

ASEAN has certainly come a long way in developing new regional governance structures, including the landmark ASEAN Charter. Indonesia's active promotion of democratic values and human rights across the region as well as political change in Myanmar have to a large extent transformed ASEAN's traditional non-interference and national sovereignty narratives. But much still remains to be done. Although it is an important step forward compared to the earlier quasi-exclusive focus on governments, ASEAN's notion of building a "people-oriented" community is more of an awareness-raising exercise than an attempt to open up the grouping to more participatory governance. Equally while institutions like the AICHR or AIPA are evolving, they are still trammled by the overall democracy deficit in the region and states' wariness of regular and direct interaction with civil society. In conclusion, a greater democratisation of ASEAN will depend on progress in the spread of democracy and democratic values across the region.

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8th Annual Conference of the Consortium for Western China Development Studies

Chengdu, 5–6 July 2013

13th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies

Ulaanbaatar, 21–27 July 2013

Over the years, the annual conferences of the Consortium for Western China Development Studies and the International Association for Tibetan Studies have grown substantially and now last from two to five days with hundreds of scholars participating in dozens of panels. While the former, held this year in Chengdu (China), focused on issues of development in western China in general, and Tibetan areas in particular, the latter, held in Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia), is the foremost conference on Tibet studies. Unsurprisingly, a number of panels at the two conferences had significant interfaces and cross sections. At each conference one panel was designed to discuss comparable topics, in Chengdu "Aspects of Modernization and Development in Western China" and in Ulaanbaatar "Livelihoods on the Tibetan Plateau: Aspects of Vulnerability and Sustainability". After a brief introduction to the conferences, this conference report will focus on details of presentations in the respective panels.

Since its establishment in 2004, the Consortium for Western China Development Studies has organized seven conferences on various issues concerning the development of western China. The topic of the initial conference in Chengdu in 2004 was “Towards a New Paradigm for Developing Western China: Meeting the Challenges of Sustainable Development and Globalization”. The following six conferences continued to discuss issues of the region’s development, while including other topics such as sustainable and rural development (Yinchuan 2005), regional anti-poverty actions (Chengdu 2006), the construction of a “harmonious society” in poverty-stricken areas (Guiyang 2007), the assessment of development processes in western China (Xi’an 2008), retrospects and future prospects (Lanzhou 2009) and whether the experiences of “Ten Years of Western China Development” may serve as a model for regional development in China (Chengdu 2010). The conferences are supported by China’s State Council’s Office of Western China Development and Columbia University’s Prof. Jeffrey D. Sachs, a Special Advisor to United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals.

In the past ten years, societies in western China have witnessed tremendous changes and transformations. In-depth analysis makes clear that a variety of internal (for example demography) and external influences (world market integration and global climate change) initiated or helped to initiate these changes, in which diverse groups are both agents and casualties of processes that shape the dimension of their vulnerability or resilience. New risks and opportunities help to aggravate or mitigate the consequences of such processes and, together with political interventions, determine households’ and social groups’ adaptive capacity. One major problem of state intervention appears to be the common assumption that it can deliver general solutions to complex problems. In China’s west, namely minority areas, interventions are often reduced to the issue of “poverty reduction”. Therefore, development is often misunderstood as the duty to create programmes to fight poverty, whereas problems of vulnerability and sustainability should also be debated.

Therefore, when Sichuan University, in association with the Consortium for Western China Development Studies and the Western China Development Committee of Regional Science Association of China, hosted the 8th Annual Conference of the Consortium for Western China Development Studies in Chengdu from 5 to 6 July 2013, the focus of the conference was issues of vulnerability and sustainability in western China. Major themes of the panels included the strategy and policy analysis of development in western China, social vulnerability and social control, ecological vulnerability and restoration, human resources, anti-poverty and global cooperation and a discussion of development models in western China.

The entire conference was underpinned by a panel on “Aspects of Modernization and Development in Western China”. Its main objective was to critically discuss issues of modernization and development in the light of development theories Western countries applied in their policies around the globe and in the light of China’s experiences since the start of “Opening up and Reform” (*gaige kaifang*) and of the “Western Development Approach” (*xibu da kaifa*). The panel’s agenda included both theoretical issues of development geography (sustainability, vulnerability, livelihood security and poverty reduction) and a discussion of specific case studies related to sustainable development in western China.

Changes and transformations that the societies on the Tibetan plateau have lately undergone are generally perceived as the outcome of political interventions by agencies of the Chinese state and the latter’s interest in assimilating national minorities. As a single explanation, this does not take full account of the facts. As in other parts of China and the world, the various internal and external influences like population growth, changing living standards, world market integration, global climate change, etc. have generated radical changes, to which diverse Tibetan groups are not only exposed, but also induce. The dimension of their vulnerability, adaptive capacity and capacity for development is a result of their own agency, external influences and their reaction to the latter. The issue of sustainability, or sustainable development, is therefore an issue that must be considered in a regional context, if not at an individual household level. It should not be discussed for the plateau as a whole or for Tibetan peasants or nomads in general. Often undertaken as anti-poverty measures and programmes to raise people’s living standards, large investments quickly produce signs of superficial wealth and the appearance of improved livelihoods.

However, the widespread practice of describing marginalized groups as “poor” also needs to be questioned. Poverty is measured using a collection of data that are neither carefully defined nor available at comparable levels in increasingly fragmented societies. The vulnerability of groups has become a crucial issue, although not easy to measure. Since much research on social and economic development in Tibetan areas relies on qualitative than reliable quantitative data, the panel suggested scrutinizing factors to identify those responsible for the vulnerability of households or their adaptive capacity. The ultimate aim is to develop criteria for a necessary, sustainable development of household and regional economies. In order to deepen the respective studies, the focus of one panel at the IATS seminar in Mongolia was related case studies in Tibetan society.

The International Association of Tibetan Studies (IATS) held its 13th seminar in Mongolia’s capital Ulaanbataar from 21 to 27 July 2013. Since

the late 1970s, the IATS seminars have developed into the largest interdisciplinary conference on Tibetan issues. The panel on “Livelihoods on the Tibetan Plateau: Aspects of Vulnerability and Sustainability” developed further aspects of the discussion at the Chengdu conference.

Addressing the issue of sustainable development highlighted the fact that the effects of any development measures must combine issues of vulnerability, resilience and sustainability with a viable, practicable, positive and appropriate outlook on future changes. The panels at both the Chengdu and Ulaanbataar conferences suggested scrutinizing and identifying factors responsible for the vulnerability of households, and on the basis of these attempt to develop criteria for the necessary sustainable development of household and regional economies. A number of contributions in Chengdu discussed conceptual perspectives (Ingo Breuer, Leipzig University, on “Modernization and Development: Conceptual Perspectives on Current Livelihood Dynamics”) and contested understandings of development (Ga’er-rang / Kabzung, Sichuan University: “Contested Understanding of Development in Tibet, China: Tibetan Buddhist Elites and Tibetan Radical Secularists”). The importance of political reliability for the minorities’ cultural identity and livelihood security was stressed by this author’s talk on “Cultural Security and Development in China’s West”, while others produced evidence of vulnerability and sustainability in some of their own case studies.

That solving poverty issues through state-induced migration may lead to new vulnerability was shown by Chen Yong, Sichuan University (“Rural Vulnerability and Migration in Mountain Areas of Western China”), while Jarmila Ptackova, Humboldt University, Berlin, questioned whether the urbanization in Qinghai’s grasslands may really offer new livelihoods and better living conditions for local pastoralists (“Urbanisation of the Qinghai Grassland: New Living and Livelihood Opportunities for Local Pastoralists?”). Two papers focused on the market. Gyamtso (Wang Shiyong), Qinghai Normal University, presented “Limitations on Tibetan Market Participation from the Perspective of People-oriented Development Theory” and demonstrated the weak market-competitiveness of Tibetans. Janka Linke of Leipzig University assessed the impact of the caterpillar fungus markets on livelihoods in the region (“The Caterpillar Fungus Commodity Chain: Assessing Impacts on Livelihoods”). Thierry Dodin, Bonn University, presented an example of how mining in Tibet could develop in sustainable ways and simultaneously benefit the local population (“Mining in Tibet: Towards Sustainability and Social Responsibility?”).

Based on his rich field experience with the Winrock Foundation, China, Ethan Golding’s successful demonstration of the paramount importance of good tools for measuring impacts of poverty evaluation (“The Importance

of Measuring Impacts of Poverty Alleviation: PACT – the Poverty Alleviation Criteria Tool) put in a nutshell what had been stressed in various other cases: that good monitoring and meaningful evaluation are the alpha and the omega for the success of any kind of development effort.

The panel on “Livelihoods on the Tibetan Plateau: Aspects of Vulnerability and Sustainability” at the 13th IATS in Ulaanbataar presented a variety of interesting issues and unique aspects of the scheduled topics.

In her paper “Making a Living on High Ground: The sMan-lha-ba-Nomads of the Shelkar-Dingri Area of South-Western Tibet”, the independent scholar Hanna Schneider detailed a picture of the living conditions in a very specific nomad community between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries CE, the sMan-lha-ba in south-western Tibet. For this purpose, she drew mainly on historical material, namely edicts, of which the oldest dates back to 1715. With her knowledge of, among other things, administrative records, land title documents, various documents pertaining to the cycles of nomadic life, from seasonal migration to pasture allocation, land lease contracts, the annual buying and selling of herd capacities for the holding of livestock within fixed pastureland, herd registers, registers listing the triannual *skye med* ‘*chi med* census, tax registers and undertakings for the transportation of salt and firewood, she was able to demonstrate how archive material can be used to not only train a historical eye on a nomadic group’s development, but also to assess the pastoralists’ survival skills. By disclosing how they were able to secure their vulnerable and challenged livelihoods in a difficult environment on the Tibetan northern slopes of the central Himalayas, she offered an important comparative perspective for similar contemporary issues in pastoralist areas.

In her presentation “Amdo Nomads between the ‘Hammer’ of Seder-tarisation and the ‘Anvil’ of Vegetarianism”, Katia Buffetrille, École Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris, focused on the hasty implementation of programmes of sedentarisation for pastoralist communities confronted with a new style of life for which they are unprepared. The most pervasive evidence of those programmes are new villages with rows of similar houses. At the same time, she also hinted at the frenzy of (re)construction of religious buildings, which is an expression of how deeply religious leaders are involved in the revival of Tibetan Buddhism and the promotion of monasticism. Their greater emphasis on Buddhist traditions offers, but also confronts the nomads with the need for, forms of adaptation that again differ from those arising out of state programmes. Katia Buffetrille’s paper argues that nomads – at least in the Amdo area – are trapped between two strategies that greatly affect their daily lives: on the one hand, the Chinese state’s path of assimilation, which is allegedly depriving them of their specific culture,

language and way of life, and, on the other, the clergy's strategy that requests nomads to follow what is thought to be – or rather construed as – the Tibetan way of life as understood by the Buddhist clergy. Both of these agendas put pressure on the local population and definitely tend to deny the identity of the local Tibetans: one aims at integration, the other at transformation. In both cases, because they are being told that the way they live is wrong, Tibetans feel they are being pressured.

In her report "In Between 'Benevolence' and 'Civicness': Social Charity and Changing Political Culture in Ethnic and Minority Communities", Wu Fengshi, Chinese University of Hong Kong, addressed aspects of the maturing civil society in Tibetan regions. Arguing that Buddhism has always taught people to be sympathetic towards others, especially those in need, she relates this to social services or charities in Tibetan societies. While monasteries and their lamas have traditionally been the key agents and centres of charity work, the past decades have yielded a new phenomenon – local NGOs. Lay people meet on a voluntary and regular basis, they gather resources, share views on public affairs, establish an organization and work side-by-side to provide support for those in need. This practice of delivering services to the community at large is a recent phenomenon in Tibetan regions inside the PRC and may, in general, be regarded as a result of the combination of political modernization and socio-economic developments in the past 30 years. In particular, the rise of a transnational civil society, the trend of philanthropy to go global, and overseas concerns about development in Tibet have had a direct and evident impact on Tibetan communities.

The emergence of lay social activism and NGOs in Tibetan regions has taken a different route from that in other parts of China. How and by what this was initiated, in which way it developed and how it could be financed are major issues of Wu Fengshi's paper. The evolution of local NGOs was outlined and illustrated by case studies of local groups, focusing on medical training and community development in Qinghai's Yushu area, namely Jinba and SSG. The critical role of overseas NGOs and foundations in supporting and fostering grassroots initiatives in lay charity work in Tibetan regions was also elucidated. The latter's long-term effort has certainly been critical for the appearance of the decent-sized community of lay charities in Qinghai and Gansu Tibetan regions. Furthermore, the presentation alluded to the return of monastery-centred charity work and social mobilization as well as to the heated debates about nature conservation between religious and lay environmentalists or environment-related NGOs. Assessing the significance of such controversies and their potential implications for the future of sustainable development in the region was a fundamental concern of this talk.

Issues of social and political transformation and the so-called modernization are also issues in Tibetan-Buddhist areas beyond Tibet. This was shown by Tashi Tsering, University of British Columbia, in his presentation on “Inequality in Traditional Farming and Related Scarce Resource Management Customs”. His report is based on a case study of fodder, firewood and dung management in Chichem village in the Spiti Valley of India. By highlighting certain social aspects of livelihood vulnerability and sustainability on the Tibetan plateau, he develops his arguments that Tibetan Buddhist villages are hierarchical and patriarchal communities, where the management of resources is not equitable, most notably if their impacts are seen from the perspective and experiences of less powerful sections of the society. Since most aspects of Tibetan society, be it traditional education, music, mountain cult, or farming, impact different social groups differently, he contends that the social organization of resource management customs in rural communities, such as those for water, are related to the social organization of managing related resources. He claims that these relationships are better understood within the context of and as aspects of broader livelihood (farming) customs, which are embedded in local social relations of power. His case study showed how traditional resource management customs that appear benign and equitable on the surface can be unfair and “very dangerous techniques” of controlling labour and access to resources. A key to understanding the micro-politics of the management of local resources is, therefore, the appraisal of which groups of users benefit from the traditional and institutional arrangements that control the timing of access to these resources. This can only be grasped within their broader historical contexts and the local characteristics of culture, politics and the economy. Tashi Tsering’s study led him to conclude that traditional Tibetan resource management customs are, contrary to the general assumption, not equitable. Accordingly, this must be taken into account by research on Tibetans’ changing livelihood situation and the measure of vulnerability.

The presentation by Chöphel (chos ‘phel), Lanzhou University, on “*mdo dbus mtho sgang gi rtsa sa’i srung skyobs khrod ‘brog pa’i go gnas la dpyad pa* – Examining the Status of Nomads and the Protection of Pastures on the Tibetan Plateau” can be considered an adequate and enriching conclusion to the IATS panel. His expertise as an erudite scholar of pastoralist studies has deep roots in his former nomadic life: he grew up in a pastoral society in the Amdo area of western China. His presentation focused mainly on the paramount importance of preserving nomadic experiences (i.e., indigenous knowledge) and lifestyles for the livelihood security of rural people in Tibetan areas. This necessarily implies two kinds of efforts. On the one hand, traditional lifestyles and mobile forms of pastoralism need to be

maintained to the greatest degree possible in order to lessen both ecological and social vulnerability and to strengthen the livelihood security of the local households. On the other hand, this aim also calls for the nomads to open themselves to modern developments and opportunities in the herding economy. This requires both sides – nomadic societies and the state – to accept and fulfil certain tasks. How this is done can ultimately only be solved through exchange and communication as equals. In this way pastoralists may be able to preserve their traditions, while at the same time opening themselves to modern economic structures. And policy-makers can feel free to design not only interventions that evoke transformations, but also a way that allows the nomads to remain nomadic. In this way, officials will realize that preserving traditional lifestyles is more than just an end in itself, because pastoral management, for instance, builds on indigenous knowledge of traditions that help to preserve reasonable ways of grazing developed in centuries of experience. All stakeholders – pastoral households, local groups, towns and, due to the simultaneous preservation of the environment, the entire state – might benefit.

Prof. Chöphel's talk revealed his wealth of experience gained in his everyday experiences of life in a nomadic society as well as his ability to reflect on it academically. Both the Chinese-Tibetan and Western audience enjoyed the fact that Chöphel was a very special discussant. Questions he was asked addressed both a nomad and a scholar at the same time. Thus, it was not surprising that the panel ended with a lively discussion that lasted for more than an hour. Nancy Levine, University of California, Los Angeles, an "old-hand" in Tibetan pastoralist studies, honoured the panellists with her presence for the entire day, thereby also contributing to the success of this IATS panel on "Livelihoods on the Tibetan Plateau: Aspects of vulnerability and Sustainability".

The 9th Annual Conference of the Consortium for Western China Development Studies will be held in Guiyang, the capital of Southwest China's Guizhou province from 5 to 6 July 2014. Against the backdrop of China's current urbanization drive, its focus is new urban district construction in western China. Since the latter has serious implications for rural livelihoods as well, notably because policymakers believe that the impacts of their urbanization model are inevitably positive, a further panel is planned to discuss the results of the 2013 conferences. It is hoped that deliberations on different concepts will lead to a better understanding of the important interface between urban expansion and the development of rural, or rather "post-rural to proto-urban" livelihoods.

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