

CHAPTER 3

Degradation of Tibetan Rangeland: Contrasting Viewpoints of Modernist Development and Conservation

Over the next three chapters, the analysis of data generated by this research is presented. With respect of the three concepts guiding this research, livelihood, property rights and local knowledge, the voices of those who participated in this research are represented.

Through the data analysis process described in Chapter 1.6, the five themes that arose in this study are extrapolated upon and explored in depth. Each of these themes relate directly to the research paradigm and concepts. In this way, each findings chapter explores the contrasting viewpoints of modernist development and conservation in terms of rangeland degradation, mining's impacts on herders' livelihood and property rights and people and environment interrelationship in Tibetan culture.

This first of the findings chapters presents data that relates to two of the research concepts: livelihood and property rights. Contrasting viewpoints of rangeland degradation on the Tibetan Plateau are explored and analyzed. Firstly, a brief historical background of Tibet and its political structures is presented. Issues relating to the concept of self-governance and autonomy are discussed. Secondly, I introduce the Three Rivers Source area including the Sanjiangyuan National Nature Reserve in terms of its geographical location, ecosystem, biodiversity and conservation policies. Thirdly, the important meaning for protecting the Three Rivers Source is explored from a mainstream view of rangeland degradation. This is followed with former herders' perspectives in relation to the Eco-resettlement project, their decisions to resettle, current lifestyle and future plans for their life in the urban area. The chapter concludes with a summary with a critical analysis derived from the data presented.

3.1 Contemporary and Current Situation of TAR

In 1949, the People's Republic of China was born under the long-term struggle for its civilians' political liberation from the ancient Chinese system. In September 1965, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) was established under the leadership of the Communist Party in China (Information Office of the State Council of PRC, 2005).

The Ethnic Autonomous Region's intention is self-government for ethnic groups' politics, economy, culture and society in its region in order to develop a relationship of equality, unity and mutual assistance between ethnic groups. The population of ethnic minorities practicing regional autonomy accounts for 71 percent of the total population of ethnic minorities in China. In practice, self-governance means that ethnic minorities living in their autonomous regions, prefectures and counties can officially use their own languages primarily, national constitutions and laws respect and guarantee the freedom of religious belief of ethnic minorities, and guarantee the rights and freedom of all ethnic minorities to maintain their traditions and customs in daily life. Self-governance of autonomous areas also have the responsibility to protect and improve the local environment and prevent pollution; the intention is that the local people can manage and protect natural resources through the law, and develop and use the natural resources available. The central government gives support and assistance to the economy and social development of Autonomous areas through launched ecological construction, environmental protection, compulsory education and poverty reduction projects. By the end of 2003, China had established 155 autonomous areas consisting of five autonomous regions, 30 autonomous prefectures and 120 autonomous counties.

The Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) is one of five autonomous regions in China covering an entirety of 1,200,000 square kilometers. The TAR is also referred to as 'U-Tsang' in Tibetan language and 'Xi Zang' in Chinese language. The names reflect the historical and cultural background of its capital, Lhasa city, as being considered a holy place which has been central for Tibetan people to carry out political affairs and cultural activities since the seventh century. The practices can be traced back to Songzen Sgampo's era, who was the 33rd king of Tibet and established

the famous Potala Palace in Lhasa city. Many people assume that Tibetans only reside inside of TAR since the term TAR has been written as ‘Tibet’ on the maps. However, the TAR is only the western region of Tibet, not the entire area. Consequently, Tibetans who reside in other provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan and Gansu identify themselves as Amdo and Kham people and they have their own Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and Counties in accordance to their population density. Particularly, Qinghai province is the second largest Tibetan area after TAR in which Tibetans are the second majority ethnic group role after Han¹ and Muslims.

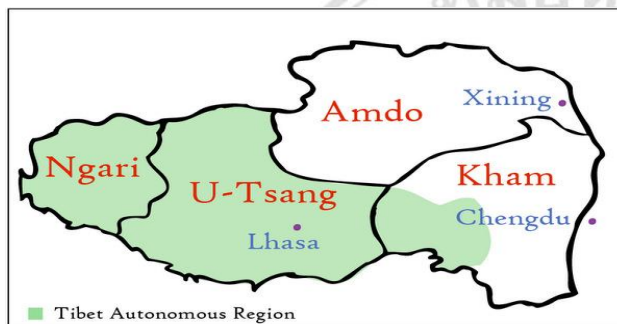


Figure 3.1 shows the wider area of Tibet. U-Tsang area, currently called Tibetan Autonomous Region and its capital city Lhasa are in the western region. Amdo is the second

Figure 3.1 Tibetan Regions in China

largest Tibetan area after U-Tsang, currently called Qinghai Province and its

capital city is Xining. The Kham area is under Sichuan Province now and its capital city is Chengdu. Culturally however, Kham Tibetan people mostly live in parts of Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces. In Qinghai Province, Kham Tibetan people only live in Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and the rest of Tibetans living there are Amdo people. Although, these three regions acquired different names after the new China was established, most Tibetans still use the former territory names, especially when they introduce themselves among their own ethnic groups. Therefore, the point that requires emphasis here is Tibetan is not only about TAR, but also include some parts of Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan and Gansu Provinces.

¹ Han is the majority ethnic group in China.

3.2 Background of Qinghai Province (Amdo in Tibetan language)²

Qinghai Province (Amdo Region in Tibetan language) is located on the Tibetan plateau and has an average elevation of 3,000 meters above the sea level. Qinghai is the largest province in P.R. China excluding the autonomous regions. The term of Qinghai comes from 'Qinghai Lake', the largest salt water lake in China and second largest in the world. There are over 37 recognized ethnic groups among Qinghai's population of 5.2 million, with national minorities making up to 46.5% of the population. The Han (54.5%), Hui or Muslim (16%), Tibetans (20.7%), Tu (4%), Mongols, and Salars are the most populous groups.

Han Chinese predominate in the cities of Xining, Haidong, Delinghai and Golmud, and elsewhere in the northeast. The Hui people are concentrated in Xining, Haidong, Minhe County, Hualong County, and Datong County. The Tu people predominate in Huzhu County and the Salars in Xunhua County; Tibetans and Mongols are sparsely distributed across the rural western part of the province. Specifically, the Tibetans mostly reside in the six Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures, Haibei, Huangnan, Hainan, Gulu, Yushu and Haixi.

Qinghai is an important province for China, even for the world, in terms of its special geographical location. Qinghai province is one of China's five major pastoral areas and the Three Rivers Source is also located on its Plateau at an altitude of over 4,000 meters. Sanjiangyuan National Nature Reserve (SNNR) located here covers an area of about 150,000 square kilometers (15 million hectares), larger than the total area of England and Wales. It is the largest and highest natural wetland in China, so 24 % of the Yangtze River, 49% of the Mekong River and 15% of the Yellow River comes from this province. Subsequently, the Reserve was established to protect the headwaters of these three rivers in 2000.

² Information for this section was derived from the official Chinese government web site: China.org.cn. Retrieved from www.china.org.cn/travel2013-03/06/content_28135757.htm

3.3 The Important Meaning for Protecting the Three Rivers Source

Specifically, the Three Rivers (Sanjiangyuan) source area of the Yangtze, Yellow and Mekong Rivers, are all located in southern Qinghai Province. The Yangtze originates at Geladandong Snow Mountain in the Banyakala mountain range. The river's length in the province is about 1,200 kilometers; 19% of its total length. The Yellow River originates at Beilgezigeza Snow Mountain. The river's length in the province is nearly 2,000 kilometers long; 36% of its total length. Finally, the Mekong River originates from at Guozongmucha Snow Mountain. This river's length in the province is around 450 kilometers; 10% of its total length' (Plateau Perspectives, 2014).

The SNNR is the second largest nature reserve in the world, as well as the world's highest and most extensive wetland protected area. Approximately 200,000 people live within its 152,300 square kilometers and nearly 600 million people depend on these rivers for their livelihoods. The area has rich resources including grasslands, mountains, rivers, snow-mountains, wetlands and abundant wildlife. It is home to many precious animals such as Tibetan antelopes, Tibetan gazelles and wild yaks (Plateau Perspectives, 2014; China.org.cn, 2013). Mr. Wang Zhibao, Director of the State Forestry Administration stated:

The establishment of the nature reserve aims to protect the Tibetan Plateau ecosystem, with an emphasis on alpine swamp meadow and natural habitat of the unique wildlife in the region, and to promote sustainable economic development in the region (cited in Plateau Perspectives, 2014).

SNNR has 18 conservation areas focusing on wetland, wildlife and forest and shrub-land, and these conservation areas are divided as a core zone, a buffer zone and an experimental zone. The core zones aim to protect endangered wildlife, buffer zones aim to promote conservation while still allowing local herders limited grazing of sheep and cattle, and the experimental zones are intended for scientific investigations and for tourism development. The total areas of the core zone, buffer zone and experimental zone amount to 31,200, 39,200 and 81,900 square kilometers

respectively (that is, 20%, 26% and 54% of the nature reserve's total area) (Plateau Perspectives, 2014).

In 2003, the Qinghai Province Government launched the 'return grazing land to grassland' project to prohibit herders from grazing on more than 100 million of hectares. The government mainly implemented the fencing, reseeding and reduction of livestock projects to prevent rangeland degradation with the apparent aim of improving the productivity of its rangeland (People's Daily of China, 2010). In 2005, the government of Qinghai province took further action to implement the Eco-resettlement Project along the Three Rivers Source of Tibetan plateau. As mentioned earlier, the Department of Agricultural of Qinghai Province reports that Qinghai is one of China's five major pastoral areas and there are 5.47 billion hectares of natural rangeland inside of its province, accounting for 51% of area.

However, because of long-term overstocking, 90% of rangelands have become moderately degraded (Plateau Perspectives, 2014). Xu Jun's research (2009) mentions this situation as one aspect from the Go West Policy (Xibu Da Kaifa in Chinese); prioritizing pastoral areas in 2000 with strategies of 'farmland into forest' and 'grain into green' (Tuigeng Huanlin in Chinese) and 'pastures into grassland' (Tuimu Huancao in Chinese). The 'pastures into grassland' program is meant to return the grassland back to the nature through implementing the resettlement project. This policy was implemented in the Qinghai Province in 2003, and involved the resettlement of 982 families and 33,500 herders.

The government of Qinghai province has explained that there are four remarkable characteristics for the SNNR. Firstly, the region of the Three Rivers Source is the largest area for natural conservation in China. Secondly, the region of Three Rivers Source is the 'Chinese Water Tower' and 24% of the Yangtze River, 49% of the Mekong River and 15% of the Yellow River comes from this region. Thirdly, the region of the Three Rivers Source is a conservation area where the multi-biodiversity is highly concentrated in this high altitude area in the world. Fourthly, the region of Three Rivers Source is a very sensitive ecosystem. The effects of land degradation is that the glaciers, lakes, and swamps are getting smaller, the level of groundwater has

declined, there are climate anomalies, natural disasters, increased drought and snowstorm, rangeland desertification and the loss of soil on ground.

3.4 The Mainstream View of Rangeland Degradation

Many Chinese scholars claim that the rangeland degradation is led by human activities, overstocking and climate change in the highland of China. Yuhongyan (2011) from Qinghai Grassland Station, has pointed out several main reasons leading to rangeland degradation through her research. Firstly, climate change is a main element leading to rangeland degradation. For example, Qinghai province has lower temperature – 6~9°C annually, less rainfall and frequent natural disasters like drought, heavy snow, and wind storms. This affects the farmers and herders' economy since the natural disasters occur about 50%-65% in spring and 25%-45% in summer season when farmers undergo cultivations and harvesting. For herders, this is the time to collect the rangeland products such as caterpillar fungus and medicinal plants and they can sell their livestock since they have high values in the market.

Secondly, she argues human activities contribute to rangeland degradation. For example, digging, exploiting and overgrazing on the rangeland have reduced 30-70% of pasture cover and reduced 30-50% of hay output inside of Qinghai Province. As China has a huge population and food shortage is a major problem for the whole country, people use many ways to exploit the natural resources. These include herders transferring their rangeland to become agricultural fields and overstocking to gain higher incomes. As a result, the land becomes very dry with rangelands having a limited carrying capacity for the livestock. In almost all of the herding areas, the livestock numbers are beyond the land's carrying capacity; in some cases even 50%-100%.

To protect the rangeland, some scholars suggest strategies for rangeland conservation. For example, they suggest the government needs to enhance the Grazing Ban Policy, not allowing herding in particular areas. Some scholars also suggest the reduction of livestock numbers, the establishment of protected areas, and the eradication of the pika. They also suggest giving trainings related to modern

technology and science to the herders, as this will improve their education and will prevent ‘overstocking’ in future (Yuhongyan 2011; Niuliming 2011; Liyu 2008). Finally, they suggest a fencing project to allow the rangeland rest from human interference, recommending the wide implementation of the Eco-Resettlement Project to resettle all the herders and guarantee long term compensation for resettled people. Table 3.1 shows data relating to rangeland overstocking in Qinghai Province from a 2014 unpublished report compiled by Xinghai County’s Government.

Table 3.1 Information for Overstocking from Xinghai Government (Source: Unpublished County Record, 2014)

Location	Number of Villages	Household numbers	Population (thousand)	Area of Natural rangeland (thousand mu)	Usable rangeland (thousand mu)	Livestock number (thousand)	Overstocking number (thousand)
Xinghai county	57	9107	43.436	15160	14440	1043.72	630
Qushian	5	204	0.921	5030	4566.74	59.941	101.5
Zhongtie	7	970	5.552	1139.3	1011.4	1274.83	111.3
Wenquan	7	1451	6.931	4144.1	3990.92	176.69	36.3
Tangnaihai	13	1143	4.876	962.3	881.197	71.973	32.6
Longzang	7	1313	5.499	1159.6	1061.99	105.169	135.4
Heka	10	2068	10.337	2803.7	2690.73	319.56	136.6
Ziketian	8	1958	9.32	4169.7	4090.62	165.669	59.6

3.5 Alternative Viewpoints of Rangeland Degradation

The Rna Thang (silver) and Gser Thang (golden) communities' rangeland give a different viewpoint from the mainstream view outlined above. My fieldwork in these two locations during the spring of 2014 and fall of 2014 gave me new perspectives on the issue of rangeland degradation. I learned that some herders from these two communities have been resettled in the town, known by the official name is Zi Ke Tan Township in Chinese. The new community is called 'Sanjiangyuan Eco-resettlement Community' or 'Sanjiangyuan Shengtai Yiminqu', but local people call the community 'San Jiang Yuan', 'New Village, Xin Cun', or call these resettled herders' original community names like 'Rbrong Thu' or 'Long Bzang' in Tibetan words. Therefore, local people rarely use the official name for this community.

In fact, the first eight eco-resettlement pilot programs were implemented in November 2004 in eight counties. These eight counties belong to the Yushu and Guoluo prefectures. In each county, one township was chosen to be the pilot. In January 2005, the San Jiang Yuan National Nature Reserve was established in the area of four prefectures, sixteen counties and one township. As a direct result of this pilot, the Tibetan nomadic families in these areas had to abandon their original life and start a new life in the towns or cities. The Xinhua News (2009) reported that from 2004 to 2009, 86 new communities were built in the Sanjiangyuan region; houses for these eco-migrants have increased to 50,000 at the time of writing.

As an outsider, it was a great challenge to identify different communities in the Sanjiangyuan Eco-resettlement Community, because there are many kinds of resettled herders who had been resettled under the various government projects in recent years. Herders who are not a part of the eco-resettlement project had been relocated in the same area with eco-resettled herders; thus, finding and defining eco-resettled herders was a complicated issue. Normally, eco-resettled herders receive government subsidies, called "eco-compensation". The normal herders who are resettled in the town do not have these government subsidies, but they are eligible for a half government-financed house. However, even some non-ecological resettled herders believe they should be eligible for eco-compensation. One non-ecological resettled

herder told me:

My family moved here due to our children's' education, because our two kids have to go to school in the town. However, I myself really envied these eco-resettled herders, because they have eco-compensation from the local government. Actually, all of us are from three rivers' source and a part of my land was also marked to be the conservation area, so we also were doing some environmental conservation work. Unfortunately, our



Figure 3.2 Resettlement site

community doesn't have this kind of subsidies (Record of notes taken in interview with XH4, March 19, 2014).

XH4 further told me that his community was also impacted by a mining company for more than ten years. The mining

caused severe pollution and damage to the surrounding environment such that local herders could not even access clean water. He settled in the town during the winter but returned to the rangeland in the summer season for grazing. This herder strongly encouraged me to see his community and witness how their rangelands are being destroyed by the mining project and how people are suffering from drinking this polluted water. From our conversation, I learned of other environmental issues occurring there.

On March 20, 2014, I visited the Sanjiangyuan Eco-resettlement Community and met one of my interviewees from my 2011 study XH5. At that time, he was a new eco-resettled herder and with his wife was running a small shop in their resettlement community since they had sold all their livestock. When I met him again, his face had grown darker and he was much thinner, causing me to worry for his health. He knew why I traveled to his community and since he strongly supports my work, he started to talk with me about the current situation in this community. He sadly explained to me

that herders in this community always throw garbage everywhere due to having very limited trashcans, making the environmental condition in this community very poor.

He further said that herders are unable to adapt to the urban life here, because they are accustomed to live in a vast land in which they can freely move. Herders also know how to manage their waste in a better way in their rangelands, unlike in the limited space of the urban area. There were several community members being hired as cleaners, but there was still garbage everywhere. Sometimes, XH5 went to knock on each family's gate and requested them to throw garbage in the community trashcans, but some herders were irritated if he went frequently. The Garbage Management Sector pay 850 yuan to him and other garbage cleaners per month. He thus had a little satisfaction compared to the other herders who haven't any job to do in this urban town. However, XH5 expressed his concern on the future of herders' life, stating:

If city people cannot get a job, then they will become a thief. If herders cannot have rangeland and livestock, then they will become a thief too (Record of notes taken in interview with XH5, March 19, 2014)).

Thus, he strongly believed that herding is a good occupation for herders. But now, many herders lost their jobs and have become thieves in the community. For example, a thief took 100 yuan and one carpet from XH5's shop in the month before I interviewed him. He described this resettlement community as a poor area.

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My observations support XH5's statements:

I observed that the roads are very bad in the resettlement area and the entire community is covered in dust. There were a few people walking in the community streets, but it seemed they did not know each other. Some small shops were open and people sat outside of the shops for half the day, chatting and drinking beverages. They seemed to have nothing to do at their resettlement area (Record of Field Notes, March 20, 2014).

Generally speaking, how many herders are permanently resettled in this community is a difficult question for both the local government and the resettled herders to answer. I interviewed one of the local officers, who mainly works for eco-resettled programs under a newly established government department called Three Rivers' Source Office, 'Sanjiangyuan Bangongshi'. This department belongs to the local government and plays a vital role among the eco-resettled communities. This Three Rivers' Source office is established on the county, prefecture and provincial levels. An officer from this department told me:

Nowadays, herders would like to resettle in the town. One reason is that they feel upset to kill the livestock, so many of them stop grazing. The second reason is if they resettle here, then they can access the public services like schools, hospitals and electricity. As you know, some herding areas have limited electricity as they are only able to use solar energy, so for watching TV can be spent two hours, but when they come to in the town, they don't need to kill the livestock, they would rather dig the caterpillar fungus to earn some income, thus the resettlement project fits for current herders' situation (Record of notes taken in interview with KP1, March 19, 2014).

I discussed with him that I observed most herders are not exactly living in the resettlement community and they even sold their resettlement houses to their relatives, friends and people who were interested to buy. He responded that he knows this kind

of situation is going on in this community, but they have to close one eye. I further asked him how many herders or households are resettled in Xinghai County, but he only gave some general numbers that more than 1,000 households are resettled under the Eco-resettlement Project. Later, I spoke with XH5 and he told me that there are 305 households, mostly Tibetan, except two to three Muslim households and one Han Chinese household in this Eco-resettlement project.

Additionally, in my first study in spring the of 2014, I specifically interviewed some eco-resettled herders who were already resettled under the Eco-Resettlement Project. Their responses fell into three categories; labor shortage, eco-compensation and education.

Labor shortage

I am a 69-year-old (male), and I have five members in my family. There is only one person that can support my family because the rest are old people and children. The two children in my family are going to school now. Our main income is from doing construction work and digging caterpillar fungus (herb). Right now, I still have 1,000-mu of land and I receive 3,800RMB from the government, which is a preference policy for people under 16 years of age and above 55 years of age after we have resettled in this new community. We normally receive some compensation from the government, such as 800MB for winter fuel every year, but it cannot support us for a whole year. In addition, before we resettled here, the government told us that they would build a house for us that had two floors, but our new house did not have two floors when we arrived here. We even didn't receive the resettlement amount. The local government said that they would financially support 40,000 RMB for our new house and that we need to self-finance for the remaining (Zi Chou in Chinese) 15,000RMB. (Record of notes taken in interview with with XHQ1, September 5, 2013).

I am a 59-year-old (female) and there are six members in my family. After my husband passed away eight years ago, I had to sell all of my livestock due to the labor shortage in my family, but we still have 40-mu of rangeland. We also receive self-insurance (Di Bao in Chinese), about 200RMB for each person every month, except my youngest son because he still holds a peasant household while the rest of us holds urban households (Ju Min Hu Kou in Chinese). Luckily, my son who holds peasant household had an opportunity to get a government supported house, which was offered under the Ecological Resettlement Project. So, we moved to a government house and one of my children receives 3,000RMB until he turns 16 years old and I also receive 3,000RMB as well as 800RMB for fuel. I am relatively satisfied with my current life because the government supports poor families, but one problem is that here there is not enough water for us in the summer (Record of notes taken in interview with XHQ3, September 5, 2013).

I am a 50-year-old (male) and there are three people in my family. I am doing nothing after I resettled here and my wife, who is 50 years old, is gravely sick. My son and daughters are all married and have their own new families. Everything here I need to buy with money such as water, electricity, meat and vegetables (Record of notes taken in interview with XHQ5, September 6, 2013).

Eco-compensation

I have four family members. Right now, I have no livestock, so my wife and I run a small business, a local shop, in this new community. However, I had 150 sheep and 10 yaks before I came here. I have 200-mu of rangeland, for which I used to need to pay 500-600RMB in tax seven years ago, but now, I don't need to pay. My family receives a subsidy of 800RMB every year to buy fuel from the government. However, I am not satisfied, because I feel pastoral life is better than resettled life here. For example, I didn't need to buy meat, butter, potatoes and other vegetables

(Record of notes taken in interview with XHQ6, September 6, 2013).

XHQ6 also stated that the local Three Rivers Source Group (TRSG) who is responsible to implement this Eco-Resettlement Project did not care much about their current living situation.

The quality of our house is very bad and often water comes inside the house after it rains. I therefore had to rebuild my house three times and every time I had to pay 4,000 to 5,000RMB and in total I paid 12,000RMB from my savings. Furthermore, the electricity condition is very bad and the price of electricity is very expensive, about 1 du is 5 mao. We often need to change our electricity meter when it breaks because TRSG sells our electricity to other communities nearby us. In addition, the TRSG forced us to buy from the electricity meter, which is about 300RMB from their hand, but the market price is only 150RMB. We also need to pay them the electricity repair fees, which are around 200-300RMB every time they send someone to our house. But actually, this kind of attitude is not allowing them to collect money from us according to the Eco-Resettlement Project policy.

Education

I don't think we should necessarily resettle here, because we can protect the environment through reducing our livestock numbers. Now, I just want to go back home, because I cannot survive here. I don't think I belong here because I do not feel at home in this new area. However, education is very important and I have two children who are going to school, so I had to resettle. This is the main reason why I sold my livestock to come here, and if the village school had not been closed, I definitely would have stayed in my original home (Record of notes taken in interview with XHQ6, September 2013).

I am a 47-year-old (male) and there are five family members in my home. Three children in my family are going to school. Right now, I have no

livestock and no labor power. My main income depends on caterpillar fungus and construction work (Xiao Gong in Chinese). I still have 270-mu of land and one child receives 3,800 RMB (3,000RMB before 2012) per year from the government and we also receive 800RMB to buy fuels such as coal, dung and wood. However, I am not satisfied with my current life because I cannot find a job here. So, I took out loans from the bank to support my children's education. In fact, I came here just for my child's education; otherwise I would have preferred to stay in my original house (Record of notes taken in interview with XHQ2, September 5, 2013).

These excerpts of interviews show both concerns and motivations relating to eco-resettlement. It can be seen that former herders resettled not only for eco-compensation, but they were resettled for their children's education. The herders realized that the education is very important and believed that if their children get a better education, then they will have a better life in the future. For this reason, herders would like to voluntarily resettle in the county to take care of their children.

In both 2011 and 2014 fieldwork, a number of former herders also expressed concerns about their traditional culture. According to them, loss of their livestock is a loss of their cultural festivals, such as horse and archery races which are considered important in their daily life. As Tibetans practiced horse racing for many generations, it is not merely a festival, but rather a cultural symbol for everyone. Furthermore, when herders are resettled in the urban town and then return back to practice religious activities in their original village, the transportation fees are expensive and cause difficulty. As the environment in this resettlement community is polluted and unclean, many herders explained they cannot find a 'sacred place' to do religious activities.

I spoke online with a local Tibetan researcher from Guoluo Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, who shared his experiences and observations to me. He was a herder a decade ago, but become a researcher when many outsiders came to his area to do

research on rangeland degradation. He explained:

I can 100% say that the eco-migration project cannot solve rangeland problems. As we know, the pastoral land needs horses, sheep and yaks, so without these livestock, the condition of rangeland could not be improved due to lack of animal fertilizers on its land. Many herders says that the condition of rangelands are getting worst as their pastoral land turned to deserts. Furthermore, in my opinion, many people would like to buy cars and motorbikes, so which heavily caused air pollutions in our hometown (Record of notes taken in interview with KP2, May 25, 2014).

He also showed his concern about Tibetan herders' culture by comparing the lifestyle in the city and lifestyle in the rangeland.

The city people and herders have had different lifestyles from a long time ago. Thus, for herders, they have winter, summer, spring and fall rangelands for grazing their livestock. This is because they want to rationally protect their land from low mobility. They use the black tents, made from yak fur and sheep wool, so they will not cause any environmental pollution on their rangeland. When I was age of 17 -18, the way of our lifestyle was changed so that we did not have our winter and summer land for move our livestock. Consequently, all herders tried to make fences on their land, permanently settling down in same location and many households were living together in a valley. Then, I found my surrounding lands became 'black beaches' and deserts. Now, there are ten households permanently settled down in a valley like a city. However, in the past, the ten households had four seasonal camps, and even our winter house was made of animals' dungs, so there were no negative impacts for the environment (Record of notes taken in interview with KP2, May 25, 2014)).

Additionally, he told me how the ideal of modernization is influencing the herders' life and their perspectives.

Several years ago, the way of herders' traditional lifestyle has completely changed through herders trying to use bricks to establish their houses, hire trucks to transport their things and upgrade the roads, so all of this brings severe environmental impacts in herding areas now. I myself, have used three to four year's time to test my own rangelands, I followed the way of past life and divided my pastoral lands as winter, summer, and fall rangelands to graze my livestock and let my rangeland take a rest for a while and I found that the quality of my rangeland was getting better a little bit under the such mobility strategies (Record of notes taken in interview with KP2, May 25, 2014)).

As these narratives demonstrate, the Eco-Resettlement Project has created some severe impacts for the future of Tibetan's traditional culture. Therefore, regarding the 'overstocking' discourse, I found that most herders I approached are reducing their livestock numbers year by year, thus negating the government's statement that overstocking is one of the causes of rangeland degradation. Table 3.2 highlights this dialectic by showing figures relating to stock and land size given by participants in one focus group held in Sanjiangyuan eco-settlement town (2014).

ลิขสิทธิ์มหาวิทยาลัยเชียงใหม่
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Table 3.2 Noted changes in stock in relation to land from former herders (2014)

Name	Age	Former Village/ Township	Mu of land	Former numbers of Sheep	Former number of Yak	Now (2014)		Current Status
						sheep	yak	
Caihua	51	Gser thang	2000	700	200	0	0	Resettled
Pula	70	Zhongtie	250	100	20	unstated	unstated	Semi-resettled
Zhuoma	77	Zhongtie	unstate d	100	unstated	200	unstated	Resettled
Lamu	78	Zhongtie	2000	700	140	100	60	Semi-resettled
Suonan	65	Gser thang	900	300	unstated	unstated	unstated	Semi-resettled
Suocai	57	Zhongtie	700	49	60	0	0	Resettled

The contrasting viewpoints outlined above challenge the notion that overgrazing is the main contributing factor to rangeland degradation in the two communities of Rna Thang and Gser Thang. The differing data in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 highlight this fact. Generally, Tibetan herders' livelihood is based on subsistence, but a few of them are likely to do some business through expanding their livestock size. In most cases, Tibetans are against this kind of behavior among themselves, because they feel it violates their religious beliefs. The term 'overgrazing' refers to a specific process, and it distinguishes between economic and ecological overgrazing (Benjaminson 1997:124, cited in Breivik, 2007). Economic overgrazing implies that the pasture in a given area are not able to satisfy the nutritional demands of the livestock, while ecological overgrazing means that the grazing in a given area has negative effects on the regeneration of the grass cover.

3.6 Herders' Perspectives on Rangeland Protection

A number of herders shared with me their viewpoints on the rangeland protection. One herder from a resettlement community stated, "I don't think the overstocking is caused environmental degradation because there are not many

livestock on my land” (record of notes taken in interview with XHQ1, September 2013). Another herder said, “I often collect garbage from my rangeland. I think our religion taught us how to protect the environment. The best way to protect the environment is to keep the ‘Household-Based Grassland Management system’ here, because individuals would be more careful with their land than with the Communal-Based Grassland Management system. I also don’t agree with killing pika because the pika do not destroy the land” (Record of notes taken in interview with XHQ6, September 2013).

A herder from Rna Thang notes that there were few pikas on his winter-rangeland. Even though he had some in the past, they were killed by the idege (in Tibetan language), which is a parasitic insect that sucks sheep, yak and pika’s blood. Generally, five or six can kill one pika if the pika’s weight was not over half a kilo. He believes that the idege came from the sky when wind blows in February and settles on the rangeland plants. As the sheep and yak grazed on the grasses, the idege would transfer to the horns of the animals and burrow into their skin to suck their blood. They are called ‘white colored idege’ because even though these insects’ original color is red and small, when they suck blood from the livestock, they become bigger and whiter. Only rain can eradicate them. Even though the rain will eradicate the idege, livestock suffer a lot before the rain comes between May and September. On another hand, the idege cannot go above 3,000-meter high altitude areas, so some herders kill pikas by using poison, but the eagles will kill the pikas in high altitude areas. (Record of notes taken in interview with XH2, March 2014).

The viewpoint that Tibetan culture educates people how to protect their own environment was highlighted by a female herder who stated, “Some outsiders do not know how to carefully dig caterpillar fungus in our land because I think they lack an understanding of the ecosystem. But for local Tibetans, they try to minimize the destruction while digging up caterpillar fungus from the ground” (record of notes taken in interview with XHQ3, September 2013).

Some informants agreed that overstocking can lead to rangeland degradation, but they further explained that they were not certain this was the cause of the degradation as some herders had stopped raising animals many years ago as seen in the following excerpts from my interviews:

I agree that overstocking has caused rangeland degradation because many of us used to own only 100 sheep, but now that has increased to 200 sheep per household. In terms of environmental protection, we are resettled, therefore that seems to mean we like to protect our environment, doesn't it? But I'm not sure whether it's the right way to protect it. I think the communal grassland management system is a good way to protect our rangeland because we do not need to worry about land boundary conflicts between families, tribes and communities. Furthermore, I don't think that killing pikas is a good way to prevent rangeland from degradation because this violates our religious belief. However, there are no pikas in my rangeland (Record of notes taken in interview with XHC1, October 2014)

After I resettlement here, my living condition has worsened but maybe the environment has improved. For example, I had cheese, butter and milk before resettlement, but now I have none of these things to eat. My perspective on environmental protection is it's better to reduce livestock, but not make whole communities of herders to resettle. There must be land reform with this current condition because the government has only distributed land based on family members two times since 1999. However, our land is not enough to distribute between our children. (Record of notes taken in interview with XHQ2, September 2013).

However, the majority of herders strongly disagree that overstocking is a main factor for causing this rangeland degradation, claiming that overstocking is not even a problem in their rangelands. These herders explained that one sheep will consume four hectares of grass in rangeland per year and one yak will consume 10 hectares of grass in rangeland for per year. Many of them stated that this keeps a good balance

between the rangeland and livestock which is very important to regenerate the grass under the seasonal movement. Thus, if one family has 500 hectares of land, then they only preferred to feed 125 sheep, because the grass can support that number of sheep. On the other hand, if a family with 120 sheep wants to expand their livestock number beyond that number, then they can rent from another family's land to graze their livestock in their rangeland. This other family's land may only be grazing 50 sheep with 500 hectares of rangeland and they don't wish to expand their livestock size. This is how herders create rangeland balance between the livestock and rangeland in Rna Thang and Gser Thang.

The herders I interviewed explained that their number of animals is getting smaller since they had been facing the labor shortage, abandoned traditional lifestyle, de-stocking project, inadequate grass in the rangeland, lack of rainfall and negative impacts from mining. When herders want to expand their livestock population, they have to rent from other herders' rangeland to make a balance between their livestock and the rangeland. Furthermore, while many herders explained that they could easily obtain other herders' rangeland through paying money, poorer herders are facing various challenges due to renting out their rangeland to herders around their communities. Herders considered to be 'poor' have less livestock and power and must rent their land for a low price to wealthier herders. In Gser Thang rangeland, this is an obvious phenomenon to see how different classes of herders are playing different powers among themselves.

Regarding the eco-resettlement project, many resettled herders are not aware of the purpose of the project. Their motivation for resettlement is largely divided into four main elements: children's education, labor shortage, religious belief and health issues. Specifically, in Xinghai County, all primary schools closed down in the villages in the past few years, resulting in a the resettlement of families to urban towns to ensure the continued education of their children. In many cases, parents remain behind in the herding areas, sending their children with aged relatives to care for them in the resettled areas. Labor shortages in the herding areas relates in part to education, in that many of the youth have resettled in the urban areas to continue their

secondary and tertiary education.

In relation to religious belief, some Tibetan lamas promote non-killing of animals even for family consumption in the Tibetan society, which makes herders to sell all their livestock. This is one of the direct reasons why some herders have resettled in urban areas. However, many Tibetan scholars argue that the majority of Tibetans still lead their life through animal husbandry. Therefore, if lamas continually promote the “non-killing of animals” doctrine, they only consider religious concerns while ignoring the economic reality of Tibetan life. This causes some Tibetan herders to abandon their traditional livelihood and risk the loss of their cultural identity in the future. Finally, for health issues, some herders are experiencing high blood pressure and other symptoms when staying in the high attitude areas, so they have to leave their rangeland to resettle in the urban towns.

However, this research found that the majority of herders who were resettled under the eco-resettlement project have actually returned to pursuing their traditional herding livelihood. Houses that were allocated to them under the government eco-compensation policy have been rented out or sold to relatives and friends. In this way, the government eco-resettlement project has created some business opportunities among the herders, which in reality has violated the state eco-resettlement policy. In short, the eco-resettlement project has been poorly implemented in Xinghai County, due to not providing clear objectives and transparent policies for herders who are part of this project.

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Figure 3.3 This is one of resettlement houses, but many herders are not completely resettled, only staying here sometimes (Source: from author, 2014)

The issue of land degradation has been affecting local Tibetan herders' traditional livelihood since Hardin's (1968) 'tragedy of commons' was applied on a global scale. In China, land degradation is reported to be due to overstocking; however, in Gser Thang and Rna Thang rangelands there is clear evidence that overstocking is non-existent with local herders reducing rather than increasing their livestock population.

Harris (2010) raises a concern regarding the importance given to an unpublished quantitative survey research conducted by local-level staff of the State Environmental Protection Agency across all of China in 1999. This research has heavily influenced current environmental policy in which "non-degraded rangeland" has been defined as "rangeland in which no livestock is grazing and therefore biomasses are high and fertile". Consequently, policies impacting negatively on herders' traditional livelihoods have been implemented (for example, the eco-resettlement project in Xinghai County) without any attention to the voices and viewpoints of these herders who have been managing rangeland conservation traditionally for thousands of years.

This research has found that the majority of local herders' cannot adapt to urban life. For example, many local herders stated that their livelihood is connected to their livestock, which is more sustainable than the sedentary life in urban areas. Also, they said that their livestock and rangeland is representative of their culture and identity as Tibetan, This directly links with Carr's findings (2013) which stated that livelihood is not merely defined in terms of material well-being, but is also concerned with a person's self-determination, status and position within households, communities and lineages. In the communities studied in this research, the majority of herders who are a part of Eco-resettlement project are still leading nomadic life in the rangeland. The main reason for this issue is that most of them are still trying to access rangeland resources and protecting their herding identity. Moreover, local herders' identity is closely linked to their livestock. For example, yaks are referred to as Tibetan people. In this case, my findings are also congruent with Ma Jian Zhong (2003), who argued that herding as a livelihood is not just concerned with economic gain; that livestock embodies cultural, spiritual and symbolic meanings in terms of Tibetan herders' identity. The initial aims of the eco-resettlement project in Xinghai County which were to improve the livelihoods of local herders, has in fact, significantly contributed to a loss of culture and tradition and caused large number of herders to be unable to maintain an adequate livelihood to sustain themselves and their families.

3.7 Summary

Qinghai Province is one of China's five major pastoral areas in the Three Rivers' source. In 2003, Qinghai government started to implement environmental conservation policies and projects in the area of Three Rivers' source due to severe rangeland degradation. For this issue, the majority of Chinese scholars claim that the rangeland degradation is led by 'human activities', 'overstocking' and 'climate change'. In particular, they claim that rangeland degradation is from a lack of scientific ways of management and an irrational way of herding in Xinghai County within Qinghai Province.

In 2005, the eco-resettlement project was introduced to herders in Xinghai County and its aims are improvement of herders' livelihood and protection of the environment in the Three Rivers' Source. However, in the Sanjiangyuan Eco-resettlement Community in Xinghai County, herders have various contentions regarding this project. Some herders explained that the project has been poorly implemented in terms of its policy levels. Hence, several years of herders' savings are spent on their resettlement houses and many resettled herders become jobless due to a lack of alternate skills and language barriers, since most of herders only speak Tibetan language and cannot communicate in Chinese. Therefore, many resettled herders who have sold their livestock have no other income except to rely on small shops and restaurants in their sparsely populated resettlement community.

Some young resettled herders are making their living in low wage labor construction work in the town, and also collecting caterpillar fungus from other herders' lands in the seasonal time. This research found that those herders who were willing to resettle had only few livestock and labor shortages in their rangelands, so they planned to rely on government eco-compensations. However, after five years, what they could receive from the government was very different from what they expected. Consequently, most of them feel that herding life is better than life in towns and cities. For those reasons, many have sold or rented out their resettlement houses among their relatives and friends and returned to relying on herding for their livelihoods. This is in direct violation of government law.

In a word, the term "conservation" is a very new concept for the majority of Tibetan herders whose religious beliefs have been tightly connected to environmental protection. However, modernist development and conservation projects introduced the new values to herders in exclusion of the religio-cultural aspects. The Eco-resettlement project as an environmental conservation strategy has created power relations among the local herders; marginalizing some from their culture and traditional economy and elevating others to positions of wealth and influence. Mainstream sponsored studies of rangeland degradation have produced unrealistic and unworkable remedies to the problem. These studies and remedies continue to be the

subject of serious contestation by the local herders who are most impacted by these so-called remedies and whose livelihoods have been severely negated.



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