

Conference Report on *Tibet and Her Neighbours* April 24-25th, 2004, Harvard University

By Mark Turin

In the spring of 2004, the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies and the Committee on Inner Asia and Altaic Studies at Harvard University sponsored a short two-day conference entitled “Tibet and her Neighbours”. By invitation only, the conference was conceived as the continuation of a very fruitful meeting hosted by Dr. Christoph Cüppers some years ago at the Lumbini International Research Institute in Lumbini, Nepal. The present conference was concerned with the cultural, religious, literary and political interactions between Tibet and its neighbours – the Indian subcontinent, the Kathmandu Valley, Inner Asia and China (from Tang to Qing).

Well organised, intellectually stimulating and held in a welcoming environment, the conference was a resounding success with 18 scholars presenting their research findings on a wide range of topics pertaining to Tibetan studies. The sessions were organised by geographical orientation: Tibet’s Eastern Neighbours, Eastern Tibet, Tibet, Tibet’s Western Neighbours, Tibetan Cultural History and Tibetan Medical Traditions. Readers will note, as this reviewer did, the conspicuous absence of a full panel dealing explicitly with Tibet’s southern neighbours: India and more particularly Nepal. Nevertheless, many individual presentations addressed relations with the southern frontier.

A wide range of topics and fields of study were visited during the short presentations, including history, linguistics, biography and medicine. Save for a few papers which dealt with contemporary issues, many presentations primarily focussed on earlier periods of Tibetan history. Presentations of special interest included Gray Tuttle’s discussion of Mongour ethnicity, Holly Gayley’s paper on female identity along the borderlands, John Ardussi’s reflections on Sikkim, Kurtis Schaeffer’s discussion of Indian intellectuals at the court of the Fifth Dalai Lama, and Robbie Barnett’s analysis of poster art in present-day Tibet.

Particular recognition must go to Professor Dr. Leonard van der Kuijp and the staff and students of the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies for the warm welcome they extended to their guests, and for steering the discussions so effortlessly.

conference website: www.fas.harvard.edu/~sanskrit/tibetconf.html