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Letter to the Editor: Himalayan Research: Human and Cultural Without the Physical

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HIMALAYAN RESEARCH: HUMAN AND CULTURAL WITHOUT THE PHYSICAL?

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William Morris Davis, the great geomorphologist of the late nineteenth century, long ago recognized the problem of research on only physical aspects of the land without attention to the concomitant human use of that land. Accordingly he helped form the Association of American Geographers with the express purpose of maintaining strong research links between the human/land dichotomy. In the first half of the twentieth century considerable attention was paid, within the geography community of scholars at least, to incorporating both human and physical aspects together in any number of physiographic studies, in spite of an unfortunate foray into environmental determinism. In this deterministic side track for a time the physical environment was thought to be a major control of the human situation and its cultural development, but more clear thinking ultimately prevailed, and the old fashioned, and ultimately futile search for environmental controls retreated deep into the background. Nonetheless, the ongoing connection between human and physical geography was generally regarded with approval by most.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the onset of the inevitable reductionism, necessitated by ever finer divisions of knowledge in order to sustain intellectual progress, led to a drift away from the admirable objective of interrelating the human and cultural aspects to the physical environment in which they exist. In the case of the **Himalayan Research Bulletin**, with its history as an outgrowth of interest in Buddhism, and its strong association to the Nepal Studies Association, the obvious bias toward the east end of the range, as well as to issues related only to the people of the mountains to the exclusion of the physical environment, leaves obvious gaps in need of attention. After all, the very magnificence of these mountains we all love so much is indeed a direct function of the physical aspects of the environment, that should be studied alongside the fascinating cultures that inhabit the range. To do less is to ignore one of the very reasons that we work in these spectacular lands. Surely the Himalayan enthusiasts and high mountain experts recognize the truth of these statements, even if we are less willingly restricted by our own disciplinary boundaries. Nonetheless, we readers of the

Himalayan Research Bulletin could be more willing to entertain a diversity of human and cultural aspects of the Himalaya, even while aspects of the geology, climate, hydrology, geomorphology, resources, and the like are presented as well.

Thus my plea here is for inclusion, rather than exclusion; in order for greater justification of the name of the journal, we need to seek a wider range of contributions while we educate the readership to the desirability of broadening horizons. Lest some think that this is a bad idea, or that they won't much understand contributions far from their areas of expertise, I suggest that this is true of nearly everyone in any case. Who among us can claim to understand every paper in most journals anyway? Nevertheless, we can all get a general idea of most technical papers, providing that such papers are reviewed by competent people who recognize the need for comprehensibility of eclectic contributions to a journal of restricted geographic area such as the **Himalayan Research Bulletin**.

This does not mean that the **Himalayan Research Bulletin** will suddenly be flooded with a variety of nearly incomprehensible discussions about such esoteric subjects as deep crystalline rocks and geologic plate motions, or filled with mathematical equations. Rather it would mean that papers with a physical base could be comfortably submitted and reviewed, as long as their interdisciplinary nature would prove useful to the general readership. Especially welcome could be papers that sought to translate the significance of physically based material to the general Himalayan focus of this journal. In other words, papers that reviewed the trends in physical science of relevance to the overall condition of the Himalayan mountains would be appropriate. Suggestions for review papers of particular focus could be sought. Such topics as seismic hazards, deglaciation and human landuse, monsoon modeling into the future, or the influence of hydrology on Himalayan landscape evolution could be of general interest to the readership. In this fashion the **Himalayan Research Bulletin** would be broadened in scope and, in my opinion at least, opened to a wider readership. What do we have to lose?