



**Water Management in Inner Asia:
Human and Non-human Actors in Placed-Based Approaches**
University of Cambridge, 15-16 March 2024 (hybrid)

This interdisciplinary two-day workshop aims to open debate on the question of water management in Inner Asia with a theoretical focus on ‘religio-hydraulic’ knowledge across Asian belief systems, paying special attention to water beings (water deities - *nāgas* (Skt.) and *lus* (Tib and Mong.), that embody ideas about non-human powers and relations between species (humans, animals, plants, deities, etc). In recent years, the materiality of water (fresh water scarcity, water caused calamities, etc.) is becoming an arena where religion, natural resource extraction, environmental awareness, and nationalism co-produce particular narratives, where water beings reveal their decisive agency in certain societies.

This workshop aims to engage multiple publics – both in the UK further afield - to explore different considerations of water beings in Inner Asia in times of climate change and expanding natural resource extraction, what is sometimes defined as Anthropocene, and to develop a broader understanding of a ‘new’ frame of reference involving human and non-human reciprocal sociality in this part of the world. Methodologically, this event is planned as an experimental Workshop to facilitate dialogue between multiple publics beyond academia such as ‘Friends of the Cam’ River environmental activists, UK government policy officer for Environment (DEFRA), religious practitioners and researchers to re-frame ‘water recovery’ paradigm. One of the Workshop participants - a Buddhist religious practitioner during his paper presentation will explain some of the techniques of engaging with water deities (*lus*) by demonstrating some water related rituals.

Recent fieldwork findings (2022 and 2023) from the “[Resource frontiers: managing water on a trans-border Asian river](#)” Project (based at MIASU and funded by ESRC 2022-2025) suggest the need for deeper discussion on the growing relevance of water beings for environmental solutions in local communities. This phenomenon requires wider cross regional/cultural comparisons and interdisciplinary expertise from different knowledge sources.

Co-organised by Dr Sayana Namsaraeva, Mongolia & Inner Asia Studies Unit, Department of Social Anthropology and Dr Hildegard Diemberger, Pembroke College; Department of Social Anthropology



To register for the workshop, please go to <https://allevents.in/cambridge/workshop-water-management-in-inner-asia-human-and-non-human-actors-in-placed-based-approaches/80002264976161> or click on the attached QR code for the event.

Please note that the workshop is held at two venues:

15 March: Pembroke College (Nihon Room), 74 Trumpington Street, CB2 1RF
16 March: The Mond Building (Seminar Room), Free School Lane, CB2 3RF

Friday, 15th March 2024 09:00 – 17:30
Nihon Room, Pembroke College

09:00 – 9:30 **Tea/Coffee** and Introducing the Workshop Participants

- 09:30 Welcome Address: Hildegard Diemberger and Sayana Namsaraeva
- 09:35 Keynote Speaker: Prof. Veronica Strang (University of Oxford)
- *Nāga Sagas: the creative journeys of water beings across Asia*

**1st Panel – Water beings and water management across Asia:
historical roots and translations** (Chair: Prof. Barbara Bodenhorn (Cambridge))

- 09:55 Francesco Bianchini (King's College, University of Cambridge)
- *Nāgas and Rainmaking: rituals and travelling narratives on weather control*
- 10:20 Prof. Charles Ramble (EPHE – PSL University, CRCAO, Paris)
- *Tibetan “Serpent-Spirits”: A Link Between Humans and Nature or Vectors of Buddhist Doctrine?*

10:45 -11:00 **Tea/Coffee break**

- 11:00 Prof. Mark Aldenderfer (University of California, LA)
- *The materiality of klu*
- 11:25 Riamsara Kuyakanon (MIASU, University of Cambridge/University of Oslo)
- *Towards a Cosmopolitical Ecology of Water Relations: Approaching nāga in Thailand and klu in Bhutan*
- 11:50 Napakadol Kittisenee (University of Wisconsin-Madison)
- *Naga Societies: The Mystical-Animal-Based Political Systems* (by Zoom)
- 12:10 Discussion

12:30 – 14:00 **Lunch**

2nd Panel – Water, Ritual and Place-making (Chair: Prof. Isabelle Charleux)

- 14:00 Prof. Caroline Humphrey (MIASU, University of Cambridge)
- *Lus as a landscape-forming myth*
- 14:25 Dobdon Maksarov (SOAS, London)
- *Mediators and their ability to tame and harness local water resources: rituals, management and care*
- 14:50 Sayana Namsaraeva (MIASU, University of Cambridge)
- *From ‘Chthulucene’ to ‘Lusocene’: making kins with local lus*
- 15:10 Discussion

15:30 -16:00 **Tea/Coffee break**

3rd Panel – Water beings in Place-based Hydropolitics (Chair: Prof. David Sneath)

- 16:00 Thomas Hughes-Morgan (MIASU, University of Cambridge)
- *Politics, with and without the lus: water management in the Nepalese Himalayas*
- 16:25 Beth Turk (MIASU, University of Cambridge)
- *Mediation of Mineral Springs (Rashaan) in ‘Age of the Market’ Mongolia*

- 16:50 Alice Millington (Department of Social Anthropology/Department of Geography, UoC)
 - *When Mindruk (Pleiades) meets the lu: astronomy, climate and time-reckoning systems in eastern Nepal*
- 17:10 Discussion
- Break (17:25 – 17:30)**
- 17:30 **Cambridge Festival** : Introduction of the Online public even
- 17:45 Prof. Charles Kennel (Director Emeritus, UCSD Scripps Institution of Oceanography, USA)
 - *A perfect storm? Water, biodiversity and climate crises (by Zoom)*
- 18:15 Q&A
- 18:30 **Wine Reception** at Pembroke College
 19:00 **Dinner** at Pembroke College

Saturday 16th March 2024 09:00 – 16:00
 Seminar Room, Mond Building

4th Panel – Water beings in environmental activism (in a cross-cultural perspective)
 Chair: Barbara Bodenhorn

- 09:00 * *Ritual of worshipping the Cam River water-beings (ven. Dobdon Maksarov)*¹
- 10:00 Yohang Li (EPHE – PSL University, CRCAO, Paris) (by Zoom)
 - *Nature conservation among Tibetan nomads in the Three River Headwaters region*
- 10:25 Jonathan Woolley (DEFRA GOV UK)
 - *The Ripple Effect: Reflections on Nudge Theory and Water Spirits in Nepal and Britain (by Zoom)*
- 10:50 Bruce Huett (Cam Valley Forum)
 - *Spiritual inspiration from landscapes: Cambridgeshire chalk streams and more*
- 11:15 Libby Peachey (MIASU/Cambridge Carbon Footprint)
 - *Climate, biodiversity and water: local action groups*
- 11:30 Hildegard Diemberger & ABC Project Team (MIASU/Pembroke College, UoC)
Water, Weather and Wonder: engaging the next generations
- 12:00 **Round Table:** How does water matter and how might its importance help to drive environmental action?
 Chair: Prof. Barbara Bodenhorn

Lunch 12:30 – 14:00

- 14:00 James Murray-White (multi-media-artist, Salzburg Global Fellow)
 - *Water is life: eros, chalk streams, and spiritual activism within a hyper local context*
- 14:30 Iris Pakulla (MIASU, University of Cambridge)
 - *Water beings from Ainur's perspective. Fragments from the film 'Angry Spirits'*

15:00 – 15:15 Coffee/Tea Break

- 15:15 **Workshop closing** and informal gathering of Workshop Working group: possible research ideas, publication, etc.)

¹Non-academic event. We meet at 8:50am at Pembroke College to go to [the Cam River](#) (take the Mill Lane and cross the bridge to Coe Fen)