



## Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines

55 | 2024

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### Lost on the path towards modernity. Urbanisation and livelihood prospects of the transitional generation in Tibetan rural areas in Qinghai, People's Republic of China

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subsistance de la génération de transition dans les zones rurales tibétaines du  
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#### Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/emscat/6340>

ISSN: 2101-0013

#### Publisher

Société des études mongoles et sibériennes

#### Electronic reference

Jarmila Ptáčková, "Lost on the path towards modernity. Urbanisation and livelihood prospects of the transitional generation in Tibetan rural areas in Qinghai, People's Republic of China", *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* [Online], 55 | 2024, Online since 19 August 2024, connection on 20 August 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/emscat/6340>

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# Lost on the path towards modernity. Urbanisation and livelihood prospects of the transitional generation in Tibetan rural areas in Qinghai, People's Republic of China

*Perdus sur le chemin de la modernité. Urbanisation et perspectives de subsistance de la génération de transition dans les zones rurales tibétaines du Qinghai, République populaire de Chine*

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## Introduction

- 1 The development strategy of the central government, the Great Opening of the West (Ch. *xibu da kaifa*), which was launched by Jiang Zemin in 1999, was intended to finally consolidate control over the land at China's western periphery and integrate its resources and its peoples into the economy and society of the PRC (see Ptáčková 2020). Although the term "xibu da kaifa" is no longer in frequent use, the development of western areas continues under a broad set of policies and projects. The expansion of infrastructure and the urbanisation of rural areas in western China are considered important steps in the development process and also serve as indicators to measure the level of development already reached in China's western provinces. After the first period of infrastructure expansion, i.e. building transportation and energy supply networks, the industrial and urban centres could also expand. This intensive urbanisation did not solely involve the extension of existing towns and cities in China's West; it also included the construction of substantial new urban centres in areas previously dominated by fields and pastureland. The extreme pace and scale of urbanisation exerted a far-reaching influence on local landscapes and populations in

the affected areas. As a result, more of the landscape was urbanised and an increasing number of people shifted the centre of their life towards an urban environment (see Grant 2022).

- 2 The engagement of the rural population in urbanisation has developed in two different ways. The first was a response to the spatial and socioeconomic changes caused by ecosystem deterioration (Qian *et al.* 2022) and development, which consumed large grassland and agricultural areas and thus reduced the production space available for established livelihoods, such as farming or animal husbandry. Simultaneously, newly available goods and services arriving in the remote west via the expanding market stimulated consumer behaviour and demand among rural populations (see also Iselin 2015). To make up for the reduction in the amount of production space and to satisfy new material demands, alternative sources of cash income proved to be necessary, as it became difficult to obtain sufficient income to meet increasing needs with the resources available to an average farming or pastoral household. This led to an increasing orientation of the rural population in western China towards urban places, where people sought new lives and livelihood spaces and opportunities. The urbanisation trend among rural families with children was also supported through stricter control of school attendance and discovery of the link between education and economic and social well-being by rural Tibetans (Bhalla & Luo 2013).
- 3 Sedentarisation of the pastoral population – or making the pastoral population urban – is put on an equal footing with development. With the aim of accelerating the transformation of the pastoral population into a sedentary one and the rural population into an urban one, the state introduced numerous projects meant to stimulate the local sedentarisation and urbanisation processes. It supplied pastoralists with houses in newly constructed settlements, carried out poverty alleviation programs and actively encouraged (or sometimes forced) rural households to become engaged in urban livelihoods. As well as fitting in with the idea of development through urbanisation, the relocation of pastoralists away from grassland areas enabled easier access to spaces designated for the implementation of certain policies and projects, such as environmental protection, further enlargement of infrastructure, exploitation of local resources, etc. These factors explain the state's objective of introducing urban ways of life into the countryside and bringing the pastoralists into centralised settlements near villages and towns (see Grant 2022). Indeed, different kinds of relocation of rural populations have become a popular remedy for dealing with almost any developmental challenge in recent years (Cencetti 2011, p. 41; Foggin 2005; Nyima & Yeh 2023). For example, new settlements were built for Tibetan pastoralists in order to improve their unsatisfactory economic situation and, at the same time, to solve the severe environmental problems (Zhao *et al.* 2013, p. 637) of fragile ecosystems, such as those in the grassland areas around major Chinese rivers. More people were removed to allow the expansion of infrastructure, for example, to build airports or dams and new urban and industrial sites (see Ptáčková 2016).
- 4 In both cases, the shift from a rural, subsistence-based livelihood to an urban way of life, together with the increasing material demands of the rural population, caused a growth in demand for cash incomes. But how can additional money be generated by a population lacking education and experience in the secondary or tertiary production sectors that predominate in urban settings?

- 5 This paper looks more closely at the situation of the rural Tibetan population and identifies the alternatives it has in terms of securing a cash income. It particularly focuses on the middle-aged generation, which is the target of the various sedentarisation and relocation projects. This generation grew up on the grassland and rarely possesses the education and skills required to establish a sustainable income base in an urban environment. It is therefore especially prone to vulnerability connected to the abrupt socioeconomic shift (see also Swift *et al.* 2005). In contrast to the younger generation, which grew up in boarding schools and is more attached to urban environments and the cash economy (Yeh 2021; see also Tsehua Gyal in this issue), the generation which entered middle age at the turn of the century grew up in a purely pastoral or semi-pastoral, i.e., combined pastoral and farming environment and did not attend school at all or only attended a few classes. These people are often overwhelmed by the abrupt transition from rural to urban settings and forced to combine several rural and urban income sources to meet household demands. This article identifies the major strategies they adopt and the mechanisms that influence their decision-making as they negotiate a shift of livelihood, considering dichotomies such as rural and urban, established and alternative, and sustainable and uncertain.
- 6 The results presented here are based on field research conducted during the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the rural areas of Qinghai Province. The data were collected through interviews in Tibetan or Chinese with members of various pastoral and semi-pastoral communities in Huangnan Prefecture (Tib. rMa lho), interviews with representatives of local governments engaged in development policy implementation, the study of relevant policy documents and observation of the implementation of the state-induced development measures. The majority of the presented examples are from the year 2013. Rather than summarising the general situation based on the collected information, I have decided to demonstrate the uncertainty of the middle-aged generation about their position between the “old” and the “modern” socioeconomic orders by providing several direct quotes. I believe that their own words, which often feature contradictory statements, best reflect their state of economic and social transition and their frequent inability to cope with the wish to maintain established and known livelihoods while pushing towards an unknown modernity and overcoming their so-called backwardness, as the pastoral population is urged to do by state channels. Although some figures, such as daily payments on construction sites, might have changed during the years that followed, the ambivalent situation and the feelings of uprootedness and uncertainty persist, as do the mechanisms of the state resettlement policies (see for example Nyima & Yeh 2023; Qian *et al.* 2022).

## Between rural and urban

Income... These two people, they don't have... They don't have any skills... Like for example carpentry, they don't have any such skill, so they go to work on construction sites and also collect caterpillar fungus... as hired workers...

This year they could not do any work, because they were busy working on the fields... (interview in a semi-pastoral area, Huangnan Prefecture, July 2013)

- 7 This was a neighbour's comment on the income of Dondrub's<sup>1</sup> household, which is located in a semi-pastoralist area of Jianzha County (Tib. gCan tsha) in Qinghai Province. It demonstrates a common dilemma in Tibetan pastoral and semi-pastoral areas. How to maintain the established livelihood of herding or farming and earn

sufficient cash to cover all upcoming expenses? How to choose between the known and sustainable but less profitable livelihood of animal husbandry and farming and the more cash-generative but insecure options available in urban areas? For the middle-aged generation, this decision is not easy. They have insufficient education to open businesses or work in the service sector, and at a more advanced age it is also difficult to bear physically exhausting work as a construction labourer. Farming and herding can supply the household with some basic foodstuffs, but are normally not enough to provide additional cash to pay for the school and medical expenses of a family, not to mention consumer products such as electronic devices, which are highly popular among the rural population in Tibetan areas (Shamo Thar 2017, p.168; Du 2017, pp.102-103). Furthermore, farming and especially herding are extremely time consuming and do not allow people to leave for several weeks or months at a time to pursue a temporary job somewhere else. This challenge is especially notable among households with few family members, where a limited labour force will often struggle to fulfil all necessary tasks. The situation has been aggravated by two more factors: the family planning policy that led to a reduction in the number of children being born in rural and minority households and stricter control of school attendance that requires all children to visit school for at least nine years (Ma 2014, p. 94). As a result of these factors, the responsibility for doing the housework and supplying the household usually falls on the middle-aged couple, who have to face social and economic changes in an increasingly urbanised and modernised environment with which they have no experience. The livelihood uncertainty of the rural population and their ambivalent attitudes are demonstrated by the statements of Tsering from Huangnan:

[What we get from the fields], we eat by ourselves. We do not sell it... For money we need to work on construction sites... If she [the wife] went to work on constructions, then she could not work on the field.

[...]

Our grassland here is not bad. If we could buy livestock, then one of us could go to the county town to open up a shop and sell milk and yoghurt...

We sold the livestock. We needed money to pay for medical expenses. If we had not sold it, we could not have paid for the doctor and the medicine. After we sold it, we could not buy it back anymore. Now it is very expensive.

[...]

Yes, [if I had money] I would buy livestock.

[...]

Most people do not want to keep livestock, because you have to take care of it every day and there is not much income from it. It is difficult to sell the milk too. Also, to sell milk, butter and the like does not bring much money. If you want to sell the milk, you need to buy a car. Then you also need to go to the town. Here is no place to sell it. All that is expensive, so people sold the livestock. People go to work instead, earn money and buy their food.

[...]

If you can work, then it is better to go to stay in town. But I have a problem with my lungs and do not have much energy anymore, so I cannot work in town. So, for me, herding is better. For others, for the young people, it is better to work in town.

[...]

[If we could] we would prefer to stay in town... because in town the transportation is better, for example here if we are ill... here it is difficult... I would move [to the settlement]. (interview in a semi-pastoral household, Huangnan Prefecture, July 2013)

- 8 The majority of my informants from pastoral and semi-pastoral areas of Huangnan Prefecture of Qinghai Province share this difficulty in choosing between rural and urban work environments. The rural population notices the new opportunities brought in by the development strategy initiated by the state, and they want to take advantage of the state-promoted programmes offering material and financial help and benefits to pastoral and semi-pastoral communities and of the opportunities available in towns. However, many have never had extensive contact with urban life and are unable to imagine what it is like and what it requires. The forced development and the hasty transformation from rural to urban in grassland areas of China's West does not account for a transition period. The common trend among young people from families with a pastoral background who attended school is to look for urban livelihoods and remain in towns. The resettlement policies targeting the middle-aged generation, however, expect the people to decide what to do without sufficient knowledge of the situation and leave no space for experimentation and information gathering. They therefore face considerable uncertainty about how to satisfy their basic existential needs.
- 9 It is inevitable that the Tibetan pastoralists would comply with the externally imposed changes and gradually adapt their way of life to a more urban environment. A gradual transformation over years or decades during which stable rural-urban linkages can be established is the key to a successful adaptation and transition (Gongbuzeren *et al.* 2021; see also Scudder & Colson 1982). However, this process seems too slow from the perspective of results-oriented policy planning. Urbanisation is a process that occurs over a few generations and not only a few years, as is required in the case of state-induced development in pastoral areas of China. With no time to gain experience within an urban environment and urban livelihoods, the pastoral population becomes reliant on the experience of others or the advice promoted by the state through its countless development projects. The pastoralists follow the suggestion of government representatives to move into settlements, because there they can get access to a new house and some subsidies, and they usually sell at least part of their herd in order to move. To make money, they follow the example of others who earn a living by harvesting caterpillar fungus, opening small shops or going to work on construction sites. The pursuit of such activities leaves little time to take care of livestock and fields. Those people who experience a period of success or are attracted or encouraged by the achievements of other community members or relatives often decide to sell their herds. However, there is no guarantee that they will experience the same success as their predecessors. Especially in case of small business establishments, people tend to start the same kind of business that has been successful before. Subsequently, instead of one well-functioning shop or tea house, there are suddenly several, mostly empty. The shops are often next to each other or in one another's immediate vicinity, which is bad for all of them, eventually forcing them to close. The employment assignments on construction sites are only temporary and the caterpillar is only a solution in certain areas. As a result, at the end of each season, most rural households find themselves facing the same challenge – how to make a living.

## Alternative livelihoods

### The caterpillar fungus

[If we could not go to collect caterpillars] then there would be no work to do. We would have to go to work with the shovel instead. There is no work to do otherwise, we would have to do construction work like building houses and such. (interview in a semi-pastoral household, Huangnan Prefecture, July 2013)

- 10 The awareness of the importance of caterpillar fungus among Tibetan pastoralists and semi-pastoralists as a steady way to earn money results in a relative carelessness among certain communities concerning their source of income. The widespread presence of this remarkable substance on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and high demand for it within China, which has caused an incredible price increase since the first decade of the new millennium (Winkler 2010, p. 96; Gruschke 2012, p. 148), has led many rural Tibetan households to rely on it. As a result, they are not too concerned with securing alternative sustainable livelihoods (see also Wang & Zhu 2013). In several areas, especially those rich in high quality caterpillars (like, for example, Guoluo or Yushu Prefectures) the local population has managed to make an extraordinary profit from this source (Sulek 2011, p. 12; Gruschke 2012, pp. 149-150). People from places without significant amounts of caterpillar fungus, such as Huangnan Prefecture, are merely left with the options of renting land from the owners of the usage right during the harvesting season in May and June or getting hired as harvest workers. Those households able to pay the high grassland rental fees (Sulek 2011, pp. 12-13) can still earn quite a lot, even if the informants tend to understate their actual profits during the interviews, as in the case of Lhamo Drolma:

We are two families buying [renting] land together and digging and selling the caterpillar by ourselves. [This year] we went to Golok, we collected caterpillar fungus, brought it back and dried it but we still did not sell it. At the moment the price is not good. I think we will earn only a bit more than we paid to rent the land. The rental fee for the land is high, and now the price for the caterpillar is bad, so the profit is not good.

Every year the nomads increase the rent for the land, but each year there is less and less caterpillar... Per person we can earn usually just about 5 000 [RMB]. (interview in a semi-pastoral household, Huangnan Prefecture, July 2013)

- 11 During the early years of the caterpillar fungus boom, the earnings from one season could reach several tens of thousands per person. This high income from only a short period of work led increasing numbers of people to participate. Following the rule “the more people involved, the more income for the household”, the pastoralists started to sell livestock in order to make more household members available for seasonal work, as in the case of Paldan’s family.

About four years ago people started to go to collect caterpillar fungus, so they started to sell animals, then couples asked other people to take care of their children and went to collect caterpillars and work on construction sites. If you don’t sell livestock, you cannot go...

Before, we went to collect caterpillar fungus, because you could earn 7 000 or 8 000 [RMB] in only two months. That time the price for sheep was very low, so we sold all the sheep so that both people could go to collect caterpillars. We only thought about temporary benefits, not about the future.

[...]

At this place in the current situation, the animals are the most lucrative things. For example, sheep you can sell for 1 700 or 1 800 [RMB]. Before the best price for a

sheep was 300 [RMB]. This was not much money so we had to work, so at that time I sold the sheep. My wife had to go farming...

Our grassland is good. There is not much livestock so the grassland is good. Now it is a good time to herd livestock, but the problem is that the livestock is very expensive...

If we wanted to buy sheep now, an adult female sheep costs 1 200 [RMB]. If we bought ten, how much would that be?... So it is impossible to buy them. (interview in a semi-pastoral area, Huangnan Prefecture, July 2013)

- 12 After it became difficult and expensive for them to rent land on their own, most people from outside got hired as labourers to collect the caterpillar and were paid either per piece or at a fixed price per season (Linke 2017). This reduced the achievable income and made the caterpillar less lucrative for many households from outside the areas where it was found. Some households thus aimed to re-establish their herds to continue animal husbandry. Due to the increase in the price of sheep, however, returning to animal husbandry was impossible for the majority of households who had sold their livestock in order to free up labour for the caterpillar harvest. The socioeconomic effect of the caterpillar thus differs significantly between the regions where it appears and the regions where it does not. In pastoral areas with direct access, it can even support the maintenance of animal husbandry (Gruschke 2012, p. 368), as it generates enough additional cash that there is no need to allocate family members to other jobs. The motivation for re-establishing animal husbandry in regions without caterpillar is rather to restore basic subsistence based on livestock. But even if sufficient funds could be provided to purchase a new herd, the more people try to return to the pastoral way of life and the more livestock they reintroduce to the grasslands, the less fodder remains for individual animals, which could potentially lead to the familiar problem of overgrazing.

### Unskilled labour on construction sites

- 13 As mentioned above, due to a lack of manpower, many households must decide whether to continue their established pastoral or semi-pastoral livelihoods or to give these up in order to make more labourers available to participate in alternative job opportunities. Due to the changing conditions for gathering caterpillar fungus, inhabitants from areas without significant sources of this substance, such as Huangnan Prefecture, have to try to earn enough money by engaging in other occupations. For the current middle-aged generation of pastoralists and semi-pastoralists, the most accessible opportunities are work as seasonal labourers on construction sites or the establishment of small private businesses.
- 14 To be employed on one of the ubiquitous construction sites, networking is important. People are usually recommended to a company by other members of their community it has employed in the past. However, an increasing number of studies mention – and my observations confirm – the growing competition between local Tibetans and labourers from provinces situated to the east. Although there should be enough demand for seasonal workers, the migrant workers from other provinces have more experience already, and the construction companies often prefer them to local Tibetan workers, who are new to the sector and can only carry out unskilled tasks (see also Zhu 2013). Additionally, my informants complained that the Tibetan workers are sometimes criticised for their lack of work discipline (see also Gruschke & Breuer 2017, p. 30),



although when it comes to discipline, Tibetan women have a far better reputation than men.

- 15 In order to provide employment for the inexperienced Tibetan population, the government sometimes sets quotas to the companies that push them to employ at least several Tibetans. Sometimes, the government offers special tasks requiring fewer professional skills, such as constructing walls surrounding the courtyards in the settlements, or paving streets within the settlements or communal roads in the remote village areas (see also Zha Luo 2014). Those people who manage to obtain seasonal construction jobs, which are usually available from spring to autumn, paid on a daily basis. According to my informants, in Huangnan Prefecture in 2013, the payment varied between 100 and 120 RMB per day of work, depending on whether the work was carried out in the prefectural town or in the countryside.
- 16 Engagement in this kind of occupation moves pastoral households to sell livestock and it raises the question of what the income source of a household currently relying on construction work will be after its members can no longer bear hard physical work due to increasing age. Also, the sustainability of this kind of employment is disputable. For the next few years, large investments from the state will certainly continue to flow to western China and enable the continuation of local development, but even this strategy of implementing huge projects to develop the west will end sooner or later and the amount of employment opportunities in construction might decrease.

### Opening small businesses

- 17 Starting small businesses is another alternative for some former pastoral or semi-pastoral households. The most common option is to offer transportation services, either transporting passengers or goods, or to open shops providing consumer staples or small restaurants. To buy a car or rent a shop and buy wholesale articles for sale requires a certain amount of capital, and not everyone has access to this. To encourage small enterprises, the government started to offer credit with quite advantageous conditions to people from rural areas.
- 18 Although some Tibetan pastoralists are successful entrepreneurs (Childs *et al.* 2011; Yeh 2021), most of my informants needed other sources of income, such as the above-mentioned caterpillar fungus or construction work, to supplement their income from a shop or service station. To allow for occupational redeployment of the rural population, vocational training courses are provided by the government and also by some NGOs. These courses, however, merely offer training in skills such as motorcycle repair or tailoring; training in the management skills required to advertise and provide new products or services is so far absent. The lack of management skills causes many participants in vocational training to return to an uncertain income strategy depending on construction work or caterpillar fungus. In addition, many of those running small businesses close their doors during the caterpillar harvesting season<sup>2</sup> so they can participate in the harvest, such as Tashi, who runs a motorcycle repair station:
- I visited a short-term training course... and learned for two months... Now, my house is located in the [settlement] place.  
There are about ten places, which repair motorbikes here... or eleven or twelve...?  
[...]  
I also go to collect caterpillar fungus. When I go, then I have to close the business...  
For all of us, it is much better to go for caterpillar, instead of working here.

[Without going for caterpillar fungus] we would not manage... The income from it [caterpillar fungus] is good. In one day you can earn 2 000 to 3 000 RMB. And here [through motorcycle repair], on the very best day I could earn just around 1 000 RMB... Now, on the best days we earn about 400 to 500 RMB. The average is about 200 to 300 RMB. (interview in a settlement in a pastoral area, Huangnan Prefecture, July 2013)

- 19 Another difficulty for these businesses is the high competition and low demand for their services and products. The majority of shops are established in newly created urban areas and settlements with insufficient infrastructure, where the stable population is quite limited and there are few people passing through to serve as potential customers. The variety of businesses is low, so in small settlements set up for the pastoralists by the government or township centres, such as those in Zeku County, where Tashi's store is located, we can find far more general stores or motorcycle repair stations than are required to satisfy local demand. In such cases, the average income from these businesses falls far below what is required for a secure livelihood (another reason the owners need to close down their shops seasonally to obtain additional income elsewhere). The absence of stable opening hours simultaneously reduces the competitiveness of such enterprises and increases the likelihood of their collapse.

## A sustainable development?

- 20 Sustainability has been declared by the Chinese government to represent a key part of the current effort to develop China's poor western areas (The Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China 2012). This approach is, however, not always visible in the implementation of development projects. The definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future generations" (Devuyst *et al.* 2001, p. 7)<sup>3</sup> is often not applicable to the Chinese situation. In the hasty development taking place in China, the focus is already on the next generation growing up in a modernising environment rather than on the current generation, who are used to outmoded ways of life. Subsequently, from the perspective of future generations of rural Tibetans, the state development process might prove to have accelerated the modernisation of marginal populations, as evidenced by the achievement of living standards matching those of China's majority. Although Emily Yeh (2021) describes cases among educated young Tibetans who decide to return to their home areas to develop socially responsible enterprises, the majority of children from pastoral areas chooses to seek a state employment and not return to live in the grasslands after their graduation. As a result of the introduction of compulsory and often residential school attendance, they have already become detached from the livelihoods and lifestyles of the pastoralists and farmers. Additionally, the new opportunities emerging in cities encourage young people to try their luck. However, regarding the middle-aged generation, it is hard to speak of "development that tends to meet their needs". These people find themselves facing various hurdles connected to development policies limiting the size of grazing areas, requiring livestock reduction, and encouraging sedentarisation that force them to make compromises and seek alternative livelihoods in alien environments, such as the numerous settlements in the region (Gruschke 2012, pp. 338, 387; Du 2017, pp. 107-108, Ptáčková 2015). These settlements, however, mostly lack the necessary urban infrastructure as well as a labour market.

- 21 The current generation of pastoralists and semi-pastoralists could thus be described as living between two worlds: the traditional rural life, which is vanishing, and the urban world, which they do not quite fit into. Their lives are characterised by a state of constant uncertainty, resulting from the uprooting of the rural population from their familiar environment, ever-changing policies and the need to accept seasonal and unskilled employment, which are unsustainable due to their unpredictability and uncertain income. This situation significantly increases the vulnerability of the affected people (see Zha Luo 2014; Wang & Zhu 2013; Yeh 2009; Meng 2012) and instead of registering an improvement, people struggle to support themselves.
- 22 Having followed the urbanisation and modernisation processes in rural areas of Qinghai Province for several years, it seems to me that it is not only the current middle-aged generation of pastoralists and semi-pastoralists, who have to face the transformation of their living environment, who are caught between their affection for a tried and tested way of life and the wish and need to participate in a new one. The state also keeps changing its attitude towards established livelihoods, such as animal husbandry, promoting them in one year and condemning them the next, before supporting them again during the following period. As its policies are often planned and implemented with no consideration for the capacity of the land and people on site, they can rarely provide a sustainable solution (see, for example, Qu *et al.* 2023). For the pastoralists, investing in the development of pastoralism or alternative sustainable livelihoods in a certain place is insecure, as the state can force them to move and adopt a new way of life at almost any time. This uncertainty has changed the mindset of the affected populations, in this case the Tibetan pastoralists and semi-pastoralists. People often do not seek long-term solutions, but instead develop strategies to profit from the latest state subsidy programmes.
- 23 Imposing development on people is much harder than modernising or urbanising a landscape. It is a general problem of China's development policy, which too often considers people as objects, disregarding the many variables that characterise human life. It should be self-evident that a rural population will not become urbanised and modern simply as a result of the provision of a house in town. Instead, planning for their transition to a modern and urban environment should allow sufficient time for them to adapt to new livelihoods and social environments, or at least incorporate close assistance from the state with both economic and social adaptation. Although pastoral societies have demonstrated considerable adaptability over the centuries, even to extreme circumstances (see Kardulias 2015), the shifts caused by the development policy of the PRC are much more severe, especially due to their abrupt implementation, which has cut rural populations' connection to anything familiar that could be used as a foundation for further independent development of pastoral society. The accent on urban livelihoods in Tibetan areas of contemporary China thus strengthens the social and economic forms of exclusion often characteristic for ethnic minorities (Bhalla & Luo 2013).
- 24 From a more optimistic perspective, the hardships of the current middle-aged generation might be seen as a necessary step to facilitate the better integration of future generations. The anticipated benefits associated with future generations, however, remain far from clear, and it is possible that the outcomes of this rapid transformation will continue to be uncertain rather than being able to provide strong roots for the further development of the targeted groups.

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## NOTES

1. All names used in this article are pseudonyms.
  2. Due to the demand for labourers in the caterpillar harvest, many parents also take their children out of school during the caterpillar season. To enable the students (and teachers) to participate in the harvest, many schools in the pastoral areas have introduced a kind of caterpillar fungus holiday (see also Gruschke 2012, pp. 210, 214, 224).
  3. Gruschke, in the context of current development research in pastoral areas, refers to a more specific definition by Scholz, who defines development as a regionally specific and long-term satisfaction of basic human needs based on sustainable use of locally available natural and social resources and with self-reliant participation of the population (Scholz 2004, p. 18; Gruschke 2012, p. 22). Neither definition, however, applies to China's current development policy.
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## ABSTRACTS

The development of western areas of the People's Republic of China (PRC) with accentuated urbanisation has had a significant impact on the established livelihood of the Tibetan pastoralists and semi-pastoralists. The middle-aged generation in particular faces enormous challenges to find its place in the changing environment and to adapt and develop new livelihoods that can provide sufficient income to cover increasing household expenses. They find themselves in transition between a vanishing past and an advancing future – a state that can cause severe economic and social insecurity.

Le développement des régions occidentales de la République populaire de Chine (RPC) ainsi que l'urbanisation accrue de cette dernière ont influencé de manière significative les moyens de subsistance des populations pastorales nomades et semi-nomades tibétaines. La génération d'âge moyen en particulier est confrontée à d'énormes défis pour trouver sa place dans cet environnement changeant et pour s'adapter et développer de nouveaux moyens de subsistance susceptibles de fournir un revenu suffisant pour couvrir les dépenses croissantes des ménages. Cette génération se trouve en transition entre un passé qui disparaît et un avenir qui s'éloigne – un état qui peut entraîner une grave insécurité économique et sociale.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** urbanisation, Tibetan, pastoralism, Qinghai, China, development policy, livelihood, insecurity, modernisation

**Mots-clés:** urbanisation, tibétain, pastoralisme, Qinghai, politique de développement, Chine, insécurité, moyens de subsistance, modernisation

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