

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

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When Dr. Anna Balikci-Denjongpa, editor of the *Bulletin of Tibetology*, approached me last year to ask whether I could offer my services as guest editor for an issue of the *Bulletin*, I leapt at the opportunity. Over the last few years, thanks largely to the tireless efforts of Rinpoche Tashi Densapa, Director of the Namgyal Institute of Tibetology, and Dr. Balikci-Denjongpa, Research Coordinator at the Institute, the *Bulletin* has been revitalised and is now once again an important peer reviewed journal for the Himalayan region. In the present issue, in an effort to showcase recent scholarship of Sikkim, we have solicited three original articles dealing with aspects of Sikkimese culture and history.

In the first article, Dr. Heleen Plaisier of Leiden University, the Netherlands, offers an introduction to the literature and orthography of Lepcha, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Sikkim and neighbouring West Bengal by the indigenous ethnic group of the same name. Dr. Plaisier provides a historical account of studies on the Lepcha community and their language, as well as a helpful overview of the mechanics of the Lepcha script. The comprehensive bibliography which the author provides as a postscript will be an invaluable resource for all scholars and students interested in Lepcha studies.

The second article is also authored by a scholar presently at Leiden University, although his permanent institutional home is the Centre of Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS) at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. Dr. Bal Gopal Shrestha, an ethnic Newar from Sankhu in the Kathmandu valley, conducted a period of intensive fieldwork among the Newars of Sikkim. Studies of diaspora communities have become increasingly popular in cultural studies and anthropology, and nowhere is such ethnography needed more than in contemporary South Asia, a region in which porous borders contribute to large scale population movements between nations. Dr. Shrestha documents with historical precision the formation, features and membership of the Newar community in Sikkim, from the first settlement of prominent families to the contemporary jostling among ethno-political organisations.

The third and final article in this issue is by Saul Mullard of the University of Oxford, a frequent contributor to the *Bulletin*. In this important contribution, Mullard provides the reader with his prudent analysis of the annotated contents of a rare seventeenth century text from the Barmiok collection, entitled (when translated into English): ‘A concise compilation of royal historical works and pilgrimage guide books to the hidden land of Sikkim’. The document provides a number of insights into early Sikkimese history and the formation of the Sikkimese state. Mullard is careful in his interrogation of the document, suggesting and hinting at possibilities rather than stridently overturning generally accepted dates and historical narratives. Over time, then, as other documents relating to early Sikkimese history come to light, Mullard’s elucidations will likely become part of accepted understandings of the workings of the nation-builders of Sikkim.

This issue is completed by a book review of David Lang’s *Sikkim Himalaya: Travels in the Cloud Kingdom*, and obituaries of German Akay (1915-2005) and Henry George Baker (1918-2006). On behalf of the editorial board, I hope that you enjoy reading this issue as much as we have enjoyed compiling it.

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