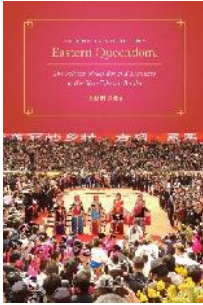


REVIEW: *IN THE LAND OF THE EASTERN QUEENDOM:
THE POLITICS OF GENDER AND ETHNICITY ON THE
SINO-TIBETAN BORDER*

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Tenzin Jinba. 2014. *In the Land of the Eastern Queendom: The Politics of Gender and Ethnicity on the Sino-Tibetan Border*. Studies on Ethnic Groups in China. Seattle: University of Washington Press. xviii + 170. Maps, notes, glossary of Chinese characters, bibliography, index. ISBN: 978-0295993065 (hardcover, 75USD), 978-0295993072 (papercover, 30USD).

This intriguing anthropological study examines local culture and politics in Suopo Township, Danba County, Ganze (Dkar mdzes, Ch: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture 甘孜藏族自治州丹巴县梭坡乡 in western Sichuan, and the township's claim to be the site of the capital of a matriarchal "Eastern Queendom" that may or may not have existed there a thousand years ago. A neighboring town, supported by county authorities, disputes the claim, and the historical record is by no means clear. The stakes – a lucrative ethnic tourist trade – are high, but the dispute also has become an issue defining the cultural identity of the Suopowa 'people of Suopo'. Tenzin Jinba's work offers new perspectives on ethnic representation, gender and ethnic identity, civil associations, and collective action in Southwest China.

Suopo is marginal in a fourfold way. Part of ethnic Tibet, the town is marginal to China (and to Sichuan Province, for that matter). Located in the Khams region, and on the Han-Tibetan frontier, Suopo is also marginal to Tibet. Moreover, the Suopowa are only marginally Khampa: they speak the rGyalrong dialect (and often Chinese as well) Entenmann, Robert. 2016. Review: *In the Land of the Eastern Queendom: The Politics of Gender and Ethnicity on the Sino-Tibetan Border*. *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 40:447-450.

and many follow the Bon religion rather than Dge lugs Buddhism. They are "marginalized Tibetans," whom mainstream Tibetans see as outsiders. But the government classifies the rGyalrong people as Zangzu or Tibetan - an ethnic category created, of course, by the central government - and the rGyalrong regard themselves as authentic Tibetans. Living in Ganze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, the Suopowa are even marginal to the rGyalrong, most of whom live in neighboring Aba (Rnga ba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture. Jinba, Professor of Anthropology at Lanzhou University, an American-trained rGyalrong anthropologist, describes himself as both an "insider from the outside and an outsider from the inside" (16). He personally exemplifies the complexity of ethnic and cultural identity.

Suopo's claim to the Eastern Queendom is based on ambiguous and unclear references in four dynastic histories, and the textual evidence suggests that this polity may in fact have been located in Chab mdo, or even as far away as the Pamirs. Suopo Township leaders, especially the local cadre and amateur scholar "Uncle Pema," fervently support Suopo's claim in conflict with county officials who support the claims of another town.

Chapter Two, 'Masculine and Feminine Internal Others in China', places this issue within the context of gender and representation of ethnicity in China. Jinba discusses two works of fiction by Han authors that represent sexualized Others. *Lang tuteng* 狼图腾 *Wolf Totem*, a highly-acclaimed novel by Jiang Rong 姜戎, presents a hyper-masculinized Mongol identity in contrast to weak Han men. *Yuanfang you ge nüguo* 远方有个女国 'The Remote Country of Women' by Bai Hua 白桦 represents the Mosuo 摩梭 people of Yunnan as promiscuous and, incidentally, matriarchal. Mosuo women's reputation for free love, exploited by the tourist industry, makes them the object of Han men's desire. In both novels minority Others are sexualized.

Chapter Three shows how Suopo people use gender to define themselves to outsiders. Initially they sought to attract tourists by promoting the area as the Meirengu 美人谷 'Valley of Beauties',

sponsoring beauty contests and the Jiarong fengqing jie 嘉绒风情节 'rGyalrong Charm Festival'. This soon led to growing anxiety over the threat that sexual tourism would corrupt local society. The male leadership of Suopo – ironically, women had little role in this – began drawing on the tradition of matriarchal rule and emphasized the political wisdom and superiority of women. They engaged in a strategic "self-feminization," influenced by the gender equality rhetoric of the socialist state. This representation was manipulated by elite Suopo men to attract tourists and enhance their social and economic position. At the same time, this narrative of matriarchy and women's superiority came into tension with the masculine self-image of the Khampas, a conflict that seems not to have been resolved.

Chapters Four and Five demonstrate how this controversy is played out in grassroots politics and offer insights into the relationship between the state and local interests. Suopo leaders pursue their interests by appealing to the agenda of the central state and regarding it as an ally against county officials. They view the center - Beijing - as the protector of their legitimate interests, as opposed to the local officials from whom they are often alienated. Jinba examines the role of the Moluo 莫洛 Tourism Association (Moluo is a village within Suopo Township). A *minjian shetuan* 民间社团 'popular association' created by local authorities, the association advocates for Suopo's Queenship claims and operates somewhere between state and society. At the same time, the association is riven by factions and personal conflicts. Nonetheless, as a "quasi-state agency and quasi-civil society," the Moluo Tourism Association "plays a role in connecting the local society and the state and in creating free space in which marginalized townspeople can voice grievances and press various political claims" (116).

Jinba's concise and well-argued work has wide appeal. It augments our knowledge of the understudied rGyalrong people. Moreover, it offers insights into the relationship of the Chinese state to local society and civil society. Most significantly, it describes the ways that ethnic tourism shapes culture and ethnic identity and

complicates our understanding of how gender affects ethnic representation in China.

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