

A Space That Has Been Labourled on: Mobile Lives and Transcultural Circulation around Darjeeling and the Eastern Himalayas

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Introduction

The paradox of Darjeeling is how well, and simultaneously, how narrowly its space, sights, products, and people are known. For global consumers, Darjeeling conjures a gourmand taste enshrined in elegant cafes and kitchens, a brand that evokes lush gardens for a colonial beverage that became the world's first GI-protected tea. This is a name whose glamour led to its appropriation by a Hollywood film as well as a French lingerie chain. For aficionados of imperial nostalgia, New Age seekers, travellers, and vacationers, Darjeeling evokes quaintly ethnic charm, an Edenic mountain backwater recently disordered by sub-nationalist violence linked to the Gorkhaland movement. Such popular perceptions have in common that they elide the complex transcultural dynamism that arose from the historical trajectories of circulation and contact that not only produced Darjeeling's imperial and global significance, but constituted it as a unique space of livelihood and labour, especially for mobile Himalayan groups. Following Mary L. Pratt's important insight, this article explores Darjeeling as a high-altitude contact zone constituted around the spatial and temporal co-presence of subjects previously separated by geographic and temporal disjuncture, whose historical trajectories of circulation intersected in and because of this mountain space.¹ At the Darjeeling hill station of British India, high altitudes and temperate climes promised to alleviate bodily ills and nurture modernity through the plantation, missionary, military, and mountaineering enterprises that had taken root. Given the diversity of indigenous, migrant, and colonial subjects who inhabited this space, asymmetrical and unequal experiences based on class, race, and gender difference became intrinsic to this promise. Such subjects included Lepcha cultivators, foragers, and guides, Bhutia load carriers and clan notables, Nepali labourers, cooks, nursemaids, soldiers, and translators, Sherpa porters and

1 Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 17–18.

climbers, English explorers and army officers, Scottish administrators, planters and missionaries—subjects who constituted Darjeeling as an interactive arena for circulation, a transcultural space that offered, to a greater or lesser degree, possibilities for historical agency.

British Indian Darjeeling arose as a hill station, the simulacrum of European temperate zones where white empire-builders recuperated from tropical summers. Later, it became a byword as the prized supplier of a desirable global beverage, tea. In analyzing its historical character as a transcultural contact zone, this article is inspired by the geographer Henri Lefebvre's directive to analyze space as a social product that incorporates the social actions of individuals around the process of production, within relations of production, and via forces of production.² Rather than a quaint Queen of the Hills, Darjeeling is to be known as a mutable transcultural "space that has been laboured on" by subjects whose mobile passages, livelihood strategies, asymmetrical relationships, and urban encounters made its and their histories.³ In exploring how Darjeeling transcended its character as a colonial settlement that displaced indigenous people in order to service European leisure and medical needs, and evolved into a mountain hub where transcultural commodities, practices, and ideas circulated, the article seeks out the hidden traces of labouring Himalayan groups whose subaltern livelihoods played a key role in its emergence as a destination for Euro-American leisure and adventure, as did their encounters with mobile and transnational elites and institutions.

A space at the top of the world

In 1835, a remote Himalayan hamlet's potential to become a health-giving sanatorium resort impelled a takeover by the English East India Company. David Arnold discusses how respected British medical practitioners such as James Johnstone and William Twining popularized a belief that extended exposure to excessive heat and humidity caused physical degeneration of the white race.⁴ Stints of temperate recuperation were deemed essential if Europeans were to thrive while labouring in hot climates. This strong environmentalist paradigm, which continued for a century or more, established as imperial dogma that periodic recuperation could best be enjoyed in newly established mountain

2 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1991), 26–46.

3 *Ibid.*, 45.

4 David Arnold, *The Tropics and the Travelling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science 1800–1856* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 140–142.

towns with attached sanatoriums, dubbed hill stations. Medical advocacy of periodic recuperation in temperate environments provided the impetus for the establishment of high-altitude towns that were set up across Dutch, Spanish, British, French, and American colonial empires.⁵

During the 1830s, British administrators enjoyed a choice of temperate hill stations, but all lay at a considerable distance from the capital, Calcutta, and the Bengal Presidency. A closer alternative seemed possible when Lieutenant-Colonel Lloyd visited a Sikkim mountain hamlet called Dorjéling (*Rdo rje gling*) on his return from negotiations about Himalayan frontiers.⁶ Lloyd's mission originated from the East India Company's obligations after the 1817 Treaty of Titalya, when it bestowed on Sikkim hill tracts recently annexed from Nepal.⁷ Deputy Surveyor-General Captain J. D. Herbert was asked to determine Dorjéling's suitability as a sanatorium site for Bengal. He found the hamlet, the former headquarters of a *kazi* (chief) virtually deserted, partly due to clashes between Nepali and Sikkimese forces, partly due to internecine conflict within Sikkim. It was topped by the ruins of a Buddhist monastery (on what the British came to call Observatory Hill), founded by a Sikkim aristocrat, Lama Rinzing Dorji Laden La as a branch of the Pemayangtse monastery. A Nepali raid had destroyed the Dorjéling monastery, but local Lepchas continued to revere the location. In contrast to the local reverence for a sacred site, what mattered to the British was Herbert's declaration that at a lofty height of 7000-plus feet, Dorjéling met all the medical requirements to rejuvenate the white race.⁸

This recommendation provided the impetus for Calcutta to put pressure on the Chogyal to grant Dorjéling to the British. The colonial archive has a rare document in the Lepcha language that records the relevant transaction on 25 February 1835: "That health may be obtained by residing there I from

5 The literature on imperial hill stations includes Aditi Chatterji, *Landscapes of Power: The Colonial Hill Stations*, Research Papers 59 (Oxford: School of Geography, University of Oxford, 2003); Pamela Kanwar, *Imperial Simla: The Political Culture of the Raj* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990); Dane K. Kennedy, *The Magic Mountains: Hill Stations and the British Raj* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and Queeny Pradhan, "Empire in the Hills: The Making of Hill Stations in Colonial India," *Studies in History* 23, no. 1 (2007): 33–91.

6 H. V. Bayley, "Journal by Lt. Col. Lloyd," appendix B in *Dorje-ling* (Calcutta: G. H. Huttmann, Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1838), i–v.

7 R. K. Sprigg, "The Lepcha Language and Three Hundred Years of Tibetan Influence in Sikkim," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of India* 24, no. 1–4 (1982): 16–31.

8 J. D. Herbert, "Particulars of a Visit to the Siccim Hills," pts. 1 and 2, *Gleanings in Science* 15 (1830): 89–96; 16 (1830): 114–124; *Report on Dargeeling: A Place in the Sikkim Mountains; Proposed as a Sanatorium, or Station of Health* (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1830).

friendship make an offering of Durgeeling to the Governor General Sahib.”⁹ Richard Sprigg found that this sonorous phrase originated with Lloyd, who was dissatisfied with the Chogyal’s terse pronouncement that the British were permitted to build houses. The Lloyd-inspired declaration of friendship elided the Sikkimese ruler’s unhappiness at the British refusal to exchange the fertile Dabgong territory for his gift. The Chogyal expressed his unhappiness by discouraging his subjects from accepting British employment at the hill station.¹⁰ A decade later, his simmering grievance provoked him into an attack on botanist Joseph Hooker and his companion Archibald Campbell when they entered Sikkim.

Captain Herbert wrote frankly of his dependence on assistance from indigenous guides, from a people called the Rong. Their Nepali neighbours knew them as Lepchas, a pejorative attribution of “imperfect speaker” that became their nomenclature in the colonial lexicon. Rong denoted mountain peak, from the phrase *Mutanchi Rong Kup Rum Kup*, children of snowy peaks (figure 1). The mightiest was Kanchenjunga (a transliteration of the Tibetan name, Kangs-chen-mdzod-lnga), known to the Rong as Kongchen Kongchlo (big stone) or King-tzum-song-bu (the highest over our heads).¹¹

According to local legend, the ancestors of the Rong, Fudongthing and Nazong Nyu, were created from Kanchenjunga’s snows.¹² The resident mountain deity came to be known as Dzonga, head of spirits and deities in the indigenous Bon faith and in the Sikkim version of Buddhism.¹³ The Rong preferred to live and to bury their dead within sight of Kanchenjunga and the mythical land of happiness and bounty believed to lie around it, Mayel Lyang.¹⁴ For the colonial British and Euro-Americans at large, Kanchenjunga and other Himalayan peaks inspired entirely different sentiments, via a post-Romantic ethos that valued mountains for their beauty, size, and as a representation of human triumph

9 R. K. Sprigg, “The Lepcha Text of the Deed of Grant of Darjeeling,” *Aachuley: A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine* 2, no. 2 (1998): 4–11.

10 Lt. Col. Lloyd to Fort William, 20 June 1838, Foreign Department, Political Consultations, Nos. 118–119, National Archives of India, New Delhi (hereafter NAI).

11 Fr. Matthias Hermanns, *The Indo-Tibetans: The Indo-Tibetan and Mongoloid Problem in the Southern Himalaya and North-Northeast India* (Bombay: K. L. Fernandes, 1954), 29.

12 Yishey Doma, *Legends of the Lepchas: Folk Tales from Sikkim* (Chennai: Tranquebar Press, 2010), 4.

13 Anna Balicki Denjongpa, “Kangchendzonga: Secular and Buddhist Perceptions of the Mountain Deity of Sikkim among the Lhopo,” *Bulletin of Tibetology* 2, no. 1 (2002): 5–37.

14 Pema Wangchuk and Rita Zulca, *Khangchendzonga: Sacred Summit* (Kathmandu: Pema Wangchuk, 2007), 31–32.



Fig. 1: J. Burlington Smith, Lepcha family, Darjeeling, Eastern Himalayas, ca.1888–1929. Photographic print, 15 x 20 cm. Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 7548/F/4.

over nature.¹⁵ The Darjeeling hill station was built in Kanchenjunga’s shadow, but it was a moot point whether Lepchas could experience it as anything close to a land of happiness (figure 2).

Captain Herbert lauded the Lepchas as “a totally different race, morally and physically, from the people in the plains...they allow themselves to be originally the same people with the Bhoteas or inhabitants of Tibet...in every thing the reverse of the Hindoostanee.”¹⁶ Indigenous “difference” augured well for colonial needs, since “the character of these people particularly fits them to cooperate with Europeans in improving the country...without those prejudices which obstruct our efforts at improvement every step we take in the plains.”¹⁷ Lepchas saw themselves as brothers of the bamboo since they

15 See Peter Hansen, *The Summits of Modern Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

16 Herbert, *Report on Dargeeling*, 11.

17 *Ibid.*, 11.

used it to build houses, weave baskets, and construct bridges, rafts, fences, bows, arrows, and household utensils, as well as using the shoots and seeds as food.¹⁸ Herbert remarked at their versatility with nature. “With nothing but a long straight knife, the Lepcha will in an incredibly short period of time, house himself. If we were thirsty on the road, a Lepcha was immediately ready with a drinking cup fashioned out of a bamboo...or a large leaf.”¹⁹

A challenge for the British was how to successfully colonize a mountain locality where fewer than a hundred Lepchas seemed to reside, whose rent roll yielded only Rs 20. Herbert attributed its near-desolation to the flight of a thousand Lepchas from the Chogyal’s suzerainty into the Ilam region of Nepal. “With their chief, Eklatok, whose brother (is) Barrajeet Kazee, whose wife and children have been murdered by the Raja of Sikkim, they have sought protection within the Goorkhalee territory, where they have obtained a settlement. Like all mountaineers, however, they sigh to return to their native glens... The first step towards establishing a sanatorium at Dargeeling would be to invite these men to return to their homes.”²⁰ He anticipated their return once the Lepchas learnt of the British takeover.



Fig. 2: Darjeeling, Kinchinjunga and the snows from Beechwood Park, 1897. Photochrom, 20.9 x 26.8 cm. Zurich, Central Library, 400020059.

18 Helene Plaisir, “Grammar of Lepcha” (PhD diss., University of Leiden, 1968), 4.

19 Herbert, *Report on Dargeeling*, 11.

20 *Ibid.*, 11.

The generally glowing tenor of Herbert's report demonstrates the specious mechanics of "discovery," wherein colonial functionaries often employed overly optimistic language to argue for territorial and resource gains. Herbert did express a few misgivings based on lack of assistance from the Sikkim court, but his Calcutta superiors, who fervently desired this hill station, chose to ignore them.²¹ Instead, the Company set in motion a classic process of colonial land acquisition to acquire Dorjéling.²²

Once the gift was obtained, Lloyd journeyed to the new British Sikkim, assisted by Assistant Surgeon Chapman, with the remit to establish basic urban infrastructure.²³ Their first stop was the Bengal hamlet of Titalya. It lay only twenty miles from Sikkim, but it took them months to organize sufficient labourers, troops, and supplies. Finally, they managed to send heavy provisions with two hundred or so load carriers from the plains.²⁴ Lloyd and Chapman's road diary narrative of slow climbs, unplanned stops, and large-scale desertions has to be read against the colonial grain to obtain a proper sense of the harsh toll this journey exacted on labourers who lacked suitable attire, footwear, or any experience of peepsa fly-infested foothills and freezing altitudes. Herbert had written that "a Lepcha will carry twice the load of a bearer or coolie, and he will carry it with good will."²⁵ What he failed to mention was that Lepchas did so in a familiar mountain environment where they eked out a tolerable subsistence from forest and field, which gave them a fair degree of agency when it came to undertaking arduous wage labour.

To connect Darjeeling to the plains, the British state needed roads that would allow for the passage of wheeled vehicles as well as animal and passenger transport.²⁶ The first effort produced the Old Military Road in 1842, but it

21 J. D. Herbert to the Foreign Department, 28 May 1830, nos. 8–12, Military Letters Turner, India Office Letters, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, London; J. D. Herbert to the Foreign Department, 18 June 1830, nos. 139–140, Military Letters Turner, India Office Letters, Asia and Africa Collection, British Library, London.

22 J. D. Herbert to the Foreign Department, 6 April 1835, Political Consultations, nos. 100–104; 1836, no. 33; 11 February 1838, nos. 107–113, NAI.

23 Lt. Col. Lloyd to the Foreign Department, 8 August 1836, Political Consultations, nos. 36–37, NAI.

24 Bayley, "Journal by Assistant-Surgeon Chapman," appendix A in *Dorje-ling*, i–v; Bayley, "Journal by Lieutenant-Colonel Lloyd," appendix B, in *Dorje-ling*, i–v.

25 Herbert, *Report on Dargeeling*, 11.

26 From Officer on Special Duty to Foreign Department, 17 April 1837, Political Consultations, no. 27; 22 May 1837, Political Consultations, nos. 113–114; 19 June 1837, Political Consultations, nos. 39–44, NAI.

took several years, and cost numerous labouring lives and a great deal of money.²⁷ Lieutenant Robert Napier (the future imperial hero Lord Napier of Magdala) of the Madras Sappers, who were deployed as experienced builders, was feted on its completion.²⁸ But that first road proved extremely steep.²⁹ In 1861, a replacement was built, the Hill Cart Road, which had a more accessible gradient to accommodate carts.³⁰ Rail transport entered the Bengal government's radar soon after the inauguration of the first Indian rail line in 1854. However, ecological and technical challenges meant that a railway line from Calcutta to Siliguri was only introduced in 1878. Rail construction was slow until the Bengal Government drafted plains workers from a famine-relief initiative.³¹

With such an array of logistical obstacles, colonial officials were compelled to seek assistance from plains labour contractors.³² There was no surety as to how long Lepcha labourers would stay. When the Titalya men wished to leave, Lloyd judged it expedient to pay cash advances and raise wages. Even then, many fled when they heard rumours that Nepal was to attack Darjeeling.³³ Shortfalls of grain and produce reduced labourers to a narrow, inadequate diet that caused diarrhoea and dysentery outbreaks. The numerous deaths linked to the Old Military and Hill Cart Roads indicate that local reluctance to work for the British had good cause. In 1839–1840, only fifty-one Lepcha males and thirty-seven females responded to British overtures to settle at Darjeeling, despite a warm welcome for their chief's son on his return from Nepal, and cash advances to followers.³⁴ Eventually, the Bengal government permitted

27 From Officer on Special Duty to Foreign Department, 20 June 1838, Political Consultations, nos. 115–117; 22 November 1841, Political Consultations, nos. 87–89, NAI.

28 LSS O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Darjeeling* (Calcutta: Government Printing Press, 1907), 180.

29 From Officer on Special Duty to Foreign Department, 19 June 1839, Political Consultations, Nos. 43–45, NAI.

30 E. C. Dozey, *A Concise History of the Darjeeling District since 1835* (Darjeeling: Gorkha Press, 1917), 4.

31 Mary H. Avery, *Up in the Clouds, or Darjeeling and its Surroundings: Historical and Descriptive* (Calcutta: W. Newman & Co., 1878), 9.

32 From Officer on Special Duty to Foreign Department, 7 August 1837, Political Consultations, Nos. 139–140; 18 September 1839, Political Consultations, nos. 167–168, NAI.

33 "Darjeeling," *The Asiatic Journal* 110 (1 February 1839): 96.

34 From Officer on Special Duty to Foreign Department, 3 July 1839, Political Consultations, Nos. 72–73; 4 May 1840, Political Consultations, nos. 113–115; 28 December 1840, Political Consultations, nos. 71–72, NAI.

Campbell to write off advances to Lepcha settlers as irrecoverable.³⁵ Over the next couple of decades, Lepchas were willing to adjust to the demands of wage-work, but usually on a temporary basis for specific tasks, such as plant collecting for botanical expeditions. Livelihoods continued to be based on a blend of shifting cultivation, foraging, and hunting, which earned Lepchas the reputation of being less enterprising and willing to turn their hands to new tasks than new Himalayan migrants.

In the absence of a reliable civilian labour pool for early Darjeeling, colonial officials were compelled to conscript military labour for the essential upkeep of mountain roads. This consisted of indigenous men from Sikkim and Nepal who joined a new militia, the Sebundy Sappers, drawn in by the lure of cash advances.³⁶ Unfortunately, those sappers were “ill clad, worse fed, and badly housed” as they cleared road obstructions and opened drains against torrential rains.³⁷ When sapper numbers fell drastically due to fevers and smallpox, Campbell had to request a hundred troops from another Bengal militia, the Bhagalpore Hull Rangers.³⁸

Until trains made travel easier and cheaper, the prime constituency of Darjeeling visitors was an upper crust of civil servants seeking refuge from hot and humid Bengal summers. Another substantial group was convalescing invalids, especially British soldiers. Such invalids formed the subjects of a drawing by the surgeon-artist Frederick William De Fabeck that depicted scantily clad labourers carrying them in dandees (sedan chairs) up precipitous paths.³⁹ With the introduction of the narrow gauge “toy train” in 1881 that transported rail passengers up fifty-one steeply winding miles, such human conveyance became redundant, but only for the journey. At the hill station destination, load carriers continued to be in evidence, since mountain topography demanded subaltern muscle to heft everything from firewood to pianos to people (figure 3).

35 From Darjeeling Superintendent to Foreign Department, 1 August 1851, Political Consultations, nos. 149–150, NAI.

36 From Officer on Special Duty to Foreign Department, 22 August 1838, Political Consultations, no. 65; 1 June 1840, Political Consultations, nos. 82–83, NAI.

37 From Officer on Special Duty to Foreign Department, 19 October 1842, Political Consultations, nos. 148–151, NAI; *The Darjeeling Guide* (Calcutta: Samuel Smith & Co., 1845), 25–27.

38 From Officer on Special Duty to Foreign Department, 18 May 1842, Foreign Consultations, no. 23; 23 August 1841, Foreign Consultations, no. 60; 8 November 1850, Foreign Consultations, nos. 137–142; 17 January 1851, Foreign Consultations, nos. 155–156, NAI.

39 Frederick William Alexander de Fabeck, European invalids on road to Darjeeling, drawing, ca. 1860–1890. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O76256/drawing-frederick-william-alexander/> [Accessed on 16. January 2016].



Fig. 3: Missionary being taken up hill on a litter, Darjeeling, ca. 1890. Photographic print, 15.5 x 11 cm. Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Acc.7548/F/9.

Largely due to such environmental and labouring challenges, early Darjeeling's urban infrastructure relied on construction workers obtained through British India's "coolie" markets, which supplied imperial mines and plantations.⁴⁰ This is to be understood in the light of South Asian labour histories that show how such labourers were part of a larger proletarian workforce drawn from indigenous and marginalized groups whose livelihoods were threatened by colonial annexations, forced agrarian commercialization, and artisanal deindustrialization.⁴¹ Such labour was

40 From Officer on Special Duty to Foreign Department, 5 February 1840, Foreign Consultations, nos. 91–92; 9 November 1840, Foreign Consultations, nos. 91–92; 24 May 1841, Foreign Consultations, nos. 59–62; 4 October 1841, Foreign Consultations, nos. 118–120, NAI.

41 See works such as Ravi Ahuja, *Pathways of Empire: Circulation, "Public Works," and Social Space in Colonial Orissa (c.1780–1914)* (Hyderabad: Orient BlackSwan, 2009); Michael Anderson, "India, 1858–1930: The Illusion of Free Labor;" Prabhu Mohapatra, "Assam and the West Indies, 1860–1920: Immobilizing Plantation Labor," in *Masters, Servants, and Magistrates in Britain and the Empire, 1562–1955*, ed. Douglas Hay (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 455–480; Mohapatra, "'Tea and Money versus Human Life: The Rise and Fall of the Indenture System in the Assam Tea Plantations, 1840–1908,'" in *Plantations, Proletarians, and Peasants in Colonial Asia*, ed. E. Valentine Daniel, Henry Bernstein, and Tom Brass (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 142–172; Ian Kerr, "On the Move: Circulating Labor in Pre-Colonial, Colonial, and Post-Colonial India," supplement, *International Review of Social History* 51 (2006): 85–109.

labelled as “coolies,” common parlance for waged workers employed at manual, low-end tasks.⁴² The next section of the article will examine how burgeoning labour opportunities and the intercession of local intermediaries brought in other Himalayan groups, and how they responded to the ethnic labour niches beloved of colonial employers.

From hill station to circulation hub

From the mid-nineteenth century, a wide array of Himalayan migrant groups arrived in search of the various types of manual and service work available in and around the hill station, from household to plantation to military to mountaineering work. Geoff Childs’s exploration of migrations as protracted historical processes rather than as singular events provides a useful insight into how emic and ontological narratives about small-scale “push and pull” movements can contribute toward a larger discussion of how circulation typologies affected Himalayan social and cultural transformation.⁴³ As Lefebvre reminds us, “social space contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of materials, things, and information. Such ‘objects’ are not only things but also relations.”⁴⁴ Following his call to examine urban spaces in light of the labour and labourers that constitute them, Darjeeling and its hinterland can be problematized as a circulatory social space where seasonal, temporary, or permanent migrations, and the conditions that led to them, created networks of classed, raced, and gendered relationships.

A wide swathe of Himalayan groups was attracted both by the prospect of earning cash wages and by the possibility of moving away from ecologically marginal lands and semi-feudal relations of production. From grooms to porters to tea workers to expedition porters, the majority of migrant labourers joined a floating subaltern population that gradually stabilized into ethnic niches that serviced the Darjeeling economy. As improved transport links brought in more seasonal visitors and summer residents, households of convalescing visitors, planters, officials, missionaries, hotels, schools, and boarding houses required reliable staff to function as cooks, grooms, nursemaids, water-carriers, sweepers, and bearers. Visitors from Calcutta complained about the higher cost

42 See Jayeeta Sharma, *Empire’s Garden: Assam and the Making of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011) for a discussion of the term coolie.

43 Geoff Childs, “Trans-Himalayan Migrations as Processes, not Events: Towards a Theoretical Framework,” in *Origins and Migrations in the Extended Eastern Himalayas*, ed. Toni Huber and Stuart Blackburn (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 11–32.

44 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 77.

of employing Himalayan servants but had little choice since plains servants, who were used to lower wages, disliked the cold climate. Especially during the summers, when Darjeeling rentals were full, Himalayan men found many domestic openings as cooks, majordomos, grooms, or watchmen. Female migrants had more restricted opportunities as sweepers and ayah nursemaids. As migrants moved in, colonial officials gradually refined a complex ethnography that differentiated between Himalayan labouring subjects based on reified cultural and biological traits that fitted tasks to groups. For instance, most migrants from Nepal were deemed suitable for plantation, household, and skilled indoors tasks, while lower-end, strenuous outdoor jobs were predominantly given to so-called Bhutia groups, the homogenizing label given to Tibetan-ethnic migrants from semi-pastoral and nomadic communities.

In the colonial lexicon, Bhootea, Bhotiya, Bhotia, or Bhutia referred to a broad swathe of Tibetan-dialect speakers who inhabited the Buddhist border regions of Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal, Tibet, and Himalayan India. Wim van Spengen described them as groups of cross-cultural traders whose activities arose in response to the eco-systematic complementarity of Himalayan nomadic and sedentary borderland groups. They combined transhumance herding of yak and sheep with cultivation of barley, buckwheat, and eventually potatoes, near seasonal settlements. During winter migrations, they bartered wool, hides, butter, iron, and salt for grain and sugar at periodic, open-air markets from Assam to Kashmir to Tibet.⁴⁵ Lloyd and Chapman had recommended that instead of Lepchas, “Bhooteas” should be preferred for outdoor tasks, especially for heavy lifting or lengthy travel.⁴⁶ For outdoors and menial occupations, it became a truism that Bhutia readiness to travel, familiarity with load carrying, and modest wage demands made them desirable for outdoor labour and expedition employment. As Bhutia and Nepali migrants circulated into Darjeeling’s hinterland in greater numbers, Lepchas began to be seen as shy, retiring, and less physically capable than other groups, except for their exceptional foraging skills. We see such logic at play when botanist Joseph Hooker, who made Darjeeling his base for botanical expeditions into Sikkim and Nepal, was advised by Darjeeling administrator Campbell and Nepal ethnologist Hodgson as to the specific types of expedition subordinates he should employ.⁴⁷

45 Wim van Spengen, *Tibetan Border Worlds: A Geo-historical Analysis of Trade and Traders* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1992), 98–106.

46 Bayley, “Journal by Asst-Surgeon Chapman,” appendix A in *Dorje-ling*, i–v; Bayley, “Journal by Lt-Col. Lloyd,” appendix B in *Dorje-ling*, i–v.

47 Joseph Dalton Hooker, *Himalayan Journals: Notes of a Naturalist in Bengal, the Sikkim and Nepal Himalayas, the Khasia Mountains, &c.* (London: John Murray, 1855).

Felix Driver usefully reminds us that scientific exploration was a job of work, and major expeditions required large labour forces, with all the planning and organization that attended other colonial laboring enterprises.⁴⁸ When Hooker journeyed to Darjeeling in 1848, he had no difficulty in finding porters in Titalya to act as temporary escorts to his mountain destination. A decade of Darjeeling colonization, with the frequent transport of provisions and visitors via the new Military Road, had made a considerable difference since Lloyd and Chapman's journey. To Hooker, Darjeeling was as busy as "an Australian colony, not only in (the) amount of building, but in the accession of native families from the surrounding countries."⁴⁹ For nearby botanical forays, he employed Lepcha plant collectors whose foraging knowledge proved vital to amass the 150,000 specimens of 2000 different species that he triumphantly sent to Kew. "These (Lepcha collectors) either accompanied me on my excursions, or went by themselves into the jungles to collect plants, which I occupied myself in drawing, dissecting, and ticketing: while the preserving of them fell to the Lepchas, who, after a little training, became, with constant superintendence, good plant-driers."⁵⁰ Driver discusses how Victorian exploration narratives took pains to enhance their credibility for readers with long descriptions of the efficacy of collectors in their capacity as instruments for the collection of knowledge, the only role for which such local intermediaries were valued.⁵¹ On the one hand, Hooker composed lengthy and appreciative screeds about Lepchas' forest skills. On the other hand, he deemed it unnecessary to name these human instruments, some of whom worked for him for several years; neither the collectors, nor the porters, nor the treasurer who enumerated expenses in Lepcha script with "a fine, clear hand."⁵² A fine irony arises from the appellation that Lepchas bestowed on European explorers; they knew the latter as *Mik Thuk*, "those who poke with their eyes"⁵³ (figure 4).

For his next expedition to the distant reaches of eastern Nepal, Hooker needed several labourers able and willing to carry supplies for fifty-six people for three months. He described to his father how "preliminaries towards my trip

48 Felix Driver, "Intermediaries and the Archive of Exploration," in *Indigenous Intermediaries*, ed. Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent, and Tiffany Shellam (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 2015), 13, <http://press.anu.edu.au/publications/aboriginal-history-monographs/indigenous-intermediaries/download> [Accessed on 1. January 2016].

49 Hooker, *Himalayan Journals*, 108.

50 *Ibid.*, 105.

51 Driver, "Intermediaries," 12.

52 R. K. Sprigg, "Dr. Hooker's Lepcha Treasurer (1848-49)," *Aachuley: A Quarterly Lepcha Bilingual News Magazine* 2, no. 3 (1998): 5.

53 A. R. Foning, *Lepcha, My Vanishing Tribe* (Kalimpong: Chy-Pandi Farm, 1987), 71.



Fig. 4: William Walker, Dr Hooker in the Rhododendron Region of the Himalayas, after a painting by Frank Stone, 1854. Mezzotint. Private collection.

Portrait of Dr Hooker in Sikkim with Lepcha collectors, Nepalese guards and Gurkha sepoy, in a pine forest at 9000 feet with Kanchenjunga in the background.

to the snows” involved interviewing a “motley group of natives—of various tribes colours & callings such as one rarely sees any of & still more rarely all together.”⁵⁴ Hodgson and Campbell dissuaded Hooker from hiring additional Lepchas beyond a few collectors, since, in their view, they would not do well in carrying heavy loads over a lengthy period. Nepali labour was not a choice since Hooker could not return “runaway” labourers to their homeland.⁵⁵ Darjeeling had already shown that plains coolies did not do well in snowy

54 Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker to Sir William Jackson Hooker from Darjeeling, India, 20 October 1848, Indian Letters 1847–1851, JDH/1/10 f.115–117, The Royal Botanical Gardens, Kew, <http://www.kew.org/learn/library-art-archives/joseph-hooker/letter-hooker-sir-joseph-dalton-hooker-sir-william-jacks-73> [Accessed on 1. January 2016].

55 Hooker, *Himalayan Journals*, 168.

terrain. Eventually, Campbell found him fourteen “Bhutan run-aways” led by a headman, accustomed to travel at all elevations, men hefty and willing to carry eighty-pound loads of rice and canned goods.⁵⁶ Although Hooker complained about their less-than-docile demeanour compared to the Lepchas, Bhutias were popular when it came to expedition recruitment. Driver writes that when the Schlagintweit brothers undertook large-scale scientific explorations between 1854 and 1858, among their collectors was Dablong, a Bhutia who had travelled with Hooker, along with Chagi, a Darjeeling Lepcha.⁵⁷

Hooker lavishly praised Campbell’s actions as Darjeeling Superintendent, since the Scottish doctor-turned-administrator had purchased land to build houses, barracks, and a bazaar, created lodging for invalid European soldiers at the new cantonment and sanatorium, and ensured that plentiful labour was available. In a similar vein, contemporaries eulogized Campbell as “sole ruler of the station and territory... (who acted) to inspire the Aborigines with confidence in British rule, to induce the neighbouring tribes to settle in the territory, and to render Darjeeling a commercial centre for traders from countries round about”.⁵⁸ This illustrious visitor’s description of official triumphs wilfully ignored how much of colonial success, especially such interventions around labour, depended on building networks of local intermediaries and chiefs. Campbell negotiated for years with a number of chiefs in the region to encourage their Lepcha, Bhutia, and Mech subjects to move into the Darjeeling area. Until he managed to arrive at terms with them, the colonial administration was not only labour-strapped but cash-strapped, unable to collect revenue for almost a decade.⁵⁹

A key intermediary during Darjeeling’s early years was the Chebu Lama, a Lepcha notable who first acted as a political informant on Sikkimese and Tibetan affairs, then graduated to supplying labouring personnel.⁶⁰ His nephew, Tenduk Pulger, who was married to a Bhutia noblewoman, was indispensable to the procurement of porters and servants for expeditions where he favoured important travellers with his presence, personal entourage in tow.⁶¹ Tenduk’s

56 Ibid., 169–170.

57 Driver, “Intermediaries,” 12.

58 “Darjeeling Guide,” *The Calcutta Review*, 1857; reprinted in LSS O’Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, addendum 1, 281–320.

59 William Wilson Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal: Districts of Darjiling and Jalpaiguri, and State of Kuch Behar* (London: Trübner & Co, 1876), 83.

60 From Darjeeling Superintendent to Foreign Department, 14 June 1850, Foreign Consultations, nos. 369–560, NAI.

61 Mrs. A. H. Guernsey, “An Englishwoman among the Himalayas,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 53 (1876): 839–848.

influence extended into Kalimpong, where he made a name as a benefactor of Buddhist and Christian causes, and for his services during the 1888 conflict with Tibet, he was given the honorific of Raja.⁶² The Lepcha elder Tumahang Sitling, who moved to Darjeeling from Ilam, mobilized workers and helped lay out the Lloyd's Botanical Gardens in 1879.⁶³ Another Bhutia nobleman Tsiwang Rinzing Laden La, whose clan had endowed the monastery that originally stood on Observatory Hill, assisted Campbell in tea experiments and helped European investors procure land for plantations. His younger clan members such as Ugyen Gyatso and Rinzing Namgyal became invaluable auxiliaries of the Great Game in their role as "Tibet pundits," as did another of his descendants, Sonam Laden La, a police officer who became known as Sardar (contractor) for his efficacy in providing everything from labour to mules and horses for the European visitors.⁶⁴ Well-versed in Tibetan and Buddhist high culture, such elite local intermediaries nurtured close ties to mercantile, political, and religious structures across Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet. In return for their assistance, especially on labour procurement, they received land grants and revenue collection rights, secured sons' and nephews' appointments to government offices, were honoured with British titles, and socialized with colonial functionaries at public forums such as the Lebong race-course.

Another important category of Himalayan migrant labour consisted of individuals and agrarian groups from central and eastern Nepal, mostly Tibeto-Burman dialect speakers whose mountain origins earned them the label Pahari (from pahar, or hills), or Newar artisanal castes from the Kathmandu valley. The Darjeeling they entered was a space whose physical and social landscape was quickly changing into a commodity economy. Captain Hathorn described how, in 1863, nine years after his first visit to Darjeeling, "fire and axe have swept away the tree and creeper to make way for tea."⁶⁵ Only a decade after Hooker's visit, the forested slopes around Darjeeling where Lepcha collectors foraged for orchids and rhododendrons to send to Kew Gardens were domesticated into tea "gardens." The smuggled China plants that Hooker had glimpsed growing in Campbell's garden were the harbingers of the first commercial British

62 John Graham, *At the Threshold of Three Closed Lands: The Guild Outpost in the Eastern Himalayas* (Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark, 1897), 49–50.

63 Foning, *Lepcha*, 136.

64 See Nicholas Rhodes and Deki Rhodes, *A Man of the Frontier: S. W. Laden La (1876–1936), His Life and Times in Darjeeling and Tibet* (Kolkata, 2006).

65 J. G. Hathorn, *A Handbook of Darjeeling: With brief Notes on the Culture and Manufacture of Tea, and Rules for the Sale of Unassessed Waste Lands etc.* (Calcutta: Lepage, 1863), 13.

tea plantation in 1856.⁶⁶ Tea, in its Darjeeling form, acquired worldwide prominence through the industry of such labouring migrants from contiguous Himalayan frontiers. For the other major tea region of British India, Assam, the colonial state introduced penal labour recruitment on indentured contracts under pressure from a tea lobby whose plantations were located in malaria-infested forested tracts, far from roads and towns.⁶⁷ By contrast, Darjeeling had little need for a formal state-run recruitment system due to plantation's proximity to the impoverished and ecologically marginal borderlands, many of whose inhabitants were already circulating into British India.

Both push and pull factors operated to gradually encourage labour circulation along porous Himalayan frontiers once the hill station's existence was known; from the mid-nineteenth century, Darjeeling became a favoured destination in Nepal, as is apparent from a famous folk saying: "Suna ko lingo, chandi ko ping, ek jieu khana launa lai thikai chha Darjeeling," or "Darjeeling will take care of me."⁶⁸ Michael Hutt describes how Nepali peasants, enslaved, or landless, or over-taxed, or oppressed by rapacious moneylenders, forsook their native hills for what they called "Mugalan" (meaning India, literally, land of Mughals), to move eastward into British territory where the grass appeared greener.⁶⁹ He cites the author Lainsingh Bagdel, whose migrant protagonist, in the novel *Muluk Bahira*, wears tattered clothes and carries a *khukri* (machete), a bamboo mat, and a blanket, much more than others owned when they arrived in Mugalan. "What a miserable state they were in, those arrivals. Although there was no *kipat* (communal) land in Mugalan, one could earn enough to feed one's stomach... You didn't have to go to Bhot (Tibet) for salt, you didn't have to suffer."⁷⁰ By the 1870s, 34.1% of the Darjeeling district's population was of Nepali origin, but it took a while to stabilize into a permanent or even a settled workforce.⁷¹ Planter handbooks warned that every winter a great many peasants came from Nepal, but left plantations in the spring when it was time to plant at home. Others fell on hard times in this new world and, when debts to moneylenders became burdensome, "they run away to Nepal."⁷²

66 C. H. Fielder, "On Tea Cultivation in India," *Society of Arts Journal* 17 (1868–1869): 291–292.

67 Jayeeta Sharma, "'Lazy' Natives, Coolie Labour, and the Assam Tea Industry," *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 6 (November–December 2009): 1287–1324.

68 H. R. K. Gibbs, *The Gurkha Soldier* (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink & Co Ltd, 1943), 40.

69 Michael Hutt, "Going to Mugalan: Nepali Literary Representations of Migration to India and Bhutan" *South Asia Research* 18, no. 2 (September 1998): 195–214.

70 Michael Hutt, "Where is Home for an Indian Nepali Writer?" in *Indian Nepalis: Issues and Perspectives*, ed. T. B. Subba et al. (New Delhi: Concept, 2009), 28–48.

71 Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Bengal*, 85.

72 *Notes on Tea in Darjeeling by a Planter* (Darjeeling: Scotch Mission Orphanage Press, 1888), 70–72.

Local intermediaries in both India and Nepal, especially those who advanced capital to would-be migrants, played a crucial role in facilitating such movement in an environment where the rugged terrain could extend journeys into days or weeks.⁷³ As one man recollected, “You do not run across the wild country of eastern Nepal. You creep up and down, out and about, over steep ridges, through jungle valleys, across rushing rivers, on trails that you can hardly see.”⁷⁴ On the Nepali end, village and clan heads acted as contractors and moneylenders. On the Darjeeling side, cohorts of plantation workers journeyed back to recruit relatives or neighbours with the inducement of cash advances from planters. Their success was such that in 1895, the Darjeeling Tea Company’s co-chairman, the Scottish planter George Christison, was able to announce to London’s Society of Arts that 175 tea gardens employed approximately 70,000 workers, growing a crop worth well over ten million pounds. The majority of those workers were born in Nepal.⁷⁵ (figure 5).



Fig. 5: Thomas Paar; Tea harvest, Eastern Himalayas, ca.1888–1929. Photographic print, 16.6 x 11.2 cm. Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Acc. 7548/F/4.

73 Catherine Warner, “Flighty Subjects: Sovereignty, Shifting Cultivators, and the State in Darjeeling, 1830–1856,” *Himalaya: The Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies* 34, no. 1 (2014): 23–35, <http://digitalcommons.macaulester.edu/himalaya/vol34/iss1/8> [Accessed on 10 May 2016].

74 Tenzing Norgay, *Tiger of the Snows*, ed. James Ramsay Ullman (New York: Putnam, 1955), 17.

75 G. W. Christison, “Tea Planting in Darjeeling,” *Society of Arts Journal* 44 (1895–1896): 623–644.

Another labouring niche that attracted Nepali migrants was the British Indian army, specifically its Gurkha regiments. Unlike plantation openings that recruited men, women, and even children, military labour was open only to men from specific ethnicities. Successful applicants were required to be from those groups whom the British considered naturally martial races, the Magar, Gurung, Limbu, and Rai. Originally theorized in 1833 by Hooker's host, ethnologist and former resident of Nepal Brian Hodgson, who moved to Darjeeling after his retirement, the traits that constituted such a martial race were comprehensively revised and tabulated in Lieutenant-Colonel Eden Vansittart's army handbook, *Notes on Goorkhas*.⁷⁶ Vansittart's handbook was published in 1890, the same year that a Gurkha recruitment army station opened in Darjeeling. Between 1886 and 1904, 27,428 Gurkhas were recruited there to serve in war and to perform peacetime tasks such as road building on labour-short frontiers.⁷⁷ It became clear that of that number, many arrived via local tea plantations.

To the chagrin of planters, once the recruitment station opened, they faced a constant problem of desertion. For Nepali labourers who moved to Darjeeling, a chance at army life as a Gurkha soldier, despite the risk of death and injury, became a highly prized form of employment. In contrast with plantation and domestic employment, the Gurkha soldier's job was more or less permanent, held the prospect of land grants, pensions, and other benefits, and carried relatively high social status among one's compatriots. Darjeeling's abundance was framed in terms of its tea economy in the form of folk sayings prevalent in Nepal such as "chiya ko bot maa paisa falchha," meaning "money grows on tea bushes."⁷⁸ Even as thousands of Nepal inhabitants listened to such sentiments and hoped for Darjeeling plantation employment, many became dissatisfied at the scanty promotions that awaited them, limited to a handful of jobs as foremen or overseers. The army offered one way out, albeit only for a select number of male migrants from Nepal.

Aspiration to Gurkha status was therefore limited to a small, gendered proportion of plantation workers. Not just the army, but most avenues for upward mobility among labourers totally excluded women. It is ironic that tea planters held that a peculiar and positive trait of women workers was that they

76 See Lieutenant-Colonel Eden Vansittart, *Notes on Goorkhas: Being a Short Account of their Country, History, Characteristics, Class, etc.* (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1890); Brian Hodgson, *On the Kocch, Bodo and Dhimal Tribes* (Calcutta: J. Thomas, 1847); *Miscellaneous Essays Relating to Indian Subjects*, 2 vols. (London: Trübner & Co., 1880); and Mary Des Chene, "Military Ethnology in British India," *South Asia Research* 19, no. 2 (October 1999): 121–135.

77 C. G. Morris, *Gurkhas* (Delhi: Manager of Publications for Government of India, 1933), 130–131.

78 Bidhan Golay, "Rethinking Gorkha Identity," *Peace and Democracy in South Asia* 2, nos. 1–2 (2006): 24–49.

were more steadfast, i.e. less likely to leave plantations than their menfolk. A critical look at the raced and gendered structures that underlay colonial labour practices shows that rather than some intrinsic gendered predisposition, subaltern women's seeming loyalty to plantations and households stemmed from lack of choice, given their relative immobility due to childrearing responsibilities, as well as female exclusion from military labour and the top echelons of domestic and plantation labouring jobs.

While the identity of a Gurkha soldier was ostensibly limited to certain ethnicities, oral histories reveal interesting slippages through which local groups might subvert colonial barriers and assert agency. Army rules declared that Gurkha recruitment was open only to newly arrived Magars, Gurungs, Limbus, and Rais from wild parts of Nepal. Colonial ethnographies of biologically determined martial traits excluded Lepchas and Newars as too peaceable to be acceptable soldiers. They offered ecological and cultural arguments for rejecting "line boys," the second-generation offspring of Gurkha soldiers, as too corrupted by urban living to make good soldiers. But the ethnographic determinism of military recruiters could not altogether stop other Himalayan groups from infiltrating the category of Gurkha. British recruiters relied on the appearance, testimony, and documents of applicants as well as the mediation of local translator-intermediaries. This was a weak link that allowed supposedly excluded men to take advantage of shared Himalayan physiognomy and knowledge of the Nepali vernacular to join the army. Local lore recalls how men such as Dak Singh Lepcha, who was accepted into a Gurkha regiment, used the Nepali sounding name Singh in public rather than the revealing Lepcha.⁷⁹

Long-time prosperity and upward socio-economic mobility for labouring migrants, where possible, often required multiple generations to achieve. Oral histories speak of individuals who followed a trajectory of chain migration in the wake of relatives or village brethren, spurred on by success stories, real or not. Gopal Singh Pradhan moved as a youth from his home in Bhatgaon, in eastern Nepal, to Fikkal, close to the Indian border. He journeyed with family members to Darjeeling, where they joined working parties on the racecourse at Lebung. Gopal rose through the ranks to become a petty contractor, settling on a land grant at the new twelfth mile village established near Kalimpong. The decisive break came in the second generation when his eldest son, Bhim Bahadur, was promoted to the rank of first-class contractor, handling jobs over Rs 50,000. Later, he received the prestigious state title of Rai Bahadur.⁸⁰

79 Miku Foning, personal communication, 2012.

80 Kushal Pradhan and Laval Pradhan, personal communication, 2012.

Gurkha retirees joined forces with such men, who began as labourers and attained middle class status as contractors, teachers, clerks, or overseers, as producers and consumers of a new Nepali vernacular that displaced dialects to become a literary language, in a homeland and in public arenas that were as self-fashioned as their lives.

Euro-American adventures in a Himalayan Orient

This section explores how Darjeeling's appeal to mobile Himalayan groups was paralleled by its growing allure for Euro-American visitors who helped constitute a distinctive Himalayan-Orientalist trope for adventure. Such an adventure trope was most vividly expressed through the Western desire to conquer high Himalayan peaks, particularly Mount Everest, to which Darjeeling was then the gateway. Such adventure quests catalyzed a new global visibility for this contact zone of the British Empire, and allowed new transcultural opportunities for well-heeled Euro-American men and women. As they flocked to Darjeeling, such adventurers co-opted Himalayan labourers such as Lepcha plant collectors, Bhutia porters, Gurkha guards, or Sherpa climbers, as mobile auxiliaries to realize Orientalist dreams. The latter, in turn, sought to transform such openings into long-term advantage for familial and clan advancement.

When Joseph Hooker stayed at Darjeeling, he was awestruck that Hodgson's windows overlooked what he declared the world's grandest landscape of snowy mountains. "Kinchinjunga (forty-five miles distant) is the prominent object, rising 21,000 feet above the level of the observer out of a sea of intervening wooded hills; whilst, on a line with its snows, the eye descends below the horizon, to a narrow gulf 7000 feet deep in the mountains, where the Great Rungeet, white with foam, threads a tropical forest with a silver line."⁸¹ In those picturesque surroundings, he kept company with British officials such as Hodgson and Campbell and retired army officers such as Lloyd, as well as temporary European visitors and settlers in search of health, a cool climate, and rarefied nature adventures. For Hooker himself, this Himalayan sojourn represented a rare chance to mark his name in the exotic annals of science and exploration, a chance that earned him the coveted position of director of Kew Gardens.

For several of the early European pioneers who struggled in Darjeeling around the time of Hooker's visit, however, their mountain quest was motivated by spiritual or economic aims. The majority were from modest British or German backgrounds, intent on religious or agrarian enterprise, sometimes both. On the

81 Hooker, *Himalayan Journals*, 112.

religious mission front, German Lutherans such as the Wernicke-Stölke family eventually flourished as farmers, bakers, and planters, although they initially struggled to convert their initial quest to convert indigenous Lepchas.⁸² Just as those German missionaries had little choice but to bake or plant to make a living, other European newcomers found that life in this frontier settlement was harder than they had expected. After graduating from Rugby, Edmund Cox, inspired by a brother's tales of India, journeyed to Darjeeling in 1876 with a dream of becoming a tea planter. To his amazement, the parson who preached the town's Sunday sermon was not only the rector of the elite St. Paul's School, but the proprietor of several tea estates. But Cox was discouraged when he witnessed the strenuous physical labour that tea required, and the necessity for more capital than he could command. He left Darjeeling to join the well-established career path of the colonial police.⁸³ Even after the tea industry was well established, there was little room for dilettantes. The former Lt. Col. Hannagan recollected, "Tea planting in those days was a particularly arduous job, entailing long hours in the field beginning at dawn and ending with dusk... The planter would have to do his own plumbing and sanitation, his own engineering and construct his own buildings. He had to be a bit of a surveyor, as most roads were inclined to follow goat tracks and woodcutters' paths, and hillsides were steep and cut up by marshes and deep ravines, large boulders and precipices. He had to study the transport of his crop, and be an accountant to keep his own books, a little bit of a lawyer, and even a judge to settle the disputes that would arise."⁸⁴ Undoubtedly, European planters enjoyed plenty of compensations in their frontier life. Planters ranked fairly low in British India's white society compared to officials, but the hallmark of their existence was a virtual autocracy over workers and local structures, a far cry from the modestly middle-class backgrounds whence the majority of planters originated.

When the Rev. William Macfarlane moved to Darjeeling in 1870, his success in winning over labouring converts was largely predicated on support from his Scottish countrymen, who formed the majority of tea planters. Around that time, there was a growing realization among missionaries that education and health interventions created local acceptance more easily than the time-honoured strategies of street preaching and debunking indigenous faiths.

82 "The Wernicke-Stolke story," photocopy of a history of a family of Darjeeling planters, 1841–1937, Wernicke-Stolke Family papers, Mss. Eur Photo Eur 421, Asian and African Collection, British Library, London; also see Fred Pinn, *Darjeeling Pioneers: The Wernicke-Stölke Story* (Bath: Pagoda Press, 2008).

83 Sir Edmund Cox, *My Thirty Years in India* (London: Mills & Boon, 1909), 15.

84 Lt. Col. L. Hannagan, "Darjeeling planting—then and now," in Wernicke-Stolke Family papers, Mss. Eur Photo Eur 421; also see Pinn, *Darjeeling Pioneers*.

Macfarlane and his lay and church supporters, the majority of whom had personally benefitted from an excellent state education system, became committed to educating subaltern groups, aside from seeking to convert them. Modest as it seems, it was unprecedented for private colonial capital that he obtained support from nine plantation managers, most of them Scotsmen, to fund fifty-five schools in thirty-eight tea villages.⁸⁵ Ambitious young men such as Gangaprasad Pradhan, whose journey brought him from Chainpur in Nepal to a plantation labouring existence at Ging, was enabled via the Scottish mission to move into the teacher-training program at the Darjeeling Normal School.⁸⁶ Gangaprasad eventually became the first Himalayan man to be ordained as a pastor, and acquired renown as a prolific author of Nepali Christian works from the mission's Gorkha Press.⁸⁷ Whether at the teacher-training Normal School that educated Bhutia, Lepcha, and Nepali students as teachers, catechists, and translators, or at new girls' schools, in a region where indigenous secular schooling was practically non-existent, such pedagogical strategies effectively demonstrated the efficacy of missionary networks in enhancing individual mobility, albeit to a limited extent.

From 1881, when the Darjeeling Mountain Railway's picturesque toy train carried passengers directly up the mountains all the way from Calcutta via Siliguri, ever-larger numbers of Euro-American visitors decided that an Indian destination with a temperate climate surrounded by sublime scenery was worth enduring twenty-four hours in a train (figure 6). The Philadelphia photographer William Rau spoke for them when he declared, "though traveling on the Narrow Gauge Railway to Darjeeling be at times monotonous, somewhat uncomfortable and largely dangerous, our journey's end will well repay us for its annoyances."⁸⁸

Darjeeling provided an ample living for sundry European and Anglo-Indian proprietors of boarding houses, hotels, schools, and purveyors of photographic studios who catered to invalids, retirees, colonial families with young children, and just plain leisure-seekers visiting for short and long stays, as they employed Himalayan labour to meet those needs. A remarkable sight that frequently struck visitors was the considerable number of uniformed white children. Hooker had remarked on Darjeeling's "active, rosy, and bright

85 *Darjeeling Kalimpong and Sikkim News* (1898), 48; Church of Scotland Missionary Archive, 1829–1933, published as microfiche by Adam Matthew Publishers.

86 Reports of the Darjeeling Mission, Letter to Supporters, 22 February 1876, Church of Scotland Missionary Archive, 1829–1933, published as microfiche by Adam Matthew Publishers.

87 P. R. Pradhan, personal communication, 2012.

88 William H. Rau, *A Descriptive Reading on Darjeeling, illustrated by Twelve Lantern Slides* (Philadelphia: William H. Rau, 1891), 7.

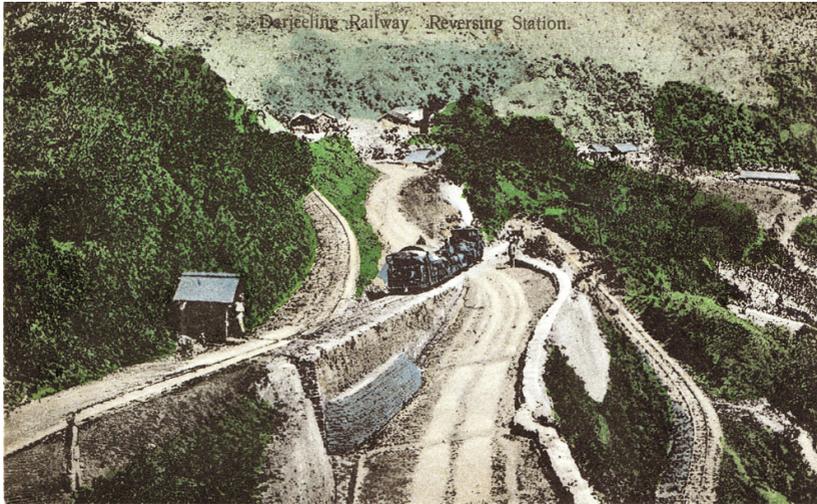


Fig. 6: Darjeeling Railway. Reversing Station, ca. 1920. Postcard, 8.7 x 13.8 cm. Private collection.

young community...It is incredible what a few weeks of that mountain air does for the India-born children of European parents: they are taken there sickly, pallid or yellow, soft and flabby, to become transformed into models of rude health and activity.”⁸⁹ In contrast to the Scottish Presbyterian mission that focused on subaltern labouring groups, Catholic missionary outfits had focused their energies on expensive British-style public schools such as Loreto Convent, St. Paul’s School, and St. Joseph’s School, which boarded European boys and girls sent to escape the tropical plains. (figure 7). While their student bodies were initially restricted to European offspring, by the inter-war years they enrolled small numbers of mixed-race and elite Himalayan children, such as the Lhasa aristocrat Rinchen Dolma Taring, whose guardians in British India sent her to the Loreto convent.⁹⁰

Herbert’s vision of Darjeeling as Eastern India’s premier sanatorium and hill station counterpart to Simla was more than fulfilled, some fifty years after his visit. Its main attraction was a striking distinctiveness from the tropical plains and cities of India. It appeared as an exotic site removed from the standard sights associated with Oriental towns, but equally, one where climate and landscape gave it an affinity to European mountains.

⁸⁹ Hooker, *Himalayan Journals*, 110.

⁹⁰ See Rinchen Dolma Taring, *Daughter of Tibet* (London: John Murray, 1970).

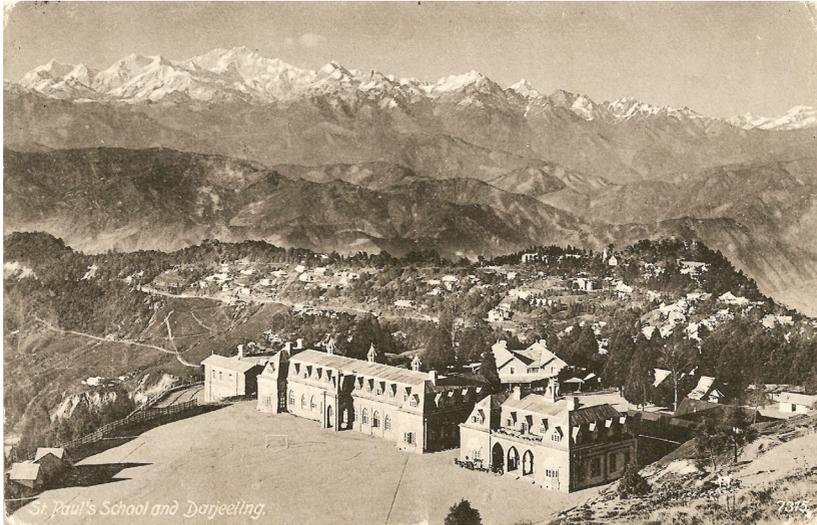


Fig. 7: *St Paul's School and Darjeeling, ca. 1907. Postcard, 13.6 x 8.8 cm. Private collection.*

Mrs Guernsey, who wrote for the popular magazine *Harper's* about her two-year sojourn in Darjeeling, was one of the first authors to introduce it to Euro-American print publics as the “Indian Alps.”⁹¹ Travellers’ accounts, guidebooks, and postcards prepared visitors to expect pristine views of white-roofed colonial bungalows, framed by majestic mountains, waterfalls, and forests declared to rival any Alpine vista. Unlike the first privately published guidebooks, which only targeted European investors, Mary Avery’s 1878 guidebook was explicitly aimed at Euro-American visitors who sought holidays at a scenic hill station. Like Mrs. Guernsey, she assured her readers that “remembrance of the Alpine regions sinks into nothingness at the sight of a mountain 28000 feet high!”⁹² Prominent Calcutta publishers such as Thacker and Spink and Newman made sure they updated their Darjeeling guidebooks every other year. Publications that were aimed at the global English-reading tourist market appeared from major publishers such as John Murray and Underwood & Underwood. Even Darjeeling events such as earthquakes and torrential rains that might interest travellers and missionary families were reported worldwide in newspapers such as the *Brooklyn Eagle*, *Volksblatt*, and *Berliner Börsenzeitung*.⁹³

91 Guernsey, “An Englishwoman among the Himalayas,” 839–848.

92 Avery, *Up in the Clouds*, 21.

93 “Darjeeling, St Joseph’s Seminary,” *Volksblatt*, June 5, 1886; “Miscellaneous,” Supplement to *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, October 3, 1899; and “Four Hundred Persons drowned at Darjeeling,” *Brooklyn Eagle*, December 10, 1899.

Images of Himalayan peaks first entered the global visual repertoire when artists such as Frederick de Fabeck and Edward Lear produced paintings of Kanchenjunga, followed by Marianne North, whose paintings were enshrined at Kew Gardens.⁹⁴ While de Fabeck was a sanatorium doctor, Lear and North were affluent artists who enjoyed illustrious reputations. Indeed, Lear's painting of Kanchenjunga was a commission for the Viceroy, his personal friend.⁹⁵ By the late Victorian era, Darjeeling had become an essential leitmotif on elite globetrotting itineraries, with prominent visitors such as Lady Dufferin, Colonel Olcott, Edward Lear, Mark Twain, and minor European and Indian royalty constantly keeping it in the news. The Bengali government did its best to woo such travellers and provide a suitably sanitized experience, whether with municipal legislation that limited porter wages, or with a new sanatorium road that bypassed the sights and smells of the native bazaar.⁹⁶ However, the official expectation that visiting Euro-Americans should confine themselves to the sanitized portion of this urban space was undercut by their growing fascination with Darjeeling's natives and migrants, deemed to be as picturesque as their environs.

Cox described the hill people as a quaint and curious lot. "There were giants from Bhutan, middling-sized people from Sikkim, known as Lepchas, and little Ghurkas from Nepal [...] all totally different from the natives of the plains. As a rule they had fair, even reddish complexions, eyes of greyish blue, and some had quite light hair [...] all sorts of picturesque pigtailed strangers from across the Himalayas, Thibetans from Lhasa, and real Chinamen from the wilder parts of the Flowery Kingdom."⁹⁷ Avery's guidebook noted, "It is really wonderful what an immense weight these coolies, both men and women, can carry in this manner, and so far from sinking under their burden, they seem rather to enjoy it. We did hear of a piano carried by a sturdy woman to the station on her back [...] we did not see but could have believed it from our own experience!"⁹⁸

94 Frederick William Alexander de Fabeck, view of Kanchenjunga from Jelapahar, drawing, ca. 1860–1890. London, Victoria and Albert Museum, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O105766/drawing-frederick-william-alexander/> [Accessed on 1. February 2016]; Edward Lear, *Mount Kanchenjunga from Darjeeling*, 1877. Oil on canvas, 78 ½ x 112 ½ in. London, The Fine Art Society, <http://www.victorianweb.org/victorian/painting/lear/paintings/2.html> [Accessed on 1. February 2016].

95 See Edward Lear and Ray Murphy, *Edward Lear's Indian Journal: Watercolours and Extracts from the Diary of Edward Lear, 1873–1875* (London: Jarrolds, 1953).

96 Bill for the registration and control of porters and dandeewallas in the Darjeeling and Kurseong municipalities, 21 May 1883, Asian and African Collection, IOR/L/PJ/6/100, File 976, British Library, London.

97 Cox, *My Thirty Years in India*, 25.

98 Avery, *Up in the Clouds*, 57.

Visuals of women porters carrying staggeringly heavy loads on the one hand, and staged dances of Tibetan lamas on the other, circulated widely to showcase Himalayan exoticism, complete with anecdotes about strapping female porters carrying pianos on their backs.⁹⁹ An entire visual vocabulary of the Himalayan Orient was produced via lantern slide, guidebook, postcard, stereoscope, and eventually, cinema newsreels. The *Newman's* guidebook gushed, “A sturdy independent lot these people are, looking capable of holding their own with any one. They are, even in their dirt, picturesque”¹⁰⁰ (figure 8).

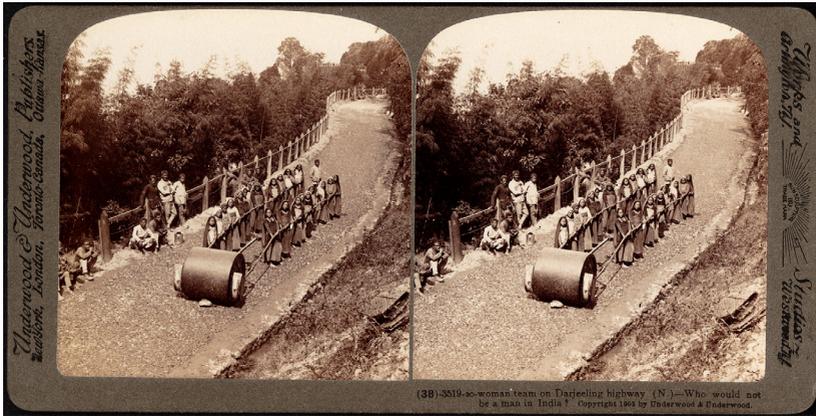


Fig. 8: 20-woman team on a Darjeeling highway (N.)—Who would not be a man in India?, ca. 1903. Photographic print on curved stereo card, 9 x 18 cm. Boston, Public Library.

Darjeeling’s increasing renown as a global tea producer enriched this Orientalized atmosphere that Euro-American adventurers relished, even as they compared its denizens favourably to backward inhabitants of their own world. “A Tea Garden...is interesting not only from seeing the tea in all its stages, but also for the study it affords of the picturesque hill men and women. The costume (minus the dirt) is not unlike that of Neapolitan women.”¹⁰¹ Such expressions of the Himalayan picturesque formed a distinctive sub-trope within Orientalism, a transcultural product of this contact zone that outlasted British rule in the forms of Western-Buddhist culture and New Age chic.

99 A selection of Darjeeling women porter images published in 1907 by photographer James Ricalton is in the British Library’s image gallery. <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/other/019pho000000181u00038000.html>; <http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/apac/photocoll/n/019pho000000181u00037000.html> [Accessed on 1. February 2016].

100 *Newman’s Guide to Darjeeling* (Calcutta: W. Newman & Co., 1900), 24.

101 Avery, *Up in the Clouds*, 58.

Joseph Hooker had enjoyed special permission to travel over eastern Nepal in quest of novel botanical finds, but his was a rare exception. In lieu of closed Nepal and Tibet, Darjeeling formed the main embarkation point when Euro-American sportsmen discovered that Alpine climbing pursuits transferred well to Himalayan peaks. This impulse created a burgeoning demand for mountain guides and high-altitude porters. Initially, Swiss and Italian Alpine professionals such as Mathias Zurbriggen were imported as climbing experts, but they lacked local knowledge and were much more expensive than Asian natives.¹⁰² Instead, British mountaineering enthusiasts with Alpine experience, members of the Himalayan Club and the Royal Geographical Society, the majority of whom were army officers, opted for a home-grown imperial alternative as they attempted to train Gurkha soldiers as their mountain and sporting auxiliaries.

General the Hon. Charles Bruce of the 5th Gurkha Regiment, in his memoir *Himalayan Wanderer*, recounted his strategies to transform a “fresh caught recruit” into a modern man with sporting avocations.¹⁰³ Bruce claimed he was the first to realize the Gurkha soldier’s latent sporting potential when he recruited Parbir and Harkbir Thapa for hill-racing, running, and other masculine pursuits that upper-class British society prized.¹⁰⁴ By 1915, when Vansittart revised his army handbook, sporting talent was enshrined as an intrinsic trait of the Gurkha soldier, as famous in the Himalayan Orientalist lexicon as his aptitude for battle. But the one sport where Gurkhas did not seem to excel was climbing, which their patrons attributed to the low gradient of their home regions. In their place, the British turned their attention to Sherpa migrants in Darjeeling, Himalayan natives whose homeland lay at exceedingly high altitudes.

From the 1910s, the mountaineering enthusiasts of the Himalayan Club and the Royal Geographical Society were thrilled to locate, among Darjeeling’s Bhutia labourers, the Sherpa of Nepal, a group that seemed to them the nearest Himalayan equivalent of the sturdy Alpine peasant. Sherpas were recent entrants into the Darjeeling economy, but for centuries they had worked as seasonal load carriers in Nepal and Tibet to supplement the meagre subsistence that their home environs provided. According to Sherpa lore, they had relocated from eastern Tibet to the Solu-Khumbu border

102 Peter Hansen, “Partners, Guides, and Sherpas,” in *Voyages and Visions: Towards a Cultural History of Travel*, ed. Jas Elsner and Joan-Pau Rubies (London: Reaktion, 1999), 210–231.

103 C. G. Bruce, *Himalayan Wanderer* (London: Alexander Maclehose & Co., 1934), 32.

104 *Ibid.*, 78.

region of Nepal in the seventeenth century.¹⁰⁵ There they grew barley and buckwheat and pastured yaks at 11,000–12,500 feet. A unique opportunity arose for them when the Scottish climber, Dr Alexander Kellas, declared that Sherpas were biologically superior to any other Himalayan group for high-altitude work, worthy of training in modern Euro-American mountaineering techniques.¹⁰⁶ This preference transformed the lives of Sherpas in the Darjeeling contact zone, where they were previously indistinguishable to employers from other Bhutia labouring groups. Now Sherpa children grew up in Solu-Khumbu watching adults carry salt and wool loads as far as Darjeeling, hearing tales of the “chilingna” white men whom Sherpas might accompany to mountains that reached the sky.¹⁰⁷ The breakthrough was when Sherpa porters acquitted themselves famously on the much-publicised 1921 Everest expedition.¹⁰⁸ Sherry Ortner notes that after 1921, it became an accepted colonial precept that the skilled, risky, and relatively lucrative labouring jobs on Himalayan climbing expeditions went to Sherpa men.¹⁰⁹

The “discovery” of the Sherpa male as an exalted high-altitude labourer and his new divergence from the category of Bhutia worked to the disadvantage of other Himalayan groups, whether Lepchas, Nepalis, or other Bhutias. The mountain establishment’s biological logic, which essentialized the Sherpa male body, meant that others were relegated to less lucrative, less risky jobs lower down the mountain, as were Sherpa women. Even among Sherpa men, differentiation was consciously fostered. The Himalayan Club, the colonial institution that acted as the official gatekeeper of Himalayan mountaineering, created an elite category of Tigers when it awarded a coveted badge and stipend to porters who distinguished themselves on expeditions.

One such Tiger, Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, went on to become Darjeeling’s most famous citizen when he climbed the world’s highest mountain in 1953. Before this, he had spent decades as an ordinary labouring migrant at Darjeeling. Norgay had journeyed as an eighteen-year-old with twelve other boys and girls from his village over perilous mountain terrain to the promised land of Darjeeling. There he exchanged his rags for Nepali-style clothes gifted by his

105 Michael Oppitz, “Myths and Facts: Reconsidering some Data Concerning the Clan History of the Sherpas,” *Kailash* 1 (1974): 1–2.

106 A. M. Kellas, “A Consideration of the Possibility of Ascending the Loftier Himalaya,” *The Geographical Journal* 49, no. 1 (1917): 26–46.

107 Norgay, *Tiger of the Snows*, 17.

108 “Mount Everest Expedition,” *The Geographical Journal* 58, no. 1 (July 1921): 56–58.

109 See Sherry B. Ortner, *Life and Death on Mt. Everest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

milkman employer and cut his Sherpa-style braid so as not to appear rustic. However, he did not realize that cutting his hair was a misstep toward his ambition to work as a climbing porter. Norgay later recollected, “This was all right for Darjeeling, but bad with the expedition, for they thought I was a Nepali, and they wanted only Sherpas.”¹¹⁰ Since his appearance was no longer that of a Sherpa, the Himalayan Club rejected him when he applied to the 1933 British Everest expedition.

After his 1933 rejection, Norgay returned to mundane labouring work, travelling back to Solu-Khumbu to carry salt loads to Tibet, and joining the labour gang that rebuilt the St. Paul’s School chapel. Two years later, when he applied to join Eric Shipton’s new Everest expedition, he made sure that he conformed to the British recruiters’ image of a genuine Sherpa. Ironically, this involved wearing a Western-style suit.¹¹¹ Norgay was overjoyed when he was hired, since “the wages on the expedition were twelve annas a day, which would be raised to one rupee a day for every day above snowline; so if I went, I would make more money than I ever did before.”¹¹²

Norgay and the climbing Sherpa community settled in the Toong Soong and Bhutia Busti neighbourhoods of Darjeeling, alongside other Bhutia neighbours. For successful Sherpa climbers, ambitions centered on schooling their children and saving for yak and land purchases in Solu-Khumbu. Living in the Darjeeling contact zone, everyday cultural norms changed; for instance, Indian tea with milk and sugar became their daily staple, while Tibetan tea was reserved for special, ceremonial occasions. Tenzing Norgay recollected how living in Darjeeling, Sherpa households like his could afford their beloved momo dumplings filled with pork many more times than once a year at the Tibetan New Year celebration, and how they frequently supplemented this delicacy with Indian-style meat curries. With newly acquired Indian citizenship, these climbing Sherpas joined fellow Himalayan denizens who made the Nepali language and Darjeeling their own, even as the once porous borders across Nepal, Tibet, Bhutan, and India that allowed such borderlands peoples to access mobile opportunities this contact zone changed to become rigidly impermeable in the face of antagonistic new nationalisms.

110 Norgay, *Tiger of the Snows*, 19.

111 The Royal Geographical Society’s Online Picture Library owns a photograph that shows Eric Shipton, the expedition leader, interviewing Sherpas, including Tenzing Norgay, at Darjeeling in 1935. <http://images.rgs.org/imageDetails.aspx?barcode=3682> [Accessed on 1. February 2016].

112 Norgay, *Tiger of the Snows*, 24.

Conclusion

This article explored the social production of colonial Darjeeling as a distinctive urban locale that generated a variety of labouring, commodity, and cultural transactions as it became a key contact zone for the British empire with the Himalayan borderlands and their mobile populations. It examines how this space evolved from a hill station resort designed for recuperating British and European bodies into a transcultural hub whose space served as a lively arena for Himalayan circulation. An expanding and diversifying colonial economy accentuated the Darjeeling region's historical and geographical connections with other borderlands and greatly increased the numbers of subaltern as well as elite migrants. Notwithstanding the challenge of interpreting the largely opaque processes through which subaltern historical subjects led their lives, this article aimed to problematize and perhaps even access some part of the hidden transcripts of the mobile individuals and groups who laboured to make this space but rarely had their voices or names appear in the archive. Darjeeling's circulating groups included Lepcha cultivators, Bhutia load carriers, Nepali labourers, Gurkha soldiers, and Sherpa porters in their encounters with Euro-American visitors to Darjeeling, English officials, Scottish planters, missionaries, and explorers, of whom only some imagined themselves as Himalayan natives, and only some depended on selling their labour to others. Particularly in the case of such subaltern subjects of history, it behoves the historian to imaginatively explore the scope of the opportunities (and lack thereof) for socio-economic mobility that this transcultural space did offer, as it acted as a contact zone that brought hitherto separate groups together, until the end of empire and the rise of new Asian nationalisms disrupted the spatial permeability of that zone.

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Fig. 2: Darjeeling. Kinchinjunga and the snows from Beechwood Park, 1897. Photochrom, 20.9 x 26.8 cm. Zurich, Central Library, 400020059. http://www.recherche-portal.ch/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=ZAD&fn=search&v1%28freeText0%29=ebi01_prod005842183 [Accessed on 20. June 2016]. ©0.

Fig. 3: Missionary being taken up hill on a litter, Darjeeling, ca.1890. Photographic print, 15.5 x 11 cm. Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Acc.7548/F/9. <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15799coll123/id/78892/rec/156> [Accessed on 15. June 2016]. ©   .

Fig. 4: William Walker, *Dr Hooker in the Rhododendron Region of the Himalayas*, after a painting by Frank Stone, 1854. Mezzotint. Private collection. <http://image.invaluable.com/housePhotos/christies/26/109726/H0027-L03264103.jpg> [Accessed on 5. July 2016]. Public domain.

Fig. 5: Thomas Paar, Tea harvest, Eastern Himalayas, ca.1888–1929. Photographic print, 16.6 x 11.2 cm. Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, Acc.7548/F/4. <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15799coll123/id/78603/rec/11> [Accessed on 10. June 2016]. ©   .

Fig. 6: Darjeeling Railway. Reversing Station, ca. 1920. Postcard, 8.7 x 13.8 cm. http://wiki.fibis.org/index.php/File:Darjeeling_and_St_Paul's_School.jpg#filehistory [Accessed on 5. July 2016] ©   .

Fig. 7: St Paul's School and Darjeeling, ca. 1907. Postcard, 13.6 x 8.8 cm. Private collection. http://wiki.fibis.org/index.php/File:Darjeeling_and_St_Paul's_School.jpg#filehistory [Accessed on 5. July 2016]. ©   .

Fig. 8: 20-woman team on a Darjeeling highway (N.)—Who would not be a man in India?, ca. 1903. Photographic print on curved stereo card, 9 x 18 cm. Boston, Public Library. <http://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/sq87dj436> [Accessed on 1. June 2016]. Public domain.