GLOBAL ASIA

Emilia Roza Sulek

Trading Caterpillar Fungus in Tibet

When Economic Boom Hits Rural Area

Amsterdam University Press

International Institute for Asian Studies

Publications

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Figure 30 by Sonamjid.
Figure 14 by Francesca La Vigna.
Maps by Maya Schneeberger (Map 4 after Daniel Winkler).

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in the Netherlands, whose opinion mattered to me a great deal. In Berlin, I had the support of Paweł Lewicki: we were fellow travellers through the exciting but painful process of doctorate writing. I also thank Li Li, my advisor, translator and a dedicated scholar of Golok, Anna Napiontkówna for her faith in this project, Francesca La Vigna for her care and for giving me a home in Berlin. Finally, I thank Thomas Studer, who accompanied me during the final stretches of work on this book, for his support and for the new perspectives.

The most important people are always mentioned at the end. These are my parents, Róża and Antoni, whose unconditional support made both conducting the research and writing this book possible. I will never be able to repay what I owe them. This book is dedicated to them, because they also dedicated themselves to it.

Notes on Transliteration

Most of my research was conducted in the Tibetan language and in places where Tibetan is the main medium of communication. A logical consequence of this is that priority is given to Tibetan in this book. However, rendering Golok pronunciation is not easy, especially given the lack of a standard system for Tibetan phonetics. In this situation, I decided to use my own simple phonetic equivalents of local terms and names. The spellings – using the Wylie system of transliteration – are given in the glossary at the end of the book. Sometimes, providing a spelling was impossible: some local words do not have a written form or have many possible variants.

When writing about the local geography, I use Tibetan or Chinese toponyms, or both simultaneously, although the latter only in the case of key place names. All other Golok toponyms in the book appear in their Tibetan version, unless my informants preferred the Chinese name, i.e., when Tibetan names are translations of new administrative units but have not taken root in the local language. Tibet is part of the People's Republic of China, whether we like it or not, but replacing Tibetan toponyms with their Chinese equivalents would falsify the local people's perception of space. Many places where I worked do not have Chinese names anyway, and if one wanted to make a map of Golok using only Chinese language, it would require leaving large parts blank or filling them with ad hoc toponyms. In this situation, the best solution was to follow the local people's choices. Foreign words, given in italics in the text, are most often Tibetan. Whenever it is not clear from the context, I add abbreviations: 'Tib.' for Tibetan, 'Chin.' for Chinese, 'Mong.' for Mongolian and, finally, 'Skt.' and 'Lat.' for occasional Sanskrit and Latin words.

This book was born between several languages: the research was conducted in Tibetan and Chinese, with the occasional use of English. I wrote it in English, whilst living in a German-, Dutch- or Swiss-speaking country. However, English is not my mother (or father) tongue. The quotations 'from myself' that appear in this book, and which come from my fieldnotes and field diaries, were written in Polish. I edited and translated them for this publication. These quotations, unless their source is clear from the context, are marked with 'FN' for fieldnotes and 'FD' for field diaries.

The names of all the protagonists and my main informants are pseudonyms: they are all names common in Golok. As with many scholars working in Tibet, I struggled between a desire to portray this book's protagonists as lively and complex individuals and the need to protect their privacy. I know that in concealing my informants' identities I disappoint many of them, who would like to see their contribution to this book manifested in a more literal way. I hope they will forgive me for doing so.

List of Abbreviations

AC	Autonomous County
CCTV	China Central Television
FD	field diary
FN	fieldnotes
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PRC	People's Republic of China
RCC	Rural Credit Cooperative
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SNNR	Sanjiangyuan National Nature Reserve
SU	sheep unit
SSU	sheep stocking unit
TAP	Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture
SU	Tibet Autonomous Region
TQAP	Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture

List of Units of Measurement and Currency

jin (Chin.)	unit of weight, half a kilogram
jama (Tib.)	unit of weight, half a kilogram
yuan (Chin.)	unit of currency, in the period of my research 1 euro was worth about 10 yuan
jiao (Chin.)	unit of currency, one-tenth of a yuan
fen (Chin.)	unit of currency, one-hundredth of a yuan
shang (Tib.)	unit of weight and formerly of currency, one-tenth of a *jin* or *jama,* fifty grams
karma (Tib.)	unit of currency, one-hundredth of a *shang* (equivalent of Chin. *fen*)
mu (Chin.)	unit of area, one-fifteenth of a hectare

Introduction

Crowds thronging the streets in Golok, a pastoral region on the Tibetan plateau, signal the arrival of spring. Everyone is feverishly buying and selling. Groups of people huddle over trays of a strange-looking product. Men in black suits sit under big umbrellas with telephones glued to their ears, discussing something in hushed voices. A group of women squat on the ground, cleaning something with toothbrushes. A few steps away there is a cardboard box in the sun; a young woman guards its contents against curious onlookers. It seems as if everyone is carrying at least some of this curious product. People in restaurants pull it from their pockets and show what looks like a small, brown, dry caterpillar to their neighbours.

Wherever you go, people talk about one thing. Instead of exchanging the usual greetings, they inquire 'do you have many *yartsa*?' 'What's the latest price?', passengers on a bus say as a conversation starter. The words *yartsa gumbu* are on everyone's lips.[1] *Yartsa gumbu* is the Tibetan name of a rather unusual organism, which looks like a larva with a horn growing from its head. It is a parasitic fungus (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*) that feeds on caterpillars of certain species of moth that inhabit the Tibetan plateau. Advertised as a wonder drug, it commands high prices on the Chinese market and thousands of kilograms of *yartsa gumbu* are sold in China and abroad. But there is only one part of the world where it grows: this species of caterpillar fungus is endemic to the Tibetan plateau and the Himalayas.

Golok is one of the Tibetan regions that produce caterpillar fungus and where people have built their livelihoods upon it. During the several weeks a year when this fungus is dug from the ground, it becomes everyone's primary concern. It captures the attention of people from all walks of life and often appears in unexpected contexts.

In Dawu, Golok's biggest town, in the house of a Buddhist monk, people wait for divinations. In gratitude for the monk's help, they offer him tea bricks, money, and caterpillar fungus. In a photo studio, a trader waits for his photographs to be developed. He radiates with pride, showing the other people around: 'Look at how large these *yartsa* are!' A monk in the monastery reveals that he dreamt that the *yartsa* will soon be extinct. During a boring

1 The Tibetan name *yartsa gumbu* is shortened in Golok to *yartsa*, and I use it in this form in quotations from the interviews. The Chinese name *donchong xiacao* is also abbreviated to *chongcao*: Chinese speakers quoted in this book use this form.

class, a school pupil draws a gigantic specimen of caterpillar fungus in his notebook, along with its name in Chinese and a price: 500 yuan.

In the Golok highlands, in high-altitude valleys where pastoralists have their tents, houses, and livestock, the atmosphere is just as fervid as in the town. Columns of people walk into the mountains, all of them carrying metal hoes. Miniature silhouettes move across the pastures as if searching for something in the grass. One sees them on high mountain slopes, in areas where people hardly ever venture. In the afternoon, on dusty roads, there are surprising crowds of people in this sparsely populated land. You wonder: has there been a car accident, a fight, or a political protest? No, these are the impromptu markets where people sell the caterpillar fungus.

Golok is in a state similar to a gold rush. On the one hand, it seems like a festival of joy: traders and diggers visiting the town party into the early hours. On the other hand, there is an air of conspiracy: people exchange information about police checkpoints on the roads and whisper that the authorities have been confiscating caterpillar fungus found on illegal diggers. Here, at 4000 m, in a region seldom visited, the streets suddenly swarm with people. There are many exotic faces: Huis, Salars, and Han Chinese mingle with Tibetan farmers. Groups of beggars roam the streets. They come from neighbouring Tibetan regions as well as more distant parts of China: caterpillar fungus season makes people generous. The beggars disappear when the season is over – just like the prostitutes, who also come to Golok in spring: this is the best time to earn money.

Aim of this Book

The most obvious aspects of the seasonal phenomenon described above are hard to miss for anyone who visits Golok. But its inner mechanisms and consequences are more difficult to observe. How far and how deep does its influence reach?

This book is a detailed record of the caterpillar fungus boom as observed in the region of Golok during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Golok at that time was already a place of intense economic life. The digging and sale of caterpillar fungus was a lucrative business engaging thousands of pastoralists and drawing people, both diggers and traders, from other regions. Therefore, although the book tells the story of one place in particular, it also reveals much about other parts of the Tibetan plateau, where the same phenomenon was observed.

Several groups feature in our story. The main protagonists are pastoralists from one particular township. The second group, the pastoralists' trading partners, work in the township and town markets. The third group remains invisible at first: these are seasonal migrants, who dig for caterpillar fungus in Golok. They are the pastoralists' partners in another economic arrangement: they lease the pastoralists' land for digging. The last, fourth actor is the state, both as abstract legislative body and control apparatus represented by state officials of various levels. Through its legislative power, the state tries to regulate the actions of the other three groups and the officials, as the arm of the state, are responsible for controlling them. Thus, the relations between these actors can be described as follows: the pastoralists earn their income from caterpillar fungus with the help of traders and migrant diggers and do so either in spite of the regulations introduced by the state or in cooperation with state organs.

The two stages on which the events described in this book take place are the pastureland and the market. The pastureland is naturally the field of the pastoralists' everyday activities – they live in high-altitude valleys and concentrate on raising livestock. Yet, the pastureland is not only grazing space for their herds, it is also a supplier of this expensive fungus. By digging it out of the ground, the pastoralists *produce* it for the market. The market is where the caterpillar fungus trade is set in motion: it starts its journey through the commodity chain to reach customers in distant corners of China and abroad. Here, at the Golok marketplaces, it is also converted into cash. However, the pastoralists' income is derived not just from the market. Golok is the location for migrations of people who are neither traders, nor pastoralists, but who also want to benefit from the caterpillar fungus boom. These venturers pay the pastoralists to lease their land. Thus, the pastoralists' income also comes from selling temporary rights to dig the fungus. The land is thus a production stage on two levels: where the caterpillar fungus is produced as a commodity for the market, and where income from the land leases accrues. These land leases, in turn, enable the diggers to search for caterpillar fungus and so produce both the fungus for the market and income for themselves.

Caterpillar fungus is a magnet that draws people together in Golok. And so, the two stages of action described above are not only zones of production, but also of contact between different groups linked by different types of economic arrangements. The pastoralists leave their high mountain valleys to sell the fungus in the town. Sometimes, traders go to the highlands to buy the fungus there. The physical channel of contact among these groups is the road between Dawu, the prefectural capital, and the township. Yet,

this is also the road that the protagonists of this book – pastoralists, traders, and diggers – must pass along on their symbolic road to wealth. It is also where the seasonal influx of people into the township is controlled during spring. If, in this simplified sketch, the pastureland is the habitat of the pastoralists and the marketplace of the traders, the road (or the part of it where controls are enforced) is the state's domain.

However, the goal of this ethnography is not only to analyse interactions between different actors or the financial side of this area of local production; this book also considers the consequences of the emergence of the whole caterpillar fungus economy and its impact on society. The caterpillar fungus economy denotes here a broad field of income-generating practices related to this resource: not only the digging and sale of the fungus, but a whole range of concomitant practices that have emerged with this boom. The book argues that this economy has not only brought about improvement of the material situation of the rural population in regions such as Golok but has also led to a complex transformation in the local society.

The caterpillar fungus boom has created a significant new source of income for the pastoralists. This would not be so special if not for the fact that Golok used to be one of the poorest parts of Qinghai Province, which itself is very low in terms of national economic statistics.[2] In the 1980s and 1990s, Golok had little infrastructure, many areas were accessible only on horseback, and many facilities were beyond the reach of its population (Horlemann 2002: 255). Some of these observations remained valid during the years of my research: the township roads were often unmetalled tracks, some areas remained unreachable with motor vehicles, and many services were difficult to reach for pastoralists in more remote valleys. And yet, Golok towns continued to grow in size. In Dawu, new buildings rose, including apartment blocks with central heating and other facilities. There is a football stadium, a television station, and a number of modern buildings hosting government units. Many of these developments were possible thanks to the state investment programme called 'Open up the West' (Chin. *Xibu da kaifa*). This programme was launched in 2001 to improve living standards in the less economically prosperous western regions of China, to foster their integration with the state, and increase state security (Goodman 2004: 67). The initiative did help 'lift' Golok up the ladder of infrastructure development, but it did not directly translate into 'economic happiness'

2 Golok occupied the second-to-last place in terms of GDP per capita income (2964 yuan; QPSY 2009). Other prefectures with similarly bad results were Yushu and Malho, also pastoral regions.

for its inhabitants, especially those living from the land. However, signs of economic improvement were observed in the lives of the pastoralists too. But these had less to do with state investments and more with the caterpillar fungus economy.

From my first days in Golok I heard remarks to the effect that pastoralists waste the money they earn from collecting caterpillar fungus: 'They go to town, get drunk, and spend everything on prostitutes and gambling'. Such comments came from people who were not directly engaged in the caterpillar fungus economy or for whom the pastoralists were 'others', people they did not identify with. These were members of the local intelligentsia, Buddhist monks, but also farmers and town dwellers. Although their words may hold a grain of truth, I perceived in them an unpleasant superior tone. They suggested that the pastoralists 'did not know' how to handle money. My own observations did not confirm this stereotype: I did not see the town being invaded by hordes of drunken pastoralists, even though I witnessed how town life changed during the caterpillar fungus season.

My goal became to ascertain what really happened with the pastoralists' income. When the harvests are over and money is in people's pockets, there is a time of spending. What does this money go on? With this question in my mind, I started investigating the pastoralists' money management decisions. The picture that emerged was indeed of the pastoralists having money and spending it, but not necessarily of them squandering it. There was no doubt that the pastoralists had more money than before the boom. They had *much* more money now, and part of it they spent on consumer goods. But a closer investigation showed that they also used it for other purposes and sometimes did not spend it at all, but saved it for the future. The money that the pastoralists spent fulfilled their needs, both those more immediate and those concerned with improving their status longer term, translating here into changes in their standard of living, measured by the amount and quality of material goods owned, technical equipment, or even food diversity. Other investments become visible only when one leaves the town; these pertain to complex and long-lasting changes in the pastoralists' world. They also translate into enhanced quality of life, but this time measured by the quality of infrastructure, living conditions, or transport facilities. These are the more *systemic* changes in the pastoral regions.

This book shows that money earned thanks to the caterpillar fungus boom is being used by the pastoralists to transform their region. In other words, it demonstrates that this economic boom has led to a profound transformation of the local society and life realities. This has been accomplished with the minds, hands, and money earned by the pastoralists from various economic

practices related to the boom. It partly corresponds with 'development' as it is envisioned by development planners and the Chinese state, and partly diverges from it. Thus, the argument of this book can be paraphrased as follows: the money derived from caterpillar fungus is used by pastoralists to *develop* their region. This sentence can only be formulated this way if special precautions have been taken regarding the meanings vested in the term 'development'.

Development and Modernity

The concept of development is a problematic and contested one.[3] It is the product of a particular geopolitical situation in the post-war and postcolonial world. As an ideology behind political and economic relations, its history started in 1949, when Harry Truman announced his Four Point Program in which 'development' was made the new emblem of US policy and gained a currency it never had before.[4] Though a body of literature that has 'development' in its name proves the existence of a whole discipline, with its own theorists and practitioners, critics still question its tenets and motives. Rather than a matter of social fact or necessity, development, they forcefully remark, must be seen as a historically produced discourse or a *domain of thought and action*. This domain is defined by the 'forms of knowledge [...] through which it comes into being and is elaborated into objects, concepts, theories and the like; systems of power that regulate its practice; and the forms of subjectivity [...] through which people come to recognize themselves as developed or underdeveloped' (Escobar 1995: 10). In other words, development is a political construct comprising a set of representations that put different parts of the globe on various levels of the 'development ladder', defining them as needing a developmental intervention and sanctioning it. This ideology now penetrates human thinking to such a degree that it has become difficult, even for persons from regions diagnosed as 'underdeveloped', to think about their situation in terms other than those provided by this discourse. Seen in this way, 'development' fits Michel Foucault's concept of discourse: far from being 'just words' or a free expression of thought, it is a *practice* with certain conditions, rules, and its variously empowered actors. 'To speak is to *do* something' and thus a

3 On development, see Escobar 1995; Sachs 1992; Ferguson 1994; and Rahnema and Bawtree 1997.

4 On the history of 'development', see Rist 2003.

discourse is an apparatus not only of seeing, knowing, and expressing, but also of acting (Foucault 1972: 209).

The concept of development cannot exist without its antonym, underdevelopment. The latter is a product of the former and gains its meaning in relation to it (Esteva 1992: 11). Though it can be broadly said that underdevelopment is a state in which resources (of any kind) are not used to their full potential, with the result that the 'development' process is slower than it *should* be, it is clear that this is a definition that could pretty much be used to explain anything. This can be demonstrated by the example of 'poverty', another concept that is devoid of autonomous meaning and gains it only in relation with 'non-poverty'. This is defined according to the standards of wealth of more economically advantaged parts of the world. It is measured by statistical quantifiers such as GNP or per capita income and evaluated by institutions based in the 'developed' world, which use their own criteria of development and convert it into 'figures or combinations of elements disembedded from the cultural type of livelihood' (Rahnema 1992: 162). Poverty as an aspect of human existence has always existed, but in the 'development era' it became problematized as abnormal or pathological. Typically, this 'abnormality' had first to be diagnosed (or constructed), and only then could the development administrators approach the task of 'treating' or eliminating it. This is one of the moments in the biography of the idea of development when its artificiality is most striking: first, a consensus had to be reached that poverty (replace with: illiteracy, malnourishment, etc.) is a problem to be solved and then a cure for it could be sought (or, vice versa, first the cure was found, and then its use justified).

Poverty or underdevelopment has a relative character and is intrinsically tied to the other end of the scale – the ideal state of welfare or 'development'. This ideal is not defined either, and as the final destination is not fixed, the gap between those who call themselves 'developed' and those who try to catch up with them can only grow: the leaders *always* move faster, as Wolfgang Sachs has noted (2010: xvii). The scope and meaning of poverty changes, too, as it directly depends on what the institutions governing development identify as the world's needs: its measures inflate and are continuously redefined. Set in a 'counterpoint with wealth', the concept of poverty can be seen as 'a theoretico-practical support for the prospect of increasing abundance' (Procacci 1991: 154). However cynical it sounds, 'modern economized societies define their poor in accordance with the capacity to absorb the commodities and services they produce', as Majid Rahnema observes (Ibid.: 19).

The above discussion places development discourse in the global arena, where it is integral to the 'West' or the 'North', which sees itself as custodian and exporter of 'development', and is imposed on the rest of the world, which is in the process of 'developing'. But a similar debate can be moved to more localized settings where – sometimes within a single state – similar discourse is being employed. In a definition stating that development is a 'historical construct that provides a space in which poor countries are known, specified and intervened upon' (Escobar 1995: 44-45), 'countries' can be replaced with peoples, regions, social classes, and other units. The case of China is one of many that show how the state employs this developmental discourse to introduce hierarchical divisions and assign roles to its various population groups, making some of them guides on the path to development and others into passengers who need to be taken there. Various kinds of state projects described in this book, such as sedentarization programmes and economic reforms carried out in the name of improving living standards, security, and social satisfaction, or to protect the environment, are interventions that have their roots (and justification) in a diagnosis that some parts of the country and its population need help on this path to development from those who are more advanced.

With all this in mind, one can approach the topic of the transformations that are taking place in Golok. I deliberately avoid calling them development, as this would imply that they lead in the 'right' direction and arise between less and more complex systems. This linear teleology is a belief that I do not share. And I do not share it even though some of the changes observed in Golok can be taken as examples of the pastoralists' own developmental initiatives. Some of them match the state's vision of development and some counter it. In all of them, the pastoralists are active agents of change. The caterpillar fungus economy is an example of how actively the pastoralists engage with current market realities and how – with the gains from it – they change their life, society, and environment, 'upgrading' it to a model that they desire. But the pastoralists do not merely exploit the economic opportunity that the boom has created *for* them; they also work to enlarge this field in order to maximize their gains. This book shows that the authorities restrict some income opportunities created by the caterpillar fungus economy, and the pastoralists need to organize themselves in order to create the space in which they can most take advantage of this boom. This does not come without difficulties and the pastoralists need to have creativity and initiative to overcome them. Finally, they are actively trying to make sense of a phenomenon that they witness and participate in as well as to incorporate it in the wider setting of their experience and life in general.

Another concept that is important for this discussion is modernity, as the processes described in this book can be taken as an illustration of how a pastoral region such as Golok is becoming 'modern'. Unfortunately, modernity is also a notoriously vague concept that gains its meaning in contrast to what is believed to be its opposite: 'tradition' or 'backwardness' are the conceptual constructs that often serve as its antonyms. While these two latter terms have different connotations in a range of diverse contexts, 'modernity' on the level of politics and developmental discourse is usually valued positively. It is closely bound with development: it is through 'development' that societies reach this ideal state of 'modernity' and it is through 'modernization' that they reach the status of being 'developed'.

What it means to be modern is just as debatable as what it means to be 'developed'. In principle, 'modernity' refers to 'modes of social life or organization' that emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and comprise a certain set of ideas about the world (e.g. that it is open to transformation by human intervention), and a complex of economic and political institutions (industrial production and market economy, nation state and mass democracy) (Giddens 1990: 1, 1998: 94). Though born in the West, 'modernity' became more or less worldwide in its influence, as Giddens observes. This leads to a question: how does it happen that societies (especially very diverse ones) become modern? According to one theory, this arises through a process of a culture-neutral 'operation that is not defined in terms of the specific cultures it carries us from and to, but is rather seen as of a type that any traditional culture can undergo' (Taylor 2001: 172-173). This theory is based upon the idea that modernity emerges through the dissipation of certain unsupported 'traditional' beliefs and practices. It implies that the paths of different societies converge: as they lose their 'traditional' illusions, they become modern and similar in their outlook. This vision of universal and linear 'modernization', happening as if by law of nature, has been criticized by many scholars who denounce its Eurocentric character and intellectual flaws. James Ferguson calls it a 'modernization myth', which on the one hand could be dismissed as false or factually inaccurate (in the popular usage of 'myth'), and on the other is 'a cosmological blueprint that lays down fundamental categories and meanings for the organization and interpretation of experience' (2000: 13-14).

Dilip Gaonkar reminds us that we should rather think in terms of alternative modernities and that modernity unfolds 'within a specific cultural or civilizational context and [...] different starting points for the transition to modernity lead to different outcomes' (2001: 17). Some of the changes may

be similar, but different starting points ensure that new differences emerge in this process. A singular model of modernity enacted in endless settings should be replaced with alternative modernities or, as Schmuel Eisenstadt suggests, multiple modernities. He notes that 'the actual developments in modernizing societies have refuted the homogenizing and hegemonic assumptions of this Western program of modernity' and observes that institutional and ideological patterns seen in the world neither constitute a simple continuation of the traditions of their respective societies, nor follow the Western project. The key to understanding the world is to see it as a 'story of continual constitution and reconstitution of a multiplicity of cultural programs', which are 'carried forward by specific social actors in close connection with social, political, and intellectual activists, and also by social movements pursuing different programs of modernity, holding very different views on what makes societies modern' (Eisenstadt 2000: 2-3). Thus, Western patterns of modernity are not the only 'authentic' ones and modernity is not one but many.

The exact meaning or 'contents' of 'modernity' in different contexts are the result of a negotiation process between different visions held by different actors: groups and individuals. Visions of modernity, even those performed by the state, change with time. Since Golok became part of the People's Republic of China, the state undertook numerous modernization projects according to a model of what it deemed that this process should bring to the rural regions of the country. The sequence of reforms and other interventions aimed at making a modern economy or a modern person evince how the meanings vested in modernity had changed, for example in the field of the economy, where 'modern' meant something different in the people's communes, in the period of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms, and with everything that came after. In Golok, at the time of my research, modernity was represented by spaceships and scientific laboratories pictured on billboards along the town streets and country roads. The doors to space or scientific conquests are not really open to Tibetan pastoralists, but the message of 'scientific rationality' that these billboards carry has a bearing on certain spheres of life that are closer to their experience. The policies regulating the use of the caterpillar fungus resources and some reforms of the pastoral economy discussed in this book demonstrate this well.

However, the state is not the only agent of modernity. The pastoralists in Golok, who are the target of the state reforms and modernizing projects, are not passive subjects who simply meet them with docile resignation. If they wanted to reject the state's modernizing or development projects (which bear some resemblance to what Stevan Harrell has termed 'civilizing projects')

they do not have to retreat to 'premodern' forms of social and economic life.[5] The system is not bipolar and does not consist only of 'modernist' and 'anti-modernist' standpoints. The pastoralists can bring to life their own vision of modernity and make their own choices. As was said about development, here, again, their choices can agree or disagree with modernity as the state envisions it. But people are not uniform in thinking and neither are their decisions, and there are many actors in Golok who have different views and expectations of modernity. Some of them appear in this book – reminding us that every ethnography should be read as a polyphonic story.

Modernity is unthinkable without the market economy that is a crucial part of the economic ideology underpinning it (Coméliau 2002: 29). Market and money are important elements in this ethnography. Ultimately, the main role of caterpillar fungus in regions such as Golok is money related. This book asks what people do in order to earn money and what they subsequently do with these funds. Conversely, there is also a question about what this money is doing to them. This is an intellectual shortcut, since the technical properties of money alone are not powerful enough to change human beings, even if a popular cliché says the opposite. However, since people are not only creators of the socio-cultural realities they live in, but also the subjects upon which these realities work, one can assume that the presence of this income affects people in certain ways. What effects has the caterpillar fungus boom had on Golok society in fields other than those directly connected to the pastoralists' investments? How does having this money impact their other life calculations and choices?

The caterpillar fungus boom in regions such as Golok cannot be analysed separately from the main branch of the local economy, namely pastoral production. This economic boom did not take place in an economic vacuum, but in a society that, until recently, had relied mainly or entirely on livestock production. Before, pastoralists supported themselves through the sale of livestock and livestock products and occasionally added to their budgets with other income. Apart from selling livestock products, they also sold medicinal plants. In the 1990s, they dug and sold *pimo* (Lat. *Fritillaria* sp.), a medicinal tuber that elicited an attractive income at that time. Caterpillar fungus then overshadowed *pimo* and other medicinal species collected for

5 Harrell defines it as 'a kind of interaction between peoples, in which one group, the civilizing center, interacts with other groups (the peripheral peoples) in terms of particular kind of inequality' which 'has its ideological basis in the center's claim to a superior degree of civilization, along with a commitment to raise the peripheral people's civilization to the level of the center, or at least closer to that level' (1995: 4).

sale. The size of the income it facilitated not only led to relativization of other activities that no longer seemed profitable, but also created a situation where people did not need money from other sources. As its market price rose, caterpillar fungus pushed itself to the centre of the local economic stage. In terms of time, digging the fungus can be treated as a side-line economic activity, because the season for it is short. However, the income produced during this period gives this activity a different status. Where the border is between side-line and main sources of income and when exactly caterpillar fungus crossed it are interesting questions. But the central question relates to the links between the caterpillar fungus boom and the pastoral economy.

Does the caterpillar fungus economy synergize with the pastoral economy or are they in conflict? Can people combine them or does the presence of a novel source of income change their attitude to the pastoral economy? Do they need to reorganize their pastoral life? This book shows that when the caterpillar fungus economy takes a step forward, the pastoral economy takes a step back. This comparison oversimplifies the problem; the changes are more complex and are not simply about advancement of one economy and decline of the other. However, the question remains: what happens to the pastoral economy when it loses its leading role in the pastoralists' lives? This question will be answered in the coming chapters.

Apart from analysing the pastoralists' investments and the changes these bring to their lives and the pastoral economy, this study shows that the caterpillar fungus boom has had an impact on other areas of life that are not related to earning or spending money. I view this economic boom as a 'total social fact', whose importance and implications are felt in many spheres: economic, legal, political, religious, and more (Mauss 1966: 76-77). This economy is a historically new element in the Golok society, but one that is tightly interwoven with the other threads of the general matrix of social life, whether these are labelled 'economic', 'social', 'religious', or other. My first impression of Golok was that life revolves around *yartsa* or that *yartsa* is what turns the world – and not only the economic world *sensu stricto*. The fact that the caterpillar fungus boom has infiltrated even the field of cultural production, i.e., local singers record songs about it, shows that this phenomenon is too big to fit into a box labelled 'economy'. The criticisms voiced about the negative sides of this economy, which are also heard in this book, show that the market career of caterpillar fungus is analysed in Golok society on many levels, including those far-removed from this economy.

Despite the critiques and conflicting interests, my intention is to create a picture of accommodation. Karl Marx envisioned human societies as riven by the tension between 'a stabilizing principle, manifested mainly

in the superstructural arrangements designed to contain conflicts arising from contradictions in society; and a destabilizing principle found in the theory of progressive intensification of contradictions' (Smelser 1973: xxiv). If, according to Marx, the dialogue between these forces is bound to end with the destruction of the old and the emergence of a new social order, my approach is dialectical in a different way: I see balance in imbalance and continuity where Marx sees rupture. Thus, the changes that this book describes can be seen as successful accommodations. The case of caterpillar fungus shows how 'throwing' a new element into the 'social laboratory' of a given society does not necessarily turn everything upside down and cause a revolution but reveals the hidden mechanisms of adaptation and the flexibility of existing structures. This new element not only finds its place in the system but is actively adapted to already existing forms. It does not disorganize the society, but rather reorganizes it. The fact that caterpillar fungus has penetrated so many areas of the pastoralists' lives can be seen as a reflection of its economic importance. It is possible that it is precisely because of its special economic status that such adaptational forces have been unleashed. However, in 'allowing' this new element into these diverse fields, the pastoralists had to integrate it into the existing structures of thinking and acting. They had to question, re-evaluate, adjust, and remodel these structures. The role of caterpillar fungus thus reveals much about human society or culture and the mechanisms existing therein.

It becomes clear from these considerations that my understanding of culture is not that of a stable and static reified entity, but rather of a constant flow of things, images, institutions, and meanings – an ever-changing social matrix existing *in* and *between* people. This resembles Clifford Geertz's definition of culture as a web of significance or a system of construable signs within which human behaviours, social events, institutions, or processes receive their meaning and can be 'intelligibly – that is, thickly – described' (1973: 14). Seen in this way, culture is created and continuously recreated by people through their involvement in social relationships and social interaction. I approach culture in terms of practices that are constantly transformed as people pick up new ideas and adapt them in the course of their life and interactions with their social and natural environment. That said, I generally avoid using the term 'culture', as – even if accepting polyphony within culture and pluralistic notions of it – this creates a risk of essentializing and building non-existing constructs, which, in the words of James Clifford (1988: 9), are a 'serious fiction'. Speaking about culture as a single concept or unit of analysis implies the existence of clear borders, cores, and peripheries, and a catalogue of fixed characteristics, embodiments,

and representations. For me, culture is not an aggregate of such material manifestations, institutions, and practices but an ability of people to manage their lives, give them meaning, and shape their relations with their social and natural environment. This echoes Tim Ingold's argument about how human actors form their worldviews as a result of the interactions between themselves and their environment (1987: 9ff). Culture is about how people deal with things and what they think about them.

It is our destiny to observe events in the world from our own particular time perspective, and we often fall victim to a conviction that we live in a period of rapid change. Nothing actually justifies this assumption, especially if one accepts that human societies are in a state of constant flux and that this change is an unavoidable part of their existence. Seen in this light, the changes that societies undergo cannot be perceived as some cultural drama – as the proponents of cultural purity and preservation always wish. The changes described in this book are not deformations of some timeless cultural substrate, but episodes in a longer stream of changes that societies undergo and create. Although I use the word 'change' as it is handier to manipulate, I see the phenomena I describe as *transformations*. For me, this word carries a more complex meaning and designates processes stretching over longer periods, not necessarily having a fixed starting point or destination. They are *trans*-formations but, as I said, I believe that human beings live in a world of constantly changing forms. More importantly, 'transformation' carries less evolutionist luggage, which would imply a 'step' or 'transition' leading from one level to another. Evolutionism as a way of interpreting the history of human societies is gone from mainstream anthropological thinking but the evolutionary narrative still hides in the nooks and crannies of a large number of modern-day intellectual approaches to the world that are built around concepts of globalization, development, economic growth, modernity, and more. As Ferguson remarked, many 'influential recent critical analyses of the postmodern reinstate a teleological and Eurocentric evolutionary narrative, in which "postmodernity" becomes simply the next rung in a social evolutionary ladder' (1999: 17).

Finally, this book reveals something about the state, in this case represented by its low power registers governing administrative units at the province level: prefectures and counties. It tells of how effective or ineffective the state can be. But it also shows something more. Trade necessitates the existence of a network of contacts and the caterpillar fungus trade created such networks extending over thousands of kilometres and traversing regional borders. They bring together people whose collaboration is necessary to make the fungus travel from its place of origin to its destination. The

section of the network that can be observed in Golok is only a small part of the caterpillar fungus trading world. However, the boom has given life to another type of network that connects pastoralists with people who arrive in Golok to dig the fungus there. This network functions in the shadow of the law and forms what can be called a parallel society, brought to life by different economic actors who coordinate their actions in spite of the state's attempts to control them. The case of the caterpillar fungus boom raises interesting questions about the state's (lack of) involvement in it. It shows how, at a certain point, the authorities decide to take action and try to subject this economic field to their legal regulations. It demonstrates what happens when the state takes action to regulate practices belonging to a sphere that has not previously been regulated by the state. However, the road from words to action is long and the state does not always interfere or does so only in a limited way. The question that arises in this context is: why? The answer will reveal itself in the coming chapters.

Some Important Notes from the Author

Every scholar writing about Tibet must clarify what this name means to her or him, as Tibet 'can encompass different geographical boundaries, depending on who is using it' (Childs 2008: 7). In this book, 'Tibet' refers to ethnic, cultural, and geographical areas in China where Tibetans constitute the majority of the population. These areas can be called 'ethnographic' or 'cultural', but in the context of the current map realities they form administrative units of so-called Tibetan autonomous status: regions (TAR), prefectures, and counties.

Although I write about Tibet and have no doubt that the protagonists of this book identify with this (currently geopolitically non-existent) country, I seldom use the ethnonym 'Tibetan' to refer to them. A single Tibetan identity developed in the course of political changes that the populations of the Tibetan plateau underwent in the twentieth century. As Tsering Shakya writes, it 'owes much to the nationality policies and ethnic categorization system', which 'categorized the people of the Tibetan plateau as a single *borig* and provided fixity to "Tibetanness", homogenising it typologically' (2012: 24).[6] This does not mean that there has been no sense of cultural, linguistic, or other affinity between different populations on the Tibetan plateau; nonetheless, it is the 'small homeland', or particular region of origin, which

6 *Borig* is the standard term adopted in China for Tibetans as an 'ethnic group' or 'nationality'.

was and often remains the primary marker of group identity. Moreover, the people in Golok recall in their written and oral histories that their region used to be inhabited by the Mongols. Some people still identify themselves as Mongols or are identified as such by their neighbours. In this situation, using the ethnonym 'Tibetan' would misrepresent people's complex identities. For this reason, to avoid the unnecessary 'ethnicization' or 'nationalization' of my informants, I use their local identifications rather than big-scale names and national constructs.

Tibet is depicted in most of the literature as consisting of three traditional provinces: Ü-Tsang, Kham, and Amdo.[7] Golok is conventionally said to be located in Amdo, which covers the north-eastern part of the Tibetan plateau. This prevailing view does not find support in the experiences of the inhabitants of Golok and their understanding of their history and geopolitical position. My informants did not think they live in Amdo. On the contrary, they stressed that 'Golok is neither part of Amdo, nor Kham. Golok is Golok.'[8] In this situation, using the province-umbrella of Amdo imposes geopolitical categories on them that they do not identify with. Instead of Amdo, I write about Qinghai, a province of the PRC that Golok is part of today. This is not a reflection of my political sympathies. It is evident that Golok has effectively become part of Qinghai only in the course of the twentieth century and – whether one likes it or not – it is to be found there today. On the other hand, identifying it with Amdo, a division that is traditionally Tibetan and that may seem more 'legitimate' in this context, can lead to misinterpretation of Golok's position and history.

The main actors in this book are pastoralists: this is the official, academic term for people colloquially called nomads.[9] The term 'nomad', as many scholars stress today, is imprecise and can be applied not only to *pastoral* nomads, but also peripatetics, traders, artisans, and other professionals who adapt their place of residence according to employment opportunities (Rao

7 The concept of the three provinces is a cornerstone of the politics of the Tibetan government-in-exile. But although 'it is deeply embedded in the political culture of the Tibetan diaspora [...] [and] enjoys universal support among the exile community, it has no recent historical base and it is difficult to assess the extent of support it might enjoy inside [...] Tibet' (Shakya 1999: 387).

8 After my fieldwork, I returned to the notes that I took at university during a lecture about Golok. I found there the same words quoted above. They were also repeated to me by John Reynolds, who heard them from Buddhist teacher Tarthang Tulku Kunga Gelek Yeshe Dorje (born in Golok in the 1930s; pers. comm., Berlin, 17 June 2013). This shows that they were part of an 'identity makeup' also observed by other scholars. Concerning the term Amdo, see Huber 2002 and Sulek and Ptackova 2017.

9 I use 'nomad' only in quotations from the interviews. My informants in Golok did not juggle with academic terminology and 'nomad' gives their words a colloquial feel.

1987, Berland and Rao 2004). Other reasons to abandon the term 'nomad' have been given by Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath, who observe that this term carries misperceptions that make us imagine 'nomads' either as embodiments of a romantic myth of freedom, or as 'low-tech, rapacious, disorganized wanderer[s]' (1999: 305). Both images hinder the proper conceptualization of the sophisticated technology and knowledge associated with pastoral life. Whatever term one chooses – pastoralist or nomad – it is important to ask what is the actual term that the people in Golok use about themselves. They call themselves, in Tibetan, *drokpa*. *Drokpa* denotes people of the *drok* or *drokki sacha*, that is, the ecological zone located above the uppermost limits of the agricultural areas and where the primary way of earning a living is through mobile livestock breeding. Yet, not all *drokpa*s have livestock. *Drokpa* is an identity category and many people born in *drok*, who are neither nomadic, nor have livestock, also use this name. Students, monks, officials, or intellectuals identify themselves as *drokpa*, although they live in town and do something else for a living. As Fernanda Pirie notes, Tibetans 'firmly refer to themselves as *drokwa* [...], as long as they still have a family tent in the pastureland', even if the routines of their daily life are far from those of the grassland (2005: 9). Finally, *drokpa* is a pan-local category. My informants stressed their affinity with *drokpa*s living thousands of kilometres away on the Tibetan plateau, saying that they share more with them than with their Tibetan non-pastoral neighbours in Qinghai.

The material for this book was collected during anthropological field research conducted between 2007 and 2010. Although this material has already acquired a historical value, for the sake of the simplicity of this narrative, in many general descriptions I use the 'ethnographic present' and, in more specific cases, sometimes write in the past tense. The reader should bear in mind that this 'present' refers to the time of my research. The ethnographic present, a literary device conventionally used in anthropological writing, has been criticized as reflecting an 'ahistorical or synchronic pretence of anthropology' (Crapanzano 1986: 51). However, similar to Kirsten Hastrup, I believe that – used consciously and cautiously – it does not have to be abandoned. Its use connects to the very particular character of anthropological field research, a participatory and very present-tense experience both for the researcher and other people taking part in it. Writing about this research later, I re-*present* the time of my encounters in the field and the state of the affairs as I observed them, or as they were narrated to me, but I do not claim to 'represent a truth about the timelessness of the others' (Hastrup 1990: 57). The situations and people's views change and

the material presented here is showed in its historical as well as current political and economic framing to ensure that the reader is aware that they are reading about a *part* of social reality that was available to me as a researcher during the period of my research.

The State of the Research

Caterpillar fungus is famous among Tibetan and Chinese *materia medica*. Its name has appeared on magazine covers and articles about it have been published by leading titles of the international press. The biology of caterpillar fungus is bizarre enough to attract attention. And if you add a few other components, such as big money, a smattering of illegality and violence, and the sex factor (caterpillar fungus is often called 'Himalayan Viagra') you get a potentially bestselling topic.[10] Although the media 'like' caterpillar fungus, they were not the first to discover it. In academic literature, caterpillar fungus and the economic boom centred on it have been described by a number of scholars.[11] Daniel Winkler is the most important among them: his research covers many regions of the Tibetan plateau and most of what we know about this phenomenon comes from him (2005, 2008a, 2008b, 2009). Other authors include Francesca Cardi and Alessandro Boesi (Boesi 2003, Boesi and Cardi 2009), Andreas Gruschke (2011a, 2011b, 2011d, 2012), Michelle Olsgard Stewart (2009, 2014), Emily Woodhouse (2015), Kunga Lama and Emily Yeh (Lama 2007, Yeh and Lama 2013). Occasional remarks are found in works by other scholars: caterpillar fungus pushes itself into studies of contemporary Tibet, including those unrelated to the economy, and it frequently features in the footnotes or the margins of the author's main discussion.

10 Even a partial overview of the popular press articles on caterpillar fungus exceeds the capacity of this book. However, a brief look at the titles, which use such expressions as 'magical', 'mysterious', and 'black gold' and grab the reader's attention with messages such as 'Killer Fungus is Gold to Yak Herders' (*New York Times*), 'The Viagra of the Himalayas: Fungus Transforms Tibet with Huge Cash Influx' (*Huffington Post*), 'Caterpillar Fungus on Radar of International Smugglers' (*Deccan Herald*), 'Craze for Magic Caterpillar Fungus Damages Land' (*Shanghai Daily*), or 'Curse of Himalayan Annapurna Region' (BBC News) shows not only the journalistic ability to employ sensational language, but also the fact that the caterpillar fungus boom facilitates this sort of hysteria.

11 Research was also conducted in Nepal, Bhutan, and India; see Devkota (2006, 2010), Namgyel (2003), Negi et al. (2006), Sharma (2004), Garbyal et al. (2004), Singh et al. (2010), Bauer (2014), Childs and Choedup (2014).

It may seem that the caterpillar fungus boom has been on everyone's lips and that many people have written about it. Yet, for a phenomenon of such economic and social importance, it is surprising that it has not been the topic of a detailed book-length analysis. It has yet to be analysed in either China, or in the neighbouring countries, in its whole context, including its very diverse aspects and consequences. It has not been subject to a study discussing its economic side and social effects as well as its history and legal aspects – one that would place it within the matrix of the socio-cultural life of the people who engage in this harvest and trade. This book is an attempt to write such an analysis.

The focus of this book is the caterpillar fungus boom *in* the pastoral society of Golok. Different aspects of Tibetan pastoralism have been discussed by many authors. The economy and life of pastoralists have been analysed, first and foremost, by Melvyn Goldstein. His work on pastoralists in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) was one of my first inspirations. His and Cynthia Beall's other works, based on long-term anthropological research, analyse specific aspects of the pastoralists' economic functioning and changes in their life (e.g. Goldstein 1994; Goldstein and Beall 1989, 1991). Valuable studies, this time from Yushu (a prefecture in Qinghai), also come from Andreas Gruschke (2008, 2011a, 2011b, 2012). Angela Manderscheid and Graham Clarke studied changes in the pastoral regions in Sichuan and the TAR (Manderscheid 1998, 1999, 2002; Clarke 1992, 1995a, 1995b). A significant contribution to our knowledge comes also from Nancy Levine, who worked in, among other places, Golok Serthar (a county in Kamdze TAP, Sichuan; 1990, 1995, 2015), as well as from Susan Costello (Golok; 2002, 2008) and Kenneth Bauer (2005, 2008, 2011, 2014). Bianca Horlemann, Fernanda Pirie, and Emily Yeh worked either in Golok, or neighbouring regions and discussed economic changes as well as other aspects of the functioning of pastoral communities (Horlemann 2002, 2012a, 2012b; Pirie 2005, 2008, 2012, 2013; Yeh 2003, 2005). Finally, scholars of my generation, such as Lilian Iselin (2012, 2014, 2017), Yusuke Bessho (2015), Jarmila Ptackova (2013, 2016), and Gillian Tan (2013, 2016, 2017, 2018), have been important for me because they conduct their research in similar economic and political circumstances and often in neighbouring regions.

The list of authors who have written about the pastoralists of the Tibetan plateau is longer. The works mentioned above provided me with comparative material and information about issues on which I had less expertise. However, a large part of the literature on Tibetan pastoralism has a very particular focus. In recent decades, Tibetan pastoralists have been targeted by numerous state interventions aimed at reforming the way they manage

their economy and grassland resources. Fencing the land, controlling herd sizes by introducing selling and slaughtering quotas, and sedentarization programmes often involving some degree of coercion made many authors focus on the effects that these interventions had on the pastoral society. The over-presence of this topic in the literature as well as in media reports creates a unidimensional image of the Tibetan pastoralists as suffering under discriminatory policies of the Chinese state. There is no doubt that the state does introduce policies that can be seen as hostile to or lacking understanding of pastoralism and that are not locally consulted on, and perhaps not even well thought through. However, not all pastoralists are covered by the sedentarization programmes and not all are critical about the state policies. Furthermore, those who are affected by them do have some space to show agency in managing their lives in these often difficult circumstances. Seen in this context, my book stands out as telling a story about people who are doing well. It does not contradict reports by other authors but supplements them. Finally, it is a book about people who are not only actively managing their lives but are doing so in a way that is much less dictated by religion than we often assume when we think about Tibetans – people who suffer under the yoke of the stereotype that religion is the main determinant of their identity.

Structure of the Book

When conducting my research, I repeatedly found myself in a situation where my colleagues associated me with caterpillar fungus rather than with the pastoralists whom I worked with. This book is structured in such a way as to stress that it is the *pastoralists* who are its protagonists: we meet the pastoralists first and only later learn what caterpillar fungus actually is. This approach also mirrors the chronology of my encounter with the topic. The first time I visited Golok in 2007 was during the peak of the digging season. This is also how the reader encounters the pastoralists: when they are engulfed in the feverish work of digging the fungus. Only later does the book show what normal life in Golok looks like. It was also a conscious choice to start with scenes of people digging and only later discuss the legal side of this activity. This shows that my approach is 'from below', in other words from the *people*, and not from the position of the state authorities. Reversing this order could lead to writing a very different sort of ethnography.

Individual chapters of this book are thought of as autonomous units and the reader can start reading at any of them. After this Introduction, which

has outlined the main argument of the book, explained the concepts used, and shown the place of this ethnography in the literature, comes Chapter 1, 'Golok: People and Places'. It introduces the region and its inhabitants and explains why this study was conducted there.

In Chapter 2, 'Digging', we travel to Golok during the caterpillar fungus season to meet the two families whom I lived and worked with. We see them and their neighbours during spring, when Golok faces an extreme mobilization of the labour force: one has a feeling that everyone who can goes out digging. Yet, at this point, it is not clear what causes this mobilization.

Readers wanting to learn about caterpillar fungus first should begin with Chapter 3, 'Fungus, Medicine, Commodity', which incorporates information about the biology as well as the medicinal and market career of this resource. Here, I answer whether the pastoralists use it in their domestic practices and show that, in Golok, caterpillar fungus functions more as a commodity than as a medicinal product. I also discuss the history of the trade, especially during the people's communes, and show how it developed into a proper economic boom.

Chapter 4, 'Market and Traders', is devoted to the caterpillar fungus market, understood as a physical space where transactions are made as well as the community of traders populating it. I discuss the legal position of the trade, show that it brings together different ethnic groups and that many traders resist state attempts to control them. I analyse the paths that caterpillar fungus travels between the moment it comes out of the ground and when it leaves Golok for bigger markets. I reveal its hidden market life and explain why this trade offers employment to such large numbers of people.

In Chapter 5, 'Market Operations', I return to the pastoralists and consider their strategies for selling caterpillar fungus. I describe different quality classes of caterpillar fungus and the criteria for evaluating it and I discuss the range of prices and their seasonal fluctuations. It thus slowly becomes clear just how expensive this fungus is. This chapter is illustrated with scenes of price negotiations and a description of a system of hand signs used in these negotiations.

Chapter 6, 'The Law in Action', focuses on the legal aspects of different activities that emerged with this economic boom and the state's attempts to regulate them. I discuss the pastoralists' opinions about them and show how the authorities' efforts to tighten control over caterpillar fungus digging have led to the emergence of underground illegal land leases. This chapter reveals the limits of the law and examines the social conditions responsible for its lack of efficacy.

Previous chapters show different ways in which the pastoralists earn their income from caterpillar fungus. Chapter 7, 'Money', answers how much they earn. Here, I not only explore the contents of the pastoralists' wallets and bank accounts but explain why this task is so difficult. I show that caterpillar fungus money has a very particular status, explain some moral dilemmas it creates, and the lines of conflict between the caterpillar fungus economy and people's religious beliefs.

Chapter 8, 'Pastoral Life and the Market', returns to the two families introduced at the beginning of the book. This time, I show them as livestock breeders. I introduce data on herd composition, migrations, and the pastoral work calendar. I also analyse the pastoralists' interactions with the market of pastoral products and show how the availability of income from caterpillar fungus has changed their approach to the pastoral economy.

What happens with the pastoralists' income is revealed in Chapter 9, 'Spending the Money', where I show the pastoralists as investors and consumers. I examine the rise of the house as a new status symbol and ask whether this is leading to increased sedentarization among this group. I discuss other technological changes in Golok and demonstrate that the caterpillar fungus boom has not only allowed pastoralists to improve their material standard of life, but also to undertake investments leading to infrastructural transformation in the highlands.

'Conclusions' gives us a chance to take a final look at the phenomenon under study and to ask questions about the future.

These reflections close the main part of the book but are followed by two more sections – 'bonus tracks', if you will. 'Afterword: A Note on Methodology' discusses the methodological toolkit for my fieldwork and reveals some problems that I encountered during my research. I leave this discussion to the end for two reasons: because this section has a partly personal character and because it can be taken as an independent essay. The methodological considerations are followed by an Appendix containing a translation of a Chinese state document outlining the rules governing access to the caterpillar fungus-producing land, which were in force in Golok during the time of my research.