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Himalayan Studies in 1994: An Editorial View

Himalayan research is in a period of unprecedented growth. As this issue shows, the field is expanding so rapidly that it has become a major task to stay abreast of, much less report on, all of the various kinds of current research on Himalayan areas and cultures. Our conference reports alone include 166 papers from the conferences on which we received reports in 1992-93, and there were certainly many more unreported to us. At the Wisconsin South Asia conference, since NSA's return there several years ago, we have become the most visible research area, with 15 panels and 61 papers on Himalayan subjects in 1992-93 alone. Nor is our growth confined to area studies contexts; one of the pleasant surprises of 1992-93 was a total of no less than 46 Himalayan-related papers at the national conference of the American Anthropological Association. And we have recently received news of the official establishment of a Himalayan and Tibetan Religions Group in the American Academy of Religion. While in absolute numbers of scholars and papers we may not quite have overtaken East Asian, African or American studies, the numbers are hardly insignificant; and proportionally, it is hard to escape the conclusion that we have become at least one of the world's fastest-growing research areas.

The bad news is that most of this growth is invisible, both to Himalayan scholars and others. Much of our work continues to be framed in terms of isolated studies of isolated sites and communities by isolated scholars, with little or no contextualization in terms of larger area or area-studies identities. Thus, for most audiences the context of a given study in an important research area and a dynamically expanding field of scholarship will never rise into consciousness. Rather, individual papers present themselves as unique encounters between uniquely pioneering researchers and uniquely exotic peoples and places. The resulting marginalization is compounded by the rigid nationalist segregation of Himalayan research areas and researchers' scholarly communities, each virtually ignored by the others' fears of the political consequences of any involvement with each other. Thus, research in the Indian Himalayas is subsumed as a miniscule and marginal sidelight to Indian Studies; Nepal research is submerged in the flood of larger, apparently less exotic and quixotic scholarly nationalisms; and Tibet research suffers the worst of both approaches, depending on whether one takes it as a flyspeck on the map of the enormous Chinese political and scholarship empires, or as the ultimate cultural and scholarly Shangri-la. Despite substantial and dynamic growth in real scholarly significance, in our own and others' perceptions, the large but invisible field of Himalayan studies remains fragmented, isolated, and marginalized; and the best that can be hoped for from a strategy of self-marginalization is marginal survival.

For this, we have no one to blame as much as ourselves; for no one else can be expected to see the growth and dynamism of Himalayan studies as long as we continue to isolate and marginalize ourselves. The solution is obvious: more self-awareness and self-promotion of our importance as a major research area. This would require us to broaden, rather than narrow, our contacts with each other and each other's work; to actively contextualize ourselves in a larger field of related studies by citing more, rather than fewer, relevant works by our colleagues; and above all, to venture beyond the walls of our deceptively secure nationalistic ghettos. We might learn from our colleagues, the Africanists; for while their study area is also full of political conflicts and political pitfalls for scholars, could they survive professionally if they defined themselves as Tanzanilogists, Rwandists and Burkina Fassologists? Rather than self-marginalization and self-trivialization, they have chosen a larger identity that immediately marks their area and scholarship as significant. We have no such ready-made identity, until we make it for ourselves. The American Academy of Religion is a case in point: a "Himalayan and Tibetan"(!) unit is viable, whereas either by itself is not, and neither by itself has previously been formally recognized as a significant part of religious studies in America. Either together we are a large and important field of scholarship, or separately we are a miscellaneous set of isolated and inconsequential fringe groups. Now, for the first time, there seems to be a real choice between these alternatives.

Growth and area recognition could work to our disadvantage, of course, if it resulted in a growing perception that our area contributed only exotic trivia of little use or relevance to our disciplinary colleagues. Fortunately, this seems unlikely. Himalayan scholars are generally moving beyond the stage of description-of-uniqueness-for-its-own-sake into stronger efforts to frame their work in terms of theories and issues of broader relevance to their disciplinary colleagues. Such demonstrations of the disciplinary relevance of our research should have beneficial consequences, as long as it does not produce the impression of cut-and-paste assemblage of marginally relevant theory with marginally illustrative ethnography, or of the Himalayas as a repository of

merely secondary examples to support preexisting theoretical constructs, the original inspiration for which always comes from other research areas. Ultimately, our disciplinary relevance depends on our ability to generate original theories and new issues in research; and with our present growth and dynamism, such a goal seems ultimately possible. However, we need to ask ourselves which areas of Himalayan research seem to be theoretically promising, and leading us into new directions of potential interest to our disciplinary colleagues.

One such area in Himalayan anthropology, studies in place and identity, is represented by the set of papers in this issue, guest edited by Mary DesChene. While these papers fall in a topical range of considerable interest in recent anthropological research, they also fall in a context of widespread interest and growing diversity and innovativeness in Himalayan studies. The last two decades have seen Himalayan researchers developing a rich and varied range of studies of the relationships of place to the construction, negotiation and transformation of identity. One of the major focal points of such work has been research on Newar culture, with results ranging from Gutschow and Kölver's wide-ranging studies of spatial organization in urban life (e.g., Gutschow and Kölver, *Bhaktapur: Ordered Space Concepts and Functions in a Town of Nepal*, 1975; Gutschow and Bajracharya, "Ritual as Mediator of Space in Kathmandu," 1977; Gutschow, *Stadtraum und Ritual der newarischen Städte im Kathmandu-Tal*, 1982, etc.), to more general works on cities (Robert Levy, *Mesocosm*, 1990) and the entire Kathmandu Valley (Mary Slusser, *Nepal Mandala*, 1982), to Reinhard Herdick's tightly-focused work on Kirtipur ("Stadtraum und Ritual am Beispiel der Newar-Stadt Kirtipur", 1977; "Death Ritual in Kirtipur in Relation to Urban Space", 1987, etc.), to Gerard Toffin's work on space, ritual and kingship ("Analyse Structurale d'une fête communale newar: le *des jātrā* de Panauti", 1982; "La notion de ville dans une société asiatique traditionnelle", 1982; *Le Palais et le Temple*, 1993; Toffin, ed., *L'Homme et la Maison en Himalaya*, 1981; Toffin and D. Blamont, eds., *Architecture, Milieu et Société en Himalaya*, 1987, etc.), to Linda Iltis' studies of ritual space and women's "place" in Newar identity (e.g., *The Swasthani Vrata*, 1985, "Newar Women and the Concept of Place," 1986; "The Power of Place in the Hindu Kingdom," 1992; "The Sword and the Truck Stop," 1990). Another locus of spatial studies has been the body of work on shamanism, healing and local religions by scholars such as Nicholas Allen ("The Ritual Journey, a Pattern underlying certain Nepalese Rituals", 1974; "The Thulung Myth of the Bhume Sites and Some Indo-Tibetan Comparisons", 1981), John Hitchcock ("A Nepalese Salt-Journey and the Concept of Bi-polarity", 1978), and Robert Desjarlais ("Self, Space, and Healing among Yolmo Sherpas", 1989). For the Indian Himalayas, recent interest in issues of space and place include studies of pilgrimage such as the work of William Sax (*Mountain Goddess*, 1991). And for Tibet, a forthcoming issue of the *Tibet Journal* (Vol. 19, nos. 1-3, 1994?), edited by Toni Huber, will focus on *Powerful Places and Spaces in Tibetan Religious Culture*, and include place-related studies by Peter Bishop, Katia Buffetrille, Hildegard Diemberger, Franz-Karl Ehrhard, Lawrence Epstein, Peng Wenbin, Toni Huber, Andrea Loseries, Charlene Mackley, Dan Martin, Francoise Pommaret, Charles Ramble, Tsepak Rigzin, Mona Schrempf, Elizabeth Stuchbury, and David Templeman. The research on issues of space, place and identity for the Himalayan region is truly impressive, and our contribution to this and other current research trends would be truly impressive if our disciplinary colleagues were conscious of the scope and extent of research in our area. We should help them to such a consciousness by increasing our own awareness and communication of what Himalayan researchers are doing.

We hope that such awareness and communication will be improved by the move of *Himalayan Research Bulletin* to the University of Texas, effective with the next issue. Barbara Brower has graciously agreed to assume the editorship, and we wish her well. When we gave in to the NSA Council's pleas to move *Himalayan Research Bulletin* to Washington, with no support available for its publication, it was a last-ditch attempt to save the journal from dying when no other institution would accept it. We are happy that we have managed to keep it alive, and embarrassed at the tradeoff of triple issues, publication delays and mistakes such as our not noting in Vol. 11 the joint sponsorship by Center for Nepal and Asian Studies of the 1992 Anthropology of Nepal Conference. With Barbara Brower's leadership, the University of Texas' support, and the contributions of new editorial board members, we expect that this era of marginal survival is now coming to an end. We would like to thank the membership for their patience, and express our appreciation for having had the opportunity to help chronicle an exciting period of growth for Himalayan research. The HRB has always depended on subscribers for voluntary submission of newsworthy material, reviews and articles, and will continue to do so. Please send your contributions; you, as much as the editors, make the HRB possible.

Ter Ellingson

Guest Editor's Note: Place and Identity in Nepal

The articles in this volume by Des Chene, Enslin, Kohn, Miller and Russell are revised versions of papers originally presented in a session entitled *Rethinking Commonplaces: Place and Identity in Nepal* at the 1990 meetings of the American Anthropological Association. There were two additional papers in the original panel. Kate Gilbert's "Immigration and Conquest, Emigration and Flight: Narratives of the Political Landscape of Eastern Nepal," could not be included here. Stacy Leigh Pigg's paper, "Inventing Social Categories through Place: Social Representations and Development in Nepal" was published in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* in 1992.

The original idea of the panel was to bring together work that, from a range of perspectives and through the analysis of a variety of topics, asked questions about the complex relationships between place and identity in Nepal. Theoretical innovations within and outside anthropology (e.g., Appadurai 1988; Harvey 1990) have been bringing previously unproblematic identifications of peoples and places into question and posing new questions about the cultural ramifications both of rootedness and of mobility. Within Nepal long-standing processes of migration, permanent (Enslin) and transient (Des Chene, Russell), and more local movements like those of women at marriage (Kohn, Miller) appear to challenge the idea of a well-fixed ethnographic map. It is also our sense, though this is little developed in these papers (but see Enslin) that recent political events have the potential for new politicization of ethnicity in which the politics of space and belonging (Terai, *pahar*; urban, rural; indigenous, migrant, etc.) may not be incidental.

I would like to thank Kathryn March who served as discussant on the panel. Her theoretical insights and extensive knowledge of Nepal added substantially to the occasion. I must also thank the editors of the Himalayan Research Bulletin and the contributors to this volume for their patience as these papers wended their way to publication.

Mary Des Chene
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NEWS

1993 Election Results

Congratulations to our 3 new board members elected to the board.
Nanda Shrestha, John Metz and Richard Tucker.

Plan to attend the 1994 Conference!

23rd Annual Conference on South Asia

Madison, Wisconsin Nov. 4,5,6

Annual Meeting of Nepal Studies Association

Saturday November 5th, 1994