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Materials for the Study of Gurung Pe by Simon Strickland. Cambridge, MA: Department of South Asian Studies, Harvard University. Harvard Oriental Series Volumes 86 & 87. 2018, 760 pp & 915 pp, 6 colour maps, 16 colour plates, ISBN 9780674984325 and 9780674984332

- 1 Volumes 86 and 87 of the Harvard Oriental Series form a *magnum opus* in the truest sense, the culmination of decades of research and granular analysis by anthropologist Simon Strickland. The Series was established in 1891 by Henry Clarke Warren (an authority on Buddhism and Pali literature) and Charles Rockwell Lanman (American Orientalist and celebrated Sanskritist). Lanman served as the inaugural editor of the Series from 1891–1934, and saw the first 37 volumes through into press, passing the torch to Walter Eugene Clark (1934–1950, volumes 38–44), then to Daniel Henry Holmes Ingalls (1950–1983, volumes 45–48) and thereafter to Gary Tubb (1983–1990, volume 49). In 2021, the Harvard Oriental Series (HOS) celebrated its 130th year of continuous publication and recently published its 93rd volume.
- 2 Since 1990, HOS has been under the unbroken editorship of Michael Witzel, the Wales Professor of Sanskrit in the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies at Harvard University. Dr Witzel has personally seen 43 volumes into print since assuming editorial responsibilities two decades ago and – most saliently for the readership of this journal – has broadened the series to include linguistically rich ethnographic studies of indigenous oral traditions from across the Himalaya and northern South Asia. This ongoing dissemination of primary research and scholarship on the Indian subcontinent is a significant achievement in its own right and Witzel is deserving of public recognition for his long-term commitment.

- 3 Under the supervision of Alan Macfarlane at the University of Cambridge, himself an established anthropologist of Gurung culture and society, Strickland's 1982 doctoral thesis was entitled *Beliefs, Practices, and Legends: A study in the narrative poetry of the Gurungs of Nepal*. After his formative ethnographic fieldwork in Nepal, Strickland went on to a productive career as an anthropologist at University College London and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, focusing on other lines of intellectual inquiry such as global health and nutrition.
- 4 Spoken in the middle hills of central-western Nepal, in Nepal's urban centres such as Pokhara and Kathmandu, and increasingly as far away as Reading (in the United Kingdom) and New York City (Gurung et al 2018), Tamu kyi – more commonly known as Gurung – is a Tibeto-Burman language with over 325,000 first language/mother tongue speakers according to the 2011 Census of Nepal. Following Strickland's definition, recitations known as *pe* or *pe-da lu-da* (other scholars prefer the transcription *pye*, cf Evans et al 2009) are a diverse collection of Gurung oral narratives, invocations, narratives of ethnogenesis and cosmological texts delivered in a ritual register of the language that connect the community to early Bon or Bön practice. In collaboration with a priest and in service of promoting health and prosperity as well as assisting with the management of illness and bereavement, *pe* are performed by a number of distinct Gurung ritual practitioners with specific responsibilities.
- 5 This two-volume set entitled *Materials of the Study of Gurung Pe* opens with a rich 40-page analytical introduction, followed by a number of detailed maps and well-produced colour plates. The substantive content of the volumes comprises 13,000 lines of annotated transcriptions with interlinear glosses for 92 *pe* and a synopsis of a further 49 items that amount to an additional 4,000 lines. The almost 1,700 pages that make up these two volumes derive from Strickland's ethnographic and linguistic research collected over a 23-year period, between 1979 and 1992.
- 6 The introduction outlines the formal properties of *pe*: its structure, metrics, style, figurative language, metaphor and associated implicit meanings. This is followed by an overview of patterns of thought in *pe*, their ontologies, divinities, cosmological order, journeys, use of reported speech, action during discourse, the meanings of the lexical items and a study of the methods of learning *pe*. A catalogue of *pe* and colour plate illustrations serve as an appendix and field recordings of *pe* are included on an accompanying DVD. Each volume includes a helpful index to the recitations and a general index concludes the first volume.
- 7 Rendering complex cultural and linguistic content in a visually engaging manner is no easy task. While other contributors to HOS have chosen a *recto-verso* approach – in some cases with text in the original orthography on one page and a translation on the other, and occasionally supplemented with a linguistically informed interlinear gloss – Strickland opts for a more minimalist typographic rendering. Each numbered line of *pe* – unstyled except for morpheme breaks – is followed by a free English translation. Strickland's analytical rendering of each recitation is consistent and easy to navigate, with chapter numbers, line numbers, judiciously placed footnotes and a short contextualising synopsis introducing the specifics of each *pe*. The author is to be commended for finding a way to render this potentially esoteric content in a transparent and jargon-free format. Strickland's work is mostly descriptive and synchronic, and the author describes the corpus as 'a body of evidence for use in more analytical studies' (p9). Overall, these two volumes are a weighty contribution that will

serve scholars – from both within the Gurung community and beyond – with an enduring written and audio record of a particular moment in the dynamic cultural history of the now global Tamu-mai (Gurung) community.

- 8 The principal body of work on which these two volumes rest dates to 1980, primarily in the Gurung village of Siklis where the ethnographer had the great privilege and good fortune to work closely with master *po-ju* ('medicine man' or 'shaman', p7) Padam Sing Gurung and master *lew-ri* ('priest', p7) Bir Bahadur Gurung. In footnote 143 on page 29 of the first volume, Strickland notes: 'This attempt to record systematically, explicate and communicate the remarkable quality and extent of their expertise is dedicated to their memory'. While this recognition of *po-ju* Padam Sing and *lew-ri* Bir Bahadur's expertise and extraordinary cultural knowledge is welcome – and indeed necessary –, this reviewer could not help but wonder whether they might have deserved more prominent billing, given their centrality to the process of recording and the exegesis, rather than being relegated to a footnote. While both knowledge holders are celebrated in photographs – plates 1 and 2 respectively – the approach in these two volumes reinforces a more traditional model of anthropological inquiry that centres the outside ethnographer as an analytical authority and the community members with whom he or she works as research subjects, informants and cultural assets (see Turin 2004 for a more in-depth discussion on this topic).
- 9 Related to such issues are important questions about access. For books of this size and production quality, the pricing is quite reasonable (USD 60.00 • GBP 48.95 • EUR 54.00) and I know from experience that the Series editor is committed to ensuring that HOS publications are accessible in South Asia. While reading these two connected volumes, I was frequently reminded of the Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh (TPLS) – an organisation established to preserve, conserve and promote Tamu (Gurung) heritage, culture, religious beliefs and practices – which now has international chapters in eight countries and 22 regional (district-level) chapters across Nepal. Given the central importance of *pe* to Tamu-mai, I would imagine that TPLS or a related community cultural organisation would be interested in Strickland's analysis and representation. This in turn might lead to a productive collaboration, helping to ensure that this unique and priceless collection has the widest possible distribution and impact, perhaps even in digital form.

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AUTHORS

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Mark Turin is associate professor at the Institute for Critical Indigenous Studies and the Department of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. Author or co-author of four books and editor of 12 volumes, Turin has worked in collaborative partnership with Himalayan communities on language and culture documentation projects since the early 1990s.