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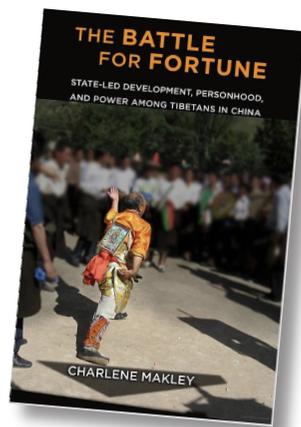
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The Battle for Fortune: State-led Development, Personhood, and Power among Tibetans in China.

Charlene Makley. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. 2018. 321 pages. ISBN 9781501719677.

Reviewed by Andrew Grant

Charlene Makley's *The Battle for Fortune* is a timely and insightful study of the long-term influence of development and urbanization on village society in contemporary eastern Tibet. Makley highlights how multiple villages have been

transformed as Rebgong, a county seat and religious center in China's Qinghai Province, steadily urbanizes. The book examines how village residents are negotiating increased state and market penetration into their lives. The Introduction explains the turning-point nature of these changes by reference to China's 2008 Olympic countdown and its accompanying "quasi-millennarian culture of anticipation and national triumph" (p. 2). The countdown period manifests itself in Beijing as jubilation and on the Tibetan Plateau as a time of protest and uneasiness over the future. Makley, who conducted the bulk of her research during this period, describes it as a time of crisis. The urgency of the crisis is important for orienting the book. Eastern Tibet had experienced a relatively stable political climate in the post-Maoist period, during which the 10th Panchen Lama inaugurated a re-dissemination of Buddhism and villages were able to exercise greater local autonomy in cultural, economic, and social matters. This was a drastic shift from the oppression and destruction of the Maoist era, which older village residents experienced as intensely traumatic.

The contemporary crisis emerges after 2000, when China's Open Up the West development campaign erodes this relative autonomy. Economic and administrative reforms lead to urban annexation of village land, the selling off of livestock, and students increasingly attending schools away from their homes. Village elders worry about the loss of the village (or *dewa* in Tibetan) authority that was gained ground during the re-dissemination years. By 2008 state encroachment and village disempowerment have pushed figures that had been relatively absent from the political sphere, including powerful deities, into the open, turning them into political

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subjects that fight on behalf of village authority. What follows is a high stakes contest between sources of authority located in the abstract Chinese state, local state officials, and rival villages.

Makley's ethnography is based on extensive, long-term research in Rebgong. She describes her writing as a dialogic ethnography, a technique that aims to "grapple with the everyday realities of unequal access to communication and voice" rather than depict the ethnographer intimately conveying villagers' thoughts in an untroubled manner (p. 10). The result is a theoretically complex and empirically rich book that integrates discussions in economic anthropology, linguistic anthropology, Tibetan history, Buddhist studies, and development studies. In every social interaction can be read the ongoing crisis of moral authority between not only villages and the state, but between age cohorts, socialist and capitalist understandings of personhood, and the slippery guarantees of host/guest relations. Often several of these dimensions are at play at once, as in the case of Tshering in Chapter Two, who in a single conversation oscillates between presenting himself as a villager frustrated at state policy and a local official working to fulfill policy goals.

The Introduction and Chapter One lay out two of the book's key concepts: the "politics of presence" and the "battle for fortune." The "politics of presence" refers to the complicated

positioning of Rebgong Tibetans as they seek to position themselves and make sense of others during politically potent interactions. The "politics of presence" brings attention to the historically loaded timespaces (from Bakhtin's chronotopes) that may emerge within social interaction, bringing forward looming beings like deities, the Dalai Lama, or the specter of state violence. "Battle for fortune" refers to the ongoing struggle in postreform China between different sources of sovereignty and moral authority. These battles are based on villages' attempts to capture fortune, typically through winning outside donors for village development. Fortune is contentious because it can be gathered, stolen, or captured through securing exclusive relationships with "gift masters" (p. 30). Makley uses the motif of white silk offering scarves throughout the book to illustrate the potentially tense exclusivity of these relationships. Once scarves are given to a potential donor, the donor is expected to ensure future fortune.

Development is at the center of these battles for fortune. Chapters Three, Four and Five are case studies of contested development in three different Tibetan villages. Chapter Two analyzes the authority of a *lhawa*, a deity medium whose authority is being diminished as the *dewa* is incorporated into a new Rebgong urban district. Chapter Three explores a village where local leaders are raising funds to build a school. These leaders mix state and

local desires, even wrapping cash in offering scarves to transmute capital into fortune for student and village success. Chapter Four focuses on the construction of a new religious assembly hall in a third village. This assembly hall is shown to be a form of "counterdevelopment" that shores up *dewa* authority, countering the village's administrative erasure (p. 182). All of these chapters show how powerfully positioned villagers' attempts to assert authority can lead to intra-village disputes over their motivations. They illustrate the wide variety of social activities that are part of the politics of contemporary development.

After the Lhasa uprising of March 2008 and Sichuan earthquake of May 2008, Tibetan regions appeared in frontpage news around the world. Chapter Five reconnects the millenarian Olympic time that opened the book to these tragic events. As the Chinese state positions itself as the only benevolent humanitarian actor that can help earthquake victims, Tibetan Buddhist monks launch an "oppositional mourning" to counter Olympic Time and promote a temporality based in Buddhist rebirth (p. 230). Examples of local opposition in Rebgong tie this chapter to the book's core themes of the politics of presence and the "scale-making" that links the local to the national (p. 44). The Epilogue follows the efforts of a prefectural Party secretary as he builds a "Culture Square" in front of Rebgong's main monastery. Authorities place a large corporate-

funded statue of the Green Tara Drolma, who is pleasing to Chinese tourists, in the center of the square. Eventually, Tibetan protestors appropriate the square for their own demonstrations, turning it into another front in the battle for fortune.

The book draws primarily from the voices of elders and middle-aged officials, and young Tibetans are often discussed from their viewpoints. This is striking because the youth are key objects of education development policy, are villages' hopes for their futures, and constitute many of the "troublemakers" that make the crisis described in the book so acute (p. 192). The book's greatest difficulty stems from its theoretical language, which was at times hard to understand and ultimately made grasping the book's insights more onerous.

Nevertheless, the book's ethnographic vignettes are both memorable and successful in highlighting the stakes of development in Tibet. Few other studies have been able to effectively engage with the complex world of contemporary eastern Tibet without giving short shrift to either contemporary policy developments or the rich social tapestry of the region.

Overall, this book is a valuable contribution for other researchers who investigate how state development policies across the Himalayas are interacting with the religious, cultural, and social lives of various communities. It also serves as a model for what such studies can accomplish: putting development into dialogue with everyday life and following how changing traditions and newly built places can become venues for political struggles both within communities and between them and the state, market, and other important scales.

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