

Significance

I attended the three-day Workshop on Law and Governance in Gilgit-Baltistan, April 26-28, held at the Nantes Institute for Advanced Study (France) and organized by Karakoram International University (KIU) in Gilgit. Participants included four graduate students from KIU, two faculty from KIU, two faculty from other Pakistan universities, one Pakistani development expert, one Pakistani faculty from Denmark, one Pakistani faculty from Canada, and two US faculty. We were joined by Fellows of the Nantes IAS. The attending faculty have been mentoring the KIU graduate students and the workshop was the culmination of a stage in the preparation of their scholarship for a broader audience.

The workshop format was selected to enable open, peer-to-peer feedback and discussion of all papers presented with the goal of producing two separate peer-reviewed journal issues on the workshop topics. The workshop was designed to develop a theoretical and methodological approach towards four topics: legitimacy of democratic empowerment and participatory government in relation to customary law and governance in Gilgit Baltistan; institutional development within the state and the role of NGOs and civil society; dialogue on rights, indigenous knowledge and identity with workshop participants and the broader academic and public audience and; ethical principles for research in conflict zones.

The workshop location in France enabled open and wide-ranging discussion that would be unlikely to occur inside Gilgit-Baltistan or Pakistan. The extensive and explicit discussion of law and governance in Gilgit-Baltistan and support for indigenous scholarship served to open new avenues for ethical research in conflict zones and develop a theoretical apparatus for engagement with the sensitive topic of law, governance and indigenous minority rights in a disputed region.

Additionally, I was invited to deliver a lecture on medieval archaeology of Gilgit-Baltistan at the Centre de recherche sur les civilisations de l'Asie orientale – CRCAO on Friday April 29 at CRCAO/Collège de France in Paris. I presented recently discovered material that offered new information on the history of the Gilgit-Baltistan region in the 8th and 9th centuries CE, to a distinguished audience of top-level scholars and PhD students. The material significantly adds to our knowledge of international relations during that period and feeds directly into the theme of indigenous identity and knowledge addressed at the prior workshop, through revealing local history to the people who are the inheritors and descendants of the actors in the events discussed in the lecture, ie, the people of Gilgit-Baltistan and their ancestor's substantial role in the history of empires.