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冬蟲夏草 的鍊金術

The Alchemy of Winter Worm & Summer Grass

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冬蟲夏草是甚麼？「冬天是蟲，夏天是草」，冬蟲夏草因其特殊的形態而往往蒙上一層神祕的面紗。冬蟲夏草是藏文名字 *yartsa gunbu*（夏草冬蟲）的直接翻譯。藏民普遍認為這種生物是蟲死後變形成草，更有人認為它具有生死輪迴的意味。據筆者觀察，在冬蟲夏草最早也是最主要的消費市場廣東省，大部分人在九十年代還是不清楚冬蟲夏草是甚麼，多數人傾向認為它是蟲。隨著冬蟲夏草消費的升溫，尤其是二零零三年非典型肺炎爆發後，消費者對其了解開始加深，很多人知道冬蟲夏草其實是一種寄生於蟲體的菌類。

How can anything be a worm in winter and grass in summer?

The name of caterpillar fungus in Tibetan - *yartsa gunbu* - means “summer-grass-winter-worm” literally. Tibetans commonly perceive it as a dead worm reincarnated into a piece of straw. Yet in the largest consumer’s market of caterpillar fungus, few people in Guangdong have any idea of what it is. In 1990s most regarded it as a bug. It was only after the SARS breakout in 2003 that people consumed it for health reasons in a frenzy did we gain understand caterpillar fungus better - it is a parasitic fungus inside a caterpillar.

冬蟲夏草的學名 *Cordyceps sinensis* 其實並不能完全對應中國現代消費者觀念中的冬蟲夏草：*Cordyceps sinensis* 單指一種蟲草屬真菌，它可寄生於多種蝙蝠蛾幼蟲體，吸收蟲體後長出的「草」才是具有藥用功效的部份，而蟲更像是提供營養的培養皿；冬蟲夏草指「蟲」和「草」的複合體，而且和藏民的簡稱類似，很多消費者甚至認為「蟲」比「草」更重要。這種認知的差異直接影響了冬蟲夏草的分級標準和消費模式。九十年代以來形成的蟲草評價標準基本圍繞蟲體的外觀和大小：蟲體越大越完整，級別就越高價格也越貴，而「草」卻是越短越好。現在如果蟲體不完整——也就是俗稱的「斷枝」基本上是不起價的，高檔的藥材鋪甚至會將斷枝棄掉，以免影響顧客信心；但「草」斷掉卻不影響銷售。筆者採訪了很多長期食用者，他們都表示一般只會吃掉蟲體，而把硬而無味的「草」吐掉。不少人直到沙土爆發後，當有關蟲草的報導增加，才獲悉「草」好像也是「有用」的，開始把「草」吃下。



Indeed, its scientific name of *Cordyceps sinensis* mismatches what an ordinary Chinese consumer has in mind: *Cordyceps sinensis* only refers to the *Cordyceps* fungus, capable to parasitize in multiple species of Hepialidae (ghost moth) larvae; the “grass” sprouted out from the encroached larva is the part with medicinal value, while the “worm” is only the culture dish and nutrients provider. Similar to the Tibetans, many consumers think that the “worm” is more valuable. Such perception directly affects the grading criterion and mode of consumption. Since 1990s, the grading of caterpillar fungus is basically about the appearance and size of the worm: a wholesome “worm” body with a short “grass” earns it a higher grading and price. If the worm body is imperfect (“broken”), it can never be sold at a good price, or even end up being thrown away. Yet a broken “grass” in an intact “worm” body is acceptable. I spoke to a number of people who have consumed caterpillar fungus for a long period. Most of them used to eat the “worm” only and spit out the rigid and tasteless “grass”. They only began to eat the “grass” too when they understand more about the tonic values of the fungus during the SARS outbreak.



商家經常將產於青藏高原的冬蟲夏草包裝成神奇藏藥，但藏人其實很少食用冬蟲夏草。在傳統的藏醫藥典中，冬蟲夏草的地位也並不突出。雖然冬蟲夏草的文字記載最早出現於十五世紀，但最主要的藏醫學經典《四部醫典》（rgyud bzhi）以及藥物學經典《晶珠本草》（shel gong shel phreng）均無冬蟲夏草的相關記載，甚至關於二十世紀初期拉薩醫療機構用藥的文本資料，仍無提及食用冬蟲夏草。但自一九七三年以來，所有的現代西藏藥物學文本都強調了冬蟲夏草的藥用價值，其中的政治文化意味值得玩味。

根據我在西藏地區的實地考察，冬蟲夏草在中國境內的藏民中的確不太流行，少部份食用者主要視其為壯陽藥，因此不少男性藏民在解釋為何藏區出產的冬蟲夏草反而更受漢人歡迎時，都會一臉壞笑地說：「因為我們根本不需要啊！」二零零七年，我在冬蟲夏草的著名產地西藏那曲進行調查時，村民們都問我為何廣東人對這蟲子這麼瘋狂，這麼貴還要吃。最後有村民用有限的漢語總結說：「可能它只對你們『低人』有用，對我們『高人』沒用。」但近年這股持續升溫的熱潮開始回流到藏區，拉薩的一些富裕藏人開始趕這潮流。

其實冬蟲夏草在中醫藥典也並不突出，最早記載的《本草從新》只錄了「補肺益腎」兩條。八十年代時冬蟲夏草地位遠不如參茸，經常滯銷，國家藥材公司需降價銷售以完成國家分配的任務。



Though caterpillar fungus is harvested mainly from the Tibetan Plateau, and is often sold as a potent Tibetan medicine, the Tibetans seldom consume it themselves. It was not honoured by traditional Tibetan pharmacopoeia either. Earliest written record of caterpillar fungus was found in the 15th century, but in both Tibetan medicine classics “rgyud bzhi” and “shel gong shel phreng”, there is no record of caterpillar fungus, neither does the textual pharmaceutical references of medical institutions of Lhasa in the early 20th century. However, since 1973, all texts of modern Tibetan pharmacology highlight the medical values of caterpillar fungus. It seems that there are political connotations behind this.

My field study in the Tibetan areas has proved the unpopularity of caterpillar fungus among Tibetans in China. A few admirers eat it as an aphrodisiac. That's why when Tibetan men explained to me the reason that caterpillar fungi are far more welcomed by the Han Chinese, they said with a wicked smile, “We simply don't need that.” In 2007 I did a survey in Nagqu, Tibet, a famous production ground of caterpillar fungus. Many local villagers were curious about the craze of Guangdong people

towards such pricey bugs. At the end, one of them stood out and concluded with his very limited Chinese, “Maybe they do work on you the ‘lower’ people, but not us the ‘superior’ ones.” But recently the growing trend has surged back to Tibet. The magical fungus is sought after by some well-off Tibetans.

Caterpillar fungus was not highly-praised even in traditional Chinese pharmacopoeia.

In the book *Materia Medica Renewed*, which caterpillar fungus was first mentioned, there was nothing more than “strengthening lungs” and “benefiting kidneys”. During 1980s caterpillar fungus was a low-profile medicine compared with ginseng. As the sales volume was flat, the state-owned pharmaceuticals had to scale down the price in order to complete the sales mission set by the government.



變形記：從蟲到金 Worm-to-gold metamorphosis

冬蟲夏草的價格自八十年代末卻一路飆升，在大陸已被稱為「軟黃金」。單看拉薩的批發市場，其價格從一九九七年的每公斤八千四百元，到二零零四年的每公斤三萬六千元，升幅便達到十九倍，即使考慮到通脹，漲幅超過百分之三百。在香港及大陸沿海地區的終端消費市場，其零售價變化更是驚人，二零一零年最高等級的蟲草價格已達五十二萬人民幣一公斤。究竟冬蟲夏草何以在短短的幾十年間從乏人問津到價比黃金呢？香港在這個過程中扮演著重要角色，不但是早期的主要消費市場，更是冬蟲夏草出口至其它國家的重要中樞。

Near the end of 1980, the price of caterpillar fungus soared forever, even being called the “soft gold” in the mainland China. Let’s peek into the wholesale market in Lhasa. In 1997 it was priced \$8,400 per kg, and \$36,000 in 2004 - a boom of 1,900%, or 342% eliminating inflation. In the end market in Hong Kong and the coastal China, the retail price has fluctuated remarkably - top-grade fungus was sold at RMB520,000 per kg in 2010. How did the fungi rose from a total disfavour to such a golden value, only in a few decades’ time? Hong Kong had played a vital role in the metamorphosis - being the major consumption market in the early stage and an important hub to export the fungi to various countries.



在藥業私有化之前，蟲草由國家在藏區分配指標統一採收，其中大部分出口至港澳地區以換取外匯，只有少部份次等品在國家藥房銷售。在大陸，文革期間只有少部份擁有「海外關係」、「港澳關係」的人才有可能以僑匯購買券購買蟲草；即使到了八十年代末，要買品質好的蟲草也需到香港。因此很多從八十年代或九十年代初開始食用蟲草的人現在仍習慣到香港買蟲草。改革開放以後，隨著中港兩地往來的增加，香港食用蟲草的習慣開始影響有著相似飲食文化的珠三角地區，並經廣東逐漸傳播到沿海各地。香港的蟲草廣告在此「功不可沒」。

Before the privatization of pharmaceutical industry, the harvesting of caterpillar fungus was centralized and allotted by the government in the Tibet areas. Most were exported to Hong Kong and Macau for foreign exchange, leaving the few inferior ones being sold in its local drug stores. During the Cultural Revolution in the mainland, only the minority with some sort of “foreign” or “Hong Kong/ Macau” relations could buy the fungus with their foreign exchange certificates. Even at the turn of 1980s, caterpillar fungi of good quality were only available in Hong Kong. Thus people who began to consume caterpillar fungus from the 80s or early 90s still cling to buying fungi in Hong Kong. After the reform and opening up, with more interactions between Hong Kong and the mainland, the customs of Hongkongers eating caterpillar fungus had propagated throughout the Pearl River Delta already having similar dietary culture, and further to the coastal regions via Guangdong. Here, the caterpillar fungus advertising in Hong Kong earns the credit!



藏區淘金熱 A Gold Rush in Tibet

漢藏之間的蟲草貿易至少可以追溯到十七世紀，藏人以蟲草交換茶和絲，乾的蟲草因而具有類似貨幣的功能。但只有在近年持續走高的蟲草市場的影響下，藏區才形成了有如「淘金熱」般的全民挖蟲草現象，並對當地的生態和社會造成前所未有的衝擊。每年五到七月的採收季節，不但藏民全家出動挖蟲草，很多外地人也湧進去想發一把蟲草財。由此引起的地界和採挖權爭議，每

年都導致暴力衝突和流血事件。二零零七年夏天，我所在的那曲村子便在積極準備與鄰村的械鬥。兩村之前一直都有通婚關係，現在卻因蟲草而血肉相見，村中老人都對此感到傷心。另一方面，突然而至的大量收入，對缺乏現金概念和儲蓄習慣的藏民造成了生活上的很大影響。蟲草帶來的收入很少被用於教育、社區建設或投資，不少年輕藏人養成揮霍和賭博的習慣，一晚賭掉幾十萬的故事到處都可以聽到。

Fungus trade between central China and Tibet began in the 17th century or earlier, when the Tibetans exchanged dried caterpillar fungi for tea and silk - a kind of money thereat. But it is until recent years, where the fungus market gets excited, that an "All-Tibetan Gold Rush" for fungi is officially shaped up. The shock to the local ecology and society was never so huge. From May to July the harvesting season, not only the entire Tibetan families out digging the fungi, many outlanders flocked in to take their shares. The disputes of boundaries and harvest rights that comes by had led to bloodshed violence year after year. In summer 2007, I have visited a village in Nagqu where people were

sharpening their knives excitedly for a weapon fight with a neighbouring village. The village elders grieved, as blood is spilled between two intermarrying villages only for the fungus. Besides, the sudden wealth has befuddled the lives of the Tibetans without cash concepts and saving habits. Not even a nibble of money from fungus was spent on education, community constructions or investments. In another way round, many young Tibetans opt for splurging and gambling. I heard stories of people losing hundreds of thousands a night all the way.

二零零七年，那曲地區政府組織了首屆蟲草節。

The first Caterpillar Fungus Trade Fair was organized by the Nagqu local government in 2007.



那曲地區草場上開挖的道路旁可以看到非常薄的土壤層
The soil layer aside the road excavated from a Nagqu grassland is very thin.



二零零七年那曲蟲草節上的特級蟲草
Superior-grade caterpillar fungus displayed in the Caterpillar Fungus Trade Fair in Nagqu, 2007.

隨著草場的退化以及定居化政策的實行，這種遊牧景象將越來越難看到。
As the pastures degrade and the settling policy put into practice, such nomadic scene could vanish in the future.



在生態方面，現在這種大規模且急速的採挖方式對草場造成很大的破壞。過去牧民們一般只是在放牧時順便挖蟲草，且挖的手法很講究，盡量減少對草場的破壞：用小鏟將蟲草連同周圍的泥土整塊鏟起，把蟲草拿出來後再把泥土回填並按好。但這種採挖方法不但耗時且容易把蟲草鏟斷，在現今寸「草」必爭的環境以及以外觀為主導的分級標準下，不少藏民不惜採用破壞性強的手法。而外來的採挖者就更不在乎對環境的影響了。另外，為了方便運輸而修建的道路也破壞了大面積的草場。而更為深遠的影響在於對原來的遊牧制度的衝擊。很多村落為了劃分蟲草資源而配合國家的定居化政策，用圍欄隔開本來共用的草地，原來的草場輪換因而無法繼續，很多研究已經指出定居化對草場生態的負面影響。

雖然已經有很多學者和媒體呼籲限挖蟲草以保護青藏高原脆弱的生態體系，但蟲草現在已經成為其產區的主要收入來源，各地政府本身就是蟲草經濟的積極參與者，爭相組織蟲草中心、舉辦蟲草節。單純的限採一來很難執行，二來也會對當地社區帶來混亂。冬蟲夏草再次向我們提出了經濟發展和環境保育這個難解的議題。而此端的消費者又該為遠在彼端的環境和社會承擔多少責任呢？這都是在全球化背景下值得我們深思的問題。❖



Prefectures within Nagqu area select their best caterpillar fungi for ratings. The winning fungus is crowned the "Fungus King", immediately boosting the values of fungi from the same prefecture.

On ecology, the extensive and hasty way of harvest is doing great harm to the meadows. In the past, herders did not reap caterpillar fungus unless they met them during herding, and they harvest with particular care and minimized harm: shoveled the fungus with the surrounding soil with a small spade, took the fungus and refilled the soil, which was time-consuming and may damage the fungus. It is a bit out of style for people nowadays not to surrender even one single straw as well as the "visual" grading system, so even the Tibetans have decided on adopting a much more environmentally-hurtful harvesting manner - let alone diggers from the outside. Roads paved for easy logistics had also brutally usurped large areas of meadows. More far-reaching impacts are on the original nomadism. To carve up fungi resource, villagers partitioned the public grasslands in compliance with the national "settling" policies for the nomads, preventing the pasture rotation which had been practiced for long. Many researches had pointed out the adverse impacts to grassland ecology brought by the settling policy.

Quite many academics and media had called for a limitation on harvesting caterpillar fungus to save the fragile ecosystem of the Tibetan Plateau. Yet caterpillar fungus has become major source of revenue for its places of origin. Local governments themselves are the active playmakers in this fungal economy, vying to establish all kinds of "fungus centres" and "fungus fairs". A simple limitation on harvest volume is difficult to implement and may cause social disorder. The struggle between economic development and environmental conservation remains an endless Sphinx's Riddle, and we are reminded again by this "winter's worm" or "summer's grass". Here, as the consumer, how far should we be responsible for the environment and society at the far end? These questions in the backdrop of globalization are left for us to ruminate. ❖

蟲草節上，那曲地區各縣挑選最好的蟲草參加評比，贏得評比的蟲草獲得「蟲草王」的稱號，而整個縣的蟲草也會因此身價倍增。