

## Book Reviews

- Ken'ichi Tachibana. 2009. <*Tasha/Jiko*> *Hyoushou no Minzokushi: Nepāru Senjuumin Chepan no Mikuro Sonzairon* (An Ethnography of <other/self> Representations: the Micro-Ontology of the Chepan, a Nepali Indigenous People). Tokyo: Fuukyousha.
- Kazuyuki Watanabe. 2009. *Hitsuji Kai no Minzokushi: Nepāru Iboku Shakai no Shigen Riyō to Shakai Kankei* (Ethnographical Study of Sheep Herders: Resources Use and Social Relationships among Transhumant Society of Nepal). Tokyo: Akashi Shoten.

Although more than twenty Japanese socio-cultural anthropologists have carried out their long-term ethnographical fieldworks in Nepal, they have written a relatively small amount of book-length monographs. Five such ethnographies by a single author have been published in the past fifteen years, all of which are written in Japanese. In this review, I introduce the two most recently published ethnographies on Nepali societies written in Japanese. Though both books were published on 28 February, 2009, and both authors started their career as ecological anthropologists, the two ethnographies are almost antithetical to each other in content as well as style.

Kazuyuki Watanabe's book is a detailed ethnographical study on shepherds (he uses the expression "sheep herders" throughout his book) in Eastern Nepal. Although the existence of transhumance of goats and sheep has been reported from various Himalayan communities, detailed ethnographic studies on this topic have been surprisingly rare. One reason for this, Watanabe argues, is the fact that herders tend to move widely and across many districts, from highland pastures of well over four thousand meters above sea level to lowlands of much less than one thousand meters. In contrast, the transhumance of yaks and yak-cattle crossbreeds is much more accessible, and thus has been studied extensively, as their movement is usually restricted to a much smaller range, usually among several community forests and fields of different altitudes in the highland.

To fill this gap, Watanabe carried out several rounds of fieldwork in and around the Okhaldhunga district for a period of more than two years in total. Notably, he actually moved on foot with shepherds, sheep and

goats for about thirteen months. Another eight months were spent to research Rumjatar, a large village of more than 3000 inhabitants on a plateau in the middle hills where many shepherds have their houses. The main villagers of Rumjatar are Gurungs migrated from Western Nepal many generations ago, whose mother tongue is Nepali nowadays and who do not use the Gurung ethnonym Tamu themselves (or at least they did not do so in 1994–1998 while Watanabe carried out his main research). Only 26 villagers in Rumjatar were engaged in pastoralism in 1998. They constituted 11 different “camps,” and many sheep owners hired some herders also from other villages. As there was little grassland and forest near Rumjatar, they had to move widely. Basically they went “up” in spring and stayed in high pastures from late June to mid August; then went “down” and stayed mainly on the southern slope of the Mahabharat range from early December to late February.

Before discussing the social aspects of transhumance of Rumjatar herders, Watanabe gives us a detailed ethnographical account on the technological aspects of their animal husbandry. A cognitive anthropological account on how they distinguish and identify individual sheep and goats is followed by the explanation of various techniques they utilize for the reproduction and management of their herds, and for the making of dairy and wool products. Then the fluctuation of the size of their herds is analyzed, which depends not only on births and deaths but also buying and selling of their livestock.

Watanabe then presents us the sociological aspect of transhumance in three layers. First come the various relations among shepherds. Each camp of shepherds consists of an owner (*sāhū*) and hired shepherds (*goṭhālā*), although it must be said that the distinction between them is not always clear. Basically an owner not only owns his herd but also manages his business independently, while hired shepherds are employed by an owner. Three different ways of contract between them exist: *jāgīr* (payment), *ṭhekhane* [sic] (entrusting owner’s sheep), and *nirbyāj* (working for one’s indebtedness). The relation between an owner and shepherds he hires is not fixed, and the membership of each camp fluctuates frequently. Relations between herders belonging to different camps are often stressful, and they must negotiate among themselves on their proper use of particular plots of pasture every year. To let their herds graze in a particular field, moreover, they have to negotiate with the owner(s) of the land. The process of negotiation varies widely, as some pastures are privately owned, others owned by a temple, and still others owned by a clan (and the owners includes members of Sherpa, Rai,

Chhetri and other groups). Notably, those herders who stayed in a clan-owned Sherpa land in summer visit the fields of every household of that clan after harvest in autumn with their herds, in order to fertilize them. Lastly, their use of pasturelands has been heavily influenced by changing government policies of forest management. Watanabe discusses the topic based on several vivid accounts of negotiation processes between herders and people of several villages in the Jumbesi valley in 1997 and 1998, clearly influenced by the amendment of the forest act in 1993.

For villagers of Rumjatar, to be a herder is one of many possible options of occupation. It is a relatively stable but not highly lucrative one, especially when comparing with becoming Gurkha soldiers or working abroad. To locate pastoralism in a wider socio-economic context and time frame, Watanabe revisited the area in 2008. Based on the exhaustive quantitative research of a ward and on many life histories of herders and former herders, he concluded that, even though many herders prefer sending their children to schools, rather than bringing their children with them to pasture, being a shepherd has offered good opportunities, especially for not quite well-off villagers, to make a substantial amount of movable property, which many of them transform to immovable property afterwards to retire from transhumance.

Based on ample firsthand data, Watanabe successfully submits a comprehensive, though inevitably partial, ethnography of sheep herders in Eastern Nepal, by combining various aspects of transhumance: the economic activities of the sheep herders (from reproduction of sheep and goats to selling of their dairy and wool products), various social relations over pastures, herders' coping with constraints posed by the market economy and government policies. He also situates herders within wider contexts, for instance in relation to other villagers in Rumjatar, to various people in Eastern Nepal with whom they have to negotiate every year, to the Nepali state whose policy has affected them substantially, and to the world job market into which they or their children may enter. Note that many of his findings could not be obtained without actually walking with herders and their sheep and goats for many months. Written in an almost conventional style, his book is highly informative, and credible as a reference point for comparative studies on herders in particular and on subsistence economy in general in the Himalayas and beyond.

Ken'ichi Tachibana's ethnography is the result of an arduous fieldwork that took even longer than Watanabe's. He first visited the M village, a large Chepang village in the hill area in Chitwan district in 1989 and lived there for more than a year to carry out an ecological

anthropological research for his MA thesis on the changing subsistence complex of the Chepangs. He visited the same village again in 1995 and carried out another two-year field research for his PhD dissertation, this time focusing on their socio-cultural life in general. Besides interviewing villagers, he observed and participated in various events in their life, from bat hunting to empowerment programs organized by NGOs; he collected their discourse (from their daily casual conversations to long oral traditions) in Chepang as well as in Nepali on various occasions. In short, he collected a huge amount of ethnographic data of a Chepang village from the last months of the Panchayat regime to a few months before the start of the Maoist “insurgency.”

It has always been a challenge for an anthropologist to represent comprehensibly piles of data of various sorts he or she accumulated, without reducing the complexity of the “reality” too much. In his case, moreover, not only villagers’ political, economic and socio-cultural circumstances but their ways of self-conception have been substantially changed since he first visited the village. The Chepangs in the M village have had their own ethnonym “*cyo?banj*” in their mother tongue. Non-Chepang Nepalis have most often called them Chepang (*cepāñ*) in Nepali. In 1989 many villagers hated this Nepali name, because they thought the term invoked their wrong and exaggerated primitive image as a nomadic tribe. The word “*cyo?banj*” was not used in Nepali conversation either, probably because it resembles the word Chepang too much. Instead, many of them preferred the Nepali term “*prajā*,” which as a common noun means “subject (of a king)” or “citizen.” In 2007, he revisited the village and was surprised to find that the villagers now called themselves *cepāñ*, not *prajā*, in Nepali, some eagerly and some still reluctantly. It was partly because Nepāl Cepāñ Sañgh chose Chepang as their ethnonym and propagated the name on the village level. Another reason was that the term *prajā*, which connotes king’s subjects, turned to be inadequate after Nepal became a republic. Though their imagined ethnic boundary has not changed substantially, their ways of imagining their own *jāt*, which have always contained internal diversity, have in part transformed rather rapidly.

Tachibana tries to represent the complicated and always fluctuating reality of the M village in a unique and very personal way. First he recalls various responses of the villagers to him just after he arrived in the village for the first time as an outsider. Several villagers ran into their houses as soon as they saw him. He learned afterward that they were afraid he might be a “*cinlan*” [ogre], because of his bloody red rucksack. Some others

doubted whether he was a “*cor*” [thief], again because of the big rucksack on his back. Several educated villagers called him “*sar*” [sir, teacher] and asked him to teach something modern. Several days later a man finally accepted Tachibana as a guest of his house, as he sympathized him who had moved around the village with his big rucksack on his back as “*duḥkhī*” [sufferer]. He finds that what appeared in this short anecdotal sequence are the four different ways through which villagers recognized and categorized strangers, and argues that each of these four categorizations, namely “*cinlan*,” “*cor*,” “*sar*,” and “*duḥkhī*,” reflects a distinct layer of their socio-cultural reality, which he calls a “symbolic world.” He thus represents the changing living world of the Chepangs of the M village as a complex of four symbolic worlds.

The symbolic world in which “*cinlans*” live (or rather, lived) is discussed in detail in chapter 2, which constitutes almost half of the whole book. “*Cinlans*” are usually represented by villagers as ogres who eat human meat. The world they have lived is thus connected to the three very anthropological and interconnected aspects of Chepang life: hunting (as “*cinlans*” eat human meat), gift and exchange (as Chepang males exchange meat and “abduct” their brides), and cosmology (as “*cinlans*” are mythical figures). Tachibana first focuses on meat and games in Chepang society. The only wild animal Chepangs in the M village often hunt is bat (“*win?*”). Using nets, villagers call and catch them easily. Deer (“*sya?*”), the most privileged game very rarely found near the M village nowadays, are hunted by poisoned arrows, usually after a very long process of chasing. Deer are not passive victims, however. When a deer looks back desperately and stares at the humans who have chased it, its eyes are thought to have the power to cause them eye disease. On the other hand, human beings are sometimes hunted by tigers (“*ja?*”), powerful and dangerous figures, some of whom are thought not simply to be animals but transformed souls of the dead who do not go to heaven. Then the distinctions of hunter/hunted, and of the power of the arrow relative to the power of staring, are transposed to other domains of their “traditional” life. Marriage, though often conceptualized as the “abduction” of a bride, offers starting point of a long sequence of exchange of meat between affines. Their gift exchange as well as marriage has to do with the emotion of love (“*jhah*”) and shame (“*ras*”) on the one hand, and poison and dangerous eyes on the other. Each patrilineal kin group (including some married-in females) in the M village holds a ritual called “*toṅkoloṅ*,” in order to persuade their ancestor spirits to abstain from making them ill. The ritual is chiefly carried out by a great

shaman (“*mah pande*”), who takes the soul of the participants, first to the heaven, then to the underground world, and finally to the earth, following the movement of the sun with his gaze. In a quasi-structuralist way, Tachibana thus represents the “traditional” socio-cultural world of Chepangs as composed of intermingled various activities of gift-giving and eye-gazing.

The world of “*cor*” (thief) is connected to the thick forest around the village which existed until several decades ago, through which thieves, government officials, and other outsiders came. The forest was not simply a natural barrier, as modern Nepali government deliberately hampered the development of the Inner Tarai region until the middle of the twentieth century. While Chepangs have often been imagined by other Nepalis as a primitive people of the forest, Chepangs have distinguished themselves not only from “clever” *Bāhuns* and other caste Hindus but also from *Kusundās*, imagined as “*jaṅgalī*,” nomadic hunter-gatherers of the forest. During the autocratic Rana regime, villagers were indirectly subjugated to the Nepali state as “enslavable” and alcohol drinking “*prajās*” living in *kipat* lands. It was the period of turmoil just after the end of the Rana regime that many “*cors*” actually haunted in and around the village.

Since late 1950s, many “*sars*” have visited the M village. First came the schoolteachers who taught villagers literacy. Second came politicians and administrators who gave them speeches in formal Nepali. Third, from 1978 came development staff of the Prajā Development Program founded on the initiative of the King Birendra, by which the Nepali ethnonym “*prajā*” was officially endorsed. As many “*sars*” were Bahuns and Chettris, the disappointment of many villagers with the “*sars*” and their programs has created the dichotomic and stereotypic view that Bahuns and Chettris are eloquent but one-way speakers who are *calāk* (clever) but mean and shameless, while Chepangs and Tharus are *sojho* (innocent) but generous people, sincerely hearing what others say. Their “resistance” to these “*sars*” based on this ethnicized dichotomy has not changed their socio-economical predicament, as is clearly shown in the detailed analysis of the series of conversation in 1995 between villagers and staff of a new and more dialogical development program (*Prajā Sānudāyik Vikās Kāryakram*), the stated slogan of which was “Let the people lead their own development and movement.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Following the insightful suggestion of an anonymous reviewer, I asked the author if this program was linked to the “*āphno gaū āphai banaū*” project. According to him, the program was jointly planned and executed by *SNV*

Unlike three other categories discussed above, “*duḥkḥī*” can be easily used to describe Chepangs themselves. The word sometimes connotes simply those who suffer from poverty and thus deserve some form of aid. More importantly, the term also connotes “those who have remained unsettled or undecided to the last” among the villagers. Based on the detailed analysis of the life history of Hira, who accepted Tachibana to his house as a “*duḥkḥī*” during his fieldwork, he points out the existence of the double-bind situation with which many Chepangs have been entangled: to avoid being *lāṭā* (dull, unarticulated) one must leave one’s village, but in the outside world he or she is categorically treated and excluded as *lāṭā*. To be “*duḥkḥī*” in one’s own village is, according to Tachibana, a strategy of remaining unsettled within the double-bind situation, temporarily concentrating oneself to what one can do without directly connecting oneself to the outside world, usually through cultivating one’s own land using one’s own body.

Tachibana thus describes the living world of the Chepangs in the M village in four coexisting layers, each of which has its own time-frame and self/other representations. This rendering is, I would argue, not totally successful, generating discrepancies in several places. For instance, “*ciṅlan*’s” world are almost totally separated from non-Chepang people, though the concept of “*syo*,” which means non-“*cyo?baij*” outsiders but also connotes abductors, is briefly mentioned there, while their “traditional” relations with neighboring people like Tharus and Kusundas are discussed in subsequent chapters within historical time, though it is very likely that ancestors of Chepangs had some contacts with these neighbors even before the establishment of modern Nepal. The virtue of his book I believe rather lies in its meticulousness and densely informative nature as an ethnography, showing us the many facets of the changing “reality” of the M village which the ethnographer has partly occupied, by juxtaposing and connecting various sort of information, from sheer material aspects to highly symbolic ones.

The two books I have reviewed here are, I believe, first-class ethnographies that share many basic traits. Admittedly, the main research for both books were done long before the heyday of the so-called Maoist insurgency, and, both authors discussed the various changes occurred since then only briefly. Moreover, the arguments of both books are not

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(Netherlands Development Organization) and the Ministry of Local Development, and was formally independent from the “*āphno gaū āphai banai*” project, though some indirect links did exist between them.

directly connected with current theoretical issues in Euro-American centres of socio-cultural anthropologies. Although Watanabe's ethnography is largely based on his experience of moving with herders and their herds through Himalayan and sub-Himalayan trails for months, he does not focus on the experience of moving or walking per se. This prevents him from connecting his arguments with current debates on space and place or on ways of walking. Despite the emphasis on "micro-ontology," Tachibana does not connect his argument with the now fashionable debates on the "ontological turn." I also admit that, throughout this review, I have tried to introduce their achievement to those who do not read Japanese, focusing on what I believe to be their main strengths, and omitting many of the criticism which I would voice if writing this review in Japanese. In spite of all these points, I believe both books, almost totally different from each other in terms of style and contents, are highly successful in representing various aspects of lives of less documented people in Nepal, from distinctive perspectives in detail. Outside the pressure for new "theories" in the centre of Anglophone anthropologies, both authors concentrated themselves to carry out their classical style fieldwork, eclectically doing whatever they could to know better what was done out there. Both authors did this task thoroughly enough in their distinctive manners, to the extent that their arguments turned out to be much more than objectivistic presentation of accumulated data. Both books are dialogical and self-reflective as well, and stay away from unfounded essentialization and overgeneralization. I strongly hope both authors write the updated versions in English or in Nepali in the near future.

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