

example in polar regions, is mainly limited by heat deficiency due to low temperatures and short growing seasons. In such environments, the need for plants to maximize their metabolic efficiency gives rise to specialization and physiological and morphological adaptations. Chapter 2 of the book focuses on physiological limits and genetic responses, based on the fact that barriers to distribution always present an evolutionary challenge. On the other hand, the Earth's climate has warmed significantly during the past decades, and the observed increase in surface temperature appears to be most pronounced in ecosystems at high altitudes and high latitudes. Observed climate-induced changes in the altitudinal distribution of plant species and communities in the treeline ecotone, as well as at the upper altitudinal limit of plant life, are described in Chapter 3.

Chapters 4 to 7 deal with regional treeline studies in America. The regeneration of whitebark pine at the timberline in the North American Rockies, along with relationships between landform and seedling recruitment, are discussed in Chapter 4, while Chapter 7 explores the impact of the Clark's nutcracker on whitebark pine. Species composition and structure of *Nothofagus* forests at the timberline in the southern Andes are described in Chapter 5. The influence of the pocket gopher, a subterranean herbivore rodent, on soil and vegetation patterns on Niwot Ridge in the Colorado Front Range is reported on in Chapter 6.

Regional treeline studies in Europe deal with humus forms and reforestation of an abandoned pasture in the Swiss Central Alps (Chapter 8), explore a tree-ring record from 320 to 1994 AD from Norway (Chapter 9), and conclude with a discussion of woodland recolonization and postagricultural development in Italy (Chapter 10).

The two final contributions deal with isolated mountain forests

in Central Asian dryland areas (Chapter 11) and provide a review of geographical and ecological aspects at the upper timberline in the Himalayas, Hindu Kush, and Karakorum (Chapter 12).

As noted by the editors, this collection of studies carried out in mountain ecosystems is dedicated to Prof. F.-K. Holtmeier—who “infected” many of his students with the “mountain virus” before retiring in 2004—as a thank you for his excellent supervision of research on a cold, but nevertheless fascinating environment. However, it is the compilation of information and insights that make this textbook a significant contribution to literature on high mountain ecosystems.

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**Secrets of Manang:
The Story behind the
Phenomenal Rise of
Nepal's Famed Business
Community**

By Clint Rogers. Kathmandu, Nepal: Mandala Publications, 2004. ix + 204 pp. US\$15.86. ISBN 99933-10-24-7.

Part of any monograph is the advertising and promotion that goes along with it, conventionally conducted by the publisher on behalf of the writer. While anyone who has written a book would support a fellow author in an honest attempt to generate a little hype on the back flap of their first book, some such “blurbs” go a little too far. Clint Rogers has regrettably fallen into this trap. Deploying words such as “striking” and “extraordinary” about the community whose economic opportunism he documents,

the book is inflatingly described as a “must-read” with “beautiful photographs” of “perhaps the most enigmatic ... valley in the high mountains of the Himalaya.” While all too many monographs fail to live up to their back cover summaries, the blurb accompanying *Secrets of Manang* does at least give the reader a sense of what is coming: back-slapping good cheer about the entrepreneurial acumen of the businessmen of Manang.

Rogers contends that the Nyishangte (people of Manang) are a uniquely successful Himalayan community, particularly from an economic perspective. The group's historical economic success, he suggests, “largely boils down to its members having been fortunate opportunists who aggressively took advantage of privileges afforded them by the central government to develop and exploit certain commercial interests” (p 185). It may be on account of Rogers' background in two disciplines (business as well as geography) that he is comfortable using terms such as “opportunist,” “aggressive,” and “exploit” with no disapproval intended, but these word choices leave me, as the reviewer, slightly uncomfortable. The book wavers precariously between ecological determinism (all is explained by good fortune and location) and economic triumphalism (it is what you make of the cards that you are dealt, a rags to riches narrative), and simply fails to convince.

There are essentially three problems with this book. First, Rogers is inclined towards a form of Nyishangte exceptionalism which is as historically unfounded as it is analytically weak for explaining the phenomena that he encounters in Manang. He contends that Nepal “is painfully short of entrepreneurial communities with a track record of economic success” (p 1), but what then of the Newar, Sherpa, and Thakali, each of whom have every reason to be called “entrepreneur-

ial” and who have received considerable attention for their economic acumen? It is incorrect to suggest, as Rogers does, that “Nepal’s Himalayan highlands are generally characterized by a low level of commercial activity” (p 68). Second, while deeply immersed in Manang’s socioeconomic history, Rogers appears ill-versed in wider Himalayan scholarship. How else can we explain his suggestion that “it is not certain whether the use of Gurung and Ghale surnames [by the Nyishangte] actually reflects historical origins or whether these surnames were adopted...” (p 14; they are without a doubt adopted), and his statement about the word Bhotia as a term which “derives from Bhot, an old Hindu word for Tibetan” (p 88; Hindu is not a language, and Bhotia derives from written Tibetan bod)? Third, Rogers’ 204 pages offer little data or analysis that can be termed genuinely new or different from earlier writings such as those by von Furer-Haimendorf (1975 and 1983), van Spengen (1987 and 2000), and Watkins (1996). *Secrets of Manang* reads like the master’s or doctoral dissertation that it is, in which the author positions himself in the field and recapitulates a lot of old ground. When

Rogers rhetorically asks, on page 63, “before we begin delving into the subject of entrepreneurship, it seems reasonable to ask the question, ‘why bother?’,” I feel compelled to agree.

I am a committed advocate of publishing the products of academic scholarship in the countries where the research was conducted. The publishing industry of Nepal has weathered the country’s recent social and political turmoil and continues to grow from strength to strength. Alongside old favorites such as Ratna Pustak Bhandar, new publishing houses sprung up in the democratic 1990s, often along with family-run bookshops, such as Himal Books and Mandala. The latter imprint now has an impressive backlist of monographs and edited collections written by foreign scholars working in the Himalayas, including the work presently under review. While the benefits of publishing in Nepal are transparent—cost, availability, and speed—there can be drawbacks, namely a questionable review process and variable quality.

Secrets of Manang occupies an uneasy middle ground, somewhere between sober academic scholarship on the one hand and more

popular, even romantic, travel writing on the other hand. If readers are attracted to this style, or have found it hard to locate the far more significant works cited above, then Rogers’ book has something to recommend it, if only as an overview to the socioeconomic structures of the Manangba community. If, however, readers are seeking an insightful and original commentary on one of Nepal’s trading communities, they will surely be disappointed.

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