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Tourism and sacred landscape in Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) National Park, Nepal

Main Theme

The main idea of the study conducted by Yang Mu, Sanjay K. Nepal, and Po-Hsin Lai is to explore the effects of tourism on sacred places and the spiritual values that locals attribute to them. The study focuses on Nepal's Khumbu Region, examining how trekking tourism has impacted the sacred landscape and the place-based spiritual values that Sherpas hold towards Sagarmatha National Park. The Sherpas believe that multiple deities and demons inhabit the caves, mountains, and forests. Every Sherpa village places sacred value on certain peaks, rivers, and valleys. Since becoming a world-renowned trekking destination, the local economy and society have undergone significant changes, providing a solid setting for the study to examine how tourism has impacted the Sherpas' spiritual values and religious practices.

Approach and Evidence

The study employs qualitative methods to investigate the impact of tourism on sacred landscapes and how locals perceive them. The paper is based on data and information they collected during two visits in 2014. During the first visit, observations were made of the geography and human contexts, main settlements, and the dynamic trekking industry. During their second visit, they performed 33 in-depth interviews in 11 villages. The interview questions

focused on the perspective on how tourism has influenced daily life, religious practices, and the perceptions of the sacredness of Beyul under the influence of tourism and globalization. The Author states that while residents perceive trekking tourism as more beneficial than harmful to their lives, tourism has influenced local spiritual values and Sherpas' perspectives of various elements of the sacred landscape. One piece of evidence the Authors use to support this claim can be seen in their participation in religious practices and activities. The authors state, "As revenue generated from tourism-related business has become a major source of income, Sherpa participation in religious practices and activities has continued to decline (451)".

Another point the authors use to support their stance is the relationship between the Sherpas and the landscape. Traditionally strong religious beliefs and place-based spiritual values regulated the locals' use of the land's natural resources. Today, the natural and cultural landscape is seen as a product to be sold. The authors also use interviews to support their claims. During an interview, the interviewee said, " Everything is changing, what can you do about it? Change is the only thing that wouldn't change! ... To me, Khumbu is indeed becoming less sacred because people are less religious ... As long as people have good hearts and respect the Buddha, and keep helping each other, gods will keep protecting us. I don't think there's a problem (453)".

Critical Analysis

I agree with the claim made by the authors. After reading the article, tourism has definitely affected local spiritual values and perceptions of sacred landscapes. While tourism has impacted the locals' spiritual values, I cannot say whether it's good or bad. A passage from the article that caught my attention is located on page 453. During the interview, the interviewee said, " Everything is changing, what can you do about it? Change is the only thing that wouldn't change! ... To me, Khumbu is indeed becoming less sacred because people are less religious ...

As long as people have good hearts and respect the Buddha, and keep helping each other, gods will keep protecting us. I don't think there's a problem (453)". The reason this captured my attention is that I fully agree with him. While I may not follow the same branch of Buddhism as them, I still believe that change is inevitable, no matter how hard one tries to resist or fight it; change will still happen. If you examine the course of any religion, you will see that the way it is practiced and followed has changed over time. I believe the only thing you can do is try to instill the core values of your religion into the younger generation and hope that they follow them. While it is sad that Lama Geshe feels like Khumbu is becoming less sacred, I think he has it right with focusing on the people and wanting them to have good in their hearts.

Role of the Sacred

The article states that a sacred landscape encompasses tangible geographical features, cultural establishments, and intangible spiritual elements, such as rituals and practices, because they reflect the local people's religious worldviews and cultural identity. When discussing the role that Sagarmatha National Park plays in the article, it is not only a sacred landscape but also a provider. The reason it is seen as sacred is that the Sherpas believe the valley was created by the Buddhist saint Guru Rinpoche. I call it a provider because, for centuries, the Sherpas could sustain their livelihood through herding, farming, and trade. Now, with the growth in mountain trekking, the mountain also supplies an economic boost. The way the article describes what makes a land sacred is similar to Bender's concept of "*Making Places Sacred*." They both argue that what makes a land holy or sacred is how the people perceive it, and the acts or rituals they perform imbue the land with power, making it sacred.