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Book review of 'Himalayan Buddhist Villages: Environment, Resources, and Religious Life in Zangskar, Ladakh' edited by John Crook and Henry Osmaston

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To begin their book the authors educate us with useful background information on Tibetan culture and the indivisibility of thangka painting and related art forms from Tibetan Buddhism. However, it would have been very helpful to the reader if this concern had been continued out throughout the book. For example, ideas about the significance of specific images in their religious context should have been introduced as each motif was discussed.

My suggestions for further improvements would be as follows:

1. The plates should be colored, particularly when the authors seem to put extra emphasis on the application of color. Moreover, the black and white reproductions of the richly colored and detailed paintings lose not only their colors but also the details of the compositions themselves.

2. The amount of detail given to the earlier stages of a painting's preparation is short cut, especially on the topic of canvas preparation, e.g., how to cook hind glue (since the masters' studios often do prepare it themselves.)

3. It would be helpful to the reader to footnote most of the religious terms since at least some readers will not be specialists in Buddhism.

4. Since there are two major traditions of thangka painting in the world, one being Tibetan, the other being Newari, and since these traditions share not only a majority of the same religious connotations, techniques, and materials and produce thangka paintings in the same general region, i.e. northern South Asia, it would not be stretching too far to make note of the small differences between these two kinds of thangka paintings, even including an explanation about why these differences exist.

In order to preserve this major form of traditional Buddhist art, the authors have sustained thangka painting with words in great detail and with splendid illustrations that show both scientific measurements as well as artistically original drawings. The honest recording of a particular master's way of mixing paint, the order in which the paint was put on the canvas and the specific ways to avoid smudging or making mistakes are all very thoughtful, practical and, in the long run, of historical value. For this reason *Tibetan Thangka Painting* will be an important resource and bring a touch of hue to Himalayan Studies.

Yin Peet

Yin Peet, an Asian-American sculptor/painter, has studied art in Taiwan, Nepal and America. During her four-and-a-half years of continuous residence in Nepal between 1984-1988, she was actively involved in various art communities and in learning about Buddhist art in Kathmandu. She holds an MFA in sculpture from Massachusetts College of Art.

John Crook and Henry Osmaston (eds), *Himalayan Buddhist Villages: Environment, Resources, and Religious Life in Zangskar, Ladakh*. Bristol: University of Bristol, 1994. £25. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass. ISBN: 0-86292-386-7, xxx + 866 pages, maps, diagrams, photographs, indices, appendices, glossary and bibliography.

In early September 1989 while I was marooned in the Delhi Airport on my way home from Nepal, the airport was suddenly filled with refugee tourists from Ladakh many of whom were sporting new T-shirts bearing the slogan "Free Ladakh from Kashmir." Behind this slogan was an eruption by Buddhist Ladakhis against Muslim Kashmiris, Hindu administrators, and the ubiquitous European tourists. Another community in the Himalaya had rebelled against the intrusion of outsiders into its domain. Crook and Osmaston, a psychologist and a geographer, along with nineteen other authors, have produced a very good book that provides the reader an entry into not only Ladakh but into a less traveled part of Ladakh, Zangskar. Several chapters in the book assist the reader in understanding the causes behind the 1989 disruption.

Contributors to this volume got into Zangskar as early as 1977 with the main field research effort coming in 1980-81. Their objectives were to "uncover in as much detail as possible the agricultural, economic, demographic and social processes that enabled the traditional subsistence economy of Zangskar to function effectively in spite of extreme ecological and climatic conditions." They have accomplished this and much more. This study rivals that of the Khumbu Himal work of Austrians and Germans published by Universitaet Wagner in Innsbruck and the Salmi community work in Nuwakot district carried out under CNRS sponsorship in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Zangskar Valley villages are situated at 3500-4000m and unlike many Trans-Himalayan villages they are "off the beaten track" from most of the Trans-Himalaya trading routes from South Asia into Central and Inner Asia. The Bristol University team and their colleagues concentrated their efforts on two villages, Shade and Tongde; the former is the highest permanent settlement. Their academic specialties range throughout the book, which is composed in five parts with a total of twenty six chapters: Part I, Environmental Resources and Farming; Part II, Demography, Work and Health; Part III, History and Social Life in Zangskar; Part IV, Monastic Life and Values; Part V, Tradition and Change.

A chapter on geology starts the book, but some readers might prefer to skip to chapter fourteen where Crook gives the history of Zangskar. There is abundant material elsewhere in the book for all scholars of the Himalaya, with individual chapters from agrosystems, human energetics, nutrition, and especially social organization. The section on monastic life is especially valuable as is the chapter on Buddhist philosophy as practiced in Zangskar. Perhaps the only topic missing from this comprehensive survey was some discussion of long distance trading that affected most communities in the region. There is, however, a vivid account of Osmaston journeying down the gorge during the winter on the annual butter run to Leh to exchange for manufactured household goods and wheat.

As a cultural geographer, my favorite chapter was the discussion of Crook's hypothesis linking polyandry with land tenure. Crook wears several hats, including that of an ethnologist and sociobiologist, an evolutionary ecologist, and Buddhist scholar, hence his explanation of polyandrous marriage and celibacy as adaptive responses to limited arable land is required reading. Almost alone among chapters, this chapter on polyandry is dovetailed with the pertinent literature available elsewhere in the cis- and trans-Himalaya. Although Crook concentrated only on one village, he presents a strong argument for polyandry and monasticism being human adaptations to a marginal environment. Absent from this analysis, however, is the suggestion from Pahari polyandry that polyandry might be associated with absent males engaged in long distance trading across the Himalaya. Crook's polyandry material supports Goldstein's work over a decade ago on "de-encapsulation" in Ladakh and it will posit itself against Levine's findings in Humla where polyandrous households were found contiguous to non-polyandrous households in the same environment.

In 1938 Prince Peter of Greece studied eleven families around Leh. Crook and Tsering Shakya in another chapter entitled, "Six Families of Leh," restudied these families and analyzed the changes found in 1980. The major impact here, as elsewhere in the Greater Himalaya, was rapid surface accessibility via roads and tracks to a wider circulation system now replete with imported goods and services. Osmaston applied his not inconsiderable knowledge of agropastoral systems to the local village livelihoods. His discussion on yaks and use of pastures is the most extensive from a western Himalaya location and compares well with the most recent literature from the books of Brower and Stevens in Khumbu Himal.

The tome is published by Motilal Banarsidass in Delhi, but a Western edition for the modest price of £25 is available from the University of Bristol. South Asia Books also lists it. Crooks and Osmaston and their collaborators are to be congratulated for compiling this substantial reference volume on a less well-known corner of the Himalaya.

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