

## Comptes-rendus

Michael Farmer, *An Atlas of the Tibetan Plateau*, Leiden/Boston (Brill), 2022. x+393 pp. [Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, Volume: 50].

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**T**his beautifully produced detailed atlas of the Tibetan regions which have been incorporated into the PRC represents the output of many years of dedicated work (beginning in the 1980s), and provides an invaluable resource for scholars of Tibetan Studies. The book is large format, and there are one hundred and twenty full page topographical maps in colour, showing locations, natural features and cultural landmarks, as well as modern roads and other developments. Roughly the first half of the maps cover different sections of the entire area, while most of the remaining maps are larger scale, providing more detail for the areas of greater population. The first map gives the key to all the numbered maps, while each of the smaller scale maps outline and number any areas which are given a detailed map. It is therefore easy to navigate from the smaller to the larger scale. Following the specific area maps, there are a number of thematic maps of the entire region over double pages, illustrating population densities, the location and lineage affiliations of gonpas (*dgon pa*), climate classification, and satellite views. As far as can be determined, little of this detailed information has previously been easily accessible.

For scholars such as myself who lack a geography specialism, access to an atlas enabling the identification of locations is a boon. Much depends on the indices, and these have clearly been given considerable thought. The Introduction provides considerable background to the linguistic complexity of Tibet and the decisions that were taken, including ideas for future geo-linguistic research, particularly the preservation of local variant place names. The indices themselves take up some 240 pages, beginning with an Index of Administrative Areas, divided into listings for Tibetan and Pinyin, in each case noting the Hanzi also, and the area capital. The longest Index is that of Place Names, again giving listings for Tibetan and Pinyin, this time including the County, Prefecture and Province, and a

feature code (noting the natural feature or settlement or building type). Clearly, the intended audience is primarily international scholars: the maps give phonetics of the Tibetan in Roman script, with Pinyin in brackets. The indices order the Tibetan lists under the phonetics used, although they also give the Tibetan language, so it is not too difficult for an international scholar to confirm the actual Tibetan. Of course, one limitation of this approach is that for obvious reasons, the atlas will be less useful for Tibetans unfamiliar with romanised phonetics of Tibetan. It would have been ideal if the maps could also have included the place names in Tibetan language, and if there had been a Tibetan index in Tibetan alphabetical order. However, it is hard to see how the Tibetan could have been fitted additionally onto the maps, and an additional index would also have meant that the atlas could not have fitted a single volume. Perhaps a useful future project for younger scholars would be to create a Tibetan language version?

The book comprises rather more than the maps – apart from the technical information on methodology, the Introduction contains an analysis of the extraordinary changes in the landscape over the past twenty to thirty years. Evidence is presented of changes to the natural environment, as well as the radical expansion of infrastructure such as roads, airports, and railways, although some of this infrastructure appears to have more of a symbolic than practical purpose (e.g. high altitude highways which could not safely maintain expected traffic flows). Perhaps of greater current impact are huge new building projects, including the development of new towns and forced re-settlement schemes. The impact of tourism, mostly from China, and other economic development is also considered; as well as the building (or re-building) of Buddhist monasteries and religious structures – but here we see official interventions also, with sites such as Larung Gar having faced repeated waves of destruction. Much is achieved through a comparison of satellite data from different periods. Harsh colonialist impositions are witnessed, the loss of Tibetan architecture and settlements to "grid-style social management" and "comfortable housing", and building structures which may even possibly be prisons, provoking a comparison with the internment camps in Xinjiang. The construction of gonpas, chörtens, and other religious features, some with creative new forms, also demonstrates Tibetan cultural resilience, along with the concomitant involvement of Chinese converts to Tibetan Buddhism. The author has a particular interest in these expanding gonpas, and has attempted a provisional analysis of gonpa lineages and distribution, with reference to the four associated thematic maps mentioned above.

In short, the Atlas is an important and handsome contribution to Tibetan Studies, which should help to stimulate further study of contemporary Tibet. For all scholars of Tibetan literature and culture, the book will doubtless remain an essential reference work for generations to come.

