Clothing and Social Movements: The Politics of Dressing in Colonized Tibet

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CLOTHING AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:  
The Politics of Dressing in Colonized Tibet

by

DICKY YANGZOM

A master’s thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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September 9, 2014

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Abstract

CLOTHING AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS: THE POLITICS OF DRESSING IN COLONIZED TIBET

by

Dicky Yangzom

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This study examines the relationship between clothing and social movements. Taking the case of Lhakar in the Tibetan Freedom Movement, it explores how Tibetans in Tibet and those in exile imagine national belonging. Second, it delineates how the multiple uses of clothing, both by the colonizing state and the colonial movement articulates its importance in serving as a symbolic boundary in nationalist identity formation. Lastly, using methods of visual analysis, the research explains how the convergence between clothing, social movements, and social media creates a non-violent transnational social movement.
For *momo la* and *popo la*. 
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INTRODUCTION

In the early spring of 2008, waves of protest broke out in many regions in Tibet. A long time had passed since such a display of grievance had taken place due to the incorporation of Tibet into the People’s Republic of China. The silence that led many into believing that perhaps China’s influence had finally garnered influence over the voices of the Tibetan people was broken. It is in response to these events, and the growing number of self-immolations that have spread beyond Tibet that the Lhakar movement proliferated.

While Lhakar is a part of the larger Tibet movement, as its subsidiary strategy, it is aimed at creating a long-term engagement of resistance towards China’s rule in Tibet. Activists in the Lhakar movement describe it as a homegrown non-violent strategy of self-reliance and non-cooperation. Inspired by the Gandhi’s Khadi movement during India’s decolonization period and the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, Lhakar incorporates activism into everyday life where daily mundane routines are made into symbolic assertions of Tibetan identity. Acts generally afforded little consideration such as: the language one speaks, the clothing one wears, the food one eats, and the stores one shops from, are all brought into reexamination. In this regard, speaking Tibetan, wearing Tibetan clothing, eating Tibetan food, and the boycotting of Chinese businesses in Tibet are all subtle measures of political resistance (especially in Tibet where any dissent is quickly silenced).

This study focuses on the use of clothing in the Lhakar movement. Primarily it seeks to provide a deeper understanding of clothing’s relationship to social movements. Scholars for a while now have highlighted the general disposition in academic research of overlooking not only the use of clothing, but materiality’s importance in general. Only recently have we come to concede the “agency” and the “social life” of things in changing societal relations (See Crane
And, while the question that things such as are not knowable without human interaction is pertinent, I restate Appadurai’s point that “from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context” (5). Therefore, in the interest of understanding the meanings that saturate and charge social life, research that focuses on the material world is a necessary one.

The central thesis of the paper is that in the absence of recognition of one’s identity, the collective participatory act of wearing Tibetan dress creates a visual signifier. Clothing here is not only a physical boundary between one self and the immediate environment, but also a “symbolic boundary” (Epstein 1992) aimed at creating distinction between what Lhakar activists see as the “real/authentic”—that is Tibetan people (as rightful natives of the land) and the “inauthentic” that is the Chinese state (as colonial intruders). Therefore, clothing manifests as a space for distinction where embedded meaning of shared collective consciousness are made visible. However, as any explicit subversion to the state poses serious risk, clothing here remains both a “public transcript” and a “hidden transcript” (Scott 1990) of resistance to state power. In addition, the ritual of collectively dressing forms a relationship of solidarity through which Tibetans, inside and in-exile, imagine a way of belonging and thus, creating a transnational social movement.

The questions that are explored in this essay and the arguments placed forward are fairly simple. What can we learn about social and political change from the use of clothing in movements such as Lhakar? How does the use of clothing illuminate our understandings of identity formation? Given the globalized nature of the world, what does the return to tradition

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1 Scott (1990) defines public transcript as “the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate” and hidden transcript as the “discourse that take place ‘offstage’ where it is unobservable those in power (2-4).
represent? And as we come to understand colonialism as a thing of the past, how do we explain resistance in places such as Tibet in the context of current global politics? For those who see themselves to have lost their nationality and remain scattered in diaspora communities across the world, how do they seek representation? How do they then, imagine belonging? These are the questions that have perplexed me over the years and observing clothing’s significance in these situations, I have attempted to provide some form of understanding.

In the first chapter, I have focused on the broader relations between clothing and social movements by exploring its interdisciplinary nature. In doing so, for analytical purposes, clarified taxonomies of fashion and clothing, and its relationship to tradition and modernity. To provide a broader context, I have briefly explored the historical conditions that surround the phenomenon and explained why a framework of clothing is more appropriate in its relationship to tradition. The last section then briefly discusses how Lhakar developed in these contexts, what it means, and how activists create these meanings.

Chapter two juxtaposes the use of Tibetan clothing by the Chinese state. In light of the debate over China’s ethnic paradigm, questions concerning multiculturalism’s representation through clothing are brought into exploration. Historical and political context is provided again by studying the representation of Tibetan clothing in the Cultural Revolution. Next, the chapter focuses fashion, museums, and tourism and explains how clothing circulates in these sites. The following section looks at the Hanfu clothing movement of Han Chinese (the ethnic majority). The development of multiple nationalisms is examined to further complicate the use of clothing and its meanings.

Chapter three focuses on Lhakar and the various ways in which clothing is deployed as a political strategy. In greater detail it explains the three key elements of Lhakar: de-
collectivization of activism, weaponization of culture, and adoption of noncooperation. Reviewing how Lhakar activists in Tibet and in the diaspora employ clothing, its meanings are explained to illustrate clothing’s relation to practices of boundary making and how it forms transnational movements.

The last concluding chapter in brief reviews of the study’s thesis and major arguments by pointing to the contribution it seeks to make. The section on research methods and the acquisition of data explains why content analysis provides the best fit for this case study. It concludes by highlighting the limitations of the study and further research that can add to the growing discipline of fashion studies.
CLOTHING AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Even before we speak to someone in a meeting, at a party, or on the street, our clothes often express important information (or misinformation) about our occupation, origin, personality, opinions, and tastes. And we pay close attention to how others dress as well; though we may not be able to put what we observe into words, we unconsciously register the information, so that when we meet and converse we have already spoken to one another in a universal tongue.

– Allison Lurie, The Language of Clothes

The New is not a fashion, it is a value.

– Roland Barthes

**Tradition and modernity: clothing and fashion**

Clothing here is interpreted as a collective form of bodily practice that is located in everyday life. Unlike fashion, to which change is central and therefore being sensitive to time, the use of clothing or dress here has the contrary characteristic of enduring through time (See Paulicelli, “Fashion: nation and narration” 290-291 and Kawamura 1).² Fashion then in essence is an experience of modernity, where the replacement of traditional societies by industrial ones have given birth to capitalistic modes of consumer centered economies (See Breward and Evans 2005 and Breward and Gilbert 2006). By contrast, clothing does not necessitate change, for in seeking continuity, it aims to maintain traditional ways of life.³ What this paper seeks to explain is the role of clothing in social movements, particularly focusing on the Tibet movement. Clothing here

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² The need to methodologically separate clothing and fashion for analytical purposes has been emphasized by many scholars. However, such distinctions beyond analytical purposes are not necessary due to the interdisciplinary nature of the topic. For example: what is fashion is clothing but not all clothing/dress is fashion. Furthermore, historical dealings of the topic within various disciplines inform how future research is carried out.

³ This is not to say that the process must be dichotomous.
functions not only as a physical boundary, an exoskeleton that shields the natural elements but a symbolic practice in boundary making (Lamont 2002 and Epstein 1992) and identity formation.

Neither the study of clothing nor fashion is new, as its importance remains well stressed by the flourishing field of fashion studies. However, in disciplinary concerns, a number of new observations need to be drawn. In the existing literature in fashion studies (a broad rubric that umbrellas both clothing/dress and fashion), most researchers focus on fashion rather than clothing. Although many researchers use the term clothing synonymously with fashion, often their studies really deal with the social phenomenon of fashion as they survey consumption behaviors and the making of class distinctions (See Crane 2000, Bourdieu 1984, Simmel 1957, Veblen 1994). In classical sociology, it is Georg Simmel who in the study of imitation practices and wealth accumulation, insisted that “fashion does not exist in tribal and classless societies” (1957, 541). Veblen in developing his idea of “conspicuous consumption,” like Simmel, was observing class behavior. In addition, both Bourdieu (1984) and Crane (2000) also observe practices of making distinction through symbolic boundaries. However, in their examination of post-industrial Western societies, class perspectives continue to dominate their analytical framework.

Alternatively, anthropologists have frequently studied clothing (often in small-scale economies of Non-Western societies), where clothing is explored as means of communication. Yet, the approach of focusing “overwhelmingly on European and Western cultures while giving little attention to Asia, Africa, and Latin America” is well noted by (Baizerman, Eicher, and Cerny 2000). They assert that the term “traditional dress,” “connotes a static image and often provokes romanticism. Traditional dress is often considered ‘authentic,’ implying that the dress… remains free from the influence of modern civilization” (Baizerman et al. 106). This bias
of affording greater analytical sophistication to the study of Western clothing while deducing Non-Western clothing into images of primitivism, tribalism, and exoticism, creates discriminative knowledge within disciplines themselves. The basis of cultural, historical, and racial difference then comes to aid in a hegemonic construction of an imagined “other” where such “orientalist” views have well-known political and social consequences. Hence, more work is needed where appropriate histories are not neglected and economic development does not necessarily parallel cultural progress. Otherwise, we fail to grasp the cultural and political agency of clothing in the non-Western world.

On the other hand, historians and scholars of material culture have also explored fashion and clothing. Here, the tendency has been to pay attention to the aesthetic dimension of material culture (including clothing) while downplaying its political motivation or its relationship to social movements. In the case of books on Tibetan clothing, most often clothing is only studied for its esoteric qualities. This is seen in books developed both in the Tibetan exile cultural institutions such as the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA) or propaganda publications from Beijing. Both draw on the physical qualities of clothing; providing very little understanding of its political meaning. In added irony, Beijing’s publications on Tibetan clothing make use of its aesthetic qualities to further state propaganda in creating a narrative of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as a multi-national and a multi-cultural state.

While all these approaches, have added significant insight for fashion studies, this study by acknowledging the “agency” of clothing, hopes to give it the recognition it deserves. Given fashion’s economic power, globalization has been an important topic for fashion studies (See Paulicelli & Clark 2009). However, based on the description of fashion versus clothing provided

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Eyerman and Jamison (1998) provide a critique of Howard Becker’s (1982) “art worlds” and Diana Crane’s (1987) “avant-garde movements” for such limitations (8).
earlier, this study differs in that it varies its approach to the global market place. It brings to light what fashion studies has frequently glossed over—the dark side of modernity that scholars have alerted us of (Alexander 2013 and Bauman 2000). An example of this is can be seen in the collapse of the Rana Plaza factory building in Bangladesh (compared to the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York). The poorly built garment factory with unfair wages, and its thick red tape of bureaucracy left 1,133 factory workers dead, 2500 injured, and 800 children orphaned.\(^5\) Zygmunt Bauman’s work on liquid modernity, consumerism, and the adiaphora that stems from global capitalism is placed in perspective when such tragic events are prerequisite to overcome our moral numbness.

I raise these points because the focus on the agency of fashion over clothing has overshadowed fashion studies’ magnitude to explain resistance to modernity, globalization, and Westernization (this is not to suggest that considering geographic case studies, it has to be a dichotomous process of either embracing Western cultural hegemony or its complete rejection, but that reflecting on these problems may lead to a more nuanced understanding of these processes). In these contextual relationships, for instance, we can then understand the complication of debates surrounding Islamic fashion and the Hijab, especially the proliferation of such concerns in the post 9-11 era where it is “perceived as threat to multiculturalism and to Euro-American norms and values” (Tarlo and Moors 2013, also see Hansen and Madison 2013). Even though, fashion’s power in the market economy should remain of serious concern, we should not do it at the cost of ignoring what lurks in its shadows.

As Durkheim expressed of the free thinker “that he should confront religion in the same mental state as the believer” for without bringing a religious sentiment to the study of religion,

\(^5\) See Jones, Dolly on the Rana Plaza factory.
“he is like a blind man trying to talk about color.”

So, it is my due respect for clothing’s agency that I approach it with the same fervor as do those who believe that by wearing Tibetan dress they are holding on to the last fragment of dignity that colonization has stripped of them. And, perhaps as did Durkheim in his study of primitive forms of religion to understand contemporary religious practices, the same can be achieved by examining clothing in non-complex economic societies. To lay stress, not only is the distinction between clothing and fashion necessary here, for in recognizing their different analytical capacities, we learn that clothing and its relationship to tradition teaches us that it is neither remote in a far way primitive place nor behind the windows of a time long forgotten, but located in the present in potent ways.

This study then intersects a number of disciplines, making it a useful addition to not only the literature on fashion studies, but other disciplines as well. First, it brings together the study of clothing and social movements, of which more research is needed (See Crane 2000, Tarlo 1996, Paulicelli 2004 & 2009, and Ramirez 2009). Clothing is inherently a social thing, for after all one simply dresses in accordance with one’s social norms (whether that norm is aimed at challenging other dominant values or in reinstating them). Therefore, it is not the individual acting alone, but a collective participatory act that is deeply dependent upon the recognition of society and others.7

The same motivation for recognition and behavior also underlies social movements. These are creative times—as much as it is politically thwarted—where as Eyerman & Jamison (1998) state, “the habitual behavior and underlying values of society are thrown open for debate and reflection, and, as the movements fade from the political center stage, their cultural effects seep into the social lifeblood in often unintended and circuitous way” (6). It is in these “unsettled

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6 See Durkheim (1965).
of debate and reflection; clothing takes political center stage in the hope that its meanings seep into the lives of the everyday mass, leaving societal values transformed.

Second, clothing and social movements for purposes of this study are delved in the context of Tibet. Numerous books have been published on Tibet, many dealing with the topic in a visual narrative and some on clothing (See Van Schaik 2011, Tung 1980, and Wang 2002). Yet, a multiplex lens that focuses on Tibetan clothing and its sociocultural or political realities are non-existent. Partially, this can be explained by the orientalist view of Tibet that Bishop captured in his book, “The Myth of Shangri-La” (1989). This Western fantasy with Tibet as a place of mysticism continues to hinder accounting for a more layered and complicated understanding of contemporary Tibet and its people. There is also the element of Tibetan Buddhism, the Dalai Lama’s international celebrity stature (granted also, Hollywood’s representations of Tibet, starting with movies such as Shangri-La, Kundun, and Seven Years in Tibet), and the internationalization of the Tibetan political movement that was launched in the 1980’s through which “Free Tibet” has become a global slogan.

Most importantly, Tibet remains a colonial domain of China where in the period following the Cultural Revolution, Tibetans witnessed the most brutal time in their history. If the period during Mao Zedong’s rise saw the demolition of Tibetan culture as Tibetans were forced to forsake their tradition for the proletariat uniforms--in the post-Mao era, a new policy of absorbing Tibetans as “ethnic minorities” under the PRC umbrella has surfaced. With this, Tibetan clothing has become a prime target of propaganda (See Per Kvaerne 1994) in creating an

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8 See Swidler (278).
9 See McGrannan (2010).
illusion of a multi-cultural state.\textsuperscript{10} Ethnic fashion shows and coffee-table books are produced to show how unique and exotic the culture of Tibetan people are, just as the same image is produced of other minorities who also contest being part of the PRC. Globally, what was China’s comparative advantage in the 1990’s (its people), have now developed into the new middle class. With this trend, the same old relations that existed in other colonial states are visible between Tibet and China (as witnessed by the development of Tibet as a tourist site for over 15 million Han Chinese and its constant differential policy treatment for the Tibetan Autonomous Region). Perhaps a new term is now needed to capture that orientalism is a phenomenon not exclusive between the East and the West but dominations of power relations between those of both the same race and geographic orientation.\textsuperscript{11}

On the flipside, this is perhaps what Eyerman and Jamison observe in social theory and cultural studies, that often “change is attributed either to anonymous, universal forces, such as modernization, capitalism, or imperialism…” (7). Like them, arguing in opposition to dominant macro approaches, the study contends that a bottom of up approach is necessary. Especially as clothing is located in the mundane aspects of life, it allows for the examination of how it creates political and social change in the everyday. And, when observed in such ways, one can see how Tibetans are negotiating such processes on their own terms. As the Tibetan writer Jamyang Norbu once explained the disappointment of Western tourists in Dharamsala (one of the many

\textsuperscript{10} Per Kvaerne (1994) goes far enough to state that the position that scholars should not get involved in politics is unsustainable as silence itself has much effect as activism. That “whatever part we choose to play, we cannot escape from the common stage in our ‘global village’” (166).

\textsuperscript{11} See Grace Yan and Carla Almeida Santos on self-orientalism in Annals of Tourism Research. “CHINA, FOREVER”: Tourism Discourse and Self-Orientalism. 2009. Note: While Yan and Santos explain self-orientalism, in the case of Tibet, it is still through the process of making the “other.” In that, Tibetans are not determinants of their own future and policies are hand down by the PRC. This nonetheless does not alter the argument here that orientalism is no longer a divided practice between the East and the West.
Tibetan refugee settlements in India) when they found Tibetans playing guitar and singing Bob Dylan songs. In all this, it is discernable that modernity for Tibetans has been a constant project of making by others, and in these social movements, a creative reclaiming is taking place.

**Historical rupture and the search for continuity**

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it.

Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968:2)

For Tibet, there is no post-colonialism. The realities of colonialism are currently taking place as most other nations in the world seek to reconcile with their colonial pasts. As academic discourse generally sees colonization as a thing of the past, it leads to forgetting the problems of those who continue to live its inhumanity and injustice.

Tibet’s invasion began in the 1940’s and by 1951 with the signing of the Seventeen Point Agreement; Tibet had been absorbed into the People Republic of China (PRC) (See McGranahan 2008, p. 177). With Mao Zedong’s rise, the Cultural Revolution was brought to Tibet under the guise of “liberation.” What was deemed feudal culture of the past was replaced with the ideals of Marxism-Leninism as Schaik (2011) states, “all expressions of Tibetan culture were banned, including clothing…” and many “were paraded through the streets wearing their traditional clothes… with signs hung round their necks detailing their crime. Anyone who

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13 China claims to have “liberated” Tibet from feudal serfdom while, the Tibetan Government in-Exile states that Tibet was militarily occupied and that the Seventeen Point Agreement was made to sign forcefully.
resisted the destruction of the ‘four old’\textsuperscript{14} would be subjected to similar humiliations” (246). What many scholars allege was genocide in Tibet, as death tolls are claimed to be over 1.5 million (See Kinloch and Mohan 2005),\textsuperscript{15} is more pervasively lived on through the cultural genocide that took place during these times.

In the years following Mao’s death, the new leadership under Deng Xiaoping adopted more liberal policies towards Tibet by allowing Tibetans to practice their culture and religion. Seeing a resurgence of Tibetan identity, it quickly took Tibetan practices as anti-Chinese, posting a threat to the “reunification of the mother land” (Smith 2008). Negotiations with the Tibetan Exile Government and the Dalai Lama had also begun, but its failure to establish China’s sovereignty over Tibet soon evolved into aggressive policies to integrate Tibet into China. Smith (2008) expresses how Chinese Marxist ideology rooted the cause of societal discontent in economic inequality but failed to see that the ethos of Tibetan culture was rooted in the pursuit of enlightenment and the belief that material goods brought greater suffering.

Such views are dominant in the current policies towards Tibet and the clash of values remain further divided. The development of large-scale infrastructure; deforestation; mining; relocation of nomadic populations into ghettoized settlements; communist patriotic reeducation camps; population transfer of Han Chinese into Tibet; language policies aimed at teaching Chinese rather than Tibetan; the making of Tibet into a tourist theme-park, have all alienated Tibetans in their own land. In the paternal and colonial rhetoric of protecting Tibet from foreign imperialists, China itself emerged as ruthless imperialists.

\textsuperscript{14} The Cultural Revolution was aimed at bring down The Four Olds, which stood for old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas.

\textsuperscript{15} Kinloch and Mohan (2005) go as far as to state that “should a forced annihilation of a nation’s identity, with an intention to physically destroy the group, be defined as genocide, then the Tibetan case would qualify for that definition” (198).
In 1959, following the exile of the Dalai Lama, large numbers of people protested Chinese presence in Tibet and guerilla fighting with the support of the American CIA continued on (See McGranahan 2010). Again in the period from 1987 to 1989, pro-independence protests had swept across Tibet, resulting to the declaration of martial law in many areas of Tibet. In the most recent events, many took to the streets again in 2008 to protest the occupation of Tibet, which resulted in violent clashes between the state and protestors. This combined with the constant rate of self-immolations in Tibet, Nepal, and India (where today the number of known cases add to 130), have added to a growing national consciousness.

In his reflections on the task of philosophy, the political thinker Alasdair MacIntyre (2006) claims “an epistemological crises is always a crisis in human relationships” (5). Defining culture as a shared schema, he explains how modes of crises break down the schemata that humans depend upon to make life intelligible. Seeing that history is also a schematic narrative, its rupture also often demands a repair—in drawing rational interpretations of these crisis events. Arguing that Tibet’s occupation and the cultural genocide has fundamentally altered human relationships—therefore representing an epistemological crisis, the return to traditional clothing and resistance to the gift of Chinese development (Yeh 2013), is an attempt to create intelligible meaning of the political turmoil in Tibet. In other words, through the use of traditional clothing (the return to tradition), it is an attempt towards restoring the cultural schemata.

**Lhakar: non-violence, tradition, and activism**

This modest movement called Lhakar comes from the fact that I am Tibetan, and it is like a note reminding us that we are Tibetan in our daily life. Through this movement, we restore, renovate and keep our language, culture, identity and tradition.

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16 Ibid.
Through this technique we can keep the people of the Snowland’s soul language till the end of humankind. This technique helps us retain Tibetan culture, Tibetan good morals and the traditions, which are born from our soul language.

– Lhakar Pledge

Clothing in particular provides useful grounds for resistance as it is a taken for granted aspect of everyday life. In authoritarian regimes such as China where collective expressions of dissent are quickly suppressed by the state through military means, wearing Tibetan clothing is seen a more sustainable and non-violent way of long-term engagement in the struggle for freedom. What Scott (1985) in his study of Malay peasants calls, “everyday forms of resistance” and “the public/hidden transcript” of the poor; for the luxury of open, organized, political activity is not only rare throughout history, but also most often crushed by the dominating power (xvi). It is in response to these political realities of colonization that Lhakar activists in the Tibet movement have re-conceptualized Tibetan activism through “personal actions such as wearing traditional clothes” to which they claim the use of “individual space to assert an identity that has been suppressed for decades.”

Originating from Tibet, Lhakar stands for “White Wednesday,” and bearing religious significance as the Dalai Lama’s soul day, it is described by Lhakar activists as a non-violent grassroots movement. Inspired by Gandhi and Martin Luther King of the American Civil Right’s Movement, Lhakar is conceptualized in three strategic parts: de-collectivization of activism, weaponization of culture and the adoption of noncooperation.

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17 See Dorjee (2013). Note: the practice extends to all forms of culture, however the paper in light of its topic of interest focuses on the use of clothing.
De-collectivization is conceived as the decentering of activism from public acts of collective protests\(^{18}\) to personal and private acts. Drawing on what is seen as fundamental elements of freedom—that of the practices of daily life—Lhakar makes activism feasible without prejudice to anyone by mobilizing capacities into private spaces. Gandhi’s use of *khadi* also served the same purpose for it furnished the movement of being something that not only belonged to the Indian elite but making it possible for anyone to participate and practice their political agency. Furthermore, there was also the question of literacy, which is no different a challenge in Tibet, and clothing’s visual power is such that it is intelligible to anyone, especially the poor (Tarlo 1996). Hence, rightfully anthropologists studying clothing in tribal societies note its communicative capacity. In the de-collectivization of activism then, Lhakar activists claim “by treating their homes, workplaces, and computers as battlefields of resistance, Tibetans are wielding their limited personal choices and daily activities as a wedge to pry open more social, political, and economic space.”\(^{19}\)

Weaponization of culture is a response to the general attitude towards Tibet, as Tenzin Dorjee, a writer and an intellectual of the movement describes it, “a fragile flower: beautiful to look at but incapable of defending itself.”\(^{20}\) To counteract such views, *Lhakar* activists are using the beauty of the culture to defend it itself. The claim that perhaps “culture can save politics, instead of waiting for politics to save culture”\(^{21}\) is reflective of change in the interest of social movement scholars from studying structural conditions to culture (Eyerman and Jamison 17). Adding to my earlier point on the hindsight’s of focusing on unanimous macro forces, the

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\(^{18}\) Public acts of collective protests refers to what is known as the 2008 uprising, which was a widespread event in Tibet but quickly crushed by the state.

\(^{19}\) See Dorjee on Lhakar (2013).

\(^{20}\) Ibid

\(^{21}\) Ibid.
deployment of traditional clothing in Lhakar as a resistance mechanism towards colonization shows how “identity movements” resist modernity.\textsuperscript{22} Lhakar, like many movements of recent decades that are “traditionalist” and nationalist in their systems of belief, is not seeking political power but recognition of Tibetan value and identity.\textsuperscript{23} Like the role of Khadi in the Indian independence (Tarlo 1996), traditional clothing’s use in the Lhakar movement and its value laden qualities exhibit how those political meanings make them into cultural weapons of non-violence.

Non-cooperation in Lhakar is adopted from Gandhi’s principle of economic non-cooperation. Starting from daily experiences of inequality such as buying vegetables from Chinese vendors in Tibet at unfair prices, and the latter boycotting of these shops, Tibetans through their power as consumers have challenged their victimhood.\textsuperscript{24} In resistance to the sinicization (Chinalization) of Tibetan identity, these practices are not confined to vegetable vendors or economic practices but every day modes of existence that have become rituals of activism.

Lhakar is what Scott (1985) in \textit{Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance} calls everyday forms of resistance. That the weak never stand in direct confrontation with the state, fully succumbing to its power, but somewhere in between, working the system. Therefore, daily mundane practices as clothing should deserve more scholarly attention for like language; it has the capacity to codify meaning, making it intelligible to select members of a group and become visual boundaries of social category.

\textsuperscript{22} Modernity’s meaning here includes the industrial development of Tibet through colonization and locating these processes within technological and military globalization.
\textsuperscript{23} Eyerman and Jamison (1998) have also made the same points (17).
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid
Unlike the public squares that have become basic gathering spaces for civil society as seen in many of the recent decade’s movements, civil society in the designing of Tibetan cities has been made impossible without being crushed by the military. With the changing of street names from Tibetan to Chinese, to Tibet being run on Beijing time (even though sun rises in both places at different times); both temporal and spacial experience is dominated by the Chinese state (and that not so much the issue rather than being that Tibetans have little to no mastery over their lives—however, this is not to neglect how through time/space relations the colonizer controls and governs the native). Given such conditions--aside from clothing functioning as symbolic codes of identity--the use of one’s body as an outward expression struggling for the rights of the Tibetan people to their land and their future is a powerful political statement (those who believe that surface is antithetical to depth should think again). And, as Eyerman and Jamison (1998) point of social movements that after they are no longer active, their ideas and ideals, “serve to inspire new movements by helping to keep the older movements alive in the collective memory” (12), the case is also evident in the borrowing that takes between Lhakar, Gandhi’s Khadi movement, and the non-violence of the American Civil Rights movement.

As expressed earlier in how modernity for Tibetans has constantly been a project designed by others, the creative redefining of tradition, and the continued negotiations in the historical rupture that is colonialism is then made visible through the practice of wearing clothing. In addition, the paradigm shift of de-collectivization, weaponization of culture, and

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25 See article by Ford on public space and social movements (2014).
26 In Potala Palace, Claire Harris (2013) points to the construction of the Potala Plaza where the atmosphere is more reflective of a military parade ground (70). In fact, many Tibetans believe that the very idea behind the Plaza is to move the military in the center of the Tibetan city in the case of an uprising.
adoption of noncooperation in the Tibet movement has created a new “cognitive-praxis”\textsuperscript{27} (Eyerman and Jamison 1991) of national awareness and collective identity (21). In creating social change, clothing then has been central to the articulation of Lhakar’s beliefs and the clothed body a space of non-violence in creating solidarity for a pan-Tibetan identity.

\textsuperscript{27} The meaning and knowledge that defines a social movement.
ASSIMILATION AND MULTICULTURALISM: CHINA’S ETHNIC PARADIGM

If you behave well, we’ll protect your culture and benefits. But if you behave badly, we’ll take care of your culture by putting it in a museum.

- Han Chinese blogger addressing Tibetans in March 2008

The body… cannot escape being a vehicle of history, a metaphor and metonym of being-in-time.

One World, One Dream

In the 2008 Beijing Olympics, fifty-six children, each in clothing that represented China’s “ethnic minorities” paraded through the stadium only to be realized later that the children were of Han Chinese ethnicity. Exclaiming how wonderful the ceremony had been, a Chinese resident commented, “We recognized the third child on the left was wearing Tibetan clothes... It's OK if they're not real minorities.” The little girl had been lip-synching.

This moment is representative of how China has grappled with the question that preoccupies much of our current global society. In China, multiculturalism is both a parading event and lip-sync. In providing a coherent narrative for the consolidation of many groups who have historically and experientially lived as distinct entities from the People’s Republic of China, multiculturalism has been appropriated for a political goal. Seeing the dissolution of the Soviet Union into numerous independent nations, state categories have shifted to “ethnicities” from “nationalities.” This has meant reeducating newly acquired territories like Tibet to bear a

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28 See Harris (2012).
29 See J. L. Comaroff and J. Comaroff 79.
30 See Kielburger, Craig and Marc on diversity and multiculturalism in China (2008).
common imagination of brotherhood with other “ethnicities” and to love the motherland.31 For Tibetans, much of this has come by way of “patriotic reeducation camps,” policies teaching Chinese (the dominant ethnicity’s language), Chinese nationalistic education, museums, and through clothing.

Given that most anticolonial movements throughout the world were driven on the basis of a lack of recognition (and given its reappearance in contemporary Tibetan politics), some reflection on its relationship to multiculturalism is necessary here. Seeing recognition’s link to identity, Charles Taylor in *The Politics of Multiculturalism* (1994) places forward its central thesis:

… identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the Precognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced form of being. (25)

Identity is a dialectical process, as illustrated by Hegel in his essay on the master and slave,32 where through recognition and dialogue, self-consciousness is formed. The “I” that is the conscious self is then collectively expressed in the “we.” Thus, Taylor states, “we define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the thing our significant other wants to see in us” (32) and therefore recognition, “it is a vital need” (26). To add, contemporary

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31 See Bass on education policy in Tibet.
32 See Hegel’s section on lordship and bondage.
Tibetan identity and Tibetan nationalism does not only exist due to socialization\textsuperscript{33} amongst Tibetans but is shaped by experiences with China and what is deemed to be “Chinese.”\textsuperscript{34} Therefore, Tibetans (especially those in Tibet) as the sociologist W.E.B Dubois (1961) had indicated of being black, also live through the problem of “double-consciousness,”\textsuperscript{35} the two-ness of historically bearing a Tibetan identity and the other of seeing oneself through the eyes of the colonizing Chinese state.

\textbf{Cultural Revolution: Art and Clothing}

\textsuperscript{33} Although contemporary social interactions for many Tibetans are informed by a cognitive-praxis of nationalism, what I mean is that Tibetan nationalism has come forth due to China’s colonization—as it was of the many pilgrims who fought the British and in their defining of a common enemy, a collective national identity of being American was forged. Tibet as historical anthropologists have proven (See Goldstein 1991 and Shakya 1999) was not a unified state (in the modern concept), and as a nation was not unified under the government’s central authority. Yet, areas which were once self-governed on the Eastern border of China such as Kham and Amdo, have made more a fervent display of nationalism, especially as it observable with the frequency of self-immolations. If the dialectical process of self-consciousness and identity formation had a way of showing then it can be discerned by the nationalistic activities around the borders where as central Tibet, has been much quieter since occupation. It was those on the Eastern borders that fought the Chinese army while allowing for safe passage of Tibetan refugees into neighboring countries (See McGranahan 2010).

\textsuperscript{34} See Appiah, for he makes similar point of African-American society and Black Nationalism that is shaped by American society (154).

\textsuperscript{35} Dubois in the first chapter of \textit{The Souls of Black Folk} wrote: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.”
In unifying the nation, Mao Zedong needed a common cause to convince people of his vision and that a revolution was needed to replace the old ideas that had held back China for centuries. This task has proven to be rather difficult in Tibet where the people spoke a distinct language and followed a system of religion that had not only had a strong hold within, but towards its neighboring countries as well. In addition, Tibet did not carry the stigma of what is commonly known as “hundred years of shame” in China, for they did not share the sort of imperialist experience China did under the British and Japan. Therefore, knowing that Tibetan Buddhism would eventually prove threat to Mao vision, Tibetans were told they being “liberated” from feudal serfdom and were made to renounce all that was associated with the old

37 Tibetans at first welcomed China’s People’s Liberation Army, not knowing that soon thousands of Tibetans would be killed at their hands. In the documentary film Tibet: Cry of the Snow Lion (2004), footage shows Tibetans gaily dancing, not knowing what they were being “liberated” from.
way of life (Lixiong & Shakya 2009). However, according to the historian Dawa Norbu (1992), the introduction of Marxist-Leninist ideology in Tibet was a complete failure, since a class-consciousness did not exist and that it was further proven by the fact that the first to revolt against these policies were not the Tibetan aristocratic elites but the peasants (218).

Fig. 2. Kvaerne, Per. The Marketplace.

While propaganda during the Cultural Revolution was widespread to many parts of life, to the interest of this paper, I shall remain my focus on clothing: its use and its meaning. Quoting Barthes’ term Weltanschauung in Mythologies, the Tibetologist Per Kvaerne (1996) restates that ‘pictures... are more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one stroke’ (167). Although Per Kvaerne is concerned about Tibetan art and iconography, he warns against the use

38 Some Chinese intellectuals like Lixiong debate that Tibetans participated in the destruction of their own systems during the Cultural Revolution while scholars like Shakya contend that at the foot of a barrel of a gun, even the Chinese had succumbed to Opium. Furthermore, these events continue to prove a problematic past to both Tibetans and Chinese, one that China would today pretend did not take place. See Nycyak. "Tibetan Women: Thrinley Chodon & The Nyemo Revolt." Lhakar. N.p., 04 Apr. 2012. Web. 24 Jan. 2014 for mixed sentiments of those in the Lhakar movement as well.
of visual narratives for ideological purposes by the state. Pointing to an artwork titled, “The Market,” (See Fig 2) he explains how traditional Tibetan elements are used to create a myth whose “action is assumed to be stronger than the rational explanation which may later belie it (qtd. in Per Kvaerne 167). Employing biographical styles of Thang-Ka paintings (Tibetan paneled religious art) with geometric and rectangular borders; in the center of the image is a young couple strolling through the market place with a motorcycle loaded with newly acquired objects and the woman carrying an umbrella as she glances back. On top, are some women with their backs faced to the viewer in distinctive styles of chupas as two of them spread a scarf for the others to view. Only one faces the viewer at a slight angle as she admiringly smiles. All the women facing the viewer in the painting are in pang-dain (an apron generally woven in silk with multiple colors signifying the woman’s married status). Agreeing with Per Kvaerne that the image is charged with meanings of consumerism, I add that it also signifies a new purchasing power, an exercise in economic agency that is nonetheless brought on by China. The glance of the woman back to the marketplace represents a new desire, and a secular one at that (Per Kvaerne points to this as well) where consumerism has replaced religion. The central figures are all youthful, symbolic of a new future. And the motorcycle is representative of mobility. The display of diverse dresses (Tibetan regional costume) expands on the narrative of ethnic diversity in China.
This image in Fig. 3 displays a row of Tibetan women, in red Chupas (Tibetan national dress) and Pang-dian offering a Khata (ceremonial Tibetan scarf) to Chairman Mao. The back of the record are songs titled, *The Brilliance of Chairman Mao; Thinking of Chairman Mao; The Liberation Army and the Tibetan People are of One Family; The Party’s Policies Shed their Light Everywhere; Pure and White Hata for Chairman Mao; The Communist Party Brings Tibetan People Happiness; Brightly Shines the Thought of Chairman Mao;* and etc. in red letters in English and Chinese (indicated as Han language on the record). Above gazes Mao placed in the image of a sun with its rays shining over the women.

The uniform Chupas of the Tibetan women represent values of National Socialism and their standing in a neat row translates its ideals of equality. In addition, the color red of the uniform Chupas stand for its association with Communism, and the yellow Won-chuks (dress shirt) according to Chinese cultural values of color: heroism and good luck. As in all visual displays of Mao, he is either depicted larger or higher. Here, like the sun, he gazes over the people, and the ray of the sun symbolizes the light he has brought to Tibet. Lastly, the Khata’s
(written as *Hata* although its pronounced *Kha-ta* in Tibetan) significance marks the arrival of Mao as a celebratory event. This image, like many others illustrate how traditional Tibetan practices are incorporated to extend the Chinese Communist Party’s narrative of helping Tibetans and in doing so, highlighting its embrace of various ethnicities.

Of the many other propagandas, one common way remains through the use of songs and dance, whose performative capacities also include clothing. Reflecting upon his childhood before escaping to India, Sonam, a Tibetan writer on a blog post titled: *Thank You Communist Party of China*, tells the story of how he grew up signing a song that had been adapted from a traditional farming folk song:

> The East is red, the sun is rising.
> China has brought forth a Mao Zedong.
> He has brought happiness to the people.
> Hurrah! He is the people’s savior!\(^{39}\)

He recalls how dance troupes would travel to remote villages using local culture to teach Communist Party ideologies about Tibet’s liberation from serfdom and imperialists.\(^{40}\) However, at the same period he states that Tibetan culture came to a halt, where every song had to be approved by the Party and since has never fully recovered. For those who chose to disobey by singing Tibetan songs, they were publicly shamed as harboring “bourgeois habits.”\(^{41}\) He further

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\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) Shaming was a common process in Tibet during the Cultural Revolution.
criticizes the dress of the dance troupes stating they were “highly-sinicized versions of traditional music dressed in hybridized costumes.”

Likewise, Per Kvaerne as a Tibetologist, notes his experience in Amdo, Tibet during the 1980s of witnessing folk-performances, Chinese pop, disco and break dancing. Adding that these were superficial shows of diversity and equality amongst China’s ethnicities, therefore being an expression of their happiness due to the leadership of the Communist Party. He states these displays were a:

Subtle message, an essential meaning which was conveyed by the dress of the dancers, which was just as gaudy and unrealistic as any to be found… Official folk culture in contemporary China is entertainment, circus, show – nothing more. Further, the personal

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appearance of the dancers – their heavy make-up and expressionless facial features – conforms to Chinese, not Tibetan aesthetic ideals. What we see there is not Tibetan folk-culture at all, but a modern Chinese cultural idiom masquerading as Tibetans. In critique of Tibetans in Tibet who participate in these events, he states:

As row upon row of [Tibetan] young women and men, who dressed up in imitations of Tibetan chupa filed before the local nomenklatura, one was struck not only by the incongruity of Chinese pink straw hats as part of Tibetan dress, but on a deeper level one realizes that one is witnessing a call to blind political obedience, collective existence and cultural uniformity. As shown in Fig 4., the gathering crowd is not in Tibetan dress but rather in the proletariat uniform of the time—although the image is taken in a Tibetan village. And only members of the dance troupe are partially wearing Tibetan dress while partially dressed in the proletariat uniform (See hat). The use of both Tibetan and the Chinese proletariat uniform in such images remain indicative of challenges on part of the Chinese state as they apply their own values of communism onto another society, all the while struggling to sincerely incorporate the distinctive individual culture of the Tibetan people. While dance troupes in general create spectacular shows, this exposes how such events were remarkable renderings; mix-matched oddities meant to pass as real culture and which they often did, judging by Per Kvaerne’s statement on the presence of blind obedience. The hybridity in clothing in these performances are then more

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Emma Tarlo (1996) discusses the problem of what to wear during India’s decolonization period where Western items of clothing were incorporated into traditional dress. This would symbolically show that India embraced both a Western modernity while, keeping their cultural roots in defining progressiveness on their terms. While, the mish-mash of outfit of the Tibetan dance troops similarly show how internal political strife often manifest into visual embodiments
than a sartorial transition. Rather, they are conscious political strategies on part of those in power to dominate another group of people, making these performances theaters of cultural warfare.

**Museums and Tourism: Tibet on Display**

Although men appear to be the agents of defining shell value, in fact, without shells, men cannot define their own value; in this respect, shells and men are reciprocally agents of each other’s value definition.

- Nancy D Munn

"The nation-state was never simply a political entity. It was always also a symbolic formation - a 'system of representation' - which produced an 'idea' of a nation as an 'imagined community', with whose meanings we could identify and which through this imaginary identification, constituted its citizens as 'subjects'."

- Stuart Hall

Celebrated as memorials and monuments, museums are sites of memory where objects are refracted from time for the safekeeping its memory. And, in modern societies it is deeply linked with tourism where cultural experiences of sightseeing often involve “going to museums.”

Through these spaces and refracted objects, people can revisit the past while learning unique histories, thus transforming museums into powerful institutions of knowledge dissemination. Like banks with financial ebbs and flows, they control stories of cultural heritage, while having formidable monopoly over how communities are represented and the circuitous ways in which these cultural currencies are valued. What stories are told, whom do they belong to, and how true are they to the socio-historical context of these objects? As borders continue to change, and groups within nations dream of shedding their “sub-ness” as Anderson (1991) put it, museums as systems of representation remain contested zones over the narrative of who is and who is not part of its “imagined community” (3). In other words, it is as political as it is a cultural site for nation through dress, we must note that Tibetans were forced to display mixed elements of National Socialism and traditional Tibetan clothing.
building and in Tibet; such narratives are closely tied to how through clothing Tibetans are represented.

Fig. 5. A display of Tibetan nomadic life at the Ethnic Museum in Beijing, China. Source: China Ethnic Museum, n.d.

In 1992, China built its first “China Ethnic Museum,” also known as the “Chinese Ethnic Culture Park” in Beijing. Consisting of mock creations representing the 56 ethnicities, China claims that through the demonstration of each one’s cultural lifestyle and the preservation of their relics, it is intended to spread ethnic knowledge. On certain days, Tibetan women in chupas perform folk songs; and on other days tents are pitched up, as actors in yak costumes roll on the grass, and Tibetan men and women in sinicized translations of Tibetan clothing gather

47 Ibid.
around, while neon colored *lungtās* (Tibet Buddhist prayer flags) fly low on the ground in midst of Beijing’s city life. The chupas are poor renderings; both in color and design, reduced to a pile of mythic costumes that belong in a slow past while the city around the museum bustles in speed. Moreover, the objects in the museum, claimed to be preserved relics were stolen during Tibet’s occupation as monasteries were looted (See Harris 2012, 4 and See Smith 2010). The use of the term “relic” also demonstrates how China sees Tibet as outmoded culture.\(^{48}\)

![Fig. 6. Photograph of a Khampa woman on the Tibet Museum website (left), n.d. and Fig. 7. Tibetan shoemaker with shoes (right), n.d.](image)

Few years after the building of the Ethnic Museum, in 1999, China built the *Tibet Museum* in the old capital of Lhasa, Tibet. Described by tourist websites as a “wonderful combination of Chinese and Tibetan architectural style…designed by a Han Chinese architect,” the museum is applauded for being an educational site in Tibetan culture and for attracting overseas tourists.\(^{49}\) A link on website “Folk Custom,” elaborates on how clothing for example in Kham (Eastern Tibet) areas display individuality. That due to nomadic lifestyles “robes of the

\(^{48}\) Such efforts of musemization have not only been confined to China but also to the West.  
\(^{49}\) "Tibet Museum, Lhasa, China."

Khampa people are looser,” and how they love to “adorn themselves with… agate, coral, amber, pearls, turquoise, ivory, gold and silver.” It adds that Khampas both men and women also wear knives which historically has been used for both practical and self-protective measures, but highlights that, “in the wake of recent social development (an indirect reference to the protests in the areas),” wearing a knife these days is purely for decorative purposes.”50 Another link on the site, “Fate of Tibetan Boots,” exclaims how Tibetan boots are impending concerns as they face extinction. The photograph of a Tibetan shoemaker, holding a pair of boots with rubber soles (a feature not characteristic of traditional Tibetan boots) and also known as Som-pas is placed above the description.

In 2004, China celebrated the 100th anniversary of anti-British struggle. In its commemoration, there is even a museum called “The Memorial Hall of Anti-British” in Gyantse, Tibet. This marks a period of Tibetan history in 1904 where Francis Younghusband and his men had captured the Gyantse fort. However, the British did not colonize Tibet and withdrew their troops in 1910.51 Packing the event with China’s “100 years of shame” under Western imperialism, the museum creates a narrative of “encouraging the people of all nationalities in Tibet to carry on the fine tradition of patriotism, [and] maintain the unity of the motherland and fight against… separatism.”52 As the historian French states, the museum contains “shoddy relief sculptures of battle scenes, with unintelligible captions” and “attempt[s] to link Tibetan history to modern Chinese nationalism.”53 This is completed through displays of Tibetan ‘folk culture’ at the museum where photographs of Tibetan noble class are used to condemn life in Tibet before

52 Ibid.
China’s occupation, where wealth only belonged to a ruling a people. Hence, as Harris states, visitors (both tourists and local Tibetans) “were trained to look upon [these] material heritage as the outdated relics of religion and in a secular, Communist mode” (66).

With the building of museums, tourism is also on the rise in Tibet where numbers are expected to increase up 15 million by 2015. While the government claims that tourism creates job opportunities, Tibetans claim that often its beneficiaries are Han migrants who just want to make a quick buck but have no further investments in the survival of Tibetan culture. In addition, the tourists are comprised mainly of China’s new middle class. And, scholars like Harris point out that in ushering large numbers of tourists, the spacial orientations of many Tibetan cities have undergone changes. This in turn has encroached upon the cultural and religious meanings of many sites, and alienated Tibetans in their own home (See Harris 2013). For example: prostrating is part of Tibetan Buddhist practice, but as tourists crowd into the Potala, it leaves little to no space for Tibetans to practice their religious rituals, leaving their daily lives forcefully altered by such experiences.

Fig. 8. A Tibetan woman refusing to be photographed. Tibet. Source: Offbeat China.

Such transgressions, seen as cultural assaults by Tibetans are not only limited to religious sites, but clothing, which tied to the representational idea of “Tibet” becomes another area of bodily violation. Following their visit to Tibet, a netizen wrote, “Those tourists with DLSR cameras and expensive lens shoot pictures of the Tibetan people as if they are animals in a zoo…” and that given the levels of distrust amongst Hans and Tibetans, “it’s only a matter of time before these tourists get beaten up by local Tibetans.” The observation here is demonstrative of the rising tensions between Tibetans and Han Chinese. Cultural tourism then in contemporary Tibetan society is rooted in commercial practices where the dynamics of power both economically and culturally compromise the agency of Tibetan people. Shakya has rightfully pointed that, traveling to Tibet is a kind of voyeurism in being entertained by the suffering and pain brought on by China’s occupation.

As Foucault explained of the “medical gaze,” the gaze of the Han tourist in Tibet behaves in a similar way for it creates the same “mind-body dualism” that dehumanizes the body as an object, frozen and captivated, and thus separating it from the identity of the person (creating the double-consciousness mentioned earlier). In Fig 8. the same can be observed from the position of the Tibetan woman, dressed in similar fashion to that of the woman being photographed, while she watches as multiple Chinese tourists photograph a fellow Tibetan woman. Reflexively, her position is indicative of the mind-body dualism, she sees both how Chinese tourists see Tibetans, and at the same, can place herself in the position of the Tibetan woman being photographed. It is this very kind of dissonance that is captured by the photograph in Fig 8., making visible what is

often unseen in the relationship between the photographer and the photograph, the tourist and the native, and as Tibetans see it, the colonizer and the colonized.

In addition, the turning of many religious sites into Disneylandish theme parks of “Shangri-La” has brought with it consumption practices where if one could take a photograph dressed as Pocahontas in Disneyland, in Tibet you could dress up as a Tibetan for the price of a ticket. While dressing up as the native might seem like an innocent activity, it is embedded with meanings of Tibetan stereotypes. Long sleeved won-chuks (shirt) for example are traditionally used during celebratory occasions to create exaggerated effects of movement while dancing. But here, such characteristics of Tibetan clothing are extracted to create a dramatized and spectacular idea of the native. For example, in the photograph above (see Fig 9) of the two tourists dressed in neon fuchsia chupas, not only is the clothing inaccurate to Tibetan aesthetics (synthetic dyes are modern inventions introduced to Tibet), but they are appropriated in disguise of the authentic to suit the needs of China’s narrative of ethnic-diversity.

Fig. 9. Chinese tourists in imitation Tibetan costumes.
Other ways of displaying ethnic or “minzu” diversity in Tibet has been through state sponsored fashion shows. Held, in various regions of Tibet and China, Tibetans dressed in local clothing display pride in their regional cultures. However, like many of the cases mentioned earlier, clothing showcased here are hybridized versions of Chinese aesthetics. The use of the term fashion is also problematic because the change from tradition to sinicized Tibetan clothing is not the sort of change that is characteristic of fashion, for after all these modifications are intended achieve a romanticized look of Tibetans as exotic people on the edge of the Chinese national imagination. In that, the element of change is not a constant factor, but a limited move in time, which instead of moving forward by way of invention, retrieves in time where the very opposite of invention is constructed by keeping Tibetans encased in a fantasy. Indicated by these qualities, it is precisely the opposite of fashion but the efforts to fabricate it as fashion, I argue is integral in understanding contemporary Chinese nationalism.

In spite of these undertakings, as often, identity is a process of negotiation, both Tibetans and the Chinese state use clothing’s social capital to their purpose as stated by Kolas (she also acknowledges that representations of the ethnic minority is a state sanctioned project). While
Tibetans use clothing to display an identity that is authentic to tourists, which in turn gains them social capital over the authenticity of knowledge, they in spite do so within the limits of how they are represented; even if that means presenting one self in sinicized hybrid clothing. For the state however, it provides dual benefits as Tibetans are represented as exotic people on the “roof of the world,” and in doing so making it possible for marketing Tibet as a tourist destination, and more so because it conveys the image of a multi-ethnic unified China where Tibet as CCP exclaims, is an integral part of it.

The Hanfu Clothing Movement and Chinese Nationalism

Along side the state’s interest in the depiction of ethnic Tibetans, is a developing movement by the Han people of China. While the topic is independently deserving of greater attention, I resort to a brief mention as other clothing related movement like the Hanfu movement in providing a context for the challenges it poses to multiculturalism in China. The Hanfu or “Han clothing” clothing movement in China is a revival of the traditional dress of the Han Chinese people who make up over ninety-four percent of the ethnic composition of China. Many ethnic Han Chinese sense that following the Cultural Revolution and the destruction of the Four Olds, a blank has been left in the history of the Han people.57 Other scholars such as Carrico (2014) contend that such revivalist movements have much to do with the discontents of contemporary Chinese society where the return to Hanfu dress provides an escape and the fantasy of a “real China.”58

Like the *Lhakar* movement, the question remains why did the *Hanfu* movement develop and what does it mean for China? This is not to suggest that *Lhakar* and *Hanfu* are the same, for *Lhakar* is a resistance modern Chinese nationalism and its incorporation of Tibetans within that idea while, *Hanfu* is a redefining of Chinese nationalism as imagined by the majority ethnic group. However, in the Hanfu movement, clothing is not only a performance of what a true “Han” is, but often posed as *truer* than whom? For example, followers of Hanfu state that clothing of the Manchu Qing era was a “counterfeit ethnic dress” that was imposed upon the Han people, and that the collapse of the Qing Empire, is a “unique opportunity to re-establish a code of ethnic dress.”

It is further stated that:

…the Han Chinese no long have their traditional dress (to its truest meaning, since they lost even the “counterfeit” stuff like the Qipao/Magua), its position in relation with its sibling ethnicities …the 56-ethnic *Zonghua Minzu* [China’s minorities]… and their flamboyant and unique dress becomes an extremely embarrassing one. This has in turn become the impetus for people to find their ethnic dress…

Multiple processes of identity formation at the local level are taking place here and therefore, it is important that they be juxtaposed with each other to clarify its macro effects on the state level. 1) Ethnic Hans feel a loss of tradition and culture and this is located both in historical experiences with the Manchus; destruction of tradition during the Cultural Revolution; adoption of Western clothing in contemporary Chinese society; and the positioning of the ethnic majority, Hans counter to the minorities, like Tibetans. 2) State policies of differential treatment of minorities in places like Tibet by placing greater emphasis on their traditional clothing has also given rise to Han nationalism.

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59 Ibid.
This requires us to go back to Taylor’s statement on multiculturalism, the need for recognition and the dialectical processes in which identity is shaped. Those in the Hanfu movement feel a lack of equal recognition when compared to ethnic minorities and perhaps even, the lack of symbols that make their recognition visible. For Tibetans, the issue is not only an absence of recognition as can be argued, rather misrecognition. Tibetans fundamentally do not consider themselves Chinese and state efforts to highlight their unique culture under the rubric of multiculturalism exposes the mythic construction of the nation-state itself. In the process of state-formation then, categorical distinctions of the majority and the minorities have allowed the state to justify differences within “its” own population. Yet, it is not simple coincidence that China’s minority states lie on its borders, or that majority of the self-immolations have been taking place not in Central Tibet but Eastern Tibet where although such areas are geographically grouped within pre-existing Chinese prefectures, experientially Tibetans do not see themselves as part of these areas. Rightfully, many scholars of ethnicity in China have now begun to explore the significance of the periphery to the center. More so, in the state’s defining of majorities and minorities, and its differential policies, often these groups are positioned against each other.

Hence, the Hanfu blogger grounds reasons for nationalism in the explanation that that ethnic minorities (or “younger siblings” as he calls it)\(^60\) have unique clothing and expresses that as the cause of embarrassment. On the other hand, the same policies have given rise to a Tibetan nationalism. In both cases, the common strain is that the dialectical process of identity formation is taking place in the struggle against each other.

\(^{60}\) A common in the way majority and minority relations are imagined.
Like the lip-syncing Han girl posed as Tibetan in the 2008 Olympics, multiculturalism in China is a hollow performance, colorful on the outside without any of the qualities of multiculturalism inside. The entire conception of it in Tibet has been a surface level operation, of showcasing to its citizens that their siblings are happy under the motherland, and to the West of China’s progress as an embrace of multiculturalism—therefore finding a short-term solution to its ethnic paradigm.
Performing Authenticity

On Lhakar Diaries, the main blog where activists share their thoughts, stands an article with a photograph of four women, which reads “Chinese tourists dressed in fake Tibetan dresses in front of the Potala Palace.” The question of “fake” is important primarily because it implies the existence of what is “real.” As indicated by the image’s description, by fake here they mean a sinicized interpretation of Tibetan clothing and placed within the dynamics of power, it is after all the Chinese state that does the interpreting.

The show of such clothing as multiculturalism, for Tibetans, has meant the assimilation of Tibetan people for it takes place at the cost of appropriating of their culture. The appropriation that nonetheless relies on the stereotyping of Tibetans where differences are made to play out in bifurcated ideas. Tibetans are seen as exotic barbarians; backward, and uncivilized, while at the same there is romanticism with them as noble savages untouched by civilization. Such processes of subjectification and paradoxical modes of representation create what Bhabha calls “fixity” that is based on cultural and “ethnic” difference and defines Tibetan colonial experience (372).

Seen in the earlier chapter, both the manipulation and the changing of Tibetan clothing to extend the Chinese Communist Party’s narrative on ethnic diversity not only creates other forms of nationalism such as the Hanfu movement, but encases Tibetans into mythic representations that compromises their cultural agency. The harm done by such constructions are well argued by

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62 See Bhabha (1999) on stereotyping and colonialism.
Said (1979) for in its discourse, the knowledge produced by the idea of the exotic savage is what makes the social category of “ethnic Tibetans,” and the institutionalization of these categories is what give it its “political” content. Hence, Lhakar activists call translations of the chupa by the state, “fake” and thereby expose the hypocrisy of the myth of the “ethnic Tibetan.”

![Fig. 11. An image of a Tibetan male stereotype. Source: fabforgottennobility.](image)

Given the fetishistic romanticism of the colonizer with the native, and how the discourse/knowledge of the exotic ethnic sibling creates the desire and demand that markets the mythic idea of Tibet as a tourist destination, Tibetans—their culture and identity—have become goods in the cycle of commodity exchange. As Bhabha indicated of the myth that is neither achievable for the native nor the colonial setter, thus ensuring the repeatability of such cases, I add that the myth is what gives it its value as Simmel said, “we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them” (qtd. in Appadurai 3). The struggle of the Lhakar movement then is a tournament of valuation through the political discourse of clothing where in a neoliberal economy; colonization meets the market at the cost of culture.
What China fails to grasp (as many Chinese citizens often express as the lack of gratitude from Tibetans, because they see the introduction of the marketplace as the introduction of the savage/native to modernity)\(^ {63}\) is that in the valuation scheme, Tibetans have little power to determine their own value since, it is subject to control and re-categorization by the state. Multiculturalism then remains compromised under such conditions, for the morality of value and its link to recognition, dignity, and equality does not exist. Objective conditions then, such as the discourse that takes places through institutional spaces like the Lhasa museum and the Ethnic Park, form subjective experiences of colonialism that become tacit shared social experiences of inequality in unifying Tibetans.

**Memory and Collective Consciousness: The Language of Clothing**

![Fig. 12. Tibetans in Amdo observing Lhakar. Source: personal photo by author. 7 March 2010.](image)

The novelist Lurie (1983) wrote:

> Long before I am near enough to talk to you… through what you are wearing…[you] give me important information (or misinformation) as to your occupation, origin,

\(^{63}\) See Yeh (2013).
personality, opinions, tastes, sexual desires and current mood… By the time we meet and converse, we have already spoken to each other in an older and more universal language.

(205)

Here, Lurie is postulating clothing’s ability to communicate. And like language, as a visual metaphor, clothing makes society intelligible. However, what happens when a society loses the language of clothing? (By loss, I mean the rewriting of history that takes place when Tibetan dress is sinicized. In such, that it no longer stands for its original meaning and is replaced by a new system of signification where it represents a new and foreign social order. Thus, the changing struggles in the symbolism of dress between tradition and a sinicized-Tibetan modernity). Sinicized clothing even if it is an imitation or an interpretation is not the “original.” It is not the original because a sinicized chupa does not carry the same meaning, as does a traditional Tibetan chupa (The question of the same meaning here again, is the question of values). And as sinicized chupas become the dominant way of representing Tibetans as ethnic Chinese, it loses that meaning. Hence, the sinicized chupa carries no significance both historically and culturally and is no different than the forcing of Tibetans to learn Mandarin. The inability to make social life intelligible in this case then, poses an ontological crisis that informs contemporary Tibetan nationalism.

Lhakar activists by returning to traditional Tibetan clothing are not only performing what they see as authentic, but also trying to make sense of their cultural loss. Tradition therefore, provides a sense of continuity for cultural survival (defined here as cultural practices routinized through out time and therefore, associated with memory). Tradition in the Lhakar movement then is intensely intertwined with memories of colonial subjectivity and the loss of tradition. To

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64 This is not suggest that there is only one chupa or that there are no grey areas of meanings.
incorporate memory’s association with the dialectics of identity, Olick (1999) states that memories become “imagos,” and require social context for their preservation, for they “are as much the products of the symbols and narratives available publicly—and of the social means for storing and transmitting them” (335). The act of dressing in traditional clothing is then to make individual memory under colonization into collective imagos stored by the movement and then transmitted to the public. Therefore, the return to tradition in the Lhakar movement means to remember the past, and through its preservation, recreates its relevance in the present.

Like Gandhi who left European dress for the peasantry clothing of the Khatiawadi, which Tarlo (1996) claims was a self-conscious and strange choice (69), Lhakar activists too have chosen to dismiss sinicized Tibetan clothing for tradition Tibetan clothing. Similarly, it too showcases strangeness in choice, as often it is a rejection of the social mobility that comes with such clothing and perhaps more for those Lhakar activists who do not live in Tibet but in in the West. Since traditional clothing includes a broad range of clothing items and variations of the chupa depending on where one is from, it increases the accessibility of the movement.

It should be elucidated that tradition in social movement is often viewed as a challenge towards “progressive” values (See Eyerman 1998, p. 26) and to multicultural societies (See Kymlicka 2001), whose traits of concern are visible here as well in the claim to authenticity. The concern is deserving of attention but it is much too early to say as the conditions and quality of modernity itself is not present in the discourse of the movement. Also in comparison with other movements such as Back to Africa Movement of the Civil Rights and the Khadi Movement in India, the question is not so much of national clothing but rather any clothing that is traditional and Tibetan.
Doing Boundary Work: The Colonizer and The Colonized

In *Fashion and its Social Agendas* (2000), Crane lays stress on how clothing is always socially motivated as a nonverbal form of communication in constructing symbolic boundaries. In other words, “conceptual distinctions made by social actors…that separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership.” I argue that clothing in the Lhakar movement is a symbolic boundary, which through the performance of authenticity, that is by wearing traditional Tibetan clothing is constructed. However, there are at least dual processes of boundary making at work, both using “Tibetan” clothing.

First, you have the Chinese state that aims to expand the conceptual boundaries of being “Chinese.” This is completed both through the language of multiculturalism and visual discourses of clothing (e.g. museums, fashion shows, and ethnic parks), which brings Tibetans into the boundaries of Chinese national imagination. Boundary work here is done through the presentation of sinicized Tibetan clothing, showing the “Chinese-ness” of Tibetan identity. Yet, failing to recognize preexisting boundaries, what is planned to include results in deeper social divides. The lack of recognition then gives Tibetans the desire to seek their own by redrawing the preexisting boundaries. Many parts of Tibet, which were not centrally ruled before occupation, in these cases find themselves with common experiences under Chinese rule, which creates a new boundary with those that were centrally ruled. That boundary is what I call modern Tibetan nationalism.

Second, traditional clothing is used to create a symbolic boundary between the colonizing state and the native, who by having access to tradition claims authority over the authenticity of their identity. Clothing then takes form as a nonverbal way of communicating these cultural

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65 See Lamont and Molnar (2002).
distinctions. Additionally, the combing effects of the preexisting boundaries before the occupation (internally in Tibet) and those defined in the following years of Tibetans under the ethnic category (e.g. Tibetan Autonomous Region which includes central Tibet), creates multiple layers of overlapping practices of distinction making.

![Tibetan noble women of Lhasa](image)

**Fig. 13.** Tung, Rosemary. Tibetan noble women of Lhasa.

For example, before the occupation, Tibet’s capital Lhasa due to numerous reasons, including the location of the Potala Palace, the Kashag (Tibetan parliament), and monasteries like Sera were the center of culture and politics. Many in Tibet and its neighboring regions revered the clothing styles of those belonging to aristocratic and noble families in Lhasa. As indicated of the leisure class\(^{66}\) by scholars, their clothing classified and delineated notions of cultural superiority for they were associated with belonging to honorable families and raised with refined tastes, manner, and customary habits (See Veblen 1978, Bourdieu 1984). Those on the margins of Tibet, including areas like Kham and Amdo that were governed by local chiefs were

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\(^{66}\) See Veblen (1994) on class and consumptionary behavior.
considered to be barbaric and less civilized by the elites in Lhasa. In that, Tibet had its own civilizing process (Elias, 1982) and practices of boundary making.

Under current conditions, on the primary level, there is a divergent process taking place: that of China removing boundaries to impose their habitus (Bourdieu) and the other of Tibetan reestablishing those boundaries to regenerate their norms and social order. On the secondary level, the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977) of the Lhasa elite to a great extent have collapsed under China, and in the reestablishing of authentic Tibetan culture, the meaning of those old boundaries are being forsaken in order to create a unified movement. However, in defining what is authentic, the removal of boundaries (be that of where one is from, or what Tibetan dialect one speaks) is also symbolically violent for in demarcating the legitimacy of the movement, some form of homologous orientation is sought after. In observing boundary work as both the Chinese state and the Lhakar movement perform it, a similar process of erasing boundaries within each group is taking place to form an imagined community.

Fig. 14. Tibetans in exile observe Lhakar on Wednesdays. Source: Lhakar Diaries

Authenticity meanwhile serves as a useful distinction in defining external boundaries, but internally it poses a challenge in corresponding with the diverse experiences of Tibetans. An
activist, in wanting to form a meaningful relationship with her heritage, but feeling alienated by the pressure to be “authentic” wrote, “notions of ‘authenticity’ or ‘indigenous’ are problematic at best. We cannot now begin to put a fence around ourselves. Instead we must be confident in the strength of our core shared values and beliefs. We must know that we can accept new visions, new ways of doing things from outside and Tibetanize anything—we have done it before.”

The blog post demonstrates the contradictory challenge, to retain “core shared values and beliefs” but at the same, “accept new visions.”

Similar challenges can also be seen in the Khadi movement. While it was Gandhi’s ambition to create national unity, khadi threatened regional identity as it stood in opposition of preserving local traditions (Tarlo 115). In restoring the mythic past of the nation, Gandhi “failed to consider the extraordinarily diverse clothing traditions that had always coexisted among different social, religious, and ethnic groups in India” and as Tarlo points, “was in danger of blanking out local Indian traditions just as much as it sought to stamp out British influences” (115). In addition, he explicitly advocated that provincialism be sacrificed for the ambitions of the nation (115).

Although the same challenges of what to wear exists in Lhakar, there are a number of differences between Lhakar and the Khadi movement. Those who express their activism most explicitly are often those who live in exile. This is obvious, given they live in countries where one can exercise the freedom of expression. Challenges of authenticity and unification are diversified by the struggles of those who were born outside of Tibet and have culturally and racially intermingled. However, the Lhakar movement is practiced in many global cities, as the

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67 See Nycyak (2011)
chapter will show. Furthermore, regional identity inside Tibet has yet to demonstrate challenges within Lhakar but that does not mean those who are unwilling to support Lhakar are not motivated by regional pride. Unlike Gandhi, Lhakar activists do not advocate sacrificing regional traditions for national unification so, there is greater tolerance for diversity of traditions but it is not without the confusing contradictions that come with the project of creating unity in nation building. With respect to clothing then, Lhakar is a low grid group where differences internally are tolerated while, the Chinese state’s boundary making practices are a high grid group formation for differences are rigidly controlled.

Transnationalism and Mobilization: Virtual Communities

The visual presentation of clothing as a form of protest and its symbolic effects so far discussed take place within a different time and space relationships. Lhakar’s goals of de-collectivization, noncooperation, and weaponization of culture are not only limited to the physical world but rituals of wearing Tibetan clothing are further shared on the Internet. As seen with movements in the Arab Spring, social media also plays a crucial role in collective action and mobilization here. To add to Turner and Killan (1957) that “continuity of group identity” is a requisite for collective action, the high turnover of information on social media increase virtual interaction (collective actions online) but in movements like Lhakar, extends the bounds of the ability to continue that group identity. Subsequently, the process then creates a transnational movement.

Unlike the Khadi Movement or the Civil Rights Movement, those seeking for political change within a country or a political system, Tibetans remain scattered around the world. Many

69 This is could be due to the fact that the movement is younger.
70 See Lamont on Symbolic Boundaries.
escaped during the occupation to neighboring countries, and many continue to do so. Therefore, mobilizing solidarity for national unification poses a unique challenge. However, in *The Information Revolution and World Politics*, Hanson (2008) states how Tibetans in-exile have been extremely successful in mobilizing support through the Internet, and in influencing politics at home and beyond (203). Although, Lhakar came to rise after during the publication of Hanson’s research, its methods of using the Internet and social media are as influential as other Tibetan groups.

In Tibet, Chinese social media platforms such as Sina Weibo and Wechat are popular spaces where Tibetans share photographs of observing their traditions. In places like Lithang in
Eastern Tibet, Tibetans dressed in traditional clothing gather to distribute awards of recognition to those who have excelled in studying Tibetan. While the Internet in China is heavily censored, the use of images to communicate remains a difficult thing for the state to control especially, if the symbolic politics requires readings of coded messages. Again, for the state this leaves the difficult task of separating the idea of “China’s multicultural ethnic Tibetan” and “the authentic Tibetan.” What can often be read as cultural pride on the surface is as James Scott states, “a hidden transcript” that critiques the state’s illegitimate rule in Tibet and the sovereignty of those who claim to be the authentic proprietors of the land.

In this gambit of virtual symbolic politics, for Tibetans in Tibet, the main audience is Tibetans in-exile and the international community. Seeing Tibetans in Tibet observe Lhakar creates a feed-back-loop of information and knowledge that would not have been possible a decade ago. As Sonam a member of the exile community said, “if Tibetans in Tibet can come up with dynamic and innovative new campaigns to resist illegal Chinese authority even under so much repression then why we can’t Tibetan in exile at least stronghold this movement by taking a resolution to boycott made-in-china products, to read Tibetan… to wear chupa every Wednesday, to speak in Tibetan…”71 For those in exile, the rituals of collective action then create ways to imagine belonging to Tibet and exercise their agency in creating political change.

Lhakar today is observed in numerous places such as New York, London, Milan, Paris, Tibet, India, Nepal, Belgium, Taiwan and the list continues to grow. And whilst the making and remaking of authenticity remains a difficult task for Lhakar activists, due to its low grid group behavior the movement continues to expand its network of solidarity. Dressing in Tibetan clothing is then a way to visually articulate the meanings of collective consciousness in resisting

state power, seeking for political change and gaining international support for the movement. In Evitar Zerubavel’s words, a practice of “lumping and splitting” takes place in the formation of boundaries. As shown earlier, not only does the practice of wearing traditional clothing create boundaries \textit{splitting} the conception of what is a “Tibetan” and what is a “Chinese” identity, but also these differences played out on social media \textit{lump} Tibetans around the world into a transnational movement. In exceeding its physical qualities, clothing also helps expand the physical boundaries of national imagination.
CONCLUSION

In examining the Lhakar movement, this study brings together two areas of research, which taken to be inconsequential remain on the margins of academic inquiry. Tibet, grasped as an exotic land where its people remain victims of a totalitarian state and clothing (including fashion) as a superficial pursuit of the less serious due to its initial material preoccupation with the surface. In connecting these two areas, the study hopes to have illustrated that both the margin and the surface are vital to not only understanding what is established as its anti-thesis: the center/depth—for in reviewing their relation, can we truly grasp what it reveals about the significance of the center. Therefore, by methodologically exploring clothing (surface) and its use, this research shows what its meanings (depth) tell us about the social world.

As Paulicelli in *Fashion: nation and narration* explains how clothing became of central concern at Italy sought to define its national identity, and therefore drew the interests of the Fascists in adopting the black shirt (286), or as Tarlo (1996) demonstrates the conundrum dress represented in India’s decolonization where Gandhi sought to unify the nation, clothing in this study also poses similar challenges. While Lhakar within the larger movement for Tibet seeks to create a unified national consciousness that is nonetheless made visible in dress, it is also confronted with challenges internally as highlighted by the civilizing process in Tibet before its occupation and contemporary concerns regarding modernizing while remaining “authentic” to Tibetan values and beliefs.

Yet, the case study also differs for it demonstrates—what it hopes to be an impactful contribution— that nation building and identity formation are variegated operations permeated with ideological contradictions and localized resistance on multiple levels where dress/clothing
acts as a litmus test in understanding expressions of nationalist solidarity and difference. For instance, multiculturalism in China is appropriated to appeal to Western norms in legitimizing statehood by emphasizing cultures of minority groups as a celebration of their uniqueness. At the same, this gives rise to nationalism in China because the majority groups such as the Han (e.g. Hanfu movement) seek to express themselves as synonymously authentic with the state. For Tibetans, in addition to claiming historical independence and therefore contesting being assimilated under the umbrella of a multicultural China, sees the current political situation as a colonial occupation. In denying the category of being an ethnic minority of China and in resisting colonial assimilation, Tibetans as oppose to submitting to the notion of a multicultural China are employing their cultural uniqueness as declaration of their independence. In both of these converging cases of nationalism, clothing illuminates the many intricate layers of either how its uniqueness is used to justify statehood for both Tibet and China; or in the case of China, how uniqueness of the other gives rise to the search of an authentic Chinese identity for the Hans.

More so, concerns surrounding the theme of uniqueness and authenticity of a group’s culture reveals both a heterogeneous (China) and a homogeneous (Tibet) formation of nationalism. What is at odds is that the heterogeneity (as multiculturalism), which standing for the Chinese nation at the same time creates homogeneity within the Tibetans (a pan-Tibetan identity) where previous distinctions (regional, etc.) become less of prime concern in the struggle

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72 This being said, heterogeneity does not mean a true multicultural society with tolerance and respect for the rights minority cultures as previous discussed, Tibetan culture beyond a performative exhibition remains at threat.
for an independent statehood.\textsuperscript{73} As discussed earlier, clothing then serves as a space for distinction where embedded meanings of shared collective consciousness are made visible in the Lhakar movement. Hence, becoming a symbolic boundary between Tibetans and the Chinese state. In addition, practices of boundary making for China remain high grid in nature as differences are rigidly maintained by the state while for the Lhakar, remains of low grid as differences are tolerated in the movement.\textsuperscript{74}

In exploring the relationship between clothing and social movements, this study also helps explain why tradition continues to play an important role. Seeing that colonialism in Tibet is a contemporary phenomenon, and therefore rule over Tibet (by way of cultural tourism and resource management) rare where in a neoliberal economy, colonization meets the market at the cost of culture. In that, the social capital provided by Tibetan culture has become a commodity in the market and much of the efforts of movements like Lhakar’s has been in response under this affair of valuation. Since commoditizing Tibetan culture has altered the habitus of those who are native to the land, Lhakar is not only a resistance to modernity and colonization, but does so by withdrawing Tibetan culture from the market (for it takes ownership of culture by reserving its usage for everyday Tibetans rather than Chinese tourists), and therefore aiming to retrieve its original symbolic meaning.

As doing empirical work in Tibet leaves participants vulnerable to state sanctioned violence, the study has taken recourse to using social media websites for content analysis. Given that over a hundred and forty thousand Tibetans live in exile around the world, social media

\textsuperscript{73} Again, this is not without internal challenges in the Lhakar movement where authenticity with regard to Tibetan identity, and the embrace of modernity continues to prove the maintenance of a careful footing.

\textsuperscript{74} For more on high grid and low grid in comparative contexts of nationalism boundary making see Lamont and Virag (2002).
provides a useful platform to examine how transnational movements are formed. Observing the exchange of information on social media and how it creates solidarity, the study shows how Tibetans imagine belonging through the symbolism of dress. Moreover, social media provides fruitful grounds for conducting material and visual analysis of clothing’s strategic role in non-violent social movements such as Lhakar.


