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Editorial Note

The first print issue of the *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* was released in spring 1991. We are pleased to announce that in the year 2021, for its thirtieth anniversary, EBHR will start a new life as an online journal.

Since we took over the editorship of the Bulletin for a new four-year cycle, our priority has been to assess the way of making this publication even more relevant for the community of people engaged in Himalayan studies. We consulted with the contributing editors who have been associated with EBHR through the years. We also felt that renewing the editorial board was needed in terms of gender balance, geographical area of expertise and disciplinary diversity. That is why, as seven members decided to leave the editorial board, we are happy to welcome ten new members with a strong anchorage in the Himalayas.

Following a series of exchanges with the previous editorial team, we became convinced that the long-awaited move to an online, open access format had become an urgent priority in order to address the challenges faced by a journal like EBHR. Immediate open access implies a change in our economic model which carries some significant challenges. Nevertheless, the new online format will provide many advantages in terms of dissemination, accessibility, discoverability and diversity of content. We are also aware of the possible constraints it imposes when access to the Internet is limited and a hard copy is sometimes a preferable mode of circulation. We endeavour to address the various challenges and opportunities that such a transition entails: detailed information about this upcoming change will be shared in the next editorial note.

The move to an online platform is, however, not a rupture in terms of editorial politics regarding the journal's scope and role. This issue's content attests to a sense of continuity and even of the revitalization of some features.

EBHR was, at its launch, designed as a Newsletter about the state of the field of Himalayan studies (with reports on research projects, notes on resources and archives, news and announcements, book

reviews, etc.). Its content has evolved and diversified with each issue: 'dissertation abstracts' were first added in 1996 (no. 10); and the same year the Bulletin turned into a fully fledged journal with a thematic double issue (no. 12-13) that included many research articles. Film reviews have also been published, and the special issues about music and photography show that early on the Bulletin was open to a diversity of topics and media. With the prospect of a transition to an online platform we feel it is a good time to revisit these early attempts and to expand the range of formats we will include in the Bulletin.

With this and the following issues, we unassumingly hope to assert the role the Bulletin can play in constituting a platform for scholarly engagement: thanks to the tireless work of Arik Moran, long-time associate editor for book reviews, many books are reviewed and discussed in these pages; we are also re-launching a 'dissertation abstracts' section with aims to give more visibility to research topics chosen by PhD students. Conference reports also give us a sense of some of the initiatives that are taking place and which in our eyes seem to convey a need to enliven the field of Himalayan studies and to consolidate the community of scholars and network of institutions that support it.

We hope that EBHR can continue to be one of the main channels through which scholarly exchanges can take place, and we will work towards making it happen. We always welcome suggestions, special issue proposals and we particularly encourage junior researchers to submit their work for publication in EBHR.

The editors, European Bulletin of Himalayan Research
Tristan Bruslé, Stéphane Gros and Philippe Ramirez

Storytelling in Prison: Oral Performance of a Gurkha Prisoner of World War I

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Abstract

Among the non-European military forces that fought on the European continent during World War I, the Gurkhas from Nepal emerged from the conflict having achieved wide renown for their bravery. In fact, it was not only on the battlefield where they demonstrated all their powers of endurance. A considerable number of Gurkhas were captured by the Germans while fighting for the British and were made prisoners of war. Though many of them succumbed to the harsh living conditions in foreign climes, some of them managed to leave behind memorials of their lives and their country in the form of voice recordings for German scholars who had a keen interest in collecting source material for their research into foreign cultures and languages. This paper briefly reviews the results of these scholarly activities regarding one Gurkha prisoner of war, Ait Singh Gurung, who was sent to Halbmondlager (Half Moon Camp). He never returned home but bequeathed to posterity a story and a poem that he recorded for the Germans. After a review of what we know about his life history, the two texts are examined to see what they reveal about Ait Singh's personal experience and the history of Nepali literature and its print culture.

Keywords: Gurkha, life-writing, Nepal, POWs, World War I

Introduction

During World War I many Gurkhas¹ found themselves venturing overseas for the first time in their lives and most of them were the first members of their families to do so.² Gurkhas of six Gurkha Battalions,³ among twenty-four thousand men from South Asia, docked in the port of Marseilles in France between September and October 1914 to help sustain the British war effort (Merewether and Smith 1918: Foreword). The first units of Indian soldiers, including Sikhs, Jats, Dogras, Rajputs, Pathans, Gahrwalis, Mahrattas, Gurkhas and Punjabi Moslems, etc., left India to be mobilised and deployed in France and Belgium. ‘The winter of 1914 in northern France and Belgium was severe, with frequent snowstorms and a biting wind. The Gurkhas felt the cold intensely; it was damp, not the dry cold to which they were accustomed. Frostbite was a major problem among troops of all nations’ (Farwell 1984: 89–90). However, the Gurkhas performed well despite the strange climate and the fearful casualties in their battalion. ‘In spite of the Indian Corps’ good record in France, military historians have doubted the wisdom of sending it. [...] It was a mistake. Indian troops were to perform better on the hot sands of Mesopotamia than in the wet cold of France. [...] The plan to send two divisions of the Indian Army to France was ill conceived; the decision to withdraw them for use elsewhere was wise’ (Farwell 1984: 94–95). Indeed, after thirteen months of service and 21,000 casualties in France, Indian soldiers were transferred by the British to Mesopotamia.

In the first year of the war, after Britain’s declaration of war on Germany on 4 August 1914, most of the Gurkha Rifles regiments that

-
- 1 King of Gorkha, Prithvi Narayan Shah, laid the foundations of today’s Nepal in the eighteenth century, hence the unit of troops he created was called the Gurkhas. They waged war (Anglo-Nepal war) with the British during the period 1814–1816, which then resulted in the recruitment of Gurkhas in the East India Company’s Army (Smith 2007 and Corrigan 2015).
 - 2 The total number of South Asian soldiers and labourers who were shipped across oceans between August 1914 and October 1918 amounted to more than 940,000 (Ahuja 2011: 4). Of these, some 200,000 Gurkha soldiers are reported to have served in the British Indian Army (Caplan 1995: 22), with one in ten never returning home from the battlefield (Bolt 1975: 66).
 - 3 1st Battalion 1st Gurkha Rifles, 1st Battalion 4th Gurkha Rifles, 1st Battalion 9th Gurkha Rifles, 2nd Battalion 2nd Gurkha Rifles, 2nd Battalion 3rd Gurkha Rifles and 2nd Battalion 8th Gurkha Rifles.

arrived in Marseilles were transported to the front and fought, among other battlefields, either at Neuve Chapelle or Givenchy in northern France or at Ypres in Flanders, Belgium. Besides the high number of casualties, nine million POWs were taken during WWI by the two sides combined. Two and a half million soldiers fighting in British ranks were captured on the battlefield and imprisoned in Germany (Roy 2011: 53). South Asian soldiers captured by Germany on the Western Front were first taken to camps in Germany: as of early 1915 Indian POWs were kept at Halbmondlager (Half Moon Camp) in Wünsdorf (Liebau 2014). Having been classed as Indian soldiers, most Gurkha POWs were also held at Halbmondlager.

Gurkha POWs are often grouped together with Indian soldiers in studies. Yet, in spite of the fact that Gurkhas were recruited in India and fought under the British India Army, they constituted a distinct military entity. Regimental history records show that a total of eight regiments out of ten fought on European battlefields.⁴ We are therefore justified in attempting to explore the experiences of Gurkha POWs as a subject in its own right. In this article I focus on an individual soldier, Ait Singh Gurung, a Gurkha soldier who never returned home from Europe but died at Halbmondlager in Wünsdorf on 15 March 1917 before his fellow fighters sailed back to their homeland (see Fig. 1).

This article approaches the life of Ait Sing Gurung from a different angle than the one commonly used in life-history research. The latter, which has strong roots in sociology, is also widely pursued in other disciplines. Unlike the common practice of using first-person narratives, personal interviews, and other material containing information about the subject in question, this article presents a biographical account of Ait Singh Gurung based mainly on the voice recordings he made at the prisoner-of-war camp in Germany in 1916. Although the recordings do not provide any concrete information about him, his comrades or the socio-political spaces they inhabited, there are nevertheless many scattered, though limited, details that bear on both him and his Gurung-Gurkha⁵ comrades. However, to start with, we should ponder

4 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10 GRs.

5 I use this expression to refer to Gurkhas who crossed the sea to fight in WWI as members of the Gurung ethnic group originally from western Nepal (all of whom bear the family name Gurung).

the question of whether he exercised full freedom of agency in the production of the recordings. Or was he merely reciting what German scholars asked or ordered him to? If he was able to choose, why did he choose that particular story and poem rather than something else? What does the content of the story and poem tell us, not only from a linguistic perspective but also as historical, sociological and literary source material? Were the story and poem his own creations or had he memorised works by other authors? Does the recited text contain any link to the corpus of Nepali literature?

The transcription and translation of his text was done entirely by the author and is provided in the appendices. Conducting an analysis while reading between the lines of Ait Singh Gurung's texts and studying the available historical material on him and his comrades are other possible approaches to this article. Several studies have already been conducted on a song by a Gurkha POW of WWI, Jas Bahadur Rai, and on a few letters and other documents from Gurkha soldiers in WWI (Chudal 2020, Das 2015, Hilden 2015, Lange 2015, Onta 2016). This article presents a new text produced by a Gurkha POW and its analysis. Before turning to Ait Singh and his texts, it is worthwhile taking stock of what we know about POWs and Halbmondlager, along with the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission which recorded his voice in the camp.

Halbmondlager and the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission⁶

Weinberglager (Vineyard Camp) in Zossen and Halbmondlager in Wünsdorf were Sonderlager (special camps) set up for propaganda purposes and especially designed for soldiers from the Entente powers' colonies in Africa and Asia. In contrast to other POW camps, prisoners of these two camps were to be treated in accordance with their religious practices and were simultaneously politically indoctrinated as part of a secret German military strategy to persuade them to turn against their colonial masters (Liebau 2011). Halbmondlager, a so-called Inderlager (Indian camp), was built about 40 kilometres from Berlin to keep South Asian prisoners separate from French colonial

6 This section is a slightly revised version of a similar section in Chudal 2020.

soldiers from North Africa and from Russian POWs. Although life was very hard in these camps and the mortality rate was high, prisoners usually enjoyed better conditions and better treatment than in normal POW camps (Lange 2011). The men were from various ethnic, social and religious backgrounds, including from Gurkha regiments. As this was a propaganda camp, built partly for show, a greater number of cultural and physical activities were provided than in the other camps, along with facilities for religious worship (Liebau 2011). However, all these activities were restricted by the limited space in the camp. Today, there is nothing left of the site. A visit to Zossen-Wünsdorf in November 2016 revealed no sign of the war. However, a few kilometres away in Zehrendorf, an Indian cemetery for WW1 POWs still exists and is well tended, having been restored by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.⁷

Halbmondlager comprised 50 barracks and associated outbuildings for 4,000 prisoners who were housed according to their religion and nationality. Each barrack provided accommodation for 80 inmates, with a prisoner being attributed approximately 103 m². Sanitary facilities in the camp were also generously apportioned (Gussone 2016: 181-183). However, the weather was in no way kind to the South Asian soldiers and this was one factor that contributed to the comparatively high mortality rate among South Asian POWs. The cold, harsh winter climate often led to fatal cases of tuberculosis (Lüders n.d.: 12). The cemetery in Zehrendorf, contains 85 headstones of Gurkha soldiers from seven Gurkha regiments,⁸ and four from the Burma Military Police. POWs were kept there until 1918. Towards the end of the war, before British forces could free the survivors, POWs, the Gurkhas included, were transferred to the Indian camp at Morile-Marculesti in southern Romania where the climate and living conditions were more salubrious and similar to what they were used to (Höpp 1997: 44-45, Adam 1936: 534).

The Royal Prussian Phonetic Commission was set up in October 1915 to record the numerous languages, dialects and music of soldiers and civilians imprisoned in Germany's international POW camps. The

7 Details may be found at: <https://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/34721/ZEHRENDORF%20INDIAN%20CEMETERY>

8 Gurkha Regiments 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10.

commission of German researchers set out to compile a sound archive of all the languages in the world (Doegen 1925: 10). Indeed, the camps filled with prisoners of war were a Mecca for the commission, providing access to soldiers from around the globe.

The commission comprised thirty academics from different fields of research, including anthropology, linguistics, musicology (Mahrenholz 2011: 190). The commission's broad objective was to make systematic recordings of languages, music, phonetic sounds and stories representative of the prisoners' countries of origin and to store them in a comprehensive sound archive. To complement the phonographic corpus, members of the commission sought to produce a transcript of the recordings in the native script, a reproduction in phonetic notation and a translation into German, together with a standardised Personal-Bogen (personal file) containing personal data of the recorded prisoners and metadata about time, location and type of recording. Today the recordings have been digitised and, together with all the existing files, are part of Berlin's Humboldt University Sound Archive.

Heinrich Lüders (1869-1943) was in charge of recording Indian languages of South Asian prisoners, including those of the Gurkhas. For this purpose he visited Halbmondlager and the Indian camp in Morile-Marculesti, southern Romania in 1918 after POWs had been transferred there in early 1917 (Hilden 2015: 8). Lüders was a German orientalist and Indologist, and had learnt South Asian languages such as Sanskrit, Bengali and Pashto. During the period of the recordings, 1915-16, he was professor of Indian philology at Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin and a member of the Prussian Academy of Sciences (Lange 2011: 157). Lüders' essay *Die Gurkhas* (Lüders 1925) and his archive housed at Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities) show that he was very much engaged with the Gurkhas. He writes in his essay that when he and Wilhelm Schulze visited the camp to research the Gurkha (Nepali) language, the brave Gurkhas provided information with great enthusiasm. They were proud, Lüders writes, to know that German scholars attached such importance to their language (Lüders 1925: 135).

After this brief introduction to the commission and its activity, we turn now to Ait Singh Gurung, one of the Gurkha POWs imprisoned in

Halbmondlager who told a story and recited a poem for the German scholars. Before delving into his recording, let us first review what we know about the man himself. The personal information sheet that was produced for him before his recording contains very scant details. This is the main primary evidence we have concerning him; the rest has to be provided by seeking links to wider historical evidence.

Ait Singh Gurung: a Gurkha Prisoner of WWI

The British had long observed different types of Indian peoples, but after the Indian Mutiny they began to class Indians into superior and inferior groups. Victorian anthropologists helped legitimise the division of India into martial and non-martial races based on climate theories, physical qualities and behavioural characteristics. When the government conducted an official inquiry after the outbreak of the Sepoy Rebellion in 1857 into the cause of the mutiny, martial races became a concern. The report concluded that the mutiny had started with high-caste Brahmins, who at the time dominated the Bengal Army, and that the British had been unaware of the true martial attribute that various Indian ethnic groups possessed. This simple explanation appealed to British administrators at the time. After all, Gurkhas, Sikhs, Marathas and Rajputs, who were once the most formidable enemies of the British, had remained loyal and accepted British supremacy. For the British, this group understood the meaning of honour and duty, and were therefore India's truly martial people (Barua 1995).

It was the Gurkha units' conspicuous loyalty and competence during the Indian Mutiny that brought to the attention of the British the fact that Gurkhas were something special. The British appreciated their capacity to endure fatigue, their lack of any pretension to caste, their huge muscles and great strength despite their being of short stature. Thus, the number of Gurkha regiments with Gurkha components increased. Moreover, Magars and Gurungs were at first the ethnic groups most sought after by Gurkha regiments (Baura 1995, Hodgson 1972, Caplan 1995). Two decades before WWI, Vansittart (1894) mentions four major fighting elements in the Gurkha army, namely Khas, Magars, Gurungs and Thakurs. He then states that 'Magars and Gurungs are by common consent recognised as the beau ideal of what a Gurkhā soldier should be' (Vansittart 1915: 74) and goes on to remark

that they are scattered from the Kali River in the west to the Mechi River in the east of Nepal (ibid.: 75). Thus, it is clear that Gurungs were among the most sought-after recruits for Gurkha regiments. And, as the Nepali scholar Dor Bahadur Bista notes, there was an economic dimension to their zeal (Bista 1967: 71): ‘The most important source of Gurung family income is from the pensions and salaries of those who become soldiers. A great majority of Gurungs join the Indian and the British armies [...]’

One can therefore say that Magars and Gurungs were considered to be some of the best martial races among the Gurkhas and during the period under consideration they undoubtedly formed the majority in Gurkha regiments (Morris 1936: 184). Furthermore, Lüders (1925: 136) mentions that both Magar and Gurung POWs were present in greater numbers than other groups in the camp. Lüders himself had started learning the Gurung language with the help of Gurung POWs.⁹

A list of approximately 300 Gurkha POWs in Halbmondslager indicates that 98 Gurung-Gurkha POWs were captured by the Germans, including 72 POWs from the 1st Battalion of the 4th Gurkha Regiment (to which Ait Singh Gurung belonged).¹⁰ Eleven of them made recordings for the Royal Prussian Phonetic Commission, four of them in their mother tongue. Altogether, 25 Gurung POWs died in the camp during their imprisonment and were buried at Zehrendorf Indian Cemetery nearby.¹¹

Table 1: Gurung-Gurkha WWI POWs in Germany

Description	Total number
Gurung-Gurkha POWs in Halbmondslager (Half Moon Camp)	98
Gurung-Gurkha POWs of 1/4 GR captured by the Germans	72
Gurung-Gurkha POWs who made voice recordings	11
Gurung-Gurkha POWs buried at the cemetery	25

Ait Singh Gurung, the main subject of this article, came from Tahsil

9 I found evidence of this in the archive in which he left notes and a self-compiled vocabulary of Gurung words with their English translation. NL Lüders, Nr. 9, Nr. 10 and Nr. 11.

10 IOR MSS Eur F120/272 *Indian Soldiers' Fund*, 15 October 1918.

11 This was determined during a visit to Zehrendorf Indian Cemetery in November 2016.

No. 2 West,¹² Gurkha¹³ district. Lamjung and Gurkha districts were two districts in No. 2 West (Vansittart 1987: 192). The personal file associated with the records of the Sound Archive and Lüders collection at the Archive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities in Berlin corroborate other biographical information about Ait Singh and provides valuable additional details. From the very limited information available on him in the POW camp records, we learn that he belonged to a Gurung family in No. 2 West Nepal. He was recruited by the 4th Gurkha Rifles (henceforth 4GR) in India. The commission collected these details from each POW before the voice recordings were made. Besides general biographical information, the commission recorded some additional facts, such as: interest in making the recording, ability to read and write, secondary languages and mastery of a musical instrument. In the data collected prior to the voice recordings, Ait Singh's age is given as 33,¹⁴ whereas his age in the personal file filled out on the day of the recording states that he was 35. Although the date of the earlier data collection is not mentioned, if accurate, this would suggest that Ait Singh lived a little over one and a half years in the camp before the recording was made, in which case he may well have been captured by the Germans at the end of 1914.

Both records mention Ait Singh's birthplace as Bhudasing and the data collected during the voice recording mentions Gorkha as his home district. On the current political map of Nepal, Bhudasing is part of Tarakeshor rural municipality in what was formerly called West No. 1 in present-day Nuwakot district in central Nepal's Bagmati Zone. In the data collected earlier, it is indeed stated that Nuwakot is the name of the largest town near Ait Singh's birthplace. He gives Gurkhali as his mother tongue, claims to speak Gurung and a little Hindustani and to be proficient in reading and writing the Devanagari script. He practised the Hindu religion and his profession was farmer. The data collected before the recording included a remark that his voice was

12 'The highlands or mountainous country [...] between the first range of hills on the south and the Tibetan frontier on the north, is divided into 21 Tehsils' (Vansittart 1987: 186).

13 The German documents register the name of the district and language as Gurkha. Otherwise, it is spelt Gorkha.

14 Archive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities: Heinrich Lüders Collection, Nr. 1 Bd. 4, page 58.

strong and that he could sing a local song very well. However, the reason for his wanting to record his voice is indicated in the earlier file as unknown.¹⁵ He did not play a musical instrument. Having been asked to state where he lived between the ages of seven and 20, Ait Singh Gurung answered – in this file and thereafter – Bakloh, a hill station in Chamba district in the state of Himachal Pradesh, India. Furthermore, he never went to school or received any formal education but could read and write Devanagari script, suggesting that he learnt these skills either on his own or in the regiment during training.

One conclusion that we can draw is that, since he was 35 years old at the time of the recording, in May 1916, Ait Singh must have been born around 1880. Furthermore, the Commonwealth War Grave Commission (CWGC) files inform us that his father was Gorja Gurung from West No. 2 Nepal. One can then fairly confidently assert that Ait Singh was born in Bhudasing, in West No. 1 Nepal, later resided in West No. 2 and at some point was recruited as a Gurkha soldier into 4GR and stationed in Bakloh.

Before India's independence, each Gurkha regiment was stationed at a permanent cantonment in the Himalayan hills or foothills, although the regiment's battalions would frequently be absent from their base during exercises or when on active service (Caplan 1995: 22). The 4GR was headquartered at Bakloh (*ibid.*: 27) for 82 years, from 1866 to 1948. The record identifies a period of time during which Ait Singh lived in Bakloh but it does not give a clear indication of the year in which he was recruited. We can merely surmise that he was in his teens, which would mean sometime in the 1890s. It is likely that he went home at least twice after that, since six months' leave was granted every three years (Parker 2005: 83).

Ait Singh Gurung served as rifleman in his regiment and bore the service number 4351. The dates of his journey to Europe and his imprisonment are not available. However, based on information supplied by Lüders about POWs being brought to Halbmondlager during the first year of the war, we can assume that Ait Singh Gurung reached Europe with the first group of soldiers having entered France via Marseilles, was captured in battle during the first year of the war,

15 NL Lüders, Nr. 1 Bd. 4, page 58.

transported to Germany and imprisoned in the camp in Wünsdorf. There is no information as to where, when and under what circumstances he was taken prisoner. According to the literature, only the 1st Battalion of the 4GR fought in WWI in Europe: Ait Singh therefore belonged to that battalion. The 1st Battalion of the 4th Gurkhas (henceforth 1/4 GR), under the Lahore Division, Sirhind Brigade, embarked at Karachi on 24 August 1914 for Europe. The Sirhind Brigade was detained in Egypt to reinforce the garrison there and only reached Marseilles on 30 November 1914 (Willcocks 1920: 19–20). We may therefore assume that as Ait Singh was part of 1/4 GR, he arrived in Europe on that day.

As for many other South Asian men, Ait Singh's journey to Europe did not come with a return ticket to his family and friends. Not much information is available about his family or marital status. Despite all the memories of his homeland, his desire to return home remained unfulfilled and he died on 15 March 1917 at the age of 36. His remains are buried in the Indian Cemetery at Zehrendorf with 24 other Gurung soldiers. The cause of his death is not known but like Lüders concerning similar cases, we may conjecture that, as Germany was slowly recovering from the peak of winter, he died of tuberculosis.



Figure 1: Headstone in the cemetery in Zehrendorf.

5 November 2016.

Photo by Alaka Chudal

Ait Singh Gurung's Story and Poem

Ait Singh recorded a story and a poem in the afternoon of 29 May 1916 between 12:45:00 and 05:01:35 in the *Ehrenbaracke* (honour barracks) of Halbmondlager. The recording required four phonograph cylinders, labelled with the call numbers PK 246, PK 250, PK 251 and PK 252/3. The first three cylinders contain some episodes of a story. Recording PK 252/3 consists of a poem. The personal file states that the second part of the story is recorded on cylinder PK 247, but this is not in the archive. PK 251 is identified as the concluding part of the story. With the poem, the archive therefore contains 7:07 minutes of Ait Singh's voice recording.

The Story¹⁶

The story Ait Singh recorded is the first of India's famous vampire riddle-tales known as the *Vetāla-pañcaviṃśati* ('The Twenty-Five Tales of an Animated Corpse'). Why did Ait Singh record this particular story as opposed to something else? To answer this question we first study the transformation of these vampire riddle-tales from the original Sanskrit into Indian vernacular versions and eventually into European languages.

The four main Sanskrit versions of these stories, which are thought to have been rooted in oral tradition, are likely to have been composed in the early- to mid-second millennium (Sathaye 2017: 3). The version by Shivadasa from Gujarat c. 1200 became the most popular version and was translated into a number of vernaculars. Surati Mishra translated Shivadasa's Sanskrit version into Braj Bhasha¹⁷ prose under the title *Baitāl Pacīsi* in c. 1700. This was translated into Hindi (1805) under the same title by Lallu Ji Lal assisted by Mazahar Ali Khan Wila for use in language courses for East India Company staff officers at Fort William College, Calcutta. It was later simplified by Tarini Charan Mitra. Duncan Forbes published another revised and simplified version of it in Hindustani (bearing more Persian or Urdu influences) in 1861 (Forbes 1861: v-vi). Meanwhile, English and German translations were also already being published in the nineteenth century in Europe before Ait Singh arrived and recorded his version of one of its stories in Germany. Early versions

16 For the full transcription and translation, see Appendix 1, Sections 1-3.

17 Literary language of north-central India until the nineteenth century.

published in Europe include John Platts' English translation in 1871 (based on Forbes 1861) and an 1881 German commentary on Shivadasa's version by Heinrich Uhle. A printed Nepali version was available on the Indian market, but it is difficult to trace the date of its first publication. In 1916 Sir George Abraham Grierson included the introductory chapter – the frame story – from a printed book as a text example of Khas-kura (or 'Naipali') (Grierson 1916: 69–74).

The above details all bear witness to these 25 stories being popular during the period in question. This compilation was one of the set texts in the entrance examination for candidates entering the East India Company's military service (Barker and Backhouse 1855: vi).

In the light of the foregoing, we can assume that *Baitāl Pacīsī* was standard reading material among British staff officers for learning the language of their recruits. Indeed, the publication of Nepali books in India, and in Varanasi in particular, had as one of its major target readerships the Gurkha Rifles headquarters. However, it is difficult to know whether Ait Singh himself ever read the Nepali version or not. One might argue that he heard the stories being recounted in his village. It is more likely, however, that he first learnt to read and write in his regiment. We may speculate that it was there that Ait Singh had the best opportunity to read the stories or to have them read to him from a Nepali or Hindi book of the type sold or available at the regimental headquarters.¹⁸ The story Ait Singh recites is much shorter than the Hindi version published during that period but more elaborate than the printed Nepali version. Moreover, the printed Nepali version is in verse, whereas Ait Singh's version is in prose and in a colloquial form of Nepali to boot.

Ait Singh's Transmission of the Story

We have already mentioned that the story Ait Singh recited is the first of the 25 famous vampire riddle-tales. In contrast to traditional versions that are about a Varanasi prince and his best friend, a minister's son, Ait Singh's version features a king and his minister.

18 There is good reason to assume that he knew a Nepali version: in the version he recorded he introduces the main female character as being from Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh, whereas in the Hindi and Sanskrit versions she is from Karnataka. The published Nepali versions have the form Karṇapura, from which Kanpur derives.

Except for Princess Padmāvati, he does not use the names of the other characters in the original story. He names Padmavati's mother Dantavati and her father King of Kanpur (a city in north India).¹⁹ His version does, however, recount the main elements of the story, namely what happens when the king falls in love with Princess Padmāvati during an encounter with her while away from his palace. No words are exchanged at that time, but the princess conveys information about herself through mysterious gestures before leaving. The king finds her with the help of his minister, accuses her of being a witch and proves this to her father who expels her, therefore making it possible for the king to marry her. Nevertheless, a number of conspicuous new elements have been introduced into Ait Singh's version. The first one concerns a fair that takes place on *somvare aūsi*,²⁰ which sets the scene for the meeting between Padmāvati and the king. In standard versions, the prince goes hunting and comes across the princess in the jungle. Ait Singh recreates the traditional acts of worship Padmāvati engages in according to Hindu tradition. She offers a flower to the Sun in the sky and one to Mother Earth before communicating with the king by means of signals. In the original versions, Padmāvati does not worship before gesturing to the prince. What is striking is that the prince in the original story has become a king, whom Ait Singh portrays in a much less flattering light than the prince. As a prisoner of war and victim of the political intrigue of kings, Ait Singh may have used the recording to make a veiled statement of his own. For example, the king suspects that his lovesickness is due to his own minister's sorcery aimed at killing him and taking over the kingdom. On the other hand, Ait Singh's version shows much more prudery than the original story. The one-month secret romance between the prince and Padmāvati at the palace becomes '*rājā rānī bhai rahe*' (they live as king and queen), therefore leaving out all the erotic scenes in the Sanskrit and Hindi

19 See footnote 18.

20 *Somvare aūsi* is a new-moon day that falls on Monday. Such a convergence is considered very auspicious in Hindu religious texts. Taking a bath at riverbanks without uttering a word on that day is believed to earn a person great merit. The same is true for performing rituals for deceased ancestors, worshipping Vishnu and making one hundred circumambulations of a peepul tree. On this day many places along riverbanks that serve as *ghāts* for pilgrims, like the one mentioned in the story, are locations for fairs (*melā*).

versions. For instance, there is no mention of the princess requesting that the prince remain sexually continent for three nights during her menstruation. In earlier versions, after Padmāvati's father learns the truth about his daughter and secretly banishes her, Ait Singh has all the women of the city examined before Padmāvati is, for a telltale mark of a witch on their bodies. Once Padmāvati has been shown for who she is, she is expelled publicly, seated on an elephant and made to go round the city three times. Ait Singh gives the story a happy ending by uniting the two lovers, with intimations of a long married life. There is no vestige of the sad outcome in earlier versions for Padmāvati's parents, who die of grief at having had to abandon their daughter. The ending of Ait Singh's story may bespeak a positive attitude towards his own life and future. Perhaps he knew someone back in Nepal whom he was looking forward to meeting again.

Documents in the Sound Archive and Lüders' own archive in Berlin reveal that the recorded texts were first written by the reciter and then transcribed and translated. Once the manuscript was approved by Lüders' committee, the recording could go ahead. Lüders' archive itself contains some texts of the recordings: they are written in Devanagari, transcribed into Roman script and translated into German. Among them is Ait Singh Gurung's story in Devanagari with a transcription.²¹ However, they both differ in content from what is found in Sanskrit or Nepali manuscripts and published versions in that there is no riddle at the end of the story as there is after every story in the *Vetāla-pañcaviṃśati*. We do not know how much of the text was in the missing second recording, but the story Ait Singh wrote down appears to have been longer than the one he recorded. We can assume that the missing recording contained portions of the transliterated version.²²

The impression Ait Singh's story leaves is that he had a fairly good command of Nepali. There are, however, notable Hindi influences, reflecting the long time he spent in India and his constant exposure to Hindi speakers and Hindi reading material. For instance, he sometimes

21 Archive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities: Heinrich Lüders Collection: No. 5 Bd. 2, pages 45–48. The Devanagari version is on No. 4 Bd 6 pages 48–49; the transcript in Roman script, on pages 45–48.

22 The unrecorded parts of the transcription appear in cursive in Appendix 1, Section 2.

mistakes the Hindi dative–accusative postposition for the Nepali one,²³ and he stumbles over certain items of vocabulary, including cognates in Hindi and Nepali that have a different range of meaning.²⁴ In addition, he often does not pay attention to gender and number agreement between subject and verb.

*The Poem*²⁵

The poem Ait Singh recited is composed in the *praśnottar* ('question–answer') style. Like the *Baitāl Pacīsī*, this kind of Nepali poetic composition has its roots in Sanskrit literature. Bhanubhakta Acharya composed his *Praśnottarmālā* (1853) in Nepali based on Shankaracharya's *Mañiratnamālā*. His *Ramgītā* (1868) is also composed in the same style. Lekhnath Paudyal's *Buddhivinod* and Krishna Prasad Regmi's *Thulo Bhaktamālā Lakṣmaṇ Praśnottarī* are later examples in the same tradition. Ait Singh's poem shows that the style was still popular among ordinary Nepalis of his time.

The *śārdūlavikrīḍita*, a classical Sanskrit metre, was another element that continued to be used in poetic composition. So common was it that it even came to be called the *jatīya chanda* ([Nepali] national metre). Bhanubhakta Acharya's *Ramayana*, which was the most widely read book of the time in Nepali, had more than 80% of its 1,038 stanzas written in this metre. Many Nepali poets including Acharya would alter the spelling of words for the sake of metre. The first book of Bhanubhakta's *Ramayana* (*Bālkāṇḍa*), except for one couplet, is composed entirely in *śārdūlavikrīḍita*. Each line of this metre has 19 syllables with a major caesura after the 12th.²⁶ When reciting his poem, Ait Singh marks these required pauses. Given his command of prosody, it is quite possible

23 As in the following two examples of the dative–accusative postposition in Hindi: मन्त्रीको निन्द्रा परी गयो (The minister fell asleep.)। राजाको सपनामा देखे (Then he saw the king in a dream.)।

24 For example, the verb *mārnā* in Hindi means both 'to beat' and 'to kill', whereas in Nepali it can mean only the latter. Ait Singh uses this verb with the former meaning.

25 For a full transcription and translation, see Appendix 1, Section 4. The first stanza is numbered 1 and the second 2, each with its own line numbering.

26 The formula for the *śārdūlavikrīḍita* is as follows (‘[˘]’ stands for a short syllable and ‘^ˉ’ for a long one):

—, —, —, —, —, —, —, —, —, —, —, —, —, —, —, —, —, —, —

Here is one of the best examples of *śārdūlavikrīḍita* from Ait Singh's poem:

पौवा-पाटी हिटी परन्तु रहने त्यो हो पछि साँचिने

then that Ait Singh composed the poem himself. In any case, it is but another example of the popularity of Bhanubhakta Acharya's work and the associated current of Rama devotionalism at the time.²⁷ We shall now consider the poem itself and Ait Singh's recitation of it.

Ait Singh tries to recite the poem metrically, but this does not prove entirely successful. This practice of reciting poems metrically, even though they were not written in metres, was relatively common at the time. These Nepali poems were called *silok*.²⁸ Ait Singh actually performed this type of recitation. He had obviously memorised the text at some point in the past and wanted to render it intact, including in the proper metre, but he clearly forgot some words and inserted others that break the metre while still conveying the gist of the poem. Therefore, it may be argued that, like the story he recorded, the poem is a borrowed improvised text.

The poem first poses questions which on the surface seem to be aimed more at eliciting the secrets of worldly pleasures and individual glory, but then goes on to provide answers with a wholly moral or spiritual thrust to them. Ait Singh knows that a stanza has four lines. He adheres to this form in the second stanza but not in the first which has only three lines. Ideally, the first stanza should have contained the questions and the second stanza the answers. But after three lines in the first stanza he starts providing answers, so that one may assume that he forgot the third line in the first stanza containing further questions.²⁹ There are five questions in the first two lines of the first stanza (1.1, 1.2): What should one eat? How should one prepare food so that it is tasty? What work should one do that has a lasting effect? What should one plant that will later benefit humans? What can be preserved for future use?

The person expressing themselves in the first lines realises that they are faced with difficult questions and is wise enough to see that moral rather than private considerations may be at stake. Thus he asks a sage for his insight (1.3). The latter provides suitable answers in the next

27 Bhanubhakta Acharya stands as the country's leading poet in this tradition.

28 Derived from the Sanskrit *śloka* (metrical verse).

29 Most pairs of lines display an end rhyme. Moreover, the lines of the first stanza would end with exactly the same word as those of the second stanza if there were a third line in the first stanza that ended with *maulne*.

lines: the name of Ram is always sweet; chanting it every day has a lasting effect (2.1). Places providing travellers with water and lodgings are to be maintained in the future (2.2). When planted, good deeds bear the fruit of great knowledge. The poet comes back at the end to acknowledge that these are all indeed profound purposes that come from weighing sin against virtue. The two lines, 1.3 and 2.4, are the same, save for two syllables: the first line asks the sage to speak and the second endorses his answer.

Motiram Bhatta (2046 BS: 6–8) in his published biography of Bhanubhakta Acharya writes how the latter was inspired by a man he saw cutting grass. The account contains a couplet that Bhanubhakta wrote on that occasion. The man was building a well to gain merit (*punya*). Bhanubhakta regretted that, though he himself was rich, he had built no inns or water facilities for pilgrims which would outlive him. This instigated Bhanubhakta to later compose his undying *Ramayana*. The author of the present poem, Ait Singh seems to have been clearly aware of this story, given the reference in it to meeting pilgrims' needs for water and rest. Here we should remember that many Gurkha soldiers returned to their villages both during their career and after retirement to invest their hard-earned pay in them. During the many years in his regiment, Ait Singh may well have looked forwards to the day when he too could carry on this tradition of acquiring karmic merit.

Conclusion

Having undertaken this analysis, we return once again to the central question regarding Ait Singh's freedom of agency while recording his story and poem. Had he been asked by the Germans to compose a story and song, or to recite ones he simply knew? Or could he have done either? Whatever the case, we can say that Ait Singh almost certainly did not have full freedom of agency. Whether he was requested or ordered to tell a story and to sing a song in his native language and from his homeland, it would have been normal for him to exercise a certain amount of self-censoring. He knew that his texts would be translated into German and read by his captors. Creative compositions can be used to make political statements: we have seen one allusion to the distrust of royalty in the story Ait Singh related, which may

reflect his own personal attitude towards kingly power. However, on the whole he seems intent on not expressing whatever hostile feelings he may have had in this regard. He knew that the story he recited was one that the German Indologist Lüders was doubtless familiar with and would have no qualms about. And indeed, Lüders (1925: 135) later mentions a Gurkha POW recording one of the famous *Vetālapañcaviṃśati* stories. As for the poem, it is entirely in keeping with the popular didactic vein. Another POW in the same camp, Jas Bahadur Rai, was noticeably less inhibited in expressing his personal feelings through the song he sang.³⁰ The recordings in languages other than Nepali are more likely to have been used as vehicles for expressing strongly felt sentiments, since the POWs in question would have been confident that ethnic languages such as Gurung, Magar and Rai would not be translated into German by Germans themselves. Ait Singh would not have felt the same freedom of agency in this regard and may have consciously resolved not to test his own limits.

Returning now to the questions raised at the outset: what can we learn from these recordings by Ait Singh? Why did he choose this particular story and song, and why not something else? What does the content of the story and poem tell us about the history of Nepali literature? Ait Singh's recording is a small but not insignificant piece of evidence which attests to one chapter in the history of Gurkhas, namely evidence that the latter were major consumers of popular Nepali literature published in India. The story he tells is not a folk tale anyone in his village would have been likely to know; it is drawn from a classical Sanskrit text. It was translated into Nepali and published by Nepali entrepreneurs and eventually became standard reading material in Gurkha regiments. Ait Singh's recording of the story is proof of this.

His poem clearly reflects the popularity of *Rām bhakti dhārā* (Rama devotionalism) and the question–answer style of verse composition. Although Ait Singh lacked formal education, his story and poem suggest frequent exposure to imaginative works written in Nepali. He had spent years in his regiment before being sent to war and therefore had the opportunity of acquiring vast general knowledge. That, along with a commanding voice, made him a particularly suitable volunteer

30 For an analysis of Jas Bahadur's song, see Chudal (2020).

for the Germans' recording venture. His intellectual bent comes across in the poem in his choice of genre. Rather than a folk song or romantic ditty of the popular genre known as *lahari*, his tastes apparently inclined to more serious subjects.

The work of the Royal Prussian Phonographic Commission was not designed to disseminate the output of the POWs to a wider German audience or to their homeland but was meant to be tapped for its linguistic value alone. Indeed, recordings like Ait Singh's have both linguistic and literary value, encapsulating as they do a slice of the history of Nepali literature. The recordings produced by the commission are therefore very valuable, whether in historical, linguistic, literary or simply human terms. They are also examples of how printed or written texts can live on in oral form, their content in this case being borne from Asia to far-off Europe, there to be retold, transcribed and captured on phonograph cylinders.

British authorities realised that climatic conditions were not suitable for Indian soldiers and wisely decided to send them to Mesopotamia. By 10 November 1915 the last unit of the Indian Corps had left France and Flanders (Corrigan 2015: 236). A similar conclusion was reached in Germany, though somewhat later than in Britain, and POWs began to be transferred to Romania. However, this came too late for Ait Singh Gurung. He never saw Romania, nor would he be lucky enough to leave Europe with those of his comrades who survived the battlefields of France and Belgium.

Appendix 1³¹

1. The first part of the story by Ait Singh Gurung

Archive No. PK 246 at Lautarchiv, Humbolt University, Berlin. Recorded at the POW camp in Wünsdorf, Germany, on 29 May 1916 at 12:45. Duration of the recording: 02:32.

कोही एक जगामा एक राजा गरीब थियो । ऊ राजाको एक मन्त्री बडो भारी पशुभाषी बुझ्ने वाला थियो । एक (एक)³² जगामा बडो भारी मेला थियो । उस जगा (उस जगा) राजा र मन्त्री पनि गयाको थियो । उस दिनमा सोमवारे औंसी परेको थियो । उस मेलाको नुआउने घाटमा एक चौतारा पनि थियो । उस चौताराको छहारीमा राजा र मन्त्री बसेको थियो । मन्त्रीको निन्द्रा परी गयो र राजा बस्दै थियो । उस बखतमा कानपुरे राजाको छोरी मैया बग्गीमाथि चढी आएर उसै चौताराको मुनितिर बग्गीलाई थामेर नुआउने घाटमा गयो । नुआउनुलागे तब ऊ नुआइसके पछि पैला फूल आकाशमा चढायो दोस्रा फूल धरतीमा चढायो । तीसरा फूल आफ्नो कानमा लगायो । चौथा फूल दाँतले च्याती फ्याले । पाँचौं फूल पाउमा दबाईदिए र आफ्नो छातिमा धाप मारी बग्गी माथि चढी गए । तब राजाको (मन) मनमा सुर्ता परे (परे) । यो मैयाले क्या काम गर्यो ? मैले बुझ्नु नसक्ने स्वभावले बिलकुल दुब्लो भयो । तब आफ्नो (राजा राज) राजमा भयाको पण्डितहरूलाई बोलाई हेराउनु लागे । कोही पण्डितले पनि यस्तै व्यथा हो भनी कसैले खार्नु सकेनन् । तब राजाको मनमा पाप मन फाँड्नु लाग्यो कि मेरो मन्त्रीले हो मलाई मारी आफू राजा होला भनी यस्तो गर्‍याको हो भनी मन्त्रीलाई निकाला गरिदियो । तब कोही दिनपछि पण्डितहरूले भन्नु लागे कि हजुरको मन्त्रीले सक्ला त सक्ला अरूले (अरूले) सक्ने छैन भनी हुकुम भयो (भयो) कि फेरि मेरो मन्त्रीलाई बोलाओ भनी हुकुम भयो । तब फेरि मन्त्रीलाई [आएर]³³ भन्नु लाग्यो, हजुरलाई क्याको सुर्ता छ मसँग भन भनी मन्त्रीलाई [ले]³⁴ राजासँग सोध्नु लागे ।

There [once] was a poor king somewhere. He had a minister who could understand the language of large animals. A big fair (*melā*) had been

31 Transcription and translation by the author. The Roman and Devanagari versions of the text found in the archive are transcriptions, that is, attempts to render the spoken text rather than standardised Nepali spellings and transliterations of them. Thus, one finds forms such as *rādźā* rather than *rājā* and मन्त्री rather than मन्त्री. These transcriptions are not always the same for the same word. My own transcription tends towards a transliteration of the standard word which I feel the reciter's pronunciation is closest to. Note that the Devanagari version does not have any punctuation marks, while the Roman version occasionally contains full stops.

32 The words in brackets are words repeated or corrected by the reciter while reading.

33 The Devanagari text in the archive has आएर ('came and'). It is not heard in the recording and, while it is not grammatically necessary, it serves to improve clarity.

34 The Devanagari text in the archive has ले (transitive subject suffix), which is not heard in the recording but is the expected grammatical form.

organised somewhere. The king, and the minister too, went there. It was Monday and a new-moon day. At the fair's bathing *ghāt* there was a *cautāra*.³⁵ The king and the minister sat down in the shade of the *cautāra*. The minister fell asleep and the king [remained] sitting. During this time a girl, the daughter of the king of Kanpur, rode up in a horse-drawn carriage, stopped it under the *cautāra* and went to the bathing *ghāt*. She began to bathe, and when she had finished bathing, she offered a first flower to the sky and a second flower to the earth. She placed a third flower at her ear. She tore a fourth flower off with her teeth and threw it away. She crushed a fifth flower under her foot, patted her chest, got into the carriage and departed. The king became worried. 'What did this girl do?' 'It's in my nature not to understand, and so I've become completely emaciated.' Then the king summoned his country's wise men and got them to look into the matter. Not even a single wise man – not one of them – could diagnose the malady. The king then began to be assailed by the aberrant thought that the minister wanted to kill him and assume kingship – that he was the one who had staged the scene. Believing this, he dismissed the minister. After a few days the wise men began to say, 'If anyone can solve this problem, it's the minister; no one else will be able to.' Hearing this, the king gave the order: 'Call back my minister!' Then he began to speak to the minister again. The minister started [by] asking the king, 'What are you worried about. Tell me'.

35 A platform shaded by trees, along a road where travellers can rest.

2. The second part of the story by Ait Singh Gurung

Archive No. PK 250 at Lautarchiv, Humbolt University, Berlin. Recorded at the POW camp in Wünsdorf, Germany, on 29 May 1916 at 04:25. Duration: 01:59 min.

तब राजाले भन्छन् कि मलाई केही पनि भयाको छैन । हामी एक दिन घुम्नु गयाको दिनमा एक मैयाँ आएर फूल चढायो । यो मतलब नबुझी म यो शोकले हो ।³⁶
 [हजुर बडा मान्छे भएर पनि यो बात को मतलब पाएन । यो बातको वास्ते फिकर नगर्नु । म भन्दिम्ला । पैला फूल आकासमा चढायो । आकासलाई चढायाको हो । दूसरा धर्ती मातालाई चढायाको हो । तीसरा आफ्नु कानमा लगाया । आफ्नु बाबुको नाम कानपुरी राजा हो । चौथा दाँतले टोकी फाले । आफ्नु आमाको नाम दन्तओती रानी हो । पाँचौँ पाउमा दबायो । आफ्नु नाम पद्मावती रानी हो भनिदिया । र तब राजाको चित्त बुझी राजा दिनदिने बलियो हुँदै गयो । छातीमा धाप मारेको मर्द भया देखि आइज मेरो संगमा भन्येको हो । तब केही दिन पछि ऊ राजा र मन्त्री उसै कानपुरी राजाको छोरी मैयाँको धाई आमाको घरमा गई बास बसे । तब राजा मन्त्रीले भन्नु लागे कि म पाँच सौ रुपिया दिन्छु । मैयाँसँग भन्नु उड्लेको ऊ मान्छे आयाको छ भनी यति भन्नु भनी पठायो । मैयाँ थियो कि पशु भाग्ये बुझ्नेवाला । मैयाँले पैले मालुम भएको थियो । तब मैयाँले क्या भनिस्र भनी गालामा पाँच औंला को डाम बसाली पठाई दियो । तब उ बुढी माउ भन्नु लागे कि तिमीहरु जाऊ मलाई मैयाँले मार्यो भनी भन्दा । तब मन्त्रीले भने तिहाँ पाँच दिन सम्म बस्नु भनेको हो तिमीलाई मारेको होइन । फेरि दूसरा पालीमा पूर्व तर्फको झ्यालबाट फालि दियो । तब राजालाई मन्त्रीले भन्नु भने पुर्ब तरफको झ्यालबाट जानु भनी पठाए । तब रानीले भरेङ लाइ दिए । तब राजा रानी भई बसे । एक मैना दिनमा मन्त्रीले भन्नु लागे कि एक मैना भयो मलाई भुलि गयो । तब राजाको³⁷ सपनामा देखे । तब राजाले भन्नु लागे मेरो मन्त्री घोडा कस्तो भयो भनि । तब मैयाँले कसार लड्डुको दानामा बिख हालि दिए । तब मन्त्रीलाई दियो । मन्त्रीले म खान्न भनी लिएन । पैले कुत्तालाई दे भनि कुत्तालाई दियाको बित्तिकै कुत्ता मरि गयो ।]
³⁸तब ऊ त्रिशूलको छाप बायाँ साप्रामा (छाप) लगाई दियो र मैयाँको गलाको हीराको हार लगी गयो । तब राजा मन्त्री जोगी भै गयो । तब राजाको छोरी मैयाँको हीराको हार हरायो भनी । (भनी) सारा दुनियाँमा हुकुम फिराई लियो कि मेरो छोरी मैयाँको हीराको हार जो सकसले ल्याउला ऊ सकसलाई म आधा राज दिउँला भनी हुकुम फिराई दियो । तब उसै राजा र [को]³⁹ मन्त्रीले उस राजाको लेन देन गर्ने दोकानमा ऊ जोगी भयाको राजाले बुजाउनु गयो । मन्त्री (मन्त्री) मसान घाटमा बसे तब ऊ दोकानवालाले हीराको हार लगी राजाको दरबारमा दाखिल बनायो । तब राजाले दोकानवाला चोरीमा पकरे । मैले चोर्याको होइन (होइन) एक जोगीले बेच्नु आयाको थियो ऊ जोगीलाई ल्याउनु पठायो तब...

36 The following cursive text is found in the written version but not in the recording.

37 'को' is an accusative postposition in Hindi.

38 The recording picks up the story from here.

39 [को] only in the recording, not in the transcript.

The king replies, 'It's nothing.' One day when we were travelling, a girl came and offered flowers. I didn't understand the meaning of this, and that worries me.⁴⁰

[*'Even though you are a great man, my lord, you have not found the meaning. Do not worry on account of this matter. I shall tell you. She offered the first flower to the sky. The second one she offered to the earth goddess. The third one she placed at her ear. Her father's name is King of Kanpur.⁴¹ The fourth one she tore off with her teeth and threw away. Her mother's name is Queen Dantavati.⁴² The fifth one she crushed under her foot. She gave [you] to understand that her name is Queen Padmāvati.⁴³' Then the king was satisfied and he recovered day by day. 'Her gesture of patting her chest means that if you're a man come with me.'* After some days the king and the minister visited the house of the wet-nurse of the king of Kanpur's daughter. Then the king and the minister said, 'I will give you five hundred rupees.' He sent her (as a messenger) and requested her to tell the princess that the earlier man had arrived. The princess had the ability to know the fortunes of animals. The princess already knew this. Then the princess asked her what she meant. With five fingers she scratched five lines down her cheek and (angrily) sent her off. Then that old lady told them to return, because the princess had beaten her. Then the minister said that she had told (them) to stay there five days; that she had not beaten (her). And the next time he threw (her) through a window to the east. Then the minister told the king that he should go (now) and sent him off through a window to the east. Then the queen⁴⁴ brought a ladder (to help him climb up to her). Then they lived as king and queen. After a month the minister thought that (the king) had forgotten him. Then he saw the king in a dream. Then the king became worried about his minister (and) horse (and let his thoughts be known to the queen). Then the princess put poison in a *kasār laḍḍu*.⁴⁵ Then (the king) gave it to the minister. The minister did not accept it, saying, 'I won't eat it.' He told him to give it to a dog, and as soon as the dog ate it it died.]⁴⁶

40 The following cursive text is found in the written version but not in the recording.

41 *kān* means 'ear'.

42 *danta* means 'tooth'.

43 *pad* means 'foot'.

44 The narrator uses the words for *queen* and *princess* interchangeably regardless of her actual status at the time.

45 A Nepali sweetmeat.

46 The recording picks up the story from here.

Then the minister said: 'We need to get the princess's diamond necklace'. Then he made a *trishul*.⁴⁷ Then he made a mark with the *trishul* on her left thigh and took the princess's diamond necklace. Then the king and the minister became *yogis*. Then the king's daughter's diamond necklace was found to be lost. An official announcement was spread throughout the whole world that whoever brought the princess's diamond necklace would be awarded half the kingdom. Then the king's minister who had become a *yogi* went to the shop to sell it where the (other) king regularly made purchases. The minister remained at the burning *ghāts* and the shopkeeper took the necklace and delivered it to the palace. Then the king apprehended the shopkeeper on (charges of) theft. 'It wasn't me who stole it; a *yogi* came to sell it.' He sent out (an order) to bring in the *jogi*. Then ...

47 A trident.

3. The third part of the song by Ait Singh Gurung

Archive No. PK 251 at Lautarchiv, Humbolt University, Berlin. Recorded at the POW camp in Wünsdorf, Germany, on 29 May 1916 at 16:30. Duration: 01:56 min.

तब जोगीले (तब जोगीले) भन्छन् मैले चोच्याको होइन । मेरो गुरुले दियाको हो । तेरो गुरु कहाँ छ भन् भन्दा मेरो गुरु मसान घाटमा बस्याको छ । तब (तब) राजाले एक गारद पठाए । तब ऊ जोगीले भन्नु लागे कि यो राजमा धेरै बोक्सी रैछ । तब उसै बोक्सीले दियाको हो । उस बोक्सीको बायाँ साप्रामा मेरो यो त्रिशूलको छाप लायाको छ । तब राजाले हुकुम दियो कि जति स्वास्नी छ सबैले कपरा खोल्नु पर्ला भनी हुकुम दियो । कोही निस्केन । आखिरीमा आफ्नो छोरी मैयाको निस्के । तब त्रिशूलको छाप देखी तब राजा भन्नु लागे कि यो बोक्सीलाई फाँसी दिनुपर्छ भनी हुकुम दियो । तब जोगीले भन्छ राजा घरमा बोक्सी निस्के भने बाहिर निकाला गर्नु पर्छ । त्यहीँ तब मैयालाई सिन्दूरे जात्रा गरी हौदा माथि चढाई तीन दफे बजार घुमाई निकाला गरिदियो । तब राजा मन्त्री पनि गये । ऊ मैया पनि गए तब राजा र मन्त्री आफ्नो पोशाक लाएर ऊ मैयालाई लगी राजा रानी भयो बसे ।

The yogi says, 'I didn't steal it. My guru gave it (to me).' He asks, 'Where is your guru?' 'My guru is sitting at the burning *ghāts*.' Then the king sent a guard. Then the *yogi* started saying, 'The kingdom has many witches. So it was [one of] the witches that gave it (to him). That witch has the mark of this *trishul* of mine on her left thigh.' Then the king ordered all the women to reveal what was underneath their clothes. No one emerged (as the culprit). Finally his own daughter emerged (as the one). Then the king, seeing the mark of the *trishul*, ordered the witch to be hanged. Then the *yogi* says that when a witch emerges from within a palace she should be expelled. There and then the princess was seated on an elephant, taken three times around the city on a *sindure jātrā*,⁴⁸ and expelled. Then the king and the minister went their way. The princess, too, went her way. Then the king and the minister changed their clothes, took the princess (with them) and [henceforth the pair] lived as a royal couple.

48 A festive procession during which red lead powder is thrown on participants.

Appendix 2

The Poem recited by Ait Singh Gurung

Archive No. PK 252/3 at Lautarchiv, Humbolt University, Berlin.
Recorded at the POW camp in Wünsdorf, Germany, on 29 May 1916 at
16:55. Duration: 00:40 min.

1.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1.1 क्या खानू [रि] मीठो कसो गरी हुने क्यारे ⁴⁹ त धेर बाँचिने | What to eat and how so that it is tasty; what [work] to do that has a long-lasting effect? |
| 1.2 क्या चीज रोपिदिएर फल्छन् नरमा क्या हो पछी साँचिने | What things to plant that will bear fruit among humans; what it is that [can] be preserved for the future? |
| 1.3 यस्को अर्थ कहो मुनि हो पाप-धर्म तौलने | Explain the purpose of [all] this [effort], O sage, [you who] weigh sin and virtue. |

2.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 2.1 रामको नाम मीठो सँधै भजि लिनू त्यो अर्थ धेर बाँचिने | Chant ever the name of Ram; that purpose has a long-lasting effect. |
| 2.2 पौवा-पाटि हिटी परन्तु रहने त्यो हो पछी साँचिने | That sunken fountains ⁵⁰ [and] pilgrims' shelters remain operative – that is [what can be] preserved for the future. |
| 2.3 पुन्यै रोपिदिएर फल्छन् नरमा विद्दे ठूलो मौलने | If you plant good deeds, they will bear fruit among humans – great knowledge that flourishes. |
| 2.4 यसको अर्थ यो हो मुनि हो पाप कर्म तौलने | This is the purpose of [all] this [effort], O sage, [you who] weigh sin and virtue. |

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49 क्यारे is a short form of के गरे spoken in western Nepal.

50 For supplying water to the public and to pilgrims in particular.

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Textual Manifestations: The Use and Significance of Mahāyāna Literature in Newar Buddhism

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Abstract

This study concerns the worship and utilisation of Mahāyāna sūtra literature among Newar Buddhists of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. The study begins by considering the contents of the texts being worshipped and the historical development of this type of worship in Nepal. In elaborating the character of contemporary sūtra worship, the study considers the organisational structure of the worshippers of the sūtras, the sūtras' popular significance in Nepal, and the manner in which their power is conceived of as related to the presence of life in the manuscripts, after which the practices of display (*darśan yāyegu*) and recitation (*pā thyākegu*) are explained. This study concludes that: sūtra worship among the Newars highlights the presence of the divine in texts; it is an example of localization; and features as a pivot point in ongoing renewal and reform.

Keywords: Nepal, Newar Buddhism, ritual, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna, sūtras

Introduction

One of the most commonly requested rituals in Newar Buddhism is the recitation of sacred texts, such as sūtras. This rite is called *pāṭha yākegu*, usually abbreviated to *pā thyākegu* or *pāḥ thākegu*, the commonly used Sanskrit term being sūtra *pāṭha*, meaning sūtra recitation.¹ The texts recited are usually one of the *Navagrantha* or

1 The Newar verb *yākegu* is the infinitive of the causative form of *yāyegu*, to do. Thus, *pāṭha yākegu* literally means to make recitation be done, emphasising the role of the sponsor. Multisyllabic Sanskrit terms are often abbreviated in Newar. Thus, *pāṭha* becomes *pā* or *pāḥ*, with the second syllable sometimes mistakenly being considered part of a verb: *thyākegu* or *thākegu*, neither of which are actual verbs.

Navasūtra texts, the nine most sacred Mahāyāna sūtras in Newar Buddhism.² Other popular texts outside this small canon include the *Pañcarakṣā Sūtras* and *avadāna* literature. After examining the contents of these and other Mahāyāna sūtras, one may come away with the impression that the quintessential Mahāyāna ritual is the recitation, copying and worship of sūtras. It is regrettable that so little has been done to understand this rite. Previous studies have reflected on the sociological concerns of this practice (Gellner 1996), as well as on the reparation of manuscripts (Emmrich 2009) and the artistic concerns of the manuscripts used (Kim 2013: 271–286).

This paper therefore attempts to understand the practice of sūtra worship in Nepal as highlighted by three themes which underscore not only some interesting characteristics of Mahāyāna literature and practice (and thus may be found elsewhere throughout the Buddhist world) but also evolving facets of modern Newar Buddhism. The first theme is the embodiment of divine qualities in books: this is primarily seen through the identification of Mahāyāna sūtras with the buddhas and other deities, and through the identification of the text as alive and of practices related to the display of texts. The second theme is localisation, whereby the doctrines and practices of Buddhism are made to adapt to local environs. Localisation is not unique to Nepal and can be observed in other places where Buddhism has been introduced. However, Will Tuladhar-Douglas notes that prior to the thirteenth century Nepal 'saw itself as an important locality within the greater Indian cultural area', but that when the Indian 'frame of reference' was removed after the decline of Indian Buddhism, Nepalese Mahāyāna adopted its own 'Sanskritising authority' (Tuladhar-Douglas 2006: 117) and began composing and redacting texts independently, such as the *Guṇakāraṇḍavyūha Sūtra* and the *Svayambhūpurāṇa*, which cast Mahāyāna narrative and doctrinal exposition within an explicitly Nepalese framework. This also applies, as we shall see, to Mahāyāna

2 The form of Buddhism prevalent in the Himalayan region and in East Asia, which is distinct from the Theravāda tradition prevalent in South East Asia and Sri Lanka. For the purposes of this article, the division can be understood as based around the acceptance of the authority of the Mahāyāna sūtras and the practices and doctrines taught therein, which Theravāda practitioners would consider either legitimate, but unnecessary, or illegitimate apocrypha.

practice. The third theme is a trend towards either renewal or reform: this will be shown primarily in the discussion of the adaptation and adjustment of sūtra worship to perceived modern standards or in the tendency towards creating a perception of conserving or re-establishing old norms. This will be seen, most prominently, in our explication of sūtra recitation practice itself, as performed in Patan.

In order to explore these themes and to have a better understanding of Newar sūtra worship, this paper first considers the texts themselves, what may be understood about the history of book worship in Mahāyāna Buddhism and Nepal, the organisation of their worship, their popular significance in Nepal, the understanding of texts as alive, the practice of displaying them in public and finally, in brief, sūtra recitation practice itself.

Textual Background

When considering Mahāyāna literature, a persistent theme appears to be the great abundance of self-referential passages. Such passages are present in all of the most popular Mahāyāna literature in Newar Buddhism, with the greatest number of such passages being found in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*, *Samādhirāja*, *Pañcarākṣā sūtras*, *Vajracchedikā*, *Lalitavistara*, and the *Laṅkāvatara*.

These passages generally involve praise of the text itself and passages related to the spreading and teaching of the text. As an example of self-referential praise, the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* claims that the text is ‘the mother of bodhisattva *mahāsattvas*’ (Wogihara 1932: 380),³ while underscoring the theme of the embodiment of divine qualities in the text. In passages related to spreading and teaching the sūtra, it is emphasised that the text should be recited, studied, and propagated (eg Dutt 1953: 233). It is often implied in these passages that Mahāyāna sūtras are a sufficient substitute for relics of the Buddha in the context of caitya (reliquary) worship (Harrison and Watanabe 2006: 122), and ideal ritual scenarios are indicated as being ones in which the sūtras are ‘set up’ and worshipped ‘with manifold pūjās’, and ‘with divine flags, bells, banners, parasols, robes, aromatic powder, perfume, fragrances, garlands, incense and flowers, and with rows of lamps on all sides’

3 All translations are my own unless otherwise specified. Bodhisattvas are buddhas-to-be: *mahāsattva* simply denotes a ‘great being’.

(Wogihara 1932: 209). Actions for the preservation and maintenance of the texts are put forward (eg Nobel 1937: 103). As is often expressed in these self-referential passages, the ideal practitioner would copy the sūtra and, among many other possible actions, make it into a book for further worship (eg Wogihara 1932: 208, 990; Leifmann 1874: 440, 443). Moreover, it is said in self-referential passages that a person who does these things will receive a large boon, from worldly benefits such as protection from snakebites, lots of merit (puṇya) and ultimately buddhahood (eg Wogihara 1932: 302–323, Dutt 1941: 38–40). While other literature, such as some purāṇas, use self-referentiality in introductions, conclusions, or other paratexts, few works hardwire them into the body of the text itself, and none in such large quantities: the same can be said for non-Mahāyāna Buddhist literature, such as Pāli literature. While the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* contains the greatest volume of self-referential passages, followed by the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, some texts, such as the *Aparamitāyus*, are entirely self-referential – one might even say that it is a book about itself.

These passages allow us to see what early Mahāyānists may have seen as the range of sūtra worship – practices towards the text which are motivated by religious goals, be they apotropaic or soteriological. As far as materiality is concerned, we are looking at the copying and maintenance of sacred texts as well as the preparation of these texts for pūjā worship. Then we have the performance of practices such as pūjā worship, recitation, and teaching. On a more internal level, to memorise a sūtra (or even a few lines of a sūtra), to understand and to practise its teachings, is said in many sūtras to be the most fruitful deed from the perspective of attaining buddhahood or other achievements.

Historical Development

There are few sources to help determine how common sūtra worship was, or how it was conceived for practitioners of early Mahāyāna. While Mahāyāna sūtras themselves paint an idealised picture of what a worshipper should do towards the sūtras, it is difficult to determine the extent to which these depictions were carried out in practice. The merits claimed to accrue from upholding the sūtras, such as being protected from malevolent spirits (eg Wogihara 1932: 190) or being able, by merely practising and propagating a sūtra, to achieve benefits

equal to those obtained by making offerings to all buddhas (eg T14.475: 556a17)⁴ may have been sufficient motivating factors in the propagation and practice of Mahāyāna literature. As for accounts of what may have been done, according to, for instance, the Chinese pilgrims to India Yijing (T54.2125: 232a–c) and Xuánzàng, sūtra recitation was one of the commonest practices in South Asia during the middle of the first millennium of the common era (T51.2087: 882b, 896c) and it appears, at least from Xuánzàng's perspective, that in some places such as Mathura, reciters of Mahāyāna texts and reciters of non-Mahāyāna Tripiṭaka (the term for a Buddhist canon) are differentiated from each other (T51.2089: 890b).

Today in Nepal, the core of Mahāyāna sūtra recitation centres on the recitation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* (which usually implies the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*). By the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, the *Prajñāpāramitā* was clearly established as the centre of *poṣadha* rites (where precepts are taken on auspicious days, as in the rites of the *Aṣṭamīvrata*, *Vasundharāvratā*, *Tāravratā*, and so forth), wherein a nine-text dharma maṇḍala is necessary alongside a nine-element buddha and saṃgha maṇḍalas. While a justification for this small canon cannot be found in textual materials dating back to before the second millennium, today it is conceived of by my interlocutors as forming the core of Mahāyāna teachings. This is referred to as the *Navagrantha* or *Navasūtra* (Nine Sacred Texts). Alternative names in contemporary usage, according to Hemraj Shakya, include *Navakhaṇḍa*, *Navavyākaraṇa*, *Navavaipulyasūtra* and the *Navamahāyānasūtra* (Shakya 1999: 38–49, 48). Today, this consists of the *Prajñāpāramitā* (by which the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* is usually implied), *Gaṇḍavyūha*, *Daśabhūmikā*, *Samādhirāja*, *Laṅkāvatāra*, *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, *Lalitavistara*, *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*, and the only tantra of the collection, the *Tathāgataguhyā* – which is usually taken to refer to the *Guhyasamāja*, but which originally corresponded to a non-tantric sūtra about the Buddha's qualities, which, besides some Sanskrit fragments, is now only fully extant in Chinese and Tibetan (Lamotte 2003: 122).

It is unclear what the origin of this set is. The earliest dharma maṇḍala

4 Citation conventions for the *Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō* (1924–1934) allow abbreviations in the text to correspond to the following: Taishō, Volume 14, Text 475: Page 556, Row A, Line 17.

is attested to in the twelfth or thirteenth century *Kriyāsamucaya* of Jagaddarpaṇa (Chandra 1977: 318).⁵ This dharma maṇḍala features the *Yoginīniruttara* Tantras in the centre, with the other classes of tantra arranged around them. A sixteenth- or seventeenth-century *Poṣadhānuśaṃsā* manuscript features the first *Navasūtra* I could find as a part of the dharma maṇḍala in *poṣadha* rites, but it still differs from the contemporary list. Modern rites follow the set that would be found, for instance, in an *Aṣṭamīvrata māha* manuscript dating back to 1830 (Aśa Saphu Kuthi DPN2167: 4v–5r).⁶ This set is believed by all my Newar interlocutors to be what it is because it encapsulates the core of exoteric and esoteric Mahāyāna teachings: the esoteric side being represented by the *Guhyasamāja*, which is the most important *Yogottaratantra* in Newar Vajrayāna and is considered essential to awakening.⁷

The buddha, dharma and saṃgha maṇḍalas are essential to various rituals and are featured in different locations in Nepal. Here, at the doors of many *bāhāḥs*, or monasteries (from Skt. *vihāra*), are three lotus circles representing the buddha, dharma, and saṃgha maṇḍalas. Some doors, such as the entrance to Kvā Bāhāḥ in Patan, feature gold-plated bronze images of the Buddha (Akṣobhya), dharma (Prajñāpāramitā), and saṃgha (Avalokiteśvara) (see Figure 1). During a *pūjā*, though the officiating *vajrācāryas* (a hereditary Buddhist caste of tantric priests) recites the names of the elements of the maṇḍalas while offering substances to each element, representations of the elements of the

5 Kriyācaryāyogayoginītantraparivṛtayoginīniruttaratantranāyakaṃ dharmamaṇḍalaḥ.

6 [4v]oṃ āryaprajñāpāramitāya vajrapuṣpaṃ praticha svāhā|| ma || oṃ āryyagandhavyūhāya|| 1 || oṃ āryadaśabhūmikāya|| 2 || oṃ āryyasamādhirājāya|| 3 || oṃ āryalaṅkāvatārāya|| [5r] 4 || oṃ āryyasadharmmapuṇḍalikāya|| a || oṃ āryyatathāgataguhyakāya|| nai || oṃ āryyalalitavistarāya || vā || oṃ āryasuvarṇaprabhāya || i ||

7 The Vajrayāna is a subset of Mahāyāna Buddhist belief and practice based on texts called tantras (such as the *Guhyasamāja*, which is part of the highest class of tantric genre called *Yogottaratantra*): these teach that through the use of mantras (sacred utterances), mudras (sacred hand gestures or poses) and forms of visualisation of deities (such as buddhas or bodhisattvas) and maṇḍalas (divine diagrams), one can attain buddhahood within one's lifetime. The methods and texts are regarded as esoteric and thus confined to a subset of the Buddhist community (*saṅgha*) that has received initiation (*abhiṣeka*): in the case of Newar Vajrayāna, this is confined to a hereditary caste (the *vajrācāryas*) for historical and practical reasons, which it is not possible to explicate here.

maṇḍalas are not necessary. Thus, except in *Navagrantha pāṭhas* where all nine books are recited, the nine sūtras do not need to be present. During daily rites (*nityā pūjā*) at many *bāhāḥs*, the nine essential buddhas, sūtras, and bodhisattvas are therefore present in the form of bronze lotuses at the door to the main shrine of the Kvābāju (the main deity of the temple), and are honoured by the *bāphās*, two young initiated priests, who touch them with their forehead. The *bāphās* carry out daily worship, with this duty rotating on a monthly basis. Similarly, in every sūtra *pāṭha*, regardless of which sūtra is present, since the *Navagrantha* is always present in the dharma maṇḍala under which the sūtra being worshipped is read, one always worships the



Figure 1: Buddha (Akṣobhya, centre), dharma (Prajñāparamitā, left), and saṃgha (Avalokiteśvara, right) above the threshold to Kvā Bāhāḥ, on 17 February 2019. Photo by Alexander James O'Neill.

Navagrantha.

The *pūjā* involved in the performance of *pā thākegu* is detailed below, but the core of *pā thākegu* is, as the term *pāṭha* implies, the reading of a sūtra. In Newar sūtra recitation, longer sūtras are typically not

read from cover to cover by one person but are split between multiple readers. Thus, a sūtra that would take ten hours to read cover to cover is read within about an hour by ten different readers. This is done with all the *Navagrantha* sūtras, and other shorter texts, such as the *Nāmasaṃgīti*, can easily be read or sung in about half an hour. Thus, in the case of a sūtra recitation where the manuscripts are divided between different readers, what appears to be of consequence is the utterance of *akṣaras*, or letters, rather than the understanding of the meaning of the text – which would not be possible for most readers anyway, as few understand enough Sanskrit to comprehend while reading at a steady pace. In fact, they function in *pā thākegu* in the same manner as *dhāraṇīs* and mantras: sacred utterances in which the syllables are sacred and powerful, and thus effective. The question of whether power comes only when the manuscript has been consecrated will be dealt with below in a discussion on the text as being 'alive'.

Role of *Guṭhis*

Regarding the theme of localisation, though not unique to Nepal, as noted by Tuladhar-Douglas (2006), Nepalese Buddhists have been intentionally localising these practices since roughly the thirteenth century. In the case of sūtras and their worship, this is seen in the adaptation of Mahāyāna ritual injunctions to Newar culture, wherein for instance the regular performance of *pā thākegu* at *bāhāḥ* and at various other locations has been linked to the system of *guṭhi* organisations. *Guṭhis* are social and religious organised units in Nepal which, according to Quigley, 'ensure that identity is not simply a matter of affiliation to lineage and caste' but is 'defined in terms of a ritual attachment to a locality' (Quigley 1985: 11). The term derives from the Sanskrit *goṣṭhī*, meaning association, which tends to have a looser meaning than *guṭhi* in Nepal. These hereditary associations are therefore based on the rotation of ritual or public duties according to rules in a defined locality (such as a *bāhāḥ*) and have a defined structure of seniority (Regmi 1976: 63). Another important feature of *guṭhis* is the regular (at least annual) organisation of feasts, the preparation and expenses of which rotate among members (Gellner 1992: 232).

Let us take the organisation of the rites surrounding the *Prajñāpāramitā* at Kvā Bāhāḥ as an example of how *guṭhi* organisation

works in relation to *pā thākegu*. At Kvā Bāhāḥ there are two *guṭhis*, one made up of *śākyas* (a hereditary Buddhist caste that undergoes initiation into monasteries but not into tantric priesthood) and one made up of *vajrācāryas*. All participants, including the sponsors, are expected to fast until the rites have all been performed, after which a ritual feast usually takes place, along with an optional *samay baji* snack. The *śākya guṭhi* are responsible for safeguarding the manuscript, and the member whose duty it is, is referred to as *sāphupāḥlāḥ*, or book guardian. The role of *sāphupāḥlāḥ* rotates between two branches of a family from Nāg Bāhāḥ to the west of Kvā Bāhāḥ. Two members of this *guṭhi* serve at the same time and, as Gellner reports on the basis of research conducted in 1985–6, they change over during the Newar month of Guṃlā (Gellner 1996: 227) – though a substitute may be sent from the same family. The *sāphupāḥlāḥs* remove and return the book to its storeroom and open and close its box. When the *sāphupāḥlāḥ* – called the breaker of the seal (*ciṃ chāyemha*) – has placed the book on its golden ‘lion throne’ (*siṃhāsana*), he applies three wax seals (*lachāp*), without using any wax, one representing the Buddha, another the dharma, and the last one the saṃgha – and only after this may the book be opened. Each of these seals bears an impression: one a vajra (a pestle-like symbolic weapon) to represent the Buddha; another a sūtra to represent the dharma; and the third a lotus to represent the saṃgha. They are each decorated with an ornamental pattern and the word buddha or dharma or saṃgha in reverse impression (see Figure 2). Similarly, the second *sāphupāḥlāḥ*,

Figure 2: **Lachāp** (wax seals) for opening and closing the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* at Kvā Bāhāḥ, used by the *Sāphupāḥlāḥ* (book guardian).

Photo by Alexander James O’Neill.



who has to remain for the whole duration of the pūjā, while the first is free to leave, must reapply the seal at the end and is referred to as the applier of the seal (*ciṃ dānha*). The money that is placed on the throne or manuscript and is part of the stipend given by the rite's sponsor goes to this *sākya guṭhi*. This *guṭhi* organises five feasts a year for its members, which are discussed by Gellner (1996: 228).

The *vajrācārya guṭhi* consists of those with a hereditary right to read the text. Seven families hold this right and, according to Gellner (1996: 225), are referred to as the 'Seven Tathāgatas'. Members of these families take turns to fulfil this duty every month. However, in families where only one member benefiting from this entitlement remains, that member has a permanent right to read the text. Three other *vajrācāryas* from outside this *guṭhi* may be invited to participate – but the main priest, or *mūlaguru*, who performs the main pūjā to worship the text is expected to be a member of Kvā Bāhāḥ. While each participating *vajrācārya* receives one stipend (which is explained in the section on the pūjā below), the *mūlaguru* receives a stipend as priest, as reader and for the ritual utensils (*thāpaṃ*). His wife usually acts as assistant and is referred to as *gurumāṃ*: she also receives a stipend. As with the *sākya guṭhi*, substitutes may be sent – and not always from the same family. While Gellner describes substitutes in Kvā Bāhāḥ *pā thākegu* as typically dividing their stipends between themselves and the right holders (226), in other *guṭhis* and places alternative arrangements are possible. For instance, members of Vajrācārya Pūjāvidhi Adhyayan Samiti (an association of *vajrācārya* trainees based in Lalitpur) came to an agreement to donate all their earnings from *pā thākegu* to build a temple for their association near Nākha Bāhāḥ.

Greater flexibility is allowed in different places for the right to recite a text. At Oku Bāhāḥ, for instance, according to Ratnajyoti Shakya, it is customary to finish reciting the copy of *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* within the month of Guṃlā (the Newar month that roughly corresponds to August). No strict rule governs how much text has to be recited each day – only that the recitation begins on the first day of Guṃlā, and that it must be finished before the end of the month. Moreover, no rule exists that specifies *guṭhi* membership as a requirement for reciting the text: in practice, almost all members of Oku Bāhāḥ end up reciting the text. Ratnajyoti Shakya told me that anyone is allowed to

take part. One *guthi* commitment does exist with regards to this text, however, and that is that every day the opening and concluding *pūjā* must be performed by a *vajrācārya* member of *Bhīmcheṃ Bāhāḥ*. *Oku Bāhāḥ* has no *vajrācāryas* of its own, and thus this role is performed by priests from outside – this also means that almost every reciter of the *Prajñāpāramitā* is of the *sākya* caste (Figure 3). This adaptation of the ritual to localities, even within the relatively small former city-states of the Kathmandu Valley, is another way in which *sūtra* worship in Nepal highlights the theme of localisation.



Figure 3: *Pā Thākegu* at *Oku Bāhāḥ*, 11 August 2018.

Photo by Alexander James O'Neill

Popular Significance in Nepal

As previously discussed, worship of *Mahāyāna sūtras* is localised and popularised in Nepal and its landscape. Various Sanskrit verses exist and appear to be of Nepalese origin, eulogising the *sūtras* and their worship. For instance, Hemraj Shakya quotes the following verse (Skt. *gātha*) as being an eulogy to the *Navasūtra* in a context where faithful devotees keep *sūtras* in their homes in order to bless the latter:

This is the king of all that is well spoken
 Given by all Tathāgatas.
 The Tathāgata dwells in the house
 Where just this jewel of the Nine Sūtras would always be found.
 (Shakya 1990: 42)

This verse is found at the end of both the *Lalitavistara Sūtra* (Vaidya 1958: 319) and the *Daśabhūmikasūtra Gāthāvibhāga* (Vaidya 1967: 110) where the last line reads 'Where just this jewel of a sūtra' would always be found, making it, with its adjustments, a Nepalese adaptation thereof. While some gāthas are adaptations from Mahāyāna literature, others, such as *Ākāś Dhātu* which is used in *pā thākegu*, appear to be entirely Nepalese creations. In Lalitpur the *Ākāś Dhātu* gātha typically contains four stanzas, whereas in Kathmandu it has two stanzas. For various reasons, it appears that the two stanzas used in Kathmandu are older, whereas the two additional ones in the Lalitpur version are newer additions.

In Hemraj Shakya's introduction to the *Nava Sūtra Saṃgraha*, a summarised form of the *Navasūtra* written by Divyavajra Vajracharya, he notes a sort of geographical localisation with the recitation of the Navagrantha at sacred pilgrimage sites (tīrthas) during the first six days of the Newar month of Guṃlā. The duty of reciting these sūtras is founded on *guṭhi* membership. Hemraj Shakya lists these sites as follows,

1. Gokarṇa Puṇya Tīrtha – *Prajñāpāramitā*
2. Guhyeśvarī Śānta Tīrtha – *Gaṇḍavyūha*
3. Śaṅkhamūla Śaṅkara Tīrtha – *Daśabhūmika*
4. Dhaṃtila Rāja Tīrtha – *Samādhirāja*
5. Khusiṅkhela Manoratha Tīrtha – *Laṅkāvatāra*
6. Vijeśvarī Nirmala Tīrtha – *Saddharmapuṇḍarika*
7. Kaṅkeśvarī Jñāna Tīrtha – *Tathāgataḡuhyāka*
8. Kandokhu Jñāna Tīrtha – *Lalitavistara*
9. Nyekhu Cintāmaṇi Tīrtha – *Suvarṇaprabhāsa* (Shakya 1990: 43)

Based on my conversations with priests at these different sites, it seems that there is no widespread knowledge of this practice. At most of these

sites there is a combination of active Buddhist and Hindu worship and, while some were aware that something was recited during Gurmlā, nobody except those involved knew what was being recited. This too is in keeping with the theme of localisation. While not forming a perfect maṇḍala arrangement, the placement of these sites in a sense sacralises the valley as a kind of large dharma maṇḍala.

In response to a perception, among Buddhist intellectuals, of widespread ignorance about the details of the Buddhist doctrine, one more recent form of localisation among Newar Buddhist scholars has been the practice of translating these Sanskrit sūtras into Newar and Nepali. This practice began in 1914 with Niṣṭhānanda Vajrācārya's translation into Newar of the *Lalitavistara Sūtra*, which was one of the first printed books in Nepal. This translation is not very literal and in many places is presented in a summarised form. In order to provide the sūtra with a sense of completeness (which in the Sanskrit version ends with the Buddha's first sermon at the beginning of his career), Nisthananda Vajracharya incorporated extracts from various other texts that serve to complete the narrative of the Buddha's life. This translation also inspired the performance of a public play based on the life of the Buddha as depicted in the *Lalitavistara* in 1924, which in turn inspired many Newars to become monks according to the Theravāda tradition (Shakya 1978: i), and of the popular Newar epic poem, *Sugata Saurabha*, written by Chittadhar Hridaya (Lewis 2010: 11).

The first translation into Newar of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* was published by Jogmuni Vajracharya in 1965. This translation features clarificatory notes that are given in parentheses. The two earlier translations were printed on paper shaped like palm-leaf manuscripts, whereas most of the later translations were published in codex format. One of the first of these was Ashakaji Vajracharya's 1988 translation of the *Suvarṇaprabhāsa*. This work features the root Sanskrit text from Vaidya's edition, followed by its translation. Subsequent translations followed, the large bulk of which were prepared and published by the Lotus Research Centre in Lalitpur. These literal and full translations feature the Sanskrit of Vaidya's Mithila editions, with the Newar translation given below them. These sometimes include commentaries, such as Divyavajra Vajracharya's *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, which was posthumously completed by

Herakaji Vajracharya and published in 2003. The latter contains a full translation of Haribhadra's commentary, and his translation of the esoteric *Guhyasamājatantra* features the commentary by Candrakīrti whose highly interpretative approach may be seen as toning down some of the text's antinomian and sensitive content. Other Newar texts of note are educational summaries, which are useful in light of the 'extensiveness' of these sūtras (hence their being referred to as vaipulya, or extensive, in some of their titles). These include, for example, the summary of the entire *Navagrantha* in Newar by Divyavajra Vajracharya in his *Nava Sūtra Saṃgraha* or Anandamuni Vajracharya's Nepali *Samkṣipta* [summarised] *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*, which outlines the unwieldy text in just 30 pages.

Translation highlights two themes: one is localisation, where a text whose language belongs to another time or place is localised in a language understood here and now; and the second theme is renewal and reform, because translation itself is a manifestation of a modern perception of the use of texts (ie that they are for reading and study) which may not have been shared by pre-modern practitioners for whom they were ritually efficacious items for use. This may be a response to the influence of modern scholarship. One example would be the inclusion of explanatory notes and interpretative word choices in translations, such as in Nistananda Vajracharya's *Lalitavistara* translation, or the later tendency towards more literal translations, as seen in Lotus Research Centre translations. In addition, the incorporation of embedded commentaries in some of the more difficult translations, serving to paratextualise and also rationalise (as in the case of Candrakīrti's commentary) what might be taken as a rather antinomian tantric text in the case of the *Guhyasamājatantra* – a tendency observed in the rational explanation of difficult concepts and the justification of apparently baroque ritual elements by gurus such as Deepak Bajracharya. Moreover, the perceived need for educational summaries in a ritually rich environment also shows the influence of what Emmrich (2011: 301–303) characterises as the power of technical and uncharismatic variants of texts (such as academic editions or manuals) on highly charismatic ritual actions and objects, such as the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* in Kvā Bāhāḥ. The restoration of this text – he argues – is imbued with greater charisma through renewal from

the uncharismatic academic Vaidya edition, and its practice has been influenced by renewed perceptions of what makes the Mahāyāna ritual proper.

The Text as Alive

According to Deepak Bajracharya, a text that does not have life (*jīva*) is not to be worshipped or ritually recited. This was explained to me in response to a question about why manuscripts are recited but not printed. Printed texts, such as Vaidya's editions which are so popular in Nepal, were described as 'nirjīva', lifeless. In order to be alive, a manuscript must have undergone consecration, *pratiṣṭhā*, in the same way in which an image undergoes consecration. In the past, for most manuscripts, this consisted of the *daśakarma* or ten life-cycle rites, from the *jātakarma* birth rite to the wedding rite (Locke 1980: 473–476). These rites are roughly analogous to the life-cycle rites that a *vajrācārya* has to undergo as a child, including tantric consecrations which are figurative deaths and rebirths. However, in recent centuries up until the present day, *pratiṣṭhā* for new manuscripts appears to have fallen out of favour and has been replaced with a shorter rite. According to Deepak Bajracharya, this shorter rite consists of visualising the text as being imbued with the Buddha, dharma, and saṃgha maṇḍalas, reciting verses (*stotras*) for the Buddha, dharma, and saṃgha, and then visualising the text as simply Mañjuśrī while reciting Mañjuśrī's *stotra*. Following this, the visualisation is made to dissolve and the manuscript may be offered *pañcopacāra* consisting of the five oblations of flowers (*puṣpa*), incense (*dhūpa*), light (*dīpa*), red and/or yellow *ṭikā* paste (*sinhaḥ*), and food (*naivedya*). With regard to new cases of *pratiṣṭhā* involving *daśakarma* rites, as far as all my interlocutors knew, this is now only done for statues and paintings.

The question arises, however, as to how one would consecrate a sūtra fully according to *daśakarma* rites. According to my *vajrācārya* informants, this would have been done according to the instructions for consecration described in Kuladatta's *Kriyāsaṃgrahaṇajikā* (Tanemura 2004), which is the reference for contemporary manuals for image consecration in Nepal. According to Kuladatta's instructions, all rites are identical for texts, just as they would be for images. Nevertheless, some alterations are made. For instance, in the first

rite – ‘purification of the womb’ (*yoniśodhanam*) –, before creating the manuscript, the scribe must first purify his body, hands, the folios on which he writes and the ink with which he writes by means of various visualisations and mantras (Tanemura 2004: 158–160). It is also here that the *vajrācārya* would ensure the presence of the deity in the sūtra (*dr̥ḍhīkuryāt*) by means of the hundred-syllable *Vajrasattva Dhāraṇī*. With regards the identity of the deity, Kuladatta gives no indication. According to Deepak Bajracharya, this is never one particular deity, even when the manuscript is *Prajñāpāramitā*, but the *jīva* of the *pañcabuddha* (the five buddhas).⁸ However, for images, the *jīva* is the one of the deities depicted in the image (eg a Vasundharā *jīva* is made to dwell in a Vasundharā image). After the nine subsequent rites which are largely the same, when the text is essentially fully adult, the next procedure would be a series of *abhiṣekas*, or empowerments, whereby the deity is made to enter *maṇḍalas* and become an *ācārya* in the manner in which a *vajrācārya* would be empowered. However, for name empowerment (*nāmābhiṣeka*) (Tanemura 2004: 202–203), the text must be given a name in accordance with the *tathāgata* family to which it belongs. While deities, in the case of images, may clearly belong to one *tathāgata* family or another depending on whose *maṇḍala* they are in, Kuladatta does not specify how one knows which *tathāgata* family a text belongs to. According to Deepak Bajracharya, texts generally belong to the *tathāgata* family of *Amitābha*, but if the text is a *Prajñāpāramitā* sūtra, since *Prajñāpāramitā Devī* belongs to *Vajrasattva*’s *tathāgata* family, it would be empowered in *Vajrasattva*’s *tathāgata* family. This family relationship is expressed during the first ten days of *Guṃḷā*, when the *Prajñāpāramitā* belonging to *Kvā Bāhāḥ* may not be recited but is placed in front of the *Vajrasattva* statue on the ground floor. At that time, as if it were an image of the *devī*, the text would only be worshipped using *pañcopacara* offerings. Here, we see the theme of identifying the text with the divine, wherein most

8 The names of these five buddhas vary from one text to another and from one inscription to another, but in Nepal, according to their representation in the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* they are *Akṣobhya*, *Vairocana*, *Ratnasamḥava*, *Amitābha*, and *Amoghasiddhi*. These represent many things, such as elements, types of wisdom, and so forth, but are most well known in Nepal through their association with the four directions, the centre being represented by *Akṣobhya*.

manuscripts are, ritually speaking, conceived of as embodiments of the *pañcabuddha*.

While the practice of producing manuscripts no longer exists and this rite can no longer be observed in its entirety, one can observe part of the *pratiṣṭhā* rites that are performed for a sūtra during the time of reparation (*jīrnoddhāra*) as discussed by Emmrich (2011: 295), where the *jīva* of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript at Kvā Bāhāḥ is removed and then returned to the text through *pratiṣṭhā jīvanyāsa* rites. *Jīvanyāsa* literally refers to the ‘placement of life’. This is a unique case in that it involves de-consecration rites, allowing the text to be restored before life is put back into it – similar de-consecration rites are discussed by von Rospatt (2013) regarding Svayambhū Mahācaitya’s renovation, a similarity also noted by Emmrich. (2011: 295) In the case of the manuscript at Kvā Bāhāḥ, it allows the text to be repaired at a time that is considered inauspicious for recitation, namely, the occasional leap month (New. *analā*; Skt. *adhikamāsa*). This *pratiṣṭhā jīvanyāsa* involves the connection of a *pañcasūtra* (a set of five threads representing the five buddhas (*pañcabuddha*) to a vase or *kalaśa*. The officiating priest then recites a *pratiṣṭhā* mantra 1,008 times with his *japamāla* (rosary) hidden under a cloth for ritual secrecy: however, when time is limited, it is usually permitted to perform 108 recitations. This transfers the *jīva* from the manuscript to the *kalaśa*. It is worth noting that, according to Emmrich (2011: 295), when the *jīva* has been removed from the manuscript, devotees still honour it by touching it with their heads or with offerings of money. While, from a certain perspective, this may be a less effective act of *dāna* (ritual offering) than if the *jīva* were within the text, this does not deter those who may know or may not know about this.

When restoration is complete, the same procedure is carried out, except that jasmine flowers are placed in the *kalaśa* and 108 petals are picked from these and placed on the manuscript. When this has been done, the *jīva* is placed back into the manuscript (Figure 4). Then, on the occasion recorded by Emmrich (2011: 306), the donor of the reparation rite lays out eleven ritual plates (*kishī*) containing offerings before the manuscript on the throne – one of these is for the manuscript, and the other ten are for the readers of the text who recite it once life has been put back into it.



Figure 4: *Jīvanāyāsa* of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā* at Kvā Bāhāḥ (putting *jīva* back into the *pustaka*), performed by the late Asharatna Vajracharya, 7 June 2014. Photo by Christoph Emmrich.

My interlocutors insisted that printed texts are not consecrated or used for these ritual purposes. There appears to be a form of power or great merit that results from having a text that is valuable not only spiritually but also in terms of labour hours, as one may find with handwritten manuscripts. As far as I could observe, there is one curious exception to this rule, which was pointed out to me by Kashinath Tamot: the Newar rendition of the *Lalitavistara Sūtra* composed by Nistananda Vajracharya in 1914. As mentioned before, this was among the first books in Nepal to be printed with movable type and was prepared in the traditional *pothi* format. Thirty-five copies of this text were made, and the first printed copy is currently housed in the Aśa Archives in Kathmandu. While all the manuscripts have 460 printed pages, the first copy features one last additional handwritten page which indicates that Gadyaguru Vajracharya consecrated the text (*'pratiṣṭhāna dayeka'*). While I cannot confirm the details and it was not stated in the handwritten colophon, Kashinath Tamot reported that for about four years after its consecration it underwent *pā thākegu* every month of Śravaṇa.

The Displaying of Texts

Many *bāhās* in Nepal display their precious possessions according to a special programme during the lunar month of Guṃlā, which roughly corresponds to August and September. During this period of time, if a monastery possesses manuscripts, it is expected to bring them out for viewing. Kashinath Tamot, for instance, described the procedure at Thaṃ Bahī in Kathmandu in 2006, where a *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript dating back to 1224 CE is displayed every Guṃlā (August to September). The manuscript was brought out in an ornate golden box for public viewing. When the box was opened and the manuscript removed, which is standard practice when opening sacred manuscripts to the public in *bāhās* and *bahīs* (monasteries or *viḥāras* with no *vajrācāryas*), the manuscript was offered *khāḍās* (offering scarves) and red paste by the devotees gathered there, who were mainly Kashmiri and Ladakhi. Then a *vajrācārya* took out a few folios and, after lining them up and reading from them in front of the crowd, he proceeded to invite devotees to watch as he leafed through each page of the folio one by one, until all 1,016 folios had been displayed. After this, the manuscript is said to have been offered money by some devotees, while others placed their *japamālas* (rosaries) on it to have them blessed or for them to simply touch the manuscript. Afterwards, everyone gathered there received *prasād* (food or other offerings that may be eaten by worshippers after a ritual) and a *ṭikā* on their foreheads (Tamot 2016: 62).

Another manner in which the Thaṃ Bahī manuscript highlights important facets of the nature of Mahāyāna book worship in Nepal is that during the full-moon day of the lunar month of Cillā (roughly corresponding to February and March), during Cakaṃdyah Jātra (*jātra* being a procession) (whose deity corresponds to Siṃhasārthabāhu from the *Siṃhasārthabāhu Avadāna*), the *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript is placed in the chariot and carried in a procession. In the past, this procession consisted of a circumambulation of the city but today it is confined to the *bahī* courtyard (Tamot 2016: 62). What this highlights is that a sacred manuscript may take the place of a Buddhist deity in the very manner described in the texts. As the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* claims, the text is ‘in a true sense, the relic of the tathāgatas’, because it is the ‘dharmakāya’ or dharma-body, of the Buddha (Wogihara

1932: 268).⁹ This doctrine would lead us to believe that manuscripts would also be placed in caityas instead of relics of the Buddha, which, according to Hemraj Shakya, is regular practice for establishing caityas in the Kathmandu Valley (Shakya 1990: 43).

The effect of parading a deity in a chariot procession – in this case the deity is embodied in a manuscript – is that the entire city is able to engage in darśan (ritual viewing, regarded by both Buddhists and Hindus as sufficient to receive a deity's blessing) of the text and to benefit from the merit thereby accrued. The fact that a manuscript that has the power of the Buddha's dharmakāya can travel through the city or even within a courtyard, is, in this sense, a blessing to the entire area. This also seems to be the reason why, in many places, an image of the Prajñāpāramitā goddess is not required for the goddess to be considered present if the text is there. For instance, a photograph which is above where the text is recited at Kvā Bāhāḥ, with the caption 'Prajñāpāramitā', shows simply the manuscript that belongs to the temple, not the goddess. One place where an image is present during *pā thākegu* is Oku Bāhāḥ (Figure 5). However, according to Ratnajyoti Shakya, this is not necessary because the text is enough to symbolise



Figure 5:
Prajñāpāramitā
Devī statue, which
is above where the
manuscript was
placed at the end
of the opening
pūjā and the divi-
sion of the manu-
script. Oku Bāhāḥ,
11 August 2018.
Photo by Alexander
James O'Neill.

9 Dharmakāya can refer both to the true non-dual body of the Buddha, as distinct from the body with which he manifests in the world (called *nirmāṇakāya*), or as the body (ie corpus) of the Buddha's teachings (ie dharma). In Prajñāpāramitā literature the two meanings are conflated, such that the true body of the Buddha is defined as being equivalent to the sūtra itself.

her presence – but since the temple owns the image, it is placed there for this rite regardless.

Gellner (1996: 223–4) comments regarding the *Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript at Kvā Bāhāḥ that ‘unlike other monasteries, which just have the text, in Kwā Bahā, they say, the goddess herself is present. Both as a physical object displayed in the monastery, and as a goddess in the minds of her devotees’. Though the renown of the Kvā Bāhāḥ manuscript may make it seem a unique case, conversations with *vajrācāryas* at other monasteries have yielded similar answers. If consecration has taken place in the manner discussed in the previous section, *jīva* may be considered to be in the text. When I asked Deepak Bajracharya why the Kvā Bāhāḥ manuscript is so widely worshipped, he answered that it was simply due to its having such a beautiful case and gold lettering rather than for any overtly divine reason.

The display of an empowered Mahāyāna sūtra and the power attributed to it clearly highlights the theme of the embodiment of the divine in the text. The fact that devotees are offered *prasād* and *ṭikā* afterwards indicates that the viewing of the manuscript in this manner was considered a ritually effective act. Other power may be associated with the presence of the manuscript, as discussed by Gellner who reports being told that during the festival of *Daśaim* (generally around October) it is taken out to witness the sword festival (*khaḍgajatrā*) wherein *Pradhān* (Buddhist *Ṣṣatriya*) members of the *bahī* are possessed by a goddess and hack a pumpkin to pieces with a sword. It is unclear, however, whether it is *Prajñāpāramitā Devī* who does the possessing or whether she merely witnesses the event (Gellner 1996: 237). Power of presence is also emphasised by the way the procession carries the powerful presence of the manuscript throughout the city.

Sūtra Pāṭha Proper

The practice of *pā thākegu* differs from Patan to Kathmandu: a difference which brings to light the theme of renewal or reform. Although a longer rite is common in Patan, in Kathmandu the opening *pūjā* generally only lasts about ten minutes. Both the longer rite and the shorter rite appear to be the result of attempts at modernisation: the Patan rite tending towards conformity with an ideal of completeness,

thus remedying a perceived decline in the twentieth century.¹⁰ The Kathmandu rite appears to be oriented towards accessibility, both for sponsors and attendees, and for *vajrācāryas*: the number of baroque complexities, as in the multiple *saṃkalpas* of the Patan rite, has been reduced and feasts marking the end of the *pūjās* may include aspects that would previously have been considered sacrilegious, such as eating cooked rice, which has traditionally been seen as causing ritual pollution. The push for modernisation or reform in Patan has come from the Vajrācārya Pūjāvidhi Adhyayan Samiti, an association of *vajrācāryas* based in Nyākhācukaḥ, Lalitpur, whereas in Kathmandu the drive over recent years has come from the prolific scholar-priest Naresh Man Bajracharya. What is happening today is undoubtedly what happened in the past, yet somewhat different. This form of renewal or reform lies behind the trend towards the routinisation of ritual, which Gellner (1992: 300–304) observed, where for instance *gaṇacakra* (mentioned later), which originally implied highly antinomian feasts, is a simple breakfast today. Routinisation in this sense is the process whereby a previously revolutionary or antinomian act is reinterpreted and incorporated into mainstream society.

A full analysis of all the aspects of *sūtra pāṭha*, particularly as performed in Lalitpur, deserves its own paper, but here a brief account is given based on the observation of dozens of performances of *pā thākegu* in Kathmandu and Lalitpur in 2016, 2018 and 2019.¹¹ As far as the setting for the *pūjā* is concerned, though *bāhāḥs* are standard sites, it is also common for *pūjās* to be performed in the homes of sponsors or priests, particularly when *bāhāḥs* are occupied for the celebration of other rites. As for the subject of recitation, this is usually the *Navagrantha* or other Mahāyāna sūtras, in addition to the *Guhyasamājatantra* which is the only truly esoteric text that seems to be read on the sole occasion of *Navagrantha pāṭhas* or at Kaṅkeśvarī during Guṃlā, as mentioned

10 This perception of decline was characterised by Naresh Shakya as a situation wherein the rite was not treated with enough respect in the late twentieth century at least, with *vajrācāryas* smoking and, according to Milan Shakya, sometimes mispronouncing words.

11 For clarifications and explanations of these *pūjās*, my thanks mainly go to Naresh Man Bajracharya, and Deepak Bajracharya of the Vajrācārya Pūjāvidhi Adhyayan Samiti. The clarification of many terms was given by Satyamohan Joshi's *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Mhasikegu Lidhamsā* (2005).

in the section on the 'popular significance in Nepal'. A *Navagrantha pāṭha* is rare and calls for a sponsor who is capable of supporting 108 reciting vajrācāryas. A *Navagrantha pāṭha* calls for not only the nine main texts of the *Navagrantha* but also the recitation of the *Pañcarakṣā* text, consisting of five short sūtras on protective goddesses and their *dhāraṇīs*, and the *Pratyāṅgirā* text, another protective goddess text derived from the *Dhāraṇīsaṃgraha*. Similarly, longer sūtras, such as the *Śatasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, are recited only a few times a year or every few years in some places (such as at Kvā Bāhāḥ). Triple-gem maṇḍalas are placed on the table in the form of rice circles before the main priest or *mūlaguru* and the manuscript is laid on top of these. At various times during the recitation, the *mūlaguru* and sponsor, or *jajmān* (Newar form of the Sanskrit *yajamāna*), worship these. Thus, in any *pā thākegu*, even when not actually present, all nine sūtra of the *Navagrantha* are worshipped, as discussed earlier with regard to other rites.

To explain briefly how the elaborate pūjā is carried out in Lalitpur, let us begin by mentioning that four *saṃkalpas* are performed. A *saṃkalpa* is a solemn declaration by the *jajmān* or by the *mūlaguru* on behalf of the *jajmān* in the presence of a divinity, whereby they both intend to perform a ritual action. The *saṃkalpas* state the time and location, essentially setting the latter aside as a sacred space for the duration of the ritual. *Saṃkalpas* also involve ritualised formulae and gestures made by the participants who support the ritualised intention. A *saṃkalpa* thus serves to transform what would be profane actions into sacred actions in what Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994: 88ff) characterise as the 'ritual commitment'. Moreover, according to Milan Shakyā, if one takes a *saṃkalpa*, one formally commits to sponsoring and being present to witness the entire pūjā. Since the time, location, and participants are noted down, this is one of the most immediate and specific levels of localisation.

The first *saṃkalpa*, the *sūryārgha* pūjā, is a declaration to the gods Sūrya and Gaṇeśa, represented by the *sukundā* lamp – according to Deepak Bajracharya, Gaṇeśa protects the beginning of rites and Sūrya watches over them to stop the intervention of harmful deities. The second *saṃkalpa*, the *gurupādārgha*, is an offering of a maṇḍala to the deity Vajrasattva who empowers the pūjā and ensures its efficacy,

as well as forgiving any mistakes made during the ritual. The third *saṃkalpa*, the pūjā plate or *pūjābhaḥ*, involves the full declaration. During this *saṃkalpa* the *jajmān* and other participants present touch the *pūjābhaḥ* containing goods used for offerings during the pūjā, while the *mūlaguru* recites the *jajmān*'s written statement of intent. During these *saṃkalpas* the *mūlaguru* appears to be able to recite the lengthy *Samkalpa Vākya*, also known as *Adya Mahādāna* and the *Mahādāna Vākya*, which gives the location and time of the pūjā, as well as the deities present.¹² I have, however, witnessed truncated or omitted versions of this in some *saṃkalpas*: in Lalitpur it nevertheless generally appears to always be recited in full at the final *pūjābhaḥ saṃkalpa*.

The fourth *saṃkalpa* is performed in the direction of the book, but this is usually preceded by a few shorter pūjās. The first is the honouring of the conch, or *laḥthala*, which is taken to symbolise the protection of nāgas because, according to Deepak Bajracharya, it is associated with the water where they dwell. The second short pūjā essentially appears to be morning rites of daily worship or *nityā pūjā*, which is offered to deities in shrines. This involves pouring water onto a leaf that represents the ritual mirror (*jvalā-nhāykā*), which is then waved in a circle before the text as is done with the ritual mirror, after which the *mūlaguru* invites deities to the place where the rite is taking place to witness the pūjā using *aṣṭalāsa nyāsa*, the visualised placing of syllables on the body along with dance-like gestures. Then the *mūlaguru* has to perform *gurumaṇḍala pūjā*, offering his maṇḍala to his own guru, which involves inviting various esoteric deities to the pūjā – the mantras of which are recited while the *mūlaguru* hides his *japamāla*, rosary, which many informants say is to prevent evil spirits from stealing the mantras for evil purposes. Finally, the *ṭikā* pot, or *kāyabhaḥ*, is used by the *jajmān* to honour the text by offering six *ṭikās* up and down the text: this is mirrored by the *mūlaguru* who performs *kuṇḍalinī* yoga up and down the six cakras of his central channel – according to Deepak Bajracharya, this unites the guru's mind with the text. Finally, the *saṃkalpa* of the book involves the *jajmān* first offering water to and then touching the book, while the *mūlaguru* again recites the *jajmān*'s solemn statement of intent. After this, the text is opened.

12 For the Sanskrit text of Jana Bāhāḥ's *Samkalpa Vākya*, see Sharkey (2001: 302–303) and for a translation of Kvā Bāhāḥ's, see Gellner (1992: 191).

Generally speaking, enough *vajrācāryas* are invited so that, when evenly divided, the text can be read in its entirety within two hours (usually five for short *sūtras*, ten for long ones, and one hundred and eight for texts like the *Śatasāhasrikā*). Thus, the text, when divided into enough sections, is handed out by the *jajmān* to whom the *vajrācāryas* receiving the folios offer blessings. After reciting a homage to the triple gem, the *vajrācāryas* recite or sing the *Ākāś Dhātu* verse (see the section on the ‘popular significance in Nepal’) and occasionally the *Ye Dharma Hetu* verse before reading from the manuscript.

After the recitation has started, the *mūlaguru* continues to perform some *pūjās*. The first of these is the performance of an esoteric (*rahasya*) maṇḍala offering and *samādhi*, wherein, according to Deepak Bajracharya, the *mūlaguru* engages in esoteric meditation involving his lineage deity. The *jajmān* is invited to perform a *pañcopacara* *pūjā* towards this maṇḍala which, according to Deepak Bajracharya, unites the *jajmān*’s mind with the guru’s, after which the triple-gem maṇḍalas are honoured once again. After this, the *jajmān* is asked to offer the ritual possessions involved in the *pañcopacara* *pūjā* to all the shrines around the temple or, if in a house, all the shrines around the city from the rooftop. This rite is called the circle or *cākaḥ* *pūjā*. The plate used for this is then returned to the main sacred site of the *pūjā*, where all the deities who were invited to protect the *pūjā* are thanked with an offering of a maṇḍala and *bali*, called the offering to the spirit-gods, or *digabali bii*.

After the recitation, the *vajrācāryas* usually recite the *Ye Dharma Hetu* verse, the *Vajrasattva Dhāraṇī*, and occasionally the *Ākāś Dhātu* verse once again. The folios are collected together to re-form the manuscript. Then the *jajmān* and other participants are invited to offer rice to the various deities who protected the *pūjā* embodied in ritual objects, or in the case of *Sūrya* and *Ākāśa* (space) to the sky, a rite called *kigaḥtine* which, according to Deepak Bajracharya, allows the deities to leave. After this, merit is dedicated according to the list in the statement provided by the *jajmān* and read during the *saṃkalpa*. The *jajmān* forms one last maṇḍala out of rice and then offers it by pushing it along the floor: a rite called *kīmaṇḍala visarjana* *pūjā*, which finally allows the deities to leave. Thereupon *dakṣiṇa*, ritual payment, is offered in the form of uncooked rice, a coin, and other goods –

money is offered in envelopes. The *jajmān* offers ṭikā to each *vajrācārya* and the *mūlaguru* offers ṭikā to all the participants in turn. Everyone generally receives a protective red thread, *hyāuṃ kokhākāpaḥ*, and a *pañcasūtra*, a five-coloured thread symbolising the five buddhas. After this, the *Vajrasattva Dhāraṇī* is often recited once again to forgive any last mistakes that may have been made.

Then the ritual feast, *gaṇacakra*, commences. Up until then, participants are expected to have fasted. According to Milan Shakya, this rite involves an offering to the deities of the monastery and thus not only satisfies participants but also the deities who protect the pūjā and make it possible. While *gaṇacakra* historically refers to tantric feasts involving alcohol, tantric songs and antinomian acts, today it essentially consists of the sacramental meal, *samay baji*, which generally includes beaten rice (*baji*), buffalo meat, black soybeans, black-eyed beans, ginger, puffed rice, and a vegetable. Many variations on this exist but the meal is expected to be ritually pure. I have also witnessed many such feasts where the sponsor asked for vegetarian food, therefore no buffalo meat. Traditionally, alcohol in the form of Newar liquors, *aylā* or *thvaṃ*, is enjoyed with the feast, but this is also occasionally left out these days.

Conclusion

While the embodiment of the divine in a text, localisation and trends towards renewal and reform are seen to exist in modern Newar Buddhist practice regarding Mahāyāna literature, these characteristics do indeed feature in Mahāyāna literature itself. Besides encouraging the reader to think of themselves as divine and as an embodiment of the Buddha, Mahāyāna literature also encourages localisation in characterising the spot on which its sūtras are placed as being a true caitya, or *caityabhūtaḥ*. The Mahāyāna sūtras' self-referentiality tends to speak directly to the reader, encouraging them to think of themselves as the idealised practitioner, and as having by necessity encountered the Mahāyāna sūtras in question and the buddhas in a previous existence (eg Wogihara 1932: 459–460, 468, 803–804, Karashima 2013: 191). Finally, the Mahāyāna doctrine of *upāyakaūśālya* (skilful means) allows for a variation in methods and teachings so long as the ultimate goal remains the same: buddhahood. Thus, while

ritual form may change throughout the years, the methods adapt to the perceived or actual needs of the audience at the time, be these conscious or unconscious attempts at adaptation and adjustment. From both a popular and textual perspective, ritual and spiritual realisation are two approaches to awakening.

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CONFERENCE REPORTS

History through Rituals. Explorations in Indo-Tibetan Religious Cultures, University of Haifa, Israel, 1-2 July 2019

Arik Moran

A workshop on 'History through Rituals' was held at the University of Haifa in Israel on 1-2 July 2019. The goal of the workshop was to explore connections within and between the Indo-Tibetan cultural spheres through an intensive engagement of anthropologists, historians, and philologists whose work addresses rituals in either one or both regions. The extensive time allotted for presenters (approximately one hour) helped further the investigations, which primarily focused on historicization, regional variance, and the transmutations of ritual practises over time. The discussions were enhanced by the presence of invited commentators from diverse backgrounds, notably Himalayan anthropologist Ehud Halperin (Tel Aviv University), Theatre Studies specialist Ruthie Abeliovich (University of Haifa) and Classics scholar Moshe Bildstein (University of Haifa).

Broadly divided between Tibetan, South Asian, and pan-Himalayan foci, the workshop began with a substantial examination of the textual evidence regarding the use of rituals among mediaeval Indian tantric Buddhists by Péter-Dániel Szántó (University of Leiden). A delineation of the forms, functions, and purposes of tantric rituals revealed the multifocal aims of Buddhist *tantrikas* in relation to state structures. The actual number of such politically relevant 'spiritual masters' in local courts was found to be exceedingly lower (barely two dozen individuals) than the prodigious literary output that their religious schools would suggest. Persisting with the philological exploration of Buddhism, Gergely Hidas (The British Museum) presented the fruits of a five year-research project on Buddhist incantations (*dhāraṇīs*) that were used to secure agricultural yields in the mediaeval Kathmandu Valley. The findings suggesting that such aspects of Buddhist tradition had found followers in Nepal from the mid-first millennium onwards (see <https://www.degruyter.com/viewbooktoc/product/509288>).

The Buddhist-philological overture of the first day was followed by lectures relating to the Tibetan cultural sphere at large. In a sobering examination of the tensions between the ‘secular’ (civic) and ‘religious’ (monastic) aspects of oath-taking, Berthe Jansen (Leipzig University) illustrated the resonance of this fundamental ritual act in contemporary refugee communities and among high ranking *lamas*, who avoid taking oaths for fear of inadvertent perjury. The regional variants of popular cults in and around the plateau were addressed in two succeeding presentations. In a detailed investigation of the ‘*sil*’ tradition of Amdo, Daniel Berounský (Charles University, Prague) produced tangible evidence of sorcery at the pale of monastic Tibet that was insightfully linked to a broader, northeast Himalayan arch of ritual subcultures. Extending the view farther east, Marc Des Jardins (Concordia University, Montreal) demonstrated the multifarious ‘domestications’ of indigenous deities along the Sino-Tibetan frontier and their entanglement in the Tibetan-Buddhist pantheon. The day concluded with an evocative examination of ‘folk’ methods for the subjugation of vampires by Charles Ramble (École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris). Drawing on Georg van Driem’s ‘fallen leaves’ model as an alternative to the traditional tree shaped-graphs for explaining relations between language families, the cross-cultural ‘borrowings’ in ritual revealed surprising links between vampire subjugation rites with respondents pointing to additional underexplored ties between the ‘demons’ of the roof of the world and Central Asian divinities depicted in wall paintings dating to the first millennium CE.

Shifting to the Indian and Nepal Himalaya, the second day began with an innovative analysis of ‘eye opening’ rituals among the Newars of Kathmandu and their distant Kham Magar compatriots in West Nepal by Anne de Sales (Paris Nanterre University). Underlining the commensurateness of these ostensibly disconnected installation ceremonies’ (*pratistha*) culminative acts—the animation of painted deities by the urban artists’ drawing of eyes in the capital on the one hand and the initiation of shamans through a piercing of blindfolds in the rugged western hills on the other hand—prompted a rethinking of Tantric ritual cultures more broadly and of the importance of individualization as a prerequisite for successful rites of initiation in particular. Also in West Nepal, Marie Lecomte-Tilouine (Laboratoire

d'anthropologie sociale, Collège de France) exposed the associative chain of ideas linking the image of the 'joker' in masked dances among neighbouring 'tribal' communities. Extending the string of ideas westwards into the Indian Himalaya, a similarly motivated reincarnation of masked dances in oral epic performances suggested incestuous relations within ruling families there are animated to produce a similar affect. Still in the Indian Himalayan, Arik Moran (University of Haifa) questioned the development of ritual cultures in the Kullu Valley. Focusing on the ritual components of the recent surge in festivals celebrating 'human sacrifices' revealed that these were, in fact, transmutations of earlier rites of 'divine marriages', whose recasting can be traced to specific historical junctures. In a departure from the strictly ethnographic data presented during the day, Alban von Stockhausen (Bernisches Historisches Museum, Switzerland) proposed new ways for thinking about rituals that draw on classical programming themes from Computer Science. Taking the life rituals of the Rai of Eastern Nepal as data, von Stockhausen illustrated how these could be fruitfully grouped into classes by noting modular attributes and transposable functions according to changing sets of rules to be defined by the researcher (or 'programmer'), the principles thus outlined being applicable to ritual cultures writ large.

As an initial attempt at establishing dialogues between regional specialists from different disciplines, the meetings in Haifa proved successful in laying the groundwork for future collaborations that are currently underway. Interested contributors are encouraged to contact the workshop organizer for additional information on follow up events.

Rethinking the Himalayas, 2nd Annual Nordic Himalaya Research Network Conference, 9 May 2019, University of Copenhagen

Elizabeth Williams-Oerberg, Dan Hirslund, Prem Poddar

On 9 May 2019, the second Annual Conference of the Nordic Himalaya Research Network (NHRN) brought together researchers in the Nordic region and beyond who work on all aspects of research related to the Himalaya region spanning India, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet. With the theme of 'Rethinking the Himalayas', the conference offered a platform for scholars of the Himalayas to present their research and was particularly intended to be a supportive meeting point for emerging scholars.

NHRN was established in 2018 with the aim of bringing together scholars from across disciplines who work on this easily overlooked but strategically important region. At the first conference organised by NHRN, scholars situated in the Nordic region came together to discuss strategies for strengthening research in the Himalayas, including identifying a need for creating networking opportunities to foster collaboration and creating platforms for junior scholars to share their innovative research. Based on the conclusions from this first conference, NHRN planned its second annual conference with the specific aim of bringing scholars together to share their research, while especially encouraging junior scholars to participate.

Addressing the theme of the conference, Prem Poddar kicked off with his opening address on 'Waterscapes: Himalayas in the Anthropocene/Capitalocene'. Poddar emphasised the importance of paying attention to climate change in the Himalayas and the need to take into account how the landscape influences and is impacted on by human relations and economic, ie capitalist, dynamics. His argument was that part of the problem of understanding the waterscape in the Himalayas is that water per se eludes elucidation: he therefore proposed to redress this by treating water as a 'hyperobject', borrowing from Morton's thinking about global warming as a hyperobject. He addressed questions of

anxieties and vulnerabilities when it comes to the representation and perception of water in the Himalayas, using the outlook of hyperobjectivity in the Anthropocene. In other words, he asked the question: how would treating water as a 'hyperobject' enable a more insightful and productive understanding of it such that a non-local agential view can be foregrounded? In an age of ecological emergency, locality (any particular part of India or China) is always a false immediacy: in other words, the water in a person's body is seemingly totally separate from the water in the Himalayan glaciers, yet the glaciers are local manifestations of the same hydrological cycle, be it the Indian Ocean or monsoon water.

After these opening remarks, the first session began with a presentation by Abhimanyu Pandey from the South Asia Institute, Heidelberg University, who discussed 'Exploring "Connectivity" in a Trans-Himalayan Border Region' in relation to the Spiti Valley, India – which borders Tibet (China) to the east and Ladakh to the north. Pandey reviewed how connectivity was perceived by various actors engaging with the valley – local/regional communities, the government, and tourists, among others; the material forms in which connectivity has been emerging in the valley; and how connectivity has been shaping livelihoods, worldviews, and lifestyles there. In particular, he examined how two roads that were built to connect the Spiti Valley to the rest of India in the 1960s and 70s have affected the valley. He considered how the transformations – political, economic, social, and material – that the roads have been engendering in the valley have not been concomitant with their initial construction in the valley. Pandey shed light on the ways in which larger political, economic, cultural, and technological changes have concatenated together with Spiti's roads to shape the valley's experience of modernity, nationhood, and globalisation.

Next, Siddharth Pandey from Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich, gave a presentation on 'In the Mould of Old, but not Quite: Revisiting the "Britishness" of Himalayan Hill Stations in the Era of Postcolonial Change'. During his talk, he took a close look at the British-established hill stations of India. Widely regarded as a unique experimentation in urban geography during the modern times, the hill stations continue to attract attention today, for both Westerners and

native Indians (residents and visitors alike). Pandey considered how the idea of 'Britishness' in post-independent India has been sustained in these hill stations. He focused on the example of Simla – now Shimla, the most famous hill station of all in the Himalayas of North India, and once the summer capital of the British Empire. He tackled the essence of 'Himalayan Britishness' through the lenses of materiality, aesthetics, affect and politics. Drawing on his experience as an ethnographer, photographic archivist and curator of Shimla (in India and abroad), he presented the complex narratives of adaptation and change by the local people and the government that arise in Shimla due to the highly chequered history of ideas and practices in contemporary India.

Following on from Pandey, Rashmi Upadhyay, an independent scholar at the time, presented 'Memories of Migration among Nepalese Migrant Coal Mine Workers'. Her presentation centred on what she termed 'circular migrant' workers who permanently returned to Nepal after migration to the coal mines of Meghalaya in India. Based on an ethnography of return migration, she focused on Nepalese coal mine migrant workers of the Jaintia Hills, Meghalaya in India and their notion of home and of belonging. She argued that the return home of Nepalese migrant workers was not just the physical act of returning, but that return is a process that triggers constant memories of migration from the past. For Nepalese coal mine workers, 'return' was not always associated with their native village, but rather with the place where they worked and had spent most of their lives, which was evident through the way these migrants collectively remembered their past in their day-to-day lives. Over the course of her stay in the coal-mining labour camps, she discovered that the coal mines of Meghalaya have become an important site for circular Nepalese migrant workers.

Continuing the discussion related to Nepalese labour, Nokmedemla Lemtur from the Center for Modern Indian Studies, Georg-August Universität Göttingen, gave a presentation on 'Understanding Labour Politics in Himalayan Mountaineering Expeditions (1922-1938)'. Lemtur analysed mountaineering expeditions in the early twentieth century, tracing continuities and breaks in colonial policies on recruitment, management and control of labour in the Himalayan region. She drew on archival material and accounts of various expeditions to identify not only labour policy through the regulations enacted by various

colonial state officials and institution like the Himalayan Club (1928), but also the emergence of a claim to a certain kind of work through negotiations and conflict with other indigenous communities that became characteristically identified with the Sherpas. Lemtur examined how mountaineering in the early twentieth century was critical for the consolidation of a Nepalese workforce that served these expeditions.

After a short break for lunch, Tristan Bruslé from the Centre for Himalayan Studies, CNRS, opened the second session with a presentation on 'Small Urban Municipalities in Nepal at a Time of Decentralisation. Production of Laws and Spaces of Living on the Fringes. (A Starting Research Project)'. Bruslé discussed the concept of 'subaltern urbanisation' in relation to a new research project that examines how small towns grow. This research project brings to the fore the voices of people living on the fringes of towns and examines processes of decentralisation as well as the production of norms by local urban bodies. One of this new research project's main fields of inquiry is the unequal access, in terms of jobs and accommodation, to the city in which urban-rural relations entail flows of products and labour.

Min Bhatta from the University of Aberdeen then presented 'Nordic Development Assistance and Promotion of Democracy in Nepal'. He highlighted how Nepal has been one of the many aid recipient countries in the world and, in particular, a target country for Nordic aid and assistance for decades. By examining the evaluation reports from donor countries, he argued that Nepal has largely benefited from foreign aid and assistance. His presentation assessed the extent to which Nordic aid and assistance have helped shape democracy in Nepal today. In addition, he underlined how Danish support for strengthening election systems, proper governance and human rights systems in Nepal has proved a notable accomplishment.

Still in Nepal, Todd Wallenius from Aarhus University, Denmark, presented a paper on 'Wealth, Internationality, and Education as a Commodity in Urban Nepal'. He drew attention to how schools in Nepal have increasingly turned into 'battlefields' owing to their intense vying for students, status and profitability where a multitude of private so-called 'international' schools have emerged. With the global education market as a backdrop, he took a close look at the

nature of class performance, rituals of distinction, educational choices, branded power and the symbolic capital of the 'international'. Based on ethnographic research, he examined how private elite schools have functioned as spaces for class performance, and how the idea of education as a commodity has produced patterns of consumer choice and class formation.

To close the second session, Rajeshwar Acharya from Aarhus University, Denmark, presented his work on 'Analysing Interpersonal Relations and Trust in Educational Aid'. Inspired by new genres of writing related to how the personal and professional selves are intertwined in aid work, Acharya investigated what 'trust' has meant to actors in everyday aid work, especially in the course of educational aid negotiations. He argued that educational aid in Nepal has been embedded in matrices of complex interpersonal relations, blurring dichotomous distinctions between trust/mistrust, formal/informal, and donor/recipient. He urged scholars to investigate educational aid through the lens of narratives produced by actors who have not only different sets of rights and obligations, but also different educational and career trajectories that shape their professional relations and friendships.

After a short coffee break, Trine Brox from the University of Copenhagen opened the third session with her presentation 'From Rotating Sūtra Libraries to Maṇi Fidget Spinners: Development of Devices that Contain and Spin Buddhist Scripts'. With particular attention to Tibetan Buddhism, Brox scrutinised the fascinating development of wheels used in Buddhist practice. Brox zoomed in on the history of devices that contain and spin sacred Buddhist scripts, such as: the Chinese octagonal sūtra library; Tibetan water, air, fire and earth prayer wheels; and contemporary wheel apps, automatized praying machines, and maṇi fidget spinners. Her presentation focused on the most well-known device, the handheld Tibetan prayer wheel that consists of a revolving drum attached to a handle. She explored the ideas that prompted this constant technological development of rotating devices, investigating how Tibetan Buddhists have adopted and further developed a technology that optimises the rotation of sacred scripts, and why rotation has been considered the proper way of interacting with Buddha's doctrine.

Edoardo Paolo Ferrari from Oxford Brookes University continued the discussion of material culture in the Himalayas with his presentation on 'Linking Tangible and Intangible Aspects in the Architecture of Ladakh'. Ferrari investigated the vernacular architecture of Ladakh, and in particular the Dukhang Yokma temple of the Ensa monastic complex in the Nubra Valley. This temple – built in the late nineteenth or possibly early twentieth century – has been the subject of an ongoing study by a team of architects to chart the temple's structural issues in view of its restoration. Along with the structure, Ferrari explored the oral history of the temple and its founder. He explained the reasons underpinning the temple's construction and positioning, which are connected to its material history and structural decay. He argued that the dukhang or temple, which is imbued with important religious as well as other intangible meanings, is an important example of showing how tangible and intangible aspects of architecture are always intertwined.

Last but not least, Judith Müller from Heidelberg University presented a paper on 'Urbanizing Water in Leh, Ladakh: Socio-ecological Dynamics in the Indian Trans-Himalaya'. Müller investigated the way urbanisation processes and limited water availability have created water governance challenges in arid mountain regions, such as in Leh, Ladakh, where snow and glacial melt runoff have been important water sources. As a result, water availability has been subject to high variability throughout the year. Müller highlighted how different uses of water resources by various actor groups has led to conflicting interests. In particular, she showed how agricultural water use has been on the decline as private households have changed their water use habits with a shift towards the tertiary sector, especially tourism, in which a growing amount of freshwater has been used and large volumes of sanitation water have been produced. Müller argued that inhabitants are connected to varying extents to the water grid, with different levels of what she termed 'water citizenship'.

The second annual NHRN conference proved to be an engaging conference in which scholars in the Nordic region and beyond convened to share their research and create networks to foster future collaborations. In response to the call for papers, the organisers received a large number of paper proposals from scholars based in

South Asia, which unfortunately we could not support due to the lack of funds to cover travel expenses. The NHRN conference was supported by the Asian Dynamics Initiative and Roskilde University with only a limited budget to fund travel from within Europe. In the future, we hope that we can bring more scholars from South Asia to the Nordic Region to share their research on the Himalayas. NHRN is planned a third annual conference to take place in conjunction with the fourth annual meeting of the South Asia Across the Nordic Region (SANR) in Copenhagen on 28–29 May 2020, with the hope that more scholars based in South Asia will travel to Copenhagen to share their research on the Himalaya (see <https://cgsas.tors.ku.dk/research-programme/south-asia-across-the-nordic-region-sanr/>). This conference was unfortunately canceled due to Covid-19, and will be rescheduled. For more information about NHRN activities, including future conference updates, please consult the NHRN website: <https://himalayanordic.wordpress.com/>

New Directions in Himalayan Studies. A joint Berkeley-CNRS Workshop, co-convened by Alexander von Rospatt and Stéphane Gros, 1-3 March 2019, University of California, Berkeley

Stéphane Gros

Hosted under the umbrella of the Himalayan Studies program at the University of California Berkeley and in partnership with the Centre d'études himalayennes (CEH) of the National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS) in France, this three-day workshop (for details see <https://southasia.berkeley.edu/himalayan-studies-workshop>) brought together an equal number of faculty and graduate students from both institutions working on the Himalayan region in the Humanities and Social Sciences. The workshop was made possible thanks to a grant from the France-Berkeley Fund and to financial support from the Institute for South Asia Studies (ISAS), the Berreman-Yamanaka Fund at UC Berkeley, and the Centre d'études himalayennes.

A welcoming address by ISAS director Munis Faruqi and a brief introduction to the Berreman-Yamanaka Fund by Keiko Yamanaka were followed by introductory remarks by the co-conveners. This broadly configured workshop allowed for a total of twenty presentations grouped around common research interests, organised in thematic panels.

The first panel on 'Religious Practices Across Tibet' allowed for cross-fertilisation between philology, history, and anthropology, involving speakers with complementary expertise in Tibetan religious traditions across the Tibetosphere. It addressed a range of topics that were discussed by respondents David Gray (Santa Clara University) and David Germano (University of Virginia).

In his talk, Fernand Meyer (CEH) showed that Tibetan techniques known as *bcud-len*, linked to ancient Indian procedures aimed at rejuvenation and even immortality, constitute a reinterpretation of these earlier practices and developed into a large variety of techniques at the confluence of medicine, alchemy, asceticism,

ritual and yogic psychophysiology. Offering a historical-critical reading of commentaries of the Guhyagarbha Tantra to shed light on early tantric doctrinal developments in Tibet, PhD student Zack Beer (UCB) presented a tentative chronology for the emergence of procedures deemed by the later tradition to entail the ‘completion stage’ (*rdzogs rim*), highlighting the transition from a sexual rite to the body’s complex internal technologies. Focusing on the Foundational Practices (Skt. *ādikarma*, Tib. *las dang po pa*) and the *gurumaṅḍala* rite, a method for worshipping one’s guru, PhD student John ‘Zim’ Pickens (UCB) examined relevant ritual manuals. He suggested that the rise of *gurumaṅḍala* practices contributed to the development of a broader set of ritualised meditations in Tibet with a focus on the figure of the lama. While analysing a short passage taken from the *Tattvasamgraha-sādhanoṣṭikā* (*De nyid ’dus pa’ bsgrub pa’i thabs*), a tantric ritual manual preserved in several copies, from Dunhuang, Jacob Dalton (UCB) discussed the ritual technique of visualising and imagining a divine form and demonstrated how the practitioner’s merging with the deity (‘wisdom being’, *jñānasattva*) and the installation of *samaya* in the practitioner’s heart represent the key moment in this early Yoga tantra system.

These philological considerations then gave way to anthropologically oriented presentations. Nicolas Sihlé (CEH) combined second-hand sources and first-hand ethnographic data (from Mustang and Amdo) to discuss the place of commensality in the ritual practice of the *gaṇacakra* (Skt.) or *tsok* (Tib. *tshogs*), pointing out that in the cases compared a given shared ritual form can be articulated with a diversity of underlying logics. Finally, PhD student Donagh Coleman (UCB) presented his documentary work in progress about the Tibetan Buddhist tradition of *tukdam* (*thugs dam*), a term referring to the tradition of dying in meditative equipoise, with the practitioners’ bodies showing no signs of physical decay for days or even weeks after their clinical deaths. He discussed how tantric understandings of *tukdam* contrast with biomedical understandings and throw into disarray Western categories of life and death, mind and body.

The second panel focused on ‘Water Management and Use’ and was an opportunity to showcase complementary strands of research conducted in Nepal by faculty and graduate students. PhD student

Yoshika Crider (UCB) presented the results of an ongoing project that addresses the issue of safe drinking water and the advantages of system-level treatment technologies by chlorination over household-level safe water products. PhD student Romain Valadaud (CEH) presented his work on the role of Water Users Associations in the eastern Tarai, their link to patronage networks and how, beyond irrigation management, they transform into local political institutions contributing to changing or reproducing social structures. PhD student Caroline Sarrazin (CEH) addressed the question of water access in relation to the use and management of *pokhāri* (ponds and tanks), also in the Tarai. Based on an extensive study of 230 *pokhāri* she discussed representations and practices of various actors to uncover socio-spatial injustices and issues related to property rights, and the influence of local management authorities. Based on long-term research in Nepal, Olivia Aubriot (CEH) reflected more broadly on ‘how to “read” an irrigation system’ and the methodological and theoretical implications of considering water management as a trace of the history of social relations: a social construct that evolves with the society that produces it. Isha Ray (UCB), co-director of the Berkeley Water Center, provided a well-rounded discussion of all the papers in this panel.

These data-rich presentations on natural resource management issues were complemented by the third panel on aspects related to landscape diversity and the impact of environmental protection policies on local communities. Under the title ‘Changing Natures’, the panel included cases from Nepal, India and China. PhD student Tracy Burnett (UCB) presented her methodological musings about the limitations of conventional rangeland management approaches in the context of Tibetan pastoralism. She addressed how, for Tibetan nomads, yaks mediate a range of relations with the environment, the grassland and its deities, well beyond considerations of subsistence production, market commodity, etc. Stéphane Gros (CEH) discussed the impact of environmental policies and poverty alleviation programmes on the Drung people of Yunnan (China). He focused on how the prohibition of shifting cultivation leads to increased dependence on government subsidies, to a reduction in traditional knowledge transmission, and to a significant increase in labour migration and female marriage migration. More concretely, he argued that the ‘livelihood conversions’

experienced by the Drung people can be correlated with the progression of 'religious conversions' to Christianity, and to the pervasive neglect of traditional ritual practices. The impetus to protect 'nature' has been behind the creation of dozens of national parks in the Himalayan range, as discussed by Joëlle Smadja (CEH). Through several case studies in Nepal and India, she showed how the control these parks exert over resource management and governance is often instrumentalised by actors who are beholden to a political or religious agenda. This is turning parks into territories where conflicts over legitimacy unfold, pitching the rights of wild animals against the interests of farmers and herders, as well as tourists, foresters, etc. Elizabeth Allison (California Institute of Integral Studies) served as respondent and discussed these three talks.

Leading on from this, Daniela Berti (CEH) addressed the attribution of legal status to 'nature', including granting the status of 'legal person' to natural resources. Based on court cases filed at the High Court of Uttarakhand (Indian Himalayas), she showed how legal and religious arguments may sometimes be combined. PhD student Fabien Provost (CEH) gave a presentation based on research conducted in mortuaries in Himachal Pradesh and in the process shed light on the various types of knowledge implicated in the formulation of medico-legal opinion. He demonstrated that forensic experts' conclusions and actions are not founded on a biological theory of the body but on a biosocial theory of humans in their sociocultural environment. Lawrence Cohen (UCB) served as discussant for these last two papers of the panel.

Finally, the fourth and last panel to take place during this workshop brought together scholars working on 'Newar Society, Religion and Art'. The first three papers were discussed by Nicolas Sihlé (CEH). PhD student Kris Anderson (UCB) examined the *Sarvadurgatipariśodhana* (Elimination of All Negative Rebirths), a Buddhist tantra that has been a source for Buddhist funerary rites in Newar and Tibetan Buddhism, in light of a circa nineteenth-century Sanskrit-Newari bilingual manual containing Sarvadurgati rites for the approach of death and the seven ritually critical days after it. She discussed the adaptation of materials from the tantra for ritual purposes, demonstrating how it is combined with transfer-of-consciousness (*utkrānti*) rites from other tantric systems. PhD student Ryan Damron (UCB) presented his research on

the late Buddhist monk Vanaratna (1384–1468). Drawing on Tibetan biographical sources and Vanaratna's own compositions in Sanskrit and Tibetan, he highlighted the religious, political, and social works of Vanaratna in the Kathmandu Valley and, through them, explored the complex religious history of fifteenth-century Nepal.

The second section of the final panel was dedicated to the ritual uses of visual materials in Newar religion. Drawing on his work on the elaborate series of old-age rituals performed by Newars to sacralise and protect elders who have reached a threshold age, Alexander von Rospatt (UCB) examined the scroll paintings or repoussés dedicated to the goddess of longevity (Usnīsavijayā). He decoded the complex iconography of these objects and explained how they serve both as icons and as commemorative objects that depict key moments in the old-age ritual as performed for Buddhists of Kathmandu when the latter reach the age of 77 years, 7 months and 7 days. Similarly, postdoctoral researcher Kunsang Namgyal-Lama (CEH) discussed Nepalese scroll paintings that are produced as icons and commemorative objects for the performance of the 'Laksacaitya' rite dedicated to the moulding of miniature clay *caityas*. She discussed different representations of the Laksacaitya ritual on *paubhās* and analysed the evolution of iconographic programmes to show how the representation of the ritual performance became a central theme. The concluding talk by Gérard Toffin (CEH) offered further analytical considerations regarding the link between rituals and images among Newars, drawing on his work on the masks of a Newar group of dance performers who belong to the Nardevī neighbourhood of old Kathmandu city. These masks represent a standard set of deities. Consecrated by local priests and worshipped with offerings, they are donned by traditional dancers who become possessed by the corresponding god or goddess. Toffin asserted that the role of adorned anthropomorphic forms of deities in religious life is one of the main features of Newar culture, a link that can also be found in other realms, such as *paubhās* scroll paintings discussed by von Rospatt and Namgyal-Lama. Patricia Berger (UCB) responded to these three final interconnected presentations.

Building on the launch of the Himalayan Studies initiative in 2017 at UC Berkeley (https://southasia.berkeley.edu/Himalayan_Studies_UCB), this workshop achieved the goal of invigorating Himalayan

Studies. It initiated the dialogue between regional specialists from different disciplines, both faculty and graduate students, and laid the groundwork for future collaborations. To foster continuing cooperation, a follow-up workshop took place on 26 September 2019. On this occasion, Keiko Yamanaka (UCB) and Tristan Bruslé (CNRS), both specialists of migration issues in the Himalayas, presented their work on a topic that had not be included in the March workshop.

The joint workshop between the two institutions from Berkeley and Paris is a first step and will hopefully be followed by further exchanges and collaborations that will also involve other institutions dedicated to Himalayan Studies.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS

***The Country of the Hundred and Twenty-Five
Thousand Mountains: Archaeological Study of the
Karnali Basin (Nepal) Between the Twelfth and
Sixteenth Century***

***(Le Pays aux cent-vingt-cinq-milles montagnes. Études
archéologique du bassin de la Karnali (Népal) entre le
XIIe et le XVIe siècle)***

By David Cornélius Andolfatto

Disciplines: ethno-archæology, art history

Institution: Sorbonne Université, Faculté des Lettres, Paris, France

Date: 23 December 2019

Supervision: Edith Parlier-Renault and Marie Lecomte-Tilouine

This research aims to study the medieval cultural context of western Nepal between the 12th and 16th century. The study is based on a careful analysis of the archaeological documentation gathered by the author and on historical and ethnographic sources. Between the 12th and 14th century, the Karnali River Basin was at the centre of an important political entity: the Khaśa Malla empire. From this empire would subsequently emerge a multitude of small independent kingdoms. Due to its geographical location on a communication corridor between the Indo-Gangetic plain and the western part of the Tibetan plateau, the region lies at the crossroad of cultures. The study proposes to question the latter by observing the modalities of expressions of power and religion through examining unpublished and largely overlooked archæological data.

A first historiographical part reviews the terminologies of Khaśa and Khaśa Malla and the historical data available for the study of the region. The question of the origins of the Khaśa Malla dynasty remained an open debate for more than half a century. The theory followed here, with new documents and perspectives to justify it, is that the so-called Khaśa Malla emperors were of Tibetan origin.

In the second part, the research lays the basis for a relative chronology

of the artistic and architectural heritage. Indeed, up until now, evaluating the age of temples (*deval*), memorial stone pillars, reservoirs and fountains involved pure guesswork and led to attributing it to the imperial period (twelfth–fourteenth century), which is considered a ‘golden age’. This new chronology is further brought together in the dynastic history of the region and in the central Himalayan context. One key assessment is that the collapse of the Khaśa Malla empire did not signify the end of arts and architecture in the region.

The third part proposes three relatively independent studies of different aspects of the region’s medieval period. In the first one, the architectural organisation of two sites, identified as the capitals of the Khaśa Malla Empire, Sinja and Dullu, is studied. A second case study analyses a hitherto ignored group of bas-reliefs representing mediums during their oracular trances. This identification is rendered possible by an ethno-archæological approach and brings to light the earliest known representations of oracular cults for the Karnali Basin (fourteenth–fifteenth century) and probably the central Himalayas. The third case study concerns a corpus of metal sculptures that are said to date back to the Khaśa Malla empire. Their style and epigraphic details are contextualised in the broader central Himalayan context and reveal an exogenous art of the Buddhist elite (of exogenous origins), which are different from the artistic idioms encountered on the field, in the Karnali river basin.

The thesis comprises three volumes divided into Vol. 1: Text, Vol. 2: Illustrations and Vol. 3: Inventory of sites, maps and plates.

Keywords: western Nepal, ethno-archæology, oracular cults, Buddhism, Hinduism, Khaśa

David Cornélius Andolfatto is an affiliated researcher at the Centre de Recherche sur l’Extrême-Orient de Paris-Sorbonne (CREOPS). He is currently editing the French text of his PhD thesis and is looking forward to publishing it in English.

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The Age of Rights: Towards an Anthropology of Civil Society Associations in Nepal
(L'ère des droits. Vers une anthropologie des associations de la société civile au Népal)

By Barbara Berardi Tadié

Discipline: anthropology

Institution: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France

Date: 6 February 2017

Supervision: Marie Lecomte-Tilouine

This dissertation examines the emergence of a 'culture of human rights' in Nepal, by focusing on the triangular relationship between civil society organisations (CSOs), the international discourse on human rights, and the social, legal and institutional changes that have characterised the country's recent history.

Its main objective is to illustrate the mechanisms through which the rights discourse has become a language for formulating claims and for articulating social conflicts in Nepal, encompassing and replacing the developmentalist discourse, and displacing, while contaminating, political ideologies. To this end, this work attempts to: 1) highlight how the 'culture of rights' has transformed the expression of ethics and (indigenous, caste and gender) identities, redefining socio-economic problems in terms of injustice and identities in terms of rights; 2) show its impact on national policies and the Nepalese normative framework, as well as its echo in the new constitution, and 3) point out the consequences, limitations and paradoxes of the multifaceted use of the international rights discourse as a new post-political ideology in Nepal.

Such an objective can only be achieved through an ethnography of CSOs which, more than any other social force, have introduced, disseminated and domesticated the international human rights discourse. The rise of these associations represent a major phenomenon in contemporary Nepal. Since the first Jana Andolan (1990), voluntary associations and community groups, clubs and committees, ethnic

and religious organizations, NGOs and federations have multiplied, emerging as a major driving force behind several Nepalese social movements, such as the Dalit, Janajati and gender justice movements.

Yet, despite their decisive impact, the role of CSOs in the social, political and legal changes that have affected Nepal since 1990 remains barely known, with the exception of the category of ethnic associations. The present research attempts to clarify this role through a transversal ethnography of Nepalese associations, at the various levels (local, national, trans-national) and across the various fields (social, political, legal) where they operate.

The first section looks at the micro-level of the neighbourhood and city of Pokhara, the focus of the field research, through a study of three specific association networks: mothers' groups, neighbourhood development associations and Dalit (low-caste) associations. In the second section, I focus on ethnic minority (or 'indigenous nationality') associations and on *parbatiya* (Nepali high caste of hill origin) groups. The third and final section is dedicated to the interaction between the judiciary and civil society in Nepal, as emerges from an analysis of litigations filed at the Supreme Court by associations specialised in the defence of human rights.

To sum up, the overall aim of this research is to identify: 1) the mechanisms through which the human rights discourse has asserted its hegemony, becoming the dominant medium through which collective demands and social conflicts can be articulated; 2) the role played by CSOs in this process, and 3) the impact of the culture of human rights on the expression of local ethics, identities and politics, as well as on Nepal's legal and constitutional framework.

Keywords: Nepal, civil society, associations/NGOs, social movements, anthropology, human rights, Public Interest Litigation (PIL)

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***Flood Management Policy and (Re)Production of Socio-Spatial Inequalities in the Koshi plain: Nepalese Eastern Terai and Northern Indian Bihar
(Politique de gestion des inondations et (re)productions d'inégalités socio-spatiales dans la plaine de la Koshi : Téraï oriental népalais et Bihar indien septentrional)***

By Marie-Amélie Candau

Discipline: geography

Institution: Université Paris Nanterre, France

Date: 20 December 2018

Supervision: Olivia Aubriot and Frédéric Landy

Floods have forever been a challenge to human societies that have more or less adapted to them. In this respect, the southern Himalayan foothills no doubt represent the greatest challenge to humans due to a combination of factors such as: the force and irregularity of the flow; the strength of this sediment-laden water; the unpredictability of variations due to erratic monsoon rains; the instability of the river's path due to the sudden rupture of the slope and the high hydraulic gradient of the rivers when entering the Gangetic plain; and the relatively high density of populations (over 500 inhabitants/km²). The management of these rivers, long neglected due to the unique combination of these factors, has become an obsession for modern Indian and Nepalese nations who have developed this plain, in northern Bihar and in the Tarai respectively, which has considerable socio-economic potential and is indeed fundamental for Nepal.

The aim of this development is to contain the capricious flow of these rivers within dikes and to divert water into irrigation canals by means of a dam. However, the expected results are not forthcoming. In recent times, flooding has increased in both frequency and duration; the areas affected have expanded and, above all, the causes have diversified, all of which clearly indicates the failure of current management strategies. Consequently, the loss of life and property has continued to

rise, culminating in the 2008 catastrophe, which resulted in over thirty thousand deaths and massive damage to property and livestock.

Fieldwork has largely confirmed these observations. It focused on six villages located between dikes or close to tributaries of the Koshi River or along the devastating path of the Koshi, both in Nepal and India in 2008. The human consequences have been dramatic. The impoverishment of much of the working class, mostly the peasant population, is of staggering proportions, with an unruly increase in the number of landless families facing destitution, with no healthcare or schools, while wealthy classes have continued to thrive.

The study of decision-making and distribution circuits reveals a semi-feudal social system controlled by the heirs of former 'zamindars' who have remained powerful landowners and influence all management decisions in order to protect their own property, often at the expense of the poor. Thus, a mechanism of privilege and misappropriation of wealth has been established with the help of a largely corrupt and clientelist political power at all decision-making levels, from the elected representative to the engineer, from the entrepreneur to the NGO, and in which mafia networks are now involved. With the obvious decline of central or regional power, insecurity is now rife in the region, which adds to the great vulnerability when faced with serious floods that are destroying and sterilising more and more agricultural land and threatening an increasing number of people.

Keywords: flood, embankment, risk, vulnerability, corruption, India, Nepal, the Tarai

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Healing 'Heart-Minds': Disaster, Care, and Global Mental Health in Nepal's Himalayan Foothills

By Liana E. Chase

Discipline: anthropology

Institution: School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London

Date: 31 December 2019

Supervision: Christopher Davis

The movement for global mental health calls for rapidly scaling up mental health services in low- and middle-income countries. This call has mobilised new resources, logics and solidarities while also igniting polemical scholarly debates about culture and power in the psyches. Over the past 10 years, Nepal has become a key site of global mental health research and practice. In the wake of the devastating 2015 earthquake, advocates worked to channel unprecedented financial and political support for mental health towards the sustainable expansion of services. My thesis charts these efforts to 'scale up' from the vantage point of an earthquake-affected community in the Himalayan foothills, foregrounding the perspectives of frontline clinicians, service users, and their families. It explores how the difficulties, necessities and possibilities of care in this environment shaped and were themselves shaped by newly introduced community mental health services.

My analysis draws attention to the way mental health care is being reimaged in and through the project of scaling up. I scrutinise the complex translations involved in bringing what mental health services have to offer into line with the desires, hopes and obligations of people on the front line of care in rural Nepal. I highlight disjuncture in the way mental health care's object is enacted at the level of policy discourse, in clinical practice by newly trained paraprofessional clinicians and in the lives of service users and their families. Ultimately, I argue that the project of scaling up not only allows for but may depend on 'mental health' being different things in different places. Each chapter adds

to our conceptual toolbox for producing the kind of experience-near, contextualised analyses that this new terrain calls for; together they amount to my vision for a ‘peopled’ critical anthropology of global mental health.

Keywords: care, global mental health, medical anthropology, psychosocial counselling, humanitarianism

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***The Sherpa Community in the 'Yak Donald's' Era:
Competition over Access to Resources in the Mount
Everest Tourist Region (Nepal)
(La société sherpa à l'ère du 'Yak Donald's': lutte des
places pour l'accès aux ressources dans la région
touristique de l'Everest (Népal))***

By Etienne Jacquemet

Discipline: Geography

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Date: 9 July 2018

Supervision: Isabelle Sacareau

The Mount Everest region (Nepal) is often regarded by trekkers and mountaineers as a perfect heterotopia: an authentic, remote place. Yet, leaving aside tourists' representations of it, the conditions for the tourist economy to thrive rely increasingly on land property, water and electricity resources. Since the boom in tourism in the seventies, these three types of resources have generated considerable revenue for locals. The latter are mainly peasants, mountain guides and porters, and the flow of tourists outside their houses has prompted a large proportion of them to build lodges. Nowadays, water conveyance and hydroelectricity allow hotelkeepers to offer a wide range of new services: hot showers, international cuisine, Internet access, teahouses or pubs, such as a local 'Yak Donald's'. This tourist income has drastically improved inhabitants' standard of living, as witnessed by their investment in second homes in Kathmandu and in the education of their children who now have access to higher education and to new job opportunities abroad.

However, access to land, water and electricity is being challenged due to different factors: first, the demand for water and energy is on the rise; second, there is an uneven distribution and availability of resources; third, individuals do not occupy the same position or have

the same capacities (ie skills, sociocultural capital, spatial capital) to tap resources. Contrary to popular beliefs, the survey carried out among 300 households in the region in 2015 and 2016 shows that tourism is not identified as an exerting pressure on access to water and energy resources. On the contrary, the water supply and power plants are frequently funded by erstwhile tourists. On the other hand, access to resources greatly differs from one stakeholder to another. Educated children of former international mountain guides with a large network of clients are often those who obtain the best land. They import and develop techniques to benefit from water and electricity resources. At the lower end of society, peasant families and villages located off the main tourist trail are the most disadvantaged. In fact, competition over water, electricity and the best land is the main issue in resource availability. This pursuit of profits leads to a fight over the best places. In this small but highly symbolic region, this fight breeds antagonism not only among lodge owners but also among inhabitants. It also opposes members of the Sherpa community (who claim to be insiders but who, geographically speaking, are widely scattered) to a new population of outsiders (Tamangs, Rais, Magars) who seek entry into the region to improve their livelihood.

In the context of intense socio-demographic and cultural changes, this doctoral thesis calls into question resource governance within this tourist hub. It shows that far from being passive, Sherpa lodge owners still reign over the territory and its tourist economy often at the expense of the poorest families and other ethnic groups with whom they should share more.

Keywords: Everest, tourism, Sherpa, resources, globalisation

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Exploring Dimensions of Accountability in Community Schools: A Constructivist Grounded Theory Inquiry

By Kul Prasad Khanal

Discipline: Education

Institution: School of Education, Kathmandu University, Nepal

Date: 25 October 2019

Supervision: Prof. Bal Chandra Luitel

The head teacher, the school management committee, teachers, parents and students are key actors in a community school. They perform various activities to produce deliverables in the form of education services. This gives rise to the concept of accountability in delivering education services. Scholars argue that given similar resource inputs, some community schools demonstrate better practices whereas others are totally unaware of their resource potentialities. While current literature provides ample evidence of the contextual understanding of accountability, the paradoxical nature of accountability with respect to local education service delivery is not properly articulated in the current accountability discourse. Why is it that the same policy works differently in different contexts? Is it the actors' internal values or is it externally imposed mechanisms that make actors accountable for their performance? To answer these questions, this doctoral study sets out to explore grounded theoretical dimensions of accountability by focusing on 'what it means for school actors in community schools to be accountable for service delivery'. The study was conducted between 2016 and 2019 in two community schools in western Nepal.

In the light of this overarching question, three subsidiary questions were taken into consideration during enquiries. One, how do school actors perceive their head teacher's accountability for service delivery? Two, how does he/she build accountability relations with other actors? Three, what are the emerging paradoxes in the process of understanding and building accountability relations? Accountability is a matter of action in progress. These questions were

therefore addressed using the constructivist version of grounded theory methodology. Placing the head teacher at the centre of the service delivery network, the study develops six grounded theoretical categories of understanding accountability for service delivery. These were discussed in terms of both ancient (Eastern) and modern (Western) theoretical ingredients.

The study explores the fact that being accountable means more than being answerable for one's performance: it involves negotiation behaviour on the part of school actors, which is manifested in managing resources, exercising autonomy, empowering actors, seeking integrity and building a two-way relationship between the different actors. In addition, the head teacher's proactive role fuels the process of building accountability relationships with other school actors, which are mediated through local practices of accountability mechanisms. In this way, the head teacher's agency creates and recreates the structure of the accountability space between school actors. This structure is created by following top-down instructions and a bottom-up reporting mechanism. In the process of understanding and building accountability relationships, the head teacher appears to switch between two paradoxical extremes: of being accountable to oneself and of being accountable to others. His/her movement to the 'being accountable to oneself' end would utilise every situation for improvement, thus transforming him/her into a benevolent administrator. Conversely, his/her movement to the 'being accountable to others' end is likely to transform the community school into a semi-private school, thereby making him/her an arbitrary administrator.

Based on these insights, the study highlights essential two-fold implications. Firstly, based on the theoretical categories of accountability explored in this study, an accountability mechanism at local level could be developed by aligning school actors' individual goals or values with those of the organisational value or mission. In so doing, school actors would be inspired to 'be accountable to oneself' by integrating both local practices and the formal mechanism of accountability in place. Secondly, the findings of the study could become a methodological stepping stone for initiating further inquiries in areas of educational development and governance. A subsequent study could be designed using either quantitative, qualitative or mixed

methods by creating a scale of accountability measures based on the accountability attributes developed in this study.

Keywords: accountability, community schools, school actors, grounded theory

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In the Shadows of Death: An Existential Approach to Mortality in the Sinja Valley of Western Nepal

By Samuele Poletti

Discipline: social anthropology

Institution: University of Edinburgh

Date: 13 December 2018

Supervision: Dimitri Tsintjilonis. External Examiners: Anne de Sales and Magnus Course

Based on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork, this thesis explores how people in the Sinja Valley of Jumla District (western Nepal) endeavour to make sense of existence through their engagement with mortality. My epistemological approach and the argument I put forwards is framed as a phenomenology of life *in the shadows of death*. This implies the exploration of how the phenomenon of death ‘appears’ to the consciousness of Sinjali people, contributing to the formation and sometimes dissolution of their lifeworlds – or, should I say, deathworlds. Still along these lines, this thesis contributes to a more nuanced anthropology of death by moving our understanding of mortality beyond its traditional focus on mortuary rites, reframing it in terms of my informants’ experiences. After all, as a Sinjali proverb suggests, ‘like the fingers of one’s hand, people are not all the same’. Moreover, the distinction that Sinjali people make between timely and untimely deaths problematises a conception of mortality as a monolithic object of thought, underscoring the fact that the modality of a particular demise is indissolubly linked to how this is going to be experienced.

Taking such experiences into consideration therefore demands that we move away from all-encompassing generalisations about the nature of death in order to foreground its existential aspects instead. Thus, while resisting any attempt to essentialise people, my argument pivots around the lives and deaths of a number of *characters*, presenting each time what is at stake for those very people. In this fashion, each

chapter of this thesis illustrates, from a different angle, how Sinjali people negotiate the precarious equilibrium between order and chaos within a dynamic intersubjective cosmos still in the making, and thus always at risk of falling apart and disappearing. Consequently, by drawing attention to the intersubjective aspects of death through the lens of a distinct ethno-philosophical sensibility, this thesis attempts to foster a critical hermeneutics of existence that will eventually lead to decomposing nothing less than 'death' itself.

Keywords: Nepal, death, spirits, personhood, intersubjectivity, existence

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High Mountain Agriculture and Changing Socionatures in Nagar, Northern Pakistan

By Michael Spies

Discipline: human geography

Institution: Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Date: 18 January 2018

Supervision: Hermann Kreutzmann

This dissertation focuses on high-mountain farming in Nagar, a rural district in the Karakoram Mountains of northern Pakistan. It deals with the question of how local farming systems have been affected over the last 30–40 years by multiple interacting processes of change, including climate change. More specifically, it investigates how a diversity of actors and factors — or ‘actants’ — have contributed to these changes in manifold ways. This investigation follows an assemblage approach to agricultural change, emphasising the complexity and heterogeneity of change processes that are simultaneously co-produced by multiple actants.

Two important events triggered substantial changes in local farming systems: the integration of the former principality of Nagar into Pakistan’s political system in 1972, and the completion of the Karakoram Highway in 1978 — a major road that connects Nagar to downcountry Pakistan and China. Since then, there has been a considerable shift from subsistence-oriented cropping practices to the production of cash crops. At the same time, agriculture has lost much of its importance for livelihoods, as new income opportunities have emerged and farm sizes have decreased. Shifting priorities and shortages of agricultural labour have resulted in a decline of certain practices, most notably in animal husbandry. Technological innovations have considerably altered local farming techniques — not only through the proliferation of chemical fertilisers and new varieties of high-yielding wheat, but also through the widespread adoption of agricultural machinery. At the same time, improvements of the irrigation infrastructure have

led to an overall enhancement of the water supply. To some extent, farming systems in certain villages have also been affected by changes in the local environment: glacier dynamics, among other things, have desiccated irrigation channels; rising temperatures have benefited crop production; and a drop in snowfall has negatively affected water supply. However, these changes have so far been of little significance compared to other processes of agricultural change.

Several actors and factors have been found to be responsible for recent agricultural developments in Nagar. Government actors have played an important role through political reforms, subsidies and infrastructure projects. The new road infrastructure, especially the Karakoram Highway has been particularly pivotal in facilitating access to agricultural markets. Local and external traders, new sources of financial capital, and social networks have also played major roles in these developments. Much of the technological change has been initiated by external development agencies in collaboration with local community organisations and individual activists. By and large, social, political, and economic actors and factors have been far more influential in transforming local farming assemblages than changes in the biophysical environment. Nonetheless, significant trends in local climate change indicate that this may evolve to some extent in the future. As the assemblage approach suggests, the effects of these trends can only be evaluated by considering them as one of many co-occurring and often interrelated processes of local change.

Keywords: high-mountain farming, agricultural change, climate change, assemblage theory, Karakoram, Pakistan

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Bloodstained Throne: Struggles for Power in Nepal, 1775–1914

by Baburam Acharya. Translated by Madhav Acharya. New Delhi: Penguin Books. 2013, ix+266 pp., ISBN 978-0-143-41637-1, INR 299.

Reviewed by Sanjog Rupakheti

Baburam Acharya, better known as *Itihas Siromani*, wrote extensively about the various facets of Nepali history. Acharya's proximity to and patronage of Rana and Shah rulers especially allowed him access to several rare oral and written records about their important family histories.¹ However, except for a few translations made by the late Mahesh C. Regmi in his *Regmi Research Series*, the majority of Acharya's works were hitherto inaccessible to non-Nepali-speaking audiences. *The Bloodstained Throne* is the English translation of Acharya's *Aba Yesto Kahile Nahos* (2004), a collection of his published and unpublished essays on eighteenth and nineteenth century Nepali political history. It is edited and translated by Baburam Acharya's son Shreekrishna Acharya and his grandson Madhav Acharya respectively. In the editorial note, Shreekrishna Acharya stresses that *The Bloodstained Throne* is the beginning of a long-term endeavour to render the unpublished works of Baburam Acharya accessible to a wider audience with an interest in Nepali history.

The Bloodstained Throne narrates in eleven chapters the tumultuous dynastic-familial struggles for power that were central to the creation of the modern Nepali state. Unlike *Aba Yesto Kahile Nahos*, the chapters of which are named after key moments in Nepali history, *The Bloodstained Throne* organises its chapters around influential historical actors from those epochs, presenting them in various roles as victims and perpetrators of mind-numbing bloody feuds. The first chapter asserts that the assassination of one of the most influential Gorkhali courtiers, Sarbajit Rana, by Bahadur Shah, Prithvi Narayan's young son, in the midst of a tussle for power with his sister-in-law, Rajendralaxmi

1 For a brief description of Acharya's intellectual history, see Pant (1972).

'marked the beginning of the despicable practice of assassination and massacre of nobles and courtiers in Nepali Durbar ... [and] pushed the kingdom towards a century-long era of darkness' (p. 6). The book then closely follows the rise and fall of Bahadur Shah parallel to the territorial expansion of the Shah state which, towards the last decades of the eighteenth century, started to be at variance with the English East India Company and the armies of the Qing Empire. King Rana Bahadur Shah and Queen mother Rajendralaxmi are frequently chastised for not fulfilling Prithvi Narayan's dream of creating a unified Nepal and of spending their lives in 'luxuries and pleasures', and are thus held responsible for Nepal's diminished territory (p. 12).

Chapter two and three narrate the ever-changing political alliances in Kathmandu Durbar, leading to the downfall of the Pandey family and the rise of the Thapa family. Chapter three, in particular, traces the emergence of Bhimsen Thapa and his almost three-decade long uncontested rule (1806-1837). Thapa is held responsible for the Nepali defeat during the Anglo-Gorkha War (1814-1816). The next three chapters discuss in chronological order the fall of Bhimsen Thapa, the swift rise and the subsequent end of Mathbar Singh Thapa's rule, including the eventual emergence of a new Rana family in the Nepali political landscape. These developments that took place in the context of intense three-way competition for control of the nascent Nepali state between the senior Samrajyalaxmi, junior Queen Rajyalaxmi and King Rajendra culminated in the Kot Massacre of 1846, heralding the arrival of a new Rana family at centre stage of Nepali politics. The successive entrenchment of the Rana family's power at Kathmandu Durbar following the Bhandarkhal and Alou episodes are narrated in chapter six, seven and eight. The Bhandarkhal massacre witnessed a purging of the Basnet family (one of the most influential political families in Kathmandu Durbar) and the banishment of Queen Rajyalaxmi to Varanasi. In 1847 the monarch Rajendra, who had initially followed his wife to India, gathered his loyal followers in Alou (a village in southern Nepal) to recover the throne from his eldest son Surendra. Rajendra and his followers were rapidly overwhelmed by Jung Bahadur's troops in what is known as the Alou Massacre. Rajendra was then brought to Kathmandu and imprisoned for life. The three remaining chapters offer glimpses into the series of inter-family assassinations that beset

the ruling Rana clan following the death of the family's patriarch, Jung Bahadur in 1877 and the subsequent emergence of the Shumsher line of the family in Nepali state politics.

The Bloodstained Throne, with a more fitting title than the Nepali version, offers fascinating accounts and details of the violent and transformative episodes that undergirded the foundations of the Nepali state. It is essentially a story of the familial nature of state formation. History students may find the book useful for looking at the imbrication between family feuds and the development of sovereignty in Nepal. Though these ideas are not conceptually developed in the book, reviewing them may help us reconsider kingship beyond an individually embodied institution to one embedded in a network of competing familial relations constantly in flux. An individual ruler's ascension to the throne in the context of the political reality of the era was rarely a peaceful process anywhere on the subcontinent. In Nepal, as in Mughal India, only those who built broader alliances succeeded in becoming king. At the same time, the Shah-Rana model of familial rule bears many similarities to political systems like the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Dahomey, and many Inner Asian polities. As such, it was not an exception, as may otherwise appear in the book.

Shreekrishna Acharya stresses that the book 'does not aim to criticise or level charges': nor is it 'directed towards any underserved eulogy or encomium' (p. ix). This claim to neutrality, however, falters barely a few pages into the first chapter. Rajendralaxmi's failure to 'unify' Nepal is blamed on 'suspicion, jealousy and fickleness of mind'— traits which the historian and the editor believe — are attributable to womanhood (p. 13). While one may overlook Baburam Acharya's implied misogyny given the era in which the original work was written, the editor's unwillingness to problematise it in 2013 is inexcusable. All influential women who have taken action to assert their power and authority in Nepal's fluid political landscape are reproved in the book for acting out of selfishness, as if the political realm were an exclusively male prerogative. Yet not all male political actors are treated impartially in the book. The book's narrative arc explicitly makes clear whom it thinks should be revered as a hero and whom should be ostracised as villains of Nepal. Bhimsen Thapa and Jung Bahadur are held responsible for most of the misery that befalls

Nepal. The vilification of individuals and the glorification of territorial conquests do not allow for a nuanced evaluation of the complex Nepali past. The total absence of footnotes and citations, both in the original and the translated version, seems to suggest that the work primarily addresses a large readership. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, *The Bloodstained Throne* is a significant work and a valuable resource, especially for the non-Nepali speaking audience seeking to understand key events in modern Nepali history.

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The History of Janakpurdham: A Study of Asceticism and the Hindu Polity

by Richard Burghart. Kathmandu: Himal Books. 2016, 489 pp., 14 black and white photos, ISBN 978-9937-597-28-9, USD 47.

Reviewed by Daniela Bevilacqua

I started my research on the Ramanandi sampradaya – the largest Vaishnava order in North India whose ascetics are also called Bairagis – by reading Richard Burghart's articles extrapolated from his doctoral thesis, which was unpublished at the time and represented a Holy Grail in the imaginary of those interested in a multidisciplinary approach. Thanks to Martin Gaenzle, this incredible work is finally available, enriched by a selection of Burghart's photographs collected from the archives of the University of Aberdeen Library.

The History of Janakpurdham is a very dense work that meticulously unravels the politics, social relationships and ascetic settlements of the Kingdom of Nepal, giving an example of how ethnohistory can help our understanding of the past and the present.

The work contains 18 chapters organised into five parts, with a ground-breaking Introduction. Here, Burghart provides a detailed discussion of F.G. Bailey's and L. Dumont's theories of social hierarchies and castes. Bailey regarded caste as a system of ranks validated by ritual social usage but also by control over productive resources; whereas Dumont based his interpretation on ritual purity. According to Burghart, the two scholars shaped their assumption based on the idea that there was only one hierarchical order in the traditional Hindu social system. However, Burghart draws attention throughout his work to the fact that Brahmans, ascetics and the king either accepted or rejected the relative superiority of the other two. The relationship was complex because 'Brahmans and ascetics were liable to be the subjects of the Lord of the Land. The Brahmans and the king were often disciples of ascetic preceptors. The king customarily had a Brahman preceptor. The king as well as the ascetics of certain sects engaged the services of Brahman priests' (p. 15). The five parts of Burghart's work

thoroughly analyse these relationships in the specific socio-historical context of the Kingdom of Nepal.

Part I introduces the main subject of research: the Ramanandi sampradaya, its foundation in the fifteenth century and subsequent development through stages of including and excluding certain members from its lineages, its inner organisation and the vows a Ramanandi has to make, and the characteristics of the ascetic group, the latter being built on the transmission of the guru's *mantra*. Part II uses this specific religious group to investigate interactions between ascetics and political powers on the basis of royal donations of land in Janakpurdham, a site in south-eastern Nepal that was discovered and developed by the arrival of Vaishnava sadhus around the end of the eighteenth century. Brahmins and ascetics received *kusa birta* land as a gift from kings who wanted to obtain their blessings to ensure their success and the prosperity of their kingdoms. Ascetics were exempted from paying revenue on the land. However, since this produced no financial profit, many abbots (*mahants*) preferred to secure revenue by collecting rights on crown land. Consequently, they gained great influence in the region, acting like lords in their own kingdom.

This analogy is pursued in Part III where the abbots' rights and duty are analysed in relation to the king and sharecroppers. Attention is given to the organisation and structure of the monasteries/palaces (*sthan*) built as the abode of the deities (mostly Ram, Sita and Lakshman) as well as to the hermitages that appeared in the eighteenth-early nineteenth century, after new revenue regulations enabled ascetics to establish hermitages on crown land. With this new law, itinerant Renouncers or Great Renouncers of the Ramanandi sect could rent a plot of crown land, build their small monastery and enjoy tenure of the plot. This led to the organisation of a Circle of Fifty-Two Hermitages organised in opposition to the main regional *sthans*. Through this circle, Bairagis were able to claim authority to settle disputes concerning breaches of customary law within the circle. Part IV analyses the development of monasteries (*mathas*) in Janakpurdham during the period 1901-1951 in relation to the transformation of the Nepalese polity. It focuses on the formation of a market of land rights, with a proliferation of offices in the district administration that aggravated rivalry between co-disciples in

sthans and led to factionalism, which disrupted the activities of the monasteries.

Part V focuses on the landowner (*zamindar*) and caste hermitages that were built in Janakpurdham from the turn of the twentieth century and which transformed the city from a pilgrimage centre for itinerant ascetics into a centre capable of hosting pious Hindu householders. This prompted the migration of traders and shopkeepers, thus facilitating access and promoting investment in Janakpurdham. The market mechanism, which was also linked to the economy of British India, became the most significant means of allocating land, labour, capital and commodities in the eastern Tarai, rendering the administration of Janakpurdham outdated as a group of local kingdoms. It was at this time that monasteries were organised under the Temple Trust Corporation of Nepal, which supported the creation of town councils to administer the town of Janakpurdham and its citizens. Furthermore, the Temple Trust Corporation initiated changes that disrupted the monastic organisation to such an extent that abbots converted from local kings to Trust employees. Thus, whereas in the traditional Hindu polity ascetic sects were thought to be a special case, with the king respecting their customary laws, in a modern polity uniformity in the land tenure system, access to land and equalitarian identity as citizen ruled out the peculiarity of being a *sadhu*.

As this short description of the contents shows, this work deserves particular credit not only for scrutinising important theories regarding Hindu social hierarchies, but also for clarifying how these hierarchies are created in the first place, and how they develop according to the needs at the time and to current events. Furthermore, Burghart's multidisciplinary approach, testifying to how a historical, diachronic approach can benefit from an anthropological, synchronic approach and vice versa, contributes to the debate on the collaboration between anthropology and history, providing a pioneering example. The description of the development of Ramanandi monastic lineages and of their fluctuating relationship with the Kingdom of Nepal, together with glimpses from the present, makes for a lively and consistent example of Janakpurdham. The result is a thoughtful commentary on Ramanandi *sadhus*, giving context to these reputed spiritual masters that reveals their markedly earthly characteristics as individuals who

had to find compromises between their religious discipline and the social context in which they lived.

Daniela Bevilacqua is a South-Asianist and obtained her PhD in Civilizations of Africa and Asia from Sapienza University of Rome and in Anthropology from the University of Paris Nanterre. Her PhD research was published by Routledge under the title *Modern Hindu Traditionalism in Contemporary India: The Śrī Maṭh and the Jagadguru Rāmānandācārya in the Evolution of the Rāmānandī Sampradāya*. She is now a Post-Doc Research Fellow at SOAS, working for the ERC-funded Hatha Yoga Project (2015-2020).

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Trans-Himalayan Traders Transformed: Return to Tarang

by James F. Fisher. Bangkok: Orchid Press. 2017, 258 pp., ISBN 978-9745242029, USD 9.24

Reviewed by Samuele Poletti

This book is a sort of sequel to Fisher's classic *Trans-Himalayan Traders: Economy, Society, & Culture in Northwest Nepal* (1986). As the title suggests, that particular study centred on the transaction circuits that determined the lives of people living in Tarang, a village in the remote district of Dolpa. After an absence of 44 years, Fisher returned to Tarang in 2011, to trace back over the changes that have taken place since he carried out doctoral fieldwork there in the late 1960s. Written in a humble and self-deprecating tone, *Trans-Himalayan Traders Transformed* begins with a critical review of the author's conclusive thoughts in 1986. Essentially, the major criticism Fisher levels against his earlier professional self is that of having paid more attention to the transaction systems in which Taralis were involved than to their actual lives. While this was common practice in the 1960s, Fisher rightly notes, 'One size rarely, if ever, fits all' (p. 169). Yet, foregrounding people's lifeworlds does not mean neglecting the broader macrosystems within which they are intertwined. The author's aim is indeed to illustrate how new opportunities offered by the changes that have taken place in Nepal over the last 50 years or so have directly or indirectly affected new generations of Tarali people. Nowadays, the ancient transaction systems described by Fisher in his 1986 book intermingle with present-day global dynamics, with repercussions that would have been unimaginable until just a few decades ago.

The seven initial chapters each illustrate a different aspect of these changes – which are more systematically listed in the conclusions (p.169-70) – in and through the lives of distinct people. Entwining biographical and contextual elements, Chapter 2 describes the carpet trade that was successfully established in Kathmandu by a man named Lank Man. Taking advantage of new opportunities that had previously

been unthinkable, the business was later developed by Lank Man's nephew Bhim, and his wife Sukar, who managed to expand it to Europe. Bhim and Sukar thus represent the 'globalized' next generation of Tarali traders, which is the focus of Chapter 3. Chapter 4 deals with the Tarali community in Kathmandu, and their relationship with other ethnic groups in the variegated sociocultural context of Nepal's capital city. Chapter 5 illustrates how the flourishing business of selling *Yarsagumba* (a parasitical fungus highly valued on the Chinese market), unknown in the 1960s, is considerably altering people's lifestyle in the remote communities of Dolpa where the fungus grows, allowing them to buy cell phones and DVD players, but also inducing the perilous, gradual abandonment of agriculture. Then, Chapters 6 to 8 mark Fisher's actual return to Tarang, offering a collection of observations and comparisons with his previous experience in the area, written in a fluid diary style.

Chapter 9, which makes up the second half of the book, grounds the point made in the introduction in the story of a single person, Chandra Man, the first Tarali to reside in Kathmandu. In effect, this case shows that one should be wary of essentialising people, insofar as unpredictable twists may take anyone's life into unforeseeable directions that discourage conceiving of someone's existence as the mere by-product of a specific context. Underscoring the dynamic interplay between 'system' and 'agency' at play in Chandra Man's life history allows Fisher to unsettle the rather straightforward correlation between 'people' and 'their culture' that has come to characterise most of anthropology. Hence the author describes his line of reasoning as somehow 'anti-anthropological' (p. 101), since the outspoken aim is to problematise this one-dimensional habit of thought by showing that people's lives are not necessarily dominated by the cultural structures within which they have been socialised.

However, as the author plainly points out, it is one thing to address 'life as experienced' and quite another to convert this experiential 'raw material' into a cohesive narrative. The author does an excellent job in bringing Lank Man, Bisara, Bhim, Sukar, and Dhanu to the fore, using their life stories as a narrative device to illustrate broader social dynamics. Still, Fisher's approach might have benefitted from further exploration into these people's personal experiences of the

broader context in which they live, and into the meaning and value each of them comes to attach to it. This would have helped to ground the discussion even more in the lives of the protagonists, enriching their biographies by highlighting aspects such as their dreams, worries or expectations for the future. On the contrary, Chandra Man's long monologue about his infancy could have been significantly edited, as it is punctuated by many digressions that distract rather than add to the narrative, whereas his adult life – the time when the real changes that made Chandra Man different from many Taralis took place – is rushed through in the last few pages. Structurally, the overabundance of monologic speech in the second half of the book could have been more evenly balanced against the lack of people's voices in the first eight chapters. Moreover, the section dedicated to the actual aim of the book – to illustrate the changes that have taken place in *Tarang* during the author's 44-year absence – is the shortest. This leaves the reader somewhat frustrated that the author didn't use his tremendous knowledge of Nepal to expand on his rich account with a thorough analysis of what is presented, which would also have made the argument more accessible to a readership that is not very familiar with the Nepali context.

Overall, *Trans-Himalayan Traders Transformed* is a noble and courageous endeavour to look back in critical terms at the work of a lifetime. Furthermore, the book bravely tackles a paramount issue in the history of anthropology: namely, that ignoring people's actual lives inevitably leads to overlooking the nuances that characterise our subject matter. Fisher encourages us to ponder what the real focus of the discipline is: the abstract forces that shape people's lives, or the actual people who in turn give shape to them? In doing so, the book offers an outstanding contribution to the rapidly growing body of literature that seems to actualise the 'second phase' of anthropological research in Nepal as predicted by Gérard Toffin (2009: 284), which, following on from an initial stage dedicated to a rather essentialist cataloguing of people and practices, is now animated by a more intimate existential sensibility.

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The Gilded Buddha: The Traditional Art of the Newar Metal Casters in Nepal

by Alex R. Furger, with a contribution by Ratna Jyoti Shakya. Basel and Frankfurt: Librum Publishers & Editors. 2017, 328 pp., ISBN 978-3-906897-05-9, CHF 85, £ 75, USD 90.

Reviewed by Manik Bajracharya

For a reader or scholar interested in Nepal's traditional metal craft, this field of study is still rarely investigated, bar a few exceptions. Alex R. Furger's seminal work *The Gilded Buddha* provides a comprehensive study of all aspects of traditional metal crafts in the Newar community. Furger, a well-established archaeologist, was head of the Roman archaeological site Augusta Raurica. In this book, he meticulously examines each and every step of metal craft production, starting from the lost-wax technique of casting to painting and adding inlays to the finished products. This excellently produced book builds on earlier works and archives, and Furger enriches it with extensive field research he carried out in Patan.

The book comprises five parts, preceded by the Acknowledgements, the Preface and an Introduction. In the Preface, the author discusses the function of Buddhist images: that it lies not in worship but in facilitating meditation. Given this function, artists lend importance to the traditional iconography. Furger argues that the city of Patan is practically the only place where the lofty art form of casting Buddhist images in metal is still flourishing. For the author, this city and its Oku Bahal quarter has been the focus of field research since 2013. In the Introduction, the author takes a brief look at the situation of artists and at the supply of raw materials in historic times compared with today. He mentions, albeit only briefly, some historical reports from the medieval period regarding the exchange of artistic knowledge between India, Nepal, Tibet and China.

Part One of the book covers the technical aspects of the production of metal statues. It begins with an explanation of the division of labour and points out the fact that outsourcing to non-Newars has surged

in recent years and that the traditionally secretive Shakya trade is now more and more dependent on cross-caste people. The book then describes the different stages in production including wax modelling, clay-mould making, lost-wax casting and the later phase of 'cold works', such as trimming, chasing, grinding and polishing. It conveys to the reader how failure and disappointment are sometimes part and parcel of metal casting and how artists still perform toxic processes with no proper protection.

Part Two deals with the historical and social background of Newar metal casting and its artists. Furger argues that the Newar metal casting tradition has not been handed down only orally since a number of historical textual sources containing instructions about it do exist. To support this, he briefly discusses some ancient and medieval Indian textual sources such as Kauṭilya's *Arthasāstra*, *Bṛhatsaṃhitā*, *Citralakṣaṇa*, *Pratimālakṣaṇa* that deal with metal casting, proportions, consecration rituals, alchemy, iconography, and arts and crafts. He also mentions works by Pema Karpo and Jīvarāma, and two relatively recent sketchbooks. However, these are more in keeping with the Lamaistic art tradition. Here, it would also be appropriate to mention texts such as the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*¹ and *Sādhanamālā*,² which are still popular among Newar Buddhist artists seeking to understand Vajrayana deities' iconography and rituals.

This part also contains a section written by Ratna Jyoti Shakya who reports that the revival of traditional lost-wax casting in recent decades can be attributed to the arrival of Tibetans and the advent of tourism. The boom in tourism and the growing demand for Nepalese metal statues have led to such a steep increase in prices that most local people can no longer afford them. As an insider, R.J. Shakya distinguishes between three different qualities of metal statues of deities that are produced in Patan, namely 'temple quality', 'private devotion quality', and 'tourist quality'.

In Part Three of the book, Furger focuses on other forms of Nepalese metalwork. Here he describes the stages in sand casting, and casting household utensils and bells. He pays particular attention to the

1 For editions of the *Niṣpannayogāvalī*, see Bhattacharya (1949) and Lee (2004). For its English translation together with the Tibetan text, see Lokesh Chandra et al. (2015).

2 For an edition of the *Sādhanamālā*, see Bhattacharya (1968).

production of bells, which also uses the lost-wax casting method. A large section of this part of the book is dedicated to chased copperware and brassware that are produced using hammering and soldering techniques. He documents the work of Tamrakars who specialise in producing copper household and ritual objects. The repoussé technique of hammering is also closely examined.

Part Four investigates the source and supply of materials required for metalwork. It examines different types of alloys used in Nepal and India, and gives their metal analyses. This part also informs us of price trends for the most important metals such as copper, brass, zinc, silver and gold over the last half century. In addition, it covers the preparation of different types of clay required for moulding, the preparation of local crucibles, the supply of industrial crucibles and the sources of modelling materials such as beeswax.

Part Five presents a summary and lists metal analyses.

The Gilded Buddha serves as a unique and comprehensive study of Nepalese metalwork, especially the lost-wax casting technique. It presents a detailed overview of the existing typology of metal crafts in Nepal. The book mentions some thirty Nepalese artists as sources of information, together with their pictures, thus spotlighting them and highlighting their specialities. Nevertheless, the reader might have expected to learn more about knowledge transfer and the teacher-disciple relationship.

Enriched with plenty of illustrations and photographs, both old and new, and of an impressive quality, this book also serves to document the process of manufacturing, the tools used, the different techniques, the quality of products and the sources of materials. In describing the processes and materials, the book uses a great deal of Sanskrit and Newari terminology, which is useful for further studies. A greater effort to harmonise the spelling of this terminology and names would render the writing more effective.

All in all, for a reader interested in traditional Nepalese metal craft, this book could be regarded as an exemplary reference work.

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A Blessing for the Land: The Architecture, Art and History of a Buddhist Convent in Mustang, Nepal

by John Harrison, Christian Luczanits, Charles Ramble, with Nyima Drandul. Kathmandu: Vajra Books. 2018, 143 pp., 56 colour photos, 56 b/w photos, 24 drawings, 1 map, ISBN 978-9937-9288-2-3, USD 40.

Reviewed by Christian Jahoda

This book brings together interrelated contributions by four experts who are well known for their studies in the fields of architecture, art, social anthropology and history of Tibetan and Himalayan societies. The result is an outstanding example of highly engaging work in terms of its scientific content, readability, fine design and wonderful illustrations and, above all, a wealth of information on a Buddhist convent, a nunnery, in Mustang, Nepal. Examined in three parts, each dedicated to a different disciplinary perspective: architecture (by John Harrison), art (by Christian Luczanits) and history (by Charles Ramble, with Nyima Drandul), Künzang Chöling nunnery is studied from its foundation, construction and decoration (1684-1695) under the direction of Lama Künzang Longyang (1644-1697) through the different religious, sociopolitical and economic developments that took place during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the twentieth century when monastic life there came to an end.

The account of the monastery's architecture is embedded in a description of the geographic setting and network of settlements (and caves, presumably predating the monastery) which surround the site on a ridge close to the Kali Gandaki River. The architectural description based on a measured survey by John Harrison in 2005 analyses the construction and the history of the monument and also extends to the function of the rooms, the materials used in the construction and the wood carvings therein. Overviews and architectural details of the building are illustrated through excellent black and white photographs, a large number of drawings of floor plans, sections and elevations (including a reconstruction of original views). The architectural design is in keeping with Tibetan criteria, such as the number of pillars

defining the size of halls. A short section briefly examines multistorey temples that house colossal Maitreya sculptures in other areas of the Tibetan cultural world, which might have been known to the founder, patrons, artists and craftsmen involved in the construction of the monastery.

The study of the artistic decoration, and in particular of the two-storey-high Maitreya image and the ground-floor mural paintings, both of considerable quality, in the assembly hall and the entry hall, is based on documentation collected by Christian Luczanits during a brief visit in 2012. These paintings, which bear witness to the founder's main religious affiliation, the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, reveal a substantial and unique iconographic programme that is described in great detail and illustrated through accompanying full-page colour photographs. The painting featuring most probably the founder of the monastery amidst his disciples and followers, which is rather well preserved and shown on a double spread, establishes a natural connection to the final part of the volume.

Under the title 'The Lama and the Nuns', the most essential events in the life of the monastery's founder are reconstructed based on information provided in his 31-chapter autobiography (photographed by Nyima Drandul in 2016). This includes in particular the founding process of the monastery, the various stages from fundraising, construction and the organisation of, expenditure for and overseeing or carrying out of works such as sculpture making, mural painting and finally consecration, all of which lasted twelve years. This biographical text is a wealth of information on the early life of the lama, his family, the religious masters he met and the pilgrimages he made to Central Tibet where he also received teachings from the Ngor branch of the Sakya school of Buddhism and was eventually ordained a second time as a Ngor pa monk. His personal encounters and activities are described with great attention to detail and in relation to the respective sociopolitical and religious circumstances and networks, such as the donations he received from his main aristocratic patron who lost his life when a great earthquake caused his fortress to collapse (1680) or the unceasing support by way of offerings and bequests from monks and the laity of the surrounding area. The forthcoming publication of this autobiography will constitute an even greater mine of information

on various aspects of his experiences and activities: first and foremost, the architectural, artistic and historical legacy of Künzang Chöling, as well as efforts to preserve and renovate it.

In addition to this biography, written sources kept in nearby villages and the convent archive collection (photographed by Charles Ramble and Nyima Drandul in 1993) are judiciously used to give accounts of the changing political and administrative context during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as an overview of annual ceremonial activities (rituals and prayers) and of the finances of the monastery, which were organised and maintained through an endowment system. The decline of the convent, which began in the early twentieth century, is described as having been linked to financial difficulties (caused – among other reasons – by additional expenditure for counter-ceremonies to compensate for Hindus' animal sacrifices during Dasain), to divisive activities by other lamas (leading to the secession of nuns) and to the slackening of monastic discipline (allowing a previously sanctioned half-nun half-lay-woman status). This is demonstrated by way of related contemporary documents that are illustrated in facsimile, in addition to the Tibetan *dbu can* script and in translated extracts.

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The Partial Revolution: Labour, Social Movements and the Invisible Hand of Mao in Western Nepal

by Michael Hoffman. New York: Berghahn Books. 2018, 232 pp., 22 illustrations, ISBN 978-1-78533-780-2, USD 120, GBP 85.

Reviewed by Matjaz Pinter

Nepal's turbulent political changeover has been at the centre of many anthropological studies in recent years. The study of different aspects of the Maoist movement has been an inescapable element in writings on contemporary Nepali society. The key political event in the country's historical narrative is unquestionably the 10-year long Maoist insurgency. It is often described as a stand-off between state forces and the Maoists, and has been explored through topics such as violence, political ideology and state formation, but less so through a lens that would grasp the broader social transformation of Nepal. In introducing an original ethnographic study into the field of anthropological literature on Maoism and the People's War, *The Partial Revolution* explores the political and economic post-conflict trajectories in an area that has seen little representation in the anthropology of Nepal. By drawing on the complex interrelation between post-revolutionary political forces, such as social movements, different political and labour organisations, and state institutions, the book grounds politico-economic and social changes in the politics of daily life, and presents them in a wider narrative of the ongoing 'great transformation' of South Asia.

One of the main qualities of the book is that, instead of focusing solely on the Maoist movement, the emphasis is on producing a detailed ethnography of the transformation of both economic and political landscapes in the urban municipality located in the country's far western lowlands. We are thrown into the world of everyday politics of a group of former bonded labourers who have experienced considerable changes since the start of the Maoist revolution. By following freed bonded labourers and looking into the creation of labour unions, freed Kamaiya political organisations and transformations in regional labour

relations, the book presents a strong argument that not only builds on the understanding of the consequences of the armed struggle, but also addresses the changing character of capitalism in Nepal. The main narrative is built in two parts. The first part provides anthropological knowledge on how political movements and labour relations have been reshaped by the Maoist uprising; the second part presents a detailed analysis of the transformation from the abolished system of bonded labour to new forms of labour relations, including 'neo-bondage'. The broader argument of Hoffman's ethnography challenges some of the existing anthropological studies on peasant politics and revolutionary situations: namely, it questions Eric Wolf's and James Scott's analysis of peasant revolutions that take the political role of the middle peasant as the main formative element of rural unrest. The argument presented 'is less positive about such a theory of revolution that casts property-less peasants and wage-labourers as impotent, helpless agents' but rather sees revolutions as events that 'can challenge the balance of power and allow former serfs to act militantly and assertively' (pp. 10). These after-effects of the different formal and informal manifestations of revolutionary ideology have opened up the discussion on the unintended social and political transformations, which Hoffman calls 'the invisible hand of Mao Tse-tung'.

The book itself is a multi-layered ethnography based on several field sites that produce a complex, yet well-structured argument to reveal a localised political reality of post-conflict Nepal. Apart from careful historical contextualising and providing an ethnographic account of the freed Kamaiya labourers community (Chapters 1-3), the book explains several political manifestations of local political movements, and their connection with Maoists and trade unions. Hoffman describes ethnographically the politics of the 'new' working class that has taken political action into its own hands. Consistent with the literature describing similar social processes in India, this political uprising is further contextualised within the history of the Maoist movement in the region. Through this lens, the book describes the formation of the freed Kamaiya community in Ramnagar, which started as the capture of a space of 'highly symbolic urban locality' (Chapter 2). The ethnographic evidence presented in the book suggests that, by understanding the transformation from the freed labourers' social movement to the

community politics of the resulting freed Kamaiya community, we can avoid making 'totalizing' conclusions of how the revolution has reshaped the community.

The book carefully avoids adopting some of the present narratives of the revolution, and instead focuses on grounding the protest movements that emerged in the area within everyday politics in this reconfigured political environment (Chapter 3). It further elaborates on the connections between FKS (Freed Kamaiya Society) and the Maoists by describing the relationship between political movements and labour unions, which in Nepal proved to be both symbiotic and hostile. Hoffman's ethnographic examples provide valuable insight into the history of labour unionisation in Nepal, a topic that has been under-represented in anthropological scholarship. In Tikapur, the book argues, the unionisation process is closely linked to the history of Maoist activity in the area. This symbiosis between non-Maoist and Maoist-affiliated labour unions was the result of a mutually beneficial relationship: Maoist support left more room for the union to develop, and the union's grassroots work extended the reach of the Maoists in previously neglected labour issues. While paying attention to this aspect of political activity, this study also acknowledges the movement's embeddedness in the freed Kamaiya community. The conclusions that are drawn thus build on a hypothesis that Tikapur's labour movement, in view of the prevailing 'communal, caste and regional identities', should be understood as a community union (Chapter 4).

In light of local politics, labour movements and trade unions, the book further examines the politics of labour and the incapacity to change the exploitative nature of relationships between workers and owners. This contribution to the anthropology of labour emphasises the importance of studying 'everyday social relations *in* production rather than *of* production' (p. 150). In the concluding chapters (Chapters 5 and 6), the book studies some of the changes in everyday urban working class practices in brick factories. It analyses the 'assertiveness and class consciousness' in the work place and its link to the Maoist movement to conclude that, although relations do exist, there is no class identity to be found that would extend beyond the individual brick factory. Brick kiln workers, who use a tougher discourse popularised by the Maoists, were conscious of their unfortunate position but at the same time appreciated

the post-revolutionary 'new mode of life' that in many ways was liberating and emancipating. *The Partial Revolution* illustrates that one of the unexpected consequences of the revolution was the creation of a new working class: a young, assertive and politically conscious workforce that takes matters and *adhikars* (rights) into its own hands. Evoking the concept of 'neo-bondage', the book concludes with the description of a new type of unfree labour relation that the owners secure by advancing or delaying payments (Chapter 6).

By shifting the focus from the impact of the revolution to the transformations caused by contemporary capitalist formations, *The Partial Revolution* brilliantly demonstrates one of the main contradictions of Nepali society. In their fight against the 'old order', Maoists predominantly focused on what they categorised as 'feudal' exploitation, while overlooking the inequalities that were the consequence of capitalist restructuring in the region. *The Partial Revolution* therefore makes a considerable contribution to the field which is currently examining the intersection between social movements, politico-economic developments and labour relations in Nepal.

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The Monastery Rules: Buddhist Monastic Organisation in Pre-Modern Tibet

by Berthe Jansen. Oakland: University of California Press. 2018, xi+281 pp., ISBN 9780520297005 (paperback), 9780520969537 (e-book), USD 39.95.

Reviewed by Per Kværne

Although books on Tibetan religion, and in particular Buddhism, whether written for academic readers or a broader audience, probably far outnumber any other type of publication on Tibet, the way in which monastic life is organised – its rules and relations to lay society – has in fact been relatively little studied. Perhaps it has been too hastily assumed that monastic life in Tibet could be adequately described by referring to the Vinaya, the Indian Buddhist code of rules (translated into Tibetan) governing the conduct of monks and nuns within their respective male and female monastic communities, as well as in their interaction with laypeople. The Vinaya, of which several versions exist in Sanskrit and Pali, has been of fundamental importance for all monastic institutions in Tibet since the founding of the first Buddhist monastery in the Land of Snow in the eighth century CE until today, and has been the subject of numerous scholarly works. However, Berthe Jansen is probably the first scholar to make systematic use of the so-called *chayik* (*bca' yig*), ‘monastic guidelines’, which can be understood in various ways: ‘regulations, constitutions, rules, codes, protocols, manuals, laws, rulebooks, regulatory texts, codified rules, regimens, monastic injunctions, standards, charters or edicts’ (p. 16).

The *chayik* constitute a vast corpus of texts, each of which establishes specific rules, supplementing the Vinaya, that regulate the manifold aspects of daily life in a monastery, based on the monastery’s size, economic resources, and, not uncommonly, the social realities of the local community. The sheer bulk of the *chayik* sources cannot be appreciated simply by glancing at the list of works in Tibetan, listed by Jansen in ‘Sources’. Although there are more than eighty titles, their size is not specified. However, to quote but one example, a collection of

chayik published in Lhasa in 2013 is simply listed by its title, and place and year of publication – there is no indication that this work contains the texts of 73 *chayik* and consists of 964 pages. Jansen’s study thus rests on a vast and solid textual basis.

The introduction and the eight chapters making up the book span a range of topics, are well structured and, moreover, are replete with insights and documentation that has not previously been available in a Western language. Chapter One on the genre of *chayik* gives a systematic overview of this textual corpus: its genesis, functions, style, relation to the Vinaya, authorship, and motivation. This is followed by a chapter that presents a historical and doctrinal overview of the basis of monastic organisations in Tibet, the author’s conclusion being that by ‘understanding the day-to-day organisation of the monastery it becomes easier to answer fundamental questions ... the rights and duties ascribed to laypeople and monks’ (p. 43). To answer these questions, the *chayik* provide a rich source, ranging chronologically from the eleventh century CE to the present day.

Subsequent chapters discuss the practical application of *chayik* rules in various contexts and are illustrated on almost every page by quotations from *chayik* texts. These chapters deal with topics such as ‘Entrance to the Monastery’, ‘Monastic Organization’, ‘Monastic Economy and Policy’, ‘Relations with the Laity’, and ‘Justice and the Judicial Role of the Monastery’. No review can do justice to the wealth and diversity of the documentation provided by Jansen. Precisely because of this diversity, one might have preferred that the material be organised, to some extent at least, along chronological as well as sectarian lines. This might have made it possible to discern possible trends in the development of *chayik* – and hence in monastic organisation – over the long period in question. It might also have been useful if a complete translation of one or two *chayik* had been included to give the reader an idea of what this type of text actually looks like.

There are relatively few references to the life of female monastics. Neither ‘nuns’ nor ‘women’ figure in the index. It is very likely that research along the same lines as those presented in *The Monastery Rules*, but focusing on nuns, would be an interesting complement to Jansen’s book, even if the source material would be more limited.

Leaving aside these comments, it cannot be emphasised enough

that the work under review is not only a pioneering and carefully researched contribution to a rarely studied aspect of Tibetan society but also provides fascinating insight into monastic life in Tibet both as it actually was prior to the Chinese takeover in the 1950s as well as how, according to the monastic elite, it was supposed to be. To give just one example, one of the fundamental dilemmas of monastic life in its practical day-to-day reality was knowing how to maintain the autonomy and separateness of the monastic community, while at the same time interacting with laypeople. Benefactors and their donations were, of course, often an important source of income but laypeople could also be perceived as intrusive. Thus, a *chayik* from 1943 stipulates that, 'Dogs and beggars are not to be let in the monastic compound, but food and drink is to be given outside to individuals' (p. 121). One reason for this apparent lack of generosity was that gifts that had been given to monastics generated religious merit for the donor, which, so it was believed, would be lost if the gift was passed on instead of being used according to its original intention. However, although Buddhist values of love and compassion are not, according to Jansen, explicitly mentioned in the *chayik*, she points out that rules such as the one quoted above imply that 'monks showed an inclination toward charity' (p. 122).

This is but one instance, chosen at random, from among the innumerable topics dealt with in Jansen's book. *The Monastery Rules* is an eminent and indispensable contribution to the study of Tibetan society, presenting the daily reality of monastic life in its hitherto undocumented diversity.

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The Agendas of Tibetan Refugees: Survival Strategies of a Government-in-Exile in a world of Transnational Organizations

by Thomas Kauffmann. New York: Berghahn Books. 2015, 226 pp., 17 illustrations, ISBN 978-1-78238-282-9, USD 135; GBP 99.

Reviewed by Fiona McConnell

An important and timely question lies at the core of Thomas Kauffmann's book *The Agenda of Tibetan Refugees*: 'how, after more than fifty years of exile, are the Tibetan refugees still able to attract such substantial assistance from Western governments, NGOs, other organisations and individuals, unlike other populations of refugees who are largely or totally forgotten?' (p. 2) This success, Kauffmann argues, is due to a relational dynamic that has its origins in the 'patron-priest' (*mchod yon*) relationship which has been the template for Tibetan international relations since the thirteenth century. Extending Dorsh Marie De Voe's argument that the *mchod yon* model had been integrated into the dynamics of development, Kauffmann provides a detailed description of how, through distinct political and religious agendas, Tibetan leadership has transformed this relationship in ways that resonate with the shifting spiritual demands of Western supporters. Kauffman traces this re-articulated patron-priest relationship back to the reorganisation of Tibetan Buddhism in exile, whereby it has been transformed into a 'world religion, exportable to the Western religious market' (p. 88). As such, by effectively conflating Tibetan culture and Tibetan Buddhism, leadership has 'transformed their supporters de facto into *sbyon bdag*, or sponsors' (*ibid*).

In developing this argument, the book follows a chronological structure, starting with an outline of how Tibetan refugees settled in exile and then moving on to discuss the role of the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and developments in Western-based organisations which support the diaspora in a variety of ways. Whilst in many places the book seems to lack a clear narrative – the subsections in each chapter often come across as being disjointed and there is some repetition – the

overarching argument is a persuasive one. A particularly compelling conception is that of the 're-enchantment' of development that the exile community has fostered amongst its Western supporters. Kauffmann argues that by adapting the concept of *chos srid zung 'brel* (religion and politics combined) the Tibetan leadership in exile has effectively framed their claims within two powerful Western discourses, or 'Utopias': a 'lost spiritual paradise' (ie Tibet) and 'development' (p. 141). As such, not only is this an unusual situation whereby Western NGOs have integrated a non-Western mode of relations, but it is also a relationship whereby both 'sides' benefit. Rather than the conventional relationship between a generous and powerful donor and a grateful and submissive recipient, here the 'donor is indebted to the recipient because he [sic] can gain merit only through the acceptance of his [sic] gift' (p. 144). Each party gains from this and, as a result, the development relationship is a balanced and arguably more successful and sustainable one. Where Kauffmann's argument is less persuasive is in his insistence in the 'uniqueness' of the Tibetan case, based on the central role played by spirituality. This perpetuation of the narrative of Tibet and Tibetans as unique could perhaps have been countered by a more analytical engagement with a wider range of scholarship from development studies, political anthropology and refugee studies.

Kauffmann does, however, draw heavily on literature on the Tibetan diaspora itself and it is here that the book makes a significant contribution in building on and furthering existing understanding of this case. Nuanced arguments are articulated regarding the development agenda of the exile community, outlining both the victim and self-sufficiency narratives, as well as the role of CTA as a local partner for Western donors. One of the strongest sections of the book is the detailed overview of the role of myriad Western and Indian relief organisations during the early years of exile, and the various types of assistance provided, from human resource capacity building to welfare and political support (Chapter 2). Fascinating insights are drawn from documents produced by NGO officials in the 1960s, which add considerably to our understanding of the political and practical dynamics of the time. This is complemented by a detailed description in Chapter 5 of the operation of two Tibet Support Groups – one based in France the other in the UK – in terms of how they operate on the ground and their relations with CTA. Whilst the latter

provides an interesting perspective on the government in exile, the other relations that underpin CTA's work and legitimacy are somewhat overlooked. There is no discussion of the shifting relationship between CTA and the Indian Government (and overall the book paints too rosy a picture of the legal and political status of Tibetans in India), nor is there an analysis of the social contract forged between the government in exile and its 'citizens' within the diaspora.

Empirically, *The Agendas of Tibetan Refugees* is based on fieldwork undertaken in Tibetan communities in India, and interviews conducted in the Tibetan Autonomous Region and in the offices of international donor agencies. However, rather frustratingly, there are relatively few direct quotations from interviews cited in the book. Instead, opinions and accounts are often narrated second hand (eg discussion with the Planning Commissioner on page 68). This paucity of empirical material is particularly disappointing given that Kauffmann claims at the start of the book that, in contrast to other scholarship, he is seeking 'to give the Tibetans a voice, and to study their own role in their successful attraction of Western support' (p. 2).

Whilst the book is primarily based on fieldwork undertaken in 2006, given the publication date of 2015 it is surprising that there is only scant acknowledgement of significant shifts within the community in the past decade. Only passing reference is made to the Dalai Lama's retirement from political life in 2011, and the implications that this has for the future leadership of the diaspora and the dismantling of *chos srid zung 'brel*. The lack of updated empirics also means that there are some inaccuracies in the text. A key example is the statement that Tibetans 'cannot gain Indian citizenship' (footnote 14 on page 177) and that their only way to claim citizenship is to pass as an Indian from a Buddhist 'scheduled tribe' (p. 160). In reality, whilst Tibetans do struggle to acquire Indian passports (as seen in *Namgyal Dolkar v. Ministry of External Affairs*, High Court of Delhi 2009), under the Indian constitution, all Tibetans born in India between 1950 and 1987 are Indian citizens.

The last two chapters of the book focus on a range of social transformations occurring within the Tibetan diaspora, perhaps the most important of which is the resettlement of Tibetans from South Asia to the West. This 'globalization phase' is presented as bringing significant challenges for the future of the community, with the argument being

that ‘Tibetans are scattered and have fewer opportunities to sustain their culture’ (p. 159). Whilst such concerns are important, no mention is made of recent initiatives to revive cultural and religious practices (such as the Lhakar movement) and to connect Tibetans in the West with communities in India and Nepal (such as the Tibet Corps and the Global Tibetan Professionals’ Network). Indeed, the Tibetan diaspora in the West is surprisingly absent from the book. In sum, this is an important and valuable book in its documentation of the shifting relations between the exiled Tibetan community and its Western supporters. Its accessible style and pertinent research questions should ensure a wide readership, and the key ‘lesson’ is an essential one: ‘development never works better than when the exchange is equal and balanced, when each party has something to receive from the other’ (p. 150).

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Demoting Vishnu: Ritual, Politics, and the Unraveling of Nepal's Hindu Monarchy

by Anne T. Mocko. New York: Oxford University Press. 2016, x+246 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-027522-8, USD 36.95.

Reviewed by Caleb Simmons

In *Demoting Vishnu*, Anne T. Mocko takes as her cue the disestablishment of Nepal's Hindu Monarchy in 2008, which was the culmination of a two-year struggle that started in 2006. She thoroughly and convincingly argues throughout the book that the virtually peaceful transition from kingship to democratic governance was facilitated by the removal of the royal ritual apparatus in the years leading up to King Gyanendra's resignation. Thus, Mocko affirms that Nepali kingship was embodied through the king's role as the political ritual actor *par excellence* or, to put it in her own words: '[i]t was the ongoing practice of royal rituals that at a most basic level underwrote his social identity as "king," and it was the collapse or discontinuation of those rituals that would enable the institution of kingship to be permanently brought to a halt' (p. 3; see also p. 9 regarding ritual as part of the monarchy's broad system of practices). Over the course of the book, the author examines the royal rituals that were central (or as Mocko puts it 'foundational', p. 13) to the construction and constitution of Nepal royalty and how these practices were both unravelled and reconstituted within the new Nepali government. Overall, Mocko's monograph is a robust, well-argued and novel study of South Asian kingship that should be of interest to anyone who is curious about modern kingship and/or royal rituals.

Mocko bases her study on scholarship on both kingship and ritual studies, incorporating a wide range of materials from the latter. Indeed, pages 15-24 of the 'Introduction' provide a lucid foray into ritual theory that lays the foundations for the entire study. Given my own interest in kingship and issues of sovereignty, I would have liked the same attention to have been paid to discussing the theoretical basis of South Asian kingship and, more broadly, kingship in general. Although there are occasional references to broader ritual trends in South Asian kingship,

for example to Chola kings and to Telugu literature, and a vast array of references in the endnotes to secondary material on royal practice, kingship as a category of scholarly inquiry has for the most part been neglected, save a brief definition of it through a critique of James Frazer, A. M. Hocart, and Louis Dumont and a fleeting mention of Ronald Inden and Clifford Geertz. I hate to critique a book for what has not been included in it, but the author inadvertently raises this issue when she proposes her 'counterfactual thesis' that Gyanendra would have remained king even without any connection to government and palace if he had retained his ritual role (p. 13). Here, I think that a discussion of South/East Asian kingship in Nicholas Dirks, Ronald Inden, Stanley Tambiah, Hermann Kulke, etc. or broader work on the theological/ritual constitution of kingship, like Ernst Kantorowicz's, could have provided a context to make this 'counterfactual thesis' less counterfactual. This critique, however, does not spoil the overall work, and any concern subsides once the author moves beyond the 'Introduction', taking the reader further into the context of Nepal and its complex royal rituals.

All the chapters provide helpful insight into the history and ritual foundations of modern Nepali kingship and its demise (Chapter 2 provides a history of the Shah Dynasty; Chapter 3 rituals of succession; Chapter 4 Bhoto Jatra, the chariot/investiture ceremony) but Chapters 5 and 6, which deal with Kumari worship during Indra Jatra and Dasai/Tika Day respectively, are particularly interesting and discerning. In Chapter 5, the author takes the reader through several years of Indra Jatra to demonstrate the centrality of the king's relationship with the goddess Kumari and how her blessings 'made certain configurations [ie royal authority] of politics legible and available for thought [by the wider public]' (p. 143). In Chapter 6, we see how Dasai transitioned from a royal context to the democratically elected government. Key to the analysis is the role of the domestic ritual of the tika blessing that the familial patriarch conveyed upon junior members of the family. Mocko argues that royal rituals, particularly the tika blessing, united the entire kingdom as one large extended family over which the king was the head, the patriarch of the kingdom. This transitioned to the office of the president – or what Mocko labels 'patriarch-in-chief' – who likewise served/s as the ritual protagonist of the Dasai tika ritual and issued/s these blessings as the new patriarch of the nation.

Demoting Vishnu ends with a short conclusion, a brief Afterword in which the author discusses Nepal and her informants in the wake of the 2015 earthquake, and three appendices that include the 2006 Proclamation which withdrew power from the king, a list of the author's interviews and a glossary of Nepali terms.

To sum up, *Demoting Vishnu* is an excellent work of scholarship, which is certainly worth the read. This book is a great resource for those interested in modern Nepal or its contemporary political situation. Furthermore, anyone working on South Asian kingship or modern and/or contemporary politics and pondering the dissolution of monarchies and the establishment of democratic governments, should consult this work. The book is eminently readable and could readily be used on graduate courses and, even more broadly, in undergraduate surveys.

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Everyday Creativity: Singing Goddesses in the Himalayan Foothills

by Kirin Narayan. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2016, 256 pp., 9 halftones, ISBN: 9780226407562, USD 25.

Reviewed by Hannah Carlan

Kirin Narayan's *Everyday Creativity* explores women's devotional songs as affective and aesthetic labour in the Kangra Valley of Himachal Pradesh, India. Having first heard upper-caste Kangra women's songs as a teenager in 1975, Narayan draws on over three decades of fieldwork in the region and pays homage to the women who brought her into their lifeworlds and into the field of anthropology, some of whom did not live to see the fruits of her labour in the form of this rich ethnography.

'How strange that people elsewhere will come to know of our songs just as they are being forgotten here' (p. xxiii), remark Narayan's interlocutors in Kangra. Indeed, the text gives voice to generations of singing practices that are on the verge of disappearing from the landscape of these Himalayan foothills. My own fieldwork in the region (2017-2019) came at a time when Narayan notes that changing musical tastes, restructured social relations, and vast economic shifts in post-liberalisation India have left these songs to recede from their traditional place during weddings, birth celebrations, and other gatherings. The indelible impact of technological transformations on everyday sociality – from the allure of an evening viewing of a series on television slowly replacing collective singing, to raucous DJs playing *bhangra* songs at contemporary wedding celebrations – makes this text 'a sort of historical account of the villages and lives in that Palampur area' (Narayan, personal communication, 14 December 2019).

Nevertheless, Narayan shows how Pahari (ie 'mountainous') songs are living entities rather than static oral texts to be transmitted in new contexts. When women get together, they combine 'pooled memory and joined voices' (p. 143) to infuse long-established narratives with their interpretations of song melodies and lyrics that are informed by their

own life circumstances. Such 'playful realignments' (p. 143) through singing constitute the heart of what Narayan calls 'everyday creativity' – the small, seemingly mundane acts through which women collectively reimagine the stories that organise their social and cosmological lifeworlds. As such, Kangra women become masters of improvisation, 'playing with possibilities within cultural rules' (p. 29). Emphasising women's agency through improvisation, Narayan reclaims the concept of creativity from the 'Big-C' association of creativity with innovation, arguing instead that through the iterative rendering of familiar stories, women's songs constitute a transformative mode of joyful expression and ritual cleansing through which singers and hearers are able to conjure, nurture and shape their relationship with the divine.

The book organises the exploration of songs metaphorically through segments of the structure of a plant – the base, fruits and head – with each chapter addressing different aspects of the way singing intersects with and impacts on women's lives. The elements of the plant's structure map on to both the genres of songs that undergird different ritual events and the stages of lives that women pass through on their way to becoming expert singers. After tracing her journey to the study of Kangra women's songs in Chapter 1, in Chapter 2 we learn of the 'base' of the plant as the larger historical and social ground upon which women's songs gain special significance as a form of ritual work marking distinct genres of events in Kangra. Narayan points to the extensive history of men's outmigration from the region, to work in the army and more recently in industrial jobs in cities, making women's labour, of which singing is a crucial part, 'especially needed and valued' (p. 40).

Four subsequent chapters organise the various 'fruits' of singing as they emerge through the stages in women's lives. Chapter 3, 'Attaining', explores the fruits of service (*seva*) through songs of Shiva and Parvati (who takes on different guises as Gauran, Gaurja, and Sati). Focusing on one singer, Sita-devi, this genre of wedding songs speaks of both service to god as well as service to the family that is required when women pass from their natal homes to their marital homes. Becoming a bride is the first major shift in the life cycle for women after girlhood, and the songs about Shiva and Parvati (Gauran) reflect the careful manoeuvres required to secure women's futures through marriage. These songs speak to the power of Parvati's strong will, which mirrors women's journeys

towards attaining (*paana*) status as wives and maintaining happy homes once they are married.

In Chapter 4, 'Playing', we learn of songs about Krishna as sung through one of Narayan's closest interlocutors, Jagadamba Mataji. These songs, referred to as 'laughing and playing' (*hansnu-khelnu*) songs, are regularly sung at boys' birthday celebrations and represent the second desired phase of women's lives: becoming mothers of sons. The pressure to give birth to sons and the double-sided axis of anxiety and joy that motherhood encompasses is mirrored by the comedic songs of Krishna's exploits and adventures. Through the voice of Jagadamba Mataji, we learn that singing is an interactive conversation with the gods. Singing provides a space for the expression of one another's joys and sorrows (*dukh-sukh karna*) in a context where women's lives are constrained by gendered and caste hierarchies that force them to toil continuously in their homes, on farms, and, for many women these days, in jobs outside the home. The comedic and erotic songs of Krishna evoke both raucous laughter and happiness even as they affirm forms of high-caste patriarchy that stigmatise both childlessness and the birth of daughters. Still, songs about Krishna are an important locus for play, allowing women to engage in hilarious impersonations and insults that reaffirm 'the great social salve in being silly and laughing very hard together' (p. 143).

Chapter 5, 'Going', draws on songs about Sali, the basil plant goddess, as sung by Janaki-devi, describing the importance of singing as everyday ritual work in the pleasing of the gods and the reproduction of familial and community bonds of reciprocity. Just as the basil plant dies each winter to be reborn in the spring, so do women toil in the fields and in the home while singing songs of praise. The worship of Sali, traditionally associated with assertions of upper-caste Rajput identity, is also in keeping with gendered expectations that place restrictions on women's mobilities and decisions, including the remonstrations of sonless mothers and the association of widowhood with impurity. Janaki-devi's memories of her childhood in a Brahman village, and the pain and sorrow that accompanied her through life after being widowed at the age of fourteen, speaks to the power of songs to express suffering even as they reaffirm women's resilience. Songs of toil and hardship, including those sung during the gruelling work performed in the fields during

paddy transplantation (*ur laana*), are waning in the valley as young women shift away from Pahari folksongs in everyday life.

Chapter 6, 'Bathing', features songs by Asha-devi about the end of the life cycle and the hope of reaching heaven through song. Here we learn of the equal importance of listening and singing and how immersion in sound entails potential transcendence and peacefulness garnered through devotion. This phase of elderly life, and its concomitant closures intersects with what Narayan describes as the irrevocable changes wrought in the era of liberalisation: amongst them, a loss of Pahari songs in favour of Hindi and Punjabi music, and the ambivalence of 'the new prosperity that [is] unevenly transforming the valley' (p. 210).

A stanza of one song in particular anchors the chapters and encapsulates the interrelatedness of devotion with women's ability to transform their situations through song across the three major stages of their lives: 'An unmarried girl who sings will gain a home and groom. A married woman will play with sons. An old woman who sings this will go to heaven. Listening, praising, is to bathe in the Ganga' (p. 98). Speaking to the themes of gaining, playing, going, and bathing, we are transported through the heart-warming and, at times, heart-wrenching stories of Narayan's interlocutors. Starting and ending with reference to Lila Abu-Lughod's classic work on Bedouin women's songs in *Veiled Sentiments* (1986), released at the beginning of Narayan's foray into Kangra women's songs, the text speaks to the multivocality inherent in women's songs and to their multifaceted power to act as valves for cathartic release, celebration and transformation through their creative practice of song and dance.

By framing women's singing as a joyful practice (*sukkini*) – or 'improvisation for delight' (p. 225) – we see how singing has the ability to invoke pleasure and beauty even as it reinscribes the constraints of caste and gender. Narayan's keen ear and subtly interwoven analysis illumines the affordances of an ethnographic perspective that can only be gained through sustained, diachronic engagement with a place. In the coda, 'Reaching the Head', we are reminded of how this work got started in Narayan's own childhood and of how through decades of interaction with particular singers she has learned not just about songs but *with* songs (p. 217). Today, women's songs have imprinted themselves onto new forms of social action through women's groups (*mahila mandal*),

NGOs, and women's rights activists, all of whom are reimagining classic Pahari songs for contemporary issues. Thus, even while songs as captured by Narayan are being re-envisioned in contemporary Kangra, we are reminded of the fact that songs have always been both transformed through the skilful practice of individual singers and transformative in their capacity to reconstitute social bonds between women, men, and the divine.

Building on Narayan's earlier theoretical contributions to oral storytelling, *Everyday Creativity* remains focused on amplifying the voices of singers, making this feminist ethnography widely accessible and of interest to ethnomusicologists, folklorists and anthropologists alike.

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The Art of Neighbouring: Making Relations across China's Borders

edited by Martin Saxer and Juan Zhang. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. 2017, 268 pp., 19 figures, ISBN 978-94-6298-258-1, EUR 95.

Reviewed by Himani Upadhyaya

The Art of Neighbouring offers multidisciplinary analyses of neighbouring relations in post-Cold-War Asia in ten lucid, individually authored chapters on 'borderworlds' in and around China. It gathers together contributions from human geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists and historians who draw attention to the peripheries of China, which boasts a total of 22,000 km of land borders with 14 countries. Published as part of the Asian Borderlands book series, this book is of particular relevance to scholars and researchers of borderland studies in general and of Himalayan studies in particular. It extends the temporal frame of scholarly discussions on *Zomia* to beyond the 1950s, where James Scott's hypothesis about upland South East Asia ends (Scott 2009), and shows that contact and exchange offer a more productive lens to understand everyday experiences and processes in borderlands from the 1950s onwards. Neighbouring rather than governing, write the editors, is a better way to understand contemporary interactions in China's margins where 'seeking fortune' is as much a reality as 'seeking refuge' (p. 21).

What does the concept of neighbouring have to offer that is new? The editors address this concern primarily with respect to scholarship on China. An attempt is made to move forwards from the conventional Sinocentric approach of the old Fairbankian tributary model as well as contemporary statist celebrations of 'Good Neighbourly Diplomacy' and the 'peaceful rise' of China where the asymmetries embedded in the country's neighbouring patterns are elided. The book shifts its focus to the peripheries to bring out experiences, realities and smaller-scale processes of change. Neighbouring is presented not just as a geographically bounded experience but also as an agentive force that

allows the forging of new relations despite geographical limitations. However, this agentive force, as Zhang's chapter highlights most clearly, is also inherently unstable and unpredictable, often in need of being re-enacted.

The chapters are organised into three thematic divisions: *Borderworlds*, *Neighbouring Beyond Proximity* and *Agonistic Intensities*. The first set of chapters, generically entitled *Borderworlds*, gives us a localised view of interconnected borderworlds along China's borders with Russia, northern Laos and Nepal. Franck Billé gives a fascinating account of the 'generative power of neighbouring' following the opening up of the Sino-Russian borders in 1989 (p. 35). The twin cities, the newly founded and magnificently illuminated Heihe (China) and the older, mid-nineteenth-century, sleepy Russian city of Blagoveshchensk, represent a case of 'mimetic rivalry' whereby each city borrows inspiration from its neighbourly other but appropriates it in unique ways. In Pal Nyiri's account of Chinese 'instant cities' built by Chinese investors in one of the poorest and remotest parts of South East Asia, northern Laos, we see how promises of infrastructural development are entangled with promises of and aspirations for urban modernity arising from the area's integration within the global economy. However, while the rise of China in some cases promises forward-looking modernity to borderlanders, for others, it also evokes nostalgia for a bygone period of thriving trans-Himalayan trade, which drives the community's aspirations, as Martin Saxer illustrates in his chapter on the politics of two recent road-building projects in Nepal's Humla district.

The second section '*Neighbouring Beyond Proximity*' discusses cases and contexts where the forging of neighbouring relations is not limited by distance. The chapters are seemingly somewhat varied in terms of their approach. In the bazaars in borderlands of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Xinjiang, neighbouring relations spread across a network of distant nodes that are crucial points of connection, interaction and exchange. With respect to these relations, Henryk Alyff illustrates that elasticity is embedded in neighbouring and that it is founded not just in financial capital but also in dynamically changing social capital, namely ethnic and linguistic affiliations. Uradyn E. Bulag's chapter on Mongolia's Third Neighbour Diplomacy is pertinent to the theme of this section, though it fits somewhat oddly into the book because it takes

us back to the macro-framework of international relations. Mongolia's ingenious neighbouring strategy of relation-making and 'collaborative nationalism' with far-off countries, such as the USA and Japan, is seen as an attempt to negotiate its historical and geopolitical predicaments of being bounded by Russia and China (p. 132). The third chapter by Tina Harris examines unevenness in experiences and processes of trade and exchange through the newly opened Nathu La pass in the Himalayan borderlands of India, Tibet/China and Nepal, focusing on three facets – roads, vehicles and (border)lands.

'Agonistic Intensities' is the most cohesive section of the book. The phrase, borrowed from Bhrigupati Singh's concept of 'agonistic intimacy', describes situations where conflict remains 'co-present with modes of relatedness' and shared aspirations (Singh 2011). Chris Vasantkumar's nuanced work throws light on the seemingly odd figure of the Tibetan migrant who has returned to China in pursuit of prosperity promised by recent Chinese economic policies. He argues that Tibetan refugees navigate and negotiate these worlds in all their odd complexities and that neighbouring China cannot be seen as a fixed or inherently antagonistic relation. Unlike Tibetan 'odd migrant' returnees, Burmese Muslims from Myanmar, a historically persecuted minority, migrate to Yunnan in China where they have found and fostered a newer and safer haven in recent decades. Renaud Egretreau points out that their brokering skills, networks of contacts and traditional association with the gem and jade industry have enabled them to fill an economic niche as 'essential outsiders' in trading towns on China's border (p. 190). Juan Zhang foregrounds the inherently precarious and fragile nature of neighbouring relations with respect to trade relations on the Sino-Vietnamese border. She discusses an incident at the International Trade Fair in 2007, which resonated with the complex trajectory of Sino-Vietnamese relations before and after the brutal border war of 1979. Neighbourly harmony, she writes, is to be found in constant practice, in the perpetual need for construction and reinforcement. The last chapter by Magnus Fiskesjo stands out from the others because of its subject and style of writing. The writer finds neighbouring a pertinent framework for understanding human-animal relations and rues the 'heavily anthropogenic and human-dominated landscape' in China, the most populous country, where the animal population and diversity have drastically decreased (p.224). He draws on

other scholars to argue that China's 'state-engineered anthropocentrism' has deeper roots in Confucian philosophy and statecraft. The latter have in turn shaped neighbouring relations vis-à-vis human Others in the past as well as in the present.

The Art of Neighbouring gives us rich and varied accounts that adopt critical approaches to contemporary developments in areas bordering China. Most contributors succeed in engaging us with neighbouring as an idea or framework to view dynamic processes in zones of contact and exchange in a post-Cold-War Asia. At times, however, the chapters do not seem to come together as a cohesive whole. While the editors specify that the book does not attempt to 'formulate a general theory of neighbouring' (p. 28), it leaves the reader wishing for a more elaborate discussion of this promising concept.

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