Ethnic Categories and Their Usages in Byans, Far Western Nepal

Katsuo Nawa

1. Introduction

I was inspired to study the Byansis by Professor Dor Bahadur Bista, whom I visited with a Nepali friend in September 1990, while I was in Kathmandu for the first time as a tourist and Master's student in cultural anthropology.[1] At one point during our conversation, Professor Bista criticized Western anthropologists, asking why so many of them went to study people like the Sherpas and the Thakalis. His own answer was that these were very rich and friendly people full of hospitality, and that it was very easy to do fieldwork among them. Then he added, "No foreign anthropologists go to, for example, the *Byansis*." I do not suppose that he referred to the Byansis because he had any special interest in them; it is highly possible that he recalled the name because the friend who was with me had come from Darchula district, where many Byansis live. Thus, he had drawn my attention to the existence of the Byansis and, from 1993 to 1995, I carried out fourteen months of fieldwork in Darchula district among the people called Byansis, to find that they too were "very rich and friendly people full of hospitality".[2]

Byans is located in the northernmost part of Darchula district in far western Nepal, lying north of the Api Himal and adjacent to both India and China. The area is composed of the uppermost valley of the Mahakali (Kali) river which constitutes the India-Nepal border. The main inhabitants of this valley are basically Mongoloid people who speak a distinct Tibeto-Burman language. In addition to agriculture and animal husbandry, many of them have traditionally conducted trans-Himalayan trade. According to the limited amount of previous literature,[3] they have kept their own culture and tradition, while being influenced by both Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism.

The purpose of this paper is to describe and analyse the meanings and implications of

[1] Earlier versions of this paper appeared in Japanese (Nawa 1997, 1998c: 30-55). The data used in the second section was analysed from a slightly different perspective in another article (Nawa 1998a: 66-70). Key ethnonyms discussed in this paper are given in italics throughout in deliberate contravention of the usual convention of naming and capitalizing.

[2] My research was supported by the Asian Studies Scholarship Program of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, Government of Japan.

[3] Dahal (1994), Fürer-Haimendorf (1988: 282-84), Manzardo *et al.* (1976), His Majesty's Government of Nepal (1975: 997-98). See also Allen (1975).

several ethnic categories used in and around Byans. Inter-ethnic and inter-caste relations have been one of the main topics of the anthropology of Nepal for more than forty years.[4] In addition, many fascinating studies have elucidated various aspects of the dynamics and institutional backgrounds of ethnic,[5] caste, and national identities.[6] However, the question 'To what language (or languages) does an ethnonym belong, and in what range of contexts is it used?' has seldom been asked. Consequently, an ethnonym in one language has too often been equated with another in a different language, and the entity signified by these ethnonyms has been essentialized and objectified. This is not a trivial point, since, in the studies of Byans and adjacent regions, it has caused much confusion regarding correspondences between the signifier and the signified of each term, and complicated relations between these terms.

I would argue, therefore, that more careful theoretical attention should be paid to the study of ethnonyms. This point has been emphasized in a series of debates on ethnos[7] by some Japanese anthropologists. Motomitsu Uchibori, the most prominent figure in these debates, argues that each ethnos is a middle-range category between everyday interactive communities (or individuals) and the whole society, and that the basis and essence of every ethnos is ultimately its name (Uchibori 1989, see also Nawa 1992). From this point of view, the process of quasi-objectification of each ethnos is possible only in relation to the use of its name (or names) by both (imagined) insiders and outsiders. This is the theoretical premise of this paper, the validity of which will be examined in the discussion below.

Before dealing in detail with the ethnonyms current in Byans, let me quote two sets of utterances reconstructed from my field notes. The first one came from a Byansi who occupied a prominent position in a government corporation, during our second meeting. He was the first Byansi I ever met, and the following statements by him were the first substantial information on the Byansis that I obtained from one of them. The first statement was made partly in English and partly in Nepali:

> There are many stories about the origin of the Byansis. Some people are under Tibetan influence, others under Jumlese influence, others under Indian influence. There are nine villages in Byans, and fourteen others in Chaudans. There is also a valley called Darma. Lots of people live in India,

[4] Fürer-Haimendorf (1966) and Caplan (1970) are early contributions.

[5] I avoid the term 'ethnicity' in this paper, because the application of the term to a particular situation automatically limits the agenda of discussion. For example, it implies that those under discussion do not compose a nation by themselves.

[6] To give a comprehensive bibliography on this theme is beyond the scope of this paper. See, for instance, Levine (1987), Holmberg (1989: 11-50), and papers in Gellner *et al.* eds. (1997). In addition, Burghart (1996), Höfer (1979), and Onta (1996), among others, identify many aspects of the interrelationship between the state apparatus and national, caste, and ethnic identities in Nepal.

[7] We discuss these issues in Japanese using the word *minzoku*, which connotes both 'nation' and 'ethnic group', and which I tentatively translate as 'ethnos' in this paper.

and every valley has a different language.

Many researches have been done on the Newars, the Magars, the Gurungs, and so on. So we can say "their culture is like this". But nobody knows about the Byansis. Only the local people know about them. So different people have different impressions of them, and some think that they are Buddhists.

In my opinion, the Byansis have a mixed type of culture, partly influenced by Tibet, partly by Hinduism. People who don't know us call the Byansis *bhoṭiyā*. The word *bhoṭiyā* originally means 'Tibetan type', and has a connotation of 'people who eat beef' and 'outcaste of the Hindus'. But the Byansis do not eat beef and buffalo meat, and have a different type of culture...

The second statement, in contrast, is an extract from a conversation in Byansi with big traders from Changru, a village in Nepalese Byans, that took place in Kathmandu a few days before my departure for Japan in 1995:

A: By the way, you said that you are going to write a book on us in Japan. What is the title going to be?

Nawa: What title do you think is best?

A: *śaukā* would be good. This term is well-known. *byānsī* is also good. The word is related to Byans Rishi.

B: No no. The title must be *rang*. *śaukā* and *byānsī* are names given by others. We are the *rang* in our *rang* language, so the title of the book must be *rang*.

C: That's no good. Readers won't recognize who the *rang* are. It will be all right if you make the title *śaukā* or *byānsī* and add *rang* in brackets.

A: You are not going to write that we are the *pang* after you go back to Japan, I hope?

Nawa: The *rang* are *rang*, not *pang* or *wolan*. Isn't that so?

A: You should write that those who call us *bhoṭiyā* are absolutely wrong. You should write that we are *matwālī chetrīs*.

I quote these remarks here not only to establish my ethnographic authority (Clifford 1986), but to make it clear that many people of Byans told me much about their ethnonyms and the implications of these ethnonyms of their own accord.[8] Indeed, highly educated officers and big traders were not the only ones who discussed their ethnic identity. Many ordinary villagers talked again and again about it, not only to the ethnographer but also to

[8] See Moerman's scepticism regarding the validity of ethnographic studies on 'ethnicity' (1974).

other outsiders and among themselves. In other words, these narratives are more than just the result of some leading questions on the part of the ethnographer.

2. Ethnonyms

2.1 Naming by others

It has been recorded in English for more than a century that in the Himalayan valleys in far western Nepal, as well as in Kumaun and Garhwal in India, there live groups of people who are neither Tibetan nor South Asian. They have been variously called *byānsī, śaukā,* and *bhoṭiyā*, with much confusion regarding both the applicable range of each ethnonym and the correspondence between each name and ethnographic reality. A good way to start, then, is to inquire into the meanings and connotations of these terms.

Firstly, in the context of Nepal, the main inhabitants of Byans are most often referred to as *byānsī*. This name means 'the inhabitants of Byans' in both Hindi and Nepali, but not in Byansi.[9] In other words, it is basically a term used by their southern neighbours.[10] Secondly, *bhoṭiyā* is a Nepali, Hindi, and Pahari word, which usually connotes Tibetan and Tibetanoid people.[11] Significantly, however, this term was used widely in India during the colonial period by administrators, scholars, and explorers to indicate Mongoloid people in general who lived in the northernmost Himalayan zone in the United Provinces.[12] They found that in Kumaun and Garhwal, as well as in the northernmost part of far western Nepal, there were people who were Mongoloid but not Tibetan, and whose languages and cultures differed from valley to valley. Many of them were trans-Himalayan traders, and the regions they inhabited, from west to east, were Mana, Niti, Johar, Darma, Chaudans, and Byans, a portion of which was in Nepalese territory. Based on this observation, much research was conducted on the social, cultural, and linguistic differences of each valley. Irrespective of these differences, however, the residents of these valleys were generally called *bhoṭiyā*, and a category that corresponds to *byānsī,* for example, was not treated as an independent unit. In other words, *bhoṭiyā* was a general category which included not only residents of Byans but also of some other valleys in the United Provinces. In India, *bhoṭiyā* is currently used in administrative terms as the name of a scheduled tribe.[13] The people of Byans who have Indian nationality, together with other Mongoloid people living in adjacent regions, officially belong to this category, and are entitled to certain legal

[9] Byans is called *byangkhu* in Byansi.

[10] See Nawa (1998b) for more information. As I have pointed out there, some scholars' usage of the word, in which it connotes only the inhabitants of Nepalese Byans (Manzardo *et al.* 1976) is unacceptable, because the Byans region lies in both Nepalese and Indian territory, and there is no reason to exclude the dwellers of Indian Byans from the category *byānsī*.

[11] The word is variously written, for instance, *bhoṭiyā*, 'Bhotia', and 'Bhootia'. The people of Byans often use *bhoṭiyā* and the Nepali word *bhoṭe* as synonyms.

[12] See, for instance, Atkinson (1996: 83-152), Sherring (1907, 1993), Lall (1911), Pant (1988), and Heim and Gansser (1994). In addition, a Japanese traveller who visited Byans in 1927 called them *Bhootiya* (Hasegawa 1975). Brown (1984: 14-29) gives an historical analysis of the usages of the concept of 'Bhotiya' in the United Provinces.

[13] Scholars who studied these areas after independence also use the name. See for instance Srivastava

rights as members of a scheduled tribe. Finally, according to the people of Byans, *śaukā* is a word which is used to refer to them in the Pahari dialects of far western Nepal and the adjacent regions of India. In other words, it is a name employed by their southern neighbours. Many people of Byans told me that this word originally meant 'the rich'.[14] Unlike *byānsī* and *bhoṭiyā*, it is a category used not in administration but in everyday interaction.

2.2 Naming by themselves

So far, I have introduced three ethnonyms which are used to refer to the main inhabitants of Byans. The range of people which each word connotes differs, and all three are names used by others to refer to them. *Rang* is the ethnonym which they use to refer to themselves in their own mother tongue. This category constitutes one part of a conceptual triad which comprises two other ethnic categories: *pang* and *wolan*. *Pang* means 'Tibetan', whereas *wolan* primarily indicates the South Asian people who speak Indo-European languages such as Pahari. The view that the *rang* are neither *pang* nor *wolan* and have an independent identity is widespread among the inhabitants of Byans.

These three terms are frequently used in daily life in Byans, and when I lived in Byansi villages I seldom spent a day without hearing them. Moreover, the use of these words is not restricted to situations of direct interaction with the *pang* and the *wolan*. For example, when a *rang* child does something which is considered rude by the *rang*, but is frequently done (so they think) by *pang* or *wolan*, he or she is scolded 'What is it, like a *pang*!' or 'What is it, like a *wolan*!' Stereotyped thinking such as 'the *pang* eat beef' and '*wolan* often deceive us' is also widespread. The boundary between *rang* on the one hand and *pang* and *wolan* on the other is confirmed and strengthened in Byansi everyday life.

It should be pointed out that these three categories are related to certain 'objective' factors. Many *rang* traders go to Tibet in the summer from their villages in Byans and adjacent regions, because some have land there and engage in agricultural activities. In winter, when many of their villages are cut off by snow, they move to Darchula and neighbouring hamlets where they have winter houses, and travel to villages and towns in the southern fringe of the Himalayas in far western Nepal and Uttar Pradesh for trade.[15] In the context of this traditional lifestyle, the categories *pang* and *wolan* virtually coincide with the two sorts of people they meet during the two different seasons each year: Mongoloid people who live on the Tibetan plateau, speak Tibetan, and adhere to Tibetan Buddhism on the one hand, and Caucasoid people who live in the southern foothills of the Himalayas, speak Pahari and other Indo-European languages, and practise Hinduism on the other. The language of the *rang* is different from the languages of both the *pang* and

(1953, 1966), Raha and Das (1981), Singh (1994), and Hoon (1996). Brown (1984) also uses the term though he is highly critical of it. Many writers of Indian Byans preferred the word *śaukā* (Amtikar 1993, Garbyal 1987, Garbyal n.d., Raypa 1974).

[14] See also Manzardo *et al.* (1976: 111-12). Contrary to Brown's assertion (1984: i), *śaukā* is not an ethnonym in the mother tongue of people in Byans.

[15] The inhabitants of Chaudans and several villages in Darma do not migrate seasonally.

the *wolan*, and many cultural differences exist both between the *rang* and the *pang*, and between the *rang* and the *wolan*, ranging from traditional costume to food restrictions, many of which can be easily observed. In other words, if we presuppose the existence of a group of people which coincides with the category *rang*, and if we view the situation from the perspective of its members, we can conclude that the *rang* have had contact with two kinds of different peoples, who are physically, linguistically, and culturally different from each other, and are called *pang* and *wolan* respectively. It is wrong, however, to think that the *rang* as an objective ethnic group moved north and south for years to find two other objective entities. The discovery of the two kinds of distinctions and the formation of the three different ethnic categories are simultaneous processes and the creation of the identity *rang* is possible only through this process of differentiation.

I am not arguing that these 'objective' factors are always clear-cut. Indeed, it is difficult for me to judge to which of the three categories a person belongs (or more precisely, to which a person thinks that he or she belongs, and to which he or she is thought by others to belong) when I meet him or her for the first time. It is impossible to distinguish a *rang* from a *pang* by facial features; even distinction between a *rang* and a *wolan* is sometimes not possible. Nor can language be the decisive criterion, because almost all of the *pang* and many of the *wolan* I met in Byans spoke the language of the *rang* to some extent. Clothing, though it was a valid distinctive feature in the early 20th century, is of little use today because so many people wear jeans, saris, or down coats.[16] Moreover, the penetration of the state apparatus of Nepal has made the situation more complicated, as the following example indicates.[17]

While I walked around Darchula with the chairman of the Byans Village Development Committee, I came across a man who had Mongoloid features.

> Chairman: Guess whether he is a *rang*, a *pang*, or a *wolan*.
>
> Nawa [in Byansi]: Umm... He looks like a *rang*, but...
>
> A Man: Hey! What are you talking about?
>
> Chairman [in Nepali] : I asked him whether you look like a person of our group (*hāmro jāt*).
>
> Nawa: Is he a *rang*, then?
>
> Chairman [in Byansi]: He is a *wolan*, a Rai. He came to Darchula as a policeman.

In this way, the people themselves are able to use these categories freely because they

[16] Tibetan women are exceptions. Many of them wear Tibetan dress, which, as far as I know, no *rang* or *wolan* women wear. On clothes in Byans in the early 20th century, see Sherring (1993: 65-66).

[17] Also see 3.1.1. and 3.2. below.

already actually know who is a *rang*, a *pang*, or a *wolan* through everyday face-to-face interactions. On the other hand, many inhabitants of Byans explain the word *rang* not only in terms of a distinction from *pang* and *wolan*, but also by talking about the connotation of the term itself. The most general and standard explanation is that 'the *rang* are the people who live in three regions: Byans, Chaudans, and Darma.' Secondary criteria, such as cultural similarity and the range of intermarriage, are also frequently added. As far as I know, no *rang* would deny this explanation, and many of them mention it as if it were the formal definition.

Does this explanation based on place of residence really define the membership of the *rang* sufficiently? Detailed ethnographic observation suggests not. Firstly, it is untrue that the *rang* live only in these three areas. Rapla and Sitola, two of the four villages in Nepal where the vast majority of inhabitants are *rang*, are outside these three areas. Moreover, the *rang* are not the only inhabitants of these three areas. People called *ḍam* in Byansi, who live in every *rang* village mainly as blacksmiths and drum players, and who belong to low Hindu castes, are considered by *rang* to be *wolan*. In addition, many Tibetans (*pang*) have settled in *rang* villages. Some of them have lived there for several generations, since before 1959 when many Tibetan refugees came to Byans. Generally they are still considered to be *pang*, irrespective of the length of their stay. On the other hand, there are some *rang* who consider themselves, and are considered by other *rang*, to be descendants of immigrants from Tibet. Therefore, we can not take the above explanation at face value. There is a tacit presupposition of *rang* membership that exists prior to and over and above the place of residence.

How, then, is this presupposition made? In order to examine this, let me shift our focus to everyday interactions within the villages. If a villager encounters a person who looks like a *rang* but whom he or she does not know, he or she asks villagers nearby, 'Who is that person?' In most cases the answer will be something like, 'He is the eldest son of one of Suresh's maternal uncles.' If no one knows who he/she is, one of them will ask the stranger directly 'Whose son/daughter are you?' Through this process, a stranger, if he or she is a *rang*, is placed within the network of kinship relations.

Each adult who thinks him/herself and is thought by others to be a *rang* and lives in a *rang* village knows almost all the *rang* of his or her own village through kinship networks. Hence, the boundary between *rang* and non-*rang* is conceptualized very clearly within a village. Moreover, the *rang* are strongly convinced that the same kind of boundary exists in other villages, and it is the concrete relations of kinship and marriage that guarantee their conviction. The three regions which they consider to be the homeland of the *rang* coincide approximately with areas within which their network of kinship and marriage can be traced. This does not mean, however, that networks of kinship and marriage constitute the *rang* as an ethnic group. For instance, there are some *rang* villages with which the *rang* of Changru prohibit direct affinal relations. Moreover, it is not the case that a *pang* or a *wolan* is immediately and automatically treated as a *rang* after he or she is married to a *rang*. In most cases, a *rang* marries a person who has already been defined as a *rang* through the network of kinship relations, and as a result the network is maintained and the quasi-objectivity of the *rang* is strengthened.

The discussion above makes it clear that *rang* is taken for granted as a self-evident category by those who call themselves *rang*. To put it another way, *rang* is an imagined community (Anderson 1991) in the sense that all those who think of themselves as *rang* do not doubt the existence of a clear boundary between members and non-members, though none of them knows all the members. Membership in this imagined community is most often explained by the traditional areas of residence, and the network of kinship and marriage is widely used in order to identify a person as a member. However, it would be wrong to think that places of residence or kinship ties in themselves constitute the *rang* as an ethnic group. In this sense, *rang* as a category is not a direct outcome of any objective reality. Rather, the essence of the category *rang* lies in a tautological categorical proposition: 'We (as the *rang*) are the *rang*.' Residential patterns and kinship networks give this proposition some apparent foundation and substance. *pang* and *wolan*, on the other hand, are two names for non-members given to them by those who consider themselves to be *rang*. But actually the category *rang* comes into existence simultaneously with the formulation of the two categories *pang* and *wolan*.[18]

2.3 Coping with names given by others

We have dealt with the ethnonyms used by the main residents of Byans in their own mother tongue. The next step is to examine how they consider the ethnic categories in other languages, i.e. *byānsī, śaukā,* and *bhoṭiyā*. This task is indispensable, since they live in a multilingual condition and use these categories frequently, with the name *rang* being used only in their mother tongue.[19]

Firstly, *śaukā*, an ethnonym employed by *wolan*, is most often used by *rang* as an ethnonym for themselves when they speak in Pahari, Nepali, or Hindi. Many *rang* told me that they prefer this word because there is no pejorative connotation to it. Many *rang* explain the relation between *rang* and *śaukā* thus: 'We call the *śaukā "rang"* in the language of the *rang*, and we call the *rang "śaukā"* in the language of the *wolan*.' *Śaukā,* the name used by others to refer to them in the daily course of inter-ethnic relations in winter, has changed into their own ethnonym in their daily multilingual life.

Secondly, the word *byānsī* is less often used by *rang* themselves.[20] This is probably because it is not a suitable word to connote the *rang* in general, because Byans, the place

[18] In what follows, I use these categories as givens. It is not that these categories perfectly coincide with the objective reality. I do this rather because the discussion is mainly based on the discourse of the people of Byans, and it is inconvenient to add 'according to them...' or 'for those who think of themselves as...' each time.

[19] The following discussion is based mainly on information given by the *rang* who live in Nepal. Therefore I cannot say for certain to what extent my argument is valid for Indian *rang*, who live under different political and administrative conditions.

[20] Manzardo, Dahal, and Rai (1976: 111) also prefer the name *śaukā* to *byānsī*.

where *byānsīs* live, is only one of the three regions where *rang* traditionally live. Logically, then, it follows that Chaudansis and Darmiyas, the inhabitants of Chaudans and Darma respectively, are *rang* but not *byānsī*. This is not to say that the category *byānsī* is of no use for *rang*. Indeed, many *rang* stressed to me that Byans, Chaudans, and Darma are not only geographically separate, but have their own distinctive dialects, traditions, and customs. Being aware of some 'objective' reality in the term *byānsī*, however, they treat them as sub-categories of *rang*. In addition, some *rang* in Nepal do refer to themselves positively as *byānsīs*. This is partly because they know that the name reminds many Hindus of Vyasa Rishi, the legendary writer of the *Mahābhārata*.[21] Interestingly, they use the name *byānsī* almost exclusively when they talk with non-*rang* from the south. So it seems reasonable to suppose that they choose the word *byānsī* on the assumption that the listeners share a knowledge of Hindu mythology.[22]

Lastly, as far as I know, the term *bhoṭiyā* is never used self-referentially in daily conversation.[23] The *rang* do not think that they are *bhoṭiyā*, which is a synonym of *pang* for them. In addition, many *rang* regard the term as highly pejorative, and are offended when addressed as *bhoṭiyā*. Many *wolan*, however, often regard the *rang* as a sort of *bhoṭiyā*, because it is almost impossible to distinguish a *rang* from a Tibetan according to physical traits, and because the customs and tradition of the *rang* are quite different from those of caste Hindus. The crucial fact is that, through this naming, many high-caste Hindus treat the *rang* as their inferiors.

2.4 Recapitulation

The discussion above shows that the category *rang* is privileged as the ethnic category of the people of Byans, in spite of differences in the articulation of their ethnic and social categories at many levels. On the one hand, many linguistic and cultural differences can be observed within the *rang*, at regional, village, and clan levels.[24] Moreover, the *rang* themselves are aware of, and often talk about, these differences. On the other hand, people

[21] See the second quotation in the introduction. Indeed, Vyasa Rishi (or 'Byans Rishi' in local pronunciation) is one of the most important gods in Byans, and according to them his abode is on top of the mountain to the north of Changru. In addition, they have a legend in which Bhima visited Vyasa Rishi, who lived in Byans (Nawa 1998c: 95-111).

[22] In addition, the name *byānsī* may have been widely used in mid-western and far-western Nepal. Fürer-Haimendorf (1988: 284) and Levine (1987) report that there were people who called themselves *byānsī* in Humla. Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka (personal communication) told me that there was a shop managed by a *'byānsī'* family in Chainpur, Bajhang.

[23] As I have pointed out elsewhere (Nawa 1998b: 69-70), many Indian *rang* were not content with being termed *bhoṭiyā* by their government.

[24] It has been reported that three dialects or languages of the *rang* exist, i.e. those of Byans, Chaudans, and Darma (Grierson 1967 [1909], Sharma 1989, Trivedi 1991). Actually, Byansi is composed of two slightly different dialects: Yerjungkhu and Pangjungkhu. Moreover, the dialects of two villages in Byans, Tinkar and Kuti, are considerably different from Byansi or any other dialects of *rang* and I was told that most *rang* from other villages do not understand them. Indeed, the majority of basic kinship terms are completely different in Byansi and Tinkari.

resembling *rang* live in some other Himalayan valleys in U.P. (Johar, Niti, and Mana).[25] In spite of this complex situation, they almost always call themselves *rang* in their mother tongue. This term, which constitutes a triad together with two other terms for non-members, *pang* and *wolan*, is the most important category for their self-identification. They use many ethnic terms in other languages according to context in relation to this category.

A question may arise: why is the triad of *rang, pang*, and *wolan* privileged among the various levels of differentiation? This question, however, is impossible to answer without giving some historical and other background explanation, because a recognition of ethnic differences in itself relies entirely on ethnic categories through which those differences are articulated. It is this condition that I have described in the expression 'tautological categorical proposition'.

3. The changing connotations of ethnonyms

So far we have seen that *rang, pang*, and *wolan* are the most important ethnic categories for those who call themselves *rang* in their own mother tongue. This is not, however, the whole story, because the usage of the word *rang* discussed above is, though common and probably the most authentic, not the only one in Byans. In this section I deal with two ways in which the imagined boundary of *rang* is redefined, that is to say, ways in which the triad of *rang, pang*, and *wolan* is re-explained by using the concepts of race and religion, and the category *rang* is juxtaposed with other ethnic groups within a nation-state.

3.1 'Race' and 'religion'

'The *rang* are not Aryan but Mongolian.' 'The *rang* are not Buddhists but Hindus.' In Darchula and Byans I often heard this kind of remark, which is based on two concepts of Western origin: race and religion. Interestingly, these two dichotomies virtually coincide with the *rang/wolan* and *rang/pang* distinctions respectively. In the following, I examine the way in which the connotations of the ethnic categories analysed above have been altered by an overlap with these two relatively new dichotomies.

3.1.1 Aryan/Mongolian

The first dichotomy, 'Aryan' versus 'Mongolian', is based on the quasi-scientific concept of 'race'. These English words are used usually, but not exclusively, by young and/or highly educated *rang* in conversations in English, Hindi, Nepali, and Byansi. The following statements give some idea of what they argue through recourse to these categories. The first statement was made to me during the early stages of my fieldwork by a young *rang* entrepreneur who was a university graduate. Watching a Wimbledon tennis match on television in his house in Darchula, he suddenly asked me, switching from Nepali to English:

[25] Zoller (1983: xxvii) reports that the inhabitants of Mana call themselves *raṅ po*.

> Do you think Mongolians are dominated by Aryans all over the world? I ask you this because you are an anthropologist. Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, all the great religions were made by Aryans.
>
> In tennis, too, there is no Mongolian in Wimbledon [this sentence in Nepali, all others in English]. Yes, only one! Michael Chang, an American Mongolian... In our country, 70% Mongolians are dominated by 30% Aryans. There has been no Mongolian Prime Minister. In Darchula, all the important officers are Aryan. Our country borders India, and has been influenced by it.

A few days later, I attended a *rang* marriage ceremony in Darchula. Many *rang* there taught many things to the 'Japanese who came here to study the Byansi culture'. One of them told me in Nepali:

> Don't you want to know our old culture? In my opinion, there was a single Mongolian culture in ancient times. Language was also the same, I guess. Even now, each Mongolian has the same face. Rang, Tibetans, Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, Bhutanese. Now their cultures differ because Mongolians have been influenced by Buddhism and Hinduism. You can compare us with other peoples who have been less influenced by these religions. Our culture has been changed by Hinduism, but you can find many things about the past through comparison.

Three points should be noted. Firstly, *rang* classify themselves as 'Mongolians' in the cases above, as well as in all the other cases I know. Secondly, many *rang* criticize the dominance of high-caste Hindus in India and Nepal using the Mongolian/Aryan dichotomy. Thirdly, they think these words are scientific. Not only do they know that a remark can be mystified by using English words; some *rang* regard those words as technical terms in anthropology. In their everyday life, this 'Mongolian'/'Aryan' dichotomy coincides roughly with the distinction between *rang* and *wolan*. It is true that many *rang* classify Mongolian people who are not *rang* or *pang* as *wolan*, as has been suggested earlier. These Mongoloid *wolan* are exceptions, however.[26] In almost all cases, the word *wolan* indicates not these Mongolians but South Asian people whom many inhabitants of Byans classify as 'Aryans'.

The use of these general categories brings new meanings to the triad of *rang, pang,* and *wolan*, because the 'Aryans' include not only those *wolan* whom many *rang* meet in their ordinary life but also the Caucasoid people of Europe and America, while the 'Mongolians' include not only *rang* and *pang* but also Japanese, Chinese, and Koreans. This is significant not only because it enables a direct link between the political situation of Nepal and Wimbledon, or an imagination of the Ur-Mongolian culture. What is important is that the

[26] Indeed, those Mongoloid people who are neither *rang* nor *pang* are anomalies in the *rang-pang-wolan* triad. I assume they are classified as *wolan* for lack of alternatives, as they are obviously not Tibetans. For another system of categorization, see 3.2.

categories provide *rang* with the means to criticize *wolan*, especially high-caste Hindus, 'scientifically'. They enable them to argue against the hierarchical assertions of the Hindus by saying, for example, 'Japanese and Koreans are also Mongolians.'

The discussion above may remind some readers of the Aryan-versus-Dravidian dichotomy in South India. However, the category of 'Mongolian' in Byans has not become a conceptual basis for any concrete resistance movement. Rather, it functions as a device for challenging value judgements made according to facial features, while accepting the existence of the distinction itself. In other words, the statement that they are all 'Mongolians', while it brings about an imagined solidarity with people living far away, has not functioned much beyond an explanation of their own physical and cultural traits—traits that differ from those of their southern neighbours, but which can be pointed out without negative connotations.[27] Besides, the difference between the *rang* and the *pang*, their most familiar Mongolian neighbours, is frequently stressed using the criterion of religion, as is shown below.

3.1.2 'Religion': Hinduism/Buddhism

While talking with villagers in Byans, I was often asked, 'What is your religion?' or 'Which religion do the Japanese believe in?' These questions presuppose that everyone, and every nation or ethnic group, has his, her, or its own religion. *Dharma,* the term I translate here as 'religion', is a loan word from their southern neighbours, and as far as I know there is no equivalent Byansi word used in daily conversation.[28] It is highly probable that the category 'religion' and the premise that all the people in the world believe in some religion or other, were foreign to the conceptualizations of the *rang* in the past, but are shared by many of them today.

When asked about their religion, the *rang* answer immediately that they are Hindus.[29] What, then, does being Hindu mean to them? This is expressed in the following discussion (in Byansi) of the differences between Tibetan and Japanese Buddhism, with a junior high school teacher from Changru:

> Teacher: Every religion is like that. We are Hindus, but our Hinduism is quite different from that of the *wolan*. They don't put up *darchō*, and don't use *dalang* in rituals.[30] There are many ways of doing ritual within a reli-

[27] I have not heard that Nepalese *rang* have participated in the *janajāti* movement collectively.

[28] As is well known, *dharma*, a word derived from Sanskrit, has much broader connotations than 'religion'. In modern Hindi and Nepali, as well as Byansi, however, it is broadly used as the direct translation of the English word 'religion'. It is to this latter usage that I refer in this section.

[29] The answer of the inhabitants of Tinkar, a village in Nepalese Byans, can be slightly different. As one villager told me, "We worship Hindu deities, but also go to Buddhist *gompa*s, because we have two founding ancestors, one of whom came from Tibet while the other cam from Hindu Jumla." However, I know of no Tinkaris who deny their Hindu belief.

[30] A *darchō* is a prayer-pole, usually with a white flag. Unlike in Tibetan *dar-lcog*, Tibetan Bud-

gion.

Nawa: But isn't *darchō* a custom of the *pang*?

Teacher: In a movie I watched, people of Afghanistan put up *darchō*. They are Musalman, but they put up *darchō*. As we live in a cold area near Tibet, some of our customs have been influenced by Tibet.

The dialogue above shows one typical way in which the *rang* assert that they are Hindus. Many of them, especially those who have received middle- or high-level education, begin by insisting strongly that they are Hindus, and then explain the differences between the *wolan* and themselves in terms of cultural contact and diffusion. Here, the difference from the *pang*, their Buddhist neighbours to the north, is emphasized as intrinsic, whereas the difference from the *wolan*, while recognized, is treated as secondary and within Hinduism.

Where, then, do the *rang* place themselves within the Hindu caste hierarchy? The people of Nepalese Byans most commonly claim themselves to be Matwālī Chetrīs.[31] On the other hand, many Indian *rang*, especially in Chaudans, insist that they are the descendants of Rājpūts. What is more important, however, is that many of them answer questions regarding their caste without hesitation. It is clear that they are accustomed to explaining their *jāt* (or in Hindi, *jāti*) affiliation not in terms of a distinct entity, but within the Hindu caste hierarchy in the Himalayan foothills.

3.1.3 Rang as Mongolian Hindus

So far, we have seen that many *rang* identify themselves as both Mongolian and Hindu. The latter assertion, however, is not always accepted by their southern neighbours, since many *wolan* still regard *rang* as *bhoṭiyās*. In spite of the *rang*s' insistence that they are Hindus, a considerable proportion of the neighbouring *wolan* have the wrong image of them as Buddhists who eat beef. *Rang* argue against these stereotypes on the grounds that they are not Tibetans but Hindus, and that they do not eat beef or yak meat. For example, see the following remarks (in Nepali) by a young *rang* entrepreneur:

Many years ago, several Nepalese anthropologists came to us for research. Not coming to Byans, however, they stayed one day in Darchula, took many photographs, asked a few questions of several persons, and went back. Later they sent us a paper,[32] and so we were pleased at first. But, as they wrote that we ate beef, we got angry and threw it away. We never eat beef.

dhist scriptures are not printed, except in Tinkar. *dalang* is a pair of cone-figured offerings made of small-grain wheat or bitter buckwheat dough. Both are indispensable items for most rituals in Byans (Sherring 1993: 90-93, Raypa 1974: 119-22, Nawa 1998c).

[31] Manzardo and others (1976: 83) record that, when asked, they answer that they are Bohara Chetrī (Matwalī Chetrī).

[32] This is the paper written by Manzardo, Dahal, and Rai (1976). I would like to add immediately

As far as I know, there is no *rang* who eats beef, yak meat, or buffalo meat, at least in Byans and Darchula. Moreover, soon after I arrived in Byans for the first time, a young highly educated *rang* trader warned me, "When you are asked whether Japanese eat beef, you had better reply that they don't. Many older people don't know the outside world. They don't know even that Americans eat beef. If they come to know that you eat beef, they will regard you with displeasure." Indeed, older villagers tend to show a strong feeling of aversion to the rumour that so-and-so ate yak or water buffalo meat in Kathmandu or elsewhere. It should be noted, however, that the Hindu food taboo is not the only one of which they are aware. On the contrary, they often talk about food taboos of other peoples, pointing out, 'It is said that the Chinese eat dogs', 'The Musalmans do not eat pork', and so on. Indeed, an old man in Changru who had visited America to meet his son there was asked every day by other villagers, "Which meat is eaten in America?" and he always answered "In my son's house, they eat chicken." They know that their food taboo is only one of many different food taboos all over the world.[33] Despite this, they not only observe but also strongly assert their food taboo which they, as well as other South Asians, think of as typically Hindu.

So far, I have stressed that, to the best of my knowledge, the *rang* have not eaten beef or yak meat for many years.[34] This fact constitutes the main reason for their strong rejection of their categorization as *bhoṭiyā*. However, acknowledging the fact that *rang* do not eat beef or yak meat does not necessarily mean that they are recognized as Hindus. I took a rest in a teashop on my first journey to Darchula. Hearing that I was going to Darchula to study the 'Byansis', two men, both of whom were Parbate Hindus, told me in Nepali:

A: The Byansis offer *raksī* to their gods. They are Buddhists.

B: No. They are not Buddhists. Theirs is not any [well-known] religion.

that this remark contains a considerable amount of exaggeration. First of all they do not write that the Byānsī eat beef but that they eat yak meat, though the latter assertion is still problematic. Moreover, it should be noted that they wrote the article as a preliminary research note (it was a by-product of a research project on the migration process in far-western Nepal) and they admit to its tentative nature.

[33] They often use the expression, 'Each people has its own tradition' (*api api thumchālū licchō*).

[34] Many Tibetan refugees in Byans also told me that *rang*, unlike them, and unlike me too (sometimes they pointed this out to me with a wink), do not eat yak meat. Sherring (1907: 102) also pointed out that no 'Bhotia' in the United Provinces ate beef. But see also Atkinson (1996: 111), who asserted the opposite.

They cannot be said to be Hindus or Buddhists. They have their own religion.

This shows that the assertion that the religion of the *rang* is not Hinduism is not necessarily attributable to the ignorance of *wolan*; it has some observable grounds, one of which is the cultural difference between the *rang* and the *wolan*. Indeed, their oft-repeated criticism of the *wolan*, 'How can those who don't speak the *rang* language know what we are doing in our ritual?' ironically shows that it is actually very difficult for *wolan* Hindus to understand their rituals. The difficulty for the *rang* lies, in the end, in their attempt to make themselves recognized as Hindus of high ritual status, without directly imitating or absorbing 'orthodox' Hinduism from the south.

In addition, the assertion that *rang* are of 'Mongolian' stock causes a problem. As noted above, it can function as a counter to the *wolan* claim that they are *bhoṭiyās*. The application of such 'racial' concepts, however, results in a fixation and objectification of the boundary between *rang* and *wolan*. Despite this, *rang* claim that they are Hindus, and have in fact adapted some of their myths and rituals accordingly.[35] The contradiction between their racial and religious affiliations can be solved logically by treating the two dichotomies as belonging to two completely different spheres. In reality, however, it has been exceedingly difficult, though not impossible, for the *rang* to make the *wolan* recognize that they are Mongolian Hindus, as many *wolan* regard the spheres as interrelated.

Finally, I would like to point out that, in the re-explanation of the *rang-pang-wolan* triad by the two dichotomies of religion and race, concepts like 'Hindu' and 'Mongolian' are, for many *rang*, givens that are already defined quasi-scientifically in the outside world. In other words, in order to use the terms adequately, they have to learn their proper usage from some outside authority. Consequently, these concepts, while they articulate and make their claims comprehensible to others, have the possibility of destroying the self-evident nature of these ethnic terms, because the boundary may be felt and understood not directly but through those foreign concepts. It is not accidental that these concepts are mainly used by highly educated *rang*. Their adoption drives many *rang* into a situation in which they have to deal with their complicated inter-ethnic or inter-caste relations through recourse to these concepts of foreign origin.

3.2 The rang *as an ethnic group within a state*

So far, I have indicated that the *rang-pang-wolan* triad has been redefined with some modification by two sets of 'Western' concepts. Let us turn finally to a different usage of the category *rang*, keeping in mind that the following discussion is applicable only to the *rang* in Nepal. A different project will be required to discuss the situation in India.

[35] This topic has been discussed by several scholars (Srivastava 1953, 1966, Manzardo *et al.* 1976, Raha and Das 1981, and Nawa 1998c: 207-313).

When I went to Darchula and met many *rang* for the first time, I explained the object of my stay by quoting the words of Prof. Bista mentioned above. A few weeks later, I found that a slightly different story was going around among the villagers: 'A professor of Tribhuvan University pointed out to him that researches on Sherpas, Thakalis, Gurungs, Magars, Rais, Limbus, and almost all the *jāt*s in Nepal had been carried out, and that only the research on *rang* was incomplete. So he came to us to learn about our tradition.' This shows clearly that the category *rang* is not always used in opposition to *pang* and *wolan*. Some readers may see it as contradictory that several levels of categories are opposed to the single category *rang*. Interestingly, however, the boundary of the *rang* is almost identical in every case despite the differentiation within the non-*rang*. Moreover, the outward inconsistency is easily overcome in their everyday life by changing the categories which lie on the same level with the *rang* according to the context. Indeed, the uncertainty or oscillation of levels of ethnic categories is by no means new in Byans, as several categories exist which do not fit well into the *rang-pang-wolan* triad, such as Gyami (Chinese) and Chenpa (the inhabitants of Johar).[36] What is new is that shifts in level occur in relation to the nation-state of Nepal.

The point I wish to stress is that here the category *rang* appears not in opposition to *pang* and *wolan*, but as a *jāt* which is a part of the multi-ethnic (*bahujātīya*) state of Nepal. Consequently, the *rang*, or the *byānsī* as they sometimes call themselves in this kind of context, are placed alongside other *jāt*s ('castes' and 'ethnic groups') in Nepal, as a relatively unknown section of the nation. Moreover, the culture and tradition of each *jāt* is imagined as a distinct entity which can be researched and written about by scholars, as the cases mentioned in the introduction clearly show. Needless to say, this usage is not the typical or dominant one in Byans, as many *rang* use the word every day in the sense discussed in the second part of this paper. However, it is noteworthy that the word *rang*, while its imagined boundary does not change much, regardless of context, has a wide range of implications, connected on the one hand to their everyday taken-for-granted habitus within their villages, while associated with the discourse on Nepal as a nation-state on the other.

4. Conclusion

In this paper I have concentrated on analysing several ethnonyms which are current in Byans. This should be done before any ethnographic study on the *rang* because it is highly problematic to write any ethnographic account without clarifying who it is that one is writing about. I end this paper by recapitulating the ethnographic account given above in more abstract terms.

First, the investigation of *rang*, an ethnonym used in Byans and some adjacent regions, confirms the validity of an analysis of ethnic identity through ethnonyms. The main inhabitants of Byans identify themselves as *rang* in their mother tongue, to distinguish them-

[36] *Gyami* is originally a loan word from Tibetan. Regarding *Chenpa*s, many *rang* told me that they were like *rang*, but they have changed their tradition and become *wolan*.

selves from their northern and southern neighbours. The adoption of the name *rang* is accompanied by several processes by which those who consider themselves to be *rang* quasi-objectify themselves as a group of people. Much apparently observable evidence supports the existence of this group, and some of it is often mentioned by *rang* as their distinctive features. However, there is always some inconsistency between their discourse and observable reality, and this indicates that it is not the existence of any objective traits, but the name *rang* which is crucial in their ethnic identification.[37] In other words, the ultimate ground of the membership of the *rang* is no more than the proposition which is seldom mentioned in itself, that they (as *rang*) are the *rang*.

I have also analysed many ethnic terms which denote the inhabitants of Byans, with particular attention to the multilingual situation. The word *rang* is used only among those who understand their language, and three ethnonyms, *byānsī, bhoṭiyā*, and *śaukā,* are employed by their southern neighbours to refer to them. It is important to note that the *rang* themselves also use these names selectively, according to the situation they face, the language they speak, and personal preference.

A similar situation was analysed by Moerman in his pioneering article on the usages of various ethnic terms in Ban Ping, Thailand (1965). He, however, turned his attention to the reconstruction of a static folk-taxonomy of ethno-ethnology, which cannot deal with the complicated reality in which, for instance, many *rang* say to Nepalese officers in Nepali, "In our language, *byānsī* is called *rang*", despite the different connotations of each ethnic term. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that ethnic terms at many levels and in many languages compose a single consistent system of ethno-ethnology.

Furthermore, these ethnic terms are in most cases accompanied by many more-or-less fixed stereotyping remarks and expressions, such as '*rang* live in Byans, Chaudans, and Darma', and '*bhotiyā*s are Buddhists who eat beef'. Here we cannot assume that there are no contradictions and inconsistencies between the imagined membership of an ethnic group and these remarks. In other words, ethnonyms are always over-determined. Despite these inconsistencies, however, the existence of a particular ethnic group is not doubted in most cases, because the existence of each and every individual is preceded by those ethnic categories and expressions.

In multilingual conditions, in particular, each individual may have a different set of stereotyping remarks on ethnic categories. Recognizing this, the people of Byans sometimes utilize several foreign ethnonyms and other concepts like 'race' and 'religion' to refer to themselves not as *bhoṭiyā*s but as Hindu Mongolians.[38] Here the over-determined nature

[37] Barth (1969) emphasized similar points by discussing ethnic boundaries rather than ethnonyms.

[38] Here the opposition between primordialist and instrumentalist conceptions of ethnicity is false, because every possibility of utilization of ethnicity lies in the 'primordial' sentiment of the people, which is presupposed by those who try to utilize it, and which is developed through the everyday use of ethnonyms (Nawa 1992). It may be worth pointing out that even Manzardo, in his highly instrumentalist discussion of the impression management and 'cultural chameleonism' of the Thakalis

of ethnic categories is exploited by them for their own purposes. And their efforts have been partly successful, as many *wolan* have come to know that the inhabitants of Byans are not Buddhists.

It would be untrue, however, to insist that *rang* freely manipulate these ethnic categories and stereotyping remarks. First, each *rang* is anteceded by these categories and remarks. Second, it cannot be assumed that he or she can always select them according to rational calculation. Third, when he or she uses foreign ethnonyms in discussions with *pang* or *wolan*, his or her accounts are judged by the people who know these terms and remarks much better than him/herself. In general, all remarks concerning ethnos are restricted by pre-existing categories and stereotypes, and their success depends on the consent of the listeners. And if a new remark is accepted, it may be recalled in the future and become a part of the corpus of pre-existing remarks. To narrate one's ethnic identity is, therefore, an awkward and circumscribed enterprise.

As I have suggested above, the relationship between the people under study and the anthropologists comprises a part of this enterprise. To put it in another way, all the processes discussed above are a precondition of writing ethnography for both anthropologists and the people represented by them. Not only can academic articles cause certain effects in the field, but also the authority of anthropologists is presupposed and calculated by many *rang*. Those *rang* who discussed the suitable title of my would-be ethnography, and who criticized ethnographic accounts by some anthropologists, clearly recognized the importance of their representation by anthropologists. In other words, for many *rang*, their relationship with an ethnographer is also a part of the serious and difficult practice of talking about and representing their own imagined ethnic group.

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(1978, 1982), simultaneously presupposes a series of 'rituals of identity'. The crucial difficulty of his argument lies, however, in that he does not demonstrate at all that the rituals he observed are really 'rituals of identity' for all the Thakalis. In other words, he is obsessed by the concept of the 'real' Thakalis "behind many masks".

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