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NEWS AND NOTES

Research on Environmental Change in the Himalaya

Two geographers, P. P. Karan at the University of Kentucky and David Zurick at Eastern Kentucky University, were awarded a grant from the National Science Foundation for a collaborative, multi-year project on "Regional Assessment of Environmental Change in the Himalaya." The project area is contained by the bends of the Indus and Brahmaputra rivers, and includes 138 mountain districts in northern Pakistan, northwestern and northeastern India, Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhutan. Phase I of the study involves a macro-level regional analysis of land cover/use change and associated socio-economic and demographic factors, based on archival materials, census data, and remote sensing techniques. Data has been gathered from numerous PL 480 libraries in the United States and from various offices located in the Himalaya countries. During Phase I, Zurick spent part of the winter 1993-94 in the field collecting study materials and establishing institutional affiliations with host universities. Those efforts augment additional archival and technical resources available for the study.

The purpose of study phase I is to assess regional variability in the environmental history of the Himalaya. Data analysis for Phase I includes spatial statistical techniques, using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) applications and computer mapping. A series of regional choropleth maps are being produced which show the significant changes that have occurred among study factors and the strength of relationships between study variables.

In August 1994 the study began Phase II, which establishes local identities to the regional trends observed in Phase I. The purpose of this study phase is to better understand the specific driving forces that are behind the historical environmental change in the region. Empirical fieldwork at selected sites located in the western, central, and eastern Himalaya examines local environmental shifts, subsistence usage of the natural environment, and modernization trends associated with market economies, with infrastructural developments, and with government policies. The methods of the local fieldwork include focus group surveys, land use studies, mapping, repeat photography, and archival resources. Zurick spent the autumn and early winter, 1994-95, in the Himalaya collecting materials for Phase II. Karan will be in the field for various periods during 1995.

The overall thrust of the Himalaya Project is to ascertain, for much of the mountain region, the historical and contemporary forces that shape nature/society relations and that change the mountain environment. That large study goal subsumes numerous research questions. They include the rates of environmental change for various parts of the Himalaya, the nature of local subsistence resource usage and the consequent impacts on the land, and the roles of modernity and development in the degradation of the Himalayan natural environment. The study views the Himalaya as an integrated region exhibiting complex internal variability in terms of culture, policy, and environment. Consequently, by combining macro and micro approaches in a spatial-historical perspective, the research seeks to understand the nature of the regional environmental patterns and the local processes that drive them.

A large Himalaya human-environment database is being developed that, upon completion of the study, will be made available to interested scholars and others working in the region. It will contain information on population and resources, development infrastructures, and other social information. In addition to scientific papers and a research monograph, it is envisaged that an end product of the study will be a comprehensive Environmental Atlas of the Himalaya.

David Zurick, Eastern Kentucky University

Heights Of The Heavens: Buddhism In Mongolia And Tibet

From May to December 1994 the Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford, England, held a small exhibition under this title of photographs and objects from Mongolia and Tibet. The central exhibit was a six-foot high model, made in 1912, of the Megjid Janraiseg temple in Ulan Bator. In World War Two the Soviets took the central statue away and used the temple as a print works. The model is now being used to help in the restoration of the temple. In cases around this impressive model were collected various unsurprising examples of Tibetan material culture: monastic dance masks, monastic hats, trumpets, and so on. The photographs on display included 37 black and white pictures by Charles Bell (1920) and F. Spencer Chapman (1936), and 11 recent colour photographs of Mongolia by Paul Harris. Photographic highlights included the Potala at New Year (1920 and 1936), an itinerant woman preacher (Bell), the 13th Dalai Lama in 1920 (Bell), the 14th Dalai Lama aged 3 (Chapman), the Abbot of Sera monastery (Chapman), and a Nying-ma snags-pa posing with thigh-bone trumpet, skulls and drum (Bell). The descriptions of the exhibits were adequate, though the present reviewer would have liked to know the source of the following 'explanation': "Gautama himself was a follower of Brahmanism, the precursor of Hinduism, and perhaps never intended to found an entirely new religion" (!).

David N. Gellner, Brunel University

Prime Minister Adhikari In London

On 16th March 1995 the Prime Minister of Nepal, Man Mohan Adhikary made a presentation at Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London, at the invitation of the Britain-Nepal Society under the chairmanship of Sir Neil Thorne. He began by pointing out the degree to which the King Birendra had cooperated with the development of a constitutional monarchy, and praised him for not insisting on extra powers. He stressed the need in the present situation for there to be consensus between different political parties. He talked about his desire to prevent future human rights violations and said that Nepalese voters should have identity cards, on the lines of those being planned in India. He also said he was in favour of state funding for political parties.

On economic issues the Prime Minister stated his preference for 'common agreeable and practical land law'. Either land must go to the tiller or landlords must invest in it. Medium landlords would receive compensation, he said. In his opinion this was the very least they could do, but it was also all they could hope to do: there was no question of thinking in terms of state farms.

On industry and commerce he said that they were looking for investment from the private sector and for foreign investment. Tea, coffee, medicinal herbs, and tourism were all areas of potential growth. He also said that he was in favour of laws giving equal property rights to women.

Taking questions from the floor, and responding to a question about development and pollution, he admitted that there had been reckless deforestation, leading to landslides and consequent floods in Bangladesh. He said that reforestation was taking place with the help of many foreign agencies.

After several other questions he was asked if he had any plans to change the name of his party. There were smiles and chuckles around the room. He replied that they had won their votes under their present name. Their policies were democratic and result-oriented. "If people are fond of that name, let them have that name. . ."

David N. Gellner, Brunel University

Northern Pakistan: Graduate Student Positions Available

We have secured a research grant to investigate portering relations and transcultural interaction in northern Pakistan. This project requires the participation of three graduate students in Geography (2 M.A., 1 Ph.D.). We are currently seeking qualified applicants interested in these positions. Our project includes funding to cover students' field expenses as well as research assistantships for part of their tenure at the University of Toronto. A brief description of the project and positions follows:

Our main goal is to explain the contemporary importance of portering for structuring transcultural relations, socially and geographically, in the Karakoram mountains of northern Pakistan. Four explicit research objectives inform that goal:

1) to describe the political economy of portering in the Karakoram region from European contact to the present in order to illuminate the instrumental context for a pivotal set of contact relations.

2) to delineate the discursive configurations that provide an ideological context for portering relations in order to understand how these relations have been reconfigured, accommodated and contested over time.

3) to examine how new but historically and spatially contingent discourses recreate portering as a critical site for shaping wider social and cultural relation in the contact zone.

4) to map the spatial tapestry of transcultural contact structured through portering - the specific and shifting spatial sites of interaction, contestation, domination and resistance - in order to describe the geographical constitution of transcultural relations in the Karakoram contact zone, both at a regional scale and in greater detail in two indigenous communities.

Description of Positions:

Graduate positions will be held in the Department of Geography, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Participation in the project is contingent upon acceptance of the candidate into the School of Graduate Studies, University of Toronto for Fall 1996 entry.

1) M.A. - the student will be responsible for collating and coding archival material collected by the principal investigators as well as developing a special expertise in some subset suitable for a Master's thesis (e.g., an analysis of the travel narratives of late 19th century mountaineering expeditions), and presenting results in relevant scholarly forums.

2) M.A. - the student will be responsible for developing and administering structured open-ended interviews in 20 Balti villages, in order to gather information on internal porter regulation, porter incomes, relations with travellers, etc. S/he will also be responsible for interviewing key actors in the regional trekking economy, and collecting statistical material on adventure tourism in Baltistan. The student will be required to develop a subset of this material into a Master's thesis exploring social and spatial dimensions of local and regional portering economies, and will be expected to present results in relevant scholarly forums.

3) Ph.D. - the student's primary responsibility will be to develop and conduct an ethnographic study leading to a dissertation that emphasizes the embeddedness of gender in the constitution of transcultural porter relations and the discursive configurations that contextualize them. She will also conduct archival research relevant to her sub-project. We expect this candidate to contribute to a specifically feminist perspective on portering in the Karakoram. The student will publish and present results in appropriate academic forums.

Principal investigators:

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For more information contact MacDonald before July 13 or after Sept. 1 1995, or forward the following:

- a) statement of interest emphasizing previous field and research
- b) 2 academic references;
- c) course transcripts;
- d) brief C.V.

Manitoba - Delhi Research in Kulu

A group from the University of Manitoba and the University of Delhi will be continuing a project in the Kulu District of Himachal Pradesh this summer. The project has to do with common property forest use in the montane and alpine zones and related issues of land degradation and natural hazards. A partner field study is occurring in the west Kootenay area of British Columbia in comparable terrain.

From HimNet, posted by Jim Gardner (GARDNER@adminbldg.lan1.umanitoba.ca)



Boys, Melemchigaon. Photo by John Melville Bishop