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VII. BOOK AND FILM REVIEWS

Sherpa

1983

Film directed by Robert Godfrey. (Available from: Centre Productions, 1800 30th St., Suite 207, Boulder, CO, 80301. \$500 film purchase; \$275 video; \$50 rental; phone: (303) 444-1166. Length: 28 minutes.)

Reviewed by: Heidi J. Larson
University of California, Berkeley

"Sherpa" introduces Sherpa culture through the life of one trekking guide named Nima Tenzing. Nima is from the village of Khumjung, in the Everest region of Nepal, where he lives with his wife Chamji and their children. His household, we are told, defines one of the two conflicting worlds which Nima inhabits, the other being his life as a guide for Western trekkers and mountaineers.

If there is one theme which the narrator reiterates throughout the film, it is change. The film marks the 1953 British expedition, on which Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay were the first to reach the Everest summit, as a major turning point for Sherpa culture. And, throughout the rest of the film, the narrator discusses changes evident both within Sherpa households, such as Nima's, and in the Sherpa community at large.

The film, for instance, points to Nima's monogamous marriage with Chamji as an example of the disappearance of earlier polyandrous and polygamous marriages, once more common among the Sherpa community.

A brief shot of a man knitting then illustrates the supposedly equal sharing of tasks among men and women in Sherpa culture. As a further example of shared tasks, the narrator comments on the men's spinning yarn for the women's weaving, an occupation which he notes is also changing as Westerners are bringing in cheaper factory made clothes. There is no real discussion of sexual division of labor in primary subsistence activities such as agriculture. And, furthermore, considering the film's great emphasis on change and the impact of foreign travellers, there is not one shot of Sherpas portering for a trekking or mountaineering expedition nor is there a shot or mention of the numerous hotels and tea shops which provide some of the biggest incomes for Sherpas.

Despite the repeated comments on Western influences, the film visually captures none of the East/West contrast. Instead, we are given a rather isolated portrayal of Nima and his family, remote from the main paths and interactions which host the influx of foreign visitors.

One aspect of changed life among the Sherpas which the film does capture is education. In particular, the film focuses on a school built by Edmund Hillary. Before Hillary's school was built, all formal education was in the monasteries. The real culture conflict which the school introduced was, ironically, not between Sherpas and Westerners, but between Sherpas and the Government of Nepal. Since the Government of Nepal has taken over the administration of the school from Hillary's Trust, the students are all taught Nepali and English rather than the local Sherpa language which many of the government teachers do not even understand. Here again, the narrator comments on the "subtle cultural erosion."

On another "erosion" issue, the film scans the deforested hillside around Kumjung, noting the barrenness. Nima's grandmother, we are told, remembers when trees used to be all around. Now they are gone. Today it takes "two full days" to walk for wood for cooking fuel. What is not discussed are current reforestation and alternative energy development efforts being made in the Khumbu area. And, there is no mention of the establishment of a National Park and the 1976 legislation restricting tree-cutting.

"Sherpa," then, as a film about conflicts, is full of conflicts. While the narrator raises some of the key issues relevant to Sherpa culture today, the film does not explore the ways in which Sherpas and non-Sherpas are truly affecting and responding to change. After repeated messages about the erosion of Sherpa culture, the film ends with a quiet, isolated scene in which Nima pursues his Buddhist faith, hand block-printing prayer flags -- "wind horses" -- on which to send messages to the gods. He is, we are told, "a man at peace with himself and with the gods," and we are left with the sense that the narrator is more disturbed by recent changes than Sherpas such as Nima.

Goldstein, Melvin C.

1984 English-Tibetan Dictionary of Modern Tibetan. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press ISBN 0-520-05157-2.

Reviewed by: Lawrence Epstein
University of Washington

This work lives up to the high standards of excellence we have come to expect from Goldstein's previous works on the modern Tibetan language. Serious research in the Tibetan area has been hampered by the lack of an adequate western language-Tibetan dictionary. Those available heretofore simply have not been very useful; generally, the lexicographer took an English or other Western language dictionary and supplied a Tibetan equivalent term on a word-for-word basis. For obvious reasons, this method cannot succeed; for one thing, an English word might have more than one meaning, and unless one were particularly deft at thinking up possible equivalents, the use of these previous works could be frustrating. Moreover, these earlier works contained many English terms, sometimes of no earthly use whatever in making oneself understood to a Tibetan, for which an equivalent term had been concocted willy-nilly. Happily, the work at hand avoids such problems. Goldstein has adopted what he calls a "semantically sensitive" approach. For instance, where English uses a single verb, "blow," for at least three kinds of action (blow out a candle, the wind blows, and blow up a balloon), Tibetan employs three different verbs. All the senses of the English term are carefully differentiated in the present work. Additionally, terms meaningful to an English speaker but not to a Tibetan, e.g. "ketchup," are ignored. It is noteworthy that Goldstein has also included terms based on Chinese constructions and other neologisms. As he notes, the lexicons of the Tibetan refugee communities and the Tibetans in Tibet have been diverging. However, it is likely that the terms in the present dictionary will be recognized by all concerned.

The dictionary supplies some 45,000 entries (16,000 main entries and 29,000 subentries). The words selected for inclusion in the dictionary were chosen on the basis of their universal and general, not highly technical, usage. The work is mostly aimed at a scholarly audience, e.g., someone who wishes to be able to conduct an intelligent general conversation. Nuclear physicists or brain surgeons, might be disappointed to find no entries for "cyclotron" or "diecephalon," and they will either have to use sign language or some other mutually intelligible language to communicate with their Tibetan collaborators. Likewise, even those narrowly interested in the more esoteric vaporings of Buddhism are not likely to find the necessary specialized vocabulary here. For them, standard literary dictionaries will have to suffice.

Before the 485 pages of the dictionary proper, there is a good fifteen page grammatical introduction, reviewing the basics of word formation, sentence and verb types, phonology and the romanization and phonemic transcription systems employed in the dictionary. Within the dictionary itself, one will find the English entry followed, minimally, by its Tibetan equivalent written in dbu-can script and its phonemic transcription. However, most entries are more complex than this minimal form. For instance, the word "agree" contains five different senses of the English word in Tibetan. Each subentry is followed by (a) the English equivalent of the sense in which "agree" is used; (b) a code for the verb type and class; (c) the Tibetan term in dbu-can and phonemic transcription; (d) an English sentence employing "agree" in that sense; (e) the sentence in romanized Tibetan and phonemic transcription. Synonymous words and phrases are noted in Tibetan romanization, as well as equivalent honorific words and phrases.

Another useful feature of this work is the way in which terms have been assembled into groups of related subentries. Thus, under the main entry "agriculture" over ninety subentries have been listed, covering terms for grains, farming techniques, agricultural measurements and so on. (Unfortunately, the printer has erred here; on page 14 the columns have been reversed.) On the other hand, this technique may prove a bit troublesome in locating terms. For example, if one wishes to know how to say "to spray insecticide," one will find it nested in a subentry under "agriculture," and not under the main entry "insecticide." Similarly, one will search in vain for "carnivore," unless one second-guesses that it will be found under "animal." But in all probability, a minimum of imagination and familiarization with dictionary will overcome these problems.

While we are on problems, potential or real, one will also find the occasional misspelling or typo in English, the dropped vowel sign in the dbu-can, or an incorrect romanization from time to time. These are regrettable but inevitable in a work of this size and complex arrangement. There are also a few more serious goofs, but fortunately they appear to be rare. For example, under the entry "snatch" (p. 400), we read the sentence "khos mo'i rgyab la hop (sic!) te kha la 'jus byas bros phyin pa red," which

has been rendered "He snatched her bag and ran away." Something has gone amiss here; it appears that "back" (rgyab) has been confounded for "bag." However, this reviewer, for one, does not anticipate staying up late at night gleefully hoping to catch errors. Instead we should all be grateful to have this enormously useful and high caliber tool at long last.

The modern Tibetan language is undergoing astoundingly rapid change. I began studying colloquial Tibetan some twenty years ago, but when I was last in the field in 1981, I was very hard put to follow the conversations of my friends, especially the younger ones. In some ways, it was a very different tongue, lexically speaking, than the one that had served me well ten years earlier. Further, I know that these changes do not even approach the more radical ones in lexicon, phraseology and style that have occurred in Chinese Tibet. We can fully expect that this vital language will continue to change, and we can also hope that Goldstein will continue to build upon the present fine work to give us updated future editions.

Karan, Pradyumna P. w/ collab. of Shigeru Iijima. Cartography by Gyula Pauer.

1984 Sikkim Himalaya: Development in Mountain Environment. Monumenta Serindica No. 13. Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa (ILCAA). 174 pp., illus., tables, maps, biblio., index. (No price. For information write: ILCAA, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies/Tokyo Gaikokugo Daigaku, 4-51-21, Nishigaharra, Kita-ku, Tokyo 114, Japan.)

Reviewed by: Donald Messerschmidt
Washington State University

This work is a collaboration by a geographer, cartographer, and anthropologist. Both the geographer and the anthropologist are well known for their previous Himalayan scholarship. The geographer, Pradyumna Karan, has published a number of important works on the Himalayas, including the now dated but important milestone geographic overview, Nepal: A Physical and Cultural Geography (1960, University of Kentucky Press.). We have long expected Karan to reissue the Nepal work, revised and updated. The anthropologist, Shigeru Iijima's work is more limited to central Nepal, including several insightful works on the Thakali ethnic group.

The present work on Sikkim is divided into nine chapters: 1. Introduction, 2. Pattern of State Income, 3. Land Use and Agriculture, 4. Forest Use and Management, 5. Minerals and Energy Resources, 6. Development of Transport, 7. Industrial Development, 8. Human Resources, and 9. Development Issues, Environmental Conservation and Future Prospects. The book includes a removable shaded relief map of Sikkim, measuring 69cm x 85.5cm (26in. x 33.75in.) at a scale of 1cm = 1.5 km.

The work, predictably, includes considerable economic and geographic base data. There is also considerable information on the socio-cultural complexity of Sikkim, and its interesting geo-political history situated as it is at the interface between the sub-continent (India) and central Asia (Tibet). The immense Nepalese influence on Sikkimese social, economic, and political life is discussed (but in contrast, very little is said of India's influence, politically, on Sikkim in the past few decades). Nepali-speaking settlers from neighboring east Nepal currently make up the largest single ethnic community in Sikkim, about three-fourths of the population. (There is some confusion in the text, however, over the precise composition of the Nepalese group. On p. 15, we are told that "While some Nepalese are Buddhists a vast majority of them are Hindus (Brahmins or Kshatriyas caste...", while on p. 119 we are told that the Nepalese "mainly belong to the Rai sub group.") The other ethnic groups in Sikkim are Bhotia (Tibetan), Lepcha (an indigenous hill group), and some settlers from northern and western regions of India, from as far away as Rajasthan and Harayana.

Two critical problems face Sikkim's development: its small population, and difficulties in the transport sector. Several interlinked strategies are suggested for its improvement -- "the long-term strategy of development in Sikkim rests on the improvement of agricultural and transport facilities, and on the exploitation of the existing hydro-potential to produce cheap power. These developments would enable Sikkim to utilize its natural resources and to expand trade. The latter is important because of the smallness of Sikkim's domestic market. Initially, the expansion in exports may come from fruits, vegetables, poultry and other livestock products and subsequently, from mineral and forest-based products and from power itself, which may prove to be Sikkim's biggest export" (p. 19). The authors also place considerable emphasis on enhancing educational opportunities, particularly those relating directly to Sikkim's economic needs.

The central chapters of the book provide a detailed index of information in all of the major development sectors -- agriculture and land use, natural resources and energy, transport and industry, and the human resources. Thereafter, the authors discuss five principal issues or problems for Sikkim's development: spatial imbalances (focused on population distribution and transport), explosive population growth (but with still considerable imbalance in the labor force), rural development (with a need for an integrated approach), diversification (in manufacturing and industry, with special emphasis on tourism development potential), and environmental conservation (as the fundamental basis for all of the above).

Karan and Iijima conclude and recommend, rather generally (after providing considerable and insightful detail throughout the book) that "In future development policies, Sikkim must continue to carefully weigh the relative desirability of uncontrolled growth vs. conservation, sophisticated vs. 'appropriate' technology, and urbanization vs. village societies... (stressing) environmental as well as economic goals" (p. 163-164).

The book is comprehensive, and overall it is quite useful in getting a conceptual fix on Sikkim's potential for development. While some readers, especially economic development advisers, may reorder the suggested priorities or come up with other alternatives, Karan and Iijima, nonetheless, have provided a sound basis for promoting the dialogue and for asking the fundamental question: Development? -- If so, on what basis (under what constraining circumstances), and towards what ends (what are the tradeoffs)?

Rhoades, Robert E.

1985

Traditional Potato Production and Farmers' Selection of Varieties in Eastern Nepal. Potato in Food Systems Research Series Report No. 2, Lima, Peru, International Potato Center (CIP), 52 pp. (No price. For information, write to International Potato Center.)

Reviewed by: Jim Lorenzen
Cornell University

This interesting, short publication focuses on traditional potato production and management practices in several ecological zones of the Ilam District in Nepal. The document is based in a series of ethnographic, open-ended interviews and thus provides information from farmers' viewpoints and is not a definitive description by an "expert."

Rhoades draws special attention to the diversity of germplasm found in the area, pointing to the 35 "possibly distinct" varieties that were described by the farmers he interviewed. While I was initially impressed, on closer reading I felt he had to push the point to draw the analogy to the diversity found in potato growing regions of the Andes. Of the 36 varieties listed, some were likely different names for the same variety, others are no longer grown due to disease or other problems. Thus, even though farmers are aware of ten or fifteen varieties, most grow only the most common three or four varieties. Seed comes from communities further up the mountain. From his discussion I was reminded more of the genotypic diversity found in a typical European or northeastern U.S. farming community than a Peruvian one.

Besides the diversity issue I found many aspects of the book fascinating. Some of the local customs described, such as the tradition that potato seed must only move downhill and never be planted above the field in which it was produced, were not only good reading, but good agronomic practice. It was also noteworthy that there are some people in the lowlands who eat greened potatoes, albeit in low quantities. Other beliefs about potato colors and types were interesting reading. Trade relationships with India and the role of Indian merchants may be new to those not familiar with Nepal.

This short publication reads well and the fact that I was disappointed at times with the lack of depth may be due to my special interest in this particular subject. Anyone interested in potato production in other parts of the world, or specifically in some aspect of food production or the relationship of foods to community life in Nepal, may profit from reading this book.

Whelplon, John

1983

Jung Bahadur in Europe: The First Nepalese Mission to the West, Published by Sahayogi Press, Kathmandu, Nepal. Distributed by Nataraj Books, P.O. Box 5076, Springfield, VA 22150 U.S.A.

Reviewed by: Kamala Adhikari

Jung Bahadur has played a major role in the history of Nepal, particularly in preserving the sovereignty of this small Himalayan kingdom and resisting the British Empire's expansionist period. Jung Bahadur in Europe is dedicated to the description of his trip to Great Britain and France at a time when only a handful of other people of his political stature had ventured so far before.

Translated from the original Nepalese version, Jung Bahadurko Belayat Yatra, this work is believed to be written by one of the members of the entourage whose name is still shrouded in mystery. None the less, this book is a true account of Jung's trip to Europe. As the first English translation, the work includes background materials on the purpose and means by which this trip was undertaken. Jung's entry into Nepal Darbar's politics, his rise to power and the exciting political situation in the subcontinent had a significant bearing on this trip.

The introductory chapter, written by Rishikesh Shah, is itself a small volume on contemporary Nepalese history. In this chapter, Shah confirms the views shared by many historians about the major objectives of Jung's tour, namely "the maintenance of the independence and territorial integrity of Nepal in the face of the fierce wind of change that was blowing strongly across the entire region and had brought the Indian subcontinent as a whole under foreign domination." Shah goes into detail about how Jung made his way from simple beginnings to the palace, telling some of the fascinating stories that made Jung a mythical figure in the minds of the Nepalese populace.

The second part of the book deals with the background circumstances that prepared Jung for this historical trip and its purpose. The third part is really the heart of the book. Coming from another corner of the world, isolated and unaware of the technological development in Europe, it was but natural for the members of the entourage to be taken aback by the technical development, the lifestyle and the culture of Britain, the most powerful empire on earth at that time. The writer of the Balayat Yatra was highly impressed with the social and cultural development as well as the technological development he encountered. He seems amazed by the fact that the source of power was not in the hands of the king but in the law and parliament. Indeed, Jung Bahadur was so impressed by the British Constitution that upon his return to Nepal he promulgated an ordinance, Muluki Aien (Civil Code), which was, at least in theory, to bind everyone, including the king. Jung Bahadur's desire to inspect factories and military parades seems to reveal his motive to estimate the economic and military strength of the British Empire.

The third chapter of the book deals with the coverage of Jung Bahadur's visit by the European press. Jung Bahadur was the only important Hindu political leader who had ventured to cross the 'dark waters,' risking his caste. So naturally his mission was regarded as the most important event at that time, which had a tremendous effect on the Indian subcontinent as well. The British and French press published very colorful descriptions of the trip, its members, the lifestyle and beliefs of the members, etc. The press created a mysterious image of the entourage which fascinated the European people.

The author's efforts to present the historical facts of Nepalese politics and the context of the times make Jung Bahadur in Europe interesting and instructive reading about Asian history, well worth looking into.