

D. P. Choudhury **Trade and Politics in the Himalaya-Karakoram Borderlands** (London, Sangam Books, 1996), 130pp., £ 15.95.

The Great Game between Great Britain and Russia created the external boundaries of South Asia as we know them until today. In order to protect the "Jewel of the Crown" of the British Empire a mixed strategy was applied to reach the target of "pacifying" the "mountain tribes" and demarcating borders. Buffer states were forcefully established, indirect rule introduced into principalities and a commercial and economic policy conceptualized for minimizing administrative costs and maximizing territorial control and profits from trade. Deba Prosud Choudhury presents us with a survey of this interrelationship of trade and politics for the northern rim of South Asia during the period from 1767 to 1898.

His study begins with the first British expedition to Nepal which finally led to the peace treaty of Sagauli (1816) and the neutralization and downsizing of Nepal's territory. Following this case the course is drawn in a chronological order towards the Western Himalayas and the Karakoram. The objectives of trans-montane trade with the Silk route oases in Eastern Turkestan (nowadays Xinjiang), competition with Russia about trade and relationships with local rulers, experiences with a power vacuum due to Chinese inability to execute control in Kashgar, and the difficulties of traffic and security within the mountain belt are the topics of two chapters devoted to these exchange relations which are followed by a separate elaboration on the borders which have been created in this region. The final two chapters focus on the Eastern Himalayas and reveal British policies towards Bhutan and Sikkim. The search for a proper and commercially viable trade route to Tibet is described up to the period immediately prior to Lord Curzon's viceroyship and his forward policy which culminated in the Lhasa expedition of 1904. Finally the Great Game is terminated after the signing of the so-called "Asia Convention" between Russia and Great Britain in 1907 and the shape of trade and politics becomes different.

The author succeeds in his narrative to draw the reader's awareness to the incorporation of local decision making and regional policies into a wider network of international relations. The British strategy in searching for viable trans-montane trade routes and optimizing the administrative costs of territorial domination is presented for the whole mountain range in a specific period. Thus the trickle-down effects of an overall imperial design become visible in a local context. That is the main asset of this undertaking.

Nevertheless this is not the first investigation into trade relations and political endeavours during the Great Game. Numerous publications are addressing this topic and have been released over quite a period of time. Many present more detailed materials, trade statistics and archival findings. The advantage of Deba Prosud Choudhury's little book is that a reader interested in a general overview about this period and this regional topic will find a comprehensive introduction and guidance to the source material from the British perspective including some archival evidence. In the context of recent discussions about the "clash of civilizations" (Samuel Huntington 1993, 1996) it becomes again important to draw the attention towards the historical dimension and imperial character of trade and politics in High Asia.

Hermann J. Kreutzmann  
*University of Erlangen-Nuremberg*