

Notwithstanding the demands that such theory and history make on the reader, this is an engaging book with abundant empirical detail to invigorate, should attention start to flag. A case study on gendered consumption, intriguingly entitled “Calling all “spendthrift chicks,”” looks at the relationship between e-commerce, discourse and value change; another, poignantly and succinctly entitled “Sustaining cruel optimism in precarious labor,” looks at the function of Reality TV talent shows as a form of hyper-commercialized television programming; a further case study on cybernationalism (“From ‘iron and blood’ to ‘little pinkos’”) looks at the normalization of aggressive nationalist behaviour online, and provides an important corrective to perceptions of how “normal” it really is.

The book covers a lot of ground: a political economy of the film industry; an analysis of journalistic practice in news media; a sustained reading of a filmic paean to the socialist worker; a case study of the online discourse on parenting. With so much going on, some old hits are inevitably given a re-run (we perhaps do not need another accounting of SuperGirl or the “soft power” expansion of PRC media overseas). And some important developments like the shift in the production and consumption of media products to digital streaming and the popularization of demotic *wanghong* do not get a showing.

The one thing that falls somewhat flat in my view is the concluding chapter. Anticipating a tour de force fusing of conceptual and empirical strands and a compelling (re-)statement of how history and politics elucidate a theory of the media, the author surprised me by proposing to “problematize the way in which the international media bring history into their reporting of the present” (p. 179), specifically through a critique of reporting on the purported resonances between Xi and Mao. This decision struck a false note for me because the framing of this proximate issue is neither especially prevalent, impactful nor revealing; an unvariegated “international media” is not particularly useful analytically; the preceding sophisticated theorizing simply does not need “international media” as a foil; and it is a distraction from the book’s primary locus, i.e., media in China. Despite this qualm, this is an important and accomplished book that should grace the shelves of everyone with an interest in how to understand the complexities of Chinese media and its intersections with history, politics, political economy and society.

JONATHAN SULLIVAN
jonathan.sullivan@nottingham.ac.uk

Trading Caterpillar Fungus in Tibet: When Economic Boom Hits Rural Area

EMILIA ROZA SULEK

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Every springtime, Golok, a high-altitude region in Qinghai, turns into a bustling market place that attracts hundreds of people from other regions of Qinghai and neighbouring provinces. They come to gather or trade caterpillar fungus (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*), a fungus long used in traditional Chinese medicine that has in recent years become a sought after commodity on the Chinese market. The price for this natural resource, which is endemic on the Tibetan plateau, has soared and, thus, created

substantial wealth in a formerly poor rural area predominantly inhabited by Tibetan pastoralists. Emilia Sulek's monograph, *Trading Caterpillar Fungus in Tibet: When Economic Boom Hits Rural Area*, is the first and only book to examine this extraordinary phenomenon through a detailed ethnography based on fieldwork conducted between 2009 and 2011. The author throws the reader right into the middle of the bustling season of gathering and trading. She uses evocative language to depict a remote pastoralist region as a place in gold rush fever during the months of May and June. Sulek then turns the readers' attention to the Tibetan pastoralists who inhabit Golok and sets out to investigate how the people, on whose land the digging is taking place and who have the usufruct rights to it, are involved in the practice and how this affects their livelihoods. Sulek demonstrates "that this economic boom has led to a profound transformation of the local society and life realities" (p. 17) and "that the money derived from caterpillar fungus is used by pastoralists to *develop* their region" (p. 20). Arguing that "development" and "modernity" are contingent, she draws extensively on critical development literature – notably by James Ferguson, Arturo Escobar and Wolfgang Sachs – and addresses the power constructions inherent in such terminology. She states that Golok's pastoralists "bring to life their own vision of modernity and make their own choices. [...] their choices can agree or disagree with modernity as the state envisions it" (p. 25). Sulek prefers to use the less loaded term of "transformation" to describe the impact the economic boom has on the pastoralist of Golok.

After this sound theoretical framing, she firmly turns her focus to the pastoralists. Marking them as the protagonists of her ethnography, she structures the book accordingly. She introduces Golok and its people in the first chapter. In chapter two the readers get to know the daily organization and labour involved in digging for the fungus and are introduced to the intricate interlinkage of local pastoralists and diggers from outside Golok. Chapter three turns to the biological life of caterpillar fungus and its market career. Chapter four and five deal with the market and its agents that emerged due to the fungus and the value ascribed to it. The interactions between traders from outside Golok, pastoralists as diggers or traders and others is a complex one and shows Golok at the centre of a network of relations that is new only in its extraordinary scale. Chapter six explains how and why state legislation was introduced at a relatively late stage in the boom and how pastoralists of Golok and state agents, most of them inhabitants of Golok, interact. The following chapters on cash transactions, on wealth accumulation and on spending or investing remain firmly rooted in the context of pastoralists whose daily routines revolve around animal husbandry, only interrupted by the short spring season of digging caterpillar fungus. Through the latter their main source of income has shifted to funds derived from leasing their land to diggers and engaging in the digging and selling of caterpillar fungus. Formerly poor pastoralists have become affluent in a matter of years and use the funds to improve their lives and the society and environment of their region.

Sulek has constructed the chapters as autonomous units that can be read in any order. Each chapter illuminates an aspect of the economic boom, its transformative power for the pastoralists, and their interaction with the state, with people from other places and other ethnic groups. Thus the author creates a kaleidoscope that brings to the fore a multifaceted and multilayered ethnography. However, this structuring at times disrupts the flow of the narrative, through ethnographic detail that seems unnecessary. Nevertheless, Sulek excels in describing two main stages where the drama of the economic boom takes place – the market and the pasturelands – and highlights how the pastoralists of Golok are not passive onlookers, but shapers of new opportunities. Her detailed ethnography leaves no doubt that pastoralists

are agents of their own fates – though they had little or nothing to do with the emergence of the boom. In her conclusion she provides a clear and succinct analysis of the economic boom and how pastoralists have capitalized on it. Though the monograph's main focus is not on the historical and political context of Tibetans as an ethnic minority of the People's Republic of China, her conclusion makes explicit that the caterpillar fungus economy was at times “envisioned as a field of competition and contest between differently empowered actors and not as a place of neutral economic activities and relations between equal partners or groups” (p. 255).

In sum, this is a well-crafted, outstanding ethnography. Sulek was able to get access to and give insight into a complex field of market dynamics that operates at the margins of the legal and sometimes in opposition to the state, and that touches on the intimate realm of individuals' money management decisions. Her monograph is an unique and remarkable contribution to the anthropology of Tibet, to regional studies of current China and Central Asia and to economic anthropology at large. It will serve well in undergraduate and graduate classes through its accessible language that gives insight into the economic and social mechanisms set in motion when a new form of income becomes available in a rural, formerly poor region.

LILIAN ISELIN
lilian.iselin@relwi.unibe.ch

Tales of Hope, Tales of Bitterness: Chinese Road Builders in Ethiopia

MIRIAM DRIESSEN

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Tales of Hope and Bitterness is a wonderful read. Over the course of its two hundred pages, it consistently displays that rarest of combinations: an important and topical subject, a solid evidentiary base, and a combination of trenchant detail and seamless analysis that only the most gifted ethnographers manage to pull off.

Miriam Driessen's book is unusual in multiple respects. Much of the emerging literature on China–Africa interactions focuses on China's impact on Africa and presumes that China is the economic superpower with the upper hand; some focuses on African agency in dealing with China. Very little literature focuses on the motivations for, and experiences of, those Chinese actors who go to Africa. *Tales* addresses this lacuna, and is firmly trained on the Chinese technicians, engineers and foremen who sojourn in Africa to build its infrastructure, the disappointments they encounter, and the ways in which African actors sidestep, divert and resist Chinese managers on the very infrastructure projects that employ them. *Tales* is based on months of fieldwork in Tigray, Ethiopia, following the construction of a road that a major Chinese SOE had subcontracted in large part to some five private Chinese companies, a provincial SOE and a few Ethiopian companies. Given that the dominant discourse on China and Africa presumes that the former is wealthy and strong, while the latter is poor and weak, Driessen finds, somewhat counterintuitively, that Chinese managers and technicians in Africa are, more frequently than not, lonely, frustrated, and feel themselves hard done by the lack of African gratitude for all that they do to aid