

**OXFORD RESEARCH IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

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**ABSTRACTS OF THESES  
IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY  
FOR WHICH HIGHER DEGREES WERE AWARDED  
BY THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD IN 1997**

MONISHA AHMED, 'We are Warp and Weft': Nomadic Pastoralism and the Tradition of Weaving in Rupshu (Eastern Ladakh). D.Phil.

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 has 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.

*Editors' note:* The research theses in social and cultural anthropology listed here are those for which higher degrees were awarded by the University of Oxford in 1997. The text of each abstract is as supplied by the author in the copy of the thesis held in the Bodleian Library of the University. Those wishing to consult a particular thesis should apply to the Bodleian or to the British Library Lending Division (BLLD), which should be able to supply microfilm copies or reprints on request. BLLD references numbers have been provided where available. 'Restricted' theses are not available for consultation until the date specified.

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 re-settlement schemes, and a shortage of pasture and overgrazing. 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.

NAOMI C. BROWN, *The nisetai jutaku* Phenomenon: The Prefabricated Housing Industry and Changing Pattern in Contemporary Japan. D.Phil.

This thesis examines the changing family patterns in contemporary Japan in the light of a new housing phenomenon known as the *nisetai jutaku*. An analysis of the spread of the *nisetai jutaku*—prefabricated detached houses shared by a parent couple and an adult child's family—reveals the consequence this has had on changing the predominant kinship model of post-war Japan because the principles embodied in the *nisetai jutaku* separate the practice of succession and inheritance. This is achieved through introducing the concept that the inheritance (the land on which the *nisetai jutaku* is standing) is part of an exchange of land (to the younger generation) for services (to the older generation). Thus, a non-successor may be chosen; furthermore, increasing numbers are living with their daughter's family, which means that the inheritance passes to another descent group (the daughter's husband's).

The analysis of the *nisetai jutaku* phenomenon demonstrates that kinship structures are dynamic and can be changed by the members of the society (in this case the government and housing companies) through the conscious manipulation of the kinship model. However, the families themselves are shown to use it to express their changing concepts of the family structure and social order. The importance of the historical, political, economic, and social environment that provided the context from which the *nisetai jutaku* phenomenon emerged illustrates

the interrelated influences that the various aspects of society have on each other, but particularly on the kinship model, so that a change in one is soon demonstrated by a change in another. This type of analysis, which embodies the many concepts of the house in anthropology, has not been conducted on Japan before.

The analysis of the changing family patterns is based on ethnographic data collected between 1992 and 1994 from within the three main factors involved: the housing companies, the families, and the government, so that the creation, supply, and consumption of the new model was followed at every stage of the process. Thus, the thesis includes both sides of the consumption process in its analysis of the *nisetai jutaku* phenomenon.

GARETH L. BURR, *Eshawa! Vision, Voice and Mythic Narrative: An Ethnographic Presentation of Ese-eja Mythopoeia*. D.Phil. (BLLD 47–3221)

The introduction presents the fieldwork methodology.

Ch. 1 introduces the geographical history of the area, as well as the political and socioeconomic background.

Ch. 2 describes the social setting of Ese-eja communities, with a brief introduction to the kinship, marriage, residence/household, and moiety relationships. It is argued that the Ese-eja are not 'assimilated' by national society but rather, the Ese-eja assimilate mestizo elements into their lives.

Ch. 3. The mythology and psychology of dying is argued to be constitutive of identity. Elements from psychoanalysis and phenomenology are argued to be important for the analysis of Ese-eja conceptions of humanness, thought, and perception.

Ch. 4 presents *Bewihaha* as a myth of origin about sibling-in-law conflict and implicitly communicates the primordial, intersubjective dynamics of libido, mortido-apetido. Mythic formation of *edosikiana*, and diverging realms of human and ultra-human are predicated on a predatorial reciprocity.

Ch. 5 presents the *edosikiana* (spirit people) as agents of affliction. The relationship between the shaman (*eyámikekwa*) and *edosikiana* is discussed in terms of the assimilation of death and the continuity of living-and-dying. The chapter examines *eshawa* correspondence and the realm of mythopoeia that constellates an intimate and efficacious configuration of person and cosmos, through life-and-death.

Ch. 6 presents the myth of *Dokwei*, the stag, and argues that the libido-mortido-apetido complex lies at the centre of sibling-in-law relations, male-female interactions of myth, and everyday life. The hidden/masked nature of *edosikiana* is contrasted with *be'o* vultures—always seen circling skies and surrounding a meat carcass. Between *edosikiana* and *be'o* vulture is the Ese-eja life-world

precipitated by a nexus of intersubjective kinship relations and an existential mythopoeia.

GRAHAM DWYER, *Supernatural Affliction and its Treatment: Aspects of Popular Religion in Rural and Urban Rajasthan*. D.Phil. (BLLD 47–553)

Based on twelve months' fieldwork in Rajasthan, this thesis focuses upon supernatural affliction—illness and misfortune ascribed to malevolent spirits and to other mystical agents or forces—and examines the rituals to which it is thought to be amenable as well as the practices of ritual specialists.

The introductory chapter outlines the main theoretical concerns of the thesis as well as its structure, its aims and objectives. Details of how the research was carried out and a note on languages and transcriptions are given here too. Chapter one provides historical and other relevant information on Mehndipur village and Ajmer city, the two research locations. A preliminary account of particular curing ceremonies and the role of priests and healers in connection with them is also given. In chapter two, affliction by capricious spirits, sorcerers, deities, and ancestor spirits is explored in terms of three major themes, namely causation, attribution, and vulnerability. Traditional ethnomedical practices are discussed, and most of the quantitative data crucial to arguments articulated in this and other parts of the thesis are presented, as are a number of different case-studies. The principal themes introduced in chapter two are developed further in chapter three, and the latter provides a number of case-studies as well. In chapter three, sorcery is analyzed in more depth, as are sorcery accusations, and it examines witchcraft and the evil eye, as well as the links between mystical forces believed to be directed by human agents. Chapter four focuses upon exorcism commonly performed both for banishing spirits and for treating those harmed by other supernaturals or mystical agents. Attention is given to emotional display, which is a central feature of exorcist rituals in Mehndipur and Ajmer and in other parts of India. The alleged experience of emotion and the therapeutic qualities that they are thought to have are also assessed. Chapter five provides a comparative examination of priests and healers, with its specific focus upon the power or authority that they possess. Moreover, the complementary relationship between these two types of religious specialist is analyzed. Finally, the thesis concludes with a synopsis of the major arguments developed in it and a resumé of its achievements.

CAMILLA C. T. GIBB, *In the City of Saints: Religion, Politics and Gender in Harar, Ethiopia*. D.Phil. (BLLD 46–12470)

In this thesis I am concerned with the identity of a particular community who refer to themselves as *Ge usu*, or ‘people of the city’, the original inhabitants of a walled Muslim city in the highlands of eastern Ethiopia.

I argue in this thesis that interethnic co-operation in Harar has been in evidence for centuries, necessitated by interaction through trade, shared religious faith, and common residence, and facilitated through cultural assimilation and common oppression. Marked cleavage within the *Ge usu* community has, however, arisen in response to the dramatic changes in the political structure of the country since 1991. While I illustrate the effect of this division in social, spatial, and temporal terms, in one domain, that of the saints around which religious life is structured, a level of continuity and cohesion persists within the group and between groups in Harar.

I argue that the inclusiveness which characterizes popular thinking about the saints and activities at their shrines absorbs political differences in much the same way as it has historically accommodated and admitted ethnic, economic, and gender differences. Local religious experience, largely shrine-based, thus goes some way toward neutralizing current political conflict while also indirectly challenging a politics which calls for the reconstruction of borders between groups resident in Harar.

The observations and analysis presented here are based on fieldwork conducted in the city between August 1994 and August 1995. In order to contextualize my own work I consider in Part I external definitions of the group by Western travellers and historians and existing ethnographic literature on the *Ge usu* and offer evidence to challenge a portrayal of the exclusivity and boundedness of the group. I then focus upon prevalent symbols in contemporary local reconstructions of historical events and the location of saints in such reconstructions.

In Part II I look at how primary spatial, temporal, and religious aspects through which life in the city is organized are structured around the saints and their shrines. These dimensions are not static, however, and I emphasize here ways in which they are experienced as processes and are responsive to changes in the political climate. In my final section, I look at how principles of *Ge’ada*, ‘the culture of the city’, are applied in the changing circumstances of individuals and the community.

M. D. JAKOBSEN, *Shamanism: Traditional and Contemporary Approaches to Mastery of Spirits and Healing*. D.Phil.

Initially, this thesis considers the various meanings of the term ‘shamanism’, relating it particularly to S. M. Shirogoroff’s view that it involves the mastery of

spirits, rather than Mircea Eliade's description of shamanism as techniques of ecstasy.

From this general treatment of definitions, the thesis falls into two main parts. First, the traditional practices of shamanism described by missionaries and other explorers, especially among the Eskimos of Greenland. This material, little known in the English-speaking world, is largely derived from Danish accounts. A major benefit of the examination of these Danish sources is that they deal with shamanism in a relatively pristine state, as there was little external influence on Greenlandic society before these accounts were produced in the eighteenth century and even as late as the twentieth. The purpose of this first part is to extract from these sources the material related to shamanism and to locate it within the general world picture of the Greenlanders.

In the second part, contained mainly in the final chapter and appendixes, shamanism in this traditional religious context is then contrasted with the resurgence of shamanism today. The fieldwork describes and analyses the mode of shamanic training at basic and several advanced courses with a number of interviews with participants and course organizers, conducted to ascertain the kind of expectations and desires people have of shamanism today. The emphasis is not on the mastery of spirits but on co-operation with them in both personal healing and the healing of society, whether by recognition of Nature through ecological awareness or of coming to terms with death and dying. Shamanism is, it is suggested, fast-growing and presents a sense of personal empowerment for individuals who feel alienated in the urban environment of today.

YURI NAKAGAWA, *Kinship Written, Kinship Practised: A Study of Kinship and the Writing of Genealogies in Contemporary Korea*. D.Phil.

The aim of this thesis is twofold. First, it aims to present the discrepancies between the ideal and the practice in Korean kinship and examines how people react to these discrepancies. Second, it attempts to identify the discrepancies between *chokpo* (written genealogies) and 'reality' and suggests a new perspective on the interrelationship between genealogy and people.

The uniqueness of the Korean kinship system lies in its adherence to the most rigid patriliney in its norms, which is reflected in every sphere of the system. The strong association between social status and kinship has motivated the Korean people to put these strict kinship norms into practice as much as possible. The tradition of keeping written genealogies has helped the people to maintain the patrilineal principles in practice.

Nevertheless, actual situations surrounding the Korean people do not necessarily allow them to follow the ideal norms. The recent trend towards industrialization and urbanization has become one of the strongest factors breaking down the

ideal Korean family and kinship patterns in rural areas. Under these difficult circumstances, people choose what should be maintained, what accommodations should be made, and what should be given up in their kin practice.

This thesis also identifies the discrepancies between written genealogies and 'reality'. Studies hitherto have only dealt with how people retrospectively manipulate genealogy so that it accords with the present reality. However, this thesis shows that written genealogy sometimes forces people to manipulate their kinship relations so as to produce a desirable record. Written genealogy thus functions not only as a historical record or as a charter to justify the present social relationships but also as a driving force to make people rebuild and reshuffle their kinship relationships, and change the direction of future kinship.

KATHRYN A. NORMAN, *Myongjun's Story: The Ideology of Korean Village Women in the Early Years of National Economic Growth*. D.Phil. (BLD 47-5841)

This thesis explores the ideology of rural Korean women in the 1960s, the first decade of Korea's phenomenal economic development. The thesis examines the paradox between the Confucian ethic, which defines women's role as passive, subordinate, and obedient, and the independent-minded resilience, strong determination, and influential mode in which women operated. It is based upon three phases of research: (1) 1967-8: eighteen-month ethnographic study of a Korean village; two-month research projects in four other villages, study of three neighbourhoods in Seoul; (2) 1978-9: two-month restudy of two villages; (3) 1995: two weeks of interviews with Myongjun, a village woman.

Part One delineates the social and scholastic setting of the study, describes the research and topic of the thesis.

Part Two opens with the life-story of Myongjun, a woman who considers herself to be 'ordinary'. Her natal village was a purely residential, subsistence farming village with multiple lineages, none dominant. A day in the life of the women in Myongjun's household shows the women to be reflecting individuals whose behaviour was not determined wholly by culture or social structure. They were capable of innovatively applying Confucian ideals to specific situations to achieve their own ends.

In the early years of national development the ideology of women was not altered: women's *strategy* to obtain and maintain their strong personal identity, sense of personhood, and security was modified as more options became available. My postulate is that women's *knowledgeability* affected dominance-dependence, enabling them to achieve influence and control while maintaining their formal status as subservient. The ideology of rural Korean women includes two levels: the principal frontstage, consciously expressed ideology based upon Confucian ethics; and the hidden, private, backstage, often unspoken ideology, allowing

women to manoeuvre, manipulate, and be effective, balancing the factors of social strength and dependence. Korean women's role in the social process is subtle and far greater than has been emphasized in ethnographic studies.

JOHN PALMER, *Wichí Goodwill: Ethnographic Allusions*. D.Phil.

This ethnography of the Wichí of northern Argentina centres on a pivotal feature of their social life, which is their theory and practice of goodwill. Goodwill is the social will of the Wichí people—in Durkheimian terms, their *âme sociale*. It is a spiritualized (though not deified) agency whose principal mode of transmission is the Wichí language, making it, like the language, an ancestral heritage. Its paradigmatic exponent is the headman, but it is equally the hallmark of personhood for all alike, since it is a faculty of the will (which is here synonymous with the 'soul', as the metaphysical principle of being). Through socialization, the will of the individual is tempered by this *âme sociale*, or social will, making his/her membership of the group possible and at the same time sustaining the group's existence. Goodwill is thus the medium through which the individual and society are integrated, and the integrity of their respective bodies preserved.

Wichí goodwill is a sociostructural principle, in the sense that it is most closely associated with the kinship system: having its maximum expression in the figure of the headman, it ideally radiates throughout the cognatic kindred of which he is the focus; and, to the extent that they are incorporated within this kinship structure as associated kin, affines too participate in the exchange of goodwill that unites and animates the collectivity. As such, Wichí goodwill might be construed as a Durkheimian sacred principle symbolizing the society, but this is to deny the transcendent reality in terms of which it is conceived—and lived—by the Wichí. Wichí goodwill is sacred precisely because it is not circumscribed by the interests of the descent group. Although, like language, it manifests itself above all in the collective ego ('us'), the moral attributes in which it is made apparent are only more or less approximately exemplified by that collective ego. Were it not accorded independent status—the status, in Wichí terms, of a spirit-being for which 'we' at best act as host bodies—then goodwill would be the handmaid of the profane entities that 'we' without it are. It would no longer be goodwill, but casuistry. As it is, it occupies a superior space—the spirit-world—where it symbolizes the Wichí's ultimate value.