

**Mobility, Assimilation & Identity: Marginalisation of
Tibetan Nomads under PRC**

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Abstract

The perceived nomadic challenge to the state seldom results in amicable resolution, under an authoritarian regime like China the results are however not in favour of nomads. China is been cracking down hard on the nomadic Tibetans who are inhabitants of the vast stretches of land in the Tibetan plateau. The nomads have been forcibly relocated to state-constructed settlements which has repercussions. The entire developmental discourse around nomads is based on the state's predispositions, which have been passed on through different regimes in China. However, the state's claimed objectives have not fully materialised on ground and imply ulterior motives behind such policies. The following article aims at identifying patterns in Chinese policies to establish the state's objectives for restricting nomadic mobility. Simultaneously, the policies are inextricably linked with the state's effort to assimilate Tibetans within a national identity narrative using education policies and (re)presentation in museums. As a result, the nomads who are forcibly relocated face intersectional issues in the semi-urban spaces where they get socio-economically marginalised.

Keywords: Tibetan Nomads, Tibetan Culture, Nomadic Mobility, Cultural Assimilation, Identity, Museums, Ecological Concerns, Marginalisation

1. Introduction

Tibet is a unique space, a region that has nurtured Vajrayana Buddhism in the Himalayas, a civilisational space with a distinct socio-political history and economic relations with the neighbouring Himalayan kingdoms. A region which had deep civilisational ties with India and China, a zone of transition and amalgamation in the Himalayas between India and China. Right from the times of the ancient Silk Route trade, Tibet has remained a crucial area in terms of politics and trade in the harsh and inhospitable terrain of the Himalayas. Especially the Tibetan nomads who have facilitated trade and transport in the extremities of the Trans-Himalayan region.¹ Tibetan nomads acted as agents of transport and cultural exchange transiting through the traditional trade routes between Ladakh, Tibet and China. However, the twentieth century has brought remarkable changes in the traditional pattern of movement in the Himalayas. With the coming of modern state borders, the existing pattern of movement has been disrupted by the states exercising sovereign control over their territory.

Tibet was subjected to Chinese control in 1950, as the Chinese Government calls it the 'Peaceful Liberation of Tibet', while the Tibetans view it as military occupation and annexation of their homeland. Now, it has been more than seventy years of the People's Republic of China (here onwards PRC) rule in Tibet, with the development discourse occupying much of the space in the Chinese government's narrative, a critical gaze is thus required into Chinese policies over time in Tibet. This paper follows a critical approach towards understanding Chinese policies in Tibet, especially around the Tibetan nomads who are perceived to pose a challenge to state authority. The primary aim of this paper is to foreground the grievances of the herders-nomads who have been deprived of agency by the state. Nomads, who are essentially a mobile community, find themselves trapped in the state's process of socio-economic development, which Andrew Martin Fischer (2014) calls 'exclusionary growth', depriving nomads of the agency to cause/bring a change. The top-down policy approach followed by Chinese authority resembles to what James C. Scott (1998) calls 'authoritarian high modernism' characterised by the state's attempts to change the social structure based on the so-called 'scientific fixes'.² The particular use of the term

¹ K. Warikoo has written extensively on Trans-Himalayan trade among Kashmir, Ladakh, Xinjiang and Tibet kingdom. To know more see Warikoo, K. 2020. 'Trans-Himalayan trade of Kashmir and Ladakh with Tibet and Xinjiang, 1846-1947' in Sinha, S. (ed.). 2020. *One Mountain Two Tigers*, New Delhi: Pentagon.

² 'High modernism' is a concept by James C. Scott that shows a top-down approach by the state that believes in science and technology to change the social circumstances. See Scott, J. C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Haven: Yale University Press.

‘scientific’ by the state while devising policies around nomads shows a lack of understanding and disregard for the traditional socio-ecological intelligentsia of the community. The so-called ‘scientific remedies’ have been challenged by several authors which will be discussed in this paper.

From Mao Zedong’s era to Deng Xiaoping’s regime and Jiang Zemin’s policy ‘Open the West Campaign’ (*Xibu da Kaifa*) to Xi Jinping’s ‘China Dream’ continuous efforts have been made to limit the Mobility of the nomadic population in Tibet. The manner in which Mobility is often used as a state tool to (re)organise border spaces has been reflected upon by Nimmi Kurian in her book *India-China Borderlands* (2014). Her work gives a fresh perspective that differs from the traditional statist view of looking at mobile people and Chinese policies in Tibet. Mobility is essential for nomadic identity and to preserve their culture: any restriction on mobility has a direct impact on them. As Benedict Anderson (2006) argues, the presence of nomadic minorities challenges the putative linguistic, cultural, religious and historic homogeneity on which ethnonationalism bases its claim to legitimacy. Being an elusive community Tibetan nomads are hard to locate and thus state finds it challenging to assimilate them into a homogenous Han-centric representation of Chinese national identity. The transnational nomadic mobility challenges the state’s ability to control borders effectively, in this case along the Western borders of China with India (Levin & MacKay 2020). Thus, Mobility becomes an important tool for the state to control nomads and, for this paper, an intriguing aspect to revisit different policies employed by China projected as developmental strategies. The Chinese state followed a core-periphery developmental model focused on improving macroeconomic growth markers that neglected the overall development of the peripheral areas like Tibet in the western part till the late 1990s (Fisher 2014). As a result, there is a lack of understanding of the traditional ways of sustainably surviving in the extremities of the Tibetan region. Changes in the leadership of the CPC also brought a policy shift towards nomads. Still, they always had a continuous pattern of limiting mobility and increasing cultural assimilation aimed at increasing homogeneity.

This paper will analyse how the state has continued to follow policies of coercive relocations and ideological subjugation through education and museums in China to create a Han-centric Chinese identity that marginalises the Tibetans' history, culture and traditions. In such a scenario, Tibetan nomads who are forced into sedentarisation get overwhelmed by multi-

layered problems in the rural-urban centres of their relocation. Thus, there are multi-faceted issues like inter-ethnic conflicts, socio-economic marginalisation, which ultimately culminate into an identity crisis for Tibetan nomads. The latter part of this article looks at the repercussions of the sedentarisation of nomads and, following their restricted mobility in the semi-urban spaces, what challenges they face to adapt to the new surroundings with existing interethnic and cultural issues.

This paper is divided into five sections. Apart from the introduction, the second section will analyse policies under different regimes in the PRC that have directly affected nomads since its inception. The aim is to know the history, pattern and responses of the sedentarisation policies around Tibetan pastoralists that have limited nomadic mobility through various developmental and ecological conservation policies despite regime change. The third section delves into the process of Cultural assimilation of Tibetans, focussing primarily on education policies and representation in museums. Further, how China engages in changing the representation of Tibetans will be discussed. The fourth section focuses on the marginalisation of nomads in the relocated areas where the existing social dynamics do not favour Tibetan nomads. The interplay between mobility, economics and cultural assimilation in the semi-urban spaces where the nomads have been relocated brings out the issues emerging from the interaction among the nomads and the existing challenges of the urban areas like economic marginalisation and regressive cultural representations. The fifth section is where the author concludes his argument.

2. Mobility, Ecological Concerns and Development of Tibetan Nomads

For the past decades, Chinese state-sponsored media houses have been intermittently uploading videos showing happy and prosperous resettled Tibetan nomads (CGTN 2019). China celebrates the achievements of its mass relocation and resettlement policies of the nomadic herders in the Tibetan region, claiming to have ‘shaken off poverty as of 2019’ in the Tibet Autonomous Region (from here onwards, TAR) (CGTN 2022). However, that appears more self-congratulatory and presents only the state’s narrative of policies pursued by the Communist Party of China (CPC) in the Tibetan region (VOA 2014). The relocation and resettlement policies implemented in the Tibet region aim at uplifting the lifestyle of

nomadic herders, providing them with better healthcare and education facilities, improving their economic conditions, alleviating poverty (Ptackova 2011), conserving and rejuvenating the degraded ecology of the Tibetan plateau (Miller 2000), overall development of the western part of China (Ptackova 2012, Du 2012, Pirie 2013), and integrating the underdeveloped region with the new market economy (Levine 1999). However, the abovementioned objectives have been partially met, albeit unintended consequences have emerged in addition to the state's ulterior motives.

Historically, the Tibetan kingdom was divided into three broad areas, U Tsang (Lama Kingdom of Tibet), Amdo, and Kham (Goldstein 1989). However the Chinese invasion in 1950 abruptly changed the traditional territorial arrangements. U Tsang was transformed into TAR, Amdo was roughly delimited into Qinghai and the borderlands of Gansu along Qinghai province, and Kham region was broadly incorporated into Sichuan province and north of Yunnan province (Pirie 2003, Goldstein 1989). This also divided the Tibetan cultural region into the areas of Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau (from here onwards QTP) and TAR, where QTP acts as a borderland between Tibet-China and the Chang tang (Qiangtan) plateau of TAR as a borderland between Ladakh-Tibet. Resentment among the Tibetan populace against the Chinese invasion was coercively tackled, and Sino-Marxist ideology was adopted to bring the Tibetan region into the socialist development model (Grushke 2012). During Mao's reign, TAR was closed to the outer world, and it was not until the 1980s that the TAR was open to scholars (Goldstein 1989). The TAR region had a significant population of nomads who were herders and pastoralists living there for centuries and having their own socio-territorial identities distinct from state territorial interpretation (Yeh 2003). Tibetan nomads are pre-state actors when we consider the case of the PRC; surviving for centuries these nomads had their own social organisation and political structure which was deeply embedded with the territory they inhabited (Levin & Mackay 2009). The differences in social organisation and culture have been used to exploit and discriminate against Tibetan nomads; even imperial Chinese considered nomads as 'barbaric' and this view of nomads has perpetuated and formed a dominant state narrative around Tibetan nomads labelling them as 'backward' (Miller 2000, Crowe 2013, Ptackova 2011, Kolas 2002). In various instances, Chinese policies have echoed a regressive narrative for Tibetans that abases their unique cultural identity and emphasises the superiority of mainland Chinese culture dominated by ethnic 'Hans' as 'modernity' (Goldstein 2012, Kolas 2002). This section will explore how state policies since the inception of the PRC started to crack down on nomads, although gradually

but continuous efforts were made in the form of different policies to cope with the nomadic challenge.

2.1 Mao Zedong's Communes and Conservatism

The sedentarisation efforts are not new they may be getting more attention now, but right from the Mao's era, efforts were made to restrict the mobility of nomads. Policies around the Tibetan nomads have a remarkable undertone that attempts to limit the mobility of herders. The Tibetan region was subjected to absolute state control during Mao's era which saw radical policy reforms to 'communist' the people of Tibet and 'collectivise' the regional resources. The socialist tenets guided China's policy toward Tibetan herders during Mao's era to enable community-based sharing of the resource pool and clubbing groups of herders to achieve the production targets (Goldstein & Beall 1989). These policies were aimed to localise the nomads by limiting the extent of the pastures and holding them responsible for production targets. Additionally, the *Hokou* System 1958, introduced household registration that divided the population into categories for receiving government aid (Fischer 2014). It created a dichotomy of rural-urban. This implied tracking and identifying the population while they were getting lured by government subsidies.

The Great Leap Forward campaign (under the Second Five-Year Plan 1958-62) introduced the 'Mutual Aid Programme' (1961), a performance-based initiative that rewarded herders with points that would add to their social performance index (Miller 2000, Ning et. al. 2012). However, the mutual aid programme was just the beginning of the regressive policies that would be introduced in the future. 'People's commune' introduced in 1966 was a crackdown on the traditional pastoralist system, replacing the centuries-old private ownership of herds; Miller (2000) views it as an attempt to destroy the social and cultural fabric of traditional Tibetan nomads. The conventional pastoral system and herd management were devalued, and the state was directing the herders to do something the state had no prior experience with. Such policies were motivated by the Sino-Marxist ideology that hoped to bring out Tibetans from the idiocy of rural life. However, the traditional knowledge of the Tibetan herders was neglected due to the state's predisposition towards the nomadic population. So, subtle attempts were made to sedentarise the nomads that somehow limited their movement. Nomadic herders traditionally moved from place to place in search of grazing grounds and

pastures, which is in tandem with the seasonal cycle. The pastures need not be fixed as a particular area may have been used for grazing earlier, and the need for pastures often led them deep into the wilderness of border areas. Transborder mobility of the Tibetan nomads from Tibet to Ladakh is evident from the treaties between Ladakh and Tibet; in the pre-colonial times, it was in the form of political missions (Rao 2021, Gardener 2021). In modern times, the absence of a strict border facilitated transborder mobility and trade in the Himalayas. This is how the traditional system worked before the invasion of Tibet and the creation of people's commune.

During the Cultural Revolution period, the Tibetan nomads experienced an authoritative and destructive regime that snatched away their cultural rights, traditional pastoral system, religious freedom, land, and political power (Crowe 2013). The period from 1960-81 is broadly categorised as a period of 'collectivisation', and policies during this phase were based on the assumption of the 'tragedy of commons' (Bauer 2005). So, people's communes were created to prevent overgrazing and over-herding in the Tibetan plateau, which could have possibly emerged from the state's policies from the past decades to limit herders' movement within a specific area leading to increased trampling of the pastures (Klein et. at. 2011). The concerns regarding over-herding and overgrazing were based on mere assumption with no substantial evidence that could support the state's narrative. Further, the communes did not fetch the expected results for the Chinese government, so they backtracked from their policies and reintroduced the privatisation of grassland and individual livestock ownership in the 1980s, however, with some changes regarding the tenure of leases and ownership of the land. Nevertheless, Mao's era focused on glorifying the CPC's policies as an achievement that transformed the 'Old Tibet' from peasantry and feudalism into a 'New Tibet' under CPC's rule, which appears condescending.

2.2 Deng Xiaoping's regime and the impetus on Rangeland Degradation Narrative

The period post-1981 is regarded as the 'decollectivisation' period under Deng Xiaoping's regime which moved away from Mao's conservative policies to liberalisation. Policies concerning Tibetan pastoralists were formed that divided livestock equally among herders and disbanded communes (Goldstein & Beall 1989, Bauer 2005). Melvyn C. Goldstein and Cynthia M. Beall (1989), Melvyn C. Goldstein, Cynthia M. Beall, and Richard P. Cincotta

(1989), Daniel J Miller (2000), and Ken Bauer (2005) studied nomads in the TAR region, which was possible only after the liberalisation reforms in the 1980s. The above-mentioned studies provide a first-hand account of the nomads in the TAR. Melvyn C. Goldstein, Cynthia M. Beall, and Richard P. Cincotta (1989) conducted studies in the Phala region of TAR and were not concurrent with the Chinese government's decision to reduce livestock holding due to lack of evidence to support the government's position that reduction in livestock would augment grassland restoration. Further, Goldstein and Beall (2002) claim that there is no concrete evidence to support the degradation narrative in TAR. In the 1980s, Xiaoping's famous phrase of 'glories of getting rich' and promise of reform certainly brought good economic conditions for the mainland Chinese people, but the conditions of nomads had a different pace.

The government insisted on developing the nomads through permanent settlements (Miller 2000), which was quite perplexing as the previous policies of communes did not fetch the desired results. So, the state's impetus for the settlement of nomads was projected as essential for their development, but ultimately it resulted in the localisation of the nomadic population by limiting their mobility. However, this phase created space for nomads to breathe, Tibetan region also witnessed more religious freedom, and pastoralists were again individually controlling the land which gave a sense of revival of nomadic pastoralism to the Tibetan herders during the liberalisation period (Mandersheid 2002).

The redistribution of livestock to individual households was started in 1983, and by 1985, 'grassland law' was introduced that privatised the rangelands on a 50 years lease, however, the state reserved ownership rights (Ning, Zhaoli & Tao 2012, Richard 2005). Despite some years of hope, the state was back with a 'household responsibility system' under which a household was allotted a specific area of land as per the number of individuals for pastoral activities and raising the livestock, and it was to be marked by installing a fence (Miller 2000, Ptackova 2010). Bauer (2005) argues that the framework for policymaking was dominated by the 'tragedy of commons' and 'rangeland degradation' so, to avert the consequences of community-based sharing of the resource pool, the capitalist logic of individual ownership was applied by introducing a fence to mark the ownership of land. This policy appears to be working on equitable distribution of resources, but again, the element of mobility was inherently embedded, and this time through the fencing of the land. Fencing the allotted land

reduced the mobility of nomads and pastoralists, thereby transforming them into ranchers (Goldstein 2012), and the state was more concerned with the nomads' development through agropastoralism and animal husbandry.

The disregard for the nomadic traditional system was already there, but the state also used negative connotations for nomadic activities as not being eco-friendly and degrading rangelands (Miller 2000). The Chinese state justified their policies by portraying Tibetan nomads as antagonists and responsible for rangeland degradation. Eventually, for the conservation of ecology the state is bound to act, so the Chinese state exploited the narrative of ecological degradation to control the Tibetan population in particular the Tibetan nomads by limiting their movement.

2.3 Jiang Zemin's Development Policies and Ecological Concerns.

Following the democratic protests of 1989, martial law was imposed. The decade of the 1990s is crucial for Tibetan herders as it marked a radical policy shift from socialism to capitalism and nationalism. Chinese authorities implemented new policies to cope with the menace of rangeland degradation and ecological concerns. The Chinese state aimed to achieve the objectives by relocating-sedentarising nomads, introducing patriotic education, and developing the Western part of China. Meanwhile, a narrative of rangeland degradation gained popularity among scholars in China, suggesting that ninety per cent of the rangelands suffered degradation (Ning, Zhaoli & Tao 2012). R. B. Harris (2010) finds this dubious as per his research on rangeland degradation in China, the State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) also claims that only one-third of the Chinese grassland was degraded during 1999. Even so, ninety per cent degradation was frequently cited.

R. B. Harris (2010) analysed multiple studies that cite a ninety per cent degradation figure; one such study was conducted by Ning, Zhaoli & Tao (2012), which focuses on rangeland enclosure through fencing in the eastern Tibetan plateau. Wang et. al. (2014), Ning et. al. (2012) and Klein et. al. (2011) found little evidence that could back the rationale of fencing the rangelands; instead, it has caused unintended consequences like conflicts with neighbours, rangeland fragmentation, security concerns and reduced mobility of the nomads

and animals. Klein et. al. (2011) views decreased mobility of herders and animals as a threat to the traditional system, and Næss (2013) argues that mobility is the key to pastoral risk management strategy.

The state's narrative around the underlying cause of degradation revolved around the over-herding and overgrazing done by the nomads (Grushke 2012, Ning et al 2012, Ptackova 2012, Ptackova 2011, Miller 2000, Goldstein 2012, Bauer 2005). In 1992, the 'four infrastructure activities project' (*Si Peitao*) was rolled out in Madoi county against the backdrop of serious degradations, which included the construction of permanent houses, construction of animal sheds on the winter pasture, fencing of grassland and grass plantation (Du 2012). In the following years, more policies were implemented to conserve rangeland, and degradation remained the dominant framework under which Tibet's rangelands were discussed (Bauer 2005). However, regarding the cause of the degradation, the state's narrative is not backed by concrete evidence. R. B. Harris' (2010) research on various reasons put forth by the state as the putative cause of rangeland desertification in the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau (QTP) found lacking supporting scientific pieces of evidence. Perryman (2001) further brings out the analysis of satellite images that show no signs of degradation in Southern Qinghai. Similar claims are made by Goldstein and Beall (2002) in the TAR region. So, a blanket approach has been followed by the Chinese authority based on a hypothesis that lacks scientific reasons. This raises suspicion about the intent of the policies around nomads. However, the Chinese government continue to project its policies as 'scientific' based on weak evidence. Labelling policies as 'scientific' prepares the moral ground for the government to implement underthought and nefarious policies to control the population in the Tibetan region. A parochial concern was exploited to implement policies on a larger scale, which may be suitable for the area but would have unintended repercussions in other regions.

E.T Yeh (2003), C. Richard (2005), and M W Næss (2013) have brought out issues that have erupted in various regions of the Tibetan plateau due to the fencing of rangelands, including the decreased mobility of the animals and the herders, which is a concern for nomads. Nomads are essentially mobile, and settling them down would efface their identity as nomads and transform them into small family ranchers controlling their pastures (Goldstein 2012). As Levin and MacKay (2020) have established for nomads, territoriality is important, but

geography is not fixed; being mobile is part of their identity. Also, nomads pose a challenge to the state's capacity to tax, conscript and control their population, and it becomes essential for the state to exert greater control over them (Levin & MacKay 2020). Given the sensitivity of the Tibet issue for China, ulterior motives of Chinese policies cannot be ruled out; nomads being elusive people, can pose a security and sovereignty challenge to the state authorities.

The Chinese government started mulling the relocation and sedentarisation of Tibetan nomads proactively after 1997-98 when the Tibetan plateau saw a disastrous snowstorm that killed thousands of livestock. The government labelled the snowstorm of 1998 as a natural disaster, and taking into account livestock loss, the government decided to forcibly relocate nomads and introduce modern animal husbandry in Tibet (Miller 2000). However, Daniel J. Miller (2000) argues that for nomads, natural calamities are quite normal as they have been inhabiting the space for centuries, even before the formation of the PRC. However, this particular event marks a shift in the approach of the Chinese government's policies in Tibet that moves away from devising a technological fix within the space to the complete removal of grazing from the landscape (Klein et al. 2011). However, efforts to sedentarise nomads were in place as early as the de-collectivisation period through the private ownership of pastures. Simultaneously, there was an impetus for developing the western part of China initiated by Jiang Zemin's policy '*Xibu da kaifa*' or 'Opening of the West Campaign' (OWC) in 1999 (Ptackova 2011, Du 2012). Jarmila Ptackova (2011) argues that after the OWC (*xibu da kaifa*) in 2000, the Chinese state's efforts towards nomadic sedentarisation have increased in the disguise of socio-economic upliftment and ecological conservation policies.

2.4 Hu Jintao and the Tibet Protests

In 2003, a major step was taken to cope with rangeland degradation in QTP, the 'Converting pastureland into grassland' (*Tuimu Huancao*) policy intended to restore the degraded parts of grassland with complete grazing ban and classifying areas as no-go zones for a range of five months to ten years depending on the degree of degradation. It was a revised policy of 1985 grassland laws (Richard 2005) that adopted more stringent actions to conserve degraded areas. In QTP, the headwater region is the source of three major Asian rivers, the Yangtze, Mekong and Yellow Rivers and the Sanjiangyuan National Nature Reserve, SNNR

(*Sanjiangyuan guojia ji ziran baohu qu*), also known as ‘Three Rivers National Reserve’ encompasses headwater region under its protection. The protected region houses millions of Tibetan nomads inhabiting the area for centuries and now, due to state policies, are forced to move out of their ancestral space. The state has stressed the importance of relocation and sedentarisation for socio-economic amelioration and environmental protection. SNNR is China’s largest national park, and a lot of money has been invested by the Chinese government, which has increased the rural income of Tibetans, but the agency and the ownership of development are based outside their homeland (Fischer 2014). Despite such efforts, Ptackova (2012) raises concerns regarding the policy of relocation of nomads and reduction in herd size.

‘Ecological Resettlement’ (*Shengtai yimin*) 2004 is a signature project under the SNNR General Plan that works for poverty alleviation of the nomads, reduction in livestock and excludes the designated area for grazing activities (Richard 2005, Ptackova 2011, Ptackova 2012, Du 2012). However, the policy restricts the activities of nomads in the specified areas that had been occupied by them earlier, and it has caused resentment among the nomadic community. Du (2012) argues that the underlying cause of the degradation of the headwater region cannot simply be attributed to grazing by the nomads, so, the relocation policy is not holistic in its approach, it reduces the status of nomads as ecological migrants within their homeland. Wang et. al. (2000) claims that thinning of permafrost is the main reason for ecological changes in the region besides mining and grazing activities. Whereas, Harris (2010) has compiled various possible reasons for degradation that have been cited in the state’s narrative and most of them lack proper scientific evidence and survey issues.

‘Nomadic Settlement’ (*You mumin dingju*) in 2005 in Amdo, Qinghai and Sichuan provinces, similar to the ‘Comfortable Housing Project’, 2006 in TAR, aimed to sedentarise the Tibetan nomads, relocating them from their traditional pastures to state-constructed settlements which the state terms as ‘new socialist villages’ (UNPO 2009). Looney (2015) argues that ‘building a new socialist countryside’ is the Chinese government’s policy for village modernisation which is a top-down campaign to demolish and reconstruct villages. In Goldstein’s (2012) analysis, there is a difference in policy implementation in TAR and QTP, but the portrayal of nomadic activities as irrational has been the same. Ptackova (2012), Looney (2015), Wang et. al. (2014), Miller (2000), Goldstein (2012), and Bauer (2005) are equivocal about the

negative stereotype built around the Tibetan nomads that have been perpetuated over time through state's policies. Jarmila Ptackova (2011) while analysing the sedentarisation process of Tibetan nomads in Amdo, Qinghai and Sichuan, concluded that political control of Tibet is one aspect of the Chinese ecological policies that has been overlooked in the research community. Within the broader framework of degradation and ecological conservation, the state has actively restricted the mobility of the nomads, a cornerstone of their identity and a way of nomadic lifestyle.

Between 2006 and 2007, around 250,000 Tibetans were relocated to permanent brick houses in new socialist villages built alongside major roads in western Tibet, which amounts to roughly one-tenth of the population in TAR (UNPO 2009). A possible reason for the hasty implementation of the policy can be attributed to the propaganda drive on Tibet's condition after 30 years of reforms in China before the Beijing Olympics of 2008 (UNPO 2009). Just before the commencement of the Beijing Olympics, Tibet was rocked by a series of protests in March 2008, that ended in a lot of casualties and acts of self-immolation by the Tibetans. However, the Chinese state blamed the Dalai Lama for the incidents of self-immolation and called them 'mentally disturbed individuals' who would be arrested if they survived (McGranahan 2019). 'Anti-Self Immolation Programmes' were rolled out where the Chinese state was offering cash rewards for information on self-immolations by the Tibetans (VOA 2012). Barnett (2009) analysed the participation of the protests and found out a section of the protestors were Tibetan nomads, and their participation had increased over time. Fischer (2014) views the widespread protests in the Tibetan areas due to the spatial influx of the rural population to the urban centres caused either by the state or voluntary migrations. The rural-urban interaction in these areas had unintended consequences that the state has overlooked.

Remarkably, the growth rate of TAR and QTP surpassed the national average in the late 1990s, and during 1997-2007, TAR's GDP quadrupled (Fischer 2014). So, it was widely believed that the force of economic subsidies, growth and improving livelihood was an effective strategy to cope with the Tibet challenge (Fischer 2014). But still, there was resentment among the Tibetans, which accentuates that macroeconomic growth was projected as development by the Chinese state (Fischer 2014). The participation of the Tibetans in the development process is marginal as the inflow of subsidies for developmental projects is mainly from the central government, which was not exclusively for the development of Tibet

but for other industrial projects (Fischer 2014). Following the 2008 protests, Hu Jintao ordered the relocation of more Tibetan herders to ‘new socialist villages’ as a way not only to develop and stabilise them but also as means to ‘reinforce the solid great wall for combating separatism and safeguarding national unity’ (Robin 2009; Crowe 2013). Jarmila Ptackova (2012) also views the nomadic resettlement of 2009 as a response to the 2008 riots. The government’s response to the protest was a complete crackdown on monasteries, restriction on media and limited access to Tibetan areas, additionally, Tibetans were forced to accept the Panchen Lama, selected by the Chinese government and worshipping the Dalai Lama was criminalised who is revered by Tibetans as their religious leader (Crowe 2013, HRW 2013). As per Human Rights Watch (2013), in TAR, almost two million were moved to new houses, and in QTP, three million were sedentarised since 2000.

2.5 Xi Jinping and the 12th Five Year Plan

China claimed to have completed relocation in TAR by moving 2.3 million Tibetans by 2014 (VOA 2014), and these relocations have brought upon nomads a different set of challenges that they face while adjusting to the new environment. International Campaign on Tibet (2017) has been vocal about the concerns of the nomads with inputs from the Tibetan region itself and considers the policies of China in Tibet as a tool to have greater control over resources in the Tibetan region and its inhabitants. The 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015) had a special reference to the ‘National Nomadic Population Settlement Project’, which indicates the seriousness of Chinese intentions to complete the sedentarisation of nomads, which aimed at resettling 1.157 million people by 2015 (Singh 2022, RFA 2012). It is intriguing to know that China has been working to turn Tibet into the world’s largest national park to protect ‘the last piece of pure land’ as the state projects it (SCMP 2017), however, in the process, Tibetan nomads have been termed as encroachers to legitimise state’s policy to relocate them (ICT 2017).

Prior to the declaration of Qinghai-Hoh Xil as a World Heritage Site in 2017, a narrative was built around the region, labelling it as ‘no-man’s land’ and mapping of Hoh-Xil excluded a large cobalt mine and a multimodal transit corridor connecting inland China with TAR through Qinghai Tibet Engineering Corridor (QTEC) (ICT 2017). So, state policies are deliberately designed in a way that can serve a dual purpose, the primary target being the

Tibetan nomads' control and the second being the exploitation of resources of the region. However, the Chinese State Council of Information Office (SCIO), in a 2019 broadcast, presented a rosy picture of nomads being thankful for the relocations; similar testimonies of nomads were widely published in state media, but a report by Human Rights Watch (2013) brought out the anxieties of nomads for their identity. Lack of education, culture-specific skill set, and the language barrier are limiting the nomads' scope to get employment other than getting employed as a labourer (New York Times 2015).

Further, the 14th Four Year Plan (2021-2025) and long-term goals for 2035 give impetus to border area consolidation, relocating civilians to border areas, construction of border defence villages (*Xiaokang* villages), strict control on non-ecological activities in nature reserves with the removal of residents, agriculture and mining from the core areas (Singh 2022, China Dialogue 2021). The policy of border defence villages is another attempt to change the demography of the border region. Singh (2022) argues that relocated populations are like migratory birds that would come only during the peak season to make a profit and then return to the mainland where they came from depriving Tibetans of their share due to the divided tourist inflow. Further, the Chinese authorities have been backtracking from their promises regarding grazing rights; a report by Tibet Watch (2021) brings to light the Chinese authorities seizing grassland use certificates from the Tibetan nomads of Yushul in Qinghai province. The current state of Tibetan nomads is at the mercy of the Chinese Government; they have now been deprived of their ancestral land, their mobility is restricted, economic options are limited, and their culture is subjected to transformation in tandem with Han-centric Chinese national identity. Studies show that the conditions of nomads have changed, and they now have access to healthcare facilities, schools and roads, but the cost incurred is beyond economics, it is the traditional way of living that has been lost (NY Times 2015).

3. Cultural Assimilation: (Re)Education and (Re)Presentation

3.1 (Re)Education: Let us tell you who you were?

In the previous section, this paper analysed several Chinese policies in the Tibetan region which targeted the nomads' mobility under the garb of ecological concerns and socio-economic development. Those policies were actively forcing the nomads to sedentarise and

relocate from their ancestral lands; willingly or unwillingly, the nomads were being moved out which has happened as an undeniable fact. Despite the economic subsidies and claims of poverty alleviation, the ordeal of the Tibetan nomads gets masked by the state's propaganda. While the Chinese state was limiting the mobility of the nomads, it was simultaneously promoting cultural nationalism. Following the democratic protest in 1989, the CPC shifted its narrative from glorifying socialism to intensified pursuit of capitalism and nationalism through patriotic education and there was a boom in the construction of museums on the mainland (Vickers 2007).

The decade of the 1990s is very crucial, and it saw the most radical changes and cocktail of policies in Tibetan areas. Many policies were framed around Tibet during this period, including ecological policies, patriotic education implementation, leapfrog development, and the construction of museums. Impetus on nationalism and patriotic education is remarkable as it marks the shift of Chinese state discourse from glorifying socialism to revisiting the glories of past civilisations (Vickers 2007). When Jiang Zemin visited Tibet, he announced 'Leapfrog development' (1990) in Tibet that aimed to blend Chinese-Tibetan culture through economic development (Dodge & Keränen 2018). Simultaneously, the patriotic education campaign (1991) was launched, and the CPC tried to build a narrative that focused on bringing past humiliations to the mainstream (Wang 2008). The colonial subjugation and experiences were deliberately portrayed as ill-treatment of the Chinese people by the colonisers (Bennet & Standen 2014). Further, the Western powers and the Japanese were antagonised and painted as the main cause of the problems in contemporary China (Bennet & Standen 2014). However, this was done to conceal the incompetency of the socialist era to bring the promised economic prosperity to China.

Patriotic education in Tibet was institutionalised through the Third Forum on Tibet (*di sanci Xizang gongzuo zuotanhui*) in 1994. It advocated re-education of the Tibetans, including monks with a more sinicised version of history that used a condescending tone for the traditional Tibetan history and culture (Barnett 2009). In universities, the 'I am Chinese Programme' was launched to highlight and propagate nationalistic fervour among students (Vickers 2007). Another aspect of the forum was to malign the image of the Dalai Lama, being central to Tibetan Buddhism, culture and politics, the CPC wanted to get rid of the Dalai Lama. Despite having a feudal past, the Chinese state criticised Tibet and labelled the

Dalai Lama's rule as feudal serfdom (Crowe 2013). The patriotic education campaign loathed the Dalai lama and abased the Tibetan culture, which had a different socio-cultural constitution from mainland Chinese culture. To add to the woes of the Tibetans, the Chinese government abducted the 11th Panchen Lama within a few days of his selection in 1995 and replaced him with the state's choice for that position (USCIRF 2022). The whereabouts of the abducted Panchen Lama are still unknown.

The Chinese government left no stone unturned to break the pedestal of Tibetan culture. As Robert Barnett (2012) has already argued that the forum had nothing to do with economics. Tibetans were forced to learn what the CPC wanted them to learn about their own culture, it told them how advanced the Hans were and how they rescued Tibetans from the poverty and misery of backwardness and traditionality (Vickers 2007). Blending Chinese-Tibetan culture was a farce; the aim was to disrupt the original Tibetan culture and introduce a new Sinicised version of Tibetan culture, which can be in tandem with the national Chinese cultural narrative.

The education policies implemented by Chinese authorities further reinforced the ideological state apparatus that constantly misrepresented the history to CPC's favour. Nimrod Baranovitch (2010) has dealt with the aforementioned issue and analysed the textbooks in China over time. The textbooks in China during the Maoist era were extremely Han-centric, and the status of minorities (non-Han people) was considered 'others' or 'outsiders' (Baranovitch 2010). The dichotomy of 'insider' or 'outsider' broadly referred to the population on either side of the Great Wall, however, outside the wall were the areas inhabited by the tribesmen and nomads, which form contemporary minority groups in China. The narrative around pastoralists and nomads being backward or uncivilised predates the modern Chinese state; they were considered 'human faced and animal hearted' by the Hans (Williams 2002, 65). However, this narrative did not change much in the initial years of the formation of the PRC, and the state was more focussed on glorifying Socialism.

In the post-Mao period, particularly after the 1989 protests, the representation of minorities was reformed, as they were being seen as potential separatists and a threat to the unity of the Chinese state. Therefore, a narrative was propagated that Tibetans and Hans share a common

lineage and are descendants of 'Peking Man' (Sautman 1997). By claiming a common ancestry, the CPC wanted to amalgamate Tibetans with Hans to subdue their unique identity. Further, in textbooks, the use of words like '*Tong Hua*' (assimilation) and '*Han Hua*' (Hanisation) was replaced by '*Rong He*' (fusion or amalgamation) to smudge the distinction between the two ethnic group's origin (Baranovitch 2010). The attempts made at amalgamating Tibetan and Chinese identity accentuate the fact that Tibet existed as an independent sovereign entity, and the Chinese state considers that as a 'problem which needs to be fixed' to present China's image as a multi-ethnic and multicultural nation or the contemporary "One China" (McGranahan 2019).

Despite the regime change the pattern of representing the Chinese version of Tibet continued. The status of minorities who were considered as 'outsiders' and 'foreign people' in textbooks during the 1950's was changed to 'insiders' and 'family' by 2003 (Baranovitch 2010). The category of 'outsiders' was restricted to the Japanese, Russians and Western Colonisers (Baranovitch 2010). Further, to fortify the state's ideological apparatus and continue the efforts initiated by the 'Patriotic Education Campaign', in 2015-16 'Education Aid for Tibet Project' was launched. The Abovesaid project is a 'group form' of education where Chinese citizens visit TAR to teach Tibetans in a manner that produces young generations loyal to CPC (TCHRD 2019). Apart from the general science education, the most crucial aspect of this project is to control the moral and ideological education, similar to the 'civilising saviour complex' in colonial structures (Yang 2019 in McGranahan 2019). Nevertheless, through changing discourse around Tibetans in educational texts, the CPC has consistently transformed Tibetan identity and presented a false narrative that deprives Tibetans of their agency and distinct identity.

3.2 (Re)Presentation in Museums

During the Cultural Revolution period, the impetus was on destroying old habits, culture, customs and ideas (Pirie 2013) through oppression, violence and state persuasion (Ou & Xiong 2021). Under Zemin's regime, the methods adopted for cultural assimilation diversified. Authoritative and autocratic regimes have always sought coercion and resorted to violence to maintain the status quo (Ou & Xiong 2021), and policies that are aimed at

forcibly controlling the population are common under such regimes. Remarkably, the propaganda in Zemin's era was more sophisticated and practical than in Mao's era (Wang 2008). The state objectives were carefully weaved into policies that appeared as socio-economic development initiatives. The cocktail of policies since the 1990s adopted both coercive and ideological ways to assimilate Tibetans into the Chinese national narrative.

Apart from the repressive policies that the CPC adopted, the use of museums as a tool of nation-building and cultural propaganda proliferated (Bennet & Standen 2014). By institutionalising nationalism as a unifying ideology (Bennet & Standen 2014) through a patriotic education drive, museums were used to reproduce, (re)present and reinforce the state's narrative. Museums were exclusively showing a state-sanctioned narrative that complemented their education policy. It represented Tibet's history in a bad light, requiring reforms, which the CPC did as a favour to their people (Vickers 2007). Museums are particularly intriguing as they represent certain perceptions to visitors who may be locals or tourists. To a broader audience who is not actively engaged in academic curiosity, these representations help build consensus and persuade the masses into the state's representations of history. In the words of Dickinson et al. (2005: 87-89), "...museums function as a rhetorical invitation to collective memory and national identity" primarily through the persuasive practices of "collecting, exhibiting, and (re)presenting". Museums and their artefacts, displays, and spaces thus engage audiences in political projects that privilege certain (re)presentations while abandoning or constraining others..." (Dodge & Keränen 2018).

The changes happening in the political sphere directly impacted the representations in museums. In the early period of the PRC's formation, the museums were established to legitimise the new regime and in the post-Mao period, they tried to maintain CPC's image as the nation just witnessed the cultural revolution (Denton 2005). Throughout the time, the museums were used to legitimise the state's actions and CPC's image, but the democratic protests of 1989 changed the narrative from glorifying socialism to pragmatic nationalism (Denton 2005, Vickers 2007, Bennet & Standen 2014).

The museums in the 1990s and onwards were focussing on highlighting the past glories of the Chinese civilisation and the humiliations faced by the Chinese people at the hands of Western powers and the Japanese (Denton 2005, Bennet & Standen 2014). In 1999, a museum was

inaugurated by Jiang Zemin in Lhasa, Tibet, to mark the 50th anniversary of the ‘Peaceful Liberation of Tibet’ and 40 years of democratic reforms in Tibet (Dodge & Keränen 2018). The Museum showcased the events in Tibet’s history weaved into the national communist story. It showed the cruelty of the landlords in ‘Old Tibet’ and the miseries Tibet faced until the Chinese state bestowed development in these regions (Vickers 2007). The images and texts were material and symbolic rhetoric of the Chinese state that undermined the traditionality of Tibetans and their agency by showcasing ceremonial dresses and clothes with distorted historical context denying the minorities of their agency (Vickers 2007; Dodge & Keränen 2014). The particular use of the word ‘Tibetan historical civilisation’ instead of ‘Tibetan Civilisation’ while showcasing artefacts and images regarding Tibet eliminates the living and continuing aspects of Tibetan culture in contemporary Chinese cultural discourse (Dodge & Keränen 2018). The language used in descriptive texts in the museums of Tibet is condescending and belittles Tibetans as a civilisation by portraying CPC as a liberator of Tibet (Harris 2012, Dodge & Keränen 2018).

The message conveyed through the museums in Tibet is in tandem with the museums on the mainland that aim to show a gradual development and better future for minorities under CPC (Dodge & Keränen 2018). However, the representation of Tibet in Chinese museums differs from the representation in museums in India established by the Tibetans in exiles. There is a stark difference in representation and narratives around Tibet (Dodge & Keränen 2018). Museums in China make Beijing central to the national narrative (Bennet & Standen 2014), and the contemporary boom in museum construction accentuates the Chinese regime’s claim to the custodianship of 5000 years of Chinese civilisation (Vickers 2007). The state is also integrating non-Han sites and minority people like Tibetans into a national narrative that emphasises the multicultural, multi-ethnic composition of the PRC (Bennet & Standen 2014; Baranovitch 2010).

However, the agency of the minorities to act on their behalf and present their version of history seems impossible as it contrasts with the state’s version. The portrayal of Tibet is inconsistent with the history, and there is a discontinuity in portrayal. The Lhasa Museum shows the ‘Liberation of Tibet’ (as the Chinese State calls it) in 1950 as a new era of development, reforms and democratisation that Tibet could only have been possible by the actions of PRC (Dodge & Keränen 2018). The post-colonial and post-communist imaginary of Tibet having an agency of its own gets shattered by such representations (Lafitte 1999).

While Tibet's past is neglected, only selected aspects are handpicked that could serve the Chinese state narrative to demean Tibet's traditional practices and culture.

However, the monumental sites, like other institutions and museums, complemented the patriotic education received in schools by incorporating the local history into the national communist story (Bennet & Standen 2014). In an attempt to do so, the state has used coercive means to change the topography of the non-Han sites and deployed the PLA to guard these monuments of importance for CPC's narrative. The traditional Tibetan neighbourhood around the Potala Palace in Lhasa has been reduced to ashes and in that area, a monument commemorating the 'Peaceful liberation of Tibet' has been built and guarded by the PLA. The Chinese state has struck the core of the Tibetan belief system, which is associated with Potala Palace and their culture, by constructing a monument that reminds the local population of the horrors of the Chinese occupation of Tibet and suppression. By deploying the PLA to patrol that area instils fear and psychologically haunts them (Dodge & Keränen 2018). This monument is a paradox, being built by an authoritarian regime by crushing a civilisation and painting it as peaceful and democratic reform to the masses. Further, the presence of the PLA is a threat to the local Tibetans of the violent consequences they would face in case of any dissent against the Chinese state (Dodge & Keränen 2018).

So, by changing the representation, the Chinese state exploits the museums and the monuments as a symbol of authority and the consequences of resistance to the state are represented as acts of liberation. For the relocated nomads and the local Tibetans in the vicinity of these museums and monuments, their depiction and use of demeaning phrases for their religious leaders are disturbing, derogatory and violate their rights as humans. The policies of the Chinese state in Tibet accentuate the efforts to exert cultural domination over the Tibetans, and the representation of Tibet and its history is patronising. The museums serve the purpose of building consent, and the guarded monuments in the surrounding are caution signs for the local Tibetans.

4. Mobility and Marginalisation

So far, this paper has tried to identify the patterns in the Chinese policies that were targeting the mobility of nomads using state coercion. Thereon, it analysed how the Chinese state used

ideology in education policies and representation to transform the Tibetan identity. This section attempts to understand how the aforementioned issues create a complex phenomenon in the spaces where the herders have been relocated. The relocated nomads are at the crossroads of challenges in the semi-urban areas. Chinese state claims they have uplifted the Tibetans from poverty, however, that claim is based on macroeconomic markers. Andrew Martin Fischer (2014) extensively covers how the relocated population suffered from issues in urban spaces. The areas like ‘socialist villages’ are the rural-urban centres where the rural Tibetan population have been settled to bring them into close proximity to the state apparatus for better surveillance (Ptackova 2012). Within these settlements in urban areas, there are intersectional concerns that have gripped the nomads.

Firstly, they are trapped as their mobility is now restricted, and they cannot go back to where they came from. Second, they face cultural challenges in these areas where the state proactively engages in promoting Han-centric representation of the Tibetan culture through monuments and museums. These two issues have been addressed earlier, and lastly, they face the challenges of the rapid urbanisation process in these areas where they are socially and economically marginalised (Fischer 2014). Therefore, curtailing the mobility of nomads and relocating them has caused a triple whammy for Tibetan nomads.

Within the urban areas, the nomads face economic challenges; lacking skills for employment, the nomads have few options other than working as a labourer or doing menial jobs (Richard 2005; Ptackova 2012). To survive in the urban areas, the nomads require money for everything, which was not the case in the rural areas; there was an abundance of pastures for the animals and their produce significantly met the dietary and economic requirements of nomads. However, in the urban areas, they lack the natural resources to feed the animals, so they have to buy additional fodder, which is an extra burden on already economically weak nomads (Ptackova 2012). Further, they have to repay the loans taken from the state to construct the houses built in the urban settlements.

Cashmere/Pashmina wool is an exotic product of the Tibetan region, and the Tibetan nomads are the ones who rear these goats, but the trade and production centres are controlled by non-Tibetans (Bauer 2005; Fisher 2005). The nomads’ disposable income comes from savings

and selling animals, and if the state limits their herd size (Goldstein 2012) it directly reduces their capacity to create disposable money. Additionally, in the resettled areas, many nomads have already sold their livestock in order to get a house in urban areas (Richard 2005). Also, the meat market is controlled by Chinese-speaking Muslim merchants (Bauer 2005), so within the urban centres, the Tibetan-speaking nomads who are not literate at par with the urban population find it difficult to survive in such an environment. As a result, Tibetans resort to avoiding Muslim middlemen in business and try to sell their produce away from cities (Grant 2018). Eventually, the herders are suffering due to the market structure in these areas.

The conditions of urban settlements are different from the rural structure, and the nomads have to start a new life, which completely changes their lifestyle and brings new challenges (Xu et. al. 2008). Illiteracy among the nomads, lack of skill development programmes (Richard 2005), limited employment opportunities and coming from lower social strata culminate into an intersectional problem for these Tibetan nomads. As Singh (2022) writes in her article, 80 per cent of TAR's secondary industry was in construction from 1993-2017, which points out the number of Tibetans working as labourers. After interacting with resettled Tibetans, Jun Mai (SCMP 2020), informed about the benefits received from the Chinese policies but simultaneously raised concerns about non-economic issues. The cost of living in urban areas is a major problem for the nomads who are skilled only at livestock-related work and find it difficult to repay loans taken from the state to construct the house and fence along with daily subsistence (SCMP 2016). A report by Reuters (2019) in Madoi county brings out the conditions of nomads who were wooed by the Chinese government's financial compensation. Some got jobs and were happy, but a general concern was regarding the loss of folklore, traditions and identity.

Rapid urbanisation and a market-led economy have given rise to a phenomenon in Tibet that Fischer (2005) calls 'exclusionary growth' in which the state tries to turn peasants-herders into workers to produce more economic value (Fisher 2014). But the herders are reluctant to transform themselves as the worker status is stigmatised and, in the process, the Tibetans are marginalised as an agent of causing change (Fischer 2014).

The spatial influx of Tibetan nomads and mainland Han Chinese within the urban space

causes mutual tension. The urban Tibetans view the resettlements as disruptive to the social structure of the area and the non-Tibetans as a threat to their economic freedom (Fischer 2014; Grant 2018). Further, Andrew Grant (2018) brings out the discrimination the resettled Tibetan pastoralists face in the urban areas in Qinghai prefecture, where the Han Chinese hold a negative stereotype about the Tibetans, calling them people ‘without a civilisation’ (Grant 2018, 15). Such views are a reflection of the dominant narrative built by the state regarding the Tibetan identity over time. Further, it shows how deeply-rooted and effective propaganda can be when the state employs policies that use ideology and force to transform identities.

The rural resettled population faces discrimination from the dominant groups, and the lack of education and skills further reduces their chances of getting employment. Even the graduates from Tibetan medium are not preferred in jobs as their employment rate is declining (Yeh & Mackley 2018). With limited economic opportunities and discrimination faced by the nomads, the urban spaces have been accentuated as zones of intricacies for them, where the state policies and the local population have unpleasant encounters with the nomads. Therefore, in such areas the nomads are being marginalised, and there is nothing they can do about it, where both the state and the existing population are not in their favour.

So, relocating and sedentarising nomads should not be understood merely as a translocation of humans but rather as a disruption of the traditional agrarian system that has survived both Maoism and the period of reformation (Fischer 2014). Tibetan nomads face subordination and marginalisation, which are reproduced within the development agenda of the rural population by relocating them to urban areas and changing their traditional lifestyle to incorporate them into the national developmental process (Fischer 2014).

5. Conclusion

A critical gaze at the policies provides an alternate/new perspective to understand the problems at the grass root level. The Chinese government’s approach resembles ‘authoritative high modernism’ that used ‘state-claimed scientific fixes’ to change the socio-cultural space of the Tibetans. However, the actual cause of the rangeland degradation has not yet been

scientifically established, but policies are framed on the mere conjecture that nomadic practices are regressive and primitive. This has given the Chinese government a free hand to use mobility as a tool to control the Tibetan population. Further, through relocation, the state tries to assimilate Tibetans into a national identity which is dominated by ethnic Hans. A broader analysis of Chinese policies shows a systematic approach to exert greater control on the Tibetans. On one hand, ecological policies force nomads to migrate, and on the other hand, the cultural hegemony of Han-dominated Chinese Government subjugates the Tibetan culture. Tibetan culture and nomadic practices are targeted through museums, where consent is built, and legitimacy is sought by reproducing the state propaganda. The strict control of media and hassles in conducting research in Tibet further complicates the situation for scholars to understand the reality of Tibetans in contemporary China.

So far, the available scholarship and civil society reports propose an image of Tibetan nomads that contrasts the Chinese Government's projection. Nomadic practices have been sustainable and the very existence of nomads in such harsh environments is itself proof of their sustainable techniques and efficiency, which the state has failed to acknowledge (Miller 2000, Bauer 2005). Mobility and migrations have been established practices for ecological health and maintaining the diversity of flora and fauna (Klein et. al. 2011, Miller 2000). Klien et. al. (2011) has argued that environmental policies are not in tandem with climate change, which is a big loophole that hinders the effective response to rangeland degradation.

The studies analysed in this article show that the Chinese government has been reluctant to accommodate the perspective of nomads and their traditional knowledge which could have been helpful to cope with the menace of rangeland degradation. Instead, the government, in the garb of ecological conservation, coercively implemented policies that force nomads to relocate and sedentarise into ghetto-like colonies away from their ancestral land. There is sheer disregard for the cultural and religious rights of Tibetan nomads. Over time, it is evident that the Chinese government follows a high-modernist approach and used mobility to change the social structure of the Tibetan region.

Further, the state-sponsored colonies help the state to effectively control the nomads by concentrating them locally and eliminating any threat to 'One China' policy. In doing so,

culture has been exploited and targeted to efface nomadic identity and assimilate Tibetans into a homogenous national identity. So far, whatever the reason be, the Chinese government has targeted the essential part of nomads' life that is their mobility, and this shows how the state uses mobility as a tool to control the population. There are shifts and discontinuity in policies, but mobility is an undertone and a continuous pattern throughout the Chinese policies towards Tibet.

To conclude, the analysis of the Chinese policies in Tibet, the saga of Tibetan nomads is full of hurdles, state oppression, curtailed freedom, marginalisation, and religious and cultural interferences. Still, the nomads are trying to cope and match the pace of development in the urban areas. There is a need for a well-thought-out and planned way to execute the policies for Tibet, and of course, proper implementation comes primarily. The Chinese state has poured subsidies into the Tibet region still there is resentment among the Tibetans, which foregrounds economic markers as not true indicators of development (Fischer 2014). The Chinese state needs to consider the position of the Tibetan nomads and the centrality of their specific cultural practices in their day-to-day lives. Tibetan nomads and Tibetans, in general, are civilisational beings who have a specific set of practices, customs and religious beliefs that are essential for their identity and culture. Any interference in the cultural and religious affairs of Tibetans will have repercussions and unintended consequences, as witnessed during the 2008 protests and several other instances of self-immolation.

There is a need to look for the resolution of the issues in the urban areas where nomads are relocated, one being letting them go back to their traditional roots, which is highly unlikely. Another is providing them with modern education that does not distort their traditional history and imparting skills so that they can get employment other than menial jobs in the urban areas to become self-sustaining. However, the state's efforts have not materialised as expected, perhaps due to superficial thoughts while framing policies for Tibetan nomads. Fischer (2014) rightly argues that Tibetan policies are doomed to fail because of the prevailing political structure, re-education campaign, and other forms of state predispositions and biases. The repercussions of the sedentarisation and relocation policies have not been duly addressed by the state, which accentuates the disinterest and disenchantment of the state towards nomads. It is only the challenges nomads pose to the state that concerns the CPC; the culture and tradition nomads carry finds no place in Chinese national discourse.

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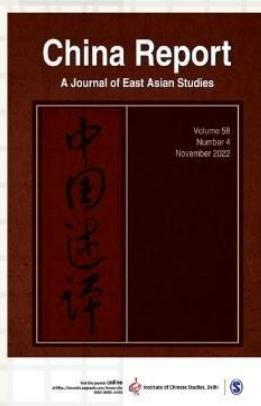


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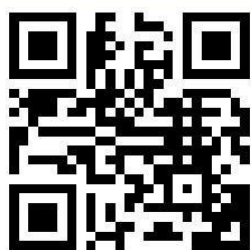
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