Bender Presents Special Lecture at the MAKAIAS Institute in Kolkata, India

Prof. Mark Bender, chair of the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures (DEALL), presented a paper at the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS), in Kolkata, India on January 8, 2015. Kolkata, located in West Bengal, is the new name for the former Calcutta, a city founded by the British East India Company in the early 19th century. The institute, devoted to cultural issues in India and Asia, was opened on its present site in the Salt Lake district in 2009. The conference was organized by Dr. Sreeradha Dutta, director of the institute, and Dr. Nandini Bhattachaya Panda. It was entitled "North East India in the Cultural Imaginations: History, Land and People." North East India, comprised of seven states, lies to the northeast of Kolkata and is bordered by Bangladesh, Myanmar, China, and Bhutan. The region is home to over 400 ethnic groups, many speaking Tibeto-Burman languages and having ancient connections to China and Southeast Asia. Other participants from outside India were folklorist Ulo Valk, University of Tartu, Estonia, who works on belief narratives in North East India, and anthropologist Philippe Ramirez of the Centre d'Etudes Himalayennes, Centre National de la Recherche, Paris, an authority on ethnic relations in the region. Presenters from India included the distinguished professors Samir Kumar Das, Sanjib Baruah, Soumen Sen, Desmond Kharmawphlang, Chandan Kumar Sharma, Manjeet Baruah, Kunjo Singh, Simon John, Zothani Khiangte, and others. Professor Bender's special lecture, "Juxtaposing Poetic Voices from North East India and Inner Borderlands of Eastern Asia: Contexts of Self and Tradition in the Eco-Historical Moment," concerned themes of cultural tradition, ecology, and poetry from an anthology he is editing of work by ethnic minority/indigenous poets writing in North East India, Myanmar, Southwest China, Inner Mongolia, and Mongolia. The accompanying photo includes Prof. Bender with a number of the participants.