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# **Introduction: Cultural History as a History of Encounters— A “Contact Perspective”**

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**Abstract** This introductory essay lays out the conceptual framework for approaching the complex cultural history of the Eastern Himalayan town of Kalimpong and its neighbours as a history of encounters. Taking Mary Louise Pratt’s influential concept of a “contact zone” as a departure point, it scrutinizes current trends in the field of Transcultural Studies to develop a nuanced analytical perspective that highlights and takes in the culturally productive forces of encounters of various sorts. In particular, this approach focuses on the circulatory nature of knowledge production, and acknowledges shifting and multilateral asymmetries of power as driving forces of a vast array of strategies such as the appropriation, translation, and transformation of knowledge, but also of acts of resistance or rejection.

In so doing, it underlines the connected nature of the cultural history of the Eastern Himalayas and its relevance for global affairs in the first half of the twentieth century, and contributes to counterbalancing the region’s relative neglect in the academic research of the past decades.

## Introduction

In the past couple of decades, a growing body of literature within Cultural and Post-Colonial Studies has questioned the feasibility of bounded entities of various sorts and the research paradigms that developed from such ideas. Essentialist notions of national and cultural identity in particular were increasingly seen as problematic, and were countered by an emphasis on processes of interaction and mutual entanglements. In the field of Historical Studies, such endeavours are embodied in the concept of “entangled histories,” that is, the idea that the history of regions, nation-states, ethnicities, or individuals must be understood in relation to other such entities.<sup>1</sup> Particularly in the context of the Himalayan region, this is also related to recent efforts in borderland studies.<sup>2</sup> Similar attempts to conceptualize common reference points of investigation in a more dynamic and processual fashion are sustained by the concept of “transculturality.” This challenges notions of culture as being based on ethnically, religiously, or nation-state based homogenous and stable entities, and instead views cultural production as transformative processes in the encounters of different regions and cultures.<sup>3</sup> As general research directives, elements of entangled and transcultural histories have recently found a wide range of applications, in a variety of disciplines, and with regard to various objects of investigation.

In this volume, we connect up with such efforts by bringing to the forefront a region and a historical setting that were shaped in a particularly intense way by encounters between peoples who came from many different socio-cultural environments. Therefore, we will focus on the Indian town of Kalimpong, a hill station in the Eastern Himalayan region, and its history during the first half of the twentieth century, a period when the region gained increasing visibility on the stage of world history. This period is commonly depicted by employing a narrative of encounters between different ethnicities, nation-states, and larger regions, which may be taken as a historical frame for the present volume. Yet as will be shown later, it is also important to address the limitations of such a narrative by developing a more dynamic understanding of encounters.

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- 1 For a contextualization of the concept of “entangled history” in historical studies, see Kaelble (2005). An important impetus to understanding history in relational terms came from Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s influential essay on “connected histories” (Subrahmanyam 1997).
  - 2 See Van Schendel (2002) and Scott (2009) as examples of a larger trend, which also involves the notion of Zomia as an alternative to nation-state based geographical references.
  - 3 Juneja and Falser (2013, 18–21) address central aspects of transculturality, along with its different usages in recent history. Mention must be made of the book *Transcultural History: Theories, Methods, Sources* by Madeleine Herren et al. (2012), which tries to outline a transcultural research perspective for historical research.

## Encounters in the Eastern Himalayas—a historical sketch

Kalimpong’s location, perched as it is between the modern nation-states of Nepal, Bhutan, and China, as well as the formerly independent kingdom of Sikkim, and Tibet, has made it a logical venue for encounters of various kinds. In 1706, Bhutan annexed the area from Sikkim, and only much later, after the British-Bhutanese war in 1865, was it absorbed into British India. Connections to Bhutan continued to be close, especially as the British gifted a piece of land to Ugyen Dorji, a trade agent and middleman in the negotiations between Bhutan and British India. His estate later became known as Bhutan House, which was an important outpost in administrative and diplomatic affairs, and which is still owned by the royal family of Bhutan.<sup>4</sup>

At the time of British annexation, the area was only sparsely populated, primarily by Lepcha and Bhutia communities, the former of which are commonly considered the original inhabitants of the region. In the decades that followed, these communities were joined by different ethnicities that were migrating from eastern Nepal, and which settled in the area as agriculturists.<sup>5</sup> Nearby Darjeeling—whose importance for Christian Mission, international politics, trade, and Himalayan knowledge-making foreshadowed later developments in Kalimpong<sup>6</sup>—was fully developed as a zone for tea plantations, while Kalimpong emerged primarily as an agrarian society. The influx of population from Nepal continued, and became a major force in the negotiations about identities in the hill region that arose in the second half of the twentieth century (figure 1).<sup>7</sup>

In the later decades of the nineteenth century, the first Christian missionaries began to settle in Kalimpong. Like the British, they understood Kalimpong as a strategic spot, a place that was “On the Threshold of Three Closed Lands”—as pointed to by the title of a report by one of the most important Christian missionaries, Dr. Graham, the founder of the eponymous school and orphanage (Graham 1897). While it was seen as a place to venture out elsewhere, Kalimpong itself was thoroughly transformed by the missionary presence. It was just a small hamlet when William Macfarlane, the first Scottish missionary, visited the area in 1873,<sup>8</sup> but soon the

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4 A brief history of Bhutan House is provided by Dorji (2008). See also Emma Martin’s contribution in this volume.

5 Early settlement reports give the following figures for the entire Kalimpong area: 1865: 3,530; 1881: 12,683; 1891: 26,631; 1901: 41,511. Numbers seem to be drawn from an earlier report by C.A. Bell (1905), and then included in later Gazetteers (see O’Malley 1999, 36). For a recent discussion of early settlement, see Sarkar (2010, 89f). He deviates from the numbers in other reports for 1901.

6 A more detailed discussion of the history of Darjeeling in this context is provided in Harris *et al.* (2016).

7 Chettri 2017, Chapter 1, attempts an overview of Nepali migration in the Eastern Himalayan borderlands, and further discusses its effects on the construction of ethnic identities in the region.

8 For information on William Macfarlane and the history of the church that was built in his memory in 1891, see Subba (1991).

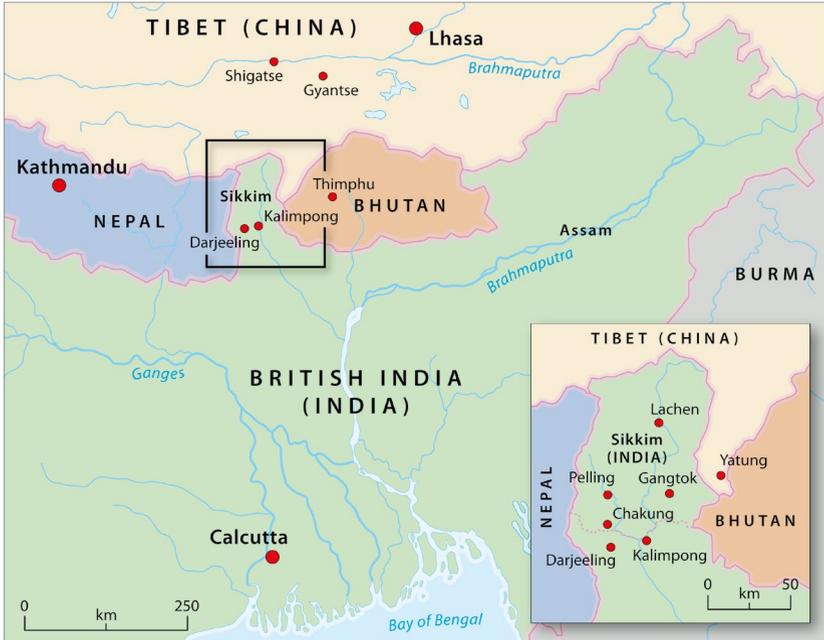


Figure 1: The Eastern Himalayas as a contact zone between different nation-states.

first churches, boarding schools, and hospitals were built—structures that were important for the municipal development of Kalimpong, and which have characterized it up to the present day as a centre for elite education. In addition, Christian mission transformed the population’s religious and secular outlook (figure 2). As early accounts and census data indicate, the influence of the missionaries was immense and many locals converted to Christianity (O’Malley 1999, 51f.; McGovern 1924, 21f.).

Missionary activities aside, trade must be seen as the most important factor in the early development of Kalimpong. While the region had been well connected through trans-Himalayan trading networks for centuries, the situation changed drastically with the British Younghusband Mission to Lhasa in 1903/04. Alarmed by the perceived or factual influence of the other two imperial players, Russia and China, the British ventured on a military campaign that succeeded not only in forcing Tibetans into trade agreements with British India, but also in establishing permanent trade agencies along the route to Lhasa, and thereby increased British influence in the region considerably. Kalimpong acted as a major hub along this route, which—with its connection to the global market through the port of Kolkata—not only facilitated a constant flow of goods in both directions, but also promoted a flow of general knowledge between worlds that knew very little about each other. The thriving economy led to a further increase



Figure 2: Kalimpong in the 1940s, with Macfarlane Church to the left.

in the population, drawing in a heterogeneous mix of peoples from the neighbouring countries. Trade, in particular in Tibetan wool, continued to flourish in the following decades and was only diminished by the political tensions between Tibet and China in the 1950s.<sup>9</sup>

Along with the economic upturn, Kalimpong was systematically developed into an urban centre. This meant that in addition to land that was occupied by agriculture, trade, and the compounds of the Christian missions, new areas were needed for further urban settlement. For this purpose, a site on the Ringkingpong ridge was chosen—the “Development Area.” By 1919, the original tenants, mainly Lepchas, Bhutias, and migrants from Nepal, were resettled to make space for a new upper class, often Bengalis, Anglo-Indians, and also Europeans who came to enjoy the moderate climate and pleasant scenery. This trend continued steadily for the next two decades. Along with the increase in population, the overall infrastructure for settlement, transport, and also administration was further developed. In 1931, Kalimpong was recognized as a town; in 1945, a municipality was established. While the British withdrawal and India’s independence in 1947 affected other hill centres considerably, this was less the case in Kalimpong, owing largely to the highly heterogeneous nature of its population.<sup>10</sup>

9 A detailed anthropological investigation of trade along the Lhasa-Kalimpong-Kolkata route is provided by Harris (2013).

10 Processes of early urban development of Kalimpong were addressed in two articles by Majumdar, in more detail in 2006, and briefly in 1993.

This mix of peoples from different backgrounds was further enhanced by the political tensions between Tibet and China. With the beginning of the Chinese occupation in the 1950s, waves of Tibetan refugees poured into India, many of whom used Kalimpong as a stopover or for more permanent settlement.<sup>11</sup> While the proximity to Tibet had attracted Europeans with a variety of interests for several decades, the actual presence of Tibetans along with other people from different borderland communities created a unique research site for scholars of Tibetan and Himalayan religion and culture. Using the opportunity to gather information as well as artefacts under these special circumstances, they produced a substantial body of scholarly knowledge that added to the earlier, more narrative accounts of Tibet and the Himalayas written by British government officials.

As tensions with China grew, Kalimpong also became a hotspot for collecting first-hand news about the political conflict—Jawaharlal Nehru even labelled it a “nest of spies” in his conversations with Zhou Enlai in 1957. At the same time, trade was seriously affected by these tensions, and, with the Sino-Indian war in 1962 and the closing of the borders, it came to an utter halt. With its main motor of economic growth gone, development in the region slowed down considerably. This also gave way to new processes on the human level. While the first half of the twentieth century was characterized by a highly dynamic coming together of peoples from different backgrounds, the period after 1962 saw a process of sedentariness and fixation, in which the formation of new identities also led to new political claims in the form of an independent state of “Gorkhaland,” deemed to be the rightful home of the hill communities. At times, negotiating these claims involved also acts of violence, particularly in the 1980s, but also in new waves of political protests in 2010, 2011, 2013, and 2017.<sup>12</sup>

As this brief historical sketch illustrates, the cultural history of Kalimpong and the Eastern Himalayas as a whole is not a history that can be tied to a homogeneous group of people; rather, it is significantly shaped by encounters between people of different geographical, cultural, national, or ethnic environments. While we can point to this diversity by distinguishing individuals or groups according to these contexts and the corresponding labels (“Lepcha,” “Tibetan,” “European”), this does not tell us much about the usage and relevance of such identifications in social reality.

But how then were notions of identity created and negotiated in the encounters between individuals? How was knowledge, not only of oneself and the Other, but knowledge in much more general terms formed and transformed in the interactions of people of different cultural, ethnic, or

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11 For a study of Tibetan refugees and their resettlement in the Eastern Himalayas, see Subba (1990).

12 In recent years, a considerable body of literature has emerged on the negotiation of such identities, as well as on the political claims that are often summarized as the Gorkhaland Movement. For an early case study, see Subba (1992). This is also discussed in the Epilogue of the current volume, see the contribution by Prem Poddar and Cheralyn Mealor.

linguistic provenance? What forces shaped and steered these processes, both from a macro- as well as a micro-perspective? What kinds of powers were at work and how did individuals relate to and make use of them?

It is this dimension of the productive and dynamic potential of encounters that we seek to address in the current volume by probing different key areas, such as trade, media, politics, religion, scholarship, education, and human relations, using multiple methodological approaches. In order to tie these various efforts closer together and to sharpen both our understanding of the objects of investigation as well as the way we look at them, we suggest engaging more closely with the notion of “contact zone,” a concept that has gained some currency over the past two decades in the study of encounters in colonial and semi-colonial settings.

### Kalimpong as a “contact zone”?

The term “contact zone” was coined by Mary Louise Pratt, a linguist who was investigating travel writing in a colonial context in South America. Since its inception in the early 1990s, Pratt’s concept has met with a broad reception in a variety of fields: Museum Studies (famously by Clifford 1997, and more recently Schorch 2013), along with Pedagogy more generally (Wolff 2002), Linguistics, Literature, History (Dirlik 1996), Gender Studies (Powers 2000, Pickles and Rutherford 2005), and Postcolonial Theory (Olson 1998), to name but a few.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, the range of its interpretations varies considerably: from a weak understanding as referring to a (physical) space of encounters between two or more factions, to a highly loaded normative concept that not only detects inequalities of power within encounters, but also calls for overcoming them. The possibility of using this concept in different ways may stem not only from the trajectories of the history of its reception, but also from a certain vagueness in Pratt’s original formulations, which critics of her influential work have also perceived.<sup>14</sup> This inevitably means that any attempt to use the concept as an analytical tool will have to start by sharpening its contours and should clarify its usage in a specific context. In the following, we shall make such an attempt in order to arrive at a more nuanced view of the processes that evolved in the historical setting of Kalimpong, but also so as to point to the limitations of Pratt’s concept in this concrete instance.

In her formative texts in the early 1990s, Pratt introduced “contact zone” as a “term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and

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13 Obviously, the literature cited here is not a comprehensive list in any sense, but it provides some snapshots of how the notion of “contact zone” is used in different fields. For the most part, these lie within encounters between colonizers and colonized, but other settings that involve power asymmetries as well as less loaded contexts are also analysed as contact zones.

14 See, for example, Kartunen (1995), who criticizes Pratt’s elaborations for being unnecessarily obscure.

grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths" (Pratt 1991, 34) and as a "space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (Pratt 2003, 6). In line with this general definition, Pratt uses "contact zone" to delineate a social space in which she investigates processes of knowledge production in the encounters of people with different cultural backgrounds. As is clear from her work, this space can be rather varied—Pratt applies the concept to a colonial setting in South America and a modern, multicultural classroom situation alike. Both have a common ground, however, insofar as asymmetrical power relations can be pointed out as driving forces for the ways in which knowledge is produced in these contexts. The notion of power is not only important in analytical terms—for detecting a flow of knowledge from the superior (colonizing) metropolis to the subordinate (colonized) periphery—but is also intended as a "critique of ideology" of European imperialism which forms the basis for metropolitan practices of representation (Pratt 2003, 4). In so doing, Pratt connects with Edward Said's paradigm of "Orientalism," which saw European knowledge production about the Orient as an instrument to legitimate colonial hegemonies (Said 2001).

## Asymmetries and power

Quite clearly, colonial powers were an important element in the development of the Eastern Himalayas. The region as a whole was a strategic site for securing the domain of British India against outside forces, but also for expanding its influence into neighbouring territories. Hill sites such as Kalimpong were developed primarily as a result of colonial concerns about expanding the political power of the British Empire; spreading its religious belief systems; feeding its economy through trade and agriculture; and building recreational spaces for its officials. We also have to consider that it was agents within this very system who produced crucial knowledge about the region and its population—as government officials, Christian missionaries, Western academics, adventurers, or religious seekers.

But encounters in Kalimpong did not solely occur between colonizers and colonized. Economic development drew in people from different places within the Himalayas or Asia, who had their own power relations which countered, emphasized, or simply disregarded colonial asymmetries. Furthermore, acknowledging larger asymmetries, colonial or otherwise, does not tell us much about their relevance to concrete agents. Individuals related to these asymmetries in different ways, and Kalimpong's location at the far edge or just beyond the sphere of political influence of different nation-states also made it a space for escaping such power constraints. There, people could meet not only to promote their origins, but also to

avoid or question them.<sup>15</sup> And even within seemingly clear-cut differentiations of superior and subordinate, relationships may reveal a more intricate complexion when we investigate encounters between concrete individuals and their entangled and intimate relationships as they evolve over time. Questions of power are therefore inevitably of importance when looking at Kalimpong encounters, but they must be asked in multilateral terms and by addressing macro- as well as micro-perspectives: what are driving forces in a particular context? How do individual agents relate to these forces? How do they circumvent, use, or produce them?<sup>16</sup>

## Entanglements and transculturation

For Pratt, too, agency is important in looking at how knowledge is formed and transformed in encounters. While Pratt argues from a rather rigid notion of bipolar asymmetries, she also emphasizes agency on the part of the subordinates (thereby going beyond Said). These then “cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, [but] they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for” (Pratt 2003, 6). To capture this aspect, she introduces the term “transculturation,” which she takes from Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz. In his analysis of the history of tobacco and sugar in Cuba, which was published in 1940, he used this term to mark transition and transmutation from one culture to another, thereby replacing the conceptual pair of acculturation and deculturation (Ortiz 1995).

For Pratt, the concept of transculturation is important for highlighting the creative processes in which knowledge is shaped in encounters. These she envisions primarily within a flow of knowledge from the (colonial) centre to the (colonized) periphery, where “colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer’s own terms” (Pratt 2003, 7). In contrast to the ethnographic descriptions produced by Europeans, this mode of representation is described as “autoethnography,” and in this way is distinguished from “autochthonous” self-representations. Influence was also exerted in the opposite direction. Just as colonizers have shaped knowledge of the periphery, so was knowledge within the metropolis shaped by agents from the colonies. A contact zone thus emerges as a space where such flows of knowledge are tightly interwoven.

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15 Such processes of “escaping identity” or “cultural reinvention” are common phenomena in border zones, as most recently argued by Howard Campbell (2015). Examples in Kalimpong are the formation of alternative political systems by Tibetans, and critiques of different elements of “Western Modernity” by various Europeans.

16 As Jacques Revel emphasizes with his paradigm of micro-history, the presupposition of a larger general context is problematic as it does not account for the factual multiplicity of social experience; see Revel (1995, 500f.).

In view of these close entanglements, essentialist notions of cultural attributions become problematic: Christian institutions such as churches, schools, or hospitals certainly came from a European background. But when they were established in Kalimpong, they looked and functioned differently than in Scotland. Were they then Indian, or European—or European, but Indianized? Or, when European adherents of Buddhism in Kalimpong propounded a rationalized reading of Tibetan Buddhism, was this Tibetan Buddhism or a European version of it?

As these questions illustrate, the dynamic processes in Kalimpong and other contact zones call for new conceptual frameworks, where cultural production is not tied to an enclosed group, but seen as a dynamic and creative process that in itself produces and transforms notions of cultural boundaries. This view of knowledge production is embodied by what Pratt tentatively calls a “contact perspective.” Such a perspective “emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other,” and, in this way sees them “not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices” (Pratt 2003, 7). Cultural contact in this sense appears not as a clash between entities enclosed in rigid boundaries, as Pratt’s divide between colonizers and colonized might suggest, but addresses the relational aspects of encounters. A similar perspective was formulated more clearly in another trajectory of the term “transculturation.”<sup>17</sup>

## Contact and transculturality

In the late 1990s, Ortiz’s term “transculturation” was taken up by the philosopher Wolfgang Welsch (1999). Reformulating it as transculturality, he uses this term as a critical concept to counter the common notion of cultures as separate islands. In this sense it must also be distinguished from the related terms “multiculturality” and “interculturality,” which account for increasing mobility and contact in a globalized world, but which still view cultures principally as closed entities. Transculturality, by contrast, should grasp the inner differentiation, complexity, and hybridity that are typical features of modern societies, on the level of larger groups as well as in the lives of individuals (Welsch 1999, 196–199). In this sense, as the historian Afef Benessaïeh notes, transculturality “refers to an *embodied situation of cultural plurality* lived by many individuals and communities of mixed heritage and/or experience” (Benessaïeh 2010, 25). It not only describes notions of identity, but can also be used to qualify knowledge in general terms, pertaining to music, literature, food, and other areas of cultural production (Benessaïeh 2010, 27). From this perspective, cultural encounters do not take place between rigidly delineated cultures, but are an intrinsic part

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17 For an overview of different usages of the term transculturality in recent literature, see Benessaïeh (2010).

of how individuals and groups orient themselves in a pluralistic setting, drawing on an enlarged and complex cultural repertoire. Such processes are more visible in the era of globalization, but cultural contact must be seen as the norm rather than the exception in all historical periods. While from this perspective cultures are not seen as stable, but in flux through constant contact, this does not mean that a focus on the entangled nature of cultures should blind us to factual conflicts.

In the context of Kalimpong, cultural plurality was clearly an important feature of the social fabric. In fact, a certain sense of “cosmopolitanism” was often noted, especially by foreign visitors (figure 3).<sup>18</sup>

But how did individual agents relate to this pluralistic atmosphere? Can we claim that everyone in Kalimpong drew on different cultural repertoires in equal ways, or are not gestures of resistance and opposition equally important aspects, especially in light of the often conflicted historical situation? Cultural contact may after all take various forms: it may lead to a process of positive appropriation of new cultural knowledge and practices, but it could also evoke separatist sentiments and calls for the rectification of boundaries—what is different might come across as either an opportunity or as a threat.

This last aspect of cultural differentiation was emphasized in a recent critique of Welsch’s formulation of transculturality. As Monica Juneja and Michael Falser have pointed out, especially experiences of exchange and encounters can lead to the need to formulate cultural separation. It is thus important to view transculturality not as a fixed property of pluralist societies, but rather as a heuristic concept if we are to highlight the processes that constitute knowledge production in encounters. These processes may encompass a wide range of strategies such as appropriation, mediation, translation, and transformation of knowledge, but they could also result in resistance or rejection (Juneja and Falser 2013, 19f.).

Understood in this sense, the concept of transculturality can augment a more concise formulation of what Pratt loosely labelled a “contact perspective” by emphasising how knowledge is produced and negotiated in mutual encounters, without presupposing a monolithic body of knowledge that gets into contact in the first place. Contact, in that perspective, is not a one-time event, but a continuing process that is constitutive of all kinds of cultural knowledge. This knowledge is seen to be neither monolithic nor homogeneous, but “fractured, dialogically produced, potentially open-ended, and socially unstable” (Sengupta and Ali 2011, 6).<sup>19</sup> It escapes

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18 As an example, Archibald Steele, a journalist writing for the *Herald Tribune*, seemed genuinely impressed by the unexpected convergence of Christian missionaries, Nepali labourers, Tibetan lamas, nobility from Bhutan, Tibet, Europe, and Burma, as well as global researchers on Tibet and the Himalayas that he witnessed in Kalimpong; see his article in the *Himalayan Times*, January 14, 1951, 3–5: [http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/himalayan\\_times](http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/himalayan_times) [accessed June 22, 2015].

19 As Indra Sengupta and Daud Ali outline in their volume on knowledge production in colonial India, earlier studies in the tradition of Said or the subsequent Subaltern Studies Collective emphasized a strong divide between the power

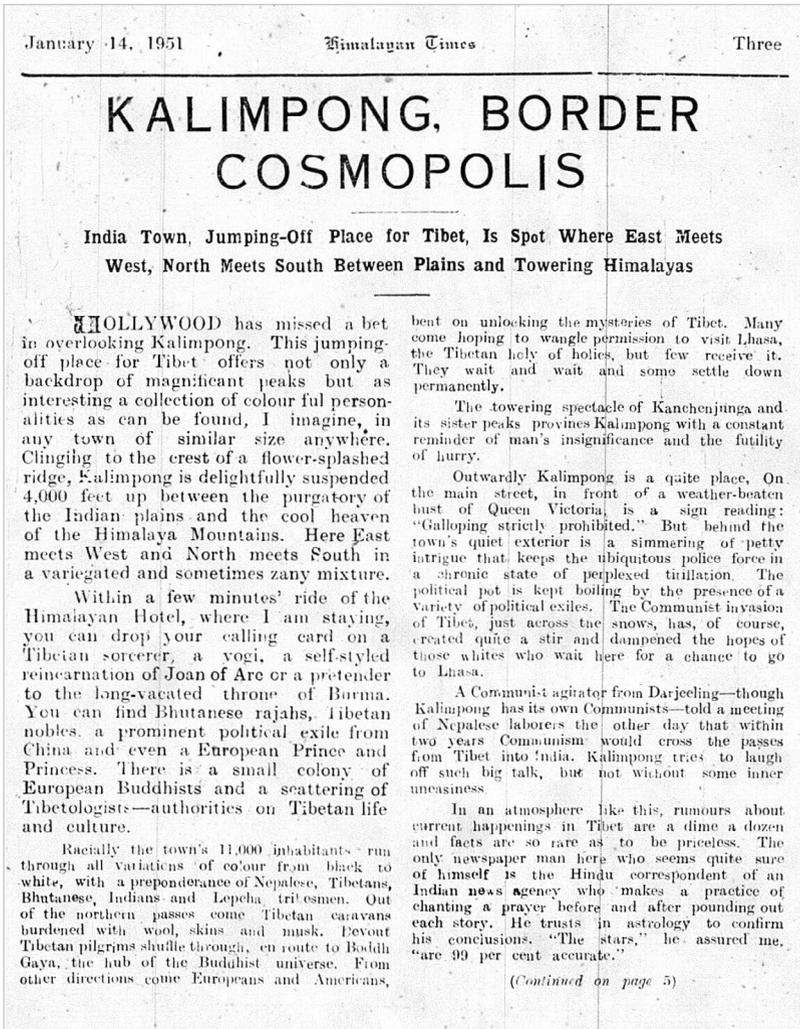


Figure 3: Kalimpong as "Border Cosmopolis"; article by Archibald Steele in the Kalimpong newspaper Himalayan Times from January 14, 1951.

delineation not only along the lines of fixed cultural boundaries, but also in terms of the rigid dichotomy of (strong) colonizers and (weak) colonized that characterizes early studies of knowledge production in a colonial setting, and which was also the point of departure for Pratt’s notion of a contact zone.

In this now “transculturally nuanced” view of a contact perspective, encounters are not seen through the lens of preconceived notions of cultural identities; instead, just how such identities are created in the encounter between people from different backgrounds becomes the focus of attention. What is “Lepcha,” or “European” is not taken as a given, but is open to question and investigation. As a consequence of this perspective, our advance into the cultural history of the region does not use notions of delineated ethnical or cultural groups as a structuring device—a practice common to many publications on the Himalayan region. Instead, the present volume focuses on phenomena that run across such preconceived notions of cultural homogeneity. In addressing key areas, such as religion, education, media, trade, politics, scholarship, and human relations, the articles will follow individual agents as well as the knowledge that is produced in their mutual entanglements across different linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and national boundaries, using a plethora of local and global sources.

## Contents and structure of the volume

The first of the four main sections—“Christian Mission, Educational Institutions, and Identity Formation”—revisits the early and formative phase of Kalimpong’s establishment as an urban centre, which was shaped significantly by the presence of Christian missionaries, the structures they founded, and the ways their knowledge and worldviews interacted with those encountered locally.

In her article, Jayeeta Sharma outlines the general context for the manifold missionary activities that began in the Eastern Himalayas in the second half of the nineteenth century. Focussing on the work of the Reverend John Anderson Graham, arguably the most influential missionary in Kalimpong, she shows how encounters between Christian missionaries and local interlocutors shaped the various projects around print culture, education, health, and social welfare that originated in this context. Being familiar with European Christian public media, Graham initiated several publication

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of European colonizers and the colonial state apparatus, on one side, and the agency of indigenous subjects on the other. More recent historical research, by contrast, has to deal with the attempt “to move away from such ‘bifocal’ tendencies and find analytical frameworks that can enable a clearer and more historically accurate understanding of the strange entanglements of colonialism that brought indigenous and colonial groups and individuals to work together on the production of knowledge even while the colonial structure perpetrated acts of violence on and subjugated Indians” (2011, 5).

projects which not only enabled flows of information between European metropolises and the peripheries of their colonies, but which he could also use to raise awareness and money for the educational and social projects he started. Most famous among these are the St Andrew's Colonial Homes, a school and orphanage that he founded in 1900 with the explicit mission of countering British India's "poor white" problem, mixed-race children who were the offspring sired by British tea planters, civil servants, and administrators with local woman, who were commonly excluded from normal educational channels. As Sharma points out, these projects became possible through a combination of several factors: not only Graham's commitment, but also the support of local as well as international sponsors, and the considerable political freedom that missionary activity was granted by the colonial administration in what was perceived as a periphery of the Empire, but one that was effectively connected, even on a global scale.

Andrew May takes a further look at Dr Graham's efforts and offers more of a close-up view of the children's Homes he founded. Modelled on Victorian ideas of social improvement, this cottage-style orphanage brought together children from a wide range of ethnic, linguistic, and also social backgrounds. While its social prestige also attracted a Himalayan and international upper class, the Homes were primarily intended as a haven and a remedy for poor Anglo-Indian children roaming the streets of Calcutta and other urban centres. Here, these illegitimate children were to be turned into "good citizens of the Empire," and trained to look for career prospects in colonial India as well as Australasia and Canada. Drawing on official publications such as the Homes' own *Magazine*, but also private correspondence preserved in archives in Kalimpong and Edinburgh, May paints a vivid picture of Graham's take on educational, social, and racial issues, as well as on the harsh realities of what it meant to grow up as an "inmate" of his Homes.

Charisma Lepcha investigates the long-term effects of Christian missions on indigenous populations. Brought up in Kalimpong herself, she offers an insider's perspective on how encounters with Christianity gave rise to new cultural identities among the Lepchas, which emerged as a complex interplay between Lepcha legends, Biblical beliefs, Nepali narratives, and modern scientific worldviews. The history that she recovers of Bom Church, the oldest church in Kalimpong which was established in 1882, explicates the importance of local agents in this process. Under the influence of early Hindu and Lepcha converts, rather than British missionaries, conversion to Christianity seemed to have occurred more smoothly than in many other places, and not as a radical break with old customs and practices. As Sharma and May emphasized earlier, missionary success was greatly enhanced by its alliance with education and the possibilities of social mobility that the latter facilitated. However, the dominance of Christian ideas among the Lepchas also led to a sense of "cultural loss," and present-day Lepcha Christians / Christian Lepchas are seen to be struggling to find their balance between ethnic and religious identities.

The next section—“Public Spheres, Public Media, and the Creation of Public Knowledge”—brings together articles that use different media to investigate how new public knowledge was formed in the transcultural public space of Kalimpong and other Eastern Himalayan hill stations, a space that was significantly shaped by the adoption of modern media and the global flows of knowledge that they facilitated.

In her contribution on photography, Clare Harris engages more closely with Pratt’s concept of “autoethnography” in order to grasp indigenous agency in the local appropriation of colonial technology and modes of representation. Her investigation of the visual economy of Darjeeling not only addresses photography as a fundamental practice of early knowledge production regarding the Himalayas, but also questions common assumptions about its colonizing character in post-colonial research. Through detailed case studies focused on the genre of the *carte de visite*, she counters practices that split photographic production of the colonial era into images of concrete individuals on the side of the European colonizers, and anonymous exotic “ethnic types” on the side of the colonized. As her reconstruction of the social spaces behind selected images reveals, indigenous agents were not mere subjects of colonial photography. Rather, they appear as important cultural brokers in the introduction of this technology, but also as consumers and, later, benefactors of the industry that emerged around it. Through her historical contextualization of concrete images, a transcultural vision of knowledge production unfolds that acknowledges a shared space of colonizers and colonized, and with that counters processes in which indigenous agents are silenced in colonial archives.

With their contribution on the yeti, the “wild man,” Anna Sawerthal and Davide Torri open up a fruitful avenue of analysis that traces the transformation and reinterpretation of knowledge from modern popular media back to its Himalayan origins. As detailed in the historical review of the various contexts in which the “yeti-complex” unfolds, the Eastern Himalayas played a crucial role in this process by enabling the intersection of two principally different public spheres. Himalayan folk narratives, ethnic origin myths, and religious rituals constitute a collection of mostly orally transmitted knowledge in which the yeti figures as a connection between humans and animated nature. Western scientists, by contrast, sought to integrate the yeti into zoological classification schemes when they encountered stories about the mysterious creature during their attempts to map the Empire’s sphere of influence in the nineteenth century. When European academics, mountaineers, and journalists engaged more closely with indigenous knowledge in mid-twentieth century Kalimpong, this led to a new interest in the yeti in Western mass media. As Sawerthal and Torri point out, modern images of the yeti must therefore be seen as a truly transcultural product. However, using an English- and a Tibetan-language newspaper produced in Kalimpong, their analysis of local adaptations of modern mass media also reveals a continuing rift between local and global public spheres, in which modern “yeti-mania” appears as a decisively Western phenomenon.

Prem Poddar and Lisa Lindkvist Zhang address another public sphere by investigating representations of Kalimpong in Chinese communist media. Their analysis of articles from the *People's Daily*, a propaganda organ of the Chinese Communist party, reveals the changing political relations between China and India that unfolded over three distinct phases between the mid-1950s and early 1960s. While Kalimpong first entered the Chinese public sphere as an idyllic trade hub, tensions with Tibet, the Tibetan presence in Kalimpong, and India's unclear stance on the Tibet issue turned it into a centre for possible political conspiracy in the late 1950s. The Sino-Indian war in 1962 brought clarity to this ambiguity, in which Kalimpong was seen as pervaded by anti-Chinese resentments. Drawing on sources from colonial archives and untranslated Chinese material, as well as recent interviews with Chinese in Kalimpong, Poddar and Lindkvist Zhang paint a vivid picture of how international political relations play out on the ground in a concrete location. Their analysis also highlights something about Kalimpong that only seemed to be contradictory: as a place on the margins of several nations' spheres of political influence, Kalimpong could act as a barometer for reading these countries' core concerns.

The third section—"Things that Connect: Economies and Material Culture"—highlights how material objects and the political, commercial, and religious economies they are part of shaped encounters of various kinds.

Emma Martin draws on the concept of "object lessons" to investigate how knowledge was transmitted and created through the exchange of material objects. In her study of the politically highly charged encounters between the Thirteenth Dalai Lama and Charles Bell, the Political Officer in Sikkim, as representatives of Tibet and British India respectively, she identifies "gifting moments" as salient sites for accumulating knowledge. Put in this perspective, their exchanges of gifts at various meetings in Darjeeling and Kalimpong from 1910 to 1912 were not only important in political and diplomatic terms, as is commonly emphasized. Rather, a close reading reveals these moments to be micro-contact zones that enabled transcultural learning and facilitated the transmission of a complex aggregation of connoisseurial knowledge drawing from South Asian, Tibetan, and Chinese ideas of craftsmanship. By focusing on the agency of material things in these encounters, Martin considers the alternative histories of objects that were silenced by colonial archival practices. However, when their voices are heard, these objects force us to reconsider simplistic notions of colonial knowledge and power, and give way to the more personal and intimate lessons that can be learned through things.

In her article, Tina Harris revisits the "golden era" of Indo-Tibetan cross-border trade, which should be seen as a fundamental lifeline in the economic development of Kalimpong and the greater region in the first half of the twentieth century. By looking at local sources, most importantly the English newspaper *Himalayan Times* and the Tibetan *Mirror (Me long)*, and using personal information from individuals directly involved in the trading economy, she questions a common narrative according to which

trade developed in direct dependence on larger political affairs. Instead of a strictly linear progression, these sources indicate extreme fluctuations that were often caused not so much by man-made politics, but by changes in the environment, trade logistics, or transportation infrastructure. Emphasising a “more-than-human” approach, she shows how trade in the crucial period of the 1950s was affected by a series of natural disasters (most commonly landslides), the availability of pack animals, changes in road conditions, or the introduction of motorised transport. Ironically, this material perspective also allows us to see how humans were trying to cope with these problems on a local level and were not just victims of larger power politics.

Material objects and the economies associated with their production and distribution are also at the centre of the contribution by Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa. In her analysis of the sacred economies of Buddhist material culture, she shows how Kalimpong’s historical function as a contact zone for peoples from diverse backgrounds manifests itself in the present-day marketing of Buddhist goods. As we see from her case studies of the production, consecration, distribution, and consumption of products such as prayer flags, statues, and the sacred substances that make them religiously efficacious, these economies are marked by the highly dynamic confluence of members of different cultural and religious communities, as well as by the intersection of traditional craftsmanship and modern techniques of reproduction. In this way, the focus on local material culture reveals transregional, transreligious, and transnational connections in which Bihari manufacturers, Bhutanese ritual specialists, Hindu Agrawal traders, and newly converted Buddhist customers from Taiwan are part and parcel of an economy that is often simplistically associated solely with Tibetan Buddhism.

The last section—“Scholars, Power, and Knowledge Production”—deals in a more focussed way with the encounters between foreign and indigenous scholars that Kalimpong’s strategic position allowed, and the knowledge that was produced through such interactions.

Trine Brox and Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen revisit the Himalayan sojourn of Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, an old-world ethnographer, explorer, and aristocrat who spent seven years in Kalimpong in the 1950s. Building on Pratt’s conceptual framework, they investigate his activities against the backdrop of three different scalar approaches to viewing Kalimpong as a contact zone. Larger geopolitical factors were responsible for bringing peoples of different backgrounds in contact in the first place, but they also brought about a climate of suspicion, which, in the end, also turned Prince Peter into a political suspect. On the smaller scale of interpersonal relations, the convergence of Tibetan refugees, European academics, Himalayan aristocrats, and others provided a fruitful environment in which Prince Peter is seen manoeuvring to advance his ethnographic aims. Geopolitical and interpersonal challenges, Brox and Koktvedgaard Zeitzen argue, also brought about significant changes in his research

methodology, as he abandoned the old-fashioned expedition mode in favour of a localised approach to ethnographic studies. Taken together, these factors led to the accumulation of an enormous body of ethnographic knowledge and artefacts, gathered in the Eastern Himalayas, but seen as a proxy for Tibet proper.

By contrast, Markus Viehbeck focuses on the ambiguous role of indigenous scholars, not only as assistants to European academics, but also as scholars in their own right. Taking as his example the life of Rindzin Wangpo, a particularly well-connected Tibetan scholar, poet, teacher, research assistant, and Buddhist, he illustrates the intersection of global interests in Himalayan culture and religion with their local representatives in the Eastern Himalayas. Rindzin Wangpo's path from Lhasa to Kalimpong, from London to Sri Lanka opens up a micro-historical perspective through which crucial developments in the study of Tibetan language and religion, Himalayan ethnography, and the emergence of new trends in Buddhism are seen to take shape through complex personal encounters. The dynamics that unfold between larger political, economic, and intellectual trends, on the one hand, and personal interactions, on the other, question preconceived notions of a rigid dichotomy between colonizer and colonized, or European centre and Asian periphery. However, the character of the different sources that Viehbeck uses to paint a nuanced picture of these encounters also forces us to reflect on powers of representation in which the agency of indigenous scholars can be made visible only through the consideration of local material, which is often difficult to access.

Discrepancies in knowledge produced by indigenous and European scholars are also highlighted in the contribution by Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia. Taking the contrasting representations of Buddhism in the work of L. A. Waddell, a British colonial administrator, and those of Kazi Dawa Samdup, a prominent Sikkimese intellectual, as examples, he points to the subversive potential of a contact zone. Drawing on Pratt's terminology, Dawa Samdup's oeuvre is thus seen as a form of "autoethnographic expression" that counters colonial views of Tibetan Buddhism as backward and superstitious, as they were presented in Waddell's influential work *The Buddhism of Tibet*. While Dawa Samdup's translations of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* and other important Buddhist texts were aimed as a corrective to European knowledge, he could only rise to this position under European influence: through the Anglophile education he received in a colonial boarding school, the positions he was given in the British colonial administration, and the knowledge that he exchanged with European scholars. As Bhutia shows through an analysis of Dawa Samdup's private correspondence, he had a unique sense of power in these encounters that allowed him to publicise his own vision of Buddhism.

While the core sections of the volume deal with phenomena in the more distant historical past, roughly the first half of the twentieth century, the last article, which acts as an epilogue, makes a connection with Kalimpong's immediate present. Focussing on the reception of Kiran Desai's

Booker prize winning novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, Prem Poddar and Cheralyn Meador show how controversies in ethnic representation emerge from Kalimpong’s migrant history and colonial past, but continue to be highly relevant in present-day politics and people’s sentiments. Placed against the backdrop of the ethno-nationalist Gorkhaland agitation, a current that was able to unify not only Indian Nepalis but also other ethnic communities with its call for an independent state in the Darjeeling and Kalimpong hills, Desai’s work touches upon sensitive issues in the migrant history of the Himalayan border region, in which claims to territory as well as to political and economic power are central issues in the formation and demarcation of ethnic identities. Desai allows a plethora of different voices to make their claims in the novel, thereby highlighting the marginalisation and under-representation that are obvious concerns in her work. However, as Poddar and Meador argue, the book itself perpetuates representational asymmetries between political and cultural centres and their peripheries, as is illustrated by the differences between the novel’s laudatory reception amongst American, European, and Indian metropolitan audiences, on the one hand, and its condemnation by people and media in the hill region, on the other. Issues of power in knowledge production are thereby exposed as pertinent to colonial contexts, but they also continue to be an issue in present-day global cultural politics.

## Conclusions

With its focus on encounters between people from different backgrounds, the contributions to this volume construct the history of Kalimpong as a prime example of a “contact zone.” In doing so, however, they go far beyond a mere literal interpretation of Pratt’s concept as a “place where people, things, or knowledge meet,” a (simplistic) usage of the concept found in the literature of a wide range of disciplines. Instead, the articles gathered here seek to nuance, interrogate, and substantiate this catchphrase in a more sustainable manner, drawing from different aspects of Pratt’s conceptual universe. As emphasized in most of the articles, a key point in this endeavour is the focus on the agency of individuals. Conceptualized as “middlemen,” “go-betweens,” or “cultural brokers” in anthropological research,<sup>20</sup> they are seen as taking an important role in the dynamics of various types of contact. They can also act as a link, bringing together larger-scale issues—the more general social, political, or economic developments which belong to Pratt’s emphasis on the role of larger asymmetries of power—and a micro-historical focus on people’s concrete interactions.

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20 See Szasz (2001, 4–20) for a review of anthropological approaches to this concept, and Von der Höh (2013) for some recent applications in Historical Studies.

The “copresence” of these people triggers a wide spectrum of actions: using, opposing, or simply ignoring asymmetries of a larger scale. In their encounters, they are seen to adopt from, translate, modify, or oppose each other, thus creating new knowledge. This knowledge is hybrid in nature, as is emphasized in Pratt’s concept of “autoethnography,” which highlights the adoption of certain (colonial) modes of representation by the weaker (colonized) party. It is, however, also highly circular as processes of borrowing or demarcation are seen to be sustained in all directions.

Approaching knowledge production through the lens of individual encounters is only possible if a vast number of sources are analysed. Sources pertaining to many of the agents considered in this volume are scattered along global trajectories, composed in a wide range of languages, and hidden from public view on the shelves of private libraries and archives, or they are suffering from the broader effects of colonial archiving or economic decline in marginalised areas. The wealth of material presented here, often of local nature, thus also echoes Pratt’s intent to counter the marginalizing effects of colonial power relations.

The focus on individuals certainly comes with its own limitations. While it can be useful for exhibiting the dynamic features of encounters which the historical setting of Kalimpong and its neighbouring areas facilitated, the articles gathered in this volume can only provide a few glimpses into the complex cultural history of the region, and the stories of many important characters remain to be told. However, by unearthing some of these stories and by pointing out their global connections, this volume also draws attention to the importance of the Eastern Himalayan borderlands for international politics and global flows of knowledge about Himalayan religion and culture in the first half of the twentieth century, and thereby helps to counterbalance the region’s relative neglect in the academic research of the past decades.

## Figures

Fig. 1: Map created by UvA-Kaartenmakers.

Fig. 2: Courtesy of Kodak Store, Kalimpong.

Fig. 3: Courtesy of Isrun Engelhardt.

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