

ing, one must look beyond the limits that Peirce set for himself. Semiotics, Peircean or otherwise would, however, then prove to be not the ultimate science explaining all meaning in general, but rather a historically and culturally contingent set of propositions and theories that manages to provide a certain amount of insight precisely because it eliminates so much from its field of view.

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## NEPAL

LEWIS, TODD T. *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal: Narratives and Rituals of Newar Buddhism*. Translations in collaboration with Subarna Man Tuladhar and Labh Ratna Tuladhar. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2000. xviii + 236 pages. Illustrations, bibliography, index. Paper, n.p.; ISBN 0-7914-4612-3.

This book explores some of the popular and pragmatic Buddhist traditions found among Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. It does so by translating and explicating a small sample of the many vernacular texts that have been incorporated into that community. Of the five texts collected here, two are narratives, the first concerned with stupa veneration and gender relations (the Shṛṅgabherī Avadāna, Chapter 2), the second juxtaposing the accumulation of wealth through trade with achieving advanced spiritual progress (the Sīṃhala-sārthabāhu Avadāna, Chapter 3). Both of these are didactic stories that illustrate proper living and include such pragmatic messages as a Buddhist defense of marriage, support for family ties, encouragement for the Newar diaspora trading groups, and justification for the rightful seeking of worldly happiness and security. Two other texts are ritual guides for priest-led, lay-sponsored rituals known as *vratas*, the Tārā Vrata (Chapter 4) and the Caturdashī Vrata of Mahākāla (Chapter 5). These are manuals for worship programs whose purpose is to achieve merit and realize the good, though they also emphasize the necessity of being a donor and patron. Chapter 6, the book's longest section, presents the five apotropaic *sūtras* of the *Pañcarakṣā*, the most utilized Mahāyāna text in Newar Buddhism. Each *sūtra* (as the text itself refers to its separate sections) is composed of a Sanskrit *dhāraṇī* (powerful condensed formulaic verses) accompanied by testimonial stories, each with a line drawing and an iconographic description of its protective deity.

These five translations, particularly that of the vernacular *Pañcarakṣā*, are in themselves important to anyone interested in the history of religion; but the volume is further enhanced by the author's developing, more descriptively than analytically, the theme of "religious domestication." Lewis defines this as "the dialectical historical process by which a religious tradition is adapted to a region or ethnic group's socioeconomic and cultural life" (3–4). Domestication frames an ambitious project not fully realized but fruitfully explored throughout this volume. The pragmatic, ethical, and utopian expressions of the texts are investigated with considerable success, as are the ways that rituals derived from these texts exemplify and express doctrinal Buddhist views. More controversial is Lewis's attempt to reconstruct interpretively discrete Buddhist traditions. Lewis describes the present, accurately, as "a chaotic pattern that simultaneously mixes archaic traditional continuities with modern elements of breakdown, revival, and transformation" (xvi), but then suggests, without real evidence, that somehow the situation must have been more orderly in the past. Consequently, he endeavors

to portray the orderliness of a past time when belief and practice were more vibrant than they are today. Assaults on Newar Buddhism over the past three hundred years are undeniable, marked by Hindu state discrimination, the end of the Tibet trade, and most recently, by the missionary activity of Theravadists; but Lewis (16) also notes that over a thousand texts like these have been printed in the Kathmandu Valley in the last century, so that more copies of them are in circulation than at any time ever before, suggesting that some of these adverse factors may sharpen belief rather than weaken it. Another problem with the book is that the selection of these five particular texts from that enormous corpus is not well defended—some of the best known and most popular tales have been omitted. While the subtitle of this book, “Narratives and Rituals of Newar Buddhism” is entirely accurate, the title is not. “Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal” led me, for one, to expect to find actual original texts, not just their English translations. All of Lewis’s translations have been published previously, between 1989 and 1995, but it is still very useful to have them collected in one volume, with the additional introduction and conclusion. The extensive bibliography is also very good. The translations would have been better had the Sanskrit terms found in the texts also been translated and not simply recorded as given—their meanings are far more accessible to a Newari audience than to the book’s Western readers. Very unfortunate is the publisher’s decision not to include Lewis’s excellent series of photographs that would have dramatically helped readers visualize the ways these texts are incorporated by local communities. Note #21 to Chapter 1 (186) points the reader to a website where these photos are supposed to be found, but during the two years since publication, they have been only temporarily available, at a different address, and once again are not to be found. All interested readers should contact the author and urge that the photos be made more permanently available.

Newars, the last surviving Mahāyāna Buddhist community of South Asia, have gradually received more of the attention from ethnographers that they have long deserved. Hopefully, with works such as this one, Newars will now take a more prominent place in Buddhist studies, where a “Buddhist sociological imagination” of the kind advanced by this study, one that studies popular narratives, not just the classics of an intellectual elite, and which embraces Buddhism’s pragmatic aspects as well as its soteriological features, could have a productive future.

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### *EASTERN EUROPE*

KOZLOVA, N[ATAL’JA] K. *Vostočnoslavjanskije bylički o zmeje i zmejah. Mifičeskij ljubovnik. Ukazatel’ sjužetov i teksti* [East Slavic demonic legends about the dragon and snakes. The mythic lover. Type index and texts]. Omsk: Omskij Gosudarstvennyj Pedagogičeskij Universitet, 2000. 261 pages; publ. in 200 copies; ISBN 5-8268-0384-3.

The work under review discusses the demonic legend of the woman who is afflicted with a preternatural lover. The texts have been culled from publications since the middle of the nineteenth century, and are supplemented by the author’s recent fieldwork, during which stories were collected from Russians in the region of Omsk in central Siberia. The culture of the Russian settlers has had in the past and still has a certain influence on the folk culture of the indigenous Siberian peoples and thus should be taken into account when investigating the