

2010

Conferences

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WORKSHOP ON MODERN TIBETAN STUDIES AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES: DATA, TOOLS, MAPS AND ARCHIVES

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY IN NEW YORK,
FEBRUARY 6-7, 2009

A workshop entitled “Modern Tibetan Studies and the Social Sciences: Data, Tools, Maps and Archives” was organized by Lauran Hartley at Columbia University on February 6th and 7th, 2009. Major funding was provided by the Shelley & Donald Rubin Foundation. The objective was to encourage undergraduate and graduate students to consider the Himalayan region as a short-term or long-term topic of study, by demonstrating the availability of data and research tools that could be applied in their social science and pre-professional coursework. A second aim was to promote use of the vast amount of recently acquired Tibetological materials at Columbia University and other institutions in New York.

The workshop’s conveners invited five scholars in the area of Tibetan social sciences and GIS mapping: Geoff Childs (Washington University at St. Louis), Andrew Fischer (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague), Karl Ryavec (University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point), Emily Yeh (University of Colorado-Boulder), and Tsering Wangyal Shawa (Princeton). Columbia faculty and alumni—including Gray Tuttle, Robert Barnett, Jeremiah Trinidad-Christensen, Chengzhi Wang, and Paul Hackett (alumni)—also gave presentations.

February 6th opened with a panel discussion on the state of the field and noteworthy studies to date. This was followed by individual presentations: Tsering Wangyal Shawa on Tibetan maps, Karl Ryavec on GIS mapping of Tibetan historical sites, Geoff Childs on demographic data sets of Tibetan populations, Emily Yeh on the cultural and human geography of the Tibetan Plateau, and Andrew

Fischer on the social and political economy of contemporary Tibet. The evening closed with a screening of a new film *Kokonor* (Purple Productions, 2008), which documents economic development, environmental degradation, and the underside of the tourist trade on the shores of Qinghai Lake through interviews with local residents.

On February 7th participants visited the C. V. Starr East Asian Library and Lehman Library for hands-on workshops to practice using local histories, GIS software, film/video editing software, and social science statistical packages. Jeff Wallman of the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center (NYC) also demonstrated the Tibetan Buddhist Resource Center’s core text collections and Knowledge Base with place/name directory. On Saturday afternoon, participants traveled downtown for a tour of the Latse Contemporary Tibetan Cultural Library and a workshop on educational and development-related sources. Finally, as the workshop was coordinated to coincide with the Situ Panchen conference at the Rubin Museum, many of our participants remained for the exhibit tour, reception, and accompanying symposium.

More than 70 participants from around the country attended the workshop, including undergraduate students, graduate students, Columbia University and Barnard College faculty and library staff, as well as faculty and library staff from other universities and organizations. The workshop presentations are now archived for free public use at <http://itunes.columbia.edu>.

SITU PANCHEN: CREATION AND CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT IN 18TH-CENTURY TIBET

THE RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART IN NEW YORK,
FEBRUARY 7-8, 2009

KARL DEBRECZENY, RUBIN MUSEUM OF ART

The Rubin Museum of Art organized a scholarly conference entitled “Situ Panchen: Creation and Cultural Engagement in 18th-Century Tibet”. The conference centered on the cultural legacy of Situ Panchen Chokyi Jungne (1700-1774), who made major contributions to the fields of painting, the literary arts, and medicine. He was also a charismatic leader during a particularly volatile period in Tibetan history, as well as the senior court chaplain in the cultur-

ally significant Kingdom of Derge on the Sino-Tibetan border. The conference organizers invited eight scholars to present on the many aspects of his cultural production and engagement with the social world of his time. Papers were given by Remi Chaix (Societes et Cultures en Himalaya, CNRS, Paris) on Situ Panchen and the House of Derge: A Demanding but Beneficial Relationship, Karl Debreczeny (Rubin Museum of Art) on Situ Panchen’s Artistic Legacy in Yun-

nan, Frances Garrett (University of Toronto) on Medical Literature in the Situ Panchen Tradition, Nancy G. Lin (University of California, Berkeley) on Situ Panchen and the Re-enactment of Buddhist Origins, Jann Ronis (University of Virginia) on Situ Panchen and Sectarian Relations in Eighteenth-Century Derge: Precursor to the Ecumenical Movement (ris med), and Kurtis R. Schaeffer (University of Virginia) on Situ the Scholar.

The conference was organized to celebrate the opening of the Rubin Museum of Art's exhibition *Patron and Painter: Situ Panchen and the Revival of the Encampment Style* (on view at the Rubin Museum of Art from February 6th to August 17th, 2009, and

at the Smithsonian Sackler Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. from March 13th, 2010 to July 18th, 2010). Tashi Tsering (Amnye Machen Institute) gave the keynote talk and discussants were David Jackson (Rubin Museum of Art) and Elliot Sperling (Indiana University). Podcasts of the papers can be downloaded at iTunes (see <http://deimos3.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/Browse/rmanyc.org.1932001687.01932001689>)

Conference papers will be published in a special issue of the online Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies (www.thlib.org/collections/texts/jiats/).

ASSOCIATION FOR ASIAN STUDIES ANNUAL MEETING

CHICAGO

MARCH 26-29, 2009

The 2009 Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting included several panels and numerous individual papers on the Himalayan region. These included the following:

A panel titled "**Situ Panchen, Tibetan Polymath of 18th Century Derge**" was organized by Jann Ronis (University of Virginia) and included papers by Nancy Grace Lin (University of California, Berkeley), "Situ Panchen and the Arbitration of Buddhist Origins"; Frances Garrett (University of Toronto), "The Medical Teachings of Situ Panchen"; Karl Debreczeny (Rubin Museum of Art), "Situ Panchen's Activities and Artistic Legacy in Yunnan"; and Jann Ronis (University of Virginia), "Situ Panchen and Sectarian Relations in 18th Century Derge." Elena Pakhoutova (University of Virginia) organized a panel titled "**Himalayan Inner Asian Art and Culture: An Interdisciplinary Panel**" that included papers by Elena Pakhoutova on "Paintings of the Eight Great Events of the Buddha's Life, Sacred Places, and Religious Identity"; Andrew H. Quintman (Princeton University), "Biographical Relics in the Consecration of Tibetan Portraiture"; Cameron D. Warner (Dickinson College), "Politics and Paean: The Ritual of Offering Eulogy-Scarfs to the Jowo Sakyamuni [statue]"; Uranchimeg Tsultem (University of California), "Zanabazar: Building of a Buddhist State in Medieval Mongolia"; and Leigh Miller Sangster (Emory University), "Producing Contemporary Tibetan Art in Lhasa: A New Approach to Memory Work and Agency".

Individual papers on Nepal included ones by Lauren Leve (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), "Secularism and Democracy in Nepal"; Piers Locke (University of Kent), "Shifting Parameters of Personhood Among Nepali Elephant Handlers"; Michael Baltutis (University of Northern Iowa), "Between Ritual Redaction and Textual Performance: Mediating Divine and Ethnic Conflict in Eighteenth Century Kathmandu"; Jessica V. Birkenholtz (University of Chicago), "The Becoming of a Ritual: the Disjunction between Narrative and Performance in Nepal's Svasthani Tradition"; and Christoph Emmrich (University of Toronto-Mississauga), "Loud and Slow: Reading and Re-Reading Practices among the Newar." Individual papers on Tibet included ones by Felix Wemheuer (University of Vienna/Harvard University), "Famine and Nationalism: Hunger and Food in the Propaganda War between Beijing and Dharamsala"; Jacob P. Dalton (Yale University), "The Manuscript Culture of Tibetan Dharanis at Dunhuang"; Jeffrey W. Cupchik (York University), "The Tibetan Chod Ritual: Tantric Embodiment of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra"; Amy P.O. Holmes-Tagchungdarpa (University of Alabama), "Mud, Compassion and Power in the Negotiation of Religious and Political Authority in the Himalayas: The Patronage of Togden Shakya Shri's Renovations of the Stupas of Nepal." For abstracts of these papers and papers from previous AAS conferences visit the following: <http://www.aasianst.org/absts/main.htm>

BRITIAN NEPAL ACADEMIC COUNCIL (BNAC) STUDY DAY REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

MARCH 30, 2009

IAN HARPER, BRITAIN NEPAL ACADEMIC COUNCIL

The Britain Nepal Academic Council (BNAC) held its seventh study day on 30th March 2009 at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Coinciding with the British Association of South Asian Studies conference, over fifty attendees enjoyed a packed schedule of varied presentations. In keeping with the tradition of the event, the call

for papers was open and encouraged unpublished ongoing research and the work of graduate students. Thus the day embodied the diversity and richness of current research interests both in and about Nepal in the UK, with presentations including the fields of political science, development, public health, nursing studies, anthropology,

and botany. It was particularly gratifying that nearly half the presentations made were by current students from the Universities of Leeds, Aberdeen and Edinburgh.

Bookended between stimulating reflections on the current socio-political situation in the Tarai by the *Nepali Times* journalist Prashant Jha, and the most recent film of the anthropologist Ben Campbell, “A Transhimalayan Road and the People of the Border”, papers were arranged around themes and research clusters. Presentations outlining broad research agendas included: The Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh’s the Flora of Nepal Project (<http://www.rbge.org.uk/science/major-floras/flora-of-nepal>); six presentations showcasing the Aberdeen Public Health Research agenda, (including work on HIV and sexual health, Maoist health workers, and women’s

health issues) and the work by members of the Centre for Nepal Studies (UK) (<http://www.cnsuk.org.uk/>). Other presentations incorporated a focus on socio-political transformations (the demise of the Monarchy, the question of Nepal as a “failed state”, and local perceptions on conflict), health worker migration from Nepal to the UK, development related issues (communications technology and community forestry), and public health. The popularity of the event, and the opportunity to share the work of others normally disciplinarily distant, means that a more systematic conference will be planned by BNAC for the future.

To see the full timetable of presentations and presenters for the day visit: http://www.digitalhimalaya.com/bnac/study_days.html

CONFERENCE OF THE SEECHAC (SOCIÉTÉ EUROPÉENNE POUR L’ÉTUDE DES CIVILISATIONS DE L’HIMALAYA ET DE L’ASIE CENTRALE – EUROPEAN SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF HIMALAYAN AND CENTRAL ASIAN CIVILIZATIONS)

PARIS

APRIL 27-28, 2009

ISABELLE HENRION-DOURCY, UNIVERSITÉ LAVAL

POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONSTRAINTS ON ARTISTIC CREATION FROM THE HIMALAYAS TO CENTRAL ASIA, FROM ANCIENT TO CONTEMPORARY TIMES

The first conference of the newly formed SEECHAC (<http://seechac.org/asso/accueil>) was organized by Gérard Fussman at the Collège de France. It drew together twenty scholars from France, Italy, the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States and Canada, and was attended by an average of sixty auditors throughout the two days. Most contributions, in either French or English, came from specialists in art history, but there were also a few presentations on history, literature, anthropology and performance studies. The scope of the conference was deliberately broad, both geographically and historically, in order to create an opportunity for scholars from different fields to reflect together on the ever present constraints weighing on artistic processes: whether religious or political, whether taking place in Bronze Age Central Asia or in contemporary Tibet, these constraints have constantly shaped both the form and content of art making. Under consideration here were statues, paintings, architectural constructions, illustrations on woodblock carvings, symbolism, drama, monastic dances and literature.

The Tibetan cultural world at large was the most represented in the conference. In the field of art history, contributions included Philip Denwood (SOAS) on “Inscriptional and other evidence on the dates of the foundation and reconsecration of the temples at Alchi, Ladakh”; Marjo Alafouzo (SOAS) on “The iconography and the historical context of the drinking scene in the Dukhang at Alchi, Ladakh”; Nathalie Bazin (Musée Guimet) on “The political and religious influences in the depictions of the kingdom of Shambhala”; Marialaura Di Mattia-Polichetti (Rome) on “An itinerary in the art and architecture of Western Tibet”; the Sinologist Deborah Sommer

(Gettysburg College) for a cross-cultural perspective on “Confucius in Tibet”; and finally, a more recent perspective, Nathalie Gyatso on “Contemporary painting in Lhasa: refusing the constraints”. Other presentations about the Tibetan cultural world were delivered by Matthew Kapstein (EPHE and University of Chicago) on “The oracle and the temple of Lamo-tchok in 18th C. Tibet”; Marta Sernesi, (Università di Roma La Sapienza) on “The patronage of Tsong kha pa by the Phag mo gru pa and the beginnings of printing in Tibet according to a text from the Tucci collection”; Cameron Warner (Dickinson College) on “The Ritual of offering eulogy kha-btags to the Jowo Shakyamuni”; Massimiliano Polichetti (Museo Nazionale d’Arte Orientale) on “The dragon (*druk*) in Himalayan symbology”; while those who dealt with contemporary issues were Nathalie Gauthard (Université de Nice) on “The Tibetan ritual dances in exile: confronting globalization”; Isabelle Henrion-Dourcy (Université Laval), on “Tibetan drama in the PRC: strategies of preservation, hybridization and patrimonialization”, and finally Lara Maconi (INALCO) with her presentation “From ‘cult to poetry’ to literary activism: The literary, spiritual and political development of ‘Od zer, Tibetan writer writing in Chinese”. Surprisingly, there was only one presentation on non-Tibetan Nepal, more precisely on the Newars, that of Will Tuladhar-Douglas (University of Aberdeen), entitled “Rat or shrew: How a small iconographic difference makes a difference in ritual, religion and resistance”.

In geographical and historical contrast, the remaining papers on Central Asia all dealt with periods before the end of the first millennium C.E.: Henri-Paul Francfort (CNRS) spoke on “Imposed and free figures in the arts of Central Asia at Bronze Age”; Frantz Grenet (CNRS) on “New iconographic data on royal protocol in pre-Islamic Iran”; Monika Zin (University of Munich) on “Manichaeism on the

Buddhist Silk Road”; Laure Feugère (Musée Guimet) on “Portraits of donors: An aspect of Kshitigarbha in Dunhuang after the Tibetan occupation”; David Neil Schmid (North Carolina State University) on “Some light again on the Six Ways: About depictions of destinies (*gati*) in Dunhuang”; and finally Paola Vergara Caffarelli (University of Genoa) on “The political and artistic constraints on artistic creations of the Oriental Church, from the 6th to the 14th C.”

Some papers were delivered with wit and humor, most of them with an impressive wealth of data and details, and all of them with abundant illustrations. The only two regrets would be first, the relative absence of papers on Nepal and the Indian Himalayas, which would have undoubtedly enriched the discussion with examples from other political regimes; and second, the fact that a few papers

did not exactly deal with the subject they announced, thereby somewhat losing the focus of the conference. On the whole, while it may have seemed a risky venture to bring together scholars from such diverse specializations, it turned out to be a very stimulating discussion: the periods for questions and answers after each presentation were not limited to exchanges between specialists of the very field, but were opportunities for all participants—and audience alike—to engage freely with the issues brought up in each paper. A recurrent theme of the debates was that of the definition of “tradition”, and its political implications. SEECHAC is planning to hold a second conference in the near future, which all participants were very much looking forward to.

REFLECTIONS ON THE 7TH CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF TRADITIONAL ASIAN MEDICINES (IASTAM)

THIMPHU, BHUTAN,
SEPTEMBER 7-11, 2009

SIENNA R. CRAIG, DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF IASTAM

Founded in 1979 by the medical anthropologist Charles Leslie and the historian Arthur Llewellyn (A.L.) Basham, the International Association for the Study of Traditional Asian Medicine (IASTAM) represents a unique vision of bringing academics and practitioners of Asian medical traditions into dialogue with each other. The organization’s mission is to promote the study and cross-cultural understanding of Asian medicines from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, and to do so in a way that not only honors but also embraces the sometimes difficult task of reckoning the world of reflection and critique with that of engagement and practice. IASTAM’s previous congresses have been held in places as diverse as Canberra (1979), Bombay (1990), and Austin (2006), but until last year, never had a Congress been held in a Himalayan country. Likewise, while one can find the occasional paper or reference to Tibetan medicine among the listings of abstracts from previous international congresses, neither scholarly nor practitioner perspectives on Tibetan medicine and related themes of Tibetan and Himalayan civilizations have been prominent in the history of the organization.

All of this changed last year, when the 7th IASTAM congress was held in Thimphu, Bhutan. Not only was this the largest international conference to ever be held in the Himalayan Kingdom, but it was also the first IASTAM event that thoroughly embraced and represented scholars and practitioners of *Sowa Rigpa*, the “science of healing” practiced and studied in its diverse forms across the sweep of High Asia and beyond, and known in the hosting Land of the Dragon (*brug yul*) as “Buddhist Medicine.” More than 200 people attended this event, which was held in the Royal Institute of Management (RIM) on the western outskirts of Bhutan’s capital, Thimphu, and which was hosted by the Institute for Traditional Medicine Services, Ministry of Health, Government of Bhutan. The event was covered

by all major Bhutanese newspapers, and was also featured on regional television and radio.

The congress brought together not only scholars and practitioners of Tibetan, Himalayan, East Asian and South Asian healing systems, but also social entrepreneurs, civil servants, and representatives of global businesses engaged in the commercial sale of Asia-derived medicinal products. Students of Asian medical traditions – including those from the local Bhutanese Traditional Medical College – were present and engaged in the conference. This international gathering was also an opportunity for other Bhutanese students (e.g. from the Languages and Cultures Program of the Royal University) to see and engage with world-class scholarly and professional presentations. This *mélange* of perspectives owed a lot to the theme of this congress: Cultivating Traditions and the Challenges of Globalization.

A DIVERSITY OF SCHOLARSHIP AND PRACTICE

During our five days together in Thimphu, many unique and innovative conversations were had within and between scholars, scientists, policymakers and practitioners. Compared with previous IASTAM congresses, one noticed a growth in the range of topics and methodological approaches in the schedule, from history, philology and religion to literature, Asian medical and biomedical practices and sciences, and from anthropology, art history, material culture, law to globalization, gender studies and modernity. I offer here a few salient examples of this diversity. Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim of the Wellcome Trust Center for the History of Medicine in the UK presented on exotic *materia medica* present in the Dunhuang cave manuscripts, while M. Alejandro Chaoul of the Center for Health, Humanities and the Human Spirit at the University of Texas and the MD Anderson Cancer Center presented on the integration of Tibetan yoga (*rtsa rlung phrul khor*) into contemporary medical settings in the United

States. Stephan Kloos, a recent PhD from the UCSF/Berkeley medical anthropology program, presented on “science and the reinvention of Tibetan medicine in exile,” based on recent ethnography at the Men-Tsee-Khang in Dharamsala. Mary Cameron of Florida Atlantic University took the opportunity to present new research from Nepal on the relationship between Ayurveda and nature.

Particularly salient from a Tibetan Studies perspective were several panels conducted entirely *in Tibetan language*, and devoted to issues of practice as well as textual studies. Topics under discussion at this panel ranged from comparative studies about the efficacy of Tibetan medical treatments for hypertension by Dr. Namla Kr from the Qinghai Tibetan Medical Hospital, preliminary research on the efficacy of Tibetan medicine against various forms of cancer by Dorjee Raptan, a clinician at the Tibetan Medical Centre in Bangalore and a member of the Central Council for Tibetan Medicine in India, a discussion of clinical research on *honlok* disease (dementia) by Renchen Dhondrup of the Qinghai University Tibetan Medical College, a presentation by Tibetan medical practitioner and anthropologist Mingji Cuomo on Tibetan medical diagnosis and treatment for diabetes, and a presentation on herbal steam baths by Druntsho Sangay Wangdi from the NITM in Bhutan.

Tibetan language and bilingual panels also included a wide ranging discussion about Bon medicine, and a panel on the relationship between ritual healing and textual practices in Tibetan contexts. Much of this was orchestrated by Geoffrey Samuel and Colin Millard (University of Cardiff) and Henk Blezer (University of Leiden), and included not only discussions of medico-religious knowledge from various Bon and Zhang Zhung era texts, but also on the production of precious pills (*rin chen ril bu*) in the Bon medical tradition, and on the relationship between tantric theory and healing in Tibetan communities, such as that presented by Dawn Collins, a current PhD student at the University of Cardiff who is working in Amdo (Qinghai Province, China). Tibetan studies perspectives were also prominent in more thematic panels on topics such as longevity practices, medical pluralism, and public health. To give one example, Barbara Gerke of the University of Oxford presented on *Chulen*, or essence extraction practices, which have been described in classical Tibetan medical texts as part of rejuvenation therapies and associated pills (*bcud len ril bu*), on which the practitioner lives for a certain period of time while practicing meditation and fasting. Barbara’s presentation discussed how ideas of *chulen* are being re-interpreted by Men-Tsee-Khang trained Tibetan doctors in India as ‘health tonics.’ Gerke’s work asks what underlies these changing ideas of a ‘tonic’ in relation to Tibetan rejuvenation therapies and contemporary pharmacological practices within the wider context of biomedical influences on Tibetan medical practice, in contemporary settings in the Kalimpong-Darjeeling Hills (2004-2006).

Appropriately, the IASTAM conference included many presentations devoted specifically to Bhutan, and which provided those of us with limited exposure to the country a wealth of diverse scholarly and practice-oriented perspectives on a range of topics. Drongtsho Tsering Tashi of the National Traditional Medicine Hospital in Thimphu provided an illuminating, schematic discussion of traditional medical services in Bhutan and the models of ‘integrative’ care that have been adopted as official health policy. Drungtsho Dorji Udon of ITMS and Ulrike Cokl, an independent scholar, presented on “Technology, Social Change, and Medicine: A View from a Bhutanese Village.” Other presentations, including one by a senior scholar of Bhutan, Françoise Pommaret (CNRS, Paris and ILCS Thimphu), focused on various ritual healing practices in the Land of the Thunder Dragon, and on the significance of particular

figures such as Sangye Menla, the Medicine Buddha, in the context of traditional medical practice in the country. Judith Justice (UCSF), a scholar with decades of experience in Nepal and Bhutan, presented on leprosy in rural Bhutan, and in the context of traditional medicine.

Many panels facilitated comparative discussions across Asian medical traditions, such as a dialogue between medicine in Amdo and Korea, situated as they are on divergent margins of Chinese culture and civilization. Other panels took up the comparative study of women and gender in medicine and healing across Asia. These panels included important contributions by Tibetan women practitioners and on topics related to Tibetan women’s health. Highlights from these panels included Mona Schrepf’s (Charité University, Berlin) work on Tibetan women’s reproductive health behaviors, which analyzed modern family planning campaigns and traditional “family values” in northeastern Tibetan communities. Jennifer Bright, a PhD student in Religion at University of Toronto presented a feminist reading of the *Healthy Mind, Healthy Body: A Handbook for Tibetan Women*, which has been published in India. Heidi Fjeld from the University of Oslo presented on problems and perceptions of infertility among Lhasa women, while Theresia Hofer of the University College London presented on the various ways Tibetan women doctors are experiencing transitions in modes of practice and knowledge transmission in the Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

ENGAGING CONSERVATION AND CULTIVATION, HONORING A FRIEND

My involvement in the IASTAM conference focused on the co-organizing, with Denise Glover of University of Puget Sound, a large multi-day panel titled “Cultivating the Wilds: Considering Potency, Protection, and Profit in the Sustainable Use of Himalayan and Tibetan *Materia Medica*.” This panel included presenters who were from, or who had done extensive work in, Nepal, Bhutan, Ladakh, India, China (Tibet Autonomous Region and Yunnan Prefecture), and at sites of Tibetan medical production and practice in Europe. We aimed to integrate knowledge, methods, and field experience from a variety of disciplines and professional perspectives to explore the intersection of conservation and development agendas related to Asian *materia medica*. We began our discussion with the assumption that the landscape of Asian medical production is undergoing a profound set of changes at present. Medicinal and aromatic plants are being increasingly commoditized, and are becoming important to a whole array of people—from rural *Sowa Rigpa* practitioners and village farmer to middlemen, factory directors, marketers, and consumers—in new, and newly interconnected ways. They represent not only pathways to healing but also to profit. They remain paragons of ‘traditional culture’ even as they are lauded, examined, and clinically tested for their scientific value. The various medicinal products derived from these raw materials are stable in one sense—based, as they are, on centuries of oral and textual tradition. Yet, like any aspect of culture, they are also malleable, diverse, and sometimes even the repositories of secret, guarded knowledge. Who holds or owns what knowledge, how it is passed down and to whom and for what ends are all questions we grappled with during the conference. In addition, we discussed the design and implementation of complex governance and regulatory structures related to the sourcing of medicinals and the production of medicines and other ‘natural’ products both in Himalayan countries and beyond, to other parts of East Asia, Europe, and North America. Our collective voices raised important questions about what ‘sustainability’ is, means, and accomplishes, both discursively and

in practice, and how natural resources such as *materia medica* are valued in the intersection between local, regional, and transnational lives and political economies.

In relation to this theme of ‘sustainability,’ the panel took up issues of over-harvesting and the depletion of medicinal resources. This concern, as well as market forces and the need for income at the local level, are giving rise to new challenges and possibilities in the form of cultivation efforts, research into substitutions (*tshabs*), and a deepening desire to document and more clearly understand who is using how much of what plants, roots, minerals, and animal products across the region. As we heard from some panelists—such as Pei Shengji from the Kunming Institute of Botany and Amchi Gyatso Bista, chairman of the Himalayan Amchi Association in Kathmandu—this is giving rise to new possibilities for collaboration between local communities, practitioners, scientists, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and (social) entrepreneurs. Yet cultivation also raises other issues: from the methods by which quality and efficacy of cultivated ingredients are determined, to how to distribute plant-based resources, determine ownership of traditional knowledge, steward land, connect to markets, and measure the impacts of climate change on these natural resources. All of these concerns point toward the intersection of cultural preservation, environmental protection, different ways of knowing and interacting with the world, as well as the socio-economic pressures that are concomitant with modern life. They also present unique opportunities for cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural engagement. All of these presentations were audio-recorded and are available as podcasts from the IASTAM website (link below) along with a complete listing of participants in this panel. A selection of these papers are forthcoming in 2011 as a special issue of the journal *Asian Medicine: Tradition and Modernity*.

This panel was dedicated to my late friend and colleague, Yeshe Chödrön Lama (1971-2006). Yeshe was one of the twenty-four people who lost her life in the tragic helicopter crash in eastern Nepal in 2006—an even that also took the life of Mingma Norbu Sherpa, Chandra Gurung, and Harka Gurung, and was a huge loss for scores of people. When I first met her in 1996, Yeshe had just returned from Middlebury College in Vermont, not far from where I now live and work. Yeshe joined the World Wildlife Fund Nepal Program in 1997, and immediately began working in Dolpo. What began for Yeshe as a project management assignment would quickly turn into a much deeper personal and professional commitment. Her scholarly contributions include a book on medicinal plants of Dolpo that she co-authored in 2001, collaborative articles with colleagues at WWF and the UNESCO People and Plants Initiative, and her MPhil thesis at the School of Oriental and Asian Studies (SOAS) in London. Her dedicated engagement with practitioners of *Sowa Rigpa*, local villagers, government representatives, and international scholars and consultants, and of course her co-workers and supervisors at WWF, straddled high quality scholarship and engaged conservation and development work with grace. Yeshe’s background in anthropology and international studies, as well as her fluency in Tibetan, were huge assets in this process, and deeply appreciated by all the people with whom she worked.

Yeshe straddled many worlds with grace—worlds represented by all of us who gathered for this panel. She was as much a Tibetan as she was marked by her life in Nepal. She held fast to her family’s history in Tibet and Bhutan even as she made her peace, like so many Tibetans do, with the experience of exile. She was a scholar in the truest sense of the term: inquisitive, skeptical, with a deeply collaborative spirit and a commitment to the exchange of knowledge

across cultural and disciplinary borders. She was also a practitioner, in all senses of *this* term: dedicated, filled with duty and devotion to the people with whom she worked. As her friend, and as someone who deeply respected not only her work but also the way she lived her life, I still mourn her death. Yeshe and I shared a deep investment in, and concern for, the future of *Sowa Rigpa*, including the health care of mountain communities and for the human ecology of high Asia. And so, this conference was a bittersweet moment for those who knew Yeshe and those who have benefited, directly or indirectly, from her lifework.

MEANING, MEMORY, AND REFLECTION

As someone who has been collaborating with practitioners of *Sowa Rigpa* for more than a decade in different national contexts (primarily Nepal and Tibetan areas of China), the IASTAM conference in Thimphu felt particularly important, given the pace at which this current of tradition is changing at present. Today, Tibetan medicine represents multiple, and sometimes conflicting, agendas. Tibetan medicines must at once be proven efficacious and safe according to biomedical standards as well as appealing to non-Tibetan consumers. *Sowa Rigpa* must retain a sense of cultural authenticity and, at times, a direct connection to Tibetan Buddhism, yet also reflect innovation within the scientific tradition from which it emerges, and from biomedicine. Tibetan medicines themselves must be capable of treating illnesses in specific individuals in Tibetan communities, often in places where health care is limited and basic biomedical treatment is also available. Yet these medicines are increasingly finding a market within non-Tibetan contexts in many countries where alternative health care options and paths to wellness are sought. Those who teach and practice Tibetan medicine must at once be attentive to new models of learning and state-mandated licensing and certification requirements as well as biomedical understandings of health and disease, but also strive to retain, and sometimes even innovate on, traditional practices and modes of knowledge transmission. For these and other reasons, the chance for such a well-respected yet diverse group of *Sowa Rigpa* practitioners to gather, learn from each other, and discuss their work, was invaluable.

The days in Thimphu passed quickly and memorably. I can still remember the feeling of flying into the airport in Paro: the verdant, monsoon soaked hills, the vertiginous turn toward a strip of runway at the base of Himalayan mountain ranges. I also remember the cacophony of languages on the plane and in the conference setting. Both within the formal contexts of panels and discussion, and as participants milled about in the lovely courtyard of RIM, feasting on *ema datse* and sweet tea, important connections were made and invaluable information was exchanged, here in Tibetan, there in Chinese, Nepali, Hindi, English, and lovely combinations of all of these.

One of the highlights of the trip for me was an excursion a group of us took the day before the scheduled panels began. We hiked up to Taksang, the famous “Tiger’s Nest” monastery perched on the craggy cliffs above Paro, where Guru Rinpoche famously flew on the back of a tigress in the eighth century. Among the group of pilgrims that afternoon was a doctor I’ve known for years who hails from Mustang, Nepal, the vice director of the largest Tibetan medical consortium in China, and various other scholars and friends. As we climbed up to the monastery, I delighted in overhearing conversations about the medicinal plants we were seeing, the lushness of Bhutan’s forests, comparative stories of medical practice, and practical discussions about future collaborations. By the time we reached the temple, high

altitude sun had given way to ominous clouds. Soon, the rains came. We huddled together in the various temples, paying respects and delivering *kathag* from far-flung locales under the raucous sound of downpour. By the time we began our decent, the red earth trail had turned to slick mud, impelling us to hold hands, to help each other down the mountain.

What I found most striking, though, was participants' sincere desires to communicate, to bridge gaps of culture or experience, and to come to know more about the diversity of healing practices in and through Asia, and, when it comes to *Sowa Rigpa*, on both sides of the Himalayas. One evening, most of the Tibetan medical practitioners in attendance gathered together for dinner and shared stories late into the evening. By the account of this event I heard from friends the next day, it was an unprecedented, moving experience. The following morning, I encountered a senior Tibetan doctor at the book display. This individual had spent the first half of his career

in Lhasa, but was now a prominent practitioner in India. His voice cracked as he told me about the previous evening, and his delight in discovering that one of the young Tibetan doctors from China whom I'd helped to invite was the son of a dear friend of his, from his Lhasa days. "This," he said in central Tibetan, "is lineage." I couldn't agree more.

The conference website can be accessed for reports, images and abstracts: http://www.iastam.org/conferences_VII.htm. More information on IASTAM activities can be found at: <http://www.iastam.org/home.htm>. The next IASTAM congress is slated for Fall 2013 in Seoul, Korea. None of this richness and diversity of perspective would have been possible without generous financial support from donors including the Trace Foundation, the Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College, and IASTAM itself, which helped to offset the costs for many Asian participants.



THE TIGER'S NEST.

PHOTO: ARJUN GUNERATNE