

Daniel Winkler is correct in highlighting the importance of non-farm income obtained from the sale of caterpillar fungus for the rural Tibetan economy. However, it is also important to keep in mind that since this resource is limited to specific areas, using averages can be misleading. For example, if 1 village in an area with access to the fungus earns 10,000 dollars and the other 9 with no fungus earn nothing, the average income for each of the 10 villages is 1000, but 9 actually have NO income.

Winkler, of course, understands this and indicated in the interview that caterpillar fungus is not found in many areas such as the Changtang and north Shigatse prefecture, and also I should add in Ngari Prefecture. These huge regions--which comprise the majority of the TAR-- therefore, are like the 9 villages mentioned above in that regardless of an average cash income calculated from overall statistics, they actually have NO income from caterpillar fungus. We must be careful, therefore, not to over-emphasize the impact of caterpillar fungus income for rural Tibet in general!

Farmers non-caterpillar regions, e.g., Shigatse, however, are also increasingly engaging in earning non-farm income.. Rural farmers in these areas are adapting to the changing economic environment in the TAR by actively participating in migrant labor (“going for income”), in working as craftsmen and in operating small businesses such as construction sub-contractors and truck/mini-van owners, as well as by producing products specifically for sale in urban markets, for example, pigs and chickens and sheep. A new article that just appeared in the journal Asian Survey {Melvyn Goldstein, Geoff Childs and Puchung Wangdui. “”Going for Income” in village Tibet: A longitudinal analysis of change and adaptation, 1997-2007,” May/June 2008) examines this aspect of rural change in detail in the rural Shigatse area. See:

<http://www.case.edu/affil/tibet/documents/ASurveypublishedpaper.pdf>