

Understanding Asia: State-Society Relations

# Places in Knots. Rethinking Himalayan Remoteness and Connectivity

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Room X-B2-103

Over the past decade, the Himalayas have witnessed a frenzy of projects in the name of connectivity. Roads are built to valleys that used to take days to reach, helicopters have become widely available, and now there is Wi-Fi at the foot of Mount Everest. At the same time, remoteness continues to be a defining figure of thought. Coffee table books advertise the last realms of Buddhist heritage and NGOs target remote “local communities”. Remoteness and connectivity undergird analysis and define interventions.

What is often lost in such debates is the long history of cosmopolitan mobility that shaped Himalayan trading communities. This history resonates in current ambitions and endeavours. Neither “local community” nor “global diaspora” captures what is at stake. As an alternative, I propose the notion of *places in knots* to understand the ties between seemingly remote Himalayan villages and their connections with the world at large. ■

Martin Saxer is an anthropologist working on Tibet, Nepal and Central Asia. Since 2015, he has been leading a 5-year research project funded by the European Research Council under the title *Remoteness & Connectivity: Highland Asia in the World* ([www.highlandasia.net](http://www.highlandasia.net)). He directed three documentary films and runs the visual ethnography blog [theotherimage.com](http://theotherimage.com). He is currently finishing a book with the working title *Places in Knots*. ■