



# **HIMALAYAN CONNECTIONS**

## **Disciplines, Geographies, Trajectories**

Yale University  
March 9-10, 2013

Workshop Report

by

Austin Lord, Andrew Quintman, Sara Shneiderman

## **Acknowledgements**

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“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 characterize Himalayan scholarship; to consider the processes of change that affect ideas about the Himalaya; and to initiate dialogue towards future collaboration.

“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 problematic 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? How might new Himalayan scholarship, oriented toward connectivity and inclusion, empowered by new collaborations and analytical tools learn from, but ultimately move beyond, its legacy? How can new voices be included to express greater diversity in Himalayan Studies?

The event began with these, and other interrelated questions, posed by the convenors: 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?

*Himalayan Connections* approached these questions through six themed panels: Disciplinary Histories; Scales of Connectivity; Identities; Everyday Religion and the Environment; Visual and Literary Representations; and States and Borders. Emerging from these discussions were additional themes of mobility, vulnerability and resilience in the face of environmental and social change, the technologies of analysis, and the increasing significance of collaborative efforts between colleagues based both inside and outside of the Himalayan region.

The panels showcased the work of 36 participants from a broad range of disciplinary backgrounds, including Anthropology, Art History, Conservation Biology, Demography, Environmental Studies, Geography, History, Literature, Political Science, and Religious Studies. Participants were familiar with equally diverse corners of the Himalayan region, ranging across Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, as well as the Tibetan cultural and historical worlds that traverse these contemporary nation-states. Rather than presenting formal papers, participants were asked to respond to a shared set of questions that the convenors provided to guide each panel (the questions are included under each panel heading below).

The panel discussions were complemented by a keynote session 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.

### **Disciplinary Histories**

*How has the study of the Himalaya been guided by disciplinary concerns; how have those concerns changed over time? How have institutional configurations shaped scholarly production? How have these disciplinary and institutional arrangements affected our knowledge of sub-regions of the Himalaya? How have you seen these conditions change over the course of your career and how does the future look from your vantage point?*

Following a brief introduction by Shivi Sivaramakrishnan, Kurtis Schaeffer opened the panel. Speaking as a literary and textual historian, Schaeffer described the “European engagement with Tibetan literature,” breaking this particular disciplinary history into eras of exploration, collection, cataloguing, and macro-

analysis. Using this trajectory as a metaphor, he suggested that other disciplines too might be entering into a period of macro analysis, where we might integrate bibliographic resources “to understand the information we have.” The incredible amount of knowledge produced about the Himalaya must be organized and understood using new analytical tools that facilitate integration and the sharing of information across disciplines. Schaeffer displayed some digital tools he and his colleagues at the University of Virginia are developing for mapping intellectual histories, asking, “How do we go from collection to analysis?” This theme was picked up by several other scholars throughout the conference.

Kathryn March encouraged those assembled to recall and revisit the political conditions within which Himalayan Studies emerged, “to ask what kind of terms and conditions were imposed upon us, our colleagues, and our subjects in producing representations.” March provided a rough chronology of shifts in the disciplinary history of Himalayan anthropology—from early colonial and social-evolutionary projects, to development-focused ethnographies characteristic of Nepal’s Panchayat Era (1960-1990), to post-reflexive and post-conflict studies, to current studies of climate change. In general, March characterized these trajectories as progressive, but shaped by the presence of power. Over time, the political crowding out of certain voices and studies has been replaced by a disciplinary ecosystem that is “much more multitudinous, with much greater opportunity for collaboration.” This process has been imperfect, and perhaps slow, but promising. Importantly, March (later echoed by others, including Samuel, Germano, and Hutt) emphasized the emergence of scholars from the Himalayan region making increasingly significant contributions across a range of disciplines. The connections, collaborations, and dialogic investigations emerging will play an important role in defining the future of Himalayan Studies. But as always, the shape of partnerships is not apolitical: “It matters who you work with.”

Kamal Bawa stressed the integrative and unifying qualities of a “sustainability science,” proposing that, “The quest for sustainability will be the dominant theme of this century.” Discussing his work with the Ashoka Trust (ATREE) in Sikkim, Bawa demonstrated how environmental problems are composed of overlapping and interrelated framings, requiring equally polyvalent responses. He stressed the need to increase our understanding of environmental problems and social vulnerability by working across disciplines, using multiple approaches to build resilience into our socio-ecological systems. A decentralized approach to knowledge production is now necessary: “We need new institutions,” concluded Bawa.

Geoffrey Samuel also argued for a rethinking of Himalayan Studies, citing a convergence of common concerns now emerging across the disciplines. Samuel recognized the striking growth of the

“environmental and sustainability agenda” and its “potential to generate an overarching framework.” Himalayan Studies is powerful as an integrative framework, he said, and has the capability to operate on the leading edge of interdisciplinary work. This will be necessary in the future, when the “academic institutional complex will need rethinking if it is going to remain a functional part of society.”

### **Geographies and Scales of Connectivity**

*How have the Himalaya been mapped across disciplines and over time? What kind of boundaries have been established and how are they contested? How do different modes of geographical representation bring into focus different scales of knowledge? What is at stake in such productions for different knowledge communities (local, scholarly, general public)? How can we establish new forms of connection across geographic and disciplinary boundaries?*

David Zurick and Joelle Smadja both discussed connectivity spatially in terms of multi-scalar geographic and cartographic representations that emphasize borders and border crossing in complementary ways. Indigenous Himalayan cartographies are often narrative, delineating areas of belonging or unbelonging, representing change or stasis, revealing or obscuring certain facets of the landscape, creating terrains or territories. Mapping conventions represent different understandings of connectivity and change, different means for understanding changing and contested cartographies. Mapping human-environment relations defines the shape of the problem, the opportunity it presents, and the possibilities for intervention. As Smadja stated, social and environmental change operates on multiple scales—South Asia, Himalaya, Nepal, watershed, slope—and “playing with scale transforms the content of the representation.” Awareness of the politics of scale is central to the conference themes, and these politics are perhaps most apparent within cartography and mapping—what is shown and not shown, what is internal and external. Interdisciplinary approaches to mapping are thus needed as a check on power. Maps can represent plural knowledges and help to display, analyze, and understand issues that cross political, ecological, or disciplinary boundaries.

Zurick and Smadja both expressed their interest in mapping agencies and vulnerabilities, new and old, in response to the legacies of “Himalayan environmental degradation theory.” This is particularly relevant to the study of climate change, which some recognize as “the new crisis narrative.” Does the Himalaya experience climate change as a whole, or as an assemblage of particularities? If the local scale is

essential for understanding these processes, then collaboration between ethnographers, cartographers, local communities, and others will be essential for understanding new geographies of risk.

Zurick presented photographic data showing qualitative change at the local scale, an essential complement to larger spatial understandings. Such plural understandings of change can assist our understanding of spatial data, and increased connectivity between types of spatial data can effect greater plurality of understanding.

David Germano began by questioning essentialist approaches to scientific research focused on the extraction of knowledge, an aim that contrasts directly with a reality built of constitutive contexts, a variety of settings and changes. Himalayan Studies must move away from an extractive model. It should instead be dynamic and rooted in a distributed approach to knowledge production that can unite fragmented disciplines and reshape institutional agendas. Germano emphasized the need for disruptive technologies that will increase functionality and equity—a “service-oriented digital ecology” that can help structure and visualize myriad data through linkages. Referencing his work at the University of Virginia and the observations of Kurtis Schaeffer, Germano described a data framework that would avoid essentializing local forms of knowledge by making them accessible in traditional forms, rather than reshaping them to fit the demands of Euro-American academic representation.

Technologies that can express messy complexities and constitutive contexts complement ethnographic study, allowing us to do more with the knowledge we have. In this model, visibility, accessibility, and searchability would facilitate inclusion, creativity, experimentation, recombination, and collaboration. By weakening disciplinary and institutional boundaries, such efforts would increase the diversity of voices within Himalayan Studies.

In discussing this panel, Shafqat Hussain recommended a pragmatic approach to interdisciplinarity that does away with “the fear of boundary crossing.” By fostering active partnerships and knowledge sharing, we foster dynamic representations that work across scales and geographies to more accurately reflect “the Himalaya,” “Himalayan spaces,” and “Himalayan subjects” that are increasingly mobile and constantly in flux.

## Identities

*How has the notion of “Himalayan identity,” broadly defined, been understood across the disciplines? What specific forms of identity have been at the forefront of disciplinary investigations: gender, political, national, religious? How are identities understood within particular sub-regions or communities? What forms of subjectivity are these linked to? How does transnational mobility in the past and present challenge understandings of ethnic and national identity as commonly defined?*

Political scientist Mahendra Lawoti discussed how his discipline has two primary approaches to the study of identity in the Himalaya and elsewhere: Some scholars emphasize connection between different groups across difference, while others focus on the fragmentation that occurs as groups develop boundaries between themselves and others. Lawoti suggested that the latter approach has been given undue traction in discussions of identity in the Himalaya, particularly Nepal, and that instead we might see the framework of “the Himalaya” as an integrative one, which could help us understand the former set of dynamics better. He posed the question: “How do diverse peoples come to live together successfully in a challenging terrain like the Himalaya?” Lawoti suggested that the very presence of strong but mutually sympathetic ethnic and national identities in the region implies that Himalayan people themselves generally view the formation of identity as an integrative process, through which they consider how their own framework of belonging may articulate productively with the multiple others at hand.

Chris Vasantkumar discussed the Himalaya in terms of mobility, border crossing, and the complex connections between spaces maintained by translocal identities. If “life is lived in a way that is informed by what is happening elsewhere,” studies of the Himalaya must be extended to include “significant elsewhere.” Vasantkumar pointed out that “the notion of *area* attempts to guarantee that everyone in the room is talking about the same thing. Can we approach Himalayan Studies in a way that unwinds this guarantee?”

Geoff Childs discussed the effects of mobility, mobile identities, and demographic change driven by outmigration on Tibetan-identifying communities (Tibetanids) in Highland Nepal. Childs finds that regional differences are de-emphasized in younger generations due to the prevalence of secular education and the acculturation that goes along with it. Tibetan young people in Nubri (central-western Nepal) attend school in Kathmandu with Tibetan refugees and children from other mountainous parts of Nepal. Interactions that were once geographically improbable, become commonplace, transforming the



processes of identity formation. These youths, and other outmigrants, maintain certain depictions and claims from afar, but may have trouble reintegrating upon returning home. The central question for Childs then becomes: how do practices of identity maintenance intersect with demographic changes?

To complement his demographic and ethnographic work, Childs reviewed web content created by migrant and diasporic Himalayan communities, produced to represent their changing homeplace. Childs agreed with Vasantkumar that complex and mobile identities are changing our conception of what “Himalayan” means, adding the observation that Himalayan populations themselves are struggling to understand this change. Observing the experiences of this demographic group might be predictive of wider social change, and a new Himalayan scale.

Responding to these perspectives, Kathryn March highlighted the range of processes within self-identification: How often do you “go back” in order to belong? How do different perceptions of residence and time affect belonging? How do different migration calendars affect group identities? William Sax and James Scott both spoke about how migration and leaving can strengthen ties to locality, reinforcing identities from a distance.

In closing the discussion, Robert Barnett asked, “Should we be looking at commonalities or exceptions, the margins or the center?” The separate disciplines contain trainings for both approaches, but how will these efforts meet within an interdisciplinary approach to identities? And how do we go about including and understanding those we don’t meet, or don’t speak to?

### **Everyday Religion and the Environment**

*What do the Himalaya and its people teach us about the study of everyday or lived religion? What does the examination of everyday religion teach us about the Himalaya? How do these questions or their potential answers relate to policies that aim to promote environmental sustainability?*

Georgina Drew, Todd Lewis, and David Holmberg examined the relationship between everyday religion and sustainability as a productive, yet under-utilized, nexus of analysis that can expand the scope of Himalayan Studies and its engagement with work in the field of religion and ecology. The presenters took direct inspiration from a March 7-8, 2013 conference on *Everyday Religion and Sustainable Environments in the Himalaya* held at The New School in New York City immediately before the Yale *Himalayan Connections* workshop.

Drew gave an overview of the ways that scholars have historically addressed environment, religion, and culture in the Himalaya, with an emphasis on how the concept of everyday religion builds upon and also diverges from earlier work. Whereas studies of religion and ecology have often focused on “world religions” and the influence of texts and doctrines on environmental practice, everyday religion offers a way to look at the lives and practices of ordinary people contending with change. Arguing that the notion of everyday religion helps address the complexities of meaning making and the dynamism of cultural worlds in a way that is particularly suitable to trends of modernization and development in Himalayan cities, Drew called for more ethnographic and empirical studies focusing on the fluidity of contemporary identities, resources, and socio-economic realities. She cautioned, however, that attempts to look at the confluence of everyday religion and sustainability in the Himalaya still suffer from the imposition of terms and concepts that may not fully reflect the perceptions of the people whose lifeworlds are being studied. What do we lose or gain from speaking of “religion” or “sustainability,” Drew asked, and how might we address such ideas in ways that neither use predetermined definitions, nor carry expectations of uniformity while still elucidating how belief impacts ecological practice in a manner that is useful for planning and policy formation?

Holmberg similarly stressed the complex set of questions that a study of everyday religion raises. In pointing to studies on ritual in Nepal, he itemized ways that we might see a notion of everyday religion to have permeated past scholarship. Despite this, new cultural forms and the influence of market capitalism and globalization has led to a more rapid revision of ritual as well as changing notions of purity and pollution. Everyday religion gets to these changes in interesting ways but is still dependent on the theories and methodologies of the anthropology of religion and development that have been invaluable to Himalayan Studies.

Focusing on public health challenges, Lewis spoke of the “contradictions” of contemporary practice in Kathmandu, Nepal where Buddhists allow pests and rodents to thrive despite possible connections to their role as disease carriers. He shared several anecdotes and religious scriptures to argue that the Boddhisatva vow to not harm living creatures is perhaps outdated if one considers that it is a bigger sin to enable the harm of humans by allowing pests to proliferate. Lewis ultimately argued that scholars have a role in helping not just to explain social phenomena but to engage in public health problems through applied scholarship that may at times mandate cultural and religious interventions. In this work, Lewis sees everyday religion as a useful lens for exploring the ambiguities of lived belief and practice as well as a means for self-reflection on the researcher’s role in shaping those beliefs and practices.

In a subsequent discussion moderated by Mahendra Lama, audience members pondered the ethical implications of the scholar's role in revising religious practice. Kamal Bawa cautioned against the utility of questioning the applicability of terms such as "sustainability" when the ecological crises in the Himalaya are increasing in frequency and thereby demand swift action that does not squabble over nomenclature. A graduate student also pointed out that the scholarship would be well served by an engagement with the gendered politics of everyday religion and sustainable environments in the Himalaya.

### **Keynote Panel: High Asian Connections**

*How and why is the study of the Himalaya relevant to non-specialists, particularly other Asian Studies scholars engaged in debates over the nature of borders, center/periphery dynamics, and transregional connections?*

Charles Ramble and James Scott both spoke about how the scope of Himalayan Studies is defined by the questions asked, rather than any political or geophysical boundaries. This is not to say that geographic boundaries should not be recognized, but that we should consider how our questions orient themselves around borders, border-crossing, and "border opportunities," which are often unique and telling of a region.

#### *Charles Ramble*

Charles Ramble began by proposing that we might use "mistrust" as a tool to better understand the disciplinary histories that constitute a Himalayan Studies, deconstructing classic presentations in order to find alternative histories and hidden transcripts that exist in parallel with them. Himalayan knowledge is built of subjective and interpretive histories, colocated in similar spaces, oriented around similar coordinates but following different paths. Citing Geoffrey Samuel's presentation, Ramble reiterated that there are "cities within cities" and perhaps mountains within mountains. Our understanding of colocation may be constrained by disciplines and histories, by the boundaries we accept, reject, inscribe, erase, and we help to construct or deconstruct. Thus we must be mistrustful of our own knowledge and aware of our role in boundary creation, maintenance, and re-creation.

Ramble asked: Is identity based on kinship or in residence? In people or in land? How do both conventions meet in our attempts to describe Himalayan identities? To that end, he discussed boundaries, sub-boundaries, alliances, and legibility in the dukedoms of Lower Lo, within the Kingdom of Mustang (Lo), presenting documentation of border regulations and border crossing, as well as false transcriptions of agricultural yields and irrigation needs. Discussing methods of evasion used by Nepali communities subject to multiple overlapping taxations, Ramble referenced James Scott by discussing the idea of “hidden transcripts” to facilitate evasion and illegibility.

Considering Tibet, Ramble asked: Is Tibet a center or a border? Referencing the findings of Childs, Vasantkumar, and others studying mobility and demographic change, he asked: Where is the center of Tibet located and how does this vary for different individuals and groups? How do varying and divergent Tibetan histories inform the location of Tibet within “Himalayan histories?” Is Tibet a barbarous borderland or a pristine land; a place needing salvation or granting it? How do different histories represent trends of degradation, development, or purification?

Many Tibetans believe that “true Tibetan essence” exists elsewhere, sequestered in remoteness, hidden in borderlands both geographic and conceptual. To Ramble these claims represent “hidden transcripts” that are telling of Tibet, but also of Himalayan identities more generally, that can exist outside of politically or economically defined spaces. Ramble concluded by showing multiple versions of Tibetan paintings depicting a constellation of temples across Tibet pinning down a great supine demoness. These paintings represent a mythological understanding of territory, meant to facilitate Buddhism subduing the rawness and harshness of Tibet, embodied by the deity. Ramble then showed a final contemporary painting that shows the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China in which monasteries are replaced by symbols of secularism and industry—a territory remapped, with nothing remaining to hold down the demoness. For Ramble, this painting makes a claim about modern Tibet, territory, spatial identities, and historical change using a classical narrative. It is a subtle form of resistance that speaks to Himalayan identities; a hidden transcript.

### *James Scott*

James Scott first addressed the possible application of his ideas about *Zomia* to the Himalaya, as proposed by Sara Shneiderman and discussed by Ramble and others throughout the conference. Scott admitted gaps in his own knowledge of the Himalaya, but mentioned a burgeoning interest in the

Tibetan state as a regional actor and the material histories that exist on its periphery. Following this comment, Scott reiterated that “one should never take the state as a defined unit of analysis,” proposing an approach where Himalayan geographies are defined by the questions asked, rather than presumed political boundaries.

Scott reminded those assembled that formal social and political texts have informal complements, folk understandings, and oral histories. And so “there are folk nationalisms and folk socialisms” that are crucial in constituting the Himalaya as a political landscape or mass, which might allow us to read formal documents against the grain. Formal and folk politics are not fixed, but “a moving system of varying influence over time.”

Similarly, formal and informal borders shift over time—political and material efforts to establish borders “tell us about their tenuousness and difficulty.” Echoing other speakers, Scott stressed the telling qualities of border interactions and border crossings, how these connections and fluxes might describe some of the complexity inherent to the whole. Scott agreed with Ramble and others that borders are simultaneously obstacles and opportunities. The processes of territorialization and territorial monetization of resources, pursued by states and other institutions, expands borders and brings “what was once fiscally sterile terra incognita” onto the map. But what of the places left out or excluded? What of people seeking to be counted in? Scott reminded us that the establishment of jurisdictions affects how goods and identities are assessed within different regimes of value. Procedures for border maintenance often reflect or incorporate this opportunism, and vice versa. Thus, the coevolution of borders and border crossings are an extremely important set of processes within the Himalayan region.

Scott concluded by stressing the importance of collaboration (of working “binationally” as scholars of Himalayan Studies and pursuing “conceptual collaborations” so as to remain relevant locally) within the Himalayan region. Earlier in the panel, Ramble refuted the idea that Himalayan Anthropology is divided between foreign scholars and those from the region itself working on separate or parallel subjects. Scott agreed that this divide cannot exist, rejecting the path of an exotic specialist detached from the ground, generating knowledge that is useful at home institutions but not in the place studied. There is a political economy of scholarship, and Himalayan Studies must be grounded in the concerns of the Himalaya. Again, “our geographies should be defined by the questions asked,” emerging from multiple sources, not just the scholarly community.

## Visual & Literary Representations

*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 emphasized specific forms of self-representation in their own processes of scholarly representation? What kinds of materials and objects come to the fore and shape both scholarly and popular understandings of the region? What kinds of links or gaps exist between disciplinary approaches to visual, literary, linguistic representation?*

Discussing the de-centering of contemporary Nepali literature, Michael Hutt reviewed literary works from the country's conflict-to-post-conflict transition, highlighting recent works that "use the past to critique the present." As Nepali literature diversifies, it moves away from central ideologies, locations, and perspectives, pushing back against patterns of social exclusion that have limited authorship and expression. In the five works Hutt highlighted, the perspectives of *janajati* (indigenous nationalities), women, Maoists, and people living far from Kathmandu are described in increasing depth, reflecting greater openness elsewhere in society. Hutt linked this trend toward diversification with growth in other new media: some of the works cited by Hutt had thousands of Facebook "likes," which serves as a testament to these emergent paradigms.

Hutt concluded by challenging Himalayan scholars to read and engage with contemporary Himalayan literature and voices. Returning to James Scott's commentary on the alignment of foreign and local concerns, Hutt claimed that "foreign-produced analysis and commentary must account for contemporary literature" produced in the languages of the region, such as Nepali and Tibetan.

Rob Linrothe addressed the panel's question "what kinds of strategies and techniques have people in the Himalaya used over time to represent themselves?" by stressing the variety of visual records found in the region, largely Zangskar in northwest India, and the ways they have changed over time. He proposed several kinds of source materials. Foremost among these are the figures of patrons, donors, and sponsors that appear in the religious art of Buddhist monuments and temples. Images of donors appear in Zangskar as early as the 10th-11th centuries, exhibiting a deeply conscientious approach to self-representation. In the earliest period, the images of such individuals show a strong affinity for the cultural regions of Kashmir and Central Asia; they later illustrate greater ties to the traditions of Buddhism from Tibet, thereby illustrating a process of "Tibetanization." Linrothe suggested that representations of donors and sponsors found at the so-called Queen's Chorten provide a window into

the religious, political, economic, and social worlds in which the structure was created: The support of the queen and other local women, for example, or even the participating of specific artisans. Linrothe also discussed the importance of photography for understanding modes of Himalayan self-representation, calling for a more nuanced history of photography in the Himalaya. Photographs have long served to exoticize the region, but Linrothe emphasized how photographic materials have also been produced by Himalayan peoples themselves for a wide range of purposes, from government identification photos to formal portraits of reincarnate Buddhist teachers. Linrothe concluded by discussing how certain forms of development, especially ill-planned renovations of religious sites, has negatively impacted historical markers of Himalayan self-representation.

In a presentation that linked the previous speakers' respective emphasis on literary and material modes of self-representation, Tsering Shakya focused on the impact of new digital media on the Tibetan language public sphere. Shakya spoke about how online blogs and cellphone access have transformed the communicative space in which Tibetan speakers interact with each other, as well as with broader publics in China, India, Nepal and beyond. New forms of technology create newly mediated forms of Tibetan self-representation, yielding a provocative set of conversations that bridge the received categories of "exile Tibetan" and "Chinese Tibetan." Out of this crucible emerge new forms of youth culture, participants in which are regenerating the Tibetan language in unexpectedly productive ways.

## **States and Borders**

*How have different disciplines recognized, or not, the importance of political histories for understanding dynamics of change across the Himalaya? When have investigations of specific polities yielded productive inquiries and when have such boundaries been limiting? How have people, ideas, and goods moved across boundaries over time, and what kind of scholarly frameworks do we need to understand such movements? Is there value in considering an unbounded trans-regional Himalaya as a unit of analysis; what is gained or lost?*

Eklabya Sharma discussed the transboundary nature of climate change on the Himalaya, which has effects on several scales. Recognition of climate change as a regional problem followed global recognition; cooperation and research was initiated following a 2007 IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report on glacial melt patterns. Climate vulnerability connects the disparate regions of

the Himalaya. But even climate change varies, with different regions and watersheds requiring different research and mapping efforts.

Sharma highlighted the ways ecosystem services connect people and places across the sub-regions of the Himalaya, and the ways climate change modulates connections between populations and environments. As ecosystem services decline in certain regions and livelihoods encounter stress, populations migrate seasonally or permanently as a climate adaptation strategy; —these climate-driven trajectories implicate surrounding spaces. Social and environmental effects incentivize regional cooperation that extends beyond the Himalaya into centers of power in India and China, which are now becoming interested in Himalayan climate issues. Thus climate change is bringing regional cooperation forward “from intention to operationalization” and a Himalayan Studies that crosses state borders can facilitate necessary regional understanding.

Saul Mullard discussed territoriality and the temporal variations of borders and states, focusing on various contestations of territory in Sikkim. Mullard questioned the assumption that polities are defined by borders, investigating how “states come about through the conceptions and imagination of power.” Because power and imaginations are temporally variable, border delineations are “subject to multiple projections of bounded space by different entities and people.” Mullard related historical and contemporary contestations in Sikkim to the keynote panel the night before, reiterating the need for alternative histories of the claims of those who are claimed by states. Discussing the *madhesi* movement, Mullard added that indigenous identities and claims are mediated by multiple states with differentiated but interrelated conceptions of identity and ethnicity. Identity movements are trans-regional and mobile, acting within different states and crossing borders; these overlapping and mobile claims to space might serve as a means to define space that is Himalayan.

Kenneth Bauer began by asking not only “where are the Himalaya,” but “when are the Himalaya?” He offered a reflexive view on Himalayan Studies, noting that, “Our studies and approach are defined by when we enter the Himalaya.” Citing his own experience in Nepal in 1990 following the democracy movement, Bauer described the era he entered as one of “big development, fears of environmental degradation or pollution, and it was always about the state—I never had ideas of timeless pristinity.” Bauer discussed Dolpa, where he has worked for two decades, as first existing outside the national imaginary and unconcerned with the idea of a Tibetan border. Changes came from elsewhere, as the Tibetan border became harder to navigate, as “what was porous became hardened, began to matter a great deal, and kept mattering.” Later Dolpa was incorporated into the optics of Nepal by the popular



film *Caravan* (directed by Eric Valli), which cast the region as a locus of pristine “Himalayan culture” within the Nepali state. Thus Dolpa is opportunistically included and otherized by Kathmandu, and affected by Chinese-Nepali relations and border policies.

Bauer continued by asking “what for are the Himalayas? And who is mobilizing the regional concept?” He appreciated that “pedagogically, ‘the Himalaya’ is a good way to think about patterns, economies, territories, etc.,” but was also skeptical of other ways in which “the Himalayas” are deployed, for example in urban centers as a “development entity,” as a “produced environment,” or “the place where development is working on Himalayan subjects.” Ethnographic work has the ability to check the framings of power, and to include “hidden transcripts” from urban youth culture, as well as embodied histories of place that describe geography by “how long and how hard the pass was.” Careful boundaries are created, but governance and change occurs. Himalayan Studies should be concerned with the productive tension within “linking place names and coordinates to dynamic placemaking.”

As the final panelist of the conference, William Sax reflected on the orientation of the conference, discussing successes, omissions, and the scalar problematics of ontology and practice. Sax claimed that “every question has an appropriate scale” that requires situational reorientation around different concepts of “the Himalaya.” Sax claimed that if Himalayan Studies really existed in coherent form, it would escape the critiques of exceptionalism and omission that frustrate area studies more generally. Echoing the keynote speakers and others, while referring to efforts toward interdisciplinarity and collaboration, Sax reiterated that “borders necessitate creativities.”

Sax then presented three different definitions of Himalayan Studies, respectively organized around physical geography, diverse cultural geographies, and the organization of professional interests. Culture is “emergent not primordial, based on borrowing and syncretism” and reacts to borders and border crossings in unforeseen ways. Therefore borders are a resource for scholars seeking to understand cultural change; borders illuminate continuity and discontinuity within cultural performance. Drawing from his own work in Garwhal, India, Sax discussed ceremonies for the maintenance of borders and rituals for the settlement of border disputes within kingdoms once strongly territorial that are now porous and open to negotiation, demonstrating how cultural approaches to changing borders change over time. Sax asserted that the activities in this small kingdom can be compared to larger territories and spaces, but attention to definitions of context, practice, and scale are necessary.

Sax concluded by reflecting on the fundamental tension within area studies, implied by the power of grouping things together, by recognizing existing borders, or redefining space. Himalayan Studies (and area studies more generally) must both reject and include the formal borders of states. Recognition of hegemonic boundaries risks reifying them and entrenching spatial power. Considering “the Himalaya” as a unit of analysis implicates complex politics of scale and centering, risking generalization and essentialism, yet the promise of such study is significant. There are complex differences between the spaces described by political or hegemonic borders and those that are lived everyday. The flows and connections that are of interest to Himalayan Studies and this conference cross both kinds of borders.

## Conclusion

In their concluding remarks, workshop organizers Sara Shneiderman and Andrew Quintman thanked participants for their efforts to develop new connections and trajectories across the Himalaya, and offered some notes on Yale’s own connections and trajectories in the region.

Yale University’s ties to India famously began with the institution’s namesake Elihu Yale, whose work for the British East India Company commenced in 1699. He would remain in India for nearly three decades. Yale eventually became the first University in North America to fill an endowed position in Sanskrit when, in 1854, it hired the pioneering comparative philologist William Dwight Whitney.

A century later, in 1950, Yale alumnus Elliott Beach Macrae traveled to India and then Sikkim, where he met the Maharaja Chögyal Tashi Namgyal, who offered him an impressive *thangka* of Manjushri, later donated to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. The figures in the painting were reportedly modeled after Macrae’s own family. Soon after his return to the United States, Macrae became President of the publishing giant E. P. Dutton, where he arranged for the release of several mountaineering tales, including W. H. Murray’s *The Story of Everest*, and *The Mount Everest Reconnaissance Expedition* by Eric Shipton. Among Macrae’s greatest publishing successes was Austrian climber Heinrich Harrer’s blockbuster memoir *Seven Years in Tibet*.

Two years prior to Macrae’s visit to Sikkim, in 1948, another Yale graduate—Chester Bowles (class of 1924)—was elected Governor of the state of Connecticut. In 1951 President Truman appointed Bowles as the third US Ambassador to India and Nepal, a position he accepted again in 1963. During an early visit to Kathmandu he was offered an impressive *thangka* of the protector Hayagriva by the Nepalese

King. It too resides in the Beinecke Library's collection, while Bowles's extensive papers are preserved in the Sterling Memorial Library.

Both of these paintings became the objects of close study by Wesley Needham, a self-taught Tibetanist who began his affiliation with the Beinecke Library in the late 1940s and became acting curator of its Tibetan collection in 1953. Needham actively corresponded with scholars of the Tibetan region. He also maintained a warm relationship with many Tibetans, including Tsepon Shakabpa, Tibetan Finance Minister and head of the Tibetan Trade Mission from 1947-49. Shakabpa later lived in New Haven where he collaborated with Needham and completed his well known chronicle *Tibet: A Political History*, published by Yale University Press in 1967. Needham also worked closely at Yale with the Mongolian reincarnate lama Dilowa Hetukhtu. At Needham's request, in 1949, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama printed a copy of the hundred-volume Lhasa edition of the Buddha's collected teachings (Kangyur) specially for Yale. It travelled by horse caravan from Lhasa and then freighter from Calcutta, eventually reaching New Haven in February 1950, just about the time of Macrae's visit to Sikkim.

Yale's longstanding relationship with the Himalaya is perhaps best illustrated by the rich holdings of material objects located across the University, in the Sterling Memorial Library, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the Divinity School, the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, the University Art Gallery, the Center for British Art, and the Peabody Museum of Natural History. These materials include—to name just a few—the Himalayan Mission Archive Collection, the world's largest archive of missionary documents from Nepal, and the wonderful watercolor paintings of Bhutan and north India by Samuel Davis. The latter were published in Michael Aris's *Views of Medieval Bhutan* (Serindia 1982). A fragment of the University's Himalayan materials were recently highlighted in an exhibition called "Himalayan Collections at Yale" curated by Sarah Calhoun, Andrew Quintman, and Mark Turin. <[himalaya.yale.edu/exhibits](http://himalaya.yale.edu/exhibits)>

Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies maintains long-standing connections with the Himalayan region, especially in North India, Nepal and Bhutan. These relationships have been further expanded over the past decade through the work of faculty members in Religious Studies, History of Art, Anthropology, and other departments in the Arts and Sciences. The Yale School of Public Health has recently established an exchange program with faculty from Bhutan's Royal Institute of Health Science.

Established in 2011, the Yale Himalaya Initiative <[himalaya.yale.edu](http://himalaya.yale.edu)> builds upon this legacy, forging connections between faculty and students working across the university, the disciplines, and various

subregions of the Himalaya. The Initiative's scope spans the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and professional disciplines. It draws upon the expertise of faculty members in departments of the Arts and Sciences (Anthropology, History, History of Art, Religious Studies), Yale's professional schools (Forestry and Environmental Studies, Law, Management, Medical), and other University centers including the MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies, and the Global Health Initiative of the Jackson Institute for Global Affairs. 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 this workshop at Yale.

The *Himalayan Connections* workshop demonstrated how such a broad interdisciplinary and transregional platform for knowledge exchange could prove both illuminating and provocative for all involved. Conversations begun at the conference have already led to new collaborations at Yale, in the Himalaya, and beyond.

## List of Participants

Elizabeth Allison (California Institute of Integral Studies)  
 Ken Bauer (Dartmouth College)  
 Robert Barnett (Columbia University)  
 Kamal Bawa (University of Massachusetts, Boston)  
 Gunnel Cederlof (Uppsala University)  
 Geoff Childs (Washington University, St Louis)  
 Anil Chitrakar (Himalayan Climate Initiative)  
 Gina Drew (The New School)  
 Paul Draghi (Yale University)  
 David Germano (University of Virginia)  
 David Holmberg (Cornell University)  
 Shafqat Hussain (Trinity College)  
 Michael Hutt (School of Oriental and African Studies)  
 Mahendra Lama (Jawaharlal Nehru University)  
 Mahendra Lawoti (Western Michigan University)  
 Todd Lewis (College of the Holy Cross)  
 Rob Linrothe (Northwestern University)  
 Kathryn March (Cornell University)  
 Saul Mullard (EPHE, Sorbonne)  
 Peter Perdue (Yale University)  
 Andrew Quintman (Yale University)  
 Charles Ramble (EPHE, Sorbonne)  
 Geoffrey Samuel (Cardiff University)  
 William (Bo) Sax (Heidelberg University)  
 Kurtis Schaeffer (University of Virginia)  
 James Scott (Yale University)  
 Tsering Shakya (University of British Columbia)  
 Eklabya Sharma (ICIMOD)  
 Sara Shneiderman (Yale University)  
 Kalyanakrishnan “Shivi” Sivaramakrishnan (Yale University)  
 Joëlle Smadja (CNRS, Paris)  
 Jeremy Spoon (Portland State University)  
 Mark Turin (Yale University)  
 Chris Vasantkumar (Hamilton College)  
 Mimi Yiengpruksawan (Yale University)  
 David Zurick (Eastern Kentucky University)