

Mountains, Deserts and Oases: Trade and Environment in Turn-of-the-Century Central Eurasia

Workshop held at Swedish Research Institute (SRII) in Istanbul

31st August – 2nd September 2026

The workshop will bring together a group of scholars from different disciplines that work on topics related to caravan trade, material culture and local environmental knowledge in Central Eurasia and beyond during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Topics discussed will be merchant know-how, cultural utilization and understandings of trade products, and local responses and adaptations to living under colonial rule on both sides of the Sino-Indian border (Qing colonial administration followed by republican rule in Eastern Turkestan and British colonial governance in India). The trade networks signified a steady flow of goods, ideas and people between Eastern Turkestan and the Indian subcontinent. However, for the sake of comparative purposes, the workshop also aims to bring up a few examples from areas further beyond this border region.

*Organized by Patrick Hällzon (Uppsala University)¹ in cooperation with Olof Heilo (SRII)

Participants:

Patrick Hällzon, Uppsala University, Sweden

Miriya Malik, INLANSO, Varanasi, India

Eric Schluessel, Oxford University, UK

Dipak Malik, INLANSO, Varanasi, India

Paro Tomar, Shiv Nadar University (NCR), New Delhi, India

László Károly, Uppsala University, Sweden

Sabira Ståhlberg, Independent scholar, Finland

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Day 1. Monday, August 31

Presentation of a multilingual trade manual

- **09:15**
Welcome!
A brief introductory note by Olof Heilo, director of Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul
- **09:30 –10:15**
Patrick Hällzon, Miriya Malik and Eric Schluessel

Presentation of a British multilingual trade manual from the late 19th century and its relevance for cross cultural research on the trade and utilization of animals, plants, and minerals in Central Eurasia

- **10:15 –10:45**
–Coffee & tea
- **10:45 –11:30**
Patrick Hällzon, Uppsala University, Sweden

Trade products between Leh and Yarkand from an ethnobiological perspective in the late 19th and early 20th centuries

- **11:30 –12:15**
Miriya Malik, INLANSO, Varanasi, India

Traders, routes and products across the Himalayas: Colonial ambitions and local necessities in the late 19th century

- **12:15 –13:30**
– Lunch
- **13:30 –14:15**
Eric Schluessel, Oxford University, UK

Tea, Cloth, Mobility, Piety

- **14:15 –14:30**
– Coffee & tea
- **14:30 –15:15**
Open Discussion
- **17:30–**
Excursion (on foot)

Day 2. Tuesday, September 1.

Presentations – Colonial rule, trade and local environmental knowledge:

- **09:00 –09:45.**
Dipak Malik, INLANSO, Varanasi, India

Borders and border politics in the 19th century Central Eurasia

- **09:45 –10:30.**
Paro Tomar, Shiv Nadar University, NCR, New Delhi, India

Perspectives on utilization of local resources and trade in the Thar desert

- **11:00 –11:15**
– Coffee & tea
- **11:15 –12:00.**
László Károly & Patrick Hällzon, Uppsala University, Sweden

The vocabulary of trade: Multilingual word lists for a better understanding of cross-border contact between India and Turkestan in the early 20th century

- **12:00 –13:30**
– Lunch
- **13:30 –14:15**
Sabira Ståhlberg, independent scholar, Finland (*Online presentation)

Enticed out of isolation: Trade impact on changing lifestyle, subsistence and local knowledge among Loptuq at the Wandering Lake

- **14:15–15:15**
– Coffee & tea
- **15:15 –16:00**
Open Discussion
- **17:30–**
– Excursion (on foot)

Day 3. Wednesday, September 2

Open discussion blocks about relevant topics related to caravan trade, material culture and local environmental knowledge in Central Eurasia during the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

- **09:00 –10:30**

Session 1. Insider and outsider, or both:

1. Examples of local vs. colonial views on the environment (15 min)
2. Examples of local vs. colonial usage of natural resources (15 min)
3. Mountain and desert areas – Cosmopolitan and international or isolated and conservative? (15 min)

- **10:30 –11:00**

Coffee & tea

- **11:00 –12:30**

Session 2. Local knowledge:

1. Examples of local knowledge – Trade and travel
2. Inter-oasis and transnational bazaar trade
3. Examples of adaptation to local needs and conditions – Names and specific usage of trade products

- **12:30 –14:00**

– Lunch

- **14:00 –15:00**

Session 3. Research strategies on Central Eurasia:

1. Mountain- and Oasis-lore about the environment as a way to extract historical information
2. What are the benefits of using multiple sources for research about Central Eurasia and beyond?
3. How can local knowledge in mountain/desert/oasis societies (agriculture, water usage etc.) be of benefit for local communities of today?
4. How can comparative historical research between different desert- and mountain communities' areas be useful and how?

- **15:00 –15:30**

–Coffee & tea

- **15:30 –16:00**

Session 4. –Ideas for future publication in *Transactions*

- **19:00–**

Dinner together