

NEPALESE TRADERS IN LHASA

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For a long time Dr Jest has been interested in the history of Newar merchants trading in Tibet, as can be seen, for instance, in his paper "The Newar Merchant Community in Tibet: An Interface of Newar and Tibetan Cultures. A Century of Transhimalayan Trade and Recent Developments", published in 1993 in Paris (CNRS Editions) in *Nepal, Past and Present : Proceedings of the Franco-German Conference, Arc-et-Senans, June 1990* (Ed. G. Toffin). The same text has been partly re-published in French, in *Garuda* (Paris), n° 50, 1998. It primarily deals with the Newar traders who had settled in Kyirong and Kuti; many of them left Tibet and returned home in 1960-61. Some of them later on resettled their trade in Tibet in the 1980s.

An article by Long Xijiang, "Investigating the History of Nepalese Traders in Lhasa", was published in 1993 in *Zhongguo Zang xue* (Chinese Journal of Tibetology), edited by the Chinese Center of Tibetology, n° 3, pp. 41-51. Although the Chinese author of this article never acknowledges these Nepalese as being Newar, using only the word meaning "Nepalese" (i.e., Nepalese citizens), there is little doubt that all of them, or nearly all of them, are Newar.

Besides briefly summarizing the history of these Nepalese merchants in Lhasa, whose vicissitudes were already known from the beginning to the 1930s, this article also provides other more recent and less well-known information on two periods, viz. World War II, which seems to have been a golden age for Nepalese traders in Lhasa (as all

Chinese seaports and coastlines were sealed off by the Japanese who also controlled the Burma road, Nepalese traders greatly profited from the substantial increase in trade between India and China through Tibet). In the second period, the troubled years from 1959 through 1961, many Nepalese traders had to leave Tibet because of the Tibetan insurrection and its suppression by the Chinese.

Information and data published in Long's article were primarily extracted from a survey initiated in 1961 by the Survey Group of the Lhasa Working Committee; chief sources were the Archives Department in Lhasa, and the memories and testimonies of some Nepalese traders. The survey includes a more detailed inquiry on the trade and business between 1945 and 1961 of four Nepalese firms considered to

be the most important and representative of the Nepalese community in Lhasa.

According to Long Xijiang, many of the data in his article were published for the first time.

Here are some of these data:

Although before 1959 there were one hundred or so Nepalese businesses in Lhasa, in 1961, only 74 were left with a total of 259 people.

It should be noted that statistics distinguish two categories of Nepalese traders (both categories are registered as "foreign"): the pure Nepalese and the "Kasarer", i.e., the Khaccara, the offspring of mixed Nepalese-Tibetan marriages (most often a Nepalese father and Tibetan mother).

Among the 74 businesses in 1961:

34 firms were owned by pure Nepalese, with a total of 90 people, employing 11 Chinese (most probably local Tibetans) and

40 were Khaccara, with a total number of 169 people, employing 5 Chinese.

44 businesses (26 pure Nepalese and 18 Khaccara) sell all kinds of merchandise.

18 (7 pure Nepalese and 11 Khaccara) sell miscellaneous household goods.

5 (Khaccara) sell food and drinks.

1 (pure Nepalese) sells herbs.

6 (Khaccara) sell farm animals, gold and silver.

61 have their shops in town.



Spanning the Bhote Kosi River in a deep valley in Kodari, the Friendship Bridge marks the border between Nepal and Tibet. The "Arniko Highway", the motor route connecting Kathmandu and Lhasa since 1967, crosses the bridge; it carries most of the trade between the two countries.

9 go from place to place.
4 are street vendors.

59 are retailers.
13 had both wholesale and retail trade.
2 were wholesale dealers only.

Division of the assets of the 74 firms in 1961:

Total amount of assets: 2,675,000 yuan
(2,449,000, or 92 %, for pure Nepalese, and
226,000, or 8 %, for Khaccara)

out of which:

Fixed assets: 278,000 yuan
(191,000, or 68 %, for pure Nepalese, and
86,000, or 32 %, for Khaccara)

Floating capital: 2,397,000 yuan
(2,257,000, or 94 %, for pure Nepalese, and
139,000, or 6 %, for Khaccara).

Thirty-two of the 74 businesses (27 pure Nepalese and only 5 Khaccara) each had a capital amounting to more than 10,000 yuan; errors excepted, it seems that the four most important Nepalese traders in Lhasa had among themselves a capital amounting to 1,445,000 yuan, i.e., as much as, and even a little more than the 70 other firms altogether.

Turn-over data:

For Nepalese traders in Lhasa as a whole, the difference between 1960 and 1961 is significant:

In 1960, the global turn-over amounted to 2,744,000 yuan (2,573,000, or 93 %, for pure Nepalese and 171,000, or 7 %, for the Khaccara).

In 1961, the global turn-over amounted to 531,000 yuan (464,000, or 87 %, for pure Nepalese and 67,000, or 13 % for Khaccara).

The survey of commercial activities from 1945 to 1961 of the four firms selected as the most important and representative takes into account: the nature of the business, trading practices, the amount, origin and structure of their capital, their assets and profits; it sheds light on the business connections of the Nepalese traders between Nepal, Tibet, Calcutta and Kalimpong and on the multiple aspects (agricultural, industrial and commercial) of their fortunes in Tibet and outside of Tibet. As may be expected, the goods most often exchanged were wool, gold, musk, herbs, yak tails, hides and skins, silver coined or in ingots, cloth, sugar, chillies, tobacco, tea, rice, leather shoes, wrist-watches and fountain-pens, etc.

This article by Long Xijian, of which only a few lines have been translated here, may complement and possibly show discrepancies with Corneille Jest's own research on the subject. It also provides official statistical data and shows how the Chinese view these foreign traders in Tibet. Considering the situation in 1993 ("Opening and reform" policy, the development of border trade along all Chinese borders), it may not be acci-

idental that a 1961 survey on Nepalese traders in Lhasa was published just at that time in an academic Chinese journal.