

HUMBOLDT-UNIVERSITÄT ZU BERLIN

Central Asian Seminar  
Institute of Asian and African Studies



## Tibet & Himalaya Lecture Series

*Decolonising Himalayan Studies?*  
- Putting Theory into Practice -

**15.11.21**

David M. Hecht  
University of Georgia

Monday  
6.15 CET

### *Decolonizing Our Maps: Centering More-than-Human Worlds of Conservation & Protection in Bhutan*

At the intersection of Tibetan Buddhism and indigenous 'Bon' animism in the Eastern Himalayas, complex relational and spatial ontologies exist between protective territorial deities (*yul lha*, *gzhi bdag*, *gnas bdag gzhi bdag*) and the communities that propitiate them. In Bhutan, a suite of local deities and more-than-human spirits are known to occupy territory, in forests, cliffs, rocks, trees, lakes, and springs, mediating relationships between people and their environments. Different local deity classes occupy and exhibit agency within the landscape, places described as "the deity's palace" or "citadel of the deity" (*pho brang*). These landscape-scale relational ontologies inevitably intersect with the politics of conservation and development in the Kingdom. While characteristics of *gnas bdag gzhi bdag* are historically documented in religious texts, there have been relatively few efforts to document this knowledge with community practitioners. Moreover, even fewer efforts to map deity citadels in a participatory capacity exist, precluding richer geographical understanding of their relational complexities, protected status, spatiality, and territoriality. Our research engages with integrative and generative methodologies in participatory mapping to document and foreground more-than-human agencies and relationalities in conservation protected areas for priority species. Drawing insights from Himalayan artistic traditions & knowledge transmission legacies, *thang kha* and *ldebs ris*, we painted a series of counter-maps to visibilize power, accentuate local 'landscape' realities, and re-center frequently marginalized traditional knowledges in community-oriented conservation & development arenas.

Register for Zoom Link

<https://hu-berlin.zoom.us/meeting/register/u5crcu6hrzkjHNIPeTxwYcvC61Ux0sf-DIhn>

Contact: [mareike.wulff.1@hu-berlin.de](mailto:mareike.wulff.1@hu-berlin.de)  
[tara.herbener@hu-berlin.de](mailto:tara.herbener@hu-berlin.de)