

## HAVING NEW EYES

NIGEL J. R. ALLAN

The title of this essay takes its theme from Marcel Proust's much-quoted remark, "The only real voyage of discovery . . . consists not of seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes" (O'Brien 1948, 181). Although landscapes I have seen since enrolling in my first geography graduate course in 1965 may be new to some, for me the major change that has occurred in the mountain landscapes of Asia—the region I know best—is how people view them in new contexts, contexts aligned with mass media such as travel guides and television programs, globalization in any form, military and geopolitical engagements, and, above all, rapid accessibility by all forms of transportation and communications. Concomitant with the new perspectives is a countercurrent movement, a backwash from "recidivists," as I call them, who wish to retreat into a geographical intellectual mode prevalent in past centuries, of a more primeval flavor where mountains are seen as a "natural region" and nineteenth-century modes of thought prevail. Much of this relapse is caused by the decline of intensive field research by practitioners of geography whose opaque vision is distorted by urban life. Patent-leather-shoe geography has won out over dirty-boots geography.

My own current living arrangements prejudice my remarks. Although I focus on the interface of South and Central Asia in this essay, I now live in a mountain settlement in the Sierra Nevada in what the futurist Joel Kotkin calls a postmodern "Valhalla" (2000, 11). Seeing a mountain landscape through a postmodern prism illuminates advances in telecommunications, combined with the general deurbanization of America, thereby introducing a "Fourth Stage" to the Veyret "Grenoble Stage Model" about the development of mountain landscapes (1972). Now Europeans of the Alpine countries come to the Sierra on fieldwork assignments to investigate how people in this modern-day Valhalla construct their transformed habitats. These new settlements are not unique in form and function just to American regions of New England, North Carolina, the Rockies, or elsewhere in the West; recent fieldwork reveals similar settlements in the Himalayan foothills of India. Fieldwork, then, like so much of the methodology of geography, has to consider the implications of globalization; there are, however, consistent conditions that are always with the field researcher.

Fred Kniffen, a longtime cultural geographer of the American scene, once remarked that geographers were just intelligent country boys. This statement—and Mr. Kniffen, if he were alive today, would agree—is now modified to include women and even some urban practitioners. The underlying message in the statement, however, is sustained. Geographers need to have some smarts in engaging with a variety of situations in a list of never-ending cultural and biophysical environments. How a

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✪ DR. ALLAN is a professor of geography at the University of California, Davis, California, 95616.