

# CHINESE FOOD, AMERICAN MONEY, JAPANESE WIFE, AND NEPALI MACHISMO: NEPALI MEN'S EROTIC IMAGINATION IN THE TRANSNATIONAL TOURIST SPACES OF NEPAL

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## Intimate Interactions between Nepali Men and Japanese Women

Nima: I don't have any girlfriend. I wonder how I could find one. Can you introduce any Japanese women to me? ... It is easy to make friends with Japanese not only because I speak good Japanese. ... I don't understand what other tourists like Europeans are thinking, but I feel something in common with Japanese people. ... The Japanese are so friendly that they talk a lot with me in comparison to other tourists.<sup>1</sup>

Nima was a Nepali male freelance-guide who spoke fluent Japanese. I was not sure if it is true that Japanese tourists are kinder or friendlier than other tourists as he claimed. However, it is clear that Nepali men like Nima have special feelings for Japanese female tourists in comparison to female tourists from other nationalities. Investigating intimate relationships in tourist spaces of Nepal, Ortner (1996) and Adams (1996) have both studied the politics of romance and sexuality between Sherpa men and Western female mountaineers and trekkers. Liechty (1996) describes the largest tourist area, Thamel, as the primary location where Western female tourists engage in sexual relationships with young Nepali men. Remembering my tourist experiences in Nepal, I wondered why these scholars have focused on Western female tourists at the exclusion of Japanese female tourists. In fact, Japan was one of the top four countries of origin for tourists in Nepal between 2000 and 2004 (Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation of Nepal 2005:34). Because along with Western tourists Japanese are one of the dominant tourist groups in

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1 All translations herein are by the author unless otherwise stated. I changed all the names of my informants in order to keep confidentiality and anonymity. When I found it possible to identify people despite changing the names, I changed or left out other information about them.

Nepal, interactions between Japanese female tourists and Nepali men are important issues to research.

Nagel suggests that ethnic differences evoke the exotic as well as erotic fantasies (2003:9-10). The sexual desire to interact with the exotic Other parallels the desire of global tourists and local hosts to mutually seek an erotic Other. However, focussing on ethnic divisions between Westerners and non-Westerners is not the only way to illustrate the politics of sexuality in global tourism. Indeed, studying the intimate relations between Nepali men and Japanese female tourists is a unique project because both groups have the idea that while they are ethnically different, they share an Asian identity. This article aims to articulate the distinctive processes of imagination in which Nepali men reformulate their sexual identities through their erotic desire toward an Asian Other – Japanese female tourists.<sup>2</sup>

### **Sex Tourism or Romance Tourism?**

Exploring erotic interactions in touristic spaces, most research has focused on male tourists and local women. However, since the mid-1990s, feminist scholars have started researching how female tourists exercise their exotic and erotic imaginations toward local men and debating whether these relationships should be viewed as sex tourism or romance tourism. Are Japanese female tourists and their Nepali male partners engaged in sex tourism in the same way that Japanese male tourists exploit local women in the sex tourism markets of “peripheral” countries such as those in Southeast Asia (Hall and Tucker 2004:11, Bishop and Robinson 1998:173)?

To answer this question it is necessary to discuss the types of tourism in which Japanese female tourists engage in erotic relations with Nepali men. Sánchez Taylor (2001) defines female tourists who enjoy sexual or romantic pleasure with local men as “sex tourists” just as male tourists are defined as sex tourists. Sánchez Taylor conducted a great number of interviews with heterosexual white female tourists in Jamaica and the Dominican Republic. According to the survey, none of the female tourists who had sex with local men perceived their partners as prostitutes or gigolos (Sánchez Taylor 2001:754). Similarly, local men did not perceive themselves as prostitutes or gigolos (Sánchez Taylor 2001:758). However, Sánchez Taylor refutes the distinction between female and male

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2 This article is a revised version of my master’s thesis (Yamaga 2007). Fieldwork for the thesis was conducted from October 2005 to February 2006.

sex tourists because both groups view their relationships with locals as romance (2001:759). Thus, Sánchez Taylor categorizes female tourists engaging in either sexual or romantic relations as “sex tourists” just as male tourists engaging in sexual relations with locals are seen as sex tourists.

Similarly, Phillips contends that relationships between white female tourists and local beach boys in Barbados “can be easily fitted under the umbrella of prostitution” (1999:191). Focusing on economic exploitation, Phillips (2002) concludes that their unequal relations are a form of neo-colonialism. Kempadoo (2001) also discusses sexual relationships between white female tourists and Caribbean men in terms of a neo-colonial hierarchy. Kempadoo contends that “liaisons between Caribbean men and female tourists and Caribbean women and male tourists are similar” since male hustlers in Barbados are “highly dependent upon the women’s wealth” (2001:49).

By contrast, Pruitt and LaFont argue that those female tourists who aim for “romance, love and the possibility of a long-term relationships in addition to sex” are involved in “romance tourism” as opposed to “sex tourism” (2004:318). Since romance is a dominant theme of gender and sexual relations in Western culture, Western female tourists explore the opportunities to fulfill fantasies of romance and “self-realization” which may not be found at home (2004:319-320, 331). Self-realization is also an important factor for Western female tourists travelling Nepal. For example, Adams explains that exposure to spiritual and exotic images of Sherpas generates in Westerners the desire for spiritual renewal (to “become like Sherpas”) which, in turn, produces a sense of erotic intimacy toward Sherpas (1996:56). Adams suggests that female tourists’ desire to develop spiritual self-awareness often leads to a feeling of romance toward Sherpa men (Adams 1996:56-57). Just as Pruitt and LaFont propose romance tourism, Dahles and Bras (1999) deny the applicability of the concept of prostitution to the relations between white female tourists and local beach boys in Indonesia. Dahles and Bras suggest that their relations “may be extended into a more protracted, diffused and personalized liaison, involving both emotional attachment and economic interest” in which local beach boys act as “romantic entrepreneurs” (1999:286, 288).

Furthermore, Herold, Garcia, and DeMoya challenge the categorization of female tourists and their local boyfriends into either sex tourism or romance tourism. Herold, Garcia, and DeMoya (2001) conducted wide-ranging interviews with female and male tourists, female

sex workers and beach boys in the Dominican Republic. Their research shows how beach boys use elaborate skills in “playing on female vulnerability” such that the relations cannot be understood in terms of a simple “exploitation of locals” formula (Herold, Garcia, and DeMoya 2001:985). Rather than concluding that these relationships can be categorized as either romance or sex tourism, Herold, Garcia, and DeMoya suggest that we consider a continuum between romance and sex; female tourists may be motivated more toward romance and men toward sex but there are many variations between the two poles (2001:994-995).

The typology of tourist behaviour and the differences between female tourists and male tourists are focal issues here. Although I agree with the claim that female tourists behave in different ways than male tourists, the emphasis should not be on the distinction between women and men. This is because some female tourists behave in just the same way as male sex tourists. On this point, I disagree with the idea that women should be excluded from sex tourism. However, neither do I want to categorize those female tourists as sex tourists thereby undervaluing the romantic aspect of their relations that might be greatly different from that of male counterparts. Should I, as Herold, Garcia, and DeMoya argue, apply both labels (sex and romance tourism) to tourists of any gender on the continuum of the sex-romance binary?

Before answering the question, I want to move away from these debates that focus on the categories of sex and romance tourism. Rather than discussing these categorizations, there is much more important analytical and ethnographic work to do in the area of sexuality and tourism. Since the processes of global tourism are culturally variable and contain various meanings and possibilities, including romance and prostitution, the typology of tourist behaviour can be misleading in stereotyping the relations between hosts and guests. Therefore, I do not use the category of “sex tourism” or “romance tourism” but focus on researching the specific processes of various relations of sexuality and tourism on a case-by-case basis, especially from the perspective of Nepali men in this article. In doing so, I examine the unique processes in which Asian men (Nepali men) recreate their erotic fantasy toward an Asian Other (Japanese female tourists) in tourist spaces of Nepal.

### **Desiring a Japanese Wife Who Has Morality and Modernity**

When I was a female Japanese backpacker in Nepal in 1999, I repeatedly heard the phrase “Chinese food, American money, Japanese wife” and I

often encountered this discourse during this fieldwork as well.<sup>3</sup> The phrase provides the elements of what is seen as the Nepali men's utopia and the words "Japanese wife" tell us how Japanese women reflect their ideal femininity. Over milk tea in a café by Kathmandu's Durbar Square, Anil, a Newar tour guide, explained to me in English:

Many Nepali men marry Japanese women and go to Japan to make money. It is like a fake love. Even though they have Nepali wives, they do it for money. Life in Nepal is very difficult here, and so many Nepali guides do like this—going somewhere, doing trekking, and make relationship easily.

I asked, "Why Japanese and not other tourists?" Anil answered with distant look:

It is difficult with other tourists. We are the same—Asian, you know? ... I had a Japanese girlfriend 15 years ago. I am now 34 years old. It is a long time ago. ... She wanted to take me to India, but I was not secured, you know? I did not have any money so that I had to depend on her. So I did not go. I was just 20 years old while she was 5 years older than I was. She wanted me to marry her. She had a lot of expectations. I was too young to manage, and our communication stopped. ... I also had a German girlfriend. It was four-year relationship. ... She wanted me to visit Germany for marriage and making a baby. But what can I do? If I go there, I do not have any money. I have to make money first, like going to Dubai for work. She visited Nepal every four months, and we stayed together. But it was difficult to continue. I also had a Malaysian girlfriend, but it broke up soon.

Anil's friends came toward us, saying "Namaste!" We started talking together in Nepali. One of his friends said, "Nepali and Japanese, we have the same Asian culture, right?" I realized that he emphasised the idea that we were the same Asian just as Anil had pointed out. Anil continued speaking in English and Nepali:

Yes, as is often said, "Chinese food, English life, American money, Japanese wife" Japanese women are very loyal to their family. They are sincere. Uum, what was the old Japanese TV program? Ah, it is *Oshin*. It is an old Japanese story. But now the life of Japanese women has changed—more modern. It is an old story like 100 or 50 years ago, right?

*Oshin* was a popular Japanese television program broadcast in the early 1980s. The Japanese heroine, Oshin, was born into a poor rural family in

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3 Nepali people rhyme this phrase in English.

the late nineteenth century and endured many hardships while maintaining a loyal attitude toward her family. This program has been broadcast in many Asian countries and the character Oshin became the symbol of loyal, long-suffering Japanese women. Anil knew that *Oshin* does not represent the life of Japanese women today, but assumed that Oshin's character was still found in Japanese women. That is why he explained his ideals in terms of the Nepali proverb, "Chinese food, American money, Japanese wife." I heard this proverb again on that day. While I was browsing through woollen caps at a handicraft shop in Thamel, the Brahman shop owner, Uttan, spoke to me, "Are you Japanese?" I said I was researching Nepali and Japanese couples. He said, "Chinese food, American money, and Japanese wife, do you know?" I asked, "Why Japanese wife?" He answered, "Japanese women love one person very much, not like other women including Nepali women who flirt with many men."

These comments point to a utopian ideal for Nepali men—eating delicious Chinese food, having money like rich Americans, and living an elegant life in England. It also reveals their fantasy that Japanese women are ideal wives who follow the Nepali values of loyalty to family and sincerity, just as Anil referred to the Japanese heroine Oshin. The fantasy of "Japanese wife" is sustained through the discourse that "we are the same—Asian," which was often repeated by my Nepali subjects. On this point, "Asian" does not mean the general sense of being Asian to Nepali people, but refers to an imagined identity that they assume is shared with Japanese.<sup>4</sup> Thus Nepali men create the fantasy of the ideal femininity of "Asian" women, Japanese wives, who possess Nepali ideals of morality.

Interestingly, while Nepali men project their traditional image of "Asian" wives onto Japanese women, they assess Japanese women in terms of "Asian" modernity or, more precisely, the indigenous Nepali concept of development, *bikās*. The ideology of *bikās* generates the perception that foreign aid donors are the powerful Others that Nepal can depend on (Bista 2001:146). Pigg argues that the conception of *bikās* refers to the notion of development associated with the influence and foreign aid from the powerful Other, the West (1992:497). However, besides Western countries, the Japanese government has played a major role in reproducing the ideology of *bikās* in the form of economic

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4 I will use quotation marks around the word Asian when it refers to the imagined identity of being Asian, the meaning of which differs depending on individuals and groups.

assistance to Nepal after it started economic development programs in 1954, and grant and loan aid in 1968 (Embassy of Japan in Nepal 2006).

Although Western donors are perceived as the powerful, absolute Other, Nepali people see Japanese donors in a distinctive way. Shiva, a male teen-age shopkeeper, explained in Nepali his image of Japan:

Japanese thinking is good. I met one elderly Japanese man. He told me, "Japan used to be poor 50 years ago. But we worked so hard that we are developed now. It is the same as Nepal. Although the situation is not good in Nepal, *bikās* will come after your hard work. Please continue your hard work." I like his thinking and agree with him a lot. This kind of thinking is similar to Nepali thinking. Japanese people are very friendly and built schools for us. One Japanese lady made a school in my village.

Indeed, Japan is perceived as a powerful Other who is a major foreign donor in Nepal. However, Japan is considered to be the powerful Asian Other that Nepal can follow in order to achieve *bikās*. Discussing the development of Nepal, Bista stresses the idea that Nepal shares the social ethics of collectivism and diligence with Japan, which are the key factors for Nepal to attain economic development like Japan (2001:159).

Accordingly, Japanese women become the ideal "Asian" women for Nepali men because they think Japanese women are the embodiment of the "Asian" morality and modernity. Similarly, Liechty (2003) argues that both modernity and morality are significant sociocultural concepts for middle-class Nepalis to position others and selves in contemporary Nepal. Nirmal, a Nepali male shop owner, told me, "I am married to my Nepali wife, but otherwise I would want to marry a Japanese woman. Japanese women are frank and educated, so I could learn a lot from them." Krishna, a Nepali male tour guide, also said, "Japanese women stand on their own feet, while Nepali people get money from their parents." Pigg points out that the professional careers and higher education of urban Nepalis represent the ideology of modernity and become the token of *bikās* in comparison to "backward" village lives (1992:502). In like manner, Japanese women represent the "Asian" development of *bikās* that Nepali people consider should be similarly achieved as in Japan.

However, the modernity of Japanese women can interfere with Nepali norms even though Japanese women are assumed to maintain the "Asian" ideals of loyalty and sincerity. Bibek was a Newar male student who worked in a travel agency. While we were walking in the maze-like back streets of Patan where Newari wooden houses stood side by side, Bibek talked in fluent Japanese about his Japanese girlfriend:

I am 25 years old and my girlfriend Kaori is 24. I am a grad student studying business. ... I had a Newari girlfriend, but we broke up one month before I met Kaori. Kaori stayed with a Nepali family when she joined a volunteer program. The family members are my relatives. But after we started our relationship, Kaori moved into a guesthouse in Thamel. It was easier to meet and I could stay with her. ... [Chisono: What is the difference between Newari and Japanese girlfriends.] Well, Newari women hold back while Japanese women speak about anything like their past and their ex-boyfriends. It is sometimes good, and sometimes bad. I discussed much with Kaori because she disclosed a lot. Japanese are foreigners, very free. It is okay if we spend the night together. Newari couples are absolutely not allowed stay overnight together anywhere. I went to many cities such as Pokhara and Chitwan with Kaori. We traveled together and stayed together in many places. ... She is now working at a big company in Japan. She used to study in Europe and she speaks fluent English. She is very intelligent. So, we speak in English. [Chisono: Do you use English even though you speak good Japanese?] Yes, I use English talking with her.

I assume that Bibek's idea, "Japanese are foreigners, very free" has a particular meaning. I suspect that Bibek said Japanese were very free not only because they were transient tourists who are free from social responsibilities. Importantly, he emphasized Kaori's modern background by mentioning her career and education, including English skills. I also suspect that Bibek strongly believed that Kaori was a modern foreign tourist who was free because she was not troubled by traditional sexual norms in transnational tourist spaces while, at the same time, he thought that she still maintained the "Asian" values of sincerity and loyalty. Consequently, I assume that some Nepali men like Bibek transgress the moral boundaries of their sexual norms by behaving in the same way as their modern "Asian" Japanese girlfriends do.

The modernity of Japanese women is often expressed in terms of their sexual openness. I met Krishna and his client Shihoko, a young Japanese woman, in a tourist bus from Pokhara to Kathmandu. I saw Krishna keep his arm around her all along the way. When the bus stopped for a tea break, I approached their table, explained my research, and asked Krishna if she was his girlfriend. They kept silent and intimately looked at each other. This silence and their physical contact made me think that they had a sexual relationship. I could join them only for a short tea break, so I visited Krishna's office another day. Krishna invited me for a drink and took me to the local restaurant off the main streets in Thamel in the

evening. Serving me healthy non-oily dishes and ordering *tongba* (local hot rice wine), Krishna said in fluent Japanese:

Well, I married a Nepali woman at a young age. I have two children. I have two Japanese female clients who visit me every year. They asked me to sleep but I said no because they were my clients. I don't receive emails from them these days. I wonder if they are angry about that. ... Some Japanese female clients came to Nepal at the age of 40s or 50s after they divorced. They said that they used to prepare dinner and a hot bath and wait for their husbands who worked till late at night. But they did nothing at night. Their husbands were too busy to do anything affectionate for them. My clients who were Japanese women told me this kind of story and cried a lot in front of me. So, I try not to talk about such things. I try to talk about something else. ... European people are very open. I saw Western porno video CDs with my friends. How about in Japan? I saw Japanese sex magazines. There are a lot of sex shops and love hotels in Japan, right? I heard that my Japanese male clients often go to these places.

By stressing the similarities between the Western and Japanese sex industries, Krishna seemed to believe that many Japanese women are sexually free due to the Westernized development of sex business in Japan. But he also implied that Japanese women are so sexually frustrated in the industrial modern society of Japan that they must visit Nepal in order to find relaxation. Similarly to Krishna, many Nepali male informants told me how Japanese women aggressively seduce Nepali men in order to get them to sleep with them. They also implied that they actually broke with Nepali sexual norms by having physical contact with Japanese women in transnational spaces, such as the body contact between Krishna and Shihoko on the tourist bus. These Nepali men enjoy sexual freedom in the transnational tourist zone of Nepal by having Japanese girlfriends who demonstrate their modern sexual aggressiveness just like other open Western tourists.

Thus, the sexual aggressiveness of “modern” Japanese women is connected to the concept of promiscuity, which contrasts with the image of the Japanese wife. Here, Nepali men hold complex images of Japanese women: Japanese women are seen as modern “Asian” women who are immoral and promiscuous; at the same time, they are also believed to maintain the purported “Asian” values of loyalty and sincerity. These contradictions suggest that the “Asian” modernity and morality is not an actual aspect of Japanese women but actually a fantasy—the embodiment of Nepali men’s erotic desire.

### **The Frustration of Men from the Country of Mt. Everest**

While the ideal image of “Asian” femininity, the modern Japanese wife, is projected onto Japanese women, Nepali men generate the fantasy of ideal masculinity through discourse and the performance. Through the narratives of Nepali male tourism workers, I discuss how the fantasy of modern and authentic Nepali masculinity is reproduced in multiple ways.

One day I arranged to meet Surya in a public square because my Japanese friend told me that he had a Japanese girlfriend named Rumi. Surya was riding a motorcycle and wore fashionable T-shirts and jeans. He told me to come to a tourist restaurant if I wanted to listen to the story about his Japanese girlfriend. I waited for Surya for half an hour in the restaurant. Then, he appeared with his friend. His eyes looked so bloodshot that I realized that he was quite drunk. Surya started talking in English, so I opened my fieldnotes on the table:

Sorry, I was late because I drank a lot at a tourist bar with Spanish people. I do not know why so many girls are crazy for me! Everybody is jealous of me. ... I don't want to just work and work for many hours. I like freedom. So I sold everything and went to India for a month, especially Goa. I saw many Japanese women with tattoos there. I do not know why so many Japanese girls became crazy for me. “Oh, you are nice,” they said to me in Goa, too. ... When I went to Europe, I met a Japanese girl at a club. She said, “You look Italian,” but I said, “No, No, I am Nepali. Do you know Nepal? I am from the country of Mt. Everest.” I just played with her and left her. ... Other Nepali people think that Rumi is just a girlfriend for a holiday. But she is not. I love her so much. ... I know that she had sex with other Nepali men, but I don't care.

Surya recognized the immoral side of Rumi, seeing her as a promiscuous woman. However, he believed that Rumi was emotionally loyal to him saying, “I love her so much. We talk in voice chat every day and she calls me three times a week.” His words remind me of Utan's who claimed that Japanese women love one person very much. Indeed, Surya showed me the complex image of Japanese women as promiscuous, faithful women.

Next I asked Surya how he had obtained travel visas, something many Nepali informants had great difficulty doing. Banging a plate down on the table, Surya said:

Visa... fucking shit! It is nothing for me, you know? I will not tell you about the detail of visas because I don't know you. I just met you today. ... I love Rumi so much. I also love my friends. There are many kinds of love. Oh, my friend is also looking for a Japanese girlfriend.

I asked his friend why he wanted to have a Japanese girlfriend. He said that Europeans were not true lovers. Surya was nodding his head and continued talking:

I am a pub boy, ha ha ha! We drink many days. Not everyday, but almost. Twenty or thirty bottles of beer. Rumi tried to stop me from drinking a lot. She punched me when I drank too much. But I also stopped her from smoking cigarettes. I don't like smoking cigarettes. But I am a pub boy, ha ha ha! ... Today is today. Nobody knows tomorrow. My destination of my life is to have a party for my future daughters and invite people from many countries. ... I drink much and get crazy. I am happy in drinking. I want to make a documentary film. It is about my life. I do not have a good education. But I have an education from the streets.

I asked when Surya came to Kathmandu. He answered:

I was nine years old. I was working in a restaurant. I do not have a father. My mother lives in my village. It is far away from here. I have a younger brother. I do not go back to my village, but call her to come here. ... Going to Japan is bullshit! For me, going to other countries is nothing!

Although I tried to stop him, Surya ordered another large bottle of beer. Surya suddenly transformed from angry to cheerful. I was puzzled over his fickle emotions and loud voice. However, I understood that it was partly because he was too drunk, but mainly because by telling his story to me he was facing the unstable situation of the battle over money and fame in the urban tourist spaces. By acquiring foreign women, Surya received economic advantages and global mobility. Doing so, Surya believed that he could become a modern Nepali man who could rise above other urban Nepalis with better education than his education “from the streets”.

Although he did not use the term “modern” in his own narrative, I interpreted his story in this framework because he emphasized how he looked like a modern Italian man by calling himself a pub boy. In fact, Surya's hairstyle and clothes looked like those of Western models in popular magazines. Liechty points out that Nepali middle-class learn modern fashion and demeanour presented in the mass media such as Asian and Western films and magazines (2003:117-148). It seemed that Surya was living the modern fantasy of the social, fashionable cosmopolitan men he saw in the media. As a result, he wanted to embody this fantasy of ideal masculinity as a modern global man by dressing like a fashion model as well as playing and drinking with modern international tourists, especially women. Ortner argues that by being seen as having the

toughness of professional climbing guides, Sherpa men are encouraged to show a kind of Western machismo, which is not common in their traditional culture (1996:206). Similarly, Surya incorporated the ways he saw Western models in the mass media into the reproduction of his masculine identity by becoming a modern pub boy who enjoys the aura of transnational tourist spaces.

In addition to the modern aspect of ideal masculinity, Surya stressed his authentic Nepali-ness by saying “I am Nepali. Do you know Nepal? I am from the country of Mt. Everest.” Adams points out that some Sherpas feel that they should remain authentic traditional Sherpas in some ways, while achieving Western standards in other ways, in order to become ideal Sherpas for Westerners (1996:109). Adams illustrates how one young Sherpa man insisted on “dressing for success” by showing off modern clothing whereas he asked Adams to be his sponsor by asking help with religious or cultural events (Adams 1996:113). Interestingly, for Sherpas, being modern and yet remaining traditional are both employed in attracting foreign tourists (Adams 1996:113,118). Likewise, Surya showed me his pride in becoming modern as well as being an authentic Nepali by connecting his identity to the indigenous Nepali landscape of Mt. Everest, which attracts mountaineers and trekkers from around the globe.

Frohlick notes “Everest embodies the very symbol of achievement and will always be the mountain to climb” (2003:531). In this sense, Mt. Everest symbolizes authentic Nepali-ness in the form of rough, tough, global masculinity which foreign women are eager to approach but find difficult to conquer. Actually, this image of authentic Nepali machismo is not a traditional aspect of Nepali men, but the imaginative product of foreign tourists who want to explore Nepal as the exotic Other (Adams 1996, Fisher 2004, Frohlick 2003, Ortner 1996). The fantasy of authentic Nepali men of Mt. Everest causes Nepali men to observe themselves and recreate the sexuality of Nepali men in transnational ways. I think that Surya had such a belligerent attitude in the tourist restaurant because he wanted to stress the authentic Nepali masculinity of toughness and prove that he was a man of Mt. Everest. Significantly, I sensed that Surya felt frustrated in the chaotic situation of tourist spaces because of his unstable emotions and alcohol habit. It seemed that he was trying to forget his insecurity by drinking as well as by showing off his prestigious status as a global man who had won foreign girlfriends. In fact, I sensed this feeling of frustration in many Nepali tourism workers.

For example, I remember how Kumar expressed his anxiety and anger in various ways. I met Kumar at a tourist café in Pokhara. It was a beautiful morning and the Annapurna Mountains were clearly visible. I introduced myself and talked about my research. After I talked about how I had backpacked in Nepal seven years ago, Kumar started speaking in English:

When I was 17 years old, I met a Japanese female tourist who was 30 years old. I was working in a restaurant and we met there. Then we stayed together for two years. She was my first love and best love. I did not know anything about love. She taught me everything. ... Well, our hearts are the most important. Life is pain, you know? ... Let's go to see a movie this afternoon, okay?

In the place where we agreed to meet, I easily spotted Kumar whose clothes were somehow different from other Nepalis. Kumar looked like a modern cosmopolitan young man in his colourful T-shirt and sneakers just as Surya's clothes had made him look like a young Latin man. I realized the fact that Kumar and Surya both repeated, "I am different from other Nepalis."

Kumar took me to many places such as a music shop, an ice cream parlour, and a movie theatre. I guessed that Kumar was remembering the days when he had dated with his Japanese ex-girlfriend. I asked, "You came here with your ex, right?" Kumar answered, "I don't want to talk about and think of her." Instead of watching a movie, we decided to walk along the river. When we saw an elderly man walking along the wall, Kumar said, "There is no security in Nepal, not like in other countries." Although his face looked sad, he changed his mood by cheerfully singing a Bob Marley song, "'Everything's gonna be all right,' isn't it?" We sat down on the riverbank. Kumar continued talking:

I need someone who can live my whole life together. I am always looking for something in my life. I am looking for my life partner. Searching, searching, and searching. But I could not find one. Nobody is immortal. Nobody has insurance not to die. Everybody will die on one day. Japanese people are computer-minded. Japanese people have security, but we have no security. Japan is a developed society. Nepal is a hard society. No tourists understand this hard life here. They just enjoy it here. What you understand is no understanding. You don't suffer because of hunger. You have a good life.

I was writing his words in my fieldnotes. Kumar lit a cigarette. He looked at my fieldnotes and asked if I was researching him. I asked him again if I

could use his words for my research and he answered, “Up to you.” Kumar resumed sharing his life story with me:

Sex is not a problem. The heart is a problem. Respect is important. Life is always a struggle. It is pain. Romance between Nepalis and Japanese? There are various individuals, so why do you research such a thing? It depends on the individuals. Your five fingers are the same fingers, but different from each other. But I am looking for something – the best one in my life. I talked much about life with my ex Japanese girlfriend. But she left me and never came back to Nepal. So, I spent hard days. I drank a lot and behaved badly. Everything was like crazy. But I don’t do these things anymore. ... I cannot trust women at all. Bitch! Japanese bitch! Not every Japanese, though. If you need to research the real lives of Nepalis, you should go to the mountains. You should see the lives in mountains. Go to places where there are no tourists and see the real pain of our lives. ... Here, people are always gossiping behind closed doors. People gossip without knowing the truth. They gossip like; he is rich because he has a Japanese girlfriend. Not good. Not right. They don’t know anything true. ... People always run after money because there is no security here. Only money. But it is wrong to think that money is all. When I was eight years old, I came to Pokhara from my village and started working for 100 rupees for a month. This is the life of Nepalis. That is why people become addicted to drugs.

Listening to Kumar, I saw the peaceful scenery of the riverside turn into the painful landscape of people’s suffering. I was afraid that Kumar might see me as a Japanese bitch, just as Palestinian street-merchants feel tremendous resentment toward foreign “rich” customers, calling them “fucking tourists” (Bowman 1989:83-84). I felt like escaping from there and said to myself, “I wish I were just a ‘happy’ tourist and didn’t have to listen to this ‘reality’.” Kumar continued talking, “Saying something is easy, but doing something is not easy. That is why life means struggle. I am learning the meaning of life from my struggle and experience.” Kumar’s words stuck in my heart. I remembered how many Nepali men, like Anil, had told me of how life in Nepal is hard and full of struggles (*duhkha*).

For the entire time that we walked on the road beside the river, Kumar never stopped talking. “Tourists think that Nepali people enjoy a wonderful life here. But there are a lot of misunderstandings. Tourists, especially Western girls don’t understand. They don’t see the real things here.” I asked, “Why Western girls?” Kumar answered, “Nepal and Japan have a similar history. Japanese women traditionally respect their

husbands even though I know that this tradition is eroding and people run after fashion today. It is the same situation as in Nepal.” Talking about female tourists, got Kumar very agitated and he suddenly said in a furious tone, “All people die out on one day. Everything gets blasted! The world is going to blow up! Everybody is selfish!” I said to myself, “What am I doing? What am I researching? How can I help to decrease the pain of his life? Am I a researcher or tourist or his friend?”

We reached the inner-city roads and saw Western tourists pass by. Kumar continued, “Western people are free. Japanese are different. You are open-minded. You should live in Nepal. You are different from other Japanese. You are a good Japanese. You are trying to see our real lives.” It was a hot, sunny day. We entered a shady local restaurant near a college. Drinking water, we watched the college students. Kumar said, “These students are not learning what life means. They should listen to me! ... I want to write a book about my life. But I don’t have an education. I cannot write and read properly, so I can’t do it.” Realizing that he was opening his heart to me, I felt like claiming that I was not a good but rather a selfish Japanese person because I was listening to him for own gain as a university student in the West. I also became ashamed of myself for allowing myself to feel “powerless” to help Kumar in some ways. I wondered if there was a solution – rather than languishing in my sense of powerless, my duty would be to listen to Kumar and put his words into ethnographic texts. Becoming confused and questioning myself, I said “Thank you” to Kumar and, under the dazzling evening sun, got on a local bus going near my guesthouse.

Kumar’s story taught me a lot of things. He had lamented the local conditions of socioeconomic insecurity in terms of a binary contrast between “backward” Nepal and “developed” Japan. Kumar also expressed a clear distinction between the resort city, Pokhara, and mountain villages. According to Kumar, the tourist area of Pokhara is the space of gossip and jealousy where people do not see the truth; on the other hand, mountain villages are the spaces where I can see the “truth” of Nepali lives that are painful. As Pigg points out, the binary image of city (modern)-village (backward) is reproduced under the hegemonic ideology of *bikās* (1992:499). I thought that Kumar felt frustrated especially because he had long been on the front-line of sensing the dichotomy of *bikās*, where “backward” Nepalis encounter “modern” tourist in their daily life. Escaping from his image of backward Nepal, I assume that Kumar wanted to become like a modern tourist by wearing clothes and behaving like tourists in the same way as Surya.

In contrast to Kumar's perspective, Japanese tourists see the binary image of backwardness and modernity from another angle. Projecting the nostalgic image of pre-modern Japan onto Nepal, Japanese tourists visit Nepal in search of backwardness (Iwabuchi 2002:175-176).<sup>5</sup> It seems that Kumar criticized this fact that these tourists were looking at the fantasy of backwardness in tourist places like Pokhara, not the real "backward" lives in Nepali villages. That is why I felt like the peaceful touristic landscape was transforming into a painful scene before my eyes as I was hearing Kumar's words. Here, both Kumar and I mapped the imagined landscapes of backwardness and modernity by seeing Nepali villages as the sites of authentic backwardness, Nepali tourist places as the modern spaces of inauthentic backwardness, and Japan as the country of authentic modernity.

Although he pointed out his sense that tourists don't see the truth but rather a fantasy of Nepali lives, I think that Kumar was also having his own fantasy about tourists, especially Japanese women. Comparing them with Western women, Kumar saw Japanese women as his ideal "Asian" women who follow their husbands. I assume that he saw Japanese women in terms of "Asian" modernity who could provide him with security in life as his best life partner. However, he had a painful memories of Japanese women, especially his first girlfriend so that he shouted, "Japanese bitch!" This ambivalence shows that Kumar held onto a fantasy of his ideal of femininity found in Japanese women, but at the same time, he knew the fact that these Japanese women could betray his expectations and exploit him as a romantic object. I suppose that Kumar projected the fantasy of the ideal "Asian" women onto me, a Japanese woman, and that is why he told me that I was a good Japanese.

Like Surya, Kumar impressed upon me the fact that Nepali men experience a strong sense of frustration working and playing in the transnational tourist spaces of Nepal. I suggest that their feelings of frustration can be partially attributed to their unstable circumstances that

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5 In my master's thesis, I argue that travelling the imaged landscape of nostalgic Nepal, Japanese female tourists seek their ideal masculinity of *yasashisa* (gentleness in Japanese) inside Nepali men that they think modern Japanese men have lost (Yamaga 2007). Just as Nepali men desire the imagined femininity of Japanese wife, Japanese women create the retrospective fantasy of ideal Asian masculinity, Nepali men's *yasashisa*. Thus, I concluded that the politics of sexual desire and fantasy between Nepali men and Japanese female tourists is a mutual process to recreate the fantasy of ideal Asian sexualities (Yamaga 2007).

involve conflict, transgression, and fluidity in the rapid modernization of Nepali contemporary society. Liechty recounts how a Nepali man turned to drugs as a way of dealing with his feelings of frustration in the form of hopelessness, and placeless-ness, which Liechty observes as the dark side of Nepali modernity (2003:245). Kunwar describes the drinking habits of Nepali male tour guides in Chitwan National Park and says that it is because they are in the “process of transformation” (2002:110). Indeed, the tourist spaces of Nepal are one important arena in which Nepali people compete for the prestige of money and modernity in the global expansion of capitalism. It is also the location for Nepali men to resist “First World” tourists by taking pride in their globally prestigious position – as the “top” men from the country of Mt. Everest. Thus, the tourist zones of Nepal are eroticised spaces for these Nepali men. They are places in which to embody an ideal modern and authentic masculinity through their performances and discourses of both cosmopolitan modernity, and of “authentic” Nepali men. Also, it is a salient space for realizing how these Nepali men bear the feeling of frustration under local and global inequality.

### **The Power of Love in Modern Nepali Men’s Lives**

Kumar stressed the idea that life is a struggle because of his painful romance with a Japanese woman. However, free (non-socially constrained) love is also often portrayed as having the potential to overcome the difficulties of life. Ahearn suggests that, through the modern Nepali state education curriculum, Nepali youth come to believe that fate is no longer the final arbiter that determines a person’s life. Rather, in matters of love (as in the rest of life), individuals should take the initiative and the responsibility to “develop” themselves (2001:189). In the context of this ethic of “development” (personal and social), young people come to believe that “the ‘main’ meaning of love is ‘life success’” (2001:3). Similarly, Ashok, a Nepali male worker in a guesthouse, initially submitted to the fate of an arranged marriage. Later, however, he rejected that fatalistic attitude by separating from his Nepali wife while seeking a love marriage with a Japanese woman. Ashok seemed to believe that love marriage was the key to success in his life, through fostering true love, working together in Japan and buying land in Nepal. Kumar also implied that he wanted to find his ideal partner through romance with a Japanese woman, despite his painful memories. Researching the relationships between Arab men and Western women tourists, Cohen argues, “the tourists help to create new and essentially false hopes for

these boys who are trapped in a situation from which, under the present circumstances, there is no way out” (1971:229). Thus, Japanese women become the symbol of life success in these Nepali men’s fantasies.

The linkage between love and life success can be clearly observed in my conversation with Bimal, a manager of a handicraft shop in Thamel. After I explained my research, Bimal showed me many photos of his Japanese wife and baby living in Japan. Bimal said that he and his wife Aki went to Japan when she got pregnant and only he came back to Nepal to look after his business. He would go back to Japan after a few months’ stay in Nepal. Bimal started telling me how he met Aki speaking multiple languages – Japanese, Nepali and English:

I am now 25 years old while she is 28. ... Aki had a Japanese boyfriend, but he had a few other girlfriends. So, she left him. Aki visited my shop everyday and tried to learn more about me. She had planned to stay in Nepal only for a month, but she extended her stay for three months. Yes, because of me. Aki told me to stay with her at her guesthouse and so I did . . . . I have been very busy with going to college and working in this shop. Many people are just playing around here, but I am different from them. For our marriage, a Nepali officer asked me to give him a bribe to expedite the marriage process. But I refused saying, “Why?” It is illegal. I know it because I have an education. ... This love is the destination of my life. I had no girlfriends before I met her. This is love. Other Nepalis care about the nationality of their girlfriends, like they love their girlfriends because she is American or Japanese. But we are different. Because our Nepali life is good! We have a rich life here. The system of facilities is not good. Even if we don’t work in the daytime, we can eat dinner in the evening! It is not hard to get food in Nepal. ... I went to Japan last year. Japanese people don’t know who lives in the neighbourhood. Nepali communities are good because we are all friends. Japanese people gather only with their relatives. In Japan, if someone visits someone else’s home, they just give a greeting. There is no time to drink tea together. In Nepal, we say, “Please come in” and offer tea. Nepal has a relaxing life. So I want to live in Nepal after I stay in Japan for a few years. I might start an exporting business to Japan. It might be difficult, but I will try.

In contrast to Kumar, who portrayed Nepali lives as ones of struggle and pain, Bimal described another side that includes the richness of good food, friendships, and stress-free living. Bimal repeated the expression “Even if we don’t work in the daytime, we can eat dinner in the evening,” that I often heard from other Nepali informants. Bista explains, “Nepal has historically been self-sufficient. ... Nepal may be poor by international standards, but Nepali peasants are self-sufficient and largely

content” (2001:133). Since he experienced life in Japan, Bimal realized the fact that Japan is not the utopia of modernity that Kumar posited in contrast to the backwardness of Nepal.

Bimal explained that he used to work as a shopkeeper and was therefore able to meet Aki at his shop. Later he was promoted to manager and had his own office in another place. So, I could meet Bimal only in the evening when he came to check his shop. Whenever I met him, Bimal called his best friend, Dorjee and invited us for *tongba*. We went to a local restaurant near where Dorjee lived. On the way to the restaurant, Bimal told me in Nepali:

Aki also speaks good Nepali like you. When she did not understand a Nepali word, she looked it up in a dictionary. She studied hard. Because we love each other, we are learning about each other’s culture. The reason Aki speaks Nepali is “power of love.” So, I am learning Japanese as well. Learning culture is possible through the power of love, right?

We reached the restaurant and saw several Nepali men drinking *tongba* at the back. Bimal said, “Dorjee is my best friend. I was so sad in Japan because I could not meet Dorjee.” Dorjee was nodding his head. Dorjee called his children on his mobile phone and his sons soon came to the restaurant. Bimal said in Nepali, “See, they are very handsome like their father. I want my daughter to marry one of them.” One Nepali man started to sing a Nepali song and his friends started dancing. We also sang the song and danced together. We drank and laughed. Bimal looked happy saying in Japanese, “It is wonderful. It is not possible in Japan, right?”

On another day, I visited Bimal’s shop. Bimal looked so tired. He ordered milk tea for me and started to talk about his life in Japanese:

I go to a Japanese language school every early morning. Then, I have to go to many places for my business. I am very busy. But I don’t feel like going back to Japan. I like the life in Nepal. ... Well, Chisono *didi* [elder sister], let’s do some exporting business. You can live half in Nepal and half in Japan. It is nice, isn’t it? I have some plans like an on-line business. I learned many things from my Japanese friends. Please consider this plan. ... By the way, I go back to my village soon. Would you like to come with me? I go back there twice a month. I have to deliver big furniture to my village.

Whenever I listened to him, I felt a sense of stability. In fact, Bimal was achieving a level of success in life that many other Nepali men would only dream about and envy. Bimal went to Japan and found many possibilities to start new business just like Ashok had dreamed of doing.

Bimal also could distinguish himself from other Nepalis by receiving a good education and by taking business and Japanese language courses in school, while Kumar and Surya wanted to but couldn't. Bimal went to his natal village quite often and had close ties to his relatives even though Surya cut his tie to his natal village. Bimal thought that he had attained success in life through his efforts of study, work, and most importantly, "the power of love." Bimal stressed the idea, "This love is the destination of my life." It seems that Bimal is now achieving success through his love for Aki.

Although I have portrayed the tourist spaces of Nepal as sites of inequality and frustration, I would like to stress the fact that they are also spaces of hope where Nepali men like Bimal can harness the "power of love" through romance with foreign women. For instance, although he had flirted with other foreign women, Surya dreamed of the day when he and Rumi would make a happy family through their sincere love. I assumed that Surya had hope in the power of love for success in his life, despite his current disorderly life as a pub boy. While dreaming of a love marriage with a Japanese woman, Ashok learned Japanese without going to school and was expanding his idea that he would start a new business with Japanese tourists. Kumar became upset when remembering his painful love with his Japanese ex-girlfriend, but soon cheerfully changed his mood, singing the Bob Marley song, "Everything's gonna be all right." For me, Kumar is not a victim exploited by foreign tourists. Remembering his song, I believe that Kumar was proceeding to make a success of his life through his painful experience of the international love affair.

These different perspectives of frustration, pride, and hope affected my observations of Nepali people in the tourist spaces of Nepal. My changing understandings of a sign that I read in Thamel illustrate these multiple perspectives. Initially I read the sign "Tourists are Honoured Guests" to imply that I was a privileged tourist in Nepal, honoured by Nepalis. However, after I listened to many Nepali informants like Surya, Kumar, and Bimal, I came to realize that the sign does not mean the position of global tourists, but actually refers to the privileged status of Nepalis themselves. I came to read the sign as stating "We are honoured hosts." I thought the sign, in fact, points to Nepali pride in being the people from the country of Mt. Everest. My changing impression shows that I had been so obsessed with my position as an advantaged global tourist that I did not recognize the fact that many Nepalis actually take pride in their identity as being global and modern.

Here, I need to return to the theoretical questions I explored earlier in this article: should we view the phenomenon of Nepali men creating intimate relationships with Japanese female tourists as instances of sex tourism or romance tourism? In this theoretical debate, I see it problematic to label the intimate relationships between Nepali men and Japanese women as a certain type of sex-romance tourism on the continuum of the sex-romance binary. I found that the transnational tourist spaces of Nepal are the sites of chaos where the concepts of romance, love, and sex are juxtaposed, contested, and recreated with Nepali local sexual norms as well as modernity. For example, I cannot forget Kumar's anger ("Japanese bitch!") and his sorrow ("Life is pain"); however, Kumar kindly told me with a smile, "You are a good Japanese." Surya behaved roughly criticizing Rumi's promiscuous behaviour, but he repeated from his heart, "I love Rumi very much." Bimal looked happy saying, "Learning culture is possible through the power of love, right?" These relationships show how Nepali men and Japanese female tourists exploit each other as sexual or romantic objects; however, it is also true that these Nepali men try to find a way to succeed in life and come to a mutual cultural understanding with foreign visitors. In this regard, these Nepali men cannot be categorized into a certain type of sex-romance tourism's subjects; rather, they are flexible actors engaging in sex or romance tourism or both or neither according to time and circumstances. Going beyond the Western framework of the sex-romance binary, I propose that these Nepali men are the specific tourism-related subjects who play with the multiple meanings and ambivalent feelings of romance, love, and sex through their fantasies of authentic Asian-ness and Nepali-ness.

Furthermore, the narratives and emotions of my Nepali subjects vividly portrayed their struggles to re-formulate their sexual identities in a transnational way. Nepali men desire to meet "modern" Japanese women in the same way that Nepali people project their ideal image of development (*bikās*) onto their Asian donor, Japan. The sexual desire reinforces the fantasy and discourse of an ideal Asian femininity, the "Japanese wife." In order to attract foreign women, Nepali men try to embody their fantasy of authentic Nepali masculinity as modern, global, and indigenous Nepali men – "Men from the country of Mt. Everest." On this point, the notion of Asian-ness uniquely generates the sexual fantasy and desire to find the intimate Other, a phenomenon not fully discussed in studies of the intimate relations between white female tourists and local men of colour who see each other as the exotic Other. Indeed, the tourist

spaces of Nepal reflect the multiple mediating activities, which are socially and culturally constructed by Asian subjects in the physical and imaginary spaces of “Asia.”

Examining erotic fantasies of Nepali men, I realized how Nepali people seek the indigenous modernity of Nepali-ness even though they are frustrated with the rapid changes in contemporary Nepal. The tourist spaces of Nepal become the site of chaos where these Nepali men savour freedom and, at the same time, rebel against the contradictions between their traditional norms and new values. It also becomes the global space for generating new ideals of being “Asian” while reinforcing domestic ideology and morality of being Nepali. Povinelli and Chauncey (1999) suggest that the study of global tourism and sexuality offers important clues to understanding current changes in the whole society. Indeed, erotic encounters in tourist spaces of Nepal are not only one important means whereby foreign influences enter Nepal, but a reflection (and even embodiment) of the many social and cultural changes happening in contemporary Nepal.

Thus, I propose that the frustration and hope of Nepali men I illustrated here are not instances of global tourism producing negative or positive impacts. Rather, they show how social changes take place in a distinctive way or, in other words, how Nepali people are struggling with the drastic transformation of Nepali modernization and Asian globalization. In examining Nepali men’s erotic fantasies for Japanese women, I believe that we can learn something of the ways in which Nepali people take active roles in the process of globalization and analyze how Nepali society is dynamically transforming in specific ways at global and local levels. I hope my research on Asian sexuality and tourism provides us with hints to create a better understanding among Asian people and other people around the world in the context of globalization.

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