

## **Asian Borderlands: Enclosure, Interaction and Transformation**

*New Mandala* readers will be interested in the following announcement for the 2nd Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network. The [first](#) of these conferences was held in 2008 in Guwahati, northeast India. It was a very worthwhile conference and I imagine that the Chiang Mai iteration will be similarly good.

The details are:

### **Asian Borderlands: Enclosure, Interaction and Transformation - CALL FOR PANELS / PAPERS**

#### **2nd Conference of the Asian Borderlands Research Network**

#### **Chiang Mai University (RCSD), Thailand**

**5 - 7 November 2010**

State-centered views of the world continue to predominate, but it is increasingly apparent that these restrict perspectives on dynamics within broader regional fields. In an attempt to leapfrog a definition of the world in terms of national economies, societies, cultures and histories, 'borderland' centered perspectives have emerged. But whereas borderland studies have quickly developed in Africa, Europe and North America, the field is still in its infancy in Asia. 'Asian Borderlands: Enclosure, Interaction and Transformation' intends to encourage scholarship that looks across Asian borders.

The conference takes its cue from an important new book by James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (Yale UP, 2009). In this book, Scott focuses on the mountainous regions of the Himalayas and its lower ranges that run from the Central Highlands in Vietnam, most of Laos, Northern Thailand, Southwest China, Northern Burma, Northeast India, Eastern Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Tibet. The 200 million people living in this huge region (over 15 million km<sup>2</sup>) are geographically dispersed and culturally diverse, yet they share crucial cultural, economic and social characteristics: hill agriculture, physical mobility, relatively egalitarian social structures, as well as commonalities in material culture and outlook. National borders often appear utterly arbitrary to them as many groups spill across two or more national borders. In this way they distinguish themselves from the lowland populations who dominate the states in which they live. Scott refers to this region as 'Zomia', a term coined by Willem van Schendel (2002/2005).

What is the viability and relevance of a concept such as Zomia for the study of Asian borderlands?

To what extent are people in such border zones sharing ideas, practices and attitudes? Why and how do they remain different? How are relationships, alliances and conflicts between hills and plains people defined? In what ways are cultural and social dynamics in and beyond such a region influenced by political boundaries? How do people engage in, and are engaged by, processes of modernization and globalization?

We invite conceptually innovative papers, based on new research, which address questions such as these, in order to develop new perspectives on the study of Asian borderlands. Panels will be considered that have a thematic focus, are of a comparative character, and involve scholars affiliated to distinct research institutions. Click [here](#) to submit proposals. Participants will be notified by February 1st, 2010.

**Deadline** to send in abstracts / panel proposals: **1 December 2009**

Participants are expected to fund their own travel and stay. Very limited financial support may be made available to specific scholars residing in Asia. If you would like to be considered for a grant: please submit with your abstract for a panel and/or paper a short letter motivating your request. Please specify the kind of funding that you have applied for or will receive from other sources. The conference operates on a very limited budget, and will not normally be able to provide more than a partial coverage of costs of travel and stay.

**Convenors:**

Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti

Prof. Willem van Schendel

Dr. Erik de Maaker