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# The Third ANHS Himalayan Studies Conference, Yale University, 14-16 March 2014

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# Conference Reports

## *The Third ANHS Himalayan Studies Conference*

**Yale University  
14-16 March 2014**

The Association of Nepal and Himalayan Studies (ANHS) Third Himalayan Studies Conference was held 14-16 March 2014 at Yale University in New Haven, CT. It followed the first conference convened by Arjun Guneratne at Macalester College in Saint Paul, MN in October 2011 and the second convened by Mahendra Lawoti at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, MI in September 2012. Mark Turin, Program Director of the Yale Himalaya Initiative and Convener of the third conference, and Mary Cameron, president of the Association of Nepal and Himalayan Studies, opened the meeting. It is singularly appropriate to express appreciation to the host, at the onset, on behalf of more than 220 conference registrants. Both thanks and congratulations are due to the Organizing Committee, which was comprised of Mark Turin, Sir Peter Crane, Timothy G. Gregoire, Arjun Guneratne, Andrew Quintman, Sara Shneiderman, Kalyanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan, Sampada KC, and Priyankar Bahadur Chand. The conspicuous success of their undertaking obviously resulted from detailed planning, efficient communication with participants, and New England hospitality at every turn.

The conference opened with a keynote address by Professor Françoise

Robin of the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Inalco, France. In her lecture, she explored the content and evolution of Tibetan poetry and films reflecting the shifting role for Tibetan artists from state-sponsored cultural actors in the 1980s to increasingly committed and embedded social critics. A second keynote in the evening included a screening of the documentary "Who Will Be A Gurkha?" by the award-winning filmmaker and writer Kesang Tseten, followed by a short question and answer session with the filmmaker.

Contributions were grouped into six roundtables and thirty-four panels, providing for a wide range of interests. Topics on roundtables included bio-medicine and the 2013 Constituent Assembly Elections in Nepal, political asylum, center-periphery paradigms in the Han-minority relations in China, Himalaya and Tibet in the North American classroom, and the past and future of the journal HIMALAYA. Panels included papers on photography in the field, citizenship, agrarian environments, conservation policies, migration, language and community, development and change, ethnic communities along the Sino-Tibetan border, identity and ethnicity, Muslim communities, Himalayan Buddhism, human ecology, laboring in the Himalaya, human-environment relationships, power dynamics and spatial authority, Nepali art, and representation of films and media in the Himalaya. Two sessions

were devoted to the work of Barbara Brower and her contributions to the Association of Nepal and Himalayan Studies. Two sessions also honored P. P. Karan and his groundbreaking work as the preeminent scholar of Himalayan geography. There was a good balance among theoretical, empirical, and applied studies. Environmental issues dominated several panels, reflecting the widespread concern over ecosystem deterioration and resource depletion in the Himalaya. Papers explored such issues as the impact of tourism, agricultural development, commerce, social change, and political development.

In terms of region, there were nine sessions devoted to various aspects of Nepal, five sessions on Tibet, three on Bhutan, and one each on South Asia and the Himalayas. A smaller but heartening selection of papers treated the Western and Eastern Himalaya, possibly setting a trend towards wider horizons in Himalayan studies. Individual contributions illuminated the topics and highlighted significant ideas. Equally encouraging was the large proportion of women and young Himalayanists who participated and wrote papers. A double roundtable session on Himalaya and Tibet in the classroom brought together university teachers and students from the University of North Texas, Dartmouth College, Université Laval, Washington University, Columbia, Cornell, University of Virginia, Yale, Holy Cross, Emory, and the Rubin Foundation for an examination of methodology,

curricular organization and content. Experiences of colleagues teaching about this part of the world were of great interest.

It was not possible for participants to attend all the panel discussions due to concurrent sessions. However, I would note that presentations by Jim Fisher, Ken Bauer, Alton Byers, and Pasang Sherpa in the panel in honor of Barbara Brower were very interesting, as were those in the panel on constructing communities organized by Mary Cameron and the panel on people and the environment organized by Geoff Childs and Teri Allendorf. A session on photography in the field with presentations by David Zurick, Marcus Nusser, and Clare Harris featured papers on critical studies of photographic practices in the Himalaya.

The presentations and discussions on panels focused on sacred landscapes and bio-medicine in Nepal were wide ranging both in terms of the empirical material used and the theoretical constructs underpinning the papers. This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that Himalayan Studies is a diverse enterprise that engages both the natural, social and behavioral sciences and the humanities.

By far the most memorable and impressive session was the one that brought together the past and present editors of the journal HIMALAYA, organized by John Metz of Northern Kentucky University, a longtime member of ANHS. Former editors David Holmberg, Kathryn March, William Fisher, Barbara Brower and Arjun Guneratne commented upon the history of the journal, the profound changes that the Himalayas have witnessed over the past several decades, and the painstaking care with which Himalayan scholars have recorded and interpreted these changes in

the pages of the journal. The present editors, Sienna Craig and Mark Turin, remarked on the challenges facing the journal and there was a lively discussion about how HIMALAYA should move forward.

Luce Hall served as the Conference venue, and sessions were held in the attractive rooms of the building. A large hall in this building offered ample opportunity for the meetings and mingling, and the exchange of news and views that form such an important part of an international gathering. The weather obligingly cooperated; throughout the Conference it was sunny and dry. In addition to Himalayan scholars, participants included undergraduates, graduate and post-graduate students, researchers, a publisher (the Director of the University Press of Kentucky), and a few academics from outside the field of Himalayan studies who are interested in mountain regions of the world.

The whole conference was live blogged on Twitter, with scholars and colleagues all over the Himalayan region reading, responding and asking questions about panels and discussions in live time through social media. If the New Haven meeting is an indicator of what is happening in Himalayan studies world-wide, then we should bet on an exciting future. The buzz at the conference was very much about opening up new spaces amongst the different perspectives, specialties and disciplines available to and used by Himalayan scholars. Participants were definitely energized. Altogether it was a very successful conference.

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### *The 12<sup>th</sup> British-Nepal Academic Council (BNAC) Nepal Study Days*

#### **School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, UK 24-25 April 2014**

The 12<sup>th</sup> BNAC Nepal Study Days took place on 24-25 April 2014 in Oxford, England. The yearly event is organized by the Britain-Nepal Academic Council and moves to different institutions in the UK each year. The School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford hosted this year's event with funding from All Souls College. The primary aim of the event is to bring together both the established scholars and early career researchers working on diverse subject areas on Nepal or the Nepali cultural world. The event occurred over two days. Scholars from different institutions in the UK and EU member states presented a total of twenty papers.

On the first day, nine papers were presented on three themes: Gurkha identity, religion, and labor and capital. The first session started with a very topical discussion on the British Government's Gurkha pension policies. Presenting a synopsis of a review document prepared by the Centre for Nepal Studies UK (CNSUK), Chandra Laksamba and Lokendra P. Dhakal (CNSUK, Reading) put forth the view that there is a need for the UK Government to review the Gurkha pension policy because most of the former Gurkhas have now moved to the UK; the UK government's point, that the pension is fair as it is pegged to the cost of living in Nepal, makes little sense. The Gurkha pension is an overarching issue for thousands of Nepali ex-Gurkhas and the CNSUK's review document sheds light on this historically impending case.