8. Healing here, there and in-between: a Tamu shaman’s experience of international landscapes

Judith Pettigrew and Yarjung Tamu

Shamans and their clients have been studied almost exclusively within their local environment or at least within their country of origin (see for example, Atkinson (1989); Desjarlais (1994[1992]); Holmberg (1989); Laderman (1991). Although there is a significant literature on shamans who practice in the urban centres of their home country (Balzer 1993; Kendall 1996; Humphrey 1999), a literature on the relationship between shamans and practitioners of other traditions (Mumford 1990; Ortner 1978; Pignède 1993[1966]) and a small number of publications on indigenous shamans who treat their non-indigenous neighbours (Joralemon 1990; Villoldo & Jendresen 1990; Young, Ingram & Swartz 1989) there does not appear to be a literature on shamans who practice transnationally. We do not know what challenges are faced by shamans who provide treatment for people of diverse cultural backgrounds in distant lands. Nor are we aware of the processes through which a local healing practice – which is embedded in a culturally specific belief system and spiritual landscape – is transported across vast distances and used to treat people whose belief system and understanding of the world are totally different.

What happens, for example, when a Nepali shaman joins the Gurkhas, is posted overseas, and is consulted by people of his own and other ethnic groups? How does he negotiate the differences of culture and landscape? At rituals in Hong Kong does he see the spirit world of Nepal or of Hong Kong? What landscapes does he journey over during rituals for people of different nationalities in diverse locations across the globe and how do his ancestors and helping spirits find these distant healing locations? How does he explain culture-specific concepts and practices to people who have no knowledge of them? What ritual use can he make of the flora and fauna of distant places? Can he, for example, metamorphose into an English fox and a Nepali tiger when working in England or can he only take on the characteristics of a Nepali animal in Nepal and an English one in England? Can a Nepali shaman encounter and tame the spirits that inhabit such diverse places as Hong Kong, Brunei, suburban England and rural Ireland?

This paper examines transnational shamanic practice through a dialogue between a Nepali shaman and an anthropologist. Yarjung Tamu is a Tamu pachyu chiba [head pachyu shaman] and ex-Gurkha soldier from western Nepal who currently lives and
works in the United Kingdom. During the last ten years Tamu has collaborated with anthropologists and archaeologists in the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Nepal on a series of projects on Tamu shamanic material culture, ritual and healing, ethno-history and archaeology. Tamu is a founder member of the Tamu Pye Lhu Sangh religious and cultural organisation whose self-appointed mandate is the preservation of shamanic religion and its associated cultural traditions and knowledge. He is one of the few remaining fluent speakers of the Tamu shamanic language Chö Kyui and is presently engaged on a long-term project to computerise his oral chants so that they will be accessible to future generations of Tamu-mai. Judith Pettigrew, who is Tamu’s partner, is an Irish anthropologist. She has undertaken research on shamanic healing, the politics of cultural preservation and ethno-history among the Tamu-mai since 1990 and has collaborated with Tamu since 1991 (Pettigrew & Tamu 1994; 1999; forthcoming).

We approach the question of the transportability of Tamu’s practice by discussing his past experiences of healing in the British Army and contemporary experiences of conducting consultations and rituals in Europe in this paper. In particular, we pay attention to the question of how a shaman adapts to practising in different geographical and spiritual landscapes with people from diverse cultural backgrounds as well as relating this to the anthropology of shamanic healing.

The first section of the paper focuses on Tamu’s experiences of practising as a pachyu in Hong Kong in the late 1970s and 1980s. It describes how it became public knowledge that he was a shaman and the circumstances under which he was permitted to treat soldiers and their families. The paper also pays attention to Tamu’s experiences of working as a regimental first aider, first aid instructor and doctor’s assistant. The overriding focus, however, is the material world of healing. Specifically, we explore the manner in which Tamu negotiated the spirit landscape of healing when based in Hong Kong. These themes are then taken up in a discussion of Tamu’s contemporary practice of shamanism in Europe. Although practical matters currently prohibit Tamu from conducting major healing rituals he frequently conducts consultations and minor rituals. While the main focus of his work outside Nepal is in the United Kingdom, he has also conducted rituals and consultations in Germany, Switzerland, Siberia and Ireland.

INTRODUCTION TO THE NARRATIVE

This narrative is based on a lengthy conversation that took place in English between the authors in the spring of 2001 and was expanded upon during short subsequent conversations. Prior to the original discussion, Pettigrew prepared a list of questions that were added to during the dialogue. As Tamu requested that the conversation not be taped, Pettigrew used a shorthand technique that aimed to record his responses as fully as possible. As the emphasis was on acquiring a detailed rendering of Tamu’s words, the resulting transcript does not have a complete record of Pettigrew’s questions. To facilitate reading, the partial list has been removed from the narrative. The presentation of the narrative in a chronological manner is based on the format
followed in the original conversation; however, the narrative has been subject to considerable editing by Pettigrew. In particular, Tamu's idiosyncratic way of talking has been rendered into standard English in order to avoid the possibility that he be viewed as anything other than an intelligent, articulate man. Italicised comments by Pettigrew, which aim to highlight, clarify or elaborate on specific points, are interspersed with the narrative. In common with Humphrey's comments (1996, 19) concerning her collaboration with Daur Mongol, Urgunge Onon, Tamu's recollections 'during our conversation we were not distanced by the act of thinking them into ... anthropology. That task was for me', [the European anthropologist]. To this end an analytical section written by Pettigrew – which Tamu subsequently read and commented upon – follows the narrative. Responsibility for the content of this section is solely that of Pettigrew as is responsibility for the overall shape of the chapter.

YARJUNG TAMU

I am a Tamu and a member of a shamanic family from the village of Yangjakot in western Nepal. Nowadays I live mainly in the town of Pokhara and also in England. All my male ancestors have been pachyu shamans and many of the women in our family know a lot about the tradition although they do not work as shamans. From the time I was a small child until I was 25 I studied to be a pachyu. Then I decided that I would like to try to join the British Army [Brigade of Gurkhas]. Our family did not have a tradition of joining the Gurkhas and so I was the first to become a soldier.

I did my basic training in Poklihawa [in the south of Nepal]. Pachyu's can't eat pork or buffalo but my gulla [recruiter] told me that as I was now in the army and was going overseas I would leave my gods and goddesses behind in Nepal and I could eat what I liked. I believed him and so I ate the delicious fried meat in the cookhouse. I didn't check what it was – I just ate it. And so sometimes I ate buffalo and pork. One evening after I had eaten pork I became possessed. For three days I shook under a mosquito net in my tent. I could not go on parade. The regimental first aider came to see me but his medicines did not work. Then they brought some local shamans to see me. They did some small rituals and I got a bit better but I did not completely recover. I changed my mind about the army and said to my gulla 'I am a shaman, I pray to lots of gods, maybe my gods don't want me to go into the army. Sorry, but I can't go to Hong Kong.' The gulla gave a report to the Gurkha major [most senior Nepali officer in the Battalion]. He suggested that I write to my father and ask him to try to control the gods and also suggested that I should try Hong Kong. He said that if I became more sick in Hong Kong then I could return to Nepal. My report did not go any further than the Gurkha major. The British officers were not told and so I was able to stay in the army. If they had been told I would probably have been asked to leave immediately, as they would have considered me to be a sick man. Why would they have kept me when there are thousands of fit men wanting to join who did not get a chance?

I wrote to my father and told him that I had made a mistake, had eaten pork and had become possessed and was now ill. I asked him to please make the gods happy.
I told him that if I was not well when I reached Hong Kong I would return to Nepal. I also promised him that I would never again eat polluted food or buffalo or pork. My father immediately did a phai lu ritual [to honour and appease ancestral and protective deities]. After that I left for Hong Kong and when I got there I completely recovered and finished my nine months of training without any problems. Because of that incident people knew that I was a pachyu. As many of them did not know the word pachyu as they did not speak Tamu language they called me a lama [Buddhist priest]. I was called the 1st 2nd ko lama [lama of the 1st 2nd Battalion of the Brigade of Gurkhas].

As the first shaman from his family to join the Gurkhas, Tamu did not have a blueprint for how he should behave as a shaman-soldier (see below for a discussion of shamans in the army). He accepted his recruiter’s comments that his gods and goddesses would remain in Nepal and that by becoming a soldier he had become a different type of person – one who could violate the prohibitions he observed as a shaman. By violating taboos, however, he discovered that this was not so – his deities had accompanied him into the army. Tamu’s request to his father and his father’s ability to control gods at a distance gave Tamu his first experience of ‘long-distance’ shamanising.

### Healing in the Gurkhas: Hong Kong

I did a lot of healing in Hong Kong. I treated people in the evenings in the married quarters. I saw children, women, men, people with all kinds of problems – skin infections, headaches, stomach ache, children with worms, people whose minds had cracked, people who did not want to eat, those who had become possessed. Witches had possessed some of these people and others had become possessed because their ancestral gods were not happy with something they had done.

The first person I treated was my section commander’s wife. She had very bad skin problems. Her skin was irritated, she had many pimples and her body was itching all over. I conducted a ritual for her one evening after work in her home. This ritual included treatment with boiling water and fire. I was able to do the boiling water treatment because I found rudru po, the special plant I needed for that treatment in the jungle. I was quite surprised to find that it grew in Hong Kong. Afterwards I discovered that many plants I needed for healing grew in Hong Kong, but I had to go deep into the jungle to find them. My section commander and his children would not stay in the room when I was doing the fire treatment. He said to me that if I burned his wife it was my responsibility! The ritual was successful and she was cured. She was very pleased as she had been unwell for a long time and although she had seen many doctors she had not been able to find a cure. The family thanked me and after that it became widely known that I was a strong pachyu and could cure people. Lots of people asked to see me.

Many of Tamu’s clients were from other Nepali ethnic groups who have shamanic traditions similar to the Tamu-mai. This does not necessarily mean that they would be knowledgeable of shamanic procedure. Some people consult shamans even though they are highly sceptical or ignorant of their methods. Treatment seeking is usually pragmatic and pluralistic and more
about perceived efficacy than about shared belief or an understanding of techniques. It is
common for clients to consult a range of healers either sequentially or at the same time.

I was not the only shaman in the Gurkhas based in Hong Kong at that time. A few
years later after I had moved to another camp a young shaman arrived and did some
rituals in the camp that I had previously been stationed in. During a ritual he fought
a witch but he didn’t win. He returned to his barracks and told his friends that he lost
a battle with a witch and that the witch had taken his heart. Shortly afterwards he
began to have heart pain and three days later he died in the British Military Hospital.
The witch had swallowed his heart [his ‘heart soul’ which meant that it could not
function properly] and so he couldn’t survive.

Witches are the prime antagonists of shamans and much of the task of a ritual involves
invoking and fighting them. There are actions, objects and clothing that a shaman can use to
protect against a witch attack but many of these forms of protection would be unavailable to a
soldier conducting part-time healing in Hong Kong. Stories about the defeat of shamans are
told by lay people and shamans alike and form part of the discussion concerning the power and
status of practitioners.

There is no literature on shamans who heal in the Gurkhas. Tantu states that at any one
time there are very few shamans in the army and those that are recruited have usually not
completed their apprenticeship. Because of this they are reluctant to practice and when
questioned will often downplay their knowledge. Tantu in contrast was considerably older than
his stated age on recruitment, had completed his training as a pachyus and was prepared to
practice. The topic of shamanic practice in the Gurkhas requires further research. On a recent
fieldtrip to a Gurkha camp in Brunei, I was told of a Tamu klehbi shaman who does not
practice; however, as I was unable to interview him I did not discover why. Klehbris, who are
death specialists and not healers, are less in demand on a day-to-day basis than pachyus and
this may account for his non-practice.

If someone wanted healing, first of all they had to ask permission from the Gurkha
major [GM] in their battalion. If the GM gave permission then it was passed down
through the ranks to me. From the GM the permission was passed to my company
commander. From him it came from the company 2IC [second in charge], and then he
told the platoon commander who told the sergeant who told the corporal who told
me! I would be told that I had to go to such and such a place at a certain time to heal.
If they lived close by then I went to their quarters by foot, if they lived far away I was
taken by Land Rover. The ritual would start about 6 pm and end at midnight. The
Land Rover would come at midnight to collect me and drive me back to my barracks.
Soldiers have to get permission to go to another camp at night and so if I was doing a
ritual in another camp and it was going to go on until late then permission had to be
given by a senior British officer. I don’t know exactly what they were told but they did
give permission and so some of the British officers knew that I was doing healing in
the camps. When I was based in Brunei I was asked directly by a British officer to give
shamanic advice. A friend of mine had got lost in the jungle during exercises.
Everybody thought that an animal had killed him. The British second in charge and a
Nepali officer came to see me and asked me if he was dead or alive. I told them that
he was alive and that the jungle spirits had hidden him. I was right, as after a week he
was found alive. They were surprised but they didn’t give me thanks. I should have had a letter of thanks, but I didn’t get anything.

There appears to be tolerance of Tamu’s healing activities on the part of British officers as he is provided with some institutional support. This support, however, seems to be implicit rather than explicit. On the one occasion when he has an opportunity to openly demonstrate his abilities in the course of his army work and does so, his skills are not given public recognition.

As part of one of my medical training courses I worked in the British Military Hospital in Kowloon for a while. I also worked in the health centre as a doctor’s assistant. This gave me a chance to watch doctors at work. I was interested in their techniques; especially pulse taking. I was surprised, as all they did was listen to the heartbeat. Our system is extremely complicated and difficult to learn. You have to be very sensitive, as there are many different types of pulses. Some of the pulses we take are vibrating and you have to work out the type of vibration, for example, is it a continuous vibration or not. As taking pulses is so difficult we sometimes consult other shamans. This is the same as doctors who talk together about their patient’s problems. We can tell a lot of things from the pulse including whether or not a person has been attacked by a witch or a spirit and if they have or have not lost a soul [soul loss is a major cause of illness. Men are believed to have nine souls and women seven (see below)].

There were other things that I was interested in. I noticed that doctors use lots of painkillers. If a soldier complained of pain they would give him a painkiller but if that didn’t help then they would up the dose. If that did not work they would change the medicine and try another one. This is a bit like our system. For example, if a small ritual does not work then we do a bigger ritual. In both systems the power is upgraded. Often doctors do not seem to know exactly what works but they do not like to send people to other systems. I thought that this was a bit strange as we often send patients to doctors if they have a problem that is not due to spirits. For example, when I was stationed in Brunei I had a knee problem. I went to the doctor and got painkillers but they did not work. Some of my friends had a similar problem and had been treated effectively by acupuncture and so I said to the doctor ‘Sir, can I have acupuncture?’ He replied, ‘No, it is just like a painkiller. You can not have acupuncture.’ I sat there quietly but I felt fed up inside. Six months later I left the army. I took voluntary redundancy.

For Tamu the army experience was riddled with frustrations. By choosing to become a regimental first aider/doctor’s assistant he placed himself in a position where he could make comparisons between his healing tradition and those of biomedicine. Proximity, however, brought disappointment as he discovered that biomedical practitioners were intolerant of other traditions. Thus the lack of status he experienced as an un-promoted soldier was reproduced in the interaction with army doctors.

When I was in Hong Kong the British army doctors told patients they couldn’t cure to go to see their witch doctor. That is how I discovered that they called people like me witch doctors. I do not know if they respected shamans or not but they did tell people to see us if they could not sort out their problems. I healed people from all the
different ethnic groups – Gurungs (Tamu-mai), Rais, Limbus, Newars – all except British people. I did not treat British people because they did not ask me for treatment. I treated Chinese people who worked in the camp but usually I only gave them first aid. Sometimes if I was called to provide first aid and if I saw that there was a spirit problem I would treat that as well. For example, if a person had a headache and the pills didn’t work then I would say a *mantra* [incantation]. I didn’t always tell them what I was doing. There was no need to tell.

While Tamu treated people from different Nepali groups on request and Chinese people with spirit problems covertly, he did not treat British people. This was not only because they did not ask for treatment, but also because, as a first aider, he did not encounter British people with spirit problems. If he had he would have treated them. According to Tamu, British people suffer from spirit problems but as they don’t have a system of rituals to counteract malevolent spirits, they suffer ill health and die unnecessarily from these problems.

I did not have much equipment with me in the army. I only had my *premphu* and my *prumain* [nine sacred Himalayan herbs collected on special days]. *Premphu* are made from the seeds of the *Prem* tree, which are collected, dried and then strung together. They can also be made from the wood of the *Prem* tree. *Premphu* that have been used by a strong shaman are very powerful. My father’s, for example, are especially powerful. *Premphu* have many uses: they are protective, they can provide information about a person’s illness or about the spirit world; they can be used for counting when chanting; they can be placed over a sick person’s body for healing; they can be used to fight spirits or witches. *Premphu* have many other secret uses that I cannot discuss. They are mainly worn around the neck but they can also be placed around the wrist or on top of the *kaidu* rice statues [see below]. In Hong Kong I did not have a drum with me, but I did use *kaidu*. *Kaidu* are rice statues that represent gods or evil spirits. Statues that represent gods are white and they are made out of boiled rice that is moulded by hand. Statues representing evil spirits are brown/black and they are made from boiled millet. As I did not have all my equipment with me, I was not able to do big rituals. Actually I did not need lots of equipment, as I was not asked to do big rituals. I only did small rituals that were not so dangerous. For example, I could not change into an animal to enable me to fight evil spirits, as I did not have the bones or beaks that represent those animals with me.

Nepalis are affected by the same kinds of spirit problems in Hong Kong as they are in Nepal. In Hong Kong there are ghosts, witches, evil spirits, cemeteries [malevolent spirits who reside in cemeteries can cause the living harm]. It is not different. Everywhere the spirit world is the same. The spirits all have the same behaviour and cause problems for people. I healed people with witch problems, spirit problems and so on. In Hong Kong and also in the UK there are many witches. People do not admit that they are a witch but the trouble is there. Other people are witches but do not know it and they give curses without knowing it. Those that know can recognise a shaman. Those that don’t know are from families that used to have a reputation for witchcraft. They cannot help it – giving a curse comes naturally to them. In the past people in the UK knew about witches – you can see this if you visit some of the museums – nowadays people here have half beliefs; their beliefs are mixed up.
Tamu believes that his model of the supernatural world has universal application. To him this is the way the world is and those who do not recognise it as such have either lost the knowledge to appreciate it or they are unaware of it.

When I needed my ancestors during a ritual they came easily. There was no need for a map. In the United Kingdom I use a map [a written list which contains the names of the countries his ancestors have to pass over en route from Nepal to the UK], but actually I can bring them directly. It is just not as easy or as fast for them. With a map they come directly. In some rituals I have to go to Nepal to collect them and in other rituals I call them and they come alone. When I collect them I go physically to get them. I can travel across the world in a second. For example, when I am chanting and say the name of a place then I am in that place. You will see me in front of you playing my drum and chanting, but I am in Nepal. Although the ancestors pass over many lands they do not have problems with bad spirits on the journey. Ancestral spirits are not like humans and they do not get danger from things along the route. I know this because they always arrive okay. Their world is different from ours. Maybe they fight with other spirits or ancestors but we don’t know. Maybe they laugh and joke also!

When I was healing in Hong Kong I did not often have to go on shamanic journeys. It depended on the ritual. If I had to go on a journey that required me to go to Nepal then I went directly there. Hong Kong is close to Nepal so its not very different physically and culturally. I felt that it was the same land so there was no problem. Sometimes I went on journeys to other worlds, for example, to the nine planets called sōku mōku. These are the planets that circle around the earth. They are places where gods and spirits live. So it doesn’t matter if you are in Nepal or Hong Kong or somewhere else as some of the journeys are to completely different worlds.

RITUALS AND CONSULTATIONS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Rituals can be done anywhere. For example, if I do a ritual in Coldhams Lane [Cambridge], I collect the local spirits and call them to the ritual. If I am here I see here, if I am in Afghanistan I see Afghanistan, if I am in Hong Kong I see Hong Kong. You can’t do healing or other rituals without the help of the local sildo naldo [gods of a local area]. If I pray then within a second I can see the local sildo naldo. Wherever I am I can see sildo naldo. Some are powerful and some are not. I have not found any powerful sildo naldo in Cambridge. I do not know why. Maybe there are some, but I haven’t met them yet. In Ely [cathedral city 15 miles from Cambridge] there are powerful sildo naldo. It is a very old place and a good place for them. It is a kind of a base for sildo naldo. I have visited Ely on foot and have also visited it during rituals [while on a shamanic journey]. I feel that there is a special kind of power there.

When necessary I can turn into an animal. If I meet a devil spirit in a ritual I can change into a tiger, lion or a leopard and either fight or run away fast. If I meet a hunting spirit I can change into a vulture and can fly in the sky. I can fly miles up into the sky and look down at the earth. It is very nice. If a different type of spirit attacks I can move into the middle of the sea and they cannot follow me. This is why pachyus
use crystals as they can represent the sea. You cannot change into something unless you have a text [oral chant] to change you. I cannot change into a hare, rabbit or mouse, as I do not have texts for these animals. I do not need them. There are so many animals in the world that it is impossible to have texts for them all. I cannot make up new texts as pachyus only chant the texts that our ancestors created a long time ago. The texts make the objects that represent the animals or the elements come alive. During the early stage of a ritual I chant the texts to get them ready to be used if I need them later on. When I need them I say a mantra. Ordinary people look at me and just see a person, but the spirits do not see a person. To them I look like a tiger or a lion so they get very frightened. The people at the ritual hear my drum rhythm change but they still hear drumming, whereas the spirits hear it another way; they hear the roar of a lion. I can change into a wasp or a bee. Wasps are poisonous and so they are very protective against evil spirits. People in the UK want to get rid of a wasp's nest, as they are worried that they or their children will get stung, but they do not realise the protective role that wasps play against spirits. There is no problem turning into an animal that doesn't exist in the place I am working in as long as I have something that represents that animal like a bone, tooth or feather.

Rituals are accompanied and narrated by the chanting of multi-purpose, often lengthy, ‘oral texts’ (pye). Essentially these texts narrate action — activities cannot occur without first being described. An animal representative cannot become ‘alive’ unless it has previously been chanted ‘alive’. Pye tell of the origins of people, animals, plants, shamanic paraphernalia and sacred substances. Others recall stories of gods, ancestors, famous shamans, shamanic travel, shrines, demons, witches, stars, luck, illness and death. The pye were created by the ancestors and cannot be expanded or updated. The emphasis in ritual chanting is on exact repetition which according to Strickland (1983: 260) experienced Tamu shamans come very close to achieving.

Spirits are all the same, they don’t have ethnicity. Every religion has its own way to call gods and spirits — Muslims, Christians, us, but it’s all the same. The only thing that is different is the way to call. Spirits understand spirit language. They all speak the same language. It is just as easy for me to recognise ghosts in Ireland, where I did a recent consultation, as it is for me to recognise them in Nepal. Ghosts do not like change and the ghosts in the house in Ireland were causing problems as the owners had done renovations and that is when the problems started. Ghosts in Nepal would do exactly the same thing. Although there are different types of spirits, they belong to the same species, just like humans. For example, we do not have tails or three legs and three arms. Spirits have some kind of special society, but I do not think that they have families or clans or a system like that. Actually, I do not know. When we are dead we will know.

The bad spirits never beat the gods: the power is in the words. For example, ‘Amen’. We say ombet. The spirits can’t beat the word. If the shaman does not have powerful words then the evil spirits can beat them. It’s like a lock/unlock system. If you don’t have the key you will be killed. If you are drunk in a ritual the spirits won’t come, you will be vulnerable and could be killed. It is very important to get the words of a chant
right as otherwise you are wasting your time and could even bring danger to yourself. This is why so much time and attention is paid to the way student shamans' chant the texts.

All humans have seven or nine souls. There is the body soul and other souls but they are secret. I know where and how souls leave a person’s body but this is also secret. Witches can steal souls. One of the main reasons that people become ill is because they have lost a soul. Souls can easily leave the body. For example, a soul can leave with a dead person during a funeral or can get lost in water. Children's souls leave particularly easily and spirits that live in water often attract them. If you lose more than half of your souls you become crazy, your brain goes, you become mind cracked [mad]. If you lose all your souls you die.

Tamu's universalist model of the supernatural extends to his model of the body and the mind, the vulnerability of humans and the causes of illness. Just as spirits are cross-culturally similar so are people, their afflictions and their potential to be cured.

I have done lots of rituals in the UK but I find it difficult to work here. It is hard to get the information I need. For example, when I am doing a ritual I need to know where the water source is, who the ancestors of the area are and the name of their original village. This information is important as I need to evaluate the power that exists in the area so that I know what power is available to assist me and what bad spirits I might have to fight. People here don't know these things, or they only know them approximately. I need exact information as otherwise it gets difficult. It's a bit of a cocktail here so it's hard for me to find lost souls. I have most of my equipment with me, which is good. I have my one-sided drum that was made on an auspicious day from the wood of a special tree and is covered with goatskin. I also have a bell and a conch shell. In the past pachyus blew the horn of a deer. Nowadays deer horns are hard to get so most of us use conch shells as they do the same job. The conch shell gives messages to the spirit world. I put power into the sound that the evil spirits can't tolerate: it breaks their ears. All the instruments I use, for example, the drum, bell, cymbals and conch shell have their own role to play but they also work like a team.

An important aspect of conducting a major healing ritual is the presence of colleagues and assistants. Assistants and/or members of the audience play instruments and undertake supporting tasks. Other essential participants are people familiar with trance who can judge if and when it is necessary to assist the pachyus leave an altered state and can provide the necessary assistance. Although Tamu emphasises that he cannot conduct major rituals in the UK as sacrifice is prohibited, the absence of knowledgeable assistants is also a limiting factor.

I have the beaks of several birds with me in England and other things like my porcupine quills, which are my main weapons. They are very powerful and are used for fighting, for protection and also other secret uses. All of these things are in the Museum [Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology]. I have a special arrangement with the curator and I can take out my objects if I need them for a ritual or if I am giving a talk. Most of the rituals I do in the UK are protective rituals for people who are going on long journeys, or people who have bad luck or have had something bad happen to them. I also do astrological consultations, protective rituals
for people who are in dangerous astrological positions and good luck rituals. Sometimes people come to see me because they think they have been cursed or because they want to know if their house is haunted or if they have a spirit problem. I see adults, children and babies. A couple of years ago I was invited to Germany to do a good luck ritual for a friend’s baby.

I do not advertise my healing and most of the people I see in Europe are friends, acquaintances, and friends of friends or people I meet when I give a talk at a university or a museum. I see anybody who asks but mostly those who ask know a bit about shamanism and have respect for it. I can treat people who don’t believe but they don’t usually come. I often give people protective amulets. There are many types of amulets made out of different types of paper on which secret symbols are written on special days. I write the symbols in different types of ink depending on what power I want to put into the amulet. For example, if I want to prevent the spread of a transmitted disease like chicken pox then the amulet must be written with the blood of a monkey. The monkey does not have to be killed; I just need a little of its blood. Amulets can also be written using ink made from herbs, human blood, or ink made from the charcoal of cremated human remains. Amulets can be written on things other than paper including the bark of a special tree or even a piece of a person’s clothing. This is used when someone wants to bring back a husband or wife who has left. If the amulet is worn then the person who has left will return within 15 days.

It is very different working with English people as the culture is different. Nepalis know what questions to ask and what not to ask but English people ask questions all the time! Sometimes I get fed up with all the questions. It is complicated here, as after a ritual, you must not take money out of the house for three days, but people here do not have that idea and they find this very difficult to organise. They ask me if they can withdraw money from the cash machine or if they can take a cheque out! Well, the ancestors cannot answer that question so I have to decide myself. As long as money does not go out of the door I think it is okay but it is hard these days to know exactly what money is. In the past there was no paper money in Nepal, only coins, and so pachyurus told people not to take coins out. Then the paper money came and pachyurus had to tell people not to take paper money out and now there are cheques and cash machines and we have to make decisions about these.

While most Nepalis that Tamu treats have some knowledge of ritual content, and have a similar cultural style regarding question-asking, there is more diversity than might first be apparent. Knowledge of rituals among second and third generation urban-dwellers is limited compared to their parents and grandparents, and interactional styles are changing.

I haven’t done big rituals here but the small ones I have done have been just as successful as those that I do in Nepal. While it is much harder for me to work here, when I overcome the problems I face, the end result is similar. I have done lots of protective rituals for people going to do fieldwork in remote overseas locations and each of these have been successful. A couple of years ago I saw a teenage girl whose mother brought her to see me as she had had a series of bad accidents. She was in a very vulnerable astrological position and I gave her an amulet. Some months later her mother phoned back to let me know that she was well and that her bad luck had
I have seen people who had psychological problems caused by soul loss and in each case I have been able to help them. With problems like depression it takes time and people usually need repeat rituals but immediately after the rituals these people improved. A couple of times I have been asked to do a ritual for a family but the person with the most problems didn’t turn up. In a situation like this it is extremely difficult to find lost souls. It takes extra time, extra work and even then it may not be possible to locate them.

Most Nepalis who consult a shaman have to a greater or lesser extent been enculturated into a ‘shaman-patient interactional model’. They know, for example, that while doctors ask detailed questions about the course of an illness a shaman requires detailed information about the local landscape, deities, ancestors and the local history of habitation. Clients in a shamanic culture also know that they will be party to certain restrictions after the ritual. Most Europeans know none of these things and while they expect to be asked about the nature of their problem and in turn to ask detailed questions concerning the course and prognosis of their complaint they do not expect to be asked to give a reading of the local landscape based on knowledge that they do not have. Neither are they prepared for the post-ritual restrictions. Although Tamu is aware of the cultural differences the success of a ritual depends on knowledgeable and compliant patients, which many of his European clients cannot be: consequently he is frequently frustrated. Clients on the other hand are usually very positive about their consultation, but are often at a loss initially to know what is expected of them and how to behave. They are frequently overly reverential and are surprised by the quick shifts between ritual actions and lively social interaction interspersed with the consumption of alcohol.

**ANTHROPOLOGICAL COMMENTARY: JUDITH PETTIGREW**

Tamu’s narrative addresses a range of themes including: 1) the view of western medicine from a shaman’s perspective; 2) the comparison between biomedical practice and shamanic practice; 3) how expatriate Tamus and Nepalis from other ethnic groups use both systems; 4) the interchangeability of some healing systems versus the incompatibility of others; 5) problems of place and geography in shamanic practice in a mobile society and 6) the adaptation of an ancient healing systems to a modern world. While each of these themes merits attention, analysis in this paper focuses primarily on two central issues: 1) how Tamu adapts to practicing in a different geographical context and with people from different ethnic groups; 2) what this mean in terms of the anthropology of shamanic healing.

Most accounts of shamanism focus on a practitioner healing in their local setting or at least within their country of origin. In contrast, this chapter presents an insider’s account of shamanic practice in a variety of transnational and cross-cultural situations. Tamu discovered as a new recruit that being a soldier did not mean that he was no longer a **pachyu**. His gods and ancestors and, therefore, his shamanic powers, went with him into the army. With the responsibility to attend to his deities and ancestors came the privileges of retaining his ability to practice.

Practising transnationally with people of different cultural backgrounds poses a
Healing here, there and in-between

range of problems. Tamu believes that all landscapes are cosmically the same, however, despite his ability to read the nuances of spirit behaviour in the townscape of Cambridge, Tamu’s ability to successfully conduct rituals is made more difficult by his clients’ lack of information concerning specific aspects of their local landscape. Most urban Europeans cannot accurately provide the required information that includes details such as the local water source and the names of the original inhabitants of the area. The answer that Tamu has been given by clients in Cambridge that ‘the local water source is Anglian Water’ [the local water company] creates a problem that can make a ritual unsuccessful. The onus is then on Tamu to adapt his practice. Although he has the scope to use some alternative approaches it is not possible for him to develop new techniques, as his tradition does not accommodate innovation. As Strickland (1983) points out the aim is exact replication in every ritual. Tamu spent most of his childhood and early adulthood perfecting his techniques in order to attain this goal. Having achieved it he cannot repudiate it. The client’s inability to fulfil the culturally specific patient role and the fact that he cannot innovate has led Tamu to comment on several occasions ‘It is just too difficult to conduct rituals for Europeans.’

This theme of frustration also runs through Tamu’s account of his experiences in the Gurkhas. He enters the army as a head shaman from a famous lineage, yet his leadership skills – an integral part of being a head shaman – are neither recognised nor valued. He remains un-promoted although his acquired skill in biomedicine and his existing skills in shamanic medicine are acknowledged by his clients. As a first aid instructor he should be a corporal but he is denied promotion. This ambivalence in status is mirrored in his encounter with army doctors, which takes place on an unequal footing. He is only permitted to perform healing rituals after hours and outside the officially sanctioned institutions of biomedical healing. Despite his reputation as an expert healer among his own people he is considered by army doctors to be a practitioner of last resort: someone whose skills extend only to treating people labelled as hypochondriacs.

Interestingly, the army appeared to sanction his healing activities by allowing him to visit other camps in the evenings and providing him with transport. There remains, however, ambivalence, as Tamu does not fully know what the British officers who gave permission were told about his activities. His patients, on the other hand, greatly respected his work and rewarded it highly. This went some way towards redressing the disappointments of his encounters with biomedical practitioners and it is why he continued to practice. Tamu considers his healing to be ‘gods’ work’. He cannot refuse to treat those in need. The esteem in which his clients held him, his awareness of his expertise, and his dedication to his profession may have partly redressed the rebuffs of biomedicine but they also created additional frustrations. Ultimately, Tamu could not convert his qualifications as a pachyju nor his successes in the informal arena of night time healing into success in the formal arena of an army career. Despite his abilities and achievements the public acclaim and prestige that accompany promotion were denied him. Frustrated and disappointed, Tamu left the army. In fact his army career was punctuated by attempts to leave but each time he was convinced otherwise by Nepali officers who pointed out the opportunities associated with army service. Finally he opted for voluntary retirement. When he left, Tamu carried with him the
impact of his encounter with army hierarchy, biomedicine and British people, the implications of which continue to play themselves out in his life. In spite of his contemporary professional and personal successes in the UK, which has enabled some of the earlier experiences to be re-worked, the residues are still there and play a role in informing his present-day interactions with British people. He is irritated by his clients primarily because of their cultural ‘ignorance’ but contained within the equation is a deeper antipathy towards British people in general, and the ‘officer class’ in particular, at whose hands he feels he has suffered disrespect, disappointment and humiliation.

The emphasis in this chapter on transnational practice marks a new departure in the study of shamanic healing. By focusing on a shaman working cross-culturally attention is drawn to aspects of shamanic healing that do not usually attract examination such as the universalist nature of the worldview, the manner in which a shaman approaches clients from other cultural backgrounds and the influence of his previous experiences with that culture on his contemporary practice, the impact of ‘ignorant’ patients and the way in which he managed a largely covert practice. Our chapter also addresses issues of power and professional recognition and touches on the difficulties experienced by a shaman undertaking training in another healing tradition that devalues his expertise.

The picture that emerges from this work is complex and contradictory. According to Tamu the cosmos is universal and shamanic practice can be undertaken anywhere. Ritual space can be created as and when necessary, gods and ancestors travel and can be called across vast distances, all people have multiple souls and their astrological constellations can be accessed via Tamu astrological calculations. Numerous gods inhabit the landscape or townscape and demons that are prone to anger can create misfortune for those who live in the locality. Everyone has ancestors – even those that know little about them – who can protect their descendants or react with anger when neglected.

This reading of the English landscape and the bodies of the people who live in it is unproblematic as long as it remains Tamu’s personal worldview. When European clients who do not share this worldview consult him and are required to act within it and cannot, Tamu faces a dilemma. Suffering is universal and it is his responsibility to provide assistance to those who request it. European clients, however, are often unable to adequately fulfil the patient role and this limits his ability to work with them. Tamu’s practice is readily exportable and at the same time deeply rooted in a specific cultural world. By continuing to work transnationally – and by doing so in a manner that is as true as possible to his traditions – Tamu endures what he calls ‘irritations’. He has been frustrated for a long time by foreign systems and has adapted as much as his tradition allows, but there is always an undercurrent of dissatisfaction.

**Orthography**

Most non-English words in this chapter are Chö Kyui (Tamu ritual language) which is an unwritten Tibeto-Burman language with no standard orthography. We have chosen
to use a phonetic approach and render words in their simplest possible spelling. We
have adopted the same approach to the small number of Nepali language words used.

Acknowledgements
We would like to thank the following people who commented on earlier versions of
this chapter: Piers Vitebsky, Chris Evans, Mark Turin, Sandra Rouse, Martin Johnston
and the editors of this volume. We are particularly grateful to Sharon Hepburn for her
insightful comments and for suggesting the title.

Notes
1 There are traditional Chinese doctors and Tibetan doctors working transnationally,
however, little or no academic attention appears to have been paid to their practices. An
interview conducted with a Tibetan doctor based in Spain reveals that the major problems
he faces concerns the difficulties Spanish people have following his dietary prescriptions
and ingesting his herbal medicines (Gerke 2000).
2 ‘Tamu’ is the singular of ‘Tamu-mai’, the ethnonym the people better known as ‘Gurung’
apply to themselves when they speak in their own language, Tamu Kyui.
3 There are two main types of shamans among the Tamu-mai: the pachyu and the klehibri.
Although the belief system, cosmology and linguistic traditions of these shamans are
essentially shared, they perform slightly different functions. The klehibri is primarily, but
not exclusively, a death specialist and in some villages is intimately involved with the
performance of certain calendrical rituals to village and clan deities. The pachyu is an
exorcist, healer and death specialist. Both, but predominantly the pachyu, perform ‘rituals
of affliction’/day-to-day rituals (leh-mai) which are involved with the removal or prevention
of human ‘misery’ (Turner 1967: 9–16). Certain ritual activities overlap and either
practitioner can perform some rites.
4 In the army Tamu acquired numerous qualifications in first aid. These included a series of
regimental first aid training courses at different levels of advancement, a hygiene course
and a first aid instructor’s qualification. When stationed in the medical centre he worked
as a doctor’s assistant.
5 Tamu is not able to conduct major rituals in the United Kingdom as these inevitably
involve animal sacrifice, a practice that it is not legal in the UK.
6 The pje [oral text] tells that in the past women were shamans and at one stage a woman
saved the tradition from extinction.
7 In 1993 Tamu was awarded a small grant to bring a collection of Tamu shamanistic
materials to the museum. For a discussion of this project see Herle (1994: 2–5).
8 Tamu’s discharge certificate from the army states explicitly that he was unlucky not to be
promoted. While he may not have had the necessary networks to facilitate promotion –
and by his own admission had a reputation for being outspoken – clearly some of his
senior officers recognised his leadership abilities. For whatever reason recognition did not
materialise into reality and Tamu left the army deeply disappointed by the experience.
9 Although Tamu did not ask for payment, and was reluctant to accept it, his clients insisted
and often paid him highly.
Bibliography


Young, D., C. Ingram and Swartz, L. 1989 Cry of the eagle: encounters with a Cree healer, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.