

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Kim Gutschow : An Economy of Merit : Women and Buddhist Monasticism in Zangskar, Northwest India. Department of Anthropology, Harvard University, 1998.

This dissertation is an ethnography of a local moral world created by the intersection of a nunnery, a monastery, and a village within the Zangskar region of Himalayan Kashmir. These three entities are related within an economy of merit constituted by institutional practices as well as the lived flow of individual experiences which emerge out of wider socio-economic, cultural, and historical processes. The thesis describes who becomes a nun, with what motivations, from what familial and social contexts, and by what kind of a ritual process.

The dissertation reverses the conventional frames of reference for most ethnographic studies of Buddhism. It privileges a view from a nunnery rather than the one from the monastery, which has dominated Buddhist studies thus far. The perspective from the nunnery reflects on the monastic life from the standpoint of those women who have renounced the world. This view may illuminate the contested nature of merit making in one Buddhist society. It appears that nuns make merit rather differently than monks do. With both male and female monastics who practice Tibetan Buddhism are expected to devote themselves to selfless compassion and asceticisms, most nuns must compromise their ritual devotions with obligations to farm, field, and family. Nuns can no more renounce their roles as dutiful daughters than they can elude the female bodies defined as inferior and impure. This contradiction between the household and monastic realms has shaped the historical development of the nuns' and monks' orders in a profoundly separate manner.

The first two chapters situate the local lifeworld of the nunnery and its inhabitants within an economy of scarcity and solidarity in this turbulent part of the Indo-Tibetan borderlands. The last of these chapters charts the history of patronage and kingship which left the monasteries so well endowed and nunneries relatively impoverished. The fourth and fifth chapters sketch the dynamics of subsistence at the nunnery and delineate who becomes a nun as well as why, drawing on theories of exchange and experience near ethnography. The sixth chapter examines the three ritual stages a nun must pass through which are theorized as : separation, liminality, and reintegration. The final chapter delineates the historical denigration of women in Buddhist doctrine and local popular culture which have established the male Sangha as the highest field of merit.

CONFERENCE REPORT

Representation of the Self and Representation of the Other in the Himalayas : Space, History, Culture Meudon, CNRS, 25-26 September 1998

BY PASCALE DOLLFUS & MARIE LECOMTE-TILOUINE

The first workshop of the European Bulletin of Himalayan Research, organised by Pascale Dollfus and Marie Lecomte-Tilouine, was held in CNRS, Meudon, France on 25-26th September 1998. The need was felt to organise a regular - annual or bi-annual- thematic workshop to gather the different scholars participating in the EBHR. Indeed such a structure was lacking in Europe despite the vitality of Himalayan studies. The next workshop will take place in SOAS, London, on the theme of Life Histories.

The first workshop gathered more than 50 scholars from different European countries. Eleven contributions were presented, analysing Himalayan identities through diverse fields : tribal claims, formation of ethnic consciousness in caste groups, ideology perceptible within folk-tales and literature, rituals and historical materials. Each communication was followed by a discussion from another specialist of the domain. A synthesis and general discussion led by Steve Brown ended the workshop. The proceedings of the workshop will be published.

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NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS

All manuscripts should be written in English, not exceed 20 pages (5000 words) and must concern the Himalayan region (whether an article, conference report, announcement, or book review, etc.). Texts should be submitted in hard copy and if possible on disk (preferably on MacIntosh, Word). Bibliographic references must be complete (i.e., with the date and place of publication and the name of the editor), and follow this pattern :

Stein, R. A.

1981, *La civilisation tibétaine*, Paris, l'Asiathèque.

Sharma, P. R.

1981, "Nepal : Hindu-Tribal Interface", *Contributions to Nepalese Studies*, VII (1), pp. 1-14.

Tambiah, S. J.

1973, "Dowry and Bridewealth and the Property Rights of Women in South Asian", in J. Goody and S.J. Tambiah eds., *Bridewealth and Dowry*, pp. 59-169, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

The deadline for submissions to vol. 17, is June 30, 1999.

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