

## ASIAN BORDERLANDS

*A Graduate Student Workshop and Conference*

**24-25 March 2017**

**Harvard University, Cambridge, MA**

Convened by: Aniket De, Department of History, Harvard University  
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*Asian Borderlands* is the first meeting of an annual research network of history graduate students. The participating universities in this network are Harvard University, the University of Chicago, Columbia University in the City of New York, and Cornell University. Participants in these conferences have a broadly historical approach to the rather loosely defined concept of “borderlands” in various parts of terrestrial and maritime Asia. We are particularly invested in *interregional* conversations on common thematic interests, beyond given categories of nation-state and area studies (such as “East Asia” or “South Asia”), yet being critically attentive to context and local textures.

Borderlands are particularly rich sites for launching such conversations, since the concept of the “borderland” encapsulates varied concerns of ecological and spatial history, political sovereignty, economic and legal history and socio-cultural interconnections. The recent influential works of James C. Scott, Willem van Schendel, Sunil Amrith and Kenneth Pomeranz have reinvigorated a range of conversations about borderland studies in Asia. As a result, several of us, working in disparate departments in distant universities, find ourselves being a part of the same debates from different perspectives. Whether we study the imperial security state, court cultures in frontiers of early modern empires, or social intermediaries in oceanic trade, we ask similar questions regarding the concept. What are the best analytical tools for understanding the borderland, and how can we synthesize different theoretical contributions originating from different regional historiographical literatures? How best to facilitate dialogue between these various conversations to devise better projects and refine our existing ones?

The research network has been conceptualized as a consortium of scholars with different trainings but similar interests. The consortium is organized around a core group of five of us, Samyak Ghosh (Columbia), Rukmini Chakraborty (Cornell), Usama Rafi and Nazmul Sultan (Chicago), and Aniket De (Harvard). The core group shall meet every semester at a different institution, and organize a series of workshops, reading circles and a public symposium at those universities. In each university, we shall facilitate conversations between faculty and other graduate students working on similar fields, through commissioning commentaries, discussion leaders, and formal papers. The consortium will circulate among various universities, bringing into dialogue new faculty and graduate students at every region.

*Asian Borderlands* at Harvard University is the inaugural meeting of this consortium.

## WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Friday, 24 March 2017

Robinson Hall Lower Library, 35 Quincy St, Harvard University

9:00-9:15am: Welcome

9:15-10:45am

Workshop #1: Samyak Ghosh, Columbia University

*Trajectories of Script Flow: Writing and Genre in Early Modern Northeast India*

**Ann Blair**, Carl H. Pforzheimer University Professor (over email)

**Lei Lin**, Department of Inner Asian and Altaic Studies

10.45-11:00 am: **Coffee Break**

11:00am- 1:00pm

Roundtable #1: Frontiers and the Transition to Colonialism

Is it useful to distinguish “early modern” frontiers from “modern” frontiers? Do we see pan-Asiatic patterns on frontiers and border-making in the 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries? What are the themes addressed by current scholarship in this period?

*Led by: Usama Rafi, University of Chicago*

**Thomas Barfield**, Professor and Chair, Anthropology, Boston University

**Rishad Choudhury**, Academy Scholar, Harvard University

**Mark Elliott**, Mark Schwartz Professor and Vice Provost, Harvard University

**Beatrice Manz**, Professor and Chair, History, Tufts University

1:00pm-2:00pm: **Lunch**

2:00pm-3:45pm:

Workshop #2: Nazmul Sultan, University of Chicago

*Sovereignty, Self-Government, and the Problem of Political Freedom: Toward a Conceptual History of Swaraj*

**Sugata Bose**, Gardiner Professor of History, Harvard University

**Aniket De**, Department of History, Harvard University

3:45pm-4:00pm: **Coffee Break**

4:00pm-6:00pm

**Roundtable #2: Borders from Empire to Nation-State**

How and why did imperial frontiers become national borders?

*Led by: Aniket De, Harvard University*

**Sunil S. Amrith**, Mehra Family Professor of South Asian Studies and History

**Sugata Bose**, Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs

**Maya R. Jasanoff**, Coolidge Professor of History

**Charles S. Maier**, Leverett Saltonstall Professor of History

6pm-7pm- **Dinner**

**Saturday, 25 March 2017**  
**CGIS-South 020, Belfer Case Study Room, Harvard University**  
**1737 Cambridge St, Cambridge, MA 02138**

9:00-10:00am: **Coffee and Administrative Meeting (Institutional Representatives)**

10:00am-12:00 pm

**Roundtable #3: Religious Networks and Social Boundaries**

What is the role of non-state actors in border-making? What kind of actors/ institutions do such processes entail? Does anthropology/ religious help us better understand border-making?

*Led by: Rukmini Chakraborty, Cornell University*

**John Comaroff**, Hugh K. Foster Professor, AAAS and Anthropology

**Ayesha A. Irani**, Assistant Professor of Asian Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston

**Brian A. Hatcher**, Packard Chair of Theology, Tufts University

12:00pm-1:00pm: **Lunch Break**

**1:00 pm- 6:00 pm**

**PUBLIC CONFERENCE**

1.00pm- 1:15pm

**Welcome Remarks**

1:15pm- 2:45 pm

**Panel 1: Space and Sovereignty**

This panel explore spatial aspects of sovereignty in early modern maritime Asia, locating borderlands between geographical and political space.

*Discussant: Rishad Choudhury, Academy Scholar, Harvard University*

*Samyak Ghosh, Columbia University*

**Rukmini Chakraborty, Cornell University**

*Sojourns and Sovereignties: Formation of Maritime Legal Dispensation in Precolonial Island Southeast Asia*

**Thomas Newbold, University of Chicago**

*Community and the Company State: Colonial Governance and Commercial Capital in the Remaking of Chittagong, 1761-1800*

**Jonas Rüegg, Harvard University**

*Centering Hachijō: Movement and Locality in the Maritime Periphery of the Tokugawa State*

2:45: 3:00 pm: **Coffee Break**

3:00 pm- 4:00 pm

**Panel 2: Edges of Empire**

The two papers in this panel discuss the relationship between empires and frontiers, focussing on two major empires of modern Asia: the Qing and the British.

*Discussant: Catherine Warner, College Fellow, Harvard University*

**Lei Lin, Harvard University**

*The Imperial, the Peripheral, and the Transnational: the Trans-Himalayan Network and Cross-border Merchants in the Making of Qing China's Border in the Gurkha War, 1788–93*

**Aniket De, Harvard University**

*An Enclosed Empire: Lord Curzon and the Reconfiguration of Imperial Borders*

4:00 pm- 5.00 pm

**Panel 3: The Nation and its Frontiers**

The final panel explore the ideological and spatial relationship between nationalism, migration and frontiers in colonial South and South-east Asia.

*Discussant: Usama Rafi, University of Chicago*

**Kirk W. McLeod, Harvard University**

*A Borderless Polity: B R Ambedkar and the Contours of State Power*

**Divya Chandramouli, Harvard University**

*Dialogue across the Bay: The Dravidian Movement's Engagement with 20th c. British Malaya*

5:00-6:00pm

**Concluding Discussion** (open to all)

**“Is “Asian Borderlands” a meaningful historical analytic?”**

Comments: **Sugata Bose**, Gardiner Professor of History, Harvard University

Facilitated by Aniket De

6:30 pm: Dinner at a Harvard Square Restaurant (TBA)

*Generously funded by Harvard's Asia Center, Weatherhead Center of International and Global History, South Asia Institute, Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies, Reischauer Institute of Japanese Studies, and Department of History.*

## Workshop Bibliography

### **Required**

- Seema Alavi, *Muslim Cosmopolitanism in the Age of Empire* (Harvard, 2015)
- Sunil S. Amrith, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal* (Harvard, 2013).
- C.A. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties* (Cambridge, 2011).
- David A. Bello, *Across Forest, Steppe and Mountain* (Cambridge, 2016).
- Sugata Bose, *A Hundred Horizons* (Harvard, 2006).
- Indrani Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friends* (New Delhi: Oxford, 2013).
- Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1206-1760* (California, 1993).
- Mark Elliott, "Frontier Stories," *Frontiers of History in China* 3 (2014):336-360.
- David Gilmartin, *Blood and Water* (California, 2015).
- Jos Gommans and J. Leider (ed.) *The Maritime Frontier of Burma* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).
- Ayesha Jalal, *Partisans of Allah* (Harvard, 2008)
- Charles S. Maier, *Once Within Borders* (Harvard, 2016).
- Matthew W. Mosca, *From Frontier Policy to Foreign Policy* (Stanford, 2013)
- Peter C. Perdue, *China Marches West* (Harvard, 2010).
- James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed* (Yale, 2009)
- Eric Tagliacozzo, *Secret Trades, Porous Borders* (Yale, 2005)
- Alexis Wick, *The Red Sea: In Search of Lost Space* (California, 2016)

### **Recommended**

- Manan Ahmed Asif, *A Book of Conquest* (Harvard, 2016).
- Thomas J. Barfield, *The Nomadic Alternative* (Prentice Hall, 1993)
- Gunnel Cederlöf, *Founding an Empire on India's North-Eastern Frontiers* (OUP, 2014)
- Janet Gyatso, *Being Human in a Buddhist World* (Columbia, 2016)
- Kwangmin Kim, *Borderland Capitalism* (Stanford, 2016)
- Karuna Mantena, *Alibis of Empire* (Princeton, 2010)
- Beatrice F. Manz, *Power, Politics and Religion in Timurid Iran* (Cambridge, 2007)
- Mandy Sadan, *Being and Becoming Kachin* (Oxford, 2013).
- Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History* (California, 2014)
- Peter Schwieger, *The Dalai Lama and the Emperor of China* (Columbia, 2015)
- Eric Tagliacozzo et al (Ed.), *Asia Inside Out*, 2 vols. (Harvard, 2015)
- (Look out for forthcoming works by Arupjyoti Saikia, Iftekhar Iqbal and Bodhisattva Kar).