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# CROSS-CURRENTS



## EAST ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE REVIEW

### **A Himalayan Border Trilogy: The Political Economies of Transport Infrastructure and Disaster Relief between China and Nepal**

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#### **Abstract**

This photo essay illustrates and contrasts the infrastructure and operations of three international border posts between China and Nepal. Located at Zhangmu-Kodari, Kyirong-Rasuwa, and Likse-Neychung borders, these posts function as the only motorable China-Nepal border crossings and represent half of the six official, open borders recognized by Kathmandu and Beijing. In addition to China's new position as Nepal's number-one source of foreign direct investment, bilateral trade, humanitarian aid, and tourism traffic between the two countries continue to expand annually. As infrastructure development facilitates new political-economic dynamics between China and Nepal, these three border posts are becoming increasingly potent symbols of ongoing evolutions in Sino-Nepal relations. Because each crossing is also located at Nepal's border with the Tibet Autonomous Region, each site exhibits a complex politics of identity, citizenship, and mobility with respect to the movement and control of local traders, Tibetan exiles, the Nepali Army, and the Chinese State Police, among other actors.

Keywords: China, Nepal, borders, roads, infrastructure, trade

#### **Introduction**

This photo essay examines the ways in which transborder mobility and road development reflect ongoing shifts in political and economic relations between China and Nepal. By looking at the trajectory and utility of several trade routes from Chinese Tibet into Nepal via the Sindupalchok, Rasuwa, and Mustang districts, I argue that transborder roads increasingly serve as vectors for the delivery of Chinese commerce, aid, and political power across South Asia (image 15). Before examining the evolution and status of these roads, however, it is first necessary to contextualize Nepal's post-2015 earthquake climate, particularly in light of recent political and economic developments in Kathmandu. Following this brief review of the state of the field in Nepal, I more

closely analyze three specific border regimes and their respective road systems with regard to broader networks of connectivity and geopolitics between China and Nepal.

As an examination of the production, negotiation, and transformation of the China-Nepal border in the context of infrastructure development, this study helps to disrupt center-periphery binaries and further complicates problematic yet enduring regional studies frameworks that designate South, Central, and East Asia as separate realms. By looking at the expanding role of Chinese investment and infrastructure development in Nepal, the study contributes fresh understandings to regional geopolitics and interstate political economies across High Asia. In order to further encourage new conceptual engagements with twenty-first-century international relations in Asia, the study employs the lenses of transborder infrastructure and (im)mobilities in service of a more localized ethnography of geopolitics of the trans-Himalaya.

### **Post-Earthquake Nepal**

The Himalayan earthquakes of April and May 2015 have significantly transformed Sino-Nepali relations by presenting a new stage on which Beijing was able to act as a global humanitarian player. In addition to causing nearly nine thousand deaths in Nepal, as well as incalculable losses to infrastructure across both public and private spheres, the earthquakes triggered landslides and blocked roads throughout the trans-Himalaya. In spring 2015, the People's Republic of China (PRC) launched a massive humanitarian aid operation to Nepal—its largest ever—in immediate response to this devastation. In order to alleviate an economic and mobility crisis that threatened to further exacerbate Nepal's humanitarian emergency, the Chinese paramilitary People's Armed Police Force took responsibility for clearing landslides and opening roads between Nepal and China in the districts of Sindupalchok and Rasuwa. Further to the west, in Mustang—a district strongly affected by the earthquakes but absent from official registers for international aid—help was also needed. At a meeting in mid-June, Chinese representatives solicited advice from local community leaders in Mustang as to how the Chinese embassy in Kathmandu could best support villages that, more than two months after the initial earthquakes, had yet to receive direct relief assistance. Chinese efforts to provide humanitarian assistance, restore infrastructure, and reopen transport corridors with Nepal symbolize Beijing's increasingly close relationship with Kathmandu and show how China's new humanitarian actors worked to fill a void left open by both the Government of Nepal and the international aid sector.

In Nepal, domestic politics have transformed a natural disaster into a protracted humanitarian crisis. Nearly one year after the initial earthquakes, the Government of Nepal has yet to allocate any international aid to reconstruction. Despite earnest global efforts to mobilize humanitarian assistance, political infighting and perennial nepotism have paralyzed reconstruction efforts. At the International Conference on Nepal's Reconstruction (ICNR) held in Kathmandu in June 2015 (ICNR 2015), the foreign ministers of China and India committed US\$480 million and US\$1 billion, respectively, toward the US\$4.6 billion pledged overall for reconstruction and relief in Nepal (Giri 2015). Almost unbelievably, not a single dollar of these donations has yet been put to use by the Government of Nepal. Following the ICNR, the rapid promulgation of a Nepali constitution became a key condition for the allocation of international earthquake aid. Motivated by this cash carrot, elites from the major political parties drafted and approved a controversial constitution in August 2015 that neglected, if not outright denied, the very provisions for minority rights that had delayed the constitutional promulgation for the previous nine years. Not to be sold on this expeditious effort of political malfeasance, opposition parties representing gender activists, indigenous and tribal groups or “scheduled castes” (*janajatis*), and large minority populations—particularly Madhesi who maintain strong ethnic and kinship ties to Indian communities along Nepal's southern border<sup>1</sup>—began to agitate.

Opposition to the constitution soon evolved into border blockades and a national fuel crisis that has paralyzed reconstruction efforts across Nepal. For example, protests in August and September 2015 in southern Nepal quickly turned violent, with over fifty dead, and by October resulted in traffic and trade embargoes at Nepal's border crossings with India, where Madhesi populations are concentrated. Because the monopolistic Nepal Oil Corporation (NOC) historically imports 100 percent of Nepal's petroleum products from India, once these borders closed, domestic demands for petrol, diesel, and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG, or “cooking gas”) soon escalated into a severe energy crisis. While the Government of Nepal immediately blamed this crisis on the Indian political leadership in Delhi (Pandey 2015), a robust and highly lucrative black market soon developed, speculatively sustained through collusion between the NOC, Madhesi activists, Nepali police, Indian authorities, and select members of the Kathmandu establishment (Rinck and Adhikari 2016). In response to this India-based fuel emergency, Chinese interventions made a highly symbolic but largely nominal “drop in the bucket” delivery of twelve fuel tankers via the Kyirong-Rasuwa road, providing just over 1,200 liters of petrol to

Kathmandu (Prasain 2015). Despite these geopolitically charged dynamics of “carbon diplomacy,” the day-to-day impacts of the fuel crisis entailed a 300 to 500 percent inflation in gasoline and diesel prices, a severe limitation of kerosene and LPG cooking gas, and the virtual shutdown of all construction industry across Nepal as of October 2015. As a result, and despite widespread reports that the fuel embargo has been lifted and relative normalcy is soon to return, earthquake reconstruction, road repairs, hydropower development, and other infrastructure programs remain suspended and paralyzed.

Between April 2015 and February 2016, earthquake devastation, international trade interests, and national fuel emergencies transformed the functional operations of China-Nepal border crossings and road networks. With the Zhangmu-Kodari border and road still closed, trade goods have been rerouted through Kyirong-Rasuwa. While there is a precedent for this routing—a similar shift in traffic occurred in 2014 in the wake of major landslides in Sindupalchok—the current political moment offers an increasingly telling preview of the future with more permanent rerouting of Chinese goods into Nepal via Kyirong-Rasuwa rather than Zhangmu-Kodari. Complicated by ongoing shifts in Sino-Nepali-Indian geopolitics, the following sections examine and illustrate Chinese aid and development to post-earthquake Nepal in the context of trans-Himalayan transport, trade, and tourism.

### **Zhangmu-Kodari**

The Zhangmu-Kodari border (also known colloquially as Tatopani in Nepal and Kasa or Dram in Tibet) was the first and, up until the 2015 earthquakes, largest border crossing between China and Nepal (image 2). Opened in the 1960s with the construction of the Arniko Highway and the China–Nepal Friendship Bridge (image 11), this post has traditionally handled more than 80 percent of direct transnational trade between China and Nepal (however, a greater overall quantity of goods continues to come from China to Nepal via sea routes to Kolkata). Transferring an array of household, commercial, and industrial goods destined for Kathmandu (images 1 and 6), on a normal day dozens of Chinese trucks offload cargo in Zhangmu (images 6, 7, and 8)—a critical step in an international exchange that is 90 percent import and only 10 percent export for Nepal. Because the post had been operating beyond capacity for years (image 9), a major expansion to border infrastructure began in 2013 with the construction of new dry port facilities below Kodari (image 14). However, disruptions at this crossing are chronic, as exemplified by

the 2014 Sindupalchok landslide and even more recently by the Nepal earthquakes. In both situations, despite earnest Sino-Nepali development efforts, commercial traffic from China to Nepal was rerouted through Kyirong-Rasuwa in order to alleviate the even greater economic pressures caused by trade suspensions.

Connecting Kodari with Kathmandu, and built with Chinese capital, engineering, and labor, Nepal's Arniko-Friendship Highway represents one of Nepal's earliest engagements with modernization through infrastructure development. The Arniko Highway is in many ways an extension of Chinese Highway G318, which itself runs nearly 5,400 kilometers from Shanghai to Lhasa and then onward to the China-Nepal border at Zhangmu. Completed in the 1960s, the Arniko highway was until 2014 the only motor road connecting Nepal with China. A critical artery for Nepali trade imports and international tourism, the Arniko Highway also assumes a significant place in the Chinese international development imaginary. This psychology of socialist labor and state building—in both China and Nepal—is vividly displayed in Zhangmu's martyrs' cemetery, a large and overgrown arboreal memorial located just above the winding and congested hillside bazaar (images 4 and 5).

The Arniko Highway's key function in the maintenance of Sino-Nepali trade is belied by its many environmental vulnerabilities. For example, a landslide along the road—not an infrequent occurrence—can and does at once suspend trade between Kathmandu and Lhasa and disrupt the near-constant flow of goods and people from China into Nepal. While an emergency of this type was experienced in 2014 as a result of the Sindupalchok landslides and subsequent lake formation and flood risk, a more severe crisis evolved in the wake of the 2015 Nepal earthquakes. Specifically, the May 12 earthquake and subsequent aftershocks—with an epicenter just 18 kilometers south of Kodari—severely damaged both the Nepali and Chinese border towns and, moreover, is believed to have damaged the Friendship Bridge so extensively that it remains closed to all but minor foot traffic. Although the Chinese military has overlain the damaged expanse with a temporary bridge, the scope of repairs is reportedly such that the existing bridge must be entirely dismantled before a suitable replacement can be constructed. This, of course, will prolong the closure and suspension of the Arniko Highway and associated trade traffic between Nepal and China. In response to this crisis, both Nepali and Chinese authorities point toward Kyirong-Rasuwa as the most expedient alternative route to resume trans-Himalayan transport and commerce.

This shift in orientation and mobility toward Kyirong-Rasuwa is further substantiated by reports from China that the town of Zhangmu has been almost entirely evacuated due to earthquake damage and ongoing risks. These reports indicate that both the Han Chinese and ethnic Tibetan residents of Zhangmu have been relocated to a settlement in Shigatse, Tibet's second-largest city and the prefecture capital that governs Zhangmu.<sup>2</sup> This new and semipermanent enclave of internally displaced people—known as the “Khasa Mall” in reference to the place of origin of the internally displaced citizens now relocated in Shigatse—suggests that damage to infrastructure in Zhangmu is so severe that Chinese authorities are unlikely to open the area for habitation or commerce anytime in the near future.<sup>3</sup> While tragic for Chinese and Tibetan populations, this closure and evacuation is difficult for Nepali borderland communities as well. This is particularly true for so-called Nepal-China border citizens (Shneiderman 2013), many of whose livelihoods are made by portering loads of goods across the Friendship Bridge and the China-Nepal border posts on a daily basis (images 12 and 13). For these populations, not only have homes been ruined and families broken, but business has evaporated and opportunities relocated. In contrast to this tenuous experience at Zhangmu-Kodari, the opposite is increasingly prevalent at Kyirong-Rasuwa, where infrastructure development and transborder trade continue to generate a boomtown environment.

### **Kyirong-Rasuwa**

On December 1, 2014, the Sino-Nepal border at Rasuwaghadhi was officially opened for commercial business. This auspicious event marked the first time since 1967 that Nepal had established a modern road link with a commercially open border along its northern boundary with China and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR). This highly publicized event drew dignitaries and security officials from both sides of the border. Inside brand-new immigrations and customs offices just days before the border opening, Nepal's chief customs officer displayed the fifteen-day entrance visa that is now available at the border for incoming Chinese tourists. Outside, a line of trucks was unloaded by dozens of Nepali porters as Chinese tourists came and went. The area seemed poised to become a new power corridor. Five months later, the entire site and an estimated thirty-five Nepali and Chinese workers were buried by a massive landslide triggered by the 7.8-magnitude earthquake of April 25.

Kyirong-Rasuwa is the most recent major border post to facilitate trade, tourism, and foreign aid between China and Nepal. Prematurely opened for traffic in August 2014 to relieve trade emergencies when monsoonal landslides in Sindupalchok blocked roads to Zhangmu-Kodari, it was just five months before the earthquakes that Kyirong-Rasuwa was officially inaugurated as Nepal and China's newest border crossing. Building on an illustrious history of national defense when the Rasuwaghadhi fort defended Nepal against Tibetan invasions in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, this route is projected to soon become the largest single corridor of transnational trade across the trans-Himalaya (images 17 and 18). Reflecting the previous construction of the Arniko Highway, this road expansion is scheduled to be made with Chinese capital, labor, and engineering and is slated to include a new, paved highway alongside the Trisuli River that is to be as much as 30 meters wide. In addition to these major infrastructural development plans, the Kyirong-Rasuwa road system also supported significant Chinese relief efforts in response to the 2015 Nepal earthquakes.

Chinese capital and construction firms have played a crucial role in the development of mutually constitutive transport-hydropower projects across Rasuwa. Between 2010 and 2012, Hongji Group, a Tibet-based construction firm backed by the Chinese government, led construction of the final 20-kilometer segment of the Kyirong-Rasuwa road (Tibet Tour International 2014). No small feat of engineering, this relatively short connection between Rasuwaghadhi and Syabrubesi in turn established a new and complete road linkage from the Chinese border to Kathmandu via the Rasuwa and Dolakha districts (images 25 and 26). Openly framed as a gift to the Nepalese government and the Nepali people of Rasuwa, this project also represents a further opening of economic possibilities between China and South Asia via a new trans-Himalayan trade route. Moreover, the Hongji-built road also increases access to new, major hydropower projects to Chinese contractors. These hydropower operations include the 111-megawatt Rasuwaghadhi Project as well as the planned 120-megawatt Rasuwa Bhotekoshi Project (image 23).

In addition to road and hydropower developments, the new Kyirong-Rasuwa road represents a significant point of economic inflection between China and Nepal. Modestly sized Nepali customs and border facilities at Rasuwaghadhi officially opened in late 2014, only to be destroyed by the 2015 earthquakes (images 28, 29, and 30). Building on larger development plans that include China's US\$200 million domestic dry port in Kyirong, pre-earthquake



commitments from Beijing included the finance and construction of a second major dry port and enhanced customs facilities for the Government of Nepal in Timure (Cowan 2013). While it remains uncertain to what extent the Rasuwaghadi border post will be rebuilt, rather than relocated, clearing and ground leveling has now begun for the development of this port at Timure. Meanwhile, the “Sky Train” that famously facilitated the territorialization of Tibet is currently being extended across the Tibetan Plateau from Shigatse through Lhatse and onward to Kyirong toward Rasuwaghadi.<sup>4</sup> To advance this project and further accelerate the production of a new trans-Himalayan “power corridor,” China has asked the Government of Nepal to initiate surveys to extend the railway into Nepal.

Supported by massive flows of Chinese capital, the rate of change to everyday life along the road in Rasuwa has intensified significantly with this scalar expansion of international infrastructure development. At the local level, in a borderland space historically characterized as “peripheral” and “backward” and dubiously marked by an absence of infrastructure and the state, the production of a new power corridor presents sweeping implications for both the indigenous and exiled populations that call Rasuwa home (images 19 and 20). In Timure and Ghattekhola, two culturally Tibetan trading settlements located just several kilometers from the China-Nepal border, spaces long considered “remote” are today hubs of economic activity characterized by the alienating experiences of “uneven development” (Smith 2008). Long accessible only via footpath and engaged with both Tibet and lowland Nepal via seasonal trade and regional kinship networks, these places are now peopled by an amalgam of development constituents: transport and trade entrepreneurs from Kathmandu; newly arrived Nepali immigration and customs officers; security forces from the Nepal Army and the People’s Armed Police Force; hundreds of Chinese and Nepali laborers building the Rasuwaghadi Hydropower Project; high caste government officials and surveyors arbitrating land disputes; recurrent waves of contractors and subcontractors; Western tourist groups; and a colorful assortment of in-migrants from southern Nepal seeking employment along these frontiers (images 21, 22, and 24).

In early May 2015, Chinese earthquake relief operations were already hard at work in Rasuwa. At the time of the second major earthquake on May 12, the specialized Road Clearance Division of the Chinese Armed Police Force (similar to another team deployed in Sindupalchok) was working to clear the Kyirong-Rasuwa road, excavate Nepalese border facilities, and exhume bodies at Rasuwaghadi. The workforce of the Chinese hydropower contractor building the

Rasuwaghadi Hydropower Project had been evacuated and the border was closed, but Chinese authorities were strongly present. The Chinese road team had already cleared several landslides along the 30 kilometers of road from Kyirong on the Tibet side, while the Nepalese authorities were still constrained from below, awaiting the arrival of Chinese assistance. According to local observations, by mid-May, Chinese road teams were operating twenty-three earth-moving machines across Nepal and Chinese helicopters were flying sorties overhead on a daily basis (image 27). Symbols of assistance, competence, and power, these most conspicuous convoys of Chinese equipment dwarfed the smaller machines deployed from the Nepal side. These material representations of Chinese aid continue to demonstrate the expanding role of Beijing's military and infrastructure services to Nepal. Of course, the unprecedented scale of Chinese assistance did not go unnoticed in Delhi. With Sino-Nepal relations riding high in the wake of the earthquakes, Beijing continues to assist with Nepalese state making—opening roads, facilitating trade, and training emergency and military units—to advance the position of Nepal as a regional trade partner and strategic ally.

### **Tibet-Mustang**

Neychung-Likse, over the Kora La pass, is one of the oldest formal border crossings in the Tibet-Himalaya region and for centuries served as the primary route for the trans-Himalayan salt trade (images 34 and 35). Closed to transborder traffic in the 1960s as a result of Tibetan guerrilla resistance operations based in Mustang, the border has become increasingly active following the construction of an international motor road in the early 2000s. Although Chinese authorities fenced the border in 1999 (image 36), after the seventeenth Gyalwa Karmapa's flight into exile from Tibet to India via Mustang<sup>5</sup>, the crossing at the Kora La is currently opened just twice a year for semi-annual trade fairs (*tsongra*) held in the TAR for Nepali and Tibetan merchants (image 37). Belying this mixed legacy, however, new Nepali customs houses, immigration facilities, and police stations are now being planned at the border to facilitate new levels of international trade and tourism between Tibet and Mustang and, more broadly, between China and Nepal (image 38).

Road projects in Mustang bridge local, national, and regional scales, and four dimensions of the transborder road construction process bear close attention: location, production, connection, and circulation. Despite Mustang's central location on one the most important trade

routes between Tibet and Nepal, and between China and India more broadly, relatively modern vehicular roads are extremely new to Mustang. For decades, residents and leaders from Mustang appealed to the Nepali government to build the district a road, to better connect their communities with the rest of the country and to facilitate improved access to commerce, education, medicine, and more, but the road was long promised but never delivered. Eventually, Mustang's communities took matters into their own hands, constructing a road between the capital, Lo Monthang, and the Nepal-China border at the Kora La in the early 2000s. Although many informants report that this was a local, grassroots effort, others indicate that financial support came from the Government of Nepal, international donors (such as the Asian Development Bank), and even the PRC. Regardless of the financier, it is telling that the first road to and from Mustang connected the district not with someplace else in central Nepal, but instead with China, via southern Tibet. As a result of this project and the expedience of motorized traffic, systems and scales of trade between Mustang and Tibet quickly began to change (image 33).

More recently, the Mustang district has also been connected with central Nepal via a new network of roads that link Lo Monthang with the district capital of Jomsom as well as Jomsom with the large central cities of Beni and Pokhara (image 31). While this road network between Lo Monthang and Pokhara remains punctuated by broken sections due to monsoonal landslides, missing bridges, and general obstacles to maintenance (image 32), it is now possible for both people and goods to make the trip in just two days—a dramatic acceleration over the traditional two-week journey by horse and foot. This new speed and course of travel has in turn generated a new current of commodity flows into Mustang, particularly evidenced by reductions in the travel times and concomitant increases in trade volumes. Rather than a fortnight trip by mule to carry rice from central Nepal to northern Mustang, it is now possible—and far quicker and cheaper—to transport such foodstuffs by truck. Moreover, it is not only Nepali goods that now make this trip but major quantities of Chinese things as well: factory-made carpets and teacups, plastic shoes and electric appliances. With huge amounts of highly affordable Chinese goods following these different trajectories—both straight down from Tibet and up from Pokhara—the mountain-region marketplaces and domestic spaces of Mustang are increasingly characterized by the traditional presence of Tibetan things packaged and consumed in a new modern form.

For decades, conversations have circulated around the development of the Tibet-Mustang road as a major route for trade and tourism between China and Nepal. In addition to its potential

as a prime corridor for the delivery of Chinese and Tibetan goods to the Nepali marketplace, travel through Mustang has long been part of the trans-Himalayan tourist imaginary. Particularly for Hindu pilgrims of Nepali and Indian descent, Mustang provides the most direct and propitious avenue for *yatra* (Hindu pilgrimage) to the major destinations of Muktinath (in Nepal) and Mount Kailash (in Tibet) via Mustang's remote sacred lake, Damodharkunda. In order to facilitate the growth of tourist and trade traffic through the district, new plans for border institutions have evolved, including expanded customs and quarantine facilities, as well as administrative immigration desks for international travelers. In view of these objectives, a preliminary Nepali feasibility study commenced in November 2015 and brought members of the Nepali Parliament, local Mustangi leaders, and Kathmandu-based development contractors to the Kora La border crossing. In addition to this high-level political visit, the Annapurna Conservation Area Program (ACAP) initiated an Environmental Impact Assessment to evaluate how major infrastructure development will affect Mustang's highly fragile ecosystem and cultural environment. Both optimistic support and grave opposition have defined the public response to the Tibet-Mustang road expansion. Ultimately, while it remains doubtful that the project will be anything less than a long, slow, and highly politicized construction process, it appears increasingly likely that the Likse-Neychung border is on track for major change (images 39 and 40).

The Tibet-Mustang road has also facilitated the delivery of Chinese earthquake aid to Mustang. Administered by the Chinese embassy in Kathmandu in concert with Tibetan and Chinese officials based in Likse, relief initiatives have been characterized by a new round of in-kind donations to Mustang comprising food staples, construction materials, and portable solar units. It is important to note that the provisions of this new program closely resemble those provided to Nepal's northern borderland districts by a recently completed Chinese five-year food aid plan. Moreover, this post-earthquake Chinese relief to Mustang also follows immediately upon the development of a major Chinese-funded solar power installation that opened in Lo Monthang in September 2015. Because the Tibet-Mustang road increasingly serves as a key vector for Chinese engagement in Mustang, and because Mustang is a culturally Tibetan region with several Tibetan exile communities, recent Chinese activities in Mustang continue to ask provocative questions about the complex politics of aid, identity, and mobility across the trans-Himalaya.

## Conclusion

In addition to a critical need for more functional road networks across Nepal, the 2015 earthquakes underscored the need for and motivated the development of additional transport corridors between China and Nepal. Particularly with the ongoing closure of the Zhangmu-Kodari border and Friendship Bridge, this emphasis on infrastructure development is especially evident in Rasuwa and Mustang. As discussed above, road expansion in both Rasuwa and Mustang is a controversial topic that continues to divide local constituents—increasingly known as “project-affected people,” according to the colloquial discourse of development in Nepal today—and more distant advocates and detractors in Kathmandu. The prospects for trade throughout and associated revenue generation is in turn offset by local concerns over access, pollution, crime, and environmental degradation. In spite of the polarizing effects of support and opposition, however, such road developments are fundamental to larger narratives of Nepali state making through the development (*bikas*) of both infrastructure and people (Pigg 1992). Built on transborder infrastructure and international commerce, it is toward this larger project of state formation that we can expect China to play an increasingly active and critical role in coming years throughout Nepal and more broadly across South Asia.

*Galen Murton is a Ph.D. candidate in geography at the University of Colorado Boulder. Research funding for this photo essay was provided by the Social Science Research Council (Andrew Mellon Foundation), the Fulbright-Hays program (U.S. Department of Education), the Natural Hazards Center at the University of Colorado, and the Graduate School at the University of Colorado. The author would like to thank his excellent research assistants and friends in Kodari, Rasuwa, and Mustang for support on this project, and especially Prasiit Sthapit for the use of image 27 and Yangjin Bista for image 37.*

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## Notes

- 1 The Madhesi population resides primarily across Nepal’s eastern and central Terai region, along Nepal’s southern border with India. In August 2015, widespread protests and subsequent violence and border blockades broke out in Madhesi regions as a result of opposition to the newly promulgated Nepali constitution, which marginalized Madhesi claims and rights to citizenship. For more information, see recent Human Rights Watch (2015).
- 2 Personal email communication with Sam Cowan, January 29, 2016.
- 3 Personal email communication with Sam Cowan, January 29, 2016.

- 4 The Qinghai-Tibet railway, or China's "Sky Train," opened in 2006 to connect mainland China with central Tibet. The train has now been extended beyond Tibet's second-largest city, Shigatse, and will soon reach the large town of Lhatse in southern Tibet. Widespread conversations and media reports in both Kathmandu and Kyirong predict that the train will reach the China-Nepal border at Kyirong-Rasuwa within two years. For more information on China's development of the train to Tibet and ongoing development projects across the Tibetan Plateau, see Lustgarten (2008) as well as "Taming the West" (2014).
- 5 His Holiness the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa is one of the Tibetan Buddhist world's most revered and celebrated spiritual leaders. Having fled Tsurpu monastery in Central Tibet in late 1999 for exile in Dharamsala, India, H. H. Karmapa has increasingly assumed a larger political presence in the Tibetan exile community. In contrast to the great celebrations of his arrival in India, his escape from Tibet was a highly embarrassing event for the Chinese Communist Party. For more information on H. H. Karmapa's flight into exile, see Kagyu Office (2000) and Crossette (2000).

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