Review Article

MUSEALISATION OF TIBET: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE POTALA PALACE

Abstract

Tibet is a controversial topic of discussion in relation to ethnography, culture and politics. The conceptions of Tibet were (re)constructed by various agencies with complex and intertwined motivations. Being one of these strategic agencies, musealisation has contributed significantly to the (mis)representation of Tibet. The Potala Palace has been one of the most crucial catalysts in shaping the imagination of Tibet. In 1999, the Tibet Museum was established near the Potala Palace, where many artefacts were relocated into the new Tibet Museum. This gesture transformed the Potala Palace from a historical religious site into a hybrid institution.

This paper intends to highlight specifically the establishment of the Potala Palace, unpacking controversial terms such as "Shangri-La" and "Tibetophilia", which resulted in accelerating the interest to musealise Tibet. Potala Palace is methodologically leveraged as both a catalyst and representation of such a musealisation mechanism. Furthermore, it is to initiate a critical discourse for the (mis)representation of Tibet through the institutionalised and internalised forces of musealisation in the postcolonial contexts.

Keywords: *Tibet, Potala Palace, Musealisation, Postcolonialism, Ethnography, (Mis)Representation of Tibet*

Introduction

Musealisation refers to the process of detachment and removal of an object from its original context, relocating to an exhibition, museum-like manner or environment (Osterlund, 2013, p.2). This paper re-evaluates the interconnected dynamics of the Potala Palace and the Tibet Museum in Lhasa, through historical and literature references of both establishments, analysing how these two institutions as musealisation apparatuses have contributed to the (mis)representations of mystified, exoticised and fabricated Tibetan culture.

Located alongside the Tibet Museum in the capital city of Tibet[1], Lhasa, The Potala Palace was a traditional-style fortress that used to be the Winter Palace of the Dalai Lama from 1649 to 1959 (Harris, 2012, p. 4). It was recognised by The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2000) in the World Heritage List in 1994, right after 1999 when the Chinese government decided to establish the Tibet Museum (He, 2012, p.32). The Tibet Museum was established to mark the monumental event of the '40th year of Economic Reform' in Tibet. The fact that this was an important event, the name of the Museum was inscribed by the Chinese leader back then General Secretary Mr Jiang Zemin (Huang, 2000, p.27). Whereas, the Potala Palace as a legitimate heritage institution has secularized from previously a respected Tibetan Buddhism religious site into a hybrid institution. It functions now as a tourism attraction, a heritage icon of the feudalistic past, and a symbol of multiculturalism and multiracialism. Ironically, the Potala Palace still practices Buddhism onsite, such as the annual Tibetan Exorcising Evil Festival which happens on 29th day of the Tibetan calendar's 12th month, which is highly regarded across all the Tibetan Buddhism monasteries (Embassy of P.R.C, 2006). On the contrary, the new Tibet Museum positioned as a secular institution derived its collections of artefacts mostly from the Potala Palace, visioned to be the first comprehensive and modern museum in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) of China (Harris, 2012, p. 183). This paper intends to compare and therefore address the reasons behind the ideological displacements and similarities between these two institutions, such as the historical provenance, curatorial strategies, narratives, objectives, collections, and displays of artefacts. By evaluating various aspects of these two institutions, so as to achieve a better understanding of the interlinked dynamics and complexity of many constructed imaginaries of Tibetan culture.

Tibet is stereotypically represented as two sets of contradicting concepted images. The first image is an unfolded legendary renowned Shangri-La paradise an epicentre of Buddhism (Bishop, 1989, p. 216). Whereas the second is a pejorative image of inferior, primitive, dangerous, and repugnant nation (ibid). However, these two representations

[1] Tibet in this paper refers to both the cultural and geographical concept of a region that covers Tibetan Plateau in East Asia and Tibet Autonomous Region in People's Republic of China (Wittke, 2010).

may not be entirely opposed to each other, but rather stand in a dialectical relationship. This is due to the fact that both of Western and Chinese imperialist perceptions as the constant manipulator (Nyman, 1983, p.101) of constructing the ongoing myths and fictional Tibet. This can be traced back to Western colonial history, as well as the ideological and political shift after the 1950's war between China and Tibet (Harris, 2013, p.64). Subsequently, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) implemented a nationalistic approach in shaping and addressing Tibetans as an 'unquestionable' minority race of Chinese and a valuable name card to the world.

Both of these two institutions rely on musealisation as strategies to represent Tibetan ethnicity. This has been accelerated by the advancement of inventions of open-seas navigation in the 15th century, such as the compass which also ignited the Age of Exploration, leading Europeans and Americans to start expeditions into Africa and Asia (Swanick, 2006, p.4). The foreign 'treasures', including objects, animals, plants and even humans found in these 'other' regions, were collected back as exotic triumphant items. With the increasing trend of exhibiting exotic collections such as reconstructing "ethnographic villages" in the colonial fair, native people were captured to perform in the replicated native village for the exhibition fair duration (Corbey, 1993, p.339).

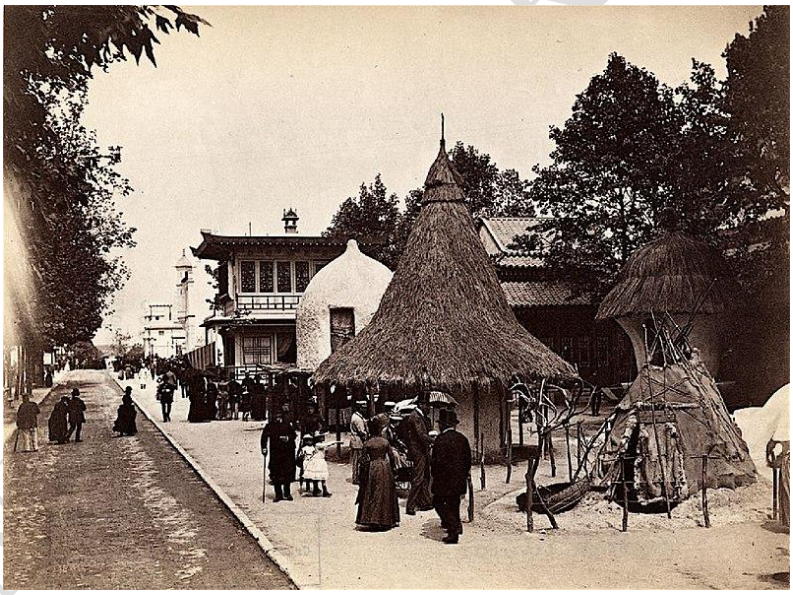

Figure 1. Exposition Universelle de 1889 Habitation d'Afrique Centrale[France Exposition 1889 Houses in Central Africa] (S.n,1889).

A well-known example of such ethnographic representation is the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition, curated by American Otis T. Mason from the Smithsonian Bureau of American Ethnology. The exposition reconstructed different living habitats of Africa, Egypt and many other non-European nations (Corbey, 1993, p.339). This continuous development had led to Ethnography as a specialism that was separated from the field of Anthropology, which systematically studies the individual culture (Dictionary, 2021). Due to the remote location and fabricated myths, Tibet became the

most sought-after ethnographic subject matter which was predominantly based on the Western colonial lineage.

This paper intended to comprehensively examine the establishment of Potala Palace and how it produced the 'constructed' Tibetan culture cognitively. This is specifically focused on the historical, ethnographic, and cultural (mis)representations of Tibet, as well as unpack the dynamics and rationales of the musealisation strategies anchored by these two institutions.

Methodology

What and who has contributed to the construction of the mystified, exotic, and misrepresented images of Tibet? How have these images been produced, sustained, and transformed? This paper is to analyse various (mis)representations of Tibet derived from the Potala Palace as well as the lineage to the Tibet Museum, particularly in regard to their historical, social, political and cultural context. Research for this study is predominantly focused on reviewing the literature of scholars and visual analysis. Due to the restrictions on library premises during the Covid-19 pandemic, thus most of the literature reviews are secondary sources available online. This study is based on a contextual and visual comparative examination, where the Potala Palace is the chosen field site in an attempt to understand the correlations of musealisation. Where the musealisation is discussed as a complex construction with postcolonialism embedded, Potala Palace is leveraged as both a representation of such a mechanism, but also a catalytic institution driving towards the building of the mechanism.

Extensive textual and visual analysis are collected from academic journals, publications and research papers from JSTOR, ChinaMaxx Digital Library, libraries, newspapers, travel and museum websites. This paper starts with an introduction by addressing the phenomenon of the misrepresented Tibet, followed by examining the literature reviews of the museum history and the dilemma of Tibetan Buddhism in representing Tibet. After which Chapter 3's methodology, the paper is mapped into two main sections: Chapter 4 intended to dissect the physical and symbolic establishment of the Potala Palace from both British and Chinese perspectives. The aim of this paper is to search for the musealisation as apparatus that contributed to the (mis)represented Tibet. The decision to select the Potala Palace as a case study was deliberate, as it is perceived as the historical 'cardinal' symbol and symbolic of Tibet. This research will unpack the history, mission and strategies of behind the musealising institution as significant disseminator for the (mis)represented images of Tibet retrospectively.

Literature Review and Discussion

The Rise of Tibetan Shrine Museums

In the early 20th century, the British Museum acquired many collections of Tibetan materials, mostly the objects collected from the expedition led by British Captain Younghusband to Tibet during 1903-1904 (Harris, 2012, p.17). This rising interest in the culture of Tibet has been accelerated by explorers like Captain Younghusband and many others from the West in the early 19th century (ibid). They collected, studied and categorised the materials as valuable 'art' or exotic 'antiques' through their perceptions. Thereafter, these objects soon entered the art markets in large quantities to personal collectors, which initiated the beginning of future museum collections Following the discussions of the appropriate ways of displaying these 'exotic' artefacts, a more common approach is to re-enact the shrine ambience as the authentic setting of where and how these religious objects used to be placed. This trend of building Tibetan shrines to house material objects was adopted subsequently by individual enthusiasts and museum curators

The idea of the "Roof of the World"[2] became a continually increasing part of the political expansion in all sorts of ways in the nineteenth to the twentieth century, from government institutions, anthropologists, and curious explorers, to museum establishers. Due to these political revivals and competitions, Tibet material cultures were taken away and seen as a trophy asset to claim their positions in the political competition globally. These Tibetan objects are represented and interpreted by the non-Tibetans without being accessible to Tibet for thorough understanding. Tibetan diasporas, especially after the Chinese war with Tibet in 1959, have begun to participate reflexively in making their own culture abroad on a global scale. Despite the fact that Tibetans who live overseas are restricted to have a close connection with Tibet when the Chinese government took sovereignty over it. The Tibet Museum leveraged this opportunity to further reconstruct the narratives of Tibetan culture to Chinese interest, which resulted in commodifying and dehistorising Tibet through musealisation.

[2] The ' Roof of the world' or ' Top of the world' refers to the high region in the world, such as Himalayas, the Tibet and the Altai Mountains. First used by British explorer John Wood in 1838, described in presumably Wakhi, *Bam-i-Duniah* (Roof of the World) as a "native expression" (Keay, 1977).

Figure 2 Alice Kandell, surrounded by her collection of 17th to 19th-century Buddhist Art (Dorsa, 2018)

Tibetan Buddhism as part of the New Age Movement [3](1970s) had led to shrines displays in museums (Loos, 2018). In New York City, Rubin Museum of Art housed numerous artefacts inclusive of books, paintings and textiles from the Himalayas regions, including Nepal, Bhutan, India, China, Mongolia and Tibet. These collections from the museum were assembled by Tibet enthusiasts, as there were not many well-established Tibetan studies (ibid). Such an example would be Alice S. Kandell, who had a great passion for collecting Tibetan Buddhist art (Fig. 2), inspired by her visits to the shrines. As a result, she had made own personal shrine at home and helped to design other shrines in museums (ibid). These types of personal interest had later set the trend that expands vastly to other major museums globally. One of the key characteristics of these reconstructed shrines consists of dimmed ambience to imitate the semi-dark light quality to that of butter lamps in traditional monasteries (2018). Some of the shrines in museums were even treated as religious practising site and consecrated by senior Buddhist clerics, such as the Newark Museum had invited 14th Dalai Lama for a consecration ceremony (Harris, 2012, p. 13). Be it the government or individuals like Tibetan diasporas or enthusiasts have had the privilege throughout in history to being in a position of power and authority, to construct various images of Tibet (Bruner, 1994, p. 408).

1.1 A Note on Terminology- Tibetophilia

'Tibetophilia' is a term mentioned by Clare Harris (2012, p.127) in her book "*The Museum on the Roof of the World: Art, Politics, and the Representation of Tibet*":

[3] The New Age Movement is a difficult term to define, in this paper it refers to the description from sociologists, that it was a new religious and spiritual movement rapidly developed in the Western world during the 1970s (Kemp, 2004).

> "It is referring to the notion of well-to-do westerners trying to escape what they see as soulless modernity by running off to a fantasy paradise. They want to keep Tibet as their museum, to preserve it in cultural formaldehyde, to freeze it in time" (Harris, 2012, p. 127)

The term views Tibetan culture as the unsullied alternatives to existing Western lifestyles that circled around the material satisfactions. Since the 1960s, understandings of Asia had gradually become more known to the Western world after the World War II. In 1965, the National Origins Quota System[4] is eradicated by the United States Immigration Act, this had allowed more racial freedom which led to the rise of Buddhism centres established by pioneering Tibetans in the country (Morreale, 1988, p. 20), by the end of 1980, there are 184 of such centres founded for learning and meditation (ibid). This continuous trend was also a by-product of the New Age Movement formed during the period of social chaos, there was a demand for alternative countercultures to replace the mainstream American way of concepts and practices. Tibetan Buddhism was one of the alternatives, which was Eastern mysticism combined with Native American spirituality (Shakya, 1996, p.178).In a 1978 interview in the quasi-New Age magazine *Parabola*, a Tibetan scholar noted a side effect behind Tibetan Buddhism's mystery nature, many western students did not go deep enough into studying the tradition of Tibetan Buddhism(ibid). Despite the lack of comprehensive studies of Tibet in the 1970s, the religious practices of Tibet were generalized and promoted by amateur Tibetan enthusiasts. Tibetophilia became the key contributing factor to the commodification and exploitation of Tibetan culture. It had sustained the ongoing mystified image of Shangri-La across the world, which brought attention from the Chinese Government to narrate its political message based on these fantasies of Tibetophilia,

[4] The U.S National Origins Quota System refers to the quota provided immigration visas to two percent of the total number of people of each nationality, starting in year 1890, it entirely excluded immigrants from Asia (Office of The Historian USA, N.d)

From Cabinet of Curiosities to Ethnographic Museums

The answers to understanding the musealised constructions and representations of Tibetan culture have to be traced back to the historical contexts. Tibetan among many other minority ethnic groups had their culture manipulated by musealisation, where objects are transformed from their functional state into examined subjects housed in museums or museum-like mechanisms (Maranda, 2009, p.253). It is crucial to understand the origins of the museum conception, especially the methods of maneuvering culture by an ethnographic museum. There is an indivisible connection between the history of museums and musealisation as an apparatus derived from this institution, this paper relied considerably on (1) '*Museums in motion: An introduction to the history and functions of museums*' (Alexander *et al*.,2017), (2) '*Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture*' (Griffiths, 2001); and (3) '*Science, magic and religion: the ritual processes of museum magic*' (Bouquet & Porto, 2006). A museum is defined as an institution that cares for a collection of artefacts and other important "artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific objects" (Alexander, 2017, p.73). The purpose of a museum varies over time, ranging from housing private collections to a general platform for public education. Historically, early museums in the 16th century are primarily built by private wealthy collectors, often known as Cabinets of Curiosities. A famous example is Ferrante Imperato's own Cabinets of Curiosities (Fig. 3), his collections consisted vast variety of objects from "nature, geology, ethnography, archaeology, religion or historical relics, works of art, and antiques" (p. 74).

Figure 3. Engraving from Ferrante Imperato's, Dell'Historia Naturale (Naples,1559).

In the 16th century, the French, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and British had begun the colonization of Asia and Africa mainly (Alexander, 2017). In the 17th -19th century, the enthusiasm and fanaticism of private collectors had expanded beyond just rare

objects, native human beings were captured as trophies. They were regularly exhibited in small family groups and performed for European audiences at Colonial Fairs around European cities (Griffiths, 2001, p.160). The indigenous people were forced into traveling dime museums and circuses as unusual ethnographic wonders (ibid). Historian Robert Rydell (2013) once argued,

> "Native people are perceived no differently to commodities, as "natural resources to be exploited as readily as mineral deposits" (Rydell, 2013, p. 202).

The first reconstructed exhibitory "ethnographic village" with native performers happened during the 1889 Paris Exposition fair (Griffiths, 2001, p.160). These native people were seen as 'entertainment', as well as display trophies to demonstrate the dominance of European colonial power over the colonized regions. In addition, Americans had also adopted a similar colonial mentality. Otis T. Mason who was the curator for the Smithsonian Bureau of American Ethnology commented that he would adopt the village display for the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. Africans with other oriental people like Javanese and Japanese were living in the newly constructed native houses, wearing their native costumes and 'performing' their daily life to the 'civilized' European audience (Bouquet & Porto, 2006). In 1917, Federic A. Lucas who was the director of the American Museum of natural history (AMNH), he had realised that such an exhibition of the native display was a valuable token to compete with other museums and amusements in the city. With the intention of getting more audience, he transformed the AMNH into a major ethnographic institution (Griffiths, 2001, p.160). Natural elements were brought into the museum as enclosed, miniature narrated exhibits of reality. That included the reconstruction of indigenous camps or homes, which was described as especially popular and entertaining by children to imagine them as little 'doll people' (p. 160). These colonial legacies of seeking ethnographic content lingered till the British expeditions to Tibet in 1903 (Fig. 4). Officer Younghusband had led the expedition to achieve more 'exotic' treasures as the British triumphant, and he had categorised these findings into an intelligence report, simply based on his own judgment of what could be considered 'valuable' (French, 2016, p.22). The personal classifications by Younghusband were based on the existing colonial mentality of segregating the unusual 'Others' in comparison with the supposed 'standard' measured by the Euro-American coloniser then.

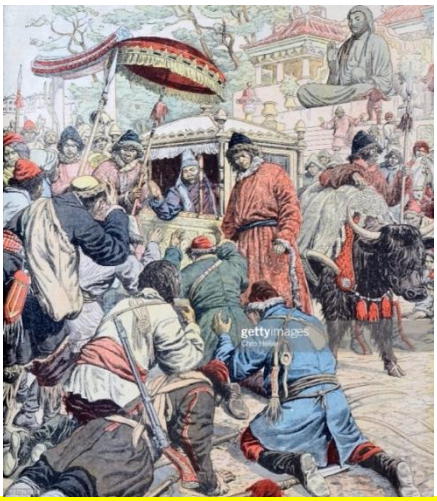

Figure 4. In Lhasa the Dalai Lama Flees the British Expedition to Tibet (Hellier, 1904)

Cultural heritage is a power dynamic of selecting the more 'valuable' past that we intend to present contemporarily, be they for economic, cultural, political, or social purposes (Khakzad, 2012). It is evident that the notion and origin of the museum were heavily embedded with the post-colonial authority to define the object of cultural heritage for preservation. Musealisation is a canonical mechanism that can be traced back to the history of museum, but also detachable as an apparatus notion itself. The Chinese government has leveraged the notion of the museum to musealise Tibetan culture. It is based on maneuvering the general perception of the museum as an authoritative institution, that was connotated with the colonial history of museum establishments. An example such as in the Tibet Museum, a similar concept in a different context of 'exoticising' Other cultures is demonstrated by the placement of human effigies dressed up in Tibetan costumes in sterile glass cabinets (Fig. 5). The museum visitors in these cases, are standing in a 'privileged' position gazing and scrutinising at these musealised 'collections. The concept of colonial superiority rooted within the notion of museum had been repackaged by the CCP after decades, it has evolved into musealisation apparatus utilised by the authority in reimagining and representing on behalf of Tibetans.

(Re)presentation of Tibetan Buddhism

The Potala Palace revolves around Tibetan Buddhism inevitably, Tibet and Tibetans were represented exotically through the religious lens. This section relied on the review of (1) the journal article '*Exhibiting the Exotic, Simulating the Sacred: Tibetan Shrines at British and American Museums*' (Clark, 2016), and (2) the book '*Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the west'* (Lopez, 2018). One of the most distinct examples is the rise of shrine displays in museums, the exhibition objects were displayed on Buddhist altar (*Chosham*) or shrine room (*Chokang*) in secular museums (Clark, 2016, p. 43). Museumgoers are allowed to make offerings to the statues and circumambulate the architecture for prostrations (p. 43). These supposedly highly regarded religious settings are reenacted as miniature Buddhist shrines under the

museum roof, so as to recreate an immersive cultural spectacle for the visitors. The musealisation acted upon not just objects but the entire temple ambience, it has generalized the Tibetan shrines as a visual commodity and props for commercial purposes. Although the artefacts in such museum shrines might not offend all Buddhists, due to the fact of ambiguity when classifying a religious object. Oftentimes, an object is recognized as religious after consecration was performed by Buddhist clerics, this is commonly applied to Buddha statues and Tangka (Bentor, 1996, p. 292). Thus, a common ground had reached in the debate on museum display, researchers, enthusiasts and Tibetan Lamas agreed that there should be not restricted displays of religious objects too particularly if the intention for the display came out of respect (ibid). Nevertheless, such shrine displays indeed pronounced the problematic appropriation of religious Tibet as the sole focal point, where artefacts are displayed without holistic truthful context. Therefore, such a spectacular exhibition narrative has enhanced the sensationalisation and stereotypical fabrications of Tibetan Buddhism. Moreover, historical records from West had portrayed Tibetan Buddhists notoriously as a 'sinister and superstitious cult' (Lopez, 2018, p. 10). Furthermore, due to the geographical remoteness of Tibet, people with limited access could only imagine and sensationalise the otherworldliness of 'mystical' Tibet. Lopez (2018) describes,

> "Tibet was consistently portrayed as isolated and closed during the nineteenth century, the period in which both Britain and Russia made attempts to establish relations with the government in Lhasa but were rebuffed" (Lopez, 2018, p. 10).

Besides geographical and political reasons to reimagine Tibet, Potala Palace is an icon closely associated with the supreme religious leader, the 14th Dalai Lama who is in exile. Potala Palace acts as the immobile symbol of Buddhism epicentre in contrast with Dalai Lama's mobile spirituality, both enhance the enthusiasm for Tibetan Buddhism across the world.

Such attention to Tibetan Buddhism in museums can be a double-edged sword. Museum as a notion itself connotes with secularity, which often interpreted as authoritative rationality. Musealised religious displays leveraged on the oppositional concept of "sacred" and "secular" to evoke the visual attention from audiences. These portrayals of Tibetan shrine in museums were embedded with a colonial conception that has endorsed the imagination and representation of a hyper-religious Tibet.

Establishment of Potala Palace

Mythical Tales of Tibet

Potala Palace was founded in ca. 637 by Tibetan King *Srong Btsan Sgma Po* (r.ca.614-650), who envisioned an eleven-storied castle-like architecture on the Mar Po Ri Hill to serve as his royal court (Irons, 2008, p. 508). Potala Palace's original Tibetan name '*Rtse Po Ta La's Pho Brang*' translated to be 'Summit Palace of Potala' refers to Mount Potalaka in India, where it is believed to be the holy site for the compassionate Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (ibid). About 1000 years later, in 1645, the original architecture was renovated by the fifth Dalai Lama (1617-1682), making it the Central Tibetan Government's new quarter (ibid). A sketch by Johannes Gruber in 1661(Fig. 5) who is an Austrian missionary and explorer who passed by Tibet, he had recorded the substantial process of the construction (ibid).

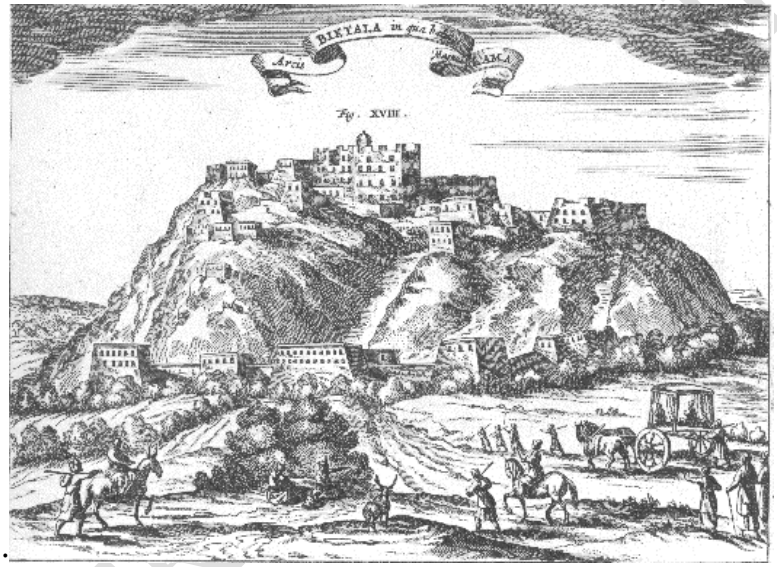

Figure 5. Depiction of Potala Palace (Grueber,1651).

Potala Palace was also the residence of Dalai Lama and Tibetan Government from the 14th to 17th century. Currently, it has thirteen floors in total, and contains more than one thousand rooms inclusive of numerous residential rooms, receptions, halls, monastic quarters, and offices. The palace is mainly separated into White and Red Palace, the White Palace functioned as the administrative and residential areas, whereas the Red Palace has located for religious purposes especially, where includes the reliquary tombs of the fifth and seventh to thirteenth Dalai Lamas (Irons, 2008, p. 508).

In the mid-19th century, narratives of Tibet from Europeans could be exaggerated and imaginative. In a 1849 report to the Royal Geographical Society, it was written that Potala Place had plenty of sacred objects that it surpasses in wealth to Mecca and Medina (Gutzlaf, 1851, p. 214). Another record stated that the Potala Palace has so many treasures of gold offering, even a golden rooftop for the Potala Palace (ibid).

Gold was mentioned tremendously in Western accounts about Tibet, Tibetans were falsified as the gold-digging 'ants' in the mountains to the North of India (ibid). In 1773, a paraphrased story of Dalai Lama had sent gold ingots to Warren Hastings as a diplomatic effort to bring peace, Dalai Lama was also described as being the most opulent individual in existence (p. 214). These stories illustrated Tibet as a place rich in gold and thus took yellow as sacred colours, such as the yellow robes of the Tibetan lamas (ibid). In 1904, Landon also imagined Lhasa as an eternal sanctuary, the most secret place on earth. As Landon (1912) described his team's tense anticipation upon arrival in Lhasa,

> "A gleam of gold in the far distance, and we thought that Lhasa was at last in sight….[But] we had to possess our souls in patience. Their reaction to catch the first glimpse of the rood of the Potala" (Landon, 1912, p.656).

From there, the myth of Tibet originally begins with banal greed for wealth, the Gold-ignited the desire and longing for Tibet as a secret resourceful place before it became an exoticised religious wonder.

The British Expedition

The curiosity for Tibet had amplified by the overstated myths in the 19th century. In 1903-04, the British launched an expedition led by Captain W.F.T.O'Connor, it was described as a journey for the long-waited obsession with the treasures in Tibet (Harris, 2012, p. 52). There, Captain O'Connor instructed Captain Francis Younghusband to compile an intelligence report of Tibet as the outcome of the expedition (ibid). Although the British had not colonised Tibet before, there was an intended British invasion to Tibet and Tibet had to sign an agreement treaty at Potala Place in Lhasa (ibid). One of the benefits of the colonial patronage signed in the treaty was that Tibet would able to receive the preservation and protection of their culture from the grasp of China and Russia (p. 52). Francis Younghusband as the expedition's leader had demonstrated that they had reached the heart of Tibetan power by signing of the treaty. It is evident to tell that the Potala Palace meant to have a sacred status to him as he described after signing:

> "I insensibly suffused with an almost intoxicating sense of elation and goodwill….Never again could I think evil, or again be at enmity with any man…..Such experiences are only too rare, yet it is these few fleeting moments that are reality" (Jung, 1968 & Bishop,1989, p. 161).

Figure 6. O'Connor and domestic staff at Gyantse in 1905 (Amenhoteplll, 1905).

Tibet held political importance to Britain, Sir Charles Alfred Bell KCIE CMG used to be the British political officer for the Himalayan regions, including Tibet (Harris, 2012, p. 77). He encouraged the Dalai Lama to transform Tibetan territory into a strong and unified modern state, this actually positioned Tibet into a geo-strategic zone between Russia and China (ibid). British also put in efforts to transform Tibet into a legitimized nation-state and friendly neighbour to India, subsequently creating an India-Tibetan identity to separate from China (ibid). Therefore, Tibet started to necessitate its own art, creating national awareness, symbol, and consciousness of Tibet as a nation, such as by founding of Tibetan own football team and having competitions for Britain versus Tibet (Shakya, 2001, p. 78). In 1920, the British also encouraged schoolchildren in Gyantse to wear traditional Tibetan clothing (see Fig. 6) and presented photos of the Dalai Lama as competition prizes. This was to reinforce the supreme religious status of Dalai Lama, in addition, the British also strengthened its power in Tibet to resist China politically (ibid).

However, not all Western influences did go smoothly like the British. In 1930, missionary J. H Edgar arrived in Tibet to spread the teachings of Christianity, he had written down the difficulty of his mission:

> "It is impossible for Christianity to develop in Tibet proper because of its antagonist, Lamaism……..is a tithe from all Tibetan families, as well as local and national form of government" (Shakya, 1996, p. 30).

This crucial statement had shown the resistance to infiltrating a new religion into Tibetans. These setbacks accounted by missionaries had reappeared as catalysts for the perceptions of Tibetan Buddhism as a 'mysterious' and indestructible religion that furthered the fantasy of Tibet subsequently. The British Expedition had been an early ignitor for the growing interest of Tibetan 'fantasy' in the future. The intelligence report gathered by Younghusband had started to classify the value of Tibetan ethnic

object with a colonial gaze, this very categorization system was continually implemented by the CCP in the Tibet museum for the selection of exhibiting artefacts.

Construction of Utopia

Mystification of Shangri-la

Potala Palace is represented as a symbolic icon for Tibet, and Tibet is perceived as the centre of 'Shangri-La'. The term 'Shangri-La' is a fictional name made up by the British author James Hilton in his novel '*Lost Horizon'* (Wood, 2007, p. 20). 'Shangri-la' was defined as the isolated mythical utopia among the Himalayan Mountains (ibid). In an interview with Hilton in 1936, he confessed that his inspirations for 'Shangri-La' originated from Tibetan material at the British Museum. They were mainly displays of travelogue of French priests, who had travelled to Beijing and Lhasa in the 1840s (McRae, 2012, p. 25). In 1933, '*Lost Horizon'* has made into a Hollywood movie (Bishop, 1994, p. 15), the fictional 'Shangri-la' that represented Tibet continued to flourish the popular culture and mass media. The fantasy continues on till nowadays, in 2001,中甸县[Zhongdian County] in China had renamed Shangri-la city and upgraded into a county level City in the Yunan Province [5] (Shangri-La City Government, 2001). Shangri-la, which was once the fictional name fabricated by James Hilton had turned into a reality for the economic and tourism benefits of China. Chinese Government does not bother by the fact that the mythical name has comprised heavy colonial connotation. Instead, they amplified this Western fictional construction into marketing strategies for the national interest.

[5] The renamed Shangri-la city is similar to other commodities that used the branding of the name for economic and tourism purposes, stated on the website that the city is a living utopia and spiritual-healing paradise as a worldly brand (Shangri-La City Government, 2001).

Early Photographic Representation of Tibet in the West

Figure 7. Buddhist ritual at Choni,Gansu,China. Photography. Collection, Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology (Wulsin, 1923).

Early precedents of photographic representation references can be traced back even before the 20th century. They had been an igniting sparks towards cultural imperialism with misrepresentation of socio-geography in Tibet. Anthropologist and explorers like Frederick R. Wulsin and his wife Janet, who had led an expedition to southwestern China in 1924 (Adolphson, 2003), where he photographed mostly anthropological portraits of the local people and their culture. In Fig 7, the featured Buddhist rituals at Gansu, where the city is located at the border of Tibet, the photo was part of the discussion that Frederick brought up about the tribe of "non-Chinese inhabitants' and their physical characteristics (2003). His book in conjunction with an exhibit, titled *China's Inner Frontier: Photograph of the Wulsin Expedition to Northwest China in 1923* (Adolphson, 2003), has become a popular subject of study in the 1970s. Similar to many other Euro-American expeditions in the early 1900s, they have travelled to other parts of the world in search of natural wonders and documented them. These still images with scrutinizing gaze on the 'other' subject matter had become the vehicles of fascination, and soon spread and gained audiences in the West.

Figure 8. Theos Bernard and Tibetan, Penthouse of the Gods (N.a, 1936).

One such distinct individual would be the anthropologist Theos Bernard (Theos), who had been one of the many travellers who reinforce the 'legendary' tale of Tibetan mystery in the early 1900s (Kunimoto, 2011). Theos was born into a family with significant influence in yoga and Buddhism, at the age of 28, he departed to Tibet motivated by his spiritual aspirations. During his mere three months stay in Tibet, he had documented nearly thousands of photographs. Oftentimes, he was in the photograph with the local Tibetans (see Fig. 8), usually without addressing their identities, nor crediting the photographer who took it. He would dress with his new identity as the self-declared 'White Lama' (2011), emphasising being part of the insider's status with the apparent ethnographic desires as an outsider from a distance still.

Such depiction photos of Tibet were embedded with authorial power, the represented Tibet these travels and expedition leaders were the imagined personal vision through layers of fascination. The inclusion of the authors in the pictures guided his audiences' desire to be wrapped around in these 'spiritually charged' ropes and imagined it as tangible, exotic yet naturalised (Kunimoto, 2011).

These culturally framed photographs displayed the characteristic of colonialist and orientalist notions towards Tibet, the perception of a travel hero (Kunimoto, 2011) in an attempt to validate the fantasies of a foreign faraway culture. There was a rise in the number of British armies and the film of Tibet was first recorded by British army officers during the early 1900s since Tibet was considered to be geographically and politically important to the British. India was part of the British Empire until 1947 (Roy, 2016) and the British intended to portray Tibet and India were in a closed neighbourly relationship, both as sovereignty under British rule (Shakya, 2001, p. 98).

Figure 9. Lowell Thomas: Tibet Lecture (Lowell,1944).

In 1920-1930, the British Empire decided to educate the 'native' people of Tibet through Kodachrome lecture films (Fig. 9), it was also meant for the British to justify the credible reason for their mission to Tibet (p. 98). Another factor that might enhance this process is the emergence of colour photo techniques, this new invention outshined monochrome prints quickly. Colorised photos had played their part in further sensationalising the mysteriousness of Tibet. In comparison with the black and white photo perceived as factual, these colorised photos of Potala Palace appeared to be the enchanted 'fairy-tale' of Tibet. These photographs and films were eventually disseminated to the rest of the world, they were once the only critical source for people to know about Tibet visually. The fragmented and selective recording by British army photographers had limited its audience by the lack of contextual information and consequently resulted in the misrepresented impressions of Tibet.

This was the first record of a Tibetan encounter film. Shortly, some of the Tibetan Government officials requested the British army officer Frederick Spencer Chapman (Chapman) to be their court photographer and made a film for them (p. 98). Chapman spent six months in Lhasa and took 2,500 photos, 13,000 feet of 35 mm film, and 6,000 feet of 16-mm Black and white film of Tibetan lifestyle (Shakya, 2001, p. 98). The content of the film mostly emphasized the long pilgrimage and ceremonial places practices of Tibetan Buddhism. British photographers besides achieving the political aim, had the liberty to capture Tibet through their lens selectively. A distinct example is Sir Basil John Gould, whose film tends to focus on the 'unusual' event in Tibet, instead of being neutral to have a more comprehensive ethnographic survey (Shakya, 1996, p. 430). A very controversial clip by Gould showing the 'lice-eating' scene had offended many Tibetan in the 1920s, they accused him of magnifying the unfavourable sides of Tibet to the world (p. 430). These examples of British army photographers mentioned above indicate that despite their different rationale for

filming, they did not manage to record Tibet without the colonial gaze to have a more holistic approach towards Tibet. Therefore, these fragments of records, be it film, or photographs of Tibet restrained the audience from making a comprehensive understanding of Tibet, moreover they transmuted a culture into an imagination.

Escapism since the Early 20th Century

Escapism summarises to be the concept of escaping from the sense of aimless modernity to a paradise (Bishop, 2000, p. 650). Tibet was perceived as the sanctuary of Tibetan 'noble savages' (Ellingson, 2001, p. 12), the isolated 'others' who had not been corrupted by civilization and remained the human's innate goodness. Tibet was and is one of these popular destinations where people had the influence to imagine it as the holy land of the world. As Philip Rawson (1991) described this trend of escapism in his book 'Sacred Tibet',

> "Tibetan culture offers powerful, untarnished and coherent alternatives to western egotistical lifestyles, our short attention span, our gradually more pointless pursuit of material satisfaction" (Rawson, 1991).

In the early 20th century, the rise of escapism to Tibet was partially due to the advancement of new telecommunication technologies, the improvement in accessibility made people more connected, and traditional notions of isolated Tibet were threatened by it thus led to nostalgia in return. In 1921, the first telegraph line reached Lhasa where Potala Palace had integrated with global communication, this was part of the social and technological reform initiated by Tibetan leadership. Progressively, Tibetan started to have more exposure from Western countries, such as movies, entertainment, cigarettes and football (Bishop, 1994, p. 14). Meanwhile, in conjunction with the New Age Movement [6](1970s), it responds to the opposition against traditional religions in the West, leaning towards various Asian spiritual traditions especially (York, 2001). Such as Tibetan Buddhism was one of the popular spiritual pursuits in the movement, and these sacred religious practices had become commodified public property (ibid). The wave of appropriation and commercialisation of Tibetan Buddhism had led to the rise of tourism in Tibet, the excessive exposure that followed thereafter had concurrently diminished the Western imagination of Tibet as a secluded secret destination. However, the escapism mentality sustains till nowadays, in search for an alternative idealized construct of utopia. For Tibet's case, the constructed fantasy is backed up and represented since the mid-20th century. In the 1960s, the British army left India and Tibet, and there the British archived and scholarly documented about as political strategic report (ibid). For instance, '*A Cultural History of Tibet*' complied by British representative Hugh Richardson, is remain in use as undergraduate textbooks at British Universities (ibid). The bubble of nostalgia for Tibet continues on even by the continuing accessible revelations of the reality of Tibet.

[6] The New Age Movement is a difficult term to define, in this paper it refers to the description from sociologists, that it was a new religious and spiritual movement rapidly developed in the Western world during the 1970s (Kemp, 2004).

Presentation of Tibet in The Chinese Interest

The 'Liberation' of Tibet

According to Professor Elliot Sperling (2004) who is one of the esteemed historians of Tibet and Sino-Tibetan relations. He stated that from the Chinese historical records, Tibet has been a subsidiary region of China historically (Sperling, 2004, p. 12). In the 18th century, the Manchu empire incorporated Tibet and ruled under China from Yuan Dynasty (ibid, p. 13). A souvenir postcard printed with a mural from Potala Palace showcased that, as early as the year 1630 during the Qing Dynasty, the fifth Dalai Lama had made obeisance and tribute to then the Qing Emperor Shun Chih (Fig. 10). This postcard sold as a souvenir at the Tibet Museum reconfirmed the position from CCP in justifying the historical relationship with Tibet. Therefore, it validated the Chinese administration in portraying Tibet as one of the minority races among the other 55 races of China (Harris, 2013, p. 70). This declaration was not well acknowledged by most Tibetans, especially among the spiritual leaders. Hence after the fall of the Ming Dynasty, Tibet's independence is announced by the 13th Dalai Lama, supported by the Tibetan Buddhism practitioners who believed that the sovereignty of Tibet to China is a political move, not history (Sperling, 2004, p. 20).

Figure 10. Mural of Fifth Dalai Lama making obeisance to Ching Dynasty Emperor Shun Chih (Wang, 1995).

On the contrary, CCP had emphasized that it was the foreign imperialistic power which had intruded on Tibet in 1904 (Sperling, 2004, p. 32). That the 13th Dalai Lama was forced to escape to Mongolia, whom only agreed to return to Tibet in 1911 when Dr. Sun Yatsun had founded the People's Republic of China (PRC; see p. 32). CCP also claimed that the British had not officially recognized Tibet as an independent country, despite it was considered geopolitically crucial between India and China (p.

35). The CCP had clarified that due to the Japanese-China War during 1931-1941, and the Chinese Civil War between Kuomintang (KMT)-led government and CCP during 1927-1949 (Jian, 2006, p. 59), Tibet was not on the radar of CCP to reclaim its righteousness under China. Whereas in 1951, Chinese Chairman Mao Zedong signed the *Tibet 17 point Agreement* to reaffirm China's authority over Tibet with the support of 14th Dalai Lama then, however according to the Chinese account Dalai Lama did not keep his promise and was exiled to India to form the Government of Tibet in exile at the age of 23 (Sperling, 2004, p. 36).

Figure 11. Clay Carving Princess Wencheng in Potala Palace (Wang, 1995).

Tibet has been portrayed by China as a majority of them are slaves under the feudal hierarchy, they had been tortured by the 'superior' wealthy nobles under the system (Harris, 2012, p. 219). The "Peaceful Liberation of Tibet" (Huaxia, 2020) freed the slaves of Tibet. This politicized Tibetan history had reiterated by Chinese officials, it has been instrumental in endorsing the political dominance over Tibet. Consequently, many establishments like the Tibet Museum had continued the legacy of accentuating the Chinese version of Tibetan history.

The Chinese Image of Tibet

The *Tibet 17 point Agreement* signed between China and Tibet changed the political status to have restricted authority over the decision making for Tibet. Potala Palace under the Chinese authority was merely conserved as the sacred Buddhist institution, it is rather a signature icon that can be represented to support the CCP's political positions. An incident that demonstrated this mentality was the architecture of '*The Cultural Palace of Working People*'(Woeser, 2007, p. 45), it was built in front of the Potala Palace as the new Chinese Tibet Government Office. This 100,000 square feet building was celebrated as the Chinese return to Tibet, and the farmers and working-class people were liberated from the previous Tibetan feudalistic society (p. 46).

Figure 12. Tibetan Civilians' Punishment during Cultural Revolution (Woeser, 2020).

Another significant event happened that reshaped the directions to reconstruct the image from a Chinese perspective. In 1966, *Cultural Revolution* started with Chairman Mao's slogan "destroy the old and launch the new" (Jian, 2006, p. 63). This movement had shifted the society to suppress the nobles, educated and royals, in pursuit to achieve equality for everybody as the working class. Monasteries and religious stupas across China were destroyed, except for the Potala Palace which had survived ironically as a reminder of the Tibetan history of feudalism. The Chinese Government musealised the Potala Palace as a stationary infamous background to contrast with the 'modernisation' of Tibet under the Chinese leadership. This shifted conception of Potala Palace can be expressed by the 'Civil Defence Project' (Woeser, 2020, p. 49). It displayed apathetic negligence towards the Potala Palace, where air raid shelter was constructed and had damaged the foundation structure of Potala Palace (ibid). Moreover, there lack of preservation plans for precious objects such as handicrafts, paintings, statues, and historical documents that were all taken away from Potala Palace (Xiong, 2004, p. 30). According to a recount from the nephew of Dalai Lama, Qiampa Getsang, who has been taking care of the Potala Palace since the listing of the UNESCO heritage site in 1991. He expressed that, in the late 1980s the palace was ill-managed without the government's subsidies, it had only left with 7782 Yuan on the official account, plus an overdue electricity fee of more than 9000 Yuan (ibid). The above examples have revealed the negligence from CCP to the Potala Palace, due to the shift ideologically to demean the Potala Palace as the relic of the past.

Figure 13. Potala Pano (Lee, 2001).

On the contrary, Potala Palace is seen as an essential factor to rebuild the image of Tibet in Chinese interest. During the 30th anniversary of the 'Liberation of Tibet', the Potala Square (Fig.13) was constructed right in front of the Palace (Harris, 2012, p. 196), where a celebration performance at the Potala Square reminded the Tibetan community of the Chinese authority. Performances also highlighted that Tibetan is just another race among other 55 minority races in China, where Han Chinese is described as dominating father or elder brother figure (ibid). At the Potala Square, the Chinese Liberation Army (CLA) soldiers will patrol here every day, the Chinese national flag flies high in the middle to reinstate Chinese sovereignty. On the whole, CCP intended to normalise Tibet with other cities in China, musealising Lhasa city into a museum relic status for further political representations.

Secularization as Catalyst for Musealisation of Tibet

China's 'triumphant modernisation' of Tibet was intended to achieve unification between Chinese and Tibetans, a key action taken is to secularise Tibet from Buddhism, Potala Palace is a substantial element in this movement as the vital religious symbol of Tibet (Bishop, 1994, p. 6). In 1994, UNESCO recognized the Potala Palace to be on the World Heritage List, shifting its status into a hybrid function heritage site that mainly operates as a tourist attraction (UNESCO, 2000). The beginning of secularisation to Tibet can be uncovered from the 1960's Cultural Revolution, anti-religious campaigns have conducted to ban churches, mosques, and temples (Robson, 2010, p. 123). Re-education camps were set up for clergies and religious personals, communism was considered the only acceptable 'religion' and belief system (ibid). The PRC's Ministry of Culture, clearly stated that a religious institution should be served as an educational centre for cultural legacies, such as the legacy of Confucianism (ibid). In order for the government to approve these religious institutions such as the Temple, it is crucial to persuade the party that the organisation is strictly for cultural purposes (ibid). As a result, this previously religious institution

like Potala Palace will not just shift its ideological position, but involuntarily musealised into a museum-like exhibition space to showcase exhibitions with clear political agenda not to emphasize religious content. These policies from the Ministry of PRC have restricted the freedom of any religious practices in China. Thus, in reality, it is necessary for many of these religious organisations to blur the line between secularism and religion, so as to sustain the institution financially, they were forced to disguise or transform inevitably into spiritual tourism attractions. Potala Palace as once the respectable religious institution under the sole administration of Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leaders has been legitimised by the Chinese policy to musealise into an exhibition object.

Monumentalising Tibet and The Potala Palace

One of the key factors to musealise the Tibetan ethnic culture is to monumentalise the Potala Palace, which is the focal image associated with Tibet. The Chinese Government is well aware of the importance by the manifestation of Potala Palace which embodied its political image from CCP. The Chinese Government had begun the project by 'musealising' the whole of Lhasa city, where the Buddhist shrines were secularised and open to tourists, it also promoted the building of new Tibetan monasteries amassed on streets as replicas to promote the Tibetanness of Lhasa (Xiao, 2019). Infrastructure was developed to promote accessibility to Tibet, such as the Qinghai Tibet Railway was connected from Beijing to Lhasa in July 2006, it is described as a 'miracle railway' due to the technical difficulty, in bringing opportunities to remote Tibet (ibid). Mr. Hu Jintao, the president of China, then mentioned the significance of the railway to further unify Tibet and China and open up to tourism and trade (ibid). Meanwhile, the state-funded Tibet Museum had also started its construction together with the theme park- *Snow City* (Harris, 2012, p. 200). The theme park consists of many 3-dimensional human effigies and ambience props to narrate the miserable lives of Tibetan slaves (ibid). It is intended to reiterate the feudalistic past of Tibetan hierarchical 'obsolescence' and 'repugnance' to recap that Tibet had surpassed the dark time due to the modern Chinese progression. The establishment of the Tibet Museum is positioned as a more neutral institution than the *Snow City*, however, it is curated specifically for the political interest of CCP.

Figure 14. 50 Chinese Yuan (Weber, 2010).

Potala Palace on the other hand, is a popular symbol that is recognizable globally. The CCP intended to leverage on the image of Potala Palace in representing China both internally and externally. In the year 1999, it marked the 50th anniversary of Peaceful Liberation of Tibet (Woeser, 2007, p. 47) and launched the inaugural Tibet Museum at the same time. In the same year, the Potala Palace was printed on the back of the green *Ren Ming Bi(RMB)* fifty-yuan banknotes (Fig. 14). This execution demonstrated the state's intention to boost Tibet economically, by creating more awareness of Tibet, in return to promote the Tibetan tourism. It had proven the impact in a 2003 report, the palace has received half a million tourists and pilgrims annually, and about 1500

visitors each day, the number is increasing at the rate of twenty per cent (Woeser, 2007, p. 47). Consequently, more advertisements and production of Potala Palace were booming as commercial souvenirs and products around China (ibid), it has further commodified the already musealised object of Potala Palace. More importantly, this deliberate gesture of bringing more attention to Tibet benefited China politically too. The tokenistic advertisement of Tibet intended to justify the accusation of oppressing Tibetans under the paternalistic approaches of Beijing (Seo & Cho, 2013). Concurrently, it excreted a reassurance that Tibet is continually to be an 'incontrovertible' part of China. The printing of Potala Palace on the banknote is one of the many mechanisms that the CCP deliberated to objectify the Tibetan ethnic culture, it has reflected once again the Chinese ambition to market the musealised Potala Palace as an iconic 'commodity' to stabilize Tibet economically and politically in the Chinese interest.

Conclusion

The cases for mystifying and fabricating images of Tibet through Potala Palace, and musealised institutions are salutary, which remind us of the repercussions from (mis)representation of a certain ethnographic culture. The impact of reconstructing the Tibetan culture through musealisation will lead to ramifications beyond the museum walls for our future generations. This paper has demonstrated that museums as a concept and institution worldwide could orchestrate and rewrite Tibetan culture for intended motives. By means of representing Tibetan culture without holistic approaches, through the lens of exoticisation and commodification, it substantially created injustice and confusion for the ethnic minority of Tibet.

Ethnic cultural content occupies a prominent percentage of the exhibition in museums around the world, and private collectors and museum institutions are constantly discovering new findings to fill up their ethnographic collections. Decision makers in the authoritative museum institutions innately withhold the social responsibility in acknowledging and disseminating each ethnic's culture more heterogeneously from the top down to the public. This awareness allows us to relook at and unpack the historical precedents of a certain ethnographic cultural formation. As well as recognizing the power dynamic between institutionalised ethnographic culture. Musealisation is an authoritative narration embedded with inherent colonial agendas, the products through the specific lens involved possible misunderstanding and exploitation of certain underrepresented or mispresented cultures. As possible directions for further study, the musealised Tibetan culture is not a unique case by itself, there are many other ethnic minority cultures, similar to Tibetan that are being exploited as musealised commodities, continually fabricating the narratives for personal, social, economic and political objectives. It is hoped that besides the acknowledgement and effort within the institutions, as global citizens we will stay vigilant on any ethnographic culture we are consuming in the highly globalized world through various mediums and cultural manufacturers. It is time to rethink and research in-depth our fellow ethnic groups in the wider post-colonial context, so to clarify and elucidate their oppressing voices against detrimental misrepresentations formed by the privileged authoritative agencies.

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