

Exploitation and optimization of “Yak Culture” resources

Zhuang Chunhui¹ and Li Ruiqiong²

1. Cultural Bureau of Aba Prefecture, Maerkang 624000, Sichuan, P.R. China

2. Historical office of the Aba Committee of the CPC, Maerkang 624000, Sichuan, P.R. China

Summary

This paper discussed the origin, character, development and utilization of the “yak culture”, and puts forward the countermeasures of developing and utilizing “yak culture”.

Keywords: Yak, culture

Introduction

The Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, called “the third pole” or “the roof of the world” is the unique largest and the highest Plateau of China, and also the highest in the world. Many rivers of our country derive from the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, for example Yellow River (Huanghe), Yangtze River (Changjiang) and the Brahmaputra that flows past the “holy land” Lhasa, and the Nujiang River, the Lanchang River and so on. At the same time, the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau is the cradle of the “yak culture”. It is permeated a mysterious and charming culture over here. The yak takes its place alongside other animals, both real and mythical, in the history, legends and mythology of the Tibetan region and neighbouring territories. From the Caidam Basin to the Brahmaputra and from “holy land” Lhasa to headstream of Huang River, are spread all over the nomadic culture.

The alpine rangeland area of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau covers nearly 2.5 million km², accounting for about 60% of its total area. It is an important pastoral area in China, its east and southeast belong to semi-humid region that is covered with meadow and also is mainly eminent rangeland that the yield is very high; but the alpine rangeland of northwest belong to arid region, relative low altitude, together with southeast region on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau have very widest virgin forest. Their area possess of three main livestock, including yak, Tibet sheep and Tibet goat, and arboreous species mainly comprise spruce, fir and dark- conifer. The Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau belong to one of non-polluted region in world, and possess of the most valuable and rare cattle breed-yak. It is one of three breed that is polluted—the rest breeds include penguin, polar bear and yak, but the yak is only can be eaten. There are alpine lands at an elevation higher than 3000m, and it is referred to as the "third pole". Much of this region offers an important habitat for many wildlife species, the yak show a high value in use. From of old, the yak is called “plateau boat”, and it is a very important vehicle on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. The yak have a lot of merits, for example their body are very strong, and thick down and hair like skirts to resist cold, their hooves are very sturdy so that they can run smoothly on the rugged mountain road, together with muffle show thin and the ability of agility, their down color mainly take on black. To meet the challenges of a harsh and often unfriendly environment, yak becomes an indispensable resource to nomad. In this harsh environment, the yak becomes indispensable life stock. Domestic yak are also of great cultural importance to the people of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. They are closely linked to the cultural and ritual activities of these herding societies. As Tibetan think that the yak is the emissary of Dong Ba and in Tibetan legend, the yak is said to be as “stars” living in heaven and the yak is always imagined as a safeguarding god. This “god yak”, as it is called in Tibetan, is an offering to gods of the local, a gift back to the environment, which sustains pastoralists. In some legend, yak are said to be as god. This behavior takes on more characteristics in Tibet. Even the phenomenon of yak totem can be found in some areas on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau and yak is sacrificed at certain festivals. Throughout

yak-raising regions, yak dances are held by herders, which signify typically the vital role that yak plays in the cultural and spiritual values of the pastoral society. At the same time, in some region, there is a special festival to offer sacrifices to “yak gods” or ancestors; yak horns and skulls are both of religious importance, and they are often carved with mantras and placed in prominent places. Religion, ceremony, social customs and its symbols are all intertwined with each other in the life of the people and with the integral role of the yak in all aspects. On the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau nomadic people place yak heads or skulls on walls, on the threshold of a gate and may even hang a yak corpse on the doors of monasteries in order to drive out evil spirits. So Almost all parts of yak body have cultural or religious values. The story King Gesar has been handed down for generations, at the same time, alpine rangeland, Manidui, Jinfan, age-old tower and so on can easily be set eyes on. In addition, on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, we can see a lot of Tibet sheep and yak together with tents. The tent is a representative character over alpine region. Apart from old-age tent, there is also multi-colored nylon tent that its color is mainly constituted by red, blue, yellow, green and white. Pastoral festival attire is very beautiful, especially, women place on their heads two silver ornaments embedded with coral and yak horn, combining with gorgeous and noblest Tibetan gown. Their ornaments clang when they are walking.

The history of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau is very old-line with rich and generous cultural resources. By exploiting and making use of the human and history culture resource, especially characteristic “yak culture”, it can help to activate regional tourism. Along with reforms, the tourism becomes a new and very indispensable industry that will drive the development of social-economy. The “yak culture” can enable us to show a rich and colorful grassland life to tourists from different countries.

“Yak culture” in Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau

There are three main cradles of the pastoral cultures: the first one is Inner Mongolia plateau characterized by horseback culture; The second is the Loess Plateau and Yun-Gui Plateau characterized by goat culture. Finally, the Qinghai-Tibetan shows as “yak culture”. The pastoral cultures interact and supplement to each other. That’s how rich and colorful rangeland culture formed in China. The farming nationality, mountain people, and nomad create our history. They frequently occur to conflict, but cooperation and development are main tide. Nowadays, our country yak’s total is about 13.4 million, and it accounts for 95.3 percent of all over the world’s total (14 million), thereinto, amount of livestock on hand estimated to 4.20 million of which is 26.04% of China’s total in Sichuan province. In Tibet, Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan provinces the proportions of accounting for our country’s are 30.57%, 34.83%, 6.19% and 0.46% respectively. Therefore, we consider that the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau is main yak’ yield region. Owing to our country’s amount of yak is very predominant in world, we hold absolute predominance at yak resource aspect, and nearly monopolize the resource. Some country’s yak derive from the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau tamed wild yak, subsequently, as nationality transfer, the yak move to other countries, for example Mongolia, Bhutan, Nepal, Sikkim, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir and so on.

A person who knows “yak culture” consequentially knows the relation between yak and Tibetan. Archaeological literature proved that Tibetan had tamed savage wild yak four thousand years ago. As illustrated with examples by archaism, yak live at southwest region of China at all times. According to ancient books “*Shan Hai Jing and Bei Shan Jing*” describing, “A wild animal like cattle, with thick down.” The yak possess of many merits, for example it shows very strong staying power. It plays an important role in day-to-day life, and is indispensable to Tibetan. Under a harsh and often unfriendly environment, whether midsummer or severe winter, yak were used as vehicles travelling all over the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. The yak resource is vital for the livelihood of the people. Many of yak in this region offer important by products for many Tibetan, such as milk, down, meat, bone and so on. At the same time, the yak must be regarded as one of the world’s most remarkable

YAK PRODUCTION IN CENTRAL ASIAN HIGHLANDS

domestic animals as it thrives in conditions of extreme harshness and deprivation while providing a livelihood for people. As herbivore, the yak lives predominantly on the “roof of the world”, as the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau is often called. Were not yak in this region, Tibetan would not live on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. According to research, at Stone Age (about ten thousand years ago), wild yak live at alpine rangeland, and they get together each other, and yak often threaten Tibetan survival. So Tibetan struggled with wild yak. In some Tibetan legend, wild yak are said to be as “stars” living in heaven, and some jinn, for example Mountain Gods named Yalaxiang and Dis, both of them become the white yak. Tibetan codex at the Dunhuang describing, “aforetime, three horses encountered to wild yak in field, then a horse was killed by horn. The rest of two horses send for an archer, finally the archer kill the wild yak”. In “*King Gesar’s biography*” describing, “the devil is called Ba La Ren, his genitals was a wild yak”. “Wubuyijiao-meaning five ancient books describing, rabbi, called Lian Hua Sheng, vanquish a devil that got a white yak in Nepal”.

The legend of yak and Tibetan ancestor

“The legend of the Na Mu Lake” describing that, “A long time ago, a beautiful girl was grazing in the north of Tibetan region. One day evening, she dreamed that a young man came from Danggula Mountains, before long the girl be delivered of a Herculean infant. Then the young man, son of God of Danggula Mountains, following the order of his father, married with the girl and he was told his son found at the Mu Na Lake. He saw that a female yak was lapping a calf when he arrived at the Mu Na Lake. The young man killed the calf, but then suddenly, the female yak became his wife, and she said with tear, “You kill your son.”

“Yak” as surname of family

The Tibetan ancestor was related to the Qiang nationality, yak totem can be found in some areas on the ancient Qiang habitation. Yak totem can be found over there, and it is an important adored artwork. According to the Tibetan historical record, a part of the Tibetan derived from the ancient Qiang nationality. Some evidence showed that yak, white horse, and Canlang – *Can wolf in meaning* totem are adored by the ancient Qiang nationality.

On the base of other historical data describing, bovine deities, believed to include yak-headed gods, were important in the religion that preceded the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet from India. In the Tibetan farming areas of Sichuan province in China, there is a special festival to offer sacrifices to “yak gods” or ancestors. At some certain festivals, many monasteries, bureaucracies make a “yak god” statue about one meter. In general, the statue was placed at divinity position or on the threshold of a gate. So far, yak horns and skulls are often carved with mantras and placed in prominent places in order to drive out evil spirits. At the same time, throughout yak-raising regions, yak dances are held by nomads, which signify typically the vital role that yak play in the cultural and spiritual values of the pastoral society, together with the phenomenon of yak totem can be found in many area. Yak, as the totem animal not only made the mark of clan, but also became nomadic ornaments. Tibetan women wear two silver ornaments embedded with coral and yak horn on their heads, from which one can imagine they are adherents of ancient yak tribes.

“Yak” as a safeguarding god

The yak and yak emblems are closely associated with many aspects of religious practice of Tibetan Buddhism and depicted widely in temple art. A age-old Tibetan song, “*the origin of everything on earth*” describing, “yak’s head, eyes, intestines, down, hoof, heart become sun, moon, stars, rivers, lakes, forests, mountains respectively”. Tibetans adore yak totem culture as a long-playing formed “yak culture” as a result. We can discover yak totem culture from some cultural relic that involves some bronze household utensils, crockery, ornaments and so on.

The character of “yak culture” in Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau

The “yak culture” characterizes different cultures in different regions. And “yak culture” is keep developing constantly.

Constant effect on “Yak culture”

The Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau lies at the center of Asia. The local climate condition is cold, aridity and rather harsh. Given the high altitude and extreme harsh environmental conditions, this high altitude grazing land ecosystem, foster the brave Tibetan. The alpine rangeland ecosystem of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau displays inherent characteristics that lead the system to being relatively stable. As one part of Chinese economy development, in this phase, we should take advantage of this chance to develop economy of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau.

The “yak culture” is closely related to Tibetan’s life. In the past, Tibetan lived on herding at all times. Yak was the mostly involved in their life. And that is the reason why Tibetan Buddhism adored yak totem. Native religion and primordial religion were gotten together a whole. In Tibetan history, Buddhism and native religion had been optimized and interjected. Although the sects reserved their own characters, they still amassed between the two sects. There is a long history of interaction between the yak and Tibetan pastoral societies. When Buddhism introduced in Tibetan from Indian, it had greatly impacted the primordial religion. This situation brought about incorporation between Buddhism and native religion. Not only did the legend about “yak totem” closely related to “mountain god” culture, but also to Buddha, Maitreya, Kwan-yin and so on.

“Yak culture” bears containing and opening character. According to the research of Tibetan nationality history, we can see that Tibetan showed a multi-aspect, development. In contrast to “central plains culture”, Tibetan culture is very different. “Yak culture” can accept a lot of different cultures, for example in Ming and Qing dynasty, dominators came from different nationality, including the Han, Manchu, Hui, Naxi, Bai, Tu nationality and so on. In religion aspect, the traditional native religion co-prosper with other sects, including the Ning Ma, Sajia, Geju, Jue Nang, Ge Lu, and Han Buddhism and so on.

The characteristics of “yak culture”

In contrast to miscellaneous “central culture”, the “yak culture” is relative simple-hearted and unadorned. This culture reflects in unadorned folkway. Their songs and dances take on bold and generous character.

The abundant content about “yak culture”

There is an inaccurate concept about “yak culture”, which was only about drinking, eating meat, singing and dancing, horse riding and wrestling. Although “yak culture” involves festival, raiment, diet and so forth, it takes a great impact on Chinese culture. “Songzan Ganbu”, a great ruler, integrated “yak culture” from some aspect, including legislation, civilization, ideology and morality system. As a result, he conquered many opponents and did a great achievement.

Optimize “yak culture” resource in Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau

Yak is indispensable on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, and it makes the yak trace shown on material culture and immaterial culture, from Tibetan religion, folklore, art, drama, architecture, diet culture to raiment culture, life article for use. Nowadays, the basic intention is to develop the yak industry make use of the market-oriented economy, balancing ecosystem, scientific livestock husbandry as direction, at the same time, we should emphasize on ecological environment to improve the out-dated the stock-breeding yield system on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau.

YAK PRODUCTION IN CENTRAL ASIAN HIGHLANDS***Beautiful “yak culture” in Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau***

Many people yearn towards the life that live in alpine rangeland, because the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau is exclusive region that is not polluted in China. Tourists go there to keep away from the polluted city and breathe the fresh air, enjoying and admiring the beautiful scenery. The “yak culture” can be classified to three aspects: material culture, institution culture and ideology system. The surface performance vessel and material civilization that embody the relation between people and nature, mainly including yield system, technology, language and arts. They belong to “concrete culture”; the inner performance institution culture, which embodies the relation between people and society, involving social system and legislation, military system and so on. Herntinton said: “culture is a mother of system”. Deeply seated signification: ideology system embodies the relation between people, mainly involving religion, philosophy, history, literature and so on. Both Institution culture and ideology system are another “immaterial culture”, at the same time, it is called “software”. Behavior belongs to an exterior exhibition. The other one is ideology. The “yak culture” can be classified two groups that involve traditional culture and modernistic culture. The traditional culture mainly includes religion culture and unreligious culture. Thereinto, the traditional culture constitute chief of the modernistic “yak culture”, at the same time, the modernistic culture absorb the prime of foreign culture. This is not only the character of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, but also is the character of Tibetan culture.

Added-value of “yak culture”

There are some special local products are very famous of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. E.g. yak down sweaters, yak charqui, yak milk and milk powder, yak butter, yak chesses and so forth. All the production shows a rich grassland culture. Yak Wang (posset) and tallow possess of rich nourishment. Nowadays, as knowledge-oriented economy period, the more culture and knowledge content, the more market share. We should take advantage of “yak culture” to develop the Tibetan economy.

A remarkable regional culture symbol

As described above, there is a big advantage of this culture and this predominance needs to be used to establish our own exclusive culture system. The horseback culture of Inner Mongolia, the goat culture of Loess Plateau and Yun-Gui Plateau are the examples. If we cannot make good use of this “yak culture” then it might slow down the pace of economic development in local.

Countermeasure of exploiting “yak culture” resource

The yak is the most important part of Tibetan’s life in Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. In springs and autumns, the plateau of west Sichuan province is famous to yak. It is typically an alpine economy characteristics in ancient Qinghai; more recently, “yak economy” plays an important role in alpine stock raising, and is also mainstay of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau economy. At the present time, with the developing of “yak economy”, the interaction between culture and economy should be emphasized. The modern ideology will substitute outdated one. At the same time, making “yak culture” known all over the world. And this deed will promote economic development of the plateau. While the pasture culture tourism industry relatively lag. In order to adequately exploit tourism industry, we should improve the productivity of “yak culture”. Since the establishment of Hongyuan Yak Industry Limited Company, we put forward to develop three sects, involving “yak economy”, “yak culture” and “yak industrialization”. At the present time, both of “yak industrialization” and “yak economy” have been triumphantly developed, so the company is preparing to exploit the sect of “yak culture”. As the “Forum of yak economy and yak culture” conference has been held, it accelerates the development of “yak culture”. Some experts put forward a lot

of significant idea to promote the development of economy and culture. The company has successfully realized two aims: First sum of capital with RMB 0.170 billion Yuan for developing yak production of the company has been ready; Second, the company has signed agreement with Land O'Lakes Corporation (one of the biggest Dairy Groups in the USA) to establish the base of dairy industry. This proposal is totally supported by local government, Aba Prefecture Government and its Party Committee. We believe that Tibetan region will be becoming much more prosperity by developing "yak culture" positively.

Further more, the exploiting of tourism industry will enforce the development of regional economy. Meanwhile, it also satisfies people of the cultural need. Because of the centuries-old history and culture of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, combining together with abundant culture resource, like "yak culture", tourism industry developing is very promising. At this rate, we can realize multi-aspect development of the plateau.

Protection and further development of "yak culture"

The far-flung land and centuries-old history lead to the broad distribution of "yak culture" relic. But there are increasing damages of the relics as well being thieved or destroyed by mobster come up together with economic development. Therefore, we should pay more attention to protect by publicizing "*Cultural Relic Protection Law*", especially in the countryside and pastoral region we should strictly execute the law to protect the "yak culture" resource.

Besides, we need to take action to restrict the impact of foreign culture to protect traditional culture. E.g. we shall do better and more efficient investigation by collecting data concerned, edit and publish relevant books to promote yak cultures in different aspects, such as folk art of the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau, involving folklore, folk dance, folk custom, folk music and so on. hold some photograph exhibition at home and overseas every now and then. Secondly, take real action of protecting some folk culture like Tibetan picture, Tibetan drama, folk song, Tibetan medicine, Guozhuang (a kind of folk dances) etc. Thirdly, we should cultivate many first-class "pasture culture" inheritors and artists.

Further study on "yak culture"

In the past decades, we attached importance to "yak culture". Although some scholars facilitate the development of "yak culture" and acquire achievement by their efforts, a lot of study hasn't been completed. Nowadays we study on some nationality that at one time live on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau as Tibetan, Menba, Luoba, Pumi, Qiang, Naxi etc and some aspects that involve economy, culture, military affairs, social. Making our history and culture better known by comparing with Bashu regional culture. Nowadays, there has been great progress made about Tibetan study, and some fruits attract the attention of many foreigners. However the current position shows that further development and study is required in many ways. Compare with eastern China, western development is pretty slow and still relatively drops behind. Therefore, we should accelerate to exploit "yak culture" on some region by means of some measures like renovate information, establish Internet web and base, scientific programming and etc.

Reasonable programming and exploit the tourism industry

In the course of the development of "pasture culture" and tourism products, we should pay attention to many aspects, for example politics, economic profit, and quality. Therefore, we take full advantage of culture resource to boost the development of tourism and economy.

Boost the pasture economy

In contrast to traditional stockbreeding, the pasture tourism culture does not only accommodate, but also belongs to

YAK PRODUCTION IN CENTRAL ASIAN HIGHLANDS

higher level of industry. Its development relies on knowledge economy, culture economy and information economy. It is very important to decide which economy model should be developed in advance. Making tourists take part in our pasture life, at the same time, we invite tourists to attend our party in festival, as horseracing, milking, tampering horse, tasting tea with milk etc. In addition, we perform some do some practical work for tourism, and make them adequately experience pasture culture. Study on the management model of King Gesar camp and cavalier club, as a result, we should carry out multi-aspect development. First of all, we display the culture and life of pasture to visitors in the large extent with natural view and special culture. Second, put forward new ploy and production to meet tourist need constantly. Finally, keep ecosystem balance is crucial. With the development of tourism industry boost the profit and this regional prosperity.

Unique management strategy and market-oriented economy

There are great potencies to develop on this yak culture; a unique management and strategy is required to meet different niches. For instance, the King Gesar camp and cavalier club emphasize the exploitation of “pasture culture”. The folk culture is an important and indispensable part of “pasture culture. We can combine theoretic innovation and production innovation by taking advantage of theoretic innovation to accelerate production innovation. And then, in the service industry, we should stand to credit standing. With more consideration of opening up market, we should emphasize potential market, and establish some tourism culture market. Finally, we should show Tibetan culture and life from different aspects, at the same time together with harmonizing ecosystem balance and the development of tourism industry.