

Trans-Himalayan Traders: Economy, Society, and Culture in Northwest Nepal. JAMES F. FISHER. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1986. xiii + 232 pp., maps, tables, figures, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$35.00 (cloth)

SHERRY B. ORTNER
University of Michigan

This is a well crafted monograph on an extremely remote village in northwest Nepal that the author calls Tarangpur. The study is primarily economic, concerning the ways in which economic choices determine cultural patterns and directions of social change. The theoretical frames derive from ecological anthropology, from a Barthian transactionalist approach, and from a Berreman-ish focus on impression management. (Fisher was trained at Chicago in the late 1960s but escaped the symbolic and structuralist approaches that were dominant there at that time. He thanks McKim Marriott and Manning Nash for intellectual guidance.)

Fisher begins by showing that the people of Tarangpur produce an agricultural surplus. He spends some time on the debate over the meaning of "surplus," and arrives at a definition that appears to suit the case (I will not review that discussion here). He goes on to argue that the things people do with this surplus are largely optional and culturally defined. With the exception of needing salt, obtained in trade with Tibetans, the villagers are self-sufficient in subsistence terms, and do not need to do all the things they then do with their "surplus": other trade activities, support of a ritual system, sundry social expenditures out of neighborliness and so forth. These, in other words, are arenas of "choice." It turns out, however, that both the support of ritual, and the obligation to be generous and neighborly, are not really arenas of choice, since the people of Tarangpur view them as irreducible requirements of normal social life. That then leaves trade (other than for salt) as the major domain of options: men (and trading is a purely male activity) may choose to put more or less energy into trading; they may choose (in modern times) to do different forms of trading; and they may choose to do different things with the wealth they garner from trading. These choices in turn, Fisher argues, have significant consequences for the local culture, particularly with reference to ethnic identity.

Fisher's case is in fact strongest on the ethnic identity question. He shows that the people of Tarangpur are situated at the interface of the Hindu Nepali culture and the Buddhist Tibetan culture, and that they have constructed and maintained an identity that is syncretic or, in less charitable terms, two-faced, over a long period of time. He has an excellent discussion of the contrast between the trade, which facilitates (material) exchange between the two regions, and the ethnic-interaction style, which blocks (cultural) exchange. He goes on to make the case that, with a relatively recent shift in trade patterns in the direction of one that is more purely oriented toward Nepali locations, goods, and needs, there is a corresponding shift to a more straightforward Nepali identity.

Fisher is on weaker ground in trying to derive

other changes from this shift. For example, it turns out that the men of Tarangpur, who used to avoid like the plague anything to do with the central government, have now got heavily into politicking for elective government offices. Fisher says that this change "is not comprehensible except as a consequence of the economic shifts" (p. 176, emphasis added). Yet Fisher has only shown that the shift in trade patterns has produced increased cash wealth, not that it has in any way (discussed in the book) dictated where that wealth should be put. Why Tarangpurian men are suddenly addicted to spending their wealth on political campaigning (and, it should be noted, these are *not* the men most heavily involved in trading) is never adequately connected with the trading shift of which it is supposedly a consequence.

Similarly, Fisher chronicles a number of areas of Tarangpur social life that have not apparently changed at all, despite the changes in the trading arena. In particular, the ethic of internal egalitarianism remains very strong, and is presumably either buttressed by other aspects of social and cultural life, or insulated from the external trade, or both, in ways that are not discussed in the book.

Overall, then, the explanatory claims of the book are somewhat larger than they should be. But the book is nicely constructed, well written, and has the virtue above all of actually having an argument that one can agree or disagree with. On all these grounds, then, it is a contribution to the growing body of quality anthropology being done in Nepal.

History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community. P. STEVEN SANGREN. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987. x + 268 pp., maps, figures, tables, photographs, bibliography, index. \$39.50 (cloth).

NORMA DIAMOND
University of Michigan

For the past four decades, Taiwan has served as a stand-in for the rest of China for purposes of field research. By rough count, at least 30 Western anthropologists and sociologists have turned their scholarly lenses on that small island-province since the 1950s, and the number of local scholars is probably double that. Professor Sangren has dealt with the problem of finding something new to say by selectively focusing on a segment of religious practice and belief and subjecting it to analysis in light of contemporary ethnological theory. It is an ambitious book, and a difficult one.

His starting point is an objective account of the historical development of the market town of Ta Ch'i and its surrounding villages, the growth of the local economy, and the marketing area's relationship to provincial economic/political developments from the 18th century on. That segment of the book, if expanded, would have made for a highly interesting monograph in itself: Chinese expansion of empire and frontier settlement are topics on which far more work needs to be done. But perhaps that is a task for an economic historian with a passion for archival work. Sangren is an ethnologist, and he turns fairly quickly from a consideration of the "nested

hierarchy" of economic space to that of ritual space—again an objective account of levels of religious participation, from household to neighborhood, village and intervillage territorial cults, and finally to cross-island pilgrimages to major sacred shrines, in this case the Ma Tsu temple at Pei-kang. (I note that the circle has widened: with the lifting of travel bans to the mainland in October 1987, a large contingent of Taiwanese identified with the Ma Tsu temple at Lu-kang applied for permission to go on pilgrimage to the mother temple in Meizhou, Fujian.) His delineation of the ritual landscape raises criticisms of earlier "explanations" of Chinese folk religion, including the tripartite model of "gods, ghosts, and ancestors" as critical categories, or earlier suggestions that the pantheon is simply modeled after the Imperial bureaucracy. I agree that these are overly simplistic, but they do emerge as folk explanations.

In the latter part of the book (Part III), Sangren takes the position that religious symbols and practice are a part of the process of social reproduction rather than simply maintenance mechanisms explicable in functionalist terms or as mirror images of social realities. I don't think he would get much argument on that. But it was around this juncture that I began losing the thread of what he has to say and wondering if someone else ought to be reviewing this book. Part of my problem is with his language, since Sangren is determined to be theoretically inclusive (or eclectic) and has drawn from structuralism, symbolic anthropology, practice theory, Marxist anthropology, deconstruction theory, cybernetics, an older "Sinology," and a judicious selection from Durkheim and British functionalism. His text is couched in terminology representative of all of the above and includes some fairly dense quotations from spokesmen of various schools of thought; at times his purpose seems less to illuminate data than to mediate between intellectual factions.

Chapters 7 and 8 are explications of Sangren's schematic constructions of Yin/Yang contrasts applied to placement at domestic and temple altars, to ideas about gods/ghosts/ancestors, male and female gods, communal and religious hierarchies and other manifestations of *ling* (here defined as supernatural power or efficacy). Chapter 9 is essentially a discussion of female gods (the heterodox encompassed within the orthodox). Chapter 10 picks up on religious pilgrimages for theoretical analysis although little data is added to the earlier minimalist discussion. For the time being, I will take his word for it that they are "arenas in which lower-order differentiations are reproduced" which enable the participants to "create, reify, or discover a consistency between a cultural construction of reality. . . and their own knowledge and experience" (p. 206). But I do wish I had more descriptive information about the who, what, when, where, and why of Taiwan pilgrimages, and those of China-proper, to hang the theory on. The next chapter, which deals with issues of legitimacy and power, does a much better job of telling the reader what it is that is being explained in theoretical terms.

This brings me to what I think are the weaknesses of this book, particularly as one to assign to students. It is far more an exercise in theoretical debate than a theory-informed ethnography. Admittedly, I

began by saying that Taiwan has been intensively written about (sometimes repetitiously so), but there is still a great deal that we do not know at the descriptive level or in terms of local explanation. Some of what is absent from this volume can be easily found in the writings of others. Some of what is absent as data, though dealt with in theory, is not available. Another 50 pages of description and local explanation added to this book would have made an important difference, I think.

In addition, I am uncomfortable with extrapolation from a distanced structural analysis of local culture to all of China, over space and time. The search for overarching universal principles that hold all of China together is an admirable quest but it tends to gloss over local variation and heterogeneity in practice and explanation. I suppose it is because of the author's belief that his model of religious thought is pan-Chinese that all terms are given in Mandarin rather than a romanized Hokkien: I hope these translations are truly cognate with the terms used by his informants and carry the same meanings.

Despite these reservations, I think that the book is outstanding within the body of scholarship on Taiwan for its attempts to offer a "logic" of Taiwanese folk religion, and for its critique and/or application of contemporary ethnological theory. Both China specialists and general ethnologists should find it of interest, even if it is not easy reading.

Home Life in Tokyo. JŪKICHI INOUE. London, Boston, Sydney and Henley: KPI Limited (distributed by Routledge and Kegan Paul), 1985 (originally published 1910). xiii + 323 pp., illustrations. \$12.95 (paper).

THEODORE C. BESTOR
Columbia University

This work resembles late Victorian travelers' accounts of "The Manners and Customs of the So-and-So." But this one was written by a Japanese,

to give a concise account of the life we lead at home in Tokyo. . . . [T]here are already many excellent works on Japan which may be read with great profit; but as their authors are most of them Europeans or Americans, and naturally look at Japanese life and civilization from an occidental point of view, it occurred to me that notwithstanding the superabundance of books on Japan, a description of Japanese life by a native of the country might not be without interest.

The author's internationalism, his familiarity with what was written about Japan in the West, and his elegantly convoluted style are not accidental. Jūichi Inoue (1862–1929) was sent as a child of eleven to study in England; in adulthood he served as a Japanese diplomat in Belgium and America.

Given who he was, when he wrote, and for whom, it is not surprising that Inoue's portrayal of life in Tokyo is a genteel one. He gives priority to traditional customs and lifeways, and though there are frequent comments about this or that custom or style of dress being superseded by a Western fash-