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# Review of "In the Land of the Eastern Queendom: The Politics of Gender and Ethnicity on the Sino- Tibetan Border" by Tenzin Jinba

Qjudi Zhang

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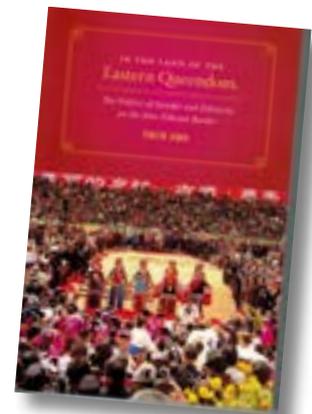
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risks to be passing statements about the momentary present. This seems problematic in the way Middleton maps the trajectory of tribal movements and weighs it so heavily such that, according to him, it downsized the movement for a separate state known as Gorkhaland. The claim that the Gorkhaland movement failed (p. xix, 3, 46-7) seems to contradict his ethno-contemporary since one of the ethnologies with which the communities of the Darjeeling hills have become well versed with is the act of balancing. It is, however, not impossible to conceive of this balancing act as actualized by the Gorkhas or by the aspiring tribes who have one foot planted on tribal identity claims and the other foot on the claim of a separate state for the ethnic Gorkhas. Such courses of action can be framed in tune with what Middleton calls the ethno-contemporary, especially when we know that the claims of tribal identity are principally raised by the Mongoloid-*matwalis*. It deserves mention that to be a Gorkha and to be a tribe both as an idea and in practice are not contradictory to each other. Unlike Nepal, where the *janajati* upsurge might have emerged in contradistinction to the Hindu-Nepali identity, tribal identity in contemporary Darjeeling does not contradict Indian Nepali/Gorkha identity. Gorkha and tribal identities complement each other if the term Gorkha is more *matwali* oriented in the cultural sense and Darjeeling-India oriented in political terms. The social formation of Darjeeling is

different from Nepal and the trajectory of the *janajati* movement and tribal identity movement of both places are again markedly different from each other.

Overall Middleton establishes the urgency of developing a new conceptual framework to explore the concept of tribe and the process of tribal identification in the post-colonial period. We have been told decades ago about the colonial fixation of the term tribe in the context of India (Béteille, André. 1986. "The concept of tribe with special reference to India," *European Journal of Sociology* 27(2): 296-318). Middleton instead problematizes the concept of tribe as a postcolonial category and offers an engaged critique of late liberal logic of tribal recognition in India. Instead of suggesting any concrete steps as to how tribes in the post colonial period should be recognized in official terms, he cautions that wholesale changes—more in the Fanonian fashion of 'analyze and destroy'—in the tribal recognition process may be reckless and utopian (p. 223). However, the overall critique that he maintains throughout the book may prove to be helpful in offering some directions towards such a reformulation.

*Swatahsiddha Sarkar is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology, University of North Bengal, Darjeeling (India). His research focuses on Gorkha ethnicity.*



***In the Land of the Eastern Queendom: The Politics of Gender and Ethnicity on the Sino-Tibetan Border.***

**Tenzin Jinba.** Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2014. 188 pages. ISBN 9780295993072.

**Reviewed by Qiudi Zhang**

Tenzin Jinba's book *In the Land of the Eastern Queendom: Politics of Gender and Ethnicity on the Sino-Tibetan Border* focuses its discussion on the Suopo community's claim of being a "legendary matriarchal kingdom" (p. 3). He begins his monograph by sketching the queendom dispute between the Suopowa and the Danbawa, who are both part of the Gyarong region, from where Jinba himself hails, that spans the Kham and Amdo regions in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (T.A.R.) and Sichuan Province in China. Similar to many other groups in the Himalayas, such as the Thangmi and the Humla peoples in Nepal, the Suopowa negotiate their group identity within both the Tibetan and PRC contexts for cultural and economic benefits.

In his book, Jinba presents how Suopowa's marginalized position in the Tibetan community in fact provides them with mobility and allows them to become 1) worthy Chinese citizens by cooperating with local party officials, 2) authentic Tibetans by claiming their dialect as the ancient Tibetan dialect, and

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Qiudi Zhang on *In the Land of the Eastern Queendom: The Politics of Gender and Ethnicity on the Sino-Tibetan Border*.

3) distinctly Gyarongwa because of the high status of Suopo women at the same time. As Jinba argues, “marginality can also be an opportunity to act as agents,” as it “connotes difference, uniqueness, and, therefore authenticity in certain circumstances” (p. 6). Interestingly, all three identities in fact interconnect with one another. For example, the Suopowa’s claim of having higher status for women in the household fits well with the PRC agenda since its establishment of granting equal status for women. But in doing so, they not only have proven themselves to be different from other Tibetan groups, but also righteous Chinese citizens.

For the Suopowa, the queendom dispute not only brings political benefits, but also economic benefits through tourism (p. 68). Through “self-feminization,” the Suopowa wish to compete with the Kham, who attract tourists because of their advertised “hypermasculinity.” As Jinba argues, the Suopowa believe that “the feminine queendom model is much more viable and appealing” to tourists (p. 68). Jinba effectively draws examples from the representations of other minority groups such as the Suopo and the Mongols in China to discuss gender perceptions, particularly masculinity in China. He elaborates on both the state and popular perception of the masculinity of minority groups. According to Jinba, the Chinese state has a negative connotation that these minority groups are “backward,”

“wild,” and “uncivilized”; yet in popular culture, their “wildness” has a positive implication of masculinity, a quality that the Han younger generation lacks. However, both perceptions have led to the sexualization of minority groups, including the Suopowa, which has been forcefully imposed by the state or voluntarily cultivated.

The queendom dispute is important as it reflects the diversity and complexity of the Himalayan region. Such diversity is visible in the languages, traditions, and political contexts examined in the context of the Suopowa. It is also important to take note of the diversity within the Tibetan community more generally. With the “inevitably political” issues regarding Tibet, it is crucial to recognize that the Tibetan population is not a monolithic group, and thus we must “examine the effects of regional variations in government and the different political units in various eras of Tibetan history” (Alex McKay. 2003. *The History of Tibet*. London and New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 14). Such diversity is reflected in the multi-layered conflicts addressed in the queendom dispute including inner-group conflicts in the Suopo community, the identity dispute within the Zangzu or Tibetan population, and the state-society clash in China. Jinba’s word choice of Zangzu, a word used by the Chinese state, instead of “Tibetan,” is also effective as it reflects the state

influence of the queendom dispute in the context of China.

Jinba’s study would have been enhanced with an examination of the dispute in a historical context by presenting previous interactions or conflicts within the Gyarong region, or between the Suopo and the Danba communities. It would also be interesting to explore similar disputes over constructed histories within seemingly unified communities elsewhere as *In the Land of the Eastern Queendom* helps us to better understand the complexity of ethnic or group identities not only in the Himalaya region but in other parts of the world.

*Qiudi Zhang holds a MA degree in East Asian Studies from Yale University and is currently living and working in Kazakhstan.*