

## SHORT REVIEWS

### \*Books

#### THE HILL MAGARS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS: HILL PEOPLES SURROUNDING THE GANGES PLAIN

By Kawakita Jiro 484 pages illustrations, plates and maps.

Published by Tokai University Press, Tokyo, 1974.

Price Approx. U. S. \$ 55

Jiro Kawakita has produced an account of his research on the peoples living in the Kali-Gandaki region which separates Dhaulagiri and Gandaki Anchals in Western Nepal, along the Jomosom trail. Kawakita has one of the broadest historical perspectives of any of the anthropologists who have worked in this area. He first went to the area from 1952-53 an account of which is available in "Ethno-geographical Observations on the Nepal Himalaya" in Kihara, H. ed. *Peoples of the Nepal Himalaya, Results of Japanese Expeditions to Nepal Himalaya 1952-53 Vol. III*. He returned again in 1958. *The Hill Magars and their Neighbors* covers fieldwork done in 1963-64.

Kawakita's approach is all inclusive, stressing the inter-relatedness of the peoples in the area. The book presents good deal of valuable comparative data of a kind which is usually difficult to find without consulting many disparate sources, but at the same time one feels that the author has bitten off a little more than he can chew. The book has no focus and one is left with a great many partial accounts, but no real organizing principle.

When the reviewer first selected the book, he expected to find an account of life in a Magar village, similar to Pignede's classic *Les Gurungs*. The reviewer was most disappointed since Kawakita spends more time on the neighbors than the hill Magars themselves. As yet no monograph has been totally devoted to the Magars. Hitchcock's popular *Magars of Banyan Hill*, an account of people living in a region S. E. of Kawakita's Magars in Sikkha, is written for college students. Hitchcock's account, though presenting much valuable information, does not focus squarely on the Magars either, but because of its audience is forced to present much background information on Nepal and its caste system in general. Oddly enough Kawakita makes no mention of Hitchcock's work in his bibliography.

Kawakita stresses the relationship of the people to their environment. He is concerned with the altitudes at which certain phenomena occur, as well as the relation-

ship between the altitude and area where ethnic groups settle. His comparative accounts of agricultural and husbandary techniques are good and should be welcomed by those working in the area. The wealth of comparative micro-data presented concerning crop rotation, ploughing, textile manufacture, hunting techniques, division of labor, etc. is the book's strongest point. Bahuns, Chhetris, Thakuris, Thakalis, Syang-ba, Panchgaonle, Gurungs as well as Magars in several villages are considered, giving this work a kind of encyclopaedic quality. The limits of comparability, however, are not always observed, so the data sometimes must be used with care. When information is missing, for example, Kawakita sometimes includes data on Newars in the Kathmandu Valley or Sherpas (included because his research assistant, mentioned several times in the text, was a Sherpa). One wonders at what point a group ceases to be neighbor of the hill Magars.

Although the reviewer doesn't pretend to be an authority on all the groups included in the book, one feels that the religious data (heavily stressed) suffers from Kawakita's desire to be everywhere at once. Because of the short time spent in the field (six months according to the itinerary printed at the end of the volume), and the great number of places visited in that short time, a great deal of the data presented is hearsay. Kawakita admits that this was the case and I am sure he would rather have had it otherwise, but gathering of anthropological data on religion takes time and especially time spent in one place. As a result, there are a good many discrepancies between his accounts and what the reviewer himself has actually seen. A short review is no place for two anthropologists to quibble about details of ceremonies or interpretations of mythology, but when short hearsay accounts are blown into large all inclusive theories concerning the history and general development of Himalayan Civilization, it becomes difficult not to say something. Kawakita likes macro-history and often makes such huge leaps from data to theory that the reviewer was left with his head swimming. Subject headings are grandiose, and seem to have little relation to the text below them such as: "What is the sociological tradition connected with the culture stratum of hunting and slash and burn cultivation;" or "Every village of the Panch Gaon seems to consist of one ethnic group;" or "A stratum of an ancient semi-civilized culture of an intermediate level is suggested surrounding the gorge area." When the two match, Kawakita is making tremendous leaps from very little evidence. There is no shortcut for the large amount of historical and archaeological work that will have to be done before this kind of theorizing can take place. Rough interpretations of myths will not do.

The book is disorganized. The author wanders from the point and falls into what sometimes appears to be free-association. On one page (p. 133) for example under a discussion of Magar hunting techniques entitled "A stage of hunting and gathering is suggested," the author discusses the antidote to the poison *bikh*. From there, the discussion mentions that *bikh* is given to rabid dogs to "cure" them. *Baidya* are men-

tioned as the usual applicers of this medicine. From here, the discussion goes to the *Baidya* caste of the Newars, far from the original topic of Magar hunting techniques. At times, one feels as if one is reading Kawakita's undigested fieldnotes, full of incomplete thoughts and repetitions. Sometimes one will run into the same paragraph, word for word, like an old friend, several times in the book. The disorganization may be due to what the author calls the K. J. method of data integration, which though "much appreciated by the world of business in Japan" (preface p. 4) needs more editing before the book is readable. The excellent index overcomes the disorganization, only if one is using the book as a reference.

The author adds confusion by insisting on localized pronunciations rather than the standard Nepali terms. He feels that standardization would lead to errors of interpretation. But since the local pronunciations were Romanized in the field, and since anthropologists are not necessarily trained linguists, they often mis-hear words in the direction of their own language's phonemic structure. Hence the book has many mistakes: like hearing *Kriya* (क्रिया Nep. meaning verb) for *Kiriya* (किरिया Nep. meaning death ceremony), or *Bir Thati* instead of *Birethanti* (village on the Modi Khola), or *diulo* instead of *dhido* (ढिडो a staple grain paste) which leads to great confusion. The reviewer has spent nearly two years in the area of study, and feels the standard spellings are closer to the actual pronunciation than Kawakita's and no new dimension would be added by retaining his spellings.

The book has a good many useful maps, though all the villages mentioned in the book are not included on them. Since several of these villages have more than one name, it is often difficult, even for one who has spent considerable time in the area, to visualize exactly which villages are being discussed. One can imagine the difficulties that would be encountered by those who are new to the area. At least Kawakita does not feel it necessary to disguise the names and locations of villages in his field area. His diagrams of shrines and technological processes are quite good (but there are some errors, such as *mahi* or whey being transformed into *dahi* or curds—a nice trick! p. 33). The photographic plates are of course excellent.

In view of the frequent misspellings, typographical errors and repetitions, as well as sentences which seem to drop out without completion, this book might have been more carefully proofread, particularly in view of the book's extremely high price. It seems that publishers have decided that books on Nepal will have only a small readership and so charge high prices thus fulfilling their own prophecies. Perhaps if this book had been more carefully edited and considerably shortened its price could have been lowered and its readership increased: as it is, the book's availability will probably be confined to libraries, institutions and receivers of complementary copies (the reviewer had to borrow his copy). This is a shame; for younger researchers working in

the area will not be able to own a copy. As I have said, the book is an excellent compendium of cultural microdata, all the more useful because it is comparative. It will certainly prove helpful to those working in the area as well as to those travellers interested in a deeper account of the peoples living along the famous Jomosom Trail.

A. E. Manzardo

#### TALES OF UNCLE TOMPA: THE LEGENDARY RASCAL OF TIBET.

Compiled and translated by Rinjing Dorje. Illustrated by Addison Smith. 79 p., 18 stories, 21 line drawings. Published by Dorje Ling: San Rafael, California, 1975. U. S. \$ 3.95.

The *Tales of Uncle Tompa* is, quite simply, one of the most refreshing books to be published on a Tibetan subject in recent years. It is a book of humor, short stories known to virtually every Tibetan, which always end with the wily old Uncle accomplishing his objectives through wit and trickery. Uncle Tompa (pron. "Agu Tömba") is one of the major folk heroes of Tibet and, if some of his exploits seem sexually explicit, they nonetheless accurately represent an important theme in everyday Tibetan folk culture.

Since the early 1960's a number of books concerning Tibetan culture have become available, but the emphasis has almost invariably been on religion, either from an academic/research orientation or from the viewpoint of those actually practicing the Dharma. The latter is spreading rapidly in the West, and the publication of the life-stories of lamas, religious traditions, and metaphysical positions emanating from the various sects has become a minor industry. Books on art, history, and classical literature are also available to western readers, but these are generally centered on religious themes, and the net result has been a somewhat one-sided view of the Tibetan people and their culture. In a sense this is justified for, as many scholars have pointed out, religion was probably the single most exquisite manifestation of Tibetan culture. Nevertheless there is another side of Tibetan life that is equally deserving of attention: that of the everyday, ordinary people going about their business. Part of this story is their extraordinarily good-natured disposition, poking fun at one another, laughing, telling stories during the endless hours around the central hearth; and in their self-confident, almost insouciant, manner compensating in fellowship for the rigors of everyday life.

Uncle Tompa stories form an important part of this fellowship. Similar in nature to the stories of the famous yogi Drugpa Kunlay ('*Brug-pa Kun-legs*<sup>1</sup>), the stories

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<sup>1</sup> For a review of R. A. Stein's *Vie et Chants de 'Brug-pa Kun-legs le Yogin, traduit du Tibetan et Annoté*, see *Kailash* (1973) 1: 91-99.

are told and retold among all kinds of Tibetans regardless of social position (I have yet to meet a Tibetan who does not know most of these stories by heart). Even the mere mention of Agu Tomba will usually bring a broad smile to the faces of all present. Uncle Tompa plays tricks on everyone, including pointedly the more pretentious of Tibetan society: the rulers, aristocracy, landlords, nuns, and lamas; but he was not above dumbfounding ordinary folk when the need or inclination arose. Many of the stories have sexual themes but women participate in their telling as freely as men, and despite occasional disclaimers of modesty, there seems to be no age or sex group that doesn't thoroughly enjoy the humor.

Some of the stories are in fact hilarious. Uncle Tompa is caught masquerading as a nun in order to gain access to the young inmates and later naked in the nunnery, but makes a wily escape; he is trapped sleeping with a ruler's virgin daughter but a cleverly laid plan leaves the ruler's bodyguards quite literally holding their organs, again while Uncle quietly slips away. Humor, like other expressions of human creativity, is largely culturally determined and not all the stories will strike the western reader as immediately funny. Nevertheless, in context most are extremely humorous, and even the ones that don't seem so at first will grow on the reader who becomes acquainted with Tibetan culture as a whole.

As Profs. Snellgrove and Richardson have pointed out, Tibetans have always used this type of medium to lampoon pretentious dignitaries and to express attitudes which could not otherwise be openly displayed:

Then as now, popular songs, proverbs and lampoons were common in the mouths of the ordinary people, resembling when not actually identical with those which Tibetans, who are not encumbered with the dignity of monkhood, still sing today.<sup>2</sup>

Uncle Tompa stories fit well with this tradition and therefore are an important contribution to our understanding of Tibetan life. One would hope that this volume is only the first effort in new attempts to render Tibetan culture in its wider perspective.

The book was compiled and translated by Rinjing Dorje, a talented young Tibetan currently living in San Francisco. The stories, which he had first learned herding yaks between the ages of six and twelve, are told in straight forward and simple English with an effort to make the exposition as close to colloquial Tibetan as possible. They were first written down in Tibetan, then translated by Rinjing with some help from Terry Ellingson in putting the English in its final form. The translation appears to be good but no Tibetan version is given. Despite the fact that the

<sup>2</sup> David Snellgrove & Hugh Richardson, *A Cultural History of Tibet*, New York: Praeger, 1968, p. 178.

stories were always transmitted orally, it would have been useful had a Tibetan version in *dbu med* been appended to the book, both for scholars interested in Tibetan folklore and for those working with colloquial Tibetan.

One of the striking features of the book are the line drawings by Addison Smith, an American artist who has worked for a number of years with Tibetan people in the Himalayan region. The illustrations are not mere decorations but form an integral part of the presentation of each story, and as such they are very successful. The test for this came when showing the book to groups of Tibetan people in Kathmandu: in large percentage without knowing English they were able to identify the the particular story by simply looking at the pictures. The drawings never failed to bring a laugh, and if at times some of the features are heavily exaggerated, it is an exaggeration which adds to the humorous qualities of the book. Especially impressive is the attention to detail in dress and ornamentation, which also brought forth favourable comments from Tibetans.

The production of the book is excellent with attractive printing on high quality mat paper and gold embossing on the cover. Although paperback, it is strongly bound and is appropriately meant to be thumbed many times. The publisher, Dorje Ling, and all the people connected with the production of the book deserve high praise, particularly for opening up to the average reader a new look at Tibetan folk culture.

\* *Maps and Documents*

CARTE ECOLOGIQUE DU NEPAL.

By Jean-Francois Dobremez et al. *1 monograph, 4 maps in color, 161 p.; tables, charts, figures.*

Published by Center National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, 1975

There is little doubt that at the present time the most productive and co-ordinated group of research scholars working in Nepal emanate from the C. N. R. S. in Paris. In recent years they have produced monographs, bibliographies, journals, papers, and documents on the Nepal Himalaya and its people, utilizing the talents of scientists working in a wide variety of fields. The current program (Recherche Cooperative sur Programme no. 253) under the overall supervision of Dr. Corneille Jest continues this tradition and uses to great advantage the concept of team research. Aided by the historically centralized nature of French academe, including finance structure, researchers from C.N.R.S. have been able to concentrate their efforts on strictly delimited regions, collecting micro-data from such diverse disciplines as botany, geomorphology, and ethnography. Specialists could be assigned to specific tasks; with

the data later to be collated and analyzed under central direction in Paris and Grenoble.

Among the most useful publications thus far are the series of documents under review (four colorful ecological maps and one well-illustrated essay on gymnosperms of Nepal) which contain valuable information for scientists, development planners, and trekkers alike. The documents are:

1. *Carte Ecologique du Nepal, Annapurna-Dhaulagiri* 1/250 000 J. F. Dobremez C. Jest, map, 43 p., 20 F.
2. *Carte Ecologique du Nepal, Jiri-Thodung* 1/50 000 J. F. Dobremez C. Jest, J. Stebler, P. Valeix, map, 16 and 10 p. 20 F.
3. *Les Gymnospermes du Nepal*, T. B. Shrestha, 26 p., 24 fig. 10 F.
4. *Carte Ecologique du Nepal, Kathmandu-Everest* 1/250 000 J. F. Dobremez, C. Jest, G. Toffin, M. C. Vartanian, F. Vigny, map, 34 p. 20 F.
5. *Carte Ecologique du Nepal, Region Terai central* 1/250 000, map, 32 p. 20 F.

In addition extensive research has been underway recently in the Langtang Valley and an ecological map covering this area (Scale 1/50 000) is currently in preparation.

The maps have been created by Jean-Francois Dobremez from the Universite de Grenoble, but each has been put into a convenient package which also includes detailed ethnographic data contributed by the other scholars noted above. Using cartographic techniques first developed in mapping vegetation of the Alps, Dobremez has synthesized a great deal of topographic and ecological information. According to the principles of "homologous zones" or "isopotential areas," as elaborated by Prof. Ozenda of Grenoble, each major zone has been given contrasting colors and symbols which clearly reflect the Nepali environment. From his introduction to the series we learn that at first an extensive bibliographic effort was mounted to gather all available ecological data.<sup>1</sup> Then:

In the course of many travels, we noted the values and variations of different groups of factors: geographical (slope, exposition), geological (nature of mother rock), pedological (type of soil, PH, structure, texture), climatological (sunniness, temperature, moisture, and rainfall), biotic (human density, utilization of natural resources by man and animals).<sup>2</sup>

In general the isopotential zones corresponded well with vegetation, particularly trees, and for this reason most of the zones were labeled by the predominant arboreal species. Nevertheless in the more amplified maps (Scale 1/50 000) an effort was made to include pasture and agricultural zones as well.

1. Published as J. F. Dobremez, Mme F. Vigny, and L. H. J. Williams, *Bibliographie du Nepal: Botanique*, C. N. R. S., Paris, 1972.

2. From the introduction to Carte 1, *Annapurna-Dhaulagiri* 1/250 000 J. F. Dobremez and C. Jest.

The production of the maps is excellent; they are well drawn, and the overall design and coloring is very effective. Using them prospective research scientists and trekkers can identify at a glance the major zones through which they will be passing, while development planners can anticipate the plausibility of various ideas by reference to the ecology. The single drawback is the quality of map paper which deteriorates quickly in the field, and even with desk use soon tears along the edges. Inevitably minor mistakes occur, but the authors point out in the introduction that this is only the first effort at a comprehensive mapping of the Himalayan environment. They promise to be increasingly precise in the future, and in fact each of the succeeding maps has been more sophisticated. The C. N. R. S. team is to be congratulated for their fine work thus far, and we look forward to the publication of the additional numbers in this series.

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E. H. W.