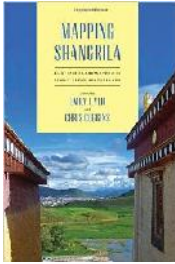


## REVIEW: MAPPING SHANGRILA

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Emily T Yeh and Chris Coggins (eds). 2014. *Mapping Shangrila. Contested Landscapes in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press. 332. Foreword, introduction, afterword, maps (10+15), 12 black & white plates, bibliography, index ISBN 9780295993584 (hardcover 75USD), 0295993588 (paperback 39USD).

Emily Yeh and Chris Coggins have gathered a collection of ten articles published under what appears as a very contradictory title: *Mapping Shangrila. Contested Landscapes in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands*. Since Peter Bishop's *The Myth of Shangri la* (1989) and Donald Lopez's *Prisoners of Shangri la* (1998), several books have appeared on Tibet and its relation with the mythical realm created by James Hilton (1900-1954). Meanwhile, Tibetans and Chinese officials in Yunnan have succeeded in establishing Hilton's imaginary place on earth in a real place, populated by real people. In 2002, the city of Gyalthang (Rgyal thang; Ch, Zhongdian), was renamed Shangrila, or Xiangelila as it is rendered in Chinese language. The Shangrila of this book covers a geographic area much larger than Rgyal thang and its surroundings, however. It deals with what the editors qualify as the "Sino-Tibetan Borderlands": places in Kham and Amdo that are undertaking a similar process of "Shangrilazation."

The authors of the articles, mainly anthropologists and geographers, are joined by two conservation scientists who were involved in the work of an NGO "during its formative years in China" (130). To these ten articles, lengthy scholarly introductions by the editors are added at the beginning of each of the three sections, along with a foreword by Stevan Harrell, and an afterword by Ralph

Litzinger. While regretting the absence of a discussion about the definition of the term "Sino-Tibetan Borderlands," each part's introduction brings a wealth of information and adds considerable value to the book.

The first part of the work (19-94) is composed of three chapters and addresses "several modalities of the shangrilazation process" (23). Li-hua Ying explores the process of shangrilazation through analysis of a selection of Chinese and Tibetan novels written in Chinese. She shows that in contrast to the time of authors such as Xu Xiahe (1586-1641) who spent two years in Yunnan, or Yu Qingyuan (1644-1911) who spent a year in Weixi, "an administrative entity that covered present day Weixi, Deqin [Chinese nomenclature is used for Tibetan Territories] Dechen, Tib. Bde chen) and two other counties in Yunnan" (27) and for whom these lands were "outside civilization" (27), these spaces are now "opened up for new modes of inquiry and identity formation" (28). Contemporary authors such as the Manchu Wen Pulin or the Han author Fan Wen (2013) "focus on the individual self and on presenting a harmonious multiethnic society" (29), depicting the Tibetan borderlands as exotic locations where you can escape from the modern world (39). But for local writers who write mainly in Chinese in a journal called *Return* or famous Sinophone Tibetan writers such as Alai, the true Tibet is still found in the past.

Chris Vasantkumar studies shangrilazation in Labrang through two recent publications sanctioned by the county and prefectural governments and directed at Western and Chinese tourists. One account describes Labrang "as a repository of timeless Tibetan culture" (61), a place that can be an alternative to famous sites in Central Tibet, while the other work also incorporates sites related to imperial and Communist history. The author highlights the importance of the process of miniaturization and the creation of many theme-parks in which "the elision of particular (uncomfortable) ethnic details has been key to Shangrilazation as a miniaturizing method" (59). Here the author might have profitably referenced to

RA Stein (1990) on worlds in miniature, container gardens, and dwellings in Far Eastern religious thought.

The last article of this first part, by Travis Klingberg, deals with the Yading Nature Reserve, which attracts, after difficult beginnings, tens of thousands of visitors thanks to the transformation of this area into a Reserve and its 2003 inclusion into the Greater Shangrila Ecotourism Zone. The legacy of Joseph Rock (1884-1962), said to have discovered the place, is not forgotten and allows a direct connection to the Shangrila story. The author shows how two Han Chinese - a botanist and a photographer - have played a large role in the construction of this place as a touristic one and underscores the role of tourists in the production of these landscapes.

Part II (95-198) deals with "Constructing the Ecological State: Conservation, Commodification and Resource Governance" and is composed of four articles. The first by John Zinda deals with all the actors involved in the 2007 creation of Pudacuo National Park, China's first national park. The making of national parks was encouraged by an NGO, Nature Conservancy (TNC), which wanted the government to "adopt new models for conserving the area's biodiverse landscapes" (105).

The author points out the various conflicts between state agencies and governments at different levels in the construction of the ecological state. The commercial success of Pudacuo National Park led to the opening of two more parks in Diqing Prefecture (Tib Bde chen). Zinda shows also how the growth of tourism changed the stakes. While the local communities received the majority of benefits in the 1990s, with the advent of the national parks, the local governments became more sensitive to the income they could draw from tourist attractions than to the residents' interests.

RK Moseley and RB Mullen, drawing on their experience as conservation scientists who worked for the group "during its formative years in China" (130) give an insider perspective on TNC. They present the history of the development of TNC in China; its goals, policy, and weaknesses; and also the criticism that confronted the NGO.

MJ Hathaway's article concerns the matsutake (a mushroom highly valued in Japan) economy in Yunnan, its development, and its consequences. These consequences are negative (intervillage conflict) but also positive, for example, a resurgence in the construction of Tibetan houses with indigeneous artistic and architectural features expressing new forms of cultural identity and wealth. The author insists on the need to "explore how management policies and activities are affected by other states and a range of private and private-public engagements, including international conservation organizations, networks of traders and scientists" (154). He also demonstrates how the trade has forced the different actors involved to take into account the socio-ecological problems, including those arising from the use of pesticides, in order to compete with imported mushrooms.

The economic results of the collection of *yartsa gumbu* (*dbyar rtswa dgun 'bu*, the famous 'caterpillar fungus' mushroom) in two regions of Diqing Prefecture are discussed by MO Steward. In spite of growing tourism, caterpillar fungus harvesting is still the most important source of income for the majority of rural and pastoral Tibetans. Steward highlights the differences in harvest management between these two places, one of which exercises strict control on the collection of the fungus while the villagers of the other area, trapped by new interests and new power relations, have lost control over their caterpillar fungus resources.

*Mapping Shangrila's* third part (199-278) addresses issues of landscape contestation and is composed of three articles. The first is a collaboration between the geographer Chris Coggins and a local Tibetan, Gesang Zeren, involved in the protection of the environment and the culture of his village, Hamugu. He is representative of a number of Tibetans who, as soon as it was legally and politically possible, became committed to the protection of culture and ecology "because they are inseparable" (222). While Hamugu Village is engaged in the protection of traditional culture, three neighboring villages had chosen to enter the tourist industry by leasing their lands for the construction of a cable car that carries visitors to a local

sacred mountain. In terms of income, the three villages are the winners, but winners at the expense of respect for traditional beliefs.

Here, as the bibliography indicates, the authors suffer from a lack of familiarity with academic literature surrounding sacred mountains, on which a considerable body of work now exists. Peter Schwieger's work on the history of Dechen (Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (2011, forthcoming) is another notable absentee from the Bibliography. As my fieldwork on several sacred mountains, among them Kawakarpo, has highlighted, this mountain is not simply a *neri* (*gnas ri*) site, but one where the concepts of the *gnas ri* (Buddhist ruling deity) and that of the *yul lha* or *gzhi bdag* (local deity') overlap. It is true that mountains associated with *zhidag* or *yullha* can be classified as male or female, but I have not previously encountered the idea that they may be classified as monks or nuns (218). Lastly, it is regrettable that the author does not specify the distinction between *yul lha* and *gzhi bdag* when he writes (220) that, "in Nedu Village...there are four *zhidag* and twenty-four *yullha*." My fieldwork led me to think that these two terms are applied to the same concept according to the area.

The second article by Charlene Makley discusses the reemergence of the cult of *zhidak* among Tibetans in Amdo Rebgong despite the efforts of the state to discourage them because of their so-called backwardness and the role of the *lawa* 'spirit-medium' (*lha ba* on whom the mountain-god "descends"). She describes the conflicts over deity recognition and shows the implications of these contestations over the authenticity of Tibetan spirit-mediums following the state-led development accompanying the Great Western Development. The author shows how "mountain deity practices have always played out in tensions between collective ideals and the competing interests of households and individuals" (243) and that all these tensions increase due to the politics of development.

The last article of this section, written by Emily T Yeh, one of the two editors of the book, deals with the formation of a movement in which Tibetan and Chinese environmentalists worked together in order to preserve the environment through strategies centered on

respect for Tibetan culture. The author highlights the differences between the approaches of exile "Green Tibetans" and the "Green Tibetans" in Tibet, pointing out through the example of Rinchen Samdrup (Rin chen bsam grub) and his NGO in Tibet "how concern for a local place and its territorial deities were reworked and represented as concern for the world's environment" (277). But following the 2008 events, the Chinese Government banned foreign financing of such NGOs, putting an end to the work of many such groups and leaving the situation of Tibetans even more precarious than before. Not only was Rinchen Samdrup arrested along with his brother Chime ('Chi med), but the official media explanation of the issues led "the Chinese public at large [to] become less willing to trust Tibetans or believe in the positive potential of Tibetan culture" (276).

Lastly, in a short but incisive afterword, Ralph Litzinger deals with the afterlives of Shangrila, among them a Shangrila which "is no longer singularly a Western fantasy" (280). Building on his own fieldwork, he contests Coggins and Yeh's optimistic vision which saw many signs of hope between 1990 and 2008 and the end of that hope only after the 2008 uprising. For Litzinger, the situation began to deteriorate long before that.

*Mapping Shangrila* deals with literature, political ecology, conservation, tourism, mountain deities, the changing role of spirit mediums, and so on in the peripheral areas of A mdo and Khams. Because of that, this book will be of interest not only for experts and scholars, but also for students (undergraduate and graduate). As in all books of collected articles, some papers are stronger than others, however, the wealth of information presented makes it an essential contribution to the knowledge of what is happening at the present time in these regions.

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