

International Conference

March 6 - 8, 2015

**Transcultural Encounters in the Himalayan
Borderlands: Kalimpong as a 'Contact Zone'**

ABSTRACTS

Organizer: Markus Viehbeck

Himalayan Hotel, Kalimpong



Transcultural Encounters in the Himalayan Borderlands:

Kalimpong as a 'Contact Zone'

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The hill station of Kalimpong played a vital role as a center of convergence for the complex transcultural processes that affected the entire Eastern Himalayan region in the twentieth century. Originally an important link in the tea trade route connecting the Himalayas, it became the main transit hub for the exchange of Tibetan and European commodities in the wake of the British Younghusband invasion to Tibet in 1904. Economic development was accompanied by a growth of its population. The historical presence of various local ethnic groups met with an influx of traders and the settlement of British and Indian colonial officers, Christian missionaries, Nepali laborers, Tibetan dignitaries, Western Tibetologists, spiritual seekers, scholars and adventurers. While pursuing their respective goals, these formed complex networks and shaped and exchanged knowledge between worlds that had known very little about each other.

Kalimpong thus became a salient space for manifold and complex cultural interactions. The study of such spaces in the colonial world has in recent years been enriched by new theoretical perspectives related to transcultural and postcolonial studies. With this workshop, we would like to focus on Kalimpong as a rich case study for stimulating dialogue between these different efforts, probing into various interconnected key areas, such as trade, religion, politics, media, scholarship, education, etc., using different methodological and disciplinary approaches.

In order to cope with the heterogeneous nature of this enterprise and to facilitate closer linkages between these different fields of interest the concept of "Contact Zone" will act as a point of connection. Developed in the investigation of travel writing in a colonial context (Mary Louise Pratt, 1992), it skillfully combines general currents of cultural studies to form a nuanced analytical perspective. While it acknowledges on one hand the importance of larger asymmetries of power (highlighted in early postcolonial discourse), this is counterbalanced by an emphasis on the agency of individuals that might not follow the logic of these asymmetries. It focuses thus on the dynamic potential of a "Contact Zone", where specific cultural forms of understanding and practice are negotiated in a continuing interactive process.



Programme

Friday, March 6

Keynote Lecture

09:15

Markus Viehbeck: Welcome and Introduction

Tanka B. Subba: Processes of Cultural Identity Negotiations in the Himalayan Region

Chair: Jayeeta Sharma

Session 01

11:15

Clare Harris: Photography in the 'Contact Zones' of the Himalayas

Anna Sawerthal: A Newspaper for Tibet: The Self through the Form of the Other

Chair: Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa

Session 02

14:00

Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa: Recovering the New Himalayan Woman: Gender, Mobility and Alternative Modernities in the Construction of Kalimpong as a Contact Zone

Carole McGranahan: Earth and Sky: The Pangdatsang Family, Social Death, and Tibetan Politics in Kalimpong, 1945-1965

Jayeeta Sharma: Circulation, Intimacies, and Writing 'Connected' Himalayan Histories

Chair: Davide Torri

Session 03

16:15

Isrun Engelhardt: A Dedicated Initiator of Cultural Exchange: Tharchin's Innovative Communication of Knowledge between the Tibetan and Western Worlds

Trine Brox & Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen: The Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia - 7 Years in Kalimpong

Chair: Clare Harris



Saturday, March 7

Session 04

09:30

Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia: Beyond the Native Informant: Kalimpong and Darjeeling in the Making of Modern Sikkimese Intellectual Cultures

Markus Viehbeck: Scholarly Networks in Kalimpong and beyond: Knowledge Production and Powers of Representation

Chair: Carole McGranahan

Session 05

11:15

Vibha Arora: The Rise of the Lepcha Subaltern and the Kalimpong Stimulus

Charisma Lepcha: Scottish Mission in Kalimpong and the Changing Dynamics of Lepcha Society

David Reid Syiemlieh: The Graham's Homes and Missionary Activities in the Eastern Himalayas: Reflections from an Alumni and a Historian

Chair: Jayeeta Sharma

Graduate Student Roundtable

14:00

Kishan Harijan: The Role of Trade and Commerce in the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Darjeeling Hills (1861-1962)

Mingma Lhamu: The Politics of Mobilization of the Gorkhas: The Role of the Nepalese King (1914-1918)

Garima Rai: Interrogating Migrant Subjectivity in Indian Nepali Writings from Darjeeling Hills (1950-1980)

Shradhanjali Tamang: Indigenous History and the *Tamba* Tradition

Binayak Sundas: Understanding the History of the Gorkhas/Gurkhas as a Socio-Political Process, 14th-20th Centuries

Reep Pandi Lepcha: Myths and Folktales of Lepchas: A Critical Assessment

Chair: Anna Sawerthal



Session 06

16:30

Mona Chettri: Cultural Revivalism and Contact Zones in the Eastern Himalaya

Rajendra P. Dhakal: Changing Orientations: A Study of the Hill Communities

Chair: Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia

Sunday, March 8

Concluding Roundtable: From Local Histories to Global Knowledge

09:30

Sandip Jain & Markus Viehbeck

Daniel Tharchin & Anna Sawerthal

Udaymani Pradhan, Bharatmani Pradhan & Jayeeta Sharma

Farewell

11:15

Markus Viehbeck: Acknowledgments & Farewell



March 6, Keynote Lecture

Tanka B. Subba: Processes of Cultural Identity Negotiations in the Himalayan Region

Contact zones, such as Kalimpong, provide both challenges and opportunities for communities to negotiate their cultural identities. The importance of contact zones as sites of identity negotiation does not go down when such negotiations are informed by considerations other than contact, such as rights, citizenship, national status, or constitutional status like scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Often, the need to negotiate identities arises from the fact that such identities are *etic*, or given by neighboring communities, although *emic* identities can be equally volatile subjects of contestation. The contestations become inevitable also because identities are often brokered by the dominant groups within a community to suit their existential needs and they are not evolved out of consensus. They of course evolve over time through the process of constant contestation and negotiation. The evolution of identities is, however, more visible if they are less inclusive of the internal heterogeneity of the communities.

In my keynote I will pick up instances from the Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali communities of Darjeeling and Sikkim to illustrate the above-mentioned points of view.

About the speaker:

Tanka B. Subba is the Vice-Chancellor of Sikkim University, Gangtok, India. He has authored and edited over a dozen books and 70 articles on various issues related to the eastern Himalayas. His major fieldworks are in Darjeeling, Sikkim and Eastern Nepal. His areas of interest are ethnicity and development, health and disease, politics of culture and identity, and diaspora.

March 6, Session 01

Clare Harris: Photography in the 'Contact Zones' of the Himalayas

Amongst the many novelties that the British introduced to the Himalayas in the second half of the nineteenth century was photography. Initially used to document the landscapes and peoples of the mountains within Imperial anthropological and topographical survey projects, by the 1880s photography had become more closely aligned with tourism and some of the other 'pleasures of Empire' (Said) that could be enjoyed in the giddy social world of the hill stations. Commercial studios were established in those places to cater to the demand for portraits of young ladies seeking husbands and for *carte de visite* that could be circulated among friends and family both in India and abroad. This market was so strong that by 1900 Darjeeling alone boasted at least half a dozen makers and purveyors of pictures, including some of the most distinguished names in the business, such as Johnson and Hoffmann and Thos. Paar. To judge from the many surviving prints, postcards and albums created in the Himalayas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the 'visual economy' (Poole) of this region is worthy of study in itself, since it reveals rare visual information about the cultures of colonialism on the periphery of British India. However the few existing publications on this material tend to present it purely as illustrative of British lives or the achievements of



British photographers. In addition, they reduce the many depictions of the indigenous inhabitants of the area to anonymous representations of 'ethnic types', thereby reiterating colonial predilections towards nostalgia and exoticism. By contrast, I seek to argue in this paper that photography in Himalayan hill stations was very much a product of a 'contact zone' situation and that, despite the general inequality of power relations in those places, photographic studios and their products can actually be construed as spaces of interaction and encounter between coloniser and colonised. The paper aims to show how the close analysis of archival images (and associated textual and oral histories) makes it possible to reinsert the identities to those who were the subject of British cameras and to assign agency to the Tibetans, Sikkimese, Lepchas, Nepalis and others who acted as culture brokers in their operation.

About the speaker:

Clare Harris is Professor of Visual Anthropology in the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography and Curator for Asian Collections at the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford. Her research interests include: the history of museums, collections and displays, photography, contemporary art and material/visual culture in the Himalayas and Tibet. In 2014 her most recent monograph, 'The Museum on the Roof of the World: Art, Politics and the Representation of Tibet', won the E. Gene Smith prize for the best book on Central Asia from the Association of Asian Studies.

March 6, Session 01

Anna Sawerthal: A Newspaper for Tibet: The Self through the Form of the Other

When the first newspapers were founded in Tibetan language in the first half of the 20th century, the format "newspaper" had been part of everyday life in most parts of the world for a long time. The yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long (Melong, 1925-1963) was founded with the dominant British (or British-Indian) press as its role model, but was certainly adapted in manifold ways to a Tibetan cultural context. At that time, a highly exclusive printing, writing and reading culture was prevalent throughout Tibetan-speaking areas, with more than 90 per cent of the population illiterate, and the written text considered sacred. In contrast, a newspaper per se strives for maximum inclusion, both from an economic and publicist perspective. It is of no surprise that the point of entry for such an innovation would be found in the contact zone Kalimpong, situated along the trade route between India and Tibet, i.e. at both the fringes of the Tibetan and the British-Indian sphere of influence. The editor of the Melong was from the borderlands himself, took up multiple subjectivities, but deliberately positioned himself as an indigenous "Tibetan" in his role as newspaper editor.

By taking up the colonial form newspaper he engaged in overarching asymmetries brought about by colonial settings in a highly active way. Inspired by Pratt's conceptualization of "auto-ethnography" this paper wants to dig into the mechanisms of the definition of the "self" through the form of the "other". Here, Pratt's main focus on idioms and linguistic forms is expanded to a more general understanding of form, incorporating material forms and questions of genre. In both visual terms and terms of content, the Melong features instances of the a) selection of colonial forms and b) appropriation of colonial forms, and the c) merging



of these with indigenous forms. In this way, the newspaper addresses both - in Pratt's terms - metropolitan audiences and the editor's own (imagined) community. This paper wants to stress, though, that the main intention of the editor of the *Melong* was, by linking Tibet to a global information network, to provide a definition of what is Tibet.

About the speaker:

Anna Sawerthal is a PhD candidate at the University of Heidelberg at the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context". She studies early Tibetan-language newspapers, mainly focusing on the *yul phyogs so so'i gsar 'gyur me long*, published from 1925 to 1963 in Kalimpong. She is interested in transformation and adaptation processes between Europe and Asia, in particular concerning the adaptation of the newspaper for a Tibetan-speaking readership. She works with theories and methods of media studies, social sciences, transcultural studies and historical studies.

March 6, Session 02

Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa: Recovering the New Himalayan Woman: Gender, Mobility and Alternative Modernities in the Construction of Kalimpong as a Contact Zone

The hill stations of British India were unique sites of cultural and economic exchange, facilitated through the development of unique social circumstances. Among these unique circumstances was the comparatively high percentage of women present in these environments. As Dane Kennedy has written, the social freedoms allowed in hill stations provided opportunities for women to assert independent agency in their vocational and social lives unseen elsewhere in colonial South Asia. They founded schools, worked as missionaries, and interacted with a wide variety of locals in social organizations, civic associations and fundraising activities. Although Kennedy's work has filled an important gap in our understanding of colonial society in Darjeeling and other hill stations, the history of women's activities in Kalimpong remains largely unexplored and opportunities for indigenous women in this unique environment absent from histories of the period. They were important figures in the negotiation of this contact zone, though, as they worked as trade agents, attended schools and passed through the town as pilgrims, merchants and translators, enjoying mobility that was inconceivable for colonial women. This paper will explore the lives of two Himalayan women and their engagement with Kalimpong in order to draw out how the educational, economic and religious networks facilitated by the myriad communities that intersected in Kalimpong led to entirely new opportunities for women and illuminate the complexities of gendered histories in the Himalayas.

About the speaker:

Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa is an assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Grinnell College in the United States. Her research focuses on the socio-cultural history of the Eastern and Southern Himalayan borderlands and their regional and global interconnections. She is the author of 'The Social Life of Tibetan Biography: Textuality, Community and Authority in the Lineage of Tokden Shakya Shri' (2014), which explores the



formation of a trans-Himalayan Buddhist lineage through focusing on the life and community of an Eastern Tibetan yogi.

March 6, Session 02

Carole McGranahan: Earth and Sky: The Pangdatsang Family, Social Death, and Tibetan Politics in Kalimpong, 1945-1965

Sa spang mda' gnam spang mda'—The earth is Pangda's, the sky is Pangda's. In Kalimpong in the 1990s, this was often the first thing people say when reflecting on the wealthy Pangdatsang family who dominated trade between Tibet, India, and China in the first half of the twentieth century. They would continue on with stories of how Pangdatsang's mule herders would say this when caught committing some offense, daring their critics to further challenge them. As everyone knew, the Pangdatsangs were not just any Tibetan family. In the span of one generation, they grew from an important trading family in eastern Tibet to the wealthiest family in all of Tibet. Shrewd traders, Sakya sponsors, Gelukpa monastery backers, Dalai Lama devotees, government officials, renegade politicians, local chieftains, Kuomintang sympathizers, and anti-colonial Anglophiles who had disputes with the Tibetan government, British colonial officials, and Chinese communists alike, the three Pangdatsang brothers should've left a deep mark on Tibetan history. Instead, their inconvenient histories have faded into obscurity for a range of reasons, some obvious, some not, such that people also now also say—"The Pangdatsangs? That family is no more." In this paper, I explore the rise and fall of the Pangdatsang family through a focus on Yamphel, the elder brother and Tibetan Trade Agent, whose spat with Gyalo Thondup (the powerful older brother of the Dalai Lama) in the 1960s proved deadly in social terms for the entire family. I draw on an eclectic array of documentary and oral sources, historic and ethnographic methods, to reconsider the Pangdatsang family's place in twentieth century history from the specific vantage point of mid-century Kalimpong.

About the speaker:

Carole McGranahan is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Colorado. She is the author of *Arrested Histories: Tibet, the CIA, and Memories of a Forgotten War*, and numerous articles on gender, history, refugees, politics, and empire. Currently, she is finishing a book manuscript on the Pangdatsang family and 20th century Tibet.

March 6, Session 02

Jayeeta Sharma: Circulation, Intimacies, and Writing 'Connected' Himalayan Histories

My paper explores my endeavor to write a 'connected' history of Intimacies and Circulation in the Eastern Himalayas, with a particular focus on the hill-towns of Darjeeling and Kalimpong. It discusses how the deployment of oral histories, personal testimonies, vernacular, and ethnographic print and visual materials allows me to interrogate how borderlands mobility, and imperial trajectories offered myriad possibilities for the circulation of people, goods, and



ideas, as well as a range of intimate encounters. Such intimate encounters generated distinctive subjectivities and connected Himalayan individuals and communities to a range of local and global histories and grassroots modernities, whose connected contours need to transcend the limitations set by individual scholarship, disciplinary and media boundaries.

About the speaker:

Jayeeta Sharma studied history at the Universities of Delhi and Cambridge and is an Associate Professor at the University of Toronto. Her book *Empire's Garden: Assam and the Making of India* appeared in 2011 from Duke University Press and Permanent Black. She is writing her second book on Circulation, Mobility, and Intimacies in the Eastern Himalayas. She is the founder of the Eastern Himalaya Research Network which promotes collaboration in digital scholarship and pedagogy, archival preservation and dissemination, and nurtures research partnerships involving university academics, public intellectuals, young researchers, and institutions across the Himalayas and beyond. She is a member of the City Foods: People on the Move global collaboration between university academics and community groups working on food and urban issues.

March 6, Session 03

Isrun Engelhardt: A Dedicated Initiator of Cultural Exchange: Tharchin's Innovative Communication of Knowledge between the Tibetan and Western Worlds

As it is unnecessary to provide further introduction to Babu Tharchin at this conference, my paper will focus on his role as intermediary between two worlds - as a dedicated initiator of cultural exchange.

Tharchin developed a variety of methods and means to fulfil this role, most important of which was his primary medium, the *Tibet Mirror*: Although the main objective of the paper was to familiarize Tibetans with the world outside Tibet, Tharchin's further priority was to provide information on Buddhist topics, for which he repeatedly succeeded in attracting highly qualified Buddhist authors such as Trijang Rinpoche and Gedun Chopel. After China's conquest of Tibet, however, he shifted the focus of his reporting and strove to supply both Tibet and the Western world with information on current events in Tibet and to open their eyes to the situation there; as a result, his newspaper was attentively followed both in Beijing and in Washington and Delhi. A further key area of focus for Tharchin was the preservation and dissemination of the Tibetan culture and language. In addition to publishing many secular Tibetan books at his Kalimpong Tibet Mirror Press, he thus also wrote textbooks and grammar books on the Tibetan language, which often went into many editions. In 1950 Tharchin even issued a Tibetan language course, designed by Hugh Richardson and Basil Gould, on the new medium of gramophone record.

To meet the needs of Tibetan refugees, Tharchin published *Hindi-Tibetan Self-Taught* and, in 1965, a multilingual dictionary, *The English-Tibetan-Hindi Pocket Dictionary*. Evidently a rapid sell-out, the book appeared in later years as a pirated reprint. As early as the 1930s, Tharchin had begun decades of work on what is probably the most comprehensive



monolingual Tibetan dictionary, including many words from Hindi and Urdu, which he regarded as his opus magnum. However, for financial reasons only two volumes could be printed in the 1960s, and the remaining unpublished volumes will hopefully become accessible to the scholarly world. In public life in Kalimpong, Tharchin was frequently sought after as a translator for various occasions and as a mediator in conflicts within the Buddhist community and in secular disputes involving Westerners. In addition, his unusually wide-ranging correspondence shows that Tibetologists and scholars from all over the world sought his advice, many travelling to Kalimpong themselves to meet Tharchin in person. Tharchin's multi-faceted and innovative activities thus played an important role in transforming Kalimpong into a centre of transcultural encounters.

About the speaker:

Isrun Engelhardt was a research fellow at the Institute of Central Asian Studies, Bonn University, Germany. Her subjects of research are Tibetan-European encounters and relations mainly from the Tibetan side from the 17th to the 20th century. She is author of numerous articles on these subjects.

March 6, Session 03

Trine Brox & Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen: The Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia – 7 Years in Kalimpong

The object of the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia was to explore and document terra incognita, an 'empty spot' on the map as well as rescue the remains of local cultures. One of the expedition's team was to head for Sikkim and work its way to Lhasa and over the Tibetan Plateau to Alaša in Inner Mongolia and from there into the territory of the "Yellow Uigurs". However, the PLA invasion of Tibet in late 1950 prevented the expedition from entering Tibet. The expedition leader, Prince Peter of Greece and Denmark, was stranded in Kalimpong and there waited in vain for permission to proceed into Tibet. Yet the inopportune political circumstances turned into a great opportunity for the expedition as the Chinese invasion triggered a "stream of refugees" into Kalimpong—Tibetan officials and their families, Tibetan businessmen, pilgrims, beggars as well as the few European residents of Tibet. Kalimpong became the place to be: "We had been denied entry into Tibet, but Tibet had come to us." (Prince 1954: 232)

The Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia, which had commenced in 1948, arrived in Kalimpong in 1950 and remained there until 1957. In this paper, we will explore the expedition's seven years in Kalimpong that resulted in a rich collection of artefacts and books, still and moving photography, sound recordings, ethnographic information as well as an astoundingly large set of physical anthropology data. We will show how Prince Peter, an old-world ethnographer and explorer, navigated in this particularly intense contact zone, negotiating difficult political, personal and scientific circumstances. One of our focal points will be how the expedition mode had to be abandoned in favour of more modern ethnographic fieldwork methods of intense study in circumscribed spaces. Kalimpong was such a circumscribed space while simultaneously a dynamic contact zone where people from a variety of socio-cultural and ethnic-linguistic backgrounds moved in and out, constantly



oscillating between placement and displacement. The Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia's 7 years in Kalimpong thus foreshadowed contemporary anthropological fieldwork, where ethnographers work with people where they are now, rather than where they are considered to 'originally' belong.

About the speakers:

Trine Brox is Associate Professor in Modern Tibetan Studies at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. She studied Social Science at the University of Tromsø (Norway) and Tibetology at the University of Copenhagen, where she also received her PhD degree in 2009 with the thesis *The Enchanted Gift of Democracy: Imagining and Negotiating Democracy in the Tibetan Diaspora*. She has published several articles about contemporaneous issues in Tibet and the Tibetan diaspora. Current research projects include (1) The Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia, (2) the entanglements of Buddhism and economy, and (3) migrant urban landscapes in China.

Miriam Koktvedgaard Zeitzen is Post.Doc. in Cross-Cultural Studies at Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. She received her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from University of Cambridge, England. Her dissertation research focused on elite Malay polygamy in urban Malaysia. Muslim polygamy in Southeast Asia remains a central research interest, but she researches all forms of polygamy world-wide. She has a long-term research interest in fundamentalist Mormon polygamists negotiating the right to practice polygamy in North America, focusing on gender, religion and legal culture perspectives. Current research projects include The Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia and mapping polyandry in the Himalayas.

March 7, Session 04

Kalzung Dorjee Bhutia: Beyond the Native Informant: Kalimpong and Darjeeling in the Making of Modern Sikkimese Intellectual Cultures

Kalimpong and Darjeeling both played key roles in the creation of knowledge and awareness about Tibetan culture and religion. As Clare Harris' work has demonstrated, they were often seen as 'mini-Tibet,' with local cultures either distorted or misinterpreted to act as proxies for the inaccessible Tibetan 'center' as it was constructed by colonial scholars. Local intellectuals and cultural brokers made key contributions to studies by L.A. Waddell, Charles Bell, and other figures who developed their research out of these hill towns. This paper will explore the stories of several Sikkimese figures who are often dismissed as 'native informants' in histories of Tibetan studies, but who in actuality were responsible for and integral to the creation of these studies. The paper will outline their own indigenous and trans-regional genealogies of knowledge, and consider the relationships between forms of knowledge production and classification across the colonial frontier and between indigenous and colonial systems.



About the speaker:

Originally from Sindrang, West Sikkim, Kalzang Dorjee Bhutia received his PhD in Buddhist cultures and history from the University of Delhi. His research focuses on the cultural history and traditions of Buddhism in the Eastern Himalayas, particularly in Sikkim. He is currently affiliated to Grinnell College in the United States.

March 7, Session 04

Markus Viehbeck: Scholarly Networks in Kalimpong and beyond: Knowledge Production and Powers of Representation

In the first half of the 20th century, the Eastern Himalayas emerged as a particularly important space for encounters between people of varied interests and cultural backgrounds. While access to Tibet was heavily restricted, the presence of Tibetan population in this border area – as an effect of long-established cultural relations, a result of the economic developments after the British mission to Lhasa in 1903/04, or as a reaction to the Chinese invasion to Tibet in the 1950s – provided an ideal environment for Tibetophiles of various sorts. In the pursuit of their respective goals they relied not only heavily upon each other, but also made use of local informants, thus creating and depending on complex networks. While most of the Western individuals involved in these processes received attention in their respective fields, the role of their "native assistants" remained largely neglected.

In my talk, I would like to take a fresh look at the intricate entanglements of these networks by following the trajectory of a particularly well-connected, though not commonly known Tibetan scholar. Originally from Lhasa, Rig 'dzin dbang po became a long term resident of Kalimpong, where he acted as a crucial link in the knowledge that was produced between Tibet and the world beyond it: as a research assistant to many Western scholars, but also as an assistant to Babu Tharchin whose Tibetan language newspaper *Me long* provided access to global events. It is also this special position, I will argue, that reflected back on his personal life, resulting in a reconsideration of his cultural background and a new orientation as Buddhist.

About the speaker:

Markus Viehbeck works as an Assistant Professor at the Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context," located at Heidelberg University. His research concerns, broadly speaking, the migration, appropriation, and negotiation of knowledge, with a focus on more recent Tibetan intellectual history. He earned his PhD from the University of Vienna (2012) with a study on the polemical exchange between 'Ju Mi pham and Dpa' ris Rab gsal, two eminent Tibetan intellectuals of the 19th century, concerning the correct interpretation of an Indian Buddhist key text. In a new project he focuses on the Eastern Himalayas, in particular the town of Kalimpong, as a "contact zone" for enabling and shaping the production of knowledge between Tibet and the modern world of the early 20th century.



March 7, Session 05

Vibha Arora: The Rise of the Lepcha Subaltern and the Kalimpong Stimulus

Nearly all anthropological discourses and historic tropes on the Lepcha community emphasize their vanishing status, their progressive marginalization and subordination in the ethnic hierarchy and the political economy of the Eastern Himalayas of India. Based on past fifteen years of socio-historical and ethnographic research in Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills, I propose the idea of a 'subaltern' Lepcha (replacing the trope of Lepcha, a vanishing tribe) and simultaneously recognize the efforts of their 'organic intellectuals' to ceremonialize and invent cultural symbols to unify the geographically dispersed religiously divided Lepcha community and memorialize 'forgotten' Lepcha leaders, as part of their struggle to recover subjectivity and reclaim their past.

The contemporary agency of Lepchas to negotiate, rebel, or resist the hegemonic power of the state has been shaped by the production and acquisition of a cultural repertoire. In recent years, Lepcha subaltern resistance has taken a spatial turn. Hence, I discuss three manifestations (worship of 'sacred' Mt. Tendong, the celebration of King Gaebo Achyuk's birthday at Kalimpong, and transformation of Dzongu into a holy land with Lepcha march from Kalimpong), which have enabled the rise of the Lepcha subaltern and their transformation into an eco-warrior guarding the fragile environment. The organic intellectuals residing in Kalimpong have given creative direction to these three historic political processes and ceremonial events, which I term the Kalimpong stimulus. The Lepchas of Sikkim and other ethnic groups duly recognize and acknowledge the power of the Kalimpong stimulus in organizing and galvanizing the Lepcha subaltern.

About the speaker:

Vibha Arora is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, India. She has received numerous awards, national and international scholarships and fellowships for her research on the Himalayan region and North-east India. She has published approximately about 40 papers in reputed journals and edited volumes on research methods, environmental politics, identity and ethnicity, state and development politics and visual anthropology. She has co-edited *Routeing Democracy in the Himalayas: Experiments and Experiences* (Delhi, London, New York: Routledge, 2013) and is currently writing a monograph on identity politics and environmental issues in Sikkim and Northeast India and co-editing a second volume on *Democratization in the Himalayan region*.

March 7, Session 05

Charisma Lepcha: Scottish Mission in Kalimpong and the Changing Dynamics of Lepcha Society

'The Lepchas seem to be the most hopeful people for us in the hills', wrote Rev. William Macfarlane of the Church of Scotland in the year-end report to his mission. Compared to the Bhutias and the Nepalīs, he found Lepchas to be the most responsive to the gospel as the arrival of Macfarlane and the Scottish Mission made way for the first missionary work in



Kalimpong. Macfarlane was known to be a 'zealous' preacher and hoped that a mission there would mean 'a mission to the great independent states of Nepal, Sikkim, and Bhootan (Perry 1997: 33)'. At that time, Nepal, Sikkim, Tibet and Bhutan, were closed to foreigners and the British missionaries were not be allowed to enter the same. So it was only fitting to convert the native Lepchas who readily accepted the gospel and send them as missionaries beyond Kalimpong.

In that context, Lepchas of Kalimpong went through major socio-cultural changes since the acceptance of the newfound religion. It has been argued that Christianity promoted "cultural dynamism" among Lepchas but Christianity also divorced them from many traditional practices. "When a Lepcha becomes a Christian, he becomes a saab." This is an oft-repeated phrase expressing the change in attitude, lifestyle and identity of a Lepcha as he accepts the newfound religion. This paper will discuss the advent of Christianity and the cultural changes that took place among the Lepchas. It will also examine the role of missionaries in the culture shift from an exclusive tribal culture to a more common culture that exists in Kalimpong today.

About the speaker:

Charisma K. Lepcha is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology, Sikkim University. Her PhD was on "Religion, Culture, Identity: A Comparative Study on the Lepchas of Dzongu, Kalimpong and Ilam".

March 7, Session 05

David Reid Syiemlieh: The Graham's Homes and Missionary Activities in the Eastern Himalayas: Reflections from an Alumni and a Historian

Over the past three decades my research interest included the study of Christian missions in North East India. Only on one occasion did I write on a subject of history relating to the Darjeeling hills. My foray into church and Mission history of another very successful activity and the subject to include my alma mater, Dr Graham's Homes, immediately raises issues of my familiarity with the historical developments in this hill region and command over the sources and the presentation of an historical narrative by a beneficiary of a mission school. This may be overcome by referring to familiar text for the background of the presentation and take this forward with my reflections of the school and its contribution to both missionary activity and the opportunities it gave to scores of Anglo Indian children.

The presentation will cover a span in time from the foundations of the Scottish and Scottish universities missions in Darjeeling and Kalimpong, the Scandanavian mission and several other missionary activities among the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepales to more recent times. The focus will then move towards the establishment of school in the hills and the difference of the St. Andrew's Colonial Homes in its foundation and focus. A brief review will follow on the more significant aspects of the school, which appropriately changed its name at the close of colonial rule and the ushering in of a policy for the Anglo Indian community. A critique will be attempted on the functioning of the school, its funding, staff recruitment, changed profile of students in more recent times, and a note on the alumni associations.



About the speaker:

David R. Syiemlieh studied in Dr. Graham's Homes, Kalimpong (1958-1970) and graduated with honours in History from the North Eastern Hill University (1974), following this with an MA in History (1976). He then taught for two years in St Edmund's College, Shillong, before joining the Department of History North Eastern Hill University where he went on to a Professorship, and held the offices of Controller of Examinations, Registrar and Pro-Vice-Chancellor. He was Vice Chancellor of Rajiv Gandhi University (2011-2012) after which he was called to the office of Member, Union Public Service Commission. Prof. Syiemlieh has interest in colonial policy and practice and Christianity in North East India.

March 7, Graduate Student Roundtable

Kishan Harijan: The Role of Trade and Commerce in the Socio-Economic Conditions of the Darjeeling Hills (1861-1962)

The history of Darjeeling constitutes an important chapter in the extension of British rule. The main motive of the research is to document the historical process and development of trade and commerce and to reveal its role in socio-economic conditions of Darjeeling hills. Trade and Commerce brought about a great transformation in the economic landscape, demography and the entire socio-economic pattern of the district. Trade became a major form of economic activity in Darjeeling hills. The research has been categorized in three broad segments: 1. Trans-himalayan Trade & Role of Darjeeling as an Entrepot Centre; 2. Tea Plantation Industry & Tea Trade; 3. Multi-Culturalism in Darjeeling hills. Trade through the Himalayas is a truly international commerce which affected important political and commercial relations between the Himalayan kingdoms and the British. Darjeeling and later Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling, flourished as the major trading posts for Trans-Himalayan trade. Kalimpong was the entrepot for the Tibetan trade. Unfortunately, the permanent closure of the Jelep Pass after the Sino-Indian War (1962) disrupted trade between Tibet and India. It reveals that the role of Darjeeling and Kalimpong as an 'Entrepot Centre' for Trans-Himalayan Trade came to an end which ultimately affected the socio-economic conditions of the people.

Secondly, the research observes the genesis & growth of tea plantation industry and more importantly, the tea trade & export. Darjeeling tea enjoyed virtual monopoly in international markets. Commercial tea plantation in Darjeeling started in 1841 under the British Colony and even today forms the major socio-economic backbone of the local population. Eventually, the work also tries to present an analytical study of how trade brought multi-culturalism to Darjeeling. Merchant communities such as the Bhutias, Sherpas, Nepalese (Newars), Tibetans, Marwaris, Biharis, in general began to migrate to this area and settled here in order to set up their business enterprises. So, culturally, Darjeeling became a 'melting pot' and 'ethnological museum'. So, even trade and commerce brought 'Cultural Integrity' in the Darjeeling hills, which contributed to the liberal and cosmopolitan identity of the hills.



About the speaker:

Kishan Harijan is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History, Presidency University, Kolkata. Currently, he is pursuing his doctoral research in the Trade and Commerce of Colonial Darjeeling hills from the University of Visva-bharati, Santiniketan. His research emphasizes on Colonial Trans-Himalayan and Tea Trade.

March 7, Graduate Student Roundtable

Mingma Lhamu Pakhrin: The Politics of Mobilization of the Gorkhas: the Role of the Nepalese King (1914-1918)

In this paper, I have embarked on to analyze how the Gorkhas during the First World War period were mobilized by His Excellency Maharaja of Nepal into the British Indian Army and the reasons or rather the politics behind his active involvement. In the course of my study of the mobilization, I will also try and bring to the limelight the difference in the mobilization of the Gorkhas during the First World War and the pre-War period. It was my personal drive to learn and, of course, accumulate increased knowledge about the Gorkha soldiers in the Indian Army which helped me realize that the mobilization of the Gorkhas was the theme that is less explored or not directly dealt with and eventually I decided to work on, though briefly, for my paper. When we talk about the mobilization of the Gorkhas, we cannot reduce it merely to the recruitment system. Mobilization is a term with a much broader outreach and it brings within its ambit not only the process of recruitment but also other essential elements, such as, the role of the recruiter, factors that necessitate or demand such role, etc. which supplement and complement it. As I have mentioned earlier, there has been plenty of work done on the recruitment as well as the role of the Gorkhas in both the World Wars and their consequent fame which became known world-wide. Purushottam Banskota, in his 'the Gurkha Connection: the History of the Gurkha Recruitment in the British Indian Army (1994),' has dealt in detail with the process of recruitment and its impact on Nepal. Similarly, Kamal Raj Singh Rathaur, in his 'British Gurkha Recruitment: A Historical Perspective,' has given information about the rich history of the recruitment of the Gurkhas in the British Army. The three books 'Indo-Nepalese Relations 1858-1914 (1974),' 'Political Relations between India and Nepal (1973),' and 'British India's Relations with the Kingdom of Nepal 1857-1947: A diplomatic History of Nepal' by Sushila Tyagi, Kanchanmoy Mojumdar and Asad Husain, respectively, throw much light on the relations between Nepal and British India on one hand and, again, on the recruitment of the Gorkhas on the other hand. But what is interesting is that these writers talk about the recruitment separately from the nature of the relations between Nepal and British instead of treating recruitment and other associated elements as an intrinsic part of the Indo-Nepalese relations. In studying the mobilization of the Gorkhas, emphasis is put on the role of the Nepalese ruler which is often over-shadowed by the extensive study of the Anglo-Nepalese relations.

About the speaker:

Mingma Lhamu Pakhrin is from Siliguri, district of Darjeeling, West Bengal. Currently, Mingma is in the last semester of an MPhil program (Modern History) at JNU, New Delhi.



March 7, Graduate Student Roundtable

Garima Rai: Interrogating Migrant Subjectivity in Indian Nepali Writings from Darjeeling Hills (1950-1980)

Migration of labor has characterized the history of colonial enterprise and even more so, it has created histories of entire communities. The salience of the articulation of an Indian Nepali identity also known as Gorkhali identity in the post independent period lies in the growth of Nepali language and culture outside the place of its origin in a community in a different, surrogate matrix. Why Nepali cannot be given up for a supra national Indian identity (or inversely, diagggregated into sub ethnic identities) and why this double negotiation takes place are the central points that this paper tries to understand. I do so by looking at the travelling lyrical forms of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, such as sawais, laharis and geets as they appear or do not appear in standard histories of Nepali literature. The overlapping areas of oral and print in late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Darjeeling Hills are inflected by the setting up of a colonial township, starting of the tea industry and recruitment of Gurkha soldiers in the British forces. Many genres, terms and concepts enter into the realm of the folk partially or completely transformed. As such, norms of categorization and literary practices call for re-examination and enquiry.

I shall try to show how lyrical forms that emerged out of a community removed from the place of its origin travelled with the members of that community, sustaining imagined and real spaces imbued with the effect of that community. The Nepali print culture that unfolds in the writing and printing of school primers, textbooks on the one hand and in the project of creation of a literary public sphere of intellectuals and institutions on the other hand, begins to create a linguistic idiom which is an embodiment of Darjeeling itself. The demographic transitions and the dominating presence of matwali groups of communities, the rise in Nepali education, the processes of language standardization and the changing politics of a newly democratized Nepal and independent India by 1950s makes Darjeeling a cultural signifier among the Nepali speaking pockets in India and the matrix for Nepali language and literature in the modern world. It is therefore within this context of movement, encounters and narration that the pre-print forms and their transmission should be understood. Relegating them to the realm of the folk and loksahitya speaks about the hegemony of literary Nepali, which in a way replaced the hegemony of Sanskrit (under the concerted efforts of group like the "Sudhapa" trio) in the process of laying the foundation of Nepali literature. Until the loksahitya ceases to occur as an adjunct to Nepali literature, forms like jhaurey stop being claimed as a community's vehicle or looked upon as a handmaid to the kavyas. Instead, they should be explored in its own right for the history of transitional periods they are privy to: The relation between the oral and print will continue to appear mutually opposed in nature. And so will the Nepali folk and popular categories be subjected to othering as the unintelligible part of that fissured migrant subjectivity.

About the speaker:

Garima Rai is working on Indian Nepali writings from Darjeeling Hills (1950s-80s) for her doctoral studies in English from the University of Delhi. She is interested in looking beyond the question of migration and identity into the kind of subjectivity that speaks for itself across fiction, theatrical performance, songs and creation of Nepali language that has come to



flourish in a matrix outside of Nepal. She has translated *Wuthering Heights* into Nepali brought out by the Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi in 2008.

March 7, Graduate Student Roundtable

Shradhanjali Tamang: Indigenous History and the *Tamba* Tradition

Shared history, language, culture and traditions predate the politically imposed modern borders especially in the case of South Asia. Sharing international borders with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, Darjeeling hills and Doars has a dynamic position, which is reflected in its language and culture. Despite being a strategic point, history of Darjeeling has almost no record of indigenous voices. Various folk forms, distinct indigenous oral history traditions and personal narratives can be studied as resources for indigenous history yet often they are not considered historical or literary enough. In my paper I would like to discuss the indigenous oral tradition of Tamba in the Tamang community. Tamba is one of the traditional social leaders of the community where Tam means speech and Ba is the agent of speech making him a repository of traditional oral tales and history. In these oral texts the distinction between history and poetry, factual and fictional, realistic and fantastic becomes blurred and hence complicates and questions literary genres and the established notion of history. This paper will address a variety of oral history forms, the dynamics of orality, the power struggle between the written and the spoken, the question of history and identity and the question of authority and authorship in this tradition. Scholars have spoken of Nepal as a unique space of intermingling ethnic cultures but Darjeeling is not as often focused upon, even though there is a dominant intermediary quality and much more complicated layered identities exist. With the growing dominance of Nepali language, the absence of the state recognition for many indigenous languages, the absence of script and an overall globalization effect there is a failure of transferring the oral history to the newer generations. These traditions are rapidly dying and researching and archiving these traditions is not only critical but urgent.

About the speaker:

Shradhanjali Tamang is from Mirik. After her schooling from Loreto Convent Darjeeling she completed her B.A, M.A and MPhil and is pursuing her PhD in Comparative Literature Jadavpur University Kolkata . After working as a UGC Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Comparative Literature, she currently teaches as Assistant Professor in the Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University.

March 7, Graduate Student Roundtable

Binayak Sundas: Understanding the History of the Gorkhas/Gurkhas as a Socio-Political Process, 14th-20th centuries

The History of the “Gurkhas/Gorkhas” has been one that has evoked much interest in the recent times. An interest, which has risen due to a variety of factors such as the political assertiveness of the Gorkha community in India, the several socio political upheavals in



Nepal, and, lastly, the continuing colonial romance that most of the British army officers and writers still harbour about the “brave” and “loyal” Gurkhas. The presentation will try to explore the various state and social formations in the central Himalayan regions between the periods 13th-19th centuries in attempt to understand the manner in which the various communities that constitute the present day Gorkha society came about and to understand the manner in which the colonial imagination of the British created an idea of the “Gurkha”, which went on to then define the manner in which the group of people defined as “Gurkhas” began to view themselves. To understand the social history of the present day Gorkha community one has to go back much farther back than the 19th century and trace their origins to the various state and social formations of the central Himalayan regions. Thus the presentation will discuss the formation of the Khas Malla Kingdom of Jumla in the 13th-14th centuries, the decline and disintegration of this state, the rise and eastward expansion of the successor states, known as the Khas states, and the resultant state and social formations, which lead to the formation of the Chaubaisi and baisi states. The presentation will also talk about the socio-political religious events of the valley of Kathmandu. Here the roles of Jyayasthithi Malla and Jyayaksha Malla and other factors, such as the role of the trade route to Tibet, existence of both Brahmanism and Buddhism in the valley etc. in the formation of the Newari society will be discussed. The various migrations and settlements taking place in the northern region of the present day Nepal during the period between 13th-17th centuries, which lead to the formations of communities such as Sherpas and Tamangs, will be explored. The presentation will then go on to talk about the formation of the states of Makwanpur, Morang, Chaudandhi and Vijaypur in the eastern terai region of Nepal, between the period 16th-18th centuries and their relations with the tribes of the eastern hills, the Khambus and Limbus.

The rise of the Gorkha state in the mid -18th century and the establishment of the Gorkha empire by the early 19th century led to several social implications for the subjugated groups. The fact that it was rather the expansion of this state and imposition of their idea of social structure, religious beliefs and land revenue and not a unification by the patriotic Prithvinarayan Shah will be discussed. The various laws that the Gorkha state passed forcing the people towards brahmanization, culminating with the Mulki Ain of 1854 will be explored. Thus the objective of this presentation is to show that the history of “Nepal” and the “Gorkha/Gurkhas” is far more complicated than what had otherwise been thought. There are several histories of various groups, societies and states which have to be explored and understood. The various events taking place in the larger south Asian region too has to be kept in mind, such as the Brahmanization, Rajputization and caste identities becoming predominant in the 18th century, as well as the various race theories that the British used to transform the military labour market in India and to secure the northwest frontier and colonize the northeast frontier, if one is to understand the manner in which the “Gorkha/Gurkhas” came about.

About the speaker:

Binayak Sundas is a research scholar, pursuing his PhD in the Centre for Historical Studies of the School of Social Sciences in Jawaharlal Nehru University. His PhD-topic is “Soldiers, agriculturists and pastoralists – Gorkhas in the Northeast frontiers, 19th-early 20th centuries.” His research interests include socio-cultural and religious history of Nepal 14th – 19th centuries, Nepali Dalit caste mobilization in post-colonial India and nature of landownership among the tea garden workers in Darjeeling, 19th-20th centuries.



March 7, Graduate Student Roundtable

Reep Pandi Lepcha: Lepcha Narratives: Understanding the Praxis of Sequestering Oral Tradition and its Impact on the Indigenous People.

Shared history and collective identity are important parameters for individuals while associating themselves to a particular community or region. Various factors contribute towards the understanding of these two constructs. I will be particularly exploring the nature of Lepcha folk narratives and beliefs and gauging their influence— where moulding the history of the Lepcha people and hence their identity is concerned. These folk narratives are part of an oral-tradition, which exists to process an intangible heritage of a community from one generation to next. In its propagation, these folk narratives preserve layers of carefully laid down indigenous knowledge. However, in the wake of changing societal trends these folklores are gradually sequestering, which poses a major problem for a community. Since no comprehensive documented history of the community has been compiled till date, severing of oral-tradition will have repercussions on the history and tradition of these indigenous people.

Multidisciplinary in approach, the research will rely on methodological techniques of oral/life history, folkloristics and anthropology. The idea is to collect oral narratives along with context oriented folklores of the Lepchas of Sikkim and supplement it with the life-history of the people contributing such narratives to garner further understanding; this will be followed by interviews with the family members of the narrators to determine the current trends in orally narrated tales. The collected data will hopefully help in analysing the occurrence of events within the Lepcha community especially where context oriented tales and legends are concerned, thus recovering narratives of recent past. With the framework of subaltern theory I hope to further strengthen my research to broach the identity quotient. The recorded data will also be developed into a sound archive to be deposited to School of Cultural Texts and Studies, Jadavpur University for the reference of scholars.

About the speaker:

Reep Pandi Lepcha completed her graduation from Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Thereafter she voluntarily taught at a school for underprivileged children in Sikkim, she also worked as an Assistant Professor at Sikkim Government College before returning to her alma-mater to pursue a PhD. She competitively won Ryorchi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (SYLFF) and is currently a research scholar there.

March 7, Session 06

Mona Chettri: Cultural Revivalism and Contact Zones in the Eastern Himalaya

The political geography of the eastern Himalayan borderland has altered significantly since the early 20th century but it still remains a 'contact zone' of different people, ideas and cultures. The conditions under which trans-cultural encounters take place has also changed but these interactions have contributed to the plurality of cultures, religions and languages. An intrinsic part of this cultural contact is the establishment of cultural difference, a process



which is influenced by the social, political and economic structures prevalent at a particular point in time. Arising out of such cultural contacts was the construction of the Nepali ethnic group in the eastern Himalayan regions of Darjeeling and Sikkim in the early 20th century. This was an ethno-linguistic group comprising of Parbatiya speaking caste groups and other hill/mountain ethnic groups united by a common language- Nepali, which set them apart from Bhutia and Lepcha ethnic groups. In the present-day context, the Nepali ethnic group is undergoing a period of transformation that is slowly contesting the notion of a single, culturally homogenous, ethno-linguistic group. This emergence of heterogeneity is apparent through ethnic revivalism and cultural politics in the eastern Himalayan borderlands of Sikkim, Nepal and the Darjeeling hills.

The paper focuses on a new form of cultural contact as evidenced through ethnic revivalism and identity politics in Sikkim. Deconstruction of the homogenous Nepali identity highlights the changing nature of interaction between state and ethnic groups in a political environment that is charged with political symbolism and instrumental motives. This process is facilitated by the state and ethnic associations play an important role as cultural brokers thereby highlighting the emerging symmetries of power and agency. Whilst discussing an important facet of state-society relations in the eastern Himalaya, the paper conceptualises 'contact zones' as areas wherein contact of ideologies and the socio-economic and political structures can lead to social configurations that are exclusive to the eastern Himalaya. Despite political borders, the history, culture and politics of this area is closely intertwined which has led to the emergence of multiple cross-border 'contact zones' where ideologies or political events in a particular area can have an impact in another neighbouring region. The paper will discuss contemporary ethnic politics in Sikkim to illustrate how cultural revivalism and deconstruction of the Nepali ethnic identity is a manifestation of state-society relations. It will also discuss how a nuanced understanding of the region can be developed by conceptualizing 'contact zones' as an interaction between ideas/ideology and specific historical, social, political and economic contexts.

About the speaker:

Mona Chettri graduated from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, in 2014 and is currently working as an independent researcher on the displacement of Nepalis on the Assam-Meghalaya borderland.

March 7, Session 06

Rajendra P. Dhakal: Changing Orientations: A Study of the Hill Communities

The mingling of various linguistic tribal communities in Darjeeling hills belonging to Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan, Indo- Aryan Khas speakers, each with their cultural distinctiveness, began much before the sense of nation developed in India. The open borders of Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet facilitated various migrations here. The pace got accelerated under British colonialism. The opportunities as well as the deprivation provided by colonialism propelled this process of cultural conglomeration. Due to the impact of colonial administration, tea garden economy, and other historical developments, Nepali became the lingua franca. The formation of this identity has had lasting implications on the social, cultural and political



life of these communities. The Lepchas were here. The Tibetans had been migrating but the number increased after the Chinese aggression. The British colonialism attracted Hindi speaking communities from the Indian plains as businessmen and workers. The British also brought Bengali speaking community as petty officials, later on at the bureaucratic level to serve in the administration. The mushrooming of tea gardens in Darjeeling and the British policy of encouraging agriculture in places like Kalimpong for revenue generation led to an increased numbers of Nepali speaking communities. By 1861 a German priest had translated preaching material into Nepali and prepared a dictionary. The census reports since 1901 show Nepali as a language spoken by the majority in the region. But Nepali is neither a race nor a caste but a conglomeration of distinct linguistic and cultural identities that transcended into one identity due to reasons peculiar to Darjeeling, the development of Nepali as lingua franca being the most important one. And it would be interesting to see how the relationships of this imagined community evolved with other non- Nepali speakers in the hill areas.

The colonial control of the region facilitated a number of the Christian missionaries in the region. The first school for Europeans was established in 1846, but by 1898 a number of primary, middle and a few high schools were opened for the local people. Gradually Christianity started spreading which also has impacted the local culture. Thus, the place became truly a mosaic of distinct cultures and religions. Firstly, various Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan, and Indo-Aryan Khas speakers were conglomerating and almost assimilating to form a Nepali community- identity. Secondly, the coming into contact of these communities to become Nepali and their contact with Lepchas, Tibetans, Europeans, as well as Hindi and Bengali speakers from the plains happened simultaneously. These processes cannot be studied in isolation. The fall out of such contact also resulted in the religious openness and understanding where the Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims and Tribal with their beliefs and faiths had been living in absolute harmony unlike the rest of India. These contacts were occurring like layers of different levels of waves finally creating a composite culture of the region, each contributing to the bulk and learning and adopting from each other. These communities have been living in harmony and are continuing to do so despite some fissures. It is interesting to see how the dynamics of the formation of such a composite culture have been influenced by political processes at various times and how the communities have adjusted and adapted to political changes.

About the speaker:

Dr. Rajendra P Dhakal is presently the Principal, Kalimpong College, Kalimpong. After completing a master in Political Science, he has received a Ph.D degree on rural development. His research interest at present is on state and society, identity politics and political culture. He writes in Nepali and English.



March 8, Concluding Roundtable: From Local Histories to Global Knowledge

Sandip Jain

Sandip C. Jain is the editor of Himalayan Times and a columnist writing for all major English publications in the region. He has written two guide books on Kalimpong and his third book on the region will be published shortly.

Daniel Tharchin

Daniel Tharchin is the grandson of Gegen Dorje Tharchin, the famed editor of the Tibetan newspaper Tibet Mirror. Daniel is a social worker and takes care of an orphanage called "Himalayan Children's Home" in Kalimpong, which was started by his late grandparents.

Bharatmani Pradhan & Udayamani Pradhan

Bharatmani and Udayamani Pradhan live in Darjeeling and Kalimpong respectively. They manage the family archive, as well as the publishing and literary legacies of their grandfather, the pioneering Indian Nepali litterateur, Parasmani Pradhan. They hope to make those available to the larger public and rejuvenate a reading culture among the young people of the hills.



About the project “Kalimpong as a ‘Contact Zone’: Encounters between Tibet and Western Modernity in the Early 20th Century” at the University of Heidelberg:

Directed by Prof. Dr. Birgit Kellner and Dr. Markus Viehbeck, the project seeks to shed light on various cultural entanglements in the Eastern Himalayas, with a focus on the first half of the 20th century in Kalimpong. In 1903, British troops invaded Tibet and forcefully established trade agreements between Tibet and British India within "The Great Game" of the imperial powers Russia, China, and Great Britain. The town of Kalimpong, situated along the trade route from Lhasa to Kolkata, subsequently developed into the major centre for the exchange of Tibetan and Western commodities. But Kalimpong also became a contact zone for Tibetan worlds and Western modernity. In contacts between British colonial officers, Scottish missionaries, European Tibetologists, and Tibetan aristocrats, politicians, and scholar-monks, decisive Western narratives about Tibet, and Tibetan narratives about a modern Western world emerged.

In an intensely internationally networked project, we look at Kalimpong as a focal point in interconnected key areas of these encounters, such as media, scholarship, religion, education, and politics.

For further information see:

www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/en/research/d-historicities-heritage/d19-kalimpong.html

About the Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context”:

The Cluster of Excellence “Asia and Europe in a Global Context” is an interdisciplinary network of researchers at Heidelberg University. About 250 scholars examine the processes of exchange between cultures, ranging from migration and trade to the formation of concepts and institutions. A central question is in which dynamics the transcultural processes between and within Asia and Europe develop. These complex historical relationships are of great relevance for the global transformations of our time. The Cluster was founded in 2007 as part of the Excellence Initiative by the German state and its federal governments. It is located at the Karl Jaspers Centre for Advanced Transcultural Studies in Heidelberg, Germany, and has a branch office in New Delhi, India. Among its international partners are Chicago University, Oslo University, Zurich University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and Kyoto University.

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