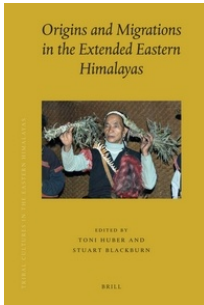


REVIEW: *ORIGINS AND MIGRATIONS IN THE EXTENDED
EASTERN HIMALAYA*

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Toni Huber and Stuart Blackburn (eds). 2012. *Origins and Migrations in the Extended Eastern Himalayas*. Leiden: Brill. Volume 16 in Brill's *Tibetan Studies Library*, Volume 4 in the *Tribal Cultures in the Eastern Himalayas*. viii+336pp, illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliographies, index. ISBN 9789004226913 (hardback 136USD/99€).

This multidisciplinary anthology draws from papers presented at the international conference "Origins and Migrations Among Tibeto-Burman-Speakers of the Extended Eastern Himalaya" held at Humboldt University, Berlin in 2008. This collection of articles contributes to discussions surrounding the nature of and questions surrounding data, hypotheses, and theories of origins and migration in the 'extended Eastern Himalaya'. This region includes the hill peoples and territory ranging from eastern Nepal to Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, upland Southeast Asia and southwest China. Although there is some thematic overlap among the fourteen essays, they are quite a diverse lot, critically examining local and regional history, theoretical and methodological issues writ large, myths and rituals, society and social narrative, language and linguistic relationships, identity formation, and local-state dynamics related to local ideas about origins and migration. This book is particularly useful for gaining a better understanding of the issues linked to topics and theories of identity in the Eastern Himalaya (and wider Himalaya region more broadly) considering the core importance of 'origins' in any construction or reconstruction of identity among diverse and widely spread communities. Graduate students and specialists

interested in the Himalayan region will find this book useful. Individual chapters, especially the more theory-oriented ones, are also well suited for undergraduate courses.

The editors of the volume immediately point out that questions and contrasting perspectives about the 'origins' of communities and ethnic groups continue to spark lively controversy both at the local and national levels as they intersect with national narratives, concepts of citizenship, majority and 'peripheral' populations (often lowland and upland populations), rights and privileges, the halls of academia, and the public domain. How *do* we start to untangle the complicated and contested nature of origins and migration – core elements of histories, identities, folklore, and local narratives – in a diverse and large region that stretches from eastern Nepal to upland Southeast Asia and southwest China? While the editors make no claim to cultural uniformity for the whole of this extensive region, similarities in material culture, ritual practices, and oral traditions, including ritual speech, do permit some interesting and sustained comparative analysis of diverse local communities, reminiscent of trans-border regions like Scott's (2009) highland 'Zomia' in Southeast Asia.

Toni Huber and Stuart Blackburn, editors and individual authors of a number of Brill publications and other volumes about the Himalaya region, offer much food for thought in the introduction, their individual articles in the publication, and in their execution of this volume. The introduction is clear, concise, and well-written. It offers a superb overview of the articles and a cogent, if rather short, introduction to where the focus and points of comparison lie among the articles.

One of the very few substantive quibbles I had with this volume was how it was situated in the wider literature of 'origins and migration' in the introduction, a stated goal of the conference and volume. Certain of this recent literature made an all-to-brief showing (e.g., Scott [2009], Duncan [2004], Giersch [2006]), but I was left wondering, especially after reading the rest of the articles, where Wim van Spengen (2000), Anderson (1991), Harrell (1995; 2001), Herman (2007), Agrawal (2005), and Ramachandra Guha (1990),

among others, might be situated in this discussion. While these authors discuss a wide diversity of borderlands, upland, and often marginalized communities in South and Southeast Asia, and China, they do share focus on identity formation, nation/majority vis-à-vis local identity construction, and often detailed discussions of communities that would have added depth to any discussion of theoretical frameworks on 'migration and origins'. Luckily, the first chapter (Childs) goes to much greater length in situating a theoretically-informed approach to studying how migrations and theories of origins are shaped by local and wider processes. I recognize that this is a quibble as only so much can be done in the introduction of a large, edited volume of fourteen articles. I hasten to compliment the editors on their article overview arrangement of the volume into four cogent themes in the introduction. This approach worked admirably and added much clarity and thematic cohesion to the wide-ranging studies – though it might have been better if the article arrangement in the volume reflected the same thematic order.

The fourteen chapters of the volume are arranged geographically from east to west along the line of the Himalayas. While this may make sense more generally from a visual point of view, it is unfortunate, and the thematic grouping discussed in the introduction makes more sense from a narrative and methodological point of view. The four coherent thematic groups include: theoretical and methodological interpretations, language, identification (local identity vis-à-vis nationality or nation state), and narratives of origins and migration. I found the thematic overview discussed in the introduction more compelling and will, therefore, follow suit in this review – with the caveat to the reader that this is not the order of the articles in the Contents.

Four chapters in particular raise issues directly related to theory and methodology in the studies of origins and migrations. It is these chapters that are particularly useful for in-class and academic discussion. In Chapter One, Childs offers an excellent study and discussion of 'processes' in community migrations that are really a series of protracted processes at the micro-local level. This is done through a case study of settlement history of Sama Village in Nepal's

highlands. This study starts with a sound and relatively extensive engagement with theoretical literature on migration in order to better understand the factors leading groups of people to migrate and perpetuate migration across space and time. His discussion of network theory and analysis of 'push-pull' dynamics related to social capital drawn from ethnographic and sociological data are particularly useful and grounded tools to explain the fundamental question of 'why' people migrate and how they do so in small groups over time - not necessarily *en masse*.

In a similar vein, Burling, in Chapter Three, asks the important question of why local populations even ask 'where' they come from, and concludes that the responsibility lies with outside forces such as schools and missionary activities as much as local social and political imperatives like boundaries. He further cautions that not all local Eastern Himalayan populations are equally concerned with questions of origins and migration.

Huber's article in Chapter Six adds another useful methodological point, a 'how' – how small scale 'micro-migrations' over time explain more of the ethnolinguistic variety and distribution than large scale, single-event migrations that have a tendency to dominate local, national, and scholarly narratives.

A fourth theory-oriented article, F.K.L. Chit Hlaing's Chapter Twelve, argues for more nuanced analyses, or jettisoning of 'single event' migration studies common to academia and the popular press, using the example of population movements of the Chin, Kachin, and Kayah of Burma. This article further cautions against simple links between ethnic category and language as multiple if related groups can use their languages differently, and contends that adopting ritual or singular languages obscures the power and presence of multi- or bilingualism.

A second major theme of the volume, language and linguistic data, offers complex and unique insights into the confluence of migration, origins, and the ethnolinguistic past of the Eastern Himalaya. Van Driem's study (Chapter Ten) situates linguistic data in a multidisciplinary framework of archeology and genetic studies. This approach highlights the sharp divides between upland Tibeto-

Burman and Indo-European languages, while helping to explain some of the complicated assimilative or non-assimilative aspects of north Indian ethnolinguistic complexes.

In Chapter Nine, Mark Post focuses on the Tani cultural-linguistic area in northeast India in order to trace different strains of contemporary Tani languages back to a kind of proto-Tani. By examining common cultural and environment-related terms in particular (a fascinating and original illustration of environmental linguistics and history), Post outlines a rough map of the diversity and movement of population splits, as well as highlighting certain of the cultural-linguistic 'islands' that fit the language family.

The third main theme of four articles relates to concepts of identity and their relationship to claims about origins and migrations. These articles are particularly pertinent for issues and analyses surrounding boundaries, national or citizenship status, and 'category-generating' practices common to contemporary states. The four following authors deal in some way with the nationalist 'imagined communities' of India, China, Burma, and 'Tibetans' (in Tibet) and smaller cultural groups part of the greater Tibeto-Burman-speaking cultural complex. In chapter eight, for example, Kerstin Grothmann analyzes the origins and migration of the Memba population on both sides of the McMahon Line and PRC-India frontier and how this population employs their own origin narratives to negotiate their current status with Tibetans to the north and the Indian state to the south.

In Chapter Eleven, Wettstein examines the Naga cultural-linguistic groups and their struggle to establish a collective identity in the nationalist(-ic) political struggles of India. Wettstein found that deployment of claims of common 'nationality' (or perhaps their origins and imagined community[-ies]?) and growing potential for more localized political factionalism over claims of origins and place have the potential to add even more stress on the north Indian ethno-political landscape.

Similarly, in Chapter Thirteen, Sadan examines how origin and migration narratives among the Jinghpaw or Kaching of northern Burma lose their cachet, complexity, and diversity when

stripped and simplified for deployment in modern state discourses. In another respect, Wellens moves away from localized ethnic deployment of Premi identity in Chapter Fifteen to analyze how the modern Chinese state has retrofitted Premi and Namuyi ethnic identity for its own purposes. While it is most obvious in the Wellens article, all these chapters share a common theme in revealing the totalizing (though not necessarily overwhelming) power of the state, or at least state-led or oriented identity, in shaping local perceptions of local origin and migration stories.

The four other authors discuss in various respects a final theme of origin and migration narratives and how different origins/migration narratives help define identity, position communities in wider political contexts, and reinforce social hierarchies. Gaenzle's article (Chapter Two) examines upland Nepal and in particular, how the Rai of southern Nepal map migration on the landscape in that the journey of the dead is a return to the point from which that their ancestors migrated – a journey fraught with danger and ambivalence - towards the place of origin.

In a similar fashion, McKhann in Chapter Fourteen examines the Naxi of Yunnan Province. His fascinating study of funeral rituals and origin myths, as well as the process of origin and return that links a landscape and 'ancestral roads', highlights social and metaphysical hierarches of the relationships between gods and humans, ancestors and the living.

In Chapter Seven, Blackburn analyzes the origins of the Apatani world and people in central Arunachal Pradesh. He found that the Apatani world began as a more unified whole, and that ancestors and objects can all be related back to a common source and ancestry. Finally, in Chapter Five, Alex Aisher examines the stories of the Nyishi and their world and migration – and emphasizes how landscapes, the spirit world, and the dead co-evolve through processes of exchanges to create the world as the Nyishi know it.

As the above attests, there is a broad spectrum of themes and localities that will interest Himalaya and migration specialists, historians, and anthropologists.

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