

'A YAM BETWEEN TWO ROCKS'

Transcultural Histories of Nepal's Relations with India, China, and Tibet

Venue: Conference hall of the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities
Karlstraße 4, 69117 Heidelberg

Date: 27-28 May 2024

Begin: Monday, 27th May 2024, 9:30

In his political testament, Divyopadeśa (c. 1774), King Prthvinārāyaṇa Śāha poignantly likened Nepal's geopolitical position, wedged between China and India, to that of a "Yam between two rocks" (*duī dhuṅgāko tarula*). This metaphor underscores the intrinsic link between Nepal's political destiny and its neighbors – a sentiment echoed by political analysts and decision-makers to this day. However, within the same text occurs another famous phrase – that of Nepal as the "true Hindustan" (*asala hindustāna*). In demarcation to colonized India, this self-representation upholds Hinduism's central role for the polity, observes the Brahmanical caste order, and zealously restricts foreign influence.

It is this notion of Nepal as the "true Hindustan" that has shaped the country's image as a "fossil" (Mary Des Chene), offering tourists an authentic glimpse into Indian culture and researchers an opportunity to study an India in the making ("Le Népal, c'est l'Inde qui se fait", Sylvain Lévi). The conference takes these tensions as a point of departure to delve into the historical, political, cultural, and intellectual connections between Nepal and the world, especially India, China, and Tibet. Moreover, it seeks to explore moments of conflict, seclusion, and the restriction of exchange resulting from complex entanglements. By investigating the potential of transculturality in understanding specific aspects of Nepal's non-colonized history, the conference simultaneously honors Professor Axel Michaels on the occasion of his 75th birthday. It critically engages with a key term in his scholarly oeuvre, inviting reflection on Nepal's dynamic relationships with neighboring regions in the past and present.

HEIDELBERG ACADEMY OF SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

Research Unit, "Documents on the History of Religion and Law of Pre-modern Nepal"

Nepal Heritage Documentation Project

Karlstraße 4
69117 Heidelberg
www.hadw-bw.de

CONTACT

Simon Cubelic (simon.cubelic@hadw-bw.de)

Lara Basile (lara.basile@hcts.uni-heidelberg.de)

Prior registration is strongly recommended

Photo: The Gurkha Campaign, painting on silk, China, 1792/93, Völkerkundemuseum vPSt

Member of the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities



'A YAM BETWEEN TWO ROCKS'

Transcultural Histories of Nepal's Relations with India, China, and Tibet



Conference
27-28 May 2024
Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities



HEIDELBERGER AKADEMIE DER WISSENSCHAFTEN

Akademie der Wissenschaften des Landes Baden-Württemberg

Conference
'A Yam between Two Rocks':
Transcultural Histories of Nepal's
Relations with India, China, and Tibet

Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities
Karlstraße 4
69117 Heidelberg

P R O G R A M

MONDAY, 27 MAY 2024

09:30 **BERND SCHNEIDMÜLLER** | HEIDELBERG
Welcome Address

**PANEL 1: HIMALAYAN CROSSROADS:
NEPAL-TIBET-CHINA RELATIONS AND REGIONAL
DYNAMICS**

09:45 **AXEL MICHAELS** | HEIDELBERG
Transcultural turbulences: New Nepalese documents
on the Sino-Gorkha War of 1791-92

10:15 **FRANZ XAVER ERHARD** | LEIPZIG
The Tibet-Gorkha War of 1790-92: A Tibetan perspective

10:45 **AYUSHMAN BARUAH** | TORONTO
The Gurkhas and the making of an informal empire in Tibet
(1855-1912)

COFFEE BREAK

11:45 **AMISH RAJ MULMI** | KATHMANDU
The Gyalpo Affair: Himalayan geopolitics at the beginning
of the 20th century

12:15 **ZEZHOU YANG** | LONDON
The unrecorded history of Nepal-China relations between
1910s-1940s

LUNCH BREAK

**PANEL 2: ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS, MATERIAL
CULTURE AND RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTERS**

14:00 **NIELS GUTSCHOW** | HEIDELBERG
Motifs in architecture: How the acanthus leaf from Corinth
and the airborne wisdom bearer on a Chinese cloud arrived
in Kathmandu

14:30 **CHRISTIAN LUCZANITS** | LONDON
Mustang at the crossroads: On the entanglement of monastery
collections

15:00 **ALEXANDER VON ROSPATT** | BERKELEY,
CALIFORNIA
From the periphery to the center: Reflections on how the
Nepalese Buddhist tradition came to situate itself between
the Indian motherland and *Mahācīna*

KEYNOTE LECTURE

Venue: Centre for Asian and Transcultural Studies,
Building 4010, CATS auditorium HS05 (1. OG),
Voßstraße 2, 69115 Heidelberg

CHARLES RAMBLE | OXFORD/PARIS
A yam or a sausage? Elastic boundaries, internal exotica and
other features in the slow coagulation of a nation

Introduction by
UTE HÜSKEN | HEIDELBERG

AFTERWARDS RECEPTION

TUESDAY, 28 MAY 2024

**PANEL 3: ENCOUNTERING THE WEST:
RELIGIOUS, MILITARY, AND DIPLOMATIC
ENGAGEMENTS IN NEPAL'S HISTORY**

09:30 **MARIE LECOMTE-TILOUINE** | PARIS
Distorting Christian presence in pre-modern Nepal

10:00 **ALAKA CHUDAL** | VIENNA
Why do we fight in the WW1? A response from the Rana
government and the Gurkhas

COFFEE BREAK

11:00 **MANIK BAJRACHARYA, SIMON CUBELIC
RAJAN KHATIWODA** | HEIDELBERG
Sources on Nepal's foreign knowledge and diplomacy in
the 19th century (reading-in-conjunction)

LUNCH BREAK

**PANEL 4: CROSSING GEOGRAPHICAL AND SOCIAL
BOUNDARIES IN INDIA-NEPAL RELATIONS**

13:30 **CHRISTOF ZOTTER** | HEIDELBERG
Transcending borders: Hindu ascetics as go-betweeners

14:00 **MARTIN GAENZLE** | VIENNA
Nepali Pilgrims in Banaras

COFFEE BREAK

15:00 **MICHAEL HUTT** | LONDON
Dalit literature in India and Nepal: Questions of authority and
influence.

15:30 **JOANNA PFAFF-CZARNECKA** | BIELEFELD
From servants to academics: Trajectories of Nepal's Dalits
in a comparative perspective

16:00 **MADELEINE HERREN-OESCH** | BASEL
Concluding remarks

BOOK LAUNCH AND RECEPTION

Venue: Völkerkundemuseum vPST, Hauptstr. 235, 69117 Heidelberg

ALBAN VON STOCKHAUSEN | HEIDELBERG
Welcome address

BOOK LAUNCH

Axel Michaels, *Nepal: A History from the Earliest Times to the
Present* (Oxford University Press, 2024)

Introduction by
DAVID N. GELLNER | OXFORD

AFTERWARDS RECEPTION