



CENTRUM FÜR ASIEN-
WISSENSCHAFTEN UND
TRANSKULTURELLE STUDIEN



UNIVERSITÄT
HEIDELBERG
ZUKUNFT
SEIT 1386

Department of Political Science, South Asia Institute
Lecture Series on Governance and Politics in South Asia

Knowing About Places and Cases in the Era of Big Data: The Role of Comparative Area Studies in Interdisciplinary Global Knowledge Production

Rudra Sil

Professor Sil laid out the distinctive features and value-added of “comparative area studies” (CAS) in an intellectual environment increasingly preoccupied with “big data” at the expense of contextual knowledge about sites, countries, and regions. He argues that the CAS embraces the pursuit of in-depth, immersive knowledge associated with area studies but also encourages contextualized comparisons across areas to illuminate surprising parallels and contrasts across time and space. Professor Sil maintains that the goal is not to infer elegant causal models or general theories, but to generate “middle range” propositions about complex phenomena that may elude researchers working with aggregate data or selecting cases solely for hypothesis-testing. In this talk, he seeks to expand the scope of CAS to include a wider range of qualitative research and considering how our institutional architecture can be adapted to simultaneously support multiple area studies communities and facilitate fruitful conversations, collaborations, and comparisons across areas.



Rudra Sil is Professor of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania where he is also SAS Director of the Huntsman Program in International Studies and Business. Sil holds a PhD from the University of California at Berkeley and has previously authored, coauthored, or coedited eight books like *Beyond Paradigms: Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics* (2010 - coauthored with Peter Katzenstein) and, most recently, *Advancing Comparative Area Studies: Analytical Heterogeneity and Organizational Challenges* (2025).



Monday, 10 November, 2025



14:15 pm – 15:45 PM, CET



**CATS, Building 4130, Great Lecture Hall,
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