

**Waste and Sacredness: The Nature and Cultural Conception of Solid Waste in
the Tibetan Areas in Southwest China**

by

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To Yanfang & Tianmin Wang

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ABSTRACT

China's explosive tourist boom has made solid waste the greatest challenge on the Tibetan "sacred" mountains in the Himalayas, especially recyclable plastic drinking bottles and metal cans. While Western scientific waste sorting and recycling prevails in China and around the world, the understanding of waste alternative to fast waste disposal is undermined. It is rather uncertain whether it is wise to prioritize recycling facilities over Buddhist prayer stones on the presumed sacred mountains to minimize waste. Although the logistics and costs of waste may be well calculated by the science of waste management, the cultural notion of waste and the dynamics between notions of waste and sacredness remain obscure. This obscurity invites cultural anthropologists to tease out the cultural work that prepares people for relating to waste and to each other. Thus, this research project explores how Tibetan people living near the sacred mountains and urban space conceptualize waste based on their dynamic understanding of people, deities, and materials from animistic and Tibetan Buddhist views and from pragmatic engagements with waste management rules. Specifically, it fleshes out the understanding of waste among Tibetans, Han Chinese tourists, and government officials as they live in, tour around, and manage the sacred landscape. By a juxtaposition of the three, it ultimately reveals how culturally dynamic and rich conceptions of dirt and sacredness come into being in the social life of waste to link people with their own and each other's lifeworld. Its findings include: (1) old clothes on sacred paths are considered persons whereas plastic bottles are considered solid waste; (2) women's works to cook and to waste represent a positive link between femininity and modernity; and (3) heart-environment, or *xinjing*, mediates how the indigenous notion *dreg pa* (unclean) is understood in practice as well as in affective strategies to cope with environmental futures with solid waste problems.

Chapter 1 Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Introduction

Thubten's dorm was barely furnished. The only valuable silver tea kettle sat on a long table, along with an old coal stove in the dimming and narrow room which he, his fellow monk, and his senior teacher shared, for cooking, eating, and sleeping. It was 2011 and my first visit to Thubten's dorm inside Shangri-La City's largest monastery Sumtseling in Yunnan in southwest China. Four years later in January 2015, I visited the dorm again. I could barely recognize it, for there was no similarities. Thubten made tea from an automatic electronic kettle on a gilded table, which shared a space along with a flat screen TV and gilded wall cupboards. He still shared the room with the other two, but with half a dozen comfortable sleeping pads and two space heaters. Thubten noticed my reaction and explained that his teacher often took them to give Buddhist talks in Macau, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Kunming, during which they would receive money from Tibetan Buddhist followers who were mainly Han Chinese. Soon after breakfast, Thubten led me out of the dorm and to the main hall of the temple, getting ready for the *Gedong* Festival, in which monks wear masks to tell stories of defeated demons and victorious deities for a large crowd. What drew my attention, however, were the crows on the roof waiting to be fed seeds from monks and laypeople, as well as the dozens of eateries outside the ritual space feeding visitors and occasionally birds. By midday, the ritual was finished. The crowds had left. A team of cleaning workers began to sweep plastics, paper, and metal waste into bins. Just as the demon-fighting ritual had cleansed the religious space, they cleaned the temple, which, of course, produces waste as any other living organism (such as a landfill, see Reno 2016). While sacred

space is being enacted, the materiality of so doing inevitably causes the existence of solid waste, necessitating physical and social works to deal with the waste.

What social processes happen during the treatment of solid waste in sacred space? This question is at the core of my dissertation and informs my ethnographic probing into cultural concepts of solid waste in contemporary Tibetan Southwest China. In a nutshell, my dissertation denaturalizes notions of solid waste to show how competing processes of the marketization of Tibetan economy and religious and ‘traditional’ practices and discourses are active in the formation of conceptions of waste. The premise of the research is that the modern concept of solid waste through scientific sorting and recycling is relative to other cultural concepts of what is and is not waste, much like Mary Douglas’s (1966) foundational theory on the culture of pollution: dirt is dirt only in the eyes of the beholder. But the research extends the culturalist interpretation of waste by adding that the material processes intertwining solid waste and sacred space shape how waste is understood and engaged with. Through ethnography, this dissertation argues that, as the push for commercializing sacred cities and villages in Tibet intensifies through a co-promotion by the Chinese state and local governments, traditional roles such as monks, patrons, and villagers create new ways of forming relationships with deities and dealing with waste inflow. To some extent, on the one hand, the form of sacredness and dirt intersection is being redefined in this commercializing transformation; on the other hand, the structure of authorities among people, deities, and institutions is being reordered. Thus, the dissertation unpacks the material, the gender, and the aesthetic aspects of the transformation and reordering of authorities, showing the moving boundaries of sacredness and profanity and the emerging social order derived from power dynamics that both the sacred and the profane manifest in everyday engagements. In doing so, it offers the first fieldwork based research on cultural

conceptions of solid waste and waste management involving Tibetan mountain areas in Southwest China and affecting people in a global and neoliberal world where sacredness is constantly being enacted anew.

Thubten's story as a rising Tibetan monk popular in China and beyond and as a new generation living with waste on sacred sites informs the research. What he and his fellows understood as sacred in the world of solid waste interests me because China's explosive tourist boom had already made waste one of the great challenges on the Tibetan sacred mountains (Jiang et al. 2009). In brief, Thubten sees waste present in the temple as things the way they are, a cycle of transformation, and irrelevant of sacred space in the heart because the point of the demon-fighting ritual was to help people to gain the ability to discover their own *heart-environment*. While rationalized scientific systems of waste sorting and recycling prevails, alternative understandings from those like Thubten are ignored and minimized. Fast waste disposal and shortening cycle between products and waste disposal is crucial, as Zygmunt Bauman (2005, 3) has argued. According to him, the well-being of modern society is solely dependent upon the "swiftness with which products are consigned to waste and speed and efficiency of waste removal." In other words, modern society thrives upon shorter periods between a new product and its disposal. By contrast, what would an emphasis on heart-environment instead offer to our understandings of current waste problems? How does this alternative notion involve actors engaging with waste in a new way? Thus, it is worthwhile to investigate Tibetan locals, Chinese tourists, the Chinese state and local governments live in, tour around, and manage the sacred mountains faced by the waste challenge, interrogating how each of them develop their own distinct categories of solid waste—though they may and do overlap—and their understandings and enactments of sacredness in regard to waste on sacred sites.

I investigated two sacred sites: the sacred mountain Khawa Kharpo (6740m), and Shangri-La City 175km east, in Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China. In the first, I chose Yubeng Village in the vicinity of Khawa Kharpo, populated by some 140 villagers with many more pilgrims visiting from elsewhere across Greater Tibet as well as tourists from mainly Chinese cities and worldwide. Previously little known to most Chinese citizens and to the world, this mountain area suddenly rose to fame in 2001. In that year, the city on the sino-Tibet border in southwest China caught attention worldwide for asserting its name as Shangri-La, which means a paradise on earth with disputable ties to the Tibetan language, a trope in the center of orientalist imagination of Tibet and the East made popular by a series of literature and popular cultural products. First in 1933, James Hilton's novel *Lost Horizon* depicted a group of Westerners, an English pilot, an American traveler, and a Catholic nun crashing their small plane and discovering a place with grand monasteries, wise monks, and gorgeous mountains, which they called Shangri-La. Then, the novel was adapted into a Hollywood film in 1937 and again in 1973 and recently into a video game in 2015. This continued popularity of the novel shows a longstanding fascination of Tibet in the West.

When the unknown and small city in the borderland claimed that it was *the* place, several other towns with similar geographic features, including snow mountains, deep valleys, and Tibetan monasteries in China and India argued that they were the *real* Shangri-La. Nevertheless, it was this small city that made it real on the map, in the national registers of place names, and in tour guidebooks such as *Lonely Planet*. Backpackers had been visiting here even before the name change, but the number was low. After 2001, mass tourism began. Chinese tourists, however, started their interests in ethnic borderlands a few years later, when the airport and bus station were ready. Unlike the backpackers (mostly Western, European, American, and some from Hong

Kong, Japan), Chinese tourists arrived in group and sought for comfort while trekking and taking photos. As they have become the majority in the tourist industry, the need for modern comfort in the resource scarce ethnic borderland has transformed the city.

Meanwhile, a small village called Yubeng, now a four-hour bus ride and seven-hour hike to the west of Shangri-La City, offered a tourist experience of a Tibetan village in the deep valley of the Himalaya mountains, something satisfactory for both Westerners and Chinese visitors. Certainly, Yubeng was quite outside the modern comforts. Each Tibetan household was turned into a hostel with dozens of dorm rooms of 2 or 3 beds and other simple appliances. The unique hiking trail that led to Yubeng made it famous among the early backpackers. Between 2005 and 2009, a US-based NGO called The Nature Conservancy (TNC) chose Yubeng as a site for ecotourism in which to experiment with development strategies that would primarily benefit the locals. It worked in the initial years. Villagers maintained the original appearance of their family houses and remodeled the interior as dorms as an exchange for their received funding for the initial investment. However, after this four-year program concluded, the idea of ecotourism was largely abandoned. In the vacuum of TNC's departure, the local government of Deqin and Shangri-La founded the public and private corporation called Meili Tourist Company (MTC) in 2009. MTC poured money to electricity, cellphone towers, and paved roads (between Deqin and Shangri-La rather than Deqin and Yubeng). MTC expected to have a return in their investment after 20 years mainly through mainly ticket revenues. While villagers complained that they had not been able to share the ticket revenues, MTC defended itself by claiming that it was still in negative in terms of earnings. The local government leaned more towards MTC because villagers earned money from hotels without paying any taxes at all, which in and of itself was a cut in shared growth.

Much of the development in Yubeng has to do with its initial selection as the ecotourism site, which was the seed for subsequent investment and tourist inflows. The further growth of Yubeng and even Shangri-La is, however, dependent upon the culture of sacred mountains in Tibet and its popularity among Han Chinese through media. Yubeng is not the closest village to the Meili Snow Mountain which houses deity Khawa Kharpo and others, but it is one of the crucial destinations in the outer circumambulation route and has its own sacred waterfall and ice lake to make up the inner circumambulation route. While the outer circumambulation route is widely known to inhabitants in the Greater Tibet and regarded as one of the most important eight sacred pilgrimage routes to travel to worship the eight deities, the inner circumambulation route is lesser known, and frankly, a kind of local knowledge in the oral traditions with lesser known deities and stories about them. Nevertheless, Meili Snow Mountain, depicted as the top in the eight sacred mountains sometimes, and the second only to Mount Kailash other times, brought about profound changes in the region. Yubeng villagers added its own local deities onto Meili, explaining the significance to fellow Tibetans who came to do the outer circumambulation and had never heard much about Khawa Kharpo. Local governments and MTC advertised Meili as the brand for tourism. Han Chinese tourists snapped photos of Meili and trekked in the mountain paths to lakes and waterfalls. These actors established their own meanings of Meili, but the fact Meili became well known through the 1991 mountaineering incident in which a dozen Japanese, Chinese, and Tibetans died in an avalanche the night before they planned to make the final move toward the summit. This tragedy shocked the international mountaineering circle, forged collaboration as well as resistance far beyond the incident itself, and boomed the fame of Yubeng. It also foregrounded the distinct interpretations of Meili among villagers, local governments, and tourists with a precursor. Even though how Meili Sacred Mountain may be

closer to any other village, thanks to the 1991 incident, Yubeng has de facto become the only place where all the contested interpretations of mountain deities matter, and where we may illuminate the contradictory development on sacred land with a strong case.

One of these contradictions lies in the waste management in both Yubeng Village and Shangri-La City. Although both aimed at creating modern, efficient, and sustainable waste management plans, there have been varied problems with plastic bottles, old clothes, kitchen cooking waste, and recyclables in municipal solid waste. For example, Yubeng adopted the household responsibility system in which each household took charge of collecting plastic bottles from a section of the mountain paths. In return, the house received compensation for labor. But when tourism boomed, villagers found the compensation for labor minimal compared to their income from expanding hostel service and lacked incentives to collect the bottles. For another example, Shangri-La built a standard landfill in 2012 to process the municipal solid waste for its population of 56,000. The public and private partnered waste treatment company hired some 300 workers to clean the main streets and to transport the solid waste to the landfill 20km south of the city. Yet due to a lack of waste sorting system, the recyclables went straight into landfill, unless some workers, outside their shift, went through and picked out recyclables for sale in the landfill. While these two examples show a lack of nuanced management strategies, the cultural notions of waste, I argue, affect the way in which certain types of waste are treated, including old clothes and kitchen cooking waste. Simply put, old clothes are not solid waste but a mediator connecting people, deities, and blessings in the Tibetan cultural practices. But the culture is contested by the tourist economy because old clothes are being removed and buried for their appearances on the sacred sites as if they were waste under the current management system. Kitchen cooking waste, in comparison, is associated with the idea that women in the house began to hold central roles in

food sales in tourism rather than subsidiary roles in conventional agriculture and nomadic economy.

Therefore, this dissertation conducts ethnographic investigations of what solid waste is and how people understand it in the daily contestations of the boundaries between waste and use. It argues that waste is active, agentic rather than a stable marker of social boundaries. Depending on Mary Douglas's insight that dirt is dirt only in the eyes of its beholder, it shows not only that the culture of waste emerges when any social orderings are disrupted (e.g., hierarchy of monks and laymen), but also that the understanding of waste shapes both the exchange between people and deities and the gender dynamics. By considering everyday and mundane objects such as plastic bottles, old clothes, and dinner leftovers as culturally rich, the dissertation probes into the negotiations among villagers, governments, and tourists in their diverse experience of the tourist development on the Tibetan sacred land. Waste problems, as one of the effects of development projects, reflect China's nuanced governance over ethnic and borderland areas as well as the strategies of collaboration and resistance from villagers at the marginal space yearning for inner purification in the world of solid waste. The dissertation discusses the various ways of approaching waste problems under the broad framework in which a modern, efficient model is set side by side with a local and somewhat messy model, showing that while the former focuses on logistics issues in waste as a form of resource management, the latter is concerned with deep ties and informs habitual behaviors among those who inhabited the world of waste as lively and living.

From the managerial perspective, solid waste on the sacred mountain paths and Shangri-La City is a byproduct and a price to be paid in the tourist development. Yubeng's pristine landscape, often a celebrated tourist lure on travel magazines, blogs, and advertisements, attracts

several hundred thousand of Chinese tourists annually who come with a large sum of plastic water bottles, mixed with a smaller amount of Red Bull cans and disposable metal oxygen inhalers. With the alarming rate of air pollution in China's urban east, Shangri-La City with the maroon colors, golden roofs, and Buddhist symbols against the bluest sky became an escape for middle-class Chinese who have a disposable income and began to value the quality of life. With several million tourists annually, the city packs up the solid waste and sends it to landfill without any sorting. This creates an opportunity for individuals picking out recyclables in the bins on the streets, and for the courageous, even in the uncovered layers of waste on the landfill site. From the personal and intimate perspective, the waste problems affect individuals' positions in the house and beyond as well as their acts of making offerings to deities. Villagers in Yubeng see the plastic bottles as a disturbance as they walked along the paths, wondering whether they are pilgrims or tourists, or neither. Tibetans from near and far offer old clothes to the groves and stones where deities are believed to emerge, but confuse tourists who follow their example by adding articles of clothes regardless of sentimental value. Women in Shangri-La waste ingredients as they learn to cook Sichuan cuisine for tourists, while taking control of household income by becoming the main players in the tourist transformation as opposed to men. These personal and intimate ties between people and waste reveal changes in social relationships rather than merely logistics. In the wooded area surrounding Shangri-La City, for example, abandoned timbers lie randomly, covering the almost shaved hill sides. Thubten explains, "people cut down the timbers for building materials of their own house, but often found flaws in the timbers after they were down. Too late. They became waste." There is a hard line between the shaven hills and the lush hills. The lush hills are sacred for nearby villagers, who burn incense and offer food to

deities twice a month with the hope of earning blessings from deities for everyday gains in this life. For larger blessings concerned with the next life, villagers have to visit Meili.

Defining “waste” as disruptions of social orderings in practice

Anthropologist Unni Wikan (2012) described *drip* (Tibetan, I use Wylie: *dreg pa*) as a form of pollution that would occur when men entered the room for women in labor, the room exclusive for women. If men must enter to assist women in labor out of dangerous situations, according to Nepali Tibetan women informants of Wikan’s, *dreg pa* would not occur. Practical concerns come before canonical rules. I adopt this view and define waste as *dreg pa* and as disruptions of social orderings in practice, that is, disruptions of monks/laymen, men/women, modern/unmodern, sacred/profane, and so on. Such disruptions do not always produce *dreg pa*, because practical concerns prevail compared to normative ones. Deities residing in the mountains must be tamed, withheld, and dwarfed in times of human needs, such as mining and hydropower stations. When people wanted the benefits from these projects over the fear of disrespecting deities by digging through their bodies, they tricked the deities with songs and rituals of praises and distractions of offerings. Then they carried on. In these cases, *dreg pa* does not occur. This view of examining waste in practice is a step further than the groundbreaking study of pollution by Mary Douglas (1966, 15) that pollution is “matter out of place,” because whether this characteristic of out-of-place matters is predicated upon practical concerns.

This broader concept of waste pertinent to practice is developed based on “waste regime” in recent literature. Originating in symbolic anthropology and Marxist value theory, “waste regime” refers to the economic, political, and material dynamics through which waste is produced, conceptualized, and politicized (Gille 2007, 9). Building upon this broader concept of waste, I consider the contested notion of waste as a moving target between the indigenous and

marketized worlds, between everyday yearning for inner purification and material wealth, and between sacred and dirt. In dealing with waste ethnographically, I focus on three aspects: what is waste and not waste; what are the everyday embodied waste management practices; and how is waste vis-à-vis sacrality in general. In order to show the holistic view of political, economic, and religious aspects of waste regime, I explore how the categories of solid waste (plastic bottles, old clothes, kitchen cooking waste, and so on) emerged from conventional practices (compost); how the contested notion of waste (in conventional ideas vs. in modern waste management) manifested itself in the everyday negotiations of cleaning workers, local urban inhabitants and villagers, tourists, and local government officials; and how and why waste is being viewed as relevant in the making of sacred mountains into distinct cultural milieu that brought about development projects on the sacred land.

Examination of waste as a cultural concept is grounded in the exploration of development strategies in China's ethnic minority southwest borderland. Yubeng and Shangri-La have undergone the typical Chinese governing strategy in ethnic "minority" areas, that is, using tourism as the engine for development while undermining its negative consequences with strong handed government intervention. In 1999, China initiated the Western Development Project (Ch. *xibu da kaifa*) aiming to relocate industrialism from the already heavily populated eastern coast to the vast western areas inhabited by ethnic minorities and rural populations. What comes with industrialization is pollution. China's environmental laws became feeble regulations only in the late 1990s (van Rooij 2006, 60). And the infringement of law is not uncommon in practice. While the local prefecture government (only lower than provincial government in the Chinese political structure) in Shangri-La is showcasing its waste-free image to tourists, the presence of waste in the presumed sacred Tibetan peak, Khawa Kharpo, has produced disagreement from

local inhabitants of the villages and cities (e.g., Buffetrille and Robin eds. 2012). Thus, my dissertation probes into the urgent ethnic and religious issues through local notion of waste, such as the Tibetan word *dreg pa* (referred as *drip* through transliteration in existing academic literature, see Mills 2003; Wikan 2012). *Dreg pa* is a lived concept which denotes uncleanness and disruption of social and moral order rather than solid waste in the management perspective. It is also a principle that people live with but are not necessarily vocal about. With ethnographic details, I describe unvoiced practices of *dreg pa* in the way in which people dealt with plastic waste, clothes, and food waste, and link them with the broader encounter between sacred worlds and an increasingly neoliberal tourist economy. As the Tibetan notions of waste evolve and transform along with labor, gender, and religiosity, I argue, their linkage to “excrements of modernity” (Bataille 1988; Anderson 1995) reveals the Tibetan yearning for an effective purification strategy against the excesses of increasingly neoliberal world in which they live.

The Tibetan notions of waste mean not only what constitutes waste in Tibetan context but also their contestation and negotiation, that is, the notions relate to the everyday embodiment (Csordas 1990) and intersubjective forms of understanding and comprehension (Jackson 2015), together with the legal, public, and other formal categories. To examine the Tibetan notions of waste from ethnographic grounds, I focus on how waste is thought of as related to sacred mountains and dedicated towards the enactments of sacredness in local inhabitants, tourists, and religious clerks; how everyday waste sorting and recycling is regulated and routinized in the state-of-exception (Agamben 2005) governance appropriated by village heads, tourist companies, bureaus in development and environmental protection offices, and especially those locals who are hired to oversee the daily activities of sorting through waste. In other words, my concern with the Tibetan case is as much about cultural notions as about daily managements. I

aim to articulate what relations between waste and sacredness are created, as both ideas and practices. “Sacredness...has its Latin root *sacer* meaning both accursed and holy” (Taussig 1999, 52). “Sacred things are defined by their capacity for producing pollution, danger, and filth” (Ibid). In other words, the idea of sacredness is largely dependent upon how waste is identified and separated from what is holy, as well as how that which is holy can be polluting. This critical approach can be understood in the example of European colonial histories where dark bodies were described as dirty versus the European bodies (e.g. Masquelier ed. 2005; McClintock 1995; Anderson 1995).

Michael Taussig (1999, 5) provocatively set “defacement” side by side with the Enlightenment project, showing that the former educated as about “knowing what not to know” as much as the latter showed what to know. Latour (1993) criticized the Enlightenment as a project of purification being a failed attempt through divisions of science and non-science, we and others. Taussig (1999, 38) elaborated on “defacement” by interpreting the obscurity of a sculpture of naked Queen Elizabeth of the U.K. as follows: “It is the essence of royalty to ‘come down’ in order to ‘stand up’... it is in effect what makes royalty royal and authorities authoritative.” The focus on defacement rather than the opposite is a postmodern move in theory to better reflect the role of the unwanted, filth and pollution in sustaining modernity. Not alone, Michel Serres (2011) also traced the idea of pollution and pushed it back to the very creation of religion in human societies, that is, to have religion, or gathering together, is to pollute together. Graeber (2001) applied Marxist dialectic of value and exchange value to analyze gift, commodity, and waste, describing a postmodern trend in our global economy in which waste is continuously the center of value production.

My dissertation on waste draws upon recent environmental studies in postsocialist societies in that market reform usually prioritizes economic gains over waste problems. One of the tensions, in my ethnography, lies in whether to slow down money gains while enforcing strict waste regulations. To be precise, the issue of waste management is barely on the top list of local concerns, including those of villagers and the local government. For villagers, the inconvenience caused by solid waste on sacred mountain paths became less concerned when they were busy with chasing profits in their hotels. For the local government, cleaning up waste was costly and hardly visible in the performance of the local officials who were on a short tenure of five years. As a consequence, the solid waste management was either lacking or falling short compared to the large amount produced in mass tourism. Is this phenomenon common in postsocialist societies where environmental regulations seemed loose compared to the Western counterparts? Krista Harper (2005) coined “wild capitalism” and “ecocolonialism” to reveal the unequal relations between developed and developing countries when market economy entered postsocialist Hungary with strings attached, that is, loosened environmental regulations over pollutants in Danube and Tisza Rivers.

Zsuzsa Gille (2007) documented the Hungarian history of socialist national campaigns that mandated collective metallic waste and reuse for citizens, the Cold War heavy industry boom based on intense production via the metallic waste, and finally the recent marketization that enabled chemical corporations from Western Europe to relocate their polluting plants to Hungary due to relaxed environmental laws and tax reduction. Compared to metallic waste in the socialist era, chemical waste has greater negative health impacts that cannot be reversed, which as a postsocialist waste, shares the characteristics of neoliberal change worldwide. Gille (2007, 9) coined “waste regime” to extend the notion of “value regime” (Appadurai 1986) and to argue

for the economic, political and material dynamics through which waste is produced, conceptualized, and politicized, reflecting the power relationship at each stage of transaction, including sorting, transporting, recycling, and circulating. This broad scheme of waste, while encompassing, may risk losing nuances in the actual processes. Chinese historian Joshua Goldstein (2007) recently described a concise one-hundred year history of waste in Beijing, from individual scrappers in the Republic era, to state mandated metallic waste collection in the Collectivist era, and to semi-privatized corporations with minimum waged workers in the postsocialist present. While the state metallic waste campaign made little sound economic sense, it consequently maintained neighborhood self-managed collection and sorting of household waste, which is no longer available with the abolishment of state infrastructure altogether and instead replaced by corporations through contract.

To be sure, the research scale in geography of this dissertation on Tibetan waste is small, considering its two sites in the Chinese southwestern ethnic frontier. Yet the unique position of this region between Tibet and borderland southwest China allows a nuanced observation on the culture of waste and its entanglements with indigeneity and religion. Rather than a case study of exception, this dissertation draws upon several ethnographies on environmental social processes in southwest China. Southwest China comprises complex geographies, ethnicities, and a less developed economy compared to the east and coastal China. Its scenic villages in the deep mountains are popular destinations for domestic tourism. For its unique frontier location, the region also has heavy industries mixed with military bases. Recently, some opportunistic groups of investors took advantage of small-scale development in state policies and invested heavily on hydropower stations for the cheaper labor and fewer regulations than the east. Michael Hathaway (2010) used “indigenous space” to argue that in ethnic southwest China, there are multiple

actors, including the state and the non-state forms of sovereignty such as villages, extended family unions, and cross-border organizations. Whereas the Chinese state does play a crucial role in shaping local practices on waste and pollution, the locals are autonomous in coming up with their specific strategies with various priorities and focuses, such as wetland, air monitors, medical prevention, international programs and so on (see Litzinger 2004; Yeh 2007, 2009; Hathaway 2010, 2013; Tilt 2010; Lora-Wainwright 2015).

Especially when the waste problems entail conflicts in economic and moral worlds, the solution is difficult to find. Lora-Wainwright's (2015) ethnography on "cancer villages" in Sichuan Province discusses the dilemma of which is more ethical, preserving one's own biophysical health and resisting the chemical waste or suffering and risking cancer but providing for one's family. Risk brought by waste, in this context, is not only bodily and biomedical, but also social and familial. Bryan Tilt's (2010) ethnography on Panzhihua steel factories and severe air pollution shows that the regulation for lowering production is as much about environment protection as it is about redistribution of power between local polities and regional offices. The top down approach of mobilization to reduce air pollutants enabled conflicts among managerial staff and government officials, having little impact on the actual pollution, a process which Tilt coined "environment winds." Though not directly related to waste or pollution, several ethnographic studies of the Miao and Yi minorities in Guizhou revealed that the making of "eco-villages" and traditional houses as cultural heritage involve conflicted interests: on the one hand the villagers want compensation for conventional drywall houses; on the other they aspire the durable concrete ones despite the undesired appearance by the government officials (see Luo 2017; Zhou 2010).

Therefore, my dissertation on Tibetan culture of waste and waste politics probes into the local moral worlds in which the idea of waste is linked to the integrity of mountain deities as well as to the market economy. Environmental and cultural concerns usually result in a reordering of power relationships in indigenous space where authorities are distributed by conventional, local, religious, cultural, and political and economic factors depending on the scenarios. It is important for anthropologists to study the local ontologies and examine the indigenous notions called “*bentu*” or “*tuzhu*” (Hathaway 2010) in Chinese discourse, which carry a negative connotation in the binary of the savagery versus the civilized. These words are salient not only in state media but also in the daily language and dialogues between locals and tourists, and locals and government officials, among others. Highlighting the local ideas of morals would contribute to the position long held among scholars of ethnic minorities of China, which postulates that the local and the national Chinese states registered ethnic and rural subjects as the impure others through media representation, sanctions of rituals, and cultivation of Chineseness among ethnic minority intellectuals and ritual experts (Blum 2007; Schein 2001; Litzinger 2000, 2004; Mueggler 2001; Wellens 2010). Such tactics by the state, I argue, shape the ways in which religion and religious authorities gain power in waste management politics. Once the cultural or religious approach to waste problems can be deemed as “backwards” or superstitious, local authorities and community leaders are undermined, giving way to the newly introduced experts in the development scheme.

Waste as one of the Tibetan plural ontologies

A study of categorization of things into use and waste has its root in classic anthropology such as Douglas (1966) and has further been developed by the “material turn” in anthropology and other related fields (Appadurai 1986; Bennett and Joyce 2010). My interest in the

juxtaposition of the categorization of waste and the culture of sacred mountain is derived from my engagement with indigenous cosmologies of sacred mountains and their environmentalism embedded in beliefs and practices (Tsing 1993; West 2006; Cadena and Starn eds. 2007; Kapferer et al 2010). Especially, the rich Tibetan tantric traditions of excretion (Tibetan holy “madmen,” see DiValerio 2011) and sacred mountains as part of “treasure revelation” (*tertön*, see Gayley 2007: 214-17; Col 2012b), though fragmented in daily activities, manifest the fabric of everyday lives, laying the foundation for Tibetans in coping with waste and pollution from the modern tourist economy in the Eastern Himalayas. As my host family near Shangri-La saw me off to the second fieldsite Yubeng in the mountains, they shared “sacred pills” with me, persuading me that they obtained these dirt pills in a Lhasa temple from a renowned monk. They believed that the sacred dirt revealed the power of deities and the enlightened beings, which could be consumed by humans through entering human bodies.

Anthropology of religion, as understood within a phenomenological perspective, approaches the fabric of everyday life as the place in which understandings of dirt and waste are resident within. Originating in Hallowell’s (2002) recognition of the “orientation” of self constituted in Ojibwa ontology, the phenomenological approach “encourages reanalyzes of existing data and suggests new questions for empirical research” (Csordas 1990, 5).

Anthropology of dirt, pioneered by Douglas (1966, 15), claims that dirt is dirt only “in the eyes of its beholder.” This position has gained new light because the categorization of purity and dirt goes beyond cognition and towards intersubjectivity. Many scholars of non-Western ontologies, following Hallowell’s (2002) “animal person,” argue for the necessity of “re-animating” the Western tradition that subjugated nonhuman beings such as animals and elevated inanimate objects to human beings (Ingold 2012, 9; see also, Douglas 1970; Sahlins 1985; Schrempff 1992;

Nesper 2002; Nadasdy 2007; Col 2012b). Thus, reapproaching “waste” as active and agentive and making the familiar strange and the strange familiar provides new insights on the anthropology of dirt. While the majority of the body of literature on non-Western ontologies in anthropology of religion focuses on art, sacred objects, museums, and other objects that people strive to preserve (Kelley and Harris 1994; Myers 2001; George 2010; Harris C. 2012), the study of waste, that is, the thrown away, sheds light upon how inseparable value and the valueless are constituted and how things are socially alive through the different potentialities of becoming a commodity (Appadurai 1986, 13-16). Moreover, recent scholarship on anthropology of religion considers religious imagination as the foreground rather than the background for global economy and globalization “as religion” because religion and globalization are “necessarily coeval and intimately intertwined” (Csordas 2009, 3, 10). As the global notion of “green waste” is often thought of as ideas disseminating from the West to the non-Western worlds, it is also shaping and affecting local religions (Cox 1995; Cannell 1999; Coleman 2000; Matory 2005; Guha 2006; Tweed 2006; Gade 2012). By the same token, the global and local dynamics of this sort in my research is complicated by religion. That is, the central peak of sacred mountain located in the village and the flow of religious ideas to the city offer the basis for a religious imagination and thus extend the religious influence in a reverse direction of globalization, from the margins to the center. For example, the dirt native to the sacred mountains is often taken back to urban homes as a form of “sacred waste.” People take pills made of the dirt when they feel bodily uncomfortable because of their belief in the healing power of such sacred waste. Thus, the first theoretical assumption considers that not only is waste constructed, contested, negotiated, and embodied, but waste also acts upon sacred mountains and people’s daily life through their perceived healing power.

Recent scholarship on waste suggests that “waste” is not a monolithic concept, meaning simply that which is vanished or has negative value. On the contrary, waste can generate positive values to those who live in, consume, and throw it away in a modern society that is centered on waste-disposal processes (Bauman 2005, 2; Hawkins and Muecke eds 2003; O’Brien 2008). While many studies extend Douglas’s (1966) argument that “waste” is not an essential but a cultural construct by considering boundary making and social differentiation (Anderson 1995; Cohen and Johnson 2005; Masquelier 2005; Al-Mohammad 2007; Reno 2009; Moore 2012; Hird 2013), others insist on a close attention to the material makeup and the history of solid waste itself, an approach first coined as “garbology” by archaeologists Rathje and Murphy (1992).

The dissertation builds upon the insight that waste is both symbolic and material. On the one hand, it is important to ask how people are ascribing sacred, ecological, and aesthetic values to waste vis-à-vis sacredness. On the other hand, it is equally valuable to research the material making and travelling of solid waste (plastics and old clothes), as well as the physical and affective labor in treating the materials. The strategy I adopt in the dissertation to investigate waste is derived from value theory and pragmatic approaches. First, I describe potentials of positive values in the materials being collected, traded, and repurposed through waste recycling (plastics, food waste, metal, and oil) and human and deity reciprocity (old clothes and dirt pills). Then I expand my analysis on the pragmatic aspects in the process of appropriating positive values from waste things as to why the practical use of those things can assist people in making claims about environmental sustainability or religious devotion. For example, *mani* stone piles, Buddhist prayers’ flags, and *stupa* ruins, common in the local landscape as well as in global imageries of Tibet, seem to be used in some locales as tourist attractions, and in other locales as waste things to be removed for a better view of sacred mountains or an easier access to road

construction. These objects are recognized by Tibetan believers as a medium between humans and sacred beings but not necessarily so by tourist companies and the government, who, on the contrary, see them as undesired waste objects to be removed. How do we draw the line? Where is the line between use and waste? The reasons, I argue, can always be found, not in abstract debates, but in pragmatic concerns.

Why do pragmatics matter? It is through pragmatics of everyday rituals, events, and practices that hosts and visitors, Tibetans and non-Tibetans, and villagers and urbanites make available and enact what they consider sacred and dirt and even create social cohesion through mitigating the societal risk in the ritual space. Moreover, by focusing on the pragmatics of mitigation of risk, I engage with the broader discussion of environmental risk and safety issues prominent in China (e.g., Tilt 2006; Zhang and Ong eds. 2008; Zhou 2008; Yan 2012). For example, the risk of receiving criticism for wasting food that many Tibetan women received was real when they offered Sichuan cuisine in their homes, because the use of excessive oil and peppercorns was incompatible with the conventional house cooking which reused butter in multiple meals. For Tibetans, this risk was something that they wished to take because the new opportunities of owning one's business in the up and coming tourist economy would give them a better chance to access modern appliances, children's education, and other social goods. The idea of excessive oil in cooking was associated by the locals not with being wasteful but with being modern, Han, and sophisticated initially, because compared to leftover butter to be saved, excessive vegetable oil represented the ability to consume, which is exactly the power one could have in the market economy. When I first visited my host family, they cooked me every meal with cabbages floating in a puddle of vegetable oil. It was several weeks later when I realized that they thought the excessive oil was something Han Chinese desired, something that was

associated with being modern, and something they used to entertain me as a guest. It felt bizarre for me even to comprehend the oil-crazing Han Chinese after this realization. But I adapted to the local custom and always brought with me buckets of vegetable oil to my host family as gifts.

Tibetan “sacred waste” and Personhood

Waste has become one of the central environmental concerns in Tibet in the way that is so particular and distinct that I term it as “Tibetan sacred waste” to emphasize its inseparable cultural root that points to sacredness or cosmoeconomics (Col 2012b). For example, as recent scholarship shows, whereas contemporary waste issues are broadly related to such issues as racial profiling in the U.S. (Checker 2005), labor politics in Mexico (Moore 2012) and Brazil (Millar 2008) and *cartonera* art in Argentina (Trajkovic 2012), the cases in Tibet, Mongolia, and Central Asia often strike us by the distinct emphasis on shamanic wisdom and sacred mountains (e.g., Humphery and Onon 1996; Yeh 2007; 2009; Mazzolini 2012), comparable and similar to those of Australian Aborigines and Papua New Guineans (e.g., West 2006; Wagner 2007). While the anthropology of Tibet and Himalayas has long contributed to both the shamanic, vernacular Buddhist views, and the desire locals might have for modernity to shape the lives of Tibetans (e.g., Ortner 1989; Lopez 1998; Mills 2003; Makley 2007; Lempert 2012), little is done about how they cope with the waste challenge. Thus, this dissertation draws upon the rich and vivid everyday experience of sorting out waste, circulating pure and dirty elements, and contesting the creation of a monolithic notion of “ecological civilization” forged by the Chinese state and sent to places where Tibetans are required to learn modern waste management. Both Yubeng and Shangri-La Tibetans are under the gaze and daily scrutiny of their counterparts, including wealthy urban Han Chinese and managerial staff from waste treatment facilities. By focusing on how this group of Tibetan villagers deals with waste on the mountain and in the proximity of the

ecological city, my research on Tibetan waste insists that the indigenous Tibetan categories and interpretations of waste and dirt should be the subject of ethnography rather than play only a “subsidiary role” (Kirsch 2006, 3) of providing information available to anthropologists.

Through a close investigation of local and global dynamics manifested in the encounter between Tibetans, Han Chinese, and various institutions concerning waste management, I demonstrate that those local categories of waste serve to craft Tibetan modern environmental subjectivities, more so than the notions of “zero waste” and “ecological citizen” that are based on urban Chinese lifestyle (Weller 2006, 134) or the notion of “green waste” that is based on the scientific mode of knowledge production dominated by the Anglophone academic discourse (Kirsch 2008, 289; Ho 2001; 2006).

Anthropology of religion has taken the “material turn” and extended agency from humans to nonhumans, specifically inanimate objects, in recognition of the potential of providing new environmental discourses. In other words, inanimate objects, such as sacred mountains and sacred waste in my research, suddenly acquire a kind of religious authority, determining what is sacred and profane and how preservation of these very objects sustain the religion. In responding to environmental crises such as waste problems and pollution, religious authorities (both human and nonhuman) are in a good position to introduce ideas such as “green waste” to local inhabitants. Although the primary role of religious authorities is presumably defining what is sacred and profane, it is never a mythical process; it is rather logical and rational. Durkheim (1995, 169) explained, “We have taken them [categorization of things] from society, and projected them onto our conception of the world. It is the society that has furnished the outlines which logical thought has filled in.” However, this process, as recent scholarship suggests, is not a neat projection either. Tim Ingold (2006, 9) suggests anthropology should take animism

seriously by not rationalizing it, but re-animating Western thoughts. The material approach and reversed epistemology (from non-Western to Western) are productive for understanding indigenous lifeworlds. For example, Rane Willerslev (2007) did an excellent ethnography on Yukaghirs in northeastern Siberia whose practical concerns on hunting reflected a world inhabited by humans, animals, and spirits. The Western binary of body and soul is inferior to the local cosmology in which there is a between space that is both substance and nonsubstance, both body and soul, both their own individual selves and reincarnated others. Similarly, my dissertation argues that the Tibetan religious notion of “waste” interprets the practical concerns such as waste treatment in a more precise way than the environmental management perspective. My ethnography shows that even if the scientific waste management exists, including a cost and benefit calculation and an establishment of waste bins, it will not produce lasting results as religion does. The result is a juxtaposition of waste and sacred sites, which has been a puzzling phenomenon both anthropology and religious studies want to solve (see Haberman 2010; Alley 2002; Darlington 1998; 2012). Why is that religious authorities from humans and nonhumans offer a better explanation for what waste really is about and how to treat it?

There is no denying that scholarship on religion and the environment understands religion and cosmology as the foreground for environmental actions rather than the mere background. In analyzing Dechen Tibetans’ notion of fortune and luck and all the actions surrounding them, Giovanni da Col (2012, s175) insists that anthropologists should “foreground cosmoeconomics.” One of the actions to earn fortune and luck, as my dissertation suggests, is to offer mountain deities clothes and treasures (made of cloth, grains, and paper) for them to distribute blessings through body odor and individual sentiment. But this form of cosmoeconomics has gone out of control and beyond the limit of the vulnerable mountain environment, because with the

convenience brought by cheap and mass made sacred objects, people have offered them too much and have damaged the water ecosystem through littering. For example, fish have been suffocated to death by truck loads of treasures. Besides, removing the objects would cause cosmic damage to those who offered them. Alternatively, as Darlington (2012) suggests, some rural Thai Buddhist monks ordained trees in forests to preserve them, which was first laughed at as superstitious and unorthodox but then accepted and supported by urban middle-class Buddhists and the Thai state. Also, Haberman (2010) suggests that prayers, songs, and oral histories about the personalized deity corresponding to the Yamuna River, as a lived experience of religion, worked as the primary source for environmental actions to clean the pollution in the river, a better approach than the imposition of the unitary “green” discourses. While Harberman overlooked practices surrounding waste and pollution, certain useful religious ideas are shaping the strategies to cope with environmental issues worldwide (see Jenkins and Chapple 2011). Instead, anthropological investigation shall focus on pragmatics and dwell upon “relational epistemology,” that is, a framework of familiarity with the other, “where the main cultural concern is to know the other not in and of itself but as someone one needs to know how to co-live well, properly, and appropriately” (Naveh and Bird-David 2014, 75).

On the one hand, anthropological studies on personhood is relevant because it allows us to see nonhuman objects as “persons” and recognize the potential environmentalist values in them. On the other hand, reflexive anthropology requires ethnographers to take seriously native cultural experts on their creative engagements with local contexts, especially how they define personhood in the world of things, e.g., “old clothes are persons not waste objects” (see chapter 3). Such emphasis on indigenous ideas, especially environmentalist ones, can offer non-Western ontologies a more prominent position in critical comparative environmental studies. The Western

idea of “green waste,” for example, assumes “a large self-regulating nature” (Mühlhäusler and Peace 2006, 458) and hegemonic understanding of the environment. Ramachandra Guha (2016) ridiculed this kind of hegemony in environmental ideas by saying, “Tribes in the Madagascar and Amazon forest are expected to move out so that men in London and New York have the comfort of knowing that the lemur and toucan have been saved for posterity.” In my dissertation (chapter 4), women took the blame for food waste even though they produced kitchen as the primary economic driver and embraced the modern methods of food preparation. While some scholars in Western feminist Marxism have strived for freeing women from the kitchen, my case shows that femininity can work with modernity and women’s empowerment in the kitchen. Women as the food preparers in Tibetan households make decisions on what goes on the dinner table and what goes to waste. They save scraps and use butter in many ways but cook with excessive oil in dishes to be sold to Han Chinese tourists. Despite a moral overtone on womanhood and personhood, this act of choice redefines what it meant to be feminine, modern, and even pure. Even the simple act of sorting things out in food waste is not solving mathematics problems but figuring out the human cognition of purity and dirt (Bowker and Star 1999, 288).

To complicate the story and to avoid a binary of the West and the non-West, it is necessary to anchor the analysis of Tibetan personhood in the nuanced politics in Tibetan areas of southwest China. Thubten’s story as a religious persona with rising popularity may provide some clues. The spiritual guidance from religious authorities could bring about positive changes in cleansing the demonic spirits as well as cultivate good behaviors regarding solid waste. Their significance in the social sphere is also the reason why the religious activities are under a close watch from the state (Fig.1). The mere presence of a policeman’s body would have a profound impact on the role of monks who enjoy religious authorities in the ritual space on the condition

that they help to maintain order and avoid any disturbance. Under the rubric of “stability maintenance,” or *weiwen*, in the recent decades, the Chinese state has employed police force to discipline the crowds during daily activities to prevent disturbances to the stability of the regime, especially in ethnic and border regions. My own fieldwork research was conducted in such tightened politics in which at times I felt that my Tibetan friends were nervous, worried, dissatisfactory, confused, and bothered, due to harassment on the bus, in the car, and at the roadblock checkpoints. My Han Chinese ethnic background gave me undeserved privilege. When I accompanied local Tibetan villagers on a trip from home to the city visiting friends, our van was stopped, and all my Tibetan friends had to register with the police at the checkpoints: name, identification card number, reason for the trip, duration of stay, and cellphone number. While all the info collected from them entered the computer, I was spared, because I was Han and I was considered nonthreatening, whereas they, in their own homeland, were suspicious for collective actions classified as disturbances. Moreover, I obtained a research permit in Yubeng from the local government, which granted me access free of charge at the ticketing office by the tourist company (RMB 240 per person, around USD 40), the equal benefit that Yubeng villagers enjoyed and was also extended to Tibetan pilgrims near and far, whose purpose of visit was not leisure and cultural experience but devotional walks. At first, I showed my research permit to the staff at the ticketing office when they hopped on the van and scanned for non-Tibetans. A couple of months later, I needed no permit check in the van where we crammed together with live chickens and groceries, chatting in Tibetan and enjoying a rare moment of solidarity.



Fig. 1, In the religious ritual aimed at cleansing demonic spirits, the local police watched the crowds closely and interfered whenever there was any indication of disturbance. The majority of the local police body was Tibetan. Photo by author, 2015.

Methodology

Yubeng, Shangri-La, and the waste problem

This dissertation relies upon participant observation, active walking along and interviews with primarily 140 villagers and 300 cleaning workers as well as dozens of tourists, government officials in selected field sites of Yunnan, southwest China. As the map (Fig. 2) shows, both Yubeng Village and Shangri-La City are within the administration of Diqing Tibetan Prefecture.



Fig. 2, Map of fieldwork sites, Shangri-La, Yunnan, China, made by author.

While the overall majority of the population is Tibetan (more than 80%), they inhabit the rural areas heavily together with Naxi, Lisu, Bai, and others and make up 40% of the population

compared to Han as another 40% and the rest 20% in Shangri-La City. Yubeng is one of the few villages that participated in a rising tourist economy, transforming all 35 households (140 people) into hotels and restaurants which receive several thousands of tourists year round. As the capital city of Diqing Prefecture, Shangri-La City (population: 56,000) has more than six million tourists a year due to the nearby Sumtseling Monastery (Ch. *Songzanlin Si*), Pudacuo National Park, and Tiger Leaping Gorge (Ch. *Hutiao Xia*). When I began research in 2010, the competition for tourists was fierce with neighboring Lijiang, a world cultural heritage city recognized by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). To attract tourists in Lijiang for a visit 4 hours north, numerous tour guides in tourist companies in Shangri-La spent a great deal of time in Lijiang building connections with locals or leading the tourist groups themselves. As a result, it is common that tourists will visit Lijiang first and then arrive at Tibetan family houses (*zang zu jiafang*) in Shangri-La as a wholesale package. There are more than twenty Tibetan family houses. Each has employees working in Lijiang. On a typical visit, two buses arrive in the late afternoon, each carrying around 40 tourists. Fully dressed in traditional garment, a man and a woman wait at the tourists' arrival, having *kha ta* (a gift for respect common in Tibet) ready to wrap around the neck of a tourist. A professional photographer then shouts, "Smile!" and quickly snaps a photo. Tourists wait in line to enjoy their own ten seconds posing for photos, before heading to a cultural performance together with a dinner. Merely for RMB 90-120 *yuan* (\$15-\$20), a tourist will enjoy a full package of the cultural experience, which, for the host, is a thin profit business that demands a large amount of sales. The standardized process and the comic representation of local Tibetan food, clothing, and dance together produce commercial culture that is fast, cheap, and ready, compatible for the needs for inexpensive but plentiful leisure of the urban Han Chinese middle-class.

In the two decades of stellar growth in tourism, the accumulation of solid waste has become a major challenge. Just in 2012, Shangri-La City built a modern landfill site 20km south to treat mainly the municipal solid waste. This earned the city the title of most environment friendly city from Kunming in Yunnan. In addition, 175km northwest, Deqin county town was scheduled bi-weekly to send trucks loaded with municipal solid waste and waste in the Meili Snow Mountain near Yubeng. The increase in tourism meant high volumes of solid waste,

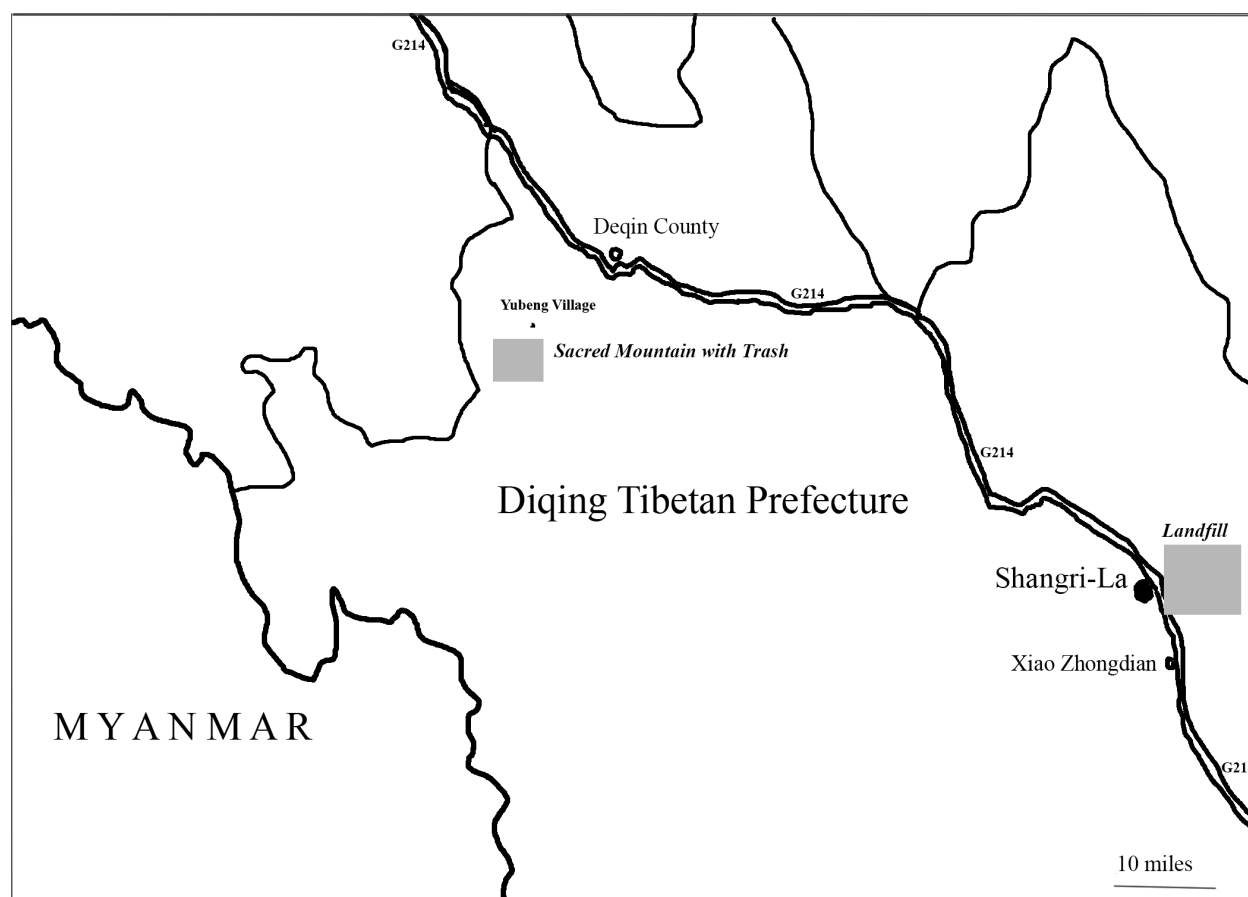


Fig. 3, Solid waste landscape of Yubeng and Shangri-La. The grey squares indicate the accumulation sites for solid waste, both of which do not have a strict system for classifying recyclables and non-recyclables but have informal workers picking through the piles for their own sale. Solid waste accumulated in sacred mountains will travel to Deqin County and to the destination landfill about 190 km southeast. Made by author.

including plastic bottles, metal cans, and food packaging materials. To transport primarily the recyclables out to Shangri-La and then to Kunming is the only method for recycling. It is a 175km road on G214 (G: *guodao*, national road) and takes 3.5-4 hours (Fig. 3). In Yubeng, due to the high cost and difficulty in transporting from the village to the road access point of G214, a large sum of solid waste remains in the village. Within the portion that makes it to the transferring site, the recyclables take up more than 90%, which incentivizes the transportation company to take the job. Lodin, the manager of the Deqin transportation company, said that the company could barely make a come out even with this deal and that it had to subsidize waste trucks with passenger buses (2015 interview). The transportation company is privatized and for profit, but it has a strong tie to the local government. Mr. Lodin attended meetings in Diqing Prefecture government frequently and had close relationships with government tourism offices. He has a full cabinet of medals and awards from the prefecture government in recognition of his excellence in business. While the unbalance is solved temporarily, the remaining waste in Yubeng has caused complaints from villagers as well as pilgrims who insist that waste does not belong to sacred mountains and that a lack of waste treatment would undermine the effectiveness of deities in the sacred mountains.

The waste problem is about cultural notions of sacred mountains as much as it is about labor. As some villages shifted from agriculture to tourism and lost their land to development schemes, the need for new employment became strong. It is critical for villagers to make a livable wage. In Yubeng, the labor of waste sorting and bagging is not recognized as paid work but a household responsibility instilled by Meili Tourist Company (MTC thereafter). MTC claimed that Yubeng villagers enjoyed infrastructure such as roads and signs built by the company virtually for free and thus should cover the labor of cleaning their own houses and

maintaining the roads. While Yubeng villagers did pocket the revenues from restaurants and hotels, they correctly pointed out that MTC took away all the ticket revenue generated from tourism to their village without any share going to the villagers whose everyday life is the object of tourist sightseeing as much as the sacred mountain peaks. The villagers wanted to clean out the waste but requested a share of the ticket revenue. The negotiation was unsuccessful between them. Now MTC provides the villagers green bags for holding waste but refuses to transport them out to G214. It is a 7-hour walk with mules, labor intensive and thus costly to carry bags of waste from Yubeng to the nearest road access. Compared to the conundrum, waste problems involve labor quite differently in Shangri-La's neighboring town *Xiao Zhongdian* (little Shangri-La) 25 km south. Despite the fact that the landfill is within the proximity of Xiao Zhongdian, chances are slim that villagers would find employment at the landfill or the municipal waste company. In the village where I stayed for four months, people complained that they were jealous of those who worked for the waste company because of the salary and benefit that came with the job, while they primarily relied upon growing cash crops, a much less steady income source. My interviews with cleaning workers in Shangri-La suggested that, on contrary to the myth of 'iron bowl' jobs, only 10% of the employments are 'official' (*you bianzhi*, or, *zhengshi gong*) with decent salary (RMB 2,400/month) and benefit, whereas 90% are temporary with lower salary (RMB 1,200/month) and no benefit. Yet the temporary work is relatively better than what Xiao Zhongdian villagers would usually hope for because the best jobs they could get are seasonal construction jobs in Shangri-La or physical labor with better pay in cities far away. To them, the jobs at landfill and the waste company mean an urban employment, which, in the current economy, beats the stagnant life in the village. "Yubeng is just an exception compared to

the vast villages in the area,” claimed the local writer and cultural expert Tashi Nyima, native of Deqin but a resident of Shangri-La City for over two decades.

Walking as a method

Friendship cultivated between locals and myself opened doors to meaningful relations that provided mutual understandings of waste problems in the wider social and cultural context. Often, such friendship is formed in many walks among the mountain ranches, sacred mountain paths, landfill, streets, village roads, and sacred waterfalls. Through walking, I learned stories of close friends and strangers and identified meaningful clues in the landscape that would otherwise be absent to any acute observer. As I began my initial fieldwork with waste issues in the village roads, Tashi *genlak* (teacher, honorific title for people with respect) taught stories of deities traveling in the mountains with footprints and handprints left behind as a clue for their followers. Tashi *genlak* interrupted my attempt to pick up all the plastic bottles as we walked, and instead, said that the more crucial thing than cleaning the bottles is to learn to attend to the deities and their invisible tracks. As I was not fully convinced, he elaborated that humans tried hiding plastic bottles elsewhere to “solve” the waste problem but failed miserably. Out of sight and out of mind? It did not work as such. With the sight of deities, waste that was once hidden would certainly reappear. For example, someone hid plastic bottles inside the cracks between the rocks but did not know that the rocks were riverbed and would give away the bottles when rainy season arrived. The ability to attend to deities, the sacred beings, is weakened in this ecologically vulnerable era, evident in worldwide epistemologies (Stoller 1989; Howes 1991; Descola 2013). As my friendship with Tashi *genlak* deepened over the seven years, I learned that his focus on deities was a product of his concerns about the village homes he and his peers had lost to development and the tourist economy, as well as his realization that the only way to gain back

the power of decision making was to learn the invisible tracks of deities. He worked as a middle school teacher in his village near Yubeng for ten years, moved to Shangri-La as a writer and journalist for a few years, returned to Deqin as an environmental envoy in MTC, and finally worked on an ethnic folk museum and preservation of *Xianzi* music dance. He published poems and essays on sacred mountains and his home, made documentary films on the receding glaciers, and helped with drafts of the Diqing tour guide manual with an introduction to the invisible deities' tracks, which has been the required text for any new tour guide license since 2011. Friendship with Tashi genlak provided me the access to the lifeworld (Jackson 2015) of Diqing Tibetans whose engagements with the waste problem pointed towards the matter of deities.

While Tashi genlak is representative of those who are public figures and eloquent about cultural norms and local idioms, Thubten, a young monk of Sumtseling Monastery with close family connections in Xiao Zhongdian introduced me to the uncertainty in the village and monastery life as well as the subtle engagements between common folks and authorities in Shangri-La. We became friends via walking. Initially, as I began fieldwork in 2011, I used personal connections to get in touch with a friend who worked in the special army first in Kunming for seven years and then in Shangri-La for a couple years. With a primarily job likening a secretary, he wrote reports and memos for various meetings on weekdays and enjoyed walking around the city on weekends because of the privilege that came with his medium rank in military. His walking near Sumtseling Monastery led to his friendship with Thubten, then friendship between Thubten and myself. While the relationship between military and Tibetan monks had been intense since 2008 surrounding religious autonomy and state oppression (see McGranahan 2012), the shared village early life among us provided common ground and continuous reciprocities. For example, Thubten received gifts, some produce from my military

friend's father who was a farmer on a weeklong visit. My military friend bought bags of *maka* (cash crop recently introduced to the locals from Peru) from Thubten's parents as a way of helping with the sale. While I often bought Thubten's parents groceries during my stay of 6 months, I received cured and smoked pork from them in the 8 months while in Shangri-La and Yubeng. Our otherwise unlikely friendship provided a window through which I could observe the village life of Diqing in great details and appreciate the hard work people put into their lives. Nevertheless, this friendship does not change the difficult situations where the everyday life of Tibetans is under brutal surveillance from the local military and government. In every March (the month when Tibetans in exile protest and fight for independence following the March 14, 2008 mass protest in Lhasa, see Barnett 2010), a team of soldiers take hold of the selected villages and establishes checkpoints for identification cards (ID, Ch. *shenfen zheng*). During this month, soldiers appear on the streets of Shangri-La to check IDs. Outside March, the military is confined in its gated complex with two outposts where incoming soldiers are trained. For young monks, the local government launched a summer religious institute to teach *Contemporary Theories of Socialism* and offered a certificate after the two-month excursion. Thubten thought that the training was empty—he and his fellow monks listened to a two-hour lecture every morning and played on cellphones and watched TV for the rest of the day. Nevertheless, such excursions pushed back the already overdue religious training in ritual duties and offered them a *useless* diploma stating that a monk completed training in Socialism. As the geopolitics of Tibet and China develops, the uncertainty for those Tibetans inside the Chinese border seems to only grow on the one hand. On the other, Thubten benefited from popularity of Tibetan Buddhism among Han Chinese, traveling to Guangzhou, Hong Kong, Maucau, Shanghai, and Bangkok to give lectures and from taking parents to Lhasa for tours around the grand monasteries. He and

his fellow monks negotiated with interested groups between religion and marketized worlds to cultivate their own paths in a secularized, politicized, and commercialized Tibet in southwest China.

Thubten walked with me to his parents' mountain ranch and village roads and, through walking, introduced me to the broader spectrum of daily life in both Xiao Zhongdian and Shangri-La. The difference between Thubten the Gelugpa (yellow hat) Tibetan Buddhism and Tashi genlak's vernacular mountain deities led me to numerous walks in the mountains of Khawa Kharpo near Yubeng. While the Gelugpa practitioners and followers take pride in practicing formal Buddhism as opposed to those mountain worshippers, the latter group claim to be the true local believers and blame the former as corroborators with the state and close allies with market economy. This contradiction is also overlaid with the binary of urban and rural economies, as well as purity versus impurity. When I was about to move further to Yubeng and closer to the mountain, Thubten's parents offered me a thumb-sized bag of dirt pills and told me that these pills would heal me when the mountain "wild people" ever poisoned me with food. The dirt pills were precious and sacred, blessed by high lamas in Lhasa monasteries from their expensive trip. However, the idea that the mountain people are wild is merely a misunderstanding, because as my fieldwork with Yubeng villagers suggested, the perceived poison ability of mountain villagers was nonexistent and instead a mere reflection of negative description of their rural identity. Presumably, Shangri-La represents urbanism and thus is superior to its rural counterparts, even though the Yubeng villagers make more money than both Shangri-La and Xiao Zhongdian inhabitants on average thanks to a much larger volume of tourists. Then the advantageous position is cultivated by the grand houses in the plains in the latter, whereas the Yubeng only has tiny houses under the cliffs due to the inconvenient location

in the narrow valleys between great mountains. However, both the valley people and the mountain people aspire to form social relations with offices and branches in the local government, because as their experience has taught them, the government brings resources. I walked the circumambulation around Khawa Kharpo with many Tibetan pilgrims near and far, and learned that people wanted their children to go to college and after that become local government employees. Even if the government job is to clean up waste, to them, it is still a decent job with promising futures. Other differences become insignificant compared to the difference between in and out of the government offices and accesses.

Besides the key informants, I use walking as the main method to both participate in the daily temple visits and observe the waste related issues in Shangri-La City. Walking is effective along a popular route and towards a temple with frequent activities as well as a constant presence of solid waste. The temple is called A Hundred Chicken Temple, a branch under the direct administration of Sumtseling Monastery in the Glukpa Tibetan Buddhism sector. It does not have monks as regular residents but does have two monks every first and fifteenth day of the month to do the rituals in the main hall and collect money from visitors' donation on the site. One worker is employed by the temple to maintain the place clean and safe. On the first or fifteenth of each month, people come by hundreds, burning incense, hanging prayers' cloth flags up the trees, throwing paper prints of Buddhist texts, and burning small bunches of pine branches. It is loud, smoky, and messy with papers sticking under the shoes. It is also orderly in that people recite "Om Mani Peme Hung," walk clockwise inside the hall and around the wall of the temple, and offer money to the monks in line. However, starting in 2013, at the entrance of A Hundred Chicken Temple, several loudspeakers blasting "No littering and be civilized" began to appear on days of locals' visits, while two men in uniform embroidered with *Huanbao*, "environmental

protection,” distributed fliers into people’s hands forcefully. Reminiscent of socialist era, these loudspeakers are still in use in ethnic frontiers in contemporary China, refusing the recognition of the integrity of such sacred spaces and secularizing the event at the fullest range. Using noise-producing loudspeakers for banning littering in and of itself is paradoxical. Some of the local visitors do not read Chinese, so they threw the fliers away not long after they were handed out to them. Perhaps the point of the loudspeakers, established at the gate of the temple, was to target the religious minds of people rather than to cultivate an ecological citizen. This point is illuminated further in a close examination of the actual policies being read by the loudspeakers below,

46. This is a municipal act on waste issues, listing forbidden behaviors including littering, dumping waste on public land, and making unwanted noises.¹

- (1) No environmental noise in the construction, remodeling, and production area is allowed between 10pm and 6am; unless (a) a special permit is obtained from the government, and (b) neighborhood residents are consulted and have agreed on terms.
- (2) No noise beyond the maximum Db is allowed in the market district.
- (3) No loud noise by entertainment business or in-home entertainment activities is allowed.
- (4) No incarnation of waste in waste bins on public land is allowed.
- (5) No firecrackers are allowed; unless on holidays and important venues, in which case, the police department will choose a temporary site and oversee the firecrackers.
- (6) All other noise pollution inducing behaviors are strictly prohibited.

The noise produced by loudspeakers would be on this list of “forbidden behaviors” but was exempted, perhaps because the offender were the policy makers themselves. Nevertheless, the everyday sensibilities of place are informed by rhythms of space, people, and things (Lefebvre 2013), and noise produced at the temple is a calibrated move by the local bureaus to

¹ This is the 46th article in the total of 52 in Shangri-La Municipal Environmental Act 2013. Source: *Diqing Archives Office Policy Newsletter*.

exercise their power. Alexander and Reno (2012, 3) pointed out that “People as well as things are remade through waste work.” In my walking routines, I came to know a regular Uncle Dorje, who was in his sixties and came to the temple for blessings to meet daily needs, including safety for his new truck, his granddaughter’s birth, and new house construction. Uncle Dorje worked for the military as a driver throughout the 1970s. While driving the truck, he listened to Maoist propaganda along the way, because the loudspeakers were everywhere. For him, it was the opportunity to learn standard Mandarin Chinese, instead of the one with a heavy local



Fig. 4, the daily routine of cleaning workers includes sweeping the streets and loading up the small green pickup trucks at 9am. Photo by author.

Tibetan accent. Dorje and many peers of his generation gained employment through military and had lifted themselves beyond agriculture, as many other Han Chinese villagers did in the 1980s

and 1990s. Loudspeakers were tied to socialist propaganda in the pre-Internet era, but since the 2000s, they disappeared except in the ethnic borders where propaganda has been reminiscent at times.

A significant portion of my fieldwork included walking with cleaning workers on the streets in Shangri-La (Fig. 4). Every day from 9am to 6pm, workers sweep the streets, empty out the bins for pickup trucks, and maintain the clean streets. In the two main city squares, admittedly, loudspeakers have also been repurposed to serve for the promotion of ethnic tourism, blasting typical Tibetan folk music in the evenings for people to dance to in a circle. Usually, when the music starts, the cleaning workers finish their shift. But seldom do they join the dance. Instead, the young workers among them change off their blue uniform and into nice clothes, going out to the dance bars in the old town. At first, I was not sure why. But later, I learn that they prefer not to feel like working outside the hours, not to be recognized by shop owners on the squares, and not to feel “dirty” in public. Thus, they make a clear divide between work and leisure, hoping to subvert the negative association of waste and the dirty jobs of cleaning workers. Walks with cleaning workers also provided firsthand daily encounters between local Tibetans and Han Chinese tourists. Often, I saw that the cleaning workers were rendered invisible when they had to pick up waste after tourists. Some tourists threw waste on the ground instead of into the waste bins, whereas others failed to squeeze in waste into the already full bins. Barely did any conversation happen between them. The relationship was merely functional, economic, and mechanical.

My walking with villagers in Yubeng led me to personal communications with tourists, by contrast. Different from the urban setting where people, things, and waste moved fast, in Yubeng, they were slow. I walked with employees at MTC to bring down the bags of waste in

the mountain paths once a month while learning that the waste bags would barely make it out of the mountains. Employees often came from elsewhere, only staying at Yubeng for the duration of the job. They usually quit after they got married, which happened quite frequently. In addition, I accompanied local families to bring bags of waste from their house hotels to the accumulation site weekly, only to find that the bags remained at the site over time. Yet it was the family's responsibility to bag the waste. On the first and fifteenth of the month, I spent the day with the elderly in the village walking from the upper side to the lower side for a worship session in the temple. These walking activities enabled me to observe the flow of people as they moved waste from houses and mountain paths to temporary sites, as well as the points at which waste became stagnant. I found that plastic waste accumulated as tourism grew but remained within the mountains due to the high cost of transportation and labor in cleaning. The waste problem, as it appeared, was about cost and benefit as much as it was about cultural understanding of waste on sacred sites.

Walking as a method evoked the dialectic in my role of a participant and an observer by putting me in the interstitial space where I strove to think and to act like a well-informed insider and simultaneously to look beyond for missing links that would be otherwise easily identifiable for an outsider. For example, I was never too shy to use my limited Tibetan conversation skills to reach out, connecting with locals and pilgrims instantly with warmth and trust, which was crucial for me to have to gain a wider spectrum of viewpoints about the solid waste and the meaning of circumambulation in their specific life stories. This expansive approach made up for my deep connections with a few key informants only by offering the general picture. Yet the same time, I recognized that my own walking brought me in positions with contradictory roles due to who I walked with and why. In such scenarios, I tended to go with the one that aligned closely with

local villagers and cleaning workers, whose opinions and understanding of waste problems, despite being pragmatic, barely went beyond the administrative bodies in the county or prefecture. My role as a researcher and an outsider in these moments gave me the privilege of talking and walking with government officials, who may have more power than the locals and may have used it against them. For example, as Yubeng transitioned itself from a publicly managed park to a partnership with the private tourist company MTC, I interviewed the chair of the county office, Mr. He, a Naxi man in his late thirties. A few years later, Mr. He took the job at MTC and left the county government. At the time, I was involved in promoting the villagers' understanding of deities and the value of such understanding in cleaning up the environment, and I did an interview with the TV News channel from Beijing about the waste problem in Yubeng. In what seemed to me a positive exposure, MTC saw it instead as a crisis and immediately created another piece for local TV on Yubeng villagers cleaning up the waste as volunteers and being praised for their love and care for the environment. Mr. He refused to talk with me. The next time we met unplanned, he took a team of investors in Shangri-La on a tour to sell potential business opportunities to transform the collective cemetery into hotels and bars. It was impossible for me to dismiss the conflict between the locals and the tourist company because of the opposite interests and goals in some cases and the interrelated motives in others.

The question of how to engage in the murky politics required continuous attention from this ethnographer and a good rapport with the local community leaders, including village heads, elders, nongovernmental organization staff, and local writers. Although my primary focus is not on community building but on cultural notions of solid waste, the involvement with local community led to my realization that its role is crucial in grounding environmental change. For example, 70-year-old Grandpa Abu (nickname in Ch.: *abu yeye*) wrote two monographs on

collections of songs about the mountain deities that used to be sung in weddings and funerals. A hunter for decades, he had an epiphany after a dream of Khawa Kharpo, the mountain god, who revealed to him the suffering spirits of animals. He decided right away to quit hunting and become an activist for conservation. He gave speeches about the value of Khawa Kharpo in various NGO forums including local Khawa Kharpo Cultural Institute, TNC (US based), Friend of Nature (Beijing based), etc, and appeared in many documentary films on the environment. On a bus ride together from Deqin to Shangri-La, abu yeye shared his speech draft for a conference to be held in Lijiang, in which he listed 45 bullet points about Khawa Kharpo, spanning from mountains as the embodiment of deities, vegetarianism, gift, and the circulation of life, to songs dedicated to the grand stories of the deity and his families guarding the villagers against various demons. For another example, the local NGO Khawa Kharpo Institute launched an after-school educational program in which elementary pupils taught waste sorting and recycling to their families. In addition, the budding writers' group that I joined discussions with often argued about what it meant to be Tibetan and what purity meant in the waste besieged sacred sites in the age of tourism, commercialization, and the waste challenge.

Organization of the dissertation

Besides the introduction and the conclusion, the dissertation has four chapters.

In chapter two, I discuss development and religion in Shangri-La through first a description of making the place into a sacred, ethnic, and exotic site for the rise of tourism and then a critical analysis of destabilizing what the sacred and the profane mean to its inhabitants. I narrate a vernacular history of Tibetan inhabitants and their situated identity in negotiations with the official history of an exotic Tibetan paradise, the Oriental imagination based on 1933's *Lost Horizon*, and the object of urban middle-class Han's desire for sacredness in recent tourism. If

the kind of life is predetermined by a script corroborated by the government development agents and business owners, the locals are being marginalized and must make room for tourist experiences of the staged authenticity and for a kind of sacredness presented for consumption. By analyzing the unmatched development speed and staged sacredness, I argue that the cosmoeconomic greed, that is, adding stuff to sacred sites for blessing and for tourism in an extra aggressive manner, has gone beyond the environmental limit. This market oriented development of religious sites has caused a waste problem, and it persisted through waxing and waning of tourism in the recent decade. However, the informal space for waste business by both individual traders and waste workers appear to be productive and a potential alternative for effective waste management.

Ethnographic investigation on the materiality of plastic waste and old clothes is the focus of chapter three. I use the conceptual framework of things-as-persons to understand how old clothes participate in the exchange between people and deities through reciprocity and via smell and touch. I introduce the local concept of *dreg pa*, which is relational in allocating interruption of social and moral order, something close to dirt in English and *laji* in Chinese. Even though this concept is archaic and unused orally, it is relevant for people to identify something wrong in their life and the need to deal with it. Usually, people offer old clothes to sacred sites in the hope of receiving blessings from deities. However, the amount of clothes has increased over time, which numerous tourists have mistaken for waste and added to with their own garbage, blurring the boundaries between sacred sites and trash heap. Hence, the cleaning work becomes more of a burden in the heart because the reciprocity between people and deities may have been dissolved.

Chapter four describes several key informants' experiences in Yubeng between hotel development and food waste, showing a positive link between femininity and modernity in the

village economy. When a man is married into a local woman's family, he is socially weakened and must reclaim himself by mastering household skills and earning a steady position in the family hotel. In other words, the social order is constructed according to nativity rather than gender. But recent investors from other parts of China have approached men rather than women to make deals, shifting the gender relations to male-centered. Also, the chapter describes the women's culinary courses on Sichuan cuisine in villages surrounding Shangri-La. In the courses, local women learn to cook in a wasteful way to produce the popular flavor for Han Chinese tourists while abandoning their own waste-free cooking. The transformation of the domestic sphere as a productive site and primary mover to household economy creates the links between femininity and modernity, between wasteful and waste-free, between tourist economy and subsistence semi-nomadic economy.

In chapter five, to conclude, I relate *dreg pa* with *xinjing* to show the heart-environment in the waste politics and its significance in articulating and understanding ways of living and dying in Tibetan southwest China. As the waste problem suggests a catastrophic environmental future, it requires equally the inner spiritual world to be compatible and resonant with the environmental challenges, and the determination to install waste infrastructures to adapt to the emergent scenarios in the development scheme. And such waste infrastructures, as this dissertation shows, include not only waste bins, transportation and labor, but also heart-environment which provides affective strategies for people to maneuver in the times of hope and despair in contemporary China.

Chapter 2 A Shangri-La Story of Development and Waste Management

Introduction

Renaming a place for acclaimed religious sites for development purposes could mean contestation on authenticity, and on whether it is a real or imagined landscape. For a borderland city with a population of 56,008 (as of 2011, Statistics Bureau, XGLL, 2015), the renaming of Shangri-La was a profound change. The renaming was an event, a ritual, and a jump start for the tourist development as well as a transformation of the Tibetan border city with proximity to sacred mountains popular in animism and Tibetan Buddhism. Before Shangri-La, *Zhongdian* (Ch.), or *Gyalthang* (Tib.) was little known. Since the official renaming in 2001, following petitions to National Congress in China and a local celebration, the city has received a steady inflow of Chinese tourists who contributed nearly 80% of the local GDP (Ibid.). The drastic economic structural change has cultural implications in both local and global contexts. Sacred mountains have been commodified and mediated by mountaineering gear, leisure apparel, and camera lenses. A long history of Shangri-La imagined in the Western world since the 1933 novel *Lost Horizon* has gained new materiality. The influx of Chinese and Western tourists enable the presentation of performed selves on stage to become ordinary for inhabitants of Shangri-La, living like the sacred other and the carefree, happy, spiritual, and authentic Buddhists for the secular Chinese and Westerners and making a living by performing this living. However, the presentation of self is caught in the fraught politics of front and backstage (Goffman 1959) and the question of “staged authenticity” (MacCanell 1973). When the imagination of sacred land overwhelms the actual ways of making ends meet, exploitation and structural inequality may

occur. Development of sacred sites in which people live often entails insufficient attention and support to the local and secular ways of living, with the assumption that people somehow do not worry about mundane obligations or economic growth like everyone else. Precisely because of this assumption being unfair, discriminative, colonial, and hegemonic towards the indigenous nonwestern and non-Chinese, they are conceived as forever incompatible with secular development and thus become the sacred other who suffer from everyday violence from capitalism and cultural imperialism (Asad 2001; McGranahan 2007; 2017). Shangri-La as a Tibetan border city that sprung from what Carole McGranahan (2017, 71) calls the “geographic and political edge of empire,” can tell a nuanced history of development under the rubric of sacred and secular ways of living. It is a history constituted by a mix of official narratives from the Chinese state, popular stories by local scholarly experts and tourist outlets, and vernacular stories about local family and kinship. Altogether, the stories provide clues for cultural politics around development on a sacred land which is in the making. No matter whether Shangri-La is authentic or unauthentic, whether it is rendered sacred to local people or tourists, or whether it is contested land for paradise on earth as Buddhism would have it, this chapter argues, the processes involving development shape the very mundane actions by multiple stakeholders: the state, the local government, tourists, and the local people.

Before Shangri-La, Gyalthang was a contested place belonging to chiefdoms ruled by either Naxi or Kham Tibetan chiefs. According to local archives of culture and history (DQDFWSZL), then Shangri-La is believed to be one of the tribes mentioned in *History of Records* under the volume of southwestern ethnic groups (*xinan yi*), but with little archaeological evidence specific for the correlation. In today’s official museum of Tibetan history at the city central square, the early history is represented by Neolithic stone tools on display, excavated

from local river valleys with generic descriptions of hunting and gathering lifestyles. There are abundant records, however, on the names of townships throughout the Chinese dynasties, which suggests that rudimentary geographic surveys had been carried out by the central governments. As time passed on, the records became more specific. In the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), for example, specific records showed occurrences of local chiefs sending gifts to the wedding of a daughter of a Heshuo in Qinghai (DQWSZL). Another museum on local folk culture, located in Moonlight Square in the Shangri-La old town center and open to the public since 2014, featured an installation of the Red Army Long March (1934-1936) “climbing over snow mountains and crossing muddy grassland” (*kua xueshan guo caodi*). In addition to exhibiting artifacts and texts that made the march grand and spectacular, the museum invites viewers to step into a large (3m x 6m) rectangular room that resembles a walk with digitally rendered snowflakes in the air, gunshots in 3D sound, and muddy grass surface simulated in wall projection. As visitors walk through the narrow corridor and exited to the bright main room, they release the tense emotions, celebrated for free space, and feel lucky that they do not have to go through the actual march. The idea of patriotism is materialized through museum works in Tibet. Claire Harris (2012, 126-131) demonstrates how China remodeled the Anti-British Museum in Gyantse *dzong*² (southern Sichuan) to make the “correct” kind of memory by reminding Gyantse Tibetans of their improved economic status thanks to the policies by Deng Xiaoping and other economic liberalizers, whereas serfs used to extract taxes from people and subject them to torture or execution for their misdeeds. The scene recovered the “execution ground” (129). The gruesome and vivid scene makes it appear that the torture only happened recently. Similarly, the Gyalthang

² In Tibetan, *dzong* means a town with usually a shared history of several ancestry lines, chiefdoms, and other social units. For example, the old town Gyalthang has another name *Dukezong*, which is the Chinese transliteration meaning a town of the *Duke* people.

Historical Museum renovation was a careful choice by the Chinese state to get the message of patriotic citizens and correct memories out to Tibetans from locals to travelers, to adults and children.

Gyalthang was officially renamed in 2001, and the effort of making the place through cartographic tools and propaganda and advertisement works has grown ever since. Around 1999, the Diqing Prefecture government where Gyalthang is the capital initiated the name changing plan with promised significant growth in GDP (>18%) to Yunnan Province, because its neighbor Naxi Lijiang had long benefited from tourism. The petition was approved and sent to the central government in Beijing based on potential economic growth and stability concerns with Tibetans, according to my interview with one of the three promoters, a now retired Tibetan official in the local cultural and archival office. He disclosed that researchers from Yunnan Academy of Social Science and Anthropology of Yunnan University came to Diqing for fieldwork, soliciting folk stories, music, dance, and religions and publishing 20 books altogether. That initial stage created knowledge foundations on cultural diversity which the succeeding administrations continued to draw upon, and, which, more importantly, set the stage for Shangri-La for the Chinese audience through books, films, songs, and video ads. The launch of Shangri-La project (1999 to now) is a ritual which produces *communitas* among ethnic cultural experts, scholars, writers, artists, and policymakers and across blurred boundaries of semi-academic and semi-popular discourses. Multiple stakeholders with unique purposes worked on a shared stage, not necessarily in agreement with one another yet entangled through flows and links, forming what Latour called social assemblage, mingling people, ideas, and things together. The assemblage represents neither a top down approach that considers the state as the sole actor to disseminate ideas and

materials from the center, nor the opposite that sees the grassroots actions as autonomous and independent. The assemblage entails negotiation and contestation.

Recent anthropological studies on China's state and society emphasize collaborative actions between local governments and local people, especially in tourism and religious revitalization. Complicity, as Hans Steinmüller (2015) termed it, describes the mutual opportunistic attitudes that villagers and cadres share in making the cultural villages in central Hunan legible and presentable on stage for tourists and vice versa. Adam Chau (2010) framed a religious ritual revitalization in Shaanxi as local villagers' strategy to grab state funded resources aimed at tourist development and redirect them for new social relations. Chau's observation on multiple use of development funds and their positive impact on bringing back the "superstitions" was accurate for contemporary China. Compared to earlier works on state and society in China that focused on hegemonic power and discourse, this body of research engages with everyday ethics by analyzing personal sentiments as products of mutually shaping forces from the state and the local. Yan (2015) observed that individual ethics had been on the rise throughout recent decades even though the state played a role in shaping how morality was mediated and negotiated in the absence of state discourses and in the invisible hand of market economy. In other words, the ambiguity in the interstitial space between the state and the local, as an analytical strategy, yields productive ethnographic research on contested morality in China where both the state and the individual expand the social sphere (see Stafford 2013; Kleinman et. al. 2015). How does ambiguity assist the understanding of assemblages that are constituted by multiple stakeholders in Shangri-La? How do local hosts, tourists, and government officials live in, tour around, and manage the *invented* places also held sacred? Would complicity be sufficient

in explaining the nuanced connections, links, and flows in these stakeholders' strategies in dwelling in the there?

This chapter focuses on the role of “sacredness” and the politics of representation in the development of Shangri-La since 2001 as an attempt to ethnographically answer how morality is shaped and shaping state-society relationships in contemporary China through a case study. I use “sacredness” in three ways: geographic, religious, and life itself. Shangri-La identified snow mountains, including Shika and Meili, as sacred land. With cartographic works and digital rendering, specific sites and routes for deities appear as dots and lines on maps, brochures, books, and videos that serve as guidance for tourists. From the outset of sacred sites and routes that connect them, bodily movements through marked space establish religious ties between people and place, this life and the next life, and the sacred and the profane. Finally, both these touristic geographic and religious understandings of sacredness are structured in the dialectics of “sacred other” and the secular self, as well as in the politics of representation through ethnic identities. In brief, while the sacred is used to describe Tibetan culture in abstract, the concrete (thus secular) inequalities that Tibetan people face in daily life are ignored. Life is sacred, whereas lives and ways of living are secular. The dialectics between sacredness of life and inequalities of lives are borrowed from Didier Fassin (2015) who analyzes productively how it came into being that a Palestinian child’s life is saved in Israel but talks on sacredness hijacked ways of living of the healed. In this chapter, I argue that the dialectics of sacred life and secular lives (ways of living) is useful for thinking about Tibetan lives becoming absent in the talks on sacred Tibetan life by secular Han Chinese, thereby rendering Tibetans as the ethnic other, sacred other, and the liberal economy’s other.

Official and Folk Histories of Shangri-La

Located in the northwestern tip of Yunnan in southwest China, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture is now inhabited by Tibetan, Lisu, Han, Naxi, Yi, Bai, Hui, and others. The three major groups of Tibetan, Lisu, and Han make up 32.36, 26.72, and 18.34 percent of its population (360k) according to the 2010 census (China Statistical Bureau 2013). Shangri-La is the capital city of Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, with a population of 56,000: 40% Tibetan, 40% Han, and 20% others (Gyalthang Statistical Bureau 2009). Shangri-La can be divided into two sections: old and new towns, demarcating roughly the tourist and non-tourist zones, although the old town was newly built to promote tourism following Lijiang's Shuhe Old Town success (Yu 2015, 47). In the geopolitical and cultural domain, Shangri-La is considered a key city in the "Sino-Tibetan borderlands" (Yeh and Coggins 2014, 8-10), embedded in the intersection of Kham and Ütsang regions as well as the route of sparse migration occurrences between China and Bhutan. The rise of tourism encouraged some Tibetans in exile to return for career opportunities as tour guides, hotel owners, herb medicine doctors, and singers. The local government requires both birth certificates and proof of kinship to grant ID cards and household registration. The transnational relocation program is usually one directional, because Tibetan returnees, once obtained Chinese passports, would have a more difficult time in applying for visa to travel abroad again. Compared to this one directional relocation program, there is also a short period visa program aimed at bringing overseas investments back to Shangri-La. In the initial stage around the early 1990s, Indian residents of Tibetan descendants were encouraged to open hotels and restaurants on the land which was "open fields and scarce villages" (Uttara, personal communication). In recent years, Tibetans with Swiss passports invested in Shangri-La Beers and made local friendly business models, contracting local barley farmers and paying higher than

market prices³. Admittedly, the active role in regional and global economy can be understood to be the unique borderland geography of trade, commerce, and migration. As the official narratives insists, the town is undergoing a revitalization of its ancient “tea-horse road” (*chama gudaο*) that brought Sichuan tea bricks to the Tibetan Plateau and other goods back on horseback since the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD). Yet the 21st-century remake of Shangri-La as the hub of cultural economy requires more than simply the fraught history of a trade route where Tibetan nomads and local government fought for control. In the government-led tourist transformation, we might ask, what kind of new sociality is being produced?

As opposed to the neat dynastic history established in local archival offices, Shangri-La inhabitants have their own stories of how their ancestors migrated to this border town. With hardly any substantiated evidence available, these stories embody family memories of a place, thus providing a vernacular way of imagining history that differs from the officially told. The first popular story, shared by a group of Chinese-speaking elderly residents in the old town, claimed that their ancestors came to town by way of a garrison near the beginning of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD). Told by this group in an authoritative tone, the stories have less implication for the actual records than the current dissatisfaction towards local Tibetans, who they thought of as beneficiaries of the economic development policies with favoritism due to ethnicity. Indeed, this history of Ming garrison descendants found little proof in local archives; nor are there any tombstones or records of them. Rather, very likely, the group represented Han and Naxi who had roots running through quite a few generations in the town, feeling now

³ Shangri-La Beer was initiated by Swiss Tibetan Songtsen Gyalzur, who insisted on paying higher-than-market prices for barley wheat from local farmers. He also began to give back to the local community by organizing volunteers to pick up trash. http://www.gokunming.com/en/blog/item/3910/interview_shangri_la_brewery_founder_songtsen_gyalzur, last access, 4/15/2017.

underrepresented in the prefecture because they do not have Tibetan ethnicity, the officially recognized one, with legal and political resources more readily available. The choice of a remote Ming ancestor avoids immediate reference to centuries of war between the Naxi and the Tibetan chiefs, and distinguished themselves as those who came to the border from the imagined imperial center of Nanjing to which they seemed to be able to return given the appropriate opportunities. Under the current tourist development scheme, such stories quickly formed a connection between nationalist Chinese tourists and not-so-Tibetan local hosts, reinforcing the idea that tourists travel to the border town indeed remarked the nationalist and imperial geography, rather than exploratory in a complete new place. Many times, tourists have written in their travel logs about excitement and solidarity they found in these “authentic” histories, as opposed to the ones in print on brochures. To them, the travel itself was considered a journey away from state-censored history and towards excavation of original stories with the local variations. Besides, the strong connotation in military base camp resembled current Chinese border policy in Tibetan areas, as well as Uyghur areas, with Special Army force (*wujing*) safeguarding the ethnic borderlands. In terms of representation politics, these kinds of stories earn the Han residents the privilege of feeling regarded as the majority in the ethnic borderland.

By contrast, some local Tibetan-speaking groups traced family lineage back to an earlier time and more heartland China, Tang Dynasty, Shaanxi. The basic assumption entails that the herb medicine traders from Shaanxi reached out to the borderland town for their family growth, but the time might have been much more recent. It is reasonable and very possible that in the 1880s to 1920s AD Shaanxi herb medicine traders had developed regional and national networks that served a family economy. For example, in Hancheng, central Shaanxi, the Dang Family had established sophisticated herb medicine business covering several provinces in North and East

China, bringing back tons of silver coins yearly to the village that covered all kinds of expenses including food, education, rituals, and even para-military defense against robbers and looters. Often, the Shaanxi village served as the headquarters and the business stayed and became localized elsewhere. In theory, this may have occurred in Shangri-La. But the integration of those Tibetan families may suggest otherwise. First, back to four to five generations, these families did not have names other than Tibetan names, and they did not mention clearly any monetary exchanges with Shaanxi in the oral histories (DQWSZL). A common history was the Shaanxi Merchants Association, which was established in 1740 AD but completely dissolved more than a hundred years ago (ZDXZ 1997). As the Qing empire incorporated Zhongdian into Yunnan, more Shaanxi Han migrated here to do trades, mining, and other works, many of whom married into Tibetan families. One of the only practices remembered from this remote past now is the tradition of erecting tombstones for ancestors, which often referred to a Shaanxi origin in very blurred language. On a journalist's 2010 blog⁴, the interview with then 80 years old Abu Gyatso suggests that this Tibetan family had rituals honoring ancestor for decades and only stopped in the Collectivist era in the 1960s and 1970s. Because people were "too busy earning labor credits on the collective farm to do any ancestral rituals." The family lineage records were nowhere to be found. The only preserved relic in Abu Gyatso's old house was a wooden beam with the signature "Ming *Chongzhen*, 1634, Carpenter *Jiao* 焦, Shaanxi." Jiao Xueren (1939-), 78 years old, with the Tibetan name Abu Renchen, claimed that his family had descended from the Carpenter Jiao family and that the traceable record was a name Jiao Bao as the Shaanxi migrant carpenter in the Lijiang County Archives (LJXZ). As he grew up, he heard stories that

⁴ http://club.qinqiang.org/script/forum/view.asp?article_id=3118888, last accessed, April 14, 2017.

his family for generations had worked as carpenters, smiths, traders, and practical writers (for legal and ritual purposes), all of which thrived upon settler garrison economy since Ming. There were several dozen families who shared similar histories. However, no one had kept the tombstone tradition for deceased ancestors for at least four generations. Instead, they relied upon memories to find the unmarked spots for tombs for memorial rituals. According to Jiao Xueren, this might have had to do with the family's fear for frequently shifting administrators from garrison leaders, chiefs (Naxi or Tibetan), and cadres, and their willingness to act like the local Tibetan families with no burial traditions whatsoever. The Gyalthang Township Center was built by Carpenter Jiao as the center for rituals and public affairs in the Moonlight Square, Old Town. It has been made into a socialist, historical museum by the city that recently received a national patriotic education base status which came with state subsidies and designated educational tours for government officials. While the wooden structures remain old, the inside display of Red Army's Long March is new. Tourists come into the curated exhibition finding out the difficulties and triumphs of the army as the foreground and the old buildings as the background.

Recently, two decades of Shangri-La development did precisely so, foregrounding a state history of 1980s onward national economic growth while diluting the thick and complex local family memories into the background. Spearheaded by the former mayor's office, the team of the mayor, an archival researcher, and a market strategist visited Singapore in 1999 for ideas of economic development and came back with the notion that "branding was the key to success" (personal communication with archival researcher Liu). Regretting that the Shangri-La brand had been taken by a Singaporean luxury hotel chain, they instead turned the county town entirely into a package of branded Shangri-La, renaming the streets from Mandarin Chinese to Tibetan to highlight the Mandala characteristics. Changing from *yilu* (1st street) to *dawa* (moonlight street),

they first claimed that the new old town would consist of eight neighborhoods divided by winding streets with artistic and Buddhist names, thereby transforming the whole town as an eight-petal lotus blossom unfolding on the landscape. Then, they named the two main squares as Mandala (*tancheng*, newly built in 2001) and Moonlight (*yueguang*, in the new old town) which were complementary to the Ganden Sumtseling Monastery that housed more than 700 monks. Three landmarks constituted the structure of a sacred city imagined in a Buddhist worldview, temple, mandala and moon, which made loose reference to the three jewels: Buddha, Sangha, and Dharma. A success in branding and tourism, the place-making of Shangri-La introduced the capitalist imagination as well as a Buddhist flair into a local community which already shared complex familial histories and dynamic social worlds. Although the commercial success brought GDP growth and a high living standard for some, the nuanced local histories were abandoned, undermined, and shoveled into the debris. In January 2014, a fire burned down 2/3 of the new old town, reducing shops into ashes. Yet the logic of the market economy sustained, only growing and deepening. Bigger shops, larger projects, and richer owners emerged from the debris, whereas small local owners could no longer afford to exist. The remedy for the fire damage, according to the current mayor's office and administration, is to grab more land for commercial use, because it had worked before. Jiao Xueren's ancestral tombs became one of the targeted development zones. Without materialized landmarks, his family could hardly win. In 2015, the city development office head Mr. Lin accompanied a group of investors to show the development zones. Mr. Lin pointed at the stone with carved remarks on the establishment of Gyalthang (*Jiantang*) in 1990, and said, "the carved stone will serve perfectly for us to build a new and expansive historical town" (fieldwork 2015). To Mr. Lin and the like, history only matters if it can be utilized for development purposes. Otherwise, it fades away.

The place making of Shangri-La and renaming of it as a Buddhist sacred city, Mandala, can be understood through the lens of “monumentalization” proposed by Herzfeld (2006). Monumentalization is “representative of an overall pattern whereby theme parks, partially made up of ancient materials but heavily restored and refurbished to suit modern ideas about the past, come to replace densely populated areas and in turn create growing zones of disaffected and displaced people” (Herzfeld 2006, 132). Since the modern ideas about the past are often predominantly Western ones in the global economy, in this case the Han Chinese tourists, because of their advantages in mobilizing resources, the Tibetan locals have experienced what Herzfeld called “social and cultural evacuation” (ibid). Their deep and long ties to the city through family generations are cut short by the development agents. Their vivid lives are replaced by monuments, including museums, squares, grand temples, and poetic road names, as if before the change, their lives were not yet “sacred.” It is the replacement of histories with spotted buildings that evacuated the complex and dynamic relationships that had already existed before development. What is Shangri-La lived? If there is ever a Shangri-La, it would neither be the product of the Orientalist imagination in *Lost Horizon* nor the Mandala sacred city as the local government claimed. It must be the one that people have embodied in various social relations through histories and family memories, from garrisons to carpenters, and across regions. To ground Shangri-La ethnographically, I describe below via fieldwork the two versions of Shangri-Las coexisting, one picturesque and sacred in the name and on the surface, while the other ordinary and mundane deep in the pulse of everyday life.

Entering two Shangri-Las

Prior to my fieldwork visit in Shangri-La, in 2007, I stayed in Dali for an academic conference and had very little knowledge of the town other than its otherworldly name and its

strong commitment to tourist transformation in Yunnan following other regional examples. A few years later, in 2011, I began my initial fieldwork on religion and environment in Shangri-La, hoping to understand why a place called Shangri-La had difficulties in dealing with solid waste overflow. Having studied colloquial Tibetan for a semester and courses on the anthropology of religion and development, I was eager to meet locals who had already begun focusing on cleaning up the waste challenge. I was quite surprised by the difficulties in finding any locals at all and by the slow tempo of the everyday life in this small border city of 45,000 residents. Each day outside my rented one bedroom studio, I saw snack vendors, food carts, and fruit stands in front of a walking corridor filled with busy shops mainly for clothing and electronics. Noisy yet with certain clear and underlying pattern of movement, the flow of people, goods, and money occupied the social space of the busiest market area in Shangri-La. From time to time, young monks still in maroon garb walked in groups from store to store, searching for top brand sports shoes, the only part of their clothing not proscribed. Short trips to the market for monks in their 20s, meant a taste of modern goods and comfort and an escape from a heavy curriculum in the monastery studying canons, making sacred objects, playing horns, and learning ritual skills from teachers. Families from nearby villages also came to purchase clothes and electronic appliances. Women usually wore distinct pink headdresses on top of two pieces of blue cloth with white cotton stuffing. It is said that the pink linen symbolizes a flower whereas the blue and white resemble snow mountains against the blue sky. Occasionally, several soldiers in army green walked on the streets in a hurry before returning to the enclosed Special Army unit two blocks to the north of the market. Deployed as soldiers in the special sector for borderlands, these soldiers, Han, Naxi, or Tibetan, often came from rural areas in Yunnan, Sichuan, Shaanxi, and other provinces and served a duration of three years before returning to their hometown where their

households registration (*hukou*) belonged. For most of them, between age 20 and 23, they spent 3 years training intensively inside the enclosure in the middle of the city, with very little hope in promotion to stay in the local unit and some potential chances of getting government employment back in their hometown if they had connections. In the secluded space, rarely did they interact with residents, except when they were on assignment buying vegetables or assisting with road repairs, or setting up checkpoints during March, the month for active Tibetan protest worldwide and a kind of inactivity in the local area under the army's close watch nevertheless. Often, when a Nyingma living Buddha (*huofo*) came for a visit in Shangri-La and drew hundreds of Tibetan audiences nearby, the army set checkpoints at both the northwest and the south, the only in and out routes, keeping a record of identification numbers, contacts, reasons for visits, and the expected duration of stay from all the Tibetans, regardless where their *hukou* belonged. In March 2014, I was quite taken aback when I, as an outsider, was not questioned because of my Han ethnicity whereas my Tibetan local friends were. I accompanied them by a rented car on their hospital visit to a relative. All my Tibetan friends gave ID cards and each answered questions for 3 to 5 minutes. It did not matter to the army that I was neither a local nor a tourist. My Han Chinese identity was all that they needed to determine whether I should be questioned. The politics of representation based on identity could have not been felt more strongly.

Thus, my entrance to the *first Shangri-La* was constituted by an observation of the busy central market and army enclosure in the city, the occasional military checkpoints on the road, and many walks with no clear purpose on the neatly built streets. In 2011, it took about three months or so for me not to notice the façade of buildings with elaborate symbols popular in Tibetan cultures, including the endless knots in maroon color and brick patterns in blue grey. As anthropologist Åshild Kolås (2008) observed in the early 2000s, Shangri-La had undergone a

huge transformation from a generic town with mostly grey matchbox buildings common in any town of China into a Tibetan place. Vibrant colors and patterns had mushroomed onto walls and streets, even on the landscape. Kolås (2004, 262) theorized the place making of Shangri-La primarily as a vehicle for economic development to benefit the estate developers and investors in the government-led scheme, leaving out the residents' desire and attachment to their land by a process that Kolås called "ethnicized" and "sacralized." The word Shangri-La itself, after all, is heavily mediated by the Western imagination, Chinese state appropriation, and the local agencies of tourism, and is a contested name for places in greater Tibetan cultural areas, including Qinghai Amdo (see Zhang 2009 PhD Thesis), Nepal and northern India. In 1997, Zhongdian hosted the biennial Khampa Arts Festival to promote tourism. In the festival's opening ceremony, Yunnan Provincial Vice Governor Dai Guanglu announced that Zhongdian was the "original" Shangri-La (Kolås 2008).

Indeed, the impact of tourism development exaggerates the "ethnic" and "sacred" aspects of the locals' social life, making them into others for the secular Han Chinese tourists. My experience in what I call the first Shangri-La, however, entails the daily mundane activities divided by the central market and militarization marked with various dialects and styles of clothing, and filled with walks from homes to markets and back. The social life in this first Shangri-La is fragmented, diverse, uneven, and divergent on numerous fronts. While the observation of rudimentary process on ethnicity and sacrality shows the general impact of development projects, it fails to see that the state can no longer govern the people with deployment of landscape technology and GDP. Outside March, the locals would not need interactions with the army. Instead, they had to go to the market for goods and services, building their house and life surrounding the market and beyond. In other words, as elsewhere, the social

life of the first Shangri-La is postmodern, partial, dependent, and vulnerable to local, regional, and global processes of capitalism. The social life is authentic only in the sense of meeting the daily goals in the town and making a living. Just as anyone else, individuals here feel uncertainties about their life, their future, and their dreams. As discussed earlier, the locals' vernacular family histories and memorials may become the background as opposed to the foreground story of a touristic Shangri-La, but they still matter. For example, Abu, the descendent of the Jiao Carpenter family, strived to keep family memories alive by an array of activities including doing stories with Shaanxi television journalists, telling his own granddaughter his experiences of early age for book manuscripts, and attempting to rebuild the Shaanxi merchant association that flourished in Shangri-La until a hundred years ago. In what I call the first Shangri-La, I see commonalities among residents, who felt the reach of the state in the everyday life, but the reach is made invisible. Even the ethnic difference, for example, is disguised in the newly manufactured desire for market goods, fragmented by affordability or the lack based on price tags, and pronounced in mundane aspects rather than those in the intense tourist encounters.

I came to understand what I call the *second Shangri-La* through deeper engagement with the local social life: the kind of Shangri-La lived every day, the place and time held and made sacred by people, and the kind of sacredness enacted through nuances and negotiations in daily activities. In other words, I attempt to describe the type of social life before Shangri-La was made into Shangri-La 1999 onwards. What elements had been and are still considered sacred? While the impact from tourism and security arms is visible, how do people living in the villages understand the place where they do mundane activities, including tending yaks and harvesting barley wheats? With these questions in mind, I decided to leave the city in the summer of 2012.

It was not enough for me to live at the city center areas chatting with locals about their home life and goods they purchased and sold on the market without a long-term stay. I visited monk Lobsang's home about a 30-minute bus ride to the south and stayed for that summer and another six months in 2015. Lobsang needed to follow an intensive curriculum in the monastery, visiting home once or twice a month. I relied on my host sister to know people in the village, asking them about family and social activities. I also lived with host parents in their yak ranch on the hilltop, a five to six-hour trip of a tractor ride and walk combined, forming friendships also with their neighbor ranchers. I managed to get to know many families through kinship ties of my hosts and neighbors. In China's official administration structure and funding scheme, a village 20km outside the city would benefit little to none in terms of tourist investments, including roads and housing infrastructures, simply because the village is expected to find its own economic resources. Prior to the 1998 timber ban, the village relied on selling timber. Now it had a restored cash crops and yaks, the conventional economy, apart from young men (and some women) working short-term construction jobs in the city to bring home additional income. No family except one or two bought commercial housing in the city. People built their houses. They intended to stay.

Michael Lambek calls upon "action" as the analytical unit for the anthropology of ethics. Lambek (2010, 16) describes the shift in focus as "from categorical imperatives to foundational act." Sacredness, thus, is rooted neither in categories of holy and unholy, as Durkheim claims, nor historical particularism as in Boas. The aim, instead, is to understand the kind of sacredness enacted in concrete and mundane acts and practices. As Lambek (2010, 23) explains "In real life, practices impinge on one another, and judgment must be exercised continuously between, for example, expending time on earning a living to feed your children and playing with them, or

between playing with them and having time for yourself.” Indeed, the imminence is life as lived for itself. What Shangri-La locals understand as sacred is not to be found in the establishment of sacred space in and out of the house, despite its significance, but to be found in the decisions of whether to stick to the house and commit to living generation after generation. Concrete, tangible, and imminent choices reflect what people consider as sacred, that is, sacred things are sacred because of people’s commitment to them not because of presumed categorical prohibitions. My host family made two decisions: (1) father Jigme Gyaltsso returned to his hilltop ranch in 2000; and (2) sister Lhamotso built a new house in 2015. For the family, the two decisions meant where to have a future and what to hold as center of the family values and sacred to their life. Briefly speaking, Jigme’s choice of returning to what his ancestors had been doing with yaks for generations marked a transition from his short but productive military driver career in much of the 1980s and 1990s. From a connected, traveled, and resourceful driver to a sedentary yak herder, Jigme decided to return to the hill ranch despite his parents having given up on yaks in the collectivist era in 1960s and 1970s. To Jigme, being able to return to routinized work day in and day out was meaningful for him. His wife Yangtso did the daily rituals of burning incense, lighting butter lamps, and praying to Buddhist figurines as well as mountain deities. Nevertheless, it was the choice of going back to a discontinued way of life that made “life felt lived and worth living for them” (fieldwork, 2014) and thus enacted sacredness in life itself. Again, his daughter Lhamotso finally began to build a house for herself, her husband, and two granddaughters, which was a remarkable moment for the three-generational extended family. Although the new house was only three hundred meters east of the parents’ house, it meant life, future, and vision for more generations to come. Lhamotso was only two years older than monk Lobsang, but she had taken the versatile role of supporting the family with the help of

her husband, who had married into her family. Lhamotso expected her daughters, aged 4 and 11, to continue education after high school, more than she had, for a bright future, while acknowledging that her brother's work in the monastery was important even though it was nothing like her heavy labor in the field. For her, Lobsang's work earned the family status in the village and beyond, because their parents could erect flags on the rooftop to show that there were religious clerks in the family, a prestigious action based on devotion, sacrifice, and altruism, that is, living a simple monastic life for the wellbeing of the community. However, her heavy labor in the field and in the house enacted another kind of sacredness in life, her children's future, and her vision of dwelling. Compared to the rituals of making sure the house structures stay stable under the blessing of Buddhist figurines and mountain deities, her daily labor and actions of care-giving make the house stable, livable, and sacred.

It is the second Shangri-La that constitutes the social fabric of village life. As the village adapts to new political and economic challenges through migration and dispersion of wealth and materials, what holds the families together? When religious life in the monastery is under scrutiny of state governance, as the military checkpoints suggest, what sacred enactment activities do villagers do to still maintain a sense of belonging and togetherness? Following Michael Lambek, I attempt to situate the notions of sacredness in the daily scenarios and multiple contexts, based on the assumption that the concrete details of actions, rather than abstraction, reveal how people understand their lives to be lived as sacred. In other words, ethnographic descriptions of actions for purposes of enacting sacredness in and of itself have the theoretical potential, beyond what conventional anthropology of ethics often thinks of as mere examples for abstract debates on morality. Below, I trace the divergent and multiple ways in

which house is lived as a sacred dwelling space, by describing what aspects of house gain meanings for people through socialization.

Houses as dwelling space for the sacred and the profane

Anthropology of the house as a social systems benefited from Levi-Strauss and structuralism (Carsten, Hugh-Jones, and Grinker 1996) and continued to influence more recent works on house as a dwelling space, commodity, and a condition for “postmodern, flexible accumulation” (Harvey 2000). As an analytical concept, house in this chapter is understood primarily as dwelling space for the sacred and the profane. On the one hand, it is the place for rituals, and on the other, it has mundane functions of assisting metabolic and biosocial processes of humans and certain potential value and exchange value. Since the 1990s, the Chinese state has continuously relaxed policies on houses as commodities for market economy, driving GDP growths up while deepening socioeconomic disparity between those who make profit in the housing market and those who work without any chance to own a house. In Yunnan, southwest China, anthropologist Zhang Li (2008) used ethnography to show the potential public space created by Chinese middle-class house owners when diverse groups came together to fight the real estate developers and management crews for rights through protest. Some of the protestors, as Zhang showed, were lawyers employed by the state to defend the sovereignty power but now chose to form unity with others to take the state agency and developers to court. In the vein of political economy, house as a commodity creates conditions for certain aspects of civil society, transparency, democracy, and open negotiations, which captures certain currents and trends of how China could cultivate dwelling space for a civil society. The house as a commodity is understood to be one of the neoliberal technologies. As Nikolas Rose (2010, 49-50) argued, neoliberalism works as a technology of rule that capitalizes on the “powers of freedom” to

induce citizens to be self-responsible, self-enterprising, and self-governing objects of advanced liberal nations. Admittedly, this argument assists the understanding the neoliberal and economic transformation of China. Yet, this body of research, while gaining recognition in most Chinese cities, falls short in providing nuances in house development in China's mostly ethnic diverse borderlands. Geographer Emily Yeh (2013) provoked the Marxist notion of "domination" to reveal the Chinese government's project on greenhouse agriculture, housing, and roads as vehicle to facilitate its colonial rule, despite the framing of development scheme as a gift in state discourses. For example, Yeh's ethnographic account of local Tibetans and migrant workers from Sichuan showed that Tibetans rented their land to Han workers, only to find that the Han would simply escape and disappear if the greenhouse vegetables had not done well in market, leaving the Tibetans empty handed with unpaid rents. The economic transformation is taken for granted as free handouts to Tibetans and thereby Tibetans are seen as freeloaders from the outsiders' perspective. However, it has made the life of many local Tibetan families even more uncertain and vulnerable.

In Shangri-La, the concept of house as the dwelling space for the sacred and the profane is pinged upon the interaction between everyday yearnings for a world filled with deities, ghosts, and spirits and a fast rewarding marketized world. Local poet, writer, and playwright Tsechen Gyaltso, aged 32, published on *Borderland Literature*⁵ an essay telling vivid stories of a stone house where his great grandparents had met for the first time and his clan had originated. The stone house was simple, functional, and provided space for several families who accumulated food sources by hunting wild animals and mushrooms. Breaking the taboo, his great grandfather, then a twenty years old young man, approached the girl, and fled as the dogs alerted the families.

⁵ *Bianjiang wenxue*, 2013(2).

Eventually, great grandfather managed to mix with the crowd in the search for invaders. Everyone was convinced that ghosts and unsettled spirits were the source of disruption and decided to do a ritual to exorcize them. Ghosts and spirits brought people together and drove them apart. In the writer's generation, as the stories have continued, houses like that stone house have all collapsed, and people from multiple families and from multiple generations no longer live under the same roof. As a budding journalist for the local newspaper and struggling to own an apartment and have a foothold in the city, Tsechen described to me many times his short film project on the understanding of house. In his film proposal, a plane lands in Shangri-La. A young man in modern clothes, wearing sun glasses and earbuds, hops on a shuttle bus. The driver first hesitates, but asks the young man about where he comes from anyway. First in Putonghua (standard Mandarin) and then in the local Tibetan dialect, the young man shares his story of moving to Beijing for work and now returning home for a short visit. Then the scene switched to snow mountains, zooming in to focus on the village houses and stopping at the old houses demolished for new hotel development. Contrasts between urban and rural, modern and traditional, and Han and Tibetan, are intended to reveal themselves in the daily interactions. The struggle of identities caught in these binaries is both visible and visceral: the demeanor of youth, out of place in the social transition, is something that the film aims to catch, including bowing to what's traditional and sacred as well as walking in comfort sports shoes. Through the lens of film, Tsechen captures the opportunities many young Tibetans face, transforming their traditional houses into something that makes money fast.

Besides the literal world, uncertainty creeps in the daily life of Tibetan villagers as they negotiate new economic ways to sustain household and family. Comparable to the conclusion from Emily Yeh's research in Lhasa, when building houses, Shangri-La Tibetan villagers do not

enjoy free handouts from the Chinese state; instead they put in years of work, take out loans, and pull resources from relatives. Building a house is the largest single expense for most families. It usually requires several days to weeks of volunteer labor from other villagers as well: men working on the beams and structures and women cooking. The communal work is indispensable for the large project. It is common that people come to help for unpaid labor even though nowadays people often hire contractors to do the whole thing. The contractors are often acquaintances who do the woodwork that fits the local aesthetics. Thus, the house building can be considered as a ritual of community, binding the villagers together with economic ties, including debts, payments, and reciprocities. Anthropologist Chen Bo (2008) discusses the significance of home in central Tibet, suggesting that the house has a name, identity, and nonerasable memories that travel with families in cases of migration. In Eastern Tibet, house names used to be a privilege shown in noble families through attachment to the actual house. Once a family with the house name moved away, the house name remained and had to be inherited by the new inhabitants (see Li 2014). Villagers share some of the same sentiments towards the house, even though they do not have house names. My host family's village (near Xiao Zhongdian, for location, see Fig. 3), for example, has 62 households, about half of whom rebuilt their houses in higher locations due to the construction of a reservoir and the other half remodeled old houses or built a second one in the past five or six years. I attended many public gatherings at the village hall where the secretary and the village-head called names and read compensation amount for lost house and agricultural field. I was shocked by the fact that people were chatting enthusiastically the whole time, playing with children, and gossiping, leaving behind the small desk where the secretary and the village-head shouted names. When it was the family's turn, people came up to the desk for verification of measurements and compensations. I

later learned from chats with several villagers why people appeared to care little: “It was a standard deal and nothing could be done about it.” By “deal” they meant the long-term and fraught negotiation between villagers and the village-head overseeing compensations. Generally satisfied with the fast payments, the villagers said that their concerns about losing land and future ways of life could not be easily monetized, especially when they thought about what their children would rely upon without the arable land that had been always in the family.

A retired cadre of a nearby hydropower station shared with me that the infrastructure construction zest may be temporary as opposed to something long lasting like the house. By “temporary,” he referred to the hydropower station established in the 1970s with engineering assistance from the Soviet Union and discontinued in the early 1990s due to the lack of necessary financial support. He shared his vivid and fond memory of visiting Czechoslovakia on behalf of the local Chinese cadres in the 1970s, emphasizing that the state policy enabled technological transfers and development then. But the time of state planned economy has gone. Almost all the hydropower stations are privately owned by investors from coastal Zhejiang. Most of the technology staff are graduates from universities in Yunnan’s capital Kunming. What is important to the cadre that I interviewed is that local villagers now have little say in the big-scaled constructions anymore, which is a matter of villagers’ rights, and was a privilege he was afforded as a cadre. In other words, the retraction of direct state intervention meant more scarce resources that villagers could mobilize.

In the absence of direct state power and influence, the positions held by local government offices became recognized for the potential to channel investments and thus became highly desired among college graduates from the villages who had received degrees in Kunming, Shanghai, or Beijing under the favored enrollment policy based on ethnicity. The potential of

local government officials for a family means access to a wider network of economic and political resources through reciprocity, be it casual small gift exchanges or other transactions suspicious of corruption. Contrary to Nikolas Rose's assumption of producing self-responsible neoliberal subjects and individuals, people create networks outside market economy and produce reciprocity, which goes closer to family and kinship than capitalism. It is precisely because of this intimate relationship between family and government through kinship that villagers see the social value of building houses beyond money. It is easier to demolish a house than break down a close-knit family and the intimate relations between the family and the house deities to whom the family offers incense. Local people inherit the house deities from previous inhabitants and continue offering the incense, making the house have values beyond those of simple marketable commodities. Houses as the dwelling space of the sacred and the profane connect kinship with government-led capitalism in this case, providing a physical and symbolic space for members in a kin group to negotiate with government officials for chances to grow household income in the market economy that has more to do with the governmental development plans than the market.

Mountains that house deities and greed

Besides houses, another vehicle for cultural economy and development is sacred mountains in the villages of Tibet. The famous sacred mountains across Tibetan regions offer blessings and promise a good reincarnation in the next life. Local sacred mountains, however, only provide good fortune such as better employment for this life, because they are only meaningful to local villagers (Huber 1995). These two types of sacred mountains do overlap, but regional ones are recognized across linguistic, cultural, and even national boundaries within Tibetan cultural areas spanning Tibet, Yunnan, Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu, Nepal, Bhutan and northeastern states of India (e.g. Holmberg 1998). People dubbed the famous eight sacred

mountains in the animist landscape that included Meili Mountain in Dechen (Ch. *Deqin*), some 200km west of the City of Shangri-La. Meili embodies Khawa Kharpo, “the white god” or the medicinal mountain. Khawa Kharpo, a wild beast with supernatural power, was tamed by Padmasambhava, the 8th century Indian monk who introduced Buddhism to Tibet or the master of “Lotus-Born” in the popular discourse. The tamed deity and his family members through marriage gained Buddhist power, which enabled their embodiment, the sacred mountain peaks to have the capacity to ensure a better reincarnation. Indeed, pilgrims visit Khawa Kharpo and his families (embodied as other nearby peaks) especially when they are concerned with reincarnation or matters beyond this life. Pilgrims walk around and in the trails, marking sacred sites as manifestations of the presence or the bodies of deities with the establishment of prayer flags and humble gestures, e.g., bowing, lifting hands over head, etc. The sacredness of mountains is renewed by such daily enactment and bodily practices, housing deities as well as people’s dreams, active in the interactions of people, deities, and place.

Anthropologist Giovanni da Col (2007) described this interactive relationship between people and sacred mountains as a kind of “cosmoeconomics,” the cost and benefit being not money but spiritual tokens. In other words, fortune can be meticulously calculated by how much material offerings have been made to deities present in the mountains. In the context of cultural economy and development in the most recent two decades, Dechenwa (*wa*, Tibetan, means people, e.g., Dechenwa: people of Dechen) have developed new strategies of cosmoeconomics to cope with the changes in the sacred mountains. The first notable phenomenon is the increase of tourist development. For example, in Yubeng Village at the foothill of one sacred mountain, 34 out of 35 households either built hotel rooms inside their own houses or tore down houses for new hotels. The shift towards tourist development also means increased disposable income with

which people could afford expensive offerings and frequent visits to sacred mountains in and beyond the region. While some enjoy the ability to offer more and hope for better effects in receiving cosmic benefits, others are pessimistic because the very experience of enacting sacredness through offerings has become so accessible that it loses the significance. The struggle between increased material wealth and declining interests in keeping the sacred enactments alive at the center of cosmoeconomics is common throughout Dechen, if not in the broader Tibetan cultural areas. While mountains house deities for centuries, they embody money through marketized world making and offer the opportunities for many to switch cosmic focus from auspicious futures in the next life to material wealth in this life. The dilemma between wealth and sacred enactment has emerged as a constant theme in the everyday life of Dechenwa.

The second change is in the attitude towards material wealth or in other words, greed. While local Buddhist monks or shamans with good reputations still receive tremendous respect, success in business and government branches is on the spot light. Several head monks in local temples quit their religious positions and pursued careers elsewhere, which made the already blurred line between profit and devotion unstable. In this sense, sacred mountains are houses for the deities but also provide vehicles for greed in the marketized world. It is necessary to add that the greed works against morality in Dechenwa's worldview. A nomadic family won more than 1 million RMB (~200k USD) sport lottery. Instead of keeping the lottery prize to the family, they donated all to the local community. Charitable works are crucial to numerous monks, who used patron's money to give back by establishing language schools with free tuition. The immaterial aspect of Dechenwa's worldview is reflected in the daily calculation of cosmic economy, and the link between good deeds in this life and a prosperous next life is secured through daily good work.

However, greed is experienced socially among villagers and represented in multiple levels of activities conducted by both laypeople and (former) religious clerks. The normative hierarchical order between the two groups, the former subordinate to the latter, as illustrated by Martin Mills (2003) in Ladakh, has evolved. For instance, when serving a meal, if a bowl is touched by a layperson at the table, then it cannot be used again to serve food to a monk, because the touch of the lower ranked has produced pollution that may contaminate the purity of the monk through the local concept of *drip*, referring to chaos and disorder (Mills 2003). In the marketized Yubeng, due to its proximity of the Khawa Kharpo sacred peak, material wealth from booming tourism has become a source for greed. Generally, the fact that one's own house could serve as means for generating income may cause alcohol abuse, gambling, and dropping out of school among young men. Soon, the Chinese investors from the mature tourist market in nearby Lijiang stepped in, making offers at a million *yuan* to contract houses for hotels for 20 to 25 years. The new and somewhat easy access to large sums of money for local villagers means an appetite for wealth at low costs. Some families began to resell caterpillar fungus that they bought from Dechen county town, but told buyers that they had hand-picked them from the sacred mountains, making them more authentic and spiritually effective than those sold in the county town and of course at a much higher price, too. The former monk in the village also participated in this scheme and offered the caterpillar fungus for sale, claiming that his religious knowledge allowed him to identify the most powerful fungi in terms of healing. Such activities embody the greed that has spread with the market economy, changing the social reciprocity between laypersons and religious clerks into a material one that can be measured by monetized values, thereby disrupting the normative cultural value that highlights religious and moral superiority.

Greed from the market economy has eliminated the difference of moral capital between the two groups.

The greed of villagers in the proximity of sacred mountains must be read in the larger context in which they interact with Chinese tourists who have greed for calculable outcomes of enhanced personal health and spirituality. The idea of cosmoeconomics in Tibetan culture requires a holistic approach to relationships among people, sacred mountains, deities, and material offerings in that the cost and benefit are calibrated in the world of them. One would not resell caterpillar fungi with lies about the more authentic quality which they do not have, because such actions have cosmic consequences, like, bad fortune and a weakened chance of good reincarnations. My numerous conversations with villagers convinced me that greed has no place in cosmoeconomics. What I would add is that such greed comes from interactions with tourists, whose desire has pushed the market price of caterpillar fungi through the roof (~150 RMB each) and who believe in its supernatural healing powers for both male performance enhancement and life energy boosting for both genders depending on cooking techniques. Boiled in soup with other counterbalancing *yin* ingredients, the caterpillar fungi's *yang* will be beneficial to women's health. When men want to absorb *yang* from it, the caterpillar fungi will be best if barely cooked, boiled in plain water. The association of *yang* with raw, *yin* with cooked, is made as such to tame the extreme *yang* essence of the caterpillar fungi, better harvested in raw than in cooked for men, safer refined in cooked for women. The market for caterpillar fungi is intended for high-end consumers. In the aisles of the Beijing and Shanghai airports, there are ads about capsules made of caterpillar fungi with a futuristic biomedical image of marvelous pills. The Chinese middle class wants to consume the medicine and believe in its magical power of healing in a natural way, due to both the Chinese philosophy of yin and yang and the marketing strategies for

biomedical corporations. One aspect of this desire is that the benefit is calculable and thus can be used economically for one's own health or as gifts to others. The calculable quality of health and fortune is created in the marketized world, making a kind of cosmoeconomics in which the personal, moral, and nuanced links between medicine and health are replaced by a numeric consumption of the magic herb. This market transformation has turned the local relationships between people and mountains into something instrumental, direct, and damaging in some cases, because the work of deities has disappeared.

Although the negative moral overtone of greed may seem an imposition from the outsiders towards the local villagers, some environmental activists recognize the role of greed in the personal search for cosmic fortune and its pressure on the sustainability of the environment. For example, Wande Gongpa, head of Shangri-La Institute (a local NGO with donors worldwide), pointed out the negative impact on water by the accumulation of large quantities of material offerings to deities in the sacred Shika Mountain. "Large sum of polyester made prayer flags are brushed down by rain into the river and caused pollution that led to deaths of fish," he shared (Interview 2011). The famous case of Treasure Bottle in *Nian bao yu ze* (place name, in Amdo) was well documented by monk activist Tashi Sang'e, also a *khenbo* (doctoral scholar in Tibetan Buddhism) in Guoluo, Qinghai.⁶ In this case, Tashi Sang'e used camera to record a small group of environmentally minded monks who removed the Treasure Bottle, that is, a cloth bag with grains and blessed Buddhist texts offered to deities in sacred lakes for a better personal reincarnation. Removing these offerings was a challenging task because, on the one hand, the bags of grains, as they break down, consumed oxygen in the water and suffocated fish to death,

⁶ http://epaper.oeeee.com/epaper/C/html/2013-04/19/content_2226542.htm?div=-1, last access, 6/4/2017.

and on the other hand, owners of the bags, who travel thousands of kilometers to do the offerings, complain that their linkage to better reincarnations was violently terminated. The dilemma in this controversial case lies in the question of whose offerings to deities deserve to be removed due to environmental reasons. The linkage between people and deities is contingent upon the presence of material offerings, which in large sums would harm the mountains and lakes, and in turn, would drive away the deities that the mountains and lakes once housed. Karma Drolma of the Laizhe Culture Center (formerly known as Khawa Kharpo Center prior to 2015) said it bluntly, “People are greedy and selfish to focus entirely on their own individual fortune-making practice while throwing away an environmental future for their children’s generation” (Interview 2015). Reflective criticism has grown from within the community members who continue to feel the need to bridge the cosmic good and environmental good for individuals. People began to realize that there is a limit on the environment—the mountains and the waters, as to how much stuff can be distributed onto them. Not only have families and owners of hotels seen the negative impact littering has on their potential income, but also herders have observed dying yaks from consuming nylon Buddhist prayer flags that forms a rock-like solid item inside their guts. When the waste problems are created out of religious motivation, residents feel ambivalent towards the way they communicate the limits of the environment to people, be they Tibetan or Han, whose greed is not about money but for better karmic results.

Nevertheless, the severe and real consequences in the rural hinterland Shangri-La are easily overlooked, whereas urban waste problems are made visible and the solving of them made mandate for the municipal government. In fact, the city government was rewarded as the best one in waste management in the 16 prefecture capital cities in 2014, even outperforming the provincial capital Kunming. The first factor presented to the competition was the city’s ban on

plastic shopping bags in 2001. Grocery stores and small food retailers in the markets and on the streets have been required by city regulations to use only reusable shopping bags since then. The second piece of evidence was the establishment of (1) the door-to-door garbage collection service twice a day throughout the city and (2) the landfill with a projected lifespan of 50 years. Like many other projects sponsored by the local government, the city waste management has problems. One of the issues residents shared has to do with the government officials' greed for political capital in waste management, profiting from the high visibility projects, *xingxiang gongcheng* while neglecting to sort out the solid waste carefully into trash and recyclables. Many owners of downtown pubs and restaurants wish to have the option of separating glass bottles from perishable food waste, but there is no such facility equipped on the daily waste picking trucks. Owner Ms. Li complained that the city simply wanted the waste out of sight at the lowest cost possible and that her tax money was used only to paint the shops and restaurants the same shade of color for creating the image and hence the feel of Shangri-La Old Town.

Waste flow and cleaning workers: a micro waste management landscape

One unexpected consequence of the government officials' greed for political capital and negligence on waste sorting is the niche market for individuals and individual traders (Ch. *geti hu*) who go after bottles, metals, cardboards, and others. Middle-aged people, predominately women, with local, little trained skills, those individuals roam throughout the city streets for plastic or glass bottles inside the trash bins daily. Some of them risk their health or even life by searching for recyclables in the open field of the new waste landfill site where, only meters away, several heavy-duty trucks smash and flatten garbage into thin layers. My notes from fieldwork recorded that in the roasting July sun in 2011, several women hunched their backs to check through the pile for bottles and raised their heads to avoid being in the way of slow

roaming trucks. The individual traders, however, focus on metal from construction waste and wholesale of bottles and cans from hotels and restaurants under mutual agreements. There are about a dozen of the traders, working in the unit of a family, who are often middle-aged couples. Most are originally from Sichuan and have been introduced to the local market by acquaintances. They rent a yard on the outskirts of Shangri-La City and spend the day going through the metal before trade partners from Kunming pick the valuable metal up by trucks. With the sizable consumption of steel, plastics, and glass left behind by the rapid urbanization, the traders are doing quite well. My interview with the couple who first came in 2013 revealed that more than a dozen traders have followed their example and shared the fruits of growth since then. The niche market of recyclables is made possible and profitable by the nearly invisible labor in the everyday life of Shangri-La: deep in the landfill field, behind the wall of construction sites, and in the outskirt blocks. While it is common in the West that recyclable trade is primarily done by corporations or municipal government branches, the invisible labor from individuals and individual traders takes the central stage of China's waste flow and waste management. The persistent work loads of sorting through waste piles while sitting, standing, or crawling guarantee the flow of waste. The state does not directly contribute towards the cleaning up.

Shangri-La waste management landscape is by no means in isolation from neighboring cities and villages, despite that the city only provides waste service within the boundaries. For example, there is a strict "no waste" policy for all the villages within 20 km south of the city to maintain the pristine views of the highland Tibetan landscape, together with the strongly enforced rules on house construction code including blue rooftops, white walls, and maroon window frames. To the villagers, this policy has benefited the city rather than the villages, simply because rarely do tourists choose to stay in their homes or buy dairy products from them.

A small group of women proposed to do the snack stands outside their village in 2012, promising the city that they would clean after their business hours and burning the waste in a pit. The proposal was finally accepted after one year's negotiation. Now tourists make a quick stop at the roadside meadow, taking photos of the wild blossoms which are known as "wolf's venom" (*stellera chamaejasme*) and having snacks including baked corn, potatoes, cheese, and butter tea. The waste they leave behind includes papers and wooden sticks. For another example, Deqin county town requested a regular waste service from Shangri-La to its award-winning Meili Snow Mountain National Park area, but only finding a service extension in times of need. The explanation for the dilemma is a lack of incentives from the city, according to a Deqin official. He also pointed out that even though the Shangri-La Municipal Landfill is desperate for having more waste so that it can follow the standard procedure by adding a layer of earth on the top each day, it simply would not pay to cover the transportation fees from Deqin to Shangri-La. However, the city did pay to transport plastic bottles from Deqin because it could gain a great deal from reselling them. The cynical view reflected numerous failed attempts made by his office in environment and sustainability. The view unfortunately still applies in the "economy-first" scheme of development in the borderland city.

Between money and waste there are new possibilities. Despite the negligence and reluctance of the city government, new players come to shape the waste management landscape by creating a waste-to-energy chain through inter-city networks. Only 150 km south of Shangri-La, Lijiang has a population of 1.3 million and hence produces a much larger amount of municipal solid waste. Lijiang wants to solve the challenge of processing such a hefty amount of waste. Mr. Zhang, a Shaanxi transplant since 2010 and business owner of a Lijiang biofuel company that transforms waste vegetable oils into fuel for kitchens in almost all the Shangri-La

restaurants and hotels. The company brings fuel tanks weekly to distribute in the summer and less often in the winter. Mr. Zhang benefited from the tax break from Lijiang for processing waste and profited from the demand in the restaurant market in Shangri-La. He attributed to the wide network of Shaanxi merchants and friends, who hold regular meetings in northwest Yunnan and find each other through common experience as military draftees in the region in the 1990s and 2000s, or through same origin of birth, secondary schools, or colleges. His role as the sole player in this waste oil to fuel niche market is made possible through networks with friends at the regular banquets, where he obtained information for production permission, transportation, and even direct contacts of clients for his business. Through this kind of assistance, his company could grow with very few people working on daily managements and become the only successful one in this field. For example, Mr. Li had worked in the military and lived in Yunnan since the early 1990s. Though at a lower rank, he had developed deep knowledge of the administration team and main players in the hotel business in Shangri-La since his relocation in 2007. Mr. Li found Mr. Zhang at a regular banquet and became friends. They met often, usually with a few old friends Mr. Li had. Gradually, local knowledge of who to talk to about new business opportunities and proposals is shared among them. Again, like the vernacular history of Shaanxi merchants in Shangri-La several hundred years ago shaping local economy, the current waste related business grows out of effective networks.

While both individual waste traders and Mr. Zhang are beneficiaries of their own migration and advantaged positions in waste related economy at Shangri-La, the local cleaning workers usually earn the minimum wage. Opportunities of upward mobility for cleaning workers are slim. Around 300 cleaning workers are employed by the semi-public and semi-private company under contract with the local municipal government. Most workers are women and

from local villages or nearby area. They fall under two categories of employment: the official and the temporary. The official employees have permanent positions funded through annual government budget and have access to healthcare and pensions. As the local understand it, this type of employment is *you bianzhi*, which means having official appointments with the state or the local government agencies. Different from the “iron bowl” jobs popular a decade ago, the *bianzhi* employments are usually administered through not the government but the companies who have gained the sole and often long-term contract with the government. Not as permanent as iron bowl jobs before, the *bianzhi* employments suggest a kind of limited benefits, but off the book people still know that they have the similar promise, unless the companies lose the contract, which is rare. Among the 300 employees in the cleaning company, only 30 have *bianzhi*. In 2012, the street cleaning workers earned the least compared to drivers and waste station managers, with a monthly wage at RMB 2,400 (~400 USD) for those who have *bianzhi* and RMB 1,100 (~183 USD) for those who do not. Only those with personal connections (e.g., those who are relatives, or at least acquaintances of government officials) could have the chance to be considered for a *bianzhi* position. Many workers with 5-6 years of experience simply do not have such an opportunity. Besides, drivers of garbage trucks are exclusively all male. Waste station managers (only 2, one in the city center and the other in the landfill) are appointed by the company through recruitment in college campuses. Thus, upward mobility is rather slim, if not impossible, for local women cleaning workers.

Women cleaning workers develop a unique sense of what Shangri-La is from the daily work. Their vision for future is deeply intertwined with new development of the city. With only one day off per week, they are responsible for a garbage-free city from 6am to 7pm every day. Around 9:30am and on, the garbage trucks will begin to roam around the city center. Around 40

women workers gather the waste bins together waiting for the trucks to arrive. For the remaining time of the day, they clean the streets with 30min intervals and make sure the waste bins are emptied out once full. The biggest challenge in daily cleaning is to scrub sunflower seed shells off the stone roads, because the shells stick to the smooth surface of stones and won't come off easily. They usually shrug off and blame the bad behaviors of some tourists as well as locals who spill sunflower seed shells around, which happen too often. In an ideal world, they wish people would come with an appreciation of the hard work of cleaning and at least simply some respect for a nice old town, tidy, relaxing, and good to look at and walk in. The very experience of walking around Shangri-La, for the women cleaning workers, is new as it is for tourists. Some workers used to be residents of the villages before they were turned into Shangri-La Old Town in 2001. While land loss and economic change seemed inevitable, many women as family members adapted to the work opportunities despite the meager wage. After all, compared to the further away villages deep in the mountains, the horizon for a steady income existed at the front doors of their former homes, instead of becoming migrant workers hundreds or even thousands of kilometers away. While perhaps deprived of the opportunity to afford a nice house or apartment in Shangri-La New Town with the meager wage, local women cleaning workers build their hope upon long-term employment which means stability and security despite at the bare minimum.

In fact, one of the many aspirations the women workers share is the emphasis on beauty. Outside regular hours, they avoid wearing orange track suits with *huanwei* (environmental cleanness) on them. The color is a reminder that their identity differs from tourists, work from leisure, locals from visitors, and service providers from consumers. When tourists come to buy the so-called authentic Tibetan products and artisan goods, the workers venture out to beauty sections in supermarkets and jewelry stores especially for skincare and gold earrings. To them,

overly tanned skin suddenly becomes undesirable. And the gold accessories remain the favorite. The idea of beauty is also embedded in the expectation for marriage. A 26-year old worker with three years of cleaning experience (2009-2012) shared that she wished to marry soon, because her two older brothers (28 and 30) would inherit the parents' house, leaving her little space at home. She wished to marry someone with a good work ethic and the ability to appreciate her "natural beauty," which meant her healthy tan and a simple style in clothing. It also implies, correctly, that most local women prefer lighter skin tone and popular clothes, because as much as tourism created authenticity to be consumed by tourists, it made modern desire in locals for artificial beauty. As much as waste management is about the government's commercial production of Shangri-La on stage, it is about paving paths for locals to have a modern life based on consumption.

Rebuilding the old town from rubble

A test for whether the government's commercial production of Shangri-La would sustain occurred in the form of a fire in January 2014 that destroyed 2/3 old town buildings into rubble. Hotels, shops, and restaurants burned to ashes. Jewelry stores were abandoned. It was said that some youngsters went back for gold, silver, and jade, only finding the materials melt because they were fake. It was also said that the owners of jewelry stores had already flee with valuables. The narrow pedestrian roads in old town did not allow fire trucks to go in. The fire department negotiated with five business owners to run over their properties intentionally, so that they could put out the fire near the Moonlight Square where the landmark buildings including a temple and two museums were located. The strategy of crashing five houses and saving the key buildings worked. A few hours later, the fire was put out. The fire shifted the landscape. The old business center *Sifang Jie* was entirely gone. So were many adjacent areas. The only parts that survived

included the immediate area next to the new town on the north and the Moonlight Square area on the south. In other words, the center of old town was burned, leaving two disconnected parts with a field of rubble and stray dogs in between.

Except a few, most nonlocal business owners could no longer afford the projected expensive reopening, not to mention the direct loss to fire, so they abandoned properties altogether and left Shangri-La. After all, for most nonlocals, the investment was an experiment, which may succeed or fail. By contrast, small local business owners had to give up their shops because the rent increased by at least ten folds (6,000RMB per year to 60,000-80,000RMB per year in one case). They don't have other options. The only compensation they received from the government was to gain a one-year permit to sell products on the Moonlight Square on a mobile stand before they find something permanent. One family had to give up their stand selling the accessories and moved back to farm house. Now they could sell vegetables in the early mornings twice a week in the streets to make ends meet. The decline in local business was imbued with a drop of numbers of tourists because of the rubble land which was once a busy town.

However, the production of Shangri-La continued. Only this time, the rebuilding transformed local economy even more detached from local people and more beneficial to outside (and bigger) investors. First, the municipal government made a deal with a couple most successful businesspersons to invest heavily and create a walking corridor with uniform style, where some 30 shops would be expected to flourish and where the new business center would take shape. In return, the businesspersons would receive tax cuts. In other words, this process of rebuilding enabled the concentration of resources to the few. While others saw losses and declines, these few expanded their business. Second, the local township authorized the remaining shop owners to rebuild their business under the condition that they must follow the 149 photos

collected, collaged, and exhibited in the reconstruction and compensation office. While the idea was to create the exact same landscape as before, the compensation was too small for the cost of reconstruction. Still, the chance to reopen business was attractive to those who managed to sustain and survive the fire, usually because of their second business. The projected growth allowed this group to continue their participation of the reconstruction. Third, the branding work of Shangri-La through media and travel literature assisted the recovery of tourism in Tibetan area in general. With the trend of fetishizing Tibet and Tibetan culture going strong, it is reasonable to see a rapid regrowth of tourist economy in the City of Shangri-La, even if the growth tends to be nonlocal.

Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the interaction between ideas of sacredness and practices in making it tangible through development by analyzing the interstitial space between the state and the local and incorporating multiple stakeholders' experience as they take roles in cosmoeconomics. In producing Shangri-La as religious and cultural objects to be consumed, the local state agencies built the official narrative from mythical, colonial, Buddhist, and historical sources freely, whereas the vernacular narratives among the locals denoted family changes over time. In the frenzy of development and rapid urbanization since 2001, greed has become relevant in investors, government officials, tourists, and most ironically, local and regional religious devotees. Some religious devotees showed cosmoeconomic greed by providing material objects exceeding the limit of the vulnerable environment. They traveled far to offer trucks of things to deities for blessings. On the one hand, they were sincere and hopeful for good fortune in this life. On the other, their behaviors unexpectedly interrupted the balance in religion and ecology, which some local NGOs and cultural experts had recognized. The ambiguity between the demands of

religious devotion and environmental stewardship resulted in the difficulty of accountability in this case, because removing waste on sacred sites could mean a loss of fortunes for individuals who devoted the very things to deities. The dilemma of local government's promoting Shangri-La as a space that is both sacred and full of sacred/waste objects transcends what sacredness means in that the labor of cleaning up the very space is rendered invisible and marginal. As new wealth is accumulated through tourism and marketization of space engineered by local business owners and government officials, local women cleaning workers experience marginality and relative advantage compared to migrant cleaning workers. Their endeavors, nevertheless, constitutes the core of what Shangri-La means and feels from the grounded, embodied, and nuanced daily life. While the fire did not really prevent the city to redo its commercial development, the tension between workers and developers (including business owners and government officials) and inequality among social classes may shake the ground on which the project of Shangri-La is built upon. In other words, this chapter concludes with an observation that China's development scheme through sacralized space has led to the uneven distribution of socioeconomic benefits because of its greed for growth, which also seems unsustainable for the limit of environment incompatible with cosmoeconomic greed for fortunes. In the murky space between sacred and secular, clean and unclean where Shangri-La inhabitants maneuver, their longing for a good environment and a better reincarnation informs their engagement with waste management, especially in sacred sites. The following two chapters will explore how Shangri-La inhabitants embody ideas from Chinese development through religion scheme in their daily practices.

Chapter 3 Plastic Waste and Old Clothes

Introduction

In the chapter, I reveal the relational concept of *dreg pa* (Tibetan, dirt, uncleanness, disorder) in practices of everyday tourist encounters and waste managerial scenes between Tibetan hosts and Han Chinese tourists, Tibetan villagers and county environmental bureaus. I rely upon an acute observation of the shift in life of a key interlocutor whose role changed from a propagator of cultural commercialization to a gatekeeper of religious traditions. In doing so, I show that the need to use the notion of *dreg pa* strategically in practice for local Tibetans, because in the relational epistemological framework, *dreg pa* refers to pollution produced in unstable sociality, in that *dreg pa* occurs when instabilities happen in the rationale that persons are things and things are persons. I illustrate so by focusing on plastic water bottles and old clothes, both of which travel or remain on the sacred land, depending of the success of vulnerable social connections. I conclude that the emergent environmental group in Tibet must be understood in the persons-as-things and things-as-persons epistemology in order not to be confused by a simplistic reduction of indigenous people accepting Western and Chinese modern ways of categorizing things and dealing with waste.

Postcard quality photos may capture the beauty in seconds, whether one is an experienced or a rookie photographer, as long as one is shooting with a camera from almost any vintage point in Yubeng Village, Yunnan, southwest China. Something about the forever blue sky, lush mountains, white walls and maroon and grey roofs together, evokes a kind of aesthetics of nature and a deep appreciation for nature's gift embraced well by villagers. In the winding trails hidden

under the thick woods, humid atmosphere creates an ambient environment which is said to heal exhausted human spirits from modern life overburdened with obligations and far away from nature. However, this natural healing walk is interrupted by the surprise of spotting large piles of plastic bottles and old clothes, laying here and there, as if making fun of the orderly and coherent appearance, as if announcing their arrival at the space uninvited, as if testing the human limits of toleration of the presence of solid waste in a pleasant environment. Plastics and old clothes are things and thus can have “agency, fear, and feelings” (Latour 1996). At least, in Tibetan areas of China, appearing as solid waste, they make a difference that matters and bears social relations within and beyond. Vast areas of Jiuzhaigou (“nine-village valley”), Daocheng (“rice paddy county”), Xianggelila (Shangri-La), Xiangcheng (“village county”), and others, spanning west Sichuan and northwest Yunnan, while sharing postcard quality sceneries and ambient atmosphere, have had and are having solid waste since the early 2000s. As much as social facts are things, “things are social facts” (Latour and Weibel 2005, in Kaplan 2007, 686). Therefore, to think with solid waste in these Tibetan areas means probing into things as social facts.

Plastics and old clothes did not disrupt nature’s beauty in these Tibetan areas but they do now. They will come in larger volumes and more assertive ways. Local inhabitants have to tell their young children about what the mountains looked like fifteen years ago (interview 2011). Near experiences become tales that existed in the past. Now the plastic bottles spread around, hardly ever break down, and often attract insects to nest around them because insects like to consume leftover flavored drinks. Sometimes yaks, donkeys, horses, and mules eat them, but are unable to digest them, and may die from severe stomach distension. Old clothes smell like molds and look as if they could function as beds for mushrooms in the thick shade crown. They tell information about their previous owners who abandoned them, their age, gender, style, taste in

fashion, income range, and so on. Both plastic bottles and old clothes do not die as solid waste; rather, they take on a new life. The process from use to solid waste, then to something else, deserves probing.

In this chapter, I pursue two lines of inquiries. First, I ask how plastic bottles and old clothes as things have become solid waste and something else, a process that is concerned with “becoming of things” (Deleuze and Guattari 2004: 451-2). I trace how they as materials relate to a cultural concept of pollution *dreg pa* in myriads of gender, marriage, labor, and others. Second, I ask how this “becoming of things” is brought to light and near experience by probing into living with *dreg pa*. I take seriously what Das et al (2014, 6) insists for anthropologists, that is, to “bring experiences nearer to reality by gathering concepts from life.” I situate poet and government official Tashi Nyima genlak’s (Nyima hereafter) life in the paradox between persistent interests in “sacredness of life” and ignorance of “inequalities of lives” (Fassin 2014), in order to show his choice in life to deal with simplified stereotypes and rooted discrimination and exoticization of his ethnic, religious, and aesthetic identities. Nyima was born in 1955 in Mingyong, a nearby village only a mountain away from Yubeng, or, a day’s walk in the winding trails in the thick woods before, and a half-day walk plus a 1.5-hour of driving today. Like many Tibetans, he was among the first-generation college students despite working little in college in the Cultural Revolution. He wrote poems and novels, and directed a film. He gave talks in Shangri-La (in the previous chapter), Lhasa, Beijing, Kunming, Chengdu, and even Santa Fe, New Mexico, but felt he “was treated as a foreigner in his own country” (Interview 2012). He referred to the fact he was stopped, patted down, and interrogated for hours by the “airport police” (TSA, Transportation Security Administration) in Lhasa in the summer of 2012, right after making restaurant reservation to see his close friends on that same day. Nyima’s other role

is county government officer who works under environmental protection and tourist development sector, a unique government branch in Tibetan areas of southwest China, targeting specifically on tourist development and almost its opposite: environment protection, in one unit. Sometimes, this unit has a neighbor sector called migration office which usually administrators emigrants to eastern and central China due to loss of their homes in the construction of hydropower dams. Nyima knows too well through his literature friends, many of whom he mentors in writing work in the migration office.

Unlike Han Chinese first generation college graduates who mostly managed to settle in the cities, Nyima and numerous Tibetans returned to hometown counties, townships, and villages for mainly government employments. This has as much to do with linguistic differences as with subsidies in Chinese national policy, higher than other inland areas because of the need of national security. Yet this positionality does not guarantee Tibetan officials in Tibetan areas having decisions made autonomously, because, as elsewhere, the majority of decisions are being made from top down based in a conference in Kunming, Chengdu, or Beijing. Thus, Nyima's tactics of solving solid waste problems in the mountains face many structural challenges, and thus the understanding of personhood must be understood in the daily nuanced encounters with colleagues, villagers, and tourists, with words, policies, banquets, to make ends meet, for the office and his own. Nyima always go back to the mountains, "we are children of the mountains" (Interview 2015). He has developed views towards inability to remove plastics and old clothes based in practice. Not good or bad, the solid waste is a pragmatic concern for him. How does his pragmatic concern tell us about politics of solid waste in today's Chinese Tibetan areas?

Things as Persons

I situate stories of things and personhood of Yubeng, China in the broader domain of recent posthuman anthropologist reflection on agency of inanimate objects and non-binary relationships between things and person. Rooted in Latour's (1993) observation that the attempt to distinguish human subjects from nonhuman objects failed, recent reflection in anthropology focuses on "unhuman subjects" (Whitehead and Wesch 2012), "inanimate objects" (Ingold 2006, 9; 2000), and nonhuman, animals and animal spirits (Willerslev 2007; Pedersen 2011) among others. Neil Whitehead (2009, 1) invited ethnographic strategies without necessarily "humans at the center" but with a focus on "all things human." Whitehead substantiated this claim by directing our attention to the sexualized nature of violence, in online world and real world, legitimate and illegitimate, all of which can be explored by studying music, images, and virtual realities— "all things human." Things that are classified as solid waste, in Yubeng, are inanimate objects but very much human. Plastics are left behind as disposals after fast consumption of purified water, as potential targets for waste management, as moral judgments related to environmentalism, whereas old clothes are intimate items, very much personal but displayed in public space. In "How persons become things," Naveh and Bird-David (2014, 75) advocated for "relational epistemology," instead of ontologies, to explore how people or things "co-live well, properly, and appropriately." Nayaka tribe's domesticated animals, plants, and land come into being in their "world of persons" (ibid, 76). This framework of blurring the lines between persons and things is derived from Irving Hallowell's (2000 [1960]) famous and first theorization of 'who' rather than 'world.' The environment is thus constituted by stone persons, wind persons, animal persons, and so on, providing people with the orientation in the world (see also, Nesper 2002). After a trip to Santa Fe, New Mexico, Nyima shared with me, "I found my people in the Native American museums there!" Although a museum is arguable not a place for

people whose cultural is materialized and displayed, the sense of finding “my people” and home in the world can be pinged upon artifacts behind the glass. In the larger context, Nyima witnessed the destroying artifacts by Red Guards in the Cultural Revolution and experienced *falling-out-of-the-world* (Al-Mohammad 2013). He found his orientation in the world at the moment of visiting a Native American museum, henceforth shifting directions in his life in working on things closer to him.

Marcel Mauss (1979[1938]) explained that person was derived from a triple concept of mask, representation, and the social institutions which he called total social fact⁷. Marilyn Strathern (1991, 588) interpreted the space among the three facets by introducing “dividual”:
 “Persons are detached, not as individuals from the background of society or environment, but from other persons.” Strathern focused on the interpersonal space as the locus for relational relations, because it was implied, since Mauss, that persons are complex social facts that are already entangled with objects, artifacts, and obligations. Rather than a separation of persons from things, Strathern asked us to focus on person-to-person relationships. “Dividuals” mean persons “in a state of division with respect to others” (Ibid). Such strategy of analyzing persons as a mediator, a reflection, a partial connection of social relations is a phenomenological one. As Csordas (1994, x) summarized, it is a “tight hermeneutic circle revolting around the theoretical construct and the cultural phenomena.” Recent works adopt this strategy to analyze personhood

⁷ Marcel Mauss ([1938]1979) discussed person from a social history approach in order to show how the notion of person in a given society came into being based on the interactions between persons and the social totality. Mauss explained that the notions of persons grew out of a total sociality which included naming systems, ranks, titles, property of things, ancestor reincarnates, masks, totems, and so on, among societies including the Zuni Pablo and Kwakiutl in North America and Kiwai in Australia.

productively in the scale of species in the Anthropocene⁸ (Carrithers, Bracken, and Emery 2011), as well as the intimate domain of care in various medical settings (e.g., Christoffersen-Deb 2012).

My analysis of Nyima 's personhood in China's borderland falls under the ethnographic probing of things as persons and persons as things. Nyima 's work as a poet and writer began after many years of being a village middle-school teacher. With his former students spreading across Shangri-La and elsewhere, he felt home each time he visited a new village. In many visits, he made friends with Naxi, Lisu, Bai, Han, and other ethnic groups and spoke a little bit Lisu, in addition to his native Tibetan and excellent Chinese. But he wrote in Chinese only. He was saddened by that he and his generation missed education due to the social movement of Red Guards and hence losing the ability to write in his mother tongue. Many Tibetan authors from Xizang, Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and some from Yunnan, do write in Tibetan. While Tibetan texts speak more naturally to them, the popularity comprises, compared to Chinese language, which enjoy a much larger audience. In the 1950s, China launched *Putonghua* education in

⁸ For some substantive contribution in phenomenological anthropology in the 1990s, see Michael Jackson, 1998, *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Michael Jackson, ed., 1996, *Things as They are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; DelVecchio Good, Mary Jo, Paul Brodwin, Byron Good, and Arthur Kleinman, eds., 1992, *Pains as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; Byron Good, 1994, *Medicine, Rationality, and Experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Thomas Csordas 1994, *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. For some phenomenological anthropological works with China and Tibet elements, see, Arthur Kleinman and Joan Kleinman, 1995, "Suffering and Its Professional Transformation: Toward an Ethnography of Interpersonal Experience," in *Writing at the Margins: Discourse between Anthropology and Medicine*, pp. 95-119, edited by Arthur Kleinman. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press; and more recent, Robert Desjarlais, 2003, *Sensory Biographies: Lives and Deaths among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. For a general review of phenomenological anthropology, see Robert Desjarlais and C. Jason Throop, 2011, *Phenomenological Approaches in Anthropology*. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40: 87-102.

border regions including Uighur, Tibetan, and Mongolian schools, teaching national standard Mandarin Chinese. Today, there are three high schools in Shangri-La City with Tibetan curriculum, but minimum offerings of class. Senior students had to repeat first or second year Tibetan due to their lack of more advanced teachers. Unpopularity is mutual. One mother shared, “What is the use after school if I make my kid learn Tibetan? None!” (Interview 2012). Active in both government and literature circle, and writing in Chinese language, what kind of environmental politics does Nyima pursue?

Dreg pa (Tibetan དྲེག་པ་) means dirt, disorder, interruption of hierarchies in monk/laymen, men/women, insiders/outside and is lived. I argue that *dreg pa* captures part of things that are human and part of human that are things. *Dreg pa* has two parts: *dreg* means dirty, unclean, immoral, whereas *pa* means persons of some traits or things of some characteristics. Scholars used “*drip*” as transliteration and dropped *pa*. People in Yubeng live with *dreg pa*, as part of daily pragmatics. On the book, *dreg pa* refers to instances of a reversion of order, thus producing “matter out of place” (Douglas 1966). In Ladakh, *dreg pa* means the dirt produced, for example, when a layman touched a serving bowl of rice before a monk who always enjoyed the right of being first (Mills 2003). It differs from karmic pollution in that *dreg pa* can be canceled out by individuals with goodwill whereas karmic is a law that works beyond cause-and-effect. Many inhabitants of Yubeng and nearby villages did not learn *dreg pa* from books but from their own experiences. An older woman shared that, “If you caught *dreg pa*, your head will be gone (invisible) in the eyes of a *huofo* (living Buddha, reincarnate in eastern Tibetan religions with discrete lineages)” (2015). And she continued, “The *huofo* I met told me to walk clockwise around the stupa for a thousand laps. So I did. He then said he was relieved to see my head reappear above my neck” (2015). Here, “individuals with goodwill” can indeed battle *dreg pa*

and win. For *dreg pa* is something like fortune and luck that Deqenwa (people of Deqin, the county where Yubeng belongs) developed elaborate ways of meticulous economics, e.g., “a thousand laps” above, to gain good luck from meticulous calculation in the local cosmoeconomics (da Col 2012).

As much *dreg pa* offers chances to turn bad into good for people, it requires embodied practices and the act of moving. “Dreg pa in practice” often involves people moving across boundaries and barriers to achieve pragmatic goals. Anthropologist Unni Wikan (2012: 232) suggested to look for *dreg pa* (*drip* in her writing) in the kitchen rather than in any ritual: a husband may not catch the *dreg pa* associated with gender if he is rushing into the assistance of his wife and offering helping hands during childbirth on the kitchen floor in Bhutan (a country where many ethnic Tibetans live). The principle of overturned hierarchy at the moment did not result in cosmic disorder, several old women shared with Wikan. The urgency of assisting one’s beloved ones exceeds the desire to remain free from pollution in principle. People move, just to be in the world of order even if the world is filled with animal and human excrement (Al-Mohammad 2007). A migrant woman worker at Yubeng said below about her moving 80km away from home,

Who wouldn’t want to live with parents? I had to leave mine because I, as a divorcee, brought nothing but pain to my parents. Under the same roof, I felt the unspeakable sadness when they acted out of this world. I was fine. But I was not fine in others’ mind. So I had to escape. I’d rather be on my own than being buried by rumors of affliction in me. I did not like working for meager wages here, but really, I had a home that I couldn’t go back to. Moving was the only way I can start over.

Unlike Nyima who is college educated, many Tibetans in rural areas move to counties and townships for physical labor jobs. This woman divorcee works in the busy kitchen in Yubeng cooking and washing dishes for tourists. In the summer months, people with connections

come to villages to recruit young men and women and transport them to a market in the city, and there, the villagers wait for employers to cook, to moving bricks, to babysit, and so on. Contrary to stereotypes of negative images of them as the spoiled ones due to China's policy giving preference to them in terms of education and employment, these new Tibetan migrants move to cities to look for a job, a way to make ends meet, and often even fail to do so. In China, their daily struggles produce the renewed meanings of *dreg pa* in practice.

History of plastic waste in China

One of the ways of living with *dreg pa*, for Yubeng inhabitants, is to live with plastic water bottles as waste. Plastic water bottles, now recyclables, take a specific route in the case of China. Polyethylene terephthalate (PET) gained worldwide market success since Dow Chemical invented in 1954 this material of durability, transparency, and disposability (Andrady and Neal 2009). The concerns of plastic bottles becoming overflowing waste came much later. Before that, it was a dazzling success to use this transparent, durable, and light bottle to consume water, reliable, individual-sized, and recyclable. Until it was not. In 2000 to 2005, the major producers of bottled water saw already a remarkable increase in consumer market worldwide; and China was the third largest consumption only following the United States and Mexico (cf. Kaplan 2007, 694). The trend continued. Besides, the story of a multinational water company in Fiji, as told succinctly by anthropologist Martha Kaplan (695), “evokes nature, health, purity and a remote, indigenous origin,” rather than luxury, to sell to high-end markets. The European American “tropical complex” worked well for investors with big monetary returns. The Chinese “plateau complex” is seen in the flourishing bottled water labels such as Xueyu gaoyuan (snow land plateau), Xianggelila (Shangri-La), and 5100 Xizang Bingchuan (5100 Tibetan Glaciers). Here, 5100 literally means that the altitude of the water source is 5100 meters above sea level for the

water company. An accurate number, a demarcation, and a neutral language advertise the Tibetan area as nature without humans to be conquered (see Litzinger 2004).

Barely do we see plastic water bottles ever in Nyima 's and his Han and Tibetan friends' hands. "Climate has shifted, and people now use thermostat bottles for hot tea or stainless bottles for water" Nyima said (Interview 2015). Nyima referred to the 180-degree shift in Chinese government policies on the employees in the "Anti-Corruption Campaign," led by Xi Jinping. Anyone can be anyone's enemy. Evidence of any kind alluring to corruption can end one's political career. As a habit, small business, and informal economy sector, recycling plastic bottles in China sustains a large group of *nongmingong* (peasant workers) or *wailaigong* (migrant workers). Historian Joshua Goldstein (2006) documented a hundred years of recycling in Beijing hutongs, *danwei* (work unit), and companies throughout Republic era and PRC. Goldstein (Ibid, 264) found that in 1957 PRC was "one of the first governments in the world to institute recycling on a permanent, nationally administered basis." Yet this advantageous position disappeared in the post-1978 reform era. The culture of *feipin huishou* (recollecting the waste goods) replaced by consumerism and "a culture of disposability" (275). A retired waste management worker of sixty-seven now recalled how he experienced this change, according to interviews done by Goldstein (277),

In the early days after liberation, street cleaners were employed under the Public Security Bureau. They gave us uniforms pretty much the same as cops, and except for a small badge, no one could tell by looking at your clothes what your job was. . . . [W]e started sweeping the streets at twelve midnight, but when I say 'sweep the street' I really should say 'sweep dust.'

Dignified, the workers in the 1950s enjoyed uniform not so different from police. Not today. Street sweeping workers in China are perhaps one of the most vulnerable people in society, living a precarious life. With a meager wage, they have little access to healthcare and little

channel through which to fight for rights, but their work is something cities cannot do without. In 2011, Nanjing *huanwei gongren* (street sweeping workers) protested low wage and unsafe working conditions and dumped solid waste in streets⁹. This was the first and only the beginning of many similar events.

However, Yubeng people are dignified when they collect plastic water bottles as *feipin*, or waste goods. Several villagers, employed as administrators full-time, wear uniform that said *anbao* (safe guards), which can be easily mistaken as special security force in China. One man at his fifties said, “We are called *anbao*, and we do not involve ourselves in putting out forest wildfires, but do collect plastic water bottles every other day and load them up for transportation out of the mountains” (Interview 2015). In broader Tibetan areas of Yunnan and Sichuan, the issue of cleaning plastic waste carried on the meaning of security to varied degrees, including biosecurity, ecological security and political security. In Jiuzhaigou, tourists may face a severe fine if they are caught littering, and even the number of tourists allowed access to the vulnerable yet pristine place is secured within the limit. Although we don’t see similar measurements in Yubeng, local villagers envision that it would be a reasonable future for them as well, when the paved roads can reach closer. *Anbao* added a political layer to the waste management, “We worked with Tibetans more than Han, and Tibetan villagers elsewhere visiting here do not have the knowledge of plastic water bottles as waste” (2015). Upgrading the level of waste management to security, in this sense, is a downgrade to the work, habits, and life of Tibetans and a politics of security, biased, discriminative, and demeaning. “Dignified” because of the

⁹ Nanjing street cleaning workers carried out a strike to protest about low wage (which did not grow over 10 years), bad working conditions (in extreme weather), and no healthcare in 2011. See, http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/detail_2011_11/17/10714832_0.shtml

police uniform lookalike, *anbao* take on a sensitive role in the Chinese frontier environmental politics.

The language “security” on Yubeng waste workers’ uniform established the sense of a stronger state presence at the borderland area. One worker told to a newly employed, “Now you have got to wear these uniform with the badge forest security. You don’t want to get fined (by the county administration)” (Interview 2015). This change, for some visitors, was a sense of formal waste management in place, formal in the sense of state authority and reliability guaranteed by the embroidered badge. But for other visitors, particularly those who, like Nyima, got patted down by airport police many times, felt nervous. A woman from Sichuan shared, “We walk to these sacred mountains to see to the gods, and do not wish to see people with scary badges following us around!” (Interview 2014) Besides, owners of a small restaurant where visitors rested their feet during climbing up the mountain path, saw a change to a standardized waste management, enforced by people in uniform. Before, they packed up instant noodle bowls and made a wall, which people barely noticed it, but once they did, they were amazed. Now they must pay a premium for the cleaning service provided by the cleaning workers.

I accompanied three workers at Yubeng station of MTC on their monthly routine of waste collection along the mountain path and observed the interactions between them and the owners of small restaurants. Tourists and pilgrims made stops for hot tea, instant noodles, and simple dishes with fried rice. When we arrived the first restaurant on the path, the three workers were angry when discovering that in the designated area for waste dump the plastic bottles were mixed with other trash including food waste, food wrappers, cheap plastic raincoats, and others. The workers said that the owners should have packed all the plastic bottles in given free bags and

composted the organic waste. Now the workers had to dive in to pack the waste up. They quarreled with the owners for almost an hour on plastic bottles. Below is an excerpt,

Owner A: We don't pay to work. We pay so you work for us. What do you mean that the plastics must be sorted out and packed in bags?

Cleaning Worker 1: We gave you these green bags for free. You fill them up, walk over there, and throw them in the pit. Easy. You throw the rest of organic garbage on the other side. We built a little house [a container made of concrete] for that.

Owner B: That pit is open! We packed bags there before. Where are the bags gone? Yes. They disappeared. The bags are like shit. They break down after several storms. We don't have space to store the bottles.

Owner A: We have more than a hundred visitors per day in the summer. Thus, thousands of bottles a month. How often do you come up to the mountain here? Once a month?

Cleaning Worker 2: Alright. We will talk to our supervisors and come more often. But now you put everything, plastics, food waste, in that pit. Don't you smell the horrible odor? People are eating at your place here. How can you have good business if waste is so close? You throw everything out there. Easy for you. Nasty job for us. We must wear gloves digging through and bagging the plastic bottles for you.

Cleaning Worker 1: You may lose your license!

Owner A & B: Don't get us started on the license. You ask them (the county administration) when our license comes. All beautiful talks. No work.

The conversation occurred after a cleaning task on a mid-October day, not long after the Chinese seven-day national holiday from October 1st to October 7th. The disputes focusing on whose responsibility of sorting solid waste into plastic bottles and food waste is common in today's urban and rural China. The argument is usually an economic one: who pays for the work of sorting and what economic fines should be applied to the wrong parties. In the case of Tibetan mountain villages, I argue that the unique material makeup of plastic bottles, large in volume and light in weight, constrains the flow of them as waste. Prior to the standardization of waste management, from 2005 to 2009, The Natural Conservancy, a US-based NGO incentivized people by offering a stable paying job to transporting plastic bottles on the backs of mules to the

outside and to the county. But it was costly. As the project ended, the job disappeared¹⁰. When I began fieldwork in Yubeng in 2011, I tried to collect plastic bottles in my bag along the mountain paths, but Nyima stopped me. He explained,

How are you ever able to do them all? People have changed. They hide these bottles in the cracks of big rocks, wishing they will disappear. What they don't know is that these bottles got brushed downstream by streams eventually. Now they don't see the streams. But in rainy seasons and even rainy days, these dry bedrocks become big rivers. People forget the power of nature and gods. You can clean up the bottles. But you have to change people's mind first.

Nyima turned to sacred landscape as a resource to articulate and frame the plastic bottles in the story of human's responsibility to care the invisible land as well. He prioritized this to the effort in enforce a standardized waste management, shifting the concern from the economic to the religious one. His transition went from turning his hometown mountain into commercial products to seeing it as what it is, a land filled with deities and gods. He worked enthusiastically on writing cultural storyboards that were meant to be used as signposts, educating people on cultural, mystic, and enjoyable quality of Yubeng. But now he took seriously the dynamics of visible and invisible worlds. His orientation in the world of solid waste was a strategy to target at the seemingly insolvable waste problems in Yubeng and beyond. Many people and organization had tried, but failed. Below is a summary of different modes in doing waste management.

¹⁰ For a review of the Nature Conservancy's (US based) role in cleaning up garbage in its larger project on eco-tourism in Shangri-La, see Robert K. Moseley and Renée B. Mullen, 2014, *The Nature Conservancy in Shangrila*, in *Mapping Shangrila: Contested Landscapes in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands*, edited by Emily T. Yeh and Chris Coggins, pp. 129-151. For the research on the work by Chinese scientists and government in wetland conservancy in cultural Tibet, see Emily T. Yeh, 2009, *From Wasteland to Wetland? Nature and Nation in China's Tibet*, *Environmental History* 14(1): 103-137. For the intricacies and nuances in the "development as gift" scheme in Lhasa, Tibet, see Emily T. Yeh, 2013, *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Table 1. Modes of waste management in Yubeng Village¹¹

Periods	Management	Disputes and Problems
Pre 2001	No mass tourism yet; Household waste went to compost or rivers.	Barely any issue; No toilets built inside or adjacent to houses.
2001-2005	Rise of tourism and influx of plastic waste; Household waste increased as tourism grew; No official management in place.	Shop appeared in the village and plastic waste from the shop not attended; Difficulty in transporting goods (and waste).
2005-2009	Eco-tourism program carried out by The Nature Conservancy; Paid worker who was not from Yubeng and who carried bags of plastic waste on his mule to nearby road access; Each household had a waste basket under their name along the three main tourist routes and had responsibility of cleaning it out periodically.	The worker was underpaid and eventually quit the job. Lack of incentives from villagers; they were burdened with food preparation new house hotels; Absence of regular labor needed for maintenance of the baskets; many baskets were destroyed by rain but never replaced.
2009-2011	Discontinued funding from The Nature Conservancy.	Lack of management.
2011-2015	Meili Tourist Company took over; paid 20,000RMB per household for their volunteer work; had staff cleaning the waste monthly.	Villagers complained that they had no share in the ticket revenues; waste increased but the cleaning work was not enough.

¹¹ This table was based on interviews with villagers, staff at The Nature Conservancy, and Meili Tourist Company.

Common in Tibetan areas of southwest China, local villagers would hang their clothes up in the trees, grooves, stones where they believe deities had traveled through at some point in time. In the world of deities crowding the major snow mountains, the visible old clothes function as roadmap for the invisible deities to disseminate blessings to individuals who offered their clothes or whose clothes were offered by their family. The ways of tracing individuals via the old clothes are through sensorium, including sight, hearing, smell, and touch. For example, 20km south of Shangri-La City, Xiaozhongdian villagers shared that women's clothes represented the snow mountains, the sky and the flowers, through the white cotton in the hat, striped fabrics over blue skirt, and pink headdress, whereas men's fur hat represented animals and their spirits alive in the mountains. Usually, striped fabrics and fur hats are chosen to represent people who wore them. In Yubeng, villagers choose other types of clothes such as coats and blue skirts. Across Tibetan areas of southwest China, the traditions vary across regions and from villages to villages.

While things that are out of place (Douglas 1966) may become waste due to their ambivalent position in our cultural scheme, the materiality of things constrains how waste come into being. In other words, the culture of categorizing of things into use and waste has a limit. This limit is reflected in the things themselves. The material making of plastic waste renders economic factors in China, but people who manage them deal with the complex issue of security daily in Yubeng. Contrasted with plastic bottles, old clothes can become medium for completing a circle of exchange among people, deities, and the sacred site, due to the personal identity that is associated with and attached to them. Old clothes may retain body odor, mark the contour, and record the size in growth. Unlike plastic bottles, old clothes are personal and individualistic, one different from another. In Yubeng, if one lost old clothes by accident, one would feel that pieces of herself is missing. When the workers at MTC removed a portion of the old clothes away from

the mountain paths, villagers protested. For them, “old clothes are not waste but persons” (Interview 2012). In the broader Tibetan area, another form of human waste, excrement, is under the umbrella of waste management as well, because of the large amount in Mount Everest.¹² Old clothes in nomadic Tibetan areas, however, are a form of devotion to the mountain deities, resonant with the idea that the mountain deities can assist the owners or the previous owners (if deceased) in guiding their way peacefully to the next reincarnation¹³. But they have become things out of place, because of the overflow of them. And precisely it is because tourists’ imitation of offering their own old clothes side by side with the ones Tibetan villagers originally had devoted (Fig. 5).

¹² A comparable case is the human waste in Mount Everest, enough to force Nepal government to require each climber to bring down 18 pounds of trash off the mountain. See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/03/03/decades-of-human-waste-have-made-mount-everest-a-fecal-time-bomb/>, visited 9/17/2016.

¹³ *Zhidak* (Wylie: *gzhi bdag*) and *yullha* (Wylie: *yul lha*) are in local dialect for village place deities and regional place deities. Usually these deities reside in mountains rendered sacred, but they can live in lakes as well. For mountain deities, see Toni Huber, 1999, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet*. New York: Oxford University Press. According to Huber, the main idea is that *yullha* has a broader pilgrim demography whereas *zhidak* focuses only on nearby villages. While *yullha* may concern next reincarnation, *zhidak* focuses mainly on fortune, blessing, and luck in this life. See also, Giovanni da Col, 2012a, Natural Philosophies of Fortune: Luck, Vitality, and Uncontrolled Relatedness, *Social Analysis* 56 (1): 1-23; Giovanni da Col, 2012b, The Elementary Economies of Dechenwa Life: Fortune, Vitality, and the Mountain in Sino-Tibetan Borderlands, *Social Analysis* 56(1): 74-98.



Fig. 5, Old clothes were offered in a sacred tree, either as medium to connect with deities, or as makeshift waste bins. Photo by author.

It is common that sacred mountains are persons. For Yubeng villagers, this person is named Khawa Kharpo. If old clothes appear nothing like Buddha statues or figurines in one's house, they direct our attention to the invisible sacred landscape that is the sacred mountain, broad, pervasive, and powerful. A grandmother shared, "I lost my third baby boy when he was 9. He fell off the slope. I was so sad. I turned to the gods living in the mountains. I put my baby boy's favorite clothes in the abdomen of mountain gods. So they can hold him gently and guide him swiftly to reincarnation." By abdomen she referred to several sites in the middle of the mountain path. Nyima interpreted the tragedy of mountaineers in Mingyong in 1991 as such,

“Khawa Kharpo [The White God] went elsewhere for a world mountain gods’ conference and did not notice these climbers on his body. When he returned home, he found them and shook them off his shoulder.” This incident was the beginning of fraught politics of development local mountains for commercial use (mountaineering then and tourism now) and preservation since the 1990s. While Khawa Kharpo won the battle by killing, villagers won by protests.

Mountaineering was banned and still is today. Before that, centuries ago, Khawa Kharpo fought Padmasambhava, the Indian monk who first brought Buddhism to Tibet and then became the enlightened. This fight ended, and Khawa Kharpo lost to Padmasambhava. Khawa Kharpo was powerful, intimidating, fearless and “beast like.” Then he was tamed into a Buddhist like mountain deity, who still retained the quality of a beast while a compassionate Buddhist. Khawa Kharpo’s feisty and beast like quality describes perfectly the resilience Yubeng people have had while living at the borderland of multiple civilizations through time. Today, people devoted the old clothes to Khawa Kharpo and deities of his alike, while acknowledging the beast like quality of theirs.

In the age of tourism and waste, it is wise for them to create talks of danger embedded in the old clothes if forcibly removed. *Dreg pa* is associated with a removal of the old clothes, simply because the removal will break the circle of exchange between Khawa Kharpo and other deities, people, and the land. The remained beast in Khawa Kharpo would punish people for the removal. The first time such stories of *dreg pa* occurred between 2005 and 2009, when The Nature Conservancy carried out its ecotourism project which entailed removal of waste, including the old clothes. Then with the conclusion of the project and the exponential growth of Chinese mass tourism, the county administration applied a policy to remove partial amount of the old clothes, to “hatch the seed for continuous tourists’ interests while maintaining a pleasant

environment” (Interview 2011). After all, in the recent decade, Tibetan areas are becoming the objects of desire and *crème de la crème* in the touristic demand for exotic and spiritual endeavors¹⁴.

Usually, the Chinese tourists consist of college students, young professionals, empty nest parents, and some retirees, who, despite diverse interests, show certain degree of acknowledgement of the old clothes as a form of dedication to the deities. At least one or several in the group would start to pick one item off their body or from the backpack and carefully place it onto the pile, while touching paws with eyes closed and mouth murmuring prayers. Then more would follow. This act of imitation is less popular than the nearby rocks where people try to stick money into the cracks.

By contrast, Tibetan tourists, travelers, and even pilgrims sometimes carry a large volume of *lungta*, that is, Buddhist prayer flags sewed in one straight line on a rope. Their purpose is to put up the line of prayer flags. They sometimes follow an experienced elder or a clergy in the monastery but often do so by themselves. The idea behind this is to ask the wind to blow through the *lungta*, as if reciting the sacred Buddhist texts on the behalf of the devotees. Old clothes,

¹⁴ In many trips that Nyima and I took together in the mountains, the taxi drivers told similar stories of interactions between drivers and Han Chinese tourists as hitchhikers. A young man at 30 had the most dramatic change of understanding of the situation. At first, he was a heavy-duty driver, but got in taxi business after his cousin’s success. He happened to pick up hitchhikers, seeing it as a good deed. Soon, he learned from online forums of hitchhiking tourists about stupid Tibetans charging no money. He was in shock but continued his good deeds. When his cousin was in trouble for being held responsible for a hitchhiker’s broken fingers that were stuck at the car door, he had realized that this expectation of him being selfless required an expensive price. After that, he followed fellow Tibetan drivers and refused to take on any hitchhikers. It is such day-to-day interaction on the road that makes Tibetan subjectivities “sacred” and take on the burden of being “sacred” and finally gave up. This realization of the price of being “sacred” among taxi drivers can be seen among many others who are deeply involved with tourists, which led to the final giving up of living as such. Tenzin lak’s story happens to almost ordinary Tibetan people as they step into tourism

however, appear rather local, unknown to Tibetans from elsewhere. Old clothes would break down and disappear through time, which in logic goes together with the immaterial view of life and personal belongings in Tibetan cultural practices, including sky burial, water burial, incineration and other funerary practices (Gouin 2010). In short, setting old clothes up in the mountain is to let it disappear, leaving virtually no personal mark on the land. Yet, in the Chinese tourists' imagination, it is crucial to show respect to deities all over the world by marking the land of deities with personal belongings. In this case, they imitate the act of putting old clothes on the mountain paths.

Doing the work of putting up the prayer flags requires money, time, and energy and thus a deep commitment. In 2014, a Tibetan traveler from Regong, Qinghai, arrived at Yubeng, carrying a bag of his body size, filled with prayer flags as well as a tent and cooking wares. He sold Regong prayer flags¹⁵ to Tibetans as he traveled, to pay for his own expenses. For him, the meaning of doing so is “to make the sacred land visible” through his hard work, and his endurance in hardship itself is his way of practicing religion (Interview 2014). Similarly, old clothes require emotive and time investment and commitment. Nyima still remembered a time prior to tourism that he walked along the mountain path noticing all the old clothes with distinct styles and with personal identities. He could know immediately to whom those specific clothes belong and whether a sad story of loss was behind them. For him, the old clothes were not things, nevertheless, waste; but, rather, they were persons. Nyima was offended by the top-down county policy of removing old clothes, despite he worked in the county office. He said,

¹⁵ Regong Art was recognized as the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2009. <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/en/RL/regong-arts-00207> , last visited 10/19/2016.

How can these be *la ji* (Chinese: waste)? They are people!¹⁶ People remember their loss by putting clothes there. Clothes disappear. People still live. Now all kinds of clothes are here and there. They become anonymous, empty, and nonhuman. A kind of *dreg pa* occurs. We talk about *huan jing*, huan jing, and huan jing (Chinese: environment). Do we care about huan jing of people? We don't. I am disappointed. I consulted with my great uncle about this abdomen of mountain gods, Khawa Kharpo and others. I recorded the stories. I looked for the possible location on the mountains as the abdomen. I have found some. I asked my nephew to take pictures for me. I wrote them up and published as a pamphlet. TNC (The Nature Conservancy) helped us to do the pamphlet. We want to make that new place as requirement for all the tour guides. But not really. We want people to know the mountain as spiritual. You can see that in these new places for deities' abdomen, far away from the busy tourist mountain paths, several sets of old clothes are presented. They are handmade clothes crafted by Tibetan grandmothers. They won't be there forever. They disappear. Not like the nylon clothes which turned to *la ji*. Of course, we picked the location well hidden in the woods, suitable for us Tibetans, the mountain people. ...

Old clothes are persons. They participate in the collective remembrance of the older generations. Yet they should disappear to make room for tourism. As Nyima said, old clothes are not *laji*, unlike the nylon clothes that tourists brought in first and locals wore. A sense of being robbed of the place and its close tie to life is boiling strong in Nyima's narrative. He learned a touristic encounter from his niece's family recently. His niece worked for her family-owned hostel in Yubeng as a cook. She often made wise comments and became good friends with tourists. One day, in the evening, she chatted with a group of tourists and laughed over details on the trip that the group just had. Then a young woman showed off a nice bracelet made of jade and wood, common in Tibetan areas. She said that she spotted in a pile of "garbage-like" old clothes and decided to fish it out for her own use, as a way of "recycling someone else's waste"

¹⁶ In my further conversations with Nyima, he explained that old clothes were animated as alive beings in the local cultural terms. "Whenever you see the article of old clothes, you show respect to the clothes as if the person who wore them were right in front of you," shared Nyima. Given that Tibetans do not keep photographs of their deceased family, this act of seeing clothes as people may have profound cultural meanings. Contrary to the idea that Tibetan sky burials feed the corpse of the dead to vultures as an act of feeding, people wrap white cloth around the body to show respect. In the local Shangri-La villages, people do the same in the water funerals, that is, wrapping the body with white cloth before dissecting it into small pieces and throwing it into the river.

(Interview 2015). The niece was a bit upset, so she improvised, “No! That belonged to a deceased person! It was set there so that the deities living in the mountain would help the dead to find the way to a better reincarnation!” (2015). Nyima was not in agreement with this specific way to interpret reincarnation, because it perhaps simplifies the karma as a cause-and-effect law that may work in invisible ways. Thus, the claim sounded ungrounded. He did, however, appreciate the sentiments embedded in his niece’s improvisation, the unsatisfactory towards tourists who showed little respect to the land and felt entitled to take away things under the name of doing recycling work. Nyima’s words were proven true when the workers believed that cleaning off the “sacred waste” behind the devotees would be a burden in the heart rather than the body (see Fig.6).



Fig. 6, Two workers carefully picked out the waste objects underneath the prayer flags near the sacred waterfall in Yubeng. Photo by author.

The sentiments over environmental issues had grown in Tibetan areas in the recent decade. Fur clothes, common in Amdo and Kham nomadic areas, became the spotlight. Tibetan scholar Woesser (2009) recounted an event in 2006 that nomadic Tibetans burned their fur clothes made from endangered species such as snow lions and tigers, right after His Holiness Dalai Lama criticized Tibetans who were wearing fur clothes as “not good and shameful.”¹⁷ This direct response to the religious leader from Tibetan ordinary people infuriated the Communist Party. But the Party could not do much about it, because the nomads meant to follow the environmental policy of not hurting endangered species. In this scenario, fur clothes work as the symbol of religious devotion, which was used to assert the religious identity against the secular governance. As much as this incident provoked the potential different paths of politics, it also reflects the everyday struggle over environmental politics over the simple old clothes. The way the Tibetans deal with fur clothes, including devoting them to sacred sites, remembering through them, or burning them for a religious and political cause, forms a unique way of grappling with opportunities in their daily challenges. And these challenges happen in dynamic ways. For example, a recent documentary recorded the different voices of removing objects on the sacred lake in the Tibetan community.

Deities may attack

Nyima carried his grandfather’s bowl when he did the circumambulation. The bowl reminded him of a recent past when using one bowl for food could be a life-long thing. In today’s standards, this would be ecologically responsible way of living. The bowl is carefully maintained and barely used, but it traveled long distance around the sacred mountains. Not only

¹⁷ http://woesser.middle-way.net/2009/10/blog-post_19.html, accessed 11/15/16.

one's family member can be remembered by bowls, but also Khawa Kharpo can be lived as body of people. Anthropologist Guo Jing in Yunnan Academy of Social Science invited Nyima and the village elders to draw out the mountains, the animals, and the body of Khawa Kharpo (Guo 2013; Nyima 2008). The highest peak is his head. The Lotus Temple is his heart, where both he and Padmasambhava are in the alter receiving incense and food, money, and gift offerings. The villages are the limbs, body organs, as well as armors. Now the presence of solid waste produced a spatial and social interruption that can be called *dreg pa*. When the villages are surrounded by solid waste, the body organs of his are deteriorating and may migrate to other parts. To battle with this deterioration, young Yubeng villagers began to explore new sites for old clothes, less visible and more difficult to access than the popularized tourist sites, because this will heal the body organs of Khawa Kharpo and thus the villagers. They have made handprints and footprints engraved on the stones. The marks on the stones may look new, compared to the moss plants in the surrounding areas, but it was clear that the clothes were placed to authenticate the sacredness of the sites. The devotional practice of re-sacralizing place and bringing stories of Khawa Kharpo into place made a distinction on the sacred land, a land filled with stories of human sufferings (see, Basso 1991). Especially, when waste interrupts the exchange between human and nonhuman beings, *dreg pa* occurs; and when *dreg pa* occurs, deities such as Khawa Kharpo attack.

Conclusion

Dynamic relations between Tibetan villagers and the world of objects take forms, grow and change. While some kinds of plastic objects become waste, old clothes become media and mediator between human and nonhuman worlds. In this chapter, I have suggested that the local interpretation of personhood entails a relational epistemology in which persons-as-things and

things-as-persons formulate the basic understanding between all-too-human and nonhuman beings, the sacred and the profane, and the devotional and managerial land. On the one hand, as shown in the exchanges between waste pickers and small restaurant owners, the relational epistemology interacts with the government solid discipline in producing a security state on the ethnic borders, hardening the boundaries between recyclable plastic waste and untreated material excess of overheated tourist developments. On the other hand, in the case of Nyima and others, they show a deep commitment to the deity Khawa Kharpo and materialize such commitment with the act of offering old clothes, which consequently destabilize the hardening line between materials in the managerial scheme.

In recent anthropological studies on personhood in the animist traditions in the Anthropocene, as well as new ontological ethnographies aiming to respect the indigenous worldviews as metaphysical in their own rights, much emphasis is given to the significance of the vivid animist personhood which could see truth beyond a narrower scientific or positivist perspective to understand the environmental change in general and cultural specifics. When anthropologists incorporate ontologies into ethnographic writings while engaging with “reality,” the key words should be “socially constructed” (Kohn 2015, 314). In the example of Tibetan villagers here, the cultural notion of *dreg pa*, a disruption of socially formed order, weaves together a distinct version of reality in the world of waste, plastics, clothes, sacred objects, deities, and human beings. In this world, the human experience has shaped material relations and human and nonhuman relations, but the story is as much human as it is nonhuman. Especially, the deities may attack when decay occurs. Instead of conceptualizing the indigenous worldview as haven or better alternatives to capitalism for environmental catastrophe, as many scholars conveniently do, I suggest we should take seriously how the local cultures construct

understandings as the local community members maneuver in the complex political and social landscape and tell stories of attacking deities in various scenarios. It is because the local people are not bound with a fixed version of animist or Buddhist worldview. Instead, like everyone elsewhere living in the Anthropocene, the Tibetans engage with a fluid, situational, and sometimes violent construct of deities, materiality, and sacrality in the ecology of many factors, which in my chapter, include generations of cultural authenticity, mass tourism, modern waste management, and security state.

Chapter 4 Food Waste and Gender

Introduction

Women's empowerment often involves freeing women from household chores such as cooking because such works are not paid. But the instability of moral values added to houseworks complicate this correlation. The moral expectations of women being food preparers who waste none may restrict the opportunity for women to achieve empowerment, even when they earn money for cooking in food service industries. This chapter investigates the role of moral expectations in a nomadic Tibetan community in shaping women's new social status in the emerging tourist oriented economy in southwest China. It tackles the meanings of food waste from nomadic and consumerist tourist economies, showing that on the one hand, Tibetan women waste virtually no food in nomadic households, and on the other, they learn to cook Sichuan cuisine which wastes a great deal of oil and peppers to satisfy the Han Chinese tourists. Focusing on several women's experiences in their adaptation and skills to translate between “a good woman in the house” and “a versatile cook in the business,” this chapter reveals the gendered dichotomies of development and conservation, wasting and non-wasting, food preparers and dumpers in the small villages adjacent to Shangri-La, Yunnan, in the eastern Sino-Tibetan borderlands. It argues that while women gain more income by participating in the new tourist economy, the moral expectations of them being waste none in the nomadic household economy affect the way in which women earn moral capital along with economic capital, a process more common among men. In conclusion, it offers the role of moral capital in shaping women's status in the tourist transformation of rural Tibetan communities by criticizing any simplistic moral

judgments towards food waste. In other words, food waste must be understood as a moral and social project which has gendered consequences.

Culinary lessons have gained popularity among village women in the neighboring area of Shangri-La City since the so-called *jia fang*¹⁸ (Ch. 家访, home visit) tourist program launched by the tourist agents with policy favors from the municipal government in 2010. The lessons are informal. Usually, village women chipped in money to pay a city chef for a one-day class in a convenient location, that is, one woman's own house. They would learn to cook one to two Sichuan cuisine dishes. They wanted to learn to create the spicy aroma unique to this cuisine by observing the chef first and then cooking on their own. Admittedly, these women were already masters cook in their own households. What mattered to them was the skill to transform food into this spicy aroma that Han Chinese tourists in *jia fang* desired the most. Once the techniques were acquired, they would use them to cook yak meat, tofu, potatoes, or even the medicinal root plants *maca*. I was invited by my host sister Lhamo to observe one class that she acted as the

¹⁸ *Jia fang* became the predominant form of tourism in southwest Yunnan and other places in China. The idea of *jia fang* was that urban Chinese could enjoy home away from home in the rural households by eating together with the hosts, as if they were coming to their own rural homes. *Jia fang* gained popularity around the 1990s, when numerous first-generation Chinese urbanites wanted to experience the village life on weekends for “eating the bitterness and enjoying the sweetness” (Ch. *yi ku si tian*). This was also the generation that returned to cities and established households, or whose parents were sent-down youths. The purpose of having such experience is thus two-fold: educating their children about bitter life and reaffirming their own middle-class life. The intersection between rural and ethnical tourism emerged later in the early 2000s and had expanded the object of desire for the Han Chinese middle-class to the ethnic borderlands of China (see Chio 2014). My own conversations with local luxury hotel owners in Shangri-La suggested that the anti-corruption campaign launched by President Xi since 2014 resulted in a sharp decline in their bookings. Tourism-related business died down about 80% in the city. The remained had shifted to nearby villages. Crowd dynamics of tourists shifted as well, from the corrupted officials to the newly rich in private sectors and the free-spirited college students, artists, and others. The latter group tended to spend less on tourism and preferred staying with the locals.

host. It was 7am. Lhamo's brother, a tour guide with certification and contract in Shangri-La, had arranged Chef Lin to do the two-course class. Lhamo and 11 women had bought chicken and fish and chopped them into cubes as instructed the day before. They arranged the ingredients per request, a wok on gas stove at the center, a dozen bowls of spices on the left, the chicken and fish on the right, a gallon of vegetable oil, chopped vegetables, minced garlic, ginger, and green onions next to the gas stove. Chef Lin lit the stove and poured about 500ml oil into the wok, while all the women stood around and observed. He threw in a handful of pepper flakes, numbing spices, garlic and ginger and let them sizzle. Then he grabbed the chicken cubes to stir fry. The room was filled with intense spicy aroma and foggy smokes. After a few minutes, he turned off the stove and transferred the dish onto a drainer to drain off the excessive oil, before he had the dish on plates. Lhamo murmured, and later explained to me that she thought it was a waste of cooking oil. Then, every woman grabbed a plate to taste the first dish called spicy chicken. As they praised the chef for the authentic Sichuan cuisine, they carefully picked out and threw away the Sichuan peppercorn under the table with chopsticks. The class went on with the second dish spicy fish, which was identical except the final addition of broth.

To Shangri-La Tibetan women, the arrival of Sichuan cuisine and its popularity in jia fang contradicted their home cooking, in that they saw the oil and peppercorn in this new cuisine as wasteful, even though necessary to produce the spicy aroma that is the trademark for authenticity. Compared to this wasteful cooking, women's home cooking involved pork, potatoes, and rice with yak butter, which reflected the subsistent economy comprised of semi nomadic and semi agricultural activities. Scholars pointed out that the economic transformation in Shangri-La dated back in the early 1980s when lumber trade was made illegal, and ever since had shifted towards service oriented (Hillman 2009). Recent tourist change posed new

challenges about the cultural identity of Tibet in the development projects under the local, provincial, and national policies (Kolas 2008; Kolas and Thowsen 2005; Litzinger 2004).

Observations on the dynamic social change in this marginal area both to Tibet and to Beijing also posed criticism to the very idea of Shangri-La as the new wave of colonial and exotic imagination of an indigenous people with unique histories (Yeh and Coggins ed 2014).

Following Hathaway's (2010) concept of indigenous space, which incorporate cultural, political, and economic activities into one encompassing space, I discuss how gender and the idea of wasteful cooking are intertwined and intermingled together in such indigenous space. The vignette suggested that Shangri-La women learned the wasteful cooking to satisfy the needs of Han Chinese tourists who preferred Sichuan to local cuisine, for the latter appeared undesired in the tourist despite cheap dining. The rich percentage in fat in the local Tibetan food, however, provided necessary calories for heavy labor in the mountain ranch and highland fields, as one would need climb an elevation of several hundred meters with steep slopes. People valued animal fat highly, both in meat and butter, due to a long history of subsistence strategy with low yielding fields of potatoes and barley wheats and thin soil just enough for sustaining grass to feed yaks. Butter, or *mal* in local word, has many benefits to one's body. Butter is precious and valuable, as gift to family and friends and to deities. One of the tasks local monks learn is to make Buddha figures out of butter dough and present them in front of Buddhist statues.

However, to Han Chinese tourists, butter was foreign, rich, and excessive, associated with high calories and unwanted scent from milk based fat, as opposed to lard or vegetable oil common in Chinese cooking and household kitchens. Many times, when I brought vegetables and meat to my host families, they simply fried them with butter, because that's what made the dish stand out

and appropriate for a meal for guests. However, this must change when the source of household income is derived mostly from tourist consumption.

Gender Performed

Cultural diversity in the multi-ethnic southwest China (especially northwest Yunnan) attracted scholarship that focused on gender and equal labor division (Du 2002), matrilineal and matrilocal marriages or the lack of (Cai 2001), sex tourism (Chen 2014), affective labor and HIV (Hyde 2007) and gendered domestic migrant labor (Liu 2010). Although it may be over generalization, it is established that many ethnic groups in what's considered southwest China have matrilineal societies. Southeast Asian scholar Michael Peletz proposed to theorize matrilineal societies as the main organizing principle throughout the region and beyond. In matrilineal societies, women usually have more say in and out houses and have chance to inherit family houses and land. Admittedly, Tibetan societies often have patrilineal structures with variations. This eastern edge of Tibetan groups, however, resembled with the Na people more than with other Tibetans. To Shangri-La Tibetans, both men and women have equal chances to inherit family houses and responsibilities, depending upon whether they decided to carry on the *huo tang*, that is, the fire in the kitchen and origin and center of family. The concern here is to carry on the house to the next generation regardless of whether it was a daughter or son. Although more men than women inherit houses and land in villages of my study, it is common as well that a woman have an in-marrying husband while her brothers marry out or become ordained as monks.

Charlene Makley (2007) first pointed out that femininity was the object for everyday discipline in Tibet. For the monks who embraced tourists and other high-profile visitors, it was

their rights to represent the modern image of Tibetan societies through a performance of gender equality in front of foreigners, state bureaus, tourists, and others. As Makley recounted, a few women were called out by the monks and invited to enter the inner section of the temple hall, to represent that both men and women had access in the sacred space. Yet such action was performed and, in reverse, a display of monks as men having power over women in determining who had access and who did not, all in public. In other words, femininity was the tool for the masculine monks to embody the idea of modernity, rather than the opposite. Makley's criticism revealed the persistent male-dominant speech action prominent in the Tibetan monasteries.

For my case, gender as performed identity must be understood in the adaptation to tourist and market economies. And as much as public space matters, gender performance in the household is important. Feminist anthropology turned to house as an analytical unit after long criticism that gender is beyond what's individual. If we treat house as the primary lens through which we observe gender performance, in most cases, the public space is an extension from the house. This is especially true when we look at women's clothing in Shangri-La. It is no exaggeration to say that the economic transformations condition the way in which people perform their gender identity, redefining masculinity and femininity as a moving target. In streets, women usually wear hot pink headdress and skirts with horizontal stripes. The color meant to reflect the cosmic order. Hot pink headdress over blue cloth over white cotton describes the flowers on the snow mountains with blue sky as the background. The rare flowers that survive and blossom on the cold and harsh land represent a good virtue and themselves embodiment of mountain deities. There are at least a dozen shops for women's traditional Tibetan garments (*chuantong zangzhuang fushi dian*) in each of the five major streets in Shangri-La. Many women own several sets of clothing for festivals and special occasions. Their

enthusiasm towards fashion and beauty was also reflected in photo makings. For high-school reunions or birthday parties, women usually take group photos while in the traditional garments and display such photos on their living room walls. It is safe to say that this is more empowering than subjecting them to the male gaze.

My host family's trip to the city usually contains a short visit to the clothing shops. Wearing traditional garments seem to be unsaid expectations for women in the villages, whereas men rarely do. Men shop sports and leisure clothes in the mall. For them, having one set of traditional garments would suffice, because wearing them is only a few times a year, in festivals, weddings, and funerals. Masculinity in this sense means the ability to be freed from the responsibility of looking traditional and cultural.¹⁹ Many interviews suggest that this trend of women's traditional garments and men's sports clothes has begun only for two decades or so, around the same time as mass tourism transformed the place.

Culture of masculinity and femininity can be observed in the economic status and earning power as well. Employment opportunities tend to rise disproportionately with tourism rather than with agriculture for most villagers.²⁰ Men often find temporary contracted works on housing and hotels construction projects whereas women tend to work on domestic services such as childcare, food, and menial cleaning works in hospitality. As tourism industries are often service oriented,

¹⁹ Men do not take the responsibility of wearing traditional garments beyond rituals and ceremonies. But when they do, they are marked, often more significantly than women. I observed a water ritual that aimed showing gratitude to mountain gods for providing villagers drinking water in the early spring of 2012, and found that men took the important roles to initiate, to lead, and to execute the major performance of welcoming the mountain gods. After that, women, men, children, and elders began to throw stones into the sacred lake for personal blessings.

²⁰ I include hospitality, restaurants, constructions, and cleaning services as tourism related or oriented.

women find jobs more easily than men. It is also because the construction projects are one-time things, whereas menial works come all year around. Ironically, some of the feminine works women do give them steady income and thus a stronger sense of economic security than men.

My 2011 interview with cleaning worker Tsomo confirmed this,

I began cleaning the central square of the old town in 2009. Our village house was destroyed to make room for a new hotel. I liked my work. I swept the square and maintained its cleanness. I got up at 5:30am and worked until noon. Then my other shift came to do the same work. My cousins who live in farther away villages said that I was lucky to have got an “iron-bowl” job, because my employer the Waste Management Company is under contract with the (municipal) government. It is supposed to be stable. It is not enough pay though. My brother works as a driver and makes more money. He does not always have contracts....

Scholarship on uneven impact of tourism on indigenous genders has shown the possibility to feminize men’s bodies when women’s labor is rewarded more than men, despite that men wear sport clothes rather than traditional clothes as women usually wear. The strong evidence usually comes from sex tourism. Sex tourism is on the rise and has been since the early 1990s in Yunnan due to the presumed exotic ethnic and borderland bodies and loose social control. For Tibetan hosts, both men and women have been fetishized, especially men. It is because the usual media depiction of Tibetan men as dark skinned, physically strong, and straightforward and economical with words, the opposite from the light skinned, physically mediocre, and sophisticated Han Chinese men. My fieldwork collected quite a few stories of Han Chinese women tourists at their twenties and thirties encountering charming Tibetan men as dates and travel companions. Many emphasized that they went after the religious and spiritual quality in Tibetan men, because that quality was always absent in the Han Chinese men as potential dates. Of course, there have been romance and marriages between local Tibetan women and Han Chinese men, which however occurs less often in touristic encounters. Beyond

sexualizing ethnicity, recent campaigns on environmental education and waste recycling provided another opportunity for exoticizing Tibetanness. And such process is gendered.

Here I would like to explore environmental values, specifically ethics of food waste, as new evidence that women's moral capital may remain less than men, even though they have earned more economic capital. I will begin with a description of women's role in the conventional semi-nomadic and semi-agriculture economy in the villages. In preparing food in an economic way, women help to maintain the food source viable for multiple family members and thus maintain a morality that food-saving is a virtue in such economy.

“Be a good cook at the house”

I entered the village only 20km south of Shangri-La in 2011 for the first time and was fortunate to have found my host family, sister and her husband, parents, and brother who was ordained as a monk. Sister's daughter was only five years old. I learned to perform how to be a guest, while forgetting that I was also expected to act as a male in the household where women were the majority. I was assigned to the bed in the alter room where mother or sister entered early morning to light up the incense and pour water into seven golden bowls. Brother was usually present in another bed in the same room. I had little idea that it was considered inappropriate to have left me and sister alone in the house even though I was quite sure that my identity as a gay man would have had cleared any suspicions or rumors. I was and still am not out to them, in part because I felt the pressure coming from their expectation for me to get married to a woman over the years, same as my own parents would. I called sister *jiejie* (Ch. older sister) or *azha* (Tib. older sister) despite that I was three years older in age. I understood that I was considered socially younger because of my uncultured behaviors in the house and

because of her higher status as a mother versus me as a single person,²¹ so I agreed to continue using this way of addressing her. Because parents spent eight months a year in the mountain ranches, and because brother was in the monastery and brother-in-law in the construction company in the city, I ended up spending a lot of time with sister in the crop field and the kitchen. My fieldnotes recorded her way of making food,

Sister uses waste papers to start a fire in the stove on the second floor living area. Once the fire goes steady, she throws in firewood. She put a kettle of water with tea leaves in it on the stove top. On the surface of the stove, she places a few pieces of sticky-rice flat bread. It only takes a few minutes to warm up the bread. She offers me some. She gives me the leftover dishes to make a roll with the bread. Then the water is boiled. She adds butter into a long bamboo tube and starts to smash the butter with a small wood stick that fits correctly within the tube. After several minutes of smashing, the butter got fluffy. She adds butter into several tea bowls, pours tea water through a filter, and makes several bowls of butter tea, or *mal cha*. She sprinkles some dry sour cheese and sugar on top and serves everyone tea. I offer to help, but sister says that you should be fine. I have had numerous tea and rice bread as meals since then.

I began to understand what *huo tang* means to a family after being a member of my host family over the years. First, *huo tang* is literally the fire pit where people make rice bread and butter tea. The location doesn't have to be on the second floor living area of a house. When my host parents live up in the mountains, they make food the same way. When brother and I go on a multiple-day trip into the mountain, we prepare food also with fire. Second, *huo tang* is a social space for family members to communicate with each other about mundane activities from calves to

²¹ In Shangri-La, families with children are often considered “complete,” because they can have their own *huo tang* and thus own house. Comparatively, the pressure on local Tibetan families having children is relatively less great than that on average Chinese families. Gender of the children is not heavily preferred to be male. In fact, I saw more families with women as the heirs than male ones, in my close networks, despite that the general statistics may suggest a male dominant lineage. Families with two daughters have equal footing as those with son or sons, because both sons and daughters could establish their new house. Childless individuals are considered as “incomplete” only because they have no *huo tang* and must share with their siblings who have children. They tag along with childrearing responsibilities as aunts or uncles. Nevertheless, they will be complete had they have their own children.

children, city shopping to temple going, and farm works to new house construction. Third, *huo tang* is also gendered. Women cook all the time and in most occasions, even though men cook sometimes. Fire in *huo tang* is considered sacred and masculine. No hair or shoes should ever be put above the fire on the stove, or worse, thrown into the fire. I once mistakenly throw waste papers that had hairs in them into the fire. My host family said never again. It is because this action of throwing dirty things into the fire will intimidate the deities represented in the fire, the deities that would provide the foundation for a good family.

The idea of gendered cooking in relation to food waste manifests itself not only in above ideologies but also in daily practices at farm homes. Below I trace cooking in various daily occasions to illustrate the gendered aspects.

Cooking. Usually men are absent from kitchen except rare cases. One such case is a widowed fifty-some years old man who cooked for himself and his eighty years old mother. In most cases, men often work on chopping firewood, sit and chat, and wait, while women are busy in the kitchen. To prepare food in the farm house kitchen, women usually have water kettle on the stove to fill up several thermos bottles—they become handy for brewing butter tea and will last for the day. In the wood cabin on the mountain top ranches, women often make butter from milk early in the morning and preserve bowl-shaped butter in cold fresh water for it to harden into shape. In both locations, when women cook a meal, boil water, or just have the fire, they always put pyramid-shaped, 5-inch tall, fresh cheese on a shelf four to five feet directly above the stove in the kitchen or the fire pit in the cabin. The idea is to use the smoke to preserve the cheese blocks. Butter is used in fried vegetables and meat throughout the day. Butter is also used in brewing butter tea. Women often save white sugar (bought from shops and expected to last a long time) to mix with cheese crumbles for small children or guests who do not yet know how to

appreciate butter tea. In short, there is rarely leftover food to be thrown away. The key to cooking throughout the day is to maintain the fire. My host family sister and mother do such an elegant job in using the minimal number of branches and minimal labor to ignite and then preserve the flame before turning it into sustainable fire for cooking.

Pipa Pork. Winter is often challenging for food preparation, especially when there is a family to feed. Usually, a family would butcher two pigs, eat one, preserve the other with salt, and use the salted pork for festivals throughout winter. The salted park is called *pipa pork* due to the stripes of fat and lean meat. Although women do not engage with butchering themselves, and most families hire someone to do it anyway, women usually work with the preservation. The procedure includes cutting the meat off the bones, mixing it well with lots of salt, saving the innards for many meals, and finally putting back the salted meat and sewing back the pigs. Even the tips of legs are sewed back with precision. People will hang the pigs up under the roof with good air circulation. From time to time, when the weather is warmer than desired, they will climb a ladder to add more salt on the skin to avoid potential maggots or decay. Salty and tough, *pipa pork* is not everyone's first pick on the dinner table, but has become the local special that many tourists come to try. Often with disappointment, tourists complain about the texture and the taste. Yet, *pipa pork* has provided nutrients and substantive portion of winter food for the local villagers. What's remarkable about it is that almost no food waste is left with this thorough preservation. In a November day, my host family asked everyone, family relatives and neighbors, to help with coating salt and sewing back on the skin. It was a full-day intense labor to get the meat ready for air dry.

Gathering. Women learn to gather mushrooms, wild berries, and edible greens in the vast regions of Shangri-La. In the flat area near the city, women usually gather food on their weekly

or biweekly trips to the mountain top ranches to send salt, meat, rice and spices. In the mountainous villages far from the city, women often take a half-day trip up to the mountains for food. The past decade saw a rise in the market for wild matsutake mushrooms, or *song rong* (Ch. 松茸). It is common that Shangri-La Tibetans participated in gathering and selling matsutake mushrooms to middlemen. Middlemen usually grade them by size. The baseline for the quality, however, is the freshness. Price drops every few hours for the mushrooms. The harvest season is only a month or so. The case of matsutake mushroom is an example of global capitalist market's deep reach in the corners and pockets of the world, linking ethnic, female, nonindustrial bodies with exploitative global trade.²² Outside this special month, however, women provide a great deal of food sources by gathering mushrooms, which, I argue, has a long-lasting impact on the local food ways. The warm and cold climates spread in this region according to altitudes, which causes a great degree of diversity in wild foods. Again, women are usually more knowledgeable than men because they prepare food for the family in most occasions.

In short, Shangri-La rural Tibetan families depend upon the waste-free behaviors, which are gender specific in most cases, because women are mothers and learn from mothers and have the skills to deal with food effectively. Yet the change in food ways and in economy brought by tourism should not be undermined. More often, a group of village women began to set up makeshift food vendors selling baked yam, corn, and sausage, usually when tourists make a brief stop of 20 minutes to take photos of wild flowers and eat some snacks. They learned to use clear plastic wraps to pack individual portion and to offer napkins. After the sunset, they burned the trash left behind by tourists in the fire pit before they put it out. Such vendors only began a few

²² See Anna Tsing 2015.

years ago and became popular among villagers. My interviewees shared that it would have been a waste of wildflower land had it not been offered to tourist photographers. Supplementing household income with the food vendors is also desired. “We live a bit far from Shangri-La City and do not share the goods tourism brought to the city folks,” one woman said. She was among the first to request the village to grant permissions for all the village houses to do food vendors by turns.

“Be a good chef in the house hotel”

The impact of tourist economy on the average household is profound, especially when the household determined to turn their house into a house hotel, approximately the similar kind to Bed and Breakfast in North America where the hosts offer guests food and accommodation in the same establishment. In the transition from own residential homes to house hotels, women take the central role in the domestic space, producing it as the focal point of economic growth, whereas men usually fade into the background by assisting with chores or leaving for menial works in the city. In this sense, women boost their status in the family by commercializing domestic labor and selling them to tourists, thereby changing the household into the frontier for neoliberal accumulation and production. Moreover, it is the femininity that translates the domestic labor into marketable values. Cooking fried barley dough and roasting yak meat, for example, attract tourists and yield income. Being able to cook in a cost-efficient way accordant to market value thus becomes essential skills for women, which means that they inevitably produce food waste in the kitchen. Wasting food, however, means a *good* chef in the house hotel, which is the opposite to the expectation of women’s role in conventional semi-nomadic and semi-agricultural economy.

In the surrounding villages of the city, “home visit” programs supported quite a few families in the house hotel business. For example, in the village immediate to the south entrance to the city, among 30-some households, a dozen families are house hotels and more under construction and transformation. Sichuan cuisine cooking lessons become popular in this region. As I shared in the opening vignette, women pay to hire professionals to learn the new cooking style, going through buckets of vegetable oils and expensive numbing peppercorns. To them, it is a worthy investment. “Once you can cook the aroma of spicy and numbing, you have the skills to apply the method to all sorts of meat, especially yak,” shared a woman student. Without the cooking skills that are crucial to this popular flavor, women find it difficult to attract tourists for an overnight stay. The cost of wasteful use of oil and condiments is easily canceled out by the earnings from overnight stays. Moreover, the price for yak meat is fluctuant according to the seasons, expensive in winters, cheap in summers, and somewhere in between in springs and falls. “We always market the dish as spicy yak meat from our own home even if we buy the meat from the meat market in the city,” another woman student shared bluntly.²³ Others added that the meat market bought yak meat from local areas anyway, which meant it was not a false advertisement. It is remarkable for me to listen to women students in cooking lessons about their sophisticated entrepreneurial skills.

The second scenario for house hotels happens in villages by the Khawa Kharpo sacred peak. With difficult transportation and second to none location for tourism and pilgrimage, these

²³ It is uncommon for farmers in the village to butcher their own yaks, considering it might be a huge investment and commitment, unless the yak meat can be sold quickly or distributed among families and relatives. During my fieldwork between 2011 and 2015, butchering a yak had been a rare event due to the sizeable amount of meat that must be consumed or sold to neighbors. The yak meat on sale in the city meat market is often from elsewhere with a cheaper cost or a larger grazing land than the mountainous Shangri-La region.

villages turn themselves into house hotels entirely. Families must adapt to a fast-pace working environment where they receive guests daily. It could be a hefty task to cook meals throughout the day for 20 to 30 people per day. Due to the location deep in the mountain, they must transport all the ingredients manually, on the backs of mules, or by risky motorbikes in the tiny roads by steep cliffs.

To manage the level of intense hotel service, local women usually hire someone in the kitchen and for the guest rooms. Often, they find employees through personal connections. They also ask for help to post temporary positions online to attract college students for unpaid internship in the house. In other words, local women have learned to be entrepreneurial about their house hotels. They must. Otherwise, they may lose the business and are forced to rent it out. Among the 35 households in Yubeng, for example, half a dozen of them cooperate with people coming from elsewhere. They either work together with a nonlocal manager, or contract the business entirely for usually a 20-year tenure.

More crucially, among the 35 Yubeng households, 5 have or had fraternal polyandry marriages. Two or three brothers marry or married the same woman as their wife. Conventional anthropology viewed Tibetan polyandry as an economic strategy for adaptation to the harsh highland environment (see Adams 1995). Although it seems true for several cases in the village I did my fieldwork, it is equally true that other cases represent a different kind of logic. First, three polyandry families are among the well-to-do group in the village. There has been little pressure for surviving harsh economies compared to monogamous neighbors. Second, the wife in the family is usually considered mature, financially sophisticated, social, and fair to all her family members. Often, I saw the wife, now grandmother, taking care of grandchildren in the yard of the house co-owned by two brothers. The third and youngest brother broke away from the

marriage and established his own family on the other end of the village. In short, women's cultural role as financially sophisticated and mature facilitates their activities in the new tourist economy.

Besides, several families are matrilocal. I had lived with my Yubeng host family for three months but had no idea about the fact that father married into the family from a village several mountains away. I did, however, interview a family of a local Tibetan woman and a Han Chinese man who ran a Sichuan cuisine restaurant but kept their house for their own use. The husband, Mr. Lin, or Lao Lin, grew up in a small village in Sichuan and came to Yubeng for a contract job with construction companies. He married the local villager Pema and had a son together. He maintained little contact with his natal family because he was never close to them. He adopted a Tibetan name and learned to speak fluent Tibetan local dialect. He shared that life there was unexpected until he wanted to build a life together with his wife. His wife Pema took some time learning Sichuan cooking and accepted his proposal to set up a tiny convenience store at the far window of the restaurant. It was the first restaurant and shop combination and quickly followed by many. Lao Lin had been living with Pema for 15 years. Their son is 12 now. Sadly, Lao Lin died of alcohol poisoning in 2015. Never close to his own natal family, Lao Lin tried hard to be recognized by the new home in the village. To the villagers, he was the *laoban* (boss) who could drink a few bottles of *qingke jiu* (barley liquor) and who knew to bring money home. He might have overcompensated in acting as the masculine outsider by overconsumption of alcohol. He was the fun guy to have drink with at any time. Local friends loved hanging out in the restaurant. Just a few months after his death, Pema renovated the restaurant on the roof to allow some space for seating. She expanded her business by jointly contracting with her brother in a house hotel. She credited her late husband for the start and seized new chances to investment. Pema adapted

to this tourist economy comfortably with the decade long legacy of her late husband, which provided a good example of women's role in welcoming new economic opportunities with the advantage of being native and able to claim ownership of their business.

In fact, the social role of women is significant and more valued than their husbands if the husbands were born elsewhere. Usually, the bundle between women and their brothers hold the major economic power in the household, leaving the husbands' role as secondary and supplementary. In my host family in Yubeng, the maternal uncle made important economic decisions, including the most recent one, that is, leasing the family-owned 40-bed house hotel to Han Chinese investors for 20 years, without the need to consult with his sister's husband who worked for the family for past thirty years. The husband didn't complain. But his silence was louder than any complaints.

Compared to the singular moral expectation for women to be a good cook in the house, women's role is more dynamic and multifaceted. They are not the moral unclean that need to be kept in the lower positions in the moral hierarchy in nomadic economy. Rather, once women embark on cooking for tourist economy, they learn to manage the kitchen food waste in the same fashion as the city street restaurants. Women are fast adaptive to new cuisines, taking lessons or hiring chefs. Women are still expected to be "the good chef in the house hotels." However, they are no longer the source for symbolic pollution in the nomadic morality. In conventional nomadic morality, women were thought of as symbolic pollution, forbidden to enter designated areas of the house rendered as sacred space such as the attic or the bed designated for monks only in various rituals. Now women become the main power to bring modern cooking and tourist economy home, making the goods of modernization available to their families. To a great degree, in this new tourist economy, men stay at the outlier and the marginal space. Women's

newly earned economic status has made modern economic morality more about femininity than masculinity, which produce a kind of feminine globalization in the local process where feminine aspects of everyday life is productive whereas masculine aspects appear irrelevant. This is not to simply say that women are the major beneficiaries of this type of tourism, but that the representation of globalization in this locale emphasizes and prioritizes femininity over masculinity, which can be owned by either gender²⁴. For example, a man, such as Lao Lin, championed in femininity—he was an outsider, non-Tibetan, good at cooking. Thus, his success was not a success of men, but of femininity in terms of being competent, efficient, and independent relying on skills conventionally ascribed to women as natural. In this sense, femininity is not a source of symbolic pollution or waste, but something productive and positive in the neoliberal world.

Kitchen waste, tactics of exposure, and gender aesthetics

Cultures of waste shape the way in which kitchen food waste takes forms in the everyday life (Hawkins 2009). The meaning of kitchen food waste varies in different context. The amount of kitchen food waste in China is astonishing and constitutes 80% of solid waste into the landfill. Worldwide, kitchen food waste is a large portion of landfill waste as well. For example, due to the difficulty in separating plastic wraps from kitchen food waste, most kitchen food waste goes directly to landfill and turns into methane gas that might be transformed into gasoline or electricity with available resources. For a small village sitting deep in the mountains of the

²⁴ It is worth noting that Han Chinese women enjoy a higher status than Tibetan men in the tourist encounter. It is common that some Han Chinese women sought masculine Tibetan men for sexual and/or romantic relationships that only last for the short period of time of their travel. Not necessarily a monetary exchange, this kind of relationship suggests that Han Chinese women objectified the supposed masculinity of Tibetan men via courtship and/or companionship and consumed it as a commodity.

Himalayas, the kitchen food waste has nowhere to go other than the animal feed, which could not possibly digest even a small portion of the waste. My host family had 8 to 12 pigs but always had extra kitchen waste left for compost or washed away by ground water. In short, kitchen waste became a problem only when guests come in large numbers, especially when the village lacks a sewage system.

In the Chinese National Day Holiday (国庆节) of 2014, Oct.1 to 7, around 700 tourists entered the village on the first day, followed by 600, and 550 on the next two days. Most people stayed for three days. At the peak time, around Oct. 4, there were almost 2000 tourists in the village. Power supply was in shortage due to the heavy use of personal electronics including phone chargers, camera chargers, and others. In the hours between 6pm and midnight, local villagers had to climb up to flip the fuse back on every thirty minutes. Rooms were full. Even rooftops were rented out for tents, hallways for makeshift beds. I had to squeeze in with host family members to stay in their residential house, giving my rented room up for tourists. All the Tibetan hosts were exhausted cooking for Han Chinese guests nonstop. Large amount of kitchen waste went to pigs, but the majority was dumped and washed away by creeks down to the river in the valley.

Tactics of exposure. At the village entrance, a clerk collected five *yuan* from each tourist as a cleaning fee, and this fee would be reimbursed by the house hotel of the tourist's choice. This is a way for the village administrators to tax on the house hotels based on the number of guests they received. Altogether, the tax went to the administrators, who would hire horsemen to transport the solid waste (mostly plastic bottles) out to the nearest city. In an interview, the village head shared that the village planned to increase the tax and to build sewage system, which may be costly considering the deep slopes the houses were built upon. In fact, the effort to

clean up never stopped. Up to 2009, the village had received five-year funding from The Nature Conservancy for ecotourism, and used part of it to cover the cost for plastic bottles transportation. After the concluding of the project, the village had tried contracting laborers for cleaning waste out but failed to have a sustainable candidate due to the relatively low salary. Now the village taxes on each house hotel on the one hand; it also negotiates with the tourist company about the responsibility of waste management. The rationale that the village adopted was that the tourist company must take the full responsibility of waste service because the company took away ticket revenues which should have belonged to the village. But the company said that the village did not pay for the road services crucial to the infrastructure without which tourism would be an impossibility. Thus, the negotiation came to a halt. For some years, there have been no functional waste management.

The tactics of dealing with kitchen food waste changed from a halted negotiation to a local and national contestation. A media event catalyzed this change around the National Day Holiday of 2014. At first, on Oct. 1, a work team from the renowned national television news channel CCTV-news came to do a story on the village and incidentally interviewed me to work on the solid waste trapped in the sacred Tibetan land. Next to the sacred waterfall on the mountain top, the woman reporter interviewed me for about an hour on disputes over the responsibility of covering costs of waste management between the village and MTC, the role of the local government, and the salient role of deities in the waste besieged sacred sites. The cameraman recorded us, while tourists and pilgrims walked nearby and devoted their flags, clothes, and other objects. Then the team left Yubeng and returned to Beijing for edits. Their final short story, albeit running only 3 minutes, stirred the local politics when it was aired on Oct. 13. A local county television cameraman shared that the officials were upset in the levels of

county, prefecture, and even province. He was working on a new story of villagers voluntarily pick up garbage along the mountain paths to maintain the clean environment for the sacred peaks and integrity of tourist economy. On Oct. 18, all the villagers gathered and each was called upon by a randomly assigned number. That number would give each villager a section to clean with a couple bags. People swapped numbers around to stay close to friends and families. A local house hotel owner handed out bottled waters to all the participants. All these activities were recorded on camera.

The tactics of the locals who passively responded to a crisis exposed on national media may first appear ineffective, but they worked to improve the waste management to another level, from absent to existent, which benefited the village environment in the end. The strategy of “exposure” is a preferred strategy for fast results in local environmental policy change. In other words, this kind of exposing garbage problems on a national media platform creates immediate pressure and criticism towards the local government officials, who may take fast steps to solve the problem while fearing that they may lose their jobs. Usually, they do not. The usual scenario for them, is however, a replacement by their colleagues of the same rank and their own transferring to a new sector. Yet the turmoil and drama associated with the change usually create a great degree of uncertainty, which may cost the opportunity of promotion in government ranks. The good results, in this case the day-long garbage picking event, come from compromise from both parties, that is, the villagers without compensation and the government officials without commitment, both of which only reached their goals by the state media exposure.

While it is uncertain how long the catalyst event would sustain its impact, it is certain that the tactics of exposure emphasizes the male participation in the local politics. Pema, like many women who managed their own family house hotels, complained that, “both the state media team

and the local officials stayed in the [male] village head's house hotel for their work." Even if Pema became the head of her household including both her and her young child, she missed the old days when her late husband functioned as point of contact with many business partners, village head, and others. When the house hotels village economy expands, the outsiders came to seek opportunities. Most are veterans in hospitality from nearby busier tourist towns Lijiang or Dali and come with deep pocket. They usually only seek local men as business partners on rent and establishment.

Gendered aesthetics. While the work of dealing with food waste seem common among middle-aged villagers, for the younger generation in their 20s and 30s, women do the "dirty" works with dishes and animal feed whereas men remain away from the kitchen. The average education level for those in 20s and 30s is between middle school and high school. Boys go to hang out in cities whereas girls tend to stay near home. Quite a few boys have gone to live in Guangzhou and even have children. This is considered adventurous and the desire to have a feeling of what it feels like to live in a modern city. Usually disappointed and upset, they returned home. Anthropologist Liu Shaohua (2010) described how village men in Yi areas of Liangshan, Sichuan, strived to make a living in the cities such as Chengdu and Xi'an, but many failed. One of the reasons was the cultural bias many urban residents held against them, reckless, illiterate, dangerous, and untrustworthy. However, the truth lies in the language barrier and unfamiliarity in cultural practices. In one striking example, the village men had to bury a friend who died of HIV at the outskirts of Xi'an, which was a proper Yi funerary practice but considered bizarre and banned by the municipal government. The men hired a truck to carry the body from the city to the outskirts, then tried to burn the body as they would in their natal village. They were

caught by onlookers and eventually stopped by police. Despite only 12 hours by train, the Yi villages and Xi'an City appeared to be two different worlds of languages, rules, ideas, and life.

Similarly, in Yubeng, to the young men, gaining the experience of modern living usually involves meager labor in the city, which already requires their ability to speak Putonghua fluently. To a young woman, however, living together with family is much more common. Learning to cook modern cuisines opens an opportunity to be independent from her family, and to achieve her dream. Through my interview with Yangtso (YT below), I share the way in which she understood beauty and worth in cooking.

BW: How did you start cooking?

YT: I did a six-month Sichuan culinary arts school in Kunming a few years ago. I got a scholarship through an NGO. I never liked it. I knew all the cooking. I helped my mother cooking when I was early teen. Why did I have to listen to the teacher about something I knew? I tried every chance to skip class and have fun in Kunming. Plus, the teacher used me as free labor doing all the dishes. I had enough of it. After I graduated, I couldn't think of anything worse to do with my life than working in the kitchen. It does bad things to my skin.

BW: What about cooking did you particularly not like?

YT: Dishes! To me cooking was all about washing dishes. I hate greasy woks, greasy plates, and greasy chopsticks. Do you want to wash all these for me? (She chuckles.)

BW: Sure. But how come you are taking this different class again?

YT: Sichuan cuisine. That's what people like to order. Spicy and greasy. I had to learn this new cooking. My previous training was on Chinese and Western cooking, generic, and I even learned to bake a cake. Now that is not popular any more. People want to eat our real food. But they do not like butter or cheese. They like the spicy flavor. I had little choice. My friends here all wanted to learn to cook this spicy flavor. And we don't have to worry about shortage in oil and spices. We can buy them in the market all year around. But what a wasteful cooking. All the oil. Before, we used kitchen leftover to feed pigs. We had a dozen pigs. Now we have more and more leftovers and have no time for pigs. Parents are in the mountains with yaks, pigs, and chickens. But it is too far for us to send the animal feed up to them.

BW: Do you like cooking Sichuan cuisine?

YT: I got fat quickly. I don't dare to eat that. But it is fun to cook Sichuan cuisine. I got to know some good Han Chinese friends and even traveled with them quite a bit myself. People eat a lot but waste way more. That seems to be how it is now. In the old days, my mother would scold me if I waste ingredients while cooking. She would go, "your brother and me and your dad work so hard to get us all fed. How dare you throw away this and that?"

Like Yangtso, local women no longer found beauty in hard work only, but also in appearance.

The small chats between young women in the village largely focused on topics of skincare, new clothes, and new hats (mainly for fashion and for blocking the sun). Unlike the women in Shangri-La who bought products easily online or in the supermarkets, Yubeng women relied on their own trips to the city, because none of the online business offered shipments to the remote village. Romance between local women and Han, Hui, foreigners became nothing spectacular, despite the disapproval from local men sometimes. The aesthetics of what is beauty, what is a good woman has profoundly shifted, from singular to plural, closed to open.

Conclusion

As Povinelli (2001: 327-8) rightly points out, "We do not ask how a multicultural or plural nation (or world) is sutured at the end of some horizon of liberal, institutionally embedded, communication. We ask instead how the incommensurateness of liberal ideology and practice is made to appear commensurate." Hence, it is not simply a matter of difference in cultural notions but how the seemingly incompatibles made to appear compatible. In this thread of inquiries, the chapter looked at how womanhood is performed in the acts of wasting as well as in the values attached to kitchen waste. Simply put, the notion that women saved food and prevented food waste from existing was compatible to the nomadic economy and semi-nomadic and semi-agricultural economy. But it is not so in the tourist economy. There, women brought modern Sichuan cuisine into the kitchen and thereby produced a large amount of waste in oil and

peppercorns. They thought it was wasteful and necessary. They thought the style of cooking and wasting was to create a moment of fragrance and flavor, something that could sell in modern tourist economy. The food preparation they had been doing for generations and taken pride in, albeit no waste, was not compatible with the tourist economy.

Kitchen waste is a problem that needs to be addressed in the villages and cities where sewage system does not exist. Kitchen waste is also a syndrome in the modern tourist economy. When the tourist economy develops, the desire for exotic, ethnic, and original taste in Tibetan areas is mingled with the Han Chinese way of food preparation. The popularity of Sichuan cuisine with a heavy flavor and a generous use of oil and peppers has made it a must for restaurants serving yak meat to adapt to this specific kind of cooking. Moreover, for Tibetan villagers, such food preparation with a wasteful amount of vegetable oil (rather expensive in Tibetan areas) made them associate excessive oil with being Han Chinese. Thus, more than providing the eminent flavor that brought Han Chinese the sense of home, oil has become a gift in Tibetan areas. When it is common that gut oils are recycled in many restaurants in Chinese cities and have produced health concerns on waste oils reheated becoming toxic, oils in Tibetan areas remain something modern and desired. Ironically, women adapted to the wasteful cooking as well as modern tourist economy, pushing men to the marginal space in the kitchen, which created new gender dynamics. Although it is fair to point out that women took the burden of labor in the kitchen and the moral criticism from men about their choices in work and marriage, it seems clear that the food waste in the kitchen served as a productive space where women can earn income and often more than men. This has established a case in which femininity is promoting modernity along with its demise—the food waste problem.

Chapter 5 House, Waste Infrastructure, and Heart-environment

Xinjing and the Environmental Futures

I will start with a work of fine art in traditional Chinese scroll painting. Below is a section from a 11-meters long handscroll ink painting on silk called *A Thousand Li Rivers and Mountains* by Wang Ximeng, dated at the turn of 12th century, Song Dynasty (Fig. 7). Notice that the meticulous arrangements of the set of mountains shows distances in space, near and far, crowded and sparse, tall and short. Notice also that the patterns of mountains constitute a solid framework, whereas the rivers, despite invisible, are rendered by contrast, and by signifiers such as the bridge, the trees, the grass, the houses, and the piers. The line where the rivers meet the sky, however, is left at the imagination of the viewers, with some clues given by the light ink in the far away. In fact, the typical scroll paintings with mountains and rivers of this period mastered the techniques of the real and the virtue, the full and the empty, the presence and the absence. Thus, the paintings rendered through art an inner spiritual world of the Chinese intellectuals. The style is called *shanshui* painting. In Song Dynasty, Chinese intellectuals expressed what they understood to be human yet through an entirely manipulation of nonhuman objects. Also, in this period, the influence of Buddhism and philosophy of renunciation reached the core of the hearts of Chinese intellectuals. So much so that they created this genre of *shanshui* painting to manifest their *xinjing*, that is, “heart-environment.” Such Buddhism-inspired aesthetic is situated in the delicate space between the socio-politically engaged Confucianism and detached Daoism. It is also correspondent with practical strategies of Chinese intellectuals to develop certain body gestures, emotions, poetic imaginations, and everyday manners as they were expected to govern and to serve the emperors.



Fig. 7, Wang Ximeng, *A Thousand Li of Rivers and Mountains*. Section.²⁵

Fast forward about nine hundred years. In 2013, artist Yao Lu (Fig. 8) made images based on manipulated photos of a collection of objects, meticulously arranged, near and far, bright and dark, solid and liquid, full and empty. Again, the mountains take solid spots whereas rivers are rendered in the empty space that relies on the viewers' imagination. The striking resemblance with *shanshui* painting would have fooled anyone, but not the careful viewers. The more time the viewers gaze into this photo, the more objects they can identify. They are not mountains, but broken fishnets, construction blinds, and plastics on the surface; piles of dirt, construction solid waste, and random garbage underneath. Repulsive. Exactly. Now with the garbage mountain in the front, the viewer would only imagine the seemingly water and sky in the empty space to be air particles, smog, dust, clouds of contamination and toxic matters. Yet the

²⁵ This is a cropped section of the complete long scroll. See, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wang_Ximeng_-_A_Thousand_Li_of_River1.jpg last access, 5/16/2017.

layer of aesthetic that existed in the *shanshui* painting remains, perhaps because the method of expressing one's inner spiritual world through nonhuman objects persists. This artistic rendering of waste objects, I argue, provides both the affective and practical strategies for Chinese to show



Ancient Springtime Fey, 2006.

Yao Lu, courtesy of Bruce Silverstein, New York

Fig. 8, Yao Lu, 2006, Ancient Springtime. Source: *Slate*.²⁶

²⁶http://www.slate.com/blogs/ behold/2013/03/15/yao_lu_new_landscapes_uses_manipulation_to_make_mounds_of_garbage_look_like.html last access, 2/3/2017.

their “heart environment,” perhaps not so much in finding the Buddhist middle-way between political Confucianism and apolitical Daoism, but a great deal in thinking of living and dying in contemporary China.

The nine hundred years of difference between the two works, however, marks the similarity of the strong influence of Buddhism on Chinese societies. Art history can provide more. But thinking from what we have as anthropologists, I look for answers in daily interactions with people. My ethnography on waste and affects suggests a strong relevancy between waste and sacred objects, between imagination of what an inner spiritual world could be and affective strategies of how to develop appropriate body gestures and emotions. I build my analysis upon interactions with Tibetan villagers and Han Chinese tourists. I focus on the way the two groups understand solid waste and objects. Everyday interaction between them can reveal how the rise of Buddhism interacts with the simultaneously strong environmental desire associated with middle-class Chinese living. In specific, I argue, it is the way of dying in the Tibetan lifeworld that transforms the way of living in the emergent Chinese middle class with environmental desire. I illustrate this process by a close discussion on the materiality of waste or sacred objects crisscrossing the sacred and the profane and operating between imitation and desires through producing concrete affective strategies, which will speak to the recent anthropology of nonhumans, that is, thinking beyond human.

Looking back, in chapter 3, I shared a photo of two workers picking piles of plastic waste overflowing the waste bins (Fig. 6). Multiple processes are happening. The woman squatting took a great effort in separating out the fallen prayer flags from plastic raincoats, perished foods, and shoes, avoiding contaminating the flags for a second time. Each line of the prayer flags belongs to each distinct person who devoted time, money, and energy to travel to this sacred

mountain with distinct purposes and requests from the deities. Moderate amount would have been no problem. Yet with the tourist boom for two decades, the amount of prayer flags simply outnumbers the affordability of the land. Seeing the land as constituted by sacred objects, eyes and ears of deities, visible and invisible routes between life and afterlife, she, like many Tibetans, would follow the affective guidelines, which include never stepping one's feet onto the flags, never pointing fingers to (generally a rude gesture in the local culture) the deities printed on the flags but always raising palms to them, never stepping over but always crawling underneath the lines of flags. Yet the job of picking waste must be done. Her colleague took a picture of the slow progress and wanted to use it to bargain for a better pay. Compared to the overtime, they both said that the work of separating sacred objects from the mundane waste was more of a burden in the heart, because they did not wish to offend anyone or any linkages that meticulously established by sincere Tibetan pilgrims from probably thousands of miles away. They did not wish to be responsible for broken linkages between people and sacred objects. Yet the environmental regulation office where they work requires them to clean up the solid waste regularly.

If it is simply an issue of affective labor in treating and sorting solid waste and sacred objects, the story would be that the Tibetan pilgrims' cosmic desires (for karmic blessings) exploded exponentially, which was facilitated by modern transportation and cheap commodities, very much exceeding the affordability of the vulnerable mountain environment. But it is not that simple. Before we can locate the blame, we must consider the larger context of the Tibetan hosts and Han Chinese tourists. It is the imitation from the Han that contribute to the problem of blurred lines between waste and sacred objects.

In the photo below (Fig. 9), a sacred tree is in the foreground. Many objects are hanging on it, including white silk scarves, used airplane tickets, necklaces, and bracelets. Besides, rocks are piled up to create a structure that marks a sacred space. A giant, iconic, frog-shaped rock



Fig. 9, A sacred tree has many sacred objects, but it has a story of a dying mother and a filial son attached. Many tourists do not know about the story and consider this site as a generic one for fortunes and blessings received from deities. Photo by author.

behind the tree, not photographed here, is called motherly stone. It is because long ago, a man carried his very sick mother to do the devotional walk around the mountain and rested his feet in this very location. He received great blessings from mountain deities so much so that his mother's sickness is gone. The story of this son with filial piety circulated wide. Recently, a stone plate with this story carved on was established by the local tourist bureau. And numerous

Han Chinese tourists imitated the usual behaviors of putting up necklaces and bracelets of their own. But this isn't the story either.

The story is much darker. Instead of a good son and a healed mother, the one I collected from oral history with village elders goes like this. A young mother lost her child to severe sickness. The conventional Tibetan treatment of dying and death considered bodies of the dead as irrelevant and thus empty shells because spirits have already entered the reincarnation after death. But she could not have the body gesture of being relaxed. She could not have the calm emotions. She lost the trajectories of appropriate, or, *correct* affects following death. But by putting up old clothes of her deceased son, by talking to deities for numerous times, and by walking around the sacred mountains as devotional obligation, she finally received blessings and her child's spirits were guided by the deities into the next reincarnation safe.

Anthropologists reported widely on difficult childbirths in Tibet due to socioeconomic stress. The story of dying being overcome by using old clothes reflects this reality. Although the death rate of childbirths is becoming low due to the access to modern medical facilities, the need to cope with death, especially children's death, is satisfied by the device of old clothes. The scent, the mothers believe, would help deities to smell the children's unsettled spirits. Deities will help if mothers made many walks of devotion. Such a powerful affective strategy to cope with dying, however, is once again, victim of mass tourism. As the Han Chinese tourists imitate the ways Tibetans do with the sacred site, they either add personal, emotional, and spiritual amulets such as necklaces or bracelets that meant special to them, or they throw in worn shoes, oxygen bottles, raincoats, and all sorts of unwanted clothes to the pile. If they spend the time reading the story of motherly stone on the site, they would imitate by giving the sacred objects in a respectful manner, body half bowed, eyes closed, and lips murmuring prayers. But if they do

not, they imitate others who waste just as they do and silently throw their personal garbage into the pile without guilt or shame. The imitation based on educated or uneducated manners produced distinct sacred or waste objects on the land, creating a typical case of mimetic faculty that Michael Taussig (1993) first elaborated on the colonial appropriation of indigenous objects and the indigenous incorporation of the colonizers into their sacred objects. In a way, the tourist encounters here resemble what happened in indigenous arts and museums, and the difference is that the art here is the assemblage of sacred objects and waste and accordant affects.

If the death and dying of children in the story associated with old clothes are appropriated by a tourist and consumerist logic of more objects and more blessings, the social death of villagers in Tibet deserves anthropological attention. By *social death* I mean the dissolving of deep social relationships between villagers and their houses, mountains, and beyond. In other words, villagers are being displaced in the tourist economy and becoming invisible. In the 35 households of the village, 34 abandoned the conventional houses and erected new ones with modern appliances. The local population of 140 is reduced almost by half in recent three years. Some literally died of overconsumption of alcohol, while others had moved the whole family out and away. The rise of alcohol use is produced by the Chinese tourist and consumerist desires and their imaginations of exotic and original Tibetan living, that is, drinking, dancing, and singing without any practical burdens whatsoever. The rise in number of displaced villagers²⁷ is produced by the fierce market competition and the lucrative business that Han Chinese had established advantage in the local, regional, and even national systems. One boss from Northeast

²⁷ The villagers displaced often strived for temporary employments in nearby county towns and capital city of Yunnan Province Kunming. Due to the lack of formal education beyond elementary school, they often found it difficult to obtain satisfying jobs that paid enough to live in Kunming.

China paid 500,000 RMB per year to host family to take over the whole house and turn it into a 20-unit hotel. The contract was set 20 years. When the contract was revealed to other villagers, their jaws dropped. However, many deals with even larger amount of money were carried out quickly. To the villagers, their own village had become the playground for new investors or the second site of backup investment for the venture capital. Nevertheless, such investment is entangled with affects—the complex towards romanticized Tibetan lifeways. A Singaporean business renter shared that she treated her business here as something original and special, an invaluable escape from her mechanic and capitalistic life in Singapore. However, again, to the villagers, it is the consensus that just in a couple years the village would be an original, authentic, and ecological one but without any indigenous Tibetan villagers living in it.

I described in chapter 4 how food waste became a key product of tourism and eventually a device for displacement of locals because they were disqualified for the assumed lack of cooking skills. Here I will stick to the social death of villagers and their views on waste and sacred objects. This will be a good place to draw conclusions. A prayer flag in the photo below (Fig. 10) shows the Khawa Kharpo, or “the white compassionate deity,” at the center riding on a horse and fully armored. He was converted to Buddhism, it is said, in the 8th century after battling hard with the “lotus-born” Guru Rinpoche. Then he became a warrior god, fierce, and compassionate. But he maintained to be intimidating and more intimidating in recent years, and unleashed his anguish towards humans more often, especially when illicit mining, dam construction, illegal mountaineering, illicit timbering, and receding glaciers happened. He isn’t a god far and up high, but a god of living and dying, a god that people live in his body and die in it too. His head, the 6,740m peak, never bowed down for any human mountaineers. His heart, the

Lotus Temple received incense. His abdomen, limbs, lungs and livers are the villages. His breaths and blood vessels are the roads in the mountains. When his air and blood vessels



Fig.10, Khawa Kharpo the mountain deity on a prayer's flag. Photo by author.

deteriorates, his head, abdomen, limbs attack. In other words, the warrior god attacks when he fails at his job of protection. Dust, or *sa*, in Tibetan language, is closest to dirt in English and *la ji* in Chinese. However, *dreg pa*, or drip, an archaic Tibetan word, means both bodily disgusted, appalled, and socially polluted. Much like *xinjing*, or “heart-environment” for the Chinese intellectuals, *dreg pa* is where one’s inner spiritual world of purity/pollution dwells upon. If the garbage mountains in the contemporary Chinese art represented “heart-environment” of the

Chinese today, the living yet attacking body of Khawa Kharpo is then the Tibetan affective strategies and practices of how to live and to die with waste infrastructures.

Admittedly, heart-environment as a Buddhist term has been utilized by some Chinese Buddhist group in their campaigns on the environment and sometimes criticized for the danger of minimizing the serious hazardous impact of environmental disasters. Because the idea that working on the heart-environment would be efficient for an environmental change discourages collective actions towards the effort in seeking out those who are responsible and should be held accountable for pollution and environmental degradations. If the matter is redirected inwards, then the outward political conditions could be minimized. In my case, the importance of heart-environment, however, encourages local Tibetans to control what can be said about their unique culture towards the market dominated development schemes, a strategy of exoticization of themselves and distancing themselves from the representation in the official museums. In this sense, emphasizing heart-environment would frame the environmental issues as something about alternative ways of depicting Tibetan lifeways, different from both the managerial perspective (backward) and the tourist gaze (authentic and original). In a way, emphasizing heart in the environmental issues aims at bringing people's heart back in decision-making, which is at least a commentary on the current waste management, lacking a heart and a heartfelt respect towards Khawa Kharpo the mountain god.

Waste Infrastructures

The village nested in deep Eastern Himalayan Mountains faces the solid waste challenge, persistent over the centuries and increasingly global, most visible, because of its narrow and unpaved roads connecting to the modern paved roads, its unique Tibetan houses adapting to and accommodating the influx of solid waste, and its waste bins aiming to rearrange the waste into

organized space. Understanding this particularly visible waste infrastructure, thus, offers insights on the impact of waste in the everyday life, when, due to the inability of regular transportation, people are taken away from the most convenient ways of depositing, relocating, burying, out of sight and out of mind. Instead, waste in the village here remains. How does the waste that remains shape the hope and despair, the affective strategies of those who step in the uncertain futures brought by the waste and waste infrastructures? Hence, conceptualizing roads, houses, and bins as waste infrastructures to transport, accommodate, and organize waste, this chapter explores the impact of these infrastructures on waste management in rural Tibetan areas of southwest China.

Claude Levi-Strauss (1961) elaborated the house as “social systems” based on his observation of Amazonian Amerindians, which inspired more recent studies of houses as productive space for meaningful social relations including kinship, marriages, legal associations, spiritual orders and beyond (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995). As houses is the primary site for solid waste sorting and preliminary treatment, they hold the central place in modern waste management practices (Bowker and Star 1999). Houses also host ideas of what is pure and impure, sacred and secular, clean and unclean, etc. For example, Martin Mills (2003) reported that *drip* in Ladakh Tibetan culture means dirt in the symbolic fashion, which can occur when a higher ranked monk’s bowl is accidentally or intentionally touched by a lower ranked commoner in the house. In other words, *drip* happens when symbolic hierarchy is disrupted, and such hierarchy exists among monk-layman, gender, seniority, and others. Following Levi-Strauss, the materiality of the Tibetan house also represents a miniature of a hierarchical cosmology: the corner room to host the figurines of Buddha, gods and deities, the other corner kitchen and

bedroom, and the toilet outside the entity of house as a detached structure—which did not even exist for Tibetan farmhouses in the earlier times.

Despite that houses, roads, and bins could work together, ideally, to mitigate the solid waste challenge regardless of where, the geography of Himalayan villages renders it impossible to do so effectively. On the contrary, the processes of removing or moving waste into invisible places are slowed down due to the shape of waste infrastructures here—plastics and metals remaining through rainy and dry seasons. Compared to the fast growth in tourist economy or industry, the waste infrastructures remain largely the same. In such a slowed process, how do we understand bodies exposed to waste, ideas of sacredness challenged by waste, and meaningful life reshaped by waste? If global environmental degradation is apocalyptic and happening rapidly, how do we put the rapid change in the slow waste infrastructure? If we were to consider the long and gradual impact of environmental degradation on the vulnerable peoples as “slow violence” (Nixon 2011), how do we think of the slow and long impact of waste infrastructure on the formation of subjectivity exposed to slow and gradual violence? What boils down is the question of how to bring experiences of living with waste infrastructure close to ethnographic analysis. I will discuss below how affects such as hope and despair emerge when people build new waste infrastructures and build their life with them. I articulate the intimate and personal stories in and around these physical buildings, to use “anthropology of life” to “bringing experience nearer to reality by generating concepts from life” (Das et al 2014, 6). I aim to show that while houses, roads, and bins facilitate hope for a better life, they also produce new conditions for despair.

I conceptualize houses, roads, and bins as “waste infrastructures” and seek to investigate the embodiment of affects in these waste infrastructures. Specifically, I use affective strategies

hope and despair to detect the instances and nuances when infrastructures shape the affects and vice versa.²⁸ When my host family saved enough money to build a second house for their adult daughter and her family, they felt hopeful about their future in that their family still had a chance of making a living in the competitive tourist business. The elders in the house, however, felt out of place with the new house, because they did not enjoy the toilet with a flush system. In fact, they did not grow up in a house with any toilet built within, and had always considered going to the outside in the woods was the only appropriate way. Now, although the waste bins along the mountain paths remained with name tags of the villagers, the names did not represent something positive about the waste management dilemma between the villagers and MTC. Rather, it was unsettling for villagers seeing their own names attached to the waste bins, which were broken down by rain, wind, snow, and animals and was a reminder of the failure in waste management. To them, it was a representation of their dimming future, waiting for being replaced by more competitive actors in tourism, with despair.

I anchor my analysis of hope and despair deeply in ethnography. As state development projects of grand scales and pressing waste issues shape the everyday life of ordinary Tibetan villagers, their way of dealing with emergent pragmatic concerns—such as feeding the family, seeking money, and having children—evolve in each step of the life course. I rely on my

²⁸ To consider hope and despair both as affects, I mean to treat the emotions and practices that embody those emotions as social assemblage (Latour 2005), as what exists prior to emotive reactions (Stewart 2007) and as primarily a category growing out of pragmatics rather than ideas, concepts, and theories (Jackson 2013; Kleinman 1991; Csordas 1994). Seeing hope as emotionally and pragmatically optimistic, I refer it to the daily practices of a prediction of positive opportunities of productive relations as life expands its horizons. Conversely, despair means that in each step of life, things do not go as expected or hoped, and people fall out of the steps along the way. Often, despair happens when one goes through an array of failures while projecting a positive future.

intimate engagements with several such villagers, probing together with them what life affords them, hope or despair. I argue that their affective strategies are intimately intertwined with the materiality of waste infrastructures, that is, houses, roads, and bins, because their futures, of having a life for themselves and their children, rely upon the building of these infrastructures, and more importantly, are also predicated upon the daily activities that are shaped by and shaping the infrastructures²⁹. It is not that capitalism achieves its accumulation by working upon these infrastructures, but that the infrastructures are generating capitalism and constituting social relationships. In this light, I aim to reveal how Tibetan villagers' hope and despair interact with waste infrastructures in China.

Anthropological work on waste management, waste, and landfills shows the potential of relating these forms of waste infrastructure to affects and practices. Infrastructures not only build but also leak, break down, fall apart, and decay (Reno 2016; Chu 2014; Appel, Anand and Gupta 2015). This chapter attempts to conceptualize waste infrastructure as both physical and affective aspects of practices related to waste. In doing so, it broadens the concept to incorporate varying kinds of affects and practices. To make sense of the affects and practices in waste infrastructure is to take the task of “bringing experience nearer to reality by generating concepts from life” (Das et al 2014, 6). Attention to practice and affect, thus, may assist the understanding of the everyday life of those who live in, near and with waste infrastructures. Methodologically, this chapter examines ways of living or dying near waste infrastructure, elaborating the theoretical potentials of everyday practices. Through an ethnography of despair, anxiety, hope, and of

²⁹ As Bear et al (2015) proclaimed, anthropology of infrastructure pointed to the direction that infrastructure of houses, productions, consumptions, etc., Marxist reasons for producing inequalities, are not given, but mutually constituted by embedded relations in gender, family, friendship, etc.

senses of purity, safety, and security in daily practice, it focuses on how wastes' affects are predicated upon pragmatic needs in the daily routines of living with waste infrastructure.

Ultimately, the question that the chapter seeks to answer is: what practices and formations of affects shape ways of living with waste?

Infrastructures as material and social construction, including houses, dams, and railways among others inform discussion on the environment. But infrastructure has a life of its own, reconfiguring embodiment of social relationships. This chapter focuses on how infrastructures of solid wastes in sacred mountains of southwest China, transport, classify, and affect wastes. Tibetan villagers place clothes of their own or deceased relatives' next to sacred stones. An imitation from massive Han Chinese tourists, subsequently blurs the lines of sacred deposits and modern garbage. Purity, sacredness, mimicking, fortune-making, despair, among others, emerge in the waste infrastructures as they engage daily lives. Based on interviews with village elders whose experiences stretch to the 1950s, this chapter compares their practices of offering old clothes with tourists since 2006. Additionally, it shows the governmental strategies of retaining some while discarding other clothes, to illuminate the paradox of development and sacred places. Whether wastes or sacred objects, the fine line between also affects the disputes over paved and unpaved roads and waste bins through uncertain waste responsibilities allocated to households rather than the state. Posters of waste policies, eventually waste themselves, are made to be mistaken as Tibetan prayer flags. Intimately connecting affects and desires, this chapter aims to show affective aspects of the moving targets between development and sacredness in defining social, political, and spiritual orders. It argues that life (*lha* in Tibetan) as a concept produces pragmatic strategies of maneuvering the lifeworld for villagers, tourists, and government officials, though with distinct processes.

Houses, Roads, and Bins

The dissertation has offered first a case study of Yubeng in the heat of rapid tourism development and the emergent waste challenge roughly from 2004-5 to 2015. Yubeng is a village of 140 people, all Tibetan, speaking a variety of eastern Kham dialect and practicing Tibetan Buddhism and local animism featuring mountain gods and water deities. In the time around 2004-5, Yubeng appeared in international travel forums as the recommended hot place for hiking with flashy comments such as “my real Shangri-La,” “life changing,” and “pristine and untouched.” For the next five years, the village received a constant influx of mostly foreign backpackers from Europe, America, Australia, elsewhere, and especially Israeli post-military service backpackers. In the next five years 2010-15, the steady foreign backpackers were outnumbered by Chinese tourists, many of whom came in as groups. As for the Yubeng locals, while some youth went out and beyond to make a living, the majority remained, renovating houses, building hotel rooms, and anticipating a bright future in booming tourism.

In 2010 when my fieldwork began, I talked to 18-year-old Denzu (pseudonym) casually at the playground by the village school. Denzu was first surprised by a Tibetan speaking Chinese and then was keen to inviting me to lunch at his house. His parents and younger sister owned a two-floor farmhouse, lower level for pigs and chickens and upper level for people to eat, sleep, and socialize. After I sat down, I realized that the house had a third floor which was like an attic. Denzu’s uncle Lama Dorje, retired from many years at the temple, resided at the attic. Lama Dorje greeted me and showed interest in my identity as a Chinese PhD student of Anthropology in a US university. He shared that three of his relatives lived in India and their dream was to go to the US eventually. Yet he was a bit disappointed that I wanted to study waste problems rather than Buddhist texts as he would have preferred. Lama Dorje lived a rather strict life at the house,

as if he were still in the monastery. Due to some health issues, he had to move back home, but he never gave up on the recitation of Buddhist texts from dawn to dark in the attic and barely set foot outside the house. To him, the house was merely a shell for his religious practices. Houses are temporary, whereas prayers to Buddha while deepening one's understanding of the words and wisdoms is permanent.

Denzu, despite at young age, acted as the most knowledgeable in the family. Dropped from school at 15, he spent recent three years in the coastal city Shenzhen through some friends, working on and off as the street seller of Tibetan ornaments while being chased after by *chengguan* (municipal law enforcement on migrant street merchants and vendors). At 18, he decided to come home. He pulled me aside after lunch, saying that he had something that he needed my help with. He gave me a piece of handwritten paper, on which it said Contract of House Construction as the title and had finger prints and signature at the bottom. It was drafted in Chinese, but on rather loose terms. It basically laid out an investment contract between a business woman from Guangdong and Denzu, the former investing 1 million yuan (\$154,471 USD) on the rebuilding of the house owned by the latter while promising a 20% share to the latter in the first five years and an eventual 50% share in profits thereafter. No specific end date was suggested. I did my best to interpret what the contract could mean with the numbers to Denzu, with my very limited knowledge in legal and economic subjects. And it was the largest number of a potential transaction that I had ever seen in my own life. I felt that I had to disappoint Denzu again after doing so to his uncle. Eventually, in 2015, my most recent field trip, I learned that after many negotiations with parents and uncle, Denzu managed to work with a Tibetan investor who agreed to keep the house as was, with an offering of a much lower payment (around a third of the Guangdong woman's proposal).

To put Denzu's story in perspective, the 34 out of 35 households in Yubeng had been building houses throughout the years and received similar contracts. To put Yubeng to larger context, China was and is still big in investing infrastructure domestically and internationally as the main engine for economic development. Particularly in 2010, when the financial crisis swept US, Europe and Southeast Asia, China made the impression of hope of saving economies by building a future. For Tibet, China built the Beijing and Lhasa Railroad in 2007 and planned more inroads to Lhasa. In Yunnan's Tibetan part, China planned a railroad to connect Kunming and Shangri-La in 2009, failed to work through, but eventually picked up the project in 2015. Anticipation on the economic boom brought by the road construction at massive scales was the main reason for why Yubeng, a village of 140, could attract millions of yuan investment. Towards 2014 and 2015, when China's economic growth significantly lowered, the effort of building a future, or saving the downfall of economic growth by building, bigger and faster, only increased. And this effort is made anew in the state discourse of Chinese Dream (*zhong guo meng*). The so-called "yi dai yi lu" (One belt one road) state project aimed to build rails and roads between Xi'an and Rome, between Kunming and New Delhi, to revitalize the Old Silk Road connecting East Asia and Europe on land and renovate the Southern Silk Road connecting East Asia and South Asia respectively.

While the confidence in building goes together with the trust in the state in fostering the large-scale building projects, the anticipation of a booming tourist future in Yubeng goes together also with the trust in the private investors and the lack of trust in the public investment in roads and bins. In Yubeng, rebuilding the house is considered a private business without any registration or legal obligation of paying revenue tax or property tax until March 2015. I witnessed that a group of special teams of Bureau of Business and Industries from the County

came to Yubeng with the request of a record of month-to-month income from each house hotel. It was the third attempt to collect taxes in that year but the first somewhat successful one. By contrast, the roads to and from Yubeng and the bins to organize waste along the roads belong to the public domain by default. Compared to the influx of investment in houses, the money that goes into roads and bins is small and insufficient. Partly this insufficiency is due to the unclear obligation of the state-sponsored tourist company which I call MLT, which claimed to invest in roads and bins in 2009 but did little about it. Next I continue to interrogate what the frenzies in building mean and how they connect to hope.

Hope

Compared to Yubeng, most Himalayan villages do not share the prosperity in tourist development. The hope of a vibrant economic future could mean potential summer jobs in construction at Yubeng for villagers nearby, whereas the hope for Yubeng villagers could mean whether to take a million-yuan contract. If Yubeng villagers are building houses to build their hope in life, villagers elsewhere tend to work on the building sites in the hope of building their own houses for ordinary use. On the one hand, Yubeng features as the exemplary case for sustainable development and even Chinese Dreams; on the other, the villages elsewhere break the bubble of myth. Yubeng villagers saw their houses as potential means for childrearing, financial stability, outreach, and overall a better life. In contrast, others elsewhere struggled to make do with what they had and aimed to rebuild their houses in time for their children's adulthood and marriages. Such contrast shows the inequalities among Tibetan villagers today brought by the rise of cultural tourism in China.

Geographer Emily Yeh (2013) critically showed that the state sponsored housing projects for rural Tibetans in Lhasa suburbs did not give a gift to them, but rather accelerated the eviction

rate for locals who had to rent out their houses for incoming Han investors due to the rise of the cost of living. The double-sided sword of state aid in development exposes and deepens structural inequalities between unskilled rural Tibetans and skilled Han migrants, despite that the inequalities are often masked by the cultural stereotype that Tibetans are lazy and premodern whereas the Han are hardworking and family oriented. Yeh (2013) concluded that the new housing after all was not a gift from the state to the rural Tibetans, but an agent of neoliberalizing the life of Tibetans, depriving the land off which they had cultivate a meaningful and sustainable relationship until the development came. This conclusion is true to Yubeng, although Yubeng seems to be enjoying the low hanging fruit of tourist development among many other impoverished villages in the market economy.

I want to treat life seriously by provoking the dilemma in building hope and the hope of building, a dichotomy that captures the Chinese Dream mobilized by numerous constructions and the logic of “building first and money next” on the one hand, and the struggling vulnerable populations whose hope for a future are merely a building that belongs to their own. I demonstrate this by borrowing Didier Fassin (2014) in his elaboration on the dialectics between the sacredness of life and the inequalities of life. Insisting on “forms of life” of Wittgenstein instead of Foucault’s “biopolitics,” Agamben’s “bare life,” and Arendt’s “life itself,” Fassin in his essay “The Parallel Life of Philosophy and Anthropology” explored that it was not the governing of life being thought of as political; rather, it was the thought of the sacredness of life being political. Fassin (2014, 65-9) described in a documentary film *Precious Life* the paradox of a Palestinian mother, receiving help from an Israeli surgeon for her son’s organ transplant while saying she had no problem of foreseeing her son to be a suicide bomber. Fassin analyzed that the statement of hers might be tailored to her Palestinian compatriots suspicious of her betrayal

based on her receiving help from an Israeli. But deeper than that, Fassin pointed out, that the question of sacredness of life—the shock of saving and then sacrificing a life for the presumed sacred cause, was meaningless, because nobody knew of why the sacredness of life was preparing her to endorse that sacrifice, or whether it was the case at all. Rather, it was the unequal ability of mobilizing social, economic, political resources to even make the surgery possible by the filmmaker Shlomi Eldar, who, like millions of viewers, was questioning whether the sacredness of life was preserved rather than thrown away by the mother, disregarding the question of concrete inequalities.

The ignorance of concrete inequalities and the overemphasis on sacredness of life hold true for contemporary Tibetan and Chinese cultural politics, not less violent than the Palestine and Israel conflict. Studies on mining, forced settlement, self-immolation, and other violence among Tibetan communities by the oppressive regime of China are abundant in the recent decade (Litzinger 2004; Fischer 2011; Yeh 2013; Liu 2015; Makley 2015). As this literature collectively showed, on the one hand, various conflicts always go back to the false idea that how sacred Tibetan lives are and subsequently unfit to modern development; on the other, concrete unequal access to education, employment, and social benefits shape the everyday experiences of ordinary Tibetans. The only few college graduates born in villages of the same region as Yubeng shared, “We cannot find employers in the cities where we obtained our degree due to our ethnicity.” While the debate is heated about canceling affirmative action in college entrance exam due to the presumed privilege the state allocated to ethnic minorities, the structural difficulties (ethnic identity based) in finding employments pose real challenges.

Nevertheless, the defending of sacredness of Tibetan culture occurs within the Tibetan community, in part as a response to the twisted images and fallacy ridden media representations

of Tibetan identity, and in part as a mask for what the inequalities really reside. I chatted many times with friends who, from mountain villages, made a career in Shangri-La City, actively shared their criticism over the media. They forwarded news on protesting the killing in Tibetan monastery scenes in the popular online first person video game developed by Netease China (a major internet company). The news accumulated hundreds of thousands of followers and forwarding, which consequently pushed the gaming company to withdraw the content. The “freedom” of interpreting Tibetan identities as imagined violent, strange, and bizarre, enjoyed by creative arts and cultural industries, illustrated in these examples, shows another kind of building of infrastructure. In this media infrastructure, for many Tibetans, their efforts in building hope are situated in institutionalized structural inequalities.

To illustrate how the dialectics of building hope and the hope of building shape intimate and personal experiences, I turn to the story of Tsolmo. Tsolmo and her family rebuilt their second family house as a hotel in 2005, hoping to provide enough money for her older brother to start a marriage and a new nuclear family. The family also has the oldest and first house sitting in the far edge of the village, dark, old, but with elaborate carpenter’s work that is rare today. Next I focus on Tsolmo’s hope and despair in houses, roads, and bins.

Despair

Anthropological attention on hope began as Vincent Crapanzano (2003) proposed to see hope as a category of social and psychological analysis (cf. Miyazaki 2006, 147). Anthropology of despair follows the similar line of inquiries with an emphasis that the pain and distress occur in social violence (Das 2007). Recent anthropology of life approaches hope and despair by bring near the experiences with the concepts generated from everyday life (e.g., Das et al 2014; Das and Han 2016). To bring despair into sight, one must rely upon the analytical potential in

people's daily pragmatics. As opportunity opens and fades away, people grapple with hope and despair to adapt to the changing situations, clearing a pathway to goals in life. The question for one is not to think in abstract what hope or despair means, but to think concretely what the next step would be and mean for one's life. Robert Desjarlais (2003) in *Sensory Biographies* argued that to recount the lives of two Yolmo Tibetan elders was not to isolate personal experiences from social context, nor to make the extraordinary case to the measurement of the typical. Neither was the case. Desjarlais wanted to show the hardship in life and the affective strategies that emerged to cope with that hardship. The relationship between affects and hardship, despite being extremely biographical and personal, manifests the social makeup of the Yolmo Tibetans in Nepal, as well as of people elsewhere in the world.

I select Tsolmo's story to tell since her experiences capture despair in the paradoxes of home and homelessness as well as motherhood and childlessness, all of which are embedded in the emergent waste infrastructures. As I argued above, the idea of home takes form in the structural arrangements of space in the house, between sacred and secular spaces, humans and animals, males and females, etc. It is as social as it is material. That means, if one builds a house without these structured spaces, it is hard to say that one finds the home. Conversely, if one loses a house to others, together with the material house, the symbolic structures, realized through ritual and everyday practices, are lost as well. In making a house home, for a woman, the central practice is to become a mother, either by birthing or adopting a child. Particularly in rural Tibet and eastern areas, while women can marry up to four men that are brothers, the majority do not. Only 3 in 35 households in Yubeng practice this type of fraternal polyandry marriage, and 2 younger men decide to break away and marry a wife of their own. For unmarried women, especially childless ones, they cannot make home on their own. Except one and only elder nun at

her fifties, these unmarried women either overstay their welcome in natal families, or choose to work in the city away from home. Charlene Makley (2007) reported in Labrang Monastery, Gansu that women were still looked upon despite the renewed gender neutral morality in the tourist economy. The monks ordered around women laypersons to show foreigners that both men and women can go to certain hall in the monastery, which performs the gender equality in the eyes of international observers and proves what Makley concluded, “Monks are men, too.” Similarly, as a village caught up in the fast transformation by tourism, Yubeng offers a similar and different lens to understand women’s experience today.

Tsolmo married first at 26 but was divorced one year later. Now at 32, she remained in her natal family with parents, grandmother, and uncle. She had been sharing residence with elder brother and his wife until the two just had a baby and moved out to their new house. Without marriage or any child, Tsolmo was left with little hope of having her own home. She was genuinely an extrovert, but she felt despair as she failed each attempt in her life to find her home as an adult. First, she was promised by uncle that if she finished culinary training in Kunming and worked as a chef for the newly remodeled house hostel, she would eventually inherit something from this second family house. Different from their first house, which was old, dark, and small, this second house, on the other side of the village, was remodeled with uncle’s generous investment, in 2005-6, and ran as an uncertified but self-claimed international youth hostel. Due to its claimed title and up front location, the hostel was among the first few early winners. Tsolmo was hopeful that she would eventually be rewarded. Her future relied upon the new house. She worked hard in the kitchen, guest rooms, and laundry room.

Second, because of being single for five years (2006-2011), Tsolmo did not earn the status as her brother who got married and asked uncle to support his plan of building a new

house. Her not being able to save up was also because uncle managed the hostel as a Tibetan family hierarchy, in which the elders expect help from the youngsters for free and hence take the responsibility of taking care of the youngsters in sickness or in need. Around 2011, outside investments such as Denzu's house construction offer became common in Yubeng, and the more trained and sophisticated in market competition people came to join the hostel business, consequently beginning to push a few local houses out of business, who had to sell or rent their hostels. Tsolmo's uncle invested their early profits in hotels of the nearby city, anticipating a better return. But the trend went opposite—the majority of tourists chose to stay in Yubeng. This was so in part because the road connecting the city and Yubeng, to everyone's surprise, was constructed in a speedy fashion. Unable to profit from the investment, nor to sell out the city hotel quickly, uncle was not able to buy Tsolmo a future house as she would have expected.

In a way, the road construction, often a way of concentrating resources of the rural areas into the urban centers in China since the 1980s, worked in the opposite way here. The resources were highly concentrated in the village where the city suffered from low occupancies of hotel rooms, precisely due to the construction of the road. This was also largely due to the unique location of Yubeng, as the closest Tibetan village to Khawa Kharpo mountain deities. Yet the road as an infrastructure by no means improved the quality of life among villagers equally, although judging by the appearances of the houses in the village, the story of all positive improvements seemed true. Unmarried women, like Tsolmo, usually did not share a network of security propagated by family inheritance which only recognized married adult children's rights. They were less fortunate than unmarried men as well, who either sought a job as taxi drivers in the city, or, in some cases, shared a wife with their elder brother(s).

The last straw for Tsolmo seemed to be marriage and children, but neither was successful in her attempts to gain them. Tsolmo married for love, according to her and her parents' opposition, to a guy who had traveled to India and mastered the Thangka painting. After a year of fighting with parents on both sides, the couple survived all the fights but one, that is, they learned in the hospital that Tsolmo was very unlikely to bear a child of her own. Hope turned into despair. According to Tsolmo,

I want to live my own life with my small family. I do not wish to be childless. Being a mother has always been my plan. But I am not that fortunate. I quarreled with my ex-husband too much about this. He was a different person when defending his views. Otherwise, he could be very kind. We are all blinded by something. Why can't there be a different way? If this is it, I will give up on love marriage. I have already given up. Men can marry and not marry, so easily. It is difficult for us women. I am working hard, smart, and beautiful, but I just can't do this [succeeding in obtaining a home for her own] anymore. I feel despair. From now on, little in life will be what I truly want. I will do what parents, uncle, and the society wants me to.

It was a devastating story nevertheless. To put it in perspective, while her family seemed to enjoy building the hope, she fell at all her attempts to her dream of having a building of her own to call home. As described above, her failed attempts come from unpaid domestic labor, inability to have upward social mobility, and infertility. These factors contribute to her unsuccessful quest for a home.

Moreover, the norms of home as a desired object and as what constitute a normal person are gendered. In the Tibetan village context, the way to have a home requires a building of a house in which the structured symbolism must exist. For example, 200km east of Yubeng, in the villages near Shangri-La City, villagers wanted to build a house with two levels, upper level for people to eat, sleep, socialize, and pray and lower level for animals. Even though buying an apartment was an available option, Tibetan villagers preferred to build a house of their own in their natal village. To be included in this act of building, one must prepare the material

foundation as well as the social condition. For a woman, that social condition means a proper marriage and children. Not be able to have both, unmarried and childless women become the social ill, a person that is incomplete, or yet to be completed by those tasks in life.

While some women managed to become financially independent, their maneuvering in life rendered more difficult. Grandmothers usually enjoyed a good amount of financial support from children and grandchildren. Widowed women, however, would face complex situations. If widowed and having a child or children, the woman relied usually on herself to make home, and occasionally on her own brother(s) in the construction of a house for the adult child or children. In Tibetan villages, contrast with the Han with patrilineal and patrilocal social relationship, matrilineal is very common, Hence, there were privileges enjoyed by wives whose husbands marrying into their own families, such as inheritance of the house.

What the road construction brought to the village life also includes ethnic inequalities and stereotypes towards women and even more so towards unmarried and childless women. More than often, I heard talks about women who married for rich and resourceful Han being unethical, among men over drinks in their leisure time. Men described women with Hui Muslim³⁰ husbands as mentally ill, because the children would no longer be Tibetan at all and had to follow the non-pork dietary restriction. Such small talks, though playful rather than serious, play a role in shaping how gender is understood in the daily life. When asked about polyandry over such talks, men, however, usually praised the wise woman with multiple husbands, because it was

³⁰ While the region is inhabited by many ethnic groups, there had been historical conflicts between the Hui Muslim and the Tibetans, which did not necessarily contribute to this bias alone. In the general stereotype among Tibetans about Hui, however, was that the Hui were great businesspeople but rarely showed interest in public services. This stereotype was created in the recent economic condition that many Hui people came to own small shops in Tibetan cities, while unable to acknowledge the larger political economy and state (as well as local government) as a player to create the inequalities through various policies.

considered a blessing for the brothers to follow the financial prowess of the woman who would take meticulous care of the whole family. Anthropological debate on the advantages and disadvantages of Tibetan polyandry remains its focus largely on whether it was for economic or cultural reasons (Goldstein 1978; Levine 1988; Levine and Silk 1997; Smith 1998). While economic reasons provide that a wife with multiple husbands prevents the family from breaking down into small units unviable on each of their own, cultural reasons focus on the positive value attached to female ability to take good care of the family no matter what. My fieldwork in eastern Tibet suggests that both lines of reasons are holding partial truth. I want to add that the infrastructure construction, brought by tourism, deepens gender inequalities along the lines of whether women have marriages and children, regardless of polyandry or monogamy.

Returning to Tsolmo, her feeling of despair was beyond emotion. Rather, her failed attempts did not bring her difficult emotions, but the realization that she cannot have her subjectivity—ability to have what she wants in life due to structural constraints. Again, whether the sacredness of life is preserved is not the concern here; rather, what is at stake here is the inequality produced by structural constraints in unpaid domestic labor, lack of upward mobility, and lack of normative family (in marriage and with children). Such structural inequality, I argue, shapes the women's experiences with waste infrastructures, specifically, houses and roads. While the houses pressured women into marriage and childrearing, the roads accelerated the precarity afforded to them. In the most updated information I collect via communication with Tsolmo and her family, they had rented out their family house hostel, and Tsolmo, again, was left with no hope but seeking a second marriage and eventually a home. After experiencing the despair, if it is safe to assume so, Tsolmo let go her ideal of a home supported by love marriage and agreed to marry a man that her family approved. Moreover, she began to seek doctor's help with infertility

from traditional Tibetan and Chinese medicines and Western medicines. Caught in between hope and despair in the fraught efforts in seeking a home, Tsomo's life story expands. The horizon in it, is rather fascinating, when examined in the larger context of changing values and changing infrastructures in the Tibetan villages. The insights of her story are of her own on the one hand, and of people in general on the other. As people move through stages in life and across multiple worlds constituted by family and house economy, what universally avails to people includes hope and/or despair. Each step of the process of orienting one's self through the world would require pragmatic evaluation of the situation and efforts to bring change. In this sense, the story of waste infrastructures is as much about material as it is about personal.

Now I turn to the third and last waste infrastructure: waste bins. If houses and roads represent the rapid aspect of tourist development, then waste bins represent the slow construction of waste management. As for why the construction of waste bins was slow, I argue that the rise of tourism introduced an ineffective bureaucratic system that ironically crashed the hope of both serious national and international environmentalist actors and appearance-focused local government. In chapter 3, I described the dynamic relationship between Yubeng villagers, village administrators, MTC (Meili Tourist Company), TNC (The Nature Conservancy), and the county government. Here, I want to emphasize that the hope of cleaning solid waste from sacred mountain paths amounted to little result. Waste bins were established along the mountain paths for collecting the solid wastes at the hands of tourists. Ideally, biweekly, people needed to come and clean out the bins. But the mechanism worked only briefly in 2008-9 and has remained largely absent since then.

According to Yubeng villagers, had the lucrative tickets revenue dictated by MLT been distributed to villagers proportionately rather than a fixed compensation a decade ago, they

would have been able to afford the transportation fees of moving the waste away. Villagers also complained that the solid waste accumulating in their own houses were ignored, because what mattered to the administrators (both company and government ones) was merely the appearance of the mountain path. As one elder villager pointed out, “It is a matter of looking good for money or for power, never for the environment!” It turns out that the villagers had been telling the truth, which the company and the government administrators at various positions revealed that their goal was to make the mountain path look clean and beautiful. The administrators also said that the villagers were being greedy, even though while the profits of tourism went predominately to the company and the government administrators, the pitfall, if you will, of tourism fell on the shoulders of villagers. If the complaints from villagers remained minimal, little was being done to improve the waste reorganization through funding the labor necessary for waste bins to work.

Why do I focus on waste infrastructures here? What is the advantage of conceptualizing houses, roads, and bins as waste infrastructures? On the empirical ground, the village in Eastern Himalayas provided a micro-cosmos for understanding the waste problems in the paradox of development and sustainability. When the waste problems are being delayed, displaced, and pushed away for future problems, at a larger scale, the solid waste persists in this small village, reminding the short cycle of production, consumption, and disposal. Moreover, attending to the processes of people’s lives shaping and being shaped by waste infrastructures, especially that which constituted hope and despair, would reveal what it like to live with waste, if it remains.

Focusing on waste infrastructures and the affective strategies—hope or despair—will also provide ways of thinking the environment through the lens of what Desjarlais termed sensory biographies. On the one hand, hope or despair corresponds to certain emotions, as a reaction to the situation one is in. On the other, hope or despair is a kind of affect that preexists. When being

interviewed, people made statements about hope or despair, and this must be understood in the performative way. John Austin (1962, 139) said, “Once we realize that what we have to study is not the sentence but the issuing of an utterance in a speech situation, there can hardly be any longer a possibility of not seeing that stating is performing an act.” Each step of building a house, people in Yubeng face serious dilemmas, such as Denzu’s decision on the house construction contract and Tsolmo’s fights to own her own home despite marriage and children. In difficult situations in life as such, any choices one makes would impact futures in profound ways, and to speak of hope or despair, as did they, is not simply a matter of emotions, but rather affective strategies, with which they orient themselves in the world, performing the self as they move through multiple situations. Therefore, the reason why I emphasize affect is to situate hope or despair in the daily pragmatics and dichotomies of doing or not doing things. After all, anthropologists observe these daily actions and shall ground their analysis on these non-extraordinary events and moments.

Conclusion

This chapter describes the entangled relationship between people and what I call “waste infrastructures”—houses, roads, and bins. By a close analysis and a detailed account of how people have hope or despair in their lives, it shows the way in which houses are beyond a physical structure, roads are beyond a gift of development, and bins are beyond an ecological cleanup. But rather, all these infrastructures have culturally and socially specific meanings: houses as normative home, roads as development, and bins as appearance. Despite that houses, roads, and bins aimed to accommodate, transport, and reorganize solid wastes in the emergent tourist economy, they become social and agentive (Ingold 2000; 2011).

The chapter has one central arguments and two sub-arguments that go along with it. First, through a close analysis on people's hope and despair, it argues that such affects are produced by the waste infrastructures including houses, roads, and bins, and simultaneously preparing people to deal with opportunities and obstacles in life. The first sub-argument lies in the dichotomy of building hope and the hope of a building: while affluent state agencies and persons are chasing Chinese Dream through launching and investing in all kinds of building activities, from international roads to small village houses, the vulnerable populations, however, suffer inequalities, and, struggle and strive for a building of their own. The second sub-argument insists that the hope of a building of one's own becomes despair, because of the introduction of fast speed construction of roads and houses. The overheated construction, despite engine of development for the village and county, accelerated the process of displacement of the local villagers, who, except a one-time cash reward from rent, had to go on to find a living elsewhere other than home. Such frenzies in development are not an exception, but the norm. Such frenzies turned hope into despair for those who are vulnerable due to incompatible skills, even though the making of hope for the powerful ones in development seems inevitable and ever growing.

Finally, using "anthropology of life" approach, the chapter aims to extend the emergent anthropology of hope in economic activities literature (Miyazaki 2004; forthcoming) into the broader horizons of life. Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil* called for attention to non-binary moral judgment such as good or bad, and J. L. Austin analyzed the speech act of what he called the nonsensical—neither good nor bad but very logical. Perhaps for anthropology, the dichotomy of hope and despair, can be useful only when one thinks beyond the binary and thinks with the daily pragmatics in which something that is neither or both could be the concern.

Conclusion

In 1933, *Lost Horizon* depicted a place called Shangri-La. In 2001, a city called Gyalthang, or Zhongdian, renamed itself as Shangri-La. Yet the story is more than a tourist place based on an Orientalist imagination. It has another source, the mountain god Khawa Kharpo. Khawa Kharpo first was a wild beast with superhuman powers such as transforming rocks into lightning. While safeguarding the livelihoods for those who worshipped him, he unleashed his uncontrolled power to bring hazards to them such as floods. Finally, in the 8th AD, Padmasambhava (the son of lotus) introduced Buddhism to this Tibetan land, after winning an intense 49-day war against Khawa Kharpo. He tamed Khawa Kharpo as a Buddhist guard god, making it the top one among the eight sacred mountains across Tibet. People from the greater Tibetan area come to walk around Khawa Kharpo for cosmic benefits, reincarnation, and good fortunes. What shot Shangri-La the city in the corner of China's southwest borderland to stardom on a global stage, however, was the 1991 Meili Snow Mountain mountaineers' tragedy. This group of Tibetans, Chinese, and Japanese mountaineers lost their lives in their attempt to conquer the peak, also known as "the head of Khawa Kharpo" in the local communities. Since then, this place has become a tourist destination, as well as home for accumulating solid waste. This dissertation is an ethnography on the culture of solid waste in the specific place called Shangri-La where deities and waste meet, Tibetan hosts and Han Chinese tourists interact, and various agents of developers (local governments and tourist companies) negotiate with local villagers. All these human and nonhuman actors shape what constitutes solid waste and which management scheme has advantages over others.

To conclude, this dissertation destabilizes waste and non-waste by investigating Tibetan cultural and practical engagements with solid waste problems, both materially and symbolically.

The analysis is concentrated on solid waste including plastic bottles, old clothes, and food waste and the distinct ways of understanding them and treating them among three groups, Tibetan locals, tourists, and the local government. While plastic bottles are waste for all three groups, the specific geography of Himalayan villages made the economist model impossible to work. The cost for transportation exceeds the potential value return in recycle even with subsidies, grants, and investments from the government, TNC (The Nature Conservancy), and MTC (Meili Tourist Company) respectively. The problem at the core is whether the development agents including the government, TNC and MTC could provide a sustainable model that benefits primarily the villagers. When the most recent developer MTC hardly can break even, the priority is not necessarily about plastic waste. When the villagers themselves face challenges from outside investors, their demand for a share in tickets revenue and a responsibility of cleaning plastic waste is largely ignored. Plastic waste has become visible in mountain paths. Hidden in the cracks of rocks, plastic waste could disappear. But it does not. When it is rainy season, the rocks become a river bed. And the plastic waste flow along the river towards the downstream.

Old clothes represent a dilemma between cosmoeconomic greed (emphasis on the cosmic) and environmental protection. Local Tibetans use old clothes to represent those who have worn them, put old clothes on sacred sites such as trees, groves, and rocks, and expect mountain deities to distribute blessings to the specific persons based the scent, touch, and look attached to those old clothes. This widespread phenomenon in Tibetan areas becomes the target for imitation from mainly Han Chinese tourists. The added volumes of old clothes represent a kind of cosmic greed, because people believe that the more clothes people offer to the mountain deities, the more blessings they would receive in mundane activities. It has gone far from what the vulnerable mountain environment could afford due to the waste problem induced by

excessive amounts of old clothes. They wouldn't break down. They accumulate. They suffocate fish when they were brushed to rivers by rain. Thus, MTC ordered its employees to remove some of the old clothes to maintain the pleasant view of the mountain. Elsewhere, a monk led a group of environmental NGOs to clean the Treasure Bottles (cloth bags containing grains and prayers) from the highland lakes in Qinghai. However, these efforts in environmental protection received protests from those who offered clothes. They argued that their specific links with mountain deities were broken due to the old clothes removal. Their cosmic benefits disappeared, even though they had spent money on the travel to these sacred mountains and offer the clothes.

The imitation from Han Chinese tourists adds another layer, that is, through imitation they consumed what they considered as authentic Tibetan, the spiritual other for Han's secular self. Some tourists picked out necklaces from the pile and wore them, challenging what's held sacred about these old clothes. This action received criticism from the Yubeng villagers who shared about the first and original owners usually being deceased children. The idea was to offer children's clothes so that mountain deities could assist them in a reincarnation. Hence, removing the deceased children's clothes would cause cosmic harm to the children, the family, and the ones who removed them. Such belief used to reflect the hard childbirth and lack of access to medical services in Himalayan villagers, but it shows the nuanced relations between Tibetan hosts and Han Chinese guests (including both the tourists and the tourist companies). The affective ties between Tibetans and old clothes made the labor of cleaning up a burden in the heart more than in the body.

The tourist transformation in the kitchen means that local Tibetan women adopted the Sichuan cuisine to cook and to waste food ingredients such as oils and peppercorns to compete with other food business in the tourist economy. The change allowed women to escape from the

moral gaze of men in the conventional nomadic economy and instead embrace a central role in the kitchen, a key productive space for income and value in the tourist economy.

Finally, the dissertation introduces *xinjing*, or heart-environment, as a cultural concept to understand the Tibetan waste problem and to forge affective strategies solving the problem. I choose *dreg pa* (pollution, waste, unclean) as the key word for Tibetan cultural understanding of solid waste. *Dreg pa* means interruption of any sort of social orderings. As I discussed above, *dreg pa* happens when hierarchies broke between deities and humans, and between genders. Inspired by the art made of waste objects, I attempt to frame the focus on the heart (including the burden of affective labor in removing waste and someone else's offerings to deities) in Tibetan locals as an affective strategy. This strategy shapes how Tibetan locals experience hope and despair in times of displacement, marginalization, and the actual risk of being forced to leave their own homes for the tourist project of an authentic Tibetan experience. Different from the intended result from heart-environment in propagating (failing to propagate) environmental actions by redirection, *dreg pa* allows Tibetans to talk about a different story, a uniquely Tibetan story, one that drastically differs from what both the local governments and the tourist companies aim to tell. Tibetan stories are largely politicized in various official museums. There is a surprisingly large amount of Tibetan cultural museums in Shangri-La City, three major ones including one national two provincial, in a city of 56,000 residents. In these official museums, state ideologies of Tibetans being liberated from serfdom are strongly present. It is in this context that many Tibetan cultural experts began to focus on the work of the heart by opening private museums, hosting environmental forums, and influencing media and the public, because they have learned that the work of the heart is the only effective way to solve the waste problems in the Tibetan areas of southwest China and beyond.

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