

Advance Praise

This book is a model of international scholarship, instructive and a delight to read. Various a booming border town, a strategic asset, a listening post, a 'nest of spies', an ideological flashpoint and a cosmopolitan retreat, topsy-turvy Kalimpong amply merits the story told here. *Through the India–China Border* will be of absorbing interest to Himalayanists and to anyone concerned with the interplay of external expectations and internal realities within a contested border region.

John Keay

Author of Himalaya: Exploring the Roof of the World (2022)

A rare, original and inimitable academic performance in Sino-Indian studies. Stylish, engaging and seminal in its historical and theoretical reach.

Xi Lin

Professor, Fudan Institute for Advanced Study
in Social Sciences, Fudan University

Poddar and Zhang, in this engaging and erudite volume, bring a slice of colonial, decolonial and postcolonial history to life through colourful and fascinating stories of events and characters shaping, and shaped by, the play of political and economic forces. Kalimpong emerges in this narrative as a protagonist in its own right, unique in its identity, yet emblematic of wider clashes and negotiations of empires, nations, peoples, authorities and individuals.

Chris Sinha

Distinguished Professor, University of East Anglia

The newest must-read on the perennial topic of Sino-Indian geopolitics, *Through the India–China Border* lucidly and vividly recounts how Kalimpong, a British colonial hill station in the early twentieth century, emerged as an interface between China and India. The book illuminates how the colonial legacy cartographically sets the tone for relations between the two most populous nations on earth and their respective claims on territorial sovereignties in the Himalayas.

Dan Smyer Yü

Kuige Professor of Ethnology, Yunnan University

Through the India–China Border

Through the India–China Border draws together original research on imperial history, postwar politics and culture by utilising rarely used archival material—British, Chinese and Indian—and sheds new light on our understandings of the ‘Tibet question’ in India–China relations.

In its foregrounding of espionage, intrigues and the interplay of political machinations in the small border town of Kalimpong in the 1920s up until 1962, this book challenges the way remote regions, or peripheries, are typically seen from the ‘centres’ of nations. The innovative use of postcolonial and transcultural theories demonstrates how this transdisciplinary framework enriches our reading and writing of decolonial history. In its interdisciplinary approach, the book provides insights into the historical making of India–China relations. It reveals the motivations of actors who are not necessarily always tied to statecraft.

Prem Poddar is former Professor in Cultural Encounters at Roskilde University, Denmark. He was an Alexander von Humboldt senior fellow in Berlin and is currently a Senior Research Associate at the Centre for World Environmental History, University of Sussex, and a Senior Fellow at the University of Manchester. He is the founding vice-chancellor of Darjeeling Hills University, West Bengal, India. His research interests include cultural theory, postcolonial and decolonial studies, India–China borders, nationalisms and the politics of the passport.

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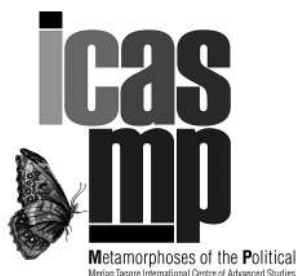
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Through the India–China Border

Kalimpong in the Himalayas

Prem Poddar
Lisa Lindkvist Zhang



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The limit [*Grenze*, or border] is the mediation in virtue of which something and each other both is and is not.

—Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*

To serve a great power always requires substantial concessions, wherefore one must offer up one's map and submit, and put the state seal in pawn for military aid. If the map is offered up, the territory will be cut up; if the state seal is handed over, prestige will be diminished. When the territory is cut up, the state will be cut up; when prestige is diminished, the government will fall into chaos.

—Han Feizi, *Han Feizi suoyin* (Concordance to Han Feizi)

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Preface

I grew up and went to school in the multi-culture of Kalimpong—the town that is the focus and main protagonist of this book. My father, a trader-adventurer, landed up in Kalimpong from Rangpo, a town across the border in the Kingdom of Sikkim, which was then a British protectorate. His father in turn had been working in Singtam (also in Sikkim) for a firm with connections to Kalimpong. This was on the heels of Colonel Francis Younghusband's 'opening up' of the route to Tibet in 1904. My father never really made it economically, nor did he sojourn in Lhasa as many businessmen were then wont to do. Coming of age, not without kvetching, in the Tenth Mile area of the town, I noted there was just a residue of the Indo-Tibetan trade, with descendants of merchants using the conduit via Kathmandu while still hoping that the Jelep-La border would one day reopen. The Chinese families still living in the town mainly ran restaurants or shoe shops. Tibetan refugees, lamas and aristocrats had a considerable presence in the town environs. The mule trains were but a distant memory for old timers as army trucks trundled up and down the roads carrying supplies and military hardware.

I remained quite clueless about the potholes in the ground of history on which I daily trod. It was only when I relocated to the United Kingdom (UK) for my doctoral work, on a different topic, that I kept encountering material on Kalimpong in the British Library, London. It was then that the urge to someday write a book on the town took hold of me. This was not a bad beginning for a scholar specialising in postcolonial studies. It was only much later that this work began to take some sort of shape, its contours cut and circumscribed by the continuities and discontinuities of the colonial experience in Asia. Although the Tibetan side of the story at the border had been written about, it seemed to me that what was lacking was the presence of China in Kalimpong, with all that this implied for the larger story of China–India relations before and after 1947.

I had lost what little Tibetan I had in my pre-teens and my Mandarin was non-existent. Bumping into Dawa Norbu—who became a close friend—in

Kalimpong in the late 1980s after his Berkeley stint was opportune. On the Indian side, Jawaharlal Nehru remained gripped by the town, mentioning it frequently, sometimes juxtaposing it with other cities such as Riga and Hong Kong that served as spy hubs. This mining, along with readings of the memoir by the Japanese agent Hisao Kimura and the archival files on Shen Fumin (who happened to be my art teacher in school), served as the basis of another article in the journal *China and Asia* in 2021. This book, I need not add, would not have been possible without the excavation of archival and textual material in Mandarin.

My work over the years has urged me to think in terms of ‘presence’ and ‘presencing’ in ways that the philosophers Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida have explicated the concept. When I meditate on that in the book, I see how China ‘presences’ India, or, more simply, is both present and absent in India. This also resonates with the Hegelian idea of the border which we have used as an epigraph to the book.

None of the chapters pretend to be exhaustive histories; they are better viewed as exemplary accounts based on interpretations of the materials available at the time. Negotiating borders and differences, exploring a nexus of connections and interactions through history and place, we strive to provide a sense of how concepts of ‘Chinese’ and ‘China’ became woven into the fabric of Kalimpong, in the spirit of what has been termed *histoire croisée*. It is along these lines that this work attempts to map just how these assorted orbits of interaction intertwine dialogically. It is hoped that the book will prompt further research on similarly entangled places, although much future work is contingent upon the opening up (that phrase, again!) of Chinese archives.

I remain an emic insider–outsider as I visit the town every year. In the world’s perennial movement, I have not always been able, as the French essayist Michel de Montaigne echoed in 1580, ‘to keep my subject still. It goes along befuddled and staggering, with a natural drunkenness’, but with a logic and momentum that cannot be disavowed.

Prem Poddar
 London

I started working on Kalimpong’s Chinese connections during my MA studies in Copenhagen. In the work leading up to my thesis, supervised by Jørgen Delman and Prem Poddar, I identified four different intertwined histories that had traversed Kalimpong. These later became the basis of Chapters 3–5 of the book. The search for primary material was challenging and time-consuming, and I visited archives and libraries in China, India and the UK looking for traces of the town’s intertwined history with ‘China’ and the ‘Chinese’. Analysing the documents

I collected took even longer, and I spent many a night poring over them. I was fortunate to meet Tansen Sen early in this endeavour, who introduced me to the State Archives of West Bengal (SAWB) and encouraged me to visit it. On his advice, I flew to a sweltering Kolkata and delved into the files, which now form much of the core primary material for the book. Later, I moved to Heidelberg to work on my doctoral dissertation on the history of Indian philosophy in modern China. While there, I had the good fortune to be a colleague of Markus Viehbeck, who was then the co-director of the research project ‘Kalimpong as a “Contact Zone”’. One of the achievements of this project was the digitisation of the newspaper *Himalayan Times*, published in Kalimpong from 1949 to 1963, which is now available as a database. Not only did I have productive discussions with Markus about Kalimpong while in Heidelberg, but he was also generous in sharing much of the primary material his team had found in India. Without the material he and his team provided and made available, this book would not have been what it is.

I undertook two field trips while researching this book: one to Kalimpong and one to Yunnan. These were truly eye-opening and allowed me to discover this extremely diverse, interconnected, often fraught and complex region that is the Eastern Himalayas. The process of writing this book has at times been incredibly difficult and frustrating. But I feel privileged to have had the opportunity to study a sliver of this incredible part of the world.

Lisa Lindkvist Zhang
Sendai

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This book has a long history in its making—long enough to amass debts to many friends and scholars who have been unstinting in their support. Given the different personal and academic backgrounds that each of us has brought to the work, those whom we wish to thank also represent diverse views and areas of expertise. Our copyeditor Russell Ó Ríagáin has done an exemplary job of picking up non-complementary expressions and errors and has saved us many blushes.

Our acquaintances and interlocutors in Kunming, Shangri-La (Gyalthang), Lijiang, Changsha, Beijing, Taipei, Shanghai and Kalimpong have impacted this work in ways that are not straightforward to pin down.

We wish to thank the librarians and archivists at the India Office Records (IOR), British Library, London; various collections in the province of Yunnan; the National Archives of India (NAI), New Delhi; and the State Archive of West Bengal (SAWB), Kolkata. The M. S. Merian–R. Tagore International Centre of Advanced Studies ‘Metamorphoses of the Political’ (ICAS:MP) in New Delhi and its board of advisors evaluated the book proposal and the referee comments on the manuscript, and Anwesha Rana and Qudsiya Ahmed at Cambridge University Press ushered the manuscript towards publication.

Markus Viehbeck at the University of Vienna gave us the opportunity to publish an earlier version of what is presently Chapter 2 in this book, and his feedback helped us in streamlining the argument in the chapter. We are obliged to the editors of *China and Asia: Studies in History*, especially Liam Kelly and Brian Tsui, and to the anonymous referees for their contribution to refining an earlier version of Chapter 4.

Participants in a seminar at the University of Kent on Chinese systems of modern propaganda offered rewarding comments on a draft chapter. James Farley and Matthew Johnson deserve special mention. Material from two of the chapters was presented at Fudan University, Shanghai. We thank Timothy Cheek of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, for commenting on one of them, as we

do Xi Lin of the Fudan Institute of Advanced Study in Social Sciences, Shanghai. We are also grateful for the Asian Dynamics Initiative conferences in Copenhagen, where some of the material was presented and received feedback. Organisers and participants at a conference on 'Third Pole Culture' in China at Beijing Normal University responded to a paper we presented. Chen Yun and Liang Jie invited us to speak about Kalimpong as part of their series of Dinghai talks in Shanghai. We are grateful to the respondents there, including Kunbing Xiao from Southwest Minzu University, Chengdu, and Zhang Ke in Shanghai.

Carole McGranahan of the University of Colorado Boulder was enthusiastic in her response to an early draft of Chapter 3. Cao Yin of Tsinghua University, Beijing, provided encouragement and shared his insightful ideas. Tanka Subba read one of the chapters and we benefitted from his remarks. Anmole Prasad, a long-time Kalimpong resident with whom we have had a continuous exchange about its space, corrected some of our mistakes in the drafts. Tansen Sen, Edward Liang, Daniel Tharchin, Richa Garg, Jeff Fuchs, Dakpa Kelden, Jørgen Delman, Amelia Bonea, Dan Smyer Yü, Willem van Schendel and Gunnel Cederlöf have had inputs that defy easy definition. Jacob Shen came up with a great deal of important and relevant information. The field notes would not have been possible without the enthusiastic participation of our respondents (who remain anonymous at their requests) in Shangri-La, Yunnan, Taipei and Kalimpong.

I, Lisa, would like to thank my friends and family who have shown me extraordinary kindness during this long (and often challenging) project. Without their unwavering support, my contribution to this book would not have been possible. I am also indebted to colleagues and the many people I met during fieldwork in China and India, who often welcomed me into their homes. My research for this project was funded by both the SC Van Fonden and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

I, Prem, would like to take this opportunity to thank Homi K. Bhabha, who supervised my DPhil programme at the University of Sussex and who has had a profound impact on my thinking. I must acknowledge my deep appreciation to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Berlin, for supporting my research into the Himalayas for over two years. The Carlsberg Foundation, Copenhagen, also provided financial support, as did the Confucius Fellowship programme in Shanghai. The Max Weber Foundation, Bonn, generously awarded me a fellowship in 2021 at the ICAS:MP in New Delhi. Xi Lin hosted me as a visiting professor at Fudan University in 2017–2018. I have presented related material at the Association for Asian Studies conferences, in New Delhi and Bangkok, and have benefitted from comments. I am also obliged to the Centre for Himalayan Studies at the University of North Bengal, Siliguri, for inviting me to air some of my ideas.

Dawa Norbu, a close friend and Tibetologist, launched me on a journey towards studying nationalism and later led me to think about my own positions. I owe him immeasurably, but, sadly, he is not around anymore for me to express my gratitude.

Jai Shankar Prasad in Heidelberg became a friend and provided support. Anil Paralkar was supportive when the COVID-19 crisis raged. Hans Harder in Heidelberg helped me out with some references. Two of the maps included in the book—the frontispiece and the one in Chapter 5—were prepared by Michael Brown in Heidelberg. Hisao Kimura's map of Kalimpong from the late 1940s is from Toyo Bunko (The Oriental Library), Tokyo.

Heiko Henkel and Amanda Hammar at the University of Copenhagen have always served as brilliant interlocutors. David Ludden, Indra Sengupta, Sanjay Srivastava, Khalid Nadvi, Bridget Bryne, Willem van Schendel, John Parker, Shabnum Tejani, Laila Abu-Er-Rub, Prakash Shah and Lars Lehmann have all been greatly supportive of this work. Sonam Lama, Abhijit Mazumdar and Pema Wangchuk are steadfast comrades, providing many links found in the book. My friend Chris Sinha has generously provided me with many opportunities, including a lecture at Hunan University, Changsha, to think through the work. He continues to inspire and support me, underscoring the imperative for rigorous scholarship, especially in regard to the intricately entangled relations of empire and nation states that are manifest in this work.

Dan Smyer Yu from Yunnan University, Kunming (leading the Trans-Himalayan Environmental Humanities working group), has supported this distinct Trans-Himalayan project in directions that can only be envisioned as complementary.

The historical analyses derive mainly from documents from three archives: the State Archives of West Bengal (SAWB), Kolkata; the National Archives of India (NAI), New Delhi; and the India Office Records (IOR), London. The files from the SAWB are almost exclusively records from the Indian Intelligence Bureau (IB).¹ Scholarly work on the *Tibet Mirror* (*Yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur gyi me long*), a Tibetan-language newspaper published in Kalimpong between 1925 and 1963, keeps on being a superb source. Newspapers and magazines, primarily the *Himalayan Times* which was the local newspaper in the region from 1947 until 1963 and the *People's Daily* which was the official newspaper of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), supply valuable information. Government reports published as white papers on China by the government of India as well as biographies and other primary literature serve as sources for political and sociocultural analyses. *Memorial of the Patriotic Overseas Chinese Leader Ma Zhucai*, a volume edited by He Genhe, He Qiang, Xu Yingtao and Wang Dekang, deserves special mention as it forms the basis for Chapter 5. The source material upon which this book is based also

includes two fieldwork trips in 2016–2017 in Kalimpong by both of us, several weeks in Yunnan in the summer of 2016 and many scattered months over four years in Shanghai.

Note

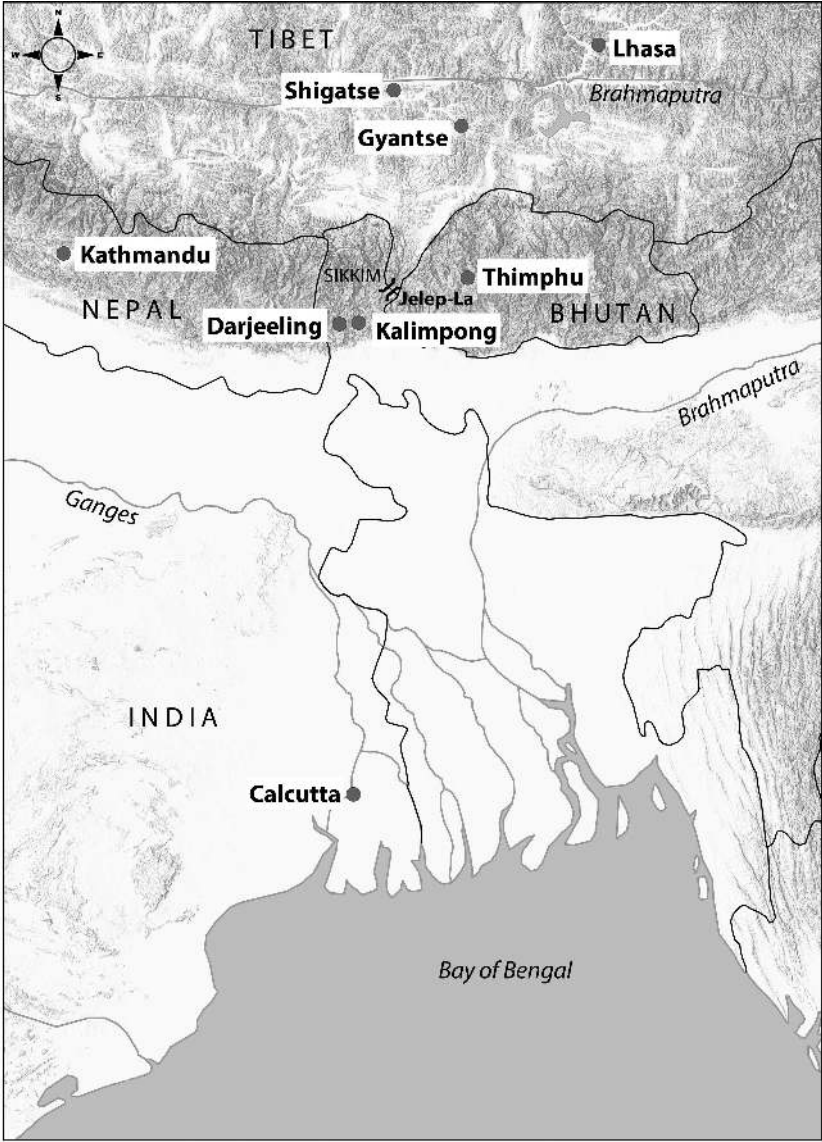
1. There is no discernible difference between the IB files before and after Indian independence.

Abbreviations

ATHR	Ancient Tea Horse Road
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CPPCC	Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CTA	Chinese Trade Agency
GMD	Guomindang, the Chinese Nationalist Party
GNLF	Gorkha National Liberation Front
IB	(Indian) Intelligence Bureau
IOR	India Office Records
JKTS	Jenkhentsisum
LAC	Line of Actual Control
MEP	Missions Etrangeres de Paris
MTAC	Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission
NAI	National Archives of India
NRC	National Register of Citizens
PLA	People’s Liberation Army
PRC	People’s Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
ROI	Republic of India
SAWB	State Archives of West Bengal
SRO	Statutory Rules and Orders
SUMI	Scottish Universities’ Mission Institution
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Note on Translation and Transliteration

In general, we refer to places with the names they had during the time period we are writing about—for example, Kolkata is spelled as ‘Calcutta’; Shangri-La is sometimes ‘Gyalthang’ or ‘Zhongdian’ when necessary, and the differences are explained. When it comes to transliteration of Chinese names, most are in pinyin, with the exception being quotes and references where the names appear as they are in the original sources. All Chinese quotes are presented in translation; however, references to works in Chinese are accompanied by both the transliterations and translations of their titles. With regard to the rendering of Tibetan proper nouns—the names of people, places and certain institutions—we have favoured forms of names that have become well established in English-language works (‘Xizang’, ‘Phuntsog Namgyal’, ‘Lhasa’). All translations from Chinese and Indian languages, unless stated otherwise, are courtesy of Lisa Lindkvist Zhang, Prem Poddar and scholars who were consulted along the way (Lars Lehmann and Jiajie Du Cecilia for some Chinese translations).



Kalimpong’s geostrategic location

Source: Prepared by Michael Brown, Heidelberg.

Note: Map not to scale and does not represent authentic international boundaries.