

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR TIBETAN STUDIES

Ethical Principles

[These principles were ratified by the IATS President and Board of Advisors on 31st August 2024 and were approved by IATS members during an online vote held during the 17th Seminar of the IATS on 27th August 2026.]

PREAMBLE

The International Association for Tibetan Studies (IATS) represents a scholarly community that focuses on the study of Tibet and the Himalayan regions. As outlined in our Statutes, our principal activity is the organization of interdisciplinary academic conferences. More broadly, as an organization and as individuals, we seek to model high standards of scholarship. We also seek to include a wide range of approaches and academic traditions.

The following ethical principles serve as a foundation for the standards that we promote through our conferences, our publications, and in the field.

BEHAVIOR IN THE FIELD

Scholars of Tibet and the Himalaya should maintain awareness of behavioural norms and cultural expectations in the field. We encourage scholars to respect local etiquette, adopt appropriate bodily conduct in both sacred and everyday spaces, and be sensitive to local speech conventions.

RESPECT FOR CULTURAL OBJECTS

We encourage scholars to show respect for culturally meaningful objects including texts, ritual objects, artwork, photographs, and various forms of material culture. Scholars should be open about their research plans with local caretakers and owners of such objects. Scholars should respect local sensitivities about their use or reproduction for research or other purposes. They must not engage in illegal commerce in cultural artefacts.

RESEARCH AND PUBLISHING

When publishing our research, we give due credit to everyone who contributed. At the same time, we respect their right to anonymity, especially in politically sensitive situations. The primary researcher should make clear the scope and intent of the project to everyone involved, along with any plans for publication and/or dissemination, including via social media. IATS supports the principles of Open Science and urges due consideration of the particular sensitivities and vulnerabilities regarding research data in the field of Tibetan and Himalayan Studies.

ENGAGING ACROSS KNOWLEDGE-TRADITIONS

IATS encourages engagement with different viewpoints, concepts, or theories, drawn from multiple intellectual traditions, in the interest of fostering dialogue and expanding our theoretical and methodological repertoire. This includes engagement with Tibetan and Himalayan intellectual traditions as legitimate creators of knowledge, rather than as mere objects of study. We also encourage scholars to be mindful of the historical and political circumstances of knowledge-production, including the various histories of Tibetology around the world, so as to avoid perpetuating hierarchies that may accompany inherited systems of knowledge.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

IATS is committed to the principles of academic freedom as stipulated by UNESCO. These include “...the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely [our] opinion about the institution or system in which [we] work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies.” At IATS meetings and in its publications, all topics related to the history or present circumstances of our area of study may be considered in a scholarly manner without political restriction or censorship, and without regional or religious bias.

PROFESSIONAL POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY

Teachers and researchers should be attentive to power differentials in our relationships and the disparate values associated with different cultural backgrounds and academic traditions. Members of IATS should not use their position or authority to exploit their students and local collaborators to promote their own ideological or activist positions.

POLITICAL AWARENESS

We must be aware of political vulnerabilities to which colleagues, students, research subjects, and informants, as well as institutions as a whole, may be exposed. We should exercise care and be mindful of the potential repercussions of our interactions and communications with them. This applies also to the published results of research, as well as activities and conduct in the field.

SEXUAL HARRASSMENT AND ASSAULT

IATS strongly condemns any form of sexual harassment or assault of students, colleagues, assistants, or research subjects in any context related to the academic career of the scholar. Any such conduct at an IATS meeting will not be tolerated. Credible evidence of sexual harassment or assault will be reported to the appropriate local authorities by the IATS Seminar’s convenor.

PROFESSIONAL DIVERSITY

When organizing events or planning projects it is good to be mindful of how specific choices promote or inhibit equal access and opportunity for all. Diversity pertains to many factors, such as

race, gender, language, career stage, and religious or academic background. We are especially committed to the professional advancement and intellectual welfare of our Tibetan and Himalayan colleagues, research assistants, and informants, particularly of women and other marginalized groups.

RECOGNIZING INTERDEPENDENCE AND SHARING BENEFITS

Good scholarly practice involves asking what we owe to one another, and where possible, repaying these kindnesses through our work and with the resources available to us as professionals. It is good to share the fruits of research and promote accessibility, for instance by communicating findings in Tibetan language and/or in local publications. We encourage ongoing attention to the interests and concerns of Tibetan and Himalayan communities who have a stake in our academic work. In sum, valuing our interdependence means taking an approach to scholarship that views it as a social good, not just an elite, privileged pursuit.