

# CHANGE, CONFLICT AND CONTINUITY AMONG A COMMUNITY OF NOMADIC PASTORALISTS

A CASE STUDY FROM WESTERN TIBET, 1950-1990

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## Introduction

Objective assessment of the situation in Tibet since 1950 has become entangled in the politics of the 'Tibet Question', that is, in the political status of Tibet *vis-à-vis* China. Strong feelings about whether Tibet was independent or part of China in the past, and whether it should now have the right of self-determination, have produced diametrically contradictory versions of modern history from Beijing and the Tibetan exiles in Dharamsala (and their supporters in the United States and Europe). Events have typically been portrayed as all black or all white, as horrendous oppression or magnificent progress. This, of course, is not unexpected, given the stakes involved. What is more surprising, however, is the dearth of objective and impartial *academic* accounts of social, political and economic changes in Tibet during the forty years since 1950. This dearth, I suggest, has enhanced the ability of politically motivated writers to portray the period in question according to their political agenda. One such issue that has been politicised in an unfortunate way is the meaning or referent of 'Tibet' itself. The problematic here is simple: what constituted the Tibetan polity at different times in its history, particularly in the modern era, and what that means *vis-à-vis* the 'Tibet Question'.

## What is Tibet? - Fact and Fancy

Ethnic Tibetan populations are distributed over an area as vast as Western Europe. They are found not only in the Tibet Autonomous Region (of China), the traditional heartland of political Tibet, but also in parts of the neighbouring Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, Yunnan and Xinjiang, as well as in parts of other nations such as India (Ladakh, Sikkim, Northern Uttar Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh), Northern Nepal and Bhutan. Although all of these regions were once united under the rule of the early kings of Tibet, during the eleven centuries following the

breakup of that kingdom in the 9th century many of the regions on the periphery became independent or fell under the authority of neighbouring states.

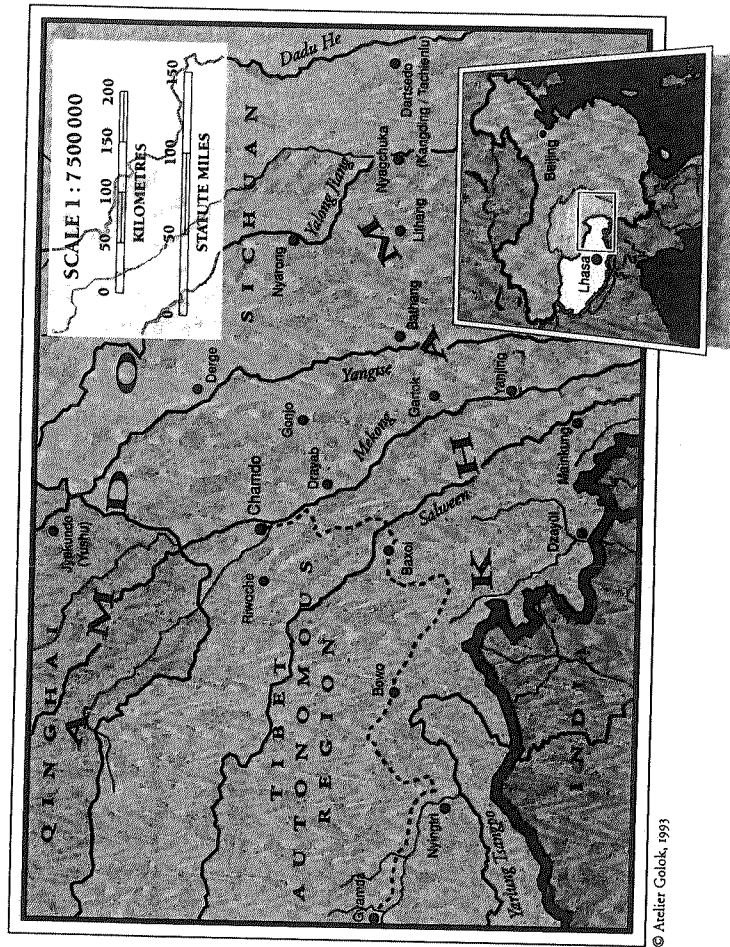
The detailed history of all of these peripheral areas is not well documented in the literature on Tibet, and this introduction will not attempt to consider each of them. Rather, it will be limited to those most relevant to this discussion, namely, the easternmost extension of ethnic Tibetan populations - the two major sub-ethnic regions known in Tibetan as Kham and Amdo.

The 'modern' Sino-Tibetan border in these two regions was generally established during the mid-18th century when the Tibetan Government lost political control over most of these areas to Manchu (Qing) China. While the Tibetan Government has never accepted the loss of these regions as permanent or *de jure* - for example it claimed all of Kham and Amdo in the Simla Convention of 1913-14 - most of these areas in fact were not a part of its polity for the two centuries preceding the rise to power of the Communists in China in 1949. Consequently, the convention used in Tibetan historiography in the West has been to differentiate analytically between the political entity Tibet and other areas outside it where ethnic Tibetans lived.

For example, Hugh Richardson, the well-known British diplomat and historian, for practical purposes differentiated the Tibetan world into two categories. Following the work of Sir Charles Bell, he used the term 'political' Tibet for the polity ruled by the Dalai Lamas, and the term 'ethnographic' Tibet for other areas such as Amdo and Kham which were outside that state. He explained his rationale as follows:

In 'political' Tibet the Tibetan government have ruled *continuously* from the earliest times down to 1951. The region beyond that to the north and east [Amdo and Kham] . . . is its 'ethnographic' extension which people of Tibetan race once inhabited exclusively and where they are still in the majority. In that wider area, 'political' Tibet exercised jurisdiction *only in certain places and at irregular intervals*; for the most part, local lay or monastic chiefs were in control of districts of varying size. From the 18th century onwards the region was subject to sporadic Chinese infiltration. But in whatever hands actual authority might lie, the religious influence of Lhasa was a long-standing and all-pervasive force and large donations of money and valuable goods were annually sent to the Dalai Lama . . . In the text that follows Tibet means 'political' Tibet except where otherwise stated. . . . (Richardson, pp. 1-2; emphasis added.)

The convention used by Richardson, therefore, is simple and straightforward. The term 'Tibet' refers to the political state ruled by the Dalai Lamas; it does not refer to the ethnic border areas



Border region of Kham, Amdo and 'political' Tibet. The dotted line shows the road from Chamdo to Lhasa.

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such as Amdo and Kham which were not part of that state in modern times, let alone to Ladakh or Northern Nepal. Until recently, this convention was, as far as I can discern, universally accepted in the scholarly literature.<sup>1</sup>

Nowadays, however, this convention is increasingly being abandoned in favour of what seems to me to be a political definition of Tibet that includes all of the ethnic Tibetan areas of the Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan under the rubric 'Tibet'. In this perspective, an event said to have occurred in 'Tibet' in the 1980s (or 1940s or 1840s) may well have occurred in areas not part of the polity Tibet, i.e. in 'ethnographic' Tibetan areas such as Amdo. The most striking example of this position is the contention that Tibet was invaded by China in 1949. This was the year, to be sure, when Amdo and the eastern part of Kham became part of Communist China, but were these areas then part of Tibet? And if they were not, is it valid to say that *Tibet* was invaded at that time?

Proponents of the view that Tibet was invaded in 1949 appear to believe that these areas were part of Tibet; they also appear to believe that this assertion is not only good politics, but also good history. Phintso Thonden, the former director of the Office of Tibet in New York, for example, suggests that these areas were part of the Tibetan state until the Chinese Communists conquered China:

Since China's invasion of and occupation of Tibet, the Chinese have *incorporated* the whole of Amdo and parts of Kham into the neighbouring Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Széchuan, Kansu and Yunnan - *leaving only* U-tsang and other parts of Kham as the so-called Tibet Autonomous Region [TAR]. This was done with the view that should Beijing be forced to give up its spoils in Tibet, it would give up only the TAR and hold on to the more economically valuable regions of Kham and Amdo. . . . (Thonden, p. 12; emphasis added.)

Thonden, therefore, appears to be asserting that these areas were part and parcel of Tibet until the Chinese Communists invaded Tibet in his terms in 1949. However, in another part of his article he seems to contradict this by writing that the Central Tibetan Government may have temporarily lost control of some areas of Amdo and Kham in the 1930s and '40s (*ibid.*, p. 13). He implies that this was due to the death of the 13th Dalai Lama in 1933 and a subsequent weak interregnum government headed by regents.

My reading of modern Tibetan history suggests strongly that both of these assertions are incorrect. Kham and Amdo were not part of Tibet in 1949 and were not temporarily lost only in 1930-40.

Thonden's article may be good politics, but it is bad history. Let me, therefore, discuss briefly the historical situation in Kham and Amdo.

### *Observations on the History of Kham and Amdo*

Although the history of the numerous Amdowa and Khamba areas has yet to be seriously addressed, there are enough available data to construct a general sketch of their situation over the past 250 years.

The Manchu Dynasty dealt with minority peoples in a number of ways including military conquest and absorption, the establishment of military colonies and the confirmation of native officials under the well-known *T'u-ssu* (pinyin: *Tusi*) system. In the latter system, the hereditary élite of ethnic areas was loosely integrated into the imperial system through the granting of court titles. In return for this 'confirmation' of its right to rule its own peoples according to its own cultural laws and traditions, this élite was responsible for various tasks such as the taking of censuses, the collection of taxes and the keeping of peace. In many cases this situation amounted to virtual independence for these native states since the Manchu tendency was to avoid interfering with local affairs unless developments directly threatened imperial control of the area.<sup>2</sup> By and large, the *T'u-ssu* system was the strategy utilised by the Manchu Empire in Amdo and Eastern Kham when it intervened in these regions in the early 18th century.

Joseph Kolmas, in a study of Tibet and Manchu China, commented on the Manchu ascendancy in this area:

The Tibetan policy of the next Manchu Emperor, Yung-cheng (1723-1735), though inconsistent, brought many important changes in Sino-Tibetan relations. The financial difficulty of maintaining numerous government troops in so remote an area as Tibet led the Emperor to order the withdrawal of the imperial troops from Tibet in the first year of his reign (in 1723). It also proved expensive and inefficient to attempt to control Eastern Tibet by maintaining Manchu-Chinese Civil Magistrates as had been done sporadically after 1720. For this reason in 1725 it was decided to replace the cumbersome and unwieldy direct control of the border zone by a sensible and flexible form of protectorate . . .

In this connection also a new boundary was drawn between Szu-ch'uan [Sichuan] and Tibet (in 1727), formed by the Ning-ching-shan range dividing the waters of the Chin-sha River (the headwaters of the Yangtze) from those of the Lan-ts'ang River (Mekong). According to this settlement, the territory east of Ning-ching-shan was to be incorporated in China proper, but the administration was to be carried on by the local chieftains (*T'u szu*) under the nominal supervision of the Szu-ch'uan

provincial authorities, whereas all territory westwards was to be administered by the Lhasa government.

Thus the territory Tibet, handed down almost unaltered through the previous centuries, underwent for the first time a drastic reduction in area. If we add the territory of A-mdo (Ch'ing-hai), separated from Tibet in 1724, then the original size of Tibet as a politico-geographical unit has been reduced almost by half. (Kolmas, pp. 41-2)

Petech's classic study of China and Tibet in the 18th century presents a similar account. For example, regarding the time of the Dzungar conquest of Lhasa in 1717, he wrote:

Thus far the Dsungars held only Lhasa and the country to the north of it. The situation in the rest of the country can be summarized thus: Western Tibet and gTsan were for the moment politically a no man's land soon to be galvanized into active resistance . . . K'ams [Kham] was practically independent of Lhasa under its great lamas, and Chinese political influence was growing stronger and stronger; Amdo and Kukonor were under the sway of Mongol chieftains under Chinese suzerainty. (Petech, p. 42)

The revolt [in Kokonor-Amdo] was repressed in . . . 1724. The emperor [of China] seized the occasion for establishing solidly his sovereignty in Kukonor, which became from that time onwards an integrant part of the Chinese dominion. (*Ibid.*, p. 85)

This, as mentioned above, did not mean that China actually exercised day-to-day administrative control in Amdo and Kham, or even collected taxes, but it does indicate that from the early 18th century the Tibetan Government, with only a few exceptions mentioned below, did not rule these areas. Cultural, religious and economic ties continued, but these 'native states', as the British called them, were not part of the Tibetan polity.

The well-known Tibetan scholar-politician, the late Tsipon Shakabpa, discussed this issue in a parallel fashion:

In 1722 the K'anghsi Emperor died and was succeeded by his son, who became known as Yung-cheng Emperor. In 1723 the new Manchu ruler began a policy of retrenchment. He withdrew the garrison from Lhasa, leaving the administration of central Tibet entirely in the hands of Tibetan officials, without any military support from the Manchus.

In the first year of the Yung-cheng Emperor's reign, Mongols in the Kokonor region, led by Chingwang Lozang Tenzin, a grandson of the Qoshot Gushri Khan, revolted against the Manchus. The rebellion was suppressed, and in early 1724, the Kokonor [Amdo] region was integrated into the Manchu Empire. (Shakabpa, p. 141; emphasis added.)

For the more recent periods, we are fortunate to have available several straightforward firsthand accounts of a number of different

border regions in Qinghai and Sichuan in the early 20th century. One such account concerns the ethnically Amdowa native state called Choni (now part of Gansu Province). The author of this account, Robert Ekvall, was an American Protestant missionary who was born in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands and lived in the Choni area from 1923 till 1935. His record of the history of the area parallels that presented above:

In the time of the Manchu dynasty, the entire region was administered by a viceroy of the Imperial Government. That portion of the country occupied by Chinese Muslims and some other, smaller, racial units was under traditional Chinese law. The Tibetans enjoyed almost complete independence and varying degrees of prestige. The Chone Prince ruled over the forty-eight 'banners' of one group of Tibetans; other Tibetan rulers or chiefs held grants or commissions - some of them hundreds of years old - from the Imperial [Manchu] government.

... Since the establishment of the Republic in 1912, changes have occurred. Although the region nominally owes allegiance to the Central Government of China, the administration has been split between Moslem and Chinese factions . . . the Chinese government has attempted to exercise considerably more power over the Tibetans than formerly. This has resulted in the establishment of a greater degree of control over the Tibetans along the border but has alienated those Tibetans who persistently maintained their independence, even enhancing that independence, which is combined with a half-wistful nostalgia for the days of the [Manchu] Empire. (Ekvall, pp. 6-7)

Ekvall's study focuses on what he saw as one of the most important issues of the day: the relationship between the ethnic Tibetans and the non-Tibetans living in the area (the Han [native Chinese] and the Hui [Chinese Muslims]). His study helps to clarify that issue but also leaves unanswered many questions regarding the precise nature of the political status of these areas *vis-à-vis* the Chinese Government. However, his work does demonstrate clearly that these areas were not then part of political Tibet.

Another Western first-hand observer, Hans Stubel, provides an account of the same region of Amdo. Like Ekvall, Stubel talks of an area which in 1936 was inhabited by Han, Hui and Tibetans. Referring to the political status of the ethnic Tibetans, he notes that they were organized into tribes which were nominally under China, not political Tibet, but in most ways were effectively independent: 'Although the Tibetans living here are under Chinese administration, they are not dependent on the Chinese and are not particularly influenced by Chinese culture'. (Stubel, pp. 6-7)

A third Western account was written by Eric Teichman, a scholarly British consular agent who was stationed in Western

China (and present in Kham) in the 1911-18 era. Steeped in the history of this area, his account echoes the observations of the above-cited authors, albeit for Kham not Amdo:

The boundary between China and Tibet was demarcated by a pillar, said to have been erected in the year 1727 . . . on the Bum La (in Chinese Ning-ching Shan), a small pass two and a half days south-west of Batang. The country to the west of this point was handed over to the rule of the Dalai Lama under the suzerainty of the Manchu Emperor, while the Tibetan Chiefs of the States and tribes to the east of it were given seals as semi-independent feudatories of China. This arrangement lasted for nearly two centuries, until the Chinese forward movement initiated in 1905 as a result of the British advance on Lhasa in the preceding year. (Teichman, p. 2)

At the beginning of the present century, before the British expedition to Lhasa in 1904 and the subsequent Chinese forward movement in Kam, that portion of High Asia inhabited by Tibetan-speaking peoples, and labeled *Tibet* on European maps, consisted of three separate entities, firstly, the Lama Kingdom of Tibet with its provinces and dependencies, secondly, the semi-independent Native States of Kham under Chinese protection, and thirdly, the Kokonor [Amdo] Territory under the control of the Chinese Amban residing at Sining in Kansu.

The Kingdom of Tibet, ruled by the Dalai Lama from Lhasa . . . extended north to the Dang La range separating it from the Kokonor and east to the Bum La, the frontier pass near Batang. (*Ibid.*, pp. 7-8)

A firsthand account by Aten, a Tibetan exile from Nyarong, an Eastern Khamba area, supports this analysis. In his discussion of the rise of the famous Nyarong chieftain Gombo Namgye in 1860, Aten wrote as follows:

Then, in the early nineteenth century, there rose a man in Nyarong who, through sheer ability and ruthlessness, united the whole of Eastern Tibet, drove the Chinese back to the border of the ancient emperors, and made the Manchu Emperor of China quiver in his satin shoes . . . He failed only to conquer the province of Amdo, the extreme northern extent of Tibet. Otherwise he had taken back and united every inch of land within the frontiers established by the ancient Tibetan emperors . . . The Manchu Emperor of China became enraged. This barbarian upstart, this petty chief of some insignificant Tibetan tribes, had in a few strokes deprived the Celestial Empire of the fruits of centuries of painful conquests and brain-racking intrigues. (Norbu, pp. 25-6)

Like Teichman's account, Aten, therefore, indicates that at the time Gombo Namgye rose to power in 1860, Nyarong and the surrounding Khamba areas were under China (at least nominally), not the Lhasa-based Tibetan Government.

Gombo Namgye's conquest of the neighbouring ethnic-Tibetan (Khamba) states, such as Derge and the Hor States, led them

to appeal to both the Chinese and Tibetan Governments for help against the Nyarong invaders. China was then deeply involved with the Taiping rebellion and the machinations of imperialist nations and, as Teichman puts it, was 'unable to take any action towards restoring order in the Tibetan States under their nominal protection' (Teichman, p. 5).

The Tibetan Government, however, sent an army to pacify Gombo Namgye in 1863 and, two years later in 1865, defeated him by trickery, burning his castle with him and his family inside. Tibet then took over the formal administration of Nyarong, and appointed a high commissioner (*nya-rong sbyi-khyab*) to govern the area. According to Teichman, Derge and the Hor States, which lie north of Nyarong, were 'freed from the Nyarong invaders and restored to independence under the rule of their own native Rajahs' (*Ibid.*).

Teichman further elaborated:

The Tibetan claim to Nyarong, and to a lesser extent to De-ge and the Hor States, dated from this time (1865). Nyarong appears to have been annexed by the Dalai Lama with the approval of the Manchu Throne. (*Ibid.*)

The trouble resurfaced in 1894 when the Tibetans of Nyarong invaded Chala (Tachienlu). Teichman describes this interesting incident as follows:

The Viceroy of Szechuan [Sichuan], Lu Ch'uan-lin, despatched a Chinese force which occupied Nyarong and suppressed the disorders. Viceroy Lu thereupon proposed, in a Memorial to the Throne, to take over the administration of Nyarong with Chinese officials. In this he was, however, opposed by the Manchu Amban at Lhasa and the Manchu Commander-in-Chief at Chengtu, while the Dalai Lama also sent representatives to Peking via India and the sea route protesting against any Chinese annexation of Tibetan territory. As a result of these representations Viceroy Lu's Memorial proposing the changes was rejected by the Throne, and the Tibetan Governor was reinstated in Nyarong. (*Ibid.*, p. 6)<sup>3</sup>

Aten, the Tibetan exile from Nyarong, discusses the fall of Gombo Namgye in a manner parallel to Teichman, concluding: 'However, Gompo Namgyal's efforts were not entirely in vain, for Eastern Tibet was reunited with the rest of Tibet. For about 40 years we were free.' (Norbu, p. 27; emphasis added) In other words, just before this incident he again indicates that this part of Kham was not included in the Tibetan polity.

Aten then continues his account of the history of Nyarong:

Nevertheless, the Tibetan Government could not retain Gonpo Namgyal's conquests . . . In 1903 . . . the Chinese Army under General Chao Er feng

[Zhao Erfeng] invaded Litang and Batang from the south . . . Little by little, the frontiers began to fall and gradually the whole of Eastern Tibet was occupied by the Chinese. (*Ibid.*, p. 28)

Zhao actually reset the border at Giamda (Gyamda) in Kongbo (Kongpo), less than 350 kilometres east of Lhasa, and started to subvert the 'native chief' system by deposing them and bringing their states under more direct Chinese rule via Chinese magistrates (*Tusi*) and so forth. After forty years under the Tibetan Government, these areas once again fell under the control of China, this time under more direct, day-to-day administration.

For this part of Kham, however, the frontier remained unstable, and border skirmishes between Tibetan and Chinese troops led to an outbreak of warfare in 1917-19 between Tibet and China. In this confrontation the Tibetan army soundly defeated the Chinese forces and, with the 1918 Treaty of Rongbatsa (brokered in large part by Eric Teichman), Tibet regained Chamdo, Traya (Drayab) and Markham - states located to the west of the Yangtse River - as well as Derge to the east of that river. However, Nyarong and many other Khamba areas east of the Yangtse River, such as Litang, Kanze (*Ganzi, dkar-mdzes*), Batang and Tachienlu, remained part of China and outside the territory of the Tibetan Government. This demarcation remained in place until 1931 when new fighting between troops of the Tibetan and Chinese Governments erupted in the Kanze area. Aten commented as follows:

But in the Spring of 1931 . . . the monastery of Dhargay in Tri Hor [part of the Hor States], north of Nyarong, revolted against its Chinese overlords . . . The Chinese rushed in soldiers to quell the rebellion, and fighting broke out in that area. The monastery was besieged, and in desperation the monks appealed to the Tibetan Government in Lhasa for help. (*Ibid.*, p. 22)

A Tibetan army was sent and at first the Chinese were badly defeated, with the Tibetan soldiers not only taking control of Nyarong, but also most of Eastern Kham. This victory was short-lived, however, and a Chinese counter-attack in 1932 drove the Tibetan army back to the Yangtse River. Aten describes this poignantly:

After about a year, the Tibetan Army suffered drastic setbacks in its advance east. The retreating Chinese, now strengthened with reinforcements, pushed back our small army and finally poured into Eastern Tibet. It was a bitter day for all of us when our ancient Lion Standard was hauled down, and the red and yellow flags of the Chinese Nationalists flown from the Castle of the Female Dragon [in Nyarong]. (*Ibid.*, p. 47)



This defeat of the Tibetan army set the *de facto* border in Kham at the Upper Yangtse River (the Driчу). From 1932, none of the ethnic Tibetan (Khamba) areas east of the Yangtse River was under the control of the Tibetan Government. Thus, while the Sino-Tibetan border in Kham fluctuated during the period 1865–1932, after 1932 it remained constant. And Amdo remained outside Tibetan Government control from the early 18th century until 1949. Consequently, when the People's Liberation Army (PLA) took control of Sichuan/Sikang, Qinghai and Gansu in 1949, these Tibetan areas were not part of Tibet. Aten's account, for example, explicitly states this: 'When the Communist army invaded Eastern Tibet, most of it was already under the rather desultory occupation of the Nationalist Chinese.' (*Ibid.*, p. 79) Thus, the recent practice of writing about the Tibetan areas of Amdo and Eastern Kham as if they were part and parcel of Tibet until 1949, when the Communists conquered and separated them, is clearly historically incorrect.

Consequently, the increasingly common claim that Tibet was invaded by the Chinese Communists in 1949 is also incorrect. This, to be sure, is the time when Amdo and Eastern Kham were conquered by the PLA; but as elaborated above, Amdo and Eastern Kham were not part of the Tibetan state at that time.

This, moreover, is not simply the view of a Western historian in the 1990s. It was also the view of the Tibetan Government in 1949, which did not consider the Chinese Communist conquest of China (including Amdo and much of Kham) as an invasion of its territory. As a result, in 1949 it neither sent its troops to defend these areas nor issued any protests, appeals or charges that its territory had been invaded. On the other hand, when the PLA crossed the Upper Yangtse River in October 1950, the armies under the command of Ngabö (Ngapo), the Tibetan Governor-General, at once engaged the Chinese forces in battle. On November 7, 1950, the Lhasa Government issued an emotional plea for help to the United Nations protesting against the invasion of its territory:

While these negotiations were proceeding in Delhi [that is, negotiations between representatives of the Tibetan Government and the Chinese Communists], Chinese troops, without warning or provocation, crossed the Dre Chu River [the Upper Yangtse River], *which has for long been the boundary into Tibetan territory*, at a number of places on 7th October, 1950. In quick succession places of strategic importance . . . fell to the Chinese . . . The armed invasion of Tibet for the incorporation of Tibet within the fold of Chinese communism through sheer physical force is a clear case of aggression [emphasis added].<sup>4</sup>

The Tibetan Government's understanding and use of the term 'Tibet' in 1949–50, therefore, was identical with that of Richardson in that it did not include the ethnic areas not under its control.<sup>5</sup> The Tibetan Government, to be sure, did not relinquish its claims to these areas, but there was no question of where the authority of its state ended.

Because the future re-integration of Kham and Amdo with what was political Tibet (now the TAR) appears to be a very emotional issue for many Tibetans in exile and Westerners who support them, let me add that the historical information I have outlined above does not in any way preclude Tibetan nationalists such as Thonden from today advocating and working to reunite these areas into a unified 'greater' Tibet in the future. Nor does it argue against the legitimacy of creating such a 'greater' Tibet since these areas share obvious cultural characteristics and were once part of a unified Tibetan state. On the other hand, scholars such as myself did not make Tibetan history – Tibetans did – and it might be useful if they and their Western supporters tried to understand it objectively.

#### *What Difference does the Location of the Border Make Today?*

Differentiating between what was political Tibet and the ethnic Tibetan borderlands in modern times is more than an arcane scholarly issue. It is an essential prerequisite for understanding clearly the issue under discussion, namely what has happened to Tibet since 1950 and what is happening now. The reason for this is obvious: the ethnic Tibetans in the borderlands, by and large, were outside the rule of Lhasa and experienced political, legal and economic histories different from those of their ethnic brothers in political Tibet. There is, therefore, every reason to assume that present conditions in 'ethnographic' Tibet (Kham and Amdo) do not necessarily parallel those in 'political' Tibet (today's TAR). Consequently, conditions in ethnographic Tibet cannot be extrapolated *a priori* to reflect those in today's TAR, and any convention which attempts to conceal such different conditions is methodologically and conceptually flawed.

Let me give a few examples of why it is methodologically important to avoid referring to events in ethnographic Tibet as if they occurred in political Tibet.<sup>6</sup>

First, China treated ethnographic Tibet very differently from political Tibet during the 1951–9 period because ethnographic Tibet was not formally covered by the terms laid down in the Seventeen

Point Agreement, which applied only to political Tibet. As a result, while the traditional economic-religious system continued in Tibet *per se*, China attempted to impose reforms in ethnographic Tibet, which precipitated bloody rebellions in 1955–6 and considerable loss of life. To describe these uprisings in ethnographic Tibet as revolts 'in Tibet', as is common today, is deceptive since there were no revolts at this time in political Tibet, where the Chinese were very careful to adhere to the Seventeen Point Agreement. Similarly, to refer to the numerous ethnic Tibetans who died in this rebellion as Tibetans killed in Tibet is misleading, since any reader of such a statement would naturally assume that these deaths occurred in, and reflect Chinese policy and actions in, political Tibet. What happened in the area that was political Tibet (today's TAR) at that time, therefore, was very different from what happened in ethnographic Tibet and should be reflected and not obscured in our accounts.

In *The New York Times* of October 27, 1990, a letter to the Editor from Tseten Wangchuk, a Tibetan living in New York City, further illustrates this kind of confusion. After declaring that Tibet includes Kham and Amdo, Wangchuk wrote: 'In my father's hometown of Gyelthang in Kham, after four decades of political rule and cultural encroachment [1950–90], it is so hard to find Tibetan teachers that children no longer speak or study Tibetan.' While this may be the case in Gyelthang, one of the Eastern Kham areas that was not part of political Tibet for hundreds of years before 1950, it does not reflect the situation in political Tibet. By referring to this as Tibet, the author leaves the reader with the impression that Tibetans *in Tibet* do not speak their language, and by inference, that the Chinese policy in political Tibet is to not teach the Tibetan language to Tibetans. While there are certainly important language policy problems in the TAR, this is not one of them. In today's TAR one finds not only that Tibetans speak Tibetan, but that all teaching in Tibetan primary schools is conducted in Tibetan, Chinese language being started only in the third grade.<sup>7</sup> And in Lhasa there are two TV stations that broadcast daily in Tibetan. Consequently, the language issue in Gyalthang, if Wangchuk's account is correct, is likely to be the consequence of the very different historical experiences of this area *vis-à-vis* those of political Tibet, which illustrates precisely why it is so important methodologically to indicate clearly whether an event is occurring in political or ethnographic Tibet.

Another important area where this kind of politico-historical revisionism has serious consequences is the controversy over Chinese colonisation in Tibet. There are recurrent charges that

Tibet after 1949 has been, and is being, swamped with hundreds of thousands of Han colonists. An advertisement in *The New York Times* of January 31, 1992, for example, states: 'Over 7.5 million Chinese [have been] transferred to Tibet [and] outnumber the 6 million Tibetans.' This is obviously a critical issue since immigration of Han populations, whether transferred by Beijing or moving voluntarily in search of economic gain, threatens the viability of Tibetan culture in Tibet. But again, to understand this in a meaningful way one must distinguish carefully between ethnographic and political Tibet.

There were no Han farmers or nomads in political Tibet at the time the Chinese Communists took control of Tibet in 1951 or in the past. My understanding of the current situation in the TAR is that there are still no rural Han farmers or nomads. The large numbers of Han who reside in the TAR are urban-based and are either government officials, construction workers or petty entrepreneurs. Moreover, all the Han in the TAR, including those with permanent-residence permits (*hukou*) and those with temporary-residence permits (*linshi-hukou*) but excluding military personnel, appear to amount to at most several hundred thousand, not millions.

On the other hand, the number of Han in Amdo–Kokonor and Eastern Kham (that is, in Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan provinces) is more substantial and includes Han farmers. But how much of this Han presence is rural rather than urban, and when this Han in-migration occurred, is still empirically unclear. Certainly, only a portion of in-migration occurred after the establishment of the People's Republic of China: it is well documented that Han and Hui farmers were present in ethnographic Tibet in the 1920s and 1930s, and probably since the Manchu domination of the area in the 18th century. Robert Ekvall's above-mentioned firsthand account of Chinese–Tibetan interactions in the 1920s in Amdo–Kokonor illustrates this unambiguously. He wrote:

The second problem . . . is the infiltration of Chinese into the region occupied by the Tibetan farming population, many instances of which are found all along the border between the Chinese and Tibetan country. In the region of the Koko Nor an extensive colonization project is in the process of development, and the government is putting all possible pressure behind it. Land has been pre-empted from the Tibetan tribes, with scant regard for their desires, and is being granted to Chinese colonists. In still other districts turbulent Tibetan villages have been brought under strict rule by Chinese authorities . . . (Ekvall, p. 29)

Following the river up this steadily changing valley, we pass from one clearly defined culture pattern to another . . . Thus, a trip of seventy or

eighty miles takes one through a veritable laboratory of culture change . . . In the first village Chinese culture is dominant, and there are only vague traces of Tibetan influence; as one moves on, Tibetan influence increases to a point where the two cultures are evenly balanced; and from there on Chinese influence decreases until in the farthest villages the Tibetan aspect of life and manners is virtually unadulterated.

Such a trip likewise recalls . . . almost a journey into the past; for leaving the first village . . . one leaves, in a sense, the present and travels gradually backwards in time until he reaches the last village, which, with its dominantly Tibetan character, represents what the now definitely Chinese village once was. (*Ibid.*, p. 80)

Assertions, therefore, that many Chinese now live and farm in 'Tibet', while certainly true for ethnographic Tibet, are not true for the TAR; nor do they mean that this is a recent phenomenon in ethnographic Tibet. What portion of in-migration occurred since 1949 is an empirical issue. The problem regarding in-migration into the TAR, however, is still a very serious matter, but its true nature can not be understood if we obscure the very different historical experiences of the TAR and ethnographic Tibet. Failure methodologically to deconstruct 'Tibet' can only lead to gross distortions of the contemporary situation.<sup>8</sup>

This lengthy introduction may seem to labour an obvious point, but I admit to surprise that some 'academics' follow the 'Greater Tibet' practice, and apparently consider their position factually correct. Let me now turn to the main topic of this paper: Tibet during the four decades from 1950 to 1990.

### Methodology

In order to convey some of the salient aspects of social and economic change in Tibet from 1950 to 1990, the standard approach would have been to examine Chinese Government statistics for this area. However, because of the general, and to an extent well-founded, scepticism most Western scholars have towards such data, I decided that the most appropriate approach would be to provide an account of Tibet from the perspective of one group of nomadic pastoralists with whom I have conducted research. I believe that their experiences are generally typical of those of other nomads in Western Tibet, and that the trade-offs from this approach - greater accuracy and insight - are worth the loss of representativeness in sample. Thus, most of this paper will use what in anthropology is called the 'case study' approach. My research in Tibet consisted of five visits to the TAR (1985, 1986, 1987-8, 1990 and 1991) amounting to thirty months of fieldwork.<sup>9</sup>

Fourteen months of this time were spent in a community of



Nomads with their animals in Pala. (*Melvyn Goldstein*)

about 265 nomadic pastoralists who live in a relatively isolated, traditional nomad area called Pala. This area is located about 300 miles north-west of Lhasa and 115 miles north of the TAR's main east-west road on the western Changtang or 'Northern Plateau'.

Traditional anthropological methods such as participant observation and in-depth, open-ended interviewing provided the data for this paper. Interviews ranged from quasi-formal, where notes were taken and tape recorders often used, to informal, where data were collected as part of conversations. No restrictions were placed on meetings or interviews, and officials did not accompany us. All interviewing was conducted in Tibetan and virtually everyone in the community was repeatedly visited and interviewed. For most of the time with the nomads, my colleague, Professor Cynthia M. Beall, and I were alone with our private Tibetan research assistants, but for a portion of the study we were joined by a young Tibetan researcher from the Tibet Academy of Social Sciences who assisted us in data collection.

### 1951-9: Co-existence under the Terms of the Seventeen-Point Agreement

The establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 set in motion events which two years later altered the 'Tibet Question' in favour of China. The new Chinese Government not only



proclaimed the re-integration of Tibet into China as one of its prime goals, but in October 1950 forced it to the negotiating table by crossing the Upper Yangtse River and invading the eastern part of the Tibetan polity. Within a matter of weeks, it captured the bulk of the Tibetan army, together with Ngabö (Ngapo), the Governor-General who was one of Tibet's four council ministers. The Tibetan Government sent a delegation to Beijing to negotiate, and in 1951 reluctantly agreed to a 'Seventeen-Point Agreement for the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet' in which Tibet formally acknowledged Chinese sovereignty over Tibet in exchange for Chinese agreement to maintain the Dalai Lama and the traditional politico-economic system intact until Tibetans themselves wanted change.<sup>10</sup> Chinese troops moved into Lhasa in the autumn of 1951, and have not left.

Although 1951 marked the end of what then was a *de facto* independent Tibetan polity, the Dalai Lama and his government remained in place as did the traditional Tibetan political economy. Beijing left the quasi-feudal economic system intact.

The years 1951-9,<sup>11</sup> therefore, saw virtually no changes in Pala. The nomads continued to be *mi-ser* (serf-like subjects) of the Panchen Lama, belonging to his vast pastoral estate known as *Lagyab Lhojang*. This meant that they were, like Tibet's farmers, hereditarily tied to the land of their lord, and that they owed taxes to him in kind and in *corvée* labour. However, they owned their livestock, as farmers owned their crops, and had full rights over their disposal. The household was the basic unit of production and consumption. All of this continued in place until March 1959, when the Dalai Lama fled into exile and China assumed direct administrative control in Tibet after suppressing a large uprising. The period known as the era of 'democratic reforms' (*dmang-gtso'i bcus-sgyur*, mangtso jügyur) then began.

#### *Direct Chinese Rule in Tibet: 1959 until the Cultural Revolution*

The history of Tibet since 1959 is a complex story that will take years of detailed research in different sub-regions to elucidate adequately. The following account, therefore, can be thought of as an incipient examination of events during that period as experienced by Tibetans in one rather remote nomad area, rather than as a definitive exposition. On the other hand, during the course of my research in Pala I had the opportunity to hold a number of conversations about this period with farmers who had come to Pala to work for the nomads, and on the basis of this I think that the find-

ings from Pala are basically congruent with the experiences of rural farmers, at least in this part of Tibet. I certainly would not, however, preclude future research revealing different patterns in other regions of Tibet.

In Pala the seventeen-year period from the time of the flight of the Dalai Lama into exile in 1959 to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 can be divided into two phases: first, the early years from 1959 until the onset of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, and secondly, the era of the Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976.

In Pala the events of 1959 began in a rather surprising way. Because the Lagyab Lhojang nomads refused to join a group of neighbouring Nagdzang nomads and rise up against the Chinese, they (including Pala) found themselves embroiled in warfare with the rebels when these nomads and their monk allies, who were mostly from Ganden Chugor monastery, began to launch punitive raids against them. This ended only towards the end of 1959 when a unit of the PLA came to the aid of Pala at the request of the nomads. Guided by local Lagyab Lhojang nomads, it engaged and defeated the rebel force.

After this, Pala underwent changes that seem to parallel those of other rural areas in Tibet. Beijing now had complete control in Tibet and started the process of land reforms, the uprising, the Chinese argued, having voided their agreement not to start reforms until at least 1962. However, Beijing decided that the Tibetan peasantry was not ready for a major transformation (communisation) of its economy along the lines of the one that had taken place in China proper. Instead, it adopted a policy of bringing Tibet into the 'socialist line' gradually. This meant some land reforms (expropriation and redistribution of land from those who were involved in the 1959 uprising), but no immediate establishment of communes. It also meant that, although the mass of monks were sent home from their monasteries, Tibetans were still permitted to practise individual Buddhism, including going to temples and monasteries.<sup>12</sup> And although new local officials were appointed by the government from among the poor nomads, and a new and formal 'class' structure was created, class struggle sessions were restricted to those who had supported the uprising and the Dalai Lama - the so called 'reactionaries' or *log-spyod-pa* (lokjüba) - or those who had administered estates particularly brutally. In Pala, this fate befell only one leader whose property was confiscated and redistributed. He committed suicide just before his scheduled appearance at a struggle session. The rest of Pala's better-off nomads, even the very wealthy leader of the entire Lagyab Lhojang area, kept the animals they held in 1959. Consequently, the poor nomads

and the nomad beggar and servant classes in this area did not benefit much from the start of 'democratic reforms', because only the one herd was available for redistribution.

In early 1961, the relatively benign policy called 'mutual aid' (*rogs-ras*) was implemented in Pala. In this system, in nomad country, several households from the 'lower-middle' and 'poor' classes were formed into mutual-aid teams that co-operated in tasks such as herding; management and economic decisions, however, remained rooted at the household level, as did all income. This era also brought the first serious persecution of the members of the former nomad 'wealthy' class who, having already lost all their authority and status, were not permitted to 'join' the mutual-aid system and were forced to pay higher taxes and wages. But their animals were not confiscated and they were permitted to continue hiring other poor nomads as servants and shepherds, albeit at higher wages than those which the 'middle' and 'poor' class nomads paid. They could also still sell their products as they wished. The main thrust of the government's policy during this period was to establish infrastructure for later reforms and to reduce the tremendous income disparities of the 'old society' (*spyi-ishogs rnying-pa*, *jitso nyingba*) as the traditional era was now called. In villages this was easy to accomplish since the demesne land of the aristocratic and monastic lords was available for redistribution,<sup>13</sup> but with nomads it was more difficult because the former lords held only pastureland, so there were no animals to redistribute. The government ultimately imposed greater equality by heavily taxing the rich, that is, by reducing their income.

The 'Cultural Revolution' that began in China in 1966 dramatically changed all of this. In Pala, word of the impending creation of communes in 1969 precipitated a revolt among the nomads, who adopted the name Gyenlo, from one of the two Red Guard groups in Lhasa.<sup>14</sup> After killing some local district officials who had declared themselves supporters of the Communist regime - which in this area meant the Nyamdre or 'Alliance' Red Guard group - and imprisoning others, the nomads seized power in their area for three months, declaring religious and economic freedom. They had heard, and believed, that the PLA would remain neutral in the struggle between the two Red Guard groups, so they thought that they were safe even though their platform was not revolutionary reform but a return to what in essence was a modified pre-1959 state. This was a bizarre misunderstanding of events in China and Lhasa, and the PLA, guided by the 'Alliance'-member Tibetan cadres who had fled the district, came and reasserted their control.

At this point, the full weight of the Cultural Revolution fell on the nomads, transforming their lives.

The nomads were restructured into communes,<sup>15</sup> and, like farmers throughout Tibet and China, earned food, goods and cash on the basis of the 'work points' they received for their labour. The technology of pastoral management stayed the same, but now work was not organised on a household basis. The commune leaders decided who would do what work.

During the commune period (1969-81), no attempt was made to diminish the geographic scope of pastoralism by expropriating nomad pastureland or resettling nomads in agricultural areas. Nor was there any attempt to settle Tibetan or Chinese farmers in the nomad areas. However, several programmes to increase yields by irrigating and fencing pastures were tried in Pala, and an agricultural test plot was also set up in one small area. The nomads opposed this and the programmes all failed.

The Cultural Revolution also re-examined the class system that had been established in 1959-60. Using new and stricter criteria, a class of rich nomad exploiters of the poor was identified. Class conflict then became the dominant task, with severe struggle sessions occurring periodically. Those designated to have 'bad class origins' were at first prohibited from joining the commune and had difficulty even staying alive: a number died during this time. This restriction, however, eased after one or two years.

Although no attempt was made to resettle Han or to use Chinese language, Tibetan traditional cultural values, beliefs and norms now came under full-scale attack. One nomad described what happened to him when one day in 1970 Tibetan officials suddenly came to his tent and immediately took him into custody:

They called me a reactionary and a class enemy and told me: from today on, all your animals and goods are confiscated and you will live under the 'guidance' of the people just as the poorest of the poor lived in the old society. We had about 1,200 sheep and goats and 100 yak at this time. Right then and there they ripped off my earring, rings, necklace, my silver flint-striker and bullet holder. They also confiscated my new sheepskin robe saying that it was too good for the likes of a class enemy like me. In its place they gave me an old, worn one. But this was not all. They also took all of my family's household possessions and food stores, leaving us only one pot, one bag of 55 pounds of barley grain per person, and a little *tsampa*. And then they took away our fine yak-hair tent giving us in its place an old, tattered canvas tent. We were stunned - our whole life's wealth was eliminated in a matter of minutes. We didn't know how we would survive since they also said that we could not join the people's

commune but had to fend for ourselves, alone and without help. Our sole means of support were the 40 goats they left us [eight goats per person], only ten of which were milk goats.

The campaign known as 'destroying the four olds' (old ideas, old culture, old customs and old habits) was energetically launched with the aim of eliminating the traditional culture and creating in its place a new atheistic Communist class system. Private religious activities were forbidden, religious buildings (including monasteries, temples and even prayer walls) were torn down and Tibetans were forced to abandon traditions that went to the core of their cultural identity. Everything was deliberately turned topsy-turvy. The class struggle sessions conducted by Tibetan cadres were frequent, going on until late at night, and there was a constant barrage of propaganda that contradicted and ridiculed everything the nomads understood and felt. Moreover, food was often inadequate since leaders claimed false production gains which, in turn, required higher taxes and left less to divide among the members.

Thus, during this phase of Chinese rule, all traditional social and economic institutions were destroyed – or at least banned – and a full-scale effort was launched to transform the values and belief systems of the nomads and of course everyone in Tibet and China. If there is a period where the term 'ethnocide' could be applied, it would clearly be the decade from 1966 to 1976.

### *Chinese policy in Tibet in the post-Mao Era: 1976 to the Present*

The death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and the rise to power of Deng Xiaoping created a new cultural and economic policy in China that changed China and Tibet for the better. The full impact of these changes reached Tibet in 1980 when Hu Yaobang, General Secretary of the Party, visited Tibet with Wan Li, then Vice-Premier, and launched a new reform policy there.

The background to this intervention is not public, but informed sources suggest the following scenario. While China was discarding the ideological and economic baggage of Maoism and the Cultural Revolution in China proper, Ren Rong, the First Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in the TAR, was reporting that conditions in Tibet were excellent and that the masses, shoulder to shoulder with their Han brothers, were dedicated to Communism and the revolution. Some Tibetans in Tibet now say that one or two Tibetan cadres may have made critical counter-reports to Beijing, but it appears clear that even if this is true, the full extent

of the situation was not felt until the Chinese invited the exile Tibetan government to send a 'fact-finding' delegation to Tibet in 1979.

This delegation was the outcome of suggestions made in 1978 to both China and the exile government by John Dolfin, an interested middleman in Hong Kong, who believed that the time was ripe to open a new round of discussions on the 'Tibet Question'.<sup>16</sup> This quickly brought the Dalai Lama's elder brother, Gyalo Thondup, who lived in Hong Kong, into contact with representatives of the Chinese Government, and finally led to the Chinese issuing an invitation to the Dalai Lama to send a delegation which would have freedom to travel throughout Tibet and observe conditions there for themselves.

Beijing obviously accepted Ren Rong's reports that conditions were sanguine in Tibet, and consequently believed that once the delegation saw the progress that had been made in Tibet, *rap-prochement* would be easier. Led by the late Lobsang Samten, another of the Dalai Lama's elder brothers, the Tibetan delegation visited a number of areas. Before going to Lhasa they went to Amdo (Qinghai Province), the birthplace of the current Dalai Lama, and there received a tumultuous welcome. Tibetans flocked to see the delegation, prostrated before them, gave them ceremonial scarves, and so forth. This reception was unexpected by the Chinese, and Beijing, embarrassed by such overwhelming expression of support for the Dalai Lama, contacted Ren Rong in Lhasa to ask him what would happen if the delegation continued according to plan and visited Lhasa. Ren is said to have told them that the Lhasa people were more developed than the simple herders of Qinghai and strongly supported the ideals of the Communist Party: there would be no such problems in Lhasa.

The magnitude of the local Han administration's ignorance of the sentiment of the masses in Tibet – namely the Tibetan people's intense dislike of the Chinese and Communism and their devotion to the Dalai Lama – is illustrated by their decision to organise a bizarre series of neighbourhood meetings in Lhasa just before the arrival of the delegation so as to exhort the local Tibetan masses not to let their hatred of the 'old society' induce them to throw stones or to spit at the Dalai Lama's delegates, since they were coming as guests of the government. The local Lhasa Tibetans<sup>17</sup> politely said 'yes' to the cadres' exhortations, chuckling inwardly, and then gave a welcome surpassing the one that the delegation had received in Qinghai. Thousands upon thousands of Lhasa people, tears often streaming from their eyes, mobbed the delegation, prostrated, shouted Tibetan independence slogans, offered

ceremonial scarves and fought to touch the Dalai Lama's brother. Because Beijing officials were accompanying the Tibetan delegation, there was no way for Ren Rong and the other Tibet administrators to cover up this fiasco and the pro-Dalai Lama and anti-Chinese emotions it revealed.

When the delegation returned to Beijing it did not make a public statement on its observations, but privately informed the Chinese about its shock and dismay at the universal religious and cultural destruction it had witnessed, and at the overall poverty and backwardness of Tibet. The delegation said that, apart from criticising the massive cultural and religious destruction, it saw no evidence even of material progress in Tibet. Twenty years of Chinese Communist rule, the delegates chided, had not even brought Tibetan areas such basic things as good roads or buildings at a level parallel to those in Han areas. These private criticisms and the reality of the spontaneous affection and support demonstrated by the Tibetan masses shocked the highest reaches of the Party. It had expected to demonstrate to the refugee delegation and to the Dalai Lama the progress Tibet had made under Chinese rule and thereby to set the stage for serious negotiations to settle the 'Tibet Question' once and for all in a manner favourable to China. Now, faced with highly critical reports, the Party was forced to reassess the situation in Tibet and, if Tibet really had not progressed, to decide what should be done about the politically sensitive minority area.

After considerable preliminary investigation, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Yaobang, made an unprecedented fact-finding visit to Tibet in May 1980, to see for himself the conditions there. He apparently was deeply dismayed by what he saw and heard, and not only insisted that Ren Rong return on the plane with him to Beijing, presumably so Ren could cause no more trouble - but publicly announced an extraordinary six-point report on Tibet which included among its salient points:

2. In view of the relatively difficult situation in Tibet, the policy of recuperation must be unswervingly carried out to lighten the burden of masses.

Compared with other provinces and autonomous regions of the country, it is conspicuous that in Tibet the people's living standards lag far behind. This situation means that the burden of the masses must be considerably lightened. The people in Tibet should be exempt from paying taxes and meeting purchase quotas for the next few years. They will definitely be exempt from paying taxes, and state purchase quotas should not be assigned to them. All kinds of exactions must be abolished. The people should not be assigned any additional work without pay. Peasants' and herdsmen's produce may be purchased at negotiated prices or bartered to

supply mutual needs, and they should be exempt from meeting state purchase quotas. It is believed that the broad masses of peasants and herdsmen will support the policy of purchasing goods at negotiated price, bartering and exchanging products of equal value. This policy will promote the development of agriculture and animal husbandry.

3. Specific and flexible policies suited to conditions in Tibet must be carried out on the whole economic front of the region, including the agricultural, animal husbandry, financial and trade, commercial, handicraft and communication fronts, with a view of promoting Tibet's economic development more rapidly . . .

5. So long as the socialist orientation is upheld, vigorous efforts must be made to revive and develop Tibetan culture, education and science. The Tibetan people have a long history and a rich culture. The world renowned ancient Tibetan culture included fine Buddhism, graceful music and dance as well as medicine and opera, all of which are worthy of serious study and development. All ideas that ignore and weaken Tibetan culture are wrong. It is necessary to do a good job in inheriting and developing Tibetan culture. Education has not progressed well in Tibet. Taking Tibet's special characteristics into consideration, efforts should be made to set up universities and middle and primary schools in the region. Some cultural relics and Buddhist scriptures in temples have been damaged, and conscientious effort should be made to protect, sort and study them. Cadres of Han nationality working in Tibet should learn the spoken and written Tibetan language. It should be a required subject; otherwise they will be divorced from the masses. Cherishing the people of minority nationalities is not empty talk. The Tibetan people's habits, customs, history and culture must be respected. (SWB, FE/6436/BII/4, June 4, 1980)

This public statement, moreover, was mild compared to the secret report (said to contain 39 points) and speeches of Hu Yaobang to the Party cadres. One point of the report is said to have gone so far as to equate the previous twenty years of Chinese rule in Tibet with colonial occupation. This decision on the part of Hu Yaobang and the Central Committee of the Party to support those who criticised conditions in Tibet formed the basis on which a series of reform measures was implemented in Tibet in the following years.

The major reform, known as the system of 'complete responsibility' (*gan-tshang*, gen-dzang), dissolved the communes and restored the household as the basic unit of production. For the nomads in Pala, this resulted in all the commune's animals being divided equally among its 57 households with all infants and senior citizens receiving the same share.<sup>18</sup> The nomads owned these animals and were free to utilise them as they wished. Pastures were also divided at this time, but were allocated to small groups of several households (called *dzug*) rather than to individuals. These *dzug* then held exclusive usufruct rights over them: that is, the

families in a *dzug* had exclusive right to use these pastures. However, in Pala they were not permitted to sell or even lease them.

This system in some ways was similar to the one prepared for farmers, and in others very different. As with the nomads' animals, all the commune's arable fields were divided among its members, normally on a *per capita* basis. However, farmers not only legally held long-term usufruct rights to their land, but most villages actually allowed the farmers to use the land as if they owned it. Households, therefore, could lease their fields for fees if they wished and could decide how much to give as an inheritance when their children married. In most villages, moreover, this land stayed with the household when a member died, although in some areas where land was scarce it reverted back to the village and was then re-allocated to landless (such as new-born) villagers.

At the time of decollectivisation, each nomad in Pala received 39 animals from the commune: 4.5 yak, 27 sheep and 7.5 goats.<sup>19</sup> In addition to this, households were allowed to retain the 'private' animals that they had held during the commune era.<sup>20</sup> This raised the *per capita* average to 42.4 animals: 4.7 yak, 27 sheep and 10.7 goats. Using the average household size in Pala of 4.7 individuals, this meant that each household had about 200 animals. In the pre-1959 era this would have situated them in the lower-middle rungs of the economic hierarchy.

Administratively the new reforms signified the end of the commune and brigade structure. In its place, the government returned to the pre-commune unit called the *xiang* in Chinese (and now also in Tibetan). *Xiang* is the traditional Chinese term for 'township', but it is usually equivalent today to a village or unit of several villages. In Pala, the *xiang* consisted of two sub-units identical to the two brigades during the commune era. The two brigades, in turn, were divided into ten *dzug*, each consisting of from two to nine households and associated pastures. Membership in a *dzug* was permanent, although households could, and did, shift so long as they secured permission from the members of the receiving *dzug* and the local *xiang* government, a task not very difficult in Pala.

The *xiang* administration functions primarily to collect local data, such as the number of animals, for the higher governmental levels. It also implements decisions passed down from above and serves as the primary legal-judicial body dealing with divorces, disputes and so forth. It is headed by two officials known as *shang-drang*, a phonetic rendering of the Chinese term *zhang* for the head of a *xiang*. These *shang-drang* are local nomads elected by secret ballot from a list of candidates compiled by the level of government immediately above the *xiang*, the 'district' or *qu*.<sup>21</sup> In 1988 there

was talk of allowing nominations to be made by the local inhabitants for these positions, but this has still not been fully implemented. Nevertheless, local political leadership has undergone a marked change because district cadres in the mid-1980s began to give the nomads more choices in these elections. Not only did they select more candidates for the elections, but the lists included individuals who were formerly classified as class enemies. The nomads have responded by electing leaders with regard to their ability and their manifestation of basic nomad values, rather than to their political ideology. Thus, one of Pala's two *shang-drang* is an intelligent ex-monk who was a persecuted class enemy during the Cultural Revolution.

The district headquarters is located about three days' walk to the south of Pala. Its officials are all Tibetan, albeit mostly from non-nomad backgrounds. It functions as the intermediary between the *xiang* and the more distant 'county', known as *xian* or *dzong*, the headquarters of which is located about twenty days' walk to the south-east at Ngamring. Above the *xian* is the 'prefecture' of Shigatse and, above it, the government of the TAR.

The language used in administration at the district and *xiang* levels is Tibetan, and all letters and notices sent to Pala are written in Tibetan. At the county level, Chinese is often used by the higher officials, particularly in dealings with the prefecture and the autonomous region governments, and there are a number of Han officials.

Education is available in nomad country through a primary school located at the district headquarters. This school teaches completely in the Tibetan language, its main subjects being written Tibetan and arithmetic.<sup>22</sup> Nomad children who attend primary school live at the school and are provided free food and housing by the government. However, there were complaints about the poor quality of the food there throughout our stay in Pala and the nomads seemed generally uninterested in sending children to school despite repeated urgings by the district and county.

The 'responsibility system' mentioned above was implemented throughout China, so Tibet was not singled out especially in this regard. However, Beijing attempted to redress some of the wrongs that had been done to Tibetans in a number of ways.

Improving the standard of living of Tibetans, particularly the rural farmers and herders who comprise about 90 per cent of the population, was immediately addressed by exempting farmers and nomads in Tibet from both taxes and the quota system whereby farmers and herdsman are required to sell fixed amounts of their produce to the government at prices slightly below free-market



prices. This nation-wide system of quota sales provides the government with its main source of farm and animal products. The exemption meant that until the late 1980s Tibetan farmers were free to utilise their entire crop as they saw fit, and to sell or barter as much as they wanted or none at all. For the nomads in Pala, however, the government continued to utilise a system of compulsory quota sales of key products such as wool, cashmere and skins, euphemistically calling this a programme of voluntarily negotiated sale contracts. The nomads were free to sell their produce on the free market only after these 'quotas' were met. This element of compulsion was a source of irritation for many nomads, but because the prices the nomads received for their wool and cashmere were not much below market prices and rose markedly during the 1980s, the discontent over this was not great. For example, between 1985 and 1988 the prices of wool and cashmere rose by 50 and 150 per cent respectively.

These exemptions and the overall increase in prices for animal products have allowed Pala households to generate profits from what is still basically a traditional system of production. Although this is still a poor area even by Tibetan standards, by 1990 many of the households had purchased new manufactured commodities such as tape recorders, sewing machines and a few bicycles.

Another sign of the new disposable income was the re-emergence of the temporary summer in-migration of Tibetan farmers from villages 20 to 30 days' journey to the south. This traditional pattern had been forcibly terminated during the Cultural Revolution and spontaneously re-emerged only in about 1985 when scores of farmers again came to Pala and the surrounding nomad areas. As in the old days, these farmers tanned the nomads' skins, made *ma-ni* walls for nomad households, carved religious stones and even built houses. The nomads paid well for these services: for example, one sheep or goat for every nine to ten skins tanned. By 1990, roughly one quarter of Pala's households had hired such villagers to construct new storehouses or winter residences for them.

Tremendous cultural changes also occurred following the new reforms, which created a process of revitalisation. The nomads were informed that it was now permissible to practise religion and express other aspects of their culture. Depending on the interests and values of individual nomads, traditional religious and cultural practices gradually became active. In essence, the nomads began a dynamic process of re-creating their traditional cultural system, knowing there were probably still limits, but without being sure what these limits were.

Individual Tibetans, therefore, began to practise traditional Tibetan Buddhism openly, worshipping by circumambulating holy sites, turning prayer wheels and placing prayer flags on their tents. They also helped to fund the rebuilding of local monasteries and temples, and used them for religious purposes. Many began to make offerings to deities, monks and lamas, as had been the custom in the old society. Altars were again set up in tents, and by 1985-6 monks were being invited to perform prayers in people's tents. The monastery even set up a 'tent monastery' at the district horse-racing festival. The depth of these changes was pointedly illustrated one afternoon in December 1987 when a few nomads brought a newly purchased radio to our tent and sat listening to All India Radio's Tibetan-language short-wave broadcast of news and religious prayers. Because they had the volume turned up and our tent was just a few feet from that of a Party leader, we asked if they weren't concerned that he would hear what they were listening to. The nomads laughed, saying 'Why should he care? He listens too.'

Institutional religion - monasteries and nunneries - also saw a renaissance, although it remained an area over which the government retained some control, particularly with regard to limitations on the number and selection of monks. In Lagyab Lhojang, work began in 1986 on rebuilding a small Drigung Kagyupa monastery in Tongling. The site for construction was beside the district centre that had been destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, and funds for the building were donated by the local nomads. It re-opened in 1988. The monks in this monastery were supported by their families during the year, and by the monastery when they gathered for prayers in winter and in the holy fourth Tibetan month. The costs of these 'prayer meetings' were met partly by yields from a herd of several hundred sheep and goats that had been donated to the monastery by individual nomads, and partly by direct gifts from nomad patrons.

These traditional practices did not reappear all at once or in an orderly fashion. At first the nomads feared that the new policy was a devious trick launched to expose pockets of 'rightist' thinking, and individuals were reluctant to take the lead and risk being singled out. Change occurred only gradually as individual nomads took specific actions that, in effect, tested the general policy. When no protest or punishment came from the district officials above them, all of whom are ethnic Tibetans, a desirable practice spread and continues to do so. The re-emergence of nomad 'mediums', individuals whom deities possess and speak through, exemplifies this. It is an aspect of the traditional Tibetan Buddhist religious

system that is considered an 'unnecessary' superstition not only by the Communists but to an extent also by the Dalai Lama's exile government. Yet it reappeared in Pala in the winter of 1987 when an adult in one camp took ill and was in great pain for days before he died. A man from the same encampment went into trance spontaneously during the illness and was possessed by a deity who gave a prognosis and explanation of the disease. When no official criticism of this event occurred in the ensuing weeks and months, he and others fashioned the traditional costume worn by mediums, and he was sought after by others in Pala in cases of illness. By 1990, however, the district officials had passed down word that for lay people to become possessed was not acceptable, so the shaman was forced to continue practising in a surreptitious fashion.

What has been occurring, therefore, is a form of 'cultural revitalisation'. The term 'revitalisation' was used by Anthony Wallace in the 1950s to describe a number of movements of native peoples, such as cargo, nativistic and messianic cults that evolved in situations of socio-cultural stress and disorganisation, as 'conscious, organized efforts by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture'. Wallace saw these revitalisation movements arising in response to an 'identity dilemma' that was common in contact situations where two cultures, one politically dominant, clashed. He wrote:

[Revitalisation movements] originate in situations of social and cultural stress and are, in fact, an effort on the part of the stress-laden to construct systems of dogma, myth, and ritual which are internally coherent as well as true descriptions of a world system and which thus will serve as guides to efficient action. (Wallace (1966), p. 30)

The Tibet situation conforms to Wallace's conditions for the emergence of revitalisation movements in a general way.<sup>23</sup> In their contact with the dominant and alien 'Communist' cultural system, the nomads were told that their traditional leaders were contemptible enemies of the people and that their old values and norms were immoral and exploitative. Compelled to abandon the traditional beliefs and symbols that gave meaning to the world around them and actively to embrace new 'Communist' norms and values that they considered repugnant, they experienced a crisis of morality and meaning. This was further exacerbated when they had to put the new morality into practice by persecuting and physically punishing the newly defined 'class enemies', many of whom were friends and kinsmen.

In another important sense, however, the Tibetan situation is inconsistent with the Wallace model since the response in Tibet has

not involved a 'conscious' and 'organised' effort on the part of an individual or a group to rectify the *anomie* by innovating a new cultural system. Rather, what has occurred is a spontaneous, diffuse process wherein members of a society individually have resurrected and re-integrated components of their traditional cognitive and effective systems to relieve stress and dissonance and reconstruct for themselves a more satisfying culture. This process of diffuse revitalisation in Pala extends to all facets of the cultural system. Butchering livestock, for example, is again taking on the stigma it had in the traditional society. Since Buddhism teaches that taking life is sinful, the nomads traditionally relegated slaughtering activities, as well as castrating and cutting ear marks on livestock, to an hereditary 'unclean' social stratum: the very poor or the irreligious. This custom has again emerged in Pala and throughout Tibet, and most nomads no longer slaughter their own livestock.

An incident that occurred during our field-work in Pala illustrates the extent to which the traditional cognitive system has been re-integrated into the present system. A former *üpung* - 'poor class' - nomad, who had been an official during the commune period, sold a lactating sheep to a trader before milking it. By doing so he was breaking a traditional taboo, for nomads in Pala traditionally believed that such an act could affect negatively the milk production of the entire camp. A man in the same camp as the former poor-class nomad, and someone who had been persecuted as a class enemy, became incensed. He berated the seller and words soon turned into pushing and fighting. They took the case before the local *xiang* government, the poor-class nomad arguing that the wealthy-class nomad looked down on him and was trying to impose reactionary superstitions on him. The local and district officials, however, were not impressed with what had become an anachronistic perspective and did not side with him. Instead they fined both men for fighting, in the process validating the acceptability of even this type of traditional taboo. On another occasion, when a goat of one of Pala's four Party members was accidentally strangled during milking by the rope that tied it, he threw the carcass into the adjacent lake. This is because it is traditionally taboo to eat the meat of an animal which had been killed, albeit inadvertently in this case, by female milkers.

Current marriage patterns also illustrate the re-emergence of traditional attitudes and values. A number of today's wealthy nomads, for example, favourably consider a potential spouse who has a high-status family background from the old society, and most nomads now refuse to marry those from the traditional 'unclean' stratum. Similarly, nomad practitioners of traditional Tibetan

medicine are again active in the area, and traditional singing and dancing often spontaneously erupt when the young from several camps come together.<sup>24</sup>

One traditional pattern that has continued unrestrained throughout the period from 1959 to 1990 is that of having large families. Despite repeated claims in the West that the Chinese have imposed a strict policy of birth control in Tibet, where 'forced abortions, sterilisations and infanticide are everyday occurrences' (*New York Times*, 31 January 1992), there was no policy of restricting reproduction in Pala, let alone evidence of forced abortions, sterilisations or infanticide.

By 1988 some Pala nomads had heard that there was a way to stop getting pregnant, but there was no pressure to utilise family planning to restrict family size. In fact, one woman with many children actually came to us asking if we could help her obtain birth control 'medicine'. When we looked into this, we found that contraceptive injections were available at the district health post, three days away by horseback, and that IUDs were provided and sterilisations done at the more distant county headquarters. Before 1989-90, however, no concerted propaganda programme extolling the value of small families was implemented. In that year, small numbers of contraceptives, of the injection and the pill types, were distributed to the local *xiang* officials who were instructed to ask each reproductive-age woman whether she wanted to use contraception. There was still no pressure or coercion, however, to use them.

Not surprisingly, the nomads, including their officials, had large families. The fertility history of Pala's four Party members, all of whom were nomads who had joined the Party during the Cultural Revolution, reflects this. Of the three who are married, the Party Secretary's wife has had seven children, of whom six are alive; the two (successive) wives of a second official have eight living children; and the wife of the third has had seven births, of which six were living. These general observations of high fertility are supported by demographic information for all the females in the nomad community.

Based on our own demographic surveys, the crude birth rate (CBR - the number of births per 1,000 population in a given year) was 35 per 1,000 over the four-year period 1986-90, and the crude death rate (CDR - the number of deaths per 1,000 population in a given year) was 30 per 1,000. Pala's fertility, therefore, is 67% higher than that of China as a whole. The crude rate of natural increase (CBR minus CDR), was 5 per 1,000 for 1986-90, which shows an annual growth rate of 0.5%. This represents a very modest population doubling time of 140 years.

#### BIRTHS TO PALA NOMAD WOMEN AGED 15-59, 1985

Age	All women		Parous* women	
	Average no. of births	No. of women	Average no. of births	No. of women
15-19	-	12	-	-
20-9	1.3	20	2.3	11
30-9	3.3	18	3.8	16
40-9	5.4	11	5.9	10
50-9	5.4	10	6.8	8

\* I.e. women who have given birth to at least one child.

Our crude birth rate and crude death rate figures for Pala, however, are based on births and deaths over only a four-year period. To obtain a better understanding of population dynamics in this community, fertility histories were collected from a total of seventy-one females aged from 15 to 59. The Table above presents the actual number of births experienced by these women. It is clear that reproduction starts relatively late but that by the age 30-9, women have an average of 3.3 children. And by the age 40-9, women had experienced an average of 5.4 births, with 4.9 of these surviving in 1988. This relatively high fertility would be even higher if it were not for the late average age at first birth (22.4 years) and the large number of women who have never given birth (5 of 39 aged 30-59). Columns 4-5 present data only for 'parous' women, those who have actually borne children. This gives a better picture of fertility by eliminating infertile couples and unmarried females who have not yet conceived. The fertility of this sub-population of women averages 0.5 to 1.8 births more than that for all women, and is far in excess of any limit of two or even three births per couple.

Despite such strong evidence that fertility is very high in Pala, these data do not preclude the possibility that coercive birth control limitations have been implemented only recently. Our data, however, also indicate this has not happened. Between 1984 and 1988, seven Pala women gave birth to their third surviving child, four to their fourth, three to their fifth, five to their sixth and one to her ninth. The reproductive histories of Pala women at all ages, therefore, provide strong evidence in support of the conclusion that no population control policy restricting couples to two or even three births was or is operative. Furthermore, no Pala nomads have ever been fined for their third, fourth, fifth or subsequent children, and all such children and their families have full rights in the community.<sup>25</sup>

Taking all these changes together, this was a heady time. The

nomads' devotion to Buddhism could be expressed by prayers and deeds, and their perception of the worth of their traditional culture had been vindicated. Told that their language and culture were primitive and 'feudal' during the Cultural Revolution, the new policies now proved, from their perspective, that they had always been right.<sup>26</sup>

Although Tibetan culture underwent a revitalisation, some traditional institutions such as polyandry remain illegal, and in others, such as '[spirit] possession', specialists have been forced to operate surreptitiously. There was also unhappiness with being forced to sell products to the government at non-market prices, and there is a controversy over the government decision to limit herd size in order to conserve the pastureland despite the nomads' claims that they were not overgrazing.<sup>27</sup>

One also must keep in mind that China's regard for human rights does not parallel our own, and although the new policies had a sanguine impact on life in Pala, there is obviously no democracy or freedom there as we know it in the West. Moreover, the nomads' knowledge and fear that the current government could intervene again at any time and impose its alien values is coupled with their knowledge that about 5% of the nomads seemed to prefer the more 'class'-oriented era of the Cultural Revolution. It will take a long time for the nomads to forget the first two decades of Chinese rule.

Let us now turn to comment briefly on the consequences of this reform policy for household wealth. Economically, the new policies were well accepted by the nomads. Nevertheless, although all started with the same number of livestock, a number of the nomads have amassed considerable livestock over the seven years from 1981 to 1988. Conversely, some have fared poorly enough to fall below the subsistence line, and one nomad has actually lost all his livestock. The number of animals per person now ranges from none to 154, and 10 households, or 18% of the total, were actually receiving welfare from the district. Consequently, a nomad economic hierarchy is re-emerging with poor families or individuals beginning to work for rich ones in a way somewhat analogous to that which existed in the old days, although the wages now being paid are quite reasonable: good food and one sheep per month. Thus, as in the rest of China, one of the consequences of the new reforms has been increasing differentiation of economic power, and all that it entails.<sup>28</sup>

Other consequences of the reforms are clearly under way. Roads have made it possible for nomads to get more directly involved in trade. While most have preferred to continue with straight animal husbandry, some have begun to explore the trade option. They

were aided by a 1987-8 government programme for making loans for trade easily available to nomads with collateral. Some Pala nomads, therefore, have tried to sell sheep to Shigatse, which is a 2-3 day trip by truck away, and have converted the income from the sheep into manufactured commodities to resell in Pala. Others have simply used government loans to buy goods in Shigatse to resell among the herders. These innovations have had mixed results. The sheep scheme, for example, has not fared well because the Tibetan traders in Shigatse, knowing that the nomads have to leave when the truck that brought them departs, only buy at the last moment at a low price.

In general, these nomads have always been somewhat affected by world wool prices, and their entanglement is now closer and more direct. This will certainly have an increasingly strong effect on their lives. For example, following the recent collapse of the world wool price, the government stopped buying wool from the herders in 1990. The economic reforms discussed above, therefore, have started a process of change, the trajectory of which is not entirely clear. The economic situation is fluid.

In conclusion, the new reforms instituted in and after 1980 have provided a rich and nurturing matrix in which the nomads' strong convictions about the value of their way of life could express itself in the cultural and economic revitalisation here briefly described. There are problems, of course, and everything is far from perfect, but the transformation of their life has been remarkable. With no Han with whom to interact and with spoken and written Tibetan the language of administration, life in Pala, excluding of course the political system, is closer to traditional Tibet than at any time since 1959. While the same cannot be said for urban areas such as Lhasa, I think that the situation described above generally reflects the set of changes that have occurred throughout rural Tibet.

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## NOTES

1. This general acceptance, of course, does not in any way mean that scholars using 'Tibet' in this way are conceding that Amdo or Kham should permanently be part of China. It says nothing at all about the political issue of which ethnic Tibetans areas should be part of a Tibetan state. It means only that the term 'Tibet' refers to a political entity - a polity - and should be used to refer only to people and events in that entity.
2. Dreyer, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
3. For a discussion of Sino-Tibetan interventions in Kham and Derge, see Teichman, pp. 6-7, and Shakabpa, pp. 260ff.
4. Cited in Goldstein (1989), p. 711.
5. When the PLA crossed the Yangtse River and invaded 'political' Tibet in 1950, the Khambas east of the Upper Yangtse River did not support the Tibetan Government's forces. In fact, rather than assisting the Tibetan Government by attacking the Chinese militarily from the rear and flanks, substantial numbers actually assisted the Chinese by providing transport and acting as guides and liaison-translators.
6. The same holds true for ethnic Tibetans in Ladakh, Sikkim, Nepal and India.
7. There is a Chinese-language track in TAR primary and middle schools in areas like Lhasa where there are thousands of resident Han. However, while some

- Tibetans are allowed to matriculate in these, they represent only a small number of individuals.
8. Military camps in political Tibet, however, often engage in farming, and there is a new trend there wherein Han privately lease farmland from suburban Tibetans to grow vegetables.
  9. These visits were sponsored by the US National Academy of Sciences' Committee for Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China (the US National Program for research in China), the National Geographic Society's Committee for Research and Exploration, the US National Endowment for the Humanities and the US National Science Foundation.
  10. See Goldstein (1989) for a detailed account of this Agreement and the historical events leading up to it.
  11. This period will be discussed in detail by the author in a monograph on Pala currently in preparation.
  12. The three great monasteries around Lhasa remained open and some joint religious activities continued up to the onset of the Cultural Revolution. For example, there were several Monlam Chenmo (*smon-lam chen-mo*) festivals. This will be examined in a book about life in Drepung currently in preparation.
  13. The new policy confiscated and redistributed all aristocratic and monastic demesne lands. However, aristocrats who were not involved in the 1959 uprising were compensated for the loss of their estates and were permitted to retain use of their homes in Lhasa.
  14. This revolt appears, at least partially, to be related to others occurring at the same time in the areas of Nyemo and Biru.
  15. The basic unit here was actually the *rukha* ('brigade'), which is technically a sub-unit of a commune (*gung-hre*).
  16. Dawa Norbu.
  17. I refer here to the *mangdzo* or 'common people'.
  18. Losang Yexe (1988, p. 12), a nomad living in Damshung, an area north of Lhasa, also reports that animals were given to families on the basis of family size, but G. Clarke (p. 44) reports a variant system for Namtso, a pastoral area north of Lhasa. There, he says, 70% of the livestock went on a *per capita* basis among those aged 15 to 50 and the other 30% were 'allocated to the younger people and also to others who could work hard'.
  19. There is actually some variation regarding these figures since one person sometimes received seven more goats, but then had this balanced by getting one less yak, etc. These data were copied from the original division list located in the *xiang*.
  20. These 'private' animals were the equivalent of household garden plots on agricultural communes.
  21. A new system was implemented in 1988-9 in which smaller *xiang* such as Pala were merged with contiguous larger ones. Thus, Pala no longer exists as a separate administrative unit.
  22. No Chinese language is taught.
  23. Wallace (1956).
  24. Goldstein and Beall (1989).
  25. Goldstein and Beall (1991).
  26. There appears to be considerable variability depending on how local cadres interpreted the new policies, so anomalous situations probably exist. For example, in at least one nomad area north of Pala the commune was not dissolved and continues today (personal communication, George Schaller).
  27. For a detailed discussion of this controversy, see Goldstein, Beall and Cincotta.
  28. Goldstein and Beall (1989).