

CONFERENCE:

The Map and The World: Buddhist Notions of Cosmology and Geography

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ABSTRACT

Pilgrimage and Identity:

***Pitha Puja* Rituals and Sacred Landscape in Newar Buddhism**

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The notion of the defined boundaries of a lived space that is both conceptually and physically constructed in the sacred geography is central to Asian religious traditions. Similarly, Nepal's Kathmandu Valley is conceptualized as a *mandala*—referred to in ritual texts and inscriptions specifically as “Nepal Mandala.” The conception of this sacred landscape, however, emerges in multivalent contexts and is shared both by the Hindus and Buddhists practitioners of the Valley. This paper explores the construction and mapping of sacred geography in the Buddhist context, discussing the pilgrimage tradition of *pitha puja* in Newar Buddhism, as the Tantric *pithas* or “seats” of the *yoginis* are propitiated equally by both the Hindu and Buddhist communities. Drawing upon the art and rituals of Newar Buddhist tradition particularly the practices related to the Anuttarayoga Tantras, the paper will address how the performative aspects of rituals and the definition of sacred landscape allow for the construction of a purely Buddhist identity in a dominant Hindu environment. The focus of the paper lies in exploring the shifting negotiations and discourses of religious identity among the Newar Buddhists, as new meanings and constructs become reified in these sacred spatial frameworks.