

Although the book is not entirely free of editorial and printing glitches, the overwhelming judgment must be that it is splendidly informative and deeply interesting. It will certainly inspire further research.

***Histoire et Devenir des Paysages en Himalaya. Représentations des milieux et gestion des ressources au Népal et au Ladakh* edited by Joëlle Smadja. Paris: CNRS Editions, 2003. ISBN 2-271-06000-1, ISSN 1269-701X, 66 figures, 60 photographs, 13 tables, 25 boxes, 646 pp.**

Reviewed by Hermann Kreutzmann, Erlangen

Whenever in recent years the relationship between man and his environment in the mountains has been discussed certain hypotheses, concepts and theories have been put forward, in the Himalayan context in particular. In the final quarter of the 20th century several Western scholars predicted that demographic growth would lead to destruction of natural resources, and projected a vicious circle of processes that would result in an early end to Himalayan nature and societies before the new millennium began. So far the Himalayas have survived, and the doomsday scenario was questioned by scientists from various disciplines, ushering in a controversial debate on what came to be called the "Himalayan Dilemma" (so the title of a publication by Jack Ives and Bruno Messerli in 1989). It soon became clear that the problem had not solely to do with the mountains and their resources, with the population and its utilization strategies, but also with certain discrepancies between the orientations of academic research on the one hand and development practice on the other. Were the appropriate questions asked? Were the adequate methods applied? And how much scope was provided for contradicting interpretations of empirical evidence? From the viewpoint of a natural science-driven approach, improvements in all these realms were required. A further drawback lay in the fact that although the mountain population was identified as the chief actor in problem-solving, little attention was devoted to the need of consulting it, investigating its role or soliciting its participation. Thus, the chances of

human survival in general and culture in particular were not addressed adequately. The mutual bias that prevailed between the protagonists of research and practice on the one hand, and the cleft between the theoretical approaches of the natural and social sciences on the other proved to be major obstacles in the debate on how to grasp the man-environment relationship in its entirety and how to take account of the complexity of Himalayan life. Since then, as a consequence of a paradigm shift, the need for holistic approaches has been propagated by development practitioners and earth systems researchers. At the same time, social sciences have experienced a “cultural turn” in that they now devote more attention to action-oriented and qualitative approaches. Discourses of history and memory, perception and construction of environment, socio-cultural spheres, imagined communities, and hybrid identities – these are just a few keywords in recent debates that have opened up new perspectives for old questions about the living conditions, culture and society in Himalayan environments.

It is in this context that we have to appreciate the book edited by Joëlle Smadja, which as a result of recent empirical research is a fresh contribution to the ongoing debate. In her introduction, Smadja begins straightforwardly with reflections about the state of dominant knowledge systems, and the issues of uncertainty and complexity. Not surprisingly then, the first box in the book recapitulates the so-called “Theory of Himalayan Environmental Land Degradation”, the critique of which was central to the “Himalayan Dilemma”. This is only the initial reference point for the argument that a time-space approach is required, which allows us to take account of cultural factors and thus enhances an understanding of landscapes in the wider sense of the term. As emerges from the introductory chapter, time and space are indeed the main dimensions of investigation. Both are constantly referred to throughout the book and remind us of the fact that cultural landscape has always been a result of human activity, including an appropriation of space over long periods of time. Reading of landscape (*lecture de paysage*) is the key issue in this book, and in their attempt at understanding environment as a “text”, the authors draw on data collected among, and interpreted by, informants from different regions and different language groups. Local knowledge, fieldwork in a number of case study areas, as well as published and archival sources provide the basis for interpretation.

Evidently, such a task could not have been carried out by a single researcher. Joëlle Smadja is supported by a team of twenty contributors to the volume, all of them more or less closely affiliated with the CNRS Himalayan Research Group in Paris/Villejuif (six of the co-authors are permanent staff members of the “UPR 299, Milieux, Sociétés et Cultures en Himalaya”). The case study areas have been selected according to the research activities of the CNRS team during the past few decades. Thus, the

middle and lower mountains of Nepal, especially the Salme region as the key area of CNRS and the editor's activities, along with Ladakh where Valérie Labbal and Pascale Dollfus conducted fruitful long-term field research, are prominently represented. This spatial restriction of focus is important to bear in mind, all the more so since a similar concentration on certain regions can also be observed in some other publications.

The introductory chapter identifies the key themes, such as frame conditions and their relationship of environmental destabilisation and demographic growth. The perception and representation of environments are highlighted, along with the historical development of land use, land cover change, and resource management. Options and risks in present-day usage of environment are addressed from the theoretical perspective of the current international debate.

The main body of the book is organized in four parts, the first of which deals with the frame conditions of environment and population. In chapter 1, Joëlle Smadja discusses geographical categories and units of measurement, and addresses issues, such as the structural properties of slopes, landscape profiles, cultivated land in general and terraced fields in particular – all examined on different scale levels. A new classification of landscape units is proposed, and informative tables with translations from the vernacular languages together with cross-references recapitulate some of the findings. Pascale Dollfus and Valérie Labbal interpret, in chapter 2, the attribution of certain properties to landscape elements in Ladakh, and illustrate it by photographs and drawings. Soil classification and the local taxonomy of land utilization are summarized in a table. Chapter 3 by Olivier Dollfus and Monique Fort focuses on the natural landscape and the process of landscape transformation in Nepal. Pairs of matched photographs stemming from different periods of time show the transformation at work on steep slopes and flat cones. The second objective of the first part of the book is dealt with in more detail by Philippe Ramirez who analyses statistical information about population growth and density in a spatial context and with reference to agricultural and some other economic activities in Nepal.

The second part of the book, devoted to the perception and representation of environment, begins with a lucid chapter by Marie Lecomte-Tilouine on the exegesis (*exegèse*) and appropriation of landscape in some local contexts of Nepal. It demonstrates the multi-dimensionality of space as perceived in emotional and biological settings, embedded in religious worldviews, defined by territorial demarcations, and subject to transformations. The discussion of the interconnections between sanctity and worldly power as manifest in the ordering of space opens up new venues for our understanding of “sacred geographies”. Her major findings of a reading of the landscape of the village of Salme in Central Nepal are presented by Joëlle Smadja in chapter 6. She treats settlement strategies

and the utilization of space by the Tamang population as processes of transformation, and points out that permanent dwellers operate filial settlements, requiring a high degree of seasonal mobility. In addition, the continuous appropriation of space and the expansion of settlements result in a fluctuation in the composition of household members. The dependence on, and the damages caused by, water are part of local livelihoods and constitute a focus in certain rituals concerned with the village territory. In chapter 7, Pascale Dollfus and Valérie Labbal contribute samples of toponyms collected in their fieldwork areas in Ladakh (Hemis-shukpa-chan and Sabu, respectively), while chapter 8, by Lucile Viroulaud, gives an interesting account of the diverging socio-religious contexts of landownership among Christians and Hindus in a Magar village of Tanahun district.

The third part of the book is devoted to historical studies of land use and resource management. In chapter 9, Pascal Dollfus, Marie Lecomte-Tilouine and Olivia Aubriot investigate the persistence of human activities in Himalayan landscape in the light of evidence provided by archaeology, mythology, epic and historiographical sources from Nepal and Ladakh. The issues of famine, of agricultural innovations, including the introduction and impact of new varieties of plants, stand in the foreground. Drawing on official documents from the 18th and 19th centuries, in chapter 10, Philippe Ramirez undertakes an attempt to explain the background of the estimation the Nepalese administration fostered for forests in general and certain kinds of trees in particular. In chapter 11, Bruno Muller gives an outline of legal history in examining the development of traditional rights and privileges concerning the utilization of forests and pasture lands in Nepal. Chapter 12, jointly authored by Blandine Ripert, Isabelle Sacareau and Stéphanie Tawa Lama, analyses resource management and environmental policies of the Nepalese State since 1950. The entire agenda of international development practice that has been applied in the “Himalayan laboratory” of Nepal – including the “Himalayan ecological crisis”, the “Himalayan dilemma”, and even buzzword issues, such as “sustainable development”, “nature protection”, “NGO’s”, etc. – are critically scrutinized in a tour de force.

The fourth and final part of the book bears the title “Local practices: between options and constraints”. In chapter 13, Satya Shrestha (she and Pramod Khakurel are the only contributors hailing from the Himalayas) investigates the link between environmental protection and pauperisation in a case study of a community on the southern border of Rara National Park in Western Nepal. Shrestha provides us with a blueprint approach to the problem of nature protection in a specific instance where external agents interfere in local practices. The same topic is taken up, in chapter 14, by Isabelle Sacareau who shows how the inhabitants of the Annapurna Conservation Area have responded to landscape changes over time. In chapter 15, Blandine Ripert examines the effects the change of

landownership rights has exerted on privatisation and communal utilization of land in the local context of Salme, and concludes that both the variety of simultaneously applicable rules and the availability of different options must be understood against the background of a legal pluralism. Gérard Toffin contributes a chapter on the practices and social organization of the Balami, wood cutters who have been increasingly deprived of their access to the forests on the southern precincts of the Kathmandu Valley. This is followed by a further case study of a region in the lower hills of the Mahabharat range in Palpa district where “*bocage*-type of landscapes”, reminiscent of France, are to be found. In this chapter 17, Tristan Bruslé, Monique Fort and Joëlle Smadja focus on landscape dynamics as shown, among other things, by the comparative evaluation of photographs from 1922, 1932 and 1997. Here again, local practices stand in the foreground. As regards the fields enclosed by stone walls, the findings contrast with what is revealed by the rest of the case studies in the book.

The concluding chapter by Joëlle Smadja articulates some reflections on the present state of environments and points out that all researchers are confronted with the existence of “artificial landscapes” and the persistence of change. She also highlights the temptation for political actors to exploit natural resources in remote areas, examines the importance of local initiatives to planting trees outside the forest proper as a panacea, and addresses some further issues, such as the role of a global, but unequally structured information society, the access to knowledge and the chances of participation by the local population. In concluding, Smadja raises the question of what is at stake: the protection of the environment against man or the protection of man against being deprived of his resources?

It goes without saying that for reasons of space, the present reviewer cannot do justice to this book with its mass of detailed information based on empirical evidence. Some readers might miss references to a host of further studies relevant to the subject, as well as certain methods and concepts, the recourse to which would have perhaps been helpful. Yet this a matter of personal preference. What weighs more is that its publication in French is unlikely to enhance the accessibility of *Histoire et devenir* to a wider readership. Who in Nepal and India will be in a position to benefit from it? Be that as it may, Joëlle Smadja is to be congratulated on persuading her co-authors to participate in the project, and on editing this substantial volume which amply demonstrates how rewarding the application of new perspectives and multi-disciplinary approaches can be.