

**Exploring the Symbolic and Socio-cultural Meanings of Yak Butter**

**Tea in Tibet**

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## **Abstract**

Tea has asserted its place as a popular beverage around the world. Yak butter tea is a daily drink for many Tibetans especially those living in Southwest China. The drinking of tea, its customs and rituals incorporate distinctive characteristics reflecting the different values, ethnicities and cultures that consume tea. From a gastronomy perspective, yak butter tea has relevance to Tibetan identity, ethnicity and cultural heritage. However, in more recent times, globalisation and industrialisation have impacted upon the meaning and making rituals associated with yak butter tea. Consequently, this research is timely because it will explore the traditional constructs of the tea, and then enquire into how those traditions and production methods have changed in the face of globalisation and industrialisation. To achieve this goal, this research uses qualitative description and thematic analysis within three in-depth interviews conducted with four experts in Shangri-La, China. Those experts include two academic Tibetan cultural experts, a yak butter tea supplier and a long-term consumer of yak butter tea. Their views and experiences have provided a compelling understanding of yak butter tea within Tibetan culture. It was found that Tibetan yak butter tea is not just a drink, it is an actant materiality reflecting much more than just a hot beverage. As a symbol of Tibetan culture, yak butter tea has undergone change. Convenience has created a mind-set change for many Tibetans because their traditional drink can be made from a sachet, in minutes. Convenience has circumvented the tea traditional production method and, in doing so, reduced its efficacy as a symbol of traditional Tibetan identity.

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### **Attestation of Authorship**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Date: 18/6/2019

## CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

### 1.1 Introducing Tibetan Yak Butter Tea

Many Westerners may not be familiar with Tibetan yak butter tea because coffee or tea may be their everyday drink. The popularity of the flat white within Aotearoa New Zealand's café culture supports this proposition. For many New Zealanders, drinking coffee is more than a daily routine. As an item of material culture and identity, coffee brings people together; coffee encourages interaction and conversation. In that way coffee, and other drinks and food, mediate discourse and support in real ways the integration of symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934) within everyday life. As Tucker (2017) noted, "consuming coffee can affirm identity, express value, or affirm social ties"



**Figure 1: Yak Butter Tea.**  
**Source: Author (2019).**

(p. 5). Within Tibetan culture, yak butter tea serves a similar purpose.

Tibetans live in a unique yet harsh environment located on the Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau. There, average altitudes reach more than 4,000 metres (Guo et al., 2014). The survival of Tibetans has been heavily dependent on the yak animal (*Bos grunniens*). Tibetans use the yak for many things. Exemplifying that, the yak is integral to the Tibetan diet, providing milk, butter, meat, and transportation. The animal's hide is used for clothing (Guo et al., 2014). Yak butter tea is made from the butter produced from yak milk and its cream. For many Tibetans, yak butter tea is a daily beverage. It is consumed either as either a salty version or as a sweet blend. Based on personal preferences, many Tibetans will add some sesame seeds, walnuts or peanuts into their yak butter tea to enrich its flavour. Considering Tibet's harsh climate, yak butter tea provides a warming beverage and an energy source (Zhaxi, Yanla, Liu, & Zhu, 2018).

## **1.2 Research Questions**

Yak butter tea is an essential daily beverage for many Tibetans. Like coffee in Western culture, yak butter tea holds special meanings for many Tibetans. My research explores the socio-cultural and symbolic meanings of yak butter tea in Tibetan culture. In order to explore and understand yak butter tea within Tibetan socio-culture, I compiled the following research questions:

- In what ways is yak butter tea important in Tibetan culture?
- In what ways has globalisation impacted upon Tibetan views of yak butter tea?
- How can the experiences of three Tibetans living in Shangri-La inform an understanding of yak butter tea?

These research questions are important, because they facilitated my research findings by obtaining different perspectives and direct opinions from my participants. In those ways, and coupled with my overview of methodology and method, my research into yak butter tea provides both a unique and an in-depth insight.

## **1.2 Introducing Globalisation and Yak Butter Tea**

Yak butter tea has been part of Tibetan culture for many centuries (Yanqian, 2005). However, contemporary themes of globalisation and industrialisation have influenced the processes of making the tea. As Steger (2013) noted, globalisation “is a set of social processes that lead to the social condition of globality, through the growing consciousness of global connectivity” (p. 16). Moreover, Glossop (2017) defined globalisation as a result of transition, reflecting “how people identify themselves through culture in the global community” (p. 142). As such, globalisation is important to this research because, by considering the impact of “global connectivity” (Steger, 2013, p. 16), we can begin to understand how and why traditional materialities such as yak butter tea undergo change.

Globalisation began toward the end of 15<sup>th</sup> century (Findlay & O'Rourke, 2003). Around that time, China and India began trading with Southeast Asia and Europe (Findlay & O'Rourke, 2003). Then, between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, European powers began to look for new raw materials and trade markets (Steger, 2013). New technologies accelerated those possibilities. Consequently, many European countries began to focus on discovering new worlds, and establishing new trade routes and trading partners (Steger, 2013). In those ways, globalisation began to influence ways of being and becoming not only for individuals, but also for nation states.

As a region and nation state, Tibet has been impacted by globalising forces. Yak butter tea reflects those forces. Yak butter tea is traditionally made in two distinct 'flavours', each derived from a common production method. Sweet yak butter tea came about when,



**Figure 2: Black Earthenware Teapot.**Source: Author (2019).

roughly about two hundred years ago, the British army invaded Tibet. Then, sugar was added to the Tibetan yak butter tea in order to create a sweet tea. That addition reflected British tastes and the English ritual of drinking afternoon tea (Yanqian, 2005).



**Figure 3: Jiza (Bamboo Filter).** Source: Author (2019).

In the traditional handmade salty method, yak butter tea is made by boiling black tea in a black earthenware tea pot. Then, yak butter and salt are added. Then tea is poured through a jiza (a bamboo filter) into a jiadong (a tea barrel which is inlaid with copper/silver/gold) and agitated in an up-and-down motion with a jialuo (a wooden stick).

That process lasts for about 7–10 minutes (Yanqian, 2005). In these ways, the making of yak butter tea represents a production ritual within Tibetan culture. However, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with globalisation, new, and advanced ways of making yak butter tea emerged (D. Yang, 2016). Those advances have benefits for Tibetans living fast-paced lives. Exemplifying that, making yak butter tea with a blending machine takes only five minutes, while making yak



**Figure 4: Jiadong and Jialuo (Tea Barrel and Wooden Stick). Source: Author (2019).**

butter tea from a powdered concentrate takes less than two minutes (Dickerson et al., 2008).



**Figure 5: Yak Butter Blender. Source: Author (2019).**

The convenience of contemporary versions of yak butter tea has impacted upon the traditional embodied and symbolic meanings of yak butter tea within traditional Tibetan culture. Considering those factors, my research, explores the socio-cultural and symbolic meanings of traditional yak butter tea within Tibetan culture, particularly in Shangri-La, a Tibetan region of China.

### **1.3 About Shangri-La**

The word and concept of Shangri-La originated from the best-selling novel *Lost Horizon* by James Hilton (1933). His novel was recreated as a film in 1937 (X. Xu, 2015). After the combined success of the novel and movie, the concept of Shangri-La came to enjoy an almost mythical status within Western culture (T. Zhang, 2018). In part, that status has been promoted by the word itself; Shangri-La means moon and sun in the heart, a wonderland (Zhang, 2018). The word Shangri-La is also closely related to the Shambhala Kingdom of Tibetan Buddhism (Yi, 2009). Shambhala represents the other world, a

paradise or fairyland (Yi, 2009). In October 1996, the search for Shangri-La in Yunnan Province was launched by its provincial government. By September 1997, that body announced that Shangri-La was located in Zhongdian county, Diqing Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan Province, China. On December 17, 2001, Zhongdian County was renamed Shangri-La (Yi, 2009). There were two rationales for the name change. The first, reflected a concerted attempt to transform the imaginary of Shangri-La to a real location. The second rationale aimed to create an attractive tourist destination (Xu, 2015).



Figure 6: Map of Shangri-La. Source: Zurick (2009).

However, for many Westerners, especially those influenced by Hilton's (1933) work, Shangri-La holds an association with Tibet. Shangri-La is indeed a Tibetan region, but in terms of its geographical location, it does not belong to 'the' Tibet that many Westerners understand. Figure 6 shows that

Shangri-La sits within the Yunnan Province of China and on the edge of the Tibetan Province. While there is a considerable distance between Tibet and Shangri-La, the regions are closely related in terms of Tibetan culture. For many Westerners the relationship between Tibet and China is perceived in negative ways. However, as a Chinese citizen, I believe that Tibet has always been a part of China.

#### 1.4 The Importance of the Research

As a Tibetan, I am aware of the significance of yak butter tea within Tibetan socio-culture. I have been drinking yak butter tea almost daily since I was born. I am familiar with both

the traditional and more contemporary versions of yak butter tea and how globalisation and industrialisation have affected not only the perceptions of the tea but also its production. Yet, in completing this research I have surprised myself. As time progressed and my research deepened, I realised that I did not know as much about the tea as I first thought. Consequently, this research has, for me as a self-identifying Tibetan, broadened my own knowledge about my own culture.

I am aware that as an individual and researcher I hold bias. However, within my research and my life, I try to be both reflective and reflexive. I am aware of Cottrell's (2003) recommendation that the composition of academic research should base on academic standards, not personal preference. Consequently, as researcher I have self-monitored my own thoughts and feelings and given preference to those of others, my participants.

### **1.5 Overview of Dissertation: A Guide to Content**

To best illuminate my topic and provide readers with ready access to my research, my dissertation is presented within the following format. Chapter two reviews the academic theories and literature underpinning my research. That includes my theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Chapter three provides my literature review. The first part of my review introduces yak butter tea within concepts of tea and the consumption of tea. Then, I proceed to discuss Tibetan yak butter tea culture and history. Chapter four presents my research design, research process and research methods. Here, I discuss my theoretical methodology and my application of it within method. Those processes include my presentation of qualitative description (Sandelowski, 2000), in-depth interview (Bradshaw, Atkinson, & Doody, 2017), thematic analysis (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003). I also discuss my operational research elements including the criteria for selecting my participants, the process of finding participants, and my collection of data and its analysis. In Chapter five I present my findings, within a thematic overview. Those

findings facilitate my final chapter where I discuss my research findings, and existing literature. In my final chapter, I also clearly identify my contribution to research, my research limitations and the potential for ongoing research about yak butter tea in Tibet.

## **CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS**

To explore the meaning of yak butter tea, this chapter presents what I term my underpinning academic meta-theories. In everyday life, theories reflecting material items and rituals such as yak butter tea, are often taken for granted constructs. It is, I suggest, the combination of taken-for-granted-ness and conscious thought (ontology and epistemology) which reflects how we come to ‘know’ knowledge and understand the world around us (Lavery, 2003). Of particular importance to my dissertation are the following theoretical positions: Mead (1934) and Blumer’s (1969) symbolic interactionism; Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) social construction of reality thesis; and Woodward’s (2007) emphasis on the actant nature of materiality. Those authors and their theories underpin my work in real ways expressed throughout my writing, and in less conscious ways also. My meta-theories have come to permeate my ways of thinking about and understanding yak butter tea. In this chapter, I explore my selected theories on two levels. The first level presents my theoretical framework. Here, I discuss the academic theories themselves. Then, in my conceptual framework, I present my adaptation of those theories in ways that best suit my research goals and helping my readers better understand the yak butter tea culture.

In addition to those frameworks, an overarching paradigm dominates my research: qualitative enquiry. Exploring yak butter tea was best suited to qualitative enquiry because I could get straightforward, in-depth participant views and opinions on my topic that reflected the subjective experiences of my four participants. Best facilitating my understandings of what my participants told me was my combination of qualitative description (Sandelowski, 2000) and thematic analysis (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003).

## **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework reflects the theory utilised by a researcher to guide their research. It represents “the application of a theory, or a set of concepts [...] to offer an explanation of an event, or shed some light on a particular phenomenon or research problem” (Imenda, 2014, p. 189). A theoretical framework provides research guidance inasmuch as it promotes a logical and accurate relationship between the variables within research. A theoretical framework promotes the development of a research hypothesis, research design and the interpretation of research results (Imenda, 2014).

My theoretical framework is based upon the theories that I have learned about in my lectures and my reading throughout my university studies. Moreover, my theoretical framework reflects my understandings of theory and how theory fitted and suited my research topic. In introducing my framework now, I discuss my selected theories. Then, I combine my understanding of them to explain how those theories link directly to my research. With those points in mind, the following sections present and discuss ontology and epistemology (Lavery, 2003); symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934); the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966); and the actant nature of materiality (Woodward, 2007).

### **2.1.1 Ontology and Epistemology**

Ontology refers to “the form and nature of reality and what can be known about it” (Lavery, 2003, p. 26). For Lavery (2003), epistemology questions what reality is and how human beings come to know and understand their social world. While ontology and epistemology are interdependent concepts, it is convenient to think of them as being in a symbiotic relationship (Neill, 2018). On that basis, ontology and epistemology are best discussed in conflated ways. Ontology and epistemology help human beings form their

worldviews and help them to perceive and understand what knowledge is within their everyday lived experiences. Therefore, ontology and epistemology are dynamically placed; they are integral to being and becoming within all socio-cultures (Neill, 2018). Yet most human beings take knowledge, and how they come to know what they know, for granted.

Reflecting on the taken-for-granted nature of knowledge and applying that concept to yak butter tea, it is possible to say that many Tibetans may not attach much importance to yak butter tea within their culture. This is because they may perceive yak butter tea as a normal part of everyday life. However, yak butter as a daily drink has its unique own culture and significance not only for Tibetans but also within Tibetan culture. Yak butter tea culture is well-known because it is a traditional drink for many Tibetans. The passive acceptance of yak butter tea within Tibetan culture reflects how knowledge, and concepts of thinking about 'how we know what we know' are often simply taken for granted. What my research illuminates, within considerations of knowledge, is what my participants know about yak butter tea and how that changing knowledge might reflect socio-cultural movement as globalised and industrialised forces impact upon traditional thought and practices associated with the tea.

### **2.1.2 Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism emphasises the interactive relationship between the human mind, the self and others within any society. On that basis, Mead (1934) proposed the social link between people, objects and their experiences. In doing so, Mead recognised that objects were often imbued with symbolic meaning and value. Extending that notion, Blumer (1969) proposed that the essence of symbolic interactionism was that social phenomena and social behaviour can only be explained through interpersonal interaction and the use of symbols to explain and determine meaning. Consequently, materiality and

language are seminal concepts within symbolic interactionism. Recognising that, Carter and Fuller, (2016) commented that:

(1) Human beings act toward things on the basis of meanings that the things have for them. (2) The meaning of things is derived from or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others. [And that] (3) meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by a person in dealing with the things he or she encounters. (p. 934)

Applying those constructs to my research suggests that drinking yak butter tea, as Giddens and Sutton (2013) suggested, “provide[d] occasions for social interaction and the enactment of rituals” (p. 10). Rituals are often repeated behaviours that are culturally ascribed (Giddens & Sutton, 2013). Thus, yak butter tea can be realised as a symbolic language within Tibetan culture and, consequently, drinking yak butter tea is a shared language that is integrated into everyday Tibetan life.

That shared language is based on a shared symbol: yak butter tea. In the traditional production of yak butter tea, there are specific words associated with its production. For example, the Tibetan word for yak butter tea is bo jia, jiadong is the traditional wooden tea barrel, jialuo is the wooden stirring stick and jiaza is the tea filter. In this sense, the language related to yak butter tea production has created names and symbols holding imbued meaning through tradition. Consequently, when Tibetans use these shared symbols, through the process of making yak butter tea, the shared meaning is reinforced. That shared meaning reflects the essence of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). In this case, the use of those symbols (shared language and utensils holding shared meanings) within yak butter tea production, combined with its ritualised manufacture, reinforce and maintain the special place and significance that yak butter tea holds within traditional Tibetan culture.

### **2.1.3 The Social Construction of Reality**

Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social construction of reality thesis recognises the subjective nature of society and human experience. Berger and Luckmann (1966) considered that socialisation was completed within the process of interaction between individuals within social settings. Therefore, it is through social interaction that individuals and society mutually construct each other. In that way, the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) refers to how people construct their world and identity via everyday communications and interactions. Thus, the social construction of reality thesis stands parallel to, yet extends, the thinking within symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934). Like symbolic interactionism, the social construction of reality thesis suggests that communication is based on a shared knowledge and a shared understanding of language (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Consequently, symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) and the social construction of the reality thesis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) both identify how language facilitates our shared understanding of the symbols we experience and use throughout our everyday life. Those experiences can trigger both personal and collective cultural memories.

Applying this understanding to my research, the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) suggests that drinking yak butter tea reflects, for many Tibetans, the embodiment of cultural rituals because the consumption of the tea enacts an understanding and shaping of the social world of its consumers within the time, place and space within which they live. Moreover, Tibetans usually drink yak butter tea during breakfast and lunch. In this case, the time for drinking yak butter tea adds order and ritual within their everyday lives. Through that order, Tibetans drinking yak butter tea allow space for interaction and communication, not only during the production of yak butter tea, but also in the time spent consuming it. Thus, through the production and

consumption of yak butter tea, Tibetans construction and understanding of their social world is facilitated by the rituals embodied within the production and consumption of the tea.

#### **2.1.4 Material Culture and Actancy**

Within the academy, the study of material culture has come to reflect an understanding of how an item can hold meaning, use and aesthetic value for its owner or viewer over and above its commercial value. Woodward (2007) supported those notions by explaining that material culture identified “how apparently inanimate things within the environment act on people, and are acted upon by people, for the purpose of carrying out social functions, regulating social relations and giving symbolic meaning to human activity” (p. 3). Woodward emphasised the relationship between people and things, which in turn provided the base for the study of material culture. For Woodward (2007), actancy was a key theme within material culture. Actancy refers to the relationship between people and material items, and the symbolic and often emotive personal and wider cultural meanings that human beings imbue many material items with (Woodward, 2007, p. 15). Consequently, material items, such as yak butter tea, provide vehicles for people to derive individual and shared meanings. That is to say, materiality aids our construction and understanding of our social worlds through tangible items and their symbolic meanings. In that way, and for my research, material culture (Woodward, 2007), the social construction of reality thesis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) are inter-dependent and complementary concepts because their synthesis facilitates the knowledge, understanding and shared expression of yak butter tea within Tibetan culture.

Applying those considerations to my research suggests that yak butter tea is a material item holding symbolic meaning. In that way yak butter tea, within Tibetan culture, is not

dissimilar to Giddens and Sutton's (2013) view that drinking coffee with friends is "part of a social ritual, and that coffee is not just a refreshment, it has symbolic value as part of our day-to-day social activities" (p. 9). More specifically, through the Tibetan cultural reliance on the yak animal, and its incorporation into yak butter tea, that tea becomes a symbolic and a distilled essence of what it means to be Tibetan. In material culture theory, the notion of actancy emphasises that relationship because yak butter tea is imbued with Tibetan social values and symbolic meaning, exemplified within its production and consumption.

## **2.2 Conceptual Framework**

In this section, I extend the application of my theoretical framework (as noted above) by discussing and extending it within my conceptual framework and within the domain of gastronomy. According to Imenda (2014), a conceptual framework refers to "bringing together a number of related concepts to explain or predict a given events, or give a broader understanding of the phenomenon of interest, or simply, of a research problem" (p. 189). Like a theoretical framework, a conceptual framework also provides an outline for the research and a guide for the researcher. A conceptual framework incorporates the interpretation of concepts derived from a theoretical framework, yet positioned in useable ways (Green, 2014).

### **2.2.1 Gastronomy and Identity**

While I have integrated meta-theories, my research on yak butter tea was also filtered through a gastronomic lens. Specifically, and considering gastronomy, my research draws upon notions of commensality and hospitality. However, before discussing those constructs it would be prudent to provide an overview of gastronomy.

For Brillat-Savarin (1825/1994) “Gastronomy is the reasoned comprehension of everything connected with the nourishment of man [sic]” (p. 52). Santich (1996) defined gastronomy as “the reasoned understanding of everything that concerns us insofar as we sustain ourselves” (p. 172). More recently, Fell and Lukianova (2015) proposed that gastronomy is a study that explored human behaviours through eating preference, setting and location. Consequently, and reflecting the construct of ‘nourishment,’ the study of gastronomy has come to include other academic domains. These domains include aspects of natural history, science, culinary art and beverages, culture, geography and human behaviour. Consequently, and within those domains, gastronomy reinforces aspects of consumer identity (H. Liu & Lin, 2009), geographic location (refer terroir, below) (Yuan, 2014), culture and heritage (Brillat-Savarin, 1825/1994). As Brillat-Savarin (1825/1994) encapsulated his thinking, “you are what you eat” (p. 14). Additionally, the study of food-related gastronomy provides subjects and topics for material culture study (Dietler, 2007). As Dietler (2007) proposed, “Food is what may be called embodied material culture” [and] “it has an unusually close relationship to the person and to both the inculcation and symbolization of concepts of identity” (p. 222).

Key to food’s position as materiality (Dietler, 2007) and identity marker is the notion that food symbolically reflects a shared language. Part of that language denotes the psychic potency of food to promote memory. Reflecting that, Holtzman (2006) proposed that:

Embodied memories constructed through food; food as a locus for historically constructed identity, ethnic or nationalist; the role of food in various forms of nostalgia; dietary change as socially charged marker of epochal shifts; and context of remembering and forgetting through food. (p. 363)

Holtzman (2006) emphasised that food is an important factor in constructing and triggering memory. Holtzman also implied that food memories are experiential and dynamic. According to Vignolles and Pichon (2014), food helps people to re-experience

and re-affirm their senses of belonging. Accordingly, that suggestion reflects the notion that food familiarity, via memory, can evoke thoughts of family, friends and homeland (Vignolles & Pichon, 2014). Yuan (2014) noted that food provides a sensual experience that includes elements of taste, smell and vision. Yuan (2014) emphasised that taste influences people's food preferences and the memories that people associate with those preferences. Compounding food's sensory dimension is location. Location, like food's sensory aspects, can also promote food memories. Location can be about where people eat food, and the food in that location might have a specific flavour, which in turn helps people remember the taste, thus, generating memory. Location can be linked to terroir. Terroir refers to a unique environment that is directly linked to the food itself. Terroir also includes elements of land, region, climate, water, people and customs related to place (Lenglet & Giannelloni, 2015).

Building upon food memory and location and linking those ideas to wider perspectives of social constructionism (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934), Abarca and Colby (2016) suggested that: "a unique quality of food memories is that although their sensory and emotional implications function within the individual, they are always socially and culturally grounded" (p. 5). In those ways, and as Abarca and Colby (2016) further indicated, food pervades individual and group memories thus promoting food's status within the "metaphorical and symbolic realm[s]" (p. 5). That notion agrees with Neill, Johnston and Losekoot's (2016) construct of the refractive gaze. For Neill et al. (2016), the refractive gaze incorporates a tourist-gastronome's personal perspectives, sensual food experiences and how those experiences and perspectives are used to promote culinary capital.<sup>1</sup> In these ways, and through the

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<sup>1</sup> Culinary capital: Culinary capital explains how and why certain foods and food-related practices mean what they do and, by extension, how and why they empower those who understand and enjoy them.

refractive gaze, food embodies feelings, memories, and culture within a subjective yet holistic perspective. Related to my research, yak butter tea is the main traditional beverage for many Tibetans. That gastronomic link opens my topic to wider exploration that ground my meta-theories in real world experience and within my operationalisation of my conceptual framework.

### **2.2.2 Gastronomy and Commensality**

While food has implications for identity and memory, both beverage consumption and food consumption are commensal experiences. Commensality refers to consuming with others (Sobal & Nelson, 2003). Commensality within “commensal units,” is important because sharing rituals “build regularized personal relationships that establish and maintain desired forms of social integration and establish and reinforce common identities” (Sobal & Nelson, 2003, p. 181). Consequently, commensality helps people understand and build social networks within group identities that reinforce group belonging and sociability. In that way, commensality is a shared expression of both the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). Supporting that notion, Fischler (2011) proposed that “one of the obvious functions of commensality is socializing individuals into specific rules involving co-operation” (p. 17). Thus, enjoying food and beverage, as exemplified by a shared family meal, is a social construction reinforcing group knowledge and underpinning how people make sense of their wider world not only through the experience of sharing food and beverage but also within constructs of conversation and interaction.

Applying those considerations to my research suggests that commensality is an important theme within yak butter tea culture. Because yak butter tea is often served at family meals, social gatherings, or at yak butter tea houses, yak butter tea exemplifies a Tibetan commensal experience. That experience of conversation and interaction demonstrates the

the relevance of the social construction of reality thesis (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969). In other words, the commensal nature of yak butter tea, as actant materiality, helps Tibetans to make sense of their world.

### **2.2.3 Gastronomy and Hospitality**

Hospitality is inextricably linked to gastronomy. Hospitality refers to the host's friendly, kindness and welcoming behaviour towards guests or a stranger (Lashley & Morrison, 2000). For Lashley and Morrison (2000), hospitality can be divided into three domains: the social, private and commercial. The social domain considers "the social settings in which hospitality and acts of hospitableness take place together with the impacts of social forces on the production and consumption of food/drink/and accommodation" (Lashley & Morrison, 2000, p. 5). The private domain focuses on the relationship between host and guest in a domestic setting (Lashley & Morrison, 2000). The commercial domain regards hospitality as an activity based within "money exchange and limits on giving pleasure to guests" (Lashley & Morrison, 2000, p. 13). Based on those considerations, Lashley, Lynch and Morrison (2006) came to understand that hospitality constituted a social lens that not only included these three domains but also realised a way to discover and comprehend the wider social world.

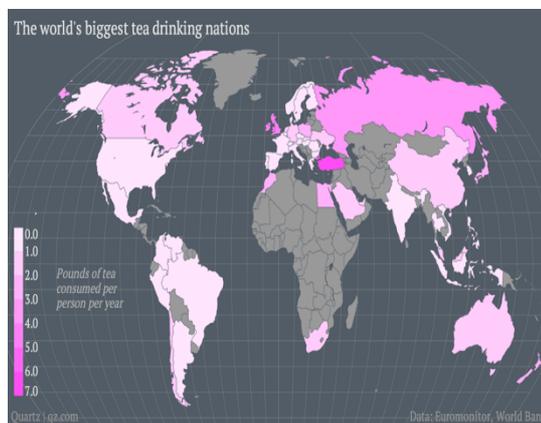
In considering those position within my research, yak butter tea as a commensal experience is captured in Lashley and Morrison's (2000) three domains of hospitality. In that way, their domains provide me with a framework within which I can explore the perspective of my four participants and their lived experiences.

## CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 An Introduction

This chapter presents my literature review. A literature review within a dissertation is designed “(a) to build a foundation, (b) to demonstrate how a study advances knowledge, (c) to conceptualize the study, (d) to assess research design and instrumentation, and (e) to provide a reference point for interpretation of findings” (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009, p. 122). To begin my literature review I explore the origins of tea. Then, I discuss its commodification and its political associations, most notably with the Boston Tea Party.

Following on from that my literature review reflects upon the symbolic importance of tea within various cultures. Finally, and before presenting literature specifically relating to yak butter tea within Tibetan socio-culture, I examine tea’s associations with religion. Then, I conclude my literature review and chapter.



**Figure 7: The World’s Biggest Drinking Tea Nations. Source: Ferdman (2014).**

Tea originated in China. There, tea culture dates back more than 2,000 years. In that context, Herrera (2013) noted that tea represented a mythological association to the Shengnong, the emperor who ‘discovered’ tea. From that ‘discovery’, “the culture of tea started its development in the moment in which tea became a culinary text and was disseminated throughout the China” (Herrera, 2013, p. 102).

At that time, tea was first used as a medicine in China. Then, as time progressed, the Chinese found out that tea could be consumed as a beverage (Herrera, 2013). Later, during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), tea became a globalised commodity. Even though

China provided the starting point for tea and its consumption, today China is not the largest tea consuming country. Instead, the country with the highest per capita global tea consumption is Turkey. Ireland is second, and the United Kingdom is third (Ferdman, 2014). Over time, as Ferdman (2014) noted, tea has spread to more than 160 countries and regions of the world.

### **3.2 Tea: Commodity and Tax**

With the globalised spread of tea and its commodification came the potential for tea to reflect themes of power and even revolution. At the end of the 16th century, as Britain replaced Spain as maritime hegemon, the British began to expand their colonisation of the world into new world regions (Wilding, 2012). North America was one such colony. To generate income, the then government of Great Britain eagerly squeezed the economic and natural resources from their colonies. Often, this caused disharmony between the settler-colonists and their government in Great Britain (Wilding, 2012).

Best exemplifying the power and politics of tea is the incident which occurred in 1773. Then, in order to sell the backlog of tea in a short time, the British government passed on the patent right that meant only the East India Company could sell tea in the North American colonies, and explicitly prohibited the colony from selling locally owned tea (Wilding, 2012). The East India Company, therefore, monopolised tea distribution in the North American colonies, and the price of imported tea was nearly half the price of locally grown tea. The cheap price suppressed local tea sales (Wilding, 2012) and caused many local American tea growers to become bankrupt. This caused anger among the colonial people of North America. On December 16, 1773, more than 8,000 people gathered in Boston to protest the tea situation. That evening, 342 boxes of tea on three ships belonging to the East India Company were dumped into the sea (Wilding, 2012). That move caused a major loss for the British East India Company. In order to suppress the rebellion, the

British colonists passed a series of mandatory decrees aimed at further oppressing and exploiting the North American colonies the following year (Wilding, 2012). Finally, under the unbearable circumstances, the people of the North American began the American Revolutionary War. In 1783, the United States won the War of Independence (Wilding, 2012). In this case of the “Boston Tea Party,” tea as a normal drink served as a concrete marker for colonialism. The reason why the “Boston Tea Party” could determine the independence of the United States is because tea plays an important role in North American daily life.

### **3.3 Tea: Cultural Expressions and Rituals**

Tea is both a commodity and a popular beverage. Over time, tea has come to embody cultural mores and rituals (Hellman, 2011). As Herrera (2013) proposed, “tea is a cultural phenomenon located in the heart of community where an exchange of information occurs” (p. 97). Consequently, the spread of tea and tea culture has transcended the boundaries of nation, identity, and culture. As Saberi (2010) observed:

The Chinese sip it from tiny cups, the Japanese whisk it. In America they serve it iced. The Tibetans add butter. The Russians serve it with lemon. Mint is added in North Africa. Afghans flavour it with cardamom. The Irish and the British drink it by the gallon with milk and sugar. The Indians boil it with condensed milk. In Australia, it is brewed in a ‘billy’ can. (p. 7)

In those ways, every country that consumes tea has developed tea-related customs and rituals. To illuminate that suggestion, my literature review will explore the tea cultures of China, Japan, Great Britain, Russia and Egypt.

China, as one of the world’s oldest civilisations, is famous for its rituals (J. G. Liu, 2016). Tea production and consumption in China link the spiritual nature of tea within a combination of tea drinking and ritual (J. G. Liu, 2016). In formal Chinese occasions, tea consumption reflects a form of ritualised etiquette. That etiquette includes the choice of

tea utensils, the temperature of the water, and the rules related to the tea's consumption (Chao, 2017). For example, when pouring the tea, it is considered disrespectful, to guests, if their teacup is over-filled. Similarly, the tea must be poured from the guest's righthand side only using the server's right hand. To pour tea in any other way is considered to be impolite (Chao, 2017). In China, tea also has symbolic meanings. For example, a newly married couple often offer tea to their elders. The symbolic value of that offering not only reflects the newly married couple's filial piety to their elders, but also their gratitude to their respective families (Chao, 2017). After offering tea in this way, the elders usually send money in red envelopes of blessing to the bride and groom (Chao, 2017). According to Liu (2016), for many Chinese, tea etiquette is important because traditional Chinese culture advocates kindness, respect and courtesy. In those ways, the etiquette of tea in China has come to reflect Chinese identity and what is mean to be a Chinese (Liu, 2016).

Japan also has a rich tea culture. Japan's tea culture developed gradually. Over time that development has created a long history that has formed a unique Japanese tea culture (Pitelka, 2003). As one of the most complicated ways to drink tea, the Japanese tea ceremony not only requires an elegant and natural environment, but also the incorporation of very strict sets of procedures and protocols. For example, no matter if it is the host who serves the tea or the guest, in receiving the tea bowl, the pattern of the bowl should be directly facing its recipient (Pitelka, 2003). In order to express gratitude to their hosts, guests consuming the tea need to lift the tea bowl to their forehead and then finish the tea in three distinct swallows (Pitelka, 2003). Like traditional tea in China, the traditional Japanese tea ritual (or ceremony) is not only focused on drinking the tea, but also in paying strict attention to the etiquette involved in its service and consumption. The tea rituals and "ceremony [have] influenced all [of] Japan's fine arts, including garden design, flower arrangement, architecture, calligraphy, painting, lacquer and ceramic arts, [and] it has developed into an elaborate social custom" (Saber, 2010, p. 43). Like China, tea

consumption and production in Japan have come to represent a materiality reflecting constructs of national identity and culture.

By comparison to Japan and China, Western tea culture had a later start. Great Britain has embraced tea culture and, like China and Japan, Great Britain has become renowned for its tea consumption, rituals and etiquette (Saber, 2010). Anna Maria Russell, the 7th Duchess of Bedford is generally considered to be the person who introduced the traditional British afternoon tea (Moffat, 2013). In the 1840s, dinner was often served later in the day, sometimes around 8pm. That timing created a need that something else be served earlier in the afternoon to assuage hunger. Consequently, the Duchess began to serve muffins and black tea in the mid-afternoon (Moffat, 2013). Her 'invention' of the afternoon soon 'trickled down' to become part of wider English culture. For the English upper class, including the 7th Duchess of Bedford, afternoon tea provided a format for communication because afternoon tea was considered to be less formal than the later evening dinner meal (Moffat, 2013). At that time, the price of tea impacted its consumption. Then, tea was highly priced. However, that price dropped sharply after 1740. The drop in price made tea available to more people, particularly the middle-class (Griffiths, 2007). According to Griffiths (2007), since then, tea drinking has become "an integral expression of middle-class virtues and vices" and "a mark of social respectability" (p. 359). Then, between 1784-85, the price of tea had fallen to the point where the labouring class could afford it and began to drink tea daily (Griffiths, 2007). As Griffiths (2007) then observed, tea had a "ritual function" among the working class: "stimulus and restoration of energy from its accompanying sugar; a legitimate excuse for a brief respite from otherwise unremitting labour; and a bonding process with fellow workers" (p. 361). Thus, as the time went by, tea became a popular beverage among all social classes. The ritual of drinking tea has thus become an important part of English food and beverage culture.

Drinking tea is also a key part of Russian life. Russians like to drink black tea (Saber, 2010). Until the 19th century, Russia was one of the largest buyers of Chinese-grown tea. Then, 75% of China's tea exports were sold to Russia (Saber, 2010). Russians have a special teapot called samovar. A traditional samovar was made of copper and heated with charcoal. Modern samovars use electricity, and they are often smaller in size than traditional samovars (Saber, 2010). For Russians, the samovar makes Russian tea culture different to the tea cultures of other countries. That uniqueness could be said to reflect Russian identity.

Similarly, Egypt is also a large tea consuming country. Egypt imports and exports tea. Egyptians enjoy strong black tea with sugar (Tuku & Smith, 2011). The rituals of making tea in Egypt are quite simple. After the tea is poured into the teacup and brewed with boiling water, then, a lot of white sugar is added. The ratio of tea to sugar can be that two thirds of the liquid volume is added sugar (Tuku & Smith, 2011). Most Egyptians drink tea throughout the day. Consuming tea may be a part of a meeting or a social gathering or used as a beverage to entertain guests (Tuku & Smith, 2011). Consequently, Egyptian sugared tea plays important role that reflects hospitality in Egyptian culture. In that way, Egyptians enjoy tea and also use the tea as an identifier and method of belonging, being and becoming an Egyptian.

### **3.4 Tea and Religion**

Griffiths (2007) suggested that the earliest association between tea and religion can be traced to early Taoism. Taoism is a Chinese religion that proposes the “nature of life, the way to peace and how a ruler should lead his life” are important in creating a harmonious environment (Cheng & Low, 2018, p. 123). Taoism uses tea as a symbolic sacrificial object within prayer and fasting (Griffiths, 2007). The tea’s purpose is to drive away evil spirits (Griffiths, 2007). Tea in Taoism evokes the effect of refreshing the mind in

meditation (Griffiths, 2007). Similarly, but within Buddhism, tea culture is linked to Zen (Griffiths, 2007). Zen is a static behaviour that unifies the body and mind (the mental and physical) within Buddhist practice (Towler, 2010). The influence of Zen on Chinese and Japanese tea culture is far-reaching. When Buddhist monks meditate, they must drink tea and burn fragrant incense (Towler, 2010). In those activities, tea aids meditation because of its refreshing impact on the mind and its stimulant effect in delaying fatigue and drowsiness (Towler, 2010).

### 3.5 The Importance of Yak Butter



Figure 9: Yak Butter. Source: Baidu (2017a).

Yak butter is a dairy product from the yak animal (*Bos grunniens*). It is an essential of Tibetan food. The butter is also used in yak butter tea. Like yak butter tea, yak butter is integral to all aspects of daily life, of the Tibetan people (Bai, 2013).



Figure 8: Yak Butter Lamp. Source: Baidu (2017b).

According to Q. Yang (2015), the importance of yak butter is expressed not only in its edible value, but also within its medicinal benefits and value as a lighting fuel. In terms of edibility, yak butter is the main fat source in Tibetan cuisine. Medicinally, yak butter is used as a medicinal binder and is often used as an oil therapy. Yak butter's use in lighting is often

associated with not only the butter lamp, but specifically religious activities (Q. Yang, 2015).

In Tibetan Buddhism, yak butter is considered to be a holy item (Q. Yang, 2016). That status is reflected within worship, whether it is worship by a Tibetan monk, or a believer who worships before a Tibetan Buddha.

In these ways, yak butter provides a refracted insight into Tibetan socio-culture because yak butter is woven throughout the being and becoming of Tibetan identity, geographic location, belief, climate and history. That history is linked to the Tea Horse Road.

The history of the Tea Horse Road can be traced back at least 1,300 years. Consequently, the Tea Horse Road has had a profound historical and heritage impact on Tibetan socio-culture (Qi, 2004). The Tea Horse Road links Tibet and China and began within the tea-horse caravan (Wang, 2005), a trade market during the Tang (618-907) and Song (907-1279) Dynasties (Qi, 2004). The route entered Tibet from the Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces, and extended through Nepal and India to West Asia and on toward West Africa (Fuchs, 2008). The Tea Horse Road facilitated the movement of furs, medicinal materials, tea, cloth, salt and other everyday materials (Fuchs, 2008). The endless flow of trade developed a society and an economy that prospered over time. The route also facilitated the movement of a large number of industrial and agricultural products from the Chinese into Tibet. Similarly, the exchange of skilled craftsmen between regions has served to enrich the region's culture (Fuchs, 2008).

The Tibetan area does not produce tea. However, tea was introduced to Tibet through the Tea Horse Road. The lack of tea in Tibet was compensated for by its abundance of horses, an abundance which contrasted their scarcity in China (Jenkins, 2010). As a result, the complementary tea and horse trading began that, over time, came to name the trade route (Jenkins, 2010).

In Tibet, tea provided a warming drink. The addition of yak butter provided a calorific boost for consumers that helped them endure the harsh climate and geographical elevation (Norbu & Riba, 2015; Pan & Wang, 2016)). In these ways, consuming yak butter tea came to reflect not only bodily need but also the harsh environment. Over time, yak butter tea has gradually entered into the Tibetan diet and become a daily drink for many Tibetans.

### **3.6 Yak Butter Tea: Tibetan Identity and Rituals**

In Tibetan regions like Shangri-La, yak butter tea symbolises Tibetan identity (Kehoe, 2015; M. Xu et al., 2015). Similarly, in the research conducted by Lu (2013), it was found that Tibetan people regarded yak butter tea as an important part of their being and everyday life. Tibetan yak butter tea is a social ritual in Tibetan culture (Wulf et al., 2010; Yanqian, 2005; Zhao & Yu, 2012; C. Z. Zhang, 2014). The tea is considered to be a polite expression of hospitality (Juean & Dong, 2016; Mayhew & Kohn, 2005). Consequently, yak butter tea holds material and symbolic meaning for Tibetans. In these ways, yak butter tea is a material expression of how many Tibetans come to understand and negotiate the world around them. That negotiation and understanding is exemplified within the tea's connection to birth, weddings, death, and the tea poem (Jiaqu).

Tibetans have formed a set of birth customs that differentiate them from other groups. For example, on the third or fourth day after a child is born, the parent's friends and relatives ceremonially celebrate the birth (Zhao & Yu, 2012). That ceremony is designed to remove bad luck. Tibetans believe that a newborn baby brings bad luck from their mother's womb (Zhao & Yu, 2012). Removing bad luck ensures that the baby will develop in healthy ways. During that ceremony, friends and relatives will bring gifts for the new baby. Those gifts include yak butter tea and new clothes (Zhao & Yu, 2012). During the ceremony, friends and relatives will serve the mother's yak butter tea before

anyone else's. Then, looking at the newborn baby, they will say a blessing. In those ways, yak butter tea mediates messages of good luck, blessing and health for the new baby.

Yak butter tea is also part of Tibetan weddings. In Tibetan areas, yak butter tea is a medium reflecting love and loyalty (Zhao & Yu, 2012). According to Zhao (2013), tea is one of the most important items in the Tibetan wedding. Zhao (2013) observed that when the bride's family accepts tea, alcohol and other gifts from the groom's family, it signals their engagement to both families.

In a traditional Tibetan wedding ceremony, the bride's family send her to the bridegroom's house. Table and chairs are placed outside the house. The bride sits in the middle. Her the parents, relatives and friends then sit on each to each side of the bride (Zhao, 2013). Tea, many kinds of fruit, and dates are then placed on the table. Then the bride and her family drink yak butter tea and wine before being joined by the groom and his relatives and friends. Then the bride and groom, their respective families and guests, sit together and drink yak butter tea or alcohol (Zhao, 2013). At this time, the bride and groom will drink the yak butter tea together and then offer the yak butter tea to the parents and other elders. That gesture symbolises the marriage blessing of the newly married couple and the respect the couple confer to their new kinship links (Su & Ciren, 2018).

The tea poem is an indispensable part of a traditional Tibetan wedding. The poem's oral tradition holds its genesis in ancient Tibet (Jiang, Liu & Zhao, 2013). It derives from the prayers of ancient Tibetan to the gods in their expectations of a good life (Cuoji, 2004). Based on Cuoji (2004), Hao and Li (2004), the tea poem can be summarised as follows: it introduces how the tea came to Tibet; the values of the tea; tea variations; tea sets; and how yak butter tea is made. The poem also discusses the etiquette of drinking tea. According to Acuo (2017), within a wedding ceremony, the rituals of the poem are

presided over by an elderly Tibetan monk who is familiar with the poem's content. Other key elements included in the poem, particularly at weddings, are the dangxie (the date of marriage); praising of the local gods; praise for family, livestock, houses and family treasures; and jiaqu (tea poem). The poem also includes a blessing for the newlyweds (Acuo, 2017).

Yak butter tea is also a part of Tibetan funerals. For Tibetans, death means the beginning of the next life. Consequently, Tibetans are not so full of grief when compared to the mourning rituals of other cultures (Que, 2004). Tibetan funerals can last three to seven days, depending on local customs. During the funeral, the family of the deceased place yak butter, yak butter tea, food and fruits on a table which is located in front of the dead body. This symbolises the family's good wishes for the deceased, and their hope that the deceased will eat and live well in the next life (Yanqian, 2005). As Peng (2009) and Quzhen (2012) noted, during the funeral, relatives and friends who come to participate in the funeral usually bring yak butter tea as a sign of their respect to the deceased. They will also drink the tea while recalling memories of the deceased. In those ways, yak butter tea is a medium that embodies the Tibetan respect for life (Peng, 2009; Quzhen, 2012). However, Tibetans who bring yak butter tea to a funeral will empty their yak butter tea container before departure. Emptying their containers of the tea ensures that they do not return home with any vestige of bad luck (Hou & Wang, 2016). Consequently, as a warming beverage, yak butter tea in Tibetan funeral rituals symbolises not only a blessing and acknowledgement of the deceased but also the wish that the deceased enjoys a better 'next life', and the respect and fear of Tibetans.



**Figure 10: Tibetan Monks Drinking Yak Butter Tea.**  
Source: Candy (2015).

In these ways yak butter tea is strongly connected to religious belief, particularly Tibetan Buddhism. Many Buddhist activities include yak butter tea. Every major Tibetan temple in China has a Tea-Collection

Festival every year. During that time, believers will bring tea to the temple and offer it to the monks (Huang, 2007). In return, the monks will recite Buddhist prayers in recognition of the gift of tea (Huang, 2008).

To conclude, in many cultures, tea holds a significant position in terms of culture and identity. Tea is not only a warming beverage, but also a vector for messages, rituals and ceremonies. In these ways, tea embodies symbols of being and becoming, particularly within Tibetan culture. Yet tea also holds medicine, political, religious and cultural expressions of power. Yak butter tea exemplifies those characteristics and rituals, and symbolises blessings and good wishes as well as representing hospitality and respect.

## CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents my research methodology (qualitative description, in-depth interviews and thematic analysis) and my methods. My research used qualitative description as proposed by Sandelowski (2000). Included in my methodological overview are sections describing and discussing my adaptation and operationalisation of qualitative description, in-depth interviews and thematic analysis. Those sections provide the information that facilitated my data collection, analysis and write up of my Findings and Discussion and Conclusion Chapters.

My data was collected from four participant interviews. My participants included: two Tibetan academic cultural experts, Associate Professor Acuo and Dr. Lundrup from Yunnan Minzu University in China. Those participants have more than 10 years of academic research experience in Tibetan culture. My third participant, Basang, was a yak butter tea supplier aged 56. Basang has operated his yak butter tea business in Shangri-La for 34 years. My fourth participant was a regular yak butter tea drinker named Lamu. Lamu, aged 45, has consumed yak butter tea for almost 44 years. My participants combined exposure to yak butter tea totalled 98 years. Moreover, my participants all spoke Chinese (Mandarin) and so my interviews were conducted in Mandarin. After my interviews with them, I translated their data into the English language.

My findings have been obtained through my use of qualitative description (Sandelowski, 2000), and thematic analysis (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003). Those approaches, particularly my consideration of thematic analysis, have allowed me to recognise themes that emerged from the data itself, viewed through a lens of qualitative description (Sandelowski, 2000). Table 1 overviews the processes that I engaged in order to distil my Findings.

**Table 1 Process of Emerging Themes**

Process	Emergent Themes	Distilled Themes
First stage: 1. Transcribe the interviews. 2. Read transcribed data. 3. Search for themes and take notes of emergent themes that evolve during reading 4. Establish an initial framework of themes framework.	1. Necessity 2. Irreplaceability 3. Climate 4. Identity 5. Hospitality 6. Message carrier 7. Rituals 8. Events 9. Global influence	1. Basic Themes: Necessity/irreplaceability and climate. 2. Rituals and Cultural Expression: events, rituals, hospitality, and poem. 3. Globalisation
Second stage: 1. Re-read the transcribed data. 2. Identify and amend themes. 3. Merge similar themes. 4. Finalise emergent themes.	1. Necessity and irreplaceability 2. Identity and rituals 3. Global influence	

Scrutinising the material, I distilled and converged necessity/irreplaceability and climate as my research starting points. I call these combined topics my Basic Themes. Doing this provided a logical and easy to follow ‘entry’ point into my topic. Then, I grouped my other themes calling them Rituals and Cultural Expression. That heading included events, rituals, hospitality and poem. My final theme was globalisation. To begin my chapter, I will sequentially work through my basic themes, and then I will extend those themes within Rituals and Cultural Expression. I have decided to present my findings in this way because yak butter tea is inextricably linked to multiple constricts of being and becoming Tibetan and Tibetan material culture.

#### **4.1 Qualitative Description**

As an inductive research approach, qualitative description began and became popular within qualitative health research (Sandelowski, 2000). For Sandelowski (2000), “qualitative description is especially amenable to obtaining straight and largely unadorned (i.e., mining theorized or otherwise transformed or spun) answers to questions

of special relevance to practitioners and policy makers” (p. 337). Qualitative description aims to understand a phenomenon, a process, or the worldviews of the people involved in that process or phenomenon (Sandelowski, 2000). Supporting Sandelowski’s (2000) position, Sullivan-Bolyai, Bova and Harper (2005) suggested that qualitative description was a subjective method reflecting participant’s worldviews by emphasising those experiences and perspectives. More recently, Bradshaw et al. (2017), proposed that qualitative description was designed to acquire direct participant views about a subject by presenting participant narratives within everyday language. In those ways, qualitative description, for Bradshaw et al. (2017), is about “understanding and describe[ing] phenomenon” (p. 3).

However, qualitative description is not without critique. By Sandelowski’s (2000) own admission, qualitative description is erroneously considered, within the academy, to be superficial and lacking validity (Sandelowski, 2000). Yet, Sullivan-Bolyai et al. (2005) suggested that qualitative description provides effective and useful data for clinical intervention, mixed method studies and small independent research studies. Additionally, Neergaard, Olesen, Andersen and Sondergaard (2009) noted that unlike other qualitative methods, “qualitative description is neither thick description (ethnography), theory development (ground theory) nor [an] interpretative meaning of an experience (phenomenology), but a rich, straight description of an experience or an event” (p. 2).

Consequently, in relation to my research, qualitative description is the best suited methodology because it potentialises obtaining straightforward viewpoints and data from my participants about yak butter tea. Additionally, and cognisant of Sullivan-Bolyai et al.’s (2005) and Gray’s (2018) recommendations that qualitative description suits small independent studies, it has become my methodology of choice (refer Appendix G for information related to other methodologies I had considered but discounted).

## 4.2 Thematic Analysis

I used thematic analysis to consider the data that I collected from my participants. Sandelowski and Barroso (2003) explained that thematic analysis helps the process of change from description to interpretation. However, as Braun and Clarke (2006) indicated, qualitative description does not over-interpret research data. They suggested that qualitative description in conjunction with thematic analysis provides a flexible method “for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data, [because] it minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail” (p. 79). Additionally, thematic analysis is well suited for use within participant life stories and their views on events and objects (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Supporting that notion, Bradshaw et al. (2017) noted that research using qualitative description tended to “predominantly consist of content or thematic analyses” (p. 5) that provided rich and in-depth findings. Those positions reinforce the importance of data gathering within qualitative description and its analysis using thematic analysis.

In using thematic analysis, researchers need to read their transcribed data to increase their familiarity with it. In doing so, researchers can draft initial codes or themes. Following on from that is a more ‘formal’ process. Vaismoradi et al. (2013) suggested that process included the “searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes” (p. 402). After the initial theme or coded framework is established, it is necessary to read the transcribed data repeatedly, and then classify the data within those themes (Belotto, 2018). Data categorisation enables researchers to focus on each topic, presenting the details and differences between the data and the themes and topics (Belotto, 2018) in logical ways.

### 4.3 In-depth Interviews

As a data gathering technique, interviews can be divided into three types: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Bradshaw et al. (2017), proposed that structured interviews use standardised questions to gain fixed data. Semi-structured interview questions cover more general themes and are flexible because they promote additional follow-up questions (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Thus, the semi-structured interview questions reveal more open-ended data.

My research used interviews to glean in-depth participant data. As Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested, “interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviour, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them” (p. 108). Furthermore, Castillo-Montoya (2016) proposed that interviews help researchers to understand their topics. That understanding, they suggested, occurs simply because research questions usually relate to the participants’ experiences and how participants have derived meaning from those experiences. In these ways, researchers are able to obtain useful, rich and ‘deep’ data. Using these processes, researchers directly and indirectly explore how participants construct their world and relate that to aspects of their shared ontologies and epistemologies.

My research used structured and semi-structured interview questioning techniques (Bradshaw et al., 2017). Consequently, and given the social nature of yak butter tea consumption, participant interviews provided a platform from which participants could share their views and experiences about yak butter tea. To facilitate my interview process I compiled a list of questions about my research topic for each of my four participants. That preparation aligned with Merriam and Tisdell’s (2016) recommendation that interview questions are sequential and consistent. My use of structured and semi-structured questions promoted my later data theming. In turn, that facilitated the analysis

of my data in a systematic, concrete and logical manner. Interestingly, the tea itself also acted as a mediating and common construct within my interviews. For example, I drank yak butter tea with my yak butter tea supplier, Basang, and my long-term yak butter tea drinker, Lamu. Through tea drinking, it was easy for me to introduce my questions in conversational ways and, in doing so, I eased the ‘research tension’ between my participants and myself.

#### **4.4 Field Work: Finding and Securing Participants**

I conducted my fieldwork interviews in Shangri-La, China. There, I interviewed four participants (purposive sampling). That number was supported by Bradshaw et al.’s (2017) observation that the sample size within qualitative description tends to be small. Bradshaw et al.’s (2017) also noted that “purposive sampling [...] provides the additional advantage of facilitating the selection of participants whose qualities or experiences are required for the study” (p. 3). Therefore, purposive sampling promoted my collection of high-quality data because I selected experienced participants who have high levels of expert knowledge. Reflecting that expertise, my four participants included two Tibetan academics who were both well versed in Tibetan culture, a longstanding yak butter tea supplier and a long-term yak butter tea consumer. My selection criteria and participant details are included in Table 2, below.

Additionally, all my participants self-identified as Tibetan, despite one of my academics having a ‘European’ surname. As I noted in Chapter 1, Tibetans are a special ethnic group in China. Consequently, Tibetans have different names compared to many Chinese people. Within Tibetan culture, some Tibetan names may be similar to European names, in terms of spelling and pronunciation, but those Tibetan names hold different meanings.

**Table 2 Participant Selection Criteria**

Participant selection criteria	Participant details
That all four participants <sup>2</sup> are familiar with Tibetan yak butter tea, either with its cultural significance, (or) its consumption rituals and meanings, and/or, how forces of globalisation and industrialisation have impacted yak butter tea in contemporary Tibetan socio-culture.	
That my academic experts has more than 10 years' academic standing in disciplines that would inform my topic.	A Tibetan Associate Professor (Assoc. Prof. Acuo) at Yunnan Minzu University, and a Tibetan culture expert (Dr. Lundrup) who works at the Tibetan Research Centre at Yunnan Minzu University. Both of them are well versed in the sociology, social anthropology that informs yak butter tea within Tibetan culture.
That my consumer participant has been a consumer of yak butter tea for longer than twenty years.	A Tibetan lady named Lamu (aged 45) who has regularly consumed yak butter tea daily for 44 years.
That my yak butter tea supplier has been in business selling yak butter tea for 20 years or longer.	A Tibetan tea supplier named Basang (aged 56) who has been in business selling yak butter tea for 34 years.

#### 4.5 Data Collection

My initial contact with any potential participant was facilitated through the Internet or introduced via family contacts living in Shangri-La. Having established those contacts, I introduced myself and informed my potential participants about my research. Initially, I only approached one participant at any time. Luckily, after consideration, my first potential participant accepted my offer to participate in my research. However, to aid their decision-making processes I used my Participant Information Sheet to inform them about my research. Also, I was keen to fully answer any questions they may ask. I supplied all my potential participants my research information in both English and Mandarin (Chinese) languages (refer Appendices A and B). After outlining the purpose of my research, I

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<sup>2</sup> That is, all four participants have relatively long-term experience of traditional yak butter tea production before the emergence of modern yak butter tea production. Thus, they all have knowledge about both types of yak butter tea.

invited my potential participants to be part of my research. I allowed two weeks for them to consider my offer. After that time, I contacted each participant again and was delighted to note that all of them were very keen to participate and, equally, that they were enthusiastic about my research topic. Surprisingly, before my interview with my Tibetan academic expert Associate Professor Acuo, he asked me if I would like his co-worker Dr. Lundrup, from the Tibetan Research Centre in Yunnan Minzu University, to join us. This introduction was an added bonus and I keenly accepted the offer, adhering to the research protocols. Therefore, in that case, I interviewed Associate Professor Acuo and Dr. Lundrup together. Of particular note, and a benefit to my research, was that Dr. Lundrup majored in Tibetology for his doctoral degree and that he worked in the Tibetan Research Centre. His expertise added depth to my research.

Then, I asked all my participants to sign a Consent Form (refer Appendices C and D). My Consent Form, like my Participant Information Sheet, was made available to them in an English language or Mandarin language version. In signing the Consent Form, participants agreed to participate. Moreover, with that process participants agreed that I could record their interviews and transcribe them. I also supplied each participant an English language and Mandarin version of my structured and semi-structured questions (refer Appendices E and F). I believed that supplying those questions to them in advance of my interviews would positively enhance my research relationship with them but also present an ‘upfront’ attitude and allow them time to consider my questions and their interview responses. I offered my participants the opportunity to read their transcribed interview if they wished and that they could add or delete any information.

#### **4.6 Visual Data**

Complementing my interview process, and further informing my research, I took photographs of both traditional and modern yak butter tea-making processes, and the tools

used to make the tea. My goal in taking those images was to help my readers to come to a deeper understanding of yak butter tea, and its place and methods of production in Tibetan culture. However, no image included in my research affected any of my participants. Consequently, my taking of photographs was not a part of my Participant Information or Consent Form processes.

#### **4.7 Ethics in Research**

Through interviews, my research collected primary data. As a researcher, I am aware of the need to protect the rights of my participants. Consequently, Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTECH) ethics approval was required. After submitting an EA1 proposal to AUTECH, my research was granted approval on November 27, 2018, under approval number 18/440. My ethics approval notifications are included as Appendix H.

#### **4.8 Summary**

My considered approach to my research topic using qualitative description (Sandelowski, 2000) and thematic analysis (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2003), complemented by photographs, has facilitated the following two chapters, my Findings Chapter and Discussion and Conclusion Chapter. Using qualitative description and thematic analysis has maximised my participants' subjective yak butter tea consumption narratives in meaningful and deep ways. Qualitative description enabled my participants, within the thematic analysis, to tell their stories and experiences as they experienced them. Using qualitative description has avoided my overinterpretation of what my participants told me. Consequently, qualitative description enhanced my research findings by maximising what my participants actually said and not my interpretation of what they said. Consequently, my Findings and Discussion and Conclusion Chapters are generated based upon my participants' descriptions and data.

## CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

### 5.1 Overview of Findings

This chapter presents my research findings within a synthesis of topics distilled from the nine emergent themes I identified within my data. In considering that synthesis I combined some of my themes and in doing so reduced nine categories down to a more manageable four distilled themes. In that way, and referencing Table 1 above, I collated what I now present as my research findings.

### 5.2 Basic Themes: Necessity/Irreplaceability and Climate

All participants agreed that yak butter tea was a necessity and a significant part of daily Tibetan life. Those views stressed the importance of yak butter tea within Tibetan socio-culture. As Associate Professor Acuo remarked:

*Since the Tang Dynasty, tea-horse trade between Tibetans and Hans<sup>3</sup> has become more frequent. Later, we had a Tea Horse Road between Tibetan areas<sup>4</sup> and Han areas<sup>5</sup>, and the Tibetans took their horses to exchange the tea from inland China. The price of a horse is higher than the price of tea. From this, we can also see the importance of the tea in Tibetan society. For Tibetans, tea was originally a foreign thing [brought] through the ancient Tea Horse Road, but the yak butter is native and [a] unique food in Tibetan regions. The combination of these two [factors] makes yak butter tea an indispensable drink in Tibetan life. Historically, its significance is important, yak butter tea is irreplaceable for Tibetans.*

Reflecting on the importance of yak butter tea, Assoc. Prof. Acuo proposed that:

*Tibetans' life is basically composed of "Ca Jia Ma San". Ca is salt, Jia is tea, Ma is yak butter, San means blend. So, we can say that "Ca Jia Ma San" are actually the most important components of yak butter tea.*

Complementing that Dr. Lundrup added:

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<sup>3</sup> Han: One of 56 ethnic groups in China; however, for Tibetans, all other ethnic groups in China can be identified as Han.

<sup>4</sup> Tibetan areas: Areas along the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, in the west and southwest of China.

<sup>5</sup> Han areas: For Tibetans, all other non-Tibetan regions are Han areas.

*As the old Tibetan saying goes “it is better three days without food than one day without tea”. Similarly, yak butter tea holds the same significance to Tibetans. This reflects the irreplaceable necessity of yak butter tea in Tibetan’s social life.*

In those ways, both academics emphasised the importance of yak butter tea to Tibetan identity and ways of being, albeit in differing ways.

My tea supplier, Basang, aged 56, reflected on how yak butter tea:

*Is a daily essential drink for Tibetans. It is necessary for life in the Tibetan Plateau. First, the Tibetan people live in such areas as high altitudes, so this kind of drink with a warm effect is needed. Secondly, yak butter tea can prevent the symptom of oxygen deficiency in the plateau. Thirdly, yak butter tea can prevent the dry chapped lips due to cold and dry weather.*

Recognising the beneficial attributes of the tea, Assoc. Prof. Acuo added:

*Tea contains vitamins, which can supplement the lack of vegetables in the Tibetan plateau and help their body to digest [other foods]. Yak butter tea can also help remove the greasy taste of meat, especially for Tibetans who heavily rely on meat as their main food source.*

Lamu, the long-term yak butter tea drinker, aged 45, confirmed the importance of yak butter tea to her:

*Yak butter tea is a must have drink for me, mainly for satisfying the needs of the diet. Yak butter tea can not only provide the energy, but it is more of like a daily habit for me. My family drinks yak butter tea every day, mainly for breakfast and lunch, but sometimes we even drink that during dinner. For me, if I do not drink yak butter tea for a day, I will feel that something is missing, and it is not comfortable at all.*

Consequently, yak butter tea is part of Tibetan daily life. While each of my participants provided a slightly different rationale, all agreed that yak butter tea was an irreplaceable part of Tibetan life and culture. That importance reflected my participants’ geographic location, climate, diet and geography, emphasising how yak butter tea mediated those domains.

### **5.3 Rituals and Cultural Expression: Events, Rituals, Hospitality and Poem**

Cognisant that gastronomy theory promotes Brillat-Savarin’s (1825/1994) suggestion that “you are what you eat” (p. 13), food reflects identity. Compounding that, yak butter reflects Tibetan’s identity through everyday life.

Yak butter tea drinker Lamu explained that:

*yak butter tea symbolises our [Tibetans] identity. There are 56 ethnic minorities in China, when people talk about yak butter tea, the first thing comes to their mind are Tibetans. Then, they will think about the environment and culture in which we live.*

My yak butter tea supplier Basang added:

*Yak butter tea is a social and cultural product. The yak butter tea itself and its culture represent the [Tibetan] identity and [Tibetan] culture.*

Assoc. Prof. Acuo recognised that yak butter tea was a potent symbol for Tibetans. He proposed:

*Food is always a good way to know a culture and people. When a non-Tibetan first contacts Tibetans and Tibetan culture, drinking yak butter tea is usually considered as the first step to understand the Tibetan culture.*

Dr. Lundrup added:

*For those non-Tibetans, yak butter tea is the most cultural drink that relates to Tibetan culture. Moreover, [for non-Tibetans], if a Tibetan does not drink yak butter tea, then that person is not an authentic Tibetan.*

Reflecting that, but locating yak butter tea within Shangri-La, Assoc. Prof. Acuo commented:

*Yak butter tea reflects Tibetan identity. However, Shangri-La is a special case [because] there are not only Tibetans, [but also] other ethnic minorities living there. They also drink yak butter tea. In this case, it is not really accurate to identify yak butter tea as a sign of Tibetan identity in Shangri-La.*

My yak butter tea supplier Basang added:

*In Shangri-La, not only Tibetan but all the people living in Shangri-La are drinking yak butter tea. From this point of view, I think drinking yak butter tea is not just a representative of Tibetan identity in Shangri-La particularly.*

Reinforcing the relationship between the tea and Shangri-La, Dr. Lundrup suggested:

*Even though Shangri-La is a special case, the dominant culture is still the Tibetan culture in Shangri-La. Non-Tibetans who drink yak butte tea in Shangri-La [more or less] have been influenced by the Tibetan culture.*

While recognising the tea's special relationship with Shangri-La, my participants also opened up yak butter tea to wider identity and rituals. As Assoc. Prof. Acuo noted:

*Drinking yak butter tea might not exactly represent Tibetan identity. But [the use of] yak butter tea throughout the everyday [Tibetan] life and [Tibetan] events reflect the Tibetan identity.*

Dr. Lundrup agreed and added:

*Traditionally, we [Tibetans] needed yak butter tea in any event that happened in our society. In traditional Tibetan weddings, not only does the host need to prepare the yak butter tea for the guests to drink, but the guests will also bring yak butter tea to express their wishes to the bride and groom.*

Lamu also recognised how the tea was used as part of Tibetan rituals. She added:

*Yak butter tea and alcohol are two essential drinks in our [Tibetan] wedding ceremony. Newly married couple are required to show respect to the elders by offering them a bowl of hot yak butter tea or alcohol at the wedding. At the same time, the elders will send their blessings to the newly married couple by drinking the yak butter tea or the alcohol.*

My two academic participants mentioned a Tibetan tea poem. That poem reinforced the importance of the tea itself and Tibetan identity. For them, yak butter tea and the Tibetan tea poem symbolised happiness. As Dr. Lundrup noted:

*In the wedding ceremony, there is a special ritual to praise the tea, called Jia Qu. A highly respected old man or a Tibetan monk will hold the tea, and then pour the tea on the ground and start to read the poem to praise the tea.*

Assoc. Prof. Acuo added to this noting:

*[The] Tea poem praises the newly married couple and their marriage by describing the tea. The tea poem introduces the origin of tea; the spread of tea; the preciousness of tea; the production of yak butter tea, the importance of yak butter tea, and different types of tea sets. The purpose of praising the tea is to let the guests enjoy the wedding and bring happiness and wishes to the newlyweds.*

In those ways, especially in Tibetan weddings, the yak butter tea becomes a metaphor representing happiness and blessings for Tibetans.

Additionally, yak butter tea was a significant item in Tibetan funerals. As Assoc. Prof. Acuo advised:

*In the [Tibetan] funeral, the deceased will be served with yak butter tea and “si”. “Si” is a combination of tea, salt and yak butter. The family of the deceased will burn the “si” and yak butter tea together to the deceased. This represents their blessing to the deceased, hoping that the deceased will be rich and happy after death and in the afterlife.*

Lamu also noted the importance of the tea within funerals. As she noted:

*At a Tibetan funeral, those who attend the funeral will sit together and have yak butter tea, then reminisce about the past with the dead.*

Dr. Lundrup expressed a connection between the funeral and the religious perspective.

He noted that:

*After the elders passed away, their family members need to go the Tibetan temple to make the yak butter tea and serve the yak butter tea to the Tibetan monks. [For Tibetans], this behaviour is a way to express their filial piety to the elders who passed away. It is also a behaviour that family members hope to get the Tibetan Buddha's protection and blessing [for the deceased].*

Considering that yak butter tea was used in religious activities, Assoc. Prof. Acuo added:

*The Tibetan monks have their own yak butter tea bowl. In religious ceremonies, Tibetans generally voluntarily donate tea and serve the Tibetan monks with yak butter tea. In return, Tibetan monks will pray for them through chanting. Basically, every Tibetan family enshrines Tibetan Buddha statues at home. In order to show their respect to the Tibetan buddhas, the first bowl of yak butter tea and the freshly made food always need to be served to the Tibetan buddhas.*

Long-term yak butter tea drinker Lamu reinforced that view:

*My whole family and I are devoted Tibetan Buddhists. In my family, no matter in what situation, every first sip of drink and every first bite of food must be offered to Tibetan Buddhas. For me, our [Tibetan] culture is mainly composed of the Tibetan Buddhism and our [Tibetan] daily life. Because my religion [Tibetan Buddhism] guides me through my whole life, including how I eat and how I behave in my daily life.*

Concluding that, Assoc. Prof. Acuo commented:

*Almost all Tibetans believe in Tibetan Buddhism, which determines that their social lives, rituals and customs are closely related to Tibetan Buddhism.*

In these ways, yak butter tea provided a channel for my participants to express their systems of belief and ways of being and becoming.

For my participants, being a Tibetan was not only about drinking yak butter tea, but also about the production and customs that are associated with it. Each of my participants made different comments about the symbolic nature of the yak butter tea, but particularly commented about its use in weddings and funerals. Consequently, yak butter tea as a

ritual helped my participants to negotiate their Tibetan identities through engagement in liminal experiences, particularly weddings and funerals.

Yet within the general use of yak butter tea, including at weddings and funerals, the tea also expressed hospitality. Reflecting upon that, Assoc. Prof. Acuo noted:

*For Tibetans, serving a cup of hot yak butter tea is a way to express their hospitality. Especially in Shangri-La, traditionally, the host will provide personalised yak butter tea for guests. When there are distinguished guests, the host will make yak butter tea in a small tea barrel, but just enough for one person to drink. Some guests prefer more tea in their yak butter tea, while some prefer more yak butter or more salt.*

Dr. Lundrup added:

*The personalised yak butter tea not only presents the hospitality of Tibetans, but also interprets what it means to be a Tibetan. Because part of Tibetans' philosophy of life is being hospitable, humble, enthusiastic and respectful to others.*

Lamu also recognised the hospitality inherent to the tea. She added:

*When guests come over, we [Tibetans] need serve yak butter tea with both hands as a sign of respect. In order to respond to the respect of the hosts, the guests cannot immediately drink the yak butter tea. Instead, they should chat with the host for a while. Then the host will add a little bit more yak butter tea before the guests start to drink.*

Similarly, Basang, my yak butter tea supplier stated:

*The production of yak butter tea and its customs is a way that expresses our [Tibetan] culture.*

In those ways, the tradition of making yak butter tea in Shangri-La, was important for my participants because the tea represented Tibetans' hospitality and individual expressions of respect, as exemplified in its use in funeral and wedding ceremonies. The ritual of serving and drinking yak butter tea not only expressed Tibetan tea culture but also hospitality. Thus, the basic principle of being a Tibetan was reflected by my participants through these rituals and their cultural expressions.

For my participants, drinking yak butter tea alone cannot completely explain Tibetan identity. For them, Tibetan identity was reflected through the various Tibetan rituals and

cultural expressions that integrated tea. For them, the use of yak butter tea in weddings and the tea poem represented rituals of happiness and blessing. Within funerals and religious activities yak butter tea symbolised the combination of feelings of fear and respect towards Tibetan Buddhas and the deceased. Moreover, yak butter tea represented an actant materiality evoking Tibetan constructs of hospitality. In these ways, yak butter tea is not only a daily drink in Tibetan society, but also a material item imbued with Tibetan cultural meaning.

#### **5.4 Globalisation**

All of my participants noted how yak butter tea had changed during their lifetimes. Two primary factors impacted those changes: globalisation and industrialisation. From a cultural perspective, Dr. Lundrup considered that yak butter tea made with a blender or instant mix had a negative impact upon contemporary Tibetan culture. As he explained:

*The globalisation itself is positive if we only pay attention to the convenience that globalisation brings to our lives. But if we look at the meaning behind the yak butter tea production, it is negative. In the traditional way, Tibetans use a slender wooden tea barrel to make handmade yak butter tea. But nowadays, we drink yak butter tea that is made from blending machine at most times. Especially for the new generation, they are less likely to be exposed to the traditional yak butter tea production, and they may gradually take the traditional Tibetan tea culture for granted.*

For Basang, my yak butter tea supplier, globalisation was perceived negatively. He commented:

*The disadvantage is that ... the Tibetan tea culture that is expressed through the use of a blender may be relatively simple compared to the traditional way of making yak butter tea. The traditional production method can express a very rich Tibetan tea culture, but the modern production method abandoned a lot of traditional procedures. So, the degree of expression the Tibetan tea culture has been greatly reduced.*

Assoc. Prof. Acuo added:

*In the process of globalisation, one of the biggest effects on yak butter tea is its production. The appearance of the yak butter tea blender will slowly eliminate the traditional tea barrel. As the use of tea barrel fade[s] away, many cultures that are associated with the tea barrel may also disappear.*

Compounding their concern for the ‘convenience’ aspects of blender or instant tea mixes, Assoc. Prof. Acuo recognised that traditional yak butter tea production was a key part of a wider Tibetan traditional handicraft culture. He commented:

*The tea barrel is not just a tool for yak butter tea, but it also carries Tibetan traditional handicraft culture.*

He clarified:

*The yak butter tea barrels are handmade. [Therefore] the absence of the yak butter tea barrel from our life may lead to the demise of traditional [Tibetan] craftsmanship.*

Dr. Lundrup linked the Tibetan tea poem *Jia Qu* to traditional Tibetan handicraft culture.

As he explained:

*Jia Qu [Tibetan tea poem] not only praised the tea but also the tea barrel. It describes how to choose the best wood and craftsman for making the best tea barrel.*

Consequently, the handmade tea barrel and the poem hold important cultural values. The rise of the convenience form of yak butter tea is, according to my participants, not only eroding those values but also endangering Tibetan handicraft culture. These fears may ultimately indicate that, as Tibetan culture becomes more convenience-oriented, the handicraft and cultural values currently imbued within yak butter tea production and consumption may gradually fade from Tibetan’s daily life. Compounding that were perceptions of taste differences between yak butter tea made the traditional way and its convenience blender or powered forms.

Dr. Lundrup commented that:

*In the sense of [Tibetan] culture, the yak butter tea made with the best tea barrel is of course different from the yak butter tea that made by the blending machine.*

Lamu recalled and compared her own experiences to those of a younger age:

*When I was a child, my grandmother taught us how to make yak butter tea with a tea barrel. But now, the way the younger generation in my family is only familiar with the yak butter tea blender. The yak butter tea that I drank in the past not only has the taste*

*of my grandma, but also the love from my grandma. Although the yak butter tea made by the blending machine costs less time, the feeling is no longer the same.*

Consequently, the perception of the taste difference between production methods has clearly impacted my participants' experiences of the tea. Those experiences compound the ongoing and potent meaning of the tea, adding to already expressed concerns for the loss of cultural values and traditional handicraft.

However, the impact of globalisation was not always perceived by my participants as harmful. Reflecting on globalisation's positives, Dr. Lundrup noted:

*The yak butter tea blender and instant yak butter tea are actually the product of globalisation and industrialisation.*

Reflecting on industrialisation, he noted how, in his experience, machinery had impacted the tea's production, particularly in its large-scale offering. As Dr. Lundrup related:

*Especially in religious gatherings, a large amount of yak butter tea needs to be prepared for the Tibetan monks, so the washing machine, which guarantees a large amount of yak butter tea while taking less time, is often used to make yak butter tea.*

In that way, globalisation and industrialisation have facilitated the making of yak butter tea in larger amounts, and in quicker time, than traditional methods might provide.

My yak butter tea supplier, Basang, discussed how global influences, particularly commercial imperatives, impacted yak butter tea. He noted:

*Nowadays, yak butter tea has changed from a necessity of a diet to an economic product in the modern market. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the modern way of making yak butter tea. Globalisation, to a degree, is very helpful to the development of my [yak butter tea] business.*

He continued, this time emphasising how convenience forms of yak butter tea saved his labour costs:

*Using a blender to make yak butter tea saved a lot of money for me. Because the yak butter tea blender only takes few minutes to make [the tea], in that case, I can hire less people to work in my [yak butter] tea house. I can make more money by using the yak butter tea blender.*

Here, Basang raised some interesting points that reflect his experiences and the commercial realities of most businesses. His position contrasted with Lamu's perspective. Unlike my yak butter tea supplier, Lamu held fast to her belief in traditional yak butter tea, and her firm resistance to globalising forces.

Mediating those extremes, Basang noted:

*I don't think globalisation has a negative impact on our [Tibetan] culture. On the contrary, whether it is from the tea culture or from the perspective of the cultural product, globalisation plays a role in promoting Tibetan culture.*

Furthermore, Basang used coffee as an example to explain why globalisation could be a positive cultural influence. As he noted in reference to coffee:

*I used to be very strange to drink coffee when I was a child. But because of globalisation, the habit of drinking coffee in Western society was slowly introduced to China. Then we learned about the western coffee culture. Now, drinking coffee is also very popular in Shangri-La. For me, this is the same for Tibetan yak butter tea. I think the impact of globalisation is a good bridge to bring our [Tibetan] culture to the world.*

My participants were divided on the impact that globalisation had on traditional yak butter tea. Some perceived global influences to be positive, others perceived them to be negative. Either way, what is in the balance is the question of how convenience yak butter tea will convey the traditional meanings that have been a seminal part of its traditional existence.

## **5.5 Summary**

To conclude my findings, according to my four Tibetan participants yak butter is a Tibetan necessity. The tea holds a special place in Tibetan socio-culture as a metaphor for identity, religious practice, including weddings and funerals, and as a traditional production methodology. Additionally, three of my four participants held strong associations between the tea and Shangri-La and being Tibetan, even though they acknowledged that other ethnicities enjoyed the tea. Those perspectives compound the tea's importance and realise that, as actant materiality, yak butter tea holds wider socio-

cultural associations than just Tibetan culture. However, yak butter tea, for my participants, reflected the socio-cultural importance and values within systems of belief, including Buddhism, marriage ceremonies and funerals.

In these ways, yak butter tea expressed Tibetan hospitality. However traditional yak butter tea was perceived to be under threat. While my four participants both embraced and shunned the impact of globalisation on the traditional elements of the tea, they also realised that with globalisation came convenience. It is the nexus of tradition and convenience that requires future research.

## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter concludes my research dissertation. Here, I present my discussion sections where I compare and contrast my participants' perceptions of yak butter tea with existing literature and knowledge. However, I begin this discussion by briefly revisiting my research questions, their theoretical implications and practical implications. Then, I begin my discussion of findings within the following themes that emerged from my findings: (1) basic themes: necessity/irreplaceability and climate; (2) cultural expression: events, rituals, hospitality and poem; and (3) globalisation. In concluding my work, I outline my dissertation's contribution to research and identify not only the limitations of my work, but also my suggestions for future research on Tibetan yak butter tea.

### **6.1 My Research Revisited**

The purpose of my research was to explore the symbolic and socio-cultural meanings of yak butter tea within Tibetan society, particularly in Shangri-La, China. To achieve this aim, I composed the following research questions:

- In what ways is yak butter tea important in Tibetan culture?
- In what ways has globalisation and impacted Tibetan views of yak butter tea?
- How can the experiences of three Tibetans living in Shangri-La inform an understanding of yak butter tea?

In researching to those questions, my participants told me that:

- Yak butter tea is a necessary and irreplaceable part of Tibetan daily life and society.
- Yak butter tea is a metaphor for Tibetan identity and hospitality. That metaphor is actively expressed through weddings, funerals and religious practice, where the tea is an integral component.

- Considering the impact of globalisation and industrialisation on yak butter tea, my participants both embraced and shunned their impact on the traditional rituals and elements of the tea.

These responses, summarised from my Findings Chapter, not only answered my research questions but also provided in-depth insights into yak butter tea consumption, ritual and practice in Shangri-La, China.

## **6.2 Theoretical Implications**

As I became familiar with my research data, I began to realise that my participants shared with me their own ontologies and epistemologies (Lavery, 2003). That knowledge was tied to how they came to know and understand Tibetan identity and the importance of material items and rituals such as yak butter tea. In these ways, yak butter tea came to symbolise an actant materiality (Woodward, 2007) that within its daily use came to aid my participants' understandings of their world. Consequently, I came to realise that ontology and epistemology (Lavery, 2003) were realised for participants in vernacular activities that included yak butter tea. That suggests that materiality (Woodward, 2007) and rituals, such as yak butter tea, help people like my participants to make sense of the world around them. In that way, my conflated realisations of ontology, epistemology (Lavery, 2003) and materiality (Woodward, 2007) have highlighted how 'things' like yak butter tea are important agents within the symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934) of everyday life, through interaction and the social construction of my participants' realities (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

## **6.3 Practical Implications**

The practical implications of my research not only reflect concepts of knowledge about how identity and materiality are linked through ritual and consumption, but also provide

insights into the changing lifestyle of contemporary Tibetan people. Many of the practical implications of my research reflect the impact of globalisation and industrialisation on my participants. For example:

- Modern yak butter tea is based on convenience. That convenience might change how Tibetans and others perceive yak butter tea, because convenience has negated the rituals of making yak butter tea.
- Over time, Tibetans may come to realise a loss of identity via their reliance on convenience yak butter tea. That reliance may impact upon their memories and socio-cultural histories associated with traditional yak butter tea.
- Consequently, convenience yak butter tea use may detract significant meanings from Tibetan weddings, funerals and religious activity because, through convenience, the tea's traditional meaning is diminished.
- While convenience yak butter tea may spread yak butter tea consumption, because it is an instant beverage, new consumers of instant yak butter tea may have no knowledge of the tea's history or ritualised meanings.

#### **6.4 Yak Butter Tea and Tibetan Identity**

My participants recognised that yak butter tea has significant symbolic meanings in Tibetan society. For them, yak butter tea was impactful; it was part of their everyday life symbolising Tibetan identity. Identity was often expressed through Tibetan rituals such as making the tea. In these ways, yak butter tea symbolised an irreplaceable materiality that reflected being Tibetan. On that basis, my participants generally agreed that it was the use of yak butter tea within rituals that made Tibetans Tibetan. However, compounding those views were globalising forces that had both negative and positive impacts.

In terms of the relevant literature, my participants' acknowledgement that yak butter tea was a reflection of their identity was expanded within concepts of culture, heritage, and geographical location (Brillat-Savarin, 1825/1994; Kehoe, 2015; H. Liu & Lin, 2009; Lu, 2013; M. Xu et al., 2015; Yuan, 2014). Yet that thinking was not shared by all of my participants because they noted that the tea was consumed by many ethnic groups, not just those identifying as Tibetan. That lack of agreement not only notes how my participants see themselves but also how they see others. Those perceptions, on a wider level, show how my participants have constructed their world through knowing and interaction. This emphasises how Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social construction of reality thesis and Mead's (1934) and Blumer (1969) symbolic interactionism are active parts of everyday life.

My participants agreed that globalisation had negatively impacted yak butter tea consumption and production in Shangri-La. Within that realisation, they also understood that identity and traditional Tibetan culture were also impacted. However, and in accord with Z. Y. Liu (2004), my participants realised that through globalisation came convenience and labour-saving technologies. Those technologies reduced the time it took to make the tea, especially when compared to traditional methods. Yet those technologies were a double-edged sword. While providing convenience, they also led to the gradual decline of traditional production methods of yak butter tea. With that decline came the reduction in the importance of traditions like the tea poem (Acuo, 2017; Cuoji, 2004). Over time, should the quest for convenience continue, the tea poem as an oral tradition may become endangered. Similarly, the quest for convenience has sidelined the traditional tools used in yak butter tea production. That sidelining contrasts Hao and Li's (2014) observation that the "tea utensil can be said to be the most important food utensil in the daily life of Tibetans" (p. 95). Reinforcing how materiality and ritual behaviours, like the poem, are endangered, Jiang et al. (2013) proposed, in their study of Tibetan

student perceptions of yak butter tea, that only a small number of them were familiar with the tea, its poem and rituals.

A further way in which globalisation impacts upon perceptions of yak butter tea is its influence on food memory. My participants, particularly Lumu, held fond memories of how the tea reminded them of past people and places. For Lumu, the tea reminded her of her grandmother. These perceptions link the tea with Yuan's (2014) notion about the relationship between the tastes of foods and beverages and memory. Yuan (2014) suggested the taste generated personal memory recall and emotions. My research reveals that the link between the tea, tradition, ritual and actancy is in decline. That decline is a consequence of how globalisation has, through the quest for convenience, changed traditional behaviours and ways of thinking and, within identity, also changed ways of being and becoming. Yet my yak butter tea merchant had a different opinion. He believed that globalisation promoted Tibetan culture in a broad way. To him, the influences of industrialisation and globalisation, enhanced by the quest for consumer convenience, provided another business opportunity. To exemplify that, D. Yang (2016) who, mirroring the impact of globalisation, noted that within the process of globalisation, cultures and ethnic groups experience current and ongoing change. Emphasising that globalisation within Tibet was a positive change, D. Yang (2016) stated that "globalization is a process for Tibetan traditional culture to promote the continuous integration and innovation of national culture" (p. 26).

#### **6.4.1 Necessity/Irreplaceability and Climate**

Aware of the harsh climatic conditions in Tibet, it was not that surprising that my participants' perceived yak butter tea as both a necessity and an irreplaceable item consequent to climate and history. My participants associated the history of the tea with the Tea Horse Road, a subject discussed in detail in my literature review (Fuchs, 2008;

Jenkins, 2010; Qi, 2004). For my participants, yak butter tea helped to keep them warm and, through its calorific content, improve the body's strength. My participants' experiences in those domains were supported by literature. Jenkins (2010), Norbu and Riba (2015) and Pan and Wang (2016) all acknowledged that yak butter tea provided not only a warming effect but that it also improved bodily health in cold weather, particularly in low-oxygen level areas. However, Tan et al.'s (2018) research revealed that the long-term consumption of yak butter tea can be harmful to health. Tan et al. (2018) suggested that Tibetans who drink five cups or more of yak butter tea every day have a higher incidence of hypertension compared to those not consuming the tea.

#### **6.4.2 Tea, Tibetan Rituals and Cultural Expressions**

Extending my findings and facilitating my discussion here was my realisation that yak butter tea consumption and Tibetan identity were not only interconnected but reflected and incorporated rituals and cultural expressions. Yak butter tea, Tibetan identity and cultural expression, particularly in in Shangri-La, were reinforced and embodied with weddings, funerals, religious activity, and hospitality. My participants noted the importance of yak butter tea use within wedding ceremonies and the reciting of the tea poem (*jiaqu*) during wedding ceremonies. Their acknowledgements in that regard supported the research of Cuoji (2004), Su and Ciren (2018), and Zhao and Yu (2012). Similarly, within funerals, my participants realised yak butter tea's importance in showing their respect to the dead and in wishing for a better life, not only for the dead but also for themselves. In that way, yak butter tea was used as a material item expressing respect. Again, those notions were consistent with the literature (Que, 2004; Quzhen, 2012; Q. Yang, 2016; Yanqian, 2005; Zhao, 2013).

Consequently, the participants' realisations of yak butter tea not only reflected identity, ritual and cultural experience, geographic location and climate, but also were also integral

to wider aspects of being Tibetan. A key theme within that amalgam was hospitality and being hospitable. For me, considering that my domain of study is gastronomy, came the link between constructs of being and becoming, expressed in ritualised and cultural behaviours, and manifestations of gastronomy. Considering Lashley and Morrison's (2000) three domains of hospitality, I came to realise that my participants and their narratives reflected each domain and their overlapping nature. I came to understand, as my participants informed me, that yak butter tea in all of those rituals and cultural events was a form of hospitality for all of my participants. Supporting that, Mayhew and Kohn (2005) noted that, in drinking yak butter tea, "your cup will be refilled every time you take even the smallest sip, as a mark of the host's respect" (p. 75). That care, for my participants, revealed their own embodied hospitality, exemplified through sharing tea. As my literature review noted, yak butter tea is a social tool used by Tibetans (Yanqian, 2005; C. Z. Zhang, 2014; Zhao & Yu, 2012) as a display of commensal hospitality (Sobal & Nelson, 2003). That sharing and interaction reiterate how my participants have embodied symbolic interactionism within their everyday lives. Those interactions serve to remind us that, as Wulf et al. (2010) noted, yak butter tea is integral to Tibetan life, particularly within ceremonies, etiquette, celebrations, religious ceremonies and practices, from births, marriages and deaths to the ordinary and everyday consumption of the tea. As Wulf et al. (2010) remarked, the tea is a material item through which people identify themselves, "by a collectively shared symbolic knowledge, but to an even greater degree by cultural action, in which they stage and perform such knowledge in rituals in which the particular social system is expressed, projected and reproduced" (p. 6).

## **6.5 Conclusion and Contribution**

Food culture reflects the differences in a particular culture and the characteristics of an identity. Traditional yak butter tea and its rituals differentiate Tibetans drinking the tea,

and the tea itself, from other cultures. Consequently, Tibetan yak butter tea is not just a drink, it is an actant materiality reflecting much more than just a hot beverage. As a symbol of Tibetan culture, yak butter tea has undergone change. Convenience has created a mind-set change for many Tibetans because their traditional drink can be made from a sachet, in minutes. Convenience has circumvented the tea traditional production method and, in doing so, reduced its efficacy as a symbol of traditional Tibetan identity. Consequently, in researching yak butter tea, I have come to realise that the tea and its traditional meanings may become endangered as the quest for convenience overrides tradition. While change is inevitable in the modern world, yak butter tea, as my participants pointed out, is an irreplaceable part of Tibetan identity. Whether that irreplaceability is indeed replaced by a convenience sachet, only time will tell. However, in the interim, it is important that the traditions of yak butter tea are recorded. It is my hope that I have made a significant contribution to that goal.

## **6.6 Research Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

I draw my readers attention to the limits of my research and suggestions which arise from them, as follows:

- Due to time constraints, my sample size was small. A wider perspective may be obtained with more participants. Further research with a larger participant group may be a goal for future research.
- While I engaged a purposeful sample, a wider purposeful sample may further illuminate my topic. Again, this may be an opportunity for future research.
- Yak butter tea is a complex materiality. My own research could have explored its general context and specific attributes and symbols (like the poem) in greater depth. However, the combination of time constraints and word limits have restricted this endeavour. Again, those limitations generate opportunities for

others to specifically research one or two key areas in yak butter tea. By doing so, researchers could obtain a greater depth of knowledge.

- My participants held different opinions on convenience yak butter tea. Again because of the time constraints and word limitations, my research could not obtain further information. However, those limitations could point to an opportunity for future research. Convenience yak butter tea could be the nexus of tradition and convenience that requires future research. It is important to know more about how convenience yak butter tea will convey the traditional meanings that have been a seminal part of its traditional existence.

### **6.7 Closing Comments**

In concluding my research, I reflect on how I have come to think in broader and more considered ways, not only about how research, knowledge and theory ‘work’, but more particularly how those elements are part of our everyday lives. When I began my work, I was puzzled about how theoretical concepts like the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966), symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), materiality (Woodward, 2007) and identity ‘worked’ in everyday life. Having considered my research and how theory informs life, I walk away from my dissertation a ‘better’ person. That better person is thoughtful, insightful and enquiring. Learning about something from my own cultural background has opened new doors of knowledge for me. Thank you for taking the time to read and consider my research!

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet



## Appendix: Participant Information Sheet

**Date Information Sheet Produced:**  
19/11/2018

**Project Title**  
Exploring the Socio-cultural and Symbolic Meanings of Yak Butter Tea in Tibet.

**An Invitation:**  
Tashi Delek, my name is Bianmu Sina, and I am a postgraduate student from Auckland University of Technology (AUT) in New Zealand. As a researcher I have engaged in secondary research within the papers, I have completed during my studies at AUT. I would like to invite you to take part in my research study about exploring the socio-cultural and symbolic meanings of yak butter tea in Tibet. This research will enable me to gain my desired qualification, a MA in Gastronomy. It would be a pleasure for me if you could participate my research, but before you whether or not you would like to tell me your views, it is for you to understand why I am doing this research. Please take some time to the read this information sheet carefully and take your time to consider whether you would like to participate this research or not.

**What is the purpose of this research?**  
Yak butter tea is a daily drink for many Tibetans especially those living in Southwest China. Like other foods, yak butter tea holds symbolic meanings. The purpose of this research is to explore the socio-cultural meaning of yak butter tea within Tibetan socio-culture.  
  
However, in more recent times globalisation and industrialisation have impacted the meaning and making rituals associated with yak butter tea. Consequently, this research is timely because it will explore the traditional constructs of the tea, then enquire how those traditions and production methods have changed in the face of globalisation and industrialisation.  
  
In addition, the purpose of this research is to help me gain my desired qualification, a MA in Gastronomy. Moreover, the findings of this research may be used for publication.

**How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?**  
Your information and contact details are collected from the internet and my family contacts in Shangri-La. The participant selection criteria as followed:

1. This research includes three participants
2. That all three participants are familiar with Tibetan yak butter tea either within its cultural significance, (or) its consumptive rituals and meanings, or, how forces of globalisation and industrialisation have impacted the tea in contemporary Tibetan socio-culture.
3. That the academic expert hold more than 10 years academic standing.

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4. That the consumer of the tea hold a long term association with the tea (20 years or longer).
5. That the tea supplier has been in business for 20 years or longer
6. Non-Tibetans and those with no knowledge of yak butter tea will be exclude from this study

**How do I agree to participate in this research?**

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You will be asked to sign a Consent Form approved by AUTECH if you agree to participate my research. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

**What will happen in this research?**

If you agree to take part in this research, I will contact you to arrange a time, date and location of your convenience for the interview. Participating in this research will include a voluntary in-depth face-to-face interview of which will be 30-60 minutes in duration. Before the interview, you will have time to read and sign a Consent Form. During interview, you will be asked six indicative questions related to yak butter tea. With your permission, I may follow-up the interview with additional questions.

**What are the discomforts and risks, and how will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

I anticipate little discomfort, for either participant or researcher, because as researcher I am familiar with Tibetan culture. Moreover, there are no anticipated participants risk in this research. I will do my best to generate a supportive and positive participant research environment to reduce participant's discomfort.

**What are the benefits?**

Your benefits of this research include an opportunity to rethink the importance of yak butter tea in your daily life and Tibetan society. Moreover, you may also feel interested to share your thoughts, since such thought and reflection may contribute to new understandings of yak butter teas place in Tibetan socio-culture.

This research will enable me to gain my desired qualification, a MA in Gastronomy. Further, it will extend my professional and personal self through research engagement.

For the wider Tibetan community, my research could provide a source of valuable information, gleaned from experts about the meanings of yak butter tea in Tibetan socio-culture. My research may also help Tibetans understand and disseminate information on traditional Tibetan yak butter tea culture.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

In my research, you will have the choice to be identifiable or not. Identification of your information will only occur in my research by your consent.

**What are the costs of participating in this research?**

You will participate this research around 30 to 60 minutes.

**What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

You will be given one to two week to decide if you will participate. During that time, you may contact me at any stage with questions about the research that may influence your participation in it, or not.

**Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

Yes, you will receive feedback from researcher by e-mail.

**What do I do if I have concerns about this research?**

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Lindsay Neill, *lindsay.neill@aut.ac.nz* , +64 9 921 9999 ext 8442.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, *ethics@aut.ac.nz* , +64 921 9999 ext 6038.

**Whom do I contact for further information about this research?**

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

**Researcher Contact Details:**

Name: Bianmu Sina

E-mail Address: 451225618@qq.com

University Location: Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

**Project Supervisor Contact Details:**

Name: Lindsay Neill

E-mail Address: *Lindsay.neill@aut.ac.nz*

University Location: Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *type the date final ethics approval was granted*, AUTEK Reference number *type the reference number*.

## Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet (Chinese Version)

AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

### 附录: 参与者信息表

制表日期:

19/11/2018

研究题目:

探究西藏牦牛奶茶的社会文化和象征意义

邀请函:

扎西德勒, 我的名字叫斯娜边姆, 我是新西兰奥克兰理工大学 (AUT) 的研究生。作为一名研究员, 我在 AUT 期间完成了相关课程及论文。我希望能邀请您参与我的研究课题: 探究西藏牦牛奶茶的社会文化和象征意义。这项研究将会帮助我获得我所需的学位, 食品学硕士学位。如果您可以参加我的研究, 这将会是我的荣幸。但在您做出决定之前, 希望您能了解这项研究的目地及内容。请您仔细阅读本信息表, 并考虑您是否愿意参与此研究。

研究目的:

酥油茶是许多藏人的日常饮品, 尤其是那些生活在中国西南地区的藏人。像其他食物一样, 酥油茶具有象征意义。本研究的目的是探讨酥油茶在西藏社会文化中的社会文化意义。然而现今全球化和工业化已经影响了酥油茶的传统工艺以及相关仪式。因此, 这项研究是及时的, 因为此研究将会酥油茶传统结构, 并探索传统酥油茶如何在全球化和工业化的背景下发生变化。除此之外, 此次研究的目的在于帮助我获得食品学硕士学位, 本研究结果也可能被用来发表学术文章。

我是如何被选择并邀请参与此项研究?

您的信息和联系方式是此研究从互联网和在香格里拉的亲戚处收集而来。参与者选择标准如下:

1. 本次研究包含三个参与者。
2. 所有三个参与者都了解藏族酥油茶的文化意义, 或其相关仪式和意义, 或全球化和工业化的力量如何影响了酥油茶在当代藏族社会文化中的意义。
3. 学术专家拥有超过十年的学术地位。
4. 一个超过 20 年长期消费与饮酥油茶的人。
5. 超过 20 年供应酥油茶的供应商
6. 非藏族人和对于酥油茶文化不熟悉的人将会被排除在此次研究之外。

### **我如何同意参与此次研究？**

您参与此研究是自愿的（这是您的选择），您是否选择参与既不会有利也不会使您不利。如果您同意参加我的研究，您将被要求签署 AUTECH 批准的同意书。您可以随时退出研究。如果您选择退出研究，那么您将可以选择是否有任何可识别属于您的数据被删除或允许继续使用。但是，一旦产生了调查结果，可能无法删除您的数据。

### **此次研究将会如何进行？**

如果您同意参与此项研究，我会与您联系，根据您的意愿安排与采访您时间，日期和地点。参与这项研究将包括一次自愿的深入的面对面访谈，访谈时间为 30-60 分钟。在面试之前，您将有时间阅读并签署同意书。在面试过程中，您将被问到六个与酥油茶有关的指示性问题。经过您的许可，我可能进一步问一些相关问题。

### **有何不适与风险？**

对于参与者或研究人员，我预计会有一些不适，因为作为研究员，我熟悉西藏文化。此外，本研究中没有预期的参与者风险。

### **如何缓解这些不适与风险？**

我将尽我所能，创造一个支持性和积极的参与者研究环境，以减少参与者的不适。

### **有何利益：**

对于参与人员：您将有机会重新思考酥油茶在您日常生活与藏族社会中的重要性。此外，您可能有兴趣分析你的感受。因为这种思考和反思可能有助于在藏族社会文化中建立对酥油茶的新认识。

对于研究人员：此次研究将会帮助我获得食品学硕士学位。此外，此次研究将拓宽我个人的学术知识以及提高个人的学术素养。

对于广大的藏族社区：我的研究可以提供有价值的，从专家处了解到的酥油茶在藏族社会文化中的意义。我的研究也可以帮助藏族人理解并传播传统藏族酥油茶文化。

### **我的隐私将如何得到保障？**

在我的研究中，您可以选择是否可识别您的个人信息。只有在您同意的情况下，才能在我的研究中识别您的信息。

### **参与此次研究的时长？**

你将花费 30-60 分钟参与本次研究。

### **我有多长时间考虑本次邀请？**

您将有一到两周的时间来决定是否参加本次研究。在此期间，您可以在任何阶段与我联系并询问可能影响到您参与此次研究的问题。

### **我会受到有关此研究结果的反馈吗？**

研究人员将会通过邮件的形式给您发送此研究的结果。

如果对此研究持有疑问我该怎么办？

对项目性质的任何担忧应首先询问此次研究的导师，Lindsay Neill, [lindsay.neill@aut.ac.nz](mailto:lindsay.neill@aut.ac.nz), +64 9 921 9999 ext 8442.

关于研究进展的问题请询问 AUTECH 执行秘书，Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), +64 921 9999 ext 6038.

有关此次研究的更多信息我该联系谁？

请保留此信息表和同意书的副本，以备将来参考。您也可以按如下方式联系研究团队：

**研究员联系方式：**

姓名：斯娜边姆

电子邮箱：451225618@qq.com

所属大学：新西兰奥克兰理工大学

**研究员导师联系方式：**

姓名：Lindsay Neill

电子邮箱：[lindsay.neill@aut.ac.nz](mailto:lindsay.neill@aut.ac.nz)

所属大学：新西兰奥克兰理工大学

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on type the date final ethics approval was granted, AUTECH  
Reference number type the reference number.

## Appendix C: Consent Form



**AUT**  
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

### Appendix: Consent Form

*Project title: Exploring the Socio-cultural and Symbolic Meaning of Yak Butter Tea in Tibet*

*Project Supervisor: Lindsay Neill*

*Researcher: Bianmu Sina*

- I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 23/11/2018.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- I agree to take part in this research.
- I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes  No
- I wish to be identified in the research findings (please tick one): Yes  No

Participant's Signature: .....

Participant's Name: .....

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on type the date on which the final approval was granted AUTEK Reference number type the AUTEK reference number*

*Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.*

## Appendix D: Consent Form (Chinese Version)

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TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TAMAKI MAKĀU RAU

### 附录：同意书

研究题目: 探究西藏酥油茶的社会文化和象征意义

导师: **Lindsay Neill**

研究员: **斯娜边姆**

- 我阅读了参与信息表并了解有关此研究项目的信息, 23/11/2018.
- 我有机会向研究人员提问并得到了解答。
- 我理解在采访期间研究人员将会记录笔记, 并且采访也将被录音和转录。
- 我知道参加这项研究是自愿的, 我可以随时退出研究而不会以任何方式处于不利地位。
- 我明白如果我退出研究, 那么我将在可以识别属于我的任何数据被删除或允许继续使用之间做出选择。但是一旦产生了调查结果, 就可能无法删除我的数据。
- 我同意参与此次研究。
- 我希望收到研究结果的总结 (请选择): 是  否
- 我希望在研究结果中被识别 (请选择): 是  否

参与者签名: .....

参与者姓名: .....

参与者联系信息 (选填):

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

日期: \_\_\_\_\_

*Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on type the date on which the final approval was granted AUTEK Reference number type the AUTEK reference number*

注: 参与者需保留一份同意书的副本。

## Appendix E: Indicative Questions

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TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

### Appendix: Indicative Questions

#### For Academic:

1. In what ways has yak butter tea been considered to be important within Tibetan history?
2. In what ways have you as an academic noticed how yak butter tea has changed in importance in more recent time?
3. In what ways do you think that yak butter tea involves in Tibetan's social and festival activities (e.g. wedding, funeral, religious ceremony), and what are the significances?
4. In what ways do you consider that yak butter tea could indicate and reflect the ethnic identity of Tibetans?
5. In what ways have you as an academic consider that traditional yak butter tea has been influenced by the globalization and technological advancement? Do you think it is a positive or negative impact?
6. As a Tibetan scholar, how do you view the acceptance, inheritance and innovation of Tibetan yak butter tea culture in today's Tibetan communities?

#### For yak butter tea supplier:

1. To what extent you as a yak butter tea supplier believe that yak butter tea as a cultural product in Tibetan society and its tea culture help you developing your tea business?
2. In what ways you noticed that new technology could help your tea business and when you made change from traditional to modern technique to sell yak butter tea?
3. As a tea supplier, how do you view the impact of globalization and industrialization on traditional yak butter tea production?
4. To what extent that you believe that technological development on yak butter tea production will change the socio-cultural, meaning, and ritual of yak butter tea in contemporary Tibetan society?

5. As a tea supplier, assuming the sales of yak butter tea (traditional way and modern way) are the same, you prefer to use traditional technique or modern technique to sell yak butter tea? Why?
6. If the cultural significance of butter tea is impacted and changed by modern technology, how would you, as a tea supplier, will promote and pass on the butter tea culture via your business?

**For long term yak butter tea consumer:**

1. In what ways that yak butter tea gets involved in your daily and family life?
2. How you perceive the importance of yak butter tea in Tibetan society and culture?
3. Do you agree yak butter tea symbolizes the Tibetan identity? Why?
4. Have you noticed that production of yak butter tea has changed in recent time, and what is your opinion about this change?
5. Does younger generation in your family familiar with ritual and cultural meaning about yak butter tea?
6. In what ways you think could help inherit and disseminate yak butter tea culture in contemporary Tibetan society?

## Appendix F: Indicative Questions (Chinese Version)

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TE WĀNANGA ARONUI  
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

### 附录：指示性问题

#### 对于专家：

1. 酥油茶在藏族历史的重要意义是什么？
2. 作为一名藏族学者，您以何种方式注意到现今酥油茶的重要意义的转变？
3. 您认为酥油茶如何参与了藏族人的社交和节日活动（例如婚礼，葬礼，宗教仪式），以及其有何重要意义？
4. 您如何看待酥油茶反映并指示了藏族人的民族特征以及民族身份？
5. 作为一名学者，从哪些方面您认为传统的酥油茶受到了全球化和科技进步的影响？您认为这是积极的还是消极的影响？
6. 作为一名藏学学者，您如何看待现今藏族群体对西藏茶文化接受、传承与创新？

#### 对于酥油茶供应商：

1. 作为酥油茶供应商，您认为酥油茶作为西藏社会的文化产品及其茶文化在多大程度上帮助您发展茶叶业务？
2. 您从何种方式了解到新科技可以帮助您的生意？什么时候您开始转变传统制茶方式至现代制茶方式？
3. 作为酥油茶供应商，您如何看待全球化和工业化对传统酥油茶的影响？
4. 您认为酥油茶生产的技术发展将在何种程度上改变了当代西藏社会中牦牛奶茶的社会文化，意义和仪式？
5. 作为酥油茶供应商，假设酥油茶的销售额（传统方式和现代方式）相同，您更喜欢采用传统工艺还是现代工艺来销售酥油茶吗？为什么？
6. 如果酥油茶的文化意义受到现代技术的影响和改变，作为酥油茶供应商，您将如何通过您的业务推广和传递酥油茶文化？

对于长期饮酥油茶者：

1. 酥油茶以何种方式参与到您日常和家庭生活中？
2. 您如何看待酥油茶对于藏族社会以及文化的重要性？
3. 您同意酥油茶象征了藏族人的身份这一说法吗？为什么？
4. 您是否注意到酥油茶的制作方式已发生转变？您如何看待这个转变？
5. 您家中的年轻一代是否了解和熟悉关于酥油茶的仪式和文化意义？
6. 您认为以何种方式可以帮助酥油茶文化在现今藏族社会中传承和传播？

## Appendix G: Selection of Methodology

Methods	Characteristics	Suitability	Reason
Case Study	Case study aims to address specific issue, requires a large amount of detailed data and usually take a relative long time to process (Gray, 2018).	No	Due to the time limitations, case study is not a good method for me.
Grounded Theory	Grounded theory is a qualitative research method. It aims to establish theory based on empirical data (Sullivan-Bolyai, Bova, & Harper, 2005).	No	My research is not about generating new theory.
Ethnography	Ethnography aims understand particular groups and their culture by observing their daily life or specific behaviour (Sullivan-Bolyai et al., 2005).	No	It seems to be a suitable method for my research; however, my research aims to get primary data, and obtaining it through observation only might not help me to get Tibetans' perceptions of yak butter tea.
Content Analysis	Content analysis uses secondary data as research objects, to analyse a certain question (Gray, 2018).	No	My research aims to collect primary data; thus, it is not a suitable method.
Qualitative Description	The researcher aims to understand a phenomenon, a process, or the worldviews of the people involved (Sandelowski, 2000).	Yes	This is best suited to my research, because my research aims to understand Tibetans' worldview that related to yak butter tea.

### References

- Gray, D. E. (2018). *Doing research in the real world* (4th ed.). London, UK: Sage.
- Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing & Health*, 23(4), 334-340. doi: 10.1002/1098-240X(200008)23:4<334::AID-NUR9>3.0.CO;2-G
- Sullivan-Bolyai, S., Bova, C., & Harper, D. (2005). Developing and refining interventions in persons with health disparities: The use of qualitative description. *Nursing Outlook*, 53(3), 127-133. doi: 10.1016/j.outlook.2005.03.005

## Appendix H: Ethics Approval



**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)**

Auckland University of Technology  
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ  
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316  
E: [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)  
[www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics](http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics)

27 November 2018

Lindsay Neill  
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Lindsay

Ethics Application:18/440 **Exploring the socio-cultural and symbolic meanings of yak butter tea in Tibet**

I wish to formally advise you that a subcommittee of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) has approved your ethics application.

This approval is for three years, expiring 26 November 2021.

**Non-Standard Conditions of Approval**

1. On the Information Sheet include advice that the interviews will be audiotaped, and transcribed. Explain whether or not transcripts will be available for the interviewee to check.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

**Standard Conditions of Approval**

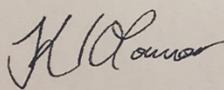
1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. If the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all locality legal and ethical obligations and requirements. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries please contact [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz)

Yours sincerely,



Kate O'Connor  
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