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Himalayan Connections: Disciplines, Geographies, Trajectories - A workshop report

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to be considered a critical factor in NGO initiatives.

Throughout the conference I was struck by the remarkably supportive community, the quickness of friendships across disciplinary divides, and the interest that participants took in papers and conversations not directly related to their own fields of study. The one regret often expressed was that having concurrent panels required participants to choose which panels to attend and which to miss—a difficult decision indeed, when everyone would have liked to attend them all.

Emma Natalya Stein,
Yale University

For abstracts and further information about the conference, please see: <http://anhs-himalaya.org/hsc/2012/programs.html>.

Himalayan Connections: Disciplines, Geographies, Trajectories

**Yale University
New Haven, CT
March 2013**

Himalayan Connections: Disciplines, Geographies, Trajectories was held from March 9-10, 2013 at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. The workshop was convened by Andrew Quintman (Religious Studies) and Sara Shneiderman (Anthropology), both Yale faculty members. It brought together a diverse group of researchers and practitioners to consider the interdisciplinary connections that might shape new approaches to Himalayan Studies; to recognize the diversity of perspectives that characterizes Himalayan scholarship; to consider the processes of change that affect

ideas about the Himalaya; and to initiate dialogue towards future collaboration.

The event began with a series of interrelated questions: How do we as scholars committed to the production of knowledge in and about the Himalayan region see the same spaces differently? How might dialogic and interdisciplinary approaches contribute to the de-centering necessary for new forms of scholarship? Is it possible to reformulate a contemporary Himalayan Studies that elaborates and improves upon past efforts? When does the spatial and temporal scale of study shift – why and what for? How can we best understand the issues that Himalayan peoples face?

‘The Himalaya’ has been invoked as an analytical category by a range of actors over time, from scientific, social scientific, humanities, and applied backgrounds. A ‘Himalayan’ framing has long served as a valuable heuristic for understanding the sweep of histories, societies, and environments that connect the region. Yet that same framing has recently emerged as a problem of scale: focusing on commonalities obscures difference, and thus diversity; focusing on difference obscures commonalities, and thus region-wide affinities. Does using ‘Himalaya’ as a broad regional signifier invoke an ecological or cultural determinism that de-emphasizes the specificity of political history? Or does it legitimately recognize the webs of ecological, economic and cultural connectivity that have bound together complex entities over time? New Himalayan scholarship, oriented toward connectivity and inclusion, empowered by new collaborations and analytical tools, might learn from its past legacy and ultimately

move beyond it. How can new voices thus be included to express greater diversity in Himalayan Studies?

Himalayan Connections considered the nature of these transformations through six themed panels: *Disciplinary Trajectories; Scales of Connectivity; Identities; Everyday Religion and the Environment; Visual and Literary Representations; and States and Borders*. Each panel consisted of 3 or 4 speakers and a discussant. Presenters were invited to respond to a set of framing questions, drawing upon the empirical content of their research in and about the Himalaya, as well as their personal reflections on the experience of conducting it over time. Guiding questions included: How has the study of the Himalaya been guided by disciplinary concerns; how have those concerns changed over time? How have the Himalaya been mapped across disciplines and over time? How has the notion of “Himalayan identity,” broadly defined, been understood across the disciplines? What do the Himalaya and its people teach us about the study of everyday or lived religion? What do we see when we look at the Himalaya? What kinds of strategies and techniques have people in the Himalaya used over time to represent themselves, their aspirations, beliefs, identities, etc.? How have different disciplines recognized, or not, the importance of political histories for understanding dynamics of change across the Himalaya? Is there value in considering an unbounded trans-regional Himalaya as a unit of analysis; what is gained or lost?

Responses to these questions were as diverse as the participants, who came from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds, including Anthropology, Art History, Conservation Biology, Demography, Environmental Studies, Geography,

History, Literature, Political Science, and Religious Studies. They have worked in equally varied corners of the Himalayan region, ranging across Pakistan, China, India, Nepal and Bhutan, as well as the Tibetan cultural and historical worlds that traverse these contemporary nation-states.

The workshop was punctuated by a keynote panel that brought together Charles Ramble (EPHE-Paris) and James Scott (Yale University) to reflect on the links between studies of the Himalaya and Asian Studies writ large. Both speakers emphasized that the scope of Himalayan Studies is defined by the questions asked, rather than any political or biophysical boundaries. The coevolution of borders and border crossings are an extremely important set of processes within the Himalayan region, and careful empirical attention to these dynamics in the Himalaya can yield important insights for broader discussions of state formation, boundary dynamics, and the ritual production of power in Asian Studies and beyond.

The conference built upon Yale University's historical connections and trajectories in the Himalayan region. These begin with personal relationships to the Kings of Nepal and Sikkim through Yale alumni on official business in the region in the 1940s and 50s, and through the development of Himalayan materials in the libraries and archives across Yale. Established in 2011, the Yale Himalaya Initiative has built upon this legacy, forging connections between faculty working across the university, the disciplines, and various subregions of the Himalaya. Yale's engagement in the Himalayan world continues to expand through contemporary partnerships between units such as the School of Forestry

and Environmental Studies, the School of Public Health, and the departments of Anthropology and Religious Studies, with colleagues and institutions in the region. Such connections have been fostered by a series of summer workshops held in the Himalaya (Dehradun, India in 2011; Kathmandu, Nepal in 2012; and Thimphu, Bhutan in 2013), which have generated a set of ongoing conversations and collaborations that complement those emerging from the Himalayan Connections workshop at Yale.

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A full conference report and the video proceedings of the event are available online at:

<http://himalayanconnections2013.commons.yale.edu/>.

For further information about the Yale Himalaya Initiative see: himalaya.yale.edu.

16th IALS Conference of the International Association for Ladakh Studies: Society and Environment in Ladakh: Historical Perspectives and Recent Dynamics

**Ruprecht Karl University
Heidelberg, Germany
April 2013**

The 16th Conference of the International Association for Ladakh Studies (IALS) was hosted by the South Asia Institute (SAI), Ruprecht Karl University in the historic university town of Heidelberg, Germany, from 17 to 20 April 2013. The IALS was established in 1987 and acts as a forum for local and international scholars of Ladakh to contact other researchers, present

their research material, and to access past papers. Information is disseminated through conferences held every two years either in Ladakh itself or across various international locations, the publication of conference proceedings, and the bi-annual journal *Ladakh Studies*. The website has a dedicated members' area where members can upload copies of their published material. For more information about the research and other activities undertaken by the IALS, please visit the organisation's website: <http://ladakhstudies.org/>.

The 16th Conference of the IALS was organised by SAI's Department of Geography, the Heidelberg Centre for Environment (HCE) and the IALS. Under the theme Society and Environment in Ladakh: Historical Perspectives and Recent Dynamics, approximately sixty scholars and scientists from across the globe presented papers discussing local history, political transitions, climate and ecological protection strategies, water and environmental management, and cultural identity and transformation in the Himalayan region. Further panels also addressed Buddhist studies and the history of art and architecture in Ladakh. A high number of Ladakhi participants attended, including representatives from local NGOs, the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Leh, the Sonam Norbu Memorial Hospital, independent Ladakhi scholars, and a number of Ladakhi research students from the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in New Delhi and Jammu University. A total of 87 members registered for the conference, demonstrating the great desire of scholars of Ladakh to share their work and to learn more about the region. The majority of conference participants were accommodated in two neighbouring