

**SELECTIVE EXCLUSION:  
FOREIGNERS, FOREIGN GOODS,  
AND FOREIGNNESS IN MODERN NEPALI HISTORY**

**Mark Liechty**

[B]efore now there were no European things in Nepal. Now, thanks to you, there are things and there are Padres. Since the Padres have given help to my subjects and made the people very happy, we are looking after the Padres as much as possible. In addition, send here for the things that you have not got there, and I will send there for the things that I have not got here. You must not have any anxiety about affairs here. You are my friend. I will do all I can. Also, there are no good doctors here. You must send me from there a good doctor and a good craftsman.

- Ranjit Malla, King of Bhadgaon to Pope Benedict XIV,  
September 7, 1744 (Vannini 1977:55)

Muglan [Mughal north India] is near. In that place there are singers and dancers. In rooms lined with paintings, they forget themselves in melodies woven on the drum and *sitar*. There is great pleasure in these melodies. But it drains your wealth. They take away the secrets of your country and deceive the poor... . Let no one open the mountain trails for these classes of people.

- Prithvi Narayan Shah in his *Dibya Upadesh*,  
1774 (Stiller 1968:46)

How ... will the English be able to penetrate into the hills? ... [W]e will expel them... . [O]ur hills and fastnesses are impregnable. I, therefore, recommend hostilities. We can make peace afterwards on such terms as may suit our convenience.

- Bhim Sen Thapa to his advisors on the eve of  
the Anglo-Nepali War, 1814 (Chaudhuri 1960:165)

I am convinced that the prosperity of Nepal is bound up with the maintenance of British predominance in India, and I am determined that the sahib who is no sahib shall never enter Nepal, and weaken my people's belief that every Englishman is a gentleman.

- Rana Prime Minister Chandra Shamsheer to  
Percival Landon, mid 1920s (Landon 1928ii:2)

## Introduction

On a rainy day in early September 1996 I wandered through several of the curio and antique shops in Kathmandu's Sukra Path. Alongside recently made objects for the mass tourist market were higher-priced items with more interesting stories to tell. From military decorations received by Nepali Gurkhas fighting in foreign campaigns, to devotional statuary and other brass items once used in domestic religious observances, the objects in these stores offered intriguing glimpses into past Nepali lives and lifestyles. Yet, another large category of goods in these shops consisted of antique *European* goods: decorative statuary, cigarette cases and lighters, engraved silver desk sets, cosmetic boxes and grooming aids, crystal glassware, sterling silverware, old photographs, old cameras, and defunct light fixtures. Although now destined for the display cases of European and North American antique collectors, these foreign goods also have tales to tell of *Nepali* lives and lifestyles during the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Unfortunately stories of Nepal's relationship with foreign goods and cultural practices before 1951 have been—like the Rana palaces and the foreign objects themselves—at best neglected as irrelevant, and at worst actively reviled as instances of cultural contamination.<sup>1</sup> By focusing on the cultural dynamics of *foreignness* in modern Nepali history this article is one part of an effort to help turn this tide of neglect and encourage further research into the social and cultural history of Nepal.<sup>2</sup>

As I use the term, foreignness pertains to the powers inherent in "phenomena that derive from a geographic distance" (Helms 1988:167) or, in other words, how associations with *distant* lands, peoples, and objects (of distant provenance) may be tied to *local* political projects. The control of foreignness both attests to and justifies power. As with all powerful phenomena, foreignness is dangerous: its power must be carefully managed, its circulation strictly controlled. My thesis is that foreignness has been an important dynamic in modern Nepali history functioning both

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1 For example K. P. Malla, in his eloquent and brilliant ode to Nepali cultural angst "Kathmandu Your Kathmandu," speaks of the city's Rana palaces as "monumental day-dreams of mimicry—each a monstrous monument to the idea of mimicry." For Malla, Rana cultural practice was simply "a cheap transplantation of the West" being all the more contemptible for amounting to "mimicry of a culture only imperfectly understood" (Malla 1979:213).

2 As Pratyoush Onta (1994c) pointed out in a recent review article, while Nepali historiography is strong in the areas of political and economic history, social and cultural history remains a largely unplowed field. See also SINHAS 1996.

as the basis for a contrastive awareness *vis-à-vis* other regions and powers, and as a resource for constructing identities and social distinction. My goal in this essay is not so much to provide a history of foreigners and foreign goods in Nepal as to look for traces of cultural processes that relate to the powers of foreignness. I am interested in the cultural economy of foreignness and its place in the construction of individual, class, and state power in Nepal from the seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries. What did persons, ideas, and goods from beyond its borders *mean* to people in the Kathmandu valley? How were these instances of foreignness perceived by Nepalis? How were they used, controlled, resisted, or sought after? How have outside powers imposed themselves on Nepal and how have Nepalis sought to harness those powers to their own purposes? Based almost entirely on English language sources (primary and secondary) this article can only sketch out a few broad historical contours of a map that needs to be filled in with new research based on Nepali documents and studies of material culture (including built environments).

By focusing on the movement of foreign goods and people into the Kathmandu valley I am interested in exploring how foreignness was managed, how its powers were directed to specific political ends, and how the meaning or nature of foreignness changed as Nepal entered into larger regional—and eventually global—political, economic, and cultural spheres. I suggest that from the late Malla period, through the period of state consolidation, to the Rana era, Nepali elites experimented with a policy of *selective exclusion* whereby they sought to at once harness the shifting and volatile powers of foreignness while attempting to keep those powers out of the hands (and minds) of their political subordinates. By the twentieth century—as waves of modern communications technologies and global political currents increasingly threatened to wash over the walls of Nepal's "mountain fastnesses"—selective exclusion became an increasingly untenable state policy requiring ever greater investments in elite ostentation, cultural isolationism, and political repression for ever diminishing returns in public docility.

Thus we confront the irony of Nepal's "opening" in 1951 when it was repeatedly described by Westerners as "secluded," "unknown," "remote and isolated," a "land of mystery," and above all, a place where "nothing has changed ... since prehistoric times."<sup>3</sup> Kathmandu's policy of selective

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3 The last of these quotes is from Sekelj (1959:23). Even in the 1970s a popular tourist guide book could exclaim, "Nepalese history is really non-history. While things were

exclusion *had* largely succeeded in shielding the valley from the Western popular and academic gaze thereby laying the imaginary ground for Nepal's new fame as tourists' mystical adventure-land (Liechty 1996), and Indologists' time-capsule (Grieve 1996). Yet Kathmandu's seclusion had never approached completeness, and the place where "nothing had changed" never existed outside of a few Rana Prime Ministers' fervent wishful thinking.<sup>4</sup> In this essay I aim to show how both isolation and efforts to "hold back time" were state policies and increasingly state myths. I suggest that Nepal's management of foreignness through a practice of selective exclusion shifted from being a strategy of foreign policy (to protect the Nepali state from foreign intervention) to a desperate domestic policy (to protect the Rana regime from its own people).

Part one of this article examines the movement of *people*—of foreigners into, and Nepalis out of the Kathmandu valley. I begin with a discussion of the moral/religious geography of the valley and its meaning *vis-à-vis* the larger universe of Hindu places, especially in light of political developments taking place on the subcontinent. I then briefly look at Hindu pilgrimage to Nepal before turning to a discussion of European visitors to the valley and the nature of their interactions with Nepalis. Since very few Europeans were allowed to enter the valley, those who were and the circumstances of their admittance are important.

Part two adds another layer of detail by focusing on the movement of *goods* into and out of the Kathmandu valley. It begins with an outline of trade patterns through the Himalayas and the valley's role or place within this trade before focusing specifically on European goods and European styles imported into the valley. The rest of part two examines how these materials and forms were appropriated and used by specific groups to specific ends. I concentrate on a particular constellation of imported goods that seem to have been most in demand by nineteenth century elites (mirrors, glass, clothing, statuary, lighting fixtures, and so on) and ask

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happening elsewhere they weren't in Nepal, which accounts for the way things are today" (Wheeler 1973:190). See Onta (this volume) for more on the historiographical construction of Nepal as a "fossil land."

4 By 1951 Nepalis in the hundreds of thousands had traveled to the corners of the globe through service in British India's Gurkha regiments during two world wars. Foreign and especially European influences were often conspicuously present (in public architecture for example) and European goods were avidly consumed, if by only an elite class. In fact the Kathmandu valley had never been effectively isolated. For millennia it had important economic, political, and cultural ties with Tibet, China, and Central Asia to the North, and especially with the Gangetic plain to the South.

how these goods might be related to new modes of class practice and cultural distinction. Finally the conclusion looks at some of the implications of the Nepali elite's apparently contradictory policy of selective exclusion, a policy which sought to both limit the dangers inherent in foreignness, and at the same time harness its powers.

### **Politico-Historical Overview**

Nepal's contact with European mercantile and colonial expansion had begun already in the early seventeenth century. By the early eighteenth century the Kathmandu valley had become implicated in the process of Europe's rise to a position of dominance in the world economic system. Simultaneous with this development was the rise of the great Himalayan Gorkhali empire of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which occurred parallel to (and was in part motivated by) the growth of the British colonial empire in India.

The emergence of Britain as the subcontinent's dominant power radically changed the nature of Nepali politics. By the mid-nineteenth century a kind of implicit British patronage had become mandatory for anyone who would rule a stable government while surrounded by the always deeply factionalized court nobility in Kathmandu. But this ruling alliance with the British East India Company was like depending on a hungry lion as one's protector. It took considerable strategic delicacy to manipulate this foreign power to one's own ends without having it turn to consume you and/or your country.

Yet through the nineteenth century British policy toward Nepal shifted from one which viewed the country in terms of trade (as a source of Nepali goods, a market for European products, and a route to markets in Tibet), to one which saw Nepal as the source of an important 'raw material'—in this case "native soldiers." In a sense, the Rana government allowed Britain to consume one of Nepal's few natural resources—people—in return for its (often tenuous) sovereignty (Des Chene 1991).<sup>5</sup>

From Nepal's position on the periphery of the ever-growing British colonial empire, foreignness began to take on new meanings. As indicated

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5 In fact the remittances that "Gurkha" soldiers in Indian regiments sent back to the hills of Nepal were crucial to the Ranas' ability to maintain a viable government. Through much of the nineteenth century agricultural taxes in the Nepal hills were demanded *in cash* (at a rate of 50% of the value of gross yields) even though most of the hill region was extremely cash-poor and had little access to cash markets (see M. Regmi 1971). For many, military service in India was a form of labor migration that increasingly became a necessary component of a hill family's subsistence strategy.

in this article's epigraphs, from what had once been the source of more or less benign foreign curiosities, or perhaps of a kind of religious/spiritual authority (i.e. Hinduism, Lamaic Buddhism), in the nineteenth century the lands beyond the valley became a region of political force that, in its magnitude, was different from anything before. It was this foreign power that the Kathmandu nobility sought to harness for national and/or private political purposes. Yet these elites made every effort to keep this foreign power foreign. As Nepal's political, religious and cultural center, the Kathmandu valley was jealously protected against *Europeans*—although not against European *goods*. As symbols of a new dominant power, the Rana elite soon appropriated these goods. This article considers how these powers of foreignness were harnessed to ruling interests within the political economy of the Kathmandu valley.

#### Part One:

#### IN A SACRED SPACE—FOREIGNERS IN KATHMANDU

##### Moral/Religious Geography and the Kathmandu Valley

"*Nepāla Deśa*"—a region comprised of the Kathmandu valley though with boundary points extending somewhat beyond—was traditionally considered one of the fifty-six sacred regions in "Hindu geography." Within this sacred space were believed to live 5,600,000 *bhairavs* and *bhairavīs* - male and female spirits of Shiva and Shakti (Hamilton 1971 [1819]:192). As protectors of *Nepāla Deśa* both the Malla and Gorkhali kings of the Kathmandu valley conceived of their territory as a bounded ritual realm which could be defiled by either immorality from within, or by persons bringing impurity into the realm. Already in the early 1700s Desideri noted that Nepalis self-consciously thought of theirs as a region distinct from and superior to many to the south for having remained uncontaminated by Muslim rule (1937:316). After he conquered the Kathmandu valley in the 1760s, Prithvi Narayan Shah (r. 1768-1775) too committed himself to defending this sacred realm. Indeed, as Burghart notes, Prithvi Narayan

claimed that the Hindu rulers and nobles of the plains had given themselves up to the enjoyment of pleasure so that they no longer possessed the ability to preserve their independence from the British or Firaṅgī.... Prithvi Narayan thought that the kingdom of Gorkha could become a "true Hindustan" (*asal hindustān*) (1984:115-116).

Within the next fifty years Prithvi Narayan's accusations of degeneracy on the plains of India seemed to be proven true as almost the entire subcontinent fell into the hands of the cow-eating British.

Prithvi Narayan's vision of himself as protector of perhaps the last "true Hindustan" is important for a number of reasons. The first is that it established a strong moral distinction between inside (pure) and outside (impure) the valley. As the British encompassed more and more of the subcontinent this distinction only took on greater significance. India became a degenerate land steeped in the ultimate depravity of cow killing and eating. Interestingly, by this criterion, British rulers only took up where the Mughal beef-eaters had left off. In fact in the eyes of at least some Nepalis, the two sets of foreign infidels were hardly worth distinguishing. Chaudhuri cites a letter written by a Nepali noble in the early nineteenth century in which, speaking of the threat of British aggression against Nepal, the Nepali wrote, "[We must not give up] the country of the Hindoos to Mussalmans ...". According to Chaudhuri, the term "Mussalman" was used by Nepalis in a "generic sense, meaning persons who took beef" (1960:114). While obviously recognizing the Mughals and British as completely distinct political entities, the two groups were lumped together into one moral category. Indeed 'non-Hindu', 'foreign', and 'immoral' were all more or less synonymous concepts.<sup>6</sup> All were phenomena to be strictly relegated to the space *outside* the valley.

The notion of ruling a sacred realm in a time of foreign degeneracy was also significant in that it created the foundation of Prithvi Narayan's policy of isolation and could later be used to justify the continuation of this policy. Prithvi Narayan enforced what Burghart calls "quasi-ascetic discipline" within the valley (1984:115). He placed strict controls on merchants and foreign imports, banned dancers, musicians, wrestlers, and other entertainers from Mughal India, wore clothing of locally produced cloth, and encouraged the production of goods within the valley rather than their importation (Stiller 1968). As the Malla kings had done before, Prithvi Narayan and the later Gorkhali rulers mandated that complicated and time-consuming rites of ritual purification (*pānī patiyā*) be performed for any Nepali returning from outside the Hindu world. As for travelers into the valley, those who were perceived as being Hindu, with more or less equivalent customary laws, were not seen as threats to the purity of

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6 Höfer notes that in the Nepali legal code (*Mulukī Ain*) of 1854 Europeans and Muslims were both referred to with the same Sanskrit word—*mleccha*—which has the pejorative connotations of 'barbarian' or 'pagan' (1979:152).

the realm. However, anyone not following Hindu *dharma* did constitute a moral threat and on this basis most Europeans and Muslims were excluded while those who were allowed to enter the valley had their movement strictly controlled.<sup>7</sup> Thus in addition to various political justifications, here we find a potent moral/religious basis for the Gorkhali policy of excluding foreigners and foreignness from the realm.

The Nepali perception of the Kathmandu valley as a sacred space is significant for a third reason as well. Earlier I suggested that British expansionism may have served to motivate a parallel expansion of Gorkhali influence across the Himalayas.<sup>8</sup> When viewed in the light of "Hindu geography," Britain's conquest of the subcontinent takes on new meaning. Bit by bit the sacred lands of the Hindus (*bhāratavarsa*) fell into foreign hands until after 1817, with the fall of the Marathas, Nepal remained the only Hindu realm unsullied by either Mughal or British rule. "The implication of this [from the Nepali perspective] was that this hitherto peripheral region of the subcontinent had now become the terrestrial center of the universe" (Burghart 1984:106). Ironically, British expansion allowed Nepal to transform its place in the Hindu world from a politically powerless peripheral position to a morally powerful position at its core. Indeed after its recently acquired political power began to wane

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7 Nepali state policy toward Buddhists was more complicated. For example David Holmberg (1989:23) cites Hamilton who reported at the beginning of the nineteenth century that Tamangs were prohibited from entering the Kathmandu valley not because of their *Buddhism*, but because they were regarded as *beef eaters*. Holmberg notes that "In Hindu social logic, to accuse people of consuming beef is to accuse them of violating essential principles of order, including the political order" (1989:28). Religious persecution of Buddhists continued in the early Rana period but again was directed mainly at casteless Buddhists of Tibetan ancestry who lived within Nepal (not Tibetan Buddhists or caste-ranked Newar Buddhists of the Kathmandu valley). Because people like the Tamang were Nepali citizens confined to the bottom of the Rana state's new national caste hierarchy contained in the *Mulukī Ain* (see below), they represented a greater threat to the state's social imagination than Buddhists from Tibet, or from higher caste Newar Buddhists.

8 For example Stiller acknowledges that it is difficult to determine to what extent Prithvi Narayan Shah was motivated by the spread of British power on the subcontinent. "Even so, the campaign to unite Nepal seemed almost a race against time. While the Gorkhals united the Hills, the East India Company brought province after province in North India under their sway" (1993:15-17). As for Bhim Sen Thapa, the Nepali general who presided over the second phase of Gorkhali conquest, Stiller writes that he was "alarmed" by British expansionism, and the Company for its part recognized Bhim Sen as "the only statesman on the subcontinent who truly understood the Company's intentions and methods" (1993:50-51).

after 1816, Nepal's perception of itself as a bastion of religious orthodoxy seems only to have increased. With the political expansion of British colonialism to the south, the concept of a moral distinction between within and without the Kathmandu valley only took on greater meaning and relevance. It was probably this belief in moral boundaries and religious exclusion that formed the basis of what was perceived as Nepal's religious conservatism.

### **Religious Conservatism**

In the eyes of Indologists, the Kathmandu valley has long been famous as a repository of ancient texts and traditions lost in Hindu India (see for example Landon 1928ii:162). The works of the great orientalist (and British Resident in Kathmandu from 1833 to 1843) Brian Hodgson were especially important in creating the image of Nepal as a land *still* ruled by a strict Hindu moral/legal code (see for example Hodgson 1834). There is little doubt that (at least in terms of official ideologies) the Kathmandu valley had long been a religiously conservative place, yet evidence suggests that it was during the first half of the nineteenth century that the Nepali state increasingly began to conceive of itself—*vis-à-vis* the outside—in terms of religious orthodoxy. Thus, to a considerable extent, nineteenth century religious conservatism in the Kathmandu valley did not represent some final holdout of ancient Indic tradition but was rather an ethical/political reaction to British colonialism.

The famous *Mulukī Ain* of 1854—a legal code based on the principles of Hindu caste hierarchy prepared at the behest of the first Rana Prime Minister, Jang Bahadur (r. 1846-77)—is an excellent example of the literal codification of Hindu orthodoxy carried out by the Nepali government in the face of the British threat. Although extremely important as one caste society's ethno-theory of itself, I am here interested in this legal code as it relates to issues of foreignness. Along these lines, the anthropological historian Andras Höfer characterizes the *Mulukī Ain* as:

a security screen against the outside world ... necessary to re-legitimate the identity of Nepal and to motivate the solidarity of her citizens.... The [*Mulukī Ain*] demarcated the country's society against foreign societies and cultures by defining it as a specifically Nepalese 'national' caste hierarchy (1979:40).

While based loosely on classical Indian legal works, the *Mulukī Ain* deals with the attribution of caste rank in a somewhat peculiar way. Rather than basing hierarchy on interaction, castes were ranked "according to the attribution of the purity of their country." Thus Nepali sacred thread wearers, untainted by *Firaṅgī* rule, were "superior to the Brahmans of all other countries and kingdoms" (Burghart 1984:117). The *Mulukī Ain* of 1854 represents (among other things) Jang Bahadur's administration's attempt to define and legitimate itself in orthodox terms thereby creating an identity morally superior to anything beyond its borders. Foreignness became an index of impurity and a quantity against which to measure a Nepali national identity.

#### **Movement of South Asians into and out of the Kathmandu Valley**

While it is clear that Europeans—as non-Hindu, beef-eating foreigners encountered serious moral barriers to entering the sacred realm of the Kathmandu valley, South Asian travelers, either Nepalis, Tibetans, or Indians, did not face the same kind of restrictions. While for Nepalis movement into and out of the valley was hindered by considerations of defilement, similar problems do not seem to have faced pilgrims who for centuries have flocked to holy places in the Kathmandu valley. In addition to Tibetans who visit Buddhist shrines during the winter months,<sup>9</sup> the valley also attracts large numbers of Hindu pilgrims.<sup>10</sup> The valley's great Pashupati temple—the residence of Shiva—has been an extremely popular Hindu pilgrimage destination for many hundreds of years. Hodgson wrote in 1831 that "lakhs of natives" from north India "annually resort to Kathmandu, to keep the great vernal festival at Pasupati Kshetra" (1972 [1874]ii:98). Some forty years later Wright estimated that up to 20,000 "pilgrims from the plains of Hindustan come to visit Pashupati and bathe in the Bagmati" (1972 [1877]:22). These large yearly influxes of Hindu pilgrims must have represented, for much of its history, one of the Kathmandu valley's most important means of contact with the outside world. With people in large numbers and from across South Asia moving in and out every year for hundreds of years, it is hard to maintain the

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9 See footnote seven.

10 In fact even now, when many thousands of tourists from North America, Commonwealth countries and East Asia descend on Kathmandu every year, Nepal receives more tourists from India than from any other country--most of these traveling for religious purposes (Richter 1989:107).

picture so often reproduced in Western literature of the Kathmandu valley as isolated from and unpenetrated by influences beyond its borders.

Although on a far smaller scale, foreign (non-European) merchants in Kathmandu also represented a significant avenue of contact with foreign regions. In addition to the foreign goods they dealt in, these merchants (often long-time residents) must have exposed locals to foreign customs, languages, and religions. There is no way of knowing when the first foreign merchants came to Nepal<sup>11</sup> but when the Armenian Hovhannes Joughayetsi arrived in Kathmandu on April 21, 1686 while on his way to Lhasa (bearing English woolen fabric), he was following in the footsteps of still earlier Armenian traders (Khachikian 1966:159-60). In a letter from 1715 one of the Capuchin fathers stationed in Kathmandu mentions a Christian Armenian merchant who had lived in Kathmandu for many years (Vannini 1977:21). By the 1760s however, due to disruptions caused by the Gorkhali conquest, Father Giuseppe noted the presence of only "one Cashmirian merchant" (1790:310). One hundred years later Wright encountered "A few Musulmans consisting of Kashmiri and Iraki merchants... . The former have been established [in Kathmandu] for several generations. Altogether they do not number more than about one thousand" (1972 [1877]:27). There was also a small but wealthy and influential group of merchants known as "Gosains" mentioned in various eighteenth century accounts. According to Schuyler Cammann, this community practiced a peculiar mixture of trade and religious pilgrimage and, professing veneration for the Panchen Lama of Shigatse, travelled vast distances from Persia to Siberia and China, from India to Moscow and Constantinople. These traveling Lamaic merchants were said to have possessed "very extensive establishments" in the valley but were expelled by Prithvi Narayan Shah for having lent aid to the Malla kings (Cammann 1951:61-62).<sup>12</sup>

Details concerning how these non-Hindu foreign merchants were treated in the Kathmandu valley are difficult to find. As dealers in foreign goods, these traders seem for the most part to have been tolerated in spite of their non-Hindu religions. Although Prithvi Narayan expelled foreign

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11 Upadhyaya (1992:269) claims that the first Muslims in Kathmandu were Kashmiri traders who came via Tibet during the fifteenth century. Slusser dates the arrival of Indian Muslim merchants to the early eighteenth century (1982:69).

12 Bernard Cohn's work on Gosains (1964) identifies them as "Shivaite devotees" some of whom were engaged in various legal and illegal trade activities along pilgrimage routes during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in what is now North India and Nepal.

merchants in his campaign to rid the valley of all foreign influences, they soon returned under succeeding Gorkhali kings. Even though they sometimes faced special tariffs and barriers that put them at a disadvantage to Nepali merchants (Husain 1970:96), foreign merchants remained in the valley.

### **Europeans in the Kathmandu Valley**

In many ways the letter written by King Ranjit Malla of Bhadgaon to Pope Benedict XIV in 1744 (one of this article's epigraphs is an excerpt from this letter) serves as an excellent introduction to the topic of Europeans in the Kathmandu valley, for it seems to encapsulate the essential interests Nepali rulers had in Europeans and their goods. Through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Nepali rulers were interested in European "things that I have not got here" and European artisans—in Rajit Malla's case doctors and craftsmen, but later also teachers, technicians, and engineers—all of whom manifested types of power and authority that derived from foreign places. Yet even though there was a demand for European expertise, since the mid-eighteenth century European access to the valley had been strictly controlled. So strictly in fact that in the 1920s Perceval Landon, a man well-versed in both Tibetan and Nepali history, maintained that even fewer Europeans had entered the Kathmandu valley than had ever visited Lhasa (1928i:171). By the 1930s one author estimated that no more than three or four hundred Europeans had ever entered the valley (Bruce 1934:186).<sup>13</sup>

Kathmandu's first contact with a European probably came in 1628 when the Portuguese Joao Cabral passed through the valley while scouting out possible trade routes from Tibet to India (Wessels 1937:428).<sup>14</sup> He was followed some forty years later (1661) by the Austrian Johann Gruber and a Belgian, Albert D'Orville, Jesuit priests in Peking on their way from China to Rome who were exploring overland routes through the Himalayas to South Asia (Forbes 1962:172; Landon 1928ii:231). Although significant in the annals of European exploration, these early visits proved to be unexceptional in the sense that they

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13 Keeping out foreigners was not only a matter of Nepali state policy. The British also sought to limit Nepal's international contacts and actively "discouraged Europeans from visiting Nepal," especially non-British Europeans (Upadhyaya 1992:128).

14 In October of 1602 Benedict de Goes, a Portuguese Jesuit assigned to Akbar's court, travelled to China via Tibet. Although his route is unknown, he may well have travelled through Kathmandu (Vannini 1977:2).

typified Europeans' interests in the Kathmandu valley—as a transit location on the great trans-Himalayan trade routes.

As was so often the case, trader/explorers were followed by European missionary efforts, the first arriving in the early 1670s. While the first two Capuchin missions had little success in the matter of saving souls, members of the third found that saving bodies through the practice of medicine made them far more appealing to their Nepali hosts. In fact the Capuchins established such friendly relations with the Newar Malla kings of Kathmandu and Bhadgaon that court Brahman retainers, feeling threatened, protested forcing the kings to promise they would give no financial assistance to the mission (D. Regmi 1965ii:626). A direct appeal by a former Nepal missionary to wealthy Spanish colonists in Mexico (Vannini 1977:143) made possible a fourth Capuchin mission which, carrying New World gold and silver, was welcomed back to the valley by the king of Bhadgaon, Ranjit Malla, in 1737 (Forbes 1962:175). This mission proved much more successful than the previous ones. The kings of Bhadgaon and Kathmandu vied with each other to attract the services of the Capuchins, granting houses and lands (their title deeds inscribed on copper) for the use of the Fathers and their small but growing flock of converts (Chaudhuri 1960:33,168). Patan too, eventually gave the Capuchins access to their domains and it was from there that, in the late 1760s, Father Giuseppe observed the final bloody years of the Gorkhali conquest of the Kathmandu valley (see Giuseppe 1790).<sup>15</sup>

Following its defeat in 1816, Nepal was forced to accept a permanent British Resident in the Kathmandu valley. From this time on, the flow of Europeans into the valley increased from what might be called sporadic drops to a small trickle. Through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries roughly two-thirds of the valley's European visitors came on business directly associated with the British Residency. In the forty-four year period between 1881 and 1925 about fifty-five Europeans came as invited guests of the State (see Landon 1928ii, appendix XXIV<sup>16</sup>). Of these probably the largest group was comprised of high-ranking British

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15 The letters written by the Catholic missionaries in Nepal have been edited and published but, unfortunately, not translated from their original Italian (see Petech 1952-1956).

16 In his "List of Europeans Who Have Visited Nepal, 1881-1925" Landon acknowledges that the information provided to him by the Rana government was incomplete. Furthermore the list does not include Europeans who visited Kathmandu prior to 1881.

officials and their parties on state visits<sup>17</sup> yet, by my count, roughly forty percent of these invited Europeans were doctors or dentists to the aristocracy. The remainder included a scattering of technicians, engineers and at least one arms merchant.<sup>18</sup>

### **Europeans as 'guests'**

Since Europeans were considered repugnant and so few were ever invited into the valley, those that were admitted tell us a great deal about what types of foreign expertise Nepali nobles were most interested in. The three categories of Europeans most often sought and/or employed by the Nepali nobility were physicians, military technicians and, after the mid-nineteenth century, teachers. Each of these categories represents groups who often derive power and authority from their essential foreignness. These foreigners embody what Helms (1988) calls "the authority of distant knowledge."

*Physicians:* The anthropological literature dealing with "traditional healers" abounds with instances in which practitioners from distant lands are accepted as having greater esoteric knowledge and healing power than local specialists. Schwartz (1978) coined the expression "the Nazarene effect" to describe this phenomenon whereby prophets, healers, etc., are most likely to be accorded authority anywhere but in their own lands. In other words, that which is different, unfamiliar, and from "without" is at once dangerous and powerful. Since, according to Helms, it is the obligation of local elites to both understand and control powerful forces, it

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17 Through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the Kathmandu government practiced a kind of 'Big Game Diplomacy' through their policy of regularly inviting English nobility to Nepal for elaborate and lavish "shooting expeditions." In the nineteenth century several Princes of Wales came shooting in Nepal and in 1911 came King George V himself, the Emperor of India, following his Imperial Durbar (Landon 1928ii:77,130-135). What is significant about these visits is that, although the British periodically made requests, no top English nobility or government office holders were ever allowed to enter the Kathmandu valley even when they directly requested permission (e.g. the British Viceroy Curzon's request in 1899 [P.S. Rana 1995:104]). The highest ranking British officials to visit Kathmandu were various "Commanders-in-Chief of India" beginning with Lord Roberts in 1892 (Upadhyaya 1992:124; see also P.S. Rana 1995:102-3, 154, 171).

18 In addition to these visitors, Onta (1994a: part 3) estimates that at least six European photographers visited Kathmandu between 1863 and the mid-1880s. At least some of these were members of, or visitors to, the British legation, though all of them were, in the words of one of the photographers, "well patronized" by the Rana nobility. See also Losty (1992).

is they who take responsibility for dealing with "distant phenomena" including potentially dangerous foreigners who enter the realm (1988:132).

Viewed in this light, the fact that the first two Capuchin missions to the Kathmandu valley failed while the third was successful is particularly interesting. Unlike their predecessors, "These men distributed medicines and in that course they befriended many people in Nepal and were able to establish intimate contacts with influential men of the place" (D. Regmi 1965ii:626). By practicing medicine, the Fathers were able to transform themselves, in the eyes of the Nepalis, from dangerous, useless pagans, into powerful, useful healers (as well as dangerous pagans, no doubt). In fact by the mid-eighteenth century there seems to have been something of a competition between Malla rulers in the valley to attract the favors of these foreigners. As one of the epigraphs above shows, at least one Malla king went so far as to request the Roman Pope to send more doctors.

The Capuchins' work as healers gave them access to people beyond the circles of Malla and Gorkhali elites. The priests spent much of their time going from house to house administering free medicine and surreptitiously giving Christian baptism to dying people (Vannini 1977:66). Father Giuseppe reports that following the siege of Kirtipur (when Prithvi Narayan Shah ordered the noses and lips of all the town's inhabitants to be cut off as punishment for their stubbornness) several Fathers agreed to treat the "poor inhabitants" who came "in great bodies to us in search of medicines" (1790:318). Earlier in this same campaign, another Capuchin had healed Prithvi Narayan's brother who had sought his services after having been "wounded with an arrow" (Giuseppe 1790:318).

Father Giuseppe mentions another interesting and important story concerning the Capuchins as healers. With some pride, Giuseppe recounts how he gained admission into a particular temple without being forced to remove his shoes—a point of contention that had prevented other Fathers from entering. Apparently a Gorkhali "commandant, ... being a friend of the missionaries," invited Giuseppe to visit him in the grounds of this temple when he "had occasion for a little physick for himself and some of his people." Giuseppe writes that then, "under the protection of the commandant" he entered the temple grounds several times "and the people durst not oblige me to take off my shoes" (1790:312). In addition to illustrating the Fathers' exploits as doctors, this story is important because it shows that in the role of healer the Fathers were given certain rights denied them as missionaries, foreigners, and infidels. Apparently on

the proving ground of a Hindu temple, the foreigner as healer took precedence over the foreigner as infidel.

As mentioned above, by the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, doctors, dental surgeons, and even "X-ray doctors" made up by far the largest category of Europeans invited by the Rana government,<sup>19</sup> excluding official State delegations. These were almost invariably designated "for medical attendance on the Maharani of the Prime Minister," for the Prime Minister himself, or one of the top Rana nobles (Landon 1928ii:301-305). But for the period between roughly 1775 and 1850 I have found no information on European physicians in Kathmandu (aside from the surgeon who was a regular member of the British Resident's legation), or Nepali interest in European medicine. Unexpectedly (to me), the otherwise highly western-oriented Jang Bahadur is reported to have preferred the treatment of traditional Nepali physicians to that of Europeans (Landon 1928i:153-155; P.S. Rana 1995:42) although he was occasionally treated by Dr. Wright, the Residency's surgeon.<sup>20</sup> Whether Jang's preference typified those of earlier Gorkhali rulers is unclear, yet we do know (from Capuchin accounts) that at least some Gorkhali nobles at the time of the conquest were eager to use Europeans as physicians (Vannini 1977).

*Military Advisors:* The first Europeans known to have been *employed* by a Nepali government were three French arms experts hired soon after the Gorkhali conquest of the valley to establish and manage a large munitions factory just outside of Kathmandu.<sup>21</sup> Accounts of these men

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19 Although I do not know how early they began arriving in the valley, by the 1940s there were several Indian doctors, trained in the west, practicing western medicine in Kathmandu and serving a clientele made up largely of lower level Rana nobility (see Leuchtag 1958).

20 P. S. Rana reports that Jang Bahadur paid Rs. 1,200 per month a considerable sum for the services of the British residency's surgeon for himself and his family (1995:42).

21 These were not, however, the first foreigners employed for military purposes. Although the Gorkhali government discontinued the practice, Malla rulers had a history of hiring foreigners mostly north Indian Muslims to act as guards and soldiers in the valley (M. Regmi 1971:196). For example, Desideri, writing in the early eighteenth century, reports a Malla king (unnamed) who had taken "men from Hindustan, chiefly Muhammedans, into his service." These men acted as personal body guards to the king, tasting food, warning against palace intrigues, etc. (1937:313-314). Upadhyaya notes that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Chaubisi Rajas of central Nepal employed Muslim military technicians to "train soldiers in the use of fire arms" (1992:269).

seem somewhat confused.<sup>22</sup> Although it is difficult to say when or how many Europeans were hired, there is no question that at least some of them were French and that they were involved in the manufacture of arms. In view of happenings on the subcontinent (and around the colonial world) during the end of the eighteenth century, that Nepalis would hire French technicians is perhaps important. Prithvi Narayan Shah (or his immediate successor) was no-doubt aware of English-French antagonism and may have chosen to capitalize on it by employing one group of *Firāṅgīs* to aid in its efforts against the other group. The Gorkhali conquest of Nepal proceeded fully aware of the political developments south of the hills and may even have taken part in them.

Important too is the simple fact that, in this case, Europeans were seen as repositories of specific kinds of expertise. As military technicians their knowledge represented power in a very graphic way and, if we can believe the report cited by Chaudhuri (1960:43), once the Nepalis acquired this knowledge they had no interest in the European except to ensure that he did not reveal information of Nepal's new capabilities to the British. The treaty of 1816 put an end to Nepal's ability to hire foreigners as military advisors, but it by no means stopped European military influence from eventually permeating the Nepali army.

*Education:* In 1877 Daniel Wright observed that,

The subject of schools and colleges in Nepal may be treated as briefly as that of snakes in Ireland. There are none. Sir Jang Bahadur and some of the wealthier class have tutors, either European or Bengali Babus, to

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22 Landon reports that "the Gurkha dynasty invited a Frenchman to install and direct an arsenal at Katmandu as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century" but also notes that "Even earlier than this" Prithvi Narayan (d. 1775) himself had "enlisted the services" of three Frenchmen (1928ii:62). Later accounts cite contemporary reports that place French military technicians in the Kathmandu valley in the 1790s. M. Regmi mentions one "French technician" establishing a munitions factory in 1793 (1971:156). Chaudhuri sites a 1795 trade report commissioned by the East India Company which notes that "the Rajah of Nepal retained in his services three 'Firinghees' and put one of them in charge of his artillery." One of the three was French, "skilful in his profession," and recruited in Calcutta during Bahadur Shah's period of ascendancy (1785-1797). This same report says that, after producing some 200 cannons, the Frenchman's Nepali co-workers were sufficiently trained that the government stopped issuing the foreigner's salary. Although he made several efforts to be granted an official dismissal, all were rejected and after two unsuccessful attempts to escape from the valley, the Frenchman was confined in chains and was presumed dead at the time the report was written (1960:43).

teach their children English; but there is no public provision for education of any sort.... The lower classes are simply without education (1972 [1877]:31).

The sources consulted here mention almost nothing else about these European tutors except to note that their employment was the one exception allowed by the British to the general prohibition stipulated in the treaty of 1816 against hiring foreigners (G.N. Sharma 1990:3, Husain 1970:106). No doubt the British were pleased to have their own nationals serve as educators and models for children of the Nepali elite.<sup>23</sup>

But if little is said about education *by* foreigners, much more is recorded about foreign education for elites. At least as early as the 1860s and 1870s (during Jang Bahadur's reign) the children of Nepali nobles were being sent to English schools in India such as Doveton College in Calcutta (Landon 1928ii:70, P. S. Rana 1995:109). Both Bir Shambsher (r. 1885-1901) and Chandra Shambsher (r. 1901-1929) were among those sent to Calcutta to receive a British education. During Chandra's term as Prime Minister more and more Rana youths were sent to India for education but what they learned there was beginning to cause some concern back in Kathmandu.<sup>24</sup> Landon (in a somewhat convoluted way) indicates that the Nepali nobility were discomfited by the "doubtful blessings" of certain educational "innovations" introduced in India which they regarded with "a mixture of astonishment and incredulity" (1928ii:156-157). No doubt their astonishment came from their observation that the Western ideology taught in British schools was destabilizing British power (and by extension their own) by feeding India's nationalist movement. In the face of this threat, Nepal embarked on the fascinating, if short lived, experiment of sending "sons of the aristocracy" to Japan to be trained in "modern methods of engineering." According to Landon, "It was thought that thus the advantages of modern science could be enjoyed by Nepal without the corresponding danger of the introduction of men imbued with Western principles of democracy" (1928ii:157,197). For some at least, Japan was an ideal to be emulated, one that offered the elusive combination of modernization and autocracy in a non-Anglo/European cultural package.

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23 Upadhyaya notes that the two British tutors employed by Jang Bahadur engaged in the sideline business of trading in musk which "They transmitted . . . direct to agents in England and France" (1992:114; see also P.S. Rana 1995:41, 117).

24 See Singh (1990) for an account of Nepali student life in Calcutta during the 1920s.

### **The Shifting Meanings of Foreignness**

So far in this essay I have discussed the Nepali conception of the Kathmandu valley as a bounded ritual realm and then described how this perception of inner (moral) and outer (immoral) space took on new meanings and significance through the political developments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. I then went on to describe movements in and out of this space by Nepalis, other South Asians, and finally Europeans, focusing on the ritual and political implications of this movement. To conclude this section (Part One), I turn to several observations made by Mary Helms (1988) to help lay out what may be some of the broader meanings of ritual space and the movement of foreigners and foreignness.

The picture of Nepali moral geography that emerges here seems to support Helms' contention that societies create moral boundaries between the known "within" and the unknown "without." It is the power of the unknown "without" that both imbues foreigners with certain mystical powers, and obliges rulers to either harness this power by using foreigners, or acquiring it for themselves by undertaking dangerous journeys to distant and powerful lands. Thus, Helms stresses, rulership is almost always associated with foreignness: foreign people and things—"phenomena that derive from a geographic distance" (1988:167). These associations with foreignness are a means by which elites create distinction; they "further emphasize the separation or contrast between elites and commoners in the home society, and thus enhance the power and authority of high office" (1988:149).

I have also shown that movement across the boundary which defines a sacred space has moral/religious implications.<sup>25</sup> The rites of *pānī patiyā* demonstrate that the outside is a place of dangerous defilement. But the outside is also a place of power. Travel to distant, dangerous and powerful places has long been a strategy whereby persons have sought to bolster their own power and authority.<sup>26</sup> Thus for centuries Nepali elites have left the valley for pilgrimages to Benares, braving the dangers of the plains, and returning with status enhanced by the power of a distant authority. Jang Bahadur's voyage to England in 1850 was an almost identical

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25 Arnold van Gennep, in the late nineteenth century, was among the first anthropologists to recognize the "intrinsically magico-religious" significance of "territorial passage" (1960:16).

26 Indeed this is the archetypal "adventure of the hero" that Joseph Campbell (1949) refers to as mankind's "monomyth"—the endlessly repeated story of departure, magical empowerment and triumphant return.

journey of empowerment.<sup>27</sup> He left an embattled contender, knelt before the British Monarch, and returned a hero. The account of Jang's re-entry into Kathmandu written by his son, although undoubtedly exaggerated, is fascinating nevertheless. He wrote:

[As Jang Bahadur approached the city] great crowds thronged the streets and collected on every possible standing ground as if the whole country had come out to welcome him; people from the remotest provinces had gathered to see him *as though he were the inhabitant of another planet...* . Dressed in a magnificent robe of white silk ... *he looked truly the hero who had braved perils both on land and water to visit one of the greatest countries on earth.* Decked with a coronet of the brightest silver, studded with a galaxy of pearls, diamonds and emeralds, and with a sword presented by Napoleon III hanging at his side, *he drew all eyes upon him ...* (quoted in Landon 1928i:140-141, emphasis added).

As a world- (and almost inter-planetary!) traveler Jang Bahadur had acquired the heroic powers of foreignness which he sought to manifest in his dazzling attire. Similarly, young men who traveled abroad to be educated in the centers of foreign power returned validated, empowered, and ready to rule. Clearly the association with power from without—gained through travel abroad—was one of the most important meanings/uses of foreignness for the Nepali nobility.

The other form of association with powers of foreignness dealt with in this section had to do with the control of foreigners, especially Europeans, in the Kathmandu valley. In the roles of physician, military technician, and educator, Europeans acted as repositories of various types of power/knowledge the authority of which was due largely to its origins from without. But the nature of this power/knowledge changed as the subcontinent changed. For the Malla kings of Kathmandu foreignness lent potency to the healing efficacy of the Capuchin Fathers. During that phase of the valley's history, space beyond the sacred realm had little direct political significance for the Malla rulers and thus powers of foreignness were probably conceived of more in terms of what we would now call religious, spiritual, or magical forces. Yet as the political economy of the subcontinent changed and a dominant power emerged, foreignness began to represent more of a political or military threat. Thus

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<sup>27</sup> For more on Jang Bahadur's visit to England the first such visit by any of the South Asian nobility see Landon 1928, P.J.B. Rana 1909, and Whelpton 1983.

during the late eighteenth century the Nepali elites' interests were turned more toward Europeans as military advisors and technicians. Finally by the mid-nineteenth century Nepal found itself on the periphery of a great world colonial power. Nepali rulers had little choice but to align themselves with the new dominant power from without. The presence of foreign educators in Kathmandu, and the increased interest in foreign education, demonstrate that foreignness had now become a source of identity for the Rana elite. That Britain now became the destination of "pilgrimage" by top Rana nobles seems to indicate that the *axis mundi* of meaning and authority had shifted from one foreign place, Benares, to another, London. In part two I examine the Nepali elites' growing identification with foreignness through the nineteenth century as it was manifested in their associations with foreign goods and styles.

**Part Two:**  
**TRADE AND EUROPEAN GOODS**  
**IN THE KATHMANDU VALLEY**

This section begins with an outline of trade patterns through the Himalayas and the valley's role or place within this trade before focusing specifically on European goods and European styles imported into the valley. The rest of part two examines how these materials and forms were appropriated and used by specific groups to specific ends. Finally part two's conclusion looks at some of the implications of the Nepali elite's apparently contradictory policy of selective exclusion, a policy which sought to appropriate the powers of foreignness while containing its dangers.

**Trade patterns in the Himalayas**

Since "the earliest times" Newar merchants in the Kathmandu valley have carried on "extensive commercial intercourse" between India and Tibet making Kathmandu one of most important entrepôt trade centers in the Himalayas (Hodgson 1972 [1874]ii:97). Thus in 1722 Father Desideri observed that "There is much commerce in this place, as many Thibettans and heathens from Hindustan come there to trade, and merchants from Cascimir have offices and shops in the town" (1937:317).

Yet, while acknowledging the valley's pre-eminence in trade compared with the surrounding regions, it would be misleading to think of Kathmandu (or any of the other valley settlements) as a major commercial center. Local products never contributed much to the flow of goods north

and south and through the end of the Rana period, agriculture remained the dominant activity for by far the majority of the valley's inhabitants. The entrepôt trade between India and Tibet was always controlled by a small but affluent group of elites and "there is no evidence that this affluence percolated to the economy as a whole, or that it was used for productive purposes" (M. Regmi 1971:25). Even after the Gorkhali conquest when it became the seat of a national government, Kathmandu retained, for the most part, a two-part social structure of nobles and peasants. Because of the Gorkhali policy of decentralized government, Kathmandu was never home to a proportionately large middle-class of government bureaucrats.<sup>28</sup> Thus although foreign trade helped to create and maintain an elite class in Kathmandu, the city's dominant economic patterns remained agricultural well into the twentieth century.

#### **Indigenous Manufactures and Exports**

With the one exception of military manufacturing (see below), when the Rana government fell in 1951 non-agricultural production in the Kathmandu valley was at a cottage industry level. Pottery, paper, cotton textiles and woolen blankets—all hand made—were the major locally produced products (Sekelj 1959:181). In the area of production, apparently not much had changed in the nearly two hundred years since (in 1795) a trading mission to Kathmandu sent by the British Company had returned to India empty-handed reporting that, as for Nepali products, "there was no market for such stuff" in India (quoted in Chaudhuri 1960:95).

Nevertheless, by the early eighteenth century, production for local consumption and occasional exports to Tibet had become fairly diverse in the Kathmandu valley. Among the large number of Newar occupational castes were such tradesmen as cloth makers and dyers, brick layers, surveyors, potters, woodworkers, ivory carvers, umbrella makers, confectioners, florists, ginger cultivators, and many others "hardly one or two of which were found in the [surrounding] region" (M. Regmi 1971:23). Locally produced goods which found markets in Tibet included metal-ware, carved ivory, wooden vessels, and coarse cloth (M. Regmi 1971:25).

Undoubtedly the most well-known and advanced area of indigenous manufacturing was metallurgy. Medieval Newar bronze statuary has long

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<sup>28</sup> At the same time it is important to recognize that the clerks, palace functionaries, and civil servants that staffed the ever-growing Rana establishment did, by the early twentieth century, form the nucleus of an incipient Kathmandu middle-class.

been famous among art historians for its exquisite craftsmanship but these same Newar artisans were also producing copper and brass vessels, lamps, bells, swords, knives and assorted utensils (Hamilton 1971 [1819]:232). Some of these products were exported to Tibet and, at least until the end of the eighteenth century, to India as well (Upadhyaya 1992:30). Advanced metallurgy probably arose in the Kathmandu valley because of its relative proximity to a number of iron and copper mines scattered across the central hills. Indeed in the mid-eighteenth century Nepal's high-grade ores represented one of its few cash producing exports to India (M. Regmi 1971:19). Yet amazingly, by the early 1800s Nepali copper was being driven out of Indian markets by European copper which was fully a third less expensive. Kirkpatrick attributes this to the great expense of transporting ore through the hills as well as to primitive extraction techniques used by Nepalis (1969 [1811]:176). Thus, through the course of the nineteenth century, Nepali metal production declined as did metal working in the Kathmandu valley. By the 1860s Kathmandu was for the first time forced to import sheet copper from Calcutta, and by the end of the century Nepal had begun to import simple copper and brass utensils from India (M. Regmi 1988:202-203). The virtual elimination of its metal-working industries is a vivid illustration of how Nepal, while remaining officially outside the British colonial empire, was drawn into its exploitative economic sphere.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Kathmandu valley produced very little for the Indian markets, Nepal's Tarai lands were a different matter. Agricultural and forest products exported from the Tarai<sup>30</sup> became the Gorkhali government's primary source of cash, a fact which explains their great preoccupation with matters concerning these lands in their political contacts with the British. Although far removed from the Kathmandu valley, the Tarai came to be of great economic importance for it represented Nepal's only area of significant surplus production (as it does today). Already in 1831 Hodgson noted that Kathmandu's nobility

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29 For an analogous discussion of the decline of indigenous cloth production in Nepal, and the rise in cloth imports, see Mikesell 1988.

30 These were principally rice and timber (Upadhyaya 1992:49) but also elephants, herbs, and drugs (M. Regmi 1971:16-17). One seemingly insignificant Nepali export was the red root of a small species of perennial vine that produced a dyestuff called madder. This humble Nepali export has a special place in the history of British colonialism for it was responsible for producing the bright crimson color of the famous British Redcoats' uniforms (Cammann 1951:32).

depended on Tarai profits to off-set the negative balance of trade caused by their demand for foreign goods (1972 [1874]i:120).

### **Military production**

The production of arms and ammunition seems to have been a major preoccupation for rulers of the Kathmandu valley for many hundreds of years. It is apparently *the one* area of manufacturing in which Nepali officials took great pains to remain at or near the forefront of international technological expertise. Already before the Gorkhali conquest Malla kings were operating gun-powder factories (M. Regmi 1971:35). By the end of the eighteenth century Kathmandu was producing its own cannons and small arms (Kirkpatrick 1969 [1811]:210). Following his visit to Kathmandu in the early 1850s, Oliphant exclaimed:

for a barbarous nation, they are wonderfully advanced in the art of fabricating the implements of war; they cast their own ordnance, manufacture their own muskets, shot, powder, and cartridge-boxes; in fact every instrument or weapon used in civilized warfare is manufactured in Nepal (1852:134-135).

Thirty-five years later Temple noted that "The valley is destitute of the superior kinds of manufactures, save those which pertain to weapons of war" (1887ii:253). By the 1920s, the valley's arsenals were turning out "excellently constructed field guns, howitzers, mountain batteries, trench mortars, and all other necessary artillery" (Landon 1928ii:189).

Exactly what this great concern for military manufacturing indicates is difficult to say. No doubt a steady supply of effective equipment was essential during the years of Gorkhali expansion and after 1816 the same products would have been necessary to create a sense of security against the threat of a British attack. Furthermore both Jang Bahadur and Chandra Shamsher used Nepal's army to curry favor with the British (during the Sepoy Rebellion and World War I respectively). Yet military products and militarism had other meanings and one suspects that by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, maintaining a threatening military force was for the Ranas as much a matter of domestic as foreign policy.

### **Nepali-British Trade Relations and Commercial Policies.**

Having described something of the impact of British colonialism on the eighteenth and nineteenth century Nepali economy, I turn now to look more closely at British trade interests in the Himalayas and Nepali

responses to them. Although European goods had been trickling northward for some time before the 1760s, the British apparently only took interest in Himalayan and trans-Himalayan trade when their attention was drawn to the region by Gorkhali rumblings along their northern borders. Much to the dismay of the British, Prithvi Narayan Shah's disruption and finally severing (in 1769) of the trans-Himalayan trade in European goods happened to coincide with the beginnings of a serious monetary crisis for the Company.

By the mid eighteenth century British mills were producing large quantities of a high-quality, heavy, woolen material known as "broad cloth." India received large amounts of this cloth even though in the region's mainly subtropical climate the cloth sold poorly and often at a loss (Chaudhuri 1960:7-8). It was only a matter of time before the thoughts of the Company's directors turned toward the cooler climes of the northern frontier. When, in 1767, Jaya Prakash Malla's plea for military assistance against Prithvi Narayan Shah appeared before them, the Company saw an opportunity to open up markets to the north. The Company had also heard rumors of great riches in gold and silver to be found in Kathmandu.<sup>31</sup> In light of the severe bullion drain the Company was experiencing in its trade with China, a military expedition to Nepal looked doubly enticing. In July 1767 a committee charged with examining the issue wrote,

We are strongly induced to prosecute the intended expedition into that country [Nepal]. In the present declining state of commerce and the scarcity of current specie, we the more readily embrace a measure which promises to open new sources of trade and stores of money to replace those annual drains of Treasury we are directed to make for supplying China investment (in Chaudhuri 1960:15-16).

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31 This rumor was probably due to the fact that Kathmandu was an important trans-shipment point (as opposed to a point of origin as the British may have thought) for Tibetan gold which moved south in exchange for Indian goods heading north. The British may also have had some information concerning the Malla kings' minting arrangements with the Tibetans by which Tibetan bullion was brought to Kathmandu where it was exchanged for an equal weight of alloyed coins. Due to the considerable degree of adulteration in the coins heading back to Tibet, the Nepalis were able to reap large profits in bullion. Whatever they may have known, by the late eighteenth century, the British viewed Nepal as "a much needed supply of gold" (Cammann 1951:118; also Stiller 1968:9).

Thus it was that Nepal's first direct encounter with the British—the Kinloch expedition of 1767—was far more than a simple scuffle between two contending powers. The roots of this conflict extended from London to Canton and again demonstrate that even an "isolated" place like the Kathmandu valley could be affected by the world system.

Following its disastrous Kinloch expedition, the Company turned to more diplomatic, though no less urgent, appeals for trading rights in and through the hills. By the 1780s the Company's currency drain had become so "alarming" that Governor General Warren Hastings was not even able to draw his own salary from the exchequer in Calcutta (Cammann 1951:67). On top of this, with the American revolution winding down and British-French skirmishes on the subcontinent coming to a close, "Hastings had reason to anticipate a renewed flood of manufactured goods from Britain, and it would be necessary to find wider markets for them" (Cammann 1951:83). By the end of the eighteenth century the British had succeeded in selling some of their broad cloths in Nepal but the policies of Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors made it a difficult proposition (cf. Mikesell 1988).

In his book on Nepali economic history following the Gorkhali conquest, Mahesh Regmi maintains that the economic policies advanced by Prithvi Narayan Shah and following rulers,

had much in common with the views held by mercantilist economists and statesmen in Europe in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries... . Like the mercantilists, Prithvi Narayan Shah believed that wealth consists in money, or in gold and silver, and that the objective of State policy should therefore be to increase production, check the outflow of wealth and encourage its inflow (1971:142).

Regmi never mentions where, how, or from whom Prithvi Narayan might have heard of mercantilism, yet concludes that the government's economic thinking "was largely influenced by these views" (1971:142). Thus whether the Nepalis arrived at their position independently, or were influenced by one of the leading European economic schools of the day, is unclear.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that, as a state commercial philosophy, mercantilism meshed very nicely with Prithvi Narayan's policy of maintaining the Kathmandu valley as a sacred realm, unpolluted by forces from without. In symbolic terms, the inflow of ritually pure substances like gold and silver would be far more conducive to

What is clear is that at least until the turn of the nineteenth century, Nepal's protectionist policy was an economic success. Prithvi Narayan ejected foreign merchants and banned the importation of European goods which he contemptuously referred to as "glasses [i.e. telescopes] and other curiosities" (M. Regmi 1971:147). "If this is done," Prithvi Narayan wrote in his *Dibya Upadesh* (1774),

our money will not go abroad. Send our herbs to India and bring back money. When you acquire money, keep it. If the citizens are wealthy, the country is strong. The King's storehouse is his people (Stiller 1968:43).

Thus, in economic terms, Prithvi Narayan's main objectives seem to have been to: 1) guarantee Nepali control of lucrative "middle-man" positions in the trans-Himalayan trade by ejecting foreign merchants and 2) staunch the flow of Nepali specie by eliminating imports of Indian and European goods. Although soon after his death foreign (but never European) merchants were allowed back into Nepal, and European goods soon followed, Prithvi Narayan's successors continued other "mercantilist" policies such as state monopolies on export commodities (primarily timber). Thus on the eve of its war with Britain, Nepal's total exports to India were valued at Rs. 364,000 with imports of only Rs. 71,000. "[T]he balance was paid by the East India Company's territory in silver" (M. Regmi 1971:150-151). The Nepali economy was holding its own against the British even though the British were desperate to use Nepal as a source of hard currency.

The 1816 war marked a turning point in Nepal's economic fortunes. By 1831 Nepal's exports had increased to Rs. 1.0 million but its imports even higher to Rs. 1.6 million (M. Regmi 1971:170).<sup>33</sup> Now a Rs. 0.6 million trade deficit flowed out of the Nepali economy into Company coffers. Following the establishment of the British Residency in 1816, the number of Indian merchants in Kathmandu dealing in European goods

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maintaining the ritual purity of the realm than allowing foreign manufactures, not to mention foreigners, across its frontiers.

33 By the end of the nineteenth century the balance of trade seems to have again shifted in Nepal's favor. Upadhyaya maintains that between 1880 and the 1920s Nepal claimed a trade surplus vis-a-vis British India (1992:153-159). Stiller implies that Chandra Shamsher's 1923 "Treaty of Friendship" with Britain, which entitled Nepal to import military and consumer goods free of Indian customs duties, may have again put Nepal in the red (1993:159-160).

increased by a third and local merchants estimated that between 1816 and 1831 trade volume tripled (Hodgson 1972 [1874]ii:92). Part of the increased trade was due to the flooding of Indian (and by extension, Nepali) markets with European goods following the end of the Napoleonic wars. But there were also internal reasons for this increased trade in European goods and the growing trade deficit. As Regmi put it, by this time there was a "growing addiction of higher classes in the society to imported goods" (M. Regmi 1971:170). The rest of this essay is concerned with the development and meanings of this "addiction" for European goods.

### **European Goods in the Kathmandu Valley**

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, trade through the Kathmandu valley, although profitable for some, was never of a magnitude that made it a really significant part of the local economy. Nineteenth century Nepal imported very few products for mass consumption and thus the majority of Nepal's imports from British India were "luxuries meant for consumption by a handful of affluent families mainly in Kathmandu valley" (M. Regmi 1988:201). Here I am interested in this trade in European luxuries bound for elite consumption. But I am also concerned with the importation of less tangible manifestations of foreignness—imports which might be categorized as European *styles*. After a brief discussion of trade routes into the valley over which imported goods had to pass, I will look successively at uses of European goods in the Malla and early Gorkhali eras, after 1800 during the reign of Bhim Sen Thapa (ruled 1806-1837), and finally during the Rana era from 1850 onward.

### **Access to the Kathmandu Valley**

From the time of the Gorkhali conquest, control over the means of communication with areas outside the Kathmandu valley had been a major concern of Nepali foreign policy. One "road" linked the valley with the plains and at least during Prithvi Narayan's reign, anyone using or attempting to open new, less rugged routes was subject to capital punishment (M. Regmi 1971:164-165). The one route that the Gorkhali government left open was meant to be awe-inspiring. It was a matter of state policy to 'maintain' the road in as bad a condition as was possible.

Its ascents and descents were components of the national defense.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, visitors to the valley, from the earliest times up until just forty years ago when the first motor road to Kathmandu was completed (1959), unanimously condemned the miserable, rock-strewn, muddy track over two steep passes. It was impossible to ride a horse, far less drive a car or any other wheeled vehicle, over the passes.<sup>35</sup> Foreigners and elites were carried in on the backs of lurching porters, or in swaying palanquins as was every single imported item, from tiny European gun-flints, to Jang Bahadur's four-ton equestrian statue.

### **European Goods in the Malla and Early Gorkhali Eras**

One of the earliest and most intriguing evidences of European contact in the Kathmandu valley is an inscription dating from 1654 which can still be seen on a large stone block in Kathmandu's Hanuman Dhoka. Composed by King Pratapa Malla, the inscription is "a series of words strung together in fifteen different characters [scripts] and many more languages, which unfortunately make no particular sense" (Forbes 1962:36). During his stay in the valley in the 1760s, Father Giuseppe was deeply impressed by this great "curiosity" and described it as follows:

[In addition to several lines in local script, some are in Tibetan,] others Persian; others Greek, besides several others of different nations; and in the middle there is a line of Roman characters; which appear in this form AVTOMNEWINTER LHIVERT;<sup>36</sup> but none of the inhabitants have any knowledge how they came there ... . They are

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34 For most of the nineteenth century the British sought to pressure Nepal into the construction and maintenance of better roads but the Nepali state was not anxious to open up increased traffic in British goods. Nepali rulers saw roads less as trade routes than as avenues for possible British invasion. As British Resident Charles Girdlestone explained to Calcutta in 1880, the Ranas view the hills as "their fortifications, and a good road over them would be a breach in his walls to a besieged General" (Upadhyaya 1992:78-79).

35 Although the British Residency constructed a telegraph line into the valley in the 1880s, Nepal had few other means of communication with the outside world. In fact it was not until 1957, after the fall of the Rana regime, that Nepal joined the Universal Postal and Telegraphic Union and developed its own system of postal and electronic communications (Sekelj 1959: 182).

36 The inscription might be read more accurately as "AVTOMNE WINTER L'HIVERT." Although there are no spaces between the words, there is an apostrophe in "L'HIVERT" (see the photographic reproduction in Landon 1928i:46).

34 *Mark Liechty*

manifestly two French names of seasons, with an English word between them (1790:314).<sup>37</sup>

Pratapa Malla's famous "polyglot stone" is a classic example of a ruler's appropriation of foreignness and "distant knowledge" (Helms 1988). This public inscription clearly demonstrated Pratapa's command of foreignness as represented in strange languages and strange symbols. Arguably it was designed to validate, and bolster his legitimacy as ruler. One of the interesting things about Pratapa Malla's stone is that European languages are accorded such a minor position. The relative insignificance of European power as represented by this stone make it a kind of base-line against which to measure the rise of European influence in the Kathmandu valley.

While Pratapa Malla collected foreign languages, later Malla rulers began collecting foreign things. Unfortunately I have found only a few references to the kinds of European goods imported in the eighteenth century. In his letter to the Pope in 1744, Ranjit Malla noted that before the "Padres" arrived, "there were no European things in Nepal." This may not be quite true for we know that in 1661 the Jesuits Gruber and D'Orville, on their way from Peking to Rome, visited the court of Pratapa Malla in Kathmandu. In Gruber's words,

The king of Cadmendu welcomed the fathers very warmly, perhaps because of a telescope,<sup>38</sup> which was up to that time unknown in Necbal, and other mathematical instruments which roused the royal curiosity to such an extent that he wished to keep the fathers with him (in Landon 1928ii:233).<sup>39</sup>

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37 Giuseppe was unaware that two or three European merchant/explorers had passed through the valley in the early to mid seventeenth century. It is now thought that one of them may have interacted with Pratapa Malla yet Cabral (1628) is the only European known to have been in Nepal before 1654.

38 Telescopes are particularly interesting items because they give their owners the ability to see at a great distance. In fact they represent a kind of power or control over distance which, according to Helms (1988), is one of the primary characteristics, or prerequisites of legitimate rule. It is hardly surprising then that from the Mallas to the Ranas (to the CIA with its spy-satellites), rulers have been intrigued with distance dominating devices.

39 It is interesting to note that the Jesuit mission in Peking, since its founding by Matteo Ricci in 1601, was famous for providing mathematicians and astronomers to the Ming and (after 1644) Qing imperial courts. In 1613 the Jesuits were commissioned by the Ming court to refurbish the Chinese calendar which had, ironically, been devised by Arab astronomers employed in Peking during the Yuan dynasty some 300 years

Gruber also recounts the story of how one day while peering through the telescope, the Malla king spied what he recognized as rival troops from Bhadgaon. "But not understanding the effect of the lens, Pratapa ... gave orders that his soldiers should march at once against them" (Landon 1928ii:233). The account does not mention whether the Jesuits left their telescope in Kathmandu but eighteenth century trade records show that "optic-" or "spying-glasses" were in considerable demand both in Nepal and Tibet (Cammann 1951:163).<sup>40</sup>

In addition to telescopes, other English articles which were "very much in demand in Nepal and Lhasa" during the eighteenth century were mostly along the lines of "trinkets" such as "looking glasses," knives, scissors, and snuff boxes but also included some broad cloth (though most of the imported fabrics were from India) (Chaudhuri 1960:91).<sup>41</sup> It was precisely these items, referred to as "glasses and other curiosities" by Prithvi Narayan Shah, that the Gorkhali government banned after 1769. Apparently the court in Kathmandu maintained Prithvi Narayan's unostentatious style of consumption. After his visit to the court in 1793 Kirkpatrick wrote that the king's wealth was great, but his lifestyle was not extravagant. Although they could have, "this court affects on no occasion either splendor or munificence ..." According to Kirkpatrick, the one item of European manufacture that the Nepali court purchased in any significant quantity was "broad cloth for the clothing of the regular troops" (1969 [1811]:212-213).<sup>42</sup> Thus around the turn of the nineteenth century Nepali elites seem to have had relatively little interest in European goods.

For the early Gorkhali Rajas court life, while no doubt most comfortable, was built around indigenous patterns of consumption. Prithvi Narayan Shah and his immediate successors maintained distinctive

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earlier (Eberhard 1977:276). Like the Arabs before them, it is likely that the foreign Jesuits were perceived as having special, esoteric, even mystical powers which made them valuable to the Chinese elite. Indeed Matteo Ricci was able to make some of his most important contacts among the nobility because people "believed him to have alchemical powers" (Spence 1984:152). Perhaps Fathers Gruber and D'Orville had a similar effect on Pratapa Malla.

40 In 1692 the Raja of Kathmandu appropriated an "English spyglass" from the Armenian merchant Hovhannes Joughayetsi (Khachikian 1966:171).

41 Clocks were also prized European curiosities. In 1716 the Capuchin missionaries presented a wall clock to the Raja of Kathmandu (Vannini 1977:19).

42 Imports of British broad cloth for Nepali troops continued throughout the nineteenth century though eventually the army began purchasing uniforms ready-made from a British tailoring firm in Calcutta (Upadhyaya 1992:140).

lifestyles of relative luxury and splendor. For example when Prithvi Narayan took over the royal palace in Kathmandu, he added magnificent new structures. But significantly these new additions continued in the same architectural style as the older Malla era structures (Korn 1976:60-1). Speaking anachronistically, Prithvi Narayan was almost Gandhian in his insistence that people use locally produced fabrics and other goods although Prithvi Narayan's "swadeshi" nationalism seems to have been motivated more out of mercantilist than moralist sentiments (cf. Tarlo 1996). Yet like Gandhi, Prithvi Narayan's conservative self-awareness and self-production were based firmly in the recognition of an external and threatening "other."

Thus when Kirkpatrick notes that the Gorkhali Raja's court "affects" neither "splendor or munificence," we have to remember that the Englishman (like Prithvi Narayan himself) was comparing the Nepali court to other "native" courts he had seen in India. My point is not that Prithvi Narayan reproduced an earlier Malla courtly style; in fact the Gorkhali court in its first decades may have been intentionally less indulgent than its Newar predecessors.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, like the Mallas, the early Shah kings practiced a relatively indigenous mode of distinction, even if their's had become a self-conscious *maintenance* of tradition growing out of a new contrastive sense of nationhood. This contrastive awareness comes through clearly in the last paragraph of Prithvi Narayan Shah's *Dibya Upadesh* (included as one of this article's epigraphs) where he speaks of the dangers of foreign decadence that he saw in his visits to India and likely associated with Malla court life. Prithvi Narayan's warnings about "forgetting oneself" in the pleasures of entertainment taken in "rooms lined with paintings" foreshadows the turn toward new foreign luxuries that characterizes the distinctive practices of Nepali elites in the nineteenth century.

#### **1800 to 1850: Growing Trade in European Goods.**

It is clear that the thirty-year period (1806-1837) during which Bhim Sen Thapa held control of the Nepali government witnessed a significant jump in the quantity of European products consumed in Kathmandu, a rise

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<sup>43</sup> For example Slusser notes that the later Malla kings, "while resisting the taint of Islam, warmly embraced the secular aspects of Islamic culture" and especially elite, or courtly culture including types of entertainment, harems, erotica, and especially "Mughal and Rajput dress--even down to the details of ornamentation and personal weaponry" (1982:68-69).

which traced the nobility's developing taste for foreign goods and styles. Trade statistics for this period confirm what Oldfield had noted when he wrote that "Bhim Seen and the Chiefs generally showed a growing inclination for British luxuries and customs" (in M. Regmi 1988:202). Bhim Sen was the first Nepali leader to adopt "purely western dress" (Chaudhuri 1960:214). In portraits he is shown in a European military uniform approximating that of a British general, complete with decorations. In one large equestrian painting, Bhim Sen has even given himself the insignia of the British Order of the Garter (see photo in Landon 1928i:83). Bhim Sen outfitted his army with European style uniforms and, immediately upon assuming power, adopted British military rank designations. After 1806 Nepali documents refer to Bhim Sen Thapa as "general" (Stiller 1976:92).<sup>44</sup> During his early years at the Residency, Hodgson observed an important change in the lifestyle of the Nepali elites. In 1831 he wrote, "Within the last fifteen years the gentry of Nepal have become universally horsemen. The court makes large and regular purchases" of horses (1972 [1874]ii:111). Clearly Bhim Sen and the Nepali nobility were embarking on a new style of consumption based more and more on European standards and expectations. It was a transformation that, not coincidentally, paralleled the emergence of the British as the region's paramount power.

To get a more in-depth understanding of consumption patterns in the Kathmandu valley during this period we are fortunate to have Hodgson's itemized, annotated trade list of Nepali imports and exports for a one year period during 1830 and 1831 (1972 [1874]:part two). In addition to many Indian goods, Hodgson reports in detail what European goods were imported and often relates how, and by whom they were used. By far the largest category of European imports was fabric. In this one year period, Hodgson estimated that imports of European broad cloth, velvet, satin, cambric and chintz amounted to well over 300,000 yards, roughly half of which was made up of broad cloth in various colors. Most of the broad cloth probably went to clothe the army but the other European fabrics were consumed by the Nepali elites. Thus European velvets "are much admired by the Nepalese, both males and females. Ladies wear velvet bodices; gentlemen velvet caps and jackets. Scabbards and saddles and cushions are covered with velvets" (1972 [1874]ii:105). English lace was

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<sup>44</sup> Before this time Nepali military ranks were designated *kaji*, *sardar*, *subedar*, etc. Interestingly these too are foreign military ranks coming from the Persian/Urdu language spoken by the Mughals in North India (cf. Slusser 1982:69).

also "well-known and much esteemed in Nepal, but only to a very moderate extent within the means of the people. Every man, however, who can afford it, will have his cap banded with lace of silver or gold" (1972 [1874]ii:107-108). Earlier in the century Hamilton had reported that "The whole dress of the higher ranks in Nepal is imported" including a good deal of Chinese silk (1971 [1819]:232). But by the 1830s Hodgson could report with pleasure that "the Satins, Silks and Velvets of China are in Nepal generally giving way before our Broad Cloths and Velvets" (1972 [1874]ii:117).

While only the elites would have been able to afford the expensive European velvets, lace, etc., other "classes" too were, by this time, consuming imported fabrics. According to Hodgson, while "the poor" still produced most of their own coarse cotton goods, "The whole of the middle and upper classes are clad in foreign cottons" (1972 [1874]ii:107). Among these, English cotton "chintzes" are "much worn in Nepal by the middle and lower orders. Women make gowns of them, the men jackets and linings to jackets" (1972 [1874]ii:106-107). The English were also making inroads into the lower class market with their imitation South Asian articles.<sup>45</sup> Says Hodgson, "Our imitations of Indian handkerchiefs and Cashmere shawls are becoming very popular among the middle and lower orders in Nepal" (1972 [1874]ii:106). What is significant about these new patterns of consumption is the way that foreign goods of various types functioned to signal class divisions and probably, before long, to actually define one's position in the social hierarchy. From velvets, to chintzes, to imitation scarves, to home-spun, various types of European fabric (or their absence) became important elements in the lexicon of an indexical language that communicated status and social rank in Kathmandu.

In addition to fabric there were several other important categories of European imports. Gun-flints and English sport rifles ("fowling-pieces") were "always [in] considerable demand in Nepal" (Hodgson 1972 [1874]ii:109-110). But perhaps more interesting was the "equal demand" for various types of English glass-ware and crockery. Hodgson mentions a growing demand for mirrors, plate glass, various lighting devices and table-ware. In one fascinating passage Hodgson mentions that,

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<sup>45</sup> For a discussion of nineteenth century British production of "Indian" textiles for the South Asian market, as well as citations to histories of the British textile trade in South Asia, see Tarlo 1996:39-42.

Not merely wall-shades [mirrored-glass lamplight reflectors?] and chandeliers, but tumblers, wine-glasses, and lanterns sell well at Kathmandu. The people are beginning to use our crockery and glass-ware at their tables. The Tibetans never had any scruples about using our plates, dishes and glasses (1972 [1874]ii:111-112).

The implication here is that Nepalis *did* "have scruples" against using English table-ware but that for some reason they were now "beginning" to get over them. Hodgson offers no elaboration but it is likely that the Nepalis' "scruples" had to do with issues of purity and pollution. For a Hindu no other domain is as highly sensitive to impurity than that of food/eating. Thus for Nepali elites to make this concession toward European eating and drinking vessels (to abandon their "scruples") must have been a significant step in their embracing of foreign goods and styles.<sup>46</sup>

Although it is difficult to know precisely how some of these European goods were used, descriptions of Bhim Sen Thapa's palace near Kathmandu offer some hints. Built on the southern outskirts of the old city, Bhim Sen's palace (Bagh Durbar) was a combination of North Indian Mughal (domes, minarets),<sup>47</sup> and European architectural styles (P.R. Sharma 1975:121). Severely damaged in the 1934 earthquake and now much altered, the palace was originally four or five stories tall with large gardens including a great oval-shaped pool<sup>48</sup> (see photo from early 1920s in Landon 1928i:89).

I was able to find one apparently contemporary description of Bhim Sen's palace—in a poem by the nineteenth-century Nepali poet Yadunath Pokhryal (1966), which provides some idea of the awe that this structure evoked in the early nineteenth century. Although deeply impressed by the many fine horses and carriages of the nobleman, the poet describes with special wonder Bhim Sen's "great glass palace" (*baḍī sīsmahal*) with its

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46 Amazingly, Kathmandu elites were also eating European *food*. Hamilton wrote in 1819, "Most of the European kitchen vegetables have been introduced: but they are only to be found in the gardens of men of distinction, and in very small quantities" (1971 [1819]:230). Perhaps these foreign vegetables helped make these men "distinctive"!

47 Bhim Sen Thapa was not the first to incorporate Mughal/Islamic architectural details into Nepali structures. Late Malla palaces also used cusped arches, wall niches, and domes (Isaacson 1990:72; Slusser 1982:68-69).

48 For this pond "Red fish were brought that people had never seen. And people came to see many other animals in the water" (Pokhryal 1966:91). Bhim Sen also kept live tigers in cages near the palace gates (P.R. Sharma 1975:121).

many tall green-glass windows (1966:89). He also describes the mirror-covered walls before which beautiful women stood to admire themselves. In the same verse the poet intones, "Many are the paintings/portraits (*tasbīr*) of great value" (1966:90). Also within this "real/true glass palace" (*asal sishavelī*) "Many are the lanterns and candles. There the night becomes bright like day" (1966:89, 91). It is interesting that some of the most noteworthy (for the poet) aspects of this palace resulted from the use of European imports. If the paintings were like those that survive of Bhim Sen, they were likely in the grand style of European commemorative portraiture. But more important, the mirrors, lighting fixtures, and especially the large amounts of glass, seem to have made the structure extremely impressive and distinctive.

Besides his palace, Bhim Sen Thapa left several other even more impressive monuments to his reign scattered about Kathmandu. Some attribute the enormous Thundi Khel (parade ground) in the center of town to Bhim Sen (Oldfield 1974 [1880]:109) but even if it was laid out during Malla times (Landon 1928i:196), it is likely that Bhim Sen was the first to turn the great field into a facility for English-style military drilling and maneuvers. Certainly the most famous of Bhim Sen's structures is Dharahara, the huge tower (constructed in 1826) which still stands near the south end of the old city. It is modeled after the great *minārs* erected by the Mughals to commemorate their victories in North India and, no doubt, like them was designed "to mark out the presence of a new conqueror in the land" (Metcalf 1984:56).<sup>49</sup> Thus, in the monuments that Bhim Sen left behind, we find a mixture of allusions to foreign powers (as well as the powers of foreignness). In the palace, the parade ground, and the *minār* are references to conquering foreigners whose power Bhim Sen sought to appropriate.

### 1850 to 1950: The Rana Period.

If anything, consumption, and especially the consumption of foreignness became an even greater concern for the Nepali nobility during the era of Rana autocracy. European goods—aside from cotton textiles<sup>50</sup>

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49 P.R. Sharma notes that the tower was also "part of a design to allow the army to be summoned quickly to [Bhim Sen's adjacent] residence by sounding a bugle, in case a contingency arose" (1995:26).

50 By the second half of the nineteenth century cotton (raw, yarn, Indian and European piece goods) had become Nepal's principal imported commodity. According to Upadhyaya by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, "There was greater demand of European piece goods than Indian goods in Nepal. In most cases the import of

and a few other consumer items<sup>51</sup>—remained exclusively the province of the elites who increasingly came to draw their identities from their material (in addition to political) alignment with dominant British power to the south. The importance of these goods is not in the quantities consumed—the volume of trade was relatively insignificant—but in the ways they were consumed.

During this period the gap between commoner and elite became a chasm. Unlike Malla rulers who had to split the resources of the Kathmandu valley three ways, the Ranas commanded the resources of the entire country. Rana elites invested (and made) fortunes in India and other foreign countries while almost completely ignoring their own nation. The state treasury became the personal expense account of the Prime Minister (Stiller 1993:164); the Ranas spent staggering amounts of money and man power on imported luxury goods and monumental architecture. They further guaranteed their privilege through a variety of sumptuary laws. In the Kathmandu valley commoners were forbidden to ride on horses or elephants (Bishop 1952). Later on, no one but the Rana elites were permitted to ride in motorized vehicles or wear European dress (Leuchtag 1958:63). Only with special permission could one build a stucco house or erect a tile roof (Isaacson 1990:68). Foreigners who made it into the valley during this period repeatedly echo Morris's observation that "The court and the people are two entirely different entities" (1963:26).

*European Style: Clothing and Militarism.* Following Jang Bahadur's visit to Britain in 1850 "there was a significant change in the dress style of the Bhardars [courtiers] of Nepal." European civilian and military clothing became standard attire for the male Nepali nobility providing

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European piece goods was nine times greater than Indian piece goods. During 1878-79 Nepal imported European piece goods valued at Rs. 1,887,996 as against Indian piece goods worth Rs. 259,892 in the same year" (1992:170). In the 1880s British Surgeon (and acting Resident) G.H.D. Gimlette noted that "Cotton cloth is also made for use in the country, very stout and durable, but the cheaper, more flimsy Indian and European clothes are rapidly taking the place of the native made artifact" (quoted in Upadhyaya 1992:122; cf. Mikesell 1988).

51 In the early 1850s the English traveller Francis Egerton noted a variety of British goods for sale in a Kathmandu shop including items "such as needles, tea-pots, empty bottles, powder and shot, &c., &c." (1852i:217). According to Upadhyaya (1992:234-235) this shop, which occupied a portion of a public building, was established by Jang Bahadur to retail European goods. Jang Bahadur set up this shop "to control the price of the market because, he thought, his wives ... and the people were charged exorbitant prices for all kinds of European articles .... Similar shops were opened at different places in Kathmandu for the public" (Upadhyaya 1992:235).

"Ranken and Co., drapers and outfitters [with] a sizable number of Nepalese clientele at Calcutta" (P.S. Rana 1995:128).<sup>52</sup> Oliphant describes the assemblage of nobles at the court, in formal attire, as "one of the most dazzling that I ever saw collected." He goes on to note that:

The English dragoon and the French hussar might here recognize portions of their uniform, adorned with gold and silver lace to an extent which field-m Marshals alone have, with us, a right to indulge in and often mixed up with some Oriental finery—a pair of glittering slippers that consorted but ill with the tightly strapped-down gold lace trowsers [sic], or a handsome shawl that clumsily supported the jeweled sabre" (1852:145).

Women's dress too seems to have mixed Western and Asian styles. Wright's account includes a plate captioned "A Rani or Nepalese Lady of High Rank" (1972 [1877]:28-29). Pictured is an elderly woman wearing a tight long-sleeved *colo* or blouse, and a *sārī* wrapped in the standard fashion, draped over the left shoulder. Yet jutting out from underneath the *sārī*, and extending far out to either side is a very large pleated petticoat type skirt which looks like the hoop-skirts worn by European women at the time (see also P.S. Rana 1995:128-129). Although one would expect women to have been relatively isolated from such influences, it appears that at this time they were actually encouraged to adopt at least elements of European style. Indeed Jang Bahadur had returned from England with 700 Pounds Sterling worth of high-fashion women's clothing (Oliphant 1852:144).

As already with Bhim Sen Thapa, the Nepali nobility continued to have an infatuation with military decorations, especially from Britain. From Jang Bahadur to the last of the Rana Prime Ministers, Nepali elites collected medals, insignia, and decorations of all kinds and wore them displayed in rows on their elaborate European style military uniforms. Some even had their insignia reset in diamonds and other precious stones (Morris 1963:27). In "payment" for the services of "Gurkha" troops, the British sent medals to the elites in Kathmandu. After World War I, the valley was practically flooded with British decorations. Chandra Shamsheer

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52 Even before his visit to England Jang Bahadur seems to have been fixated on matters of dress. In a letter written in 1846, just prior to the Kot Massacre, Honoria Lawrence (wife of the Resident) wrote of Jang Bahadur, "He takes no very prominent part just and now, and seems to spend his energies in devising new uniforms" (quoted in P.S. Rana 1995:16).

had almost every available British civil and military insignia (Husain 1970:200) plus the title of Grand Officer of the Legion of Honor granted by the French (Landon 1928ii:154). Jang Bahadur was granted knighthood by Queen Victoria and in 1872 received imperial China's highest military honor (Landon 1928i:153).<sup>53</sup>

Indeed the Ranas seem to have created almost a cult of militarism around themselves—a militarism based on a British model. The Nepali army was organized in units following the British practice and were even drilled *in English* (Wright 1972 [1877]:47).<sup>54</sup> Military training manuals and drill books were "based upon similar text books used by the British army" (Landon 1928ii:186). The Ranas studied British military history and congratulated each other for successfully deploying British military tactics (Landon 1928ii:66-67). Although Rana nobles collected British insignia, they did not depend on them for their own military ranks. Depending on their birth in the extended Rana family, nobles were born into their place in the military ranking system. Indeed they were apparently so absorbed in this aura of militarism that Wright lamented how young men refused to participate in anything else; "They have no business, except at playing at soldiering" (1972 [1877]:73).

Nepali emulation of British clothing and military styles is noteworthy for at least two reasons. First is the way in which Nepali and European elements were combined. The glittering slippers with formal military dress, the hoop-skirts worn under a *sārī*, and perhaps most interestingly, the foreign insignia reset with precious jewels, all represent combinations of, or compromises between, two traditions. The slippers are probably due to the Hindus' refusal to wear leather; the women's retention of Asian clothing on the upper body probably indicates that European styles were considered too immodest in that 'region'; and the reset medals might be an effort to heighten the symbolic power of these foreign insignia by combining them with indigenous markers of power and distinction, i.e., jewels.<sup>55</sup> The reset insignia in particular (and the other examples to some

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53 Onta (1994b) describes how competition between high-ranking Ranas for British decorations became so intense that some went to extraordinary measures. For example, Kaiser Shamsheer, after having received a "Knight of the British Empire" (KBE) star insignia, privately commissioned an extra-large KBE star which he displayed until British officials complained.

54 Ironically, Nepali Gurkhas in the British Indian Army were drilled by their English officers *in Nepali*.

55 It is true that, on one occasion at least, one of these British decorations came already reset. When King Edward invested Chandra Shamsheer into the Order of the Bath

extent) seem to represent the Nepali appropriation of a foreign item in such a way as to direct its more or less nebulous *foreign* power into intelligible *indigenous* channels.

Bernard Cohn's essay on ceremony in British India (1983) suggests a second possibly significant observation to be made about clothing and insignia. Cohn describes the "ceremonies of incorporation" conducted at the Mughal court in North India in which rulers and vassals exchanged ritual gifts, the vassal often receiving sets of lavish clothing with ornaments, jewelry, etc., known as *khillat*. But this ceremony was more than just a simple exchange of gifts. The *khillat* represented a physical continuity from the body of ruler to vassal through the medium of clothing. "The recipient was incorporated through the medium of the clothing into the body of the donor... . Those thus incorporated were not just servants of the king, but part of him" (Cohn 1983:167-168; see also Dirks 1987:86). Considering the great solemnity and pomp which surrounded the Nepali ceremonies of investiture, and the elite's consuming interest in insignia of all kinds, it is probably not too far-fetched to suppose that British clothing, and especially British insignia, may have represented types of "incorporation" for the Nepali nobility. Through their foreign clothing and decorations, the nobility could become part of the materiality of the region's dominant, foreign power.

*Early Rana Architecture and Foreign Goods:* Jang Bahadur's years as Prime Minister witnessed a flurry of palace building in and around Kathmandu.<sup>56</sup> Jang and many of his sons and relatives built massive new homes and several old palaces had new modern wings attached (P.R. Sharma 1975). Several residency officials and visiting Europeans have left fairly detailed descriptions of these buildings and their contents. Architecturally, the most striking features of these new palaces were their often massive European style facades of white stucco with great pillars and colonnaded porticos several stories tall facing formal European style

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during Chandra's visit to England in 1908, the King had the insignia set in diamonds (Landon 1928ii:124). Whether this may have been responsible for starting a trend, or whether Edward had the work done because he knew it to be popular in Nepal, is hard to say.

56 Bjonness notes that the Ranas were the first to systematically stray from traditional land use patterns, appropriating large tracts of productive irrigable land on which to build palaces. The Ranas brought in foreign-trained architects who "made a colonial and dependent architecture totally out of proportion with the needs of the society at large" (1990:9-10).

gardens. Builders chose their sites carefully so as to heighten the effect of their new homes. Oldfield noted:

The sites on which [the new mansions] stand having been well selected, the ground leveled,<sup>57</sup> and the surrounding buildings cleared away, give them rather an imposing appearance, and make them contrast very strongly with the humble, and dirty, . . . exteriors of the mass of the old Niwar dwellings in their neighborhood. (1974 [1880]:106).

These dazzlingly white structures in "pseudo-classical or carpenter's gothic" styles were no doubt designed with precisely this "contrast" in mind.

The other most striking features of these palaces were their large and imposing "public" or "reception" rooms. Huge English-made steel girders (shipped to India and carried up from the Nepal Tarai by porters) made possible the high ceilings and tall windows that made these rooms so spectacular (Isaacson 1990:74). Jang Bahadur had four of these huge "public rooms" all "large, lofty and ornamented with pictures" (Wright 1972 [1877]:13-14). Oldfield describes these new "native houses" as having:

one or more large public reception rooms, built in the English fashion, with lofty ceilings and glass windows, the walls of which are ornamented with mirrors and pictures, and the floors covered with Brussels carpets (1974 [1880]:107).

Even the old Newar royal palace in the center of Kathmandu had new wings added "built after the European fashion" including a "long modern darbar or public reception room" complete with "plain glass windows and green Venetian blinds" (Oldfield 1974 [1880]:104-105). Wright too commented on the new rooms with their "glass windows, which are rare in Nepal, being found only in the houses of the wealthiest" (1972 [1877]:10).

Although surely related to the darbar tents of Mughal North India, and the ornate reception halls of palaces in India's Princely States, these huge Rana rooms are arguably of a different species. Not intended for

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<sup>57</sup> Before Chandra Shamsher's enormous Singha Durbar could be constructed nearly fifty hectares of rolling farm land had to be leveled, presumably by hand (P.R. Sharma 1975:120).

conducting state business, these halls were apparently for entertaining and enjoyment. For example Prime Minister Bir Shamsheer Rana, after building two enormous palaces, built another "for rest and recreation" (P.S. Rana 1978:91). This third palace (Fohara Durbar) was surrounded by a canal and gardens with huge fountains and featured an indoor swimming pool (P.R. Sharma 1975:119).<sup>58</sup> But Bir Shamsheer lavished special attention on his public halls.

The main crystal hall of Seto Darbar was the main attraction of the building complex. There was a crystal staircase and several pillars of cut glasses were fixed inside the hall. Italian marble tiles were fixed on the floor and costly Persian and Belgian carpets were laid from wall to wall. At night multicoloured crystal chandeliers were fully illuminated. These lights provided extra brilliance to the hall. This hall was then considered one of the best halls in Asia.

For the interior decoration of these buildings expensive Victorian furnitures were supplied by C. Lazarus & Co. of Calcutta and London; crystal chandeliers were imported from Rome, Venice and London; Hamilton and Co. of London and Calcutta supplied expensive clocks and silverware; Mappin and Webb of England made special silverware and cutlery with the special emblem of the Prime Minister "H.E. Maharaja Bir S.R.B. 1895" (P.S. Rana 1978:92,91-92; see also P.S. Rana 1995:106-107).

Although it would require more research to prove this point, I feel that the Ranas were not simply imitating North Indian "native" elites, but had actually elevated their ostentation to another level. Unlike the Indian princes (and even the British Government in India in the early twentieth century) who favored "Anglo-Mughal" or "Anglo-Saracenic" building styles (Metcalf 1984), the Rana elites (from Jang Bahadur on) adhered strictly to a "pure" European neo-classical style. I am inclined to agree with Joel Isaacson who suggests that Rana insistence on a "pure" neo-classicism was a way of distancing the "Rana Raj" from both the Princely States and the British Government in India itself. By this line of reasoning, just as Jang Bahadur had sought to bypass the British Viceroy by going directly to Buckingham Palace, the continuing tradition of Rana neo-classicism (and slavish consumption of English distinctive goods)

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<sup>58</sup> In the 1950s the American government bought Fohara Durbar, tore it down, leveled its gardens, and built a private baseball diamond. See the excellent photo of Fohara Durbar in Proksch 1995:111.

was a way for the Nepali elites to at least imagine a *direct* link (noble to noble and therefore superior) with the "real" imperial power (Isaacson 1990:73), a link that would distinguish them from their "native" brethren in India.

Behind their grand classical facades, and lofty glass-lined public rooms, some of these new palaces kept features of more traditional Nepali domestic architecture. Having visited some of these homes, Oldfield wrote, "In their interiors the private apartments retain the low ceilings and doorways, step ladders, and trap-doors, which are characteristic of most native houses" (1974 [1880]: 106-107). Thus in their construction of public and private spaces, these Rana palaces seem to literally map out the distinction between inside and outside, core and surface, indigenous and foreign. The "public" exterior is always foreign, designed to be seen and seen in; whereas the private spaces are always Nepali, intimate, shadowed and secluded. From the external, foreign regions of display (or regions of foreign display), the Ranas could retreat into a more familiar non-visual world not oriented around competitive display and consumption.

As repositories of foreignness, or perhaps even representations of foreignness, these great public rooms deserve more careful consideration. As already mentioned, their walls were covered with mirrors and portraits or, as Wright noted of Jang Bahadur's palace, "The walls are graced with pictures of Her Majesty Queen Victoria and Prince Albert ... besides full-length portraits of Sir Jung Bahadur, his brothers and other relatives, which were painted in England and France" (1972 [1877]:14). Portraits of foreigners mingled with portraits *by* foreigners in a profusion of *powerful* visual representations. Elaborate lighting in these halls was also one of Jang Bahadur's central concerns. "In the centre of [Jang's] hall stands a crystal chandelier some thirty feet in height, which was also brought from London, and cost, it is said, [British Pounds] 500" (Wright 1972 [1877]:14). Jang had (literally) gone to great lengths to make these rooms highly *visible*. In the 1890s Bir Shamsheer imported a "powerful steam engine" to generate electricity for the chandeliers in his three palaces, to light his expansive gardens at night, and to run a "huge searchlight ... which could illuminate an area of about fifty square metres and could be focused to and round the whole valley" (P.S. Rana 1978:92). Inside and outside their palaces, the Ranas were clearly fixated on the (perhaps panoptic) powers of illumination.

Scattered about in the great Rana public rooms were collections of foreign goods "crowded together in the most curious confusion" (Oldfield

1974 [1880]:107). There was English and French ornamental furniture (sofas, couches, easy chairs), billiard tables, imported steel fire places with marble mantle pieces, candelabras, telescopes, vases, glass-ware, pianos, organs, rugs and carpets. Of the English goods in Jang's palace, Wright commented, "it is difficult to say what there is not" (1972 [1877]:14).

After his visit to the valley in 1850, Oliphant recorded a list of items he found on display in the palace of one of Jang's brothers. These are especially interesting because they were probably collected *before* Jang's trip to Britain. According to Oliphant, the palace's reception room was

adorned ... with a profusion of pictures, occidental as well as oriental while in the midst, upon a round table, and displayed as drawing-room ornaments, was an incongruous collection of articles amongst which I remarked three leaden spoons, an old cruet-stand, a Bohemian glass scent bottle, an old hair-brush and toothbrush on some hot water plates, a pair of brass candlesticks and other wares usually found in kitchens, pantries and bedrooms. [There was also a] handsome telescope ... a piano [and other] European luxuries strangely mingled with barbarous inventions (1852:140,165).

Precisely what these apparently bizarre collections of foreign things meant to their owners may be impossible to say. But we can probably conclude that they represented what Helms calls "tangible evidence" of association with distant centers of power. They symbolize "distant, potent regions" whose power elites universally seek to appropriate and transmit to those under their control (Helms 1988:164-165). These foreign items—essentially decontextualized curiosities—are like signs with no clear signification. Their most important characteristics were simply their foreignness, their sheer materiality and visibility, and their association with the people who owned and displayed them. On display these items graphically represented the Rana's appropriation of the power of foreignness.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> It is interesting to compare these Rana curiosity collections with a portrait of the eighteenth century traveler to the Pacific, Joseph Banks (reprinted in Thomas 1991:142). The portrait shows Banks draped in a Polynesian bark cloth cape and surrounded by a bizarre assortment of "native" objects ranging from agricultural implements, to weapons, to articles of clothing, all arrayed to signify authenticity, intimate experience, and uncontestable knowledge.

Yet while these foreign goods embody a kind of abstract, decontextualized, non-narrative power, the *way* they were used, and *what* was chosen for display does say something about the Ranas' conception of foreignness and what it meant *vis-à-vis* their own indigenous traditions. Thus some of the strangest items that Jang Bahadur chose to display in his "fantastically ornamented" state room may say the most about the place or role of foreignness. Here in these great "public rooms"—walled in glass and mirrors and illuminated night and day—Jang Bahadur chose to display European fashions that he had acquired during his visit to London in 1850. Oliphant's account describes how there were articles of English clothing—riding habits, men's and women's fashions—"hung round the walls upon pegs" (1852:142). Wright mentions seeing an English "baby's frock" on display in the same room. Here in these new "public spaces"—in this early phase of Jang Bahadur's experiments with modern commodities—fashion is once again liberated from the bourgeois pretence of utility and allowed to radiate pure meaning.<sup>60</sup> It is significant that this commodity fetishism was the center piece of these new brightly-lit, mirrored and glassed public rooms. The image of disembodied fashions publicly displayed effectively captures a fundamental relationship between commodities and class—a relationship in which bodies, not fabrics, are immaterial. These articles of European clothing hanging on the walls of the reception room seem to sum up the meanings of foreignness as represented in these Rana palaces. Foreignness is almost always associated with displays and surfaces (the display of surfaces)—it has to do with exteriors, adornment, and visuality as a means of producing difference.

*Objectification:* One of the more subtle undercurrents in the history of consuming European goods in Nepal is a growing trend toward the objectification of culture and environment, at least within the elite class. Although there is no 'baseline' against which to measure change, it seems that the Kathmandu elite's growing preoccupation with products such as mirrors, portraits, distinctive clothing, lighting, and so on, all point to the development of a different conception of the human form and how it is presented and represented. But there is another development during this period that has important implications for objectification of another sort.

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60 As Barthes argues in the European context, "in former ages, costume did not connive at function, it displayed the artifice of its correspondences" (1983:268). In the new "fashion system" one finds a shift away from clothing as fetishized object (livery, royal garb, ethnic or caste marker) toward clothing as fetishized commodity (in which use-value is subordinated to its semblance [Haug 1987:110]).

No doubt also influenced by British practice, Nepali elites (starting around the time of Bhim Sen Thapa) developed a growing interest in hunting, or perhaps more accurately "shooting," and trophy taking. Jang Bahadur was himself the very model of a big game hunter and visitors describe seeing rooms in his palace crammed with trophy animal heads and skins—not just one of each, but piles of every kind (e.g. Wright 1972 [1877]:14). For the Ranas, animals became things to kill, collect, and display.

But even more interesting is Landon's description of the "enormous albums" that Jang Bahadur commissioned to record the "natural history" of Nepal. Although Jang had refused access to almost all foreign scientific expeditions,<sup>61</sup> he employed his own artists to "draw for him representations of nearly all the larger game of Nepal, together with hundreds of illustrations of smaller beasts, birds and even butterflies" (1928i:151). Again, I have no way of knowing how animals were perceived before the nineteenth century in Nepal, but certainly this "natural history" approach to wildlife, with its representation, categorization, and separation of animals from their natural contexts, must have represented a new way of seeing the world; a way in which animals become objects distinct from and not dependent on or contiguous with their specific environments; a way in which order, or structure is imposed on the world and the resulting objectifications become a new arbitrary but hegemonic reality.<sup>62</sup> What is significant is that Jang understood the power inherent in this kind of objectified 'scientific' knowledge and took pains to prevent its falling into foreign hands. It is intriguing to think that in and through their contacts with European foreignness, the Rana elite might have developed this objectifying 'gaze' and learned to use the power of objectified knowledge in realms beyond simply "natural history."<sup>63</sup>

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61 Jang Bahadur refused entry to British explorers, surveyors, scientists, and business people even after the personal intercession of British Governors-General and Viceroys (Upadhyaya 1992:104).

62 It seems likely that Jang Bahadur's cataloguing project was related (directly or indirectly) to the British Resident B. H. Hodgson's preoccupation with natural history. Landon (1928i:272-279) provides a list of 127 articles that Hodgson published between 1826 and 1858 on Himalayan mammals and birds, some of which he named after himself (e.g. the Chiru Antelope: *Gazella Hodgsoni*). These schemes of knowledge objectification are closely related to what Cohn (1996:78) describes as "European interpretive strategies for 'knowing' India" in the seventeenth and eighteenth century which centered on "the construction of a history for India."

63 For example, could the *Mulukī Ain* of 1854—in which dozens of Nepali ethnic and social groups were turned into castes and then ranked according to a hierarchy that

### **The Late Rana Era**

In the early twentieth century and through till the end of their period of control, the Rana elite in Kathmandu continued to follow the patterns of consumption outlined above though with even more zeal. Luxurious European and American cars replaced fine horses and carriages as the favored mode of distinctive transport. Fine palaces in European style, some of unsurpassed magnificence, continued to be built. For example, the great Singha Durbar, modeled after Versailles, had a reception hall so fabulous that "there [was] not a hall in all India of such magnificence." Between its towering French windows were "enormous mirrors," statues and paintings. Its ceiling supported tiers of huge crystal chandeliers above an inlaid parquet floor (Landon 1928i:189). The main building alone had more than 1,000 rooms and was said to be the largest structure in all of South and South East Asia (P.R. Sharma 1975:120).<sup>64</sup> Singha Durbar cost five million rupees and was built in only three years, using largely appropriated materials and pressed labor. Upon announcing that Singha Durbar would be the official residence of the Prime Minister of Nepal, Chandra Shamsher sold the building to the state for twenty million rupees and pocketed the proceeds (P.S. Rana 1995:162). According to Landon, in the stately homes of the Prime Minister and most of his close relatives, "the comforts and standards of life have ... been closely approximated to those of Europe" (1928ii:123).

In order to keep themselves well-supplied with imported "comforts" the Rana regime instituted a variety of new means for acquiring foreign consumer goods, including the aerial ropeway that, by the late 1920s, was able to deliver up to eight tons of freight per hour, "without in any way opening up for passenger traffic the new avenue into the capital" (Landon 1928ii:208). To keep his ropeway busy Chandra established a "foreign goods department attached to the Jinsi Adda" in Kathmandu, and a "buying agency" in Calcutta, that imported European goods for "certain of the Prime Minister's domestic requirements" (Upadhyaya 1992:128, 253). Taking advantage of the increasing scale of mass production in Europe, the Ranas mail ordered countless tons of goods from the West—from pressed-tin ceiling panels and decorative statuary, to bath tubs and marble

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placed the Rana elites in a privileged position—be seen as the objectification and arbitrary ordering of social reality?

64 The Singha Durbar compound occupied a space fully one half as large as the old town of Kathmandu, an area inhabited by more than 80,000 people. Malla era palaces covered no more than 1/25th of the total city area (Korn 1989:5).

floor tiles. The Jinsi Adda dealt mostly with British supply houses but on at least one occasion ordered goods from the great French department store *Au Bon Marché* (Upadhyaya 1992:129). One recently published photo (Proksch 1995:123) shows Kathmandu's "authorized Ford dealer" in Lazimpat in the mid-1930s. Pictured are three new 1935 Ford automobiles, among others. Yet these Fords appear plebeian compared with the huge Packards, Rolls Royces, and other luxury vehicles pictured in the same volume, each "carried over the mountain trails on bamboo cross-poles by teams of 64 porters" (Proksch 1995:122-123).

By the 1920s Nepali commoners too had begun to acquire a taste for imported consumer goods. In particular Gurkha servicemen returning from the First World War brought with them both cash and a desire for some share of the goods that they associated with modern life. According to Stiller (1993:159-160) Chandra Shamsher was able to cash in on this popular consumer desire after 1923 when the new treaty with Britain entitled Nepal to unlimited duty-free imports through Indian territory. Japanese manufacturers in search of new markets for simple consumer goods found eager partners in Rana importers. "Nepalese merchants bought, and Japanese manufacturers shipped, practically everything the newly returned servicemen thought represented modern life: shoes, tennis shoes, cotton cloth, umbrellas, and trinkets." Because they were able to undersell British suppliers, "Cheap imports from Japan flooded the small market of Nepal," devastating Nepali cottage industries, effectively draining off much of the cash that the servicemen had brought back to Nepal, and enriching the Rana state treasury (Stiller 1993:159-160).

In spite of the consumer "crumbs" that they allowed to drop from their loaded banquet tables, the Ranas knew that their own ever-expanding consumer comforts came at the price of growing political insecurity. Visitors to the valley from the 1930s onward describe what is almost an armed camp. The streets bristled with soldiers and for decades a strict night-time curfew was imposed on every citizen. Cannon volleys marked the beginning and end of the curfew as well as the passage of time through the day (Singh 1990:24-5). According to Leuchtag, the Ranas forbade large public gatherings and were even uneasy about group worship in temples (1958:63). But try as they might, the Ranas could not stop the steady under-cutting of their monopoly on access to powerful foreign knowledge.<sup>65</sup> Although they tried desperately to seal their country from

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65 This article does not begin to do justice to the growing power of non-Rana social groups in Kathmandu (and in exile) from roughly the 1920s onwards. Indeed the

the influence of the Indian nationalist movement,<sup>66</sup> the political economy of the subcontinent was shifting once again. The Rana dynasty had risen with the aid of the newly-dominant British power in the mid-nineteenth century, and fell when the British finally pulled out of India.

### Consumption and Meaning: Seeing and Being

What can be said about what it meant for the Nepali nobility to consume foreign goods, and certain kinds of goods in particular? One way to answer the question is to compare the material I have presented here with several other recent works of historical anthropology that also consider the role of imported European goods in non-Western societies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One important difference between the experiences of people in Nepal and, for example, those in the Pacific islands (Thomas 1991) or South Africa (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991) was that Nepal had relatively free access to foreign goods without having to accept the presence of foreigners themselves. The missionaries, traders, and colonial administrators that play a crucial role in the "modernization" of many places were simply not allowed into Nepal.<sup>67</sup> Thus Nepal's experience is not the story of the "European embrace" described by the Comaroffs (1991:32), though it is the story of the embrace of European things.

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history of this pre-1950 Nepali proto middle class—and how it sought to reshape the Nepali nation and Nepali modernity in its own image—has only begun to be written. For example Onta (1994a: part 6) offers intriguing insights into how non-Rana civil servants and palace functionaries in Kathmandu ventured into the new domain of consumer modernity using 'democratic' technologies such as photography to construct and claim a space of "middle-ness" between the Ranas and the masses during the 1930s and '40s. In another recent article Onta considers how for a small group of educated, activist, expatriate Nepalis in India during roughly the same period "the Nepali language and a *bīr* [brave] history of the Nepali nation formed a set around which projects of inculcating self-consciousness and promoting self-improvement of the Nepali *jāti* could be organized" (1996:39-40). Similarly, in an article in this volume, Onta describes B. K. Sama's (1903-1981) complex mixture of foreign cultural influence and inspiration, and his pleas for the rejection of foreign "impurities" in a new Nepali national cultural life. Clearly these projects (of creating a national identity at once Nepali and modern) have much to say about a new middle-class's selective appropriation of, and growing incorporation into, the powers of foreignness.

66 For example during Gandhi's "Quit India" movement of 1942 Rana Prime Minister Juddha Shamsheer clamped down on all in-coming newspapers from India and ordered people to turn in all radio receivers (P.S. Rana 1995:187).

67 The British presence in Kathmandu was very small and their movements were tightly controlled and monitored.

What is the power of these European things? In his study of material culture and colonization in the Pacific, Nicholas Thomas argues that "Western commodities cannot be seen to embody some irresistible attraction that is given the status of an inexorable historical force" (1991:103). Instead, Thomas insists, the meaning or value of any object is "grounded in local cultural and political agendas" (1991:88). In this article (especially part two) I have tried to show how foreign goods were incorporated into the cultural and political economies of Kathmandu. For those able to consume them, these new goods represented new means of producing distinction. Their price and scarcity alone made them useful markers of a gentry who—especially during the nineteenth century—was seeking to set itself off in new ways. From this perspective the European goods consumed by the Ranas differ from prestige goods of earlier centuries and regimes in volume, but not necessarily in their essential meaning as means of distinction.

Yet even while I fully respect Thomas' argument that we must look for the meaning of goods in the context of their social usage, I think it may also be worth considering the possibility that certain goods *do* embody certain pre-existing meanings, even certain epistemological paradigms. Could it be that certain goods embody social meanings, or that their consumption promotes/enables certain modes of sociality or social relations? To explore these questions I focus on that particular constellation of European products that seem to have been most popular in nineteenth century Kathmandu. These include window glass, chandeliers, clothing (cloth and styles) lanterns and candle reflectors, mirrors ("looking glasses"), telescopes, and portraits.

All of these items have in common their involvement in acts of seeing, looking, being seen, and being able to see (sometimes without being seen). They have to do with vision, appearance, and surfaces. Glass creates interiors that are at once enclosed and illuminated. Telescopes extend vision and fracture the horizon by isolating and magnifying what is at a distance. As the poet Pokhryal observed, lighting devices make night "like day" extending vision in different (temporal rather than spatial) but also artificial ways. With the use of glass and artificial lighting, rooms become different kinds of spaces.<sup>68</sup> They become places to see and be

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68 One could make the argument that glass was desirable for its functional, utilitarian value in, for example, keeping out drafts while still allowing in light. However, in the way Bhim Sen Thapa and the Rana elites used glass—from cut glass pillars, to mirror covered walls, to enormous glass chandeliers—there is a degree of excess that

seen, especially with mirrors and portraits on the walls. These rooms become places for admiring oneself and for being admired. In these lighted, transparent, portrait covered, mirrored spaces, human nature was being imagined, abstracted, and objectified in new ways. In these places surfaces and appearances took on exaggerated importance. People were becoming more the objects of vision—things to be seen—than of other sensory or ideational criteria.<sup>69</sup>

In their study of Protestant missions and consciousness in nineteenth century South Africa, Jean and John Comaroff (1991) also consider the role of some of these same European goods in the colonial context. They describe how missionaries used glass—mirrors and occasionally telescopes—as gifts to prospective converts. These were "devices capable of working transformations ... Clearly, glass was taken to be the window into a new way of seeing and being" (1991:185). Speaking of colonial subjects, the Comaroffs argue that "the final objective of generations of colonizers has been to colonize their consciousness with the axioms and aesthetics of an alien culture." They have sought to "impose ... a particular way of seeing and being" (1991:4). With the introduction of mirrors and later combs, clothing and other goods, African people were "drawn into a conversation with the culture of modern capitalism—only to find themselves enmeshed, willingly or not in its order of signs and values, interests and passions, wants and needs" (1991:xxi). In this way the Comaroffs describe a very deliberate, strategic deployment of certain goods on the part of Europeans in order to transform colonial subjects.

There are at least two important contrasts to be made between the Nepali and the South African contexts in the nineteenth century. The first is, as I have already mentioned, that foreign goods did not come with foreign agents. Unlike in South Africa where missionaries worked to guide their converts into a new way of "seeing and being" through the use of foreign goods, in Nepal elites imported the goods—along with a new

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transcends simple utility. Furthermore, considering Oldfield's observations (described above) on how glass was used in public but not private quarters in some Rana palaces, it seems that functional utility was not the primary objective.

69 A small but important body of anthropological literature focuses on visibility and its role in South Asia (Babb 1981; Eck 1985; Cohn 1989). But the enactment of *darśan*, in which a religious devotee desires both "to see and be seen by the deity" (Eck 1985:3), is also central to the religious experience of the Kathmandu valley, an area known for centuries for its exquisite religious statuary. Here however I am interested in a different way of seeing: a new gaze that imbues the material domain with meaning and value by maximizing the communicative power of images and material goods.

way of seeing and being—without the foreign interpreters. Arguably, at least some aspects of the "culture of modern capitalism" that the Comaroffs associate with the missionary's use of mirrors, clothing, etc., may reside less in the human agents of capitalism than in the goods themselves.

Before expanding on this point, the second contrast between the experiences of Nepal and South Africa concerns the relationship between capitalist commodities and individuation. According to the Comaroffs, the goods distributed by the missionaries "were the bearers of a particular kind of selfhood" (1991:183). In the combs, jewelry, and especially mirrors, the missionaries hoped that potential converts would "see themselves" and "will their own transformation" (1991:170). They speak of "the capacity of the looking glass to frame, individuate, and seize personal identity." The "self" that missionaries wanted Africans to see in the mirror was "the self ... of bourgeois individualism nurtured by the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution" (1991:181).

But does the mirror *necessarily* individuate? Is the "self" in the mirror *necessarily* the self of European bourgeois rationality? I would qualify this reasoning by suggesting that in Nepal (and perhaps in the West as well) the self-in-the-looking-glass is not necessarily a self-imagined-as-individual. Alternatively, the mirror may help persons imagine their relations to groups in new ways. The mirror need not abolish group-based identities, but may transform the nature of these group identities. I would argue that persons may regard the image in the mirror not as some individuated *self* as much as *that-which-others-see*. In the mirror one sees what others see; there we see the image we bear in the eyes of our social others.<sup>70</sup> As social creatures, humans are always beings-for-others but with the arrival of mirrors people learn to be-for-others in new ways. With mirrors (and ever more so with further advances in the technology of representation) persons imagine the self, and therefore present the self, in different ways. Humans have always engaged in the "presentation of self"

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70 My ideas here are related to Cooley's notion of the "looking-glass self" or "social self." According to Cooley,

As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass . . . so in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on. . . . The thing that moves us . . . is not the mere mechanical reflection of ourselves, but an imputed sentiment, the imagined effect of this reflection upon another's mind (1964:184).

Thus the looking glass fosters a social being that dwells on the "face, figure, and dress in the glass" and how that image will be perceived by our social others.

though with the growing awareness of the self-in-the-mirror persons learn to present the self less (or not only) through ideational constructs such as history, genealogy, or cosmology, and more on the sensory plane as a visual sign or material entity. The Comaroffs suggest that for Africans the culture of capitalism was a new way of "seeing and being." My argument is that a certain set of European goods in Nepal embodied, or were the material expression of, an episteme in which seeing *is* being.

Suggesting that a certain kind of ideology might reside in certain kinds of things is not new. For example Marx argues that capitalist commodities legitimate class relations of exploitation to the extent that social relations seem to exist between objects, not between humans. When Marx suggests that ideology is embedded in commodities he focuses on the ability of commodities to mask "the social character of labour," hence their "fetishism" (*Capital* Vol.I in Tucker 1978:322). Yet Marx never really explores the cultural specifics of *how* commodities embody and thereby naturalize class privilege. By considering the potential social implications of certain capitalist commodities (and their associated practices) in Kathmandu I am trying to explore how commodities might embody certain class practices and even epistemologies.

Above I suggested that with the arrival of mirrors and other modes and means of visual representation people may begin to imagine their relations with others less in terms of history, genealogy, or cosmology and more along the lines of a visual or material essence or character. The conditions that define and enforce social boundaries begin to change from ontological/ teleological strategies of distinction—those which rationalize privilege (or its lack) in terms of timeless, non-material essences that extend from past to future through blood or institutions—to new strategies of distinction firmly rooted in the present and manifested in material terms. In this transformation goods (and increasingly consumer commodities) bear more and more of the weight of cultural signification.

During Jang Bahadur's reign, might we be seeing the ascendancy of a new mode of "seeing and being," and in particular, a new mode of seeing *as* being? Do the changing patterns of consumption and display that I have outlined in this essay suggest a new (or perhaps newly privileged) material mode of distinction whereby goods and the control of material resources were not only the underlying source of secular power, but the primary means by which power and privilege were manifested and legitimated? While Bhim Sen Thapa had been the first to experiment with the new means of visual distinction in a major way, it was Jang Bahadur,

especially after his return from Britain, who transformed elite cultural practice. Jang Bahadur mobilized the ideological content inherent in a particular constellation of goods and appropriated this new visually-oriented material culture as the basis for a new class culture. By transforming the calculus of dominance and the logic of self presentation, the Ranas were able, I argue, to harness a very effective means by which to circumvent the genealogical and cosmological basis of traditional authority. With Jang Bahadur, Nepali elites for the first time established direct links to the distant world centers of industrial mass production. In his turn to an almost exclusively material mode of distinction Jang Bahadur set the stage for new patterns of class production and class culture. Jang Bahadur helped to forge the links, and promote the logics, that continue to influence class practice in Kathmandu.

Herein may lie the meaning of these commodities—glass, lighting, clothing, mirrors, portraits—as well as the secret of their "fatal attraction" (Thomas 1991:85). In the mirrored, portrait-covered, brightly-lit "public" rooms of the Rana era, a new regime could imagine itself as an elite class based on its shared appropriation of a new material mode of distinction. The reflections that people saw in the mirrored walls were not so much of "selves" as of personal investments in a new materially-based class culture. In the mirror one saw the quality of one's claim to group membership. The mirror is at least as much a technology that produces identification or group-ness, as it is one that produces some free-floating identity of self-as-individual.

Visual commodities came to embody, or form a channel for, a mode of class practice that privileges the material as the ultimate reality and value. Mirrors, portraits, clothing, and statuary became the fetishized signifiers of a new reality, a material reality that resides in things and images. When the material becomes the ultimate reality, the value of people becomes a function of their materiality. When seeing *becomes* being, the more one has, the more one is. Mirrors, glass, and interior lights were essential goods in the Rana elite's efforts to establish and naturalize materiality/visuality as a class strategy of superiority. Mirrors helped elites to imagine and confirm their material superiority while glass and lighting created the spaces for this new mode of material being. These were the exclusive spaces where elites exercised their "freedom" to see and be.

Thus in the brightly-lit, mirror-covered "public rooms" the Ranas were the first Nepalis to practice the modern "freedoms" of the consumer episteme. These rooms were "public" to the extent that they were spaces

in which to practice the "democracy" of vision; to "freely" see and be seen. Here members of the elite were "free" to display their privilege, their superior material being. These great halls (shrines to a new material reality) foreshadow twentieth century "public" spaces in Kathmandu—restaurants, cinemas, streets, shopping arcades—spaces where the "freedom" to consume continues to be a function of personal wealth (Liechty 1994).

### **Conclusion: Selective Exclusion**

Having surveyed more than three hundred years from the late Malla era to the end of Rana rule in Nepal, what can be said about changing modes of elite distinction, new economic patterns, and new ways of calculating and showing wealth? Rather than offering economic data,<sup>71</sup> it may be just as helpful to note that during this period Kathmandu elites went from being heads of a city-state, to rulers of a nation-state. Thus what is perhaps the most important transformation relates to scale rather than substance. What distinguishes the Malla kings from late Rana prime ministers is not some change in elite desires to lead opulent, distinctive lives, but the resources they were able to mobilize. As their tax base (and outright holdings) increased, absolute rulers in Kathmandu came to control enormous resources. Especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Ranas made huge profits from timber sales to India where the wood was used for railroad ties and rolling stock. In these and other transactions the Ranas became wealthy not by developing Nepal, but by development in India and investments outside the subcontinent (Isaacson 1990:92; Stiller 1993:197). Treating their entire state as a private feudal fiefdom the Ranas were able to mobilize resources such that their conspicuous consumption was of truly international dimensions.<sup>72</sup>

Along with the changes in scale there were obviously changes in the contents of elite consumer desires. But these changes too have to do with the emergence of nations and the way global political economies transformed the meanings and powers of foreignness. Over the course of three centuries the Kathmandu valley went from being a small political center in a universe of (more or less) similar centers, to a position on the

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<sup>71</sup> For this see M.C. Regmi 1971, 1978, 1988.

<sup>72</sup> For example when Chandra Shamsher died in 1929, "he left his sons and heirs [British Pounds] 41,000,000 in cash and securities, huge tracts of agricultural land and substantial palaces" (Stiller 1993:160-161; see also Upadhyaya 1992:266).

periphery of a great dominant regional power. But even as the valley became a political periphery, a similar transformation was occurring in the 'moral economy' of the Hindu world which left Kathmandu at the center of the last remaining "true Hindustan". Through all of these shifts in the moral and political balance of the subcontinent, the meanings of foreignness and their implications for Nepali elites were changing. European power went from being only one of many in the distant worlds of foreignness for the Mallas, to a threatening military competitor for the early Gorkhalis, to finally, a model of authority and legitimacy for the Ranas. Thus as Nepal emerged as a peripheral nation-state, national elites adhered more and more slavishly to external sources of power and distinction.

In addition to changes in scale and contents of elite distinctive practice, I have also suggested that there were changes in what might be called the mode of distinction. By stressing the *visual* qualities of imports (especially European imports) across these centuries—from telescopes to glass to lighting to clothing—I have suggested that elite distinction became increasingly a matter of seeing and being seen. In a sense power is justified in an increasingly material (materialistic) manner, and relatively less in moral, genealogical, or divine terms.<sup>73</sup> In the nineteenth century we see power shift from the hands of the Shah kings—who were (are) worshiped as incarnations of Vishnu—to those of the anglophillic Jang Bahadur and his descendants who construct their authority increasingly in secular, material, highly visual, terms.

If this is the story of the increasing "secularization" of authority, what I have tried to show here is something of the cultural content of that turn: the ways in which goods embody (or serve as conduits for) ideologies, transform the terms of distinctive practice, and make possible new patterns of class culture. It is in this way that Rana elite practice foreshadows later developments in Kathmandu. By transforming the terms and mode of distinction, the Ranas set the stage for modern class practice

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73 This is not to say that the Ranas abandoned moral, genealogical, and divine claims to authority. Rana elites continued in the "moral" traditions of patronizing religious institutions and priests, and Jang Bahadur Rana's *Mulukī Ain* is a key instance of the Rana administration's efforts to create an identity of moral superiority for itself. Jang Bahadur's adoption of the high-status Chetri surname Rana, rather than Kunwar, indicates the regime's continued concern for genealogy, as did the Rana practice of intermarriage with the royal Shahs. Finally the Ranas' self-ascribed title of "Śrī 3 Mahārāja" suggests a desire to appropriate something of the divinity of the Shah kings. Thanks to Lazima Onta-Bhatta for pointing out the significance of these practices.

and the construction of class through consumer cultures that I have discussed elsewhere (Liechty 1994). What the Ranas realized only too late was that the practice they set in motion could and did get out of hand.

Clearly one of the central ironies of Nepal's modern history up to 1950 was the government's policy of, on the one hand, a strict exclusion of Europeans (and their influence) from the realm and, on the other, a compulsion for European goods around which the ruling elites increasingly built their identities. Thus while the Ranas cultivated intimate political ties with the British, they maintained Nepal as the only country in South Asia where Europeans were not allowed to enter for trade. Whether in terms of trade, industrial development, or the development of communications or transport infrastructure, "The Ranas particularly understood that throwing open their country to foreign capital would in no time end their feudal system and would eventually lead to their decline" (Upadhyaya 1992:98).

Yet while maintaining their *feudal state* depended upon economic and cultural isolation, maintaining the Rana's *feudal power* increasingly depended upon British support. Rana Nepal was self-sufficient in food grains<sup>74</sup> but by the turn of the century "Nepal had become dependent on India *only for modern weapons and for official recognition* of the current Rana Prime ministers" (Stiller 1993:130, emphasis added). (To weapons and political patronage we must also add the Rana dependency on British India for access to distinctive luxury goods). In other words, "Nepal" was not dependent on the British, but the Rana regime was. Early Rana Prime Ministers were fiercely protective of treaty rights and insisted on strict adherence to protocol befitting an independent nation.<sup>75</sup> Yet in his 1908 visit to Britain Chandra Shamsher "was not treated as an Ambassador of an independent state" but as a vassal "feudatory state chief." Chandra's predecessor Bir Shamsher had refused to travel abroad on these terms (P.S. Rana 1995:154, 104). During Chandra's reign—and continuing until 1951—Nepal experienced a simultaneous rise in foreign luxury

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74 In fact Nepal was a significant grain exporting nation well into the twentieth century (Upadhyaya 1992:159-163).

75 Said British Resident Charles Girdlestone in 1877, "There is no native state in alliance with us which lays greater stress on the declarations of the British Government than Nepal. In all its communications the Durbar shows an intense fondness for precedent and an inclination to interpret the clauses of the treaty in the strictest sense" (quoted in Upadhyaya 1992:100).

expenditures,<sup>76</sup> domestic paranoia and political repression,<sup>77</sup> and general obsequiousness towards the British.<sup>78</sup>

This contradiction between the exclusion and inclusion of foreignness points to one of the main themes of this essay—that foreignness is at once both dangerous and powerful. I have shown how, from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, Nepali rulers sought to deal with this contradiction by following policies of selective exclusion. That is, they tried to exclude the dangers of foreignness, while harnessing its powers.

In fact the Rana approach required the most careful balancing of foreign dangers and foreign powers. The Ranas invested heavily in an image of foreignness that they presented to their subjects through a combination of extreme ostentation and sumptuary prohibitions. The regime knew that its power depended on the ability to strictly control *how* foreignness was defined, and *who* had access to it. They had to monopolize both the representations of, and the access to, foreignness. It was a strategy based on one class's exclusive consumption of foreignness.

But it was an extremely unstable and inflationary strategy in that it required ever greater levels of consumption. Especially after the wars, when thousands of Nepalis had gained first hand experiences abroad, this strategy forced the Ranas to invest even more heavily in ostentatious foreignness, with ever diminishing returns. From Jang Bahadur, to Bir Shamsher, to Chandra Shamsher, successive Rana rulers felt compelled to justify their own legitimacy by constructing ever more astonishingly spectacular palaces and in the process squandering unimaginable amounts of wealth and labor. Chandra's huge freight carrying aerial ropeway serves as the perfect caricature of the Rana era. With this structure, Chandra

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76 There was a particularly sharp spike in the amount of foreign goods imported during the first years of the century during the construction of Singha Durbar (Upadhyaya 1992:157-159).

77 These included increasing public surveillance and secret police activity, nightly curfews, tight restrictions on travel into and out of the valley, censorship of Nepali publications, and the arrest, torture, and execution of political dissidents (P.S. Rana 1995:155-160).

78 One particularly revealing illustration of this fawning posture toward the British is a picture in a photo album in Kathmandu's Kaiser Library (reproduced in Onta 1994a:part 4) that shows Chandra Shamsher doubled over in a deep bow before the English Monarch George V. Similarly Chandra's throne in Singha Durbar (itself a monument to Rana anglophilia) was flanked by busts of the King and Queen of England, the guardians of Rana power in Nepal (Landon 1928i:189).

hoped to provide himself with the means to import greater and greater amounts of foreign goods, while keeping foreigners out.

If Prithvi Narayan Shah had been concerned with denying foreigners access to the valley, by this time Chandra was concerned more with denying the valley access to foreigners. He knew that the Ranas' own viability as rulers depended on the maintenance of an image of British power in India as monolithic and invincible.<sup>79</sup> In this regard, one of Chandra's most astounding and revealing remarks came in response to a question by Perceval Landon concerning why Nepal continued to maintain a strict policy of exclusion toward foreigners. Included as one of this article's epigraphs, Chandra's reply speaks of his conviction that "the prosperity of Nepal is bound up with the maintenance of British predominance in India," and his determination—in an era of "easy travel"—that "the sahib who is no sahib shall never enter Nepal, and weaken my people's belief that every Englishman is a gentleman" (Landon 1928ii:2). In other words, Chandra feared the democratic populism sweeping India and struggled to maintain an image of uncontested British monarchical power supported by a class of loyal feudal gentry.

Chandra could not have spoken more eloquently about the basis of his own rule and the precise nature of the threats to it. The forces of twentieth century modernity—"easy travel" and no doubt other forms of mass communication—were undermining the Ranas' strategy of power. With legitimate authority tied to an image of foreignness, the Ranas knew that they must deny their subjects the ability to create that image themselves. Indeed the massive changes in the Kathmandu valley since 1950 are due to the relatively unrestrained access to foreignness and its powers that ensued after the fall of the Ranas.

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<sup>79</sup> Even after the 1923 Treaty of Friendship in which Britain formally recognized Nepal's independence, Chandra did not send envoys to Britain, preferring to deal with British India. Nepal was also one of only four independent nations in the world that did not seek membership in the League of Nations. "[Chandra] was very confident that his seat was secured as long as the British ruled over India, so he always avoided confrontation with the British" (P.S. Rana 1995:162).

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68 Mark Liechty

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