CHAPTER SIX

New settlements on the Tibetan Plateau of Amdo-Qinghai: Spatialized power devices

Elisa Cencetti

Introduction

In the past decade new settlements for Tibetan herders have mushroomed throughout the Amdo-Qinghai region in the eastern part of the Tibetan Plateau. Identical numbered houses aligned in a chessboard grid surrounded by grasslands have become a common sight in this region’s landscape. These new settlements serve different purposes for the government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) – poverty alleviation, infrastructural and socio-economic development, environmental protection, and ideally also social stability – which all lead to the same result: the relocation of Tibetan herders previously living scattered over the grasslands. According to an official Chinese source (Xinhua 2012), the central government has provided more than 200,000 herders with houses in new settlements in Qinghai Province since 2009, and planned to create similar housing for an additional 50,000 herders by the end of 2012.

New settlements for Tibetan herders have been created as part of the Sanjiangyuan (Tib.: gsum gsum mgo khangs) also discussed by Nyima in ch. 5 of this volume), which represents a provincial-level reflection of the national aims of the Open Up the West campaign (Tib. rabs eg rgyud

1. The Tibetan regions can be divided into three cultural units: Amdo (a-rje), Uyang (dbyung gsum), and Khams (skyabs). The territories of Amdo are split between the PRC's provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan. Although most new settlements are located in the western regions of the PRC, which have been only marginally affected by the socio-economic boom seen in the eastern provinces over the last three decades, there are examples of new settlements located in eastern China that are based on ecological and socio-economic policies similar to those described in this chapter (Asian Development Bank 1995, 2006; Croll 1999; He et al. 2009; Haggard 2006; International Rivers Network 2003).
ON THE FRINGES OF THE HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

guar spyl shes rten mtu; Ch.: xiu shu de kajie) introduced in 2000. Moreover, the new settlements respond to the objectives settled by the political ideology of the 'harmonious society' (Tib.: chen tshun spyl (shogs; Ch.: huxie shehui), which has been 'promoted since 2005 as the new way of thinking of the PRC by the administration under Premier Wen Jiabao and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary and President of the PRC Hu Jintao' (Choukroune and Garapon 2007).

The Open Up the West campaign has aimed to reduce the socio-economic disparities between the eastern and western provinces of the PRC through the development of industry, infrastructure, tourism, and services in provinces inhabited by mostly non-Han populations (Goodman 2004). Accompanying this campaign, the provincial government of Qinghai set up the Headwaters of the Three Rivers Nature Reserve, which covers the large area of the headwaters of the Yellow, Yangtze, and Mekong rivers (Foggin 2005). The stated aim of this nature reserve is environmental protection because, according to official Chinese assessments, the grasslands of the Tibetan Plateau are 'degraded and therefore must be protected.' This objective is, of course, also motivated by economic considerations. The preservation of the sources of these rivers is connected to the economy of the eastern and southeastern provinces of the PRC, through which these rivers flow (Harris 2010; Yeh 2005). Moreover, the nature reserve promotes tourism that in turn encourages the development of infrastructure and services in Amdo-Qinghai. The nature reserve is, I contend, furthermore closely linked with social stability, promoted through the implementation of

2. This has been treated in several works (e.g.Das 2002; Han et al. 2008; Harris 2010; Ma 2001; Ma 2001; Ts et al. 2008), and the 'degradation' of the Tibetan Plateau has proven to be a controversial topic. The causes and extent of the environmental problems of this region are nonetheless still little studied. In the area where I conducted most of my fieldwork, Tibetans usually employed two terms to describe the environmental problems of the grassland: They used the word leqpa, meaning 'something that has been corrupted,' thus extending the meaning of the word 'degraded.' They also employed the expression legling, which usually means 'dirty.' By using this word to discuss the officially declared environmental problems of the grasslands, they let it be the connotations of 'polluted' or 'degraded,' which is a recent interpretation according to Tibetan inflectors. According to them, the word 'polluted' did not exist until recently. It has been created from the Chinese word meaning specifically to discuss the environmental problems of the Tibetan Plateau. In this chapter, I posit that the term 'polluted' best fits because, with the exception of the Chinese authorities, none of my interlocutors used it. Instead, when Tibetan herders discussed the environmental problems of the grasslands, they always pointed out specific and concrete situations (Cristitti 2010).

NEW SETTLEMENTS ON THE TIBETAN PLATEAU OF AMDO-QINGHAI

'ecological migrations' (Tib.: skye khama gnas spar; Ch.: shengtai yimin) and 'converting pastures to grasslands' (Tib.: 'brog 'dor rtsiua lebs; Ch.: tuwu huancuo) programmes (Richard 2003; Yeh 2005; see also Niyama, ch. 5 in this volume). According to the logic of these programmes, the 'degraded' grasslands need to be emptied of both livestock and people in order to be properly protected (Foggin 2005). The inhabitants of the grasslands that were judged 'degraded' by Chinese authorities were thus forced to undertake ecological migrations and move into the new settlements. Moreover, the official discourse promoting relocation also asserts that the herders' living conditions will be greatly improved in the new settlements, as the government promised to provide not only houses, but also hospitals and schools for the new settlers. In many cases, however, these have turned out to be empty promises, as verified by my own fieldwork experience, which reveals a large discrepancy between the official discourse and lived experience. This chapter focuses on these new settlements situated on the fringes of China's 'harmonious society,' both geographically and conceptually. Rather than reproducing the master narrative of a Chinese state building a 'harmonious society' through the development of economy, technology, and a society based on a 'scientific outlook' (Tib.: tshan jphel rgyan; Ch.: kezai fazhan) (Boutonnet 2009; Delary 2008; We-Lap Lam 2007), this chapter suggests that the settlements are state-driven attempts to 'harmonize' this area — in other words, to make sure the target population, the Tibetan herders, conform to the official policy directives. The central argument is that the state strives to align this region and its inhabitants with the rest of the country by using spatial strategies of arranging people into special areas.

In what follows I shall neither analyse the Chinese government's policies nor reproduce a 'mythologised' nomadic stereotype of the traditional life of Tibetan herders. Rather, I shall focus directly on the new settlements as spatial entities. In the first section I compare them with relocation programmes implemented in other parts of the world

3. I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in several Tibetan autonomous districts in Qinghai Province over the course of 14 months in 2009–2010. I visited many Tibetan settlements and spent several months in one settlement. The data and information collected during this period are principally based on discussions with Tibetan herders who had already been relocated to new settlements. I also interviewed several Tibetan officials and some Tibetan herders still living on the grasslands.
ON THE FRINGES OF THE HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

and at different times. Identifying the common denominators makes it easier to visualize how planned settlements function as a device of state power. I will demonstrate how the political dimensions of these plans are often hidden behind environmental and socio-economic development discourses and policies. In the next section I shall return to the new settlements of Amdo-Qinghai. A closer look at the needs that these settlements are intended to meet and the logic behind their construction reveals that the organization of living space is closely linked to power. I will argue that the characteristics of the new settlements on the Tibetan Plateau can be seen as modulations of a recurring power device aimed at territorial control and population surveillance, though I do not claim that the spatial organization by itself is sufficient to establish surveillance and control or, indeed, to achieve the ultimate goals of social stability and order.

Finally, I will analyze the actual effects of the new settlements in the context of Amdo-Qinghai, where national minority policies, economic development plans, and ecological targets overlap. I explore how spatial organization, aimed at creating a "new human being" as envisioned by the dominant political ideology, can reconfigure human living space accordingly. The actual effects produced by the relocation of the people for whom these settlements are built, however, are usually quite different from what was planned. People, as a destabilizing variable, interfere with and modify the living space designed for them. At the same time, people's habits and customs become transformed in the new settlements, as do their production systems and needs. The new settlements become sites of constant interaction between the new and foreign environment designed to meet certain political criteria and the people living in it, who negotiate and sometimes manage to interfere with these devices.

Disciplined people in docile villages: Historical and theoretical reflections on relocation

What is essential is, in fact, to gather the population that is everywhere and anywhere; it is essential to make it distributable. When we hold it, we

4. The perspective presented in this chapter is my analysis of the new settlements. When I shared it with my informants during fieldwork, they usually exclaimed from expressing an opinion until after we had spent several months together. As disclosing such a topic is dangerous and the herders' opinions of this chapter's topic are confidential, I will not report them here.

NEW SETTLEMENTS ON THE TIBETAN PLATEAU OF AMDO-QINGHAI

will thus be able to do many things which, at the moment, are impossible for us; it will allow us to capture its spirit after we have captured its body.

-Captain Charles Richard 5

Settlements for relocated Tibetan herders constitute a completely new phenomenon in the region of Amdo-Qinghai. It would nonetheless be misleading to consider them unique, and could lead to misunderstanding the political motivations behind them. Relocation schemes were launched in China as early as the 1950s and 1960s (Bonnin 2004; Chen 1996), and in Inner Mongolia herders have been resettled in a manner similar to those in the Amdo-Qinghai region (Sneath 2000). Moreover, the Chinese government has also relocated Han farmers in the eastern regions of the country (Croft 1999; He et al. 2009; Zhang et al. 2008). Though the new Amdo-Qinghai settlements purportedly solve environmental and socio-economic problems, we nevertheless have to ask why the state has decided to address these problems in this particular way. The answer to this question, I argue, is related to the state's efforts to strengthen its political control over this region, which is inhabited predominantly by Tibetans. In this section of the chapter, I will look at the politics behind the socio-economic and environmental discourses promoted in Amdo-Qinghai by comparing the new settlements to similar relocation projects elsewhere in the course of history. Furthermore, I suggest that urban theories, particularly the concept of "heterotopia" (Foucault [1966] 2009), are useful for studying how these new living spaces collapse previous relationships between people, time, and space. In this section, I analyse these 'heterotopias' as attempts to transform people by changing their living environment, and I highlight the importance attributed to space as a means of establishing new political orders or different systems of power (Scott 1998).

The central division of the Roman Empire was an early experiment in the organization of land and population redistribution. The new territories conquered by the Roman army were divided into squares, arranged in a grid pattern corresponding to plots assigned to colonists or inhabitants according to the quality of arable land (Chevalier 1961).

This method of dividing conquered land rendered previous land divi-
sions invalid and ignored local practices. It was an efficient method for administering the conquered land and imposing a new order.

Comparable reorganizations of people and territory were also introduced in the Soviet Union, Algeria, and Tanzania. In the 1930s the Soviet Union introduced collective farms (kolkhozy; pl.: kolkhozy), where all farmers and nomadic herders were forced to settle (Scott 1998: 193–222). Earlier land divisions were replaced by these collective farms, which also aimed at facilitating government control over the territory. Moreover, the kolkhozy broke down traditional centres of informal socialization such as the market and the church, thereby rendering them irrelevant (Scott 1998: 214). Similarly, in Algeria the French army forced farmers to relocate to new villages between 1955 and 1962 (Bourdieu and Sayad 1964). The French government introduced a programme of territorial control and population surveillance in order to break down local resistance in rural areas, a strategy that also enabled them to distribute the land among the colonists (Bourdieu and Sayad 1964: 15–27). As a result, Algerian farmers who had lived scattered in remote areas lost their land, which was their source of income, and were resettled in new villages composed of identical houses arranged in a grid pattern. Similarly, between 1973 and 1976, the Tanzanian government resettled 5 million people who had lived scattered throughout the countryside. To implement socio-economic development policies, they were forced to move to planned villages and, as in the above examples of the Roman Empire, the Soviet Union, and Algeria, they were resettled in villages composed of identical houses and aligned in a grid pattern (Scott 1998: 223–61).

This list of different regimes at different times employing similar methods of organizing and controlling land and people could be much longer; my aim here is simply to highlight the similarities between these spatial strategies and their relationship to power. Having quoted some historical parallels, let us now turn to some theoretical reflections on the living space of humans to gain a more complete understanding of how these settlements can function as power devices.

Le Corbusier’s (1946) vision of town plans structured human living space into ‘dwelling tools’ that organize the activities of the inhabitants and define them according to their social class and occupation. Moreover, the town should satisfy its inhabitants’ needs as determined by the values shared by the totality of the social body. Le Corbusier assumed that the living space should not only meet the practical needs of its inhabitants, but should also generate new feelings and values. As all inhabitants supposedly share the same needs, feelings, and values, city planners and, ultimately, the state expect this kind of human living space to create a new person in harmony with the totality of her or his society and surrounding environment. This conception of the human living space as a tool for modifying or generating the values and customs of its inhabitants has served many political theories and been the foundation of many utopias (Bryz 2005; Scott 1998). In the new settlements, I contend, these visions take shape as ‘heterotopias’.

The state needs to control and survey its inhabitants. Human living space, I argue, plays a significant role in the state’s attempt to make human beings manageable and predictable. This is also evident in the form of these housing environments, which should reflect the content, the human being. Scott (1998) argues that for any system of power to be operational, the environment and its inhabitants must be visible to the state administration. Creating a synoptic vision within the state domain can ensure this. Foucault (1975) reasons that the organization of human space should generate order and should discipline people so that they facilitate the administrative tasks of the state. The prison’s panoptical organization of space, Foucault explains, can be used to describe a certain type of spatialized power relations specific to modern states. Through discipline, the state watches over and controls individuals in a ‘soft and diffuse’ way (Foucault 1975: 206). The discipline works from within the body of the individual, which becomes the ‘root of his own subjection’ (Foucault 1975: 204). This enables the state to exert deeper control over individuals because the discipline operates at the level of the smallest unit of the social body: the individual. By assigning to each individual his or her place (Foucault 1975: 146), the disciplined space of the ‘panopticon’ uses and transforms the space in order to exert the state’s power.

Both Le Corbusier’s visions of the city’s transformative powers over its inhabitants and Foucault’s problematization of how state power works from within the self-disciplined individual are key to my central contention that the new settlements are power devices. From an empirical point of view, the layout of these new settlements reminds one of ar-
ON THE FRINGES OF THE HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

architectural plans for towns and prisons. I am not suggesting that the new settlements on the Tibetan Plateau are prisons. I am simply highlighting the commonality in the power device used, which in these examples changes only in terms of the degree of influence over people: the fact that the power device could be 'soft and diffuse' does not mean that it does not exist. Why have these different systems of power resorted to the same grid pattern of identical, aligned dwellings when designing the settlements in which to relocate people? I propose that living space in these instances is the state's power device: while living space is regulated by the state, it is also supposed to regulate the inhabitants.

Furthermore, since all these villages have been created ex nunc, these places for relocating people do not have any 'history' of landmarks, routes, or meeting places. The absence of shared lived experience and history make these spaces hollow. Thus, the state could better control people by inscribing into these 'empty' spaces the values and principles that it wants to generate in people. These new values ideally lead to the production of a new type of human being moulded in accordance with the criteria and political ideals endorsed by the state, for example, socialist values in the case of the collective farms in the Soviet Union, or the ideal of a 'harmonious society' in the case of the new settlements in Amdo-Qinghai. The dominant system of power attempts to provide new landmarks, routes, and meeting places for the inhabitants to harmonize with the state's agenda of surveillance and territorial control (Foucault 2004: 3–30). By making a habitation of the past, these places also reshape their inhabitants and their social relationships, starting from the smallest unit, the individual. All these ordered spaces serve not only the aim of spatially reproducing abstract ideals of society, but also of social engineering and control.

The new settlements and architectural utopias listed above all serve to facilitate state control of people and territory. This need to control becomes particularly strong when the state has to manage nomadic people or others living scattered over remote and vast territories. If the state is as sufficiently centralized and strong as the PRC, it is able to implement power devices to control and survey its inhabitants and territory. New

---

NEW SETTLEMENTS ON THE TIBETAN PLATEAU OF AMDO-QINGHAI

settlements that make people visible to the administration can enable the state to secure order and transform society to optimize production.

The official discourse of the Chinese state uses to promote and justify the implementation of the new settlements is reminiscent of the utopian visions aimed at transforming society through the provision of an appropriately ordered living environment. The stated intention behind the new settlements in fact reflects Le Corbusier's vision 'of facilitating the living conditions of ensuring inhabitants physical and moral health, of promoting the maintenance of the human species by offering the necessary conditions for perfect education' (Le Corbusier 1946: 59). These settlements are expected to promote socio-economic development and improve the living conditions of Tibetan herders by supplying better dwellings and services. The plan of the new settlements promises that the houses will be provided with running water and electricity, and have convenient access to schools and clinics. With their official aim of environmental protection, the new settlements also correspond to another aspect of Le Corbusier's ideal city: they 'fulfil some conditions and establish useful relationships between the cosmic milieu and the biologic human phenomenon' (Le Corbusier 1946: 59).

The similarities between these utopian visions and the official discourse of the Chinese state become clearer when one looks at the current political discourse of the Chinese leadership. The new settlements, I argue, are part of the PRC government's current political project to construct the 'harmonious society'. Although the term 'harmonious' in Chinese political writings taps into ancient tenets of Confucianism (Billiod 2007; Delury 2008), as a political term it is nonetheless ambiguous because the methods used to reach this 'harmony' and even the goal itself are not clearly formulated. The term 'harmony' can also mean the absence of conflict, thus a consensus that ensures social stability. This in effect implies a society where there is no more need to control and survey people because they have been disciplined to the point of consent. Considered from the perspective of a 'state-making' agenda (Tilly 1985), this would mean that the citizens of the PRC, including national minorities, recognize the legitimacy of the dominant system of power, including state violence and enforced policies.

---

6. The nomadic lifestyle, with its different system of production and exploitation of resources, poses a threat to voluntary states because the methods used to enforce legitimate power, such as conscription and taxes, have to be calibrated along different parameters (Harfield 1993; Delany and Guatcat 1980; Scott 2009).

7. For a cogent elaboration of the concept of the 'harmonious society', see Guo and Guo (2008: 2–3).

165

167
ON THE FRINGES OF THE HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

'Harmonious society' may also relate to morality when it is linked to the Confucian approach, which advocates a personal search for 'harmony' within oneself and the rest of the social body through study and respect of hierarchies (Delury 2008). The Foucauldian application of the 'panopticon' as a general principle of 'political anatomy' in which the object and the aim are not the relationships of sovereignty but the relationships of discipline (Foucault 1975: 210) is thus a useful tool for rethinking the implicit aims linking the 'harmonious society' ideology with the spatial organization of the new settlements on the Tibetan Plateau.

The local impacts of ecological and development policies

Having explained the significance of relocation policies in terms of a spatial power device, I now turn to examining the consequences of this policy implementation, which has transformed grassland management and Tibetan herders' practices and habits. The 'ecological migrations' and the creation of new settlements have historical antecedents. Over the last 30 years Chinese authorities have implemented a number of economic and political policies with important territorial consequences. The introduction of the 'household responsibility system' meant that, since the 1980s, formerly collectively managed livestock and production tools have been divided among herding families and have become the responsibility of individual families. In Qinghai, this policy also led to the division of grasslands (Goldstein 1996; see also Nyima, this volume). The introduction of fencing in the 1990s further promoted the fragmentation of grasslands and their management by individual households. The Chinese state restructured the administration of territories and peoples throughout the entire country, separating out and giving legal 'visibility' to the smallest unit – the household – which had previously been subsumed in commune. Now the household became directly linked to the administrative organization of the state. The new policies introduced in the 1980s and 1990s directly focused on households.

In Qinghai in the 1990s, the division of grasslands among the households of Tibetan herders was followed by the implementation of the s-pa-tso (Tib: chu grig babs) poverty reduction programme (Foggin 2008; Yeh 2005), which encouraged herders to build houses for themselves and shelters for their livestock on their pastures. If they wanted financial aid allocated by this programme, they had to fence in their pastures and use at least part of them to grow fodder. This programme further promoted the development of small rangeland properties managed by single households (Banks 2000; Bauer 2005). The land management plan thus followed the PRC's development strategies of the 1980s and 1990s encouraging the development of the socialist market economy.

When the Chinese government implemented the 'ecological migrations' and the new settlements at the beginning of the 2000s, the Tibetan herders on the Amdo-Qinghai plateau had just finished building houses and shelters and fencing their pastures according to the previous s-pa-tso programme. The resistance that the local governments encountered in implementing these new policies is reflected in the countless differences in the manner and strategies adopted to realize them in different districts and prefectures of Qinghai. The local authorities were aware that the implementation of such policies was problematic, as it implied that the herders would have to leave their livestock and the pastures that they had just finished fencing, thereby losing their main source of income. In some districts the relocation was only partially introduced and the herders were free to choose whether to move or not; in other cases, not all of a household's members moved into the new settlements. There are, however, districts in which all the members of a household had to relocate to new settlements. Yet in others areas, herders relocated, but nonetheless continued herding their livestock on their grasslands and often returned to their grasslands to harvest caterpillar fungus (Tib: dbyer rtsus dgu m'nyen; Ch: dengzhangxian) during the summer.8

In many areas of Qinghai, the government authorities told the herders that the new settlements were only a temporary measure aimed at restoring 'degraded' grasslands. In other districts, the government promised better living conditions and pastures for grazing livestock close to the new settlements. The herders often bought their houses in these settlements thinking that they were seizing an advantageous opportunity handed to them by the state. In fact, many of them sold some or all of their livestock and used at least part of them to grow fodder. This programme further promoted the development of small rangeland properties managed by single households (Banks 2000; Bauer 2005). The land management plan thus followed the PRC's development strategies of the 1980s and 1990s encouraging the development of the socialist market economy.

8. The information related to the actual situation of grassland divisions and the implementation of territorial policies is based on ethnographic data and is supported by prefect- and district-level government documents gathered during fieldwork.
9. Caterpillar fungus is a medicinal root found only on the Tibetan Plateau. The Tibetan name literally means 'summer grass, winter worm'. It is so named because the fungus grows out of the body of a caterpillar. See Daniel Woldie's publications listed at www.danielwoldie.com/ Daniel_woldie_selected_publications.htm, (accessed 11 April 2011) as well as Woldie (2010).
to come up with the necessary cash to buy a house at what seemed like a convenient price. Moreover, they mistakenly thought that they could use these new houses as a second home that was closer to the townships than their house on the grasslands. Only later did they understand that if they did not live permanently in the new settlement and moved back to the grasslands, the state would appropriate their property, and they would lose all the money they had invested in it.

In my main field site, relocation in new settlements was still going on at the time of my research. According to my interlocutors, when local leaders – who are mostly native Tibetans of the region – told them to relocate, they also encouraged them not to sell all their livestock to buy a house in the new settlements. Local leaders in fact suggested that herdsmen sell only half of their livestock and keep grazing the other half. Some Tibetan officials confirmed to me that they could not ask the herdsmen to sell all their livestock because without it they would not have had any sources of income whatsoever. They also argued that the herdsmen would never have accepted this condition anyway. Therefore, the herdsmen who relocated to the new settlements, as well as the local officials in charge of policy implementation, ignored the official policy according to which all livestock had to be sold in order to empty the grasslands and allow them to recover, which could take anywhere from three years to eternity. In fact, herdsmen repeatedly stressed that they moved to the new settlements with the expectation of certain benefits that turned out to be nonexistent. Some herdsmen moved because the local leaders assured them that they could graze their livestock around the new settlement, or that they would receive training and be employed in new jobs. Most of my interlocutors in my principal field site claimed that they moved to the new settlement because the local authorities assured them that the move was temporary. Another important reason herdsmen agreed to relocate was to be closer to their children, many of whom had to attend boarding schools in the townships. These boarding schools were often characterized by poor living conditions, and children could only return home once every couple of weeks. The herdsmen moved to the new settlement because the local authorities promised them that there would be schools there. Another complication stemmed from lack of sufficient information about the conditions of relocation. As herdsmen did not know that purchasing a house in the new settlement meant that all the mem-

bers of the household had to relocate, they often split the family in two parts: the members of the household who were able to work remained on the grasslands herding livestock, while the others moved with the children to the new settlement (a strategy that has also been observed in Kham-Qinghai by Nyima in ch. 5 of this volume).

However, according to the new educational law implemented in 2009 in Qinghai Province, a pilot programme was launched in Tseho (Tib.: stgo bo ch'i. Hainan) Prefecture that stipulated that all school-age children should attend primary schools located in the townships. The result of this policy was that all villages, including those in the new settlements, had to close down, and the children had to move into township boarding schools. Many herdsmen felt that local officials had tricked them, not only because they had been misled to believe that they could stay close to their children, but also because they incorrectly believed that they could maintain a double-residence pattern – in other words, continue living on their pasturage and own a new house in the settlement. Only after arriving in the new settlement did they discover that if they wished to keep the new house, at least a part of the household had to permanently live there in order to prove to the Chinese authorities that they had actually given up residence on the grasslands. Many relocated herdsmen found this situation unacceptable. Many of those herdsmen who had not sold all their livestock moved back to the grasslands. Others split their households in two, leaving the oldest couple of the family or a woman with pre-school children in the house in the new settlement, while the rest of the family remained on the grasslands.

The policy of 'ecological migrations' could not be implemented fully because of herdsmen's resistance to selling their livestock and relocating in the new settlements. The local government of the district in which my main field site was located was challenged both by relocated herdsmen who chose to move back to the grasslands and herdsmen who refused to move from their pasturage in the first place. The latest intervention initiated by the local government came in the fall of 2010 and was simply an extension of the previous 'ecological migrations' policy. According to this new plan, all herdsmen, even those that had refused to relocate previously, were to be forced to move to the new settlements. A new kind of 'collectivization' was intended to compel herdsmen to pool their livestock into one large herd, as they had done during the period of collectivization up
ON THE FRINGES OF THE HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

to the 1980s. Only one household should live on the grassland grazing this 'collective' herd, while all the other households should move into the new settlements. This programme met with strong opposition among herders, who categorically refused to recollectivize their livestock. To the best of my knowledge, the implementation of this collectivisation plan is still waiting to be realized.

The endless search by local governments for suitable ways to implement the policies and plans decided by the central government shows the level of resistance and the compromises with which any political plan must cope. The gap between the formulation of political and economic visions at the highest governmental levels and their practical implementation in the local context are aptly indicated by the long years separating the introduction of a new plan and its actual realization, as well as by the strategies employed by local authorities to adapt these policies to local conditions to make them more palatable. Local authorities and their representatives are constantly obliged to negotiate policy execution with local people. However, this does not mean that these policies will be reformulated in loco or that they will never be applied. Policies are partially adapted according to the local context, but in the process local people have to accommodate and accept them.

Tibetan herders challenging the state’s power device

The space created by the new settlements is a useful tool for the administration. In the new settlements each household owns one house, which is identical to the other houses and is identified by a number written in big characters on one of its walls. When a household moves into a new settlement, it does not have the right to choose its own building. Rather, the local authorities assign a house to each household. They then register it, indicating the name of the household head, the number of people in the household, their region of origin, and the age, sex, and educational level of each household member. Additionally, the amount of livestock and land owned by the household, as well as the size of the pastureland relieved from grazing, are also noted. For the Chinese state, registering the Tibetan herders moving into the new settlements makes it easier to control and order them. But what really happened in practice when the Tibetan herders moved into the new settlements? How did the state device actually operate and how did people respond to it?

NEW SETTLEMENTS ON THE TIBETAN PLATEAU OF AMDO-QINGHAI

In the new settlement where I lived for several months, the situation was quite different from the picture painted in official documents. The relocation of the herders in this district began in 2007 when the settlement was under construction. When I was living there in 2009, construction was still going on, with many houses empty and awaiting new herding households to move in. Herders belonging to one kinship group usually bought their houses on the same street because the authorities assigned accommodation in the same neighbourhood to households coming from the same region. Consequently, the overlapping of family and territorial links remained preserved in the new settlement. One concrete consequence of this spatial distribution was that people usually spent their days in the streets where their close kin and previous grassland neighbours lived. This way of distributing people within the settlement reduced the threat that political relations would be transformed once people relocated, and the local government could more easily install a new settlement leader and CCP secretary to whom relocated herders could address their grievances concerning government institutions.

In this particular settlement several households actually bought more than one house, taking advantage of the attractive prices offered only to herders coming from the regions included in the ‘ecological migrations’ plan.10 Some herders ostensibly – although not in fact – split their household into two households so that they could buy two houses in the new settlement. One of the two new households kept grazing its livestock on the grasslands, while the other moved into one of the houses. They could thus lease the other house to Tibetans coming from towns who did not qualify to buy property in the settlement. This meant that the herders’ households received a state subsidy while gaining an additional source of income: the rent. The result was that the new settlement as a device for order and control was in practice not very efficient because the registration of the new settlement households was often incomplete or incorrect. Using the pretext of being two separate households residing in two new houses, the herders often managed to get two subsidies allocated by the state as compensation for the loss of herding income and as a subsidy to buy coal during the winter season. Moreover, the

10. In the area where I conducted most of my fieldwork, the cost of renting one room in the nearby township was between 70 yuan and 100 yuan per month in 2009 and 2010. The cost of buying a house in the new settlement was 70,000 yuan.
ON THE FRINGES OF THE HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

herders also managed to maintain family and regional unity within the settlement layout. For a family or for a group of households coming from the same region, the possibility of moving into the same part of the settlement also meant that they would remain neighbours and that their houses would share a courtyard wall. Two households sharing a courtyard wall often decided to tear it down in order to let the members of the two household units pass easily from one courtyard to the other.

Since the majority of the herders in my main field site still owned livestock, they often returned to their pastures for quite long periods. This practice of herders temporarily moving back to the grasslands despite the fact that they had officially settled down in the new settlements was quite common in the Qinghai area. In some settlements founded prior to the one I lived in, the practice of moving back to the grasslands during the summer period was quasi-official in the sense that the herders were allowed to go back to the grasslands to harvest caterpillar fungus. Some herders would move with their children back to their pastures at the beginning of the school summer vacation on this pretext. Many herders who had permanently relocated to the new settlement where I lived returned to their pastures also during the New Year festival. This practice was illegal, but the local authorities accepted it for the time being. Another informal practice of the herders in this particular settlement was to use the courtyard of their house as a barn for animals. A few months after the relocation of the first herders in the new settlement, the local government conducted agricultural training for relocated herders, teaching them the basic techniques of farming. At the end of this training the local authorities encouraged herders to cultivate their courtyards. The herders were given seeds and financial aid to build greenhouses. Many herders participated in this training, but a few months later most of them abandoned the idea of cultivating their courtyards. Instead they bought animals and started to breed them in the courtyards and in the surrounding grasslands.

One last example of herders' "interference" with the plans for the new settlements has to do with the lack of what I call 'shared history' in these newly constructed living spaces. The new settlements were usually devoid of meeting places. There were no markets, squares, or any other public spaces in which people could meet and socialize. In the settlement where I lived, an informal practice was established among the inhabitants, particularly among older people. In the afternoon, they would climb to the top of the little hill behind the settlement and spend the afternoon sitting together, chatting, discussing, and looking after young children. People thus created a meeting place where they informally got together and discussed settlement problems and other communal issues, actually evading official surveillance.

The above are examples of a much longer list of "tactics" (De Certeau 1990: 50–68) Tibetan herders engaged in to transform the spatial restrictions generated by the new settlements. These few examples nonetheless highlight the way in which these plans, built on political ideologies, must accommodate and adapt to the responses and needs of local inhabitants, who were clearly troubled by the ideal envisioned in the original plans. In pragmatic ways people targeted by and subjected to administrative measures interfere with and modify the programmes that have been ostensibly designed to serve their well-being and happiness, but which simultaneously function as a means of tighter social control.

The state's power devices challenging Tibetan herders' practices and customs

The new settlement rules, as shown above, were often modified and even subverted once the herders moved in. People transformed their houses physically and adapted the restrictions of the new settlements to their needs, juggling between legal and illegal frames. Nevertheless, the new settlements restricted Tibetan herders and had an impact on their established practices. In what follows I will give two examples of such changes taking place after the herders had relocated.

As has been mentioned above, for most herders relocation meant selling most or all of their livestock. The loss of livestock implied that herders' households now had access to fewer resources than before. As livestock had previously fulfilled almost all of a household's basic needs, including meat, milk, cheese, dung for fire, and wool, the loss of livestock meant that a household had to buy all these expensive products on the market. Despite the fact that the Chinese state compensated relocated herders for the loss of livestock income for a period of ten years, a household that moved into a new settlement had less cash than before because it had no more livestock resources. Many of the herders, however, did not know that these subsidies were for a limited time only,
ON THE FRINGES OF THE HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

and assumed that they would receive these subsidies in perpetuity. In any case, the subsidies were not sufficient to maintain a household, and the herders had to look for additional sources of income. They searched for employment, but because they were inexperienced, lacked skills other than herding, and often did not know Chinese, they rarely found employment. If they did succeed in finding a job, it was typically on construction sites.13

My interlocutors also pointed out that, in addition to the new need to buy products that they used to produce for themselves, the households now also developed new consumer behaviour. This was stimulated by their close proximity to the township and the discovery of new products such as kitchen appliances and electric tools, which progressively came to be seen as necessities. Sometimes they also claimed that the proximity to the market simply generated a consumerist mentality that did not exist when they lived on the grasslands. Now they had to find the money to buy products that they would not have bought if they were still living on the grasslands.

These examples show that relocation is a complex process that has actually revolutionized Tibetan herders' lifestyles socially, politically, and economically. Thus, to assert that the new settlements are innocuous is disingenuous. The new settlements are power devices which, although they are still not working as intended, have already proven sufficient to engender new constraints, new needs, and new customs among the new settlers.

Conclusion

The new settlements cropping up all over the Tibetan Plateau respond to the central Chinese leadership since 2005: economic development, amelioration of living conditions, scientific and technological development, and environmental protection. Social stability is also addressed, as the spatial layout of these settlements facilitates control of inhabitants. Although the establishment of these settlements is a recent challenge that Tibetan herders must face, it is not a novel phenomenon when compared with similar modernization projects in other parts of the world. The main aim of this chapter has been to analyze this strategy of spatializing power in grid-patterned settlements. It has been shown that the attempt to control populations by ordering their living space is a recurrent strategy employed by many states. Political ideals find their empirical realization in planned villages, which are power devices for exercising and renewing state control and surveillance over territory and people, as the examples of the Roman centuria divisions, the Soviet kolkhozy, and the Tanzanian and Algerian villages have illustrated.

These states believed that the transformation of people by instilling the politically correct mindset could be achieved by changing their living environment, which would also lead to strengthening social order and control. Ideally, people living in these special spaces should also transform their customs and habits to meet the challenges of their new environment. We have seen that the herders moving into the new settlements reflect upon how they have changed many of their practices, and the emergence of new household needs is further confirmation of this. Nevertheless, this chapter has also revealed the strategies employed by the herders to appropriate and adapt these settlements to their needs. In this way, they actually challenge the state-imposed idea of a 'harmonious society.' Having moved into their new houses, they have introduced numerous informal practices – interactions, negotiations, and adjustments, many of which are illegal – that simultaneously serve to evade supervision and social control by state institutions. Many Tibetan herders have resisted state-planned relocation, but even those who have relocated have interfered with and disrupted the plans and policies as they continue to struggle for their own livelihood and to satisfy their social needs.

In order to realize the plans of the new settlements, the local government must deal with herders who have resisted relocation or who have reversed their relocation. These examples remind us of Scott's (1998) insights on how strategies used by a state to organize human living space have often failed in the long run. Nonetheless, although the herders'
practices covertly challenge state policies, they do not generate any actual power that would enable the herders to explicitly influence the political agenda set by the centre or to engage in open forms of resistance. At best they may slow down and delay the implementation of certain projects designed to control and order the herders. It is to be expected that the Chinese government will eventually apply other strategies and approaches to achieve its aims, aims that are unlikely to be fundamentally changed by the needs or actions of the settlement inhabitants.

The new settlements of Amdo-Qinghai, like the villages in other regions of the world that I have described in this chapter, have a chance of becoming effectively operational once they are linked to economic transformations. These most recent ones are power devices that are actually achieving the goals of transforming people’s habits and customs, creating new needs, and enforcing constraints.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Trine Brix and Adélabo Bellèr-Hann for their advice and constructive suggestions on earlier versions of this chapter. I am grateful to Robert Barnett and Jane Caple for their useful suggestions. I am also thankful to Brian Donachie for kindly reviewing and commenting on the final version of the chapter. Finally, I acknowledge the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation, the Centre d’Études Françaises sur la Chine Contemporaine, the Louis Dumont Foundation, the EHESS, my research laboratory IRIS, and the Paula Sandri Foundation for supporting my doctoral research.

References


ON THE FRINGES OF THE HARMONIOUS SOCIETY


NEW SETTLEMENTS ON THE TIBETAN PLATEAU OF AMDO-QINGHAI


Tu Qixun, Tan Shuxiao, Niu Heerink and Qu Fujian (2008). ‘Les effets de la culture sur les performances économiques et la dégradation des prairies:...
ON THE FRINGES OF THE HARMONIOUS SOCIETY

le cas des Tibétains et des Mongols de la région du lac Qinghai', Perspectives Chinoises 2: 39–47.

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-02/01/c_131440400.htm (Last accessed on 13 October 2013)


CHAPTER SEVEN

Harmonious or homogeneous? Language, education and social mobility in rural Uyghur society

Chris Hann

Introduction

The violence which claimed almost 200 lives on 5 July 2009 took place in downtown districts of Urumqi, the dynamic metropolis which is the capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), where Uyghurs form less than 15 per cent of an urban population now well in excess of two million. However, state officials were quick to claim that the main Uyghur perpetrators were for the most part not registered urban residents at all. Rather, they were officially classified as rural inhabitants of densely populated oases in southern Xinjiang, where Uyghurs still greatly outnumber Han. These regions are underdeveloped and have not benefited significantly from the Open Up the West campaign (Ch.: xibu da kaifu), launched in 1999. By widening disparities between social groups and increasing both inter- and intraregional inequalities, policy initiatives ostensibly intended to promote equality have accentuated the perception on the part of many Uyghurs that they are second-class citizens in the region that is supposed to be their homeland. The immediate triggers of protest in July 2009 have been expertly analysed by James Millward (2009). My aim in this chapter is to outline the changing structural conditions which constitute the deeper causes of that tragedy.

1. This chapter is the product of long-term research carried out jointly with Heiko Beißwenger since the 1980s. Our work on the Qumul (Hami) oasis between 2006 and 2009 was made possible by a cooperation agreement with Xinjiang University, in the framework of the project 'Kinship and Social Support in China and Vietnam', supported by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology. I am especially grateful to Amin Ablula and Bahsix