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## Book review of 'Tibet and the British Raj: The Frontier Cadre 1904-1907' by Alex McKay,

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trait of Western culture, otherwise the Western anthropologists, i.e., the majority of contributors to this volume, would not be able to even identify as the topic of their investigation agency, self, and capacity to act. The contributors, however, seem equivocal about whether self-reflection on agency is universal. In his article, Parish (p. 56) strongly implies that indeed it is. A political theorist might conclude that Parish is a liberal—the belief that self-reflection is universal is a liberal one, or what Levy would term an “Enlightenment” one. Levy himself rejects this. In his Afterword, he argues for the particularism of self-reflection in his comparison of Nepalis and Tahitians, suggesting that the Nepalis, unlike Tahitians, are more like “us” in the West. But at this point, one feels that Levy should perhaps return to navel-gazing. Is Tahitian society really different from Nepali (or Newari to be more specific in Levy’s case) in regard to self-reflection and notions of the self? Or did Levy’s questions change over an obviously productive career in the field? Of course the same could be asked of Parish: are Parish’s informants’ interpretations of narratives consistently subversive or only when they are talking to Parish? More broadly, are our interpretations self-reflective of ourselves?

Most of the contributors to the volume probably fall somewhere between these two positions of Parish and Levy on the issue of self-reflection as universal or particular. I would have liked however a more explicit treatment in some of the other chapters, particularly of the relation between ritual and self-reflection on agency. For example, when women construct their selves through subtle subversions in traditional singing, is this “agency” self-reflective? Or better yet, is it pre-meditated? Is the “self” making a life choice or is the self spontaneously responding to unanticipated consequences of changing cultural practices? Des Chene (pp. 39-40) does indeed raise these questions in a slightly different format—interestingly, she concludes that anthropologists should turn away from focussing on rituals and toward the mundane. The danger in her prescription is that we unwittingly replace cultural rituals with political and economic structures as the totalizing constraints on agency. Compelling work done by anthropologists on the *bikas* or development mantra suggests that everyday survival and subsistence in Nepal is contextualized by this discourse. Nowadays, the development debate is updated with discourses on global capitalism and neo-liberalism. We do not however want to revert back to the “old” anthropology, where the anthropologist imposes an external framework to structure the data she collects. We must be careful not to render the “forces of global modernity”, to use Liechty’s phrase (p. 132), as totalizing, structuring subjects’ needs, wants and preferences. Trade is not synonymous with capitalism; we should not interpret every transaction as indicative of global capitalism, every interaction in urban Kathmandu as manifest of materialist anxiety (especially if your “N” is only two, as in Liechty’s case). To be fair, Liechty does characterize transactions and interactions as “negotiated,” but one fears the loss of agency to the universality of capitalist culture in his analysis.

Again, perhaps these questions I’m raising are merely the ramblings of a political scientist, as irrelevant to anthropologists as I am sure they are to the contributors’ informants. But these are the questions that puzzle the political scientist in reading this volume. For me at least, they are provocative questions—and I admire and recommend a book that provokes them. Perhaps the cover photo (by Todd Lewis) sums up the paradoxes raised the best: a small boy, cozy on an oversized rigid chair, sits below three pictures: one of Buddha, one of Marx, and one of the King of Nepal.

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### **Tibet and The British Raj: The Frontier Cadre 1904-1907.**

By Alex McKay. Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1997. Pp.xxvi + 293, 9 Plates. \$35.00.

Tibet, colonized in a period in which nations around the world were asserting their independence from imperial rule, presents an interesting case study for scholars of the history and anthropology of colonization and anti-colonial struggle. The academic study of Tibet has, until recently, been almost exclusively focused on the study of Tibetan religion. One of many gaping holes in the scholarship on Tibetan culture and history has been in the study of Tibetan political culture in the period preceding China’s “liberation” of Tibet in the 1950’s. Alex McKay’s informative and well-researched account fills a gap in the scholarship on 20th century

Tibetan politics, and contributes to nascent discussions within Tibetan studies scholarship of the relationships among the Tibetan elite, colonial and neo-colonial powers, and China.

Lieutenant-Colonel Francis Younghusband's 1904 diplomatic mission to Lhasa forced the Tibetan Government to sign the Anglo-Tibetan convention, which brought Tibet into the British imperial sphere of influence. Under this treaty, three British trade agencies were established in Tibet which were manned by officers of the British Raj (xx). Alex McKay traces a history of the British presence in Tibet largely through examining the lives of the members of the "frontier cadre," the over 100 representatives of the British Raj who served in Tibet from the 1904 British mission to Lhasa through the end of the Raj in 1947. In his impressively researched work, McKay argues that the British officials who served in Tibet demonstrated certain attributes and outlooks which made them suitable to the Tibetan frontier and identified them as a distinct group. Drawing focus away from the romanticized representations of Tibetan life found in period travelogues, McKay devotes his attention to character studies of British officers and analyses of their political maneuvers and of their relationships to other important figures in the British colonial administration.

McKay is centrally concerned with problems facing the Tibet cadre in its attempts to influence the decisions of the India Office at Whitehall by univocally advocating "forward" policies. The cadre's continuous struggle for Whitehall's support—in their attempts at influencing the Tibetan elite in their favor and in their goal of establishing a permanent mission in Lhasa—provides the narrative tension of McKay's account. He pays careful attention to the roles cadre officers played and the tools they used to influence frontier policy, with particular attention to the reasons why their advocacy of a "forward" approach often fell on deaf ears. In his analysis of the cadre's political aims, McKay elaborates the cadre's relations with various Tibetan individuals, monasteries, and political bodies only where necessary. He does not address members' personal fascination with Tibetan religion or mystifications of Tibet, and he mostly shies away from social scientific theories about the construction of Tibet by competing powers and discourses (2). This paucity of theory is intentional; McKay's study is a revision of his doctoral thesis, which, he writes "was necessarily more concerned with theoretical matters" (xii).

In presenting the lives and experiences of members of the frontier cadre, McKay aims both to dispel the myth of an isolated Tibet and to challenge the theory that "the unequal power equations involved in colonial encounter meant that neither culture could really understand the other" (76). McKay's account takes the form of an heroic history of great men and events through which he aims to prove, against current trends in the academic study of colonialism, that although the colonial context enabled the cadre's presence in Tibet, it did not affect cadre members' understanding of their surroundings. He argues that the context of colonial power does not preclude mutual understanding, and that to insist that it does is to ignore the diplomatic and scholarly achievements of many members of the frontier cadre, such as Sir Charles Bell and Hugh Richardson.

Successful officers, as McKay demonstrates, were interested in Tibet, had an empathetic attitude toward its people, were physically strong enough to endure its altitude and harsh climate, and were often scholarly, dutiful, and a bit reclusive by nature. McKay shows how the cadre officers' collective character was carefully developed through their schooling. Many of them were sons of Indian Army or Civil Service Officers who came into their positions through family connections. The patronage of an officer who had served or was serving in Tibet was key to getting a posting there. Education and family background aside, perhaps the most important criterion of a cadre officer's success was interest in Tibet: McKay points out that less successful officers often indicated in their letters a preference for serving somewhere else over Tibet. Empathy for the local people was another quality of successful frontiersmen which many officers were lacking (186-187). McKay demonstrates that former Indian Civil Service officers tended to do better than former Army officers, perhaps because an empathetic interest in Tibet seemed to be such a strong condition of success.

Throughout his study, McKay is concerned with the image the cadre projected of Tibet and the diplomacy thinly veiled in its portrayals. In the early stages, the cadre played on British fear of Russian encroachment on their empire in order to legitimate the Younghusband mission. Negative portrayals of Tibetans helped to sanction the mission's violence: McKay cites a London Times correspondent at this time describing Tibetans as "a stunted and dirty little people" (199). Later portrayals were extremely positive, as the cadre's interest became geared toward legitimating their continued presence as protectors of Tibet against Chinese and Russian encroachment. McKay argues that since the images of Tibet perpetuated by the cadre were

largely positive ones, theories of the relationship between imperial power and knowledge that claim that dominant knowledge is used to denigrate local knowledge do not apply in the case of Tibet (200). However, positive images are not always perpetuated in the interest of the people flattered by them. McKay acknowledges the political import of images of Tibet to the development of the Tibetan "buffer state," citing an official document as stating that there was little or no difference between propaganda and policy in the case of Tibet. The voice of the cadre became the dominant voice on Tibet, not least because it actively controlled access to Tibet and suppressed alternative perspectives (205). Although members of the cadre occasionally claimed to have observed supernatural phenomena, their accounts appeared the voice of reason, in contrast to the generally fantastic accounts of travelers and religious fanatics.

Although McKay only peripherally addresses the roles British officers played in a larger Tibetan or world history, he does an excellent job of presenting a complex picture of the status of Tibet in relation to China, Russia, the Raj. In his introduction, McKay states clearly that "Younghusband's mission did not encounter a modern nation-state as Europeans understood it" (15). Refusing a simple phrasing of the question of Tibet's independence before 1950, McKay emphasizes instead the reactions of various Tibetan rulers and institutions to Chinese, British, and Russian expressions of interest. The cadre worked hard to project the image of an independent Tibet threatened by outside interests in China and Russia, and in the process came to believe in this image. McKay writes that "Sympathy for Tibetan aspirations left The frontier cadre 'unspeakably sad' when it became obvious that Tibet was unlikely to be accepted as an independent nation-state in the post-war community of nations" (182). Perhaps the strength of McKay's portrayal of the cadre's interests and his refusal to view their actions through the lens of a larger historical or theoretical context have the same source: McKay seems to sympathize with the officers about whom he writes, and to see the failure of Britain to assert its claim on Tibet as an enabling factor in China's later "liberation" of Tibet. McKay's sympathetic portrayal of the cadre officers' lives and views is sure to inspire many more inquiries into the problematic history of colonization and anti-colonial struggle in Tibet.

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Karl-Heinz Krämer.

**Ethnizität und Nationale Integration in Nepal. Eine Untersuchung zur Politisierung der ethnischen Gruppen im modernen Nepal.** (Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung 174, Südasiens-Institut, Ph.D. thesis, Universität Heidelberg) Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 474 pp., incl. Index, 1996.

This extensive study examines the development of the Nepalese nation and the political and legal efforts and claims of its ethnic groups. Based on his twenty years of research in the history, politics and ethnology of Nepal, Karl-Heinz Krämer presents intriguing details on the historical development and conception of the Nepalese nation state that give this study a hand-book character as far as its German readership is concerned. While incorporating a vast body of literature, the author also proves that many insights and details must be gained by referring to Nepalese sources. For these reasons I would express my personal hope that the author would consider publishing his English summary in that it would probably facilitate the circulation of his book to a wider public.

In the introduction the author draws attention to the problem of self-ascription and external ascription of the status and unity of ethnic groups, referring to the work of F. Barth (*Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 1969) and G. De Vos and L. Romanucci-Ross (*Ethnic Identity: Cultural Continuities and Change*, 1975). Accordingly, Krämer points out that the problem of nationalism was long excluded from western anthropological research because of its negative value in western societies, leaving it to be considered under the heading of "ethnicity," whereby even though ethnic identity is conceived as continually changing and not as something given or fixed. Krämer supports this view with evidence in the second chapter of his book. This perspective is