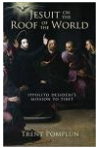


REVIEW: *TRANSCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN THE HIMALAYAN BORDERLANDS - KALIMPONG AS A "CONTACT ZONE"*

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Markus Viehbeck (ed.), 2017. *Transcultural Encounters in the Himalayan Borderlands - Kalimpong as a "Contact Zone."* Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Publishing, viii + 350 pp, ISBN 978-3-946054-58-0 (paperback 55.37USD).

This volume is both a story of the hill station of Kalimpong, in the Eastern Himalayan region, and a study of transcultural dynamics seen through the prism of the local story of Kalimpong. A collaborative work, the book is the result of a conference that brought together various international scholars on the cultural history of Kalimpong. Scholars from Europe (Amsterdam, Copenhagen, Heidelberg, Manchester, Oxford, Roskilde), North America (Los Angeles, Toronto), Oceania (Melbourne), and India (Sikkim) met in Kalimpong 6-8 March 2015, to discuss the topic from a variety of disciplinary viewpoints, including social history, Tibetan studies, anthropology, ethnography, religious studies, and postcolonial literature. The publisher, Heidelberg University Publishing, has included this anthology in its prestigious Heidelberg Studies on Transculturality.

The history of Kalimpong, the other mountain town of Darjeeling and, more generally the entire Eastern Himalayan region, has been the focus of a specialized yet expanding scholarly field. Works center on Kalimpong (Hilker, 2005), Darjeeling (Besky, 2014; Sharma, 2011 and 2014; Warner, 2014), and the entire area of the Himalayan territories of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan, as well as parts of Northern-Eastern India (Huber and Blackburn, 2012; McKay, 2007; Mullard, 2011; Phuntsho, 2013; Shneiderman, 2015). In this context, scholars note how Kalimpong and Darjeeling shared the same destiny:

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originally sparsely populated settlements in the foothills of the Himalayas, both villages were acquired in the nineteenth century by the English East India Company (Kalimpong was annexed in 1865 from the kingdom of Bhutan, and Darjeeling from the kingdom of Sikkim in 1835) to become British-ruled towns and ultimately hubs for commerce across British India, Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan, Tibet, and China. Both cities showed a social hierarchical organization with colonial administrators, planters, and missionaries on top, and a wide range of settlers representing diverse Asian and Himalayan ethnicities, as well as British, German, French, and Scandinavian sojourners. Both cities would suffer in the post-colonial era from the rise of Asian nationalism, which has obstructed the once porous borders across Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, and India.

The book looks at the history of Kalimpong through the lens of "the encounter." In the colonial and early post-colonial era, this mountain space enabled a variety of encounters between (British) India, Tibet, and China; Nepal and Bhutan; Christian mission and Himalayan religions; and between global flows of money and information and local markets and practices. The town has operated as a "contact zone," i.e., a magnet attracting into the same zone (place) subjects previously separated by geographic and temporal disjuncture, *de facto* intersecting and modifying historical trajectories of circulation in this space. The aim of the book is "to investigate the Eastern Himalayan border region through new theoretical and conceptual approaches" (v). In particular, the approach is borrowed from the work of Mary Louise Pratt on travel writing in a colonial context (Pratt, 1992), in which general currents of cultural discourses are counterbalanced by an emphasis on the agency of individuals that might not follow the logic of these discourses.

The book is divided into four sections. The first, titled "Christian Mission, Educational Institutions, and Identity Formation," addresses the role played by Western missionaries, mostly Protestants, in turning a village into a border cosmopolitan town. Three essays investigate how Christian individuals and institutions came to Kalimpong in the second half of the nineteenth century, engaged with the indigenous population, operated in a Victorian evangelical style, and left an enduring mark on local culture. The second section, "Public

Sphere, Public Media, and the Creation of Public Knowledge," investigates the role of media in constructing public knowledge in public space of Kalimpong. Three articles study media (photography), interpretation (the gulf between the indigenous and the Western interpretations of the same phenomena), and geo-politics (the Chinese coverage of Kalimpong on Chinese media varies in accordance with the more general conditions of Sino-Indian political relations).

In the third section, "Things that Connect: Economies and Material Culture," the focus is on objects and activities operating as cultural artifact that stimulate transcultural connections. A piece covers the "gifting moments," the moment of encounter between dignitaries when gifts are exchanged; another addresses the trading economy, particularly the economy that emphasizes cross-cultural trade. Finally, a paper focuses on economic rituals "as a contact zone for peoples from diverse backgrounds manifests itself in the present-day marketing" (17).

The fourth section is titled "Scholars, Power, and Knowledge Production" and deals with the interactions between foreign and indigenous scholars in Kalimpong and the knowledge produced through such interactions. Three articles investigate the subject from the perspective of the foreigners and of the local scholars, who are operating in support of Western scholars and on their own. A paper studies how the interaction operates to either elevate certain local knowledge or to silence it. The last essay functions as an epilogue and connects the colonial and early post-colonial history of Kalimpong to present times.

Transcultural Encounters brings together an impressive number of local stories on, and global trends around, the transformation of Kalimpong from an obscure rural village to a cosmopolitan microcosm in the foothills of the Himalayas. The sources are impressive in their range - not limited to local sources but also reflective of archives and primary sources from former colonial powers. The book offers a nuanced, powerful narrative that represents an important addition to the scholarly literature on the Eastern Himalayan region.

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