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***'Tibetanness' under Threat? Neo-integrationism, Minority Education and Career Strategies in Qinghai, P.R. China.* ADRIAN ZENZ. Leiden and Boston: Global Oriental, 2013. xvi + 341 pp. \ \$133.00. ISBN978-90-04-25796-2**

Andrew M. Fischer

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Overall, the author makes his case convincingly and in considerable detail. The fact that his argument about external comparisons and support is so important makes this a timely book. It will be welcomed by scholars and observers of China's ethnicity and political mobilization among them, including people in various disciplines, such as ethnology and politics. The author writes well in a clear and accessible style that avoids the denseness found in some academic work. In general, he adopts a balanced approach that takes account of various conflicting viewpoints. This is a valuable addition to the literature in a field that has more than its fair share of controversies, and I recommend it strongly.

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'Tibetanness' under Threat? Neo-integrationism, Minority Education and Career Strategies in Qinghai, P.R. China

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It has become an outdated cliché to suggest that good anthropological work on contemporary Tibet is lacking. Quality social science scholarship on Tibet, based on in-depth fieldwork in Tibet and an increasing engagement with the political economy of China, has become increasingly rich since the 1990s. However, not many works carry the potential of injecting fresh perspectives into the polarized understandings of development in Tibet as either domination/subjugation or liberation/progress. Adrian Zenz offers this potential in his book, *'Tibetanness' Under Threat? Neo-integrationism, Minority Education and Career Strategies in Qinghai, P.R. China*. With a focus on the ever-sensitive subject of education, the book strikes a nuanced balance between the agency–structure dualism of Han Chinese dominance versus Tibetan-led initiatives that subvert or counter this dominance. In particular, it offers a rare insight into the dynamics of minority education that will unsettle the dominant view that Tibetan-medium education has been eroded since the “golden years” of Tibetanization in the 1980s.

The focus of the book is specifically on Qinghai, a province that is mostly composed of Tibetan areas and contains a minority Tibetan (largely Amdo) population. It was one of the epicentres of the protests that broke out across the Tibetan areas of China in spring 2008. Qinghai was also the site of vigorous Tibetan protests in 2010 against a new education initiative proposed by the government to promote a decidedly Sinicizing version of “bilingual minority education” into the schools of the minority education system – “bilingual” in this case meaning the increased use of Chinese as a medium of instruction. This initiative reinforced the dominant perspective, adopted in even some of my own work (for instance, *State Growth and Social Exclusion in Tibet*, NIAS Press, 2005), that Tibetan-medium education has been on the defensive since the 1990s, particularly since the early 2000s when assimilationist strategies received a boost under the Hu–Wen administration.

Zenz challenges this perspective with troves of empirical evidence based on extensive fieldwork from 2006–08, combined with statistical data up to 2013. His evidence points to a quiet bottom-up revolution of Tibetan-medium education in Qinghai that has been gaining momentum since the early 2000s, mostly through the initiatives and

innovations of Tibetan educators and local government officials. These initiatives have often been in the face of institutional resistance and provincial or national policies working in counter directions. The expansion of Tibetan-medium education has been in both breadth and depth. First, many Tibetan secondary schools have been implementing so-called “pure” Tibetan tracks in which most subjects are taught in Tibetan as the written and spoken medium of education. Second, tertiary minority departments in Xining have greatly increased the number of majors taught in Tibetan.

These insights alone force us to reconsider our understanding of recent protests, including the recent wave of self-immolations that started in 2011, as signs of increasing vigour rather than of desperation. Indeed, literacy in Tibetan is probably much higher now among Qinghai (and especially Amdo) Tibetans than it was at any time in the past. (Literacy was very low in the so-called “Old Society,” as it was elsewhere in China prior to the 1950s, and it remained low in Tibetan areas during the Maoist period despite the introduction of modern schooling.)

The other major contribution of this book is the analysis of the career strategies and employment prospects of graduates from both Tibetan and mainstream Chinese-medium systems. The mood here is more sombre, as the expansion of Tibetan-medium schooling runs up against the erosion of preferential employment policies for minorities. Zenz makes the important observation that whereas minority education and career concerns operated in synergy in the late 1970s, 1980s and much of the 1990s, they have since diverged as a result of the termination of the job allocation system in Qinghai in the early 2000s. The divergence has resulted in an employment crisis among this rapidly expanding cohort of young educated Tibetans, who are severely disadvantaged in the new competitive job allocation system that privileges Chinese fluency and ascribes little or no value to Tibetan education.

Some preferentiality nonetheless survived this reform through niches of public employment that require proficiency in spoken and/or written Tibetan, or even degrees in Tibetan-medium majors. Interestingly, Zenz demonstrates how graduates from Tibetan-medium programmes, while facing a more restricted range of employment possibilities within these limited niches, are subject to less competition within this restricted range than Tibetan graduates from mainstream Chinese-medium schools or programmes, who face much tougher competition across a wider range of employment possibilities. Zenz therefore argues that language requirements in public employment should be expanded in order to ensure adequate employment for these graduates, and thus to preserve the long-term viability of Tibetan education in general.

Despite some criticisms of my own more macro-structural analysis of these issues, Zenz’s analysis is broadly in line with arguments I have made about the exclusionary dynamics of this interaction of education and employment systems (e.g. see “Educating for Exclusion,” CRISE working paper, Oxford, 2009; or *The Disempowered Development of Tibet in China*, Lexington, 2013). He questions the sustainability of the impressive expansion of Tibetan-medium education in Qinghai given the lack of supporting employment conditions. Indeed, one must question whether the expansion is to a certain extent an institutional overhang, driven by the generational momentum of a cohort of educators, but without the political economy foundations to sustain itself past the immediate needs of staffing the expansion of the Tibetan education system over the next ten years or so. This is the great danger of current advocacy in China regarding the ending of the minority nationality policies, as spearheaded by Ma Rong and others, in that such advocacy might well undermine a whole range of powerful positive developments led by Tibetans themselves, thereby reinforcing Tibetan disaffection with Chinese rule. Zenz’s work is

timely given the importance of reorienting policy towards a more synergistic support of such Tibetan-led developments.

Other fascinating details discussed by Zenz include: Tibetan students strategically switching between the Chinese and minority education systems; the “Sinicized in-betweens” of Tibetan society; Tibetan discourses of backwardness and development; the informalization of public employment; and corruption in government job recruitment (likely one of the most comprehensive accounts on this important subject in Chinese minority studies). He also discusses how the political dynamics created and promoted by the central government have led to obstacles in applying minority nationality legal frameworks in China.

Overall, the value of his work is immense for our understanding of contemporary Tibet, minority nationality policy in China, and the anthropology of education more generally. It highlights the importance of preserving some degree of preferential employment policy – even if not in the institutional form of the “iron rice bowl” that Zenz deems to be unrealistic and irretrievable – but at least some degree of legal and administrative measures to assure that those who govern and teach communities of largely unilingual Tibetans are proficient in speaking the local dialects and literate in the written language of these communities. Insisting on this would serve as a crucial means to sustain the education revolution already well underway.

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Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development

EMILY T. YEH

Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013

xvi + 322 pp. \$75.00

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Spoiling Tibet: China and Resource Nationalism on the Roof of the World

GABRIEL LAFITTE

London and New York: Zed Books, 2013

x + 204 pp. £16.99

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There has been a long controversy as to whether the regime imposed by the People’s Republic of China in the ethnic Tibetan regions it controls and regards as its own amounts to colonialism. Debates on political taxonomy – especially when such emotionally laden terminologies are involved – are rarely infused with facts, and positions seem determined by ideologies, projections and personal subjectivities. Yet, leaving the “c-word” aside, if there was a need to establish a phenomenology of the socio-political situation in contemporary Tibet – with whatever name we might want to qualify it – then this need has now been perfectly satisfied in the form of Emily Yeh’s *Taming Tibet*.

Indeed, the all-round picture that emerges from Yeh’s work evokes a perfect example of alien rule-cum-exploitation, disturbingly akin to any classical colonial rule by a 19th-century European power. All constituent elements are there: military and para-military subjugation, the cultural alienation of the locals in their own environment, a direct control of the primary resources by non-locals with privileged access to state power, the same outsiders *de facto* (i.e. not *de jure*) controlling the economy, and the manipulation of historic antagonisms to keep the local majority population in