



8-2023

Book Review: Michael Farmer. *An Atlas of the Tibetan Plateau*. Volume 50 in Brill's Tibetan Studies Library series

Constance Wilkinson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr>



Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wilkinson, Constance (2023) "Book Review: Michael Farmer. *An Atlas of the Tibetan Plateau*. Volume 50 in Brill's Tibetan Studies Library series," *Comparative Civilizations Review*. Vol. 89: No. 89, Article 17. Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol89/iss89/17>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Comparative Civilizations Review* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

**Michael Farmer. *An Atlas of the Tibetan Plateau*. Volume 50 in Brill's Tibetan Studies Library series
Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022**

Reviewed by Constance Wilkinson

An Atlas of the Tibetan Plateau is a masterful melding of science and art created by British architect and cartographer Michael Farmer. Based on extensive contemporary data painstakingly woven from satellite imagery, the intrepid and apparently indefatigable Mr. Farmer has, over decades, produced a unique and indispensable reference work.

Mr. Farmer's *Atlas* offers a panoramic *Garuda*'s-eye view¹ of the vast Tibetan Plateau. The largest and highest plateau in the world, it is largely an inhospitable area inhabited by humans for 40,000+ years and is the birthplace of an ancient and unique civilization that has long magnetized the curiosity of outsiders. Through Farmer's work, a detailed understanding of the characteristic geography of this remote region is available for the very first time, with a potential to enlighten and inspire a wide readership.

Indeed, a plethora of socio-political and scientific ramifications can be inferred from the information collected here that affects us all, due to glacial warming and desertification harming a complex system which affects billions of people in countries downstream of its water sources. Farmer's *Atlas* belongs in the hands of cartographers, bibliophiles, librarians, comparative civilization-ists, policy wonks, international relations gurus, international-boundary negotiating diplomatists, anthropologists, archaeologists, Tibetologists, Sinologists, revisionists, visionaries, climate change theorists, students, teachers, free-lance curmudgeons, and even adventurous CCP cadres on holiday in a mysterious, exotic tourist destination, a region recently re-named, "*Shangri-La*."

An Atlas of the Tibetan Plateau is a sustainably-produced object that is both beautiful and beautifully made. It was published as part of the remarkable series, *Brills Tibetan Studies Library*, edited by Henk Blezer, Alex McKay, and Charles Ramble. At 5.32 lbs. and 393 pages, it qualifies as a weighty tome, yet carries profound moral weight as well, insofar as it documents the deleterious effects that domination by its dominant neighbor have had on the unique civilization and culture of Tibet.

Almost impossible to put down, this *Atlas* turns out to be, well, not a pot-boiler but an actual page-turner, thus achieving a wondrous star quality this reviewer had not previously associated with atlas-reading.

¹ Garuda, a powerful bird-like creature important to both Hindu and Buddhist mythology

Yes, it's true. Here I am, waxing lyrical about an atlas, shamelessly singing its praises. And by so doing, I do mean to praise not only what Mr. Farmer has done, but how he has done it.

To be continued ...