THE HIMALAYA COMPLEX
ROADS AND CONFLICT IN HIGH ASIA

Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes how the development of transportation infrastructure throughout the Trans Himalaya affects inter-state relations and intra-state conflict across the greater Inner Asian region. I challenge the realist misperception that purely competitive interests drive both China and India's foreign policies and robust economic growth. Instead, I suggest that a new level of complex connectivity, brought about by modern transportation technology, is transforming the region on an international scale. However, concurrent with this inter-state development is a converse, intra-state dynamic that threatens security in the Himalayan borderlands: many new roads are also creating conflict across western China.

My hypothesis is that the development of highways and railroads linking western China with neighboring South and Central Asian countries is utilitarian yet exhibits an oppositional dynamic: international roads enhance regional stability but China's domestic projects cause internal conflict. In order to gauge the net result of these phenomena, I test my hypothesis on this oppositional dynamic with comparative case study analyses. To this end, I examine both inter- and intra-state conflicts in the Tibetan Himalaya as well as make micro case studies on representative road developments, conducted by China and India, in Afghanistan, Kashmir, Tibet, and Sikkim.

Maps and Data Sets

INTRODUCTION

We have crossed over into a period in which things happening in Asia, opinions formed in Asia, and decisions made in Asia, will largely determine the course of events everywhere else in the world.

-Owen Lattimore, *Solution in Asia*, 1947

In 1950, Owen Lattimore identified Xinjiang and western China as the "Pivot of Asia" and anticipated the region's ascension from frontier backwater to geopolitical fulcrum.[1] Today, while remote and often omitted from discussions on global affairs, this crossroads of Eurasia has again assumed a significance that belies its historical obscurity. However, in 2011, the most significant relationship in the region – if not the world – is not that between China and Russia, but rather the one between China and India. Accordingly, this "Pivot" has shifted and now stands at the apex of Inner Asia: the Himalaya and Tibetan Plateau.

As Lattimore noted more than a half century ago, Asian affairs have global ramifications – and this is perhaps more true today than ever before. Like Xinjiang in 1950, the 'Tibetan Himalaya' is central to a nexus of change that is unprecedented and international in scope and scale.[2] The driver of this transformation is the development of modern transportation infrastructure, such that former frontiers from the Pacific Rim to the Central Asian Steppe are rapidly changing (if not disappearing altogether).

A paradigm shift of the Eurasian continent is taking place, from the center outward to the periphery, and the primary agents of change are new road systems. At the center of this Himalayan event, historically closed borders are starting to open and frozen relations are

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[1] Owen Lattimore, *Pivot of Asia: Sinkiang and the Inner Asian Frontiers of China and Russia* (Boston: Little, 1950).

[2] I will define the parameters of this 'Tibetan Himalaya,' as well as oppose it to the greater 'Trans Himalaya,' in Chapter 1.

beginning to thaw. The southern extensions of ancient Silk Routes are becoming motorized

corridors for 21st century trade, and increasing amounts of people, products, and resources

are traveling the roads and rails that now connect East, South, and Central Asia. Although

many of the routes have not yet been directly linked, in light of the populations, the

economies, and the futures that these Inner Asian states present, it is expected that more

border crossings will soon open. Already, the result is that new networks have begun to form

through a convergence of policy, technology, and economics. I call this collective

phenomenon the Himalaya Complex.

The Problem of the Himalaya Complex

The Himalaya Complex presents an oppositional dynamic: the development of

highways and railroads across the Trans Himalaya is good for international relations but

problematic for China's internal security. When they cross borders, new roads often

contribute to inter-state stability because of market integration and economic growth.

Moreover, when they are domestic – in part or in whole – the new roads also facilitate

growth and promote stability as an extension of central government control. Contrary to this

trend, however, is that domestic road development in western China is stimulating intra-state

conflict. The result is that the Himalaya Complex is fundamentally altering the territorial

status quo of High Asia.

The effects of road developments, under unique regional conditions, are strikingly

divergent with respect to inter-state and intra-state relations. On the one hand, the creation of

overland linkages between China and her Himalayan neighbors – India, Nepal, Pakistan,

Afghanistan, and Kazakhstan – has led to a more politically stable, and economically liberal,

Inner Asia. For example, this is particularly true with respect to the 'Friendship' Highways from China to Pakistan and Nepal, respectively.[3] Moreover, in several instances, the modernization of international roads that extend beyond the boundaries of Tibet and Xinjiang have mitigated historical tensions and facilitated political normalizations. One case - opening the international road link between China and India at the Nathu-la pass in Sikkim, India - was tantamount to a form of rapprochement.[4]

Primary Transport Networks of the Himalaya Complex[5]
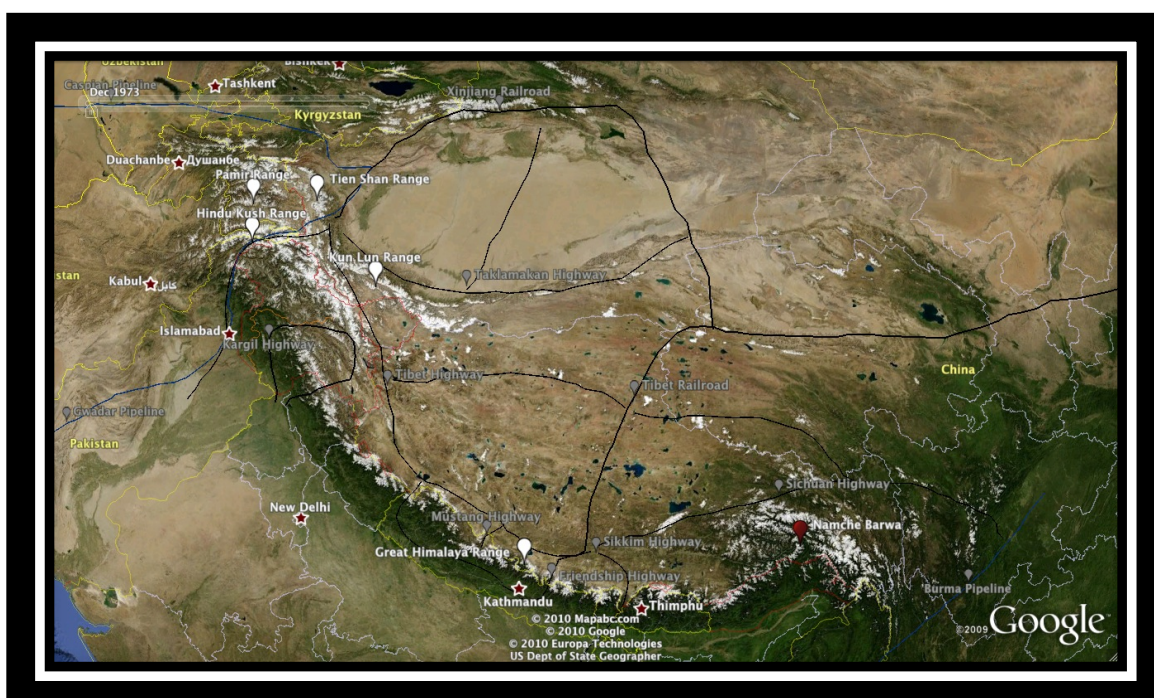
In light of several other roadways projected to open in the near future, and also located in volatile regions of High Asia, a positive trend can be detected. This trend indicates that cross-border infrastructure development throughout the Trans Himalaya is enhancing

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[3] More popularly known simply as the 'Karakoram Highway' between Xinjiang, China and Pakistan and the 'Friendship/Arniko Highway' between Tibet, China and Nepal. See map: Major Transport Networks of the Himalaya Complex, Introduction.

[4] *Border trade off: Ice melts with Sikkim deal* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/pm-on-china-visit/news/Border-trade-off-Ice-melts-with-Sikkim-deal/articleshow/39907.cms.

[5] Map created by the author using Google Earth (accessed February 1, 2011); available from: http://earth.google.com

inter-state stability.[6] More specifically, a number of ambitious, international projects through historical battlegrounds – including Kashmir, Afghanistan, and Arunachal Pradesh – show that the promotion of road development is a critical and initial step in the complex process of resolving protracted, territorial conflicts.[7]

On the other hand, however, the construction of highways and railroads from mainland China into the western provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang has led to an increasingly restive and unstable, domestic environment in China. More specifically, new roads are radically altering the traditional ethno-demographic status quo, and to an explosive degree. This is because the roads, fueled by economic growth and state security interests, are also vectors for migration flows. As a result, major population shifts have subsequently led to conditions that are fundamental causes of conflict. Specifically, in-migration, economic asymmetry, and ethnic alienation have been widely cited both by Tibetans and Uyghurs, as well as western scholars, as root causes of the tense and volatile climate that erupted in violent riots across Tibet and Xinjiang in 2008 and 2009, respectively.[8]

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[6] In addition to the Sikkim, Nepal, and Karakoram cases, these other critical development projects include the recently built roads from Tibet into Nepal at Lo-Monthang (Mustang) and Kyirong-Rasuwa as well as the promotion of the Northern Development Network in Afghanistan and Beijing's plan to construct a railroad through the Wakhan Corridor. These will be discussed in more detail below. See map: Major Transport Networks of the Himalaya Complex, Introduction.

[7] These include opening the Kashmir highway to transit trade between Srinagar (India) and Muzaffarabad (Pakistan) as well as completion of the road link across the Aksai Chin between Leh, Ladakh (India) and Ali, Tibet (China). The construction of a road through Arunachal Pradesh has also been suggested as a means to shift the status quo on another Sino-Indian conflict as well. See map: Major Transport Networks of the Himalaya Complex, Introduction.

On Kashmir, see Ayesha Jalal, lecture at the Kashmir Initiative Seminar at the Carr Center for Human Rights, Harvard Kennedy School of Government, November 19, 2009; on Afghanistan, see Andrew C. Kutchins and Thomas M. Sanderson, eds., *The Northern Distribution Network and Afghanistan: Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2010); on Arunachal Pradesh, I have previously identified and suggested the opportunity for road development to act as a mechanism for conflict resolution, see "A Middle Way through the Mountains: Breaking the Himalayan Impasse in Arunachal Pradesh, unpublished manuscript at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, December 11, 2009.

[8] Matthew D. Moneyhon, "Taming China's 'Wild West': Ethnic Conflict in Xinjiang," *Peace, Conflict, and Development* 5 (July 2004); available from: http://www.peacestudiesjournal.org.uk/edition/17; Andrew Fisher, "The Political Economy of Boomerang Aid in China's Tibet," *China Perspectives* 3 (2009), 38-54.

The indigenous populations of western China are experiencing radical and abrupt changes in their homelands, and roads are the harbinger of that painful transformation. Han Chinese in-migration, as well as government policy, has created economic inequality with ethnic divisions across western China. In fact, such asymmetrical conditions have led to the marginalization of local communities under new globalized economic systems and a fear among Tibetan and Uyghur populations that they may soon become minorities in their ancestral home.[9] Thus, while new roads do promote economic growth and urbanization through modern infrastructure, they also threaten to undermine what tenuous stability exists in the region.

Methodology

Bearing this oppositional dynamic in mind – the 'problem' of the Himalaya Complex – my paper analyzes both the positive and negative aspects of infrastructure development across the 'Trans Himalaya.'[10] My 'hypothesis' is that the development of this transportation network is utilitarian and will eventually entail a net gain for High Asia: it is contributing to the 'greater good' by resolving international conflicts and modernizing underdeveloped regions. I will test this hypothesis with analyses that comprise a holistic evaluation of a complex phenomenon – one that presents local, regional, and global implications.

My methodology is a comparative case study of two major conflicts that continue to make the Himalaya an unstable place: the Sino-Indian conflict (an inter-state case) and the

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[9] This is a common grievance voiced throughout the Tibetan exile community in Dharamsala, India. It was expressed to me with particular eloquence by the poet and freedom fighter, Mr. Lhasang Tsering, in McLeod Ganj, Dharamsala, India in June 2009.

[10] I use 'Trans Himalaya" in a general, macro sense with reference to the larger region of Inner Asia which includes Tibet and Xinjiang as well as neighboring, mountainous territories that share ethnic and political characteristics. However, I use and will place more focus in this paper on the 'Tibetan Himalaya,' a more ethnically homogenous region that comprises the cultural center of the Himalayan region. This distinction is more defined below in Chapter 1.

Sino-Tibetan conflict (an intra-state case). In addition to this macro-framework, I also make

four micro case studies on road development projects and their association with conflict and

its transformation. Two of these are in accordance with the major, regional conflict case

studies – the Aksai Chin Highway and the Tibetan Railroad – and two others illustrate the

transformative effect of road development, sponsored by China and India, in other Trans

Himalayan areas of protracted conflict – the Afghanistan Transportation Network and the

Sikkim Highway.

The structure of my analysis follows the logic of dependent, independent, and

intervening variables. The transformation of conflict in the Tibetan Himalaya is the

'dependent variable.' This transformation is represented two ways. On the one hand, it can be

negative, as roads can lead to war and violence – this is the problem with both the Sino-

Indian and the Sino-Tibetan conflicts. On the other hand, however, this transformation can be

positive, demonstrated by the opening of borders and markets, as well as the passages of

people, in areas that have long suffered violence and turmoil. This type of transformation

leads to stability that is represented (and extensively discussed below) by the emergence of

'Gateway' channels out of 'Shatterbelt' regions.[11]

The development of transportation infrastructure is the 'independent variable.' Roads

are harbingers of change, and their impact on conflict can be positive or negative (and both!).

Accordingly, my case studies illustrate how regional conflict is directly affected, and

transformed, by the presence of such transportation networks.

Finally, several 'intervening variables' are what link the roads to the conflicts. The

promotion of economic development, states' internal security interests, bi- and multi-lateral

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[11] I will define and discuss these geopolitical Shatterbelt and Gateway concepts below in Chapter 2.

foreign relations, and human migration patterns are the phenomena that build, maintain, and travel the highways – they are the vectors for and vehicles of change. Collectively, they make the greatest impact on conflictive environments, for better and for worse, and together they form the structure of the Himalaya Complex.

The geopolitical framework of my analysis considers the local, regional, and global ramifications of road construction in the Trans Himalaya. I apply complexity theory to a real world situation: new roads into Himalayan valleys have impacts not only in local villages and across regional borders, but upon global systems as well. Of course, the fundamental nature of a complex system is that its nature is anything but linear. Bearing this in mind, I hazard to present my research on these development patterns according to the thesis format.

Part I provides a regional and theoretical introduction to the key places and concepts of my study. In Chapter 1, I first define the parameters of the Trans Himalaya versus the Tibetan Himalaya in geological, cultural, and historical-political terms. In Chapter 2, I then discuss the relevance of the region in terms of political geography theory and the frontier-boundary dynamic. I apply the Shatterbelt-Gateway theory to the Himalaya and examine inter-state and intra-state tension across this borderland as well as the modern transformation of China and India's historical frontier. This is done in order to establish a framework within which the conflict transformations taking place in the Trans and Tibetan Himalaya can be better understood. Finally, I also make a short survey of the most significant conflicts that plague the Trans Himalaya (and that comprise the Himalaya Shatterbelt) and introduce the emergence of Gateways out of these conflict zones; this is illustrated by a minor case study on the development of Afghanistan's modern road systems.

Part II is a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the dependent, independent, and intervening variables in the Trans and Tibetan Himalaya. Chapter 3, my first major case study, discusses an international conflict between China and India and illustrates the direct impact of road development on frontier and boundary zones. More specifically, it shows how road construction, as the infrastructure of a state's security interests, can undermine stability in the region. This analysis also considers several 'conflict attractors' that serve to maintain the protracted, territorial status quo across this Sino-Indian borderland and the respective policies (and intervening variables) that support it.

Chapter 4, my second major case study, examines the current intra-state conflict between Tibet and China and considers the significant impact of new transportation systems on the socio-cultural and economic environment of the Tibetan Plateau. More specifically, this study illustrates the direct connection in western China between domestic road development, demographic transitions, economic asymmetry, and regional conflict. Both of these major inter-state and intra-state case studies also include a minor, focused case study on an individual road project in the respective region: the Aksai Chin Highway and the Tibet Railroad.

Finally, Part III examines the transformation of conflict in the Himalaya as a result of new roads and the international policies behind their development. The emergence of Gateway zones out of Shatterbelt regions is increasingly prevalent in the Trans and Tibetan Himalaya, and Chapter 5 underscores my theory that increased connectivity through international road systems has the potential to resolve numerous protracted, inter-state conflicts. A final, minor case study on the Sikkim Road will illustrate this phenomenon and introduce several factors that suggest it could be replicated across the region.

As shown below, my research is informed by the literature of conflict studies as well as theories on the causes of intra-state and inter-group violence, particularly in the cases of Sino-Tibetan and Sino-Indian conflict. I also utilize literature on rural road development and the limited scholarship that specifically addresses transportation infrastructure in the Himalaya. However, the most rewarding, and exciting, aspect of my research was the investigation of where these Himalayan roadways are actually located, what condition they are in, and how they fit together into a network that comprises what I call the Himalayan Complex.

This fieldwork was made over the course one decade, between 1999-2009, during which I made over one dozen expeditions to the Himalaya Region. It was an initial, bumpy journey in 1999 from Kathmandu, Nepal to Lhasa, Tibet – along one of the very few roadways that penetrate the Himalaya – that first piqued my interest in transportation systems across the Tibetan Plateau. In the summer of 2009, a return visit to that road, the 'Friendship Highway,' brought into sharper focus the significance of 21st-century transport networks in the region. This paper is my attempt to make sense of questions pondered while riding along that very road not long ago.

My research methods are primarily qualitative. They include ten-year comparative analyses of the Friendship Highway as well as attempts at 'participant observation' made during several passages on the well-known train to Tibet. Other efforts entailed covert forays into remote areas where new roads have been quietly developed (i.e. surreptitiously walking the Langtang-Rasuwa (Kodari) Road in 2000) while still others found me resorting to internet research and inquiries with well-traveled colleagues.[12] At this point, after ten years

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[12] See map: Development of Nepali Roadways through Mustang, Langtang, and the Friendship Highway, Chapter 5

of wayward travel and exploration, I have managed to traverse most all of the roads in my data set which are (or were at one point) open to foreign travelers. Of course, many of them have changed significantly since I was last there. As a result, it's already time to go back.

During this process of traveling Himalayan highways and byways, I also conducted research according to the socio-anthropological fieldwork technique of 'rapid rural appraisal,' a method widely practiced by international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).[13] This entails a swift but direct exchange with informed subjects in order to gain local insight with which to compile data that are significant both in quantity and quality. Basically, the logic is that what people have to say is more reliable than surveys they might be asked to complete, or, even worse, reports that have been written by outsiders about them.

Following this technique, my research on cultural tensions and conflict in Tibet and Xinjiang was informed, in the former case, by interviews with Tibetans living in-exile in India as well as with others residing in Tibet proper, and in the latter with Uyghurs located in various towns across Xinjiang. While I conducted some interviews in Tibetan, the majority of those done in India were in English while those done in Tibet were translated into English from Mandarin Chinese or Tibetan by a third party. In light of other language difficulties (that is, my illiteracy in both Uyghur and Mandarin), my research on Uyghur and Han Chinese perspectives is largely reliant upon secondary source materials.

My data sets are illustrated and cataloged in maps, tables, and diagrams. These data include the transportation networks that are known to traverse the Himalaya circa 2010, the periods and outbreaks of conflict in the region, the development of international treaties and economic policy that support regional liberalization, and the emergence of new corridors, or

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[13] Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (Essex, England: Longman, 1983).

gateways, that have been, at various times, both a cause and result of regional stabilization. Data Set 1, The Himalaya Complex Matrix provides an illustrated framework of this analysis with stability vs. conflict on the y-axis and domestic vs. international road development projects on the x-axis. It is from select road systems situated in each quadrant on this matrix that I will draw my four micro case studies on particular road projects in Afghanistan, Kashmir, Tibet, and Sikkim, presented in Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5. Finally, in the Appendix, I also provide a Venn diagram of my literature review. This is intended to illustrate the dearth of literature at the core of this body of work – the complex impact of the development of transportation infrastructure on conflict across the Himalaya region. [14]

i. Data Set 1: Infrastructure Development and Conflict in the Trans Himalaya

The following matrix is an illustration of my analysis and represents the oppositional dynamic of infrastructure development and political conflict in the Trans Himalaya. In order to evaluate the complex interplay of these regional phenomena, I make a minor case study of one road project from the sample in each quadrant. The top right quadrant identifies international road projects that have contributed to stability and conflict resolution in the region; the association between territorial dispute resolution and opening a highway and border crossing in Sikkim will be examined for this case (Chapter 5). Moving left, quadrant two represents domestic development projects that have promoted stability in the region; the expansion of modern highway systems in war-torn Afghanistan will be discussed here in the context of national security enhancement (Chapter 2). Below this is quadrant three, characterized by conflictive internal environments that are the negative result of the

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[14] This Venn diagram depicts the overlapping scholarship that comprises my review as well as the holes that currently exist in the literature.

expansion of domestic transportation infrastructure; the role of the Tibet Railroad on current political dynamics in Chinese Tibet will be examined for this case (Chapter 4). Finally, quadrant four is almost a null quadrant, as very few roads have been built through areas that are both international and conflictive. However, the construction of China's road through the Aksai Chin region of eastern Kashmir is such a case and will be considered in light of this unique condition as the case study on Sino-Indian conflict (Chapter 3).

Data Set 1.

Matrix of Infrastructure Development and Political Conflict in the Trans Himalaya
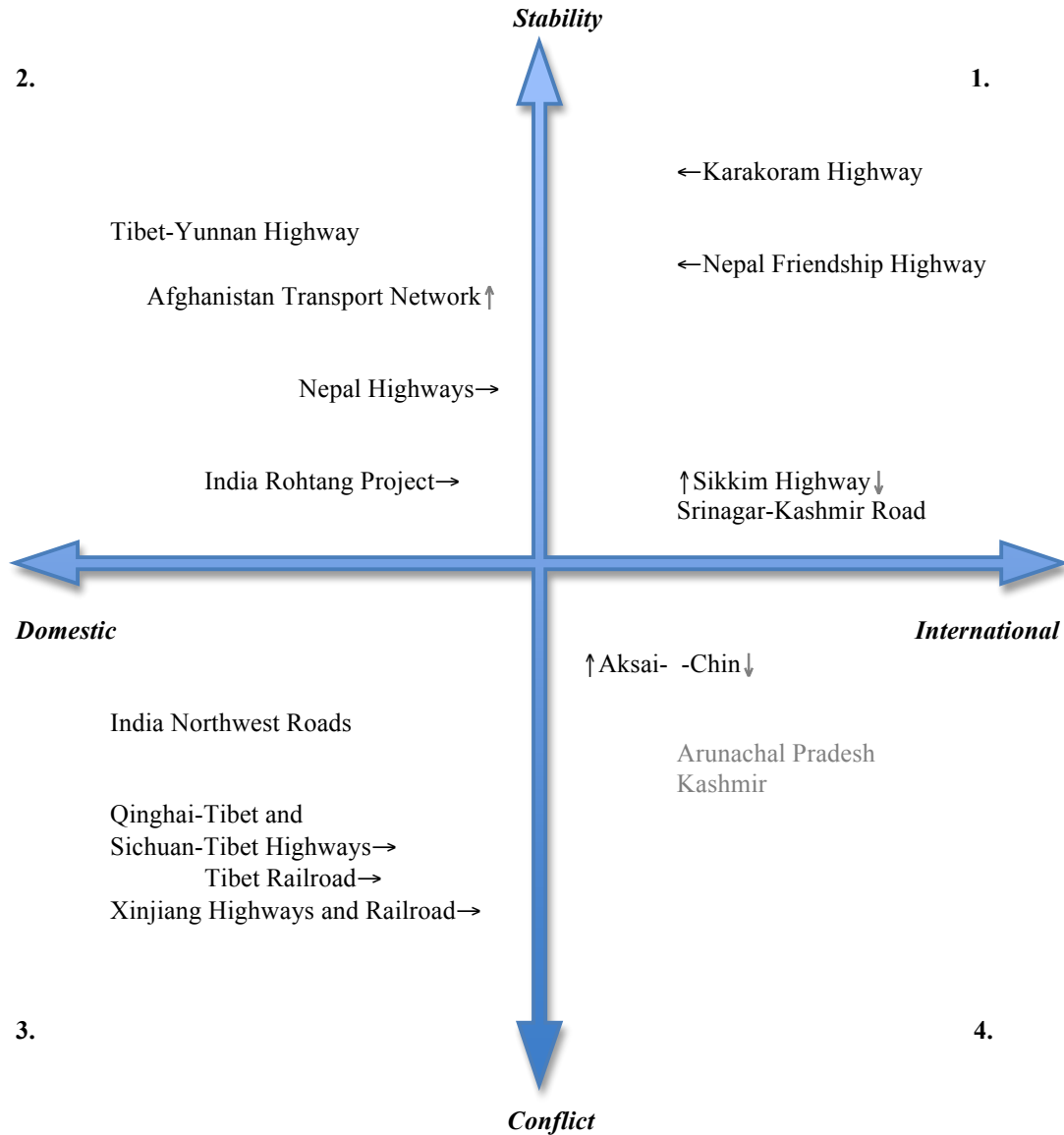
Quadrant 1. International-Stability: Roads are international avenues for socio-economic linkage
Quadrant 2. Domestic-Stability: Roads are in dynamic areas and promote security and stability
Quadrant 3. Domestic-Conflict: Roads are in contested and restive areas and exacerbate conflict
Quadrant 4. International-Conflict: Roads are largely unrealized due to political conflict but this may change
←→↑→ refer to direction of transport infrastructure's influence on political climate
←→↑→ refer to where infrastructure development has shifted stability-conflict balance
Regions where territorial disputes disrupt/deny roads development

Literature Review

My objective in this thesis is to make a contribution to a field that currently possesses a very limited literature. Despite the importance of the Trans Himalaya as a geopolitical fulcrum, its legacy of protracted conflict, and the current robustness of economic growth and infrastructure development, there is a dearth of cross-disciplinary scholarship on the issues that comprise the Himalaya Complex.[15] Therefore, I have reviewed, compared, and incorporated the literature of Tibetan Studies, Frontier Development Studies, and Conflict Studies with empirical research on Himalayan road developments as the foundation of this study. From those data, the paper evolves into a critical and comparative analysis of the role of infrastructure development on regional conflict throughout the Tibetan-Himalayan frontier.

My theory on the geopolitical relevance of the Tibetan Plateau and Central Eurasian Steppe is grounded in the early-20th century work of geographers, scholars, and explorers. Owen Lattimore's writings on High Tartary and Inner Asia are fundamental to my opinions on the enduring primacy of this very continental part of the world. The British mountaineer-diplomat, Eric Shipton's writings on the Himalaya, including *Nanda Devi, Blank on the map*, and *Mountains of Tartary*, helped form my view that the Himalaya is a vast, mountainous arena where borders have far less meaning than cultural traditions.[16] And although I strive to avoid a Western-centric perspective on the relevance of the region, Sir Halford Mackinder's theories on the Heartland, including his seminal article, "The Geographical Pivot of History,"

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[15] In fact, within the world of academia, the field of 'Himalayan and Tibetan Studies' very rarely stands alone as a major geographical or topical field of its own – though it should be one. Instead, studies of the region are often relegated as a minor sub-field within another, larger regional discipline, such as South Asia, East Asia, or Central Asia studies. Yet, the truth of the matter is that the Himalaya exceeds the limitations created by such artificial regional demarcations, as it is both a component of and composed by all three macro-fields.

[16] Eric Shipton, *The Six Mountain-Travel Books* (Seattle: Mountaineers' Books, 1997).

have affected both international scholarship and policy for over one century.[17] A student of geography, particularly of Central Eurasia, cannot help but be influenced by his grand ideas.

Peter Perdue, Tsering Shakya, and Melvyn Goldstein have conducted exceptional studies on the cultural collisions that define the complex history of Inner Asia. Perdue's *China Marches West* examines the many centuries of contact, and conflict, between Tibetan, Chinese, Mongol, Dzhungar, and other Turkic societies across what is today known as western China.[18] Shakya's *The Dragon in the Land of Snows* is the most authoritative and rigorous text on the political history of Sino-Tibetan relations.[19] And although notoriously accused of Chinese apologetics, Goldstein's *A History of Modern Tibet: 1913-1951* remains one of the finest, and most comprehensive, accounts of Lhasa's relationship with Beijing written by a western scholar.[20]

In a more contemporary context, only a handful of studies have been made on Chinese road and rail development across the Tibetan Himalaya. Moreover, very little of this scholarship has been conducted by 'outside' or 'impartial' third parties. Rather, many papers are politically charged analyses (one might even call them propaganda) produced by one of two factions: Chinese government publishing houses or Tibetan advocacy groups. The former tends to highlight the capital expenditure and modernization that Tibet has experienced as a result of such development; the latter takes a critical tack and makes an explicit link between infrastructure, economic growth, migration patterns, and conflict in

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[17] Halford J. Mackinder, "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal* XXIII, no. 4 (April 1904): 421-443.

[18] Peter Purdue, *China Marches West: The Qing Conquest of Central Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

[19] Tsering Shakya, *The Dragon in the Land of Snows: A History of Modern Tibet Since 1947* (London: Pimlico, 1999).

[20] Melvyn Goldstein, *A History of Modern Tibet, 1913-1951: The Demise of the Lamaist State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

Tibet. I have read both the praises and the blame published by each respective group, and have considered their very different conclusions accordingly.

Taking into account Tibet as well as Xinjiang, two main studies survey and catalog the expanding road and rail network across western China. John Garver's "Development of China's Overland Transportation Links with Central, Southwest, and South Asia" is one of the very few analyses that both survey the infrastructure and comprehensively connect road development and Beijing's expanding influence throughout Asia.[21] However, Garver's work, while primarily focused on China's 'Great Western Development' effort (*xibu da kaifa*, also referred to as the campaign to 'open up the west') and its significance in Tibet and Xinjiang, places more emphasis on international economic policy than its association with conflict.

Jonathon Holslag has expanded upon Garver's work in "China's Roads to Influence."[22] In this study, Holslag specifically focuses on the tension between Beijing's promotion of transportation links as a "new regional common good" and the primacy of Chinese interests that drive these projects. Taking into account the historical issue of regional conflict, Holslag's discussion critically identifies Beijing's concern of losing influence throughout Asia and correlates that fear to the state policies that currently drive road development projects.

In the realm of conventional (as opposed to specialized) literature, Abrahm Lustgarten's *China's Great Train* provides an excellent report on the development of the railroad to Tibet.[23] From Mao Zedong's original vision to contemporary Chinese Communist Party policy behind the initiative to the arduous construction of the line itself, his writing is

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[21] John W. Garver, "Development of China's Overland Transportation Links with Central, South-west, and South Asia," *China Quarterly* 185 (March 2006): 1-22.

[22] Jonathon Holslag, "China's Roads to Influence," *Asian Survey* 50, no. 4 (2010): 641-662.

[23] Abrahm Lustgarten, *China's Great Train* (New York: Times Books, 2008).

one of the few works that makes an impartial and generally apolitical examination of one of

the most significant regional projects in recent memory. More journalism than scholarship,

the book is nevertheless important and reveals the rapid pace by which Tibet is being

affected by globalization.

Moving beyond the physical dimension of transportation infrastructure and looking at

the implications of what these systems facilitate – economic asymmetry and conflict – the

most important variable to consider is migration. In light of the dramatic demographic

transformations currently taking place in western China, several scholars provide a critical

assessment of what is happening 'on the ground.' Susette Cooke's paper, "Merging Tibetan

Culture into the Chinese Economic Fast Lane" addresses the connection between

transportation infrastructure, China's 'Great Western Development' campaign (*xibu da*

kaifa), migration, and cultural conflict.[24] Her analysis accurately recognizes that the impact

of Beijing's development policies in Tibet is best measured culturally, rather than purely

economically. I utilize her emphasis on this cultural collision, brought about by migration, to

contextualize conflict the region.

Reliable metrics on Chinese demographics and economics are notoriously hard to get,

in large part because of the questionability of statistics collected and published by the

Chinese state. The last official census for China was conducted in the year 2000, and the

entire country – especially the western provinces – has experienced radical change since

then. Despite these obstacles, Andrew Fisher has completed extensive fieldwork throughout

China's Tibetan regions, and in concert with rigorous analysis of demographic statistics, has

identified key elements of China's western development policy that are often overlooked.

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[24] Susette Cooke, "Merging Tibetan Culture into the Economic Fast Lane: The Great Western Development Campaign should increase immigration to inner China to the Tibetan Autonomous Region," *China Perspectives*, no. 50 (November-December 2003).

Specifically, Fisher's theory on the "conflictive repercussions of exclusionary growth" and his examination of socio-economic disparities in Tibetan provinces of China have informed my study on the root causes of internal conflict in the region[25]

Furthermore, Xu Chunfeng and Lu Shengrong's report, "Study on Relationship between Road Transportation and Economic Development in Xinjiang Based on Grey Relation Analysis" provides a critical analysis on the relationship between road transport and economic development in western China.[26] Although their study is limited to Xinjiang, the conclusions they draw, if not the figures, are relevant in consideration of similar projects taking place in Tibet.

M. Taylor Fravel has published widely on China's expanding 'sphere of influence' and the relationship, and balance, between internal stability and inter-state security for Beijing. Fravel identifies a trend in Chinese state policy that promotes the inflammation, and militarization, of external territorial disputes for the purpose of maintaining internal stability.[27] My border-conflict analysis takes into account theories posed in his *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, particularly the frontier-boundary dynamic *vis a vis* Tibet and Xinjiang.

Before commencing a deeper review of the literature from Conflict Studies or Tibetan studies, it is necessary to mention the wider, geopolitical context that frames my study. I rely on concepts from the field of political geography, and the sub-discipline of frontier studies, to

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[25] Andrew Fisher, "Resolving the Theoretical Ambiguities of Social Exclusion with reference to Polarisation and Conflict," *Social Exclusion Developmental Studies Institute Working Paper*, no. 08-90 (January 2008).

[26] Xu Chunfeng and Lu Shengrong, "Study on Relationship between Road Transportation and Economic Development in Xinjiang Based on Grey Relation Analysis," *2010 2nd Conference on Environmental Science and Information Application Technology* (University of Wuhan, China, 2010).

[27] M. Taylor Fravel, *Strong Borders, Secure Nations: Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).

establish a theoretical framework within which the Trans- and Tibetan-Himalaya may be located and evaluated.

I apply center and periphery theory from Ladis Kristof's seminal article, "The Nature of Frontiers and Boundaries," to examine the national interests and geographic structures that are at play in the Trans Himalaya.[28] That is, the Tibetan Plateau and Himalaya Range have historically been viewed by both China and Delhi as frontier areas, although they have also concurrently functioned as boundary zones. And now, all of this is changing before our eyes. Kristof's distinction between the centripetal push of a boundary and the centrifugal pull of the frontier is particularly germane to today's transformation of the Himalaya, that from a barrier of containment to an arena of exchange.

In another application of geopolitical theory, I also incorporate Saul Bernard Cohen's 'Shatterbelt' and 'Gateway' dynamic into the Himalaya Complex.[29] While I use caution in employing the term 'Shatterbelt,' I utilize it conceptually in order to create a dichotomous framework from which the Gateway phenomenon can be seen to emerge.[30] As such, I extend Cohen's collection of global Shatterbelts to the Trans Himalaya. However, I also identify a trend of emerging Gateways in the region, largely attributable to the development of transportation infrastructure. According to this transition from zone of war to zone of peace (or, at the very least, zone of business), I apply Cohen's theory with respect to regional

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[28] Ladis Kristof, "The Nature of Frontiers and Boundaries," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 49, no. 3 (September 1959).

[29] According to Cohen, Shatterbelts are "strategically oriented regions that are both deeply divided internally and caught up in competition between Great Powers of the geostrategic realms." Conversely, Gateways are passage zones where geography, policy, and the marketplace converge to create places of interchange. Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*, 2nd Edition (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield: 2009), 44.

[30] Because all of Cohen's Shatterbelts are located in developing regions of the world, his theory might appear, at first glance, to be Western-centric and presuppose that those regions are somehow secondary to the greater powers that compress them from the outside. However, a critique of Cohen's theory is not my intention here; rather, I strive to contextualize his concepts in order to illustrate my own theory on the dynamic events currently transforming the Himalaya region.

conflict and the effect of road developments on international relations and economic growth across Inner Asia.

From the field of Conflict Studies, I have drawn primarily from the theoretical literature on structural violence and power asymmetry to assess the roots causes of conflict in Tibet and Xinjiang. Johan Galtung's theory of structural violence is salient to the precarious environments in Tibet and Xinjiang.[31] Additionally, William Zartman's work on internal conflict as a result of disparities of power is also particularly applicable to the conflicts that fester in western China.[32] I also consider Peter Coleman et al.'s theory on the "emotional aspects of intractability" in my discussion of 'conflict attractors' *vis a vis* the protracted Sino-Indian border dispute and the frozen status quo that continues to paralyze the region.[33]

My review of the Sino-Tibetan conflict in influenced by Warren Smith's writings on the Tibetan struggle for self-determination. His recent study on nationalism, *China's Tibet?,* and analysis of the causes of Tibetan revolt in 2008, *Tibet's Last Stand?*, provide deep insight into the various causes of conflict in western China. More specifically, the Tibetan struggle for autonomy against assimilation and acculturation defies the Chinese central government's claim of stability in the west and continues to threaten the internal security of the state.[34] Ultimately, despite the government's capital expenditures and many significant achievements, Tibet and Xinjiang refuse to be interwoven into the cultural fabric of the Han Chinese mainland.

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[31] Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167-191.

[32] William Zartman, "Dynamics and Constraints in Negotiations in Internal Conflicts," *Elusive Peace: Negotiating an End to Civil Wars,* ed. William Zartman (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1995), 3-29.

[33] Peter T. Coleman, Jennifer Goldman, and Kathrin Kugler, *Emotional Intractability: The Effects of Perceptions and Emotional Roles on the Immediate and Delayed Conflict Outcomes*, February 14, 2006 (accessed November 23, 2009); available from: http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=915947, 3.

[34] Warren W. Smith, Jr., *Tibet's Last Stand?* (Plymouth, England: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), and Warren W. Smith., Jr., *China's Tibet?* (Plymouth, England: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008).

Several studies on economic development and ethnic conflict in Xinjiang are particularly relevant in light of nearly parallel processes occurring in Tibet. The geopolitical theory of center and periphery is illustrated ethno-nationally in Jessica Koch's "Economic Development and Ethnic Separatism in Western China: A New Model of Peripheral Nationalism."[35] Her comparative analysis of Chinese national policy for ethnic minorities and foreign policy with states that also have populations of those minorities can be extended from Xinjiang and applied to Tibet. Additionally, Matthew Moneyhon has written extensively on the structural factors that have led to ethnic conflict in Xinjiang.[36] My analysis of the tension between Tibetan demands for autonomy and Beijing's iron-fisted state policy echoes his work elsewhere in western China.

I have drawn from Development Studies literature on rural road development to examine the implications of modern infrastructure on remote, minority, and 'traditional' populations.[37] Tibet and Xinjiang are currently experiencing growing pains that are symptoms of the arrival and introduction of new roads in rural regions (not to mention globalization in general). This is a phenomenon that has parallel models around the globe, many cases of which are discussed by John Howe and Peter Richards in their compendium, *Rural Roads and Poverty Alleviation.*[38] I draw on Howe and Richards' case studies on road development and the tension and contrast it presents between economic opportunity and vulnerability to exploitation to contextualize Tibet and Xinjiang in the 21st century. Robert

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[35] Jessica Koch, "Economic Development and Ethnic Separatism in Western China: A New Model of Peripheral Nationalism," *Asia Research Center, Working Paper, no. 134* (August 2006).

[36] Moneyhon.

[37] By 'traditional,' I mean populations that are historically pastoral and/or agrarian and that have had little contact with global economic systems prior to the arrival of modern roads in their homelands.

[38] John Howe and Peter Richards, eds., *Rural Roads and Poverty Alleviation* (London: International Labor Organization: 1984).

Chambers has also written extensively on the political and cultural complications of rural road development in *Rural Development: Putting the Last First.*[39] The construction of roads has long been a policy priority for developing nations, and China's ambitious western development strategy (*xibu da kaifa*) follows this common model.

More focused examinations on the significance of road development in remote territories of the western Himalaya – namely northern Pakistan – have been made by Mahnaz Ispahani and Hermann Kreutzmann. Ispahani's *Roads and Rivals: The Political Uses of Access in the Borderlands of Asia* remains the most comprehensive and authoritative study on the international, geopolitical significance of road development in disputed territories of the western Himalaya.[40] Her study of the Karakoram Highway is particularly relevant to my analysis on the influence of infrastructure on borderland development and regional change.

Kreutzmann has completed the most thorough and comprehensive studies of Himalayan road networks to date. While his interests primarily focus on the Karakoram and western Himalaya, his survey of "metalled" (or modern, sealed) road systems in the Hindukush, Karakoram, and Himalaya is incorporated into my data sets. I also utilize his analysis on "The Impact of Road Construction on Mountain Societies" to discuss the deep and irreversible change that roads bring to historically isolated communities.[41]

My research is also informed by the nascent, but growing, social science literature of Tibetan Studies. Although the field of Tibetan Studies has a rich history dating to the 19th century, only very recently has its scholarship expanded beyond the scope of traditional

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[39] Robert Chambers, *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (Essex, England: Longman, 1983).

[40] Mahnaz Ispahani, *Roads and Rivals: The Political Uses of Access in the Borderlands of Asia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 145.

[41] Hermann Kreutzmann, "The Karakoram Highway: The Impact of Road Construction on Mountain Societies," *Modern Asian Studies*, 25, no. 4 (1991): 711.

religious, philological, and historical disciplines.[42] Moving beyond these scholarly

limitations, my work is primarily informed by research conducted by contemporary social

scientists on economic and demographic subjects. These include: Robbie Barnett on the

modernization of Tibetan cities and ethnic tensions therein;[43] Geoff Childs on traditional

livelihoods in borderland regions of the Tibetan Himalaya;[44] Kenneth Bauer on rangeland

management and traditional Himalayan livelihoods;[45] and Emily Yeh on the effect of modern

Chinese development policies on traditional nomadic as well as urban Tibetan

communities.[46] From my study on the geopolitical and socio-economic significance of road

systems in the 21st century Himalaya, I aspire to contribute new research to this foundational

social science literature of Modern Tibetan Studies.

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[42] Kenneth Bauer and Geoff Childs, "Demographics, Development, and the Environment in Tibetan Areas," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies*, no. 4 (Decemeber 2008): 1-7 (accessed March 9, 2010); available from: http://www.thlib.org/collections/texts/jiats/#jiats=/04/bauer/b3/)

[43] Robert Barnett, *Lhasa: Streets with Memories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), and Robert Barnett, ed. *Resistance and Reform in Tibet* (Bloomington, Indiana: 1994).

[44] Geoff Childs. *Tibetan Transitions: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Fertility, Family Planning, and Demographic Change* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

[45] Kenneth Bauer. *High Frontiers: Dolpo and the Changing World of Himalayan Pastoralists* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

[46] Emily Yeh. "Tropes of indolence and the cultural politics of development in Lhasa, Tibet." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 97, no. 3 (2007): 593-612.

PART I. WHAT IS THE TRANS HIMALAYA (AND *WHERE* IS TIBET)?
GEOGRAPHICAL DEFINITIONS AND GEOPOLITICAL THEORIES ON INNER ASIA

More than just a massive mountain range, the Himalaya is a major Inner Asian cultural region with extensive common, geographical denominators. Although conventionally defined by geology and politics, the Himalaya is far more complex than the geopolitical borders delineated along its glaciated spine. A comprehensive analysis of the Himalaya must therefore consider the core anthropological and historical dimensions of the region, those that transcend the limitations of the modern nation-state structure and extend into a greater "cultural" arena. As such, before discussing the modern development of the Himalaya Complex, the Trans and Tibetan Himalaya itself will first be defined according to key geological, anthropological, and geopolitical aspects.

In Chapter 1, I define the parameters of the Himalaya in two contexts: the greater Trans Himalaya and the more central Tibetan Himalaya. This discussion provides a geographical, cultural, and historical background on Inner Asia before I make a more theoretical evaluation of the region. Moreover, it also clarifies the parameters of political Tibet and the greater Tibetan cultural region, an often misunderstood construct.

Chapter 2 provides an introduction to two geopolitical theories that are germane to current developments in both the Trans and Tibetan Himalaya. First, I review the geopolitical logic of Frontier-Boundary theory *vis a vis* the Trans Himalaya, both historically and contemporarily. Therein, I explain how the Himalaya exhibits, and is defined by, both centrifugal and centripetal forces that respectively correspond with the Frontier and the Boundary. I also analyze the nature of frontiers and borders with respect to the foreign and domestic policies of both China and India.

Following this section, I then discuss the Shatterbelt-Gateway dynamic and apply theoretical concepts from that framework to Inner Asia. This section also includes a survey of the major conflicts that comprise the Himalaya Complex as well as a preview of the region's emerging Gateway phenomenon. Finally, I then present my first, minor case study on the modernization of Afghanistan's road network. This provides an initial example of a Shatterbelt-Gateway transformation in the Trans Himalaya.[47]

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[47] That is, the stabilizing effect of domestic transportation infrastructure in Trans Himalayan regions that have experienced recent and protracted conflict.

Chapter 1.   A Geographic Perspective on High Asia

A. The Trans Himalaya: Common Mountains, Rivers, and Traditions

Geologically, the Trans Himalaya (or Greater Himalaya) stretches north-west to south-east for nearly 3000 kilometers across Central-South Asia. Towering where the Indian Subcontinent collides with the Eurasian landmass, this Himalaya comprises the entire alpine knot of Inner Asia. Also known as the 'Roof of the World,' it is a convergence of mountain ranges that includes the Tibetan Plateau and extends in an unbroken line from the glaciated peaks of eastern Kazakhstan's Tien Shan range to the mountainous jungles of northern Burma.

The central heart of the Himalaya, or Great Himalaya, is defined by precise topographic end-points where major rivers make great turns around two of the largest mountains on earth. The poles of this expanse are Mt. Nanga Parbat in northern Pakistan and Mt. Namche Barwa in southeastern Tibet (southwest Yunnan Province, China).[48] More specifically, these termini are where the Indus River wraps nearly 270 degrees around the Nanga Parbat massif before turning south towards Karachi and the Arabian Sea and where the Tsangpo/Brahmaputra River wraps around the Namche Barwa massif and similarly turns south towards Calcutta and the Bay of Bengal.[49]

However, the Trans Himalaya (as opposed to the Great Himalaya) is far vaster than the areas confined by these peaks and rivers. Starting from the northwest, it includes the ranges and lands of Pakistan's Karakoram and Afghanistan's Hindu Kush as well as

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[48] Nanga Parbat is 8126 meters, making it the 9th tallest mountain on earth. Namche Barwa is not actually 8000 meters – of which there are only fourteen – but very close at 7756 meters.

[49] The exact coordinates of these peaks are: Nanga Parbat (74°33'30.11"E, 35°10'4.91"N and Namche Barwa: (95° 3'56.78"E, 29°37'32.70"N). Determined using Google Earth (accessed December 5, 2010); available from: http://earth.google.com.

Tajikistan's Pamir, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan's Tien Shan, and China's Kun Lun ranges.[50]

On the eastern end, the Trans Himalaya extends beyond northeastern India and into northern

Myanmar and the highlands of southwest China. Furthermore, to the north the Himalaya

includes the entire Tibetan Plateau up to the Central Asian steppe and Tarim Basin. And in

the south, the Himalaya ends where its altitude drops below 1000 meters and its rivers

descend from the hills of central Nepal down into the Gangetic Plains.

Major Ranges and Significant Peaks of the Himalaya[51]

On the map above, the Trans Himalaya is depicted by the arc of snow-capped

mountains visible as white ridgelines shaded across the center of the image. The Tibetan

Plateau forms the high-altitude lake region that terminates where the Kun Lun mountains

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[50] The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), a leading non-governmental organization based in Kathmandu, Nepal that conducts research and reports in Asian mountain zones, classifies the region as the Hindu Kush-Himalaya. See below for an illustration of the Hindu Kush-Himalaya watershed and river systems. *Regional Information: Hindu Kush-Himalaya Region* (accessed May 3, 2010); available from: http://www.icimod.org/index.php?page=43.

[51] Map created by the author using Google Earth (accessed May 3, 2010); available from: http://earth.google.com

descend into the Tarim Basin and Taklamakan Desert. These appear, as their names imply, as the flat and low altitude desertified areas depicted by grey and sand-colored shading to the north.

In addition to the mountains themselves, the waters of the Trans Himalaya are a key aspect of its geographical (and geopolitical) identity. Over one third of humanity – at least 2 billion people – live within the greater Himalayan watershed, and its rivers sustain populations from Beijing to Bombay and Hanoi to Herat.[52] The glaciers and aquifers of the Trans Himalaya are the fount of Eurasia's great waterways, and have been the cradle and lifeblood of civilizations for thousands of years. These rivers include the: Mekong; Yangtze; Yellow; Tsangpo/Brahmaputra; Indus; Ganges; Amu Darya/Oxus; and Syr Darya/Jaxartes.

As many observers have already pointed out, water has become one of the greatest security concerns for the 21st century. And as it becomes a more contested resource and central topic of international geopolitics, the snows of the Himalaya will become increasingly critical. For one, the 'controversial' effects of global climate change are made dramatically evident upon observation of the rate of retreat of Himalayan glaciers.[53] The consequences of this enhanced glacial melt include the major, short-term risk of disastrous flooding along Asia's major rivers, not unlike what Pakistan experienced in August 2010. Moreover, the danger zone is precisely where the vast majority of the continent's populations live. Conversely, some longer-term hydrological ramifications of climate change include significant water shortages for the billions of people who live within the Himalayan watershed and increased desertification of Inner Asia's landscapes. In light of these realities,

[52] *Regional Information: Hindu Kush-Himalaya Region*,

[53] Anil V. Kulkarni, I. M. Bahuguna, B. P. Rathore, S. K. Singh, S. S. Randhawa, R. K. Sood, and Sunil Dhar, "Glacial retreat in Himalaya using Indian Remote Sensing satellite data," *Current Science* 92, no. 1 (January 10, 2007): 71.

and as the largest non-polar source of this irreplaceable and increasingly contested resource, the Himalaya will remain at the nexus of resource management and international relations for decades to come.

Watersheds and River Systems of the Trans Himalaya[54]
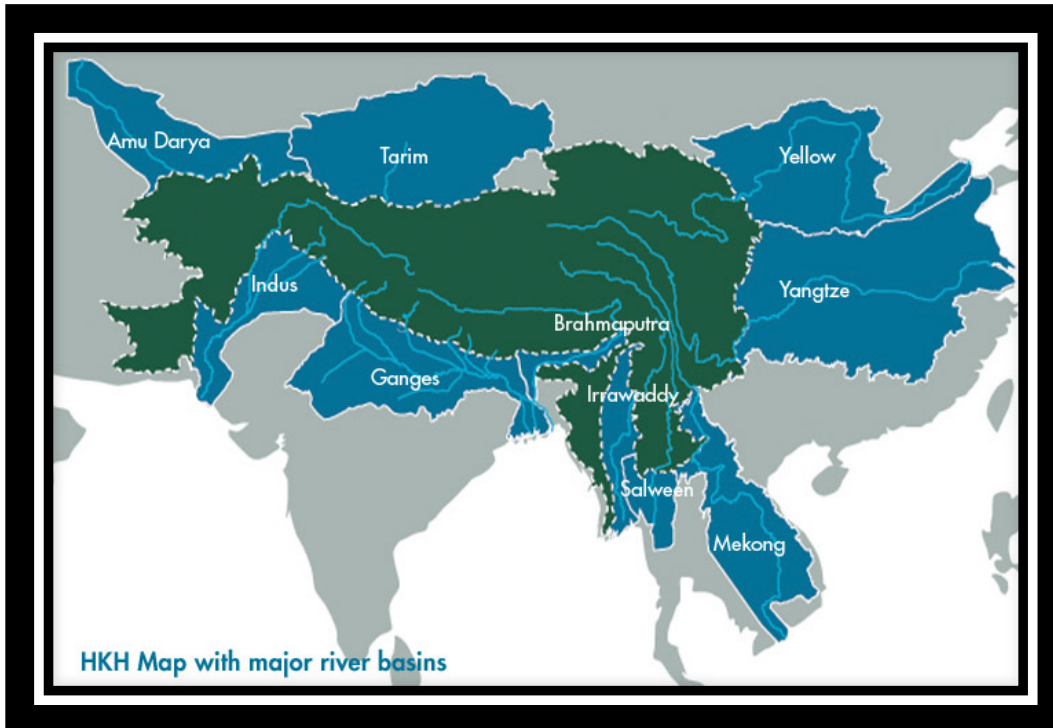
For this paper, 'Trans Himalaya' will be used in reference to the heart of Inner Asia where the region's six major mountain ranges and the Tibetan Plateau intersect. Although this place is home to many religious traditions and ethnic identities, there are several common, cultural denominators that belie this heterogeneity. These factors include ancestral ideology, traditional livelihoods, Buddhist heritage, and unique ecological systems.

This common profile of the Trans Himalaya has roots from the Kazak Steppe to the hillsides of Nepal, exemplified by populations that are predominately composed of seasonal nomadic and pastoral mountain peoples. In virtually all of these communities, a common

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[54] *Regional Information: Hindu Kush-Himalaya Region.*

creation myth, and ideology, can be traced to the "sociopolitical-religious ideal of the heroic lord" and his band of warrior brothers, the descendents of whom live in the region today.[55] In addition, the domestication of unique fauna, namely the yak, cashmere goat, and Mongol horse is found widely, and exclusively, across this elevated terrain. The rangeland of these species is the expansive mountain pasture that stretches, west to east, from the slopes of western Kyrgyzstan to the highlands of eastern Tibet and, from south to north, from the mountainsides of northern Nepal to the grasslands of the Mongolian steppe.

B. Tibet Identified: A Cultural and Political History

At the heart of this 'Trans Himalaya' is the 'Tibetan Himalaya.' I will use this term in reference to the specific cultural and historical region that crosses numerous international borders and comprises the ethnographic Tibetan world. Whether shepherds or farmers, the people of this Tibetan Himalaya share a common ethnic heritage with respect to language, religion, and food. In fact, the identification of such 'Tibetan-ness' has even been equated with *tsampa*, or roasted barley flour, the staple of the Himalayan diet.[56] Anyone called a '*tsampa*-eater' from Burma to Pakistan likely lives at high altitude, speaks a Tibetan dialect, raises yaks and sheep, drinks salt and/or butter tea, rides horses extremely well, and probably is (or historically was) a Buddhist as well.

For example, the people of Baltistan, a Shi'a Muslim area of Pakistani Kashmir based in the high Karakoram, share many cultural traits with Buddhist communities on the other

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[55] Christopher Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road: A History of Central Eurasia from the Bronze Age to the Present* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[56] Nicolas Tournadre and Sangda Dorje, *Manual of Standard Tibetan* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2003).

side of the Tibetan Plateau.[57] Not only do Baltis traditionally speak an historical form of Tibetan astonishingly similar to that spoken 3000-kilometers to the east in the steep jungles of China's Yunnan Province, they also eat *tsampa*, drink salty tea, and maintain architectural styles that are strikingly consistent with those in all other Buddhist Himalayan kingdoms. Moreover, from Baltistan to Mongolia, virtually everyone calls moonshine *arak, polo* (Tibetan for 'ball') remains a favorite traditional sport, and gold teeth continue to be a ubiquitous fashion accoutrement!

Buddhism is also a common historical legacy, as in centuries past it was the primary religion of Asia. Even today, Buddhist paintings and temple relics are found not just in India, Nepal, and Tibet, but in the distant corners of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Xinjiang, and Kyrgyzstan as well. These are, in many cases, living relics of the iconographies and philosophies carried and exchanged along the illustrious Silk Roads. Although many of the region's Buddhist civilizations of the first millennium were eventually replaced by Muslim Khanates – empires that were in turn conquered by various Western imperial powers – elements and influences of the Buddhist faith remain today. As a result, the legacy of Buddhism is an indubitable link between the Tibetan Himalaya, where it continues to be practiced today, and the frontier lands of Inner Asia – and the entire Trans Himalaya – where it flourished in times past.[58]

Historically, the Trans Himalaya was a gateway for one of the earliest trans-continental economies – the great routes of the Silk Roads. At its apex under the Mongol Empire in the 13th-14th centuries, the cosmopolitan towns of Inner Asia supported the flow of

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[57] This area has recently gained popular recognition through the work of Greg Mortenson, the work of his Central Asia Institute, and his bestseller, *Three Cups of Tea*.

[58] For a geopolitical example, consider that the seemingly irreconcilable dispute between China and Tibet over Tibet's claim to independence is historically rooted in Buddhism through the Mongol patronage link between the Qing Dynasty and Lhasa's lamaseries. See Beckwith, *Empires of the Silk Road*.

commerce and trade from the Pacific to the Atlantic across this vast Eurasian landmass.

During this period, the Himalaya was a hub and interchange of goods and ideas, making it

one of the earliest, global 'Gateway' regions.[59] A number of major crossroads and oases of

this early transport network were found across the Tibetan Plateau and in the widest of

Himalayan valleys, from Kashgar and Leh in the west to Lhasa and Gangtok in the east.

Today, these four towns have again become critical waypoints within the emerging

transportation network of the Himalaya Complex.

Gateways of Kashgar, Leh, Lhasa, and Gangtok[60]
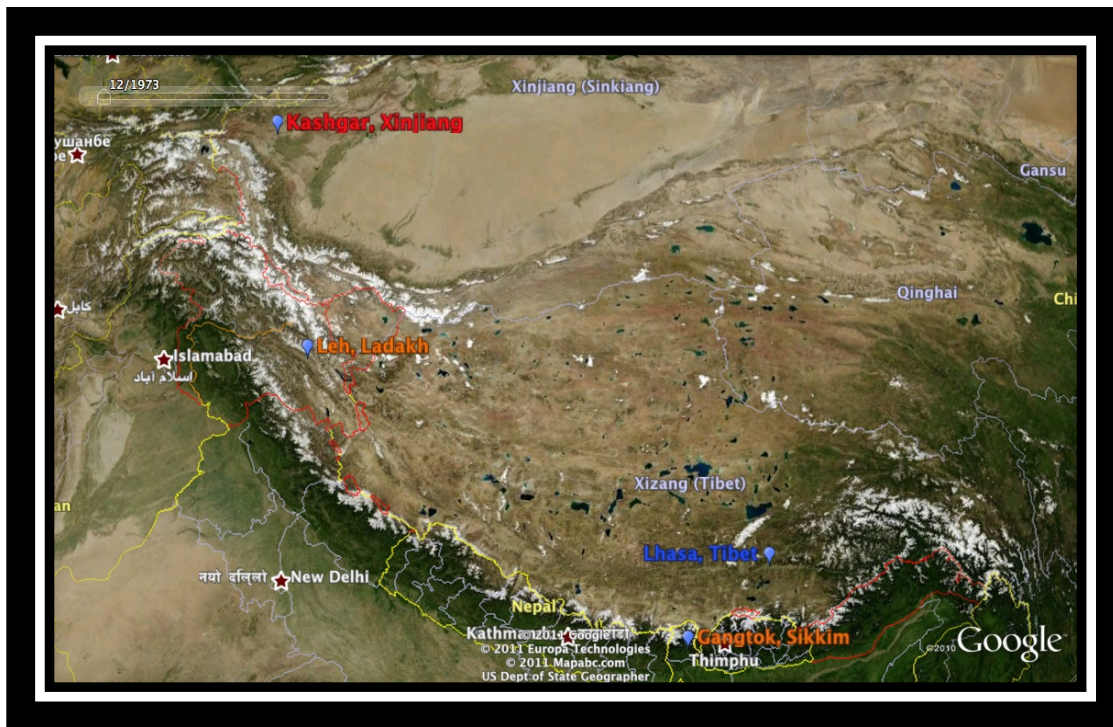
It is essential to discuss the locations of Kashgar, Lhasa, Leh, and Gangtok in terms

of a working definition of both the Trans and Tibetan Himalaya. The first two are the cultural

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[59] Saul Bernard Cohen's geopolitical framework on the 'Gateway' concept, as well as its opposite, the 'Shatterbelt,' will be discussed below.

[60] Map made by author using Google Earth (accessed March 13, 2011); available from: http://earth.google.com

capitals of Xinjiang and Tibet, respectively, and the major cities of China's western provinces. Perhaps more than anywhere else, they have also undergone dramatic (at many times traumatic) and irreversible transformations under Chinese development projects. Leh and Gangtok, on the other hand, are frontier towns of India's northwestern and northeastern states of Jammu and Kashmir and Sikkim, respectively. Both were popular trading posts and *caravanserai* (resting places) on the historic Silk Roads. Today they are militarized and modernizing city-towns in extremely close proximity to the Sino-Indian border. Most importantly, however, is the fact that each of these Himalayan towns has a fundamental link to Tibet with respect to geography and ethnicity.[61]

Due to great discrepancies between modern politics and ethnic heritage, the term 'Tibet' is often confusing and must also be defined for this discussion. Tibet is often used interchangeably, and sometimes mistakenly, in reference to two (or even three) regions, one a smaller but core component of the other(s). Officially, Tibet refers to the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), a province of western China popularly known for political sensitivity and Hollywood sympathy as well as the former home of the Dalai Lamas. This TAR comprises the historical Tibetan regions of U, Tsang, and Ngari. However, historical Tibet was approximately 60% larger than the TAR, and included the majority of the modern Chinese province of Qinghai (known in Tibetan as Amdo), much of western Sichuan (known in Tibetan as Kham), as well as large portions of the Gansu and Yunnan provinces.

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[61] Kashgar is the one possible exception, as its indigenous population is Uyghur and Muslim rather than Tibetan and Buddhist. Despite this, however, its position along the historical Silk Roads and relevance to 21st century Gateways places it in an analogous context as the other towns: Leh, Lhasa, and Gangtok.

Political Regions of Tibet within People's Republic of China[62]
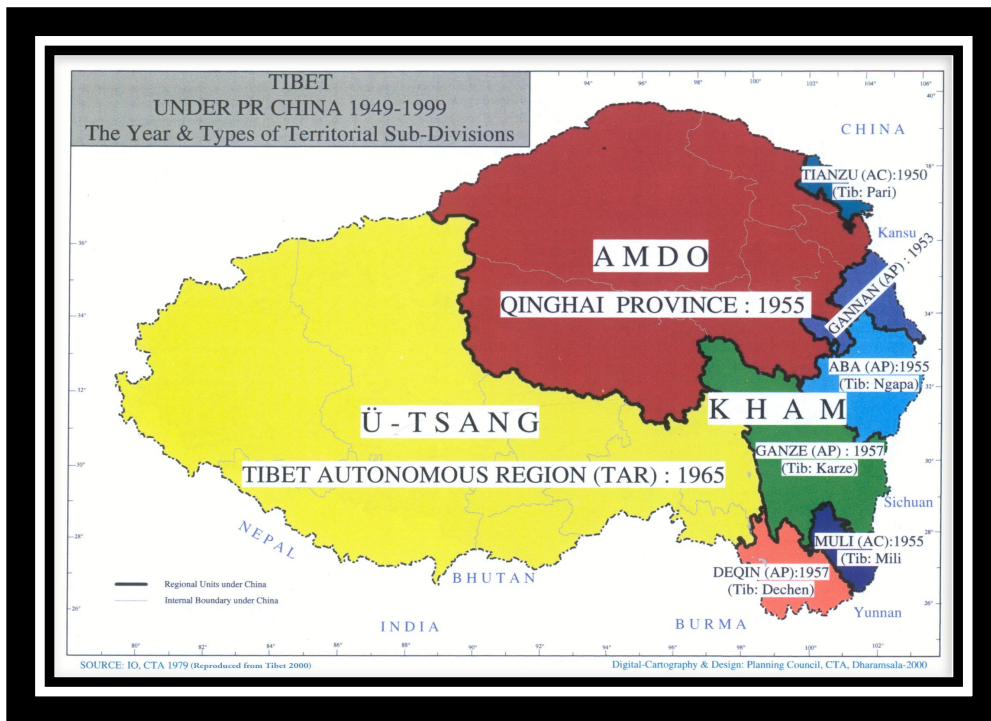
Both historically and still today, the scope of the greater Tibetan world, or Lhasa's 'sphere of influence,' exceeds the borders of the modern Chinese state. This Tibetan Himalaya includes those adjacent regions where people speak dialects of Tibetan, identify themselves as Tibetan Buddhists, and generally eat *tsampa* on a daily basis. The zone is also largely consistent with the vast range of monastic 'lamaseries' that flourished under the Vajrayana Buddhist renaissance of the 12-14th centuries. Even today, this pan-Tibetan region entails far more than just China's Tibet; that is, it includes: India's Ladakh-Zanskar territories of Jammu and Kashmir; the north Indian state of Sikkim as well as large areas of India's north-eastern states; Bhutan; the northern third of Nepal; and vast stretches of south-west China and even some of northern Burma.[63] Accordingly, in this paper the term 'Tibetan

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[62] Map of Political Tibet (accessed March 25, 2011); available from www.tibet.net.

[63] One might even include the greater territory that extends from northeastern Pakistan, across southern Xinjiang and the Dunhuang area of Gansu, and into southern Mongolia. However, while these areas were historically Buddhist (and in the case of Mongolia, still is), they are not included in this definition of the Tibetan Himalaya because only the Pakistani region

Himalaya' will refer to the entire Tibetan cultural region and 'Tibet' will refer to all Tibetan

regions of China (rather than the TAR alone).

The Tibetan Cultural Region[64]
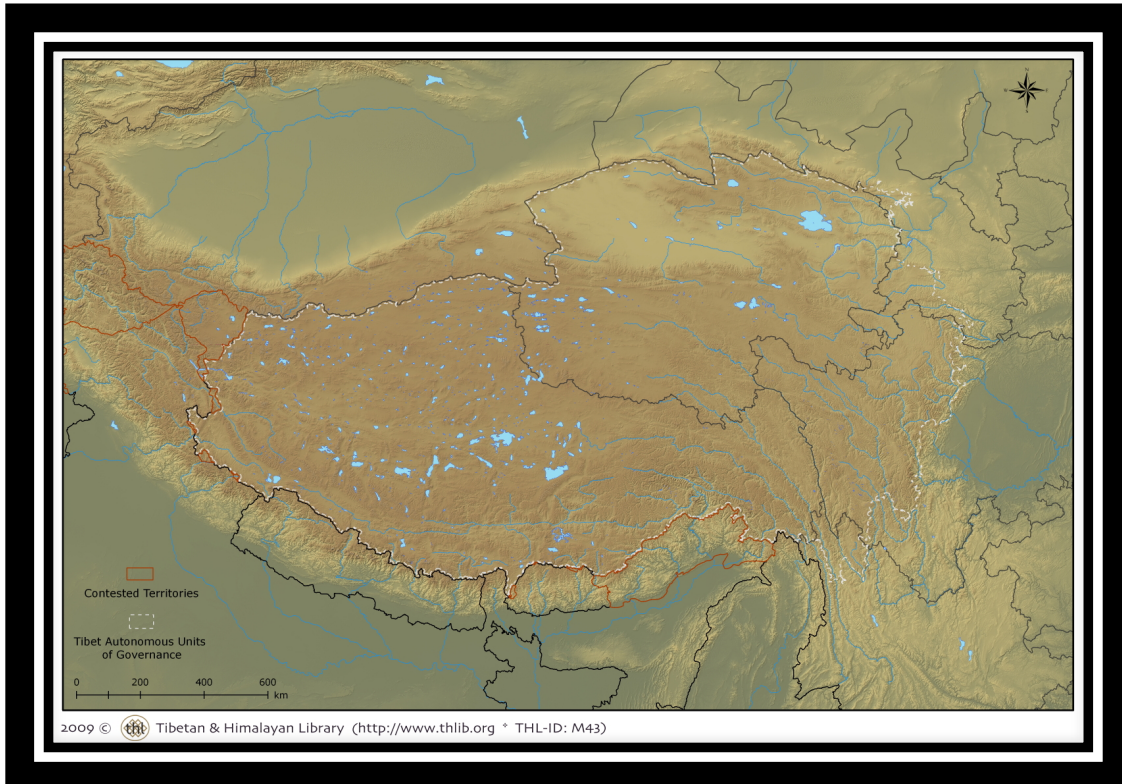
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[64] This unlabeled map is used intentionally to illustrate the trans-border nature of the Tibetan world. All areas shaded in
brown are linguistically and culturally Tibetan regions. The Tibetan and Himalayan Library (accessed March 25, 2011);
available from http://www.thlib.org/places/maps/collections/show.php?id=275.

Chapter 2.   Towards a Geopolitical Theory of the Trans Himalaya

In order to analyze the connection between transportation, markets, policy, and migration and its association with conflict and change in High Asia, it is necessary to establish a theoretical framework with which to evaluate the region. For this, I correlate prominent, theoretical concepts from the field of political geography to events that are occurring today in Central Eurasia. First, I utilize the Frontier-Boundary dichotomy to examine the historical relevance of Inner Asia and, moreover, to examine the intra-state vs. inter-state interests that fuel development projects in the region today. I then discuss the geopolitical model of the Shatterbelt-Gateway dynamic and apply it to the Himalaya Complex system. Finally, I discuss the dual role of the Himalaya as both a borderland and a frontier zone and make my first, minor case study on the emergence of the Afghan Gateway.

Borderlands of the Trans Himalaya and Inner Asia[65]

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[65] Map created by author the using Google Earth (accessed May 3, 2010); available from: http://earth.google.com.

A. The Frontier and Boundary: A Theoretical Framework of Himalayan Geopolitics

A result of the emergence of Gateways out of the Himalaya Shatterbelt is that the peripheral position of remote mountain valleys and villages across the Tibetan Plateau are becoming increasingly linked to the centers – that is, Beijing, New Delhi, and the greater global economy. Security interests and state policies that have traditionally prioritized the boundary and its centripetal, constrictive aspect are instead looking towards and beyond the frontier according to its centrifugal pull. The tension that exists between these two trajectories is a defining feature of the Himalaya today.

Due to its extreme topography, the Trans Himalaya has functioned, across time and place, as both a frontier and a boundary. In the sense of the former, its people have been exposed to products and worldviews from the East as well as the West. As such, the frontier activities of the Himalaya, with its "mobility of people, commodities, and ideas," came to define the region during the Silk Road era.[66] However, its geographical structure, and the formidable girth of such a landmass, has also characterized the place, particularly upon the advent of the modern nation state. And so in more recent times, the Himalaya has been a boundary that creates borders, (relatively) "closed and static," and political climates have subsequently been determined by the features of its physical environment.[67] Now, according to 21st century geopolitics, many things are changing, and the Himalaya acts both as a boundary and a frontier and it exhibits both inward and outward aspects.

In most cases today, the range is chiefly perceived as a boundary, a fence that separates and contains Asian nations. Ladis Kristof recognized this function as one that

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[66] Wim Van Spengen, *Tibetan Border Worlds: A Geohistorical Analysis of Trade and Traders* (London: Kegan Paul International: 2000), 12.

[67] Ibid..

defines sovereignty, where boundaries exert a centripetal force and suggest an orientation towards the homeland, or the center.[68] Ultimately, the Himalaya performs this centripetal, geopolitical function in two ways: it delineates national territories and it divides the respective spheres of influence of Eurasia's rival, nuclear states: mountain ranges constitute the physical borders between China and India as well as between China and southern Central Asia and Pakistan/Afghanistan.

Therefore, more than any other environmental feature in Asia, the geology of the Himalaya is a political geography that defines international borders. For example, China and Nepal's boundary is largely located along the spine of the Great Himalaya (where the highest mountains are located), and the very summit of Mt. Everest is itself an official border. Congruently, the international borders of most all South-Central Asian states – China, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan – are largely defined according to sub ranges of the Trans Himalaya (including the Karakoram, Hindu Kush, Pamir, and Tien Shan, etc.). As a result, the boundary structure of the mountains has had an historic influence on domestic policies as well as international relations throughout the region.

Both in addition to and opposed to the boundary construct, the mountain areas of the Trans Himalaya are also historical frontier zones. As such, this rarified alpine, plateau, and steppe territory also has a centrifugal aspect – the horizon towards which states orientate their outward sights and their expansive foreign policies. According to this model, Kristof also recognized that "the frontier is outer-oriented. Its main attention is directed toward the outlying areas which are both a source of danger and a coveted prize."[69]

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[68] Kristof.

[69] Kristof, 127.

In terms of their frontier history, the Tibetan Empire and East Turkestan (now known as Xinjiang) were, for centuries of imperial China and India's rulers, the great 'Wild West.' While the Chinese did construct their Great Wall in order to blockade the Mongol Hordes from the north, the land of mystics, traders, and brigands to the south and west – Tibet and Xinjiang – were either engaged in religious or economic exchanges (through Silk Road trade) or, otherwise, left to their own devices.[70] Thus, despite various efforts to contain the nomads and establish imperial sovereignty, the Himalayan frontier remained a land primarily self-governed and a space with a centrifugal pull (and fascination) for the lowland masses.[71]

In a view from the West, the magnetism of the Himalayan frontier was powerful during the 18th and 19th centuries, particularly under the imperial British Raj in India. For them, Tibet and Xinjiang were both overland Gateways to China and, more importantly, buffer states to Czarist Russia. That is because during the high period of the Great Game, the Himalaya was an arena of espionage and intrigue between British India and Czarist Russia, with both London and Moscow jockeying for control of Central Eurasia.[72] At that imperial time, the region was more arena than avenue, and its utility was more strategic than economic (although trade did of course factor into the regional calculus).

In the early 20th century, Sir Halford Mackinder famously labeled the Trans Himalayan region "The Heartland," a concept that remains influential even today.[73] His critical theory on the primacy of control of Central Eurasia, or the "World Island," and the

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[70] Perdue.

[71] This fascination with the Wild West, or mystical Tibet, is particularly popular today, manifested in the exponential growth of Chinese tourism to Tibetan regions of China and the branding of many things Tibetan – from natural medicinals to Buddhist teachings – as ancient, sacred, and powerful. This 'Brand Tibet,' its commercialization, and the associated tourism industry is an important topic for which there is, unfortunately, insufficient space to comprehensively analyze in this paper. However, please see Chapter 4 for more discussion on the topic.

[72] Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[73] Mackinder.

relevance of its proximate Rimland, went on to influence generations of Cold Warrior leaders. From its place in the geographic logic of Owen Lattimore to its position on Zbigniew Brzezinski's "Grand Chessboard," the role of Inner Asia on international affairs has long been significant (if not popularly well known).

Today, the Trans Himalaya has assumed even greater importance. Fundamentally, it is the crossroads towards which the expanding economies of Inner Asia – China and India, as well as Pakistan and Kazakhstan – focus their attention. And rather than a centripetal push, it is a centrifugal pull that dominates the region, characterized by roads being built through the mountains to markets on the other sides of the border. Moreover, the vast mineral and petroleum resources in the ground of the Trans Himalaya are a major gravitational pull for the growing economies and populations of Eurasia. Those hydrocarbons are a critical element that links local resources, and communities, to regional and national interests to, furthermore, the global economy. Ultimately, this is the very phenomenon that drives the emerging Gateway network of the Himalaya Complex.

An underlying principle of infrastructure development is to bring rural regions into the fold of the urban, to integrate the peripheral with the central, to link the margins to the main.[74] In turn, it follows that a single region can, and often does, serve as both a frontier and a boundary. Therefore, although the frontier-boundary is a dichotomous construct, its two aspects are not mutually exclusive.

Despite the centrifugal characteristics of New Delhi and Beijing's strategic actions in their respective, Eurasian 'frontiers,' much of the Himalaya indeed functions both as a frontier and a boundary. As Michael Van Spangen recognized, a "regular trait of former

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[74] Of course, multitudinous infrastructure projects will invariably penetrate this boundary construct, a centrifugal action that reverts the region back to its frontier aspect.

frontier areas has been their transformation into fixed boundaries."[75] This transformation is

precisely one of the aims of Beijing's 'open up the west' campaign. The economic

development of the western provinces will create an ordered and controlled space on China's

periphery and thereby buttress the strength of the center.[76]

In terms of India, Delhi is building more extensive highways networks across the

country's northern reaches to both integrate remote areas and to the fortify the border against

perceived threats from neighboring China and Pakistan. In a very complex manner, these

roads are delivering modern technology and commodities to historically isolated

communities, encouraging the expansion of cross-border trade in those areas, yet

concurrently further militarizing those same regions. The ambitious effort to construct a

tunnel under the Rohtang Pass and through the geologically active Pir Panjal range of the

Indian Himalaya is one such endeavor.[77] Quite simply, the project is India's response to

China's high-profile train to Tibet. Such infrastructure will allow, for the first time ever,

year-round access to eastern Kashmir and the Siachen Glacier while also cutting in half the

overland driving time between two of India's most popular tourist destinations and historical

Himalayan trading area– Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh.

China and India's sights are set towards the horizon, and thus their development

projects follow a centrifugal trajectory upwards to the frontier. All across the Himalaya, this

has resulted in the search for and development of passages through the mountains, or

Gateways – corridors in the form of highways, railroads, pipelines, and even fiber-optic

cables – for economic, political, and cultural objectives. As a result, what were once

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[75] Van Spangen 48

[76] This 'open up the west' campaign will be discussed more extensively below in Chapter 4.

[77] India Digs Under Top of the World to Match Rival. *The New York Times*, July 31, 2010; available from:
http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/01/world/asia/01pass.html

moderately trodden pathways for yak and camel caravans are today transforming into

international highways to the remotest corners of the world.

B. Shatterbelts and Gateways of the Himalaya Complex

Once known only as a frontier backwater and considered a 'blank on the map,' the

Trans Himalaya is today a fulcrum of geopolitical dynamism.[78] Geographically, it is the

intersection of four nuclear powers (China, India, Pakistan, and Russia), the borderland of the

world's two most populous countries, the watershed for nearly half of humanity, and a nexus

of Eurasian economic growth. In addition to these factors, however, the region has also

experienced recurrent cycles of interstate war, domestic conflicts, and protracted territorial

disputes. As a result, it is fundamentally one of the most complex geopolitical regions on

earth.

In a theoretical sense, due to pervasive conflict and other negative, geopolitical

realities, the Himalaya can be called a 'Shatterbelt.'[79] Political geographer Saul Bernard

Cohen identifies three current global Shatterbelts: the Middle East; Sub-Saharan Africa; and

Andean South America. They are, or have recently been, some of the most unstable and

violent places in the world. According to Cohen, Shatterbelts are "strategically oriented

regions that are both deeply divided internally and caught up in competition between Great

Powers of the geostrategic realms."[80] On the basis of his framework, I propose that the

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[78] This is what High Asia was called in the early 20th century, a concept popularized by the British diplomat-mountaineer Eric Shipton's *Blank on the Map* in 1938. See Shipton.

[79] As mentioned above, I employ the term Shatterbelt cautiously, and do not suggest it with an ethnocentric bias. Rather, I utilize the concept to explain what happens in a 'traditional' region when pressures exerted by powerful, proximate nations converge with the radical forces of globalization (such as the modernization of technological change and urbanization). Also, in order to suggest the emergence of Gateways in the Himalaya, it is necessary to discuss their opposite (the Shatterbelt).

[80] Problematically, Cohen's Shatterbelt concept applies only to underdeveloped regions with traditional populations that are being squeezed by large, foreign powers. As a result, it might imply that such regions are structurally weak and

greater Himalaya displays similar characteristics and thus appears to be another one of the world's Shatterbelt regions.[81]

Conversely, however, the Himalaya increasingly seems to belie this fractured reality. A great convergence is happening, one of emerging markets, liberalized trade policies, and new road systems that constitutes a reopening of the region. Collectively, this formation of the Himalaya Complex relies on a network of 'Gateways' whose fundamental structure, and driving force, is the creation of new transportation systems. According to Cohen, such Gateways are boom regions that link and facilitate the exchange of peoples, goods, and ideas.[82] And now, through a correlation of modernity with history, these developments of globalization in High Asia evoke the former connectivity of the ancient Silk Roads.

i. Shatterbelts

The Trans Himalaya is a Shatterbelt because, from Uzbekistan to Burma, myriad conflicts plague the region and many of the disturbances are associated with one another. Although territorial disputes in north-east India's Arunachal Pradesh may not, at first glace, appear related to recent riots in Xinjiang, China, there is nevertheless great overlap which links these conflicts together. In this case, Beijing's claim to territorial sovereignty is opposed by two separate, but ideologically similar, movements for autonomy and self-determination: ethnically Tibetan Arunachalis and the Uyghurs of Xinjiang, respectively.

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institutionally unsound. This, of course, is certainly not the case, as many of these regions are the historical home to illustrious civilizations, including the Empires of the Inca, the Safavids, and the Mongols. Moreover, cultural traditions in these places today are inextricably linked to those societies of the past. Therefore, while I do not subscribe to the realist theories that presuppose the inevitability of Shatterbelt eruptions, I nevertheless suggest that the model is germane to contemporary dynamics in the Trans Himalaya. Cohen, *Geopolitics*.

[81] Galen Murton, "Lifting the Gates on the New Silk Roads: The Transformation of the Himalaya Shatterbelt into a 21st Century Gateway" (unpublished manuscript, The Fletcher School, May 3, 2010).

[82] Cohen, p. 50 and Murton, 2010.

Numerous other conflicts throughout the region exhibit a measure of congruency within the framework of the Himalaya Shatterbelt. These include, but are not limited to, the Naxalite and Maoist insurgencies in North India and Nepal, respectively, as well as ongoing, tripartite border disputes between China, India, and Pakistan. Although an analysis of the Himalaya Shatterbelt must look beyond the congruent and consider the diverse breadth of its many conflicts, it is beyond the scope of this paper to thoroughly elaborate on all of the complex local and regional situations that contribute to this phenomenon. However, a macro-analysis and brief summation of the most critical conflicts that comprise the Himalaya Shatterbelt, and a consideration of their local, regional, and global implications, follows.

Shatterbelt Flashpoints and Gateway Networks of the Trans Himalaya[83]

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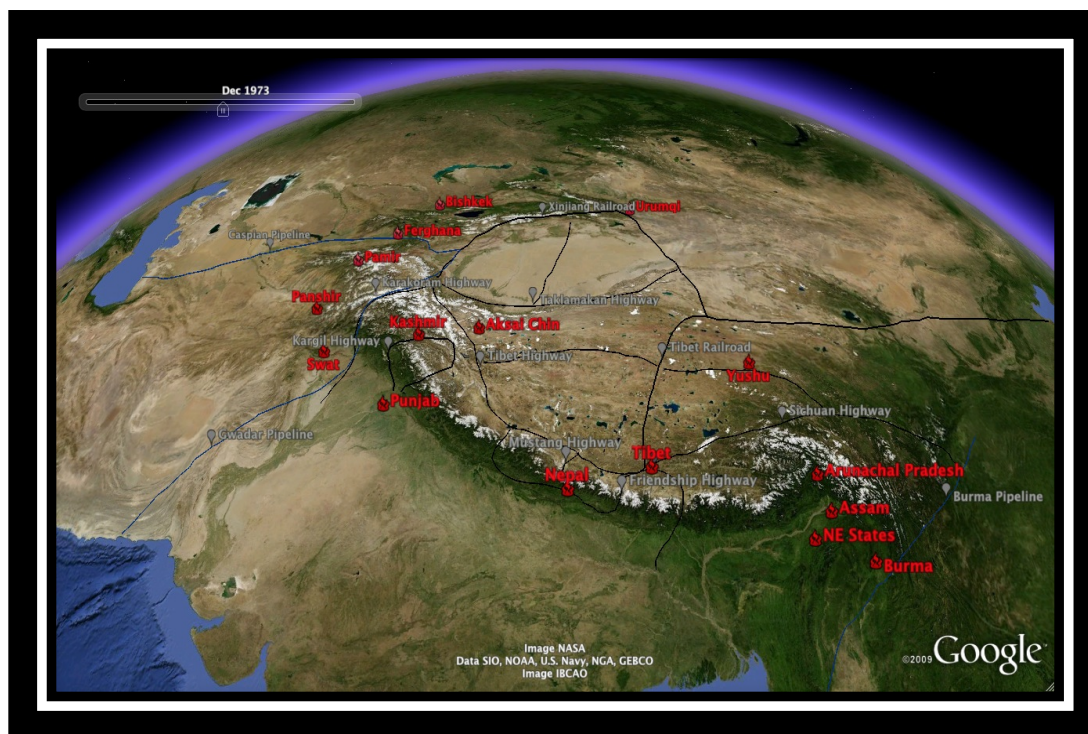
[83] Shatterbelts are depicted by the red flames; Gateways by the black and grey roads and labels. Map created by the author using Google Earth (accessed April 14, 2010); available from: http://earth.google.com.

Pakistan. Pakistan became an element of the Himalaya Shatterbelt long before the current

war in Afghanistan spread into its western territory. First and foremost, the country has never

achieved peaceful stability. From the brutal massacres at Partition with India in 1947 to the

bloody divorce from Bangladesh (East Pakistan) in 1971, Pakistan has been plagued by

devastating violence. Numerous *coups d'etat* and military dictatorships have been

exacerbated by the protracted conflict with India over Kashmir and the Indo-Pakistan Wars

of 1947, 1965, and 1999. And at the very heart of the Himalaya, the Siachen Glacier is the

highest, and one of the most inhospitable (if not uninhabitable), militarized places on earth.[84]

Although largely resolved, previous territorial disputes with China over the northern

borderlands further fueled Pakistan's instability. As conflicts radiate west and north into

Afghanistan and Central Asia as well as east and south into China and India, Pakistan is at

the center, both literally (geographically) and figuratively (politically), of the Himalaya

Shatterbelt.

Afghanistan. Afghanistan is also one of the most critical and devastating regional conflicts in

the Trans Himalaya. From the Soviet Invasion of 1979 and the Mujahideen Wars of the

1980s to the rise of the Taliban in the 1990s and subsequent US invasion in 2001 and War on

Terror, Afghanistan has been ravaged by foreign occupation and civil war for more than

three decades. Today, the struggle over Pashtunistan has made the antiquated Afghanistan-

Pakistan border of the Durand Line all but insignificant (and it, like the McMahon Line, is

but another dubious, British colonial construct). As with many of the other unstable areas of

Central Eurasia, the collapse of the Soviet Union (and the subsequent power vacuum), while

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[84] Tragically, however, more soldiers have died on the Siachen Glacier due to exposure, altitude sickness, and hypothermia than to active combat. *Siachen Glacier, Operation Meghdoot* (accessed May 2, 2010); available from: http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/siachen.htm.

ultimately a liberating event for the Afghan nation itself, led to significant increases in factionalized, tribal violence, narcotic trafficking, and a climate conducive to corruption.

India. India's position along the Shatterbelt begins, as mentioned above, in Kashmir, and then extends across her northern border, the Himalaya Range, to the extreme northeastern states of the country. India and China fought a bloody war in 1962 over the disputed territories of Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh, and these conflicts remains unresolved today. Furthermore, the violent, Maoist Naxalite insurgency threatens the north Indian states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (and violence there has been blamed on Maoist support from China and Nepal). Finally, regional struggles for autonomy and/or independence remain problematic in India's extreme northeastern states of Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur along the Burmese borderlands.[85]

Nepal. Although Nepal's decade-long civil war ended with ceasefire in April 2006, the country is far from stable in 2011. The central government exercises very limited power and continuous threats, if not outbreaks, of violence and protest strikes (*bandhs*) initiated by marginalized groups paralyze the country on a regular basis.[86] While there was international hope that the Maoist majority would deliver stability and accountability following their victory in parliamentary elections held in May 2008, Maoist leadership has thus far failed to create even a moderately effective government. Moreover, both China and India vie to

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[85] *Who Helps the Naxals?* (accessed March 25, 2011); available from: http://sify.com/news/who-helps-the-naxals-news-features-jgzpnneehee.html.

[86] *Nepal hit by Maoist bandh, peers seek PM's ouster* (accessed March 25, 2011); available from: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/South-Asia/Nepal-hit-by-Maoist-bandh-peers-seek-PMs-ouster/articleshow/5883547.cms.

control Nepal's economy and the country is increasingly becoming a proxy battleground in the contest over spheres of influence between Beijing and New Delhi.

China, Tibet: Ever since China's People's Liberation Army marched into Lhasa in 1949, Tibet has been one of the most intractable, and widely known, conflicts on earth. Tibetans' demands for independence, based on the claim of Tibet's *de facto* independence in 1949, is refuted by Beijing, which maintains that Tibet has always been a part of China and is an integral part of the Motherland. Uprisings of Tibetan resistance erupted in Lhasa in March 1959 and March 1989 and again, most recently, across three Chinese provinces with substantial Tibetan populations in March 2008. The Tibetan government-in-exile, based in Dharamsala, India, accuses Beijing of cultural imperialism and calls for a halt to the rampant development of the Tibetan Plateau because of the threat it poses to traditional culture and religion. Conversely, Beijing continues to expand the Tibetan economy while building highways and railroads into and across the Tibetan plateau. Ultimately, the crux of the problem remains the Tibetan government-in-exile's demand for 'genuine autonomy' versus Beijing's drive to 'open up the west,' facilitated by state subsidies and large-scale immigration of ethnic Han into Tibet.[87] This Sino-Tibetan conflict will be discussed much more extensively below.

China, Xinjiang: Along with Tibet, Xinjiang is a highly restive region and Uyghur resistance is now perceived by Beijing as one of the nation's most significant security concerns. Many of the very grievances expressed in Tibet are echoed in Xinjiang: the invasion of Han migrants; the marginalization of local populations; a lack of religious freedom; the threat to

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[87] *March 10 Statement of HH the Dalai Lama* (accessed March 25, 2011); available from: http://www.dalailama.com/news/post/318-march-10th-statement-of-hh-the-dalai-lama.

traditional culture; and a general lack of opportunity for (if not prejudice against) Uyghurs both in their homeland and across China.[88] These issues erupted in violent protests and riots in Urumqi in July 2009 and, despite the severe crackdown leveled by Beijing, the environment across Xinjiang remains extremely volatile.

Tajikistan: Tajikistan is still recovering from the 1992-1997 civil war and the nation's stability remains compromised by the conflict in Afghanistan. Moreover, international drug traffic exploits Tajikistan's limited security apparatus, as massive quantities of opium and heroin produced in Afghanistan are largely funneled through the loose Wakhan Corridor borderlands with Tajikistan *en route* to Russia and Central Asia. Tajikistan is also the only Persian-speaking country of post-Soviet Central Asia, which links it to the Dari/Farsi speaking populations of Afghanistan but also separates it ethnically, linguistically, and even culturally from the other Turkic-language states of Central Asia.[89]

Uzbekistan: Severe violence erupted in Uzbekistan in May 2005 with the massacre of several hundred citizens in Andijan.[90] Following this episode, the Uzbek government became increasingly oppressive and human rights and free speech remain threatened. Although the growing Uzbek economy has been fueled by large exports of natural gas, oil, gold, and cotton (amongst other resources), the general population has not benefited from this economic growth. As a result, opposition to President Islom Karimov's regime is widespread (if not often voiced, for fear of violent reprisal). As an indication of its instability, since 2005 the

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[88] *China Reports Deadly Riots in Xinjiang Region* (accessed March 25, 2011); available from: http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106290856

[89] *Tajikistan, The World Factbook* (accessed April 19, 2010); available from: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ti.html.

[90] *How the Andijan killings unfolded* (accessed April 19, 2010); available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4550845.stm.

United States Peace Corps has not operated in Uzbekistan, and the US State Department continues to define it as an 'authoritarian state.'[91]

Kygyzstan: From 1990 until 2003, Kyrgyzstan was heralded as a beacon of democracy in Central Asia and widely recognized as the most open and free country in the region. However, the rampant corruption and nepotism that have characterized the regimes of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have led to two recent popular uprisings in Kyrgyzstan. In 2005, the nonviolent protests of the 'Tulip Revolution' forced former President Askar Akayev from power after accusations of corruption and fraudulent elections. More recently, in April 2010 popular resistance to the corruption and cronyism of the Kurmanbek Bakiyev regime again erupted in nonviolent protests. However, the violent response of Bakiyev's security units led to massive, popular rioting, the ousting of Bakiyev, and a government takeover by the Kyrgyz opposition led by Roza Otunbayeva.[92] Even more recently, violent clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and ethnic Uzbeks in the southern city of Osh erupted in the summer of 2010, leaving hundreds (if not thousands) dead and missing and significantly compromising international relations between Bishkek and Tashkent.

Tragically, conflict is a common denominator all across the Trans Himalaya punctuated, unpredictably, by tenuous periods of stability. Historically, violence has erupted in the region as a result of external pressures being forced upon local populations, both by colonial powers and oppressive central governments. Today, the tensions that have led to such outbreaks are exacerbated by the shock of globalization, as formerly isolated

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[91] *2008 Human Rights Report: Uzbekistan* (accessed April 19, 2010); available from: http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2008/sca/119143.htm.

[92] Kuban Kabiev (Kyrgyz Diplomat stationed in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan and 2010 graduate of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy), electronic interview with author, April 8, 2010.

communities experience profound change as a result of technological and economic

transformations on an increasingly frequent (and perhaps imminent) basis. However, the

situation is so complex because, despite the volatility of such change, local communities also

benefit, in some cases, from such modernization. And when this happens, Gateways emerge.

That is why the Shatterbelt-Gateway model is used as a theoretical framework with which to

contextualize the complex dynamics of the region.

<u>ii. Gateways</u>

Despite their volatility, Shatterbelts are not static territories and have the potential to

change into regions of opportunity, or Gateways. In fact, because these two frameworks are

not mutually exclusive, Gateways can and do arise within Shatterbelts. The two systems exist

together when states' security and economic interests converge and foreign policies align, or

overlap, at an international level. "Structural overlap may cause so much contention as to

fragment states and regions into Shatterbelts. Conversely, such overlap can become the basis

for inter-state and regional accommodation through the formation of Gateway regions."[93]

Some specific Himalayan examples of the Shatterbelt-Gateway transformation include the

development of Afghanistan's Northern Development Network and the lifting of the gates

between India and China at the Nathu-la border post in Sikkim. Both if these projects will be

discussed more extensively below as micro case studies on road development in Chapters 2

and 5, respectively.

Cohen primarily emphasizes the international and foreign policy aspect of Gateways

and recognizes them as transformative places. He identifies them as passage zones that

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[93] Cohen, *Geopolitics*.

interconnect separate and distinct global regions on the basis of mutual interests, economic exchange, and technological development.[94] "Gateway regions are located between major realms, and possess the capacity of becoming regions of accommodation."[95] This accommodation occurs when mutual interests are recognized and national objectives move beyond a zero-sum game. The results are bi-lateral trade agreements, regional alliances for security and market growth, inter-regional infrastructure developments, and the opening of borders. Quite simply, Gateways are the spaces where mutual, inter-state opportunities should flourish.

Of course, such transformation requires not just the cooperative interests of external states, but – and perhaps even more importantly – an internal dynamic by which local populations promote and benefit from such overlap and development. That is, Gateways can only arise when local and regional interests are both met and collectively benefit from the processes of globalization (such as industrial, technological, and electronic change that comes with roads and new communications systems). However, the development of Gateways is fundamentally challenged by internal state instability – and this is a real problem for China. Conversely, building inter-state infrastructure and promoting international trade policy can, and in many instances has, been instrumental in mitigating tensions, creating Gateways, and setting the stage for the resolution of protracted conflict.

In order to facilitate cultural and economic exchange, Gateways must be strategically located – position is everything. Geographically speaking, Gateways are found where mountain passes, river ways, and small seas provide natural corridors to facilitate the flow of

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[94] Saul Bernard Cohen, "Reconfiguring the Global Geopolitical System," unpublished paper delivered at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy to DHP P208: Geography, Foreign Policy, and World Order (Tufts University, Medford, MA, April 8, 2010), 6.

[95] Ibid..

transportation and trade. Additionally, gateways typically include small states with specialized economies. The Himalaya features the ideal geography that Cohen attributes to a Gateway zone: international roads that follow mountain passes; major rivers that sustain population centers; and expanding markets increasingly linked to the global economy.[96]

There are many historical and contemporary examples of Gateways throughout the Trans Himalaya. These include the Gansu Corridor linkage between Pacific East Asia and the Central Eurasian Steppe and the oasis cities and safe avenues of the ancient Silk Roads. More recently, motorized crossings that penetrate the most formidable of mountain chains include the Khunjerab Pass (4,693m/15,397 ft.) and Lalung-la Pass (5,050m/16,570 ft.), located at the apexes of the 'Friendship Highways' between China and Islamabad, Pakistan (Karakoram Highway) and China and Kathmandu, Nepal (Arniko Highway), respectively. As mentioned above, penetrating waterways such as the Indus, Brahmaputra, Mekong, and Yangtse all originate atop the Tibetan Plateau, in the northern reaches of the Himalaya. These rivers traverse thousands of miles and have, over several millennia, sustained billions of people as they meander to great cityscapes, from ancient Mohenjadaro and Xian to modern Karachi and Shanghai.

Furthermore, and in addition to geography, technology plays a critical role on Gateways, for they are, as Cohen identified, where "space, time, and information are reconfigured."[97] China and India's economic centers, like Shenzhen and Bangalore, are becoming increasingly interdependent: manufactured goods assembled in coastal China are consumed in Indian cities, precisely where the computer software that runs those Chinese factories is produced. Also, trade in these products, though historically by sea, is bound to

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[96] Ibid..

[97] Ibid..

expand via the land linkages that run directly between China and India across the Himalaya and Tibetan Plateau.[98] Thus, technology, in combination with the rapid development of transportation networks, is currently driving a more extensive and complex transformation of the Himalayan frontier into a Gateway zone.

Gateways also exist at the policy level, and these strategic and economic inter-state alliances are providing a positive and stabilizing influence on the Trans Himalaya. New, international alliances such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Central Eurasia and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in South Asia are driving policy that increasingly liberalizes the region. Boundaries are lifting, borders are opening, and the frontier is rapidly shrinking as historically competitive states' foreign policies align to meet mutually identified interests.

In fact (and it is worth noting that), despite much negative and perhaps inaccurate press about the rivalry between the Dragon and the Elephant, relations are better between Beijing and Delhi than at virtually any other time in recent memory. For example, from 2001 to 2008, direct exchange between these Asian powers leapt from $3.6 billion to over $52 billion.[99] And while competition will certainly continue to exist, and increase, between these rising powers, the annual expansion of their bilateral trade relations and the anticipated opening of more border crossings is a testament to the change brought by emerging Gateway systems.

As mentioned above, Gateway developments can mitigate conflicts, and this is particularly the case when they introduce road linkages in troubled places. Such systems

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[98] Joanna Jolly, *Highway will bring Nepal and Tibet 'in from the cold'* (accessed May 2, 2010); available from: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8480637.stm.

[99] Waheguru Pal Singh Sindhu and Jing-dong Yuan, *China and India, Cooperation or Conflict?* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers, Inc., 2003), 150.

provide opportunities, through trade, technology, and policy, to shift the status quo and transform Shatterbelts into regions of contact and change. In the case of China and India, not only do these powerful Himalayan neighbors display increasingly interdependent and robust economies, they also show even greater space for growth and future cooperation. By capitalizing on these opportunities, the emergence of new Gateways presents unprecedented potential to overcome numerous disputes that have destabilized the region for decades. A review of the emergence of many new Gateways across the Trans Himalaya, as a result of infrastructure development and trade policy, will be made more extensively below in Part III.

C. Micro Case Study 1
Afghanistan – The Northern Development Network

Bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan is a great, global objective that headlined the first decade of the 21st century. It is also a task that has defied virtually all international efforts over the past three decades, from Communist governance, to sponsorship of the Mujahideen, to the War on Terror, to modern counterinsurgency (COIN) efforts. Tragically, thus far in Afghanistan few projects – particularly those designed around a central government – have borne durable fruit. However, there now appears a viable way to transform the Afghan Shatterbelt into a modern Gateway zone. Therefore, the Afghan road network is provided as the micro case study from Quadrant 2 of the Himalaya Complex Matrix, an example where domestic road projects promote the resolution of conflict. It presents the positive effect of my independent variable (the development of road systems) on the dependent variable (transformation of conflict) through the agencies (or intervening variables) of economic growth, state security, and regional foreign relations.

The creation of modern transportation infrastructure across Afghanistan is a new initiative that presents real promise for developing the state and promoting stability in the war-torn nation. The hallmark of this system, the Northern Development Network, will capitalize on Afghanistan's geography to integrate the nation into the nexus of Central Eurasian economic growth.[100] Signaling this, in 2007 the Government of Afghanistan confirmed its commitment to a "transport-based national strategy," clearly demonstrating the level of interest that already exists in-country.[101] Moreover, scholars at Johns Hopkins University's Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program have outlined this "Modern Silk Road Strategy" and vigorously recommend that the United States take the lead in sponsoring such an effort.[102]

The Afghanistan Road Network.[103]

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[100] Starr and Kutchins.

[101] Ibid., 8.

[102] *The New Silk Roads*, S. Frederick Starr, ed. (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, 2010).

[103] "Afghan Road Projects Shows Bumps in Drive for Stability," *Wall Street Journal,* August 17, 2009 (accessed April 22, 2011); available from: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125046546672735403.html

Source: Asian Development Bank

Located at the crossroads of South, Central, and Southwest Asia, Afghanistan could well become a hub for the region's international shipping routes. This would establish a permanent industry that requires the maintenance of stability across Afghanistan. The Network would provide sustainable economic opportunity to the country, buttress the legitimacy of a central government, and, by association, lend proximate security to other countries in the region. More specifically, overland transportation systems that traverse Afghanistan will enable the landlocked nations of Central Eurasia (rich in oil, gas, and other mineral resources) access to deep-water ports, and rapidly expanding markets, along South Asia's Indian Ocean coast. It will bring the various countries of South and Central Asia together with the collective, mutual interest in economic expansion and cross-border security, driven both by competition and cooperation.

A number of significant projects have already begun and remain international priorities. Foremost among these is the completion of the Afghan Ring Road and Kabul-Herat Highway, the core transportation system for the country. Moreover, linking this network to the trans-continental trunk roads, including the Grand Trunk Road from Peshawar to Calcutta, is already within reach. Additionally, networks that connect the Afghan highway system to roads coming from China, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and southern Pakistan are also being negotiated. These roads would provide direct access both to the hydrocarbon resources of Central Asia as well as the new, deep-water port at Gwadar in Pakistan (developed, of course, by China). Completing such a project would also be a major, supportive step towards the creation of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipeline, long on the table but yet to be realized. Finally, and in an even greater scalable shift from local and regional development to the global system, rail and electrical transmission lines could finally be linked from Afghanistan all the way to Europe as well as Southeast Asia.[104]

Both China and India maintain great interest in developing this transportation network across Afghanistan. Beijing has already made significant investments in Afghan mining operations as well as indicated its intentions to develop a highway (and perhaps even a railroad) from Xinjiang across the Hindu Kush via the Wakhan Corridor.[105] Complimentary but opposite to the TAPI Pipeline, other corridors that transfer oil and gas from Iran across northern Afghanistan would avoid the maritime chokepoint at the Strait of Hormuz and further enhance China's energy security. Finally, a domestic road system that supports

[104] Starr and Kutchins.

[105] Christian Le Miere, "Kabul's New Patron," *Foreign Affairs* (April 13, 2010).

market integration (and popular consumption) is also of great interest to China, ever on the lookout for new destinations for its export industry.

In addition to the international interest of stabilizing the country, India's activities in Afghanistan are largely driven by the desire to check China and challenge Pakistan for influence in the country. India led the effort to build the Afghan Ring Road, perhaps the most significant domestic development project conducted thus far. An extension of this road network is now being constructed to Iran's Chabahar port, which is Delhi's answer to Beijing and Islamabad's Gwadar.[106] Furthermore, India continues to invest heavily not only in transportation infrastructure, but also in national efforts at urbanization and general economic development. Perhaps more than anything else, Delhi desires to pull Afghanistan away from the grip of Islamabad and to assert its role as a primary leader in South-Central Asia.

What we see happening in Afghanistan, particularly in terms of infrastructure development, is a new, regional rivalry arising. However, I posit that the various projects now underway, spearheaded by China and India, will remain fiercely competitive but not necessarily contentious. Because Afghan stability is of direct benefit to both states, it is likely that both Beijing and Delhi will spare no effort to see that internal security (if ever established) is maintained. As the Johns Hopkins group identified, the most viable and accessible avenue to transforming the conflict in Afghanistan is a "comprehensive strategy, one that embraces the expansion of transport and trade as the main engine of economic advancement."[107] And such an initiative is, of course, nothing less than the transformation of an historical Shatterbelt zone into a new, globally connected Gateway system.

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[106] Robert Kaplan, *Monsoon* (New York: Random House, 2010)

[107] Starr and Kutchins, 9.

PART II.   VIOLENCE ON THE ROOF OF THE WORLD

A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY ON THE SINO-INDIAN AND THE SINO-TIBETAN CONFLICTS

Bearing in mind the geopolitical theories of frontiers and borderlands and having placed the Himalaya within a Shatterbelt-Gateway framework, I will next discuss two major conflicts in the region: the Sino-Indian conflict and the Sino-Tibetan conflict. This will comprise my analysis of the dependent variable: conflict, and its transformation – in this case, causation and exacerbation – in the Himalaya. In this section, I will also address the salience of road development in the region by illustrating how transportation infrastructure has played a critical role – indeed, caused and compounded – these two unique conflicts.

I will make this analysis in two parts. First, Chapter 3 is a focused case study of a significant inter-state conflict that is the result of territorial disputes and road development along the Himalayan borderlands: the Sino-Indian conflict over the Askai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh. This chapter will first examine the history of Sino-Indian relations in terms of their century-old border dispute and illustrate how the construction of a single road led to war – an analysis of the independent variable's impact on the dependent variable. I then discuss how territorial disagreements compromise these nations' inter-state relations yet, conversely, that leaders on both sides continue to maintain the status quo due to 'emotional conflict attractors' and in pursuit of domestic interests. This section will also consider the impact of several intervening variables – economic development, state security, and foreign policy – on the regional situation (however, a more extensive examination of these intervening variables will be made with the final road-specific case study on the Sikkim Road in Chapter 5). Additionally, and as an introduction to the intra-state conflict case study that

follows, this chapter will also specifically discuss the direct relationship between inter-state and intra-state conflict in terms of China's foreign and domestic policies.

Chapter 4 is a comprehensive case study analysis of the Sino-Tibetan conflict and the implications of modern transportation infrastructure development in the region. This section first reviews the political history of the Sino-Tibetan conflict, which I call the Tibet Issue – an examination of my dependent variable. I then make a focused case study of a regional road – the independent variable – and its association with current conflict: the new railroad to Lhasa. In this section, I also review the literature on intra-state and ethnic conflict and apply several theories (Galtung, Zartmann, Coleman, Fisher) to Sino-Tibetan relations in order to identify the specific factors that perpetuate conflict across the Tibetan Plateau. These intervening variables are the Chinese state policies that promote economic growth, internal security, and in-country migration. I call this complex dynamic the Tibet Problem.

Chapter 3. The Troubled Borderland: A Case Study on the Sino-Indian Conflict

"One of the most continuously negotiated borders in modern history"[108]

The great Himalayan rivalry between China and India has transcended kings and emperors, powerful dynasties and colonial rulers, and today their race for Asian (if not global) supremacy rages on. Fundamental to that contest is the long-standing conflict over the 2000-mile border that they share, one that straddles the Himalaya mountains. The political scientist and China observer, M. Taylor Fravel, has accurately stated that this Sino-Indian border dispute is one of the most protracted territorial conflicts on earth. The following chapter will analyze this conflict as a geopolitical crisis that arose from post-colonial confusion, further complicated by contrasting claims to historical possessions. More importantly, my analysis also shows that the height of this conflict, and its protracted nature, was caused by the creation of a road through a disputed, borderland territory.

This paper's first, major regional case study begins with a look at the symbolic root causes of the Sino-Indian conflict: the legacy of the colonial British McMahon Line and historical limits of the Tibetan state. My analysis focuses specifically on the disputed areas of the Aksai Chin in the western borderlands of China and India as well as Arunachal Pradesh, located along their eastern border. This examination also includes a minor, road specific case study on the 1962 war in Arunachal Pradesh, a conflict that occurred because of road construction through the disputed territory of the Aksai Chin. In support of this analysis, and to provide a modern perspective on why the dispute has not been resolved, I also discuss the conflict attractors that compel Chinese and Indian leaders to maintain the status quo –

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[108] *China using border row to block aid to India* (accessed October 13, 2009); available from: http://news.rediff.com/report/2009/sep/06/china-using-border-row-to-block-aid.htm

following regional norms and nationalist interests – in the context of both inter-state and intra-state relations.

A. A Controversial Border in a Contested Land

In 1950, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mao Zedong, young leaders at the helm of the two largest nations on earth, faced a critical problem: their international border was largely disputed. The crux of the problem then, and what remains a key point of contention today, is that there has never been a mutually recognized and accepted boundary to Tibet – the very Himalayan land that separates China and India. The *de facto* border (known today as the 'Line of Actual Control') has never been a *de jure* boundary. And the source of this contentious issue, which is ultimately a construct of British colonial rule, dates to events in Simla, India in 1914.

The Simla Accord (or the Convention between Great Britain, China, and Tibet, Simla) was held at the British Indian hill station of the same name in 1913-14. It was convened to delineate British India, Buddhist Tibet, and Republican China with a tripartite agreement and for representatives from Delhi, Lhasa, and Beijing to discuss and designate Tibet's status. Ultimately, it intended to establish a formal, international border between Tibet and China and Tibet and India.[109] But, in the end, this was not to be the case.

Tragically, the Accord was an ultimate failure, and its main legacy, the McMahon Line, was and remains a key problem. A dubious demarcation intended to establish the territorial limits of these Himalayan states, the boundary is named after Sir Henry McMahon. The British plenipotentiary at the event, McMahon delineated international borders according

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[109] By 1949, with Lhasa ruled by China, this became the *de facto* Sino-Indian border.

to the whims of British colonialists. Unacceptable to the Chinese, his lines were rejected by the Beijing delegation altogether and the Chinese representative, Ivan Chen, withdrew from the conference. As a result, the British Indian and Tibetan delegations closed the sessions with a bilateral agreement only – one that mainly served the interests of the British Raj.[110]

China did not sign the Accord at Simla and has never recognized the borders that the McMahon Line designates. India, on the other-hand, has consistently claimed that the borders are legitimate. Nevertheless, and problematically, this disputed division remains the functional *de facto* border between China and India today.

B. Micro Case Study 2
Aksai Chin-Arunachal Pradesh: The Dispute, a Road, and then War

In addition to the dubious influence, and complicated history, of international boundaries, the current conflict in the Himalayan borderlands between China and India reached its peak of violence as a result of road development. Accordingly, my study of this conflict – one that radiates from the Aksai Chin to Arunachal Pradesh – constitutes an analysis of my independent variable upon the dependent variable. Therefore, this micro case study corresponds to Quadrant 4 of the Himalaya Complex Matrix, an example (that is rare) of the effect of international road development in a zone of conflict in the Tibetan Himalaya.[111] The intervening variables of states' security interests, policies towards economic growth, and the international relations of the region have, in this case, perpetuated the conflict and, moreover, continue to maintain the status quo. Migration, on the other hand,

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[110] Melvyn C, Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 30-34.

[111] I imply that this case is rare because there are very few instances in the Himalaya in which international roads have been built through conflict zones, precisely because such conflict typically precludes the construction of roadways.

has only a negligible effect as a result of extremely low population density, and is limited to nomadic trading.

The McMahon Line border dispute ultimately evolved into a violent conflict between China and India, and it happened because of a road. Although tension on and about the boundary has erupted more than once, the most notable event was the 1962 Sino-Indian War. At that time, battles were waged in Arunachal Pradesh, a highly contested state in northeast India that attributes its cultural heritage to Tibet but that is also claimed by China (the international border of Arunachal Pradesh is also drawn according to the McMahon Line). However, the fundamental cause of the war is something that occurred on the other side of the Himalaya, at the far western end of the Sino-Indian divide. Those events took place in the Aksai Chin, when the Chinese built a road through the contested territory.

Because the McMahon Line did not establish a fixed border through this largely uninhabited and desolate landscape, the Aksai Chin was left as an ambiguous designation at the conclusion of the Simla Conference, with clear-cut sovereignty going neither to China nor to India. Delhi's claims to the region are predicated on the Aksai Chin's historical association with Ladakh, the Buddhist kingdom long linked to Tibet that by the 1940s was governed by the Maharaja of Kashmir. Upon 1947's Independence from Great Britain and Partition from Pakistan, Ladakh, along with the vast majority of Kashmir – including the Aksai China – went to India, owing to the loyalty of its Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh, to the Indian Congress party. Beijing, however, has its own version of this history, maintaining that the Aksai Chin has always been part of Tibet, and that Tibet is an irrefutable part of China.[112]

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[112] Critically, the Aksai Chin is a historical crossroads of the Silk Routes and home to the illustrious Karakoram Pass, located at the intersection of Tibet and Xinjiang, China with Ladakh, India and Balitisan, Pakistan. This makes it important

Sino-Indian Border and McMahon Line depicting Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh[113]
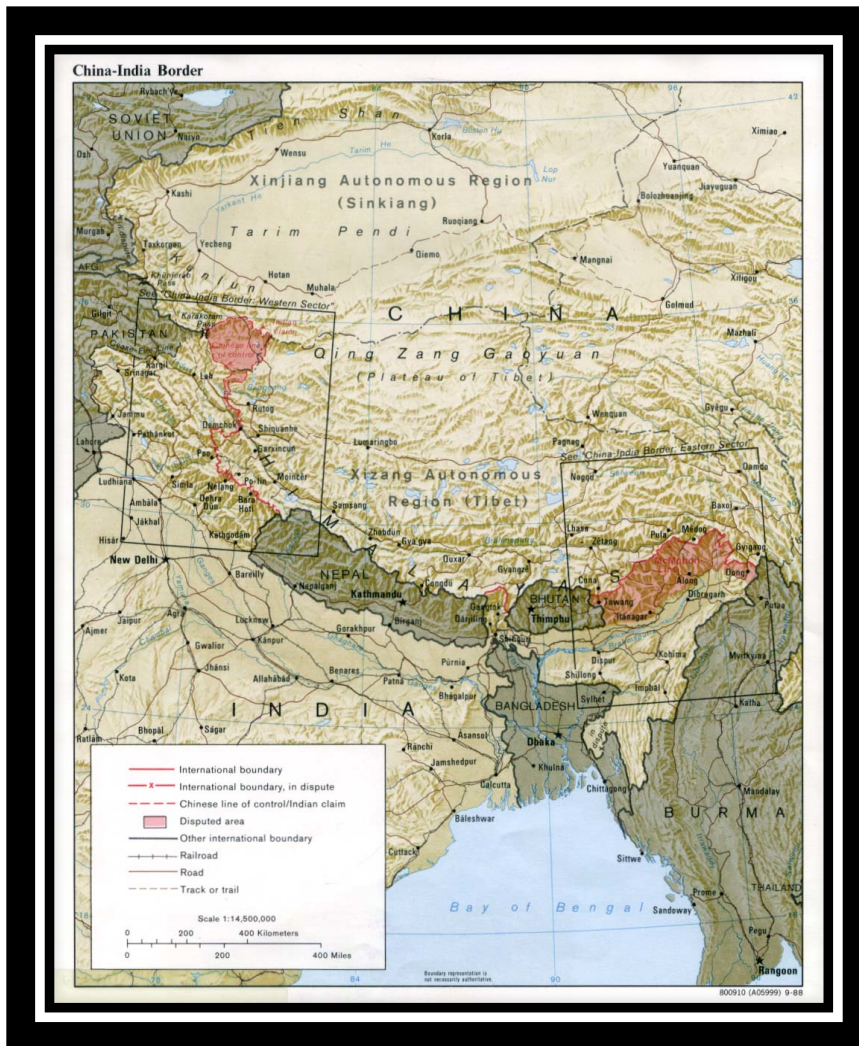
Despite its controversial status and its strategic location at the crossroads of High

Asia, India's political and military leaders were apparently unaware of Chinese road

development through the Aksai Chin until it was too late. By the time India realized what had

happened (having been focused at the time on more pressing conflicts with Pakistan), China

had militarized the territory and ultimately secured its claim to the place. When Indian

authorities realized what had happened – that a motorable road had been built, by China,

to both Delhi and Beijing, as well as Pakistan. See *Aksai Chin: China' disputed slice of Kashmir* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from: http://edition.cnn.com/2002/WORLD/asiapcf/east/05/24/aksai.chin/

[113] Map of Aksai Chin (accessed March 25, 2011); available from http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/china.html

through their backyard and right under their noses – they used the offense as justification for war. And thus began the Sino-Indian War of 1962.[114]

The disputed territory has remained prominent and been a barrier to political normalizations between China and India ever since. For Beijing, the critically strategic highway transecting the territory has become a point of pride. It is also a critical link between China's western provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang, as well as the staging route to the Karakoram Highway to Pakistan. India, on the other hand, has never regained control of the region, despite extensive protests from Delhi, demands leveled at Beijing, and continued nationalist calls for justice. In fact, according to India, the Aksai Chin remains an illegally occupied area and a key roadblock in resolving the protracted border dispute with China.[115]

In a wider context, the Aksai Chin issue remains inextricable linked to all other disputes in the greater Sino-Indian conflict – particularly the situation in Arunachal Pradesh. As a result, the Aksai Chin has been exploited as both a carrot and a stick for over five decades. Specifically, possession of and sovereignty over the Aksai Chin has on several occasions been used as a point of leverage or compromise in Sino-Indian border negotiations. On his visit to Delhi in 1960, China's Prime Minister Zhou Enlai offered an exchange to India's Prime Minister Jawaralal Nehru: Beijing would recognize Indian sovereignty of Arunachal Pradesh if Delhi would recognize the Aksai Chin as Chinese territory.[116] Despite the asymmetry of this offer in Delhi's favor, Nehru balked at the proposal and offered

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[114] However, the most violent episode of that conflict took place in the eastern Himalaya, rather than in the west or Aksai Chin, when Chinese troops invaded western Arunachal Pradesh at Bomdi-la and proceeded to humiliate the Indian military. See Parshotam Mehra, *Essays in Frontier History: India, China, and the Disputed Border* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 136.

[115] *Aksai Chin: China's disputed slice of Kashmir.*

[116] Mehra, 172.

nothing more than a cold shoulder.[117] Many cite this diplomatic slight as an initial cause of

China's bellicose invasion of Arunachal Pradesh and other Indian border regions in 1962.[118]

And since the end of that 1962 War, the Aksai Chin has been a *de facto* Chinese territory and

political negotiations have made little progress on resolving the issue.

Today, the Sino-Indian border remains disputed with lines drawn according to those

established by the 1962 war. At the end of the conflict, the Chinese army withdrew back to

the McMahon Line, and though there are occasional incursions by Chinese soldiers into

Indian territory, the state of Arunachal Pradesh continues to be held by India.[119] Conversely,

the Aksai Chin remains in China's possession, despite India's ongoing claim that it is an

occupied territory. As a result, both borderlands are heavily militarized, and despite

occasional negotiations towards normalization, the region continues to complicate (and

compromise) Sino-Indian relations.[120] As M. Taylor Fravel explained above, "The China-

India border dispute has got to be one of the most continuously negotiated borders in modern

history. That shows how intractable this dispute is."[121]

Of course, what is key about this conflict is that it is one of recent history. Prior to the

creation of modern nation states in Central Eurasia in the mid-20th century, borders were

fluid and depended on local, tribal loyalties. But this all changed, abruptly and irreversible,

upon the advent of 'modern' governments (be them communist or democratic) and the arrival

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[117] Ibid., 240. India was offered all 90,000 square kilometers of forest, river, and mountain in AP, including all villages. Conversely, China asked only for the entirety of the remote, barren, and uninhabited 38,000 square kilometer Aksai Chin.

[118] Ibid..

[119] *India to deploy more troops along Arunachal border* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from: http://www.zeenews.com/news578258.html. Report also based on interviews in Tawang, Arunachal Pradesh, May 18, 2007.

[120] Such as China's effort to block India's request for a major Asian Development Bank loan because the proposal included infrastructure projects in the Arunachal Pradesh. See *China using border row to block aid to India* and *India-China face off worsens over ADB loan for Arunachal* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from: http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/IndiaChina-faceoff-worsens-over-ADB-loan-for-Arunachal/459910/.

[121] *China using border row to block aid to India.*

of technology in the region in the late 1940s. Furthermore, this inherently extended, for the first time ever, to the geopolitical interests and nationalist ideals of young leaders at the helm of Beijing and Delhi. And thus began the conflictive nature of border disputes across the Trans Himalaya.

In recent years, however, slight progress has been made on the Aksai Chin conflict through road connections and the recognition of shared economic opportunities. In this way, value has been created on both sides through the alignment of economic interests and the movement of human populations. In the southern reaches of this disputed territory, Tibetan nomads are now allowed to traverse the boundary and graze their livestock across borders. Moreover, satellite images show, and reports confirm, that both India and China have completed the construction of sealed roads to their respective borders in the southern Aksai Chin at Rutok.[122]

Yet, while unofficial trade flourishes in the region, Delhi and Beijing have failed to reach a formal agreement to open a border crossing. Moreover, it remains to be seen if delinking the Aksai Chin from the Arunachal Pradesh conflict will move negotiations forward. Alternatively, perhaps offering an Arunachal Pradesh-Aksai Chin swap is once again in order. In light of these options, what is clear is that although the construction of a road through the region, as a unilateral measure, led to significant conflict, the zone is now ripe for transformation. Opening new roads could well be a catalyst for such change, and a model to follow is that from Sikkim (the case of which will be reviewed below in Chapter 5.)

C. Conflict Attractors: Emotional Intractability and the Borderland Status Quo

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[122] Visit to nomadic region at Tso Moriri Lake in Ladakh, India, September 2005; interview with Peter Sonam, Tibetan nomad, in Delhi, India, June 22, 2009.

An analysis of the Aksai Chin conflict is indivisible from the other protracted dispute at the opposite end of China and India's border: Arunachal Pradesh. In 1962, one conflict – caused by road construction through the Aksai Chin – led directly to war in Arunachal Pradesh. Today, while the Aksai Chin remains a remote and inhospitable land, entirely within China's control, Arunachal Pradesh continues to exhibit occasional troops movements and is perhaps an even greater obstacle to territorial normalizations between Delhi and Beijing. For both nations, status quo positions are maintained for psychological and political reasons. These conflict attractors are what perpetuate the problem and serve the apparent (but I propose misguided) ends of internal state security. The following section will examine the emotional commitments made by India and China and introduce how the frozen situation in Arunachal Pradesh might be changed.

The Sino-Indian border dispute has caused Arunachal Pradesh to exist in a suspended state of tension, punctuated by violent episodes of conflict that are linked to 'emotional aspects of intractability.'[123] Although Chinese forces quickly withdrew to pre-war positions after their decisive victory in Arunachal Pradesh in 1962, the humiliating defeat remains a sensitive bruise on the Indian national psyche. Moreover, as Chinese troops continue to make occasional incursions into Indian territory – to the severe consternation of local Arunachalis as well as well state and national leaders – the tension only gets worse.[124]

This Chinese activity has inspired national criticism and, in turn, psychological aspects of the Arunachal Pradesh situation have become significant conflict attractors for India. That is, the conflict is increasingly mentioned, and utilized, by the political and

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[123] Coleman, et. al..

[124] *India to deploy more troops along Arunachal border* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from: http://www.zeenews.com/news578258.html.

military elites of New Delhi. I will examine the nature of this dynamic in the section below. Following this, China's perspective will be considered, including Beijing's own conflict attraction made on the basis of the historical connection between Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet. Together, these two, emotional and competitive interests out of both New Delhi and Beijing are what really prevents a breakthrough on resolving the conflict.

i. Delhi on Arunachal Pradesh: The Indian Psyche, Politics, and the Army

A case of ideology driving policy, Delhi's commitment to defending Arunachal Pradesh has become a point of national pride, a conflict attractor with a deep "emotional aspect."[125] This historical psychology also preserves the territorial status quo, as memory of the conflict deepens India's position-making and exacerbates her obstinacy. Recent rhetoric out of Delhi – vitriolic criticism of Beijing's efforts to interfere in Arunachal Pradesh development projects, in particular – consistently gain greater traction with subtle reminders of the humiliation of the 1962 Sino-Indian War.[126]

In recent years, Indian political parties have exploited the Arunachal Pradesh issue on numerous occasions. This was evident when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh made a highly visible campaign swing through the region prior to the first-ever state elections in 2009. His tactics to drum-up support for the incumbent Congress Party relied upon the identification of Indian sovereignty over Arunachal Pradesh, fueled anti-Chinese nationalistic sentiments, and ultimately proved successful on the state's election day.[127] Interestingly, the rival Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has used similar methods in its campaign to win local seats, making

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[125] Coleman, et. al., 2.

[126] *China using new border row to block India.*

[127] *India rejects China's objections on PMs Arunachal* (accessed October 1, 2009); available from: http://news.rediff.com/report/2009/oct/13/china-protests-pms-visit-to-arunachal.htm.

claims that Congress is weak on China and that the party has not defended Arunachalis'

rights against invasive Sino-forces.[128] While the BJP efforts did not prove successful in the

2009 elections (at least not according to the ballot box), both instances show how the

Arunachal Pradesh dispute tends to be manipulated for domestic, political interests.

It is in Delhi's interest to maintain troops in Arunachal Pradesh in order to protect the

region from Chinese advances as well as to respond to flare-ups in the restive Northeastern

States (NES). For one, when there is a war, someone always get rich, and so long as the

Arunachal Pradesh conflict exists, the Indian military will maintain a great interest in the

region (and its units stationed there will continue to be generously funded). Whether these

troops can defend against the Chinese or control regional rebels, their presence serves

multiple and complimentary interests.[129] Maintaining an active military throughout the

Arunachal Pradesh border area is also a prudent internal security measure, as troops standing

sentry are also positioned for rapid mobilization in the event of a regional emergency in the

volatile NES. India's NES is the most restive territory of the country, where Maoist

insurgents, indigenous freedom fighters, and international drug traffickers vie for control

against an under-funded, and generally ineffective, local government.[130]

These deep conflict attractors preserve the status quo in Arunachal Pradesh because

they give utility to the dispute. In turn, if the issue can be exploited, incentives for a

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[128] *BJP not for personality-based campaign this time* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from:
http://www.thehindu.com/2009/09/26/stories/2009092656431000.htm.

[129] I am not advocating or proposing that the large Indian military presence in the region is in the interest of local
communities; in fact, I believe exactly the opposite. However, I use this example to illustrate the relevance of a mobilized
military presence in NES and Arunachal Pradesh for the Delhi central government's interests. There is ample literature that
indicates Delhi's belief that the government's counter-insurgency efforts are actually working. See: Bethany Lacina,
'Rethinking Delhi's Northeast India Policy: Why neither Counter-insurgency nor Winning Hearts and Minds is the Way
Forward, in *Beyond Counter-Insurgency*, ed. Sanjib Baruah, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 329.

[130] India has repeatedly accused China of supporting the Maoist insurgency; however, evidence is dubious. See *India's
Failures are the Responsibilities of her Neighbors* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from:
http://www.veteranstoday.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=9419.

definitive resolution or other negotiated settlement are consistently marginalized. These are

the primary reasons that India has yet to act on resolving the protracted conflicts in

Arunachal Pradesh and, by association, the Aksai Chin. And yet, by returning our attention to

the roads, as will be done below, one can see the potential for this status quo to finally be

broken.

ii. China's link between Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet

Beijing remains committed to Arunachal Pradesh largely because of the sensitivity to

its claim on Tibet. In fact, the Tibet issue and the Arunachal Pradesh issue are not only

related, but integral, and thus both have exceptionally high "emotional aspects of

intractability." It is dangerous for China to concede Arunachal Pradesh as a part of India, for

doing so could force Beijing to recognize other, historically Tibetan regions of the

'Motherland' as also beyond her sovereignty. This Chinese state policy has found expression

especially when activities in Arunachal Pradesh correlate with those of Tibet. For example,

the Dalai Lama's high-profile visit to Arunachal Pradesh in November 2009 was severely

condemned in China, and resulted in an exchange of harsh criticism between Beijing and

Delhi.[131]

The militarization of Arunachal Pradesh is also a conflict attractor for China, and

sustains Beijing's commitment to the status quo. M. Taylor Fravel has identified such a trend

in Chinese state policy that clearly illustrates the utility of militarizing external, territorial

disputes in order to maintain internal stability.[132] Specifically, when Beijing feels a threat to

domestic security, particularly in a restive and/or minority region, and an international border

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[131] *Should the Dalai Lama visit Arunachal Pradesh?* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from: http://news.rediff.com/report/2009/oct/21/should-the-dalai-lama-visit-arunachal-pradesh.htm.

[132] Fravel, 7.

dispute exists that is related to that internal threat in an ethno-geographic sense, China

consistently resorts to the use of external force to bolster both its claim to the international

border as well as to reinforce domestic security.[133]

This partially explains the 1962 invasion of, and war, in Arunachal Pradesh. The

conflict erupted during a significantly tenuous period when China faced a minority uprising

across the Tibetan Autonomous Region (the Chinese province that borders most of

Arunachal Pradesh). China's invasion of Arunachal Pradesh and use of force against the

Indian army, signaled and reflected a domestic policy to control, if not crush, the claim for

Tibetan independence.[134]

The conflict attractor dynamic of this state policy has been demonstrated recently in

several minority regions along China's frontier. In 2008 and 2009, major uprisings occurred

in Tibet and Xinjiang, respectively. The biggest incidents included popular riots with

thousands of protestors, deaths in the dozens (if not hundreds), and ultimately entailed the

worst sectarian violence experienced in China since the late 1980s.[135] In response to events in

February-March 2008, China mobilized troops along its ethnically Tibetan borderlands with

Arunachal Pradesh (as well as all other border regions with India and Nepal).[136] A heavily

militarized border, in addition to quick patrols into Indian territory, was meant to show

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[133] Ibid., 182.

[134] The 1962 War was also related to the Aksai Chin dispute in Northwest India as well as a deterioration in relations between Delhi and Beijing.

[135] On March 10, 1959 His Holiness the Dalai Lama took flight into exile in India. 40 years later, on March 10, 1989, massive protests erupted on the streets of Lhasa. In a tradition of solidarity, March 10 has ever since been commemorated as 'Tibetan Uprising Day,' primarily in exile but recently in Tibet as well. 'Dalai Lama Won't Stop Tibet Protests," *The New York Times*, March 16, 2008; available from: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/16/world/asia/16cnd-tibet.html

[136] While troop build-up has been confirmed, Indian accusations of Chinese troop penetration into Indian AP itself have not been verified by any third party.

Tibetan insurgents that they were contained, their supply lines blocked, and that they would be crushed should calls for independence break out.[137]

Beijing's swift and harsh response system was also evident in July 2009 during the violent uprising in Xinjiang. Then, in addition to heavy-handed reactions on the ground by China's Public Security Bureau, significant troop mobilization along China's ethnically-Muslim Xinjiang-Kazakhstan border areas followed a model similar to that displayed in Tibet one year earlier.[138] In light of such destabilizing domestic turmoil, it follows that Beijing maintains the status quo and refuses to negotiate on Arunachal Pradesh or the Aksai Chin largely for reasons of both territorial integrity and nationally ideology.

D. Current Sino-Indian Relations and Regional Economic Growth: Intervening Variables

To more fully understand the powerful motivation behind state policies in the Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh, as well as to introduce the nature of development projects in Tibet and Xinjiang, it is necessary to place those events in the context of Sino-Indian relations. As already noted, China's domestic politics in the western provinces are intimately (and at times directly) related to international relations across the borders of the frontier. In fact, the structure of Chinese state policy throughout the region is indivisible from the nature of its foreign relations with India. Therefore, I will next analyze the intervening variables that affect conflict, and its transformation, by way of road development: state security and economic growth. However, because the Sino-Indian borderland is almost entirely closed to

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[137] Some theorize that the uprisings were led by Tibetans-in-exile who returned to Central Tibet from AP's Tawang as well as Dharamsala. Interview with Tenzin Choeying, President of Students for a Free Tibet in Dharamsala, India, June 25, 2009.

[138] Interview with Kuban Kabaev, Department of Foreign Ministry, Republic of Kyrgyzstan, in Medford, MA, November 23, 2009.

human travel, the third intervening variable of foreign policy will be examined instead of that of migration.

China's economic interests and security concerns are inseparable, and India is a key factor in Beijing's calculus. As Michael Swaine observes, "China's primary strategic objectives in the international arena are to maintain an external environment conducive to the pursuit of economic reform." [139] As such, China's foreign policy, particularly across its frontier regions, is characterized by three inter-related factors: domestic security; economic growth; and international relations. Yet despite Beijing's core interests, the three are not in harmony.

Domestic security presents a paradoxical tension between China's advanced physical security (considering the size of its army and police force) and increasingly restive populations in the western provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang. As its core security interests become threatened – such as the natural petroleum resources of Xinjiang and the stability of domestic political climates – Beijing responds with an ever-tighter grip on its minority populations.[140] The result is a self-perpetuating and vicious cycle of repressive measures. Rather than promoting economic growth and open borders with neighboring states, such opportunities are instead stifled under the pretext of security at home. The international implications of these policies were addressed above, in that domestic security is the primary driver behind China's foreign policy, particularly with neighboring states involved in a territorial conflict.[141]

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[139] Sidhu, 151.

[140] Ibid., 152.

[141] Fravel, 16.

The second key factor is Beijing's challenge to maintain and expand economic growth and to overcome the great deficiency in its overall (and overland) trade relations with India.[142] Despite sharing a border that extends more than two thousand miles across the heart of Asia, with numerous natural Gateways that could easily be linked by roadways, China and India currently share only one open border post for international trade (and nowhere is open for direct travel). Moreover, not only is this post located at 14,000 feet in a remote corner of Sikkim, but tradable goods are extremely regulated and of limited economic value.[143]

However, in spite of these bureaucratic hurdles, bilateral trade between China and India has grown exponentially in recent years. From 2001 to 2008, direct exchange between these Asian powers leapt from $3.6 billion to over $52 billion.[144] Moreover, it is likely that totals for bilateral trade in 2010 will exceed $60 billion.[145] Even more encouragingly, in December 2010, during Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's state visit to India, he and India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh agreed to further expand their relationship, with the target of $100 billion in trade by 2015.[146] Of course, sustaining and expanding this growth will require more avenues to transport goods, and not just of the oceanic type. Thus, we can expect the development of roadways across the Tibetan Himalaya to further increase in order to keep such trade flowing.

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[142] Sidhu, 152.

[143] The development of this border crossing, including the government policies and economic incentives behind it, will be analyzed in Chapter 5 with the fourth and final micro case study on road projects.

[144] Waheguru Pal Singh Sindhu and Jing-dong Yuan, *China and India, Cooperation or Conflict?* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers, Inc., 2003),150.

[145] It bears noting, however, that the vast majority of this exchange was, and will continue to be, through the economic and geographic channels of maritime shipping. See *China – India bilateral trade soars to US$32 billion; India sets up Economic wing in Beijing* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from:http://inchincloser.com/2010/08/02/china-india-bilateral-trade-soars-to-us32-billion-india-sets-up-economic-wing-in-beijing/. Also, see *Bilateral Trade Statistics* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from: http://www.indiachina.org/trade_statistics.htm.

[146] *India, China agree to raise bilateral trade to $100 billion* (accessed April 2, 2011); available from: http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article956229.ece

These issues of domestic security and economic growth converge at several junctures, most importantly with regard to China's foreign policies.[147] The management of international relations with neighboring states depends greatly on the existence of both stability and capital in the borderland regions. In an Inner Asian context, the promotion of these interests is nothing less than the core of the Himalaya Complex: modern roads are fundamental to development and economic growth, and while they sometimes promote international stability, in many other instances they cause domestic turmoil. Thus, the concurrent expansion of multilateral trade, maintenance of positive international relations, and preservation of domestic harmony remains the greatest challenge for Beijing.

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[147] Sindhu, 150.

Chapter 4.   Instability in Chinese Tibet: A Case Study of Intra-state Conflict

The Sino-Tibetan conflict is the most prominent and protracted intra-state conflict in the Himalaya. Deeply rooted in national ideology, the two parties – Tibet and China – maintain strikingly different (indeed, oppositional) interpretations of the history, politics, and cultural implications of a very complex situation. In an effort to comprehensively analyze the issue, I consider, first, the historical-political legacy of the dispute, including the causes of conflict and barriers to resolution. I call this the Tibet Issue, and it introduces my dependent variable: the transformation (in this case, exacerbation) of conflict across western China.

The second section is an assessment of the current cultural collision that continues to drive and perpetuate the conflict – the effect of the intervening variables upon the dependent variable. This is called the Tibet Problem, and I attribute it to China's western development policy, asymmetrical economic growth, and in-migration of Han Chinese to Tibet and Xinjiang. Finally, my analysis of this Tibet Problem also includes a micro case study on the Tibetan railroad and demonstrates how this single infrastructural development – the independent variable – exerts extreme pressure, and is a harbinger of controversial change, across the region.

A. The Tibet Issue: Historical, Political, and Geographic Causes of Conflict

The Tibet Issue is a complex and multi-dimensional affair. The root causes of the conflict include the historically ambiguous status of the Tibetan state between 1911-1949 and policies codified (but generally not observed) by the 1951 17-Point Agreement between representatives from Beijing and Lhasa. Compounding these disputes are proximate causes such as the exploitation of Tibet's strategic location and natural resource wealth and

controversy over Beijing's development projects in Tibetan cultural regions. Moreover, economic policies and migration patterns – both directly linked to new road developments – have significantly contributed to a cultural disequilibrium in Tibet that is increasingly tense and unstable.

i. A Disputed History

The Sino-Tibetan conflict is fundamentally a political dispute made on the basis of different interpretations of history between Tibet and China. For hundreds of years, the diplomatic relations between these two states fluctuated between mutual autonomy and royal tribute under imperial sovereignty. Both countries have, at different times, ruled empires that waged influence across the other's borders. Moreover, political arrangements in the late 19th century were based on ancient religious relations (rather than modern state diplomacy) between theocratic Tibetan Buddhist lamas and the imperial court of China's Qing Dynasty.

Briefly, there are two distinct sides to the story of Tibet and China's modern history. Tibetans maintain that in the early-20th century, Tibet was a sovereign state and was in no way a part of China. They stress that it practiced its own diplomacy, issued its own passports, traded its own currency, and had a unique language, religion, and culture. Conversely, Beijing's position is that Tibet was, since the mid 19th century, absolutely under the jurisdiction of China due to the historical presence of representatives, or *ambans*, of the Chinese Emperor. The fact that Chinese military garrisons were established even earlier in select Tibetan towns (including the capital city, Lhasa) further deepens their claim.

An impartial look at the region's political history does not resolve things. This history shows that from 1911, when the Qing Dynasty collapsed, to 1949, when Communist China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) marched into Tibet, Tibet enjoyed *de facto* independence.

During this time, there were in fact no physical Chinese representatives or manned military installations in Tibet. However, Tibet was not a *de jure* independent state during this period either, as its independence was not formally and legally recognized by any foreign nation (although, Nepal did have a consulate in Lhasa for trade relations, and England had a representative of the British Raj as well). Whether or not this means that Tibet was a free and sovereign nation in 1949 continues to be at the center of the Tibet Issue.

Within this historical context, the crux of the problem is the disputed status of Tibet's political independence prior to the entrance of Communist China's PLA into Tibet in the 1950s. To Tibetans, what happened was a military 'invasion' by the PLA, tantamount to the occupation of a free and independent homeland by a powerful foreign neighbor. Conversely, and according to Beijing, 1950-51 marked the 'peaceful liberation' of Tibet from medieval conditions under the feudal serfdom of a lamaist theocracy (a government ruled by the Dalai Lamas and other high-ranking monks and aristocrats).

The issue was supposed to be decided by ratification of the 17-Point Agreement in 1951. The document, signed in Beijing by representatives of the Tibetan Government-in-Exile (TGE) and leaders of the Chinese Communist Party, recognized Tibet as an integral part of the Chinese nation and promised to guarantee Tibetans genuine autonomy and cultural protection within their homeland. The problem is that the policies of the Agreement have not been observed or fulfilled by the Chinese government, resulting in decades of resistance and unrest in Tibetan regions of China. Essentially, the treaty is disputed and has been a key point of contest for sixty years.

Beyond the historical context, the Tibet Issue is ultimately a conflict of ethnic independence and political nationalism. It is a struggle of an indigenous, minority population

– the Tibetans – for their right to self-determination and autonomy in opposition to a state – China – that is committed to maintaining what it considers its right to historical, multiethnic integrity. And it is also not an issue that can be easily resolved by the international regime.

Unfortunately, the distinction between justified self-determination and the prevention of secession is complicated, rather than assisted, by ambiguity in the United Nations Charter. Specifically, Article 1 (Section 2) states that the UN exists to ensure "friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principles of equal rights and self-determination." [148] Conversely, Article 2 (Section 7) maintains: "nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state." [149] As such, Tibetans' rights and efforts at self-determination and autonomy are both supported and thwarted by the UN Charter.

ii. Tibet's Natural Resources and China's Security Interests

Tibet is an extremely strategic region for China. In terms of resource management as well as inter-state security, Tibet lives up to its Chinese name of *Zizang,* the 'western treasure house.' In terms of the former, it holds immense hydropower potential; vast primeval forests; abundant known reserves of metal ores, rare earths, and semi-precious stones; significant hydrocarbon reserves; and extensive possibilities for alternative energies such as wind power and even solar installations along its northern grasslands. As to the latter, geopolitical case (and discussed above), Tibet borders two of China's nuclear neighbors – India and Pakistan – as well as much of the former Soviet Union that remains within Russia's sphere of influence. Accordingly, China has militarized large expanses of the Tibetan frontier and remains

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[148] Melvyn Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), ix.

[149] Ibid..

committed to maintaining Tibet as a strategic buffer state.

The TGE has expressed specific opposition to Beijing's efforts to exploit the rich resources of Tibet and militarize the region as a frontier buffer. In his Five-Point Peace Plan delivered to the US House of Representatives in 1987, the Dalai Lama states a commitment to preserving the ecological balance of the Tibetan Plateau and emphasizes a desire to demilitarize the entire region (he also demands a halt to the repopulation of Tibet under massive Han Chinese migration; requests observance of democratic systems and human rights across China; and calls for commencing active negotiations between Tibetan and Chinese authorities).[150] In contrast to this framework, the robust development and repopulation of the Tibetan region under Beijing's 'open up the west' strategy continues to threaten a fragile environment and political climate that teeters precariously close to the tipping point of violent conflict.

In many ways, China's western development initiative echoes many of the 'noble' aspirations and nationalist calls to progress that were promoted as 'Manifest Destiny' in 19th century America. The development of the Tibetan and Xinjiang railroads across the plateau and steppe is not unlike the drive to establish the Great Pacific Railroad across the United States, and the nationalist attitude of China's duty to develop the west evokes the 19th century sentiments of Fredrick Jackson Turner.[151] Of course, both of these initiatives were also concerned with far more than transportation, as they facilitated the exploitation of national

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[150] Dalai Lama, *Five-Point Peace Plan* (accessed March 25, 2011); available from :
http://www.dalailama.com/messages/tibet/five-point-peace-plan

[151] Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (accessed May 2, 2010); available from:
http://xroads.virginia.edu/~Hyper/turner/chapter1.html#foot20.

resources and the marginalization and containment (if not eradication) of native

populations.[152]

B. The Tibet Problem: A Cultural Collision on the Plateau

i. *Xibu da kaifa*: China's Campaign to 'Open Up the West'

In 1999, the Chinese Communist Party launched its 'Great Western Development'

strategy or the campaign to 'open up the west' (*xibu da kaifa*). This nation-building scheme

promotes state-sponsored, provincial-level development through the integration and

modernization of rural, western regions such as Tibet and Xinjiang. In a theoretical,

geopolitical sense, it is an effort to link the periphery (or frontier), with the center and the

main. More practically, it is a strategy to expand the economies and harness the minority

populations of rural and underdeveloped regions and to link them more closely to the yoke of

the state. The primary tool of the campaign is development, and infrastructure is a

fundamental component of the initiative.

Beijing's development strategy in the rural, and statistically 'impoverished,'

provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang follows a model that implies discontent and grievance are a

symptom of 'backwardness' and poverty. The solution, according to the Chinese Communist

Party, is economic growth and improved livelihoods. Such a strategy was also devised,

ironically, to reduce socio-economic inequalities; whereas, in reality, it has had exactly the

opposite effect.[153] Ultimately, conflict has not been mitigated by development in Tibet or

Xinjiang. Rather, it appears to have intensified alongside advancements in business,

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[152] However, I would not go so far as to say that eradication of native populations is China's objective as well.

[153] David S. G. Goodman, "The Campaign to 'Open Up the West:' National, Provincial-level and Local Perspectives," *China's Campaign to 'Open Up the West:' National, Provincial-level and Local Perspectives, The China Quarterly Special Issues New Series, No. 5,* ed. David S. G. Goodman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

infrastructure, and income (advancements that in most cases have benefitted the in-migrant Han ethnic group more than the native Tibetans and Uyghurs).[154]

Although the Tibetan economy has grown at a faster rate than that of China as a whole, the region is more tense, militarized, and unstable than at virtually any other time in the past thirty years. Boosted by tremendous direct state subsidies as well as subsidized investments, growth of real per capita income in Tibet exceeded 10% per year, and surpassed the national average, from 1996 to 1999 and again from 2001-2003. To put this growth in perspective, from 1996 to 2004 GDP in Tibet grew about three times, whereas for China as a whole it doubled (and this national rate has of course been regarded as nothing less than miraculous according to global standards).[155]

However, massive subsidized investment in Tibet is matched only by the level of its inefficiency. Astonishingly, state investments rose to 120% of the economy of Tibet in 2004-2005, such that government expenditure in the region exceeded the size of the province's economy itself. Moreover, the great inefficiency of this investment is reflected in the 'negative growth rate' it displays: barely 0.5 *yuan* of GDP was recorded to have increased for every 1.0 *yuan* spent as state subsidized investment from 2001-2005. Finally, the greatest problem with this investment is that it did not remain in the local economy. Almost in concert with its inefficiency, the vast majority of state investment has been controlled by Han populations. More problematically, these communities tend to leak money out of Tibet by way of import trades and provincial remittances.

The major problem with this growth, and its statistical significance, has to do with

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[154] Andrew Fisher, "Educating for Exclusion in Western China: Structural and institutional dimensions of conflict in the Tibetan areas of Qinghai and Tibet," *CRISE Working Paper*, no. 69 (July 2009), 4.

[155] See Fisher, "Educating for Exclusion in Western China" and Fisher, "Resolving the Theoretical Ambiguities of Social Exclusion with reference to Polarisation and Conflict."

inequality and urbanization.[156] While some native Tibetans in the major cities (such as Lhasa and Shigatse) have benefited from state development schemes, the vast majority of Tibetans remain rural and largely unaffected by economic improvements reflected by such statistics. Conversely, the in-migrant Han population – the vast majority of which resides in urban districts – has consistently been better positioned to capitalize on various incentives and subsidies in order to grow and prosper.[157] The imbalance brought about by these intervening variables is a root cause of the tension that now pervades the region. Supported by the vector of road development (the independent variable), it gives rise to the turmoil that increasingly erupts (the dependent variable). Collectively, it is what I call the Tibet Problem.

ii. A Case of Structural Violence

China's campaign to 'open up the west' has created what Johan Galtung identified as "structural violence."[158] Economic policies and development initiatives initially proclaimed to benefit local populations have (de)evolved into institutional and cultural systems that perpetuate conflict in Tibet. However, unlike in decades past when China's People's Liberation Army and, later, Red Guards, inflicted violence directly upon the population in campaigns of revolution (and destruction), today's violence is symptomatic of a national policy that seeks, above all else, to promote stability and maintain security. Although the intentions may have once been good, in reality these development policies marginalize Tibetans within their homeland and facilitate both tighter control of the population and the exploitation of the region's resources.

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[156] Andrew Fisher, "Perversities of Extreme Dependence and Unequal Growth in the TAR," *Tibet Watch Special Report*, August 2007.

[157] Ibid..

[158] Galtung, 170.

Rather than the infliction of 'violence' in the conventional sense, this structural violence is largely represented by social injustice.[159] As Andrew Fisher has documented, the campaign to 'open up the west' has largely resulted in pervasive urban inequality. This is represented according to disparate levels of literacy between Han and Tibetan populations as well as the general disadvantage that Tibetan populations face in the urban business environment.[160] Collectively, the situation has deteriorated into an unstable environment that displays, as Fisher coins it, the "conflictive repercussions of exclusionary growth."[161]

What this means is that in several recent episodes, intra-state structural violence has tragically led to into physical inter-group violence. This was the case in recent riots across Tibet (2008) between ethnic Tibetans and Han Chinese in-migrants as well as in Xinjiang (2009) between Uyghurs and, again, Han Chinese in-migrants. In both situations, native communities' perception of economic marginalization and contempt for in-migrants apparent advantages (and prosperity) turned frustration into anger and tension into bloodshed. Below we will discuss in more depth two key intervening variables that have contributed to this instability and volatility in western China and that are inextricably linked to transportation networks: the demographic transformations from in-migration and the economic inequalities of development.

iii. Globalization and Conflict: Roads, Migrants, and Asymmetrical Development

The development of transportation systems is multi-dimensional and critical to review in the context of China's campaign to 'open up the west.' On the local level, new roads bring

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[159] Ibid., 171.

[160] Fisher, "Perversities of Extreme Dependence and Unequal Growth in the TAR."

[161] Fisher, "Educating for Exclusion in Western China."

economic opportunities as well as health and educational facilities to historically isolated communities of Tibet and Xinjiang. However, in addition to the positive development of social service infrastructure, roads also contribute to many of the negative aspects of globalization. These include general urban expansion and the tendency for local communities – composed primarily of farmers and nomads in the Trans Himalaya – to abandon their agricultural and pastoral traditions for the trappings of a modern consumer culture.

Ultimately, modern roads facilitate, and the forces of globalization drive, migration flows. In western China, this migration generally follows two forms. The most significant is the in-migration of ethnically heterogeneous groups, such as Han Chinese from eastern (or Mainland) China, to the 'underdeveloped' regions of the west – Tibet and Xinjiang. Second is the relocation of native Tibetan and Uyghur nomads and farmers to urban centers. In both cases, the result is an irreversible and abrupt transformation to traditional society.

Unfortunately, the meeting of these different populations is not often smooth and peaceful. Economic incentives that draw both groups to urban centers are not necessarily equitable in distribution. In fact, under-educated and rural, native migrants tend to be at a distinct disadvantage to Han Chinese in-migrants when it comes to employment and business opportunity in the cities of their homeland. And the asymmetry of this dynamic, if left unchecked, creates the very structural violence that Galtung identifies above.

Furthermore, a precarious problem with development in western China today is the asymmetry it creates between native, Tibetan and Uyghur populations and in-migrant Han Chinese communities. What has happened is the creation of an economic model by which Han Chinese attain superior positions in business, government, and various other socio-economic sectors, resulting in bitter animosity on the part of Tibetan and Uyghurs. William

Zartman identified such asymmetry – in both opportunity and power – as a common root cause of conflict, and this is exactly what is now happening in China's western provinces.[162]

Across Tibet and Xinjiang, particularly in the largest cities, there are two key factors that contribute to this socioeconomic asymmetry: Mandarin language skills and modern business acumen. The necessity to speak Modern Standard Chinese in order to succeed economically and experience with the modern marketplace (and networks into the Chinese economy) are critical skills that, historically, local populations have not possessed. Although native urban residents today are generally fluent Chinese speakers, native rural Tibetan and Uyghur migrants, flocking to the cities in search of a new course of life, are rarely able to capitalize on perceived opportunities because they typically lack the above skills. Conversely, Han Chinese in-migrants are well equipped to succeed in the growing western economies because they naturally possess Mandarin language skills and can leverage connections in the population centers of Mainland China for economic pursuits.

Thus, in comparison to both urban and rural native populations in the cities of Tibet and Xinjiang, newly arrived Han Chinese in-migrants gain favorable positions in local economies despite their non-native status. Moreover, a distinct advantage for Han in-migrants is that they are better positioned to capitalize on state subsidies, whereas native populations are passed over because of their less developed language and business skills.[163] Therefore, under China's state development schemes such as the campaign to 'open up the west,' local communities have experienced far less benefit and had far fewer opportunities to 'cash-in' on state-sponsored economic programs than Han Chinese in-migrant populations. The cumulative effects of these economic policies, and the inequalities that they create, mean

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[162] Zartman, 3-29.

[163] Fisher, "Educating for Exclusion in Western China," 2.

that Tibetans, as well as Uyghurs, have become virtual (if not actual) second-class citizens in their own home.

The asymmetry of this situation has led to a crisis of identity and widespread grievances in western China. With no voice that is heard by a repressive state bureaucracy, local populations have time and again responded, in desperation, to such pervasive imbalances with violence. In fact, although the Tibetan image, especially in the west, is one of peaceful and nonviolent conflict, observers could be disabused this notion in light of the violent protests, and even riots, that have recently erupted with increasing frequency across ethnically Tibetan regions of western China[164]

At this point, local populations increasingly view themselves as minorities in their native homelands, especially in capital cities and urban districts where most Han settle. At a fundamental – indeed, instinctual – level, cultural survival is frequently acknowledged as a chief threat caused by such demographic shifts. Moreover, frustration about the situation and fear for the future has created a pervasive sense of animosity towards Han settlers within the native Tibetan and Uyghur populations. The result is an increasingly unstable and volatile environment, illustrated most clearly by the recent explosions of several of these western tinderboxes in Tibet in 2008 and Xinjiang in 2009.

Accordingly, the asymmetry of economic policy, rampant in-migration, and the exploitation of the region for internal security interests are ultimately responsible for this cultural collision and the overall Tibet Problem. Ultimately, they are the key intervening variables that are part and parcel of conflict in the Tibetan Himalaya. Of course, they are also indivisible from the development of modern transportation systems, and this is precisely why

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[164] The violent riots that erupted in Lhasa in the spring of 2008 are of course the most salient example of this trend. However, other protests throughout Tibet have become increasingly severe in the past several years as well.

roads are placed at the center of the Himalaya Complex. That is, roads are the very infrastructure projects that facilitate migration patterns, which in turn create new demographic imbalances and economic asymmetry, which then result in conflict between unstable and restive populations.

C. Micro Case Study 3
The Tibet Railroad – Conquest and Conflict atop the Plateau

Road construction across western China is driven by three complimentary, but also complex, factors. First is Beijing's strategic and economic interest in expanding its influence into South and Central Asia.[165] Second is that China seeks overland linkages between its coastal population and production centers and distant western regions that are rich in resources and home (or adjacent) to emerging markets. Thirdly, Beijing also strives to integrate and assimilate China's many minority populations into the national identity, and this is largely completed though economic development and regional urbanization. Moreover, infrastructure development is one of the surest methods of strengthening the control of central government in remote areas. Thus, the railways to Tibet and Xinjiang are not only about national security and access to international markets but also to support the export of valuable natural resources and to better control the frontier populations.

The Tibet Railroad is one of the most significant infrastructure projects to have been completed in the Trans Himalaya in recent memory, on par with the Karakoram Highway to Pakistan and the 'Friendship' Highway to Nepal. However, in contrast to those roadways –

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[165] Hermann Kreutzmann, "Paper 2: The Significance of Geopolitical Issue for Development of Mountainous Areas of Central Asia," *Strategies for Development and Food Security in Mountainous Areas of Central Asia (*Dushanbe, Tajikistan: Aga Khan Foundation International Workshop, June 6-10, 2005).

routes that have facilitated positive cooperation and bilateral exchange between China and her neighbors – the Tibet Railroad has had a direct and largely negative effect on conflict in the region. As a result, it is highly controversial and has generated much of the tension that now pervades western China.

According to my framework, the Tibet Railroad itself is a key independent variable on regional conflict that both drives and is driven by the intervening variables of economic growth, national security, and population transfer. Because increased tension and recent, violent conflict have been the result of these interrelated phenomena, I present the Tibet Railroad as my third micro case study on a Trans Himalaya road project. This study is an example from Quadrant 3 of the Himalaya Complex Matrix: an increase in internal conflict due to the expansion of domestic transportation systems.

From the earliest days of the People's Republic of China in the mid-20th century, developing a modern railway to the frontier existed at the forefront of the national consciousness. Connecting the periphery to the main, and bringing the Tibetan and Xinjiang populations into the fold of the Motherland, has remained a national priority since 1949. Even before the People's Liberation Army reached central Tibet and western Xinjiang, Mao Zedong did not hesitate before commencing the construction of motorable roads in order to reach those ends of national integration. And while the prospect of a rail-line was proposed and discussed, technological limitations prevented its construction for many decades.[166]

With the rise of China, and the expansion of her economy, has come the modernization of the nation. As a result, suddenly in the late 1990s it became fiscally and technologically viable to build the 'impossible:' the train to the Roof of the World. While

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[166] Lustgarten, 9-10.

countless naysayers insisted that it could not be done – that the environment was too harsh, the permafrost too shifty, the altitude too high (for Han Chinese laborers), the multi-billion dollar price tag too extreme – Beijing set forth with the indefatigable determination to complete its drive to the west. Not long after, having harnessed the energies of hundreds of engineers, thousands of laborers, millions of nationalists, and billion of dollars ($4.1 billion was the price tag), Beijing announced the launch of its 'Great Train' in the spring of 2007, nearly a full year ahead of schedule and prior to assuming the world stage with Beijing's 2008 Olympic Games.[167] As a result, Tibet will never be the same again.

Infrastructure of Tibetan Railroad Depicting Route and Planned Extensions[168]

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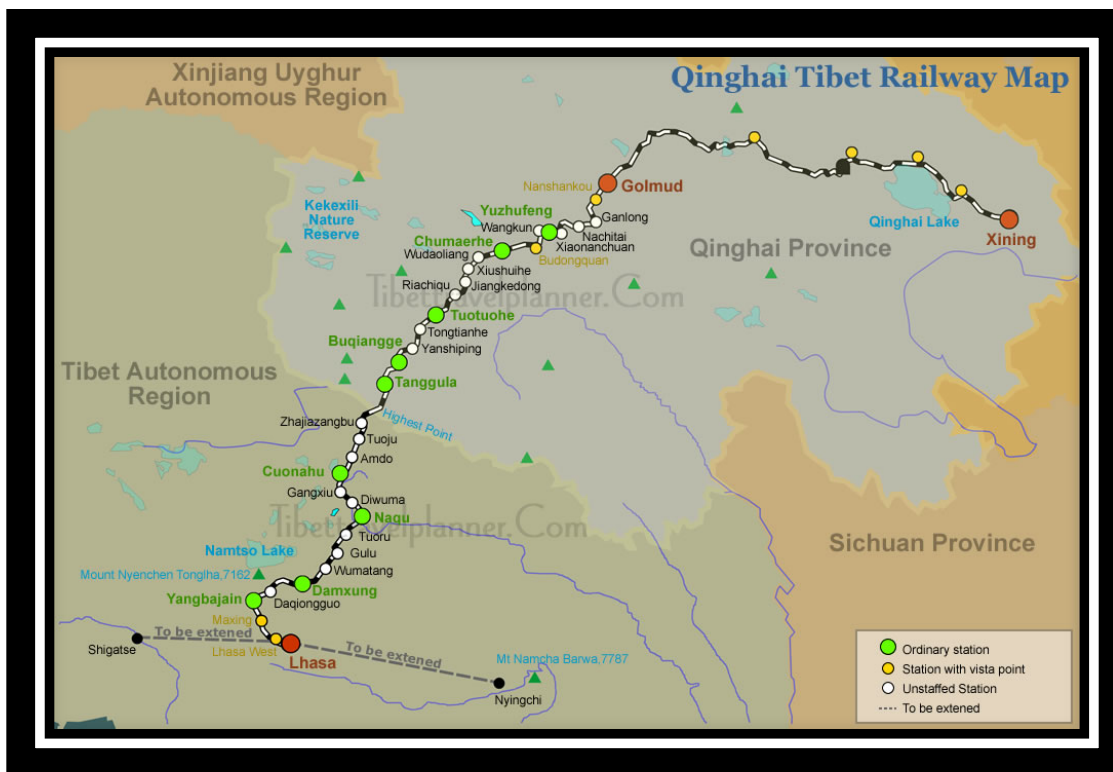
[167] *Tracking the Steel Dragon* (Washington DC: International Campaign for Tibet, 2009); available from: http://www.savetibet.org/documents/reports/tracking-steel-dragon, 10.

[168] Map of Qinghai Tibet Railway (accessedApril 22, 2011); available from http://www.tibettravelplanner.com/train/qinghai-tibet-railway.htm

Although China's great western development strategy (*xibu da kaifa*) has been underway for more than a decade, no single event or element of infrastructure has brought near as much change to the Tibetan Plateau as the railroad. And this is not necessarily a good thing. Immediately upon the advent of commercial rail travel, ethnic Han in-migrants began relocating to Tibet in droves. The opportunities presented by the expanding economy of the 'Wild West,' as well as the many state subsidies that could be grabbed by making the arduous move to Tibet, attracted entrepreneurs as well as laborers by the millions. Both in response to these parties as well as to attract even more, the government injected tremendous capital into the region, building housing blocks, city streets, government offices, hospitals, schools, shopping malls, and the like. The result has been the rapid and jarring modernization of rural Tibet and, as discussed above, the asymmetrical growth of the pre-modern economy.

In addition to the growth of the commercial-industrial sector, a dramatic change that is evident as a result of the railroad is the unprecedented number of Chinese tourists now found in central Tibet. In the late 1990s, very few Han were seen in Lhasa other than shopkeepers, bureaucrats, merchants, taxi-drivers, and other economic migrants. At the Potala Palace – the historical, winter home of the Dalai Lamas and now a tightly controlled 'museum' – perhaps a handful of hardy and adventurous souls could be seen touring the dozens of chambers and temples of the complex on a given summer day. In 2006, the numbers were significantly higher, as tourism was on the rise in line with the expanding Chinese middle class, but crowds were hardly an issue. But in 2009, when I last visited Lhasa, the masses of Chinese tourists, pilgrims, and photographers had reached a crushing level, one hardly even imaginable before. Of course, this trend has continued to rise, to the

point at which 'religious tourism' has become a national obsession. And Tibet is at the top of the list of destinations.[169]

The effect of this rapid change to the demographic make-up of Lhasa, as well as Tibet as a whole, is severe. As Andrew Fisher pointed out (and discussed above), one of the greatest problems it presents is the "exclusionary growth" experienced across all Tibetan regions, a situation that consistently has "conflictive repercussions."[170] So long as this pattern continues along the trajectory it currently follows, Tibet will become increasingly tense and volatile. And this, of course, is hardly in Beijing's security interests. Nevertheless, the rails are being extended, the migrants keep arriving, and the Tibetan economy continues to expand at a record-breaking rate.

Returning to the infrastructure itself, Beijing seeks to expand its western transportation network not only to the domestic frontier, but over the borders and into international markets as well. The railroad to Lhasa has already been extended to Tibet's second city, Shigatse, and plans are to continue the line all the way to the border with Nepal. Furthermore, China has indicated the desire to extend the railroad all the way to Kathmandu, bringing Nepal even closer into the arms of Beijing.[171] Beyond Nepal, and discussed above, there are also plans to extend the railways from Xinjiang into Pakistan and Afghanistan and perhaps even Kyrgyzstan (they already run to Kazakstan, too). These rail-lines would provide China with rapid and reliable access to the Arabian Sea deep-water port of Gwadar and the

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[169] But, in fact, this could actually be a good thing - for a Chinese population long accustomed to enforced atheism and now desperate for spiritual meaning, the religious depth of Tibetan civilization may not just save the soul of China, it could save the life of Tibet itself, too.

[170] Fisher, "Perversities of Extreme Dependence and Unequal Growth in the TAR."

[171] This would likely result in a Nepal train-race, as New Delhi has also expressed intentions to extend India's railroad from its present border-terminus into Nepal proper. See *Beijing begins extending railway to Nepal boundary* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Beijing-begins-extending-rail-to-Nepal-boundary/articleshow/6633156.cms

tremendous mineral resources of the Hindu Kush as well as the energy and mineral resources of greater Central Asia.[172] Of course, all of these objectives are right in line with China's prime interests of economic growth and energy security, and they can only be fulfilled through expansive transportation systems.

Finally, the most important, future development project that we can expect Beijing to embark upon is one that further correlates internal security with international relations. Road networks already enable China to access and mobilize her international borders, but only at certain points. However, nearly all of China's western border is with nuclear-developed neighbors, and the majority of the Indian border is disputed, too. Therefore, it appears likely that Beijing will also seek to connect the Tibet and Xinjiang railroads – and this is an act that New Delhi certainly takes very seriously. Significantly, such a rail-line would run approximately parallel to the Sino-Indian (and Sino-Nepali) border, east to west across the Tibetan Plateau and up into Xinjiang. The geopolitical implications of such a rail link include the ability to mobilize troops everywhere along the Sino-Indian border as well as the means to ship goods by rail to South Asian road-heads located in the Himalayan borderland. Therefore, it is evident that for Beijing, enhanced connectivity attends to the interests of energy security and military mobilization just as it is also facilitates domestic development and population movement.

What remains to be seen is if these projects will create the conditions for more conflict or, conversely, cultivate an environment that mitigates tension. For the time being, unless Beijing makes some major changes (and soon) to its development strategies and national policies (including addressing issues of cultural sensitivity), it is unlikely that

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[172] Le Miere.

already restive populations will become anything but more agitated. As the International Campaign for Tibet recently recognized: "By continuing to pursue a model of development that appears to increase rather than close the gap between urban and rural, rich and poor, Chinese and Tibetan, the Chinese state risks further marginalizing and alienating the Tibetan people, potentially under-mining the political objectives of its current development: a stable Tibet within China."[173] However, and despite the reality of this trend, one must be careful not to think that China's development projects exclusively follow a one-way street. Thus, it remains possible for Beijing to change direction and promote more sustainable methods of growth, all the while continuing to expand its transportation network and further developing the Himalaya Complex.

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[173] *Tracking the Steel Dragon*, 6.

PART III.   TRANSFORMING THE FRONTIER

THE PHYSICAL AND POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF THE HIMALAYA COMPLEX

Primary Transport Networks of the Himalaya Complex[174]
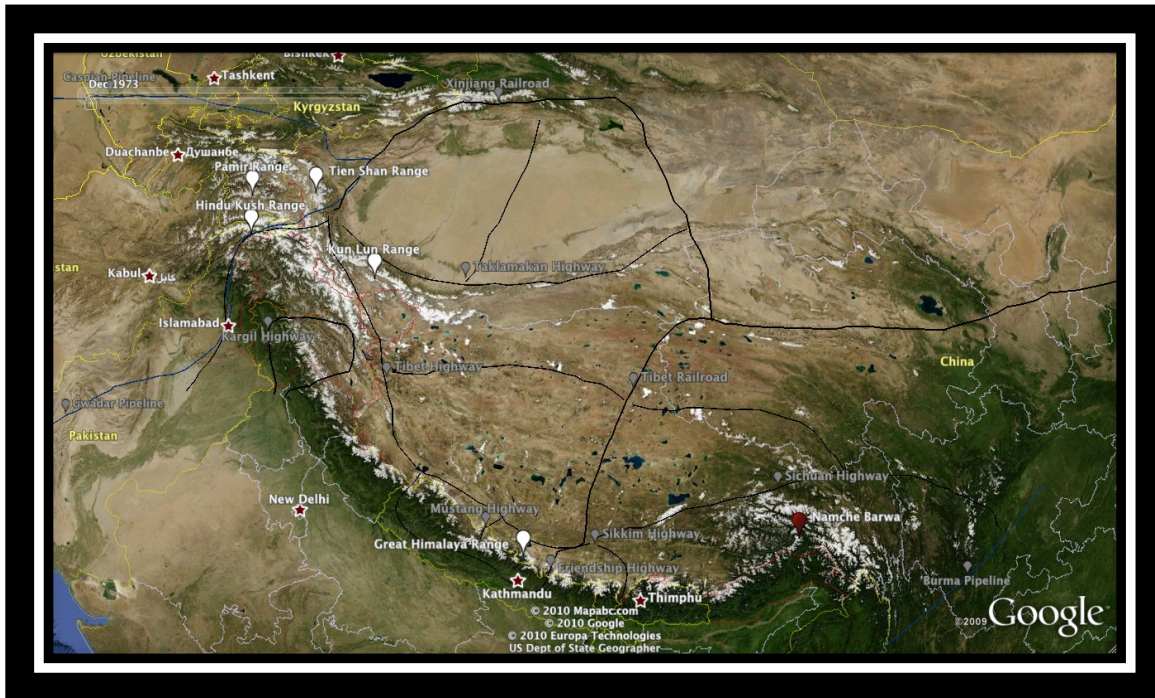
My analysis thus far employs geopolitical theory and comparative case studies on

conflict and road development to assess change in the Trans Himalayan frontier of Inner

Asia. I have examined the geographic history and political implications of territorial disputes

between China and India as well as evaluated the 'conflictive repercussions of economic

growth' in the Tibetan Himalaya. This has set the context within which I now present the

structural dimensions of the Himalaya Complex.

In order to holistically gauge the local, regional, and global ramifications of this

phenomenon, I will survey the region's physical transportation infrastructure as well as the

policies behind such endeavors. Chapter 5 will examine both early and more current road

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[174] Map created by the author using Google Earth (accessed February 1, 2011); available from: http://earth.google.com.

projects through the Trans Himalaya, discuss the foreign policy objectives and treaties that support such operations, and present a final case study – the Sikkim Road – on the emergence of a Gateway out of the Shatterbelt. Collectively, this section will illustrate the potential for road networks (my independent variable) and the socio-economic changes they support (my intervening variables) to transform conflictive environments in the Trans Himalaya into regions of multilateralism and stability (my dependent variable).

Chapter 5.   Infrastructure: Roads, Rails, Treaties, and Trade across Inner Asia

Chapter 5 presents infrastructure development across the Tibetan Himalaya in both historical and contemporary contexts. The chapter begins with a data set of the largest and most significant infrastructure projects that have been constructed throughout the Trans Himalaya over the course of the past half-century. This data set also notes the current condition of these roads and the author's experience traveling their length during a decade of fieldwork. A discussion of the contents of Data Set 2 is also made in Section A. Section B reviews a number of Indian and Chinese domestic and foreign policies that currently drive the growth of transportation networks across the Tibetan Himalaya. This section also presents Data Set 3 as a correlation of infrastructure projects with the trade and development policies that facilitate their growth. Finally, Section C, my final, micro case study on the Sikkim Highway, offers an example of how road development initiatives can break protracted territorial disputes and ultimately lead to the resolution of regional conflict.

Data Set 2. Gateways of the Tibetan Himalaya[175]

Tibetan Plateau	Name	Type	Route	Dis-tance (km)	Date Opened (projection)	Notes and *year Traveled*
Rails	Qinghai-Tibet Railroad	Rail	Xining,Qinghai-Lhasa	1972	2007	*2007*
	Lhasa-Shigatse Rail Extension	Rail	Lhasa-Shigatse, Tibet	253	(2014)	Under-construction
Major Highways	Qinqhai-Tibet Highway (G109)	Sealed Road	Xining,Qinghai-Lhasa	1922	1954	5150m pass, *2006*
	Sichuan-Tibet Highway North (G317)	Sealed Road	Chengdu,Sichuan –Lhasa (North)	2321	1954	*1999, 2005*
	Sichuan-Tibet Highway South (G318)	Sealed Road	Chengdu,Sichuan -Lhasa (South)	2095	1954	
	Xinjiang-Tibet Highway, (G219)	Sealed Road	Kargilik,Xinjiang -Lhasa	2514	1957	*2000*
	Yunnan-Tibet Highway, (G214)	Sealed Road	Xiaguan,Yunnan-Mangkam (Chamdo),Tibet	704	1974	*2009*
	Xining-Yushu Highway, (G214)	Sealed Road	Xining-Yushu,Qinghai	811	1943	*2007*
	Sino-Nepal Friendship Highway (Arniko Rajmarg-G318)	Sealed Road	Kathmandu, Nepal-Lhasa, Tibet	500	1967	5481m pass, *1999+2009*
	Changtang Highway (S310)	Un-paved Road	Naqchu-Shiquane, Tibet	1409	NA	Remote trans-plateau road, unofficial route
Cross-border Roads	Nathu La-Sikkim Highway (S204-NH31A)	Un-paved Road	Gyantse, Tibet-Gangtok,Sikkim India	250	2006	4031m pass, Historical Silk Routes
	Shipki La Trade Route (NH22)	Un-paved Road	Tibet (G219)-Kinnaur, India	NA	1993	
	Lipulekh Trade Route (S207)	Foot Trail	Purang, Tibet-Uttaranchal, India	NA	1992	5334m pass, pilgrimage route, *2000*
	Kyirong-Rasuwa Road (G219 off-shoot)	Un-paved Road	Kyirong (Saga), Tibet-Syabrubensi, Nepal	NA	(2011)	Historical trade route, *2000+ 2006*
	Tibet-Mustang Road (G318 off-shoot)	Un-paved Road	Zhongba, Tibet-Lo Monthang (Mustang), Nepal	NA	(2011)	Under-construction, *2004*
	Ladakh-Tibet Road (G219/S301)	Un-paved Road	Demchok (Ladakh) India-Gar, Tibet	91	Pending	Political obstacles, roads exist
	Stillwell Road	Un-paved Road	Arunachal Pradesh-Burma-Yunnan, China	NA	Pending	Historical trade route, renewed interest to open

[175] This data set refers only to roads that exist in the Tibetan Himalaya. Conspicuously absent are such significant routes as the Karakoram Highway, the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad Road, Afghanistans Northern Development Network, and other major transportation projects of the greater Trans Himalaya. Figures on constructions dates and distances for Tibetan roads: *Tibet Transportation* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from: http://www.tibettravel.info/get-to-tibet/index.html and *Map of China's Highways* (accessed April 22, 201); available from: http://www.china-tour.cn/images/China-Maps/Map-of-China-Highways.jpg

A. Historical and Contemporary Transport Across the Tibetan Himalaya

Before the second half of the 20th century, the Tibetan Plateau and Himalaya Range were traversed for centuries, if not millennia, only by caravans and the most intrepid of explorers and mystics. In the mid-1950s, however, the region was irreversibly opened to the automobile upon the arrival of Chinese forces – and their modern vehicles – in the Tibetan and Xinjiang capitals of Lhasa and Kashgar, respectively. More military lorries and government vehicles soon followed, and the construction of motorable roads became a fundamental initiative in the Communist Party's drive to modernize Tibet.

In more recent history, Landcruisers filled with tourists, as well as buses loaded with migrants, began making the arduous journey to the Roof of the World. And then, in 2006, the very first train made its maiden voyage from Beijing to Lhasa, to the popular acclaim of headlines the world over. Thus, in the span of just over fifty years, the first roads to traverse the Tibetan Plateau have grown exponentially into a transportation network that is at the very heart of the Himalaya Complex. And this network continues to expand, with increasing rapidity, under the forces of development in a globalized Inner Asia.

i. A Short History of Regional Road Development

In a historical context, major transportation infrastructure across the Himalaya began with the construction of the Qinghai-Tibet and Sichuan-Tibet highways, both of which opened in 1954.[176] These early projects followed the western march of Mao Zedong's People's Liberation Army (PLA), the Communist vanguard that first reached Lhasa in 1949. Roads were proclaimed a critical step in the modernization of Tibet, and PLA troops utilized

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[176] *Sichuan-Tibet Highway* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from:
http://chinatibet.people.com.cn/96064/96098/6552503.html

local labor in the robust effort to construct highways and 'liberate' Tibet and Xinjiang (where the first road opened in 1957).

Following the establishment of motorable roads to Tibet and Xinjiang in the mid-1950s, Beijing wasted little time before embarking on even more ambitious projects to connect these remote, western provinces with China's foreign neighbors – Nepal and Pakistan, in particular. These ambitions were realized when the Nepal-China (Tibet) 'Friendship' Highway opened in 1967, also know as China National Highway G318. At this time, construction was already underway on a similarly coined 'Friendship Highway' to Pakistan, a colossal effort to traverse the deepest gorges of the Indus Valley directly through the mighty Karakoram Range between Kashgar, Xinjiang and Islamabad, Pakistan. This project required no less than two decades of work and the lives of several thousand men and women before the Karakoram Highway opened in 1986 to great fanfare (including Pakistani sentiments proclaiming it the 'Eighth Wonder of the World').[177] As a measure of state security, it is also imperative to recognize that these two 'Friendship Highways' are actually linked by quite possibly the most important domestic road in the region, China's Xinjiang-Lhasa Highway G219 through the Aksai Chin (discussed above in Chapter 3).

It is worth noting that China did not attempt to build a road *into* India during this period in the 1950-60s, a time of ambitious of domestic and international highway development. That is because Sino-India relations were then at an all-time low and the border dispute over the McMahon Line was at its height of contention. However, China did proceed to build a road *through* Indian space – the Aksai Chin, the remote territory claimed by both

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[177] This glorified history is made abundantly clear by the frequent sign postings (actually, painted rocks) and memorials that are found along the Karakoram Highway.

Delhi and Beijing. Of course, this development project led to the 1962 Sino-Indian War and we know that it remains a thorn in the side of Sino-Indian relations today.

China's Western Roads[178]
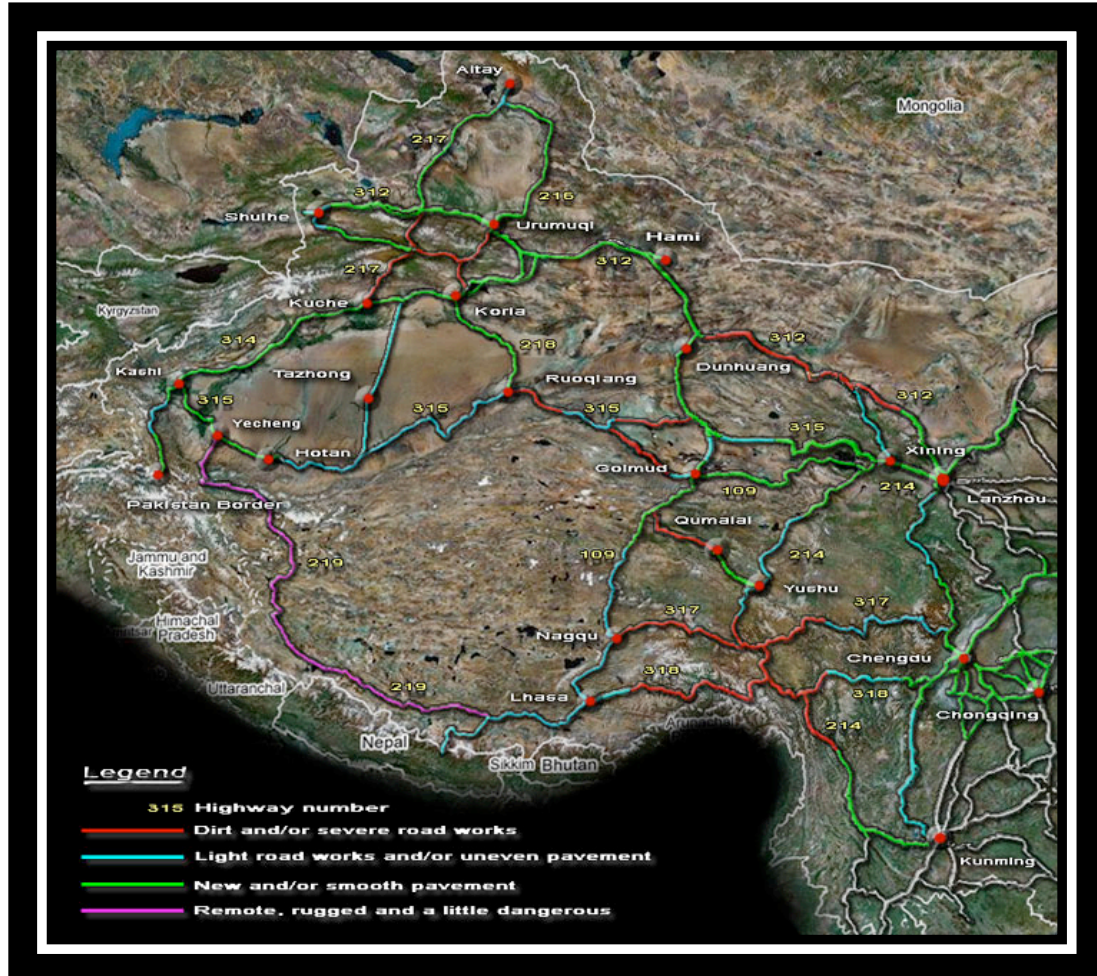
Through the 1980s and 1990s, road development in the region continued steadily, but new avenues did not have the dramatic geopolitical and economic impact that the Nepali 'Friendship' and Karakoram Highways presented. However, from the late 1990s and through the first decade of the 21st century, China and India's rapid and robust economic ascent has

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[178] Map by Carl Parker (accessed March 25, 2011); available from http://www.carlparker.com/WC_roads.html

led to a renewal of significant development in the region. And this is the very dynamic that now drives the Himalaya Complex.

ii. 21st Century Linkages: From Security to Stability

The modernization of road systems across the Tibetan Himalaya is driven by two mutually inclusive interests: security and economics. Although the regional powers – India and China – maintain only one road that directly connects to their neighbor's backyard, both Delhi and Beijing have recently embarked on significant road development programs in an effort to become more closely connected. These campaigns include domestic projects into each state's underdeveloped frontier as well as international financing for new, regional road networks, particularly in Nepal and Afghanistan (as discussed above).

The foundation of this nascent, 21st century Himalayan highway network is a collection of routes that already traverse the borderlands for strategic purposes. For China, foremost among these is Highway G219. It parallels China and India's heavily militarized and long disputed border and supports several new southbound roads that recently opened into historically remote and isolated regions of Nepal (but that today are now directly linked by modernizing road systems to the capital, Kathmandu). Similarly, India's northern road network in the state of Jammu and Kashmir largely exists for military support of the Indo-Pakistan conflict, particularly at the Siachen Glacier and Line of Actual Control (LOC). Moreover, highly ambitious new projects – such as Delhi's construction of the Rohtang Tunnel from Himachal Pradesh to Ladakh – constitute not only India's response to China's high-profile train to Tibet, but a new level of modernization that promise to transform the frontier.

Belying the history of conflict in the region, these roads also provide the basis for new, international routes that might well lead to breakthroughs in relations between India, on the one hand, and Pakistan and China, on the other. Furthermore, secondary roads increasingly radiating off from these strategic highways demonstrate great potential for transportation networks to mitigate, and perhaps even resolve, protracted disputes. The road between Srinagar, India and Muzaffarabad, Pakistan has recently reopened for local travel and transit trade. Tufts University Professor Ayesha Jalal has suggested that a simple initiative like this could play a key role in breaking the ice between Delhi and Islamabad on the Kashmir issue.[179]

There is similar potential in the case of China and India. Infrastructure has largely been established in India's Ladakh region along the cusp of the Aksai Chin; and on the China side, a highway already exists. Today, it even appears possible that a new, direct link between India and China through this western stretch of the Tibetan Plateau could open in the near future. This would connect the ancient Silk Route crossroads of Leh, Ladakh and Yarkand, Xinjiang by way of the Aksai Chin and the towns Chinese/Tibetan towns of Demchok and Ali. In fact, this route is already used by Tibetan and Ladakhi nomads who practice small scale trade in the region.[180] All that is necessary for more drastic change is for the political leadership to open the gates on this closed border. Should this prove successful, a congruent development scheme in Arunachal Pradesh could potentially break the protracted conflict at the other side of the Sino-Indian border as well.

iii. A Caveat: Internal Implications of External Influence on Traditional Livelihoods

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[179] Ayesha Jalal, lecture at Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, November 19, 2009.

[180] Visit to nomadic region at Tso Moriri Lake in Ladakh, India, September 2005; interview with Peter Sonam, Tibetan nomad, in Delhi, India June 22, 2009.

In contrast to such promising potentialities, the new roads are also unprecedented in their reach and the change they bring to historically isolated communities is impossible to predict. In the case of Sino-Nepal development, the recently opened Mustang Highway and Langtang Road follow ancient trade routes down the Kali Gandaki and Rasuwa-Kyirong Valleys, respectively. As a result, motorized transport now exists in remote Himalayan villages for the first time ever.[181]

Development of Nepali Roadways through Mustang, Langtang, and the Friendship Highway[182]

These roads are the vanguard of modernization in rural and traditional communities, and their arrival is a precarious event. While such networks do deliver socio-economic

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[181] Personal email communication with Broughton Coburn, specialist on Himalayan development and frequent researcher/explorer in the Mustang region, August 2009.

[182] Although not depicted by the dated satellite imagery used in the creation of this map, in the case of Mustang, the northbound route (from central Nepal) and the southbound route (from Tibet) have nearly been connected and will soon open to motorized transport. In Langtang-Rasuwa, the roads are also just about linked, although reports on the current status of this route are notoriously difficult to attain. Finally, the Friendship Highway is fully motorable on both sides of the Sino-Nepali border. Map made by author using Google Earth (accessed April 9, 2011); available from http://earth.google.com

benefits such as modern facilities for education and health care, they also open areas long

accustomed to sustainable, mountain livelihoods to contemporary, capitalist culture. More

specifically, these roads now bring a flood of Chinese goods into northern Nepal – from

instant noodles to plastic shoes to Pabst Blue Ribbon beer – and this is not entirely a good

thing.[183]

While it is indeed a component of China's strategic push to gain economic and

scalable footholds – leverage – across the western frontier and into South Asia, it is also a

situation that India monitors with anxious concern. That is because from initial, small-scale

commercial steps, a greater economic and political pace invariably follows, potentially

leading to hegemonic control. This is what India worries will, and in fact now is, happening

in Nepal according to an increasingly ubiquitous Chinese presence. Furthermore, the

response of local populations, despite the usual welcoming of modern amenities, typically

becomes one of consternation and concern as powerful neighbors gain increasingly powerful

positions.

In a Subcontinental context (or, 'south of the Himalaya'), this paradigm of socio-

economic penetration by large nations into smaller, frontier states is also evident with India's

influence in Nepal. For example, although Nepal depends almost entirely on India for its

supply of fuel as well as basic foodstuffs, the Nepali citizenry has begun to express

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[183] Of innumerable Chinese consumer products, one of the oddest and most surprising items I have routinely encountered in remote Himalayan villages – from the base of Mt. Kailas in western Tibet to valleys in northern Mustang and Dolpo, Nepal – is Pabst Blue Ribbon beer (particularly known for its 'hipster' popularity in the United States).

vociferous frustration with the Indian economic lifeline.[184] A common grievance is the prevalence of Indian ownership over Nepali businesses, factories, and industries.[185]

More recently, New Delhi's inclination to intervene in Kathmandu's political climate has provoked exceptional resentment in Nepal. "The perception that Nepal's sovereignty is being encroached upon has increased," said Ashok Gurung, senior director at the India China Institute at The New School in New York City. "It is clear that micro-management by Indian authorities in Nepalese politics has intensified and produced anti-Indian sentiment in Nepal."[186] In addition to these recent expressions, opposition to India's economic presence (or interference) in Nepal was a core component of the Maoist ideology that swept across the country and contributed to their eventual victory in Nepal's decade-long civil war.

In light of this Nepali example, it is evident that modern road systems bring change that is good as well as change that is bad to Himalayan communities. Ultimately, however, what drives this development is a fundamental, mutual interest in economic growth and regional security. Therefore, inter-state policies and treaties are increasingly being created to establish the terms for further expansion of trade and transportation across the Trans Himalaya. It is to that inter-state political dynamic that I now turn.

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[184] These are sentiments I have heard countless times in Kathmandu, and are frequent sentiments behind the motivation for protests in the capital city.

[185] *Nepal Maoists resume opposition to Indian investments* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from: http://english.irib.ir/subcontinent/news/top-stories/item/78118-nepal-maoists-resume-opposition-to-indian-investments

[186] *Nepal grows weary of Indian 'interference'* (accessed August 17, 2010); available from: http://www.lankabusinessonline.com/fullstory.php?nid=2080726650

Data Set 2. The Shrinking Frontier: infrastructure meets policy in the Trans Himalaya

Region	Project	New Infrastructure Developments/Policy	Alliance	Year
Tibet Himalaya	Tibet Railroad	Nepal Extension	Nepal-China	2006[187]
Pamir/Tien Shan	Xinjiang Railroad	Tajik-Afghan Extension	Tajikistan-Afghanistan-China	2005[188]
Nepal Himalaya	Trans-Border Highways	Remote roads from Tibet into Nepal at Mustang/Rasuwa/etc	Nepal-China	2009[189]+ underway
India Himalaya	Sikkim Highway	Nathu la border crossing and road development	India-China	2006[190]
Afghan Pamir	Wakhan Corridor	Kashgar-Wakhan Corridor Highway and Railroad	Afghanistan-China	Under-way[191]
Tien Shan	Caspian Pipeline	Kazakhstan-China Oil Pipeline	Kazakhstan-China	2009[192]
Burmese Highlands	Kunming Pipeline	Myanmar-Kunming Pipeline	Burma-China	2010[193]
Trans Pakistan	Gwadar Pipeline	Pakistan-China Oil Pipeline	Pakistan-China	Under-way[194]
NE India-N Burma-SW China	Dhaka Declaration	BCIM Regional Economic Forum (BCIM)	Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar members	2007[195]
South Asia	Strategic and Economic Alliance	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)	India, Nepal, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Maldives members	1985[196]
South Asia	Free Trade Zone	South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA)	All SAARC Members	2004[197]
Central Eurasia	Strategic Alliance	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)	China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Russia members	2001[198]
Central Eurasia	Trade and Transport Corridor Plan	Central-South Asian Transport and Trade Forum (CSTAFF)	Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, India, China	2005[199]

[187] "Banyan: New Silk Roads," *The Economist*, April 10, 2010, 48.

[188] Le Miere.

[189] Jolly, *Highway will bring Nepal 'in from the cold'* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8480637.stm. I have also visited the region several times in person between 1998-2009 to observe the development of roadways in this area of the Nepal Himalaya.

[190] *China, India reopen historic trade route* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from: http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200607/06/eng20060706_280587.html.

[191] Le Miere.

[192] *CNPC announces Kenkiyak-Kumkol section of Kazakhstan-China Oil Pipeline becomes operational* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from http://www.youroilandgasnews.com/cnpc+announces+kenkiyak-kumkol+section+of+kazakhstan-china+oil+pipeline+becomes+operational_35798.html.

[193] *China, Burma Sign Oil Pipeline Agreement* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/03/27/china-burma-sign-oil-pipe_n_180067.html

[194] *Karakoram Highway's Gwadar link likely* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from: http://www.dawn.com/2006/07/05/top1.htm.

[195] *Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar Forum for Improving Trade, Transport, and Tourism* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from: http://www.indoburmanews.net/archives-1/2007/april/bangladesh-china-india-and-myanmar-forum-for-improving-trade-transport-and-tourism/.

[196] *SAARC Charter* (accessed March 15, 2010); available from http://www.saarc-sec.org/SAARC-Charter/5/.

[197] Gulshan Sachdeva, "India," *The New Silk Roads*, 337.

[198] *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (accessed April 22, 2011); available from: http://www.cfr.org/international-peace-and-security/shanghai-cooperation-organization/p10883

[199] Gulshan Sachdeva, "India," *The New Silk Roads*, S. Frederick Starr, ed. SAIS, p. 337

B. The Policies that Drive Development in the Trans Himalaya

The construction of Inner Asian road systems is built upon a foundation of regional market integration. To this end, many efforts have been made to create bi-lateral and multi-lateral treaties and cooperatives that liberalize the various marketplaces of Eurasia with those of India and China. But because of the great sensitivity of Tibet and the natural barriers of the Himalaya mountains, these policies have largely been drawn according to two regional contexts (thereby avoiding the most troublesome political and geographic obstacles): Southeast and Central Asia. However, with increasingly greater bilateral trade relations, it appears likely that Delhi and Beijing will not only reach the terms to expand their direct exchange, but that that space will be prepared to resolve some of their protracted disputes as well.

For starters, China and India have made significant progress in widening their relations through collaborative initiatives in Southeast Asia. Foremost among those has been their inclusion in the annual meetings with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). While not necessarily a 'Southeast' Asian state per-se, India has for the past decade reiterated its historical, social, cultural, and economic ties with Indochina and its interest in revitalizing those relations.[200]

Indian and Chinese leaders have recently taken to meeting face to face 'on the sidelines' of the annual ASEAN meeting to discuss mutual concerns. Promisingly, at the ASEAN summit in October 2009, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India and his counterpart, Premier Wen Jiabao of China, indicated their intentions to address 'issues of

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[200] Sanjib Baruah, *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 222.

conflict' between Delhi and Beijing.[201] At this point, unfortunately, no substantial progress

has been made beyond those discussions. What is evident, however, is that the ASEAN

forum has become an opportune venue for both sides to sit down together, discuss their

interests and concerns, and to strive for agreement on shared economic and territorial issues.

Another noteworthy and encouraging development is the Bangladesh-China-India-

Myanmar Regional Economic Forum (BCIM Forum) that evolved from the 1999 Kunming

Initiative. This cooperative meets annually, includes both India and China, and brings leaders

from the non-governmental (NGO) and private sectors together in an exercise of Track-2

diplomacy.[202] Charged with improving relations between member states through shared

economic opportunity, parties to the BCIM Forum also stand to influence political leaders

and thereby assist with the formation of state policy.

The most significant BCIM Forum – Bangladesh 2007 – resulted in the Dhaka

Declaration, a three-part objective on improving trade, transport, and tourism in the region.

With a vision across borders and the creation of economic 'Growth Zones,' "the forum

emphasized the critical importance of improved transport connectivity for efficient

movement of goods and people in the interests of both regional and global competitiveness

and in order to promote tourism and better understanding among the people."[203] As will be

seen below, opening a road between China and India in Sikkim is a critical first step towards

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[201] *India, China to discuss issues of conflict during ASEAN summit* (accessed March 15, 2010); available from: http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/india-news/india-china-to-discuss-issues-of-conflict-during-asean-summit_100264823.html.

[202] Md. Tariqur Rahman and Muhammad Al Amin, *Aspects of economic cooperation in the Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar region: A quantitative assessment*, Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network of Trade Working Paper Series, No. 73, July 2009; available from: www.unescap.org/tid/artnet/pub/wp7309.pdf, 2.

[203] *Bangladesh, China, India, and Myanmar Forum for Improving Trade, Transport, and Tourism* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from: http://www.indoburmanews.net/archives-1/2007/april/bangladesh-china-india-and-myanmar-forum-for-improving-trade-transport-and-tourism/.

this objective, and one that might possibly be followed by similar initiatives in Arunachal Pradesh and/or the Aksai Chin.

In a Central Asian context, both China and India have recently participated in a number of international fora that strive to open the Inner Asian marketplace to free trade and infrastructure development. These groups include the Central and South Asia Transport and Trade Forum (CSATTF), which is composed primarily of Central Asian states with China and India as special participants.[204] The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is another regional initiative in which India has joined China in the pursuit of market and transport reforms across the Trans Himalaya. Discussed above, both India and China have also made substantial investments in rebuilding Afghanistan and continue to pursue development projects that include road and rail infrastructure.[205] In light of these recent steps, the future for South and Central Asia is increasingly linked both by road and by policy.

In fact, the opportunity to bridge disconnected markets might finally push China and India out of the 'frozen' status quo of their territorial disputes and inspire Beijing and Delhi to open their frontier areas to commercial traffic at long last. This, in turn, would lead towards a greater Inner Asian trade network, one that has been proposed and discussed but thus far unrealized. To understand why this has been so elusive to implement, and why the negotiations have failed and the roads are still closed, China and India's respective foreign relations and economic policies must be considered.

i. Indian Policy and the Players: State Coalitions and Negotiations on Regional Integration

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[204] Gulshan Sachdeva, 337.

[205] Le Miere.

India's commitment to international connectivity and economic growth is characterized by its Look East policy. Introduced in the early-1990s, the cornerstones of this policy include multi-lateral cooperatives and liberalized, regional trade agreements. These include the BCIM Forum as well endeavors such as the Bay of Bengal Initiatives for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC, which includes Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand).[206] India has also joined the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), which is modeled on North America's NAFTA.[207] China is conspicuously absent from both BIMSTEC and SAFTA, whereas it is an integral member of the BCIM Forum.

India has also cultivated development strategies in Central Asia, represented foremost by its central role in the construction of transportation infrastructure in Afghanistan. This of course presents a challenge to both Pakistan and China, and that is entirely India's intention. Most importantly, the recent completion of the Ring Road connecting Afghanistan's major cities was largely financed by New Delhi. As mentioned above, India has also participated in meetings with the Central and South Asia Transport and Trade Forum (CSATTF) and holds observer status with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as well.[208]

Due to the sensitivity of the region, coalition-building is an essential element of successful negotiations on Sino-Indian and greater South and Central Asian trade alliances.[209] Although negotiations on opening India's northeastern marketplace and the creation of a pan-Asian highway and trade network have occurred on many occasions, progress remains

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[206] Rahman, 2.

[207] Ibid., 1.

[208] Sachdeva, 337.

[209] Christophe Dupont, "Negotiation as Coalition Building," *International Negotiation* 1, no. 1, (The Netherlands: Kluwer Law International, 1996), 47-64.

limited because of both international territorial disputes and internal political interests. Ultimately, before any border disputes can be resolved, parties must recognize the shared interest in (and align behind) the creation of an environment conducive to change. And that is one that is amenable to bilateral growth.

Proponents of Indian expansion into the Himalaya Complex are aligned around a significant community of "middle-of-the-road-pragmatists" composed of policy makers, regional officials, and business leaders.[210] The group has recognized the conspicuous absence of a clear China-policy coming out of Delhi, and they propose to create one that is agreeable to parties on both sides of the divide: hawkish anti-Chinese factions (the China-threat camp) vs. dovish, Socialist-leaning intellectuals (the China cooperation camp).[211] These central players are powerful politically as well as economically, and they stand to make a lot of money should the borders be opened to trade. Not surprisingly, they are several of the key members of India's delegation to the BCIM Forum.[212]

These "middle-of-the-road-pragmatists" include representatives from India's Ministry of External Affairs, political and tribal leaders from borderland states such as Arunachal Pradesh, and Delhi industrialists. Powerfully, this group also counts members from the Confederation of Indian Industry, a foremost proponent of expanded trade, investment, and tourism. This middle-road collective, pushing for the expansion of bi-lateral trade with China, has political muscle in Delhi but is also willing to make compromises with Beijing. If

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[210] Sindhu, 149.

[211] Ibid..

[212] Ibid., 150.

they can gain the ear of sympathetic military leaders, they stand to gain the leverage needed to change the calculus of India's historical foreign policy with China.[213]

In order to realize their objective, this middle-road camp must convince Delhi that India's interests are not exclusive to those of China. Drawing their policy agenda from elements contained in both the China-threat and the China-cooperation camps, they have demonstrated a commitment to compromise. Their approach strives to expand the agenda with China and to cut deals with Beijing, highlighting the fact that the normalization of relations can actually be accomplished within the confines of the current territorial dispute.

> "This policy reflects the salience of the territorial issue for the bilateral relationship and stresses the need to provide the necessary political impetus regularly to move the negotiations forward. However, the policy does not call for the normalization of Sino-Indian relations to be contingent upon the resolution of the border dispute. Instead, it seeks innovative ways to broaden and deepen the present bilateral interaction, including improving business and encouraging joint ventures (though not necessarily promoting the level of integration sought by the Kunming Initiative and MGC process)."[214]

How to make this happen is of course the critical question. Thus far, mutual interests have been recognized according to a shared agenda. Yet the extensive commitments contained in the BCIM Forum/Kunming Initiative have led extreme parties to voice reservations that are critical of such ambitious plans.[215] What is needed is a gradual and measured (and thus truly viable) approach that follows the precedent of an already opened border. This will be examined below through the case of Sikkim.

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[213] Ibid..

[214] Ibid., 150.

[215] *Prospects brighten for Kunming Initiative* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/EB12Df04.html.

ii. Chinese Strategy and Policy: Beijing's Regional Ambitions and Demand for Resources

In contrast to the domestic focus of Chinese foreign policy in previous decades, today Beijing is looking outwards beyond the horizon. China's development strategy to 'open up the west' (*xibu da kaifa*) and the Chinese names for Tibet (*Xizang*, the 'Western Treasure House) and East Turkestan (*Xinjiang*, the 'New Frontier) underscore the centrifugal pull that Mainland China feels towards the west.[216] But this momentum surpasses the state's boundaries. That is because, although various domestic projects have been launched to modernize and secure the state internally, many others have been created to establish international connections between China with her neighbors.

China is above all driven by the pursuit of economic growth and the country is in desperate need of raw materials and additional energy sources to fuel its rise.[217] Therefore, the development of oil and gas pipelines and access to the petroleum fields of Central Asia and the ports of the Indian Ocean has largely driven China's foreign policy with states of Central Eurasia and Southeast Asia. Such interests have been met through the liberalization and formalization of relations with SCO, SAARC, ASEAN member nations such as Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, and Burma.[218] Incidentally, each of these states is either a significant producer of hydrocarbon energy (Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan) or else currently finds China developing trans-national pipelines across its territory (Pakistan and Burma) in order to link deep-water ports with domestic consumer markets. In addition, Beijing has also witnessed Central and Southeast Asian trade expand as old roadways are

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[216] John Avedon, *In Exile From the Land of Snows* (London: Michael Joseph, 1984).

[217] Although Xinjiang, by far, holds the largest reserves of oil and gas in all of China, Beijing requires the import of additional resources from every available producer on continents across the globe.

[218] See Data Set 3 for details on the Gwadar port west of Karachi, Pakistan and the Myanmar-Kunming pipeline.

opened according to cooperative agreements – such as those between Yunnan and Laos as well as Xinjiang and Kazakhstan.

While the capital and market size of China is fundamental to these international initiatives, and critical to the cetripetal pull many states feel towards Beijing, maximizing trade relations with India has long been stymied due to closed borders. In avoidance of this problem of political geography, the vast majority of Sino-Indian trade continues to be a function of maritime commerce. This is the case not only because of the low-cost efficiency of ocean shipping but also due to the great geographic hurdle of crossing the Himalaya.

As a result of these conditions and the general absence of direct road links between China and India, market reforms across the Tibetan Himalaya have been only marginally successful. However, this is bound to transform, as interests exist, the markets await, regional precedents are set, and the infrastructure is viable. As will be seen below, the initiative to open the highway through Sikkim exemplifies how road projects can overcome political, geographic, and infrastructural obstacles and truly create change in a region of conflict – the emergence of a Gateway out of the Shatterbelt.

C. Micro Case Study 4
The Sikkim Road – Breaking an International Impasse

In July 2006, the gate was lifted on the first and only commercial border crossing between India and China at the Nathu La, a border-post at 4500m/15,000 ft between Sikkim, India and Tibet, China. The first direct link to operate between China and India since the 1962 Sino-Indian War, the Sikkim Road illustrates the emergence of a Gateway out of a Shatterbelt. Moreover, the policy behind the project amounts to a form of rapprochement between Delhi and Beijing. In this way, the Sikkim Road is an example of how the

development of transportation infrastructure (my independent variable) can positively affect

(if not drive) international conflict resolution (the dependent variable).

Map of Sikkim Road and location of Nathu La[219]

A former protectorate of India since the British Raj, Sikkim became an Indian state,

or more precisely a 'union territory,' in 1975. China, however, long refused to recognize

India's claim to Sikkim, in large part because of this former Buddhist kingdom's close,

historical relations with Tibet. However, in June 2003, India's Prime Minister Atal Bihari

Vajpayee made an historic state visit to Beijing, in part to discuss border issues, and in so

doing laid the foundation for initial Sino-Indian rapprochement.[220]

In Beijing, PM Vajpayee and China's Premier Wen Jiabao signed a Memorandum of

Understanding (MOU) to normalize relations in Sikkim. At that time, Wen called for a 3-

phase framework for resolving the crisis, a method of value-creation that delinked the

positional causes of the problem from the opportunities posed by shared interests. The

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[219] Sikkim Map (accessed April 16, 2011); available from: http://thinkingparticle.com/articles/nathula-pass

[220] Baruah, 227.

approach was: to phase out the difficult problems; not allow them to affect the process of mutual understanding; and to undertake consultations on equal footing in a friendly atmosphere to find solutions.[221] The MOU established the terms for Beijing to officially recognize Sikkim as a *de facto* territory of India with the objective to eventually acknowledge *de jure* sovereignty as well. In exchange, for the first time ever Delhi officially declared Tibet an integral part of China, that "the Tibetan Autonomous Region is part of the territory of the People's Republic of China."[222]

Thus in the case of Sikkim, opening a road fulfilled mutual economic opportunities and led to normalized boundary relations. Hao Peng, China's vice chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region, stated in the *China Daily* two weeks before the road opened that "the reopening of border trade will help end economic isolation in this area and play a key role in boosting the market economy there…It will also boost the transportation, construction and service industries, paving the way for a major trade route that connects China and South Asia."[223] Indian parties also recognized the success: "The resumption of border trade is a great historic event, not only for enlarging trade, but also for greater relations between the two great countries," said Dr. Christy Fernandez, a senior commerce ministry official who led the Indian team at talks with the Chinese.[224]

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[221] *Border trade off: Ice melts with Sikkim deal* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from: http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/pm-on-china-visit/news/Border-trade-off-Ice-melts-with-Sikkim-deal/articleshow/39907.cms.

[222] *China Acknowledges Sikkim an Indian State* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from: http://www.indianembassy.org/i_digest/2004/may/sikkim_ china.htm.

[223] *China, India reopen historic trade route* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from: http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200607/06/eng20060706_280587.html.

[224] *Road between adversaries fuels hope, fear* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from: http://www.boston.com/news/world/asia/articles/2006/07/04/road_between_adversaries_fuels_hope_fear/?rss_id=Boston.com+%2F+News.

Whether or not the Nathu La border crossing resumes the same prominence it held in previous centuries, it definitively stands to boost overall Sino-Indian exchange. The route has been granted Most Favored Nation (MFN) trading status by the Delhi government, and rail links are available within 200 miles.[225] Even more importantly (and not coincidentally), it opened the same week as the much more widely publicized launch of the new, revolutionary railroad from Beijing to Lhasa, Tibet. As a result, goods can now be shipped overland between Shanghai and Calcutta in about one week, about twice as fast than the traditional maritime route through the Malacca Straits of Singapore.

But before these opportunities can be capitalized upon, India must first loosen restrictions placed on trade through the Nathu La. Delhi currently permits the export of only 29 goods to China and the import of only 15 items via this route, mostly foodstuffs such as rice and salt and textiles like yak pelts and silk. The Indian government prohibits electronics, mobile phones, and other manufactured Chinese products in an effort to protect India's economy from the negative flood of low-quality goods that have entered China's neighbor's marketplaces, particularly Nepal, Laos, and Thailand. China, on the other hand, places no limit on what can be imported or exported to India (save illegal or illicit substances).[226]

In a foreign policy sense, the opening of this Sikkim Road is consistent with India's Look East policy (discussed above) as well as China's commitment to expand trade with India and greater South Asia. While commercial activity at the Nathu La in 2009 was not a huge contributor to the year's $52 billion in bilateral Sino-Indian trade, it does represent major progress in improving overall relations. It also offers great promise for other conflict

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[225] *Sikkim: India-China trade to reopen through Nathu La on Friday.*

[226] Ibid..

borderlands – such as Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin – because Sikkim had long been a disputed region before the recent breakthrough.

Ultimately, the events in Sikkim demonstrate how value-forming negotiations based on the alignment and promotion of shared economic interests transformed Sino-Indian relations in a disputed Himalayan region. There, "a battlefield was turned into a marketplace," said Sun Shi Hai, Deputy Director of the Institute of Asia-Pacific Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.[227] While the model is applicable to other conflictive regions, the great difference in Sikkim, of course, is that normalization of relations and territorial recognition were pre-conditions for renewing cross border trade. Nevertheless, the resolution to open international business activity (a key intervening variable) across the Nathu La border demonstrates the salience of resolving territorial contests (the dependent variable) through economic avenues such as road development (the independent variable).

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[227] *Reopening of border trade signals warmer ties* (accessed December 10, 2009); available from: http://in.china-embassy.org/eng/ssygd/zyyhn/jmjle/t261670.htm.

CONCLUSION: ROAD DIPLOMACY AND THE FUTURE OF THE TRANS HIMALAYA

My analysis on the impact of transportation infrastructure on conflict in the Trans Himalaya follows two trajectories. On the one hand, the development of roads and rails across the provinces of western China has not led to an increasingly stable and secure Tibet and Xinjiang. Rather, it has created an environment of ethnic tension and conflictive growth that is the result of population transfer and economic asymmetry. Yet, despite this reality, the Chinese government continues to promote its western development strategy, under the pretext that modernization will lead to stabilization and internal security will enhance the state's external security. But, as I've shown above, that is not the case, and the development of transportation infrastructure is ultimately having a negative, disruptive impact on China's domestic stability.

Conversely, the expansion of road and rail systems in other regions of the Trans Himalaya demonstrates that connectivity contributes to security. This is evident, firstly, in domestic cases such as Afghanistan and Nepal. Moreover, international transportation projects have the potential – and precedents have already been set – to transform protracted territorial disputes and resolve inter-state conflicts. This is exemplified by the road through Sikkim and has also been suggested as a way to break the ice in Kashmir. Built upon shared interests in economic growth and the security that comes with enhanced connectivity, international transportation systems are changing the geopolitics of the region. And this phenomenon, radiating out from the heart of Eurasia, has extremely significant implications that are local, regional, and global in scope.

But what do we make of the oppositional dynamic of these events? How can development in one region contribute to stability while in another it undermines security?

The answer, of course, is complex. In turn, predicting what will happen across the Trans Himalaya – next week or next year – is a dubious prospect. Nevertheless, it is worth consideration.

China and India will soon have the largest bilateral trade relationship in the entire world. As Robert Kaplan recently pointed out, this factor alone is bound to cushion historical tensions between these rising Asian powers.[228] Moreover, in response to their mutual interests, there will follow a collapse of distance between their economic centers. Calcutta and Shanghai are getting 'closer' because the frontier itself is 'shrinking.' Airports and railroads in Tibet and highways and marketplaces throughout India's northern Himalayan valleys are not only linking Beijing and Delhi more intimately together, they are also suggesting radical new, overland alternatives to the traditional maritime trade routes through the South China Seas, Malacca Straits, and Indian Ocean.

As such, it appears inevitable that more Gateways are soon to emerge out of the historical Himalayan Shatterbelt. China and India share a border of over two thousand miles, and yet they have only one road open to limited, commercial trade. Despite the contentious territorial disputes that continue to complicate their foreign policies, more roads are virtually certain to open. Beijing continues to extend the Lhasa railway to the Nepal border, and most likely has interest in linking the lines through Sikkim to Calcutta as well. Delhi, for its part, has also initiated rail development projects into Nepal, and is building a tunnel to its Sino-Pakistan border under the Rohtang Pass, too. Considering that the infrastructure will soon be established, it follows that the borders will naturally open to trade.

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[228] Robert Kaplan, lecture titled *Monsoon,* at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Medford, MA (April 21, 2011).

The consequence of these projects is nothing less than 'road diplomacy.' Building routes across the Sino-Indian border will require attention to the disputed regions of the Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh, as they are natural corridors and already have highways to their boundaries. In the interest of expanding regional trade relations, and to capitalize on the potential that is there, it is critical for Delhi and Beijing to address their territorial conflicts. In fact, to open the best of passages to trade – to allow the Gateways to emerge – these conflicts need to be resolved, and the Shatterbelt thereby reduced. And because, in the 21st century, economic trade appears to trump all else, it is probable that China and India will acknowledge their mutual interests, break the status quo, and initiate a great movement towards territorial normalization by way of road diplomacy.

But, then again, we have the problem of Tibet and Xinjiang. However, it is not roads or migration *per se* that is the issue here. Rather, it is threats to cultural survival, a systemic economic asymmetry, and a pattern of societal marginalization that comprises the core, visceral grievances expressed by these minority populations. This is what makes those places so volatile, but Beijing can still do something about it. By attending to the interests of these western communities – granting them a semblance of previously proffered 'autonomy,' acknowledging the ethno-cultural divides and rifts that continue to widen, and recognizing that modern urbanization does not automatically lead to content, obedient, and stable populations – local anxieties can be assuaged and the climate of conflict mitigated.
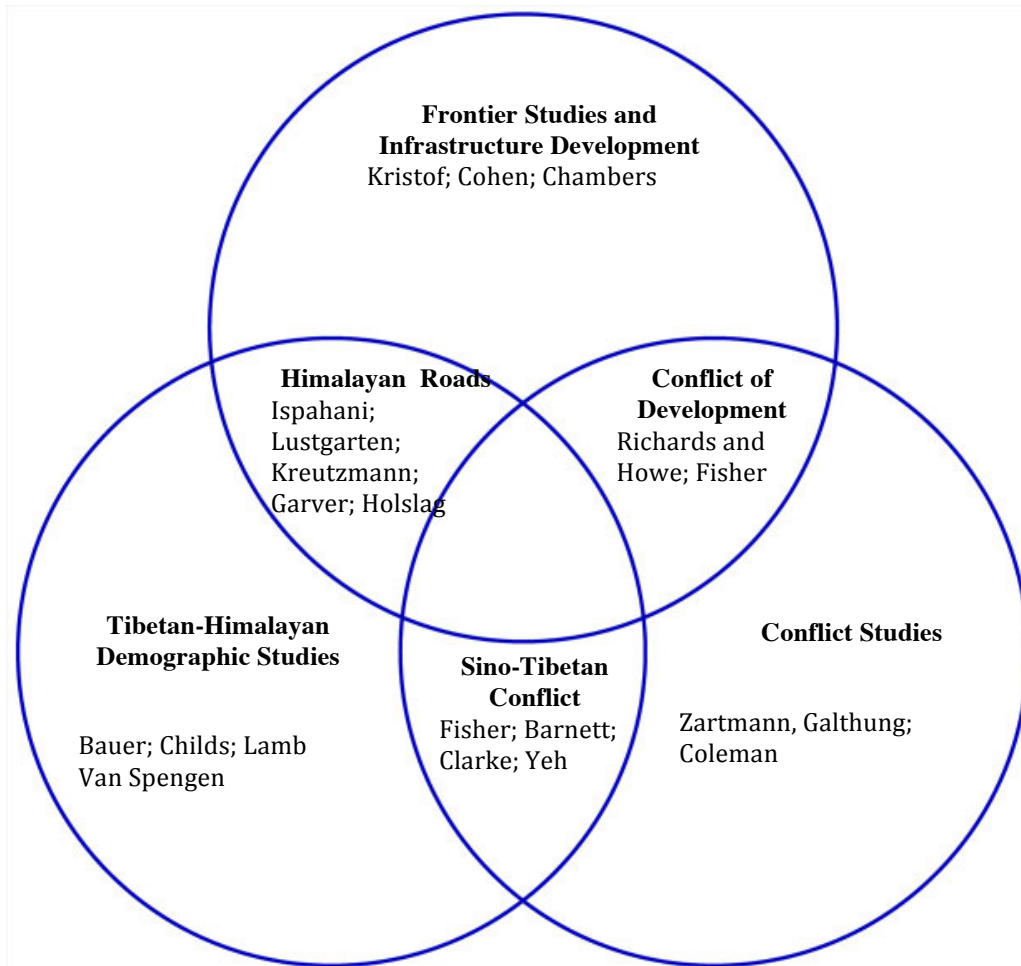
The access and opportunity that new roads will deliver to remote communities is in the interest of both the state and local residencies. Moreover, connecting those people and places to foreign lands, new products, and global ideas can have a positive effect as well. Therefore, I return to my hypothesis that the development of transportation infrastructure

across the Trans Himalaya, and particularly in the Tibetan Himalaya, is utilitarian and can bring a greater good. However, this potential can and will be undermined if, instead, Beijing continues to pursue a policy of cultural dilution and assimilation. Tibetans are Tibetans and Uyghurs are Uyghurs, and while they may be Chinese in the sense of modern nationality, they are not Han and their unique ethnic identity and traditions must be respected and preserved. Only then will western China be stable and the county more secure.

In conclusion, we see that events happening on the Roof of the World are not only processes of globalization, but that they are global affairs in and of themselves. The frontier of Inner Asia is no longer a 'blank of the map.' The Trans Himalaya has shifted from the periphery to the center, and it has become the new nexus of Eurasian growth. As it was five centuries ago, the region is reawakening as a trans-continental crossroads. And how these events unfold – something I have called the Himalaya Complex – will in turn determine the future of trade, transport, and conflict transformation from 'Chindia' outward to the world.

Appendix

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Literature Review

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Frontier Studies and Infrastructure Development
Kristof; Cohen; Chambers

Himalayan Roads
Ispahani;
Lustgarten;
Kreutzmann;
Garver; Holslag

Conflict of Development
Richards and Howe; Fisher

Tibetan-Himalayan Demographic Studies

Bauer; Childs; Lamb
Van Spengen

Sino-Tibetan Conflict
Fisher; Barnett; Clarke; Yeh

Conflict Studies

Zartmann, Galthung; Coleman

This Venn Diagram depicts my literature review and illustrates the dearth of scholarship on the unique topic that is the focus of this paper.

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