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Review of *Tibetan Environmentalists in China: The King of Dzi* by Liu Jianqiang, translated by Ian Rowen, Cyrus K. Hui, and Emily Yeh.

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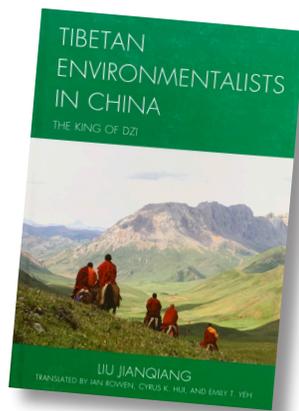
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***Tibetan Environmentalists in China:
The King of Dzi.***

Liu Jianqiang. Translated by Ian Rowen, Cyrus K. Hui, and Emily Yeh.
London: Lexington Books, 2015. 350 pages. ISBN 9780739199732

Reviewed by Alexander R. O'Neill

In Liu Jianqiang's *Tibetan Environmentalists in China: The King of Dzi*, the Tibetan Plateau emerges as a central stage for conservation, corruption, and resistance in modern China. Jianqiang pulls his readers into Tibet's politically charged terrain, exploring nuanced aspects of Tibetan culture and its response to Chinese-state developments. Narrative vignettes string readers through this ethnographic journey, which will appeal to broad audiences interested in human-environment relationships.

Tibetan Environmentalists expands upon a series of field investigations conducted by *ChinaDialogue* editor Liu Jianqiang between 2005 and 2009. During his tours, Jianqiang became enamored with Kekexili Nature Reserve—a protected area and UNESCO World Heritage Site located in northwestern Qinghai, China. Wildlife trafficking and illegal mining plagued this protected area. However, during interviews, locals expressed hope in the harrowing efforts of six men who dedicated their lives to reversing the landscape's degradation. These protagonists emerge as Jianqiang's primary collaborators, and the central voices of this ethnography. Using journalistic conventions, Jianqiang amplifies their personal experiences in conservation. In doing so, he presents a targeted history of Tibetan environmentalism narrated by the very actors who shaped it.

Six curated chapters highlight central themes from the lives of these environmentalists, namely: "Seeking the Buddha," "Leaving Home," "Wasteland," "Love," "Seeking the Way," and "Running Away." Of particular note are passages detailing environmental crimes and corruption throughout the region. According to informants, state authorities "collect levies and confiscate caterpillar fungus, acting almost as if they were robbers" (p. 59). Park officials turn a blind eye to the poaching of Tibetan antelope, or *chiru*, and effectively condone the exploitation of human and non-human communities for their personal gain. Rich, personal reflections on being Tibetan and Buddhist in modern China further enhance these insights. Government and non-government organizations working in Qinghai, Tibet (Xizang) and Xinjiang will benefit from the collaborators' discussions when

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O'Neill on *Tibetan Environmentalists in China: The King of Dzi*.

pursuing natural heritage programs.

First published by Zhong Hwa in 2009 (Hong Kong), this edition is a part of Lexington's *Studies in Modern Tibetan Culture* series. It was translated into English by Ian Rowen, Cyrus K. Hui, and Emily Yeh in 2015. The book will serve as springboard for future studies in environmental history as well as historical and political ecology from Central and East Asia. It is approachable, and will be entertaining for academics and non-academics alike.

Although compelling, this text falls short in several domains. Jianqiang conducted exhaustive interviews with his informants, but his narrative presentation of these conversations misses the mark. The author jumps awkwardly between past and present events to contextualize what his collaborators say. Long passages digress into the realm of trite romanticism, as the author's personal reflections become intertwined with those of his interlocutors. These contributions detract from his collaborators' messages and undercut the authenticity of the text. This book could also benefit from a central thesis. Jianqiang neither analyzes events nor situates them within the growing field of environmental anthropology. Again, the author's personal reflections serve as a poor proxy for analysis. Readers must grapple with ethnographic

anecdotes to construe their own theory of Tibetan environmentalism. Finally, there are numerous spelling, grammatical, and formatting mistakes that should be edited.

Environmental humanities from the Greater Himalayas and Tibetan Plateau will buttress conservation programs in the coming century. Nature and culture are inextricably linked, and texts like *Tibetan Environmentalists in China* will help erode arbitrary boundaries between natural and cultural resource management. Despite its shortcomings, this book is a welcome addition to regional scholarship.

Alexander R. O'Neill is a graduate candidate in Environmental Management (MEM) & Forestry (MF) at Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment. He has served teams at the International Union for Conservation of Nature, U.S. Department of State, and G. B. Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment & Sustainable Development.