

Call for Papers for the International Interdisciplinary Workshop on

Naming and Renaming Places: Hegemonies of Place Names, History and Landscape in Tibet and Beyond

29. & 30. May 2026, Institute for Asian and African Studies, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin

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Since the occupation of Tibet by the People's Republic of China in the 1950s Tibetan place names have gradually been rendered and replaced by Chinese names. Tibetan maps have become virtually impossible to find. Google Maps and Chinese map-applications only provide Chinese versions of Tibetan place names in Chinese characters and/or in Pinyin transcription and many Tibetan places are no longer displayed. As we have become reliant on such web-based map applications, the day-to-day use of Chinese names for Tibetan places has exponentially increasing and seemingly become solidified. Tibet University (TU) as of summer 2025 was re-named in English as Xizang University (XU) and the TAR (Tibet Autonomous Region) as Xizang Autonomous Region (XAR). Even international maps have begun adopting Chinese colonial place naming practices and notable European museums, such as the Musée Guimet in Paris and the British Museum in London, have started renaming Tibet as "Tibetan plateau" and as "Xizang Autonomous Region". What is going on? Will the term "Tibet" be erased? Will Tibetan place names disappear?

The proposed workshop hopes to bring scholarly debates on colonial practices of place naming and critical place names studies in other parts of the world (Williamson 2022) to Tibetan and Himalayan Studies, especially to think about the Chinese colonial context of Tibet. Place names have often developed over centuries and are deeply linked to local cultural practices, religious beliefs, geographical knowledge, indigenous science, political ambitions, language and language change, and are intimately related to indigenous ontologies (Hazod 2009, Hofer 2022, Huatse Gyal 2021, Jabb 2015, Lange & Lhendup 2024, Monet 2024, Washul 2024). Furthering existing empirical work, we invite papers that go beyond presentations of historical "facts" and changing etymologies of place names and offer a deeper theoretical engagement and analysis of the related contestations, negotiations and consequences of deliberately controlled place-naming policies and practices in Tibet and the Greater Himalaya.

We invite both scholarly papers as well as creative contributions (such as poems, radical cartography interventions, photography projects etc.) on the everyday social relations, practices and struggles around landscapes and place names, both historical and contemporary. The workshop will provide a platform for discussing the naming and renaming of places by political authorities in Tibet and beyond from different disciplinary and research perspectives. We look forward to exchanging ideas among specialists from fields such as, but not limited to, social and cultural anthropology, mapping and cartography, human geography, place naming history, museum studies, linguistics.

Interested participants are invited to submit an abstract of no more than 250 words (excluding references) in English to diana.lange@hu-berlin.de

The deadline for all abstract submissions is January 31, 2026.

Limited funding will be made available for junior colleagues without other sources of funding and based on one-on-one application basis.

References

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- Hofer, Theresia (2022) 'What's in a Place Name in the Tibetan Sign Language? Iconicity and the Use of Signed Toponyms among Deaf Signers in Lhasa', *Minpaku Sign Language Studies*, Vol 2: 133-175.
- Huatse Gyal (2021) 'Our Indigenous Land is Not a Wasteland' *American Ethnologist* website, 6 February 2021.
- Jabb, Lama (2015) *Oral and Literary Continuities in Modern Tibetan Literature: The Inescapable Nation*. New York: Lexington.
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- Tashi Dekyid Monet (2024) Translating Tibetan Lifeworld(s): An Ontological Bridge or Erasure' Special Issue, *Yeshe: A Journal of Tibetan Literature, Arts and Humanities*, 4:1 (76-84).
- Washul, Eveline (2024) 'Centering the Histories of Tibetan Place Names', Special Issue, *Yeshe: A Journal of Tibetan Literature, Arts and Humanities*, 4{1}:69-75.
- Williamson, Beth (2023) 'Historical geographies of place naming: Colonial practices and beyond.' *Geography Compass*, 17(5): 1-12.