



# An anthropological equivoque. Researchers' engagement and knowledge production (Comment on "Coproducting efficacious medicines")

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# Coproducing Efficacious Medicines

## Collaborative Event Ethnography with Himalayan and Tibetan Sowa Rigpa Practitioners

by Calum Blaikie, Sienna Craig, Barbara Gerke, and Theresia Hofer

CA+ Online-Only Material: Supplement A

This article emerges from a workshop titled “Producing Efficacious Medicine: Quality, Potency, Lineage, and Critically Endangered Knowledge,” held in Kathmandu, Nepal, in December 2011. An experiment in collaborative event ethnography (CEE), this workshop brought together Tibetan medicine practitioners (*amchi*) from India, Nepal, and Tibetan regions of the People’s Republic of China, with anthropologists who have been working with *amchi* for decades. This workshop focused on practitioners who still compound and prescribe their own medicines, in an era when such practitioners are declining in number due to rapid commoditization of Tibetan medicines, shifts toward standardized mass production, institution-based education, and the implementation of pharmaceutical governance regimes derived from biomedicine. The workshop aimed to encourage knowledge exchange between diverse practitioners and generate new, collective, and more nuanced anthropological knowledge about Sowa Rigpa epistemology, history, theory, and practice. Our method of choice was collaborative event ethnography formulated as a *workshop* in the most literal sense of the word: a space where artisanal forms of praxis were honored and where material things—medicines—were collectively made. This article discusses how this CEE experience departs at the level of scope, structure, and implications from other collaborative, event-based ethnographic practice described in the anthropological literature.

Today, the quality of medicines has declined and our medicinal herbs are being depleted due to the massive increase in demand arising from development [of a Tibetan medicine industry], where short-term profit is reaped at the expense of the future. If we don’t take better care now, there will be great problems ahead. . . . When I was small, we had a little bit of even some very rare species, but at this current rate of “development” we’ll be out of ingredients in twenty years. Our Tibetan Sowa Rigpa [science of healing] is like a precious jewel. It needs

protection. . . . If we don’t pay attention now, future generations will blame us.

—Gen Wangdu, senior practitioner from Lhasa’s Tibetan Medical College

A meaningful convergence of methodologically sound, critical, reflexive, and engaged anthropology . . . will free us up to focus on differences that actually do matter in the real world: the compelling divides that separate those who have from those who do not, those who are honored from those who are stigmatized, those wielding disproportionate power from those with limited agency and voice, and those who are central from those who are marginalized.

—Rylko-Bauer, Singer, and van Willigen (2006:187)

Thick monastery-style meditation cushions were placed in a large circle, enabling 40 practitioners of Sowa Rigpa (*gso ba rig pa*)<sup>1</sup> and four anthropologists to see and listen to each other. The words of Gen Wangdu that open this article signaled the start of an 8-day workshop entitled “Producing Efficacious Medicine: Quality, Potency, Lineage, and Critically

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1. Tibetan terms in this article are phoneticized following Germano and Tournadre (2003).

Endangered Knowledge,” which took place in Kathmandu, Nepal, in December 2011. An experiment in collaborative event ethnography (CEE), this workshop brought together *amchi*, as Sowa Rigpa practitioners are called, from Ladakh in India, northern Nepal, and several Tibetan regions of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), with US and European anthropologists who have been working with *amchi* for decades. Our imperative, as the second quote above suggests, was to use anthropology in ways that would benefit those whose positions are compromised by politics and whose voices are silenced by geographic or social marginalization. Through this process, we hoped to encourage connections and knowledge exchange between diverse practitioners from across Tibetan cultural worlds, and also generate new, collective, and more nuanced forms of anthropological knowledge about Sowa Rigpa epistemology, history, theory, and practice. As such, our method of choice was collaborative ethnography formulated as a *workshop* in the most literal sense of the word: a space where artisanal forms of praxis would be honored and where material things—medicines—would be collectively made.

Specifically, our motivation was to bring a diverse group of *amchi* together who not only belong to specific lineages of practice, but who also still compound and prescribe their own medicines. The workshop aimed to engage these individuals’ knowledge and skill, most of whom practice Sowa Rigpa in remote communities with limited access to biomedical health care. Such practitioners are declining in number across the region in an era marked by rapid commoditization of Tibetan medicines, shifts toward standardized mass production, and the implementation of pharmaceutical governance regimes derived from biomedicine (Adams, Dhondup, and Le 2010; Craig 2012; Kloos 2010; Saxer 2013). The idea for this workshop emerged from discussions between two of us four anthropologists and several *amchi* gathered for the International Congress on Traditional Asian Medicines (ICTAM-VII) in Bhutan in September 2009.<sup>2</sup> After more than 2 years of planning, we finally convened at Shechen Monastery, beside the great Buddhist *stupa* of Boudhnath.

Between the meeting in Bhutan and the workshop in Kathmandu, CEE emerged as a specific, if still nascent, ethnographic method developed in response to the growing importance of international meetings in shaping many of the social, political, and economic phenomena with which anthropologists are concerned (Brosius and Campbell 2010). Scholars from environmental anthropology, political ecology, and critical cultural geography circles recognized the need to think systematically about how best to study such events in

ways that acknowledged their legitimacy as spaces for anthropological analysis and, specifically, as components of multisited ethnography in the tradition first outlined by Marcus (1995) and Gupta and Ferguson (1997). CEE also emerged at a moment in the discipline’s history when long-standing discussions about applied, engaged, public, and practicing anthropology, as well as action research and collaborative ethnography, seem to have reached an apex. We knew that our experiment in CEE would differ significantly from the work of those who had first developed it for use in large-scale, global forums. Our event was to take place primarily in Tibetan languages, in a relatively peripheral location, and involving practitioners who were, by and large, not the “elites” of their tradition. Nevertheless, we were convinced that approaching this workshop as an occasion for CEE would yield fruitful results. In reflecting on the event through this article, we contribute to theorizing the coproduction of knowledge within these contemporary currents of anthropological praxis.

In order to reach Kathmandu, some of the *amchi* had traveled overland from cities in Tibetan regions of the PRC, via Lhasa. Others had descended from the mountains of Nepal by foot and road, or traveled from Ladakh by airplane and bus, via New Delhi. They ranged in age from students in their mid-twenties to senior physicians in their mid-eighties, and included people practicing under a variety of socioeconomic and institutional conditions. Although only one female practitioner attended the workshop, the place of women in Sowa Rigpa was a recurring point of discussion.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the event, many *amchi* commented on the unique opportunity it offered for such a diverse group to assemble. This diversity—despite its gender imbalance—was central to the productive dynamics of the workshop.

Given the nature of documenting complex events that occur in distilled time periods, CEE requires multiple forms of inquiry and a team of data collectors. Our approach drew from conventional anthropological praxis as well as action research and collaborative inquiry (Greenwood and Levin 2006; Reason 2006). The specific methods we used included not only “traditional” forms of participant-observation and interview, but also collaborative pre- and post-workshop conversations with different stakeholders, including the leadership of the Kathmandu-based Himalayan Amchi Association (HAA), with whom we co-organized this event. Our core methodologies, though, emerged from the tactile, sensory work of making medicines: consulting pharmacological texts, sharing life histories and oral pharmacological knowledge, shopping for and preparing raw materials, and performing Buddhist rituals. We also engaged selectively with local media, liaised with representatives of the Nepali government, and made extensive use of audio, video, and still photogra-

2. This congress was organized by the International Association for the Study of Traditional Asian Medicine (IASTAM), which also co-sponsored the workshop in Kathmandu. IASTAM’s objective is to create a platform of knowledge exchange for both academics and practitioners, <http://iastam.org>.

3. On issues of women and gender in Tibetan medicine, see the special issue edited by Fjeld and Hofer (2010, 2010–2011), and their introduction (Fjeld and Hofer 2010, 2010–2011).

phy to document and iteratively reflect on the workshop. At the end of each day, we anthropologists gathered at a rooftop café (called “Paradise” no less) overlooking the Boudhanath *stupa* where we shared notes, debated translational issues, challenged each other’s interpretations of social dynamics, and discussed our strategies for the coming day. In these recorded sessions, we produced summaries and interactive analyses of the much longer workshop audio and video recordings, illustrating conceptual and practical strengths of CEE.

The workshop had two related but distinct aims: to provide a space in which practitioners from different regions and backgrounds could share knowledge and experiences within a larger geopolitical context that often prohibits such exchange, and to advance anthropological research on Sowa Rigpa. This required us to be attuned to the ethical and practical challenges behind the ideal of sharing knowledge and skills, and to address differing expectations about the workshop and what might emerge from it—including questions about what constitutes a “useful” outcome. We strove for balance between *amchi* wishes to secure a viable future for Sowa Rigpa and improve their medical practice, and our wishes as researchers to better understand these practices in a period of flux. This distinction was neatly summed up by a Ladakhi *amchi*, who said: “It is good that Westerners are interested in our medicine and want to learn about it. You can talk and write about these things easily, but we *amchi* have people’s lives depending on us every day. We must understand very well, because we cannot make mistakes.” The stakes were—and remain—different for practitioners of Sowa Rigpa and practitioners of anthropology. Yet, the motivations that drew us together represent dual (if not always shared) understandings that social research can be used not only to describe and analyze but also to create and validate forms of knowledge that may, in turn, lead to positive social change (Greenwood and Levin 2006; Rylko-Bauer, Singer, and van Willigen 2006). At the very least, we hoped the workshop would lead to more refined articulations of the social, ecological, political, and economic transformations facing Sowa Rigpa in contemporary Asia, and a greater sense of shared endeavor among practitioners.

In the following section we locate this workshop within disciplinary discussions about collaborative work, specifically event-based ethnographic practice. Then, we take the reader through each of the 8 days of the workshop, using this chronology to highlight our engagements with core anthropological questions that emerge from, or are conditioned by, these three terms: *collaborative*, *event*, and *ethnography*. This includes discussions of “the field” as it emerges through event-based practice, group dynamics and the politics of participation, embodied skill, and bearing witness to public and private performances that confer authority, legitimacy, and efficacy—at once social and medical. We conclude by reflecting on the benefits and constraints of CEE, as we experienced them.

## Collaborative Event Ethnography: Scale, Structure, and Implications of Engagement

In reviewing the extensive literature on engaged, public, and practicing anthropology as well as collaborative ethnography,<sup>4</sup> we recognize its emergence from older debates within the discipline about the politics of “applied” anthropology and from postcolonial contexts that emphasize histories of violence, political inequality, and socioeconomic marginalization. While some of this scholarship focuses on ethics, human rights, indigenous knowledge, and the work of decolonizing the social sciences (Smith 2012), other authors critically examine dynamics between anthropology and development (Kothari 2005; Mosse 2005). These diverse approaches each question how anthropology as a discipline, and anthropologists as people, can bring practice to bear on theory while creatively challenging privileged positions within the politics of knowledge production. Such work has informed our own training and sense of professional responsibility. It also provides the theoretical and methodological grounding for our CEE efforts. We agree with Kamari Clarke’s (2010:311) argument that there is no single definition of “engaged anthropology” because its specific meanings are always shaped by context. Likewise, we appreciate Eric Lassiter’s reminder that even as “public anthropology” has become a popular way of referencing anthropological relevance, public engagement, and action, such calls are in some sense “out of touch with contemporary practice” (cf. Field and Fox 2007) because “the contemporary work conditions of anthropology require an ever expanding range of conceptual and practical expertise” (Lassiter 2008:72). We take inspiration from Lassiter’s strategies for collaborative ethnography (2005a, 2005b), including his emphasis on reframing ethnographic research away from bounded relationships with informants toward dynamic interactions with consultants. However, we did not locate any studies that delved into the specifics of doing collaborative event ethnography of the kind we describe herein.

When J. Peter Brosius and Lisa M. Campbell (2010) coined the term “collaborative event ethnography,” they attempted to capture the globalizing social context in which conservation policies are formulated and deployed. Their framing article emerged from fieldwork conducted by 22 researchers over 13 days at the 2008 Fourth World Conservation Congress, hosted by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in Barcelona. The paper highlights a “need to focus our attention on a set of actors not normally considered in assessments of ‘the social context’ of conservation: conservation organizations, donors and others who are instrumental in designing and promoting various conservation paradigms, policies, and practices” (Brosius and Campbell 2010:2). We have found this work intellectually inspiring and methodo-

4. Baer 2012; Foley and Valenzeula 2005; Kirsch 2010; Lamphere 2003, 2004; Lassiter 2005a, 2005b, 2008; Lawless 2000; Low and Merry 2010; MacDonald 2010; Mullins 2011.



logically productive, particularly in the way it describes the messiness of collaboration and enables analysis of how institutions and socioeconomic networks shape discourse and practice across different scales. That said, several crucial parameters of our workshop expand on what CEE has to offer anthropology. We frame these differences in terms of scale, structure, and implications, theorizing them here before returning to them throughout the article in reference to specific ethnographic moments during the Kathmandu event.

### Scale

Initially, CEE offered a productive way of “studying up” (Nader 2001)—doing ethnography of elite networks and institutions in the context of large meetings, in spaces where a great deal of “insider knowledge” is circulating that is not readily apparent or accessible to “outsider” anthropologists, particularly when working alone. To that end, all the CEE-related literature we located emerged from high-profile gatherings such as international film festivals or large INGO meetings, reflecting ethnography at a rather impressive scale. In contrast, we applied the methodology to a much smaller and arguably more “peripheral” event. Indeed, our workshop conjoined anthropologists with medical practitioners who are marginalized to differing degrees, not only within the nation-states from which they hail but also at the level of regional or global acknowledgment of their practice. Consider these examples: Sowa Rigpa is not officially recognized by the Government of Nepal or supported by the Ministry of Health and Population, although Ayurveda and even Chinese medicine are granted such status. In both India and the PRC, Sowa Rigpa is recognized but is subject to distinct forms of social, political, legislative, and even pharmacological pressures by virtue of its position as emerging from a politically sensitive “minority nationality” in the PRC and from communities designated either as “scheduled tribe” status in the case of Ladakhis or, in the case of exile Tibetans, without formal Indian citizenship or even official “refugee” status. In sum, Sowa Rigpa occupies a marginal position when compared with other scholarly Asian medicines.

Brosius and his colleagues navigated spaces of global agenda setting around what might be dubbed “universalist” forms of knowledge related to conservation. In contrast, we gathered in one small meditation hall and dove deeply into highly contextual knowledge about Sowa Rigpa *materia medica*. Even so, as in Barcelona, both *amchi* and anthropologists experienced what Anna Tsing (2004) so aptly dubs the “friction” that emerges when global, national, and local discourses and practices of development, conservation, and social change intersect. Recall that Gen Wangdu’s core message at the start of the workshop referenced some of the very dynamics that organizations like the IUCN seek to address: concerns over the loss of biodiversity and cultural knowledge in the face of development, including the impact of extractive industries on the viability of distinct social ecologies, as

well as a moral responsibility for addressing such issues. We believe CEE has the capacity to productively explore these areas of congruence and friction as they emerge at different scales.

### Structure

The Kathmandu workshop departs most radically from other CEE events when it comes to structure. Unlike global IUCN meetings, our workshop was a coproduction from start to finish. Putting it all together demanded fund-raising, networking, and consensus building across languages, time zones, organizational modes, and epistemologies—processes that in themselves generated new forms of ethnographic data. The goals of practicing collaborative ethnography and coproducing both tangible and intangible things—shared knowledge and actual medicines—required that we be intellectually nimble and flexible. However, when it came to structuring the event itself and moving through each day of the workshop, anthropologists and *amchi* worked together in ways that were quite distinct from the team of ethnographers deployed in Barcelona and, we believe, distinct from any other account of CEE in the literature.

Whereas Brosius and other event ethnographers employed rather orthodox anthropological positions—participant-observation and interviews in the context of an event over which they had no organizing control, albeit in changed conceptualizations of “the field”—we were intimately involved in creating the conditions for this workshop to occur. From Skype-based planning calls to the political act of crafting invitation letters such that our Tibetan colleagues from the PRC would be granted passports and visas to attend, to raising the funds for the workshop itself, we engaged from consciously situated positions. Despite these organizing and facilitating roles, we did little to orchestrate the actual unfolding of day-to-day activities once the workshop was underway. This meant that we needed to be constantly analyzing our motivations and adjusting our actions in relation to both the *amchi* and each other. As was the case with the Barcelona event, we organized nightly “check in” sessions, but instead of trying to bring together insights from a large and disparate conference, we spoke about specific micro-events, body language, questions of translation, and points of confusion occurring within much smaller—yet still highly complex—groupings and conversations.

The structure of the Kathmandu workshop also differed profoundly in terms of the languages used and the daily activities in which we engaged. Instead of working in what could be deemed a globally hegemonic language (English), we spoke in Tibetan, which is inclusive of many regional dialects. *Amchi* worked hard to create spaces for mutual intelligibility, aided by the fact that most were literate in classical Tibetan, sharing linguistic competencies that enabled them to read the same texts, which they often did sitting side by side. That most of the work was happening primarily in Tibetan also

raised new and distinct challenges. Each anthropologist has a working command of Tibetan and could communicate directly with the *amchi*, albeit to varying degrees. Although other languages—Nepali, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, English, and German—filtered in through the edges of our discussions, the fact that all participants shared, at some level, a common language, meant we were unburdened by the cumbersome work of simultaneous or staged translation that, if not precluding participation altogether, would be a necessity were such *amchi* to participate in most international workshops or conferences. Yet, grasping for mutual intelligibility and listening carefully across dialects demanded new forms of work. Just because we were not relying on English (or Hindi or Chinese) did not mean that communication was somehow devoid of power dynamics or fully “decolonized.” It shifted registers of power and authority, but created the need for other translational practices. As one *amchi* from Nepal put it, “With each passing day our language becomes closer.” We argue this was true not only for the *amchi* in conversation with one another across Tibetan dialects of Ladakh, Amdo, Lhasa, and the Nepal Himalayas, but also for the anthropologists and between these two constituencies.

Finally, with respect to structure, instead of replicating professional meetings that tend to be primarily “cerebral” (discussing around a table, watching PowerPoint presentations, listening to papers), this workshop was as much about doing as it was about talking: examining medicinal ingredients, going to herb markets, cleaning and grinding medicines, poring over pharmacological compendia, tasting finished medicines, and performing Buddhist rituals. The practical nature of the workshop as compared to the discursive focus of other CEE work pushes the boundaries of what Lassiter (2005a, 2005b) has called for, in great part by shifting emphasis away from the end goal of producing collaborative writing (which we have also done) toward greater collaboration in the conceptualization, content, daily activities, and analysis of the workshop itself. While this approach is theoretically included in Lassiter’s broad definition of “collaborative ethnography” (2005b:16; 2008:74), the most striking way it differed is through its explicit focus on practice, on coproducing medicines and taking seriously embodied skills and lived experiences. This reminded us that the techniques of pharmacy are also “techniques of the body” (Mauss 1973) and are deeply embedded in “currents of sociality” (Ingold 1993:158). That said, these structures gave rise to productive and at times difficult points of cross-cultural difference with respect to what we call below the “horizontal” and “vertical” modes of interaction that permeated the workshop: from where people sat to who got to speak when.

### Implications

As with most forms of engaged anthropology, the implications of CEE are, at some level, political. Stuart Kirsch writes: “Engaged Anthropology. Anthropology as advocacy.

Ethnography-as-activism. Collaborative Anthropology. Militant anthropology. Public anthropology. Despite their differences, all of these projects share a commitment to mobilizing anthropology for constructive interventions into politics” (2010:69). In doing CEE at a major IUCN gathering, Brosius and colleagues positioned themselves as ethnographers in ways most conducive to analyzing networks of knowledge and power, and forms of decision making that have impacts far beyond such meetings, such as in Borneo, where Brosius has worked for decades. At the same time, they also intervened in, learned from, and in the process changed the dynamics of such meetings in ways that pushed them, as ethnographers, to be more collaborative. In Kirsch’s case, earlier ethnography in Papua New Guinea that emphasized indigenous analysis of social and environmental relations and processes (Kirsch 2006) has led to new work (2014) that considers ethnography-as-activism. Through alliances with indigenous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and his role in legal battles, he engages with the politics of capitalism, specifically global mining industries. In both of these instances, the political implications of CEE and other forms of engaged ethnography remain deeply connected to local and regional politics, but are more fully articulated in relation to the global repositioning of anthropology.

In Kathmandu, the scale and structure of the workshop had political implications with respect to how individuals and communities of practitioners relate to each other. Based on our ethnographic experiences over the past decade and in consultation with the HAA and Tibetan colleagues in the PRC, we decided not to invite *amchi* associated with the preeminent Sowa Rigpa institution in India, the Men-Tsee-Khang. We agreed that inviting practitioners from this Tibetan-exile-run institution could create obstacles for the workshop, both interpersonal and geopolitical. Certain kinds of theoretical rigor and institutional authority are highly valued at Men-Tsee-Khang (Blaikie 2011, 2014; Craig 2012; Kloos 2010). Several of us had previously witnessed interactions between rural, lineage-trained *amchi* who still produce their own medicines and Men-Tsee-Khang doctors in which the former’s knowledge and experiences had been belittled or devalued by the latter. The gathering did include one physician who had trained at Men-Tsee-Khang, but who lives and practices privately in Ladakh. We recognize that exile-Tibetan medical practitioners in India constitute a much larger and more diverse group than that which is represented through Men-Tsee-Khang, and that the attitude of the Men-Tsee-Khang does not necessarily equal the attitudes or experiences of individual exile-Tibetan *amchi*. We might have included more such practitioners, were it not for the following issue. We knew that inviting exile Tibetans, especially those affiliated with the Men-Tsee-Khang, could place at risk those Tibetan physicians invited from the PRC, and might even curtail their ability to participate altogether given the intensity of PRC state surveillance of Tibetan citizens and their relations to exiles.

These practices of exclusion were, at some level, a paradoxical position from which to commence an event aiming to share knowledge and explore regional connections. However, in drawing up the roster of invitees we chose to privilege those individuals who by virtue of their geographies of home, their socioeconomic circumstances, their language abilities, or the net of politics in which they were caught up would otherwise not have any opportunity to meet each other or participate in international gatherings. We (mostly but not exclusively the anthropologists) judged that exile-Tibetan doctors living in India have greater possibilities for speaking with each other and, to a certain extent, with practitioners from Nepal and Ladakh, than do their colleagues from Tibetan areas of the PRC. To that end, we did invite two practitioners whose primary employment rests within pharmacology and sourcing divisions of a large Sowa Rigpa institution in Qinghai Province, PRC, but who also hail from family-based medical lineages. We made these decisions with an eye toward the core intellectual purposes of this workshop: namely exploring the links between practicing and producing one's own medicines.

Although the workshop was entirely without political motivation vis-à-vis the "Tibet issue," it occurred within a context of heightened political sensitivity regarding the place of Tibetans in Nepal.<sup>5</sup> Prior to the workshop, the HAA leadership was required to visit the chief district officer of Kathmandu to explain the nature of the event and testify that it was nonpolitical. Even so, Nepali police officers came to the workshop seeking (and gaining) assurance that the assembled Tibetans were not fomenting Tibetan nationalist sentiment. Throughout the workshop, however, *amchi* and anthropologists remained deeply aware not only of geopolitical machinations but also of the profound impacts that modernization, development, commoditization, climate change, and shifts in the modes of intergenerational knowledge transmission are having on the possibilities for producing efficacious medicines, now and into the future. This awareness has had a significant bearing upon how we have come to understand our role as ethnographers of Sowa Rigpa specifically, and Tibetan and Himalayan communities more broadly. This, in turn, holds implications for the various outcomes of this workshop, only one of which comes in the form of academic articles.<sup>6</sup>

5. See [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/02/world/asia/rights-group-documents-repression-of-tibetans-in-nepal.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/02/world/asia/rights-group-documents-repression-of-tibetans-in-nepal.html?_r=0); and [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/14/world/asia/china-makes-inroads-in-nepal-stemming-tibetan-presence.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/14/world/asia/china-makes-inroads-in-nepal-stemming-tibetan-presence.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0) for press coverage of these issues.

6. Other outcomes of this workshop have included: a short documentary video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6nzpofRuePE>); a trilingual (English, Chinese, Tibetan) newsletter publication (<http://www.trace.org/news/producing-efficacious-medicines-small-scale#.U1vhtccaA2I>); several Nepali press articles; a presentation at Martin Chautari, a Nepali research and social activism collective; and an op-ed written to the former prime minister of Nepal, Baburam Bhattarai.

### Recognizing Positions, Setting Parameters

Choosing a CEE approach required that we anthropologists address the ways our backgrounds and preexisting relationships would shape the dynamics of the workshop. Unlike other CEE events, we needed not only to position ourselves in relation to each other and devise strategies for collecting ethnographic data together, but also to consider our individual connections to our *amchi* interlocutors and their relations with each other. The workshop also included one non-*amchi* facilitator from Ladakh and another from the Tibet Autonomous Region, PRC, who provided invaluable perspective, facilitation, and translation assistance from positions that were distinct from both *amchi* and anthropologists.

The HAA includes practitioners from districts across northern Nepal, but is dominated by doctors from Mustang and Dolpa districts. While it has lobbied for more than a decade to increase the support and recognition for Sowa Rigpa in Nepal, the HAA is a somewhat fluid group of people, each with their own familial and regional interests (Craig 2007, 2012). Many of the doctors gathered had vied with each other for power over this organization for much of the past decade (Craig 2013). The Ladakhi delegation included several practitioners deeply involved in Sowa Rigpa development activities, some practicing alone in urban or rural areas, and others who are critical of the medical professionalization and industrialization taking place in the region. The group itself thus reflected the breadth of viewpoints and the tension characterizing this medical tradition (Pordié 2008b), particularly as it enters a phase of intense transformation from borderline illegal to state endorsed, following the official recognition granted to it by the Government of India in 2010 (Blaikie 2013, 2014). While several of the Tibetan representatives work within specific organizations and institutions of Sowa Rigpa, some came representing themselves or the small private clinics and pharmacies they oversee. Although in the PRC Sowa Rigpa is recognized and supported by the state—often presented as "China's Tibetan Medicine" and part of the framework for minority nationality/ethnic medicines (*minzu yiyao*)—this recognition is double-edged. It at once pushes the possibilities for the "development" of Sowa Rigpa and "culturally appropriate" health care in Tibetan regions and makes Sowa Rigpa accountable to both Chinese biomedicine and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) through policy and practice (Craig 2012; Hofer 2008, 2011, 2012).

As for us anthropologists, we each had regional connections that not only shaped our individual ethnographic contributions but that also situated us vis-à-vis the *amchi* in distinct ways. Calum Blaikie has worked for over a decade with Ladakhi *amchi*, both as an anthropologist and as a member of the research-oriented nongovernmental organization Nomad RSI.<sup>7</sup> Theresia Hofer's doctoral research with *amchi* from Tsang, central Tibet; her involvement in the 2009 Bhu-

7. <http://www.nomadrsi.org>.

tan conference; and her current curatorial role in a major exhibition on Sowa Rigpa at the Rubin Museum of Art in New York<sup>8</sup> meant that many of the *amchi* were aware of her scholarly work and organizational skill, even if they did not know her well. Sienna Craig's 20 years of work with *amchi* from Mustang, Nepal; her long-term involvement with the HAA;<sup>9</sup> connections made during her PhD research in Lhasa; and her more recent work with the Arura Tibetan Medical Group in Qinghai Province, PRC,<sup>10</sup> meant that she knew most of the *amchi* from Nepal well and several from the PRC also. Although Barbara Gerke did not know many of these individuals prior to the event, more than 20 years spent working on Tibetan medical texts and contemporary practice in India allowed her to rapidly engage in meaningful discussions over shared intellectual terrain. Her educational experience with Trogawa Rinpoche at the Chakpori Tibetan Medical Institute in Darjeeling<sup>11</sup> in the 1990s further facilitated engagement because of the popularity and stature of this late Tibetan medicine master.

The day before the workshop began, members of the HAA, the anthropologists, and the non-*amchi* facilitators met to discuss workshop structure. As we sat with a Tibetan language draft of the workshop schedule before us, the then-HAA chairman focused our attention on what he saw as the aim of the gathering: "At the center of this workshop is the *Yuthog Heart Essence* empowerment," a Buddhist ritual that would be performed, "and a focus on medicine making. The main goal is to put our knowledge together to improve the quality of medicine." A senior Nepali *amchi* added, "We need to write down the recipes for each of the medicines we decide to make and compare. But we also need to request the talented people among us to discuss the fine details—to give them the responsibility for this work. Keeping everyone together for discussions of substitution, toxicity, and the purification of mercury is also very important." Such comments helped to confirm that these issues—key research interests for us—were also central concerns for our *amchi* colleagues. However, such conversations also revealed the need to clarify our anthropological positions for the participants at the very start of the workshop: to make overt the goals of ethnography in ways that depart from how anthropologists have approached data collection in other CEE events.

Later that night, we discussed how to set a tone of transparency and trust at the outset. How might we articulate respect for the individual knowledge and perspectives of each participant, including the boundaries around knowledge that exist in the form of *menngak* (personalized and sometimes "secret" oral instruction), while also encouraging collaboration? Given that the event was to be documented with video, audio, and still photography, what parameters could ensure

that the cameras were shut off if needed? Where would our anthropological interests settle within a process that would involve a delicate balance between guidance and the relinquishing of control over not only the ethnographic process (in which one is never really in control) but the structure and facilitation of the entire event? Although we anthropologists trusted each other and had already worked together in traditional academic settings such as conferences, we had no idea how doing collaborative fieldwork together would play out. The implications were both personal and professional, and the stakes were high given the size of the gathering and the resources required. We strove to share vocabularies of practice with each other and with our *amchi* interlocutors, and to articulate concerns and ontological orientations. These shared platforms—albeit with uneven surfaces, shifting gradients, and rough spots—were crucial to the coproduction of medicines, as well as being important, if impermanent, products of the workshop process itself.

### Locating the Field

Winter sun filtered across the steps of the meeting hall on the first morning of the workshop. Sowa Rigpa practitioners from across the Himalayas and Tibet collected name tags and notebooks, sipped cups of tea, and greeted each before settling into their seats on the floor. From traditional *chuba* cloaks to jeans, polar fleeces, and polyester blazers, sartorial differences signaled Sowa Rigpa's plurality and the contrasting spaces it occupies in different countries. That first morning and throughout the event, the workshop was also marked by absences: people whose lack of a passport prohibited attendance; whose family situations or physical frailty kept them home.

One of the critiques of CEE has been that events like the World Conservation Congress are not, in an anthropological sense, recognizable as "the field" (J. P. Brosius, personal communication, November 2013). Such events might be viewed as *one* location in a multisited approach to ethnographic practice, but some argue that such events cannot constitute "the field" because they are too fragmented, too big, too constrained by time and structure. We argue that, actually, CEE in this instance offered a unique way to do multisited fieldwork. Instead of anthropologists going to "the field" or even multiple field sites, this event brought disparate practitioners within the field of Sowa Rigpa together in one central location: it was a meeting at once of geographies of difference and of shared forms of embodied and textual knowledge. Furthermore, although Kathmandu was not an entirely neutral place, it was a practical meeting point given political exigencies. Equally importantly, Kathmandu represented a hub of trade in *materia medica* and constituted a site of considerable religious importance for many *amchi*, even if they had never been there before.

The first session on day 1 focused on anthropological practice and research ethics. We anthropologists distributed bio-

8. <http://rubinmuseum.org/events/exhibitions/bodies-in-balance>.

9. <http://www.drokpa.org/haa.html>.

10. <http://www.aruramt.org>.

11. <http://www.chagpori-tibetan-medical-institute.com>.



graphical sketches, offered general overviews of our discipline, and described our research interests in Tibetan. Many, though not all, *amchi* read the biographies as we talked, nodding in approval at our interest in *materia medica* substitution and the challenges of standardized production methods. This moment of collective—and quite generalized—anthropological transparency marked new practice for each of us. It involved careful yet spontaneous translations of such core concepts as “ethnography” and “informed consent” into understandable Tibetan vernacular. We also found words to speak openly about secrecy: to acknowledge that participants might not want to share certain aspects of their knowledge, and that this would be respected. Likewise, we explained that the documentation of this event would not circulate beyond the group without explicit permission, that copies of the video archives would be returned to participants for their own use, and that anyone had the authority to request that something not be recorded. Interestingly, most of these concerns turned out to be unfounded, especially as many participants also documented the workshop with their own digital equipment. Finally, given this era of growing concerns over intellectual property rights as they intersect with Sowa Rigpa (Pordié 2008a; Saxer 2013), we felt compelled to acknowledge that we had no commercial interests, and that our engagement was motivated by the exchange of knowledge and a deeper questioning of what it means to produce efficacious medicines in a time of rapid industrialization and commodification.

From that introductory session onward, we learned to adapt to how the *amchi* articulated their needs and interests, which often differed in important ways from our own. We carried certain assumptions—which we were swiftly asked to reexamine—about what the “collaborative” in CEE should look like. Despite our many years of work in culturally Tibetan and Himalayan communities—representing more traditional fieldwork locations—we harbored the notion that, despite the group’s geographic, linguistic, and generational diversity we would remain in a circle, rubbing elbows on the floor. Once the introductions were over, however, the practitioners realigned themselves into socially delineated spatial formations with which they were more familiar. Following the Tibetan tradition of elevating teachers above students, the *amchi* shifted from a circle formation to one in which the senior *amchi* sat on raised cushions beneath the conference banner, facing their junior counterparts. We had envisioned horizontality; they realigned according to a vertical axis.

In addition, we initially suggested that the workshop begin with six senior practitioners—two each from Ladakh, Nepal, and the PRC—speaking about their lineages and backgrounds, thus enabling oral histories to be recorded. In pre-workshop planning sessions with *amchi* and non-*amchi* collaborators, this idea was valorized as something that could contribute (via video archive) to teaching novice practitioners and creating regional historiographies of Sowa Rigpa practice. As things unfolded, senior *amchi* spoke on their own terms,

offering fragmentary biographies but focusing primarily on social commentary and the mounting difficulty of sourcing raw materials. In other words, while we had initially thought that individual practitioners’ stories would be central to this session, the *amchi* stressed shared experiences, despite the wide biographical and geographic differences.

## Ritual and Forms of Authority

The second day was devoted to a *wang* empowerment ceremony in the tradition of the Yuthog Heart Essence, a Buddhist practice of great importance to Sowa Rigpa practitioners since the twelfth century CE (Garrett 2009). Manifest in both oral and textual forms, this practice provides spiritual support to *amchi* (e.g., through meditation practices that sharpen the sensitivity needed for accurate pulse diagnosis) and confers authority by evoking the blessings and power of its long lineage. Presided over by Chokling Rinpoche, a high-ranking Buddhist teacher, the *wang* was the only part of the workshop that was open to the public and to other *amchi* practicing in the Kathmandu area. More than 200 people sat together on the floor, facing the Rinpoche on his throne, including *amchi*, monks, Tibetan and Nepalese laypeople, foreign students of Tibetan Buddhism, and us four anthropologists. We all became participant observers.

Some of the more “vertical” hierarchical dynamics that characterized other moments in the workshop, as described above, were for now suspended as everyone received the blessings of the *wang* in an experience of *communitas*. Yet the *wang* also brought forth different hierarchies. For example, the anthropologists and senior members of HAA were at one point called to the front to act as *jindak*—personifying the sponsoring institutions of the event—and to make ritual offerings to Chokling Rinpoche (fig. 1; for additional images, see figs. A1–A11 in the supplement to this paper, available online). Although a standard procedure for ritual sponsorship in Tibetan cultural contexts, as *jindak* we played a particularly visible role on this day. In contrast, Gen Wangdu, who played a prominent part in the workshop due to his seniority and erudite knowledge, merged into the crowd during the *wang*, revealing multiple layers of hierarchies of knowledge on other days (e.g., day 6). Chokling Rinpoche held the “authority” over this ritual event, drawing from his own teacher’s blessings, his lineage, and textual instructions, all of which illustrate Tibetan conceptions of erudition and religious authority.

The *wang* emerged as one of the various “field sites” of the workshop. Each of us had studied similar rituals in our respective “local” field sites in Ladakh, Dharamsala, Nepal, and Tibetan areas of the PRC. Drawing on these long-term field experiences, now, collaboratively as a group, we could make more sense of the ritual, discussing it during our evening sessions and subsequent conversations. The meaning and parameters of a “field site” enlarged through CEE, because we could collaboratively merge some of our previous field-



Figure 1. *Amchi* participants and anthropologists making offerings to Chokling Rinpoche during the Yuthog Heart Essence empowerment ceremony. © Thomas Kelly; used with permission. A color version of this figure is available online.

work experiences and arrive at new insights concerning this ritual together. During a later Skype discussion Hofer concluded: “Brosius and Campbell remind us that one of multi-sited fieldwork’s important ideas is that one doesn’t ‘add up the field sites’ but pays attention to the relationship between them.” In this case, the *wang* was significant for the rest of the practical medicine-making sessions, since it passed on to the participants the power and blessings of this lineage, and permission to make and consecrate efficacious medicines.

### Coproducing Medicines

Although based on a shared set of classical formulae, Sowa Rigpa pharmacy varies widely in practice according to ecological, geographical, social, and economic factors (Blaikie 2013; Craig 2012; Hofer 2011; Saxer 2013). A key aim of the Kathmandu workshop was to explore this variability through the collective preparation of medicines. The diverse origins of the participants offered the anthropologists a rich basis for comparison, while many participating *amchi* expressed curiosity about the methods favored by others, or wished to learn about specific techniques from the assembled experts.

After lunch on day 3, the organizing team announced the start of the medicine-making phase of the event, but then

stumbled over how to proceed. During the planning process we had noted the impossibility of 40 people making medicine together but, wary of asserting too much administrative authority, had not decided how the participants should be divided up, and it took a good deal of discussion before a solution was reached. This transition from the verbal medium of the opening phase of the workshop into the practicalities of making medicine, and from a single group into several smaller ones, saw ideas about collaboration reshaped, the workshop’s structure adapted, and new forms of co-production emerge.

Almost everyone became involved to some degree in deciding how the practical phase should be organized. Several discussions involving *amchi* and anthropologists took place simultaneously: how many groups should there be and how should they be constituted? After some time, a cluster of senior *amchi* announced their idea of forming three groups, each of which would make a medicine that corresponded to one of the three principals of Sowa Rigpa theory, known as *nyépa*: *lung*, *tripa*, and *béken*.<sup>12</sup> This was immediately and unanimously accepted as the perfect solution, because *nyépa*

12. Due to the difficulties associated with translating these concepts, we stick to the Tibetan technical terms; see Gerke 2012:119–22.

represent fundamental epistemological frameworks for Sowa Rigpa, and they also correspond to three distinct classes of medicine.

Everyone agreed that the groups should be representative of regional and generational diversity, but nobody could come up with an appropriate method of division. The *amchi* looked to the anthropologists to facilitate, but we remained reluctant to impose selection criteria. After further discussion, one of the anthropologists suggested “drawing lots,” well-known among Tibetans as *gengyak*. A ripple of agreement spread through the hall, and the *amchi* set about using chance to constitute the groups. Meanwhile the anthropologists decided to focus on one *nyépa* group each, with the fourth person circulating between all three groups, allowing for both focused and comparative ethnographic data collection.

Although it lasted less than an hour, this transitional period raised important questions about the politics and mechanics of collaboration, while illustrating the practical and conceptual benefits of allowing emic organizing principles to influence workshop structure. The events described in most CEE literature were orchestrated by third parties, with participants following a set program and anthropologists playing a largely observational role. In contrast, important structural components of the Kathmandu workshop were coproduced through a process that cut across languages, cultural frameworks, and expectations of how such events should be run. The results were two simple yet elegant solutions, which emerged in the moment and made sense to everyone rather than simply reflecting the logic, assumptions, and interests of the organizers.

### Embodied Skill and Knowledge Production

On the morning of day 4, we headed to the herb markets of Kathmandu to source materials for the chosen medicines and buy samples of more than 50 ingredients. We crowded into the small ground-floor shop of a fourth-generation Nepali herb trader whose shelves held hundreds of boxes and bags containing plants, spices, and minerals. Even as the *amchi* began discussing the quality, prices, and varieties of the medicinal ingredients, they immediately and instinctively started breaking off parts in order to taste, smell, and feel them. Such “enskilld” and embodied knowledge is crucial in making Tibetan medicines since both the taste and the smell of ingredients, as well as the final compounds made from them, relate to core principles of Sowa Rigpa pharmacology and to ideas of how the body-mind can be treated. Based on texts and personal experience, pharmacists know that each substance on earth has properties deriving from a particular configuration of the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space). The precise constitution of these elements, and hence their effects on an ailing body, can be determined through their six related tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, astringent (Hofer 2014:48–49). At the most basic level, the six tastes help to correctly identify ingredients, especially when a

plant is already dried or processed and its morphology no longer clearly determinable.

Furthermore, *amchi* use taste to determine the quality, potency, and efficacy of medicinal substances. With this sense faculty being so pivotal, it has been said that *amchi* “have their laboratory on their tongue.” Such mechanisms of identification and “quality control” have nowadays been downgraded, if not entirely replaced, in most industrial production of Tibetan medicines, where good manufacturing practices (GMP) and laboratory-based biochemical testing places authority largely outside the trained practitioner’s embodied sensory skill. To honor and account for *amchi*’s continuously “enskilld” senses, the shared act of tasting and smelling medicines (fig. 2) gave all workshop participants insights into the persistent role of the senses in making efficacious medicines in certain places today. The *amchi* were able to compare their understandings of taste with each other, which in turn helped the entire group to coproduce the three medicines.

For the anthropologists the lesson was, among other things, methodological. We had been skeptical that we could “know” very much about making efficacious medicines without actually making them, or for that matter, “know” about taste without tasting. Heeding Tim Ingold’s insights into the nature of skill (2000, 2011), we knew that we could not observe and understand the particularities of Sowa Rigpa skills manifested in the ways *amchi* used their sensory capacities without participation. Our approach to both planning and *being* at the workshop was, in this sense, closer to anthropology’s methodological stronghold of participant observation, and it literally resembled an artisanal workshop space, where things are created and produced. Our participation in learning embodied sensory knowledge contrasts strongly with the methods employed by the group of environmental anthropologists learning about “trade-offs” at the World Conservation Congress (Brosius and Campbell 2010). Here there were few participatory elements and literally no practical exercises in conservation, which resulted in the ethnographers mainly listening to and observing presentations, discussions, and meetings. Our participation in the coproduction of medicines thus diverged in substantial ways from knowledge production that arises from more conventional presentation styles and cerebral modes of investigation, which we all know so well from international conferences and meetings. Our trips to the herb markets and involvement in the coproduction of medicines proved appropriate for our purposes, while also reinforcing the sense that each instance of CEE will likely require specific methodological innovations.

### Evaluating Ingredients, Evolving Practices

Day 5 began with the three small medicine-making groups sitting on the floor, cleaning and preparing raw materials (fig. 3). This proved a lively forum for considering different definitions of “cleanliness,” “quality,” and “contamination.” As we watched and engaged in these congenial smaller gath-





Figure 2. *Amchi* participants from the Tibet Autonomous Region, PRC, and Ladakh, India, tasting medicinal plants in a Kathmandu herb market. © Thomas Kelly; used with permission. A color version of this figure is available online.

erings, while also recording and taking pictures, we observed *amchi* practice change. For example, while the cleaning began in the morning with *amchi* wearing plastic gloves and face masks—an aesthetic and governance norm in the industrial production of Tibetan medicine—a few hours later they were taken off and considered of minor relevance to the overall quality and efficacy of the medicines in the making. We witnessed interesting discussions over the removal of certain parts of plants, as well as the discarding of an entire batch of ingredients, which was considered too old and rotten after a skilled evaluation through taste, smell, and sight.

Most academic conferences, even those aiming at direct policy outcomes, are marked by a representational imbalance. Those people whose practices are discussed and potentially affected by the new policies produced at such conferences tend to be at the margins, if they are represented at all. These might be patients who will be affected by new medical technologies, or people whose conservation practices in Belize or Pakistan are under discussion (Brosius and Campbell 2010:248). At the Kathmandu workshop, the aim was to document, evaluate, and support the critically endangered knowledge of *amchi* who are marginalized on national, international, or regional levels. Day 5 highlighted the

extent to which *amchi* who possess such knowledge were at the center of discussion and exchange while the anthropologists occupied more marginal positions, at times struggling to follow *their* language and expertise, not the other way around. This approach facilitated tangible changes in *amchi*'s practices that arose from their own participant-observation: learning, emulating, questioning, and performing skills during the workshop in the company of others with whom they shared epistemological and ethical foundations, despite their lived experiences of difference. Following Ingold (2000:5), we could see these skills were “not passed on from one generation to the next, but regrown in each, incorporated into the *modus operandi* of the developing human organism through training and experience in the performance of particular tasks.” The anthropologists became apprentices in an artisanal workshop. Coproducing these three medicines afforded deep insights into the various factors and decision-making processes with which these small-scale producers must continuously engage.

When we turned to the task of weighing and apportioning ingredients for each of the three medicines, we again observed new practices and knowledge evolving in real time, based on what the practitioners felt was most germane to





Figure 3. One of the three groups cleaning and evaluating medicinal ingredients. © Thomas Kelly; used with permission. A color version of this figure is available online.

making good medicines today. CEE allowed us here to witness active disagreement over the quality of certain ingredients, their ratios in relation to each other, and what the impact of such decisions would be on the efficacy and potency of the final compound. The disputes were resolved through lively debate, and with a great deal of participation not only by senior practitioners but also by young *amchi*. This differed from other moments of discussion in the workshop, when novice practitioners had been relegated to sideline positions with much less authority and power. These more horizontal dynamics were carried over into discussions the next day about patterns of substitution for rare, endangered, or otherwise prohibitively expensive ingredients.

### Knowledge and Power

One of the most significant events of day 6 was a discussion of the detoxification of mercury and its processing into mercury sulfide ash, known in Tibetan as *tsotel*. As well as numerous herbs, this substance typically contains eight metals (including gold) and eight mineral components, and is the base material of many popular “precious pills” or *rinchen rilbu* (Gerke 2013; Kloos 2012). Since it takes considerable time, labor, and funds to manufacture *tsotel* (and related precious pills), it is produced irregularly by Tibetan pharmacies and

rarely by independent physicians alone. All participating *amchi* from Tibetan areas of the PRC had received lineage-based instructions concerning *tsotel* from Troru Tsenam (1928–2004), who revived the practice after the Cultural Revolution (Holmes 1995). In contrast, many of the Himalayan *amchi* had never made *tsotel*, and regarded Lhasa as the center of such knowledge, the cradle of Sowa Rigpa, so to speak. The dynamics surrounding precious pills and their constituent ingredients are complex, tied to sensibilities of religious and cultural belonging. For example, Tibetans from the PRC who visit Dharamsala, India, often bring precious pills as gifts back home with them because they are believed to contain special blessings of the Dalai Lama.

In contrast to the dynamics of medicine making, this discussion of *tsotel* encouraged longer lecture-type contributions by Gen Wangdu, who emerged as the *tsotel* specialist and was explicitly asked to speak on the subject. As one possible follow-up to this event, many of the *amchi* requested a *tsotel* workshop to be held in Lhasa, in order to receive the transmission and learn the difficult processing methods. Some *amchi* spontaneously said they would even contribute funds to buy the gold. Nevertheless, we all quickly realized that making *tsotel* and bringing these *amchi* to Lhasa for 3 months would cost a fortune. The *amchi* expectantly looked to the anthropologists, who had co-organized the funding for

this workshop, hoping we might sponsor such an event. A gender issue arose as well, since according to some Tibetan textual and institutional conventions women are barred from processing mercury, and three of us anthropologists were women. One of us respectfully challenged Gen Wangdu: "If we are not able to participate in such a workshop, are we still expected to raise money for it?" This brought up issues, which the four of us later critically analyzed as limitations to CEE as a method in this context. How does actively organizing an event (including its finances) potentially change the very practices one is seeking to study ethnographically? This raised ethical questions of power and authority over collaborative knowledge production, putting the anthropologists as funders/organizers/participants in a complicated position. If one considers social research as a way "not only to describe and analyze but also to *create* and *validate* forms of knowledge," as described in our introduction, where are the ethical limits when applying CEE methods to such ventures? The idea of a *tsotel* workshop in Lhasa faded in the end, but clearly revealed not only how issues of access to such teachings inexorably involve forms of authoritative knowledge, but also how the scope, structure, and implications of our CEE efforts raised new challenges to ethnographic practice under these circumstances.

### Plants, People, and Pilgrimage

The organizing team was well aware of the limited opportunities that most participants had to travel internationally, and the challenges many had faced getting visas to visit Nepal. We wanted to respect the range of possibilities that this trip represented, as well as to make space for more relaxed activities after the intensity of the early phases and before the formality of the closing ceremony. Thus on the morning of day 7 we left Kathmandu to visit nearby Buddhist pilgrimage sites and botanical gardens, in doing so shifting the objectives and dynamics of the workshop once again. Outside the confines of the workshop setting yet still part of it, this day allowed for different kinds of interaction among the participants and for different forms of research to come to the fore, further illustrating the variety of "field sites" and relational modes composing the event. Squashed together in minibuses, climbing the steep hills of holy sites, and walking around botanical gardens brought people together in fluid, unstructured ways. These occasions allowed for informal sharing, discussions of diverse subjects both medical and otherwise, jokes and laughter, narrowing the gaps between all of us.

Pilgrimage remains a central element of Tibetan and Himalayan religious practice, so the chance to visit sacred sites was widely appreciated, although it held a range of meanings given the different position Buddhism occupies across the region. Visiting the botanical gardens allowed for discussions of medicinal plant availability, trade, and cultivation to take place without external encouragement or facilitation. Simi-

larly, driving through the Kathmandu Valley along a road that links India and the PRC enabled discussion of the relations between these three nation-states and their roles in shaping Sowa Rigpa practice. Such exchanges deepened mutual understanding between *amchi* practicing under very different conditions. While in a sense artificially created, this space allowed for the spontaneous exchange of technical and nontechnical information among the *amchi* concerning how Sowa Rigpa is configured differently in different places while forming a recognizably shared medical tradition, and concerning notions of "best practice."

Day 7 simultaneously enabled new forms of ethnographic research to take place. We moved through a range of physical and social spaces, further expanding what constituted "the field" of this event. We participated in informal interactions of various kinds, often without any direct relevance to our research, as well as following up issues of particular interest with small groups and with individual practitioners. This offered rich ethnographic detail, while blurring the boundaries between research and recreation, friendly interaction and data collection. It therefore required us to recognize that while attempting to minimize orchestration and instrumentalization, CEE envisaged in this way nevertheless involves a greater degree of manipulation of circumstances and steering of events than in cases where third parties organize everything, or where life unfolds in one place. This day enabled the coproduction of yet other forms of knowledge, this time about *amchi* and anthropologists as people as much as technicians and scholars. It also underscored the importance of a strong ethical framework and keen reflexive awareness when engaging in collaborative forms of research in which power imbalances remain despite the best efforts of those involved.

### Empowerment and Social Efficacy

The final day put into stark contrast regimes of power and authority, as well as senses of the workshop's purpose. It involved an intimate ritual process and the distribution of our coproduced medicines, on the one hand, and a public closing ceremony on the other (fig. 4). Prior to the day of pilgrimage, several *amchi* from each medicine group and two anthropologists had taken batches of apportioned and mixed ingredients to a local *amchi* pharmacy to be ground into powder. On the final morning, the *amchi* spontaneously decided to perform a *mendrup* for these three formulas prior to their distribution. Literally "accomplishing the medicine," the *mendrup* consecration ritual did to these medicines what the Yuthog Heart Essence empowerment afforded practitioners: it infused both products and people with a sense of ritual and social efficacy (Garrett 2009). The *mendrup* unfolded simply. Led by senior practitioners, novice *amchi* and anthropologists were encouraged to collectively recite the empowerment text. At the ritual's conclusion each participant tasted each medicine, leading to further discussions



Figure 4. Portrait of all participants at the official closing ceremony. © Thomas Kelly; used with permission. A color version of this figure is available online.

about which of the three was of the highest quality and why. This discussion reinforced the notion, eloquently expressed in Tibetan, that efficacy or *phenü*—a concept combining “benefit” and “potency”—can only truly be known in relation to a person to whom a medicine is given. In other words, efficacy itself is coproduced.

As such, this event afforded an ethnographic window into one of the highly empirical aspects of Tibetan medical production—one that, among artisanal producers, is usually done privately and, in the context of industrial production, is obscured and perhaps fundamentally changed by evaluative measures that emerge from biomedicine (Craig 2011; Saxer 2013). Had we not convened such an event, there would be no way to ethnographically document empirical consensus regarding concepts like taste among diverse practitioners. Such agreement—despite other interpretive differences—goes a long way toward illustrating both the art and the science implicit in Sowa Rigpa (Adams, Schrempf, and Craig 2010). Often, it is a lack of such acknowledgment and instead the immediate recourse to biomedical parameters that stands as a major barrier to recognition and support for Sowa Rigpa’s empirical and epistemological foundations at national and global scales.

Aspirations for national and international recognition provided the *raison d’être* for the afternoon closing ceremony. This event took place in an adjacent hall, involving another micro transition of field sites. A stage spatially separated “distinguished guests” (including the anthropologists and a senior *amchi* from each representative country) from the other practitioners. The ceremony involved formal speeches by Nepali government officials and academics specializing in Ayurveda but supportive of Sowa Rigpa. Participants were then handed certificates of participation signed by Nepal’s Minister of Health and Population, along with Tibetan offering scarves. We anthropologists sat quietly on stage. Unlike the moment during the Yuthog Heart Essence empowerment when we were called upon to perform specific roles as ritual sponsors, this positioning was a powerful reminder of anthropology’s colonial legacies and the larger forces of inequality at work in the room.

The closing ceremony was the only moment of the event when Tibetan was not used as the primary language of communication. The shift to Nepali alienated the non-Nepali-speaking *amchi* and created further challenges for ethnographic documentation, because only one of the anthropologists speaks Nepali. After days of collaborative discussion



over our field notes, being reduced to one ethnographic “voice” at a moment of performative displays of power and authority felt limiting. Despite its shortcomings, though, this final ceremony remained a strong reminder of the larger social and political contexts in which practitioners of anthropology and Sowa Rigpa operate.

## Conclusion

Like others who have engaged in CEE, we realize that our socioeconomic, ideological, and political positions were as crucial to the event as those of the participants themselves. We recognized too that the practitioners would bring their own assumptions, social roles, politics, and ideologies to the workshop, even if such positions were not always clearly articulated. As Lawrence Cohen puts it: “Authenticity has little relationship to the world beyond the text, or in the carefully delineated forum of practice, when one’s own embodied experience is not at stake” (1995:343). In preparing for this workshop, we heeded many of the analytical lessons that emerged from Cohen’s (1995) observation of diverse Ayurveda practitioners and academics at the ICTAM-III congress in Bombay in 1990. Cohen shows how even the creation of a venue such as a conference or workshop, its locale, and program scheduling can serve to valorize some practitioners—particularly those from elite institutions—and marginalize others. In contrast to the international visitors to ICTAM-III, we *did* put our own experience at stake, albeit to a far lesser extent than the *amchi*, on whose bodies and through whose experiential abilities their patients ultimately depend. Still, we considered the workshop itself and CEE methodology useful because they allow for consolidated, intense forums to become key sites of knowledge production and negotiation, and thus important spaces for social analysis. Event ethnography provides a conceptually rich field through which to understand how senses of community are imagined and enacted at different scales.

Although small-scale pharmacy itself (Blaikie 2013, 2014; Hofer 2011), “biographies” of medicine (Craig 2012), and the workings of large-scale production (Craig 2012; Kloos 2010; Saxer 2013) have been topics of recent research, over a relatively short time this workshop allowed for the collective generation of a great deal of ethnographic data concerning the conceptual ideals and lived practices of Sowa Rigpa pharmacy, including its variability within and between regions, lineages, and individuals. CEE was a useful framework through which to gather a breadth and depth of data, and to analyze these data with more nuance than we could have on our own. CEE provided space for innovative forms of facilitation and organization, which also enabled us to observe ourselves and others coproducing structures and effects in real-time. The totality of interactions and outcomes were as important as the medicines we made together.

We are aware that we have pushed at the limits of this methodology by creating the event to which we applied a

CEE framework, rather than simply documenting an existing event and its dynamics. Not using English as the main language was a positive challenge for the anthropologists, allowing the *amchi* and their skills to be the axis around which the event turned. From the feedback we received from *amchi* after the workshop, they valued the immediate and observable results of collaborative practice and sharing skills. Perceived benefits of the event were shaped by the places participants came from: *amchi* from Nepal used it to push their agenda for gaining government recognition; *amchi* from the PRC enjoyed the combination of the workshop with a *wang* and a pilgrimage; *amchi* from Ladakh enjoyed working with each other outside the spaces of local political fissures. We anthropologists did not just “manage a workshop,” but rather created spaces for the coproduction of knowledge and elaboration of skills, which were neither predetermined nor reflective of what any individual *amchi* or lone anthropologist might have produced. We tend to agree with the comment of one senior *amchi* from Nepal who, in a follow-up interview, said that most other conferences he had attended were filled with “useless talk,” but this workshop provided space for “lots of meaningful talk”—talk facilitated by specific tasks, shared texts and theories, and a mutual sense of urgency regarding the future of Sowa Rigpa.

## Acknowledgments

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Heart Essence, to Tom Kelly for allowing us to use his beautiful photographs, Carroll Dunham for her enthusiastic support, and our two non-*amchi* facilitators from Ladakh and the Tibet Autonomous Region. The authors would also like to thank each other for sharing the precious path of researching, thinking, and writing *together*. On this note, we have chosen to list ourselves in alphabetical order as authors, acknowledging that each of us has contributed equally to this coproduced piece of scholarship. Our greatest debts and respect are owed to the participating *amchi*, who so generously shared with us and with each other their knowledge of and expertise in making Tibetan medicines, along with their good humor and hope for a beneficent future of Sowa Rigpa.

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## Comments

### Vincanne Adams

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In November 1998, the Dalai Lama opened the First International Congress on Tibetan Medicine in Washington, DC, with the comment that this congress was not actually the first such gathering. The first, he said, took place in the Yarlung Valley of Central Tibet in around the seventh century, with medical experts from Asia, Persia, the Mediterranean, and even local shamans. This event lasted several years and, out of this sea of collaborative ferment, an early version of Tibetan medicine was born. The four prominent scholars of Tibetan medicine here offer a compelling and thoughtful iteration of the historical effort to simultaneously produce and study Tibetan medical practices, offering methodological and substantive insights about anthropological expertise.

The collaborative event ethnography (CEE) used here is both strikingly familiar and radically novel. Placed on a continuum from Emile Durkheim (1915) and Victor Turner (1968) to Sally Falk Moore and Barbara Myerhoff (1977), CEE in many ways resembles an old and familiar form of ritual analysis. Anthropologists are experts on the ambiguous effects of secular rituals, including reinforcing and reconfiguring social structures and relationships. The authors are keenly aware of the pushes and pulls of the social relations involved in the event they write about, including hidden tensions of hierarchy and specific inequalities that not only inform and shape but also potentially disrupt these relations. Ceremonies to bless and compound medicines are here played out in a larger ritual drama in which Tibetan practitioners are gauging their interactions and agendas against perceived (and imagined) expectations of the sponsors of the event (including the authors), and vice versa. These revelations reveal structural disparities and epistemo-

logical unevenness. This work inherits a great deal from the canon here, and can be seen in this light, analyzed with these dynamics in mind.

On the other hand, the CEE method here seems rather novel in several ways. If one of the primary modes of knowledge production in the early twenty-first century is the experiment (reflected in the turn to social studies of science in anthropology, and in works by Rabinow [1996], Marcus and Fisher [1999], and Petryna [2009], among others), then CEE is an interesting iteration of ethnography in this trajectory. How are the planning, funding, and orchestration of events like this, including (or especially) when they map space for unplanned moments and emergent unknowns, very similar to an experiment in ethnographic data production? That is, from one perspective, CEE looks like an organic collaboration arising from the unique strengths of participant observation (in which the ethnographers are highly reflexive about their presence in the field site). But from another perspective, this method approximates that of laboratory science in which a staging of the sequences, the characters, the relevant actors (material and nonmaterial) are brought together for the scientists who have both a desire for and a specific kind of data in mind. Here, the ethnographic empirical arises as a collaborative structuring that aims to catalog and capture both new and old knowledge. In fact, it would be hard to imagine a Tibetan medicine that is not already deeply prefigured by the engagements its practitioners have had with Western observers, and so this "experiment" captures the truth about Tibetan medicine today in some ways even before the experiment begins. The ethnographic project here is resolutely (and without judgment) thoroughly modern: the truths about collaboration and hierarchy, but also about what Tibetan medicine is supposed to look, taste, smell and feel like, are built into the very structure of the workshop, a point the authors are keenly aware of. The experimentalism of the event is also seen in its shared hope for platforms for future collaboration based on consensus (rejecting a past filled with diversity) and at the same time for salvaging historic knowledge (making the past a modern preoccupation). Finally, the experimental form is collaborative yet filled with desires for essential and timeless singular truths, much as science is and does. The ethnographic materials here thus lead us to ask: what kinds of epistemological mandates are required of this traditional medicine that is created in these collaborative, experimental spaces? If experimentalism undergirds epistemology here (and not all will agree that it does) then it is worth asking these questions and worth spending time ferreting out what is going on with truth in these engagements. This paper is a great start.

Finally, this research presents an excellent example of an anthropology in which the political commitments of researchers who care deeply about a group of people, a form, and body of knowledge are taken as instrumental to the data collection. The effort to intervene in the lives of those we study is not new (as the authors note). But how we do this is

important. I recall the work of anthropologist Darrell A. Posey, whose ethnobotany among Amazonian healers put him in controversial relationships with commercial businesses like Shaman Pharmaceuticals over native intellectual property rights and cultural survival (Posey et al. 1995). Lawrence Cohen noted similar tensions in the annual meeting of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Asian Medicines, as they note. This paper is tied to this lineage. Posey argued for ethical activism when it came to standing up for/working to protect the interests of those we study. Cohen points out that such collaborations create an epistemological carnival in which moral certainty is far from clear. Research on CEE offers a nuanced way to enter into this space of activism in a manner that is highly sensitive to issues of empowerment among participants whose stakes in the production of knowledge are far greater than those of the ethnographers. These debates ultimately draw us toward questions of efficacy that, these authors remind us, are not just about medical outcomes. Efficacy is always coproduced, always already emergent in events like these where the politics of staging such an event are as important as, or perhaps even more than, the potency of the medicines themselves. Collaboratively, these authors open the door for more work on this topic, bringing to the forefront important questions about the role, the rules, the ethics, as well as the outcomes and implications of a politically engaged collaborative anthropology today. They should be congratulated for this bold move.

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When our research group carried out our initial collaborative event ethnography (CEE) at the World Conservation Congress in 2008, we were aware of the epistemological and methodological challenges of what we were trying to do, but it wasn't until after the event, as we began planning for a follow-up CEE at the CBD COP10 meeting in Nagoya in 2010, that we explicitly recognized that we were engaged in an extended evolutionary process of defining a new model of collaborative research. In short, we were acutely aware that CEE is, and should remain, a work in progress that will continue to evolve as it is applied in new contexts with new groups of researchers.

In "Coproducing Efficacious Medicines," Blaikie et al. have taken the CEE approach in a new and innovative direction, and their efforts have contributed substantively to extending the range of contexts in which this approach can be applied. What this article demonstrates so clearly is that the continued evolution of the CEE approach is contingent

on the scale, structure, and context of events being observed and that research teams must be responsive to that, as this group is. Whereas our initial CEE research was carried out in the context of large international meetings with thousands of participants, Blaikie et al. brought this approach into a much more intimate setting of some 40 Sowa Rigpa practitioners and four anthropologists in an intensive, hands-on workshop. Equally significant is that the research team played a key role in structuring, planning, and orchestrating the event that they subsequently set about to study.

In speaking of collaborative event ethnography, it is important to acknowledge that the term "collaborative" carries multiple registers in contemporary anthropology. As we began to develop the CEE approach in 2008, the form of collaboration we had in mind was that between a group of researchers (mostly anthropologists and geographers) faced with the challenge of making sense of a large international conference. Our efforts since that time have focused on the challenge of addressing the temporality of collaboration by promoting productive collaboration across events. But of course, as anthropologists have confronted the politics of knowledge production in our discipline in recent decades, we have witnessed a rich florescence of approaches that place collaboration with those we research at the center of the fieldwork enterprise (Lassiter 2005a, 2005b; Smith 2012).

Where Blaikie et al. have made a particularly significant contribution is in extending the CEE approach in a context that lies at the intersection of both senses of collaboration. Not only does their research benefit from the synergies of collaboration between a group of researchers, but the Sowa Rigpa workshop itself is a great exemplar of critically engaged collaborative anthropology. This, of course, presents a whole other set of challenges pertaining to the politics of knowledge production of which the research team is well aware, and which they appear still to be struggling to address.

There are two issues that this article might have devoted a bit more attention to. First, befitting the collaborative goals of the workshop and the fact that all the researchers had significant research experience working with Tibetan communities, Blaikie et al. note that the Sowa Rigpa workshop was carried out in Tibetan. Though they do not explicitly address the issue, one is left to wonder if the nightly "check-in" sessions they describe were carried out in English. If so, it would be interesting to explore the implications of this and the degree to which it might have influenced what they identified as interesting or significant as the workshop unfolded, or as they analyzed it in retrospect.

Second, one of the things that became abundantly clear in our own efforts to develop the CEE approach is that the process of collaboration cannot be bounded by the event itself, but must extend both before and after the event. Blaikie et al. clearly devoted major attention to the collaborative process (in both senses of the term) for some 2 years before the Sowa Rigpa workshop was held. What is less clear is how collab-

oration (again, in both senses) was conceptualized or enacted *after* the workshop. This is especially important given the different goals of workshop organizers and Sowa Rigpa practitioners that Blaikie et al. refer to. The authors are clearly conscious of the complex politics of knowledge embedded in their efforts to both organize this workshop and apply the CEE approach to it. How this might translate into a more extended process of collaboration, especially with Sowa Rigpa practitioners, would be worthwhile to explore more fully.

This article represents a major contribution to the development of the CEE approach; Blaikie et al. have pushed the boundaries of how such research can be conceptualized and enacted, particularly in the degree to which their work represents an engagement with both senses of collaboration.

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This article is based on a workshop organized by anthropologists in collaboration with Tibetan medical practitioners from the Himalayan Amchi Association (HAA). It used the theoretical framework of collaborative event ethnography (CEE) as a form of applied anthropological research methodology with the aim of not only encouraging knowledge exchange between doctors from different parts of the world who compound their own remedies, but also advancing the anthropological research of Tibetan medicine in its theory and contemporary practice in diverse social and political contexts, by creating a more integrated study connection with stakeholders.

From the manner in which the workshop was arranged, several advantages can be noted. From the point of view of the anthropologists, it opened up a new dynamic working relationship with the stakeholders through engaging in making medicines and receiving the sacred spiritual transmissions/authorizations. This not only enabled the researchers to observe the process of producing Tibetan medicine, but also to listen to the interpretations and discussions on the details of practice. This gave researchers an engaged learning experience in keeping with Hsu's (1999) view of "participant experience," which involves learning subject matter while collecting data. Additionally there was the opportunity to observe a special evaluation system, through debating and reasoning controversial issues, as a special way of refining knowledge, which is then evident through clinical results.

The Tibetan medical practitioners gained benefit in that the anthropologists used their prestigious role of having the access to wider social and geopolitical areas, and relatively long-term research experience in Tibetan medicine, to fa-

cilitate the exchange of knowledge and practice between doctors from different parts of the world, as well as empowering doctors from a more "marginalized" position in terms of both government recognition and educational level in the skill and knowledge of Tibetan medicine. Thus the anthropological aid as applied research emerged from their scholarly position and politically nonsensitive role.

My own professional experience as a physician of Tibetan medicine, besides my role as an anthropologist, illustrates that traditionally every Tibetan doctor would be expected to have the knowledge and skills to perform all kinds of work involved in diagnosing and treating patients (e.g., medicinal ingredient identification, collection, detoxification and synthesis, as well as diagnosis and prescription). This process allowed for the discovery of the interdependent relationship between the inner being and the outer world (*phyi nang snod bcud rten 'brel ba*) as a core in the definition of holistic epistemology of Tibetan medicine (Cuomu 2012) through developing a true sense in determining the therapeutic properties possessed by different ingredients. This is also an important way to assess clinical efficacy and discover cures for life-threatening conditions. The composition of the medicines is highly dynamic in Tibetan medicine, depending on the nature and degree of the imbalance between the three dynamics (*lung, tripa*, and *béken*) (Cuomu 2012). Vital discussion points thus naturally emerged while making medicines and giving interpretations of practice during the workshop, and this is particularly important when communication opportunities between physicians across borders is rare.

Recent studies suggest that the production of Tibetan medicine has increasingly become influenced by the commercialization of medicines in order to follow GMP requirements for meeting commercial standards as well as massive production needs (Adams and Le 2010; Craig 2012). However, beyond this increasingly industrialized phenomenon in the medical fields of Tibet, traditional knowledge and practice such as compounding medicines oneself still continue providing one has the required knowledge and skills, with the support of a law called "medicine preparation house" (in Chinese: *yiyuan zhiji shi*), which runs parallel to GMP. This was evident from the experience of organizing a workshop entitled "Conference for the Preservation and Promotion of Special Clinical and Pharmaceutical Expertise of Private Doctors in the Tibetan Autonomous Region" under the framework of the Tibetan Medical College, Lhasa, in 2012, in which I surveyed the entirety of Tibet to seek out private doctors who have developed remarkable knowledge and practice in treating chronic health conditions. I noticed many of them still compound their own medicines and have found the cures for some incurable health conditions (e.g., severe rheumatic problems, oedema, and stroke). This is due to the fact that the practice of Tibetan medicine is largely based on the individual physician's knowledge and wisdom rather than hospital infrastructure. Physicians' skills are refined particularly in a

rural environment where the community's health heavily relies on the physicians, with limited choice. In short, this event was innovative, not only setting a good example and possibility for the anthropological study of Tibetan medicine, but also as a platform for exchange between Tibetan medical practitioners.

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It is difficult to write a comment as an "informant" or "consultant" for an article written by anthropologists for anthropologists. The authors describe that collaborative event ethnography (CEE) can provide anthropologists with unique perspectives and insights that only informants would have, due to years of immersion in the subject matter. In this sense, I agree with how the authors portrayed the value of CEE in creating the context to merge individuals, expertise, and geographies of our field to give anthropologists access to "more refined articulations of the social, ecological, political, and economic transformations facing Sowa Rigpa in contemporary Asia." I agree that this would rarely be so concisely obtainable in isolated ethnographic ventures otherwise—particularly for observing the process of making our medicine. For one, the inherent hierarchy of authority and legitimacy ascribed to an *amchi* in our field due to that *amchi's* regional origin, institutional affiliation, transmission lineage, exposure to critical medicinal preparation processes, and so forth, may only be clearly observed in a collaborative event where such diversity is gathered and juxtaposed. For those of us who are practitioners—the insiders—the issues that emerged did not come as a surprise, though they would often be left unacknowledged outside the bounds of such an event.

However, despite the promise of this CEE design, I have several reservations whether their methodology actually delivered the insights they claim to have gained. First, due to the diversity of knowledge-praxis lineages and traditions within Sowa Rigpa, there exists significant regional variation regarding medicinal plant identification for a given textually described plant. With the limited travel of many *amchis* inter-regionally, the specimens available in Nepal for the CEE event may have been the first time many participants saw various species that local *amchis* use regularly in a given common formula. For example, *bashaka* is an herb described in various formulas within Tibetan medicine, but *amchis* from different regions recognize different plants. *Amchis* from the Tibetan Autonomous Region and Qinghai Province recognize two different species: *Veronica ciliata* versus *Corydalis impatiens*. India-based *amchis* recognize yet two different species: *Justi-*

*cia adhatoda* and *Phlogacanthus pubinervius*. The same characteristic of decreasing heat in blood vessels is acknowledged for all of these specimens recognized as "*bashaka*," and any formula calling for *bashaka* uses its regionally recognized species. The lack of standardization and agreed-upon methods for identifying *material medica* ingredients, let alone processing those ingredients, and compounding the respective medicinal formulas, marginalizes Sowa Rigpa as a global health system. However, the CEE design seems to have minimized this significant issue and the challenge it presents for other issues the CEE sought to explore.

Second, because Tibetan medicine is rooted in Buddhism and its rituals, most *amchis* necessarily would agree that all medicines need to be blessed by the *mendrup* ritual with the preceding Yuthog Heart Essence empowerment to do so. The CEE would demonstrate an ideal performance by participants but not necessarily actual practices or perspectives of *amchis* in their daily context. Many hospitals and individual *amchis* cannot receive the empowerment nor conduct the *mendrup* because of political, financial, and other socioeconomic reasons. Other *amchis* cannot do the *mendrup* for all medicine made. Furthermore, many *amchis* are changing their view on disease etiologies and efficacy mechanisms of Tibetan medicine formulas with an increasing value for scientific evidence. Many young *amchis* feel pressure to say that the empowerment and *mendrup* confer medicine effectiveness, but do not even know the actual meaning or process of *mendrup*, nor have they participated in the ritual in the last 5–10 years. In the CEE, it is unlikely outsiders would observe the complex reality of whether and how *amchis* enact these Buddhist rituals and the related practicality, practice, and perspective on them.

Third, and similarly, the CEE extracted *amchis* from their local context and political, socioeconomic realities of medicine production and placed them in a performative demonstration of their traditional ideal of quality control. Traditionally, *amchis* assessed quality and composition by taste, smell, and observation, and maintained their own regional *materia medica* quality and availability. However, the expansion of Sowa Rigpa nationally and internationally has forced many traditional harvesting and quality assessment measures to get neglected. Many *amchis* these days do not have the proper sensory training to assess medicine ingredient quality by traditional means. Ingredient substitutions, lower quality specimens, and using rare or endangered ingredients have become common. The human factor of medicine production is hidden in such a performative event as this CEE. Today's reality is that *amchis* are beholden to hybrid methods for quality control and national directives for sustainability and environmental protection. For example, although medicinal ingredients are tested by the most senior doctor at the Qinghai Tibetan Medical Hospital, national standard biochemical and clinical laboratory tests are also required, especially in the case of precious substances.



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In the last decade or so, the meanings of and implications for collaborative ethnography have expanded considerably. The journal *Collaborative Anthropologies*, for example, has encouraged critical evaluation of collaborative ethnography and other forms of collaborative research, and has raised important questions about its practice in ever-shifting and multisited fieldwork settings (see, e.g., Lassiter 2008, 2009; Lassiter and Cook 2010–2013). One of the most promising of these questions includes how the political and structural dynamics of collaboration actually work in specific field contexts and, in turn, produce diverse and varied kinds of research products outside the realm of traditional ethnographic writing (see, e.g., Breunlin and Regis 2009; Isaac et al. 2012; King 2010). In this sense, collaborative ethnography may engage us in a broad range of dynamic field contexts, relationships, and products—which means, of course, that questions about “difference” increasingly function as a central problem for thinking about, pulling together, and carrying out any form of collaborative research in anthropology and related fields today.

Blaikie, Craig, Gerke, and Hofer’s experiment in collaborative event ethnography (CEE) nicely illustrates this significant development in collaborative research. Importantly, the authors problematize collaboration at the outset (here framed “in terms of scale, structure, and implications”) and highlight difference (e.g., “socioeconomic, ideological, and political positions”) as part of an organizing trope (rather than couching their narrative wholly within tropes of agreement, as was more common in earlier forms of collaborative research). Though, by definition, this particular CEE transpired within the context of a specific event located during a particular time and place, it pulled together several collaborations across time and space to produce a deeply collaborative ethnographic outcome (in this case coproduced medicines, knowledge, and skills) that rose out of the complicated differences that constituted the event collaboration in the first place. While their particular challenges with collaboration are, of course, very specific to this project, their work to pull together diverse collaborations into the same stream is quite like the dynamics characterizing much collaborative ethnography today. As many scholars of collaborative research have noted (see, e.g., Marcus 2005), we often inhabit many and diverse “fields of collaboration” every bit as multisited as multisited (see Campbell and Lassiter 2015:15–29).

Thinking about and doing collaborative research via frameworks of multiple and dynamic collaborations, that problematize collaboration and highlight difference, is arguably more common today (see, e.g., Cook 2009). The larger question for many contemporary collaborative ethnographers

concerns how these expanding collaborative field practices and products might inform and shape (and perhaps even transform) anthropological theory and practice over the long haul. Certainly, as the argument goes, these new field contexts and practices have implications for new kinds of collaborative ethnography (as demonstrated by Blaikie, Craig, Gerke, and Hofer), but their implications also reach further than that (Rappaport 2008). Scholars have noted, for example, how many new forms of collaborative research have enormous potential to radically shift our pedagogies at all levels (see, e.g., Faubion and Marcus 2009; Kirsch 2010; Lassiter and Campbell 2010). To this point, however, this and other potential “revolutions” implicated by collaborative research approaches have yet to transform, or even refunction, anthropological theory and practice in any systemic way (see White 2012). To be sure, we anthropologists have taken an important first step in broadening our field praxis and coproducing more newly diverse collaborative ethnographic processes and products such as CEE. But how might we theorize the fullest implications of important and worthwhile projects like Blaikie, Craig, Gerke, and Hofer’s such that they are more integrative, central to what anthropology could become?

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The article by Blaikie et al. discusses a medicine-making workshop involving a diverse group of Sowa Rigpa practitioners. This workshop had two aims: the first was to establish connections and knowledge exchange between the participants; the second was to enrich anthropological knowledge about Sowa Rigpa concerning its epistemology, history, theory, and practice. The 8-day workshop was created by the authors to fulfill these two aims as an experiment in collaborative event ethnography (CEE). In this comment I will first assess how successful the event was in achieving its two aims, and then move on to discuss the CEE methodology.

As the authors indicate, a range of factors have arisen in the separate states where Sowa Rigpa practitioners now exist, which pose major challenges to the continuity of this tradition. Their aim is to use anthropology to benefit Sowa Rigpa practitioners. The workshop is thus a continuation of engaged anthropology that each of the authors has been undertaking in this area for many years. The importance of bringing *amchi* together to share experiences and learn from each other was recognized in the 1980s by the NGO Leh Nutrition Project in Ladakh, which ran an *amchi* support program. Since 1984, it has organized yearly seminars with the aim of establishing a communication network between *amchi* and between *amchi* and biomedical practitioners (Smanla

and Millard 2013). Arguably it is this kind of mobilization which ultimately led to the recognition of Sowa Rigpa as an Indian system of medicine in 2010 by the Indian Parliament.

The workshop in Kathmandu brought together *amchi* from Nepal, India, and Tibetan regions of the People's Republic of China, and judging by the feedback at the end, all the participants valued the experience of coming together to share their experience and knowledge. The workshop also provided a number of important anthropological insights into Sowa Rigpa knowledge and practice. For example, the discussion among the *amchi* about how they understand "cleanliness," "quality" and "contamination," and the important insight into the role of taste in determining the quality, potency, and efficacy of medicinal ingredients. The discussion about potency has implications for how the effectiveness of a Sowa Rigpa medicine can be measured. The Cochrane Collaboration, which in biomedicine is the source of gold standard systematic reviews of clinical trials, makes a distinction between "efficacy," which it relates to the effects of medical intervention under ideal conditions (i.e., clinical trials), and "effectiveness," which is what a medicine does in ordinary circumstances. Such a distinction would be hard to maintain for Sowa Rigpa, if, as the authors say, that the benefits of a medicine are "coproduced" in relation to a specific person.

The final issue I would like to discuss concerns the CEE methodology. The authors on a number of occasions refer to a tension between vertical and horizontal social alignments in the group; they had envisioned horizontality, but verticality kept resurfacing. For instance, we are told during the ritual empowerment at the beginning of the event, the vertical elements were held at bay as the group experienced a state of *communitas*. I would argue that the whole event was ritualized in Humphrey and Laidlaw's (1994) sense of the term, and the participants entered a state of *communitas* from the moment of the empowerment at the beginning up to the final closing ceremony. Perceived in this way, the vertical and horizontal dimensions correspond respectively to Turner's notions of structure and antistructure (1977). For Turner, *communitas* brings about a state of antistructure where the differences between the participants are temporarily lost in a sense of common identity.

At the level of structure, there are differences between *amchi*, and also conflicts. Conflicts between different religious and lineage affiliations, between political and ideological perspectives, and between different visions for the future. The authors are aware of this and had taken this into consideration when they were deciding who to invite to the event. This presents a potential methodological problem: once the participants are in the state of *communitas* it is likely that what will arise in their representations is an idealized official version of Sowa Rigpa. Bourdieu (1977) has shown us that such representations fail to capture the nuances of social practice. This could have been a failing of the CEE methodology in the context of this event. The authors themselves draw attention

to the way that CEE has been criticized because the events that it has focused on differ from the standard anthropological "field." However, these criticisms do not apply in the context of the Kathmandu workshop. The authors have long established working relationships with the participants within their communities, and as such for them the workshop can be taken as an extension of the field, and based on their broader fieldwork experience they can fill in the nuances of social practice.

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### An Anthropological Equivoque: Researchers' Engagement and Knowledge Production

Blaikie and his colleagues offer a methodological definition of an ethnographical inquiry based on close collaboration between anthropologists and their research subjects. They write about collaborative event ethnography in a way that shows substantial departures from the existing literature. The main point of divergence is the fact that these anthropologists were also the organizers of the event they were seeking to examine. By doing this, they have built the terms of a singular mode of communication with their interlocutors. This is exemplified by the fact that they were concomitantly considered as donors (*sbyin-bdag*) and researchers and, by some, as friends. In other words, the anthropologists themselves have created the social conditions that produce their ethnographic reality.

These researchers must therefore be part of their own study. This is not a new thing in itself. Social theorists have insisted on considering the observer as part of his research for nearly half a century (Jongmans and Gutkind 1967). Although it is always present, the relationship between the observer and the observed is often masked by methodological or narrative decorum. The paper by Blaikie et al. has the merit of making this relationship very visible, as it broaches the dynamics of anthropological knowledge production in this context. This comment will draw attention to the ambiguous status of the knowledge produced in such ethnographic situations.

In organizing a Tibetan medicine workshop, the authors had a dual project in mind. They hoped to frame a particular form of ethnographical research while aiming to improve the living conditions of their studied subjects at the same time. This raises two questions: Is it possible to simultaneously study and transform a social object? Does political/ideological engagement undermine research objectivity? For the sociologist Aron (1959), the scholar must repress the feelings

and emotions that tie him to the object of study, as he wrote in a preface of the political writings of Weber. Still today it is widely accepted that the ethnographer's authority is expressed by his distance, real or symbolic, to the subject of study. This is one of the reasons why, for example, the insertion of this discipline into the field of international development has generated strong oppositions, both on the side of development and of anthropology (Gow 1993). It is the critical autonomy of the researcher that is called into question here. Numerous social scientists therefore camouflage their personal convictions because they would risk harming the manner in which their work is perceived in the eyes of their scientific community (McElroy 1996:521). However, everyone has a very precise view of the world; preconceptions and presuppositions, or value judgments, are inherent in the ordinary beings we are. One is no more secure than anyone else against "leaving unthought [his] own thinking" (Bourdieu 1992:209). It would then be judicious to bear in mind the sentiments that link anthropologists to their subjects, and to allow various levels of subjectivity to emerge, rather than to repudiate them as Aron suggests. Surely, ideological positioning intervenes when the anthropologist selects and classifies diverse types of data well before a formal analysis of the field is begun. The researcher's efforts to not judge the observed phenomena according to the restrictive influences of her own ideological criteria find their limit here.

In spite of these reservations, many anthropologists are engaged researchers. The forms of these engagements vary greatly. "Engaged," "applied," "public," or "militant" anthropology are not descriptive synonyms of a single category, as Blaikie et al. seem to imply. For instance, the fact of rendering social situations intelligible is in itself a form of action, and researchers need not commit to practical implementation in the field to think of themselves as "engaged" (Agier 1997). Other people favor involvement and implementation. Such an ideological posture is discernible in the work of Farmer (1999) and, through distinct methodological approaches, of Fassin (2001), Nichter (2006), and Pordié (2005). In a different social and historical context, Leiris (1969), in complete political support of the defense of colonized populations, went so far as to remind anthropologists of their duty to be politically engaged. This resonates with the kind of militant anthropology claimed by Scheper-Hughes, where commitment must be total. For this author, anthropological traditions "blind us to the banal materiality of human suffering" (1995:416); the researcher must denounce inequalities, intervene in the field, and undertake to modify the course of events. Here the question of the validity of the anthropological knowledge produced through such an approach is not even questioned. What is at stake is the ethical dimension of anthropological practice.

The approach put forward in the article by Blaikie et al. could help to build a reasoned "ethic of engagement" that would protect anthropology from two main pitfalls: epistemological (the knowledge produced does not reflect the ob-

served situation) and political (anthropology becomes instrumentalized to serve ideology). These issues are latent within the article commented here and perhaps demand further critical appraisal. In all cases, however, to maintain a distance from the object is an imperative. But this distance is neither emotional nor political: epistemological distanciation is a condition that makes political engagement through research possible.

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This collaborative event ethnography (CEE), organized by engaged anthropologists and for participation of Himalayan and Tibetan Sowa Rigpa practitioners, yields new insights into how the carefully crafted context of such a CEE endows meanings to what is happening within such a staged and structured time and space. The event was remarkable in itself by creating a unique opportunity for otherwise mostly marginalized practitioners of Tibetan medicine, and their increasingly endangered skills based upon lineage rather than institutional and certified education, to exchange knowledge in the collaborative making of efficacious medicines. Most of the practitioners came from remote Himalayan areas—mainly in Nepal and Ladakh—as well as from Tibet and Tibetan areas of China, and have been long-term informants of the four anthropologist organizers and authors of this article. The latter reflect quite extensively on the impact their own roles and presence, including as sponsors and participant observers, may have had upon this collaborative, 8-day-long workshop. One of the aims of this event was also to protect and support an increasingly endangered knowledge of handmade compounding of Tibetan *materia medica*. Through their careful choice of participants, the organizers aimed to avoid interpersonal and geopolitical tensions between different power holders in China and India, but also those within India, that is, between center (Dharamsala Men-Tsee-Khang) and periphery (Ladakh). This apolitical, somewhat neutral third space-time-frame event in Kathmandu was specifically set up to foster egalitarian rather than hierarchical knowledge exchanges among the practitioners themselves. This endeavor, bridging existing sociopolitical gaps between practitioners and their different ethnic alliances, as well as marginal and centralized and institutional practices, should be considered worthwhile in and of itself. Thus, one aim of the workshop, "to encourage knowledge exchange between diverse practitioners," was certainly achieved.

However, despite the egalitarian intentions of the organizers to create a more open, leveled, and "neutral" space by orchestrating equal opportunity for all the participants, for example, by seating them in a circle, the latter rearranged

themselves into a hierarchical order by placing the most senior and widely revered teacher and scholar—in this case the former head teacher at the Tibetan Medical College in Lhasa—upon a throne while seating themselves at his feet directly below him. It is these seemingly minor observations that are most telling about how such a third space, one apparently unconnected and beyond the everyday-life context, were used by the participants to reiterate existing social orders and identities, offering an opportunity to the anthropologists to understand the deeply engrained teacher-student relationships that persist even among otherwise disparate and “unconnected” practitioners.

The second aim, that is, to “generate new, collective, and more nuanced anthropological knowledge about Sowa Rigpa epistemology, history, theory, and practice” remains somewhat open. How can a staged event to which very specific and, to the anthropologists, mostly well-known participants were invited influence the realities beyond its premises? It also raises many other questions on what can be gained through event ethnography and even, to a certain extent through ethnographic fieldwork in general if based on situations and events staged by anthropologists themselves, how much do we influence as ethnographers the context of our inquiry, through our mere presence and the expectations that infuse our questions? How predictable are the outcomes in staged situations, such as a structured interview or an event that we shape by our questions or even nonverbal bodily expressions, that we support by our donations or encourage by other indirect means? And what can be gained in terms of knowledge and skills beyond the setting that we generate ourselves?

By chance, I recently met one of the participants from China 2 years later. Asking him about his experience of the CEE workshop in Kathmandu, he replied, “It was certainly interesting to know about the variety of Tibetan Medicine practitioners outside of China. However, our background is totally different, how to say, ‘academically uneven.’ I hope one day that the Nepalis and Ladakhis can come here to see how we practice Tibetan Medicine in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” Yet, it is exactly this sociopolitical unevenness and increasingly intergenerational gap between institutionalized and privately practicing lineage physicians that the organizers had tried to bridge through their CEE. This divide of perceptions in what is efficacious medicine and what not runs deep between diverse practitioners of Tibetan medicine and their individualized “traditional” or rather standardized “modern” approaches within and in-between all the different Asian and Western countries in which Tibetan medicine is practiced. While certain hierarchies of knowledge reformed themselves almost automatically, the observations within such a staged event certainly cannot replace comparative ethnographies in “the field” outside. What does this tell us? Certainly, that meaning is coproduced in a context-dependent and situated manner, and that a given context requires an adaptive methodology. Yet, a staged context presupposes the structure for its own methodological exploration.

## Reply

The importance of transnational and intercultural exchanges to the development of Sowa Rigpa (Tibetan medicine) are widely accepted by scholars, historians, and practitioners alike, as noted by Vincanne Adams in the first of the above comments. The workshop “Producing Efficacious Medicines” brought together *amchi* (practitioners of Sowa Rigpa) and anthropologists from seven countries. The event can be understood, in part, as a continuation of such exchanges across physical and social boundaries, but whose context, aims, processes, and outcomes differ in crucial ways from anything that came before. The event took place at a time when small-scale producers of Tibetan medicines are facing increasing marginalization through rapid commodification and standardized mass production, and when their embodied skills and methods of quality control are questioned through pharmaceutical governance regimes. Furthermore, the workshop was an experiment in collaborative event ethnography (CEE), drawing upon anthropological approaches that, as Eric Lassiter notes, push us to expand understandings of how collaborative fieldwork and writing can inform, shape, and even transform anthropological theory and practice. How might we theorize these events and processes in such a way that they are more integrative and central to what anthropology could become? Lassiter asks. The workshop, writing the article, the responses to it from colleagues, and our reply all represent important steps toward the reflexive and critical discussion needed to address this question.

Peter Brosius’s query about how things have unfolded since the workshop also speaks to how questions, as posed by Lassiter, have steered our subsequent conversations. They are worth addressing because they concern substantial shifts in how anthropology is conceived of and practiced. Considering the many recent developments in this area, including a new journal dedicated to *Collaborative Anthropologies*, the “collaborative turn” can no longer be ignored (Fitzgerald et al. 2014). But acknowledging new forms of interdisciplinarity and the collaborative impulse is not the same as embracing the theoretical richness and methodological complexity that *doing* collaborative (event) ethnography involves—for anthropologists and our interlocutors. The workshop challenged us to transcend many of our conceptions about fieldwork, which, when turned into the form of an academic article, has provoked both constructive critique and praise. We believe our work has been aptly described by Adams as a form of “experiment in ethnographic data production.” We might consider the CEE experiment as a form of serious play, wherein play is neither trivial nor uncalculated but open, still, to unexpected moves and new strategies.

We also take Lassiter’s remarks to be a productive probe toward further “decolonizing” the social sciences (Harrison 1997; Smith 2012), echoed in a fundamental premise of pragmatic action research (Greenwood and Levin 2006): that re-



search, action, and participation through the iterative dynamics of collaboration among those for whom the stakes are significant, is an ethical mode of engagement that can generate and test new knowledge to promote both social analysis and social change. Such change may manifest differently among diverse stakeholders. Although the event was not “political” as such, there is—as several commenters point out—a politics to bringing together this diverse group of Sowa Rigpa practitioners and anthropologists at a challenging time for “traditional” medical practices. Although the event itself did not alter this difficult terrain, it made its topography more visible, sparking important discussions about what matters most to this diverse group of *amchi*.

Nearly 3 years after the workshop, we realize how the CEE experiment in Kathmandu forged spaces of intellectual community that none of us experienced during previous fieldwork carried out “alone.” This ongoing collaboration has resulted in two coauthored papers (this one and Blaikie et al., in preparation), several conference presentations, multilingual reports, news articles, and a video. It also provided significant data that we have revisited in various ways, even when returning to our respective field sites. Building such a strong rapport among anthropologists working and living in four different countries is rare and in itself a valuable outcome of the workshop. Writing together—moving from spoken word and notes to a narrative that is so thoroughly *all of ours*—confounds conventions around the “ownership” of ideas and authorship in our discipline. The “rite of passage”—one of Colin Millard’s points—that began with the ritual empowerment on the second day of the workshop, marked the beginning of an ongoing “*communitas*” between us anthropologists. This deepened through our daily reflective sessions at Café Paradise, which, to answer Brosius’s question, were carried out in English, our shared research tongue. Brosius is right in assuming that this influenced what we “identified as interesting or significant as the workshop unfolded.” These sessions were our unfiltered, immediate, and largely shared but also debated responses to the events of each day. The goal was not consensus but rather multivocality and productive questioning. These discussions played a part in shaping subsequent workshop activities, but by no means dictated them. They also became recorded summaries from which to write, as collaborative experiences were analyzed and turned into text. *Amchi* participants, returning to their respective clinical and pharmacological practice, had different experiences. For some, new scholarly and emotional ties forged during the event have been maintained; for others, the workshop helped to address some of the interpersonal politics that can riddle networks of practitioners—in the Himalaya and Tibetan Plateau, as anywhere. As Mona Schrempf notes, some *amchi* participants clearly recall the workshop as a moment where knowledge was shared but also where differences between practitioners were exposed.

Experimental research methods will, by definition, raise concerns, and we seek to address at least some of these here.

Laurent Pordie’s statement that “the ethnographer’s authority is expressed by his [*sic*] distance, real or symbolic, to the subject of study,” identifies one of the major hurdles to social scientists’ acceptance of CEE or collaborative ethnography in general as a valid research method. It raises the age-old question of objectivity and how involved researchers can or should be. Traditional empiricism “drew firm lines between the researching subject and the researched object, and also defined across the social sciences what attributes of the researcher could usefully contribute to the activity of knowledge construction—namely, rationality and the capacity for detachment” (Davies 2010:2). Many would agree that any kind of engaged fieldwork is inherently subjective. This begs the question whether researchers with greater distance necessarily generate better scientific knowledge. We argue that this idea of critical distance, while useful, should not be treated as coterminous with “good” data. At the same time, as Greenwood and Levin argue, action researchers must be “adept in the use of the scientific method, with its insistence on the systematic attempt to discover the unexpected and counterintuitive explanations often hidden from view by assumptions and other elements in cultural training and social systems” (2006:99). In this sense, everyone participating in this workshop was at once an insider and an outsider, engaging in a shared experience but also acknowledging difference about what makes (for) good medicine. Here, we echo Elisabeth Hsu, as evoked in Mingkyi Tsomo’s comments, who addresses these issues of knowledge production based on long-term work with Chinese medicine practitioners: “Detached observation should maintain objectivity, but the study of so-called traditional medicines increasingly involves researchers engaging in ‘participant experience,’ as undertaken by anthropological fieldworkers who set out to learn to practice these medicines themselves” (2013:3). Making medicines together revolved around precisely this kind of “participant experience,” for anthropologists and *amchi*.

In response to Mona Schrempf’s comment that “such a staged event certainly cannot replace comparative ethnographies in ‘the field’ outside,” we underscore that it was never intended to. Rather, we argue that CEE offers an innovative method for including such events as legitimate field sites, offering valuable insights into contemporary knowledge and practice that are difficult to gain through other methodologies. We always intended our findings from the workshop to exist alongside results drawing on conventional anthropological research methods, not to devalue them. Here we agree with Schrempf that “meaning is coproduced in a context-dependent and situated manner, and that a given context requires an adaptive methodology.” Adapting fieldwork methods is something we do all the time as ethnographers. Meaning is always “coproduced” to some extent through our very presence. In this regard we accept that “a staged context presupposes the structure for its own methodological exploration,” as Schrempf concludes. However, we advocate making this process visible and open to critical reflection rather than

hiding it behind a façade of “critical distance” or “natural” field settings. As Adams’s experimental outlook on the workshop shows, such an approach involves mistakes and the negotiation of obstacles, but these are inevitable parts of fieldwork no matter how one draws a boundary around “the field.”

Schrempf also asks: “How can a staged event to which very specific and, to the anthropologists, mostly well-known participants were invited influence the realities beyond its premises?” This question is more difficult to answer since we did not engage in systematic follow-up interviews with all the participants and thus cannot comment in any detail upon the way that individual *amchi* incorporated what they learned into their own pharmacy practice. In Nepal, however, the workshop and its related media coverage were useful political statements in the long struggle for Sowa Rigpa’s recognition. We did not have high expectations of “improving the living conditions” of the *amchi* back at their homes, as assumed by Pordié, nor any aspirations of “development” per se. We rather provided a space in which various practitioners could meet and share knowledge while enabling us to learn from them about our respective research topics and real-world medical activities.

This process brought issues of standardization and marginalization to the fore, about which Dr. Dhondup from Amdo critically remarks: “Many *amchis* these days do not have the proper sensory training to assess medicine ingredient quality by traditional means.” His comment points directly to the Critically Endangered Knowledge, the theme of the workshop, and highlights the need to explore the contemporary role of “traditional means” such as tasting raw ingredients and finished medicines. When this “lack of standardization” is portrayed as something which “marginalizes Sowa Rigpa as a global health system,” as Dr. Dhondup proposes, we accept this as the perspective of a well-trained “neo-traditional” (Pordié 2008c) practitioner from a large PRC-based institution producing Tibetan medicines for Chinese and (potentially) global markets. His comment actually *underscores* the marginalization of lineage-based Himalayan *amchi*, who have neither the training nor means to standardize their medicine production according to national and/or international standards, but nevertheless continue to provide crucial primary health care using “traditional means,” however backward others might perceive these to be.

Likewise, the view of a workshop participant from China, quoted by Schrempf, seems to reflect the sociopolitical and medical hierarchies we discovered in the seating arrangements during the workshop, thus confirming one of our findings: that established social and cultural differences and hierarchies played out in the horizontal and vertical modes of interaction during the workshop. The comment also highlights what we wanted to avoid in the first place—namely that institutionally-trained *amchi* perceptions of “backwardness” among noninstitutional practitioners hinder knowledge exchange. The participant’s comment does not mean we were unsuccessful. The *amchi* were exchanging knowl-

edge on all kinds of topics, including substitution of endangered or unavailable species, and crossed lines of conventional hierarchies of knowing in Sowa Rigpa. As with all forms of experimentation, there was no way to tell at the beginning how such an exchange would work out. We took a risk, and consider it a success that the outcome elicits debates on the coproduction of knowledge through CEE and advances the current “collaborative turn” in anthropology.

For *amchi* and anthropologists, another crucial element of this “participant experience” involved the Yuthog Nyingthig empowerment. Remember that it was *amchi* from diverse quarters who requested this spiritual transmission from several of us anthropologists as a form of “religious authorization,” as Tsomo calls it. This request catalyzed the idea for a workshop in the first place. Linking the empowerment to making efficacious medicine helped to create pragmatic and ontological spaces later on in the workshop, in Tsomo’s words, “to observe a special evaluation system, through debating and reasoning controversial issues, as a special way of refining knowledge.” As both a Tibetan physician and an anthropologist, Tsomo is uniquely positioned to comment on the dynamics of Sowa Rigpa epistemology, especially in the domain of pharmacology. This novel CEE approach might also be thought of as building on an established tradition of Sowa Rigpa experimentation, whereas from an anthropological perspective, the workshop diverged more significantly from traditional epistemology and modes of practice.

This discussion leads us to reflect on Pordié’s suggestion that our approach might offer some protection against “two main pitfalls: epistemological (the knowledge produced does not reflect the observed situation) and political (anthropology becomes instrumentalized to serve ideology).” We did intend to produce a distinct “ethic of engagement” through this event, and were consciously striving to carve out some middle ground between exaggerated and artificial distancing on the one hand, and more radical forms of political and social engagement on the other. The fact that we focused on small-scale pharmacy rather than on inequalities in health care or endemic violence, for example, certainly made it easier to occupy such a space, but nevertheless these pitfalls need to be acknowledged. As Millard points out, each of us has long-standing, situated conceptions of *amchi* in the context of their daily lives, and we have researched within and written about these frames extensively. Individually, this helped us to avoid overstating the significance of the observations made during the workshop, and collectively it enabled us to address possible misinterpretations arising from individual political or epistemological positioning.

In conclusion, social scientists are increasingly aware that conferences, workshops, and meetings of various kinds are today important sites of social exchange, knowledge production, policy making, and political action. If we are able to overcome the restricted way in which “the field” is still delineated in certain quarters, CEE methodologies offer highly promising and powerful ways of rendering such events ame-

nable to deeper anthropological analysis. If future chances arise, we would seek to extend the method to incorporate more in-person (as opposed to e-mail, phone, and Skype) collaborative preworkshop planning and more postworkshop writing projects with participants in multiple languages, as well as more follow-up work to assess the outcomes for all involved. We hope our CEE experiment in Kathmandu contributes to this “collaborative turn” and to continued decolonizing moves in anthropology. By this we specifically mean that power relations inherent in all anthropological work are made visible and critically reflected upon, and that knowledge accrued from research does not exclusively benefit academics. A central question we pose is whether, within a carefully defined “ethics of engagement” and with critical self-awareness, anthropologists might include events in which the definition of “participant-observation” is recast toward a more dynamic (and perhaps more transparent) understanding of social organization, experimentation, and facilitation.

—Calum Blaikie, Sienna Craig,  
Barbara Gerke, and Theresia Hofer

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