Cosmopolitical Ecologies Across Asia

Places and Practices of Power in Changing Environments

Edited by Riamsara Kuyakanon, Hildegard Diemberger, and David Sneath

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Cosmopolitical Ecologies: the multiple possible readings of this newly coined compound term point to this volume's engagement with cosmology, political ecology and cosmopolitics. As Bruno Latour notes:

> That politics has always been a cosmopolitics, that it has always been about landscapes, animal husbandry, forest, water, irrigation, about building cities, the circulation of air, the management of disease, in brief about cosmic and material forces, is so obvious in so many traditions that I do not have to belabor the point. This age-old connection does not need to be religious, it is also largely secular … What counts is not if you are religious or secular, but if you manage to protect *humans* from being defined without the cosmos that provide their life support, and *nature* from being understood without humans that have collaborated with non-humans for eons. (Latour 2011: 73)

The need for this engagement became clear to us as we struggled to convey the importance of the cosmological in environmental politics, and of environmental politics in the cosmological, in understanding our various sites of study, in our various ways. We believe that a 'cosmopolitical ecologies' approach conceptually shines a light on a lacuna in addressing relationships between environmental politics and the presence of the cosmological and other-than-human entities in landscapes across Asia, and the contributors of this volume work across disciplines in the environmental humanities and social sciences, united in practice-based engagement that proceeds from long-term commitment in the places where we work.

The chapter contributions in this volume are studies of processes of composition that are at once normative and descriptive, entangled with political and ontological claims, and subject to historical change, and encompassing multiple registers, from the textual to the phenomenological. From thinking on cosmopolitics, we take the inspiration that politics extends beyond the human world to include relations with other-than-human beings. A central endeavour of this volume is thus the analysis of processes, past and present, by which the political and the cosmological interact and come into being. As Latour notes, 'to speak of

cosmopolitics is to say that the world has to be *composed*' (2011: 73). From political ecology, we take the invitation to question how these relations constitute and are constituted by environmental politics, conceived of in the broadest possible terms. As far as the concept of cosmology is concerned, we take it in the most inclusive way, keeping in mind that it can range from the study of the universe in different epistemological traditions to thought and narratives (logos) about the world (cosmos) akin to the German *Weltanschauung*. Cosmologies can be religious or non-religious and provide the framework to interpret human societies' situatedness in the universe over time; they encompass place-based meaning making as explored phenomenologically by anthropologists such as Tim Ingold (2000, 2011) and Julie Cruikshank (2005).

While the cosmopolitical attention to the 'more-than-human' or 'other-than-human' has common ground with a range of critical perspectives as found in posthumanism, new materialism, interspecies cosmopolitanism and so on, and brings up some of the same questions, including what constitutes 'politics' (e.g. Haraway 2008; Mendieta 2018), in this volume we emphasize the central importance of (usually) non-material, cosmological beings and entities that exist relationally with humans and their environmental politics in different places across Asia.

We set out to explore places of power in Asia, taking up Marisol de la Cadena's invitation to conceive of cosmopolitics as a political practice that includes 'nonhumans as actors in the political arena' (2010: 364). Our approach diverges, however, when it comes to what might constitute histories and political philosophies, following the premises arising from our different ethnographic sites. De la Cadena's observation that 'a modern state engaging in political conversation with worlds of willful mountains would not be modern nor would the conversation be a political one (2015: 247)' presupposes an idea of what is modern, and what is political, that is not borne out in many of our study sites, such as in Mongolia, where sacred mountains are enrolled in state legitimization through the reintroduction (and reinvention) of a cosmological ritual (Sneath 2014, see also Sneath and Turk in this volume), or in Bhutan where mountain gods can be key actors in environmental management practices (Kuyakanon and Gyeltshen 2017, see also White, Diemberger and Tsomu in this volume for similar instances). Likewise, many of the contributors of this volume have different points of departure for categories such as 'indigenous' or concepts such as 'indigeneity' or 'ethnicity' arising from their ethnographic sites.

Political ecology

With a commitment to understanding that politics has always been a cosmopolitics, to suggest what cosmopolitical ecologies approaches might include, we turn first to political ecology as a means to making sense of how environmental issues are also political issues. Political ecology is 'a field that seeks to unravel the political forces at work in environmental access, management, and transformation … to demonstrate the way that politics are inevitably ecological and that ecology is

inherently political' (Robbins 2004: xvii). Like thinking on cosmopolitics, it is informed by a normative aim for social and environmental justice.

Political ecology explores relationships between the economic, political and environmental, and its attention to political economy and power analysis at different scales has contributed to the understanding that those who often bear the brunt of environmental degradation are generally not the cause of it. A political ecology approach is multi-scalar, local and global, place and actant attentive, even among transnational spaces, and draws from geographical thinking on what constitutes 'place' (e.g. Massey 1991). It is 'highly conjunctural' (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987: 239) as it examines how what occurs in localized sites relates to political economic and ecologic processes at broader scales. This is often done through progressive contextualization (Vayda 1983) following a chain of explanation that employs historical analyses of land access, the wider political economy, socio-natural environment, and so on, as well as discourse analysis[1] to understand the different contexts for environmental decision-making.[2]

While remaining attentive to structural rather than proximate causes, political ecology approaches to power analyses in environmental politics are diverse and no longer solely grounded in Marxist political economy.[3] Under the broad umbrella of 'political ecology', there is a whole array of approaches to power, from Hobbesian sovereign power to Foucauldian analyses of discursive power, biopower, resistance, to poststructural and posthumanist formulations. The trend has continued in the direction of social constructivism, in which the nature or environment that is knowable is a social construct (e.g. Castree and Braun 2001). In what might be called 'third generation political ecology' by some, we can include STS (science and technology studies), postcolonial, urban, feminist and queer analytics. Within these readings, conceptualizations of the environment are produced by what Descola and Pálsson (1996: 15) call 'ever-changing historical contexts and cultural specificities', which work in favour of some, and not for others.

Despite political ecology's attention to socio-natures and social constructivist approaches, it has, on the whole, with some notable exceptions, been blind to the non-human in any terms other than materialist. Political ecology has seldom engaged seriously with ontology (see Schulz, 2017) or non-Eurocentric perceptions of what constitutes the world, which is ironic, considering that much political ecology is 'done' in non-western places. While the participants or actants in political ecology analyses may not be exclusively human, the field remains largely locked within a dominant worldview in which participation is limited to quantifiable, identifiable organisms.

Unsurprisingly, political ecology has been critiqued for pre-supposing 'the importance … of certain kinds of political factors in the explanation of environmental changes' (Biersack and Greenberg, 2006: 167), to which we would add the presupposition that only certain kinds of actors or actants can participate, and in which only certain human-nonhuman assemblages are privileged (Yeh 2017: 147, Kuyakanon Knapp, 2016). Borrowing from Ben Campbell

(whose work *Living Between Juniper and Palm* is one of the notable exceptions mentioned above), we suggest 'taking seriously indigenous concepts of power and local sovereignties, that puts movement, embodiment, and lived encounters between the human and non-human into view' (2013: 32), as a way to address these shortcomings.

Cosmopolitics

The contemporary currency of the term 'cosmopolitics' owes much to the work of Isabelle Stengers and Bruno Latour. In her monumental work *Cosmopolitics* (2010), more recently followed up with a 'Manifesto' (2019), philosopher of science Stengers makes a case for a 'slow science' that examines both the historically contingent conditions of modern science's own emergence and the political consequences of its engagement with other knowledge practices. In Stengers' work, the 'cosmopolitical' points to the engagement required for the reflexive exploration of situated knowledge, the need to slow down to think of what 'the enigmatic term cosmos' might be (2005a: 994), and the 'ecology of practices' associated with this (2005b). 'In the term cosmopolitical, cosmos refers to the unknown constituted by these multiple, divergent worlds and to the articulations of which they could eventually be capable' (ibid.: 995).

Philosopher-anthropologist Latour embraced Stengers' notion of cosmopolitics since, for him, '"cosmos" is what ensures that politics will never be just for the benefits of isolated humans, and "politics" is what ensures that the cosmos is not naturalized and kept totally apart from what humans do to it' (2011: 3). While Stengers specifically disavowed any connection with 'Kant or with the ancient cosmopolitism' (2005a: 994), Latour (2004) has pointedly addressed the difference to elaborate how Stengers' cosmopolitics goes beyond Kantian notions of 'cosmopolitanism' which aims to transcend parochial politics to embrace a common world, such as that found in the sociology of Ulrich Beck.

In anthropology, there have been a number of engagements with the notion of cosmopolitics, most noticeably by Marisol de la Cadena and Mario Blaser, who, in their words, 'borrowed the term from Stengers and gave the term an inflection of our own' (2018: 12). De la Cadena made striking use of cosmopolitics to go beyond the concept of 'culture' in addressing the indigenous 'ethnic' politics of Latin America (2010, 2015). She does 'ethnographic colabor' to show that contemporary indigenous movements involve political practices that cannot be reduced to 'modern' (Latour 1993) epistemological claims of 'multiculturalism' or the pursuit of cultural rights which are blind to the relational worlds in which these practices are co-produced. These practices, for example, invoking the presence of *tirakuna* (translated by de la Cadena as 'earth-beings', perceived by outsiders as mountains), expand the political beyond the human sphere and challenge the conventional dichotomization of human 'culture' and empirical 'nature'.

For Blaser, the cosmopolitical project of Latour, expansive though it be, is nevertheless orientated towards 'the composition of the common world' (Blaser

2016: 548). This approach, he argues, risks obscuring the perspectives of the relatively powerless or differently-orientated.[4] As has been pointed out by de la Cadena, Blaser and others, what is at stake in thinking through cosmopolitical ecologies is not a matter of simply expanding the existing notion of politics to include other actors. The issue becomes one of the multidisciplinary debates on representation, epistemology and ontology. Rather than seeking to explore ontologies as such, i.e. schools of thought about what exists, comparable with the Euro-American subfield of metaphysics,[5] the studies in this volume are largely concerned with practices, including knowledge practices, and with forms of mediation. There are good reasons for this. The ultimate ontological status of the entities and relationships involved is often indeterminate, disputed or inaccessible, and the identification of separate ontological schemes is all but impossible in the eclectic contexts studied in this volume. The focus here is on the practices and forms of knowledge by which humans gain access to places of power, sacred landscapes and other-than-human entities. As Appadurai (2015: 228) notes, religion can be fruitfully seen as 'primarily a form of mediation between the visible and the invisible orders' and 'as a space of anxiety and indeterminacy about the relationship between [them]' (ibid.: 224). The focus here is on historical practices and forms of knowledge that not only mediate between the visible and the invisible, the cosmological and the political, but that help constitute a wider field encompassing both.

In dealing with the cosmopolitical, many ethnographic engagements in this volume are open to a questioning of standard epistemological categories, as well as highlighting the value of multi-disciplinary work in challenging monolithic disciplinary categories of what might constitute history or politics around environmental issues in a particular context. While some of the findings in this volume point towards encounters and clashes between different cosmological frameworks, we stop short of describing these in terms of multiple ontologies representing radical alterities since many of the contributions in this volume are dealing with the specific engagements of different epistemic practices, many of which have been in long-term direct or indirect contact, and these engagements are navigated by those concerned, through different forms of knowledge according to what is available and appropriate to addressing their specific predicaments. People mix and match ideas, information, strategies and solutions, often with the help of 'cultural brokers' who are able to navigate multiple knowledge/religious systems and translate across different epistemologies. These forms of mediation can take place thanks to religious specialists, community elders, state officials, scientists, NGO operatives, as well as mediums possessed by spirits or digital platforms. This is not a new phenomenon. For example, the blending of Buddhist and non-Buddhist perceptions in Himalayan landscapes has a long history to which the engagement with scientific perspectives just adds a new chapter. The same mountains can be invoked as deities through oracles and specific rituals, be surveyed scientifically on the ground and be represented in satellite images posted in a temple.

Ecologies of practice

For Stengers (2005b), the concept of an ecology of practices represents a 'tool for thinking' about the various forms of knowledge generated by practices such as those of the physical sciences. In this thinking, various sources and forms of knowledge coexist and interconnect, in a sort of epistemic ecology, without the established hierarchy in which empirical science appears as a superior form of knowledge. Stengers' ecology of practice is comprehensible within postcolonial and feminist praxes that stress the importance of reflexivity, situated knowledge, and co-production.[6] Such an ecology of practice speaks directly to the aspirations of political ecology (the field of research) as praxis: 'A domain of academic representation, political ecology is implicated in the very processes the analyst seeks to study and must fall subject to reflexive, self-critical commentary' (Biersack and Greenberg, 2006: 27). These ideas resonate with Deleuze's notion of 'thinking par milieu' – what we take to mean thinking in context, with context and through context, without pre-imposing abstract definitions or ideations that we then conform the context to. This sort of practice co-produces the thinker, as well as the ethos of the practice, and may best be understood relationally, with 'no identity of a practice independent of its environment' (Stengers 2005b: 187). 'Practice', then, stands for the activities used to give claims to knowledge, which cannot be abstracted from the social and material environments that produce them – their ecologies.

Characteristic of the multivalency of the terminology we engage with, Stengers and Latour also speak of 'political ecology' in their work, not in reference to the field of political ecology as set out above, but with respect to knowledge production.[7] Stenger's political ecology is rooted in the oikos, in the local and the empirical. Furthermore, this oikos is inseparable from ethos, 'the way of behaving particular to a being' (ibid. 997), meaning that there is no ready-made abstract framing or impartial onlooker. In her words, 'Political ecology affirms that there is no knowledge that is both relevant and detached. It is not an objective definition of a virus or of a flood that we need, a detached definition everybody should accept, but the active participation of all those whose practice is engaged in multiples modes with the virus or with the river' (Stengers, 2005b: 1002). From this vantage point, it can also be set in a productive conversation with Buddhist literature on 'interconnectedness' as a notion often mobilized in Buddhist environmentalism in different guises (see, e.g. Karmapa 2017).

Perceiving the cosmological while being 'present' to environmental politics, or engaging with environmental politics while being 'present' to the cosmological and *not* 'without the cosmos that provide their life support', whilst being aware of the mediated politics of non-human entities and cosmological concepts applied to environmental features, we endeavour to take the experienced moral dimension seriously without reducing it to a reflection of power relations. Are there ways in which a holy mountain can be both a powerful political actor as well as a spiritual resource that transcends it? Is looking at it in terms of

cosmopolitical ecology reconcilable with a phenomenology of meaning making that creates the very sense of place? We ask what kinds of powers are at play, how are they manifest (or not), and what implications arise from such sites or assemblages.

The importance of historical texts

> Ontologically complex, this archive included events, the evidence of which could be recorded in writing, along with events that left no evidence and the writing of which would have been insufficient to prove their existence anyway, for they would have been reduced to beliefs. (de la Cadena 2015: 123)

These above comments might have been applied to many contexts reflected in this volume, except that across Asia, we also have societies and communities where non-human beings are part of the historical record and were *not* reduced to beliefs. The relevant textual sources here have an extra layer of richness and complexity in that they reflect voices and debates that developed partly or entirely independently from European cultural history and historiography. From this vantage point, these textual traditions can also reflect distinctive engagements with imperial and colonial powers, offering a multivocality that decentres the binary of the West and the rest and goes far beyond.

The chapters included in this volume explore a wide range of settings across Asia, where history matters in multiple ways, and there are multiple meanings to 'history'. For example, many Inner Asian places such as Qinghai (lit. 'blue lake') are recorded in sources in Chinese (Qinghai), Tibetan (Tsongon [blue lake]), Mongolian (Kokonor [blue lake]) within different and sometimes contrasting historical narratives. Place-based meaning making, as reflected in toponyms and landscape mythology, can thus become a site of contestation and negotiation of political relevance – including the potential raising of legal claims associated with juridical personhood of topographical features (see Studley 2019). This applies not only to space but also to time so that historical periodization can be a site of contestation and negotiation, too. For example, in China, the revival of religion and the culture of ethnic minority nationalities in the post-Mao era in Tibetan areas has been hailed as '*yangdar*', i.e. as the era of the 'further spread of the [Buddhist] doctrine' so as to fit into a traditional Tibetan religious historiographical framework. Also, many narratives travel and are re-deployed in very different settings. A famous example is the legendary figure of the Buddhist spiritual master Padmasambhava who appears in several of the chapters in very different guises (see Diemberger, Tsomu, White, Sneath and Turk).

Across Asia, rich textual traditions offer unique glimpses into views, debates and even theories in which cosmological politics clearly matter. Some of the sources engaged with here were produced, circulated, commented upon and also hidden to prevent destruction in times of persecution such as during the 9th century Tibetan civil war, 20th century Stalinist repressions in the Soviet Union

and Mongolia, and Cultural Revolution in China. Many of these texts were re-discovered at particular junctures to tell their stories (e.g. religious revival in post-socialist countries).

Voices from the past re-emerge in multiple ways and for multiple reasons. For example, a text of worship for a sacred mountain may be part of textual collections hidden during the Cultural Revolution or Stalinist religious repression and rediscovered in its aftermath; the same text may include portions thought to have been hidden during earlier religious persecutions and revealed subsequently (see for example Diemberger and Tsomu in this volume). These texts have their own archival histories, which reflect the politics of representation and, at times, engagement with multiple languages and translations. The re-emerging cosmopolitical and ecological relevance of texts is also compellingly shown by Taneja's chapter exploring the writings of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Kuyakanon & Gyeltshen's on the ritual procession of Buddhist texts re-deployed as a COVID-19 safeguard. The past also strikingly re-appears in foundational texts of the present, as Humphrey's chapter shows in her analysis of the Buryat-Mongol People's Moral Code that claims to be a modernization of the law code of Chinggis Khan, said to have been handed down through the generations.

Against the background of this rich historical texture which interfaces with living contexts of socio-environmental change that are explored ethnographically, the chapters of this volume offer a unique contribution to thinking on cosmopolitics and political ecology.

Volume structure and contents

This volume offers a range of different case studies focusing on an engagement with cosmological and political aspects of human relations with the environment and its transformations. Rather than assuming a single framework of analysis, we use 'cosmopolitical ecologies' to suggest a mode of investigation that highlights human relationality, including its connections and disconnections with the other-than-human. There is a diversity of engagement with cosmopolitical ecologies approaches in this volume. Thus some chapters engage directly with cosmopolitical ecologies in their analyses, while others speak to it through their subject matter or were written in dialogue with this Introduction. Some chapters are exemplars, and some are proponents of a cosmopolitical ecologies approach. Against the background of Stenger's ecology of practice, then, the chapters in this collection speak with different voices reflecting a variety of disciplines, positions and collaborations (including authors, such as Tsomu, Gyeltshen and Woolley, who speak about the environment they are most familiar with as they are voices 'from the place'). Because of this diversity, the editorial team has chosen not to intervene to standardise the rendition of vernacular terms, respecting their context of use (they are normally rendered as they are pronounced with transliteration added when relevant).

The contributions to this volume are grouped thematically into four sections, each of which has a different focus but speaks to the others.

The first three chapters, in the section Cosmopolitical Landscapes and Ecologies of Practice, focus on case studies that immediately reflect an engagement with ecologies of practice in specific sites exploring historical depths and contemporary practices.

Anthropologist Hildegard Diemberger sets out from the exploration of a key 11th century Tibetan chronicle of the Buddhification of Tibet, which had seminal influences across all Tibetan Buddhist traditions, to explore connections between cosmology, politics and environment. Looking at a range of historical sources and ethnographic examples from different Tibetan areas in China and Nepal, it focuses on the mobilization of place-based spirits in different settings to shape cosmopolitical ecologies that combine historical depth and constant re-creation and repurposing of rituals and narratives in light of new agendas and constraints.

The same theme returns in the following chapter by Tibetan studies scholar Yudru Tsomu, who sets out from observations on the revival of local spirit cults in her homeland in Eastern Tibet/Sichuan Province to examine these types of rituals that are central to Tibetan popular religiosity and were some of the earliest manifestations of spiritual life to be revived in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). The focus of intersecting religious traditions, including local autochthonous cults, Bonpo, Buddhism and Taoism, these deities appear as non-human actors engaging in a complex relationship with the modern Chinese secular state and its shifting policies. Often mediated by new digital technologies, they are also the focus of epistemological arrangements in an ecology of practice in which secular environmentalist agendas can dovetail with Buddhist activism despite differing ontological assumptions and ethical priorities.

Since the seminal work of Stanley Tambiah (1970) on spirit cults in Thailand, non-human entities inhabiting Thai landscapes have attracted significant anthropological attention, but not necessarily in terms of how they concretely impact human relations with the environment. Based on a case study of farming practices around the District of Mae Chaem in Northern Thailand, the chapter by anthropologist Julia Cassaniti reports on past rituals held to propitiate the spirits before harvesting and attitudes about the use of fires to clear fields before new farming cycles. It examines land management fires from a cosmological, political perspective, moving analysis away from material practices and toward relations with the other-than-human. Such a move draws attention to shifting cosmopolitical attitudes about land and identity that remain hidden when contemporary fires are seen as a continuation of past localized farming practices. In this perspective, they clearly point to the cosmopolitical implications of agroindustry in national politics experienced from the ground up.

The following set of three papers, in the section Communities and Cosmos: Place-based Knowledges and Practices, foregrounds the importance of knowledges and practices as multiple, shifting and potentially contested.

Religious studies scholars Hanna Havnevik and Astrid Hovden explore the relationship between cosmology, environment and politics in Limi, a high mountain community in north-western Nepal particularly vulnerable to glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs). The local system of environmental management has developed throughout the centuries to accommodate an agro-pastoral life-style and is grounded in a cosmology and knowledge system that is very different from that of the Nepali state to which these village communities belong. Noting how the villagers draw upon different knowledge regimes to address natural hazards such as floods and landslides, as well as a changing weather pattern, this chapter explores the complex role of religion in local environmental politics and discusses the strategies people use to manage the sacred landscape in a shifting cosmopolitical context.

Anthropologist Caroline Humphrey focuses on the gendered dimension of Buryat landscapes by looking at shifting cosmopolitical ecologies in the post-socialist context. She noticed that amid the general re-sacralization of the landscape in the post-Soviet period, the construction of new shrines and monuments cele-brating 'mothers' (*ezi*) emerged as a new phenomenon. Female deities, spirit land-masters, ancestresses, and historical heroines now have prominent roles in local cosmologies alongside the previously hegemonic male equivalents. The placing of these mother-sites brings to attention landscape features such as lakes, rivers, forested groves, caves and clefts that were previously overshadowed by the male imagery focused on sacred mountains. She argues however that the new initiatives are not feminist and indicate how the concept of 'mother' indexes changing con-ceptual configurations of indigenous territories and human groups.

Looking at Japan, anthropologist David Lewis explores forms of spirituality expressed in attitudes towards certain natural phenomena, whether it be a re-verent attitude towards the Sun or Moon or a practice of visiting places of natural beauty that had been regarded as embodiments of spirits but now might be called 'power spots'. There is also a fear of potentially vindictive spirits that may need to be pacified through rites of propitiation, not only at a local but also at a national level. This chapter shows that such beliefs and practices remain widespread within a technologically sophisticated, urbanized and well-educated population. The political and environmental implications of the relevant spiritual transformations and adjustments emerge as a fertile ground for exploration.

The next set of three papers, in the section Cosmopolitics and the Contemporary State, focuses specifically on how cosmopolitical ecologies relate to the State.

In Mongolia, anthropologists David Sneath and Elizabeth Turk focus on the historical circumstances within which humans have been able to represent non-humans as powerful actors in political realms, including state formations. The authors present two cases where humans recruited non-human entities into political spheres. Close attention to historical ritual texts reveals the cosmo-logical not as an autonomous realm composed of essential and timeless forms but as dynamic and changing. Cosmological forms are as subject to innovation as the historically-produced milieu that frames it. In an effort to move beyond essentialized indigenous ontologies, the authors engage the concept of historical

mediation to model how humans, through sets of practices and discourses, mediate the real.

Anthropologist Thomas White explores Inner Mongolian examples of the revival of religious practices in China's ethnic minority-inhabited borderlands. These are often rendered acceptable to the secular state by being framed as examples of 'cultural heritage', which is increasingly understood in regional rather than merely ethnic terms. This chapter draws on an ethnography of a ritual to venerate a sacred mountain in western Inner Mongolia, at which a Mongol lama criticized state officials in attendance for allowing mining projects near the mountain while also admonishing lay Mongol elites for their errors in conducting the ritual. This chapter uses the lama's speech to think through what notions of 'cosmopolitics' can do for our understanding of post-socialist religious revival in the context of contested ecologies but also uses this Inner Mongolian case to point some lacunae in the broader literature on cosmopolitics.

Contestations and multiplicity features in the chapter by social anthropologist Richard Fraser, who explores the conflicts surrounding environmental conservation amongst the Reindeer-Evenki, a community of reindeer herders and hunters in Northeast China. He describes how these conflicts are not just the result of differing attitudes towards the environment but also of different ontological claims in a cosmopolitical framework in which clashes and incommensurability are maintained through a wide range of practices. Drawing upon debates surrounding non-human personhood, the chapter shows that for the Reindeer-Evenki, the environment consists of various kinds of 'persons', including the reindeer on whom they depend and the spirits thought to inhabit the taiga environment. The taiga is the domain within which to maintain meaningful relationships with such persons through the quotidian practices of herding, hunting, and dwelling. In recent years, however, the Chinese state has implemented a series of conservation measures that have problematized these practices, including resettlement, the establishment of protected areas, and a much-criticized hunting ban. The chapter shows how these limit Evenki interactions with non-human persons and compromise their ability for meaning-making. It also describes how some Evenki circumvent these policies through adaptation of herding and hunting practices, as well as employing new discourses of intangible cultural heritage. In the process, this chapter argues for consideration of the role played by non-human persons in understanding people's experiences of environmental policy and contestations of the environment.
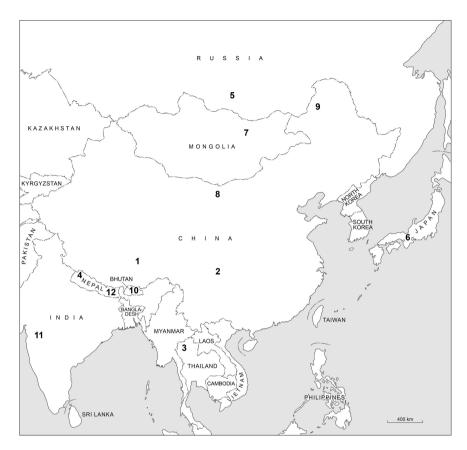
The final section, Cosmopolitical Ecologies for the 21st Century, looks at ways in which cosmopolitical ecologies play out and are used to address 21st century challenges cutting across disciplinary and geographical boundaries.

Situated in Bhutan, the chapter by human geographer Riamsara Kuyakanon and Buddhist scholar Dorji Gyeltshen is the product of a collaboration that focuses on a territorial rainmaking ritual and its re-purposing. It stems from one author's chance encounter with the ritual while travelling across the country and the other author's first-hand experience of conducting the ritual as a young monk. The chapter draws on participant observation, historical sources, as well

as event and internet ethnography to examine the uses and revival of this ritual during the COVID-19 outbreak. Through this example of cosmopolitical synergy of state and clergy at a time of national crisis, it documents how the cosmological is neither static, unchanging nor 'out there'. Rather, the authors argue that the cosmopolitical is contingently composed within ecologies of practice that include the government, monk body, civil servants, citizens, researchers, and of course, the virus in its different manifestations – within scientific, political and ritual assemblages.

Anthropologist and Islamic Studies specialist Anand Vivek Taneja approaches cosmopolitical ecologies from a very different angle: he looks at Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, one of several major leaders of the Indian independence movement who were confined to Ahmednagar Fort for over three years from 1942 to 1945. He turns to Azad's prison writings published in 1946 as Ghubar-e Khatir (*The Dust of Memories*). A major Indian-Muslim political figure, Azad was the President of the Indian National Congress from 1940 to 1946, and the first Education Minister of independent India, and an influential and authoritative religious thinker. Taneja pays particular attention to three letters in Azad's prison writings that reflect an underexplored tradition of Muslim ecological thought, the ethics of the garden. Through Azad's depiction of how an altered experience of time can lead to a transformative intimacy with other beings – in his case, the sparrows he shares a room with – Taneja describes a truly democratic encounter across species and reflects on a cosmo-theological ecology of practice resonant with experiences of lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the final chapter, anthropologist/civil servant Jonathan Woolley reflects on an unexpected encounter between place-based spirits in the Himalayas and the UK brought about by the invitation of a Nepali Shaman to a British Druid. Noticing that landscape spirits of the Himalayas intervene in environmental management perceptions and decision-making in the region, he finds common ground with similar perceptions in the UK. For example, rockfalls in Nepal are attributed to the *banjhakris*–forest spirits, who are offended by roadbuilding beside the cliffs they inhabit. Similar place-based spiritual concerns also animate controversy over road building in Europe – with Britain's druid community regularly mobilizing both politically and ritually to defend their sacred places from road building and oil and gas exploration. Druidic eco-activist rituals and Sherpa critiques of development hinge on similar cosmopolitical logic – namely that the landscape is inhabited by numerous spiritual agencies that can be directly affected by human activity. This chapter pursues a comparative approach, ethnographically exploring both environmental activism and animism in Nepal and Britain. It bridges the 'here' and 'there' to show how place-based environmental cosmopolitics may at the same time be transnational. Ecology of practice here seems to encounter Kantian and ancient cosmopolitanism in a new light.

An afterword reviews how cosmopolitical ecologies lenses have been brought to bear on conceptual areas of interest that are traditionally distinct (politics, ritual, cosmos, environment and ecological management) yet are here re-framed in terms of cosmopolitics and political ecologies in the contributed chapters. It

sets out important new questions and novel spaces for transformative engagement that arise through cosmopolitical ecologies framings and opens out towards new possibilities within and well beyond Asia.

Map with location of research site across Asia

1. Hildegard Diemberger: When *lha lu* spirits suffer
2. Yudru Tsomu: Territorial cults in Sino-Tibetan borderlands
3. Julia Cassaniti: Disappearing spirits of the land
4. Astrid Hovden & Hanna Havnevik: Balancing the sacred landscape
5. Caroline Humphrey: 'Mother' memorials and cosmopolitics of environment
6. David Lewis: Behind the façade, unseen faces of Japan
7. David Sneath & Elizabeth Turk: Knowing the lords of the land
8. Thomas White: Speaking of mountain deities beyond the county border
9. Richard Fraser: Contesting the Chinese Taiga
10. Riam Kuyakanon & Dorji Gyeltshen: Cosmopolitical ecology of COVID
11. Anand Vivek Taneja: Sharing a room with sparrows
12. Jonathan Woolley: Druids and *Jhakris*

Notes

1 The deployment of narrative deconstruction, such as debunking the generic 'tragedy of the commons' narrative of ecological collapse, which disguises the role of state and non-local elite appropriation of capital, is a classic observation of political ecology (Muldavin 1996, in Robbins, 2004: 45).

2 Two seminal works are often pointed to when tracing political ecology's emergence in the 1980s. Michael Watts' *Silent Violence* demonstrated that what was deemed 'natural' phenomena such as famine, was in fact socially produced - an outcome of the "'rupture of local systems as they become part of coherent and highly integrated global networks'" (Watts 1983b: 14 in Robbins, 2004: 77). Blaikie and Brookfield's soil and social science work in Nepal, *Land Degradation and Society* (1987), showed that blaming the proximate poor for land degradation was an inadequate explanation, and what instead needed to be asked was why they were settled on marginal land in the first place, and what factors affect the range of choices that resources users have?

3 Aletta Biersack, in her introduction to *Reimagining Political Ecology*, characterized political ecology at the beginning of the 21st century as 'second generation', not grounded in one totalizing theory (Marxist political economy dominated the first wave of political ecology and remains a strong current in political ecology), but 'a fluid and ambivalent space that lies among political economy, culture, theory, history and biology' (2006: 5).

4 Such a cosmopolitics would be limited in its ability to address certain sorts of conflicts where a common world might itself be subject to debate, such as those surrounding the government of Newfoundland and Labrador's 2013 ban on caribou hunting because population numbers were dropping, which was rejected by the political leadership of the Innu Nation, *because* population numbers were dropping: for the Innu, in order to restore the health of the population, Innu hunting protocols– and therefore hunting had to be followed.

5 Although there is wide agreement that, as a subfield of metaphysics, ontology is concerned with 'what there is' Hofweber (2005: 256), there are differences of philosophical opinion as to what makes up any given ontology. As Fine (1991: 264) notes, "[a]n ontology consists of all those items which are, in an appropriate sense, accepted. There are different views as to what it is for an item to be accepted into an ontology."

6 In 'It Matters What Concepts We Use to Translate Other Concepts With…' de la Cadena is at pains to recognize the necessity of a very attentive and careful writing process (2015: 26), one that recognizes its own 'partially connected' conversations (Strathern, 2004), that controls the equivocation by probing the translation process itself (ibid., 116), acknowledges onto-epistemic complexity (ibid., 116), and the limits to understanding, including the author's own (ibid., 64).

7 In Stengers' particular case, the philosophy of science, as conceived of by a practivist, it means 'the politicization of positive knowledge-related issues or practices concerning "things"' (Stengers, 2005a: 994).

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