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# A R T I C L E S

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## HIMALAYAN AND TIBETAN IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

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### INTRODUCTION

RAFAŁ BESZTERDA & ANNA SZYMOSZYN

#### EDITORS

Western Himalayas and Tibet are specific areas, quite popular among scholars and intensively researched for over the last 150 years. It would seem that after such a long time we should know almost everything about the people and the region but such a vision could not be further from the truth. The Himalayas, best known for their natural beauty, are still a treasure trove for the representatives of various disciplines, from geologists, entomologists and botanists to cultural geographers, linguists, art historians, ethnographers and so on. Every year brings a plethora of new publications and even more importantly, a wider scope of original future prospects. More areas and topics of interest are opening than closing and it is what makes Himalayan studies so fascinating.

Culture is constantly on the move and these studies are no exception. It is beyond a question that the global world has already entered The Roof of the World. Satellite broadcast is reaching the villages together with sparkling sweet drinks and capped drinking water in a company of contemporary ideas, so called modern style of living and increased expectations. All of the above combination put enormous pressure on the local inhabitants, changing their vision of traditional values and the native economy in relation to the state and international market. Finally fundamental question of identity arises: local, regional and national. All particular dimensions of everyday life in the Western Himalayas show a huge dynamic of change and it is what provides the reason for permanent research being undertaken by both native and international scholars.

The time has come to cohesively gather together the several directions of Himalayan-Tibetan research conducted by scientists from Europe and India. In this volume of *Ethnologia Polona*, 4 Poles (Klařkowski, Bloch, Beszterda and Szymoszyn) together with Tsering Chorol from India, Gerald Kozicz from Austria and Bela Kelenyi from Hungary, present articles on their own investigations in various zones and regions in Ladakh, Zanskar, Kinnaur, Lahul&Spiti and among Tibetan and Himalayan

communities in India, Nepal and all over the world. A common thread running through these outcomes is the primary research being undertaken although their scope and specific interest is different.

As editors, we feel a great satisfaction that we were able to obtain competent authors and publish a volume on the area to which we devoted ourselves many years. When we both started work at the IAE PAS in middle 1990s., prof. Maria Paradowska, who was our principal and editor-in-chief of *Ethnologia Polona*, told us that it would be hard to realize our scientific ambitions due to a lack of interest in this area by academic and ministerial authorities, deciding on the allocation of funds. We paid our first research trips to Asia from our own money. It is only in the last decade that science funding policy has changed radically, and it is now much easier to obtain funds for fieldwork in remote parts of the world.

Professor Paradowska, however, was kind to us and agreed to our many month-long – stays in the Himalayas and Tibet and printed in *Ethnologia Polona* our first articles (Beszterda 2002, 55–83, Beszterda 2003, 131–148, Urbańska 2003, 149–165). In 2004, she agreed to devote part of the new volume to Himalayan-Tibetan issues. A group of young researchers published 6 articles on traditional trade routes in the Western Himalayas (Hincza 2004, 151–164), the medical activities of missionaries in North India (Beszterda 2004, 135–150), the revival of Bon religion in exile and in Poland (Urbańska-Szymoszyn 2004, 117–133), changes taking place in the environment of Tibetan youth in exile (Bloch 2004, 105–106) and the spread of Tibetan culture in Poland (Sanocki 2004, 87–104, Urbańska-Szymoszyn 2004, 79–86). In subsequent years, a further 3 only articles related to the region were published in *Ethnologia Polona* (Maksymowicz 2011, 165–180, Bloch 2011, 169–190, Urbańska-Szymoszyn 2013, 143–153).

We hope that the current volume, published 13 years after the first thematic Himalayan-Tibetan edition of *Ethnologia Polona*, will be very interesting for our readers and will bring a lot of new information and insights, despite this being a mere snapshot of the research conducted in so amazing part of the world.

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