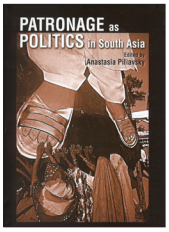

Anastasia Piliavsky, ed., *Patronage as Politics in South Asia*
Cambridge University Press, 2014. xiv + 469 pages. List of illustrations, bibliography, index. Hardback, $120.00, ISBN: 9781107056084. eBook, $96.00, ISBN: 9781316156681. doi: 10.1017/CBO9781107296930.

If, as Tim Ingold (1992, 696) writes, "Anthropology is philosophy with the people in," political anthropology is political theory with people's lived experiences, evaluations, and expectations in. What better way, indeed, to understand "the political" in South Asia (or anywhere) than listening to and observing those variously engaged in it? *Patronage as Politics in South Asia* does just that. In doing so, its editor and contributors recognize how—high-flying political philosophies and theories notwithstanding—democracy (and political life more widely) is simply a set of social relations: an arrangement between persons concerning governance and political authority and their discrepant roles and expectations in it. Anastasia Piliavsky poses in her incisive introduction, "what is democratic representation if not a social relation?" (29). If the form and meaning of social relations diverge from one society to the next, so, consequently, does the social substance of democracy. That democratic politics and lifeworlds are everywhere socially enmeshed and reworked into historically evolved contexts, moral values, and cultural circumstances is an observation many liberal theorists, and their ventriloquists, find difficult to accept, even perceive. But this book's sixteen essays (preceded by a foreword by John Dunn and an introduction by Anastasia Piliavsky) jointly show postulated models of modern, liberal democracy and of the "good political life" are just that: normative models and "as if systems" that superficially abstract that which cannot be abstracted from the pre-existent moral and political gloss of the land. "The land," here, is South Asia, a place, in all its diversities and complexities, that increasingly claims central stage in the study of our modern political condition.

Anthropologists, John Beattie (1964, 12) argued long ago, should study two things: first, those social relations that are "standardized, institutionalized, and so characteristic of the society being investigated," and, second, the ideas and values associated with these social relationships. In South Asia, it is patron–client relationships that make one such characteristic practice and value. It is the history, persistence, and moralities of patronage in South Asian political life that this book engages, through both historical and ethnographic excursions. Even as the contributors (wisely) refrain from adopting a single definition of patronage and variously celebrate, criticize, and convict its many manifestations, they all agree that patronage remains etched—as a value, idiom, practice, and critique—at the heart of South Asian political life. They also agree that patronage is best approached as a "living moral idiom" (4) that operates in a complex moral multiverse in which "relational principles" (13) and values of munificence, mutual dependencies, and "hierarchical reciprocity" (366) create political bonds and loyalties that last.

While not everyone may agree with Anastasia Piliavsky that "in the social sciences patronage has had its day" (4), many ethnographers do document relations of patronage in their work, or even in the academic settings in which they write (Peacock 2016). Patronage politics certainly finds no place in normative, Weberian projections of what

modern, liberal democracy should look like; votes, after all, should not be bartered, and impersonal governance should supersede clientelistic exchanges, while politicians are expected to behave as *servants* of the public good, not as powerful patrons who provide and protect their devotee voters. This position has its adherents among mostly middle- and upper-class citizens in South Asia, but less so among the poorer, more vulnerable sections of the society, for whom patronage, in its many forms and guises, is coterminous with politicians and politics. It is the very moral framework, as most of the chapters variously conclude, through which they engage in politics, formulate their political demands, and evaluate their political representatives. Put differently, patronage, across South Asia, is not a dying remnant of a pre-modern past, soon to be swallowed by India's new modernity, but nourishes a contemporary political sociality and structure of political morals that are at once historically traceable and contested, but also scripted and evaluated afresh. Besides delving into the moral depths of patronage, the authors also, both explicitly and implicitly, use the study of patronage as a stepping stone leading to other questions, such as South Asian manifestations and meanings of the public good, political ideology, public sphere, political representation, and even corruption. These are fundamental fields of inquiry, into which sets of insights are offered.

In South Asia, "patronage politics" is everywhere just around the corner, both in the past and present. A tour around the region, as this book offers, shows this. In traditional Tibet, to start with, the polity took the form of a governmental diarchy between the "preceptor-donee" and ruler and lay donors, although it is not always clear, as Seyfort Ruegg (chapter 2) shows, whether the vocabulary of patronage does justice to this relation, or, for that matter, "who 'patronises' whom?" (69). Traveling south and bypassing Nepal (to which, unfortunately, no chapter is devoted), we arrive in northern India where Beatrice Jauregui (chapter 10) invites us into a police *thana* to show how the production of First Information Reports (FIRs), central to India's legal system, are often not the result of legal-rational proceedings but subject to interpersonal relations of exchange, negotiations, and protection, with police officers operating both as patrons and clients, depending on the context and actors involved. Also in northern India, we find that elected representatives are perceived—and manifest themselves—as "politician-kings" and "patron-protectors" (283), whose political clout hinges on their ability to protect (organizing violence if they must) and provision their followers, who, in turn, look upon their political representatives as "extraordinary kin" (283). Voters express their affection for (and reliance on) their political leaders in an idiom of caste competition and belonging, shared blood, and substantive bonds of divine kinship that trace back to Hindu gods, deities, and mythologies (Lucia Michelutti, chapter 12).

Heading westward and entering Bangladesh we meet "political bullies," or *mastans*, criminalizing street-level political life. They engage in muscular political brokerage, racketeering, politically motivated crime, and violence, and derive legitimacy and protection from the patronage they receive from political parties, which now and then rely on these "political bullies" to navigate the murkier and violent sides of Bangladeshi politics (Arild Engelsen Ruud, chapter 13). Moving south, we first learn about "remnants of patronage" among the Valaiyar community in Tamil Nadu, whose sense of history, place, and identity is traced and articulated through narratives of past royal patronage they received in the form of titles, land grants, and temples (Diane Miles, chapter 3). Also in South India, in Kerala, we learn about the (im)moralities of brokers

who use their social "connectedness" (366) to help prospective labor migrants to jobs in the Gulf. While these brokers like to think of themselves as munificent and claim to be involved in community development, their fees are often hefty, their motivations selfish, and they occasionally cheat. All the same, most would-be migrants continue to prefer these informal networks of mediation, often immersed into relations of kith and kin, over the formal channels provided by the bureaucracy and other state-sponsored organizations (Filippo Osella, chapter 16).

Continuing our journey westward we are introduced to "political fixers" in Gujarat, who are employed both by the poor, to help them access the state and its resources, and by elected politicians, who use them to "facilitate clientelistic exchanges" (197) and to win votes (Ward Berenschot, chapter 8). Entering Rajasthan, we find that politicians relate to their constituents as donors do to donees, making a hierarchical political arrangement that, in some ways, traces back to the so-called Jajmani system. Voters' political preferences, Anastasia Piliavsky (chapter 6) shows ethnographically, are contingent on a politician's commitment and capacity to act as a benevolent patron whose duty it is to "provide." A pervasive idiom of "feeding and eating" (160) forms the moral basis for political relations, both literally through lavish election feasts, and metaphorically by politicians "getting things done" (174) for their voters. Both ways, "feeding and eating" is not merely transactional but generative of the lasting bonds and loyalties politicians need to win elections. Further westward, and crossing the India–Pakistan border, Nicolas Martin (chapter 14) emphasizes patronage's darker sides, as in the Pakistani Punjab clientelistic exchanges that "reinforce existing power structures and undermine popular freedoms" and are "integral to processes of dispossession" (343). In addition to the chapters mentioned above, this volume carries contributions by Mattison Mines, Sumit Guha, David Gilmartin, Lisa Björkman, Pamela Price (with Dusi Srinivas), Steven Wilkinson, and Hildegard Diemberger (constraints of space prevent me from discussing these chapters individually), each of which variously engage practices, moral principles, and paradoxes of patronage.

A few years ago Rajeev Bhargava (2010, 56) lamented that "a critical tradition of political theory does not exist in India." Most political treatises, he lamented, remain derivative from concepts and categories that emerged from the so-called "West." In the current search for India-centric (and South Asian) political theory and thought, scholars would do well to take careful note of this volume and include in their canons presently "under-construction" the histories, politics, and moralities of patronage. While patronage is many things, this volume shows convincingly how in South Asia it is not a field of moral aberration but has its own moral sense, historical trajectories, rules, rewards, and drawbacks. Relations of patronage will, of course, continue to evolve and change. Yet, as a moral frame and political praxis, patronage is probably there to stay in South Asia, certainly for the foreseeable future, and this collection of essays therefore contributes greatly to capturing the character of contemporary political life in South Asia.

References

Beattie, John
1964 *Other Cultures: Aims, Methods, and Achievements in Social Anthropology.* London: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9780203985069

Bhargava, Rajeev
2010 *What is Political Theory and Why Do We Need It*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Ingold, Tim
1992 Editorial. *Man*, New Series 27: 693–96.

Peacock, Vita
2016 Academic precarity as hierarchical dependence in the Max Planck Society. *Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6: 95–119. doi: 10.14318/hau6.1.006

Jelle J. Wouters
Royal Thimphu College, Bhutan

The 2008 so-called "Peaceful Revolution in the Year of the Earth Rat," also known as the "3.14 Incident," was a turning point in Sino-Tibetan relations. Marking the fiftieth anniversary of violent protests in Amdo, and coinciding with the Beijing Olympics, it revealed that decades of development and integration had not assuaged Tibetan sentiments. In fact, the protests that followed the 2008 Revolution renewed discussions of independence within the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China (TARC). Many consider the period to be one of a Tibetan national awakening. Shokdung's *Division of Heaven and Earth* was written at the height of these developments and has emerged as one of TARC's most contentious political commentaries. Compared to the tenth Panchen Lama's *Petition in 70,000 Characters* (1962), its bold assertions and distinctly Tibetan prose provide a rare glimpse into an emerging intellectual scene in the People's Republic of China.

Shokdung (pseudonym; Tragya) argues that Buddhism, namely the doctrine of emptiness and no-self, contributed to the decline of the Tibetan polity. Citing Tibet's "history of repeated capitulation, sectarian conflict, priest–patron alliances and closure to the outside world," he asserts that Buddhist influences stunted notions of the individual, sovereignty, and territory needed to advance nation-states. Tibet could not achieve true autonomy until it reconciled its Buddhist heritage with modernity. In this background, Shokdung views the 2008 protests as a pivot away from this precedent. Advocating "freedom and rights in practice as well as in thought [and theory]," the Peaceful Revolution had adapted secular ideologies to justify political freedom.

While the book itself is not divided into general sections, it helps to imagine its four chapters as falling into two sections that expand upon the mentioned premises. The first section explores the author's powerful, emotive response to the events of 2008 in three chapters: "Joy," "Sorrow," and "Fear." Embellished with Buddhist analogies and proverbs, this section provides a coherent, albeit controversial, thesis fashioned in the style of Tibetan Buddhist commentaries. The first chapter on "Joy" bemoans the suffering of Tibetan communities since the Cultural Revolution but celebrates the fact that, through suffering, Tibetans have discovered their political agency. In the second chapter on "Sorrow," Shokdung elaborates upon political repression that followed the Peaceful Revolution. The third chapter on "Fear" comments on its aftermath, including both misconceptions about Tibetan terrorists and violent nationalism among Han Chinese. The second section then provides a way forward from these conditions based on the author's experiences. Of note, Shokdung suggests that Gandhian *satyāgraha* (Tib. *denpe utsuk*), or non-violent protest, is a possible method for maintaining political momentum in the Chinese context.

The book merits distinction from political scientists and scholars of modern China for its subaltern and intersectional analyses of modern Tibet. Texts of this nature seldom receive attention outside of the region, particularly those that maintain their Tibetan character. Matthew Akester's lucid translation upholds Shokdung's poetics and presents his philosophical discussions in accessible English. It will prove to be a valuable resource for those interested in subaltern studies as well as social movements in the PRC.

Despite its indigenous value, *The Division of Heaven and Earth* has several shortcomings that are addressed forthright by Hurst Publications in the foreword and preface. These include overt, functionalist claims on the development of Tibetan society. For instance, Shokdung states that "the Tibetan psychology is a primitive one, in which many characteristics of pre-civilized peoples can be seen," and that "[Tibetans

are] primitive people still in the clutches of an old-world psychology of demons and spirits." Those familiar with South-Central Asia will quickly understand that these arguments are the product of regional education systems. Shokdung was largely self-educated in political science; many available and accessible texts in this area cater to a hierarchy of civilizations. Even with these conditions in mind, however, Western readers may disparage other claims such as the following: "Tibetans have not so far made contributions to world historical progress, political, economic, cultural or, in short, human development." Francoise Robin in his foreword to the book comments on this at length, elaborating upon Shokdung's inability to understand that "religion is not an obstacle to modernity but a feature of it."

Despite some tenuous claims, *The Division of Heaven and Earth* will undoubtedly provoke discussion on a wide variety of subjects, ranging from anthropology and religion to political theory and philosophy. I suggest that readers be familiar with the 2008 events, at least generally, before attempting to engage with Shokdung's arguments. The author greatly downplays crimes perpetrated by Tibetans against non-Tibetan business owners during the protests. Also, his assessments are indeed subaltern, even radical, in many respects. The book could easily be paired with Emily Yeh's *Taming Tibet* (2013) for a more holistic perspective on state space and power struggles that led to the Peaceful Revolution.

Reference

Yeh, Emily T.

2013 *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development*. New York: Cornell University Press.

Alexander R. O'Neill

Duke University