

HOUSING PROJECTS IN THE NOMADIC AREAS OF CHINA'S EASTERN TIBETAN PLATEAU: REPRESENTATION, MARKET LOGIC, AND GOVERNMENTALITY

Gaerrang (Kabzung)

Abstract

This paper explores the Chinese government's efforts to develop housing projects in Sichuan Province, and to encourage Tibetan herders to settle and enter the market economy. The paper uses primary sources to analyse how media and government reports provide a constructed image of Tibetan herders and their cultural landscape. These reports depict Tibetan traditions, including Buddhism, as impediments to modernisation, secularisation, market-oriented logic, materialism, and governmentality. Finally, the reports are contextualised in a larger governmental effort to continue with housing and economic projects in the Eastern Tibetan Plateau.

KEYWORDS: Housing project, Tibetan pastoralists, market subject, sedentarisation, governmentality.

Introduction

Before settling, we lived in a primitive condition (生活条件简陋), and we did not have many thoughts [about making money]. After we settled, our living condition improved, and we now have a higher living standard. Next year, I want to take a loan from a bank to start a 'Tibetan herders' home for the tourists' (藏家乐) so that I can sell yak meat and milk for more money.

A herder in Hongyuan, as quoted by a state journalist, 2011

The state journalist attributes this 'change' in the Tibetan herders' traditional life to a shift towards an entrepreneurial way of thinking that has emerged since 2009, subsequent to the implementation of an ambitious housing project in the pastoral areas of Sichuan Province (Fang and Zhou, 2009).¹ According to the provincial government's reports, the project would benefit about 480,000 people who lacked housing or lived in substandard houses, which amounts to about 88.6 per cent of the total population of 533,112 Tibetan pastoralists in Sichuan (*Sichuan Daily*, 2008). As an urbanisation and development project,

1. '四川省藏区牧民定居行动计划暨帐篷新生活行动'

the provincial government mobilised all its of related agencies, Tibetan herders themselves, and the region's housing industry to reshape the cultural landscape of the nomadic communities.²

At the midpoint of the housing projects (2010–2011), the state convened three important Central Government forums related to Tibetan pastoralism. These included the January 2010 Fifth Forum on Work in Tibet (中共中央国务院召开第五次西藏工作座谈会)³ which included for the first time not just the TAR but also the other four provinces with Tibetan populations (Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Yunnan) (Rao ai min, 2010). This highlighted the importance to the government of eastern Tibet, particularly nomadic areas, for the political stability of the entire region in the aftermath of the violent protests that took place on 14 March 2008 in Lhasa.

Additionally, in July 2010, the Central Government held a forum in Beijing on the 'Open up the West' campaign (Li Tao 2010). There, leaders discussed the state's concerns about continued economic disparity between regions in the East and West, and their intention to extend economic reforms to the West. Initiated in 2000, the 'Open up the West' campaign – a strategy designed to intensify market economy – has had and will have a profound influence on Tibetan pastoralists and their landscape.

A year later, in August 2011, the National Conference on Pastoral Regions (全国牧区工作会议) was held in Hulunbeier, Inner Mongolia (Xin yu 2011). That conference reframed the development strategy in terms of the nation's ecological safety. According to the State Council (2011), the issues facing Tibetan pastoral areas should be framed in terms of development versus rangeland ecological security, and the ecological impact of rangeland degradation on the major rivers supplying China's urban and industrial areas.

Interestingly, though the problems that those forums attempted to address are separate and distinct (political stability, economic disparity, and ecological security), the remedy proposed was the same: the projection of economic reform deeper into the western regions (State Council 2011; Li tao 2010; Rao ai min 2010).

The National Conference on Pastoral Regions also highlighted the importance of ecological stability in pastoral areas (State Council 2011; State Council 2010; Yonten 2012), but attendees insisted that it should be achieved not by reducing economic development, but rather by transforming traditional pastoral

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2. The housing construction business has been dominated by outsiders, mostly Han Chinese. Tibetans participate in low-level jobs such as transporting construction materials but the contracts and vast majority of jobs are awarded to outsiders.
 3. In this paper, Tibet refers to the Tibetan populated regions of the Tibetan plateau including the Tibetan Autonomous region, along with Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan Provinces.

production into industrial livestock production and by relocating herders from pastures. This would be a change from 'extensive' herding to an 'intensive' market-oriented livestock industry. Simultaneously, speakers at the conference suggested restoring the rangeland ecosystem by creating a monetary incentive system called 'The Rangeland Ecological Compensation Mechanism' (草原生态补偿机制)(CPPCC, 2008).

Similarly, at the Fifth Forum on Work in Tibet, President Hu summarised the main conclusion of the gathering:

By firmly sticking with the two major tasks of development and stability, they [the local governments in Tibetan regions] should promote the leap-forward development to ensure the national safety and stability of Tibet; [to achieve this], economic development is the top priority, national unity is the foundation, and the improvement of people's livelihood is the starting point.

Regardless of the source of ecological problems or stability issues, economic development has become a sovereign remedy for all the problems the state sees in Tibetan areas. The assumption is that deepening economic development will lead to more governable citizens (Wu 2008; Yan 2003) who will become economically efficient, ecologically friendly and affiliated with mainstream Chinese culture. There are three keys to achieving this goal: 1) the formation of a market-oriented actor (Yeh and Gaerrang 2011); 2) the secularisation of Tibetan culture; and 3) the cultivation of loyalty to the state. By analysing three media 'success' stories about the housing projects, this paper examines how the state represents Tibetan herders and their cultural landscape and how this framing generates governable citizens in the nomadic communities of the eastern Tibetan plateau.

The discourse of market-oriented citizens

In recent decades, Tibetan herders on the eastern Tibetan Plateau have increasingly become the focus of market-based economic development in both material and discursive terms. Peck (2008) observed a parallel phenomenon in America with the emergence of an era that is characterised by minimal government and maximum personal responsibility, and that informs a market-based social arrangement where structural problems requiring collective solutions are reduced to individual efforts.⁴ Drawing from Foucault's term 'governmentality' (Foucault 1991), i.e., governmental rationality or more generally 'the

4. Peck (2008) illustrates this by describing the cultural influence of Oprah Winfrey as a self-made billionaire.

conduct of conduct', Ong and Zhang (2008) argue that the Chinese state's push for individual ownership of property along with privatisation programmes (thereby putatively optimising their ability to act in the free market) is a set of calculated techniques to govern Chinese citizens. Ong and Zhang (2008) call this strategy, 'socialism from afar', in that it maintains the Communist Party's position while ceding responsibility for livelihood and well-being to individual Chinese citizens. Analysts of these policies have typically used ethnographic methods and focused on material aspects of these transformations in China. In contrast, this paper explores another aspect of citizen formation – the discursive strategies through which the state moulds new, governable citizens out of 'backward' Tibetan herders – in recent state development projects. This discursive reconstruction of herders and their landscape makes it possible for the state to facilitate the changes taking place in material life. I suggest that, for the state, the actual materialisation of new citizens requires the creation of specific kinds of target groups and places so that national ideals can be realised materially and symbolically.

'Discourse' refers to the nexus of knowledge and power through which particular concepts, theories, and practices for social change are created and reproduced (Escobar, 1995). The epistemological premises for this approach are grounded in poststructuralist and postmodern concepts that see language and discourse as systematically organising power through the subjectivity of social actors and their actions. With this concept, Arturo Escobar (1995) examines why mainstream development, after numerous failures to deliver what it promised to provide for target groups, maintains its position. He uses Foucault's analysis of the power of representation and its ultimate creation of social reality to explain how development discourse becomes hegemonic, rendering alternative ways unthinkable. Similarly, James Ferguson's *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1990) employs Foucault's discourse theory to analyse the nature of 'development discourse', revealing how 'experts' are often ignorant of local historical and political realities when they formulate development projects. In this vein, this paper uses three 'success' stories: a herder in Hongyuan, as reported by a state journalist; housing projects highlighted in a state journal report; and other government documents to explore how the state creates a 'reality' of 'transformation' in the lives of Tibetan herders. The stories serve as windows through which we can see the ways that the state projects, and thereby realises, a specific scenario for the future Tibetan pastoralists. These representations might differ from actual accomplishments, which are more complex and entail religious forces, nationalism, local conditions and other global forces. Therefore, whether or not the goal of creating governable subjects is actually achieved is beyond the scope of this paper. Following a short introduction to housing projects in Sichuan Province, I will quote three

‘success’ stories about the housing project, which will be followed by a discussion about citizen formation, representation, loyalty and secularisation. In the last section, I will discuss the material aspect of changes in herders’ lives in relation to the housing project.

Housing projects in Sichuan Province and the case of Hongyuan County

In 2009, the Sichuan Province government began promoting the ‘Housing Project for Herders and the Action of New Life in the New Tent’ in Tibetan pastoral counties (Fang and Zhou 2009).⁵ The goal of this project is to ensure that all nomadic households have their own houses, new tents and access to community public squares. The project deployed dual strategies: the transfer of labourers from pastoral production to secondary and tertiary industries; encouraging herders to settle in towns and make their living by other means; and the modernisation and intensification of livestock production through fodder cultivation, livestock shelters, road construction and improved yak breeding.

According to government reports, this four-year project would involve 90,000 of the Province’s 112,000 nomad households and would improve (and, in some cases, establish) a total of 1,409 settlement sites (定居点) in 29 counties (RGC GO 2010). According to a report from a ‘Meeting of the Housing Project for Herders’, 68,647 houses had been built by February 2011 – fulfilling almost seventy per cent of the government’s targets. In addition, 504 of the 915 planned community centres had been built at settlement sites. Moreover, many communities had received support to renovate houses (inside and out) as well as to build village offices, tourism centres, clinics, and running water systems. By 2012, a state report claimed that 93 per cent of the original plans had been completed (*Sichuan Daily* 2012).

Hongyuan County in Aba Prefecture is one nomadic county covered by the provincial housing project. In Hongyuan, the majority of new houses were constructed in the herders’ existing settlements, which most Tibetans call ‘Shang tok’ (meaning ‘at the township seat’), ‘Ru nang’ or ‘Ru sde’ in Tibetan. Most nomadic families already had houses in these settlements before the project, and these houses were typically used for children and the elderly with special needs. These houses also serve as storage units to facilitate

5. ‘The Action of New Life in New Tents’ (‘四川省藏区牧民定居行动计划暨帐篷新生活行动’) is a part of the housing project for Sichuan Province. Through this programme, the state not only supported the construction of houses, but also provided free nylon tents to Tibetan pastoralists.

seasonal migrations. Many of these settlements were established during the commune period, when the state transformed some pastures into agricultural lands (which subsequently failed). Many herders started to build shelters and houses near township government (人民公社) seats at that time. According to elderly herders from these communities, prior to the 1950s, Tibetans did not live in settled communities in one location as is the case today, but rather a smaller number of shelters in their winter pastures. In the past, Tibetan herders moved frequently across their different seasonal pastures with family members, including children and the elderly. Still, it was possible for some monks and elderly to stay in small houses near the local monasteries.

The houses in these settled communities were initially made with woven branches and mud (*sak khang*), turf bricks and mud (*bo khang*), or stones (*rdo khang*) along with covered sheds during commune times, all replaced by the cement brick houses with livestock shelters with roofs after the 1980s. The houses built by the project are made of cement block and have multiple rooms, a bathroom and waterproof roofs. Compared to previous and local efforts, the state Housing Project for Herders has brought unprecedented change to the community landscape. The pastoralists were motivated to participate principally through state incentive policies and benefits. With incentives of subsidies, five-year interest-free loans and permits to build houses in their current locations, the project was enthusiastically welcomed by Tibetan pastoralists. In addition to the state's outright contribution of 16,000 RMB, most herders invested over 50,000 RMB in building new homes; this includes state loans of 30,000 RMB.

Indeed, these subsidies and loans have been significant for herders, the majority of whom rely on raising yaks and sheep. Livestock and dairy products (butter, cheese, and yogurt) are the main income sources, and these are supplemented by the collection of medicinal products (mostly *yartsa gunbu* or caterpillar fungus) and herbs (*beimu* or *Fritillaria*), and by working on construction sites and in local factories. Recently, some herders have been engaging in businesses like restaurants, small hotels for tourism, transportation, mini-supermarkets and livestock trading. Compared to places like Naqu in the TAR and Guoluo in Qinghai Province, where income from caterpillar fungus plays an important role in Tibetan herders' sedentarisation, *yartsa* has not been not significant source of income for Tibetans in Hongyuan: its collection accounts for only five to ten per cent of annual income. Because Hongyuan comprises one of the most productive grasslands on Tibetan plateau, livestock density is very high, with most households owning over 100 yaks (maximum of 500 yaks). Today, even after the implementation of the 2009 provincial housing project, the majority of Tibetans there still need to herd their livestock between pastures in different seasons. Yet, simultaneously, the trend today is for herders

to attempt to settle themselves in towns or communities. Some Tibetan herders in Hongyuan have left their pastures because they have developed stable income sources other than yak herding, e.g., running small businesses or leasing out pastures, or through employment as government workers. For some households, the facts of limited pastures or small herds have forced them to settle in towns to make a living from part-time jobs. Finally, there are more and more educated young Tibetans who prefer to make a living by finding jobs with the government or private firms, or by working temporarily (打工). It is in this context that we explore three reported ‘success’ stories written by a journalist from the Hongyuan County Government about the housing project.

Reconstruction of Tibetan herders and their homeland: Three ‘success’ stories of the housing project

In this section, I present three ‘success’ stories that are typical of state updates on the progress of the Housing Project for Herders. Some elements of these stories are exaggerated and overstated while others are possibly real. Here, my purpose is not to tease out what is real and what is not, nor to assess the success of projects, but rather to see how the state’s discourse about the housing project constructs new forms of subjectivity shaped by market forces, the state’s development agenda and the transformation of cultural landscapes. In these stories, we see the representation of an ideal model of ‘new herders’ that the state wants to produce with its projects, and the state sees the housing project as the condition in which Tibetan pastoralists will adopt certain ways of thinking and actions.

Gongbo Huaqing’s (2011) report is entitled ‘Three stories of Tibetan herders: A witness of the tremendous changes over two years’ (三个红原牧民的故事：见证藏区两年巨变). Here I quote sections of these stories to illustrate how nomads are represented in government documents.

Konchok Tashi: Headed for his ‘second house’ (二套房)

As he was in the first group of beneficiaries of the housing project, Konchok Tashi, a herder of Sedi Township, moved into his new house of seventy square metres in October 2009. Located near Provincial Road 301, the house has changed the entire life of Konchok Tashi. His *old plank-shelter collapsed* under heavy snow. Now he and his family sit around a warm stove in his new house, which has enabled his family to enjoy a comfortable new life. The collapse [of his old house] firmly lodged in his memory, and it changed his way of thinking. By December 2010, he was able to pay off the loan he took for the new house. With income from his

livestock, Konchok Tashi also bought a new van, starting a transportation business from his township to the county seat. Settling in the housing project has enabled his family to release extra labor for other work. *Now he is much more hopeful about his future life.*

Beginning in July 2011, regardless of how busy he was in his transportation business, he always managed to also work on building *his second two-storey house*. Looking at his second house, which was almost complete, he could not hide his satisfied smile. In June 2011, *he boldly sold most of his 100 yaks* and kept only a dozen female yaks and few breeding yaks, so that his wife no longer needed to stay on their pasture for the whole year. With the income from selling his yaks and from his transportation business, he decided to build another two-storey house of 300 square metres. His plan with this new house is to run a home-stay hotel and, with the advantage of its location near the provincial road, he expects that the future hotel will earn over a hundred thousand RMB a year. 'Before we settled, we lived in a primitive condition, and we did not have much thought [about making money]. After we settled, our living condition improved, and we now have a higher living standard. Next year, I want to take a loan from a bank to start a "Tibetan herders' home for tourists" (藏家乐), so that I can sell yak meat and milk for more money.' So said Konchok Tashi, giving a brilliant smile on his hard face while his white teeth sparkled in the shining sunlight.

Dekyid Drolma: from a poor household to becoming a boss of a chain of yak yogurt stores

'She is the richest "poverty-stricken" household in our village.' The village secretary told this interesting story to the journalist. During his second visit to this village, a leader from the prefecture government, wanted to see Dekyid Drolma who was still a 'poverty-stricken' household (贫困户) when the leader visited her last time. This time, when the leader saw Dekyid Drolma and her new house, he thought he went to the wrong place, for what he has seen this time was a totally different view compared with his previous visit: this time, excited Dekyid Drolma lived in a fully equipped, well-furnished house. The leader asked why there was such an astonishing change to her living conditions. The village secretary told the leader that she is not in a 'poverty-stricken household' any more.

With support from the government, Dekyid Drolma not only built her new house, but also started a yogurt business. Because her yogurt is very popular in the market, she recently partnered with others and expanded her business into another larger tourism site. The growth in her business has led her to a wonderful plan for the future. She wants to start a factory to produce new products like yogurt ice cream and popsicles, leading her fellow-villagers in a drive for a relatively comfortable life (奔小康).

Ajam Dorji: to record this era brick by brick!

Returning home after working outside his community, Ajam Dorji became aware of the implementation of the housing project. He decided to build a house for his family with the skills he had learned outside and with money he earned with his part-time work. He told his idea to local government officials, who helped him to find construction materials and sent him a consultant. In October 2009, he finished his house and its quality and design surprised the quality control officials upon their inspection.

Seeing a business opportunity in the housing project, Ajam Dorji decided against migrating out for part-time work. Instead, he established a construction team, for which he has received great support from the local government. As expected, his work has been highly recognised by the local herders whose houses were built by Ajam Dorji. In this way, he has been able to dig up the first gold in his life through the housing project.

Ajam Dorji, a former part-time labourer, has now become a small contractor with a good reputation in his community. Though this is just the start of his career, he has set a lofty goal for his future: 'I want to record the great change and time we are experiencing, brick by brick, with my construction work.'

The journalist concludes his narrative by saying,

From mobile nomads to settled herders, it is a Millennium leap-forward: sedentarisation has become a driving force for economic development, which is a realistic option. The vast grassland of Hongyuan is reverberating with a new song of a new era.

The primary message of these stories is that the newly settled life is a condition in which herders have become new people, with new ways of thinking and acting. That is, the new houses, new villages, new tents and new community centres have produced new herders who have not only left their old black tents and pastures to happily settle in their new houses but have also now become market-oriented actors with more material desires (Rofel 2007), with business ideas that mobile nomads *did not have*. That is, they are now no longer primitive herders, but have become *open-minded, market-oriented actors* who calculate and make decisions with market logic. For instance, Konchok Tashi has become a new model of Tibetan herder with his desire for a second house, his engaging in the local transportation businesses, his bold sale of most of his yaks for material comforts and business ventures and his business ideas of running hotels and stores, opening a tourist home and commercialising butter and yogurt. Similarly, Dekyid Drolma's creation of a yogurt business and the establishment of a yogurt chain store as well as her plan to start a factory to produce new yogurt products reflect this new outlook. And so it is with Ajam Dorji, who

decided to establish one of the first construction teams run by Tibetans.

Secondly, the stories associate these changes directly with the housing project, assuming that the project led herders to be settled.⁶ These individual initiatives are the result not of state campaigns or changes in cultural norms (e.g., increasing status of education), but of the condition of the settled way of life. Settlement has yielded herders who make the proactive changes that the state wants to see. The new ways they can make a living are only possible with a sedentary life. As Konchok Tashi says, 'Before we settled, we lived in primitive conditions (生活条件简陋), and we did not think much about making money. After we settled, our living conditions have been improved, and we now want to have a higher living standard.' For the state, the herders' move away from their old tents to new houses not only represents a more comfortable and happier life – it also signifies a thorough change of their lives internally and externally, a historic transformation of traditional nomads into market-oriented entrepreneurs or members of the towns-based labour force.

Lastly, the three stories portray 'happier' Tibetan herders, in a variety of ways. Tibetan herders' traditional black tents are replaced with new tents or new houses, livestock herding practices are replaced with wage labour or income through other business sectors and the herders' seasonal movements are replaced with life in the towns. Ultimately, the 'happier' lives of Tibetan herders are related to the successful transformation from mobile pastoralists to settled entrepreneurs. For instance, Konchok Tashi's 'brilliant smile' as he relates his commercial ambitions of building a hotel; likewise, Dekyid Drolma and Ajam Dorji's successes in business demonstrate a kind of confidence and belief in the future that traditional herders do not have.

The reconstruction of herders in this way is important for the state not only to highlight achievements of projects but to lay the groundwork for further interventions. In this state discourse, herders are portrayed as having new desires for material comforts and the opportunity to engage in market competition in settled communities. A part of the strategy to achieve stable settlement includes transforming the traditional extensive yak production system into one of intensive production. The idea is that the tradition of grazing yaks on open pastures need to be made 'modern' and yaks' naturally low productivity must be scientifically improved (APPC and APG 2009, SPGO 2009). Despite the

6. The official Chinese name for the 'Housing Project for Tibetan Herders' is Mumin [herders] Dingju [sedentarisation] Xingdong Jihua [plan of action]. Arguably, the housing project was not a deciding factor in herders' settling down in township or village headquarters. The state is well aware that seasonal movement of herds is still necessary for livestock production, so it provided herders with industrially-produced tents. Regardless, the intended trajectory planned by the state is clear and well reflected in the three 'success' stories reviewed here.

fact that this has proven to be difficult to realise, the state is still committed to this reform. Taking Hongyuan as an example, the government has launched initiatives including fodder cultivation, improved livestock shelters and fodder storage and the construction of roads linking small towns and pastures to accomplish this goal. Other measures include yak breeding programmes (both hybrid and non-hybrid), encouraging herders to maximise female livestock numbers, increasing the off-take rate of male yaks and promoting the large-scale commercialisation of yak-related products (Yang and Qi 2010, Zhou 2011, State Council 2011).

The second strategy is to permanently settle the herders by transforming settlement sites into tourist destinations. The local government encourages herders to engage in the service sector by providing support for local culture-based tourist businesses, including accommodation, catering, entertainment, tent home-stays and others. In the long-term, the state plans to provide vocational training for herders to ensure the steady transfer of labourers from pastures to the urban towns. The empirical effects of these projects are contested and questionable, but they coincide with state discourses about herders and their landscape. In this sense, I suggest that the housing project and related discourses lay out a specific vision for pastoralists and their homelands. Furthermore, the 'Housing Project for Herders' is not simply an economic and settlement project: by improving living conditions and educational opportunities, and by encouraging herders to participate in non-herding labour including small businesses and other part-time jobs, it is also designed to reshape Tibetan herders' way of thinking and behaviour.

Cultivation of loyalty

In these stories, the transition from mobile nomads to entrepreneurs describes the state as engineering the salvation of the 'simple-minded' and economically 'backward' Tibetan herders. The bright new image of Tibetan herders as market actors stands in contrast with the 'darkness' of their life in the past, seen in their collapsed wooden sheds, old tents, and seasonal movements on their pastures, all characterised by poverty and harshness. The gradual departure from the 'darkness' of the past and the beginning of 'new life' is attributed to the benevolent state. In her ethnographic study of agrarian change, Chinese migration, and urbanisation in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), Yeh (2013) frames state development as a 'gift' to Tibetans. Upon receiving it, Tibetans become trapped in owing gratitude to the state. Similarly, in the housing projects for herders in Sichuan Province, the government is presented the agent for the transformations occurring, for which Tibetan herders owe gratitude and

loyalty to the state. Likewise, the stories of ‘success’ – Konchok Tashi’s new businesses ideas, the state leaders’ visit to meet the female entrepreneur Dekyid Drolma, and local government subsidies for Tibetan construction teams – all highlight the role of the state. These stories are, in turn, nested within broader discourses of state development that have historical lineages. In the first story, Konchok Tashi is painted as having a brilliant smile that shines like sunlight, evoking the *sunlight* brought by the Party-led with its liberation of Tibetans in the 1950s and later through the economic reforms of the 1980s. In similar manner, Dekyid Drolma’s story is framed within the current state discourse of a ‘Relatively Comfortable Life’ (奔小康), a key objective of the nation’s current economic development plans.

The portrait of ‘happy’ Tibetan herders in the housing projects reflects the state’s benevolent agenda, which will ultimately lead to the region’s long-term stability. This political agenda was also clearly stated by the governor of Sichuan Province at an opening ceremony of a housing project in Tagong township, Ganzi Prefecture, in 2009:

The Housing Project for Herders and the Action of New Life in New Tent is an effort to promote the economic development and *ensure the long-term stability in Tibetan populated regions*. It is a livelihood improvement programme related to the immediate interests of the public, and it is a primary project for the overall strategy of development, reform, and stability of Tibetan populated regions ... The project should highlight the themes of harmony and stability; it should be integrated *with the work for the unity of nationalities; through strengthening of propaganda*, the project should fully implement the Party’s policy towards nationalities and religions to build the foundation for the realisation of unity and common prosperity among all the nationalities together.

Similarly, the Party Secretary of the Aba Prefecture government emphasised these themes during a meeting on the housing project in 2010:

The Housing Project for Herders & the Action of New Life in New Tent and other provincial livelihood programmes are the provincial strategy and basic programmes to achieve leap-forward development and long-term stability in the Tibetan populated regions.

The Housing Project for Herders & the Action of New Life in New Tent project has also been accompanied by the campaign of ‘Gratitude Education’ (感恩教育) (APPC and APG 2011), whereby recipients are encouraged to show their gratitude to the state and Party (HCGO 2011). In mobilising county government leaders to integrate the ‘Gratitude Education’ campaign as they deliver new tents to herders, the Party secretary and the governor of Aba prefecture instructed, ‘All county government [workers] should do well in delivering new tents to herders’ hands, and they should also deliver the love and care that the Party and government have

for their people to the hearts of Tibetan herders at the same time' (Aba Prefecture Government Office 2011). Given these statements, it is clear that the changes targeted by these projects are not only physical, but also psychological and symbolic.

In other contexts, the driving reason for sedentarising pastoralists – whether in China (Williams 2002), Iran (Rosman et al. 2009) or in Africa (Gefu 1995; Chatty 1996) – has been to control pastoralists, whose mobile life style present challenges to states regarding access to those groups. At a minimum, this suggests that physical control over pastoralists (their bodies and their livestock) is what is sought by the state. In the case of Tibetan pastoralists, I argue that the Sichuan Province housing project is oriented as much as to the minds as to the physical bodies of Tibetan pastoralists. In other words, the state's development gifts (Yeh 2013) are expected to be exchanged for loyalty to the state as these projects enter the Tibetan herders' *hearts*, so the state can more fully govern its citizens.

Secularisation

With the housing project, the state not only wants herders to become market actors, but would also like to see them become materialist and secular, thus presumably occupying the same cultural realm as the Han Chinese and their mainstream ideology.⁷ The need for this cultural shift is based on the assumption that much of the instability in the region is attributable to ideological conflict. In Tibetan pastoral areas, having 'appropriate desires' (Rofel 2007) is an important aspect of the 'technique of self' necessary for the state to govern people with different cultural backgrounds (Foucault 1991). For Tibetan herders, some desires are highly encouraged and others are marginalised or discouraged. The desires for worldly comfort/enjoyment and the accumulation of wealth are promoted, while spiritual interests are labelled as superstitious and dissident, and are discouraged. For instance, the some herders' refusal to slaughter and sell their yaks in the market for spiritual reasons is anathema to state leaders.⁸ Many government officials, even some secularly-minded Tibetans, describe Tibetan herders as 'irrational' for keeping so many yaks instead of selling them to improve their living conditions (Gaerrang 2012). As seen in the profile of Konchok Tashi, herders' willingness to sell their animals to improve their lot and/or to venture into business is highly valued. The decision to sell off yaks for the meat market contradicts the recent anti-slaughter movement, in which Tibetan religious leaders have urged herders not to sell their livestock to slaughterhouses, based on

7. 'Secular' here refers to the people becoming less religious.

8. The question of whether or not herders should sell their livestock to slaughterhouses is also hotly debated among Tibetans.

Buddhist teachings of non-harm and avoiding evil deeds (Gaerrang 2012).⁹

The goal of secularisation can also be seen in the aesthetics of the newly built communities. When one village moved into its current location five years ago, the state subsidised the construction of 130 houses for the village's 200 households. This village is located next to a provincial road that links the Hongyuan County seat and other counties. At the centre of the village are the newly built village administrative offices for the village leaders and the central square (广场和健身设施), where herders are expected to exercise. Absent in this new communities are any of the usual religious sites such as a temple or *mani* wheels. This design reflects the emphasis on secularisation, a pattern that is common across the new villages established through the housing project. Ironically, other forms of Tibetan culture have been emphasised in the housing projects. For instance, the exteriors of houses and the entrances to these communities have design elements with Tibetan styles. There is an emphasis on the keeping some symbols of local culture even as development requires the secularisation of local culture and landscape. Here, secularisation comes not only from the state but also from Tibetan radical secularists and modernists who see Tibetan Buddhism and tradition as hindrances to Tibet's development (Zhogs Dung 2005, 2008; Gaerrang 2012).¹⁰

Conclusion

In his study of development as discourse, Escobar (1995) argues that 'the Third World' is constructed by a constellation of ideology, group interests and the attempt by the West to impose its economic and political interests on non-western peoples. Ferguson (1990) noted that the World Bank constructed Lesotho as a traditional peasant subsistence society so that development experts were needed to bring roads, markets and credit. This rests on a narrative which ignores the fact that these already existed before these World Bank programmes. Similarly, the first 'success' story suggests that housing projects have led herders to be settled. But in this part of Sichuan, the fact is that, in many ways,

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9. For the majority of Tibetan herders, selling yaks and sheep along with dairy products is the only way to generate cash to invest in new houses and to pay off loans. Yet, for some rich households, the housing project may not be only reason to sell off their livestock since they have enough savings to build houses. Rather, ecological reasons are forcing these herders to liquidate their herds due to the limited size of the pastures they received through the grassland allocation policies (草场责承包任制), which has caused overstocking.
 10. Zhogsdung is one of the most radical and controversial writers in contemporary Tibet, and he suggests that Tibetan traditions, in particular Buddhism, play a negative role in the modernisation of Tibet.

it simply *enhanced* housing conditions in existing communities near townships or village seats. Still, it is also possible that the housing projects led some households to be settled, especially considering these were relatively well-furnished houses. A majority of herders of labouring age are still herding livestock on their winter pastures and summer pastures.

Second, in pastoral areas of Tibet, nomads have been participating in the market economy since livestock decollectivisation in the 1980s, not just since the start of the housing projects. The 'newly emerged business ideas' that the 'success' stories associate with the housing project including investments in the transportation business, running hotels and stores, the commercialisation of dairy products and establishment of construction teams were not triggered by the housing projects but have been emerging gradually since China's economic reform in the 1980s. The current Yak Milk Factory of Hongyuan County was initiated by a local Buddhist lama named Gongtang Tshang before 1959 and later run by the state. Recently, many Tibetan herders have been engaging in the dairy business. Similarly, it was common prior to resettlement to see Tibetan herders run hotels and tents near the main roads of Hongyuan County. Other assertions in these stories seem questionable. How can Konchok Tashi's future hotel earn over 100,000 RMB with only two floors?

During recent field trips, I encountered cases similar to the second and third stories reviewed here. For the past few decades, some Tibetan herders have been venturing into small businesses like yogurt sales, becoming proprietors of homestay hotels and restaurants and buying land and houses. Some Tibetans have also created housing construction teams. These teams have indirectly benefited from housing projects, without any clear cause-and-effect relationship.

Even if the stories rest on exaggerations, they accomplish their intended purpose. The reconstruction of Tibetan herders and their landscapes not only reinforces the state's planned social changes but also opens a new imaginative space where the formation of governable citizens is made possible, justifying even further interventions. While the housing project was completed by the end of 2011, Tibetan herders will have long-term relationship with these domestic spaces; the long-term material and social effects of the housing project will therefore be complex and unfolding, and demand extensive and ongoing research. Still, some impacts on herders' life are already visible in the early stage of project. For example, the housing project has confronted herders with decisions about whether or not to abide by the Buddhist prohibition on slaughtering animals. Because many herders have no other income sources outside of livestock, they were forced to sell off large numbers of yaks for the first payment on their new houses, and later to repay bank loans.

Tibetan herders' participation in the housing projects and related market activities has significantly influenced how herders value their grasslands,

houses, and livestock. For instance, many herders rank the value of pastures not only based on the availability of grasses and water but also on the distance to the county town seats and their access to state services. Many herders have managed to build multiple houses, which they see not only as residences but as investments, and this has only increased since herders began receiving house certificates for the buildings they constructed during the project. For instance, a herder from Hongyuan with over 500 yaks stated, ‘These days, the rich herders with many yaks are nothing compared to those who have good houses and lands near towns.’ Herders have assimilated market-oriented logic and have developed a stronger desire for the worldly material comforts and successes. These shifts in thinking and norms are complex, impacted by religious resurgence, the state’s policies in relation to religion and the recent rise of nationalism in Tibet and trans-regionally. Indeed, my studies of the anti-slaughter movement in the eastern Tibetan plateau show that a hybrid of neoliberal market-oriented ideology and a Tibetan Buddhist resurgence has emerged over the course of several decades (Gaerrang 2012).

The idea of ‘socialism from afar’ (Ong and Li Zhang 2008) is also a useful lens through which we can look at the antecedents of the housing projects in pastoral areas including the privatisation of livestock (家庭联产承包责任制) and the grassland allocation to individual households (草场承包责任制) in the 1980s and 1990s (Yan 2005, Yan et al. 2005). Drawing upon the case of Inner China, Ong and Zhang (2008) describe how ‘socialism from afar’ means the withdrawal of state-supported provisions for the welfare of citizens, who have become more responsible for their own lives. In the nomadic areas of the Tibetan plateau, the state has ceded responsibility for pastoral production to individual herders with decision-making power over grasslands, time and labour, livestock herding and market exchanges. This transition is evident in Tibetan pastoral areas of Sichuan Province, which underwent privatisation of livestock and allocation of grassland use rights to individual households (Richard et al. 2005). In short, herders are now responsible for the decisions they make about grassland use, animal husbandry production and market exchanges – decisions that were previously controlled by the collective entity Gongshe (公社) or Dadui (大队), once important agencies of the state apparatus at the local level. Since then, ideas and practices like property ownership, cash-based exchanges of goods, investments and rent seeking, which previously represented an ideological divide between socialism and capitalism have become instruments for state governance in China (c.f. Harvey 2005). Nevertheless, I argue that in many pastoral areas of Tibet, changes come not only from specific programmes such the decollectivisation of livestock in the 1980s and of grasslands in the 1990s (Gaerrang 2012) or the current resettlement projects, but also through the reconstruction and representation of target group in state

discourse and propaganda. For the state, the creation of new citizens requires that the target group be constructed in certain ways and that new landscapes be produced both materially and symbolically.

In sum, the state's reconstruction of herders through its discourse paves the way for further interventions designed to change the herders' way of thinking and behaviors and thereby become market actors. The state is positioned as a benevolent saviour and while the herders' traditional life and homelands are depicted as primitive, backward and poor. Moreover, as Yeh (2013) argues, the state's 'benevolent development' is exchanged for the herders' loyalty, a political dynamic that is embedded in traditional Chinese culture by which the rulers of Inner China were linked with, and achieved hegemony over, minorities in western regions. Simultaneously, the state's objective to secularise the nomadic cultural landscape is reflected in the discourse of the housing project. Clearly, secularism and materialism are fundamental to the identity of the Chinese state and a majority of its citizens, an outcome of the modernisation process that in fundamental ways parallels the path of western civilisation. In short, the newly constructed image of Tibetan herders embodies more market-oriented logic, which demands loyalty to the state and a more secular and materialistic mindset; these ideologies will continue to influence state projects in Tibetan areas into the future.

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Gaerrang (Kabzung) earned his Ph.D at the University of Colorado-Boulder in 2012, and is currently an Associate Professor at the Centre for Tibetan Studies, Sichuan University (Chengdu, China). He grew up in a nomadic community of southeastern Tibetan Plateau and received graduate training in both China and the United States. His research interests include development, religious movements, and environmental change in pastoral societies of southeastern Tibet, China.

Email: yakserser1@yahoo.com

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