

## **La Part manquante. Echanges et pouvoirs chez les Drung du Yunnan (Chine)**

by Stéphane Gros.

Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie (collection 'Haute Asie'), 2012, 589 pages, Glossary, bibliography, index and plates, ISBN 978-2-901161-96-7, 28 €.

Reviewed by Françoise Pommaret

The population studied by Stéphane Gros in this book are the Drung, also called Dulong, who are classified as a minority (*minzu*) in China. The Drung speak a Tibeto-Burmese language and live in the Salween valley of Western Yunnan, sandwiched between other ethnic groups such as the Lissu, the Nung and the Naxi to their west, the Rawang of Burma to the south (who are considered a branch/kin of the Drung) and the Tibetans to the north. This reviewer's own limitations cannot do full justice to this brilliant and dense anthropological work, especially when having to summarise in a few words its enigmatic title *La part manquante*, 'the missing share'. Gros' thesis is that 'the missing share' is a logical operative mode, which runs throughout Drung society and which justifies its identity markers, its social reproduction and its political relations with its neighbours. For Gros, the missing share constitutes an alternative formulation to the logic of exteriority, which demands that fertility and power are brought in from outside.

Prior to this work, which was his PhD dissertation (2005), Stéphane Gros had already produced excellent articles in which the complexity of his subject was more than apparent in the course of his dealing with Chinese and Drung languages, as well as with Tibetan and obscure references such as French missionary writings. For a complete list of his works, one might refer to [www.vjf.cnrs.fr/himalaya/fr/membres/s gros.htm](http://www.vjf.cnrs.fr/himalaya/fr/membres/s gros.htm), but two of his articles should be mentioned here as they are in English and provide an excellent introduction to this work. These are 'Economic marginalization and social identity among the Drung people of Northwest Yunnan' in *Moving Mountains: Highland livelihood and ethnicity in China, Vietnam and Laos*, edited by Jean Michaud and Tim Forsyth, pp. 28-49 (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2011) and 'A sense of place: the spatial referent in the definition of identities and territories in

the Dulong Valley (Northwest Yunnan - China)', in *Dynamics of Ethnicity in Asia: Interethnic relationships through ethnonyms, territories and rituals*, edited by Christian Culas and François Robinne, pp. 103-122 (Routledge, 2010).

The present work is divided into ten chapters which deal with the following: pygmies, slaves and the tattooed; the minority situation; chiefs from the East; salt, oxen and slaves; women's destiny; residential and lineage logics; movement of alliance; the domestic universe; from generation to perpetuation; the missing share. The introduction is in itself an important work, which reflects the whole approach of the book: grounded in facts and highly conceptual at the same time. The chapter 'Pygmies, slaves and the tattooed', in particular, provides a fascinating background of the complex geo-political situation of the Drung and dwells extensively on the minority issue in China, as well as on the implications of ethnonym and autonym. It warns against the temptation of too strict a categorisation, which would not take into account the ever-changing political situation. Gros puts great stress on the importance of facial tattooing, as in his analysis it is the thread that leads him to fertility, one of the central themes of his book. Tattooing in the Tibeto-Burmese areas has not been studied in depth, nor has it been studied from a comparative point of view; it is hoped that Gros will expand this study.

Gros's work is based on extensive and groundbreaking ethnographical work. In this respect, the book can also be read as a classical monograph on an unknown population. The Drung place the 'missing share' at the heart of their identity and it is the fundamental traits that are built with this operating logic that allow them to survive as a society. Gros vividly describes tattooing, alliances, political manoeuvres, rituals, household chores, and the exchanges and feuds between the Drung and their neighbours, alternating between storytelling, empirical descriptions, interviews and myths. This wealth of ethnographic material is used rigorously to advance several key notions. Amongst these is the notion that taking history into account must not aim at reconstituting a past, but rather at an understanding of temporality; societies must be understood in their relations to each other (p.33). In this, Gros follows the paths of Mauss, Leach and Amselle.

Gros also brings in the concept of Zomia, popular since the 2000s with anthropologists working on the margins. With great analytical finesse, he writes that the concept of Zomia would fit the case of the Drung well,

given their isolation in their valley and past role as victims of political and economic exploitation. However, what Gros learned from his experiences in the field is that the Drung themselves see their past and present social and political environment from an angle of hierarchy and asymmetry. Therefore it would be beneficial to see the Drung not only as victims or fugitives, but also as actors in a globalising hierarchical system that contributes to their local identity (pp. 28-29). Another important reflection underlies this work: the relation of a minority with the centralised Chinese state, and Gros notes that to speak about the Drung is also to speak of China, but from a decentralised point of view. Far from having an exotic view of the Drung, his work wants to place the Drung within the changes presently occurring in Yunnan and in greater China (p.26).

This work should find an echo with scholars working on the Himalaya because the Drung society and its vocabulary have much in common with ethnic groups surviving and adapting in other centralised states of South Asia. It also provides important historical documentation on the Tibetans operating in Northern Yunnan, which is located on the fringes of their sphere of influence. This 580-page book, beautifully but densely laid-out, as is the norm with the *Société d'Ethnologie*, includes photos, a long note on the different transcriptions and orthography used, scholarly footnotes and references, sketches, maps, elegant drawings of daily life objects, a bibliography, a Drung glossary, an index and a detailed table of contents. Such detailed representation allows the author to show his respect for the reader by providing him or her with as many technical supports as possible in order to make the topic more easily understandable in this maze of shifting alliances, ethnic groups and historical events in which the Drung tried to cling to their identity while adapting or fighting different 'masters'. A translation in English of this pioneering and thought-provoking work is highly recommended.