

**Fukachi Furukawa. 2020. *“Sherupa” to Michi no Jinruigaku (An Anthropology of “Sherpas” and Trails)*. Tokyo: Akishobo.**

In this book, Furukawa presents a vivid and lively description of lives and practices of Sherpas based on ethnographic data collected as he lived and walked the trails in Khumbu together with his research subjects. At the same time, he skillfully weaves into his ethnographic accounts philosophical discussion that could lead readers to reflect on their own worldviews. In this review, I shall present an in-depth summary of the book and conclude with some critical comments.

In the Introduction, Furukawa poses three principal questions that underlie the book. The first question deals with trails. In the Everest region, the word “trail,” or “*bāto*,” denotes diverse objects, from a roadway that comes from Kathmandu to a rope at the Everest summit. The first question Furukawa asks is, more specifically, as follows: “In the mountain area, what do ‘trails’ mean; what does the fact that ‘trails’ exist mean; and what kind of practice is it to walk ‘trails’?” (p. 11) The second question deals with “Sherpas.” Specifically, Furukawa asks, “how did the word Sherpa, which

had ‘actually’ been a tribal name, start to denote both Sherpa as a tribal name and ‘Sherpa’ as an occupational name; how do people living in the Everest region recognize two Sherpas?” (p. 11). Based on the two questions, Furukawa casts the third question:

that is the fundamental question of what precisely it is to *be* in the world. Come to think of it, given a physical/social environment that is under continuous transformation, such talk as “trails” exist or “Sherpa” exist are extremely uncertain statements. (...) [T]his book aims to present a tentative study through participant observation on daily practices in the Everest region.” (p. 12)

Part I, “The Flux of Himalayan Worlds,” opens up with Chapter One, “Trails, Walking, and Environment.” Here, the significances of trails with respect to the three questions above are presented. According to Furukawa, by focusing on trails it becomes possible to capture, in the physical scale, relationships between bodies and environments; in the social scale, dynamics of social groups in relation to material objects; and, in the more encompassing scale of human entities and their actions, the constitution of the world. He then reviews studies on trails and walking and points out “the lack of perspectives on environment as continuously transforming, or in flux, and bodies as walking within that flux” (p. 40). Here Furukawa draws on the work of Tim Ingold (2000, 2007, 2011). Furukawa notes that Ingold proposes a monism which “deems the environment, including human beings, to be monistic under continuous transformation, and takes that flux as a precondition of divisions between self and other, subject and object, or existence of all entities” (p. 40). According to Furukawa, the monism contains the risk of falling into a holism of sorts, in which all entities melt together and life as a whole is prioritized over the lives of individual organisms. While Furukawa adopts monism as a theoretical framework for the following discussion, he carefully avoids the risk of holism by focusing on the reflexive and seamless self-identification of subjects.

Chapter Two is given the title “Overview of the Field.” The Khumbu area, which lies in the northern part of Solukhumbu District of Nepal, has been widely known as a mecca of trekking and climbing tourism. Furukawa delves into the socio-historical foundation of this development. Foremost, a group of Nyingma Buddhists started to migrate from Tibet in the early

sixteenth century, to form Sherpa society in Nepal—the word “Sherpa” had originally meant “people in the east” in the Tibetan language. While Sherpa society was formed through processes of flexibly incorporating outsiders, Himalaya expeditions, which began to gather momentum after World War I, fundamentally altered Sherpa livelihoods and identity that had formerly been based on agriculture, trade, and migrant labor. Himalaya expeditions hired Sherpas as high-altitude porters and consequently the word “Sherpa” began to be used also as an occupational name. Later, those from other areas started to flow in, calling themselves “Sherpas,” to obtain jobs of guiding and high-altitude portering.

In Chapter Three, “Job is Adventure,” Furukawa considers mountain tourism and its influences with a specific focus on a particular tribal Sherpa village. Phortse, the most conservative village in the Khumbu area, in the sense it is least affected by the tourism industry, has also become increasingly dependent on it. Men in the village go to Everest for moneymaking; high-altitude portering and trek-guiding have become a primary source of income there. Yet, climbing Everest has started to carry another meaning. At the mountaineering school in Phortse, operated by an International Non-Governmental Organization, the image of the Sherpa idealized by the Westerner has been taught and, as a result, climbing “Everest has become recognized as a part of Sherpa ‘identity’ and a kind of rite of passage” (p. 119).

Part II, “Those Who Walk Mountain Trails,” focuses on various groups of people who walk the trails in the region. In Chapter Four, “Suffering and Hope in Load Carrying,” Furukawa pays attention to the jobs of local portering, or the job of carrying loads of stores between villages, taken up by relatively uneducated individuals of various *jāt*, or caste/tribes, from neighboring areas; their practices of interpreting trails as they walk carrying heavy loads; and the influences of walking on their bodies. Some local porters aspire to be trekking porters, often calling themselves “Sherpas.” Although the incomes of trekking porters are not necessarily high, the jobs of trekking portering require less suffering than the jobs of local potering, and provide opportunities to receive tips and goods from foreign tourists, as well as to form connections that might help to obtain better jobs, and, hopefully, to migrate to foreign countries.

Chapter Five, “Guiding Trails,” discusses the social aspect of walking, with a specific focus on trekking guides. Their job is, of course, to guide tourists safely, and, also, to lead trekking porters. According to Furukawa,

however, the agency of walking cannot be attributed only to trekking guides. Referring to Ingold's discussion of a centaurian synergy of human and beast (Ingold and Vergunst 2008), Furukawa depicts the guides as those who "make tourists and porters walk through mountain trails and, at the same time, are made to walk by them" (p. 196). Trekking guides walk as they take into consideration how trails "appear" differently for different bodies and thus adjust gaits of the different bodies; in this sense, the agency of walking is attributable to what Furukawa calls the "'tourist-porter-guide' hybrid."

Chapter Six, "Making Trails in a Mountain," discusses the Sherpa as an occupational name. In order to do so, Furukawa goes back to the mountaineering school. The job of the Sherpa is "to carry loads in high mountains, such as Everest, and lead mountain climbers to the summits" (p. 247), and, in this sense, one "becomes" a Sherpa. In the school, students are trained to find trackless trails, to make trails, to bring their bodies and tools in harmony to go through trails, and to care for others such as tourists. Also, Furukawa provides a detailed description of the influence that the Sherpa as an occupational name has brought on the Sherpa as a tribal name. For example, even for some tribal Sherpas, one is not born to be but becomes "the real Sherpa" through practice.

Part III, "Toward the Trails Themselves," begins with Chapter Seven, "Walking Bodies, Bodies as Trails." Citing Ingold (2000) again, Furukawa asserts: "An entity is [appears in] the relation that is built in each occasion within the environment (...). For example, the statement 'a forest is a mother' is not a metaphorical projection of a 'social relation' to 'nature,' but mother and child [*sic*] are the relation when a request for food is answered" (p. 269–270). He argues that trails should be understood in the same way as the entities that "appear" when the relations between bodies and the environment are built; hence, they "appear" differently for different bodies. In addition, relations are not necessarily dyadic ones between one's own body and the environment, rather they are tripartite, including those with whom trails are to be shared. Moreover, tools such as ropes are also components of trails in the sense that they extend human bodies. Furukawa states boldly: "In the process of walking (...), there are not clear boundaries between bodies of self and other, and material objects; rather, they penetrate each other" (p. 293).

The last chapter, "Road as Infrastructure," focuses especially on "roadways." Roads are the infrastructure that supports the lives of the Everest region, and, also, the sign of *bikās*, or development. Here, Furukawa extends

his argument on trails to roadways for motorized vehicles. According to him, like trails in mountains, roads are also the entities that “appear” in the relations between bodies and various elements in the environment. The road exists only when bodies extended by cars can make arrangements to go through that road.

In the Conclusion, Furukawa proposes an insight that could change worldviews of his readers. As trails “appear” differently for different bodies, “it may seem apathetic to consider that each individual lives in his/her own world [in the sense he/she is isolated from the others]. Yet, it is not. Supposing others and their worlds are different from oneself and one’s own world, we shift our perspectives toward them and imitate their conduct and gaits, which opens up the possibility to understand others sympathetically” (p. 329).

Focusing on two Sherpas, the most prominent ethnographic contribution Furukawa makes is the detailed delineation of ongoing dynamics of tribal and occupational identities in the backdrop of tourism and development. There is no doubt that this book is a significant contribution for scholarship in the caste/tribal category, tourism, and development, within Nepali studies and beyond. The book’s philosophical discussion appeals to a still wider readership of anthropologists and other scholars of various disciplines.

However, I want to point out a weakness I found in the book: the weak tie between data and theory. One of the most important features of anthropology—and, what distinguishes anthropology from philosophy—is that it must persuasively show both the necessity and the effect of theory in relation to data. In other words, an anthropologist should clearly demonstrate, why and/or for what he/she applies and/or refines certain theory based on specific data. Yes, it is possible to understand trails as the entities that “appear” in the relations between various elements in the environment. However, why and/or for what does Furukawa propose this new understanding of trails? One can still understand trails as the entities that human agents, observing the natural environment, caring for others, and using material objects, find or make; I find it hard to identify problems with this conventional understanding.

There is no doubt that this book offers significant ethnographic contribution and philosophical discussion. I am confident that the vivid and thought-provoking narrative in the book will appeal to general readers, both with expertise in Nepal and theoretical interests in ontology. It is a rare account that makes it possible for readers to vicariously experience

walking the trails in Khumbu, sometimes as a fieldworker, in other times as a “Sherpa” of one sort or another. I have already recommended the book to many of my Japanese colleagues and friends, and I hope that it will make its way into English readership and make its presence in the wider world.

## References

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