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The Discursive Art of China's Colonialism: Reconfiguring Tibetan and State Identities

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Abstract

How do present forms of colonialisms persist in what is presumed to be the 'post' colonial era? One-way colonialism persists in the current era is through the state's 'modification' of its identity according to Indigenous studies scholar Glen Coulthard (2014). Scholars of Empire studies have long stressed how the colonial state constructs its own identity in the process of constructing the identities of its colony and subjects (Cooper and Stoler 1997, Stoler 2010). In this article, I consider this question through the framework of Tibet and China and ask, how is China's current relationship to Tibet understood as state and subject, rather than colonizer and colonized? In the following, I suggest this in part has to do with how Tibetans are understood to be 'Chinese' in the present moment. Through a careful examination of China's different and successive government's discursive and rhetorical mechanisms, I explore how Tibetan identity is reinvented and state identity modified to construct Tibet in China's national imagination as part of China.

Keywords: Tibet, China, Colonialism, Discursive Art, Identity

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rather than colonizer and colonized? In the following, I suggest this in part has to do with how Tibetans are understood to be ‘Chinese’ in the present moment. Through a careful examination of China’s different and successive government’s discursive and rhetorical mechanisms, I explore how Tibetan identity is reinvented and state identity modified to construct Tibet in China’s national imagination as part of China. Such reconfiguration of identities, which centers the history of Tibet’s development through Chinese frameworks rather than Tibetan ones, function to counter and erase past and ongoing histories of Tibetan nationalism that continually challenge China’s sovereign claims over Tibet. The discursive ramification of such state-produced historical erasures and identity reconfigurations is that it allows modern nation states such as China to operationalize systematic colonialisms in its colonies while distancing itself from its colonial identity. This is how present forms of colonialisms under new modern orders continue to function anew in what is presumed to be the ‘post’ colonial era.

In the following, I examine discursive moves produced by different Chinese regimes on Tibetans to understand how Tibetans have come to be constructed as ‘Chinese’ in contemporary China’s national imagination and why Tibet and China’s relationship is understood as ‘not-colonized’ in two ways. First, through an exploration of China’s National Republic government’s (1912–1949) ethnographic construction of Tibetans as “primitive” Chinese from China’s past, which were drawn from earlier centuries’ observations of Tibetans from the Qing (1644–1911) and western colonial officers and explorers’ accounts. And second, through an examination of the People’s Republic of China’s (1949-) rhetorical devices deployed to modify the state’s identity as anti-imperial and anti-capitalist during its earlier era, to a benevolent state invested in the upliftment of its ‘backward’ subjects of Tibetans in the present. Through a careful exploring of how the state discursively reinvents Tibetan identity as Chinese and rhetorically constructs itself as a liberal state invested in its subjects, I show how the current Chinese state is able to erase its contemporary relation to Tibet as colonial at home and abroad.

Chinese Imagination of Tibetans as Chinese and Tibet as Part of China

In a 2012 New York Times article by Xu Zhiyong, a Han Chinese lawyer and human rights advocate writing on the subject of the Chinese state and self-immolating Tibetans, Zhiyong ends the article with reflections on the self-immolations of Nangdrol and others like Nangdrol with some powerful last words:

I am sorry we Han Chinese have been silent as Nangdrol and his fellow Tibetans are dying for freedom. We are victims ourselves, living in estrangement, infighting, hatred and destruction. We share this land. It's our shared home, our shared responsibility, our shared dream — and it will be our shared deliverance (Zhiyong 2012).



China's Propaganda painting depicting all the "ethnic minorities."

Image: Shanghai Jiaoyu Chubanshe

Although Zhiyong's closing words seem to acknowledge state-sponsored inequalities and violence against Tibetans with his apology. He frequently uses the word "we" to talk about himself as a Han Chinese and other Tibetans to denote an equal positioning of the both as Chinese. Zhiyong's insistence at using "we" to describe Tibetans and himself as Chinese seems to miss the point that the immolators and other Tibetans,

he had met on his journey in Tibet were trying to convey with their insistence on identifying themselves as ‘Tibetan’ rather than Chinese when they introduced themselves or talked about the subject of the immolations to him. The way Zhiyong deploys “we” is reminiscent of Derek Gregory’s ruminations on the conflict between imagined narratives by the colonizer and the colonized played out in the colonized space-land (2004). Gregory’s work, which utilizes Said’s orientalism (1978) to look at how the US discursively constructs middle easterners as terrorists, as methods for carrying out violent imperial agendas, discusses how Israelis saw themselves versus Palestinians when it came to the conflict of Israeli occupation of Palestine. While Israelis viewed themselves as fighting for the “right of homeland” as scripted in the Zionist imagination, Palestinians saw themselves as fighting against Israeli “invaders” whom they saw as “settler colonizers” (2004).

Zhiyong deploys the word “we” empathetically when discussing protests by Tibetan self-immolators and human rights advocates like himself against the state to denote Tibetans and Hans as equals. His view of Tibet as a “shared home” between Tibetans and Hans also highlights how Zhiyong sees Tibet to be part of China, and therefore, sees Tibetans as Chinese citizens like himself. In stark contrast, on the 20 June, 2012, Ngawang Norphel and Tenzin Khedup self-immolated and died while shouting for a “freedom” that were in direct conflict with Zhiyong’s usage of the term “shared home” (Wong 2012, Tsering 2012). According to a letter left behind by the two deceased, “they urged all Tibetans to be united in the fight for Tibet’s freedom and the return of the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama from exile” (Tsering 2012). Zhiyong comes to interpret the “freedom” that Ngawang Norphel and Tenzin Khedup are calling for to mean freedom in accessing rights allotted to citizens like him yet are denied as subjects of the state. In such an interpretation, Zhiyong fails to understand considerations for a kind of “freedom” that self-immolators such as Ngawang Norphel and Tenzin Khedup call for that could be rejecting of Chinese citizenship in recognition of a Tibetan national one. In other words, Zhiyong fails to understand how such calls for freedom by Tibetans could include freedom from the Chinese state altogether. Such calls are not new when considered through Tibet’s recent history of national protests against the

Chinese state. They have been recorded beginning with Khampa rebellion in Gyalthang under the leadership of Wangchuk Tempa (Norbu 2009) and spread across other parts of Kham against the People's Liberation Army soldiers in the 1950s (McGranahan 2010). The Lhasa uprising against Chinese military occupation in 1959, retaliation against Cultural Revolution policies in the late 1980s that went on till the early 1990s (Schwartz 1994), the 2008 uprising across the Tibetan plateau against the Chinese state which gave rise to protest by self-immolation in recent times (Woeser 2016). Such protests by Tibetans, which coincide with the inception and establishment of Chinese military control of Tibet beginning in the 1940s, have been consistent in their call for a freedom from the Chinese state in recognition of a Tibetan one (Lokyitsang 2013). While self-immolators such as Ngawang Norphel and Tenzin Khedup recognize such pasts through their own commemorative act of protest which highlight grievances of Tibetans against the state as ongoing and originating from the initial loss of Tibet's sovereignty. Zhiyong comes to interpret such acts to be in line with his own grievances against the state as a Chinese citizen whose rights are being violated.

Despite Zhiyong's novel attempts at understanding Tibetan protests against the state through the framework of sameness as Chinese citizens fighting for "freedom," he fails to understand the Tibetans he spoke to in Tibet about the self-immolations as calling for a freedom that not only included accessing rights which Tibetans as ethnic minority citizens of China are denied, but also included demands of a freedom from the Chinese state that implicitly calls out the Chinese state's relation to Tibet as foreign and occupation by such protestors. In other words, Zhiyong is incapable of comprehending Tibetan calls for a freedom that could mean complete separation from China and a denial of Chinese identification in preference for a Tibetan national one.

Structurally Designed Misidentifications: The Durability of Imperial Re-orderings

Zhiyong's conflict in understanding Tibetan grievances and protests inside Tibet resonates with what Achille Mbembe called "entanglement" of the modern state in the postcolonial era (2001). Entanglement involves "the coercion to which people are subjected, . . . a whole cluster

of re-orderings of society, culture, and identity, and a series of recent changes in the way power is exercised and rationalized” (2001, 66). For Jean Dennison, such re-orderings sought to control and define Native communities of North America within the bounds of the settler state by denying them tribal recognition, a path that would legalize tribal sovereignty and allow such communities to have control over their own self-determination (2012). The “durability” of such re-orderings and their persistence in modern state-craft in the post-colonial era from the colonial era according to Ann Stoler (2016) is also what causes the kinds of confusions Zhiyong experienced. Zhiyong’s misidentification of Tibetans as Chinese and his misinterpretation of their protests as about rights alone are not deliberate attempts by Zhiyong at misreading Tibetans. How then does Zhiyong come to assume Tibetans as Chinese and Tibet as “our shared home”? In other words, how did Zhiyong along with most of China’s population in the present era come to envision Tibet to be part of China?

To begin, Zhiyong’s assumptions are not far from China’s own state narrative regarding Tibet. As such, I take such assumptions and read them through the framework of the state, and how the state comes to construct such narratives in the first place. In other words, readings of Tibetans as Chinese and Tibet as part of China should be understood as state-crafted narratives that assists the state in its efforts to re-order society, culture, and identity of its subjects. For George Steinmetz, one way the German state achieved such re-ordering of indigenous identities and societies in its colonies was through the “effects of ethnographic discourse” (2007, xix). To disturb Zhiyong’s notion of Tibet as “our shared home,” I turn to interrogate ethnographic discourses produced by the Chinese state on Tibetans. For historian Tsering Shakya, notions of Tibet as an “integral part of China” are a recent construction by the Communist Party in its efforts in nation building (2002). However, for historian Yudru Tsomu, such constructions were themselves adopted by the current administration from the Nationalist Republic government, which were themselves informed by the Qing administration and western orientalist publications on Tibet (2013). The Qing (1644–1911), the Nationalist Republic of China (1912–1949), and the People’s Republic of China (1949-) were successive governments that came to power after

initiating the fall of the other, one after the other, in order to begin a 'new' republic in the modern era. Each governments inherited, adopted and redesigned the earlier administration's discursive ethnographic constructions of Tibetans in order to initiate construction of its own national identity.



“Ethnic minorities” performing in front of the Potala, Lhasa, Tibet.
Image: Xinhua

The Invention of Tibetans as ‘primitive’ Chinese: Ethnographic Constructions of the Nationalist Republic of China

The discursive formation of Tibetans as Chinese began with the efforts of the Nationalist Republic government after the demise of the Qing administration. In *Taming the Khampas: The Republican Construction of Eastern Tibet*, Tsomu writes about how “[i]ssues of insecurity and unruliness on the Kham frontier forced the government of Republican China to adopt a policy of integration” (2013, 1). The “issue of insecurity and unruliness on the Kham frontier” in eastern Tibet were issues the Nationalist government had inherited from the Qing administration. Before the Nationalist’s successive revolt against Qing rule in 1911, the Qing administration had been preoccupied with attempts to control the Kham frontier due to insecurities concerning Western imperialism. The Qing administration became increasingly insecure when western powers penetrated their territories during the first and second Opium Wars (1840-1842 and 1856-1860), and saw its neighboring countries and

kingdoms become colonies under various European empires (Hevia 2003). According to Dahpon David Ho, it was such threats that prompted the Qing administration's interest in incorporating Tibet and securing what the Qing saw as its "frontiers" (2008, 210-246). This insecurity became legitimized in Tibet for the Qing in two key moments according to Yudru Tsomu: the rise of Nyarong Gonpo Namgyal in Kham in the 19th century and the British invasion of Lhasa at the beginning of the 20th century (2013). These two events challenged Qing authority in Tibet, heightened their insecurities concerning western imperial infiltration, and was the basis for their desire to incorporate Tibet under their rule.

Nyarong Gonpo Namgyal had been a chieftain and a native of Nyarong, Kham during the 19th century (Tsomu 2014). At the time, Nyarong had been a major commercial and transportation hub between China and larger Tibet (Tsomu 2014). In order for the Qing to take "effective control over Lhasa," they needed to first secure its dominance over the border province of Kham (Tsomu 2013, 4). Nyarong Gonpo Namgyal's rise to power in the region, which saw the conquest of Nyarong by 1848 and culminated with majority of Kham captured by 1863, challenged Qing and Lhasa administrative rule and trade possibilities in the province (Tsomu 2014, 185). However, by mid-1865, the Tibetan government's army was able to defeat Gonpo Namgyal with assistance from local chieftains (2014, 209) and extended Lhasa's administrative control over the province (221). Gonpo Namgyal's rise in Kham served as a reminder for the Qing of the fragility of its control in the border province. This fragility was furthered when the British invaded Lhasa in 1904 (Harris 2012). The increased threat to Qing rule in Tibet first by the chieftain Gonpo Namgyal, followed by the British invasion in 1904 prompted the Qing to launch a military invasion of Lhasa and introduced reforms aimed to establish Qing rule in Tibet in 1910 (Goldstein and Beall 1991, D. Norbu 1998). Such efforts were interrupted however, by the outbreak of Nationalist revolution against the Qing in 1911. The 13th Dalai Lama called on Khampas to unite and "defend Buddhism" against the Qing in 1912 (Shakabpa 1976, 195-96), and by 1913 used the momentum against the Qing to proclaim Tibet's independence to deter further encroachments on Tibet's sovereignty by foreign forces (Tenpa 2012).

Following Qing's defeat, the Nationalist Republic took up where the Qing had left off with Kham. Like their predecessor, the Nationalist administration also considered Kham as an important geopolitical and strategic location for accessing larger Tibet, and took serious interest in western imperial intrusions of the region. Following the 13th Dalai Lama's proclamation and reassertion of Lhasa's administrative control



“Western-Imperialism” against China propaganda art.

Image: H. Meyer

over Kham, the Nationalist government felt such proclamations and reassertion of power needed to be countered and matched (Tsomu 2013, 5). As a result, “[t]he integration of Kham became an integral part of the Chinese nationalists’ national imagination” (Tsomu 2013, 5). Although the Nationalist government had inherited Qing concerns for the need to incorporate Tibet through Kham as avenues for deterring western imperial forces, their strategies for how this incorporation should take shape differed discursively. While the Qing administration considered Tibet under its imperial sphere of influence, they never considered Tibetans to be of Qing stock. Instead, Tibetans and other ethnic communities in Qing accounts were framed as an ‘other’ in contrast to themselves (Mullaney 2010). Denoting difference rather than sameness between the Qing and Tibetans, for the Nationalist government however, the incorporation of Tibetans required a strategy of sameness rather than difference. For Tsomu, this strategy involved the need for Kham “to be incorporated in China’s national imagination and understood as a

core territory of the new China” (2013, 5). The Nationalists were able to do this through a discursive strategy on Kham that projected an image of a “commonality of co-nationals that was stressed through common ancestry and historical linkage” (5). Alongside military attempts to take geopolitical control of Kham, the Nationalists also deployed a textual strategy to reconstruct the people and customs of Kham as “ancient Chinese” in order to reinvent their identity as Chinese co-nationals (6).

At the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century, scholarly developments on the frontier regions by other imperial powers such as Japan, Russia, and other Western countries prompted the Chinese to also invest in scholarly study of these regions (Durara 2004, 188-92). “[S]cholarly knowledge about Tibet produced by European and Indian scholars in the same period surpassed the sum total of works produced in the first two centuries of Qing influence in Tibet” (Tuttle 2005, 29–30, Tsomu 2013, 6). “As a result, from the late Qing and particularly during the [Nationalist] Republican period, there was a rush to study and produce research works on Tibet” (Tsomu 2013, 6). While western scholarship on Tibetans were considered evidence of western penetration, Nationalist intellectuals also began drawing on and translating such works into Chinese as avenues for integrating the frontier in the new China’s national imagination (Wang Yao et al. 2003: 230, 148). In addition to the Chinese language reproduction of western scholarship on Tibet, they also published works by Chinese official cum scholars who had performed administrative or military duties under the Nationalist government in Kham. The Nationalists also employed their own intellectuals to produce scholarship on the frontier peoples who later advised the government on how to rule such regions. One such figure was Ren Naiqiang, he is considered “the founding father of Kham studies in China,” writes Tsomu (2013, 10). “For the duration of one year, he travelled throughout nine counties in Kham. During his investigation trip, he married Lodrö Chöntso, the niece of Dorje Namgyel, the indigenous leader of Upper Nyarong. On returning to Chengdu, he wrote a series of articles based on what he had seen and heard” (Tsomu 2013, 10). Following successive books on Kham, he became a professor and advised the Nationalist government on how to govern Kham towards a favourable outcomes for the Chinese state.

Ren also surveyed and came up with his own standard map of Kham. His map later served as blueprints for the People's Liberation Army soldiers who invaded and consolidated power in Kham on behalf of the People's Republic of China in the 1950s (Ren 2009, 2, Wei 1989, 8).

In Ren Naiqiang's descriptive work, he tended to place Tibetan culture and tradition as part of China's past. "Throughout Ren's work, there are constant references to Tibetan practices as ancient Chinese traditions," writes Tsomu (2013, 15). Doing so allowed Ren to highlight "a narrative of similarity" rather than difference (15). Yet claims of such practices as remnants of China's past lacked actual historical evidence and was motivated instead by the need to trace the roots of such customs to China, according to Tsomu (2013, 16). While this narrative method stressed similarity, the implication that such customs were themselves practices of China's past emphasized how such customs were seen through an evolutionary lens. "The method here to explain the cultural traditions of Kham is to position the local culture as both primitive and a remnant of ancient China. There is no attempt to understand the traditions in themselves. The history of the local traditions is always framed in relation to China. Han culture is the natural condition and the people of Kham are viewed as remnants of the Han past" (Tsomu 2013, 16).

By divorcing Kham from their own developmental history as a people and geography, and placing them within China's national past as Chinese primitives through evolutionary frameworks, Nationalist intellectuals such as Ren were able to successfully construct Kham, and thus larger Tibet, within China's national imagination as 'Chinese'. The construction of Tibetans as Chinese primitives through such discursive means allowed the Nationalist government to naturalize its identity in Kham as co-nationals. Doing so allowed the Nationalists to justify sovereign claims over Tibet. While the identification of Tibetans as co-nationals stressed a relation of equals, the evolutionary categorization of Tibetans as "primitives" from China's "ancient past" denoted Tibetans as lagging behind their Han counterpart. Such framings of Tibetans as primitives lagging behind also worked to advance Nationalist assimilation projects targeted at Tibetan people. In short, the discursive strategy

of constructing Tibetans to be Chinese primitives of China's past helped to advance the Nationalist claims of Tibet as part of China, and supported their aim of constructing Tibetans in China's national imagination as Chinese. This discursive strategy proved useful for the Nationalist government, and was reproduced later by the successive People's Republic of China (PRC) following their victory over the Nationalist government in 1949.

The Rhetorical Devices of the Communist State: Constructing State-Identity in the Era of Decolonization and Liberal Modern Nation-States

If we are in the 'post' colonial era as suggested by postcolonial studies, does that mean colonialism is over? This question was posed to me by a friend in 2012 when I told him I was working on the topic of colonialism in the present. "But I thought colonialism was over." I asked him to elaborate on what he meant. He pointed to how former European colonies were no longer under colonization. I point to this example because colonization is often assumed to be specific to Europe, and thus, over (Pels 1997, Stoler and McGranahan 2007). This is also an assumption that is normalized in popular discourse on Tibet by the Left which presumes governance under communist claiming regimes are free of imperial and colonial underpinnings (Parenti 2003, Sautman 2003, Chomsky 2012). The problem with such reductive readings is not only its denial of continuing cases of colonialisms such as Palestine, Hawaii, and Tibet in what is presumed to be the 'post' colonial era, it also fails to acknowledge long Asian imperial histories including those of China, Japan, and India. This is problematic because such presumptions center the history of the world, even about empires on Europe in linear and singular terms. Such presumptions also become the basis for how the PRC constructs Tibet's relation to China as that of state and subject and erase its relation to Tibet as colonial through the deployment of state-constructed rhetorical devices.

In 1949, following the defeat of the Nationalist Republic government by the Communist Party of China, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) began advancing into Kham under the claim that they were there to 'liberate' Tibetans from 'western imperialism'. World War II had just

come to an end, and former colonies under different European empires were experiencing decolonization following successive nationalist independence movements (McGranahan 2007, 180). As a result, “[d]isavowal of imperial status” was becoming “de rigueur” at the time, writes McGranahan (2007, 176). Although the imperial status was going out of style, it did not mean empires ceased to exist. Instead, they simply changed their tune by condemning old forms of domination associated with European colonialism, while functioning anew under “national languages of defence, development, and global responsibility” writes McGranahan (2007, 176). For instance, the US used the discourse of ‘freeing’ countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Philippines through the rhetoric of ‘democratization’ in its Cold War rivalry efforts while claiming to champion anti-colonial efforts. “If [the era of] Decolonization discouraged colonialism as a specific form of imperialism, it ironically opened the world to other forms of similar domination,” writes McGranahan (2007, 175). Taking full advantage of the “moment of decolonization” (186), the PLA launched a full military takeover of Tibet that began in Kham in 1949 and ended in 1959 with the taking of Lhasa while justifying such military overtaking through the rhetorics of ‘liberation from western imperialism’ domestically and internationally. The PRC’s promotion of itself as ‘anti-capitalist’ and ‘anti-imperial’ during the era of decolonization to the international community also became useful rhetorical devices for deterring other nations from intervening on Tibet’s behalf despite lobbying efforts by Tibetan government officials at the United Nations (Shakya 1999, 52, 59, 221).

In recent international discourse, the PRC has moved on from the rhetorics of itself as anti-imperial and anti-capitalist to one about being victims of western interests in keeping a rising China down (Sautman 2012). Such was the case when the 2008 protests by Tibetans broke out across Tibet. When western media covered the events of the uprising by Tibetans against the state, Chinese state media responded with accusations of western meddling in the internal politics of China. Making the claim that western coverage of Tibetan protests was motivated by western imperial interests in wanting to curb China’s socio-economic rise in the global arena (Hillman 2009). Mass protests by Chinese citizens in China



“Lady Liberty” bringing Democratic freedom. U.S. propaganda poster during Cold War. Image: Unknown

and abroad broke out against western media as a result. CNN was among western media companies targeted by such protests. While there is no denying that there could indeed be imperial interests that shaped past and current interactions between the US and China, such rhetorical device deployed by the Chinese state also do the job of shifting the attention of the protests of 2008 away from Tibetan protestors on the city streets of Tibet, and reorients the topic regarding the protests on a narrative about western domination over China again. In other words, the state’s deployment of such rhetorical

methods forces any possible conversations concerning Tibet from Tibetans themselves to shut down. Which is the intended purpose of such state-produced rhetorics.

As previously highlighted, the PRC inherited its ethnographic construction of Tibetans as primitive Chinese, which does the job of construction of Tibetans as ‘Chinese’ subjects who need saving from western imperialism from its Nationalist and Qing predecessors. The narrative has evolved in the current moment to construct the PRC as occupying a relationship with Tibetans as that of benevolent state invested in the upliftment of its materially and culturally backwards Tibetan subjects. This narrative has been proliferated by the state through multiple discursive methods since the PRC’s administrative control was established in Tibet from the 1950s onward, and include state-sponsored mediums such as movies, music, literature, art, plays, and so on at home and abroad (Shakya 2008, Norbu 2010, Zeitchik and Landreth 2012). More recently, this narrative has been deployed



2008 Anti-CNN protest by Chinese Nationalists in the US.

Image: China Digital Times

to explain and justify intensification of infrastructure development in Tibet following China's "Go West" modernization campaign (Singh 2002). In *Taming Tibet*, Emily Yeh looks at how the state narrates such projects across Tibet as "gifts" bestowed by the state and its Han settlers to their Tibetan "little brothers" (2015). Despite the state's attempt to portray itself as a benevolent state invested in its supposed backward subject of Tibetans, scholars agree that Tibetans have responded to such mechanics through a show of collective dissent as nationalist rebellions against a state they see as foreign beginning with Khampa rebellions against advancing PLA soldiers in the 1950s (McGranahan 2010) and more recently through the 2008 uprising and self-immolation protests that followed (Lokyitsang 2013, Makley 2015). Such Tibetan nationalist and anti-colonial-occupation rebellion against the Chinese state also highlight how the state's 'gift' of development have benefited few and disenfranchised many in Tibet from having control over their own destinies and land (Fischer 2005, 2013).

While the rhetorical devices and discursive methods I have mentioned are not based on, and have no bearing on how Tibetans actually identify or see their history, by focusing my discussion on how the state constructs and deploys such discursive technologies, I highlight how such



Film poster for “Serf”. Produced by August First Studio in 1963. From Woesser’s article in *High Peaks Pure Earth* (2011).

discourses are not actually about Tibetans or their histories. Instead, I have shown how such discursive methods become deployed by the state to construct its own identity: as liberators of western imperial infiltration during the Nationalist era, as an anti-imperial and anti-capitalist state of the Communist era, and as a benevolent state invested in the upliftment of its backward Tibetan subject in the present. This rhetorical and discursive device, constructed by and build upon by different Chinese governments has served each state in its own efforts in constructing its own identities in the frontiers, at home, and abroad. It is also how

the current state in Beijing is able to erase its relation to the frontiers such as Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang as colonial.

Conclusion

In concluding, I have explored how contemporary China comes to view Tibetans as Chinese and Tibet as part of China through the deployment of discursive technologies and rhetorical strategies by different and successive Chinese administrations of the Qing, the Nationalist Republic of China, and the People’s Republic of China. I have highlighted how the Nationalist drew on Qing insecurities concerning western imperialism and western produced ethnographic sources to refashion a new kind of ethnographic narrative that constructs Tibetans in China’s national imagination as Primitive-Chinese from China’s civilizational past in order to make sovereign claims over Tibet. I have shown how such racialized renderings of Tibetans as ‘primitive’ Chinese were later incorporated and reproduced by the Chinese Communist Party to propagate notions of Tibetans as Chinese and how this narrative serves to justify the state’s military and infrastructure development activities in Tibet. These state-

produced narratives are not based on how Tibetans themselves identify and barely engage the development of Tibetans as a people and their land through Tibetan civilizational accounts by Tibetans themselves. Instead, these state-accounts of Tibetan people and history are designed by the state to construct the state's own identity as a benevolent state concerned with its backward subjects against the backdrop of western imperial domination for its domestic and international audiences. This new identity of the benevolent Chinese state also works to erase the state's original identity in Tibet as foreign and its relation to Tibet as that of occupation and colonization. Such discursive and rhetorical method which frames the issue of Tibet as domestic internal matters of China, also operates to shut down all discussions concerning Tibet that diverge from the state's official accounts. This is how liberal Chinese advocates such as Zhiyong, who insist on citizen-led political mobilizations in China to challenge the state to democratize, continually fail to see state-sponsored securitization campaigns that terrorize Tibetans through colonial frameworks. By pinpointing how such discursive methods are constructed, I have shown how colonial governmentalities in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia (under the current administrative control of the central state in Beijing) are allowed to continue operating under the banner of a modern nation-state in what we assume to be the 'post' colonial era. Such reconfiguration of state identity-making is how modern forms of colonialisms are allowed to function anew as liberal modern states in the present moment. While scholars of empire studies, postcolonial studies, and settler colonial studies have stressed how the state continually seeks to redefine itself through its subjects, developing scholarship in Tibetan studies and China studies has only recently considered such approaches for analyzing the development of the current state in Beijing. I hope this work contributes to this development and encourages more rigorous approaches for analyzing Tibet's relation to China that does not shy away from engaging imperial, settler colonial, and securitization analytics that takes the state's own identity-making approaches into account.

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