

2002

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## Recommended Citation

Mikesell, Stephen L. (2002) "The Legacy of John Hitchcock's Cultural Ecology in the Anthropology of the Himalayas," *Himalaya, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*: Vol. 22: No. 1, Article 5.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol22/iss1/5>

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# *The Legacy of John Hitchcock's Cultural Ecology in the Anthropology of the Himalayas*

Stephen L. Mikesell

## ABSTRACT

John Hitchcock undertook the earliest application of Julian Steward's cultural ecological approach in the Nepal Himalaya. Based on Marx, cultural ecology introduced a sense of a necessary relationship between the material environment and the technological, social and ideological aspects of human culture which arrange themselves as a collection of forces, both creating humans and at hand for them to create. Many elements of this perspective have been grappled with in the various avenues of thought pursued by different anthropologists. Except where anthropologists take culture as their starting-point, Marx took life and thus the needs of life, defined historically, with their imperative of engaging with the environment to create culture and its products, as his starting point. Steward put this engagement with the environment at the center of study and acknowledged its necessary relationship to other aspects of human existence. He diverged from Marx only in the dialectical, simultaneous character of the relationship of the various elements.

Although Hitchcock found his initial goal of holding cultural variables constant in order to isolate the effects of adaptation to the environment almost impossible, given the circumstances of the Himalayas he did discover that the exigencies of adaptation to the environment seem to override cultural variables of different groups within the same "ecozone." He proposed the thesis that Hindu plains culture could only extend as far as the limits of the rice growing culture due to its various proscriptions and its requirement for surplus production necessary for supporting an elite class. In the lowlands the high productivity of paddy agriculture and relative scarcity of land caused land to become a controlling factor, whereas in the hills ample availability of land, the extreme labor-absorbing, dispersed character of subsistence activities which related status to access to pastureland rather than arable land, kept land from becoming the primary factor in the control of labor. Finally, where the plains culture has spread into the Nepal hills, it could never assert itself to the extent found in the neighboring Kumaon region of India due to the preexisting institutions the Khas kingdom that had once existed. These institutions forced the plains culture to accept the terms of the hill peoples.

## Introduction

John Hitchcock initiated his career using a cultural ecological approach, which he noted was in the tradition of Karl Marx, Julian Steward and Marvin Harris (1966). Over the course of eight years this led to at least five publications and papers comparatively studying Tibeto-Burman groups in western Nepal. Imbued by his modest persona and humility, both characteristics of good science and scholarship, Hitchcock's writing on this subject has not had the influence it deserves. Part of the problem, perhaps, is his clear and simple style and lack of catchy words or phrases, something that does not necessarily help you float to the top in academia.

## Origins of cultural ecological theory in Marx

First, a note about the tradition in which Hitchcock worked. In a letter which Hitchcock's colleague Aidan Southall claimed to have in his possession (personal communication), Julian Steward attributed his cultural ecological approach to Marx, a tradition Hitchcock also acknowledged. But due to the nature of the times, Steward was unable to safely make this connection explicit in his writings. Key to Marx is his dialectical and materialist approach. Starting from the standpoint of humans as producers of their life through creative engagement with the world, Marx saw humans as both the product of their environment and the producers of it, something that is coming home to us with a vengeance in this age when we are refashioning,

devastatingly and irreparably, not just particular localities but our entire biosphere and all its local cultures. As producers of our environment, each generation leaves a legacy to the next generation in the form of an earth that is refashioned, of the technology that we interact with it, of the social relations in which we organize ourselves (i.e., the forms of the family or the way that work is organized in the fields or on the factory floor), and the knowledge, ideas and symbolic assemblages that accompany these ways of doing things. Marx saw these different aspects of human life existing together in historically-derived necessary relationships which served as forces through which humans project themselves into their world and into successive generations and which, in our mythology and histories, are projected into our past as well. As each generation finds itself the inheritors of the products of previous generations, these forces not only provide people with the means of life, they also take a life of their own to shape and determine the way people live. From the perspective of the individual, these forces seem to exist independently from humans, and as societies become larger and more centralized, they seem to stand more and more against the individual.

Due to Marx's identification of the power that these forces have over human life, he is often accused of being a historical determinist. Indeed many of his epigones extracted extremely rigid periodizations and formulas for human development from Marx and created a Marxist hagiography to legitimize and sanctify them, particularly when they wanted to consolidate or hold onto state power, party position, set up a priesthood of intelligentsia, and generally undermine democracy. Marx in contrast positioned human and natural creativity prior to everything else, and he saw humans as not merely receiving the world but creating it. For example, rather than subordinate individuals to politics, as we find for example in today's formal democracies, he encouraged individuals to become fully political. For him, history is determinate only as long as it is not reflected upon, understood and confronted. His goal was to understand the seemingly determinate features in human life as products of human activity, thereby leading to a means of transcending them. Currently we see this same attempt to impose a new form of universal materialist determinism in the form of market ideology, particularly of globalization with their brays of TINA, or "There is No Alternative," even while these same ideologues of the market castigate Marx for being a determinist.

### **Cultural ecology's divergence from the culture concept**

As an anthropologist, Julian Steward took culture, not human activity, as his starting point. The culture concept encompasses all the elements identified by Marx: technology, social relations with their roles and statuses, and knowledge and ideas. The necessary relationship between these elements had been identified in the school of thought called

functionalism.<sup>1</sup> The idea that these elements appear as a collection of forces arrayed against the individual has its analogy in Kroeber's identification of culture as being "super-organic" in which culture is seen as taking an existence outside of any individual human action. Unlike Marx, however, the culture concept starts with culture as a given and does not necessarily make its production a problem. For functionalism, the problem was to demonstrate how all the elements of culture have an internal consistency and integrity, while for Kroeber it was to show how the individual behavior is shaped by an overarching culture. For Marx, a central problem was to show how culture was a product of human activity and interests and, as such, need not be taken as a given. Production can be seen as giving precedence to elements of culture directly tied up with supplying human material needs necessary for people to live, according to the nature of life in the particular culture.<sup>2</sup>

Julian Steward felt that the culture concept failed to give priority to the human engagement of nature which Marx saw as central to the human metabolic process (as mediated through technology, relations and ideas). He could not use Marx's categories, so to get to the same thing he emphasized cultural aspects in a necessary relationship to the environment as analytically prior to other elements of culture. To bring out this relationship, Steward set up a hierarchy of categories, starting with a cultural core, which encompasses all those aspects of culture which play a necessary role in people's direct interaction with their natural environment, and then the secondary traits which were shaped by this

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<sup>1</sup> The functionalist perspective takes the position that every observed aspect of culture has a necessary functional relationship with the culture as a whole. Differing from Marx's sense of historical necessity, this is a purely empirically defined sense of necessity—that reality is in what is observed—and though it recognized culture as fully human created, it too easily took the observed culture as a given. Thus, for example, much of anthropological writings have too easily described a world that had been conquered and colonized by European armies, merchants, planters and bankers as consisting of a collection of small, integrated and autonomous social units that could be fully understood on their own terms.

<sup>2</sup> Marx differs from Kroeber, among other things, in that Kroeber started with facts and artifacts, that is, culture empirically perceived, while he (Marx) started from the active individual as historical being, that is, culture-creator. This led Marx to insert subjectivity extending from individuals' activity, and thus understandable historically, whereas Kroeber's subjectivity led back to a largely ahistorical empirically apprehended culture. Regarding the concept of individual here, since individuals are themselves products of human activity, they are not the isolated, free individual such as found in contemporary microeconomic thought—itsself derived from the dominant cultural representation of Western society—but social individuals. As such, they define themselves socially, as class and cultural beings, through the course of their own activity.

core but which were not necessary to it. Marvin Harris took this further to identify an “infrastructure” of technology and population, “structure” of human social relations, and “superstructure” of ideas, religion and law.<sup>3</sup> Thus Steward, and to a much greater extent Harris, compartmentalized the world into categories of things and ideas, whereas Marx, with his dialectical view of the world, saw these different categories as having essential relations with each other, fully grasped in terms of a simultaneous existence. Luckily, Hitchcock kept his analysis concrete, mentioning “culture core” and possibly “infrastructure” only once or twice in all his writings and thereby staying away from turning his study into an analysis of terms instead of people.

### Differences Between Marx and Cultural Ecology

There are some ways that neither Hitchcock, nor for that matter Steward and Harris, carried their analysis as far as Marx. For example, Hitchcock sometimes, and Harris explicitly, presented population growth as an independent variable, whereas Marx comprehended reproduction dialectically as simultaneously “new production”,<sup>4</sup> and thus population growth, itself a result of production—i.e., human cultural activity or labor—was always something that had to be explained. Although human life and labor were the necessary starting points for the study of humans, he never reduced these into a mere biological existence or even a generalized conception of life or production.<sup>5</sup> He saw life as always contingent on all the particular conditions that any group of humans had put themselves into through their previous accumulated creative activity and interactions or relationships engaged both with other humans and with nature.

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<sup>3</sup> These terms are also derived directly from Marx who as far as I have found used them in only one place in his writings, in a preface to another work, as a kind of simplified shorthand for the character of human relationships. These terms by no means capture the essence of Marx’s understanding, and it is a misuse of Marx’s writings, which treated the relationships as much more dynamic and complex, to construct a theory based on them.

<sup>4</sup> “The object of all these communities is preservation, i.e. *the reproduction of their individual members as proprietors, i.e. in the same objective mode of existence, which also constitutes the community itself. But this reproduction is at the same time necessarily new production and the destruction of the old form*” (Marx 1986:417).

<sup>5</sup> “When we speak of production, we always have in mind production at a definite stage of social development, production by social individuals. . . . If there is no production in general, there is also no general production. Production is always a *particular* branch of production—e.g., agriculture, cattle-breeding, manufacture, etc.—or it is the *totality* [of production]. . . . Finally, production is not only particular production, but it is invariably a definite social body, a social subject, that is active in a wider or narrower totality of branches of production” (Marx 1986:23–4).

Cultural ecology has also picked up some unfortunate terms from biological ecology which frame the relation of humans to the environment as more determinant and less dialectical than Marx. “Adaptation” and “niche” in particular imply that the natural environment is simply a given which requires organisms to shape themselves to interact with it and fit into predetermined slots provided by it. The result is that some of the cultural ecological studies in the Himalaya have attempted to show simply how a village’s specific environmental situation has determined its way of life and culture. Although this paradigm is based on biological categories, many biologists (Levins and Lewontin 1985; Lewontin 1991) now realize that every aspect of our environment—the atmosphere, topsoil, forests, field and the ocean—was fashioned by preceding forms of life. Forms of life, though they arose as adaptations to the conditions given to them, have themselves gradually changed the world, requiring that they either remanufacture themselves or give way to new forms of life. Through living, we and all organisms change the conditions of life. What we call nature is a product of life, including humans, just as much as it has provided a workshop and means for all the various forms of life. And as soon as humans engage with nature in their activity and thought, nature becomes, in Marx’s words, “humanized” and can no longer be seen as an independent variable which can be called upon to explain things in its own terms outside of human history and production.<sup>6</sup>

### Hitchcock’s Engagement with Cultural Ecology

Hitchcock’s work does not get stuck in determinism or reductionism, in part because he did not focus on one village but took a comparative approach between not just two villages but between two cultures within each of these two villages. This allowed him to start to perceive not only how culture was shaped by the physical environment in different ways but also that people interact with the environment differently depending upon their historical origins. Furthermore, he shows that the ways that different cultures come into contact and interact are themselves shaped by both these physical environment and historical origins. Hitchcock does not seem to have explicitly laid out how he used cultural ecological theory, yet he was very much aware of the complex, two-way nature of human interaction with the environment, and he made it a centerpiece of his work.

Hitchcock had originally hoped to ask what happened to a culture that adapted to different environments if tradition and the effects of diffusion were held constant. This question came from Marshall Sahlins’s *Social Stratification in Polynesia* (1970), in which Sahlins had asked what would happen when the same group settled on islands having dif-

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<sup>6</sup> A good recent example of this is Stephen Pyne’s (1990) argument that the entire planet in the preindustrial period had already been shaped by humans through the use of fire.

ferent environments. Hitchcock aimed to select two villages occupied by the same culture group so as to be able to hold cultural variables constant while comparing the effects of their adaptation to the environment on their culture (1966, 1970). He thought Nepal would be a good place for such a study because the country offered a gradient of ecological zones, from a subtropical environment in the lowlands on the southern Indian border to alpine arctic environment in the Himalaya heights in the northern regions of the country.<sup>7</sup> He expected the mountains furthermore to act as barriers to outside influence which would allow the hill people to reshape and stamp what outside influence did occur according to their own needs and character (1966:22–23). Hitchcock chose to study a Tibeto-Burman linguistic group because these peoples are supposed to have come into Nepal prior to either the spread of Buddhism to Tibet or the entry of Hinduism into Nepal, which he thought would allow him to study the effect of the introduction of Hinduism on these people in different locations.

Although Hitchcock had originally planned to work among the Gurung peoples, he followed a suggestion from Fürer-Haimondorf to study Magars, because Fürer-Haimondorf thought that the long history of the Magar-speaking peoples in both the lowlands and highlands would make for a better comparative study of the effects of different environmental variables. After completing the study of the lowland group documented in his book *The Magars of Banyon Hill*, Hitchcock encountered great difficulty in his search for a highland group that would meet all the control specifications. This tale, related in Spindler's collection of essays on fieldwork and theory (Hitchcock 1970), is a wonderful study of how the real world does not fit our carefully laid out research plans. Hitchcock finally did find a highland village named Monal in a valley on the flank of Mt. Dhaulagiri.

One problem with establishing controls in the Himalaya is that mountains do not isolate people to the same extent as the vast expanses of water between Polynesian islands, which according to genetic and linguistic studies were settled basically by a small group of people, if not by one migration. In Nepal, as Hitchcock points out, rivers and valleys serve as highways and by-ways into the mountains for wave after wave of immigrants so that different populations in Nepal are overlaid with different migrations, each of which might leave its own residue, for example, in different clans or strata. There is furthermore no way to establish that different populations within the same social group do not have different social origins (e.g., pastoralists vs. sedentary peoples) which would predispose them to settle in different

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<sup>7</sup>These ecozones correspond to what ecologists term "biomes", but from the standpoint of combinations of human cultural traits in adaptation to the particular climatic and physical environment rather than the combination of organisms and climatic and physical features.

areas rather than representing two different adaptations within the same group. Controlling for culture would have been difficult even under the best of conditions, but considering the dialectical nature of human interaction with the environment, even with the environment treated as an independent variable introduces difficulties. Hitchcock also indicated that Monal fell short of the original hopes for the project, not only because the people were not from the same culture group, but because environment overrode cultural variables. He ended up with the view that groups from different linguistic groups, tribes or cultures within the same ecozone have far more in common than those from the same linguistic groups in different ecozones. This is an interesting observation which could bring the notion of cultural or tribal group in the Himalaya into question, though he did not pursue it in his published work.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, Hitchcock's study ended up asking a somewhat different, and in my mind, just as interesting question. All of Hitchcock's cultural ecological works deal with the problem of the differing effect of Indian plains culture on the culture of Tibeto-Burman populations according to variables of environment, land, and the state. An important theme in the anthropology of India in his time was the concept of Hinduization, which dealt with how tribal populations were encompassed by Hinduism. Although I do not recall that he ever used this term—being that he tended to keep his terminology simple and concrete—he brought to task the notion that the process of Hinduization was a simply one of diffusion. He proposed that the spread of Indian plains culture into the Himalaya was related to a specific form of subsistence based on rice culture. He did not see that the Hinduization of Himalayan populations was inevitable, but rather that it was mediated by particular environmental and historical conditions. For me, this raises intriguing questions of the role of Brahmanic culture in spreading a specific form of domination into the Himalayas based on a particular form of landed estates which I have dealt with in an article of my own (Mikesell 1991).

### **Magars of Banyon Hill**

In one of the earliest of his cultural ecological works, *The Magars of Banyon Hill* (1966), Hitchcock deals solely with the lowland Magars. Observing that Nepal's rivers and valleys provided the pathways for Brahmanic penetration into the mountains, he uses as indices of Brahmanic influence the proximity and extent of interaction with Brahmins, the

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<sup>8</sup> Hitchcock's colleague, Aidan Southall (1970, 1988, 1996), did pursue this question in Uganda to argue that the whole notion of tribe defined in terms of language was a creation of the colonial imagination to frame African groups in terms of European statecraft for administrative purposes and had little to do with how people had actually organized themselves. Something similar could be the case for Nepal—see Mikesell (1999: 210n. 2) for discussion along these lines.

observance of Hindu ritual practices, and the social, economic, political and religious status of Brahmans in the society. According to these indices, the lowland Magars have been heavily influenced by the North Indian plains culture. But this is not without caveat. He goes on to demonstrate that the same mountains whose valleys have provided the avenues for Brahman penetration from the plains have also provided the barriers that have allowed even the most Hinduized Magars to reshape the plains culture according to their own needs and character. One whole chapter shows that the Brahman gods have been reshaped by the Magars to fit their own pattern of 'gustatory godlings'. And though the Banyon Hill Magars observe Hindu rituals and intensely interact with Brahmans in many spheres, when you get inside their houses, you find that their family is an amended version of the traditional Hindu family of the plains, with the traditional Hindu patterns only hinted at. The plains emphasis on the patriarchal extended family is mediated by a number of factors which make the Magar family tend towards a nuclear pattern which gives women a high value and a much more independent position, including control over property, various kinds of economic independence, and the right to return home or divorce and remarry. Hitchcock attributes the divergence of Magar families from their Hindu counterparts to several factors: the smaller size of the hill farms, less land pressure, less status competition and political jockeying, a pattern of a nuclear household, and marriage based on erotic and affectionate ties.

### **Comparison of Lowlands and Highlands**

Although Hitchcock initially presented the comparison of the lowland Magars to their highland counterparts as the primary aim of his Banyon Hill monograph, except for contrasting various traits such as forms of subsistence, Hindu influence, clan names and language, he left the full-blown analysis for later works. Two of these papers develop the question of why the Magars of the lowlands have been heavily influenced by Brahmanic culture while those of the highlands have not (Hitchcock 1973, 1974). These papers argue that the spread of plains culture accompanied the penetration of Brahmans into the hill communities. As Brahman ritual status and life ways depend upon a natural environment conducive to rice production, the presence and density of Brahmans depends on the area of land available for growing irrigated rice. This limited the penetration of Brahmans to the lower, rice-growing areas of Nepal.

The lowland communities exploited an area between 2,000 to 3,200 feet, providing the conditions for sedentary agriculture combined with stall-feeding of animals. The highland conditions in contrast allowed only wheat and barley production while providing ample high pasture for a semi-transhumant pastoral system based on a fixed village adjacent to agricultural fields, but with many of the members of the village constantly moving their sheep herds from pasture to pasture and between grain and potato fields in

altitudes ranging from 8,500 and 15,000 feet over the course of the year.

The lowlands not only supported a denser population, but the proximity of the fields to the village and presumably their greater productivity meant that land, not labor, was the limiting factor. By gaining control over land, richer villagers were able to extend control over the labor force of the village. Thus control over land, particularly the irrigated rice lands, became the basis for status differences in the society.

In the highlands, not only was the population less dense, but the large amount of time consumed in moving between fields, pastures and village meant that subsistence activities demanded a much larger amount of family members' time, making labor the main limiting factor in the highlands. Uncultivated land was still available so it was difficult to use control over land as a means to capture people's labor, since a landless family merely had to clear a new plot of land to gain access to land. Thus without a ready supply of surplus labor, people could only clear and farm as much land as their own family members could cultivate. Similarly, ample pasture land allowed the lineages that owned the land to rent out grazing rights in addition to their own herds. Thus status differences in the highland society related to differences in rights to pasture. Pasture rights in turn were based on clan membership, with clan members enjoying the fullest rights, followed by pasture renters, pasture sharers, and lastly herdsmen. The members of the lineages shared an intimate knowledge of every detail of the pastures, including a complex system of management and sanctions for the use of these pastures. These observations were significant because at this same time as Hitchcock was doing his study, the urban western-trained planners in the Nepal government had assumed that because the pastures were not permanently occupied they were not privately owned and were being freely exploited in the sense of tragedy of the commons, so it was the government's job to take over these lands and administer them according to western commercial land-management practices. Twenty years later Winrock International published a collection of studies that claimed to have rediscovered the same lineage-based property that Hitchcock had already identified and showed that the government management had disrupted their operation, leading to degradation of pastures and social and population dislocation. Regarding these pastures in particular, just before Hitchcock's study, Tony Hagen had assumed they were unoccupied because the herds were elsewhere at the time he observed them, and he advised the government that it could resettle Tibetan refugees in them. As a result, Hitchcock experienced a great deal of difficulty establishing rapport with the local people who were justifiably distrustful of western social scientists.

It was in the first of these two papers that Hitchcock related Hinduization and more generally stratification to greater population density and the production of surpluses.

The spread of Hindu culture is based on the ability of the society to produce enough beyond the needs of the direct producers to support Brahmin and other caste specialists. Hitchcock argues that in the lowlands, a more favorable climate and topography, exposure to sun, and better soils meant that the land can sustain paddy agriculture. The much more productive paddy agriculture can support these specialists, whereas in the highlands, with the greater absorption of labor into subsistence activities, the surpluses that can be separated from the producers is insufficient to support a separate class of non-producing specialists. While in the lowlands there are a good number of occupational specialists as well as Brahmans, in the highlands only blacksmiths are found in large numbers due to the need for production of implements for agricultural activities. As blacksmiths make up forty percent of the highland population, only a small proportion of them actually engage in their specialty. Most make a living by farming the available land in the region. Few Brahmans, on the other hand, are found beyond the rice growing regions for the reason of the lack of surplus, plus the auspiciousness of rice in the Hindu worldview, the requirement of using rice in Vedic ritual and the proscription of Brahmans from plowing their own fields. (Hitchcock called all the specialists *jajmans*, but in many regards in Nepal, from what I understand, the Brahman's patron is called *jajman* whereas the untouchables' patron is called *bista*.)

In the lowlands, not only do the Brahmans own all the paddy land, every Brahman family has at least some paddy of their own. Greater population density in the lowlands and less access to land for Magars and low caste families insures that there is plenty of labor to work on the land from among these groups. The Brahmans collect surplus from the land by renting it out, and the accumulated surplus is used to extend more credit to Magar and other families. Thus the Brahmans, and from my own work, merchants, are the main credit sources in the lowland regions.<sup>9</sup> Foreclosure on unpaid loans shifts more land into their hands and further extends their control over land and people. In the highlands where Hitchcock documented less inequality and found no landlord caste, people obtain credit through rotating credit associations which don't exist in the lowlands. Looking at it from another way, since the pastures are owned collectively by the lineages and there was ample forest land accessible for cultivation, land could not serve as collateral for loans because it could not be used as a means of controlling people. Rotating credit associations provided guaran-

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<sup>9</sup> Merchants lived in their own separate communities in hill bazaars which themselves were tied together by commercial, family and ritual relations, not only with neighboring merchant communities in Nepal but with merchants, middlemen and officials in both Nepal and other countries where they did business. This made these relations between villager and merchant difficult to discover just by focusing on the village.

tees from others that the loans would be paid off. All the highlanders, including their wives, belonged to these credit associations, oftentimes several at a time.

This discussion in which Hitchcock relates the spread of plains culture to penetration of Brahmans, and of this penetration to convertible surplus, and convertible surplus to environments conducive to rice production and more dense populations, seems to me to be one of Hitchcock's most important ideas in these works. It countered the dominant functionalist characterizations of caste and the spread of caste society, or Hinduization, in terms of simple diffusion of ideas and organization of society for mutual benefit. Testing these ideas would require looking comparatively across the Indian subcontinent and seeing if the spread of Brahmanic culture is indeed limited to rice growing regions, and if not, do differing conditions explain the different findings? For example, we find Hindu temple complexes springing up around the United States in regions that certainly are not characterized by rice cultivation, but these can still be explained by surplus capture mainly by professionals in an industrial and imperial setting. And furthermore, it does not seem that it is Hindu ideas that are being spread so much as Indian professional expatriates carrying these ideas out across the world. The content of the relations has changed, but in essence their significance remains. Regarding the lack of spread of Hindu cultural ideas in the highland village, Hitchcock might have just seen the spread of plains culture at an early stage in its development. As the higher altitude areas become more populated, if they do, will there be a spread of Hindu culture with more Brahmans, construction of temples, development of highland pilgrimage into year-round temple complexes and so forth? After all, Tibetan religion is also based on obtaining surplus and it has done well in the highland areas. This raises a question whether the Buddhist monasteries with their large rent-collecting estates and attached labor forces of monks and nuns are more conducive to capturing surplus in the highlands where production is extensive and labor is a premium.

### Caste and the State

This takes us to the nature of the state, and in his final paper on the theme of the spread of Indian plains culture into the hill regions of India and Nepal on Nepal's western border entitled, appropriately enough, "An Additional Perspective on the Nepalese Caste System" (1978), Hitchcock extends his analysis of the relationship of the spread of plains culture to the role of the state in mediating it. Hitchcock observes that the population in the area has been characterized by three different migrations. Although these migrations have led to the same combination of groups of people occupying each of the two regions, in India and Nepal, the relationships between them differ significantly. In both areas the earliest group to enter the region was a Tibeto-Burman population moving from east to west prior to the seventh to eighth centuries CE, particularly Magars in the Bheri and

Kali Gandaki regions. The second group was Pahari-speaking Khas Rajputs and Brahmans who entered west Nepal from Kumaon and established a powerful kingdom during the ninth century CE. Needless to say, this was based in the rice growing regions near Jumla, and it extended over much of Nepal and Tibet, possibly as far east as Kaski near Pokhara. In the Indian Kumaon these same Khas were never able to consolidate into a powerful empire. Most recently, the Muslim invasions into India brought a new wave of Brahman and Rajput immigrants into both the Kumaon region and the area of the Khas kingdom.

Hitchcock observed that in the Kumaon region the recently arrived Brahman and Rajputs there are divided into a four-fold division of castes which sets the immigrant Brahmans and Rajputs over the Khas Brahmans and Rajputs and proscribes against intermarriage between the immigrants and original high caste groups. In Nepal, on the other hand, there is a simple three-fold division between those who do not drink alcohol (Khas and immigrant high castes), those who do drink it (the Tibeto-Burman population), and those who are not to be touched. Here not only do immigrants intermarry with the Khas, but both the immigrant and the Khas intermarry across caste lines and with the Tibeto-Burman population, according to certain inheritance rules and ritual proscriptions.

Hitchcock argues the reason for the difference is because the immigrant Brahmans and Rajputs confronted a strong kingdom in which the Khas were allied with a strong, militant indigenous Tibeto-Burman hill population, whereas further west in what is now India the Khas were divided into small states, making them weak in the face of the later immigrants. The plains Brahmans were able to extend their caste proscriptions against the 'promiscuous' but weak Khas, whereas in Nepal the immigrants were forced to accommodate to these conditions in which the Khas led religiously and politically from strength. This final study explains the relaxed situation in Nepal, not just by the exigencies of hill living or the problem of a minority population needing to intermarry, but by the political configuration. The foundations for this were implied in the previous studies which relate caste to particular forms of subsistence and land tenure and, by extension, state. But Hitchcock shows that these processes were working in quite a different way due to the particular configuration of sociopolitical relations in Nepal.

### Conclusion

Here we showed John Hitchcock's work in western Nepal as coming out of a tradition of cultural ecology that ultimately finds its foundations in Marx. This approach, as interpreted by Julian Steward, started from the position of nature having an important role in shaping culture such that culture has a core, consisting of a combination of necessary relationships between the environment and essential cultural elements related to serving human material needs, with other artifacts that do not have this necessary relationship.

While guided by the spirit of cultural ecology of seeing human culture as extending out of a dynamic relationship between humans and nature, Hitchcock's emphasis on ethnographic data, in the best of anthropological tradition, allowed Hitchcock escape both the reduction of the relationship of humans and the environment into a simple deterministic one and the reification of the various of Marx's categories found in cultural ecology and, more so, in Harris's cultural materialism. This is not to say that he transcended all of cultural ecology's limitations, exemplified for example in the use of population as an independent variable, due to cultural ecology's (and later Cultural Materialism's) failure to fully locate analytically culture's origin in human creative activity or human labor. Essential to Hitchcock's work was its comparative approach of focusing not on one village or region but comparing between different villages and regions in his various studies. This allowed him to perceive that environment was not purely determinative but that there was a two-way relationship between culture and the environment leading to different histories and different cultural forms in different places.

All of Hitchcock's work takes on the problem of the identifying the differing effect of Hindu plains culture on various Tibeto-Burman populations in the Himalayan foothills of Nepal and neighboring India. He observed that particular processes considered universal in the Himalaya, particularly what is called Hinduization, are not inevitable but mediated by cultural and historical conditions. He proposed that Brahmans and Brahmanic culture had been unable to penetrate into the highlands of Nepal at that time of his study due to the dependence of Brahmanic ritual life on rice culture and the need to control labor surpluses from rice production. Differing situations between the plains and hills of labor and land made it difficult for Brahmans to establish themselves in highland regions. Control over surpluses and land imply forms of state, and in his final study comparing the hill region of western Nepal and the Kumaon of India, Hitchcock argued that even where the same mix existed of immigrant castes, the earlier Khas population, and Tibeto-Burman groups in Nepal, recent high-caste immigrants in Nepal had been unable to impose their caste proscriptions in the manner found in India onto the earlier the Khas caste groups due to the history of a strong Khas state which left the Khas groups in a much stronger position even today.

Where Hitchcock's use of the state as explanation is important, it leaves out the role of the British and its Indian successor colonial states own use of caste to extend and preserve their colonial rule or the different needs of the two states in India and Nepal. There are a lot of questions that need to be answered first before one could accept Hitchcock's argument that all the differences in caste relations on the two sides of the border relate to the Khas state. These include the relative control of the Khas and non-Khas groups over land, the benefits accrued by creating the division in India that might not have accrued in Nepal, the offi-



cial support received by the plains Brahmins in India as opposed to discrimination against them in Nepal and so forth. His environmental considerations also require testing in other hill regions where Hinduism has successfully interpenetrated into indigenous peoples and even in the Indies, Great Britain and the United States where large Hindu immigrant populations have established themselves. What, for example, might be the role of the monastic priesthoods of the Tibeto-Burman groups in creating a barrier against the incursion of Brahmanic groups, as for example even among Tibetan refugee groups which have entered into the lowlands which have remained largely Buddhist. Protestant Christians also admit on their websites that they are having very poor success at making converts out of the highland Buddhist groups such as in Manang and Mustang as opposed to peoples in the middle hills and lowlands.

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