

es, Lin refrains from developing and extending his analyses in ways that would open up his China-centered vision. For example, he details multiple cases of KMT deception of Tibetans. One such example is when KMT officials invited Tibetans to a “conference” that Tibetans believed was to discuss Tibetan-Chinese relations, but was, in reality, a meeting of the National Assembly, following which KMT officials argued that Tibetan presence at the Assembly was evidence of Tibetan membership in Nationalist China. Moments like this lend this book a contradictory feel and disappointing limitation in that Lin appears to get stuck between theory and practice. He overtly argues that during the period of KMT rule, Tibet was not a part of China in practice. However, he pairs this with the presumption that Tibet is a part of China in theory.

Why is this a problem? For this reviewer, the problem lies in the fact that this assumption is left unacknowledged. It provides the default grounding for the book, but is neither historicized nor theorized. There are multiple places in the book where analytical attention to Chinese ideas about Tibet as part of China would be welcome. Chapter Two, for example, is titled “Professed Frontier Policy, Policy Planners, and Imagined Sovereignty.” The concept of imagined sovereignty is a provocative one, with which Lin could do much work in getting inside KMT approaches to Tibet. What does it mean for sovereignty to be imagined? Does the KMT’s imagining of its sovereignty over Tibet trump the empirical reality that KMT China did not have sovereignty over that region? Lin does not do the needed analytical work with the term, instead stating “how Chiang Kai-shek ... really perceived China’s relations with Tibet” is a “topic for further exploration” outside of this book (79).

If the book is strongest in its inclusion of new Chinese sources and analysis of Chinese intentions towards Tibet, it is weakest in its understanding of Tibet. Numerous mistakes and misunderstandings plague the text, from the place of the Panchen Lama in the Tibetan political system to the geographically incorrect claim that Kanze and Nyarong are on the “east bank of the upper Yangtze River” (62). Getting details like these correct is important. Placing Kanze and Nyarong on the bank of the Yangtze river rather than acknowledging their location several hundred kilometers east of the river is politically problematic given the importance of the Yangtze River (or Dri Chu in Tibetan) as a disputed border between Tibet and China. In the Epilogue, Lin even goes so far as to ponder if Tibetans engage in state-building tasks, that is, not to ask which practices they use or how, but *if* they engage in state-building at all. Familiarity with current scholarship from Tibetan Studies would help to remedy some of these flaws. The work of Fabienne Jagou on the ninth Panchen Lama, Gray Tuttle on Tibetan Buddhists in Republican China,

and Yudru Tsomu on Chinese intellectuals and Tibet, each of whom draw on both Tibetan and Chinese language sources, would be of great value in rethinking this period and gaining a Tibet-centered understanding of Tibet to both supplement and sharpen Lin’s China-centered approach.

In sum, this is a historically detailed book written for specialists. It has exceptional detail to offer and an intriguing thesis. While it lacks a situating of its own historical and political orientation, and falls short in terms of grasping the Tibetan side of the equation, it is undoubtedly a valuable and welcome resource for scholars of Tibet.

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A BOY FROM SIKLIS: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CHANDRA GURUNG

BY MANJUSHREE THAPA

New Delhi: Penguin Books, India, 2009, 226 pp. ISBN: 9780143065487.

REVIEWED BY DON MESSERSCHMIDT

It is not often that a biography is reviewed in this journal, but this is an exceptional book about an exceptional individual – a renowned Nepalese environmentalist – whom many of us either knew well, or had met, or have certainly heard about: Chandra Prasad Gurung (1949-2006). It is a remarkable biography, about someone of outstanding accomplishment, from whom we can learn a great deal.

A Boy from Siklis: The Life and Times of Chandra Gurung is by Manjushree Thapa, one of Nepal’s preeminent writers, and the much-acclaimed author of fiction (*The Tutor of History*), literary non-fiction (*Forget Kathmandu*) and short-stories (*Tilled Earth*). Manjushree knew Chandra Gurung well; she worked with him some years ago when he was in charge of the Annapurna Conservation Area Project (ACAP) during its formative start-up years. Many of us knew Chandra then, or perhaps earlier when he was an impressionable young student just back from America, or later when he so resolutely directed the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) Nepal Program. Ms. Thapa has successfully captured the Chandra that we knew.

Chandra Gurung was killed in the unfortunate helicopter crash in eastern Nepal in September 2006, while on a trip to turn over control of natural resources in the Kangchenjunga Conservation Area Project (KCAP) area to the local communities. That crash, in bad weather in the mountains, claimed the lives of 24 persons – Nepalese, Canadian, American, and Finnish, plus the Russian pilot – most of whom were pre-eminent environmentalists. Seven were WWF staff. Included on that fateful flight were individuals who ranked in the top echelons of the Nepalese conservation movement, both in government and with non-government organizations. Besides Chandra, they included Harka Gurung, Narayan Prasad Paudel, Tirtha Man Maskey, Mingma Norbu Sherpa, Damodar Prasad Parajuli, and Binjan Acharya (all but one of whom this reviewer knew well and had worked with on a professional basis). With their going, the nation and much of the world environment movement mourned.

The Kangchenjunga project hand-over was the high-point in Chandra's career. It was why he and so many other notables – “conservation heroes” they have been called – were visiting eastern Nepal that September. Thapa points out the importance of both the Kanchenjunga and the Annapurna Conservation Area (KCAP and ACAP) program objectives. “Chandra was doing what he loved best,” she writes. “Chandra's previous work, particularly in his native Annapurna area, in west Nepal, had proved that it was the people of any given area, rather than government officials and bureaucrats in far-off Kathmandu, who best promoted nature conservation. We take care of what we feel is ours . . . At the urging of environmentalists, the government had thus far allowed local people to *manage* their forests; but now, in Kangchenjunga, they were going to grant the local people full *ownership* of their forests. This marked a democratic breakthrough in the country's not-so-democratic history of conservation. The handover [accomplished just hours before the crash] was history in the making.”

What made Chandra Gurung unique was his tireless and sensitive conservation leadership. When he ran ACAP, from the headquarters in the Gurung village of Ghandruk, not far from his home village of Siklis, he had “strict, if unwritten rules that the staff had to follow,” rules that set a remarkably high standard for participatory development. It is what he had studied for his master's degree at the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok, and the participatory development approach underpinned his Ph.D. studies in anthropology at the University of Hawaii.

Thapa describes his rules of participation and professional deportment for ACAP staff. For example, “They were always to defer to the local people, to call them by terms of respect . . . and to fit into the cultural norms of the village . . . Before launching any scheme, the staff had to initiate village-wide dialogue. They had to woo the village leaders in particular . . . [and] they had to watch out for the interests of those who wielded little power in the village: women, minorities, the Dalit castes, the poor.”

His work on the Annapurna project was superlative, and he carried much of the same approach with him when he took on the directorship of the World Wildlife Fund Nepal Program. There he oversaw the development of a number of outstanding projects that, besides KCAP, included the Northern Mountains Conservation Project (in Dolpa) and the Terai Arc Landscape (TAL) project, interlinking linking a series of Nepalese and north Indian parks, conservation areas and wildlife sanctuaries.

The book also details Chandra's personal life, including his early upbringing as the son of the last Mukhiya (pre-Panchayat era headman) of Siklis; his early education in Pokhara and in Colorado, then Bangkok and Honolulu; his personal dilemmas revolving around two marriages, his up-and-down relationships with the royal palace and politicians; and the inevitable run-ins with the Maoist insurgents (who virtually undid all progress on ACAP by their wanton and misguided destructive acts).

Thapa describes Chandra as a progressive development activist whom one is lucky to meet “once in fifty years.” She attributes the respect he earned and his renown to his *bhai-haalchha* – “of course it will happen” – attitude: “adventurous, and sometimes risky . . .” It made him overconfident at times, but he persevered. He was revered by his staff and villagers, and respected by government officials and donor agency officers, alike. He had a way of getting done what was needed, and outside resources for what needed to be funded. He will be long remembered as a major player in the conservation and natural resource development of Nepal.

A Boy from Siklis has 17 chapters. Given the detail and history-making activities described, it lacks only an index to aid others in tracking the many strands of his life and accomplishments. It is illustrated, but the pictures are small and inconsequential. It is who Chandra Gurung was, what he accomplished, how he did it, how his life and work fit into the larger picture of natural resource development – and what we can learn from him – that makes this book a “must read.”

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