

Excluding the exceptions noted above, what this volume lacks in analytical edge may be made up for in sheer information and breadth of topics covered. While unlikely to satisfy all readers, it can be commended for drawing a clear picture of the contributions of health philanthropy in China historically and for presenting concise snapshots of recent programmes. Most of the chapters end with some prognostications on their particular topic, a contribution of unique value for those looking to understand what pathways Chinese civil society may take in the future.

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The Disempowered Development of Tibet in China: A Study in the Economics of Marginalization

ANDREW MARTIN FISCHER

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After more than 60 years of incorporation into the People's Republic of China (PRC), ethnic Tibetan regions are still characterized, especially in the West, as rebellious, as is evidenced by occasional outbursts of protests, riots and self-immolations. To make sense of this persistent rebelliousness, most common explanations would resort to moralistic reasoning based on the polemics of Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) oppression and Tibetans' resistance for the goal of national self-determination – i.e. "Free Tibet." However, there have not been many empirical studies of social conditions in contemporary Tibet, with the notable exceptions such as the works by Emily Yeh. Yet, unlike Yeh's works, which are still more of an interpretive nature, Andrew Fischer's book is outstanding in that he is one of the very few Tibet scholars in the West who have utilized social scientific methods, based on various statistics from the PRC, to analyse the social, economic and political situation in Tibetan areas.

In the book, Fischer examines the rapid economic development that is currently underway in Tibetan areas in China. As part of the development programme of the western regions (*xibu dakaiifa*), development in Tibetan regions, as in Xinjiang, has been conceived as a remedy to cure the Tibetans' lack of "political allegiance" to China. As a result, the Chinese government pumped large sums of money as subsidies into Tibetan regions, particularly the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), to jumpstart the economic modernization process. As Fischer points out, in 2010 more than 100 per cent of TAR's GDP came from the central government's budgetary subsidies, while other Tibetan regions are also highly subsidized (p. 3). Although such heavy subsidies have the effect of alleviating poverty levels and improving living standards for local Tibetans in absolute terms, Fischer argues that they have in fact perversely increased the economic marginalization of Tibetans in their "own homelands," as a consequence of the immigration of Han Chinese and the discriminatory effects of the Han-centric economic system. Thus, Fischer turns the Chinese government's development programme on its head and argues that the intensified economic integration of Tibet to the rest of China has exacerbated the subordination and marginalization of Tibetans, which in turn has strengthened their political grievance and resistance (p. 11).

Drawing upon structuralist economics theories on processes of polarization and marginalization, Fischer addresses a set of dimensions that affect the marginalization of Tibetans. In chapter three, he examines the issue of the Tibetan demographic challenge as a result of Han Chinese migration and the urban exclusion of Tibetans. Fischer puts forward the nuanced argument that although overall Tibetan population growth has been rapid, and the overall percentage of Tibetans remains relatively constant throughout the Tibetan regions, the exclusion of Tibetans from urban areas and the prominence of Han Chinese and Hui Muslims in the urban economy have led to the perception of Tibetans being demographically swamped by outsiders. Chapter four specifically examines the institutionalization of economic development in Tibet, which Fischer claims to be predominantly based on government administrative expansion and large-scale construction projects. Such skewed development patterns have not only substantially increased the integration of the TAR with the rest of China, but have also generated and entrenched an extreme form of dependency, whereby local Tibetans are essentially excluded from the implementation of economic development. In chapter five, Fischer examines changes within the Tibetan labour market, and the increasing urban–rural and intra-urban inequalities resulting from urbanization and from the exclusion of Tibetans from employment in the more stable and better-paid state sector. Fischer then explains in chapter six how educational disparities and the linguistic disadvantages Tibetans face in the Chinese-dominated labour market have equally excluded them, thus increasing their economic dislocation. The final two chapters explore how Tibetan communities in China have responded to social polarization and economic exclusion. Particularly fascinating here is Fischer’s comparative study between Tibetans’ economic activism against Hui Muslims and the rise in collaborative private interactions between Tibetans and Han Chinese through the medium of the increasing popularity of Tibetan Buddhism across China.

What is laudable about Fischer’s book is his command of a wide range of statistics from Chinese sources that he cross-tabulates to offer strong empirical evidence in support of his arguments. By combing through Chinese statistical yearbooks, Fischer manages to combine a compelling narrative of “why Tibetans continue to feel grievance toward the Chinese state and the reasons why resistance will continue” with strong empirical evidence. While Fischer’s analyses of the contemporary economic and social conditions in Tibet are convincing, I find his proposed solution to reduce the marginalization of Tibetans in China to be unrealistic. For Fischer, the way to balance economic development and to reduce the marginalization of Tibetans is for Tibet to have more self-autonomy. He repeatedly suggests that greater autonomy, such as linguistic and employment preference for Tibetans, was practised by the Chinese government in the 1980s, but surely in Beijing’s view it was exactly such autonomy measures that led to years of protests against its rule in Tibet. The problem here is that the author has a totally different perspective from the Chinese government. For Beijing, its fundamental goal is to solidify control in Tibet, perhaps through the use of a variety of economic development strategies. It is thus antithetical for Beijing to lessen its control in Tibet, as argued by Fischer, so that Tibetans’ marginalization can be improved. Ultimately the Tibet question is a political one; it is about national sovereignty in both Chinese and Tibetans’ minds. Perhaps balanced development for Tibetans can be achieved when Tibet is truly autonomous or independent; but why would Beijing agree to such a suggestion?

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