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The Films and Photographs of Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf : The Making of an Archive

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The History of the Archive in Cambridge

Some years before his death, Professor Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf gave the bulk of his ethnographic film collection to an ex-student of his, Alan Macfarlane—now Professor of Anthropological Science in Cambridge. In his old age and infirmity, Haimendorf wanted to be rid of some of the clutter that surrounded him dating back to his fieldwork days. He was close to disposing completely of his immensely valuable 16mm films when they were thankfully salvaged by Alan Macfarlane. These films cover a huge geographical area - from the Philippines to Ceylon, from hunter-gatherer populations in central India to yak herders on the Tibetan frontier.

Although some of the films are in colour and have synchronised sound, most are black-and-white and silent. The quality of many of the early films, especially those dating to the 1940s in India when Haimendorf worked among the Chenchus, Apa Tanis and Bondos, is quite poor. The film stock has deteriorated beyond repair. Alan Macfarlane, who had already begun the long process of logging and cataloguing the collection, decided to send the films away for professional copying to the newer medium of U-Matic in January 1984.

Matching silent film to fieldwork notes of sometimes 50 years earlier is extremely difficult—even with such meticulously kept diaries as those of Professor Haimendorf. Alan Macfarlane and his wife Sarah Harrison decided to ask the Haimendorfs (Christoph's wife, Betty, accompanied him on all field trips) to view the films and to comment on what they could remember. These commentaries, made on standard audio tape, added a great deal of depth and helped with the accurate logging and dating of the old films.

In the following years, this semi-collated collection of ethnographic films was used by people (who came to know of it) and by those with a specific interest in the visual documentation of the Indian subcontinent. It was not until Professor Haimendorf's death, however, that funds were secured to make a properly documented archive of the original 16mm reels and their copies.

The Archive Today

In 1996 I worked in the Department of Social Anthropology in Cambridge to help establish the Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf Archive. With the kind help of Haimendorf's son, Nicky, and the Archive Department in the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), I produced a complete catalogue of the collection. For ease of viewing, third generation VHS copies of the most historically or ethnographically interesting films were made from the second generation U-Matic copies. I also made detailed notes on all the films by matching comments in unpublished field diaries with those of Haimendorf's published works, along with using his supplementary commentary from the audio tapes mentioned above. The purpose of this was to place all the films in a working order so that future generations of researchers and students alike would find this unique resource to be more accessible.

At present, the archive consists of the following:

- over 100 reels of 16mm films taken by Professor von Fürer-Haimendorf
- 18, Sony BR U-Matic second generation copies of the best of these 16mm films

- 18, VHS third generation copies of the Sony BR U-Matic copies
- various cassettes with commentaries by Professor von Fürer-Haimendorf and original sound recordings from the field
- a video copy and transcription of a three hour interview with Professor von Fürer-Haimendorf by Professor Alan Macfarlane, recorded in June, 1983
- a VHS copy of an impressionistic short film about the life of the Haimendorfs made by Mark Turin in 1996
- detailed catalogues with full lists and instructions about how to use the archive

Using the Archive

It is the explicit aim of the Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf Ethnographic Film Archive - which is still in essence a small private collection - to keep his written, audio and visual sources all together in one place, thereby affording the researcher the possibility of entering into the spirit of the time and place where the films were shot. Professor Haimendorf bequeathed his oeuvre to the School of Oriental and African Studies in London where he held various positions throughout his professional career. The School is currently working to establish a far more extensive archive of Professor Haimendorf's work, to include his sound reels, slide photographs as well as some unpublished notes. It is foreseeable that when the SOAS archive is near completion, the film archive presently held in Cambridge will be moved to London and be incorporated into the SOAS collection. It is fitting for Professor Haimendorf's films to be housed in the institution to which he devoted his academic life.

At present the archive is open by appointment to all serious researchers from related disciplines. Viewing rooms are available in the Rivers Resource Unit in Cambridge to allow users to view the films.

The 18 VHS copies are easiest to view because the hardware required is readily available. Some of the subjects covered by the films are as follows:

Nepal:

- “The Land of the Gurkhas”
- “The Land of Dolpo”
- Thak Khola & Mustang
- Dang - Moina/Jumla “rice sowing”
- Sherpas
- Kathmandu

India:

- “Hill Tribes of the Deccan”
- “The Men Who Hunted Heads”
- “Tribal Dances”
- Ceylon - “The Land of the Buddha”
- Wanchu, Nagas & Reddis

All serious inquiries are welcomed, and should be addressed to either:

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Thangmi: An Overview of a Tibeto-Burman Language and People of Nepal

For a relatively large language community, around 70,000 speakers, the absence of any substantial previous research on the Thangmi of Nepal (nationally known as Thami) is surprising to say the least. While other far smaller tribal groups of the Himalayas have received considerable attention from ethnographers and linguists alike, the Thangmi seem to have somehow slipped through the net.

I spent 4 months this year conducting fieldwork on the Thangmi language. The oldest Thangmi settlements are in the Dolakha district of eastern Nepal - but whether the Thangmi are autochthonous to the area is still unclear. According to some sources, there is also a sizable Thangmi population on the northern slopes of the Himalayas, in Tibet. Furthermore, an early migration to north-eastern India has resulted in the emergence of a dynamic Thangmi community in Darjeeling.

In terms of culture and religion, the Thangmi of Nepal are noticeably heterogeneous. Like many other ethnic groups in Nepal, they observe both Hindu and Buddhist rituals and festivals, and they have a developed and vibrant indigenous shamanic tradition. Based on both linguistic and ethnographic evidence, one possible hypothesis is that the Thangmi are comparatively new to sedentary agriculture, previously practicing shifting cultivation alongside foraging and hunting.

The Himalayan Languages Project traditionally concentrated on the description of the largely unstudied Kiranti languages of the Tibeto-Burman group. Whilst Thangmi is clearly a Tibeto-Burman language, it does not conform to the typical Kiranti model which is characterized by extremely complex verbal morphology. The simpler affixal agreement system of Thangmi looks like a modified or rudimentary Kiranti system, and it is the contention of the author that the Thangmi language may well - along with Baram and Dolakha Newar - constitute a sub-group which has come to be known in the literature as "Mahakiranti."

Mark Turin. Leiden University

Cornell-Nepal Study Program

The Cornell-Nepal Study Program (CNSP) was established in 1992 in the Kathmandu Valley of Nepal to provide American students with a unique opportunity for study in a country known for its rich cultural and ecological diversity. The program was designed to offer students in different fields a variety of academic and cross-cultural experiences as well as the chance to pursue independent research projects.

CNSP students live and study with Nepalese student counterparts from Tribhuvan University, the national university of Nepal. All students study the Nepalese language and participate in a lecture series course entitled Contemporary Issues in Nepal, which provides an introduction to the history, culture and religion of the country and covers issues such as sustainable development, environmental degradation, ecotourism and natural resources management. In addition, based on their personal interests and college majors, students choose from two possible courses in Research Methods and Proposal Writing, one focusing on cultural and social issues, and one focusing on environmental and ecological issues. Each student designs and carries out a month-long research project. Classes are taught by professors from Tribhuvan University, and professional language instructors.

Several factors make CNSP different from most study abroad programs:

Nepal is a country of astounding geographic diversity, ranging in altitude from 80 to 8,848 meters above sea level, and all students are given opportunities to experience Nepal's three major geographic regions: the high Himalayas, the middle hills and the flat Terai plain.

Nepal's geographic diversity has led to great ethnic, cultural and religious diversity as well. While Nepal is the world's last Hindu kingdom, the mountain regions are populated by Buddhist cultures, and different tribal and ethnic groups live throughout the nation.

CNSP students live with Nepalese students in the ancient town of Kirtipur, location of Tribhuvan University, and are taught by Nepalese professors. CNSP's Nepalese students come from different parts of Nepal, representing different regions and ethnic groups. Thus, the American students have an authentic cross-cultural Nepalese experience.

Nepal is a newly democratic nation, a developing country, with one of the world's lowest GNP's and per capita income levels. Students are encouraged to experience first hand the pressing issues facing such a country.

The chance to carry out individual research projects is a major factor in developing students' practical field research skills and experience. Examples of research projects pursued by CNSP students indicate the wide range of opportunities study in the program provides.

Rural Sociology

As a developing country Nepal has experimented with various paradigms of the planned development process. Many national and international non-government organizations are participating in the development process. Contact with these organizations has enabled students to explore the effects and impacts of different development programs on various sectors of the society. In some instances student research has proven useful to the agencies themselves in evaluating the success of their programs. Some examples of student research in this area include: Indicators of Women's Empowerment in Nepal's Terai; Effects of a Water Scheme Project on Villagers' Lifestyles; Villagers' Attitudes toward Development in the Makalu Barun; Project Area Rural Poverty and Development in Nepal: A Look at Two Development Projects; and Quinocrine Sterilization for Rural Nepal.

Anthropology

Nepal's population includes many tribal and ethnic communities. Some have had little contact with foreign visitors while others, because they populate areas frequented by tourists and trekkers, have experienced major changes as a result of tourism. Students have carried out research on various topics in both types of communities including: the Study of the Ghale community in Barpak; Illness and Healing in Brushubang (Chepang); Attitudes to Foreigners in the Khumbu Region; Ama Tolis (Mothers' groups) among the Gurung; Religion and Social Rank in a Tibetan Community; and Jankhris and the Supernatural: A Traditional Healer from Gorkha.

Natural Resources, Botany and Ethnobotany

A country of subsistence farmers which, despite problems of deforestation, also has a wealth of forest resources, Nepal is known for its non timber forest products, including medicinal herbs and edible wild food. Students have conducted research related to farming systems, community forestry and ethnobotany. Examples include: Fodder Systems in the Eastern Terai; Developments in High Altitude Rice Breeding; A Farming System in Jhapa; Medicinal Plants and Shamanistic Practices in Solu Khumbu; Collection and Trade of Sivertia Chirata in Makalu Village Development Committee; Ethnobotanical Study of Wild Edible Plants in the Annapurna Region; and Women's Participation in Community Forestry in Dhading District.

Culture

Although the program focus is in the areas of Sociology/Anthropology and Environment/Ecology, students have successfully pursued research in other areas as well, most notably Religious Studies, Art & Architecture, and Ethnomusicology. Examples include: Self-expression in Mithila Art; Shankhamal Temple Complex; Urban Design and Renovation; Musical Instruments in Solu: Their Origins and History; The Interaction of Hinduism and Buddhism in Traditional Rituals; Daily Life in a Buddhist Nunnery; and Women and Buddhism in Nepal.

Buddhist Studies

Nepal is a Hindu kingdom, but it has long history of Buddhist study and practice as well. Now home to a thriving Tibetan refugee community which has established a great many monasteries, nunneries and study centers, Nepal is an excellent place for Buddhist studies students to contact authentic teachers from all the contemporary Buddhist schools. Students interested in pursuing such studies will be assisted to that end.

Himalayas - Where Earth Meets Sky

Himalayas - Where Earth Meets Sky (<http://library.advanced.org/10131>), is a comprehensive site about the world's highest and most majestic mountain range - the Himalayas, and its land, history, life, culture, religion and more. The cite presents a detailed tour across the vast Himalayan lands of India - visiting Kashmir, Ladakh, Zaskar, Lahaul, Spiti, Kinnaur, Kumaon, Garhwal, Sikkim and the Arunachal. It explores the Nepal Himalayas - from the Everest region in the East, to Central Nepal and Western Nepal, and on to the northern frontiers of the Himalayas - Tibet. It provides information about lamas and monasteries, and observes the life and culture of the people of Tibet.

The cite includes coverage of Himalayan topics including geology - the formation of the Himalayas, trekking, mountaineering, flora and fauna, and environmental problems facing the mountains. It includes over 500 photographs and 30 detailed maps of the region.

This is a NONPROFIT, educational web site created by three 16 year old high school students - Debangsu Sengupta of India, Simon Wisselink of the Netherlands, and Yian Cheng of the USA and is a part of the ThinkQuest international competition (www.advanced.org/thinkquest). Sengupta was awarded the 1997 Thinkquest web page contest for his participation in the creation of the web site.

These students have attempted to provide a comprehensive coverage of the Himalayan region. In attempt to add information about areas not yet covered, they encourage contributions to their cite (<http://library.advanced.org/10131/travelers.html>). Tales about personal experiences in the region, photographs, and maps are also welcome.

Their traveler's corner (<http://library.advanced.org/10131/travelers.html>), has an easy-to-use system that provides a platform for people to share their Himalayan experiences with the rest of the world. By filling out simple forms, one will be able to add their content (be it stories, information travelogues, scanned photographs or maps) to the web site. Stories can also be sent to Debansu Sengupta at debansu@hotmail.com. Contributors will receive credit for their contributions and can include links to their website.

ICIMOD Adds New Site to Home Page

ICIMOD recently added a new site to its home page (<http://www.south-asia.com/icimod.htm>). This new site, the "Best Practices" (<http://www.south-asia.com/icimod/bpmenu.htm>), provides concise information on actions, research and dissemination, and training activities that have had varied technological success in the rugged marginal environments of the Hindu Kush Himalayan region. Some of these activities are in the testing and demonstration phase while others are already included in ICIMOD's major programs.

ICIMOD promotes the replication and dissemination of innovative, low-cost, local resource based, productive options and appropriate technologies for the sustainable development of mountains.

Activities included in the Best Practices site include the following: Angora Rabbits; Beekeeping; Effective Microorganism; Fertilizers for Soil Conservation; Ghoriharka Oilseed; Low-cost Water Harvesting; Participatory Forestry; Plastic Film Technology; Mini and Micro Hydropower; SALT (Sloping Agr. Land Technology); Seabuckthorn; Sunflower Stalks; Urea Treated Straw for Buffaloes; and Urea Molasses Block.

Contributing Editor Nirmal Tuladhar Has Been Busy . . .

In the beginning of 1996 Nirmal Tuladhar was involved in establishing the Central Department of Linguistics at Tribhuvan University, as the Member Secretary for a Task Force commissioned by Tribhuvan University. In the middle of 1996, a Department of Linguistics was established at the Kirtipur Campus. Since then he has been busy teaching MA students of Linguistics at the Department besides editing the CNAS Journal and seeing to affiliation procedures for foreign students who apply for affiliation to the Centre.

In September of 1996 he went to France with two friends to participate in the 9th International Kite Festival held at Dieppe for two weeks, in which thirty countries participated. Each country had a stall with a national flag. One million spectators reportedly turned out in the festival. His article on "Cutting is the Greatest Fun" was published in *Kite Lines* (Winter-Spring 1996, Vol. 11, No.4), the quarterly journal off the Worldwide Kite Community.

In October of 1996, *HRB's contributing editor* went to The Netherlands to participate in the XXIX International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics and the 2nd Himalayan Languages Symposium held at Leiden. He presented a paper on a 'Sociolinguistic Survey of the Jirel Community.' After the conference, he went on a month-long tour in Brussels and Germany.

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