

May 2016

Review of 'Nepal in Transition: From People's War to Fragile Peace' edited by Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone, and Suman Pradhan

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Recommended Citation

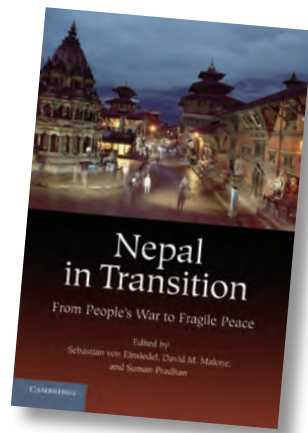
Hutt, Michael. 2016. Review of 'Nepal in Transition: From People's War to Fragile Peace' edited by Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone, and Suman Pradhan. *HIMALAYA* 36(1). Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol36/iss1/25>



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Nepal in Transition: From People's War to Fragile Peace.

Edited by Sebastian von Einsiedel, David M. Malone, and Suman Pradhan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Xiv + 398 pages. ISBN 9781107668980.

Reviewed by Michael Hutt

Nepal's political culture has deteriorated progressively since the mid-1990s. This is due to a range of factors including, *inter alia*, the 'People's War' of 1996-2006, massive aid dependency, enduring feudalism, and party leaderships which pay little more than lip service to the greater public good. The civil war was in large part the result of a reaction against this environment. It ended in political compromise and a commitment by all of the major political players to construct a new political dispensation in which inclusivity, equality, and democracy would be assured. However, during the seven years of constitutional uncertainty (2008-15) that followed, the Nepali political system, which had by now accommodated most of the former rebel leaders, returned to business as usual.

This volume deals with Nepal's transition from war to peace during 2006-8. It runs to nearly 400 pages, and contains seventeen essays arranged in three substantive sections: 'The Context,' 'Critical

Transition and the Role of Outsiders,' and 'Regional Dynamics,' plus an introduction and conclusion.

The contributors fall into three distinct categories. First, there are Nepali political journalists and public intellectuals: political analyst and commentator Deepak Thapa, civil society leader and development critic Devendra Raj Pandey, economist Sujeev Shakya, human rights advocate Mandira Sharma, political scientists Aditya Adhikari and Mahendra Lawoti, journalist Prashant Jha, and former journalist and now UN political officer Suman Pradhan. Second, there are those who were themselves actors in the political dramas of 2006-8: Bhojraj Pokharel (Chief Election Commissioner 2006-9), Ian Martin (head of UNMIN, the United Nations Mission in Nepal) and S.D. Muni (Indian political scientist). Finally, there are foreigners who were either working for various agencies in Kathmandu during the period in question or who were presumably deemed by the editors to occupy positions that allowed them an authoritative overview of events in Nepal: Sebastian von Einsiedel (UNMIN), David Malone (Canadian academic and diplomat), Jörg Frieden (Swiss Co-operation), Frederick Rawski (international lawyer), Catinca Slavu (independent consultant and advisor), Teresa Whitfield (conflict prevention and resolution specialist), Rajeev Chaturvedy (Indian foreign policy

analyst) and Rhoderick Chalmers (then of the International Crisis Group).

Unfortunately, the quality of the essays is very uneven. On the one hand, the analyses provided by most of the Nepali contributors probably still merit a place in reading lists on recent Nepali politics (though in the case of Adhikari and Jha they have been superseded by book-length accounts), and the chapters by the foreign players in the drama constitute a useful, though partial, historical record. On the other hand, some of the international contributors' accounts read like records of a task completed, place a self-congratulatory accent on their organisations' contributions to this achievement, identify social exclusion unproblematically as the sole cause of the war, and deal only with elite-level politics. It is not surprising that no reference is made by these authors to any sources in Nepali, the language in which the most crucial debates take place in Nepal, but one wonders why some of them feel they have a right to refer to Nepali processes or events with terms they have coined themselves, such as 'masala peacemaking' (Whitfield) or 'rhododendron revolution' (Frieden) when these have no currency in local discourse. The absence of contributions from academic Nepali specialists is anomalous in a book published by a prestigious university press.

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Michael Hutt on *Nepal in Transition: From People's War to Fragile Peace*.

Nepal was regularly described as being 'in transition' after the end of the 'People's War' in 2006/7. This description implied that at some point the 'transition' would come to an end, at which point a New Nepal would emerge. A much longer process of 'transition' than the one described in this book may now be seen to have ended with the promulgation of the 2015 constitution. Alternatively, it may not: the constitution was controversially fast-tracked in the aftermath of the Gorkha Earthquake, opening up a political schism not only between the people of the plains and the people of the hills, but also between the governments of Nepal and India. I hope the next edited volume on recent Nepali politics will contain writings by international authors who can take a longer, deeper view.

Michael Hutt is Professor of Nepali and Himalayan Studies at SOAS and Director of the SOAS South Asia Institute. He has published extensively on modern and contemporary Nepali literature, and also on Nepali and Bhutanese politics, the Nepali diaspora in India, Nepali art and architecture, and the Bhutanese refugee issue.

Being Human in a Buddhist World: An Intellectual History of Medicine in Early Modern Tibet.

By Janet Gyatso. New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. 544 pages. ISBN 9780231164962.

Reviewed by Barbara Gerke

In recent years, several anthropologists have written extensively about Tibetan medicine or Sowa Rigpa (lit. "science of healing"), providing a clearer picture of the cultural, socio-political, and contemporary Tibetan medical world. Scholars who work on Tibetan medical history from textual and religious perspectives, however, are still few. Janet Gyatso's book makes a much needed contribution to our knowledge of the medical, textual, and empirical history of Sowa Rigpa. In her lucid and eloquent writing style, she introduces the reader to the intellectual history of Tibetan medicine between the 12th and 18th centuries, a period that produced an enormous corpus of medical literature, of which we know so little, but that so much shaped the ways Tibetan physicians teach medicine and perceive health and illness, even today. The book does not consider the wide heterogeneous fields of Tibetan healing, including Bon, ritual healing, and oral medical traditions, but draws from an array of medical texts as well as the detailed illustrations of the 17th century set of 79 Tibetan medical paintings. These

well-reproduced colored plates add an artistic element to the book's beautiful layout. Gyatso analyses how Tibetan medical thought developed its epistemic orientation and a focus on material realism with what she calls a "scientific sensibility" (p. 5) and a certain "medical mentality" (p. 16). It is important to understand that this intellectual development took place in Tibet within the context of state-sponsored Buddhism, esoteric Tantric Buddhism, and outside the intellectual developments of European modern medicine.

The book is the result of years of dedicated scholarly work and the long-term collaboration with Tibetan medical and textual specialists (especially Dr. Yang Ga). Many readers will find Gyatso's approach to historical Tibetan medical texts accessible and refreshing, for her ways of "reading" these texts are quite unlike standard philological approaches to texts in Tibetan Studies. Gyatso engages with the characters of her medical authors and opens the reader's mind to an intricate and complex history in which medicine was not simply "Buddhist medicine" but influenced by "Buddhist habits of thought and practice" over time (p. 16). This process of developing scientific medical thinking in Tibet was an evolving one, which the reader can follow through seven chapters and several centuries. Gyatso is "convinced that to read for processes ... rather than positions requires a