

December 2018

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Recommended Citation

Nyima, Yonten. 2018. Obituary | Andreas Gruschke (1960–2018). *HIMALAYA* 38(2).
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol38/iss2/15>



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Obituary | Andreas Gruschke (1960–2018)

Yonten Nyima



Andreas Gruschke (center) in the field in Tibet.

(Ingo Breuer, 2006)

Professor Andreas Gruschke's passing away was truly a huge loss to his wife, Astrid Zimmermann, whose love for him was immense; to his Tibetan and Chinese friends and colleagues who have learned from him and appreciated his humour, warm-heartedness, and optimism; and to the Institute of Social Development and Western China Development Studies (ISDWCDs) at Sichuan University, Chengdu, China, where he worked as a full-time professor teaching and doing research primarily on Tibetan pastoralism since 2012. Professor Andreas Gruschke loved Tibet and China, and sincerely wanted to bring about policy change through his research.

Andreas Gruschke was only fifty-seven years old when he passed away on January 30, 2018. Writing this obituary, I feel like he is still with us. My last conversation with him was on January 12th, eighteen days before his passing. On that day, I shared an image on WeChat of the *Sichuan University Conference on Promoting World-class University Construction* (四川大学世界一流大学建设推进大会).¹

Andreas responded:

Unlike hardware the university as such cannot be 'constructed' as first class. What is needed is to create an academic (including social and political)

environment in which the academic work can be improved in ways to eventually develop into a first-class university (Andreas Gruschke, WeChat message to author, January 12, 2018).

Andreas made an insightful comment, as he so often did. Therefore, I shared his comment with some other friends with his permission. I never expected that this would be our last conversation. This conversation was a good example of how we became close friends as, in addition to being colleagues at ISDWCDs, we shared many common values and beliefs. I met Andreas for the first time in the summer of 2013 in Lhasa, Tibet, and we quickly bonded over our shared perspectives and experiences as human geographers conducting research on Tibetan pastoralism.

Andreas Gruschke was born in Tengen, Baden-Württemberg, Germany on April 16, 1960. He studied geography and romance languages and literature at RWTH Aachen University from 1981 to 1982. Between 1982 and 1990, he studied geography, ethnology, and sinology at the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg, Germany, and he spent one year studying the Chinese language at the Beijing Languages Institute (Beijing Language and Culture University since 1996) from 1984 to 1985. Upon completing his Chinese language program in Beijing at the age of twenty-five, Andreas worked as a language teacher at the Shanxi Agricultural University at Taigu, Shanxi Province in China for a year. This was the start of his lifelong international career that would eventually lead to his research in Tibet and western China. Since 1987, his interests turned particularly to Tibet, the Himalayas, the Silk Road, and South Korea. He would later go on to write nonfiction books on these areas.

In 1990, Andreas received his master's degree in geography, social anthropology, and sinology from the Albert Ludwig University of Freiburg with a thesis on China's land reclamation: "Land Reclamation in Arid Areas of the People's Republic of China and Its Contribution to the Nutrition of the Chinese Population" (*Neulanderschließung in Trockengebieten der VR China und ihre Bedeutung für die Nahrungsversorgung der chinesischen Bevölkerung*) (Gruschke 1990).

After earning his master's degree, Andreas started field research in Tibet, China, and South Korea, and conducted extensive research across Tibet, Ladakh, and Bhutan. From 1992 to 1993 he worked as a visiting professor at the Institute of German Studies at Kangweon National University, Chunchon, South Korea.

In 2009, Andreas received his Ph.D. in development geography from Leipzig University, Germany with a dissertation on resource management and pastoral livelihoods in Tibet: "Nomadic Use of Resources and Livelihood Security in Transition: The East Tibetan Region Yushu (Qinghai, PR China)" (*Nomadische Ressourcennutzung und Existenzsicherung im Umbruch: Die osttibetische Region Yushu (Qinghai, VR China)*) (Gruschke 2009).

Andreas worked as a researcher at the Collaborative Research Centre "Difference and Integration" affiliated with the Universities of Leipzig and Halle-Wittenberg, Germany between 2004 and 2012, with five months of postdoctoral research work at the Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research-UFZ, Germany from August to December 2010. During this time, he wrote the Tibetan case study for the research project "Nomadic without Pastures? Political Ecology and Human Security," which explored the question of pastoralists' sustainable resource use in the context of global change through three regional case studies from Morocco, Eastern Tibet, and Northern Sudan.

His research primarily focused on pastoral resource management and livelihood security in Tibet in a rapidly changing world from the perspective of pastoralists. This is particularly important in China where such a perspective is often missing, as policymakers and government-patronized scholars still consider pastoralists' way of life and thinking as backward. Andreas stressed the importance of pastoral perspectives in an article published last year called *Ecological Change on the Tibetan Plateau and the Human Interface: Pastoralists as Agents and Victims of Environmental Impact* (Gruschke 2017). The following quotes from this article precisely articulate a fundamental problem not only in pastoralism vis à vis the state, but in Tibet-China relations; namely, imposing one's own wishes on others (己所所欲, 强施于人), which reflects a bitter irony between the nominal autonomy and the actual hegemony in today's Tibet.

In the long run, there will only be a chance to improve results if herders are not simply coerced into accepting policies decided by others, but are actively included in the process of decision-making... Local adaptations demonstrate that herders have expertise that enables them to play their part in the process, as long as they are allowed to do so (Gruschke 2017, 50).

A state that postulates that it "knows the best solutions" for all its citizens under all circumstances suffers from a serious overestimation of its capabi-

lities...This clearly shows that the state, in order to solve the problems existing in its complex society, needs to learn lessons from those whose lifestyles it considers to be backward (Gruschke 2017, 53).

Andreas loved his field research and had been to all of the major pastoral areas in Tibet. His pastoralist-oriented approach won him many Tibetan friends in his research areas. They found him willing to listen to their concerns, opinions, and wishes, and thus felt respected, valued, and understood. As a result, they were willing to share their true experiences with him.

During his tenure at Sichuan University, Andreas worked as a Tibet and China scholar with expertise in social geography, development geography, and anthropology. His research interests continued to focus on the social and cultural geography of Tibet and China; socio-economic transformations and livelihood security of Tibetan pastoralists under conditions of political and ecological change and state interventions; the monastic economy and its impact on local livelihoods; and the impact of tourism development and livelihood security in rural western China.

Andreas made successful efforts to bring together Tibetan, Chinese, and Western scholars to pursue issues that Tibet and China face from an international perspective. In 2015, with the support of ISDWCDs, he initiated an annual international forum entitled the “International Symposium on Cultural Inclusion” (ISCI), which addressed issues encountered by minorities around the world. In 2017, with his fellow German colleague at ISDWCDs, Professor Ingo Breuer, he published an edited volume entitled *Tibetan Pastoralists and Development: Negotiating the Future of Grassland Livelihoods* (Gruschke and Breuer 2017a). With fifteen chapters written by Tibetan, Chinese, and Western scholars from the social and environmental sciences, it explored the question of possible futures of Tibetan pastoralism in the context of a changing world. The edited volume examined the complex roles of the Chinese state, economic relations, and rangeland resources in shaping the present and future of Tibetan pastoral livelihoods through fieldwork-based case studies. He also made great efforts to share his research findings and thoughts with scholars and students through formal and informal academic exchanges at universities and research institutes outside Sichuan Province.

The research seminar and colloquium at ISDWCDs that Andreas co-taught with his wife, Astrid, herself a professor in the School of Tourism at Sichuan University, was truly welcomed by students. They found the seminar to be

very practical and useful, as their questions about doing research were addressed through critical discussions of their own work. I talked with several students who told me that they appreciated his interactive, activity-based approach, compared to the passive, lecture-based teaching approaches they were more accustomed to.

Over the course of his career, Andreas published two books and numerous articles on Tibetan pastoralism-related themes, including contemporary pastoral livelihoods and state interventions into pastoralism. In addition to *Tibetan Pastoralists and Development: Negotiating the Future of Grassland Livelihoods*, he published a book based on his dissertation, *Nomadic Use of Resources and Livelihood Security in Transition: The East Tibetan Region Yushu (Qinghai, PR China)* (*Nomadische Ressourcennutzung und Existenzsicherung im Umbruch: Die osttibetische Region Yushu (Qinghai, VR China)*) (Gruschke 2012). Using a case studies approach, the book explored the challenges of livelihood security, vulnerability, and resilience of Tibetan pastoralists from Yulshul in eastern central Tibet.

Andreas’ major articles on Tibetan pastoralism included: *Ecological Change on the Tibetan Plateau and the Human Interface: Pastoralists as Agents and Victims of Environmental Impact* (Gruschke 2017); *Pastoral Livelihoods on the Tibetan Plateau in the 21st Century: Status Quo, Recent Developments and Future Perspectives* (Gruschke and Breuer 2017b); *From Yak Herders to Yartsa Traders: Tibetan Nomads and New Market Options in Qinghai’s Yushu Region* (Gruschke 2011); *Nomads without Pastures? Globalization, Regionalization and Livelihood Security of Nomads and Former Nomads in Kham* (Gruschke 2008a).

Andreas also discussed other Tibet-related themes, including issues in contemporary Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism in his earlier articles. For example, *Unemployment and Underemployment in Tibet: Political Pressure or Consequences of Social Transformation? (Arbeitslosigkeit und Unterbeschäftigung in Tibet: Politische Druckmittel oder Folgen sozialen Wandels?)* (Gruschke 2003a); *The Jonang Order: Reasons for Its Decline, Preconditions for Its Survival and Current Situation (Der Jonang-Orden: Gründe für seinen Niedergang, Voraussetzungen für das Überdauern und aktuelle Lage)* (Gruschke 2002).

Andreas introduced Tibetan culture and Buddhism to Western readers in his nearly twenty books in German. These include: *Ways of Wisdom: Tibetan Myths and Legends. From Warriors, Monks, Demons and the Origin of the World (Wege der Weisheit: Tibetische Mythen und Legenden. Von Kriegern, Mönchen, Dämonen und dem Ursprung der Welt)* (Gruschke 2008b); *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet’s Outer Provinces: Kham.*

Vol. 1, *The TAR Part of Kham* (Gruschke 2004a). *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet's Outer Provinces: Kham*. Vol. 2, *The Qinghai Part of Kham* (Gruschke 2004b); *Tibetan Buddhism (Tibetischer Buddhismus)* (Gruschke 2003b); *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet's Outer Provinces: Amdo*. Vol. 1, *The Qinghai Part of Amdo* (Gruschke 2001a); *The Cultural Monuments of Tibet's Outer Provinces: Amdo*. Vol. 2, *The Sichuan Part of Amdo* (Gruschke 2001b); *The Life of Buddha (Das Leben Buddhas)* (Gruschke 1999); *Wisdom of the Tibetans. With meditation pictures and murals from Tibetan monasteries (Weisheit der Tibeter. Mit Meditationsbildern und Wandmalereien aus Tibetischen Klöstern)* (Gruschke 1998); *The Holy Places of the Tibetans: Myths and Legends from Kailash to Shambhala (Die heiligen Stätten der Tibeter: Mythen und Legenden von Kailash bis Shambhala)* (Gruschke 1997); *Tibet: Vast Land on the Roof of the World (Tibet: Weites Land auf dem Dach der Welt)* (Gruschke 1993).

In his life of fifty-seven years, Andreas spent more than half of it on Tibet-related research and became a great friend of Tibet and Tibetans. I believe that his past karmic actions made that happen. I also believe that what he did in his life will in turn bring him back to Tibet, and thus Tibet and Tibetans can continue to benefit from his presence.

Yonten Nyima, originally from Nagchu in Central Tibet, is a human geographer who specializes in Tibetan pastoralism. His main research interests are development and environmental policies, pastoralism, rangeland and natural resource management and access, indigenous knowledge and climate change, and cultural politics and resistance. Having earned degrees in human geography (Ph.D., University of Colorado-Boulder, U.S.A., 2012) and international affairs with a concentration in economic and political development (M.A., Columbia University, U.S.A., 2006), Dr. Yonten Nyima draws from political ecology and political economy in examining rationales for, implementation of, and socioeconomic, cultural, political and ecological effects of China's ongoing development and environmental policies in Tibet. He has published peer-reviewed articles on Tibetan pastoralism in international academic journals including *Area*, *Conservation and Society*, and *Human Ecology*.

Endnotes

1. This is the original English translation of the conference title. In 2015, the Chinese government put forward the concept of the promotion of world-class universities and used the Chinese phrase 'construction' (建设), implying that in China the promotion of world-class universities is seen more as a hardware project than a software project.

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