

Externally-Resident Daughters, Social Capital, and Support for the Elderly in Rural Tibet

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Abstract This paper focuses on assistance that externally-resident daughters provide for their aging parents in rural Tibet, China, to challenge the notion that rapid modernization invariably threatens family-based care systems for the elderly. The authors discuss social and economic changes associated with modernization that have created new opportunities for parents to send daughters out of their natal households in ways that can benefit them in old age. By investing in a daughter's education so she can secure salaried employment, or by helping a daughter establish a small business so she can earn an independent livelihood, the authors demonstrate how some externally-resident daughters represent a novel form of social capital that parents can draw on for social support. Daughters with income and freedom from extended family obligations are now providing elderly parents with (1) leverage against co-resident children who do not treat them well, (2) temporary places of refuge from ill-treatment at home, (3) caretaking services and financial support when they require hospitalization, and (4) financial resources independent of their household which they can use to pursue age-appropriate activities like pilgrimage. The authors conclude that this new form of social capital vested in externallyresident daughters is having a positive impact on the lives of the elderly in rural Tibet.

Keywords Aging · Modernization · Gender · Social capital · Social networks · Social support · Tibet

Introduction

Similar to other societies that lack formal social security systems, the elderly in rural Tibet¹ depend on adult children to care for them in old age. Any changes in the ties that bind adult

¹In this paper Tibet refers exclusively to China's Tibet Autonomous Region.

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children to their parents can therefore affect the health and welfare of the elderly. Tibet is currently undergoing major social and economic transformations which are affecting domestic relationships and processes. In the last decade China has dedicated enormous resources toward improving the standard of living in Tibet, in part as a political strategy to win the allegiance of Tibetans (Goldstein *et al.* 2010). Policies aimed at achieving modernization are increasing opportunities for secular education, non-farm employment, and rural to urban migration, and in the process creating a more mobile population of youths that prioritizes cash incomes over farm production (Goldstein *et al.* 2008). Today, family dynamics are in flux as people adapt to these state-initiated social and economic changes.

According to the seminal theory on aging and modernization (Cowgill & Holmes 1972; Cowgill 1974), the very forces of modernization that are now transforming Tibet can negatively impact the elderly by producing inter-generational competition, residential segregation, social distance, and an inversion of status as the younger generation acquires more skills and earning potential than its parents.² In an East Asian context rapid population aging, modernization, and state policies can erode the cultural practice of filial piety that binds adult children as caretakers to their aging parents (Ikels 2004). Although studies in Japan (Traphagan & Knight 2003) and China (Whyte 2003; Ikels 2004) demonstrate novel ways that parents are adapting to life with fewer co-resident children, in general researchers interpret the declining proportion of parents who live with an adult child as evidence that filial piety is on the wane, and that this process has a negative impact on the well-being of the elderly (e.g., Benjamin *et al.* 2000; Ng *et al.* 2002; Zhan & Montgomery 2003). The mobility of children, engendered by modernization, is thereby seen as a threat to the ability of families to provide care for aging members.

In this paper we provide a more nuanced view on the mobility of adult children by using data collected in three villages of Tibet's Shigatse Prefecture to demonstrate ways that externally-resident daughters can positively impact the lives of their aging parents. In traditional Tibetan societies daughters who moved out, typically through arranged marriages, were considered a net loss to the household, as epitomized by the proverb, "The hen eats at home and lays its eggs outside" (Pemba 1996:81). Nowadays, social and economic changes associated with modernization have created new opportunities for parents to send daughters out in ways that can benefit them in old age.

Social Capital and Social Networks

Scholars have developed several strategies for analyzing the quality of relationships between the elderly and their adult children.³ In this paper we use the concept of social

² Cowgill and Holmes theoretical framework, arguing that the status and material well-being of the elderly declines with the advent of modernization, engendered a lively debate due to conflicting research findings. Since the 1970s, a body of research has been produced by gerontologists, historians, anthropologists and other social scientists that both supports and contradicts this theory. For example, see Aboderin (2004), Albert and Cattell (1994), Bengtson *et al.* (1995), Foner (1993), Goldstein and Beall (1981), Rhoads (1984), Sokolovsky (1997), and Van Der Geest *et al.* (2004).

³ For example, Roberts and Bengtson developed an influential model of intergenerational solidarity to predict the level of social support that parents receive from their children (Roberts and Bengtson 1990; Bengtson and Roberts 1991). Intergenerational solidarity includes measures of sentiments, frequency of interactions, agreement about values, exchange of services, normative expectations, and opportunity structures based on family composition and geographic proximity of family members. Although we can use our data to shed light on some of these issues, we did not conduct a formal survey designed to measure each dimension of intergenerational solidarity, which is why we do not use the concept here.

capital to explore the evolving nature of relationships between parents and externally-resident daughters. Whereas aging and modernization theory provides insights into the mechanisms that can jeopardize family-based care systems for the elderly, the concept of social capital provides a platform for understanding benefits that emerge through interpersonal relationships or involvement with social networks in a rapidly changing social and economic context.

Coleman defines social capital by its function. He posits that social capital “inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors”, and argues that “social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible”. Social capital functions as a resource that actors can draw upon to achieve certain goals (Coleman 1988). Similarly, Bourdieu defines social capital as, “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition,” and reasons that, “the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected” (Bourdieu 2001:102–103). Sociologist Ronald Burt also views the functions of social capital as rooted in interpersonal relationships, and defines it as, “friends, colleagues, and more general contacts through whom you receive opportunities to use [other forms of] capital” (Burt 1992, cited in Woolcock 1998). Similarly, Portes writes, “social capital refers to the capacity of individuals to command scarce resources by virtue of their membership in networks or broader social structures” (1995:12). In an influential work on social change, Robert Putnam refers to social capital as “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (2000:19).

More recent research in social gerontology has focused on filial norms as a dimension of social capital. Following Coleman and Bourdieu, Silverstein *et al.* (2006) argue that the resources parents invest in their children from birth to adulthood generate a reserve of social capital. Drawing insight from life span development theorists (Elder 1992; Riley & Riley 1993), Silverstein hypothesizes that the social capital imbued in the relationship with adult children may lie dormant for many years, but can be activated during a time of need such as a health crisis. The key is to determine when certain members of a latent kinship matrix (the sum of family members who vary from potential to actual providers of support) become active in providing support for the elderly, and why. Silverstein characterizes relationships between the elderly and their adult children in the United States as containing long periods of relative autonomy punctuated by intense periods of interaction and support.

To summarize, social capital is rooted in interpersonal relations that involve reciprocity over the life course. For the elderly, a critical component of the social support network within which social capital resides is their own children. Social capital can remain latent, but more importantly can be mobilized to facilitate an individual’s access to resources in order to accomplish specific aims. In line with the above discussion, we view some externally-resident daughters of Tibet’s rural households—namely, beneficiaries of parental investments that facilitated financial independence and urban residence—as a novel form of social capital from which the elderly can solicit social support. Social support here refers to various types of assistance a person can receive from others, and is generally divided into two categories: emotional support and instrumental support. The latter category is rather broad, so we divide instrumental support into caretaking assistance and financial assistance.

A fundamental point of this paper is that daughters who move out of their households through education or employment represent an important form of social capital because

they possess a unique combination of income, urban residence, and greater freedom to assist aging parents compared to daughters who were sent as brides to other rural households. This combination enhances their ability to provide elderly parents with (1) leverage against co-resident children who do not treat them well, (2) temporary places of refuge from ill-treatment at home, (3) caretaking services and financial support when they require hospitalization, and (4) financial resources independent of their household which they can use whenever they want, for example, to purchase sweets for themselves or their grandchildren or to pursue age-appropriate activities like pilgrimage which typically involves participation in non-kin social networks consisting of friends and neighbors. All of these provisions contribute positively to the well being of the elderly by giving them more control over their situation, and more access to the benefits associated with non-kin social networks.

Data and Methods

Between 2006 and 2009, we conducted four stints of fieldwork for a total of approximately 9 months in three villages in Tibet's Shigatse Prefecture to investigate the impact of modernization on rural families and the elderly. The three villages, while not selected to represent all of Tibet, lie within a major agricultural corridor running between Tibet's two largest cities, Lhasa and Shigatse, which contains about 30% of Tibet's population. They were selected to meet a research design comparing a continuum of villages from relatively wealthy to relatively poor (more to less affected by modernization). Sogang, the least affected by development, is located in Panam County in the upper (mountainous) part of a tributary river valley, while Norgyong, the intermediate site, is situated below Sogang on the main river. Norgyong is located immediately beside the county seat in Panam. Betsag, the third site, is located only 10 km from Shigatse City and was included in the current study to represent a wealthy farming village that is more heavily affected by mechanized agriculture and government development programs. Despite these economic differences, the three villages are geographically close, within a two-hour drive of each other, and are part of the same Tibetan sub-ethnic cultural and linguistic zone.

The data presented in this paper are based on in-depth interviews with the elderly and their caretakers, as well as survey data collected between 2006 and 2009. During the initial research phase we interviewed at least one elderly person (defined as aged 60 and above, $n=155$) from every household containing an elderly resident. These interviews used both survey-type questions that could be quantified (e.g., self-assessment of health), and open-ended questions to elicit opinions, attitudes, and experiences. Subsequently, we interviewed primary caretakers of the elderly, defined as adult, co-resident sons, daughters, son-in-laws, or daughter-in-laws who spend most of their time in the village ($n=73$), as well as with people who regularly leave the village to engage in seasonal wage-labor ($n=41$). We refined the depth of our study by selecting 15 focus households from each village that span the economic spectrum from rich to poor. Some household were selected because they have harmonious relationships between the generations; others because they have inter-generational conflicts. The elderly in the focus households were interviewed repeatedly to gain in-depth perspectives on the impacts of modernization on aging and inter-generational relations.

In addition we conducted a demographic and socioeconomic survey of all households in 2006, and an elderly survey in 2009. One purpose of the elderly survey was to track externally-resident children: their whereabouts and the contributions they make to their parents and natal households. In this paper we use descriptive statistics to illustrate inter-

village differences, and to provide contexts for understanding the importance of family management strategies that the elderly revealed to us in the interviews.

Moving Children Out of the Household

From the 1960s until the early 1980s rural Tibet was organized into collectives wherein work points and food allotments were awarded to individuals based on their labor contributions to the commune. When that system was dismantled during the early 1980s, the commune's land was divided equally among all members so that the household resumed its role as the primary unit of landholding and farm production. This occurred in the context of an economic paradigm shift in China from an emphasis on common property and wealth equality during the Cultural Revolution, to an emphasis on individual initiative in Deng Xiaoping's market economy with socialist characteristics that was epitomized by his famous proclamation, "Poverty is not socialism. To be rich is glorious."

People in our fieldwork area responded by renewing the traditional corporate family system that had ended when the commune replaced it as the basic unit of production. When families again got their own land to farm and manage, they revived one of most salient traditional strategies for advancing families' economic interests—the practice of fraternal polyandry, a type of marriage in which two or more brothers share a wife. This type of marriage had two main advantages over each brother taking his own wife. First, it created a kind of stem family that was the functional equivalent of primogeniture in the sense that, with only one wife per generation, only one set of offspring (heirs) was produced. This greatly facilitated the family land being passed along intact to the next generation. Second, fraternal polyandry *simultaneously* concentrated male labor within the family, enabling it to pursue a broad range of economic activities. For example, one brother could herd the sheep in a mountain pasture, a second could manage the farm, and a third could concentrate on trading (Goldstein 1971, 1976, 1987). Consequently, after decollectivization, there was a major revival of fraternal polyandrous marriages throughout our study area (Jiao 2001; Goldstein *et al.* 2002, 2006; Fjeld 2006).⁴ Multi-generational stem families created through monogamy (if the family had only one son) or fraternal polyandry quickly became the norm once again.

Filial piety is a deeply held value in Tibetan society: children are expected to express gratitude to their parents and provide care for them in old age. This is reflected in our study area where almost all the elderly live in a family with their children. In our three fieldwork villages 81.7% of households with an elderly resident have at least one son at home, and usually a *nama* (daughter-in-law, *mna' ma*) as well. In these household, an average of 1.8 sons live with their elderly parents. In the 18.3% of households with an elderly resident that have no co-resident son, most contain an adult daughter or adoptive daughter and her matrilocally resident husband. The only elderly who do not co-reside with an adult child live in Sogang: a lifelong spinster, a widow with no surviving children, and a couple who split from their son after intolerable arguments and now live separately.

The Tibetan marriage system is patrilocal which means that a bride moves to her husband's home at marriage. A daughter who marries out is in no position to provide

⁴ Not all households practice polyandry. Those that do not include (1) households with only one son, (2) households lacking male heirs so that a daughter and her husband co-reside with her parents; (3) households where parents send sons out in marriage and keep a daughter home instead; and (4) households consisting of infertile couples or spinsters who live alone or with an adopted child.

support for her own parents because her primary obligations transfer to the marital family. In fact, a married woman who diverts labor, cash, food, or other resources to her natal household breaches a protocol that can compromise her status with in-laws. One household in our research area split apart after the daughter-in-law was accused of secretly sending butter and other items to her parents. The ensuing arguments prompted the family to build a wall through the center of their house; the elderly parents now live on one side of the wall, while their son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren live on the other side.

The task of caring for elderly parents ideally falls to those who reside within the household, normally the son(s) and daughter-in-law. However, despite the cultural norms of patrilocal marriage and coresidence with sons, we found a widespread sentiment among the elderly that their own daughters are the people best suited to be primary caretakers in old age. For example, one man said,

Daughters are better because they give good care. They do not feel it is dirty when giving nursing care. Sons don't know how to give nursing care. But in order to improve the household's economy, keeping sons in the house is better. If you keep a daughter at home there is no way to improve the household.

The conflict is elegantly expressed in a proverb another man recited when discussing the topic of elderly care. He said,

On the morning of birth, [one prefers to have] a son. (*skyes pa'i snga dro bu*)
On the morning of death, [one prefers to have] a daughter. (*shi pa'i snga dro bu mo*)

He explained the proverb in the following terms:

It means we are happy when a son is born, but when we die we are happy to have a daughter present. Parents try to keep sons in the home, but the sons have to work outside so they cannot provide nursing care. When parents become invalids or are dying, then daughters are important because they can care for the elderly. Parents are happier if a daughter is nearby during their dying days.

Typically, old folks phrase their preference in terms of receiving “food from the hands of my own daughter.” For example, one woman said,

Our family decided to keep two sons at home and get a nama for them. That is the custom of the area. We sent our daughters out. Now I regret that decision. If I chose to keep a daughter and get her a *magpa* [an in-marrying groom], then I would get food from the hands of my own daughter and life would be easier right now.

Another woman stated,

Our custom is to send girls out while sons remain home and take a nama. When I think about the elderly, having a daughter at home is better. Sons go for income, daughters stay home. If you keep a daughter, she is home every day and can serve you food, support you when you go to the toilet. There is no shame in asking help from a daughter. If the woman in charge of the household is a nama, she is an outsider. One is fearful of asking favors from her.

Despite such attitudes, sending daughters out as brides to other families is still the norm. Because of the widespread practice of fraternal polyandry, many daughters cannot find husbands and do not marry at all. In fact, a salient feature of fraternal polyandry is that it

produces an excess of unmarried females.⁵ In our three fieldwork villages 27.0% of women aged 25–39 were unmarried in 2006. What to do with them becomes a major issue in polyandrous societies.

Given the preference for having one's own daughter as the primary caregiver in old age, an obvious answer for older parents would be to keep one or more unmarried daughters in their natal families. However, many feel strongly that this should not happen. In the Tibetan corporate family system, as mentioned earlier, the overriding goal is to maintain the family and its land intact across generations by having brothers jointly take one wife. Tibetans consider allowing an unmarried daughter to remain in the household after her brother(s)' bride has arrived almost as detrimental as allowing two brother to each have their own wife—the two women are likely to have conflicts over authority and control. Moving unmarried daughters out of the family, therefore, is considered an important strategy for safe-guarding the integrity of the family across generations, particularly after the new bride gives birth to an heir since at that point her position in the family is greatly enhanced vis-à-vis the unmarried daughter.

What happens with an “excess” female who is unable to marry into another rural household? Traditionally, parents were able to send her to an infertile couple's household as an adoptive daughter, to ordain her as a nun so she could reside in a convent, or most commonly, help her build a small house in the village where she would live separately. Spinsters (*mo hrang*) subsisted as best they could by working for others, for example by weaving, spinning and carding wool, and performing agricultural chores such as weeding. Nowadays, the economic situation is slightly better for these “excess” women, because they have rights to a share of land when they leave their natal household.

Nuns and spinsters (who often over time become single mothers) were still beneficial to their parents. By living in adjacent houses spinsters could not only contribute labor to their natal households, but often provided caretaking services as well as places of refuge for parents when relationships within the main household broke down. As for nuns, the combined forces of a gender ideology that devalues female celibacy and the underfunding of convents (Havnevik 1989; Klein 1995) meant that they were often expected to help care for aging parents and contribute to the welfare of their natal households (Gutschow 2004). A Tibetan proverb encapsulates the value of a nun to her parents: “If you want to be a servant, make your son a monk. If you want a servant, make your daughter a nun” (Lopez 1998:211). In at least one Tibetan society parents intentionally create nun-daughters to be their primary caretakers in old age so long as they remain in their natal village (Childs 2001).

Some traditional means for moving a daughter outside of the household remain options for parents in contemporary rural Tibet. Many women still leave through adoption and arranged marriage, or are split into independent residences once their brothers bring home a bride. The monastic option, on the other hand, is limited. During the 1980s, Sogang's residents petitioned the government to reestablishment a local nunnery that had been destroyed during China's Cultural Revolution. The government granted permission but—similar to Tibetan areas throughout China—imposed a strict limit on the number of resident nuns. The eight designated slots for Sogang's nunnery were filled immediately. Since then no other woman has been able to gain admission.

⁵ Goldstein (1976) was the first to identify the link between polyandry, female nonmarriage, and low aggregate fertility in Tibetan populations. The proportion of never-married females aged 25–29 ranges from 21.4% to 57.3% in several Tibetan societies that were studied demographically before experiencing fertility declines (see Childs 2008:235).

Meanwhile, new options for sending a daughter outside the natal household have emerged. These include establishing a small business in a city or town, finding her a low-level salaried job, or investing in her education in the hope that she attains a higher-level salaried position. These non-traditional options move a daughter out of the household in a way that allows her to achieve financial independence. In addition, women who “go for income”, that is, who are sent elsewhere as seasonal wage-labor migrants, often marry out of love (*kha thug*) and do not return.

In the following analysis we use data from our 2009 survey of the elderly⁶ to track externally-resident daughters. Table 1 shows that close to half of the women born to households in Betsag (47.2%) and Norgyong (50.7) currently reside in a city or town, indicating the emergence of an urban-oriented strategy for moving daughters out of the household. In contrast, a very small percentage of Sogang’s daughters have moved to a city (16.9%), and in fact 40%—about double the percentages for Betsag and Norgyong—still live in their natal village. Sogang also has the highest percentage of daughters who are unmarried residents of their natal households (26.2%). This is indirect evidence that parents in Sogang have fewer options for moving unmarried daughters out of the household. Furthermore, Betsag has the highest percentage of women who moved to other villages through employment (11.2%). Most of them are teachers who were appointed to rural schools after completing their education. Finally, if we consider only those women who migrated away from their natal village, a high percentage of daughters from both Betsag (60.3%) and Norgyong (61.0%) moved to a city or town for reasons associated with employment. In contrast, the majority of Sogang’s daughters (71.8%) left through the traditional means of arranged marriage; most were sent to other rural villages.

Data obtained through interviews and participant observation help explain why so many daughters from Betsag and Norgyong are able to establish independent lives outside of the village. In Norgyong people are taking advantage of new economic opportunities in Panam, a rapidly growing town situated a short walking distance from the village. Many parents invest capital raised by the household to establish a small business for a daughter, such as a restaurant that sells *chang* (a fermented barley beverage) or a shop that sells clothing, snack foods, cigarettes, and other small items. This strategy not only gives a woman the chance to achieve economic independence, but also to marry a partner of her choice and establish a neolocal household. It also means that her share of the land remains with the family in the village. Although town-dwelling women typically possess limited financial means, they are not beholden to other households and therefore remain in a position to assist their elderly parents. The importance of this strategy is illustrated by the fact that 32% of all females in Norgyong who engage in non-farm employment run small businesses, a much higher percentage than in Sogang (0%) and Betsag (17%).

The first shop in Panam run by a Norgyong resident was opened in 1990 by an enterprising salesman who made his initial profits by taking a donkey cart laden with clothing from village to village. In the mid-1990s several women from Norgyong opened small restaurants, but most of these failed within the first few years. However, by 2006 our household survey reveals that 23 women from Norgyong were running small businesses in Panam. They ranged in age from 22 to 49, with a mean of 30.1. Since 2006, several others

⁶ The data includes only households with at least one elderly person present in 2009. Therefore, the data does not reflect current residences of all women from each village. Through the 2009 survey we could determine the current place of external residence of 89 women from Betsag, 77 from Norgyong, and 65 from Sogang. For the category of unmarried women who still reside in the household, we only included those aged 25 and above because younger women still had a good chance of being sent out as brides.

Table 1 Daughters’ current residence (percent) by reason for leaving and village. In this table we combine those who leave for a job with those who were sent out for income then failed to return after meeting a husband. The reason is that women who leave by the latter means do so while working as a seasonal labor migrant. Thus, employment was the primary reason they were sent out of the household in the first place, albeit at the time these women left their parents may have had other plans for them

Current Residence		Reason for Leaving/ Staying	Betsag	Norgyong	Sogang
Out of Natal Village	Living in Town/City	job/ <i>kha thug</i>	38.2	42.9	16.9
		nama	9.0	7.8	0.0
	Living in Other Village	job/ <i>kha thug</i>	11.2	3.9	0.0
		nama	23.6	22.1	43.1
	Total Out of Natal Village		82.0	76.7	60.0
In Natal Village	Living in Other Household	split out/ <i>kha thug</i>	3.4	3.9	3.1
		nama	5.6	5.2	9.2
	Living in Natal Household	unmarried	6.7	6.5	26.2
		married	2.2	7.8	1.5
	Total In Natal Village		18.0	23.3	40.0

Goldstein *et al.* 2006 Socioeconomic Survey; Goldstein, Childs and Wangdui 2006 Socioeconomic Survey

have joined them. We asked one of these women to describe the process of splitting out from her natal household. She reported that two brothers who work outside the village each gave her 2,000 ¥ (\$270), which was sufficient capital to start a restaurant in Panam, and recalled,

I was the eldest child of my parents, I helped raise my siblings and manage the household. All of my brothers’ kids call me ‘*ani*’ (aunt), we have good relations. I stayed in the home for 13 years with the nama. After she had more kids her power increased. She started to complain that I was not doing well. Our relationship became bad, we argued. I said to her, “In this village the custom is that sons stay in the household and daughters move out. So if you take good care of my parents I will split out.” The nama and I did not have open arguments, but our relationship caused unhappy feelings within the family.

An elderly man in Norgyong told us that he helped his daughter establish a business in Panam with the intention of keeping her nearby as a potential caretaker in old age. In his own words,

I planned and took action to keep my daughter near. At the time my wife was already old and really needed a caretaker. We kept our daughter at home to do that. Then she fell in love with an electrician. They married, so we opened a restaurant for her [in Panam]. Last year her husband got a job offer in Shigatse. It’s in a bigger city and a higher salary. He wanted my daughter to move with him to Shigatse. I said to him, “Please don’t go, I really need my daughter. After I die you can take her as far away as you want. But while I’m alive, please stay nearby.” Shigatse is not far away, but I still wanted her in the town. Therefore, he didn’t change jobs.

Although some parents in Betsag have tried to help a daughter open a shop in the village or Shigatse, their preferred strategy is to invest in her education so she can secure employment with a regular salary. Table 2 compares educational attainments of women who live inside and outside the three villages.

Table 2 Years of education attained by individuals aged 20–34 by gender, village, and whether residing inside or outside the natal household

	females			males			Diff: females outside versus males inside
	outside	inside	diff.	outside	inside	diff.	
Betsag	8.2	2.6	5.6	7.7	4.9	2.8	females + 3.3
Norgyong	3.7	2.1	1.6	7.1	4.1	3.0	males + 0.4
Sogang	1.9	1.8	0.1	4.9	4.0	0.8	males + 2.1

Goldstein *et al.* 2006 Socioeconomic Survey

The data in Table 2 shows a connection between education and mobility, especially in the wealthiest village Betsag. Note the large educational gap in Betsag between women who live within a village household and those who have moved out. The latter have attained an average of 7.4 years of education—nearly 5 years more than women of similar age living in a village household. To emphasize the weight Betsag's parents now place on educating daughters as an intentional strategy to facilitate their independence, note also that externally-resident females have attained an average of 3.3 more years of education than their male siblings who still reside within natal households. In contrast, externally-resident daughters in Norgyong and Sogang are only marginally better educated than women who live within village households, and are less educated than their male siblings who remain at home.

These days many parents in Betsag devalue the traditional option of sending a daughter as a bride to another household. When we asked one elderly woman whether or not parents in her village are more prone to send daughters to school than sons, she responded,

Yes, it is true. Parents are more likely to send girls to school in the hope that they get a life through education. For one, you can't keep daughters in the home; you must send them as nama which is costly [the household must provide her with numerous sets of high quality clothing as well as grain and other gifts for her marital household]. Secondly, if you send a daughter as a nama to another household then she must serve people of another family. Most parents don't want their daughters living under such circumstances. They try to make a better life for them. Education is the best way, so parents try to send their daughters to school.

Although we heard many similar responses to our question on the merits of educating a daughter, the strategy is not risk-free because success is contingent on passing exams that enable advancement to higher levels of education. A daughter who fails her high school or college entrance exam is considered over-educated and under-skilled to be a competent farm wife, but under-educated to obtain a high-status position such as teacher, health professional, or government administrator. One elderly mother in Betsag explained,

All parents hope to get better lives for their children through education. But when the young go to school for a long time they become unfamiliar with village work. So we must continue to send them for higher education. . . . They become incapable of being a nama because they can't farm or do housework. Going to school makes them incapable. If we send them as nama [after sending to school for several years] they would suffer and receive much criticism [from in-laws].

Parents in Betsag whose daughter fails an exam can still take advantage of the village's close proximity to Shigatse to move her out of the household. Some seek low-level jobs for

daughters in the industrial and service sectors (e.g., factory worker, street sweeper). This is an acceptable option, albeit far from ideal. Other parents are willing to invest significant funds so that a daughter can continue trying to pass her college entrance exam. One woman told us that she intentionally kept her two eldest sons at home and only sent her three daughters and youngest son to school in the hope that they could find independent livelihoods through education. When one daughter failed her college entrance exam, the family spent 4,000¥ (\$500) on tuition to send her to a private school for an extra year of preparation. She explained,

If my children get jobs [through education] then they can depend on the government [for employment]. They have a lifetime guarantee; they have no need to worry. They have a monthly salary, a better life. They can give some of the salary to the household. If we send them as *nama*, they are powerless in their new households. They can't do anything.

We followed up by asking if parents hope to gain benefits from an educated daughter. She responded, “Yes, that is one reason to send daughters to school. Elders here are getting money from children who get jobs. Some parents are getting money, while others are hoping to receive it in the future.”

Even when parents in Betsag take the traditional route by marrying daughters out, some try to strategically place them in the nearby city, Shigatse. Table 2 shows that 9.0% of Betsag's daughters left to join an urban household through an arranged marriage. One woman explained that many suitors came for her daughter, but she chose a family from Shigatse because, “I thought that she will have an easier life in the city”, and “I hoped it would make visiting Shigatse easier.” Another woman told us,

Before my parents passed away they told me, “Nowadays we have no relatives in Shigatse. If you can send one of your daughters to a place near Tashilhunpo [a large monastery in Shigatse], then in the future when you visit Shigatse or Tashilhunpo you will have a house to go to.” I kept my parents message in my mind. Then, as circumstances would have it, a family in Shigatse asked for our daughter. It was already on my mind, so I agreed. Now when I go on pilgrimage I go to her house.

To summarize, parents in the three villages are using different strategies to move daughters out of the household. Sogang, the relatively poor and remote village, exhibits the most traditional pattern: most daughters continue to move out through arranged marriages. Meanwhile many parents in Norgyong, the intermediary village in terms of wealth, are taking advantage of opportunities provided by the burgeoning town of Panam to establish commercial enterprises for daughters. An initial capital expenditure provides these women a chance to make an independent living so they are no longer dependent on the household. The fact that they are not beholden to in-laws in a marital household leaves them in a position to provide continuing assistance to their parents. Finally, parents in the wealthier village Betsag are using education as an opportunity to provide daughters with the means to attain financial independence. As a result, a relatively high percentage of adult daughters now receive regular salaries through employment. Similar to daughters in Norgyong, many of these women are not constrained by the obligations of living in a husband's natal household with elderly in-laws, and are thereby free to assist their own aging parents.

In the next section we discuss the potential benefits externally-resident daughters can provide to their aging parents. We demonstrate that the value of daughters, in the form of social capital, can vary according to how they are moved out of their households.

Support from Externally-Resident Daughters

The way a daughter is moved out of her household affects the potential social support she can provide for aging parents. Although there is much variation in the support that individuals can give, in general we find that daughters who were given as brides to other rural households have the least potential to assist elderly parents because they are beholden to their marital families. On the other end of the spectrum, daughters who are educated and have secured salaried employment can provide parents with spending money, nursing care, and financial backing to cover medical bills. The following sections discuss emotional and instrumental support that non-resident daughters are contributing to the rural elderly in Tibet.

Emotional support

Parents sometimes seek solace from an externally-resident daughter after receiving bad treatment from household members. For example, an elderly man reported that his two urban-dwelling daughters often call home and encourage family members to treat him well.⁷ They tell his sons, “You only have one elder left in the household, so you should treat him better.” Similarly, “Butri”⁸ is treated disrespectfully at home by her son and daughter-in-law. When we asked how she felt about this, Butri responded, “Even if I can’t get kindness from my son I still have my daughters in Shigatse and Lhasa. I can receive much love from them.” She then told us, “My son and nama listen to my daughters because they are more powerful. My daughters come home to scold them about once a year.” More important, Butri’s daughters exert leverage over her sons by threatening to cut off financial contributions if she is not treated kindly.

Some parents depend on externally-resident daughters for places of temporary refuge when the situation in the household becomes intolerable. Daughters who are in a position to provide such support tend to be those who live independently from in-laws. For example, Kyipa complains that the nama of her relatively wealthy household serves her black tea rather than butter tea and locks food away, both of which are serious affronts in this village. When the situation becomes intolerable—a frequent occurrence—Kyipa makes the short walk to her daughter’s restaurant in Panam. Often she stays all day and only returns in the evening after eating dinner. Although Kyipa receives emotional support, she will not move in permanently with her daughter. Kyipa explained, “When I get bad treatment and no food I think about splitting out. But then I think, “If I die shortly thereafter, then it is meaningless. My sons lose a share of land.”⁹ Kyipa also worries that her town-dwelling daughter lacks the financial means to provide a proper funeral ceremony—a major concern for the elderly. In her own words, “I’m old and my daughter is poor. I worry that if I stay with her I’ll be a burden when I

⁷ Phoning home is a relatively recent phenomenon in our fieldwork sites. In 2006 79% of households in Betsag, 66% in Norgyong, and 13% in Sogang had landline telephones. Until recently Sogang was connected to the outside via a single, common telephone housed in the local store. Only in 2004 did families start to get private land lines to their homes, and mobile service came in 2007. Norgyong and Betsag have had mobile service for a few years longer, and the sharp rise in private land lines started earlier (2000 in Betsag, and 2003 in Norgyong).

⁸ All personal names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

⁹ Kyipa owns one share of the household’s land by virtue of being resident at the time of land redistribution. If she remains in the household until death, her sons will inherit this share of land. But her sons will lose this land if she officially transfers her residence elsewhere.

die because then she will be responsible for all the funeral ceremonies.” In this case Kyipa’s daughter can mitigate the situation by providing emotional support and sharing food from her restaurant. But beyond feeding and consoling, there is not much she can do to improve her mother’s plight.

Instrumental support 1: nursing care

Through interviews with the elderly we established that, of those who had been ill in the past year, over one-third had received the most caretaking support from a daughter. The other main caretakers were a spouse (17.1%), a son (16.1%), and a nama (14.5%). We also learned that some daughters are better positioned to support their parents. As discussed above, sending a daughter to another family as a nama practically guarantees that her support as a caretaker is lost. Externally-resident daughters who can potentially provide assistance include those who were split out but remain within the same village, and those who live independently or in urban neolocal households. For example, Dorje from Norgyong intentionally kept his only daughter nearby by opening a restaurant for her in Panam. He explained,

If I get sick I can stay with my daughter. At the end of life, when I’m about to die, I’ll have them send me home and my daughter can stay a short time to provide nursing care with my son. I always openly say to my daughter that, because of the [bad] family relationships, I’ll face difficulties at the end of life. My daughter says, “There is no need to worry. I’m nearby. When you are sick I won’t let you stay with others who argue with you. I will take care of you.” . . . Everybody in my household has to farm. If they were busy I’d be home alone. I don’t want that. If I am with my daughter she can stay home all day. It is a better choice.

Similarly, when we asked Pasang, a woman who runs a small restaurant in Panam, who would care for her mother when ill, she told us,

I will need to do it. I’ll get help from my brothers. If my mother has a bad illness, is bedridden and can’t go to the bathroom on her own, it is my duty. I’ll come back to the home and do it. Last year I went to Lhasa. My brother called me and said, “Mother is ill, please return quickly.” When I arrived she was a bit better, but still needed to go to the hospital every day and couldn’t eat much. I lived in the main household to provide care for her. Then she got better so I returned to the restaurant.

The improved transportation system in Tibet makes close proximity less of a precondition for children to provide nursing care. When we asked Migmar from Betsag who would care for him if he becomes incapacitated, he responded,

It should mainly be done by the nama. She is in a position to serve food and provide nursing care. But of course if I’m incapacitated then my family will ask my daughter to help. It would be difficult for my other daughters to provide care because they married out. But my youngest daughter is in Lhasa. She doesn’t have a regular job. Her husband also doesn’t have a secure job. For both of them it is easy to ask for a 15-day leave, so she could come here to care for me.

We then asked whether it is better to receive care from one’s own daughter or a nama. He said, “Of course from your own daughter, if possible. There is more trust with her than with the nama. We two love each other very much, that is the reason.”

Instrumental support 2: financial assistance for health care

Externally-resident children also provide important financial resources that help parents access health care facilities. In one case an elderly man, his brother, and wife planned to receive care from their two resident sons and nama. However, bad family relationships led to a divorce and the flight of one son from the household, leaving the elders in an economically precarious position. In response, a daughter living in Shigatse provided a safety net. According to her father,

We planned to depend [for support in old age] on our two sons. Therefore we kept them at home and married our daughters out. Now, one of our daughters in Shigatse is rich. She said to my son, “You probably think about the huge future burden of having three elderly in the household. But there is no need to worry. Now the elders can do some jobs around the home. When they become ill and weaker, I’ll take care of them. You won’t have to spend anything.” I think we can get support from her. . . . We didn’t ask her to help. She visits sometimes, and brings special food and clothing. She gets a chance to know what is happening. She told us, “The three of you don’t have to work a lot, just do a little. You have enough food and clothing. There is no need to worry. Relax more. In the future, if you encounter difficulties, I will take care of you.”

She promised to not only cover her parents’ medical expenses, but their funeral costs as well. Similarly, Purbu, an elderly man in Betsag, depends more on his government-employed daughter than any other family member when he is ill. When we inquired why he depends so heavily on this particular child, he responded, “Tsamchö has an office job. The others are farmers, so even if they wanted to help they couldn’t. She has a relatively better situation.” Purbu credits Tsamchö’s assistance with saving his life during a recent illness. He said,

Last summer I had a serious illness. Tsamchö picked me up and said she would pay the hospital expenses in Shigatse. I stayed for one month in the hospital. I worried about not having money for the hospital. My grandchildren are in school, which is very expensive. . . . If Tsamchö had not paid my hospital expenses, I may have died. Our household doesn’t have much money for health care.

We then asked how it came to be that Tsamchö rather than the household paid Purbu’s medical expenses. He explained,

I was ill. My son told me to go to the county clinic. I said, “I don’t want to go, we don’t have the money. If I go it will be a large expense. We don’t have the money, so we’d have to borrow it. How would we repay it?” I refused to go. Tsamchö came later to see me and we discussed the situation. She asked if I was getting better, and I replied that I wasn’t. She asked, “Should we go to the hospital in Shigatse?” I replied, “That is not possible. I understand it is very costly, and the household doesn’t have the money to cover the expense.” She said, “We should go to the doctor immediately. I’ll pay.” She then took me to the hospital.

Nowadays the health insurance system in rural Tibet greatly reduces the cost for families to obtain both inpatient and outpatient services from village clinics, as well as county and city hospitals (Goldstein *et al.* 2010). Nevertheless, the cost of healthcare remains a serious concern for many elderly people who fear the financial burdens they may impose on their households due to illness. In general, we find that the elderly who have externally-resident

children with reliable salaries feel more confident that they can obtain the best health care available.

Instrumental support 3: pocket money, pilgrimage, and non-kin social networks

Going on pilgrimage (*gnas skor*) and visiting temples (*mchod mjal*) are important age-appropriate activities that have both spiritual and social benefits.¹⁰ From a religious perspective, the elderly state that pilgrimage allows them to cleanse negative karma (*las 'bras*) accrued over their lifetimes. Their intent is to positively influence future lives by negating the effects of bad actions. During the pilgrimage the elderly accomplish this goal through prayer, ritual actions like prostration and circumambulation, making offerings of butter and cash to certain deities, and giving alms to beggars. As one man stated,

It is a rare chance to be human, and I'm old, so it is time to find the correct path toward the next life. [While on pilgrimage] I do rituals and give food to beggars. I am trying to attain a better next life, to be reborn a human.

Many elderly expressed the opinion that better roads, more vehicles, and increasing household incomes makes it easier than ever to go on pilgrimage. Nevertheless, surveys conducted in 2006 and 2009 reveal inter-village differences in the frequency of pilgrimage, distances travelled, and amounts spent per trip. Table 3 shows that a higher percentage of the elderly from Betsag than the other villages undertook a pilgrimage in the year before the 2006 survey, and in the 5 years before the 2009 survey. Table 4 shows that Betsag residents travel longer distances on pilgrimage.

The ability to go on a pilgrimage is contingent on access to cash. In the rural Tibetan corporate household structure all income generated by family members should be handed over to the household head, a position usually held by the man who has the best combination of competence, experience, and physical ability. Typically, when a man reaches his mid 60s he relinquishes the household head position to a son, after which cultural norms hold that the aging man should begin withdrawing from economic activities in order to concentrate on endeavors, such as pilgrimage, that prepare him for death and rebirth. Once a man has passed the household head position to his son, he must depend on the benevolence of others for spending money. Some sons readily give cash to parents. Others are more reluctant to do so, necessitating that the elderly obtain money from sources outside the household.

Table 5 breaks down pilgrimage expenses by village and whether funding was secured from a member of the household or from someone living outside the household. Interestingly, the percentage obtained from household and non-household sources is nearly identical in Betsag and Sogang. Nevertheless, the absolute amounts are much higher in Betsag which allows the elderly from that village to undertake longer, more distant journeys.

More than half of Betsag's elderly who received funds from outside the household got money from a daughter. In contrast, only a handful in Norgyong and Sogang received pilgrimage funds from a daughter. Educated daughters with regular salaries are the main

¹⁰ Pilgrimage connotes a long journey to a sacred site. In this paper we use the term in reference to long journeys (*gnas skor*) which include visits to sacred sites (*mchod mjal*), as well as to visits to nearby temples that do not require overnight stays. For a detailed ethnographic analysis of pilgrimage in a Tibetan context, see Huber (1999).

Table 3 Percentage of elderly individuals who went on pilgrimage by village

	2006 Survey: Pilgrimage during last year?		2009 Survey: Pilgrimage during last five years?	
	yes	no	yes	no
Betsag	89.1	10.9	89.8	10.2
Norgyong	50.0	50.0	74.5	25.5
Sogang	52.6	47.4	80.6	19.4
Total	65.5	34.5	81.6	18.4

Goldstein *et al.* 2006 Socioeconomic Survey; Goldstein, Childs and Wangdai 2006 Socioeconomic Survey

providers because they are in a better position to give money to parents than daughters who were moved out by other means. For example, daughters who were moved into Panam to start restaurants and stores use most of their earnings to cover food, rent, and educational expenses for their own children, and as pointed out above, women who moved out through an arranged marriage risk the wrath of their in-laws if they direct too much support to their natal households.

Pilgrimage and temple visits are some of the most important social activities for the elderly in rural Tibet. Typically, these journeys are undertaken with a network comprised of friends and neighbors, and our research leaves no doubt that rural Tibet elders derive much pleasure from traveling in groups with peers. When we asked old folks what they liked most about going on pilgrimage, the majority cited social gatherings. One man stated, “I can meet acquaintances from other villages. We converse, which makes me happy. I can recover from sadness.”

The elderly typically commented that socializing during temple visits gives them pleasure, makes them more relaxed, and helps them forget about anxieties at home. Between visiting temples, making offerings, and performing circumambulations, they gather in parks or restaurants to share food and drink. One man explained,

We do a large circumambulation [around the temple complex], then sit together and eat and drink, then go do another large circumambulation, then sit together again and eat and drink. If we have more chang [fermented barley beverage], or are having a good time, then we sit together longer after lunch and forget to do the third circumambulation in the afternoon.

Three circumambulations of a sacred site is considered the most appropriate and auspicious performance of a pilgrimage ritual. Therefore, admitting that he sometimes neglects the third circumambulation highlights the relative importance this man places on the social activities associated with pilgrimage.

Table 4 Percentage of elderly individuals by distance of last pilgrimage and village

	Short	Medium	Long
Betsag	31.8	20.5	47.7
Norgyong	63.2	26.3	10.5
Sogang	41.4	31.0	27.6

Goldstein, Childs and Wangdai 2006 Socioeconomic Survey

Table 5 Cost of pilgrimage and source of funds by village

	Mean Cost	HH's Contribution	Outsider's Contribution
Betsag	261 ¥	102 ¥ (39.2%)	159 ¥ (60.8%)
Norgyong	113 ¥	60 ¥ (53.2%)	53 ¥ (46.8%)
Sogang	186 ¥	73 ¥ (39.4%)	113 ¥ (60.6%)

Goldstein, Childs and Wangdai 2006 Socioeconomic Survey

In Betsag elderly individuals generally visit holy sites, such as nearby Tashilhunpo in Shigatse, with members of a friendship group consisting of people of the same gender and similar age.¹¹ One man explained,

[When going to Tashilhunpo] I schedule a date with the others [in his group]. We say, “Let’s go the day after tomorrow.” We were six friends, but two of them died. The four of us go together. When we were 20 we agreed to form a special friendship. Afterwards we didn’t take new friends into our group. We did not include those men who married into the village. We started visiting monasteries when we were young.

An elderly woman told us how her friendship group formed,

I have a group of friends, five or six of them. . . . When I was a young woman, a daughter of my household, I had several female friends. But then we all married out [of the village], so later it was hard for us to gather. After getting married I established another friendship group with women of similar age. . . . When we went on trips together we drank chang, become closer, and finally set up a stable group. We consider ourselves to be members of a group. We gather, are happy, and joke around. . . . The friendship group does not have other social obligations; it is only for emotional support.

To further highlight the social and emotional benefits of pilgrimage, consider the situation of those elderly whose lack of cash hinders their ability to participate in friendship groups. For example, one elderly woman told us that she only goes to Tashilhunpo alone, not with friends. When we asked her whether she belongs to a friendship group, she replied,

I don’t have a friendship group. Members of such groups can support each other, and help each other during serious situations. My whole life has been difficult. I’ve been poor, so I don’t have [a friendship group]. If you find such a group, then you must gather together and buy food [while visiting a monastery]. I don’t have money for the expenses. Women say, “You should join us when we go there,” or, “Come sit and join us.” I say I will, but usually I don’t.

One impoverished woman with no children of her own lives with an adopted daughter. Despite receiving welfare assistance from the government, the two continually struggle to make ends meet. When we asked whether she envies those who visit temples often, she replied,

I wish I could go more frequently, like other elderly people. I cannot for two reasons. The first is that I am unable to go because I’m physically weak. Even if I did go, I

¹¹ Several terms are used in Betsag to describe friendship groups. Females tend to use the term *grogs mo* (“female friends”), whereas males use the terms *rogs byed* (“helpers” or “assistants”) and *grogs mched* (“friends who are as close as relatives”). These are distinct from *chang’thung grogs po* (“beer drinking friends”), a category that implies a less stable and more opportunistic relationship.

could only visit some temples, but couldn't climb [the steps] to others. Secondly, even though I could hitch a ride and therefore not have to pay [for transportation], it would still be embarrassing because, after visiting the temples the elderly like to have food in a restaurant. If I went together with others, I would have no money to pay for it. If I remained alone, without a partner, that would be shameful. So I tell my adoptive daughter, "Nowadays it is better for me to stay in the village, drink tea, and do circumambulations." It is better for me.

The importance of group pilgrimage activities should not be underestimated given the consistent finding that there exists a positive relationship between engagement with non-kin social networks and wellbeing. Research across the globe has shown that strong social networks have a positive correlation with longevity (USA: Berkman & Syme 1979; Hanson *et al.* 1989; Kawachi *et al.* 1996; Europe: Berkman *et al.* 2004; Pennix *et al.* 1997; Australia: Giles *et al.* 2005; Asia: Sugisawa *et al.* 1994). Other studies have revealed positive correlations between social networks and old people's health (House *et al.* 1988; Seeman 1996), functional abilities (Michael *et al.* 1999), morale (Litwin 2001; Wilson *et al.* 1994), ability to resist the onset of dementia (Fratiglioni *et al.* 2000), and access to health services (Logan & Spitze 1994). A more fine-grained picture emerges when researchers delineate network types.¹² For example, Litwin (2001) finds that not all social networks are equally beneficial. The morale of the elderly is highest among those who engage in social networks that extend beyond close kin and include friends, neighbors, and other community members. Likewise, Giles and colleagues find that extensive friend and confidant networks "had significant protective effects against mortality", and "it is friends, rather than children or relatives, which confer most benefit to survival in later life" (Giles *et al.* 2005:577). In other words, discretionary relationships (those one can choose) have a more positive effect on survival at old age than relationships over which the individual exerts little choice (e.g., one's own children).

Although our data does not allow us to test for relationships between engagement with non-kin social networks and health or wellbeing, at the very least we can observe that (1) pilgrimage is an important undertaking in the lives of these Buddhist villagers, (2) pilgrimage provides solace for those approaching the end of life because it allows people to feel as if they are proactively preparing for future lives, (3) the elderly derive pleasure from social activities with non-kin peers during pilgrimage, (4) those who cannot go on pilgrimage due to financial constraints feel sad or embarrassed about their inability to participate in non-kin social networks, and (5) daughters—especially those from Betsag who are educated and earn steady incomes—through gifts of cash are becoming important facilitators of their elderly parents' pilgrimage activities.

¹² Wenger (1991, 1996) uses three criteria (availability of local close kin, frequency of contact with family, friends, and neighbors, and levels of social integration in community groups) to identify five network types among the elderly in Wales: (1) the family-dependent network, which as its name implies is comprised primarily of close kin; (2) the locally integrated network that includes family members, friends, and neighbors; (3) the local self-contained network that relies mainly on neighbors; (4) the wider-community-focused network that centers primarily on friendships; and (5) the private-restricted network in which local kin are absent and people have minimal ties with neighbors. Subsequently, Glass *et al.* (1997) developed four composite measures of social networks based on ties with one's own children, other relatives, friends, and confidants. This model was replicated by Giles *et al.* (2005) using data from Australia. Similarly, Litwin (2001) used cluster analysis to distinguish several types of networks among elderly Israelis that are somewhat analogous to those developed by Wenger, that is, some were rooted primarily on ties of kinship whereas others were more diverse.

Conclusions

As Bourdieu (2001) points out, children living outside of a household are connected to parents through durable kinship relationships that normatively entail exchanges at various levels. In rural Tibet, the nature of expectations and exchanges differs depending on the circumstances under which a daughter left the household. Simply put, the social capital vested in a daughter who was sent to another rural household as a bride pales in comparison to that of a daughter who was moved out through education or by establishing a small business. Daughters living in neolocal households who have financial independence can, and often do, provide considerable social support for their elderly parents. Tangible benefits range from caretaking during a time of illness to gifts of cash that allow the elderly to engage in pilgrimage activities, and by extension, to interact more intensively with non-kin networks. Contrary to many predictions associated with aging and modernization theory, the effects of the education gap between parents and children and the increasing social and economic mobility of children—direct results of China’s drive toward modernization—are not invariably negative. Rather than being silent victims of changes that are often beyond their control, the elderly in our fieldwork sites are taking proactive measures that actually increase the capacity for externally-resident daughters to provide them with emotional and instrumental support. Parents who recognize the benefits of either salaried employment or urban-based small business opportunities for adult daughters are creating novel forms of social capital that they can draw upon to improve the quality of their lives in culturally relevant ways, and to help sustain them during a health crisis or a breakdown of relationships within the household.

Based on current trends it is safe to conclude that the latent social capital vested in daughters is on the rise, at least in those areas where parents have the means and infrastructural support (e.g., a functioning school system, proximity to a town or city) to educate daughters or establish commercial opportunities for them. Both strategies aim to move daughters out of the household in ways that facilitate their attainment of financial independence. There is reason to believe that this trend will expand from villages close to urban areas to more remote locales. In the past, most parents saw little incentive to educate daughters. Nowadays gender norms and attitudes are changing. Data in Table 6 shows that parents in Betsag and Norkyung overwhelmingly feel it is better to send a daughter to school than a son. Sogang is the only village where parents responded that it is better to send a son than a daughter, but note that two-thirds of the survey participants responded that it is the same.

If the value placed on educating daughters continues to rise, and if more people believe that independent livelihoods can be secured for their children through education or business opportunities, then it is reasonable to anticipate that more parents will change their traditional strategies for sending daughters outside the household. What is less known at

Table 6 Survey responses to question: “Is it better to send a boy to school or a girl to school?”

	better to send a boy	better to send a girl	it is the same
Betsag	7.7	44.0	48.4
Norkyung	5.8	42.5	51.7
Sokhang	20.7	12.6	66.7
Total	10.7	34.2	55.0

present, however, is who will take care of externally-resident daughters when they get old. One study of female carpet weavers in Lhasa, women who migrated to the city from rural areas and often remit earnings to their natal households, suggests that some externally-resident daughters plan to seek assistance from their rural-dwelling brothers when they reach old age (Zhang 2010).

In conclusion, we have demonstrated that parents, especially those living in Betsag and Norgyong, are finding new ways to deal with the traditional, polyandry-generated issue of having more daughters than they can marry into other households. Their adaptive response to changing socioeconomic conditions includes a concerted attempt to establish independent livelihoods for some daughters. A subtle but important shift is thereby underway in the composition of social support networks in rural Tibet. Most elderly still reside with a son (or multiple sons) and a daughter-in-law. Nevertheless, they are increasing their reliance for support on those non-resident daughters who have attained a degree of independence. Such women have more power, influence, and financial means to positively impact the lives of their parents compared to women who were sent as brides to other rural households. Based on the common sentiment that it is best to receive care from one's own daughter rather than a daughter-in-law who is viewed with some trepidation, the increasing importance of externally-resident daughters is interpreted by many elderly in rural Tibet as a positive social development.

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