

## Introduction: Tran-Himalayas as Multi-state Margins

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### The Project

The concept of this book emerged from two conferences held in March 2013: ‘Everyday Religion and Sustainable Environments in the Himalaya’ and ‘Himalayan Connection: Disciplines, Geographies, and Trajectories’ – organized respectively by the India China Institute of the New School and Yale Himalaya Initiative. Both conferences showcased a wide range of papers addressing historical and current topics from diverse ecosystems, human communities, and nation-states in the Himalayas. The inquiries pertaining to how we have conceived and are reconceiving Himalayan studies culminated in the keynote presentations and discussions of James Scott, and Sara Shneiderman, and Charles Ramble. The themes centered on the conceptual interfacing of concepts of Zomia (van Schendel, 2002; Scott, 2009; Michaud, 2010) and the Himalayas, deconstructing and reconstructing disciplinary boundaries, and the historical and current shifting of borderlands and territories. First coined by Willem van Schendel, ‘Zomia’ is etymologically derived from Tibetan-Burmese languages spoken in the Himalayas to refer to contiguous regions in Northeast India, Southeast Asia, Southwest China, and the Tibetan Plateau (van Schendel, 2002). Its subsequent evolutions by James Scott, Jean Michaud, and Sara Shneiderman have different geographical coverages, contributing toward rich theoretical ground.

While the interdisciplinary reconceptualizations of the complexity of bordered connectivity in modern High Asia underlined the core theoretical inquiries of the two conferences, it was also discernible that the default conception of the Himalayas as a region was centered mostly on the geography of the Himalayan territories of Nepal, Tibet, and India, limiting how we explore new frontiers and the diversity of Himalayan studies. My post-conference queries resonated with those of the Yale workshop organizers:

Does using ‘Himalaya’ as a broad regional signifier invoke an ecological or cultural determinism that de-emphasizes the specificity of political history? Or does it legitimately recognize the webs of ecological, economic and cultural connectivity that have bound together complex entities over time? How might new Himalayan scholarship, oriented toward connectivity and inclusion empowered by new collaborations and analytical tools learn from, but ultimately move beyond, its legacy? How can new voices be included to express greater diversity in Himalayan studies? (Lord, Quintman and Shneiderman, 2013:1)

Do we have to make either-or choices when we encounter the simultaneity of continuity and discontinuity? If we regard borders as ‘simultaneous obstacles and opportunities’ (ibid.11), we could very well treat discontinuity and disconnectivity as new forms of continuity and connectivity as all borders have no absolute closure but

consist of regulated ports of entries and exists as well as of disputed or demarcated but unguarded lines open for illicit and illegal crossings (van Schendel, 2005:38-68). An area or a region is never absolutely bounded. The end of each is the beginning of the other. This is particularly pertinent to areas and regions that are located in a same landmass with a long history of human interactions in addition to the region's geological, ecological, and climatic integrity.

In Fall 2014, the 'connectivity', 'inclusion', and 'new voices' evoked by the Yale scholars were naturally integrated into existing and upcoming projects at Yunnan Minzu University's Center for Trans-Himalayan Studies. This book, as one of the inaugural projects of the Center, is a multi-national, collaborative project based on the YMU workshop 'Exploring New Grounds in Himalayan Studies: Niche Living, Transboundary State Effects, and Sustainability of Ethno-Ecological Heritages'. With participating scholars specializing in South Asia, Southeast Asia, Southwest China, and Tibetan studies, the lively discussions and debates centered on a reconceptualizations of Himalayan studies, on how the practices of modernization have complicated the meanings of traditional modes of being and pre-modern inter-regional commerce, and how the trans-border effects of state-building engender the simultaneity of border marking and borderland residents' agentive responses to challenges and opportunities. This has led to the current shape of this book as an interdisciplinary experiment sitting within a range of disciplinary competences: anthropology, environmental studies, ethnology, human ecology, geography, history, religious studies, and Tibetology.

## I- TRANS-HIMALAYAS AND TRANS-HIMALAYAN STUDIES

This book is not geared toward constructing or revamping a unique transregional study; however, its chapters are thematized and bound together under the geographical and conceptual rubrics of trans-Himalayas and trans-Himalayan studies. It is thus necessary to begin with the historical connotations of these two overarching phrases that link the chapters in this book with existing works of Himalayan studies and related fields.

The intellectual history of Himalayan studies or trans-Himalayan studies began with explorers and colonial officers. Issues related to boundary crossings, frontiers, and borderlands are characteristics of the formative phase of Himalayan studies. The origin of the term 'trans-Himalayas' can be traced to Sven Hedin (1865-1952), a Swedish explorer, whose work in three volumes was called, *Trans-Himalaya: Discoveries and Adventures in Tibet* (Hedin, 1909, 1910, 1913). Hedin's descriptive use of the phrase 'trans-Himalaya' is indicative of his south-north traverse of the Himalayas from India to Tibet and of how the highest mountains functioned as natural borderlands separating Tibet from its southern neighbors. He emphatically posits 'the Trans-Himalaya as the true boundary range of the elevated country [Tibet]' (1913:43), while noting that the mighty 'snow-crowned domes' and their 'wild precipitous rocks' (1913:2, 24) did not fully enclose Tibet within its plateau, but were traversed by passes linking the north with the south. These were the ancient caravan routes that Hedin's Kashmiri guides and Ladakhi assistants were most familiar with and, that made his adventures and explorations possible (1913:27). His voluminous depictions of Himalayan cultures, religions, and trade practices serve as historical sources for the study of pre-modern trans-Himalayan

connectivity that considers trade routes, pilgrimage passes, and the advent of the geopolitical encounters between the British India and the Manchu Empire (Waterhouse, 2014:7).

Eighty-three years before Hedin set out for his trans-Himalayan expeditions, Brian Houghton Hodgson (1801-1894), an officer of the British East India Company, was assigned to the foothills of the Himalayas in Nepal and Darjeeling where he spent thirty-eight years ‘developing trans-Himalayan trade to China through Tibet – in particular an overland route from Calcutta to Peking’ (Waterhouse, 2014:7b). However, Hodgson had his own calling for a wide range of scholarly interests. He is belatedly regarded as ‘a founder of Himalayan anthropology’ (Gaenszle, 2014:209) and has received posthumous recognition for his scholarly achievements. His systematic collection of Buddhist texts, and Himalayan flora and fauna, and ethnological writings are the historically traceable origins of Himalayan studies (Waterhouse, 2014a). Therefore, he rightfully deserves credit as a foundational scholar of Himalayan studies.

Hodgson’s presence in Nepal and Darjeeling represented the British East India Company’s effort to open the Himalayas as ‘a political frontier as well as a scientific frontier’ (Arnold, 2014:200), with the latter serving the interests of the former. The former was ‘a new and exhilarating frontier of colonial knowledge’ (Arnold, 2014:196) furthering the vision of the Himalayas as a ‘settlement of Europeans’ and as a point of inter-regional commerce supplying resources to ‘the starving peasantry of Ireland and of the Scotch Highlands’ (Arnold, 2014:200). The importance of the Himalayas to the British Empire was thus not merely territorial but also pertained to the livelihoods of the millions of its imperial subjects back home. Its intent for the northward territorial expansion inevitably engaged with Tibet as a frontier of the Manchu Empire. A seed of later geopolitical contentions with modern China was sowed during the time when Hodgson and his compatriots were stationed in the southern foothills of the Himalayas.

This legacy was further accentuated after the McMahon Line was drawn at the Shimla Convention in 1941 and the Sino-Indian border wars broke out twenty years later. With the Himalayas divided between post-colonial India and the new socialist China the region was transmogrified into ‘a peripheral hinterland of two irreconcilable civilizations’ (Rawat, 2004:23). From this point on, the diversity of the Himalayas and the advancement of Himalayan studies were overshadowed and hindered by the geopolitics of the two most populous nations on earth. Thus, the signature of Himalayan studies observably remains, to this day, Indo-Tibet-centric or Indo-China centric.

Today, Himalayan studies continue to suffer from the multiple aftereffects of the cartographical practices of India, China, and other modern, emerging nation-states in the Himalayas and their contiguous regions. Four of the aftereffects particularly echo through the pages of this book and in the greater field of Himalayan studies:

- Previously connected ethno-linguistic communities, ecological zones, trade routes, and pilgrimage passages are divided into the territories of modern nation-states (Bergmann, 2016; Diemberger, this volume; Saunders, 2010; Samuel 2005; Saxer, 2013; Shneiderman, 2015a;)
- The identity discourse of the modern nation-states’ territorial sovereignty minimizes local affective senses of place, dwelling, and boundary (Cederlöf, 2014; Drew, this volume; Coggins and Yeh, 2014; Horstmann, this volume; Li

Quanmin, this volume; Shneiderman, this volume; Smyer Yü, 2015; Turner et al 2015)

- The moral dichotomization of the ‘barbarians’ and the ‘civilized’ in the critiques of historical imperial encounters reduces the significance of ecologically-conditioned, and subsistence-driven interactions, network-building, and territorial expansions in the histories of multiple small-scale human communities and larger cultural systems (Giersch, 2006; Harrell, 1995; Scott, 2009).
- State effects are manifest in the territorial practices of national sovereignty, modernization programs, and local agentive responses in the borderlands (Diemberger; Drew; Li Yunxia; Michaud; Turner; Shneiderman, all in this volume).

In her chapter, Hildegard Diemberger states plainly that border formation between modern nation-states in the Himalayas is a geopolitical materiality that blocks historical trans-Himalayan commercial and religious flows from the southern Himalayas to the Tibetan Plateau in the north. In her findings, borderlands were not absent among the diverse human communities of the Himalayas but they were porous enough for inter-community trade, pilgrimage, and the flourishing of craftsmanship dependent on geographically distant, locale-specific raw materials. Trans-Himalayan trade routes sustained a diversity of human heritages, not necessarily as ‘free trade zones’ in the contemporary sense, but maintained among what Diemberger calls ‘a galaxy of communities’.

It could be said that borders, borderlands, territories, and sovereignties in the pre-modern world of the Himalayas were networked as a web of interconnected feudal states, kingdoms, and smaller-scale societies (Tambiah, 2013; Sturgeon, 2005). The Himalayas then were ‘a vast network of cultural and commercial relations’ (Bergmann, 2016:89). The modern states’ reshaping, reterritorializing, and geostrategizing of the Himalayas have segregated themselves, along with the nodes of this network, behind their borderlines. The displacement and the disintegration of ethnic groups and their ancestral land into two or three modern nation-states in the greater Himalayan region are common geopolitical factors that have altered livelihoods and patterns of human relations.

This volume initiates a re-visioning of Himalayan studies in the form of a trans-Himalayan study, acknowledging the eco-geological contiguity of the great Himalayas, emphasizing the ethno-historical integrity and/or connectivity of what we now refer to as frontiers, borderland communities, and trans-border livelihoods, and, finally, studying the inherent convertibility of the cultures, empires, civilizations, and modern states to the formation of the current geopolitical cartographies and borderlands of the greater Himalayas.

This proposed re-visioning of Himalayan studies coincides with the ongoing trend among scholars who call for the studies of world regions (van Schendel, 2002), reconceiving the Himalayas as an integral whole that is reshaped as ‘a multiple-state space’ (Shneiderman, 2010), and rejoins the highlands of Southeast Asia and Southwest China with the central Himalayas as a greater Himalayan region (van Schendel, 2002; Michaud 2010). In this regard, this re-visioning is premised upon High Asia, in general, as a continuous zone rather than as disconnected spaces at the peripheries of individual

nation-states (Bergmann, 2016:90; van Schendel, 2002). Border contentions between adjacent nation-states are not merely a matter of demarcating contended national sovereignties. Their foremost impact is the disruption or the discontinuation of the livelihoods dependent on inter-communal and interregional trade. Known as the 'Himalayan impasse' (Saxer, 2013:37; Dodin, 2013), this has interrupted the salt-grain trade, seasonal pastoral transhumance, and pilgrimage routes (Saxer, 2013).

To re-emphasize the eco-geological contiguity and the ethno-historical continuity of the Himalayas does not mean to disregard the geopolitical specificities of borders and sovereignties. On the contrary, it engages the concurrent disconnectivity and connectivity of the situation. While globalization emphasizes territorial porosity elsewhere in the world, it entails a different set of occurrences in the greater Himalayan region, namely, the solidification of borderlines, heightened border disputes, the trans-border and transregional movements of people, capital, and goods (van Schendel, 2005:38-68), growing borderland economies, and new livelihood strategies based on ancestral knowledge of local terrain, ecology, and the inter-ethnic and religious affinities that rely on ancient feudal alliances or treaties (Turner, Bonin and Michaud, 2015; Sturgeon, 2005).

If this book does innovate a 'new Himalayan scholarship', as hoped for by the Yale workshop organizers, it is a trans-Himalayan study or a trans-Himalayan perspective that finds its emphasis in the prefix 'trans-' signifying shifting frontiers, territories, flows, networks of trade and pilgrimage, and spatial engagements of empires and states in both historical and modern terms. The trans-Himalayan study experiment undertaken in this volume is thus a type of transboundary area study or a transregional study aimed at an ethno-culturally and ecologically coherent but geopolitically demarcated world area called for by van Schendel's process geographies (2002:658). It treats space, region, and area not as trait-based, fixed geographical containers of culture, ethnicity, and identity but rather as variables of socio-political spatiality.

### *1- The geographical coverage of the trans-Himalayas*

The geography of the trans-Himalaya region in this volume includes the central Himalayas (including their Northeast Indian, upland Bangladesh, Nepali, and Bhutani peripheries), Mainland Southeast Asia, Southwest China, and Northwest China including the Tibetan Plateau. These regions are found largely in the coverage of Scott's Zomia (2009), Michaud's 'the Southeast Asian Massif' (Michaud, 2010:48), Shneiderman's 'the Himalayan Massif' (2010), and van Schendel's 2007-Zomia extended from his 2002 version exclusive of Xinjiang and a large part of Central Asia (van Schendel, 2002; Michaud, 2010:188). This High Asia possesses 'spatial cohesion' (Saunders, 2010:3), an entwinement of eco-geological forces as well as translingual connections, religious affiliations, civilizational encounters, and commercial interactions. High Asia is thus an outcome of the co-production of natural forces and human affairs.

Again, the immediate goal of this book is not to build 'a new architecture for area studies' as proposed by scholars in the mid 1990s (CIS, 1997:1), but is an experiment of pulling together a wide range of historical and ethnographic cases studies centered on a High Asia that is deeply entangled with multiple imperial histories, modern state effects. There is also the sustained academic ambition to make this disciplinarily 'illegible' area

(van Schendel, 2002:652) as a coherent regional study. It is thus necessary to inform readers of how the region is understood in this volume.

Seen from the perspective of Vicente Rafael's notion of region, the spatial cohesion of the geographical areas discussed in this book is revealed through the use of vertical and horizontal coordinates. He writes, 'In any and all cases, the regional only comes into view comparatively: vertically related to that which seeks to maintain and subsume it, such as the empire, the nation-state, or the metropole; and horizontally in a relation of complementarity and conflict with other regions' (Rafael, 1999:1208). Translating Rafael's point into the multi-faceted context of this book, the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the modern trans-Himalayas pertain to the 'power-laden practices of mapping' (Rafael, 1999:1210). The formation of area studies could be said to be the result of the vertical understanding of areas and regions as formulated in the context of the geopolitics of the Cold War era. It has a traceable genealogy of power beginning with the polarization of the capitalist West and the communist East (Sidaway, 2011:3; Cumming, 1997:9). In this vertical line of thinking, the initial engineers of area studies and their governmental patrons defined areas by the geographical domains of given nation-states (Cumming, 1997:7-8; van Schendel, 2002:655). This past verticality in area studies has become a hindrance to the studies of the border-defying simultaneous occurrences of connectivity and disconnectivity, deterritorialization and reterritorialization, and porosity and impenetrability as they occur in the context of globalization and the new forces of change emerging from regional superpowers.

Within this multi-faceted context of the trans-Himalayas, the authors of this book work with horizontal, transboundary matters between communities, ecosystems, and states, which the vertical orientation of area studies in the past largely missed. Scholars understand very well that current changes in the trans-Himalayas, like 'a shaken kaleidoscope' (CIS, 1997:2), are transforming every human community into 'a global phenomenon' (ibid.3). We also recognize the role of revitalizations of past connectivity and enthusiasm for renewing traditional trade routes and networks previously terminated when state-created borderlines cut through them. In this regard, native senses of geography and strategies of resilient and sustainable livelihoods are the heart of the horizontal matters in this book.

## *2- Changing habitats and livelihoods in the trans-Himalayas*

The ecological conditions and the age-old historical networks between different human communities display the essence of horizontal connectivity in the trans-Himalayan region. The chapters and existing works of Cederlöf (2008 and 2014a), Michaud (2010), Samuel (2005), Shneiderman (2015), Turner (2010), Drew (2014a), Diemberger (this volume), and other contributors remind us of the extensive connectivity in both pre-modern and colonial eras. Elements of the natural world are not merely the building blocks of the physical earth, as things-in-themselves but condition human livelihoods through the uneven distribution of natural resources and climatic patterns seasonally predetermining the availability of inter-regional routes for trade and pilgrimage and controlling the timing of inter-state warfare. In her study of the Northeast Indian and Burmese Himalayas that made up part of British India's nineteenth century frontier, Cederlöf regards the lifeworlds of different ethnic communities as 'a protean

landscape' that shapeshifts with the monsoon (Cederlöf, 2014:22). Rivers lose their identity as natural streams of water, flooding indifferently beyond their banks, invading dwelling spaces, and crossing boundaries of all sorts. Likewise, the flooded landscape is no longer solid but a watery medium connecting one community to another. Water, as a natural elemental, determines human social and political behaviours. Commercially, the rising waterways become highways (Cederlöf, 2014:9) that reduce the 'friction of distance' (Scott, 2009:264) in inter-regional trade activities. At the same time, the indifferent watery mass makes the boundaries of ethnic communities and nation-states porous, opening up possibilities of external invasions or outward offensives. The changing natural conditions engendered by the monsoon dictate a range of human affairs. Both the solid landscape and the rivers become fluid.

In the central Himalayas, the horizontal connection of human affairs and environmental conditions is reflected in the altitudinally differentiated ecological zones and in the correspondingly differentiated niches that sustain human livelihoods. Each ecological zone of the Himalayas affords a unique livelihood niche but presents both environmentally conditioned sufficiency and deficiency of resources for the sustenance and the cultural continuity of the community. Such afforded niches include the salt-grain trade between Nepal and Tibet through Upper Humla (Saxer, 2013), the transportation of the ecologically specific plants and pigments used in Buddhist papermaking and icon-making in the area from the southern Himalayas to Tibetan Plateau (Diemberger, this volume), and the tea-horse trade between Southwest China and Lhasa and beyond (Ma and Ma, 2014). Each points to the resilience and the flourishing of the ecologically situated human communities and lies in their awareness of one another's environmental conditions as well as material abundance or scarcity. The horizontal knowledge of the environmentally-induced, economic comparative advantages and disadvantages found among different communities in the Himalayas materialized as trade networks, religious affiliations, and political alliances long before the advent of the modern era. Human affairs and ecological zones remain horizontally coterminous and in the face of challenges and frustrations, they generate new forms of connectivity.

A recurring theme in this book is the transformation of physical landscapes by economic globalization and state-sanctioned modernization programs and the ways in which individuals, households, and communities adapt to new modes of production and living. In this process the livelihoods of the Akha, De'ang, Han, Hmong, Indians, Nepalis, and Tibetans in this volume are undergoing complex changes. These case studies demonstrate how the transboundary modernization programs and the demands of consumer markets compound the pressures on human communities to diversify livelihoods, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. Reconstructed livelihoods are the results of what Michaud phrases as the 'strategy of selective modernity acceptance' (Michaud, 2011:1868) in reference to the enactment of agency as 'life projects' (Michaud, 2011:1867) that are embedded in local histories; they encompass visions of the world and the future that are distinct from those embodied by projects promoted by state and markets (Michaud, 2011:1868; Ortner, 2006:147).

To re-emphasize, the horizontal relationships between different ways of making a livelihood, Michaud's 'life projects', in the trans-Himalayas have become more complex and more complicated with the borders that cut through and divide them. This is where trans-border livelihoods engender what Sturgeon calls 'landscape plasticity' signifying

that livelihoods are ‘sites for maneuvering and struggle’ (Sturgeon, 2005:9, 25) in relation to land use, transboundary cultivation and harvesting of crops, while minimizing challenges and maximizing opportunities. Livelihoods in the borderlands are processual in nature. ‘The past is also a source of visions of how things could be revived or reworked in new contexts’ (Sturgeon, 2005:9, 121). In relation to this facet of livelihoods, the contributors practice an enactment of what Turner, Bonin and Michaud call for: ‘more inclusive, culturally specific, actor-oriented approaches to livelihoods that consider micro-scale social relations and their embeddedness within local socioeconomic, political, and cultural systems’ (Turner et al, 2015:6).

## II. ZOMIA FROM DICHOTOMIES TO SYMBIOSES

Van Schendel points out three factors that made Zomia institutionally illegible in area studies: Zomia lacked clear geo-ideological lines dividing the communist and the capitalist spheres of influence, was alleged to cover only the geographical margins of modern nation-states, and was not sanctioned by ‘the colonial experts’ and ‘the civilizational specialists’ who ‘were keen to make sure that any new area studies were built around the civilizational constructs to which they devoted themselves’ (van Schendel, 2002:654-656). Van Schendel is instrumental in increasing the legibility of Zomia by presenting these factors to his readers. Subsequently, James Scott’s *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009) and the contributions to the special issue of *Journal of Global History* entitled ‘Zomia and Beyond’ (2010) edited by Jean Michaud all point to the theoretical fecundity of Zomia. Zomia as a geographical ‘zone of refuge’ and ‘shatter zone’ (Scott, 2009:7, 22) for those running from the state is debated but its conceptual implications are abundant.

The most active responses to Scott’s Zomia are centered upon the pairs of opposites that frequently appear in his text, namely the hills and the valleys, the state and the stateless, and the barbarians and the civilized. In Michaud’s special issue, Sara Shneiderman points out that Scott’s dichotomized vision of Zomia does not speak to the complexity of the lived experiences of territory, sovereignty, and agency in the Himalayas. She sees the Himalayas as ‘a multiple-state space’ and ‘an agentive site of political consciousness’ rather than a ‘non-state space’, in which the subjects of different states constantly enact their agencies to maximize their existential, economic, and cultural interests (Shneiderman, 2010:28-29). In a similar vein, based on his ethnographic and historical studies of Southwest China including the Kham region of cultural Tibet, Patterson Giersch also expresses a view different from Scott’s, ‘Zomia was not always a place in which culture or political organization was shaped by refusal’ (Giersch, 2010:238) particularly in reference to local populations’ resistance and the varied imperial and state governing measures (Giersch, 2006:97-126). The responses from Shneiderman, Giersch, and other practitioners of borderland and transregional studies rest upon a recent historical fact that since the mid-twentieth century, there are no longer non-state spaces in Scott’s geographical Zomia.

Continuing from the works of Shneiderman, Giersch and others, Scott’s Zomia could also be read with a different emphasis, particularly where he addresses the symbiotic history of the hills and the valleys. The symbiosis of the opposites, in his text,

is possibly under-read and under-discussed among scholars. ‘By symbiosis’, he writes, ‘I mean to invoke the biological metaphor of two organisms living together in more or less intimate association—in this case, social organisms...It is not possible to write a coherent history of the hills that is not in constant dialogue with lowland centers; nor is it possible to write a coherent history of lowland centers that ignores its hilly periphery’ (Scott, 2009:26). To note, ‘symbiotic’ in Scott’s and this volume does not necessarily reflect its etymological emphasis on a relationship to the advantage of all parties involved. Symbiosis might also entail a set of relationships that are forcibly, inequitably or negotiably engaged but that eventually produce a new set of frontiers and new agentive dynamics of livelihood constructions. This re-emphasis of Scott’s symbiotic understanding of the hills and the valleys is meant to be a practical dissuasion from overuse of the ossified dichotomies and opposites such as civilized and barbarians, and state and stateless.

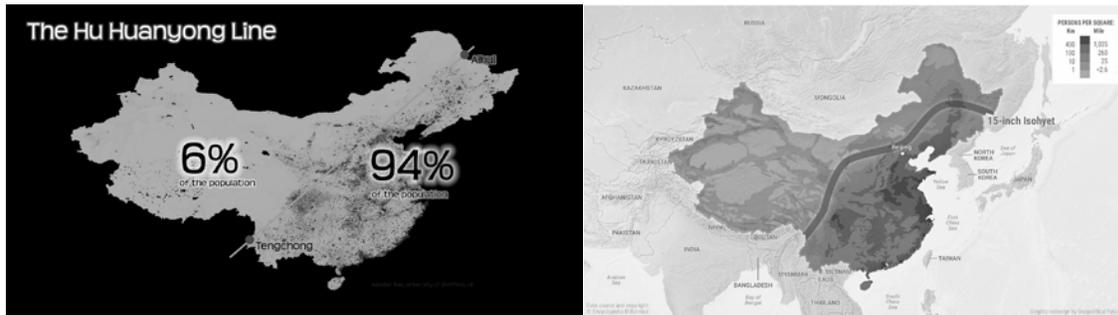
The discussion of horizontal connectivity in the trans-Himalayas can be extended with Scott’s symbiotic approach to include an emphasis on ecology and subsistence. From this perspective, the historical antecedence of the moralized understanding of ‘barbarians’ and ‘civilized’ was, in fact, the environmental conditions of household livelihoods and subsistence economies, which were the motive forces of material interactions and territorial conquests taking place between different human communities, kingdoms, and empires. In this process, ‘barbarians’ and ‘civilized’ were often reciprocally convertible on the grounds of livelihood-making and the translating of ecological differences into comparative advantages/disadvantages of subsistence economies. For instance, since this book situates the trans-Himalayas mostly within the geographical coverage of van Schendel’s Zomia, it should be noted that the border of the People’s Republic of China cuts across the entire region from the Guangxi-Vietnam border to the Xinjiang-Kyrgyz border. Its total length is approximately 10,800 kilometers (Nie and Li 2008:2). Inevitably China appears frequently as an imperial colossus in both Zomian and trans-Himalayan studies, and yet the critiques mostly remain on the moral scale of how Han Chinese viewed their neighbours as ‘raw’, ‘primitive’, and ‘uncivilized’ (Scott, 2009:x-xi; Michaud, 2010:195, 198; Harrell, 1995:3-38).

If we take an ethno-historical, eco-historical, and livelihood-focused reading of China’s territorial formation, it is not too difficult to see the current cartographical shape of China is mainly a co-creation of Mongols, Manchus, and Han Chinese. In the process, the former “barbarians” became the rulers and the civilized, while the former rulers became third or the fourth class citizens (Buell, 2003:160-161; Ge, 2015:233).

Undeniably, the human cost to the conquerors and the conquered alike were high (Lary, 2012:53; Buell, 2003:123); however, the imperial conquests and the reciprocal conversions of varied moral complexes deserve an ecological reading in addition to the resulting moral lessons yielded. Scott suggests emphasizing Owen Lattimore’s historical understanding of the Han-Mongolian-Manchu frontiers premised on ecology. Scott writes, ‘Having shown that “the Mongols” were not some ur-population, but instead enormously diverse, including many ex-Han, Lattimore saw the *hegemony of ecology*: “The frontiers between different types of soil, between farming and herding, and between Chinese and Mongols coincided exactly”’. Scott then continues, ‘Ecological niche, because it marks off different subsistence routines, rituals, and material culture, is one distinction around which ethnogenesis can occur’ (Scott, 2009:262) (emphasis mine). To

add, examples of the simultaneous ethnogenesis and frontier-genesis are amply found in western China and the Southeast Asian Massif. For instance, The ‘Kayah/Karenni tribe’ is exemplified by Scott’s work on political ethnogeneses in Burma (Scott, 2009:262). The genesis of the Hous (currently known as the Tu in Northwest China) traces back to Mongol soldiers and officers. Their hybrid modes of production continue to be found in the middle ground where steppe nomadism and plains agriculture meet.

Lattimore’s work on Asian frontiers is a civilizational history that emphasizes what Scott calls ‘the hegemony of ecology’. Lattimore articulates his keen sense of the ecological duality of nomadism and agriculture in the case of Han-Mongolian-Manchu imperial encounters. He begins with this duality in the physical borderlands separating Han Chinese, Mongols, and Manchus but soon sees a union of opposites in the movements of ecologically conditioned resources mediating the interactions of these three imperial players who shaped the territory of modern China. In their tug of war between wealth and mobility, while the Han Chinese lost wealth and territory to their nomadic counterparts, the nomadic empires lost their mobility to the wealth and lands of the Han Chinese (Lattimore, 1940:76-80).



Courtesy of the National Bureau of Statistics of China and Encyclopedia Britannica

In the mid 1930s, Lattimore’s contemporary, the late geographer Hu Huanyong, proposed the ‘geo-demographic demarcation line’ (Hu, 1935) of China, also known as ‘the Aihui-Tengchong Line’ or ‘the Hu Huangyong Line’. Drawn from Aihui (currently Heihe) in Helongjiang Province to Tengchong in Yunnan Province, the line cuts China into the Southeast half and the Northwest half. Besides its significance in demographic studies, the line could also be looked upon as an ecological line, a meteorological line, a civilizational borderland line, an ethnic fault line, and a nomadic-agricultural boundary line. The co-creation of modern China’s territory and borderlands by the three imperial polities could be metaphorized as an artificial rotation of the line with Tengchong as the axis, counter clockwise, westward until it reached Central Asia and laid flat on China’s current trans-Himalayan borderline. The duality of nomadism and agriculture, the ‘barbarians’ and the civilized, and the uplands and the lowlands was then territorially integrated into one single empire from which the modern Republics emerged. The emergence of modern republics and reinforcement of their territorial sovereignties was based on the imperially co-created cartography. Lattimore’s historiography of Asian frontiers and Scott’s symbiotic approach to dualities and opposites are invaluable to both microscalar and macrosalar approaches to the studies of the verticality and the horizontality of frontiers, territories, and livelihoods in the modern trans-Himalayas.

### III. THE TRANS-HIMALAYAS AS MULTI-STATE MARGINS

The social realities referred to in Scott's symbiosis of the hills and the valleys, van Schendel's 'flows' (2002:662-665), and Michaud's 'transnational social space' (2010:209) have encountered multiple state territorial effects and subsequent conceptual frustrations since the advent of the modern era. The question has evolved from 'who exactly needs a notion such as Zomia'? (Michaud, 2010:212) to suggestions of new conceptual puzzle pieces, e.g. 'Zomia thinking' (Shneiderman, 2010:293), 'trans-frontier economic space' (Giersch, 2010:219), 'selective connection' (Hathaway, 2014:156; Coggins and Yeh, 2014:9) and 'multiple and shifting articulations' (Bergmann, 2016:88). Although 'Zomia remains an awkward choice of name in relation to an enormous and vastly diverse reality' (Michaud, 2010:200), its evolving, diversifying conceptual deployments in the trans-Himalayan contexts are rebuilding trans-historical pathways interlinking the past transregional networks with their presently bordered counterparts and overlaying each with the other to affirm the trans-Himalayas as a diverse, interconnected but cut-up, world region. Our contributors' consistent cross-referencing between the past and the present conditions of their cases coincides with this trans-historical trend of articulating the ever-present but artificially suppressed or rechanneled trans-border and inter-regional networks as modern state effects discussed in the chapters of Diemberger, Drew, Horstmann, Shneiderman, Smyer Yü, and Turner.

This hermeneutics of state effects is congruent with Scott's reading of 'the relative uniformity of valley culture' that produces the 'centralizing' and 'flattening' effects to both valley and hill populations through the spread of valley-based modes of being, e.g. political practices and religious beliefs (Scott, 2009:155). Modern states are known for maximizing the leveling effect through modernization programs and global economic and geopolitical outreach. Valley crops are grown in the hills (Li Yunxia, Brendan Galipeau, this volume); the yields of hill crops are distributed in the global markets of the lowlands (Turner, Li Qunmin, Cheng, this volume); the affective and pre-modern senses of place and territory are re-emerging and re-articulated (Drew, Horstmann, Shneiderman, and Diemberger, this volume); and the traditional sense of place, the imperial ambivalence of territoriality, and the modern notion of sovereignty are so deeply entangled that they produce third or fourth options for livelihood reconstruction and the solidification of a modern nation's physical borders (Smyer Yü; Horstmann, this volume).

To be emphasized, the notions of the 'affective boundaries', the 'trans-Himalayan pathways', and the 'imperial vision' of frontiers respectively discussed in the chapters by Shneiderman, Diemberger, and Cederlöf in particular point to the divergent and yet entwined local vertical-horizontal coordinates and those of their imperial counterparts regarding place-making, region-making, and sovereignty-making as processes of imperial territorial engagements and of the re-membling of local affective 'territorial consciousness' (Shneiderman, this volume). The three authors separately illustrate how the enacted imperial visions of territories and boundaries cut through the integral homelands of different peoples and reorient the verticality of their political centers and the horizontality of their relations with neighbouring peers.

The territorial foundations of many modern trans-Himalayan nation-states rest

upon the visions of their imperial predecessors or former colonial masters. The historical momentum of the imperial territorial vision, although varied, contributed to the formation of modern state sovereignty as ‘the absolute territorial organization of political authority’ grounded in “a grammar of fixed boundaries and identities’ (Agnew, 2005:439-440). Postcolonial Indian and socialist Chinese sovereignties are the pertinent examples of the unilaterally defined sovereignty based in an imperial past. The trans-historical nexuses of British India with the Republic of India, and the empires of the Mongols and the Manchus with the modern Chinese Republics are respectively the ballasts of the two modern nation-states’ territorial sovereignties.

The clear-cut borderlines, actual or intended, in modern trans-Himalayas nullified the leniency of the past imperial indirect rules (Mantena, 2010:7; Giersch, 2006:33) and closed traditional interregional overland trade routes. They have reshaped the trans-Himalayas as what I would call ‘multi-state margins’, referring to the shattering of this once cohesive region into the territorial possessions of different nation-states. The trans-Himalayas stand as an integral eco-geological landmass; however, the past cohesiveness of human affairs has been recentralized toward new political centers or new paradigms of governance whose territorially oriented national identities have transformed the trans-Himalayas into multiple territorial frontiers and margins as separately owned or contended state properties. This plains-focused state effect translated the imperial sense of remoteness and frontier into the language of sovereignty, state territory, and development. Livelihoods and cultural identities have inevitably been destroyed and reconstructed. As shown in the chapters of this book, however, this does not mean that the borderland populations are only passive subjects of their states’ territorial redefinitions of their homelands; instead, their resilience, grounded in their histories and knowledge of their habitats, continues to empower them with active responses to the external forces of change.

## **TRANS-THEMATICS OF THE CHAPTERS**

The chapters in this book are parsed into two transregional and theoretical subthemes – ‘Territory, Worldviews, and Power Through Time’ and ‘Livelihood Reconstructions, Flows, and Trans-Himalayan Modernities’. These two trans-thematics of the book are centered upon an overarching intent to rejoin those differently demarcated massifs, areas, and zones based on our respective accounts of trans-Himalayan connectivity and disconnectivity. Although the threads that bind the chapters together are manifold and the routes of human and ecological connections are numerous, these two subthemes best illustrate a collective agenda to practice a trans-Himalayan study that acknowledges the factors of ecology, subsistence practices, trade routes, and inter-ethnic networks. Thus, this trans-Himalayan study is also geared toward the complex historical, ethnographic, and critical examinations of the local and transregional effects of state-building, economic globalization, religious networks, and modern geopolitics of territoriality.

### *1 – Territory, Worldviews, and Power Through Time*

In the studies of modern borderlands, the notion of territoriality is mostly concerned with what van Schendel calls the ‘spatial strategy’ of states (van Schendel, 2005:46) aimed at permanently demarcating sovereignty in the form of physical borders. In this sense, territoriality and sovereignty is co-terminus. Modern borderlands thus have a dual function of ‘fixity and motion’ (ibid. 41). Fixity is understood as an inherent part of constructing a territorial sovereignty as a containment of its subjects and exclusion of outsiders and consists of a set of restricted points and areas of contact with the outside world. Territoriality is, therefore, a nation-branding process involving cartographical, legal, physical, and geopolitical demarcations. It often goes against globalization represented by a compression of space that is popularly welcomed as the emergence of ‘global villages’. However, in the actual borderlands and frontiers of modern nations, states’ legal and geopolitical endeavours to solidify their physical borderlines with their neighbours surpasses their efforts to loosen the inter-state, cross-border movements of people, goods, and capital. To a large extent, the legal definition of sovereignty slows down or closes the cross-border flows that existed prior to the establishment of the modern sovereign nation and that are now deemed ‘illegal’ or ‘illicit’ (van Schendel and Abraham 2005) by modern national and international legal definitions. This is a top-down outlook on the geography of national peripheries and frontiers. We are, therefore, compelled to reconceptualise borderland in both modern and pre-modern terms regarding the encounters of smaller-scale human societies with empires and nation-states, traditional transregional networks of trade, pilgrimage, and environmental flows as well as of trans-historical, pan-Asian religious traditions, such as Buddhism. All of them have cut across ethnic, imperial, and state boundaries for centuries. This is the point where we group together the chapters by Jean Michaud, Sara Shneiderman, Dan Smyer Yü, Hildegard Diemberger, and Gunnel Cederlöf to address the historical and modern formations and conceptualizations of border, territory, transregionality, modernity, and their varied consequences.

The chapter by Jean Michaud opens the modern historical perspective of the book by illustrating the ethno-demographic composition of the Southeast Asian Massif and by narrating the encounters between kingdoms, and modern empires and nation-states. It demonstrates the complexity of ethnic diversity and pre-modern governing systems, and how local encounters with larger empires and global forces of change reshaped their traditional modes of being. Scott’s thesis of Zomia stands out in Michaud’s chapter, highlighting the geographical fact that prior to the mid-twentieth century the Southeast Asian Massif was a ‘shatter zone’ or a zone of refuge for runaways from tribal feuds and imperial invasions. Plains-based empires, feudal states, and, later, modern nation-states pushed the smaller ethno-linguistic groups up into the hills and the whole region underwent an agrarian transition from subsistence farming to industrial agriculture.

While Michaud focuses on the livelihood changes, Shneiderman begins her chapter with the question – ‘How do Himalayan peoples conceptualize “territory”?’ Based on her case study of the formation of modern Nepal and its recent restructuring process in the period between 2006 and 2015, her inquiry is multi-scalar, meaning that the scale of territory pertains not merely to the state’s biography of the nation but also to the individual and the communal narratives and lived experiences. If we use her conceptual terms, the sense of ‘the properties of territory’ is based on ‘the practices of territory’ that vary from one ethnic homeland to another and from one historical period to

another. Based on Shneiderman's fieldwork in Dokkha, Banke, and Mustang, these three districts of Nepal show a history during which they had divergent transregional, national, and religious gravitations embodied in their relationships respectively with Tibet, the British East India Company, and a Buddhist orientation. Thus, for centuries, they were relatively autonomous to one another. It was only in recent history that they were integrated into modern Nepal. Shneiderman convincingly presents a case of territorial consciousness that is shaped with what she calls the 'administrative boundaries' and the 'affective boundaries'. The former signifies the state's structuring of villages, towns, and regions into administrative units as the national integration process. The latter pertains to complex kinship and social relations, human settlement patterns, and eco-geological constituents such as rivers, mountains, and forests. Territory in Shneiderman's Nepali case is thus understood in multi-scalar terms and in varied historical and living contexts.

Territoriality in Dan Smyer Yü's chapter is discussed as both a state claimed property and a geopolitical contention in the context of the Tibet issue. It is an explicit top-down question of territorial belonging in respect to modern sovereignty but irrespective of what Shneiderman calls the 'affective boundaries' embodied in dwelling spaces and the ecological habitats that sustain them. By adopting van Schendel's perspective on modern nation-state's spatial engagements in the forms of 'cartographic surgery' (van Schendel, 2005:38-68; 2002:652) detached from but having an impact on the contended physical borderlands, Smyer Yü re-emphasizes that religion-based territorial conflicts and ethnic identity reclamations are not new in the Himalayas and that the ongoing Sino-Indian cartographical slicing of the Himalayas is a process of reterritorialising the geographical margins of traditional Tibetan territory. While the territorial claims of China are based on the imperial maps of the Mongol and the Manchu empires, India builds its territorial entitlement mostly upon the British colonial cartography of the Himalayas. Smyer Yü then argues that the recent devolution of the Dalai Lama's political role through secularist reform among Tibetans in exile is an example of what Talal Asad calls the 'agentive complexity' (Asad, 2003:12, 25) in which religion and its secularity are instrumentalised in the geopolitics of Sino-Indian territorial disputes but with Tibet largely excluded. The territoriality of Tibet from its ethno-linguistic and religious definition is thus replaced with a bilateral state territorial consciousness preoccupied with the intent to solidify the disputed borderlines insensitive to the eco-geological and affective consciousness of territory on the ground level.

Hildegard Diemberger's chapter subverts the cartographical rigidity of modern nation-states in the Himalayas. Her historical study of Buddhist book artefacts and papermaking across the Himalayas between Tibet and Nepal demonstrates that the trans-Himalayan geographical space was interconnected and compressed differently in history. Although 'the friction of terrain' (Scott, 2009:xi, 45) was bigger than that of its modern counterpart, human societies were nevertheless linked together with trade, warfare, and transregional religious affairs. The historical pathways and routes of these inter-ethnic and inter-regional human affairs attested to the existence of the dense networks of human societies in the pre-modern Himalayas. The borderlines of modern nation-states rather block or restrict these extensive webs of connectivity found in pre-modern times as shown in the case studies of Shneiderman and Smyer Yü. Complex connectivity and the compression of space in this regard, is not an invention of the current iteration of globalization. It had prior interregional reality in all cardinal directions. Diemberger's

transregional vision of the Himalayas consists of movements and networks of people and objects in what she calls ‘a galaxy of communities’ rendered from S. J. Tambiah’s concept of the galactic polity and Anna Tsing’s reconceptualization of marginal and remote places filled with routes and flows connecting them. Diemberger’s chapter culminates in her articulation of the trans-Himalayan region in the twenty-first century as a ‘transnational virtual space’ for the preservation and movements of heritages, which opens a new scholarly frontier for trans-Himalayan studies.

In her chapter, Cederlöf follows the routes of the British expeditions from Bengal to Burma and the southern tip of Yunnan, China. Similar to Diemberger’s assessment of the premodern connectivity between Nepal and Tibet, Cederlöf’s findings show the existing transregional trade corridors and networks before the arrival of the British who were surveying these interconnected highlands. Although she does not situate her historical work in a Zomian context as Michaud does, Cederlöf could be seen to be inadvertently demonstrating van Schendel’s thesis of Zomia as a map of flows tracing handmade goods from Yunnan and Burma, commercially appropriated waterways, and the British mercantile expeditions. These flows took place along what Cederlöf calls the ‘age-old routes’ woven together with lines of movements and dots of diverse ethno-linguistic communities. The Chinese overland and maritime Silk Roads struck the fancy of the British whose mercantile and colonial ventures eventually led to territory-based conflicts in the region. Her historical account illustrates the early evolution of the modern cartographical divisions of the highlands contiguous to both the Himalayan Massif and the Southeast Asian Massif as shown in the works of Michaud, van Schendel, and others.

## *2 – Livelihood Reconstructions, Flows, and Trans-Himalayan Modernities*

The chapters in this subtheme continue to address the varied conceptualizations of borderland but with an emphasis on livelihood reconstruction in the context of trans-border and transboundary modernization processes in the southern Himalayas, Southeast Asia, and Southwest China. The authors engage contemporary issues under different borderland circumstances. Borderland in this regard is understood as both the international border of the sovereign state and the cultural boundary of a given ethno-linguistic group within the sovereign state. When borderland is conceptualized in either framework, its dynamics are both historical and modern. Historically the trans-Himalayas, inclusive of the Southeast Asian Massif, are multiple contact zones of regional and local ethnic communities, kingdoms, and empires. The works of Edmund Leach and James Scott, for instance, illustrate the encounters of hill peoples with lowland civilizational systems and modern state effects (Leach, 1954; Scott, 2009). On the topic of the evolutionary/revolutionary changes of livelihoods in the trans-Himalayas, especially in the contact zones of Southeast Asia and Southwest China, we see the rigidity of state borderlines but we also recognize the continued but varied trans-border movements of people, goods, and capital based on premodern trade networks and the existing dwelling patterns of borderland communities. Thus, borderlands in this section of the book can also be understood as the ‘persistent frontiers’ (Giersch, 2006:9) and the ‘landscape plasticity’ (Sturgeon, 2005:9, 25) pertaining to livelihood making and remaking based on the historically existent ‘galaxy of communities’ discussed in

Diemberger's chapter. In the same time, we also recognize modern borderland dynamics in ecological and environmental flows entwined with agentive responses to economic development, human religious practices, place-based affect, and spiritual emotion as shown in Georgina Drew's chapter.

Drew's chapter is centered upon the mutual embodiment of religion and landscape but entangled with development, modernization, and modernity. The case of her ethnographic and discursive inquiry is the Tehri Dam on the Ganga River, a massive hydroelectric project in the Garhwal Himalaya of Uttarakhand State, India. The Ganga River, according to her Hindu interlocutors, is a living goddess; therefore it embodies her divine life force. Its affective and spiritual functions point to a collective subjectivity among Hindus that the Ganga River or rather the deity in the watery form is what Drew documents as 'a bridge to heaven'. Modern development projects such as the Tehri Dam radically transform the local landscapes animated with intensely felt divine forces and religious emotionality. This is where Drew lays out her arguments for multiple 'trans-Himalayan modernities' in their regional manifestations and the developmental landscapes with what she refers to as the 'terrains of subjectivity and agency'. Grounded in her ethnographic work, her critical conversations with the perspectives of Maria Kaika, Jean Michaud, Hugh Raffles, and Anna Tsing, reveal the conflicting logics of development in the arenas of nation-building centred on material progress, environmental discourses, and place-based religious affect. The hydraulic politics of the Tehri Dam illustrate the divergent outcomes of development and varied agentive responses from different local constituencies: the state's nationalist agenda for building a stronger India, religious spokespersons' declaring the death of the river deity, and environmentalists' proposition for sustainable ecologies. The natural state of the trans-Himalayan flow of the Ganga River is not only artificially regulated but is also conceptually diverted into varied agentive visions of progress and social reconfiguration as the indexes of multiple contested modernities. The theoretical implications of her discussion on trans-Himalayan modernities not only underscore one of the overarching themes of this book but also present a new conceptual frontier of trans-Himalayan studies regarding the plurality, interactivity, and multi-contexts of agency, development, modernisation, and spiritual and humanitarian meanings of place and ecological flows.

The chapter by Alexander Horstmann presents fresh horizons for the studies of the international humanitarian aid programs in the case of the residents who are caught in the violence of protecting or reclaiming their autonomies in the Thai-Myanmar borderlands. Based on his long years of fieldwork in Myanmar and Thailand, Horstmann argues that humanitarianism in principle could be neutral but, in practice, is partial. The partiality comes from what he calls the 'politics of everyday humanitarianism' denoting the local actors' intimate connection with their international compatriots who channel funding into the refugee camps in the borderlands via international humanitarian organizations and church groups. Thus the local-global nexus brings about what Horstmann calls the humanitarian economy that not only financially sustains the borderland refugee communities but also substitutes the state's role in economy, health, and education, especially on the Thai side of the border. In Horstmann's account, the international connectivity and economic growth of Mae Sot, a border town, benefits from the humanitarian economy as it hosts the funds and personnel of various international organizations and their staff members. Another front of Horstmann's chapter

ethnographically shows that the Karen conflict continues a set of religious contentions between Christian and Buddhist constituencies as one of the legacies of British rule and American missionary endeavours. The borderlands in Horstmann's account are both refugee settlements and the entry points of international forces of change.

Yang Cheng's chapter is a study of relocated farmers and the transformation of their farming landscape into Chenggong, a new district of Kunming as a global gateway of China's 'One Belt One Road' initiatives extending China's economic might into Southeast Asia and South Asia. The newly completed high-speed train station in Chenggong is expected to connect Yunnan with Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and eventually India. This irreversible urbanization process fully covers the fertile soil of the farmland with the asphalt streets and concrete buildings of universities, shops, and real estate complexes. The meagre earnings of urban livelihoods motivate the former farmers to regain their social respectability by resuming their farming life. Yang recounts how an increasing number of them have begun renting farmland within the commutable radius of fifty to ninety kilometres mostly for vegetable growing catering to restaurants, hotels, and supermarkets across China and beyond. In the theoretical front, Yang argues that this type of tenant-entrepreneurial farming, resulting from state-corporate development, is what she calls a 'circular livelihood' in which the ancestral farmland is no longer available while the farming skills afford these former farmers to resume their farming livelihood with added cash values. This economically motivated livelihood reconstruction entails the movements of people, capital, and goods. This transregional and trans-ethnic theme of livelihood reconstruction is similarly captured in the chapters by Brendan Galipeau, Li Quanmin, Li Yunxia, and Sarah Turner. Borderland populations are caught in the dichotomy Michaud calls 'modernizing or perishing'.

Galipeau's chapter on Tibetan wine making in Shangrila (Gyalthang) is a complex case of how wine as a local commodity intertwines the cultural and commercial meanings of place, identity, and what he calls the 'niched living' in the ongoing process of the economic development in northwestern Yunnan. In his ethnographic documentation, Tibetans in the area, especially Catholic Tibetans, successfully identify their new economic niche in individual household wine making and marketing. According to his extensive fieldwork, it is a case of successful new livelihood building during which local Tibetans fully take advantage of the state sanctioned viticulture development in the region for economic gain. In marketing their small-production wines, the Catholic Tibetans associate their wine with Shangrila's paradisiacally perceived landscape and the French missionary wine making technique brought to the region in the nineteenth century. Galipeau recaps the marketing strategy of the Tibetan wine makers with Demossier's idea of *terroir*, or the taste of place. Both place and identity in the case of the Catholic Tibetans are simultaneously grounded in their ancestral landscape and reoriented toward the wine countries of their European Catholic progenitors. The dual significations of place and identity are thus the bases of the niched living or the livelihood reconstruction of the Catholic Tibetans as winemakers. To them, the places of their biological ancestors and European religious forebears have joined together as the landscape of their new livelihood in both tangible and intangible terms. In the midst of the physical transformation of their ancestral landscape, the Catholic Tibetans are able to retain the affective elements of it, including the cross-continental Catholic history, for rebuilding their livelihood.

Li Quanmin's chapter presents a unique case of the De'ang tea-offering rituals as a way of sustaining cultural memories and strengthening community solidarity. Its uniqueness lies in Li's ethnographic account that the De'ang are less entangled with the outside world compared to other ethnic communities discussed in this book; however, the external pressure on their livelihood is shown in how Buddhism is re-evoked as the moral compass for sustaining their livelihood and cultural integrity. Through her ethnographic observation of three annual De'ang Buddhist festivals, Li documents the importance of the tea offering rituals to the community's moral health and prosperity, and, therefore, the increase of merit provided to the dwelling landscape of the De'ang. The high point of the chapter is Li's coinage of 'merit-landscape', which is interpreted from assorted theoretical angles, such as those of Tim Ingold, Dan Smyer Yü, and James Gibson. In her concerted articulation, merit-landscape signifies a gift exchange process between the tea growers and the Buddhist ritual masters. The sequence of the merit transfer is circular, meaning that the tea offered to the masters is eventually transformed into the merit that the gift-givers accumulate and the blessings that the landscape receives. In this case, the integrity of the native landscape of the De'ang is preserved through their tea offering rituals. Unlike other ethnic communities whose landscapes are being reshaped by China's modernization, the De'ang are able to preserve their traditional ways of sustaining their lifeworld.

Approximately two hundred kilometres away from the De'ang along the Yunnan-Lao border, Li Yunxia has done her fieldwork among the Akha for over a decade. Her chapter narrates how the Akha enact their agency to optimize economic opportunities in rubber planting and trading. Li situates her work in the context of globalization and China's outward modernization programs toward its Southeast Asian neighbours. Adopting Aihwa Ong's perspective, Li looks at the economic dynamics of the borderlands as a type of globalization favouring local populations' 'experiments of freedom' (Ong, 2006). Borderlands are thus the meeting grounds of the diversely expressed agencies and differently positioned institutions of border residents, external investors, states, and the transregional market. The agency of the Akha on both Lao and Chinese sides is largely expressed in efforts to indigenize the modernizing forces from afar. These forces of change compel the Akha to reclaim or reuse the ancestral lands repossessed by the Lao and the Chinese states respectively. While they optimize the economic gains from Yunnan Province's relocation of its rubber plantations to the Lao side, the Akha on the borderlands have learned to negotiate with their states for economic freedom of mobility and profitability.

The last chapter of the book by Sarah Turner builds on the idea of frontier as a landscape that is frequently related to as an object of resource extraction. She finds that, in the case of the Sino-Vietnamese borderlands, frontier in this sense is intertwined with the very concept of borderlands. Critiquing, as others have done, earlier conceptions of frontier such as that of Owen Lattimore, which emphasized the frontier as a point of encounter between so called 'civilized and uncivilized' populations, Turner points instead to the malleability of frontiers, be it culturally, economically, or politically, taking on board Pat Giersch's idea of the frontier as a 'middle ground' where indigenous and non-indigenous peoples meet. This is where Turner presents her case study of the black cardamom trade of Hmong and Yao in the Sino-Vietnamese borderland and how Hmong and Yao cultivators enact their agencies to find the balance between commercial

opportunities and the preservation of their cultural traditions. As she puts it, the Sino-Vietnamese borderlands are “a transnational space” of livelihood reconstruction and commodity trading.

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In many ways the chapters in this book are expansions of our contributors’ existing works that respectively underscore four trends in transregional studies and borderland studies in the highlands of Southeast Asia and Southwest China, the Himalayas, Northeast India, and the Tibetan Plateau. First, an inclusive, processual geography of the greater Himalayas is in practice. It factors in the human and natural moving matters, e.g. imperial encounters, trade, religion, and water, which signify multiple complex local, regional, and global nexuses (Michaud 2010; Shneiderman 2010; Smyer Yü 2015; Turner, Bonnin and Michaud 2015; Samuel 2005; Cederlöf 2014; Drew 2014a). Second, it is becoming clearer that trans-border livelihood changes in the region are mostly consequences of the modern nation-states’ territorial endeavour to harden their physical borderlines and of their differentially implemented cross-border modernization programs (Shneiderman 2015a; Michaud and Turner 2016; Horstmann 2014; Turner and Pham 2015). The former presents a geopolitical reality of highly controlled border crossing, while the latter subjects borderland communities to the reconstruction of their livelihoods making them increasingly dependent upon the state-corporate development agenda and the fluctuation of market demands locally and globally. Third, the studies of ethnic and national identities in the region have discernibly shifted toward the territorial and environmental affect of given human societies rooted in their culturally coherent ancestral homelands but are currently fragmented into the frontiers and borderlands of different modern nation-states (Shneiderman 2015b; Smyer Yü 2014). Forth, trans-Himalayan or Himalayan studies are becoming ever more publicly engaged and geared toward policy implications in the global arenas of climate change, transboundary hydraulic politics, preservation of cultural and linguistic heritages, border disputes, humanitarian discourses, and conflict resolution (Drew 2014b and 2015; Horstmann 2014; Cederlöf and Sivaramakrishnan 2014).

Between the book workshop in summer, 2015, and the publication of the book, four new Himalayan research centers were inaugurated on the campuses of our workshop participants, namely the Center for Study of Buddhism and Himalayan Nations at Qinghai Minzu University, the Pan-Himalayan Center for Cultural and Religious Research at Sichuan University, the Tibet Himalaya Initiative at the University of Colorado, Boulder, and the Center for Trans-Himalaya Tourism and Culture Studies at Sichuan Leshan Normal University. Five research centers in Europe and North America initiated a formal collaborative alliance with the Center for Trans-Himalayan Studies at Yunnan Minzu University. Himalayan studies are obviously mushrooming on a global scale. The chapters in this book are our continued effort to co-catalyze with our peers more interdisciplinary, inclusive, and innovative studies of the greater Himalayan region.

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