia, the galactic states and monastic institutions across mainland Southeast Asia and the Himalayan region were not disrupted nor were the peripheral states (Nepal, Assam, Bhutan, Southeast Asia) integrated into the Mughal empire. In Southeast Asia, long-distance trade via these peripheries--always the symbiotic ally of Buddhism--was

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<sup>24</sup> In the study of Tibetan Buddhist history, as shown in Wylie's classical study of Marpa's tower (1964), merely reading the record in religious terms would obscure underlying frontier processes and political events. In Lewis and Shakya (1988), we document a case of a Gorkha general resorting to an assassination of mid-montane Tibetan officials to expand the state's territory.

not undermined. Far removed from the culture hearth zones, Brahmans on the frontiers still faced a powerful adversary in Buddhist monasticism, a tradition which also proved its enduring adaptability in extending the frontiers of Indic civilization.

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*editor's note: the author is blameless for peculiarities in the printing of diacritics and italics in this article. Transmogrification of his careful work is a consequence of computer, printer, and editorial failings.*