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and contradictions that ensue when an atheistic state attempts to enhance its legitimacy and political standing among a minority population by promoting and participating in a religious ritual. Barnett discusses how claims of authenticity are established through visual portrayals of the event (paintings and documentaries), and the role that deliberate fabrication plays in creating a historical legacy. This is the most fascinating analysis to date of the Eleventh Panchen Lama's controversial selection.

In summary, grouping conference papers under a coherent theme is always a tricky proposition. It does not succeed with this volume because the editors have tried to impose an ill-defined concept (modernity) on disparate papers. As historian Frederick Cooper writes, "The word *modernity* is now used to make so many different points that continued deployment of it may contribute more to confusion than to clarity" (2005:113). Herein resides one of the shortcomings of this volume: a multivalent, nebulous concept is the purported unifying theme, and yet the editors neither provide a cogent definition of modernity nor discuss the term's intellectual history. As a result, the reader is often guided to the rather banal observation that modernity assumes different forms and is interpreted by different actors according to historical, political, economic, social, and cultural contingencies. In the absence of precise definitions or analytical frameworks, virtually anything can be (and often is) forwarded as evidence of modernity or, more annoyingly, multiple and alternative modernities. However, any qualm about using modernity as a unifying theme does not detract from my final assessment: this volume is an important contribution to Tibetan Studies because it contains some original, provocative, and insightful studies of culture change in contemporary Tibetan societies.

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Looking into the future. Photo: Emilia Sulek

PARADISE LOST?: STATE FAILURE IN NEPAL

BY ALI RIAZ AND SUBHO BASU

Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007. xiv, 220 pp. ISBN 978-0-7391-1426-1 (cloth).

REVIEWED BY SUSAN HANGEN

Paradise Lost?: State Failure in Nepal offers a unique interdisciplinary perspective on Nepal, as one author, Basu, is an historian, while the other, Riaz, is a political scientist. The book serves as a concise reference on the history of modern Nepal from 1768-2006, and a valuable primer on the social, political and economic issues that contribute to the ongoing political crisis of the country. The authors do not suggest that Nepal was a paradise at any point in history, except perhaps for its rulers or some foreigners who imagined Nepal as a Shangri-la. Rather, the authors paint a picture of a polity that has long been mired in problems and is currently facing an unprecedented crisis.

The book's central argument is that the Nepali state has failed, and that this failure has been evolving for a long time, due to the "extractive patrimonial" state which created a "disjuncture between the state and society" (2). The authors state that their intention in classifying Nepal as a failed state is to answer the question of "for whom the Nepali state failed and how" (17). As the authors note, the concept of state failure is plagued by blurriness and a lack of a commonly accepted definition. They attempt to clarify their use of the concept by outlining the "most conspicuous features" of failed states, including:

"the presence of enduring violence...; the predatory and oppressive nature of the state...; inability of the state to control its own territory; the growth of criminal violence and lawlessness...; deterioration and/or destruction of physical infrastructure; the decaying state of social services (including education and health); and providing economic opportunity for a few at the expense of the majority of the population. An equally important element of the failed state is the loss of legitimacy" (19).

The authors argue that state failure is a long-term process

rather than an “overnight spectacular event” and outline three stages that mark the progression towards state failure: “first, institutions fail as delivery agencies; second, ethnic, social, and ideological competition further weakens the ability of the institutions entrusted with service delivery; and third, various sources of pressures (such as poverty, urbanization, environmental degradation) overwhelm the state, leading to failure” (22).

Despite the inclusion of this framework, the concept of the failed state remains blurry in its application here. The challenge in using the criteria identified here is that Nepal has experienced many of these problems since its emergence as a modern state, such as the predatory nature of the state, the decaying state of social services, and economic inequality. Although a few of the characteristics in this list have more recently emerged in Nepal, such as the rise of violence and lawlessness, and the widespread loss of legitimacy of the state for its citizens, the authors do not assign extra weight to these characteristics.

The authors demonstrate that Nepal has been in stages one and two of the process of state failure since at least 1951. Yet it is unclear when the state became “overwhelmed” and thus moved into the condition of being a failed state. The Maoist insurgency from 1996 onwards and the resurgence of the monarchy in 2005 appear to be the key developments that marked the failure of Nepali state, as they led to both the intensification of violence and the ideological crisis of the state. However, the authors do not make this point explicitly. Their description of the third stage suggests that the state could have failed long before the Maoist insurgency, as a broader range of pressures such as poverty could also lead to this condition. Thus the authors do not clearly identify a particular moment in history when the state failed. Furthermore, given this presentation of the concept, it is difficult to imagine when Nepal might ever escape the “failed state” category.

Although the failed state concept remains somewhat vague in this book, the core chapters provide an insightful analysis of modern Nepali history. Chapter One provides a succinct history of the country’s major political developments and regimes from 1768, when the Shah dynasty captured Kathmandu, to 2005, when King Gyanendra staged his royal coup, suspending democracy in the country. Much of what the authors discuss here has been covered in other histories of Nepal, yet the chapter offers a solid introduction to the topic for non-specialists.

Chapter Two examines how ethnicity became a central force in Nepali politics. It traces the rise of high-caste Hindu dominance from the Shah through the Rana era, and demonstrates how that dominance was institutionalized during the Panchayat era. The chapter provides thumbnail sketches of some of the key social movements that arose during the 1990s. The authors illustrate how movements by Dalits, indigenous nationalities and Madhesis challenged the hegemonic narrative of Nepal as a monolithic Hindu nation.

The chapter accurately captures the multiple identities that have gained political salience in Nepal, including caste, indigeneity, and regionalism. The data provided in this chapter demonstrates the roots of the state’s ideological crisis of legitimacy, which the authors refer to elsewhere in the book but do not mention explicitly here.

Chapter Three outlines the dire economic problems of the country, and examines their roots in exogenous, endogenous, and ecological factors. The section on exogenous issues reviews Nepal’s foreign relations and its dependency on India and other global powers, and provides a helpful review of the shifts in foreign aid from 1951 through the 1990s. Regarding endogenous factors, the authors critique the elite and urban orientation of state policies, particularly their neglect of the agricultural sector, and the highly centralized structure of the state. The authors blame the ruling elites for policy choices that “institutionalized ... social inequities” (112) and led to the “perpetuation of external dependency” (114). The economic failure of Nepal is both an indicator and cause of the failed state, the authors argue, as these problems weakened the “performance legitimacy” of the state (91).

Chapter 4 examines the rise of the Maoists, illustrating that the Maoists arose because of, and further contributed to, the failure of the state. The first part of the chapter traces the history of the communist movement, perhaps in more detail than necessary for the central argument of this chapter. Next, the authors succinctly describe how the Maoist insurgency was the product of limitations of the post-1990 political system. Maoists were excluded from participation in the political system, as Nepali Congress leaders repressed their political activities in Rolpa and Rukum districts. Furthermore, marginalized social groups who were increasingly politically mobilized after 1990 were frustrated by the state’s lack of response to their new expectations and demands and found in the Maoists a “political outlet” (139). The authors demonstrate that the success of the Maoists resulted not only from their organizational prowess and from the marginalized groups’ support for their ideology, but also from the inherent weakness of the Nepali state. The power struggles between the monarchy and the political parties, as well as the state’s limited presence in rural areas of the country, provided a political context in which the Maoists were able to make tremendous gains (146-147).

Chapter Five briefly describes the popular uprising of 2006. The authors summarize how the political parties, Maoists, and civil society members came together in reaction to the King’s 2005 implementation of direct rule and suspension of democratic governance, and successfully reinstated democracy. Chapter Six examines the challenges that lay ahead of Nepal after this uprising. Due to the highly fluid political context, some of the authors’ recommendations have quickly become dated, but the chapter provides a useful review of the key issues in 2006. These final brief chapters are not as polished and analytically rich as the other chapters, most likely because the authors were incorporating relatively

recent occurrences into their manuscript.

In sum, Riaz and Basu have written a clear and engaging book. As a political history of modern Nepal, the book is remarkable in that it is compact while also offering considerable detail in its review of key trends. The book would work well in undergraduate classes on the politics of developing countries or South Asia, and will also serve as a convenient reference work for scholars.

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GROUNDING KNOWLEDGE/ WALKING LAND: ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND ETHNO-HISTORICAL IDENTITY IN CENTRAL NEPAL

BY CHRISTOPHER EVANS WITH JUDITH
PETTIGREW, YARJUNG KROMCHA TAMU
AND MARK TURIN

University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK: McDonald
Institute Monograph, McDonald Institute for Archaeological
Research, 2009. xii + 211pp., illustrated. ISBN: 978-1-
902937-50-2.

REVIEWED BY DON MESSERSCHMIDT

Until recently, knowledge and understanding of the archaeology and anthropology of ancient central Nepal has been shrouded in mystery as dense as the clouds that cover the high hills during the monsoon. Virtually no ethno-archaeological/historical studies have been done on ethnic origins in the hills until recent research conducted at a remote site in the high forest below the Annapurna snow peaks northeast of Pokhara. The result is *Grounding Knowledge/Walking Land*.

The book is remarkable both for what it is, what it isn't, and how it was researched and written. On the one hand, it is a long awaited study in Nepalese pre-history, focused on a set of ruins and storied places of cultural-historic and religious significance in the upper mid-hills. But it is not a fully finished product, for the researchers were seriously constrained by the political circumstances (insurgency)

in Nepal during the decade of their work. It is unique for how it was created, by a multidisciplinary team representing archaeology, ethnography, linguistics, shamanism, and social activism.

The focal point is a set of unique ruins called Kohla, a large ancient site in the high forest. Kohla is over 700 years old and is considered by scientists and ethnic Gurungs to be the earliest known village of the Gurung (or Tamu-mai) ancestors. (Note that many Gurungs prefer to call themselves by their indigenous name *Tamu* (plural *Tamu-mai*), and that both terms are used interchangeably here.)

The study of these ancient Gurung/Tamu ruins was a collaborative venture involving several institutions and individuals, including researchers from the University of Cambridge (UK) led by archaeologist Christopher Evans; members of the Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh, an ethnic religious and socio-cultural organization headquartered in Pokhara, including the indigenous shaman Yarjung Kromchai Tamu¹; the Irish anthropologist and Tamu specialist Judith Pettigrew; and the British linguist and expert on ethnic languages of Nepal Mark Turin. This team was also joined in various tasks by several other scholars.

The study is "concerned with histories and journeys, and with land and identities..." and Evans notes that "it could be a story of high adventure, relating the discovery of Himalayan ruins and particularly the extraordinary site of Kohla..." or it "could equally have a quality of historical inspired myth."

By tradition, Kohla predates Gurung settlements across the Himalayan foothills by hundreds of years. It is "reported to be the last place that the Tamu-mai/Gurung of central Nepal lived collectively together as a people (before dispersing to villages at lower elevations)." Dates of occupation are estimated between 1000 and 1300 AD.

Kohla and vicinity, and routes to and from the site, include several places of great significance in Gurung/Tamu myth and legend, particularly associated with the spirit journey of traditional Gurung shamans known as *pajyu*. This journey is related and recited by the shaman in the form of sacred oral texts called *pye*. *Grounding Knowledge/Walking Land* includes a translation of the lengthy *Lemakō Rōh Pye*, recited from memory by the shamans during the death ritual (*pye laba*). The traditional death rites are among Tamu society's most richly significant social events. The oral text speaks of many ancient places, linking past with present, myth with reality, and the spirit world with the living.

The *Lemakō Rōh Pye* is also significant for relating the origins of both humans and animals, as well as the names of places associated with Kohla, which figures prominently in stories about the arrival of the Tamu ancestors centuries ago out of Tibet and into Nepal's central highlands. It also tells of a series of events that occurred in and around Kohla in that early time.

While the study concentrates on Kohla, the researchers also investigated several other sites revealed in the oral texts. Some of them appear to be most closely associated with the