

Jane E. Caple. *Morality and Monastic Revival in Post-Mao Tibet*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2019. x + 218 pp. \$29.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-8248-6985-4.

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Jane Caple's 2019 book, *Morality and Monastic Revival in Post-Mao Tibet*, examines the revival of monasticism (mostly within the Geluk school) in Rebgong and western Bayen in Amdo (Qinghai Province) from 2008 to 2015, at sixteen lesser-known scholastic monasteries. Her fieldwork is based on 137 interviews and informal conversations with a wide variety of interlocutors including monastics, nonmonastic specialists, farmers, herders, artisans, businesspeople, students, teachers, and government officials. Her focus on the lived experiences of these individuals rather than solely on grand narratives of the state, economic development, tourism, and the Tibetan community in exile in relation to monastic revival provides a nuanced, emic exploration of localized understandings of these and other relevant issues. In Caple's words, her study pays "attention to local logics of the good and the desirable in an attempt to understand its dynamics from the ground up" (p. 4). We learn from monastic and lay Tibetans themselves about some of the complexities regarding issues such as the self-sufficiency of monasteries: is the state simply aligning monasteries with its designs to build a modern socialist state, or are there moralistic and pragmatic concerns which come from within the monastic setting that are also driving monasteries toward self-sufficiency? Caple similarly explores other important issues

through local narratives, such as the relationship of tourism to monastic revival, economic development and monastic recruitment and retention, and the future of monasticism in relation to these issues.

The place of tourism in relation to the monastic revival is examined carefully, not only as a revenue-generating initiative that may impact the routine and education of monks but as a break from Tibetan-initiated self-sufficiency projects that allow for greater autonomy from the state, in opposition to tourism, which may give local officials greater control of monasteries. Further, Caple examines in detail the perceptions of monastics regarding different types of tourists, as either nuisances or potential patrons, and the sometimes blurred distinction between "tourist" and "pilgrim." The reasons for the decline in the number of monks at monasteries are also brought to light through the personal stories of monks who have either disrobed or entered the monastery at a later stage in life. While a simplistic narrative of the temptations of modern life appears at first glance to explain the reason for monks disrobing and entering lay life, Caple skillfully draws out the many complexities of moralistic and pragmatic approaches to this subject from among her interlocutors. Similarly, Caple employs a balanced approach to the "quality versus quantity" debate in relation

to the number of monks at monasteries and the subsequent quality of their education, discipline, and retention, taking account not only of state efforts to reduce monastic populations but also the ideas of her monastic interlocutors concerning this issue, as well as exiled Tibetan discourses.

Unbeknown perhaps to some readers, sources of monastic revival that are rarely touched upon in other academic works or state publications on the subject are acknowledged. For instance, we learn that much of the impetus, materials, and funding for the reconstruction of monasteries and the education of monastics has come from the lay Tibetan community, or through gifts bestowed on incarnate lamas who have subsequently funded various projects. The state has been less of a player in this revival than is often imagined and portrayed in state publications. Similarly, the input of outside investors such as Chinese patrons (businesspeople and/or practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism), while significant, does not constitute the core of the ongoing developments in the monastic revival, according to Capel's interlocutors, who variously even reject such investment in favor of internal economic initiatives that give them more control over their own affairs.

Capel's carefully researched book is to be applauded for its close attention to the variety of perspectives it offers on the monastic revival in Amdo, and for the way in which it compares and contrasts this revival across a network of monasteries rather than examining individual monastic revivals in isolation. One minor suggestion is to perhaps include a map of this monastic network to guide visually oriented readers, as at times the geographic position of monasteries in relation to each other is hard to track as one progresses through the book.

While Capel does acknowledge the state and its discourses as pervasive, she sometimes does not appear to fully acknowledge the extent of this pervasiveness. She makes mention of the fact that the state was of course the instigator of destruction of

monasteries during the Cultural Revolution, but claims that it is rarely seen as having any significant input in the monastic revival. While this may indeed be true, the implicit influence of state rhetoric of self-sufficiency among interlocutors may not be sufficiently acknowledged, given that they are speaking with a foreign academic in a tightly controlled political environment. Further, while Capel does recognize tensions between monastic and state worldviews, and makes reference to the 150 self-immolations of monastic and lay Tibetans since February 2009, she does not mention the patriotic education that has been implemented at Tibetan monasteries following the 2008 protests, examined in John Power's 2016 book, *The Buddha Party: How the People's Republic of China Works to Define and Control Tibetan Buddhism*. Acknowledging the tensions explored in Power's work would have perhaps added value to discussions on monastic perspectives in relation to the state.

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