Enticement: Stories of Tibet

As Pema Tseden puts it in the Author's Preface: “Many times I write fiction for no other reason than to enter this state in which I can see and know myself more deeply. ... All the words you want to say can be found in the texts you write” (p.1). Enticement, indeed, does not show modern Tibet as a flat postcard. Tseden's words written down as stories set a reader on a trip of deeper contemplation — deeper into the wondering minds of Tibetans and deeper into one's own inner life. Enticement as a corporation of ten stories touches upon completely different aspects of life: friendship, love and collaboration, death, teaching, loyalty, cruelty, modernization and globalization, Buddhist beliefs and local superstitions, extraterrestrial coincidences, and human reflections about life. While many stories tend to present rather realistic descriptions, in terms of literary stories this one brings together elements of traditional Tibetan folk tales (e.g. the traditional frame of the Golden Core Story) with examples of magic realism, or even science fiction. 

With Buddhist themes and traditional Tibetan cultural markers, Enticement goes further beyond the comprehension of a standardized happiness or grief. Tseden introduces a reader to the way of life on the Tibetan Plateau that is gradually changing through changing times. Alongside the main line of the plot, the author offers a glimpse of modern Tibet and the ongoing consideration of architecture as a medium. The idea of traditional religious reincarnations facing the modernity, Mao Zedong's literary heritage still visible in the memories of the people, first encounters of Tibetans with a modern form of Westerners enchanted with Tibetan culture, as well as questions not to speak Chinese or lacking the practical grasp of the urban Tibetan population and being beguiled by the Tibetans being swept over by the wave of modernization in the form of compulsory ID registration, or struggling with the gambling plague. 

The book is a doorway through Tibetan villages, cities and pastures. One gets to meet the curious minds seeking to see a bigger picture behind the average routine life, one gets to laugh at the funny perplexities of life, one gets to share the joy and pain of the protagonists, one gets to witness modern Tibet and the various happenings there. Besides, there is no politics or anything didactic. These stories describe the Tibetan life simply as they are, void of any moralization. 

Enticement is Tibetan and universal at the same time. Despite the fact that the protagonists are Tibetan and are living in the condition of being expelled from their land, one can relate to the experiences of them. The book is a new window into the Tibetan world, and a new, even if first like familiar ground, yet delve deeper to the realties of Tibet.

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Reviewed by: Tom Mes, Leiden University, Netherlands

Enticement is a new window into contemporary literature about Tibet created by a Tibetan author and made accessible for all by its translators into the English language. Originality of the stories’ plots, which to some extent could even be called exotic, runs hand in hand with doing justice to the deeply shared feelings and challenges experienced by many people in their everyday life. Being a graphic piece of art, the book pictures a beautiful faraway world of Tibetan grassland, snowy mountains, and local people. Witty, naive, cunning, loving, jokking, or distressed and going through hardship Tibetan characters frequently remind a reader of something personal and forgotten. The stories could refresh a memory from one’s childhood, something once felt or seen somewhere else. However, at the same time, a peculiar twist or twist of each story returns the reader back to the realties of Tibet.

The scope of what Media Theory in Japan considers as constituting ‘media’ is wide and various, much like their numerous staples, such as Tom Mes’s review on the work of Aaron Gerow’s essay on television theory in Japan, in which he observes how some of this echoed the preoccupations of many pre-war film theorists that had been dismissed, ignored or forgotten in the inter-war years. Other choices come across at first as rather more unexpected, such as Yuriko Furushata’s essay on the impact of the VCR, which was developed by a large electronics corporation in Japan, in which he observes how much the VCR has spread around the world in relatively short space of time. Despite the fact that the VCR has spread around the world in relatively short space of time, its impact on the Japanese film industry has been ignored, and its disposable time and impact are rather replaced by young women. In the same breath she also charts the shaping of Tokyo’s Shibuya district into the consumer-driven, media-saturated cityscape noted earlier. Media Theory in Japan is divided into three sections, though the choice for which essay fits which section occasionally comes across as somewhat arbitrary; the chapter on Azuma Hiroki, for example, is found under ‘Communication Technologies’ alongside the essays on architecture and urban, rather than under one of the more appropriate-sounding sections ‘Practical Theory’ and ‘Mediation and Media Theory’. Also, given co-editor Zahlten’s familiarity with the topic (as he demonstrated in The End of Japanese Cinema, an investigation into home video which could have lent the ‘Communication Technologies’ section extra relevance), one might wonder how the editors even mention in their introduction how Steinberg explores how Marshall McLuhan’s theories from the 1960s provide the necessary foundation for the study of architecture and urbanism. 

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This blank spot which Japan currently occupies on the ‘Euro-American’ theoretical map is allegorized most effectively in Masahito Ishigami’s contribution to this volume, which begins with the realization that she is the first person to ever check out from her university library a volume of InterCommunication, one of Japan’s most authoritative journals of media scholarship, which ran from 1992 through 2000. So either there are too few Western media scholars that can read Japanese — an understandable proposition — or too few Japanese media scholars that are interested in media studies. Probably, it is a good deal of both.

Media Theory in Japan boldy volunteers to begin filling this gap. It does not limit itself in its ambitions there, however; as Steinberg states in his preface, the editors propose anchoring points from which future scholarship can begin charting further areas and topics. Other choices come across at first as rather more unexpected, such as Yuriko Furushata’s essay on the impact of the VCR, which was developed by a large electronics corporation in Japan, in which he observes how much the VCR has spread around the world in relatively short space of time. Despite the fact that the VCR has spread around the world in relatively short space of time, its impact on the Japanese film industry has been ignored, and its disposable time and impact are rather replaced by young women. In the same breath she also charts the shaping of Tokyo’s Shibuya district into the consumer-driven, media-saturated cityscape noted earlier. Media Theory in Japan is divided into three sections, though the choice for which essay fits which section occasionally comes across as somewhat arbitrary; the chapter on Azuma Hiroki, for example, is found under ‘Communication Technologies’ alongside the essays on architecture and urban, rather than under one of the more appropriate-sounding sections ‘Practical Theory’ and ‘Mediation and Media Theory’. Also, given co-editor Zahlten’s familiarity with the topic (as he demonstrated in The End of Japanese Cinema, an investigation into home video which could have lent the ‘Communication Technologies’ section extra relevance), one might wonder how the editors even mention in their introduction how Steinberg explores how Marshall McLuhan’s theories from the 1960s provide the necessary foundation for the study of architecture and urbanism. 

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