Imagined Geographies in the Indo-Tibetan Borderlands: Culture, Politics, Place

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Swargajyoti Gohain teaches Sociology and Anthropology at Ashoka University, India. She has published widely on borders, state, culture, politics, and Tibetan Buddhist communities in Northeast India and the Himalayan region.

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Imagined Geographies in the Indo-Tibetan Borderlands: Culture, Politics, Place is an ethnography of culture and politics in Monyul, a Tibetan Buddhist cultural region in west Arunachal Pradesh, Northeast India. For nearly three centuries, Monyul was part of the Tibetan state, and the Monpas – as the communities inhabiting this region are collectively known – participated in trans-Himalayan trade and pilgrimage. Following the colonial demarcation of the Indo-Tibetan boundary in 1914, the fall of the Tibetan state in 1951, and the India-China boundary war in 1962, Monyul was gradually integrated into India and the Monpas became a Scheduled Tribe. In 2003, the Monpas began a demand for autonomy under the leadership of Tsona Gontse Rinpoche. This book examines the narratives and politics of the autonomy movement regarding language, place-names, and trans-border kinship against the backdrop of the India-China border dispute. It explores how the Monpas negotiate multiple identities to imagine new forms of community that transcend regional and national borders.

"During the last years we have seen a number of new publications on Northeast India that is based on solid empirical - historical and ethnographic - research. This is a highly welcome development. With Imagined Geographies in the Indo-Tibetan Borderlands we get another great addition. The book concerns a geopolitically highly sensitive place and addresses questions of large scholarly and public interest. It will certainly attract a larger readership."

Professor Bengt G. Karlsson, Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University

"This remarkable ethnography takes us deep into Monyul – as a place, a political construct, and a way of life. Gohain’s rigorous, sensitive research results in a timely interpretation of how ‘Himalayan’ identities are produced in and beyond Arunachal Pradesh. Essential reading for students of borderland lives everywhere."

Professor Sara Shneiderman, University of British Columbia