

Editorial Note

Since the launch of our journal in 2010, *Transcultural Studies* has been expanding within and across several disciplines to new topics and approaches. Connected and transnational histories, multi-scalar perspectives, and interdisciplinary analyses of issues have begun to open new paths for understanding historical complexity at local and global levels. *Transcultural Studies* aspires to provide a platform for the ongoing exploration of such new paths, rather than to formulate a canon that might end up stifling discussion and competition among different research traditions, theoretical schools, and methodological approaches in this young field. As our world continues to confront forces of segregation and nationalism—themselves products of transcultural interaction even as they seek to resist it with postulates of purity—rigorous critical scholarship hopefully has an important contribution to make: To deepen understanding of the vital importance of transcultural interaction for any aspect of culture—and to live up to it by itself engaging in connected and collaborative research across national and disciplinary boundaries.

The present issue, comprising one independent article and a themed section, offers several new thematic and methodological foci. The contributions describe places as different as 1920s Berlin and the border region between the British Raj, Tibet, and Sikkim in the Himalayas, yet they all deal with the dynamics of transcultural interaction at sites where local and global interests merge and collide, driven by actors from different ethnic groups, institutional backgrounds, and religious as well as political traditions. They all have their own agenda and transcultural connections, which are realized in the fields of commodity exchange and developing knowledge. The articles address three connected issues: the role of place within a transcultural contact zone; the importance of the larger institutional setting of a given locality, and the motives driving individuals to become cultural brokers in such places.

The contributions in this issue demonstrate how, in such versatile social milieus, seemingly local encounters may acquire a transregional or even global reach. The authors analyse the places under discussion, whether Berlin or colonial Darjeeling and Kalimpong in the Himalayas, not simply as localities but as contact zones whose political, social, and geographical context is crucial in determining both the form and content of transcultural interaction. This approach allows the papers to challenge traditional narratives and to show the relevance of hitherto neglected evidence that links local processes with larger transcultural exchanges.

The issue opens with an article by Susanne Marten-Finnis, who explores the role of the Russian publishers who, for a short period (1921–24) after the October Revolution and the Russian Civil War, made Berlin the chief centre of Russian publishing. The author begins her analysis with the rise of a new Russian intellectual elite in St. Petersburg who had close ties to Jewish publishing enterprises that had long-standing commitments to encouraging philosophical and ideological discussion and to disseminating knowledge in society. In the aftermath of the October Revolution, many of these publishers relocated to Berlin. The liberal atmosphere secured by the larger institutional framework of Weimar Germany and the long-standing publishing tradition in Berlin fostered a fruitful symbiosis between German and Russian publishers, many of whom (on both sides) were of Jewish origin but pursued very different agendas as “cultural brokers” mediating between Russia and the world. The author identifies three groups: Russian emigrants living in Berlin, nostalgic for pre-revolutionary Russia and waiting for the Bolshevik regime to collapse; emissaries mediating between the new Bolshevik elites in Soviet Russia and the German publishing sector, and highly politicized avant-garde artists who engaged with global trends while believing in the ideals of the new Soviet society.

Moving from a recognized hub in the middle of Europe to a marginal(ized) mountain region on the border between the British Empire and a firmly sealed Tibet, the themed section explores transcultural interaction in a contact zone far from capitals, seaports, and courts, but operating according to the same kind of locally infused logic. The four papers explore how, for a time Darjeeling and Kalimpong evolved into international centres for commercial, spiritual, and intellectual exchanges. As the authors of the introduction note, Darjeeling and Kalimpong had already been Asian trade hubs before colonial interests intervened, but only in their wake did the two towns acquire global significance due to their favourable climate, their overseas exports (Darjeeling tea and Kalimpong wool), and—last but not least—their strategic position as frontier cities facilitating cross-border exchanges of knowledge and goods. These centres soon attracted sojourners and settlers from different parts of the region and the world. They greatly contributed to the unique spiritual and intellectual atmosphere that gave these two places such a central role in the flourishing of modern Buddhism and the dissemination of knowledge about Tibet, its language, and its culture. Eschewing a reductionist account of colonial domination, the themed section uncovers the “hidden histories” and significance of local elites while also exploring the complex motivations, loyalties, and networks of the foreigners congregating here, highlighting connections and intersections within the broader narratives of global history.

Jayeeta Sharma's analysis identifies colonial anxieties rather than a colonial "master plan" as the driving force in Darjeeling's development from a remote Himalayan village to a transcultural hub. To help British residents of India cope with its climate, the Rāj set up a hill refuge in the cool Himalayan borderlands. With the triple charm of a mild climate, growing economy, and availability of knowledge about Tibet, Darjeeling attracted a diverse and growing population from the region as well as from among the global scholarly and religious community. Sharma foregrounds these agents as the real protagonists of Darjeeling's success story: British officers, Lepcha cultivators, Nepali workers, Sherpa porters, Gurkha soldiers, Sikkim landholders, Bengali clerks, Scottish planters and missionaries, and prominent Euro-American visitors—an ethnically and culturally mixed group of people whose relationships involved hybridization as well as segregation, shaped by the asymmetry underlying colonial domination.

Emma Martin explores the global dimension of local intellectual networks in the creation and negotiation of knowledge about Tibet. Providing the only window to the theocracy of Tibet with its sealed borders, Darjeeling combined a strategic position with a favourable intellectual environment that attracted Asian and European scholars who wrote histories, ethnographic studies, travelogues, and dictionaries relating to Tibet. Martin's main interest is in the pioneering and painstaking, but also very collective effort to make the Tibetan language comprehensible to the outside world, as well as the diverse cultural backgrounds and philological practices that came together in this enterprise. Pride of place here goes to the local monasteries that offered themselves as transitory homes for a global community of "agents" with different spiritual, intellectual, or political motives. The monasteries enabled these sojourners to interact with local elites and each other and to develop hitherto inaccessible knowledge about things spiritual, geographic, political, and linguistic which were of absorbing if highly varied global interest, including the strategic considerations of the Rāj. Whatever the individual motivation of the people working on the Tibetan language, their publications were mainly directed toward colonial administrators rather than native speakers.

The access to Tibet that Darjeeling and Kalimpong offered linked them to the twentieth-century global Buddhist revival. In his study of the branches of the Young Men's Buddhist Association (YMBA) in both cities from the 1930s to the 1960s, Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia explores their cosmopolitan connections as well as the local characteristics of these branches. Part of a modernizing current in both colonial and non-colonized Asian societies led to the establishment of branches of or counterparts to the YMCA, the YMBA goes back to the Buddhist revival in Colombo, Ceylon, in 1898, its activities consciously mirroring those

of the YMCA. It was part of a cosmopolitan Buddhism that shared an identity without having a consistent ideology, clear centre, or central administration. The particulars of the Darjeeling and Kalimpong YMBA branches illustrate the importance of the local environment and the networks of local agents even in such global movements.

Samuel Thévoz concludes this section with a portrait of the charismatic and unconventional Alexandra David-Neel (1868–1969), whose sojourns in Tibet and interaction with Tibetan Buddhist monks changed her own Buddhist worldview and prompted her to write books that transformed Western perceptions of Tantric Tibetan Buddhism from “degenerate” to a source of “modern” high spirituality. Tracing her path from the Theosophical Society to Tibetan Buddhism, the study examines the extent to which David-Neel’s perception of Buddhism was shaped by encounters with prestigious figures of Tibetan Buddhism—especially with the Dalai Lama in Kalimpong and the abbot of Lachen Monastery in Sikkim. Henceforth she considered it her responsibility to be the intermediary between this tradition and the West as she proclaimed the universal relevance of pristine Buddhism to the modern world. Her unrivalled personal experiences and profound knowledge, combined with a strong impetus for intellectual self-staging as well as reliance on spiritual guidance, provide a powerful example for the role of transcultural interaction among individual agents in the emergence of global Buddhism.

The cosmopolitanism and ensuing global appeal of these two Himalayan border towns firmly places them within connected histories that challenge a Braudelian geodeterminism. The case studies in this themed section show that the historical trajectory of even a remote mountain region is essentially open rather than defined by their intrinsic remoteness and unruliness, as postulated in Willem van Schendel’s and James C. Scott’s “Zomia” model for these highlands with its stress on distance from state-imposed order. Cosmopolitan “port cities” may be located right in the Himalayas, their openness in this case secured by the British Empire.

While dealing with two of the issues mentioned above (the impact of local characteristics and the institutional environment of a given place on its role as a contact zone), all articles in this issue highlight the need for more research and reflection on the third: how to identify the characteristics and motivations of the cultural brokers involved. Does “Swedish,” “colonial administrator,” “Tibetan Buddhist abbot,” “Jewish intellectual,” or “unconventional woman” suffice to anchor the motivation driving these people to spend many of their best years in exploring and expanding the frontiers of knowledge? What if the “colonial administrator” becomes a defendant of Tibet, or the “Jewish intellectual” is

only tagged by others as Jewish, while he himself has no connection to the Jewish religion, has a mixed ancestry like everybody else, and might consider himself primarily a professional artist? What if the “Tibetan Buddhist abbot” decides to move to the British Rāj and build a house for himself that combines colonial style with Tibetan features? The ultimate exercise of such tagging—the story of the march of the “pure” homo sapiens sapiens north, wiping out Neanderthal-type humans on the way—has by now yielded to the unsurprising discovery that we all happily run around with a dose of Neanderthal genes. Evidently, neither a passport, nor ethnicity, profession, religion, gender, nor any other general ascription can be relied upon to provide a safe anchor to determine what drives people’s attitudes and actions on a given issue at a particular time and space. Individuals also are shaped by being part of smaller and larger communities that have developed their own traditions, networks, and habits. They draw on different registers for different issues, and might at high-temperature times such as war or revolution privilege one over all others without being able to explain themselves once things have cooled down. Given the fact, finally, that all of this issue’s featured actors have grown up in a cultural environment already marked by transcultural interaction, no one engages in it with a clean slate. Through their painstaking research, the authors have shown the need for more research on the identity and particular motivations in space and time of the agents of transcultural interaction.

In the hope that you find this issue useful for your research and teaching, we also strongly encourage scholars to submit relevant research to *Transcultural Studies*.

Diamantis Panagiotopoulos and Rudolf Wagner

Beginning with this issue, Diamantis Panagiotopoulos, a professor of Classical Archaeology at Heidelberg whose research focuses on maritime networks and mobility in the Bronze Age Eastern Mediterranean, is joining the editorial team. He will broaden its competence and encourage submissions from scholars working on early history in the interstices of archaeology, anthropology, demography and geography.

The Editors