



Juni, zari, and asu puchauni: Why do the ethnically Tibetan Humli-Khyampas of far western Nepal use socio-cultural Hindu concepts?

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The Humli-Khyampas are a group of nomadic traders who bartered Tibetan and Indian salt for rice in far western Nepal for many generations. After the 1990s, their traditional trade came to a standstill because of Chinese policies. The research material on which this paper is based stems from my field research carried out in 1976–1977 when the Humli-Khyampas were still walking with their sheep and goats from the Indian border villages up to the Tibetan trade marts in Purang to buy or barter Tibetan salt. Living part of their economic cycle in the hilly region among Hindus meant that they also worshipped Hindu gods when problems arose. Despite being proud of not being settled villagers and not being Hindu, they adopted a few distinctive Nepalese cultural concepts, i.e., juni, zari, and asu puchauni. Why?

The first part of the paper deals with the ethnographic account: juni stands for the wealth a woman receives in her old age after her husband has died and the household is partitioned; zari is the compensation money a woman's previous husband's family demands from this woman's new husband's family after an elopement; asu puchauni means the compensation a son receives after his father died and his mother remarries into another household. The second part focuses on the interpretation: (1) Are these new customs or do equivalent ones exist in western Tibetan societies? If yes, why did the Humli-Khyampas replace the Tibetan terms by Nepali ones? (2) What does it mean for Humli-Khyampa women? Is this to their material and/or social profit or loss?