China's connections to South Asia date back to the first millennium CE, when itinerant Buddhist monks, the circulation of ritual objects and commodities, and the rendition of Indic texts into Chinese led to the creation of unique linkages across the Asian continent. These connections and linkages continued, albeit transformed through commercial expansions and the spread of European colonial domination, during the second millennium. The opium trade and the wars that ensued triggered the formation of new networks of intellectual exchanges and the publication of a wide array of Indian and Chinese writings about each other in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

THE VISIT OF THE NOBLE J. AUREATE Rabindranath Tagore to China in 1924 provided a significant impetus to these writings that were often framed within the context of pan-Asianism. New sites of interactions between Indian and Chinese intellectuals, such as Santiniketan, near Calcutta in India, and Shanghai in China, emerged during this period. It was at this time that Chinese migrants started settling down in larger numbers in Calcutta and Bombay, and Indian traders expanded their businesses in Shanghai, Tibet, and Xinjiang. These exchanges persisted into the 1950s with the establishment of the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China as two new nation states. The catchphrase ‘Hindi-Chin bai-bai’ (Indians and Chinese are brothers) was created to mark the end of imperialism and celebrate the beginning of decolonized brotherhood. Unfortunately, though, territorial disputes and issues of national integration resulted in the India-China war of 1962, the trauma of which continues to define the contemporary relations between the ROIs and the PRC. And it is within this context of unease, that many innovative projects aimed to foster people-to-people connections have been launched, or older programs revived.

This issue of China Connections reports on some of these initiatives. They include the visit of the Indian author Amitav Ghosh to China, the establishment of new centers of research, and the training of young scholars from the two countries. These initiatives are examples of new linkages and global connections of the twenty-first century.

Tansen Sen is the founding director of the Center for Global Asia at NYU Shanghai.

For more information contact: Tansen Sen, Professor of Chinese Studies, at NYU Shanghai. 

India-China Links

Tansen Sen

China's connections to South Asia date back to the first millennium CE, when itinerant Buddhist monks, the circulation of ritual objects and commodities, and the rendition of Indic texts into Chinese led to the creation of unique linkages across the Asian continent. These connections and linkages continued, albeit transformed through commercial expansions and the spread of European colonial domination, during the second millennium. The opium trade and the wars that ensued triggered the formation of new networks of intellectual exchanges and the publication of a wide array of Indian and Chinese writings about each other in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries.

The China-India Studies Program at the Harvard-Yenching Institute

The Harvard-Yenching Institute has recently developed a joint doctoral fellowship program that seeks to bring together and train the next generation of scholars of Indian studies in China and scholars of Chinese Studies in India. This new program, facilitated by the participation of the Institute for Chinese Studies in Delhi and four partner institutions in China (Fudan University, Peking University, Sichuan University, and Yunnan University), is open to those in all fields of the humanities and social sciences.

Each year a small number of promising doctoral candidates in Chinese Studies at Indian universities will be selected for the joint doctoral fellowship program. In addition to their doctoral studies in India, funded by the Indian side, participants are eligible for two years abroad, funded by the Harvard-Yenching Institute. One year of HYI support will be spent at a host institution in China to receive advanced Chinese language training and interdisciplinary training in Chinese Studies. After the year in China, program participants will be eligible to spend one year in residence at the Harvard-Yenching Institute for dissertation research and writing.

The program's host institutions in China will also be invited to nominate a small number of outstanding doctoral students or younger faculty members in Indian Studies to come to HYI as Visiting Fellows or Visiting Scholars. Selected candidates will then study at a partner institution in the US to receive advanced Chinese language education and training.

The China-India Studies Program at the Harvard-Yenching Institute is designed to promote academic and public understanding of the contemporary relevance of India-China studies. It is also intended to catalyze new connections and collaborations between the two disciplines. The program's goal is to foster a new generation of scholars who will be trained in the complex dynamics of contemporary India-China relations and who will be able to contribute to the ongoing dialogue between the two countries.

The Center for Gandhian and Indian Studies at Fudan University

The Center for Gandhian and Indian Studies at Fudan University established in Fudan University in 2015 is a platform for comprehensive and interdisciplinary Gandhian and Indian Studies. It aims to integrate the strength and resources of Gandhian and Indian Studies throughout the university, and communicates with scholars from China and abroad. It focuses on studies about Gandhi's ideology and social practices, Indian economy, politics and foreign relations, as well as Indian language, religion and culture, including studies related to Buddhism and historical contacts between India and China in this context.

The Center for Gandhian and Indian Studies endeavors to establish the discipline of Indian Studies at Fudan, to cultivate talents of Gandhian and Indian Studies, to promote exchange and communication between Chinese and Indian academic circles as well as people from all walks of life to enhance mutual understanding between Chinese and Indian people.

The Center has already commenced publication under the book series entitled Indologia et Studia Indica. Recent books include Zheng Weihong's 'Buddhist Logic and The Path of Transcendence'. The Center has also been working tirelessly to promote the study of Asian interactions and global connections of the twenty-first century.

Tansen Sen is the founding director of the Center for Global Asia at NYU Shanghai.

For more information contact: Tansen Sen, Professor of Chinese Studies, at NYU Shanghai.

The India China Institute at The New School

Established in 2005, the India China Institute (ICI) at The New School supports research, teaching and discussion on India, China, and the United States, with special focus on making comparisons and understanding interactions between the three countries as well as their joint impact on the rest of the world. The Institute is an international network of scholars, students, and opinion-makers. Through fellowships, courses, public events, publications, and collaboration with a wide range of institutions around the world, the Institute promotes academic and public understanding of issues of contemporary relevance to India-China studies.

Sacrificed landscapes of India and China

For the past three years, the ICI has been conducting research across India, Nepal and China as part of its ‘Sacred Landscapes and Sustainable Futures in the Sacred Himalaya Initiative’, supported by the Henry Luce Foundation. ICI has been exploring the complex relationships between Lake Manasarovar and Mount Kailash – two sacred sites in Western Tibet – and the diverse faith communities from across South Asia who undertake pilgrimages to visit and worship these sites. The project has tried to better understand how local communities are adapting to a range of issues, from climate change and new economic pressures brought about by globalization to the changing geopolitical realities. The new work will be presented later this year at the ‘Mountains and Sacred Landscapes Conference’ (20-22 April 2017) in New York City.

Fostering scholar-leaders in India and China

Another exciting project ICI leadership is leading our recently launched ‘China India Scholar-Leaders Initiative’, which will bring together emerging young scholars from India, China and the US, focusing on the theme of “Prosperity and Inequality in China and India”. By combining advanced academic capacity-strengthening with fieldwork and research-mentoring, this new initiative seeks to deepen the fields of India-China Studies and provide much-needed academic and organizational support to young scholars. Fellowships will spend 18 months developing new research for publication while expanding their professional networks across India, China and the US.

The great urban transformations of China and India

In addition to these two important projects, ICI is also establishing a unique research and policy collaboration on urbanization. ‘The Great Urban Transformations of China and India: Comparisons for Equity and Livelihoods’ in the first three-year phase (2017-2020) of a larger project, ICI and partner institutions in Shenzhen and New Delhi will collaborate to develop a transnational (India, China, and United States) network of urban scholars and practitioners whose research and policy work can evaluate and compare ways that urban policies and practices in these two metro-regions can address more closely the problems of urban inequities and the proliferation of precarious urban jobs and livelihoods. To learn more about this and other India-China related efforts visit the India China Institute’s website: https://www.indiachinainstitute.org. You can also follow us on Twitter @india_china.

For more information contact: Ashok Gurung, Senior Director of the India China Institute at The New School (gurunga@newschool.edu)
‘Little India’ in China

Ka-Kin Cheuk

Sanskrit Studies at Peking University

The ORIGINS OF SANSKRIT STUDIES at Peking University can be traced back to 1921, when the German scholar Alexander von Staël-Holstein created a Sanskrit course for PKU students. After him, Walter Liebenthal, also a German, taught this course in the 1930s. In 1978, the noted intellectuals Lin Liekuang and Wu Xiaoling, who became celebrated scholars for their contributions to the field, joined Peking University to promote India Studies in China. Due to their reputation in the academic community, and because of their excellence in teaching and scholarship, the 1990s witnessed a rapid development of Sanskrit Studies at Peking University.

The first undergraduate majoring in Sanskrit and Pali were enrolled in 1960, most of whom pursued academic careers after graduation. Among them Jiang Zhihui and Huang Baosheng, who became celebrated scholars for their contributions to the field, were among the first scholars who paid attention to the study of Sanskrit manuscripts found in Tibet and the translated the Hindu text Manusmrti (Laws of Manu) into Chinese. Huang also translated and completed the translation of the Indian epic Mahabharata and made major contributions to the study of Sanskrit poets. In 1978, shortly after the Cultural Revolution, Jixianlin established the Department of Oriental Languages at Peking University, marking the beginning of the discipline of Indology in modern China. Two years later, Jixianlin joined Peking University and worked together with Jia Xu to promote India Studies in China. Due to their reputation in the academic community, and because of their excellence in teaching and scholarship, the 1990s witnessed a rapid development of Sanskrit Studies at Peking University.

The first undergraduate majoring in Sanskrit and Pali were enrolled in 1960, most of whom pursued academic careers after graduation. Among them Jiang Zhihui and Huang Baosheng, who became celebrated scholars for their contributions to the field, were among the first scholars who paid attention to the study of Sanskrit manuscripts found in Tibet and the translated the Hindu text Manusmrti (Laws of Manu) into Chinese. Huang also translated and completed the translation of the Indian epic Mahabharata and made major contributions to the study of Sanskrit poets. In 1978, shortly after the Cultural Revolution, Jixianlin established the Department of Oriental Languages at Peking University, marking the beginning of the discipline of Indology in modern China. Two years later, Jixianlin joined Peking University and worked together with Jia Xu to promote India Studies in China. Due to their reputation in the academic community, and because of their excellence in teaching and scholarship, the 1990s witnessed a rapid development of Sanskrit Studies at Peking University.

The first undergraduate majoring in Sanskrit and Pali were enrolled in 1960, most of whom pursued academic careers after graduation. Among them Jiang Zhihui and Huang Baosheng, who became celebrated scholars for their contributions to the field, were among the first scholars who paid attention to the study of Sanskrit manuscripts found in Tibet and the translated the Hindu text Manusmrti (Laws of Manu) into Chinese. Huang also translated and completed the translation of the Indian epic Mahabharata and made major contributions to the study of Sanskrit poets. In 1978, shortly after the Cultural Revolution, Jixianlin established the Department of Oriental Languages at Peking University, marking the beginning of the discipline of Indology in modern China. Two years later, Jixianlin joined Peking University and worked together with Jia Xu to promote India Studies in China. Due to their reputation in the academic community, and because of their excellence in teaching and scholarship, the 1990s witnessed a rapid development of Sanskrit Studies at Peking University.

China tour with Amitav Ghosh

In Fall 2016, West Heavens curated a one month visit to China with Indian writer Amitav Ghosh, in collaboration with NYU Shanghai and the publishers of the Chinese editions of An Antique Land and River of Smoke. Ghosh’s travel covered major cities throughout China – including Kunming, Chengdu, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Beijing and Shanghai – giving talks on the relationship between history and the contemporary. Ghosh also met with local authors, critics, press, and in particular with Chinese readers, and presented at two major book fairs, Beijing Book Fair and Shanghai Book Fair. In addition, West Heavens curated a Youth Round Table on history and writing, in MinGuo Library in Shanghai, with Amitav Ghosh and young writers, artists, and researchers from inside and outside of academia. During his talks and roundtables, Ghosh left the Chinese readers with a vivid impression of a contemporary Indian literature. Indian literature is not sufficiently translated into Chinese, and those who won major Western literature prizes have so far attracted the attention of Chinese publishers. The question of how and why certain literature should be introduced to readers shall be further discussed among academics, critics, publishers and readers.

For more information contact: Yun CHEN, researcher and project manager at West Heavens (chenyunrhyme@qq.com).

For more information contact: Associate Professor Shaoyong YE (fanjingjing@pku.edu.cn) at the Dept of South Asian Studies at Peking University.

West Heavens: India-China cultural exchange program

West Heavens is an integrated cross-cultural exchange program. It aims to untangle and compare the different paths of modernity taken by India and China, to facilitate high-level communication between the two countries’ intellectual and artistic circles, and to promote interaction through social thoughts and contemporary art. Since 2010, the program has organized more than 100 events including forums, exhibitions, film screenings and workshops, and published more than ten books. China has been in the grip of modernization for over a century. From Revolution to Cold War, and now capitalist globalization, China has been unable to shake off paradigms set by the West. Even Chinese discourse about modernity has so far been trapped by dichotomies of ‘East/West’ or ‘China/West’. No wonder that efforts at developmental self-reliance have only led to increasingly Westernized economic and political institutions and lifestyles. Today the West that China emulates as the model of an ‘advanced civilization’ is no longer suitable for guidance, and yet access to China’s own historical resources has been blocked by the framework of these models. To establish a position for itself outside of the two Western Cold War ideological paradigms, to develop historical resources beyond Western ideals, China must make connections elsewhere. Among Asian countries that have struck off on different paths of modernization, but still successful by the parochial standards of ‘progress’, India has much to offer its neighbors. For more than a century, challenges of imperialism and capitalism have forced India and China to develop political strategies that have profoundly transformed both societies. Sharing this experience is valuable for Indians and Chinese alike.

India had experienced one of the profound cultural turn long before the seismic cultural shift towards the West. The Buddhist turn did not bring comparable destructive fervor as those who won major Western literature prizes have so far attracted the attention of Chinese publishers. The question of how and why certain literature should be introduced to readers shall be further discussed among academics, critics, publishers and readers.

India-China connections

In Keqiao, it is well-recognized that the arrival of many Indian traders drastically transformed the local trade landscape. The first wave of Indian migrants to the city coincided with its industrial growth at the end of the early 20th Century. Since then, the value of fabric exports has overtaken that of the domestic trade, thereby making international fabric trade indispensable to the economic development of Keqiao. From the perspective of the Indian traders, their relocation to Keqiao was largely a market choice. These Indian traders usually operate their transactions mainly in cash budgets. Most of them specialize in the intermediary trade of low-grade fabrics for the price-savvy buyers, particularly those frequenting the re-export market in Dubai. Living in Keqiao enables the Indian traders to establish stronger networks with suppliers. It allows them to negotiate better prices and deal directly with manufacturers. Together with other foreign traders, these traders have brokered a large amount of fabric trade for their buyers in different parts of the world, mostly in the Global South.

In Keqiao, most of these suppliers only manage to supply cheap and low-quality fabrics, which is a crowded market that inevitably faces intense price competition. The local price competition, however, turns out to be a market strength in the low-end export sector, given that the Indian traders are also extremely price-sensitive in their purchases. With both sides being so much strained on the price factor, their everyday encounters in Keqiao tend to be fraught with tension and conflict. Nevertheless, holding to a dual commitment of cutting cost and maintaining partnership, Indian-Chinese trade in Keqiao is a resilient force in sustaining the grassroots connections between China and the Global South, especially so in the time of on-going global economic uncertainties.

Ka-Kin Cheuk, Postdoctoral Researcher, Leiden University (k.k.cheuk@hum.leidenuniv.nl)
In January 1924, copies of the newspaper Hindu Jagawa were seized by the Shanghai Municipal Police (S.M.P.) at the headquarters of the Hinduist Association in Rue du Consulat, in the French Concession of Shanghai. The editor of this newspaper, Harbans Singh—viewed as the ringleader of the Indian nationalist movement in Shanghai—was then charged with publishing “seditious” papers that would result in a breach of public peace. The evidence of this charge lay in an article, entitled, “One who seeks the blood of his brethren for his own personal benefit.” The article blamed a jemadar [Inspector] of the Sikh branch of the S.M.P., Buddha Singh, for using the Guruwara’s [Sikh place of worship] money to buy gifts for his British officers in order to flatter them. It alleged, “outwardly [Buddha Singh] seems to love his people, but inwardly, he is against them and on the side of the government.” Why was Buddha Singh regarded as a traitor by the nationalists? And in what ways did Buddha Singh’s personal story shed light on the Indian nationalist struggle as well as the Chinese political landscape of the 1920s? 

Central Asia was born in the Majha region of the Punjab in the 1870s. He came to Shanghai and joined the S.M.P. as a constable in 1903, according to the Terms of Service for the Indian Branch of the S.M.P., a constable had to detach himself from the position of Jemadar, the highest rank for any Sikh serving in the S.M.P. Buddha Singh decided to lend himself to this fate. Apart from completing his own work in an exemplary way, he also performed as the treasurer of the local Sikh community and was actively involved in organizing religious festivals, such as the Sikh Sabha Celebration, which gained him considerable respect among his countrymen. The S.M.P. felt Buddha Singh’s rising influence was of much importance for the Sikhs, and as a reward for his contribution, Buddha Singh was conferred the title of Sirdar Sahib, the most honorable titles a Sikh had ever been offered in Shanghai. To glory in this achievement, all high-profile British officials in Shanghai attended the ceremony in the British Consulate. A processional line of mounted Sikh policemen, European policemen, and Sikh Boy Scouts, was held to greet the titleholder. The British Consul-General, Sir Everard Fraser, presented the insignia to Buddha Singh in person.

The honor, however, was only the side of the coin. Buddha Singh’s influence and his stubborn attitude toward the Indian nationalists also brought him great troubles. On the morning of 15 July 1914, days after Buddha Singh forwarded the name list of seven ‘seditionists’ to the S.M.P., he was assaulted with a heavy stick by an ex-police officer, Lal Singh, an alleged Ghadar member who turned out to be a friend of those on the list. Ten days later, he was attacked again by three alleged Ghadarites who knocked him down and tried to blind him by fiercely attacking his eyes and head. Buddha Singh was so seriously injured that he was unconscious for several days. 

Buddha Singh also faced repeated threats against his life. In June 1914, he received a letter from the Ghadar Party that threatened to kill him for his disloyalty to the Indian people. On 3 October 1923, when he was on a ship bound for Hong Kong, four Sikhs informed him that one day, someone would kill him and that the killer was willing to become a martyr for the cause. Buddha Singh understood that these threats were real and told his friends on numerous occasions that he would meet his fate of being assassinated by these revolutionaries; a prophecy that came true.

Indeed, to create disturbance among Sikh policemen in Shanghai and to support the Chinese nationalist revolution, the Ghadar Party harbored a plan to assassinate Buddha Singh. On the morning of 6 April 1927, a Gadar Party member, Harbant Singh, shot Buddha Singh dead in front of the gate of the Central Police Station in the International Settlement of Shanghai.

The assassination of Buddha Singh appalled the British authorities, within two months of the assassination almost all important Ghadarites were put into custody. Furthermore, the British decided to improve the salaries and living conditions of the Sikhs in Shanghai. Ironically, this episode bears little significance to modern Chinese national history, or to scholars, yet when interpreted from a transnational approach it can shed light on how Indian nationalist movements, the Ghadar movement in particular, developed in Shanghai from the 1910s to the 1920s, and how their anti-British conspiracies were intertwined with the international communist movement and the Chinese nationalist revolution. In effect, the Ghadar movement, and in particular the assassinations of the concept of Buddhism, gave rise in the late 1920s and early 1930s to the formation of the British trans-regional surveillance network, to check the flow of Indian dissidents from North America to India through Southeast and East Asia.

Vin Cao is a Research Fellow in the Department of History at Sun Yat-Sen University (cao.yin50@u.nus.edu).

References
1 For this article, the author made extensive use of the archive of the North China Herald. His text is a summary of the author’s 2016 article “Kill Buddha Singh: Indian Nationalist Movement in Shanghai, 1914–27,” Indian Historical Review 43(2): 270-288.

Conferences
The Nature of Chinese Modernity: Reflection and Prospect

China Connections continued

The Nature of Chinese Modernity: Reflection and Prospect

ACADEMICS MONTHLY, Fudan journal (Social Sciences Edition) and the International Center for the Study of Chinese Civilization, Fudan, co-organized the international conference ‘The Nature of Chinese Modernity: Reflection and Prospect’ in Fudan University in Shanghai (23-25 September 2016). Among thirty distinguished scholars from, among others, Europe, North America, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Macau, Mainland China were invited to attend the event. Coming from various areas and disciplinary backgrounds, the participants discussed key concepts such as ‘modernization’, ‘modernist’, and ‘modernity’, and explored various dimensions relating to ‘Chinese Modernity’. The presentations revealed how cutting-edge research in this domain has become more rigorous through a full and thorough investigation of the unique forms of Chinese responses to the common challenges faced in the modern world. To understand ‘Chinese Modernity’, scholars should investigate beyond the key concepts came into and disseminated in China while they should put emphasis on China’s history and reality. Moreover, Western theories and Chinese tradition are both important frames of reference for this issue. The conference contributors arrived at the powerful conclusion that the most important task currently facing this field is how to develop a truly global perspective. It is on the basis of this increasingly systematic work that scholars can build up a multi-coordinated strategy in order to gain a more objective vantage point capturing the ‘genuine face’ of China in the modern world wide.”

Asia and Intra-Asian Connections

The CENTER FOR GLOBAL ASIA at NYU Shanghai held its inaugural conference “Asia and Intra-Asian Connections” on 22-24 August 2016, co-organized by the Asia Research Center at Fudan University. The conference aimed to generate new dialogues on China’s interactions in intra-Asian interactions and China-India connections. It did so by gathering a diverse group of scholars who work on a wide variety of historical and geographical perspectives focusing on China, India and beyond. Over three days, approximately forty scholars from Asia, North America and Europe were joined by NYU Shanghai faculty and students to engage in stimulating discussions. Amitav Ghosh gave a keynote speech on China-India connections. The first two days of the conference explored connections between China and India by analyzing unexplored primary sources that dealt with colonial and post-colonial relations and perceptions. China’s cultural contacts with Southeast Asia and the Islamic world were also examined. The third day of the conference featured a workshop on Asian Studies, with two roundtable sessions. The first session investigated the concept of Asia that developed during the age of European imperialism, the discourse on the region in the early phases of decolonization, and the incorporation of the continent into the emerging field of Area Studies. The second session examined the dominant approach to the research and teaching of Asian Studies; the shortcomings of sub-regional; the importance of bridging specialist research and public policy, and Asian Studies in Asia. The conference provided a forum for scholars to discuss new perspectives on Asian Studies and fostered a scholarly network devoted to reimagining Asian Studies for the 21st century.