Last Monday's reading discussed how the government commodifies and markets some Tibetan cultural performances to tourists, especially those that are spectacular or "exotic." This Monday's reading is also about commodification of Tibetan culture, but this time we learn about a movement by Tibetans to *de-commodify* certain aspects of their traditions.

For this writing assignment I want you to relate the particular events described by Yeh to our readings and discussions from last week. How does the pelt burning movement pertain to the commodification of the Lurol ritual; to the anti-slaughter movement; to secular criticisms of clerical authority; and so on? Additionally, how would you apply a gender critique to the pelt-burning movement? Emily Yeh writes, "the act of burning was a search for and an attempt to promote a more egalitarian agenda;" however does this new egalitarian agenda involve more gender equity? How else might the Tibetans further "decommodify" themselves in order to resist assimilation and state control?

- "Open up the West" campaign coincided with new representations of Tibetans within China as "simple and spiritual," and of Tibetan areas as being romantic utopias, paradises where Han Chinese tourists would seek natural beauty and exotic culture (322)
- "In particular, the new emphasis on tourism and the commodification of Tibetan culture as a strategy for development that accompanied China's open up the West campaign had significant implications for tigers (322)
- Pelts became "requisite features of weddings, summer festivals, and the New Year" in "the late 1990s" (322, 323)
- Tibetans are being constantly positioned at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy in the family of nationalities in China
- "Their specularity was crucial to participants' efforts to destroy the commodity-nature of the pelts" (328)
    - Poor quality "described their desire to show the world through their videos that Tibetans were no longer so backwards in their environmental consciousness compared to other ethnic groups, and to serve as an inspiration for other Tibetans.
- Burnings were gendered. "Privileging of the (male) embodiment of the pelts." (328)
    - "Women, for the most part, watched and tore small trims off of their chubas, but did not make a dramatic show of the burnings"
    - "Men...spectacularly exhibited the pelts upon their bodies before sacrificing them.
      "Women sat demurely on the sidelines
- Burnings were emotionally charged.
    - "I was so happy -- I felt the power of Tibet. Everyone was united."
- Equality -- necessary for creating greater social harmony and reducing visible signs of jealousy

Gaerrang

- Among the many social transformations in pastoral areas, one of particular concern to a number of Tibetan lamas...has been the increased rate at which livestock are sold to slaughterhouses. (929)
    - Tibetan *khenpo*s assert that Tibetans need a form of development consistent with the teachings of Buddhism.
    - Many Tibetans do this despite the fact it would reduce their income.
- "Massive slaughter will result in disaster and misfortune rather than the real development that Tibetan people need." (938)

Makley

- In the Lurol festival are elements of state-sponsored promotion (667)
    - In 2005, Dorje's shachong expelled the prominent elders who organized Lurol without consulting the deity. Then, he appointed a group of his own followers instead. (668)
    - "Only then, with Dorje back on his throne, did the 2007 Lurol resume its ideal appearance for tourists' cameras."

Nithin Raghavan

Jann Ronis

Tibetan 115

16 April 2018

Ever since Deng Xiaoping proclaimed that “development is the first principle” in 1980, the Communist Party of China has permitted Tibetan expression of its own culture, but has sought to control it through other means. According to Yeh, Tibetans have almost always been positioned at the bottom of the ethnic hierarchy in the family of nationalities in China, and so the PRC has taken the stance that Tibetans, and their culture, must be improved in order to match Han standards (Yeh 322). China’s “Open up the West Campaign” sought to modernize Tibet through tourism, and began to promote the idea of Tibetans as“‘simple and spiritual,’ and of Tibetan areas as being romantic utopias, paradises where Han Chinese tourists would seek natural beauty and exotic culture” (Yeh 322). As a result, the vast majority of Tibetan cultural traditions became laden with state-driven propaganda and commodified with tourism-benefitting practise. Recently, Tibetans have sought to recover and de-commodify their culture, with examples ranging from the pelt-burning movement to the anti-slaughter movement.

The pelt-burning movement was spawned after the Dalai Lama gave an impassioned speech at Dharmashala, where he condemned the excessive materialism of Tibetans, especially at such events as the Khampa Arts festival. As a result, many Tibetans decided to show solidarity with the Dalai Lama by burning furs, greatly displeasing the CCP, and leading them to force Tibetans to wear furs to continue maintaining their “exotic” image. The causes of this phenomenon have a lot in common with those of other displays of anti-Chinese sentiment as well. Charlene Makley noted that Jima village’s annual Lurol festival contained several elements

of state-sponsored promotion, and was generally conducted under the eyes of the CCP as a touristy event; Makley notes an incident in 2005 where a *lhapa* temporarily tried to seize control of the event, but was forced back in 2007 so that Lurol would "resume its ideal appearance for tourists' cameras" (Makley 668). Similarly, Chinese development in Tibet also led to the creation of a yak meat market, resulting in the industrial scale slaughterings of yaks, a circumstance which has greatly displeased many lamas, who have called for the boycotting of this industry; according to Gaerrang, "Tibetan *khenpos* assert that Tibetans need a form of development consistent with the teachings of Buddhism", and many Tibetans follow suit, even though it comes at a significant cost to their yearly salaries, indicating a willingness to show solidarity with Tibet (Gaerrang 929). Similarly to these events, pelt-burning was emotionally charged, and represents a desire for many Tibetans to "destroy the commodity-nature" of the pelts, in order to reclaim their original Buddhist heritage (Yeh 328). And in order to inform other Tibetans about the importance of this cruciality, many record these ceremonies, often in very poor quality, to declare that Tibetans were no longer so backwards in their environmental consciousness (i.e. the video "Tibetans in Ngaba burn Animial (sic) Skins 2006"; Yeh 238).

As with all circumstances in Tibet, one can find heavy instances of differences in gender roles within these events as well. Yeh notes that such burnings privilege males over females, where males often made a dramatic show of the burnings and females "sat demurely on the sidelines" (Yeh 328). This is due to the traditional, strict gender roles and inherent class differences between females and males in Tibet, where females are considered of lesser birth. This is unlikely to change due to the rigidity of the system, and current lack of effort to change it.

Tibetans could also, in order to de-commodify their culture, continue to write songs (in the modern pop genres) in order to praise Tibet and teach traditional Buddhist teachings to the

young generation; this is in accordance with Dondrup Gyal's ideology of modernizing Tibetan culture, and can also simultaneously serve to resist assimilation and state control.