Preserving the Grasslands and the Tibetan Pastoral Nomad Way of Life: The view from Phala, the Tibet Autonomous Region

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Phala’s altitude: 16,000-17,500’
1. In the traditional era, Tibetan nomads have utilized the high altitude Qinghai-Xizang plateau for millennia without destroying the grassland resource base.

2. The Phala Pastoral nomadic (drokpa) identity:
   - Subsistence by raising livestock without farming
     - Yak
     - Sheep
     - Goats
     - Horses

3. Nomads seek to maximize herd size so how was the resources base not totally degraded?
   - Non-Equilibrium System.
The Traditional System of Pasture Management and Rotation: The Phala nomads and The Panchen Lama

The Panchen Lama’s Lagyab Lhojhang Estate
The grasslands were divided into discrete pastures and allocated to households for 3 years—households the basic unit of production.

Each pasture was rated by a carrying capacity unit called “marke”:
- 13 yak = one marke
- 1 yak = 6 sheep
- 1 yak = 7 goats
Tax Obligations to the Lord, the Panchen Lama

- Butter
- Skins
- Salt
- Baking Soda
- Woven cloth
- Felt saddle pads
- Leather ropes
- Forced sale of wool, etc.
3 Types of Pasture Adjustments

1) shifting pasture areas every three years among households within a single nomad sub-group

2) transferring entire pasture areas from the control of one of the 10 sub-groups in Lagyab lhojang to another.

3) moving entire households and their herds from one sub-group to another where herd size had decreased significantly.
The Socialist Period

Democratic Reforms
Democratic reforms early period, 1959-1969    Pasture Sharing Groups

- Phala
  - Shagar pasture unit
    - Household 1
    - Household 2
    - Household 3
    - Household 4
  - Berag pasture unit
    - Household 5
  - Chamar pasture unit
    - Household 6
Commune Period, 1969-1981

- All livestock and tack given to the commune
- All work tasks managed by the commune leaders
- Individual nomads assigned tasks as individuals (not households)
- Subsistence through complicated system of earned “Work Points”
The Contemporary Era

- 1981 = Decollectivization
- the household again the basic unit of production

- 1988-89 = Söjö System

- 1997 = Privatization 1

- 2005 = Privatization 2
Decollectivization

- Commune dissolved, household restored as the basic unit of production

- Each individual received:
  - 37 animals
    - 5 yaks
    - 25 sheep
    - 7 goats
  + their private animals
Revival of Pasture Sharing Groups

Basically the same as during Democratic Reforms Period
1997- Privatization # 1
Privatizing “shares” of pastureland and Söjö

If Phala = 100 marke of pastureland and 4,000 sheep, each marke = 40 sheep carrying capacity

- Pasture were divided up on the basis of animals AND people
  - 60% of the pastures (60 marke) were divided on the # of people
    - population = 60 nomads, so each received a 1 marke share of pasture (60/60)
  - 40% of the pastures (40 marke) were divided on the # of livestock
    - Animals = 4,000 sheep, so each sheep received a 0.01 marke share of pasture (40/4000)
The 1997 System: Two hypothetical households

1. A hypothetical household with 5 people and 400 sheep
   - 5 people @ 1 marke/person = 5 marke
   - 400 sheep @ .10 marke/sheep = 4 marke
   - Total = 9 marke
   - Each marke’s carrying capacity = 40, so their share of 9 marke could graze 360 sheep. But the hh has 400 sheep.

2. A hypothetical household with 4 people and 0 animals
   - 4 people @ 1 marke/person = 4 marke
   - Each marke’s carrying capacity = 40 sheep, so their share of 4 marke could graze 160 sheep. The household, however, has no sheep.

Therefore: the HH with excess animals has to either kill/sell them or pay a pasture fee to a HH with less animals.
The 2005-Pasture Privatization Process

- Switch from privatization by marke to privatization by hectares
- BUT, no delimitation of each households share of pastures “on the ground”
- Groups of nomads still share pasture areas.
- A Pasture Fee payment system now formalized
The Revolving Sheep Bank Program

- Grasslands Protected and Traditional Way of Life in tact, but there were still many poor nomads. How to help them?

- Poverty Alleviation
  - 1. Government: Pasture Fees from richer HHS
  - 2. The Anthropologists: Revolving Sheep Bank
The Two Alternative Models

1. The Phala model where privatization refers to a *share of the pasture* and where pastures are jointly used by Pasture Sharing Groups.

2. The dominant model where privatization refers to *specific pastures* allocated to households and where households are fencing their private pastures.
Conclusions
Three periods, three different systems

1. The Manorial Estate Period
   Private pasture rights with triennial reallocation
   The basic unit of production = the household

2. The Socialist Period
   No private pasture rights
   The basic unit of production = the commune

3. The Contemporary Period
   Private pasture rights with no reallocation
   The basic unit of production = the household

BUT there are 2 models of privatization:
The Future

?  ?

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