HOW HAVE DECADES OF CHINESE POLICIES – such as livestock quotas, grassland fencing and eviction – affected the Tibetan nomads?

How are current policies – which aim to move the entire nomadic population into fixed housing – affecting the nomads? What concerns do the nomads themselves raise?

How do China’s policies compare with those in other countries?

This publication will address these questions in a landmark attempt to give voice to Tibet’s nomads, who have faced severe changes to their traditional culture and ecologically sustainable lifestyle, thanks to policies over which they have had no say.

Tibet’s delicate environment has been cared for by its indigenous peoples – the Tibetan nomads – for thousands of years. Whilst there is no doubt of the Tibetan plateau’s value to China – its Chinese name translating to “Treasure House” – the land’s inhabitants have not been valued.

Rather than removal from their grasslands – often in the dubious name of environmental protection – Purging the Treasure House suggests that the valuable knowledge of the Plateau’s custodians must be preserved and put to use in the fight against climate change.
Purging the Treasure House
Displacement and
the Status of the Tibetan Nomad

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Advocacy for home, Action in exile

The Tibetan Women’s Association (TWA), was founded in Lhasa on March 12, 1959, when Tibetan women from all three provinces of Tibet stood united for the first time in Tibetan history and challenged the brutal clampdown by the Chinese Government. The Tibetan women engaged in peaceful resistance against the oppression and since have maintained a steadfast presence in leading the non-violent struggle against the repressive Chinese regime.

In 1960’s as women in Tibet continued to challenge the Chinese domination, Tibetan women in Kalimpong, Darjeeling, Dharamsala and Rajpur fresh with the scar of 1959 crackdown continued the struggle in exile with equal fervor and worked tenaciously towards the preservation of Tibetan culture. Under the indomitable leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the peerless efforts of the Tibetan women in exile India resulted in the reestablishment of TWA on September 10, 1984 in India.

Committed to resolve the injustices inside Tibet, TWA’s expansion of 57 regional chapters within four continents (Asia, America, Europe and Australia) totaling more than 16,000 members outside Tibet, furthers the advocacy objective for social justice. TWA is the most powerful women’s organization in Tibetan history, as well as the only Non-Government Organization of Tibetan women in exile. TWA advocates human rights for women inside Tibet and is committed to empowering women in exile.

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Preface

China’s name for Tibet roughly translates to “Treasure House” in Tibetan, demonstrating the value of its natural water and mineral resources to China. However, the land’s indigenous nomads have not been valued by the Chinese regime.

The Women’s Environment & Development Desk (WEDD) of the Tibetan Women’s Association (TWA) holds immense pride to see a report like this being published and able to reach out to a wide readership. Apart from online reports, there are far too few reports dealing with the displaced Tibetan nomads. In publishing this report, we aim to create awareness across the world about the real Tibetan nomad situation inside Tibet and how they are suffering due to the Chinese government’s so called grassland protection and modernization policies. This is an urgent issue and we have been longing to put together this report for a long time; we are delighted that we are now able to publish it.

The nomad population of Tibet is approximately 2.25 million of the nation’s total 6 million population. This report illuminates the traditional and, importantly, sustainable Tibetan nomad’s culture and how Chinese grassland policy has devastated the nomad’s life from the core. In this report, we have included around new 15 interviews conducted with recently arrived refugee Tibetans belonging to a nomadic background. This report gives a thoroughly researched background of the Chinese government’s policies concerning the nomads, and continues to illuminate the real situation in Tibet by giving the nomads’ thoughts on resettlement and other policies.

Wishing to draw attention to the Chinese government’s actions in a global context, and to show that for governments wishing to “develop”

We appeal to peoples, governments and international organizations to put pressure on the Chinese government to immediately rethink the widespread displacement of Tibetan pastoralists.
nomadic populations there are alternative solutions, this report’s final chapter compares the situation of the Tibetan nomad with the other nomadic cultures of Africa, Mongolia, Afghanistan and Iran. The evidence used will demonstrate that if the Chinese government adopts such alternative ways for Tibetan nomads, this will be beneficial not only for the nomads but also their environment.

Reading the nomads’ testimonies in this report, readers will be left in no doubt of the Tibetan nomad’s grief. We appeal to peoples, governments and international organizations to put pressure on the Chinese government to immediately rethink the widespread displacement of Tibetan pastoralists. There is now a real risk that Tibetan nomads will lose their sustainable way of life and culture; this is a threat to Tibetan identity itself as well as to Tibet’s fragile and important environment.

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TWA owes it immensely to Gabriel Lafitte, advisor to Women’s Environment and Development Desk (WEDD) of TWA, for giving this book its academic sheen.

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Women’s Environment and Development Desk
Tibetan Women’s Association
November 2011
President’s message

The Women’s Environment & Development Desk of the Tibetan Women’s Association was established in 2010 to raise awareness about the impacts of climate change upon Tibet’s unique ecosystem and upon the plight of the Tibetan nomad. Being a Tibetan women’s organization, it is so natural for us to play a caring role towards our motherland, Tibet.

The current environmental situation in Tibet is at critical stage. There is an urgent need for support from people worldwide to become a voice for the voiceless people inside Tibet. I personally request to all the parliamentarians of the world to take up the urgency of Tibet’s environmental situation in your agenda during UN climate negotiations. Glaciers are thawing and rivers are drying in Tibet, which has a catastrophic impact on downstream nations in the form of natural calamities.

Scientists and environmentalists name Tibet the “Third Pole” of the world which itself makes clear the importance of Tibet’s environment; although in fact its importance is even greater than the north and south poles, due to its proximity to such a large population. It is crucial that all of us work for a better environment as our universal responsibility.

Aside from the environmental impact, Chinese policy has had devastating impact on thousands of nomads, who have been forced to leave their homes and lifestyles behind in the name of grassland rehabilitation and social advancement. The fact that nomads have lived sustainably for thousands of years is ignored. As is the fact that most nomads do not leave their homes willfully, or if it is through choice they often regret it later due to the lies they’ve been told. I

Simply put, the Chinese government’s policy of displacing Tibetan nomads and wiping out their historic way of life – reducing them to unskilled casual laborers or discontent unemployed – goes against their fundamental rights.
would like to request all the government representatives to press the Chinese government to withdraw these ill thought out policies. There is a danger of turning grassland to barren land in near future if nomads are forcibly evicted.

Simply put, the Chinese government’s policy of displacing Tibetan nomads and wiping out their historic way of life – reducing them to unskilled casual laborers or discontent unemployed – goes against their fundamental rights.

Kirti Dolkar Lhamo
President
Tibetan Women’s Association
November 2011
Map of Tibet

© 2007 John Emerson

Areas populated by Tibetan herders where resettlement is taking place.
A herd in winter
Photo @ anonymous

Moving grasslands
Photo @ anonymous
I. Tibet, nomad’s land

In one of the world’s harshest environments, Tibetan nomads have survived for millennia by practicing seasonal migration - an ecologically sustainable way of life.

Prior to the 1959 Chinese invasion of Tibet, the land’s earliest inhabitants – the drokpa (nomads) - had for over eight thousand years maintained their traditional way of life. Today, it is difficult to determine the precise number of remaining Tibetans living nomadic or semi-nomadic lives, but the common estimate is that they constitute approximately 2.25 million of the Plateau’s 6 million Tibetans. However these lives are today under threat; the grasslands upon which nomads have made their homes are degrading due to worldwide climate changes, and forced resettlement is rewriting the nomadic way of life.

A unique environment and a unique kind of nomadism

In one of the world’s most inhospitable environments, at altitudes of 3000 to 5000 meters, nomads thrive by practicing seasonal migration. Groups of between ten and twenty five families, with their yak hair tents and their herds, periodically travel to the different grasslands that comprise 70% of the Tibetan Plateau. Their ecologically sustainable lifestyle varies according to changes in their surroundings, adapting to the broad and changeable climate across the 2.5 million square kilometers of the Plateau. This plateau is dubbed China’s “number one water tower” but its importance stretches even further than that: it contains the source of most of Asia’s rivers, which about 40% of the world’s population is dependent upon or affected by. Yet in seeming contradiction most of its plains are semi-arid, cold and thus unsuitable.
for farming. To the modern observer how the nomads have lived sustainably in this complex and sensitive environment is difficult to understand; however our understanding of the past and present lives upon these lands is crucial to the future of the world’s highest and largest plateau - our “Third Pole.”

Whilst elements of the Tibetan nomads’ pastoralism – a system of free range livestock production - present an example of behavior that was once ubiquitous across our world, such nomadic behavior is today rare.\(^1\) Furthermore Tibetan pastoralism can be distinguished from most other varieties due to the high altitudes of 3000-5000 meters and varied temperatures, in contrast to the lack of water which characterizes many of the world’s other pastoral regions.\(^2\) Tibetan nomads also set themselves apart as one of the few cultures of the world that practice fraternal polyandry; women would commonly marry two or more brothers, giving their family further protection and strength in the extreme weather conditions as well as ensuring that the large lands needed to support families were not split. This is just one example of how the nomads have developed a unique lifestyle in response to their unique environment. For Daniel J. Miller this exceptional environment had two key consequences; without the intrusion of farmers the Tibetan nomadic culture has been able to prosper, and nomads have been able to develop complex methods of livestock management accompanied by in depth knowledge of their environment.\(^3\)

**Nomadic survival as dependent upon sustainability and adaptability**

The hardy Himalayan yak, evolved to be at home at heights of 3000 to 5500 meters, is not only symbolic of the Tibetan nomad’s own highly evolved lifestyle but also indicative of the nomad’s dependence upon and sensitivity towards his or her environment. Along with sheep, goats and horses, nomads typically keep herds of yaks in numbers of 20 to 100.\(^4\) As anthropologist Melvyn Goldstein noted, the nomads live efficiently and without “wasted motion”; “When goats are milked, for example, a group of 30 or so animals is tied together and when the milking is done the animals are released with a simple pull on the rope. The milk itself is made into yoghurt, butter and cheese.”\(^5\) Whilst
the primary use is milk, the yaks also provide meat for the cold winter periods; resilient hair and skin for clothing, tents and insulation; dung for fuel; products to trade, and a means of carrying possessions over long journeys. With these animals facilitating the nomads’ lives in harsh conditions, the nomads have naturally structured their lives according to the needs of their herds.

The continuing movement has enabled the nomads to live sustainably; they effectively use their surroundings for their needs whilst allowing them to recover.

Seasonal migration is as essential to herding as crop rotation is to farming, with various factors considered by nomads when moving for fresh grasslands, carefully pitching tents and allocating different grassland to different animals. Historically, Tibetan nomads commonly travel great distances, grazing their herds on the ample grasslands in the summer and returning to more permanent settlements in the winter in order to sell their animals or animal produce and to buy products such as grain and medicine in the market; this liberty of movement was essential to their way of life. For Owen Lattimore who lived with Tibetan nomads in the early 20th century, such freedom determines success and power and is therefore tied up with nomad identity: “if you belong to a ‘powerful’ tribe you do not think of this power in terms of the number of square miles that the tribe owns but in terms of linear miles of movement permitted to you.”

The continuing movement has enabled the nomads to live sustainably; they effectively use their surroundings for their needs whilst allowing them to recover. The unpredictable environment simply demands mobility and adaptability from its inhabitants, with change itself as a constant rather than something to be feared or governed. Academic and Tibet expert Gabriel Lafitte draws attention to this idea in his assessment of Robert Ekvall’s writings, a westerner who lived his first 22 years until 1936 with Tibetan nomads and spoke Tibetan as a native language. Ekvall comments on the common nomad greeting “has there been any difficulty?” noting that the reply is along the lines of “no trouble at all,” when in fact there have been a great many challenges as a matter of course:
No day filled with the exigencies of pastoralism combined with nomadism can be without trouble. Repeatedly, I have travelled with Tibetans when the entire day has been a succession of disasters or near-disasters: loads thrown in bogs and streams; robbers evaded or, in head-on confrontation, bluffed off; rain all day, so hard that no noon halt was feasible and everyone went hungry and thirsty; what should have been fords become waters for swimming, with loads and cattle nearly swept away; and at the end we were a sorry bedraggled lot, but the answer, somewhat hoarsely defiant and denying all reality, remained true to form –Ma dKaa THal (No difficulty at all).8

Ekvall acknowledges the constant risk the nomads are vulnerable to; he helps to illuminate how risk taking is a normal element of life on the Plateau and how it has affected the personalities of the nomads. For Ekvall the nomads are “tough, self-reliant, meeting emergencies as mere routine, and subtly alert to changes of weather, scene, and circumstance; for the change that goes with movement is a variable requiring constant, focused attention.”9

For the Tibetan nomad all is connected and forms a balance and harmony despite the changeable climate and an uncertain and vulnerable life. This way of understanding the nomad’s life is discordant with much of modernity that requires stability, predictability and management.10 As Lafitte notes, the nomad life involves:

Living in the present rather than reconstructing the past so as to predict and control the future. This includes living with generalisations, rules, policies and ideologies kept as useful ways of organising, but not as master narratives to be followed, irrespective of actual circumstances in the present.

Accepting as a fact rather than a problem that one’s environment and access to sustenance is unpredictable, ungovernable and unreliable recognizes how the adaptability and mobility of pastoral nomadism is its biggest strength, “operating not by avoiding risk but by harnessing it as the very basis of production.”11 This strength is exhibited in the way nomads have survived for thousands of years by using seasonal migration. As Lafitte explains, it is absolutely incorrect to judge
Making cheese in Karze
Photo @ Santiago Carralero

Pilgrimage to Mount Kailash
Photo @ Phil Borges
Khampa woman milking in Kyegudo
Photo @ Santiago Carralero

A nomad embraces technology whilst living on the grassland, Photo @ Phil Borges
pastoralists’ decisions on where they move their herds as if these decisions are made in a stable environment; “to apply a steady state model to the way pastoralists live is to inevitably find them to be dangerously overgrazing, carelessly pushing the land beyond its limits.”12 Failure to understand this perhaps explains why nomadic lifestyles are today under threat.

**Religious beliefs and respect towards surroundings**

The dependence of the nomads upon their environment has instilled a great respect towards their surroundings, and in no way is this better demonstrated than by the nomads’ religious beliefs, with mountain, forests, rivers and lakes revered as sacred. In their sublime surroundings, nomads traditionally worship mountains as the dwellings of deities, with Mount Kailash being the most famed. Mount Kailash is paired with Lake Manasarovar, with partnerships between mountains and lakes joining their respective masculine and feminine qualities.13 Such holy sites are attributed an omnipotent supremacy, able to rule over the grasslands and protect the nomads and their herds, as well as punish inappropriate behavior with livestock epidemics or extreme weather.14 The nomad will also fear spirits ruling over the earth, rivers and lakes; failure to constantly respect one’s surroundings can result in vengeance from these spirits. The Tibetan nomad performs rituals, burns incense, offers prayers, attaches prayer flags to mountain flags for good fortune and regularly goes on pilgrimage to circumambulate the holy sites.15 These early folk beliefs demonstrate the Tibetan nomad’s intimacy with and sensitivity towards their environment; such beliefs were accommodating to the Buddhist teachings which were introduced to the Plateau in the 7th century, such as the ideas of karma and rebirth.16 During this period sacred “hidden valleys” were established throughout the region to provide people with refuge in times of need and stone monuments were used to bring peace and prosperity to the

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Such beliefs attributed a sacred status to one’s entire environment; such reverence and acceptance that ultimate power is outside of human grip is intrinsic to traditional Tibetan nomad identity.
surrounding area and its inhabitants.\textsuperscript{17} Such beliefs attributed a sacred status to one’s entire environment; such reverence and acceptance that ultimate power is outside of human grip is intrinsic to traditional Tibetan nomad identity.

**How we struggle to understand Tibetan nomadism**

Our above observations have made no attempt to romanticize the lives of Tibetan nomads, something which Western observers may be prone to. For researchers and academics there is no doubt that the lives atop the Plateau’s heights came with great difficulty, and high mortality. But though difficult to understand, the nomadic lifestyle is special. It is a lifestyle where information is gained through direct experience, rather than through the mediums of selective books or education; it is a lifestyle where knowledge can seem innate when its bearer is unable to convey it in words. Lafitte cites Tai Situpa who examines the difference between nomadism and modern life:

People who grow up in a changed, more artificial environment have difficulty understanding that life is simple. Everything becomes very complicated for them, and especially such things as love, caring for themselves and other people, having balanced relationships, discipline and so forth. Such basic states as happiness, sadness, death, and birth all become very complicated. [...] People who have grown up with nature might not have seen any books, and they might not have the ability to explain what love, respect, or kindness is, but they know and feel these principles in a way that gives them stability. [...] Nowadays the simple things that people once knew naturally have become areas of uncertainty.\textsuperscript{18}

Lafitte notes that these observations should not be misinterpreted as romanticized visions of “living at one with nature”, but rather simply how nomads learn.\textsuperscript{19} This learning, though buried in our modern age, still lies somewhere beneath how we interpret and grow through the world - this perhaps explains our fascination with nomads; rather than romanticism they remind us of a truth we have long suppressed.
However, such illumination of Tibetan nomadism means nothing if absolutely ignored by government policies.

**Chinese policy: reining the wild environment and its backward people**

The Government of the People’s Republic of China made their intentions towards the nomads explicit in the 1980s and 1990s, with their national policy’s stated aim to end the nomadic way of life of all Tibetan herdsmen by the 21st century.20 In this period, Vice Minister of Agriculture Qi Jingfa noted that the government “began assisting roaming herdsmen to settle down” in 1986, ostensibly to help “develop animal husbandry [on] a large scale and promote cultural, technological and education undertakings in the pastoral areas.”21 For the PRC Government the nomadic way of life was “backwards” and in need of modernization.22 Since the Chinese Government’s resettlement scheme was launched in 2003, between 50% and 80% of the 2.25 million Tibetan nomads have been moved from their land. In the Qinghai province it is estimated that 89% of nomads (around 100 000 families) were resettled in 2005.23 The hitherto successful nomadic way of life has changed forever, with resettled nomads today torn from the environments they know and left representing some of the poorest, least skilled and least educated in urban areas.

Whilst much of the PRC focus has allegedly been on improving rudimentary nomadic life, protecting the environment has been used to
further justify their policies, with the government not recognizing the existence of a harmonious Tibetan ecosystem prior to its invasion when “ecological improvement and environmental protection started.”\(^{24}\)

Whilst climate change undoubtedly necessitates care towards the Plateau, Chinese policy has forced the nomads to change their lives and denied them any say on their future. The incessant drive to regulate the environment and its people undermines the values that defined the adaptable nomadic way of life, with “more than 30 local regulations, regulatory documents and administrative rules covering ecological conservation and environmental protection” published by governors of the “Tibet Autonomous Region.”\(^{25}\) This attitude has been reinforced in other PRC documentation, for example: “we cannot refuse any interaction between man and natural eco-environment on the excuse of preserving the fragile primitive natural state, because this will hamper the economic and social development and the improvement of people’s living standard in Tibet.”\(^{26}\) Not only do such assertions demonstrate how man is set up as struggling against his environment rather than working with it, they also place supposed aims to protect the environment in a highly dubious light.

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**However, environmental justifications have been exposed as questionable with Party Secretary Zhang Qingli stating in 2007 that the purpose of resettling nomadic communities was to promote economic development and to counteract the Dalai Lama’s influence.**

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Major overhaul of the Tibetan way of life has taken place since 1959, with the asserted aims of “ecological improvement and environmental protection work in Tibet,” with the people of Tibet (of all ethnic groups) as the “main beneficiaries.”\(^{27}\) However, environmental justifications have been exposed as questionable with Party Secretary Zhang Qingli stating in 2007 that the purpose of resettling nomadic communities was to promote economic development and to counteract the Dalai Lama’s influence.\(^{28}\) PRC justification has been consistently confusing, flitting between aims of environment protection, environmental control, supporting the nomads, or ending their way of life; official motives fail to withstand closer inspection. Many now justly fear that Chinese policies have been wrapping political motives in a guise of
environmental or social concern. China may not have succeeded in ending “the nomadic way of life of all Tibetan herdsmen by the 21st century,” but it has certainly dramatically changed the lives of Tibetans across the region. Whether this is for their benefit is far less certain than PRC documentation would wish to convey.

**Learning from the nomads**

If we do set aside such inconsistencies and interpret policies as benevolently aiming to protect grasslands and improve the “low human quality” of the nomads, the Chinese government still misunderstands the nomads. The farce of this is poignantly elaborated upon by Lafitte. He explains how in the writings of Chinese elites, the difference between the modern civilized person and the barbaric nomadic others comes down to how food is delivered to the animals: the civilized man will not take his animals to graze, but will bring food to them; he will not allow his animals to feed from the pastureland, but will fence them in, go out and cut forage or grow a fodder crop, and deliver it to his animals. Exposed in this light, the supposedly civilized Chinese attitude is cast as far more ignorant: “It matters little that the civilized method is more laborious and these days reliant on fossil fuels as well. It cannot be that the nomad with her herd has a more relaxed life, or more leisure, or time to train the mind, because the nomad is a slave to nature, at the mercy of the elements, an insignificant figure in the vastness of the endless plateau”. Whilst verging on comical, this fundamental misunderstanding has brought tragic consequences.

Perhaps what is needed is a new understanding of Tibet’s lands and the choices of its people that does not compel regulation and control of what is challenging, contradictory and extreme. This would be a new understanding of history and human identity – one that does not depend on achieving a sense of human progress and change but rather values balance and adaptability in a naturally changing and challenging world. Most of us have long left nomadic life far behind us, yet far away – on the roof of our world – it prevails, persevering amidst a climate that the modern age is failing to entirely control or understand. However, forced resettlement is redefining the meaning of these nomads’ lives forever. With this change we are losing the nomad’s
unique knowledge of sustainable life on Tibet's lands, confining it only to the limited space of a textbook – lost in history. However these lessons are those that may be necessary to our survival in a new age of innate uncertainty; climate change and the future.

The scope of this report

Whilst many of this chapter’s observations of traditional nomadic Tibetan life have been described in the present tense, these habits are becoming increasingly rare and are today under threat of extinction thanks to drastic changes in Tibet. This report will: outline the Chinese policies of grassland conservation and evaluate whether they have been effective; describe how the relentless resettlement has affected the lives of the nomads; offer insight into the present nomadic lives on the Tibetan pastures using new interviews, and finally take a look to the other nomadic cultures of the world to shed light on Chinese policy in Tibet. The resilient Tibetan nomads have fought for thousands of years, ceaselessly working hard to survive; this fight is not yet over.
II. China’s policies of grassland conservation and their impact

Decades of heavy-handed policies including grassland fencing, livestock quota and nomad resettlement have succeeded in uprooting Tibetan nomadic culture, but their effects upon grassland conservation are minimal.

Traditionally, the nomadic Tibetan practiced seasonal migration, utilizing mobility to allow sufficient time for the replenishment of pastures. This practice also ensured that the best forage was available to their livestock, by utilizing high alpine pasture in summer so that livestock grow healthy and store enough fat to survive the long bitter winter and spring seasons. Observing the array of policy concerning the nomads and their grasslands since 1959 reveals one blatant fact: this sustainable and adaptable lifestyle has been consistently misunderstood by the Chinese government. This misunderstanding is epitomized by the attitude of one Beijing-based Tibetology researcher towards nomads; “it’s impossible for them to protect the environment voluntarily. So they need guidance and control [..] the first step is control.”

The 1950s, 1960s and 1970s: land reclamation and the communes

Close to one million yaks were also seized as pack animals to carry military supplies into Tibet, few of which were ever returned.

Tibetan nomads have been some of the first victims of Chinese policy in Tibet since the People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) arrival in 1949. Most battles took place on pastoral land, where the nomads - ill-equipped to defend against the PLA’s experienced soldiers - were forced to flee. Close to one million yaks were also seized as pack animals to carry military supplies into Tibet, few of which were ever returned.

Once Tibet had been conquered, boosting agricultural production became a centerpiece of the Chinese development strategy starting
in the early 1950s, in order to feed the newly increased population. Approximately 20 million hectares, or 5% of the present grassland, were converted to croplands. In 1952 the PLA founded Tibet's first state farms, using land that had previously been predominantly used for grazing herds and owned by the Tibetan government; this conversion of grassland to cropland forced many nomadic herders to adopt agriculture as their livelihood – something both unfamiliar to nomads and unsuitable for the local environment. This continued with 1958 “Great Leap Forward” Campaign which aimed to convert grasslands, often classified as “waste” or “underutilized” areas, from pasture to farmland. This was called “reclamation.”

Not only were Tibetan nomads forced to adapt to the conversion of grassland to cropland, they and farmers were also pressed to grow wheat. Wheat, unsuited to the harsh Tibetan climate, was much more difficult to grow than the familiar barley. Farmers had little idea how to harvest or prepare the wheat for consumption. After the initial years of harvest, ecological disaster followed. Unsustainable conversion of grassland into farmland seriously damaged the grassland in many areas. Natural grasses, now destroyed, were difficult to replenish due to the frigid climate, turning many previous grassland regions into desert. Not only were grasslands degraded, but the collective farming and herding practices imposed from 1957 to 1979 also led to famine and great pressure on nomads’ ability to maintain their herds.

Government changes in the 1950s led to the introduction of land reforms, abolishing previous autocratic land ownership and replacing it with redistribution of livestock, bans on bartering and taxation. As part of the introduction of the commune system in 1956, all components of the pastoral production system were collectivized. Pastoralists were forced to surrender all their herds into a collective, meaning that the crucial mobility became difficult. Influenced by the socialist ideology that poor rural workers should not progress into a landowning class of farmers, cooperatives were introduced that later developed into systematic collectivization. The communes would typically comprise of around 20,000 members sharing facilities, with farmers and nomads working in strict factory-style farms run by the state and specializing in one type of crop or animal. Tibetans were forced to live in the huge communities lacking private space or personal possessions, and
Collecting aromatic plants in Lhagang, Sichuan
Photo @ Santiago Carralero

Collecting yak dung for fuel in Amdo
Photo @ Santiago Carralero
Preparing the yak caravan in Amnye Machen, Golog, Amdo, Photo @ anonymous

Propaganda poster of life in Mao’s communes
given rations only according to their work productivity. With the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976, this commune system was greatly intensified, with the eventual cessation of all private ownership of land and animals.

The 1980s: redistribution of livestock and the grasslands law

In eventual admission of the commune system’s instability, the Chinese government gradually changed direction and reallocated ownership of grassland within the household system. In 1985, Chinese ecologists and policy makers concerned about the degradation of grasslands introduced the Grasslands Law, initially in Inner Mongolia and then in the “Tibetan Autonomous Region.” At the time, degradation was attributed to overgrazing by herders so new policies required each household to fence off areas of pastureland. The stated purposes were: “improving the protection, management and development of grasslands and ensuring their rational use; protecting and improving the ecological environment; modernizing animal husbandry; enhancing the prosperity of the local economies of the nationality autonomous areas and meeting the needs of socialist construction and the people’s life.” Such a law exposes how the grassland’s productivity and sustainability have been of foremost importance, the livelihoods of the people coming second.

Beyond the introduction of the Grasslands Law, China’s policy measures became increasingly focused on “modernization” and uplifting the “low human quality” of the nomads. This included the introduction of the “Household Contract Responsibility System”, which broke up the communes and redistributed livestock to individual nomad households, with supposed exemption from state taxation and unpaid labor responsibilities. This policy granted the government their desired greater administrative control and emphasized a market orientated livestock production system. Nomads moved en masse from their tents to assigned housing on fenced plots, which were leased to
individual households, though actual ownership of rural land was not legal.\textsuperscript{44} The system aimed to re-establish tenure rights and promised long-term (30-50 years) land tenure to encourage nomads to invest in sustainability. Thus with this policy nomads were given some flexibility to revive features of their traditional practice of animal husbandry.

Whilst able to return to herding, this was within fenced lands and with a permanent settlement, both of which made nomads more visible to the state. The first fencing in the “Tibetan Autonomous Region” occurred in the 1960s but it was with the “Household Contract Responsibility System” in the mid-1980s that both fencing and permanent settlement spread quickly.\textsuperscript{45} Many nomads also experienced difficulties in their new settlements where they also had to sow grasses: Chinese scientists for the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development (CCICED) stated that nomads—who were not provided with the seeds or materials to cultivate the land—were ordered to take bank loans and pay a Chinese business with no experience in grassland management to plough the degraded grassland and sow seeds.\textsuperscript{46} This new project only worsened nomadic poverty and forced many into debt.

The 1990s to present: resettling the nomads and protecting the grassland

Despite appeasing ethnic policy adopted in 1980 with its measures such as allowing nomads to herd and monasteries to reopen, the government was shocked at the discontent revealed by first Lhasa riots from 1987 to 1989. This led to the Chinese government announcing a focus on development and modernization in the 9\textsuperscript{th} (1996-2000) and 10\textsuperscript{th} (2001-5) Five-Year Plans, claiming to address economic inequality and thus ease political tensions amongst China’s “ethnic minorities.”\textsuperscript{47} The 10\textsuperscript{th} Five-Year Plan – backed up by 1999’s “Opening Up the Great West Campaign” (\textit{xibu kai dafa}, also known as the Western Development Strategy) – alleged 31.2 billion yuan (US$4.2 billion) investment into various development and infrastructure projects, apparently focused on economic growth and GDP.\textsuperscript{48} However, a review of the key policies shows that the broad focus has been more on fencing grassland and removing nomads from grassland - purportedly for restoration.
The “Opening Up the Great West Campaign” was accompanied by a change in the language used to describe grassland policy, focusing on the benefits of fencing off pasturage, of “scientific” breeding, of the development of meat production for the market, and of sedentarization of mobile populations. Under this campaign, three more policies were also introduced for ecological purposes, aiming to address the degradation of pasturelands and control disasters in the lowlands of China. They included measures such as grazing bans, grazing land non-use periods, rotational grazing and accommodation of carrying capacity, compulsory fencing, the slaughter of animal livestock, and the planting of eucalyptus trees on marginal farmland to reduce the threat of soil erosion. Unfortunately, these policies are reported to have been implemented in ways that are “opaque and generally lack due process and compensation [for nomads] in Tibetan pastoral areas”.

One of the most important initiatives was called “convert farmland to forest” (ruigeng huanlin), envisaging tree planting on marginal farmland to reduce the threat of soil erosion. In grassland areas, a similar policy of restoring degraded grassland to its natural state was enacted, known as “removing animals to grow grass” (tuimu huancao). This policy was aimed at reversing degradation in pastoral regions by imposing total, temporary, or seasonal bans on grazing. This policy’s fundamental principle is that in order to restore degraded grassland to its natural state a period of respite from livestock grazing is necessary, and thus the livestock and their herders should be moved away. This movement of the nomads from their land broke the promise of 30-50 years tenancy according to the 1980s “Household Contract Responsibility System” (see chapter three for a full account of resettlement).

In Tibet’s 11th Five-Year Plan (2006–10), the Chinese government tried to address previous shortcomings that had not prevented social unrest by adding a major emphasis on social development, that is, development to improve the quality of life of rural Tibetans. The “people first” (yiren weiben) focus reduced the earlier key emphasis on
economic growth, moving on from the previous notion that overall economic growth would eventually benefit rural Tibetans; instead a sum of money – more than 100 billion yuan (US$13.3 billion) - was set aside to directly improve the living conditions of nomads and farmers, over double anything previously allocated. A total of 180 projects were listed, of which 33 were specifically “people-first;” these were reportedly allocated 21.9 billion yuan (US$7,333), however research has not been able to verify the delivery of these funds.

At the heart of the 11th Five-Year Plan was the “Comfortable Housing Program” (anju gongcheng), premised on the notion that modern housing is necessary for rural people to achieve a certain quality of life. According to official reports, a huge and unprecedented 3.2 billion yuan (US$427 million) allocated for grants to villagers, to enable 80% of Tibetans to “upgrade their housing conditions by 2010.” Once again casting the motivations behind policies into unclear light, TAP was the only provincial level entity with the mandate and funding to resettle and house the whole rural population.

China’s 12th Five-Year Plan, for 2011-2015, continues to work towards the modernization of its Western provinces, pledging to make most of villages in Tibet accessible by highways by the end of 2015. According to the transport authority of “Tibet Autonomous Region,” Tibet will have highways totaling 70,000 kilometers long by the end of 2015, an almost 20 percent increase from the current 58,000 kilometers.

It is evident that efforts will continue to sedentarize Tibetan nomadic herders. For Human Rights Watch, the revised 2003 Grassland Law “explicitly provides for the government’s right to radically limit herds and resettle people.”

Despite a focus on development and modernization, it is evident that efforts will continue to sedentarize Tibetan nomadic herders. For Human Rights Watch, the revised 2003 Grassland Law “explicitly provides for the government’s right to radically limit herds and resettle people.” Most recently, the Nomadic Settlement Project, described by some as seemingly parallel to the Comfortable Housing project in “Tibet Autonomous Region,” has been implemented in Qinghai Province since
2009. It aims to develop and modernize the 31 counties of Qinghai Province in six prefectures: Tsojang, Tsolho, Malho, Kyegudo, Golog and Tsonub. All the affected places are ethnic Tibetan areas. Between early 2006 and December 2009 226,302 houses for nomads and farmers were built, at a cost of 13.3 billion yuan, with 80% of nomads and farmers relocated by the year end. Whilst policies may have been presented in the name of “modernizing” the herders, in order to “solve [their] difficulties,” the constraints they impose and the specificity of the people they affect make it difficult for them not to be seen as opposed to herders and their way of life, and opposed particularly to Tibetans, Mongolians or other non-ethnic Chinese herding peoples.

What has been the impact on grassland and the environment?

Since the invasion of Tibet in 1949, the Chinese government has adopted a myriad of policies concerning the nomads and their land. Not all academics and scientists have found these policies to be effective at either improving the living standards of the Tibetan nomads or preserving the grasslands; many even argue that these policies could be the cause of, or at least contributing factor to, the accelerated warming of the Tibetan Plateau. Directly undermining China's years of authority over the Plateau, according to today's evidence many NGOs and environmental experts are favorable to direct ownership of grazing areas by nomads, because after decades of misguided policies their unique knowledge of the Tibetan ecosystem would be a major asset in the preservation of the Tibetan environment.

The inappropriate land management practices and the limitation of livestock to small areas of land have led to levels of grazing that exceed the carrying capacity of the region.

While China has held the Tibetan nomads responsible for the degradation of Tibet's grasslands due to over-grazing, degradation has actually been linked to the unsuccessful collectivization policy from the 1960s to 1980s. The inappropriate land management practices and the limitation of livestock to small areas of land have led
to levels of grazing that exceed the carrying capacity of the region. This concern is acknowledged in a leaked 2010 US diplomatic cable, which states that government policies of land division and fencing could actually be to blame for degradation, in contrast to the flexibility of traditional practices of rotational herding. In addition, land degradation has been shown to cause significant local temperature increases. This has been exacerbated by urbanization, which has occurred extensively on the Tibetan Plateau, and can result in temperatures 8º C - 11º C higher than in surrounding rural areas. Furthermore, the warming of the Tibetan Plateau has contributed to the loss of glaciers in the region, a major water source for Asia (see appendix one for an outline of current environmental concerns in Tibet).

In the “Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region”, immediately to the north of the “Tibet Autonomous Region”, 40% of grasslands are severely degraded, and the total area of grasslands has decreased by 30 to 50%. Zhao Xinchun, an agricultural official from the region, said, “The protection and construction of grasslands cannot wait any longer. We urgently need to expand investments and policy support to protect the ecology of the grasslands”. This response, stressing the urgency of grassland preservation, is surprising given the government’s extensive policies in nomadic areas over the last three decades.

A journalist spoke with nomad Phuntsok Dorje in 2010 who noted that the abundant grasslands once surrounding his house were now desert-like and overrun by rodents, due to the hunting of predators close to extinction (such as hawks, eagles and leopards). Barren land due to gold mining in place of what was once grassland, is also visible on the mountain road from Yushu to Xining, which passes through the Three Rivers national park – source of the Yangtze, Yellow and Lancang rivers. Phuntsok’s nearby town Mato was previously the richest in the Qinghai province with its herding, fishing and mining industries, but environmental change and the drying up of resources have brought such industry to an end; by one estimate 70% of the former grasslands are now desert.

Gauging a true insight into the results of government policies in Tibet is difficult, with both media and environmental work highly controlled; high-profile environmental campaigners Jigme Namgyal and Rinchen
Samdrup were arrested in August 2009, and their brother Karma Samdrup in January 2010. Human Rights Watch has described these as “test cases for the Chinese government,” with Karma Samdrup’s subsequent sentence to 15 years imprisonment considered by many to be based on fabricated charges (of robbing tombs and dealing in looted relics) and revealing authorities’ unease with his defense of his brothers and their environmental work.

A 2010 US diplomatic cable also observed that despite environmental recovery and preservation being frequently cited as the top priority for officials and the justification behind policies, there is in reality “little evidence of implementation”.

The ongoing difficulty of gauging a real perspective was reinforced by discrepancies between the information given on an officially guided trip for US diplomats – visitors were shown a herder’s land and told how officials had worked with the family to protect their land – and the information gained when travelling without official guides – few locals were familiar with grassland recovery policies and which land was completely banned for grazing. A 2010 US diplomatic cable also observed that despite environmental recovery and preservation being frequently cited as the top priority for officials and the justification behind policies, there is in reality “little evidence of implementation”.

Anthropologist Emily Yeh has also commented that it is difficult to evaluate to what extent herding is responsible for degradation and whether the government policies have helped, with few rigorous studies having been conducted. She concurs that studies which are available actually suggest that large-scale boundary fencing and the control of lands by the state is harmful; in addition to causing degradation, this reduces mobility, which could increase vulnerability to snowstorms and have negative effects on migratory wildlife. It has also been observed that sites cleared for grassland restoration, actually see a spread of shrubland – which is of no use for livestock grazing. In further support of land management remaining in nomads’ hands, Yeh refers to ecological evidence from grazing experiments on the eastern Tibetan Plateau, which suggest that moderate grazing in fact lessens the expected effects of global warming on both reduction of biodiversity
and rangeland quality.77 Founder of NGO Green Earth Volunteers Wang Yongchen agrees that nomads overgrazing is most likely not the cause of grassland degradation, with the visible lack of improvement suggesting that climate change and mining have had the bigger impacts.78

Even according to the Chinese government’s own statistics, 90% of the entire 4 million square kilometers of its territory’s grassland is in poor health, and Xu Jun of the Ministry of Science and Technology has admitted that, “the ecological situation is terrible.”79 Considering Chinese policy in Tibet from an ecological perspective, at best improvement is inconclusive, at worst - with much evidence finding Tibet’s environment in a deteriorated state - it has been an absolute failure.
III. Resettlement of nomads in the name of development

Nomads are being deprived of basic rights through eviction, confiscation of livestock, and false promises of adequate compensation—all in the name of “development.”

Sedentarization efforts have been an integral part of the Chinese policy on the Tibetan grasslands since the 1960s when they were introduced with Chairman Mao’s catastrophic “Great Leap Forward” Campaign, aiming to transform the population of the People’s Republic of China from an agrarian society to a modern communist society through rapid industrialization and collectivism. Furthermore, aside from protecting the degraded grassland, the relocation of nomads into urban settlements allows the government to manage the nomadic population on the Tibetan Plateau with fixed addresses. Though the government claims that its policies are meant to modernize Tibetan herders by moving them from subsistence living into the modern economy, Tibetans themselves express mixed feelings, especially since few have had a choice about their resettlement.  

Resettlement and the 9th and 10th Five-Year Plans

In an effort to reform China’s economy, the “Opening Up the Great West Campaign” was introduced in 2000. The first program underway was nationwide environmental restoration, of which the “farmland to forest” policy was a key initiative. It outlined the aims of planting trees on small areas of less used farmland, in order to reduce soil erosion,

The argument for their resettlement is that three to five years of respite from herders will allow the grasslands to be restored: however, such limited periods of exclusion have already expired, and thus far no one has been officially allowed to return.
however in Tibetan areas it has been exposed as a means of justifying arbitrary confiscation of land, as well as forcing farmers to provide labor and pushing others to seek alternative livelihoods. According to the parallel policy in grassland areas, known as “turning pastureland into grassland,” restoration of degraded grassland has been addressed: in areas with high degradation, the pastureland has been completely enclosed or fenced off and a grazing ban set down. Affected households are resettled and the number of their livestock significantly reduced. Whilst grazing is banned, the nomads are entitled to fodder and grain subsidies as compensation from the government. The argument for their resettlement is that three to five years of respite from herders will allow the grasslands to be restored: however, such limited periods of exclusion have already expired, and thus far no one has been officially allowed to return.

These policies are joined by a new attempt at ecological preservation, namely “ecological migration” (shengtai yimin) – a term used by the government since the mid 1990s to describe planned relocation from areas in need of environmental protection. The government claims that the main focus of relocation is poverty alleviation and improvement of the socio-economic situation of nomadic households as they move towards modernization. Since 2004, this has been implemented within the Three River Sources national nature reserve area, located in the center of the Tibetan Plateau, encompassing the headwaters of three major Asian rivers: the Yellow River, the Yangtze River, and the Mekong River. Tens of thousands have been told to relocate from these grassland areas and either take up new livelihoods in farming, or move to live in new towns.

In 2003, the Chinese government announced plans to displace and resettle the 27,679 nomads then living in the Golog and Yushu Tibet Autonomous Prefectures (TAP) in Qinghai Province, claiming this would protect the 70% of grasslands barren in Matoe County of Golog (TAP). Some researchers expressed concerns that true motives were to clear the land for mining and the immigration of Chinese workers, with the sites cleared directly linked to later mining sites. Furthermore, resettlement of Tibetans has become widespread across the Plateau, with thousands of farmers also affected (for example, to make way for damming projects – see appendix one.
Resettlement and the 11th Five-Year Plan

Building upon the strategies of development and modernization in China’s 9th and 10th Five-Year Plans (1996-2000; 2001-05), China’s 11th Five-Year Plan (2006-10) added a major emphasis on social development, to improve the quality of life for its rural nomads. In line with this strategy, the “Nomadic Settlement” project involves all Tibetan nomadic households without a permanent house or one in danger of collapse. This project, which is described by some as seemingly parallel to the “Comfortable Housing” project in the “Tibet Autonomous Region,” has been implemented in Qinghai Province since 2009, encompassing 31 counties of six prefectures, all of which are ethnic Tibetan areas: Haibei, Hainan, Huangnan, Yushu, Guoluo and Haixi. On paper this nomadic settlement project aimed to balance biomass growth with supporting feedlot animal husbandry; it claimed to help with construction such as animal sheds, fencing, grass planting, water pipe systems, roads and solar and methane energy facilities.

According to this policy, the nomads either pay a fixed share for the governmental construction or are responsible for the house construction themselves and obtain a fixed grant from the government. Whilst the nomads’ contribution to the construction costs is supposed to be a fixed amount, in practice it has turned out to be highly variable according to the local government. In order to settle, a household must have a minimum of two members and at least two years passed since splitting from any other household. The latter measure aims to tackle the “household splitting” which became quite common; elderly family members were set aside as a separate household, allowing the family to keep their pastureland and livestock, whilst acquiring a house near transport networks and schools.

The limited information given by the government usually leads to high numbers initially willing to participate, with demand exceeding supply of houses; only after they have signed their contract to nomads realize the conditions, such as loss of their grasslands, which they can do nothing about.
The policy is aimed at poorer households with smaller numbers of livestock, however anthropologists note that the richer families are often interested in a fixed home so long as they can keep their livestock and land. New government policies of strict school attendance also encourage nomads to relocate, given that settlements are often nearer to schools or transport links. The limited information given by the government usually leads to high numbers initially willing to participate, with demand exceeding supply of houses; only after they have signed their contract to nomads realize the conditions, such as loss of their grasslands, which they can do nothing about (see chapter iv).

For those who are resettled, there is no guarantee as to the location of the newly constructed settlements—sometimes they are in the same county; sometimes they are located in a completely different province. Daily expenses are temporarily covered by governmental subsidies; however they rarely cover the costs of basic needs given the loss of nomads’ livestock and entry into the cash economy. According to the program, it is possible to return to their grassland after the period outlined in their resettlement contract – but this depends on grassland recovery and government approval, and to date has not occurred.

How many nomads have been resettled?

Whilst it is difficult to determine the precise number of those resettled, Chinese government and media reports allow an estimate to be made; in phase one of the 11th five year plan (2006-9) the total number of nomads and farmers relocated was a huge 1,391,100 (see figure one for a breakdown resettlement across different locations and information on phase 2 resettlement in 2010). Under the 12th five-year plan (2011-15) continued resettlement plans are outlined, to include farmers and nomads of 185,000 households, including those in “medium quality” houses not covered under the previous five-year plan, and the most needy 60,000 households.
## Figure 1: Two Phases of 11th five-year plan for housing development for farmers and nomads in TAR

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<td>Phase 1</td>
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<td>Households resettled</td>
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Cost in Chinese yuan, Households resettled, Total population resettled.
Resettled nomads playing pool
Photo @ Tashi D. Lek

A new resettlement house in Sichuan
Photo @ Jonathan Watts
How the implementation of resettlement policies varies greatly

Research conducted within Tibet by Jarmila Ptackova reveals that the implementation of resettlement policies varies considerably place to place:

“In Golog Prefecture, Qinghai Province, in 2009 the government scheduled construction of 5,128 new houses in the nomadic area. According to a Prefecture Government announcement these houses were to be built by the nomads themselves. The construction should include a house of at least 60 square meters, a toilet, an animal shed and an animal yard. […] According to our field research, in Machen County, Golog Prefecture any nomadic household could apply to participate on this program. Even households who already possessed a stable concrete housing started to build a new house. Most households build their house by themselves. It is possible to hire labourers for the construction, but that would mean additional costs for the nomads. The new houses could be constructed optionally either at the winter grassland or in a new village settlement next to the Prefecture town. Only after a house in Tibetan style […], interpreted as a tiled front and a toilet, was raised, was the owner authorized to get the financial grant of 40,000 yuan. Construction of animal sheds was contracted separately and participant households had to prepay 6,000 yuan to the government in order to obtain double this amount later. By the end of 2009 this money still had not reached the nomads, even when the house construction and the animal shed preparation had been completed months previously.

“In Tsekhog County, Qinghai Province, inhabited mainly by nomads with low incomes in comparison with the nomadic households of Machen County, the government decided to take charge of all “Nomadic settlement” project house constructions. The nomads merely had to pay 5,000 yuan per household to get a new house. The general project description allows houses to be built on the original winter grassland location, but the local County Government office in charge decided to build all the new houses in uniform settlements near administrative units or at least along the main roads […]. Through this plan, the
county government saved the high costs of transporting material to the winter grassland locations.”

Ptackova continues to describe how many nomads were misinformed about the conditions of their resettlement:

“During the sedentarisation propaganda in 2009 in Tsekhog County, the governmental representatives praised the advantages of a cheap house but did not explain the further conditions of the policy. Large numbers of nomads applied. In one affected village in Tsekhog County, the village leader, facing too high a number of applicants for the settlement, selected program participants by choosing their names randomly from a hat. Many nomads still can read neither Tibetan nor Chinese and so even when signing the contract, they did not understand the embedded condition that the government had now the right to claim 50% of the household’s grassland. So far, in this case the government has not enforced its right on the grassland and the affected nomads hope that the situation will remain as it is.

“In the nomadic area of Tongkor County in the neighbour Province of Sichuan, the government was also implementing the Nomadic settlement project. The grassland conditions here are relatively good, so the justification for settlement constructions here primarily serves regional development and better political control… The government also hopes that through moving nomadic households closer to urban areas, the nomads will increasingly engage in business and services. According to my research data, only a small number of households actually try to get additional income as drivers or plan to open a restaurant or guest accommodation. Most people in the settlements just use the free time to rest and rely on the food supplements provided by their livestock in the grassland and financial subsidies from the government.”

The result of the resettlement policies

Between July 2004 and December 2006, Human Rights Watch Report interviewed 150 resettled nomads, of whom many cited the same systemic problems with the resettlement process, including lack of consultation and the loss of their traditional livelihood with limited
Gomang settlement, Mangra, Amdo 2009
Photo @ EDD, DIIR

New fencing in Kham, Photo @ ICT
New settlements in Darlag, Photo @ ICT

Settlement in Sershul 2010, Photo @ EDD, DIIR
However, they have been implemented without due care to the nomads’ education, training, employment and social status.

training that failed to enable ex-nomads to compete with Chinese migrants.\textsuperscript{101} At first look, these policies seem potentially effective ways to ease grassland degradation and to support poor nomadic families. However, they have been implemented without due care to the nomads’ education, training, employment and social status. They have also been implemented quickly, allowing little time for nomads to adapt or these problems to be solved. If these oversights are left unaddressed, they may cause long-term problems for the nomads’ integration. The problems already occurring are described in the following chapter, using new interviews with nomads.
IV. In their own words - Tibetan nomads’ lives after resettlement

How the nomads lives have changed, both positively and negatively, following resettlement.

China, claiming to have a vested interest in both protecting the grassland and improving the living conditions of the Tibetan nomads, has implemented a wide range of programs and policies in a move to modernize their Western provinces—an area that happens to cover the entirety of the “Tibet Autonomous Region” as well as other Tibetan areas annexed into Chinese provinces. Policies such as the 1985 Grassland Law and the “Opening Up the Great West Campaign” have been accompanied by programs like “removing animals to grow grass” and “convert farmland to forest” to purportedly address the degradation of pasturelands and control flood disasters in the lowlands of China. Alongside the restrictions placed on nomadic lifestyles, systematic induced or encouraged resettlement has taken place across the Plateau.

Contrasting reports from Chinese and international media

Chinese news sources such as China Daily have reported great success with resettlement initiatives like the Comfortable Housing Project; their message is that government policies have simply facilitated nomads’ resettlement according to the nomads’ wishes. For example, official Jampa Phuntsok claims that, “many Tibetans, especially farmers and herdsmen in remote areas, used to live in poor conditions, and the Comfortable Housing Project greatly improved their livelihood.”102 This news report also quotes Dondrup, a resettled nomad; “The nomadic life sounds exotic and even romantic to travelers, but Tibetans in our county are drifting in a harsh environment where the average altitude is 4,900 meters and the temperature is merely zero degrees… Everybody wants to live in safe buildings with heating, running water
and electric lights.”¹⁰³ This simplicity is immediately undermined by the information available in the international press, for example BBC: “For most nomads, the transition to a more urban lifestyle is difficult. They are often settled in featureless blocks of housing by the side of roads or in newly created urban areas, and face the problem of creating an entirely new and sustainable livelihood”.¹⁰⁴ The Chinese government wishes to portray their resettlement policies as simple and cohesive; as interviews with the nomads confirms, this is in contrast to the wide variety of Tibetans’ experiences across the Plateau.

According to official policy, nomads that participate in nomad resettlement programs receive a grant of 3000 to 8000 yuan per household per year on the condition that they abandon herding for 10 years. However, testimonies from nomads reveal that payments to help families make the transition to their new livelihood in the urban economy are usually insufficient, if received at all. In an interview with a UK newspaper, Shang Lashi, a resident at a resettlement center in Kyegudo said, “We live on the 3,000 yuan allowance, but the officials deduct money from that for the housing, which was supposed to be free.”¹⁰⁵ Numerous relocated families have lamented the increased cost of living, a cost that normally exceeds the stipend given by the government.¹⁰⁶ There are also allegations of corruption and discrimination in the compensation process.¹⁰⁷ In one rare incident, difficulties were even admitted in Chinese state news: “The money for selling 40 yaks and 25 sheep has been used,” 33-year-old former nomad Zhaduo says, adding that, “it is so expensive to live near the town center now. Everything costs big money.”¹⁰⁸
The impact of fencing the grasslands and limiting livestock numbers

For 29-year-old nun Ani Metok from Lagyab, Pasho Zong, Chamdo, previous government policy regarding nomads has failed to help nomads, in particular fencing the grasslands. Ani Metok says this has caused quarrels between neighbors and family, as well as deaths of their cattle due to their limited grazing area; Ani Metok feels “unfenced pasture is best for livestock to graze as well as for people.” 109 23-year-old Gompo from Driru, Nagchu Prefecture also commented on the social problems caused by fencing: “Fencing grassland is a huge problem for us because it limits the animals from grazing and ignites disputes or quarrel among neighbors and relatives on land ownership.” She also revealed how nomads will hide their cattle from government officials who come to observe nomads are keeping to limits. For Ani Metok, “livestock are the lifeline of nomads and if government put such restriction then it’s very hard for us to live.” 23-year-old Tenzin Wangdak from Palbar, Chamdo, has yet to encounter forced resettlement although his family has already encountered restrictive livestock limitation policies in their grassland area of 40-50 nomad households. He says overgrazing is not a big issue in his area, since the nomads are still moving from summer pasture to winter pasture, allowing grasses to recuperate. He notes that “nomads know their grassland more than anything else.” When asked if he would like to resettle into permanent housing, his response is a resolute “no,” although there seems to be no way out under current government policy; he adds that, “my soul lies with my families at grassland.”

28-year old Woeser is a doctor from Shigatse who arrived in India in October 2011. He grew up in a city but traveled extensively to nomadic areas such as Rathang in the Namling district and Lakashashang and Tsashang in the Shethongmon district. He observed that all Lakashashang nomads had already been moved to permanent settlements, and that in other areas previous government policies of livestock limitation and fenced grasslands caused difficulties when the “main source of income for nomads is their livestock.”

For many nomads, development is important, but this need not necessitate resettlement. 23-year-old Tashi Lhakdor from Kirtimey,
Amdo Ngaba, lived with his nomadic family until the age of 16 when he enrolled in Kirti Rongpo Monastery. Whilst their number of livestock has been reduced according to government policy, his family remains solely dependent on livestock products. He expresses that those in his area are concerned about their approaching resettlement and is not sure himself whether it represents a solution to nomads’ difficulties: “nomad life is good but development is also essential like education and medical facilities which we are deprived of in our place, and possibly resettlement could solve these issues. But I still think that life without livestock is very difficult for nomads.” Ani Metok grew up on nomadic pastures and echoes these reservations: her family are expected to resettle soon into new government built housing for which they will pay 80% of the cost as well as bear expenses of moving far away from their grassland, moreover they will have to sell their livestock and will receive, at most, nominal compensation from government; Ani Metok says “I prefer nomadic lifestyle and want to stay back – there is no life without livestock for nomads.”

These concerns were repeated during other interviews with nomads for this report: 18-year-old Kalsang Jampa is from Lhorong, Chamo, in eastern Tibet, where his family continues to live on their grassland, although they will soon have to resettle. They are struggling due to existing livestock limitation policies, allowing only two animals per person (if the limit is exceeded they must slaughter the animals). According to China’s own definitions of poverty, 20 yaks is the minimum herd size per person; there is no doubt in both government and nomad eyes that the limit of 2 is a cause of destitution. Kalsang Jampa’s family are reluctant to cause further upheaval to their lives by resettling, as they must sell their livestock and pay 80% of the new housing cost, although they will be left without a source of income. He expresses that, “nomads lead a mobile life so I don’t see any problem of overgrazing in my area. There is enough pasture for animals to graze though fencing has created problems lately. […] I would prefer to lead a nomadic life and resettlement is a threat to the nomad’s lifestyle.”

According to China’s own definitions of poverty, 20 yaks is the minimum herd size per person; there is no doubt in both government and nomad eyes that the limit of 2 is a cause of destitution.
21-year-old Tenzin Dolma is from a nomadic family in Ghonang, Golog, and arrived in India in 2007 where she is studying and aspires to teach Tibetan. Her family has not been resettled, but poor quality permanent houses have been built on their grassland and yak hair tents have been replaced with white synthetic ones. They have been subject to strict policies limiting their livestock numbers and fencing their grassland, which made grazing difficult and caused problems between neighbors and families. She says her family live in fear as “Chinese authorities came to their village and marked their animals on their ears, so my mother doesn’t know whether the Chinese government is planning to take the cattle away.” Tenzin Dolma cannot “see any positive impact on nomad’s life if displaced from their pastures. Shopping centers and hospitals might not be far from the resettlement camps but nomads’ livelihoods will be at stake. When I think about our nomadic life in Tibet, I feel so serene and happy. My heart hurts when thinking about the situation of displaced nomads in Tibet.”

Dawa Kelsang, 27-years old and from Lhorong, Chamdo, lived as a nomad until the age of 18 when he became a monk at Pheykar Monastery in Driru, Chamdo. He went to school in a nearby town when aged 16, but after one year the government destroyed the school, as part of a policy of centralized schooling and the closing of many small local primary schools. He confirms other nomads’ testimonials, describing how livestock is reduced to 2 per person (his family of 11 had previously had 60-70 cattle), how fencing has created social problems, and how, “grassland is best for nomads because we have been staying there for millennia: nomads are not skilled workers who could earn livelihood after resettlement, so resettlement is the end to nomads’ livelihoods.” 29-year-old former nomad Tsering Chodon from Machu, Amdo has lived in India since 2003 and cannot return home as her husband is an ex-political prisoner charged with “splittism” after smuggling a Tibetan flag into Tibet. She experienced the earlier policies of fencing and limitation of livestock numbers and is gravely concerned about resettlement, saying “I heard of displaced nomads who are turned to beggars. Nomads don’t have formal education and business skills to sustain their life in completely new environment or lifestyle”. Similarly, 24-year-old Karma Damdul from Driru, Kham says that “animals are a nomad’s nor [wealth] and we depend on them.”
18-year-old Tsering Woedhen from Lhorong, Chamdo, spent his first 15 years on the grasslands with his nomadic family, until going to Pheykar Monastery in Driru and becoming a monk. His family is allowed two livestock per person, and their grassland is fenced, which has caused difficulties for feeding animals. In contrast to most interviewees, he is positive about resettlement due to its potential to help nomads; “I am young and I think resettlement is good because we will get good education and health facilities, but I might be wrong because I am just thinking about the present. My parents and elders look very worried and nervous, and say that resettlement is no good and grassland is the best place for nomads. My thoughts might be those of a young boy who doesn’t make much sense!” Whilst Tsering Woedhen is positive about the potential benefits of resettlement, it is unsurprisingly that older nomads who have experienced past ineffective and detrimental policies are concerned. Considering the revelations of already resettled nomads below - about the state of the permanent housing settlements, the lack of services and the struggle to make a living – Tsering Woedhen’s faith in his government’s policies may sadly be misplaced.

Mining as the cause of grassland degradation and motivation for resettlement

Karma Damdul came to India in May 2011 and left his nomadic family behind; he finds mining activities to be the government’s grounds for resettlement: “My family is still at grassland but 50% of the nomads’ households in my area are already resettled. Mining is a big issue in our area. […] Hilly grasslands are degrading because of excessive mining by the government which also makes our river dirty and impure.” Gompo concurs; “Mining and the construction of an airport at Ngari have caused immense environmental disaster like grassland degradation and many animals dying. There is also no rain. Chinese have also laid barbed wire on the grassland to stop animals grazing and to stop people coming in. Mountains are all dug up for mining.” 30-year-old Tsultrim Tenzin from Driru, Kham, shares this opinion: “Grassland degradation is caused by building houses on grassland, fencing and of course mining activities.”
degradation is not caused by animals grazing. [...] the problem has risen out of mining activities in nomadic areas where the Chinese government have turned the hilly grassland into a barren land.” Tenzin Dolma was also in no doubt about mining’s impact on the grasslands; “I think that grassland degradation is caused by building houses on grassland, fencing and of course mining activities.”

Many nomads also feel that not only was mining the cause of grassland degradation, it was also the true motive behind the widespread resettlement. For example, Phuntsok Lodoe feels that resettlement is driven by the Chinese government’s wish for greater access to natural resources: “In my area there are a lot of copper mining activities and hydropower projects are being planned. There are many Chinese trucks carrying copper. The Chinese have built factories where mined copper is cleaned in the rivers, using chemicals which make unsafe drinking water and affect the local people’s health. Also, people in the places where they have erected dams and where mining works are carried out have been relocated.” Woester also says that, “the reason for forcibly relocating nomads is for mining activities of the Chinese government.” Karma Damdul’s feelings are the same: “I personally think that more and more Chinese are entering our grassland for mining and other hydro power projects.” Gompo also refers to this motive, stating “the Chinese have made roads but only linking to mining areas of grassland” (see appendix one for more information on mining in Tibet).

**Life in the settlements**

While the grassland conservation benefits of Chinese government policies remain questionable, what is definite is that rapid and enforced changes in lifestyle threaten the nomads’ traditional pastoral lifestyle. Those nomads who have lost their own source of income and become dependent on governmental subsidies in the settlements are at high-risk of becoming economically marginalized, and in turn, a marginalized group. A case study of a town in Rebgong shows that this has already occurred in their rural Tibetan community: after the nomads were moved from their original location on the grassland of Tsekhog County into a new settlement next to Rebgong town, locals began to see the nomads as “dirty and criminal.”
During her time in prison in 2008, Jamyang Kyi encountered Dolma Kyi, a nomadic woman in prison for charges of “splittism”, who explained how her nomadic life had changed – drawing attention to the nomads’ difficulties to reintegrate:

Dolma Kyi wept and said, “After the government confiscated the pasture and livestock in our nomadic home, we were sent to live in empty brick houses. In the first year we were given 8000 yuan per family to meet our living expenses. After that, not even small change was given. […] For countless generations in the past, the people of that area had sustained themselves independently by relying on their pasture and livestock. The people know absolutely nothing about undertaking business ventures and have no skill in doing handicrafts. Hence, what they did was tantamount to driving the people to their death.” //
She also explained that had there been no serious mistreatment from the government, there would have been no way people like her would end up in a place like this detention centre. Hearing her speak thus, it was hard to believe that she had never been to school.111

Despite this hardship, Dolma Kyi explains that “if it benefitted her people a little, she did not mind spending time in prison,” indicating the level of discontent experienced in her community.112

26-year-old Jigme Phuntsok from Nyarong, Kham, shares such grievances; “my family resettled after I escaped to India this year. Nomads are forced to resettle and have to pay for the houses. There is a school in the resettlement camp but they only teach Chinese. There are no medical facilities at the resettlement area, only in the nearby town. I think living on the grasslands is better than the new settlements, where nomads are suffering from poverty. Nomads belong to grassland and depend on their livestock. Chinese don’t pay money to nomads for living. My family would be happier back in green pastures.” Tsultrim Tenzin also comments on the poor conditions for resettled nomads: “In my case, our family resettled quite early by our choice, but for the rest of the nomads it’s been a case of forced eviction. As of now I haven’t heard of any schools and medical facilities available in the resettlement
areas” (see chapter v for a discussion of mobile schools in Kenya – a possible alternative to resettling nomads for their “development). Karma Damdul notes that he has observed no new schools or hospitals for nomads in his new settlement, and similarly Gompo describes a lack of support: “Tibetan nomads have to pay even for drinking water and in schools only the Chinese language is taught. Displaced nomads have to buy everything now.”

“Giving compensation and barley for resettled nomads are pure Chinese propaganda; in reality the Chinese government rarely give any compensation to the displaced nomads.”

Woeser elaborates on the lack of compensation, “only a few nomad families receive some compensation after resettlement and only for a limited time, but this isn’t as promised to all nomads.” Similarly, Tenzin Dolma says that “giving compensation and barley for resettled nomads are pure Chinese propaganda; in reality the Chinese government rarely give any compensation to the displaced nomads.” She also notes that some displaced nomads are “setting up small businesses like shops at the resettlement camps for their livelihood.” Tsultrim Tenzin is also dismissive of claims of compensation: “giving compensation is a false promise. I think the Chinese government gives compensation only to 1% of the nomad population. Forcing nomads to built houses has resulted in poverty and unemployment.” Gompo suggests compensation is merely a false promise to coerce nomads into resettlement: “the Chinese government is forcing us to leave our grassland and if we say ‘No’, then they make fake promises to support us financially which are deceiving. [...] They] pay no compensation to the displaced nomads; instead nomads have to pay 400-500 RMB for ‘development’.”

**Poor quality housing**

Dawa Kelsang’s family is awaiting resettlement and he describes the poor condition of the houses they will move into: “I got the chance to visit one of the permanent houses already constructed and waiting for nomads to resettle. They are in shoddy condition. I witnessed water leakages, and cracked walls in the houses are common even though
the government claims it is a new house for nomads. Every house has portraits of Mao and other communist leaders. Nomads are forced to resettle and there is no room for other options.” Tsering Woedhen’s observation that all houses had portraits of communist leaders lends support to concerns that nomad resettlement is largely for political reasons and is part of China’s “civilizing mission” to improve the “low human quality” of the nomads. Similarly, 27-year-old Phuntsok Lodoe who is from a semi-nomadic family in Minyag, Kham, and arrived in India in October 2011, recalls feeling sad when he saw Chinese flags above each resettlement house. Phuntsok Lodoe also notes that, “the condition of the houses is very weak; houses are not cemented, instead they are made of piled stones and very small like ghetto-style housing blocks.” In agreement, Woeser observed the resettlement block houses in the Nagchu area and found the houses “very small, made up of piled stones, and in a very poor condition.” Karma Damdul also describes the new houses as small, with no animal sheds and in “really bad shape,” noting that they can stand only for a few months and that “the images of those resettlements that the Chinese government showcases on TV are only the good ones but in reality most of the houses are in poor condition.”

A September 2011 report for a UK newspaper interviews former farmer Wang, the mother of a family relocated from China’s Sichuan province (part of Tibet). Wang’s house was built in 2011 but has many cracks in the walls, a neighbor’s floor has already completely collapsed and another’s bedroom is tilting. Wang is another victim of the gulf between the propaganda slogans urging sacrifice for the nation and promising new homes, compensation and farmland, and the reality of leaving one’s home, moving into poor housing, having one’s compensation denied by corrupt officials, finding no jobs and being marginalized by locals. The report found that of 30 relocated people across three villages in Nanyang, Yulgan province, only one was happy to have moved, eight reluctantly accepted that they had made a necessary patriotic sacrifice, and the remaining 21 were furious. It was also noted that “without exception, the longer they had been at their new homes the less they liked them.” One resettled man complained that “President Hu Jintao said honest folk shouldn’t lose out, but that is what has happened.”
Social issues and conflict amongst the nomads

Those resettled are unhappy without their promised share of the local farmland, whilst older residents of the settlements complain that the new arrivals are “uneducated people from the mountains;” these grievances have led to theft and violence. Researchers examining the resettlement policies of nomads in Tibetan areas, alongside areas in Inner Mongolia since the 1950s and Xinjiang since the 1980s, found that the results have been unemployment, poverty, loss of social cohesion, community and family breakdowns, alcoholism, domestic violence, prostitution, crime and greater dependency on state support. Even in small rural housing settlements these problems are occurring, with a field researcher observing in 2007 that there were “inner city” type problems.

Between 1985 and 1991 there were 47 armed conflicts over grassland in Gansu and on the Gansu / Qinghai border. One example is the dispute between Ngulra township herders in Machu county and neighboring Arig herders in Yulgan county, which resulted in the deaths of at least 29 Tibetans between 1997 and 1999. Approximately 2000 herders fought on each side, with the Arig herders defending land that had been their historically but fenced and officially re-allocated by the government. The officials refused to mediate or respond to petitions submitted by both sides, and nobody was arrested. Whilst the lack of reporting from Chinese state media makes information on more current conflicts difficult to assess, the testimonials of nomads – many of whom refer to tensions between neighbors due to fencing - suggest continuing discontent and friction.
Struggling to make a living

Both those on the grasslands and those resettled are looking at alternative ways of maintaining a living thanks to limited livestock numbers on the pasture lands and no support for herding in the camps. This has led to many nomads taking up casual work in construction, recycling rubbish, or collecting dung. In certain areas, another casual job has also become a vital source of income, as Gompo describes; “limiting the number of animals per household has left nomads to look for other source of income for family. People in our area started collecting and selling the yartsa gumpu (caterpillar fungus) which is found on grasslands.” Similarly, Karma Damdul notes that some people are going to the grasslands to collect yartsa gumpu as there is no other source of income. Tsultrim Tenzin also refers to caterpillar fungus as a source of income, although he comments that it is not without difficulties; “To support their livelihood, nomads also collect and sell yartsa gumpu (caterpillar fungus). But if a Tibetan belonging to the different county comes to their area to collect yartsa gumpu then the Chinese government charges them with heavy taxes per person.”

This desperation has led to regular conflict on the grasslands, with disputes over the borders leading to armed fights and casualties amongst Tibetans and between Tibetan and Chinese Huis, in which officials have refused to intervene.

The Caterpillar fungus trade boom may not be so positive either if it is, as our nomad interviewees note, merely the last resort for those desperate nomads who are unable to find alternative stable employment. This desperation has led to regular conflict on the grasslands, with disputes over the borders leading to armed fights and casualties amongst Tibetans and between Tibetan and Chinese Huis, in which officials have refused to intervene. Following her research in Tibet, Emilia Sulek confirms the nomads’ dependence on the caterpillar fungus trade, stating that it is “hard to overrate” its importance.

Furthermore, whilst collecting caterpillar fungus has provided abatement to the financial struggles of some nomads, this may be but temporary if the Chinese government decide to impose greater control. Gabriel Lafitte discusses this further:
China might decide the wild west yartsa boom is an embarrassment. It might decide that the resource is being over-exploited and the millions of small holes dug in the turf to extract the fungus—which is up to five inches long—threaten pasture sustainability, especially in areas where safeguarding China’s water catchments is top policy priority. [...] If China decided to assert greater authority over these remote areas and resettle the nomads, it would be all too easy to do so in the name of biodiversity conservation, watershed protection, rational land use management, orderly marketing, rangeland rehabilitation and scientific development.  

Lafitte also comments that perhaps the trade will continue uncontrolled for now, the government recognizing its ability to stop discontentment: “Why would the state seek to extend its reach when wealth is accumulating, fulfilling the promise of the past three decades of reform?”  

Whilst the fate of nomads’ caterpillar fungus work remains open for now, what is evident from previous policy is that this fate lies out of their hands.

### The difficulties facing women nomads

The official illiteracy rate for rural females across China in 2000 was 16.43% compared to 6.18% of rural males; across the population in Tibet it was a staggering 60.47% for women and 34.38% males.

Women nomads – *drogmo* – have traditionally lived a more laborious life than male nomads, bearing the brunt of all domestic and childcare tasks. This includes milking the yaks, spreading the yak dung to be dried each morning and later used as fuel, preparing all meals and other chores such as weaving blankets and making butter whilst the men graze the animals. Women are also given less access to education: the official illiteracy rate for rural females across China in 2000 was 16.43% compared to 6.18% of rural males; across the population in Tibet it was a staggering 60.47% for women and 34.38% males; thus the illiteracy rate for nomadic women can be estimated as greater than any of these figures.
Tibetan nomad Danma states that, “When I was a child, my only future seemed to be bearing children, herding livestock, fetching water, collecting wood and yak dung for fuel. [...] People believe education is wasted on girls because they cannot use it to help their families. Most girls marry and leave their villages before they turn twenty.” She continues to explain that her own aspirations of university education have been difficult to achieve due to both her family’s expectations of her traditional role in the village and their inability to support her financially. China’s vice-minister Wu Qidi has confirmed that female children are deprived of education, especially in rural and poor areas. Despite the continuing difficulties and inequality of Tibetan women nomads, Qidi also acknowledged that the education of female children is invaluable, since, as mothers, they can affect multiple generations.

Many nomadic women who have been resettled without sufficient compensation, access to training or access to jobs, find themselves needing to take up casual work to support their family upon entry into the cash economy. Elderly resettled nomad Lhabu works in a parking lot in Kanlho, letting tourists ride her horse for US$4 an hour; “If we’re lucky, we can get two tourists a day,” she said, “[but] lately, we’ve been getting just one deal in five days.” The women are reduced to migrant workers of low status, and suffer multiple discrimination as women and migrants; they are likely to work in low-paid, labor-intensive sectors, where they are frequently subjected to long overtime hours, poor or unsafe working conditions and the withholding of wages. There are reports of some women resorting to prostitution in order to make money. Furthermore, reports of sexual violence against Tibetan women throughout Tibet are widespread.

A further problem facing traditional nomadic women in their remote communities is the lack of hospitals or childbirth education; it is estimated that three women die for every 100 births and that one in ten infants dies before one year. Research has shown the imperative of improving medical care for childbirth; when a Tibetan mother dies, her surviving children are less likely to attend school and more likely to die younger. Traditionally, Tibetan nomads will not allow a stranger to attend the birth of a child. Furthermore childbirth is seen as unclean and usually takes place away from the family’s tent. NGO One Heart have shown that some of these problems can be addressed without
Drokpa woman cooking in the tent,
Photo @ Santiago Carralero

Sonam Choedon & his grandfather; luckily Sonam’s birth was without complications
Photo @ Phil Borges
Child from Nangchen has depigmented hair from malnutrition, Photo © Nancy Harris

A village in Dechen Tibet, Photo © ILRI
resettlement, by training local nomadic women to become midwives and by providing plastic sheets to contain unwanted blood and enable women to give birth in their tents.\textsuperscript{136}

In the “Tibetan Autonomous Region” there is a limit of two children per family, a policy that applies to both farmers and nomads. Of course this has been difficult to enforce when nomadic women do not give birth in hospitals and nomadic families lack fixed addresses. Discussing the inconsistency of implementation of their two child policy in Tibet, the Chinese government has announced intentions to break up the perceived “vicious cycle” between poverty and the “excessive growth of population in rural areas” and “speed up the improvement of economic conditions.”\textsuperscript{137} In regard to this, it is possible that an additional motive to moving the nomads into settlements where they can be controlled, is to enable wider enforcement of childbirth policies.

Given nomad women’s problems, resettlement into areas with better access to schools and hospitals could, theoretically, be greatly beneficial to them. However, as the nomads’ testimonies state, such facilities are often not available near to the settlements and hospitals are often too expensive. Resettlement could also be expected to have the positive effect of reducing the women’s traditional heavy workload, with their husband freed from daylong herding and access to modern facilities alleviating some traditional chores such as drying yak dung. However, a new problem has emerged; the structure of traditional family relationships, with several families living as a close community and men and women inhabiting different domains, has been entirely torn down in the confined houses of the settlements. Unfortunately this change, combined with the discontentment of ex-nomads without employment and the lifestyle they know, has caused an increase of social problems, as confirmed by an International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMD) study:

\begin{quote}
The land division has definitely affected family relationships. In nomad families, women traditionally do a lot of the hard work close to home - milking yaks, making butter and cheese, while men had a clearly defined role looking after the livestock and moving the animals from different pastures. Now the responsibility of the male herders has been taken
\end{quote}
away, which is leading to many social problems. Many of them just go to the towns and get drunk or play cards all day. Usually it’s difficult for them to find other work, and they need good connections to start a business of their own.\textsuperscript{138}

The nomadic men’s frustrated redundancy has been further described by Kate Karko following a six month stay with nomads; “nomads are a tough and diligent people but now the men have been rendered impotent. Because of the fences there is no reason to herd the animals and it is more difficult for bandits to attack an enclosed encampment. Their role in the family has been all but erased. The new laws have tragically accomplished their goal of nomad domestication.”\textsuperscript{139} In line with this, there is also much anecdotal evidence of domestic violence against women in the settlement areas.

The former UN Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing Miloon Kothari has warned that the forced eviction leads to marginalization especially of children and women.\textsuperscript{140} Furthermore there is a growing global consensus that due to their social role women are key to development in poor communities. Regardless, Chinese policies have thus far failed to address the specific difficulties facing nomadic women.

\section*{How China’s policies are failing the nomads}

In dismissal of the evidence of widespread social problems and unhappiness amongst resettled nomads – not to mention the loss of a millennia old culture and the disregard of nomads’ rights - the Chinese government continues to fail to amend their policies. A pithy summary of this absolute dismissal is given by one researcher for a Beijing research center on Tibet, who does not find resettlement to be objectionable, and notes that nobody is stopping [nomads] from carrying on their culture, their religion, their customs. They can still sing and dance.”\textsuperscript{141}
The Communist Party secretary for Tibet Zhang Qingli, stated in 2008 that the nomads’ “peace and contentment” derived from improved housing are key to their fight against the “Dalai clique.”\textsuperscript{142} Whilst the Chinese government may appear satisfied with their current resettlement policies in Tibet, if their motive is to control the Tibetans and reduce loyalty to their nation and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the discontentment expressed by nomads suggests resettlement may prove problematic. In this light the Chinese policies seem shallow and ill thought-out from all perspectives.

The policies in Tibet regarding the nomads are broadly accepted as ineffective and against the nomads’ rights. The UN Special Rapporteur, Olivier de Schutter, who visited China in 2010, noted that herders should never be put in situations where their only options is to sell their herd and resettle, regardless of their disputable role in grassland degradation.\textsuperscript{143} However, whilst outsiders and Tibetans can express concerns or dissatisfaction, there is a real sense of helplessness amongst the victims; one young Tibetan nomad, who asked remain anonymous, commented, “No Tibetans I know like being resettled, but what we can we do? The government is stronger, and we can only go along.”\textsuperscript{144} With the nomads themselves voiceless, it is left to the international community to pressurize China to change track. The final chapter of this report will demonstrate how there are alternative development policies being used across the world; it is such alternative policies that China \emph{must} consider before it is too late for Tibet’s nomads.
V. Other nomadic cultures

Nomad populations exist across the world, fighting the effects of government policy, urbanization and climate change; how do the Tibetan nomads differ?

Along with the struggling nomads up on Tibet’s highlands, traditional pastoral populations continue to herd their animals across the world in the arid lands of Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, Mongolia, the Andes, arctic Scandinavia and Siberia. However, the combined forces of climate change, mismanagement, colonization and fundamental misunderstanding and fear from governments are presently threatening these pastoralists’ ways of life. The below snapshots make no attempt to comprehensively explore the world’s many nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralist cultures, nor to cover in full the complex histories and contexts of nomadic struggles. Rather, the select examples attempt to bring attention to present issues affecting nomads and the ways different governments and NGOs are responding; in addition parallels are drawn between the issues affecting nomads across the world and those in Tibet.

The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Olivier De Schutter, visited China in December 2010 and observed that engaging in consultations with nomads, using their knowledge in tandem with modern science and working with them to rehabilitate and manage overgrazed pastures in a sustainable way would be a better option than the policies currently opted for. De Schutter also recognized that resettlement has been adopted before adequate exploration of other policies, such as livestock insurance programs – which have been tested successfully in Mongolia – to decrease nomads’ vulnerability to disasters and thus enable nomads to herd with smaller herd sizes, more sustainably. In addition to De Schutter’s suggestions, the examples

There is a global consensus that the environment and nomads’ livelihoods can be protected only by working with the nomads – Chinese policy can be described as “backward” in this global context.
below gather a wide range of possible methods of supporting nomads. Whatever conclusions we draw, one thing is clear; despite continuing difficulties and past struggles, there is a global consensus that the environment and nomads’ livelihoods can be protected only by working with the nomads – Chinese policy can be described as “backward” in this global context.

**Africa’s Sahel region and a tragic misunderstanding of the “commons”**

A permanent transformation of pastoralist lifestyle can be observed following colonization in Africa’s Sahel region during the 18th and 19th centuries; alongside vast population increase due to improved medical care and sanitation, pastoralist mobility was limited and settlement encouraged. While these latter two measures compounded the existing threats upon pastoralist life, governments justified their approach according to the theory outlined in Garrett Hardin’s 1968 influential paper “The Tragedy of the Commons”; Hardin described how shared resources – such as the grasslands distributed amongst pastoralists – eventually become overused and destroyed, and argued for these resources to be privatized. Hardin’s theories supported the popular argument that pastoralism was fundamentally unstable and thus likely to cause environmental degradation. In accordance, the desertification and diminution of resources in the Sahel region were blamed on pastoralists’ mismanagement, rather than the actual causes of external intervention in their management and severe climate change conditions.

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For a pastoralist dependant on their land, a lifetime of dedication towards its care is only natural; this sustainable relationship was abolished with the privatization of the commons, with the lands passing into the hands of those whose priority is profit.

Hardin’s seminal text contained a significant misunderstanding in its presumptuous use of the term “commons.” The lands which pastoralists had made their homes and depended on for survival were viewed as “public property” in need of governance by the state. These lands, that had been in the possession of pastoralists for centuries, were regarded
as belonging to the “commons” as they were unfenced and governed by several households. Hardin assumed everyone is a selfish individual caring only for what he owns, with no care for common property. This misunderstanding – coupled with subsequent government actions – propels a desire for ownership and control that is entirely divergent from the sustainable pastoralist way of life, in which resources are not regarded simply as something to own, govern and exhaust, but rather as enabling survival through generations. For a pastoralist dependant on their land, a lifetime of dedication towards its care is only natural; this sustainable relationship was abolished with the privatization of the commons, with the lands passing into the hands of those whose priority is profit.\textsuperscript{151}

Hardin’s influence cannot be overstated: for authorities such as the World Bank and Western governments his guidance provided a convenient rationale for the widespread privatization of land; for Africa’s freshly elected governments searching dramatic change this led to the mass reallocation of land from the pastoralists to the state or individuals, alongside further intervention in their livelihoods.\textsuperscript{152} The Sahel region is merely one example of the mistake governments have made, acting contrary to the modern evidence that pastoralist lifestyles are an efficient and sustainable way of surviving and sustainably managing lands in difficult environments. Regrettably, recent research has confirmed that such programs have had a negative impact on not only the pastoralists but also their environment.\textsuperscript{153}

\textbf{Struggling to control pastoralism across Africa}

\textit{Kenya, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Niger, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Sudan.}

Parallels can be drawn between the changes to pastoralist lifestyles across Africa’s dryland regions and nomads across the Tibetan Plateau, with climate change and growing human populations and settlements dramatically changing the environment upon which they have evolved. There are 268 million pastoralists spread across 43\% of Africa’s landmass, contributing between 10 and 44 per cent of the Gross
Domestic Product in the countries they live in. Whilst their value cannot be denied, current research finds that - like Tibetan nomads - pastoralists are experiencing severe threats to their way of life.

For the Arid Lands Information Network (ALIN) there is a huge – and thus far untapped – potential for pastoralism to: “reduce poverty, generate economic growth, manage the environment, promote sustainable development, and build climate resilience,” as recognized by the 2010 African Union’s policy framework. In contrast to this positive potential, African pastoralists are struggling with not only dramatic climate change - causing droughts, which in turn cause livestock deaths – but also increasing human populations, leading to competition for water and the loss of traditional grazing areas. Furthermore, despite their unquestionable struggles and the proven benefits of support, African pastoralists are becoming increasingly marginalized in their societies.

In Kenya mismanagement combined with climate change caused diminishing grazing areas. A program from NGO FH-Kenya has been introduced to: help pastoralist communities identify their needs and use maps to find grazing and water they may not know of; explain using seasonal calendars the best places and times to graze, and which animals to move; support existing grazing control during elders meetings, with the elders also responsible for handing out fines to those who violate rules. Following the introduction of these measures, pastures have been exhausted at a slower rate, despite external hindrances such as damage to the pastures by intruders from other communities, and complaints of lack of support from the government.

In northern Kenya index-based insurance (IBLI) is being explored to aid the estimated 1.8 million affected by droughts, a scheme with aims to reduce poverty by offering protection against climate-related risks. In January 2010 a pilot IBLI project was launched in Kenya’s Marsabit region, with 2500 households buying cover, demonstrating pastoralists’ willingness to try new approaches. Presently the possibility of extending the project is being explored, despite ongoing risk management challenges of pastoralists struggling to understand the concept of insurance as well as poor infrastructure in the area. Therefore despite a certain amount of success, the project
reiterated the need of government commitment, namely investment in infrastructure in rural areas, investment in the IBLI (also from private corporations), and ongoing education and training for pastoralists.\textsuperscript{164}

A further project tested with success amongst Kenya’s nomadic communities is mobile teaching; this progressive project does away with the mistaken idea that nomads must change their lifestyle in order for development (i.e. “it is either herding or education”), rather this project adapts to the nomads. In support, Minister for northern Kenya Mohamed Elmi said that, “My view is that people should not have to choose between their lifestyle and an education.”\textsuperscript{165} In January 2010 there were 91 mobile schools, mostly along Kenya’s north border with Somalia and in the east.\textsuperscript{166} A BBC report in 2010 observed the “innovative” approach of the teacher in small Kenyan village Saka Junction, with students learning the alphabet using materials from their surroundings such as goat droppings and wild fruits.\textsuperscript{167} Despite not being paid in months, teacher Mr Farah – who will travel with the nomads - hailed the project as a success and suggested that in the future a mobile clinic would be a great help.\textsuperscript{168} Whilst these schools have met difficulties, they demonstrate that development need not necessitate settlement.

Across remote areas of Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, reside the nomadic and semi-nomadic herders known as the Fulani-Mbororo people, who live sustainably off the lands by practicing seasonal migration.\textsuperscript{169} However, like the Kenyan pastoralists, they are facing the effects of climate change, such as droughts, desertification and loss of biodiversity.\textsuperscript{170} Whilst they are used to migrating distances of 110-1000 kilometers, Fulani-Mbororo pastoralists now have to search even further for pasture. In Chad indigenous nomadic herders are being forced to change their lifestyles with their livestock they have hitherto depended on dead or sold
In these harsh conditions, herd management - such as dividing livestock, raising different types with different grazing habits, and raising different types to limit loss of herds due to disease breakout – has enabled the nomadic peoples to survive. A two-way exchange of knowledge between traditional and modern adaptation approaches, with wider dissemination of that already documented by nomads, is viewed as an imperative step to enabling continuing survival.

In the Borana and Shinile regions of Ethiopia, pastoralists have adapted to the lengthy history of droughts, with embedded community social structures and resource management systems, such as storage of surplus dairy products for poorer households without milking animals, particularly during dry seasons. However climate change, alongside social and political pressures, is bringing new challenges to these people, for which their traditional strategies are proving ineffective. For example, during drought periods pasture areas are significantly reduced and the remaining become overgrazed, meaning livestock are producing less milk and meat, and more regularly dying due to greater susceptibility to disease. The results are: a greatly diminished household income; malnutrition, disease and higher death rates; and social problems such as school dropouts or conflicts over competition for land. Possible solutions have been identified as: giving the pastoralists greater information (e.g. weather, climate change and pest or disease outbreaks); improving education and skills; offering financial support, and exploring new markets for the selling of products.

In Sudan three farmers and two nomads were left dead and two farmers injured in September 2011, following disputes between cattle farmers and nomads over animals grazing in the farms in a North Darfur village. Although Darfur’s nomads form 60% of the state population, numbering approximately 1 million, the new North Darfur Nomads Peace and Development Network has expressed concern that nomads are neglected by aid agencies. Whilst armed attacks in the western Sudan region of Darfur have declined 70% in the past three years, conflict has displaced many nomads, forcing them to find new livelihoods in poor areas often lacking midwives and other social services. The slowness of humanitarian agencies programs to recognize the term nomad and deal with their many struggles has led to escalating problems in terms of education – which does reach nomadic areas but often comes to
OTHER NOMADIC CULTURES

Afghanistan nomad, Photo © Associated Press

Inner Mongolian nomad, Photo © Jill Penney
Village women and livestock in Niger
Photo @ ILRI Stevie Mann

Kenyan mobile school
Photo @ Ashley Seager
an end after elementary level – and water, healthcare and widespread desertification.\textsuperscript{181} North Darfur Nomads Peace and Development Network leader Hassan Abedlaziz has stressed that nomads not only offer a message of peace and sustainability, but also they play an important role in society and Darfur’s peace process because they mix with all communities as part of their lifestyles.\textsuperscript{182} UNAMID has several planned projects to support the nomads, including training for members of the Nomadic Forum for Peace and Social Coexistence, as well as awareness raising on conflict prevention, early marriage, circumcision and developing income generating activities.\textsuperscript{183}

\textbf{Marginalization and Afghanistan’s Kuchi people}

The Kuchi are a nomadic and semi-nomadic group mainly in Afghanistan, numbering between 2 and 3 million, with at least 60\% maintaining fully nomadic lives despite over 100,000 having been displaced due to climate change such as drought and flooding.\textsuperscript{184} Several decades of conflict are believed to have reduced the previous Kuchi population by half, with many having been forced into poverty and work as casual laborers, or life in slums.\textsuperscript{185} Their illiteracy rate is the highest in the country, and over 54\% live in absolute poverty (compared with more than 30\% of the whole Afghan population).\textsuperscript{186} They struggle with lack of schooling and healthcare and have repeatedly voiced reluctance to continue their roaming lives, but have found it difficult to find settlement.\textsuperscript{187} Across the country they are highly marginalized and widely distrusted as opportunist herders and traders, with previous association with the Taliban, a label which continues to be used with political motives.\textsuperscript{188} Their struggle over reduced land (caused by climate change and population growth) has worsened relations between Kuchi people and other Afghans, with conflict in spring 2010 leading to nationwide protests from the Hazara community, many of whom had only lived in cities and had never seen a nomad.\textsuperscript{189}

Between 2001 and 2008 over 15 billion US dollars were contributed by the government and aid agencies but little has made its way to the Kuchis, due to aid money being distributed through provincial and ministerial budgets and there being no Kuchi province or ministry.\textsuperscript{190}
Settlement and stability for the Kuchi people have proved highly problematic due to a combination of political, social, environmental factors, with their problems presently remaining unresolved.

Whilst Kuchis have 10 seats in the lower house of the Afghan National Assembly, they are widely under-represented in Afghanistan’s provincial and district councils because they are not considered to be local residents. In September 2011 Kuchi MPS met with Afghan president Hamid Karzai and asked for the government to support allotment of land plots for permanent settlement; it was reported that Karzai agreed to this, as well as to holding regular seminars. Settlement and stability for the Kuchi people have proved highly problematic due to a combination of political, social, environmental factors, with their problems presently remaining unresolved. The complexity of their situation and the crucial role government policy must play in their future security draws comparison with the situation of Tibetan nomads.

Gradual extinction of Iran’s nomadic tribes

In 1920, tribes practicing nomadic pastoralism accounted for over 25% of Iran’s population, however this number fell sharply following forced settlement in the 1920s and ‘30s, and fell further due to continued pressure and the temptation of the cities from the 1960s. Despite the decline, Iran still has one of the world’s largest nomadic populations, estimated by the government as 1.5 million in a country of about 70 million in 2008. In 1978 the Aras River Irrigation Project forced around 2000 nomadic families to lose their winter pasture (90,000 hectares), and 20 of the Shahsavan nomads’ winter camps – each with grazing capacity for an average of 15 families - were converted into farmland. These changes pushed many nomads to become farmers or form their own farming businesses, with land replacing livestock as the main source of wealth.

Whilst, since the 1960s, the Iranian government no longer forces settlement, nomads have been threatened by the nationalization of pastures, limited water resources, the encroachment of factories,
roads and cities on pastures, and also the expansion of oil and gas exploration. Problems for present day nomads include poor security, drought, high rent for the land, bad governance, and lack of active support groups for the nomadic tribes. The government has few policies in place to protect these nomadic groups, bar a program of “tent schools” to develop literacy amongst children. Nomadic tribes are also marginalized with governments wary of their mobility and ability to avoid its power, and Amnesty International finding Iranian minorities subject to widespread discrimination, including land and property confiscations, denial of state employment and restricted social, cultural, linguistic and religious freedoms. This treatment draws many parallels with that of the Tibetan nomads. For researcher Ali Qoli Mahmoudi Bakhtiari, “nomadic life is on the brink of extinction. If this trend continues, there will be no more nomads living in Iran in the next 20 years.”

Chinese policy and Inner Mongolia

A Radio Free Asia report has described how Chinese policies in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region are causing social unrest amongst the ethnic Mongolians who now comprise less than 20% of the region’s 23 million population. In October 2011 a herder who tried to protect his grasslands and herds from Chinese oil trucks was knocked down and killed, similar to an incident in May 2011 when a herder was killed trying to stop a coal truck driving over grasslands. Widespread protests took place in the region throughout May and June 2011, widely believed to be due to large-scale ecological destruction of the grasslands and unfair development policies affecting the livelihoods of the ethnic Mongolians, of whom many practice nomadism. Protestors complained of aggressive open-cast (or “strip”) mining in Inner Mongolia (China’s largest producer of coal), which is recognized as one of the most environmentally destructive forms of mining, causing devastation.

Facing similarly tough restraints to their Tibetan neighbors, ethnic Mongolians are also struggling due to policies forcing them to limit their grassland and reduce livestock, which has pushed many to search for unskilled casual work in the cities.
of the surface ecosystem of a wide area and releasing pollutants into the air. \(^{205}\) Facing similarly tough restraints to their Tibetan neighbors, ethnic Mongolians are also struggling due to policies forcing them to limit their grassland and reduce livestock, which has pushed many to search for unskilled casual work in the cities. \(^{206}\)

According to PRC Vice Minister of Agriculture Gao Hongbin, 90% of China’s 400 million hectares of grassland now show a degree of environmental degradation. \(^{207}\) State newspaper *China Daily* reported that subsidies would be provided for cattle herders in both the north and west of China (i.e. Inner Mongolia and Tibet) and herders would be prohibited from grazing on damaged grasslands. \(^{208}\) Echoing the experience of struggling Tibetan nomads, there have been complaints of corruption and unpaid compensation, or payment for land handed over to local authorities under pressure. The harsh clampdown by Chinese security and the difficulties for nomads to voice their discontent at having their needs denied draws further parallels to problems in Tibet, with an estimated 40 people detained since major protests erupted in Shiliingol League, Inner Mongolia in May. \(^{209}\) *Southern Mongolian Human Rights Information Center* director Enhebatu Togochog has stated that, “[The PRC] are still not listening to the indigenous peoples who have true knowledge and experience of taking care of grassland, but are determined to continue to bar the herders from returning to their grasslands.” \(^{210}\)

**Conclusion: what does this mean for Tibet’s nomads?**

The above observations demonstrate a variety of strategies used across the world’s pastoralist populations to either sustain their mobile way of life or aid them to adapt. Whilst some steps have been taken to empower pastoralists to continue their traditional lifestyles, other steps have been more reactive, such as helping them gain access to healthcare needed following malnutrition caused by dying herds, educating them about contraception to reduce population growth, or helping them gain access to education, which in turn enables them to find different modes of employment. Whilst the latter steps are important, if we are truly to overcome the worldwide threat to indigenous populations and their
traditional pastoralist nomadic lifestyles, we cannot merely respond to their hardships. It is necessary to look deeper; at why ostensibly well-meaning government policies are detrimental to pastoralists; at why both organizations and governments can misunderstand or underestimate the value of pastoralists, and at how their sustainable way of life can, truly, be supported in a world whose drive for profit and growth forgets even the very meaning of sustainability.

Development policy analyst Gabriel Lafitte has commented that nomadic mobility constitutes the core of the problem for fearful governments’ understanding of nomads across the world; “If they can be anywhere, far beyond the gaze of the state, they can gather into a horde and descend without warning, to plunder civilisation. These are the heavily laden archetypes common to both ends of the Eurasian continent, whether in China or Europe, towards the Eurasian heartland’s endless steppes and its nomads.” Lafitte explains that from this understanding were born the concepts of barbarism and civilization, existing but as antagonistic polar opposites; “This is perhaps the deepest of dualisms, a logic of either/or, good and bad, right and wrong, in which one term entails the other but always opposes it, a source of chronic tension. This is clearly a construct of the sedentary, history-writing, civilised mind, seeking to distance itself from the barbarian”. In the past, this did not lead to any attempt to govern nomads, rather to the civilized peoples’ attempts to distance themselves. The continuation of historic attitudes may help to explain the present marginalization and threat of extinction faced by present day nomads, due to perhaps increasingly well-meaning but also often ill-conceived government approaches. But this attitude fails to explain the current Chinese policies that threaten nomads’ entire livelihoods.

Devastatingly, the tragedy of the Tibetan nomads extends even further than that of other pastoralists; their “backward” lives and knowledge are destined to extinction unless there is fundamental change in PRC attitude and policy.

Consideration of other populations across the world leading nomadic or semi-nomadic lives reveals that Tibetan nomads are not alone in facing the grave twofold threat of climate change and misguided government policies (itself tied up with social marginalization and conflict). The
urgency of protecting the survival of nomads has only recently been recognized, and in response many NGOs are today working with governments worldwide to support their nomad populations. This contrasts to the situation in Tibet where strict government control restricts NGO alternatives. In this sense the Tibetan nomad’s situation – cut off from the world in extreme weather conditions as well as by a repressive government – differs from other nomadic peoples. No other nomadic population has faced comprehensive and consistent government policies determined to terminate their livelihoods. Whilst the struggles undergone by Mongolian nomads share many similarities, the PRC’s political motive differs in Tibet. If Tibetan nomadic culture is successfully obliterated, with nomads reduced to discontented and unskilled casual workers existing on the peripheries of cities dominated by Chinese Han migrants, traditional Tibetan culture and its special knowledge of a unique environment will be lost – the PRC will be another step closer to its unitary “One China” vision. But, of course, the ramifications of losing our Third Pole’s stewards ring out far beyond Chinese politics.
Appendix I.
Environmental change in Tibet

Whilst the emphasis of this report has been placed upon the affect of Chinese policy on the nomads, the policies and their threat to nomad lives are tied up with the environmental changes; below attempts to summarize the key problems facing Tibet’s environment today.

Deforestation

Widespread deforestation occurred immediately following the Chinese invasion of Tibet; in 1959, there were 25.2 million hectares of forest in Tibet, but this was reduced to 13.57 million hectares by 1985. Between 1959 and 1985, US$ 54 billion worth of Tibet was removed from Tibet. Today, it is estimated that over 46 percent of Tibet’s forest has been destroyed, in some areas as much as 80%. This change to the environment, combined with insufficient reforestation, has affected wildlife including over 5000 unique plant species, caused soil erosion and caused flooding affecting not only China, but also the hundreds of millions living on the flood plains in south-east Asian countries. The dangers have already been seen, with deforestation identified as the cause of the deadly 1998 Yangtze (Dri chu) River floods in China, which affected over 200 million people.

China’s huge consumption of timber is continuing; according to Zhang Jianlong, deputy administrator of the State Forestry Administration, China’s total timber consumption was expected to increase to 477 million cu.m for 2010. Jianlong also noted that the growing need for timber cannot be met only by importing more, stating that it is urgent to promote domestic timber supply, allocate land areas for wood and timber production and improve forest management. If this is not managed effectively, further problems may be caused by deforestation in Tibet.
Soil erosion

Population migration into the northern Tibetan Plateau (now annexed as part of Qinghai Province),\textsuperscript{220} massive deforestation, mining and intensive agriculture have caused soil erosion.\textsuperscript{221} This has also caused siltation of the important Mekong (Zachu), Yangtze (Drichu), Indus (Senge Khabab), Salween (Gyalmo Ngulchu) and Yellow (Machu) rivers, which in turn has caused major flooding across Asia, increased landslides and reduced farming land – thus affecting half of the world’s population, who live in south-east Asia.

Global climate change effects

In addition to the problems created by flooding in China’s neighboring countries, scientists have found correlation between the natural vegetation on the Tibetan Plateau and the stability of the monsoon, something many in South Asia depend upon. Furthermore, research has suggested that the Tibetan Plateau’s environment affects jet-streams which partly cause Pacific typhoons and are related to the El Nino-Southern Oscillation which causes extreme weather in many regions.\textsuperscript{222}

Whilst the Chinese government has in the past tried to play down the extent of environmental problems in Tibet, studies by Chinese researchers in 2010 and 2011 have found evidence that glaciers across the Tibetan plateau are melting “faster than ever.”\textsuperscript{223} One study found that 70 square kilometers or 5.3\% of the glaciers in the Yangtze (Drichu) river’s headwaters had disappeared in the past three decades, accompanied by a continued rise in the average temperature over the past fifty years, with 2010 reaching a five-decade high. In the headwaters of the Mekong (Zachu), 70\% of glaciers have disappeared, with a group of 80 glaciers near the source of the Yellow (Machu) river also shrinking.\textsuperscript{224} Researchers warn that this could lead to water shortage and even a dry-up of rivers, with the glaciers lifelines for not only China but Asian rivers such as the Indus and the Ganges; other risks are also ecological disasters such as wetland retreat and desertification.\textsuperscript{225}
Extinction of Wildlife

Since the Chinese invasion, “trophy-hunting” of endangered species has been encouraged, threatening the 81 endangered species on the Plateau which comprise of 39 mammals, 37 birds, four amphibians and one reptile. The abundant herds that caused pre-1950 travelers to compare Tibet to East Africa are no more, and species such as the rare giant panda and golden snub-nosed monkey are under threat.

Mining

The minerals of Tibet are being extracted without regulation as raw materials for China’s rapid industrial growth, including an estimated 30-40 million tons of copper, 40 million tons of lead and zinc, and billions of tons of iron. The new Qinghai to Lhasa railway line allows easier exploitation of these resources, with more than 600 new sites of gold, copper, iron, lead, zinc and chromite reported to have been discovered in 2007, as well as a 200 million-ton oilfield near the railroad; official sources value the natural resources along the northern (Nagu) part of the railway at US$ 776 billion, the area dubbed the “Golden Belt.” The increased mining damages vegetation, which increases the risk of severe landslides, widespread soil erosion, loss of wildlife habitat and the pollution of rivers. New mining sites have also been accompanied by resettlement of nomads and farmers, with indigenous Tibetans evicted and replaced by migrant Chinese workers.

Nuclear Waste

The Chinese’s first nuclear weapon was brought onto the Plateau in 1971. Today there are at least three or four nuclear missile launch sites in Tibet with an unknown number of warheads. There have reportedly been deaths of Tibetan nomads and their livestock close to nuclear sites as well as increases in cancer and birth defects, in addition to water contamination.
Agricultural Development

Tibet is now home to large-scale agricultural development projects, in conflict with the traditional practices and ecological balance hitherto maintained by nomads and farmers. Whilst the schemes may have benevolent motives, there is concern that they may do more harm than good for the environment and also Tibetans, with some schemes found to have a bias towards employing Chinese migrant workers.\(^{234}\) Researchers have acknowledged the potential benefits of the expansion of settlement and agriculture, however further support needs to be given to those moving from semi-subsistent household food and agricultural systems, to semi-commercial systems, and the rudimentary and often dysfunctional marketing systems need to be improved.\(^{235}\)

Hydro-Electric Construction

There are dozens of hydro-electric dams planned along Tibet’s rivers in order to export electricity to Chinese cities. Scientists in China and the U.S. have also published reports examining whether the Zipingpu Dam in Sichuan may have helped cause the devastating May 2008 earthquake which killed around 80,000; the dam is 5.5 kilometers away from the earthquake’s epicentre and was built 500 meters from the earthquake’s fault line.\(^{236}\) Whilst it is difficult to measure whether the dam caused the earthquake, a U.S researcher alongside one research paper by Chinese scientists concluded that the weight of collected water affected seismic activity.\(^{237}\) Despite the government and some Chinese scientists denying any connection between the dam and the quake, 62 Chinese environmentalists and scientists appealed for a moratorium on dam construction in the region pending further study of the risks.\(^{238}\)

Hydro-engineering projects are found to be a major impetus behind resettlement; one 2011 report outlined the major hydro-projects and the subsequent resettled population across China, the statistics as follows: Three Gorges dam – 1.5m people; Sanmenxia dam, 410,000 people; Danjiangkou dam, 380,000; South-North water diversion, 345,000; Xiaolangdi dam, 200,000 people; Pubugou dam, 120,000; Zipingpu dam, 33,000 people.\(^{239}\) One scheme is resettling 345,000 nomads and farmers in order clear the way for China’s hydro-engineering project
– a transfusion of water from the Yangtze (Drichu) river basin. This project is known as the South-North water diversion, lasting 50 years and costing US$60 billion project. This scheme was disparaged in a US diplomatic cable leaked in 2011, which stated that “If the Chinese government wants to solve the ever deepening water crisis, demand management practices such as water conservation and improved agricultural practices need to be pursued rather than a costly water diversion solution.” Changing Chinese policy has also caused some families to resettle more than once, for example elderly farmer Zhang Guangren has moved twice for dam projects, and now her son has been told to relocate as his apartment will be flooded when the diversion raises water levels – she noted that the compensation of 40,000 yuan (US$ 6,300) is not enough for a new home but there’s no other choice.

In reference to those displaced for the Three Gorges Dam, researchers have highlighted this project’s mismanagement, stating that one key lesson for likely future forced resettlement across the world due to climate change is to ensure assessments are made before resettlement to consider health and social effects.
Appendix II. Romanized Tibetan and Chinese (Pinyin) place names

This report has used the original Tibetan place names. For your information and to assist further research we include the romanized Chinese names below.

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<tr>
<th>Counties under “Chamdo” Prefecture</th>
<th>Lhoka Prefecture</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tibetan name</strong></td>
<td><strong>Chinese name</strong></td>
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<td>Nang Dzong</td>
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**APPENDIX II. ROMANIZED TIBETAN AND CHINESE (PINYIN) PLACE NAMES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nagchu Prefecture (Ch: Naqu shen)</th>
<th>Tingkye</th>
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<td>Shethongmon</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Yunnan Province Dechen TAP (Ch: Diqing/ Shangrila)</th>
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<td>Palung (Bayen)</td>
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<td>Yadzi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gonlung</td>
<td>Tridu</td>
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<td>Tsojang TAP (Ch: Haibei)</td>
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<td>Siling</td>
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<p>| Tsojang TAP (Ch: Haibei)                  | Gansu Province                                 |
|                                          | Karzi                                          |
|                                          | Sichuan Province (Ch: Ganzi)                   |
| Tsojang TAP (Ch: Haibei)                  | Gansu Province                                 |
|                                          | Karzi                                          |
|                                          | Sichuan Province (Ch: Ganzi)                   |</p>
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<tr>
<th>English Place Name</th>
<th>Chinese Place Name</th>
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<td>Drakgo</td>
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<td>Lithang</td>
<td>Litang</td>
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3 Miller, p.3
7 Lattimore, cited by Miller et al, p.112
9 ibid
10 Discussed in further detail in Lafitte
11 Saverio Kratli, cited by Lafitte
12 Lafitte
13 Miller p.12
14 Miller p.12-13
15 Miller p.12
16 Miller p.14
17 ibid
19 ibid
21 ibid
22 The word “backward” and its derivatives are commonplace in publications from the Chinese government, in reference to traditional or nomadic


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The Central People’s Government of the People’s Republic of China, “Ecological Improvement and Environmental Protection in Tibet”

ibid


Lafitte

ibid


ibid


ibid

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Lafitte


Lafitte

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Environment and Development Desk, Central Tibetan Administration, p.26
Environment and Development Desk, Central Tibetan Administration, p.27
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Goldstein Melvyn C, Geoff Childs and Puchung Wangdui, “Beijing’s ‘People First’ Development Initiative for the Tibet Autonomous Region’s Rural Sector – A Case Study from the Shigatse Area” The China Journal (01/2010, 63, pp.57-75) pp.57-8
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PURGING THE TREASURE HOUSE: DISPLACEMENT AND THE STATUS OF THE TIBETAN NOMAD

81 Walker
82 Human Rights Watch, p.17
84 Walker
85 Ptackova
86 Walker
87 World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
88 World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
89 Ptackova
90 ibid
91 ibid
92 ibid
93 ibid
94 ibid
95 ibid
96 ibid
97 ibid
98 ibid
99 Statistics courtesy of Research and Analysis Center, Central Tibetan Administration (1/11/2011) Phase one statistics are taken from Chinese government media reports, and phase two statistics are gathered from both government media and other media reports. There is one discrepancy in the phase one statistics; other media sources for Nagchu state that actually 38,591 households have been resettled with a total cost of 185 billion yuan (US$29.1).
100 Ibid (Tibetan place names added)
101 Human Rights Watch, p.8
103 Dondrup, cited by Dachong and Peng Yining
105 Watts, “Tibetan nomads struggle as grasslands disappear from the roof of the world”
106 See interviews, Human Rights Watch
107 ibid
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109 Testimonials on nomads collected and translated from Tibetan by Tenzin Woebum on behalf of Tibetan Women’s Association, from August to October 2011. All are ex-nomads and recent refugees to India, usually in 2011 and occasionally in 2010 - unless otherwise noted. All names have been changed.

110 Ptackova


112 Kyi, p.191

113 Watts

114 Watts

115 Watts

116 Watts


119 “Fact vs. Myth”


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122 ibid

123 ibid


125 Sulek, p.19


127 Lafitte


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131 Fan

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ibid


ibid

Dareini


Dareini


Dareini


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Lafitte, “Modern Freedoms, Nomadic Freedoms”


World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)


Central Tibetan Administration (Also see Lu Chuan’s Kekexili: Mountain Patrol (2004) which portrays the efforts of Tibetan nomads to protect antelopes from Chinese hunters in the face of failed Chinese laws, even if this leads to their own murders)

International Campaign for Tibet


ibid

ibid

Watts


Watts