

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

***Sky Burial for a Dangling Man
Between One Inhaling and One Exhaling
Corpse and The Ten Thousand Things in the
Kham Tibet***

By

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Introduction
晃蕩迷糊的吸引
Dangling Attraction

1

A Verse and Questions

We were in the mountain near the Larung Valley. In the first of the four-level sky burial platform reconstructed by the CCP government, a verse inscribed on the stone wall wrote:

筋骨血肉，飞溅在天葬石的周围
凌乱的寒风，吹动着尸发四处飞扬
孤独的亡灵，不用自主，漂泊不定

苍苍似雪的白发，在刀斧的利刃上浮游，青春少年的尸骨
在寒林犬的唇齿间晃动；娇嫩幼儿的四肢在鹰鹫的尖爪上飞舞

从鹰鹫的口中，觉察到无常的本质
从累累白骨中，生起了出离之心
从腐尸恶臭中，觉察到轮回的过患；
从尸陀寒林中，通晓了生命的真谛

常于尸林念死亡，无倚自命安乐身，目睹种种污秽相，贪著身体欲念消
心思趋于寂静故，不复放逸生厌离，蛇蝎鬼神令人畏，然居尸林亦不怖

This verse, as well as my witness of the sky burial, raises the question of how the perception of the extremely detailed process of the dismemberment of a body, in form, sound, fragrance, tactile sensation, and maybe in flavor, leads to experience emptiness and impermanence. Ziporyn (2016) interpretation of emptiness prepares me to answer this question. He suggests that the idea of Emptiness, in the foreground/background approach (p.53), is that any item is connected to everything else. Hewing any item from the set of things to which it is connected means making it connect to something else. X is connected to Non-X. Non-X is the context of X. Each particular connection (each particular pair of X and Non-X) defines the identity of X. Thereby, the identity of any item is only impermanent. If the interconnection is the core of the idea of emptiness and my experience of emptiness, my work then is to provide a detailed description of the word “connection”.

Bodies of hemp, bodies of goat meat, bodies of rice loaves, bodies of cloths, bodies of living people drunk and danced around wrap the dead bodies in poetic layers with the logic of kinship and cosmology relations. Written in delicate sensibility, Mueggler’s (2017) work in funerals in Juzo, Yunnan, reveals how the assembly and partition of bodies actualize kinship and the social relations of all sentient beings and the cosmos. Then, in what ways my ethnography has concretized the word “society”? How is dismemberment intensively manifested in the sky burial funeral an onerous social participatory effort of all (in)sentient beings?

She sees. She is seen. Layers of colors come to her. Layers of luster come to her. Layers of eye contact come here in various trajectories. She hears. She is heard. Air and vultures are fluttering. Fellow practitioners are chanting and reciting. Rumbling, the ten thousand things. She touches. She is touched. In the Medicine King Hill (藥王山), the prayer flags’ layered material textures press her palm. People bring in new

flags bought from this and that town during this and that festival, wrapping the old with the new. The birds coming from anywhere and nowhere peck at the flag, and the wind blows the soil against its surface. Hands and soles bring some moisture. The ten thousand things touch them purposefully while leaving traces purposelessly that generate the multifariousness of texture. She smells. She is smelt. The stench of death runs through her nose.

So, she perceives. So, she is perceived. The vast and gentle temperament of the motherlike grassland draws her. The stench of death runs through all her nine openings(九竅). Layers of the immaterial temperament of the (in)sentient beings shape her temperament and shape her ways of making eye contact. Using Daoist terms, the kernel of vitality (精) of that thing wrestles the kernel of vitality of her. Thus, she makes such eye contact and shows such temperament forged by the many times of patterned perception, the patterned craftwork of things. When she is drawn to participate purposefully and purposelessly in society, she is transformed and transforming the world.

My ethnography materials have taught me that society is the scents that sway, the gazes, fingers, skins, and bones that press, and the breath that contracts and spreads. Society is the kernel of vitality (精) and breath(qi 气) of the ten thousand things that come in and pass by one (in)sentient being at each of this single moment. They are sedimented into temperament and perception in the background strata when they pass by. Society has strata. The body has strata. Perception has strata. When they come in and appear, they are brought out by the connections which hinge on them.

Besides, I also attempt to argue that the body has strata. Strata is both material and immaterial. Ecology, infrastructure, sentient beings, and insentient beings all have strata. They connect through a specific stratum of one being hinge on the specific stratum of another being. It is sensation/perception¹ that generates and activates hinges. Sensation/perception sway the flows immanent in (in)sentient beings, either connect one (in)sentient being to another at this moment and this local place, or shift one to another perspective, to another local world.

2

The Analytical Bones: Strata Body, Strata Perception

How you describe a place that is so distant? In modern cities, even in a highland city like Edinburgh, I was inextricably subsumed into the coming and passing marked by professionalism and politeness. This “coming and by” is weaved by a particular pattern of a matrix of the tension and relaxation of muscles, the gravity of posture, the net of the trajectories of gazes.

The Scottish Highlands' warm and direct sunlight grants courage and comfort. I wander in a meadow. My soles pressed into the soft earth, and my shoes and ankles brushed through the thick, short grass and unknown white flowers, producing a shushushu sound. The low, overhanging clouds and the occasional short, oval hilltops that enter my view allow it to drift expansively in a soft and open landscape. Let those limbs and muscles that are meant to hang, hang (here I mean hips, tailbone, upper arms)! Let those meant to stretch, stretch (shoulders, belly, lower abdomen, soles)! And let the five viscera and six bowels play and rearrange themselves according to

¹ I dissolve the differentiation of sensation and perception. As I dissolve the differentiation of body and mind, culture and nature, human and non-human.

their desires. Muscles, bones, and organs press and being pressed, harmonize and being harmonized with all the ten thousand things as my openings (九窍) are open. These flows happen within a specific stratum of my body. Through vibrations and responses, these flows wrestle with the other flows in close strata. For example, the intersubjective eye contact creates a superficial face/phase/perspective, a trajectory across the surface. At the same time, the trajectory on the surface resonates with the body's other flows in deeper strata, thus generating affective glances that are gentle, aggressive, or evasive. One gentle glance is a kind of trajectory of eye contact, which is 'embracing' at first and then gliding away. An averted eye contact is one whose trajectory is a scooping out first and then recoiling outward.

Nevertheless, I was still drawn into such scenarios: the jogger strode proudly, chest lifted, hands swinging in a disciplined march gesture; the dog walker got their eyes widened when commanded the pitiful puppy to sit and shut up barking; the reader tightened their shoulders and erected their spine, sitting on their picnic blanket bought from some organic goods vendor; the coffee shop's counters showcased their face-changing games -the casual 'hi there, thank you" chat, the smiling mouth, widening eyes and dimpled cheek when facing toward you, and the drooping corners of the mouth and eyes when turning way; the diners sit primly, hands folded, assessing themselves always in the appropriate body movements. With their constant bombardment of sounds, colors, and smells, such interactions come to me from all directions. They gather my breath, arrange my muscles, and adjust my rhythm.

Thankfully, the occasional whiffs of grassy fragrance, the 'vroom vroom' sound of motorcycles racing through alleys at night, and the arches of my thigh muscles tightening on slopes allowed me to be genuinely immersed "in" the Kham Tibet area, to convert my ethnographic experiences into words and to crystallize these experiences from the ocean of undefined experiences through writing. Amidst the music and the comings and goings of voices of chats, a round table and a tangible object to manipulate (a glass of water, a teacup, a piece of wood) always lead me to a mysterious tranquility. After all, the theme of this text is dedicated to emphasizing such things:

(1) What we call experience is those so-called social/cultural/natural/world things doing craftwork on the arrangement, tension, and gravity distribution of muscles, limbs, and internal organs; on the closing and opening, proximity and distance of the five senses; on hands and gaze. I also use my torsos, breath, and scent, my gaze, and hands to transform the society/world. (Because of the field material, handworks and gaze works are the focus of this text.) Craftwork that converges subject and object, activeness and passiveness. Reminded by Ziporyn, I'd like to add here that for something to be an experience, it emerges from a background.

(2) How such multifarious, layered, and vital impression/temperament arises? It is the result of both purposeful and purposeless fusion. Purposeful crafting of light and shadow (matte, polished or glossy light), purposeful splicing of colors of various materials, purposeful hammering and pressing to shape contours, etc.; it is also the purposeless act of being repeatedly stepped on, touched by the bodies of all things, bringing what is called the retro/antique color. And what does complexity and layering imply? It means more, it means each time you look, you see more. More implies infinity.

(3) Craftwork encompasses two types of actions: akin to forging iron and playing music. Passing through the body's openings, the streams of ten thousand of things (i.e., the streams of scents and images) coordinate and sway the arrangement of our body's layered strata. Doing pressing, hammering, kneading, the streams of the ten thousand of things (various massive of gaze of other people, gaze of vultures, soil, wind etc.), strike our strata, our muscles, bones, eyes etc, sculpting new strata within our bodies, uneven and distinct. The latter movement/transformation also ceaselessly bleed over the former transformation.

- A. The scents that sway, the gazes, fingers, skins, and bones that press, the breath that contracts and spreads, and the invisible kernel of vitality (精), and breath(qi 气) of the ten thousand of things are those faces/skins/strata that subsume one into a local world, nesting one's faces/skins/strata/slime/breath into it.
- B. Here, I collapse the differentiation of society, culture, nature, human and non-human. Society here means ecology, infrastructure, bodies, breath, kernel of vitality, smells, gaze, earth, wind, ghost. It means the ten thousand things. Some already have their names; some are not named yet.
- C. Taoist thought holds that all things possess kernel of vitality (精), energy (气), and spirit (神). Interaction implies the intertwining of the kernel of vitality, the energy and spirit of this thing with the kernel of vitality, the energy and spirit of that thing. Based on this, both humans and non-humans, as well as the five phases, are able to open up to each another.
- D. Drawing on Taoist thought, my work here is to use the analogy of music and harmony, as well as the forging of geological layers, to depict the intertwining more intricately through their terms.

(4) So, body here gets concretized. Zhuangzi says “the hundred bones(百骸), the nine openings(九竅), the six internal organs(六臟) are all present here as my bodies”(p.12).

- A. I will argue that for each specific moment, for this now, only specific “parts” of body are born. Only these participate/being subsumed in the intersubjective social/cultural/ecological craftwork exist as bodies. Only these socially participated local bodies are open, are here. The other lurks in the background being closed.
- B. I will also argue that such specific socially participated body is stratified, a multi-layered geology. Therefore, I use terms from stratigraphy and music to describe how it connects with all things.
- C. Furthermore, I expand the image of strata. Strata includes facial expression, temperament, smells etc. Strata can be both corporeal and immaterial. Strata are fluid. Faces are strata, strata are faces. Openings/bones/organs/blood/smells/voices are strata, strata are openings/bones/organs/blood/ smells/voices. The issue is how one stratum bleeds over to the other. What kind of verbs we use to describe such movements?
- D. More precisely, the connection is made through hinges characterized by reversibility.

(5) What I refer to as craftwork might be described by scholars as social interaction. However, I want to clarify that the image of interaction typically depicted is one of multiple exchanges between two fixed unchanging points. The movement I aim to illustrate here is different that : it is a singular coming in and passing by. Based on this imagery, I wish to emphasize three concepts: friction, hinges, and the connections of strata brought about by hinges, as well as the compression, expansion, and adjustment resulting from these connections.

- A. The term "coming" implies that a successful connection inevitably requires friction. It involves the emergence of something being a hinge for something else. Without friction, things essentially do not exist.
- B. The term "passing by" means that all successful instances of coming must eventually leave. The essence of friction itself involves two heavy objects pressing against each other and then separating. This inevitable "leaving" ensures the arrival of the next new instance. It ensures desire. It ensures will.
- C. The successful coming and inevitable passing by forge the connection. More specifically, what is forged is a surface, a phase whose texture is alike water, characterized by: (1) susceptibility to all types of vibrations (sound, smell, pressure, etc.), which causes it to ripple and change shape; (2) although its outline is unclear, it solidly encompasses the things within. Abstractly speaking, what is forged is a perspective.
- D. The culture/society/nature/human/nonhuman that intersubjectively participate in forging a layer has both near and far aspects. The near is the "this", here, now, local, while the far is the "that," everything that has already happened, the background, and the source.

Please refer to the following description for better understanding:

The lover wipes your nose, the tissue gently glides over the upper lips; fingertips and the nasal area are warmest; covering with a blanket, warmth clings to the skin, from the neck to toes with each touch of the blanket. As the tissue moves away, emotions stabilize; the blanket is neatly placed, eyes focused, leaving the room. Local shifts to the dreamland, the tiles on the ceiling, feet hanging halfway the bed and floor.

Like all partings, we must miss each other. Leaving, closing the door, getting into the car, looking back from afar, hearts in tune. Parting is made actual in produced faces (the door, the steps). A farewell for ten miles. Step by step, checkpoint by checkpoint. Each checkpoint is formed by the things of society, with love creating an interface. It's like taking a car ride all the way from the plateau back to Chengdu. The door sees me off, the steps of the vehicle carry me. Trees greet me. Pine forests, marshes, yaks, and Hippophae rhamnoides greets me and parts me. Reaching the lowlands, warm and humid air, the Chinese character signs for noodles in Dujiangyan greets me and parts me. Tall buildings tower above. The plains suddenly appear. Urban life encloses me.

(6) Perhaps what I ultimately want to argue is a political stance: that the key element/precondition causing the collapse of culture/nature/human/non-human is to let the skin, limbs (the so-called body and mind) sway, loosen, wrinkle, smile, sigh heavily, grieve, or just change, in response to all the vibrations of the present moment. This also means allowing everything to pass away. It is a powerful play and a profound forgetting.

A. By moving accordingly, allowing the 'I' (which is actually dispersed, connected with other interacting surfaces) and the connected 'it' to become one.

I am the bird, the flesh of the corpse, the belly of the hungry ghost, the clean eyeballs of the puppy. we are a family. I am the hostile gaze, the exclusion. As Erik Muggler says: "our bodies are given to us by the gazes of others, in which our own gazes have their origin; they are given to us by the voices of others, from which our own voices arise. Those gazes and voices clothe us with our own flesh. To have a body in this sense is to be part of that portion of the world that is added to it by the vision of others; it is to be subsumed in that coiling of vision back upon the world's 'massive corporeality'" (2011, p.176).

B. My desires, my will, and my cravings for difference, for more, will make me shift perspectives, connect with the next, and bring about the new. This is what is called being active.

The plan of this text, its reasoning and narrative lines, as I will introduce in the next section, shows how I have encapsulated the narrative of sky burial within the other ethnographic materials highlighted in this project. Using the Taoism terms, sky burial is open up (通) with all the other things of life/world. My analytic approach, as the reader might already see, is reading a tantric Buddhist practice from a Taoist perspective. The convergence of activeness and responsiveness activity is exemplified in the butcher story written by Zhuangzi. Moreover, it shows how ontology, epistemology, and methodology also converges.

The opening story of Chapter 3 in Zhuangzi tells a butcher handing and being handed by knife cutting through the open channels that form the grains of an ox's body. A somewhat stop-and-go smooth rhythm. This story shows that one aspect of a Zhuangzian Genuine person is like the edge of the knife, who, quoted from Ziporyn, "has no thickness", lacks any definite identifiability and has lost itself. The world is ox. At the touch of knife (the present perspective), placing the knife's edge into the ox is like a stopping-strolling human in the world. The meaning of "in" is intersubjectively being produced and producing from surfaces : foot treading/ed on firm earth, ears resonating/ed with sound streams, nose and mouth breathing/ed in and out with air currents, skins touching/ed the silk of the ten thousand things. The knife (person) "has to get to each juncture to detect which way to go, and it is its presence there that opens up that new and unforeseen way to go, which from the perspective of a moment ago, when the knife had not yet reached this new position and its perspective, may have looked entirely impassable and unobstructed, with no dao (opening, channel, path) available, and which may again closed up from the perspective of a moment from now, when the has departed".(p.11)

Unintentionally and before my reading Zhuangzi, my unexpected 'journey' and encounter in Sethar is like this. And all my "theorization" is a hindsight analysis. This reminds the anthropology academic field that the "meaning" of field work might better not fully professionalized academicized thus being narrowed-fancied and chased as a capitalized valuable research tool in the academic economy. I suggest that fieldwork should be "vaguely non-purposefully." It can be trash; it can have no value at all.

Just like how Zhuangzi plays with the dao, though it signifies beautiful openness, it also signifies trash shit. Humans and the ten thousand things can be genuine but also sly thieves. Do not value things. Play with corpse and fieldwork,

sometimes with stagnant and idiot eyeballs and face, sometimes with sharpness. Sometimes with loose, wrinkled skin with its center of gravity scattered.

Looking back, my way of searching secondhand materials also corresponds to this strolling “method.” It definitely limits the scope of the materials, the depth of drilling down the materials, and my analysis. Without the ability to read Tibetan, Tibetan written materials are also not addressed in this study. But I am like the edge of a knife, led by the world and leading the world. Currently, I am here. Writing, saying what is now, informed implicitly by things already deposited there/here.

The thoughts and the image of sky burial I picture here are encouraged by Zhuangzi, who writes: “dropping away the torso and limbs, chasing out acuity of hearing and vision, departing from the body and getting rid of the understanding, becoming the same as the great (transforming) openness, [which is] called sitting and forgetting” [墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大（化）通，此所謂坐忘]. And “ousting past and present, ousting the world, ousting all thing, ousting life itself” [外古今，外天下，外物，外生]. What I’d like to stress is that such ‘dropping away the torso and limbs’ and such ousting are not only for emptying preconception, not only a visualization, and not only a kind of mind-work as scholars of Chod practice have argued, but also impersonal material mind-sensuous work that creates faces, phases, perspectives and local world so that ultimately creates connections. In its essence, the material and immaterial body is impersonal, dismembered, cosmological. Using the hand as an example, this hand is the hand and skin of human, but the hand and skin of the ten thousand of things.

3

Signposts in The Mist: The Plan of This Text

Witnessing a sky burial is like participating in a meditation. The perceptible cutting, pecking, and scattering occurring on multiple contact surfaces, which seem to bring about a final phenomenon of absence, actually bring about presence: reconnection and the redistribution of the gravity of all things. Although this reconnection is difficult to perceive at that moment and in that local perspective, it emerges when we shift to the next, another local perspective. The smell of hand-sliced yak meat and the fingerwork of the sky burial master, who plays a crucial role in recontextualization, hinge for the smell of the corpse at the sky burial site. The sky burial also recontextualizes the content of hand-sliced yak meat and its context (i.e., enjoying it with my family). Such inter-recontextualization embodies those new connections.

The lateral and vertical movement of smell, vision, hand, flesh, vultures, sky burial masters, seers, and air at the sky burial site reveals the essence of action (Part 2’s Section 1 gives a detailed description): each action is composed of two phases:

- (1) subsuming 納/wrapping 裹/ inhaling 吸, which makes things to be ‘here’ and makes the Local.
- (2) ousting 外/ swaying and vibrating 搖盪/ exhaling 呼.

There is a necessary and inescapable connection between the two; subsuming immanently is constitutive of ousting and vice versa. This means that when X is subsumed, non-X is ousted. However, the contrast between them and their separation

is necessary because skin, surfaces, bodies, strata, smell, touch, and perception arise precisely from this contrast.

Based on the core idea of connection and hinge in this text and the contrast between subsuming and ousting, I can turn those vague yet intense things of my ethnographic experiences into words, forging paths through the haze. The horizon of wrapping/subsuming allows me to find out that bodies of sentient and insentient beings do the kneading-like craftwork. In contrast, the political party does the rough and violent craftwork. In a comparative view, these two craftworks weave ecology, human bodies, grassland bodies, infrastructures (scaffolding, Chinese communist party's slogan in Chinese, etc.), prayer flags, etc., into two different though coexisting strata patterns. Part 1's Sections 2 deal with these descriptive and analytical chunks.

While in Part 1, Sections 3, the contour of Yarchen Gar's wooden house will detail the process of knead, section 2 do the outline work for the two strata patterns. I write here that one of the two strata patterns is exemplified by the layered various color and materials of the Medicine King Hill, which embodies an infinite moretivity and multifariousness. I group Medicine King Hill, Yarchen Gar, Larung Gar Buddhist Academy before its demolition (known through photo) together, each one hinges for another. My argument is that this strata pattern is analogous to an outcome of *kneading craftwork*, and it is more ethical than the other one which is roughly made by the "quick coming and going" political power which I call *the shoddy work*. Firstly, because when sentient beings perceive them, when they are perceived by the textures of Medicine King Hill, Yarchen Gar, Larung Gar Buddhist Academy, which ultimately means when a specific stratum of one being hinge on the specific stratum of another being, their bodies are open up – their knotted and clogged kernels of vitality have become open. That means any (in)sentient beings living in there get their body open. Secondly, the looping effect of having an open body is that one tends to do delicate craftworks/interactions toward the other. And one will do them repetitively. And as one is doing repetitive and delicate interactions toward the other, one actually subsumes, brings in the coming of the ten thousand things, from all directions, purposefully and purposelessly. In other words, the tension and relaxation of muscles, the gravity of posture, the net of the trajectories of gazes, and the breath of one being, actualizes the phenomenon of infinity, motivity, and multifariousness. It transforms one who lives near Medicine King Hill, lives in such vast ecology of grassland plateau, lives in his wooden house to one who becomes Medicine King Hill, becomes his wooden house, becomes the vast ecology of grassland plateau. That is the meaning of someone has nurtured by his place, and the root for temperament. That is the reason I can dissolve the differentiation of non-human, human, ecology, culture and nature.

The horizon of ousting/swaying and vibrating allows me to deal the issue that how one shifts his/her perspective to another one. Part 1, section 4 examines the spatial arrangements of objects surrounding the seat of nuns where they recite scriptures and study and examines one's interactions with her fellow practitioners in a sound-mouth vitality, which help me elucidate the shifting process.

Only after this, Part 2, section 1 starts delving into the core of this book and the phenomenon group in my ethnography: sky burial. Section 2 describes how smells, affect, and social relationships are transmitted and dispersed through contact and transmission via fingers, bodies, etc. It provides a detailed description of the swaying and vibrating aspects of action.

You might have already seen how I have encapsulated the narrative of sky burial within the other ethnographic materials highlighted in this project. Rather than

describing the storyline as time moving forward, it might be more accurate to say it's time moving backward. Instead of saying that there is a thread connecting each moment, it might be more accurate to say only one capsuled moment exists. One of the capsule's aspects immanently hinges for the other aspects of it reversibly. The storyline of this text is an outcome of shaping ethnography in Kham Tibet into an imaginative narrative. The shift and connection between scenarios are dreamlike. It begins with me standing at the noisy dispersal center at the foot of the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy. As I sat in a dilapidated bus heading for the town of Seda, with the scenery outside the window gliding by, I walked along the paths of Yarchen Gar. I was passed by yaks swishing their tails on the hillside grass, hiking toward the sky burial site. I stared at the neatly folded shirt on my old sister's bed. She was wrapped in a disinfectant-smelling white sheet, a feeding tube, a natal tube, and a ventilator mask with her naked body in the ICU. I was on the bus to the C hospital in Chengdu, passing the Wuhou Temple Street, where there were monks in blood red robes, walking like fire. I felt it was time to return to the grasslands and Amdo and Kham.

Part 3 records the experiential materials yet to be developed/interpreted. It attempts to address the question of friction. For the past ten years, I have been reluctant to return to the grasslands, to Aba Prefecture (covers Adom Tibet where my birthplace Hongyuan County locates), or to Ganzi Prefecture (covers Kham Tibet where my ethnography locates). Even though the grasslands and cattle and horses have shaped my temperament. It wasn't until I saw the red-robed monks on Wuhouci Street that I found it is the time I went back those areas and that I wondered if he was the source of friction that makes my connection with my birthplace and other unknown things successful. What does a successful hinge require? I point out that hinges might fail. Only with friction can something become a hinge.

4

All the Academic: Literature Review

Sky burial, in Tibetan, is Jhator ("giving alms to the birds") or Bya khyir ster-ba ("to give to birds [and]dogs"). Scholars who take sky burial as an object of study are obsessed with tracing its origin and finding an explanation of it in ecological terms: scarce timber recourse for cremation (see Martin 1996). Dooren (2011), Martin (1996). and Wylie(1964) though have documented descriptions of the detailed works on the dead bodies; their goal is to argue its origin by making a comparative study between the sky burial ritual procedures in Tibet and the middle Asia area. For example, Dooren (2001) says that the corpse is bound in a fetal position and wrapped in cloth, which is then stripped and cut into pieces, unlike Parsi practices (p.68). They also noticed that bones would be collected and pulverized to be mixed with barley. Thupten Sangay, under the translation from Gavin Kilty (Sangay & Kilty, 2011), before his MA study in the School of Oriental & African Studies and then a museum anthropology MPhil program at Oxford University, had written a paper on Tibetan death ritual, with some description on the procedures of disposal of dead bodies (bound the corpse and wrap in silk) similar to what Dooren (2011), Martin (1996) and Wylie (1964) have documented in their writing about sky burial. Thupten Sangay's paper is odd since he admittedly says that in Tibet, people "did not do these things". One reason for the limited writing of Western scholars might be the limited access to Tibet. Besides, as Dooren says (2011, p.69), sky burial is sensitive to being banned by the Chinese government, and it was banned as early as 1793.

In this sense, sky burial conducted by and near the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy till now with its well-known across local and national people, lay and monks then seems so peculiar. This makes it even weirder why a Tibetan background, Thupten Sangay, claimed its absence.

Those do not take it as an object of study, taking it as a literature symbolic word in their poetry (see Levin, 2011; Gizzi, 2020; Xinran, 2004) and a document novel in Chinese Government's crackdown in Tibet (see Kerr, 1997). WOESER and Dechen Pemba's (2012) work is one of a few dedicated to giving a sky burial voice from the perspective of a sky burial master (in Tibetan called Tokden) and expanding the scale of writing and talking to life scenarios other than the sky burial, thus providing it with more texture. Veronika Ronge (2004) also writes a paper on the sky burial master.

Another stream of scholarship related to this study is the study of chöd practice, of which some link the relation between chöd and a way of dealing with corpses akin to sky burial. Mumford (1989) is one of scholars who found links between Chöd and the death ritual. The type of chöd practice in Mumford's ethnography is performed for 49 days following a death, in an interval known as the Bardo period, when a lama and the community should guide the consciousness of the dead person to help them along the path to reincarnation (Goss & Klass, 1997). In this case, the deceased's body is represented in the form of an edifice, cut into many pieces, and offered to all practitioners. It coincides with the time and purpose of sky burial.

This strand of scholarship could have been more helpful. Their problems seem to lie in their usage of the idea of "mediation", "connection" and "sacrifice" to understand the idea of "emptiness". Mumford (1989) and Bernstein (2013) argue that the image of the body becomes a medium for obtaining a state of emptiness. Bernstein (2013) argues that chöd, as a ritual technique involving voluntary body dismemberment and sacrifice, like self-immolating Buddhist monks, has been used as a powerful weapon (and in some cases, literal weapons) in contemporary necropolitics. A better image for understanding interrelation is the reversible hinges, as Ziporyn (2009) shows. My additions here are: What is the middle in the hinge diagram? How is the middle created? There is no issue of struggles for sovereignty in sacrificing one's body either since the process is impersonal.

Secondly, what is the image of movement the concept exchange offers in those scholar's heads after all? I argue that the movement between two encounters should be more in the movement of coming in and passing by. The making of interfaces and their attenuation or moving back to the background. After all, those scholars don't give any account and attention to the detail of "cut". How the preposition "in" is the convergence of contracting/entailing/lightening "on" and expanding/spitting out/shadowing "on", if we concretize the preposition "in" being the product of intersubjectively created surfaces that is also the convergence of rolling back and forward, localizing and globalizing, rolling vertical and lateral, and entailing and transmitting for the changing of lightness and darkness.

PART 1
Forge, Knead and Harmonize the Strata:
Body, Perception, the Ten Thousand of Things and Social Relations

Swaying Along: Daily Trajectories, Bus and Medicine King Hill (藥王山)

Sit on government-run coach, I was sent from the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy enclosed within the Larung Valley down to the foothill. There was a newly built government distribution centre on a steep slope and flat contact. I was bit of restless, not because of I didn't know what things can carry me to the next destination. Even though I didn't know if I should go straight to the sky burial site or go to te Seda County at first. I never like planning trips.

It was because of it's a mess here. People came in and out from a shop, tourists ambitiously bowed to screen search tourist tips on social media like xiaohongshu (小红書), local residents carrying hemp worn in dark grey cotton clothes. Business opportunities, purpose, implicit teasing aimed at Han tourists, no intersection of the crowd, and separation. I also like a headless fly, buzzing. There wasn't a clear sign (any kind of sign: sound, street sign) instructing me how to get out of here. A policeman stood guard in the distance, next to a board house selling cold cola, instant noodles and milk tea. Small groups of young men in their twenties, deceitful and bashful, stood in the corner to solicit guests in private cars. They stared at the Han tourists, and if they make a readable eye contact, they called out to the tourist's usual place: "County town County town. Chengdu Chengdu".

Giving a glance on the street, it was easy to tell who is an inland Han Chinese tourist and who is a plateau living resident. Han Chinese tourists often dressed in fully equipped outdoor gear, which are waterproof and sun protective, with a decorative silk scarf. Local residents wore gray and black cotton coats. Despite trekking jackets are also popularly worn by the plateau residents, no one would unnecessarily wrap a silk scarf around their necks or carry an expensive camera outdoors just for dressing up and taking selfie photos. During the backpacker culture from 2000 to 2015s, Han Chinese entering Tibet often referred to themselves as backpackers rather than tourists. While they also wore outdoor clothing, they carried backpacks and appeared rugged and dusty.

I tried to move actively to ask someone here. To see if I could find a way through this chaotic and seemingly parallel mess. Who to ask? This choice has richly reflected the complex background of the individual, rather than a reference to the overly simplified issue of identity and knowledge. I ran to ask the shouting young men. My fellow ran to the police to ask if they had a car downtown or just to get some help from the "Uncle cops," as the song goes. She was born in Wenzhou, lived in the coastal city all the year round, and was a student of the Academy of Fine Arts. Because she has been educated in the mainland, although having mixed feelings of doubt and belief toward the national politics, having no way of knowing more. She often sighed that the film and television field was treacherous and heartless. Girls in silk scarves, sun caps, sunglasses and light makeup came up to us and said maybe we could save money by carpooling together. Preferring to travel alone, I showed a sense of rejection. As for the police, I just harbor resentment towards them. They have never been helpful. When dealing with fraud or sexual harassment, they only mock you for being naive when you report it. On my first day in Seda County, I walked around the central square newly built, taking photos. Armed police were stationed 500 meters away from me. I didn't know how they noticed me taking pictures. One came approached and said "comrade, you can't take photos here. Delete the ones you took." Those are the reasons of why I never ask the police for anything.

"Is there a bus to the county town?" I asked, deliberately using Sichuanese to distinguish myself from the typical tourist. "No buses here. But I can take you to the town for 50 yuan per person. Do you want to go or not?" , he replied. Suspecting the young men might be overcharging, I moved to a nearby flat area, crouched down, and prepared to pass some time idly. People's relaxed demeanor, their large and small bags (likely containing barley flour, butter, and clothes for the long journey, to save on expenses), and the close-knit groups of elderly and young people walking together said to me that there must be cheaper transportation options to the nearby towns. I observed their postures with my eyes, listened to their tones with my ears, and let their streams of kernels of vitality waves over me. I deliberately and inadvertently opened my senses (my nine openings) to let these calm, intimate bodies, these skins, expressions, and clothes pass through me. The result was that not only did they convey information and function as a sign, a symbol, but they also, like music, harmonized with my inner rhythm, eventually aligning me with them, transforming my restless agitation and buzzing into idle daydreaming and unordered tranquility. It broadened my perspective.

In the waiting and hovering, the daily track will always quietly come. It will emerge from the noisy tourist trajectories and trajectories sustained by so-called government assistance. The daily track spread out into the distant background by the moving of its infrastructures(bus), bodies, the sun, and the crying hungry baby (human and horse) at home. Not loud, not heavy.

Twenty meters away from me, an old, rumbling bus arrived. I recognized it as a public bus because it resembled the buses in Dujiangyan (都江堰) in its 2000s to 2010s. In the 2000-2010s, I spent my adolescence in Dujiangyan - a geographic intersection at the foot of the Hengduan Mountains, where the Aba Prefecture meets the Chengdu Plain, a place famous for its mix of Taoist and Buddhist influences. Those simply dressed people with their luggage boarded the bus. I hopped on as well. Spent only 2 yuan.

Two local young men in the same car, unexpectedly, asked for the address of the sky burial platform, in Sichuan dialect mixed with dialects I did not understand. The driver pointed skillfully in the direction and nodded to indicate that he would drive by. Then they started chatting. I couldn't bear to wait, afraid of missing the spot. I summoned the courage to reconfirm with the driver in Sichuanese. "Just follow them out of the car," he said. Following this thin daily track, I was unexpectedly arranged by this network. I just sway along it. This time the swaying brought smooth, the next time it might brought ups and downs, and interruptions. Anyway, I guess not knowing is for the best.

The Larung Gar Buddhist Academy was located in the south; we were heading north towards the town of Serta. On the right side of the car window ran a long stretch of low hills. The Medicine King Hill draped in prayer flags, lay along this road. In the following days, I often visited it, touching here and there, speaking to the fabric of the prayer flags and to the unknown bundles of objects. I murmured to a boat-like bundles which was composed by cloth, arrows, bones, yak hair, and skull images wrapping together in layers. It showed layered retro color made by time and various beings passing by here: new and old layers of fresh/old blue, fresh/old red, fresh/old yellow, and dark shadow tones of skull bones dyed by prayer flags, wind horses, khata. There's also a small earthen vessel for burning pine branches(煨桑台). This was my favorite place. On the ground beneath my feet, and among the unknown objects at the sides of my upper body, various items with different materials and

meanings had been scattered over time by different people. These were the things that create vitality. Their materiality remained here, forming visible strata. Although some wind horse banners and smoke had been carried away by the wind, their breath and temperament(氣息) still lingered here. Though invisible, it remained perceptible, leaving behind layers of strata detectable by other senses. Perception is created in this way: one sensation is reversibly hinged to another. Multiple sensations, through reversible hinges, merge into one. One sensation, through reversible hinges, connects to others, creating multiple experiences. The touch of fingers, the vibrant colors and scents of the air, the fluttering and disarray, and the emanation of a dark essence—all these occur within their respective strata but blend together, inviting me into a realm of tranquility and namelessness. This is the gentle aspect of death's essence. The dark essence envelops everything without bringing any threat.

To the left of the window was grassland surrounded by mountains. I was surprised that there were few yaks and horses on the grassland. The marks of the bulldozer's work were obvious: rectangular bulldozed pits were patched to the soil and grass. It also appeared that construction was halted midway. There was a 50-centimeter drop between the level of grassland and the level of road, carved out by machinery. Considering the three waves of demolitions of Larung Gar Buddhist Academy by the CCP government from 2001 to 2016, this patchwork of two distinctly different styles of strata became understandable. Later days on one hitchhike, I deliberately asked my hitchhike driver. They said yaks in Seda county were centralized. When they heard that I was from Hongyuan County (near the Maiwa tribe 麦洼部落 and grassland where the famous Maiwa yak is bred), their reaction was: your yak meat was of good quality ! Your Han people were rich, weren't you ? The industrialization of yak is a topic worth discussing. It is closely related to the nationalization of pastoral areas and the settlement of nomads by the CCP in the Adom Tibet. My family's economic and social relations are also deeply embedded in this historical political and economic process².

2

The Kneading Craftwork and The Shoddy Work The Politically Hammered and Forged Local Strata

The scenes sliding past the car windows play out two patterns of strata that co-exist. On one hand, the massive varieties of color and texture and the mysterious and dark vitality/breaths of Medicine King Hill exemplify the pattern, which I call the lively retro-shadow, a craftwork of kneading. This image of the Medicine King Hill here hinges for those photos of the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy before its renovation hanging on the hostel's wall and the current appearance of Yarchen Gar. They share two qualities:

- (1) The powerful vitality, tranquility, and remoteness manifested from: the monks' resolute and devout eyes, their radiant smiles of Yarchen Gar and Larung Gar Buddhist Academy on photos; the Buddha statues, the fluttering prayer flags and the buddle boat-like pointing towards the sky on Medicine King Hill

² My mum, together with her 4 siblings, had operated a joint-stock yak meat factory in Hongyuan County, using the great quality of Maiwa yak, from 2010-2022. It was bought by the state-owned asset in 2022.

- (2) The fresh-old-layered vibrant colors manifested from: the retro red, the irregularly pieced together handmade wooden houses, the blood-red monk robes, and the fresh red lips and faces in Yarchen Gar and Larung Gar; old and new layers of fresh/old blue, fresh/old red, fresh/old yellow, and dark shades of skull bones of Medicine King hill dyed by the yellow/red/blue/white prayer flags, wild horses and ceremonial scarfs.

On the other hand, these bulldozer-made neatly rectangular pits, the absence of the yak and horse, but the presence of wooden shacks on the grassland here initially brought me confusion. At that moment, these were merely hinges for the history of the three waves of demolitions. However, after witnessing the sky burial and integrating those new experiences into my strata, those elements emerged from the background, becoming a 'this' again. They started to hinge on the dug soil blocks on the way to the sky burial site, the transformed road, the newly built iron fences (encircling the hillside, blocking all paths to the sky burial site), the suspended bridge in the sky, the large patriotic slogans in Chinese on the hillside, and the work ID tags worn by the supervising monks. These phenomena share the same pattern of strata, characterized by one highlight point :

- (1) The sudden exposure of ugly pits and signs. The impression/phenomenon of 'sudden' can be understood through a series of details:
 - a. The soil and grassland being hammered with external materials (iron, plastic signs) that are not present elsewhere and hammered only a few times hastily; or being abruptly cut through by external materials (suspended bridge).
 - b. The hammering leaves behind straight, angular surfaces that even the soil reflects with fresh colors. These color differences outline dark contours; the straight and angular corners indicate that this is not the result of human and animal skin, bodies, fingers, or mouths crafted under emotional states but rather the result of machines' heavy blows.

Compared to the second pattern, the first pattern resembles the result of a kneading craftwork. Kneading. Repeated kneading. For the first pattern, although noticeable connections can be seen, the lines of these connections are soft and smooth. This indicates that the differences have not disappeared. Kneading, this deliberate or inadvertent mixture, creates complex paths between differences, with textures as broad as avenues and as delicate as threads. In the next chapter, I will provide additional examples of the kneading craftwork of the handcrafted wooden houses of Yarchen Gar.

My argument is that kneading is more ethical for the following reasons:

- (1) Road: Repeated kneading by different subjects will trample an infinite number of unknown lines. Bring boundless roads with depth and with shallow. They help to quickly unclog new pressures, turning the squeezing surface into streamlines and into flowing water.
- (2) Variety, more: Note the movement I have emphasized: coming in and passing by. Unpredictable, diverse people/animals bring society in all directions. Breath, eyes, language, hands, color, and texture add a more complex texture to these local material/immaterial strata.
- (3) Pay attention to reversibility: while the "object" has become more open, the 'subject' has become more open as well. These local material/immaterial strata also pounded all the past existence, all the precipitation, through the breath, the

eyes, the language, the hands, the color, the texture, on the sentient and insentient beings. As a result, ones' knotted and clogged kernel of vitality has been open.

The first pattern seems to be those strata that have not been subject to political attention or those that, due to their characteristics, are difficult to strike, render, or alter. After all, changing a character, expression, or atmosphere requires time and considerable effort. I will boldly propose in the following sections that tourism is precisely designed to accomplish this work, to alter character, expression, and atmosphere, heavily waxing the surface of culture/geography/sensory experience/landforms. Compared to the second pattern, the first pattern is more akin to the result of a kneading process. Kneading. Repeated kneading.

The contrast between these two patterns reveals political traces. The work of politics is akin to the actions performed by human fingers, gazes, animal claws, and the wind: it is what I previously referred to as Craftwork. The work of politics (power) can also be understood as involving these two actions: forging iron and playing music. Under the influence of political (power) tourism, which urgently pushes many Han people to relocate to another place, it resembles the image of a tractor pounding the soil, producing similar effects: sharply defined social conflicts and divisions. The sudden impact and the abrupt introduction of new materials inherently bring about hard-to-digest pressure. This new, unabsorbed material must immediately endure the next blow's rapid arrival, intensifying digestion's difficulty and accentuating the sharp contours. According to the framework of this paper, this hard-to-digest pressure, along with the yet-to-be-harmonized rhythms, is the root of the conflicts.

From the perspective of my personal experience in my hometown of Hongyuan County, which is also in eastern Tibet, the changes in social property and sense of belonging experienced by my mother's generation also illustrate the results of this brutal impact. For example, even though a Tibetan-owned religious goods store has been located across from the Han supermarket operated by my family for over 20 years, I, who love to wander, have never stepped into it, which surprises me. Business, wealth accumulation, and social and economic relations were rooted in Hongyuan county (the 1980s to 2012); asset transfers, company nationalization, and social and economic relations became hollow in Hongyuan county (2012 to 2024)³. In just 30 years, a generation's time, my mother experienced a shift from accumulation, struggle, and partial identification to a sudden and complete upheaval. She has had to adapt diligently. This has also caused substantial accumulated pressure, including psychological issues not only related to identity. I think these so-called "natural" changes are like the layers of prayer flags on Medicine King Hill. Due to time constraints, I will write about this in detail in another project. Tourism applies a thick layer of wax onto such landscapes, making the traces of political hammering even harder to detect. The wax is so thick and sticky that, in addition to concealing the marks left by political forces, it also drips downward and outward, adhering to other forces (the forces of life, human hands, etc.) that are involved in hammering and stripping away layers (what is referred to as the local people's lives).

The bodies of tourists/visitors are themselves complex strata. They cut, press and hammer the others by their postures, gazes, muscles, and skin, thus making new connections/trasformations/strata; while the emanations, dispersions, and renderings

³ Please refer to my footnote 2

of smells, breath, sounds, and tastes in the Kham and Amdo areas subsume the travelers into the patterns of strata which have been sedimented there for a long time with its own historical ups and downs. The new strata and rhythms that emerge will coexist with all the other strata and will be changed at any moment, so there will be no fixed outcomes or predictability.

Next, I will provide a more detailed description of the first type of strata pattern. I will first describe the textures of the wooden houses and roads handcrafted by the nuns of Yarchen Gar and the temperament of their eye-body-breath-contact. The text will move from perceived textures and colors to affect, impression, and temperament. that s A kind of eye-body-breath-contact that seems indifferent but is accepting and open. In this contact, everything is just right. In such a heart and vision, there is no difference between a person who suddenly appears and a sparrow who suddenly appears. There is no friendliness, politeness, or courtesy in such a heart and vision. There is only acceptance or nature. Then, I will describe the seats where nuns chant and study at Larung Gar Buddhist Academy and how a nun is enveloped and nurtured by the richly layered social materials (taste, smell, color, tone) and corporality, satisfying the seven emotions and six desires. I ponder a philosophical question: How does perception transform into an impression, a breath? How does it become the action of bodily gravity and the trajectory of gazes? Moreover, finally, how does it become a temperament?

3

Sparrow is Me: Trails, Handcrafted Wooden Houses and Nuns' eyes in Yarchen Gar

Larung Valley. The valley cradled clusters of low blood-red wooden houses in its arms. The eyes of the window and the head of the eaves show the craftsmanship of the owner. They were whispering, face to face, shoulder to shoulder, like the monks, whose heads they bent slightly to watch (see photo 1). After the one after one blow of hands and hammers, after one after one blow of snow, wind and frost, the blood red of some houses gets a retro old color. Sometimes whispering, sometimes walking alone (see photo 4). Houses like people, people like houses. The expressions that change every moment (see photo 2.3), the prayer flags that flutter every moment. Human like prayer-flag, prayer-flag like man. Layers of color ground by years. These are the perception/sensation, the patterns of strata, hinging Medicine King Hill on the past Larung Gar and the current Yarchen Gar.

But at this moment, I was walking in the narrow mud alley in the Yarchen Gar. It is 120 kilometers from Baiyu County and only 5 hour's drive from the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy. What I just described was just the past style of the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy. The practioners and monks/nuns' houses were reconstructed. It was painted in the kind of red that you see on kfc and the Chinese flag. In the name of fire prevention, the government had expanded the distance between wooden houses. The same applied to half of the houses rebuilt at the Yarchen Gar. Today, nuns living in the new wooden houses will find that the construction team's new board houses face the road on all sides, exposing the eyes of passers-by on all sides, instead of only the side where the door was leading to the road, as before, the other three sides were close to the house next door.



Photo 1.

This is the old photo of the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy, hang on the wall of the public areas of the youth hostel I lived

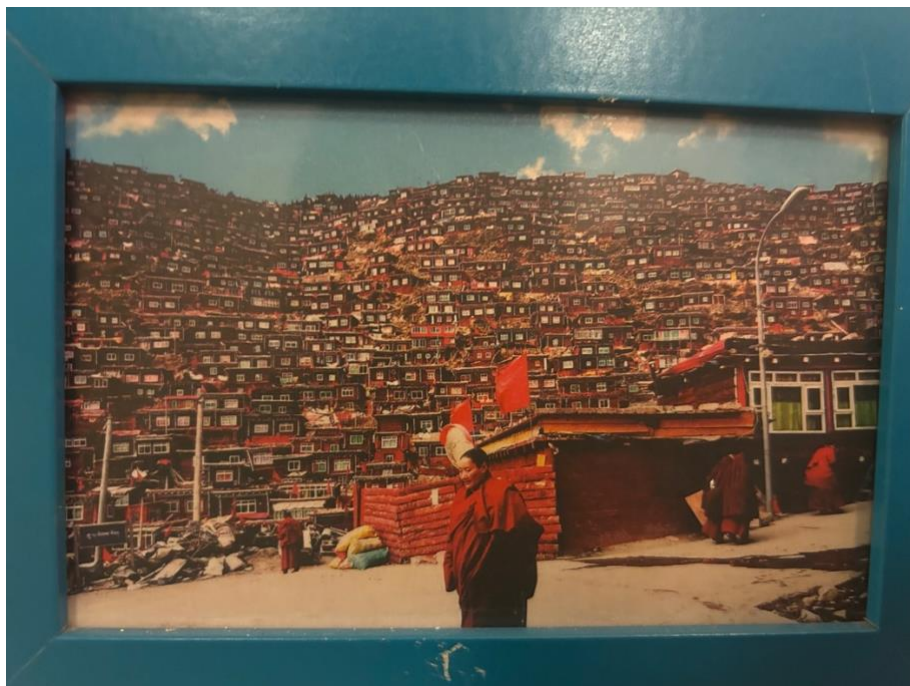


Photo 2



Photo 3

I have forgotten which street in Seda county I found the bus to the Yarchen Gar. There was no public bus between the county towns. Commuting was entirely dependent on the community of drivers, who did not fall under the jurisdiction of any branch of government. Drivers had their own gatherings in different counties, wearing black leather coats and shaggy hair, huddling together to attract passers-by or waiting for hitchhikers to find them themselves. Some gathering points were at the entrance to the abandoned grand hotels that once flourished. Such as named with the characteristics of the times: happiness hotel. Because the main reception of government and commercial dinner, so often had a parking lot can accommodate more than 20 cars); Or on some stretch of road for which I didn't know why. Anyway, never located in a place called a passenger terminal/passenger center. Tourists were in trouble. This means that an Autonavi search for passenger hubs will never find them. People can only ask, exposing their language, intonation, mouth corners, eyebrows, expressions, smells to others. Also makes other people's language, expression come to you. Finally, those gazes and voices clothe us with our own flesh, as Mueggler says (2011)

This is really a training for city dwellers, because the 'hitchhiking' experience in the Kham reminds them that the body, which exudes heterogeneous smells, temperatures and uncertain meanings, is actually necessary for the smoothness and convenience of the journey. Heterogeneous bodies are not to be feared. Like a tropical rainforest residence won't rid the 15 feet insects from his home. For a thing to be terrible chasing, valueless, because, in this scenario, it is not the hinge for the desire at the moment. In the city, the traveler does not need to make complicated contact with the flesh of the people in close proximity to pass smoothly. Because of the plastic road signs and the software in the phone screen, not the human body, the city residents go to their travel roads. In this sense, for urban commuters, formally because the human body is not a hinge for their commuting road, the human body does not exist conceptually. But the smell of the flesh and the physical friction of the people actually around that makes it unbearable.

Anyway, I was walking on the mud alley sandwiched by two rows of wooden houses, where the width of the road was just enough for two feet passing, where weeds and wildflowers sprouted from the irregular meeting lines of the house foundation and the road. I felt sweet and had a jump in my step. Though deeply attracted by the profound yet ethereal atmosphere, I paid attention to the details around me—the occasional stoppings pulled at my steps. There were pieces of iron sheet and water-proof cloth nailed together and hammered by the human hand repetitively here and there to shelf and enclose the wrapping walls and roof, covering nuns from the rains and snows in the plateau’s snowy winter (see photo 5). The house there shared the same pattern as the Larung Gar before its demolition: the other three faces of each house are attached to the neighboring house, with only the face of the door open to the narrow outward east and west alley where I walked. Just like how a fingertip touches the skin of a palm, with only one of its directions open outward. Built by friends and neighbors by hand or just by hiring simple construction machines, the eaves were low, the roof was sloping, and the materials used were different by each household. By the end of 2019, while all the hand making flat houses were demolished in Sethar, only a half of Yarchen Gar’s self-built wooden houses had been demolished by the Chinese authorities, with another half remained untouched. The standardization of housing construction at Yarchen Gar widened the distance between houses, making them open to all four faces and cubic (see photo 6).



Photo 5. Yarchen Gar Nuns Hand Built House before standardization



Photo 6 Yarchen Gar: Cubic House after standardization

Wrapped in iron sheet, cloths, and wood sticks (see photo 5), light came through the cracks in the tarp and tin. There was chanting and light looming in the house. And laughing, the cici sound of burning wood for cooking and warming. If one find too dark or too bright, he/she can get up and take a tin ax to fix it, adjust the focus of the sun and the size of the halo. Like the result of kneading, this also opens up the body and the outside world. This is a spiritual life that can't be described as a mystery, but is safe and situated enough. Being enveloped within the stable, determinate localized surfaces made by hand and other partial bodies after one and one hitting, nailing, sensing, and kneading allows a kind of solitude. Using material bodies assembled from near and far (wood, mud, water) and borrowing a hand from the familiar and non-familiar people actualizes how Ziporyn (2009) says “this” is composed of “not-this”, thus, “the outside is in the inside” (Ziporyn, 2009, p. 67). One already lives in an intensely intersubjectively made localized wrapped womb. The ‘boundaries’ of the flat wooden house are analogous to the womb and drum skins instead of a dead rigid line, bumping and drumming resonating with the inside and outside. Due to such skin’s delineation of a determinate inside, it also opens up the in and outside. This is why solitude can and is simultaneously an opening up. As Levinas (1961) suggests in *Totality and Infinity* : sufficient solitude is the condition for and constitutive of opening up to the Other. Tiantai Buddhism also says that for a pair of extreme contrast, the more separated they are, the more unified they are, and vice versa (Ziporyn, 2016, p. 2).

Skin allows one not to engage with things as long as she doesn’t want to at each present perspective. But what is subsumed in the skin also ensures one is always intersubjectively engaging with something, and most importantly, ensures one shift to another different perspective and gravity, and engage with different things. Pivoting around the intersubjectively assembled hand-hand-made skins is the contrast, difference, local coherence, and global incoherence (Ziporyn, 2009). Skin is wrapping and wrapped by a soft-watery bounded womb with darkness and lightness contrast. Skin holds a soft-watery bounded womb with darkness and lightness contrast.

My torsos were caught between houses, my feet in the mud, the smell of firewood burning, the eaves not much taller than me, the old colors, the clouds of the plateau, and the unknown flowers at my feet. The bodies of all things in this moment

were superimposed on my body; these smells, colors, the nameless immaterial things swayed my spirit. They also open me up to my “past” and to the national economic-political history. This was the pathway that I talked about in the last section. I returned to my childhood summertime from early 2000 to 2010. I seemingly walked on similar trails near the supermarket my mother ran in Hongyuan County (from the 1980s till 2008, closed after the Wenchuan earthquake) and the trails where my father worked at the Food Bureau, which had nearby compact bungalows close to them. My sentimental memory also led me to discover that this kind of path, interspersed between compact bungalow-houses, has existed in three critical stages of the Chinese political economy. The Food Bureau represents the collective economy, and the supermarket represents the period of marketization. The half demolished, half remained alley represents the current political economy characterized by tourist economy and power.

I heard voices talking in a particular room ahead. After a while, a nun opened the door and bent down to brush her teeth. The water poured on the alley and flowed away in the ravines in the road. The nuns must have heard and seen me, but she did not seem to see me: there was no heavy eye contact, nor was there a blocking or awkward atmosphere coming from the absence of direct cutting of eye contact. I guess that for her, I am like a sparrow standing on the treetops on the roof or an eagle flying across the sky that comes occasionally every day. It is like I could be the one living here at any time. I am no one and anyone. There was neither hospitality nor vigilance in Yarchen Gar's valley.

By contrast, going back to the second pattern a bit. In the town streets, people would occasionally look at me, going through my surfaces and my clothing; they would sense my breath manifested from my torso's waves in the gestures of walking and talking, and they would like to see if I am a tourist or something, a man or a woman. After more intense destruction and conflict, unlike Yarchen Gar and its nearby counties, Larung Gar and its near Sertar County were left with more tense relations. People secretly watched each other more. Local people dressed in grey-dark casual cottons and those in functional-decorative bright clothes with a waiting attitude would exchange vigilant glances and breaths, and there was more rejection, ridicule, or avoidance of observation. In Larung Gar the main road for visitors was occasionally flanked by stairs leading to areas located at different levels of the mountain. 'Monks' residence, tourists are not allowed to enter,' reads a sign at the entrance to a staircase leading to the monks' residence. I love jumping up and down, but afraid I will be stopped whenever taking some steps on the stairs. I had to walk along the main road. That's how trajectories of eye contact, words, colors, and gestures change me toward another way, transforming me to be closed and cautious. The hundred bones(百骸), the nine openings(九竅), and the six internal organs(六臟) of me was knotted and clogged. While the pattern of trajectories of eye contact, words, gestures, etc., of Yarchen Gar also cloths my flesh and shifts the aura of my eye contact as well, it is a transformation that opens me up and harmonizes me.

4

Larung Gar Buddhist Academy: The Study Seat, the Wrapped and Nurtured Nuns

Not like bones and muscles are vulnerable to knots; the person's temperament is hardly to beat after a handful of times. The temperament change requires the action of

kneading because it is an outcome of superimposed, infiltrated, and tuned connections to complicated things, and then it will be 'unconsciously' deformed. The Medicine King Hill continues to exist, giving off its temperament and telling me about the deeper deposits accumulated in this area, although yaks and horses have been gathered into concentrated pastures, and the uniform squares of mud grass houses cut by tractors have added a new pattern of strata/images to this natural/infrastructure/human landscape. I walked down some small paths with few people and continued to sway.

On the path where I did not know where it led, I passed several small shops selling daily necessities, spicy snacks, and drinks. In the refrigerator were vegetarian frozen skewers and hot pot balls. It was time for class to end, and near the nearby shops, there were 3 or 5 herdersmen carrying iron buckets of fresh yak milk, surrounded by students. The students filled bottles of Nongfu Spring mineral water with milk for 5 yuan each. I murmured excitedly: this is practically a university! The desire of mouth and belly. In the broad view, I captured and was captured by a dynamic life, following its breath (here is the lively atmosphere of life), I found a big nunnery study hall. But about 30 minutes later, I was "ushered" out.

I saw nuns frequently lifting the heavy windproof curtains and entering or leaving. After some stairs, there was a platform, with a few steps leading to the curtain entering the study hall. A few nuns of varying ages, from 10 to 60, were sitting on the platform chatting, eating snacks, or lying on the cold platform, reciting texts or devoutly prostrating themselves with a student-like aura. Again, I couldn't help but smile wryly: were these postures like those of elementary school students?

Having lived in a co-ed boarding school for several years, with my blurred gender, I was able to quickly sense the atmosphere of conformity or solitude within the community. The nuns all shaved their heads. Those with a slightly more feminine aura did not diminish their female charm. At the same time, those with a touch of masculinity displayed smooth manly characteristics under their stylish red robes and shaved heads. Some chatted lively, greeting passing friends. Others pondered quietly, with a hint of detachment, walking briskly calmly (see photo 7 as an example)



Photo 7

I sat cross-legged on the platform for a while, the hall's inside hidden by heavy curtains. I was curious but hesitate whether to go in. Maybe I (Han Chinese, tourist, in their eyes) can't go in? However, I think some will think in this way though, but just some narrow ideas. I casually picked a vacant cushion to sit among the nuns. Closing my eyes, I played and rubbed my beads. Nuns reached out, leaning left and right, padding the shoulder of another in the back and front. Or, one just converged to her position: though unnamed voices, the recitation, and the chanting mummer were not in her perspective now, they led her somewhere and nowhere in the ten thousand of streams, as my wandering in the alley in Yarchen Gar led me dwelling in my ten years old summertime in Hongyuan (or something else?) From the perspective of the singular seat, each person was enveloped by their belongings, by the intimate scene of chanting, studying, meditating, sleeping, eating, and laughing—a miniature structure for those handmade red flat houses.

Though the variety in the items each person brought differed - some had only basic books and a pair of bowls and chopsticks, while others had sets of them and layers of blankets - the types and spatial arrangement of items were consistent: cushions under the buttocks, blankets quilt on the back wrapped around or placed behind; daily necessities boxes, books, bowls stand in front; laughter, recitation of classmates and the crunching sound of snack in the left and right. Nuns are nourished by the familiar smelt and touched quilt brought by their mums/grandmas in the far and by the mouthwatering snacks and drinks bought with friends in tuck shops open along many corners in the academy.

The scene was bustling even more with cafeteria aunties dressed in white kitchen attire, carrying ladles and large spoons, holding iron tea pots walking around. They moved between the seats, asking if anyone wanted butter tea or porridge (which tasted like barley porridge with milk). To decline, people raised both hands and waved them upward. I was also approached indiscriminately despite not wearing robes. I mentioned I didn't have a bowl, and one of the aunties said she would find one for me. However, it never arrived before I was eventually asked to leave.

Even after such a total reconstruction, and after many hotels and car parks were built that attempted to transform Larung Gar into a landscape with sticky, noisy, and restless tourist vibe, such lingering non-discrimination aura still rang loudly. Thanks for the durability of temperament rooted in the infinite complexity of all things, I was allowed to understand better a report I read yesterday in a website maintained by Khenpo Sodargye's students, which quoted H.H. Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche (the founder of the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy) saying that: "All students and visitors at the Academy are treated with equal respect: regardless of their status as monastics or lay practitioners, gender, ethnic or national heritage, or educational achievement, all are welcome to receive the teachings articulated more than 2500 years ago by the Buddha and developed over the millennia by enlightened masters" (khenposodargye.org, n.d.). In the same website, Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche also says that the central teachings in the Larung Gar are "*Unity and Harmony*"; "*Pure Precepts*"; "*Listening, Reflecting and Meditating*"; and "*Spreading the Dharma to Benefit Sentient Beings*". (khenposodargye.org, n.d.).

In this project, I want to claim that such teaching and training principles is realized within a unique one-to-many relation by a fully satisfied desire of eating, sleeping, and emotional fulfillment in communal life. It is not realized in asceticism, living in isolation, and breaking the social relationships outside the Buddhist Academy. It is not realized as written by the Chinese National Geography (2014): "people who come here to study and worship Buddha, for the sake of their beliefs,

abandon their homes and careers, and travel hard to come here to endure extremely simple living conditions, live an ascetic life, and look forward to the perfection of meditation."

The effect of tourism is also obvious, just like the ground of the grassland beaten by the tractor and the cubic houses after standardization. Instead of strolling in dynamically perceptual ways, people walk on a set tourist path/route. By the road, by indicators guide, by the propaganda of asceticism and hard life -the dominant/close perspective - for tourists, alley, then, is not easy to go to. The details of daily life and the details of the tension is drawn into the side into the blind spot. In addition, the standardization of housing construction, and the seamless route/service (一條龍服務) from Chengdu Chadianzi sub-station to Seda County tourism distribution center to the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy fixed and made the convenient tourist route, which also draws the details to the side. In this way, the view of the impersonal propaganda of asceticism - hard life is transformed into the view of the personal visitors.

About half an hour later, a nun around 50, who seemed like a leader, gave me a stern look and gestured towards a youthful-faced monk beside me, who then passed a word in Mandarin to me. I was asked to move to the edge, sitting with ordinary Tibetan residents rather than with the group of nuns. A legacy after the demolition. Initially, though, I had sensed some nuns showing mixed expressions of casualness and discomfort because the cushions beneath me and the storage boxes in front of me were each person's personal items, which meant that I had taken a student's seat. They hesitated to ask me to move.

PART 2
Core that Lights and Shades Things

Ten minutes is enough to recall a lifetime. But I was still in the same bus. As we neared the destination, the driver said, "here we are, the sky burial site, hurry up and go. Do not move in groups to attract the police coming to block you ". The bus stopped, and people started jumping off one after another. Two young Tibetan men slightly hunched, moving swiftly and quick. I also ran off quickly, leaving my two companions far behind. They were still in leisure walking. I knew how much I hated the police's questioning and obstruction. I knew they wouldn't listen to any reasoning.

A month later, in August 2023, my partner Brook and I went again to the Larung Gar Buddhist Academy and the sky burial site, that time on our own. At 8 AM, there were no police patrols. I was able to stroll in the hillside meadows. As I walked across the vast, undulating grassy slopes, the balls of my feet and the front muscles of my thighs taut in an arched bowstring shape. My eyes and top torsos passed yaks lying down with their heads buried in sleep or their tails flicking as they grazed. We passed chubby marmots staring blankly like stones and some landmarks wrapped in khata and yak hair marking specific sacred sites. In just a month, I found that fences had increased significantly. After 10 minutes of walking along the barbed wire, I found an unenclosed entrance. The two men with plain clothes ahead. I like wild guerrilla soldiers, search screens, and grasp the timing right arch squatted on.

I also knew I was too eager to witness the sky burial. I knew I needed to see it. I had often heard my family and company employees who frequently traveled to Tibetan villages for business talking about it. They said, "they just cut the flesh off directly. It's terrifying, brutal and bloody, I don't dare to watch." I have a habitual obstacle. The more I love something, the more I distance myself from it. The more I long for something, the more I prevent myself from approaching it. I have eight years hasn't been Kham Amdo region. My father never went back after he died. I don't know how the two are related. Although the river water of Dujiangyan (my father's residence after his retirement from the grain bureau), the cattle and sheep of the grassland cultivated my temperament. I think we are the same things. Long ago, I would often fantasize: is there a monk, the drifter, the nomad in their flowing red robe, living in a wooden house with a window open? When dust floats gently in the sunlight, he would carefully and devoutly cut open a body, dragging a large hemp sack, leaving marks as it brushes against the grass. At the right moment, they walk towards the circling vultures. Like how they scatter prayer flags, they throws pieces of the corpse, one by one. The relatives bow their heads and their hands folded in respect, hoping this act will help their loved one on their journey. That troubling body, breathless, dead, and terrifying. The body of a loved one no longer to be seen.

The owner of the youth hostel – a Tibetan intellectual from Seda County – told me that it used to be possible to hike from the hillside of the Sky Burial Platform to the valley of the Buddhist Academy, passing a vast undulating grassland. However, at some point - residents have become tight-lipped about any inquiries regarding the academy or provide vague answers - the government had erected iron fences (see photos 6 and 7), attempting to block all hillside entrances gradually. By the first time I arrived there in July 2023, several entrances to the Sky Burial Platform by hiking were through a foothill through which one climbed up the mountain. Only residents knew and could recognize it from the identical-looking foothills. People from surrounding areas of Seda County could find out through their chit-chat and inquiries. A driver or the hostel owner told me that people from nearby towns and even farther

away would drive to this sky burial platform since they believe Larung Gar Buddhist Academy possesses greater spiritual power. I did not continue to ask what it meant.



Photo 8 Iron fens



Photo 9 Iron fens

Approaching the summit, earth pits dug by tractors showed up. One tall suspension bridge stood prominently (see photo 10). Very weird. Am I on my way to a death funeral or what? I recalled the dirt pits carved out on the grassland outside the car window. It made sense. This is a coherent local. Turning onto the newly dug winding mountain road, I saw a sign in Chinese that prohibited photography. Then, I was greeted by a four-tiered landscape with marble-paved ground and standing statues. The first tier was a broad platform with murals of hell and poetry on the walls. The second tier, accessed by climbing steps, was where the sky burial stone was located. It is said that in the past, corpses were placed directly on this sky burial stone. It was no longer used and was surrounded by newly erected statues on flat ground, turning it into a sightseeing spot. A stupa was located at this tier as well. The notches and scratches on the columns and the yellowed-white paint revealed that this was not newly built. The stupa is the necessary path for transporting bodies. The third tier had

caves filled with skulls and a pillar covered with human hair. From the left side of the third tier, after climbing a few steps, were the currently used rectangular corpse placement area, enclosed by a waist-high iron fence and mud walls. In the northeast direction of this area, there was an iron shed housing a machine worked to ground bones to mix with barley flour.



Photo 10 Construction at Larung Gar Sky Burial Site



Photo 11 construction at Larung Gar Sky burial site

Around 12:30, about 30 vultures were circling over a hillside. As relatives carrying corpses seemed to approach, two monks in red robes sitting in the corner near the stupa started chanting. Long gray hair, eyes closed, left hand turning the prayer wheel with a deep, heavy whisper-like chanting. Two monks wearing work badges around their necks that wrote their names and positions in the CCP party also showed up, standing beside the fence, holding a loudspeaker calling out to non-relatives to keep away from the fencing areas that enclosed the central ground where corpses were unwrapped. Unlike the domineering expression and tone that most

party workers had, they spoke gently and patiently, requesting everyone's cooperation to watch from a distance of at least 10 meters away on the near hillside.

One sky burial master came in. He was pushing open the fence. Others and I standing in front of the fence made way for him. He grabbed a wooden-handled knife, the kind I and East Tibetans use when enjoying hand-pulled yak meat. He sharpened the knife for a while. Family members hurry over, and all of us, including the monks from the nearby academy or what were shouted away. Unveiling and cutting the body were not allowed to be seen since the Chinese government took over the Buddhist academy. The leading monk who wore his work badge reluctantly said, "Please, everyone, cooperate. This is what the government demands. Our Buddhist academy has no choice. It will be troublesome later". Only after everything was done and the vulture swooped down, were we allowed to approach.

On my second visit, the management was much stricter in every aspect. The supervising monk had also changed. Compared to the monk I met during my first visit, this one issued commands without hesitation. Even when speaking to those nearby, his gaze remained directed outward, and his mouth would curl up. He was in a state of constant assessing. I found it challenging to stay as close to the ground as I had the first time. I stood on a sloping hill, just far enough to view the fencing area from 100 meters away. Relatives arrived. The bodies, wrapped and tied in a fetal position at home, were carried by men on their backs or placed in boxes and carried on wooden poles. They circled the stupa three times clockwise, then climbed the steps, walked over the colorful stone-paved road, and entered the site. The burlap sack and ropes were cut open. The body, with a 'poof,' spread out. It was swollen, with disheveled hair, bloated, and bluish.

With a nod from the more composed and gentle overseeing monk (at my first witness), I took a quick step forward and glimpsed the completeness of the body for a moment. It was then immediately engulfed by the vulture. A nod between him and me - which released enough information while remaining sufficiently discreet - was a device for escaping the seemingly omnipresent sense of governmental surveillance. Such a personal nod also demonstrated that, despite the lack of explicit dialogue between us, we reached an understanding and resonance with each other through mutual observation and the exchange of our breath. He understood my attitude, which was neither driven by "voyeurism" nor devotion. Such sensitive perception requires each person to be in their introspective sentiment.

I had never witnessed so "delicately" the gradual disappearance of one's flesh. Captured by such immense gravity, I stood in a field unlike any I had experienced before. Feathers of vultures swirled with dust, blood, and flesh blurred, and the putrid stench of long-rotten corpses wafted intermittently. Chants rumbled, vultures squabbled, seizing scraps of human skin. Standing next to me, a 10-year-old Tibetan child, with cheeks flushed with the typical highland red and his old brother standing beside, was biting his oranges as he watched the vultures pecking at limbs and fingers of the corpse. He held the orange in his left hand, nibbling away, while peeling the skin with his right hand. The sweet and tangy juice covered his palm. A satiated vulture perched on the hedge near my head. We locked eyes for a minute. Am I eatable? Beneath the fence at my feet, another curious vulture pecked at my pants cuffs. Playful and cute, no longer being a huge fearsome scavenger. Perhaps fearing I would be frightened by the corpse-eating vultures, a young monk from the Buddhist academy about my age pulled me back.

My youthful arms, muscular and full of blood, were indeed no different from the swollen, bruised corpse. The living are hungry ghosts.

P.k.14, a band in the Chinese modern alternative music, writes in their song '*the cut of talking*':

這是說話的傷口
這是說話的傷口，
他穿過血紅的天空
唱著一隻熟悉的歌
這是我的手
這是我的手
它抓住黑夜並且把它扔掉

-P.K.14

The sky burial master, in Woesser's (2012) pen tip, closed his eyes with his arms and legs twisted in different directions and said that he wanted to see what he would look like after he was brought to the sky burial platform after he was dead. Woesser replied that he looked exactly like the corpses waiting for sky burial. Am I, like the sky burial master, mirroring myself to the corpses? Yes, but no, since such mirroring is not a mirror between two whole given entities but sensuous partialized strata of body.

Vultures fought for a piece of flesh and pulled a piece of skin. The sky burial master walked among them to ensure each get feasted. He gently portioned the target flesh, throwing to the chirping birds. He gripped the knife's wooden handle tightly, sliding over the leather and flesh. The edge of knife was sharp enough. The scent arose as it lingered, carried by the wind, vultures, and sky burial masters. Within the defined local feng shui, it was received and dispersed with each cut, each bite, carried, and spread everywhere. The scattering becomes a connection between other things. Scattering makes sure another set of connections. As Mueggler (2017) says, the division of bodies makes them actual, and each divided body "is a whole produced by anatomical operations of partition" (p.133).

Suppose we say that sky burial involves some karmic processes. In that case, the meaning of karma revealed by sky burial is an unknown infinite redistribution of the relationship of who wraps/subsumes this particular 'this'. As Muegger has suggested, "to assemble bodies for the dead is to draw powers of rituals acts to selectively materialize elements of that enormous, variegated, manifold, and indeterminant ocean of sensation and affect that underlies the socially determinate partialities of relation and identity"(2017, p.74).

The determinate making of faces, phases, perspectives, and connection at every single moment is implicitly defined by all the past things that existed already there and is explicitly defined by each of the cutting of the masters, each of the biting of the vultures, each of the sensation/perception of the witnesses, and each of the transmitting of air. While the indeterminate making of faces, phases, perspectives, and connections are left to be done by the other indeterminate ten thousand of things. This is like smoke waving and waving by streams of (in)determinate void. It fades into the background while those lurking in the background arise, bleeding over into the visible smoke through their intermaking of faces, phases, and perspectives. The latter suggests how the smoke transforms the void streams like the knife butcher image told by Zhuangzi.

In this sense, sky burial is open to seeing and seeing by all (in)sentient beings. That is why the leading monks speak in a resigned tone when he issued the driving away. Not only tourists but also students in Buddhist academies and monks/nuns are encouraged by their teachers to see the funeral. Family members accept their relatives' bodies being viewed, initially. How does the sentiment that such viewing equates to "disrespecting the deceased" come about? This cannot be examined in this project, but it is valued for further research.

When talking about touch, scholars have stressed that the bodily surface as a whole is involved in touch (Ratcliffe, p.134). Tim Ingold (2020) writes that the feeling of touch "radiates from the area of contact throughout the body. You feel the three with your entire body" (p.38). However, I will argue that firstly, there's no preexisting body and skin. Second, there's no "entire body" existing since the body/skin is, by definition, dismembered and local. A singular surface is produced, emerges, and thus exists from intersubjectively subsuming and passing by. Subject is object (Merleau-Ponty, 2004). One's body surface is the touched local surface of the desk. Part is whole. Only part exists. The localized and created surface of human skin and desk skin are both touched and touching. Third, "those" things that have not emerged in light are together with all the other ten thousand things that have not been brought into the present view, lurking in the ocean of indeterminate background.

At each moment and position, there are intersubjectively corresponding uncontacted global and contacted local. From this local to the next local in the next moment just requires shifting the perspectives. Perspectives are made by desire/purpose/aim. For example, from the perspective of the backpack-back, the backpack on the back is the contacted local, but the belly is not (from the perspective of clothes-belly, touching the clothes underneath, the belly is the contacted local part, and the fingertips are the uncontacted global). Limited to this moment, this intersubjective pair, this position, it has its corresponding bright = contacted = centered multi-relevant locals/skin/bodies/strata/smell/etc. The rest are invisible = dark = lurking = non-skins/non-bodies/non-strata/non-smell/etc.

Each action is composed by two phases:

(1) subsuming 納/wrapping 裹/ inhaling 吸; which makes things to be 'here', makes the local.

(2) ousting 外/ swaying vibrating 搖盪/ exhaling 呼.

While there is a necessary and inescapable connection between the two, subsuming X means ousting non-X - the contrast between and the separation of them is necessary. Skin/surfaces/bodies/strata/smell/touch etc. arises out precisely from the contrast.

The shifting of inhaling in and exhaling out leads to the changing of the distribution of gravity here and there (the ambient). Inhaling in and exhaling out drive transformation going on, through connecting, which means making multi-localized surfaces/bodies/skin/strata/touch/smell. The nuns. Reaching to her left and right fellow practitioners, wrapped by the cushion on the buttock, blankets on the back, snacks in the mouth, buttermilk handing over, and chanting lingering around, and finally led to the unknown meditation phase/vision/understanding or be dwelling in the past/future lives, there are many and always new/more known and unknown directions available for a nun to orient to, to make connections, and to shift her focus, defined by her this and now sentiment/affect/nature(情狀), so-called karma. As she reaches out, listening, chanting and giggling, as she inhales in and exhales out, she also transforms her local surroundings and the unknown global. The world vibrates.

The world redistributes the gravity of the ten thousand of things. She vibrates. She redistributes the gravity of the ten thousand of things.

The barely material impersonal and singular corpse who is in starkly absolute breathing out and who is seen and seeing— as Muggler (2017) suggests impersonal because it requires no personality, consciousness or memory; singular because it is experienced uniquely by each being (p.72) - calls fiercely social actions doing upon it. It reveals the necessity of socially made multi-localized surfaces and the changing gravity distribution. In the next section, I will give more description of the phenomenon/aspect of ousting 外/ swaying vibrating 搖盪/ exhaling 呼.

2

萬物彌散的搖盪:手

Coming down from the southern mountains, Book and I hitchhiked back to the county town, thumbs up. A young couple stopped to give us a ride. People always ask where someone is from, just like with my gender, it's an answer i can shape. I always say Hongyuan rather than Chengdu. People are usually more relaxed around those from Kham and Amdo. My hair is stiff and a bit messy, I wear a black jacket, creased and dusty. Walking day and night on the grassland slopes and familiar streets (Seda County, which, like Hongyuan County and other counties in the Kham and Amdo regions, has the same atmosphere). My gaze is forged with broad confidence. It's partly this aura, along with the hitchhiking gesture, that makes passing cars stop. In early 2010, the road-tripping culture spread to Tibet. Bold young Tibetans appreciated and embraced this kind of interaction. They didn't treat us like regular tourists; even if they started off by teasing and charging us, after a few words, and handing out a few cigarettes to them they wouldn't take my money.

Men always like to observe me through the rearview mirror. Most of them are straightforward ones always ask whether I am a boy or a girl, and where I am from. This couple was no exception. Upon learning that we were from Hongyuan, they started talking about their work in Lhasa and invited us to visit Ngari. As we approached the county town, they recommended a restaurant of Tibetan cuisine we should try. In a twist, that young man messaged my partner later that evening, inviting her out alone. What kind of male charm is this? Bold, direct, a competition of masculine vibes ? He knew Book is my girlfriend and thought I am a man.

The next day, Book and I went there to eat. Hand-pulled yak meat was tough and moist. It was my first-time ordering hand-pulled yak meat at a restaurant not from my home, and I wasn't used to such small portions – 50 yuan per pound only gave us three square pieces of meat. At home, we always have big chunks of meat piled high. It's casual, thrown into a bowl, stacked like a small mountain. Some pieces have bones, some don't, from various parts of the yak. Everyone has their favorite parts. In a mound of meat, we search for our preferred pieces, taking a small knife to slice and pick bones. I always prefer the pieces with bones, and those with tender fat interspersed. My uncle prefers pieces with tendon for chewiness. If we find a suitable piece for each other, we always grab and tell them. Mom loves pieces with a mix of lean and fat, always searching and saying, 'it has to be half lean and half fat to be delicious. This piece is good, eat this one.' The slim aunt always shakes her head and says, 'too fatty, I don't want it.'" But they do enjoy that flavor.

Book said this taste and smell was very familiar but not know how. The sky burial site. I looked at the meat in my left hand, the knife in my right hand: I was wrestling with a greasy, sinewy piece of meat, sliding up and down, adjusting the strength in my fingertips. Paused for a moment, I set down the piece of meat. Ah, so that's how it is. Sky burial get recontextualization, actualized in multi swarm of faces, phases subsumed in a local: in greasy particular hand works, in chewing aroma.

The Tibetan cuisine restaurants here are mostly family-run, often with partitioned sections where curtains can be drawn. This particular place also operates a bathhouse on the second floor for soaking baths, each in separate rooms. On the third floor is the restaurant and water/tea bar. As we entered the restaurant, to the right was a large partitioned area. When the waiter opened the door to deliver food, I saw elderly grandparents, a middle-aged man, and others inside. It seemed like a family gathering for dinner. Inside, there was mist swirling and it was steamy hot. People looked warm and lively, yet not rowdy. Unlike restaurants in Sichuan Han areas where family gatherings are bustling with voices, excitement, and lively gestures, and where men would discuss passionately, pointing fingers, giving each other directions for puzzles, squinting their eyes occasionally, and taking a drag of their cigarettes with a crooked mouth when listening to others. The elderly, however, remain quiet like children. Even though seated in the most prominent positions, they are obedient like well-behaved children, saying nothing, neither looking around nor seeming bored, as if they already knew everything and thinking those men were just boasting. The old are not the focal point at the dining table. In this room, the elderly is gentle and lively, while the young men show a robust masculine demeanor. They do not hesitate to smoke water pipes among the elders, nor shy away from appearing tough or exuberant, yet they show respectful affection towards their mothers.

Returning from this scene, Book and I chose a section nestled in the corner. In such family-style restaurants, seating arrangements are either facing each other in rows with long tables or partitioned with curtains separating individual spots. In Han Chinese areas like Sichuan, these are called private rooms ('bao fang'), which often require an additional fee or minimum spending. Inside, they are usually lavish: suitable for private family gatherings or formal business dinners, emphasizing decorum. Each private room is given an elegant name. But here, separate rooms are not an additional feature. A simple, sturdy wooden table, curtains embroidered in Tibetan style, and sofas with Tibetan-style embroidered cushions create a small heaven and earth. The tissue box chosen by the host, embroidered Buddhist patterns on the curtains. Sitting comfortably on the well-worn sofa, book and I breathed a sigh of relief—it's really comfortable! Looking around at this personal space, I feel grounded. My facial expressions can relax now. There are often water pipes in the restaurant. I carried myself with the air of an addict, indifferent gaze, relaxed limbs, breathing in and exhaling smoke. I didn't talk.

I remember my mother's supermarket and pharmacy were like this too. In the early 1980s, the store was originally named after my parents' initials. The employees hired were often younger relatives from distant places, not recruited extensively through labor agencies. At the back of the shop, there was the owner's private room, typically centered around a stove with an iron kettle sat on top, emitting a 'psssh psssh' sound, with smoke billowing up, as if the surrounding is the night, silent. There were a few short wooden stools around. People rubbed their hands, moved around the stove, warmed themselves, drank hot water, and chatted. In the early morning, a fresh pot of yak milk would also be heated in the same iron kettle.

Those years, during the summer yak festival, my family and the supermarket staff would go 耍草壩子⁴. Pitch tents, set up stoves, and place several large iron pots. Through acquaintances, we'd buy freshly slaughtered yak meat from the market, using the broth to stew noodles. The male staff with my uncles would set up tents and transport things, while the aunties and the girl staff cooked. We'd choose a spacious spot on the grassland, setting up open tents. Behind the tents, there was often a small river for fishing. Tables set up to cut vegetables and meat. Oil stains from the yak meat would splatter on the tabletops. Everyone would pour Sprite and fresh orange juice from large bottles into paper cups and distribute them around. After asking around, paper cups, utensils, beverage bottles would all be covered in a thick, sticky layer of congealed yak butter. Fingers would be left with the smell of yak meat and the bubbly scent of Sprite and orange juice. I'd wander around here, having eaten and drunk my fill, then go play on the nearby grass. Catching grasshoppers and going to the river with older brothers to catch fish. In such group activities, the supermarket brothers and sisters were becoming relatives of brothers and sisters.

⁴ 耍草壩子 Play the grass dam. It's Sichuan dialect. It embodies the Chinese language in eastern Tibet. For me, my parents' generation, Chinese education was in Sichuan dialect. Up to now, the post-00s generation, Chinese education is Mandarin

PART 3
Friction
Temperament?
Father
Mother

Walking fire,托住陰影臭氣: ICU

Is the shadow we bear enduring constant suffering? I once lived in such moment: racing against time and medication during the days my sister was critically infected and admitted to the ICU. This is the reality of life. I understand. At home, I watched her neatly folded clothes lying on the bed. Her naked flesh lay exposed on the ICU single bed, covered only by a white blanket. Not wrapped, just touching the surface of her skin, to conceal the ugliness and agony of the four or five tubes attached to her and her convulsions. She had to synchronize her breathing with the ventilator's frequency and pressure, day and night, with every breath. The nasal pressure strip of the mask left red swelling marks.

I need to be quicker than the doctors. Before they take any measures, I inform them: I inform them about our choices if intubation becomes necessary; I inform them about which arm's blood vessels to avoid for future dialysis protection after needle insertion; I inform them about dietary preferences: low-protein but sufficient energy intake. This is the hospital where my sister had her kidney transplant. In the early 2000s, they were among the best in the Southwest for kidney transplants. However, after military reforms and entering the 2010s, the loss of funds and doctors resulted in their medical resources, equipment, and technology lagging behind, which in turn led to fewer patients and limited clinical experience. In the past five years, its ICU team has only encountered one patient who, years after kidney transplant, developed lung infection and was considering a second transplant. Simply applying a nutritional plan designed for systemic immune deficiency-related lung bacterial infections would overly tax my sister, potentially preventing her from surviving the most severe stages of bacterial assault. Their limited experience, coupled with outdated equipment due to lack of funds and exhausted nurses, along with the absolute authority and command of the ICU team, makes me distrustful. The ICU is a black box. A fortress behind iron door. In my daily 30-minute visits, on the days when family members aren't present, I see tired interns vigorously wiping patients' noses and vomit. I witness how they ask about patients' private and embarrassing daily activities with a disdainful expression. When family members are present, however, they put on a facade of utmost dedication to reassure us. How can we be reassured? The nurses are so exhausted that patients' noses are reacting to the masks. Everything requires our decision. If it reaches a supposed emergency, a decision must be made immediately. Every second, my sister is suffering. Every second, there's a risk of falling below medical standard, judged by a group of inexperienced doctors who might issue a "must intubate" command. What am I competing against and outrun?

Finally, one day, the doctors said they had to intubate her. In these five sleepless days, I had made all the preparations. Within the family, I convinced everyone to transfer her to the best hospital in the region, leveraging our family's social and economic resources. I pleaded with my uncle to use his connections to contact people back in Hongyuan who could pull strings to reach the leadership of Hospital C and secure a scarce ICU bed. I drafted several summaries explaining my sister's condition, detailing ICU medications and her illness, and humbly consulted with the current hospital's ICU doctors, as they were reluctant to disclose information. After many twists and turns, I found injectable medications and a reliable transport company.

At every moment, I was prepared for the possibility of her being intubated, exacerbating infection and risking death. When I was finally informed that intubation was necessary, I was fully prepared to demand a transfer to another hospital. On that day, my sister told me that the previous day she had been moved to a solitary isolation

area and was very afraid, feeling like it was a morgue. She told us that when we visited, we must insist she not stay there and that she needed to be transferred. Before this, she had been hesitant, worried about causing us too much trouble and concerned about the risks of transferring. Perhaps it was our shared understanding that prompted her to speak up. However, the doctors told me the single-person ward was a gesture of care for her: "To protect her from infection, we have placed her in a single-person room."

After successfully transferring to Hospital C, my sister received treatment without needing intubation and was discharged two months later. The new ICU had a different management system: conscious patients could use their phones anytime but there were no visiting hours for family. As approaching her departure from the ICU, she was wheeled out for an examination. Her long-term medication had caused her hair to thin and bald patches. A nurse braided it for her. When she saw us, she smiled. She looked at the sunlight, quietly, without saying a word.

Every day, I head towards the corridor in front of the ICU's iron gates. Whether before or after the transfer, I waited outside the doors. Sometimes I pleaded with the auntie receptionist inside the ICU to pass on messages or asked her to deliver boxed meals to Bed 17. Other times, I was shooed away. Since the hallway had to remain clear, bustling with carts racing to and fro to save precious ICU beds. Despite the thick, card-swipe iron gates separating us, I felt my sister's presence just within reach. My heart was at ease. Sometimes, minds open up to each other even though there's a barrier of iron doors. The interface is made by sensuous-mind.

It is on that day, one day, sitting on the bus, passing Wuhouci Street, there was that monk in his red robe. His steps serene, the hem flowing gently. It was both intense fire and emptiness. Suddenly, truly suddenly, I felt a profound solace. With a firm silence, he walked, cutting through the surroundings, carving out a path, while the air around him enveloped. The path he tread bore no trace. Like as one walked, the weeds grew behind, covering the marks he left. As Khenpo Sodargye says: "Do not lose your path, Do not disturb other's mind" .

My sister has been discharged. At home, she put on her clothes. The neatly folded clothes on her bed no longer filled me with fear. It reminded me that in Sichuan, funeral rites burn all the clothes after a person passes away. The red robe of Wuhouci didn't leave or go anywhere. But people pass through the gates of hell: wrapped in cloths in, wrapped in cloths out; wrapped in cloths in, covered in white cloth out. What's seen is no longer the person, only the clothes in the wardrobe and on the bed. Folded into a heap. There's a shirt, short sleeves, and the loose skirt she loved.

**A Song and An Expression
Friction? Temperament?**

For a long time, I dared not return to Hongyuan, to Qiongxian Town, to the grasslands and wetlands around. I feared the staggering changes. I feel disconnected from my surroundings regardless of whether I am physically present. I am detached from everything around me. The currents of myriad things glide past me without friction. The red robe of Wuhouci and I hinged led by unknown streams, which gave me a new kind of friction. I understand what I need to pursue now. I am grateful for its compassion and for its strength. I am going there to seek the power of death. It's a power that resonates deeply within me.

When I was a child, we drove 8 hours to Hongyuan county every summer vacation. My mother's car stereo would sing:

父亲曾经形容草原的清香
让他在天涯海角也从不能相忘
母亲总爱描摹那大河浩荡
奔流在蒙古高原我遥远的家乡
如今终于见到这辽阔大地
站在芬芳的草原上我泪落如雨
河水在传唱着祖先的祝福
保佑漂泊的孩子,找到回家的路
啊!父亲的草原
啊!母亲的河
虽然已经不能用不能用母语来诉说
请接纳我的悲伤我的欢乐
我也是高原的孩子啊
心里有一首歌
歌中有我父亲的草原母亲的河

啊!父亲的草原
啊!母亲的河
虽然已经不能用不能用母语来诉说
请接纳我的悲伤我的欢乐
我也是高原的孩子啊
心里有一首歌
歌中有我父亲的草原母亲的河
我也是高原的孩子啊
心里有一首歌
歌中有我父亲的草原母亲的河
母亲的河

Grassland(caoyuan). I am still a child of the grasslands
Grassland, river, the kinship, friends, the staff, the fish and yaks

Grassland and river let the kinships, friends, employees, fishes, yaks and so on all become the same ontologically
Grassland nurtures them.

Father's grassland. Is grassland a father?
Mother's river. Is river a mother?

Taoism says heaven and earth. This song says grassland and river.
It's not an issue of Han, Confucian, and Taoist; or Tibetan, and Buddhist.
It is *father and mother*, the two eternal concepts and mood of human that will open every "identity" /social thought/ belief to up to each other. The ancient is the present.

My mother and father will die. My mother and father won't die.

Who is mother, who is father?
Who is my mother, who is my father?
What is my temperament?
I have no self?
Can I go back to (my) mother, to (my) father ever?

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