

Imaginarities of Ladakhi modernity

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This paper seeks to identify and map the trajectories of contested imaginaries of modern Ladakh. While giving due attention to local forces, actors and processes, primary attention will be given to ways in which the production, shaping and dissemination of these imaginaries are connected with supralocal processes, contemporary as well as historical. Specifically, the encounter with modernity (understood here as always emergent, a process and project) produces different cultural, social, political and economic effects in different regions and countries. Here, in particular the articulation of religious and developmentalist visions for Ladakhi modernity will be analyzed through the examination of written and oral materials. Different strands of influence from different parts of the world (Tibet, India, “the West”), as well as the trajectories, the media and agents of their insertion into Ladakhi public discourse, will be traced historically. Specific imaginaries of Ladakhi modernity must be understood as particular crystallizations of these multiple streams and elements, shaped by local as well as exogenous processes and forces. Acknowledging the strategic deployment of such visions of modernity for the mobilization of domestic and international audiences, serving particular political and economic interests, the paper sheds light on the shaping, meaning and salience of imaginaries of modernity in Ladakh, offering a contribution to the anthropology of modernity in Tibetan societies.