

Regina Höfer

Editorial

Representing Tibet Abroad: Tibetan Heritage, Art and Material Culture

This special issue of *Transcultural Perspectives* investigates representations of Tibetan heritage, art and material culture in the Tibetan diaspora. It aims to shed light on ways both Western collectors and Tibetan representatives choose to construct facets of Tibet and the Himalayas. The three articles deal with the Museum of Contemporary Art in the Netherlands, the collection of scholar Nebesky-Wojkowitz in Vienna and the symbol of Tibetan diaspora culture in India, The Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.

In their article *World Systems Perspectives and Art: A Case Study of the Museum of Contemporary Tibetan Art in the Netherlands* Braden and Oosterman apply the World Systems Theory to investigate how the Tibetan-run newly established Museum of Contemporary Tibetan Art (MCTA) in Emmen is defining and representing Tibetan art and culture to the local residents. The authors argue that MCTA counteracts the typical threat of cultural appropriation by a dominant Western culture and the re-fashioning of Tibetan heritage for Western consumption by education and the combination of “Eastern and Western” aesthetics. This successfully facilitates the public to both gain awareness for the political history of Tibet and Tibetan art which is “familiarised” by the use of Western elements.

Authors Niebuhr and Widorn examine in *‘Tibetan Treasures’ of the Weltmuseum Wien: A First Critical Approach to René de Nebesky-Wojkowitz’s Policy of Collecting* the Austrian anthropologist’s first of three field trips to South Asia and his Eastern Himalayan collection. They demonstrate how during his expedition from 1950 to 1953 to West Bengal Nebesky-Wojkowitz acquired Himalayan artefacts and researched the culture and traditions of the Lepcha people in particular. His sources consisted mainly of the local residents, Tibetan refugees or intermediaries with access to central Tibet. In rare cases he also commissioned *thangka* paintings out of his reach. Altogether his

collection of sound recordings, objects mostly of daily use and photographs contributed to the understanding of Tibetan and Himalayan communities’ cultures and religious beliefs in a time when these were threatened both by the political situation and the loss of tradition in the course of modernity.

Saikia employs in her article *The Library of Tibetan Works and Archives: Diaspora, Memory, and Movement* the Cultural Memory Studies framework in order to investigate how the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives (LTWA) in Dharamsala represents Tibetan culture and serves as a site of memory. As a ‘national’ library, museum and archive for the diaspora the LTWA enables cultural remembering and practices and thus mediates memorialisation, for example by the ritual practice of circambulating the building. The author suggests that the LTWA not only offers forms of remembrance of the past, but constructions and aspirations of the future, too, in highlighting the importance of secular education for example, thus even creating a memory citizenship.

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Title

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