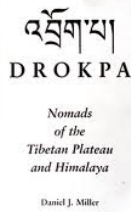


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Daniel Miller. 2008. *Drokpa: Nomads of the Tibetan Plateau and Himalaya*. Kathmandu: Vajra Publications. 132pp, maps, notes, photographs. ISBN 97899946506052 (paper 42USD).

Daniel J. Miller is a rangeland ecologist who has studied agricultural and pastoral practices around the Himalayas and on the Tibetan Plateau since the 1970s. *Drokpa: Nomads of the Tibetan Plateau and Himalaya* is a collection of photographs published for a general audience. The text's stated purpose is to reach beyond the "restricted readership" of Miller's academic publications and to "[provide] the viewers with a more considerate and compassionate portrait of Tibetan nomads" (6-7). In addition to these generalized goals, Miller's photographic and textual narrative includes the following arguments:

1. The geographically widely distributed Tibetan-speaking nomads in Bhutan, Nepal, and The People's Republic of China may be viewed as a semi-cohesive whole, sharing similar landscapes, pastoral practices, and cultural and linguistic heritage. Furthermore, they face similar challenges in regards to modernization processes and policies.
2. Policy-makers in these areas have disregarded the cultural and ecological significance of Tibetan pastoral practices and, consequently, have enacted a range of policies that, while having brought educational and economic benefits to herding

communities, have done so at considerable cost.

3. Policy-makers in these areas should consider Tibetan nomads as important sources of knowledge about grassland ecology and animal husbandry. Tibetan nomads should be given a more active role in designing grassland management and settlement policies so their "desires and needs are considered along with an understanding of the ecology of the land and a vision for the future" (131).

The first point is evident in the thematic arrangement of photographs. The photo sections are arranged as following: "Herders of Forty Centuries", "Fields of Grass", "Herds on the Move", "Sacred Spaces", and "Winds of Change". Photos in the first four sections highlight similarities over time and distance (i.e., photos are from all time periods and from the Tibet Autonomous Region, Amdo, Kham, Nepal, and Bhutan). "Winds of Change", the last section, is the only one where this arrangement is not employed, i.e., photos shown in pairs or clusters are from Amdo or Kham regions. Only five of the twenty photos in this section are from the Tibet Autonomous Region, Nepal, and Bhutan. This presentation conveys a narrative of diverse peoples with a unified experience, as nomadic pastoralists with shared cultural and linguistic heritage facing similar challenges.

Thematically presenting the images effectively introduces a general readership to the vast geographic range, but similar cultural and linguistic aspects of Tibetan-speaking nomads in Bhutan, China, and Nepal. Miller makes the point about commonality explicit: "Despite the extent of the Tibetan nomadic pastoral world, all these nomads share many things in common" (120). He goes on to describe the following commonalities: high-elevation rangeland environments, grazing of livestock, pastoral production practices, patterns of mobility, yak-hair tents, and types of livestock. Miller also draws attention to similarities in language, culture, and religious practices. Miller concludes, "all nomads are now confronting and dealing with significant changes to their way of life" (120). This cohesive grouping could be considered a rhetorical "economy of scale" strategy to

increase the significance of his arguments about policy-making. Before he can make his case for policy, he needs to convince his readers that the nomads under discussion are worth caring about.

The second and third points regarding policy-making are not as evident in his photographic narrative, but may be inferred from the section titles. "Herders of Forty Centuries" implies a sense of temporal continuity with little change, a sense that is reinforced in "Fields of Grass", "Herds on the Move", and "Sacred Spaces" that present images of people, landscapes, dwellings, and livestock and other cultural practices that, while diverse, provide the reader with an overall sense of shared experience. Though many of the photos were taken in the 1990s, Miller has curated images that show nomads interacting with symbols of modernity (e.g., cars, trucks, motorcycles, sunglasses, Pepsi) and grouped them together in the "Winds of Change" section. This section provides the backbone of Miller's overall narrative arc: nomads across the Himalayas and the Tibetan Plateau share a strong, interconnected culture and an evolutionarily rational and sustainable pastoral system, and are threatened by change.

Miller's writing is informative, clear, and concise. Laying the foundations for his argument of how nomads should be included in policy-making, Miller starts with a general introduction to the rangelands of the Tibetan Plateau and Himalayas and a description of the ecological diversity and fragility of the grassland. Miller argues that since the grasslands have supported nomads and their livestock for millennia, the ecosystem is "resilient," and the rangelands can be heavily grazed and maintained "as long as livestock numbers are not excessive" (122).

This is a direct counter-argument to nomad settlement policies that claim ecological preservation as a primary reason for sedentarization of nomad communities. Grassland degradation is often cited as a reason why nomads should move off the grasslands, and over-grazing is given as an official reason for grassland degradation.

Miller describes the cultural and ecological significance of mobility and argues that nomads have a much more sophisticated

grasp of geography and pastoral practices than is generally realized (see 123-126). By highlighting the ecological importance of herd mobility, Miller provides another counter-argument to sedentarization and the increasingly common policy of fencing grasslands. In showcasing nomads' "keen knowledge" of animal husbandry, Miller adds weight to the argument that nomads should participate in grassland management policies.

Miller takes a hard stance against top-down modernization and development policies. He writes about conversations with a Khams pa nomad who, for the sake of maximizing economic output, was asked to cease raising horses and focus on raising sheep and yaks. The "proud nomad" tells Miller, "How can they tell us not to keep horses? We're Khampas. We ride horses. Always have, always will" (128). This is a singular example of how grassland management policies have ignored the cultural values of the people who are most influenced by these policies. In terms of ignoring nomads' knowledge of ecology and grazing practices, Miller writes:

The Chinese policy of settling nomads goes against state-of-the-art information and analyses for livestock production in pastoral areas. This body of scientific knowledge champions the mobility of herds as a way to sustain the grazing lands and nomads' livelihoods (129).

Miller summarizes the adverse consequences of these policies. Rapid sedentarization results in loss of rangeland-related ecological knowledge and subsequently the loss of nomads' "singular identity" (131). Settlement policies have also not addressed the lack of employment opportunities for newly settled nomads, which further contributes to the marginalization of nomad communities (see 129-130).

The strength of Miller's work comes from the interplay of his photographs, his narratives of interactions with nomads, and, crucially, his ecological expertise. His photographs and storytelling situate his arguments suitably for a general audience. Moreover, Miller's photographs provide an insightful historical window into

nomad settlement policies that were intensified on the Tibetan Plateau during his time there. In the mid to late 1990s, a government poverty alleviation policy, 'Four Way Scheme' (*sipeitao*), was introduced in nomad areas in China. This policy's four schemes include: i) subsidizing concrete housing for nomads, ii) subsidizing shelter for livestock, iii) erecting fences, and iv) growing additional fodder. Miller took most of the photographs that appear in *Drokpa* around 1996-1997. Many of these are from areas affected by this policy. As such, *Drokpa* is an excellent introduction to the history of Tibetan nomads and the challenges they currently face.

My criticisms are minor. First, the reader is left with the impression that all religious practices in the diverse regions Miller writes about are relatively homogeneous. The textual treatment of religious culture and customs is where Miller is the least comfortable. Second, Miller alludes to the specious premise that Tibetan Buddhism is somehow linked to, or responsible for, ecological harmony (see 128, 132). This type of non-evidenced adulation of Tibetan cultural practices unfortunately undermines Miller's own hopes to avoid romanticizing the Plateau and the people living there (see 117).