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American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting

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more than 6,000 presentations in concurrent panels, roundtables, poster sessions, and workshops. Prominent experts, scholars, and graduate students shared the latest research and applications in the field of geography and related social science disciplines and addressed how their interests intersect with the Meeting's themes: Geography, GIScience, and Health: Building the International Geospatial Health Research Network (IGHRN); Geographies of Human Rights: The Right to Benefit from Scientific Progress; and Physical Geography in Environmental Science.

Besides these key themes, sessions and roundtables focused on a range of different subject matters and attendees with a special interest in Nepal and the Himalayan region had much to choose from. A highlight of the conference was the Nepal and Himalayan Studies Symposium which Katharine Rankin (University of Toronto, Canada), Elsie Lewison (University of Toronto, Canada), and Galen Murton (James Madison University) organized as part of the Asian Geographies Symposium sponsored by the Asia Geography Specialty Group. The Nepal and Himalayan Studies Symposium combined one keynote speech, two paper sessions and one roundtable that featured lively discussions around the special topics of sustainability, infrastructure, and disaster in contemporary rural and urban Asian landscapes. The keynote was delivered by Dinesh Paudel (Appalachian State University) who argued for a new conceptual framework to think about geopolitics and geoeconomics in the Himalayan region based on his study of development practices in Nepal.

Presentations during the two

American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting

**Washington, DC
3-7 April 2019**

The Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers (AAG) took place in Washington, DC on April 3-7, 2019. The five-day conference was held at the Marriott Wardman Park and Shoreham Hotels and brought together almost 8,500 human and physical geographers, environmental scientists, and other attendees from around the world, making it the largest Annual Meeting to date.

The conference featured a special opening session and symposia with keynote presentations from distinguished speakers. Altogether, the 2019 Annual Meeting comprised

paper sessions covered a wide range of geographic topics relating to landscape, development, and environmental change in Nepal and the broader Himalaya. Parveen Chhetri (California State University Dominguez Hills) discussed how tree line and mountain ecosystems respond to climate change in Nepal. Rajesh Bista (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) and Conghe Song (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) presented a paper on community forestry sustainability in the country's mid-hills. Dhananjaya Katju (Texas A&M University) focused on environmental governance in the Manas Tiger Reserve in the Indian state of Assam and Rajiv Ghimire (Arizona State University) and Netra Chhetri (Arizona State University) addressed climate sensitive agricultural techniques in the Nepal Himalaya. Milan Shrestha (Arizona State University) and Alton Byers (University of Colorado Boulder) considered the impact of glacial floods in the Sagarmatha (Mt. Everest) National Park and Buffer Zone, while Robert Beazley (Cornell University) discussed the relation between roads and landslides by raising the question of sustainable development in Nepal. In their talk, Keshav Bhattarai (University of Central Missouri), Mahmud Yousef (University of Central Missouri) and Sunil Lama (University of Central Missouri) used bus schedules to talk about traffic congestion in the Kathmandu Valley. Also focusing on Nepal's capital city, Patrick Daly (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore) and Pia Hollenbach (University of Zurich, Switzerland) interrogated the political economy of heritage-making among Newar communities. Dikshya Devkota's (Gorkha Foundation, Nepal) talk foregrounded the importance of a strong civil society within disaster

relief operations and Krishna Shrestha (University of New South Wales, Australia) similarly highlighted lessons learnt from Nepal's 2015 earthquake.

The following roundtable of the Nepal and Himalayan Geographies Group continued a five-year tradition at AAG. In this annual roundtable, geographers and other social scientists of Nepal and the Himalaya convene to discuss common points of interest across different geographic subfields. This year, the meeting and conversations congregated around a forthcoming special issue of *SINHAS: Studies in Nepali History and Society* on sustainability, infrastructure, and disaster. After everyone in the audience introduced themselves, Elsie Lewison, Janardan Mainali (Portland State University), Dinesh Paudel, and Nadine Plachta (Heidelberg University, Germany) presented their paper contributions to the special issue. The floor was then opened to the audience to share thoughts, reflect on ongoing conversations and scholarship within the community, and discuss collaborative opportunities.

In addition to the Nepal and Himalayan Studies Symposium, the Annual Meeting featured numerous other presentations that centered on issues of development, agrarian expansion, water landscapes, climate change and risk management, conservation practices, geopolitics and mobilities, and culture, tourism, and new technologies.

Elsie Lewison's talk built on research in an agro-biodiversity region in north-western Nepal to reflect on the role of the state in sustainable value chain development initiatives and eco-market engineering. Suzanne Walther (University of San Diego), Elizabeth Dengen (University of San

Diego) and Krishna Gurung (Kevin Rohan Memorial Eco-Foundation, Nepal) also discussed sustainable development practices in their presentation, which described how GIS and remote sensing can maximize foreign financial aid and investment to local non-government organizations through computer analysis and spatial visualizations. Mai Kobayashi (Research Institute for Humanity and Nature, Japan) mentioned how food choices and the consumption of meat stem from politics surrounding Buddhist teachings and notions of development in Bhutan.

Four paper presentations interrogated urbanization and agricultural expansion. Rajesh Sigdel (Western Michigan University) set out to understand the land cover change process in the Kathmandu Valley by considering the impact of urban expansion and human activities. Jie Dai (San Diego State University), Dar Roberts (University of California Santa Barbara), and Douglas Stow (San Diego State University) similarly discussed land cover change in Nepal's Chitwan District. Sadaf Javed (Rutgers University) showed how traditional farming practices and the cultivation of seeds have become objects through which farming communities in Uttarakhand contest monocropping, corporate interventions, and state-led policies. David Meek (University of Oregon) untangled the politics of scale in recent agroecological transitions in Sikkim.

Prajwal Panday's (Nichols College) talk considered the socio-hydrology of water supply, sanitation, and scarcity in the Kathmandu Valley. Sephanie Leder (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden)

used a feminist approach to ask if water technologies can address a “feminization of agriculture” in farmer collectives across the Eastern Gangetic Plains. Puja Jana’s (Oklahoma State University) research in Kashmir investigated the impact of the Transboundary Water Distribution Agreement between India and Pakistan.

Issues of climate change adaptation were brought to the fore by Pasang Sherpa (University of Washington) who stated that non-Sherpas settling in the Solu Khumbu region are changing the ways in which local residents connect with their environment, asking who is vulnerable and what are communities adapting to? Tim Forsyth (London School of Economics, United Kingdom), Constance McDermott (University of Oxford, United Kingdom), and Oliver Springate-Baginski (University of East Anglia, United Kingdom) called for rethinking resilience to climate change under recent livelihood transitions in Myanmar and Nepal. Using geospatial techniques, Sanam Aksha (Virginia Tech), Lynn Resler (Virginia Tech), Luke Juran (Virginia Tech), and Laurence Carstensen Jr. (Virginia Tech) questioned hazard risk assessments which focus on a singular hazard type and showed that geographic areas are simultaneously at risk to multiple interacting hazards.

Highlighting conservation practices, Yogesh Dongol (Florida International University) and Narayan Prasad Bhusal (Tribhuvan University, Nepal), in their respective talks, examined the role of community participation and the state in the safeguarding of biological diversity in Nepal’s national parks and protected areas.

Three presentations considered

geopolitics and mobilities in the Himalayan region. Mabel Gergan (Florida State University) explored the patterns of racialized exclusion African migrants and communities from Himalayan borderland regions are facing in urban India. Galen Murton investigated the Indian economic blockade and resulting Chinese emergency petrol provisions to talk about broader and ongoing shifts within geopolitical relations in post-earthquake Nepal. Looking at garbage and other discarded things in Nepal’s northern borderlands, Nadine Plachta foregrounded the wealth, consumption, and changing economic practices of Nepal’s Tsum region.

Several other paper presentations focused on culture, tourism, and new technologies. Amira Benali (Copenhagen Business School, Denmark) addressed the critical issue of orphanage tourism and the commodification of poverty in Nepal. Interrogating the perspectives of porters in trekking and mountaineering expeditions, Sanjay Nepal (University of Waterloo, Canada) discussed the correlation of ethnic identities and social hierarchies in the tourism industry. Kingsley Haynes (George Mason University) and Jitendra Parajuli’s (George Mason University) paper presentation addressed the rapid growth in Nepal’s internet sector by examining the reasons for broadband and narrowband internet subscriptions.

Furthermore, Alton Byers, Anudeep Dewan (University of Oregon), Tashi Gurung (Arizona State University), Komal Kaur (Kansas State University), and Ian Thompson contributed to the Mountain Geography Specialty Group Poster Session, where the poster presenters engaged in one-on-one discussion with colleagues and reached a large audience.

In addition to these paper sessions, roundtables, and poster presentations, an expansive range of booths and exhibits showcased recent publications. Attendees could talk to institutional and company representatives to communicate publication ideas and personally meet with editors, authors, and readers, while browsing through various book and journal titles.

The Annual Meeting of the AAG also presented numerous opportunities for networking and professional career development. Besides an international reception and a student networking event, it hosted a large and dynamic Jobs & Careers Center, which highlighted employment opportunities for geographers as well as training sessions and workshops to help advance professional and academic careers. Other special events included the World Geography Bowl and the Awards Luncheon, where the recipients of AAG honors for achievements in scholarship, service, publishing, and education were celebrated.

For those with a special interest in the political dimensions of geographical research, the Annual Meeting was preceded by the Political Geography Specialty Group (PGSG) preconference, which was organized on April 2. The PGSG preconference was hosted by the Institute for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies at George Washington University. It featured 39 presentations in eight sessions that were grouped around the themes of nationalism, infrastructure and development, migration, sovereignty and geopolitics, urban spaces, and the environment. Galen Murton, who was elected into the PGSG board, gave one paper on Chinese development interventions and the BRI in Nepal.

Attendees of the AAG Annual Meeting also had several options to explore the Washington, DC area through informative field trips and excursions. Apart from the Smithsonian museums and the Library of Congress for example, the National Cherry Blossom Festival, held the last two weekends of March through first two weekends of April, featured cultural and music events around the Tidal Basin and Jefferson Memorial.

The 2019 Annual Meeting of the American Association of Geographers was a great success. It was a meeting place of shared research interests for geographers of Nepal and the Himalaya, as well as a place where key questions of global concern were discussed that benefitted greatly from Himalayan perspectives. The next AAG Meeting will be held in Denver, Colorado on April 6–10, 2020 and will feature yet another community-building annual roundtable of the Nepal and Himalayan Geographies Group. This year's thematic focus is decolonizing Nepal and Himalayan Studies.

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