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# Compte rendu de : Nomads of Eastern Tibet. Social Organization and Economy of a Pastoral Estate in the Kingdom of Dege

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► **To cite this version:**

Pascale Dollfus. Compte rendu de : Nomads of Eastern Tibet. Social Organization and Economy of a Pastoral Estate in the Kingdom of Dege. *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*, 2010, pp.182-185. halshs-01694586

**HAL Id: halshs-01694586**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01694586>**

Submitted on 29 Jan 2018

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**35-36**

Autumn 2009-Spring 2010

**EBHR**

**EUROPEAN BULLETIN  
OF HIMALAYAN RESEARCH**

*Special double issue: Nepalese migrations*

more classical academic book, with a disparate quality between each article. Some authors tend to say “we” when speaking about INOs. As confirmed by Subba (p.26), this book may provide some guidance to the Nepali youth, intellectuals and opinion makers. However, for the non INO reader, the impression may be confusing. Secondly, it is regrettable that studies of Indian Nepalīs still concentrate on North-East India. This is understandable, as it is where the greater concentration of Nepalīs are located, but it would be of great interest to learn about the numerous Indian Nepali communities who live in big cities like Delhi or Mumbai. The Gorkha community from Derhadun is, for example, completely absent from the book and, to my knowledge, no study has ever been made of it. The need to differentiate between the different INO communities would clarify things and highlight the bonds between them. As Golay (p.75) says, there is no “comprehensive study of the contributions of social and cultural movements in Darjeeling and elsewhere towards the formation of a distinct Gorkha identity”. Thirdly, except for general statements about the INOs and their occupation, and two articles about food (Tamang: 296) and herbal medicine (Chhetri: 311), anthropological, religious or cultural studies should really be enhanced in order to understand practices and the world view of INOs. Grass-root data about INOs are lacking for the community to be fully understood. Overall, the assumption that what unites Indian Nepalīs is a common language, a common origin and history has not been totally checked at local level. The question is raised in the introduction, but there are very few hints as to its answer. The reader is given no information about the links between scattered communities, though some study of them would have been of great interest. And finally, the term diaspora, seldom used, is not really re-appraised. The question remains: are Indian Nepalīs part of a diaspora, whether south Asian or global, or are they just another Indian ethnic group?

***Nomads of Eastern Tibet. Social Organization and Economy of a Pastoral Estate in the Kingdom of Dege, by RINZIN THARGYAL. Edited by Toni HUBER. Leiden: Brill, Brill’s Tibetan Studies Library 15. xii + 222 p. ISBN 978 90 04 15813 9.***

Rewieived by Pascale Dollfus

*Nomads of Eastern Tibet* is a monograph of a pastoralist community from the Kham region in Eastern Tibet during the mid-20th century. This small and mutually dependent community, known as Zilphukhog, was located in the Kingdom of Dege whose prestige and power at the time was quashed

by repeated acts of rivalry and intrigues. The pastoral community itself ceased to exist after 1958 due to the Chinese occupation. In fact, the research itself was not conducted “on the field” but in the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal between September 1982 and February 1983 among Tibetan Refugees who had been living in exile for the last two decades and, especially, among ten informants representing nine different households. At the time of Rinzin Thargyal’s fieldwork the youngest informant was aged 54, and since then some of them have passed away. The author is one of the first Western-trained native Tibetan anthropologists. He did an M.A. in Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo in 1985, and now teaches the Tibetan language and works for the Network for University Co-operation Tibet-Norway. Though born in Tibet, he had to flee his homeland when he was 10 years old, leaving his family behind under the Chinese administration. He himself was not a nomad but belonged to the lower ranks of the aristocracy of the agricultural region of Meshe, one of 25 traditional “districts” comprising the kingdom of Dege.

Rinzin Thargyal documents the life of pastoralists in detail in this book. Having recounted how the Zilphukhog was founded and evolved, the author briefly examines the structural features of the Dege polity. He then discusses the nature of labour service as it manifested itself locally among the three groups of dependents – nomadic pastoralists, peasants and monastic households describing the corvée labour service, along with the costs and benefits of the system for the lord and his dependents. Since nomadic pastoralist households were numerically dominant and had a preponderant impact in the region, he introduces us to animal husbandry, giving the local taxonomy for animals according to sex and age categories, describing the methods of slaughtering yaks and sheep, of milking, tanning and weaving. The author subsequently deals with trade and peripheral incomes (such as gold mining, butchering animals for wealthy households, hunting and gathering) which supplemented these pastoral resources, and he examines the economic and strategic exploitation of the pastures, the pattern of movement or migrations back and forth between a winter tent encampment and summer pastures. Having described the household economy at some length, Rinzin Thargyal devotes three chapters to the social organization of the community, starting with the spatial and ritual organization of the household, and the tent as a social place, then marriage patterns and kinship, and ending with birth and death.

Concerning polyandry (p.167) for example, he points out the diversity of this practice among Tibetan pastoralists even within a small community, showing that this form of marriage is practised only by those who own their own animals and who have well established households.

“When there is a head a tail is needed. If there is not head a tail is not needed.” However, the central focus of this work is the lord/dependent relationship. In this way, Rinzin Thargyal convincingly contributes to a crucial and controversial issue in pre-modern Tibetan societies, namely the debate about feudalism or serfdom. Based on case-studies, he offers a new and nuanced analysis of the dyadic relationship between a local “lord” (*dpon*) and his “dependents” (*’khor pa*), both peasant and nomadic pastoralists, as well as monastic dependents, who were obliged to perform corvée service. According to the author, this relationship was more hierarchical in the Dege Kingdom during the 17th-19th centuries than it was during the mid-20th century when the weakening of the State and the effects of various political upheavals “gave dependents an unprecedented bargaining power vis-à-vis their lords or leaders. To put it metaphorically, in a sea of political fluidity and fluctuation, one could swim almost in any direction one chose given that one was prepared to take the risk of drowning” (p.184).

This descriptive portrait of a pre-modern pastoralist society in Eastern Tibet is introduced by a comprehensive essay by Toni Huber, a specialist of the anthropology and cultural history of Tibetan and Tibetan-influenced Societies in Central Tibet, Amdo, Changthang, but also Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh in India. He points out how the modern anthropology of Tibet has been circumscribed by the difficulty or impossibility to freely conduct research on the Tibetan plateau, leading researchers to “work at distance” either among Tibetans settled outside the Tibetan Plateau or in Tibetan speaking populations located in the Himalayan highlands. He also places Rinzin Thargyal’s work in its context and highlights its uniqueness – working with pastoralists rather than agriculturalists in Khams, a complex region which remains largely unknown – then he sketches a brief biography of Rinzin’s life.

Besides this introductory essay, Toni Huber also edits the entire text. As he notes himself in his Preface, he provides “footnotes for clarification, and also to direct readers to literature and debates about certain topics which have appeared since Rinzin undertook his research; standardizing the phonetic equivalents used for Tibetan words, and their Romanization; redrafting Rinzin’s original hand-drawn figures and providing several new maps; adding black and white photographs from the relevant historical period and geographical area [by Josef Vanis and Albert L. Shelton]; and compiling an index”. This extensive editorial task is indeed much appreciated. As such, Toni Huber and Rinzin Thargyal’s book is altogether an important contribution to our knowledge of Tibetan nomadic societies, which once again are endangered by Chinese policies of rangeland privatization and the forcible relocation of herders in new Chinese-built

villages, which leaves them with no livestock and drastically curtails their livelihood.<sup>18</sup>

As is always the case with Brill's Tibetan Studies Library series, the layout and the presentation of this book which includes an index, 9 figures and 11 photographs are of a high standard.

***Through the Eye of Time - Photographs of Arunachal Pradesh 1859-2006: by Michael Aram Tarr and Stuart Blackburn. coll. Tribal Cultures in the Eastern Himalayas , vol. 1. Leiden/Boston: Brill. (Brill's Tibetan Studies Library Volume 16/1). 2008. 217 pages, 220 pictures, 2 maps. ISBN 978-90-04-16522-9.***

Reviewed by Marion Wettstein, University of Zurich

The region today referred to as Northeast-India has since British-colonial times fascinated anthropologists. Among the areas most researched were the Naga Hills and what is today the Indian Union state of Arunachal Pradesh. After Indian Independence these areas have become largely inaccessible, though never forgotten. Since a few years they are partly open to visitors and researchers again and the recent flow of publications shows that this corner of India has not lost its importance for anthropology. Unlike in the 1920s and 30s, today the medium of photography rather than writing seems to be the means to portrait and present the region. Many of the publications on Northeast India of the last years – scientific or popular – are photo-books emphasizing contemporary pictures.

The work of Michael Tarr and Stuart Blackburn, which was realized in the context of the Tribal Transitions project (2002- 2007), gives a new viewpoint to the corpus of photographic publications on Northeast India. The authors have collected the earliest photographs known from

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<sup>18</sup> On these policies implemented since 1999 – fencing off pastureland, resettlement and livestock limitation affecting Tibetan herders which are presented as a necessary response to an environmental crisis of pasture degradation and overgrazing, see among others Human Rights Watch, 2007, 19 (8) “No One Has the Liberty to Refuse”. Tibetan Herders Forcibly Relocated in Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and the Tibet Autonomous Region; Zukosky Michael L. 2007. Making pastoral settlement visible in China. *Nomadic Peoples*, 11 (2). pp.107-133. Robin, Françoise. 2009. “Les nouveaux villages socialistes’ en Région Autonome du Tibet: remodeler le paysage rural, contrôler les populations”. *Perspectives Chinoises* (3). Hong Kong. pp.60-69.