hectares, while the areas constructed during the last 40 years cover nearly 5000 hectares?

Hypotheses about the meaning of the changes and structures and their evolution across the centuries are suggested by the above questions and discussed in the conclusion.


This thesis, based on twelve months of fieldwork and archival research undertaken in Ladakh, explores the place of wool and weaving in the life of Rupshu. It attempts to trace the nexus between livestock, fibres, textiles, social and symbolic structures in Rupshu in order to understand the multitude of contexts within which wool-oriented activities exist. The craft of weaving was bestowed upon Rupshu by the gods, and thus all acts related to it have a close connection to the sublime.

Rupshu lies in the easternmost part of Ladakh in North India, in a Restricted Areas Zone, and is accessible only to Indian citizens. Hence, extensive fieldwork as not been carried out in this area. Further, though there is a little documentation on the craft of weaving in Ladakh, none exists on the nomadic tradition of weaving.

The first two chapters introduce the region of Rupshu and explore the historical context. They include a discussion of the origin and development of weaving and textiles in the area, and of the old trade routes in fibres. The next two chapters examine the connections between livestock, the source of fibres in Rupshu, and the Ladakhi pantheon. The relationship between the two is reflected in the manner in which livestock are revered and treated in Rupshu. Further, this affinity is widely expressed in Rupshu, and one such occasion is the harvesting of the fibres. The next four chapters look specifically at the craft of weaving, and local representations of the tradition. Using examples of particular pieces woven in Rupshu, I examine the gender, spatial, and hierarchical relations that they express and perpetuate. Not all the fibres harvested in Rupshu are used there, and the final chapter examines their distribution through trade. While woven articles are not traded, specific containers are woven for the transport of fibres and their characteristics are looked at here.

The concluding remarks include a discussion of the future of wool and weaving activities in Rupshu, and address the dangers posed by resettlement schemes, and a shortage of pasture and over-grazing. These trends would eventually lead to a decrease in the number of livestock, and cause the people of Rupshu to abandon their tradition of nomadic pastoralism.


In this dissertation, a critique of the concept of sustainable development is presented in the context of a case study of social identification and politics of representation in Ladakh, North India. The initial critique of the concept revolves around the inherent assumption of availability of distribution, either in a descriptive or a normative sense, which is seen to be at hand in various elaborations of the concept. This assumption is linked to the parallel assumption of community or collective identity as the primary context of distribution. Through a detailed presentation of material relating to the political history and representation of Ladakh vis-à-vis government administration and development, it is intended to show that current conceptualisations of sustainable development more often than not take for granted the availability of “community” in one form or the other. Thus, in the case of Ladakh, the dissertation seeks to elucidate historical processes in which privileged representations of Ladakh were established in the context of resource distribution and political representation. Special attention is given to the formation of the category “Ladakh Buddhists” as a vehicle for securing representation. This formation is seen to be informed by and recognised in various representational practices, ranging from the context of South Asian Protestant Buddhism to the context of contemporary invocations of Ladakh as a living example of sustainable development as imbedded in the cultural ethos of indigenous people. What is at issue is not whether the representations are accurate depictions of socio-cultural realities in Ladakh or not. Rather, the representations are surveyed for the images they invoke and how they are put to work in practice. It is the consequences of representations which are accorded importance in the dissertation, as well as their construction within various
frames of identification of "Ladakhiness" and the accompanying claims to truth; relevance and legitimacy in the highly politicised context of social identification in Ladakh. The dissertation is an attempt to pin-point how such identification carries consequences for the practice of sustainable development - which, in spite of the initial critique, should not be discarded but further elaborated to address issues of social justice in a more distribution-independent manner. The consequences of identification along the lines of "community" is exemplified by the case of Ladakh Ecological Development Group, a local NGO with strong commitments to the preservation of "traditional" life in Ladakh. In the case of LEDeG, it is seen that the logic of communal identification in combination with the outlook and practical activities of local influential "interpreters" of contemporary life in Ladakh combine to create an organisational weakness and inability to change practices in favour of greater involvement/participation in activities. In conclusion, the dissertation asks for a reconsideration of the dual distributive basis (descriptive/normative) of the concept of sustainable development. In this respect, an emphasis on identification in relation to rights is suggested which should be informed by history and practice in a given context, rather than the assumption of distribution as empirical fact/normative goal.


This dissertation is the result of twenty-two months of fieldwork in Zanskar in the western Himalayas (Jammu and Kashmir State, north-western India). It is a study of the connections between religion and polity in a Tibetan community. The author examines the separation between the monastic authorities and the Zanskar monarchical structures (the King of Zangla, leader of a small kingdom, maintained his prerogatives until 1950).

After a lengthy introduction to Zanskar’s geography and history, the thesis successively describes the main features of Zanskar social order, the political and religious figures, the economic foundations of the exercise of power and the ritual roles played by the King and the monks which symbolically contribute to ensure their authority and power.

In conclusion, the author considers the association between the Tibetan king and monk in comparison with the Hindu king and Brahmin as analysed by Louis Dumont. In both cases, the hierarchy is linked to the distinction between status and power, and the pair is in a "hierarchic reversal" form of relationship. However, great divergences appear: on one hand, the Tibetan monasteries and hierarchs’ economic life is not entirely comparable to the material dependence of the Brahmins upon their clients; on the other, the Buddhist king is somehow linked with the divine sphere (indeed, the idea of a strictly secular nature of the Hindu king, asserted by Dumont, is decried by numerous Indianists).

Martijn van Beek: Identity Fetishism and the Art of Representation. The long struggle for regional autonomy in Ladakh, Cornell University, 1996. 410 p., map, fig., tabl.

This study seeks to understand the mutually conditioning influences of a global hegemonic discourse of rights, rooted in contradictory imaginings of the world as populated by sovereign individuals and collectivities such as peoples, nations, tribes, communities, and state practices of resource allocation and access (globally, inter-nationally, nationally) and the complicity of (social) science in these processes. The study further investigates the links between this hegemonic grammar of identification, representation and justification, and the daily practices of people who seek to make a living under rapidly changing conditions, characterized by commodification and the (perceived) loss of decision making power to centralized institutions. It is argued that most social science and political practice suffer from identity fetishism: the perception that the social is comprised of a natural order of stable, unambiguously bounded, communities/peoples/cultures. Conceptions of justice and democracy are built on the principle of representation assuming a convergence between 'identity' and 'rights'; both multiculturalism and racism are rooted in this misrecognition of the nature of being and belonging, effectively producing the very difference that is supposed to be represented, and instituting a logic of fragmentation without end. The study uses the struggle for regional autonomy in the Ladakh region of Jammu and Kashmir, India, as an illustration. In spite of the fluidity of lived experience and practices of identification in Ladakh, the most recent agitation after 1989 pitted Tibetan Buddhists and Muslims against each other. In-depth archival and field research of the conflict and its historical background carried out during prolonged visits over a ten-year period, shows that neither causes, nor form