

RGYAS BZANG TIBETAN TRIBE HUNTING LORE

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ABSTRACT

The Yul shul (Yushu) Rgyas bzang Tribe historically possessed a rich hunting tradition. Wildlife was hunted for food and other animal products. By 2007, hunting culture had diminished due to improvements in living conditions, wildlife protection laws, greater state control of wildlife product skin market and gun ownership, animal diseases, and the absence of such wildlife as wild yaks in local areas.

KEY WORDS

hunting, hunting dogs, Rgyas bzang Tribe, wildlife, Yul shul, Yushu

¹ Andrew Smith, George Schaller, Daniel Miller, and Kunchok Gelek made helpful comments on this paper. Whatever mistakes remain are the author's responsibility.

EDITORS' NOTES

A preliminary investigation of the literature reveals a dearth of material on hunting in Tibetan society. Huber (2004) provides the only site-specific description of traditional hunting knowledge and practices. Huber (2003) also provides details of the development of Tibetan hunting laws and Huber and Pederson (1997) give a general introduction to Tibetan traditional ecological knowledge, which includes hunting lore, using meteorological knowledge as an example. Ekvall (1968) provides a general description of hunting among the nomads of the Mgo log region, and also discusses the role of dogs in A mdo pastoral communities (1963), including their role in hunting. Richardson (1990) provides a description of hunting accidents from early textual sources on Tibetan history.

The current lack of information emphasizes the value of this study in filling a lacuna in knowledge of Tibetan hunting practices and knowledge. Moreover, this study, to our knowledge, is the only English-language account of hunting by a Tibetan author.

CONSULTANTS

- Rnam rgyal tshe 'phel (b. 1951) is a native of Bde chen Administrative Community (see below) and worked in the Rong po Town government in 2005.² He is a former hunter and provided information about local hunting, especially related to guns.
- Sher dga' (b. 1944) was a herder in 2005 in Bde chen Administrative Community. A former hunter, he provided

² Field research for this article was undertaken by the author in 2004 and 2005.

information about hunting and hunting dogs.

- Lha rgyal (b. 1949) is a native of the Rgyas bzang Tribe and a former hunter. He was retired from government service in 2005 and provided information about hunting and guns.
- Yed yag (b. 1973) was a herder in Bde chen Administrative Community in 2005 and had hunted with hunting dogs.
- Tshe ring phun tshogs (b. 1943) has lived in the Rgyas bzang tribal area all his life, worked for the local government in 2005, and provided information about local history.
- Che yag (b. 1946) was a native herder in Bde chen Administrative Community in 2005 and provided information about local history.
- Rnam skro (b. 1924) was a monk at Rgyas bzang Monastery in 2004 and provided information about local history.
- Tshe ring (b. 1979) was a native herder in Rkyang chen Administrative Community in 2004. He provided information about contemporary hunting among Rgyas bzang tribesmen.
- Rgo rgyod (b. 1940) was a herder in Rkyang chen in 2004 and provided information about local history. He was the last person bearing the original clan's name, Rgo rgyod.
- Bzang po (b. 1983) was a native herder in Bde chen Administrative Community in 2005. A hunting dog

enthusiast, he provided information about contemporary local hunting.

- Stobs rgyal (b. 1970) was a native herder in Bde chen Administrative Community in 2005 and provided local proverbs related to hunting.
- Tshe dbang lha srung (b. 1943) was a local businessman in Rkyang chen Administrative Community in 2004 and provided information about the Tibetan mastiff business.

THE RGYAS BZANG TRIBE

The Rgyas bzang Tribe has historically resided in a herding area along the upper reaches of the 'Bru chu (Yangtze, Changjiang) River in the southwest of Yul shul (Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, China. It is located approximately seventy-five kilometers west of Skye dgu mdo (Jiegu), the prefecture capital. In the early twenty-first century, Rgyas bzang tribespeople lived in Rgyas rong (Jielong) Township, which has since been reclassified as Rong po (Longbao) Town.³

In 2005, the Rgyas bzang Tribe had a population of approximately 700 households in the three administrative communities (*dadui*) of Bde chen, Bya nya, and Rkyang chen. Each community had three or four brigades (*she*). Additionally, Kha la khug lug (Sanbei yangchang) is a separate administrative village (*cun*), not included within the three administrative communities listed above, whose inhabitants belong to the Rgyas bzang Tribe.

According to local accounts, the Rgyas bzang Tribe grew from six large clans that gradually united. When

³ 'Rgyas rong' is derived from a combination of the names of the Rong po and Rgyas bzang tribes.

neighbor tribes invaded what is now Rgyas bzang territory, conflict ensued. Grwa'u Rin chen tshe ring, a senior official in Skye dgu mdo, gained considerable autonomy from the Nang chen King.⁴ His territory consisted of eighteen tribal territories: the eight Dmar gsum villages; the six 'Gag la shor villages; the two Skye sku mda' seng villages; and the two Byang gi zur pa khag villages. Grwa'u Rin chen tshe ring enlisted Ma Bufang's⁵ help and defeated the other tribes. Later, the clans united under the tribal leader, Rgyas bzang nor rgyam, hence the tribe's name. Rgyas bzang nor rgyam died during conflict in 1958.

The altitude of the area ranges between 3,500-4,500 meters above sea level. Most local people graze yaks, horses, sheep, and goats. The main sources of income are the sale of livestock and such animal products as meat, animal skins, milk, animal hair, butter, and dried cheese.

The local landscape is characterized by mountains, wetlands, rivers, and lakes. The origin of this area is encapsulated in this local account:

Long ago, there were two extremely knowledgeable monks. One was compassionate while the other was aggressive and selfish. When they became old and death drew near, the aggressive monk wished to be a giant animal in his next life, hoping to make humans suffer. The gentle monk thus wished to subdue the giant animal in his next life.

In time, both monks died and the aggressive monk was reborn as a furious giant fish. He held a magic jewel in

⁴ See Teichman (1922), Samuel (1993), and Gruschke (2004) for more on the Nang chen King.

⁵ Ma Bufang (1903-1975) was a Linxia Muslim who ruled Qinghai under the auspices of the Nationalist government. Ma fled to Taiwan after defeat at the hands of the PLA in 1949.

his mouth from Gnyan rgyas Lake⁶ and planned to leap into the Pacific Ocean to flood the world. When such wild animals as tigers, wolves, horses, and lynx heard this news, they chased him and tried to control him by surrounding him in the four directions, but this proved very difficult.

At that time, the other monk was reborn as a bird and flew from Bya shul khog⁷ and landed in front of the giant fish. When the giant fish looked at the bird, he thought it was very odd because it had a small head and large body. Unable to control himself, he laughed and the jewel fell from his mouth and into the G.yu chu River.

The creatures mentioned in this story explain the names of local mountains: Fish Mountain and Tiger Nose Mountain in the west; Horse Nose Mountain in the east; Wolf Nose Mountain in the south, and Lynx Nose Mountain in the north. The G.yu chu River separates Bird Nose Mountain from Fish Mountain. This is described in folksong lyrics, including, for example:

Between Bird and Fish mountains,
Father Rgyas bzang Tribe has become rich and happy.

Historically, local herders lived in black yak-hair tents and followed traditional patterns of transhumant pastoralism. Beginning in 1996, however, life changed dramatically with the implementation of new government grassland policies and the severest snowstorm in living memory.

Government policies began to be implemented that, in 2004, led local people to build houses, increase the

⁶ In Rab shul Township, Yul shul County, Yul shul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province.

⁷ This location is twenty minutes by car or motorcycle from today's Skye dgu mdo Town.

amount of fencing, build yak shelters, plant barley for livestock, and divide the grassland between individual households. One outcome of grassland division has been increased conflict over land between families, villages, and tribes. The current situation engenders much dissatisfaction over boundaries, leading to disagreement and conflict. Fencing has also decreased the amount of rangeland available to such wildlife as blue sheep and Tibetan gazelles.

Snowstorms in 1996 greatly reduced livestock numbers. Additionally, local people traded livestock for motorcycles, vehicles, clothing, and food, further reducing livestock numbers. Disruption in the traditional pattern of herding created by the building of houses, land allocation, and overgrazing on land near homes, have contributed to a decrease in livestock quality and output. Many households have at least one motorcycle and certain households have motor vehicles.

Local avifauna includes vultures, eagles, buzzards, ravens, black-necked cranes, geese, gulls, and swallows. Mammals include wolves, brown bears, lynx, snow leopards, badgers, otters, Tibetan gazelles, musk deer, white-lipped deer, blue sheep, wild yaks, marmots, and otters.

Local herders distinguish mammals according to their teeth. Animals with both upper and lower sets of teeth, such as wolves, dogs, and horses, are considered improper to eat. Animals without upper teeth, such as Tibetan gazelles, blue sheep, and yaks are considered proper to eat. Certain wildlife is either extinct or nearly so. For example, local old men say they hunted wild yaks in the past while the author has never seen wild yaks in the local area.

HUNTING HISTORY IN RGYAS BZANG

Rgyas bzang tribes-people maintain they have lived in the area where they now dwell for thirteen generations and,

historically, have always hunted; particularly poor people hunted to avoid starvation. Knives, horn traps, wooden traps, flintlock rifles, and hunting dogs were used to hunt marmots, Tibetan gazelles, and blue sheep. Elders said some men fought brown bears with only a knife, hoping to thrust the knife into the bear's heart when the bear stood on its hind legs. If the hunter missed, however, it was particularly dangerous. More difficult to hunt because of their speed were musk deer, white-lipped deer, and Tibetan gazelles, which were hunted with traps and hunting dogs.

A group of low-status men traditionally hunted marmots. The belongings of these wandering men were carried by dogs. Such families also had dogs especially adept at hunting marmots, called 'marmot dogs'. These dogs were not considered special, because it is thought that almost any dog can hunt marmots. Furthermore, these dogs were considered ugly because they were mottled—the back of the neck was spotted and the tail was white. Such dogs were thought to be slow and clumsy. Currently, local people disparage certain dogs by calling them 'marmot dogs'.

HUNTING ACCOUNTS

Account One (Bkra shis dpal 'bar)

My name is Bkra shis dpal 'bar. I was born in 1980 and am a student at Qinghai Normal University. I'm from Rong po Town, Yul shul County, Yul shul Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. My dream as a child was to ride a splendid horse covered in a decorated Indian carpet and a gold saddle, to wear a spongy Tibetan lambskin robe, and to be followed by a hunting dog. This dream has since vanished along with traditional hunting culture.

I was born into Rgyas bzang Tribe by virtue of my mother's ancestry. My father is from the lower Rong po

Tribe, which is a neighbor of the Rgyas bzang Tribe. Grandfather was a chieftain. Unfortunately, he was killed and Grandmother imprisoned when the People's Liberation Army (PLA) arrived. At that time, my father somehow obtained some fresh mutton while many people were starving, and tried to visit his mother in prison. On the way he was told that she had died there. Afterward, Father served a local rich family by herding livestock, and then found a job as a horse herder with the local government. Local officers arranged his marriage.

Whenever I return to my home area, I notice people are talking about selling horses and what I mostly hear are noisy motorcycles in the street. It makes me sick. I haven't seen hunting dogs since I graduated from middle school. I ask myself, "Where have the hunting dogs all gone?" In the past, the street was full of colorful hunting dogs. People enjoyed looking at and talking about hunting dogs. Now, I sometimes cannot believe my eyes.

I asked Father about the hunting dogs. He said, "Hunting dogs have been killed. They are dead. People don't need them anymore. Our living conditions are improving."

I think he was right, but I cannot stop recalling my childhood with hunting dogs.

When I was eight, every household had at last one hunting dog that always sat by the door, poised and ready for its master's command. Usually one did not visit other families unless one was familiar with their hunting dogs, otherwise they might attack. We never tied up hunting dogs because it was good for them to practice running freely. Watchdogs are more aggressive and dangerous than hunting dogs, but most people who were injured by dogs were attacked by hunting dogs and a cross between a hunting dog and a watchdog. My family had seven dogs, most of which had been abandoned by other families. The dogs' food was such leftover animal products as lungs and

other internal organs. The number of our dogs increased every year. People passing by our gate needed to call to us to restrain the dogs.

My task in winter was to care for the bitches' rooms. I built cozy rooms of clods and covered the floor with dried powdered yak dung. I wished the pups to inherit the characteristics from my uncle's dog and was eager to see if the pups' color matched his color. Well known in my village for being able to catch fox on the grassland, he had a white line from his nose to his forehead and his left nostril had a white spot. He had a white chest and half of each of his front legs was white.

Sometimes I waited in front of the rooms until the mother had delivered them all. Sometimes it took a long time. The sun would move back to the mountain and then Father would yell for me to come to dinner. My mind was still with the dogs and the night was so long that I couldn't sleep well. Occasionally I dreamed of dogs until the murmur of Mother's prayers woke me in the morning. Immediately I got up and ran to the dog's room. When I found pups with features similar to the sire, it meant I had to watch them constantly to prevent them from being stolen by other villagers, keen to have good fox-hunting dogs.

My primary task at that time, which was not really my choice, was to study. I considered taking care of the dogs my real job and my parents tolerated this as long as I studied well. I had more than ten dogs each year. My cousins were charmed by the puppies. When they visited my family while they were on caravan, each cousin took one or two puppies with them. Sometimes I was unwilling to give up those pups, but my parents persuaded me to do so. Father always comforted me with, "You can have better puppies if you take good care of the bitches." When my cousins visited the next year, my first question was about my dogs. According to my cousins, my dogs were good

wolf dogs⁸ and nimble hunters. They showed me some fox skin hats from fox hunted by my dogs, making me very proud of my dogs.

Once, one of my maternal uncle's family's sheep was attacked by wolves, and he asked me for a dog to fend off wolves. At the moment, I had no furious wolf dogs, only a mute pup. But he wanted it so I gave it to him. Two years later he thanked me because that wolf dog was a great help.

I loved taking care of dogs. Somehow they were my best friends. Other village boys were the same. Every boy had a hunting dog. Most we trained ourselves, with such simple commands as "Go!" and "Attack!" We rubbed butter on their ears so their ears would grow bigger, and controlled their food intake so they would be slim. We learned these training skills from such hunters as our fathers, uncles, and grandfathers. We trained the pups in our spare time. We didn't hunt often, because the pups were frightened when confronting wild beasts. To encourage them, we bumped their noses against each other to make them fight. Victory also brought prestige for their little masters.

I had a dog called 'Red Dog' when I was in Grade Four in primary school. He could fight well and was my best friend. One winter day after I had finished my classes and was starting home, I heard dogs' yelping, but the cold and heavy snow falling obscured my vision. I tried to move toward the commotion. The yells were from an old rundown building where I found several cruel boys beating innocent pups with dog beaters. Blood was everywhere. Some puppies were dead. Others lay on the ground, their legs shaking in pain. Others were trying to escape into the corners of the adobe house. I was shocked. I didn't know

⁸ A wolf dog protects sheep by going around the sheep both day and night, making it hard for wolves to attack.

whether I should stop the boys or let them continue. Those boys were known to be very violent. All the villagers despised them. Finally, I asked them to release the pups but they ignored me. When I bravely tried again, one boy angrily shouted "This is none of your business. My father told me to do this." Then he tossed a dog in front of me and shouted, "Take it home if you want it!" I picked up the dog and went home.

When Father discovered this dog, his face immediately turned red. He yelled, "What are you doing with this abandoned pup? Return it!" I tried to explain, but he ignored me. Finally I could only cry.

Mother then beseeched Father who, after drinking a cup of tea, agreed I could keep the dog. I appreciated my parents' compassion and wiped my tears away with my sleeves.

I mixed roasted barley flour with cool water for the dog to eat. His whole body shook when he ate and it was hard for him to stand. After finishing eating, his belly was round and he stretched his legs. I took him to our family yard where the other dogs lived and he made friends with them. Two or three days later he was fine, largely because of a sense of belonging with the other dogs.

He became brave and was the type of dog I liked to train to hunt. I fed and trained him. He fought a lot with outside dogs, so his ears and nose had big scars, but he never bit people. Gradually he began hunting rabbits, marmots, pikas, and Tibetan gazelles. I wanted to go far away by horse to hunt, but this dream never materialized because I had classes every day and my parents didn't like killing animals. I sometimes climbed mountains around my village and destroyed bird nests while my dog hunted.

My dog attacked a marmot one day. When some herders learned this, they teased me by saying, "Everybody's hunting dog is a blue sheep hunting dog, killing blue sheep on white rocky mountains, but your

hunting dog is a marmot hunting dog, killing marmots on the grassland."

This saying was created by Rdo rje,⁹ of the Rgyas bzang Tribe, and hidden within those words was an unforgettable scandal. Villagers' living conditions were miserable when the Culture Revolution ended; most depended on hunting and begging. Weapons had been collected by the local government. Hunting dogs were the only thing people had to help them. People started to value and train hunting dogs. Some local people treated hunting dogs like their own children and a local man named Tshe ring¹⁰ even treated hunting dogs better than his own family members. Every day he fed his dogs meat soup and meat that he never shared with his family. He loved hunting, but his dogs were dull and clumsy and could never catch blue sheep or Tibetan gazelles, so he hunted marmots and rabbits. He was proud of his hunting dogs and boasted about them. However, Rdo rje didn't like this and laughed at Tshe ring, improvising a saying, suggesting that a spot on Tshe ring's daughter's lip was inherited from one of the dogs, among other things.

Nowadays locals understand the background of these words as a demeaning joke, thus when people put this joke in my ears, I felt intensely ashamed and tried to stop my dog from hunting marmots. I never beat my dog for he gave me a joyful childhood. In winter my dog pulled me on the ice and I cut hair from his tail to make shuttlecocks. When summer came, he was a bodyguard, protecting me from strangers, especially when I went to dig caterpillar fungus.

An aged woman called and waved to me when I was on my way home one day. I thought she needed help. When I approached, I noticed that her eyes were full of

⁹ A fictitious name.

¹⁰ A fictitious name.

tears. She spun her prayer-wheel quickly, said something I could not understand, and pointed to a hill, but I didn't see anything. Then she calmed down and told me that my dog had been killed. I didn't believe it. The picture in mind that afternoon was of going to school. My dog followed me a while, then returned home. I thought she must be hallucinating.

The kitchen was so silent when I got home that it seemed no living beings existed. My parents and sisters looked at me guiltily. Immediately I knew something was wrong with my dog and asked my mother where my dog was. She glanced at Father's face accusingly and replied, "Your father killed your dog on Fish Mountain."

Father said, "Your dog attacked our neighbor's sheep so..."

I didn't fully believe them until I saw the dog. I ran up the mountain in one breath and found him lying on the rocks. I tried to wake him, calling his name, but there was no reaction. I wept, hating Father. I knelt for half an hour. Then my sisters came and brought *byin rten*,¹¹ putting some on the dog's nose and mouth; then they took me back home. When I got home, I carved some *ma Ni*¹² on a stone. Father tried to explain and comfort me. He paid a *ma Ni* sculptor to make *khyi rdo*.¹³ Two days later, I took the stones to the place where my dog died and put them on his head. When I gazed at his death ground, I saw vultures hovering. I prayed for him to have a good rebirth.

¹¹ *Byin rten* = made of milk, water, and substances blessed by high lamas. It is used to help the deceased accumulate merit for their next reincarnation.

¹² *ma Ni* = Short for the six syllable mantra oM ma Ni pad+me hUM.

¹³ Literally, 'dog stone'. *Khyi rdo* are stones on which mantra are carved for the deceased dog in order that it might be reborn as a human.

Account Two (Uncle Sher dga')

My name is Sher dga'. I'm from the Rgyas bzang Tribe. I'm sixty-one years old and all my life I've been a natural born killer. I killed every kind of animal that came into my sight. When I was little, around six or seven, my brother and I killed pika with string loops. We skinned the carcasses and made finger covers with the skins. Sometimes I stole Buddha images from home and put them far way; we used them as targets, and shot at them with toy guns. Eventually I was able to kill marmots with a slingshot. At that time, my family was rich and I considered hunting fun.

After the PLA arrived, my family's livelihood depended on hunting, but I didn't have a gun. Most of my hunting was done with hunting dogs. I had five dogs that included Tiger Spot, White Falcon, and Black Bird. They were as smart as humans and as fast as lightening.

Usually we hunted in groups of more than two people. Some people carried guns and others took hunting dogs. We hunted on certain mountains where blue sheep, Tibetan gazelles, and fox lived. However, some mountain deities are so powerful that hunters never dared shoot or to order hunting dogs to attack wildlife on their mountains. Before the sun rose above the mountain and when there was no fog, we divided into two groups and took different routes. Sometimes we simultaneously attacked from the back and the front of the mountain. Sometimes we attacked from both sides of the mountain. We waited until the wild animals came to graze and to enjoy the sunshine.

Once, my family moved to another area. Early one morning I went with my friend to a mountain to hunt with seven hunting dogs. When we made out some blue sheep, my friend took three dogs and stealthily moved to the side of the mountain while I ran up from the back of the rocky mountain, holding the other dogs close to me. When I came to the top of the rocky mountain and spotted the blue

sheep, so did my dogs. They jerked their ears and eyes, focusing intently on the blue sheep. I ordered, "Go!" and they immediately gave chase. Of course the blue sheep raced away, but my friend's dogs chased them up the front of the mountain. Then the blue sheep escaped down another very steep side of the rocky mountain. The hunting dogs chased them back and forth and finally cornered a group of blue sheep in a crevice, where the dogs couldn't reach them. They watched until my friend and I moved above the crevice. We threw rocks on the blue sheep's horns. When they fell, the dogs tore out their throats. We killed five blue sheep and brought their carcasses back home one by one. That night, my family and my friend's family had a tasty dinner.

Account Three (Uncle Lha rgyal)

My name is Bsod noms lha rgyal. I'm fifty-six years old. I was born in a poor family. My parents died when I was a little boy and my two sisters and I were adopted by one of our aunts. When I was around eighteen, I joined the local militia and hunted wild animals with poor-quality 'seven-six-two' Chinese rifles. Eventually I got a good Chinese rifle. I could kill more than before and I supplied local people with meat. People always called me when they noticed such wild animals as blue sheep, Tibetan gazelles, musk deer, and white-lipped deer. I must have killed more than 500 wild animals. After a while, hunting became my profession. I loved it. Mostly I hunted with rifles. I didn't hunt with dogs, though I love them. Right now I have three Tibetan mastiffs and one blue sheep hunting dog, which my cousin gave me.

I became so ill once when I was out hunting that I could hardly mount my horse to return home. On the way, I heard stones rolling down the mountain. I jerked my head up and noticed a musk deer on a cliff. I was thinking about

shooting it, but I had lost all motivation. I slid off my horse, unslung my rifle, lay on the ground, and fired twice. The musk deer tumbled to the foot of the mountain. I took my horse close to the carcass, but I found the musk gland was split in two and was useless. I then tried to continue my journey by horse.

oM ma Ni pad+me hUM. I was such a hunter, until I got *phog thug*¹⁴ and almost died. Then I swore in front of a lama that I would stop hunting. This is how it happened: In the winter, I went to hunt with my friend and I shot a male blue sheep so big I couldn't carry it. Then I thought maybe I could move it to a steep valley that had ice covering it from top to bottom, and slide it down. Anyway, I tried. I sat on the carcass and slid on it right to the foot of the mountain, leaving a trail of blood behind me; I couldn't have cared less and returned home. When I got home, I felt tired and lay on my bed. Suddenly a strange woman jumped on my chest. She sat on me, and I couldn't move; it was hard for me to breath. After a while she disappeared.

Afterwards, I became very sick, and remained that way for half a year. The woman was the mountain deity who punished me. I visited monasteries, held religious activities, and gradually recovered.

GUNS

From 1930-1950, traditional flintlock rifles began to be replaced by rifles, which were called 'seven-nine' in Chinese. The flintlocks had a bayonet the 'seven-nine' lacked. At that time, only certain noble families and chieftains owned guns because guns were imported from inner China and India and

¹⁴ *Phog thug* = literally 'harm', but also suggests that one has angered the mountain deity, who has taken revenge by making one sick and hurting one's family and livestock.

were expensive.

Other than the high costs, local beliefs also presented obstacles to hunting. Chiefs and lamas urged the protection of wildlife for they were usually rich enough that hunting was unnecessary. Hunting was forbidden near monasteries and tribal chiefs' homes. Mountains abound in this area and monasteries are always near mountains. Hunting on mountains near a monastery was thought to anger mountain deities, cause hunters to be ill, reduce the quality of land, and increase the frequency of such natural disasters as snowstorms. Few people were positive about hunting. Secondly, Tibetan Buddhism explicitly proscribes killing.

With the arrival of the PLA in Khams areas, the local community's pattern of life totally changed. Livestock were collectivized, people's communes were established, and private property was abolished. In practical terms, all livestock were brought together and people were then placed in herding, milking, plowing, and other work-groups. People had less food and more work than ever before in living memory. In 2004, certain elders referred to this period as 'the black mushroom time', because local people consider black mushrooms inedible but they were, nevertheless, collected and eaten at that time.

The hunting group was followed by members of another work unit that rode yaks and collected the animals the hunters killed. A hunting group generally consisted of ten people on horseback. Each hunter had a 'seven-nine' gun and had a bullet budget: five bullets for a wild ass (kiang), seven for a white-lipped deer, three for a blue sheep, and two for a Tibetan gazelle. Hunters could take as many bullets as they wanted but were later required to account for fired bullets according to the number of the animals they had killed. Hunters had to report daily the results of their hunting to the local Communist Party. Secretly, local hunters hunted with dogs, metal traps, and local guns.

ANIMAL PRODUCTS

Hunting provided food and such useful products as fox-skin hats; fox noses hung under saddles that were thought to protect against evils; Tibetan gazelle skins were used to make quilts for young children; and the skin of white-lipped deer was used to make bags, horse saddle covers, saddle blankets, and so on.¹⁵

White-lipped deer antlers are of two types. The white horn was used to make snuff boxes and 'blood horns' were used to make medicines, especially for joint complaints.

The skin of blue sheep was used as a decoration to patch the back of men's sheepskin robes. Wild ass leg skin was used to make cruppers attached to a saddle.¹⁶

Badger skin was used to make doctors' medicine bags. A piece of badger skin hung from a horse's neck was thought to protect against gossip.¹⁷

Brown bearskin was used to make bed sheets for the elderly. Brown bears are of two types: 'fire bear', and 'water bear'. The former are red and their gallbladders and paws are believed to be particularly potent medicines.

Musk deer provided musk for medicine and the flesh of the female musk deer provided meat for human consumption.¹⁸

Rabbit tails were used to clean the stone mills in which medicines were ground, which was thought to increase the efficacy of the medicine.

¹⁵ The skin of the white-lipped deer is considered waterproof and soft.

¹⁶ The crupper from the back of the saddle under the horse's tail.

¹⁷ Bkra shis dpal 'bar saw a piece of badger skin hung around a dog's neck in 2004 in Skye dgu Town.

¹⁸ Male musk deer meat was sometimes eaten, however, it was usually avoided because of its strong smell.

Otter and snow leopard provided skins to decorate Tibetan robes, and snow leopard bones provided medicine. These two species have always been rare.

Wild yaks provided skins used to make traditional Tibetan boots and leather bags, and also provided meat that was eaten.

HUNTING DOGS

Livestock were divided among individuals in about 1962. At that time, most people had hunting dogs, seven-nine guns, and traps. Dogs were considered very important in hunting and every family had at least one hunting dog. The following lines were used by local hunters to describe hunting dogs:

- An upper body as round as a ball, a lower body as straight as a stick, like a stick joined to a ball, a body as smooth and flexible as a fish.
- If the tail reaches the back leg joint it indicates it can catch a distant fox (run very fast).
- The toes should be tight and large to climb rocky mountains.
- A stupa standing atop the skull; a stupa standing alone is best.¹⁹
- The ears should be as large and thin as a wing so as to easily hear its master's voice nine valleys and nine mountains away.
- The tail should be long and thin, like the lasso of the

¹⁹ This describes the dog's cranial crest.

King of Hell.

- If the ends of its ears can reach the fangs, blue sheep can be caught on cliffs.
- Short front legs are good for running up mountains.
- A long body is good for steep winding ways.²⁰

Local hunters distinguished three types of hunting dogs. The first was the blue sheep hunting dog with a strong build and tight, thick toes that prevented broken stones and thorns from getting caught when running on rocky mountains. The hair was thick to keep the dog warm at high altitudes. The second type was the fox-hunting dog that was faster and smaller than the blue sheep hunting dog. Tibetan antelope hunting dogs were smallest, had a smooth coat, and were swift runners. Hunters put the Tibetan antelope hunting dog in their robes and when antelope were encountered, the hunting dogs leapt out through the sleeve and gave chase.

The following names of hunting dogs describe their appearance and color: white lipped bear cub, eaglet, female eagle, female Tibetan antelope, white Tibetan antelope, white Tibetan gazelle, Tibetan gazelle fawn, lion cub, white eagle, baby falcon, white flyer, jumping Tibetan gazelle, white falcon, jumping eagle, falcon, and tiger spot.

HUNTING TABOOS

Taboos involved guns, hunting units, hunting locations, deceased hunters, and quarry.

²⁰ At times, one side of a path is higher than the other. These are often winding paths. A long body is thought to be helpful in negotiating such paths.

Hunters took care to ensure that guns remained undefiled. A gun touched by a pregnant woman, for example, was considered to be polluted and would not shoot well.

Hunters chose hunting companions carefully. Certain companions increased one's luck and were chosen on the basis of experience gained from previous hunting trips. Some men worked well together and could kill many animals, while others who joined the hunting party were notably unsuccessful.

Certain mountains were hunted on because their mountain deity did not harm people, while other mountain deities were very dangerous. Hunting on the latter mountains brought the risk of diseases striking the hunter's family or being struck by lightning. Torrential rains might fall locally or in extreme cases, the whole region might experience natural disasters (cf. Huber and Pedersen 1997). In the territory of strict mountain deities, hunters might not be able to aim at their quarry, or the target might turn into a monk or woman.

A dead hunter's name was not mentioned because the hunter's soul remained in the area where he hunted; sometimes he could be heard calling his hunting dogs. Black eagles and black dogs were considered bad luck and shooting them was taboo.

HUNTING METHODS

Fox were hunted using hunting dogs and by mixing mouse and pika poison in small balls of roasted barley flour mixed with tea. These balls were placed around foxholes. A second method involved blocking all the holes but one leading out of a fox den. The latter hole was then blocked with a stone and a fire was made nearby. Smoke was blown into the hole using goatskin bellows. After half an hour, the fox was usually found dead with its nose near the stone. A leather

rope was pushed in the hole and twisted in the hope that it would touch the fox and become tangled with the fox's fur or tail, and then the fox was pulled out.

A method utilized when there was only a single hole was to fill the hole with dirt and cover it with a large stone. The next day the fox would have moved the earth put in the hole away from the stone. This was repeated until the fox was forced to come to the hole's mouth, where it could be killed. Another method was to set traps near pika burrows because fox hunt pikas for food.

According to local people, brown bears live in caves on mountainsides. Hunters calculated when the bears would emerge from their winter dens and waited atop the dens with a large, heavy cleaver normally used for chopping bones. When the bear emerged, the hunter struck the bear's forehead, which is considered the most vulnerable part of the bear's body, and might have been able to kill two bears from one den. Sometimes, hunters shot into the dens in winter to rouse hibernating bears and shot them when they emerged from the dens.

In summer, mindful that injured bears attack humans, hunters planned carefully when hunting brown bears. Hunters were also careful to avoid being in a position that would allow the wind to carry their scent to bears. Local people considered brown bears to be as smart as humans. If a brown bear smelled a human, it might put a piece of dried yak dung on its head, stand, and wave in order to resemble a human and lure the person. When it rained, brown bears might walk on the grassland to hunt marmots. If a hunter spotted a brown bear doing this, he hid in a safe place and then aimed his rifle at the bear's forehead, spine, or between the front legs and the stomach. According to local hunters, each bear needed to be shot with at least twenty to forty bullets by a 'Chinese rifle', because brown bear skin is very tough. Sometimes bullets could not penetrate the skin.

When hunting otter, a small channel along a

riverbank where footprints or droppings had been discovered was made. The end of the channel was blocked in one of the following shapes: Ω or \cap . When the otter entered this trap, the hunters blocked the opening and killed the otter with stones or sticks. Otters were also shot when they came up on the riverbank.

Brave hunters killed snow leopards with sticks. Such hunters wrapped their arms with thick wool material. When a snow leopard attacked, the hunter then beat its head. Another method was to grab the tail when it attacked lambs or goats tied in a tent in winter. Rgam tshe witnessed 'Jam dpal from Bde chen Administrative Community fight a snow leopard and later take the pelt to Rgyas rong Township Town.

Blue sheep, musk deer, and white-lipped deer all graze in the morning and afternoon and thus were hunted at these times with hunting dogs. If blue sheep were spotted, the hunter held the hunting dogs by the back of their necks and then at the right time, pointed to the sheep and said, "Go!" The dogs gave immediate chase. When the blue sheep scattered, the dogs focused on one small group, biting the back of their legs. When a sheep turned from the pain, the dogs lunged for the throat and held on until the sheep died.

When blue sheep escaped into a steep crevice and the dogs were unable to reach them, the dogs surrounded the hiding place, preventing escape. Hunters then might have climbed above the crevice and tossed large stones onto the sheep's heads. Dogs attacked sheep that fell from the crevice. Hunters also tied stones on either end of a leather rope and threw them around the horns of blue sheep, which eventually made the blue sheep trip and fall. Certain hunters lassoed blue sheep and then killed them.

Hunting dogs played a central role in hunting strategies that did not require rifles.

With the introduction of rifles, large male blue sheep became the main targets because the meat is considered tasty. Hunters aimed at the blue sheep's backbone, between the

back legs and stomach, and the neck bone. Hunters tried for a single shot that would incapacitate or kill the animal outright. An animal that escaped while injured might have been impossible to locate.

Wild yaks were typically killed with rifles.

When wolves attacked such livestock as sheep, yaks, horses, and goats, people killed the wolves by putting traps near their caves or with guns, but did not eat wolves' flesh nor use the skins. According to local beliefs, wolves cannot be killed because they are watchdogs of a local protector goddess. Consequently, there is reluctance to discuss hunting wolves.²¹

Traps were used in places where Tibetan gazelle habitually dug holes with their feet. Similarly, traps were put in locations where male musk deer habitually rubbed their tails against rocks or trees.²²

People frequently moved during the Cultural Revolution and killed wildlife to survive because there were too few livestock to provide families with food and the government provided weapons to local people for hunting.

²¹ See Karma-Dondrub (2005:26-29) for an account of trapping and skinning a living wolf in Yul shul, setting the wolf free, and a subsequent religious ritual to appease the local deity; Tsering Bum (2007:88-89) for an account of eating wolf meat and its value as a tonic; and Mgon po tshering (2010) for a description of a ritual performed in 1999 in Brag 'go during which a man, his son, and his nephew visited some villages with a wolf skin and asked for donations to appease the 'owner of the wolves'.

²² Local informants said that the tail of the male musk deer is frequently swollen and suffers from a skin disease, making it itchy; the deer hence rub their tails against trees.

CONCLUSION

Traditional culture experienced a revival in the 1980s. However, religious beliefs, improving living conditions which meant people no longer needed wild animal meat, government policies outlawing hunting, and fewer markets for wild animal products all combined to ensure that traditional hunting practices were not part of that revival. In 2005, environmental protection policies and the confiscation of guns further diminished hunting culture. The market for such animal products as skins, gallbladders, milk, butter, and cheese were controlled primarily by Han and Muslims who imported tiger skins, leopard skins, and fox skins from Pakistan, India, Turkey, and from within Heilongjiang, Jilin, and Liaoning provinces in China. Trade of animal skins within Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture, Gansu Province was permitted by the government and Tibetan merchants bought animal skins from these areas for resale to Tibetan customers.

Hunting dogs had mostly disappeared by 2005, but Tibetan mastiffs were very popular. Almost every family tried to have at least one Tibetan mastiff that might have been sold for great profit.²³ According to local businessmen, Tibetan mastiffs are one of the world's oldest purebred dogs and originate from the Tibetan Plateau and surrounding Himalayan regions. People described Tibetan mastiffs as lions, leopards, and bears, but considered them to be close friends because they protect family property and livestock.

²³ By 2008 however, abandoned, starving dogs roamed the streets of Yul shul Prefecture Town. Buyers for dogs were few and prices had plummeted. Dogs had also been abandoned in the wild, where some hunted wildlife. Others had been abandoned near monasteries.

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H

Han 汉 Chinese

Heilongjiang 黑龙江 Province

Hui 回; Muslim ethnic group in China

J

Jiegu 结古; place name

Jielong 结隆 Township

Jilin 吉林 Province

K

Kha la khug lug ཁ་ལ་ཁུག་ལུག (Sanbei yangchang 三北羊厂);
place name

khyi rdo ཁྱི་རྩོ།; stones on which mantra are carved for a
deceased dog in order that it might be reborn as a
human

L

Lha rgyal ལྷ་རྒྱལ།; person's name

Liaoning 辽宁 Province

Linxia 临夏; place name

Longbao 隆宝 Town

M

Ma Bufang 马步芳; person's name

ma Ni མ་ཤེ།; Buddhist Sanskrit chant

Mgo log མགོ་ལོག།; Guoluo 果洛; place name

N

Nang chen རང་ཅེན།; Nangqian 囊谦; place name

oM ma Ni pad+me hUM ཨོཾ་མ་ཤེ་པདྨེ་ཧཱུྃ།; Buddhist chant

P

phog thug ཕོག་ཐུག།; literally 'harm', but also suggests that one
has angered the mountain deity, who has taken
revenge by making one sick and hurting one's family
and livestock

Q

Qinghai 青海 Province

R

Rab shul རབ་ཤུལ།; place name

Rdo rje རྡོ་རྗེ།; person's name

Rgam tshe རྒྱམ་ཚེ།; person's name

Rgo rgyod རོ་རྒྱུད།; person's name

Rgyas bzang རྒྱལ་བཟང་།; tribe and place name

Rgyas bzang nor rgyam རྒྱལ་བཟང་ནོར་རྒྱམ།; person's name

Rgyas rong རྒྱལ་རོང་།; place name

Rkyang chen རྒྱང་ཆེན།; place name

Rnam rgyal tshe 'phel རྣམ་རྒྱལ་ཚེ་འཕེལ།; person's name

Rong po རོང་པོ།; place name

S

Sanbei yangchang 三北羊厂; place name

Shaanxi 陕西

she 社; administrative unit

Sher dga' ཤེར་དགའ།; person's name

Skye dgu mdo རྗེ་དགུ་མདོ།; place name

Skye sku mda' seng རྗེ་སྐུ་མདའ་སེང་།; place name

Stobs rgyal ལྷོ་བས་རྒྱལ།; person's name

T

Tshe dbang lha srung ཚེ་དབང་ལྷ་སྲུང་།; person's name

Tshe ring ཚེ་རིང་།; person's name

Tshe ring phun tshogs ཚེ་རིང་ཕུན་ཚོགས།; person's name

Y

Yangtze (Changjiang 长江) River

Yed yag ཡེད་ཡག།; person's name

Yul shul ཡུལ་ཤུལ།; place name

Yushu 玉树; place name