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Editorial

Éditorial

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1   When the EBHR was launched in 1991, the first editors – Richard Burghart, Martin Gaenszle and András Höfer – pointed out in their Editorial the need to mobilise European colleagues and to involve scholars from Himalayan countries in order for the Bulletin to be successful. This need persists today, especially in the ever-evolving landscape of academic publishing and of institutional support to area studies. In 2021 the EBHR celebrated the thirtieth year of its existence by transitioning into an online open-access journal, adapting to changes in the publishing environment and improving the dissemination of its content. We trust this will lead to renewed interest and will increase the EBHR's attractiveness and broaden its readership.

2   To remain true to its mission, the Bulletin needs to maintain its European foothold through both the involvement of individuals and institutional backing. For the past three decades, key institutions – Heidelberg's Südasien-Institut/South Asia Institute, the School of Oriental and African Studies, and the CNRS's Centre d'études himalayennes/Centre for Himalayan Studies (now Centre d'études sud-asiatiques et himalayennes/Centre for South-Asian and Himalayan Studies) – have lent the Bulletin their full support. Today, the EBHR's support base is in need of renewal. We are eager to hear from colleagues elsewhere in Europe who share our ambition to ensure that the EBHR remains a lively and stimulating platform for scholarly exchange.

3   The European identity of the journal should not, however, be perceived as a Euro-centric orientation of the research it publishes and disseminates. Past issues are testimony to the continuous foregrounding of research undertaken by scholars residing in Himalayan countries. We hope that this special issue, guest-edited by Dibyesh Anand, Swargajyoti Gohain, Nitasha Kaul and Sayantani Mukherjee will further testify to our commitment to give voice to scholars beyond European borders – in this case from India and the Tibetan diaspora – who have particular expertise in regional specificities and contribute empirical content from the trans-Himalayan regions.

4   The contributors to this special issue provide interdisciplinary perspectives on the trans-Himalayan region both past and present, and on the intersections and

constitutive interactions across borders, which go beyond the limited framework of state-centred exchanges. Following an introduction by the guest editors, which offers a stimulating conceptualisation of the Himalayas as a field of enquiry, contributions by Swati Chawla, Sanjukta Datta, Kaustubh Deka, Tenzin Desal and Tenzing Palmo delve into various facets of belonging and place-making and into the constitutive hidden geographies and fragmented histories that make up life in the Himalayas.

5 We remind our readers and potential contributors that we welcome proposals for our new features, such as photo essays and multi-modal inquiries, which we have introduced thanks to online publishing.

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Special issue: The Himalayas from its edges: networks, identities, and place-making

*L'Himalaya depuis ses marges : réseaux, identités et fabrique des lieux*

Introduction. The Himalayas from its edges: networks, identities and place-making

Introduction. L'Himalaya depuis ses marges : réseaux, identités et fabrique des lieux

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Special Issue:The Himalayas from its Edges: Networks, Identities and Place-Making (*EBHR* 62)
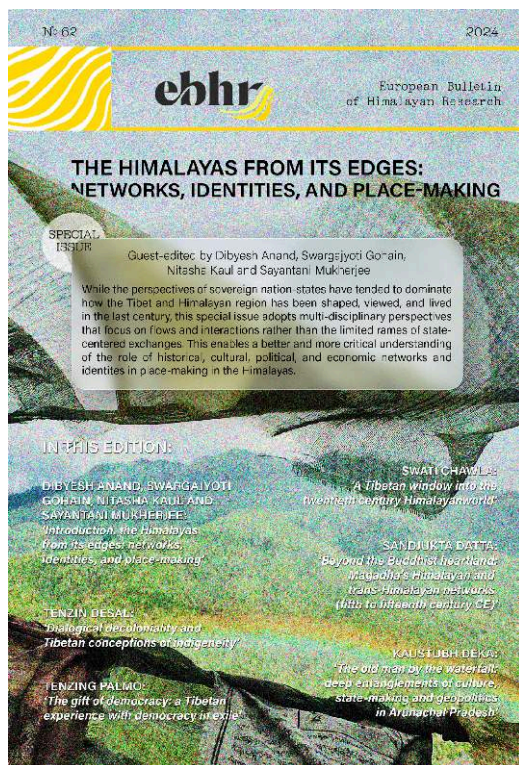
Introduction

1 The mountainous geographies of the Himalayas bring together the modern-day nation-states of Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Pakistan as well as the Tibetan ethnocultural areas that traverse the borders of these states but are now seen as part of one or the other nation-state. In the twenty-first century, perspectives of sovereign nation-states have tended to dominate how the region is shaped and viewed, often defining, sometimes dictating, how the people, places, institutions and ecosystems of the region engage and can be engaged with. However, the adoption of multidisciplinary perspectives that focus on flows and interactions rather than the limited frames of state-centred exchanges enable a better understanding of the role of historical, cultural, political and economic networks and identities in place-making in the Himalayas (Craig 2021, Gohain 2020a, Harris 2013, Mukherjee 2024a forthcoming).

2 What do we mean when we talk about the Himalayas? Today, the ranges comprising the 'Indian' Himalayas are further divided into the eastern, central and western Himalayan sections in academic and policy circles. The trans-Himalayas include the parallel northern ranges further extending into northern India, modern-day Tibet, Nepal and China. Research in the Himalayan region has long been inhibited by connectivity issues and geopolitical factors. Some areas have been more conducive than others to long-term research but, with improved access thanks to new roads and transport infrastructures as well as the gradual opening up of the border regions in the last decade, many researchers are now increasingly being drawn to the Himalayan region as a field of historical, political, anthropological and environmental inquiry (Berreman 1978).

3 How should we conceptualise this vast landscape that is home to diverse communities, some closely interconnected, some not so much? As a peripheral and frontier space between nations, forever at the margins of dominant centres of historical power? As a strategic security challenge where regional and global powers compete (Kaul 2021a, 2022a) or as sites of 'subalternising geopolitics' (Kaul 2023)? As a unique regional environment with its own resilient specificities that undo the work of imperial ambitions and military border-making (Guha 2015, Dzüvichu and Baruah 2019, Mukherjee 2024b forthcoming)? As an entangled geography that makes political fragmentation irrelevant through its convergence of social, economic, cultural and religious networks (Saikia 1997, Huber 1998, Christian 2000, Li 2002, Yang 2004, Saikia 2004, Chatterjee 2013, Ramirez 2014, Gohain 2020a)?

Himalaya: a productive site of contestation

4 Himalayan Studies today remain dominated by the security imperatives of nation-states whose survival depends on the preservation of hard borders. As a result, the region is often studied at best as a 'buffer zone' (Gohain 2020b), or a point of exchange between modern states, or at worst as remote and therefore 'exceptional', a discourse of strategic dismissal which severely limits the possibilities of analysis (McGranahan 2017). Furthermore, the mountain chain has been normalised in academic scholarship as a natural barrier between modern states. As a field of enquiry, the Himalayas have been conceptualised through three main approaches (Gohain 2024 forthcoming): the romantic Himalayas (Kaul 2018), a space romanticised through mystic, remote,

orientalising tropes (Anand 2007); the frontier Himalayas, seen through national security, military metaphors and as a natural barrier; and the lived Himalayas, as a region that should be understood through grounded histories, oral narratives and by piecing together fragmented histories. Our collection foregrounds this last approach without denying the productive and restrictive roles played by the first two. We argue that if the Himalayas are studied as a reterritorialised spatial assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) that was deliberately restructured between the state and the market, we are able to uncover hidden geographies of social, political and cultural diversity and change in the South Asian highlands, successfully moving past the rhetoric and truth-claims of state-centred and state-sponsored narratives. The diversity revealed by these hidden geographies is also precisely the ambiguity that was weaponised by empires in the past and by modern nation-states today to justify the deployment of exceptional violent policies in frontier spaces.

5   The 'state' remains a crucial presence in Himalayan Studies even though there are different approaches to the state as institution, state as effect, state as process and state as lived body in those regions seen as the borderlands. While political scientists often centralise the state as a tangible institution, many anthropologists shift the focus to everydayness and to the effects of the state on ordinary lives (Gupta 1995). Without seeking a consensus, we argue for the need not to forget the state even when challenging its stranglehold over political imagination. As Gellner reminds us, 'ordinary people must have ideas about the state in order to interact with it, and any worthwhile ethnographic investigation must engage with both practices and ideas' of state (Gellner 2013: 3). While it is tempting to see flows and networks as illustrative of 'homeland as a place of interaction, meeting, struggle, exchange, belonging, and transition, sometimes despite vigorous attempts at state interdiction' (Van Schendel 2013: 269), the spectre as well as the everyday presence of the state in various forms is never absent (Smith 2020).

6   This is especially pertinent for border areas, where 'uncertain sovereignty and apprehensive territoriality lead to sensitive borders' (Van Schendel 2013: 169), a phenomenon that has marked the Tibeto-Himalayan region significantly. Both the border dispute (Anand 2011) and the conflictual-competitive relation between China and India continue to play a conspicuous role (Aggarwal 2004, Guyot-Réchard 2017). While questions of security are doubtless a key constitutive element of what is taking place, any attempts to resolve the region's unsustainable tensions must take into account how its environment, culture, language and security are interrelated. State-making and militarisation in the Himalayas have already yielded disastrous results for local peoples and for the global climate. The analysis of India–China-Pakistan tensions that do not take these circumstances into account distorts its realities (David et al 2021: 29).

7   While offering some insights into the Tibeto-Himalayan region, we remain mindful of the homogenising and problematic moves of 'Himalayan Studies'. What is studied? Where are lines drawn? Who studies? Whose knowledge is valorised? How does production of knowledge contribute to state-making and vice versa? While it is tempting to imagine a discrete and distinct subject matter for Himalayan Studies, as Des Chene reminds us,

> The different polities that encompass the Himalayan region have always sat
> uncomfortably with the idea of Himalayan Studies and work that situates itself in
> this way seems frequently to try to analyze the cultural apart from these divergent

political histories. One can imagine a different Himalayan Studies that took the political history of the region as its basis. (Des Chene 2007: 210)

8   Even the moves to study, say, the northeastern India – southern Tibet region through 'Indic' and 'Tibetan' tropes is problematic in that it ignores cultures and experiences that resisted both.

9   The Himalayas have never been under a single common rule, resulting in diverse local forms of sovereignty and territoriality which persist today. State elites have historically considered the mountains to be a problematic periphery in which local wars, ethnic confrontations and contraband trade flourish; where resources remain difficult to exploit and where state control is haphazard and expensive. As a result, the Himalayas, though considered strategically important, have also been marginalised geopolitically. While many parts of the Himalayas have resource and technologically intensive development infrastructure that is oriented to military needs and promotes a selective connectivity, for the outside world the region has otherwise been transformed into a political geography of silence and erasure. At the same time, any tendency to treat Himalayan and trans-Himalayas regions simply as sites of 'recovery', from which to excavate and 'rescue' historically marginalised voices and narratives, runs the risk of re-marginalising these perspectives, thereby cementing their so-called 'peripherality', a designation that has only served the interests of imperial and national powers (Mukherjee 2022).

10   The diverse geographies that marked the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan landscape comprised an extensive pre-colonial map of economic, political, and cultural networks marked by the circulation of goods, people, ideas, discourse and practices. Prior to the 1800s, Himalayan and trans-Himalayan Tibetan states never conceptualised these regions or the relations and connections between them in terms of the 'frontier', as their archival records amply demonstrate. Rather, their intercourse was described as being conducted between independent kingdoms (see Bhuyan 1990 [1932]: 147–148, Saikia 1997: 173–218). Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their historical scope would come to be defined by the constant clashes between a loosely defined Tibetan ecclesiastical state whose sphere of influence was progressively limited and contained by British Indian and Chinese imperial power. Where multiform polities and societies once characterised these complex geographies, the result of their encounters with both British Indian and Qing states led to a significant reordering of these landscapes, ultimately limiting the definition and imagination of these regions to that of a cultural-ecological and geopolitical frontier area (Mukherjee 2022: 61).

11   As these geographies then came to represent the limits or the periphery of imperial authority and influence, the idea of these imperial frontiers now signified 'marginal' spaces, located only at the edges of empires or imperial territories, undergirding in turn the centre-periphery model that is used to frame the discussion of these spaces in scholarship. These rich pre-colonial geographies were now discursively framed as the *terra nullius* that would passively anticipate the advent of imperial ambition and capital. The colonial archive came to acknowledge the distinctions between these regions as more or less savage and mysterious, while also directing attention towards creating connections between them through land routes, new market regions and communications projects. More specifically, pre-colonial networks and processes were 'unearthed' and appropriated by the colonial state to articulate the aims of capital and empire in the production of this new mapping (Bhutia and Holmes-Tagchungdarpa

2019, Gardner 2021, Mukherjee 2022). Under the dual impact of capital and colonial empire-making through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these regions were gradually absorbed into the framework of frontiers and borderlands that linked the colonial territories possessed by imperial states (see Namgyal and Dolma 2021 [1907], Marshall 2005, Kreutzmann 2008, Zutshi 2010, Ludden 2011, Dzüvichu and Baruah 2019).

12   This multidisciplinary issue brings together scholars from India and the Tibetan diaspora to discuss different parts of Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions in their historical and contemporary sense. The various papers in this collection focus on some of the historical and embedded networks – of trade, migration, kinship and mobilities of objects, texts, ideas, goods and capital – that connect the geographies, people and cultures of the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan landscapes even though politics and geopolitics might separate them. It is this persistent diversity of the interactions between its inhabitants and dwelling-places that sets the area apart from its surrounding regions, and that has historically undermined the imposition of strict imperial, national and academic borders. While the different papers in this issue adopt different methodological approaches, as a whole they combine methods and frameworks from the field of border studies with Himalayan Studies. Since the geographical Himalayas are divided by many international boundaries, tracing past and present connections and networks across border bifurcations assumes greater prominence. The historical papers included in this issue show how Himalayan borders evolved and took on their present shape. Furthermore, all the papers speak to how national borders influence wider processes of identity formation, citizenship and development in the Himalayas, even far away from the actual border location.

Connections and ruptures

13   In this special issue, we contend that regions should not be viewed as fixed geographies characterised by prefigured themes. Instead, we analyse the Himalayas as an initial context for themes that generate mutable, fluid geographies. A 'frontier' is not simply a physical or topographical separator between political states or the site of conflict between their politics. On the contrary, these spaces are characterised by complex interactions and exchanges between various cultural, social and political communities. It is precisely this dynamic that makes frontier spaces fluid and ambiguous, thereby often negating legalised definitions of state boundaries. Frontier regions are perhaps best understood by foregrounding the historical processes that shape their geographies, through emphasis on language, culture or other attributes affixed to peoples or to space (Van Spengen 2000, Giersch 2010).

14   The framing of the Himalayas as a 'frontier' region was closely linked to the very process of empire-making itself, as a new semantic entity that functioned as a barrier rather than as a connector. British colonial administrators in particular repeatedly framed the Himalayas as the natural and inviolate frontier of the South Asian subcontinent, and rejected ethnic or linguistic affinity as the basis for deciding frontiers (Caroe 1960). Through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the production of 'modern' frontier and borderland spaces in Asia, such as the Himalayas, were shaped by complex processes and interactions located within the drives of imperial expansion and uneven practices of knowledge production about geographical spaces (Ortner 1989,

Waller 1990, Mueggler 2011, Martin 2016, Mathur 2018, Lange 2020, Kaul 2021b, Gardner 2021, Mukherjee 2021). While modern colonial border-making preferred certainty over ambiguity in some cases, it also nurtured ambiguity in other contexts (Anand 2009) and accepted a 'panoply of exceptions' (Robb 1997). Exploration, wars, surveillance, mapping, control and treaty making (Kaul 2022c) have all played a role in how the region has been shaped through the colonial and postcolonial periods (Anand 2012).

15   While being seen as 'distant', 'at the edges', 'beyond the edges' by mainlanders, people and places in the Himalayas were vibrant centres in their own right. Wouters and Heneise point out that 'for millennia, Highland Asians have connected far-flung regions through movements of peoples, goods, and ideas, and at all times have been the enactors, repositories, and mediators of world-historical processes' (Wouters and Heneise 2022). The Himalayan and trans-Himalayan have also been analysed as a zone of retreat akin to or even part of 'Zomia' in highland Southeast Asia (Van Schendel 2002, Shneiderman 2010, Giersch 2010, Samuel 2015). The essence of a border is to separate the 'self' from the 'other' (Newman 2003: 14). By creating 'otherness', we create separate identities through the maintenance of the border. The location of the boundary may change through time, as some groups or territories expand and others decline, but they will always demarcate the parameters within which identities are conceived, perceived, perpetuated and reshaped (Newman 2003: 15). The acknowledgement of continuing interconnectedness and flows of ideas, networks and identities does not mean that there have not been conspicuous ruptures in the history of frontier spaces like the Himalayas.

16   An important point to bear in mind is the enduring presence of the traditional Tibetan geographies in the region we are addressing. The exigencies of war propaganda and imperial frontier-making through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries produced the spatial and territorial entities of the Himalayas and trans-Himalayan Tibetan cultural regions as 'borderland' areas between empires and now nations, erasing local histories, polities and communities in the process (Mukherjee 2024b forthcoming). Tibet did not disappear on its own, it was made to disappear. A few decades since 1951 we are speaking of Himalayan regions where pre-colonial Tibetan states are a spectral presence that may or may not be explicitly acknowledged depending on institutional and national politics of scholarship.

17   The British installation and then the end of the princely state in Jammu and Kashmir transformed it into a site of proprietorial claims and militarised conflict between India and Pakistan, disrupting and breaking historical connections and flows (Kaul 2010). The unresolved India-China border dispute is another imperial inheritance, whereby heavy militarisation, open conflict and severe prohibitions on cross-border flows and movements since the 1950s have played both a restrictive as well as productive role in shaping the landscape. When flows are interrupted, they are not ended or wholly lost, but modified and reshaped. New paths, networks and identities are formed by new authorities as well to bypass and undermine those same authorities. For instance, the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the exile of more than a hundred thousand Tibetans primarily in India and Nepal was a major rupture in the Tibet and Himalayan region but led to the transformation and rejuvenation of old and even the creation of new Buddhist circuits in India (Gohain 2023).

Networks, identities and place-making

18 Place is partially elaborated by means of the social but this does not legitimate the claim that place is merely a social construction (Malpas 1999). According to Tim Cresswell (1996), place is about two things – belonging and relation. One belongs to a particular place, and one's place is clearly related to one's relation to others. Jeff Malpas's analysis extends this by arguing that places have a character and are always positioned in relation to other places, which allow a view of their character relative to other places. The idea of a place encompasses both the social activities of people and institutions, as well physical objects that constrain and are sometimes constrained by these social processes (Malpas 1999: 35). Geography and ideology intersect, according to Tim Cresswell. Space and place are used to structure a normative landscape – what is appropriate where, and who belongs where (Cresswell 1996: 9). The effect of place is not simply geographical but has a socio-cultural character which, in turn, is undergirded by power. Thus, colonial geographies of power and their postcolonial continuities mark normative landscapes that can be contested. The different papers in this collection all speak to place-making, in this sense, as both geographical, social, cultural and not limited by physical location but extending or reaching outwards to encompass, forge and claim new networks.

19 We see place and place-making as both socially constituted and constitutive; in its social expression it does not exist as a neutral slate but is actively connected to collective identity. Place and identity – ethnic, national or transnational – go hand in hand in our understanding. Scholars who have critiqued identity for its implications of homogeneity and for silencing internal differences (Hall 1996) have also proposed alternative terms, such as 'interpellation' or 'identification' (Cooper 2005, Hall 1996). In our theoretical framework, we see place and identity as not being separate from each other, for places are embodied identifications.

20 Networks are a third and important vector for complementing the triadic keywords of place-identity-network. After Bruno Latour (2005), the study of networks has become overwhelmingly associated with actor-network theory and science and technology studies, and as an analytic tool to understand the human, the non-human, and the technical entanglements. Insofar as the papers in this volume consider the imbrication of capital, tourism infrastructure, state and global power as different network 'effects' or 'new kinds of connection that have come about as a result of technological advances which have enabled greater movement of goods, people and ideas along routes and trajectories' (Knox et al 2006), they are working with networks. But we also look at how networked societies are not only a result of capital's new configurations in an increasingly connected world, albeit carrying its own disconnections and dislocations, but also at how communities that are territorially dispersed, or removed from their national frameworks, can still forge new networks and inspire collaboration and comparison.

21 In this conversation on networks, identities and place-making, our contributors do not take categories of identity or place for granted but examine multiple – and sometimes contested – ways in which these operate and are constituted. We defy the disciplinary boundaries of History, Political Science, Anthropology, Religious Studies and Political Economy, as we are driven not by disciplinary conformity but by a primary desire for the investigation of interconnected networks and processes in the broader Himalayan

and trans-Himalayan region. We are conscious of bringing together regional and empirical content from the Indian Himalayas as well as the trans-Himalayan Tibetan regions. For various reasons, including academic specialism, access to the field, and methodological nationalism (Glick-Schiller and Wimmer 2002), the study of the region so far has been fractured and fragmented to the point where research on Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, the eastern Himalayas and the western Himalayas often do not speak to each other. As Gellner (2013: 5) reminds us in the context of northern South Asia, 'methodological nationalism takes for granted national units that have in many cases existed only for a very short time, leading to considerable distortions of the historical record and great lacunae in what is studied'.

22   Here, we analyse Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions historically and in the present, foregrounding the intersections and constitutive interactions between them and amongst them. The multidisciplinary nature of this special issue therefore brings perspectives from the ancient past to the present day, including works by historians of ancient India and the colonial period, and anthropologists and political scientists who work on the contemporary period. The analysis of different parts of the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions offered here emphasises the interconnectedness of histories and the present when it comes to networks, identities and place-making. It reminds us that the Tibeto-Himalayan region is a living entity where the ethos of cultural and ecological preservation are important but ought not be a defining and restricting aspect. When moving beyond security and strategy, there is often a popular focus on fragility or beauty or both, and what is overlooked are the varied lived realities of vibrant cultures and communities.

The future of Himalayan Studies

23   The papers that comprise this special issue come from a conference co-organised by Ashoka University and the University of Westminster's Centre for the Study of Democracy, held in January 2023 at Ashoka University in India. The *Himalayas from its Edges: Mobilities, networks and geographies* brought together researchers whose cutting-edge work on the region transcends the disciplinary and area studies boundaries that typically limit the scope and impact of such scholarship. Our commitment to advancing the academic (and frequently political) project of undoing the legacy of arbitrarily placed borders is offered as a provocation to the readers of this issue. By proposing to understand the Himalayas from its *edges*, we centre the transnational and connected nature of the mobilities, networks and geographies that make up the vast expanse of these mountains. Read as a whole, this special issue brings together interdisciplinary perspectives from scholars for whom the Himalayas are much more than an academic fetish, foregrounding voices that are themselves frequently marginalised in an academic landscape dominated by the interests of the so-called Global North.

24   Sanjukta Datta locates us in Magadha between the fifth and fifteenth centuries CE, and by using epigraphic sources, explores the transregional interconnected networks that brought Buddhist scholars from Nepal, Tibet and China over the Himalayas to this ancient seat of learning to exchange ideas, expertise and knowledge. Historical networks such as the ones uncovered in this paper can be retrieved to counter the normative geographies of national borders in the present. Swati Chawla then moves us to Gangtok in the twentieth century to explore the cosmopolitan worlds of the

Himalayan kingdoms, where Sikkimese, Bhutanese and Tibetan nobility were witness to and implicated in a new lexicon of place-making and border-building by the British colonial state in India. Such a focus on historical friendships and identifications across territorial boundaries indicates the subjective aspects of place. Following this, Tenzin Desal invites us to rethink conceptual understandings of indigeneity in Tibetan populations in the contemporary states of India and China, demonstrating the possibilities and limits of those frameworks. Tenzing Palmo complements this insight by offering a critical take on intellectual networks embedded in place among Tibetans in exile, where the scope of a questioning public sphere is limited by the view that democracy is a gift bestowed by the Dalai Lama. Kaustubh Deka further sharpens this lens by focusing on the lived realities of the people of the Arunachal Pradesh region, enquiring into the making of a complex and dynamic zone that creates new networks between nature and nationalities, challenging borders artificially imposed by modern nation-states.

25 'While "connected histories" that de-center the nation-state have offered a way to move beyond essentialisms in other historiographical contexts, this is not a clear-cut corrective in the case of the Himalaya where the region has sometimes been read as outside of history' (Maran and Warner 2016: 33). Histories, polities, cultures, ideas and practices all remain central for understanding the Tibeto-Himalayan region. The spatial transformation of the Himalayas illustrates clearly how frontiers and borderlands, rather than being liminal spaces between states and capital or complete worlds unto themselves, are integral to forming the very nature of 'modern' regions, realised as they are through the reconfiguration of different geographies across the world. '[I]t is vital that we create spaces and conversations for our knowledges to reflect the interlinked realities that are simultaneously political/social/economic/ecological/cultural' (Kaul 2022b). While geopolitical contestations between contemporary nation-states have long limited our imagination of the Himalayas to their place in the practices and vocabulary of frontier management, a collection such as ours assertively reopens space for seeing these mountains in their multiple modes of being.

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ABSTRACTS

While the perspectives of sovereign nation-states have tended to dominate how the Tibeto-Himalayan region has been shaped, viewed and lived in the last century, we argue for adoption of multidisciplinary perspectives that focus on flows and interactions rather than the limited frames of state-centred exchanges. Collating empirically grounded studies from different parts of the Himalayas, this special issue highlights the cross-border networks, negotiated identities and politics of place that are directly and indirectly enabled by state practices and are enacted in the lives of the people in the region. This issue offers a critical understanding of the tangled role of cultural, material, political and economic factors that have informed historical and contemporary processes in the Himalayas. In this introductory paper, we highlight the Himalayas as a productive site of contestation before identifying some of the connections and ruptures that mark it. A useful way to understand the region and its peoples is through the foregrounding of networks, identities and place-making that mark its lived realities.

Alors que les points de vue des États-nations souverains ont eu tendance à dominer la façon dont la région tibéto-himalayenne a été façonnée, vue et vécue au cours du siècle dernier, nous

plaidons pour l'adoption de perspectives multidisciplinaires qui se concentrent sur les flux et les interactions plutôt que sur le cadre limité des échanges centrés sur l'État. Rassemblant des études empiriques provenant de différentes parties de l'Himalaya, ce numéro spécial met en lumière les réseaux transfrontaliers, les identités négociées et les politiques de l'espace directement et indirectement rendues possibles par les pratiques de l'État et impactant la vie des habitants de la région. Ce numéro offre une compréhension critique du rôle des facteurs culturels, matériels, politiques et économiques qui ont influencé les processus historiques et contemporains dans l'Himalaya. Dans cet article introductif, nous soulignons que l'Himalaya est un site producteur de contestations avant d'identifier certains des liens et des ruptures qui le caractérisent. Une manière utile de comprendre la région et ses populations est de mettre en avant les réseaux, les identités et la création de lieux qui marquent les réalités vécues par ses habitants.

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Beyond the Buddhist heartland: Magadha's Himalayan and trans-Himalayan networks (fifth to fifteenth century CE)

Au-delà du cœur bouddhiste : les réseaux himalayens et transhimalayens de Magadha (du cinquième au quinzième siècle de notre ère)

Sanjukta Datta

Introduction

1 Ancient Magadha or the region that corresponds to the south of the river Ganga in the southern part of the state of Bihar in eastern India constituted the heartland of Buddhism (*Madhyadeśa/Majjhimadeśa*) as the Buddha had spent considerable time propagating his teachings here in the sixth century BCE. Magadha witnessed a long history of Buddhist worship and scholarship until about the middle of the second millennium, attracting pilgrims from near and far to the monastic centres and sites related to the Buddha's biography that came to define its religious geography, such as Mahābodhi (modern Bodhgaya), Nālandā (modern Nalanda), Vikramaśilā (modern Antichak), Odantapuri (modern Bihar Sharif), Rājagṛha (modern Rajgir), Tailāḍhaka (modern Telhara), Ghośaligrāma (modern Ghosrawan) and modern Kurkihar. Over the centuries, patrons from afar left a deep imprint on Mahābodhi and Nālandā. At the same time, they steadily sought to recreate in their homelands some form of association with these two places through, what they perceived to be, the unparalleled sacrality of hallowed landscapes and authentic Buddhist scholarship of the highest order. In this paper, I explore Magadha's Himalayan and trans-Himalayan networks over a millennium (fifth to fifteenth century), with special focus on these two sites, using a combination of textual, inscriptional and art historical material. Dividing the paper into two distinct sections dealing respectively with the Buddhist heartland and

the trans-Himalayan regions, I foreground Buddhist devotional practices along with the patronage of monks, kings and laymen of political and social privilege in trans-regional contexts. Surviving documentary evidence of these connections dates from the fifth century, the following centuries being marked by cross-cultural traffic until the fifteenth century when Buddhist monastic activity significantly declined in eastern India.

2 There is a rich corpus on Mahābodhi's and Nālandā's premodern trans-regional Buddhist connections using sources such as textual accounts in Chinese and Tibetan; inscriptions in Sanskrit from Mahābodhi and Nālandā, and in Chinese, Tibetan, Burmese and old Mon from Mahābodhi; illustrated Buddhist manuscripts in Sanskrit produced in Nālandā; and Mahābodhi-inspired images and monuments reproduced in the Asian Buddhist world.[1] However, scholars have seldom adopted a *longue durée* approach to critically evaluate the interface between the two pre-eminent Buddhist sites and a particular geo-political or cultural region.[2]

3 Although their respective characters were markedly different, both Mahābodhi and Nālandā were multi-religious sites, distinguished by their sustained links with the premodern Asian Buddhist world. Mahābodhi was the place where the historical Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment (*bodhi*). It was included in the oldest known Buddhist pilgrimage circuit connecting the four sites where the Buddha's defining life-events had occurred (birth, enlightenment, first sermon and death), sanctioned by the founder of the faith himself. Over time, it came to be imagined as the locus of enlightenment for all Buddhas of the past, present and future. Nālandā, on the other hand, derived its widespread reputation from its association not with the Buddha's life but with a mega-monastery (*mahāvihāra*) whose nucleus was established probably around the fifth century CE, and which evolved into a highly regarded centre of Buddhist learning.

4 Both Mahābodhi's and Nālandā's Buddhist landscapes witnessed staggered growth but there isn't enough evidence to fully trace their built histories. What is certain in Mahābodhi is that, from at least the third century BCE, the focus of worship was an open-air shrine around the sacred fig tree (which came to be identified as the *bodhi* tree) and the stone seat beneath it (*vajrāsana*), commemorating the spot where the Buddha is said to have attained enlightenment. Multiple pieces of evidence strongly suggest that this shrine was built by Aśoka, the third-century BCE emperor of the Maurya dynasty. At some point, probably around the middle of the first millennium, primacy shifted from the tree to a towering brick and stucco temple of distinctive architecture, a greatly modified version of which has survived as the Mahabodhi temple (fig 1).[3] Enshrined within this temple was an image of the Buddha seated cross-legged in the earth-touching posture (*bhūmisparśa mudrā*), recounting the moment when he had called on the earth to bear witness to his enlightenment. This image became synonymous with the site and was thus referred to as the Mahābodhi or Vajrāsana Buddha. Nālandā, on the other hand, is the oldest known *mahāvihāra* in eastern India. Excavations at this brick-built monastic complex have revealed that it had been carefully conceptualised, following a basic plan of a row of massive temples facing a parallel block of spacious monasteries, organised along an east-west axis.[4]At least three of these temples were built sequentially from the fifth century onwards, and underwent rebuilding at different points in time, like many of the Nālandā monasteries. It has not been possible to ascertain whether, like Mahābodhi, the site had

a main ritual focus. If this had ever been the case, it would have undoubtedly been Temple no3, a gigantic *stūpa*/temple at the south-western end of the site, which was probably the oldest monument, and one that underwent numerous rebuilding phases (fig 2).[5]

Fig 1: Mahabodhi temple, Bodhgaya.

Photo: Sanjukta Datta. Date: 2013.

Fig 2: Temple No3, Nalanda.

Photo: Sanjukta Datta. Date: 2023.

5   It is not surprising that, as dynamic loci of Buddhist doctrinal developments, both Mahābodhi and Nālandā initiated major innovations in eastern Indian Buddhist art from around the sixth-seventh centuries.[6] Between roughly the eighth and the twelfth centuries, the two centres became prominent representatives of Pāla art, a term used as convenient shorthand for the art style that developed in the Bihar-Bengal region of eastern India during the reign of the influential Pāla dynasty.[7] Pāla art widely influenced Buddhist sculptures, paintings and architecture in various parts of Asia, including the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions.[8]

In the Buddhist heartland

From Sui-Tang and Song China

6   A discussion on Magadha's Himalayan and trans-Himalayan connections has to begin with the three textual accounts composed by the Chinese scholar-monks Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing between the fifth and the seventh centuries.[9] Although the nature of these accounts is somewhat different from each other (especially Yijing's seventh-century account compared with Faxian's account in the fifth century and Xuanzang's in the seventh century), all three belong to a distinctive tradition in the early history of Buddhism in Chinese territories. Buddhism had certainly been introduced into China by the first century CE, and it reached its peak during the Sui and Tang periods, between the late sixth and the early tenth centuries. Over these centuries, the transmission of Buddhism was facilitated by the movement of monks from Central and South Asia, visits of native Chinese to the Buddhist heartland, state-sponsored translations of a

variety of foundational texts (largely belonging to the Mahāyāna tradition), the construction of cave-shrines and monasteries, as well as the veneration of the relics of the Buddha. From the early fifth century, scholar-monks began writing accounts of their travels to the Buddhist homeland, documenting Buddhist sacred geography and reporting on various Buddhist matters, such as the workings of the monastic order (*saṅgha*) and modalities of worship. Faxian's account is the oldest such surviving record.[10]

7　Both Faxian and Xuanzang used the overland route at least one way, which makes it possible to get a sense of the arduous journeys that pilgrims would have had to undertake across the Himalayas to reach the Buddhist heartland. A little more than two centuries apart, both Chinese pilgrim-monks set out from Chang'an, the western capital of the Tang dynasty, close to the modern city of Xian in Shaanxi province of north-western China. They traversed the arid deserts and the snow-capped mountains of China and Central Asia before entering north-western India.[11] From there, they travelled south-east along the rivers Ganga and Yamuna to reach Magadha. In the seventh century, Chinese and Korean monks also took the route through Nepal and Tibet, as is evident from Yijing's compilation of a biography of fifty-six contemporary or near-contemporary monks.[12] Moreover, the itineraries of these Sui- and Tang-period monks show that the Mahābodhi monastery and Nālandā were regular sojourns. As for Yijing, he lived in Nālandā for a whole decade, studying and translating Buddhist texts under learned monks, like Xuanzang before him who had spent about two years at this monastery. Consequently, the accounts of these two monks along with Xuanzang's biography provide an overview of the nature of Buddhist scholarship at this distinguished monastic centre, the names of earlier and contemporary teacher-monks of renown and the types of subjects that were studied (Li 1995: 94–95, Li 1996: 250–251, Li 2000: 43,149–150).

8　The accounts of Faxian and Xuanzang – *Foguo ji* (*Record of Buddhist Kingdoms*, completed in 414) and *Datang xiyu ji* (*Record of the Western Regions from the Great Tang*, completed in 646) – are crucial for grasping a sense of the scale of memorialisation and built histories of Mahābodhi and Nālandā about a thousand to twelve hundred years after the Buddha's death. By this time, both sites were dotted with temples, monasteries, *stūpas* and images of the Buddha and *bodhisattvas*, many of them commemorating spots where noteworthy episodes were believed to have occurred either in the Buddha's lifetime or during his previous births. In the case of Mahābodhi, Xuanzang's detailed description of the lofty brick and stucco edifice firmly establishes the seventh century as the *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the Mahabodhi temple (Li 1996: 217–220). However, it is not good practice to use Chinese Buddhist accounts as authoritative guide maps for visualising Magadha's sacred geography, as is frequently done with *Datang xiyu ji*. For instance, Xuanzang's layout of Nālandā, particularly the relative location of its monasteries, does not correspond to the plan of the excavated site (fig 3). Moreover, the sequence of successive kings of the Gupta dynasty in central India, whom he identified as patrons of these monasteries, is historically inaccurate (Asher 2015: 33–34, Deeg 2020: 252–253).

Fig 3: A comparative representation of the excavated remains of Nālandā (left) and the layout of the site as described by Xuanzang (right). The blue squares numbered 1 to 6 in Xuanzang's layout represent monasteries.
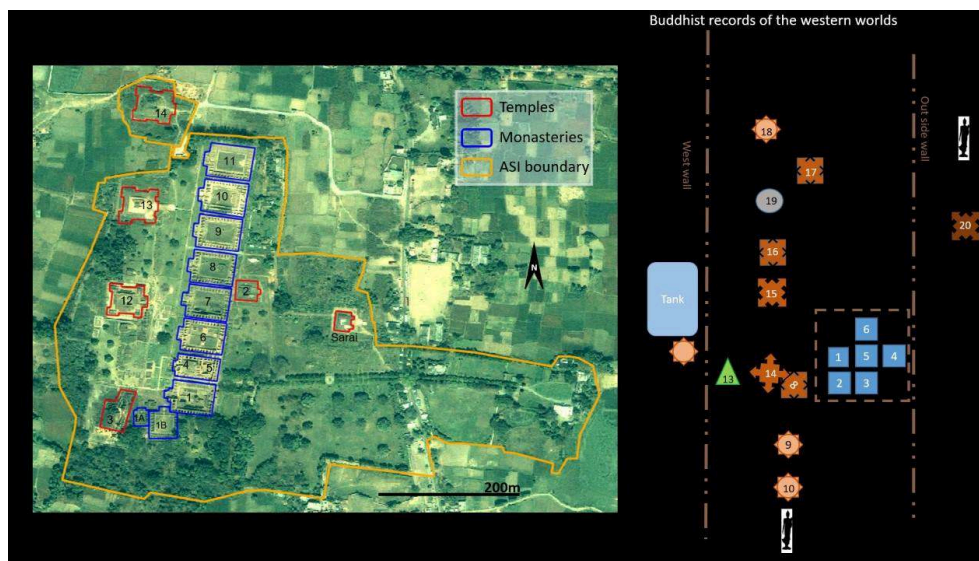

Photo: M B Rajani.

9   Mahābodhi remained a frequent stop-over not only for Chinese monks but also envoys deputed by two successive Tang emperors. The Taizong and Gaozong emperors sent two imperial missions from Chang'an to the court of the post-Gupta king of northern India, Harṣavardhana of Kanauj, in the 640s and 650s.[13] In 645, for instance, in the course of the second Tang mission, Wang Xuance, a diplomat and second-in-command, visited the Mahābodhi monastery and placed an inscription beneath the *bodhi* tree.[14] Thirteen years later, in 658, when he led the fourth mission, the head of the Mahābodhi monastery organised a grand reception, bestowing precious gifts upon the Chinese emissary while the Chinese entourage presented the Mahābodhi monastery with a monastic robe on behalf of the Gaozong. Given that the monk's robe was infused with great symbolism linked to the transmission of Buddhist *dharma* in Chan Buddhism in the early Tang period, the gifting of a robe at Mahābodhi is strongly indicative of Tang China outgrowing what Antonino Forte calls China's pronounced 'borderland complex' or a sense of inadequacy resulting from the spatial and chronological gap between its early exposure to Buddhism and the origins of the religion in eastern India (Forte 1985: 122–128).[15]

10   The Tang dynasty succeeded in establishing independent Buddhist credentials for its empire and in emerging as the source for the dissemination of Buddhism in East Asia. It came to project its dominions as a sacred realm, on a par with the Buddhist homeland, through the invention of pilgrimage centres that drew devotees from near and far. The best example of such a sanctified locale would be Wutaishan (Mount Wutai), the snow-covered mountain in north-western China, which came to be recognised from the seventh century onwards, throughout the Asian Buddhist world, as the abode of the *bodhisattva* Mañjuśrī, personifying supreme wisdom.[16] Magadha's connections with Wutaishan can be traced back to mid-660 when a ninety-four-year-old monk of Sri Lankan origin named Shijiamiduolo (probably Śākyamitra in Sanskrit), who had studied at the Mahābodhi monastery, became one of the first monks from South Asia to visit this sacred site. Interestingly enough, trans-regional networks were instrumental in

the popularisation of the worship of Mañjuśrī in both Tang China and Magadha around the seventh–eighth centuries. Amoghavajra, one of the most influential Indian Tantric Buddhist monks in eighth-century China, actively promoted Mañjuśrī as the protector deity of the Chinese emperor and his dominions. Chinese pilgrims, such as Yijing, might have been responsible for bringing the Mañjuśrī cult into vogue in Magadha. According to Jinah Kim, Mañjuśrī of Wutaishan was almost certainly the inspiration behind the emergence of a specific iconographic type in Nālandā from the late tenth to the early eleventh century: Mañjuśrī riding an animated lion. This particular form bears remarkable similarity with what is identified as 'new-mode Mañjuśrī' in the early-tenth-century Buddhist caves of Dunhuang, an oasis city in north-western China (Sen 2003: 76-86, Kim 2022: 197–203).[17]

11   Yet, despite Tang China's assertive reinvention of its empire as a Buddhist holy land, Magadha continued to be a sought-after destination for Chinese Buddhists, with a peak registered during the Song period that lasted between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries. Song China witnessed another resurgence of Buddhism under the active patronage of its early emperors. Consequently, during the tenth and the eleventh centuries, there were intensive exchanges between the Buddhist homeland and trans-Himalayan regions, characterised by the arrival of monks from South Asia (including those from Magadha) to territories under the Song, visits of Chinese monks to pilgrimage sites in India, the procurement of Buddhist literature and perhaps, most significantly, the revival of the project to translate Indian Buddhist texts.[18]

12   Regarding the many Song-period monks who would have come to Magadha and left records of their acts of piety, details of the merit-making activities of a few of them can be found in five Chinese inscriptions dating between the end of the tenth century and the third decade of the eleventh century.[19] The inscriptions attest to the fact that three out of five monks travelled together from Song China, and between them the five erected small sandstone *stūpa*s and gifted gold-embroidered silken monastic robes to be hung over the *vajrāsana*.[20] Among these epigraphs, the two most distinctive ones are those of a monk named Yunshu, dated 1022, and the imperial epigraph dated 1033.[21] Yunshu, who came from Xihe in north-western China, set up near the *bodhi* tree what appears to have been a stone *stūpa* bearing multiple images of the Buddha. The stone stele on which his long epigraph is recorded is a cross-cultural artefact that ingeniously weaves together text and imagery to highlight the Buddha's enlightenment. Although the shape of the stele borrows from the vertical back supports of contemporary eastern Indian sculptures, the text inscribed on it completely transforms it. And with regards its iconographic programme, the stele presents an unusual combination of two image-types closely associated with Mahābodhi: Buddha in *bhūmisparśa mudrā* and Marīcī, the Buddhist goddess of dawn.[22]

13   The royal inscription refers to the building of a *stūpa* besides the *vajrāsana* in memory of the deceased Song emperor Taizong, by the monk Huaiwen who had been deputed to Magadha by the reigning emperor Renzong (r 1022–63) and the empress dowager Empress Liu. While memorialisation at the site of the Buddha's enlightenment would have obviously been a supremely meritorious act by the deceased's grandson and daughter-in-law, Jinah Kim speculates about the timing of the imperial memorial, that is thirty-six years after the Taizong's death. Given that Empress Liu had been a politically astute figure in Song dynastic history, acting as the *de facto* ruler when her husband Zhenzong was fatally ill, and eventually serving as regent to her adopted son

Renzong until her death in 1033, Kim is probably right about the possibility of some political mileage being derived from this act. According to her, a political exigency in the form of growing pressure from Tanguts from the kingdom of Xixia to the north-west might have provided the occasion for erecting the royal memorial, helping to convey a message of alliance with Tibetans who had begun to place inscriptions at Mahābodhi from around this time (Kim 2022: 195). However, in the absence of any record of a contemporary Tibetan imperial mission or a royal inscription from Mahābodhi, it becomes difficult to identify this as the exact political motivation.

From the Tibetan regions

14   Incidentally, the resurgence of Buddhism during the Song era marks the period when Asian pilgrim traffic to Mahābodhi reached its highest peak (eleventh to thirteenth century), which is borne out by the site's unique, multilingual inscriptional corpus. During this phase, kings from Myanmar sent two missions to repair/restore the Mahabodhi temple, six lay donors from Tibet undertook a pilgrimage to mitigate the impact of an inauspicious constellation in their lives, a layman from Sri Lanka (probably with his wife and son) installed an image of the Buddha, and a Tibetan monk appears to have set up an image of the Buddha or that of a Buddhist deity.

15   Visits by Tibetan pilgrims at this point can be linked to the widespread resurgence of Buddhism in Tibetan territories from the mid-tenth century onwards, which was termed the 'latter transmission' or *Phyi dar* in Tibetan Buddhist historiographical traditions, to distinguish it from the 'earlier spread' or *Snga dar*. Historical evidence shows that during the Tibetan empire (seventh to ninth century), Buddhism had been established throughout the imperial domains that included parts of Central Asia, China and India. In the early post-imperial period, the Purang-Guge kingdom in western Tibet emerged as the main centre of a religious-cultural revival that affected several other Tibetan-speaking regions. During this time, royal patrons, as major architects of *Phyi-dar*, invited learned Buddhist masters from India and Nepal, sent young students to Kashmir to acquire Indic Buddhist teachings, sponsored monasteries (such as Tholing and Tabo) and ran an eminent translation school, facilitating Tibetan translations of a large number of Sanskrit Buddhist texts (especially Tantric works) by scholars from eastern India, Kashmir, Nepal and Tibet.

16   The revitalisation of Tibetan Buddhism was characterised by a strong belief that genuine Buddhism could be established through direct access to Indic Buddhist literature and the strict observance of Indic monastic rules. Magadha strongly influenced the re-shaping of Tibetan Buddhism and, from the thirteenth century onwards, the subcontinent at large and the region around Magadha in particular came to be identified in Tibetan works as the holy land (*Phagyül*). Within Magadha, Mahābodhi, which Tibetan adherents called *Dorjeden* (derived from *vajrāsana*), was imagined to be the geographical and cosmological centre of the world (Huber 2008: 74–84). Furthermore, one of the pioneering figures of the *Phyi dar* was Atīśa Dīpaṅkara Śrījñāna, an eminent monk from Magadha who was taken to Tibet by a special royal mission in the early eleventh century. According to most of the later Tibetan sources, Atīśa, who was the abbot of the Vikramaśilā monastery, had been initiated at Mahābodhi and had studied at Nālandā (Behrendt 2014: 6).

17   Among early Tibetan visitors to Magadha were scholar-translator monks, called *lotsawa*s (*lo tsa ba*), who came to pursue their Buddhist scholarship in eastern Indian monasteries. When used with caution, surviving hagiographical accounts of *lotsawa*s, called *namthar*s (*rnam thar*), are helpful in reconstructing a picture of contemporary monastic pursuits and lay devotional activities in prominent centres of eastern Indian Buddhism. One such *namthar* is about Dharmasvāmin (Chos-rje-dpal) (1197–1264), a revered thirteenth-century *lotsawa*. Dharmasvāmin travelled through Magadha between 1234 and 1236, studying under Buddhist teachers in Nālandā and Rājagṛha, against the backdrop of Turkish military raids from northern India. In reference to this period of turmoil, he mentions Buddhist centres that had either been abandoned (such as Vikramaśilā and Odantapuri) or those whose activity had been temporarily discontinued (as in Mahābodhi, Nālandā, Vaiśālī and Rājagṛha).[23] Consequently, his *namthar* is widely considered to be an eye-witness account of the demise of Buddhism in eastern India. This is problematic because the end of Buddhism is a very complex issue and has to be understood as a process of gradual decline brought about by a combination of historical factors.[24]

From the Khasa kingdom across the Himalayas

18   Tibetan pilgrims were not the only ones to maintain links between Mahābodhi and the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions in the thirteenth century. In the second half of the thirteenth century, some associates of King Aśokacalla (r 1251–1278) of the Khasa-Malla dynasty of western Nepal recorded their patronage in Mahābodhi by inscribing a few epigraphs in Sanskrit.[25] In 1253–55, Aśokacalla's royal preceptor and a couple of functionaries built a monastery (*vihāra*) wherein they placed an image of the Buddha. They assigned the daily task of offering food to the deity to the Sri Lankan *saṅgha*, which by this time seems to have emerged as the custodian of worship at Mahābodhi.[26] Aśokacalla's royal preceptor appears to have been based at Mahābodhi for some time, evidently involved in the upkeep of the sacred site. This can be inferred from the epigraphs dating from 1278 and 1274–79, found in Bodhgaya and neighbouring Gaya respectively. The first of these records local king Buddhasena's gift of land to Dharmarakṣita, who is identified as chief preceptor of Aśokacalla and royal preceptor of Kamā (modern Kumaon).[27] Through this endowment, Dharmarakṣita was made responsible for handing over a section of the landed property at Mahābodhi to Sri Lankan monks, some of whom had stayed there while others had returned home. The second epigraph documents the way Dharmarakṣita sought Aśokacalla's consent before overseeing the construction of a shrine for the Buddha by Puruṣottamasiṃha, a king of the Kamā region, in memory of his dead grandson. Like Aśokacalla's own officials, his younger brother Daśaratha's treasurer was a benefactor at Mahābodhi. In 1278, he performed some merit-making activity (*deyadharma*), details of which are unspecified in his inscription but which could have involved building a shrine, dedicating a Buddhist image or gifting land.

19   At Mahābodhi, the endowments of these functionaries, manifestly representatives of Aśokacalla, have to be situated within the history of the origins of the Khasa-Malla dynasty, the geopolitics of the Khasa kingdom and the nature of Aśokacalla's kingship.[28] Kings of the Khasa-Malla lineage, whose exact linguistic and ethnic identity remain uncertain, ruled over a large, culturally diverse kingdom that existed between the

twelfth and the fourteenth centuries. At its peak, the Khasa kingdom stretched across south-eastern Tibet and north-western Nepal, extending into the Kumaon and Garhwal regions of Uttarakhand in the central western Himalayas. The political integration of these territories in the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions coincided with growing economic and religious-cultural networks because some of the most important trans-Himalayan trade and pilgrimage routes passed through the Khasa-Malla territories (Pande no date, Michaels 2024: 99–102).

20   Aśokacalla actively contributed to the expansion of the Khasa domain in multiple directions, in keeping with the expansionist policy of his father, Krācalla. Samuel Grimes attributes to Aśokacalla a pivotal role in the Khasa-Malla dynasty's successful transition from what he calls the Tibetosphere to the Indosphere, following its likely origin as the house of Yatse in Guge, western Tibet. According to Grimes, the fact that Aśokacalla authorised inscriptions at Bodhgaya stemmed from his Indic inclinations (Grimes 2023). This might be a plausible hypothesis given the consistent claim made in Tibetan sources that Yatse rulers in the southeast of Purang originated from the royal lineages of Guge and Purang, coupled with Grimes' careful reading of Khasa-Malla inscriptions.

Patrons of Nepalese and Tibetan origin

21   Around the same time that Mahābodhi witnessed a peak in its trans-Himalayan networks, Nālandā saw an influx of patrons from Nepal and Tibet, actively involved in nurturing a Buddhist book cult. Between the late tenth and the thirteenth centuries, there was an efflorescence of a cult around the ritualised worship of Mahāyāna texts in Buddhist monasteries in the Bihar-Bengal region.[29] Although written texts had always been held sacred for being embodiments of the Buddha's *dharma*, their potency now came to approximate that of consecrated objects such as *stūpa*s and images. In eastern India, three texts were singled out for their unparalleled ritual efficacy – *Prajñāpāramitā*, *Kāraṇḍavyūha* and *Pañcarakṣā sūtra*s – and laypersons, seeking to acquire spiritual merit (*puṇya*), began to commission richly illustrated copies of these texts in large monasteries, especially Nālandā.[30] These manuscripts would most likely have served as dedicated visual aids for monks during meditation.[31]

22   The early medieval period in Nepal, spanning the centuries between the end of the Licchavi dynasty in the late ninth century and the beginning of the reign of several Malla clans from the early thirteenth century, was characterised by the emergence of city-states such as Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Patan in the Kathmandu Valley in central Nepal. The Kathmandu Valley had already developed into a major regional hub of Indic Buddhist traditions by the fifth–sixth centuries CE, and Vajrayāna traditions were consolidated in the early medieval period. This was a time when many new monasteries were built in these places and emerged as prominent centres of Mahāyāna-Vajrayāna scholarship, frequently attracting distinguished scholar-monks on their way to and from the Buddhist heartland and the Tibetan regions (Michaels 2023: 95–98, Lewis and Bajracharya 2016: 88–93).

23   The practice of making illustrated Buddhist manuscripts on rectangular palm leaf folios began almost simultaneously in monasteries in the Kathmandu Valley and in Magadha around the late tenth century, and cross-cultural interactions were evident in both of these traditions. For instance, while the use of palm leaves in a similar format might

have been introduced in Nepal from eastern India, it is highly plausible that it was the initial demand for manuscripts by lay and ordained Buddhists from Nepal and Tibet that boosted their production in eastern India (Pal 1978: 36, Kim 2013: 226). There was evidently a great demand for manuscripts of the *Prajñāpāramitā* and the *Pañcarakṣā* in the Kathmandu Valley because the largest number of copies of these two texts were made there from about the eleventh century onwards (Lewis and Bajracharya 2016: 90–91). The role of distant patrons in Magadha can be clearly identified from details about donors in precisely dated manuscript colophons but also sometimes via additional information attesting to the manuscripts' presence in Nepal or Tibet not long after their production.[32] For example, one of the oldest surviving copies of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* from Nālandā, dating from the fourteenth regnal year of the Pāla king, Nayapāla (mid-eleventh century), records that it was commissioned by Rāmajīva, a Nepalese (*nepāli*) lay donor, and that Svameśvara, a resident of Nālandā, was the scribe who wrote it (Kim 2013: 213–215).

24   Manuscripts from Nepal have also on occasion brought to the fore specificities of eastern Indian sacred geography. This is because, from the early eleventh century, illustrated manuscripts in Nepal began to portray sacred sites and their associated powerful cultic images not only from within Nepal but from across the Asian Buddhist world, such as India (many of which were from Bihar and Bengal), Sri Lanka, Java, Sumatra, Central Asia and China. One such *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscript, dated 1015 and prepared in a monastery called Shri Hlam in Nepal, identifies an Avalokiteśvara image in Nālandā as being associated with Candragomin, a well-known mid-fifth-century lay Buddhist master from eastern India (Kim 2013: 56–57, 88, 95, 214–5).

25   Once the practice of commissioning illuminated Buddhist manuscripts had been initiated, patronage was extended by lay men and women of high social status from eastern India, and ultimately by indigenous monks and nuns in the mid-twelfth century. But even when domestic donors dominated the scene, it was not uncommon for Tibetan monks to commission manuscripts in Magadha. For instance, in the early twelfth century, in the thirty-seventh regnal year of Rāmapāla, Vijayakīrti, a monk (*bhikṣu*) of Tibetan origin (*Cīṇadeśa*) residing in Nālandā (*Nālandānagara*), commissioned a richly embellished manuscript of the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* which was prepared by a *dharma*-preacher (*dharmabhāṇaka*) named Kanakamuni-jāgeśvara.[33] The manuscript is unusual in that it bears individualised portraits of Nālandā's Buddhist monks engaged in various activities, including meditating over a book, thus providing visual evidence of contemporary monastic usage of illustrated manuscripts. In the same century, another Tibetan *bhikṣu* named Puṇyakīrti donated a manuscript of the *Maitreyavyākaraṇa*, which was prepared in Ghośaligrāma (Kim 2013: 264, 116–17 footnotes 5 and 6, 118).

From the Buddhist heartland

26   In the history of the spread of Buddhism across Asia, the circulation of material objects, such as relics of the Buddha and copies of images of the Buddha and of other Buddhist deities associated with specific locations, played a crucial role in spatially and culturally integrating diverse regions and in drawing adherents to the Buddhist imaginary. In the context of Magadha's interface with the Himalayan and trans-

Himalayan regions in the first and the second millennium of the Common Era, replicas of famous image-types and monuments associated with the Buddhist heartland facilitated the transposition of Magadha's sacred landscape onto locales far removed from the birthplace of Buddhism. For instance, an image of Maitreya under the *bodhi* tree was copied in the course of the second Tang mission by an artist named Song Fazhi and was later used as a blueprint for a sculpture at the Jing'ai monastery in Luoyang and a golden image in Chang'an. Similarly, images from Nālandā had apparently inspired the eighth-century Buddha images that were set up by Amoghavajra in the Jin'ge monastery on Mount Wutaishan. Monks also played a pivotal role in the dissemination and re-creation of Magadha's monastic architecture in distant lands. For example, in the seventh century, Yijing and his compatriot Huilun sent back home models and sketches of the monasteries in Nālandā and Mahābodhi (Sen 2003: 38, 206–7, Lahiri 1986: 1–2). In the 760s and 770s, monks of Indian origin, Śāntarakṣita (who had been associated with Nālandā) and Padmasambhava, were closely involved in the building of Samye, Tibet's first Buddhist monastery. The monastic complex was allegedly modelled on Odantapuri, with a three-dimensional *maṇḍala*-like arrangement of smaller buildings around the central temple (Apple 2014: 106).

27 Mahābodhi was probably the only site in the Asian Buddhist world whose unparalleled sacrality generated a pan-Asian culture of replication in art and architecture from about the ninth–tenth century at least, if not earlier (fig 4 and 5). Consequently, miniature Mahābodhi images in stone, wood and cloth, terracotta plaques depicting the enshrined image within the sacred precincts of the Mahabodhi temple-complex, small-scale temple models in stone and wood, and even full-scale copies of the Mahabodhi temple found a home in different parts of Buddhist Asia (Asher 2012: 63–75). Among the wealth of re-creations of various types, it was reproductions of the Mahābodhi image that were adopted in both Tang China and in post-imperial Tibetan regions.[34]

Fig 4: Terracotta plaque depicting the Buddha in *bhūmisparśa mudrā* inside the Mahabodhi temple.

Photo: The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, USA (Public Domain). Gift from Michael De Havenon. Source: *JSTOR*, https://jstor.org/stable/community.24618070 (accessed 14 May 2024)

Fig 5: Stone model of the Mahabodhi temple.

Photo: The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Public Domain). Source: *JSTOR.* https://jstor.org/stable/community.18623084 (accessed 14 May 2024)

In Tang and Ming China

28 The Mahābodhi image was introduced into Tang China in the mid-seventh century and assumed its full-fledged form by the beginning of the eighth century.[35] It was eventually widely disseminated in the rest of East Asia and to some extent in Central Asia with the diffusion of the Tang Buddhist art style (Wong 2018: 52–53). Between the 660s and 680s, it came to be depicted on a large number of mass-produced, moulded clay tablets of an average height of 10 to 20cm, which have been discovered in a few monasteries in Chang'an. Since many of these tablets were found in the Large Wild Goose Pagoda of the Daci'en monastery, the primary centre of Xuanzang's translation activities, the pilgrim-monk had evidently been directly involved in the propagation of these portable icons. Scholars have identified two main types of these clay tablets in the Chinese context: the 'merit-clay' type, featuring the Buddha seated in *bhūmisparśa,* flanked by two standing *bodhisattva*s; and the 'Indian Buddha image' type, portraying the Buddha in *bhūmisparśa*, according to his contemporary Indian figural form, and stamped with the Chinese translation of the Sanskrit verse *ye dharma hetu*, the Buddhist formula of dependent origination.[36] As in all other parts of the contemporary Buddhist world, the dedication of these sealings would have been considered a highly efficacious, merit-accruing activity.[37] By the end of the seventh century, large reliefs and statues of this image-type began to be made in Chang'an and Luoyang and on cave-temple sites in Sichuan. That this iconographic form was derived from Mahābodhi was clearly established by label inscriptions that identified the images as being copies of the auspicious image of the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment (*ruixiang*).

29   From at least the eighth century, the Mahābodhi image in Tang China also came to be combined with another iconographic type from South Asia – the bejewelled Buddha – to form the hybrid image-type of the bejewelled Buddha in *bhūmisparśa mudrā*. However, unlike the Mahābodhi image-type, the bejewelled Buddha in *bhūmisparśa* had a more limited trans-regional impact. Found in places like Chang'an, Luoyang, Sichuan and Dunhuang, such unusual hybrid icons depict the Buddha with crowns, armlets and elaborate necklaces, often seated on a throne and accompanied by regal paraphernalia. And like the inscribed examples of the Mahābodhi image-type, bejewelled Buddha images modelled on eastern Indian prototypes are identified as such. For example, a few eighth-century silk paintings from Dunhuang categorise the type as the 'light-emitting miraculous image from the country of Magadha'.

30   The association with Mahābodhi prevailed in Ming China, albeit in a very different form. In the early fifteenth century, the Yongle emperor (r 1402–1424) began a copy of the Mahabodhi temple in Beijing, his newly established imperial capital. This temple, built on the grounds of the Zhenjue temple-complex, was completed in 1473, about fifty years after his reign. Before the Yongle, ambitious rulers of the Pagan, Pegu and Chiang Mai kingdoms in Southeast Asia had also built replicas of the Mahabodhi temple in their emergent capitals, between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries.[38] This was the period when the Mahabodhi temple came to be closely interlinked with kingship in the Asian Buddhist world through the figure of Aśoka, who had institutionalised worship at Mahābodhi. By recreating the monument associated with the patronage of this paradigmatic ruler in Buddhist history (*cakravartin*), later monarchs sought to project themselves as righteous Buddhist rulers and their capitals as the centre of the Buddhist world.

31   However, while aspiring to the common *cakravartin* ideal, each of these rulers was also reacting to their particular historical circumstances and imperial legacies. As Arthur McKeown's analysis shows, the Yongle emperor's patronage of the Vajrāsana *stūpa* (*jingang baozuo ta*)/Mahabodhi temple) stood out by the way it drew on imperial traditions in the Chinese realm and by a powerful connection with Mahābodhi through Śāriputra, the last known abbot of the Mahābodhi monastery (McKeown 2019). A Tantric Buddhist practitioner of eastern Indian origin, Śāriputra had been active in Nepal and Tibet before he was invited by the Ming court. There, he was appointed preceptor of the state and supervised the building of the replica on the basis of the plans that he had brought along.[39]

In the Tibetan regions

32   In the Tibetan cultural regions, from the early eleventh century onwards, understandings of Indic Buddhist sacred geography encompassed both sacred sites of early Buddhism concentrated in Magadha as well as a relatively newer network of Tantric cult-centres (*pīṭha*s) located outside Magadha. Moreover, the transfer of toponyms and the transposition of holy places came to be a distinctive Buddhist practice on the Tibetan plateau.[40] From around this time, associations with Mahābodhi were sought to be replicated through the Vajrāsana Buddha image, miniature copies of the Mahabodhi temple and scroll paintings (*thangka*s). In Tibetan areas, the Mahābodhi image came to be represented through relatively small metal sculptures (usually less than 15cm high) created in a modified Tibetan style following the late Pāla tradition.

The Tibetan re-creation stood out because of the portrayal of the Buddha with a short neck in *bhūmisparśa mudrā*, a particular style of the robe and the use of two separate metals for the Buddha's body and robe. Among these features, the Buddha's short neck and the use of two metals for his figure are unusual in the art of the Himalayan region and are clearly indicative of the image-type's association with Mahābodhi. Jane Casey Singer identifies the use of a brassy copper alloy for the Buddha's body along with red copper for his robe as clear inspiration from the eleventh–twelfth-century Tantric Buddhist text *Sādhanamālā*. An invocation in the text describes the Vajrāsana Buddha of the Mahabodhi temple as the one with a yellow-gold body, wearing a brown-red robe (Singer 2001: 44–45, 47–48).

33 Tibetan Buddhists had a special relationship with miniature models of the Mahabodhi temple, which might have functioned like the Tibetan portable shrine (*gawu*), housing their tutelary deity (*yi dam*) or as three-dimensional *maṇḍalas*.[41] Stylistically dated between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries, such fine-grained stone models (usually less than 20cm high) are unmistakable for the way they reference the Mahabodhi temple, notably through its signature pyramidal tower flanked by four smaller replicas at the corners. Their ritual import can be deduced from the fact that several models are painted in gold and each of them portrays at least one element of Buddhist significance, such as the Buddha's footprint, double thunderbolt (*vajra*) or scenes from the Buddha's life. Among these, two models made up of multiple components – one in stone and the other made of sandalwood – are unique in their depiction of the entire temple-complex.[42]

In the Khasa-Malla kingdom

34 Apart from the continuous history of inspired re-creations of its signature icon and temple architecture in China and Tibet, in the thirteenth century Mahābodhi also served as a channel for the transmission of eastern Indian sculptural art to the extensive Khasa kingdom. An interesting outcome of Aśokacalla's involvement in Mahābodhi was the influence of eastern Indian Buddhist art on the well-established tradition of casting metal images nurtured by the Khasa-Mallas from that period onwards. Khasa Malla sculptures, lavishly cast in gilt bronze or silver, are usually of a modest size (between 5 and 25cm), but are characterised by fine workmanship largely derived from the Newar style of the Kathmandu Valley. Apart from the Buddha, they frequently depict Buddhist deities of the Vajrayāna pantheon popular in Nepal and Tibet, such as Nairātma, Saṃvara, Hevajra and Bodhisattvas Avalokiteśvara Padmapāṇi and Ṣadakṣarī.[43] But the incorporation of prominent eastern Indian iconographic forms into the Khasa Malla corpus, such as the two-armed Prajñāpāramitā and the Vajrāsana Buddha, along with distinctive stylistic elements from Pāla sculptures, bears testimony to the trends in artistic influences (Alsop 2005: 1–5). In the Khasa kingdom, stylistic idioms were borrowed from various sources, as is evident from the influence of Tibetan regions, the Kathmandu Valley and different parts of northern India on the art of western Nepal (Andolfatto 2021: 73–74).

Conclusion

35 My analysis of Mahābodhi's and Nālandā's interactions with the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions in the course of a millennium reiterates the significance of adopting a long-term perspective in understanding cross-cultural encounters within Asian Buddhism. As places of trans-regional renown located within the Buddhist heartland, Mahābodhi and Nālandā steadily drew lay and ordained practitioners from mountain regions lying to the far north. A careful survey of extant literary and archæological sources has established that this circuit extended from the Himalayan regions of northern India and central Nepal to the trans-Himalayan areas of Tibet and central-northern China. In the period between the middle of the first and the second millennia, Magadha had sustained links with the kingdoms under the Tang and Song dynasties of China. Comparatively speaking, its relationship with post-imperial Tibetan territories, extending into the Kathmandu valley and the surrounding areas of Nepal, covered a shorter period beginning around the eleventh century. Magadha's most short-lived association was with the Khasa-Malla kingdom that straddled the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions, which was limited to the second half of the thirteenth century.

36 While some devotees travelling from distant places added to Magadha's sacred landscape by building *stūpas*, setting up shrines and gifting illustrated texts, others contributed to knowledge production around the site of the Buddha's enlightenment and eastern India's oldest *mahāvihāra* in the Asian Buddhist world by composing literary accounts and by bringing material objects. Monks from Magadha also periodically travelled to trans-Himalayan kingdoms, either on a pilgrimage or on more permanent assignments. Consequently, trans-regional influences remained multidirectional, which was perhaps most clearly manifest through the popular worship of Mañjuśrī in Tang China and in Magadha. This is materially reflected in the production of remarkable hybrid artefacts, such as visually enriched Chinese inscriptions from Mahābodhi as well as Vajrāsana Buddha images from Tibetan regions and the Tang territories in China.

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NOTES

1. Scholars who have worked over the last two decades on different facets of these trans-regional connections include Asher (2012), Datta (2021), Deeg (2019, 2020, 2021), Frasch (2021), Gongkatsang and Willis (2013), Kim (2013, 2022), Leoshko (2012), Sen (2003, 2006) and Singh (2014, 2016).

2. A notable exception is Singh (2016) who traces the long history of Burmese engagement with the Mahabodhi temple in Bodhgaya between the eleventh and the nineteenth centuries.

3. In the absence of either incontrovertible archæological evidence or an accompanying foundation inscription, it very difficult to establish an exact date for the building of this temple. However, it is known that the temple underwent a series of frequent repairs from at least the eleventh century onwards. See Myer (1958) and Malandra (1988) for the history of the Mahabodhi temple.

4. Extensive excavations have unearthed a total of six temples and eleven monasteries but in the past there were at least three additional temples and three to four additional monasteries. See Rajani (2016) for a reconstruction, using satellite imagery, of Nālāndā's original expanse, beyond the excavated area of approximately one square kilometre.

5. See Rajani and Kumar (2019) for the relative sequence in the construction of temples 12, 13 and 14 based on the authors' hypothesis about the orientation of these temples being carefully aligned to the rise of a particular target star, either Spica or Beta Librae.

6. A detailed discussion on the nature of Buddhist worship at Mahābodhi and Nālandā is beyond the scope of this paper but two major developments should be cited. At

Mahābodhi, the image of the Buddha in *bhūmisparśa mudrā* began to appear from the late sixth century as a symbolic reference to the Buddha's act of having achieved enlightenment at the site. Over time, the image-type assumed multiple meanings, reflecting the evolving conceptualisations of the historical Buddha. In the late tenth century, Nālandā seems to have emerged as the cult centre associated with eight principal miraculous events in the Buddha's life (*aṣṭamahāpratihārya*). Consequently, it emerged as a production centre for steles depicting this set of eight events arranged around the central figure of the Buddha's enlightenment at Mahābodhi. Such compositions referenced a pilgrimage cycle encompassing the eight sites where these events had occurred, emphasising the goal of Buddhahood. See Leoshko (2001) and Huntington (1987).

7. Nālandā's art production, which began in the first half of the seventh century, stood out by its fine sculptures in stucco, stone, bronze as well as its richly illustrated manuscript paintings. See Asher (2015).

8. See Huntington and Huntington (1989) for the transmission of Pāla art in Nepal, Tibet and China.

9. Li (1996, 2000, 2002). See Deeg (2021: 130) for why it is incorrect to identify these accounts as 'pilgrim records' as they are widely known.

10. See Deeg (2021) for a discussion on various dimensions of this tradition. See Poceski (2014): 41–51 for a broad historical survey of Buddhism in China until the Tang period.

11. Faxian and Xuanzang did not follow identical overland routes. The former passed through Dunhuang in north-western China, crossed the Tarim Basin in western China and then crossed over the Pamir and Hindukush Mountains in Central and South Asia. Xuanzang, on the other hand, used the northern Silk Road, crossed the Tianshan Mountain range and travelled through Central Asia, crossing the Oxus River. On his way back, Xuanzang crossed the Indus River and went over the Karakorum Mountain range. Deeg (2019: 3–6). See Sen (2006) for maps tracing the routes followed by Faxian, Xuanzang and Yijing.

12. Lahiri (1986). Yijing himself used the sea route through Southeast Asia to reach Magadha.

13. See Sen (2003: 15–54) for the role played by Xuanzang in initiating diplomatic exchanges between Tang China and northern Indian kingdoms, and the nature of these imperial missions. They represented a combination of politico-military, commercial and religious agendas that included the strengthening of Buddhist ties, and a common interest in checking Tibetan expansionism.

14. Just before reaching Mahābodhi, the mission placed an inscribed tablet at the foot of the Gṛdhrakūṭa Mountain in the city of Rājagṛha. Sen (2003: 38).

15. See Kieschnick (2000: 27–31) for legends related to the monastic robe as a symbol of the transmission of *dharma* in the lineage of the Buddhas and from a Buddhist master to his disciple.

16. See Sørensen (2018) for an excellent discussion on journeys undertaken by Korean Sŏn monks of the eighth–ninth centuries to China, the source of Chan/Sŏn Buddhism, including pilgrimages to Wutaishan.

17. The Buddhist cave site of Dunhuang comprises almost five hundred cave-shrines excavated between the fourth and fourteenth centuries. The site-complex has yielded a singularly rich set of mural paintings, painted clay sculptures, manuscripts, portable

paintings and textiles. In the revamped representation of Manjuśrī at Dunhuang, instead of being an attendant figure flanking the central Buddha image, the *bodhisattva* is the central icon surrounded by his own retinue. See Wang (2018).

18. Translation activities were now completely controlled by the state-sponsored Institute for the Translation of the *Sutra*s (*Yijing yuan*), later renamed Institute for the Transmission of the Dharma (*Chuanfa yuan*). On the revival and ultimate failure of the Song translation project, see Sen (2003: 102–141).

19. Inscriptions provide evidence of a mere fraction of the overall pilgrimage traffic to Magadha from the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions. A total of six Chinese inscriptions at Mahābodhi have been recorded, one of which is broken and consequently its donative purpose, if any, cannot be recovered. For a brief overview of the Chinese inscriptions, see Willis and Biondo (2021).

20. It was common practice for Chinese pilgrims to offer silk to the image of the Buddha at Mahābodhi. Yijing, for instance, mentions having presented a monastic robe, the same size as the Buddha image, made from a piece of silk that had been given to him by laity and monks on the eve of his departure from China. Lahiri (1986: 81).

21. For the translated texts of the two inscriptions, see Cunningham (1892: 69–71), Gongtaksang and Willis (2013: 437–438). For a comparative analysis of how these two Chinese inscriptions might have come to be engraved at Mahābodhi, see Gongkatsang and Willis (2013) and Kim (2022).

22. See Leoshko (2012) and Kim (2022) for an analysis of the portrayal, in the stele's top register, of the Buddha in *bhūmisparśa mudrā* flanked on either side by the figure of Marīcī. Since two other Chinese inscriptions also carry images that are stylistically similar to those on Yunshu's stele, Jinah Kim speculates that there was a sculptural workshop at the site dedicated to Chinese visitors. Kim (2022: 194, footnote 20).

23. For Dharmasvāmin's account of Mahabodhi and Nālandā, see Roerich (1959: 63–77, 90–97).

24. It is not possible here to present the historiography on the decline of South Asian Buddhism but suffice to say that the claim about Islamic iconoclasm being a major factor has been overly emphasised. See Amar (2019): 48–74 for an analysis of how archæological and epigraphic data relating to Buddhist institutions in thirteenth-century Magadha contradicts this enduring narrative. On the resilience of Buddhist monasteries in eastern India, see Kim (2013: 263–270). For a broader discussion around Buddhist-Islamic engagement in South Asia, see Truschke (2018).

25. There are three dated inscriptions from the Bodhgaya-Gaya area referring to Aśokacalla and his associates. But given their unusual mode of reckoning – number of years since the reign of Lakṣmaṇasena, an erstwhile king of Bengal, and number of years since the Buddha's *nirvāṇa* – the exact dates of these inscriptions have been a matter of scholarly debate. The dates suggested by M R Pant seem the most reasonable since he situates Aśokacalla within the broader Khasa-Malla chronology. See Pant (2009: 297–298). For the texts and translations of the inscriptions, see Indraji (1881: 342–344) and Vidyavinoda (1913–14: 28–30).

26. The complete history of Sri Lankan monks' institutional control over Mahābodhi remains unknown. Xuanzang's account provides one of the earliest references to a resident community of Sri Lankan monks living in the Mahābodhi monastery built by an erstwhile king of the island-country. Rongxi (1996: 227–229).

27. Buddhasena belonged to the local Pīṭhipati dynasty that had custodianship of Mahābodhi. See Balogh (2021) for the history of the dynasty and some of its rulers' association with Mahābodhi.

28. In the inscription of Daśaratha's treasurer, Aśokacalla is identified as the paramount king of Khasa country (*Khasadeśa*) in the *Sapādalakṣa* Mountains (*Sapādalakṣa śikhari*). While *Khasadesa* refers to the Karnali region in western Nepal, *Sapādalakṣa* indicates the Shivalik range. Vidyavinoda (1913–14: 30), Alsop (2005: 1–2), Indraji (1881: 344–345).

29. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, such manuscripts often contained complex Tantric Buddhist iconography and therefore are likely to have been commissioned by individuals whom Jinah Kim identifies as lay esoteric Buddhist practitioners. (Kim 2013: chapter 5, 240–247).

30. Prajñāparamitā, who personified the wisdom necessary for the attainment of Buddhahood, evolved from around the ninth century into an immensely powerful deity in Mahāyāna Buddhist worship in eastern India. This explains how *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*s – the foundational texts associated with her, recording the Buddha's teachings on transcendent wisdom – became central to the emerging book cult. Within the *Prajñāpāramitā* family of texts, it was the *Aṣtasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*, a work on metaphysics consisting of 80 thousand verses in its most complete form, which was considered to be supremely efficacious and was thus the text that was most often dedicated. See Shaw (2006:166–187) on Prajñāparamitā and Zacchetti (2020) on *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*s.

31. Since manuscripts more often than not identify Nālandā as their place of production, John Guy describes it as the 'parent-atelier' of the illustrated manuscript tradition (Guy 2011: 38). Nālandā was also a centre for iconographic innovations in eastern Indian manuscript traditions, including perhaps the standard representation of scenes from the Buddha's life in *Aṣtasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* manuscripts from the mid-eleventh century onwards. (Kim 2013: 87).

32. See Kim (2013: 226) for examples of two such manuscripts of the *Aṣtasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā* which made their way to Nepal and Tibet respectively in the thirteenth century.

33. *Dharmabhāṇaka*s, who were members of the monastic community, might have functioned as master scribes and ritual masters in the Buddhist book cult. The manuscripts prepared by *dharmabhāṇaka*s are distinguished both by the quality of their production and design. (Kim 2013: 260–261).

34. See Sen (2019) for a discussion about the impact of images and paintings from South Asia on the history of Buddhism in China as well as the role of South Asian and Chinese Buddhist art forms in the successful dissemination of Buddhism in East Asia, within the broad framework of the contributions of itinerant images in integrating, what he calls, the 'Buddhist cosmopolis' encompassing most of Asia.

35. The discussion on reproductions of the Mahābodhi image in Tang China is based on Wong (2018: 23–94).

36. By this time, the verse on dependent origination, which summarises the core Buddhist philosophy, had been established throughout the Asian Buddhist world as being singularly significant, and came to be inscribed on all kinds of sacred objects such as sealings, miniature *stūpa*s and images. See Boucher (1991).

37. The purpose of dedication can be inferred from Chinese inscriptions stamped on the back of some of the sealings of at least one particular type. (Wong 2018: 33–34).

38. See McKeown (2019: 213–252) for a detailed discussion of the re-creations of the Mahabodhi temple in Southeast Asian kingdoms.

39. See McKeown (2019: 253–75) for how the Yongle-Śāriputra's patron-preceptor relationship, along with the selection of Beijing as the site for the Ming monument, referenced elements of Chinese imperial history, especially the reformulated *cakravartin* concept by the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty of the early thirteenth century.

40. See Huber (2008: 100–121) for a discussion on Tibetan engagements with *pīṭha* sites, which included the creation of a new Tantric Buddhist geography in the Tibetan regions through the replication of cultic centres like Devīkoṭa. I thank Sayantani Mukherjee for calling my attention to Huber's work.

41. See Datta (2021: 83–85) for issues relating to the provenance and workmanship of these miniature temple models.

42. See McKeown (2019: 287–288) on the strong possibility of Śāriputra having been involved in the design and execution of the sandalwood model.

43. See Heller (2020) for some examples of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century sculptures of the Buddha in the Khasa Malla corpus.

ABSTRACTS

The Buddhist landscape of ancient Magadha, modern south Bihar in eastern India, constituted the religion's heartland because the Buddha had lived and taught here for a substantial period of time in the sixth century BCE. Within a few centuries after the Buddha's death, Magadha started developing strong trans-regional connections, attracting pilgrims from within and beyond the subcontinent to the many shrines and monasteries that came to define the region. While Magadha's robust translocal networks have been well established, a long-term history of its interface with the Himalayan and trans-Himalayan regions in the premodern period has yet to be charted. In this paper, I explore Magadha's connections with parts of Nepal, Tibet and China in the course of a millennium (fifth to fifteenth century CE), using a combination of texts, inscriptions, sculptures and other artefacts. Within Magadha, I focus on Mahābodhi, the place of the Buddha's enlightenment, and on Nālandā, the site of a renowned mega-monastery (*mahāvihāra*), since they had the most enduring transcultural links. Such an exercise highlights the evolving character of the Buddhist heartland and the perception of it in the Asian Buddhist world. It also demonstrates how cross-cultural influences contributed to shaping Buddhist practices both within and beyond the heartland.

L'ancien Magadha et son paysage bouddhiste (actuel sud du Bihar dans l'est de l'Inde) constituait le foyer central de la religion parce que le Bouddha y avait vécu et enseigné pendant une longue période au sixième siècle avant notre ère. Quelques siècles après la mort du Bouddha, Magadha a commencé à développer de fortes connexions transrégionales, attirant des pèlerins de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur du sous-continent vers les nombreux sanctuaires et monastères qui ont fini par définir la région. Si les solides réseaux translocaux de Magadha ont été bien établis, l'histoire

longue de son interface avec les régions himalayennes et transhimalayennes au cours de la période prémoderne n'a pas encore été écrite. Dans cet article, j'explore les connexions de Magadha avec certaines parties du Népal, du Tibet et de la Chine au cours d'un millénaire (du cinquième au quinzième siècle de notre ère), grâce à l'étude d'une combinaison de textes, d'inscriptions, de sculptures et d'autres artefacts. Au sein du Magadha, je me concentre sur Mahābodhi, le lieu de l'illumination du Bouddha, et sur Nālandā, le site d'un grand monastère (mahāvihāra), car ces deux lieux ont eu des liens culturels durables. Un tel exercice met en évidence le caractère évolutif du foyer du bouddhisme et la perception qu'en a le monde bouddhiste asiatique. Il montre également comment les influences culturelles ont contribué à façonner les pratiques bouddhistes tant à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur de ce foyer.

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A Tibetan window into the twentieth-century Himalayan world

Une fenêtre tibétaine sur le monde himalayen du XXᵉ siècle

Swati Chawla

[The] future of Asia depends on the goodwill and
neighbourly relations among Asiatic countries,
and of these China and India must obviously play
a dominant role.
— Jawaharlal Nehru, 1948[1]
We Tibetans used to call Jawaharlal Nehru
'*Chola*[2] Nehru.' *Chola* means brother…and in more
senses than one, he became so.
—The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso,
1975[3]
If you will come to our country,
We will put our golden saddle on our finest horse,
In our golden platter with a silver lid,
We will serve you.
There is no other sentient being like you,
And you are worth this grand welcome.
— Song welcoming the Fourteenth Dalai Lama to
Turtuk village in Baltistan, 2005 (Palsang 2009)

Introduction

1   Histories of migration on the Indian subcontinent in the twentieth century have emphasised the mass migration leading up to and following the Partition of British India into two nation-states on the one hand, and the formation of a large South Asian diaspora in Europe and North America on the other (Jalal 2014, Jayal 2013, Kapoor 2022, Roy 2016, Zamindar 2007). Recent studies have analysed the impact of this migration on regimes of citizenship-making and policies regarding refugees and other migrants

(Kapur 2010, Rai and Reeves 2011). However, they have not been sufficiently attentive to the longer history of customary movement across the subcontinent's Himalayan region, and how this migration was impacted on by the formation of the Republic of India (1947) and the People's Republic of China (1949) on either side of the mountain range. The region includes large areas of northern and eastern India, as well as the countries Nepal and Bhutan, and the erstwhile kingdom of Sikkim which became part of India in 1975. Historians studying South Asian nation-states have pointed to the role of itinerant religious men and women (and their organisations) in shaping the present political landscape (Chatterjee 2013, Dhulipala 2015, Gilmartin 1988). It has been pointed out in recent work that contemporary nation-states are plagued with colonial amnesia about these precolonial models of multiple, layered and polycentric sovereignties organised through religious patronage, which historian Indrani Chatterjee has characterised as 'monastic governmentality' (Chatterjee 2015). These monastic complexes scattered across the Tibetan cultural region spanned present-day central and western Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan and eastern, north-eastern and northern India; the 'monastic geographicities' tied together the region's householders, monastics, tax collectors and rulers through 'Hindu', 'Buddhist' and 'Muslim' ideals of gift-giving, movement and 'parivrajaka' or peripatetic renunciation (Chatterjee 2013, van Spengen 2000).[4]

2   The Fourteenth Dalai Lama is the most well-known of these renunciants in the contemporary period, but by no means the only one (Chawla 2022c). Tibetan monastics had been coming to India long before he went into exile, including his own predecessor the Thirteenth Dalai Lama who lived in exile in British India from 1910–12. In fact, Tibetans could enter British India without a passport, visa or any entry permit; the same had been true for Indians travelling to Tibet. The British Government had used this concession to make trade deals and political negotiations. The last British political officer in Sikkim, Arthur J Hopkinson, had ruefully observed that 'Tibetans get passport-free entry into India, which is more than the Chinese or French, or I myself get'.[5]

3   After Independence, when the government was questioned in the two houses of parliament about its preparedness against the Chinese military presence on India's borders, the deputy minister of external affairs B V Keskar admitted to the porosity of India's borders with Tibet, and the unfinished task of demarcation and of establishing an administration in the Himalaya. He told the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) on 9 February 1951 that the government had no record of the number of Tibetans who had entered India in the last quarter of 1950, or since the Chinese invasion (Anon 2006a: 9). Confronted by the magnitude of political disturbance in Tibet and the increasing numbers of migrants, the Indian government had to reconsider its open border policy for Tibetans. From December 1950, it required that Tibetans obtain a permit for entry and stay in India, and those who were already there were required to register themselves as foreigners. In April 1951, four months after the new regulations had come into effect, over three quarters of current residents (1,433 out of 1,939) and Tibetan newcomers (2,650 out of 2,835) were concentrated in the state of West Bengal, which bordered the kingdoms of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. Despite the change in regulations, entry permits were relatively easy to acquire at the time and the government did not take any particular steps to discourage increasing numbers of Tibetans coming to India in the wake of political changes in Tibet. A day before the

Dalai Lama reached India on 31 March 1959, Nehru pointed out that it was common for Buddhist monks from Ladakh to travel to Lhasa for religious instruction. Four head abbots from Leh were in Lhasa, and anywhere between thirty and a hundred monks were thought to be in Tibet. Nehru was unable to provide specific figures to the Lok Sabha because the monks were not required to register: 'they simply come and go, and do not report to us', he said (Anon 2006a, Anon 2006b). The fantasy of solid borders was challenged, as it has always been, by the daily movement of borderlanders in ignorance or breach of them (Gellner 2014, Radhu 2017).

4   Some modern lay literature written by Tibetan exiles constructs India as home and depicts refuge in India as a 'homecoming' or a return to the birthplace of Buddhism (Chawla 2010). This enabled Tibetans who had relinquished their homeland in Tibet to imagine a home in India.[6] On the Indian side, archival evidence reveals that an interconnected religious history and the claim of India being the fountainhead of the subcontinent's Buddhist heritage motivated supporters of the Dalai Lama within the government (and the parliament at large) to muster greater sympathy for the Tibetan cause (Chawla 2023c, Surendran 2024).

5   This article examines the interconnections between parts of the Indian Himalaya and Tibet in the period encompassing the escape of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama to India in 1959, which had been cultivated in centuries-old networks within families in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet through monastic patronage, colonial education, intermarriage, seasonal migration and trade. It draws on colonial and postcolonial archival sources from collections in India, the United Kingdom and the erstwhile Himalayan kingdom of Sikkim; oral histories and private papers of Indian political appointees; and a recently published memoir of a Tibetan family whose members lived under Chinese occupation and in exile and who had close ties with the Janus-faced Himalayan world under British colonialism via English boarding schools and intermarriage into Sikkim's aristocracy. It also makes use of Indian parliamentary proceedings from the first two decades after Independence.

6   While the broad theme of interconnections among Tibetan and Himalayan peoples has been extensively studied, the material from Sikkim, Bhutan and Ladakh brings fresh subtleties to the table. Contemporary histories of these regions – and of postcolonial India more broadly – have not been sufficiently attentive to the long history of interconnections with Tibet. The private papers of N K Rustomji, Apa Pant and other Indian appointees in Sikkim and Bhutan introduce a fresh perspective from a newly independent nation-state – different from both British and Indian sources from the colonial period – of undertaking the hitherto unfinished tasks of territorial consolidation (with the integration of princely states) and boundary-making. They also inform us of the long afterlife of precolonial and colonial networks in the lives of Tibetan exiles in the 1950s and 60s, which enriches the histories of Tibet and the Himalaya on the one hand and postcolonial India on the other. The article concludes with a reminder of older histories of syncretism in Ladakh, and the organic and reciprocal expressions of gratitude and reverence towards the Dalai Lama in the Himalaya that transcended on the one hand sectarian, religious and national boundaries, and on the other the rupture caused by his exile. It makes a case for a deeper understanding of contemporary subcontinental history through an appreciation of interconnected Himalayan histories which have, like the mountains themselves, long been relegated to the fringes.

'Indians had intense feelings about Tibet…'

7 On 18 December 1975, over sixteen years after he had come into exile in India, the Dalai Lama spoke of his first meeting with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in an oral history interview with the Gandhian biographer and historian B R Nanda in New Delhi. During the interview, a transcript of which is housed at the Prime Ministers Museum and Library (formerly, the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library), the Dalai Lama (b 1935) recounted their meeting in Beijing in October 1954, when he was just nineteen years old. Accompanying him was the Tenth Panchen Lama (1938–1989), three years his junior. The two teenage men were the senior-most monks in the Gelug order of Tibetan Buddhism; the Ganden Podrang government led by the Dalai Lama's line of incarnation had governed Tibet since the seventeenth century.[7] The Lamas were in attendance at a cocktail party as Chinese dignitaries, where Premier Zhou Enlai introduced them to Nehru (His Holiness the Dalai Lama 1975).[8]

Fig 1: (L-R) Zhou Enlai, Jawaharlal Nehru, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and the Tenth Panchen Lama in Beijing, October 1954. The Dalai Lama was nineteen years old at the time; the Panchen Lama was sixteen.
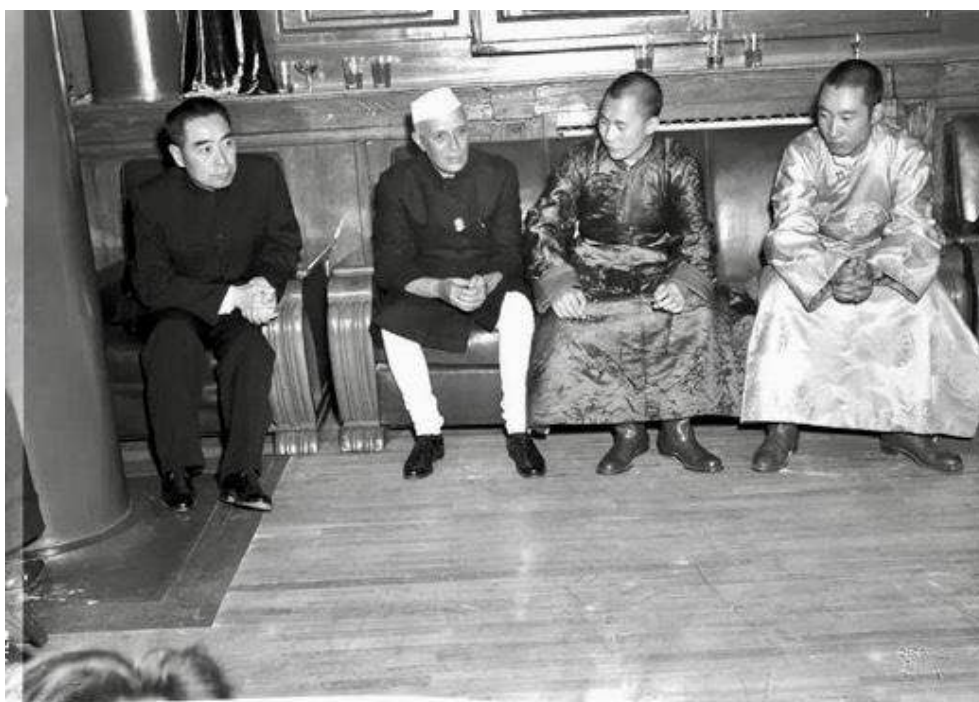
Source: Ghosal 2015

8 We need only pause at the provenance of their titles to understand their complex position at that meeting between Indian and Chinese dignitaries: *Dalai* is the Mongolian word for 'ocean', while *Panchen* is a portmanteau of 'pan di ta chen po', merging the Sanskrit *pandita* (scholar or expert) and the Tibetan *chen po* (great or supreme).[9] The Dalai Lama remembered speaking with Nehru via two interpreters, the first of whom translated from Tibetan to Chinese, and the other from Chinese to English. Some Tibetans among his staff could have translated directly from Tibetan to English, but 'the Chinese always emphasised that the translation should be through the Chinese

interpreters', he said. The Dalai Lama told Nehru that he was 'extremely happy to meet him', and had 'heard of his fame for many years'. Little else could be said verbally:

> I had the impression that he (Nehru) was also moved. He did not speak a word. For a few seconds he just kept silent and was holding my hand. Naturally, I also did not say much. I was also moved, felt very happy and did not know what to say... [T]he deep feelings we felt at the time could not be expressed adequately. It was like meeting a friend you had not met for many years, and then when you meet him you do not know what exactly to say. Then, I think, he said something like this: 'I am very happy to meet Your Holiness.' That is all. (His Holiness the Dalai Lama 1975)

9 They met a few other times on that visit, though 'one Chinese always was present'. With the benefit of hindsight, and now ensconced in the government-in-exile headquartered in India, the Dalai Lama offered an 'interpretation of this experience' to the interviewer: he had been in 'a foreign country' then, as had Pandit Nehru, and 'the land was not suitable for showing the true feelings'. The Dalai Lama believed that 'Indians in general had some intense feelings about Tibet, owing to cultural and religious affinities *from time immemorial*'. Tibetans in turn, '*since we are Buddhists*', '*naturally*' regarded India as a holy place and felt a 'deep down' affinity with Indians. Also, 'Lord Buddha was an Indian', the Dalai Lama said (His Holiness the Dalai Lama 1975, added emphases).[10]

10 Other autobiographical and third-person accounts record the striking affection and deference in his recollections of Nehru (Tenzin Gyatso 1990), who functioned as a synecdoche for India itself – the fountainhead of Buddha dharma, a refuge from persecution, and a guide and confidante: 'We can never forget his kindness and the right advice he gave. Although we were passing through the darkest period in Tibetan history, we were relieved to find a leader like Pandit Nehru who had so much sympathy for the Tibetan people' (His Holiness the Dalai Lama 1975). The Dalai Lama was not alone. Nehru was widely regarded in Tibet as a leader and sympathiser of anti-colonial movements. Leaders of the Tibetan 'Mimang'[11] or 'Peoples Party' practically accosted Sikkimese Political Officer Apa B Pant on his visit to Lhasa in 1957 and asked him to relay their 'deep gratitude and veneration' for the Indian Prime Minister whom they called 'Chogyal' or 'Dharma Raja'.[12] They believed that Nehru would 'protect religion not only in Tibet but in the whole outside world', and India was 'the only country which can and will help in their plight'.[13]

11 The Dalai Lama's claim of kinship with India and with its pre-eminent nationalist leader might seem surprising when compared with the assertions made by other Himalayan Buddhist nations – Bhutan and Sikkim – about their religious, racial and cultural differences with India at the time. The monarchs of the last two kingdoms claimed kinship with their northern neighbour Tibet, which was the source of their Buddhist faith, and of their political and social customs (Chawla 2022b, 2023a, 2023b). By contrast, the Dalai Lama saw India as the original home of Buddhism and thus a 'natural' ally to Tibetans.[14] Bhutan and Sikkim mirrored the racialised characterisation of their peoples as 'Mongoloids' and the colonial understanding of their kingdoms as India's 'Mongolian fringe' (Baruah 2013, Caroe 1980) to argue that they were irreconcilably different from India. The Dalai Lama instead stressed Tibetans' affinity and 'deep' affection towards India and Indians, which he believed were reciprocated, and spoke of China as the 'foreign country'. For him, India had been the consecrated land of dharma 'from time immemorial', and starkly contrasted with China (His Holiness the Dalai Lama 1975). The Dalai Lama has subsequently called himself 'a son of India' – for six decades of eating *daal-bhaat* (lentils and rice) have made his body Indian;

his mind, instructed by the Nalanda masters of yore, is also Indian (Anon 2016, Chawla and Balasubramaniam 2023, Gandhi 2014).

A view of 'the Himalayan triangle'[15] from Sikkim

12   While Buddhism had been the connecting tissue between Tibetan and Himalayan peoples for centuries, it was not the only one. At the time of his escape, the young Dalai Lama was far from blazing a trail in seeking refuge in India. Interconnections between aristocratic families in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet – who had close ties within intergenerational networks of monastic patronage, colonial education, intermarriage, seasonal migration and trade – had been thoroughly documented and closely monitored during the colonial period, especially through the British Political Office in Gangtok.

13   India took over the administration of Sikkim in 1888–89 and established the Political Office in 1890. Over the next three decades, India attempted to establish new structures of administration in Sikkim, modelled on those in the provinces, in sectors such as law and justice, health, education, taxation and communication systems (McKay 2021). The political officers in Sikkim were also responsible for Indian relations with Tibet and Bhutan, and were mostly recruited from among the 'frontier cadre', an elite corps of a few dozen men who had run British operations in the Himalaya, many of whom were fluent Tibetan speakers (McKay 1997). Traditionally, the political officer in an Indian princely state was supposed to be 'the Whisper behind the Throne, but never for an instant the Throne itself' (quoted in Duff 2015: 17). In Sikkim, however, they took a more overt and overbearing interest in the kingdom's affairs. The political officer's base, called the Residency, was topographically the highest building on the Gangtok mountainside. It towered over the palace in the pecking order, and quite literally too (Duff 2015: 21).

14   The Indian administration was conscious of the potential provided by education and employment to ensure its proximity with the elite in the region. Princes and princesses from Sikkimese and Bhutanese royal families, the Tibetan aristocracy and some of the Dalai Lama's own siblings often studied in English schools and colleges in the colonial capitals of Simla and Calcutta, as well as cosmopolitan centres like Kalimpong and Darjeeling near Sikkim, and also at universities in England (Harris et al 2016, Holmes-Tagchungdarpa 2019, Jetsun Pema 1998, Thondup and Thurston 2015). These included the Sikkimese Chogyal (Dharma King) Tashi Namgyal (r 1914–1963) and his children, some of whom subsequently joined the Government of India's employ, which further strengthened their loyalty. Tashi Namgyal's eldest son, Paljor, was a pilot officer in the Royal Indian Air Force and served in the Second World War (1940–41). At the time of his death in a flying accident in Peshawar (capital of the North West Frontier Province) in 1941, he had been preparing to transfer to Burma to fight the looming Japanese advance. After his passing, his younger brother Palden Thondup Namgyal became the heir apparent. In addition to an English education, Thondup had spent three years training as a monk at a Tibetan monastery. His mother's family lived in Lhasa and his first wife Sangay Deki was also from Lhasa. Thondup's sister Princess Coocoola was married to the Governor of Gyantse (in Central Tibet), who was from the family of Phunkang Shappe[16] in Lhasa (see Harris and Shakya 2003). Thondup's paternal cousin was Jigmie Dorji, whose family held the hereditary position of prime minister of

Bhutan, and the two had trained together at the Indian Civil Service (ICS) academy in Dehradun in 1942.

15   The British were acutely aware of the solidity of these interrelations between Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet, and understood the importance of these families as supporters of British policies in Sikkim and Bhutan, as links in their relations with Tibet and as a potential counterbalance to the (albeit weak) Kuomintang influence in the region (see Harris et al 2016, Singh 1988). Archival references to their role are often found in unlikely places, for example, in a 1942 file about the wool trade between British India and Tibet from the Sikkim Agency (under the Department of External Affairs) at the National Archives of India. Here, Basil Gould (political officer in Sikkim, 1935–45) recounted the educational, professional and personal details of some of these children to H Weightman, the joint secretary in the External Affairs Department in Delhi. Gould had taken a personal interest in Jigmie's and Thondup's education, and recommended them to the ICS course.[17] He said:

> The Sikkim New Year… fitted in with the beginning of the School holidays and we had with us the Sikkim Maharaja's children: Thondup—who had just done his Senior Cambridge Examination…; and Raja Dorji's children: Tashi, who has been working for her Intermediate Science examination —with a view to becoming a doctor— in Calcutta; Jigme[18] who is now Jongpen of Ha in Western Bhutan… and Ugyen and Lhendup (boys), who are at the Convent School in Kalimpong.
>
> It was recently 'discovered' that Ugyen is the spiritual successor of the Incarnate Lama of a monastery at Chaksam, where one crosses the Brahmaputra on the way to Lhasa. There were also five boys of good Lhasa families who are at school at St Joseph's, Darjeeling. The eldest Sikkim girl Coocoo, as you know, recently married the eldest son of Phunkang Shappe in Lhasa.
>
> They are all good specimens, full of intelligence and fun, and of excellent manners…
>
> I mention these children because individually and collectively, they, and the few who had already come and the many more who may hereafter come from Tibet to school in India, are likely to have a big influence on our relations with Tibet, and on progress in Sikkim and Bhutan.
>
> The Chinese, with their school in Lhasa, show that they realise the *political importance of education*. The Tibetan children provide *valuable link*s with several of the leading officials in Tibet. The youngest of them is the same age as the Dalai Lama.[19]

An interconnected Himalayan world: Tendöl's story

16   The 'valuable links' Gould alludes to in the above passage proved crucial to Tibetan families when they came into exile. A recently published autobiographical account *A Childhood in Tibet: Tendöl's story* (2021) by Tendöl Namling from the Namseling family captured the warp and weft of social relations in the Himalaya; the family itself serving as a microcosm for Tibetan aristocracy in the twentieth century. Tendöl was the youngest daughter of Paljor Jigme Namseling (ca 1908–1973),[20] an aristocrat whose family had been in public service from the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682). Since 1925 her father had held several high-ranking appointments in the Tibetan government; inter alia, as Dzongpön (*rdzong dpon*, governor) of Shigatse and a Tsipön (*rtsi dpon*, chief accountant), who would ride on horseback to work at the Potala. Paljor Jigme mistrusted the '17-Point Agreement'[21] and was believed to have played a major part in drafting the petition to the Chinese in 1952, which listed six points for 'improvement of relations between the Chinese and the Tibetans'. He led a delegation

from Lhasa to Lhokha in southern Tibet to negotiate the disarmament of the Chushi Gangdrug (*chu bzhi sgang drug,* four rivers and eight ridges) resistance force in October 1958, but ended up joining them instead. His wife was three-months pregnant with Tendöl at the time he fled from Lhasa to India. In fact, Paljor Jigme and his fellow resistance fighters helped the Dalai Lama arrive safely in India. At the time Tendöl recounted these events for her memoir, she was still wearing the prayer rosary the latter had given her father in recognition of his service to Tibet. In exile, Paljor Jigme worked in Kalimpong and Gangtok as the Dalai Lama's representative. He spent the final years of his life with his daughter Soyang (Sonam Yangchen) in Sikkim, and died in 1973 (Hodler 2021: 4, 17–20, 67). Soyang was married to Gyalsey Kushon Jigdal Tsewang Namgyal (1928–2014), affectionately known as Gyalsey Georgela, the youngest son of Sikkimese Chogyal Tashi Namgyal. The connection with the Sikkimese royal house probably resulted in Tendöl's and Soyang's mother's early release from prison in Lhasa; Choekyi was allowed to leave a month earlier than scheduled because Soyang was visiting Lhasa at the time (Hodler 2021: 71). She had been imprisoned for 'active counter-revolution and sabotage'; her arrest warrant alleged that she had 'deluded herself into restoring the satanic system of serfdom...[and] repeatedly told her son how beautiful life was in India, Bhutan and in former [Tibetan] society, and taught her son the reactionary ideology of capitalism' (Hodler 2021: 40–41).

17   The Namseling family were wont to making pilgrimages to Buddhist centres in India, such as Bodhgaya, and it was under the 'ploy of pilgrimage' that Tendöl's mother took the three eldest siblings to India, crossing the Nathu La pass to Sikkim on foot in September 1957. The mother and daughters spent an idyllic five months in Kalimpong, where 'they listened to music, sang and danced' – the last vestiges of normality before history intervened (Hodler 2021: 7–9). On their way back, they met many Tibetans who were already fleeing to India. Like many Tibetan aristocratic children, the Namseling girls were enrolled at the Catholic convent, St Joseph's, in Kalimpong. Their brother was an incarnate lama, recognised by the Dalai Lama himself as the sixth Khado Rinpoche. Suddenly, after March 1959, the Namseling sisters stopped receiving remittances from home, and they had to sell their coral and turquoise jewellery to pay their school fees. They did not know that their father had joined the resistance and fled to India (Hodler 2021: 7–9, 20-21, 77). It was a shared experience of rupture familiar to many Tibetans in exile. The Dalai Lama's younger sister Jetsun Pema recounted a tense period at Loreto Convent in Darjeeling when sporadic updates of political disturbances in Tibet came through a lone radio set up in the common room, and did little to quell the anxiety among pupils enrolled in English schools in India whose families navigated an uncertain future back home. One day, the Mother Superior summoned Jetsun Pema out of the classroom to relay the news: 'Your family have fled from Tibet. No one knows where they are'. For several weeks she did not receive word of the safe arrival of His Holiness and other exiles (Chawla 2022a, Geleck Palsang 2022).

18   Tendöl was made to leave school and work in the road construction camp in Kongpo near the border with India. She was among a group of 400 workers – which mostly comprised young Chinese people who also had to work in road construction to earn the right to attend school or vocational training. It was here that she heard the news of her father's death – six years after his demise – from a passing group of Tibetan men travelling from India. She realised much later that the men were part of the first fact-finding delegation sent by the Dalai Lama to Tibet in 1979, led by Kalon Juchen Thubten

Namgyal (1929–2011), which also included the Dalai Lama's brother Lobsang Samden (1933-1985), and his brother-in-law Phuntsok Tashi Takla (1922–1999) (Anon 1985, Anon 2011, Anon nd).

A two-way debt of gratitude

19   There were several supporters of Tibet in the highest echelons of administration in India. Among them was N K Rustomji, who had served as Government of India's advisor to Bhutan and Sikkim. In September 1965, barely three years after the Sino-Indian War and six years after the Dalai Lama had escaped to India, he made an impassioned case for India's support for the exiled leader in an address to the All India Radio.[22] Rustomji pointed out that while Tibet owed a debt of gratitude to India for the teachings of past masters, it was now India that was indebted to Tibetans in exile. Santarakshita (eighth century CE), Padmasambhava or Guru Rinpoche (eighth century CE), Marpa (eleventh century CE) and Atisha (eleventh century CE) had expounded Buddhist teachings and assisted in translating the Buddhist canon into Tibetan. And Tibetan refugees who followed the Dalai Lama were keeping alive precious manuscripts and shepherding monastic traditions that had long disappeared in India, often at great peril to themselves:

> [W]hile leaving behind their personal possessions, [they] have remembered, in the fullness of their faith, to bring with them the precious Tibetan translations of ancient Indian texts on early Buddhism that had long ago disappeared from their homeland when the monasteries in India were pillaged by invaders from the North.[23]

20   In the late 1960s through to the 1980s, E Gene Smith, at the Library of Congress Field Office in Delhi, oversaw the reprinting of many of these texts provided by Tibetan exiles, or by Tibetan-speaking communities in the Himalaya. The texts laid the foundation for the Buddhist Digital Resource Centre, formerly the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Centre (Yachin and Fischman 2022). However, refugees were not the first or the only ones to have brought Buddhist manuscripts to India, nor was it always the sacrificial or heroic feat that Rustomji made it out to be. Decades before Tibetan exile, Indian scholars such as Sarat Chandra Das (1849–1917) and Rahul Sankrityayan (1893–1963), as well as imperial spies disguised as Buddhist lamas, had travelled to Tibet and brought back Buddhist texts, paintings and artifacts; Sankrityayan's extensive collection is housed at the Patna Museum (Das 1893, Stewart 2013).[24]

21   In a similar vein to Rustomji, Sikkimese political officer Apa B Pant's recollections from a visit to the Norbu Lingka (the Dalai Lama's summer residence) in September 1957 dismissed contemporary 'political, ideological, social and economic tensions' in Tibet – the rebellion against the Chinese in Kham – as 'temporal and temporary power-conflicts, in favour of Tibet's "timeless" religious bond with India'. As with Bhutan and Sikkim, Tibet was oriented towards India, as opposed to China, in the understanding of officials like Pant and Rustomji:

> I was less concerned with these temporal and temporary power-conflicts than with the desire to reach and find that which Tibet had preserved for centuries. Generation after generation, Tibetans had journeyed on pilgrimage to India, China, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, in search of Buddhist texts and traditions… But the greatest goal of travel had always been India, where Gautama the Buddha had lived and taught, and the script of their language had been developed for the prime

purpose of translating Sanskrit texts... Down to this day, every Tibetan book begins, to show its authenticity, with a sentence taken from Sanskrit: Gyāgār ketu– 'So is said in the language of India' (Pant [1974] 2018: ch6).

22   Thus, in characterising Tibetan refugees as worthy of India's gratitude and sympathy, these officials also defined their vision for India: they stressed a connection between Hinduism and Buddhism, and established India as the natural home of Buddhism, from where it originated and to which it should return, and implied that Tibetan exiles assisted in a Buddhist rejuvenation in India (Ober 2019, 2023, Sherman 2022, Surendran 2024).

Conclusion

23   Gratitude and reverence towards the Dalai Lama have flowed organically and reciprocally among the Himalayan regions of India, before and since the rupture caused by his exile. Here, both Buddhists and Muslims, equal inhabitants of a syncretic Tibetan world, have embraced mutual gratitude. An illustrative example is the Radhu family of Ladakh that had secured the right to carry the triennial tribute[25] and homage from the Ladakhi kings to the Dalai Lama's seat at the Potala Palace in Lhasa.[26] The journey of over a thousand miles took two and a half months along the Changthang plateau. In a moving description of the syncretic and symbiotic culture of Ladakh at the time, historian Siddiq Wahid recounted how the last caravan carrying this tribute in 1942 was led by his father Abdul Wahid Radhu (Radhu 2017). While the tribute items required fewer than ten pack animals, the caravans were usually made up of over two hundred and fifty of them. The remaining pack animals were donations by common Ladakhis to contribute to the mission's expenses and carried the private trade goods of the tribute-bearers. Since the caravan was on its way to the auspicious seat of the Dalai Lama, people considered it a privilege and an honour to contribute to the mission's operations, both in kind and labour. The mission was exempt from paying for lodgings in the villages *en route* to Lhasa and back, and the mission flag protected it from being attacked by brigands on the way. Thus, in addition to the honour of being part of the mission, those carrying the tribute did not incur any overhead costs and loaded the extra animals with private goods for trade. The Lhasa branch of the Radhu family largely depended on the tribute-corridor trade with Lhasa. The items for Lhasa included wool, gold dust, turquoise, coral, amber and other semi-precious stones, dried apricots and consumer items. On the way back to Leh, they mainly carried Chinese tea bricks and wool (Radhu 2017: xi–xii).

24   Fortunately, syncretism and harmony outlived the tribute mission in this part of the Himalaya. This is evident in a recent documentary *Prayers Answered* (2009) by Tibetan exile filmmaker Geleck Palsang, which chronicled the Dalai Lama's trip to a Muslim village called Turtuk on the invitation of its tribal leaders. The Balti village in the Union Territory of Ladakh, whose people were a composite of tribes from Iran, Tibet, Dard and Mongolia, became part of India after the 1971 War.[27] The village leaders spoke of the Dalai Lama as 'rehnuma' (Urdu for leader or guide) and received him with deep reverence and affection (Palsang 2009).[28] They described themselves as Muslims of 'Tibetan racial stock' and their physiognomy and lifestyle – eating, dressing and the dialect – as similar to that of western Tibet.[29]

25 This story of just one part of the western Himalaya, whose inhabitants revere the Dalai Lama despite not sharing his faith, is either neglected today or presented as an addendum to the history of India proper or mainland China (see Atwill 2014, 2018, Bhutia 2018, Wahid 2017). Thus, an understanding not only of the migration but also the acceptance of Tibetans in the Himalaya provides a richer, fuller account of Indian history. At a time when it is fashionable to talk about globalisation and plural societies, it behoves us to resuscitate these histories of nations with 'a priori "globalised" social structures that were more than a millennium in the making…' (Radhu 2017: xxii).

26 In the end, as the evidence presented in this article has shown, the Himalaya is not, and never was, an insurmountable 'natural barrier' – a sentry as Indian schoolchildren sing in *sare jahaan se achcha* ('better than the whole world')[30] – that separated India from its neighbours in the north and the east. It is home to interconnected yet internally diverse ecologies, societies and polities that crisscross many contemporary borders and are often ensconced in a Tibetan and Buddhist cultural sensibility (Chawla 2024). We could conclude with a reminder from Wahid: 'the loss of the memory of *organic relationships between nations* in favour of exclusive *territorial possessiveness between states* may be at the root of the problems that besiege societies', and the Tibetan and Himalayan world might offer us lessons to overcome these problems (Radhu 2017: xxii, emphasis in the original).

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NOTES

1. Prime minister's note to the foreign secretary on the situation in Asia, 14 December 1948 (quoted in Bhasin 2021: xxvi).

2. Wylie: jo lags, 'older brother'.

3. His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Oral History Interview by B R Nanda, 18 December 1975, Transcript, Prime Ministers Museum and Library (formerly, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library), New Delhi. Hereafter, His Holiness the Dalai Lama 1975.

4. For how some of these itinerant men served as translators, surveyors and spies, see Stewart (2013).

5. Arthur J Hopkinson, political officer, Sikkim to H E Richardson, Indian Mission, Lhasa; Copy to central intelligence officer, Shillong, Assam; the superintendent of police, Darjeeling; the Tibetan liaison officer, Kalimpong, 8 May 1947. National Archives

of India (hereafter NAI), External Affairs, Tibet, 1947, File 7(18) P/47, 'Policy of British India towards Tibet'.

6. See Diehl (2002), Hess (2009), Shakya (1993, 1999). Examples abound in fiction, memoirs and poetry too (Bitter et al 2017, Norbu 2011, Tsundue 2008, Tsering 2003, Tsundue 2014).

7. The governance of Tibet by the Dalai Lamas began with the 'Great' Fifth Dalai Lama Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso (1617–1682). He established a wide infrastructure of taxation and administration, both in secular and religious matters, named himself an emanation of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (considered the patron protector of Tibet), constructed the Potala Palace in Lhasa and shifted the Dalai Lama's residence from Ganden Podrang at Drepung Monastery in Lhasa to the newly constructed Potala, which then became the seat of the Tibetan government (Gardner 2009).

8. The Dalai Lama recalled that his very first meeting with Nehru was at the airport in Beijing prior to the interaction at the cocktail party mentioned here (His Holiness the Dalai Lama 1975).

9. The title was first bestowed in the 1570s upon the Third Dalai Lama, Sonam Gyatso, by the leader of the Tumet Mongols, Altan Khan. It was then applied posthumously to his previous incarnations, Gendun Drub and Gendun Gyatso. Khan and Sonam Gyatso established a 'patron-priest' relationship (Wylie: *mchod yon*), modelled on the one between the Sakya leader Pakpa Lodro Gyeltsen and the Mongolian emperor Khubilai Khan in the thirteenth century (Adams 2008).

10. Anachronistic claims about the historical Buddha's 'nationality' have long been a point of contention within religious-nationalist debates in India and Nepal. Both contemporary states claim to be the true inheritors of the Buddha's legacy. Most scholars agree that Siddhartha Gautama, the Shakya prince who became the Buddha, was born in Lumbini in present-day Nepal. The site of the capital of Kapilavastu, where he was raised, has been a matter of some dispute among archæologists and historians, with some claiming it was at Tilaura Kot in the Kapilvastu district of Nepal, and others that it was at Piprahwa in present-day Uttar Pradesh, India. Siddhartha is believed to have awakened (attained Buddhahood) under a Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, taught his first sermon at Sarnath and passed away at Kushinagar, all of which are in present-day India (Dennis 2017, Sharda 2015).

11. Wylie: *mi mang*, 'common people'.

12. Wylie: *chos rgyal*, 'a king who rules according to dharma' (and literal translation of the Sanskrit 'Dharma Raja').

13. Prime Ministers Museum and Library, Apa B Pant Papers, Subject File No5.

14. While Tibetan culture is often identified with Tibetan Buddhism, not all Tibetans are Buddhist. Many follow the pre-Buddhist Bon religion; some are Muslim (Atwill 2018, Ramble 1993, Radhu 2017). The film from which the third epigraph above is sourced documents the deep affection and regard with which a Tibetan Muslim village in Baltistan welcomes the Dalai Lama in 2005 (Palsang 2009).

15. The 'triangle' refers to Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet (Singh 1988).

16. A lay member of the Tibetan cabinet.

17. NAI, External Affairs, Sikkim Agency, 1942, File 1(1) P/42. 'Further education of Palden Thondup Namgyal, Maharajkumar of Sikkim and Jigmie Dorji of Bhutan in ICS Probationers Training School in Dehra Dun'.

18. The reference is to Jigmie Palden Dorji of the Dorji family of Bhutan.

19. 24 December 1941. NAI, External Affairs, Sikkim Agency, 1942, File 101/X/42. 'Tibetan Wool'. *Added emphases.*

20. http://tibet.prm.ox.ac.uk/biography_180.html

21. 'The Agreement of the Central People's Government and the Local Government of Tibet on Measures for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet', more commonly known as the 'Seventeen Point Agreement' was signed in Beijing between Tibet and China on 23 May 1951. For China, the Agreement 'represents the legal and historical basis for Chinese rule in Tibet', and Tibetans within the government in Tibet have relied on it to argue that Tibet was unlike other minority groups and regions. Subsequently, the Chinese government held that the abortive revolt of 1959 had made the Agreement invalid, while Tibetan exile organisations and the Dalai Lama – who publicly repudiated the Agreement in a statement to the press on 20 June 1959 – argued that it was invalid because it had been signed under duress (Shakya 2013:609–10). See also Goldstein (1991)

22. Prime Ministers Museum and Library, formerly the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), N K Rustomji Papers, Subject File No 32. Rustomji was speaking within the pressing context of 'the Chinese ultimatum' to withdraw from alleged incursions into Tibet, which had been given to India during the India-Pakistan War.

23. Ibid. See also Chawla (2024).

24. I am indebted to Alison Melnick Dyer and Ruth Gamble for alerting me to these early preservation efforts.

25. Wylie: *lo phyag.*

26. The tribute-cum-trade mission was decreed by the Treaty of Tingmosgang (1684), which had been signed following a five-year war between the Ladakhi monarchy (Buddhist) and the Mughal Kashmir (Muslim) alliance on one side and the Tibetan (Buddhist) clergy and Mongol (shamanist) tribes alliance on the other (Radhu 2017: xi).

27. For about twelve centuries before the Dogra ruler Gulab Singh combined Gilgit, Baltistan, Ladakh and Kashmir to create the Jammu and Kashmir State (1834–1846), Ladakh and Baltistan had been Tibet's westernmost ethnic, linguistic and cultural extensions; Kashmir lay at the centre of the links between Central Eurasia and South Asia (Radhu 2017: xi–xxii).

28. See the third epigraph above. Following the Dalai Lama's visit to Turtuk and with his personal encouragement, a group of village students were enrolled in the neighbouring Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) school. The children are culturally Tibetan and Muslim, and the school provides resources for both parts of their identity to flourish. The TCV (formerly, the Nursery for Tibetan Refugee Children) was founded in 1960 to care for orphaned Tibetan children and those who had been separated from their families. It now comprises a network of eight residential schools and four day-schools across India, as well as youth hostels, colleges and vocational centres. It caters to 16,726 children, a large number of whom come from the Himalayan states in India and neighbouring countries, and some have advocated the model of schooling for the Himalaya at large (Chawla 2022a, 2023c; Wahid 2014).

29. On the rich and composite history of Tibetan Muslims, see Atwill (2014, 2018).

30. Mohammad Iqbal's rousing song 'Sare Jahan se Achcha' ('better than the whole world'). Originally titled 'Tarana-e-Hindi' or 'Anthem of Hind (India)', it was written as

a nationalistic song for children in 1904 and is performed to this day during morning assemblies in Indian schools. The song depicts the Himalaya as a sentry and watchman protecting India.

ABSTRACTS

This article examines interconnections between parts of the Indian Himalaya and Tibet in the period encompassing the escape of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama to India in 1959. While Buddhism served as connecting tissue binding together communities across recently drawn national borders, networks linking families in Sikkim, Bhutan and Tibet were also forged through monastic patronage, colonial education, intermarriage, seasonal migration and trade. Through a reading of colonial and postcolonial archives from Delhi, London and Gangtok, as well as the private papers of Indian political appointees in the Himalaya, the article shows how, far from blazing a trail, the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans who followed him into exile were treading well-worn migration routes and leaning on relationships forged over centuries. Archival evidence from press and parliamentary proceedings in the 1950s and 1960s reveals a shared religious history and information that India claimed to be the cradle of the subcontinent's Buddhist heritage, which helped garner greater support for the Dalai Lama and his countrymen.

Cet article examine les interconnexions entre certaines parties de l'Himalaya indien et le Tibet au cours de la période qui a suivi la fuite du quatorzième Dalaï Lama en Inde en 1959. Si le bouddhisme a servi de lien entre les communautés au-delà des frontières nationales récemment tracées, les réseaux reliant les familles du Sikkim, du Bhoutan et du Tibet ont également été forgés par le mécénat monastique, le système éducatif colonial, les mariages mixtes, les migrations saisonnières et le commerce. À travers une lecture des archives coloniales et postcoloniales étudiées à Delhi, Londres et Gangtok, ainsi que des documents privés de responsables politiques indiens dans l'Himalaya, l'article montre que, loin d'ouvrir une nouvelle voie, le Dalaï Lama et les Tibétains qui l'ont suivi en exil empruntaient des itinéraires de migration bien connus et s'appuyaient sur des relations forgées au fil des siècles. Les archives de la presse et des débats parlementaires des années 1950 et 1960 révèlent une histoire religieuse commune et montrent comment l'Inde se voit comme le berceau de l'héritage bouddhiste du sous-continent, ce qui a contribué à renforcer le soutien au Dalaï Lama et à ses compatriotes.

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Dialogical decoloniality and Tibetan conceptions of indigeneity

Décolonialité dialogique et conceptions tibétaines de l'indigénéité

Tenzin Desal

Introduction

1   How do we approach the question of decoloniality when it comes to communities that do not constitute postcolonial states? How do we address decolonial concerns of reparation, repatriation and reconciliatory truths for communities that are states-in-waiting? How can we introduce guard-rails to protect decoloniality from majoritarian appropriation? At the same time, how can communities experiencing violence in contemporary forms of settler-colonialism negotiate decoloniality and their collective right to self-determination? To partly answer these questions, I introduce the notion of dialogical decoloniality to foster conversation among and within colonised communities and broaden the scope of the decolonial project in addressing contemporary forms of settler colonialism.

2   The initial seeds of this paper are assertions that I have often encountered during seminars organised in Dharamshala and from interviews with informants, Tibetan scholars, activists and members of Tibet advocacy groups. It is often maintained that Tibetans are not indigenous. This has led me to revisit literature on indigeneity and to return to the field to carry out 'patchwork ethnography' in order to understand the reasons for the refusal to identify them as indigenous. Such assertions are also reported in earlier studies based on ethnographic fieldwork among Tibetan exiles (McGranahan 2016, Lokyitsang 2017, Yeh 2020).

3   The entry for Tibet in *The Indigenous World*, an annual publication of The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), draws a similar conclusion. The entry for its 2007 edition reads as follows: 'Tibetans consider themselves an occupied rather than an indigenous people but share the same characteristics and problems as indigenous peoples around the world' (Stidsen 2007: 301–307). Though earlier issues of the

publication categorised Tibet as a separate collective indigenous people, in the 2023 edition this is subsumed under a section on China (Mamo 2023: 181–190).

4 Exilic condition and statelessness has compelled Tibetans to negotiate various political spaces, and refusal as a political practice among Tibetan exiles is one example of this. Carole McGranahan (2018) has demonstrated that many Tibetan exiles in India and Nepal have refused citizenship of those south Asian countries as an act of rejecting international norms and of insisting on Tibet's past and future sovereignty. New field data might show a different result on account of a demographic shift among the exile population in the last couple of decades, but the purpose of this paper is not to contribute to literature on the refusal of citizenship. Instead, I wish to consider another case study on refusal: the refusal to collectively identify Tibetan people as indigenous. The insistence on refusal and entry points for uptake of indigeneity as a concept were observed through participant observation and interviews with informants primarily based in Dharamshala. I also conducted a series of interviews with Tibetan activists, officials and members of advocacy groups. Therefore, the paper is limited to what has been called 'patchwork ethnography' (Günel et al 2020) among the exiled Tibetan population.

5 The emergence of global movements for decolonisation, reparation and repatriation of material culture should prompt us to rethink the foundational idea of Tibetan selfhood and to renegotiate the Tibetan self in the light of Chinese colonialism and Tibet's self-determination. Framing Tibetan indigeneity in the context of Dharamshala–Beijing negotiations to find a solution to the longstanding issue of Tibet's political status can problematise the dominant discourse of Tibetans as an ethnic minority in the People's Republic of China (PRC).

6 I intervene in this debate by introducing the notion of dialogical decoloniality. My objective in insisting on dialogical instead of a standalone decoloniality is twofold. Firstly, to provide a guard-rail for the decolonisation project against the kind of majoritarian appropriation in postcolonial states which mirrors their colonial past by investing in the maintenance and reproduction of what Mahmood Mamdani (2020) describes as permanent minorities. A dialogical approach makes it possible to apply decolonial methods to communities that have not been able to assert self-determination and which therefore constitute states-in-waiting (Walker 2024). Secondly, it is a gentle nudge to fostering conversation and bridging the gap between scholarly debates on theoretical concepts and public application of these concepts. Indian scholars (Chaudhuri et al 2018) borrowed Edward Said's (1983) proposition on travelling theories in literary studies to demonstrate that there is constant negotiation between 'Western theory' and 'Indian' theorising. Their work distinguishes between 'common sense' and 'theoretically informed knowledge'. Their arguments tell us that theories emerge in specific historical contexts and travel to be ultimately adopted by institutions in different parts of the country. Literature on indigeneity lends credence to Edward Said's (1983) idea that theories travel: concepts, in this context indigeneity as a travelling concept and its theoretical application, acquire different meanings, particularly when seen in light of settler-colonialism.

7 Dialogical decolonisation is therefore needed to broaden the scope of decoloniality to accommodate communities that missed out on the process of decolonisation through self-determination that took place in Africa and Asia in the first half of the twentieth century, a movement exemplified by the participants of the 1955 Bandung Conference.

At the same time, dialogical decolonisation invites us to engage with critical theories and to think about its application while keeping in mind the fact that theories travel. This two-way conversation is necessary for the project of decolonisation, as I seek to demonstrate through the case of identification and rejection of Tibetan indigeneity.

Accommodation, flight and adaptation

8   The military occupation of Tibet resulted in the signing of a 17-point Agreement on 23 May 1951, though the validity of this agreement in international law remains contested (Thorson et al 1959, Dalai Lama 1959: 215, van Walt van Praag 1987: 165). Following the signing of the agreement, the People's Republic of China asserted its alien rule over Tibet by forming an *ad hoc* and transitionary administration known as the Preparatory Committee for Tibet Autonomous Region (PCART) (Goldstein 2014: 282–305). This uneasy accommodation was achieved through co-option of indigenous elites in the forging of the People's Republic of China (Tuttle 2007).

9   This new governance was disrupted after the escape of His Holiness the Dalai Lama (hereafter the Dalai Lama) into exile in 1959. After reaching India, the Dalai Lama repudiated the 17-point Agreement on the grounds that China did not hold up its side of the bargain (Dalai Lama 1962: 221). He established the Tibetan government in exile and sought independence from PRC rule.

10 In the meantime, the Dalai Lama and his administration in exile was preoccupied with the rehabilitation of Tibetans who had followed him to India and those in exile in Bhutan and Nepal. Scholars engaged in fieldwork in Tibetan settlements in India observed the 'successful' adaptation of Tibetan exiles to their host country (Palakshappa 1978, Saklaini 1984, Subba 1990). Dawa Norbu's (2001a) study found that there are three structural reasons for 'successful settlements', as follows: (1) humanitarian work as political compensation, (2) coordination among NGOs and (3) indigenous leadership and organisation in Tibetan refugee society. At the same time, he points out that the interest among anthropologists and Tibetologists was primarily centred on reconstructing and analysing traditional Tibetan society in Tibet through informants in refugee settlements (Goldstein 1968, Aziz 1978) rather than studying Tibetan refugees as a community (Norbu 2001b: 22). At present, according to the Home Department of Central Tibetan Administration, the exiled Tibetan population, apart from the Tibetans in Nepal and Bhutan, is spread across various states in India, in 15 agriculture-based settlements, 14 handicraft-based settlements and 11 cluster communities.

Entrenched difference and the limits of class analysis

11 Noteworthy intellectual debates in China emerged to reflect on the widespread protests in Tibet and Xinjiang in 2008 and 2009 (Hillman et al 2016). China's state discourse on unrest in Tibet and its policy prescription to suppress unrest in 'Western China', as the PRC refers to the region, is framed as a developmental issue. Ben Hillman (2016: 14) notes that despite the appearance of debates after the 2008–2009 protests, the criminalisation of protests and their framing by the PRC as separatist actions has shrunk space for Chinese scholars to acknowledge and investigate the unrest from Tibetan and Uyghur perspectives. Nevertheless, James Leibold (2013), in his study on

China's 'ethnic policy', sheds light on the divergent positions taken by Chinese scholars and policymakers after protests in areas inhabited by Tibetan and Uyghur people from 2008 to 2009. One of the most strident positions taken by a Chinese scholar is that of Peking University's Ma Rong (2007), who proposed the 'depoliticization of ethnicity in China'. The central thrust of his thesis is that the Chinese state is aping Soviet-style policies to politicise ethnicity by identifying and recognising so-called '*minzu* groups'. This, Ma Rong argues, strengthens differences through the system of regional autonomy and ethnic preferences (2007). He highlights an alternative model that could follow the approach of the United States, whose constitution grants citizens' rights in relation to group rights. Through such 'depoliticisation', Ma Rong contends that China could learn from the United States and consolidate its own national identity (Leibold 2013: 17). This approach is reminiscent of an observation made by James Leibold that China is currently undergoing a fundamental rethinking of how it manages ethnocultural diversity and its colonial possessions. He writes that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Xi Jinping is 'turbo-charging the transformative resolve' through 'significant policy innovations across their colonial possessions – from Kashgar to Hong Kong and Lhasa to Hohhot' (Leibold 2021).

12   Scholarship on Chinese authoritarianism has received renewed attention in recent decades, particularly since the eighteenth Party Congress when Xi Jinping replaced Hu Jintao as the General Secretary of the CCP. These studies reflect attempts to understand both the resilience of the party-state and creative innovation in institutionalisation since Xi Jinping took charge of the state, party and military (Nathan 2003, Lai 2016). The PRC case contrasts with democratic diversity where theorists have, for example, stated that the case of the Kashmir Valley alone should cause India to be categorised as a 'robustly multinational' state (Stepan et al 2011: 2). If we put aside the authoritarian nature of the PRC's political system for a moment, then the PRC corresponds closely to the Republic of India in terms of geographical scale and the size of its population. If India as a constitutional democracy is described as deeply diverse, then the PRC as an authoritarian state could be described as a state with entrenched differences.

13   The history of modern Tibet's past is best chronicled in Melvyn Goldstein's quartet. The four-volume work is unrivalled in the use of untapped materials and in particular the memories of Tibetan informants. However, it has been critiqued for employing 'anecdotal material to infer that this feudal and oppressive social order [in Tibet's past]…[was] characterized by depravity and decadence' (Akester 2009: 2). Such discourse is narrativised through the normative use of the term 'liberation'. Hence, the colonial invasion of Tibet is framed by the PRC as an incorporation of Tibet through Mao's 'enlightened' 'gradualist policy'. On the other hand, Tibetans who attempted mild resistance, such as the 'Peoples' Association', are characterised as 'extreme, unrealistic, and unrepresentative of the people' (Akester 2009: 2). A similar discourse can be observed in state-sanctioned materials since 2008 in written and visual formats. Séagh Kehoe argues that 'these media discourses attempt to construct a "regime of temporality" in order to manage public opinion about Tibet and consolidate Chinese rule over the region' (2020: 1133). The emergence of a new Tibetan literature originated from the same context, as Tsering Shakya (2008: 61) notes:

> The notion of underdevelopment (*rjeslus*) is crucial to understanding the nature of Chinese rule in Tibet. The term implies that Tibet lagged in technology and, more important, that it was culturally stagnant and backward. Therefore 'liberation of the serfs' was intended to encompass both economic emancipation and cultural

empowerment of the people. And it was in this context that a new literature emerged in Tibet.

14　China's discursive politics has structured contemporary Tibet–China relations in terms of a minority-majority framework and has categorised Tibetans as one of the 55 ethnic minorities. This framework informs discourse and dominates scholarship on the Tibetan population in contemporary China across all academic disciplines. As posited by Richard Sennet (1972) in his work on the hidden injuries of class, there are structures in Tibetan society that engender entitlement and social exclusion. This paper will not wade into the Chakrabarty–Chibber debate (Chakrabarty 2000, Chibber 2013) on how certain universal ideas can be provincialised to Europe or on the critique of the cultural turn in Marxist tradition, but I argue that the intersection of colonial modernity, emancipatory ideals and China's disenchantment has made a class-essentialist and historical materialist approach to the study of Tibetan history and contemporary Tibetan society limited in scope. In other words, the study of Tibetan society and its history based exclusively on class analysis alone makes it difficult to understand other forms of state-society relations, the plurality of intellectual ideas, the robustness of ethno-federation and the right to self-determination.

15　I make the case for this analysis by looking at literature on the 2008 protests. These protests have been marked as significant in terms of their political impact. They cemented China's international image as authoritarian on the eve of its big push to refashion itself by playing host to the Olympic Games in August 2008. At the same time, Tibet emerged as one of the top priorities in Sino-US and Sino-EU relations (Barnett 2012). The transformation of protests from a localised region to a widespread pan-Tibet movement also caught the attention of scholars. When sites of the 2008 protests were mapped, Tsering Shakya observed that they show a similar geographic spread to those of the 1950s Tibetan rebellion against China at its peak (2012: 25). With reports and data available at the time of its writing and publication in 2009, Robert Barnett's analysis points out that Tibetans participating in protests came from a broad cross-section of classes in Tibetan society. He asserts that 30% of the 95 reported incidents took place in villages and townships and infers from this that a significant number of farmers took part in protests. Most of the remaining protests were reported in small towns with a population ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 (Barnett 2012: 11). In Marxist tradition, these populations were classed by the Party-State as peasants who, since the advent of Chinese colonial modernity in Tibet, stood to gain the most through its policies of land distribution in the 1950s and the disbanding of communes in the 1970s.

Internationalisation and disciplining engagement

16　The Tibetan government in exile in Dharamshala has approached the resolution of Tibet's political future through a two-pronged initiative: finding channels of communication with the PRC and highlighting the issue of Tibet in the international community (Gyari 2022: 254). A significant breakthrough came when Deng Xiaoping expressed interest in engaging with the Dalai Lama in 1979. This initiative was part and parcel of his 'four modernisations' policy and marked a watershed in China's approach to resolving outstanding 'national' problems such as Tibet and Taiwan (Norbu 2001b: 315).

17   Since the 1970s Dharamshala's administration has scaled down its position from seeking independence to what is currently framed as genuine autonomy. In his statement on 10 March 1978, the Dalai Lama stated, 'If the six million Tibetans in Tibet are really happy and prosperous as never before, there is no reason for us to argue otherwise'. He reiterated the position more explicitly in 1980 when he said that 'the core of the Tibetan issue is the welfare and ultimate happiness of the six million Tibetans in Tibet' (Norbu 2001b: 316). The Dalai Lama sent a series of fact-finding delegations to various Tibetan-inhabited areas but Beijing indicated that it would define the parameters of and identify issues for the Sino-Tibetan dialogue. Simultaneously, Hu Yaobang who was then General Secretary of the CCP Secretariat led a fact-finding delegation to the Tibet Autonomous Region. He concluded the trip with a six-point policy directive. The second, third and fourth points of the directive dealt with the amelioration of economic conditions, tax exemptions and allocations of funds for Tibetans. The fifth point was directed at the 'development of Tibetan culture, education and science' within the socialist framework. Representation of Tibetan leadership in the administration of the region was discussed in the sixth point. More significantly, the first point of the policy directive is the articulation of 'autonomy'; significant because it is laid out by a leading member of the CCP. Hu Yaobang called for autonomy to be extended by 'having the right to decide for oneself' through economic decentralisation, but this definition explicitly kept political and cultural autonomy out of the discussion (Norbu 2001b: 316–317).

18   The parties having found ground for dialogue, on 28 July 1981 Hu Yaobang relayed through Gyalo Thondup, the Dalai Lama's elder brother, a 'five-point proposal to the Dalai Lama' (Thondup et al 2015: 270). The proposal described how China had entered a new era of political stability and sought interlocuters who must not 'bargain like businessmen'. It proposed the return of the Dalai Lama to take part in promoting national unity and the progress of the 'four modernisations'. The proposal assured that the Dalai Lama, upon his 'return', would be appointed vice-president of the National People's Congress and vice chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Committee. Hu implied that the Dalai Lama and his 'entourage' would be granted comfortable living conditions and employment as China would 'guarantee their privileges'. In its conclusion, the proposal said that China would hold a grand reception followed by a press conference. The Dalai Lama later dismissed this proposal by stating that 'instead of addressing the real issues facing the six million Tibetan people, China has attempted to reduce the question of Tibet to a discussion of my own personal status' (1988a: 4).

19   The Dalai Lama later advanced a counter-proposal when he spoke before the US Congressional Human Rights Caucus on 21 September 1987 (Dalai Lama 1988a). In this Five-point Peace Plan, he called for:

    1. Transformation of the whole of Tibet (Inner and Outer) into a peace zone

    2. Abandonment of China's population transfer policy which threatens the very existence of the Tibetans as a people

    3. Respect for Tibet's future and the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and democratic freedom

    4. Restoration and protection of Tibet's natural environment and the abandonment of China's use of Tibet for the production of nuclear weapons and dumping of nuclear waste

5. Commencement of earnest negotiations on the future status of Tibet and relations between Tibetan and Chinese peoples

20 A year later, elaborating on the Five-point Peace Plan and in particular on the fifth point that called for the earnest resumption of dialogue, in his address to the members of the European parliament, the Dalai Lama outlined a 'framework for Sino-Tibetan negotiations'. This became to be known as the Strasbourg Proposal (Dalai Lama 1988b). According to this proposal, China could remain responsible for Tibet's foreign policy and defence. However, through its foreign affairs bureau, the government of Tibet would be able to pursue relations in the field of commerce, education and culture, religion, tourism, science, sports and other non-political activities. In terms of political autonomy, the government of Tibet would be founded on a constitution or basic law, a democratic system that would be entrusted with ensuring economic equality, social justice and protection of the environment.

21 There is no official report on China's response to the Dalai Lama's proposal. Engagement between Dharamshala and Beijing resumed through what are termed exploratory talks. Dharamsala sent two delegations in 1982 and 1984. During these talks, the Tibetan delegations conveyed that the Dalai Lama did not accept the Chinese five-point proposal which enjoined the delegation to 'not "bargain like businessmen"' (Norbu 2001b: 317) and backed their agenda, including the reunification of Inner and Outer Tibet, greater autonomy in association with the PRC, withdrawal of Chinese troops and paving the way to make Tibet a peace zone (Norbu 2001b: 321). The Chinese embassy in India relayed a message to the office of the representative of the Dalai Lama on 23 September 1988 saying that China invited the Dalai Lama to talk with central government anytime. The talks, the message said, could be held in Beijing, Hong Kong or any diplomatic mission abroad. However, the invitation to talks was qualified by two conditions. Firstly, China would not accept any delegation designated by the Kashag government because the Kashag, it said, had always indulged in 'activities of the independence of Tibet'. Secondly, the Strasbourg Proposal could not be the basis for negotiations. Chen Xin, who was vice-minister of the State Nationalities Affairs Commission, gave China's explanation for this delayed engagement, saying that the Dalai Lama was 'insincere' towards proposed talks in Geneva because he would not personally attend the talks. He also referred to inclusion of a foreigner in the Tibetan delegation, which he said 'contravenes the principle adhered to by the central people's government'. On 12 April 1989 the Bureau Office of H.H. the Dalai Lama issued a statement in response (Norbu 2001b: 326) which outlined the Dalai Lama's position:

> We have conveyed to the Chinese government on numerous occasions through their embassy in New Delhi that (1) the framework for negotiations proposed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama refer[s] specifically to the positive notion of association with the People's Republic of China; (2) the Tibetan negotiating team has been appointed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and it is within His right to appoint whosoever He considers competent to represent Him; and (3) there is no foreign participation in the negotiating team. There are both Tibetan and non-Tibetan advisors to the team. It is quite natural for the team to seek advice from qualified persons regardless of their nationalities.

22 A series of pro-independence protests broke out in Lhasa from 1987 to 1989. China eventually responded by imposing martial law on 8 March 1989. Three months later, student protests in Beijing were crushed and the Tiananmen Square incident received global condemnation. The Dalai Lama issued a statement of condemnation against the

advice of his interlocutors, who pointed out that it might derail negotiations with China (Gyari 2022: 618).

23 On the international scene, the Dalai Lama's proposal was received positively. The Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. The Tibet issue was raised before the US Congress, which passed six resolutions between 1987 and 1991. The European Parliament passed two resolutions in 1987 and 1989. The Council for Europe also passed a resolution in 1988. Similarly, the West German Bundestag and the Italian Parliament passed resolutions on Tibet in 1987 and 1989 respectively.[1] International hearings were also held in various capitals from 1989 to 1990 (Norbu 2001b: 356).

24 Formal dialogue between Dharamshala and Beijing resumed after 2002. Since then, nine rounds of talks have been held between the Dalai Lama's representatives and the CPC's United Work Front Department. The first round of talks took place in Beijing from 9 to 24 September 2002. Apart from the fourth round of talks which was held in Bern, Switzerland, from 30 June to 1 July 2005, the talks were held in China. Dharamshala decided that the Tibetan negotiation team led by Gyari Lodi Gyaltsen would be responsible for implementing one agenda through one channel. The then prime minister of the administration in exile, Samdhong Rinpoche, also stated that there was but 'one channel and one agenda'. In Dharamshala's dialogue with the PRC, 'the approved channel is the one pursued by the Special Envoy Gyari Lodi Gyaltsen and Envoy Kelsang Gyaltsen, and the approved agenda is seeking genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people' (Gyari 2022: 531).

Selective osmosis in conceptions of indigeneity

25 The approximate Tibetan translation and definitions of the term 'indigenous' in Tibetan dictionaries are limited. The Tibetan word used to infer the meaning of indigeneity is *doema* (*gdod ma* Tibetan:). This is defined in the Great Tibetan-Chinese dictionary (   ) as 'primaeval' (Sun 1984) or 'first' (   ). Reviewing literature and ethnographic field data has led me to conclude that the Tibetan reception of the concept of indigeneity could be categorised into three points of entry. Iterations of this concept are received as a translation through what, I argue, can be considered selective osmosis. The informants I have interviewed rejected Tibetan identity as indigenous based on three conceptions, namely a historical approach, affirmative action politics and indigenous political ecology.

Historical approach

26 The historical approach to the conception of Tibetan indigeneity is derived from a Tibetan reading of classical periodisation in Tibetan history and historical time. Tibetan historical literature from the ancient to early modern period relies heavily on what Romila Thapar has described in Indian historical tradition as 'embedded history' (Thapar 2013: 87–143), the idea being that sophisticated consciousness related to history is embedded in diverse texts in classical literature. Tibetologists (Kapstein 2000, Cuevas 2013: 49–63) have observed the emergence of a 'truly indigenous historiography' from late tenth century onwards in Tibet. In this history, we find Tibetan history divided into four periods. The first is pre-history, which is characterised by Tibetans as primaeval. The second is from the seventh to the mid-

ninth century, the age of imperial Tibet and the introduction of Buddhism to the country. The assimilation of Buddhism in Tibet is represented as a civilising force, a rupture from a primitive past. During the third period, Buddhist histories narrate the disintegration of the empire and Tibet's descent into darkness. The fourth period is marked by the renaissance of Tibetan culture and religion. This fourfold model has been widely used in historical writings (Cuevas 2013: 52), and the first period is often described in Tibetan texts as the indigenous period.

27 Deyu, a thirteenth-century Tibetan figure, in his history of Buddhism in India and Tibet, represented Tibet's past before the emergence of the Tibetan empire in this manner:

> As we have just seen, the appointed kings were renowned in the four quarters of the world. But in the center, in Tibet, on account of prevailing ignorance, they were poor and powerless. They say they were unable to counter their enemies, so they stayed in the fastness of their rocky mountains. (Martin 2022: 584)

28 Standardised Tibetan textbooks for Tibetan students in exile are distributed across schools administered by Tibetans. As of 2023, according to the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), under India's national board of education, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), there are 13 Tibetan schools offering senior secondary education under three different autonomous bodies: Tibetan Children's Village (TCV), Tibetan Homes Foundation (THF) and Sambhota Tibetan Schools Society (STSS).[2] Textbooks used in these schools are published by the CTA's Department of Education. Part II of the Tibetan Reader for sixth standard students includes chapters on Tibetan royal genealogy, religious history and Buddhist logic (

> *rgal rabs chos byung dang rigs lam nang chos*).

29 Tibetan indigeneity in the school textbook for Tibetans in exile is represented in terms of Tibet's historical past, characterised as primordial and primitive. This text can help us understand the representation of Tibetan indigeneity, particularly the second chapter of the textbook which deals with the features of indigenous Tibetan society. According to the textbook:

> From the time Tibetan people started to exhibit features of a society, terms such as king and subject came into existence. At the time, there was no king that ruled pan-Tibet and Tibet was ruled by over 40 fragmented minor kingdoms. In 127 C.E. the first king of Tibet, Nyatri Tsenpo came into existence... (Department of Education 2002)

30 In accordance with the distinction made by M N Srinivas and his emphasis on field view in relation to book view, it should be noted that the book's representation of indigeneity is also reflected in field interviews conducted for this research. The simple question, whether Tibetans are indigenous, yielded multiple responses from informants. A senior civil servant of the Central Tibetan Administration who is intimately familiar with its efforts to standardise terminologies in Tibetan[3] answered, 'Tibetans were indigenous before the founding of the Tibetan empire. Since Nyatri Tsenpo founded the Purgyal dynasty, Tibetans were no longer primitive'.[4]

31 The rejection of Tibetan indigeneity illustrates the observation in historical linear time by Priya Satia (2020: 19) who demonstrated that history since the European Enlightenment 'came to be understood as linear and irreversible and, especially, progressive'. Furthermore, the classical works of Thucydides and Herodotus were 'claimed as the foundational texts for a discipline that was now all about telling the stories of nations, especially through the lives of their political makers' (Satia 2020: 19).

This is not unlike anthropologists studying tribal societies in the light of evolutionary theory such as the work of Lewis Henry Morgan, who advanced a study that demonstrated stages of social evolution by comparing so-called 'primitive' societies (Béteille 1986: 298).

Affirmative action politics

32 The second conception of Tibetan indigeneity is acquired by selective osmosis of affirmative action politics in the Tibetan diaspora's main host country, India. This is the uptake, by selective absorption, of concepts and theories through existing debates on protective/positive discrimination for 'backward groups', as the Indian government has referred to them. Here indigenous rights are seen as a derivative right within the framework of the nation-state. This is a narrow reading of indigenous rights as an assertion of minority rights. An interview with a Tibetan official[5] who had been an advocate for Tibet's environmental protection is illuminating in this regard:

> Whenever I get invited to speak at platforms on Tibet's environmental crisis, I preface my talk by saying that Tibetans are not indigenous. As per my experience in attending international conferences on global environment, the rights of indigenous people are that of minorities in various countries. If Tibet recovers its sovereignty, then there is no question of indigenous identity. Tibetans will then be the majority.

33 The Tibetan movement in exile has not yet been associated or exhibited solidarity with any Adivasi or tribal movement in India. On this matter, exiled Tibetans have taken a politically agnostic position. It is also worth noting that most Tibetan settlements in India are next door to communities that are recognised by the Indian state as tribal.

34 In India, the constitution recognises a category of a collective group of people as a 'Scheduled Tribe'. For this category, the constitution offers special provisions for their representation in politics and their economic and social welfare. Formed in 1979 by the Indian government under the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai, the commission, whose official report is titled 'Report of the Backward Classes Commission', is commonly known as the Mandal Commission, named after B P Mandal who served as its chairman. The commission's mandate was to identify socially or educationally backward classes in India and offer recommendations to consider reservations for marginalised communities in order to address inequality and discrimination. V P Singh, the prime minister of India in 1990, announced the partial implementation of the commission's recommendations, though this met with resistance (Alam 2007: vii) and continues to remain contentious.

35 In fact, there are wide-ranging Adivasi movements in India. The core articulation of Adivasi rights and their struggle for survival are framed to preserve their endangered identity, environment, language, gender sensitivity, belief systems, performance traditions and human rights (Xaxa et al 2011). Scholarship on tribal rights and the Adivasi movement essentially study how the state's paternalism towards tribal populations reproduces attitudes that assume the latter to be subordinate citizens despite affirmative action in the constitution under its Schedule V and Schedule VI. The transformation of the Adivasi movement is also notable. Their past struggle against colonial governance, forest guards, usurious moneylenders and non-tribal land-grabbers has shifted to resistance against corporate interests in Scheduled Areas. This has inadvertently led them to 'pay heed' and to engage with the state, resulting in

sophisticated alliances with civil society (Rao 2019: xv). Affirmative action in India has drawn hostility but, unlike in the United States, no Indian political party has called for an end to reservation for tribal and other communities belonging to the 'backward classes' category in India (Roychowdhury 2023). The rejection of indigeneity on the part of Tibetans here, as illustrated in the interview with the informant cited above, stems from a reading of indigeneity as a minority right within the state where subaltern tribes are seen as being given a leg up.

Indigenous political ecology

36 The third point of entry for uptake of the concept of indigeneity comes from indigenous political ecology. This corresponds to Emily Yeh's (2020) study on translations, uptake and resemblances in Tibetan indigeneity. She argues that Tibetan exiles put forwards a narrative that asserts 'ecological wisdom and deep connection to nature', building on earlier work by Toni Huber (1997) which charted a genealogy of 'green Tibetans'. Yeh maintains that this assertion of inherent eco-friendliness on the part of Tibetans appeared relatively late. This came after the idea of 'inherent environmental stewardship and knowledge had already been firmly attached to other groups including Native Americans and Kayapo' (Yeh 2020: 73).

37 In my interviews with Tibetan activists and members of advocacy groups in exile, the rejection of Tibetan indigeneity did not follow a singular common rationale. One of my informants who has travelled widely to attend global climate forums mentioned limited avenues to speak about the implications of the climate crisis in Tibet. The informant suggested that Tibetans share similar experiences to those of various indigenous communities who, according to the informant, have the benefit of more platforms for speaking during global climate conferences. Yet the activist rejected acknowledging Tibetan people as indigenous. Similar sentiments were echoed by an advocate for Tibetan affairs. The informant claimed that if Tibetan people accepted the status of indigenous, then this amounted to accepting China's assertion that Tibetan people are one of the 55 ethnic minorities, thereby reproducing the Chinese state discourse on Tibetans as an ethnic minority.

38 It would be hard for Tibetan exiles to ignore the various Adivasi movements in India. Many of the Tibetan settlements in India are near various communities that are categorised as Scheduled Tribes, and they are aware of positive discrimination that brings tangible benefits from an educational, economic and professional point of view. At the same time, the articulation of Adivasi movements in India is framed around the protection of indigenous 'Jal, Jungle, Zameen' (water, forest and land), that is, the assertion of indigenous rights over their resources and of an equitable share of participation in economic, educational and electoral politics. They also address anxiety over the loss and erosion of indigenous culture and language. These social movements fall within the democratic framework of the Indian state (Shah 2010). However, armed resistance groups among indigenous communities, inspired by Mao, fall outside the framework discussed above (Shah 2019, Lovell 2019).

39 Carole McGranahan (2018), in her ethnography of Tibetan exiles in Nepal and India, found that for six decades stateless Tibetan refugees have refused citizenship of their host countries in order to stake claims to Tibetan state sovereignty. This constitutes the refusal of citizenship as a political practice in the host-refugee relationship.

Although, as I have mentioned, changing attitudes among Tibetan exiles warrant fresh ethnographic data, McGranahan captures this refusal of indigenous identity in an illuminating interview:

> Specifically, I was told that Tibetans did not consider themselves indigenous, as they were people with their own country, a country they had lost within the living memory of many exile community members. Indigenous was thus interpreted by Tibetans to mean a small-scale group of people incorporated into a larger State who were fighting for rights vis-à-vis the State, but not for their own State sovereignty. At the time, Tibetans framed their struggle as one of a sovereign people against an occupying State. (McGranahan 2016)

40 As outlined, the present paper offers an exploration of the refusal of indigeneity, where responses from informants ranged from outright rejection to expressing a need to forge solidarity with other indigenous movements. I have encountered visceral acknowledgement of similarities between the Tibetan experience and those of indigenous communities. This departs from Carole McGranahan's observation that the refusal of citizenship is articulated by stateless Tibetans through the claim that they belong to a Tibetan state. Here, the refusal of Tibetan indigeneity is rooted in multiple uptakes of the concept of indigeneity. There is, however, a discernible gap between these uptakes and a theoretically informed engagement with the concept. As mentioned above, I describe this as the selective osmosis of a theoretical concept. By selective, I mean to emphasise the processual nature of this osmosis.

41 To demonstrate this selective osmosis of the theoretical concept of indigeneity, let us take one example of each means of uptake. In the first uptake, based on a historical approach, refusal of Tibetan indigeneity is based on a periodisation of Tibetan history. Primordial indigenous Tibetans have ceased to exist with the advent of Buddhism in Tibet and the founding of the Tibetan empire. The second is based on the understanding of indigenous movements in India, namely the Adivasi movement, and affirmative action policies of successive governments, as well as the fact that the implementation of and resistance to such policies are perceived by Tibetans to be within the democratic framework of India and therefore, according to field interviews, are not seen to be in congruence with the acceptance of the status of Tibetans as a minority ethnic group in contemporary China. To put it succinctly, the Tibetan movement is seen as being beyond the assertion of rights over 'Jaal, Jungle, Zameen'. On the other hand, the armed Adivasi resistance movement inspired by Mao cannot be discounted in the Tibetan understanding of indigeneity, especially when this is juxtaposed with their own experience with Mao's violent transformation of Tibetan society. Such an experience is recorded in Dawa Norbu's work on intellectual debates with urban intellectuals harbouring amenable attitudes towards Naxal movements in India (Norbu 1997: xi). On another issue, the acceleration of the adverse effects of climate change has caused the voices of indigenous communities to come to the fore, and field data on the environmental protection issue yielded the informants most receptive to the concept of indigeneity.

Beyond a Westphalian system: Tibet and the indigenous right to self determination

42 Recent scholarship on indigeneity has called for a radical rethinking of indigenous identity in settler-colonial contexts and a rejection of colonial politics of recognition

(Coulthard 2014). Although the PRC voted in support of the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) at the UN General Assembly in 2008, the government pre-empted any further debate by proclaiming that there were no indigenous peoples in the PRC. Instead, in an anachronistic assertion, China declared that for '5,000 years [they have] lived in unity and harmony with 55 designated minorities living in peace in their own land' (Davis 2014).

43   The 2007 Declaration of the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples is considered as a landmark in the recognition of indigenous peoples' right to self-determination. This declaration came to fruition after decades of advocacy. A crucial passage in Article 3 defined ingenious peoples' right to self-determination: 'Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development'.[6]

44   The following article quickly places limits on this right, however (Bauder et al 2023): 'Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions'.[7]

45   Article 3 might appear to be radical, but it continues to be shielded by dominant Westphalian sovereignty. Westphalian sovereignty guarantees nation-states control over internal and external affairs, a privilege that does not extend to indigenous sovereignty within the current framework. To address the anxiety among its member states about calls for indigenous secession, a final article, Article 46, was added to circumscribe rights declared in preceding articles. It stated that 'Nothing in this Declaration may be interpreted as...contrary to the Charter of the United Nations'. This demonstrates that, though the declaration includes an article on the indigenous right to self-determination, that right continues to remain a derivative one within the Westphalian nation-state system. This reinforces the hierarchical and uneven relationship between Westphalian sovereignty and indigenous sovereignty. In other words, reordering indigenous sovereignty to be on par with Westphalian sovereignty undermines the foundation of the United Nations, which exclusively recognises Westphalian nation-states as members.

46   Coming back to the entrenched difference in contemporary China, the assertion of Tibetan people as indigenous has the potential to lay the groundwork for forging alliances and sharing solidarity with global indigenous movements. Indeed, indigenous scholars appreciate the value of subverting colonial concepts for the purpose of decolonisation (Alfred 2002, Coulthard 2014). Sovereignty, as a modern concept, can trace its origin to Europe. European colonial powers exported this form of statehood to different corners of the world, transforming Westphalian sovereignty into a universal model for conducting international relations and structuring organisations such as the UN and the WTO. Mamdani (2020) notes that in the history of political modernity, the nation-state and the colonial state create each other. As observed since the decolonisation of Asia and Africa, the colonial state and the nation-state have been mutually constructed through the politicisation of religious or ethnic minorities at the expense of an equally manufactured majority. To borrow from Mamdani's work, this argument could be extended by taking contemporary China and the making and unmaking of permanent Tibetan minorities as a case study. The PRC's normative deployment of sovereignty has not gone unnoticed (Fravel 2020). Even mild criticism of China's human rights violations in Tibet is rebuffed as an attack on China's sovereignty.

Notwithstanding the UN's restrained attempt to reconcile Westphalian and indigenous sovereignty, the Tibetan people's assertion of indigeneity would have the potential to open spaces to reflect on decolonisation. However, studies have demonstrated that the deep entrenchment of Westphalian sovereignty in international relations and law reinforces and reproduces ongoing colonisation of populations within states globally (Hickey 2020, Mamdani 2020). Studying Tibetan representation and Tibetans' status as a minoritised ethnic group in the Westphalian PRC presents a new frontier of scholarship to understand the nature, structure and dynamism of China's settler-colonialism in Tibet. As argued by Harald Bauder and Rebecca Mueller (2023), the articulation and advancement of indigenous sovereignty poses a critical challenge to the Westphalian framework and paves the way for decolonisation. The field of Tibetan studies and the Tibetan movement could seek paths to decolonisation by engaging with and remaining sensitive to developing canons on indigenous studies.

Conclusion: dialogical decoloniality and Tibet as a state-in-waiting

47   For Tibetans, Western and global theories of modernity/ies arrive through multiple and often circuitous routes and languages. For instance, a Marxist class analysis and its approach to transforming Tibetan society came to Tibet following its occupation by the PRC. In other words, the development of a class analysis of Tibetan society and the emergence of class consciousness arrived in Tibetan society and its language in the form of colonial modernity. China's invasion of Tibet started an ambitious state-led project to translate Chinese communist literature. Apart from imparting state-sanctioned ideas on Marxism, there is very little intellectual space for Tibetans to receive or produce literature on alternative emancipatory ideas and to articulate what the disenchanted space of Tibet should look like. Ironically, vocabularies of class emancipation and class consciousness came to be instrumentalised as language of abuse and oppression. This took its most radical form during the Cultural Revolution when Beijing's metropolitan social theories spilled over into Tibet.

48   In the future, if Tibetans are successful in asserting their right to self-determination, they will have to confront Tibet's own diversity within any political arrangement it manages to salvage. This will require rethinking relations pertaining to state and society in the Tibetan context and the intersubjectivity of social relations. Such a project for Tibetans will need to include multiple ideas and engage deeply with different concepts. Dawa Lokyitsang (2017) rightly notes that indigeneity has 'become a discursive site for legal contestations between settler states and Indigenous Nations'. My field data collected among Tibetan exiles in Dharamshala has persuaded me to contend that there is very little evidence to suggest deep engagement with indigeneity as a concept, or application of the concept to assert indigenous sovereignty or exploration of indigenous self-determination. Nevertheless, I agree with Lokyitsang's assertion that indigeneity is not just a symbolic category but a means for 'leveraging international movements and creating strategic solidarities for Native Nations mobilising against the mechanics of settler governmentality'.

49   This paper is in no way a call to arms to essentialise Tibetan indigeneity as a sole subaltern Tibetan subjectivity in contemporary China, but it seeks to demonstrate how, at the outset, one must engage with the concept, thereby leading to theoretically

informed knowledge and thus bridging the gap between theory and practice. On the other hand, it is an attempt to rescue decoloniality from becoming shorthand for majoritarian appropriation in post-colonial states. It also seeks to broaden the scope of decoloniality beyond the postcolonial states of the Bandung Conference. For the numerous peoples who could not assert self-determination and thus still constitute states-in-waiting, dialogical decoloniality is an invitation to engage in the project of decoloniality and to explore avenues to assert self-determination in the face of contemporary forms of settler-colonialism.

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ABSTRACTS

Current discourse on entrenched differences within the People's Republic of China (PRC) is defined in terms of evolving concepts of nationality and ethnicity. Tibetans are recognised as one of the 55 ethnic minorities distinct from the dominant Han Chinese (who comprise over 91% of the total population). This majority-minority framework has been cemented in China's normative thinking as a multi-ethnic nation-state. Political movements among Tibetan exiles based in India advocate for greater autonomy within the framework of the constitution of the PRC and the *Law on Regional National Autonomy* (*LRNA*). Based on 'patchwork ethnographic' work, this paper seeks to investigate the refusal among Tibetan exiles to associate Tibet's collective self with the concept of indigeneity. The PRC does not recognise the existence of indigenous peoples, although it voted in support of the 2007 United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples. These two divergent conceptions of indigeneity preclude the possibility of staking greater claims to indigenous sovereignty within China. By wading into debates in the Global South on decoloniality, this article is a call to revisit assumptions that have caused a reductive reading of indigeneity either exclusively as a derivative right or through the outright refusal to recognise it. I propose the notion of 'dialogical decoloniality' as opposed to selective osmosis in the uptake of theoretical concepts among states-in-waiting.

Le discours actuel sur les différences persistantes au sein de la République populaire de Chine (RPC) est défini en termes d'évolution des concepts de nationalité et d'ethnicité. Les Tibétains sont reconnus comme l'une des 55 minorités ethniques distinctes des Chinois Han dominants (qui représentent plus de 91 % de la population totale). Ce modèle majoritaire-minoritaire a été inscrit dans la pensée normative de la Chine en tant qu'État-nation multiethnique. Les mouvements politiques d'exilés tibétains basés en Inde prônent une plus grande autonomie dans le cadre de la Constitution de la RPC et de la loi sur l'autonomie nationale régionale (LRNA). Sur la base d'un travail ethnographique « en patchwork », cet article cherche à comprendre le refus des exilés tibétains d'associer l'identité collective du Tibet au concept d'indigénéité. La RPC ne reconnaît pas l'existence des peuples autochtones, bien qu'elle ait voté en faveur de la Déclaration des Nations unies sur les droits des peuples autochtones de 2007. Ces deux conceptions divergentes de l'indigénéité excluent la possibilité de revendiquer davantage de souveraineté autochtone en Chine. En s'immisçant dans les débats du Sud global sur le décolonialisme, cet article appelle à revoir les hypothèses qui ont conduit à une lecture réductrice de l'indigénéité, soit exclusivement comme un droit secondaire, soit par le refus catégorique de la reconnaître. Je propose la notion de « décolonialité dialogique » par opposition à la diffusion sélective de concepts théoriques par les États-en-formation.

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The gift of democracy: a Tibetan experience with democracy in exile

Le cadeau de la démocratie : une expérience tibétaine de la démocratie en exil

Tenzing Palmo

Introduction

1   The date 27 May 2021 is important for Tibetans around the world. After a successful general election during the Covid year, Mr. Penpa Tsering was sworn in as the Sikyong or the head of the Tibetan administration in exile. This election was historic as it had a voter turnout of 77.02%, the highest so far in the history of Tibetan democracy.[1] The events that followed did not go so smoothly, however. On 8 June 2021, out of the 45 elected parliamentarians, 21 members undertook their oath in the presence of the Interim Speaker, who was sworn in by the Chief Justice Commissioner (CJC); whereas other 22 members, in defiance, took their oath in front of a portrait of the 14th Dalai Lama and the Charter, citing the illegitimacy of the CJC's involvement in the swearing-in ceremony. Due to the divide, all parliamentarian functions were put on hold. This impasse stemmed from an earlier instance: in one of the sessions of the previous sixteenth parliament, the majority of the members of parliament (MPs) had dismissed all the three judges of the Tibetan Supreme Justice Commission on the grounds of interfering in the internal workings of parliament. The judges were reinstated after several months on the grounds that the dismissal process had not been duly followed. Though there was confusion regarding the constitutionality of the judges' reinstatement, the judges oversaw the swearing-in ceremonies of the newly elected Sikyong and the interim speaker of the parliament in exile, which became a bone of contention at the centre of this impasse among the MPs.

2   As the incident received media coverage, there was confusion among the Tibetan diaspora. While commemorating the sixty-first Tibetan Democracy Day on 2 September 2021, the Sikyong urged MPs to end this impasse and at the same time expressed his gratitude towards the Tibetans inside Tibet, saying, 'It is this strength that unites the

Tibetans in exile and keeps alive the freedom struggle. It is the common wish in our heart to reunite in Tibet'.[2] Tibetans shared their concerns and views on the issue. In the comment section of an article in *Phayul*[3] titled 'Elected representatives of the 17th TPiE[4] set to meet to resolve parliamentary deadlock', a person under the pseudonym 'deshbhakt' appealed to the representatives '*to give Tibet a priority* and let the wisdom prevail as you deliberate' (emphasis mine). Another person under the pseudonym 'JangchupSG' urged the parliamentarians to resolve the issue: '*No more drama please because we the public, everybody is watching... closely including the international govts & medias all over the world*' (emphasis mine)*.* After almost four months with no resolution, the MPs decided unanimously to approach His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Expressing his disappointment regarding the unfolding of the situation, the Dalai Lama advised the members to follow the procedures outlined in the Charter. Following this, all 45 parliamentarians were finally formally sworn in. In reaction to all this, an illustration by the artist Cactus was posted on the online handle of *Phayul* (a media group) which said: 'Our democracy was a gift, and gifts aren't returned back' (see fig 2)*.*

3   This incident highlights certain interesting characteristics of Tibetan democracy: the centrality of the figure of the Dalai Lama, the use of the term 'gift' for democracy, the overarching nationalist theme of returning to Tibet and reuniting with fellow Tibetans, and the importance of the international community to ensure legitimacy and support. According to McConnell, the rationale behind instituting the Tibetan democracy is threefold:

> (i) as an ideological weapon against Chinese propaganda and a means of legitimising TGiE (Tibetan Government-in-exile) in the eyes of western democracy, (ii) as a key part of the Tibetan freedom struggle, and (iii) as a stabilising mechanism to prevent a power vacuum after the death of the Dalai Lama. (McConnell 2009: 126)

4   McConnell (2009: 138) also highlights the fact that for Tibetan democracy, which spans various spatial and temporal contexts, it is a challenge to balance the institutional and administrative functions of democracy with its strategic mobilisations for various other means. The present article delves into the question of how the Tibetan discourse in exile influences the imagination and workings of the democracy in exile set-up. This article brings together concepts such as gift and the public sphere to understand a Tibetan experience of democracy and strives to show that democracy, which is considered a gift from the Dalai Lama, is understood by Tibetans as something sacred and precious which should not be tainted. I argue that such a conceptualisation of democracy as sacred and as a means to attain the 'higher cause' of a future free homeland saturates the space for critical public discussions, thereby sidelining the public sphere in the Tibetan democracy.

Methodology

5   This research was undertaken as part of a one-year Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (MLS) programme at Ashoka University. I spent almost four months (December 2021– March 2022) in the field. I conducted my research during the COVID-19 pandemic which limited my opportunities for participant observation. I interviewed the Tibetans of the Sonamling Tibetan settlement in Leh-Ladakh. Due to restrictions on movement and limited time for research, it was best to do field work in only one location. I chose Sonamling for two main reasons: (1) familiarity with the location because I come from

there, which allowed for easier access to the people and was helpful since it was my first research endeavour; (2) the local elections were about to take place and Sonamling is one of the few settlements in exile which elects their own chief representative, which could give more insight into my research topics. The research participants belonged to different age groups ranging from 20 to 80 years old, which made it possible to gather views from different generations; some had seen Tibet with their eyes whereas others had been born in exile. There was also an attempt to include people from both genders.

6   As for the interviews, a *semi-structured* format was adopted and was adapted according to the respondent, which allowed for varied conversations. Questions included, amongst other things, their views on democracy, discussions, gifts and elections. Personal histories were also an important component for a better understanding of their opinions and thoughts. Utmost care was taken to seek the participants' informed consent, and their anonymity was guaranteed. Real names have not been used in the article. Around 14 in-depth interviews were carried out. The interviews were conducted in the Tibetan language and, for the purpose of the research, they were translated as faithfully as possible into English. I used the Wylie transliteration for Tibetan phrases. A holistic and interpretive analysis approach was used as this seemed to be the best way to grasp abstract themes such as democracy, exile, nationalism and others. Most of the claims made here would be specific to Tibetans in India.

Initiation of democracy in exile

7   Democracy's global hegemony is well accepted and sought after. Democracy is regarded as a barometer for the progressiveness of a state or a community. As Dunn (2019: 15) asks, 'Why should it be the case that, for the first time in the history of our still conspicuously multi-lingual species, there is for the present a single world-wide name for the *legitimate basis of political authority*?' (emphasis mine). Democracy can be understood either in its instrumental and institutional forms or it can be viewed as a philosophical ideology underpinned by ideas such as freedom, equality and justice. Moreover, as anthropological works show, democracy as a concept is multifaceted and manifests itself in variegated forms in different contexts. Therefore, each democracy is unique. Anthropologist Julia Paley (2002: 475) points out that 'different definitions of democracy can be identified not only in the meaning systems of cultural subgroups, but also in state discourses and national self-understandings as well'. Defining democracy in just one way therefore limits our understanding of this multivalent concept. Emphasising the variations in democracy, Paley shows the myriad ways in which democracy is strategically employed by people within their specific contexts. Paley (2002: 477) talks about Coronil's (1997) work in Venezuela, among many other works, where the meaning of democracy has changed with different political and historical contexts; or Tambiah's (1996) work which deals with violence and democracy, as oxymoronic as it may sound. All this shows 'democracy's very multivalence' (Paley 2002: 476), which allows it to be mobilised for extremely different outcomes. However, this is not to suggest that the institutional and organisational aspects of democracy are unimportant. Rather, it is to draw attention to the multiplicity of the understandings and implementations of democracy. Béteille (2012) highlights the importance of the institutions of democracy, but he also emphasises democracy's processual nature. He suggests that the 'advance of democracy transforms subjects into citizens' (Béteille

2012: 8) whereby, rather than being subjected to various ideas and norms, people are increasingly taking ownership of the functioning of democracy. My insights from this research resonate with the argument put forward by Paley about the importance of seeing how different groups understand and implement democracy in their own way. The Tibetan journey with democracy, located in a specific time and space, underlines democracy's generally multivalent character.

8 Tibetans' formal encounter with democracy took shape in exile, but the seed had started to germinate earlier. In his foreword to the Constitution of Tibet (drafted in 1963) the Dalai Lama writes

> Even prior to my departure from Tibet in March 1959, I had come to the conclusion that in the changing circumstances of the modern world, the system of governance in Tibet must be modified and amended so as to allow the elected representatives of the people to play a more effective role in guiding and shaping the social and economic policies of the State. I also firmly believed that this could only be done through democratic institutions based on social and economic justice.

9 Therefore, one of the important missions of the Dalai Lama in exile has been to rehabilitate the Tibetans who had followed him into exile and to initiate the democratic journey. As early as February 1960 in Bodh Gaya, the Dalai Lama started introducing democracy by advising the Tibetans to elect their representatives. Following this, on 2 September 1960, a 13-member Commission of Tibetan People's Deputies (which later became the TPiE) was elected. This day is celebrated every year as Tibetan Democracy Day by Tibetans all over the world. Tibetans often say that democracy is a gift from the Dalai Lama. The sudden introduction of democratic freedoms, which Tibetans did not necessarily ask or fight for, could have caused confusion. However, the Dalai Lama, in an effort to familiarise the Tibetans with democracy, insisted that democracy is not 'strange' or 'alien' to them because democratic aspects are integral and inherent to Buddha's teachings and practices (Brox 2008: 71). In addition to introducing democracy, the Dalai Lama also initiated efforts to protect the Tibetan language and culture. The first Tibetan school, where Tibetan children who had fled with their families could be educated, was set up in March 1960 in Mussoorie. Thanks to these efforts, Tibetans have managed to carve out a distinct identity for themselves, which contributes to the construction of a Tibetan national identity.[5] An illustration by Lobsang Gyatso (fig 1) for the *Tibetan Review* aptly summarises the Tibetan democratic journey which was bestowed from above.

Fig 1: Illustration by Lobsang Gyatso for the *Tibetan Review*, 1990.
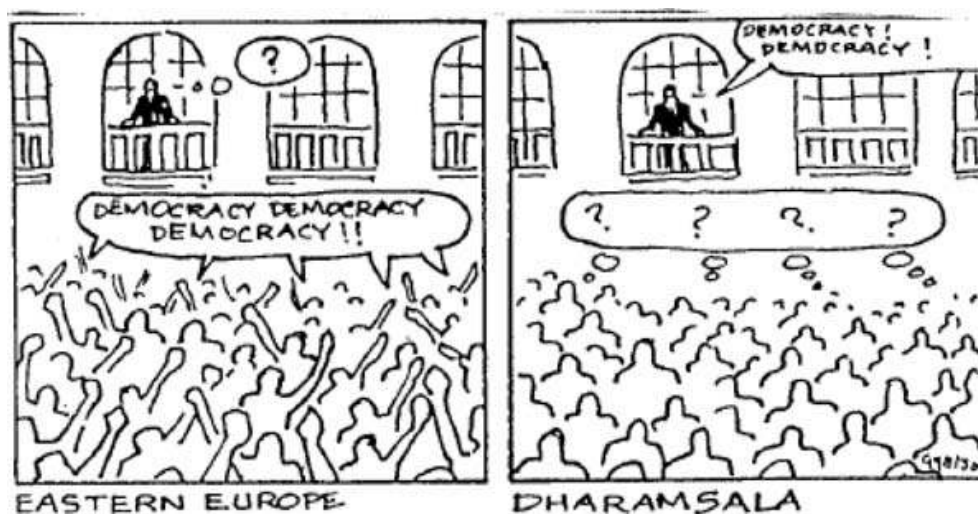
Source: Tibetan Review. Date: 1990.

10   McConnell (2009: 128) suggests that 'Tibetan democratisation can be seen as constituting a key image-building exercise and an attempt to situate the Tibetan exiled polity and its broader cause firmly within contemporary discourses about democracy and good governance'. Exile became a place from which exiled Tibetans would remember and protect their homeland, language and culture so that by the time they returned to Tibet, they would have a full-fledged democratic system, a legitimate one. For the Tibetans in exile, democracy becomes a mechanism which connects them with those who remain in Tibet and also a democracy becomes hope of returning to a free homeland. With the Tibetan freedom struggle as its backdrop, democracy was presented to Tibetans as a path connecting the past and future aspirations for a self-ruled Tibet. In the words of the Dalai Lama,

> Because this freedom struggle of ours is for rights, freedom and the future happiness of six million Tibetans, we certainly must consolidate the democratic institutions and democratic systems. As I have said many times, for the creation of modern Tibet and the development of the people, it is crucial to value freedom and democracy. (Brox 2008: 79)

11   In line with this, McConnell (2009: 122) uses the term 'democracy-in-waiting' to characterise how the existent Tibetan democracy in exile negotiates various temporal and spatial contexts. The making of Tibetan democracy speaks simultaneously to a past which needs to be reformed and practised in exile in the present to create a better future in Tibet. I slightly differ from McConnell in that, instead of setting aside democracy for a future time, I argue, like Paley (2002), that democracy is as democracy does, and hence I wish to show how democracy manifests itself in the case of Tibetans in India.

A Tibetan nation in exile: Tibet as a constant

12   Nationalism can be understood as a 'particularised discourse of collective identity' (Anand 2000: 274) wherein what is characterised as 'national' is carefully chosen and constructed. The Tibetan nation in exile was constructed as an entity united against Chinese oppression, with a wish to return home and to reassure itself that the self will

not disappear in exile. For Anand (2000: 275), 'the Tibetan national imagination is a product/process of strategic essentialism, oriented towards the goal of retaining homeland'.

13   The Tibetan national identity is characterised by the condition of being in exile, where specific resources from history, language and culture are strategically employed to instil a sense of lost homeland and one's liminal existence in exile. A quick overview of the exile set-up with the various refugee settlements and Dharamshala, the seat of Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), reveals a careful re-creation of the imagined homeland in exile. As 'self-contained cultural units' (Norbu 2003: 209), the refugee settlements were 'deliberately designed…to recreate Tibetan society with its core values intact' (ibid: 204). There are around 45 settlements across India, Nepal and Bhutan[6] which are akin to small microcosms with all the required functionaries such as welfare, education, economy and others. The governance of these settlements is a mixture of grass-roots level democracy run by group leaders and their committee members (*bcudpon*) and of supervision by the CTA Home Department through the appointed settlement officers.[7] The extensive network of around 63 Tibetan schools in India and Nepal works to provide modern education to Tibetan children and to instil in them a strong feeling of Tibetanness (Hess 2009: 66). Lokyitsang's (2022: 2) ethnographic essay about the educational institutions in exile shows the central role that schools played in fostering solidarity within the Tibetan community, members of which viewed each other as family. Her work shows that despite being separated from their kin back in Tibet, Tibetans in exile were able to forge new friendships which were 'not about replacing family with friends, but instead represented a way of adapting to the realities of being separated from kin' (Lokyitsang 2022: 9). The structure of the exile set-up further emphasises the primacy of recreating Tibet in exile. Norbulingka, which is named after the summer abode of the Dalai Lama in Tibet, is a well-known cultural centre in Dharamshala. The three traditional monastic institutions (Sera, Drepung and Ganden) along with the other main monasteries and nunneries (Tashilhunpo, Namdroling and others) have been rebuilt in India and are home to thousands of monks and nuns. 'Potala', 'Snow lion', 'Lhasa', 'Tibet' and other Tibet-related motifs are commonly adopted by Tibetans for their business ventures. The production of culturally representative yet strategically essentialist motifs and traditional crafts, which is one of the main sources of livelihood for the Tibetans in exile (Korom 1997: 3), constitutes a significant amount of cultural work, forging the image of their homeland. As Korom (1997: 5) proposes, 'the intentionality behind these emergent craft forms seems to suggest a purposeful attempt to locate the homeland at the centre of the refugee discourse' and these efforts have borne fruit.

14   A lost homeland and a separated people are a constant and recurrent theme amongst Tibetans of all generations. It governs much of their exile life. A 39-year-old man who works for a non-governmental Tibetan organisation said that the fact that there are millions of Tibetans inside Tibet who have put their faith in those in exile, believing that they will bring some good news soon enough, is what drives him to do his public work in the Tibetan community. An elderly grandmother broke down in tears while talking about the struggle the Tibetans have been through and insisted that 'the younger Tibetans should live up to the wishes of the Dalai Lama and get our country back'. Penpa, an 83-year-old grandfather (*popo*) said, 'I am someone who has to leave this world one day but I am always ready and waiting to go back to our *home,* to Tibet, if

and when the efforts of the Dalai Lama and the government bear fruit'. He then added, 'if needed, I am ever-ready to give my life'. He had left Tibet and his family because he had decided that wherever the Dalai Lama would be is where he would go. He asked me rhetorically, 'who is not attached to/who doesn't have allegiance towards Tibet?'

15   For the elder generation, who have experienced first-hand the loss of their homeland, it is natural to feel strongly about returning to Tibet. However, younger Tibetans feel no less passionately about this. Tsering and Choekyi, two young women who are also members of the Regional Tibetan Youth Congress, saw no other way of being Tibetan than being vocal about Tibet. One of them (aged 26) said that 'there is no option of backing off' and that being born a Tibetan is itself equivalent to being an activist for Tibet. The other woman (aged 29) rationalised that, being in a free country like India as opposed to being repressed in Tibet, one must use this freedom to raise one's voice for the brothers and sisters back in Tibet. There are Tibetans who are more vocal, but there are some, like one young interlocutor (aged 24), who are determined to contribute in any way to the Tibetan struggle but would first like to set themselves up in life. Life in exile is precarious and complex for many young people who negotiate their existence on a day-to-day basis. However, as this young interlocutor put it, every Tibetan, including themselves, is 'hot-blooded' when it comes to Tibet.

16   The Tibetan nation is intrinsically connected to democracy. As I will show in the following section, democracy among Tibetans in India cannot be treated separately from the larger vision of a Tibetan homeland. The Tibetan nationalist cause is integral to imagining the Tibetan community within the exilic population, and democracy becomes subsumed within this greater cause. This has repercussions on how people view the process and purpose of democracy.

Democracy and nationalism in exile

17   In exile, democracy is constituted within the larger framework of nationalism, which is undergirded by the desire to return home. Democracy facilitates the creation and strengthening of a Tibetan national identity through processes such as elections and voting which help to knit the Tibetan community together, counteracting dissolution into the host communities. Every aspect of this democratic machinery stands as a reminder of one's exile and reinforces the nationalist goal of returning to a free Tibet. Unlike other democracies, voting and elections in the Tibetan set-up take place according to one's region of origin in Tibet, and the constitution of the TPiE is based on the three traditional regions of Tibet and the four sects of Tibetan Buddhism and the Bon religion. Concerning the Tibetan electoral system, McConnell (2016: 83) observes that 'the voting system [...] was designed to play a key role in shaping the political consciousness of the diaspora and forging a symbolic link with the homeland'. After seven decades of exile, there are three generations of Tibetans who have been born without the physical and material attachment that the first Tibetan exiles had, yet the feeling of Tibetanness is no less strong amongst new generations. It is the processes of nation-making, such as elections, education, history, culture and language, that keeps the Tibetan identity alive and intact. Other than democracy, there are various other elements that help create a Tibetan national identity in exile. For instance, the layout of the exiles' settlements, as discussed by Norbu (2003: 186–212) and Bentz (2012a:88–91), were instrumental in creating a nation in exile.

18   India, Nepal and Bhutan used to host the majority of Tibetan exiles, however, with increasing out-migration, the number of Tibetans settled outside these regions is increasing. An estimated half of the exile population have settled in regions like North America, Europe and Australasia (Samten et al 2020: 10). The exile set-up allowed the Tibetans to maintain a distinct identity for themselves. Moreover, the 'non-assimilative' approach by the host governments facilitated the maintenance of the separate identity (Norbu 2003: 204). One example of this is the 'voluntary' statelessness that the Tibetans have chosen for themselves. Tibetans, according to the Citizenship Act of 1955, are eligible to become citizens of India. However, the path to obtaining Indian citizenship is not easy. The TGiE maintains statelessness as a 'moral approach' (McGranahan 2018: 370), constitutive of their common political project of sovereignty and legitimacy. Even though the TGiE neither encourages nor discourages the adoption of citizenship in other countries, there exists a political narrative, mostly in South Asia, which juxtaposes one's citizenship and one's political allegiance to the Tibetan cause. The assumption is that by taking on foreign citizenship and therefore distancing oneself from the TGiE, one will move farther away from the Tibetan cause and identity. However, Gupta (2019: 343) has shown that voting cards or Indian citizenship do not have a transformative impact on political self-identification among Tibetans or on their allegiance to the Tibetan cause. McGranahan posits that the refusal of citizenship by some Tibetans in South Asia is not an end in itself but is 'generative and affiliative' (2018: 368) as it forges solidarity amongst the Tibetans and a claim for sovereign Tibet (2018: 371). The embedded morality in remaining refugees in South Asia is stronger than the gains provided by citizenship (McGranahan 2016: 337). With their migrating to the West and the fact that it is impossible for them to continue as stateless people, Tibetans opt for foreign citizenship, but they do not give up their refugee-hood (Bentz 2023: 435–440). McGranahan argues that refusal here (outside of South Asia) does not apply to citizenship but to the assumed link that obtaining foreign citizenship cancels their refugee-hood (McGranahan 2018: 376). However, Bentz (2023: 428) argues, based on her work with Tibetans in Canada, that rather than being a reconfigured refusal, the negotiations by Tibetan migrants serve to 'repurpos[e] citizenship with a new and highly specific meaning'. Similarly, Hess (2009: 20) argues that 'Tibetans see the adoption of US citizenship as a means to empower themselves as political actors for their lost homeland in a transnational sphere. *In short, by becoming US citizens they become political agents for their own lost state*'. Bentz (2023: 442) suggests that the Tibetan diaspora in the West could be best understood through the concept of 'refugee citizenship', as their identity of being a refugee is underpinned by a cause which is further propagated and defended through their citizenship status in the host countries. Irrespective of where one is or which citizenship one holds, 'Tibet represents both a palpable sense of loss and, at the same time, it represents all that is most saturated with meaning, the raison d'être for many exile selves' (Hess 2009: 12).

The figure of the Dalai Lama and the gift of democracy

19   The Dalai Lama is central to both the nationalist and democratic framework. He is the symbol of Tibet and the foundation of the Tibetan nation. As the manifestation of the Bodhisattva of Compassion (*Avalokiteshvara)*, he is the patron deity of the Tibetan land and people and, as one of my elderly interlocutors Popo-Pema (aged 61) states, 'the one

and only' (*yod na med na).* The Dalai Lama is the 'symbol of Tibet' (Bentz 2012b: 293) wherein Tibetans identify with him and recognise him as their leader. Bentz argues that the figure of the Dalai Lama and the institution associated with him have been considered a symbol of Tibet, but it is because of his living in exile and especially of his being the current fourteenth Dalai Lama that he is considered a 'summarising symbol' (2012b: 290), a symbol that explains everything Tibetan to the Tibetans. Ortner, who coined this term, explains that 'summarising symbols... are those symbols which are seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotionally powerfully and relatively undifferentiated way, what the system means to them' (cited in Bentz 2012: 290). Bentz observes that within the precarious conditions of exile coupled with the trauma of invasion, there was a strong need for unity and guidance which the Tibetans found in the figure of the Dalai Lama: 'a consensual figure for all Tibetans..., a figure able to transcend basic political, religious and social divisions' (Bentz 2012: 290). A few random interactions with Tibetans are enough to gauge the centrality of the Dalai Lama and the immense faith and respect the Tibetan people show towards him. For instance, an elderly grandmother (*ama la*) in her seventies said tearfully, 'we who do not even have an ounce of land to call ours in this foreign land are able to live a good life, all because of the Dalai Lama's efforts and hard work'. The Dalai Lama is the 'one and only' symbol for Tibet and the Tibetans. He is also a symbol of religion for many Buddhists around the world. And not only for Tibetans or Buddhists is the Dalai Lama an international icon and a symbol of humanity, peace, compassion and non-violence.

20 The establishment of the current system of democracy in exile is a result of the Dalai Lama's efforts and mission. The common perception of democracy as a 'gift' from the Dalai Lama and the reverence reserved for it are evidence of his centrality in the democratisation project. Owing to his charismatic presence (Bentz 2012b: 298) and Tibetans' unquestioned faith in him, the Dalai Lama has been a key figure in constructing Tibetan democracy as it exists today. At the start of his exile – an exile the Tibetans thought would be temporary but which is still ongoing –, the Dalai Lama presented democracy as the 'only choice' (Brox 2008: 71) available to the Tibetans. Democracy was strategically introduced in exile to provide the Tibetan population with 'security for the present and hope for the future' (McConnell 2016: 99). Democracy becomes a springboard for connecting the past with a desired future of a democratic Tibet, allowing for continuity in its political legitimacy. Until 2011, the fourteenth Dalai Lama was both the executive and the spiritual head of the Tibetans. In 2011, the Dalai Lama devolved all his political authority upon the elected leadership. However, on requests from the Tibetan representatives, he remains advisor and guide to the Tibetan leadership and the people. Regarding the transition to democracy and the devolution of powers by the Dalai Lama, McConnell (2016: 100) suggests that these are a 'key stabilising mechanism in light of an imminent power vacuum after the current Dalai Lama passes away'. However, this devolution has been accepted with some resistance by the Tibetan populace. The elderly man who earlier called the Dalai Lama the 'one and only', when asked how he felt when the Dalai Lama had devolved his powers upon the Sikyong (political leader), said, 'it was not right... no one can rule and guide like the Dalai Lama'. Furthermore, the case described at the beginning of this article, in which the parliamentarians unanimously approached the Office of the Dalai Lama for guidance, is proof of the immense presence the Dalai Lama continues to have in the

democratic set-up. It is difficult to imagine the permanent alienation of the figure of the Dalai Lama from the nationalistic and democratic discourse in exile.

21 As a 'higher being' (Frechette 2007: 99) whose wisdom transcends mortal capacities, any and everything to do with the Dalai Lama is considered to be sacred and precious. Having been blessed or touched by the Dalai Lama is considered virtuous. A morsel of food from which he has taken a bite is shared amongst many people as it is believed to be blessed. Now let us consider democracy, a project spearheaded by the Dalai Lama who has invested a great deal during his exile in nurturing a democratic system. There is an uncontested belief among Tibetans that democracy, for them, is a *gift* from the Dalai Lama; therefore; democracy becomes an object of deep reverence and value. If even a small piece of food from the Dalai Lama is treated with such intensity of emotions, imagine what democracy would mean to a Tibetan populace who did not have to fight for it like other communities around the world. In the interviews I conducted, this reverence towards democracy was very potent and the people wholeheartedly accepted that democracy is *indeed* a gift. When I asked the question 'what do you think about the common phrase that democracy is a gift?' people responded in ways that meant that it was not in fact a question. Popo-Tsering, an elderly man, aged 79, who had escaped Tibet in the 1960s as a monk before joining the army in exile, agreed with the same zeal that democracy is a gift. He said that Tibetans are extremely privileged in that they were given a 'ready-to-use' democracy (*bza chog chog thung chog chog*), hinting that they did not have to struggle for democracy but were presented with it *ready-made.* He even exclaimed that it is rare or unseen in the world for someone with power and authority (*rkubkyag*, lit. chair, seat) to willingly and voluntarily give it all as the Dalai Lama has. He said that Tibetans are therefore very fortunate. Democracy was presented by the Dalai Lama to the Tibetans who accepted it with reverence and a deep sense of indebtedness for this 'gift'.

22 Labelling Tibetan democracy a gift from the Dalai Lama triggers conversations about the meanings of gift and the way to deal with this gift. Instituting democracy was one of the foremost engagements of the Dalai Lama on reaching India. For the past six decades, Tibetans have practised democracy in their own ways. The Tibetan way of doing democracy is not the same as the way democracy is practised elsewhere, or even in India, the host country. Democracy as such may consist of certain universal elements such as freedom, welfare or specific institutions, but how these values are understood, implemented and negotiated are matters dependent on the context and the people, something Brox (2016: 2) would call 'translations 'of democracy. Studying Tibetan democracy as a gift from the Dalai Lama would give an idea about how Tibetans make meaning(s) of democracy and its consequences.

23 Douglas (2012: xi), in her foreword to Mauss's *The Gift*, wrote that 'the whole society can be described by the catalogue of transfers that map all the obligations between its members. The cycling gift system is the society'. Therefore, studying gifts can illuminate a whole society, as gifts are not just objects passed from one person to another but are embedded with the processes of society-making. Exchanging gifts involves relation-making. Marcel Mauss (2012: 50) expounds on the three obligatory aspects of gift-giving: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive and the obligation to reciprocate. Amidst the giving, receiving and reciprocation operate social processes of identification and recognition: only when one engages with another can one be identified or recognised; thus, gifts are productive. Similarly in the Tibetan case,

accepting democracy as a gift underpins a kind of relationship between the Dalai Lama and the Tibetans wherein the Dalai Lama is recognised as the symbol for Tibet and as a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara.

24 Responding to the incident that was described in the introduction, the artist Cactus drew an illustration for *Phayul* which said that 'our democracy was a gift, and gifts aren't returned back' (fig 2).

Fig 2: Illustration by Cactus for *Phayul*, 24 May 2021
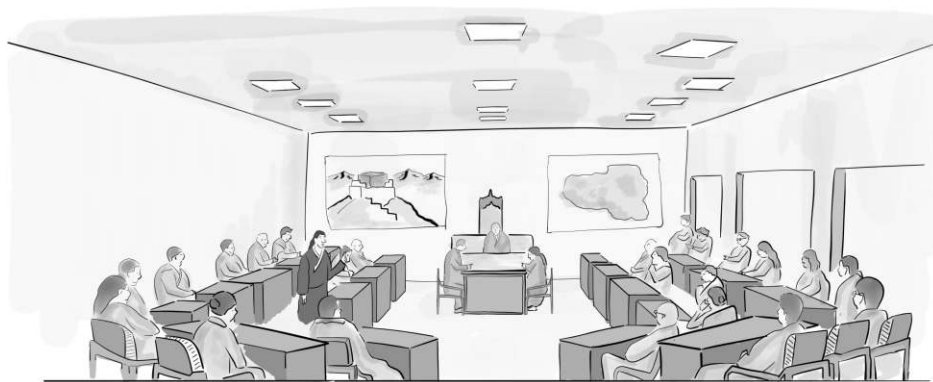
"Our Democracy was a gift, and gifts aren't returned back."

ᐸᐱᐸᐳᐭ (for Phayul)

Source: http://www.phayul.com/2021/05/25/45698/ Date: 2021.

25 All this raises the question of what it means to call democracy a gift, why this gift cannot be returned, how to return it or what is so inappropriate in the return. The Maussian idea of the 'spirit of the gift' is helpful here. Mauss discusses the Maori idea of the 'hau', the spiritual power innate in things that have been given, which obliges the receiver to reciprocate. Otherwise, it is believed that 'serious harm might befall [them]' (2012: 14-15). The gift then is not 'inactive' (Mauss 2012: 15) but is animated with the spiritual and personal forces of the giver which elicits reciprocation. Mauss has been critically scrutinised by many authors for his understanding of the 'spirit of the gift'. However, its salience as a concept cannot be denied (Graeber 2001: 155). Sherry observes that

> once an individual invests psychic energy in an object, the object becomes 'charged' with the energy of that agent. Objects become containers for the being of the donor, who gives a portion of that being to the recipient. This metaphoric conception of gift exchange alludes to the symbolic encoding of the gift with connotative meaning. (Sherry 1983: 159)

26 The animated gift is an embodiment of the giver, which personifies the 'permanence of the original donor's rights' (Godelier 1999: 44). The gift or the valuable has a force of its own which obligates the recipient to reciprocate the gift (and to do so in an appropriate manner). In the exchange of gifts, the honour of both the giver and receiver are

engaged, and therefore reciprocation must be of equal level or higher status (Mauss 2012: 42–55). This idea of an 'active' gift is visible in the Tibetan case where democracy is considered a gift from the Dalai Lama and is therefore suffused with some personal essence of the Dalai Lama himself. For Cactus, the aforementioned artist, it seems that the inability of the TPiE to resolve the impasse problem and the fact that they had to involve the Dalai Lama who had devolved his powers is akin to an inappropriate return of the gift of democracy.

27 Graeber (2001: 167) emphasises the fact that, to understand the gift, one must understand local ideas about personhood and local world views. In the Tibetan case, the Dalai Lama, as a symbol for Tibet and a manifestation of Avalokiteshvara, is an enlightened 'higher being' (Frechette 2007: 99) whose presence transcends everything. For the Tibetans, the gift of democracy is not just any gift but a gift from the Dalai Lama, the Bodhisattva of Compassion. This gift of democracy is animated by the personhood of the Dalai Lama and is therefore accepted as precious and sacred (Frechette 2007: 116) with faith-like reverence and a sense of indebtedness. The translation of the Dalai Lama's sanctity and spirit onto democracy has characterised it as something sacred which belongs to a higher spiritual realm. This intricate connection between the Dalai Lama and democracy which disengages democracy from any form of noise or negative influences. A sacred democracy allows only sanitised engagement which is protected from any disorder, without more openly conflictual debate. Any form of chaos, disagreement or disorder in the way democracy functions is treated as a direct sign of disrespect and ungratefulness towards the Dalai Lama, and therefore the Tibetan cause. Bentz (2012b: 296) says that 'when the Dalai Lama is ridiculed, this has an impact on the Tibetan cause, which he both represents and defends'. A dysfunctional or chaotic democracy is seen as a failure of the democratic project the Dalai Lama has spread and therefore projects a negative image in the international arena.

The danger of a 'summarising symbol'

28 There is an inherent danger in constructing everything around the Dalai Lama. As Basu rightly points out

> The evocative strength of the symbol of the Dalai Lama is directly counterpoised by a corresponding vulnerability: the unitary character of a summarising symbol allows little possibility for adaptive reformulations when the social matrix that originally produced it undergoes radical change. This singularly remains the challenge of the Tibetan diaspora. (Basu 2018: 81)

29 Adding to this, Bentz (2012b: 290) argues that, unlike the American flag – an object that Ortner takes as an example – the symbol in the Tibetan case is a person in flesh-and-blood who is subject to change and death. Therefore, centring anything and everything Tibetan around the Dalai Lama is dangerous, and the system risks being paralysed when the current Dalai Lama will no longer be there. It is a well-known fact that the Dalai Lama himself is aware of the power he wields amongst Tibetans and the dangers of being the only symbol for the people. As an alternative to this situation, the Dalai Lama has framed and promoted democracy amongst the Tibetans as a symbol of the people to ensure the 'continuity of political legitimacy' of the structure in exile and to rightfully fill the power vacuum once the current Dalai Lama passes away (McConnell

2016: 99–100). According to Basu, the Dalai Lama is perhaps the only 'Tibetan symbol that can transcend the potentially destructive factionalism of political groupings' (2018: 82) and unite Tibetans in their fight for their homeland. If the Tibetan cause does not see any developments during the time of the current Dalai Lama, there is a huge risk of the Tibetan nation falling apart and therefore challenging the durability of the Tibetan cause. It is within such a vulnerable context that democracy, strategically introduced, has the capacity to overcome these challenges. With the devolution of his political power in 2011, the Dalai Lama formally gave the reins of Tibetan democracy to the people. However, the constant evocation and involvement of the Dalai Lama by the Tibetan populace in matters of democracy, as is evident in the case described at the start of this article, limits the potential of democracy. Tibetans are socialised into a notion of sacred democracy which reflects or embodies the Dalai Lama. Such a conceptualisation of democracy is detached from the everyday workings of democracy, which are usually characterised by discussions, exchanges, differences, disagreements and disorder. If indeed the 'advance of democracy transforms subjects into citizens' (Béteille 2012: 8), an active public sphere driven by Tibetans would be a marker of that transformation which we see as lacking in the Tibetan space.

A Tibetan public sphere: fomenting trouble

30   In India, 'democracy emerged… out of a confrontation with a power imposed from outside rather than an engagement with the contradictions inherent in Indian society' (Béteille 2012: 9–10). Similarly, the Tibetan democratic journey took shape in exile against Chinese repression and was constructed with a future-oriented goal of returning to a free homeland. This democracy was embraced by the Tibetans as a 'gift' from the Dalai Lama. The intermeshing of all these factors has lent a unique character to the Tibetan democracy in which much has been invested in building a strong nation with a democratic foundation geared towards the achievement of the political goal of regaining the homeland. In India, too, the development of its democracy was first and foremost a freedom struggle against the colonial rulers wherein 'the building of new political institutions took second place, and the creation of the economic and social conditions for the successful operation of those institutions, such as education, health care, and other social services, lagged well behind' (Béteille 2012: 10). As is always the case when one aspect is prioritised, other elements are compromised. Similarly, in the Tibetan case, the nationalist discourse in exile has driven democracy in a particular direction. Democracy is saturated with nationalistic ideas of regaining the lost homeland which leaves very little room for other aspects of democracy to flourish. This article deals with one such neglected aspect: the public sphere.

31   Habermas (1989: 117) outlines the 'bourgeois public sphere' as being made up of private people gathered together and engaging in a rational-critical debate to articulate society's needs with the state. His work traces the journey from a 'public critically reflecting on its culture to one that merely consumes it' amidst the rise of capitalism, the growth of corporations and the increasing presence of the media (Habermas 1989: 175). The Habermasian public sphere is a 'space of institutions and practices between the private interests of everyday life in civil society and the realm of state power' (Kellner 2000: 4) where individuals openly discuss common public concerns with little fear of consequences. In eighteenth-century France when social mobility and

intermingling was difficult to imagine, men from the nobility and the bourgeois classes gathered in *salons* to talk about art, literature, economics and politics (Habermas 1989: 31–36). In a highly hierarchised society, a space was created where one's status did not preclude one's engagement in intelligent discourse. Of course, this public sphere of the *salon* is far from equality as we imagine it today, as only educated men were allowed. However, the creation of such spaces where criticality and rationality were prioritised is one of the first manifestations of the public sphere, and the value of this concept is still very potent. According to Fraser, the public sphere

> designates a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs, hence, an institutionalised arena of discursive interaction. This arena is conceptually distinct from the state; it is a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state. (Fraser 1990: 57)

32 Fraser (1990: 70) takes the notion of public sphere further by suggesting the existence of multiple public spheres or counter publics instead of a single one, and argues that discursive equality on all fronts in one public sphere is not possible. No one would disagree that a vibrant public sphere is essential for achieving the necessary conditions for democracy. But, as mentioned before, it would be almost impossible to find the same kind of democracy in every context; instead, what we find are *translations* of the concept of democracy. Similarly, the notion of public sphere is appropriated by different people and contexts to meet their needs and conditions. Paley uses the term 'accountable democracy' (2004: 498) to emphasise the importance of public deliberation in policy aspects when she says 'my point is not to discredit deliberation but, instead, to identify it as a necessary *but insufficient* condition for democracy, which must also entail the impact of public opinion of public policy and law' (2004: 497). To Habermas's normative framework of the public sphere (where people deliberate and communicate on matters of public concern), Paley adds the idea that citizens' deliberation should have an impact on policy to produce a more democratic society (2004: 497).

33 In addition to the context of exile within which the Tibetan nation in exile and democracy germinated, there also exist certain conditions for the public sphere. Tibetan democracy functions in a nationalist framework wherein the cause of Tibet, the common project of returning to the homeland, is a higher cause than the practice of democracy itself. Brox (2016: 263) notes that '[m]ost Tibetans view these two [freedom struggle and democracy] as disconnected projects in which "free Tibet" represents a "higher cause", compared to democracy that is identified as "lower politics"'. Democracy becomes a means to achieve an ultimately noble end. With the nationalist discourse so focussed on the Tibetan struggle, other aspects of democracy – discussions, dialogues, disagreements, differences – are sidelined and seen as causing trouble (*rnyog dra kyi rtsa va*) especially when discussions concern elections or political workings. A 37-year-old man expressed his worries when I asked about developments in Tibetan democracy, referring to the elections of 2011 and 2016. He said, 'it is worrisome that in just half a decade, we have already had so many issues and troubles, I don't think it is helpful at all, for our struggle', and added that 'if people from outside see it, it is shameful'. Labelling these discussions as causing trouble or jeopardising the overall struggle highlights the degree of aversion and sensitivity amongst the Tibetan people. This aversion is the most pronounced in the case of elections in the Tibetan diaspora, as shall be seen in the next section.

34   This is not to say that public space as such does not exist at all in the Tibetan case – it certainly does exist but is restricted and minimal. Tibetan democracy is so saturated with the nationalist discourse that critical communication and discussion of public matters, whether political or social, do not get much space: critical internal questioning becomes secondary to the nationalist project of returning home. Tibetans do express concern over social issues such as education, gender, youth employment, welfare and others but these spaces are perceived to be limited to experts. However, initiatives like the Tibetan Equality Project (a space for the Tibetan queer community) and Drokmo (an organisation focussed on gender) have kickstarted conversations on these sidelined topics. Similarly, The Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy (TCHRD) started a campaign called 'YouthQuake' wherein they engage in discussions with different groups of young people on the topic of Tibetan democracy. There is also 'Democracy and Debate', a channel on YouTube run by students and professionals with the aim of 'improv[ing] Tibetan democracy by creating a platform for open discussion and educating society'. These initiatives are the start of a public sphere of discussion on democracy but seem to be a long way from changing the status quo where democracy is treated as a 'gift' and a means to achieving the nationalist goal of returning home.

Elections: from a public debate to 'in conversation with'

35   The Tibetan general elections are held every five years and any Tibetan above the age of 18 who has a Green Book can directly elect the Sikyong, along with the 45 members of parliament. The Tibetan democracy is a partyless democracy and has a unicameral legislative body. The TPiE consists of 45 members: '10 representatives from each of the three traditional provinces of Tibet ie U-Tsang, Dhotoe and Domey; two from each of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism and the pre-Buddhist Bon religion; and two representing each of the Tibetan communities in North America and Europe; plus one from Australasia and Asia (excluding India, Nepal and Bhutan)'.[8] According to Shain (1989: 2), the 'two main concerns that affect all exile political activists and shape their behaviour are "national loyalty" and "recognition"'. Elections are the stage where both national loyalty and recognition are secured. In the Tibetan case, elections function in two ways: internally, voting with one's Green Book is an act of legitimising the exile administration and thereby promoting the nationalist struggle; and externally, elections are an appeal for recognition and support from democracy-loving states and individual liberals, including activists and politicians outside the Tibetan diaspora.

36   In *Why India Votes?* Banerjee (2014: 4–10) studies ordinary Indians' experiences of voting and elections and the meanings they confer on these processes. Elections are undoubtedly one of the most characteristic markers of democracy, perhaps even a precondition. Elections are also performative in that they have an effect. The voting rights of Tibetans under the TGiE area reminder of one's statelessness which is a historical, political and moral claim of nationhood and also a political critique of the repressive Chinese rule in Tibet (Gupta 2019: 333). Therefore, Tibetans regard voting and elections as a serious matter, almost as a sacred responsibility. As Banerjee says,

> Voting is not just a means to elect a government. Rather, the very act of voting is seen by them as meaningful, as an end, which expresses the virtues of citizenship,

accountability and civility that they wish to see in ordinary life, but rarely can.
(Banerjee 2014: 3)

37   However, simply casting one's vote does not equate with a full-fledged participatory democracy. For instance, voting in Nagaland is done collectively or by what is called 'proxy-voting' wherein votes are cast on behalf of people or clans who do not necessarily go to the voting booth (Wouters et al 2019), which runs counter to the election motto 'one vote one person'. For Tibetans, voting is a sacred act. Everyone I corresponded with for this research had cast their vote for both the Sikyong elections and the local Chief Representative Office (CRO) elections. Dawa, a 50-year-old man who runs a shop in Leh said, 'This gift of democracy was given to us because it was needed. Being a Tibetan, one is given one right, the right to vote, and one should prioritise it and decide for oneself who to vote for'. In a similar vein, Dolma and Penpa, an elderly couple aged 79 and 83 respectively, proudly said that they have voted in every election at all levels (Sikyong, local CRO and even the camp elections). They talked very passionately about Tibet and, when asked about voting, they said they considered it their right but also their responsibility.

38   Tibetans take a keen interest in the political workings of the Tibetan administration in exile but are averse to anything which disrupts unity and undermines the Tibetan struggle. Consequently, discussions or debates about the government in exile and its workings are minimal or at best avoided. Dawa, the shop owner, explained the futility of public discussions. He said, 'a good use of pen and paper would be when one writes words that are useful and not when one writes useless and unhelpful things'. He continued: 'since our society is very sensitive (*khrugpo*), debates will cause instability'. Similar aversion is seen in another case. In Ladakh, where this research was conducted, a few youths decided to organise a 'public debate' between the two candidates for the local CRO elections.[9] When I interviewed the organisers, they said that they thought that it was important to bring the candidates together with the general public for a discussion. It was indeed a fresh initiative, but a public debate did not take place, because one of the candidates refused on the grounds that discussions are a source of trouble. Therefore, instead of calling it a 'debate', the organisers referred to it as being 'in conversation with' the other candidate.

Concluding remarks: to question is to harm the Tibetan struggle

39   The Tibetan struggle opposes the Chinese government who occupies their land and continues to destabilise the community in exile.[10] Tibetans need to show a strong united front against the Chinese state. Therefore, any inkling of disunity or fracture in the Tibetan community is a direct symptom of weakening national solidarity. Mention of China or the Chinese government is a metaphor within common Tibetan parlance for disunity, disturbance or rupture, and there is always the fear that a Chinese spy might be amongst the people. Popo-Penpa, the 83-year-old grandfather, was relatively sure that the Chinese were behind all the destabilising activities or trouble during the elections. He said that those creating 'trouble' in society were backed financially by the Chinese government. Another 34-year-old woman, who has spent about three years volunteering at the Regional Tibetan Women's Association, when asked about how the election campaigns were, said that 'healthy discussions are good but what we see now

in our society disrupts our unity and harms our Tibetan struggle'. She added that 'there is no need for Chinese then', meaning that if Tibetans themselves can ruin their unity and harm their Tibetan struggle, the Chinese do not need to come do it for them. She went on to say, 'our main aim (*dmigsyul*) is to not forget Tibet, and to work hard for our Tibetan cause, but if we get occupied with these things [referring to dialogues and discussions], then it slows down our pace'. As I further inquired whether democracy was harming the struggle, she said,

> It is not that democracy is bad or anything. For instance, it is unthinkable to imagine people from the older generations expressing their opinions ... [however] we have slowed down in our initial and larger project and I would like us to speed things up.

40 Moreover, with only around several thousand Tibetans in exile, maintaining peace and harmony is regarded as the most important. Therefore, most people prefer to stay silent rather than engage in discussions which they believe will not only upset the Dalai Lama but also jeopardise their struggle. When I asked Popo-Pema about the absence of debate amongst Tibetans, he said, 'The community is so close, there is some hesitation, which is why people don't speak up much'. He continued, 'Why forge enmity when we know that we will see each other again?' Another man in his fifties, when asked about why he does not engage in discussions at his camp's meeting, responded, 'I am worried that what I may say might hurt someone, so it is better to keep quiet'.[11]

41 As I have shown in this article, Tibetan democracy is constituted within a nationalist framework which prioritises the goal of returning to a free Tibet. Moreover, as a 'gift' from the Dalai Lama, democracy is treated as a sacred reflection of the Dalai Lama himself. Instituting democracy in exile was framed as necessary for a democratic free Tibet, but it was also to ensure political continuity in the future when the current Dalai Lama will no longer be there. However, the constant evocation and involvement of the Dalai Lama in democratic functions fail the purpose of instituting democracy in the first place: providing an alternative to the figure of the Dalai Lama as a unifying symbol for Tibetans. With democracy centred around the Tibetan struggle and the Dalai Lama, some aspects of democracy – discussions, dialogues, disagreements, differences – are seen as harming the Tibetan cause, which thereby limits full development of a critical democratic public sphere.

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10. A case in point is the recent controversy over the interaction between the Dalai Lama and a child. For instance, see Genkhang (2023).

11. This may be specific to the Indian context and may not be true in all Tibetan communities, especially those in the West where some have become politically active in local politics to speak out about Tibetan issues along with other impending issues. See Bentz (2021: 25).

ABSTRACTS

Instituting democracy was one of the foremost engagements of the Dalai Lama in exile. The intricate connection drawn between democracy, the nationalist goal and the Dalai Lama gives a unique flavour to Tibetan democracy. Considered as a 'gift', democracy is conferred a sacred character by the Tibetan people which immunises it from the usual aspects of everyday democratic functioning of which discussion, dialogue, differences and dissent are an integral part. Drawing on theoretical concepts from the anthropological literature on democracy, gift and the public sphere, and putting them in conversation with the primary data obtained from field research, this paper first examines the complex relationship between democracy and Tibetan nationalism, and how democracy came to be constituted within a nationalist rhetoric. It then

shows the characteristics of a Tibetan public sphere considered as a source of trouble within the complex web of democracy and nationalism in exile.

L'instauration de la démocratie a été l'un des principaux engagements du Dalaï Lama alors en exil. Le lien complexe établi entre la démocratie, l'objectif nationaliste et le Dalaï Lama donne une touche unique à la démocratie tibétaine. Considérée comme un « don », la démocratie se voit conférer par le peuple tibétain un caractère sacré qui la protège des aspects habituels du fonctionnement démocratique quotidien, dont la discussion, le dialogue, les différences et les dissensions font partie intégrante. S'appuyant sur des concepts théoriques issus de la littérature anthropologique sur la démocratie, le don et la sphère publique, et les mettant en relation avec des données de terrain, cet article examine tout d'abord la relation complexe entre la démocratie et le nationalisme tibétain, et la manière dont la démocratie s'est constituée dans le cadre d'une rhétorique nationaliste. Il montre ensuite les caractéristiques d'une sphère publique tibétaine considérée comme une source de difficultés dans le réseau complexe de la démocratie et du nationalisme en exil.

INDEX

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The old man by the waterfall: deep entanglements of culture, state-making and geopolitics in Arunachal Pradesh

Le vieil homme près de la chute d'eau. En Arunachal Pradesh, des interactions fortes entre culture, construction de l'État et géopolitique

Kaustubh Deka

Along with a few more men from my *busti* (village), I trekked for many days through dense forests, guiding the retreating Indian military troops to the safety of the plains below, though I lost them at times. When we returned to our mountain *busti*, they [the Chinese troops] were already camping there, looking well-settled, even trying to make a water treatment plant or something at the mouth of the waterfall. – Lomtung Tago, an octogenarian, recalling his experience of the 1962 Sino-India conflict (Siko Dado falls, Shi Yomi district, Arunachal Pradesh, December 2019)

Introduction: the spectre of war and space-making in the eastern Himalayas

1 I came across Lomtung Tago sitting by a fire at a small tea-stall outside Siko Dado Waterfall in Shi Yomi district, Arunachal Pradesh. The stall is situated on the road to Menchukha, the strategically important town inhabited predominantly by the Memba and Adi communities, close to the MacMahon Line that demarcates Indian and Chinese

territory. The town also operates as an important base for the Indian military and has emerged as a popular tourist destination since the road network has improved in recent years. For those with keen eyes and ears, it is not difficult to come across elders along the upper ridges of eastern Himalayas of Arunachal Pradesh who have vivid memories of the 1962 Chinese incursion and who hold the unfortunate distinction of being the only people in post-Independence India to have lived, albeit briefly, under foreign occupation. This peculiar experience imparts as its legacy a sense of fragility that continues even today.

2   But what was on Mr Tago's mind on that cold winter afternoon as he sat by the fireplace near the waterfall (fig 1)? He was a teenager back in that tumultuous winter of 1962 when Chinese troops marched into his village and stationed themselves there for months. Mr Tago, along with other youngsters from his village, volunteered to act as scouts for the retreating Indian army, guiding them through unfamiliar terrain towards safer bases in the Assam plains. Two retired Indian military officials recount the episode in their book:

> Menchuka was vacated on the night of 18/19 Nov and the Chinese occupied it by the morning of 19 Nov. The Independent Battalion was tasked to progress operation towards Tuting. The withdrawal from Menchuka by 2/8 GR proved disastrous. A small party of 35 led by the Commanding Officer Lieutenant Colonel DA Taylor who ventured out on a 'hunters track' to Tato, got lost. Many died of exhaustion including the Commanding Officer. The main party under Major Dar was ambushed on Menchuka–Tato track on 20 Nov. In the process of withdrawal, 2/8 GR suffered 42 casualties including three officers and 12 taken as prisoners of war (PoW). Out of a total force of 13 officers, 18 JCOs and 826 OR at Menchuka; eight officers, four JCOs and 150 OR were reported to have been be killed/missing or taken PoW. (Dwivedi et al 2014)

Fig 1: Lomtung Tago warms himself by the fire as he recalls his experiences in the Sino-Indian war of 1962.

Photo: Kaustubh Deka, Siko Dido falls, She Yomi, 2020.

3   Since then, a lot of water has flown down the Siko Dido falls and Mr Tago has borne witness to it all. Arunachal Pradesh, a sparsely populated but culturally rich part of the eastern Himalayas tucked away between Assam, Tibet, Bhutan and Burma, has witnessed a surge in state-making in the last few decades. An intimate interaction between nature, nation and nationalities has been shaping the region, along with the expansion of interconnected infrastructures – be they military-led, tourism-based or focused on pilgrimage – which are bringing radical changes to this culturally and ecologically sensitive zone. In this context, Menchukha has been pulled into this unfolding phenomenon of infrastructural assemblages where its history as a militarised borderland interacts with the existing cultural logic of the place, mostly owing to its Buddhist spatialities. As I discuss in the subsequent sections of this paper, viewed together, the developments in Menchukha and its neighbouring counterpart, Namsai, show two different types of interactions between unfolding forms of cultural tourism and the military presence. When seen in combination with the infrastructural development that has started to define the region, this duality is further revealed to be the result of a militarised state in which the cultural sphere of religious tourism can take on different manifestations depending on the historical location and geopolitical contexts, often intertwined in such a way that these factors begin to reinforce each other.

4   The communities who have been living in these spaces for a long time and who were later classified and counted as 'tribes' in the Indian political system, nevertheless continue to have their own imagination about local life-worlds. The discussions in the following sections of this article therefore relate to what Gohain describes as the

unfolding of an 'imagined Himalayan geography', 'new circuits of belonging – formed by networks rather than a circumscribed location', where the Himalayas 'indicate not simply a physical terrain, but an imagined space of belonging' (2020: 17). This trans-Himalayan space, straddling the eastern Himalayas, is essentially a 'place of relations' (Saikia et al 2017) that owes its historical shape and contemporary dynamism to an abundance of movement, connections and flows (van Schendel et al 2022: 11).

5　To understand what influences these flows and frictions in the 'truly ancient passageway' (ibid) of the eastern Himalayas, we have to evoke the phenomena of making the region into a resource frontier at a particular point in history where communities forge their lives 'against the backdrop of a militarised extractive economy regime' (Kikon 2019: 7). A long history of colonial interventions followed by postcolonial conflicts has shaped the very foundation of the region, setting it up as a resource frontier, as an empty or underpopulated wilderness which holds the promise of high rates of return on investment. The resource frontier is the inevitable product of 'capitalist globalisation', where 'capital actively seeks out and establishes new resource peripheries, thereby reproducing uneven development and marginalisation' (Barney 2009: 148). As van Schendel (2013) argues, these complex interactions and interventions call for an understanding of such transboundary spaces through an 'anthropology of frayed edges' rather than with a definite 'geography of lines'. To understand the (continued) production of these 'frayed edges', we need to engage with the (still unfolding) history of resource appropriation in these transboundary frontier spaces. The nineteenth-century discovery of oil, tea and coal in the eastern Himalayan foothills had a profound and enduring impact on life in the region. With these discoveries, the region turned into one of the most important eastern frontier outposts of the British Colonial Empire in India. Since the locals were seen as 'lazy natives' and the hill groups as 'wild tribes', indentured labourers from outside the region served as the foot soldiers for improving the empire's garden estates (Sharma 2011: 87). Resource extraction not only altered social relations and reconfigured the 'inner spatiality' of the region, for example by accentuating binaries such as hills and plains, but also shaped the spatial boundaries of the region as a frontier.

6　Historian Sugata Bose's (2006: 56) observation of the case of frontiers elsewhere is relevant to the discussion on Northeast India: most colonial frontiers were 'historically no frontier at all' but the 'heart' of a continuum. Envisioned as liminal zones, as 'an edge of space and time: a zone of not yet – not yet mapped, "not yet" regulated' (Tsing 2003: 5100), the making of resource frontiers thus results in disruptions of various kinds. Van Schendel observes that 'the new spatial frame of Northeast India sets limits on our enquiries into history, both pre- and post-Partition' (2018: 275). In a similar vein, Harris talks about the emergent boundaries of the unit called Northeast India which was detached from much older circuits of trans-Himalayan trade, kinship and pilgrimage, curbing the existence of a longstanding 'web of extensive trade and pilgrimage routes [that] have cut across Himalayan region' and once defined it (2013: 7). The region is called 'India's last remaining resource-frontier' (Guha 2006: 232) and analysing it as such remains relevant to understanding disruptions and spatial (re)configurations, as these reflect the social and environmental legacies of resource appropriation, 'the way the region was included in the capitalist world market as a supplier of raw materials – that still structures contemporary Northeast Indian societies' (Karlsson 2022: 283). The sociocultural dynamics in the mountainous regions of Northeast India, the flows and frictions of lives therein, can therefore be best

understood as an outcome of a dynamic interaction between two seemingly oppositional tendencies. On one hand, there has been a history of a certain kind of 'anarchism', hill people in these regions being 'runaway, fugitive, maroon communities who have, over the course of two millennia, been fleeing the oppressions of state-making projects in the valleys (Scott 2009: ix). Thus, the region constitutes an 'otherness', a common predicament faced by communities living in 'Zomia' (van Schendel 2002) – a historically largely non-state space, including highland Northeast India, now located on the margins of neighbouring nation-states, a vast upland space that transcends political and academic boundaries (Wouters 2022). On the other hand, there is an unleashing of aspirations, anticipations and anxieties as the region is drawn into the dynamics of a resource frontier. It has been observed that the making of resource frontiers is often complemented by other measures of spatial reconfigurations such as 'corridorisation' – that is, the emergence of corridors that implies spatial intensity as well as anticipatory or accelerated temporality (Murton et al 2020). In the topographically channelled Himalayan region, most of the time these newly imagined corridors track older pathways of trade and exchange (Saxer 2016). However, as the insights from the ethnographic engagements in the ensuing sections of this article suggest, the nature and extent of this reimagination of spaces or reconfiguration of spatiality varies significantly depending on the assemblage of geopolitics and culture.These prospects also denote ways in which geopolitics displace traditional knowledge systems and disrupt animist cosmologies.

7 The envisioning of Northeast India as a zone of convergence has grown stronger in recent years with the coining of concepts such as 'multiple state space' by Sara Shneiderman (2010), 'borderworld' by Mandy Sadan (2013), and 'multistate margin' and 'perpendicular geospatially' by Dan Smyer Yü (2017, 2021), to name a few. The region as a geographical and historical entity has begun to attract attention as a productive site for research since its dynamic geographies are calling attention to 'emergent spatial configuration between the national and the global' (van Schendel 2002, Karlsson 2018). Focus is shifting to the way people in the region continue to find means of forming passages back into their collective cultural memories despite securitisation and spatial disruptions, moving through an assemblage of nostalgia and aspiration. These mobilisations take resurgent, aspirational or stagnant forms depending on the nature of their assemblages, giving these border spaces an 'intersubjective dimension' which has shifting and provisional boundaries (Gohain 2020: 17). Against the predominant perception of remoteness, the circulation of mobility and the persistence of connectivity are garnering more attention from researchers. Kikon calls for the need to combat taken-for-granted categorisations such as remoteness, unruliness, backwardness and underdevelopment and to look at 'Northeast India as an important location through which we can understand new forms of heterogeneity, citizenship, indigeneity, legitimacy and gender relations in contemporary India' (2019: 25). In the eastern Himalayas of Northeast India, places that once sat prominently on the highways of Himalayan caravans became frontiers for empires and were subsequently turned into militarised borderlands. However, as the discussions in the following sections show, the lost connections at times remain dormant, waiting to be revived. Sometimes ways are found to circumvent the 'closed' boundaries by activating various sorts of networks.

Being part of an exceptional region: India's Northeast and its many life-worlds

8   The territory that is known today as Arunachal Pradesh, a state in the Union of India, is

> largely mountainous, straddling a great stretch of the southern slopes of the Eastern Himalayas. On its east, it shares its frontier with the central Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan. The entire northern portion runs parallel to the Tibetan Plateau until it reaches the tri-junction where Tibet, China and Myanmar meet. It takes a syntaxial bend southward along the Irrawaddy–Salween divide, following 'knuckles' of the Pat until the borders of the present Tuensang district of Nagaland. Its skirts the Brahmaputra valley on its south as it moves eastwards. (Hilaly 2015: 289)

9   The present-day political unit of Arunachal Pradesh is home to distinct ethnic groups which existed historically at the margins of various other established states at various points, namely the Tibetan, Ahom and various Burmese kingdoms, and lastly the British Empire.

10   Subsequently, the territory that was named Arunachal Pradesh, designated as the Northeast Frontier Agency (NEFA) until 1972, became a part of the geopolitical region collectively known as India's Northeast, a positionality that 'both controls our spatial imagination and conveys a specific location, identity and meaning' (ibid: 291). Containing a little less than 4% of the country's total population and approximately 8% of its total land area, the eight north-eastern states of India, collectively referred to as India's Northeast, assume significance due to their geopolitical location (at the trijunction of South, East and Southeast Asia), ecological resources (a rich biodiversity zone with abundant water, mineral and forest resources) and cultural diversity (hosting eclectic ethnic minority identities resulting in competing territorial nationalisms). Northeast India is in many ways 'an umbrella connotation, which tends to wipe off its immense diversity of history, culture and politics' (Misra 2014: 8). Yet the term persists and assumes increasing significance as a normative and instrumental framework for both policymaking and social movements.

11   The history of India's Northeast, as a region and a borderland, 'the residual fallout of colonial politics and administration' (Phanjoubam 2009: 158) and 'a freak child of partition' (van Schendel 2018: 273) continues to shape the public discourse in the region in many ways. 'Historically a suspect, contemporarily an experiment, and potentially an investment' (Deka 2020: 520), the construct of 'Northeast India' within the official state discourse posits the region as a 'zone of exception' – a geopolitical and geo-cultural unit that justifies and even requires 'adjustments' to India's macro-liberal democratic ethos (Baruah 2005, Baruah 2020, Vandenhelsken et al 2017, Oinam et al 2018). As a prelude to this, van Schendel and Cederlöf (2022) talk about a certain production of ignorance about the region, in which ill-informed colonial accounts of the inhabitants of the trans-Himalayan corridors as mysterious, outlandish and violent began to circulate. 'Echoes of these ideas still shape contemporary notions of the region, and there is a need to decolonise such perceptions', they argue (ibid: 21). As in other parts of the world, in the enterprise of colonialism, the gun, the compass and the Bible moved together into Northeast India (Thomas 2017). Territories were mapped, people were subjugated and cultures were labelled. At the root of the ensuing political violence was an epistemic violence. Beyond objectifying the 'geo-body' of the region, a

cognitive dissonance was created with its image as a land of witchcraft and magic, animism and wild tribes (Deka 2020). For a long time 'the lens of insulation and remoteness' thus remained dominant tropes through which the region has been seen: 'as a land of marginalized minorities, an economic backwater, the political and cultural fringe of India, a place where India's territorial sovereignty is defended, where raw materials are extracted to fuel its economic growth, and where ethnographic and other empirical data is mined to debate theories from elsewhere' (Wouters et al 2023: 3). This justified the overwhelming presence of a 'military metaphysics or a military definition of reality that dominates the official narratives of the region' (Baruah 2020: 129). A contentious intersection between national security from above and ethnonationalism from below thus shape the discourse of change in the region, a phenomenon that can be understood in the context of 'a society coming to terms with historical social change' (Baruah 2009: 952). As some would argue, the dominance of this security-centric doctrine also perpetuates an 'infrastructure of injustice' (Ziipao 2020), a deliberate negation of hill communities in dominant discourses of development, reflecting a particular ideology of development and governmentality (Arora et al 2020). A later section of the paper discusses this point further.

12   In discussing the eastern Himalayas of Arunachal Pradesh, this article analyses two regions with unique and sometimes even contrasting cultures, Menchukha (Shi Yomi District) and Namsai (Namsai District) to further illustrate these aspects (fig 2). For the purposes of this article, I find what Martin Saxer (2016) calls a methodology of 'co-itinerant ethnography' relevant and appropriate. This term 'emphasises the analytical value of time spent on the road and the encounters it fosters' (Saxer 2016: 115). An extension of the multi-sited practice of ethnographic research, the co-itinerant ethnographic approach tries to move beyond a focus on space, place or landscape to an analysis of movement, mobility and flow. Thus, in the following sections, information from the official archive is placed alongside and measured against informative conversations with locals, tales shared by the fireplace or vignettes heard during a walk. The idea is to make sense of these spaces as a 'socio-spatial constellation that aggregates heterogenous elements' (ibid).

Fig 2: Political map of 'Arunachal Pradesh' (She Yomi district and Namsai district highlighted by the author)

Source: Maps of India, https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/arunachalpradesh/

'The land of medicinal snow water': fragmentations, appropriations and resilience in Menchukha

13 'One fine day, perhaps the borders as they exist now will not be there anymore. I will be able to go and meet my loved ones left behind on the "other side" once more', chuckled Lhakpa Sona, the oldest living Memba in Menchukha at that time.[1] He is often found dressed in fine traditional clothing, sometimes adorned with ornaments. He cannot speak much Hindi or English, unlike the later generations of Membas. His life as well as his memories are split by the McMahon line which has driven a wedge into his very life-world. Grandpa Sona passed away recently in August 2023 at the age of 96. His history is a testament to how empires disrupt the flow of life. His eyes would gleam while narrating stories of his many visits to Lhasa on foot; he would cross over the Lola pass, carrying business loads and meeting friends and family. He was always 'home'; it was the borders that came to him (fig 3). With him, a rich repository is laid to rest. This repository, however, needs to placed also in the context of the colonising endeavour of the Tibetan state, as different accounts show the ways 'Tibetan state authorities, high-ranking Buddhist dignitaries, and local Tibetan rulers were engaged in the colonisation process, making Pachakshiri the estate of a Lhasa aristocratic family [that] was administered through the authorities of Sgar chags rdzong' (Grothmann 2020).

Fig 3: Lhakpa Sona recalls his caravan trading days along the Himalayan corridors, and through his memories he continues to transcend spatial fixities.
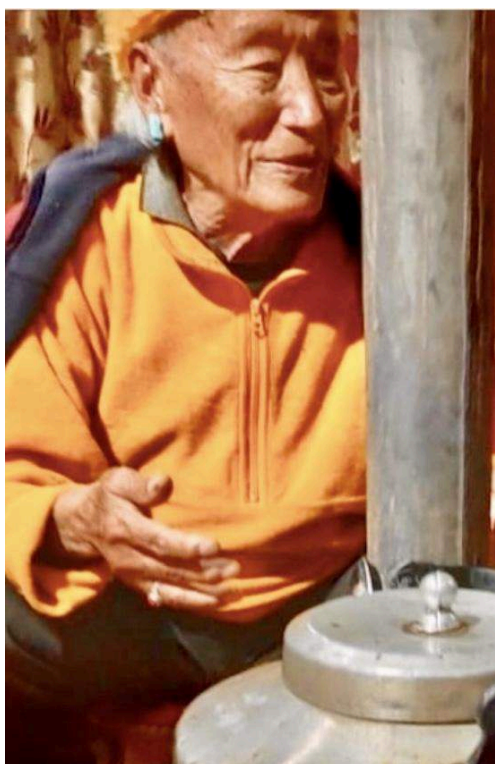
Photo: Kaustubh Deka, Menchukha, 2020.

14 Most Memba houses continue to use artefacts and everyday items such as wooden kitchenware, shawls, pots and wares used for religious rituals etc, which they procured from the 'other side' (fig 4). They are their cultural heirlooms and their significance has been confirmed by various elders of the community.[2] One can also discern a sense of fondness and nostalgia that the Membas attribute to these items. Through the retelling of memories and oral narratives of trade, pilgrimage and kinship, regions like Menchukha continue to be a part of a Himalayan 'transnational circuit' (Gohain 2020: 17). The story of the Membas is otherwise one of forced ruptures, given the fact that Menchukha lies close to the much-contested McMahon Line, the effective boundary between India and China, which causes the state to be hyper-present, turning the region into one of the most militarised borderlands in the country.

Fig 4: The interior of a Memba home, located in Dechenthang village, Menchukha. Memba houses are often filled with various cultural heirlooms that serve as a connection with a disappearing past.

Photo: Kaustubh Deka, Menchukha, 2020.

15   The biggest structure that dominates the landscape of the small mountain town is the imposing Advanced Landing Ground maintained by the Indian Air Force, a sizeable airstrip surrounded by high concrete walls decorated with military colours. Menchukha provides plenty of insights into the complex influence of a modern penetrative state on people's shared social memory – memory which is a repository of collective history. As an instance of this, we might discuss the case of a particular stone formation by the river on the way to Dorjeeling village that the Membas consider to be a sacred relic and which, they believe, depicts the entire topographical design of the Memba dwelling-place , spanning across the man-made international border. Called 'Shinjong Saptra', this map-stone of Pachakshiri (the old name for Menchukha) is believed to have been visualised by Yabme Pawo Dorje after a long meditation at Pemajeling (Grothmann 2012) (fig 5). Such accounts of map-stones being divined by religious masters not only refer to a belief in the power of Buddhist masters in defining the boundaries of the Beyül – the sacred hidden lands but also alludes to a cultural notion of fluid spatiality. These spatial dynamics intimately tied to cultural and religious beliefs have intersected with state-led spatiality in more recent years. Pilots of the Indian Air Force are said to have confirmed the accuracy of the map-stone with an aerial map of the region. This was told to me in a matter-of-fact way with much pride and satisfaction by almost everyone I spoke to about it as a validation of their belief whenever the topic of the map-stone was raised.[3] Intersections of varying notions of space do not always fit so well however.

Fig 5: The 'Shinjong Saptra' map-stone believed to be designed by Buddhist masters at Menchukha.

Photo: Kaustubh Deka, Menchukha, 2020.

16   The example of the map-stone contrasts with another sacred spot, a waterfall with a cave beside it, known as Neh-Pema Shelphu, which the Membas consider holy, believing it to be a spot where the great Buddhist master Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava) meditated (fig 6). Once the region became a zone for the movement of military troops, the spot was 'identified' by a certain military colonel as one where the founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak meditated on his way to Tibet (Grewal 2021). A plaque mentioning this has been installed since then and tourists crowd around it to take photos. A *gurdwara* (or *gurudwara*, the Sikh place of worship and assembly) subsequently called 'Gurdwara Menchuka Sahib' has also been built. It was only after some local complaints that the structure was moved across the road. However, in recent times, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) (which translates as 'Supreme Gurdwara Management Committee'), the Sikh religious authority responsible for managing Sikh places of worship, has complained that the gurdwara has been converted into a Buddhist shrine.[4] The overwhelming presence of the military and its support for the gurdwara, the fact that the gurdwara is maintained by the 5 Para Battalion, the fact that an appeal has been made for soldiers to keep a guard there permanently for protection of the Gurudwara' (Grewal 2021) and the fact that the gurdwara is a tourist attraction (promoted as a must-see place when in Menchuka by various tour operators) that has become one of the mainstays of local income have all served to contain any possible local resentment towards this issue.

Fig 6: Neh-Pema Shelphu, the waterfall and cave held sacred by the Membas because Buddhist Guru Padmasambhava, also known as Rimpoche, is supposed to have meditated there.

Photo: Kaustubh Deka, Menchukha, 2020.

17   Then there is also the case of yet another must-visit tourist destination – 'the Hanuman face point' – that has grown popular in recent times with the surge in tourism in the region. This particular rock formation on a mountain overlooking the highway to the McMahon Line, on the outskirts of Menchukha on the way to Yarlung, is supposed to depict the face of Lord Hanuman – a revered Hindu deity. However, elders from the area call it a recent development, with no such local or traditional interpretations of the rock face existing before then (Menchukha, January 2021). A Hanuman Temple has nevertheless been built on the highway overlooking the rock formation, as well as a few tea-stall shacks to cater for the tourists who often stop there to take photographs. These developments underscore the question raised in the introduction to this article concerning the extent to which the undercurrents of geopolitics and state-making can displace traditional knowledge systems and disrupt animist cosmologies. In light of this, Gohain and Grothmann's (2015) study is relevant; they discuss how the culturally Tibetan Buddhist regions in Arunachal Pradesh have been the subject of a protracted Sino-Indian border dispute for more than half a century now, with rampant practices of replacing local place names to map these areas as Indian territory, while marking them as discontinuous with cross-border circuits. This point is further illustrated by Gohain in another context: the Monyul region of Arunachal Pradesh, where she quotes a local respondent who says 'wherever the army people have moved, they altered the place-names' (2020: 153).

18   One needs to keep in mind, however, that the effects of the state are not a totalising project and defiance emerges in surprising ways (Gohain et al 2015, van Schendel et al 2022). The small *gonpas* (monasteries) and prayer centres in the sleepy town organise

chanting sessions and ritualistic events where Membas, many of them engaged as petty traders or government employees in other towns, participate in the trance with a sense of devotion. To someone not from the place, it feels like going into a lost world or to a world fast disappearing, hanging by loose threads of prayer. It makes one reflect on the 'need to pay attention to the structures of feeling that bind space, time, and memory in the production of location' that Akhil Gupta (1992: 76) talked about in the context of transnational identities and the reinscription of space in late capitalism. One could sense a certain kind of precarity and preservation around the prayer meetings and other Buddhist programmes at Menchukha that can be better explained if put in the context of the precarious existence of the oldest gonpa of the region.

19 The Samten Yongcha Gonpa of Menchukha is said to be one of the oldest gonpas belonging to the Mahayana sect in the whole of the eastern Himalayan region (fig 7). The monastery, said to be more than four hundred years old, is in a visibly derelict condition compared to some of the better-known ones such as the gonpa at Tawang and even those dating to a later period (and of different sects), such as those of the Namsai region which we discuss in detail later. The road to the gonpa is barely motorable and only in good weather. The many precious materials, scrolls etc in the gonpa are in the need of urgent preservation. Evidently, the place lacks the support and attention from the relevant authorities. The rise of the gurdwara, which we discussed earlier, and the decay of the gonpa present a telling picture of the place.

20 The question here is not about the lack of adequate infrastructure of religious tourism at Menchukha alone, but that of place-making and cultural appropriation in a militarised borderland. Drawing comparisons with other parts of the state which experience a different religious tourism will help us to better engage with this question.

Fig 7: The Samten Yongcha Gonpa of Menchukha, said to be one of the oldest gonpas belonging to the Mahayana sect in the entire eastern Himalayan region.

Photo: Kaustubh Deka, Menchukha, 2020.

Pagodas at the edge of the nation: envisioning a 'Pali cosmopolis'

21   'Take these to your queen and tell her these are the weapons we fight with. You cannot enter Thibet, it is against the order of the Chinese Government. Go back, or we will kill you', a Mishimi chief told Thomas Thornvill Cooper after presenting him a *dao* (native sword) and spear. Cooper was the first Englishman to extensively tour the Mishmi Hills, after camping in the Tai-Khampti (Khamti) village of Chongkham (Chowkham) to explore a trade route from India to China through Tibet and via the Mishimi region (present Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh) (Cottam 1876). The tragic rebellion of the Mishimi chiefs did not hold in the long run, and the area effectively came under British imperial control, an exploit accomplished through many punitive British expeditions. However, the encounter between Cooper and the chief and the latter's defiant stance reflect the dynamics that were to unfold in the region in the years to come. Near Chongkham, the adjoining town of Namsai, the capital of Namsai District, is primarily inhabited by Khamti people who belong to the Tai group and are followers of Theravada (Hinayana) Buddhism. Places like Namsai, along with local historical villages such as Chongkham, need to be understood through the geographic lens of a Himalayan corridor because these places were not only important points in trans-Himalayan trade but also in the expeditions led by the British Empire. The region continues to emerge in postcolonial times as a relatively prosperous area within Arunachal Pradesh and its reported growth presents an opportunity to look into the assemblage of resource

extraction, militarisation, local aspirations and identity formation. It also illustrates the important interplay between forces of culture and geopolitics.

22 Unlike the difficulties faced by Menchukha in trying to maintain its old gonpas, as described in the previous section, Namsai has built substantial tourism around its pagodas. The centres of Theravada Buddhism have been renovated with generous donations both from the government and from private sources from Japan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and other Theravada Buddhist countries. Kognum Khu, known popularly as the Golden Pagoda (fig 8), has grown into a prominent tourist attraction over the years and is an illustration of such collaborations. Elsewhere in the town, the construction of a stone statue of the Buddha, supposed to be the largest Buddha statue made of this material in the whole of South and Southeast Asia, is underway at the behest of a prominent Khamti clan supported by funds from all across the world (fig 9).[5] This successful mobilisation of resources and the effective support system for the increase in religious tourism in Namsai needs to be understood in the context of a complex assemblage of spatial dynamics, cultural logics and geostrategic rationales that operate in these geopolitically charged borderlands. This point will be further discussed in a later section.

Fig 8: The Kognum Khu or Golden Pagoda in Namsai has emerged as a popular tourist destination.

Photo: Kaustubh Deka, Namsai, 2021.

Fig 9: The stone statue of the Buddha, currently under construction and touted to become the largest stone Buddha statue in the whole of South and Southeast Asia.

Photo: Kaustubh Deka, Namsai, 2021.

23   Here a counter argument can be made whereby the contrasting experiences of Namsai and Menchukha allude to the lingering effects of a civilisational thesis that was once powerfully advocated by scholars like Sheldon Pollock to describe a phenomenon of 'Sanskrit cosmopolis', an enormous geographic sweep of the Indic discourse that led to the 'Indianisation/Hinduisation' of Southeast Asia (Pollock 2006). For a more relevant ethnographic engagement with the region, Bhattacharya (2023) argues for the use of the lens of 'Pali cosmopolis' developed by Tilman Frasch (2017) which better describes the dynamic forms of interaction between the Indic and Southeast Asian cultures and ideas.

24   To illustrate this 'Pali cosmopolis', we can refer to the case of the Pali school in Chongkham (fig 10), one of the few residential Pali schools in the region for monks to study the ancient language. There are purported instances of young monks from the other side of the border seamlessly fitting in and attending the school.[6] Fluidity is normalised in such spaces. The 'Pali cosmopolis', or the long arm of Indic discourse, seems to have endured modern disruptions. Such ethnographic material continues to question hard boundaries by showing that there are multiple subtle and ongoing Himalayan interrelations that disrupt dominant nation-state-driven narratives of borders and difference, even against the backdrop of militarisation and nuclear neighbouring states. To what extent does the presence or absence of an Indic imagination continue to influence the geopolitical presence of a place? To meaningfully understand the presence of fluidity in some places and the lack of it in others, we will have to explore the context of the unfolding discourse on infrastructure in the region.

Fig 10: The Pali school in Chongkham represents the way cultural links survive beyond spatial rigidities.

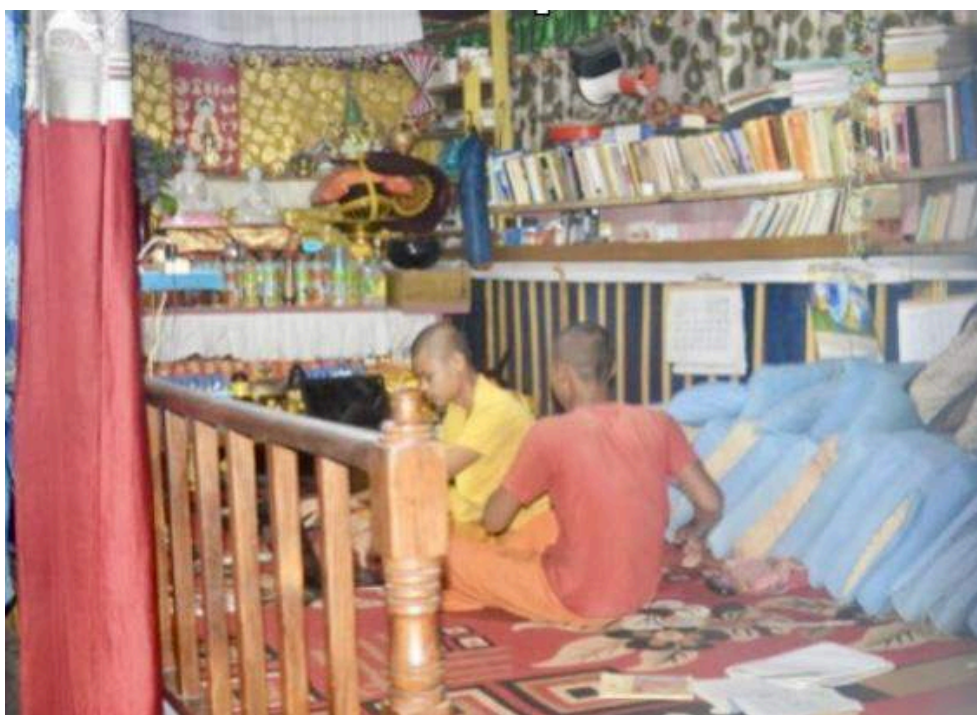

Photo: Kaustubh Deka, Chongkham, 2021.

A region of contentions concrete: Arunachal Pradesh as an infrastructural hot spot

25 Northeast India is littered with concrete. From winding flyovers to towering churches on village hillsides to surveillance towers housing paramilitary forces, concrete is integral to the region's urban and rural landscapes and everything in between. What does all this concrete tell us? What stories does it reveal? What questions about politics, power, development and culture can concrete raise (McDuie-Ra 2018)?

26 From a policymaking perspective, the Northeast Indian region has been construed in terms of a complex geography of difference where it is projected as being trapped and languishing in an infrastructural void. This void marks the general perception of the region as remote, isolated and less developed. The 'chicken neck' corridor, the 22-kilometre-wide land corridor that is seen to connect Northeast India with the rest of the country, is often considered 'a congested space, the techno-formal domain of security and modern logistics' (Townsend 2018), a tenuous connection needing surveillance, control and more infrastructure investment. In this understanding, infrastructure is both a practice and a discourse manifesting tangible material forms as well as intangible forms in terms of networks and institutions.

27 In the Northeast, besides the presence of international and state boundaries, there is also the presence of

> multiple, less tangible but nevertheless real boundaries that crisscross the region – fiscal, legal, liquor and emotional borders among them. Such borders, which do not

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usually appear on maps, are also underpinned by a similar 'border-logic' of dividing
and relating territories and peoples. (Tunyi et al 2016: 1)

28   How do the phenomena of infrastructure development engage with these regional
complexities? Here one needs to radically expand the idea of infrastructure and situate
it in the concrete context of the eastern Himalayas or South and Southeast Asia more
broadly. The paramount importance of the context of a militarised frontier is seen to
create a sharp binary divide in the region between what Ziipao describes as 'civilian
infrastructure that remains underdeveloped, un-modern and military infrastructure
that gallops ahead as developed and modern, thereby creating a condition of
"infrastructure of injustice"' where the indigenous people of the region are placed in a
disadvantageous position, even being dispossessed of their resources (2020: 41).

29   The state of Arunachal Pradesh is undergoing a phase of intensified infrastructural
expansion, as a few new significant policies have been drawn up and approved by the
central government. According to reports, there was a 65% increase in the construction
of national and state highways between the periods 2015–16 and 2022–23 in the state.
From 30,692 kilometres in 2015–16, road construction covered up to 50,555 kilometres
in 2022–23, of which 2,506 kilometres are border roads (Tripathi 2023). These include
the Union's Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways' (MoRTH) permission for the
1,500-kilometre Frontier Highway that would connect all the border areas of the state
from East to West at an estimated cost of ₹44,000 crore. Another significant road
expansion plan, the ambitious Trans-Arunachal Highway scheme, is nearing
completion. Currently under construction, it includes an existing 1,811-kilometre route
comprising NH-13 (1,559 kilometres) and parts of NH-15 (80 kilometres), NH-215 (30
kilometres) and SH-25, and consists of a two-lane highway covering more than 2,407
kilometres and passing through 16 districts in Arunachal Pradesh. It runs from the Line
of Actual Control (LAC) in Tawang in the northwest to Kanubari in the southeast at the
tri-junction of Assam–Nagaland–Arunachal Pradesh and interconnects at least 16
districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Another strategically important frontier highway
project has been proposed, starting from Bomdila in West Kameng and ending at
Vijayanagar in Changlang, and covering 1,748 kilometres (Sharma 2023).

30   Another programme called the Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP) with a financial
allocation of ₹4,800 crore has also been launched. According to government claims, the
scheme aims at the comprehensive development of villages in border areas to improve
people's quality of life, which would help encourage them to stay in their native
locations in border areas, thus reversing migration. The VVP will provide funds for the
development of essential infrastructures and the creation of livelihood opportunities in
19 districts and 46 border blocks in four states and one Union Territory along the
country's border. Besides these, the Arunachal Pradesh government has initiated
several infrastructure development programmes in 65 model villages in areas
bordering China, Bhutan and Myanmar under the Border Area Development
Programme (BADP), which the Deputy Chief Minister of State recently announced to
the assembly.[7]

31   Many of these initiatives have been placed under the rubric of the major policy
initiative by the Indian government called the Act East Policy, which proposes to
develop the infrastructures in the region by building roads and highways, expanding
air connectivity, extending railway networks, opening trade routes and creating
infrastructural conditions for border trade. These have put the Northeast region on a

fast track to expand its infrastructures. Indeed, most of the Ministry of Urban Development flagship schemes have been focusing on the region. Nine cities across the Northeast region have been declared Smart Cities – two of them, Pasighat and Itanagar, are in Arunachal Pradesh. Funding amounting to ₹14,124 crore for 464 projects has been earmarked in the first phase for part of the Smart City Mission in the north-eastern region. In essence, policy thrusts like this mean the construction of many bridges, highways, railroads and airports. Whereas many of these developments can be understood through the lens of 'time-space compression' (Harvey 1990) (to refer to the way the acceleration of economic activities leads to the destruction of spatial barriers and distances), given the way the expansion of infrastructures unleashes a flow of resources, it can also be seen as having triggered a specific form of desire: 'a desire specifically of communities to be recognised by the state as ethnically and culturally unique, and, relatedly, a desire for a privileged state-community political sociality' (Wouters 2022: 32). What Gonzaga discusses regarding how 'infrastructure has become one of the primary mechanisms for governments, businesses, citizens and migrants to negotiate flows, interchanges and transplantations of images, knowledge, technologies and money' (2020: 60) in the larger Southeast Asian context is relevant here. In such scenarios, and especially in the case of border spaces, one can observe the dynamic interplay of the triangular interactions of state, regional elite and local people (Baud et al 1997).

32 What does this high level of infrastructural expansion do to a region which is mired in contradictions of conflict and transition? The critical task here is to assess the foundational doctrine on which the rationale of such 'developmental interventions' are premised. Under present circumstances, if one travels to remote parts of Arunachal Pradesh where roads are just reaching or being improvised, one is very likely to see a few land-moving vehicles, known in popular parlance as JCB (the name of a particular company), in action. JCBs have become the true Himalayan constant in that sense, and owning a few of them is a matter of social status (fig 11). Infrastructure in this light not only imposes spatial limitations but also creates and consolidates boundaries and borders. In other words, social identities become induced performances, conditioned by the flow and tenor of infrastructural designs. Infrastructure is both a practice and a discourse manifesting tangible material forms, as well as intangible forms in terms of networks and institutions. Sharma et al goes so far as to say that

> infrastructure more than the border shapes the ways in which territoriality is performed and enacted by state and non-state actors. While political boundaries (between states, armed groups and sub-state entities) have traditionally shaped b/ordering practices, in recent years the management of both territory and flows has been sculpted by and for particular infrastructure projects. (Sharma 2022: 16-17)

Fig 11: A JCB near the frontier areas in Menchukha. The earth-moving vehicles, commonly called JCBs, seem to be the Himalayan constant, as one finds them digging across the length and breadth of the region.

Photo: Kaustubh Deka, Menchukha, 2020.

Where JCBs lead to monasteries: religious tourism, infrastructure and space-making

33 The promotion of religious tourism in Arunachal Pradesh occurs in three broad and interrelated contexts. First, it is connected to the issue of India's soft power projections in South and Southeast Asia. Second, it is linked to the project of a certain nationalisation of space, 'an angle of cultural co-option' (Gohain, 2020) in contentious spaces through an intensified infrastructural expansion, both military and civil. And lastly, there is the dimension of transnational policies like the Act East Policy that revolves around economic, political, strategic and cultural initiatives to engage with the Asia-Pacific region. These contexts therefore span from the local to the international region through interplay with the national.

34 It needs to be emphasised here that the issue of the promotion of religious tourism in the Northeast Indian region, especially the projection of Buddhist circuits, is deemed important from the point of view of India's soft power projection in the neighbourhood at large, as mentioned earlier. The spread of Buddhism from India to Southeast Asia is considered one of strongest threads of a longstanding civilisational contact with shared cultural aspects in terms of food, language, art, architecture and so on (Bhonsale 2019). The idea of developing and extending the concept of Buddhist heritage circuits in the north-eastern part of India has been taken up by the Indian state since at least 2015, when the Ministry of Tourism announced the establishment of Circuit 3 as 'Buddhist

Heritage Trails (State Circuits)' and when Arunachal Pradesh, Tawang and Bomdila were placed on this list. These Buddhist circuits identified by the Ministry of Tourism were to be developed with the help of central government, state government and private stakeholders.[8]

35   An interesting comparison can yet again be made with Menchukha where, under the Domestic Promotion and Publicity including Hospitality (DPPH) scheme, the government has begun to promote 'festival tourism' at Menchukha rather than religious tourism. Since 2014, a 'Mechuka Adventure Festival' has been organised. Prominent Bollywood stars have been called upon to inaugurate and attend these events. After Bollywood 'superstar' Salman Khan came to inaugurate one of the early editions of the festival, Dorjeeling village, one of the oldest settlements in Menchukha region, gradually began to be known as 'Salman Point' in tourist parlance. At a certain level, historians studying the region would find a thread of continuity in perception in terms of a certain nationalisation of space from the 'hegemonic standpoint of centralised states, where the histories of these states constantly featured in place of the peoples' histories' (Hilaly, 2015). However, today, centralisation is mediated through the growing association between Bollywood popular culture and tourism that 'serves the purpose of nationalism by mapping these spaces as marginal, to be sure, but also appropriable as us and ours' (Gohain 2020: 157).

36   Comparisons like this also suggest that a growing link between a project of place-making, infrastructure discourse and religious tourism in the region cannot be overlooked. Since 2014–2015 the Ministry of Tourism of the Indian government has initiated a scheme called the National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive (PRASHAD) that provides financial assistance to the state governments/Union Territories for the creation of pilgrimage and/or heritage tourism infrastructures at pre-identified destinations across the country.[9] In Arunachal Pradesh, the site selected for development under the PRASHAD scheme is Parasuram Kund in Lohit District, a pilgrimage spot for Hindus. The amount allocated in the year 2020–21 was about ₹37.88 crore. Here, what Gohain (2020: 155) has observed in other parts of Arunachal Pradesh seems relevant when she points out that any 'history' of Arunachal Pradesh is only projected 'through pan-Indian legends – and indeed, tourist brochures of Arunachal Pradesh often promote only those historic ruins or sites that have mythological associations with the Indic culture, such as Malinithan or Parasuram Kund in eastern Arunachal Pradesh'.

37   It is important to look at the way religious tourism is being projected as part of a larger infrastructural upgradation of these regions. Union Minister of Tourism G Kishan Reddy gave a detailed account of the infrastructural and essential facilities developed under the PRASHAD scheme in Parliament on 13 February 2023:

> The infrastructure facilities being approved under the scheme include development/up-gradation of destination entry points viz. passenger terminals (of road, rail and water transport), basic conveniences like tourism Information/ Interpretation/Amenities Centers with ATM/Money exchange counters, last mile connectivity, pathways, procurement of equipment for eco-friendly modes of transport and equipment for tourist activities such as Light & Sound Show, renewable sources of energy such as Solar Lights, Solar Power Systems, Electric Charging points, Rain Water Harvesting, parking facilities, drinking water, toilets/ bathrooms, changing rooms, cloak room, waiting rooms, Craft haats/bazars/ souvenir shops/cafeteria, rain shelters, watch towers, First Aid Centers, improvement in communication through establishing telephone booths, mobile

services, Wi-Fi hotspot, soft and hard landscaping, Shoreline development & rejuvenation of natural water bodies, Swachchhta Components like dustbins, Solid Waste Management, provisions of lightings, illumination, CCTV surveillance system, signages etc.[10]

38 Such wide-ranging infrastructure development measures need to be understood in the context of the 'the multi-scalar processes through which politics articulate infrastructures and infrastructures articulate politics' (Murton et al 2020: 11).

Continuous entanglements

39 We have seen, on the one hand, how geopolitical zones such as Arunachal Pradesh have increasingly come to embody heightened attempts at territorial control and the securitisation of spaces, 'the securitized calculations of China and India' bringing both countries to shore up their strategic footprint along their borders by 'infrastructuring the borderland' (Rahman 2022). Dean and Sarma argue that 'the criss-crossing infrastructure assemblages at the China-Myanmar borderlands have enabled state, global and indigenous capitalism to extract profits while disciplining peripheries, making territories legible and securitizing these areas expediently' (Dean et al 2022: 5). Ethnographic insights discussed in the previous section, however, reveal the many subtle and innovative ways in which these projected hard lines continue to be transgressed, whether it is the Menchukha Membas' continued remembrance of ancient trade routes and expectations to see them reopened, or the circuits of cultural-religious flow being kept alive by the Khamtis in Namsai.

40 What is the broader context to these entanglements that are being continuously produced in India's Northeast? Is it the flow of a civilisational discourse, or the lost footnotes of a complex history, battered and bruised by equally complex geopolitics? An overpowering march of capital in the form of an all-encompassing discourse of infrastructure development? Or is it an assemblage of all these? A polyphonic unfolding of history that carries people forward? Places like Arunachal Pradesh thus also illustrate the paradoxical development and a major dilemma for contemporary bordering practices in times of globalisation: creating conditions of 'selective permeability' (Popescu, 2015: 50) where 'state borders are expected to allow uninhibited cross-border flows while at the same time retaining effective territorial protection capabilities' (ibid). What complicates this paradox in this case is the continuous production of the Northeast India region as a resource frontier standing in the perilous ruins of capitalism. The example of infrastructures such as roads, plantations and special economic zones (SEZs) on the China–Myanmar borderlands put forth by various scholars is comparable to the phenomenon of plantation infrastructure springing up in Arunachal Pradesh in the form of oil-palm cultivation, which has the potential to change the landscape of the region substantially in the years to come. The agriculture department of Arunachal Pradesh has started an oil-palm plantation/cultivation project in nine districts of the state under mini-mission-II of the National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm. The department has selected four zones, including nine potential districts in the state and has identified approximately 1.26 lakh hectares for oil-palm cultivation. In 2017, as part of this project, the state government signed a memorandum of understanding with Ruchi Soya Industries to plant 25,000 hectares of oil palm in four districts – East Kameng, Papumpare, Lower

Subansiri and West Siang. However, studies have suggested further ecological entanglements in the form of loss of biodiversity in this otherwise biodiversity-rich region once these measures unfold. Experts have called the phenomenon of expanding oil-palm cultivation in Arunachal Pradesh 'a risky proposition' (Srinivasan 2017).

41 Despite these sweeping changes, intimate ethnographic narratives like the ones touched upon in this article illustrate the way human relations and cultural connections continue to disrupt the dominant discourses of territorialisation and securitisation. At times trans-Himalayan routes and corridors in the region become a 'thoroughfare of globalisation' (Campbell 2013), embodiments of the political and economic ambitions of states; or they remain 'pathways', a configuration that is 'at once geographical and social', shaped and maintained by lived practices of passage and exchange (Saxer 2016: 105). Himalayan pathways in the region, at times dormant (like the ones at Menchukha), at other times more vibrant (such as the ones at Namsai), 'with the capacity to survive centuries and resurface as crucial sites of socioeconomic exchange at different historical conjunctures…continue to shape the Himalayan experience of remoteness and connectivity until the present day' (Saxer 2016: 105).

42 One therefore needs to place the growth of religious tourism and the promotion (or lack of it) of certain pilgrimage circuits in the context of the dynamics of a quickly transitioning and contentious borderland spaces. The growth trajectory of religious tourism needs to be highlighted against certain formations of what Dan Smyer Yü calls a 'perpendicular geospatiality of corridors and borderlands' (2022: 6), which 'signifies the paradoxical pairings of commons-fragmentation, movement-fixity, flow-interception, connectivity-disconnectivity and freedom-confinement' (ibid). In this sense, a discussion on the varied experiences related to the growth or stagnation of the religious sites and sectors across the eastern Himalayas, such as the comparison between the two regions of Namsai and Menchukha, helps us to better situate these spaces in the broader discourse on borders, corridors and crossroads, and place them at the intersections of space, subjectivity and agency (Anderson 2012) as regions made of 'unstable territorial signifiers' (Ludden 2003: 31). In a sense, the world of JCBs, the ever-busy earth diggers in the Himalayas, and the ancient life-worlds at gonpas symbolise two different and conflicting worlds – and yet they are increasingly entangled with each other through an extensive military presence accompanied by the growing securitisation of landscapes and through the rapid but strategically selective expansion of infrastructures. The growth trajectory of religious tourism and its flows and frictions in the eastern Himalayan state of Arunachal Pradesh fully illustrate the deep entanglements of culture, state-making and geopolitics in trans-border spaces.

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NOTES

1. Interview by the author at Menchukha, January, 2021. The Memba are a Tibeto-Burman Buddhist community who live in Tibet as well as the Menchukha Valley nestled along the Yargapb-chu (Siyom) river in Arunachal Pradesh. However, scholars like Grothmann (2012, 2020) argue that the word 'Memba' is a new classificatory reference created by the Indian administration in 1950s when it reached the region and assumed control. The ancient name of the region is Pachakshiri or 'hidden land' and the inhabitants identify themselves as Pachakshiriba – the ones from Pachakshiri.

2. Interviews across various parts of Menchukha, such as Dechenthang village, Dorjeeling village and Regong, December 2020 and January 2021.

3. Interview with Mr Gebu Sona, Menchukha, January 2021.

4. 'Arunachal Pradesh: Gurudwara in Mechuka converted into Buddhist shrine, alleges SGPC.' *NE Now News*, 24 April, 2023. https://nenow.in/north-east-news/arunachal-pradesh/arunachal-pradesh-gurudwara-mechuka-converted-buddhist-shrine-sgpc.html (accessed 10 September 2023)

5. Field interview with various community members, Namsai, April 2021.

6. Field interview with members of the Pali school, Chongkham, December 2021.

7. 'Arunachal developing infrastructure along international borders: deputy CM'. *The Hindu,* 9 March 2023. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/arunachal-developing-infrastructure-along-international-borders-deputy-cm/article66599288.ece (accessed 21 September 2023)

8. '3 Buddhist Circuits identified by the Ministry of Tourism'. *Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Culture*, 4 March 2015. https://pib.gov.in/newsite/ PrintRelease.aspx?relid=116398 (accessed 20 September 2023).

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ABSTRACTS

Arunachal Pradesh, a state in Northeast India, is going through a phase of rapid infrastructural expansion, a phenomenon intensified due to the state's geostrategic location. Despite the colonial enterprise of frontier-making and the resulting securitisation of space, the presence of the eastern Himalayan frontier has historically infused the region with elements of both steadfastness and dynamism, as its spatial fluidity persists in one form or the other. Meanwhile, despite being situated in a Himalayan corridor, the region finds itself entangled in the contentious politics in which states in South and Southeast Asia are locked. Drawing on ethnographic experiences from two geopolitically sensitive and spatially significant places, Menchukha and Namsai, situated on the eastern Himalayan slopes at Arunachal Pradesh, this article discusses the paradoxical conditions of 'selective permeability' (Popescu 2015: 50) that often informs contemporary border regimes, where factors favouring cross-border mobility are weighed against the demands of maintaining territorial integrity. In this context, this article looks at some prominent sites of pilgrimage and religious tourism to understand the differential attention they receive from the state, revealing a complex assemblage of spatial dynamics, cultural logics and geostrategic rationales that operate in geopolitically charged borderlands.

L'Arunachal Pradesh, un État du nord-est de l'Inde, connaît une phase d'expansion rapide de ses infrastructures, un phénomène intensifié par la situation géostratégique de l'État. Malgré l'entreprise coloniale de création de frontières et la sécurisation de l'espace qui en a résulté, la présence de la frontière himalayenne orientale a historiquement insufflé à la région de la constance et du dynamisme, sa « fluidité spatiale » persistant sous une forme ou une autre. Par ailleurs, bien que située dans un couloir himalayen, la région se trouve empêtrée dans les politiques conflictuelles dans lesquelles les États d'Asie du Sud et du Sud-Est sont enfermés. Basé sur des expériences ethnographiques dans deux lieux géopolitiquement sensibles et spatialement significatifs, Menchukha et Namsai, situés sur les pentes himalayennes orientales de l'Arunachal Pradesh, cet article examine les conditions paradoxales de « perméabilité sélective » (Popescu 2015 : 50) qui informent souvent les régimes frontaliers contemporains, où les facteurs favorisant la mobilité transfrontalière sont mis en balance avec les exigences du maintien de l'intégrité territoriale. Dans ce contexte, cet article se penche sur certains sites de pèlerinage et de tourisme religieux importants pour comprendre l'attention différentielle qu'ils reçoivent de l'État, révélant ainsi un assemblage complexe de dynamiques spatiales, de logiques culturelles et de

rationalités géostratégiques qui opèrent dans des zones frontalières géopolitiquement incertaines.

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Book reviews

Recensions d'ouvrages

Jagadish Timsina, Tek Narayan Maraseni, Devendra Gauchan, Jagannath Adhikari and Hemant Ojha (eds), *Agriculture, Natural Resources and Food Security: Lessons from Nepal*

Olivia Aubriot

REFERENCES

Agriculture, Natural Resources and Food Security: Lessons from Nepal by Jagadish Timsina, Tek Narayan Maraseni, Devendra Gauchan, Jagannath Adhikari and Hemant Ojha (eds), Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2022.

1   It is great to see a book from a prestigious publishing house that is entirely devoted to agriculture in Nepal and, to boot, almost exclusively written by Nepalese people (experts, academics, practitioners). The very origin of the project explains the reason for this: in 2019, four of the editors set up, from Australia, a scientific cooperative association between Nepal and Australia. All have a very sound knowledge of Nepalese agriculture and have been specialists of the topic for 20 to 40 years. More than 60 contributors and 40 reviewers, a good number belonging to the 'Nepalese scientific diaspora', were involved in this book.

2   The scientific editors' preface clearly announces the situation Nepalese agriculture is facing: 'The past decade has been particularly unprecedented… as we see the country become a net food importer from a food exporter. … 15% (4.6 million) people [are] experiencing food access problem. … Productive agriculture lands are being abandoned, while food demand is growing.' (pxiii). The book aims to provide an

analysis of this situation and to suggest technical, legal, institutional and policy solutions to remedy it. In order to go beyond the 'silo' and a fragmented vision of agrarian development work, the editors advocate a holistic and systemic approach.

3   To achieve these goals, the editors offer us a rich 451-page book that describes and analyses Nepalese agriculture which is still one of the country's predominant sectors, with 60% of the labour force contributing to 26% of the national gross domestic product. The book also puts forward various solutions, and some chapters deal with projections and simulation models. The first chapter introduces the book's content and gives an excellent summary of the results of each of the other 23 chapters. It also provides in table form the contribution of each chapter to the 15 United Nations' sustainable development goals. Finally, it sets out all the recommendations from various articles, whether in terms of lines of research or policy recommendations.

4   The book is then divided into four parts, each addressing a theme. The first part, entitled 'Agriculture, horticulture, and post-harvest management', with 12 chapters, accounts for more than half of the book. The second part, 'Livestock and fisheries', is made up of five chapters (numbered 14 to 18). Three chapters make up each of the last two parts: one on 'Forestry, community forestry and agroforestry', and one on 'Cross-cutting topics'. Apart from two chapters, all the others are co-authored (2 to 9 persons).

5   Numerous tables, graphs, maps and photographs illustrate the chapters, many of them in colour. All of these go towards completing the text, which will no doubt be appreciated by the reader. The methodology used is clearly explained in each chapter. Some chapters are based on national statistical analysis, some on case studies, some combine a literature review with the authors' knowledge based on their experience in the field, and a few deal with future projections.

6   What is striking is the diversity of the topics covered (seed system, soil fertility, post-harvest management, food contamination and laws, citrus exports, urban agriculture, transhumance, fisheries, agroforestry, forest ecosystemic services, gender equity etc), which reflects how complex it is to fully grasp the situation that agriculture is facing.

7   An analysis of national statistical data provides an overview of food production. Chapters 2, 3 and 14 succeed in doing this – respectively in cereal production, fruit and vegetable production, and livestock farming –, and they present various issues specific to these types of farming. Food production is on the rise but not enough to cover a growing demand: there has been only a slight increase in cereal production, a doubling in fruit and vegetable production between 2000 and 2020, a similar increase in the pig population, slightly less in buffalo, more than double in goats, while the numbers of chickens and fish has tripled over the 2010 decade. Low yields are therefore singled out: cereal yields are lower than elsewhere in South Asia, vegetable yields have stagnated (an increase in the cultivated area explains an increase in production), and the per capita availability of livestock products (meat and milk) is low despite the large livestock population (Nepal is one of the countries in South Asia to have the highest livestock population density per unit of cultivated land). Various reasons are given to explain why production has not been further improved, such as the ill-timed availability of fertilisers, the drop in soil fertility – due to the intensification of farming, reduced quantities of manure, inappropriate application of chemical fertilisers and soil acidity –, or a decrease in the cultivated area due to urbanisation and land abandonment, the latter resulting from outmigration and labour shortage. Added to this, the effects of climate change will have a negative impact on the potential increase

in agricultural production so that there is little chance of the country achieving food self-sufficiency by 2030.

8 These chapters also examine why the low levels of food production have contributed to making the country largely dependent on imports. 'Limited marketable surplus available at household level is the fundamental reason for steady increase in food imports' (chap2). They also explain how import conditions are detrimental to agriculture: cheap food imports have changed diets (less and less diversified) and crops (many of which are no longer cultivated). Moreover, they remind us of the complexity of organising trade in mountain areas and with a multitude of small farms. For example, chapter 14 explains that meat traders prefer to buy and import meat from a few Indian wholesalers rather than to collect it from a multitude of small farms.

9 These few examples show that agro-ecological, technical, social and economic issues are interconnected, and these chapters do indeed achieve the goal announced at the beginning of the book: to analyse all these issues.

10 To illustrate how the systemic approach advocated by the editors is applied, how it helps to understand the interconnection between agriculture, natural resources and food security, and in order to suggest solutions to this intricacy of issues, I have chosen to focus only on a few chapters, given that the chapters based on concepts such as regenerative agriculture, resource-conserving technologies, ecosystem services, agrobiodiversity, water-food-energy nexus and gender equity have particularly integrated this approach.

11 Chapter 11 (on regenerative agriculture), for example, starts with an interesting historical analysis of the policies, thus reminding us of the influence of policies on farmers' practices. It criticises the policy choices that have reduced agricultural subsidies because the mid-1990s and have focused strategies on intensive commercial agriculture: since 80% of farmers are smallholders, such policies are not appropriate for them. The current policy, with an emphasis on cash crops, also shows less concern for the livelihood improvement of small farmers. The authors suggest turning to regenerative agriculture, which is a nature-based type of farming with reduced use or no use of chemicals. Various practices could be implemented in Nepal, such as agroforestry, no tilling, production of food in water bodies, green fertilisers etc. This agriculture has the advantage of being more resilient to climate change. Close to traditional farming, it can still benefit from traditional knowledge. The authors propose a framework for planning the transition from conventional to regenerative agriculture, while developing the role of the different stakeholders. Chapter 7 (on agrobiodiversity and neglected species) needs a mention here since it points out specific examples of policies that are not adapted to small farmers and their food security. It recommends promoting crops overlooked by national policies. Because of their nutritional qualities and their resistance to climatic hazards, these negected crops are now called 'smart crops' that can play a part in the future 'smart food'. Millet has therefore been upgraded in the Humla region. This valorisation has come up against certain obstacles but these have been analysed, overcome and are explicitly detailed here in order to provide some lessons concerning other places or crops.

12 Chapter 12 also proposes a type of agriculture that calls for a break with the conventional agriculture model. The cropping system based on conservation agriculture technologies follows three principles: minimum soil disturbance, residue retention in fields, and diversified and sustainable crop rotations. This seems

particularly suited to farmers who lack manpower. The chapter reviews the various techniques tested in Nepal and gives measured performances from on-station and on-farm experiences, showing that this type of agriculture is relevant to Nepal. It has numerous advantages in terms of food production, environmental preservation, adaptation to climate change and adaptation to the social context of labour scarcity. The authors then explain the pros and the cons of implementing this type of model. They even suggest how to integrate it within the three new levels of government in federal Nepal.

13 Chapter 19 addresses a conceptual shift that has to be operated if we are to understand the forest ecosystems services that benefit the community. The authors highlight the fact that forest administrators and forestry professionals see the forest above all for its 'classic' timber and firewood products, not for its ecosystem services. These actors are still using approaches based on the conservation and management of forest biomass, though – as the chapter demonstrates – some initiatives regarding management based on ecosystemic services are emerging within forest communities.

14 These examples are a good illustration of the publishers' desire to move away from a purely productivist assessment of agriculture, and the reader can only appreciate this approach. However, it is not always clear whether the authors of the other chapters subscribe to this idea. We regret that some chapters propose solutions based essentially on irrigation (chap2, 22, 23), though no chapter is actually devoted to this subject or to water as a natural resource. Yet Nepal has many specialists in this field. Nepal is renowned for its farmer-managed irrigation systems, and management issues concerning large-scale irrigation systems set up by the State have also been studied there.

15 All the chapters propose practical, institutional and/or legal solutions as well as lines of research to make agriculture more productive and abundant enough to feed the country's population. They do indeed meet the book's goals. However, in my opinion, the good practices advocated throughout the book are not specific enough for each altitudinal belt.

16 Another aspect, which might seem minor since it concerns only two sentences out of the entire book: I was surprised to read in this book devoted to agriculture that 'agriculture is a prime driver of global land degradation' and 'cultivation on sloping lands has accelerated soil erosion' (p382). These are to be found in the chapter on agroforestry that shows how environmental degradation leads to food insecurity. The first statement should have been nuanced since some types of farming systems may deteriorate the environment while others won't (as the chapter also shows). The second one should have been phrased more carefully since the theory of Himalayan environmental degradation was dissected and dismembered by Ives and Messerli in 1989. Despite this, this theory spread widely for many years and had a significant impact on development programmes. Is it because the authors do not adhere to the demonstration of the *Himalayan dilemma* book, or because the present book only has a Nepalese bibliography from which some classic works have been left out?

17 Finally, we can say that this is in fact a book about agriculture, not necessarily about farmers (even if this remark is not valid for every chapter). For example, we learn that in general the number of livestock is increasing and that there are major dairy pocket areas. But what about at farm level? Does it mean there is a concentration of ruminants on certain farms, and fewer on smaller farms, especially since oxen are no longer

needed as a pulling force due to the ongoing mechanisation process? Similarly, who are the farmers who have contributed to the increase in fruit and vegetable production? Are they situated only close to roads so that their produce can be sold to cities? We can warmly encourage members of the group behind this book to continue their work by addressing the deceptively simple question: who will be the farmers of tomorrow in Nepal?

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Michael Hoffman, *Glimpses of Hope: The rise of industrial labor at the urban margins of Nepal*

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REFERENCES

Glimpses of Hope: The rise of industrial labor at the urban margins of Nepal by Michael Hoffman. Berghahn, 2023, 191pp

1   Drawing on a series of ethnographic vignettes from fieldwork in Nepal, Michael Hoffmann takes readers from the lowland town of Nepalgunj in the Terai to the upland city of Pokhara while offering readers a glimpse inside Nepal's growing urban industrial labour scene. The book draws on research and multiple field visits between 2013 and 2020 to weave together a story of changing industrial labour relations and class formations, of the evolving power of Maoist unions, and the occasional foray into the world of spirits and occult economics. Through a mix of details about the daily routines of industrial workers and their bosses and reflections on the lasting impact of the Maoist revolution and Nepal's integration into global labour markets, Hoffmann gives readers insights into how labour politics, class consciousness, ethnic and Indigenous identities, gender politics, urban versus rural dynamics, and religious practices all play a part in Nepal's evolving industrial landscape and workforce.

2   Hoffmann opens the book by situating his project within a larger set of scholarly debates about labour and society that will likely be familiar to scholars of anthropology and labour. In addition to the usual suspects (Karl Marx, Max Weber, EP Thompson), he also draws on anthropological insights from scholars such as Michael Burawoy, June Nash, Don Kalb and Jonathan Parry. The book is split into two sections, which correspond to his two research sites. Part I focuses on an extended case study of a food-processing plant in Nepalgunj, while Part II includes case studies of a noodle factory, a water-bottling facility, the building trade, and sand-mining operations in Pokhara.

Hoffmann uses these cases to develop his arguments about changing industrial labour dynamics in Nepal and to highlight key differences between the two regions.

3   The author develops one of his key arguments in Part I, namely that the influence of labour organising, which was dominated by communist parties after the civil war (and remains largely the case today), helped to secure worker protection and enshrine the power of unions. As he notes, 'much of the book has shown how Maoism has affected labor relations in these new industrial and urban work environments and in some cases has helped make labor more, instead of less, secure' (165). But he argues that these benefits have not been divided equally. Regarding the first case, the Agrawal food-processing facility in Nepalgunj, Hoffman argues that ethnic Madheshi workers, as skilled workers, have overwhelmingly reaped the benefits of unions' organising labour, have gained more secure labour contracts and employee benefits thanks to the unions, whereas Indigenous Tharu loaders (*paledars*) who carry out heavy manual labour have not benefited from unionisation efforts, so their jobs remain highly precarious and physically dangerous.

4   Hoffmann argues that this was due to various factors, ranging from strategic decisions made by Maoist party leaders to focus on winning Madheshi voter support after consolidating power in government, to biases (from Indian or Nepali Bahun managers) against lower-caste and Indigenous workers, a bias also evident in Maoist party leadership. As Hoffman reveals, a general manager told him 'Tharu contract workers still have a lot to learn. It will take them a minimum of twenty years before they adapt to a modern industrial working culture' (64). Elsewhere he notes that management describes Indigenous Tharu contractors as backwards or uncivilised 'jungly people' (67). This pattern of Indian or upper-caste Nepali Brahmins running industrial operations, while lower-caste ethnic or Indigenous groups work as temporary contract labourers, is a central theme of the book. As Hoffmann argues, such precarious labour, especially in the Terai, is also associated with the historical legacy of bonded labour (*kamaiya*) within Tharu communities.

5   In contrast to this picture of the largely successful organisation of labour by Maoists in the Terai, the story in Pokhara is one of labour unions on the decline or, in many cases, entirely absent. According to Hoffmann, this is partly due to smaller-scale industries in Pokhara compared to Nepalgunj, many of which are on private land on the city outskirts, rather than on industrial estates. Another factor concerns contractors (*thekedars*) shifting from temporary labourer status to self-employed contractors or even business owners, especially in the construction industry, as workers aspire to achieve middle-class status. Hoffmann also argues that union rivalries, mostly between Communist and Congress Party-affiliated unions, have further weakened the power of unions. And finally, especially in the case of Maoist unions, the consolidation of the party via electoral politics has increasingly enmeshed communist unions in the bureaucratic malaise of the state. As Hoffmann suggests, 'the shift from radical militant unionism to a more bureaucratic and standardized organization at the central level' (158) has meant that unions focus more on the business of business – such as collecting union fees or arbitration settlement fees in cases of legal action – and less on advocating for workers' rights. One result is that many of the cases that come before the unions are not from workers at all but from contractors or owners trying to collect unpaid bills.

6   To Hoffmann's surprise, and this is worth noting for scholars of comparative labour in particular, the experience of industrial labourers in Nepal appears to run counter to common claims about the destructive power of global capitalism and the creation of a new underclass of precarious labour (Standing 2011; Hann and Parry 2018). As he argues, 'Nepal remains an outlier in the context of the global decline in labor activism and the continuing devaluation of labor by capital around the world' (174). Instead, what Hoffmann documents at his industrial sites is a move away from more precarious and temporary forms of labour contracts (*asthai kam*) towards more regular and permanent employment (*isthai kam*), though with some important caveats, as I've noted among Tharu labourers. Hoffmann credits this shift to the legacy of Maoists labour organising following the civil war, especially for the larger industrial sites in Nepalgunj.

7   Through his analysis of these different urban industrial sites in Nepal, Hoffmann tries to show that a key result of the post-conflict Maoist era is the creation of a bifurcated labour force in Nepal. As he explains in the case of Nepalgunj, 'Those who had a permanent job were most likely Madheshi locals or were from an Indian background. Those who worked as casual laborers were more likely from the Tharu ethnic group. In Pokhara, the division was less about permanent versus casual labor and more about larger versus small factories...there is a division in the informal economy between the labor elites and the common workers, and that ethnic identities map upon this division in important ways' (170). Hoffmann also argues that we are seeing class identity take over and replace caste identity as the key social signifier in Nepal. I have to admit my skepticism on this point, as I didn't see enough evidence in his cases to support this, and the evidence that was provided may not be generalisable beyond his selection of industrial labour sites. Regardless, for scholars interested in how post-Maoist labour politics are interacting with an emerging industrial labour force and global market pressures, from increasing labour migration to Malaysia and the Middle East to growing middle-class aspirations by a globally connected Nepali youth culture, the grounded case studies provided by Hoffmann offer many important insights into these dynamics in Nepal.

8   There is one final issue I wish to touch on, which is at the heart of chapter three and concerns some interspersed items in other chapters, and that is the role of rituals and religion. Hoffmann draws on the work of Jean and John Comaroff (1999 and 2000) and the idea of 'occult economies' to argue that religion is often used as a managerial instrument of control to pacify and shape the labour force and as a hedge against uncertainty. Informing this theory of occult economies is the belief that supernatural forces can have a direct impact on economic systems, and the goal of religious practitioners is to harness these forces for capital accumulation. Hoffman argues we can see such religious dynamics manifested in at least three distinct ways in the Nepalgunj case.

9   First, Hoffman discusses a physical redesign of the building sites by Hindu management under the guidance of an expert in Vastu Shastra, a kind of Vedic sacred geometry akin to the Taoist *feng shui*. Ostensibly, this was done to improve the factory workflow and to make the business more profitable, but Hoffmann's own analysis suggests this was as much an Indian business fad linked to globalisation as a serious religious act. Many of the managers he spoke to confessed to doubting its validity and, as he notes in the case of the Tharu loaders, 'The casual workers, however, did not embrace the spiritual

reforms taking place in the factory. For them, Vastu Shastra had little meaning' (81). A second example is the rituals performed by machine operators at a shrine honouring the Hindu god Vishvakarma[1] (the craftsman god), which were to protect workers from accidents. A third example includes animistic rituals practised by Tharu contract workers when they return home to their villages, as well as occasional visits to a local ritual specialist (*guruwa*) to help with physical ailments blamed on malevolent spirits. Management had a similar response to Tharu animism as Tharu workers did to the Vastu Shastra rituals. 'Yet walking home to conduct a sacrifice to appease a house god or visiting another factory to see a shaman were practices that the company's management dismissed out of hand' (80).

10 Hoffmann describes these interactions as potentially reflecting 'limited spiritual economies', but I would suggest that what was going on were incommensurate forms of religious practice that operate on different registers, yet both could be more productively read as forms of lived religion, a framework that I expected to see Hoffman draw on, but which was noticeably absent. As religious scholars Kim Knibbe and Helena Kupari argue, lived religion 'attempts at theorizing the future of religion in modernity by focusing on how religion is practised. Rather than assuming an inherent incompatibility between religion and modernity, it enquires into how religion is encountered and experienced – how it comes into play – in different environments: public and private, official and informal, sacred, secular, and religiously "neutral"' (Knibbe and Kupari 2020: 159). This is an approach that works especially well with ethnographic work of the kind that Hoffmann undertook and could have strengthened his engagement with religion.

11 I raise this last point because Hoffmann's analysis came across as being dismissive of animism as an artifact of outmoded, rural folk superstitions that linger on the margins of Nepali society and aren't really held anymore by Nepal's urban industrial workers. This point is most obvious in the final case study on sand mining where he asks, drawing on arguments by Aihwa Ong (1987) and Comaroff and Comaroff (2000), if it may be more accurate to read 'the story of possession of the workers by evil spirits ... as a more subtle cultural expression of resistance to workplace-based exploitation' or 'to generally view the practices of shamanism and spirit possession in the wider area as a cultural response from the many who are left out of the benefits of new forms of capitalism? The answer, I believe, is both, but there is also a third reading of such practices' (161–62). I found his third answer highly unconvincing and problematic given that he is a scholar of religion. Instead of taking such religious beliefs seriously, Hoffmann instead argues that folk superstitions simply divert attention from real issues, such as the unsafe conditions of sand mining. He therefore concludes that 'such ideas, discourses, and practices of shamanic advice to the miners provided legitimacy to the contractor of the mine...the fact that some of the miners were under the influence of shamans who defined the "evil" in the mine as originating from supernatural beings, rather than exploitative work regimes, also contributed to the stability of this complex wealth-extraction scheme in the sand mine' (162–63). Such questionable framing left a bad taste in my mouth and raised other questions about his analysis of religions in Nepal more generally.

12 As a grounded ethnographic study of urban industrialisation and evolving class politics in Nepal, and of the ways post-conflict Nepal is being shaped by new labour relations, this book is a welcome addition. For scholars of lived religion in the Himalayas, you

may want to look elsewhere for a more nuanced analysis of how lived religion is entangled with industrialisation, or take the insights offered by Hoffmann with a pinch of salt. This criticism of the handling of religion aside, this book is a good contribution to the field of Himalayan Studies, and should also be of interest to those, like Hoffmann, who argue for the value of comparative labour studies.

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NOTES

1. Hoffmann spells the name of the deity 'Vishwakarma' with a 'w', but it is unclear why. This spelling typically refers to the caste group of metalworkers and smiths that claim to be followers of the god Vishvakarma (विश्वकर्मा).

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John K Locke, *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal: A survey of the Bāhās and Bahīs of the Kathmandu Valley*

David N Gellner

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Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal: A survey of the Bāhās and Bahīs of the Kathmandu Valley by John K Locke, SJ. Trinity, Canada: Orchid Press, 2023 (1st edition 1985)

1   The UNESCO World Heritage sites of the Kathmandu Valley give pride of place to the temples and palaces at the symbolic heart of the three formerly royal cities: Kathmandu itself, Patan and Bhaktapur.[1] What gives these ancient Newar cities their character, however, is not just the royal centres but the rabbit warren of lanes and courtyards that make up the rest of the urban fabric. Among these many courtyards, set back from the streets and crossroads, Buddhist monastic courtyards (*baha* and *bahi*) loom large. The Tibetologist David Snellgrove, visiting Patan in 1953–54, speculated that the city 'must have been a kind of vast university-city, differing little in its mode of life from similar towns in mediaeval Europe. In fact, its traditions, its way of life, must have been modelled on the great monastic universities of central India' (Snellgrove 1957: 102–3). Snellgrove was right that the Buddhism of the Kathmandu Valley – its ideas, its rituals and its architecture – derived directly from the great monastic centres of northern India of the late first millennium, such as Nalanda and Odantapuri. However, his idea that Patan was once a university city like Oxford or Cambridge may have been fanciful. As Locke points out here (p404), Buddhist scholars from India and Tibet visited in the Thakuri period (10th–14th centuries) and many manuscripts were copied in the Kathmandu Valley, but there were no large institutions of learning on the scale of the Indian establishments.

2   Snellgrove's parallel with Oxford and Cambridge may have some mileage in it, nonetheless. Imagine if Oxbridge dons, once they started marrying and having families

in the nineteenth century, had, instead of moving out of college, privatised part of a quadrangle in their college and built a house in one corner of the formerly monastic courtyard, while continuing to fulfil their ritual and other duties in college. This is what started happening to many of the Nepal Valley's monastic courtyards from the fifteenth century onwards. In fact, it is quite likely that 'married monks', on today's model, existed already several centuries earlier.

3 John Locke SJ (1933–2009) was born in the USA and died a citizen of Nepal, having spent most of his life in the Himalayan kingdom (it became a republic less than a year before his death). He was an educator, a scholar and a theologian interested in inter-religious dialogue (Sharkey 2009). In the 1980s the Jesuits were deeply embedded in Kathmandu society thanks to the fact that the parents of the boys studying at their school, St Xavier's, and in due course the boys themselves, made up a significant proportion of the Nepalese Establishment. Nepal's Tribhuvan University was only just getting going – the Jesuits were among the first to do PhDs there – and most of the other educational establishments in existence today had not yet been set up. The Jesuits were therefore in a position to make a major contribution to intellectual life in Nepal from the 1970s to the 1990s, both through their teaching and through their research. They published pioneering historical and anthropological monographs based on a deep acquaintance with the country and long years of study.[2]

4 Locke's academic career was devoted to the study of Newar Buddhism, a field in which he was undoubtedly a pioneer. Since Newar Buddhism is the last direct descendant of the north Indian Buddhism of the late first millennium CE, and is consequently the only Buddhist tradition remaining where the liturgy is chanted in Sanskrit, its practices and traditions have a huge significance for world history and the history of religions. Yet Newar Buddhism falls outside the conventional classifications with which Buddhism is taught – Southern or Theravada Buddhism, Northern or Tibetan Buddhism, and Eastern or Chinese/Japanese/Korean Buddhism – and therefore is often ignored or only mentioned in passing by the standard histories and surveys of the subject.

5 Locke considered *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal* to be his most important work. It does not have the historical and ethnographic narrative unity of *Karunamaya: The cult of Avalokitesvara-Matsyendranath in the Valley of Nepal*, the book of his PhD thesis (Locke 1980), but, like it, it is the fruit of hard work and focused enquiry. In fact, in terms of the number of years of labour and repeated investigations, with the help of his (then) young assistants, Tirtha Lal Maharjan and Kundan Sthapit, it outstrips *Karunamaya*. The sheer length of time and amount of research required to cover so many sites over such a large area meant that only a scholar based in Nepal, and only a scholar with a sympathetic support network and gifted with stubborn persistence in the pursuit of knowledge, could have achieved this level of systematic coverage.

6 *Buddhist Monasteries* is nothing less than an encyclopaedic survey of everything that is known about 363 separate Newar Buddhist institutions: 185 in Lalitpur district, 130 in Kathmandu and 48 in Bhaktapur. Some of these are tiny, no more than a small shrine in a forgotten courtyard, owned by a single family; some indeed have disappeared. At the other extreme is Kwa Bahal, the famous Golden Temple of Patan, honorific title Bhaskara Deva Samskarita Hiranyavarna Mahavihara, with 1,750 initiated members in 1985 (today the total is said to be over 6,000). Large Newar Buddhist monasteries, such as the Golden Temple and many others, are included in the pilgrimage routes of Tibetan Buddhists visiting the Kathmandu Valley (Dowman 2020).

7   The Newar Buddhist monastery preserves certain architectural elements that are very archaic, especially the smaller, less populated and less wealthy *bahi* class of *vihara.* All Newar Buddhist monasteries have, or should have, a *caitya* and a main deity (*kwapadyah*), usually Sakyamuni Buddha, and, if they have a functioning *sangha* or membership, a Tantric god hidden away upstairs. Some monasteries have died out, so that the name and the site are remembered and play a role in collective rituals, but the actual buildings that must have been there are no more. All this is meticulously documented for every one of the 363 sites.

8   These sacred sites are controlled by the Vajracharyas and Shakyas, two intermarrying sections of the Buddhist religious elite. They are 'married monks'. Vajracharya and Shakya boys pass through the monastic initiation rite of *cudakarma* or *bare chuyegu* in the *baha* or *bahi* of their father, which makes them a member of that particular monastic association or *sangha*. During this four-day ritual, they enact the role of a monk, receiving alms and eating only pure food. On the fourth day they hand their monastic robe back to their Vajracharya preceptor guru, and embark on the path of the Buddhist householder, all the while incorporating the status of monk (Locke 1975; Gellner 1988, 1992; von Rospatt 2005).

9   The monastic status of Shakya and Vajracharya men is acted out once a year during the annual festival of Panchadan, when they circulate to receive alms from the laity, and also when their turn comes to be the 'god guardian' (*dyahpala*) of their monastery, the context in which ancient monastic practices are most faithfully reproduced (Sharkey 2001). I once asked a Vajracharya if he had ever invited Theravada monastics to his house. He replied simply, 'We ourselves are monks [so we don't need to]' (*jimi he bhiksuta*) (Gellner 1992: 162). Without the monastery architecture and sacred sites documented by Locke, it would have been impossible for Shakyas and Vajracharyas to sustain and legitimate their claim to the elevated status of monk and Buddhist ritual specialist for so many centuries. Until 1951 Shakyas and Vajracharyas who had migrated to hill bazaars throughout the Nepalese hills used to trek long distances, at great expense, bringing their boys to the Kathmandu Valley in order for them to be initiated in their ancestral *baha* or *bahi* (Gellner 2010). That they were willing to do this was testament (1) to the exclusive power of the consecrated *vihara* to confer a sacred status as Buddhist clergy on Shakya and Vajracharya young boys; and (2) to the pervasive fear of outcasting, if their boys were not properly initiated, under the caste-regulated Hindu Rana regime (1845–1951).

10 This reissue of Locke's *Buddhist Monasteries of Nepal* by Orchid Press is very welcome. The original edition was set by John Locke himself in the early days of word-processing. Although perfectly serviceable, both the font of the original and the reproduction quality of the photographs are showing their age. The layout of the new edition is easier on the eye, particularly the map lists of the three cities. There is a new list of illustrations. A more effective layout has reduced 542 pages to 443 pages. The only thing still missing is an index.

11 The book will stand forever as a key reference work. It is a monument of documentation about monuments, essential for anyone interested in the history of Newar Buddhism and the built environment of the Kathmandu Valley. Inevitably, however, the descriptions and the photographs are keyed to a particular moment in time, the 1970s and 1980s. That built environment, despite many people's best efforts,

has been subject to massive change and rebuilding, not to mention the effects of the earthquakes of 2015. It begs the question of how these sacred sites are faring today.

12 In Locke's day there were only a few scholars and isolated individuals interested in heritage. In recent years there has been a huge upsurge in interest and in activism. 'Stakeholders', in the contemporary policy jargon, include local groups such as Chiva Chaitya (chivachaitya.org.np), academic initiatives, such as the Nepal Heritage Documentation Project (danam.cats.uni-heidelberg.de/), and governmental and international bodies (among others, UNESCO's Nepal office). What is called for today, I would suggest, is a collaborative, interactive and constantly updated website where Locke's findings, suitably uploaded and searchable, could be added to and continually updated. In most cases it would be easy enough to add contemporary photographs taken from the same spot where Hugh Downes stood in the 1980s. Locke's scholarship would then be integrated with other people's work on Buddhist (and other) monuments, including research by the locals who inhabit the courtyards that Locke loved so much and devoted so much time to exploring and to rescuing from the ignorance of history. Locke himself would doubtless have been delighted to find his work incorporated with local/insider research in this way.

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NOTES

1. Many thanks to Greg Sharkey SJ for comments on an earlier version. Full disclosure: in the 1980s and afterwards, Locke was unfailingly friendly and helpful to me, a much younger scholar following in his footsteps in the study of Newar Buddhism. I visited him regularly to profit from his advice and knowledge. One of my very first articles (Gellner 1987) was a long analysis of *bahas* and *bahis* of Patan, where I did my DPhil fieldwork (19 months from 1982 to 1984). I shared the article with Locke in its pre-publication form and he cited it when discussing the *bahi* monasteries of Patan.

2. For example, Stiller (1973, 1976), Miller (1987, 1990), Locke (1980), Sharkey (2001). On Marshall Moran, the founder of the Jesuit Mission in Nepal, see Messerschmidt (1997).

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Hannah Uprety, *Becoming a Migrant Worker in Nepal: The governmentality and marketization of transnational labor*

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Becoming a Migrant Worker in Nepal: The governmentality and marketization of transnational labor by Hannah Uprety. Bielefeld, Transcript Verlag, 2022, 378pp

1   If there is a key feature that broadly defines Nepal's social and economic geography at this historical juncture it is migration and remittances. Although patterns may vary across the country's geography, castes, genders and ethnicities, hardly any rural and urban spaces have been left unaffected by migration and remittances. Added to this, the country's overall economy and social structures have undergone some level of transformation, though Nepal is no exception in Asia as far as experiencing this type of change. Consequently, the country's economy has been largely seen as a 'remittance economy' (Seddon et al 2002), and even rural villages have turned into 'remittance villages' (Sunam 2020).

2   Despite the fact that these transformations are occurring in Asia and across the Global South, only a limited amount of research exists on the governmentality of labour migration. Uprety's *Becoming a Migrant Worker in Nepal* thus fills an important gap by analysing techniques of governmentality, diverse and entangled rationalities, and subjectivities that have shaped the regime of Nepali labour migration. The author rightly accepts that the labour migration that has emerged over the last decades is remarkable in many ways, even though migration is an established practice in countries such as Nepal. While broad structural factors related to the economy are

taken into account here Uprety also reveals how social conditions shape people's migration aspirations, decisions, and migration journey and experiences.

3 The book uses a novel conceptual framework that integrates a political geography of migration, governmentality and the marketisation of migrant labour. It is grounded in a rich ethnography involving fieldwork in different localities in Nepal, and is complemented by discourse analysis of textual and audio-visual materials related to the governance of Nepali labour migration. Its analysis of visual materials is noteworthy as it makes use not only of texts but also of videos/songs, images, interview recordings and informal conversations.

4 The book delves deep into the governmentality of Nepali labour migration by investigating migrant governance techniques and tools, as well as the forms of rationality that have rendered possible these techniques and tools. In doing so, Uprety identifies three key interconnected pillars of migrant governmentality in Nepal, in which many forms of governance techniques are embedded: (i) recruitment, (ii) market encounters and (iii) instructions. Five primary migrant subjectivities are identified and it is noted that every aspiring migrant is subject to a specific blend of these ideal forms: 'self-sacrificing provider', 'submissive servant', 'productive worker', 'responsible citizen' and 'entrepreneurial self'. The image of migrants as 'self-sacrificing providers' reflects Nepal's traditional gender roles and rationalities of modernising development. Two other subjectivities – the 'submissive servant' and the 'productive worker' – echo the marketisation of Nepali migrant labour. While the subjectivities of the 'responsible citizen' and the 'entrepreneurial self' sound appealing, they may work towards maintaining the status quo in the migration regime by making individual migrants responsible for their fate, while undermining the powerful structural factors at play in Nepal and in host countries, which could significantly shape migrants' experiences and vulnerabilities. It is argued that intersecting categories of gender, caste, ethnicity, geographical location and professional skills shape migrant workers' access to particular forms of government and corresponding modes of subjectification.

5 The author organises the analysis around three key pillars of migrant governmentality: recruitment, market encounters and instructions, which I will briefly review in the sections that follow.

Governmentality of recruitment

6 The first part of chapter four focuses on the governmentality of the recruitment of migrant workers. It does this by framing labour migration as both a desirable solution to address developmental problems and a problem to be redressed through state intervention. Drawing on a large body of scholarly works, Uprety succinctly provides a genealogical perspective on the Nepali development regime. For those seeking brief insights into the history of development (p108), this section is a go-to.

7 What I find quite illuminating in this part of the book is the visuality of recruitment. Uprety discusses how recruitment agencies promote the Dubai, Doha, Kuala Lumpur and Riyadh skylines, their multi-lane highways and attractive shopping plazas to showcase the landscape of luxurious urban life and progress in host countries. As the author puts it, '…recruitment websites sell the dream of development', commenting on the chasm between these images and the everyday lived experiences of migrant

workers in host countries. Many studies, including my own work, have highlighted the precarious lives Nepalese migrant workers endure in Malaysia and other countries. However, as Uprety also notes, migrant returnees rarely talk about the exploitative conditions and other challenging and painful experiences they have faced overseas. As a migration researcher, I contend that this tendency – of returnee migrants to share rose-tinted accounts of experiences overseas while remaining silent about their own awful experiences – could further intensify labour migration from Nepal.

8   Uprety discusses how migrant subjectivities co-evolve with gendered norms. Women are often left out of the recruitment campaigns launched by hiring agencies; this is by no means accidental but a deliberate action, suggesting an interesting dimension of gendered migration. As the author puts it, recruitment techniques tend to portray gendered subjectivities of the 'male migrant' and the 'immobile woman'. Women in Nepal are actively discouraged from migrating, and the author outlines various rationalities behind this. One of the key rationalities is that women should be protected from harm because the assumption is that they are more vulnerable to exploitation, including sexual abuse, when they are overseas. With regards to this, another rationality relates to preserving women's sexual 'purity', thus assuming that migrant women may be sexually abused or may become promiscuous while working abroad. The author writes, 'While men have the responsibility to gain *ijjat* [prestige] through migration, it is women's responsibility to preserve *ijjat* by remaining immobile' (p123). However, despite these rationalities and narratives, Nepali women have long been migrating overseas for employment, particularly in the domestic and care sector.[1] Many women are forced to travel overseas for work, particularly to the Gulf states, through irregular channels due to the unfavourable and gender-restrictive policy implemented by the Nepal government.

9   State regulations and brokerage are also key elements of the governmentality of recruiting Nepali migrant workers, as Uprety sums up the situation. Consistent with Kern and Müller-Böker (2015) and Shrestha (2018), the author rightly challenges the vilification of (unlicensed) brokers, highlighting the important role they play in facilitating labour migration.

10   To protect migrants from exploitation, the Nepali state has introduced strict regulations concerning the recruitment industry. The author illustrates how subterranean practices, hidden rules and conflicts largely shape Nepal's labour regime. Yet the relationship between the Nepali state and the private recruitment industry is complex and mutually constitutive. Both state structures and the private recruitment industry are often involved in 'subterranean' practices, which sometimes renders migrant workers more vulnerable. Cases of corruption within the foreign employment sector are widely reported in Nepal; the book could perhaps have provided additional ethnographic insights into this. I also note that it is a politically sensitive issue, and any researcher would find it challenging to delve deep into this.

Market encounters

11   In investigating the market aspects of governmentality, Uprety addresses the process of job interviews and aptitude tests, and sheds light on how the foreign worker regimes of host countries, along with their hiring techniques, singularise the Nepali worker on the international market.

12   Uprety argues that while in-person interviews and aptitude tests constitute only one part of the recruitment process, they significantly influence the marketisation of Nepali labour. These selection processes often result in the production of 'pacified' workers. Moreover, instances of counter-conduct by prospective migrants, aimed at subverting some of the selection techniques used against them, are also discussed.

13   Drawing on academic and secondary sources, as no fieldwork has been conducted in the host countries, Uprety examines how the host country contexts (for example, in Malaysia, Qatar and Saudi Arabia) and their specific approaches to governing foreign workers shape the market dynamics that operate between Nepali workers, employers and recruitment agencies. Three sets of techniques that are entrenched in host countries' foreign labour regimes are discussed: the marginalisation and commodification of workers, the positioning of them between restrictive state regulations and subversive forms of governance, and the segmentation of the labour market. Uprety argues that the hiring of Nepali workers internationally is a highly differentiated practice mediated by domestic and international asymmetries of power, which contrasts sharply with the popular homogeneous imagination of the 'Nepali worker'.

Technology of instruction

14   The Nepali government, recruitment agencies and other actors have been providing education, training and advice to prospective migrants regarding the recruitment process, pre-departure requirements, health, safety and other rules in migrants' destination countries. Uprety suggests that techniques of education and training not only provide migrants with neutral 'knowledge' and job skills but they also shape migrants' conduct and subjectivities in particular ways. The author is aware that the training and instructions provided to migrants in their pre-departure phase are in keeping with the international market's demand for a submissive and pacified worker but do not respect migrants' rights.

15   Uprety has also examined the promotion of skills as a key government technique. This has received growing attention in the public discourse in Nepal and elsewhere. The author has unpacked multiple yet sometimes contradictory rationalities behind this. One of the rationales is that when prospective migrants gain skills, which can contribute to reducing their vulnerability and to their accessing secure employment abroad, it can also help them to gain higher wages and to elevate their economic status in home communities. Recruitment agencies and other actors can also benefit from the promotion of skills because it provides a business for them. The Nepali government intends to reduce its dependency on the remittances received from Nepali migrant workers and, to this end, it has been attempting to 'skill' aspiring migrants to enable them to find a job within the country. Nevertheless, I would have liked to have seen further discussion on whether the skill promotion strategy has benefited migrant workers.

16   In sum, Uprety's *Becoming a Migrant Worker in Nepal* is a fascinating book that bridges the gap between scholarship on critical migration studies and scholarship on governmentality. The author's association of feminist concepts – such as performativity, materiality, affect and emotion – with governmentality offers a nuanced, gendered understanding of governance techniques and migrant

subjectivities. The book is a valuable resource for scholars, students, policymakers and practitioners alike who seek to understand the complex governance of labour migration and the making of the migrant subject.

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NOTES

1. According to the National Labour Force Survey 2017/18, around 20% of migrants are women (see *State of Migration in Nepal* https://www.ceslam.org/our-publications/state-of-migration-in-nepal-2023)

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