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**Dan Smyer Yü and Jean Michaud, eds., *Trans-Himalayan Borderlands: Livelihoods, Territorialities, Modernities***

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How has the Himalayan region been conceptualized then and now? What are the theoretical implications of the “borderlands” concept for trans-Himalayan studies? How can we understand the projects of nation-state formation and globalization in transforming the landscape of this vast region and people’s livelihoods? How do people respond to such challenges based on their cultural and historical specificity? *Trans-Himalayan Borderlands: Livelihoods, Territorialities, Modernities* answers these questions and is an important contribution to the literature on Himalayan and borderland studies, which have been overshadowed by the cartographical practices of modern nation-states. In bringing the diversity, connectivity, and continuity of the Himalayas to light, this edited volume calls for understanding the region as a center of its own that has its own peripheries. The book acknowledges the state and global forces in reshaping the region and hardening borders while highlighting the connectivity, fluidity, and porosity imbued in the process.

The volume under review consists of fourteen chapters, with an introduction (Dan Smyer Yü) and conclusion (Jean Michaud) highlighting the overarching theories and themes that cut across the twelve case studies. A vast geography of the Himalayas is covered in this book, stretching from North India in the west (Georgina Drew) to the Sino-Vietnamese borderland in the east (Sarah Turner). Temporally, it stretches from premodern transregional commerce (Hildegard Diemberger and Gunnell Cederlöf) to recent trans-regional development projects, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (Yang Cheng). With such scope, this volume celebrates the diversity of the Himalayas yet acknowledges its ecogeological specificity and ethnohistorical continuity.

The book is divided into two sections, with section 1 concerning the entanglement of territoriality, sovereignty, and transregionality in the Himalayas. Jean Michaud’s opening chapter offers a general overview of the communities residing in the eastern upland of the Himalayan range, which he terms the Southeast Asian Massif or what James Scott refers to as the “shatter zone” (Scott 2009, 24). Through reviewing the encroachment of this area by forces such as empires, states, and industrialization, Michaud showcases continuous territorial mapping in the region and its impact on people’s livelihoods. Sara Shneiderman offers insights into indigenous conceptualizations of territory and

boundaries. Through examining the varied “properties of territory” (68) across ethnic, religious, regional, and historical lines within the context of state restructuring in Nepal, Shneiderman argues that the possession of multifaceted territorial consciousness is both rooted in indigenous affective boundaries and shaped by administrative boundaries of the modern nation-state. In his chapter, Dan Smyer Yü marries territoriality with religion in the Tibetan context to demonstrate the “geopolitical nature” of Tibetan Buddhist secularities (98). He argues that secularities are an outcome of Sino-Indian territorial disputes and a strategic response by Tibetans who need to prepare themselves for future diasporic lives and possible negotiation

Both Hildegard Diemberger and Gunnel Cederlöf examine Himalayan premodern territoriality and connectivity. Through tracing the production and circulation of Buddhist sacred books, Diemberger reveals how, for centuries, knowledge, materials, and technologies tied a “galaxy of communities” together (106) and shaped their relationships in a relative and dynamic way. In a similar vein, Cederlöf showcases the richness of the webs of routes that connected people, goods, and markets before British colonial expansion through delineating the routes of British expeditions from easternmost Bengal to south China in the nineteenth century. Taken together, these five chapters highlight the reconstruction of senses of place, territory, and sovereignty in the Himalayas and how they are reoriented toward adjustments in livelihoods.

Section 2 focuses on the intersection of landscape and livelihood changes within the context of transborder modernization. The notion of plurality is pronounced in the chapters of Georgina Drew and Alexander Horstmann. Drew examines conflicting views on dam construction on the Ganges and how senses of place have been disrupted and reestablished during and after construction. Drew illustrates the contested nature of development and the dynamic and plural subjectivities in development projects. Horstmann focuses on the plurality of the everyday humanitarianism in Thai-Burma borderland communities displaced by war and repression. Horstmann demonstrates that the plurality of humanitarian regimes—mediated by the diversity of religious, ethnic, socio-political landscapes—in turn shape the materiality of the borderlands.

People’s agency to adapt their livelihoods based on their cultural and historical specificity is another theme in section 2. Yang Cheng’s chapter examines peasants’ practice of resuming commercial farming in Yunnan after losing their land and highlights farmers’ agency in finding and securing a “floating niche” (199) with their skills when facing land dispossession and social transformation. Brendan Galipeau looks at how the Tibetan Catholic community in Yunnan actively engages with wine production and reconstructs their identities by resorting to the nineteenth-century Catholic history of the missionaries and recent state-led tourism projects.

The notion of the vernacularization of modernity is addressed in chapters by Li Quanmin, Li Yunxia, and Sarah Turner. Within the context of the rapid growth of the tea industry in Yunnan, the ritual use of tea in the De’ang community examined by Li Quanmin helps form a “merit-landscape” (231), where their commercial farming of tea and the integrity of their ancestral landscape can be balanced. Similarly, in Sarah Turner’s chapter, indigenous conceptualizations of livelihood and wealth among Hmong and Yao black cardamom cultivators on the Sino-Vietnamese borderland help them find balance between economic advancement and the safeguarding of cultural livelihoods. Lastly, the transformation from poppy to rubber plantations among the Akha on the Laos-China borderland in Li Yunxia’s chapter addresses a similar theme. Akha’s livelihoods

reconstruction and aspiration for a better life, which takes many locally specific traits, demonstrate the indigenization of modernity.

Building upon the frameworks of Himalayan studies, especially Michaud's Southeast Asian Massif (Michaud 2006, 2010), Scott's shatter zone, and Shneiderman's (2010, 293) "Zomia-thinking," this volume calls for scholars to move away from disaggregated area studies that focus on geopolitical domination and subordination to a more coherent form of regional studies where borders as spaces of connectivity and disconnectivity become analytic themes. Ethnographically, this book enriches our understanding of the social and livelihood changes in the Himalayas. As such, it will be of great interest to scholars engaged in the study of the Himalayas, borderland studies, and development.

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#### REFERENCES

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