

# Recreating the Sacred Landscape:

## Tourism and Pilgrimage in Himalayan Sacred Places

### Under the Economic, Social, and Political Conditions of Modernity

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Lewis and Clark College  
Portland, Oregon  
May 2015  
Environmental Studies Honors Thesis  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

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## **Abstract:**

Increasing pilgrim and tourist traffic at sacred sites inspires us to examine why and how pilgrims and tourists interact with ecosystems and local cultures at these sacred places. Despite the destructive potential of tourism and pilgrimage, sacred places can motivate outsiders and locals to preserve ecosystems within these spaces. In this paper, I examine this issue in the context of Himalayan sacred places. I explore how colonial and religious history has shaped both tourist and pilgrimage travel to the Himalayan region and how this molding has affected the modern impacts of both. I demonstrate this phenomenon through two case studies: one conducted by myself in Pharping, Nepal, another examining Shangri-La in the Yunnan province of the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China. Using these examples of the interactions between pilgrims, tourists, and local cultures and ecosystems at sacred sites, I examine the extent to which 'sacredness' can drive ecological and cultural preservation in the modern world. I contend that the tourist and pilgrim creation of Himalayan sacred spaces as outside of political and economic realms is problematic considering their impacts on ecosystems and societies at these sites. In order to adequately preserve cultural and ecological elements of sacred sites, collaborative, multi-scaled policy coupled with a reconceptualization of sacred space tourism is necessary.

## **Acknowledgements**

This project was a culmination of many friends and mentors spending countless hours working with me. I am incredibly blessed to be able to work with such talented and insightful people. With this in mind I would like to thank:

Saman Raj Adhikari and Hom Ojha for all of their help situating me in Pharping and making me feel at home in Nepal. Thank you for inviting me into your homes and showing me more of Nepal than I could ever have seen alone.

The monks, teachers, and staff at the Neydo Tashi Choeling Monastery for letting me into their lives and taking care of me during my work there. Thank you for your time and your patience.

Kabir Mansingh Heimsath, Cari Coe, and Jim Proctor for their invaluable contribution as my honors thesis committee. Thank you for the time you spent, the countless drafts you read, and the wisdom you shared with me which I attempted to infuse into this paper.

Andrew Bernstein for his guidance during my independent study and for inspiring me to think critically about topics of pilgrimage and mountain tourism. Thank you for your help in formulating my ideas and for your expertise in securing academic grants.

Sepideh Bajracharya for her knowledge considering the Nepali social structure.

Jessica Starling for her instruction on the topics of Buddhism and Hinduism.

Kelsey Kahn, Gabby Henrie, Katherine Jernigan, Schuyler Schwartz, and Ben Small for their emotional support and general help during the writing of this thesis, you are all wonderful people and scholars.

The Student Academic Activities Board and the Mellon Foundation for their financial support of my work in Nepal.

My parents for their support of my academic career and my generally unusual topics of interest. Thank you for trusting me.

Thank you all for your invaluable support, your contributions mean the world to me.

I dedicate this paper to the victims of the 2015 earthquake in Nepal. It is my hope that this research will be of some benefit to those affected and that scholars keep this community and their wellbeing in their thoughts during this time of emergency and moving forward into the recovery process.

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## Introduction



*Fig 1. Prayer flags in the sacred valley of Pharping, Nepal*

Increasing pilgrim and tourist traffic at sacred sites invites us to ask how and why pilgrims and tourists interact with ecosystems and local cultures at the sacred places they visit (UNWTC). Despite the destructive potential of tourism and pilgrimage, sacred places can increase the motivation of outsiders and locals to preserve ecosystems within sacred places (Verschuuren 2010). When a sacred space becomes a tourist destination it can motivate local communities to preserve ecosystems as a means of income generation. However, when landscapes change meaning because of the economic forces associated with tourism, these altered incentives can affect how locals understand and interact with sacred sites (Spoon 2011). Tourism has also been cited as a major cause of environmental degradation due to its multifaceted impacts on local landscapes and cultures (Higham et.al. 2005). Combined with these impacts, tourism in sacred spaces has been noted to contribute to the commodification and decay of local cultures (Zurick 1992). Considering the importance of their ecosystem services, their biological and cultural diversity, their religious importance, and their draw for both pilgrims and tourists, the sacred places of the Himalayan region present an enigma for those wishing to implement ethical and ecologically sound tourism practices.

Through the analysis of tourism and pilgrimage to sacred spaces in the modern era, I will examine how colonial and religious history has shaped both tourist and pilgrimage travel to these regions and how this molding has affected the modern impacts of both. I will demonstrate this phenomenon through a case study I conducted in Pharping, Nepal, which will draw from other studies of sacred sites in the Himalayan region. Using these examples of the interactions between pilgrims, tourists, and local cultures and ecosystems at sacred sites, I will determine the extent to which ‘sacredness’ can drive ecological and cultural preservation in the modern world. I will also discuss how tourism to sacred sites stratifies income and power throughout local populations.

The term sacred space combines religious, sociological, and geographical notions of place and meaning. It represents a large-scale tendency of human beings to designate things and ideas into sacred and profane. According to Relph, designating sacred spaces is part of our nature and that “to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places” (Relph 1976 p1). Levi and Kocher (2012) draw from a variety of sources to state that sacred spaces can be characterized by the combination of their behavioral, emotional, and place-anchored definitions. The behavioral definition refers to the rituals that individuals do while in the space. These activities are usually tied to a particular set of religious beliefs that ordain the appropriateness and sanctity of certain activities done in a specific place (Bremer 2006). The emotional definition of sacred space can be explained by the fact that sacredness is not tied directly either to the observer or to the place itself, but through the meaning created through the combination of the two (Carmichael, Hubert, & Reeves, 1994). Sacredness may be attributed directly to a place because of the presence of spiritual forces or due to the consecration of an area by a religious official (Bianca 2001). The reasons why a place is defined as sacred may be the result of one or many of these factors. The drive to visit a sacred space is typically a desire to either have a direct religiously mediated experience of the sacred or to be in a place where others have such a connection. However, under the conditions of modernity, visits to sacred spaces can be motivated by a variety of factors (Levi

Kocher 2012). Sacred spaces are not just defined by their religious and social meanings, but also by the ecosystem services they provide for locals, and the type of travel they inspire. They are subject to the economics, politics, and social conditions of the world around them and are thus never fixed.

While it is useful to differentiate what is meant by the terms ‘pilgrim’ and ‘tourist’ relative to their histories, it is difficult to separate the two in the complexities of the modern age. This is reflected in modern definitions of pilgrimage, some of which necessitate the involvement of sacred space, while others assert that many forms of travel can be deemed pilgrimage. Journeys as disparate as trips to Star Trek conventions to visits to abandoned concentration camps have been examined as pilgrimage (Pazos 2014). Aside from modern adaptations, pilgrimage remains one of the most persistent attributes of major religions today (Mckay 1998). The universality of the concept of pilgrimage is striking; it has been practiced by cultures in both the East and the West throughout many historical periods. Even for those who do not embark on pilgrimages, the stories of those who do, such as *The Canterbury Tales* and *Pilgrim’s Progress*, fascinate readers (Turner et.al. 1978). Pilgrimage has been a contested subject in the fields of religious studies and anthropology. While MacCannell (1976), Cohen (1978), and numerous other scholars have debated the extent to which a tourist is a pilgrim this paper will explicitly separate them (Maccannell 1976; Cohen 1978). In order to form the arguments relevant to this paper, I will borrow from both Cohen (1978) and Timothy et.al. (2006) who have called pilgrimage, when compared to tourism, an undertaking of a journey that holds great meaning and whose destination is an area set apart from the ‘ordinary’ world by its spiritual significance to the traveller (Timothy et.al. 2006; Cohen 1978).

The anthropologists Edith and Victor Turner state that “a tourist is half pilgrim if a pilgrim is half tourist” (Turner et.al. 1978). Describing their interactions with each other and space is made difficult by the fact that the terms pilgrim and tourist, like sacred spaces themselves, are not fixed (MacCannell, 1976). In an attempt to puzzle out the differences between a pilgrim and a tourist, Erik



Cohen categorized these two groups based on their motivations for travel. Cohen states that as far as motivation, pilgrims and tourists move in opposite directions, one towards the object of the sacred located in their center of the world, the other away from it, in search of the other (Cohen 1978). Smith defines a tourist in his book *Hosts and Guests* as any person with the leisure time, income, and social situation which sanction travel (Smith 1989). While these definitions are useful, they do not capture the complexities of modern pilgrimage, especially in the context of the Himalaya. They also fail to reflect complex fields such as spiritual tourism, where the traveller searches for meaning in the religions of other cultures. Considering these complexities, the duality of tourism and pilgrimage is not useful when examining the impacts of these groups at sacred sites. While the histories of pilgrimage and tourism are inseparable from the issues of colonialism and power, tourists and pilgrims share certain economic, political, and cultural impacts at Himalayan sacred sites.

This paper will examine the history, motivation and practices of two groups of tourists, known as adventure and spiritual tourists and how they interact with cultures and ecosystems in sacred spaces. Norman defines a spiritual tourist as an individual who “undertakes spiritual practice or seeks spiritual progression in the course of their travels, usually with the intention of gaining ‘spiritual benefit’” (Norman 2011: 17). In December 2014, The New York Times released an article in their Sunday edition titled *The New Allure of Sacred Pilgrimages*. The author, Bruce Feiler, describes the reason why more and more travellers, especially those of western descent, are willing to pay large sums of money and forgo the usual comforts of an average vacation in order to travel to destinations defined by their spiritual characteristics (Feiler 2014). According to statistics collected by the United Nation’s First International Congress on Tourism and Pilgrimage, one in every three travellers identifies themselves as a pilgrim (UNWTO). Growing alongside spiritual tourism is adventure tourism, which has grown 69% per annum since 2009 (Adventure Travel Trade Association). Beard et. al. borrow from Addison (1999) to define adventure tourism as “the threefold combination of activity, nature, and

culture” (Beard et. al. 2012: 29). Both of these forms of tourism are results of the history of pilgrimage, travel, and colonial ideology. Spiritual and adventure tourism have not only grown in number of travellers but also have spread out spatially into areas that have historically not been frequented by tourists. Spiritual tourism and adventure tourism are the two main methods, which bring western travellers to montane sacred spaces, driving the intersection of tourists, pilgrims, and sacred sites.

A central concern of this paper is the extent to which tourism affects local cultures and ecosystems. The economic dimension of this examination concerns tourism as a development mechanism. Tourism and development experts are divided about whether the expansion of the tourist market will benefit local communities and ecosystems or hasten their destruction. Considering tourism’s global scope and the developing world’s general comparative advantage in sites for spiritual and adventure travel, tourism has a potential to drive economic development as well as cultural and ecological preservation in these areas of the globe. Since the nineteen-sixties era of neoliberal international development thinking, tourism has been touted by the developed world as a way to efficiently generate income through foreign exchange earnings, tax revenues, and employment opportunities for the impoverished (Carbone, 2005). Numerous international development organizations cite tourism as a primary tactic for alleviating global poverty. The World Trade Organization is one such agency which states that for 20 of the world’s 48 least developed countries, tourism accounts for the 2nd largest source of export earnings. Tourism connects local cultures to the global marketplace which can generate wealth in regions where other sources of income are scarce. Tourism is also constructed as a mechanism which can bring income into otherwise isolated rural regions, like many settlements in the Himalaya (WTO). Tourism has been touted in many regions of the world as a necessary means of generating foreign investment and of meeting certain development goals. These sources state that the ability of the tourism market to expand through diversification and for local cultures to market themselves based on their ‘uniqueness’ allows the impoverished at tourist

destinations to benefit (Richardson 2010). In general, tourism is depicted by these larger development organizations as a method of connecting otherwise isolated and impoverished populations to the global economy.

The view of tourism as a means of wealth generation in the developing world is countered by other scholars who do not see tourism as a major source of benefits for locals. On a local scale, tourism has been noted to cause economic stratification and, due to its boom and bust nature, produce erratic returns and unequal development. While tourism affects all elements of local population, the returns generated from it are stratified. The ability of certain groups within the local population to profit from tourism is determined by tourist preference and the group's ability to market themselves and their environment as a tourist commodity. Locals who choose to be a part of the tourism market in the developing world become a part of the tourist attraction, with or without their consent, creating a power interaction of serving and served (Reid 2003). This power relationship has been broadened to a discussion of tourism as a form of neocolonialism. In her study of tourism in the Caribbean, Momsen argued "tourism seeks consciously and specifically to capitalise on differences between places and when these include differences in levels of economic development then tourism becomes imbued with all the elements of domination, exploitation and manipulation characteristic of colonialism"(Momsen 1994: 106). Tourism, as defined by these authors, contributes to global and local power disparities between the rich and the poor. Tourism acts as a means of economic development for a specific social, and sometimes ethnic, minority.

In the context of the sacred spaces of the Himalaya, tourists, pilgrims, and local cultures and ecosystems meet creating both opportunities and impacts for locals. The stakes involving sacred space tourism in the Himalaya are high due to the importance of mountain ecosystems and communities. Mountains cover one-fifth of the surface of the earth and provide water and other resources to over half of the world's population. Close to one-tenth of the global population live in mountain environments,

comprising the largest number of ethnic groups and a surplus of local knowledge (Godde et.al. 2000). Many of these groups have been less affected by processes of globalization due to the isolation provided by their extreme topographies. Mountain regions like the Himalaya are home to some of the most poor and marginalized populations in the world (Ives 1997). 90% of the residents living in the Himalayan region live in small villages. A large portion of these residents derive substantial segments of their income from agriculture, and the ecosystem services associated with the forests and other biomes in these areas (Singh et.al. 2008). Tourism provides an opportunity for residents of mountain regions to generate income outside of agriculture but can also degrade the ecosystems on which local populations are dependent.

The mountain regions of the world host 25% of global tourism, which is vital to the economies of these regions (Kumar et.al. 2003). Tourists are largely drawn to the Himalayan region by its cultural and ecological diversity. The Himalayan region also contains a rich history of Hindu and Buddhist spiritual geography. Combined with these attractions, mountains and their cultures are a major driver of tourism for multiple reasons. Some authors claim that religious and nonreligious travellers experience spiritual awakenings that can be attributed to the power of the Himalaya (Godde et.al. 2000). Although the cultural and ecological factors which draw tourists to the Himalaya are the same factors which are threatened by tourism, this industry also provides valuable income for local economies. Tourism in the Himalaya has a troubled past and a complicated present, but both must be examined within local contexts to determine the influence of tourism on local populations and its potential to preserve local ecosystems.

Like tourism, the designation of sacred space has the potential to both preserve or degrade local ecosystems. Sacred spaces have been touted as a means of protecting local ecologies and cultures from degradation. An example is a sample of Indian sacred groves which biologists compared with government forest reserves in regard to certain factors indicating biodiversity. Through this comparison

it was discovered that sacred groves were equally or slightly more effective in biodiversity preservation than government protected areas. When compared with the unprotected areas surrounding them, the sacred groves almost all had comparably higher levels of biodiversity (Verschuuren 2010). Sacred spaces also provide valuable ecosystem services for communities surrounding them. Throughout the Himalayan region, sacred spaces serve as storehouses of medicinal plants and associated traditional ecological knowledge, windbreaks for agricultural land, and as a means of species conservation. Authors state that sacred sites have long served as a primary network of preserving ecosystems and culture (Verschuuren 2010). The exact number of Himalayan sacred spaces is unknown but, for the sake of scale, in India alone there have been over 50,000 sacred groves documented (Rutte 2011). Sacred sites in the Himalaya have potential to benefit local cultures both for their ecosystem services and as a tourist commodity.

While sacredness can provide an impetus for promoting the ecological conservation of a landscape, the draw of sacred sites can harm their ecology and alter local social definitions of space. Edwin Bernbaum believes that sacred mountains that have been opened to the world through the construction of motorable roads face threats to their natural and cultural character. He also asserts that other schemes aimed at promoting mass visitation, such as the proposed gondola to the summit of Mount Sinai in Egypt, represent the tendency of policy-makers to value the number of visits to a site rather than the ecological and cultural integrity of a place (Bernbaum 2012). Bernbaum is correct in his assertion that mass tourism can damage the cultural and ecological integrity of sacred sites. Under conditions of modernity, improved infrastructure leading to sacred places combined with the disparate cultural values that are reflected when tourists get to sacred sites, open these areas to ecological destruction and cultural decay (Verschuuren 2010). The draw of sacredness can thus be a cause of social and environmental problems.

Throughout this paper I will highlight my assertion that Himalayan sacred places and the travel they encourage are subject to political, social, and economic factors, meaning that the ability of ‘sacredness’ to preserve a certain cultural and ecological character is limited. I will use the histories of Indian Hindu and Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage, the history of western travel in the Himalaya, combined with my own work in Pharping, Nepal to illustrate this notion. I will begin by examining the respective histories of Indian and Tibetan Pilgrimage in the Himalaya and discuss how colonialism has shaped the practice of pilgrimage in the modern age and how modernity has altered how pilgrims interact with sacred places. I will then contextualize adventure and spiritual tourism, which are the primary focus of this paper, relative to their colonial histories and how these histories continue to determine their impacts on culture and ecosystems as well as how these histories have contributed to the construction of the Himalaya in the modern age. In order to illustrate the themes that emerge in the history section, I will present a case study I completed in Pharping, Nepal which discusses the role of spiritual tourism in cultural and ecological change in the region. In order to broaden my findings to other areas of the Himalaya, I will also refer to Kolas (2007)’s description of the Shangri-La region in the Yunnan province of China. Through my study of Pharping I will illustrate how tourism permeates social and ecological life in sacred sites and discuss the extent to which the quality of sacredness promotes the conservation of ecological and cultural elements at the site. Next I will examine how the ‘Buddicization’ of Pharping has changed its cultural and ecological character and how tourism earnings made from Buddhist sacred geography have stratified local economic power and agency. I will then conclude by discussing the topics of pilgrimage, tourism, and modernity in relation to the Himalayan region as a whole and how multi-scaled policy and a reconceptualization of sacred-space tourism have the potential to preserve cultural and ecological elements at Himalayan sacred places.



*Fig 2. Machapuchare in the Nepal Himalaya*

### **The History of Indian Pilgrimage**

Pilgrimage in the Himalaya began in India. Through the incorporation and development of sacred spaces under the doctrines of the Hindu faith, pilgrimage changed according to social factors present on the subcontinent. Indian pilgrimage was transformed initially by the British colonial era through the British intensification of motorized travel. The changes wrought by infrastructural development during and following the British era altered the character of pilgrimage and set the stage for both spiritual and adventure tourism in the Himalaya. In this section I will illustrate the basics practice of Hindu pilgrimage, how it has changed throughout one author's vision of its history, and how these changes have affected modern pilgrimage and tourism in the Himalayan region.

*“Hinduism”*

The term Hindu contains additional meaning to anthropologists and religious studies researchers familiar with the etymology of the word. This term has been criticized for being both a tool of imperialism, because of the British role in its popularization, and overly simplistic, because it masks the local diversity that characterizes the practice of religion on the Indian subcontinent (Lipner 2006). I have chosen to use the word Hindu because of both the broad scope of the research and this term's prevalence in material dealing specifically with pilgrimage in the Himalaya.

*The Rg Veda, the Ancient Period, and the Popularization of Hindu Pilgrimage*

In his book *Himalayan Pilgrimage and the New Tourism*, Jagdish Kaur presents one perspective on the history of pilgrimage and tourism in the Indian Himalaya. Kaur believes that while the Himalaya have been present in Hindu literature since the *Rg Veda*, pilgrimage was not formalized and institutionalized until the Ancient Period (6 BCE-10 AD). During and prior to this period, the Hindu tradition had absorbed the beliefs, deities, and sacred places of Himalayan mountain tribes as Brahmin Hindus expanded their settlement North into the Himalayan region. The process of the absorption of spiritual traditions on the Indian Subcontinent into the Hindu pantheon is known as ‘Sanskritization’ and was coined by M.N. Srinivas (Srinivas 1956). In Kaur's view, the popularization of pilgrimage to Sanskritized sacred places occurred due to cultural factors which shifted the focus of some Hindus to ascetic practices done at sacred sites in the Himalaya. For Brahmin Hindus, pilgrimage was made equal in merit to sacrifice, which before had been one of the most meritorious rituals one could do. This further popularized pilgrimage as a religious act. Kaur believes that the shifts towards asceticism at sacred sites and the equation of pilgrimage to sacrifice played a large role in popularizing pilgrimage during the Ancient period.

While Kaur stresses the importance of these two cultural shifts, he believes that the popularization of pilgrimage could not have happened without a number of economic and institutional



developments within India happening simultaneously. The first of these was the development of road systems during the 5th century, which opened India to its surrounding neighbors. Trade with the Tibetan region expanded channels of cultural and material exchange. These roads and trade routes increased the knowledge of Himalayan geography as well as provided an opportunity for infrastructure to propagate. The *Uttarapath*, meaning “northern route”, was one of the trade and pilgrimage routes that was developed during this period. Local rulers promoted tourism and attempted to make pilgrims, who experienced many dangers during this period, safe from bandits and other hazards. The *Uttarapath* was seen as auspicious to travel on and represented one of the first pieces of infrastructure created in part for the purpose of pilgrimage. The economics of pilgrimage were also developed through a network of huts known as *chattis* where pilgrims could stop en-route to sacred sites and the claiming of certain sacred places by lineages of priests, who profited from charging pilgrims and maintaining the sites. The Medieval Period (1000 AD-1815 AD) can be characterized by a lack of growth due to Muslim invasion. Pilgrims still visited sacred sites but the development of pilgrimage sites and institutions was not emphasized as it had been during the Ancient Period.

### *British Colonialism and Himalayan Pilgrimage*

According to Kaur, pilgrimage in Northern India was altered significantly by British colonization. This era began at the end of the Medieval Period in 1815. Outside of the many cultural and social changes inflicted on Indian culture by the British, their main effect on Hindu pilgrimage was seen through their development of infrastructure. To explain these alterations generally and briefly, the British came to the Northern Indian region in part to retreat from conditions in the larger cities, but they stayed out of the mountains. Botanical and early mountaineering expeditions into the montane regions created one reason to develop more advanced infrastructure into these areas. The British extended the railway system north, making mass transit possible to this area for the first time. They also created motorable roads throughout India, which significantly altered the sites visited by pilgrims.

While it would seem that these developments in mechanized transport by the British would only affect the volume and demographics of individuals at sacred spaces, the introduction of motorized travel into pilgrimage altered the entire structure of the endeavor in two ways. The first was the shift in the way in which pilgrimage sites were visited. Usually the experience of a *tirtha* involved visiting a number of less significant sites leading to the actual pilgrimage site. Roads meant that smaller sites could be easily bypassed in favor of the efficiency and comfort of visiting the main site. Secondly, the convenience of motorized travel shifted the economy created by the earlier form of pilgrimages. *Chattis*, the simple huts where pilgrims traditionally stayed were bypassed in favor of larger lodging schemes at central sites. Settlements that had been supported by multi day travel were no longer necessary to pilgrims travelling in a motorized world. Kaur asserts that the modern era of pilgrimage corroded the traditional infrastructure and economy that characterized earlier era of pilgrimage (Kaur 1985).

#### *Infrastructural Development and the Altered Face of Himalayan Pilgrimage*

While the British rule over India officially ended in 1947, one of the ways the British Raj left their mark on the subcontinent was through the lasting effects of their development of road and railway systems. Development of roads into the Himalaya continues to occur in postcolonial India and Nepal. One of the reasons for the development of these roadways is the belief held by the World Bank and other developmental organizations that transportation and commercially accessible roads are a way to connect impoverished rural communities with the economic opportunities offered by urban markets (Lennartz 2013). However, other researchers have shown that while it is assumed that road enhancement projects will promote economic development for all settlements involved, benefits are limited and stratified depending on socioeconomic conditions occurring along the path of the road (Campbell 2010). While roads are not a surefire means of promoting economic development, their construction can drive people to relocate in order to reap benefits from the road traffic, even if it means

a more perilous existence (Lennartz 2013). While these studies do not relate specifically to roads created to access sacred places, they illustrate the social and demographic changes that can result from road construction. In the Himalayan region, roads act as a connection to larger markets in cities, which can have drastic effects on rural communities. Since modern pilgrimage and tourism is generally reliant on the use of motorized transport, the development of this infrastructure has altered the face of Himalayan sacred sites.

### *Indian Pilgrimage in the Modern World*

These changes in infrastructure have continued to affect the nature of pilgrimage in the Indian Himalaya. Motorable roads and the modern lifestyle that has proliferated throughout Asia have caused profound changes in the way pilgrimage is conducted. In his study of Japanese Shikoku pilgrimage, Ian Reader examines the effect of bus travel on a pilgrimages aesthetic and ritual function. Reader found that modern pilgrims were primarily concerned with time spent at and travelling to sacred sites while pilgrims not using motorized transportation were primarily worried about the dangers of the road. Travel efficiency was not only important for safety: modern work schedules mean that pilgrimages must fit within a certain timeframe (Reader, 2006). While Reader refers to aspects of Japanese pilgrimage, his observations are generalizable to modernized pilgrimage in the Himalayan region as well. The speed and affordability of motorized transport lead almost all pilgrims to use some form of it on their journey.

The increased human traffic that motorized transportation enables has consequences for Himalayan sacred places. An example of this is the pilgrimage site Badrinath, which was once only accessible on foot through mountain pathways but has now been opened to bus travel, causing environmental problems of deforestation, and air and water pollution which were previously nonexistent. While the Hindu religious institution encourages pilgrimage, the incorporation of mass transit into Himalayan sacred sites involves many externalities (Bernbaum 2012). Reader believes that

the fast pace of modern life has driven pilgrimage to enter the realm of mass transit. This shift towards time-efficient motorized travel is a continuation of the cultural shift that occurred as a result of British Colonialism.

Through the changes introduced by the British and other forms of continued infrastructural development, the character of Hindu pilgrimage in the Himalaya was significantly altered. The history presented by Kaur, and the depictions of Nepali road projects by Lennartz and Campbell, make it clear that the introduction of mass transit has altered the economies, societies and ecosystems associated with sacred places in the Indian Himalaya. The draw of the sacred in these locations has driven infrastructural and economic development in sacred sites. Reader (2013) notes that in many cases, especially at popular pilgrimage sites, pilgrimage and the marketplace are symbiotic. However, changes in infrastructure can have large scale effects on the economies associated with pilgrimage. The earnings that are associated with pilgrimage coupled with the promise of infrastructure bring new merchants, who further change the character of sacred sites. Infrastructural development can also destroy economies which are bypassed by newly created roads (Campbell 2010).

In summary, the British introduction of roads coupled with the emphasis placed on roads as a development mechanism has changed the character of Hindu Himalayan pilgrimage. It has altered the sites and towns visited by pilgrims which has in turn created and destroyed economies, depending on where and when the roads are built. This description of pilgrimage and sacred space in the Indian Himalaya shows the interconnectedness of the political, economic, and social dimensions of sacred space.

### **Tibetan Pilgrimage History**

Tibetan pilgrimage in the modern era has been shaped by Chinese imperial action beginning in the early 1950s. In order to show how Chinese influence has shaped Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage and

Tibetan sacred sites in the modern era I will examine a narrow segment of Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage history and practice. I will then discuss the Chinese government's use of Tibetan Buddhism and its sacred sites as means of opening the Tibetan region to tourism earnings and the associated social issues.

*The Gnas-Ri Tradition and the Sacralization of the Tibetan Landscape*

The histories of Buddhism and Hinduism are inextricably linked to one another. Both have appropriated and been appropriated by the other, all the while incorporating other local traditions through Buddification and Sanskritization (Huber 2008). After the opening of trade between Tibet and India, these two worlds have remained in constant cultural flux (Mckay 1998). After a decline because of the collapse of the Tibetan empire during the period of the 9th to the 11th centuries, Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage peaked during 12th to the 15th centuries.

Toni Huber depicts his vision of the growth of the Tibetan *Gnas-Ri* tradition and their role in popularizing pilgrimage and sacralizing the landscape of Tibet. He states that during the period of the 12-15 CE the *Gnas-ri* tradition created a spiritual geography of the Tibetan landscape which sacralized certain elements of the landscape and Buddhicized others which had been made sacred by *Bon* traditions, a form of indigenous worship in the Tibetan region. Sacred space in the *Gnas-ri* tradition is usually accompanied by a text, which details the process of its sacralization. The first step in the process involves a central hero who is usually a lama or a Buddhist teacher, sometimes from an incarnate lineage, who visits a sacred space to attain realization. Next he battles with local demons residing in the place and competes with the masters of other religions to assert his dominance over the place and the other forms of worship taking place there. The dramatic struggle results in the lama becoming the victor due to his supreme ritual actions. This process represents a term known as Buddhicization, which describes the incorporation of local deities into the mythology and practice of the Tibetan Buddhist faith (Huber 1999).

Mckay (1998) explains that when a space has been Buddicized, it affects how humans interact with it physically and ecologically. Objective markings, such as *stupas*, are placed to mark the space. These spaces are also altered by the infrastructure built to feed and house pilgrims visiting the site. Along with these physical changes to the landscape, wildlife also falls under the purview of sacredness. This means that all animals within the bounds of the space are sacred and thus must not be killed. The sacred landscape of the pilgrim is defined by the meaning applied to the landscape through realized beings practicing there. Spaces are sometimes marked by sacred symbols or self-manifest phenomena, such as a self-arisen image of a deity. Also sometimes a realized being will leave hand or footprints in a sacred space to indicate their presence (Dowman 1988). Thus, making a landscape into a sacred place changes its social and ecological character as well as imbues the place with religious meaning (Mckay 1998).

#### *The Nature of Tibetan Buddhist Sacred Sites*

The sacralization of the mountain spaces and their incorporation into the *Gnas-Ri* tradition coupled with cultural exchange with India lead to the institutionalization of pilgrimage within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The concept of Tibetan Buddhist sacred geography is borrowed from Indian concepts of mandalization. The Tibetan word for pilgrimage, *gnas-skor*, means literally “going around a place” (Huber 1999, 16). This concept is adapted from the Indian practice of *Parikrama*, which means to circumambulate. Circumambulation is a means of generating merit for Buddhist pilgrims. While the merit accrued from circumambulation is certainly important, the object of worship, which is being circumambulated, is paramount in the mind of the Tibetan Buddhist pilgrim (Huber 1999). Awareness of this object as sacred is brought to mind through circumambulation, sometimes many times, either on foot or while prostrating (Dowman 1998). Tibetan Pilgrimage is primarily concerned with the creation of a relationship between the pilgrim and the object of worship. Relationships formed

with deities present at sacred sites can have worldly connections affecting illness, agriculture, and other aspects of Tibetan life (Huber 1999)

Pilgrim interactions with sacred space usually involve activities laid out in pilgrimage guides. These guides describe the spiritual landscape of sacred space as well as the rituals required while the practitioner is travelling to the site and at the site itself. The relationship between pilgrim and landscape is a source of meaning development for sacred spaces. Dramatic landscapes are often the subject of religious mythologies. An example is Mount Kailash, a sacred site for both Hindus and Buddhists, where mythologies concerning the mountain's formation place it within the pantheon of both religions and highlight the divine nature of certain characteristics of the landscape (Bernbaum 1998).

#### *Pilgrimage and their Economic and Material Character*

In a Tibetan context, it is impossible to tell whether pilgrimage created trade or visa versa, but once each process was developed they became symbiotic. Since Tibetan pilgrims were usually on the road for sometimes as long as two years, depending on the pilgrimage, they had to trade and barter in order to get to where they intended to go. These pilgrims extended trade networks further into the mountains where Milarepa and other saints created their holy spaces. Apart from larger festivals, which had their own systems of economics, pilgrimage economy was characterized by many pastoralist pilgrims carrying both bundles of surplus agricultural products and cattle as walking merchandise. In McKay's words "devotees usually managed to combine religion with a little business" (McKay 1998: 40). Combined with this economy was a trade in gemstones and medicinal herbs. This market was sustained by the hardships of pilgrimage. Although pilgrims sought merit in sequential lives they were often affected by worldly maladies. Gemstones were also traded and used for medicinal and spiritual purposes on the pilgrim's path. The herbs and gemstones available in the Himalaya continue to have their own profitable economy in the modern age. The markets associated with spaced places show the interconnectedness that has and continues to connect pilgrimage and economics (McKay 1998).

As far as their material character, traditional Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimages varied in size, demographics and purpose. While some pilgrimages were small, localized, and could be done individually over a matter of days, others lasted extended periods of time and brought pilgrims well outside of their known geographies. Each type of pilgrimage required its own institutionalization and planning. Who could go on pilgrimage was also economically stratified. Pilgrimage was open to all genders and classes but required money and sufficient leisure time (Mckay 1998). The merit accrued from pilgrimage is also transferable, meaning that one person could go on pilgrimage for their whole family if their economic or social situation did not allow the whole family to participate (Huber 1999). Wealthier pilgrims had a far greater chance of survival while on pilgrimage because they could afford the necessary food and shelter to combat the harsh environment of the Himalaya (Mckay 1998). Pilgrimage has never been independent from social and political factors. As pilgrimage has developed into the modern age, pilgrimage, society, and politics have become increasingly intertwined.

#### *Chinese Imperialism and Pilgrimage in Tibet*

While scholars are divided about the status of the relationship between China and Tibet prior to the era of Mao, the People's Republic of China (PRC) asserted their dominance over Tibetan territories in 1952 (Sperling 2004). In response to the PRC policies, Tibetans organized an uprising in 1959 which failed and resulted in restrictions on Tibetan mobility and religious freedom. After the Dalai Lama went into exile in Dharamsala, India, over 80,000 Tibetans followed him into South Asia. According to the Central Tibetan Administration, most of these exile communities formed in South India but many exiles also ended up in Dharamsala, Kathmandu, Delhi, or Mussoorie (Yeh 2005). Those who stayed faced religious persecution and a complete overhaul of the pre-Chinese Tibetan social structure into that of a collectivized unit which answered to regional Chinese authority. Religious practice was largely discontinued and agricultural production became the main focus of lay and monastic Tibetans (Kolas 2007). The Chinese introduced reforms that completely altered social and religious life in Tibet.



Sacred sites were destroyed and pilgrimage was brought to a standstill. While Tibetan Buddhism survived the policies of Mao, these sacred sites, and the pilgrimage associated with them were changed by China's persecution of Tibetans and subsequent promotion of ethnic tourism.

### *Tibetan Sacred Spaces and the Effects of Tourism*

By 1982 the tenets enforcing collectivization were softened, allowing family style agriculture to resume. This meant that Tibetans had more mobility and could resume some of their pilgrimage practices. By the mid 1980s pilgrims were once again going on pilgrimage in large numbers. Despite the restoration of certain freedoms, the Chinese retained oppressive control while leading Tibet into the modern age (Kolas 2007). McKay discusses the extent to which Chinese imperialism has affected the popularity and character of Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage. According to McKay, Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage has become more popular in some sites and less in others with no clear pattern determining why. One major change he notes in post-Mao Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage is its new social role in Tibetan Buddhist society. Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage in the modern era is embarked upon not only for religious reasons, but also as a method of resistance to Chinese oppression and as a means of creating and strengthening Tibetan national identity. These changes demonstrate that Tibetan Buddhist pilgrimage is not isolated from the sociopolitical world and is in flux relative to social conditions.

### *Tibetan Buddhism's Role in Tourism Development and the Alteration of Tibet's Sacred Sites*

China's decision to open up to foreign tourism was part of a larger plan to open their economy to the world. This policy began in the 1970s, with the opening of major cities and coastal areas to tourists. After the success of this program, inland China was opened to tourism during the 1990s and the Tibetan region was opened shortly after. Tourism was introduced as a development strategy in the Tibetan region and the area began to depend on it as a large part of the Gross Domestic Product; in some regions accounting for as much as 25% GDP (Kolas 2008). The campaign to open Tibet to

foreign and domestic tourism has changed the places and the communities that exist in Tibetan sacred sites.

Tourism development plans which use ethnicity as a means of attracting tourists, like those in Tibet, can have profound effects on local values and identity. In his examination Greenwood explains that tourism commodifies culture, redistributes wealth and power, and imposes massive alterations on local culture (Greenwood 1989). In examining this issue in the context of Shangri-La, a tourism destination that has been developed in the Yunnan province, Kolas (2007) states that local distribution of wealth has changed due to tourism and that the gap between rich and poor continues to widen as tourism becomes entrenched in the regional economy. Chinese policies regarding tourism have had radical effects on Tibetan society, economy, and value structure. Under Chinese tourism implementation, sacred sites such as waterfalls and mountains become ‘natural resources’ free to be consumed by tourists. While cultural tourism allows minorities to represent their own ethnic identity, it also changes local power dynamics and can corrode the meaning of practices and places (Kolas 2007).

#### *Changing Meanings of Pilgrimage and Sacred Space in Tibet*

While Tibetan Buddhism continues to play a large role in Tibetan society, Chinese rule has fundamentally altered how Tibetan sacred spaces are governed and experienced. Tibetan pilgrimage has changed from being part of a small local economy to being opened to global market forces through its involvement in the tourism industry. This opening has not only affected the religious nature of sacred sites, but has also altered the social structure of Tibetan society. Chinese colonialism, while far different than British colonialism in India, has also had a significant effect on the Tibetan region.

### **Tourism History in the Himalaya**

To examine the full scope of tourist history in the Himalaya is beyond the scope of this paper. This section, like those preceding it will focus on the main events and processes relevant to themes that

will be investigated later in this piece. It will begin by discussing the background of tourism in the Himalaya through a discussion of the western fascination with the religions and cultures and the east and develop into a discussion of how both spiritual and adventure tourism began in the Himalaya and how they have affected local cultures and ecosystems.

### *Colonial Aspects of Tourism History*

The conventional view of the history of tourism as cultural phenomenon is that it began with the elites of ancient Greece and Rome and reemerged in the Renaissance Period. The implementation of Grand Tours of Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries followed this era. Thomas Cook, who thought that tourism could be a cure to the social ills of the 19th century, popularized the idea of using railroads as a means of enhancing the lives of his countrymen. The normalization of motor and air travel throughout the 20th century accelerated the development of tourism worldwide. This version of history depicts a vision where tourism begins in Europe and spreads outward to the surrounding world. John Towner calls this version of the history of tourism the ‘colonial history’ (Towner, 1995). There is a substantial case for other cultures having both the leisure class conditions and the motives to travel for pleasure, especially in China and Japan (Towner, 1995). Since this paper will focus on tourism as a modern phenomenon, which is divided by definitions of east and west, it will focus on the history of western tourism in the Himalaya coming into the modern era.

### *Creation of the Himalaya in the Western Imagination*

The creation of the Himalaya as a tourist destination can be attributed to a variety of interrelated cultural and political factors. In the Western consciousness, the Himalaya were mythologized through a combination of literary, political, and social processes. A good place to begin when discussing the formation of the Himalaya in the western consciousness is certainly the colonial era of British India. India gave intellectuals an opportunity to examine the aspects of culture that it defined as mystical, poetic, and irrational, a process that had been perpetuated since the Enlightenment

Era. This segmented imagination of eastern cultures, which regards secular rationality as paramount and marginalizes qualities the British associated with Indian culture can be called “orientalism” (King 1999). Orientalism characterizes the literary creation of the Himalaya in the western imagination.

Many westerners were first introduced to the Himalaya through books. In his study of the formation of the Himalaya in western literature, Peter Bishop describes three contexts within which the climate that created the western, especially British construction of the Himalaya occurred in. The first context is what he calls the “imagination of imperialism” which refers to the attitudes of British imperialist which were concerned with global geopolitics, trade concerns, consolidation of the empire through exploration, and a sense of imperial destiny. Another background which contributed to the western construction of the Himalaya resides in the geographic imagination of the imperial age, in which the concept of exploration of the wild places of the world was seen as necessary to define the scope of conquest. Through this mindset, the fields of geography, anthropology, and comparative religion were developed. Finally, the public view of personal experience and mysticism were being socially accepted due to the decline of the Catholic Church and increasing openness to eastern religions leading to idealistic creations of these religions and their practitioners. These three contexts set the stage for how the Himalaya have been constructed and interacted with in the western worldview (Bishop 1989).

### *The Imperial Era of Himalayan Mountaineering*

It is important to note the imperial era of mountaineering and why it was a driving force in moving people and resources into the Himalaya. In order to put this era in a historical context one must consider the social climate in Britain after World War I. The images of maimed young men coupled with the numerical loss of Britain’s once young and virile military had “emasculated” the nation (Bayers 2003: 75). Traditionally war had placed the male body in a symbolic context of being willing to face mortal danger, courageous, and self-sacrificing. The new age of imperial mountaineering also

used the Himalaya as a stage for the cause of British nationalism to play out on an international scale. Early expeditions to the large peaks of the Himalaya were seen as exploratory and fell within the imaginings of imperial geography. Exploration of foreign territories, undertaken largely by Britain's Royal Geographic Society, was understood as necessary to explore and map "unknown" lands. 'Unknown' in this context refers to land that has not been officially recognized by the British elite. The main focus of these early expeditions was Everest because it was determined to be the tallest peak in the world. This gave the ascent of Everest symbolic supremacy because of the British dominance over the Orient putting an Englishman on top would represent. Thus while these early mountaineering expeditions were disguised as investigations of geography, they were overlayed with notions of colonial ideology as well as religious and racial superiority. While Britain never formally colonized Tibet or Nepal, they served as aesthetic expansions of the British Empire (Bayers 2003).

Francis Younghusband's 1926 expedition took place under these cultural conditions and is indicative of the post WWI British attitude towards the Himalayan region and its people. The account of his attempt of Everest in 1926 reflects the imperial ideology defining this era but also reflects the British idealism and romanticism of the Himalayan region. In the postwar climate described above, the British were not only looking for new sources of male identity but also new sources of spirituality. Younghusband's account of his failed expedition up Everest is indicative of the British construction of the Himalaya. The combination of the heightened need for spiritual truth created by war, new knowledge about Hinduism's and Buddhism's worship of sacred mountains, and a continuation of the Romantic tradition created a vision of the Himalaya which placed local practitioners and their homeland at the center of timeless knowledge (Bayers 2003). This sentiment was heightened by forms of literature which depicted Tibet and the Himalaya as a place where spiritual masters resided and where "a complete knowledge lies in a state of suspended animation awaiting the day when it can be

brought back to life to reanimate state control over knowledge amidst a world in ruins” (Richards 1993: p13). It is clear why this depiction of the Himalaya appealed to the post war British imagination. These imperial expeditions and their accounts were formative in the creation of the Himalaya as a destination of spiritual and adventurous travel. Mountaineering heroes of this and proximate eras created archetypes within which modern tourists could place themselves.

### *Modern Tourism and the Search for Meaning*

After global power dynamics changed following World War II, the idea of tourism was normalized in the developed world. In the United States especially, the era of the 1960s and 1970s created a culture where travel was normalized and worked into the modern lifestyle. In his study of tourists and their motivations, MacCannell (1976) states that the leisure time that was afforded to moderns living a postindustrial lifestyle combined with the individualism prevalent in American culture created an atmosphere where the everyday world was considered inauthentic. Reality, and self-discovery were things that would happen outside of everyday life. In the framework of relations created by modernity, nature and traditional cultures are seen as worth saving because they were viewed as being outside of time and unchanging, in contrast to the world of market forces which was always developing and adapting (MacCannell 1976). Cronon (1996) notes this trend as well in examining how moderns go out into the “wilderness” in search of authentic and timeless truth to escape what they see as a mechanized and manufactured world (Cronon 1996). Tourism brought individuals out of the known and into the mystified, into an area where real meaning can be found through the lives of others (MacCannell 1976). It was under these social conditions that the institutionalized eastern journey took root. In particular, the seventies countercultural movement used eastern religions to contrast the social and environmental problems of Western modernity (Ortner 1999). Journeys to the Himalayan sacred sites fulfilled westerners living in conditions of modernity’s desire for lasting truth

outside of their artificial world. The east provided a destination of sacredness away from material world in which they found themselves.

### *The Hippy Era and the Birth of Spiritual Tourism*

Mark Liechty's description of Kathmandu during the 1960s and 1970s is indicative of what was happening in the Himalayan region during this era. Liechty believes that the Nepali kingdom opening its doors to the world in 1951 was a formative event in the creation of Nepal as a tourist destination. Beginning in 1965, a new type of tourist, previously underrepresented in the tourism scene emerged. These tourists tended to be young idealists who followed what was known as the "Hippy Trail", a road which began in North Africa and Europe and ended in Nepal. This journey in search of meaning represented a radical shift in the worldview of western youth. The "holy center" of the east had shifted from Jerusalem to Kathmandu. This was a product of both the anti-modern and the transcendentalist sentiment that was a reaction to the Vietnam Era discord of the age. In this social climate Oriental mysticism was becoming a part of the mainstream. Literature such as Hilton's *Lost Horizon* (1934), and W.Somerset Monheim's *Razor's Edge* (1944), combined with the accounts of mountaineer heroes, located the mythical journeys of the 1920s and 1930s in the East. The Baby Boomer generation wanted to physically visit these locations for a personal spiritual quest. Drugs also played a large part in what attracted young people to the Himalaya. The "hashish lands" of the east provided the ideal destination for many of the youth of the 70s. This early generation of "hippy tourists" paved the way for the spiritual tourists of today (Liechty 2005).

According to Liechty (2005) the demise of the Hippy era in Nepal began in 1973 when the Nepali government, in response to Nixon's War on Drugs, made the sale of cannabis and hashish illegal. This coincided with cultural phenomena such as political assassinations and other factors which lead to the end of the hippy movement in the popular sphere of the United States as well. The move by King Birendra, then the monarch of Nepal, to illegalize hashish was indicative of an attempt by his

government to rebrand the nation as an adventure tourism destination. This involved the creation of parks to protect cultural and ecological heritage areas as well as designating and developing trekking routes. Leichty points out that this signified a new era of tourism.

“My point is that a new global economy had spawned a new form of tourism and a new breed of tourist. After 1973 there was a clear shift in the general ethos of western youth culture away from the anti-establishment sentiments of the 1960s and toward a more conservative, consumerist mode in which “experience” was *not* something to be sought existentially, but to be bought in package form. This new ethos framed its travel under a moral obligation of low impact travel that boosted developing economies. The character of tourism in the Himalaya had changed from “hippy to yuppie, experience to adventure” (Leichty 2005: 26)

### *The Age of Adventure Tourism*

Adventure tourism provided a ‘middle road’ for yuppies who were not the hippy tourists of the 1960s but were also not the crusty mountaineers of antiquity. Adventure tourism fit the mold of the type of travel and the type of risk that Leichty’s ‘yuppies’ were looking for. The aspect of spirituality persists in Himalayan tourism. The “journey to the east” still resonates with the youth of today who visit Himalayan sacred spaces in large numbers, still influenced by the generation of seekers who came before them (Leichty 2005).

While the cultural forces described by Leichty were certainly factors in the development of adventure tourism in Nepal, the mountaineering that had been taking place since the 1800s was also a precursor of adventure tourism. It was mountaineers who first penetrated (with the invaluable help of local guides who had lived there for generations) into the areas of the deep Himalaya. Today, a vast majority of visitors to these mountain sacred spaces are trekkers rather than mountaineers. There are entire systems of teahouses and snack shacks where trekkers can stay in a bed and be cooked a hot meal each night. It is quite clear that the adventure tourist experience is far different from that of both the



mountaineer hero of the colonial era and the hippies of the early years of Nepali tourism but it remains a product of both.

### *The Effects of Adventure Tourism*

The work of Spoon (2010)(2011), Ortner (1999), and Bayers (2006) bring the discourse on adventure tourism in Himalayan sacred spaces into the modern era. Ortner and Bayers discuss elements of neocolonialism present in mountaineering and trekking, the main ways in which adventure tourists access Himalayan sacred sites. Bayers asserts that tourism is a force of imperialism, which acts under the guise of globalization. This is shown by Jon Krakauer and the other adventure tourists depicted in Krakauer's book *Into Thin Air* and their relationship with local Sherpas. Sherpas are characterized as agents of their own history rather than shapers. While mountain tourism brings economic prosperity to Sherpa villages, Sherpas are viewed as useful for their bodies because of their ability to perform at high altitude and act as what Bayers calls “cultural raw materials”, referring to cultural commodification resulting from adventure tourism (Bayers 2006). Ortner furthers this discussion by adding that the incorporation of sherpas into the global marketplace through their employment as porters for mountaineering and trekking creates perverse economic incentives. Sherpas are encouraged to take the risks associated with the activities out of economic necessity due to adventure tourism's embeddedness in the region's economy (Ortner 1999). The consequences of this were shown on April 18th, 2014 when 16 sherpas were killed in an icefall incident while working for western clients (Krakauer 2014).

While the power disparities associated with adventure travel and its service economy are immediately apparent, Jeremy Spoon examines more subtle consequences of the interaction between adventure tourists and local communities in Himalayan sacred places. Spoon's research suggests that adventure tourism and its associated economic benefits have eroded certain values associated with place-based spirituality and caused others beliefs to persist or adapt, according to tourist preference. While Spoon stresses that Sherpa spiritual values relative to landscape have never been static and have

changed relative to social and ecological conditions, tourism has stratified both ecological knowledge and understanding of sacred landscape. Tourism has caused generational gaps in the understanding of spiritually charged landscape and ecological knowledge (Spoon (2010)(2011). The economic incentives spiritual and adventure tourism provide can cause place-based spiritual values to change. While these values are always in flux, tourism becomes the primary agent of change regarding local spiritual traditions when those traditions are part of the commodity that is being exchanged in the tourism transaction.

### *Modern Motivations for Travel*

In order to paint a complete picture of the adventure and spiritual tourists in the modern day, their motivations must be examined. A necessary inclusion for the definition of both of these tourists is the aspect of adventure. Adventure tourists are specifically interested in visiting what are constructed as culturally or environmentally wild spaces, and as places where adventure is known to occur, where there is an established narrative of experiences with uncertain outcomes (Varley et.al. 2013). Adventure tourism has been seen as a reaction to the security of modern life. The Himalaya in particular capture the imagination of the adventure tourist. They are the largest mountains in the world and therefore offer grand adventure. Many adventure tourist accounts factor in historical and contemporary mountaineering heroes, placing the traveller in the lineage of masculine mountaineer heroes of the imperial era of climbing. Adventure tourists, like spiritual tourists, are interested in self-improvement and a new perspective. The cultures of the Himalaya, and the perception of their traditional ways of life and religion, add to the mystique of the adventure to sacred spaces (Howard 2012). Similarly, spiritual tourists are interested in an encounter with the sacred other. An authentic experience of sacredness outside of the confines of their known world combines the allures of sacredness and adventure.

In its quest for wild spaces, adventure tourism presents its own threats to the ecosystems of sacred spaces. Adventure tourism interacts with landscapes differently than spiritual tourism and

pilgrimage. While pilgrimage routes tend to circumambulate sacred spaces, adventure tourists climb peaks or venture into delicate alpine ecosystems, impacting sacred spaces in new ways. The impacts of adventure tourism have been noted to be litter, trail erosion, habitat change, water pollution, endangering and extinction of animal and plant species, and resource depletion. While ecotourism and other cultural phenomena have led to tourism's improved environmental ethic, it is unclear whether private and governmental advocacy of sustainable tourism influences tourist behavior (Zurick 1992).

### *The Framework of Modern Himalayan Tourism*

The transition from the imperial age of mountaineering to the spiritual and adventure tourism seen today in Himalayan sacred spaces remains framed within the original orientalist framework. This area is still constructed as a place containing ancient wisdom outside of time. The Himalaya have become a place where western moderns can go to experience what they see as actual truth. Whether it is through a different culture, as MacCannell (1976) has asserted, or through an encounter with wilderness as Cronon (1996) believes, Himalayan sacred spaces are still the site of the western search for timeless meaning. Today's travellers place themselves within the frameworks developed by imperial mountaineering heroes and the hippies to form a new relationship with locals. This relationship is imbued with notions of economic and political power, meaning that both tourists and locals are in flux, changing and being changed by one another. However, it is the ecosystems and local communities at Himalayan sacred spaces that face the effects of spiritual and adventure tourism. The impacts of travel are removed from the main agents of change, the tourists themselves, who leave before their impacts are fully realized and internalized by locals.



*Fig 3. A statue of Shakyamuni Buddha being constructed in the Pharping Valley*

### **Pharping**

In order to situate the historical trends discussed above, I will describe a Himalayan sacred space where Hindu, Tibetan Buddhist, and tourist definitions of sacred space meet. Pratt (2007) defines what she calls the ‘contact zone’ of cultural interaction 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 2007: 8). In Pharping, local Nepali residents, whose spirituality is complex and tied to the social and political history of Nepal but whom I broadly term ‘Hindu’, share space with a community of Tibetan refugees who have been flowing into the region since the 1960s. Combined with these two groups is a fairly constant stream of spiritual tourists coming to visit sacred sites and to study Buddhism with teachers of specific lineages. Tibetans and Hindus also come here on pilgrimage to visit two main sites: Dakshinkali, one of the most significant Kali temples in Nepal, and Yanglesho, a cave system that is a

long standing pilgrimage site for both Tibetan Buddhists and Hindus, resulting from differing mythologies. While there is little confrontational violence, the Tibetan refugee community and the local Nepali community contend with each other for territory in the Pharping spiritual landscape and economic resources. This contention is connected to the global marketplace through tourism, international aid, and donations made to Tibetan Buddhist monastic institutions which have been active in Pharping since 1960. Fueled by revenue from these three sources, divisions between Nepalese and Tibetan Buddhists, as well as internal divisions between different Nepalese castes, have been aggravated. Combined with these social and political factors, the increase in pilgrimage and tourism traffic have stressed the surrounding forest ecosystems, which many locals rely on for fuelwood and services relating to the primarily subsistence agriculture economy. This study will examine the differing spiritual geographies of Pharping, and gauge how tourism limits the ability of sacredness to preserve cultural and ecological elements of sacred place. I will also examine how tourism revenue fuels social and economic stratification in Pharping.

The primary aim of my investigation in Pharping was to determine different notions of spiritual geography in Pharping. I planned to separate concepts of spiritual geography based on Hindu, Tibetan Buddhist, and tourist denotations. While I was able to understand the surficial character of the spiritual geography of each of these groups, I was more struck by the interactions they were having with each other and with the landscape. This shifted the focus of my study to the history of Tibetan Buddhists in Pharping and how they, and the tourists who have followed them, have changed the character of the Pharping valley. In order to get a sense of this, I lived in the Neydo Tashi Choeling monastery for 8 weeks from the end of May to the beginning of July 2014. During that time I taught English classes and participated in monastic activities to the best of my ability. After my teaching responsibilities were fulfilled, I conducted participant observation and informal interviews with people I met at the sacred sites of the Pharping valley and other places in town. I conducted semi-structured interviews with

pilgrims, tourists and locals at these sites as well. The questions I asked in these interviews attempted to determine the motivations and frameworks that guide travel for both of these groups and how they exercised mutual influence on the Pharping region. My interview subjects were limited due to my lack of lingual proficiency in Nepali, Tibetan, and the numerous other dialects which are present in the Pharping valley. My observations were also certainly skewed because I was living at a Tibetan Buddhist monastery and therefore was able to understand much more about the Tibetan perspective of Pharping than the Hindu understanding. Despite these limitations, I believe my study revealed a great deal about the social, political, and environmental character of the Pharping Valley.



*Fig 4. The Neydo Tashi Choeling Monastery, where I stayed while conducting my study in Pharping*

In order to expand my analysis of Pharping to other Himalayan sacred spaces I will relate elements of my analysis with Kolas (2007)'s discussion of tourism in the Shangri-La region of Northwest Yunnan. In Shangri-La, local spiritual identity has been used in conjunction with the area's natural beauty by the Chinese government to market the region as a tourist destination. The manner in which tourism has been structured and the continued role of the Chinese government has changed local definitions of sacred space and has contributed to alterations in the region's economic and social character. In Shangri-La, Tibetans, Han Chinese immigrants, and other minority ethnic groups contend for tourist dollars through the use of Tibetan ethnic character by the Chinese government, private tourist enterprises, and the Tibetans themselves. Through referencing Shangri-La I hope to expand the findings of my own research in Pharping to other Himalayan sacred places.



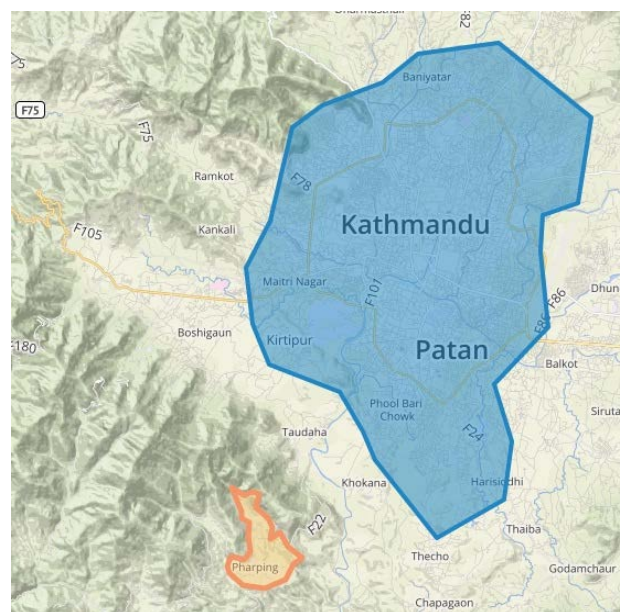
*Fig 5. Downtown Pharping*

### *About Pharping*

Pharping is a small but growing settlement 22 kilometers outside of Kathmandu containing sacred sites of importance to both Hindus and Tibetan Buddhists. In his study of the Vajrayogini procession in Pharping, Tuladhar-Douglas (2012) comments that the ethnic majority of Pharping is



made up by native Newars, the largest Nepali ethnic group, but there is also a surprising amount of ethnic diversity in Pharping considering its size. Other groups of Nepalese such as the dominant Bahun-Chhetri caste, who controls political dealings in Pharping, and the Dalit caste, which is a broad term used to denote economically and socially marginalized peoples of various ethnic groups, are present. Tamang and numerous Tibetan ethnic groups also reside in Pharping but have generally come more recently than the Nepali groups (Tuladhar-Douglas 2012). The main source of income in Pharping, like most of Nepal, is largely based on small-scale and subsistence agriculture. This can be observed in the expanse of rice paddies which surround the old city of Pharping. This economy is intertwined with other subsistence resource use in the surrounding forests (Freschette 2002). For Buddhist practitioners, tourists, and Nepalese, Pharping is a retreat from the hecticness and dirtiness of Kathmandu. However, Pharping's tranquil nature is threatened by both its own growth and the continuing expansion of Kathmandu.



*Fig 6. The location and settlement area of Pharping relative to that of Kathmandu*

Tourists come to Pharping seasonally, generally choosing to come outside of the monsoon season. They are usually interested in participating Buddhist ritual and monastic activities or observing the rituals at Dakshinkali. These individuals play a substantial role in the local Pharping and regional



Nepali economy, as seen in the number of guesthouses, restaurants and handicraft shops in the Old City of Pharping. Tourists are also a large source of income for the Tibetan Buddhist community in Pharping through their patronage of monastic institutions. Many tourists interested in Tibetan Buddhist spirituality attend teachings and visit retreat centers in both Kathmandu and Pharping.



*Fig 7. Pilgrims outside the Dakshinkali marketplace*

### *Hindu Sacred Sites in the Pharping Valley*

In the context of Pharping and Nepal in general the word ‘Hindu’ is once again complicated by local intricacies. ‘Hindus’ in Pharping can be generally described as Śaiva ritual specialists but the lived reality of this religion is stratified based on ethnic dimensions. These dimensions have complexified since 1990 due to the redrafting of the constitution, the People’s Movement, and other sociopolitical factors. For an in-depth discussion of the complexities of contemporary Nepali Hindu identity see Gellner et.al. (1997).

According to some of my Nepali sources, the story of Pharping begins with the formation of a Hindu sacred site. In discussions I had with local villagers about Dakshinkali, they explained that the origin of the temple was the dream of a Malla king during the 14th century. In this dream he was visited by the goddess Kali and told that he must immediately build a temple devoted to her outside of the Kathmandu valley. When the workers began to break ground to construct the actual temple, they discovered an image of Kali, inscribed in stone, already at the site. Devotees at the site told me that since its creation, Dakshinkali has been frequented by Hindu pilgrims from many parts of Nepal, which was reflected in the large number of pilgrims I saw visiting each day and the size of the adjacent market. Dakshinkali is also known as the ‘Southern Kali’ temple.

Today, many pilgrims come to Dakshinkali due to the belief that Kali can make wishes come true. Walking down to the temple, the path is lined with vendors who sell fruit and flowers to be offered to the goddess. Dakshinkali is also one of the last places in Nepal at which animal sacrifice is permitted, a topic of dispute that will be discussed later. Pilgrims make offerings to Kali primarily in hopes of worldly benefits; seeking the blessings of Kali for endeavours such as beginning school or a new business venture. Apart from giving offerings, Pharping locals and some people from Kathmandu come to Dakshinkali for picnics with families or dates with lovers. Despite the fearsome deity and sacrifice that occurs there, the atmosphere surrounding Dakshinkali is festive.



*Fig 8. A Hindu Tol*

While a pilgrim's sacred geography of the Pharping valley centers around Dakshinkali, locals' daily worship involves patronage of local *Tols*, which are small shrines devoted to a particular deity. *Tols* are distributed geographically based on caste. Another key aspect of Hindu sacred geography is a temple dedicated to Vajrayogini, a goddess who is revered by Nepali Hindus and Buddhists as well as Tibetan Buddhists. This temple is second in significance to Dakshinkali for many Hindus but remains important. The other noteworthy site of local Hindu spiritual geography of Pharping is the sacred mountain Champa Devi which overlooks the entire valley. On special holidays, worshippers will climb the mountain to conduct rituals at the shrine on top of the mountain.

Another way in which the landscape is organized in relation to religion is the mandala organization of the Old City of Pharping. The city is generally organized by caste with the most powerful and wealthy individuals being located near the town center and those with the least social and economic power being located near the outskirts of the settlement. Many of the Tibetan monasteries are located on the outskirts of town for numerous reasons but their location should not be seen as separate from this spiritual geography. Religion and its hierarchy of people and landscape largely determines why and where groups are located in the Valley, though, this too is complicated by modern economics.



*Fig 9. A monk outside the Yanglesho Cave Complex*

### *Yanglesho and the Tibetan Pilgrimage Circuit*

The sacredness of the Pharping Valley for Tibetan Buddhists relates to the practice of Padmasambhava at the Yanglesho cave. Padmasambhava is the name of the most important Buddhist saint who brought Buddhism to Tibet and opened a number of Himalayan sacred sites like those in Pharping. According to legend, Padmasambhava came to Pharping because “it is a very auspicious and blessed place, where flowers do not wither, even in the wintertime” (Tsogyal, 1993:53). Once in Pharping he took a consort (according to some sources, the daughter of a Nepali king) and worked towards the attainment of Mahamudra, a high level of Buddhist realization, in the Yanglesho cave. During his time practicing in the cave, evil spirits came to disrupt his efforts by causing drought and famine in the region. In order to gain the knowledge to deal with these evil entities, Padmasambhava sent two attendants to India in order to get texts that would allow him to combat them. Once they returned with the scriptures, the evil spirits were immediately subdued, rain began to fall and all disease and hardship accompanying the famine ended. Finally, Padmasambhava was then able to accomplish



the attainment of Mahamudra without distraction (Tsogyal, 1993). While both Tibetan Buddhists and Hindus live and worship in the Pharping Valley, this mythology defines the area as a fixed Buddhist space, placing it within the tradition of Buddhicized Himalayan sacred sites.



*Fig 10. The lower cave in the Yanglesho Complex*

According to my informants, the Yanglesho cave has been site of Buddhist pilgrimage for hundreds of years. However, pilgrimage increased dramatically after Chatral Rinpoche “re-opened” Yanglesho as a pilgrimage site and built the first Buddhist retreat center there in 1960. Today, Yanglesho, and the significant and adjacent Asura cave, are built into a Tibetan Buddhist retreat complex. Throughout the day monks and laypeople flow in and out of the cave reciting mantras, reading Buddhist texts, and meditating. Tibetan Buddhist Pilgrims coming to visit Yanglesho will usually do a circuit of sacred sites beginning at a large Padmasambhava statue in the center of town, passing several monasteries, visiting the Asura and Yanglesho caves, and finishing at the Vajrayogini temple. While pilgrimage has been a long standing practice for Tibetan Buddhists, their inclusion as permanent residents of Pharping is a recent phenomena.



*Fig 11. Monks studying in the Neydo Tashi Choeling Monastery*

### *Tibetans in Pharping*

Tibetan Buddhists believe that once a master like Padmasambhava has practiced at a certain place, the obstacles which stand in the way of a practitioner's realization are far fewer than in an 'ordinary' place. However the desire for favorable conditions of practice is only a part of the story of why Tibetans came to Pharping. At the time of my study there were 27 monasteries in Pharping, which is a relatively small settlement, in which 40,000 people reside (Sheshnarayan VDC). The reason for the recent increase of Tibetans in Pharping is a product of patterned social, economic, and environmental factors.

The first event that lead to the creation of Pharping as a permanent Tibetan Buddhist residence was the flight of the Fourteenth Dalai from Tibet. As discussed in the Tibetan history section, many Tibetans followed the the Dalai Lama in exile into South Asia. Those who came to Nepal primarily settled in the Boudha neighborhood of Kathmandu. While many Tibetans left most of their possessions in the occupied Tibetan region and came to Nepal with very little, as a community the Tibetans have

been generally successful in exile. Frechette posits numerous reasons for why Tibetans were able to succeed economically in Nepal, one of the poorest nations in the world. She states that Tibetans were able to go from landless and extremely impoverished to one of Nepal's most successful groups due to the ties they created and maintained with international aid organizations. Through the formation of a refugee identity, Tibetans in exile have formed relationships with these organizations which have allowed them access to foreign capital through connections other ethnic groups in Nepal do not have (Frechette 2002).

These relationships have led to a large monastic community in Pharping through the support of western and South Asian Buddhist practitioners and supporters. The monastic community was able to use ties to western nations to support the expansion of Tibetan Buddhism in Nepal. The United States and Tibet developed a relationship during the Cold War in a failed resistance campaign against the Chinese. This relationship resulted in donations to Tibetan relief organizations, including direct donations to the Dalai Lama during the period of the Vietnam war. Even when the US ended its fiscal relationship with the Tibetan government in exile, Tibetan Buddhist teachers and their associated institutions were able to generate money from the west through translated Buddhist texts and teachings. Once their message was translatable into English, Buddhist Lamas could both tour western nations giving teachings for pay and also deliver teachings in English to westerners visiting the exile community. This allowed the monastic community to enter the global marketplace and access new sources of income (Frechette 2002). I observed that these financial relationships continue today within the Pharping monastic institution. One of the monks I tutored in English was having his monastic education be funded by a US Marine who wrote and called him monthly. The internet provided the opportunity for this financial connection to take place and facilitated their continued relationship.

For these reasons, the Boudha neighborhood of Kathmandu became crowded with young monks and refugees hoping to enjoy the prosperity other Tibetans had in Nepal. The influx of Tibetans

alongside rural Nepalese into Kathmandu during the 1980s, caused the population of Kathmandu to grow 44%. This growth overwhelmed the city's infrastructure and caused various environmental and social problems. The water and air quality of the valley significantly decreased during this period due to unregulated expansion of settlement and industry (Haack et.al. 2002). According to Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche, who supervises practice at a monastery in Kathmandu, these changes to the environment of Kathmandu made it less attractive for the monastic practice of Buddhism, mainly because of the noise created by the increase in bus traffic and the poor air quality. Because of the availability of funds from Tibetan Buddhism's western expansion and these environmental drivers, Kathmandu lamas wanted to open retreat centers outside of the city. Pharping was an ideal location for retreat centers because of its religious significance, its proximity to Kathmandu and the Tibetan community in Boudha, and its calm and quiet character which make it optimal for the practice of spiritual attainment. Monasteries and retreat centers became increasingly popular in Pharping during the 1980s and 1990s. According to Tuladhar-Douglas (2012), it has become a symbol of status for Kathmandu-based lamas to open a retreat center in Pharping (Tuladhar-Douglas 2012). For these reasons, monasteries and retreat centers dot the hillsides of Pharping and land has been purchased for the construction of more.

The Tibetan monastic institution in Shangri-La, located within the Yunnan province, was also able to capitalize on its role in the tourism market. These monasteries are appreciated by tourists for the artwork and architecture as well as their role in Tibetan spiritual life. Tourists generally do not stay at the monastery or receive teachings from lamas as they do in Pharping, but monasteries do gain revenue through donations and offerings left by travellers. Kolas also explains that the incorporation of these sites into the tourist geography of Shangri-La gives locals an opportunity to reshape and redefine sacred geography. The monastic institution is able to market its version of 'Tibetan culture' in order to play a larger role in the tourist market. Tourism has also changed the character of many monasteries in Shangri-La through the westernization of certain festivals (playing disco music and in some cases



serving alcohol) and through changing the behaviour of some monks who focus less on their studies and more on other pursuits in tourist centers (Kolas 2007). Tibetans, as primary cultural brokers in Himalayan sacred sites, are able to shape these sites and their behaviours to cater to the tourist vision of how a sacred place should look. Monasteries in Pharping have similar cultural capital, allowing them to shape and reform their identity to promote involvement in or distance from the global tourism market.



*Fig 12. Monasteries dominate the visual character of Pharping*

### *Symbols of Power*

As discussed above, Hindus and Tibetan Buddhists have separate but interrelated conceptions of the sacred geography of Pharping. These notions reflect differing ideologies which are arranged hierarchically in different ways according to the two groups. For instance, some believe that Padmasambhava's triumph over the demons at Yanglesho reflects Buddhism's domination over Hinduism at this site. Like other sacred spaces in the *Gnas-Ri* tradition, the Hindu space of Pharping has been Buddhicized through the Tibetan construction of monasteries. Sacred sites are not fixed in their importance and mythological representation; they are subject to regional political and social factors. One of the ways Buddhists attempt to depict Pharping as a 'Buddhist place' is through the

visual and spatial dominance of Pharping as seen through the prevalence and extravagance of their monasteries.



Fig 13. A map showing the placement and number of monasteries, noted by blue markers, in Pharping

This domination is furthered by the placement and number of monasteries in Pharping. While there are monasteries in the town center and near the Yanglesho cave, most of the newer monasteries have been built outside of town on hillsides and hilltops. The visual presence of these monasteries, compared with the simplicity of Newar-style houses which characterize most of the non-Buddhist settlement in Pharping, is striking. With a vast number of gold-shrouded monasteries looming over the town, as seen in Figures 12 and 13, an outsider would be sure to think that Pharping is a ‘Buddhist place’ rather than a site which is overlain with different notions of spiritual geography. Monasteries are not just examples of Tibetan wealth, they are indicative of shifting power dynamics in the Pharping valley.

Kolas also notes how religious, political, and economic structures have shaped and reshaped Shangri-La. In the case of the sacred mountain Khawa Kharpo, the Buddhist clergy incorporated this

landscape and the associated protector deities into their version of the sacred geography of the region through guidebook which depict Padmasambhava subduing local deities. This creation changed Khawa Kharpo from a site of pre-Buddhist and *Bon* significance to specifically Buddhist pilgrimage site. When the area was taken over by the PRC and pilgrimage and other religious practices were banned, the spiritual character of Shangri-La was once again changed, this time through political means. Sacred space was interacted with differently due to the laws and material requirements of the Chinese state. Finally, when pilgrimage practices resumed and China opened up to tourism after the death of Mao, the nature of Shangri-La was changed for a third time through integration onto the tourist market and the accompanying differing notions of spiritual geography. Chinese government officials and other agents involved in the tourism market drew on the mythological past of Shangri-La in order to market it to tourists. This depiction appeals to the nostalgia of Chinese tourists who are sold a vision of Shangri-La that places it apart from the scientific and rational state which describes the rest of China. The sacred space is reframed once again to cater to the needs of tourists (Kolas 2007). Sacred spaces are thus acted upon by religious, political, and economic factors. These elements change how sacred spaces are interacted with, who visits the spaces, and how the spaces are constructed in the minds of these visitors. Locals and visitors play active roles in the place making process, but political and economic power confirm or deny certain behaviors and relationships with sacred space.



*Fig 14. Nepali children playing soccer on the hillsides of Champa Devi*

#### *Tibetan-Nepali Communication*

While the Tibetan community asserts spatial and economic dominance in Pharping, the Tibetans may be unaware of the social and political role they play in the Pharping valley relative to other ethnic groups. Tuladhar-Douglas discusses this disconnect in depth in his study of the Vajrayogini procession, an event which in theory should attract Tibetan Buddhists and Nepali Hindus and Buddhists but in which Tibetans choose not to participate. Generally, Tibetans in Pharping do not participate in what they see as ‘Hindu’ or specifically Newari celebrations. Tuladhar-Douglas noted that Tibetans do participate in Newari religious celebrations in other regions in Nepal but not in Pharping (Tuladhar-Douglas 2012). These observations indicate the lack of interaction between Tibetans and other ethnic groups in Pharping.

In my observations living at a monastery, I noted three main reasons for why there are limited interactions between Tibetans and other, predominantly Nepali, ethnic groups. The first reason is the monastic life lived by most Tibetans in Pharping. While there are certainly Tibetans who are not monks or nuns, the Tibetan presence in Pharping is dominated by those involved with the monastic institutions. Life in a monastery, especially a monastery housing young monks like Neydo Tashi

Choeling, is very regimented and allows little free time. Weekends are the only time when the day is not dedicated to classes or *puja* and during this time they must wash clothes and take care of other aspects of personal care. While football games in the village were attended by many people, they happened only once a week and all of the players were typically Tibetans. For these monks, the rigors of monastic life mean that they have limited opportunities to interact with members of other ethnic groups. The interactions I noted between younger monks and the rest of the Pharping community usually occurred in shops or, rarely, on the football field. One monk I spoke with expressed his individuality relative to other monks because he had a Nepali friend with whom he played football. His choosing to use this fact as a means of expressing individuality exemplifies the division between monks and other non-Tibetan youth.



*Fig 15. Senior monk debates at Neydo Tashi Choeling*

While older teachers in the monastery might have had time to interact with non-Tibetan Pharping residents, most of those working at Neydo Tashi Choeling did not speak the Nepali or English necessary for conversation. The Rinpoche of the monastery is an exception in that he spoke English but the other teachers I met spoke only Tibetan. Other Tibetan workers in the Monastery, such as the accountant, did speak Nepali and did interact with non-Tibetans in ways I never saw monks doing. I

saw the manager of the guesthouse associated with the Neydo Tashi Choeling monastery playing cards with the Newars living outside of the monastery, for example. The monastery also employs numerous non-Tibetans for landscaping, cleaning, and security work. These workers interact with monks to some extent, but play no role in the spiritual activities which take place in the monastery. In general, I noted that language is a main factor which separates Tibetan monks from interacting with non-Tibetan Pharping people.

The final and most important factor which affects the separation of Tibetan Buddhists and non-Tibetan Pharping residents is the differing perception of appropriate behaviour in a 'sacred valley'. Pharping is one of several Tibetan Buddhist sacred valleys in Nepal. Within these valleys, killing animals is forbidden. The seriousness with which Tibetan Buddhists take this can be seen in their unwillingness to kill biting insects and their abstinence from playing football during seasons when insects are known to be in large numbers on the field and might be trampled. Non-Tibetan Pharping people do not adhere to this vision of behaviour in the Pharping valley and many eat chicken and goat meat. The animal sacrifice which takes place at Dakshinkali is also an object of contention. For these reasons many of the monks described the general non-Tibetan community living outside of the monastery as 'dirty' and 'bad people' for their practices. The practices of animal sacrifice and meat eating that have taken place in the Pharping valley for hundreds of years do not conform with the Tibetan Buddhist idea of proper behaviour in a sacred valley, causing an ideological disconnect between Tibetan Buddhists and non-Tibetan residents of Pharping.

The result of the lack of communication between Tibetans and non-Tibetans in Pharping is that Tibetans may not be aware of social conditions in Pharping. The limited interactions between these two groups are usually characterized by business transactions. For instance, Tuladhar-Douglas (2012) notes that members of the Newari caste known as Maharajans speak favorably of Tibetans due to their economic ties resulting from their involvement in the construction of monasteries in Pharping

(Tuladhar-Douglas 2012). Despite these business style interactions, Tibetan Buddhists are likely unaware of their role in social changes in Pharping. This means that they may unconsciously contribute to environmental degradation and disenfranchisement of the poor in the Pharping Valley. Tourism involving Tibetan Buddhist monasteries is another agent which fuels these environmental and social phenomena, largely unconsciously.

### *Tourists in Pharping*

Due to Pharping's proximity to Kathmandu, it is likely that tourists have been coming to Pharping since at least the 1970s. But, Pharping's draw for tourists has certainly increased due to the growing presence of Tibetan Buddhists in recent decades. The international tourists who I observed in Pharping generally fit into the category of spiritual tourists. However, many of them also had plans to trek or further their travel into the mountains in some respect, showing not only the extensiveness of adventure tourism in Nepal, but also the dynamic nature of the terms spiritual and adventure tourism.

While I did observe some tourists at Dakshinkali, they were primarily observing the rituals occurring there with little knowledge of the religious meanings behind them. The focus of most of the tourists in Pharping was Buddhism. Some of the tourists I met had a fairly advanced knowledge of the importance of Yanglesho for Tibetan Buddhists and wanted to visit the cave to attain the merit associated with it. Others had come specifically because of the monastic communities in Pharping. A large number of the tourists I met had come specifically to practice with a master of a certain lineage. Many were continuing travel from ashrams in India and had come to Pharping to escape the oppressive monsoon season there.

Most of the tourists in Pharping construct the valley as a primarily Buddhist destination. While many are aware of Dakshinkali and other Hindu sites in the valley, their interaction with the space is weighted towards the Tibetan Buddhist construction of spiritual geography which places Yanglesho at the center of importance. The definition of Pharping as a 'Buddhist' place is also seen through tourist's

economic and social interactions. Tourist interactions with locals in Pharping are heavily weighted towards the Buddhist community. While everyday transactions were conducted with Nepalis at handicraft shops and restaurants, many of the tourists I met were staying at Tibetan Buddhist retreat centers. A majority of the money spent by tourists went to Tibetan Buddhist institutions where they paid for lodging or teachings. Tourists also were, in general, unaware that the Tibetans and their associated monasteries were new additions to the Pharping valley. Tourists thus contribute to the Tibetan Buddhist dominance of the spiritual landscape of Pharping through their social affirmation of Buddhist spiritual geography and their economic support of monasteries.

Another notable population of non-Nepali residents in Pharping is the small community of western expatriates who live near the old city of Pharping. Those I spoke with were born in the United States or Europe and had moved to Pharping for reasons pertaining to Buddhist practice. One informant, who was Swiss, told me that he had moved to Pharping because here he was not an outsider because of his Buddhist faith, as was the case in his native country, but rather was ‘normal’ for his beliefs in Pharping. This population is relatively small but, like the Tibetan community, purchase land through the Bahun-Chettri ethnic group, a process which has contributed to social issues of low-caste land disenfranchisement in Pharping.

### *Stratified Benefits*

The stratification of benefits from tourism is shown in Kolas’s discussion of Shangri-La. For tourism to be a beneficial element for local populations, these populations must understand how to capitalize on the tourist market. In a discussion of a tourist site which involved a terraced waterfall created by farmers to irrigate their crops, an ex-government official commented that despite the fact that the farmers created the attraction itself, owned the land where the attraction was located, and used the water produced by the attraction, they did not profit from the tourism the waterfall generated. This occurred both because of the farmers were left out of the negotiation discussing the distribution of



profits from ticket sales and because of the farmer's lack of awareness that the site had potential to generate tourism revenue (Kolas 2007). Similarly, in Pharping, the Tibetans have been able to market themselves on an international scale due to the publicization of their plight as refugees. This has allowed them to tap into portions of the tourist market that Nepalis have not been able to reach. This is also tied into the tourist's conception of the sacred geography of Pharping. The Buddhist dominance of the landscape is perpetuated by the affirmation of their spiritual geography by tourists and the revenue they bring to Pharping.

Tourism revenue in Pharping is not just stratified amongst ethnic groups, it is also divided on economic and caste lines. This is shown through the land disenfranchisement of the Dalit caste of Nepalese, fueled in part by tourism earnings. It is difficult to discuss social issues in Nepal without some knowledge of the caste system in a Nepali context. The Nepali social system is incredibly complex and comprises numerous ethnic identities, many of whom have their own social hierarchies. These ethnic groups have migrated to Nepal from different parts of southern Asia. While a discussion of the ethnic complexity is beyond the scope of this paper it is relevant to discuss the two Hindu groupings of individuals into higher and lower castes. The higher caste Bahun-Chhetri group dominates the political, economic, and academic spectrum of Nepal and has come to control 70-80 percent of high level political, administrative, and military positions. They are thus able to manipulate economic and social situations to their benefit (Bhattachan 2013).

There has been a history of land disenfranchisement of lower caste and tribal people, broadly termed 'Dalits' by the ruling Bahun-Chhetri group. I was told by interview informants that this was also the case today. However this process was different than the land grabbing, taxation, and labor policies that were historically used to displace Dalits (Bhattachan 2013). What I observed in Pharping was a process that created a stratification of wealth which was displacing Dalits. The first part of this dynamic was the acquisition of wealth by Tibetan lamas and the general exile Tibetan Buddhist

institution in Nepal through the spread the market power of Buddhism, leading to the construction of numerous Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and retreats. The funding for these monasteries comes in part from the spiritual tourist population. Spiritual tourists will pay to study, live, and practice at monasteries for periods of time. Lamas and Rinpoches will also give talks in English in Kathmandu and collect money. Using the revenue they accrue from these sources, which are unreachable for many Nepalese, Tibetan monastic institutions build monasteries and retreat centers in Pharping

In order to construct a monastery, land must first be purchased. The Bahun-Chhetri group hold a monopoly over the political aspect of land management. Through this monopoly on property and its associated dealings, Bahun-Chhetri elites are able to create schemes that displace Dalits of the Tamang and Newar ethnicities from their property (Bhattachan 2013). I noted this to be occurring in Pharping; I was told Bahun-Chhetri elites would use this land to sell to Tibetans at inflated prices. The increase in land prices caused by this policy is also a force in displacing the impoverished of Pharping through the indirect consequence of rising land prices because of inflated costs of land being sold to expatriates and Tibetans.

Not only has tourism revenue caused economic and social stratification between Tibetan and non-Tibetan ethnic groups, tourism earnings also fuel economic disparities between castes. In the case of Pharping, Tibetans and tourists are, intentionally or not, unconscious participants in the land disenfranchisement of the Dalit group. This disparity represents a stratification of agency within Pharping society. Those with the ability to profit from spiritual tourism or the industries associated with it, such as real estate and monastery construction, have the agency to stay in sacred spaces. Those who are outside of this economic transaction are pushed out. While the tourism market is not the only source of income in Pharping, the profits associated with it can drive social processes such as the disenfranchisement of poor Pharping residents. Agency to exist in sacred space is thus stratified by tourism earnings.

### *Ecological Consequences of Growth*

While tourism has funded monastery construction which has fueled social inequality in Pharping, the combination of motorized transit, increasing pilgrimage and tourist traffic, and the spatial expansion of Pharping driven by the construction of new monasteries, has impacted ecosystems within the Pharping Valley. This issue brings into question the effectiveness of sacredness in protecting ecosystems from degradation.

Today, pilgrimage to Dakshinkali and Yanglesho can be undertaken using only motorized transit. Dakshinkali has its own bus terminal where pilgrims and other travellers can access various regions of Nepal. As a result of this accessibility and the relatively inexpensive cost of bus travel, pilgrimage undertaken via motorized transit has become the norm. While my informants noted that the air quality of Pharping is far superior to that of Kathmandu, the unregulated expansion of motorized pilgrimage has the potential to cause intensified air pollution as it has in the Kathmandu valley, one of the most polluted cities in the world. Kathmandu is not connected to any major overland transportation networks like railroads and is therefore heavily reliant on bus and air transport. Buses and airplanes are major sources of air pollution because of the dust and carbon dioxide they produce in Kathmandu and surrounding valleys like Pharping (Thapa et.al. 2007). The primary means pilgrims and tourists use to get to the Pharping Valley, buses and airplane, degrade the quality of air and the atmosphere of tranquility which many of my informants said they valued about Pharping. The draw of Pharping's sacredness makes it susceptible to the ills of air pollution because of the vehicles used to deliver people to its sacred sites.

Each day I stayed in Kathmandu I woke up with black mucus clogging my sinuses. The pollution resulting from the amount of motor vehicle traffic and industrial scale production affects everyday life significantly. Motorized transportation is both affordable and convenient within Kathmandu and its surrounding settlements. These buses are seen as a good investment and a career

option for young men. Buses and taxis are the only way to reach Pharping from Kathmandu. Buses leave for Pharping from Kathmandu every thirty minutes during the daylight hours which attests to the popularity and embeddedness of this system of transportation. These buses are poorly regulated and operate with very few emission standards. While air quality in Pharping not as poor as it is in Kathmandu, this area is developing similar pollution problems. As a valley with a similar topography and settlement, Pharping runs the risk of developing similar pollution problems due to its reliance on motorized transportation.



*Fig 16. The expanding settlement in the Kathmandu Valley from a hill on the outskirts of Pharping, showing the proximity of the two settlements*

Another aspect potentially harming the ecosystems of the Pharping valley is the expansion of settlement. Ehrlich and Ehrlich have noted that population and settlement growth are major causes of local environmental change. In particular, regional population growth has the potential to have a negative impact on local ecosystems (Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1990). The monastery construction which has happened in recent years, as described above, has pushed the boundaries of development in Pharping out into the surrounding forests. The forests are relied upon, especially by Pharping's poor population, for fuelwood and grazing land for goats. The monastic expansion into the hills surrounding Pharping has led to road construction to these monasteries, causing the removal of plant and animal life. Since

monasteries promise having many monks living in one place, they offer an opportunity for economies to form around them: when monasteries are constructed shops and services have an economic incentive to move close to them. This can increase the development of the area and can further degrade local ecosystems. Those who rely on the forests surrounding Pharping for their ecosystem services, predominantly Pharping's poorest residents, are affected by the environmental consequences of growth disproportionately. These individuals are mostly non-Tibetan meaning that the Tibetan Buddhist population largely does not experience the externalities of their own growth and are therefore unlikely to stop.

As seen in Figure 16 showing the proximity of these two settlements, the expansion of Pharping is directly linked to the expansion of Kathmandu. The Kathmandu valley has experienced rapid urbanization due to a variety of social and economic factors in Nepal. This has resulted in dramatic land use and socio-economic changes due to the conversion of agricultural land to urban land. This has led to demographic change and has created new socio economic strains between residents (Thapa et.al. 2009). Due to its emerging economy because of its status as a pilgrimage site and a hub of spiritual tourism, Pharping has the potential to face some of the same problems as Kathmandu due to its rapid growth. Also, as noted by Thapa et.al. (2009), land use change caused by urbanization can create socioeconomic tensions. As a place which is already characterized by economic stratification based on ethnicity and other social factors, these stresses have the potential to cause conflict in the Pharping Valley.

*Discussion: Sacredness as a Driver of Cultural and Ecological Preservation*

Pharping provides an example of what can happen when disparate cultures interact with the sacred differently within the same space. While Hindu and Tibetan Buddhist interpretations of sacred space in the Pharping valley are not inherently conflicting, when combined with political, economic, and social realities, competition ensues. The ability of Tibetan Buddhists to market themselves as a

religion and as a culture in exile, has contributed to their generation of income from sources not available to non-Tibetans and has allowed them to be more economically successful than other ethnic groups in Pharping. This success is reflected in their visual and spatial dominance of the landscape of Pharping through the construction of many monasteries in visually striking locations.

The Tibetan expansion in Pharping has also been a result of a symbiotic relationship with spiritual tourists. Tourists have provided income for Tibetan Buddhists to expand their settlement in the Pharping valley. The expansion of Tibetan Buddhist settlement has led to the construction of Pharping as a 'Buddhist' destination, which appeals to the tourist definition of Pharping sacred space. This has increased the popularity of Pharping as a tourist destination and further funded the Tibetan monastic institution.

The expansion of Tibetan monasteries and the development that has followed them has encroached on forest ecosystems which Pharping's subsistence farming population relies upon for many ecosystem services. While there have not been any ecological surveys to determine the effects of this encroachment, monasteries increase human traffic which can degrade ecosystems. This expansion has been unregulated and propelled by tourist dollars. Coupled with these ecological impacts, the creation of Pharping as a 'Buddhist' destination has created economic stratification between Tibetan Buddhists and non-Tibetan Nepalese. This income gap, combined with the distance between the monastic community and local Nepalese caused by lingual differences, the constraints of monastic life, and differing perceptions of behavior in a sacred valley, has led to the Tibetan community having a limited interaction with non-Tibetan Nepalese. Because of this lack of interaction, Tibetan monastery construction has the potential to displace Dalit populations through land deals which disenfranchise their ownership of land parcels.

The integration of the sacred space of the Pharping Valley with the global economy through the channel of spiritual tourism has expanded the economic and social influence of some parties and fueled

the disenfranchisement of others. Sacredness as an attraction for tourists and a destination for pilgrims is a driver of social and environmental change. When a certain definition of sacred geography becomes dominant through social and economic processes, the landscape is physically changed to reflect these new values. In the case of Pharping, this has meant the creation of a valley of monasteries, defining Pharping as a 'Buddhist' destination and changing its character.

The studies of Kolas (2007) in Shangri-La and Pharping show how the contact zone of tourism and pilgrimage is an area of environmental and social change. The global nature of tourism causes it to connect certain minorities within the contact zone with sources of income which are unreachable to other groups. In the cases of Shangri-La and Pharping, tourist definitions of a space are preconceived and, in some cases, depict these sacred regions as outside of sociopolitical and socioeconomic realities which shape the lives of locals in these destinations. These two case studies show that sacred sites drive social and environmental change rather than being isolated from it.

### **Conclusion**

The sacred places of the Himalaya are sites of cultural contact, religious politics, sociopolitical flux, and disparate interactions with place. These sites are areas of complex social and ecological relationships between people and landscapes. Sacredness, when combined with the realities of the global economy, becomes a factor which attracts people to places for many different reasons. For Himalayan pilgrims, sacred sites are generally areas of mythological significance where the practitioner come for a direct experience of the divine through a prescribed interaction with the landscape. Spiritual and adventure tourists come to sacred spaces generally to search for a truth and authenticity which they believe is lacking in the modern world. Spiritual tourists search for this truth in the cultures and religions of others. Adventure tourists search for authenticity in the wilderness, which they see as outside of the realm of mankind's meddling. On an interpersonal level, spiritual sites are an interaction

between these definitions of place and what a person came to experience there. These interactions, when examined further, are products of cultural constructions which are based on religious and colonial ideologies that separate pilgrims and tourists from their impacts.

Tourist and pilgrim interactions with sacred sites can be divided into the interrelated categories of individual, social, and political. While I separate these interactions, these three realms are inextricably linked and act upon one another in many ways.

### *Individual Interaction*

Individual choice drives pilgrimage and tourism travel. My own interest in the Himalayan region and its sacred spaces was inspired by a photo of Mount Kailash in western Tibet. The mountain's perfect shape and its status as one of the most sacred Hindu and Buddhist sites appealed to the climber and the consumer of eastern religions in me. My motivation to travel to Pharping and to see the rest of the Himalaya was my own choice but fit into the framework of my socioeconomic status, my age, and my American nationality. Whether I knew it or not, all of these things affected every step of my travel, especially my interaction with sacred space. Who I could talk to, what I understood, where I went, and how people treated me were a direct result of personhood within a western context. This tourist personhood is different from that of a pilgrim, who usually comes from an area of southern or central Asia. While their inspiration for travel may be similar to mine, their travel is a product of a different historical, political, and economic context. While a traveller's choice to travel to a sacred site is an individual decision, it is mediated and filtered by larger social and political processes. The tourist individual and the pilgrim individual are generally products of different motivations and filters. However, the journey of both the pilgrim and the tourist is mediated by social structures which remove the sacred site from the world of economic, political, and social realities.

### *Social Role of Interaction*



While interaction with sacred places on an individual level is driven by individualized life experiences, these interactions do not fall outside of global political and economic realities. The image held by a tourist of the Nepal Himalaya is a product of western society. The western imagination of the Himalaya, formed during the imperial age, continues to influence tourist interaction with sacred sites. While spiritual and adventure tourists may have advanced understandings of local religions and landscapes, the general construction of a journey to the Himalaya, formed through literature and imperial ideology, places their journey outside of the political, economic, and environmental realities to which it is intimately tied. While this cultural construction is created by tourists, some locals are able to use this imagination of the cultures of the Himalaya to appeal to tourist and profit from them, as the Tibetan Buddhists did in Pharping and Shangri-La.

While locals can benefit from the tourist imagining of Himalayan sacred spaces, this ideology also has consequences. The social construction of tourists place themselves outside of their impacts by imagining their destination as outside of the ‘ordinary’ world. The mythologizing of space by religious structures also removes sacred spaces from a pilgrim’s worldview. For these reasons, the economic stratification and accompanying social tension combined with the degradation of local ecosystems is usually not noticed by tourists and pilgrims. The complexity and embeddedness of these issues within local culture masks their severity to these travellers.

#### *Political and Economic Interaction*

Tourist interaction with sacred space enters the political realm through the economics of tourism and development. Tourism’s role in economic development can cause changing definitions of spirituality and space. As seen in the examples of both Shangri-La and Pharping, dominant notions of sacred space are tied into the economics of tourism. The groups which exhibit qualities that are attractive to tourists usually receive the benefits of tourism and are thus able to further adapt to accommodate the needs of tourism. This is not to say that locals in both cases are not active participants

in this transaction. However, the economic incentives tourism provides can clearly alter the character of a sacred place. The interrelation between economics and sacredness bring into question the extent to which the quality of sacredness can be used to preserve the ecological and cultural character of a space. Ecologically, sacredness is a major driver causing people to visit a place. In the Himalaya, the expansion of infrastructure spearheaded by British and Chinese projects has brought mass tourism and pilgrimage to the region. The increased number of people at sacred sites combined with the impact of motorized transportation and its associated infrastructure, has placed the ecosystems within Himalayan sacred sites under pressure. When pilgrimage sites become sites of tourism, they are subject to increased traffic and therefore increased pressure. The increase in spiritual tourism coupled with the intensification of motorized pilgrimage suggests that a larger human impact will continue to stress local ecosystems in these spaces. Since many sacred sites provide vital ecosystem services for local populations, the preservation of their ecological character is of utmost importance. In this sense, sacredness is a driver of ecological and social change rather than preservation. The political, social, and economic character of both pilgrimage and tourism in the modern world threaten the alteration of the sacred spaces of the Himalaya.

Tourists and pilgrim interaction with sacred spaces takes place on various scales. While these scales can be distinguished from one another, they interrelate to create the structure which governs the impacts tourists and pilgrims will have at a sacred site. These frameworks are products of both colonial and religious history in the Himalayan region and this region's involvement in the modern global economy. As a result, policy and response must address this issue on multiple scales through diverse vectors.

*Sacred Spaces: Sites of Impact and Opportunity*

In their study of the sacred spaces of the world and their value and benefits, Verschuuren et.al express their belief in the potential for sacred sites to be drivers of political and cultural conservation.

These authors state that tourism can degrade local definitions of sacredness and that it also is a major driver of global environmental and social change. The current global economic system, in which tourism is a major actor, does not accommodate a broad definition of human wellbeing in which the ecological and cultural integrity of sacred space is accounted for. The authors states that unregulated market forces have allowed the exploitation of cultural and ecological resources from the world's sacred sites at the expense of local populations. The changes brought by the integration of sacred sites into the global market threatens indigenous access and use of these places. (Verschuuren et.al 2010).

Verschuuren et.al posit other conclusions about the state of the sacred natural sites of the world. First, they state that these sites have historically been a primary conservation network for protecting ecosystems and culture. Not only have sacred sites been areas of importance for ancient societies, these authors state that conservation biologists have noted that sacred sites have been areas of biodiversity conservation under the appropriate cultural conditions. Secondly, they note that sacred sites can promote community autonomy and can give agency to local populations. Sacred sites act as areas of cultural interaction that can lead to mutual understandings in multiethnic communities. Thus, under certain cultural conditions, sacred sites act as areas of both ecological and cultural preservation (Verschuuren et.al 2010). While I agree with many of the points made by these authors, their general conclusion that sacred spaces are inherently good for all parties should be questioned. Sacred sites can be areas of cultural interaction but can also drive cultural collision. When we examine sacred places as beneficial, we must ask: who are receiving these benefits?

It is difficult to conceive of how to reform a process like tourism which involves actors and structures on a global scale. However, large issues offer many potential aspects of reform which can begin large scale structural change. I have examined addressing the effects of modernity on Himalayan sacred sites in two ways. The first involves the managing of these sites through various scales of governance to minimize impacts on local ecosystems and cultures. The second examines how tourism

can be reframed in order to treat sacred spaces as dynamic places within their contemporary economic, social, and political contexts.

These authors state that in order to encourage these conditions a collaborative mix of local and international effort must take place. Local governments and religious authorities must be committed to similar goals of conservation and have the support of local populations. This local support could be combined with regional and state action through the implementation of laws and state protection. International support is also required to broaden the scope of conservation initiatives. Since tourism to sacred space is a global industry, it must have a global scale solution. Thus, for sacred spaces to act as preservers of both ecology and culture a complex network of interrelated actors, working on multiple spatial scales, must collaborate (Verschuuren et.al 2010).

While the solutions these authors provide are complex and ambitious, they attempt to address a problem that is extremely intricate and large with far-reaching impacts. Tourism to sacred sites is unlikely to decrease given its substantial role in the global economy, the support it receives from the UN and other international bodies, and its potential to create wealth for the governments of developing nations. As a result, government at many levels must be involved in order to create conditions in which sacred spaces can be visited in ways which preserve the integrity of local culture and environment. The policies must be flexible to reflect the changing nature of sacred space and the agency of locals to change the spaces they have deemed important. The ambitiousness of these measures reflects the value of sacred sites. They aim to change tourism from a problem to a solution. While there is no cure for the effects of globalization, its impacts can be mediated with thoughtful and interactive action.



*Fig 17. Young Tibetan pilgrims at Yanglesho*

While the popularity of sacred sites increases their human traffic and therefore the associated human impacts, this popularity also reflects an aspect of common ground. Those who visit sacred spaces are intrigued by some aspect of the relationship between humans and landscapes. Whether that is represented with an icon, a temple, or some other form of denotation, sacred sites bring people from disparate parts of the world together for the experience of something meaningful. Global tourism has expanded at an incredibly fast rate and, while the impacts and problems associated with it are still being discovered, the opportunities for mutual understanding and cultural exchange should also be recognized.

Some of my colleagues and myself have discussed how tourism could potentially be reconstructed to reflect modern complexity. While tourists are currently attracted to a place of what I deem ‘eternal-time’, due to the view of their existence being outside of contemporary influences, these sites could be reframed as sites within ‘current-time’. This new notion of time would reflect these sites

as spaces within the scope of modernity. Tourism, framed in this new light would attract visitors to sacred sites because they are outside of everyday life not because of their role outside of time and space but because of they are areas of intricate cultural interaction and collision. Under these conditions it is likely that tourist dollars could be equitably distributed in light of understood social realities. While this would certainly be difficult, a new paradigm of tourism is essential to the preservation of the cultural and ecological character of Himalayan sacred sites.

No place is ever fixed, this may be especially true of sacred sites. Sacredness is an element that seems to hold a power which begs to be transformed throughout history. However sacredness and its universal appeal can be a cause of community formation and ecological conservation. It is the work of all humankind to foster these conditions at home and abroad; understanding one another, understanding the sacred.

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