

# Planting and its Discontents: or How Nomads Produced Spaces of Resistance in China's Erstwhile Xikang Province

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*Di guang ren xi*—the land is vast and the people are few. This classical idiom appears in nearly every major Chinese publication on the Kham region from the early twentieth century. It figures as a sort of talking point, an apologia for China's slow progress in modernizing its southwestern borderlands. Kham was unlike most other Chinese places: not only did it look big on a flat map (larger than Texas by some estimates), but it also had a vertical range of over two miles, rising from the Sichuan basin to the southeast of the Tibetan plateau. Kham's upper reaches could not support agriculture of any kind and were populated mainly by nomadic yak herders, or by no one at all. The land was vast and the people were few.

A modern Kham needed people. In 1938 the chairman of an experimental land reclamation project toured several counties in Sichuan Province looking for eighty farmers and one hundred stonemasons to settle Kham, which was known in Chinese as *Chuanbian* (the Sichuan borderlands) and later *Xikang* (Kham-in-the-west). Xikang was slated to become a province of the Republic of China in 1939, but administrators faced logistical hurdles: a paucity of farms, combined with a lack of good roads and bridges made the price of agricultural products far higher than in China's lowland interior. Building things was more difficult at high altitude. The founder and governor of the new province Liu Wenhui emoted to readers in the 1940 inaugural issue of his own local newspaper that “the people of the interior could not possibly imagine the hardships we

have experienced” because of transportation difficulties, backwards culture, and a lack of economic development.<sup>1</sup> Against all odds, he and his settlers had finally built Xikang Province.

Planting was central to the building of Xikang Province. The administration relied on the practice of land reclamation (*tunken, kaiken*) which in turn necessitated the “transplant” (*yizhi*) of Han Chinese who were skilled in agriculture from China Proper, often under military supervision. Land reclamation was simultaneously an economic activity and an expression of human ingenuity, a mode of production in which farmers were agents and the land was reagent. In Chinese writings on Kham, farming as an enterprise was often favorably opposed to nomadic pastoralism, which was then the dominant mode of production in the region. Nomadism seemed to reverse the agential polarity: it was the nomad who responded to the land. The most consistent definition of nomadism in Chinese texts was yet another phrase from classical literature, *zhu shui cao er zhu*—chasing the water and the grass.

Modernizers were certain that nomadism was the unfortunate consequence of geographical isolation. When natural obstacles were overcome and agriculture came into contact with nomadic pastoralism, the latter would disappear, or so it seemed. By this point Chinese intellectuals embraced the tenet of social evolutionism that ethnic groups occupied higher stages of human progress than others, exemplified by the work of social scientists as Henry Lewis Morgan. Morgan's

argument that agriculture was a necessary condition for civilized society in fact meshed nicely with earlier Confucian ideas about the Divine Farmer and the sagely origin of planting. Like the mythical Divine Farmer, the Han would introduce farming and elevate Khampa nomads from their primitive mode of production. Agricultural reformer Han Dezhang commented in 1941 that "the people of Kham are in constant contact with the Han, and the gradual replacement of nomadism with sedentary agriculture is the inevitable result."<sup>1</sup>

But what if the replacement of nomadism with sedentary agriculture was not inevitable? Recent work by political theorist James C. Scott depicts nomadism and other marginalized modes of production as escapes from, rather than preludes to, intensive agriculture. In Scott's narrative, it is the proclivity of grain agriculture to concentrate subjects and tie them to the land that makes that mode of production so amenable to coercive governing techniques. Scott gives the rugged highlands of the Southeast Asian Massif, which he terms "Zomia" after Willem van Schendel, as the quintessential example of a place where states have had great difficulty establishing a foothold due to their "friction of terrain." He argues that this distinctive terrain has been used to the advantage of those who wish to evade capture by lowland states—and the Chinese empire in particular.<sup>2</sup>

The Zomia model sheds light on the history of Kham, but this essay seeks to add nuance to that model.<sup>3</sup> There has been some confusion over whether Zomia is best understood as a geographical location or, as Geoffrey Samuels puts it, "a state of mind and a mode of behaving."<sup>4</sup> I would argue that it is neither: Zomia is effected through assemblages of human and non-human actors. In my analysis the state-resistant spaces of twentieth-century Kham were not merely occupied by nomads, but were actively produced through the practice of transhumant yak pastoralism, a human adaptation to the local environment developed over centuries. Nomads in that context were not merely refugees from the

state, but counteracted it through a complex socio-technical system in which the production of food and the production of social space were inseparable. The first section of the essay addresses the geography of assimilation—that is, how space figured in the project of assimilation and resistance to that project. The second section further develops the notion of state-resistant spaces, theorizing them as social products rather than inherent features of the natural landscape.

The final section turns to the problem of justice in Kham. The drokpa contested planting in many arenas including land use and education, but I have chosen to focus on justice because it is often seen as a defining feature of the state. In Max Weber's classical definition, the state is identified by its "monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force in the enforcement of its social order."<sup>5</sup> The inauguration of Xikang Province in 1939 was predicated on the establishment of the Xikang High Court, tasked with this very mission. As Michel Foucault famously argued, the particular form of justice that characterizes the modern state is the carceral system, in which courts are linked to prisons. This conflicted with indigenous justice systems that emerged from the transhumant mode of production. The state-resistant nature of Khampa nomadic space is most prominently manifested by the inability of the Xikang carceral justice system to thoroughly penetrate that space.

The interplay of altitude and ascendancy here is food for thought. This is a story about Chinese modernizers who looked down on the people who lived above and expected them to succumb to the gravitational pull of civilization. But like David Bello in his study of sand flat cultivation during the Qing Dynasty (this issue), I find that the Chinese state's reliance on riparian land reclamation often placed its success at the mercy of goings-on in the highlands, resulting in what Bello terms "intermittent order." If this is an environmental history from below as per the theme of this issue, I will leave the

interpretation of "below" up to the reader, but with the following caveats. The drokpa are the subalterns in the conventional sense of that word because they were targets of cultural assimilation, and because for the most part their voices are not included in the written historical record, except when mediated by others. On the other hand, my sources come from below in the literal sense: they are the writings of the Han migrants and travelers who

ventured up into Kham from China Proper, as well as international anthropologists who composed ethnographies on drokpa life. By reading my sources against the grain I hope to turn this conceit upside-down: the drokpa engaged their environment through an advanced technological system that flouted the discipline of the grain-based state. They occupied a rarefied social atmosphere, and still do. The land is vast and the people are few.

## The Geography of Assimilation

*China has been a nation founded on agriculture since ancient times. The proverbial saying that "men plant and women weave" has been passed down through the generations as a clear mandate for the establishment of industry. All of China's heritage, institutions and thinking are products of agriculturalism.*

—Huang Fensheng, *Borderlands Land Reclamation Workers' Manual*

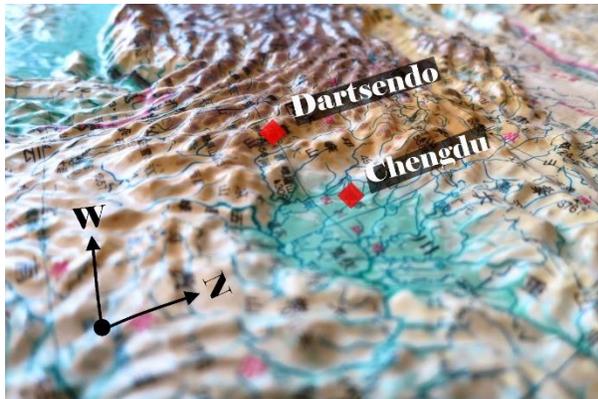


Figure 1. Relief Map of Xikang Province indicating the locations of Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, and Dartsendo (Kangding), a former capital of Xikang Province

China's ethnic policy under Chiang Kai-shek centered on the cultural assimilation of all ethnic groups into the Chinese nation. As Thomas Mullaney points out, while Guomindang leadership continually reaffirmed its dedication to a "unity of the five ethnic groups" (*wu zu gong he*),<sup>7</sup> this concept emphasized not so much multiculturalism as "the possibility of and necessity for assimilating such groups into the Han majority."<sup>8</sup> Political leaders sometimes promoted assimilation by juxtaposing it with more violent approaches. In his landmark treatise *China's Destiny*, President Chiang states that "our Chinese nation is the

amalgam of many ethnic groups," and that "the method of amalgamation is assimilation, not conquest."<sup>9</sup> Chiang was tapping into a nationalist discourse on assimilation not so different from that employed in the United States (the nation as a "melting pot") and borrowing directly from the Japanese notion of *dōka*, written with the same characters as the Chinese word for assimilation, *tonghua*.

Planting was a technology of assimilation. The Guomindang inherited the Qing dynasty strategy, known as *tunken*, of cultivating the ethnically diverse borderlands under military supervision in order to consolidate rule there. *China's Destiny* asserts that, far from being mundane, "borderlands land reclamation is a great task of the highest order in the building of our nation," and that the political contributions of borderlands land reclamation workers exceed those of urban workers tenfold.<sup>10</sup> Huang Fensheng further developed the Guomindang position on land

reclamation in his *Borderlands Land Reclamation Workers' Manual*, in which he argues that China's great culture and institutions are and always have been based on "agriculturalism" (*nongbenzhu*).<sup>11</sup> Land reclamation was not framed as an economic activity that facilitated the dissemination of national culture—instead, it *was* the dissemination of national culture. *Tunken* in its formulation was explicitly inherently political, a sort of politi-cultivation.

Land reclamation was the lynchpin of Xikang's development. Administrators advertised for migrant farmers in neighboring Sichuan and beyond, claiming that by turning "wasteland" into grain farming villages they could "benefit the nation and enrich the people" (*li guo fu min*). With its focus on accomplishing political goals through creation rather than destruction, *tunken* was engineered to resemble what political theorists would later call "soft power," yet in practice it was not always so soft. The Guomindang emissary Liu Manqing offers an interesting vignette of life under *tunken* in her *Mission to Tibet*. On her entry to Kham she passed through Ya'an, at about 580 meters above sea level, which she found newly under rice cultivation. Tibetans have sometimes referred to their ethnic nation as "tsampa eaters," but when the soldiers of the Fourth Regiment built a new headquarters at Ya'an in 1927 they pressed local men, women, and children into rice cultivation, apparently because the regiment's Han Chinese soldiers could not adapt to "the tsampa life."<sup>12</sup> Farmers were even forced to bribe local officials in rice in order to ensure an accurate weigh-in.<sup>13</sup>

Still, grain agriculture has geographical limits, and so the imagined geography of Xikang as a polity was not fully commensurate with the material practices needed to effect that polity. The paradigm of territoriality demands that modern administrative units were and are visualized primarily as horizontal spaces on two-dimensional maps, yet Xikang had an extraordinary vertical range of over four thousand meters (13,000 feet).<sup>14</sup> In the 1930s and 40s, a new wave of geographical and ethnological surveys in Xikang alerted readers

throughout China to what many local administrators already knew: it was Xikang's vertical dimensions that placed the greatest limitations on its assimilation into the Chinese nation.

In horizontal terms, Xikang was bounded by autonomous Tibet, British India, and British-controlled Burma to the west, and by the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan to the east. The border between Chinese-controlled Kham and autonomous Tibet was established by the Simla Accord of 1914, signed by Great Britain and the Tibetan government in Lhasa, which established a division between "Outer Tibet" and "Inner Tibet," with Inner Tibet belonging to the Republic of China much in the way that Mongolia had earlier been divided by the Soviet Union. The Kham region constituted the southern portion of this latter territory. The process by which Great Britain became involved in Sino-Tibetan relations is beyond the scope of this essay and is well documented elsewhere, but suffice it to say that for the first time Kham was critical to China's international geopolitical strategy.

In many ways, Chinese rhetoric construed the settlement of Xikang as a mere westward extension of the Chinese republic. Writers often referred to everything west of Dartsendo as being "outside the pass" (*guanwai*), a term that had for hundreds of years referred to all territories outside of China Proper.<sup>15</sup> But beginning with Ren Naiqiang's survey tour of Xikang in 1929-30, Chinese readers began to pay more attention to the region's topography. When geographer Pinghai Chu toured Xikang with a survey team in 1940, he was compelled to note that "nothing is more impressive than the close relationship existed (sic) between the human habitat and the natural environment."<sup>16</sup> Major divisions in Kham's subsistence economy reflected the region's environmental diversity; most importantly, food production was divided between farmers (*zhingpa*) and nomadic pastoralists (*drokpa*).

It is possible to determine an approximate altitude at which pastoralism was the only viable form of sustenance. Chu's geographical survey team was careful to note the vertical limits of both human settlements and their food. Wheat, barley and "villages" all met their vertical limit at a little over 3,500 meters above sea level, while the cattle pastures (*niuchang*) extended to 4,199 meters. By contrast, his team did not observe rice—the staple grain of southern Chinese—being grown above 1,522 meters.<sup>17</sup> Agricultural modernizer Han Dezhang similarly noted in 1941 that house-dwelling Khampas tended to live below 3,400 meters, while pasture-dwelling Khampas predominated above this level.<sup>18</sup> American ethnologist Robert Ekvall noted that altitude ranges for farms and pastures varied according to latitude, but the figures he provides would put the upper limit for most of Xikang's agriculture at approximately 3,700 meters.<sup>19</sup> By Ekvall's estimate, yak pasture in this latitudinal range extended from about 3,700 meters at the lower limit to about 4,500 meters at the upper limit.

In short, there was a sort of "grain line" somewhere around 3,500 meters, above which farming villages were not viable, overlooked by large tracts of land in which nomadic pastoralists thrived. The fact that altitude was the major deciding factor meant that these two realms—the agricultural and the pastoral—had very complex borders that would be difficult to identify on a flat map. These spatial configurations complicated the process of cultural assimilation, tinging the optimism of Han observers with frustration.

There was some disagreement among modernizers over the degree to which agriculture alone was capable of effecting cultural assimilation. Observers who viewed the people of Kham through an ethno-racial lens were often optimistic because of the popular belief that people of Tibetan ethnicity were culturally advanced in comparison to other minorities in the borderlands owing to Tibetan Buddhism, which had promoted a

literate tradition as well as a rigorous philosophical tradition, at least among clerics.

Following her travels through Kham and Central Tibet, the Guomindang envoy Liu Manqing argued that even uneducated Tibetans were culturally superior to the "southern barbarians" (*nan man*) thanks to the transmission of folk songs and Buddhist philosophy. An agricultural expert from Tianjin named Han Dezhang noted in 1941 that "Xikang's nomads are primarily Tibetans" and that "among the various borderland peoples, the Tibetans are the easiest race to assimilate."<sup>20</sup> Encouraged by what he perceived to be an ongoing population shift from the high pastures to valley regions, Han further argues that contact with agriculturalist settlers would inevitably lead the *drokpa* to abandon nomadism.<sup>21</sup>

Assessments differed when observers emphasized mode of production over ethnicity. A 1931 article in *New Asia* commented that house-dwelling Khampas were "basically the same as the Han," but that pasture-dwelling Khampas were "not at all like the Han."<sup>22</sup> Ren Naiqiang, the preeminent scholar of Kham society, complained differing modes of production precluded the frequent contact upon which assimilation was dependent. He writes of Kham that "when the Han are transplanted there, other than engaging in trade they tend to reclaim the narrow strips of land along the river valleys. The pastures that cannot be ploughed they generally abandon." However, Ren explains, the "pure" Tibetans tended to live on the high plains, where they had for several thousand years been "following the water and the grass" (*zhu shui cao er ju*).<sup>23</sup> He observed that farming knowledge was not entirely absent from Kham's traditional society, but rather drokpa exhibited a cultural preference for nomadic pastoralism, and they generally considered farmers to be of lower status than nomads. Ren put his hope for Xikang's future in people of "mixed blood", whom he described as the "core" of society; they who tended to live between the river valleys and the high plains, often spoke

Chinese, and were more cooperative with Chinese officials. In true eugenicist form, Ren writes that "regulating Xikang's industry must

Fortunately for Ren, *tunken* was never just farming. In the Republican era the practice of land reclamation merged seamlessly with a variety of techniques of assimilation, from education to intermarriage. A 1931 manifesto for Kham land reclamation in the Nanjing-based magazine *Military Affairs* (Jun Shi) listed ten suggestions for improving the region, which included "transplant local soldiers into agriculture in order to further reduce the number of active soldiers," "broadly establish compulsory education" and "implement migrant land reclamation and inter-marry in order to eliminate ethnic segregation."<sup>25</sup> Land reclamation was a total system of assimilation that put Han Chinese in contact with non-Han, established agricultural villages (*cun*, the basic unit of legal and political administration), and funded the institutions that produced disciplined subjects within those villages as well as those within urban centers.

But the disciplinary institutions of the state did not function as well above the grain line as they did below it. Instituting primary education in the grasslands, for example, was a nearly impossible task. Sociologist Ke Xiangfeng spent a large portion of his 1938 field visit to Kham touring schools and speaking with school administrators. As he passed through low-altitude Luding county on the way to Kangding, he noted that there were over a thousand students in that county's primary schools, and while the county thus far lacked schools beyond the primary level, "many of the local people here have already been assimilated, and public order is kept marvellously."<sup>26</sup> Ke found that the greatest challenge to the project of assimilation was educating Kham's pastoral nomads. While in Kangding he spoke to the special education team of the Preparatory Committee, which experimented with "chasing after nomad children and living in tents, instructing the

follow from harmonizing its blood (*tiaobe xueye*)."<sup>24</sup>

children in practical knowledge" for several months at a time.<sup>27</sup> Another observer explains that education teams would place a large tent in a nomad encampment for use as a classroom, without the desks or chairs typical of an urban school. When the clan migrated between pastures, the "classroom" would be packed on yaks and moved along with the other tents.<sup>28</sup>

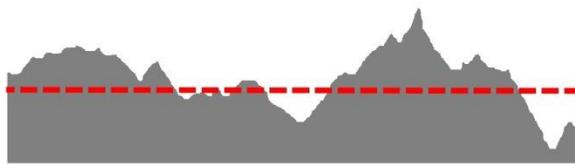
The operating principle of education in the grasslands was different from that of urban education, because the balance of power was inverted. In cities, families could be coerced into sending their children to school or enticed with tax exemptions. At urban schools, children of various ethnicities were placed in an immersive environment that facilitated their acquisition of the Han language and their assimilation to Han culture. In the grasslands, by contrast, it was the educators who were forced to adapt to a nomadic lifestyle. Teachers in nomad camps were dependent on their host clans for safety, if not for food and shelter. As Ma Yanling, an official in the Department of Education specializing in Tibetan education, pointed out, Han teachers in the grasslands needed to be highly sensitive to the particular desires of their hosts, because "if they don't send their children to study, what will you do then?"<sup>29</sup>

Cultural assimilation can flow both ways, and in the space above the grain line the current was often reversed. Another vignette by Liu Manqing illustrates this nicely. At nearly four thousand meters above sea level in Lithang, Liu found that nothing whatsoever was planted, and that the land was "out of cultivation" (*huangwu*), although the local population raised sturdy livestock. Lithang has no deep river valleys, and the elevation remains relatively stable at an average of about 4,500 meters, so that it was not conducive to agriculture. Liu found that modern education had not arrived in Lithang—there was only one primary school that catered to the small local

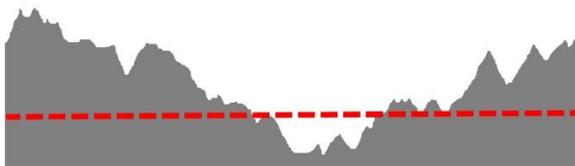
Han population and still offered only an archaic education in the Confucian classics. Law enforcement was handled by local lamaserics, and this system was so successful that, according to Liu, it had been used to justify "calls for self-determination" elsewhere in Kham. The only Chinese military presence was a lone border guard (*shou tu li*) with a Khampa wife. Liu Manqing, who spent some time at the official's residence, comments that this official, Wang Junsui, was "thoroughly Xikang-ized" (*Xikang hua*) and that with little actual authority, he "governed only over himself."<sup>30</sup>

Theories of social constructivism are limited in their ability to explain why education worked differently on the grasslands than it did in the valleys, or why Lithang was more difficult to assimilate than Ya'an. Historians and anthropologists who write about

territoriality are generally more concerned with how polities are imagined than with the material conditions that stimulate and circumscribe the political imagination.<sup>31</sup> Clearly the Chinese territorial vision that was Xikang did not match the reality of Liu Wenhui's territorial control. Large swathes of land remained beyond the purview of the Xikang administration. This situation recalls Lauren Benton's observation of European colonial powers that "although empires did lay claim to vast stretches of territory, the nature of such claims was tempered by control that was exercised mainly over narrow bands, or corridors, and over enclaves and irregular zones around them."<sup>32</sup> In what follows I attempt to account for the spaces that remained mostly beyond the purview of the state.



**Dartsendo (Kangding)**



**Dawu (Daofu)**

*Figure 2: 40-kilometer elevation profiles centered on two Xikang county seats, with the "grain line" of 3,500 meters indicated by a red line. This line gives an approximate indication of the maximum viable altitude for grain cultivation as well as the maximum altitude for Han Chinese villages. Tibetan names are given first, followed by Chinese names in parentheses. These elevation profiles are based on elevation data from Google Earth.*

## Khampa Nomadic Pastoralism and the Production of State-Resistant Space

*Whereas the migrant leaves behind a milieu that has become amorphous or hostile, the nomad is one who does not depart, does not want to depart, who clings to the smooth space left by the receding forest, where the steppe or the desert advances, and who invents nomadism as a response to this challenge.*

—Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*

Some historians and anthropologists have noted that nomadic pastoralism tends to foster certain kinds of political structures, so that nomadic pastoralists across various regions tend to have greater leverage than sedentary populations against the coercive measures of states. Philip Salzman's observation that among the Yomut Turkmen "the nomadism so useful in adjusting to a variant environment also served to undercut hierarchical power"<sup>33</sup> is notably similar to Rinzen Thargyal's observation that in the former Kham polity of Dege, despite the position of nomads as retainers of a sedentary lord, "absolute power of one social category over another, in a crude sense, did not prevail."<sup>34</sup> James C. Scott examines this issue at length in *The Art of Not Being Governed*, arguing that many of the mobile peoples of the Southeast Asian Massif are descendants of people who fled the Chinese imperial state to live in places where "owing largely to geographical obstacles, the state has particular difficulty in establishing and maintaining its authority."<sup>35</sup> He writes that "once we entertain the possibility that the 'barbarians' are not just 'there' as a residue but may well have chosen their location, their subsistence practices, and their social structure to maintain their autonomy, the standard civilizational story of social evolution collapses utterly."<sup>36</sup>

If we wish to posit something that we can call non-state space, it is tempting to define it in terms of the failure of states to propagate themselves in that space. Since most states were built on agricultural foundations, this might include all land that is not conducive to grain agriculture, such as the portion of Kham

above the grain line. Scott invokes the image of three-dimensional relief map with enough red paint poured over it to cover the arable lowlands; the degree to which we must tilt the map in order to cover any given location in red is a rough indicator of the degree of difficulty that states have historically had controlling that location.<sup>37</sup> The difficulty of the state—that is, the red paint—to cover higher ground is what Scott terms the "friction of terrain." In Scott's understanding, it is primarily the friction of terrain that sets the parameters for the non-state spaces of Zomia.

But this conceptualization of space largely reproduces that of the agriculturalist states Scott wishes to critique. To attribute the limits of state control to environmental factors is to ignore the historical agency of those beyond the pale. This narrative assumes that the people Scott terms "non-state peoples" are merely occupants of prior non-state spaces. Even if we accept Scott's valorization of these peoples, the greatest ingenuity with which we may credit them is that they were savvy enough to occupy a certain kind of space. In other words, there is not much art to his "art of not being governed."

There is simultaneously the danger of attributing too much agency to highlanders. Perhaps the most popular narrative of highlands peoples is the anthropocentric one in which political autonomy is explained as an internalized characteristic of the highlander, whether through evolution or psychic processes. This includes Robert Thurman's nationalistic claim that Tibet "has always been independent and always will be a free highland... where only people with special genes can be comfortable with the lack of

oxygen at almost three miles of altitude,"<sup>38</sup> as well as Yo'av Karny's broader claim that "altitude shapes attitude."<sup>39</sup> Like narratives of environmental determinism, visions of human potency are also easily coopted by the state; Heinrich Himmler saw traces of the Master Race in the people of the Tibetan plateau, and the eugenicist elements in the Guomindang were only too eager to integrate the rugged Khampas into the Han majority through intermarriage.

In understanding how resistance to the state was effected, we need not choose between humans and the environment. I echo many environmental historians who believe that, to quote Timothy Ingold, "the domain in which human beings are involved as social beings with one another cannot be rigidly set apart from the domain of their involvement with the non-human environment."<sup>40</sup> It would be better to think of the phenomenon of resistance in terms of something like Bruno Latour's notion of an assemblage, in which agency is distributed among a variety of human and non-human actors. The particular assemblage that we call Khampa nomadic pastoralism includes humans, bovinds, and grasslands as its most salient members.<sup>41</sup>

The problems with privileging any of these actors (humans, bovinds, grasslands) in our narrative, or even isolating them as individual actors, becomes obvious when they are evaluated on a large enough chronological scale. In the *longue durée* we find that they are mutually constitutive—that is, humans, animals and the terrain physically transformed one another through the evolving practice of nomadic pastoralism. Like all domesticated bovinds, the yak has been bred selectively since its domestication approximately five thousand years ago, but it has also adapted genetically to low-oxygen environments over millions of years.<sup>42</sup> The human drokpa are physically constituted by their herds in the obvious sense that their diets consist primarily of the animals' dairy products and meat, but they have also been physically altered by centuries of living at high altitude, which biologists now know has

given them the genetically-encoded ability to operate in a low-oxygen setting without increasing their hemoglobin count unlike most people on earth.<sup>43</sup> Given theories of environmental determinism, perhaps the most significant blind spot regarding the evolution of Khampa nomadic pastoralism was the degree to which it *created the grasslands*. Han Chinese modernizers of the Republican era who characterized the drokpa in terms of their passivity towards nature would probably have been startled to read the recent conclusion of a team of paleogeographers that, taking advantage of warmer temperatures during the mid-Holocene, nomadic pastoralists in Kham "created their own environment transforming forests and tall grassland into the present golf course-like pastures."<sup>44</sup>

Khampa nomadic pastoralism was (and is) thus not a passive response to the environment, but nor was it a more primitive mode of engaging the environment than agriculture. It is now generally accepted that the domestication of livestock in nearly all cases occurred within the context of agriculture, with animals serving as beasts of burden or as supplemental sources of food, and that agriculture thus preceded nomadic pastoralism.<sup>45</sup> We might therefore assume that the drokpa progressed from animal-assisted agriculture at the lower altitudes of the yak range to the abandonment of agriculture in favor of full pastoralism at higher altitudes. Indeed, Robert Ekvall observed this ongoing process during his field work in Amdo in the 1930s. Ekvall explains that during the winter, when drokpa are at their lowest altitude, they are also in greatest contact with sedentary communities, and that during this time farmers may choose to join a nomadic community.<sup>46</sup> Ekvall claims that "the trend is not to settle down, but to develop and practice movement from the soil to the high pasturage."<sup>47</sup> As noted previously, it was the conceit of some Han modernizers that contact with agriculture would naturally prompt nomads to settle; their misguided understanding of the stages of

human development led to bad predictions and ultimately frustration.



Figure 3: Tethered pack yaks in contemporary Lhagang. Photograph 2011 by the author.

Clearly there was a spatial element to drokpa life and its resistance to assimilation. The kind of space that I argue for here largely coincides with what Scott refers to as “non-state space,” but I find Scott’s term deceptive because nowhere is the state absent entirely; the spaces that he designates as such fostered what could easily be considered limited state apparatuses and were simultaneously included in the imagined territory of more fully articulated states such as China. Instead I am interested in identifying *state-resistant spaces* within Kham, or spaces that created dissonance between territorial visions and the actual exercise of power within those territories.

What is the nature of state-resistant space? I wish to reach here a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between space and resistance than the narratives of environmental determinism and human exceptionalism. The first step is to distinguish the notion of *space* from the physical terrain (defined as geological structures) and to define it as the experience of that terrain in actual practice; this move roughly mimics the

distinction that Michel De Certeau makes between *place* and *space*.<sup>48</sup> The next step is to acknowledge, after Henri LeFebvre, that space thusly defined is a social product that emerges in large part from our ongoing modes of production.<sup>49</sup> Much as Huang Fensheng identified China’s national culture as a product of agriculture,

Khampa nomadic pastoralism produced its own array of cultural practices within a certain kind of terrain. At the same time it would be horribly essentialist to say that this culture is characterized by resistance to state authority; my diagnosis of resistance is not so much descriptive of practices within drokpa space as of the effects of those practices on the enterprise of assimilation.

What enabled drokpa to produce state-resistant spaces was a set of technologies based on detailed knowledge of the local environment and its ability to sustain their herds. The role of the yak cannot be overstated. Nomads in other parts of Greater Tibet frequently herd sheep, but in Kham the yak, as well as genetically neighboring bovids, have typically provided the raw material for most of these technologies. The black tents known as *dru* in which most drokpa spend at least three seasons out of the year are made of woven yak hair, and they are heated with fires fueled by yak dung. Yak hair is also used to make nearly all clothing, and women must learn to both weave and felt it. The yak also provides all the

nutrition that drokpa need to survive through its milk, which is used to make butter and cheese, as well as its meat, although drokpa may trade with farmers to obtain barley flour and other agricultural products as well. In short, the yak potentially enables the drokpa clan to be fully self-reliant, so that in optimal circumstances it is not dependent on a state of any kind.<sup>50</sup>

The yak determines the normal spatial range of the drokpa clan and limits its movements. Ekvall explains that "the prime ecological factor which, with only minor exceptions, sets apart the Tibetan pastoralists from those in the arid zone, is one of altitude." As he notes, the yak can only thrive above 10,000 feet (about 3,000 meters) and below 17,000 feet (about 5,000 meters), although its range in any given location is usually far smaller than that.<sup>51</sup> The herd must be moved between at least three pastures corresponding to the advent of summer, winter, and spring, and these movements vary by season in terms of both speed and horizontal and vertical distance. These movements were complex and required an intimate understanding of the local environment as well as the livestock; for example, nomads in the Zilphukhog Valley would move both downhill and horizontally from their summer pasture to their autumn and then winter pastures to find fresh grass and escape extreme cold, but executed only a more gradual horizontal movement from their winter pasture to their spring pasture due to the weakened state of the livestock during this period. This was followed by a rapid uphill move to the summer pasture to escape the heat once the livestock had fully recuperated.<sup>52</sup>

The various technologies that enabled drokpa life, when taken together as what Deborah Johnson calls a "socio-technical system,"<sup>53</sup> must have seemed primitive in terms of their ability to produce raw calories (a field in which rice is unparalleled), but they were effective in empowering people to avoid asymmetrical power relations with sedentary

states by making drokpa both relatively self-reliant and mobile in a setting where population density was extremely low. This involved not only drokpa relations with the modern Chinese state, but with indigenous overlords as well. In his ethnography of formerly nomadic refugees from the Zilphukhog valley, which was under the rule of a noble house by the name of Yudrug-Tsang until the mid-twentieth century, Rinzen Thargyal determined that nomadic dependents were not miserably subjugated, as has often been claimed, but that "the lord/dependent relationship in Zilphukhog necessarily had to be reciprocal and complementary."<sup>54</sup> This was because the extremely low population density of Kham meant a shortage of labor, and while sedentary dependents of a noble household were somewhat grounded, nomadic dependents could leave to seek refuge with another lord (a practice known as *gotakpa*), and reasonably hope to obtain it. Thus, rather than shirk political power altogether, many drokpa used their mobility as leverage to obtain more reciprocal terms with local rulers. Similarly, a study of Kham land use published in 1949 by the Institute of Pacific Relations notes that nomads in the most remote areas generally were not required to perform *corvee* service to local lords, and that they instead paid a simple tax in kind.<sup>55</sup>

These same technologies enabled drokpa to resist the disciplinary technologies of the modern Chinese state, including compulsory education and law enforcement. More to the point, they produced spaces in which discipline could not easily be coerced by the Xikang administration. This is because political institutions ground the political ideals of the state in material reality through their demands in terms of infrastructure and personnel, and in nomadic space those demands were not often met. The most vivid manifestations of this problem (for the Xikang state) can arguably be seen in the arena of criminal justice.

## Legal Structures and Nomadic Agency: The Problem of High-Altitude Justice

*If we take the norms of this society and use them in that society, what is taken to be normal practice among the people will not be so in the eyes of the law; what the nation considers a crime will not be a crime according to public sentiment.*

—Review of *the Advancement of the Xikang Judiciary*<sup>56</sup>

In 1945 an unfortunate migrant named Wang Dezhong met his death at the intersection of indigenous land use practices and the Republic's agriculturalist regime. Wang had moved to Yanyuan County in Xikang's Liangshan district about a year earlier and "was a planter by trade," but he was seized by indigenous chieftain Ba Chengji after locals accused him of a crime. The great irony is that his "crime," as named by locals, was precisely what the likes of Chiang Kai-shek and Feng Huangsheng had implored China's youth to do in the borderlands: *gaitu*, or "altering the land." At an ad-hoc tribunal, the chieftain beat Wang severely and then shot him to death. In reporting this summary execution to the Chinese administration, Wang's brothers excoriated Chieftain Ba as a person who "treats human life like grass and truly disregards the discipline of the nation." If Ba Chengji felt that their brother had committed a crime, they said, he "should have submitted a plaint to the government or the judiciary so that they could attend to it."<sup>57</sup>

Wang's plight illustrates a paradox of Xikang's development: the Liu Wenhui administration wished to undergird its plans for economic development with modern legal protections, yet most counties lacked the resource base to support effective legal expansion. Large swathes of land remained entirely beyond the purview of the Chinese state, ruled instead by chieftains whose economic base included both nomadic and sedentary dependents. "Reform is hard," complained one reporter, "because though the chieftains no longer have administrative powers, they continue to have economic

power."<sup>58</sup> When the same reporter asked the chieftain of Garze, "if I live in this area, can I buy land from you?" he responded that "if you live in this area we welcome you, but you can only borrow the land, and when you are no longer using it you must return it for we have no precedent of buying land."<sup>59</sup>

The Kham that the Qing Empire left behind in 1912 was legally pluralistic by imperial design. *Tusi* or local chieftains administered their own law within bounds, and non-Han peoples even enjoyed a form of extraterritoriality within certain regularized prefectures. The Qing Dynasty, which expanded the empire to its greatest territorial extent, often took the political ecology of Inner Asia into account when implementing law; a series of legal codes implemented in Mongolian and Tibetan regions in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries charged fines in livestock for various crimes including robbery and murder. Moreover, the kind and number of livestock levied as fines varied according to local pastoral practices.<sup>60</sup> A robber in eastern Mongolia was likely to be fined horses, while a robber in Yazhoufu (the eventual seat of the Xikang government) paid in yaks.<sup>61</sup>

Legal pluralism is less conducive to nation-states than empires, and shortly after the revolution of 1911 the Republic of China attempted to place the entire region under a uniform code of Chinese law, resulting in the gradual uphill creep of legal infrastructure. During most of the Qing dynasty the Chinese court system extended into Kham only as far as the prefecture of Yazhoufu at the foothills. In 1912 a fifth branch of the Sichuan Province High Court circuit was established there (now renamed Ya'an). Following Xikang's accession

to provincial status this court became the main branch of the Xikang provincial circuit, and smaller branches were established in the cities of Kangding and Xichang.

Modern judiciaries change the way territorial space is perceived through the instrument of legal jurisdiction. In the case of Xikang, the introduction of a court system produced a particular territorial vision in which any given locality within the borders of Xikang fell under the jurisdiction of a Chinese county court with an attached jail. Space was made hierarchical as well; once the relevant courts were constructed, local courts fell under the authority of a nearby urban appeals court, and these deferred to the provincial high court. Thus, while early Han settlers in Kham showed little interest in controlling the space beyond the river valleys that comprised their economic bases, legal expansion in the 1930s shifted the governing paradigm of the Xikang administration to one characterized by territoriality on a provincial scale.

Michel Foucault famously argued that the carceral system of criminal justice is "the greatest support, in modern society, of the normalizing power."<sup>62</sup> Accordingly, Han administrators in Xikang made efforts to replace indigenous justice practices with standardized law (*biaozhun fa*) in which incarceration was the standard mode of punishment for non-capital crimes, but found their efforts hindered both by their lack of territorial control and by the difficulty of building new infrastructure at such high altitude. Incarceration became the standard mode of discipline for non-capital crimes. But carceral modernity is dependent on an array of highly-educated personnel as well as physical structures (courts and prisons) that were difficult and expensive to construct at high altitude, and thus the establishment of Xikang's justice system lagged significantly behind the planting of land.

Modern legal culture is, to a large extent, a material culture with extensive material needs. According to the 1947 work report, the first Xikang Minister of Justice,

Yong Cheng, "placed great importance in the form and spirit (*jingshen*) of the justice organ," and yet, "as the structure (*xingshi*) is incomplete it is hard to gain the faith of the people."<sup>63</sup> The non-Han of Xikang were simply not inclined to bring cases to the courts.<sup>64</sup> By 1948 The Kangding branch theoretically had jurisdiction over the areas that were primarily Tibetan, but even then this jurisdiction was limited mainly to the city of Kangding. Few counties above Kangding had jails, and the administration of justice was carried out much as it would have been during the Qing dynasty—by a local magistrate operating out of a small office (*yashu*), which was often in a severe state of disrepair.<sup>65</sup>

The Xikang justice system competed not only with the offices of the *tusi*, but also with an indigenous justice system that was better adapted to the grasslands. Violent conflicts among Tibetans were dealt with through vendettas between clans, a practice known as *titsö*.<sup>66</sup> Although this practice varied across time and space, the observations of a number of ethnographers give us a fairly clear picture of its basic functioning. In the words of Ren Naiqiang, "if one person desires revenge, the whole clan avenges him, and the whole clan also bears the consequences."<sup>67</sup> Vengeance could be enacted on anyone in the enemy's clan, whether or not they were personally responsible for the original offense, partly reflected the difficulty of apprehending a single offender in the vast grasslands. Vendettas could span multiple generations but were eventually resolved either through the total defeat of one clan, which often fled permanently to another region, or through mediation (*bardum*).<sup>68</sup> Mediators might be lamas or chieftains, but they might also be Han Chinese administrators. Thus, magistrates and other Han administrators might be used strategically by feuding clans but they rarely dictated the terms of judicial resolution.

Various localities had their own mediation traditions, and these often put Han Chinese at a disadvantage. Although fines were typically levied at least partly in silver, these

were often payable in kind, with livestock as well as manufactured goods. Han merchants were particularly vulnerable to being robbed by horseback raiding parties, but when they appealed to local authorities for help, they were likely to be disappointed with the result. A 1939 Chinese report on justice practices in various counties found that when two Han merchants were recently waylaid by robbers in Litang they were "merely compensated with items estimated at a high value that were in fact worthless, not comprising one tenth of the value of the stolen goods."<sup>69</sup> In another case, a group of monks from Nyarong who had taken justice into their own hands by slaying a lama whom they accused of theft were subjected to nothing more than a fine of 300 sheep and 100 taels of silver by the local magistrate, but they refused to pay so much silver, arguing that the sum was without precedent; in fact, they proceeded to riot.<sup>70</sup> The expectation among the Han was that criminal justice was a necessarily coercive process, but mediation among Khampas was a more symmetrical process in the form of an agreed-upon transaction. With its meager agricultural base in a predominantly pastoral region, the Han population had little power to dictate the prices of goods, and thus there was widespread frustration over the general reliance on fines and mediation to resolve violent cases.

Becoming involved a case could be extremely dangerous for a magistrate. For example, in the final years of the Qing dynasty a mule thief named Kalsang Chinpe was intercepted by a vengeful enemy (*choujia*) from another clan and brought before a Dawu official who had him beaten and thrown in a river. Kalsang Chinpe escaped and ran home, later returning to Dawu with a band of twenty-four of his fellow clansmen, murdering the official who had tried him and plundering his household. The case went unresolved for twenty-five years until the son of the murdered official asked a merchant to report the case in another county, where the local magistrate was successful in convincing the clan headman to come in for a negotiation.<sup>71</sup>

While Chinese officials often played a role in grasslands justice, they had very little power to coerce a particular resolution. Another case illustrates this even more clearly: In 1929 a Han Chinese merchant by the name of Yan Chaolu was leading a caravan of mules through the mountains of Xikang when he ventured into the middle of a long-standing clan war between the people of Nyarong and Driwo. The caravan was ambushed by a group of men from Nyarong, and five of their mules were stolen before they managed to flee. When the magistrate Zhang Rongxuan of Nyarong paid a visit to Mr. Yan's home county of Dawu he admitted that the robbery had been carried out by people who were supposed to be under his jurisdiction. He had planned to negotiate a resolution on their behalf, but eight riders caught up to him in town and sabotaged the negotiations. Even after Yan assembled a force of more than one hundred guns to coerce the riders into an agreement in the Dawu market, the riders mocked him and rode off casually—according to the author of this report, "as if without a care"<sup>72</sup>—as the band of men from Dawu looked on helplessly, too frightened to actually engage them in a gun fight. Even after Zhang Rongxuan's successor managed to retrieve the stolen mules some time later, Mr. Yan was so intimidated by the horsemen of Nyarong that he would not travel there to collect them, and they had to be sent over to Dawu.<sup>73</sup>

In sum, justice among drokpa clans operated on a different set of principles from the modern Chinese justice system. The grasslands acted as a form of state-resistant space, but they were never socially isolated from the more densely-populated river valleys under state control. Although it seemed barbaric to state administrators, drokpa justice was simply more effective in a grasslands environment. The Chinese emphasis on apprehending individual suspects was manifestly less likely to succeed in a setting where population density was so low, since suspects could easily flee on horseback. Further, unlike the Republican legal system, the

*titsö* system did not rely on any particular kind of infrastructure to operate, much less a bureaucracy.

When reading Chinese sources on criminal justice in Xikang one must learn to read against the grain: what for Khampas constituted justice was often coded as criminal behavior by the Chinese state (and perhaps vice versa). When magistrates failed to maintain order, Chinese narratives typically blamed human recalcitrance. In *The Xikang Problem*, Chen Chongwei complains that Kham has a culture of criminality because “people know the list of crimes and punishments but they do not feel that being punished is something to be ashamed of.”<sup>74</sup> Han observers particularly

denigrated the horsemen of Nyarong, with its county seat at about 3,200 meters overlooked by high pastures; one 1930 survey report describes the riders of Nyarong as “fierce and fearless” and asserts that “they love murder and robbery.”<sup>75</sup> What is lacking in these narratives is an acknowledgment of the role of non-human factors in resisting the state, or what Jane Bennett calls “the recalcitrance of things.”<sup>76</sup> Resistance was effected by the assemblage that is Khampa nomadic pastoralism, which precluded the asymmetry of power necessary for the uniform administration of a carceral system within Xikang’s imagined territory.

## Beyond Xikang

*Environment engulfs everyone.*

—Robert Ekvall, *Fields on the Hoof: Nexus of Tibetan Nomadic Pastoralism*

In his influential essay “Doing Environmental History” Donald Worster points out that “in any particular place nature offers the humans dwelling there a flexible but limited set of possibilities for getting a living.”<sup>78</sup> For many who study ecology, nomads seem to be victims of severe environmental limitations—“following the water and the grass,” to use the Chinese idiom—for why else would one choose that path? Nomads are among the global class of what Rob Nixon calls “ecosystem people,” or people who are “dependent for their survival on the seasonal cycles of adjoining ecosystems and therefore often living in circumstances of necessarily adaptable mobility.”<sup>79</sup> From another perspective, however, harsh environments often place limitations on the incursion of agriculturalist populations. Consider, for example, sociologist Fei Xiaotong’s mockery of Han migrants to Inner Mongolia: “It was as if they had dived, headfirst, into the soil, as if

they were unable to see any other way of using the land.”<sup>80</sup>

James C. Scott’s work on Zomia turns the camera on the limitations of the grain-based state, and I have tried here to write in a similar vein. But Scott’s account, which its emphasis on the “friction of terrain,” devotes relatively little attention to the agency of non-agricultural modes of production in producing spaces of resistance. One unfortunate blind spot in his “anarchist history” is a lack of attention to the presence of coercive interactions within state-resistant highland communities. Very often resistance to the state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of force involves the use of considerable violence, or at least that is what I have found in my study of Xikang. Geoffrey Samuels has described Scott’s work as “almost an elegy for people who have managed to escape the state and live on a very local scale.”<sup>81</sup> I am more agnostic as to whether opting out of state justice is generally worthy of praise.

The underwhelming success of the Xikang project demonstrates that the Zomia model has clout in the modern era, at least to a point. From a vantage point in the middle of the twentieth century, it would appear that China, as a nation-state founded on agriculture, was impotent to develop the highlands of Kham. But already the 1940s witnessed an active discussion on whether or not state agriculturalism (*nongben zhuyi*) was a viable philosophy for China.<sup>82</sup> Industrialization would eventually transform China's relationship to the Tibetan plateau for reasons that were simultaneously technological and ideological, and the mental association of the Chinese nation with agriculture is far weaker in the China of today than it once was. Emily Yeh has chronicled the PRC's development projects in central Tibet since the 1950s, revealing that industrialization has complemented the agricultural penetration of the plateau through such innovations as plastic greenhouses and better transportation infrastructure linking lowland Sichuan to the highlands.<sup>83</sup>

Xikang Province was dissolved into Sichuan and other neighboring provinces shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The Chinese

Communist Party has developed ever more creative mechanisms for integrating problematic drokpa into the state over the past several decades. The Sichuan provincial government began distributing tents made of synthetic material to Khampa nomads in 2008, along with satellite televisions and modern appliances, in a project titled "New Tent Life" (*Zhangpeng xin shenghuo*). I recently came across the instruction manual for one of these tents, which explains that "with the development of agriculture and pastoralism, nomads' standard of living is improving every day, and nomads' demand for high-functioning tents is even greater; in response, the Sichuan provincial government has developed the new K4XZ-20B tent model." I am impressed by the ingenuity of this gesture, yet as a component of what Yeh terms the "gift of Chinese development," it seeks to erode the element of self-reliance and foster reciprocity towards the state. The dra or yak-hair tent has historically been part of a complex drokpa assemblage that is not reliant on government factories. Even something as subtle as a change in the way that tents are obtained has implications for the nature of nomadic space.



Figure 4. A dra (yak-hair tent) in contemporary Kardze. Photograph 2011 by the author.

## Notes

1. Liu Wenhui. "Fa kan ci [Remarks on the Launching of the Newspaper]." *Xikang guomin ribao* [Xikang daily citizen]. October 10, 1938.
2. Han Dezhang. "Xikang youmu minzu yu gongyehua" [The Nomads of Xikang and Industrialization]. *Dangdai Pinglun* [Contemporary criticism] 1, no. 24 (1941): 11
3. Scott, James C. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. Yale University Press, 2010.
4. There is some ambiguity regarding whether or not the Tibetan plateau should be included in discussions of Zomia since it is virtually absent from Scott's monograph, but Geoffrey Samuels argues compellingly, I think, that it is a fitting paradigm because, among other things, "substantial segments of the Tibetan population, particularly in the pastoralist areas, were effectively outside any kind of state control" ("Zomia': New Constructions of the Southeast Asian Highlands and their Tibetan Implications." *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 37 (2015): 234).
5. Samuels, Geoffrey. "'Zomia': New Constructions of the Southeast Asian Highlands and Their Tibetan Implications." *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 37 (2015): 225.
6. Weber, Max. 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 54.
7. Huang Fensheng. 1946. *Bianjiang tunken yuan shouce* [Borderlands Land Reclamation Workers' Handbook (Qingnian chuban she), 175.
8. The "five ethnic groups" in Guomindang ideology included the Han majority as well as Hui, Mongols, Tibetans, and Uighurs.
9. Mullaney, Thomas. 2010. *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 25.
10. Chiang Kai-shek, *Zhongguo zhi mingyun* [China's Destiny] (Bai cheng gongsi, 1944), 2.
11. Chiang Kai-shek, *Zhongguo zhi mingyun*, 87.
12. Huang Fensheng, *Bianjiang tunken yuan shouce* [Borderlands Land Reclamation Workers' Handbook] (Qingnian chuban she 1946), 175.
13. Liu Manqing and Lu Yi *Kang Zang Yaozheng* [Mission to Tibet] (Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1933), 17.
14. Liu Manqing and Lu Yi *Kang Zang Yaozheng*, 17.
15. Here I reference Robert D. Sack's definition of human territoriality as "the attempt to affect, influence, or control actions and interactions (of people, things, and relationships) by asserting and attempting to enforce control over a geographic area" ("Human Territoriality: A Theory." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 73, no. 1 (March 1983): 55–74).
16. Millward, James A. *Beyond the Pass: Economy, Ethnicity, and Empire in Qing Central Asia, 1759-1864* (Stanford University Press, 1998), 3.
17. Chen, Hansheng, and Institute of Pacific Relations, *Frontier Land Systems in Southernmost China: a Comparative Study of Agrarian Problems and Social Organization Among the Pai Yi People of Yunnan and the Kamba People of Sikang* (International Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations 1949), 23.

18. Chen, Hansheng, and Institute of Pacific Relations, *Frontier Land Systems in Southernmost China: a Comparative Study of Agrarian Problems and Social Organization Among the Pai Yi People of Yunnan and the Kamba People of Sikang*, 24.
19. Han Dezhong. "Xikang Youmu Minzu Yu Gongyehua" [The Nomads of Xikang and Industrialization]. *Dangdai Pinglun* [Contemporary criticism] 1, no. 24 (1941): 11.
20. Ekvall, Robert Brainerd. *Fields on the Hoof: Nexus of Tibetan Nomadic Pastoralism*. (Waveland Press 1983), 5.
21. Han Dezhong. "Xikang Youmu Minzu Yu Gongyehua" [The nomads of Xikang and industrialization]. *Dangdai Pinglun* [Contemporary criticism] 1, no. 24 (1941): 11
22. Han Dezhong. "Xikang Youmu Minzu Yu Gongyehua."
23. Wang Dufeng. "Niuchangwa zhuangkuang" [The situation among the drokpa]. *Xin Yaxiya* 1931: 2, 23
24. Ren Naiqiang. *Xikang tujing* [Xikang Pictorial] (Nanjing: Xin Yaxiya Shehui, 1934), 25.
25. Ren Naiqiang. *Xikang tujing*, 25.
26. "Duiyu Yi Bing Xikang Zhi Tunken Jianyi" [Recommendations regarding military land reclamation for the fortification of Xikang] *Jun shi zazhi* [Military affairs magazine] no. 36 (1931), 39-47.
27. Ke Xiangfeng, "Xikang Jixing" [Travels through Xikang]. *Bianzheng Gonglun* [Border administration forum] 1941 1(3-4), 182.
28. Ke Xiangfeng, "Xikang Jixing," 185.
29. Liu Jun. "Youmu xuexiao" [Nomad Schools]. *Kang Dao Yue Kan* [Kham guide monthly] (4).10 (1943).
30. Ma Yanling. "Chuangshe Youmu Jiaoyu" [Creating Education for Nomads]. *Kangzang qianfeng* [Tibet Vanguard] 5, no. 8 (1939): 8.
31. Liu Manqing and Lu Yi, *Kang Zang Yaozheng* [Mission to Tibet] (Shangwu Yinshuguan, 1933), 30.
32. Here I reference Benedict Anderson's influential *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006) in which the author argues that nation-states were made possible by the ability of people to communicate ideas about the nation-state through print media and other forms of mass communication.
33. Benton, Lauren. *A Search for Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900*. Cambridge University Press, 2009, 2.
34. Salzman, Philip Carl. *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2004, 69.
35. Thargyal, Rinzin. *Nomads of Eastern Tibet: Social Organization and Economy of a Pastoral Estate in the Kingdom of Dege*. Leiden ;Boston: Brill, 2007, 65.
36. Scott, James C. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009, 13.
37. Scott, James C. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, 8.
38. Scott, James C. *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, 57.

39. Thurman, Robert. 2008. *Why the Dalai Lama Matters: His Act of Truth as the Solution for China, Tibet, and the World*. Simon and Schuster, 68.
40. Karny, Yo'av. *Highlanders: A Journey to the Caucasus in Quest of Memory*. Macmillan, 2001, XII.
41. Ingold, Timothy. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. Psychology Press, 2000, 61.
42. Yaks are also the livestock of choice among nomads in Amdo as well as certain other parts of Greater Tibet, while drokpa in other parts of Tibet herd goats, with social implications similar to those discussed here. Some nomadic households herd multiple animals. As one reviewer noted, the composition of herds is determined in large part by precipitation and vegetation type. Horses also play a critical role in drokpa life across the plateau.
43. Ding, X. Z et al. 2014. "Physiological Insight into the High-Altitude Adaptations in Domesticated Yaks (*Bos Grunniens*) along the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau Altitudinal Gradient." *Livestock Science* 162 (April): 233.
44. Simonson, Tatum S., Yingzhong Yang, Chad D. Huff, Haixia Yun, Ga Qin, David J. Witherspoon, Zhenzhong Bai, et al. 2010. "Genetic Evidence for High-Altitude Adaptation in Tibet." *Science* 329 (5987): 72–75.
45. Mieke, Georg, Sabine Mieke, Knut Kaiser, Christoph Reudenbach, Lena Behrendes, La Duo, and Frank Schlütz. 2009. "How Old Is Pastoralism in Tibet? An Ecological Approach to the Making of a Tibetan Landscape." *Palaeogeography, Palaeoclimatology, Palaeoecology* 276 (1-4): 130–47.
46. For example, see Harriet Ritvo, "Animal PLANET." *Environmental History* 9, no. 2 (April 2004): 211; James C. Scott *The Art of Not Being Governed*. Yale University Press, 2009. 29.
47. Ekvall, Robert Brainerd. *Fields on the Hoof: Nexus of Tibetan Nomadic Pastoralism*. Waveland Press, 1983, 35.
48. Ekvall, Robert Brainerd. *Fields on the Hoof: Nexus of Tibetan Nomadic Pastoralism*, 23.
49. Certeau, Michel de. 2011. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press, 74.
50. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 26.
51. In using the term "self-reliant" rather than "self-sufficient" to describe Tibetan nomads, I follow the precedent of Jones Schuyler. An excellent and concise discussion of the difference between these concepts may be found in his *Tibetan nomads: Environment, Pastoral Economy, and Material Culture* (First Edition. New York, New York : Copenhagen: Thames & Hudson, 1996), 57-59.
52. Ekvall, Robert Brainerd. *Fields on the Hoof: Nexus of Tibetan Nomadic Pastoralism*. Waveland Press, 1983, 13.
53. Thargyal, Rinzin. *Nomads of Eastern Tibet: Social Organization and Economy of a Pastoral Estate in the Kingdom of Dege* (Leiden ;Boston: Brill, 2007), 112-114.
54. Johnson writes that "While technology is not *just* artifacts, neither is the social just social. Many social practices, relationships, institutions, and arrangements are partly constituted by artifacts." In Layne, Linda L., Sharra Louise Vostral, and Kate Boyer. *Feminist Technology* (University of Illinois Press, 2010), 38.
55. Thargyal, Rinzin. *Nomads of Eastern Tibet: Social Organization and Economy of a Pastoral Estate in the Kingdom of Dege* (Leiden ;Boston: Brill, 2007), 195.

56. Chen, Hansheng, and Institute of Pacific Relations. *Frontier Land Systems in Southernmost China: A Comparative Study of Agrarian Problems and Social Organization among the Pai Yi People of Yunnan and the Kamba People of Sikang* (International Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations, 1949), 122. This study is harshly critical of the longstanding system of corvee service in Kham—indeed, suspiciously so—which would seem to reinforces the significance of this statement.
57. “Gaijin Xikang sifa zhi jiantao [Review of the Advancement of the Xikang Judiciary].” *Zhongyang xunkan* 1, no. 16 (1938), 11.
58. Sichuan Minguo 34 Nian Zhuang Gao [1945 Sichuan Murder Report],” 1945. Jindai Collection, Series 252: Xikang gaodeng fayuan. Sichuan Provincial Archives.
59. Can Yang, “Ji Xikang fengtu (xu): san, zhengzhi yu falu [Record of the Land and Customs of Xikang: 3, Administration and Law],” *Fazhi yuekan* [Law Monthly] 1, no. 5 (1941): 82.
60. Can Yang, “Ji Xikang fengtu (xu): san, zhengzhi yu falu,” 82.
61. Chinese versions of some such codes, including the *Xining Qinghai Fanyi Chengli* may be found in the *Zhongguo zhenxi falu dianji jicheng bing pian* (Beijing: Kexue Chubanshe 1994, 361).
62. A legal code from the Qianlong era for non-Han subject (*yu*) of Yazhoufu specifying fines primarily in yaks (*niu*) appears in Cao Lunbin and Cao Lunhan (ed.) *Xikang sheng Yazhoufu zhi* (Taibei shi: Chengwen, 1969), 326. Niu can also refer to cattle (*huangniu*), but I have taken the liberty of translating niu as “yaks” here since the yak and its hybrids comprised the bulk of Khampa herds.
63. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Random House LLC, 1977), 304.
64. *Xikang Gaodeng Fayuan Gongzuo Baogao* [Xikang High Court Work Report]. (Ya’an tongzhi yinshua gongsi 1947), 2.1.
65. *Xikang Gaodeng Fayuan Gongzuo Baogao*, 7.2.
66. Ibid.
67. Namkhai Norbu, and Library of Tibetan Works & Archives. *Journey Among the Tibetan Nomads: An Account of a Remote Civilization* (Dharamsala, H.P.: Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, 1997), 8.
68. Ren Naiqiang, *Minguo Chuanbian Youzong zhi Xikang Zhaji* [Ren Naiqiang’s Assorted Notes from his Republican-Era Travels through Chuanbian], (Beijing: Zhongguo Zangxue Chubanshe), 2009, 23.
69. Geoffrey Samuels observes that in premodern Tibet “disputes were settled by local mediation both in pastoralist and agriculturalist areas; they were rarely brought to the small number of state administrative officials, and there was no developed body of law, either case-law or statutory” (“Zomia: New Constructions of the Southeast Asian Highlands and their Tibetan Implications.” *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 37 (2015): 221–49). This remained true of Kham in the early twentieth century outside of urban centers.
70. Deng Durong, “Xikang ge xian sifa shikuang xu di si qi” [The State of Justice in the Various Counties of Xikang, Volume Four], *Kang dao yue kan* (Kham Guide Monthly) 1, no. 6 (1939): 26.
71. Ren Naiqiang, *Ren Naiqiang Minzu Yanjiu Wenji* [Collected Ethnological Research of Ren Naiqiang], (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 1990), 58.

72. Ren Naiqiang, *Minguo Chuanbian Youzong zhi Xikang Zhaji* [Ren Naiqiang’s Assorted Notes from his Republican-Era Travels through Chuanbian], (Beijing: Zhongguo Zangxue Chubanshe), 2009, 23.
73. The original phrase is *tairan ru bu zai yi* 泰然如不在意.
74. Ren Naiqiang, *Minguo Chuanbian Youzong zhi Xikang Zhaji* [Ren Naiqiang’s Assorted Notes from his Republican-era Travels through Chuanbian] (Beijing: Zhongguo Zangxue Chubanshe, 2009), 23.
75. Chen Chongwei, *Xikang Wenti* [The Xikang Problem], (Zhonghua Shuju, 1930), 193.
76. Dong Zhaofu, “Zhanhua Xian Tudi Renmin Diaocha Lu” [Survey Record of the Land and People of Zhanhua (Nyarong) County], in *Bianjiang* 1930(3), 324.
77. Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2010), 1.
78. Ekvall, Robert Brainerd. *Fields on the Hoof: Nexus of Tibetan Nomadic Pastoralism* (Waveland Press, 1983), 87.
79. Worster, Donald. *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 298.
80. Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press, 2011), 155.
81. Fei Xiaotong, Gary G. Hamilton, and Zheng Wang. *From the Soil, the Foundations of Chinese Society: A Translation of Fei Xiaotong’s Xiangtu Zhongguo, with an Introduction and Epilogue* (University of California Press, 1992), 38.
82. Samuels, Geoffrey. “‘Zomia’: New Constructions of the Southeast Asian Highlands and their Tibetan Implications.” *Asian Highlands Perspectives* 37 (2015): 225.
83. See, for example, the exchange between pro-industrialization economist Zhou Xianwen and the pro-agriculturalism sociologist Yang Kaidao in Zhou Xianwen, *Xin nong ben zhu yi pi pan* (Beijing: Beijing zhong xian tuo fang keji fazhan youxian gongsi, 2007).
84. Yeh, Emily T. *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese Development*. 1 edition (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press), 2013.