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Chapter 15

Tibetan Pastoralists in Transition. Political Change and State Interventions in Nomad Societies

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Abstract Past and present Chinese policies towards Tibetan pastoralists developed in the context of the Communist Party's ideological agenda from which implemented project measures can be deduced. This context needs to be understood in order to assess what kind of practical implications of pastoral policies were and are aimed at. Examples from case studies in Yushu, southern Qinghai, will demonstrate what kind of transformational processes underlie changes both in the pastoralist society and in the policies. This paper will argue that policies are imposed with regard to both the difficult livelihood situation of the people and new efforts for ecological conservation. However, the policy's objectives and the results of its implementation often diverge very strongly. A preliminary analysis will seek to explain this.

Keywords Tibetan pastoralism • Political change • State interventions • Settlement and migration • Rangeland availability • Declining significance of animal husbandry

15.1 Introduction

When collectivisation started in the People's Republic of China (PRC), mobile pastoralism in Tibet was thought to perish. The economic liberalisation starting in 1980, however, apparently brought about a 're-nomadisation' (Gruschke 2008, 3). Pastureland all over the Tibetan Plateau was 'reconquered' by the typical black tents of nomadic households and their herds, and prospects for the market orientation of the pastoral groups were supported by government policies. Obvious features of

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better livelihoods – motorbikes, mobiles, etc. – were interpreted as signs of a sound mobile pastoralism and animal husbandry in Tibet. The PRC's leadership is the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and yet outside observers neglect the ideological background as a constituent of its policies. Rather, mere speculations about alleged motives disseminate. Thus, new government schemes aiming at severe changes in rangeland management, the transformation of property rights, settling nomads and policies to encourage households to give up animal husbandry and resettle in urban settlements are often interpreted as the mere ambition of a socialist government to get a vagrant people under its definite control. To understand the policies, probe its shortcomings and assess where it might have strengths, the underlying ideas need to be considered. For this reason, the Sino-Marxist² background, political changes since the PRC's establishment and their consequences for policies in Tibetan pastoral areas are addressed here. This ideological background then is contrasted with a number of practical experiences and local testimonies on the policies' impacts, hinting at the complex nature of sociopolitical processes and the difficulty in finding solutions to problems, when only few factors are understood.

15.2 Methodology and Research Region

The objectives of Chinese policies and their implementation in Tibetan pasture areas are studied according to their blueprint representation in official and semi-official (grey) literature.³ Their comparison to actual circumstances on the ground is based on data collected in 2004–2010 during field trips to pastoralist areas in the eastern part of the Tibetan plateau. Major research methods include participative observation, non-formal, semi-structured, biographical and standardised household interviews as well as some focus group discussions. The interviews cover a big spectrum of household types and single protagonists in their various roles and positions in pastoral and non-pastoral society, economy and administration. The main focus of research lays in the Tibetan autonomous prefecture (TAP) Yushu, a region extending in the east-central part of the Tibetan plateau and the south of Qinghai Province. The administrative seat of the prefecture is the town of Gyêgu (Tib. *Jyekundo*), widely known as Yushu, that was destroyed by an earthquake in April 2010. Although recent processes of urbanisation are effective (Gertel et al. 2009), the nomadic population of this region still outnumbers farmers and agro-pastoralists. Different processes of modern reconfiguration are now following the recent re-nomadisation. Interview sites included 41 of 46 townships in all the six counties of Yushu TAP and are complemented by interviews and field observations in other Tibetan areas.

15.3 Development Processes Since the Communist Takeover

Since the mid-twentieth century, Tibet underwent processes of transformation to an extent hitherto unknown. With mobile pastoralism representing the major livelihood in the vast expanse of the Tibetan highland, nomads were seriously affected.

The takeover of the CCP in China in 1949 entailed socio-economic changes initiated from outside the pastoralist society. Those changes, however, did not occur all of a sudden. In 1942, Mao Zedong had advocated that 'the economic activities of the army, Party and government should harmonise with the economic activities of the people. Anything which damages the people's interests or causes them dissatisfaction is not allowed'.⁴ Initially, the CCP's actions indeed interfered less with the nomadic way of life than with other groups of China's population. When summing up the living circumstances of Tibetan pastoralists during the first years of CCP rule, Ekvall (1972, 285) noted:

They have imposed less coercive restriction on the high-pasture ones [= drokpas] than on any other segment of the population and appear concerned mainly with leaving the herds-men undisturbed, provided only that the latter continue to produce. They bemoan the fact that production is less than it should be, and they have some things to say about increasing the birthrate by elimination of venereal disease. With great pride, they report increase in livestock and in the production of wool, meat, hides, butter, and animal fats; and they are obviously experimenting with projects and devices calculated to reduce nomadizing while maintaining full-scale pastoralism.

Ekvall's observations were made from a remote position and his conclusions drawn from secondary sources, but his assessment of the situation in the early 1950s corresponds with statements made in biographical interviews. A short while later, the hasty collectivisation during the so-called 'Democratic Reforms' in 1958–1959 and the ideologisation of daily life in the Cultural Revolution (CR) in 1966–1976 revolutionised the social and economic sphere (Goldstein 1994). The nomads were then deprived of their responsibility for, and the free disposal of, herds and pastures as all animals were transferred into collective property and management. Essential innovations in the livestock economy and production were the introduction of veterinarian measures and state-organised processing and marketing of animal products. Obvious endeavours in the pastureland were large tracts being enclosed with walls made from sods and clay. Apparently, those did not disturb seasonal migration cycles since the enclosures were delimiting community borders that followed traditional clan borderlines. This was still the case when collectivisation measures started in the mid-1950s and people's communes were formed after 1958. The nomads' way of life, however, underwent serious shifts, and their social organisation was revolutionised. The economy experienced the total reorganisation of work distribution and management responsibilities, but pastures and herds were still organised according to schemes of mobile pastoralism. Biographical interviews with elder nomads in Yushu between 2005 and 2007 support this view. Goldstein had similar findings amongst the Phala nomads in western Tibet.⁵ Production brigades used seasonal camps even during the CR, and animals were herded on seasonal pastures as it was done before. This is confirmed in an interview with 75-year-old (2006) Phüntso Nyima, a nomad of Xialaxiu who sold his animals and settled in Yushu county town in 2000:

Yes, in the old society we had different camps for winter and summer, but now after [re-] distribution no more, but before [i.e., during the CR] we also had different winter and summer camps. We want different camps for winter and summer pastures, but now it is impossible, we don't have enough pastureland [any more].

With Mao's death in 1976, the Cultural Revolution ended. China initiated a new phase of development with crucial effects on pastoral areas. The CCP under Deng Xiaoping gradually realised the economic construction programme known as 'Reform and Opening' (*gaige kaifang*) by instigating the 'Four Modernisations' (*sige xiandaihua*): of industry, agriculture, national defence and science and technology. This alteration of the political agenda is frequently taken as a pragmatic course of the Chinese leadership and as an indication that the long-term objective of communism was abandoned. This is not the case, but a shift of perspective within Sino-Marxist dialectics as von Senger (1982, 2008, 103–125) has made clear. The major concept of argumentation in dialectical materialism is the defining of the principal contradiction. Since 1937, it represented a central idea in Mao's line of reasoning, and remained so unaffectedly under Deng Xiaoping and his successors.

The Sino-Marxist conception denies the epistemological significance of philosophy but perceives it as a means for changing the world. To incite changes, the CCP defines a principal contradiction that needs to be solved by the Chinese people. In the eyes of the party leadership, redefinitions of the principal contradiction delimit different stages of the country's social development.⁶ According to that definition, it is decided which of the upcoming tasks have the highest priority (von Senger 2008, 99–111). Until the end of the CR, class struggle was seen as major task but was rated secondary when, in 1978, the party defined that 'at the present stage, the principal contradiction in Chinese society is one between the ever-growing material and cultural needs of the people and the low level of production'.⁷ This resolution acknowledged that the leadership under Mao had introduced the commune system too early. It was now explained that China is a country in the 'initial stadium of socialism and will, for a longer period of time, remain in this stage'. The redefinition determines the primary task of 'deliberating the productive forces and gradually realizing the country's socialist modernisation' to fight poverty and backwardness in China.⁸

The party's confidence in positive developments in Tibet led to the Dalai Lama being invited to dispatch a so-called 'fact-finding delegation' in 1979. The latter's critical report about poor life conditions of Tibetans incited CCP chairman Hu Yaobang to lead his own delegation to Tibet and verify the observations. The drastic reform measures he suggested for Tibet were implemented right away (Goldstein 1994, 96–100). In order to improve the living standard of Tibetan farmers and herders, the Beijing government enacted their exemption from dues⁹:

The major reform ... 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. 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. (Goldstein 1994, 99–100)

This grave alteration of the leadership's attitude vis-à-vis the people's communes led, in the early 1980s, to the ultimate dissolution of the collective system and to the

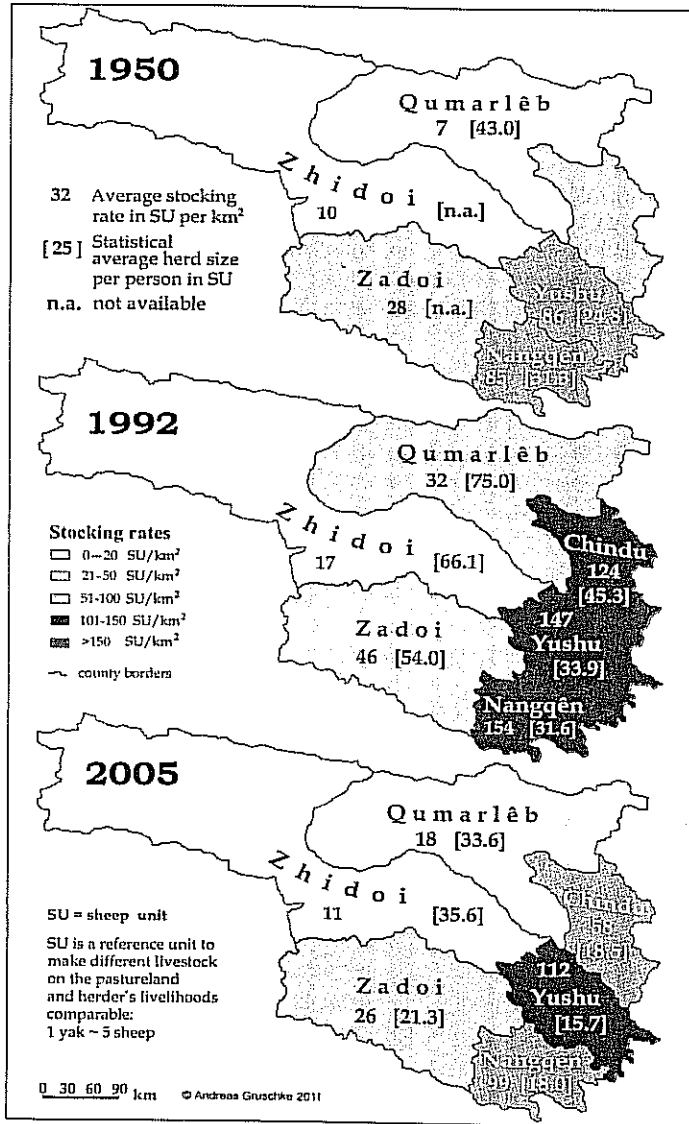
introduction of the 'household responsibility system'. The distribution of the communes' animals to the pastoral households led to the revival of mobile pastoral systems that existed before collectivisation. Notably in naturally favourable regions of eastern Tibet, pastoralists achieved certain affluence by marketing their highly valued animal products to urban markets. Counties like Zhidoi and Qumarlêb in Yushu TAP were then considered wealthy since due to their low population density, they had large herds grazing on low-stocked rangeland resources. In 1992, herders there disposed of 66 and 75 sheep units (SU) per capita,¹⁰ whilst in comparatively densely populated Nanggên, it was not even half that figure (Fig. 15.1). The increasing productivity that followed the privatisation of livestock and the better market integration initially seemed to be the key for raising the living standard in rural areas.

In 1987, the CCP enacted a new comprehensive three-step strategy for China's economic construction aiming at (1) doubling the 1980 value of the gross national product and solving problems in nourishing and clothing the population, (2) quadrupling the 1980 GNP by the end of the twentieth century and (3) completing the country's modernisation by the mid-twenty-first century.

By then, the average per capita GNP is intended to equate the level of a developed country of medium standard and the Chinese citizens to lead a relatively comfortable life (von Senger 2008, 119–120). To attain these national goals, regional development plans had to be designed to suit the respective local conditions. In pastoral areas, the improvement of infrastructure (highways, services) was envisioned to enable a better market integration of the pastoral economy and consequently enhance public welfare.

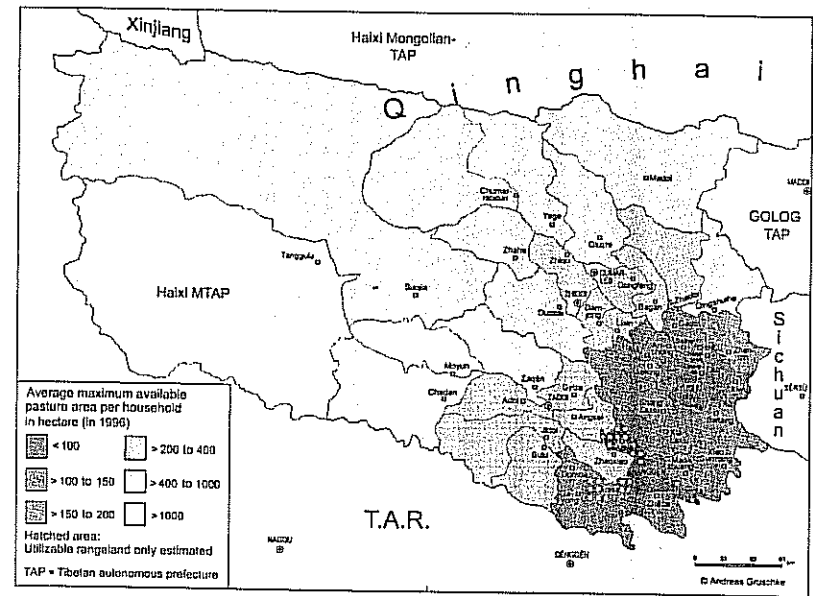
After marketing was conferred to the private sector, however, marketing chains through state enterprises built up in the collective period disintegrated. Only households in relative proximity to bigger cities – like Xining, Lanzhou and Lhasa – were able to profit from the urban demand for livestock products. The densely populated pastoral areas in south-eastern Yushu experienced a growing demand for such products within their own sphere. As the human population grew faster than livestock numbers, the per capita availability of animals decreased, resulting in a shift back to a subsistence-oriented animal husbandry amongst the majority of rural households. The conditions were further aggravated by three subsequent snow hazards in the 1990s (Gruschke 2009, 90–91). Still, the average stocking rates in all counties evened out at a level a little higher than the 1950s – with livestock availability considerably below subsistence level (25 SU) for most parts of the region (cf. Fig. 15.1).

The situation seems further exacerbated by pasture degradation. In a persuasive paper, though, Harris (2010) has drawn the extent and alleged causes of rangeland degradation into question. The various hypotheses to explain range degradation may be invalidated as *general* explanations for the phenomenon and further challenged due to the lack of supporting primary data. Existing Chinese data are certainly far from being thoroughly analysed. Observations in the field and interviews made in Yushu, however, support the view that combination of several factors results in serious pasture degradation.¹¹ Its magnitude may be difficult to calculate and



Source: author's calculation based on data in YSB 2000 and YSB 2006

Fig. 15.1 Development of stocking rates and per capita herd size in Yushu (1950-2005) (Source: Author's calculation based on data in YSB 2000 and YSB 2006)



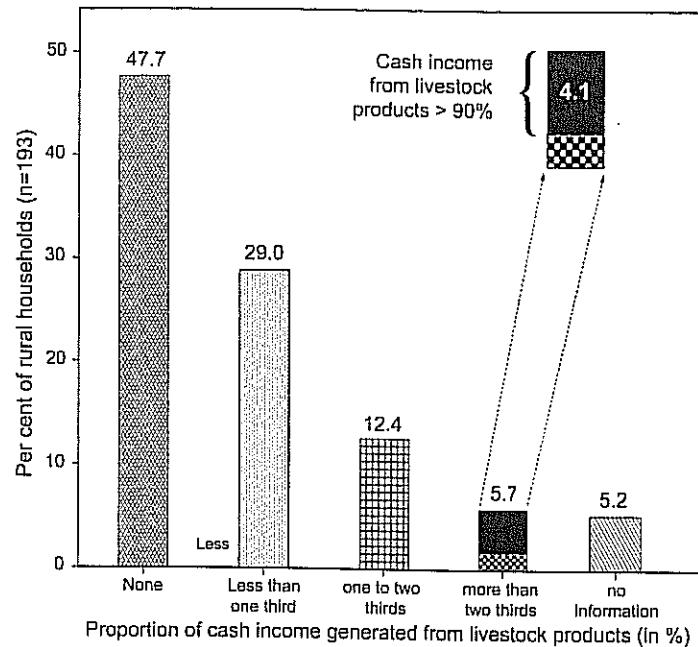
Sources: author's calculations based on data in YSB 2000 and YZZ 2005

Fig. 15.2 Uneven rangeland distribution in Yushu (Sources: Author's calculations based on data in YSB 2000 and YZZ 2005)

express in numbers, but the extent is perceptible and felt by pastoralists. Almost 70% of the 296 Yushu households we surveyed in 2006/2007 referred to degradation as a major concern, slightly less than their complaint about the general lack of pastures (74.3%).

Unlike in historic times, the region does not offer anymore unused space to make new grassland accessible elsewhere. The availability of pastureland is far from being balanced (Fig. 15.2). The most extensive pasture area is available where the population density is low. New households of the young generation had no chance to develop bigger herds and a sound basis for animal husbandry since all utilisable pastures were already distributed. Resettlements to more distant pastures would entail conflicts with herders who historically claimed and at present have an entitlement to that land. Remaining possibilities are the intensification of animal husbandry production, finding new modes of herd management – with pasture availability and lack of means for investment being the main limiting factors for enhancing productivity – or to extend income portfolios through non-pastoral activities.

Still, rural areas in Yushu appear to harbour a sound mobile pastoralism. When analysed in detail, however, the 2006-2007 sample survey of Yushu households reveals that less than half of them own enough animals to live above the subsistence level (25 SU per person). Between 12% and 20% of rural households did not even



Source: Gruschke (2009)

Fig. 15.3 Decreasing importance of livestock for income generation of Yushu pastoralists (Source: Gruschke 2009)

own livestock. Almost half of the livestock owners interviewed (47.7%) could not earn any cash from animal products, most of them not even producing enough for their own sustenance. Another 29% earn less than a third of their income from pastoral economy. Only every sixth to eighth pastoral household of the Yushu survey could establish animal husbandry as main source of living (cf. Fig. 15.3; Gruschke 2009, 396–397).¹²

Under such circumstances, rural outmigration is a foreseeable consequence, and this is what gradually started in the 1990s. The extent of migration is yet smaller than could be expected since many nomads in the eastern part of the plateau have access to a unique resource: caterpillar fungus. This tonic is collected in specific parts of the grassland and helps them making up for the deficits of the pastoralist economy (Winkler 2008). It enables both rural people to stay in their home villages even if they have too few animals, and to subsist in townships and urban areas, where their lack of education and vocational training make it rather difficult to find employment. Rural migrants to towns run a high risk of being marginalised given that they compete on urban labour markets with Han, Hui and Salar immigrants. Many herders have thus become aware of the importance of education, which is

corroborated by the increasing number that moves to towns because they want their children to attend better schools.

This meets the intentions of the state. By upgrading and extending the infrastructure in pastoral areas, political measures intervene more strongly into the organisation of their livestock-based economy. This applied especially for the period from 1996 to 2004 when the 'Comprehensive Set of the Four Constructions' (*sipeitao jianshe*) was implemented in the grassland areas. This project's goals were the construction of fixed settlements on winter pastures, the installation of fenced pasture areas, the construction of schools and health stations and forming long-term leasehold contracts for pastureland, which endow household with territorially bound usufruct rights for a period of 50 years.

These measures aim at minimising risks for pastoralist households by enclosing reserve pastures for the most difficult time in spring, creating possibilities for additional fodder supply and equipment of winter quarters. The consequences of the agenda for mobile pastoralism and the household economy are, however, reflected in controversial discussions.¹³ Whilst the project intended to lessen the vulnerability of pastoralists, some reports indicate that it may have brought about more negative effects: restricting pastoral mobility through fences, reducing the income by limiting the number of animals, causing overgrazing near winter housing and the indebtedness of households as they have to bear their share of the costs. Such problems cannot be generalised, however, for they are far from thoroughly researched. Again, there is a lack of quantitative data, and qualitative data procure ambiguous results at times. Some statistical figures, on the other hand, overstate certain developments. The so-called enclosure movement, for instance, is widely seen as fencing privately used pastures contracted to the households. In Yushu, the fenced area fluctuated considerably during the 1980s, but was already increased before the above-mentioned 'Four-sets' project started off (Table 15.1).

The project thus amplified developments that were already underway. This is all the more true with the construction of winter houses. Before collectivisation, few nomads possessed houses in winter camps, as can be learned from biographies like 70-year-old Lobsang's¹⁴:

When I was a servant [in his youth], we stayed in the tent in summer and lived in a house in winter. Nowadays, we stay in the tent from April to August and live in the house from September to next April. I would like to tell you foreigners that if you stay in the tent in winter, you'll be frozen without any doubt.¹⁵

In the 1980s and 1990s, more and more households started to build simple houses. With the 'Four-sets' agenda, the state supported this development, now called 'construction of fixed settlements'. Meanwhile, almost every Tibetan pastoralist household possesses a winter house, and yet can mostly continue herding on seasonal pastures. But as Lobsang recounts, other things have also become relevant for them:

Currently, a new road is important for us [since] to fetch water is a difficult task ..., and some families have a shortage of fences for grassland. Fences are important for us; if we have [some], the grass will grow well and herding animals is easier for us.

Table 15.1 Enclosure development in Yushu TAP

Year	Fenced area in ha	Time period	Increase by
1983	33,370		
1984	12,610	5 years	200%
1985	10,170		
1986	51,790		
1988	15,340		
1989	37,730	5 years	158%
1990	58,310		
1994	97,490		
1995	105,990		
1996	119,280		
1997	152,540		
1998	197,520		
1999	348,130	6 years	178%
2005	966,000		

Source: YSB (2000, 2006)

Fencing is not meant to interrupt the system of mobile pastoralism, even though figures seem to reproduce a different trend. Cadres use statistics to demonstrate the progress of their project implementation, but the growth rates, remarkable at a first glance, need to be compared to the general situation. In two decades the increase rate of enclosures was very high in the beginning of the 'Four-sets' (257%), but slowed down to the average before the project's start (Table 15.1). When state subsidies for fences ended in 2005, the total fenced area in Yushu was at 16.9% of its utilisable rangeland (162,800 km²). Thus, it does not represent a movement to split up the rangeland into pieces of privately used land, but reserve pastures for harvesting fodder during the difficult spring period.

The purely socio-economic target of the Chinese long-term development strategy unfolded serious consequences. According to the Sino-Marxist inside view, the single focus on the principal contradiction disregarded 'secondary contradictions' too long. Their resolution having been neglected, existing problems increased and new 'contradictions' added on top. Thus, for instance, the disparities between Chinese coastal provinces and the 'hinterland' increased, the wealth gap between poor and rich widened and ecological problems long ignored became conspicuous. Ultimately, the 'secondary contradiction between economic development and environmental conservation' had to be addressed as it contributes to the aggravation of the 'contradiction between the modernisation of the country and the protection of its cultural peculiarities (notably of minority groups)' (von Senger 2008, 146).

In order to realise the nationwide success of modernisation efforts until 2049, the strategic goal the CCP pursues is to reduce regional disparities and to overcome the development gap between the Han majority and ethnic minority regions, thus contributing to the maintenance of social peace and national unity.¹⁶ The means the CCP chose to overcome those disparities is the strategic 'Big Opening of the West' (*xibu da kaifa*) agenda. At the turn of the millennium this state programme started off with enormous investments in order to accelerate the economic development of

poorer areas in the western half of China. The Tibetan plateau and its vast rangelands were embedded in a national framework aiming at integrating all areas that had been neglected in the hitherto existing development processes. The implementation of the projects related and investments handled needed to be adapted by regional and local administrations. This was done within political structures gradually reformed since the late 1980s. New competences to people's congresses at different levels were defined and responsibilities to regional and local administrations handed over (Paul and Cheng 2011, 107–118). This entailed political challenges, like decentralisation that initially was not procured intentionally, but yet hazarded:

Without accompanying decentralisation of political power and the conferring of substantial degree of regional autonomy in the control and use of local resources, ethnic minorities may perceive the central State's projects as attempts at internal colonisation, leading to their outright opposition to the whole regional development strategy itself, thus exacerbating the already simmering ethno-regional tensions. (Yeoh 2008, 23–24)

One of the major consequences of decentralisation is that the outcome of project implementation is quite inhomogeneous. Major infrastructural projects – like the building of new highways and solar energy plants – were completed at different pace from province to province. Other projects like the construction of settlements, electrification and rural water supply varied extremely depending on priorities given by regional administrations – not to speak of financial 'losses' by defrauded funds.

Paying attention to the contradiction between economic development and environmental conservation, the state decided on measures to protect the fragile ecology on the Tibetan highland. A major result was the establishment of the 'Three Rivers' Headwaters (*Sanjiangyuan*) National Nature Reserve' where poorly managed mining, logging, hunting and grazing were contained, in order to protect rangelands and wildlife and promote sustainable economic development (Foggin 2005, 5–6). In designated 'core zones', herding had to be stopped, whilst pastoralist activities in all other areas were controlled. This was a reaction to the growing number of concerns coming from academics as well as from locals about ecological problems and the impoverishment of the population. The policy 'Pastures to [unused] Grassland' (*tuimu huancao*) went against overgrazing and classified the rangeland into zones where herding was to be abandoned for a number of years or seasonally.

The realisation of this policy began in 2002. It has definite consequences for the livelihood of nomads, even more so as it is accompanied by measures for 'Poverty Alleviation by Resettlement' (*yimin fupin*). These measures were unambiguously reflected in the 11th Five-year Plan (2006–2010) that is subordinate to the above-mentioned three-step strategy. The latter aims at optimising the structure of industries and expects to increase the efficiency of resources' utilisation, strengthen sustainable development efforts, bring the system of the market economy to perfection and raise the people's standard of living.¹⁷ In autumn 2007, Party Secretary Hu Jintao emphasised the significance of a 'scientific development conception' in the sense of a comprehensive, well-coordinated and sustainable development to attain a 'harmonious society'. The Five-year Plan was supplemented by the 'National Plan

for Environmental Protection' intending investments in environmental conservation on the level of 1.35% of the GNP (von Senger 2008, 120, 146–147).

One of the best-known interventions in this context is the so-called 'Eco-migration' (*shengtai yimin*), a programme that was started in ecological problem zones. The emphasis on environmental conservation entailed the resettlement of herders in towns to take pressure from rangelands – first implemented in Inner Mongolia and later in Tibetan pastoral areas. In Qinghai alone, the investment for the 'Eco-migration' scheme amounted to 7.5 billion Yuan, covering the construction of houses, related development of infrastructure, financial support for the households concerned, promotion of vocational training, etc. (Gruschke 2009, 356). This programme is different from the 'Four-sets' settlement policy, although the housing built make it look the same. Within the resettlement scheme, households receive terminable subsidies in order to become residents of county towns and townships, sell their animals and waive the land use rights of their pastures temporarily (5–10 years). There is, however, the expectation that many will continue to stay in urban settlements in case they find employment. Still, according to their agreement with the government, they are entitled to dispose of their contracted pastureland again once the 5–10 years are over.

On the other hand, the Yushu survey (Gruschke 2009) revealed that a considerable number of migrants from rural areas already moved to county towns and Gyêgu. In two of the sample villages, Yarcer and Zhêca of Nangqên County, between one third and half of the registered households had already taken residence in the county town during the past 15 years. Pastoralists who have little prospects to live from animal husbandry as snow hazards made them lose their livestock or their herd is too small, are often willing to accept government resettlement schemes. As such, the 'Eco-migration' fails in its objectives since such families do not help to reduce pressure on the grassland (whilst they help to lessen the demand for resources in their village): it rather turns out to be a 'poverty alleviation migration' programme. Furthermore, the projects tend to be failures since other project parts, namely, educational and vocational training, are not well managed, if supplied at all. Problems of corruption on local administration levels sometimes further deprive resettlers of some of their benefits.

The framework of political and administrative conditions determining the transformation processes that pastoralists in Yushu – and elsewhere in the Tibetan plateau – undergo are considerably stimulated and led by processes related to changes of technical (media, communications), environmental (global warming) and demographic nature (population growth). Together with the integration of Chinese economy into the world market, they severely affect the socio-economic structure in the Tibetan plateau and the livelihood of nomadic societies. Households of herders make their choices: many stay in the countryside to continue their habitual life, adapting from modern life what they deem useful; others take their chance and settle in newly developing urban areas. By virtue of leaving their villages migrants help those staying back to dispose of, more or less, enough resources. Some of them may fail in towns, whilst others might be successful. Unfortunately, so far research has been done on state programme resettlers, but little is known about how those migrating on their own initiative deal with the transformation of their society.

15.4 Conclusion: Problems Remaining Unresolved and Future Prospects

The 're-nomadisation' of the 1980s in Tibetan pastoral areas has clearly exceeded its climax. The shrinking resource base of a growing number of pastoralist households has to be held responsible for this. Together with higher overall stocking rates and an increasing menace by ecological factors, rangelands gradually lose their capability for regeneration. Grassland is in higher demand since due to the growing human population, the overall number of the animals has grown even though more and more households have smaller herds. The disproportional change in the livestock–population ratio elucidates the decreasing importance of livestock for pastoral livelihoods. Simultaneously the surface of utilisable pastures has declined.

Until the mid-twentieth century, the economy of Tibetan nomads was a subsistence-oriented mobile pastoralism with yaks and sheep as most important livestock. Herders met their grain requirements by exchange with settled farmers. As livestock keepers, they need to produce surplus animal products in order to exchange them against goods like grains, oil, salt, etc. Still in the early 1980s, the situation of animal husbandry in Yushu allowed for equilibrium. With the growth of the human population, the situation has changed. A rising number of pastoral households find themselves forced to develop new economic opportunities. The increasing pressure on pastoral resources even resuscitated grassland conflicts that had been settled in the 1950s. To mediate such conflicts, the unloved state plays an increasingly important role – as he does in other problem fields. This explains the growing number of state interventions since animal husbandry was handed back into private responsibility.

At national and provincial levels, the Chinese central government has introduced policies that in their way of decision-making are still guided by Sino-Marxist ideology. However, due to changes in administration enabling a certain degree of decentralisation, the measures for implementation are adapted to local conditions. Not only are such conditions extremely varied, but also the engagement and the expertise of cadres as well as their willingness and ability to consider requests of the herders are highly variable. Hence, such policies are, on the local level, often diverse at best, if not conflicting, confusing or even counterproductive at worst. Whilst state interventions in China definitely aim at solving problems reported by both pastoralists and academics, successes tend to be limited and new problems arise.

In the long run, there will only be a chance to improve results if herders are not just meant to accept policies decided, but rather if they are included in the process of decision-making. Participation in planning and implementation still sounds like a long way to go, although there are cases in which local administrators and pastoralists, often under involvement of NGOs, have managed to do so – like in cases of co-management as advocated by ICIMOD (Banks et al. 2003). Local adaptations demonstrate that herders have expertise enabling them to play a part in the process, if they are allowed to. State interventions in the form of projects are accepted by pastoralists more than it is commonly believed. Major complaints are about measures

that are not consistently implemented, conditions that have changed and local administrators that do not stick to what was promised:

Since the government implements the project 'Pastures to Grassland' we thought we can get financial support from the government. The central government promised that we can get financial support if we give up our animals and return the pastures. (...) Even though we have lots of difficulties I do not want to complain to the central government. We need a house to live in and a regular income. The central government invests a lot of money, yet it is running to the pockets of officials. We received very, very little. This caused the suffering of the people in our village. (...) My hope is that the central government gives the money directly to us. This is not only my wish, it is the wish of all the villagers. If it will be like this, I can die one day in peace. I trust in the central government and I do believe in the PR China.¹⁸

One of the major issues of all projects in China is met with here: monitoring and evaluation. The same people who implement projects also give their feedback to higher-level authorities: This leaves little space for critical analysis. Official statements on projects in public media let the projects appear as a success, if huge amounts of allocated funds were fully spent. This provides good opportunities for misappropriation. Corruption amongst local Tibetan administrators is as big a problem as in the rest of China, and this creates tensions, even if projects are acceptable to local people. This becomes more serious for pastoralist households, since due to the remoteness of their places of living, they have less possibilities to access enough information about how policies are and can be interpreted, what kind of rights they have or should have, and by which means they could organise themselves to insist on them (Gruschke 2009).

It is true, as Melvyn Goldstein¹⁹ expressed, that there is enough evidence that from 1949 until the end of the CR, there were less changes in the pastoral management in Tibetan areas than after the economic liberalisation that started off in the early 1980s. We cannot be sure, however, that all the changes were only induced by policies. Coincidences alone are no evidence, since they also coincide with global processes of modernisation, market integration, demographic change, etc. Those may play their part in the story. Policies and interventions in Tibetan pastoral areas cannot be understood without regard to the ideology-guided decision framework of China's general economic policy, whilst successes and failures need to include an analysis of the structural problems and shortcomings in its implementation, monitoring and evaluation. So far, it has to be worried that changes in policies will not help much as long as the monitoring and evaluation system cannot be improved.

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Notes

1. 'Nomadic' refers to the term *drokpa* ('brog pa) representing the self-image of people whose identity is built on being mobile pastoralists in marked contrast to the people practising farming. This reflects, until today, the Tibetan understanding of a way of life based on economic

- activities related to animal husbandry, mobility and specific traditional values different from other groups of the region (cp. Gruschke 2009).
2. This concise term for 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics' (you zhongguo tese shehui-zhuyi) was introduced by von Senger (1994, 207–209, 230–232; 2008).
 3. For detailed references see Gruschke (2009, 65–70).
 4. Cited according to Watson (1980, 24), based on an edition of Mao's Collected Works (1949).
 5. Goldstein (1991, 95) and (1994, 110–112).
 6. Between 1937 and 1945 the principal contradiction was the 'Chinese people against Japan'; thereafter until 1949 it consisted of the party confrontation between CCP and KMT (Chinese National Party). From the foundation of the PRC until 1978, the contradiction between the proletariat/peasantry and the bourgeoisie/gentry led the party to focus on class struggle.
 7. Op. cit. Constitution of the Communist Party of China, amended and adopted at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on Oct. 21, 2007.
 8. Statute of the CCP, cp. von Senger (2008, 111–116).
 9. For a period of time, dues for the lease of pastures were levied as well as local taxes for productive livestock and school fees. Those were ultimately abolished in 2005.
 10. The livelihood situation can be vaguely assessed by calculating the so-called 'sheep units' (SU) per person. It is a reference unit to make different livestock on the pastureland and herder's livelihoods comparable. Mostly one yak is calculated like five sheep. According to Miller, a person would need at least 25 sheep or five yaks to meet her basic needs (Gruschke 2008, 11).
 11. Cf. the synopsis in Gruschke (2009, 91).
 12. It should be noted that the pasture-rich western part of Yushu is underrepresented in the survey. The study reflects, however, the situation of the most densely populated pastoral areas and thus of the larger proportion of the Yushu pastoralists.
 13. Cf., for example, Banks et al. (2003), Bauer (2005), Liu Yimin (2002), Goldstein (1996), Goldstein and Beall (1989), Horlemann (2002), Miller (2000), Sheehy et al. (2006), Wu and Richard (1999) and Yeh (2004, 2005).
 14. Lobsang is the head of a nomad household in Gyiza, Zadoi County (interviewed in January 2007).
 15. No specific months were mentioned for the 'summer' and 'winter' periods, but apparently the period of staying in the house was extended – at least for the elders.
 16. China State Council, <http://www.China-west.gov.cn/english> (downloaded 10.11.2003).
 17. The 11th Five-year plan, http://german.China.org.cn/china/archive/china2006/tx/2007-01/19/content_7681420.htm (downloaded on 6.8.2008).
 18. Tsering Topgyal, 57-year-old nomad from Shang Laxiu, resettled to Gyêgu and interviewed in January 2007.
 19. Acc. to Goldstein's presentation 'Changing Patterns of Resource Use and Pastoral Management in Western Tibet over the Past Half Century: A Case Study of the Nomads of Phala', Wittenberg, Nov. 30, 2007 (Symposium 'Paradigms of a Nomadic Mode of Living. Tenets and Perils of Coexistence', SFB 586 'Difference and Integration', 30.11.–2.12.2007).

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