

June 2017

**Review of *Religion and Modernity in the Himalaya* edited by
Megan Adamson Sijapati and Jessica Vantine Birkenholtz**

James G. Lochtefeld

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Recommended Citation

Lochtefeld, James G.. 2017. Review of *Religion and Modernity in the Himalaya* edited by Megan Adamson Sijapati and Jessica Vantine Birkenholtz. *HIMALAYA* 37(1).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol37/iss1/28>



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The author thus drives home a key contribution of linguistic anthropology: namely, the ever-shifting nature and boundaries of “languages” and their co-production with people within wider social and political formations.

Theresia Hofer on *Signing and Belonging in Nepal*

of NSL in Chapter Four makes an important contribution to the study of gesture and homesign systems. It also sheds new light on debates regarding second sign language acquisition in relation to the so-called ‘critical window’ of language development in (deaf) children. Taken altogether, this book succeeds well in addressing its main audiences of students and scholars of linguistic anthropology, Nepal anthropology, and international sign language and Deaf Studies.

While the author is meticulous about placing her encounters in the historical period of the “People’s War,” the concluding Chapter Six considers post-2006 developments. Alongside changes to the political structure in Nepal since then have come transformations in local language ideologies and practices. For instance, the diverse signs for “mother” mentioned earlier (and other concepts) were again permissible, widespread even, now sometimes perceived to be “ethnic signs.” The author thus drives home a key contribution of linguistic anthropology: namely, the ever-shifting nature and boundaries of “languages” and their co-production with people within wider social and political formations.

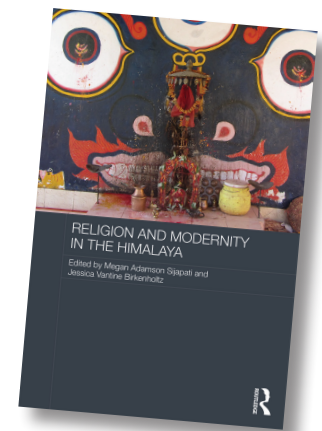
A new challenge for a Deaf *jat* emergent during the author’s most recent fieldwork was the move away from language to territory as a key issue in the post-2006 “classificatory

moment” for ethnic and social groups in Nepal (cf. Shneiderman, Sara. 2013. “Developing a Culture of Marginality: Nepal’s Current Classificatory Moment.” *Focal: Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 65: 42-55). And yet, a new “territory” in the “Deaf World” (Lane, Harlan. 2005. “Ethnicity, Ethics, and the Deaf-World.” *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education* 10(3): 291-310) might be in formation, at least for urban Deaf Nepalis, through Deaf-led international tourism and trekking operations as well as, hopefully, through Deaf Nepalis’ own increased mobility.

I recommend this book very highly, both to readers of *HIMALAYA* and to colleagues and friends in the field of Nepal and South Asian studies. Enjoyable on every page, I was especially gripped by the ethnography and in-depth linguistic analysis, which are beautifully married in this slim, readable gem of a text. Gallaudet University Press published this book and is the home press of Gallaudet University, the American Sign Language-medium University for the Deaf in Washington DC, founded in 1864. This choice of publisher, together with Hoffmann-Dilloway’s scholarly efforts, in my mind prompt us all to appreciate the infinite strength, beauty, and creativity of the world’s many, as yet largely unknown, sign languages.

Theresia Hofer is lecturer in social anthropology and Wellcome Research

Fellow at the University of Bristol as well as a research associate at the University of Oxford’s Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, UK. She has written an ethnography and various articles about Tibetan medical practitioners and memories of Communist reforms in the Tibet Autonomous Region, China, and curated Bodies in Balance at the Rubin Museum in New York in 2014. She has since moved into studying the newly emerging Tibetan Sign Language in Lhasa and associated language ideologies and novel social formations.



Religion and Modernity in the Himalaya

Edited by Megan Adamson Sijapati and Jessica Vantine Birkenholtz.
New York: Routledge, 2016. 191 pages.
ISBN 9780415723398.

Reviewed by James G. Lochtefeld

In October 2014, an errand took me to a Haridwar branch of India’s State Bank. While waiting to complete my

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James G. Lochtefeld on *Religion and Modernity in the Himalaya*

business, I watched how the staff interacted with their customers and with each other. The computerized bank operations were little different than those in the USA, but what struck me was how Indian patterns of hierarchy and deference were embedded in these everyday bank transactions. It was an “Indian modernity,” and sparked the epiphany that developing societies become “modern” in their own particular way. An added corollary to this would be that such variations on modernity are even more pronounced in mountain settings, given these regions’ historical isolation, ethnic variation, and distinctive cultural patterns.

Religion and Modernity in the Himalaya, an edited volume by Megan Adamson Sijapati and Jessica Vantine Birkenholtz, skillfully addresses the interplay between religion and Himalayan modernity—or rather modernities, since this means different things in different settings. In her introductory essay, Sijapati notes that the notion of modernity is “polysemic and fluid” (p. 6), but that one important feature is not only the technological and infrastructural changes usually associated with modernity, but people’s awareness of these changes, even if they are yet not fully present. If “modernity” is a state of mind, then simply knowing that something is possible changes one’s world.

The book’s eight essays examine this topic in Himalayan regions in five nation-states—India (three essays), Nepal (two), and Pakistan, Bhutan, and Tibet (one each). Given this geographical breadth, it was only natural that I wondered, when I first perused the table of contents, how they might form a meaningful whole. At the end of the day, two primary factors make this collection cogent, coherent, and valuable.

The first factor—which one expects in any edited volume—is an effective introduction. Sijapati thematically frames the collection by highlighting the ideas of peripherality and emplacement. Given these regions’ geographic isolation, it is not surprising that they are peripheral—that is, at the margins of their larger societies. Yet this same marginality reinforces a strong sense of local identity independent from those far-off central authorities, since these larger cultural “margins” are in fact the local cultural “centers.” This awareness of regional distinctness feeds into the notion of emplacement, which is described as being aware of “the importance of place to religious practitioners understanding of themselves and of the divine and material worlds around them” (p. 10). Emplacement highlights the importance of local contexts in understanding the interaction between Himalayan religion and modernity.

To be sure, Himalayan “modernity” is often patchy and is always context-driven, in that local factors determine which elements are present. Luke Whitmore’s essay on the Kedarnath temple—set in a dead-end canyon surrounded by sheer mountain cliffs—highlights this uneven development. The town lacks basic infrastructure such as reliable electricity, and yet burgeoning demand for site access means that multiple helicopter companies fly people there. Kedarnath’s particular “modernity” directly reflects the push and pull of local circumstances.

Aside from its strong introduction, the volume’s other virtue lies in each essay’s insistent and particular ethnographic focus. For example, Katherine J.L. Miller uses schools among the Hunza to illuminate Ismaili identity in Pakistan’s Gilgit-Baltistan region. In the same way, each of the other essays engages the intersection between religion and modernity in a particular place, and then uses that as a lens to illuminate broader cultural and historical questions.

The book is divided into three primary sections: Space, Place, and Material Modernities (three essays); Gods and Place: Migration, Frontier, and Identity (two essays); and Education, Governance, Official Discourses, and Religion (three essays). The introduction works through each of these categories in discussing the book’s overall plan,

though the last seems a bit of a catchall. In the book itself, each of these sections is separated only by a title page. Given that these essays were divided into three discrete sections, a brief introduction at the start of the each section could have provided a little more of an interpretive framework, even if this might have entailed some repetition from the general introduction.

Yet in the bigger picture this is only something that I would have liked, rather than something that was desperately needed. On balance, these essays vividly document and convey lived religion in diverse Himalayan regions. At least at the cultural level, South and Central Asian modernities tend to be religiously tinged, even though religious concerns may not be a particular person's primary concern. Still, this makes these examples of modernity very different from Euro-American ones, which are almost always assumed to be secular.

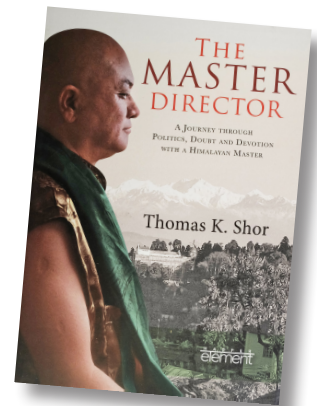
These Himalayan modernities can produce both predictable and unexpected consequences. Nadine Plachta documents how "modern" ideas about women's status and abilities—absorbed from Euro-American visitors as well as the larger marketplace of ideas—are gradually changing monastic education to give Tibetan Buddhist nuns greater agency. Here one finds—as one might expect—that modernity is running against tradition, but it can just as easily reinforce it. Holly Gayley

recounts how desktop recording technology has given "T-Pop" artists the agency to record and transmit Buddhist messages independent of the Chinese-controlled media. Whereas making a film or sound recording used to require significant capital resources, new technology has democratized this process—as one also sees in Andrea Pinkney's description of the Garhwal pilgrimage pamphlets, which are increasingly locally produced. In some cases, the encounter with modernity has such unexpected results that it generates completely new insights. Elizabeth Allison's essay on waste management in Bhutan highlights sharply differing ideas about what constitutes "garbage." Bhutanis assiduously refrain from dirtying or polluting certain places, since this would be disrespectful to local deities and could provoke their anger, but they have no hesitation about littering with plastic candy wrappers, which come in a variety of decorative "modern" colors.

Some of the text's essays have been cited here as examples; this implies no disregard for those not mentioned. In every one of these essays, the insistent focus on a particular context yields valuable insights on the connections between religious processes and Himalayan space, culture, and identity.

James Lochtefeld is Professor and Chair of Religion at Carthage College in Kenosha, WI. His past and ongoing work has

largely focused on Hindu pilgrimage and pilgrimage sites in north India, and especially in Uttarakhand state.



The Master Director: A Journey through Politics, Doubt and Devotion with a Himalayan Master.

Thomas Shor. Noida, India: Harper Element, 2014. 294 pages. ISBN: 9789350297315.

Reviewed by Alex McKay

As so many Western visitors have discovered, the neat division of the Buddhist and Hindu traditions into separate categories swiftly dissolves on South Asian ground. So, too, can any simplistic construction of authentic/good and inauthentic/bad religious practitioners seem woefully inadequate, particularly in the case of what the headline writers love to call India's "Godmen." These colourful and charismatic spiritual teachers embrace paradoxes and manifest contradictions that challenge Western perceptions of the ideal