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A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Geography

by

Andrew Nicholas Grant

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Belonging and Ethnicity in China's West:

Urbanizing Minorities in Xining City on the Eastern Tibetan Plateau

by

Andrew Nicholas Grant

Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

University of California, Los Angeles, 2016

Professor John A. Agnew, Chair

China's twenty-first century economic rise has had a powerful impact on the lives of Tibetans and other ethnic minorities living in its Western Region, the administrative region composed of China's Inner Asian border provinces. Urbanization in this region is reshaping the lives and livelihoods of erstwhile farmers and pastoralists moving to urban environments. The state hopes to decrease ethnic tension through economic development and the enrollment of all frontier peoples into the national consumer economy. In light of this situation, this dissertation asks: are Tibetans' lives and livelihoods changing for better or for worse? Focusing on one exemplary city in this region, I argue that despite increased material prosperity, ethnic differences have been exacerbated as perceptions about unequal access to work and ethnic discrimination have proliferated. Urbanization has led to great changes in the economy, the built environment, and communications technology that influence how Tibetans come to belong in the city.

This dissertation uses two approaches to investigate what is behind these changes. First, I use discourse analysis of Chinese public intellectuals and policy changes to show how the Chinese state conceives of the Western Region as a state development project. The imagination of these frontier provinces relies on culturalist narratives of progress and civilization. Concerns about the domestic economy and geopolitics also drive the historical looking backwards and economic looking outwards that shapes contemporary discourse about the frontiers. Moreover, I find that representations of frontier peoples - in historical geography, politics, and in popular culture - often elide the voices of ethnic groups that inhabit China's Western Regions.

Second, I use ethnography, interviews, and analysis of urban imagery and social media posts to show how Tibetans and Muslims come to live in Xining City, the provincial capital of Qinghai Province located on the eastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau. The changes occurring in the city are exemplary of the urbanization that is affecting all of China's minority ethnicities. The frontier economy is changing livelihoods. It also remains unstable and dependent upon policy makers in Beijing. The transition to urban life is pushing Tibetans to envision new relationships with the city, the countryside, and even their own self-identities, as they seek to become urbane citizens and retain their ethnic identity. Tibetans also struggle to place-make, contributing sites of worship and ethnic particularity in an urban environment organized into urban territories that privilege Han Chinese urban landscapes. The Hanness of frontier urbanization contributes to ethnic difference in other ways as well, as revealed in Xining Tibetans' social media narratives about ethnic stigma and surveillance in the wake of terrorist attacks across China in 2014.

The thesis of Andrew Nicholas Grant is approved.


Chi-Fun Cindy Fan

Nancy Levine

John A. Agnew, Committee Chair


University of California, Los Angeles

2016

**Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation to my family and to the people of Qinghai, whose generosity has allowed this project to be possible. Thank you.

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## Acknowledgements

I also must thank my family for tolerating my whirlwind visits and constant distraction. Graduate students always feel like they need to be reading and writing, and often, rather than doing these things, are simply fretting about it over holidays. Thank you greatly for the encouragement and succor, and thank you Suzanne Chapin for editing my bibliography.

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Finally, and most of all, I would like to thank Laura Brown, who provided feedback and edited my project every step of the way. This dissertation owes much to her.

**Vitae**

Andrew Nicholas Grant received a B.A. in Geography and a certificate in Russian, Eastern European, and Central Asian Studies from UW-Madison in 2006. After graduating he taught English and Geography at Qinghai Normal University in China from 2007-2008. He matriculated into UCLA in Fall 2008, going on to earn an M.A. in 2012 in cultural geography. He advanced to doctoral candidacy in 2012.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

## I. Geopolitics of Urbanization as a Development Strategy

This dissertation studies the effects of urbanization on the politics and livelihoods of ethnic groups at China's geographic and socio-economic margins, in particular Amdo Tibetans and Muslims. The People's Republic of China's (PRC) political stance towards its frontiers is continuously changing. Bolder stances towards territorial claims on its sea frontier has been a frequent news topic in the early 20th century, as has unrest in the broad zone along China's land frontiers called by the state its "Western Region." Since 2000, the Communist Party in Beijing has led a project to further incorporate the region into the country's political, cultural, and demographic core through infrastructure development, urbanization, and the promotion of consumer society. My research analyses the material and symbolic aspects of this political shift, and then looks at how urban life is affecting Tibetans and Muslim minorities living in Xining City, a provincial capital located at the eastern edge of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau (see Figure 1.1).

Although these minority populations have long lived in Xining City's environs, urban expansion and economic shifts are making urban lifestyles more common. Arriving from their agricultural and pastoral homes in eastern Qinghai Province, more minorities are joining Han Chinese in Xining's densely packed high-rise buildings and pursuing education and work in the city. Yet the process is not without friction. Ethnic minorities strive to identify and maintain the hometown practices, local language, and religious morality that are important parts of their

identity. The result is a continuous negotiation between the discourse and material development the state foists onto frontier populations and these groups' own interests and particularities. Xining provides an excellent focus point for development on the Chinese frontier for several reasons. First, it is in an ethnically diverse region, containing considerable Tibetan, Muslim, and Han populations. Second, the city is less well known than more politicized frontier cities such as Lhasa and Ürümqi. Those cities are irrefutably important, but they tend to overshadow other frontier cities with growing ethnic populations. Xining, Chengdu, and smaller urban centers will come to increasingly represent the experiences of ethnic minorities as urbanization expands beyond the conventional urban sites of western China.

My initial hypothesis was, "Does state-led urbanization improve Tibetans' lives, as the state claims?" In order to investigate this hypothesis, I examined the political context of urbanization and its results for Tibetans' livelihoods and ethnic identity. Identity is strongly linked to a sense of belonging and is an important aspect of life satisfaction that supplements economic well-being. When I began this research, there was already a great deal of literature on government projects that settled nomads, but little work on county towns or cities. There are now several studies of urban Tibet (Yeh 2013a; Wang S. 2009; Fischer 2013; Makley 2007), but only one book-length treatment of Tibetans living in Xining (Zenz 2014).
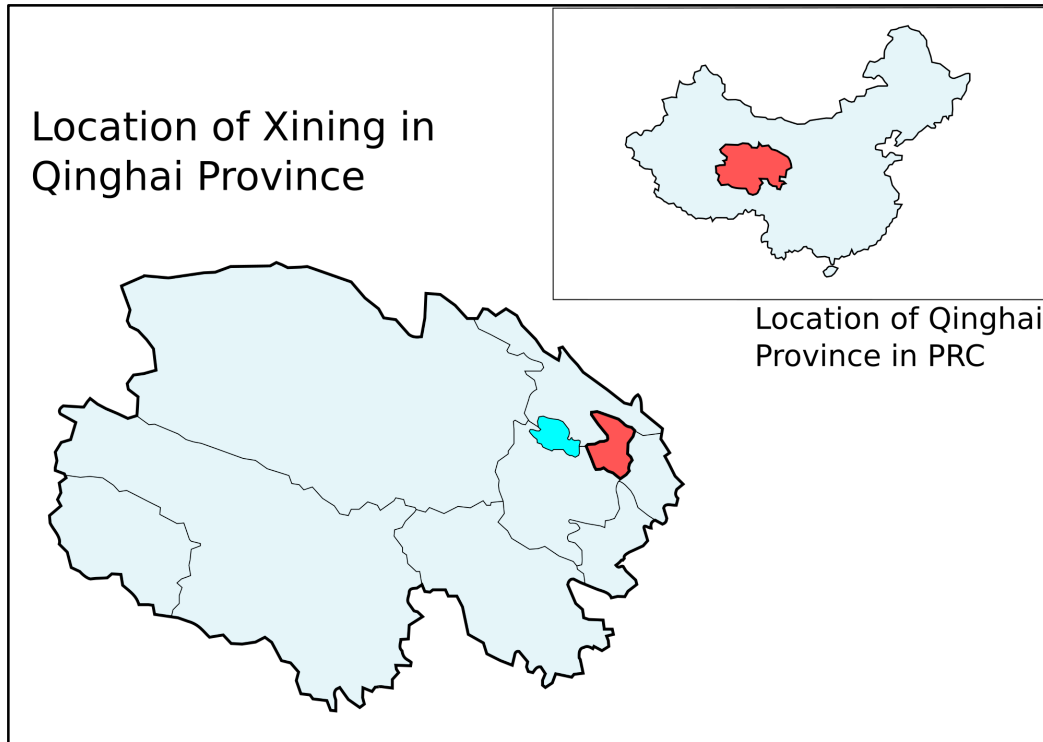
Figure 1.1 Map of Qinghai Province.

Xining City is shaded red and within Qinghai Province. The inset map shows the location of Qinghai Province, shaded red, in China. Map by author.

My plan was to write a comprehensive geography of Xining's urban environment situated within a critical appraisal of the contemporary political situation. I quickly discovered that the geography of the region is colored by its history, and that the interpretation of both space and time were subject to great degree of perspectivism that not only denies Truths, but is so heady with disagreement as to the nature of things that there is very little one can say that doesn't seem to play into a greater political project. At the core of this is the moral question of whether the Chinese government has any business being in the western frontier lands that it claims are so integral to Chinese civilization, history, and territory. Ultimately, this is a question that exceeds a case study of China and Tibet, or China and Xinjiang, and can be found in regions around the world. It is a question of disproportional political power, indigenous rights, and universal claims

of improvement and progress that can be found in situations ranging from European colonization of Africa and the United States' expansion westward, to Russia's treatment of its Siberian regions. It is the story of colonization: whether it takes place within or without the territory of a nation-state, it makes little difference. Recognizing the many shared ideological and legal strategies of colonialist states, scholars have started to look at "settler colonialism" as worldwide condition of structural disempowerment (Wolfe 2006; 1999). While such a framework requires context and nuance to be most effective, its sense of political urgency animates my dissertation.

## II. Method and Orientation

Research in this dissertation relied on four different methods that I will discuss in turn. The first method is primarily textual, relying both on recent publications in Chinese and on secondary histories of China and its western regions. This research method was used in the first two chapters. Discourse analysis has been an important part of political geography, especially critical geopolitics, since the early 1990s. Gearóid Ó Tuathail and John Agnew have argued for the importance of an emphasis on language as a contested space for ideas in political geography, drawing on ideas such as Foucaudian discourse, rhetoric, and narrative (Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992; Ó Tuathail 1996). Recently, this approach has faced pressure from a theoretical perspective that argues that Foucault's theory of discourse envelops practices, and that the two cannot be separated. From this perspective, the subject-positions that are created by discourse constrain those that occupy them. As a result, agents' strategy making practices must be considered part of the discursive ordering (Müller 2008; Müller and Reuber 2008). Rather than a genuine multiplicity of agents and ideas, there are only the variances within a hegemonic discourse, or a potential disruption of the entire authorizing episteme.

Another more general trend, part of a growing interest in the social sciences, is in breaking up structures, whether they are periodizations, discourses, or materials. While earlier critical geopolitics writings were influenced by post-modern concerns with narrative and the power in the production of knowledge, the field has also recently began emphasizing relational space and the contingent assemblages (Dittmer 2014; Müller 2015). While a move towards ontological fluidity is useful for understanding how geopolitical visions materialize, or fail to materialize, on the ground, the study of ideas remains an important feature of geopolitics in general, as this study bears out.

Discourse analysis has been used to deconstruct the Western geopolitical imagination (Ó Tuathail 1996). It need to be applied more to Chinese geopolitics in order to counter deeply essentialized notions of the Chinese territory and the Chinese nation, ideas that still circulate in the popular media and even in academic works. This does violence to the history of the Chinese geobody and mirrors the PRC's official narrative, which was in part invented to justify its claims to the frontier territories of the multi-ethnic Qing Empire. In recent decades scholars have challenged this deeply naturalized notion of China. Prasenjit Duara (1995) has shown how the Chinese nation was produced through intellectual battles to tame alternative conceptions of Chinese regions. Other scholars have recently taken to deconstructing the notion of Han ethnic identity (Mullaney 2012). The re-embrace of a timeless Chinese Civilization after the Reform Era can obscure the politics of essentializing China. Of particular concern to political geographers today is the political role of China's borderlands. We must carefully navigate China's recent turn to its frontiers so as to make sure that an emphasis on cosmopolitan interactions across frontier cultures does not sit too easily with claims of naturalized Chinese rule

and belonging. A real emphasis on plurality is cognizant of the power geometries that structure China's borderlands.

The second method I used was a mixture of semi-structured interviews and ethnography I conducted while living in Xining during the period of September 2013 to December 2014. I interviewed with forty Tibetans, Muslims, and Han, with an emphasis on Tibetans. I recorded and, with help from assistants, transcribed 35 of these interviews. These interviews lasted up to two hours and were conducted in Chinese, Tibetan, and, on a few occasions, English. Tibetans interviewed came from a variety of places including Xining, Huangnan Prefecture, Hainan Prefecture, Xunhua County, Golog Prefecture, and Yushu Prefecture. I spent a great deal of time having more free-flowing conversations with a number of closer friends and acquaintances.

Interviews were helpful for keeping my discussions about housing, income, and urban life on track. They allowed me to gather information about type of employment, size of household, opinions about urban dwellers' personal quality, and attitudes toward Hanification. This information has been invaluable to my analyses in chapters five and six. Yet as my fieldwork progressed, I realized the limitations of the formal interview method. First, many participants felt uncomfortable being recorded. In retrospect, using a recording device most likely made participants resort to self-censorship that adversely impacted the quality of the information I gathered. Second, questions about economic income and borrowing money are not only sensitive and can potentially elicit dishonest answers, but questions of "income" often don't grasp the multiple ways that family members share profits or otherwise assist one another. This is an important point, because while other scholars have noted the insufficiency of official statistics on income in minority regions (Howell and Fan 2011), there still remain problems with assessing income in China's western regions using interview and survey methods. Before

entering the field, I never anticipated how difficult it would be to gauge income and expenditure. Every participant was a unique case, and unstructured interviews and ethnography revealed to me the indirect ways that money and housing circulates in Xining, as well as the nature of inequality and ethnic discrimination in Xining City.

Finally, chapters seven and eight use mixed methodologies that analyze image and text that circulate in the urban environment, and in the case of chapter eight, the social media platform Wechat. This information is used in tandem with interview and field note data to show how Tibetans navigate religious and ethnic discrimination in the city, as well as construct their own places through everyday acts of decoration and consumption. I draw inspiration here from the Nick Megoran's (2006) work on everyday geopolitics and James Leibold's (2010; 2015) work on Han nationalism in cyberspace.

## III. Field Site

My fieldwork was conducted in Xining City, which, like many cities in China, is an amalgam of the enduring old and the glaringly new. It is also a land of distant migrants originating all across China, and a magnet for Xining's nearby rural and pastoral lands. Xining urbanites share many commonalities. They all complain about traffic problems, closely follow the prices of new apartments, and bare daily witness to the construction of innumerable high-rise buildings, sprouting up on newly developed land within and at the ever-expanding edges of the city. They also take advantage of the city's ever-improving infrastructure to visit family both near (by bus) and far (by rail or plane), and go sight-seeing in the spring and summer, when eastern Qinghai's trees and grasslands bear flowers and the roads are burdened with long queues of passenger cars and tour buses. At the same time, Xining's residents remain split along

economic and ethnic lines. Many work and socialize primarily with their own ethnicity, and Tibetans and Muslims worry about losing their identities in the face of Han-dominated urbanization.

Anticipating these differences, I initially came to Xining expecting to find a city territorially segregated along lines of ethnic division. I knew that Muslims had long dominated the eastern portion of the city. I presumed that Tibetans and Han didn't have such a long cultural or historical tie to Xining, but would nonetheless cluster together upon arriving in the city. These assumptions were based on my own personal experience in the city: I had lived in Xining serving as an English and Geography instructor between 2007 and 2008. Upon my return, however, I found that the fast pace of the city's growth and the boom in its housing market is upsetting such easy divisions, although they dominate many residents' urban imaginary.

Many Tibetans reside in the housing units, ranging from a single stairwell unit to an entire building, that government agencies in Tibetan-dominated counties outside of Xining have purchased, but a growing number of Tibetans are living in apartments located all across the city. The place of their work, the attractiveness of the housing units, their attitudes about different urban districts, and nearby convenience for them and their families all influence their housing decisions. Tibetans with less lucrative work often live on short-term leases or month-to-month in smaller units in predominantly Han or Hui areas of the city.

## IV. Structure of Dissertation

The dissertation is comprised of seven substantive chapters in two parts. The first part contains three chapters: two chapters on the changing geopolitics of China's Inner Asian frontier and one chapter that gives background to the history and geography of Xining City and the

surrounding region. The second part consists of three chapters focusing on the social economy and attitudes of Tibetans and Muslims in Xining City. A final chapter looks at the growing importance of social media in Chinese ethnopolitics.

Part one looks at the big picture of China's incorporation of its western regions in the 21st century, examining the present appropriation of China's past for political purposes. We begin with chapter two, which analyzes emerging geopolitical discourses about China's frontier territories. In China and in the West, scholars and popular authors are using "orientalist" narratives to argue for the exceptionalism of a Chinese political and economic system. These narratives rely on a revision of Chinese political thought and of China's historical geography, reimagining of China's orientation towards and beyond its frontiers. Recent books on China's historical territory have worked to naturalize past relationships with frontier peoples and their lands. By embracing a discourse of China's acculturating power and superior civilization, these books form a counterpart to those on China's current geopolitical rise as an undeniable "civilization state" or "civilizational state." These emerging discourses also work to silence the voices and concerns of frontier ethnic peoples. A section on China's changing strategy for its railway system, long structured primarily for defensive and nation-building purposes, highlights how the current period reveals a move towards a more "open frontier" in Chinese geopolitics.

In chapter three I deconstruct the notion of China's Western Region. The current region has been constructed through a "looking back" and re-organization of "Chinese" traces (military, commercial, and architectural) in the region. In an earlier incarnation, the Western Region (Ch. *xiyu*) was a place where steppe empires formed and threatened inland dynasties, and where Chinese diplomats and generals would come into contact with foreign tongues and defiant populations. Today the Western Region (Ch. *xibu*) is an administrative region that includes the

regions where China's ethnic minorities live in large numbers. For the Chinese government, this region is associated with economic backwardness and a need for heightened "civilization." It is the target of development campaigns to raise the region's GDP and better integrate it with the rest of the nation. The "Western Region" is always changing, and it is important to look at it in its contextual specificity: inaccurate and essentialist narratives mistakenly argue that China has always been colonizing and assimilating these the Western Region inhabitants. Finally, I show how China's regions recast their images as they seek to attract capital. Tibetans find themselves part of a national competition to promote their regional image and identity, and they must balance their own interests while catering to a domestic market for cultural consumption.

Serving as a link between parts one and two, chapter four gives an account of the history of Xining City and its surrounding region. Over the centuries, Xining's regional role has changed. Many petty kingdoms, as well as empires, have controlled Xining, but it has also had commercial, cultural, and religious significance. Xining was one of many regional markets where Tibetans and Muslims could trade or visit religious centers. At times there was ethnic or religious division, but different groups also cooperated to further their own interests. During the 20th century, the city has gradually modernized, becoming an industrial center and infrastructure hub.

Part two takes a more fine-grained look at Xining City. On the surface of things, the state urbanization drive has led to improved livelihood for ethnic minorities who move to the city: better road networks and outside investment in the region are allowing for increased mobility and new work and dwelling possibilities for urban Tibetans and Muslims. But still there is a degree of resentment and distrust that manifests along ethnic lines. The following chapters look at this disjuncture, focusing primarily on Tibetans.

Chapter five shows how Xining Tibetans with different types of work - government, private, and informal - purchase apartments in Xining and attain the goals they have set for themselves and their families. A disparity can be found between better off Tibetans with stable government work, and urban Tibetans whose livelihoods are contingent on the precarious frontier economy. Tibetans often blame Muslims or Han for their difficulties in finding work or fair prices for their goods. An ethnic division of labor contributes to urban intraethnic ties.

Chapter six moves away from concerns over work and income, and focuses on Tibetans' affective relationships with the city. I offer a tripartite model to better understand urban Tibetans' geographical associations about the city and the country. Tibetans can view the city in a good light: a new Tibetan urban class is embracing the conveniences of the city and the cosmopolitan promise of an urban subjecthood. Tibetans are, however, also fighting against the dominant civilizational discourse that elides Tibetans from cities. I argue that Tibetans conceive of an abject urbanization that they criticize in order to shore up their own urbane identities. Finally, Tibetans struggle against assimilation into the majority Han ethnic group. They are revaluating the countryside as a cultural reservoir of Tibetan language and behavior, which they must preserve in order to prevent Hanification. The negotiation of this tripartite division is coming to define the Tibetan urban experience.

The final two substantive chapters look at political encounters in the city. Chapter seven focuses on the relationship between legal territories, social territories, and urban individuals. The re-configuration of the territorial state in China has led to new territorializations that govern urban administration. Laws constrain the places where religious venues may be built in the city. I focus on Tibetans experiences attempting to build prayer wheels in their housing complexes. These wheels and other uses of place contribute to constructing social territories, which are often

impinged upon within urban territory. Another facet of recent urbanization is the emergence of the community (Ch. *shequ*) district system, which seeks to monitor and provide benefits for Xining's inhabitants. However, the system often fails in its basic goals. Because the enforcement of laws and regulations constraining built space and monitoring the community system is so uneven, I argue that urban governmentality, rather than being treated as all-pervasive, is best understood through a focus on the contingencies of territoriality. Regardless of the effectiveness of these state territories, Tibetans often interpret harassment within them as ethnic in nature.

After a number of terrorist attacks occurred across China in late 2013 and early 2014, social media posts about experiences of ethnic harassment went viral among Xining City's Tibetans. Chapter eight shows how these national events were interpreted at the local level, as part of pattern of ethnic discrimination to which Tibetans feel subjected. Battling against mistreatment by local government and private individuals, Tibetans asserted their grievances within the discourse of national unity (Ch. *minzu tuanjie*), arguing that discrimination increases discord. This approach stands in sharp contrast to the official explanations that implicate religious extremism and foreign-instigated separatism as the main sources of ethnic unrest. This chapter also highlights the growing importance of social media in contemporary Chinese ethnopolitics.

Taken together, these chapters show how China's new policies towards its frontiers are having a powerful impact on the lives of China's minority populations. While the shift in China's geopolitical and development policies, as well as its self-identity, have been prompted by the country's economic rise, the lives and livelihoods of the Tibetans and Muslims in Xining reveal that China's rise causes frictions and uncertainty at its frontier.

# Part I Frontier and Region

## Chapter 2. Frontier Dreaming

### I. Introduction

The PRC is a massive country, ranging from the Himalayan mountain range of the Tibetan Plateau in the west to the East Chinese Sea, from the sands of the Taklamakan and Gobi deserts in the north to the dense sub-tropical forests of Yunnan and Guangxi Provinces in the south. Just as for Russia, the United States, and other territorially large states, knitting together ecologically and sociologically diverse regions into one cohesive whole has been a difficult task. From the perspective of modern nation-states, all cultural and social variegations found within state territory must share a common history and fate. The commonality of such understandings is the triumph of a silencing of alternate perspectives and a successful naturalization of certain geographic narratives.

The way many writers in China look to its borders today is a marked shift from earlier PRC paradigms. In the new narrative of China's unstoppable emergence and revitalization, the past and present of China's spatial and cultural heterogeneity is obscured by the production of inward and backwards looking discourse that seeks to fix China's frontiers and the lands beyond its borders as either inherent parts of China or as places that could one day return or be enrolled into China's civilizational fold. Tim Oakes (2012) has argued, however, that in some of the narratives of resurgent China that dominate public discussion in contemporary China, the essentialness of Chinese civilization is challenged through an embrace of the diversity of frontier areas. But looking out to the frontiers isn't necessarily a cosmopolitan act; a culturalism

masquerading as cosmopolitanism affirms the marginal and subordinate positions of frontier peoples and places. As a result, looking out to the frontier can serve to reinforce, rather than displace, understandings of the dominance of Confucianism and Central Plains-based narratives about Chinese people and culture, even while purporting to celebrate difference.

Mainland Chinese narratives continue to deny counter narratives that give real historical agency and regional autonomy to groups such as Tibetans, Mongolians, and Uighurs in the early 20th century, in addition to other historical groups deeper in the past. In China's historical geography, periods such as the century of national humiliation (Ch. *bainianguochi*), when European and Japanese colonial powers occupied and exploited Chinese territories, are have been rendered as exceptions to the laws of Chinese civilization, which tends towards political harmony and geographical unity. In the contemporary period, the adoption of a civilizational and developmental narrative allows the current regime, as well as many Chinese commentators, to reinforce the idea of an economically expanding state, which can now reposition towards a regional and ultimately global power.

A linear narrative of the Chinese nation crafted during the late 19th and early 20th centuries has persisted into the present. Today it is being used to emphasize China's necessary ascendency not only to the status of a Great Power, but as the next pre-eminent Great Power, following a historic pattern of hegemonic succession (Agnew 2010). Nationalist debates during the late Qing and Republican eras worked to claim a place for the Chinese nation-state as the subject of History (Duara 1995). These narratives have been accompanied by a strong sino-centrism. The most imaginative of commentators, inspired by the open-ended patriotism of China's revitalization (Ch. *fuxing*), have rushed to supply new possibilities for China's rise. In so doing they narrativize Chinese history and emplot historical events within a trajectory that

connects, at one end, the trans-historical integrity of the Chinese geobody, and as a *telos,* China's inevitable place as a great unifying power. Yet rather than embrace the linear fixity of China's current frontier, many authors look to the glory days of the earlier Chinese dynasties, such as the Qing (1644-1911), when Chinese territory expanded and Chinese power was without equal. But earlier conceptions of frontiers, territories, and empires were often the products of cultures beyond the Chinese civilizational fold.

This chapter will explore the narratives that spatially suture together the Chinese geobody. I argue that China is entering and embracing an "open frontier." As it does so, politicians and patriotic writers carefully manage the history and integrity of China's territory, silencing some frontier perspectives and proposing a vision of an essentially cosmopolitan, yet assimilating, Chinese state. At the same time, elements of autarky and defensiveness can still persist. The chapter is in three parts. First, it examines how contemporary discourse argues for the exceptionality of China's "civilization-state," and how this in specific relates to China's territories and borders. Second, I examine notions of Chinese boundaries and frontiers in a comparative perspective, taking into account how these ideas shifted within self-described "Chinese" states over different dynastic constitutions. Third, I examine railways as a historical contributor to China's sense of violated territorial integrity, and as a contemporary dream to develop both the Chinese state and open up new regional and global markets. Although in many portions of the world, air travel and extensive highway systems have eclipsed railways in imaginative geographies, Chinese railways have political, cultural, and social power in 21st century China: the "High Speed Era" (Ch. *gaotieshidai*) promises to reshape China's frontiers and perhaps the world.

**II. The Long Pillow of China's Dream**

In 2005 Hu Jintao introduced the concept of the "harmonious world" (Ch. *hexie shijie*), which would serve as an objective for Chinese foreign policy. William Callahan has explained that this concept is an extension of Hu's domestic policy of building a "harmonious society" (Ch. *hexie shehui*). He writes that Chinese officials and scholars "explain 'building a harmonious world' as a new – and better – way of seeking 'lasting peace and common prosperity,' whereby different civilizations can coexist in the global community" (Callahan 2012, 1). The optimistic scenario proposed by the harmonious world and the harmonious society has been further promoted through Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" (Ch. *zhongguomeng*). When Xi Jinping delivered his China Dream speech to the Twelfth All Country People's Representative Meeting on March 17, 2013, he framed the Chinese dream as the rejuvenation of China through the creation of a strong and economically prosperous state and a revitalized Chinese nationality (Ch. *minzu zhenxing*). The Chinese Dream is the aggregate of all the individual dreams of the Chinese people, united beyond differences in status and ethnicity as one mass striving for national regeneration.

In a widely available edited volume published by the People's Daily Press, the journalist Ren Zhongwen (2013) extends this dream into a territorial dream with both domestic and international implications: the Chinese Dream includes the Qinghai Tibet Railway dream, the submarine dream, and the aircraft carrier dream. The Chinese Dream is entangled with the economic development and military growth of the country. From this official perspective, the Chinese Dream goes beyond meeting the domestic interests of Chinese citizens, such as obtaining a good job, an apartment, and a car; it also boldly extends to contested frontiers of the nation-state and to lands subject to international disputes beyond them. The Chinese Dream

secures both a harmonious society and a harmonious world, but on terms distinctly related to Chinese interests.

During the presidency of Hu Jintao, Chinese politicians and academics contributed to a growing discussion of China's role on the international stage. While the status quo remains that China operates as one Westphalian state among many, intellectuals in and outside of China are turning to Chinese history to offer up alternative International Relations and neo-imperial models that seek to weaken American hegemony and raise China's stature in the world (Agnew 2012; Callahan and Barabansteva 2012). A shared conviction is that as an ascending world power, China will inevitably exert more influence over international relations, and that its long peaceful history can offer an alternative to Western imperialism and exploitation. John Agnew (2012) argues that the two strongest contemporary strands of Chinese geopolitical thinking are what he terms orientalist discourse, which promotes a revival of Confucianism, and a "big family" harmonious political system, the "nationalist *geopolitik*" view that emphasizes territorial integrity and a defensively militaristic spirit.

One important orientalist discourse has been offered by Zhao Tingyang, from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. His promotion of All under Heaven (Ch. *tianxia*), a Confucian framework for understanding political relations, has set the agenda for contemporary debates about China's role in an emerging world system. Zhao argues that the current international system is too quarrelsome and advocates a new world institution based on voluntary enrollment in a political system that subordinates all states to the guidance of one state. This primary state would lead justly and maintain the allegiance of all of its subjects through fair and virtuous rule. The model draws strongly on notions of the Confucian family, in which relations are smooth as long as everyone knows their place and are not unethical or selfish. Zhao appeals to the Chinese

imperial tradition of the tribute system, which is viewed as united through a system of voluntary reciprocity. The imperial center always gives out more than it takes in and lesser states stand to gain as long as they do not upset the balance of power (Zhao 2012; Zhao 2005).

Geneva-based scholar and author Zhang Weiwei (2010) in his book *China Shock* offers a deeply territorial reading of China's potential as a civilizational state (Ch. *wenmingxing guojia*). He argues that China can bring together its unique characteristics as a civilization state (Ch. *wenming guojia*) and as a modern state (Ch. *jindai guojia*) in order to realize its inherent potential, but without seeking to return to the sinocentric tributary system proposed by Zhao and Martin Jacques (2009). Zhang argues that a civilizational state occurs when a world civilization is coextensive with the political borders of its state. He says that the Roman Empire once represented this in Europe, and that, though politically fractured today, such a state could re-emerge in the future. The same possibility remains for Islamic countries. India is a civilizational state, but remains hampered by its attempts to emulate Western civilization.

The military colonel and Chinese National Defense University instructor Liu Mingfu has offered another view of China's strategic rise. He advocates that China should focus on military build-up so that its rising economic wealth doesn't attract the avarice of foreigners, in particular the United States. In the zero-sum game of world domination, a race struggle pits Chinese civilization against the West. In his book *The China Dream,* Liu draws upon racist geopolitical notions while peppering his text with allusions to Chinese classics (Liu 2015). This text, like many mentioned above, is targeted at mainstream audiences, but it has infiltrated popular thinking about China's role in an emerging world order (Callahan 2013; Wong 2015).

These "orientalist" writings, while varying in degree the ways that they propose China may interface with the rest of the world, share many common assumptions. They depend on a

world civilizations model similar to that of Samuel Huntington. For Zhang, civilizational states can only succeed if they stop mimicking others' policies and systems; instead of seeking the approval and acknowledgement of other civilizations, they must pursue their own goals and use their own methods. The sociologist Bai Gao (2012) has suggested that a revitalized Silk Road may lead to the resurgence of other civilization states such as Turkey and Iran, which survive only in weakened forms. While countries such as America, Holland, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom are frequently lauded and analyzed as Great Powers (Ch. *daguo*), China is unique in that it combines temporal power with a territorially integrated civilization.

How has China been able to secure its territory through history, the special quality that authenticates it as a civilizational state? Its long history, geographical vastness, and cultural heterogeneity would seem to challenge notions of civilizational uniformity. A crucial aspect of imagining "China" today is recasting the past – of refashioning the legacy of imperial territories and of the nature of the frontiers that always seem to tell stories of unsettled conflict. To get a better understanding of the political work that must be done to keep in repair the myth of a geo-historical civilization uniformity, accounts of China's ancient and fundamentally unchanging past must be challenged.

**III. China at the Frontier**

With China's rise and national rejuvenation, the Chinese state's disposition towards its contested land frontiers to its northwest and west, and its sea frontiers to the south and southwest are changing. The emergence of the orientalist paradigm has made an impact on how borders and border peoples are viewed from the present. This is a shift that influences historical understandings of China's non-Han peoples. The pre-eminent Chinese sociologist and

anthropologist Fei Xiaotong (1988) has written that Chinese civilization has expanded outward, like a snowball, acculturating frontiers peoples as the territory grows. A revised culturalist model of Chinese social development, drawing from Joseph Levenson, and has been given renewed meaning by Beijing University Professor Ma Rong (2007), who argues for the cosmopolitan assimilation of ethnic minorities so that they may share in China's development as regular citizens. The stress on economic development and modern advancement not only links to the backwards/forwards teleology of modernity, but rests on a logic that links minorities to China's regional periphery, especially its land frontiers. Elena Barabansteva (2009) has shown that the Chinese state, adopting and adjusting the language of international development, has opposed minority groups held back by traditions and religion with modern subjects of the Chinese state. She writes, "this delimitation places ethnic minorities and the Han at opposite ends of the scale measuring the meaning of being modern citizens" (Ibid: 247). A new regional vision emerges in which minority areas are marked as economically, socially, and culturally backwards and in need of development in order to help them obtain economic prosperity, social harmony, and the Chinese Dream. Yet even this development is more than an effort to alleviate poverty and raise GDP, it is also an effort to materially and symbolically secure China's frontiers.

*Civilization*

It is curious that an orientalist discourse, drawing from classic Confucian texts, would draw upon and promise civilizational uniformity. Early Chinese intellectuals frequently employed civilizational discourse to distinguish "us" from "them." The barbaric peoples at the edge of China often served as foils in discussions about human nature. What did it mean to be human? Can people change? Can they become civilized and pursue the Way? Multiple

interpretations could be found in the passages of the Confucian Analects and other classical texts (Dikötter 1992: 5). One interpretation was expounded upon and passed on in Gongyang's exegesis of the Confucian classics: Barbarians were seen as corrigible and could learn the Way if they pursued it. Yet a counter discourse also emerged, drawing from the Zuo Zhuan and Mencius, which portrayed the barbarian as immutably other, impossible to assimilate (Ibid., 18). Chinese ethnonyms for frontier peoples even betrayed an unwillingness to accept their adversaries in frontier conflict as fully human: two of the Barbarians of the Four Corners (Ch. *siyi*) had the radicals for animal and insects written into their characters.

The idea of a geographical basis for the other is also related in the Confucian classic *The Tribute of Yu*, which describes the make-up and interactions of the nine states (Ch. *jiuzhou*) of the Chinese ecumene (Ch. *tianxia*). In this model, the nine states are situated within five differentiated zones surrounding a civilized center: a zone of agricultural production that provides fixed products for consumption, vassal states, a zone of pacification, distant lands, and finally, the barbaric wastelands (Ch. *manhuang*) where the light of civilization fades away (Ge 2013: 4-5). While this is an ideal model, the distinctions of a gradation of civilization linked with agricultural cultivation and distance from an imagined center was frequently reproduced in Chinese history. Documents from the Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties cited this geography when they wrote of the submissive, but not entirely trusted, "cooked" barbarian peoples that resided in regions where the Chinese state maintained a tenuous administration. Abutting zones of "cooked" barbarians were lands beyond the direct political control of the state, where wild and rapacious "raw" peoples lived. The raw continuously threatened garrisons, roads, and settled peoples. Such categorical distinctions accompanied moments of encounter when the cultivated

and cultivating center came into contact with the inhabitants of border regions that were in the process of being colonized (Fiskesjö 1999).

*Walls, Nomads, and Territorial Change*

The generality of the labeling of barbarians and of the "cooked" and "raw" in the Chinese literary tradition should not obscure the diversity of border peoples. The barbarians of the broad northern and northwestern frontiers have often been portrayed as dangerous minorities, and today Tibetan and Uighur separatism, real and imagined, continue to loom as dangers to the integrity of the Chinese geo-body (Bulag 2002). The threats to political legitimacy posed by modern nationalist movements in these borderlands continue to hold sway in the Chinese political imagination. In order to subdue threats of separatism that can find legitimacy in the territorial bases of distinct historical polities over thousands of years in these places, a revisionism that naturalizes cyclical frontier history has emerged.

On the one hand, the Great Wall has symbolic power as a testimony to the stark differences and irreconcilability between the steppe and the sown in Inner Asian history. But this understanding is itself a cultural product with its own history. The Song Dynasty (960-1279) developed a firm conceptualization of its northern and northwestern frontiers along defensive walls built during a period of insecurity along its boundaries with the Tangut and Khitan states. Nicholas Tackett (2008) has argued that this period marks one of earliest instances of looking backwards in time to establish China as a "geobody" of which the boundaries have been time and time again attributed, often erroneously, to the ancient Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC), whose walls were likely originally built in the fashion of enclosed kingdoms (Barfield 1989: 32; Lattimore 1962a: 97-118). Whether or not they were effective, the walls of the northern China represented

a firm political boundary; "nothing could be more static in conception than the Great Wall" (Lattimore 1962b: 477).

On the other hand, walls had practical political purposes. The wall was part of what Owen Lattimore (1962b) called for a distinct "frontier style" in Chinese history. He argued that the northern frontier of China was marked by its exclusion of those beyond it, namely Turkic peoples and Mongolians. When Chinese settlers entered the marginal terrain of Northern China, in became difficult to carry on as typical Chinese agriculturalists, and they took on the frontiersman traits that made them difficult subjects. Difficulty of rule combined with raids from northern pastoralists contributed to successive Chinese states resorting to building and rebuilding iterations of the Great Wall in order to affect stability in the north. Lattimore (1962b: 485) proposed that strong nomadic empires formed when the Chinese state didn't do enough to stop nomadic raiding. Nomadic groups slowly became stronger through victories, plundering, and ransom. Inward looking Chinese dynasties saw the nomads as pests, and created walls to stop them.

Thomas Barfield (1989) revised Lattimore's thesis, arguing for a distinction between steppe and Manchurian-type states in Inner Asia. Steppe polities were parasitic on strong Chinese states, using raiding to establish regular payments in exchange for peace. This parasitic strategy allowed steppe polities to procure the luxury goods and gifts that held their confederations together. While these states had little interest in or ability to rule sedentary peoples, Manchurian-type states, located at margins with mixed ecologies and economies, were more adept at managing both nomadic and agricultural populations. These states created a system of dual administration that proved effective for ruling nomadic tribes and Chinese

bureaucracies. Over time Manchurians established increasingly stable dynasties that straddled both China and steppe lands. These included the Khitan, Jurchen, and Qing Dynasties.

Barfield's theory of "shadow empires," in which Inner Asia polities gain their distinctiveness from their relationship with China has been controversial. Scholars have recently argued that steppe states did not depend on China in order to attain their social and political form, and that more focus should be placed on internal dynamics among steppe societies such as class stratification and the formation of an aristocracy (Sneath 2007; Rogers 2007). In China, however, Barfield's and Lattimore's portrayals of parasitic steppe peoples have grown in popularity. Works of both authors have recently been published in mainland China, and the books can be found alongside new books by Chinese authors that also re-appraise China's Inner Asian frontier.

This growing interest has led to a renewed focus on the nature and dynamics of "the other half of China's history," as one popular book is titled. In this book the history of two thousand years of Inner Asian political interactions is framed as a long encounter between China and the many-named northern frontier groups found in Chinese records. Although these groups do exercise some cultural and biological influence on the peoples of the Central Plains, their fate is steady assimilation into the Chinese cultural core. The preface to the book, which also serves as the introductory framework, argues for a corrective to inward-looking Chinese history:

> There have, however, previously been some works from which problems have arisen, mainly because they have connoted historical China with the dynasties of the central plains, equating the history of these central plains dynasties with the history of all of China; moreover, seeing the minorities and their states as "different nations" or "outside countries," categorizing them outside of China's history, neglecting the moral duty to see minorities equally. (Gao 2010: 2)

Although the Central Plains are dislocated, the book still draws from Fei Xiaotong's conception of the "snowball" effect of assimilation, the Marxist framework of minority ethnicities (Ch. *shaoshu minzu*), and the recent popularity of looking out to China's frontiers in order to cast the history of the steppe and Manchuria as properly Chinese. Thousands of years of frontier interaction between the Central Plains culture and the "barbarians" that once marked the edge of Chinese cosmology is recast of a geographical space with no relevant "outside." This is not a history of cultural exchange and reciprocal influence; it is ultimately the history of China's continuous geographic growth and civilizational expansion. As a rule, barbarian others and their non-native Chinese dynasties can only be sinicized.

Fudan University historical geographer Ge Jianxiong (2013) has argued that Chinese history is marked by two opposed yet complementary trends: unity (Ch. *tongyi*) and fission (Ch. *fenlie*). Unity arises when Chinese dynasties unite territory and rule it from a Chinese cultural center such as the Central Plains. Fission occurs when the state fractures into petty kingdoms or rests on a system of administrative autonomy for minority nationality regions, that is, the system imposed in the PRC during the 1950s. Unity and fission work in a dialectical fashion over time, yet the synthesis ultimately tends towards unification. Fission only sets the stage for a reinvigorated state unity. In this vision, the territorial expansions of the Yuan and Qing were parts of China's long pattern of periodic integration. The vast empire achieved during the early and mid-Qing mark the most recent pinnacle of this trend. It was followed by a period of disintegration beginning after 1840, when foreign encroachment began to threaten China's territorial integrity. Warlordism, division between Nationalists and Communists, and an administrative cartography that enshrined ethnic difference, all contributed towards a 20th

century marred by disunity. Only today is China finally starting once again on the track towards geographic unity.

Both *The Other Side of Chinese History* and Ge Jianxiong's *Unity and Fission* rely on trans-historical truths about the overwhelming effectiveness of Chinese culture to assimilate and conquer cultural and political difference. Both texts look to the frontier, but instead of finding real difference, they find the safety of a China that has always been, and, in Ge's work, a suggestion that China's territorial integrity (based on the territorial conquests of the Qing) may be restored again. Ironically, the reliance on the essential unity of "national minorities" and on foreign dynastic land claims in Gao's text could easily be argued in the other way if the synthesis tended towards disunity.

*The Changing Frontier*

China's recent economic reform has turned China from an inward-looking autarky to a place of premier significance in the global market (Arrighi 2009). As the Chinese state has looked for markets for its goods both internationally and in its rapidly growing domestic market, it has promoted trade. Moving away from a state-managed market has necessitated risk-taking, and this has had a direct impact on China's frontiers. The hardness or porousness of political boundaries is closely linked to the economic goals of a given polity. Writing about historic European states, Jean Gottmann (1973: 18-22) described two ideal types of states. The first was an inward-looking Platonic type, modeled on a bounded, stable, and well-organized polity with modest ambitions for economic or territorial growth. The second was the Aristotelian type, which is ambitious and pursues trade to obtain the means that would enable it to attain the greatest happiness for its population. While the former state is satisfied with a secure and limited

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territory, the latter pursues a more open vision of its political space, seeing both opportunity and risk in adventure and expansion; this is the vision of the open frontier. Gottmann asserts that this binary has universal application beyond Europe, arguing for example, that isolated Tokugawa Japan is an example of the security state. It also sheds light on the history and present of China's frontiers. Looking at the behavior of Chinese dynasties over several thousand years, it is hard to categorize dynasties as strictly isolationist or open to trade and trans-frontier movement. To begin to think about what an open or closed frontier might mean, the Chinese concept of "frontier" must be put in historical and cultural perspective.

*Frontier Concepts*

The lands at China's periphery are often understood in English as "frontiers," but as the meaning of the term is often unclear in English, applying it to East and Inner Asian borderlands without qualification is doomed to conceptual and historical imprecision. As political concepts, the meaning of frontier, border, or boundary shifts between times, contexts, and languages. In European languages, variations of the term "frontier" emerged alongside the conceptualization of territorial sovereignty during the 16th century. The shift from a military to an administrative sense of the frontier has its origins in the architectural façade of a stronghold, whose *frontiere* marked the edge of a territory (Febvre 1973). The clearly demarcated limit of such a frontier displaced medieval European marches or provinces under semi-autonomous military rule.[1] Over time its legibility led to a sense of the frontier as a "clearly demarcated line marking the external boundaries of internally coherent and adjacent state territories" (Hirst 2005: 36). Notions of

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[1] Marches served as buffer zones to protect the polities that established them, and could ultimately be absorbed by an expanding state (Fawcett 1918: 76-77). These zones were similar to the Roman *limes*, which were malleable zones at the edge of the Roman Empire (see Hirst 2005).

frontiers, boundaries, *confins*, or *limites* as administrative and political concepts evolved in the early modern period, eventually taking on social connotations as demarcating the limits of national society. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the mapping of European frontiers helped to make clearer the bounds of territorial sovereignty (Agnew 2001: 10-22).

Yet a distinction continued to persist between the firm and exclusive boundaries, and a zonal conception. While states may have attempted to hold such firm boundaries in Europe, European Imperial pursuits abroad were marked by a variety of political techniques to create spaces of provisional suzerainty or neutralized territorial ambition through innovations such as protectorates and spheres of influence, and the aggressiveness of a "forward policy" on colonial frontiers (Curzon 1908). The most influential modern conceptualization of an open frontier comes at the end of the 19th century, when Frederick Jackson Turner proposed his thesis of the frontier in American history. Looking west towards the Pacific Ocean, he argued that "the frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization" (Turner 1921: 3-4). This was a line that was always moving, and a frontier that was always changing. Rather than being defined through its fixity, the American frontier could be understood as fostering particular political and social dispositions in which new settlers, forming new communities, reinvigorated the American way of life.

Chinese conceptions of "frontier" have touched upon European and American concepts to some degree, but remain distinct from them. Both walls and zones can be encountered, and while the Great Wall may symbolize the antiquity and continuity of Chinese civilization, terms for zonal concepts both exist and have been appropriated in recent frontier imaginings. The genealogy of the Chinese terms for "frontier" reveals the difficulties of political context and the polysemy of multi-lingual dynasts. Franck Billé (2012) has proposed that contemporary Chinese

conceptions are more porous than those of China's northern neighbors, the Russians. A variety of Chinese characters are used in in combination to describe concepts such as boundary, border, and frontier. Some terms denote firm boundaries, such as *bianjie*, the former character being a less clearly defined space, and the latter denoting a delimitation. The term *bianjing* is an ambiguous zone until a line (Ch. *xian*) is added, giving the space a cartographically legible edge. Another more cartographically powerful image can be invoked in a country's *bantu*, which can denote a cartographically represented territory.

The character *jing*, is often used in characters that denote a perilous circumstance, such as *chujing*, *jingdi*, *jiongjing*, and *kunjing*. In classical texts the four jing (Ch. *sijing*) marked the edges of political states, and when considered in the context of the Chinese ecumene, marked the places beyond which the four barbarians lived and things were not in a state of pacification. They were also places prone to fantasy and adventure, a theme that will be picked up in the following chapter.

Chinese concepts of the frontier must also be understood in historical context and in dialogue with other languages and political systems. An important concept that dominates the study and description of Chinese historical and contemporary borders is *bianjiang*. This term describes a frontier zone, the latter character illustrating a series of measured and cultivated fields. The province Xinjiang, which incorporates the *jiang* character, has been translated as New Frontier or New Dominion. This is a telling example of how the Manchu Qing Dynasty conceived of its distant western regions. Mark Elliot (2014: 343) has shown how Manchu terminology reveals conceptualizations that do not concisely overlap with the Chinese. The malleable semantics of the Manchu term *jecen* allows it to signify linearity or a zone. Elliot argues that *jecen* should be understood apart from Chinese terminology and may constitute a

separate discursive understanding. He suggests that the expansionist Qing Empire had an expansive, open-ended vision of the frontier, perhaps informed by the vision of a universal empire, models drawn from the Chinese Great Unity (Ch. *datong*), or something else entirely (Ibid.: 344-345).

In another historical case, the Tang Dynasty – Tibetan Empire (Ch. *tufan/tubo* Tib. *wod chen po*) Treaty Stele in Lhasa uses a variety of concepts to refer to Tang lands (Ch. *guojiang*) and Tibetan lands (Ch. *jingtu*) (Wang 1980). The actual boundary between the two polities is demarcated with a stone near Qinghai Lake, and uses the character *jie*. Of course the actual use of these terms in Chinese does not mean that they conceptually matched with the Tibetan terms used, such as the term for border or boundary *mtshams*. This treaty was the result of a century of attempts to settle disputes between the Tang and Tibetans, during which the Tang only belatedly acknowledged the Tibetans on equal footing.

The British used the Treaty Stele and early Qing boundary markers as historical evidence for the distinction between China, Inner Tibet, and Outer Tibet during the Simla Accord Conference of 1913 and 1914 (Kao 1980: 225-232). The Chinese negotiators refused to acknowledge that internal boundaries meant anything other than control of Tibet by China. As Elliot Sperling (2004) has argued, much of the rhetoric about Chinese rule of Tibet is based on trans-historical understandings of "China" that fail to take dynastic difference into consideration, and equate imperial domination with natural belonging. Indeed, it is the failure to differentiate between not only the quality of rule, but also the nature of various dynasties' frontiers that fuels orientalist and nationalist understandings of a "China" with an immutable political language.

*Sea Frontier*

The land frontier was defined by interactions between powerful societies with their own conceptions of borders and boundaries. At times the frontier was closed, at other times it was open. China's sea frontier was similar. During the Sui (581-618) and Song Dynasties the Chinese population shifted south, and both dynasties invested heavily in agricultural production, transportation canals, and irrigations systems (Tuan 1969: 88-95; 127-130). During the Song Dynasty, this southward movement reached the seas, and new technologies allowed large numbers of ships to push the coastal frontier towards distant markets (Chase-Dunn and Hall 1997: 170-178; Elvin 1973). Although the Song and Ming Dynasties were ostensibly closed to sea trade for most of their duration, illicit sea-borne private trade continued during both dynasties, and trading ships continued to carry silks and other goods to European trading bases in Asia as well as Japanese ports. These sea pirates posed a problem for both the late Ming and early Qing. Pirates were less organized than nomads, but their raids encouraged central governments to either attempt to fight them or find ways to accommodate them. The Qing used tactics borrowed from the northern frontier to turn powerful leaders against their allies (Perdue 2014: 46).

Only in 1684 did the Qing Emperor Kangxi open many Chinese ports to private trade. This policy allowed for a flurry of trade activity in East Asia that would slowly subside through the 18th and 19th centuries as later Qing rulers grew weary of and more cautious towards the European traders they encountered at sea (Zhao 2013). The opening of the Qing to trade in the late 17th century reveals a willingness to engage in risk for the enrichment of China's material conditions. On the other hand, private trade at sea was heavily curtailed during the Song and the Ming, and the famous missions of Zheng He were state-sanctioned tributary missions. Still, the

sea frontier during native dynasties was not as closed to trade as some accounts suggest (Fairbank 1953). The active role of local coastal provincial officials, as well as pirates and merchant groups hailing from island bases, in affecting and undermining the policies of Chinese dynasties reveals the rebellious and independence of the marginal sea frontier against imperial centers.

This image of the sea frontier in addition to Lattimore and Barfield's portrayal of the fissile tendencies of the northern frontier tell of border regions that were only rarely within the full civilizational orbit of a distinctly "Chinese" dynasty. Conceiving of the frontier as open or closed is closely connected to geopolitical contingency. The next section will take up one example that shows the dangers and opportunities involved in railway building.

## IV. Railways, Foreign Encroachment, the Chinese Territory

Like many aspects of China's development, its railway system is more than a dispassionate objective meant to strengthen national infrastructure. China's railway history is complex and international. Foreign empires had a great interest in the development of China's early railway infrastructure, hoping to exploit it for commercial, strategic, and territorial advantage. The memory of this contemptible history has served as impetus for Chinese officials, past and present, to build a centralized national railway system to promote internal connectivity and territorial integrity. The newer high-speed railway speaks to a future in which China's land frontiers are open to the trade that once threated its geobody. In an emerging narrative, China is cast as the next technological leader in a sideshow of the great-power competition; it is the great trailblazer of the High-speed Rail Age. This section will look at the dynamic and structure of the railway in China, emphasizing the frontier qualities of the railway, and how they have affected

and continue to affect China as a centralizing political force. While the Railway Dream is a dream of the center, inviting a reified sense of China, both the nation-state and the contemporary rail are the outcomes of a contested and contingent history.

*Early Railways and Railway Dreams*

The earliest efforts to build railways in the Qing Empire were at the behest of foreign interests, primarily merchants hoping to link treaty ports with their hinterlands. As early as 1863, firms from Britain and elsewhere were pressing for the construction of a Shanghai-Suzhou railway (Kent 1907). The then governor of Jiangsu Province, Li Hongzhang, did not permit the railway to be built. Reflecting the attitudes of the Imperial administration at the time, he mistrusted the motives of foreign enterprises that wanted to purchase land in order to construct railways for the benefit of the government. In 1881 Li worked with a domestic mining company in order to build the first tramway with a steam locomotive. This new line, called the Kaiping Tramway, connected a Zhili colliery to a seaport serving water canal. This railway was eventually expanded to Tianjin and Beijing, and became one of the first parts of the Imperial Railway of the North.

Until the end of the Qing Dynasty, railways were typically built through foreign loans and managed by foreign companies. During the "Battle for Concessions" that started after the Sino-Japanese War ended in 1895 (Kent 1907: 90), the foreign imperial powers used their railways to sell their goods within China (Leung 1980). Railway construction contributed to the tension leading up to the Boxer Rebellion of 1899-1901, and railroad tracks near Beijing were even damaged or destroyed. After suppressing the rebellion, the foreign powers intensified construction of their own railway systems within their respective "spheres of influence" (Leung

1980: 31). The territories along the coast were established as the "half colonial" regions of China, and railways helped further their development and exploitation by a different sort of foreign dynasty.

The case of Manchuria is a prime example of how railway construction imposed on Qing territory and contributed to nascent nationalist fears of territorial encroachment upon China. At the time railways were being built in Manchuria, the region was rapidly changing, with Shandong Province settlers displacing pastoralists at the fringes of the Liaodong Peninsula, where they began to open fields for agriculture. The region of Manchuria became a contested space between Qing, Russian, and Japanese Imperial powers. In 1896, The Russians negotiated with Qing officials to lay railway track across northern Manchuria to link its Trans-Siberian Railway with Vladivostok, which would save them a 500-mile extension around Qing Territory. The result was the Central Eastern Railway, built as a joint venture in which Russia had administrative and military control of the line. This railway became a geopolitical liability for the Qing. It was soon extended south from Harbin to connect with ice-free Port Arthur. During the Boxer Rebellion, the Russian military entered Manchuria through this railway connection.

This state of affairs was short-lived. The Russians and Japanese came into conflict over their competing Manchurian schemes. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 concluded with Japan's seizure of the Liaodong Peninsula and the destruction of Port Arthur. The Japanese military took control of the Central Eastern Railway south of Shenyang (Mukden), which became called the Southern Manchurian Railway. At the onset of the Russian Revolution, the European-dominated Inter-Allied Board took control of the Central Eastern Railway in 1918, with the purpose of fighting the Bolsheviks in Siberia. By 1924, however, the Chinese had re-negotiated the original 1896 agreement over the CER and the railway was again put under joint

Russian and Chinese control. During the 1920s the Russian and Japanese controlled systems competed with each other for passage of goods, each building more feeder railways and attempting to maximize the use of their ports. Before long, the Republic of China began an independent effort to build rails in Manchuria, constructing its own separate system coming from the south. This system then competed with the Russian and Japanese systems (Wang 1925; Leung 1980).

Towards the end of the 1920s, the Chinese government became upset with Russia's control over the CER rails, and the two powers came into armed conflict in 1929 (Norton 1930). Then in 1931 an explosion along the South Manchuria Railway served as a *ruse de guerre*. This event, known as the Mukden Incident, gave Japan a pretense for the invasion of Manchuria.

I highlight this historical example because it shows the deep connection between foreign powers, railway construction and use, and territorial integrity. Over the course of the Anti-Japanese War, the Japanese military would seize, renovate, and use for their own purposes nearly all of the railways built in China (Leung 1980: 69). This is backdrop against which patterns for rail building that privileged the integration of national space over economic purpose gained prominence.

*A Chinese Rail System*

Officials in late Republican China realized the importance of building railways for territorial defense (Leung 1980; Sun 1955). Ma Jianzhong, a reformist official with close ties to Li Hongzhang wrote of the importance of the railway in repelling foreign encroachment: "Only railroads will be able to annihilate (foreign) appetites for our frontiers and to provide protection for our country. Therefore, I appeal that we must construct them, and permit no delay" (Ma 1994

quoted in Chin 2013: 212). Railways were built during the Imperial period, but funds were tight and technology had to be borrowed from foreigners. A young Sun Yat-sen saw the expansion of China's railways as key to the Republic's political and economic future. In 1894 he wrote Li Hongzhang, suggesting that the Qing government build more rails in central China, rather than towards the frontiers. Sun argued that the railways were the arteries of the nation and preferred them over a maritime strategy (Edmonds 1987: 422 ft2). In 1922 Sun Yat-sen published his book *The International Development of China* with the purpose of attracting foreign investment capital. The text is oriented towards economic development, a large concern of which being a national railway infrastructure that covers the entire country and has dozens of international links. The plan is broken into five regional programs (see Figure 2.1).
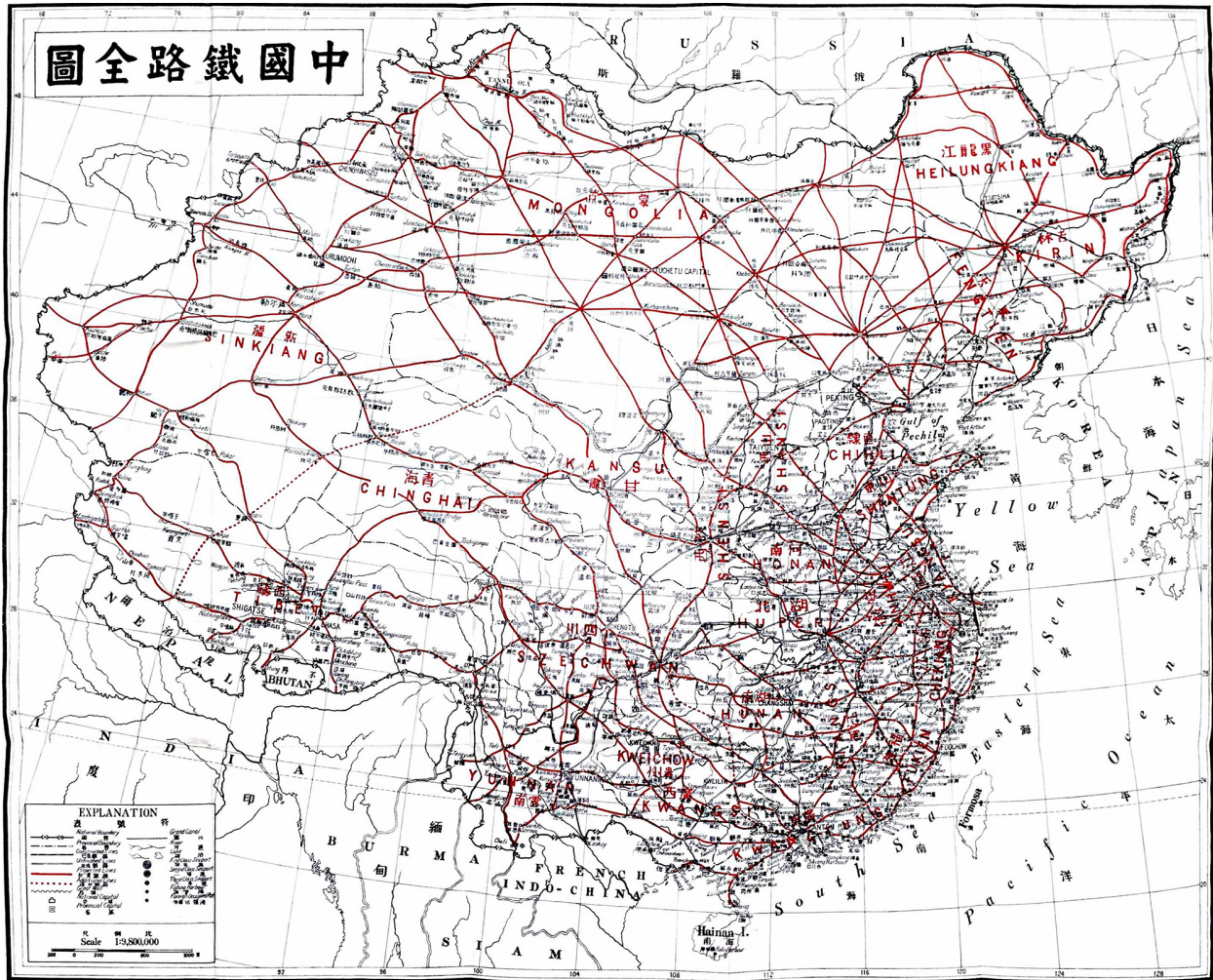
Figure 2.1 Sun Yat-sen's railway plan.

The red lines show Sun Yat-sen's planned railway network. Source: Sun 1922.

Despite the hopes of Qing Reformists and the Republicans to create a unified rail system, it was difficult to complete. During the Qing, the power of local governments and merchants to tax and route rail systems resulted in a fragmented cartography of privately owned rail systems oriented more towards local profit than territorial integration (Leung 1980: 47-49), while during the Republican period continuous warfare hindered construction projects.

C.K. Leung (1980) has argued that Mao Zedong's pre-1963 strategy was rooted firmly in his Communist ideology of reducing contradictions, in this case regional contradictions. During

that period a great effort went into railway development in the least industrialized and least populated parts of China such as Qinghai, Xinjiang, Guangxi, and other "continental frontiers." This effort to reduce spatial economic and social contradictions was closely connected to the desire to fix Qing frontiers into the Chinese nation-state, a political and geopolitical issue that continues to concern the PRC. The railway system constructed during the Maoist period fulfilled many of Sun's ambitious plans (Edmonds 1987). Today rail development continues rapidly, but along with economic concerns, the overtly political has reappeared.

Recent plans for the China's high-speed rail include an interlaced system of railways that bear a striking similarity to Sun's plan, with a measured partial disregard for population concentration and actual demand: pulling together national territorial space remains of primary importance. The current system is based on a plan of four north-south and four east-west (Ch. *sizongsiheng*) lines that make high speed travel between on an indirect route between locations such as Xiamen and Ürümqi possible (see Figure 2.2). This plan was proposed in 2008 with the Chinese Railway Longterm Development Plan and finally completed at the end of the 2011-2015 Five-year plan and has 18,000 kilometers of high-speed permanent ways (Zuo and Chen 2012: 20; Han 2012).
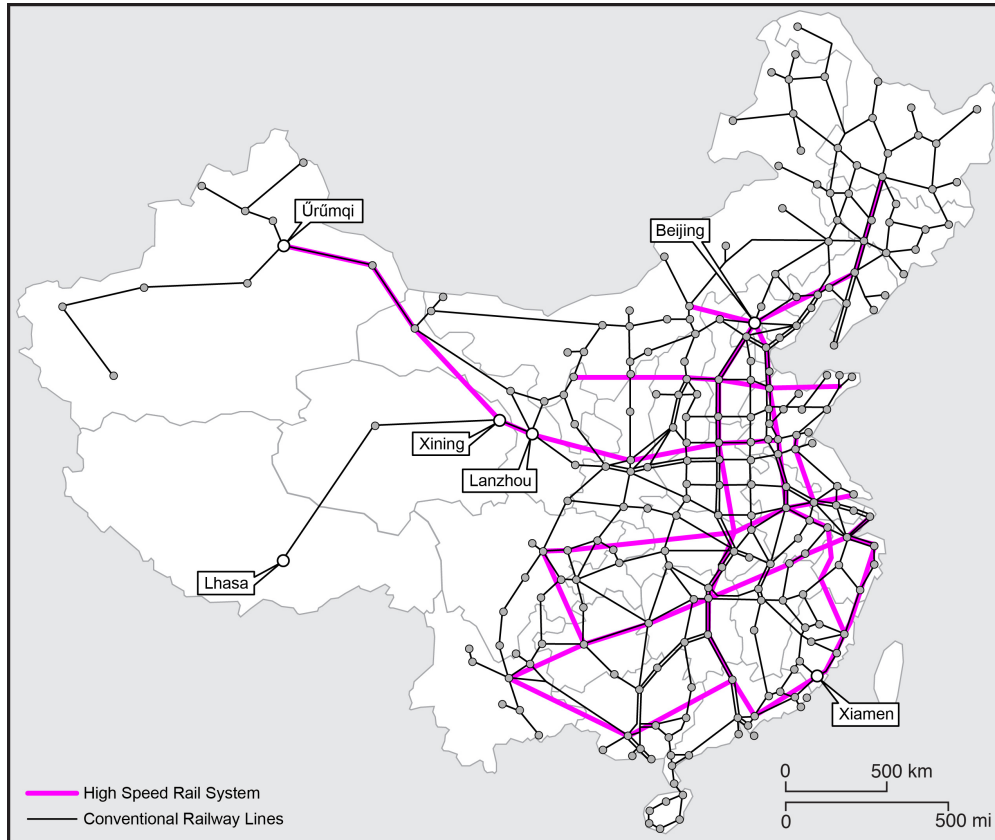
Figure 2.2 Map of High-speed Railway System.

This map shows approximations of the high-speed routes in pink and the conventional routes in black. Note the lattice-like design of both systems. Map by Matt Zebrowski.

*Fears of Encroachment and Foreign Command*

As the Chinese mainland is pulled together, efforts have also been made to pull together China's frontiers. The lands at China's borders continue to be subject to geographical anxiety, and railways are part of the story.

The book *Maps of the Century of National Humiliation*[2] (People's Press Map Room 1997: 59-61) features a map of "Road Authority Seized from China by the Imperialist Powers"

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[2] This text was published by the official People's Press Map Group. In the late 1990s Jiang Zemin oversaw a renewed interest in this Republican-era genre. Under a "patriotic education" program, new textbooks stressing national humiliation were created. This text is a part of a sister-genre of map books (Callahan 2010: 32-40; 110).

and a table that includes the nature of the foreign privileges and the lengths of a variety of railways being built between 1898 and 1914. An entry for a Tibetan Railways even exists, but as no railway was ever built, no track length is entered. The idea of a potential foreign railway helps complete the image of pervasive economic and political penetration into territory naturalized as integral to the Chinese state.

Curiously, this same narrative of penetration has been used in foreign presses that lament the encroachment of Chinese development as manifested in railway development. The Lhasa-Golmud railway that has allowed for direct trains from Shanghai and Beijing to the Tibetan Autonomous Region's capital has been singled out for particular criticism, both by Western authors (Lustgarten 2008) and the Tibetan Government in Exile, which has accused the railroad of being a tool for demographic swamping of the Tibetan region (Kunchok Dolma 2009).

In a bilingual (Chinese and English) book for tourists published in Xining City, where many tourists on their way to Lhasa stop, a section explains the recently completed railway. While the Chinese text of the book impresses with technological statistics alone, the English edition reminds its foreign readers of the great technical achievement of the railway, one that outsiders had doubted:

> The American traveler Paul Theroux once prophesized that the Kunlun Range would prove to be an insurmountable obstacle, "a guarantee that a railway will never get to Lhasa." Now, this guarantee has been forgotten since trains have finally come to the "Roof of the World." (Qiang 2010: 75)

China's technological achievements are a repudiation to China's doubters. On the border of China and Mongolia, I picked up an issue of the *China Logistics Times*, a national magazine

featuring the voices of Chinese transportation researchers. An article on Eurasian railways criticizes Russia for de-nationalizing its railway:

> The privatization of the Russian Railway Company, which controls [Russia's] national strategic channels, perhaps will effect the ability and control of Russia to supply the nation. The facts confirm the truth: all of the railway artery has been pushed towards the hunting field of free capitalist countries, weakening the basis of the economy, just like the English railway is controlled by German and French capital. Yang 2015: 41

Chinese railways are candidates for a special protectionism because their existence is so closely linked to ideas of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This vision from the frontier betrays an anxiety that differs from open conceptions that promote an open market. It rests uneasily with visions of the railway as opening China to the world. Indeed, one of China's great soft power initiatives of the 21$^{st}$ century is the repurposing of a historical trade route.

*A New Silk Road in the High-Speed Rail Era*

The term Silk Road which denotes the trading routes that historically linked the Middle East, Central Asia, and East Asia, derives from an 1877 writing by the German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen. The geographer's travels in East Turkestan were funded by American and European corporations and the German State, all interested in the development of a railway across Eurasia (Chin 2013: 210). The term was then popularized through his student Sven Hedin's 1936 book *The Silk Road*. Hedin suggests a motorway, and perhaps eventually a railway, could be built from China to Western Europe. He writes,

New fields would be opened to exploration, more easily reached than those of to-day, and darkest

Asia would be made accessible to culture and development. The Chinese Government which calls

the Silk Road to life again and opens it to modern means of communication will certainly have

done humanity a service and erected a monument to itself. (Hedin 2009: 234)


The cosmopolitan aura of the Silk Road, a concept from a romantic, if imperialist, strain

of European geography, has carried over into the present, where the term has frequently been

used by boosters of a new Eurasian railway that could bind together a region of new economic

potential.[3] This is also the approach that has been adopted under Xi Jinping. It is the reversal of

an earlier Maoist era understanding of the "so-called" Silk Road as a foreign concept symbolic of

imperialist attempts to open China to exploitation from Eurasia (Chin 2015). In lieu of this

conspiratorial tone, the new Silk Road is a hopeful development, expressing China's openness to

go beyond its frontiers.

The PRC is currently promoting two types of Silk Roads under one umbrella project

called One Belt, One Road (Ch. *yidaiyilu*), which includes the overland "Silk Road Economic

Belt" through Eurasia and the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" that extends from the South

China Sea into the Indian Ocean. The land belt and the sea road were announced within one

month of each other in late 2013, during state visits by Xi Jinping to Kazakhstan and Indonesia,

respectively (Swaine 2015). The official action plan for the One Belt, One Road system declares

that a "Silk Road Spirit…has been passed from generation to generation, promoted the progress

of human civilization, and contributed greatly to the prosperity and development of the countries

along the Silk Road" (China Daily 2015). The primary goal of both projects is to develop

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[3] Trans-Eurasian railway connections already exist. The Trans-Siberian railway has had connecting lines to Harbin and Beijing for some time. In 2014 a railway line linking Madrid to Yiwu, a city in eastern China, was inaugurated. While reducing transportation speed over sea shipping, the railway is a composite of existing systems and necessitates changing the gauge of rolling stock three times and locomotives every 500 miles (Burgen 2014).

economic infrastructure, such as railways, roads, and ports throughout the regions, where China and the states it works with all stand to benefit.

While this is a two-pronged conception of the Silk Road, some commentators suggest that the land road is China's best strategy. Duke and Shanghai University professor Bai Gao has proposed that high-speed railway is key to a new global strategy for China. He calls his strategy the Continental Power Strategy (Ch. *luquan zhanlve*), which hinges on the use of the latest high-speed railway technology. He says that China's economic focus since the beginning of the reform period has focused on a Blue Sea Strategy (Ch. *lanhai zhanlve*) that left the coastal regions well developed but neglected inland China. A land strategy would fundamentally change the political economic pattern of China and work to reorient China towards Eurasian markets. This design is reminiscent of earlier strategies to homogenize state growth within China's frontiers, but there are significant geopolitical considerations for either approach.

On the one hand, China's expansion into its sea frontier has been marred with controversy, and it has faced significant pushback from the United States, Japan, and other countries in the South China Sea. On the other hand, China faces other geopolitical designs in Central Asia, including the United State's "New Silk Road" initiative, which is focused largely on developing Afghanistan's economy and orientation towards South Asia, and more importantly, Russia's Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Although Russian and China frequently cooperate in economic organizations,[4] there are fundamental points of difference. Like the US, China seeks to open markets along free trade principals, keeping in line with international standards, whereas the EEU promotes a more closed market, raising tariffs for non-members.

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[4] Other groups include the Shanghai Cooperative Organization and the New Development (BRICS) Bank and the Chinese initiated Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

The adoption of the One Belt, One Road signals a strategy of geopolitical boldness. It is not by incident that the overland Silk Road is imagined not just as a road or rail line, but a revitalized belt. This has led to foreign commentators suggesting that the new project is China's own Marshall Plan, an attempt to recast the world order around China. This has been rejected by leading Chinese officials and media who argue that the Silk Road is open to everyone and is not a geopolitical tool for furthering its own interests against a rival, as in the greater context of United States and Soviet Union competition during the period of the Marshall Plan (Swaine 2015: 10-12).

Whereas the history of borrowing railway technology and purchasing foreign equipment once caused dependency, China has been adamant about using joint ventures to acquire and improve upon high-speed rail technologies. These technologies are now being marketed abroad as affordable and cutting edge. As a recent book celebrating Chinese rail technologies rhapsodizes:

> High-speed rail has already become one of the turning points for the revitalization of the Chinese nationality and the nation's rise. China stands at the forward position of the world's railways, ready to cooperatively respond to global challenges, find future solutions, and take the lead in the high-speed rail age. (Zuo and Chen 2012: 134)

Railways become part of a domestic and global renewal. New deals are being announced internationally. China is selling large amounts of rolling stock and railway materials abroad. The Chinese Commerce secretary announced that railway consortiums led by PRC state-owned enterprises had sold abroad railway equipment worth $3.74 billion and had engaged in 348 foreign railways projects in 2014 (Tan 2015). In the summer of 2015, the first Chinese-US

project for building a high-speed rail connecting Los Angeles to Las Vegas was announced (Bloomberg News 2015). Since 2010, government-spearheaded "railway diplomacy" (Ch. *gaotiewaijiao*) appears to be meeting success around the world, especially in Africa. Chinese railway companies made record profits in 2014, and have plans to break ground in Nigeria, Zambia, and Tanzania. One hundred and ninety billion dollars has been made available for financing, including forty billion to revitalize the Silk Road (Tan 2015). An ASEAN backed Kunming-Singapore railway connecting most of Southeast Asia was proposed during the 2000s, and has recently gained traction with China's economic assistance (The Economist 2011). The British government has sought out Chinese companies to bid for a high-speed railway project connecting London to Birmingham (Topham 2015).

But Chinese firms have also encountered resistance to their projects, especially in Latin America. Dealing with less centralized governments, Chinese international railway planning has faced local resistance and economic realities. A plan to link the Pacific Ocean to the Caribbean through Colombia has stalled, as has a railway that began in Venezuela. A project in Mexico was cancelled. While China can use state dirigisme to fulfill its ambitious infrastructure plans within China, state-owned firms have come across greater difficulty abroad, where funds and local politics are throwing up obstacles. A trans-continental railway scheme that would connect Brazilian ports on the Atlantic to Peruvian ports on the Pacific is proving difficult to negotiate (Romero 2015).

In sum, Chinese railway development during the 19th and 20th century was formed during a period of colonial exploitation and internal war. Mistrust of foreign powers dating from the late Qing has spurred a desire to unite China's territory with a national rail system throughout the 20th century. Railways have been used in recent years not only to develop and exploit China's

Inner Asian frontiers, but to gain access to the resources and markets of Eurasia. High-speed rail technology is also being sold abroad to bolster China's state-owned industries and raise China's prestige through "railway diplomacy." The discourse of teleological progress found in discussions of China's high-speed rail finds parallel in discussions of China's rise to global predominance.

## V. Conclusion

This chapter has shown the directions and the tensions that underlie Chinese politicians' and popular writers' pivot towards a more cosmopolitan identity and "open frontier" stance. Emerging orientalist discourses that portray China as a unique civilization or civilizational state obscure a contested history of geographical and civilizational disunity. From their perspective, China is an old but dynamic civilization, always expanding and bringing enrichment to its frontiers.

The recent return to openness and risk-taking at its frontiers has pushed China's railway dreams to its Eurasian borders and beyond. A re-invented Silk Road is exemplary of this shift: a construct once deemed colonialist is now an opportunity for China to show its technological, diplomatic, and economic strength. The cartographic anxiety embedded in the cartography of the national railway system reflects a concern to embrace the frontier on terms that specifically help China, as conceived from Beijing.

Finally, the current Chinese regime is appropriating the peoples and places of historical "outsiders," including frontier-derived non-native dynasties, in an effort to narrative and naturalize the Chinese geobody. This narrative of China began with modern nationalist thinkers (Duara 1995; Leibold 2007) and Communist scholars and cadres (Harrell 1994; Mullaney 2010)

who struggled to subdue alternate histories and geographical imaginations and convert the patchwork of China into a coherent, bordered, and reproducible nation.

Recently, these people and places have come to be re-imagined as always integral to and never outside of China (Baranovitch 2010).[5] The current shift towards "looking outward," as Tim Oakes (2012) has termed it, often overlooks the desires of people in frontier regions – China's ethnic minorities. Writing about Inner Mongolia, Uradyn Bulag has expressed wariness over the imposition of a new Chinese cosmopolitanism on frontier peoples:

> A Chinese nation, it is now asserted, needs no internal borders, either ethnic or administrative-cum-territorial. The Chinese nation is imagined as a national cosmopolitan space, in which no bound autonomous nationalities have any room for existence. Ethnic groups are no longer allowed to have any line of demarcation (*jiexian*) with the Chinese. Chinese intellectuals now openly embrace Deleuze and Guattarian nomadology, using it to urge the descendants of nomads to live up to this ideal. (Bulag 2012: 53)

While the spirit of cosmopolitanism may seek to erase boundaries, administrative territories remain important parts of how the Chinese state, and even the Chinese public, sees and acts upon its frontiers. The next chapter will show how this is occurring in China's largest macro-region: the administratively defined Western Region.

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[5] Ironically, the "Chinese" dynasties that most embraced culturalist approaches were of Central Asian import. Peter Perdue (2009: 254) has also argued that Song and Ming ruling class were more conservative in their view of the transformative (Ch. *hua*) potential of frontier peoples and adopted racialist attitudes (those derived from Mencius), while the Tang, Yuan, and Qing empires shared culturalist assumptions. This was rarely a process of either-or, as both perspectives could be found among interpreters of the classic texts.

# Chapter 3. Regional Dreams

## I. Introduction

Despite persisting narratives about China's civilizational essence and geographical unity through time, regions continue to contain and generate difference within China's borders. The genesis and alteration of a region reveals both political projects that tame alternative historical and geographical narratives and the continuous negotiation of regional image and identity between local populations and state administration. Regions are not static, their existence and identity are fraught with political and cultural significance.

This chapter has two goals. First, it works to de-naturalize China's "West Region," as a site of age-old Chinese possession and settlement. I show how several "Chinese" regimes committed to political expansion and economic openness have appropriated past events and occupations in the region in order to legitimate their own Inner Asian political projects. Compared to past inner Chinese initiated colonization efforts in Xinjiang, Mongolia, and on the Tibetan Plateau that were often defensive and limited, the PRC's efforts are more ambitious. It conceives of its Western Region as a zone that requires massive economic and cultural transformation. The Western Region has been re-imagined through macro-regionalization as a place lacking civilization and development and in need of national assistance.

Second, administrative regions are the sites and objects of a politics of place, in which the character of regions and the financial benefits they can accrue are contested. China's West Region is politically structured through provinces, prefectures, and counties, many of which have

regional governments that hope to promote their regional image. Regional "image branding" practices can work together and accentuate local perceptions of belonging, but they can also threaten to efface "residual" cultural practices in an effort to cater to the consumptive habits of middle-class Chinese searching for the adventure and exotica of China's western frontiers.

## II. Regions in Geography and Regions in China

Once the foundational concept and unit of analysis in geography (Hartshorne 1939; Entrikin 2011), contemporary geographical debates over "the region" must often ask whether the region is a useful concept at all (Agnew 2013). Rather than dealing with regions differentiated by physiography or spatial economic laws, regional thinking today confronts post-structural conceptualizations of identity, the relationality of economics and communicative connections, and the continuous flux of administrative and legal de- and re-territorialization. These are new frameworks that allow geographers to grasp the shifting nature of contemporary regions.

Many of aspects of this new region-making that *prima facie* appear tethered to contemporary globalization, may, with qualification, also be profitably used to look at regional contexts in the past. Historically, networks of trade cut across political boundaries and linguistic and social divisions to engender regions of political domination, cultural transmission, and specialization of industry and labor. Boundary-spanning globalization processes haven't occurred only in the contemporary period, but are features of the past as well.

A difficulty that arises in studies of regions is whether they are just a discursive construction, such as in this teleological narrative, or whether they are real and durable, such as a zone of Chinese civilizational influence. Agnew (1999a: 95) has argued that this realist versus constructivist split is overstated: "Regional schemes are never simply intellectual. Neither are

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they simply political. They play with facts about the world at the same time they must reflect the biases, intellectual and political, of their originators." Ethnonational groups often look to the history of China's Inner Asian frontiers in an effort to prove regional belonging using historical facts. Recovering new "facts" is itself not an unmediated process. As Bruno Latour (2005) has demonstrated, facts are themselves fabricated by experts, working in places that are imbricated in particular relationships of knowledge and understanding. "Geographies of knowledge" underpin the production and dissemination of knowledge, and influence how people come to naturalize regions and geographical belonging (Agnew 2007). As a site of continued conflict over regional belonging and regional identity, Inner Asia is both a site and an object of conflicting geographies of knowledge.

Attempting to get beyond the "institutional space" of regional studies, Willem van Schendel (2002) has looked at the margins of eastern Eurasia as sites that are overlooked through the dominant state-centric and civilization-centric institutionalizations of Asian regional studies. He argues that studying borderlands and the licit and illicit commodities that pass through them not only highlights the over-looked particularities of these places, but also actually allows for their re-centralization in relation to scales such as states and civilization. Embracing this perspective from the borderlands, James Scott (2009) has studied the highlands peoples of Southeast Asia, representing them as the opposite of the state in all respects: every aspect of their lives performs a function of state-evasion. But this re-casting of "the facts" to reveal another sort of region has its own risks: his portrayal of a zone of state resistance is dialectically reliant on the powerful effects of states. These zones of defiance are inseparable from and peripheralized by a civilization state.

Wim van Spengen (2000) has drawn on Braudel and Vidal de la Blache to argue that Tibet can be understood as a "regionality." In his conception, Tibet is composed of two *genres de vie,* the agricultural and the pastoral, which are connected to each other by trade. They are also united "mentally" by an underlying structure of Buddhism. Van Spengen's emphasis on the long durée allows for a centering of the region that does not reduce it to a periphery of China or India. Other Tibetologists have stressed the important role of political organization across Tibetan areas to shape people's political identities and carved recognized regional ideas out of the geopolitical landscape. Melvyn Goldstein (1991; 1973) has revealed a political structure based around Lhasa that was distinct from its neighboring states and civilizations in both social organization and regional identity. Paul Nietupski (2012) has shown how Labrang Monastery maintained its own local power center in eastern Amdo; it and other large monasteries could maintain a great deal of autonomy despite the political presence of the Qing Dynasty. These texts and others have revealed powerful regional divisions within Tibetan lands that complicate any vision of a politically unitary "Tibetan" region (Shakya 1999; Tuttle 2013).

Historians of the Qing Dynasty have argued for the distinctiveness of the Manchu state's political and ethnic projects. They argue that the Qing state conceptualized its territorial possessions around regional distinctions based upon the nature and intensity of its rule, distinctions that found expression in Qing political institutions (Di Cosmo 1998; Elliot 2001). These studies all complicate and decenter our understandings of China's historical regions. They take seriously the key roles both of geographical imaginaries and political rule and administration, and help us see the difficulties in approaching Qinghai and other parts of Inner Asia as China's "Western Region."

## III. Frontier as Colonial Space

In contemporary China, the term for Western region is *xibu*, has both political significance and carries cultural associations. An older Chinese concept that also had both political and cultural significance, and which can also be translated as Western region, is *xiyu*. While the two terms should not be conflated, they must be understood and distinguished, for the ancient term has been brought to bear upon the present. This is because the current Chinese state is reviving older notions of the frontier as it looks outward beyond its frontier. The current paradigm of "opening up the west" (Ch. *xibu dakaifa*) echoes the opening (Ch. *kaituo*) of the *xiyu* under the Han Dynasty official and explorer Zhang Qian. That opening was exploratory rather than related to any type of political or military consolidation, but the idea of opening a region to Chinese interests is found in both conceptions. More importantly, past traces of "Chinese" presence in amorphous regions labeled "western" or otherwise have led to colonial projects along China's Inner Asian frontier as the Qing, Republicans, and Communists have all attempted to consolidate geopolitically sensitive regions. Opening the west and the revitalizing the Silk Road allows the PRC to fold irreducibly different historical contexts into a single history. It is a strategy with universal import: looking to past polities' achievements and claiming a sort of direct descent in order to legitimate present actions can also be found in past European predilections to look back to ancient Rome for an intellectual, political, and territorial model (Agnew 2001).

The last expansionist dynasty that ruled over China and its "Western Region" was the Manchu Qing Empire.[1] During their rule, the Manchu over time began to appropriate Han imagery and the Han classical tradition for their own use and self-aggrandizement. James

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[1] This is the earlier word for Western Region, *xiyu*, which would come to be replaced by the term *Xinjiang* over the course of Qing rule (Millward 1998: 20-21).

Millward (1999) has explained how during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor, the labels for Qing domains beyond those enrolled in the regular Chinese bureaucracy were written in Manchu script on maps. Only later in the dynasty, during the reign of Qianlong, did court cartographers begin engaging in onomastics, recovering and re-labeling cities based on names derived from Han history rather than transliterations of their contemporary non-Chinese names. The reason for this change can be found in court culture: using names from Chinese history bestowed prestige on the court literati who could demonstrate their cultural fluency. It also worked to naturalize the regions as belonging historically to China, rather than as separate and distinct possessions of the Qing Empire, which ruled its frontier regions through the Qing Office for External Affairs (Ch. *Lifan Yuan*).

The Manchu rulers, as empire builders, were very careful about how they ruled their Chinese subjects, who created the maps. Pamela Crossley (1999) has argued that the Qing, and Qianlong especially, were very particular about how they represented themselves to different audiences. The Manchu specifically adapted a form of Confucian court orthodoxy in order to ensure that the Qing emperor was exclusively a sage ruler, a position that allowed him to manipulate his image for other audiences. Qianlong could be, at the same time and for different people, a Son of Heaven, a Buddhist Cakravartin (an enlightened ruler), or associated with various war gods, including Guan Di (Chinese) and Gesar (Mongolian and Tibetan). In his military expansionism, Qianlong self-consciously modeled himself on the Tang emperor Taizong (Waley-Cohen 2006: 885-888).

During the early Tang Dynasty, instability among Turkic tribes, combined with growing military confidence, led the Emperor Taizong to begin incorporating the Turkic settlements of the Tarim Basin into an extended Tang administration (Wechsler 1979: 224-228). Taizong

established the Four Garrisons, a series of outposts stretching from Turfan to Kashgar. These areas remained beyond regular state administration and operated largely through local political structures. In the late 7$^{th}$ century, the Tibetans, hailing from the agricultural regions around Lhasa, pushed into the grasslands in the east of the Tibetan Plateau and down into the Tarim Basin. The Four Garrisons then went in and out of Chinese control. Eventually the Tang moved to strengthen its frontier with the Tibetans, establishing agricultural settlements in the Gansu corridor and western Sichuan (Twitchett and Wechsler 1979: 285-286).

Taizong dedicated poetry to Han Gaozu, the founder of the Han dynasty (206 BC-220 AD). Taizong was enamored with the territorial authority gained by Qin and Han Chinese emperors, but he wanted to improve upon their conquests by making himself a model of virtue, leveraging cultural power to supplement his military power (Chen 2010: 58-59; 162-165). He also looked back to the model of a dynasty that straddled a different geographic space, network of economic connections, and religious world.

The Han Dynasty *xiyu* was a wild and difficult place to govern outside (Ch. *wai*) the bounds of China. Early Chinese settlements in the region were largely defensive. In an effort to exercise better control over the independent cities that were both seized and raided by other regional powers, the Former and Later Han dynasties established military garrisons in the Gansu corridor and eastern Xinjiang. The Han set up tributary relations with states in the Western Region (Ch. *xiyu*), but the relationships were not lucrative (Yü 1986: 401-427). The early Han state organized the garrison system (Ch. *tuntian*) of military agricultural settlements, which was intended to protect Han trade in the region by contributing to the pacification of the surrounding region and grow food to sustain soldiers (Tuan 1969: 96). Ultimately, the purpose of the Han colonies was defensive and strategic. The steppe-dwelling Xiongnu's influence could be checked

in the area, and a potential political union between the Xiongnu and the highland Qiang southwest of the Gansu corridor could be prevented (Beckwith 1987: 5-7).

In distinction from this "frontier of control" (Gaubatz 1996), settlements during the Qing period became more oriented towards long-term settler colonialism. In the early Qing, garrisoning was common, and the Manchu sought to maintain strict ethnic and geographic segregation (Crossley 1999; Gaubatz 1996). During the late Qing, colonizing had come to be seen as a political expedient for the securitization of border regions, though it also created power bases for unpredictable regional rulers.

Colonial expansion in China's west provided opportunities for regional rulers to put their own interests before those of the state. During the 18th century, the Kangxi and Qianlong emperors made several campaigns along the Qing state's western frontier targeting the unpredictable and often uncooperative Mongol groups that controlled Kokonor and the oases of the Tarim Basin.[2] In the early 18th century, Sichuanese Governor-General Nian Gengyao divided Khoshot and Khalkha Mongols as well as Tibetan groups in the region into separate tribes, settling them administratively apart from one another. Nian sought to promote inland settlement and cultivation near military garrisons. Although these last plans ultimately went unrealized, they reveal a colonial approach to solving security problems (Perdue 2005: 310-313). While the Khoshot Mongols of Kokonor were conquered and subsequently settled, campaigns against the more threatening Zunghars in the north resulted in their near annihilation. After the campaigns ended, the Zunghar lands were given over to Han settlers from inland areas, albeit with restrictions. Han settlers were tied closely to military and penal colonies and were usually restricted from owning land (Perdue 2005).

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[2] The name Qinghai draws from the Mongolian term Kokonor, which means "Blue Lake." The boundaries of these regions are not coterminous. Qinghai is an administrative region of China, while Kokonor refers to the grasslands surrounding the actual high altitude salt lake now known as Qinghai Lake.

A late attempt at colonization under the Qing occurred in the western highlands of Sichuan, in the Kham Tibetan region. This expansion was notable for the initiative taken by the Sichuan Governor-General Zhao Erfeng, who had his own goals in the region. After the British invasion of Tibet from 1903 to 1904, the Qing administration gave increased power to the provincial government of Sichuan. Between 1905 and 1911, Zhao Erfeng launched a series of reforms that sought to eliminate the system of locally ruled chieftainships (Ch. *tusi*) in the region and bring Kham into the regular bureaucracy of the expanding provincial government. Zhao battled monastic leaders, converted pastoral land to cultivation, built roads and bridges, and attempted to bring mining to the region. He also pushed to acculturate Tibetans, pressuring them to adopt the food, clothing, and language of inland China. His push to power created animosity among the Kham Tibetans and placed further stress on a politically divided region. As Wang Xiuyu (2011) has argued, this was a case not only of state attempts to bring an area more closely into political orbit, but of the state losing control over regional powers that were above all interested in consolidating their own bases of power.

*Colonizing the Nation, Developing the Nation*

At the turn of the 20th century, a new ideology of modernization and state-building began to emerge among Chinese elites (Harrison 2001). Educated abroad and knowledgeable about foreign ideas, some emerging elites drew explicitly upon western notions of colonialism and settler expansion. Over the 20th century the idea of a defensible national space would become naturalized among elites and eventually the Chinese population.

As discussed in chapter two, railways brought the threat of foreign colonization to Manchuria. Sun Yat-sen saw this clearly, and hoped to turn his budding railway system into a

pathway for colonial expansion. His 1922 book revealed a plan to develop rails into China's frontier provinces, many of which had declared independence after the fall of the Qing Empire in 1911. One of the goals of the project was to transfer population onto "waste" lands:

> The Colonization of Mongolia and Sinkiang is a complement of the Railway scheme. Each is dependent upon the other for its prosperity. The colonization scheme, besides benefitting the railway, is in itself a greatly profitable undertaking. The results of the United States, Canada, Australia, and Argentina are ample proofs of this. In the case of our project, it is simply a matter of applying waste Chinese labor and foreign machinery to a fertile land for production for which its remuneration is sure. The present Colonization of Manchuria, notwithstanding its topsy turvy way which caused great waste of land and human energy, has been wonderfully prosperous. If we would adopt scientific methods in our colonization project we could certainly obtain better results than all the others. (Sun 1922: 129)

Sun also proposed a complicated network of interlaced railways in Xinjiang and Tibet. None of these plans had any regard for the geographical realities of these regions, where permafrost, deserts, and a lack of cultivatable terrain made colonial expansion on this scale not only impractical but nearly impossible. Sun's thinking and language is here in line with the concerns of Isaiah Bowman:

> Vacant land can be a source of political danger. It may attract another kind of people who also wish more land. The empty lands of the world are politically of two classes, active and passive. It is the business of government leaders not to permit any land that they might control to be politically passive. It is a source of power once its potentialities of settlement are realized. It not only helps the controlling national power but it keeps out political and social undesirables. (Bowman 1931: 74-75)

Sun's plan reflected this political project of reducing uneven development in order to make the passive frontier become active.

During the late 1920s and 1930s, Jiang Jieshi's Nationalists and his wayward warlord allies pushed to open China's north and northwest to development. Facing increasing pressure from the Japanese, the Nationalists sought to develop a northwestern base. They established the Northwestern Reclamation Committee and created laws and projects to develop the agricultural and mining potential of the Chinese northwest (Lin 2011: 36). However, the Nationalists continuously had to temper their developmental impulses with local realities. For example, when Nationalist-affiliated warlords in Mongolia attempted to convert too much land for crop cultivation, Mongols rebelled (Leibold 2007: 66).

Regional boosters of Qinghai in the 1930s utilized fears of foreign encroachment and the backwardness of local pastoralists to promote a program of land colonization. An essay from the early 1930s in the periodical New Qinghai (Ch. *Xin Qinghai*) sets the tone:

> But the people of inland China are too crowded, cultivated land dare not be further divided. It can be said with regret that there are "too many monks and too little gruel." The entire land of the frontier (Ch. *bianjiang*) lies in waste, it merely attracts the covetous gaze of the foreigners. … The Frontier Mongols and Tibetans in Qinghai and Xikang, they are still far away in the pastoral age. Han people like to plow the earth, to open land to meet their schemes, but the Mongols and Tibetans are like to raise livestock, and they see land divided for cultivation as a perilous road! (Lan 1932: 37)

Yet these plans hardly came to fruition. The Japanese invasion and Chinese civil war opened the door to a new era, with a different state and regional dynamic.

Throughout the regions of Inner Asia under Chinese jurisdiction today, the Chinese state is a powerful driver of regional development, regional image, and regional identity. Regions only pursue their own goals within the parameters and guidelines of the Chinese state. In contemporary China there are two institutional features that drive regional differentiation.

First, the creation of macro-regions that are used to shape long-term developmental goals. Despite an increase in Skinnerian models of Chinese economic development among Chinese scholars in recent decades (Cartier 2002), the most important macro-regional divisions in PRC policy have been the broad divisions of coastal, inland, and western China. As Cindy Fan (1997) has demonstrated, these divisions have been largely driven by practical concerns of Maoist government, some of which will be discussed below. Deng Xiaoping turned the PRC away from ineffective and wasteful programs to develop industry and infrastructure away from coastal regions. While his approach strengthened the Chinese economy, it depended on a strategy of unequal pricing of goods and uneven development that angered regional leaders away from the coast; it was eventually corrected in the mid-90s with the Ninth Five-year plan.

These divisions have continued into the recent period, but the three regions have also been retooled to allow for a discourse more accommodating to the Han civilization-centric modernization campaign. Beginning with the Open the West campaign, the western region has been expanded and re-imagined as a site of both material impoverishment and backwards social organization and cultural habits (Barabansteva 2009). An influx of development in the region has promoted a program of resource extraction, tourism development, and the alteration and possible elimination of traditional modes of livelihood such as pastoralism (Goodman 2004a; Yeh 2009).

Second, the territorial administrations of provinces and special regions are the bureaucratic units that carry out government programs. These provinces are also divided into prefectures and counties, with urban level administrative units occurring at every level. Unlike the regions of contemporary neoliberal states, which are largely formed by the free market, the growth and re-territorialization of provincial territories are strongly tied to PRC policy, financing, and strategic planning, which are in turn connected to the five-year development plans aimed at shaping regional growth (Cartier 2015).

This system has only gained traction over time. In the first years after the PRC revolution, under the policy of the United Front, ethnic minorities continued to be ruled through local intermediaries, and care was taken not to alienate them from Communist Party rule (Weiner 2012: 32; Dreyer 1976). But ideas about wasted land and geopolitically sensitive frontiers persisted. Starting in 1956, when the PRC launched its first rustication (Ch. *xiafang*) campaign, inland migrants were continuously sent to or encouraged to settle frontier regions. The goals of the migrants were often land reclamation. Locals rejected the Han migrants' entrance into the region, and the migrants, likewise, rejected the local landscape and yearned to return home (Dreyer 1975). One related policy was a program that encouraged young Chinese to join military-style teams (Ch. *qingnian zhiyuan kenhuang dui*) to open land to agriculture in Qinghai Province (Rohlf 2003). These teams toiled to increase agricultural production in the arid Plateau climate, where they filled roles that had been held by prisoners and state workers. Grossly misjudging the agricultural potential of the land and sensitivity of the environment, the projects were largely abandoned and many of the youth fled the region.

Another failed attempt to bring population and development to the region was the "Third Front" (Ch. *sanxian*) campaign, which lasted roughly from the Sino-Soviet split and Vietnam

war to the rise of Deng Xiaoping. Fearing Soviet and American invasions, the PRC implemented this policy, which sought to construct a military-industrial front in central and western China at a distance from China's northern and coastal frontiers (Naughton 1988). Steel mills were established in Gansu Province, but many of the plans for Qinghai never came to fruition. Many of the materials for factories and railways were simply shipped from coastal regions inland, thereby reducing overall industrial productivity. Ultimately the inefficiency of the program made it a failure, but the program did reveal the importance of western China for CCP security concerns. Despite these development attempts, most of the population growth in the front regions was set off by population losses.

Rohlf (2007) suggests continuity between Qing efforts to settle Inner Asian lands and Communist projects. While both groups relied on settlers to bring the areas more closely into their state orbits, the geopolitical contexts were quite different, as was the underlying vision of the frontier. Early PRC propaganda drew inspiration from the Virgin Lands Campaign then underway in the Soviet Union; the frontier (Ch. *bianjiang*) was advertised as a modern place free from the fetters of feudal society, a fertile ground for communism's future.

*Development, Civilization, Urbanization*

Since 2000, the "Open Up the West Campaign" (OWC) has sought to build infrastructure, develop the industrial economy, and to promote "ecological protection" in western China. The Tenth Five-Year plan allowed for more state intervention in the western regions than had occurred in the coastal-oriented development schemes of Deng Xiaoping. This plan revived and modified the regional scheme of the Third Front era. Shortly after OWC was announced, modifications were made to the provinces and administrative regions that constituted the West.

Ultimately, the term became a metonym for ethnic minority areas, incorporating discontiguous and geographically non-western minority prefectures and counties into its regional framework (see Figure 3.1). The Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture (bordering on North Korea), Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefectures in Central China, and Inner Mongolia, which spans north-central China were all included in the designation (Goodman 2004a). Curiously, the majority of provinces and regions that are explicitly "minority autonomous," or that have high concentrations of minority autonomous prefectures and counties, were majority Han in 2000, often as the result of Han in-migration to cities (Barabansteva 2009: 242).

Figure 3.1 Chinese Macro-Regions.

The Western Region spans a vast arc including Inner Mongolia and Guangxi. Map by Matt Zebrowski.

The discourse of the OWC combined tropes of backwardness found both in Beijing-centered looking out towards its frontiers and in the logic of neoliberal development. Elena Barabantseva has demonstrated how the official narrative stresses that an inflow of Han migrants will bring an "advanced mode of life" to Western areas as well as technological skills that could help train minorities. The Han are depicted as a "higher level nationality" (Barabantseva 2009: 235). In comparison, coastal regions are described as being more modern and of having higher

levels of civilization than the West. The bundle of characteristics that mark high quality and modern lifestyles in the coastal east include consumerism, urban living, and speaking proper Mandarin. Under Hu Jintao, developmental logic rendered the poverty and ethnic inhabitants of the Chinese West as barriers to the full realization of a modern China. Social underdevelopment is of particular concern in Tibetan regions, where populations are portrayed as vulnerable to the Dalai Lama, who derives his authority from oppressive feudalism (Xinhua 2012).

Since the mid-1990s, and especially since the OWC, the Chinese state has heavily subsidized Tibetan regions of China.[3] The Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) is the most heavily subsidized province of China, followed by Qinghai Province (Fischer 2013). Both the central government and other provinces invest heavily in the region. Much of the money has gone into a construction boom. The Chinese National Bureau of Statistics categorizes three sectors of economic production: the primary sector, which consists of farming, husbandry, fishing, and forestry; the secondary sector, which consists of mining, construction, and manufacturing; and a tertiary sector of "non-physical services", which consists of state administrative jobs, tourism, hotels, trade, education, restaurants, and secretive military spending. The TAR and Qinghai are primarily engaged with the primary and tertiary sectors. The secondary sector has grown during the frontier economic boom.

Andrew Fischer (2009; 2011) has used these statistics to show that in these two provinces, the majority of the primary sector remains in the hands of Tibetans, while the secondary and tertiary sectors, outside of a small group of elite Tibetans, is monopolized by

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[3] The rate of development in the region is quite fast: the first two-lane highway between Lanzhou and Xining opened in 1972, the first expressway was built between 2001 and 2002 (Goodman 2004b), and new tunnels are continuously being carved into mountain sides to decrease distances between cities. Between my first visit to Qinghai in 2007 and my last in 2015, the travel time from Xining to a variety of regional towns, including Tongren, Chab cha, and Trika, had been reduced by several hours due to the completion of new roads.

recent migrants and out-of-province investors. Continued investment in infrastructure has allowed for many jobs in Lhasa, Xining City and other sizeable Qinghai cities, as well as new highways and housing. The percentage of Qinghai's population engaged in the primary sector dropped from ~60% to ~45% between 2000 to 2008 (Fischer 2011, Figure 2, 68). While some of this work goes to Tibetans that were formally farmers or herders, Han migrants hold the majority of construction and mining jobs. Both capital and population influxes into the region are heavily skewed towards the cities.

In both of these regions, and in other places in the Chinese West where the primary sector is mostly being displaced by the tertiary sector, the phenomenon of "boomerang aid" looms. As Fischer (2009) explains, state and private business ventures in the secondary and tertiary sectors tend to send profits made in the TAR and Qinghai back out the province. Because these businesses are based elsewhere, and largely employ migrants or non-Tibetans, little invested money stays in the region.

As an illustration of the transformations that have recently affected Qinghai, we can look at the increasing length of highways, the shift from rural to urban population, and transformations to agricultural production. Total length of highways has increased from ~17,000 km to ~62,000 km between 1995 and 2010. During the same time period, total passenger traffic on those highways has increased by a factor of four. The ratio of urban to rural population was 0.51 in 1995; it had increased to 0.81 in 2010 (excluding non-registered migrant workers). Finally, less land is being used for conventional farming staples such as highland barley and wheat, and more land is being dedicated to the cultivation of wolf berries, tubers, oil-bearing

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crops, cattle silage, and other vegetables (Qinghai tong ji nian jian 2012).[4] Land is being adjusted

to grow products that satisfy the consumptive patterns of urban China.

A looming question about the expansive growth in Qinghai and other parts of Western

China is how durable it will be. In a comparison of expansion across settler frontiers in Russia,

the United States, and British colonial possessions, James Belich has indicated a pattern of

growth by investment, which he calls the progress industry:

> The main economic game was actually growth itself: the encouragement, management, and
> renewal of inflows of people, goods, and money; the supply, housing, and support of immigrants;
> the stocking of new farms; the construction of towns, farms, and transport infrastructure; the
> supply and support of construction. The *progress industry* is a useful generic label for this cluster
> of activities, all involving growth through growth. (Belich 2010: 58)

After an initial boom in infrastructure, business, and population expansion, a bust occurs and the

economy is reoriented from importing to exporting. Finally, "export rescue," the creation of an

export economy of either a staple food resource or valuable natural resource is needed to shore

up the settlers and investments along the expanding frontier. Whether or not this is the future for

Qinghai is still unclear, but the rapid development of the region is more the result of state

dirigisme than any other factor.

For Chinese states, the Western Region has been an unstable place, marked by different

kinds of settlements, linked more through narrative than policy. Only in recent years has the

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[4] There has been an increase in greenhouse grown vegetable throughout the Tibetan Plateau. Emily Yeh (2013a) has demonstrated the growth of these greenhouses around Lhasa, where the vegetables that constitute inland Chinese diets are grown. Most of the farmers are also Han migrants, mostly from Sichuan Province. The conversion of traditional farmland to greenhouse land can also be seen in Qinghai Province. West of Xining City, great numbers of elongated plastic roofs constructed in rows can be seen as well, contributing vegetables for daily consumption in Xining.

Western Region and its frontiers become part of national colonial designs. The Western Region has been rendered a place of impoverishment and in need of civilizational help, but the provinces that constitute it are also part of the same politics of regional identity that span across a country competing for capital and notoriety.

## IV. Frontier Dreaming

While security concerns and grabs for regional power have animated the activities of many of the states described above, the "Western region" has also taken on a role in the imaginations of contemporary Chinese citizens. Popular ideas about the character and fame of regions are often tied to both administrative division and broader areas of distinctiveness, marked by ethnic or ecological sameness. Such regions are closely linked to regional territorial administration, where the organs that allow for and authorize the codification of regional images lie. Although governments and businesses drive representations of regional identity, regular people promote regional images and regional identities in their everyday interactions, as well as negotiating their ideas and opinions with these more top-down regional notions.

This section will explore regional imagination at the frontier in two parts. First, it explores the rise of the domestic tourism industry and its impact on regions that, left out of many aspects of the secondary and tertiary sector, seek to find tourism profit. For Tibetans and other minority groups, regional divisions are taking on new meanings as places that both institutionalize local characteristics and that may be used attract capital. Second, in dominant Chinese discourse, the notion of the frontier, and in particular the ethnicized frontier, has taken on an aura of danger and invigoration. These ideas both spur a market for consumption of regions and rest uneasily with the peoples who live on the frontier.

People often have affective relationships with places that they have themselves experienced, whereas abstract regions need to be conceptualized to gain substance (Tuan 1977). Coming to imagine a more abstract place requires the mediation of political technologies and everyday reminders of abstract identity (Anderson 2006; Billig 1995). John Agnew (1987) has argued for place as "meaningful location," bringing together political and economic conditions, social locale, and people's affective senses of place. Places, formed through physical contact or communications technologies, are sites where people encounter, make sense of, and internalize more abstract notions of place-based identity; as Agnew writes, "information and social cues are meaningful only when activated in everyday routine social interaction" (Agnew 1987: 2 – 3).

Doreen Massey (2005) has criticized the concept of place, which is often imagined as either closed, bounded, and atavistic in its makeup, or as an open, politically progressive idea. She argues for an affective embrace of global space, which would allow for a more equal spatial politics. While a compelling political project, her focus on a difficult to grasp global space and call for more "relational thinking" is less useful for studying in-process formations of "senses of place" or even "senses of territory" (Murphy 2002) that underlie people's attachment to cartographic geobodies.[5] Michael Curry (2002; 2005) has argued that imagining abstract spaces is an exercise that stems from an epistemology divorced from that of everyday places; place is a concept rooted in everyday experiences. Yet it is hard to completely separate experience from that economic, political, and social formations that influence the places where notions of greater belonging are negotiated. This has been the concern of political geographers that look at places to help understand national and regional identity and allegiance. Agnew explains that places are always in process, and if they are coerced more than enrolled, they may unravel:

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[5] Critical urban geographers have also pointed to the importance of place. A prominent example is the bundle TPSN (territory, place, scale, and network) that has been proposed by Jessop et al. (2008). Their formulation tends to focus on political, legal, and economic aspects, largely overlooking ideology.

There is nothing absolute, determined, or inevitable about it. It is sustained only with great

difficulty and through control over major educational, cultural, and political institutions… Places,

therefore, are connected to the state through its organization into various tiers of administration

and the geography of its hegemony. (Agnew 1987: 39-40)

Despite attempts at administrative closures, the places from which we imagine regional

images and regional identities are always in flux. The institutionalization of territories, the

communication of boundaries, and the production of "we" and the "other" are key to the areal

differentiation of regional image and regional identity. At the heart of understandings and

identifications of national, sub-national, and supra-national regions is the mediation of place. The

ideological implications of regions shift as political and economic contexts change. As the

tertiary economy grows in importance across China, regional branding has risen in importance.

*Tourism and Region*

Looking at the branding of regions for economic competiveness and tourism

development, Anssi Paasi (2013) has emphasized Raymond Williams' discussion of dominant,

residual, and emergent cultural formations as a useful tool for framing regional identities. He

writes:

While "residual culture" consists of discursive elements which echo cultural tradition and heritage,

"dominant culture" is materialized through current hegemonic discourse such as the association of

regional identity with tourism and regional development. "Emergent" elements often parallel or

challenge this hegemony, for example casting identity as a brand that has to be created or modified

to enhance a region's future competitiveness. (Paasi 2013: 1209)

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While serving as a useful guide for framing discussions on the instrumentalization and commodification of regional images, Paasi neglects nuances in Williams' theorization. Williams makes a distinction between "archaic" elements and the "alternative and oppositional" elements of residual culture. He indicates that both residual and emergent culture, despite the attempts of a hegemonic formation to fully incorporate them, may exist as the practical consciousness of lived experience and as a "structure of feeling" (Williams 1975; 1977). These details influence minorities in western China and middle class Han tourists' recent imaginings of the "Western Region" and the "frontier."

China's post-reform reorientation towards the global economy has led to the increased desire of provincial officials to push away from negative regional stereotypes and cast themselves as attractive places for capital (Oakes 2000). Strategies of cultural development have reached into towns and villages as well, where inhabitants uncover and refashion cultural particularities and advertise their cultures as unique (Oakes 2006). Tim Oakes (2009) has shown that local scholars draw on "residuals" to portray their cultures as authentic and marketable experiences. He is careful to distinguish this approach, which shows business acumen and strategic agency in the global marketplace, from Chinese Marxist historiography that renders "feudal" cultural elements as "living fossils" of a rural tradition fated to disappear in the teleology of progress. Other scholars have also revealed the roles of local elites in creating a sense of local culture for tourist consumption (Litzinger 2000; Schein 2000). This approach often portrays ethnic minorities as sexualized and feminized commodities for the consumption of Han Chinese (Gladney 1994).

In a fascinating study of villages populated by the Gyarong, an ethnic group in western Sichuan that sits uneasily with its official Tibetan classification, Tenzin Jinba (2014) has shown how a similar set of power brokers in Danba County of Sichuan Province's have made efforts to promote tourism. Based on ambiguously detailed historical records, a respected country leader promoted the idea of an "Eastern Queendom," and the county tourism bureau set out to discover traces of this past. One local tasked with collecting these traces uncovered toponyms allegedly related to the ancient queendom. He and his associates' claims brought them into conflict with those of a nearby township in the same county, leading to an inter-village struggle over who could claim the mantle of Eastern Queendom and the tourism profits they hoped it would deliver.

On the one hand, the county-level government was instrumental in creating a Danba-centered regional image. This image was crafted by older men and local cadres at both county and township levels. The information they recovered was in many senses "archaic," without any significant cultural trace. On the other hand, some of the activities of the locals, such as a puberty ritual and dancing, were existing cultural traditions that were appropriated as acts for tourists. The Queendom culture is then only in part archaic, it also draws upon and co-opts residual culture, all the while finding a regional representation within the framework of administratively recognized spatial divisions. At the same time, Tenzin Jinba's work is testimony to the persistence, and even exacerbation, of local place identities that the competition for county funds and external tourism capital has generated.

I befriended a local booster of regional image in the city of Trika, in Hainan County, Qinghai Province. My friend, named Sonam, would take me to sites in the city, and I would help him edit English versions of tourist texts. During the early 2010s, many Tibetan cities in eastern Qinghai Province were experiencing a boom in local tourist growth; these projects were often

directed by county governments. County municipalities, the seats of county government, would build and renovate tourist attractions, including museums, monuments, and temples. Sonam was a tireless promoter of Trika, in particular its Buddhist temples and beautiful wetland scenery. He hoped to create a future tourist market in which he could promote his own nearby farming village and local monastery. While he comprehensively promoted the whole region, he grumbled about the cornering of tourist attractions at places like the nearby National Geology Park. That park attracted a lot of tourist money, but consists only of a parking lot and ticketing gate in front of some attractive colored stone formations. In contrast, the recently constructed "Chinese Prayer Wheel" museum, filled with information about Tibetan Buddhist sects and locally made artisanal wares, received from Sonam more enthusiasm. It shines as an attractive, and fundamentally Tibetan, local image. Although its name situates it within the greater context of China (Ch. *zhonghua*), it serves as a marker of regional importance, imprinted upon the landscape by the most economically powerful organization at this level – the country government.

Su Xiaobo and Peggy Teo have found little in the way of "resistance" between locals against tourism development in the Yunnan Province city of Lijiang, which was traditionally populated by the officially recognized Naxi ethnic group. They write:

> By reclaiming parts of Xinhua Street and Sifang Square, local people have managed to create Naxi representational spaces that include local activities. Indeed, from this study it can be seen that tourist landscapes do not reflect a power dichotomy between locals and the state. Instead, it is the intersection of heterogeneous discourses. (Su and Teo 2008: 165)

But these tourist landscapes can also be the sites of heterogenous projects, and politically conservative and profit seeking local governments don't always take into account the opinions

and desires of minority inhabitants, whose everyday practices become enfolded into the tourist landscape as consumeable commodities. Local governments seek to fashion regional images to attract capital, and local people must find ways to profit within development schemes in which their interests and even financial gains are marginalized. Indeed, a scramble for capital can lead to contentious politics both between locals and the government, as well as between regions competing for resources.

A similar effect can be seen on larger scales as well. The prefecture of Yushu hosts a large horse racing festival, attracting tourists and becoming a focal point of regional nomadic interaction. Qinghai Lake has become an emblem of the region, taking on national prominence through an annual bike tour. The region has also been subject to an inscription into the Chinese geohistorical imaginary. One example of this is the travels through Qinghai of the Princess Wencheng, one of several Tang princesses wedded to members of the Tibetan court in a marriage alliance (Ch. *heqin*). This ancient diplomatic policy has been revived as an expression of the historical civilizing process between the Han Chinese and the uncultured Tibetan (Warner 2011). Images of the princess serve as points of tourist attraction around Qinghai Lake; one such site at Sun Moon Mountain (Ch. *Riyueshan*) is displayed on the mug of Xining City's Starbucks. In this last representation, Qinghai becomes one of the consumable regions not only nationally, but potentially globally.

Counties, prefectures, and provinces have become important sites at which regional image and regional identity are negotiated and contested. These administrative scales take on new meanings as local residuals are re-purposed as consumable traditions in the tourism industry. The imperitive of tourism development in the west leads to an unequal politics of representation.

The rise of frontier tourism has led to the selling of regions at China's frontier as exotic and unmodern sites where urban Han can be remade. From Xinjiang through the Gansu corridor south to Tibet and Yunnan, a geographic belt of exoticized peoples has formed an imaginary region upon the travel itinerary of the emerging Chinese middle class. These exoticized frontiers attract mobile cosmopolitans in search of alternatives to the stressful competition in coastal China (Zhu and Qian 2015). Places that were considered "barren" during the Maoist period are now undergoing a process of re-appraisal.

Oakes (2012, 2009) suggests that the border is often imagined as a zone of cultural purity, where Chinese culture is in reserve and from which it may be renewed or reinvigorated. The frontier has a reservoir of cultural values uncorrupted by the excesses of coastal China. The parallel with Turner's expansive and revitalizing frontier is clear:

> American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. (Turner 1921: 2-3)

In this vision, the frontier is a historical translocal space where China's outward and global orientation has its roots. But as Tenzin Jinba (2014: 45) has argued out, this is a view that stems from Han Chinese writers and romanticizers, and silences the actual minorities in China's borderlands. Tenzin Jinba points to the portrayal of the Inner Mongolian steppe and Mongolians in the extremely popular Chinese book *Wolf Totem* (Ch. *Lang tuteng*), which was adapted for film in 2015. In the book, "sent-down youth" (Ch. *xiafang nianqing*) from Chinese cities go to

live in Inner Mongolia and help to modernize Mongolian pastoralism. As the story unfolds, the main character Chen Zhen realizes that Han agricultural policies are ruining both the grassland and the ancient vitality of the pastoralist lifestyle, which breeds a primitive but youthful and virile lifestyle that comes to be represented by the wolf. On the pastoral frontier, he sees a way of life that can revitalize both himself and Chinese civilization, which has grown old and lost its vim through stultifying Confucianism: "There'd be hope for China if our national character could be rebuilt by cutting away the decaying parts of Confucianism and grafting a wolf sapling onto it" (Jiang 2008:377).

In the 2014 annual state-run New Year's television gala, the predicable singing and skit acting was punctuated by a recording of Xi Jinping delivered a message to Mongolians on the frontier. Wearing a large woolen coat and floppy eared black fur cap, Xi delivered his speech. The image was framed by two yurts, beyond which the grassland sprawled to the horizon. He spoke into a microphone covered with a large furry gray windshield, which accented the wild and windy discomfort of his location in relation to the television viewers at home. Mongolians in ethnic dress were gathered around him. A montage of the rest of his visit showed him eating in a canteen with some soldiers. Everyone used utilitarian metal trays, metal bowls, and metal chopsticks. I watched the New Year's gala with a Chinese shopkeeper who was extremely critical of government policies on housing and business; he remarked that Xi was aping Mao. My friend saw it as a cynical ploy in the anti-corruption campaign: the performed frugality of government workers. The image portrayed the tough and tumble readiness of China's leader, modeling himself on both the Maoist image of frugality and (group) self-reliance, and the invigorating cold of the Mongolian frontier. Xi was keeping watch over China's empty frontiers while we watched TV from China's endlessly expanding cities.

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In *Wolf Totem* Chen Zhen secretly raises a small wolf, which gives him both psychological and physical nourishment in the face of the destruction of the grasslands: "The desolation vanished from Chen's heart each time he sat down by the cub, as if he'd received a transfusion of roiling wolf blood" (Jiang 2008:494). There is irony in how this popular version of the life-instilling wild frontier is at odds with the very argument that enables it. The developmental and colonial discourse threatens to pacify and destroy the grasslands, but even Chen Zhen, when arguing for the grafting the "wolf sapling," can't let go of the higher calling of Chinese civilization: "[The wolf sapling] could be combined with such Confucian traditions as pacifism, an emphasis on education, and devotion to study" (Jiang 2008: 494). There is an uneasiness between the slow-and-steady "scientific" progress expounded by Chinese state, which dates back to the 1950s,[6] and an emerging exoticization of the frontier that is connected, on the one hand, to military prowess,[7] and on the other hand, to emerging interest in the exotic wild and freedom of the frontier.

Among other sources, the exoticization of the West can be traced to the writers, filmmakers, and artists associated with the Fifth Generation in Chinese cultural production. During the 1980s this group of artists moved from China's coasts to its western provinces in pursuit of inspiration. The exemplary 1986 film *Horse Thief* (Ch. *Daomazei*) portrays Tibetan characters on the open frontier, whose law-breaking freedom runs counter to "the moral depravity of an over-bureaucratized, urbanized Chinese core, which lacks beauty, vigor, and ritual" (Gladney 2004: 93). This vein in the cultural industry has persisted, adapting to and reflecting other threads in Chinese society. Chinese artists and writers use Tibet and Tibetans as

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[6] See, for instance, Shakya (1999) on the frequent use of "scientific" modernism to justify social programs in Tibet in the 1950s. This language is still common today, and is connected to development programs.
[7] Liu Mingfu (2015) uses similar zoological invocations of the advantages of wild animality versus sheepishness to explain why China needs to build up its military.

illustrations of how to live in harmony with nature (Wang and Shakya 2009: 202). Over the last decade a popular book series called *The Tibetan Code* (Ch. *xizang mima*) has sold well in coastal Chinese metropolises. These books and a television series called *Tibetan Secret* (Ch. *xizang mimi*) portray Tibetan places and people in a casual mixture of romantic pastoral lifestyle, mysterious Buddhist practices, and violent intrigue. My Tibetan friends roundly criticized these inaccurate portrayals of Tibetans and Tibetan history.

When looking at books or media about frontier regions, a term roughly translatable as "secret land" or "mysterious frontier" (Ch. *mijing*) is often used. Innumerable books use the term in their portrayal of Tibetan regions as exotic, though the phrase is also attached to other places of tempting fantasy. This usage of border (Ch. *jing*) is tied to fantastical notions of the frontier: *renjian xianjing* (Earthly Paradise), *huanjing (*fairyland), and *miaojing* (wonderland). These enchanted uses of *jing* are also used in advertisements for luxury apartments and detached houses (Ch. *bieshu*). The notion of the negation of a limit (Ch. *yong wu zhijing*), appears in an ad for an Audi SUV, shown summiting a snowy peak that turns even mountain goats away (see Figure 3.2). Because the notion of a romantic, open, and mysterious border is so tied to travel and unexplored places, it is of little surprise that I have encountered it most often not in official publications, but rather in magazines, on billboards, and in airports.

Figure 3.2 Consuming the Frontier.

Advertisement for an Audi Q7, portrayed as surpassing all limits in a vaguely Himalayan landscape. Photo by author.

Some Chinese fonts used in advertising have been Tibetanized. These fonts are applied liberally on Tibetan shops advertising to Chinese tourists, on Chinese shops advertising Tibetan-related goods or services to Chinese tourists, and by extension, on an entire genre of products with associations of the distant and the mysterious (see Figure 3.3). A popular book series called "Heaven's mystery: Unmasking Atlantis" uses a Tibetanized font in its title. The mysterious border extends to places real and imagined. The Chinese frontier functions as a site of freedom and vitality while also representing a place largely emptied of people. In a popular recent example, the 2013 film *No Man's Land* (Ch. *Wurenqu*) takes place in a northwestern Chinese desert in an environment filled with thieves, cars, guns, and explosions. Rather than focusing on frontier minorities as wild and violent, the frontier spirit is now firmly part of Han self-reverie. These films are comparable to the American wild west films of the mid 20th century that located Turnerian freedom in the lawless frontier lands recently dispossessed from Native Americans.

Figure 3.3 Tibetanized font.

This book cover features actual Tibetan script as well as a Tibetanized font. The title of the book is *Mysterious Frontier Qinghai*. Photo by author.

A focus on Han-centric discourse and development unsurprisingly leads to the elision of actual voices from the frontier. Guo Xuebo, an Inner Mongolia writer and intellectual, has criticized the portrayal of Mongolians and the wolf spirit in Jiang Rong's book: "'Wolves are Mongolians' natural enemy … wolves are greedy, selfish, grim, and bloody. Publicizing the wolf spirit is antihuman fascist thinking'" (BBC Chinese Net 2015).

During my interviews, I asked Tibetans to tell me what connotations a variety of terms had for them: frontier (Ch. *bianjiang*), the Western Region (Ch. *xibu*), snowland (Ch. *xueyu*), inland China (Ch. *neidi*), Amdo (Ch. *anduo*), the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau (Ch. *qingzang*

*gaoyuan*), and Tibetan regions (Ch. *zangqu*). Participants largely held the Western Region as a place that lacked development. They had romantic conceptions of snowland, Amdo, and the plateau, all of which called to mind open grasslands, herding animals, mountains and relaxation. But they didn't simply internalize hegemonic discursive conceptions about these places. As discussed in later chapters, these were instead regional conceptions based out of trans-local connections and politics in the Tibetan community. The most surprising association I heard from several participants was an appreciation of the term *zangqu*, because it linked together Tibetan regions that the government tried to split between provinces. It called to mind a united Tibetan territory.

## V. Conclusion

In a bizarre paradox, China's Western Region has grown even as China's economy has dramatically improved; how could the Western Region, which represents geographical and temporal (e.g. backwards) distance from the Chinese center, be expanding? The answer lies in part in the possibilities and connotations that regions bring to mind. The current western administrative region (Ch. *xibu*) has been given its form as a site of internal improvement. Despite a differing geopolitical context, the desire to develop the region echoes in spirit, if not in approach, earlier 20th century attempts to colonize frontier regions. Developing the west also draws upon a self-conscious history of frontier expansionism; the "Chinese" dynasties that have been present in the Inner Asian arc were often militaristic in nature and can be seen in hindsight to represent a strong China progressing into the future.

The Western Region's administrative territories are also sites of negotiation between government officials, consumer desires, and local peoples. Han Chinese often have

disproportionate power in these struggles over regional image due to their prominence in the PRC government and as domestic tourists. Yet frontier ethnicities do exercise agency and seek to preserve and further their own particularities and interests by shaping regional images.

# Chapter 4. A Short History of Xining City

## I. Introduction

Xining City is today the capital of Qinghai Province. The city has an important role as the administrative center of the province, but its political role in the region goes back thousands of years, and includes rule by a large number of states and ethnic groups. Xining was not always a city, and its role in the region was often diminished in the face of other centers of trade and power. This chapter emphasizes the alternate perspectives afforded by looking at Xining in directions that include, but are not limited to, Beijing. To approach Xining from other directions is to more fully grasp its relationship with northwest China and its Tibetan and Muslim worlds.

The first Chinese toponym that serves as the early bookend to Xining's history is *Xipingting*, or Western Peace Pavilion. Later appellations for Xining were of a grander nature: post, prefecture, commandery. These changes reflect Xining's many roles for different political regimes. Under the Qing Xining was a prefecture (Ch. *Xiningfu*); under the Ming a commandery and market town (Ch. *Xiningwei*), and under the Northern Wei part of Shanzhou (Xiningshi zhi lishibufen 1984). The first use of the name Xining was by the Song in 1104, when that dynasty briefly occupied the region (Xiningshi zhi chengshi jianshezhi 1993: 33). Garrisons in Xining often exercised control over nearby locations, yet inland Chinese rule of the region was frequently subject to political challenge; hence the need to continuously establish a Xining.

The perspective that official Chinese gazetteers and recent condensed histories afford is of a city emerging chronologically out of its pre-historical past. These annals owe a great deal to Imperial histories and are based around a narrative of outside invasion and restoration that takes Xining's Chinese character for granted. While these sources are a wealth of knowledge, the story of the city's political, cultural, and architectural history can best be told from all directions. Xining's regional significance is best grasped as the product of a myriad of ethnic and religious influences. The following sections emphasize Tibetan, Mongol, and Muslim contributions to Xining City, and help us understand how these groups come to belong in the city today.

**II. Valley of the Onions**

Contemporary Xining is made up of several counties in addition to its urban district. These counties include Datong, Huangzhong, and Huangyuan. Huangzhong County contains a Tibetan population of over 40,000 - almost as many Tibetans as now live within Xining's urban districts (Xining tong ji nian jian 2014: 51). The name Huangzhong signifies the middle reaches of the Huangshui river, which runs east starting from the watershed located in Huangyuan County (*yuan* signifying the source of the river) and cuts through contemporary Xining City, where it serves to demarcate the boundary between several urban districts. When Tibetans claim that Xining is historically a Tibetan City, they are drawing upon two histories: the dominance of a Tibetan monastic center in Huangzhong County, a part of the Xining City-level prefecture, and the presence of the Tubo/Tufan and Tangut (Ch. *Xixia*) Empires in the region during the period between the 8th and 13th centuries. In particular one older site, a city called Qingtang, has become a powerful representation of a Tibetan city.

The Tibetan name of the Huangshui river is the Tsong River, or onion river, which flows through Tsongkha, a region of Amdo Tibet that Andrea Gruschke has defined broadly:

> The name of Tsongkha may thus be taken as the "[area around the] origin headwaters of the] Tsong [chu river]" and the district of Tsongkha is to be considered as the valleys of the drainage area of that river… This region stretches east of Lake Kokonor and the Nyima Dawa La Pass, and includes the main valley of the river Tsong Chu and several side-valleys. Hence the Tibetan-named district of Tsongkha would be comprising today's Chinese-named counties of Huangyuan [*stong 'khor in Tibetan*] and Huangzhong [*ru shar*], Huzhu [*dgon lung*], Ping'an [*tsong kha khar*], Ledu [*gro tshang*] and Minhe [*bka 'ma log*, plus the city of Xining [*zi ling*] including its county Datong Xian [*gser khog*]. (Gruschke 2001: 27, citing Schram 2006)

Tsongkha encompasses a region that includes and exceeds the current administrative boundaries of Xining City. Today all of the places of Tsongkha are united by roads that allow Tibetan pilgrims to travel to a variety of important monastic centers in the region, including Qutan, Youning, and Kumbum Monastery, located in today's Ledu, Huzhu, and Huangzhong, respectively.[1] Kumbum Monastery was founded in the portion of Tsongkha where the founder of the Gelug, or Yellow Hat, school of Tibetan Buddhism, Tsongkhapa (literally "one from Tsongkha"), was born. The Gelug would come to predominate in Tsongkha, as well as in Lhasa under the Dalai Lamas.

Historically, the site of contemporary Xining has typically been used as a defensive outpost and military garrison for inland dynasties, but the city also served military functions for other groups, such as the Xianbi, the Tufan, and the Tangut. After 757, Xining fell out of control of the Tang and under the influence of the Tufan. After the Tufan went into decline, the Tangut dominated the region. In the 10th century, at the site of contemporary Xining, the city of Qingtang was established as the capital of a Qiang-dominated kingdom. The leader of the kingdom, Gululuo, has a pedigree that suits western China: he was born in the region of Turfan in contemporary Xinjiang, and merchants struck by the boy's appearance brought him back with them to Hezhou (today's Linxia). The kingdom he eventually established would go on to fight both the Tangut and the Song (Xiningshi zhi lishibufen 1984: 34-48). Piper Gaubatz has described the capital city he founded:

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[1] Several of these regions are today counties. Haidong City, established in 2013 as Qinghai Province's second provincial-level urban area, includes many of these counties, which encompass the valleys that descend into Gansu Province: Ledu, Ping'an, Minhe, Huzhu, Hualong, and Xunhua.

Qingtang Cheng was a walled city about 10 km in circumference, with a population of at least a thousand Tibetan families. A north-south wall ran through the center of the walled area and divided it into two sections called the East and West cities. The West City was the home of the elite. … In contrast to this exclusive western district, the East City was the home of about 100 families of traders of many different nationalities. The suburbs surrounding the city contained several Buddhist monasteries. This basic layout, with the ruling ethnic group in the west, a multiethnic trading community in the east, and monasteries in the outlying areas, was to remain the form of Xining until 1949. (Gaubatz 1996: 57-58)

The Song eventually sieged the city, and re-designated it as Xining, but they were unable to hold it. Eventually the region would fall to the Yuan as they displaced the Tangut and smaller polities during their late 13th century campaigns in the region.

Qingtang City animates many contemporary Tibetans' historical perspective on Xining － the city is a Tibetan center of power rather than a Chinese garrison.[2]

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[2] The Qiang are often seen as proto-Tibetan.

Figure 4.1 A Tibetan Xining.

A Tibetan map depicting Qingtang. The contemporary Chinese name of "Xining" appears only in the title for a source in the legend. Source: Wechat.

I encountered the map in Figure 4.1 on the popular social media program Wechat,[3] over which it was being shared as a partial proof of historical Tibetan presence. The Tibetan version of the Chinese name Xining (Tib. *ziling*) is used for the capital, while its typical Chinese name is omitted, instead the Chinese name Qingtang City is used. The map is selective in pulling the city together, emphasizing Tibetan and Buddhist sites, and highlighting Hongjue Temple, a Buddhist temple that built during the Ming period.

While Xining is significant as a Tibetan place in the imaginations of contemporary Tibetans, it has not always been regarded in this way. A reference to Xining as a Chinese city

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[3] See chapter eight for a description of Wechat.

can be found in *The Geography of Tibet*, written by Blama btsanpo in 1820: "Proceeding half a day's journey eastward from Sku-'bum [Kumbum] is the Chinese fortress (mkhar) called Zi-ling" (Wylie 1962: 109). Here Xining is clearly regarded as a Chinese place, one located by reference to the more significant Kumbum monastery.

## III. Mongolian Influence on Xining

Trading and military activity in the Western Regions have brought China into contact with Central Asian groups for thousands of years. During the middle of the first millennium, expanded military, diplomatic, and trade activity between the Wei and Tang Dynasties and the Sogdian and Turkic populations in the Tarim Basin led to large settlements of these populations in many Chinese cities (Hansen 2012: 139, 149). Later, the spread of Islam in Central Asia led to a conversion of populations there to Islam. Muslims from these regions also came to inland Chinese cities, where they lived in segregated quarters (Lipman 1997: 28). The same would be the case for Xining's Muslims, who arrived during the Yuan Dynasty.

In 1227 a branch of Chinggis Khagan's Mongolian army entered the Gansu Corridor and attacked Tangut outposts throughout the region, eventually striking at Xining Prefecture and enrolling it into the Mongol Empire. In 1286, Xining Prefecture was placed under Gansu Province (*Xiningshi zhi lishibufen* 1984: 49). The Mongolians, who embraced religious diversity as political expediency, brought a great number of migrants into the area, including Mongolian tribesmen and Turkic Muslim peoples from Central Asia.

These Muslims assisted the Yuan government, in which many held high-ranking positions. Xining's oldest Islamic structure is a Sunni tomb (Ch. *gongbei*) that was constructed for the Baghdadi Gutubu Ranbani, one such Yuan migrant Muslim. He lived in Xining in the late

13th century, where he once preached Islam to 15,000 officers and men (Tuo 1992; Fenghuangshan gongbei 2014).

Yuan influence in the region declined in the mid-14th century. In the late 14th century the Ming made inroads in the region, gaining the allegiance of local leaders and establishing the Xining Commandery (Ch. *Xiningwei*) in 1373 (*Xiningshi zhi lishibufen* 1984: 55-58). Between 1385 and 1387, a construction boom established the foundations for the walled city that remain the reference point for representations of Old Xining: a walled city with four gates and an attached Muslim quarter (Xiningshi zhi lishibufen 1984: 63).

The oldest Buddhist structures that can be found in Xining today were constructed during the early Ming. The Chinese Buddhist Temple Nanchansi was built on the north aspect of South Mountain in 1410 (Xiningshi zhi chengshi jianshezhi 1993: 12). The Mongour Headman Li Ange is credited for building the Big Buddha Temple (Ch. *Dafosi*), located north of today's Xida Avenue adjacent to the Qinghai People's Government Building (Xiningshi zhi dimingzhi 1993: 179). Built in 1390, the structure was originally of the Tibetan Buddhist Nyingma school, but when a Sakya school leader tried to re-establish it under the Qing, Gelug leaders resisted this change; the structure eventually fell into disrepair (Gruschke 2001: 44). The Hongjue Temple (Ch. *Hongjuesi*) was established in 1412; it was the largest Tibetan Buddhist structure in the city until the 20th century (Xiningshi zhi dimingzhi 1993:179).

Although Xining fell out of Mongolian control after the Yuan, Mongolians continued to be political agents in eastern Qinghai. The grasslands around Qinghai Lake became a stage for the struggles between the Manchu, several Mongolians tribes, and the Lhasa-centered Tibetan kingdom. In 1638, the Khoshot leader Gushri Khan brought his followers into the grasslands around Qinghai Lake; they would continue to dominate the region until being joined by the

Zunghars in the late 17th century (Nietupski 2012: 6). Tibetans and Mongols in these regions would be drawn into Xining's ambit after the Qing established its Xining garrison in the early 18th century and installed the amban system to monitor their tribes (Nietupski 2012: 117).

## IV. Trade and the role of Muslims

During the Ming Dynasty, Xining became an important entrepôt for goods coming from inland China onto the Tibetan Plateau, in particular tea. Xining was one of many routes that tea took through the region: a market center was established there as early as 1642.[4] The tea trade was both commercial and tributary; Mongol princes offered goods to the Tibetan monastic powers that recognized their legitimacy. Horses also passed through the trading centers of Xining and other regional trading posts, such as Hezhou. The Qinghai Tea-Horse trade supplied healthy horses for Chinese garrisons in the southwest (Tuttle 2013).

Evariste Huc reported passing through Xining in 1840, where his party stayed at an ethnically segregated inn for no fee. He noted that Xining was "of a very large extent, but its population is limited, and itself, in several parts, is falling into absolute decay" (Huc 1900: 325). Huc felt that the city's trade had moved to markets beyond the city, such as that in contemporary Huangyuan (Tib. *stong 'khor*). In fact, thriving regional markets were reported in towns all around the Xining region (Horlemann 2012a: 110; Rock 1956: 23). Bianca Horlemann (2012a) has described the system of markets in the region, in particular the "House of Repose" (Ch. *xiejia*) system that Huc mentioned: in the 19th and early 20th centuries, Tibetan, Mongol, and Mongour traders were barred from staying in Chinese inns. Instead, they had to stay at

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[4] The tea that was traded was then exchanged for precious metals, religious imagery, and prestige. After the Qing subdued the Khoshot Mongols of Kokonor during the 1720s, Mongolians and Tibetans negotiated with the Qing in order to conduct the trade. This state of affairs continued until the Zunghars were eliminated (Perdue 2005: 266).

government regulated Houses of Repose, where innkeepers recorded the goods being transacted as well as collected commissions on the goods sold, and, in later years, taxes.

Muslims from the Gansu and Qinghai often kept these inns and sustained long term relationships with their Tibetans clients, from whom they would purchase wool, salt, and other goods. Indeed, long-term trading relationships between Muslims and Tibetans were common in the early 20th century and could include periods of Tibetans hosting Muslims on the grasslands as well (Ekvall 1939: 53-58). This system reveals the interpersonal connections that could characterize ethnic relations before the system was eliminated through the monopolization of trade and regularization of tax levies under the Ma warlords in the early 20th century (Horlemann 2012a: 132-133).

But not all was peaceful. From the 1860s to 1890s, fits of unrest rocked Xining and other cities in Northwest China. Fights erupted between Islamic schools (in particular various Sufi groups) and the Qing government. Starting in 1861, the uprisings shook the Xining region, and Muslims laid siege to Xining and Huangzhong garrisons. Full control was only restored to the Qing in 1872 (Xiningshi zhi lishibufen 1984: 114-123). This uprising is portrayed in Chinese gazetteers and histories as an outburst of chaos and pillage. During this period a great number of religious structures in Xining were destroyed by "ravages of war," including the Dongguan Mosque in the eastern portion of the city and the Phoenix Mountain Tomb and Nanchansi on South Mountain (Xiningshi zhi dimingzhi 1993: 177; Fenghuangshan gongbei 2014). The only parallel incident of destruction of religious structures would occur during the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution.

Religious affiliation wasn't the only basis of explanation for political division in this period, and these "Muslim rebellions" included various constellations of Muslims fighting

Muslims, some with Qing support (Lipman 1997). Political or material interest often trumped religion or ethnicity. During the rule of the Ma family of Muslim warlords, for example, Tibetans were often played against one another for the purpose purposes. Furthermore, political divisions were often based around family interests, with Muslim clans and Tibetan tribes who were often hostile towards one another and willing to ally with other ethnicities in order to further their own interests (Horlemann 2012b).

Under the Ma family, the city of Xining began to modernize. In a city that was characterized by mud and straw houses structured around courtyards, foreign style buildings began to emerge (Li 2012: 49-53). Ma Qi and Ma Bufang oversaw the establishment of a number of elementary and secondary schools and even a teaching college in 1940 (Ibid.: 104-106). The highway to Lanzhou was rebuilt multiple times, and roads were extended to Tibetan regions further afield, such as Yushu and Aba (Li 2012: 54-59). Xining also grew in importance as a regional trading center. In Qinghai, exports of wool and imports from inland Chinese provinces increased during the 1910s; this trend only halted with the onset of the global depression and Sino-Japanese conflict. In 1932 Ma Qi moved to consolidate markets across the Xining region, leading to the monopolization of trade. Muslims traders would bring furs, skins, musk, and deer antlers from Qinghai to markets across China, bringing back cloths, satin, metals, and bicycles to sell (Yang 2013: 266-267).

## V. Xining Under the Communists

After defeating the Kuomintang-allied Ma Bufang, the People's Liberation Army entered Xining City on September 5th, 1949. According to Xining's official annals, the people enthusiastically exclaimed, "Long live the Liberation Army!" and "Celebrate Liberation!"

(Xiningshi zhi lishibufen 1984: 245). Xining City then became the center of provincial administration under the PRC.

From 1949 through the early 1960s, the city's administrative structure was subject to continuous shifts. Six urban districts were established in Xining in 1949. By 1954 they had been merged into only two districts. After this first establishment, the power structure between the street committees of the urban districts, dominated by administration and industry, and the agricultural villages included in the Xining government was continuously renegotiated: for instance, after its initial founding, the West District organizational system was annulled in 1957 and 1961, then re-created 1960 and 1963 (Xiningshi chengxiqu zhi 1993: 30-31).

During the 1950s and 1960s, Xining took on the character of a PRC city. Industries were organized as Qinghai Province entered the command economy. In 1955, Xining's textile, sundry good, foodstuff, medicine, writing material, pork, beef, and mutton industries were organized under joint state-private ownership (Xiningshi zhi dashi ji 1993: 115). In 1957, an urban city architectural bureau was established, and shortly after surveying teams measured and prepared the surround environs for factory construction (Xiningshi zhi chengshi jianshezhi 1993: 44). Soon a large number of factories began to open in Xining. These factories, working in concert with industries in Golmud (Ch. *Ge'ermu*) and other feeder sites within Xining's transportation network, processed materials from around the province. Products as diverse as rubber, gelatin, and gypsum were created from the materials entering the city.[5] More factories would be built during the Third Front period, as Xining took on more industrial responsibilities (Qinghai sheng zhi hua gong zhi 1993: 3-7).

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[5] The factories given here are just examples of the many kinds of factories that contributed to Xining's industries, and are not exemplary of its production. On the west side alone, other factories made batteries, noodles, calcium carbide, bicycles, glass, car parts, and processed metals and other natural resources (Xiningshi chengxiqu zhi 1993: 81-85). Many of these early communist state-owned enterprises have since shut down.

The growth of these industries and other administrative, medicinal, and education sites pushed Xining into a new geography. The city expanded north, west, and east far beyond the old city walls. Some areas were specially set aside for industry (see Figure 4.2).
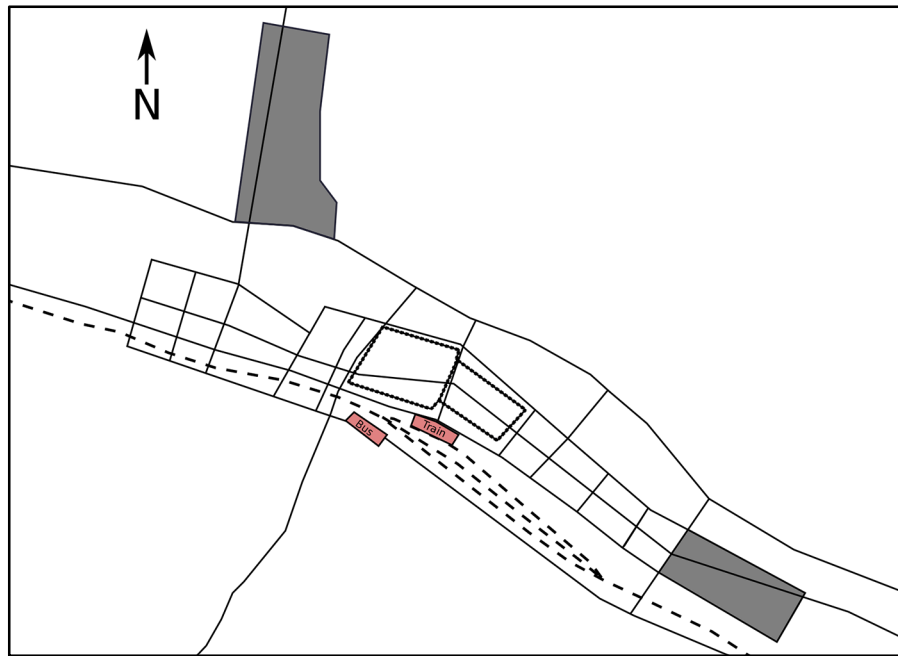


Figure 4.2 Map of Xining in 1954.

This map shows early PRC expansion beyond the old Ming walls, seen in the center of the city. Gray areas
demarcate land set aside for industry. The red areas are the bus and train stations.
Drawn from map in Xiningshi zhi chengshi jianshezhi 1993.

The modernization of Xining has not simply been a story of continuous development and improvement; religious structures in the city faced conversion and destruction as the state's position towards religion fluctuated. In 1958, the Panchen Lama was granted the Big Buddha Temple as a residence (Gruschke 2001: 44), but during the Cultural Revolution, the structure was razed. Hongjue Temple was partially destroyed after 1949. As of 1993 its remnants housed a printing factory (Xiningshi zhi dimingzhi 1993: 179), though it is currently in the process of restoration. Daguan Mosque became a cultural center during the Cultural Revolution, and only in

1979 were religious activities there restored (Xiningshi zhi dimingzhi 1993: 178.) Today new mosques are breaking ground throughout the city, reflecting a government more flexible towards Islam and the material wealth of Qinghai's Muslims (see Figure 4.3). These new mosques no longer overlook courtyard homes, but newly built high-rises. During the late 2000s and early 2010s, I witnessed the gradual destruction of the earth and straw houses that filled Xining's historic Muslim quarter, erasing one of the most striking features of Xining's architectural past.



Figure 4.3 Raising funds in Xining.

Muslim men raising money in Xining for mosque construction in nearby Minhe county. Photo by author.

## VI. Conclusion

The effects of urbanization on Xining City make the most sense when the city is understood not simply as another instance of urbanization in China, but as a city with a history and with the long-standing role as a pivot of politics and commerce in the surrounding region, however it is defined. When approached from multiple perspectives, it becomes clear that there is ample evidence that Xining is a Tibetan city, a Muslim city, and a Chinese city, as well as a Mongol, Xianbi, or a Qiang city. Xining has long been a locus of religious, ethnic, and social interaction in Qinghai's richly diverse Huangshui river valley. In the following part of the dissertation, I will discuss the attitudes and livelihoods of ethnic minorities living in the city, with particular attention paid to Xining's Tibetans, who come from places all over the eastern portion of the province (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 Map of Eastern Qinghai.

This map shows the places in Eastern Qinghai Province that will be mentioned in Part II. Many of the marked county towns share their names with the counties of which they are seats. Map by Matt Zebrowski.

# Part II   Urbanizing Ethnic Minorities in Xining City

# Chapter 5. Styles of Work, Family, and Household in Xining

## I. Introduction

One morning, after returning home from Amdo classes at Qinghai Nationalities University, I got a call from my friend Jamyang. He was in Xining, and could meet me in an hour. We had talked a few days before and discussed meeting up, but he was in Chab cha (Ch. *Gonghe*) and unable to meet me. When we had last talked, he had no idea when he would next be in Xining, which is several hours away from Chab cha. Jamyang frequently called me on short notice to meet, because he was not always sure when his work schedule would free him.

Jamyang's business was construction contracting. He would hear about competitive bids for work projects, and would then rush to Xining to enter his name in the bidding. He would try to put in the lowest prices he could manage, but was often out-competed. Jokingly, we referred to him as the boss (Ch. *laoban*), making light of his authoritative position. Jamyang was on continuous call between building projects: homes, roads, even solar energy. His projects brought him to many areas of Qinghai Province, but he always came back to Xining, the center from which the contracts are distributed. Bosses like him are part of an emerging economy based around exchanging labor for short-term unskilled contractual work, in construction or in caterpillar fungus picking (Goldstein et al. 2008; Wang 2014). In both cases the success of bosses and the people that work with them are dependent upon government initiated development strategies or the unstable market of luxury goods, which is typically driven by Han

Chinese. That is, their economic fates are driven by forces beyond their control and originating from outside of the region.

While Jamyang and I talked over plates of a local noodle dish (Ch. *ganbanmian*), served with meat sauce and hot pepper, he explained to me that he was unable to get today's contract because he was out-bid by a Han work team. He had been down on his luck lately and out of work for weeks. Indeed, almost any time I was able to meet with him it meant that he was without work, without a contract. Jamyang's on and off work fortunes also implicated his brother, his business partner, and the dozens of Tibetan construction workers who carried out the manual labor. These men and women were recruited through ad posts on the mud walls of Chab cha's housing districts and via word-of-mouth on Wechat, a popular social media program. This contingent work affects many people's livelihoods and puts them in migratory circulation around eastern Qinghai Province.

Cindy Fan (2008) has argued that migration in China has two important dimensions that must be understood in relation to one another. On the one hand, the state drives macro-economic shifts and controls access to place-based services. Deng Xiaoping's reforms have enabled the growth of capitalist economic zones since the 1980s. This has increased the circulation of people who can come to cities, but aren't always able to permanently live there due to *hukou* registration restrictions; this population is famously known as the "floating population" (Ch. *liudong renkou*). At the same time, Chinese families have opted to split their households in order to gain money in cities and to keep their rural homes as a form of security (Fan et al. 2011).

Economic reforms have also led to the rise of an equivalent to a floating population in Tibetan regions, what has been called "going for income" (Goldstein et al. 2008: 517). These changes are also driven by macro-economic processes, but ones that particularly target restive

minority regions in western China and which rely on short-term infrastructure investment potential (Fischer 2013). Tibetans also face obstacles presented to them by the *hukou* system, but Tibetans are strategizing to take advantage of the wealth found in urban environments and to take advantage of programs to improve living standards in agricultural and pastoral areas. Many of the Tibetans I met living in Xining maintained their rural *hukou* but were still able to rent or own apartments in Xining. These Tibetans lived in the city but were enmeshed in families and households in both the city and the surrounding countryside.

This chapter will investigate the frontier economy in which Xining's urban Tibetans participate. I argue that urbanization is benefiting Tibetans materially, but that this is linked to fortunes in the frontier economy beyond their control. Three types of work predominate among Tibetans living in Xining: government work, private trade and service sector work, and flexible labor, including the sale of caterpillar fungus and the contract work like Jamyang's. Many families had members who participated in more than one type of work. Participants also used government connections within their families or with family friends, typically from the same home region, to aid their purchase of apartments and establishment of businesses. Before going into the details of these three types of work, I explore the disadvantages Tibetans face in economic competition and in social stigmatization, vis-à-vis Han Chinese, which puts them in a difficult position. On the one hand, they pursue similar desires for a modern consumerist urban lifestyle, on the other hand the ethnicized frontier economy appears to limit their long-term potential for securing these dreams.

## II. The Frontier Economy

Many scholars of Tibetan regions have written about Tibetans' fear that the Han Chinese are taking their jobs away. This is often tied to an imagined demographic invasion, in which incoming Han populations are perceived to be "swamping" Tibetan lands. While Han populations in Tibet and Qinghai have certainly increased since Reform period began, Han populations tend to stay in urban areas (Fischer 2013). There is little movement of Han peoples to the large areas where pastoralism or agriculture are practiced, although in Lhasa, Emily Yeh (2013a) has reported that farm land once tilled by Tibetans has gone over to be tilled by Chinese farmers. This is in part related to a qualitative change in farming practices, in which greenhouse vegetable farming has replaced open air barley cultivation. Even in this case, Tibetans still profit from their land, which they rent out to the migrant farmers. In my interviews, most of the tension concerning the loss of jobs is directed at government posts, which Chinese are perceived to be filling in ever greater numbers. The statistics bear out disproportionately small numbers of minority cadres in both the TAR and Qinghai province (Fischer 2013). Historically the lack of Tibetan cadres or even Tibetan-speaking Chinese cadres has been a source of both ethnic tension and self-criticism on the part of the Chinese government. Reviewing the troubling state of economic and social conditions in 1980, Hu Yaobang called for an increase in the number of Tibetan cadres in the TAR (Shakya 1999). The problem has never gone away, and the leading Chinese ethnologist Ma Rong (2015) continues to cite the lack of ethnic representation among cadres as a sore point in the restive ethnic autonomous regions.

But ethnic representation does not itself guarantee social stability. Michael Hechter (1999) has argued that the persistence of ethnic divisions is a hallmark of "internal colonies." His argument, based upon England's "Celtic frontiers" had two aspects, both of which are useful in

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the context of Xining and its surrounding areas. First, there is a cultural division of labor, through which the labor market is hierarchical and segmented, and in which the Celtic peoples (Scots, Irish, and Welsh) occupied lower rungs. Second, attitudes of English cultural superiority antagonized and stigmatized Celtic peoples and undermined state efforts to build legitimacy. While some members of the ethnic groups were acculturated and incorporated into the dominant social structure, usually as elites, the persistence of interethnic economic antagonism on the one hand, and intraethnic communication on the other, allowed for the development and perpetuation of distinct ethnic identities. Following Fredrik Barth (1969), Hechter argued that these factors contributed to boundary making between the English and the people of their internal colonies.

Within China these trends can also be seen with Tibetans and other ethnic minorities unable to access the same economic resources available to Han Chinese workers and the Han dominated Chinese state institutions. These differences are only more visible as the Chinese population is being endowed with a new purpose as responsible consumers. Whereas in the past Chinese workers helped boost the Chinese economy simply through their participation in China's export-oriented economy, today Chinese workers must aid the nation-state through consumption as well. Especially since the global economic downturn in 2008, the Chinese economy increasingly relies on domestic home and retail sales to promote economic growth (Yu 2014). As this shift has occurred, a new type of state subject has emerged, one whose consumptive habits and desires for new goods and services are part of China's national success - part of the Chinese Dream. Chinese consumers are invested in jobs that promise them maximal economic returns and the attainment of the consumer goals embodied in the Chinese Dream. At least, these are the hopes of a state pinning its legitimacy to rapid economic growth.

Tibetans living in Xining City seek out a variety of employment, but certainly the most sought after work is in government. Besides just being stable income, government employment offers security for the entire family, and the easiest way to obtain apartments, education, and vehicles. Adrian Zenz (2014) found that Tibetan students in Xining not only desired secure government posts, but felt a great responsibility and desire to maintain Tibetan culture as well. The majority of my interviewees who had government jobs, whether as teachers or in other forms of government administration, balked at the official assurances that they must be secular and stop practicing religion. As one defiant worker told me: "Since am a civil servant (Ch. *gongwuyuan*) my religion is the Communist Party, but I am still a practicing Buddhist." Many continued to practice their religion in public, while others felt pressure to do so only in private. Ultimately, the prohibition on religious practice was seen as a sign of state discrimination. Even among elites, bans on religion, loss of native language, and the Hanification of Tibetan society were affronts that contributed to a near unity of intraethnic concern.

Even as they pursue posts, Tibetans remain ambivalent and resigned to the Party; they accept the pursuit of government work out of economic and social pressures, and a lack of strong private market alternatives. Furthermore, a general climate of confusion about how to get private market jobs, and the knowledge that they have fewer benefits than public work, spurs Tibetans to attempt to secure the government work that will allow them to attain a "peace of mind." Government work is the most lucrative among the variety of work available to urban Tibetans. The benefits provided by government work's economic gains outweigh the stigma attached to it in Tibetan communities. Furthermore, the stability of the work gives it a measure of prestige.

Tibetans leverage government work to help their kin, natal neighbors, and close friends. After rural and pastoral communes were dissolved in the 1980s, the Household Responsibility System led to private property regimes for both agriculturalists and pastoralists. In contemporary villages, land is divided between the villagers that own it, and pastoral land has been fenced and partitioned between families as well.[1]

During the recent push to develop China's west, many new programs have been put in place to subsidize Tibetans. These programs often involve resettlement or reconstruction of homes (Bauer and Yonten Nyima 2012). Typically, these programs target poorer populations first, giving them more money to build homes than wealthier villagers (Goldstein et al. 2010; Ptackova 2011). Tibetans I interviewed from farming communities in Huangnan, Hainan, and Xunhua Counties all knew about these programs, and were often actively involved in re-building homes. In order to get funds, they had to apply for approval from the county government, build the home, and then have it pass inspection, so that they could recuperate as much money as possible.

This money was dispensed at the household level rather than traditional forms of political community, formed along lines of village and kinship. In Xining I interviewed people from Huangnan and Xunhua who could identify their tribes (Tib. *tsho ba*), and would, on occasion,

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[1] In the past, large families were important to Tibetan societies both for agricultural or pastoral work, as well as for corvée labor. During the communal period large families could help them pool the points that improved living standards (Levine 1999). Today, large families can help families make money in different ways. Across Tibetan regions, family members increasingly venture into towns to make money as traditional foodstuffs can not only be harvested with less work that traditionally needed due to renting tractors, but have become less valuable in the market (Goldstein et al. 2008; Wang 2014). While livestock remains a valuable asset to be sold, it has lost its relative value against lucrative external skilled labor, or even caterpillar fungus (Wang 2014). Some nomads have sold off their herds because labor-intensive seasonal herding does not produce enough return value as the costs of hides and fur fall and competition from cheaper meat grows; a viable alternative in Golog has been caterpillar fungus picking (Sułek 2010).

render financial assistance to fellow members. Among nomads in Golog and Garze in Qinghai and Sichuan, respectively, historically households living in the same tent villages (Tib. *ru skor*) practiced a form of mutual aid in which neighboring households were dependent upon one another (Ekvall 1968). In recent years this form of social organization has declined, but among Golog the tribe still persists as a meaningful social unit (Levine n.d.). Most people I interviewed from farming areas were not able to identify a tribe, however, and were more likely to identify with a village (Tib. *sde wa*) or with relatives "of the flesh" or "of the home" (Tib. *sha mi, khyim mi*). One participant knew her tribe name but had little relation to them (Ch. *mei guanxi*) and spoke of their gatherings with disinterest. A woman from Nangqian indicated that her clan (Ch. *jiazu*) was more important and that known clan members would financially help one another, whereas lesser or unknown members (numbering two to three hundred) were only seen at annual events.

Some studies have reported formalized institutions of mutual aid among unrelated Tibetans living in urban environments. In a study of members of the "urban middle class" in cities along the Indian-Tibetan border, Beatrice Miller (1956) indicated two Tibetan organizations that bound people together for mutual aid: ganye (Tib. *dga' nye*) and kidu (Tib. *skyid sdug*). These forms of mutual aid functioned to transfer money to members in crisis, often to help pay the expensive religious fees that accompany family deaths. In an earlier period, these organizations were important for urban Tibetans because they could replace family relations that were strained by distance. Distance made communication, transportation, and the transfer of money difficult, as did the lack of easily available bank credit or government. There is a study of such a mutual aid institution in contemporary Bari village near Lhasa. In that village members of a kidu travel with each other on pilgrimages and help one another build houses (Tenzin Tsondre

2011). None of my participants in Xining explicitly acknowledged such systems of mutual aid in the context of purchasing apartments, although many did mention family friends that were of assistance.

In most cases there was no organized money exchange between members of a tribe or mutual aid group, whereas giving money to poorer parents, or receiving either direct financial aid or help buying cheaper apartments with the aid of a father, uncle, or siblings was common. By far the most important sources of money for younger Xining urbanites were from these family members or from bank loans.

Communication and transport is relatively easy in contemporary Qinghai Province, where tunnels and highways are continuously shortening distances and accommodating ever-growing numbers of vehicles. Xining Tibetans frequently travel between cities when there is a family crisis, and telephone communication is instantaneous and affordable with widespread cellular networks. Further, funds can be quickly transferred through banks' automatic cash machines and the social media app Wechat. For these reasons, families remain well connected and familial responsibilities can be met. It is in this context that government work and banks serve as sources of stability and money that enable urban Tibetans to not only help their own families, and in some cases tribes and villages, but also be less dependent on them for housing, transportation, and other pecuniary matters.[2]

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[2] The changes Tibetans are facing are reflected in Polanyi's (2001) arguments about the permeation of liberal ideologies into work and exchange. Reciprocation and householding is giving way to the marketization of labor and individualization of financial matters in the contemporary Chinese economy. Lending from Chinese banks are currently indebting local governments and private individuals throughout China, but it is yet to be seen whether failure to pay back debts will have long-term negative impacts on Tibetans. The return of debt, which the Chinese Revolution wiped away, could contribute to greater class disparity (see Graeber 2012). Many of the Tibetans I talked to had either repaid debts or were in the process of repaying them.

Before looking more closely at the work types of urban Tibetans and how they manage financial burdens in the city, I want to show that Tibetans are not only pushed towards the city by hard economic realities, but are pulled to it as well. Many Tibetans I met desired urban life because it was considered convenient and appealing. To a degree, they had had been enrolled in visions of a better, more modern life, that was promised in the city. They were chasing some form of the Chinese Dream (see Figure 5.1). In its essential formulation by Xi Jinping, the Chinese Dream is a bourgeois nationalist dream, promising material prosperity and a "national rejuvenation."



Figure 5.1 Chinese Dream Publicity.

A sign in a Muslim portion of the East District reads: "The China Dream. National Revival is My Dream. Amity of Nationalities Help Boost the Forward Leap of Development. Prospering and Strong, the awesome people." Photo by author.

In my interviews, I asked participants if they had ever heard of the Chinese Dream. For most people I interviewed, the "Chinese Dream" had a variety of meanings. Some claimed to have heard nothing of it, but often I would receive a laugh or wry smile, and be told it meant nothing. They scoffed at its unmistakable genesis in a Chinese publicity department. On the surface, the soft power of the Chinese Dream fell a bit flat, but its influence was still strong. Whether acknowledging the stated meaning of the Chinese Dream, or proposing a personal non-Chinese dream, participants pointed to fulfilling their own pursuits, aiding their families, and owning an apartment. While this was often complemented by the more distinctly Tibetan goal of Buddhist compassion for others, a desire to obtain the cyclical products of the consumer economy was also evident. This is the unmistakable domestic economic goal of the Xi Jinping's program.

Cities are sites where the consumer dream can be realized. Cities are hubs of the latest commodities, modern entertainment, fancy restaurants, and an emerging Tibetan urban culture. The city is also the best way to get the latest prestige goods, which can be kept for personal conspicuous consumption, sold, or given to friends and families in villages and pastoral regions. One of my friends, Trinley, described to me the first iPhone she got, which was purchased a few years before. Whereas in the past she would always hide her phone in public, so that no one would steal it, she started proudly using her phone on the public buses, so that people would see that she had a valuable phone. She acknowledged that these phones were a bad investment, devaluing greatly after several years, but the prestige that the latest phone brings is difficult to understate (see Figure 5.2). The phone is of significance because often it is the one of the most expensive items people own besides their apartment. I spent several days in a Labrang cellphone

shop where nearly all of the Tibetan customers came in to inquire about the handful of iPhones brought in from Lanzhou to be sold locally. Every time I've come to Xining from abroad I have been asked to bring back the latest iPhone, as models bought in China are often secondhand and perceived to be fake. In 2014, when the iPhone 6 came out, people rushed to buy it, and when the esteemed gold models ran out, gold stickers were put on other models to mimic it.



Figure 5.2 Luxury Labeling.

Apple logos on a Tibetan jacket for children. Photo by author.

Costs of apartments go beyond initial payment. A heightened sense of what constitutes high-quality and tasteful interior decoration is driving up costs of renovation. New apartments

typically come without any furnishings (see Figure 5.3). In earlier Xining housing stock, apartments are simple and often have one cold-water utility sink for kitchen and cleaning purposes, course tile floors, and Spartan bathrooms. Along with the modernization of buildings has come increased flexibility for home and water heating, and more ornate housing decoration. Right before new inhabitants would enter recently completed buildings, I would often notice large numbers of small trucks and vans with workers who wire electricity and install lights, carry up refrigerators and appliances, install cupboards, tile bathrooms, and paint interiors. One exemplary banner hanging from the side of a private mixed ethnicity housing complex in the East District of Xining revealed the latest trends in home customization: a water purifier, below-floor heating, and small water heaters for the kitchen sink. Private contractors are brought in, usually workers from Sichuan who can be found through home renovation companies, or at popular pick-up places, like near the East District bus station or the second hand goods and materials markets near the train station or at North Mountain market.

Figure 5.3 Home interior.

This home is in the process of remodeling, and its walls have not been completed. This is a Tibetan home and a kang, a type of bed, is being built by a Sichuanese wood worker. Photo by author.

Costs can also be kept low by purchasing furnishings from secondhand furniture and appliance stores, frequently run by Muslims and requiring hard bargaining to get good prices. These portions of the city, which dominated the furniture market when I first lived in Xining in 2007, have been slowly displaced by the spread of Chinese chains similar to Home Depot, such as Gome and Suning, which have spread throughout the country accompanying the boom in the housing market. In short, the increased pressure to purchase a new house has been accompanied by increased pressure to purchase higher-quality furnishings. The total price to purchase and decorate an apartment has gone up, as has the need to make or borrow money to do so.

The city is not only a source of more income for Tibetans, but it provides an environment of continuous encounter with the latest luxury goods and symbols of the Chinese consumer

society. Living in the city becomes an end in itself: an urban livelihood supports the obtainment of the modern consumer lifestyle. One the most reliable ways to obtain this urban lifestyle is to secure a reliable job in the public sector.

## III. Public Work

Employment in the public sector is desired because it is seen as more stable than private work and because government allows people to retire and gain more benefits. Family members with official work are often well positioned to help family members. In particular, civil servant (Ch. *gongwuyuan*) work is one of the most promising types. As one man who recently started work in a public security office in Xining explained to me:

> As a civil servant, the work is good and the salary is high. It is what I am trained for. Public enterprise (Ch. *Shiye danwei*) pays less. Compared to work in a public enterprise, civil servant you get your salary and insurance into old age, as well as a pension in old age. The civil servant work is really suitable and there is no stress (Tib. *sems 'khur*).

Government work nearly guarantees a steady stream of income, enabling government workers to help their parents, siblings, and children. In the past family members with government posts could leverage their positions to help their kin get government jobs. But this has become more difficult as competition for posts has increased. One of my friends attempted to leverage her family connections in order to secure a teaching job at a vocational college, but, despite multiple trips by family members from her home town to meet with administration at the school, she was unable to secure the post. She lost out to Han candidates and subsequently perceived an ethnic basis for discrimination.

A more dependable way that government posts can be used to help family members is through bank loans (Ch. *daikuan*). Getting loans are easier if you have government work because a client with a reliable source of income is a dependable one. I interviewed many young Tibetans who had passed the test for official work and taken up posts only within the last few years; they had already taken out loans to put towards apartments. Some participants had even used loans to purchase apartments which they then mortgaged to buy cars. Banks were fast becoming tools for credit-based expenditure. Long-term government workers also took out loans on behalf of family members, purchasing their apartments for them.

Tibetans would take out informal loans as well. One participant told me that she got the money for her apartment from a family friend. Despite qualifying for a loan as a lower-tier government office worker, she preferred a loan from a family friend (Tib. *dom*), over that from a bank, which she did not trust. Moreover, her family friend charged 2% interest due every month, which she said was a better rate than what the banks would charge.

Bank loans are not the only way government employees help themselves and family members get apartments. I was frequently told that government officials and civil servants obtain houses cheaper to begin with because they get preferential options on purchasing property at below-market prices when housing construction projects are completed. These deals could shave 10% or more off the list prices of apartments. This is usually the result of an exchange of favors between the development company and a government bureaucracy, members of which then circulate the cheaper apartments again to their connections in other governmental offices. Thus relationships (Ch. *guanxi*) can unite a broad network of government workers and family members in apartment deals. I lived in two different apartments while I lived in Xining, and one of them was purchased through a development deal. The apartment was the third home of a Han

government official. He had other units in Golog and Huzhu, which were subsidized through this government post. In addition to this surplus of apartments, he had two cars.

Another way government affiliations helped people get good deals was for a government unit to buy together several apartments constituting one unit (Ch. *danyuan*) or several floors of a unit in a building. They bought these apartments for considerably less per square meter, but were able to do so by purchasing in bulk. The buyers in these cases were typically the financial administrations (Ch. *caizheng*) of rural counties elsewhere in Qinghai. Although the apartments were ostensibly for retirees, they were often sold to connections or rented out.

The privileges that government work confers on Tibetans allows them not only to help their families, but to be mobile: they are more likely to be able to afford multiple apartments and a private car. Two married Tibetan teachers owned the second apartment in which I lived; the apartment was rented out to me while its owners rented and lived in a small apartment near their daughter's school in another part of Xining. They owned one car and also had a small apartment in Trika, their hometown. Their government work allowed them to own two apartments, turning the second into a source of income. I found this pattern of renting for income among several other government employees who either owned two apartments in Xining, rented their apartment while living with members of their extended family, or had a second house or apartment outside of Xining. Housing allotment or subsidy from government posts enabled them to be minor landlords.

*Stigma*

To be accused of landlordism was one of the great humiliations of the Maoist era, and was a mark that could be applied both to both the relatively wealthy agriculturalists (Ch. *dizhu*)

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(Spence 1991), and relatively wealthy herders (Ch. *muzhu*), a class status against which the Communist Party agitated pastoralist Tibetans and Mongolians to denounce (Weiner 2012; Bulag 2002: 119-121). Contemporary housing landlordism (Ch. *fangdong*) has not been stigmatized by the state, but the types of government work that most allow for landlordism and the purchase of multiple apartments often do carry a stigma of state collaboration. While positions as government officials (Ch. *guanyuan*) or civil servants are sought after and difficult to obtain, they are seen as necessary evils. Trinley's father was a civil servant who took the position in the 1970s, moving from Huangnan to Yushu. But he didn't like the work, as he had to "say things he didn't like to say, and do things he didn't like to do." I encountered several older Tibetans who either had been an officials or technically still were officials in rural Tibetan areas, but who disliked the work and the imperious nature of their superiors. Some had been able to either keep their pension or stay on the payroll as employees in those workplaces, then draw a second salary in less stigmatized government work, namely as a teacher or doctor, in Xining. The opportunity to get and retire from these more lucrative posts is increasingly rare, as the system for allotting government work has been slowly abolished over the last several decades (Zenz 2014: 133-4).[3]

People worried that government work contributed the Hanification of Tibetans and could even constitute a form of ethnic betrayal. One day when eating dumplings with my friend Sonam Jyid at one of Xining's colleges, I was told a curious story about an "ethnic scum" (Ch. *minzu de beilei;* Tib. *mi rigs kyi zhabs 'dren pa*). The story is most likely apocryphal, but is telling in its discussion of ethnic relations. A Tibetan student was fighting over course enrollment with a

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[3] Scholars have recently suggested that educated and urbanized Tibetans not only are also finding themselves in difficult economic positions because they must compete against Han Chinese (Zenz 2014; Fischer 2013: 275-284), but that many of them are unwilling to do work that is considered menial and socially beneath them (Fischer 2013: 311, 346).

higher-level office staff member. The worker was a Mongolian who was considered thoroughly Hanified and had a Chinese surname, Zheng. Their arguments grew more and more heated, and then the student called Mr. Zheng ethnic scum. This didn't alleviate the situation, and a third person then stepped in who was a Hanified Tibetan. The student also called her ethnic scum. The situation didn't improve, and then the student called Mr. Zheng a sheep, adding insult to injury. Incredibly the shouting died down after this, everyone dispersed, and things went on as normal, the issue presumably settled.

The scenario was offered as gossip by a regular teacher toward the Hanified office staff. This story, like many others I have heard from Tibetans, is a part of a general structure of dislike and distrust towards bureaucrats, who are seen as self-serving, proud, somewhat lazy, and exploitative of their underlings: in this case, teachers. What makes this story particularly of interest is that the teachers implicate Mr. Zheng and the Tibetan staff member as deserving of ethnic censure. They are cast as animals more than people, because they follow the commands of the Han-dominated bureaucracy rather than cooperate with their own people, interested more in their own careers than in commitment to their ethnicity.[4]

## IV. Private work

Tibetans own a variety of private businesses in Xining. Prior to 2013, the majority of Xining's trade in Tibetan goods was conducted near the train and bus stations in East District. The train station was the hub for regional trading, and had a dedicated and so-named "Tibetan market." This name was, however, misleading, as the market had many Muslim and Han traders,

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[4] Historically, the separation between government bureaucracy and regular Tibetan people has had explosive consequences, as can be noted in the Nyemo rebellion, in which a millenarian movement murdered local Tibetan cadres. Tsering Shakya (1999) has interpreted this as in part the result of anger over the devaluation of Tibetan traditions and ways of life by Chinese cadres and their Tibetan collaborators.

and many Tibetans rented their stalls from Muslims. In 2013 the old market was torn down as the entire area was reconstructed by urban planners in order to accommodate a rebuilt train station and establish newer commercial buildings.[5] In the years before the Tibetan market was torn down, its reputation had degraded, and the area became associated with dirt, crime, and hushed murmuring about Tibetan prostitution (see Figure 5.4).



Figure 5.4 A Tibetan Market.

The old Tibetan market in its final days, it was demolished in October of 2013. Photo by author.

Responding to the perceived decay of the area, the growing numbers of Tibetans living in other parts of the city, and to the expansion of the city itself, Tibetans began opening stores and restaurants in other places across the city. Tibetan products can be found in daily markets

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[5] As of the summer of 2015, the land where the old market was still under construction. The new train station opened in December 2014.

throughout the cities, and shop fronts have opened for regional luxury goods including art and caterpillar fungus. In response to the razing of the main Tibetan market, many Tibetan shopkeepers who were once located there have re-organized in a new market called Xiaoshangpin in order to more easily access their customers, who include both Xining Tibetans, and Tibetans from outlying regions.

Jigme Tenzin is a young shopkeeper. He is only 25 years old but runs his own business. Unlike many Tibetan shopkeepers, Jigme has an associate's degree in management from Nankai University in Tianjin. He felt that this degree gave him skills that many Tibetans, who are not accustomed to business, don't have; too often Tibetans sellers are not good at bargaining and lose money on their wares. This store he opened with money he made in private work after he graduated. In the future he hopes to open more stores so that he can promote more Tibetan language electronics, which he sees as a way of promoting Tibetan culture while turning a profit. He also brought his family members to town to do business with him. He lives near to market in a rented apartment with his uncle and three brothers (Tib. *spun zla*). Together they pay 1400 RMB a month to rent an apartment near to the market. This location was chosen for convenience and all of his neighbors are Chinese. He has his own car, which is used in his business.

His uncle runs a clothing store in the same building, and beyond his family members, they employ five young Tibetan girls who work in retail, all of whom were found over Wechat and originate from different parts of Qinghai Province. Jigme and his family used to have a store in the old market, but they came to Xiaoshangpin when their lease expired in 2012. Business has been good and he financially supports relatives and parents. He purchased a car without a loan. Although he likes the more open cultural climate in Xining, he would like to move back to Chab cha, but he doesn't think he could get enough business there.

Another shopkeeper in Xiaoshangpin came from Rebkong. Unlike Jigme, he had no college education at all. He originally started work at one of his uncle's Thangka painting shops in Rebkong. In 2013 another uncle gave him this shop to run. His uncle keeps another convenience store and cellphone shop in Xiaoshangpin, in addition to an apartment restaurant in the recently developed Kaifaqu area in the east of the city. They came over from the old Tibetan market with group of Tibetan business owners who signed new three-year contracts to open shops in this building. After moving in, however, the shop keepers weren't enthusiastic about the new location. Many people were grumbling about poor business. The old market was much better for business because the shops were all on one floor where people could easily stroll about. In comparison, this market was distributed over five floors and tucked away on a market street selling stoves. Recent construction on the train station had closed off the entry road, making it difficult to reach by either public bus or taxi. On the best days, usually during the summer, he reports making 10,000 RMB and on bad days, during the winter, 2000-3000 RMB. Although more people were finding out where the market was located, the still under construction Caojiasai market was seen as a more promising venture. They were hoping to move to that market, located near the Minorities University, once the structure was completed. His dream, which he distinguished from the Chinese Dream, was to continue this shop and expand it. Similar to Jigme, he saw his work as promoting Tibetan culture, and he hoped to open more Tibetan shops in the future.

Figure 5.5 Painted wood.

A shop selling Tibetan style decorations. Photo by author.

In contrast to the Tibetan-run businesses selling Tibetan goods, Xining also sports many Han run stores that sell Tibetan-styled goods, such as the wooden furnishing in Figure 5.5, which were being sold by Sichuanese traders in a market in Xining's North Mountain market. (Ch. *beishan shichang*). These practices met with universal opprobrium by Xining Tibetans. The Tibetans were not hesitant to purchase Chinese-style woodwork from the Chinese, but production of Tibetan style images and religious imagery touched a nerve. One of the reasons is that the Han are imagined to be stealing work from Tibetans. Profiting off the products and styles

associated with other ethnicities was common in Xining where capital can be extracted from products connected to Qinghai's regional image as an exotic Tibetan place. But it also manifested itself in less predictable ways. A Uighur baker confided in me that Hui Muslim men frequently stopped by his shop front and offered to pay him thousands of RMB if he would show them how to bake the Uighur naan bread. I even observed him scold a Hui man who lingered too long observing his technique. By the time I had left Xining I noticed an uptick in ersatz naan, flattened versions of the Hui breads.

*Restaurants and Foodstuffs*

Today Xining has a large number of Tibetan restaurants. Some are plainly visible to the eye, on the ground floor of well-trodden streets or residential walkways, others are hidden away in hard-to-locate apartment units in residential complexes. These apartment restaurants fascinated me after I first visited one in 2009. Prior to that time, all of the Tibetan restaurants in Xining I was aware of were located near the train station. I met Lhamo Tso for an interview after I had visited her restaurant in a high-rise in the Central District several times. She rented in the West District of the city with her mother, husband, and son. She came to Xining but found it hard to find anything besides low-paying unskilled labor. Rather than return to her farming area in Hainan Prefecture, she gathered money from older family members and bought an apartment. She converted this apartment to a restaurant. The apartment restaurant purchased for 2000 RMB a square meter in 2007 for a price in the mid 200,000s RMB, which was paid for entirely through a bank loan secured by her aunt, who has government work. Her uncle did all of the woodwork for the restaurant, which is subdivided into separated opaque stalls. The restaurant is popular with Tibetans and a growing number of Chinese customers, yielding them a net annual profit of

240,000 RMB. She has been able to save 200 RMB per day and over 70,000 RMB a year, which she is putting towards purchasing her own apartment. Things were going so well that they often don't have enough seats and have to turn customers away. Her family then decided to open a second restaurant. This restaurant opened in 2014 and cost much more to buy: nearly 5800 RMB per square meter for a total of 700,000 RMB, the cost paid for in part by a bank loan and in part through profits. The growth of restaurants like this one is a direct response to the growing numbers of Tibetans living in and visiting Xining City, and their demand for Tibetan places to eat and socialize in.

As the Tibetan population of Xining has grown, vendors have started selling Tibetan food staples all around the city. Every morning, the street below my second Xining apartment was converted into a teeming market, which would disappear shortly before noon. No matter the weather or the season, the street would fill with vegetable, fruit, meat, seafood, clothing, and appliance hawkers. In this market were three Tibetans vendors, all specializing in breads. I got to know one vendor from a village outside of Rebkong; she lived in a small apartment with her husband, children, and older sister. They rented their apartment as well as a nearby store, where the sister baked bread in two large ovens while the vendor and her husband traveled around the city selling the bread. Like bakers the world over, the sister kept a cot in the store and woke up at 2 am every morning to bake 300 breads, one third large and two thirds of small size, selling the large breads for 10 RMB and small ones for 5 RMB. Despite unsold bread, they manage to make several thousand RMB a day selling the bread as well as the others as staples of tsampa, butter, and Zeku yoghurt.[6]

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[6] I heard some criticism of these breads from Tibetans. Whereas Rebkong breads (Tib. *reb kong go re* or *go re sna gcu*) are traditionally baked in earthen ovens, these breads are baked in iron molds in gas food service ovens, leading to the accusation that they are both less authentic, and suspicions that they may have the same adulterations that are

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The Muslims of China's northwest, including the Hui and the Salar, have famously profited from the food trade. They travel throughout the country practicing their noodle pulling craft (Lipman 2004: 32). Recently Qinghai Muslims from the adjacent regions of Hualong and Xunhua Counties have been criticized in a national media outlet for selling incorrectly branded noodles across the country. The peoples of these "hand-pulled noodle counties" (Ch. *lamianxian*) are accused of selling Qinghai pulled noodles under the name of Lanzhou pulled noodles (Zhang 2015), a dubious distinction that betrays frictions over regional branding. Xunhua is a Salar nationality autonomous region, and Salar noodle shops are found all over Xining, among whose residents Salar business savvy is renowned. I interviewed several Salar including a man in his 50s named He Wenge. He had spent a lifetime traveling and plying various trades. He began as one of a handful of Muslim restaurant operators in Lhasa in the early 1990s, where he worked with his family. As competition there increased, they moved their business to Chamdo, Kangmar, and other towns in Tibet, where they plied whatever trade was profitable in that locale: opening noodle shops, clothing stores, and selling cushions for horse saddles. Ultimately none of these ventures turned stable profits, and his family returned to Qinghai. He went to Deqin, a Tibetan region in northern Yunnan Province, and he met a Bai woman whom he married. They had two daughters, but they split up after she faced pressure to convert to Islam. Taking one of the daughters, he moved to Zhongdian (today known as Shangri-la), another Tibetan area of Yunnan, and married a Tibetan wife.

Eventually he returned to Qinghai and re-entered the restaurant business with his family in Xining. As the city has experienced booming growth over the past decade, his family has opened five stores and restaurants. Their ability to do this was tied to the rising value of real

widely suspected to be found in other urban food products. Nevertheless, Tibetans and non-Tibetans eagerly buy these breads.

estate in certain parts of the city. He claimed that an early investment in a location that had become a popular shopping district proved valuable, and the family was able to sell a restaurant there for fifty times the original investment. They used this money to open more businesses. All of the management and kitchen chefs are family; the service staff and his sisters' husbands are the only workers that are not of blood relation. All eight of his brothers and sisters, and many of their children, work in their restaurants. All of the money is given to his mother, who then apportions it to the family members. The strategy has worked well and he has two apartments, including one for his son.

In sum, stores and restaurants catering to Xining's ethnic minorities are more prevalent than ever. While some of these business people are leveraging family members with government work, most of them are dependent on the market, which shifts in its location and nature depending on both where customers are living and on Xining' growth and redevelopment. Overall, among Tibetans I found many more renters among Tibetans engaged in private business than in government work. This is especially true among private business employees, such as Jigme's five shop workers.

## V. Pastoralist Patterns

Most of the Tibetans discussed above have come to Xining from farming areas. Many Tibetans from nomadic areas are also purchasing apartments in Xining. Some of them purchase their homes with government connections, while others use money they have made through the sale of profitable luxury items to buy their houses. Like the participants discussed above, these Tibetans are living in Xining to take advantage of its opportunities in education, business, and the accessibility to contemporary goods and services the city affords. Pastoralist arrivals in the

city have relied on family and friends to help them get their apartments, but their economic dependence on difficult to control markets makes their lifestyle more precarious than those with government work.

I would often hear that people came to live in Xining from nomadic areas in order to escape the harsh winters in the higher-altitude nomadic areas, such as the grasslands of Yushu, Golog, or Qinghai Lake. But these seasonal migration patterns shifted depending on the growing housing stock of the county towns in those areas. Although I was told that fewer and fewer nomads were coming to Xining because of increasing stocks of heated housing in those places, I still encountered many nomads wintering in Xining, where I spent the New Year holiday season of 2014. The cold, dry months of January and February were marked not only by jarring reports of chains of fire crackers, but also by increasing numbers of Tibetans that told me they had come for the New Year. One Nangqian home-owner in Xining told me that the differences in home heating rates were negligible:

> The payment for heat in the winter is the same in Nangqian County town. If we were there we
> would also have to buy coal to keep the room warm, so the payment is the same. Our parents are
> still in Yushu. They don't like to stay in this apartment all day. Because we don't have any stupas
> or temples to circulate around, they don't like to come to Xining. If we had such places, they
> would perhaps want to stay in Xining.

The decision to come to Xining was more closely related to family networks and the availability of religious structures, which is discussed at length in chapter six, than to other comforts. The nomads I did find living permanently in Xining were engaged in business or at

school. Before discussing two cases of nomads and their families, I will discuss the source of their income and a give a case of a nomad who does not live in Xining.

The most common and most lucrative product discussed by the nomads I met was caterpillar fungus (Ch. *chongcao*, Tib. *dbyar rtswa dgun 'bu*), which is a valuable commodity that is found in highland grasslands. These highlands also produce other marketable products such as rare edible mushrooms. These products are distinguished by their rarity and their ability to bring riches to pastoralists that harvest them from the grasslands. While caterpillar fungus has been a hot commodity for years, amber (Ch. *mila*) is seen as a hot commodity and is popularly sold to tourists in 108-bead rosaries or large-beaded wrist bracelets. Whereas caterpillar fungus is typically found sticking out of the soil surface, from which it is dug out, amber has circulated as jewelry for generations in Tibetan areas and now has new value in the national market.

Yet caterpillar fungus remains the most lucrative good for nomads. It generates money for pastoralists in three different ways: by digging it up oneself, by renting out land and allowing others to harvest and sell what they find, or by renting out land, typically to Tibetans or Muslims, who in turn contract a third party to harvest the fungus for them. In some nomadic areas, such as in Yushu, schools may take a holiday in the spring so that children can assist in a family's caterpillar fungus harvest. This is the most direct way to make money, but requires a large investment of time and the need to bring the fungus to market and negotiate for a price. Renting out land brings money more quickly and easily, but allows less control over what is found, such as an unexpected bumper harvest.

I would often meet Tibetans in Xining that were selling caterpillar fungus. I met one man from Haibei Prefecture, located northwest of Qinghai Lake, on the regular bus (as opposed to the 10 RMB more expensive "fast" line) from Xining to Lanzhou City in Gansu Province. He was

travelling with six of his family members, all of whom were also on the bus. These nomads were preparing to spend three days in a hotel in Lanzhou, where they planned to sell several kilograms of caterpillar fungus for 30-50 RMB per gram. The man was 55 years old and had 50 sheep and 100 cattle in his home area. While he seemed satisfied with his business venture, many urban Tibetans criticized nomadic fungus sellers for their ignorance of the market. They got bad deals when they sold their fungus to traders, usually described as untrustworthy Muslims. The nomads also squandered most of the money they made during their sojourns in the city. They wasted money on overpriced hotel rooms, purchased fake electronics, and were even notorious for squandering money on poor quality trucks, such as those of the Chang'An brand, which are priced starting around 30,000 RMB.

But the nomads I met who permanently lived in Xining were very different from the figure of the honest nomad, innocent of urban guile and liable to be fooled, that circulates among Xining's urban Tibetans. I interviewed a Yushu man named Lobsang who lived in Yushu New Village in the West District but traveled to Xining's East District everyday to work in his caterpillar fungus business. He argued that the current focus of the market is the Muslim businessman who serve as middlemen between grassland harvesters and the larger companies that repackage the fungus, advertise, and distribute it. Because Tibetans like him feel that they are either being cheated by Muslim middlemen or are in competition with them for business, he and other Tibetans caterpillar fungus businessman were planning to open a new market near the Small Bridge (Ch. *xiaoqiao*) area of Xining's North District that would be centered on Tibetan businessmen. These won't be the first Tibetan-run caterpillar fungus businesses, but this reveals a growing ethnic consciousness around the caterpillar fungus, and a naturalization of the fungus as a product that growing in Tibetan lands, should belong to Tibetan people.

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Lobsang got his apartment through a friend who worked for the Yushu county government, which paid to build the apartments. His apartment was obtained at the lowest rate I encountered in my interviews, paying only 1050 RMB per square meter for a 125 square meter apartment for a total of 131,250 RMB. They paid 70,000 RMB up front and then took out a bank loan, on which they paid 10,800 RMB per year for ten years. Some of the money from the loan they put towards interior decoration, which was done by Sichuanese woodworkers. Bank loan money also went to help pay for the 2000 RMB tuition surcharge for their daughters' Xining education; this fee (Ch. *jiedufei*) is levied on residents without a Xining *hukou*.

The money to pay off the bank loan came from three sources. Lobsang's wife pulled a salary as a Yushu veterinarian even though she was for all practical purposes retired. Lobsang was himself still on the books for a state-operated salt factory in Yushu, but the primary source of Lobsang's money came from selling caterpillar fungus. This income allowed him to indulge in his passions, freeing animals for merit (Tib. *tshe thar*), and contributing financially to a school that teaches Tibetan to elementary school-aged Tibetans in Xining, such as his three daughters. He was also assisting children in his extended family. Besides his own daughters, his wife's younger brother's son, and wife's younger sister's son were also living with them and attending school.

Another participant was a Yushu nomad named Phuntsok. He was in his late 20s and lived in a Xining apartment that his father had purchased. He bought a medium-sized unit of 115 square meters for 805,000 RMB at a rate of 7000 per square meter. The money for the apartment came from caterpillar fungus. His father had initiated a fungus selling business in which he and his older brother helped. He lived alone in Xining while his two sisters and mother cared for his father in a Chengdu hospital. Caterpillar fungus could be a lucrative business, but its profitability

was highly unstable. Phunstok said that in a good year they earned as much as 100,000 RMB, and during bad years as little as 50,000 RMB. Bad times include the financial crash of 2008 (remembered as the worst year) and the recent anti-corruption campaign, which has limited government offices and officials in buying expensive luxury items. The best times he could remember were the years 2010-2012, between China's stimulus-instigated economic rebound and the assumption of Xi Jinping.

While the current outlook for caterpillar fungus was not great, Phuntsok's life was clearly quite good. He had the latest iPhone model, a Hyundai car, and a degree in Tibetan Literature from a regional Nationalties' University. His dream was to go abroad to study Tibetan Buddhism in Dharamsala. Unlike the trader who travelled to Xining and Lanzhou to sell his self-picked fungus, or the wealthier man who wanted to establish a more fungus selling business in Xining, Phuntsok and his family actually had Chinese friends from Chengdu, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen come all the way to his Nangqian home during the summer to purchase their fungus. In fact, the family had built a hotel in Nangqian County town with the money they had made, establishing yet another source of income.

In conclusion, these nomads use Xining both as a place to sell valuable caterpillar fungus and establish homes. Purchased apartments are often paid for using caterpillar fungus, but some Tibetans leverage family connections, especially those living in units affiliated with county governments beyond Xining.


## VI. Conclusion

Urban Tibetans pursue their livelihoods in different ways; each way has its own typical outcome. Work type has a direct impact on apartment ownership, income stability, and degree

and sort of aid rendered to family members and friends. Furthermore, some Tibetans dwell permanently in the city, while others visit the city to trade or procure contract work. Government workers find purchasing one, or even multiple, apartments easier because they can get preferential access to low priced apartments, obtain loans, and help their relations get housing through these means. The benefits of government work in the booming Xining economy outweigh the social stigma associated with government affiliation, even if gossip about "ethnic scum" circulates.

Owning a business in Xining is considered prestigious, and, despite anxiety over competition, owners are optimistic about their economic futures. Business owners are finding that sustaining businesses in their home areas is difficult due to the insufficient size or saturation of the market in those places. They are finding Xining a superior place to do business as a large, if seasonal, market. As a result, Xining's bread shops, yoghurt vendors, apartment restaurants, and Tibetan markets are growing in number and size. Those engaged in private businesses that have yet to flourish are likely to be renting. For others Xining is the source of contract work that is connected to a construction boom. Because such work is so closely tied to government infrastructure expenditure, their employment, and the lives of those who carry out the contract work, is precarious.

Erstwhile pastoralists are also in an uncertain position. Even those that have purchased apartments and are turning good business are dependent on an unstable economy of luxury good sales. That market is sensitive to changes in taste, the government anti-corruption campaign, and the natural depletion of the goods they sell.

What is most clear is that Tibetans in Xining are maintaining their connections to family members and neighbors from their home areas. These contacts maintain an intraethnic

community connected through family, natal home, workplace, and social media applications (which are discussed further in chapter seven). While Tibetans come to Xining to pursue both livelihood income and their variants of the China Dream, they are on guard against assimilation. They are well aware of the ethnic dimensions of labor, whether in competition against Han for public sector work, or against Hui in some forms of private work. The maturity of the frontier economy will bear out whether Xining and eastern Qinghai will come to resemble a place like Hechter's internal colony or whether a more equitable future can emerge. The next chapter will explore Tibetans' imaginings of the city and the districts within it. The process of urbanization is leading Tibetans to strategize where they live and travel to in order to maintain Tibetanness and prevent Hanification. Young Tibetans in particular have to navigate their urban environments and the countryside as they seek out urban Tibetan identities.

# Chapter 6. Abject Urbanization and the Cultural Reservoir

## I. Introduction

This chapter argues for a tripartite model of Tibetans' geographical understanding of the city; the urban experience is best understood in its negotiation of three imagined places: the good city, the abject city, and the cultural reservoir. In chapter five I established the sorts of work that Tibetans pursue in Xining. Urban dwelling Tibetans frequently cite education and employment as key motivators in their decision to move to Xining City. Tibetans with high incomes and bank loans find new apartments in recently renovated parts of the city, pursuing an urban life that will bring them and their families comfort and happiness, in essence the good life in the good city. But young urban Tibetans that have children or are planning to have children have been faced with the reality of raising those children in a place that has few characteristics of their home areas: few Tibetan language signs, few religious institutions, and a lack of Tibetan-centered education. In response to this, Tibetans have had to rethink their relationship to their home area, turning it into what I call a "cultural reservoir." These places have come to seen as sources of Tibetan language education and Tibetan values that can be tapped to maintain Tibetanness in the face of the increasing threat of Hanification (Ch. *hanhua*). Urban dwellers strategically leverage these sites of "Tibetanness" even as they admit preferring the conveniences of higher quality education that the city affords.

A driving force behind the "reservoirization" of Tibetan places is the growing prominence of representations of the city as a corrupting and Hanified place. The city becomes a

place of objectionable influences in relation to the countryside. Scholars have long written of the tendency of new urban migrants, or a culture undergoing a period of urbanization, to romanticize the place whence they come. Raymond Williams (1975), in his study of the countryside and the city in England, discussed the perpetual tendency to romanticize past forms of rural social organization. The countryside was romanticized, and the corrupting city became the foil against which the passing golden age was counterpoised. This cultural tendency obscured the hardships and inequalities that accompanied rural forms of social organization, which were themselves dynamic.

Robert Park described how the movement from stronger "primary relationships" in migrant peasants' home regions to an urban society characterized by weaker "secondary relationships" resulted in the emergence of "sentimental attitudes." These sentiments often conflicted with migrants' objective interests in the city, leading them to hold on to primary connections and habits (Park et al. 1984). While the increased mobility that marks eastern Qinghai and many parts of the world alleviates such a stark dichotomy between "primary" and "secondary" connections for Xining migrants, the ethnicized character of Xining Tibetans' struggle between their desire to maintain Tibetanness and their pursuit of goals in the Hanified city contributes both to a romanticization of the Tibetan countryside and to the practical pursuit of tapping the countryside as a cultural reservoir to reach the goal of maintaining Tibetan linguistic and behavioral characteristics.

The future of Tibetans and Tibetanness wrests on the negotiation of identity, a negotiation between preserving Tibetan culture and adopting the qualities of contemporary cosmopolitan urban inhabitants. Following Frank Billé's (2015) discussion of Sinophobia in Mongolia, I argue that rather than defining themselves only against an ethnic Other, Tibetans'

geographic discourse about the urban and the rural expresses their own fears, encouraged by dominant state discourse, about being an uncivilized people. Working from the psychological theories of Lacan, Žižek, and others, Billé argues that urban Mongolians work to expel the unassimilable petit object a(utre) which is the constitutive principle that orders the Mongolian ego. What this means is that Mongolians work to preserve their Mongolianness by patrolling the parts of themselves that are both influenced by, and want and desire, the Chinese. He cites the example of Mongolian nationalists sharing online shaming videos in which Mongolian women who are suspected of liaisons with Han men have their hair cut. This activity not only shames women in to being sexually loyal Mongolians, but reveals Chinese desires for Mongolia.

The Tibetan case is not nearly as extreme, but I found that young urban Tibetans both desired to maintain their Tibetanness and struggled to embrace contemporary urbanism that is both global and cosmopolitan, yet clearly dominated by the Han. This is especially difficult because widespread civilizational discourse in contemporary China stigmatizes rural regions, ethnic minority regions in particular, as backwards and lacking in quality (Ch. *suzhi*). Caught up in this pervasive civilizational discourse, young Tibetans imagine abject urbanization, which is linked to dirt, low levels of culture, the presence of selfish Han and Muslims, and old infrastructure.[1] Rather than simply disparaging the city as a uniquely Han modern environment, the location and quality of urbanity is important. A desire to expel the abjected city organizes Tibetans' dual pursuit of modern urbanity and cultural preservation.

In the follow sections, I highlight three threads that were prominent in my interviews and discussions. First, I emphasize that there is a strong sense of comfortable urbanization that young

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[1] My notion of the abject is drawn from Judith Butler's (1993) discussion of abjection in creating gendered subjects. I consider these portions of the city "abject" because, for both state discourse and my participants, they are excluded from the dominant representation of the good and civilized city. Furthermore, abject urbanization includes bodies that are excluded from the dominant, more technically and socially advanced bodies – those of Han subjects.

Tibetans aspire towards. Second, this sort of urbanization can be contrasted with less desirable, abject urban sites. Tibetans make distinctions within and between Xining City's neighborhoods, locating places connected to notions of dirt, danger, and low quality. There is a fear that the urban environment has corrosive effects on Tibetans' *sems*, the seat of emotional health, ethical character, and embodied dispositions. The city also inhibits the study and practice of the Tibetan language. Finally, I show how the Tibetan countryside is imagined as a cultural reservoir to resist the corruption and Hanification of cities. Bodily dispositions and morals cultivated in rural and pastoral countryside areas are seen as a crucial way to shore up Tibetan culture.

## II. Imagining The City

Xining City itself is composed of four urban districts and three counties. This chapter focuses on the city districts themselves, collectively named *Xiningshiqu*, leaving aside the three counties, which are less urbanized and generally are not part of urban Tibetans' imaginary of "Xining City" (see Figure 6.1).
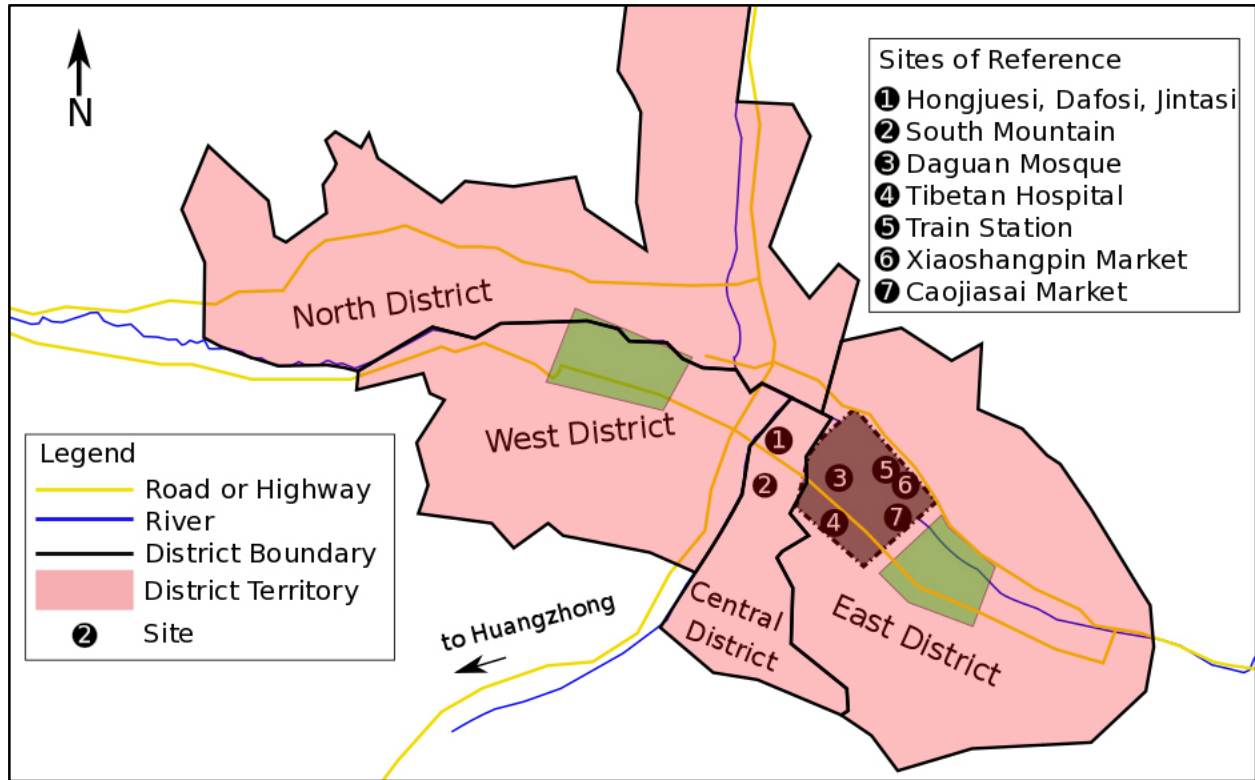
Figure 6.1 Map of Xining's districts.

Xining's four urban districts are shown in pink. The more developed and desired Lake District (on the left) and Economic Development District (on the right) are shown in green, and the stigmatized, densely Muslim, quarter of the East District is shown in brown. Map by author.

Tibetans often expressed their desire to live in West or South district, the latter of which, while not officially a district, is popularly called a district and may be roughly demarcated as the portion of Central District west and south of Nanshan Park. These areas are frequently described using the same words: they are peaceful, green, and more convenient for access to goods and services. Terms for convenient (Ch. *fangbian,* Tib. *stbas bde*) were used to describe what were essentially the most modern aspects of Xining: new restaurants, less chaotic roads, less cluttered pedestrian walkways, and access to the best goods imported from other provinces. One of the most desired districts is among the newest in Xining, called Lake District (Ch. *Haihu Xinqu*). The book *The Story of West District* well encapsulates the image of Lake District, as promoted

by the municipal government and developers. The text of the book is a series of short essays mixed with flattering photos of the area. In a section playfully titled "The Mysterious Frontier (Ch. *mijing*) of the Concrete Forest," the author waxes:

> Green symbolizes life and calls forth wishes. It makes a city verdant and brimming with life. … Lake District was planned and constructed to weave together this "green" hope. … Live and work in peace and contentment in the best housing area. With the economic development boom, West District has dedicated itself to perfecting social wellbeing. … Prioritizing the strategy of developing education and further deepening *suzhi* education. (Sun 2012: 172)

Peaceful and green were ideas linked to the newer housing projects in Xining City, which often boast large outdoor amenities like flower gardens, gazebos, and squares for dancing. These were the places where Tibetans most wanted to buy homes. Here there is a convergence with the lifestyles promoted by developers and contemporary middle class commercialism found throughout China. As one participant told me, echoing the national fantasy, "I think all girls want to have a husband who owns an apartment and a car. That is a stable family."

For younger Tibetans it was most important to get an apartment that was convenient, peaceful, and in a green area, and as commodious as possible for a reasonable price. One Nangqian Tibetan voiced concerns about their housing choice to me in a way similar to many of the aspiring Han middle-class:

> My neighbors in Xining are Han and there are no Tibetan neighbors that I have seen. I don't talk to my neighbors. The reason I want to move to Shangri-la Housing Complex [a modern housing complex name after the James Hilton-derived place] is not for Tibetan neighbors but because of the environment (Tib. *'khor yug*). the environment should be big and clean.

While my participants expressed an interest in living among other Tibetans, it was typically of secondary concern. Living in a nice environment and obtaining a commodious apartment in a new building were more important.

While a large number of urban Tibetans had received subsidized apartments through government coordination, typically when a work unit purchased a cluster of housing units in Xining at a discount, many located their apartments through websites or through one of the ubiquitous pasted announcement throughout the city (see Figure 6.2). One young mother told me how that she set out to find her West District home one morning on a bicycle ride. She found a flyer, called the number, and later, with the aid of her husband and family, purchased the apartment.

Figure 6.2 Browsing Potential Homes.

A wall of notifications for apartments to rent or purchase. Photo by author.

In distinction to West and South Districts, East District was criticized as a dirty and dangerous place. This is despite the facts that Tibetans frequently visited the East District Tibetan market *Xiaoshangpin*, which was the largest such market between the summers of 2013 and 2015, and that a new district called "Economic Development District" (Ch. *jingji kaifa qu*) has been added to the East District administration region. That region is seen in a positive light, but the label of East District continues to carry a stain of negative association. Since the time of the Ming Dynasty, Xining City's East District has contained a concentration of Muslim homes, businesses, and mosques (Gaubatz 1996: 59). The location of the city's central train station and, the city's largest bus terminal on Bayi Lu, which serves Tibetan and Muslim populated villages and grasslands, has made it a hub for regional travel and trade. While this portion of the city

contains a large number of Xining's Muslim Hui and Salar nationalities, it also hosts a

significant proportion of Tibetans and Han, as is reflected in Figure 6.3.

| Division | Total | Han | Tibetan | Hui | Tu | Salar | Mongolian | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| District | | | | | | | | |
| East | 374867 | 231478 | 10578 | 116985 | 3282 | 6167 | 1886 | 4491 |
| Central | 305495 | 270731 | 12380 | 14641 | 2804 | 862 | 1624 | 2453 |
| West | 250465 | 218961 | 10640 | 13335 | 2752 | 861 | 1636 | 2280 |
| North | 308268 | 278452 | 8395 | 13700 | 2827 | 611 | 1584 | 2699 |
| All Districts | 1239095 | 999622 | 41993 | 158661 | 11665 | 8501 | 6730 | 11923 |
| County | | | | | | | | |
| Datong | 442387 | 231792 | 28420 | 131523 | 44989 | 164 | 4724 | 775 |
| Huangzhong | 447775 | 328407 | 40496 | 76094 | 1499 | 82 | 671 | 526 |
| Huangyuan | 138334 | 119673 | 13597 | 2471 | 445 | 82 | 1903 | 163 |
| Entire City | 2267591 | 1679494 | 124506 | 368749 | 58598 | 8829 | 14028 | 13387 |

Figure 6.3 Distribution of Xining's Ethnic Population in 2013.

Datong County (Ch. *Datongxian*), Huangzhong County (Ch. *Huangzhongxian*), and Huangyuan County (Ch. *Huangyuanxian*) are all under the jurisdiction of Xining City but geographically removed from its central districts. Source: Xining tong ji nian jian 2014: 50-51.

The majority of Tibetans I interviewed held that in East District the streets and food were

dirty (Tib. *mi gtsang gi*), and that East District was a place filled with thieves (Tib. *rku ma*).

These were views held not only by the Tibetans living outside of the district, but of some

Tibetans living or working there as well. This view can be juxtaposed with those of the Muslims

I interviewed, who described the areas as comfortable and convenient because of its many

mosques and halal restaurants. Tibetans mentioned stories of deceitful (Ch. *jiaohua*) Muslims,[2]

thieving fake monks, and kidnappings. As one participant told me:

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[2] Prejudices against Muslims in this regard, though very widespread among Tibetans, were most prevalent among Tibetans from Xunhua, who frequently refer to all Muslims as "Salar" which is a Turkic-speaking Muslim group with relatively small numbers in Xining. This can largely be explained through the contentious history of the Xunhua region, which has been a center of many historical Muslim rebellions in northwest China (Lipman 1997). It can also be connected to current conditions in Xunhua, an area that is majority Salar. Xunhua Muslims have a strong

Almost all Muslims are the same, while there are some good Muslims, most Muslims would do anything for profit, even kill their own family members. The religion itself is good, but Muslims are not following their religion.

As the next section will explore, it is the sordid quality of the East District that brings to bear both the need for urban Tibetans to gain success and a comfortable lifestyle in better parts of the city, and which encourages them to seek out the edifying effects of cultural reservoirs for their children.

## III. Corrupting Effects of the City

Negative aspects of the city were often expressed through criticisms of the low quality of the people living in East District and other smaller pockets of disrepute. Their low quality found expression in the collective behaviors that could be found in those parts of the urban environment. My participants frequently deployed the concept of *suzhi,* a prominent trope in contemporary China, to explain the poor behaviors of urban inhabitants. *Suzhi* is roughly translated as "quality" and is a quantum that exists on a relative scale of high to low, or can be in complete lack (Ch. *meiyou suzhi*). During my interviews, the term was often used along with the Chinese term for culture (Ch. *wenhua*). In the eyes of many educated or long-term urban dwellers, lack of *suzhi* or culture is a distinguishing characteristic of the recent rural migrants that populate Xining, in particular of Han and Muslim arrivals. Discussions of *suzhi* often evolved into discussions about the corrupting potential of city life. A Tibetan term was used as

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local stigma connected to their alleged keeping of underground gun factories. On the other hand, Yushu Tibetans, in particular those from the nomadic area of Nangqên, were less likely to mention Muslims.

well: the city was a place that damaged *sems*. The term *sems* is translated as mind or as heart, but is also seen as dominant to and exercising influence over the body (Janes 1995: 10). In Tibetan Buddhism, the mind and the ego are bound to *sems* and are susceptible to attachment to material things, greed, and desire (Yeh 2013a: 173). In the reform era, afflictions of the *sems* have been linked both to bodily illness (Janes 1995) and perceptions of unhappiness (Yeh 2013a).

While people from the countryside may be seen to lack *suzhi*, contemporary education encourages it through a program that stresses moral, physical, intellectual, and aesthetic cultivation with the guide of state ideology (Brownell 2009). Ann Anagnost has linked *suzhi* to consumer culture and the Chinese middle class. Obtaining greater "quality" is a desire inscribed within the minds of those seeking to ascend the socio-economic ladder in China today. Anagnost sees this as part of shifting economic structure:

> S*uzhi* is what defines the middle-class family as a theater of neoliberal subject production through the project of building quality into the child. At the same time, the desire for acquiring *suzhi* is what lures the migrant laborer to the city as an escape from rurality. (Anagnost 2004: 192)

While *suzhi* has become an analytical point in the study of emerging class relations and class aspirations in modern China, it remains a discussion largely focused on the Han ethnicity. Two recent exceptions have been in works by Emily Yeh and Chris Vasantkumar. Yeh looks at the notion of *suzhi* among Lhasa Tibetans and their understandings of it vis-à-vis their own bodies and the bodies of migrants from inland China. Yeh found that her participants would contrast the work ethic and consumption desires of the Han migrants with the Tibetan term *sems* to illustrate how Tibetans did not value material gains to the same extent as the Han and so did not labor as hard.

It posits a very different regime of value in relation to labor than does the dominant national value-coding of *suzhi*, which positions Tibetans at the bottom of a hierarchy of worthiness because of their purported inability to cultivate themselves the desire and capacity for greater productivity and accumulation. (Yeh 2013a: 173)

Chris Vasantkumar (2014) found that *suzhi* was deployed in Labrang not only to describe ethnic difference, but also to code subtle differences in education, place of origin, and employment among Tibetans and Han. In my own research, I found that aspiring young Tibetans would frequently relate the city of Xining as a place whose population had low *suzhi*. Indeed, the city often seemed to be the embodiment of low *suzhi*. Instead of the terms *suzhi* and *sems* being opposed to each other, they became conceptually blended. Tibetans desired high *suzhi* and material goods, as well as the maintenance of a healthy *sems*. The biggest threat in the city to *sems,* and a sign of low *suzhi,* was selfishness. As one participant explained:

Xining people's *suzhi* is much lower than that of people in my hometown. People in Xining are reckless in their pursuit of even the smallest gain (Ch. *yi dian liyi*). For example, if you give a Xining person an envelope to carry, they will tear it open. But people from my home would certainly take the envelope right to you, and not open it on the street. So in Xining if we have many "friends," they don't trust us, and we also don't trust them. But at home we would knock on their doors every day!

The city weighed heavily on people's *sems*. Some characterizations used were the lack of a centered *sems* (Tib. *sems la thugs med)*, *sems* is unsettled (Tib. *sems mi bdi gi*), *sems* is burdened or stressed (Tib. s*ems khur che gi*) and *sems* is polluted (Tib. *sems de la gnod ba yod*).

Encounters with low *suzhi* was bad for *sems* and made Tibetans compare the city unfavorably to the countryside. Interviewees would balk at the idea of Xining as a civilizational city (Ch: *wenming chengshi*) as promoted on city, district, and neighborhood level publicity (Ch. *xuanchuan*) posters. [3] I recorded many reasons why people lacked *suzhi*: spitting, public urination, jay-walking, general rudeness, etc. Low *suzhi* was frequently connected to Muslims or Han from the inland China.

> Xining is not a civilized (Ch. *wenming*) city, especially Salar (Muslims) and Han are not civilized. A lot of people do not have benevolent (Ch. *cishan*) hearts and are very selfish (Ch. *zisi*). No one in our home area would do you wrong, so we don't feel Xining is a civilized city. Among Xining Tibetans there are also some bad Tibetans, but maybe because we are Tibetan, we don't think Tibetan people are as bad as Han or Muslims.

The behavior of Han was also linked to rudeness and low quality, as they were seen as rowdy, pursuing petty profit, and even disrespectful to Tibetan culture. The Tibetan restaurateur Lhamo Tso told me that although many of her customers became drunk and boisterous, she found it hardest to forgive the Han customers. She seemed genuinely pained by this admission. Curiously, while Han from the inner provinces brought low quality to Xining, interviewees who had been to other inland cities, from Beijing to Chengdu, ranked those cities much higher than Xining in terms of general quality.

The idea of others as dirty was sometimes reflected in Tibetans own resentment at being considered dirty by others. I interviewed a young man from Hainan County. He worked in the office of a small private business. He criticized Han's discrimination against Tibetans as dirty:

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[3] *Xuanchuan* can also be translated as propaganda, but I haven't translated it as such because it doesn't always have the same negative connotations that the word carries in English.

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Here many Han that think Tibetans are dirty, but actually they are more dirty.

*Q: Why do you think they say Tibetans are dirty?*

Mostly they say we have dirty clothes.

*Q: Does that make you mad if they say Tibetans are dirty?*

Yeah, they only see the superficial. They dont know the quality of the inside.


This last idea came up over and over in regards to Tibetans being dirty, a condition that might render the label of low quality upon them: Tibetans may appear dirty on the outside, but they are clean on the inside (Ch. *zangzuren benlai waibiao zang, keshi neixin hen ganjing*). One young woman from Xunhua told that she could overhear Han discussing the dirtiness and wildness (Ch. *ye*) of Tibetans at restaurants, something that upset her greatly.

But fear of dirt can also be turned on fellow Tibetans, as Jarmilla Ptackova (2011: 9) has shown. She reports that nomads moving from pastoral Zeku to Rebkong, a county town and monastic center, were looked down upon as "dirty and criminal." I also met a Zeku shop keeper in a Rebkong market who asked me if I thought that he and his family were dirty. At the time I was quite confused by this question, and interpreted in within an international civilizational narrative, that I, a foreigner, might think that these Tibetans were dirty. But it is more likely that this was part of a more localized civilizational narrative. While conceptions of pollution tied to bone (Tib. *rus*), or kinship, and manifested in class persist, cleanliness has become an idiom for assessing the quality of others.

*The Dangers of Hanhua*

The term *sinicize* has a long history of use by foreign scholars attempting to explain the history and persistence of the Chinese cultural and political sphere. It is based upon the theory that a strong Chinese civilizational center has long had the power to transform the civilizations it encounters at its edges. John Fairbank (1968) described Imperial China as a "Sinocentric" sphere that would assimilate barbarians and foreigners (Ch. *fan*) by bringing them within the Chinese orbit and converting them (Ch. *laihua*).[4] Whereas sinicize is a term employed to describe a purported historical process, the term *hanhua* is used in contemporary discourse in China. Many scholars translate *hanhua* as sinicize (Zhu and Qian 2015; Zenz 2014), but I argue that the conjoining of the terms Han and China not only conceals the conscious efforts of modern Chinese scholars to construct the identity of "Han" (cf. Mullaney 2012), but also obscures the fact that one can be both Chinese and non-Han, a modern Chinese citizen or someone who has taken on traits associated with the Han, been Hanified.

To take an illustrative instance of the disjuncture between Han and Chinese, I offer a 2011 conversation I had with a Muslim noodle-maker in Xining. He was celebrating the recent downing of an American helicopter in Iraq, telling me that the Americans were bad for killing Muslims. Yet when I asked him if he sympathized with Uighurs' protesting in Xinjiang, his Chinese identity trumped any kind of Muslim solidarity. He replied: "Of course not, I am a Chinese person (Ch. *zhongguoren*). Those Uighurs are being influenced by splittists." This man strongly identified as a Muslim, but also as a Chinese citizen. Yet with this modest noodle shop directly across from a mosque, and his concern with international Islam, he would hardly have been considered *hanhua* by any of my participants.

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[4] Historians have used the term to describe China's outward expansion and various dynasties adoption of Confucian-derived philosophies in their governance, such as the Yuan and Qing Dynasties (e.g. Ho 1967).

To be sure, Tibetan is also an indeterminate category. As one participant told me, before moving to Xining from Huangnan County for college in the mid-2000s, she had never before conceived of herself as a Tibetan. Now, as she was living in the city and preparing for a future with children, she was concerned about her children losing the very Tibetanness of which only a decade earlier she had been unaware. The legacy of the Maoist project of nationalities is in part responsible not only for the reification of the Tibetan, but also for the controversy, anxiety, and reaction over the potential demise of this identity category.

My interviewees, Tibetan and Muslim, used the term *hanhua* to describe a very specific phenomenon: the ongoing Hanification of the youngest generation that was growing up in the city. Most of the Muslims I talked with saw the main threats along religious lines, and sought to counteract them by enrolling their children in religious classes. In several interviews participants mentioned that their imam (Ch. *ahong*), would talk about the threat of *hanhua* for Muslim practice (see Figure 6.4). Curiously, Muslims I talked to were very split on what constituted a threat to their identity. I interviewed younger Muslim women who did not wear hijabs and were ambivalent about the threat of *hanhua* even while acknowledging it. This is likely because the threat to language is not seen as a problem: the Hui speak a dialect of Chinese.

Figure 6.4 Muslims praying at an East District Mosque.

Every Friday the east-bound lane of a key Xining thoroughfare. Dongguan Avenue fills with Muslims coming to prayer. For Muslims it an important religious and social occasion.

On the other hand, many Tibetans stressed the importance of Tibetan language for Tibetan identity. This certainly isn't a new phenomenon, particularly in Qinghai, where in recent decades there has been a strong push from within Tibetan society to promote Tibetan language learning (Zenz 2014; Fischer 2013: 255). The strength of public support for Tibetan language education can be illustrated by the protests, which resulted from a 2010 effort by the Qinghai provincial government to increase the proportion of Chinese language in minority education (Zenz 2014: 117). Second generation Tibetan urbanites were very aware of their lack of Tibetan skills and sought to fix this in the next generation. One Tibetan from Chab cha told me:

My parents can speak Tibetan but none of my siblings or my children can. When we were young I

didn't have the environment to study Tibetan, so I am now thinking whether I should send my son

to the village to study Tibetan.

Some young and middle-aged Tibetans didn't know Tibetan at all. Many of who did worried that their Tibetan was not fluent (Tib. *stengs*). They hoped to improve their children's language abilities through a full Tibetan language immersion. Xining Tibetans were very aware of the importance of Chinese-medium education for an increasingly competitive economy. They sought to take advantage of the two tracks of language learning: Chinese-medium and Tibetan-medium, in order to maximize their children's potential to excel in Chinese-medium studies but still obtain elements of their own language. As one young parent explained:

I am planning to send my kids to go to Tibetan school at home (Tib. *pha yul*) when they are in

primary school and afterword let them have schooling in Xining for middle school and high

school. In Xining we don't even have a Tibetan primary school.

Often young Tibetan parents expressed desire to send their children to school in their home villages for primary school. In a handful of cases, my participants had already done this. While Xining has a few schools that provide a Tibetan language courses at higher age levels, primary language training was lacking. Some private institutes had opened in order to cater to the increased demand for Tibetan education. Donors, wealthy from caterpillar fungus sales, had invested in winter institutes for language learning, paying teachers to educate urban Tibetan children. I interviewed several teachers of weekend and holiday Tibetan language programs within Xining. They explained the crisis in Tibetan language learning in Xining, arguing that the

problem would only get worse as more Tibetans came to the city. I encountered several new schools that opened between 2013 and 2015. One school even reflected the trope of *suzhi* education with its name "Mother Tongue Quality Development" (Ch. *Muyu suzhi tuozhan peiyu suo*, Tib. *ma skad rtsal nus dar 'byed gso skyong khang*).

## IV. Home as Cultural Reservoir

But it often wasn't enough to teach children Tibetan in the city. Not only is it clear to many parents that time spent learning Tibetan in a Chinese-dominated atmosphere is not enough to teach the language, but there are aspects of Tibetan-language learning that have very little do with language. These include the Tibetan environment's production of less selfish people and their cultivation of respectful behavior. As a result, these Tibetan environments have come to be seen as cultural reservoirs that serve Tibetan youth in two major respects: as sites where students may enroll in Tibetan-medium primary education, and as places where youth may be brought into contact with high concentrations of other Tibetans and with Tibetan activities, such as the celebration of local holidays, lay religious practice, socialization with other Tibetans, and spending time with elders.

Urban life can be seen to have negative affects on Tibetan morality and behavior. One teacher complained to me about the lack of respect that Han students have for teachers in comparison to Tibetan students. Tibetan students, he said, make way for teachers in hallways and rise in unison to greet incoming teachers. Han students, she said, don't do this, and Han teachers are less willing to enforce harsher corporeal forms of punishment on students, a method that was, in his eyes, very efficacious. These behaviors could even take on more subtle and mundane

characteristics, as one Tibetan mother explained: "I am afraid that if my daughter goes to a school in the city, she will not even know how to wear a Tibetan robe."

These examples point to a very dispositional character of Tibetanness. These embodied habits are assumed to only be cultivated in areas where Tibetan people are in the majority. Tibetans do not live in concentrated communities in Xining City, they live in a pattern that Chinese social scientists call "mixed living" (Ch. *sanju*), which stands in contrast to the "clustered living" (Ch. *jiju*) of Xining's Han and Muslim inhabitants. As a consequence, urban Tibetans look to the countryside as a site where Tibetans live in large numbers and maintain distinct and relatively unbroken communities. These are places where Tibetan *habitus,* or bodily techniques, are dominant. Marcel Mauss (1973) stressed the emulative inculcation of bodily techniques, writing, "the child … imitates actions which have succeeded and which he has seen successfully performed by people in whom he has confidence and who have authority over him" (Ibid.: 73). Bourdieu highlights the "disproportionate weight of early experiences" (Bourdieu 1990: 54) on these dispositions and their connection to passing on tradition. These ideas fit well with the desires of urban Tibetans: "[*Habitus*] ensures the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms" (Ibid.: 54). A securely Tibetan place allows for the possibilities of continued Tibetanness in language and action, as well as for a good moral *sems* as a mitigating factor for the corrupting influences of the city.

Beyond language classes, there were other important reasons to send children home. This included exposing children to the ethical environments of the home district. A young mother from Xunhua told me about her strategy for maintaining her daughter's Tibetanness:

I can communicate with her in Tibetan and make an example of respecting (Tib. *brtsi bkur*) my

parents. This can also be taught by taking her home (Tib. *pha yul*) to experience daily traditions

and monasteries. My husband's family is Tibetan but they cannot speak Tibetan, yet the way they

respect the elders is very good and I would like her to learn that.

Tibetans recalled their homes in positive terms, contrasting their place of urban dwelling

(Tib. *'dug sa*) with their native home (Tib. *pha yul*). They enjoyed being home, visiting family,

helping out with seasonable labor in farming areas, and participating in religious or local holiday

activities. Tibetans were also becoming adept at leveraging the increasingly strong regional

infrastructure to realize their desire to socialize their children in Tibetan environments. With

increased construction of tunnels and highways in the region, it has become increasingly easy to

make brief trips of only a few days. Rural or town-based Tibetans can also more easily visit their

families in Xining City. But even this has its down side:

I don't like the highways because it makes the transportation much more convenient. The

implication is many Han people will move in [to my home area]. Also the highway is not

scientific. But for development making transportation better is necessary. Really the most

important thing is to come mine the resources, which destroys nature.

In this way the rural home is taking on connotations of a place of refuge from eroding

effects of the urban and where youth can learn what it is to be Tibetan. The effects of this

Tibetan education, cultivating their *sems*, will hopefully last a lifetime. Of course this

envisioning of the countryside obscures not only a complicated history but a complicated

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present: the countryside is inhabited by many ethnic groups and, due to recent programs that have rebuilt highways and rebuilt entire villages.

Urban Tibetan parents can use geography to their advantage – gaining access to the convenience of the city and the education and opportunities it provides, and leveraging their proximity and connection to the countryside to ameliorate *hanhua* and maintain Tibetanness. While participants did not wish for lives of farming or herding, which many family members continue to engage in, they care deeply for these places as sites of Tibetanness. Urban Tibetans not only feel that they are preserving their culture, but that they will be able to mitigate the negative urban influence on their religious morality and ethnic particularity.

## V. Conclusion

Over the course of 2015, a set of photos showing a young Tibetan couple went viral on social media across China; the story was even covered in the foreign press (BBC 2015). A Tibetan advertising agency based in Chengdu produced the photos, which offered contrasting images of modern Tibetan life: the young couple was featured drinking coffee at a café, roaming urban streets in modern business clothing, and alongside a helicopter. In contrast, the other images in the set showed the same couple wearing traditional Tibetan clothing, climbing the steps of Potala Palace, and emerging from a grassland tent. The photos became a sensation because they showed Tibetans living two seemingly contradictory lifestyles; the urban lifestyle, in particular, is seldom associated with Tibetans. These photos speak to the on-going negotiation of Tibetan identity within the Tibetan community. As the boss of the advertising company, Phuntsok, explained to me about his choice of place for the images, "the city and the grasslands

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are the two scenes that are representative of the lives of young Tibetans." He defended the blending of the traditional and the modern as a practical necessity:

> We want to protect our cultural essence … it will certainly change along with technological development, just like the earliest Tibetan works were printed on paper leaf, today they have all been digitized and are available online. Are these writings and scriptures the real essence of Tibetan culture? Only the medium has changed, but the contents of the culture will never change as long as we have awareness [of our identity]. In that case ethnic culture can never be lost.

Phunstok's photos and views succinctly show the continuing importance of the rural and the traditional in the self-identities of young urban Tibetans who are embracing urban lifestyles and urban identities. The young Tibetans I interviewed were not only pursuing the goals of the contemporary urban Chinese consumer, pulling them more closely in line with national ideals, but they were also trying to retain Tibetan culture and distance themselves from negative aspects of the city, as shown both through negative connotations about minority enclaves and through fears of assimilation through Hanification. The tripartite view offered in this chapter highlights the geography of this continued negotiation.

First, the good city is imagined as a place of economic opportunity and the fulfillment of urban dreams of home-building and consumption. Xining Tibetans seek spacious homes and proximity to urban conveniences. Second, these urban dwellers are anxious about the corrosive effects of the city on morality and the potential loss of Tibetan culture in their offspring. I have called the abject city the imagining of urban zones that threaten urban Tibetans' self-conceptions as Chinese citizens on equal terms with the Han.[5] The East District and encounters with the low

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[5] Franck Billé (2015) has written that what Mongolians fear most about the China is not the Chinese *per se* but the threat of the Chinese within themselves - a threat which is born from the anxiety that they might be the very

*suzhi* found there are negative aspects of living in the city, and this district must be identified, criticized, and rejected in order to create distance from it. This abject urbanization has an unstable position for urban Tibetans: the same dirtiness and knavery that are attributed to Han and Hui in Xining can also be attributed to rural, and in particular, nomadic, Tibetans. Third, fears about the loss of Tibetan particularities within the city has encouraged the imagining of cultural reservoirs. These are places where Tibetan behaviors can be inculcated, and where the Tibetan language can be cultivated for usage in the city. While sentimental attitudes towards the countryside reflect the influence of national media and urban lifestyles on Tibetan self-imaginings, envisioning the countryside as a haven is more than nostalgic reflection – it is a strategy, which, in its very contemplation, forms a resistance to the homogenizing effects Hanification.

The following chapter argues that the city's ethnic dimensions are not limited to the imagining of urban zones like the East District; Tibetan residents' place-making and unpredictable encounters with the urban government are key sites that produce ethnic difference.

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backward Asians against which they imagine themselves. This backward Asian is what must be expelled in order to be a modern Mongolian.

## Chapter 7. Arbitrary Encounters: Neighborhood Territory and Place-making

### I. Introduction

One summer morning, I took a bus to the Luxurious Garden Community to interview its inhabitants.[1] I took several buses in order to arrive at a recently developed area of the city at the foot of a hill marking Xining's southern edge. As the narrow valley where Xining lies fills with newly constructed buildings, more new development projects must hug the mountainous ridges to the north and south of the city. I had never before visited this place but it had its own bus stop and a wide gate that could accommodate several cars when it opened. In an earlier interview, a participant had alerted me to a struggle over the built environment in this walled housing compound, the Luxurious Garden Community. I was referred to the participant's uncle, a resident of this community. He and his neighbors had pooled their money together in order to build a prayer wheel that they and anyone else could use.[2] They wanted to build this prayer wheel on land within the walled complex, and in a hushed voice, I was told that conflict had arisen with the local police over its construction. As not to misconstrue the story, I decided to make an effort to contact the uncle and further explore it.

My first trip was on my own. I didn't have the uncle's contact information, so I walked the length of the Luxurious Garden Community searching for the prayer wheel. I encountered many concrete manifestations of Han culture: sages, philosophers, calligraphy scrolls, etc., but no instances of anything related to Tibetan Buddhism. As I was about to give up, feeling I had

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[1] This is a pseudonym.
[2] Prayer wheels are important Tibetan religious devices that can either be small handheld implements or larger architectural features.

gotten the wrong address - I finally saw the prayer wheel, set under a tiled roof. At this point the prayer wheel was not yet complete, but three men were before it, watching the workers and chatting. I introduced myself and listened to their discussion. One man was explaining, through words and gesture, how Amdo Tibetans kept their arms down when they danced, and how Yushu people, who are Kham Tibetans, kept their arms up. After a burst of laughter from his small audience, I seized the moment to ask him about the prayer wheel, telling him I had never seen such a thing in an ethnically mixed housing settlement. Was it difficult to build? He hesitated, offered a restrained affirmation, and then began to look uncomfortable. Then the men abruptly moved several meters away from me, carrying on their conversation without the nosey intruder. Later when I returned with my research assistant and the uncle's contact information, I discovered that Tibetan residents' attempt to create a religious structure in their housing community violated regulations over land use in their housing community and in the city: the state met their usage of space with a bulldozer.

This controversy over the prayer wheel was an instance of urban-dwelling Tibetans' encounters with the Chinese state. Using space in the city can always trigger an effect of the urban government, be it restrictions on visual representation in the urban landscape or the prohibition of certain practices in the public environment. In addition to these restrictions, being merely present in the urban environment invites enrolment in biopolitical programs such as community-based health care and participation in local urban politics. The points of friction and outcomes of encounters that Tibetans have with Xining's various urban governing agencies vary based on a variety of factors: the actual legal coding of various urban territories, the quality of their enforcement, and the sorts of targets that Tibetans pursue in the built environment. At different times Tibetans can collide with the urban state, avoid it, or simply co-exist with it.

In order to show the divergent results of encounters, or a lack thereof, between the space of the urban state and urban inhabitants own created places, this chapter turns to literature on territory and theories of the interaction between the urban state and urban inhabitants. First, I will illustrate key points in the recent re-territorialization of administrative rule in China and how they are affecting Xining City. The reconfiguration of urban territories in China is altering the ways that the local municipal government relates both to the higher territorial levels and to urban inhabitants. Second, I show how Tibetan migrants in Xining City negotiate with the local territorial state in order to construct prayer wheels. Their place-making efforts in the urban environment are defined by an ethnic civic territoriality, in which distinctly Tibetan places draw extra scrutiny. Regulations on ethno-religious sites in the territorial government reveal the growing *de jure* importance of the territorial state, yet enforcement of territorial law remains contingent on actual urban encounters with agents of the state. In the final section, I look at the gradual growth of the "community district" and its implications for everyday life. I argue that state surveillance and biopower over its population is uneven, and that state territoriality must be scrutinized in order to account for the urban reality of Xining City. Urban dwelling Tibetans employ conscious strategies and unconscious practices to assert their own places in the city. The state's unpredictable absence points out both the effectiveness of residents' resistance to the state and the frequent inefficiency of the state in carrying out its own schemes. Ultimately, I argue that place-making is a key way that ethnic identity in the city is maintained.

## II. Territoriality in China

This section will explore territory in two registers. First, contemporary territorial jurisdictions in China and how they come to be re-territorialized. This leads to a second register:

what territories are and how they come into being. While the shifting nature of administrative territories influence socializing and surveillance within their jurisdiction, they do not fully exhaust the phenomena of territoriality, which also must be examined from a bottom-up perspective, that of place-making.

Carolyn Cartier (2013) has argued that scholars are too quick to employ the vocabulary of urban planning and assumptions about decision-making in the world city paradigm when they discuss urbanization and administrative territories in contemporary China. What is overlooked is the authoritarian and hierarchical nature of Chinese governance. The Chinese central government frequently restructures, by fiat, the administrative mosaic of the country. It has the power to control cities such as Beijing and Chongqing directly and to determine who may run to preside over special zones such as Hong Kong. Andrew Fisher (2013) has even argued that minority 'autonomous regions' actually exhibit a greater degree of direct control from the center than regular provinces. The ways such administrative zones are merged and directed are opaque. They are simply publically declared with unanimous support from party and non-party apparatuses of officialdom (Cartier 2013). Given the frequent circulation of members in both of these apparatuses, in which cadres take up similar positions throughout the country, it is of little surprise that there is little effective resistance from local officials to territorial transformations of the administrative geography. Even despite the devolution of many political functions to lower-tier administrative levels, a top-down hierarchy based on meeting certain targets, such as raising GDP, continues to characterize territorial administration in China (Chan 2010). While officials at the urban level may pursue their own pet projects, they still ultimately function under and within the dictates of the next higher administrative level. As a saying about the structure of leadership

in China goes: What number one says goes, what number two says is not what number one says, what number three says is not what number two says, etc.[3]

At a finer scale, a number of laws and promulgations have been put forth since the establishment of the Ministry of Land Management in 1986. These regulations have acted to realize and adjust territorial administration throughout China (Hsing 2010: 38). Local state governments battle over the right to define their territories and profit from the rental or sale of land within them.

Still, there remain two important trends that have developed since the 1980s. First, the movement from vertical territorial rule, in which state enterprises, institutions, organizations, and bureaucracies have direct control over land use (Hsing 2010), to territorial state governance. Second, the privileging of higher levels of authority, such as provincial and municipal, over the goals of townships or villages, whose protests over redevelopment are limited towards requesting greater compensation. As a rule, urban areas can annex nearby rural land; rural collectives may only rent out land for production. Cities' ability to requisition rural land allows them to act as growth machines (Li et al. 2010). Stopping an expanding city is nearly impossible. The central government ministries issue land-conversion quotas, the greatest proportion of which are given to larger-scale territorial governments, such as provinces and municipalities. Furthermore, the desire for urbanization at the local level stems from the need to find new sources of revenue. In most parts of China, municipalities receive less direct money from the central government today than in previous years (Hsing 2010).

Urban expansion and urban population management are clearly goals that are directed and not simply encouraged by the PRC. As Kam Wing Chan (2014) has explained, in December

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[3] I first encountered this comment in an online article decrying the great power that county level leaders (Ch. *xianzhang*) had in their jurisdictions vis-à-vis their underlings.

2013 Xi Jinping took the unprecedented step of becoming (in public view) personally involved in the national urbanization conference. The result was a new blue-print for urbanization in China that seeks to increase the urban population to 60% by 2020, registering more urban *hukou* and providing better benefits to those living in Chinese cities. Chan has suggested that guiding development to smaller cities and towns away from the coasts would be a desirable way to spread out economic development. While in the era of the Third Front the state frequently attempted to build up hinterland populations through population transfer (Naughton 1988), the market economy has made less productive portions of China less attractive. Yet urban development is a crucial component of driving GDP growth throughout China and can be a way to meet growth targets when such areas would attract little attention in a less managed economy.

China's contemporary transition to a system of territorial rule echoes processes that have been found in other parts of the world. Like those urban inhabitants, urban Tibetan have had to invent new ways of dwelling in the city. Theoretically, the relationship between territory, the state, and regular urban inhabitants can be conceived of in many ways. These discussions largely revolve around two main questions: is territory reducible to a state space? And secondly, what kind of relationship can actors beyond the state have with territories?

*Territories beyond the state*

In recent geographical literature concerned with globalization and its implications, scholars have sought to create better ways of conceptualizing territory and the relationship between state spaces, legal jurisdictions, and politics (Sassen 2013; Agnew 2005). Responding to pressures from globalization, state territories are often seen to be weakening and in need of defensive re-territorilization to shore up their sovereignty (Agnew 1999b). This also occurs at the

level of urban territories. Some urban geographers have attempted to organize geographical concepts into comprehensive frameworks (Jessop et al. 2008), wherein territory comes to sit alongside the concepts of place, scale, and networks as a key geographical concept that remains in flux through processes of de-territorialization and re-territorialization.[4] Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid (2015) have emphasized that territorial regulation is a key urban dimension along with spatial practices and everyday life. In this discussion territory is broadly conceived of as a structured space: a product of statist encoding of economic regulation and entrenchment. Helga Leitner and her colleagues (2008) have described the struggles between urban inhabitants and state actors (as enforcers of the territorial state) as moments defined by competing uses of spatialities. Again, territory is reified as a concept intertwined with, but separate from, notions such as place and network.

So far territory has been described as a state-structured space contingent on political and economic contingencies, but territories also have dimensions that non-state actors actively produce and reproduce. National and regional administrative territories are important nodes of political identity (Agnew 2003; Paasi 1996). Robert Sack (1983; 1986) has promoted a conceptualization of territoriality as a strategy for claiming and classifying space, in which the author of a territory, be it an individual, society, or institution, attempts to maintain control over places and the actions of people within them. Sack would eventually set his notion of territory within his larger theorization of place (Sack 1997) and refer to it as "place-as-territory" or as a version of "primary place" (Agnew et al. 2000). In this final sense, territory or place is a universal that finds manifestations in societies all over the world at a variety of scales. While this

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[4] Brenner (1999: 432) has defined re-territorialization as "the reconfiguration and re-scaling of forms of territorial organisation such as cities and states." It is a process that happens as the result of administrative change within a variety of scales of "geographic scaffolding," but which has powerful impacts on urban territories. It happens through local processes, national planning strategies, or to accommodate or adjust to capitalist globalization.

version of territory was perhaps too insensitive to notions of multiple and overlapping political jurisdictions and to the experiences of those excluded by others' territories (Delaney 2005), Sack's (1986) emphasis on territoriality as a social strategy helps to recover the way that a social territory may be asserted in the face of other spatial claims.

Andrea Brighenti (2010a) has also argued for a broader understanding of territory, arguing for a "territorology" that emphasizes the on-going effects of encounters between territory-making agents. Brighenti seeks to capture territory as a process in which these agents, as vectors of mobility, come into contact with each other, producing territories and making them visible. This conceptualization seeks to capture both sociotechnical and biopolitical aspects of territory, and therefore show how the interplay between individuals, groups, and states produces places with political consequences (Brighenti 2010b). Both this approach and Sack's place-making approach allow for a rich understanding of territoriality as a political activity and practice. Similarly, Jacques Lévy (2011), recognizing the wide range of connotations that the term "territory" has in romance languages, has proposed a framework that seeks to capture different epistemologies of measuring and understanding space. This approach looks at how territories, be they urban neighborhoods or states, come together with networks to shape geographies. Lévy argues that, for scholars, such an approach "encourages open-mindedness about other patterns of thought when having to consider the range of spatialities to be found in the social worlds we all inhabit" (Lévy 2011: 281). Imagining place-making as a kind of territoriality allows us to better understand how transformations of state territory in China come into conflict with the place-based practices of Xining City's Tibetan inhabitants.

**III. Ethnic Civic Territoriality**

All across China urban populations are attempting to assert their rights and interests in the face of a disempowering urbanization. Reconfigurations of urban territory in the reform period have had important impacts on how Xining Tibetans may and may not use the land in the housing districts where they reside and frequently own housing property. You-tien Hsing (2010) has deployed the concept of "civic territoriality" to study disputes over land in Chinese metropolitan areas; she expands the concept to encompass two different modes of territoriality:

> While state territoriality is the process by which state actors strategize to consolidate power and exercise sovereignty, civic territoriality is the process in which social actors organize to protect themselves from state extractions and market invasion, and assert territorial autonomy through negotiations with the state and market. Territoriality, therefore, is highly contested, and leads to varied results. (Hsing 2010: 185)

The struggle over urban land between urban citizens and municipal authorities as China opens up to market forces has resulted in new types of territorial politics. At stake for urban citizens is more than land use or land rights, but the assertion of place-based identity, civil rights, and collective rights.[5] Zhu and colleagues (2011) have shown how rapid urbanization and large-scale migrations to new urban high-rises can lead to new desires for place-based community identities. In their study of a re-territorialized urban district in Guangzhou, they show that local inhabitants strove to consciously recreate a place-based identity in their newly re-organized and re-constructed neighborhood. Whether occurring as a response to administrative restructuring,

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[5] Hsing (2010) presents her model of urban territoriality as the welding of territory onto Agnew's (1987) three-fold theorization of place as location, locale, and sense of place.

migration, or economic pressures, the coming to consciousness of a place-based identity can be seen as a hallmark of the modern geographical experience (Tuan 1980).

I argue that ethnic civic territoriality in Xining revolves around the legitimate use of land in the city for the purposes of an ethnic group. I found that community building though place-making in the local built environment and patterns of religious and ethnic spatial use were points of friction between residents' desires and the homogenizing expectations of the dominant urban paradigm. For instance, during my time in Xining, Muslims who had been recently displaced from the westernmost portion of East District gathered in front of the gate of Qinghai Province Government in order to protest their dissatisfaction with new housing lacked the multi-purpose courtyard space. Their former homes, razed for new high-rises, had these multi-purpose kitchens in homes that incorporated their extended families. They were promised similar amenities in the new buildings, but were unhappy with the housing units they were actually given. A housing complex in the downtown area had rebuffed developers and managed to hold their ground against attempts to displace them, allegedly including homicide (see Figure 7.1). Yet when I asked my Tibetan friend Jamyang what he thought about audacious use of the urban landscape to challenge territorial encroachment, he raised his hand towards his face, saying, "They can do that if they are Han, but if they were Tibetans…" He then clenched a fist and sharply exhaled. Older Xining residents, who tend to be Han or Muslim, and the populations that Hsing (2010) looks at in her study, differ from Xining's Tibetans. Tibetans are a new population, entering new urban communities largely through migration in search of work and an urban lifestyle.[6] They are being displaced for new development projects and therefore don't have material assets with which to leverage their position against the local state. One of the flash points between their desire for

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[6] Charlene Makley (2013) has found a dissimilar process of urbanization in Rebkong County in which Tibetan villages have been subsumed into urban territories. The village then becomes its own community district.

place-making and state encodings of space are over the possibilities for a religious built environment.



Figure 7.1 A Resistant Housing Complex.

Housing community with political messages about the right to housing. Photo by author.

*Religious built environment*

Regulations concerning religion are constantly changing in China. National laws are created and refined, and at lower administrative levels more regulations are promulgated and revised as conditions change. For the Communist Party, a primary concern is to maintain order and cooperation, while still allowing for more religious freedoms. As government suppression of religious movements reveals, the government is wary of the revival of feudal superstition. More powerful religious organizations are potential challenges to state authority and legitimacy. At the national level, the Religious Affairs Bureau (Ch. *zongjiaoju*) regulates religious groups and

registers large (Ch. *daxing*) religious structures such as temples (Potter 2003; Leung 2005). At subordinate scales different territorial authorities have power over the construction of religious structures. Robbie Barnett has addressed the territorialized restrictions concerning religion, stating that the government emphasizes "the importance of location in Chinese legal thinking about religion – a presumption in post-liberalization China, and perhaps earlier, that religion belongs in certain places" (Barnett 2013: 90). Looking at restrictions on the religious built environment in the Tibetan Autonomous Region, Barnett has pointed to an increase in venue-specific regulation of religious activities and site construction.[7]

In the case of Xining City, the 1992 "Qinghai Province Venue for Religious Activity Management Regulation" outlines a number of articles that bear upon the creation of religious sites and their government oversight by the Patriotic Religion Organization (Ch. *aiguo zongjiao tuanti)*. Article three of the regulation pertains to the construction of a venue for religious activity (Ch. *zongjiao huodong changsuo*):

> Opened or newly built venues for religious activities must seek the approval of their respective village (or town) People's Government. Upon approval they must request to be examined and verified by the upper level county (or district or city) Ethnic Religion Affairs Bureau, as well as attain the approval of the Provincial and Municipal Government or administrative office. Without obtaining permission, no organization or individual may open or construct a venue for religious activities. No structures may be constructed on the grounds of government organs, schools, enterprises, or *danwei*. Withdrawing, consolidating, or altering the address or name of a venue for religious activities requires approval by the original approving authority.

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[7] Emily Yeh (2013a) has discussed at length and in detail the implications of religious restrictions in Lhasa, where the ethnic character of the city has lead to repressive measures much harsher than those in Xining.

I found that two separate territorial administrations were especially relevant for the construction of religious structures in Xining City: one at the scale of the city district and the other at that of the province. Different sorts of structures need different types of approval, and the quality of enforcement is continuously changing despite the comprehensive wording of the Qinghai Province Venue for Religious Activity Management Regulation.

A Xining housing complex named after Yushu's Chengduo County (Tib. *khri 'du rdzong, Ch. chengduoxian*) is located south of Xining's Tibetan Hospital. Tibetans from that county, at the initiative of officials and ex-officials, used Chengduo County Financial Administration funds to purchase the land and build a residential building. Later they built prayer wheels and a small shrine (see Figure 7.2). For this small housing complex at the southern edge of the city, constructing these religious places was relatively easy. Approximately ten years ago, policy implementation changed and it became more difficult to obtain construction permission from the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau (Ch. *minzu zongjiao shiwu bumen* or *zongjiaobu*), which is administered at the level of city district. The authority that has jurisdiction over the prayer wheel in Luxurious Garden Community is called East District Level One Religious Bureau (Ch. *chengdongqu yiji zongjiaobu*). According to a Religious Affairs Bureau official, it is increasingly hard to get building permission because more projects are deemed nonstandard or irregular (Ch. *buguifan*), but loopholes (Ch. *loudong*) in the system may be exploited if one has the appropriate resources and connections. As one participant told me, although official channels would likely deny her a permit to build a structure in her own housing community, she felt confident that she could accomplish such a project by leveraging family connections at the relevant government bureau.

Figure 7.2 Turning Prayer Wheels.

Prayer wheels on the grounds of the Chengduo housing community. Photo by author.

A distinction can be made between small (Ch. *xiaoxing*) venues for religious activity and large structures such as mosques, large stupas, and temples. In Xining City, the small structures can be approved at the district level, while larger structures need comprehensive multi-scale approval. The story of Luxurious Garden Community is notable because the residents began to build the structure without obtaining prior approval from the required East District Religious Affairs Bureau. In subsequent interviews with community residents, I was able to learn more of the story. Retirees in the housing community (Ch. *xiaoqu*) gathered money to build a prayer wheel. Prayer wheels are important symbols of Tibeteness, as well as sites where merit can be produced. Circumambulations around monastery circuits and prayer wheels are bodily acts that produce religious merit. This practice is especially important for older Tibetans who are closer to death and transmigration (Ekvall 1964). One resident explained that their requests to build a religious structure were ignored:

These two buildings were bought by Yushu people. Before they bought these two buildings they

requested the construction boss to build a small platform for a prayer wheel, then the boss left a

place our us to construct the prayer wheel. We made requests many times to the government in

order to get the permission, but nobody took it seriously. Then we started to build the prayer wheel

and the local government came to us and said we were not allowed to build it and destroyed what

we had built. . . . Then the old women from this housing community argued with the local

government and told them the many reasons we had to build this prayer wheel and scolded them.

Later the local government rebuilt the prayer wheel yard to pay us back.

As I discovered, the women had actually obstructed the path of the bulldozer that eventually destroyed the concrete platform, but they were ultimately unable to stop its destruction. They eventually put together a petition and demanded their right to construct the prayer wheel. In this petition the situation was compared unfavorably to that of the Japanese invasion of China. For these residents the struggle to build a prayer wheel was a struggle over who had the power to form a community place in an urban district. It was a territorial struggle lying at the intersection between state logics of religious regulation and Tibetan residents' desire to create a place with social and religious significance for their community.

I interviewed another Tibetan living in one of the few other housing communties in Xining that had also constructed its own prayer wheels. Even though Yushu New Village was built on land purchased by a Yushu government organization, residents were still restricted in how many Buddhist religious structures could be constructed on the land:

For us it is an honor to have prayer wheels and a temple in our community district. Originally the

Yushu people planned to build a stupa and housing buildings in a Tibetan style, but the Xining

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government did not allow them to do so because it would be too Tibetan. The prayer wheels were made by each household [here]. They said it was very important to have religious things like prayer wheels and a circumambulation circuit in their yard. When my wife and I have time, we turn prayer wheels and circumambulate. There are around twenty more people from Nangqên in this community district… We meet some of our neighbors and friends when we are at the prayer wheel.

Although this conflict was peacefully resolved, it reveals the significance of the prayer wheel as a public place and the power of the local state to control such places within their jurisdiction. Tibetans were very aware of the sensitivity around religion and religious structures in China and this caused a level of anxiety. It was easier to steer clear of these territorial conflicts than to be involved in them.

A few housing units away from the Luxurious Garden Community prayer wheel lived a retired teacher who appeared indifferent to the events concerning its destruction. While his wife watched TV and spun her prayer wheel staff, he told me that he had never visited the community-built prayer wheel or heard of the events surrounding it: "We don't know anything about that and I don't think the government destroyed it." I wondered how he could be so indifferent. Compared to other interviewers, he held very atypical views of government policies affecting Tibetan culture. Indeed, he was the only Tibetan I interviewed who did not recognize Hanification as a problem.

The situation of the construction of Tibetan religious sites in Xining can be compared to that of Muslim communities. One young male Muslim participant, a driver of odd-jobs, told me about the signifiance of having a place to pray in the city:

Yes, everyone wanted to have [a place to pray in the housing community]. For people like my father, who lives in the Railway Housing Complex in which there are many Han, there is no Mosque and it is inconvenient to go to prayer. In every place we have small places to pray, but once we build usually we build big Mosques. In Xining there are two major Mosques. Now almost every community district has a small place to pray if the boss is Muslim. They consider our convenience in prayer.

For any community of Qinghai Muslims, access to a Mosque is a necessity. Throughout Xining's East District, mosques, tombs, and local prayer halls can be found that serve a variety of sects and orders. The urban religious geography of Tibetans differs from that of the various Qinghai Muslim orders. Xining's core urban districts contain a total of three relatively small Tibetan Buddhist temples, named in Chinese *Dafosi*, *Jintasi*, and *Hongjuesi.* Xining residents I interviewed went to them occasionally and when I visited these sites, I encountered many out-of-town Tibetans praying between check-ins on family members at the Tibetan Hospital. However, outlying monasteries, such as Kumbum Monastery, which is located within the Xining Metropolitan Area, are much more popular, as they are significant religious centers.[8]

Territorial governments face difficulty controlling religious places because they have no place in the geographical ontology of the commercialized and Hanified spaces of Xining's urban environment. The codification of urban territory has a clear impact on what religious objects Tibetans and Muslims can build in their housing communities. Successful construction of a religious place, if discovered, can draw the attention of the state and end in a clash that can end inhabitants' efforts. As meaningful symbols and centers of social gathering, large or small religious places are important to Xining's ethnic minorities. In turn, their restriction,

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[8] The city maintains a bus service between the city's Tibetan hospital and Huangzhong County, where the Monastery is located.

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surveillance, and suppression are important to the state. Besides venues for religious activities, other place-making efforts give rise to other territorialities, affecting urban life and at times challenging the urban state.

## IV. Community Districts and Governmentality

Stuart Elden (2010; 2013) has worked to circumscribe the term "territory" as the geographic field of certain political technologies that are based around calculation and centered on the state. He has linked the term specifically to Michel Foucault's understanding of security governmentality: "The same kinds of mechanisms that Foucault looks at in relation to population are used to understand and control territory" (Elden 2013: 14; see also Elden 2007). In his discussions on power and society (Foucault 1977; 2003; 2007), Foucault offers three primary modes of governance: sovereignty, discipline, and security (or biopower). In each of these theorizations of power the prevailing center of authority uses different political knowledges, *dispositifs*, and techniques to govern. The final configuration of security and biopolitics, emerges in its dominant form through state use of statistics for rule. Through advanced forms of regulation and control, the population is protected from risks such as famine and poor hygiene. Yet they are also allowed to openly circulate, because the state depends on an internalization of conduct, a self-regulating care of the self. But security power and security spaces continue to co-exist with other forms of power. Forms of governmentality co-exist, especially in transition periods, as technologies of governance adapt to shifts in knowledge and economy. Therefore, scholars that periodize and privilege one form of governmentality risk misrepresenting the workings of power (Coleman and Agnew 2007).

But how do these forms of state power manifest themselves in the city? Andrea Brighenti, in his broad theorization of a relational territorology, argues that the encounters between state agents and the population actualize state territory.

> In order to work properly, government needs to territorialize a given population within its own framework of sovereignty. In Foucault's account, this is precisely the aim that disciplines help to achieve. What counts is not space per se, but the relationships among people that are built through space and inscribed in it in the effort to sustain the triangle sovereignty-discipline-government. (Brighenti 2010a: 55)

In a compelling attempt to historicize the relationship between power and place in China, David Bray (2005) has emphasized the importance of the architecture of the house and the city in powerfully shaping Chinese subjectivities over time. Bray begins with the cosmological schemas of early dynasties, tying the blueprint of the early Chinese house to the hierarchy of the Confucian family. A Foucauldian perspective is employed to explain how political power is exercised over Chinese subjects: while in the early period power is sovereign, in the socialist period a more complex assemblage is revealed: state authority is pastoral, the monitoring of conduct relies on discipline, and welfare provisions guarantee biopolitical health. In a system that Bray describes as totalistic, socialist cadres guide the population of the urban *danwei,* the basic territorial unit of the Chinese city. During the socialist period, the urban grid of *danwei* territories produce a collective subjectivity of *danwei* residents, who live and work together, forming "integrated communities through which urban residents derive their sense of place and social belonging" (Ibid.: 5). Other scholars have also described *danwei* through analogy to the family:

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The functions of the *danwei* can be divided into two main areas: political and social. These two functions maybe characterized as "paternalistic" and "materialistic" respectively. As in a traditional family, the *danwei* acts as a patriarch who disciplines and sanctions his children, while at the same time serving as a maternal provider of care and daily necessities. (Lü and Perry 1997: 8)

Increasingly, *danwei* are being demolished or opened up to private renters. At the same time, urban welfare provisions have been drastically reduced. Throughout China the fabric of urban space is coming to be defined through "community districts" (Ch. *shequ*). Unlike the *danwei* system, which was tied to state-operated units and therefore not subject to regular restrictions of the municipal territorial order (Hsing 2010), community districts are defined by their territory. Community districts were originally created in an effort to provide more services and inculcate a sense of "natural" community in the mid-1980s, but since then their breadth has expanded to the point where they have largely replaced not only the *danwei* system, but also supplanted the Residents' Committee (Ch. *jumin weiyuanhui*) as a critical grassroots organization, provider of services, and territory of surveillance.[9] Communities districts have been cast as part of the solution to the contradictions of China's growing urban society, working to fill gaps where the welfare system has retreated (Bray 2006).

Notably, the term *shequ* can also be translated as "community" and aspires to become naturalized into the urban socio-spatial fabric, as one author writes: "Communities districts are

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[9] Indeed, there is now a good deal of terminological and geographic confusion related to *shequ,* for instance the residence committees that community districts have largely superseded are now called *shequ juminweiyuanhui.* Systems of larger *shequ* have been designated for the coordination of services within districts. For instance, there are thirty-one *shequ* in the East District of Xining, but as of 2013 twelve "new type community districts" (Ch. *xinxingshequ*) have been established at the meso-level between Street District and the residence-level *shequ* as part of reforms to the service system (East District Government of Xining City 2013).

the cells of society, community district harmony is the basis of societal harmony" (Yu 2008: 91). The term trades on the Tönniesian concept of *communitas* and thus speaks to concerns about maintaining a sense of local society among urban dwellers (Shieh 2011; Yu 2008). Bray (2006) has pointed out the importance of this attempt to merge the territorial state with an artificial attempt to create community belonging. He argues that the goal is to make self-governing communities in the Foucauldian sense, communities that care for themselves and maintain ethical standards of community members, excluding those that do not fulfill standards of human quality (Ch. *suzhi*).

*Community Districts in Xining*

Yet since its adoption, the community district has steadily expanded not only in scope, but also in scale. Multiple residential blocks now comprise a community. In a fast-expanding private housing market where people hardly know their neighbors, efforts to establish any sort of local community through the *shequ* have yet to yield results. When I asked questions about the community district, few participants knew what the *shequ* was. As of 2014, East District was divided into thirty-one community districts, which are in turn divided into smaller "grid systems" (Ch. *wangge*). The managers of the grid systems are supposed to keep "daily journals of the people's feelings" (Ch. *minqing rizhi)* within their "fields of duty" (Ch. *renwu tian*) and register the comings and going of anybody calling on a tenant (East District Government of Xining City 2012).

Yet rather than being sites where urban bodies are closely monitored by community workers dutifully scribbling in notebooks, I found that research participants rarely encountered agents of the state as either disciplinarians or health providers and did not engage in self-

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government efforts. Only one participant, who had lived in her apartment for ten years, reported knowing of her community district and interacting with it. She lived with her elderly mother, who received occasional health check-ups from the community district's health services.

The most common interaction with the municipal bureaucracy was registering at the local police station (Ch. *paichusuo*), which was typically only done only by residents who had purchased their apartments. After doing this, owners were typically free from any sort of interactions with a territorial government organization. While some renters registered for temporary residency permits, most never bothered. One renter reported that he only bothered to register for his temporary permit after several years of living in multiple places, and this was done only to apply for a driver's license. For the advantages that registration did provide, it was often possible to circumvent the process. One such urban amenity was Internet access. Unofficial urbanites can simply ask friends or relatives, who were registered, to go in their stead to China Telecom in order to sign up for broadband Internet access.

Interactions with the real estate services office (Ch. *wuye*) were common, as those offices collect the bills for heat, water, and waste services, hold mail, and open the gates for vehicles. Individual housing communities are gated, and each has its own such services office typically located at entry gates to the housing complexes. These offices are private and contracted out from businesses in Xining that hire people to work in these small structures. In one of the housing communities where I lived, the monthly fee collector was a 26-year-old Han girl whose father owned a large real estate services company. As the number of housing complexes under his purview increased, he decided to give his daughter responsibility over our small housing community. She coordinated with utility employees who irregularly came to check water and electric usage.

Hired guards monitored who came in or out of our housing complex. They opened the car gates and pedestrian doors that are the only accessible points in an otherwise continuous perimeter of concrete walls crowned in glass shards. However, during the day this complex and nearly any other are easy for strangers to enter. As compared to the days of the *danwei* when all inhabitants were known and movement was closely monitored, new tenants, new guests, and new cars are always circulating through the gates. Almost anyone has daytime access to a housing community. At night the story is slightly different, as a guard may have to be awoken to open a gate.

As grassroots organizations, community districts are supposed to promote participatory democracy. In the neighborhoods I lived, I saw this frequently promoted through large banners which extoled the benefits of voting. One afternoon when I was passing by the gate of my housing community, I saw a large red paper sign detailing the time and location for community district voter registration. The sign stated that the election was open to permanent or temporary residents as long they were registered within the community district for at least a year as a renter or owner, were of sound mind, and had proper documentation in order. Nominees from the community were also welcome. I asked my friend, who lived in the same housing community, about this sign. Was she intending on voting? To paraphrase her response: No, it doesn't matter if you vote. They have already selected the candidates. They will pick the relative of the party head of the community district. Indeed, this was a widespread attitude. This particular call for voters was pasted on the wall for only a few days. The actually date and time for the election was never posted, and several weeks later another sign appeared revealing the names of the elected candidates. That sign was removed before the day closed.

Expectations about community districts were low. If residents even knew what these districts were, they typically wanted to steer clear of them, especially if they were renters, who assumed that they could get no services from them. Rather than being seen as empowering ways of pooling community resources or exercising influence on the local built environment, participation and interaction with local democratic government was seen as risky; another way of drawing the unwanted attention of the state. Employees of community districts were only called upon to resolve the most intractable of neighborly conflicts.

The dense and constantly changing bureaucracy of the Chinese city frequently fails to effectively territorialize its proscriptive regulations or establish a sense of community through participatory democracy. The close surveillance and medical care of the *danwei* era has retreated as the nature and size of housing districts and community districts have changed. Citizens today are more mobile and their physical presences are loosely tracked. While during certain periods and at certain time the state is feared, the Tibetan population also understands that disciplinary forces are frequently absent, and that biopolitical apparatuses operate haphazardly, for good (avoiding grassroots democracy), or for bad (lack of knowledge about health services). Still, citizens' sometimes successful avoidances of certain practices could also be read as a state victory: if the goal of the state is read as discouraging political interference even as it ostensibly encourages participation.[10]

In the next section, I focus on the mundane activities of place-making in housing communities. Tibetans assert place in a city dominated by state planning and unmarked Han imagery. They also use the urban environment for religious purposes despite government

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[10] The very inconsistency and inefficiency of states to carry out development schemes has been shown to have dangerous consequences elsewhere (Gupta 2012).

attempts to "socialize the management of religion" and control suspicious superstitious activity (Xining Government 2011: 5; Xining Financial Information Network 2013).[11]

*Everyday rhythms*

Geographers of the urban frequently discuss the everyday as the experience of living life within an urban paradigm that is not one's own design. In the writings of many pre-eminent French theorists of the urban, the city is often presented as a stultifying manifestation of the functionalist visions of urban planners and technocrats. Urban residents must make the best of things, attempting to *habit* within the coldly rigid schemes of the professional urban designer, who is linked closely to the state.[12] For Michel de Certeau (1984), people use tactics, a playful bricolage of activity, within such spaces in order to circumvent the panoptic gaze of the urban state. Lefebvre (2004) offers the metaphor of rhythm to describe various temporal patterns that mold the experience of daily life. Rhythm can capture both the routinization of urban life through repetitive activities tied to the economic cycle and the potential for urban inhabitants to break such routines through their own alternative activity. This counter-rhythm can take on a revolutionary beat, as Lefebvre explains, "Objectively, for there to be *change*, a social group, a class or a caste must intervene by imprinting a rhythm on an era, be it through force or in an insinuating manner" (Lefebvre 2004: 14). Lefebvre and de Certeau are helpful for highlighting the conflict between space that has been structured, materially and legally, but their analyses

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[11] Government documents related to community districts frequently represent them as sites of struggle where "resisting superstition" (Ch. *dizhi mixin*) and "opposing cults" (Ch. *fanxiejiao*) occur. These problems are alongside the need to suppress self-immolations and increase the management of religion.

[12] The term habit, or others that may be translated as such, can be found in the work of Henri Lefebvre and Martin Heidegger. Stuart Elden (2004: 96) has suggested we could translate Lefebvre's *habiter* as "to inhabit" or "to dwell." The word connotes the everyday, and is used to index a type of relationship with the world that is more poetic or rooted than based in calculation. Put more simply, it is a more humane and experiential sort of living, rather than a rational sort of living, like that urban planners might envision as they use statistical data to draw up plans for housing projects and urban districts..

draw a stark picture of the relationship between a totalizing state and its inhabitants. In Xining, despite laws territorializing the care of the population and how urban space might be used, habiting occurred everywhere and often went unnoticed.

Chinese citizens of all ethnicities make imprints on Xining's urban landscape. People invent new ways of using space, drawing on residual customs to create alternative rhythms both within their homes and community districts. A few examples that capture this reality include designs on doors, funerals and death-related offerings in the city, neighborhood dancing, and traveling salesmen that come to housing complexes.

Nearly every door in a Xining housing complex can be found with some sort of decoration that demarcates the ethnicity of the residents. The majority of recently built housing complexes in Xining are six story stairway accessible structures. These structures are divided into units that have a central staircase with one housing unit on each side of the stairwell on every floor.[13] Outside of occasional bulletins posted by the local government or services office (Ch. *wuye*), advertisement stickers and posters adorn the metal doors of homes and the whitewashed concrete corridor walls. These advertisements promote white goods, wall-mounted and underfloor heating units, education services for children, and other products one would expect urban consumers to require or desire. Stickers with phone numbers for small privately locksmith operation are also common, the smiths themselves living nearby.

The majority of these images are rather utilitarian and have no ethnic content. On the other hand, renters' and owners' doors are places where ethnic identity is strongly expressed. Door decorations are common throughout Han regions of China, where strips called *duilian* are placed around doorframes. These strips have auspicious sayings on them that invoke prosperity

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[13] Taller buildings have both staircases and elevators. In those buildings each floor will have multiple housing units accessible from a central corridor.

and good fortune. The centers of the door are also frequently adorned with a large paper symbol, common choices being the character for fortune or the zodiac animal for the current calendar year. Frequently, the entire paper assemblage is refreshed in whole or in part during the Chinese New Year. The rhythm of the Chinese New Year consumes the entire city, affecting public transit times, closing stores, and generating a cacophony of firecracker explosions that dominate the urban soundscape in the months of January and February. The housing community is affected as well. Beyond the inescapable explosions, the door décor of the Chinese New Year creeps beyond individual residences, and can occasionally consume even the more public, ostensibly neutral spaces of the housing community.

While Hui households frequently use *duilian* to decorate their doors, Tibetan households' décor is markedly different (see Figure 7.3). The most common marker of a Tibetan door is the "All Powerful Ten" or "Tenfold Powerful One" (Tib: *rnam bcu dbang ldan*), a very auspicious cosmogram. A sticker of this image can be bought at Xining's Tibetan markets and at shops adjacent to the *Dafosi* temple. Some Tibetan households had Tibetan door markings that were more elaborate. When asking Tibetan participants if they were aware of or had met any Tibetan neighbors, I discovered that some people's knowledge of their neighbors was based exclusively on these door images. They had never actually met the neighbor, but the displaying of the imagery on otherwise unremarkable mass-market doors indicated a common desire to use ethno-religious imagery in an effort to make the built environment more comfortable and to bring about good fortune.

Figure 7.3 Doors in an urban housing complex.

Han residents decorated the top two doors and the bottom two images, were provided by Tibetan residents. The top right image shows Han door décor creep. Photos by author.

Another urban community practice punctuated by an ethnicized rhythm is funeral practices. The rhythmic complexity of diverse practices allows for the co-existence of social territories, and prevents the dominance of any one rhythm, the closure of isorhythmic synchronization (Kärrholm 2009). Han funerals last many days and involve the use of several tents, horn playing, circular flower garlands, papier-mâché animals, and many family members coming from near and far in order to mourn the deceased. When these funerals occur, they occupy both large amounts of shared public space in the housing community and generate a considerable amount of noise. In distinction to this practice, neither Tibetans nor Muslims carry out funerals in housing complexes. In areas of mixed housing, they make considerably less of an

impact on the shared public space. This does not mean, however, that the space is not used at all for religious funeral purposes. A young Tibetan man in my housing complex died unexpectedly. This was a great tragedy for the family and as a result they made many offerings to encourage a better rebirth for him (see Figures 7.4 and 7.5). Every morning for nearly a month family members went to a small area of concrete just outside of our unit door, set up a pile of *bsang,* a type of incense used for offering, and set it alight. In another case I discovered Tibetans carrying plates of offerings called torma (Tib. *gtor ma*) shaped into animals to a smoldering makeshift outdoor shrine. I also came across boxes of these offerings alongside busy Xining roads, prepared to aid an ailing relative (see Figure 7.6). These urban practices express the ways in which Tibetans place-make in the loosely policed territory of the city.



Figure 7.4 A Han Funeral.

Figure 7.5 Tibetan Burnt Offerings.

Figure 7.4 on left. Photos by author.

Other modes of habiting occur within homes themselves. Some aspects of Tibetan villages do not travel to the city, such as stove gods (Tib. *thab lha)*. These operate on a principle of potential pollution through the burning of improper items within them, but are do not inhabit the electro-magnetic hotplates that replace stoves in most urban apartments. Wrathful home protectors and corpse-burning sites are also absent from the city. Other things do travel, but only on certain conditions. Nearly every Tibetan home I visited had a shrine room (Tib. *mchod khang,* Ch. *fotang*), typically located in its own room or a corner of the veranda off of the living room (see Figure 7.7). These shrines contained images of deities associated with their family's monastic institution in their home areas, as well as protective deities and high profile teachers. Shrine shelving contains various religious artifacts, statues, and photos. Pious family members, especially the elderly, will rise early in order to prostrate in front of the shrine. When I asked one exceptional woman why her home did not have a shrine, she told me that her father forbid her from transporting the deity from the countryside to the urban apartment. His reasoning was that her frequent trans-local mobility would make her unable to replenish the offering cups of water every morning. In order to guard against this offense, the shrine stayed in the village home where her mother and father could prevent any negligence.

Figure 7.6 Boxes of offerings.

Torma offerings formed from tsampa. Photo by author.

Figure 7.7 A Household Shrine.

This shrine features photos of religious leaders from the resident's home area, a statue, fruits, and stylized wood.
Photo by author.

Many housing complexes and public parks host Tibetan dances, informally organized by people with a mobile amplifier. These mobile music units create their own rhythms. I found that dances near the Tibetan Hospital consist almost exclusively of Tibetans, while dances in more ethnically mixed housing areas often draw Han dancers as well. The Yushu New Village even has a housing division organization that organizes tug-of-war competitions. Finally, sellers of regional products often bring seasonal goods to sell in housing complexes. From the backs of trucks Muslims can be found selling milk and Tibetans selling yoghurt. They bring an ethnic dimension to the typically patterns of the contemporary Chinese city, and allow communities their own particular points and times for gathering.

## V. Conclusion

This chapter has explored territory in two registers: as state space and as non-state place-making. Ethnic civic territoriality is of great importance in the Xining, where changes to the city's urban territories work to affect the behaviors of ethnic individuals and the form of their communities and housing districts.

Chinese administrative territories influence the built environment of Xining both through regulating construction and through its surveillance institutions and regulations. While the local state can loom large when it is enforcing territorial prerogatives, it also frequently fails to properly police its residents, provide social welfare, or enroll residents into grassroots democratization projects. Tibetans often view such programs cynically and may seek to keep distance from the state rather than draw its attention for good or for ill. Tibetans are drawing from the retinue of the weapons of the weak that James Scott has outlined: "They require little or no coordination or placing; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms" (Scott 1985: 29). Indeed, even as Tibetans say they are avoiding collision with the government, they still perform their own acts of place-making, disrupting the rhythm of the territorial state.

In light of the fears over Hanification discussed in the previous chapter and the dominance of Han imagery in the urban landscape, I argue that Tibetans use place-making to avoid the homogenizing effects of the city. I found a form of ethnic community that was linked to religious practices and which found expression in place-making. These communities were typically in places with higher concentrations of Tibetans, often intentional retiree communities. They had a strong sense of commitment to the urban Tibetan community and a desire to create a ethnicized place they could habit. While often these communities often had older Tibetans, their

struggles inspired the younger Tibetans, many of whom live in areas with fewer Tibetan neighbors, and therefore contributed to a sense of intraethnic urban experience.

The success of these forms of community, held together through hidden transcripts, forms a sharp contrast with the *shequ* program, the state's effort to build intentional communities in 21$^{st}$ century cities. These "community districts" had yet to make any meaningful impact on the lives of urban inhabitants. The unevenness of security power's disciplinary enforcement or the "conducting of conduct" in Xining's *shequ* challenges Bray's Foucauldian assessment of the impacts of change in Chinese housing policy. His model is overly historicist, failing to account for the alternative geographies that continue to influence urban inhabitants' use of places or their interactions with state bureaucracy and law enforcement.

A useful notion of territoriality that can help us grasp the struggle between state and "civic" territory is that offered by Brighenti, who emphasizes an encounter perspective that recognizes both state and non-state contributions to territories and territoriality rather than bracketing them off as preserves of the state. An encounterist understanding of territory enables us to grasp the contingent ways territories come to be manifested and the multiple rhythms that both reify and challenge them. An encounterist perspective also leads us to see the state as not fully present in urban Tibetans' lives. On the face of things, this is odd – the state drives economic change and shapes the urban landscape in its built form and regulatory framework. But beyond the failure of new urban community programs, gaps in the enforcement of the urban state's own regulations lead Tibetans to believe that they have more freedom over their places than they really do. When the bulldozer does come, then, Xining's Tibetans realize that their place-making activities draw attention precisely because they are ethnically marked.

# Chapter 8. Tibetan ethnicity in practice: narrativizing urban discrimination

## I. Introduction

On March 1st 2014 four men and one woman entered the crowd filtering in and out of the Kunming train station. Brandishing knives, they brutally stabbed passersby, killing 31 and injuring another 141 (Xinhua 2014a). In Ürümqi, Xinjiang on May 22, 2014, two SUVs drove onto a crowded market street adjacent to an urban park. The vehicles crushed people under their wheels while their passengers threw homemade bombs at market shoppers; 39 were killed and 94 were injured (Jacobs 2014; Xinhua 2014b). These very violent attacks occurred after a high profile but less deadly attack: an attempt, also by Uighurs, to drive a car into the south gate of the Forbidden City complex, where the iconic portrait of Mao Zedong hangs (Xinhua 2013). Taken together, these attacks are notable not only for their methods, but also for the wide geography over which they were distributed. The diffuse nature of the attacks contributed to a national climate of fear and attempts by policing forces to securitize urban spaces, including those within Xining City.[1]

Two days after the train station attack, religious leaders in Xining City from all major represented religions - Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Daoism - gathered together, in front of TV cameras, to denounce the Kunming attack (Guo and Luo 2014). For the remainder of that spring and the entire summer, urban religious structures in Xining carried banners condemning the train station attack and police vans were dispatched to commercial areas, where police men

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[1] A small explosive had been set off in a trash can at Xining's airport (Huang 2014); it was rumored that Muslims had been behind the explosion.

kept a look out for signs of danger among shoppers. Anyone leaving through the exit of Xining's train station encountered a line of stern-looking militarized police carrying automatic weapons and gazing into the emerging crowd.

But who were they looking for? While the media discourse after the attacks put the blame on religious extremism and terrorism from beyond China, the Xining landscape emphasized another danger: local governments rushed to stress harmony among ethnicities, implicating minority ethnicities in particular.[2] At the local level, fears about terror attacks, and debates over them, are strongly ethnicized in contemporary China. The ethnic identities of the people behind the 2014 attacks, the 2008 violence in Lhasa and across the Tibetan regions, and the last half-decade of Buddhist self-immolations is well known and widely discussed. Chinese media and the Xining municipal government reacted to the events of the terrorist attacks in a different manner than Xining's Tibetan residents: Chinese media stressed the external origins of terrorist and separatist threats. The urban governments stressed "amity of nationalities" (Ch. *minzu tuanjie*), while behaving with increased suspicion towards minority ethnicities. The multitude of official responses to these attacks reflect what Uradyn Bulag (2002) has described as the tension lying at the heart of the concept of *minzu tuanjie*. It is the tension between stability based in a unity of minority groups, and the separatism that threatens to fissure the system along ethnic lines.

Xining Tibetans, on the other hand, viewed the attacks as proof of *ethnic* discrimination, and these events ultimately contributed to an on-going process of ethnic group crystallization (Brubaker et al. 2006). Yet it must be stressed that government actions and Tibetans' reactions did not *have* to emphasize ethnicity. Ethnic discourse took precedent over religious extremism or

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[2] Translating the Chinese term for ethnicity is difficult. Since 1995 the Chinese government has translated *minzu* into English as ethnicity instead of nationality. In regular use *minzu* connotes many of the same ideas as the English word ethnicity, but the 56 official *minzu* of China also have institutional support, constitutional protection, and "autonomous" territories. I will translate the term as ethnicity when I talk about discrimination and translate the term as nationality when speaking of legal implications and official definitions.

external agitation shorn of ethnic connotations. The latter could have become the guiding narrative for either local governments or Xining Tibetans after the attack, but it didn't. Likewise, for the Tibetans who took to social media to highlight their persecution, and those that read and shared those social media messages, ethnicity became a key way to make sense of government behavior.

Following the work of Paul Ricouer (1984), Adam Moore (2011) has shown how a recent instance of violence in Mostar, Bosnia, came to be understood as ethnic in character because local residents experienced and emploted new occurrences of violence into a pre-existing narrative of ethnicized violence. In Ricoeur's words, a "concordant discordance" of disparate moments is knit together to form a legible story. In a parallel phenomenon, through a surge of viral social media posts in the spring and summer of 2014, Xining Tibetans took everyday experiences and the actions of uncoordinated local governments and independent actors, arranging them into a narrative of ethnic discrimination. In this narrative, instances of Tibetans being prevented from staying in or traveling to certain places and frictions on mobility such as compulsory inspection of identification cards were narrativized as ethnic injustices that the central Chinese government, sponsor and perpetuator of the *minzu* system, has failed to guard against.

In this chapter I argue a narrative of unequal treatment in the city accentuates ethnic difference and that social media was a key medium for the writing of this narrative. Emphasizing narrative runs the risk of displacing attention from real political problems and actual persecution. Tibetans and Uighurs have come, in some regards, to represent "dangerous populations"[3] that

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[3] I draw this term from Adriana Kemp's (2004) discussion of how Palestinian populations were discursively constructed as a dangerous population in early Knesset debates. Ethnicized dangerous populations had (and continue to have) a precarious position in Isreal, where they were marked as potential sources of danger while still being regular citizens of the state.

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must be secured in the face of potential threat. If this were not the case, then few of the images or online posts shared below could or would have been created. But my argument is that continued encounters with social media messages and publicity in the urban landscape promoting ethnic harmony have a primary place in how Xining Tibetans' came to narrate and understand these moments of discrimination as primarily "ethnic" in character. They came to feel that their ethnic identity marked them and created unjust frictions in their freedom of mobility.

The research in this chapter draws on images from the urban landscape, articles shared over the social media platform Wechat, and discussions with Xining residents about this media or with the discourses they involve. Wechat is an important platform to study because of its widespread use among Chinese people and the nature of how posts are shared on it.[4] The platform conceals posts from anyone who is not a user's contact. Therefore, one can only see the information shared by one's direct contacts and read comments on others' posts that originate from a mutual contact. These are the rules that govern the general interface, or "friend circle" (Ch. *pengyouquan*). Yet the events described in these posts originated in both Xining and in places where I had no direct contacts. I was able to read these posts because they had gone viral and were being shared by a variety of Tibetans from different geographical origins and social position. All of this should be kept in mind for the following discussion on the circumscribed nature of online political grievance and the narrativization of discrimination. I draw inspiration from a method employed by Franck Billé (2015), who asked residents of Ulaanbaatar to comment on articles from the Mongolian tabloid press. Billé found that using articles from the tabloid press as both primary sources and as starting points for discussion allowed him to explore topics that were difficult to address directly. The Chinese internet acts in many ways as a tabloid,

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[4] In my experience, this social media platform was by the most popular in Qinghai and Gansu during the period September 2013 – December 2014. It is called Wechat (Ch. *Weixin*, Tib. *skad 'phrin*). Wechat's parent company Tencent reported that the platform had around 400 million active users in mid-2014 (Danova 2014).

circulating information that is of interest to Chinese citizens but which might not be treated by larger media organs.

The chapter is in three sections. The first section explains how the Chinese internet has become a place that official organs both represent and acted upon as vulnerable to trans-national networks that work to encourage ethnic separatism within China. The following section summarizes a virtual debate that circulated in social media after the Kunming attacks. This debate and its popularity shows the importance of the *minzu* system in ethnic consciousness and offers a glimpse into the acceptable limits of online political speech concerning ethnic discontent. The final section shows how, in the charged security climate after the March 2014 attacks, Xining Tibetans faced increased surveillance and encountered more posters and banners urging inter-ethnic harmony as urban publicity (Ch. *xuanchuan*) offices increased their activity. Their sharing of online posts worked to narrativize tropes of their relative immobility into a legible story of ethnic discrimination.

## II. Dangers Beyond the Great Firewall

In this paper cyberspace is important for several reasons. First, official discussions of the provenance of separatism, and the dangers it poses, cast the internet as a social technology and meeting place that must be secured. Second, Tibetans are aware that the internet is policed, and this knowledge shapes the content of online posts, which are tailored so that the grievances expressed in them are placed both within the discourse of *minzu tuanjie* and within the political space circumscribed by China's contemporary borders. Finally, social media was a medium that allowed Xining Tibetans to disseminate and narrativize the ethnic discrimination in the spring and summer of 2014.

Chinese publications regularly argue that certain forms of ethnic and religious protest are, almost by definition, a product of outside instigation; external forces are portrayed as targeting undereducated sensitive populations and exploiting them for their own goals. Even offline publications implicate the internet as a site of nefarious activities. *China's Tibet* is a widely circulated trilingual bi-annual magazine that celebrates Tibetan culture and society while taking a hardline stance on historical and political questions. The tone of the magazine on questions of development (uniformly welcomed by Tibetan populations) and unrest (originating from beyond China) bears a striking resemblance to the tone of PRC white papers. One article in the magazine illustrates the key role that online communication is said to have in linking mainland Tibetans to the scheming associates of the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGiE). In a dramatic story, a young Tibetan named Tudan Huaden moves to Beijing to study Buddhism. While online he meets Drolma, a Tibetan woman who turns out to be a TGiE agent in disguise. She befriends him and they frequently chat. She manipulates him, telling him about self-immolation, pushing him towards it and then away from it, all the while working towards the final persuasion:

> Tudan Huaden has the idea "If I self-immolate, it won't be for no purpose." Dromla immediately gives her approval, saying "Self-immolation requires bravery and preparation, one can't be blind in action. One death has value . . ." Drolma step by step led and encouraged Tudan Huaden to finally send out the message "In Beijing, self-immolating." This time, "sister" Drolma doesn't dissuade him, she only states, "In Beijing security is tight." (Cheng 2013)

Although friends ultimately talk Tudan Huaden out of self-immolation, the story reveals an online world in which splittist elements from beyond China's borders can network with the territorial population. The language used in this article is very strong, the author describes the

exiles using the derogatory "Dalai clique" (Ch. *dalai jituan*), accuses several mouthpieces (Ch. *houshe*) of the TGiE, and employs many synonyms for instigation and provocation. This language penetrated regular intercourse among Xining's Han when we discussed topics such as terrorism or unrest.

One day I was reading a poster that had been put up to denounce the dangers of evil cults (Ch. *xiejiao*) in downtown Xining. The subject of the poster was a Christian group whose member had stabbed a woman to death in a McDonald's in Shandong Province. I had a conversation with a Han man who was also reading the poster, and our talk eventually turned to Tibetans and the Dalai Lama. Like the *China's Tibet* article and an exposé in the Global Times, which linked a TGiE cyberspace outreach initiative to America's National Endowment for Democracy and the US Congress, this man talked of outside incitement (Ch. *shandong*) and put the blame on sources ultimately stemming from America (Cheng 2013: 14; Global Times 2009). Explanations for Uighur unrest implicate both the United States and international Islamic terror, both of which are problems that originate beyond China's boundaries. One Han business owner told me that terrorism was an international problem that stemmed from people's hatred for the world and the bad experience of their youth. She told me, "They don't have culture or education. Later bad men use them. We must help more people. . . . Afterwards we [can] change them so bad men don't lure (Ch. *liyou)* them." But she had no sympathy for those that resorted to violence. They would go to hell.

Security concerns lead government publications and media to portray the internet as a shadowy medium full of dangerous external forces, the online discussion I encountered among Tibetans concerned only actors within China's borders. Tibetans have a genuine investment in the nationality system that is supposed to protect both their ethnic rights and guarantee them

equality in the face of the state. Rather than blaming forces beyond China, Xining Tibetans directly implicated the policies and actions of local governments and the everyday prejudice of some Han people. They used social media as a platform to "make sense" of the ethnic discrimination they felt, thereby reinforcing their own groupness.

*Social Media*

Over the last decade, new telecommunications technologies and social sharing has created new and creative venues for ethnic expression. They have provided new possibilities for social movements that bolster Tibetan ethnic identity (Yeh 2013b), and provided for forums and blogs where Tibetan identity is contested and reformulated (Kehoe 2015). Yet as online forums have proliferated, they have also engendered feelings of paranoia. Tibetans I interviewed, like most Chinese online users, were very aware that the internet is policed (see Figure 8.1). This was most obvious because of the large number of Tibet-related websites that are blocked within China, and the frequent disruption of popular software such as Gmail. Rampant online censorship and the anti-rumor drive launched in 2013 (Svensson 2014), is public knowledge. Furthermore, many Tibetans had personal experience, or had heard stories of others' experience, with police visits that occurred after accessing Facebook or visiting sensitive sites through VPN connections.

Figure 8.1 Wechat is closed

A modified Wechat logo that circulates as a profile avatar. The Tibetan reads "Wechat is closed," which was explained to me to be an allusion to constraints on speech. Source: Weixin.

But while the Chinese government has a history of restricting access to foreign websites that discuss Tibet and foreign run social media sites (Zittrain and Edelman 2003), Tibetans are effectively using Wechat to disseminate information and share their sentiments about current events, even having political engagement with local state actors.

## III. A Virtual Debate

One morning I went to attend a class that I was auditing at Qinghai Nationalities University in Xining; this class had no Tibetan students but was focused on questions of the history of the Qinghai region. That morning my professor and classmates were debating the points of two articles that were posted on Wechat. These discussions had rapidly moved through Wechat and other social media platforms. I will summarize these two texts, as they well

encapsulate the political debate about the *minzu* system occurring within the bounds of discussion that the state deems permissible.

In the first article, the ethnologist Ma Rong offered his take on the so-called "Nationality Question." Elsewhere, Ma Rong (2007; 2000) has advocated for the elimination of the legal category of "nationality," (Ch. *minzu*) arguing that it reifies political distinctions and can obstruct the consolidation of a national identity. As he explains it, China has, over its long history, either chosen a cultural integrationist strategy, in which marginal groups join with China's cultural core, or a strategy that relies on the hardening of ethnic group distinctions. He argues that China turned hard to the ethnic path under the influence of the USSR, and that now it is time to return to the culturalist path. According to James Leibold (2013: 14), these ideas have gained considerable traction in recent years: "Through prolific scholarship, years of persistent advocacy, and a legion of students and supporters, Ma Rong's once-eccentric views now permeate much of contemporary Sinophone discourse on ethnic relations and policy."

In the post that circulated over Wechat, Ma Rong (2015) aligns himself with national minorities, citing his time living among Inner Mongolians in the 1960s and his own minority status as a Hui. Ma reminisces about his time in Inner Mongolia: "People taught us how to live and to herd sheep, everyone helped each other, and there was no Nationality Question." Before the reform era, political concerns were not couched in terms of nationality, but in the language and concerns of the Communist Party, which everyone endorsed. Ma Rong looks to the reform period as a time of great change in China's domestic and international situation and asks why, if China is willing to undergo so many dramatic changes to its economic structure, is it unwilling to change its nationalities system? In contemporary China any sort of problem concerning national minorities is reduced to a complication that both stems from and must be resolved within the

nationalities system framework. Ma empathizes with minorities who do not feel represented in mainstream Chinese culture. He writes, "Sometimes, when we speak of the tradition of the Zhonghua nationality, we only speak of Confucius, Laozi, and so on, things related to the national minorities are not even granted consideration. I believe that this disregard is itself Han Chauvinism."

Ma Rong sees the nationality system as the invention of the Soviet Union and as a contributor to the USSR's dissolution: "Every ID card had a nationality designation on it. It strengthened each nationality's national consciousness, and lead directly to the disintegration of bonds with the central government." Because of this political problem, Ma Rong sees that system as a risk, but he also sees Han Chauvinism as a moral evil. He criticizes the lack of minority representation in minority areas' local government, and to decry foolhardy attempts to alleviate all social ills though economic growth alone, a strategy that results in such chauvinism as naming streets in Xinjiang after Chinese coastal cities. Ma Rong's main contention is that the Nationalities Question should be depoliticized (Ch. *quzhengzhihua*) and therefore eliminated by erasing the legal distinction of "nationality" and shifting China to a system that he compares with America and India, in which rights revolve only around the citizen.

Unsurprisingly, this extreme proposal has engendered the vocal opposition of what "may be termed the '*minzu* establishment,' those institutions and individuals with close ties to China's vast ethnic bureaucracies" (Leibold 2013: 22). The other article that circulated online shared these sentiments. Wang Dahao is a Xinjiang-based government researcher and prolific online writer. Wang Dahao (2015) authored an essay that went viral on Wechat after the Kunming bombing; it was popular among Tibetans because Wang Dahao repudiates Ma Rong's insistence on eliminating the legal and political distinction of the nationalities. He uses what he calls

"Interest Theory" to challenge Ma Rong's "Name Change Theory," mocking Ma Rong (and greatly simplifying Ma's sophisticated argument) for thinking that changing the word nationality (Ch. *minzu*) to ethnicity (Ch. *zuqun*) in order to depoliticize the Nationality Question will be able to resolve the crisis. For Wang, nationality is a "natural community of interest" (Ch. *tianran de liyi gongtongti*) that rests within a scalar hierarchy of interest groups, including families below and the nation-state above. Members of a community of interest see an attack upon one of them as an attack upon the whole group, and will respond accordingly. The best way to prevent conflict is to satisfy the needs of a group, an approach that deals with root causes, rather than treating nationality as something that is purely an ideational construct.

While Ma Rong's ideas are increasingly disseminated and have even gained in popularity among Chinese liberals (Leibold 2013: 27-28), they are not popular among Tibetans, even though some of their concerns seem to overlap. For example, Tibetans also see how mundane uses of ID cards work to reinforce ethnic difference. Yet for many Tibetans the rights guaranteed to nationalities in the constitution, such as language policy, autonomous regions, and the institutionalization of certain reified aspects of culture, are extremely important. They fear the very bases of their distinctiveness will be worn away by the culturalist forces that Ma Rong argues should be embraced. In contrast, Wang Dehao argues that nationality problems are just that: they must be solved through appealing to the interests of a nationality group, which is lived and felt as a concrete reality. If nationality/ethnicity is an important site of debate for public intellectuals, then ethnicity as a lived category is an important aspect of Tibetans' lives. Ethnicity is something that is seen and encountered in the practice of everyday urban life.

**IV. Mobility and Gathering**

One of the key ways that Tibetans encountered and emplotted discrimination after the 2014 attacks was through the trope of immobility. Tibetans and Uighurs, in the images and stories shared online, were continuously being denied the right to unfettered mobility, a privilege that seemed the preserve of the Han. Tim Cresswell (2010: 19) has asserted that mobility can be considered in three interconnected aspects: the actual manner of movement, representations of mobility, and the experience of mobility. Looking at the politics of all three aspects of mobility helps demonstrate how speed, slowness, friction, mode of movement, imaginations of mobility, and embodied habits of movement are all politicized. This section will first address impediments to actual mobility and then look at an example of represented mobility. Discussion of reduced mobility is a key way in which ethnicity becomes a meaningful category of identity.

The Chinese state has a monopoly on movement across and within its borders, and in times of political crisis, has regulated movement in ethnic minority regions. Even in times without draconian restrictions on movement, however, friction of mobility may still affect ethnic minorities. Some of these frictions impede movements, while others are largely psychological. For instance, the sociologist Joel Migdal (2004) has described virtual bordering practices such as racial profiling that serve to demarcate the in-group from the out-group. Others take firmly concrete manifestations, such as the system of identification cards and checkpoints that work to limit the mobility of Israeli Palestinians and provide material and furnish psychological reminders of unequal status and geographical separation (Tawil-Souri 2011; Abu Zhara 2008). Whether occurring in physical checkpoints, in moments of presenting identification cards to a business or authority, or in perceived slights, these bordering practices all may contribute to the internalization of ethnic identity and speak to realities of restricted mobility. They also provide substance for discussions of commonly shared experiences of immobility.

How does ethnicized immobility come into being in Chinese cities? Emily Yeh (2013a: 43-49) writes of a state of continuous fear and tension in Lhasa, where the Chinese state surveils and treats with suspicion the bodies of all Tibetans in the urban environment. Tibetans' movement is restricted through ID card checks and the frequent closures of public areas that are common during times of political sensitivity. The threat that Tibetan mobility poses to the state is answered through disciplinary and biopolitical measures that attempt to keep the population ordered and controlled. Lhasa Tibetans are subjected to a territorial array of disciplinary monitoring stations, and neighborhood level "security grids," or *wangge*, have allowed local policing forces to monitor the circulation of Tibetans, keeping an eye on the movement of residents and allowing for the flagging and possible expulsion of non-locals who are considered self-immolation threats (The Economist 2013).

In Xining this gridding system is in place, but its punitive and monitoring functions are quite weak. More visible are government publicity in the urban landscape. After the attacks government organizations at the levels of community district, local police stations (Ch. *paichusuo*), and large religious structures, such as mosques and temples, contributed publicity banners and posters to the visual landscapes of their respective jurisdictions. These images were most notable in the City's minority heavy East District, which became saturated with colorful images of cheering ethnic minorities, red banners, and slogans promoting peace and harmony (Figures 8.2 and 8.3).

Figure 8.2 Publicity Banner.

Figure 8.3 Publicity Sign.

The sign at left promotes peace, harmony, and the Chinese Dream in East District, while the sign at right iterates the inseparability of China's minority ethnic groups from the Han. Photos by author.

While the messaging was adjusted to fit current events, it must be emphasized that publicity images are ubiquitous and Xining residents are often inured to them. However, one young Tibetan man held a strong opinion about such signs, reading the Chinese conception of harmony (Ch. *hexie*) against a Buddhist notion of harmony (Tib. *zhi bde*). He explained, "I have many thoughts about this. This was made by the government. We Tibetans live in harmony, but the Han won't even think of helping others. Our Tibetan religion says a lot about helping and living in harmony." For him the sign was an ironic example of the hypocrisy of the ethnic state.

One Xining sign elicited a very strong reaction. It was a police notice affixed to a wall in a housing complex in Xining's West District by Qinghai's Xinhai Road Police Department, a neighborhood-level police jurisdiction. When the image of the notice began to be posted on Wechat, it elicited strong emotions from my Wechat friends. The notice proclaimed:

> For every housing building in this jurisdiction, from this day forth all homeowners with visitors (Xinjiang people, Uighurs, or Tibetan Monks) must register at the police station. If during inspection anyone is found to be unregistered, this will be pursued as the homeowner's responsibility.

This notice was posted on March 4th, only three days after the event in Kunming. It clearly revealed the police's interest in two sorts of minorities: Uighurs and Tibetans. Responses included: "[Xinhai Street Police Station] is discriminating against minority nationalities, manufacturing contradictions between the nationalities. The Zhonghua People's Republic is comprised of 56 nationalities. Don't discriminate against minority nationalities. This must be vehemently condemned." In another version of the post, the dweller posted the picture and this text in Chinese and Tibetan: "This is the attitude that the [Xinhai Street Police Station's] takes against the Mass Line and *minzu tuanjie*! Is this how harmony among nationalities and public security will be established?"

The proliferation of these harsh condemnations and others brought the following response from Xining City's Public Security Bureau's official Tencent Weibo account on March 5th (see Figure 8.4):

First, thanks to all of our internet friends who told the West District Security Work Bureau their careful understanding and criticism. Our Xinhai Road Police Station on March 4th called for the floating population to have their ID cards examined. Because the Police Station's ideological work was neglected, their work style was simplistic. In writing their "Police Notice," their wording was inappropriate and hurt ethnic feelings. We have instructed the police station leadership and the district police to make a formal examination and to submit it to the City Public Security Bureau's Police Inspector Department. We hereby sincerely apologize to the vast number of internet friends. We accept your criticism. From now on we will discuss how we can strengthen police education and training, enhance national unity, ensure social harmony and stability and work hard. Thanks to everyone for correcting public security work.

The police apology was also widely shared; it expressed vindication and affirmation that perceptions were true: Tibetans were being unfairly discriminated against and their mobility aroused suspicion.

西宁市公安局城西分局 （@xiningshijucheng）

℗ 长微博

**真诚致歉**

首先感谢所有网友对城西公安工作的关心理解和批评。我局兴海路派出所在3月4日对流动人员身份核查中，由于派出所民警思想怠慢，工作方法简单，在撰写《民警提示》中，措辞不当，伤害了民族感情。我们已责成派出所主要领导及管区民警做出书面检查并上报市公安局警务督察部门。在此，我们诚恳地向广大网友道歉，接受大家的批评。今后，我们将加强对民警的教育和培训，为增强民族团结，确保社会和谐稳定而努力工作。感谢大家对公安工作的指正。

Figure 8.4 Online apologies.

Original Tencent Weibo post that was shared on Wechat. Source: Tencent Weibo.

In May 2014 a self-recorded video of an airport security circulated on Wechat. The video portrayed a Uighur man who is accusing the airport security staff of profiling him and making him remove his shoes, a procedure that is usually not required for Chinese domestic flights. The man argues with multiple airport staff and other airport travelers as they attempt to tell him that his nationality was not the reason for the request. This video hit a cord with some Xining Tibetans, who sympathized with a man who was treated unfairly by circumspect airport employees. I was often told stories about travels within inner China (Ch. *neidi*) in which the traveler felt that they had been given different treatment at airports when their ID cards revealed them to be Tibetan. In a separate Wechat post from May 2014, an incident at Xi'an's main airport was described. Two Tibetan passengers were forced to remove their shoes and belts at the security checkpoint, while Han passengers didn't have to do either. In the post, the individual wrote:

> National minorities are also citizens of the Zhonghua People's Republic. Why did Xianyang Airport security undermine *minzu tuanjie* in this way? Their security is discriminating against minorities' distinctiveness. The Constitution makes clear that citizens of the Zhonghua People's Republic of China are equal.

The message goes on to demand an apology from the Xianyang Airport for their botched work. The attention that Tibetans, as marked minorities, receive at airport security was mirrored by the separate attention they also received from hotel staff. While there were few cases of overt discrimination (one man told me he had been turned away from an inland hotel), many Xining Tibetans felt marked as members of a dangerous population the moment their nationality identities were revealed at these sites.

These mobility frictions combined with knowledge of online surveillance to make Tibetans feel harassed and monitored. In June 2014 I attended the annual Tibetan gathering (Tib. *bod tshogs*) at Nanshan Park in Xining. There I had discussions with Tibetans suspicious of plainclothes police officers among the crowds and controls on telephone use. The following is an excerpt from my field notes for that day:

> Telephone jamming. All day we were having trouble contacting each other with our phones. Text messages were 10 minutes late, phone calls either didn't work or were plagued with "Hello, Can you here me?" and then abandoned. Wechat wouldn't connect either. All along the cellphones displayed high signal symbols. The crowd was large, but not much more so than a busy day on the central square or in the shopping district, indeed it might have been less. We were on a hill so perhaps it always has poor reception. Anyways, I assumed it was a capacity problem, but the Tibetans I was with were confident the problem was contrived. "Of course they [the authorities] are doing this. Do you think they would allow so many Tibetans to gather here without doing something? They don't want it to be easy for us to communicate." (From field notes 6/08/2015)

The irony was that Nanshan Park is on a hill ridge overlooking the city and is dotted with telecommunications towers of all sorts. Yet as it turned out, these Tibetans' concerns were not unfounded. One of the organizers of the gathering told me that they were only allowed to have the gathering on condition of police surveillance, both hidden and visible.

Small gatherings could also draw unwanted police attention. I was told of one business that organized for ten Tibetans to live together temporarily in a rented apartment during a training session. This unauthorized gathering of Tibetans drew the attention of the police, who demanded they obtain temporary residency permits (Ch. *zanshizhuzheng*). When this was not immediately done, armed police returned, declaring that their gathering was illegal.

Another outpouring of online indignation occurred over beatings that allegedly stemmed from the Special Police (Ch. *tejing*), an organization founded in 2005 that has a direct lineage from an earlier anti-terror force (Wang Xianlin 2009; Wang Xiaodong 2009). A pair of posts, one in Tibetan and one in Chinese, showed the bloody faces of the beaten men:

> Friends widely spread the word: Zoige County (Ch. Ruoergai, Tib. mdzod dge) Special Police today gave my hometown people a beating like this. Over ten people are in the hospital, one of them is in critical condition and is going to Chengdu, the oldest is 65 years old. The deputy village leader is lying in bed. What happened is that the tollgate at the entrance to our village would not allow though a truck carrying supplies for the renovation of a Buddhist Pagoda. The village leader took the lead to go request permission. Suddenly, special police came with this sort of solution. This is the Party's Mass Line? Everyone spread the word and ask for justice.

These posts clearly allow for an alternate narrative to the *ethnic* discrimination. It never directly implicates Tibetans, stressing religion and the Mass Line (an appeal to socialist morality) instead. Yet in my discussions with Xining Tibetans, the special police are largely imagined as a force that has been created and deployed in connection to *ethnic* unrest. The greater visibility of the Special Police and the Armed Police (Ch. *wujing*) with a simultaneous proliferation of *minzu tuanjie* discourse at the local level after the attacks is hard to ignore. Most likely, this post held different meanings for the residents of Zoige, but for many Tibetans in the wider viral media audience, the meaning was clear: The continued failure of the party-state to guard against ethnic discrimination.

Government issued ID cards also factored into bordering practices in indirect ways that added friction to everyday plans and triggered complaints about the state's unequal treatment of Tibetans. Copy and print shops are commonly visited places in western China, where few people own personal printers. People visit copy shops for extra copies of official documents, document alterations, and to have books and readings printed and even bound. Unsurprisingly, Tibetans often want to copy texts in Tibetan. Because it is often unclear to Tibetan illiterate authorities what is printed in Tibetan, fears sometimes arise that subversive texts are being mass-produced and disseminated. On occasion, local police attempt to restrict printing: an image of one such attempt was shared on social media. A police notice from the Tibetan Autonomous County of Aba in Sichuan Province was photographed and posted online; it read: "Internet Security Police Notification: To Copy or Print in Tibetan please register your ID card in person." This post also upset Tibetan Wechat users. The following text accompanied many of the posts:

> Tibetan is a Zhonghua People's Republic constitutionally recognized legal script, the Tibetan people are an inseparable member of the Zhonghua People's Republic, but in some individual areas the law enforcement bureaus still racially (Ch. *zhongzu*) discriminate against the Tibetan people. America's pattern of racial discrimination against blacks in the 1950s is today appearing within the borders of the Zhonghua People's Republic, which is very lamentable! This is one of the factors of instability in Tibetan areas.

The wording in this excerpt is deliberate. I translate the term People's Republic of China (Ch. *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo*) as Zhonghua People's Republic because the writer employs this formal name in order to highlight the term Zhonghua, the conceptual mechanism and unifying

principle that brings all of China's diverse peoples together as one.[5] The term is employed to argue for Tibetans' equal position, as an officially distinguished nationality, to other national groups within the Chinese state, and therefore their right to use their language unmolested. The rhetorical use of the term "race," which is not a term used in official discussions of China's ethnic make-up or internal affairs, connotes that discrimination is of itself something that is not proper to China. Such discrimination only makes sense in the context of other places, like America. The implication is that China is backsliding into racial strife, which, in Chinese Marxist dogma, is proper only to the Imperialist countries of the West (Dikötter 1992: 191-192).

Just as all national minorities are said to be inseparable parts of China's Zhonghua nationality, territories of China are often popularly presented as "belonging" (Ch. *shuyu*) to China. One participant criticized the term "national minorities" (Ch. *shaoshu minzu*) because she felt it was derogatory: although the minorities might be small in number, their lands make up a large portion of China, and they are not small in number on their land. As I witnessed in the mainland response to international protests over the 2008 Beijing Olympics international torch relay, the patriotic slogan "Tibet Belongs to China" (Ch. *xizang shuyu zhongguo*) had wide currency. One of the first Wechat messages that started circulating among Xining Tibetans after the March 1st attack was the text: "Xinjiang's oil is called 'Sinopec,' Xinjiang's natural gas is called 'China LNG,' Xinjiang's Mineral Products are called 'China's Assets,' so why can't Xinjiang's terrorists be called 'China's terrorists'?" This cleverly worded text exploits the logic that minorities and their territories belong to China, as well as the tension at the heart of *minzu*

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[5] At the turn of the 20th century, the influential modernist thinker Liang Qichao was a proponent of a single Zhonghua nationality that would build on China's supposed powers of assimilation to construct a new post-Imperial Chinese nation. Liang's thinking was affected by America's purported melting pot culture. In the "Manifesto of the Nationalist Party" Sun Yat-sen promoted racially assimilating diverse groups into the Han and creating a Zhonghua national order. The Communists also appropriated the category of Zhonghua, but tailored it to fit the demands of both Marxist thought and the construction of a unified nation-state (Leibold 2007: 34-35, 43, 152).

*tuanjie,* by linking the things that China is presumed to want most from Xinjiang – valuable natural resources – to the Chinese companies that exploit them, but then pointing out the hypocrisy of bracketing off those elements of Xinjiang that the state is quick to disown.


*Differences in Mobility*


A final set of examples from Wechat shows how Tibetans' experiences of reduced mobility are brought into contrast by the representations of highly mobile and freely behaving Chinese tourists and into relief by Tibetan schoolgirls who were barred from going abroad in 2013. They also point to how the events *after* the terrorist attacks were narrativized into a continuous pattern of state attempts to restrict Tibetans. Furthermore, the examples show how religion and place, as the constitutionally guaranteed ethnic region, come up again and again as points of ethnic offense. Images of Han tourists, or people who are perceived to be Han tourists, behaving badly in Tibetan religious sites circulated on Wechat in 2014. A widely spread message took on a very strongly worded, even racist, tone:


> Domestic animals from inner China, if you come to Tibet (Ch. *zangqu*) you must respect Tibetan culture. Even a dog cannot be compared to you, you see life but only know death, see culture but only know destruction. Dogs with no quality (Ch. *suzhi*), I hope you are eliminated from this planet.


These images were offensive to some Tibetans because the tourists are indulging themselves to the point of sacrilege. In some of the photos, Buddhist sacred objects and texts are being pressed to the ground under people's shoes; in others, tourists are shown putting their feet on an offering altar and grabbing the head of a Buddha statue (see Figures 8.5 and 8.6). While

comments such as the one above expressed vehement anger, others revealed a desire for greater understanding between ethnic groups:

Under your feet are our heads. Your ignorance is my life's pursuit, thank you for honoring us with your presence, but you absolutely will not be permitted to trample our beautiful dignity. If you enter Tibet you must respect customs and beliefs. Please extend this message to your Tibetan and Han friends: Respect the Tibetan people's customs. Thank you everyone!



Figure 8.5 Tourist Standing on Offering Altar.

Figure 8.6 Tourists Trampling Prayer Flags.

Alleged Han tourists desecrating Tibetan religious objects. Source: Wechat.

The greater mobility of Han Chinese is more than a representation; it is a lived experience. It is often difficult for Tibetans and Uighurs to get passports, which is a cause of

frustration and a frequent topic of online posts. In early October 2013, a story circulated on social media explained the plight of a handful of young Tibetan girls from the countryside who had obtained permission to go abroad to study, but were denied passports. As Radio Free Asia reported the story, girls from multiple schools in Qinghai Province were selected to go abroad in July by foreign schools in Japan and the United States (Lumbum Tashi and Dorjee Tso 2013). Although they had cleared the appropriate examination barriers, passports were ultimately not issued to the girls. I met many students at Qinghai Nationalities University who cited this event as evidence that Tibetans were not allowed passage abroad for study and that the government would not issue Tibetans passports.

These Tibetan students' troubles can be contrasted with the highly visible and seemingly unrestricted movement of Han going abroad. Traveling abroad is increasingly part of the aspirations of China's burgeoning middle class, as can be seen in television serials about youth going abroad such as "The Children Came Home" (Ch. *haizi huiguole*).[6] Among Xining Tibetans, permission to move freely within and beyond Chinese borders is largely felt to be the privilege of Han. Stories of Tibetans students being denied passports combine with dominant media representations of Han going abroad in order to form a representational politics of immobility. Although I do know many urban Tibetans who have obtained passports, they always feel like exceptions, especially alongside those they know or have heard about who have not been able to get passports.

The story of these Tibetan girls is symbolic of Tibetans' reduced mobility vis-à-vis the Han. One Wechat message lamented that these students were reduced to taking to the streets of

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[6] An increasing number of such movies and serials are being produced, not to mention other programs that feature characters with international aspirations and experiences. Titles of programs based around the topic of studying abroad include: "My Own Private Germany," "Wait for me in Sydney," "Little Study Abroad Students" and "Seven Hour Time Difference." The characters are overwhelmingly Han.

Xining to personally campaign for their right to go abroad, carrying a banner alluding to the Chinese Dream. The text of the message accompanying the photo declared that "The design of the 'Chinese Dream' seems to not permit Tibetan children to have a 'Passport Dream' or a "Go abroad Dream'." Savvy web users, even if they don't have all of the information concerning funding sources, are aware of the Chinese government's suspicion and hostility towards support for Tibetans from beyond China's borders. Connecting immobility to the Chinese Dream is another way to demonstrate ethnic discrimination despite the alleged equality of China's ethnicities.

## V. Conclusion

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of 2014, the Chinese government worked to emplot various instances of unrest and violence within or stemming from Xinjiang and Tibet into a narrative of outside agitation directed towards *minzu* separatism. From another perspective, Xining Tibetans narrativized government responses to such events as proof of official discrimination and disregard for *minzu* unity. When Tibetans reflect upon and discuss with one another their experiences of reduced mobility and prejudiced treatment, they are mapping a pattern of discrimination that draws together the past, present, and likely future. These collected moments become structured in an on-going narrative that highlights the pervasiveness of ethnic discrimination. As a corollary, they also criticize the shortcomings of the state's commitment to a just *minzu tuanjie*.

Uradyn Bulag has argued that state prohibitions on casting ethnic grievances outside of the paradigm of national unity has resulted in the dominance of the *minzu tuanjie* paradigm, which both "privileges the interests of the Chinese" and is invoked "at every sign of ethnic

unrest," as a site for the negotiation and resolution of ethnic conflict (Bulag 2002: 216). Bulag also helps explain the continued relevance of state language in post-socialist China and in online posts; appealing to state principles allows for ethnic minorities to fight for their rights:

> Communism, whatever its reputation outside of China, still commands a certain aura of respect in Inner Mongolia and in various ethnic regions of China. Communism provides for a higher moral ground, enabling Mongols to criticize Chinese chauvinist and racist attitudes and practices. (Bulag 2002: 173)

The ethnic grievances that Tibetans air and share online employ the state language and appeal to promises of an eclipsed state Communism. But the things that can be said are constrained by a "rules consciousness" that defines the limits of political participation (Perry 2009). Though these online comments are important, they only tell part of the story. Beneath them are the "hidden transcripts" of dissension and gossip that question the intentions of discriminatory agents. It is important to acknowledge the impact that the loss of a state monopoly on discursive production has had. The Chinese state has difficulty persuading many Tibetans to accept the official narrative of geopolitical danger, based around the external interference of foreign powers and the Dalai Lama's alleged exploitation of their religious beliefs. While compelling online debate can be found in the discussion on whether or not to reassess the *minzu* system, as revealed in the posts of Ma Rong and Wang Dahao, these discussions are the preserve of dominant state-sanctioned commentators; critical Tibetan voices are excluded.

Finally, ethnicity is never a closed category, it is a "category of practice" that is only experienced in specific contexts and at certain times. It is not a closed meaning, but an always-emergent property (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). While the *minzu* system guarantees encounters

with ethnic categories in certain contexts, social media has become a new site where ethnicity is fundamental for discussion of Tibetans' encounters with discriminatory representatives of the state or the Han people. It works to expand the contexts in which ethnic categories are the salient framework for interpretation and narration.

Indeed, online discourse after the events of 2014 revealed the feelings of empathy that Xining Tibetans expressed for regular Uighurs who also experience everyday suspicion. The emergence among Tibetans of such a structure of feeling has allowed for the experiences of Tibetans and Uighur Muslims to be narrated together, at least among some Tibetans. Social media thus provides a new site where the practice of ethnicity can take forms and content beyond that of which the *minzu* system intends.

# Chapter 9. Conclusion

## I. Belonging and Urbanization

On October 30<sup>th</sup> 2015, the China Daily, a PRC-aligned English language newspaper, published a timeline establishing China's historical presence in the South China Sea, invoking the Han Dynasty-era "marine silk road" to establish legitimacy. Seeking to ease international criticism over the Chinese military's controversial construction of a "Great Wall of Sand" in the Spratly Islands, the timeline establishes a chronology of Chinese control in the South China Sea (China 2015).

Developments on the sea frontier share two key features with the recent shift towards an "open frontier" in China's Western Regions: a selective looking back onto past territorial traces, and a use of the built environment to accomplish political goals. Urbanization and infrastructure development are key parts of China's contemporary geopolitical strategy. In Tibetan regions of western China, this new frontier strategy is powerfully transforming the lives of Tibetans and other minority groups. The state hopes to decrease ethnic tension through the economic development and access to the consumer economy that emerges through the urbanization process.

This dissertation studied how these developments take form in Xining City; it investigated whether urbanization has a positive impact on the lives of city-dwelling Tibetans. While urban Tibetans are accepting and enjoying economic prosperity: taking on new urban lifestyles and adopting a version of the China Dream, they can't help but feel out of place in an environment where they are marked as ethnic bodies that can draw unwanted attention.

Furthermore, the future success of the frontier economy is highly contingent on continued state financial support of the region.

To come to this conclusion, I showed the interplay between the macro-level and the micro-level, the national and the local. The culturalist thread in Chinese geopolitical thinking - claiming an essential Chineseness rooted in ancient civilization – applies both within China's frontiers and, increasingly, beyond them. Official and popular narratives that naturalize China's territorial presences it the Western Region appropriate a past to serve present geopolitical projects and national development goals. China has made great efforts to expand its railway infrastructure into the "original" over-land Silk Road, re-appropriating that region's past as a demonstration of historical cosmopolitanism. Within China the Western Regions have also been reimagined as wild frontiers of China that can serve both as entertainment for domestic tourists and as a site of national re-energization for the Han. I have argued that although this open frontier vision looks out its frontiers, it really remakes them in its own image rather than embracing the differing political visions, policy opinions, and senses of belonging that frontier peoples may have.

As an instance of urbanization of China's Western Region, Xining City is an exemplary model. It sits in a region of great diversity and is a site that Han, Tibetans, and Muslims can all call their own. As the economy of eastern Qinghai Province changes, Tibetans have been drawn into a new frontier economy dependent upon policy makers in Beijing. Although urbanization brings material benefits to the majority of Tibetans, outcomes have been uneven. Government work remains highly sought after because it guarantees a stable income and the preferential bank loans that facilitate apartment purchase. I found that family members and friends with government connections frequently assist less established urban dwellers. Business owners like

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Jigme Tenzin are less likely to be apartment owners, but the most successful businesses attain success by providing services to their ethnic community. Finally, Tibetans like Jamyang, the construction boss, and Lobsang, the caterpillar fungus seller, can turn significant profits when the market is good, but they are also the most subject to the whims of state policy. Difficulty in finding work or less than desirable profits from work are frequently blamed on the Han, who are associated with the state and ethnic privilege. Blame is also placed on Xining's Muslims who have long played a role in regional trade, and who also find themselves seeking out an economic foothold in the new economy.

The transition to urban life is pushing young Tibetans to envision new relationships with the city and the countryside. These places become strategic sites in the on-going negotiation of Tibetan self-identity; Tibetans are seeking to become urbane citizens while retaining their ethnic particularities. I offered a tripartite model to better understand the difficult terrain upon which this negotiation takes place. Economic growth is creating urban consumers among national minorities, who are increasingly drawn towards national ideas about the good life urban consumerism provides. Many participants wanted to purchase housing based less on who would be their neighbors, than on the newness of the housing stock, the open space of the housing project, and the convenience of access to stores and amenities. Nationally, the city is imagined as a place where civilization takes place. Dirt and the low quality of some urban denizens are often linked to rural and ethnic regions, imagined as mired in poverty. Adopting some of these ideas, young Tibetans are distancing themselves from Xining's East District, associated with scheming Muslims and polluting dirt. Ironically, the East District remains a key site for Tibetan commerce. Finally, the countryside exists as a counterpart to these positive and negative valuations of the

city. Tibetans fear Hanification and hope to tap the countryside as a reservoir for the Tibetan language and the stronger moral disposition of Tibetan rurality.

But Tibetans don't only locate their culture in the countryside. As the number of urban Tibetans increases, Tibetans are place-making in the city, carving out their own social territories with ethno-religious symbols, such through the building of prayer wheels in their housing complexes. These efforts prove to be more successful than government programs that attempt to secure a sense of community. Recent urban re-territorialization has changed how urban dwellers relate to the local state. Although new "community districts" are supposed to encourage democratic participation and guarantee a new type of surveillance of the population, Tibetans frequently evade or don't encounter the state. When they do encounter the state, the results can be explosive, such as in the case of the bulldozed prayer wheels. Encounters can contribute to a sense of ethnic discrimination in a city dominated by a Han Chinese visual landscape.

But urban state also mobilizes in other contexts as government responses to terrorist attacks across western China in 2014 reveal. The increase in armored police, "amity of nationalities" publicity, and local police attempts to track and register ethnic minorities, also contributed to a sense of ethnic discrimination. These events were picked up in social media discussions where they were narrativized into a story of ethnic prejudice against and the relative immobility of Tibetan bodies. While Tibetans continue to call for social justice over social media, China's ethnic policy has become a topic of heated debate in official circles (Leibold 2013). Unfortunately, Tibetans find themselves marginalized in policy discussions. Tibetans across Amdo fear that any significant adjustment to the regulations that institutionally guarantee minority language education and other support could be erased. The loss of such protections would drain the cultural reservoirs Tibetans strive to maintain.

In sum, China's pivot towards its frontiers is leading to urbanization in Western China, having an impact on the economy, housing, and transportation. Xining City has become an urban home for many Tibetans and Muslims in the surrounding hinterlands. While these new urban dwellers pursue material prosperity and national dreams of success and happiness, ethnic difference is also being exacerbated due to concerns over unequal access to work, negative associations with some quarters of the city, conflict over the built environment, and intraethnic discussion of ethnically-based discrimination.

## II. Future directions

Going forward, more case studies must be done in China's frontier areas to determine the exact nature of urbanization there and how frontier peoples are responding to it. Recently geographers have begun to explore a new epistemological approach to the urban, deconstructing its attributes to see how the concept might be used to better understand the nature of the urban in its great diversity (Brenner and Schmid 2015). More closely defining the urban and applying it to frontier sites, where new technologies are making it easier than ever to urbanize places remote from traditionally conceived urban centers, affords us a better view of the quality and extent of the transformations enabled by expanding transportation, increased resource consumption, and connection to wireless telecommunications technologies.

Such an understanding will enhance understandings of urbanization along China's frontiers, where the state is taking novel approaches to constructing the built environment. Xining and its surrounding regions are important sites not only for understanding the impact of state development on Tibetans, but also the political consequences of urbanization that can favor some and put others at a disadvantage. The outcomes of Chinese infrastructure development

abroad, such as that in Latin America and Africa, could serve as useful comparative projects. Those cases pose questions about the relationship not only between the Chinese State and local populations, but involve native governments and Chinese companies operating abroad as development machines. Important parallels can be drawn, but we would be remiss if we do not recognize that there is no single "Chinese model" that is operating within China or across the world today (Dirlik 2012). Geopolitical context, changing regimes, local governments, and the lives and experiences of peoples on the ground make understanding a Chinese approach to development, or even geopolitics, difficult. More case studies are need to better understand how differing urbanizations in differing contexts can be used to understand urbanization as an economic and political strategy.

Additionally, at the heart of much of the political tension highlighted in this dissertation is the question of belonging: how are places and people coming to belong in the 21st century? It is a question that will persist as the global geopolitical order moves further away from American hegemony, and rising states such as China, Russia, and India become bolder in their claims. It is also a question is brought to bear when xenophobic democracies harden their borders against migrants fleeing conflict and climate change. It a question indigenous peoples are posing to the states that have dispossessed them through violence and disingenuous politics. Finally, it a question that will continue to affect humans as we continue to seek happier and more fulfilling ways to dwell. This multi-faceted question of belonging is best grasped through a combination of perspectives: historical, socio-economic, and cultural, as this dissertation has attempted to do.

# Appendices

# Appendix A. Place Names

| *Pinyin* | *Chinese* | *Wylie* | *Tibetan* | *Alternate name* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bayilu | 八一路 | | | Bayi Lu |
| Beishan shichang | 北山市场 | | | North Mtn. Market |
| Caojiasai shichang | 曹家赛市场 | | | Caojiasai Market |
| Changdu | 昌都 | chab mdo | ཆབ་མདོ | Chamdo |
| Chengbeiqu | 城北区 | | | North district |
| Chengdongqu | 城东区 | | | East district |
| Chengduo | 称多 | khri 'du | ཁྲི་འདུ | |
| Chengnanqu | 城南区 | | | South district |
| Chengxiqu | 城西区 | | | West district |
| Chengzhongqu | 城中区 | | | Central district |
| Dafosi | 大佛寺 | mkhas pa mi gsum gyi lha khang མཁས་པ་མི་གསུམ་གྱི་ལྷ་ཁང་ | | |
| Datongxian | 大通县 | | | Datong County |
| Deqin | 德钦 | bde chen | བདེ་ཆེན | |
| Dongguan dajie | 东关大街 | | | Dongguan Avenue |
| Dongguan qingzhensi | 东关清真寺 | | | Dongguan Mosque |
| Fenghuangshan | 凤凰山 | | | Phoenix Mountain |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gansu | 甘肃 | | | |
| Ganzi | 甘孜 | dkar mdzes | དཀར་མཛེས། | Garze |
| Ge'ermu | 格尔木 | | | Golmud |
| Gonghe | 共和 | chab cha | ཆབ་ཆ། | |
| Guide | 贵德 | khri ka | ཁྲི་ཀ | Trika |
| Guoluo | 果洛 | mgo log | མགོ་ལོག | Golok |
| Haibei | 海西 | mtsho nub | མཚོ་ནུབ། | |
| Haihu Xinqu | 海湖新区 | | | Lake District |
| Hainan | 海南 | mtsho lho | མཚོ་ལྷོ། | |
| Hezhou | 河州 | | | Linxia 临夏 |
| Hongjuesi | 宏觉寺 | tsong kha dgon | ཙོང་ཁ་དགོན། | |
| Huzhu | 互助 | | | |
| Hualong | 化隆 | ba yan mkhar | བ་ཡན་མཁར། | |
| Huangnan | 黄南州 | rma lho | རྨ་ལྷོ། | |
| Huangyuan | 湟源 | | | |
| Huangyuanxian | 湟源县 | | | Huangyuan County |
| Huangzhong | 湟中 | | | |
| Huangzhongxian | 湟中县 | | | Huangzhong County |
| Jingji kaifa qu | 经济开发区 | | | |
| Jintasi | 金塔寺 | dus gsum nyi 'od gling | དུས་གསུམ་ཉི་འོད་གླིང་། | |

| Kangmar | 康马 | khang dmar | ཁང་དམར། | |
| Kashi | 喀什 | | | Kashgar |
| Lanzhou | 兰州 | | | |
| Nangqian | 囊谦 | nang chen | ནང་ཆེན། | |
| Nanshan Park | 南山公园 | | | South Mtn. Park |
| Qinghai | 青海 | mtsho sngon | མཚོ་སྔོན། | |
| Qinghai hu | 青海湖 | | | Kokonor |
| Qingtang cheng | 青唐城 | | | Qingtang City |
| Shanzhou | 鄯州 | | | |
| Ta'er si | 塔尔寺 | sku 'bum | སྐུ་འབུམ། | Kumbum |
| Talimu pendi | 塔里木盆地 | | | Tarim Basin |
| TAR | 西藏自治区 | bod rang skyong ljongs | བོད་རང་སྐྱོང་ལྗོངས། | |
| Tongren | 同仁 | reb kong | རེབ་ཀོང་། | Rebkong |
| Turpan | 吐鲁番 | | | Turfan |
| Xiahe | 夏河 | bla brang | བླ་བྲང་། | Labrang |
| Xiaoqiao | 小桥 | | | Small bridge |
| Xiaoshangpin | 小商品 | | | |
| Xining | 西宁 | | | Ziling |
| Xiningfu | 西宁府 | | | Xining Prefecture |
| Xiningshiqu | 西宁市区 | | | Xining City District |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Xiningwei | 西宁卫 | | | Xining Commandery |
| Xipingting | 西平亭 | | | Xining Pavilion |
| Xinjiang | 新疆 | | | |
| Xunhua | 循化 | ya rdzi | ཡ་རྫི | |
| Yunnan | 云南 | yun nan | ཡུན་ནན | |
| Yushu | 玉树 | yul shul | ཡུལ་ཤུལ | |
| Yushu Xincun | 玉树新村 | | | Yushu New Village |
| Zeku | 泽库 | rtse khog | རྩེ་ཁོག | |
| Zhongdian | 中甸 | rgyal thang | རྒྱལ་ཐང | Shangri-la |
| Ruoergai | 若尔盖 | mdzod dge | མཛོད་དགེ | Zoige |

# Appendix B. Glossary of Chinese Terms

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ahong | 阿訇 | imam |
| aiguo zongjiao tuanti | 爱国宗教团体 | patriotic religious organization |
| ando | 安多 | Amdo |
| bainainguochi | 百年国耻 | One hundred years of national humiliation |
| bantu | 版图 | domain; territory |
| bianjiang | 边疆 | frontier; borderland; border region |
| bianjie | 边界 | boundary; border |
| bianjing | 边境 | border; frontier |
| bieshu | 别墅 | villa |
| buguifan | 不规范 | irregular |
| baizheng | 财政 | financial administration |
| chengdongqu yiji zongjiaobu | 城东区一级宗教部 | East District Level One Religious Bureau |
| chongcao | 虫草 | caterpillar fungus |
| bhujing | 处境 | plight; unfavorable situation |
| cishan | 慈善 | benevolent |
| daguo | 大国 | great power |
| daxing | 大型 | large; large-form |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| daikuan | 贷款 | loan |
| dalai jituan | 达赖集团 | Dalai Lama clique |
| danwei | 单位 | work unit; unit of measurement |
| danyuan | 单元 | unit; residential entrance |
| daomeizi | 盗马贼 | Horse Thief |
| datong | 大同 | Great Unity |
| dizhu | 地主 | land lord; land owner |
| duilian | 对联 | vertical strips on either side of doorway |
| fangbian | 方便 | convenient |
| fangdong | 房东 | land lord; apartment owner |
| fengshui | 风水 | geomancy |
| fenlie | 分裂 | fission |
| fotang | 佛堂 | shrine room |
| fuxing | 复兴 | revitalization |
| ganbanmian | 干拌面 | dry mixed noodles |
| gaotiewaijiao | 高铁外交 | railway diplomacy |
| gongbei | 拱北 | Sunni or Sufi tomb |
| gongwuyuan | 公务员 | civil servant |
| guanxi | 关系 | relations; relationship; connections |
| guanyuan | 官员 | government official |
| guojiang | 国疆 | territory; dominion |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| hanhua | 汉化 | hanification; hanified |
| heqin | 和亲 | alliance marriage |
| hexie shehui | 和谐社会 | Harmonious Society |
| hexie shijie | 和谐世界 | Harmonious World |
| hexie | 和谐 | harmony |
| houshe | 喉舌 | mouthpiece |
| hua | 化 | transform |
| huanjing | 幻境 | fairyland |
| huizu | 回族 | Hui ethnicity |
| hukou | 户口 | household registration |
| jiang | 疆 | border; frontier; boundary |
| jiaohua | 狡猾 | deceitful |
| jiazu | 家族 | clan |
| jie | 界 | boundary; kingdom; scope |
| jiedufei | 借读费 | school enrollment fee |
| jiju | 集居 | clustered living |
| jindai guojia | 近代国家 | modern state |
| jing | 境 | border; boundary; place; situation |
| jingdi | 境地 | circumstances; condition |
| jingtu | 境土 | region; lands; territory |
| jiongjing | 窘境 | plight; predicament; awkward situation |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| jiuzhou | 九州 | nine states |
| jumin weiyuanhui | 居民委员会 | residents' committee |
| kaituo | 开拓 | develop a border region; pioneer |
| kunjing | 困境 | predicament; difficult position |
| laihua | 来化 | convert; acculturate; assimilate |
| lamianxian | 拉面线 | hand-pulled noodles |
| lang tuteng | 狼图腾 | Wolf Totem |
| lanhai zhanlve | 蓝海战略 | Blue Sea Strategy |
| laoban | 老板 | boss |
| yi dian yili | 一点利益 | a little benefit |
| lifan yuan | 理藩院 | Office for External Affairs |
| liudongrenkou | 流动人口 | floating population |
| liyou | 利诱 | lure |
| loudong | 漏洞 | loophole |
| luquan zhanlve | 陆权战略 | Continental Power Strategy |
| manhuang | 蛮荒 | wilds; barbaric wastelands |
| meiguanxi | 没关系 | no relationship |
| meiyou suzhi | 没有素质 | no human quality |
| meiyou wenhua | 没有文化 | uncultured |
| mijing | 秘境 | secret land; mysterious frontier |
| mila | 蜜蜡 | amber; beeswax amber |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| miaojing | 妙境 | wonderland |
| minqing rishi | 民情日志 | journal of people's feelings |
| minzu zhenxing | 民族振兴 | revitalize nationality |
| minzu zongjiao shiwu bumen | 民族宗教事务部门 | Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau |
| minzu | 民族 | nationality; nation; ethnic group |
| minzudebeilei | 民族的贝类 | ethnic scum |
| minzutuanjie | 民族团结 | amity of nationalities; national unity |
| muzhu | 牧主 | herd lord |
| neidi | 内地 | inner China; inland China |
| paichusuo | 派出所 | police station |
| pengyouquan | 朋友圈 | friend circle |
| qingnian zhiyuan kenhuang dui | 青年志愿垦荒队 | Youth volunteer wasteland reclamation team |
| qingzang gaoyuan | 青藏高原 | Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau |
| quzhengzhihua | 去政治化 | depoliticize |
| renjian xianjing | 人间仙境 | Earthly Paradise |
| renwu tian | 任务田 | fields of duty |
| riyueshan | 日月山 | Sun Moon Mountain |
| salazu | 撒拉族 | Salar ethnicity |
| sanju | 散居 | scattered living |
| sanxian | 三线 | The Third Front |
| shandong | 煽动 | incite |

| shaoshuminzu | 少数民族 | national minorities |
| sheng | 省 | province |
| shequ | 社区 | community; community district |
| shi | 市 | city |
| shiye danwei | 事业单位 | state enterprise unit |
| shuyu | 属于 | belong |
| sijing | 四境 | all the borders |
| sizongsiheng | 四纵四横 | Four horizontals and four verticals |
| suzhi | 素质 | quality; human quality |
| tejing | 特警 | special police, special weapons police unit |
| tianxia | 天下 | all under heaven |
| tongyi | 统一 | unity |
| tufan/tubo | 吐蕃 | Great Tibetan Empire |
| tuntian | 屯田 | garrison system |
| tusi | 土司 | system of tribal headmen |
| wai | 外 | outside |
| wangge | 网格 | grid; grid system |
| weixin | 微信 | Wechat |
| wenming chengshi | 文明城市 | civilized city |
| wenming guojia | 文明国家 | civilization state |
| wenming | 文明 | civilization |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| wenmingxing guojia | 文明型国家 | civilizational state |
| wujing | 武警 | armed police; militarized police |
| wuye | 物业 | real estate services office |
| xiafang nianqing | 下放年轻 | sent-down youth (program) |
| xian | 线 | demarcation line; route; brink; thread |
| xian | 县 | county |
| xiaoqu | 小区 | housing complex; housing community |
| xiaoxing | 小型 | small; small-form |
| xibu dakaifa | 西部大开发 | opening up the west (policy) |
| xibu | 西部 | Western Region |
| xiejia | 歇家 | House of Repose |
| xiejiao | 邪教 | evil cult |
| xin qinghai | 新青海 | New Qinghai |
| xinchong | 新宠 | new love; hot commodity |
| xixia | 西夏 | Tangut |
| xiyu | 西域 | Western Region |
| xizang mima | 西藏密码 | The Tibetan Code |
| xizang mimi | 西藏秘密 | Tibetan Secret |
| xuanchuan | 宣传 | publicity; propaganda |
| xueyu | 雪域 | snowland |
| yang | 阳 | masculine |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| yidaiyilu | 一带一路 | One Belt, One Road |
| yin | 阴 | feminine |
| yong wu zhijing | 永无止境 | endless; boundless |
| zangqu | 藏区 | Tibetan Regions |
| zangzu | 藏族 | Tibetan ethnicity |
| zanshizhuzheng | 暂时住证 | temporary residency permit |
| zhongguomeng | 中国梦 | Chinese Dream |
| zhongguoren | 中国人 | Chinese person |
| zhonghua | 中华 | the Chinese nation; China |
| zhongzu | 种族 | race |
| zhou | 州 | prefecture |
| zisi | 自私 | selfish |
| zongjiao huodong changsuo | 宗教活动场所 | venue for religious activity |
| zongjiaobu | 宗教部 | Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau |
| zongjiaoju | 宗教局 | religious affairs bureau |

# Appendix C. Glossary of Tibetan Terms

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 'dug sa | འདུག་ས། | dwelling place; home |
| bod tshogs | བོད་ཚོགས། | Tibetan gathering |
| brtsi bkur | བརྩི་བཀུར། | respect |
| dbyar rtswa dgun 'bu | དབྱར་རྩྭ་དགུན་འབུ། | caterpillar fungus |
| dga' nye | དགའ་ཉེ། | ganye; mutual aid organization |
| dom | དོམ། | loan |
| go re sna gcu | གོ་རེ་སྣ་གཅུ། | Rebkong circular bread |
| gtor ma | གཏོར་མ། | offerings |
| khyim mi | ཁྱིམ་མི། | relative (of the bone) |
| mchod khang | མཆོད་ཁང་། | shrine room |
| mi gtsang gi | མི་གཙང་གི། | dirty |
| mi rigs kyi zhabs 'dren pa | མི་རིགས་ཀྱི་ཞབས་འདྲེན་པ། | ethnic scum |
| mtshams | མཚམས། | boundary |
| pha yul | ཕ་ཡུལ། | homeland |
| reb kong go re | རེབ་ཀོང་གོ་རེ། | Rebkong circular bread |
| rdzong | རྫོང་། | county |
| rku ma | རྐུ་མ། | thief |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| rnam bcu dbang ldan | རྣམ་བཅུ་དབང་ལྡན། | All powerful one; Tenfold powerful one |
| ru skor | རུ་སྐོར། | tent village |
| rus | རུས། | bone |
| sde wa | སྡེ་བ། | village |
| sems | སེམས། | mind; heart |
| sems 'khur | སེམས་ཁུར། | stress; anxiety |
| sems la thugs med | སེམས་ལ་ཐུགས་མེད། | *sems* is not centered |
| sems mi bdi gi | སེམས་མི་བདི་གི | *sems* is uncomfortable |
| sems khur che gi | སེམས་ཁུར་ཆེ་གི | *sems* is burdened or stressed |
| sems de la gnod ba yod | སེམས་དེ་ལ་གནོད་པ་ཡོད། | *sems* is polluted |
| sha mi | ཤ་མི། | relative (of the flesh) |
| skad 'phrin | སྐད་འཕྲིན། | wechat/weixin |
| skyid sdug | སྐྱིད་སྡུག | kidu mutual aid organization |
| spun zla | སྤུན་ཟླ། | brother; sibling; close relative |
| stbas bde | སྟབས་བདེ། | convenient |
| stengs | སྟེངས། | fluent |
| thab lha | ཐབ་ལྷ། | stove god |
| tshe thar | ཚེ་ཐར། | life release; animal release |
| tsho ba | ཚོ་བ། | tribe |

| wod chen bo | བོད་ཆེན་པོ། | Great Tibetan Empire |
| zhi bde | ཞི་བདེ། | harmony |

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