WHERE ARE THE ANCESTRAL MAGARS FROM? A TOPONYMICAL STUDY OF CHINA, INDIA, SOUTHEAST ASIA AND NEPAL -Dhruba Adhikari

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-Dhruba Adhikari

1. Introduction

Nepal is a small landlocked country that lies in South Asia between the latitude 26° and 31°N, and longitudes 80° and 89°E. The country is bordered by India on East, West and South and by Tibet Autonomous Region of People's Republic of China on the North and has an area of 1,47,516[1] square kilometres with the current population being around 26.5 million[2]. Tibetan speaking mongoloid people live in the high Himalaya regions of the north ranging from 3000-5000m from sea level and south of the Himalayas are the mountain valleys where people speak Tibeto Burman and on the further southern plains reside several Indo-Aryan language speaking people and some indigenous people like Tharu, Dhimal, Satar, Koche, Musahar, Meche Dhangar etc. The country currently has 123 languages spoken within its administrative boundary.

Plenty has been written on the history of modern-day Kathmandu, referred to as Nepal Valley later after 18th century CE, but the prominent and the oldest one is the Gopalraj Vanshawali[3],
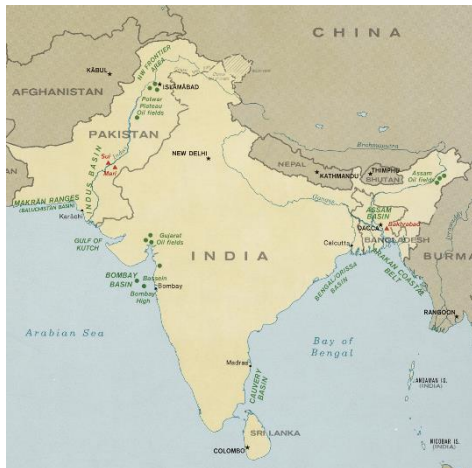
Map of South Asia Showing Nepal towards North (Source: Library of Congress, 1977 CE)

a 14th century handwritten manuscript of Nepal which serves as a genealogical record of Nepalese monarch. The oldest mention of the word Nepal was found in Muaryan Emperor Chandragupta's (321-297 BCE) royal advisor Kautilya's book entitled "Economics" (Arthasastra) and the word Nepal represented the modern-day Kathmandu and surrounding region.

The middle and upper hilly region inhabited by Tibeto Burman speaking population lacks historical documentation as majority of such groups did not have writing system and scriptures. A few exceptions are Lepcha and Limbu scripts which may have been devised very lately, the former being influenced by Tibetan script dates to 18th CE[4] and the latter also reigns during the similar time. Hence the anecdotes of warring kings of middle and upper hill of Nepal prior to the unification of Nepal in 18th century CE are mostly undocumented mythical tales. The tale of Aramudi believed to be a Magar king, skilled in magic[5], of Nepal has been mentioned in

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1 https://kathmandupost.com/national/2020/05/20/government-unveils-new-political-map-including-kalapani-lipulekh-and-limpiyadhura-inside-nepal-borders
2 Government of Nepal. (2014). *Population Monograph of Nepal.* Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal
3 Malla, K.P. Vajhracharya D. *The Gopalrajvamshawali,* Nepal Research Center Publication. Edited by Albrecht Wezler. 1985. Kathmandu
4 Palisier, H. (_____) *A brief introduction to Lepcha orthography and literature.* Bulletin of Tibetology. pp 12
5 Probably referring to the Shamanistic knowledge of the King

Rajatarangini[6] (*Rājataraṃgiṇī,* "The River of Kings"), a historical chronicle of Northwest India where there is a mention of Aramudi *(əramudi)* defeating Jayapida (Instated 782 AD), the king of Kashmir who set out to conquer the world. King Aramudi is mentioned to have defeated Jayapida in skirmishes held at the bank of Kaligandaki[7] river and is held as hostage until his minister Devasarman entices Aramudi to set his king free[8]. While there are some mentions of Kalahana's Rajatrangi accounts to be exaggerated[9], the name of Nepalese King Aramudi is of major interest for this article.

Historian Dilliraman Regmi mentions the possibility of Aramudi being the king of Gandak region and likelihood of him being the king of the Magar Tribes, but he contemplates his uncertainty of Aramudi himself being a Magar and leaves linguists and scholars to decode Aramudi's affinity via Magar vocabulary[10].

2. Approach

This study adopts a Toponymic approach in which the meanings of geographical names are analyzed based on the deep review of the known history of the related regions. Etymology is known as the study of origins and meaning of words and it answers questions about historical relationships of and among languages and in that sense, they address additionally to the linguistic issues the full historical dimension of toponyms. Place names or toponyms or geographical names are the general terms for any place or geographical entity and as such are the research objects of onomastics, which is known as a subbranch of linguistics.

While toponymic approach can be an important tool to understand the geographical relationship between different historic events and elements, the researcher should be aware that toponyms can change due to different factor like migration, immigration or population shift and as a result of political changes. It is therefore crucial to undertake a thorough historical review of the events and elements before attempting to analyze toponymies. Both synchronous (refers to the static stage of a language word formation, sound laws etc.) and diachronous[11] (affiliated with the history of words name history, language changes etc) elements of toponymy are equally important in the analysis process.

Meanwhile, researchers should be extra cautious on relating the tribes based on toponymical similarity. While the names of places may be preserved for a long time, the occupiers of the places may change significantly over time. Even if two places far apart share toponymical similarities, it does not guarantee the current occupants of those places being ancestral relatives of each other. Toponymical method may not be an effective tool for inquiring genetic ancestry but could be used as a tool to investigate the geographic ancestry of a tribe. Hence

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6 Stein, M.A. (1961). *Kalhana's Rajatarangini: A Chronicle of The Kings of Kashmir.* Motilal Banarasidaas pub-lishers private limited, Delhi

[7] Magar word for Kaligandaki is Ridi (Ri meaning black and Di meaning water)

8 Ibid pp 171-173

9 Ibid pp 286, 326

10 Regmi, D.R. (1960) *Ancient Nepal*. Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta, India, pp 172

11 Hausner. I. (___). *Etymology and the historical study of geographical names*. Obtained via https://unstats.un.org/unsd/geoinfo/UNGEGN/docs/CHAPTER%2026.pdf accessed 13.06.2021.

in this study I do not aim to establish genetic relationship between tribes based on shared toponymy but aim to discuss geographical ancestry of the studied tribes.

I put forward a simple example of *rang* suffix, a hallmark of Chepang[12] Toponym of modern-day Nepal. Raksirang *(In Chepang Raksi: Shorea Robusta tree, Rang: Field/place)* lies in Makwanpur district of Nepal currently with a Chepang Majority and Borang, a purely Chepang Toponym (*Bo: Forest Rang: Field/Place*) lies in Lamjung district where there is almost no trace of Chepangs now. While toponymical relationship, particularly with the suffix *rang* can be established but claiming modern day Chepangs having ancestral relationship with the current occupants of Borang- majorly Brahmins, an Indo Aryan group of people, would be very unscientific. However, establishing the geographical relationship of ancestral Chepangs with Raksirang and Borang after thorough linguistic and historical review is a more scientific approach.

All the Topographical data for this study was obtained via Geonames[13].

3. Review of Toponyms

A total of five toponyms (*mudi*, *udi*, *ʃyang di*, *di* and *baŋ*[14]) found among the Magars will be analyzed in this paper as these toponyms are visible in indigenous geographic regions of Nepal, particularly among the Magar of western and central Nepal, the major scope of this paper being limited to those population. This paper reviews Chinese history because it is known to be one of the earliest civilizations, the historical influence of which has spread all over the modern-day Chinese dominion and across southeast Asia along with other neighboring countries including Nepal.

3.1 Mudi (*mudi)* [15]

Jin Emperor Mudi, son of Emperor Kang was an emperor of the Eastern Jin empire who ruled the Jin Empire (344-371 CE). He was among one of the empires who ruled during the 'Period of Disunion' (220-590 CE) where sixteen northern kingdoms were formed by the *Five Barbarians* (Xiongnu, Jie, Xianbei, Di and Qiang). The sixteen-kingdom period was a chaotic history in China where political order of Northern China was fractured by the majority of non-Han people of China who had settled in Northern and Western China. Classical Chinese historians called this period the sixteen kingdoms of Five Barbarians.

The suffix *Mudi* has been preserved in a few Toponyms of Nepal in Dolkha region, Gandaki region and a few in the mid and far western Nepal. The list of Toponyms with suffix Mudi has been annexed as Table 1.

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[12] Chepangs are semi nomadic hunter gatherer groups who have recently been sedentary and remain around Mahabharat hills of central Nepal and speak a Tibeto Burman language.

13 The GeoNames geographical database covers all countries and contains over eleven million placenames that are available for download free of charge (www.geonames.org)

14 Phonetics in IPA format

15 China Knowledge.de- An encyclopedia on Chinese history, literature and art. (2000). *Jin Mudi.*
http://www.chinaknowledge.de/History/Division/personsjinmudi.html

Plotting the Mudi Toponym coordinates shows its concentration around the Kali Gandaki river where the King Aramudi[16] has been known to have fought and defeated the Kashmiri King Jayapida in 8th century[17] CE and some toponyms are also preserved in Western region of Nepal. The Kaligandaki gorge is one of the world's deepest gorge that separates two major mountains of Nepal, Dhaulagiri and Annapurna, providing access between Nepal and Tibet and thereby facilitating Trans-Himalayan trade. A Nepalese anthropologist mentions the Kali-Gandaki valley and gorge providing one of the best trade routes along the Tibet-Nepal border[18]. The other known historical route is Tinkar Bhanjyang (currently in Darchula district Nepal) via Lipulekh pass, a route that connected western Nepal with Tibet. While it is not known if any trading occurred between the Nepal and modern-day Tibet during the Aramudi's reign, it is logical to assume that Kali Gandaki corridor and Lipulekh pass were some of the major strategic key points of entry via Tibet to western Nepal and vice versa.

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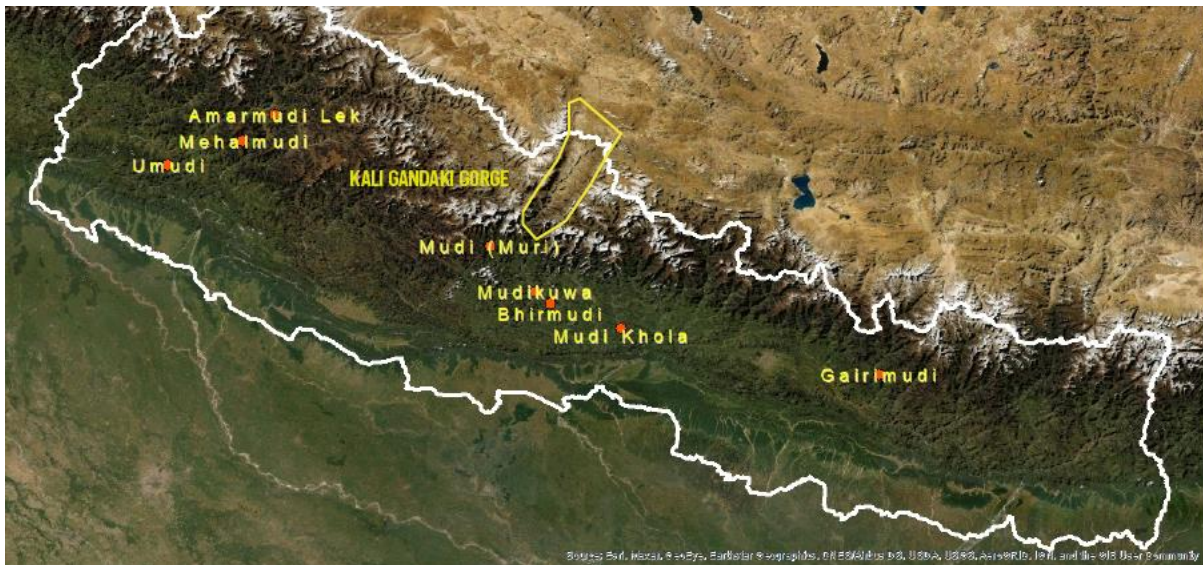
16 The toponym Armaudi is preserved in Baglung district of Dhaulagiri region, Arma meaning shaman in western Magar language and udi a popular toponym in western Magar region. Armaudi and Aramudi should not be confused as being the same because there is evidence of mudi toponyms present in western Magar dominion.
17 It is also noted in Rajatarangini in later verses that once the king was set free, he destroyed Aramudi's troops.
18 High land trade routes also included Tarakot of modern day Dolpa where the Dhaulagiri region could be reached by crossing Thage Pass (See Himalayan-Traders-Life-In-Highland-Nepal pp 207)
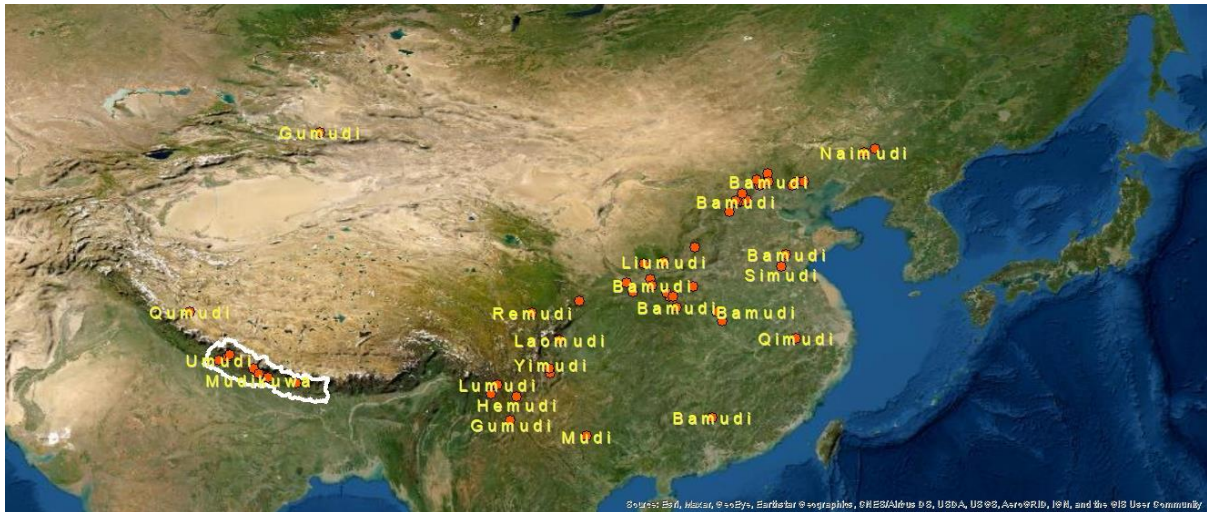
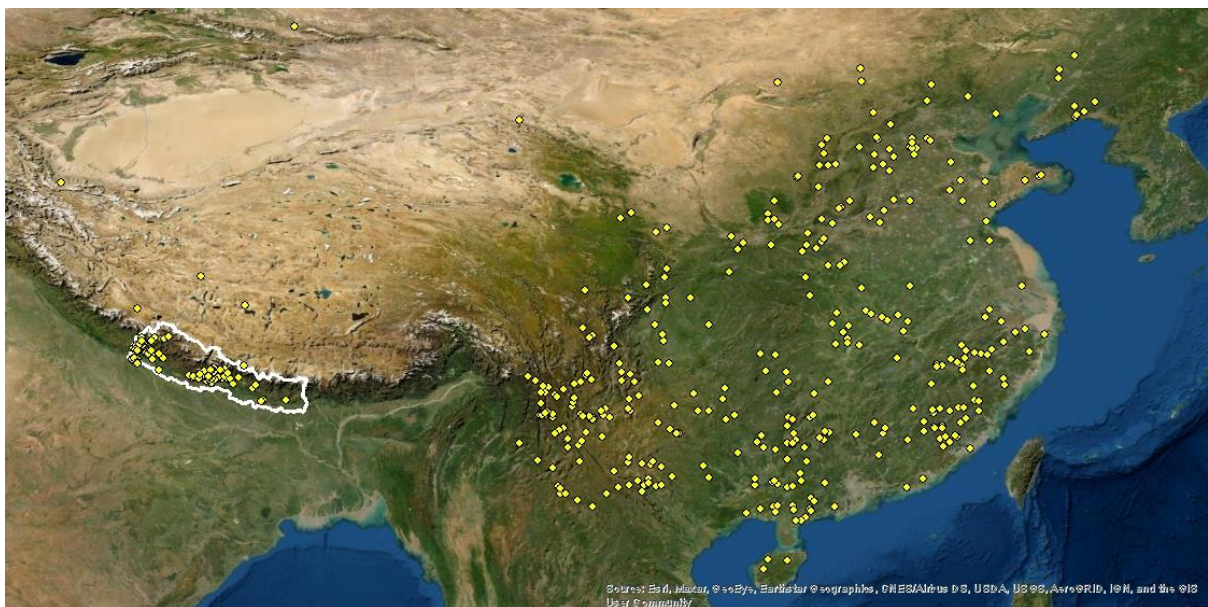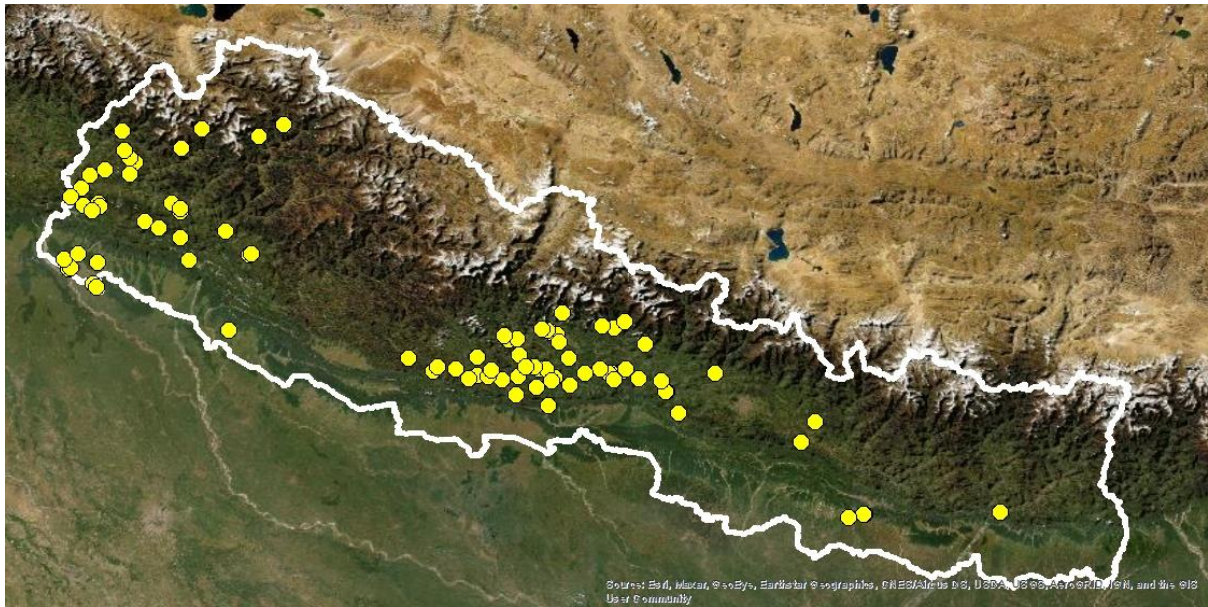(Mudi Toponym Coordinates plotted in Nepal and China)

3.2 Wudi (*udi*)

There are two major Wudi figures in Chinese history. The prior Wu was the seventh Han emperor of China ruling from (141-87 BCE) for a total of fifty-seven years. The character Wu-means martial and Di mean Emperor in imperial history of China. Wudi, also called Wu or Liuche, born in 156 BC was the son of the Han emperor Jingdi (156-141 BC). In 111 BCE Han Wudi the Martial Emperor destroyed and annexed the semisinicized state of Nan-yueh (Vietnam), and started a thousand years of Chinese rule over northern Vietnam. He conquered Korea in 108 BC, and a Chinese command remained at Pyongyang until 313 CE. Han Wudi's reign was one of the longest and most eventual reigns on record[19]. Under Wudi 's rule, China expanded its borders, repelling threats from the north and introducing the Silk Road, a trade route that became an international [20]highway of commerce and cultural transmission. Wudi was also responsible for establishing Confucianism as China's state religion[21].

The other known Wudi figure in Chinese history was Jin Emperor Wu, the founder of western Jin Dynasty (266-290 CE) who hailed from a family of powerful general and was able to overthrow the house of Cao that had ruled over the empire of Wei, also known as Cao-Wei empire. Western Jin under emperor Wudi reunited China in 280 CE but the empire started collapsing shortly after the death of the emperor in 290 CE after instigating his *"developmentally ill"* son emperor Hui of Jin, also called Hui Di, on the throne thereby creating the conflict among the already hostile powerful princes that finally led to the period of "war of eight princes *(291-306)*" with the last emperor of the dynasty Jin Min Di surrendering to a general of Xiongnu state and later being executed by its emperor Liu Cong.

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19 Keay, J. (2008) *China A History.* Harper Press, Great Britain
20 Xiaobing. Li. (2012). *China at war An Encyclopedia,* ABC-CLIO. California. USA. pp xxii
21 China Knowledge.de- An encyclopedia on Chinese history, literature and art. (2000). *Emperor Han Wudi.*
http://www.chinaknowledge.de/History/Han/personshanwudi.html

(Udi Toponym Coordinates plotted in Nepal and China)

The "Udi/wudi" suffix on the existing toponyms in Nepal and China has been plotted in the diagram above. Like the Mudi toponym, Udi toponym is also clustered in the similar region of Nepal, i.e Kaligandaki region and western Nepal. In China, the toponym is conserved north-ward from Yunnan cluster, scattering eastwards and reaching up to Northeast China. There is an almost absence of Udi/Wudi and Mudi toponyms in Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia.

3.3 Shang Di (*ʃyaŋ di*)

The first mention of the word Shang Di was in the oracle bone of Shang Dynasty (ca. 1600-1050 BCE) as the most powerful spirit. The term is variously translated in English as "high lord," "lord on high," "high god/' "supreme thearch," and even "God".[22] In the transmitted textual tradition, from the Western Zhou (ca. 1050-771 BCE) on, Shang Di is closely related to

22 Allan, S. (2007). *On the identity of Shang Di and the origin of the concept of a celestial mandate (Tian Ming).* Early China. Vol. 31. pp. 1-46. Cambridge University Press

Tian and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. Some scholars have proposed Shang Di to be spirit of Pole Star while some other argue that Shangdi derives its association with the pivot of heavens at North pole. From oracle bone inscription it is known to scholars that Shang Di had the power to "send down" and "command" weather phenomenon[23]. Although it is evidential that the celestial concept of Shang Di flourished during the Shang dynasty, the later dynasties like Zhou transformed the concept of Shang Di to Tian and although the later dynasties performed rites similar to Shang Di, the relationship of such rites to Shang Di is not clear.

Shang Di itself being an ancient term, the first known to have been used around 3600 years ago has not been largely preserved in both Nepal and China. In Nepal, a major river Marsyangdi has preserved the gloss along with them are a couple of Toponyms including Syangdi (28.01322,84.17361) in Lamjung district and Kasyangdi (28.07714, 83.93607) in Syangja district of Nepal- also preserved in China Keshangdi (32.3563, 80.671), the word Syang-ja itself containing the morpheme of Shang. A few Shangdi toponyms are preserved in eastern China.
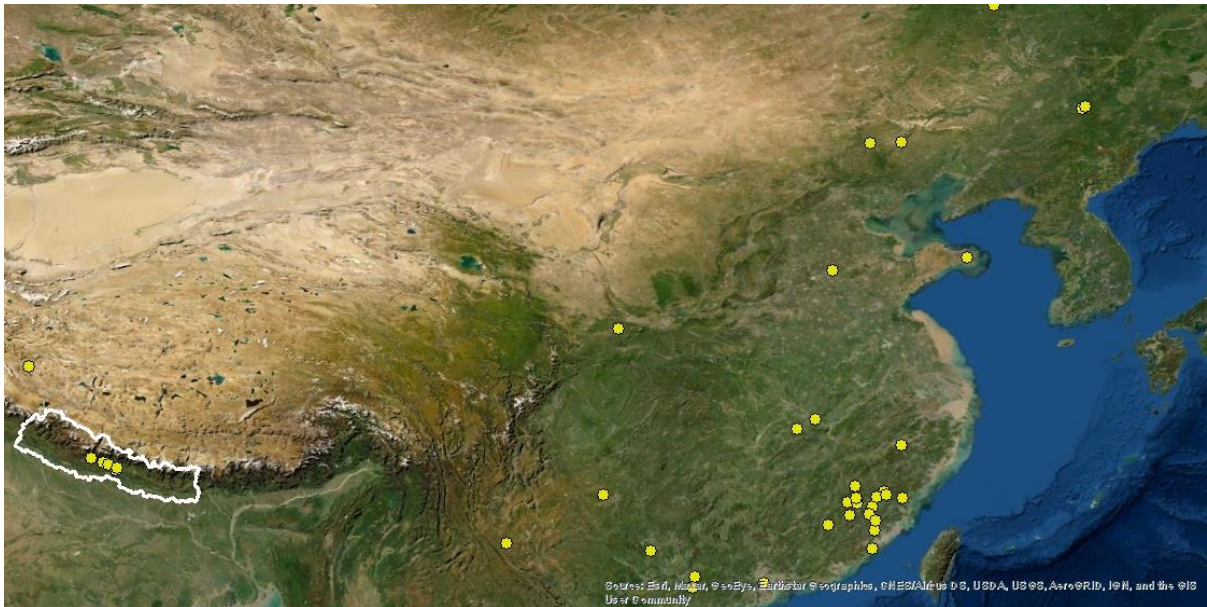
(Shangdi Toponym Coordinates plotted in Nepal and China)

The toponym Marsyangdi, Kasyangdi and Syangdi of Nepal and the ones with gloss Shangdi preserved in China are important in a sense that almost none of the emperors in Chinese history have used the title Shang Di except the mythical Jade emperor also known as Yu Huang Shangdi/ Yudi, considered as the supreme ruler of heaven and the first emperor of China and another exception being Han Shang Di (105-106 CE) from Eastern Han who was placed on throne when he was barely over 100 days old and died before his first birthday. Like the earlier toponyms Shang Di toponym is also visible around the Kali Gandaki region. Simiarly, the prefix *ãdi* of Andikhola (*ãdixola*), one of the major rivers of Nepal shares cognate with the emperor of Han Andi *(ãdi)* (106-125 CE) who succeeded the child emperor Shangdi.

23 Ibid pp 4

3.4 Di (*di)*

Di can be inferred as one of the oldest concepts in Chinese history. As discussed in earlier section the morpheme Di attached with Shang Di is closely translated as "deity" while the title Di attached with emperors (eg. Qin Shi Huangdi) is usually translated as emperor. During the Zhou dynasty Di was one of the rituals was performed at the ancestral temple on a grand scale, often after the grain harvest in summer[24].

3.4.1 Di as Barbarians

Di has also been used as a term to describe non-Chinese "barbarians". The earlier Di represented one of the "Four Barbarians" residing in north-west China. During the Autumn and Spring period (770- 5th Cenutry BCE), Chinese chronicle mention Red Di, White Di and Tall Di. The earlier Zhou dynasty (11th Century-221 BCE) were also known to have raged war against steppe people and often enslaved captives of Di tribe. The Di so stimulated the rise of the institution of the hegemonial lord (ba) during the Spring and Autumn period by the Zhou dynasty whose major function was to support the king and ward off barbarians. Yet the Di tribes continued harassing the regional states and even forced the king of Zhou to flee the capital Luoyang which was later brought back by the duke Wen of Jin by defeating Di people. The Di had vanished as a distinct people at the end of the Zhou period.[25]

The latter Di were a semi-nomadic people living in the western regions. They were ethnical relatives to the Qiang and Tanguts. Di and Qiang are already mentioned in the Confucian Classic Shijing "Book of Songs". During the Han period (206 BCE-220 CE) they lived in the western region of Longxi, the modern province of Gansu, western Shaanxi and northern Sichuan. The various tribes of the Di were politically not connected, and each had their own chieftain. When the Han empire expanded to the west, the Di tribes declared their submission to the Han court and sent their tributes. Their chieftains were appointed official administrators of native commanderies and districts. During the Han empire, White Horse Di were among the most powerful Di and were defeated by the Han emperor Wudi (141-87 BCE) and were settled in the commandery further to the west and were assigned to control merchant traffic in the silk road[26] which they later resisted and were defeated by the warlord Cao Cao who then forcibly transferred them to different commanderies to fight his opponent in the South.

Under the Jin dynasty (265-420 CE), a lot of Di people lived in the ancient capital region around Chang'an (modern Xi'an, Shaanxi). As non-Chinese, they were regularly recruited for labour work and so virtually served as labour slaves of the Chinese government. In 296 CE. Therefore, a lot of Di people rebelled against the Jin government, and their leader Qi Wannian proclaimed himself emperor but was defeated later. The Di were not purely pastoral nomads but also lived of agriculture and in the course of time learned producing handicraft products. They were famous for several types of fabric, but also for their lacquerwork and their fine honey. In (4th century CE) the five barbarians including Di overthrew the western Jin dynasty

24 Wei, W. Hua Yuan, L. Jian Xian, C. Bo. J. (___). *A study on ancient rituals in China.* Institute of Archaelogy. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences
25 China Knowledge.de- An encyclopedia on Chinese history, literature and art. (2000). *Di.* http://www.chinaknowledge.de/History/Altera/di1.html
26 China Knowledge.de- An encyclopedia on Chinese history, literature and art. (2000). *Di.* http://www.chinaknowledge.de/History/Altera/di2.html

and established their own dynasty in 4th-6th centuries[27]. The population of Di vanished after the reunification of China under Tang dynasty (618-190, 705-907 CE).

3.4.2 Di as river

The most prominent use of the word morpheme Di is visible in the rivers of Nepal particularly in the eastern Magar region, the word di meaning river in eastern Magar language. The word *bhai*[28] is used for river and rih (*ri)* is used for water in the western Magar language, the river Bheri could clearly be attributed to the western Magar, Buri Gandaki with Gandaki being a rather Aryanized Toponymy may also be attributed to western Magars because of the presence of *ri* in Buri. Similar are the rivers like Bari Gad[29], Mari River, Lungri river associated with the western Magars Toponymically.

On the other hand, the abundance of Di suffix used in Nepali river names are associated more with the eastern Magar than that of the western Magar. The map below shows the names of river with suffix di and their clustering in the eastern Magar region.
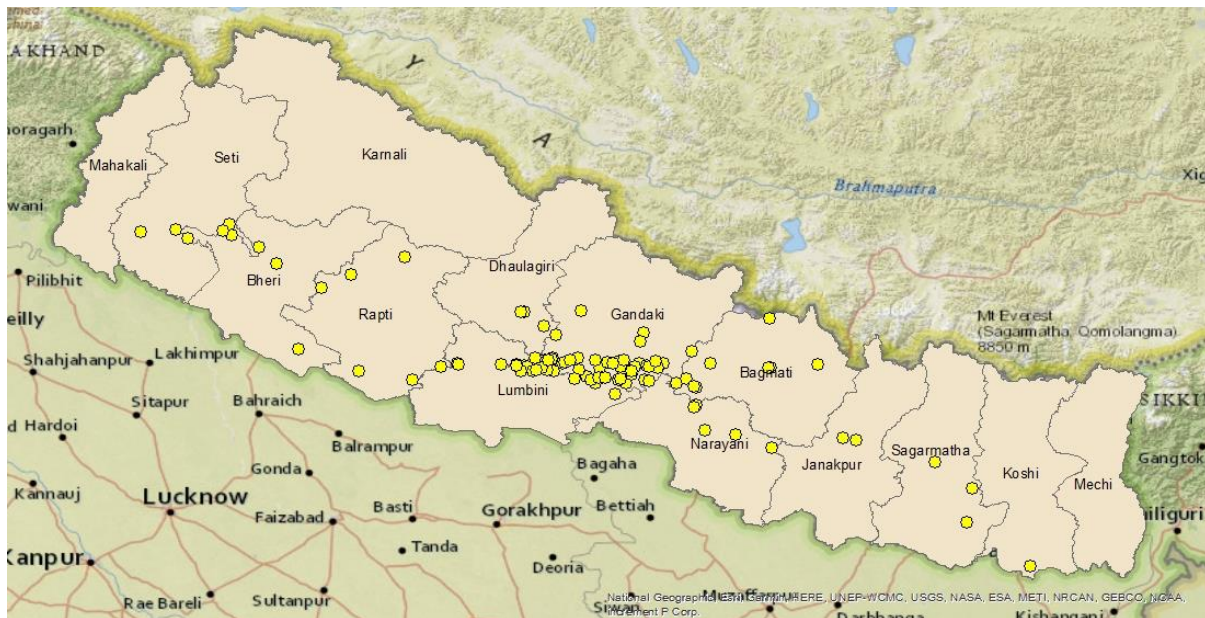
3.5 Bang *(baŋ)*

One of the earliest mentions of Bang in Chinese imperial history can be traced back to Liu Bang, also known as Emperor Gaozu of Han (206 BCE- 220 CE) who founded the earlier Han Dynasty after rebelling against the existing Qin empire. When Liu Bang took the throne in 202 BCE, he inherited Qin the title of emperor, "huangdi" and continued institutions, policies, and religious practices. Han dynasty emperorship was fundamentally different from that of the foundation, and essential rationale. While Qin emperorship of centralized, absolute political power, based on the personal achievement, whereas Han emperorship diffusing its power

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27 Ibid
28 Watters, David.E. (2004). *A dictionary of Kham: Taka Dialect.* Central Department of Linguistics. Tribhuvan University. Kathmandu. Nepal, pp-41
29 The *ri* suffix is preserved and *gaḍ* is a khas word for river.

among compartments of the empire, collective effort, and consensus of what the participants called "Sharing the world". This democratic characteristic of Han rulership has often been seen as being cause by temporary weakness of the Han empire caused by Civil war.[30] Although Liu Bang was an influential figure as the founder of the dynasty his reign just lasted for around seven years (202-195 BC), most of the time busy suppressing rebellions and fending off incursions. Liu bang was understood to despise academics and Confucian scholars as he had, in his words, conquered the world on horseback and saw no need to study Confucian classics.[31] He was admonished by Lu Jia, one of his advisors to follow the advice of the Confucian scholars, because the world could not be governed from horseback but only with the knowledge of rituals and by bureaucratic procedures.[32] Liu Bang was succeeded, by Han Hui Di who was known to be of weaker character and dominated by his mother Dowager Empress Lu. There was a tension in succession of Liu Bang as he preferred his third son Liu Ruyi (208-194 BCE) born to him by his concubine Lady Qi. He tried several times to make Ruyi the crown prince, but Empress Lü and several of his ministers admonished him not to do so.

3.5.1 Bang Toponym in Nepal

Although there are variations within the Kham Magar language itself, there is a general agreement of the word bang meaning meadow/grassland in Kham Magar language. As seen in the illustration below[33] there is a slight variation for the word meadow in different kham dialects, the Lukum, Gam and Mahat dialect of Kham maintain the original proto-Kham gloss bang meaning meadow.

P-Kham	Lukum	Gam	Mahat	Taka	Maikot	gloss
*b-rəhŋ	rəhŋ	rəhŋ	rəhŋ	rɨ̄:h	bərã:h	horn
*kəŋ	kəŋ	khəŋ	kəŋ	khɨ̄:	khõ:	foot, leg
*r-bəŋ	bəŋ	bəŋ	bəŋ	bɨ̄:	rbõ:	cattle byre
*rəhŋ	rəhŋ	rəhŋ	rəhŋ	rɨ̄:h	rã:h	see
*thəŋ		thəŋ	thəŋ	thɨ̄:	thõ:	dry out
*s-meŋ		meh?	me:h	mẽ:h	myõ	forget
*b-rihŋ		rihŋ	--	rẽ:h	brẽ:h	drum
*siŋ	siŋ	siŋ	siŋ	sɨ̄:	sɨ̄:	tree
*baŋ	baŋ	baŋ	baŋ	bã:	bã:	meadow
*haŋ	haŋ	haŋ	haŋ	hã:	hã:	cliff
*cuŋ	cuŋ	cuŋ	--	cõ:	cũ:	sit, perch

Source: (Watters, 2004)

The particular trait of western Magars adding suffix bang to name a place is illustrated by the Map below in which major cluster can be seen in Pyuthan, Rukum, Rolpa, Baglung and Myagdi district of Nepal, a minor cluster seen in the confluence of Dhading, Chitwan, Gorkha and

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30 Wang. A. (2001). *Creators of an Emperor: The Political Group behind the Founding of the Han Empire.* Asia Major. Third Series. Vol. 14(1). pp. 19-50

31 China Knowledge.de- An encyclopedia on Chinese history, literature and art. (2000). *Emperor of Han Gaozu Liu Bang.* http://www.chinaknowledge.de/History/Han/personshangaozu.html

32 ibid

33 Watters, David.E. (2004). *A dictionary of Kham: Taka Dialect.* Central Department of Linguistics. Tribhuvan University. Kathmandu. Nepal. pp 13

Makwanpur district and some scatter around Eastern region of Nepal which may suggests a later migration as it is known that Magars were assigned in different parts of the country after the annexation of the kingdom of Nepal by Prithvi Narayan Shah where the Magars played a major role in Gorkhali warfare.
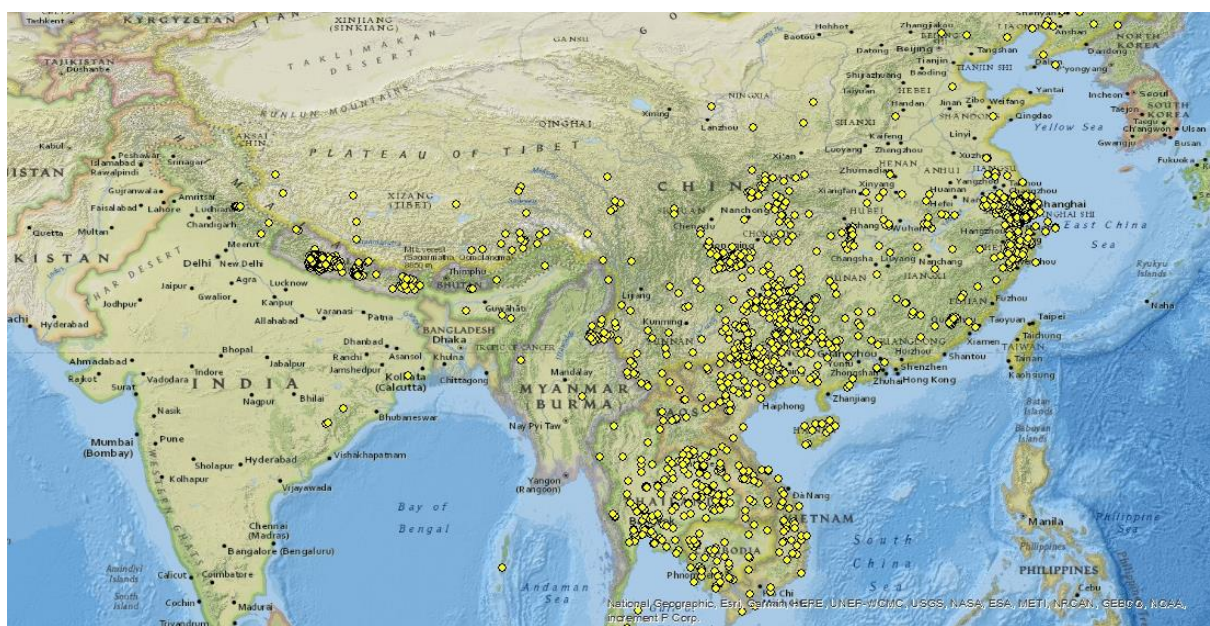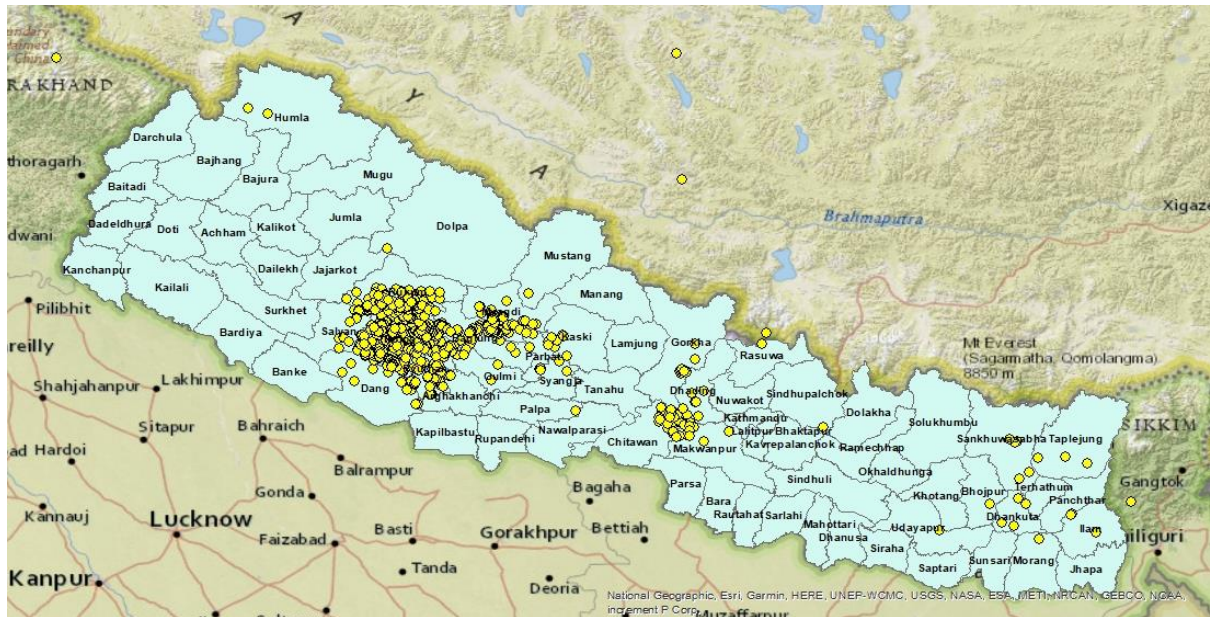
(Bang Toponyms plotted in Nepal, China, India and Southeast Asia)

Bang toponym when plotted in India, China and Southeast Asia produces an intriguing phenomenon as the data clusters in East and South China along with significant scatter across Southeast Asia, a majority of the toponym also being preserved in Thailand (Siam) and surrounding countries. The spread of Toponym bang not only show the relationship of the bearers with the China but also with South-East Asia and unlike the Ding toponym heavily scattered in Tibet, the bang toponym is minimally scattered in Tibet and the scatteredness is clustered in eastern China and Southeast Asia thereby suggesting the possibility of the ancestral

carriers of this Toponym to have an admixture between the Chinese and Southeast Asian tribes.
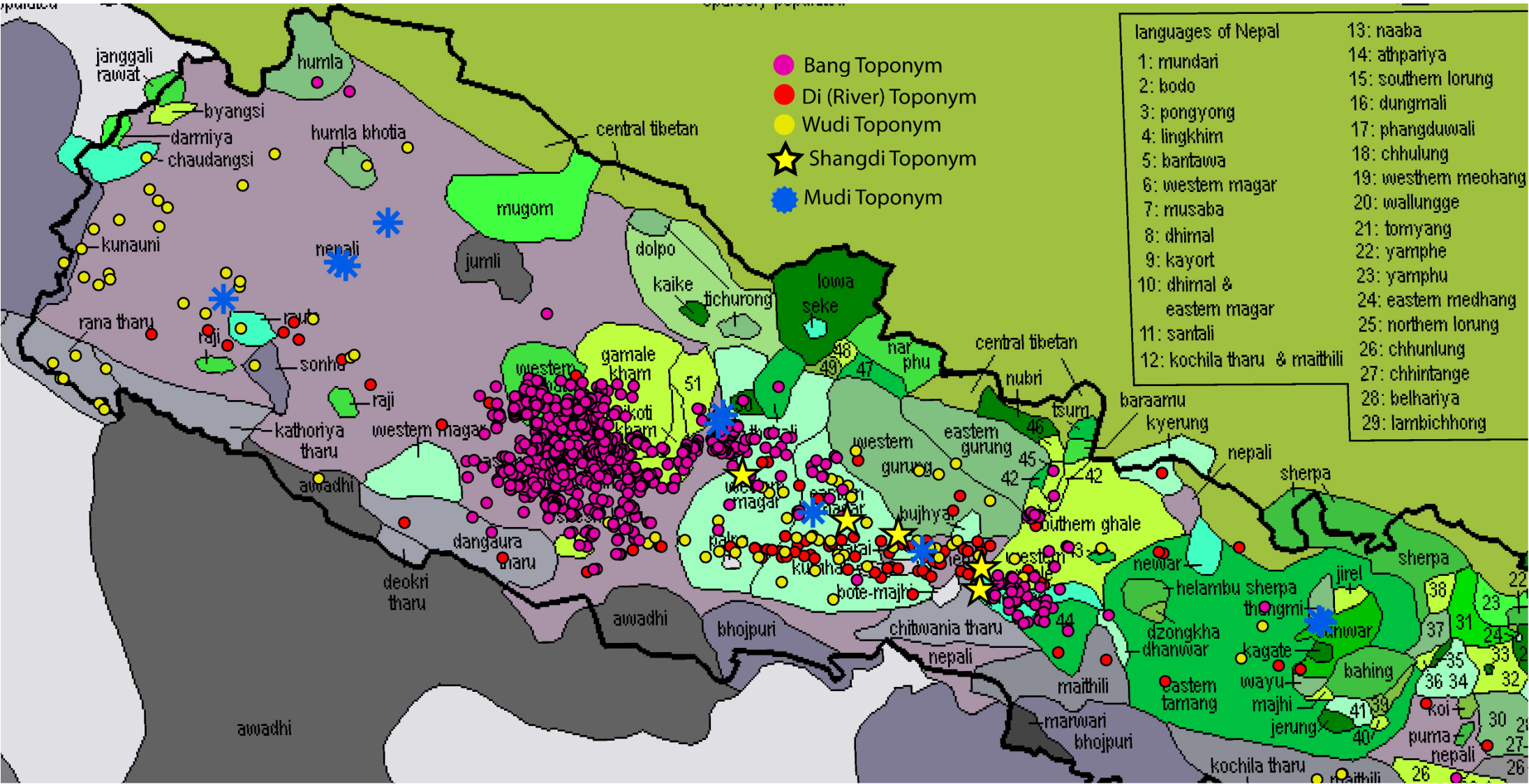
4. Results and Discussion

Based on the Geographic Information System (GIS) analysis the following features of the five toponyms are visible:

Toponym	Features
Mudi	The data density of Mudi toponym is low. The plotted data shows a clustering in Kaligandaki and Far western region of Nepal. Clustering is not significant in Tibet, Xinjiang region, Qinghai and Inner mongolia.
Wudi	The density of data relating to Wudi is higher compared to Mudi. Nevertheless, like the Mudi toponym, wudi toponym is also clustered in Kaligandaki and Far western region of Nepal. Clustering is not significant in Tibet, Xinjiang region, Qinghai and Inner Mongolia.
Shang Di	The data density is very low. Very limited toponyms are visible around Kali Gandaki region. In China, limited toponyms are visible in Eastern China.
Di (as a river)	The data density is significant in Nepal. The toponym of Di as river is clustered in Eastern Magar region, a few toponyms also visible westwards.
Bang	The data density of bang toponym is significant. In Nepal it is clustered in between Kali Gandaki and Bheri region, a known region of Kham Magars. Data density is high in Shanghai, west of Sichuan and Yunnan and is not significant in Tibet. Clusters are also seen in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, and Indonesia. A minor cluster is also visible in Chepang region of Central Nepal.

Based on the above analysis, three toponymic carriers are visible:

a) carriers of bang toponym clustering in Eastern China, Southeast Asia, and western Nepal-region of Kham Magars

b) carriers of Di (as river) toponyms clustering in eastern Magar region

c) carriers of wudi, mudi and shangdi toponyms in Kali Gandaki and far western region of Nepal. The map presented below illustrates the spread of toponyms in different linguistic regions of Nepal.

Legend:
- ● Bang Toponym
- ● Di (River) Toponym
- ● Wudi Toponym
- ★ Shangdi Toponym
- ✴ Mudi Toponym

languages of Nepal
1: mundari
2: bodo
3: pongyong
4: lingkhim
5: bantawa
6: western magar
7: musaba
8: dhimal
9: kayort
10: dhimal & eastern magar
11: santali
12: kochila tharu & maithili
13: naaba
14: athpariya
15: southern lorung
16: dungmali
17: phangduwali
18: chhulung
19: western meohang
20: wallungge
21: tomyang
22: yamphe
23: yamphu
24: eastern medhang
25: northern lorung
26: chhunlung
27: chhintange
28: belhariya
29: lambichhong

(Linguistic Map source: Muturzikin.com, Carte Linguistic En Asie, Toponym points plotted by the author, Map digitized via Arcgis)

4.1 Carriers of Bang Toponyms

Tai Languages
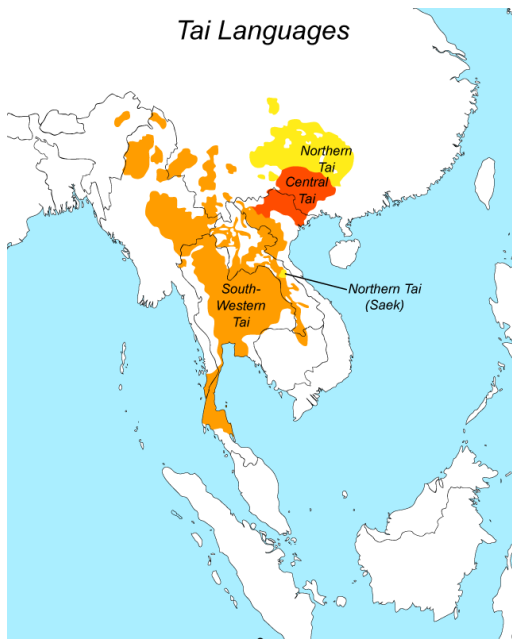
Geographical distribution of the Tai-Kadai phylum. Classification according to David B. Solnit

As evident in 3.5.2, Bang toponyms is spread in the west of Sichuan and Yunnan and in southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Cambodia suggesting the ancestral carriers to be related geographically to the modern-day Tai/Khmer region that currently exist in Southern China and mainland southeast Asia. It may be safe to assume that the current carriers of bang toponym in Nepal, currently known as Kham Magars or their ancestors could be related to the geographical regions of mainland southeast Asia, noting the current region is occupied by Tai/Khmer people, the word Kham possibly borrowed from the neighboring Tibetan Kham tribes (north of Nepal) after their arrival in Nepal or via Khams[34] of Sichuan region prior to their migration from Southeast Asia.

A more historical review of Tai/Khmer people and related tribes may shed light on the historical migration, if any, of ancestral Tai/khmer groups to Nepal. Currently it is beyond the scope of this paper to answer when and why such migration occurred. However, the Manchurian shamanism still conserved and practiced among the Kham Magar of western Nepal suggests these groups could be some of the earliest migrants to Nepal. Also, if the earlier migration was driven by warfare or by the intent of better access to natural resources or any other reasons needs to be explored further. Since this paper provides a rather larger geographic picture of the Toponym carriers in China and Southeast Asia, further historical and linguistic study could help narrow down the geographical regions closely associated with the Kham Magars.

4.2 Carriers of Di (as river) Toponyms

The naming of river with Di is fairly common among the North-East India's Tibeto Burman tribes particularly in Assam where the name of principal rivers with di means water. Some of the principal rivers of the region are Dipula, Dikarai, Dihang, Disang, Dibang, Dihing, Dikhow and Diju. [35] Some writers agree that the Kachari/Bodo ruled the Brahmaputra regions of northeast India through the imprint of names that they have given to major rivers. Dimasa-Kachari tribe residing in Asam and Nagaland of north-east India hold their name Di-Ma-Sa meaning sons of big water referring to Brahmaputra river known as Di-lao in Dimasa. The preservation of Di toponym in modern day Assam region of North-East India particularly

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34 The possibility of the ancestors of Kham Magars being associated with the Khams of Sichuan/Yunnan region prior to their migration towards Nepal also stands out as a possibility.

35 Dikshi, K.R. Dikshit, J.K. (2014). *North-East India: Land, People and Economy.* Springer

among the Dimasa tribe suggests the relationship of ancestral Di toponym carriers of Nepal to be related geographically with the modern-day Brahmaputra valley region.

"The wide extent of long duration of Bodo domination is shown by the frequent occurrence of the prefix di or ti, Bodo word for water in the river names of the Brahmaputra valley and adjoining country to the west eg. Dibru, Dikhu, Dihing, Dihong, Dibong, Disang, Diphang, Dimla etc. In some cases the old name is disappearing- Dichu river for instance is now better known as Jaldhaka while in others it has already gone, as in the case of Brahmaputra which in the early days of Ahom was known as the Ti-Lao[36]."

The North-East India is the homeland of different races with their composite culture and distinct identity. All the major races of India viz., Austric, Dravidian, Mongolian and Aryan had lived in this North-East India particularly in Assam with their own culture and heritages.[37] Beside such diversity of tribal population, Northeast India has been fairly Hinduised. The earliest account of a Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsiang who toured India in the first half of the seventh century CE during his tour to Kamarupa (modern day Assam) mentions the people to be of dark yellow colour who adore and sacrifice to Devas and have no faith in Buddha[38].

The Baarha Magarat meaning twelve confederation of Kings of the Magar region and the Magar people celebrating festival in Barhakune Tal (meaning twelve cornered lake) to commemorate the foundation of Barha Magarat[39] and the Assam legend of twelve petty kings known as *Baro* (Twelve) *Bhuiya*, each independent of the others in their own domain but having habit of joining their forces whenever threatened by their common enemy suggests a common trend and the title Baro Bhuiya was also visible in Bengal region.[40] Similarly, Tiwa (Lalung), a scheduled tribe in the state of Asam a subgroup of Kachari, are known to have 61 clans which also includes a clan named Magor[41]. Susgengpha (1604-1641 CE), the 17th king of Ahom kingdom of Assam was called Burha Raja (Old King) as he was advanced in year when he became the king and yet another influential *Burha* figure in Ahom kingdom was Burhagohain, one of the titles given to counsellors in Ahom kingdom, the latter being Bargohain[42.] The Bura clan of Magar cognates with influential figures of Assam like the Burha King and Burhagohain of the Ahom kingdom.

Some of the major political changes in the Assam region occurred in 6th and 12th century AD. In the former period Tang empire was being built by Tang Taizong, from the Tsangpo basin of Southern Tibet Tsrong-brtsan-sgam-po was masterminding the unification of the tribes of Tibet and Harsa Vardana was establishing his power over Hindu Buddhist states of Northern India extending east up to Kamarupa (modern day Assam), Sassanid ruler Khosrau II was attempting to recreate Persian empire from Xinjiang to Egypt[43].

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[36] Gaie, E.A. (1906). *A History of Assam*. Thacker Spink and Co. pp 5

[37] Chaklader, Snehamoy (2004): "Sub-Regional Movement in India", KP Bagchi & Company, Kolkata pp26.

[38] Gaie, E.A. (1906). *A History of Assam*. Thacker Spink and Co. pp 22-23

[39] Rana, B.K. (2005) *A short note on King Aramudi and other Magar rulers of Kali Gandaki region*, retrieved from https://sites.google.com/site/rana1616/king-aramudi-and-other-magar-rulers-of-nepal.

[40] Gaie, E.A. (1906). *A History of Assam*. Thacker Spink and Co. pp 36

[41] The information is unsourced (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiwa_(Lalung). A few governments document of district Assam has mention of a surname Magor. Further exploration is required.

[42] Gaie, E.A. (1906). *A History of Assam*. Thacker Spink and Co.

[43] Keay, J. (2008) *China A History.* Harper Press, Great Britain

Meanwhile in the 12th century CE a major martial tribe Ahom, believed to be the offshoot of great Tai or Shan race which spread eastwards from the border of Assam over the whole further India and far into the interior of China[44], became a kingdom initially through minor skirmishes against Kachari tribes like Chutias and Morans, leading to a kingdom that ruled Assam in between (1221-1826 CE) after which it was finally taken by East India company followed by the end of Anglo-Burmese war.

Based on discussions above, the carriers of (DI as river) toponyms in Nepal (Eastern Magars) can be attributed with the larger Bodo-Kachari group currently residing in Northeast India who may have separated during the historic times. Since not much evidence has been generated to understand the reason behind migration or spread of Bodo-Kachari group to Nepal, the migration of such groups from the rich fertile alluvial soil of Brahmaputra basin to rather hostile Himalayan mountains suggests the migration to be driven by warfare related consequences rather than a quest for better natural resources. Meanwhile the possibility of such migrating tribes already or in the process of being Hinduised inside Assam region before migrating towards mountains of Nepal should not be ruled out.

4.3 Carriers of Mudi/Wudi and Shangdi Toponyms

As the data density of Shangdi Toponym is very low, not much can be said about these toponym carriers except them being observed in Kaligandaki region and China and that Shangdi is a very old toponym dating back to Shang and Zhou dynasty of ancient China.

However, the remarkable trait of *Mudi* and *Wudi* toponyms unlike the earlier *bang* and *di* toponym is their presence not only concentrated around Kali Gandaki river but also the traces of the toponyms being visible in Far western region suggesting a wider dominion of these toponym carriers in the historic times. The decline of these toponym carriers in Far western region may be attributed towards the Khas dominion in these regions beginning from 13th century CE[45] when the Khas people first started entering Nepal towards the east of Kali River.

The near absence of Mudi/Wudi and Shangdi toponyms in southeast Asia suggests the slim possibility of those groups to be associated with Southeast Asian regions; meanwhile a very low-density toponym present in Tibet and a significant cluster in Sichuan and Yunnan region extending the whole of Eastern China and reaching below northeastern China suggests the relative possibility of these toponym carriers to be related to the inhabitants under the Chinese dominion[46]. The potential route of spread or migration could be the following:

a) East bound: Scatter/migrate via Sichuan/Yunnan's mountainous region and reach Nepal via Arunachal Pradesh region of India.
b) South bound: Spread/migrate southwards from Tibet towards Kaligandaki region via Kaligandaki gorge and later expand to Far western region of Nepal.
c) Southwest bound: Spread/migrate southwest from central Tibet to Far western region of Nepal via Lipulekh Pass/Tinkar Pass and later spread to Kaligandaki region. Buras of

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44 Ibid PP 67
45 Witzel, M. (1991). *The Brahmins of Kashmir.* PP 8
46 By Chinese dominion the author means the modern-day China dominion.

south Baglung have a tradition that they came from the west to their present location.[47]

 d) Two separate migration/spread, one southbound and the other southwest bound in similar or different time periods.

5. Conclusion

Natural calamities further fueled by warfare among the Martial tribes, state atrocities, enslavement, human sacrifice, famines, epidemic were common in Chinese and Southeast Asian history and may be influential factors for people to migrate in smaller or larger groups. Similarly, migration because of trade and cultural ties also stand out as possible factors for migration lately into this Himalayan kingdom. The hilly region of Nepal offers the prospect of security as it is sandwiched between the Malarial plains on the south and mighty Himalayas on the north thereby creating a safe home for indigenous tribes who might have been driven off their original habitat out of warfare, state affairs or famines. Its lush forest and abundance of freshwater flowing through the Himalayas have been homeland for indigenous semi nomadic hunter gatherer groups like the Chepangs, Rautes and Kusundas who have been able to access natural resources for their survival. The possibility of sustaining agriculture via terrace farming and the availability of water through hundreds perhaps thousands of small rivers and stream flowing through almost all the parts of the region may have attracted different neighboring tribes.

Magar, currently the third largest ethnolinguistic groups of Nepal has historically been one of the most dominant indigenous groups of Nepal with their specified regions of control like Barha Magarat (Twelve Magar States) and Athara Magarat (Eighteen Magar States) although after 18th Century CE most of their dominions ceased to exist after the unification of the country by an influential King of Nepal, also known as the founder of Nepal. The Magar people have sustained warfare against Kashmir, very likely fought against Khas kings of western Nepal, battled against Gorkhali kings, assisted in the unification of the country, fought world war and very recently shouldered armed revolution led by the Community Party of Nepal-Maoist.

The migration of these groups to Nepal can been seen as a multi staged process possibly emerging out in separate periods of time. This study proposes a major three separate migrations:

 a) Emerging from Southeast Asia (probably modern-day Tai/Khmer region)
 b) Emerging from Brahmaputra basin of Northeast India
 c) Emergence not clear. Possible spread via Tibet or Yunnan/Sichuan region

The order of these migration according to time requires further study. Similarly, it should also be noted that the ancestors of these groups may have looked completely different from the ones that are present in Nepal today and there is possibility that they spoke a very different language than the ones spoken today. Despite the group being hugely endogamous, the prospect of admixture with the outer population and within the inner related population remains. There are accounts of their intermingling with *Matwala Khas*[48] (liquor drinking Khas)

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47 Hitchcock, J.T. (1965) *Subtribes in the Magar community in Nepal.* Asian Survey. Vol. 5 (4) pp 213
48 Ibid

and since these three-separate group of people have been known to share geographical region the possibility of admixture among the population persists. The finding is also consistent with the categorization of the modern-day Magar in to three linguistic categories[49].

5.1 So, who are the "Real" Magars?

The modern-day Magar are the groups of people who may have undergone admixture within and outside their population from historic times because of several political and social changes within their dominions. Some of the ethnic groups who have taken the name Magar are Kham, Kaike, Kusunda, Raute, Raji and Chantyal[50]. Noonan states that non-Magar castes may have adopted the Magar name because it was more prestigious[51]. Van Driem also weighs in on why many groups have adopted the name Magar: "there are many non-Magar groups which either collectively or individually pass themselves off as Magar because this gives them the social advantage of belonging to a large population group with Thakuri status."[52] Currently, the question of "Real Magar" may not be a very relevant question when the group has already gone through several generation of admixtures and the whole population group is united through a common identity of the "Magars". However, one simple answer to the question, based on this study, is that the "Real Magars" were probably the most powerful, influential, prestigious, successful, and dominating tribe among the three or more set of tribes who lived closely in the western hills of Nepal in historic times, influencing the rest of the neighboring tribes to take the "Magar" title.

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49 Bista, Dor Bahadur. 1967. People of Nepal. Ratna Pustak Bhandar: Kathmandu, Nepal

50 Grunow-Hårsta, Karen A. 2008. A Descriptive Grammar of Two Magar Dialects of Nepal:
Tanahu and Syangja Magar. Vol. 1. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

51 Noonan, M. (___). *The rise of ethnic consciousness and politicalization of language in West-central Nepal.' Globalization, technological advances and minority languages.* University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. pp 6

52 Van Driem, G. (2001). *Languages of the Himalayas: An ethnolinguistic handbook of the greater Himalayan region*. Leiden: Brill.