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## Chapter 12

# Implementation of Resettlement Programmes Amongst Pastoralist Communities in Eastern Tibet

Jarmila Ptackova

**Abstract** In the context of a major policy initiative by the Chinese state to better integrate western areas with the rest of the country, the government is implementing numerous programmes that affect the pastoral communities of the Tibetan Plateau. Resettlement of pastoralists away from their traditional grazing lands is the most significant intervention into their way of life. According to the design of resettlement programmes, small village settlements are viewed as ideal for establishing new lifestyles for Tibetan pastoralists who should afford increased comfort and income possibilities through better connections to infrastructure. The research results from my case study area of Zeku County, Qinghai Province, demonstrate that implementation of resettlement away from grasslands often does not reflect official planning, and that there has been a general lack of consultation with Tibetan pastoralists throughout the entire process. Due to insufficient state support for pastoralists to obtain alternative skills and livelihoods, the many resettlement villages now appearing across the eastern Tibetan plateau remain populated by unemployed pastoralists facing an uncertain future.

**Keywords** Resettlement • Sedentarization • Development • Governmental programmes • Grassland degradation • Tibet

### 12.1 Introduction

Following the introduction of the *Opening the West* (Chin: 西部大开发 *Xibu da kaifa*) development strategy, launched by Jiang Zemin in 1999 (Heath 2005), the central government shifted its focus from the coastal areas in the east of China to

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the western provinces and autonomous regions. The state maintains that social and political stability in the country as a whole depends upon narrowing the growing socio-economic gap between the East, that has been developed with the aid of huge state investment since the 1980s (Goodman 1989), and the West, where many regions feature at the lowest positions in statistics for national GDP (QD 2009). Chinese propaganda often uses the word 'backward' to describe the western regions, which are overwhelmingly rural. On the eastern Tibetan Plateau, which nowadays extends over most of Qinghai Province and parts of Sichuan, Gansu and Yunnan Provinces, 'backward' refers to the traditional way of life of Tibetan pastoral communities and emphasizes their lack of modern facilities used in daily life and production processes. Many Tibetan pastoralists themselves also currently adopt this term when describing their situation. Whilst admitting their 'backwardness' in comparison with other types of Chinese citizens, they also agree with state plans to develop and modernize their lands by way of the *Opening the West* development strategy.

The first decade-long phase of *Opening the West* concerned the development of infrastructure and extension of urban areas (Paul and Cheng 2011). Thus, nowadays roads connecting all administrative centres and existing towns and cities across the eastern Tibetan Plateau have been rebuilt and enlarged, and new urban settlements have been established. The second phase of the development strategy uses this new infrastructural network to reach rural inhabitants for implementation of programmes that directly modify daily life practices of local communities and which will have a significant impact on their future development. In this chapter, I will outline such development programmes that directly concern the pastoralists of the eastern Tibetan Plateau. My primary case study area is in the Zeku County (Chin: 泽库县 *Zeku xian*, Tib: *rTsekhog*) of Huangnan Prefecture, Qinghai Province. Zeku County is a purely pastoral area and one of the poorest places in Qinghai Province. The 2007 population was 57,923 people in 11,165 households, of which 56,000 people were recorded as engaged in animal husbandry (ADGM I). With an average altitude over 3,500 m, grassland vegetation in Zeku is not as rich as in neighbouring pastoral counties situated at lower altitudes, such as Henan County, and suffers more from degradation (ADGM VII).

Current state programmes that influence the lives of Tibetan pastoralists most directly are those featuring large-scale resettlement and sedentarization measures. The major programmes of this nature on the eastern Plateau are named *Turning Pastureland into Grassland* (Chin: 退牧还草 *Tuimu huancao*), *Ecological Resettlement* (Chin: 生态移民 *Shengtai yimin*) and *Nomadic Settlement* (Chin: 游牧民定居 *Youmumin dingju*). Each programme has a clear policy outline and detailed implementation plan for affected areas. Nevertheless, the execution of these programmes in practice often differs significantly from their theory and guidelines (Table 12.1). Each local government modulates guidelines according to the current situation in any affected area under their jurisdiction, in order to benefit either the local communities concerned or the implementing officials themselves. In this chapter, I will present examples from the implementation of the three programmes just mentioned as they occurred in my case study area of Zeku County (Fig. 12.1).

**Table 12.1** Overview: implementation of resettlement in theory and practice

Theory	Practice
<i>Socio-economic improvement:</i>	
New house	Partial or total abandonment of grassland and reduction of livestock
Increase of household income, e.g. through available facilities on site to grow vegetables or establish business	Increase of cash need, difficulties to establish new source of income (no skills to grow vegetables or get engaged in business)
Access to science and technology, widening of skills of the pastoralists through vocational training offers	Lack of state funds to cover vocational training costs, no assistance to adapt to the new environment
Access to infrastructure and facilities, including main water supplies, electricity, roads, schools, medical and veterinary services and television broadcasting	Insufficient funding causes shortfalls to the formally scheduled subsidies, the subsidy is too low to cover expenditures of a household
Regular payment of subsidy for the resettlement period	
<i>Environmental protection:</i>	
Recovery of grassland vegetation, protection of high-altitude animals and natural resources, water retention in the catchment areas of the three rivers, reduction of soil erosion and prevention of desertification	Fundamental change of grassland ecosystem
Total reduction of livestock, restriction of land use rights	Pastoralist household splitting in order to keep grassland and get a new house
Return to grassland forbidden during the resettlement period	Reselling of resettlement houses and returning to grassland
	<i>Political benefits:</i>
	Exploitation of natural resources
	Close political control and better integration of ethnic minorities

Source: Own compilation

My data are drawn primarily from Chinese state documents and from interviews conducted from 2007 to 2009 with programme officials in implementing bureaus and Tibetan pastoralists directly affected by the programmes.

## 12.2 State Programmes Featuring Resettlement and Sedentarization

The Chinese state is promoting its regional development policies in the west of the country as a way to improve household income levels, usually measured in cash terms. In Tibetan populated areas, pastoralist households have typically had low levels of cash income and are therefore considered to be poor, an appraisal which

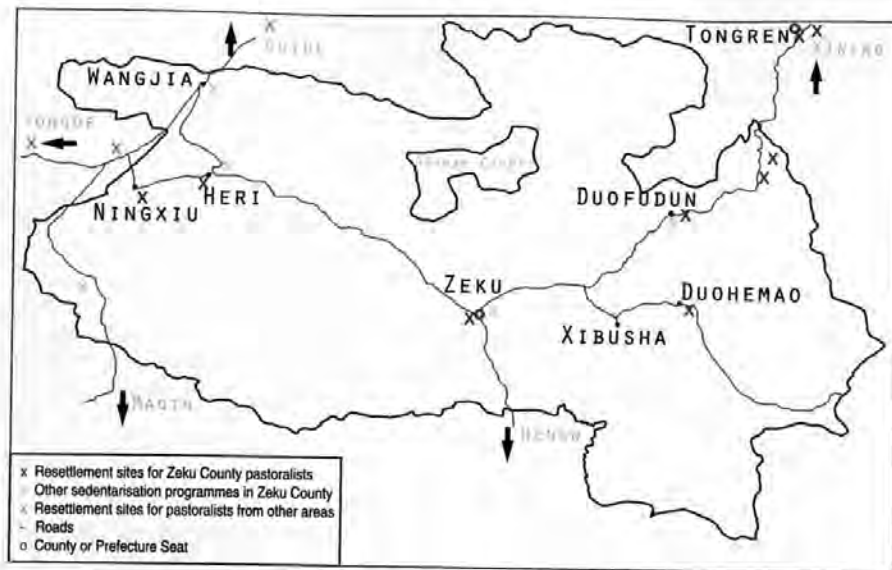


Fig. 12.1 Sketch map of Zeku County resettlement sites (Design: Jarmila Ptackova)

disregards their investments in livestock. In addition to local economies in China's west, the state has also expressed concern about the level and quality of vegetation cover and the spreading of surface erosion on the grasslands. Such environmental factors of the high plateau environment have a downstream impact on the main Chinese river system, the Yellow River, the Mekong River and the Yangtze River, all of which have their sources in Qinghai Province and supply most of lowland China with fresh water. Increasing erosion leads to sedimentation downstream, which in turn causes flooding in low-lying regions. This encouraged the state to include environmental protection of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau within its *Opening the West* policy (Yeh 2005). In 2003, a huge preservation zone named *Three Rivers' Headwaters National Nature Reserve* (Chin: 三江源国家级自然保护区 *Sanjiangyuan guojia ji ziran baohu qu*) (= Sanjiangyuan) was established to protect the upper reaches of the Yellow, Mekong and Yangtze Rivers (Foggin 2005). With an area of 152,300 km<sup>2</sup> (ADGM III), the zone covers the entire southern part of Qinghai Province. Within its boundaries, the policies of relocation of pastoralists away from their traditional grassland areas and reduction of livestock numbers have been stressed more than in any other Tibetan Plateau areas.

Currently, resettlement and sedentarization are promoted by the state as measures for both socio-economic improvement and environmental protection. According to the state's discourse, the potential ecological benefits from implementation of resettlement programmes and adoption of grassland resting and rotational grazing systems will ease pressure on grassland habitats, stimulate recovery of grassland vegetation and aid protection of high-altitude animals and natural

resources. Longer-term ecological benefits would be better water retention in the catchment areas of the three rivers, reduction of soil erosion and prevention of desertification. Second, the state claims a wide range of potential benefits for local pastoralism and pastoralists from its resettlement and sedentarization programmes. Achieving balanced numbers of grazing animals and livestock reduction will benefit carrying capacity of grasslands and should mitigate the lack of grass for animals in winter. In terms of socio-economic improvement, these programmes should benefit pastoralists by offering training to raise their level of skills. They should help to increase the income of households, reduce mortality of livestock, improve selling rates of animal products and accelerate the fattening of lambs in order to be able to sell them within the first year. Livestock turnover could be hastened and animal husbandry improved due to use of animal sheds which could double as greenhouses to plant vegetables during the summer period. Adopting the resettlement and sedentarization programmes will also result in new access to infrastructure and facilities, including mains water supplies, electricity, roads, schools, medical and veterinary services and television broadcasting to each new village. It should enable access to science and technology and help pastoralists to absorb, extend and apply knowledge, such as education about prevention and cure of animal diseases, the use of greenhouse-based horticulture and so on (ADGM II).

Large-scale resettlement of Tibetan pastoralists commenced in eastern areas of the Plateau during 2003, with the implementation of the *Turning Pastureland into Grassland* programme. This programme has a primarily ecological agenda and concentrates on the restoration of degraded areas of grassland. In places with high levels of degradation, the pastureland is completely excluded from herding and a grazing ban is instituted. The grazing ban entails a year-round grazing prohibition scheduled for a period of 10 years. Affected households are being resettled, and the number of their livestock holdings significantly reduced. During 2004, additionally, the *Ecological Resettlement* programme was introduced in the Sanjiangyuan protection zone. This programme focuses on poverty alleviation and improvement of the socio-economic situation of pastoral households. In order to help pastoral households from regions with severe grassland degradation, and to allow for grassland ecosystems to recover, this programme resettles households from affected regions into newly constructed settlements (Ptackova 2010).

As participants of both *Turning Pastureland into Grassland* and *Ecological Resettlement*, local pastoralists should receive a new house in a resettlement community near to an already existing administrative centre or at least along main roads, and they should obtain a government subsidy which is officially scheduled for a period of 10 years. Following the resettlement period mentioned in the official contracts between the state and the pastoralist participants, participating households should have the possibility to return back to a pastoralist way of life. Apart from the official agenda of both of these programmes, their actual content is very similar, and in practice, it is often difficult to distinguish between them. In fact, some officials claim that it is the same programme which was split administratively between the Department of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry which administers *Turning Pastureland into Grassland* and the Development and Reform Committee which

administers *Ecological Resettlement*, in order to obtain double subsidies from the Central government which again enables the resettlement of twice as many pastoralists.

The aim of the *Nomadic Settlement* programme is relocation of pastoralists from their grasslands as well. Nevertheless, it has a slightly different agenda to the two aforementioned programmes. *Nomadic Settlement* was launched in 2009 as a reaction to widespread riots throughout Tibetan areas during 2008. By providing Tibetan pastoralists with new houses in settlements established along main roads, the government intends to demonstrate to the Tibetan population that it cares for them and wants to help them to attain a more comfortable life. On the other hand, a police station situated in each of these new villages enables the government a far closer degree of control over Tibetan pastoralists, who otherwise live scattered over vast areas of grasslands (Ptackova 2011).

A significant difference to the other programmes, and a most important point for local Tibetan pastoralists themselves, is that currently the *Nomadic Settlement* programme does not require any abandonment of the grassland or reduction of livestock on the part of participating pastoralists. Depending upon local implementation office, pastoralists can either obtain a fixed amount of money as a government grant towards building a new house (the case, e.g. in Maqin and Hongyuan Counties) or the pastoralists pay very low prices to purchase a new house constructed by the government (e.g. in Zeku County). The pastoralists usually appreciate such governmental assistance, especially if it comes in additional to maintenance of their pastureland and herds and does not require any restrictions upon their lifestyle as pastoralists.

All of the programmes I have just described that include resettlement or sedentarization of Tibetan pastoralists do sound reasonable and also beneficial for their participants, at least on the level of state policy documents that describe their agendas and implementation schemes. Nevertheless, the reality of these programmes on the ground often appears to be very different. The main reason for this discrepancy between state policy and the reality of implementation is to be found in the Chinese administrative system and the almost absolute authority of local implementation officials within the areas under their jurisdiction. Therefore, actual implementation and its circumstances vary from place to place. In the following section, I will describe some examples of the local execution of resettlement and sedentarization policy with reference mainly to Zeku County, Qinghai Province.

### 12.3 Local Implementation of the Turning Pastureland into Grassland and Ecological Resettlement Programmes

According to the government of Qinghai Province, over 500,000 Tibetan pastoralists should be relocated from grassland areas by the end of 2014 (Du 2009). In Zeku County, the first resettlement phase was scheduled for the years 2003–2006. Initially, this resettlement has been implemented as part of the *Turning Pastureland*

*into Grassland* programme. The *Ecological Resettlement* programme was then introduced into Zeku County during 2005. These programmes form the main aspects of the overall Sanjiangyuan zone resettlement policy. In 2007, *Ecological Resettlement* was made programme number one in Zeku County. From each bureau on the township and county levels, one member was selected to participate in project administration as part of the new Sanjiangyuan office (ADGM X). This office is responsible for selecting future resettlement sites, planning new villages and supervising construction works and the overall resettlement process (ADGM XI). During the first period of 2003–2006, 1,093 households from throughout the entire County were scheduled to be resettled to nine different resettlement sites. Seven of these sites (Zeku County seat, Longzang village and Duolong village in Duofudun Township, Duofudun Township administration centre, Duohemao Township administration centre, Ningxiu Township administration centre and Heri Township administration centre) were located within the county itself, close to the township and county seats. Two resettlement locations, Laka site and the CP school site, were located in neighbouring Tongren County near or within the prefectural seat (ADGM XII) (see Fig. 12.1).

By 2006, only 400 households of the planned total were resettled in only two of the designed new villages, being those which were partly finished in Heri and Ningxiu Townships. The large-scale resettlement wave did not start in Zeku County until the year 2007. According to the Sanjiangyuan *Ecological Resettlement* plan, during 2007, 765 households with 3,620 people should have been resettled in Zeku County (ADGM VI). Similar plans were made throughout the whole of the Sanjiangyuan zone. Each resettlement construction site was marked by an information board presenting information about the agenda of the resettlement programme, the exact number of households and people that should move in there, site plans with sizes of houses and courtyards and a list of additional facilities. The new houses were constructed either in the form of bungalows, usually with small courtyards, double-storied houses with shop facilities on the ground floors, or blocks of flats in the case of the Communist party school resettlement site in Tongren town. The information boards also informed about the dates of start and completion of all construction works on each site. During 2007 in Zeku County, commencement of construction work was scheduled for the start of May, and the resettlement sites should have been completed already by the beginning of October of the same year. Nevertheless, none of the sites was completed by this date. Official data from the Chinese government state that by 2007 in Zeku County, 3,991 pastoralists already participated in or were assigned for the *Ecological Resettlement* programme and 500 pastoralists already participated in or were assigned for *Turning Pastureland into Grassland*. Throughout the whole Sanjiangyuan area, by 2007, the total number of participants of both of these programmes is listed as 69,283, which means almost 15% of the entire pastoralist population of the Sanjiangyuan zone (ADGM I).

In 2008, the information boards informing the public about each construction site were removed, and it became difficult to distinguish between the resettlement sites and their background programmes. The construction of new houses

continued far in excess of the previously scheduled numbers. In 2009, additional localities were chosen to situate new resettlement villages to be raised within the framework of the new *Nomadic Settlement* programme. In Zeku County, the *Nomadic Settlement* programme should fulfil the resettlement and settlement efforts. Within a further 3-year period, the government plans to involve all remaining pastoral households still located on the grasslands within this latest programme.

#### 12.4 Selection Process for Participation in Resettlement

Officially, any public participation in resettlement and sedentarization programmes is voluntarily. However, during the planning period, the government sets targets for the number of households that must be relocated in each county or township. The exact numbers of households which are going to be resettled as mentioned in the programme implementation documents are the result of state examination of local grassland carrying capacity, and thus represent the number of households that exceeds the local capacity. The task of the local implementation officials is then to persuade this specific number of households to participate. Similar to the implementation process for other state policies in China, the designated county and township government officials visit the communities<sup>1</sup> under their jurisdiction and inform the community leaders and heads of each household about the programme during a meeting. Alternatively, the community leaders are invited to the seat of township government, where the county and township officials educate them about the new policy and subordinated programmes, and give them instructions on how to implement this in practice. The community leaders then inform the heads of each household in their community at a meeting, or they visit each household individually. Whilst informing the households, the mediators stress the benefits of the planned programme, such as a new comfortable house achieved under very advantageous conditions, the easy access to roads, transportation and schools, available government subsidy and so on. They also inform the people that an unwillingness to participate could result in restrictions in the form of no further governmental assistance in future or similar measures.

The benefits of resettlement mentioned in these sessions are certainly real, but without knowing the entire agenda of the overall policy and the commitments entailed by participation, such as partial or total abandonment of grassland and reduction of livestock, the pastoralists themselves cannot imagine the thoroughgoing impact that relocation programmes will have upon their daily lives. Motivated by the promised benefits, numerous households apply to participate. The first targeted households, and also those who most readily agree to relocate, are the poorest households with few or no livestock. Additionally, richer households with enough livestock to secure a comfortable living on the grassland are also interested in the prospect of a cheap new house near an urban area. Nevertheless, such households

would only agree to participate if the new houses came in addition to, and not instead of, their pastoralist lifestyle. The skilful presentation of the new state programmes usually causes a high enough interest to cover the set quota or target of households designated for resettlement. In Zeku County so far, there have often been even more households applying for resettlement than the number of available new houses. In such cases, the community leader decides by lot, for example, by pulling names of applicant households from a hat. If not enough households from one community should be interested, the officials can appoint more households from another community instead, or they simply decide which families from the reluctant community must move to the resettlement.

After the households in a community are selected for resettlement, the heads of each household proceed to the township government to sign the resettlement contract. Over 50% of my pastoralist informants from Zeku County who were appointed to resettle into the Duofudun town, Zeku County seat and Tongren Laka resettlement sites are completely illiterate and had to sign a contract they could not understand. Those who do know how to read only found out during the signing procedure itself that their participation entails that they must voluntarily reallocate from 50% to 100% of their pastureland to the government. Nobody dared to change their mind at this point about their participation in the resettlement programme as they feared the possible negative consequences.

According to the original government plans, on average, each participating household should pay 18,000 RMB (from the total of 55,300 RMB) as their own contribution to new house construction. Nevertheless, pastoralist households in Zeku County are comparatively poor and those households which actively participate in resettlement programmes represent the poorest without livestock. For this reason, it was decided that in Zeku County the share of the resettlement construction costs normally contributed by pastoralists will only be set at 3,000 per household (ADGM XII). This of course caused financial shortages in government construction planning and was one of the reasons for implementation delays. According to my pastoralist informants, each household involved in the resettlement programme initially had to pay 6,000 RMB for the new house. Later the government repaid them 3,000 RMB. This latter amount, however, matches the annual government subsidy granted to the pastoralists by the state as set out in the programme policy documents. By the end of 2009, Zeku pastoralists with resettlement contracts dating from 2007 had received only two annual subsidies of 3,000 RMB per household for the 2007–2008 period for those who resettled within the county itself and 3,500 RMB per household for those who moved to resettlement sites within neighbouring Tongren County. Additionally, the government granted them 500 RMB each winter for fuel costs. In the official programme documents, this annual government subsidy is scheduled as a regular payment to participating pastoralists for the duration of 10 years (ADGM XII). However, the pastoralists themselves who participate in the programme in Zeku County possess no written document stating the amount of the payment or the duration of entitlement. Every year now they have to wait to see whether any further support will be granted or not.

## 12.5 The Resettlement

After moving to a resettlement site, pastoralist households find themselves in a completely new environment. Giving up the land and livestock which formerly provided much of their subsistence needs, their daily costs for basic needs rise enormously. The pastoralists suddenly realize that everything must be purchased for cash. Their modest government subsidy cannot cover daily expenditures for a whole household, and the pastoralists must seek additional sources of income. Part of the state's implementation guidelines includes plans for future economic supplements in resettlement areas. Depending upon the specific resettlement locality, some sites were designated for farming, for example, the Laka site near Tongren town. It is intended that others secure their income through harvesting caterpillar fungus (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*, Tib. *yartsa gunbu*) and trade, as was scheduled, for example, for the Communist party school resettlement in Tongren town. Other resettlements near cultural sites or spectacular landscapes of interest to tourists, like the Longzang village near Maixiu forest, are meant to somehow profit from tourism and related service industries (ADGM X). Unfortunately, at least by the end of the year 2009, these plans all remained mostly on paper and were not converted into practice. The implementation reports by local governments often concede that the available funds are not sufficient to cover necessary costs for the vocational training of resettled pastoralists, nor for establishing the required capital investments to enable them to start new businesses. The insufficient funding even causes shortfalls to the formally scheduled subsidies. Therefore, not enough help is offered to the resettled pastoralists to obtain new skills and qualifications to be able to follow the new economic concept presented in the state's programme documents. If there is any vocational training given at all, then it is only a 1-month course, which is far from sufficient to impart enough knowledge about the new domain and enough self confidence in it to start new business ventures.

Obtaining new qualifications and creating new income bases is a key task in order to enable pastoralists to adapt to the new environment of the resettlement sites and to urban social life in general. Without a secured existence for their households, resettled pastoralists will never find satisfaction in the new villages. At the majority of resettlement sites for Zeku pastoralists, I observed situationally the types of problems just described. For example, in the resettlements of Duofudun, Zeku County seat, Longzang, Ningxiu and Tongren, the pastoralists complain that there is no possibility to find a new job. First, there are no jobs on offer, and second, they lack any qualification apart from skills in pastoralism.

In several resettlement sites, the pastoralists have obtained houses with courtyards which could be used to grow vegetables, whilst in others, shops were included to enable business opportunities. In reality, the pastoralists say they do not know how to grow vegetables, and the high local altitudes do not allow the plants to gain their usual size. The new shops are in most cases managed by local Tibetans from nearby townships and not by the households from the resettlement sites themselves. For resettled pastoralists to be able to secure their livelihoods, there remains the

option of using their own savings as investment capital or of seeking work at state construction sites in the region. The construction work brings only a small salary home, and the work is physically demanding. This leads most resettled pastoralists to revert to the recently lucrative alternative of harvesting medicinal plants, especially caterpillar fungus, which is sold for very high prices on the Chinese market (Winkler 2010).

Facing difficulties in adapting to their new environment and in securing enough income to support the whole family, many pastoralists attempt to resell their new houses and return to the grassland. Theoretically, this should not be possible within the framework of the state's programmes, but the pastoralists find their own ways to negotiate the resettlement policy and gain the most benefit out of it for themselves.

According to the agenda of the original resettlement programmes, all pastoralists who resettle must sell all their livestock. Nevertheless, in many areas, such as Zeku, Henan or Maqin Counties, we can observe pastoralist households who possess a new resettlement house whilst keeping their herds at the same time. One reason for this is that, in order to extract the maximum official benefits, numerous households officially split into two, appointing the elderly resident members of the 'grandparents' generation as a separate household unit. This way, one original household is able to send the grandparents and children to inhabit the new house in a resettlement site and to enjoy all the benefits of a comfortable house with a road and school access plus government subsidy but also keep their herd on the grasslands as a source of food and income.

In some areas, for example, in Duofudun or Heri Townships in Zeku County, the government did not require the pastoralist households to sell all their livestock and give up the pastureland contracted to them. In Duofudun, those pastoralists designated for resettlement in 2007 had to sign a contract, which assigned from half to all of their pastures to the government. Nevertheless, the government has not enforced its right to the land, and so the majority of pastoralist households intended for resettlement still remained at their grassland locations during 2010 and hope that the government will not enforce its claim to the land. In Heri Township, the pastoralists who participated in resettlement claim that they did not even have to sign any contract and that they are allowed to keep their land and livestock in addition to their new state houses. These households still have some possibility to abandon the resettlement site and return to the grassland in case they dislike life in the more urban locations. In case a household should reconsider its participation in the resettlement process and decides to return to their original pastureland, it usually tries to resell the house in the resettlement site. Especially in resettlements sites established in county or prefecture seats, such as those at the Communist party school in Tongren, or even those nearby to towns such as the Zeku County seat resettlement site, pastoralists can earn at least double the amount they invested in building their resettlement apartment or house by reselling it. Both reselling of such houses and returning to the pastureland is technically illegal under the state's programmes, but ultimately it depends on how such breaches are dealt with by the implementing office of the local government.

But those pastoralist households who had no livestock, or who sold it all before moving into the resettlement sites, and whose pasture is now being controlled by the government, have none of these options and must stay in the resettlement, an example being the resettlement of Maduo pastoralists in Tongde County on the Zeku County border.

During my field study, it was not the case in all resettlement sites that pastoralists complained about the difficulties of adaptation or finding new sources of income. There are some locations where the resettlement programme appears to be successful. For example, in the Heri Township resettlement site, all my pastoralist informants claim that the relocation enables them a more comfortable life and a better income. The reason for this is the local tradition of stone carving in this particular pastoralist area. In almost every resettled household, there is someone who masters this handcraft. The availability of more free time and better connection to the market allowed by the resettlement enables these people to produce more and better sell their stone products. Nevertheless, these particular pastoralist households at Heri still maintain their pastures and livestock on the side. They all agree upon the fact that without the additional economic possibility of stone carving, life in the resettlement would be a harder life than that as a pastoralist on the grassland.

In Zeku County, the government actually promotes the Heri site as an example of a resettlement success (ADGM IX), although it was not primarily the government which was responsible for this apparent positive result.

## 12.6 Further Sedentarization Efforts of the *Nomadic Settlement Programme*

It could be said that, in general, the pastoralists of eastern Tibetan areas are not against sedentarization programmes and what they entail. However, they only want to accept the new housing provided by the programmes in addition to their pastureland and livestock and not instead of it. Therefore, the ideal solution for both the state's intention to relocate part of the pastoralist population from the grassland to accessible urban locations and the wish of the pastoralists themselves to possess a new house on top of their existing life as pastoralists seems to be offered by the *Nomadic Settlement* programme. This allows the pastoralists to maintain their existing pastureland and livestock whilst additionally enabling them to obtain a new house in an urban area.

However, the *Nomadic Settlement* programme does not end merely with providing pastoralists with a new house. Under the label 'Development of Tibetan Areas', the state wants to demonstrate to the pastoralists that, following the period of riots during 2008, it cares for them and their welfare and comfort. Supplying pastoralist households with material goods and houses on the one hand, the government pursues its unpublicized aim of tighter social control over Tibetan pastoralist communities on the other hand since they now should reside in permanent houses in highly accessible locations where social life can be easily monitored. The *Nomadic*



**Photo 12.1** Longzang resettlement village in Ningxiu, Zeku County (Photograph © Jarmila Ptackova, July 2008)

*Settlement* programme targets all remaining pastoralist households, not engaged into any resettlement programme yet (ADGM VIII). From the beginning of the implementation of the *Nomadic Settlement* programme in 2009, the Zeku County government planned to resettle approximately 30% of the remaining pastoralist population from the grassland each successive year. Under this programme, each participating household must contribute 5,000 RMB for their new house, whilst the remainder of the ca. 40,000 RMB costs is covered by the government. The government itself takes responsibility for the entire construction work involved and selects the actual settlement locations. Similar to the resettlement sites of the *Ecological Resettlement* programme, the new houses built for *Nomadic Settlement* in Zeku County form well-laid out housing schemes (Photo 12.1) at the periphery of county seats or townships, or they are situated directly along major roads.

So far, the participants in the *Nomadic Settlements* programme can maintain their livestock and land and must move only part of their household into the new houses. During 2009 in Zeku County, housing projects for *Nomadic Settlements* were already under construction. Nevertheless, none of these new urbanizations had been finished by the end of the year. Therefore, local pastoralists did not start inhabiting these new houses during my fieldwork period, and it was not possible to examine their situations after joining the *Nomadic Settlement* programme. In other pastoralist



areas, such as Maqin County in Guoluo Prefecture or Hongyuan County in Aba Prefecture in Sichuan, the construction work proceeded much faster, and participating pastoralist households could already enjoy their new houses during 2009. In these counties, the implementation methods of the programme vary from those applied in Zeku County. In Maqin County, the pastoralists first build a house that complied with the parameters set down by the government, and then they can apply for a financial subsidy of 40,000 RMB. The pastoralists could erect the new house either at their regular winter pasture site or decide in favour of a house in an existing settlement near the county or prefectural seat. In Hongyuan County, the households first applied for and were granted 20,000 RMB to build new houses in a settlement location selected by the government, or they could allow the government to build the new house for them (Ptackova 2011).

Regardless of how promising the recent implementation of *Nomadic Settlement* appears to be, as it reflects the current wishes of the pastoralists to continue their lifestyle as pastoralists in grassland areas with an additional chance to obtain a living base in an urban area. Beyond this, the Chinese state is already developing much grander plans that will affect the entire pastoralist population and its future right across the Tibetan Plateau. It is the state's current view that the whole 'backward' system of Tibetan-style pastoralism should be modernized (ADGM IV). This means, for example, focusing on the rapid fattening of marketable animals in sheds (ADGM V), or introduction of new livestock breeds, along with a restraint upon the practice of traditional grassland pastoralism. In the long term, all such measures would ultimately lead to more sedentary lives for Tibetan pastoralists.

## 12.7 Conclusions

Due to various complex factors, grassland conditions across the eastern Tibetan Plateau—including all of Qinghai Province—are changing, and in some areas, vegetation cover is significantly degrading (Harris 2010). In several pastoral areas, where grassland degradation is relatively advanced, animal husbandry alone cannot now cover the increasing cash demand of Tibetan pastoralist households. Representatives from such pastoralist communities, for example, from Ningxiu Township in Zeku County, but also from Golok, Tianshu and so on, went to the responsible local government officials to ask for help to secure their living standards. In such cases, local governments have only few possibilities to respond to such requests. They merely control funds granted by the Central government, most of which are already appointed for specific programmes and are not flexible enough to deal with each request by local people on an individual basis. Only if there is a programme already designed by the state at the central level to be implemented in pastoral areas can the local government offer people chances to participate in these and thus gain assistance. This is also the case with resettlement. The government

offers the pastoralists participation in resettlement programmes as a realistic solution for their difficult situations, as a way out of poverty, or as a possibility to establish an additional income base if the grassland is not good enough to support their livestock. Nevertheless, even if the pastoralists do not specifically request any help, the task of local government is also to ensure enough participation by the Tibetan pastoralist communities they administer in order to fulfil the quotas or targets set by the Central and Province level governments.

The fundamental problem is that none of the current resettlement and sedentarization programmes were primarily designed to suit the pastoralists and their needs. In the first instance, the implemented policy matches developmental and political aims of the state to modernize the western part of the country. Whilst this is often phrased by the state as a discourse of 'bringing the poor west up the same standard of the affluent east', its goals are clearly to better exploit the abundant and diverse resources available in the west of the country and maximize its economic potential, whilst also further integrating the region's various (and often politically disruptive) ethnic minority populations into the mainstream of Han Chinese population. In some grassland areas, the government requires back the use rights over the land from the Tibetan pastoralists assigned for the resettlement programmes. Officially, the full government management authority over the grassland is needed to monitor the grassland conditions and assure a restoration of degraded vegetation. However, we can also find increasing number of cases, where the grassland areas controlled by government are used for mining activity (Lustgarten 2008), which certainly is in conflict with ecological preservation. The inhabitants of grassland areas, the Tibetan pastoralists, must give way to the implementation of government policy. Although they are those most profoundly affected, the Tibetan pastoralists were not consulted during any stage of the design and preparation of all current resettlement programmes. Apart from insufficient consultation during the planning and preparation phase of programmes, the most important deficit in the implementation phase is lack of assistance during the adaptation period in the new sedentary, village-style environments at resettlement sites. After the resettlement and abandonment of pastureland and livestock, the cash demand of a household increases enormously. Having difficulties to supply the family with basic alimentary products, the pastoralists experience the life in a resettlement as a greater hardship than the tough life in the grasslands. Moreover, at least in Zeku County at the time of my research, the majority of the pastoralists remained unaware that resettlement life might become a permanent state for them, and they still count on a future return to their original pastureland after a certain period of time mentioned in the resettlement contract has passed or after the government approves the grassland conditions and allows them to go back. Therefore, due to such perceptions, most resettled pastoralists in areas like Zeku County do not make much effort to establish new income bases and only try to survive in resettlement sites with the help of their own savings, their government subsidies or by trading medicinal plants. Regardless of whether they sold all their livestock and gave up their pastures before relocating or not, they still consider themselves as pastoralists or nomads (Tibetan: *Brog-pa*).

If the government wants to ensure a successful and possibly permanent relocation of Tibetan pastoralists into new urban settlements, it must provide vocational training in new skills and abilities to these people in a sufficient way during their transformation period.

Furthermore, the lack of detailed information given to pastoralists about the resettlement and settlement conditions during the application period and the hasty implementation of these programmes both hinder the possibility of a successful adaptation. The pastoralists have neither enough information nor time given to them to consider the benefits and disadvantages of a resettlement step. In a very short period of time, they are requested to relocate and start a completely new life in a totally new environment. A successful adaptation under such conditions is very difficult, if not impossible. Many households could remain long-term dependents upon governmental subsidies, and thus resettlement communities might become a far worse social problem for the government than the current, mainly self-sufficient Tibetan pastoral communities living on their traditional grasslands.

It is also not clear whether the removal of pastoralists from the grassland environment through resettlement and leaving grasslands fallow and ungrazed by livestock for a longer period of time, as required, for example, in the *Turning Pastureland into Grassland* programme, will actually have the planned positive influence upon the recovery of grassland vegetation. The majority of households which actively participate in resettlement programmes are the poorest ones, with no or only few livestock. Therefore, concerning ecological impact and the reduction of overgrazing, removing such households alone cannot have the desired influence upon ecosystem recovery.

Moreover, although the majority of my pastoralist informants from Zeku County claim that the grassland condition in their community grazing areas has worsened in comparison with the situation prior to the 1980s, only 10% of them believe that resettlement implemented by the government might benefit the improvement of grassland vegetation. On the contrary, the same informants claim that long periods without livestock grazing on pastures would actually harm the ecosystem and modify it permanently.

It is clear that achieving ecological balance in grassland areas across the eastern Tibetan Plateau system whilst also raising the living standards of Tibetan pastoralists closer to those enjoyed by the Chinese population in the east of the country will not be easy tasks to achieve. Therefore, the Chinese state might better now slow down the implementation speed of its development policies in order to really match the complex local needs of those most affected, the Tibetan pastoralists, and reconsider exactly how much impact this implementation is contributing towards attaining their stated ecological goals.

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## Note

1. Community or village (Chin: 村 *cun*) refers here to the smallest administrative unit in the Chinese state administrative system. It describes an area inhabited and used by people who administratively belong to one community. The next higher administrative levels are township (Chin: 乡 *xiang*), county (Chin: 县 *xian*), prefecture (Chin: 州 *zhou*), province (Chin: 省 *sheng*) or autonomous region (Chin: 自治区 *zizhiqu*) and central government (Chin: 中央 *zhongyang*).

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## Chapter 13 'Everybody Likes Houses. Even Birds Are Coming!'

### Housing Tibetan Pastoralists in Golok: Policies and Everyday Realities

Emilia Róza Sulek

**Abstract** This chapter discusses the trend visible amongst Tibetan pastoralists of Golok Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai Province, China, to invest increasing amounts of money in building houses upon their winter grazing lands. It reveals the beginnings of this phenomenon and brings data on the newest state policies aimed at encouraging the pastoralist population to construct houses. Analysis of successive waves of house construction is accompanied by a discussion of the reasons pastoralists themselves give for building new houses. The chapter analyses the roles which the houses play in the lives of their owners and discusses whether or not the pastoralists perceive the living in houses as conflicting with their self-image.

**Keywords** Pastoralists • Sedentarization • Resettlement • Tibet

#### 13.1 Introduction

On my first visit to the Golok highlands during 2007, my hosts invited me: 'Come to stay with us in summer! We'll be staying in black tents, that's how the pastoralists do it!' When I returned and visited the same friends' summer camp and lived in their black tent, they said: 'Come to stay with us in winter! We'll be back in the house. It'll be warmer and more comfortable'. It was a rainy summer and tents did not seem to be the most admired form of dwelling under the constant showers and upon soil soaked with rainwater. But was that only about the bad weather?

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