

Mizuki Watanabe. 2018. *Yūjō to sagi no jinruigaku: Nepāru no kankō shijō tameru no hōseki shōnin no minzokushi* (An Anthropology of Friendship and Fraud: An Ethnography of Jewelry Merchants in Thamel, a Tourism Market of Nepal). Kyoto: Koyoshobo.

Thamel is a center of tourism in Kathmandu, Nepal where a variety of shops targeting foreign tourists can be found. The owners of these shops are friendly to the tourists and try to be their “friends.” Many repeat tourists to Nepal visit their “friends’s” shops. Watanabe’s book explores various aspects of this relationship between “real friends” by examining the interaction between shopkeepers and foreign tourists amongst the jewelry merchants in Thamel.

*An Anthropology of Friendship and Fraud* begins with a brief discussion on the author’s choice of the jewelry merchant as her research subject. The introductory chapter (“What is a Friend?”) places this very question at the center of the narrative. Watanabe seeks to understand the constitutive aspect of friendship and its linkage to global standard. This chapter utilizes several analytical frameworks in anticipation of the important discussions later in the book.

Chapter One (“Closeness to Ease a Conflict of Interest”) traces the history of Nepali state policies from the period of “exclusion of foreigners”

to the economic liberalization. It also introduces concepts and practices of friendship that are common in the Nepali cultural milieu. In particular, it compares *mīterī* (a ritual friendship) and *sāthī* vis-à-vis “real friends” built in Thamel and mediated via global travel and commerce.

The next chapter (“A ‘Regular’ Customer with One-Time Transaction”) discusses how Thamel evolved to be a major center of tourism from 1951 onwards. Jewelry merchants in Thamel come from Nepali, Indian and Tibetan backgrounds, and they are found at different levels of retail, wholesale, and crafts work.

Chapter Three (“Community Reproduction”) focuses on the widely prevalent “*māmā-bhānjā* relationship” in the Indian retail merchant community. Indian retail merchants usually induct *bhānjās* (sisters’ sons) to manage the shops. However, the independence of the *bhānjās* from their *māmās* (mothers’ brothers) overtime breaks the filial relationships, and creates a new kind of relationships between the two.

In Chapter Four (“Producing Transaction Ethics of Jewelry Merchants”), the author examines a business relationship called “regular.” “Regular” is a relationship built between a retail merchant and a wholesaler, or between a retail merchant and a goldsmith. The author using the theory of “public secret” argues that in these “regular” relationships neither party attempts to know their personal information and/or the jewelry traded between them. According to sociologist Georg Simmel, it is not always honesty and openness that underlie social relationships. On the contrary, not discussing certain matters and keeping the secrets of others by not prying into personal affairs sustain social relations. Building a “trust” with a partner implies agreement in not interrogating and sharing the content of their transactions with others in the Thamel jewelry market. People who are not part of the trade are also aware of this. For this reason, many jewelry merchants in Thamel think poorly of a retailer who reveals his wholesale partner’s fraud. They likewise think very poorly of these retailers in comparison to those who cheat the retailers. This is a remarkable feature of transactions in the market.

In Chapter Five (“‘Faith’ to Friend”), consumption, where a customer repeatedly purchases goods and services from a specific individual, is discussed. A “Face” shown by one who acts as a “friend” in friendly commerce is discussed as a friendly mask. Such a “face” leaves other party involved in the transaction unsure about what is genuine or fake, serious or acting, or true or false. There is no way to confirm whether a gem is authentic

or fake and no one can prove whether or not a merchant is a cheat. The more a tourist attempts to uncover a fraudulent behavior of a merchant, the more the merchant responds with shrewd deception. In such repetitive interactions, the friendly face of the merchant strengthens. The tourist cannot get out of the spiral and keeps expecting that “he might be my friend.” After all, the tourist continues to purchase goods from the same merchant, going back and forth between doubt and trust. Therefore, this type of relationship continues, in which the tourist becomes an accomplice in fraud.

In Chapter Six (“Betting on a Mask”), the author describes a case in which a retail merchant “one-sidedly presents” himself to a tourist. It is the opposite of the cases discussed so far where a foreign tourist keeps consuming goods from a specific retail merchant. In the jewelry market of Thamel, a tourist often tries to probe whether he or she has been deceived by obtaining information about the retailer and jewelry he/she bought in another shop. In this case, a retailer in another shop considers whether the tourist is trustworthy or how to make himself believed by the tourist, and the merchant gives a limited piece of information to the tourist to gain an advantage. The author uses the anthropological discussion of “betting” to examine such attitude of a retail merchant. Here, cases where a retail merchant bets on being a friend with some tourists and appears sympathetic toward his/her circumstances is described. The retail merchant has an economic loss in friendly commerce.

The concluding chapter (“To Understand Pure Gift among Friends from the Perspective of Economic Transaction”) summarizes the book and revisits the question raised in its introduction: “does a ‘true friend’ exist as a global standard?” The author concludes that through the floating image of “true friend” in jewelry market, Thamel has a reality and influence on actual economic transactions.

This book is an excellent work of ethnography. It describes very lively and thrilling interactions among people in painstaking details, which has the potential to engross the readers. The author discusses “friend commerce” in Thamel, neither as a strategy to obtain economic profit, nor as a concept of “friend” that is peculiar to Nepal or South Asia. She discusses these transactions not necessarily based on logical calculation via analytical frameworks like “public secret” or “friendly mask.” In doing so, the author offers new possibilities of examining market transactions.

With that said, I see these variety of analytical frameworks introduced by the author being less helpful in deepening the otherwise thick ethnography.

But, the author's argument that the image of a "real friend" in the Thamel tourism market has a reality that greatly influences actual transactions is very original. Such descriptions of a tourist who clings to a particular shopkeeper with doubts, and of a retail merchant who gifts to his customers with an economic loss raises the following questions: what is the "friend" mentioned again and again by shopkeepers? Is it an expression of their closeness or just a trick of fraud? In a way, the book itself becomes a text that strengthens a friendly mask, as the author acknowledges toward the end.

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