

Pastoralists without Livestock: Perceptions of Work and Livelihood Strategies in New Settlements on the Amdo-Qinghai Tibetan Plateau

Elisa Cencetti

1. Introduction

Starting in 2000, the campaign of the “Great Development of the West” (Tibetan: *nub rgyud gsar spel chen mo*; Chinese: *xibu da kaifa*) aiming at the socioeconomic development of the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) western provinces, promoted a set of new policies and programs for reducing economic and social disparities between eastern and western provinces of the country. This campaign focuses on the improvement of industrial and infrastructural development as well as tourism and services implementation in provinces inhabited by mostly non-Han people (Goodman 2004). In concomitance and following this campaign, the Qinghai province government set up the Three Rivers’ Sources Nature Reserve (Tibetan: *gTsang gsum mgo khungs*; Chinese: *San jiang yaun*) in 2000 (Foggin 2008), which covers the region where the Yellow River, Yangtze and Mekong have their sources. The environmental protection of the grassland of this area is officially the main cause for its implementation. The grassland in this area of the Tibetan Plateau has been evaluated by Chinese governmental experts as “degraded”,¹ thus in need of protection (Dan 2002; Han and al 2008; Harris 2010; Tu and al 2008). However, at the beginning of the 2000s, another environmental protection program was implemented concerning all the grassland regions of China, i.e., the “converting pastures to grasslands” (Tibetan: *’brog ’dor rtswa ’debs*; Chinese: *tuimu huancao*) (Yeh 2005; Richard et al 2006). According to this program, a government defined surface of pastoral regions of the country has to be reconverted to grassland and should no longer be used for herding.

However, the creation of the Nature Reserve was also linked to economic aims, in particular the development of tourism, infrastructure and services in a region until recently remained mainly rural and economically based on the primary sector. According to these environmental protection and economic development plans, the Qinghai authorities implemented the common program to relocate the Tibetan pastoralists in new settlements.

Pastoralists can be relocated according to “ecological migrations” (Tibetan: *skye khams rkyen gyis yul mi gnas spo ba*, Chinese: *shengtai yimin*) or several poverty alleviation programs. However, the result is identical: all these programs foresee the relocation of the Tibetan pastoralists into new settlements. These settlements are

¹ In the Tibetan region called in Tibetan language Amdo and mostly located in the province of Qinghai, Tibetan people commonly used two words for describing grassland environmental problems. The word *brlag* is used with the meaning of “degradation” and “something which is corrupted”. The Tibetan pastoralists also use the word *btsog*, which commonly means “dirty”, with the meaning of “polluted/degraded”. According to my interlocutors, the word “pollution” did not exist until recently. It was introduced from the Chinese term of *wuran* when the PRC’s authorities started to worry about environmental protection on the Tibetan Plateau.

completely new urban spaces in the grassland and they are usually located in the proximity of previous townships or along the main roads. They are composed of identical, aligned and numbered houses.

At the beginning of the relocation program, the settlements were simply composed of a bunch of houses. However, during the last five years, kindergartens, clinics, government offices, shops and common spaces, like public squares, have also been built. Due to the lack of surrounding pastoral area, the pastoralists usually sold all or a part of their livestock, as soon as they moved in. Since the herding practices have been banned on their previous grassland, the pastoralists have no choice, but to sell their livestock.

Official discourses promote these settlements by claiming that besides the protection of the natural environment, they are also an efficient method for improving the living conditions of Tibetan pastoralists.

In order to protect the “degraded” grasslands, the government authorities argue that the pressure of livestock and human beings in these areas has to be reduced or eliminated. It is currently also in the common discourse of the pastoralists, relocated or not, that the grass does not grow as in the past and that for feeding a sheep or a yak they currently need much more surface of grassland than before. The romantic image of the grassland where the grass grew as high as it touched the belly of a horse is cited as an example of this lucky past time. If at the beginning of my ethnographic fieldwork in 2009 the pastoralists usually imputed the cause of grassland problems to the disastrous initiative to farm the grassland during the 1960/1970s, nowadays they have integrated the official discourse claiming that the grassland problems are linked to climate change and pollution. Since they cannot change these two problems, the pastoralists have to resign to changing their work and quitting pastoralism.

Pastoralists’ relocation is not a new practice in the region. During the 1950/1960s in fact Tibetan pastoralists in some areas of Qinghai province were temporarily relocated close to urban areas in order to maintain social order. However, the current relocation program is motivated by the reduction of human beings and the pressure of livestock on the grasslands. It is thus completely in line with the environmental protection plans linked to the establishment of Nature Reserve and the *tuimu huancao* program. Moreover, the new settlements softly serve the political aim of social stability promoted under the harmonious society (Tibetan: *‘cham mthun spyi tshogs*; Chinese: *hexie shehui*) slogan since 2005, through territorial control and population surveillance (Brox & Bellér-Hann 2014).

This article focuses on two particular aspects of the new settlements and the relocation of Tibetan pastoralists, both linked to current economic transformations. Since 2009, I have regularly conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Hainan (Tibetan: *mTsho lo*) located in Qinghai province in the Tibetan region of Amdo.² I have conducted ethnographic fieldwork in particular in one new settlement of this prefecture, where I have lived for several months in 2009 and which I visit each time that I go back in the region for fieldwork. The data analysed in this article concern exclusively of this region.

² The Tibetan area is composed by three regions: Amdo (*a mdo*), Ü-tsang (*dbus gtsang*) and Kham (*kham*s). Nowadays, Amdo’s territories are split between the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan.

Once the pastoralists moved in the new settlements, they face many lifestyle changes, both social and work-related. What practically happens when the pastoralists move into the new settlements, leaving their livestock and grassland and looking for new economic resources? How do they manage to provide for their families' needs? Which kinds of new employment are available for the inhabitants of the new settlements? These questions are directly connected to another issue: the perception of self as "working". The analysis of this aspect and the social issues linked with it constitutes the core of this article.

Before proceeding with this study, it is important to clarify two terms, which are usually applied to the topic of the new settlements and the relocation of pastoralists in Tibetan areas, namely "sedentarization" and "nomads".

Tibetan pastoralists, despite of the common discourse, especially in Western countries, are not "sedentarized" in these new settlements. "Sedentarization" actually occurred long before the new settlements program. Following the implementation of the Household Responsibility System (HRS) in the 1980s and especially with the *sipeitao* (four allocations) program in 1990s (Yeh 2005), the grassland of Qinghai province was divided between the pastoralists' households. During the 1990s, each household had to fence its lands and, according to the *sipeitao* program, they built on it a house and a shelter in order to receive state subsidies. Since then, they have stayed all year round on the same pastures.

Concerning the term "nomad," this is usually used to translate the Tibetan word '*brog pa*. However, its real meaning is not "nomad," but instead "pastoralist". Even if the pastoral activities of Tibetan pastoralists could previously be defined as nomadic husbandry, this has not been the case since at least the end of the 1980s for the reasons already stated. Consequently, I use the term "pastoralist" and, in the last part of the article, I show the relevance of using this literal translation, rather than the more usual term "nomad".

2. Survival Strategies in the New Settlements

The experience of a pastoralists' household relocated in a new settlement close to the county-town of the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Hainan (*mTsho lho*), will illustrate some of the survival strategies which the pastoralists undertake once relocated. Tserang³ (*Tshe ring*) is a pastoralist born in 1964, who lived until 2007 in one of the counties of Hainan Prefecture. After having married Lhamo Tso (*Lha mo mtsho*) and moved into his wife's family, Tserang entered into both a new family and *tsho ba*.⁴ For a few years, he has been the only male of his new family. His older sister-in-law (born in 1959) never got married, and the younger sister-in-law (born in 1990), only recently had an uxori-local wedding with a young pastoralist. Their family could thus count a

³ I have changed the names of the people and places referred to in order to protect the anonymity of the people who accepted to talk with me. Their names do not correspond to their real names nor do the name of the places, when they are mentioned. I have thus preferred to spell people's names as they are pronounced in Amdo-Tibetan dialect. The first time that a name appears I include the Wylie transliteration in brackets.

⁴ The *tsho ba* is a sociopolitical organization of the Tibetan pastoralists (Clarke 1989). It does not correspond to the clan neither to the tribe. It is not the aim of this article to discuss the definition of this Tibetan term in western languages, thus I maintain here the Tibetan name of this organization.

new male member. Tserang and Lhamo Tso had two children: two girls born in 1994 and 1997. They both attend the school and one is currently at the last year of high school in the town of Rebgong (Chinese: *Tongren*) (Qinghai). The other is attending the middle school in the county-town close to the new settlement where her parents currently live. However, Lhamo Tso's younger sister, who is only a few years older than Tserang and Lhamo Tso's oldest child, never went to school. During their childhood, Tserang and Lhamo Tso did not go to school either.

Tserang family's social class background was that of "poor farmers". They thus belonged to the right social class under the Maoist period and his father became a government official in his hometown, located in a pastoral area of the county. Tserang describes himself when he was young as a bad person, because he spent too much time drinking alcohol and fighting. However, his father taught him tailoring skills and herding practices. When he got married at the age of 22, he was thus able to herd his new family's livestock as well as tailoring.

Tserang describes his family-in-law at the beginning of the 1990s as quite rich because they owned 100 cattle, 500 sheep and several horses. They lived in tents and moved three times per year into three different pastures (winter, summer and intermediate). During the first half of the 1990s, the grassland which they were using with other households was also divided according to the HRS. They thus had to settle on what had previously been their intermediate pastures (Tibetan: *bar sa*) usually exploited at the end of the summer just for a short period of a month before moving in the winter pasture. This land was around 500 *mu* and it was not enough to keep as many animals as they owned before, thus they first sold the horses and bought a motorcycle, then they also sold half of their livestock. When the Nature Reserve was established in this area, Tserang family's grassland was included in this protected territory. The government of the county asked the pastoralists living in the Nature Reserve territory to further reduce the size of their herds. Henceforth, Tserang's family could barely meet their livelihood needs.

In 2007, the county government built a new "ecological migration settlement" close to the county-town. Tserang's family decided to sell a further part of their livestock in order to buy a house in this new settlement. Since the housing was reserved for the pastoralists' households living in the area where Tserang's family lived, the government supplied most of the money needed for buying the house. He and the other pastoralists in his area had only to add a few thousand RMB to become the owners of new houses close to the county-town.

For Tserang's family, the decision to buy a house in the new settlement was a very calculated economic strategy. Since by then they had many problems providing for their livelihood needs in their grassland and Tserang's children were at that time attending the schools close to the county-town, they decided to split the family in two households. Tserang and Lhamo Tso with their children moved into the new settlement's house and the rest of their family remained on the grassland taking care of the livestock. Tserang's mother-in-law, an old woman of around 80 years old, refused to move into the new settlement and kept living on the grassland.

The decision to move Tserang and Lhamo Tso's household and not Lhamo Tso's younger sister's household was linked to the fact that Tserang had more technical skills than his brother-in-law or his sister-in-law. In fact, he knew both husbandry and tailoring, he could read some Tibetan and he could speak the Chinese dialect of Qinghai

province at a basic level. Moreover, he already has some “good” connections in the county-town. There were thus more possibilities for him to find an employment in the urban area around the new settlement than his sister-in-law household. Finally, his children had to go to schools, which were close to the new settlement.

They bought a house in the new settlement for 7000 RMB and moved in. Most of the pastoralists’ households living in this new settlement decided, as Tserang’s family has done, that only some family members should have moved in. They were usually the more skilled family members for whom it would be easier to find employment in the county-town labour market. The second most common pattern among the pastoralists’ households moving into the new settlement was that the families were divided according to age: younger members able to work remained on the grassland, herding livestock, and older members moved into the new settlement with the children going to school. Finally, there was a third pattern: some pastoralists’ households simply moved into the new settlement because their resources on the grassland were no longer sufficient to provide for their livelihood. The living conditions of these pastoralists’ households in the new settlement are the worst because they cannot rely on the grassland and livestock resources anymore. They have to base their livelihood exclusively on state subsidies and temporary and wage-earning employment.

However, the decision of moving into the new settlement has been a calculated risk for these pastoralists’ families. They have decided to undertake it according to economic strategies based on the facilities that the county government promised to them, but which it has only partially provided. In fact, the county government provided subsidies for the loss of livestock and grassland, for heating expenses during the winter season and for children’s education. However, the government also promised to the relocated pastoralists that they would be given some professional training and helped to find new employment. These last promises remained empty words. Apart from being given some training in farming techniques (which is quite useless since the grassland cannot be farmed and, even if it could, the relocated pastoralists do not own any land beside the courtyard of their house), the relocated pastoralists never participated in professional training programs and have to find an employment by themselves. Therefore, they have made calculated economic strategies relying on parameters which, once relocated in the new settlement, were shown to be false. They have relocated into the new settlement on the assumption that the local government would provide them with new income resources other than livestock and grassland, which were in any case no longer enough for their family’s livelihood. They were conscious that moving into the new settlement would mean looking for new kinds of work for which they usually lack the necessary skill. They were also aware of the necessity of knowing Chinese language, which was, among other factors, capital for negotiating a work position in the urban centres.

After that Tserang’s household moved into the new settlement, their principal activity was initially weaving the wool produced by the livestock herded by the other family members remained on the grassland. However, Tserang’s manual and language skills and his relationships (Chinese: *guanxi*) in the county-town eventually allowed him to find regular work as a skilled labour on construction sites close to the new settlement. At that time, not only was the settlement still under construction, but there was also a road being built, connecting the county-town to the provincial capital, Xining, according to the plans of the “Great Development of the West” campaign. The pastoralists of the

new settlement, lacking the technical skills required for other kinds of work, could only find employment as unskilled manual labourers on these construction sites, earning an average of 70 RMB per day (currently the average salary per day in the same county is 100 RMB). Because of his technical skills and connections, Tserang was able to get works paying around 90 RMB per day and also enjoyed better working conditions than unskilled manual labourers. Moreover, thanks to his tailoring skills, he was also able to start new tailoring business in the township.

Even if his household enjoyed considerably better living conditions than the average household in this new settlement, Tserang's family could not reach economic stability. The economic uncertainty of his household was evident in their concern to save every penny and their restless search for resources besides Tserang's temporary jobs.

Tserang is an example of the new proletariat emerging from the new settlements. Despite their efforts and greater possibilities of finding an employment, the richer households of this new settlement were also unable to escape employment insecurity. Therefore, they could not avoid economic dependence on state subsidies and aids, which were provided after relocation for a period of ten years and for the children attending the school.

When Tserang hurt his right hand working on a construction site during the summer 2010, his family livelihood quickly deteriorated because only his wife could henceforth work. Before she became the only working member of the household, Lhamo Tso has been working in many sideline occupations, subsidizing her husband's income, which was the principal household income. She was weaving wool and making repairs and engaging in construction works in their new house. Beside these activities, she has been herding pigs, collecting grass on the pastures around the new settlement for fire and gathering waste for sale to Han Chinese or Hui people coming to the new settlement to buy plastic and metal.

Tserang and Lhamo Tso received state subsidies for the relocation into the new settlement and for the loss of their livestock, even though they still have livestock. They also received state subsidies for sending their two children to school. Moreover, they still obtain almost all of the products that they need for subsistence from their pastureland (milk products, meat, *tsampa*, dried dung for fire). Other households in the new settlement who have no family members continuing to herd livestock have to buy these products in the county-town market. Finally, it was easier for them to find new kinds of work than other inhabitants of the new settlement because of Tserang's skills and connections.

Nevertheless, they perceived their livelihood as extremely precarious. Tserang considered that he could not provide for his family needs, especially since they have moved into the new settlement. The reason of this perception of precariousness stems from two principal causes. Firstly, after they have moved into the new settlement, their proximity to the county-town's market led the household to discover new products which they have previously ignored, but which now became new needs. Tserang complained that since they have moved into the new settlement, his wife and children asked him for money, which they have never done before. For example, he said that they wanted to buy new clothes, while previously he made the clothes for the whole family. Proximity to the market brought with it a consumerist mentality, which they had ignored before. This created a new dependence on the PRC's economic system – the place where they could find the money to buy these products. This was strengthened by

another kind of dependence on the PRC system: the pastoralists were reliant on state subsidies to provide for their families' needs and for hard cash. For some households living in the new settlement, state subsidies provided their only source of income.

The perceived uncertainty in finding a work and the new dependence on market products and on state subsidies fed the perception of precariousness among Tserang's family members, even if they were actually managing to settle quite well in the new settlement. They are actually one of the most successful relocated families that I have met. Even after his debilitating accident, Tserang managed to be part of a Tibetan medicine production training program in the county-town. When it has ended, he was employed by the local Tibetan hospital and is currently earning a stable salary, which has lifted his family out of the precariousness that they have experienced during the previous years. Nevertheless, they still consider themselves as being in a precarious economic situation. The dependence on the state subsidies and market products, interlinked with the problems in finding an employment – usually temporary wage-earning labour – has strengthened the pastoralists' self-perception of being unemployed. However, this is also grounded in shared social values as I will show in the next section.

3. The Job of Pastoralist as a Total Social Function

Tserang and the other inhabitants of this new settlement called themselves '*brog pa* (pastoralist) and used this term as a synonym of *bod pa* (Tibetan). This way of using this word reveals that the job of pastoralist is an intrinsic characteristic of themselves as individuals, going beyond the limits of a simple job's category and having significance in their social relationships and perceptions of self.

The Tibetan language dictionary defines the word '*brog pa* as the "people basing their livelihood mainly on pastoral activities".⁵ Thus, '*brog pa* is the pastoralist drawing his livelihood from the livestock and pastureland. However, the common way in which people who call themselves '*brog pa* use this word, implies much more than a simple system of production. The inhabitants of the new settlement where Tserang lives, call themselves '*brog pa* even if they are not practicing husbandry anymore. Having sold their livestock, sometimes even their grassland and no longer returning to their previous lands, these pastoralists still keep calling themselves pastoralists. '*Brog pa* is thus for them an equivalent to the name of a group of people to which they recognize themselves. It is interesting to notice, for example, that Tserang explained that the people living in Lhasa are called *bod pa* while the people living in Amdo are called '*brog pa*. Nevertheless, as I will illustrate later, not all the inhabitants of Amdo are '*brog pa*.

The pastoralists in the new settlement could not stop "being" and calling themselves pastoralists in the same way that they could have stopped any other kind of job. Being a pastoralist in fact involves values, customs and practices encompassing the singular person of the pastoralist and even more the professional category of the pastoralist. The meanings attached to the practice of pastoralism interconnect people to each other and to social norms and customs shared by their social group. The economic function of the pastoral activities is transcended by the social implications that this word is charged with. The inhabitants of this area of Amdo-Qinghai called themselves '*brog pa* because,

⁵ "'*brog pa ni phyugs las gtso bor byed pa la brten nas 'tsho ba'i mi,*" *Dag yig gсар bsgrigs*, mTsho sngon mi rigs dpe skrun kang, 1989: 568–569.

as a result of their education and habits, their shared values and customs could be represented in the lifestyle of the pastoralists. The quality of a “pastoralist”, as Bourdieu argues for the Kabyle farmers (Bourdieu 1964), shapes the relationships of the individuals within their social group and creates a differentiation between them and the other inhabitants of the Tibetan Plateau. In fact, this word not only indicates a different group from the people of Lhasa/Central Tibet, but it also denotes a distinction from local Tibetan farmers, who are called *zhing pa*. According to Tserang, for example, the pastoralist is supposed to be a “simple” person. They should not “talk too much, listen too much, and look too much”. This means that they are not supposed to be “cunning”. This “simplicity”, explained as a virtue by the pastoralists and as a fault by urban people, is one of the characteristics of the “real” pastoralist. The pastoralists are proud of the fact that they have preserved the “ancient” Tibetan traditions and customs. They also argue that even the language spoken by the pastoralists is closer to the original Tibetan language than that spoken by the Tibetan farmers, which has been contaminated by the Chinese language as their practices and customs.

This complex system of shared values, customs and beliefs usually accredited to the pastoralists also means that the inhabitants of the new settlements cannot so easily dissociate themselves from this job, even if they are no longer practicing husbandry. Since they are living in the new settlements, the pastoralists are no longer herding livestock. In most cases, they do not have any animal in the new settlement and, if they did, the animals are different from the animals which they usually herded on the grassland. In the new settlement, they in fact usually herd pigs, which are not used for self-consumption, but they are sold in the township market. The most of the inhabitants of the new settlement are usually employed as temporally and unskilled manual labourers on construction sites around the new settlement. They are thus entering the local labour market in a very low position in terms of their job prospects. Lacking technical skills, knowledge of Chinese language (the language spoken by the owners of the construction sites) and good connections (*guanxi*), they are restricted in this kind of work opportunities. Moreover, lacking start-up capital for starting their own small businesses, it is very difficult for them to move beyond the category of unskilled manual labourers. They thus rely on temporally and wage labour as well as on state subsidies for meeting their family’s needs, having few chances to avoid this economic impasse.

The self-sufficient system of production of the grasslands has changed and the pastoralists have been inserted into the new production system of PRC, which follows the capitalistic rules of the socialist market economy. This involves using money to buy products which they have previously produced by themselves, thus to relate the work with the working time and the money earned during this time. The need to buy products put the pastoralists face to face with capitalistic and market values. The need to count hours to check whether they have been paid the right amount, has meant that time has also come to mean money with which they can buy products.

The perception of “job” is gradually transformed as well as the values linked to it and to themselves as workers. This has brought the pastoralists to consider as work only the activities which bring in a salary. One of the consequences has been, for example, that the occupations accomplished by women in the new settlement, even if they are hard work, are not considered as work (however, house’s works usually practised by women are often not yet recognized as works also in Western countries). Working in the courtyard’s field, collecting grass for the fire, building and fixing the new settlement

house and herding some animals in the settlement which are done by women are not perceived or recognized as work.

The inhabitants of the new settlement claim that, since they have moved into it, they “have nothing to do”, “have no occupation” or “spend their time lazily”.⁶ Yet, especially during the summer, the inhabitants of the new settlement are quite busy and do many different kinds of work. However, even if they have temporary employment on construction sites or as streets cleaners in the county-town, they still consider themselves idle. Since they do not herd livestock anymore, they call themselves “unemployed”, even when they actually do work in the new settlement or on construction sites.

The occupations of the new settlement are not worthy of being called work, because they do not bring any money and, moreover, they do not imply herding. Considering that the job of pastoralist is embedded with group shared values and practices, it cannot be considered as a simple economic activity. Thus, it could not be given up by the simple relocation in a new settlement, because a pastoralist keeps being a pastoralist even without livestock or grassland. Being a pastoralist is firstly a way of being in the world, a way of linking with the nature and the others, which could not be dropped without giving up this particular way of being and self-perception.

Even if, practically, the inhabitants of the new settlement are no longer “pastoralists”, they still consider themselves to be pastoralists and they do “not know anything else besides this”. Calling themselves unemployed is related to the fact that they could not call themselves employed when engaged in activities which they still do not perceive as work. Defining themselves employed in other activities would also mean renouncing being a pastoralist. This would mean renouncing all the connotations contained in this word. If they define themselves as employed, they would not be pastoralists anymore, but something else: a construction worker, for example. If they cannot call themselves pastoralist (*'brog pa*) anymore, what for example Tsering could call himself living on the high plateau of Amdo to distinguish himself from Lhasa people? The self-perception as unemployed is linked to other values and meanings connected with the previous job of pastoralist. This job for the inhabitants of the new settlement has a “total social function” (Bourdieu 1964), that is to say that they attach to this job the values and practices inherent to their social world. Thus, the end of pastoralism potentially means the end of previous forms of relationships with nature and society that brought the inhabitants of this region inside one single unit, sharing the same social values and practices. As Bourdieu (1964: 102) argues “the experience of wage labour, the generalization of monetary exchanges and the economic attitude correlated to it” modify the perception that people have of the occupations conceived as work, because this has become the activities which bring cash incomes while previously the work was linked to herding practices and production.

4. Conclusion

Relocation in the new settlements has generated a double dependence. The need to find a new employment and have access to cash has generated a dependence on the local and national labor market. The lower the technical skills and educational level of the relocated pastoralists, the higher is this dependence. The second dependence on the

⁶ For a good analysis of the presumed “Tibetan laziness”, see Yeh 2013.

economic system of the PRC is related to the contact with consumer goods, generating new needs. This double bind has also generated a third dependence: on state subsidies.

The pastoralists of the new settlement where Tserang lives are completely reliant on state compensation for the loss of their livestock and subsidies for the education of the children and their heating expenses. Once they have settled in the new settlement, these subsidies become for some households the only income. Relocated pastoralists complained that, since their family has sold the livestock, they are completely dependent on these state subsidies for living. This has left them feeling trapped, unable to leave the new settlement and move back to their family grassland because someone has to stay in the settlement if they want to continue to receive state subsidies. In fact, if a relocated household enjoying state subsidies for relocation leaves the new settlement house, it would lose all the subsidies as well as the house.

This third type of dependence is often the only reason for not leaving the new settlement houses and going back to the grasslands. In fact, after having moved into the new settlement, the pastoralist often complain about the environment of the settlement which is not as good as their previous home which they miss. They often argue that their lifestyle was better on the grasslands even if they had few animals, because at least they could produce by themselves the basic products which they need for surviving. However, the wish to move back to their grassland usually remains a vain dream, because, once they move into the new settlement, the pastoralists are completely dependent on state subsidies for survival and cannot leave the house in the new settlement or they will lose their access to these subsidies. This economic dependence on the state for buying basic living products created by relocation in the new settlements is a strong device for controlling and administering the slippery population of this area of the Tibetan Plateau.

Through creating economic dependence, the Chinese government has restrained the inhabitants of these particular places. It is thus in the government's interests not to free the pastoralists from economic precariousness by giving them technical skills and resources that would allow them to find stable and sufficient paid employment to meet their families' needs and eventually definitely transform pastoralists' perception of themselves as worker. However, as long as the pastoralists living in the new settlements tie themselves to the government in order to receive subsidies and aid providing them the cash needed for their livelihoods, they cannot go against or even resist any government decision. As long as relocated pastoralists are subjected to the economic system of the PRC becoming the proletarians of the new urban centers of the grasslands of Amdo-Qinghai and not having any agentive power over it, they will also be politically dependent on any government decision. The latter can thus impose its plans and projects without running into these people's resistance. The dependence on the production system of the PRC is so deep that the pastoralists in the new settlements are no longer able to set themselves free from the financial aid of the state while, when they still lived on the grassland herding their livestock, their economic dependence on the PRC system was minor, thus its political influence was also weaker. The economic dependence has become political dependence.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Jane Caple for her useful suggestions and critics. I would also like to thank the research team of the Central Asian Seminar of the Humboldt Universität zu Berlin. I also acknowledge the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for supporting my post-doctoral research.

References

- Bauer, K. 2005. "Development and the enclosure movement in pastoral Tibet since the 1980s," *Nomadic Peoples* 9 (1–2): 53–81 (29).
- Bauer, K., Yonten, N. 2010. "Laws and regulations impacting the enclosure movement on the Tibetan Plateau of China," *Himalaya. The Journal of the association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies*, 30 (1–2): 23–39.
- Bourdieu, P. 1977. *Algérie 60: structures économiques et structures temporelles*. Paris: Éd. de Minuit.
- Bourdieu, P., Sayad, A. 1964. *Le déracinement: la crise de l'agriculture traditionnelle en Algérie*. Paris: Éd. de Minuit.
- Brown, C. G., Scott, W. A., Longworth, J. W. 2008. *Sustainable Development in Western China: Managing People, Livestock and Grasslands in Pastoral Areas*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Brox, T., Bellér-Hann, I. 2014. *On the fringes of the harmonious society: Tibetans and Uyghurs in Socialist China*. NIASS Press.
- Clarke, G. E. 1989. "Aspects of social organization of Tibetan pastoral communities," *Tibetan Studies, Proceeding of the 5th Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, 393–409.
- Dan, G. 2002. "Shilun "Sanjiangyuanqu" de shengtai huanjing yu shuili jianshe," *Qinghai Minzu Yanjiu* 13 (4): 1–5.
- Deng, L. Q., An, P.S., Li, L. 1996. *Dangdai Qinghai Jianshi: Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Difang Jianshi Congshu*. Dangdai Zhongguo Chubanshe.
- Foggin, M. J. 2008. "Depopulating the Tibetan grassland: the role of national policies and perspectives of the future of Tibetan herders, Qinghai province, China," *Mountain Research and Development*, 28 (1): 26–31.
- Giroir, G. 2007. "Socioterritorial fractures in China: the unachievable 'harmonious society'," *Chinese Perspectives*, 3: 83–91.
- Goldstein, M., Beall, C. and Richard, C. 1990. "Traditional nomadic pastoralism and ecological conservation on Tibet's Northern Plateau," *National Geographic Research*, 6 (2): 139–156.
- Goodman, D. G. 2004. "China's campaign to 'Open up the West': national, provincial and local perspective," *China Quarterly* 178: 317–504.
- Goodman, D. G. 2004. "Qinghai and the emergence of the West: nationalities, communal interaction and national integration," *China Quarterly* 178: 389–390.
- Gruschke, A. 2008. "Nomads without pastures? Globalization, regionalization, and livelihood security of nomads and former nomads in Northern Kham," *Journal of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* 4.
- Han, G. J., Zhang, Y. J., Wang, C. J., Bai, W. M., Wang, Y. R., Han, G. D. and Li, L. H. 2008. "Rangeland degradation and restoration management in China," *The Rangeland Journal* 30: 233–239.
- Harris, R.B. 2010. "Rangeland degradation on the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau: a review of the evidence of its magnitude and causes," *Journal of Arid Environments* 74(1): 1–12.
- Ho, P. 2000. "The clash over state and collective property: the making of the Rangeland Law," *The China Quarterly* 161: 240–263.
- Levine, N. 1995. "From nomads to ranchers: managing pasture among ethnic Tibetan Sichuan," *7th Seminar of the International Association of Tibetan Studies* 5: 69–76.
- Li, D. Z. 2009. *Hainan zangzu zuzhi zhou gaikuang*. Beijing: Minzu Chibanshe.

- Luosang, Lingzhi Duoji 1996. *Qingzang gaoyuan huanjing yu fazhan gailun*. Beijing: Zhongguo Minxue Chubanshe.
- Luosang, L.D., 1998. *Qingzang gaoyuan renkou yu huanjing chengzaili*. Beijing: Zhongguo Minxue Chubanshe.
- Ma, C.K. 2001. "Qinghai xumuyede fazhan yu shengtai huanjingde baohu," *Qinghai Minzu Yanjiu* 12 (3): 19–24.
- Ma, J. 2001. "Lun shengtai jianshe yu shengtai luyou xietiao fazhande guanxi," *Qinghai Minzu Yanjiu* 12 (4): 13–15.
- Mauss, M., 2012 (1924). *Essai sur le don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques*. Paris: PUF.
- Richard, C., Yan, Z., Du, G. 2006. *The paradox of the individual household responsibility system in the grasslands of the Tibetan plateau, China*. USDA Forest Service Proceedings. RMRS-P-39: 83–91.
- Tu, Q., Tan, S.H., Heerink, N., Qu, F.T. 2008. "Les effets de la culture sur les performances économiques et la dégradation des prairies: le cas des Tibétains et des Mongols de la région di lac Qinghai," *Perspectives Chinoises* 2: 39–47.
- Van Wageningen, N., Sa, W.J. 2001. "The living Plateau: changing lives of herders in Qinghai. Concluding seminar of the Qinghai livestock development project," *EU-China Qinghai Livestock Development Project*, 5–24.
- Vigoda, M. 1989. "Religious and Socio-Cultural Restraints on Environmental Degradation among Tibetan Peoples – Myth or Reality," *Tibet Journal* 14 (4).
- Yeh, E.T. 2005. "Green Governmentality and Pastoralism in China: 'converting pastures to grasslands,'" *Nomadic Peoples* 9 (1–2): 9–30(22).
- Yeh, E.T. 2013. *Taming Tibet: landscape transformation and the gift of Chinese development*. Cornell University Press.