

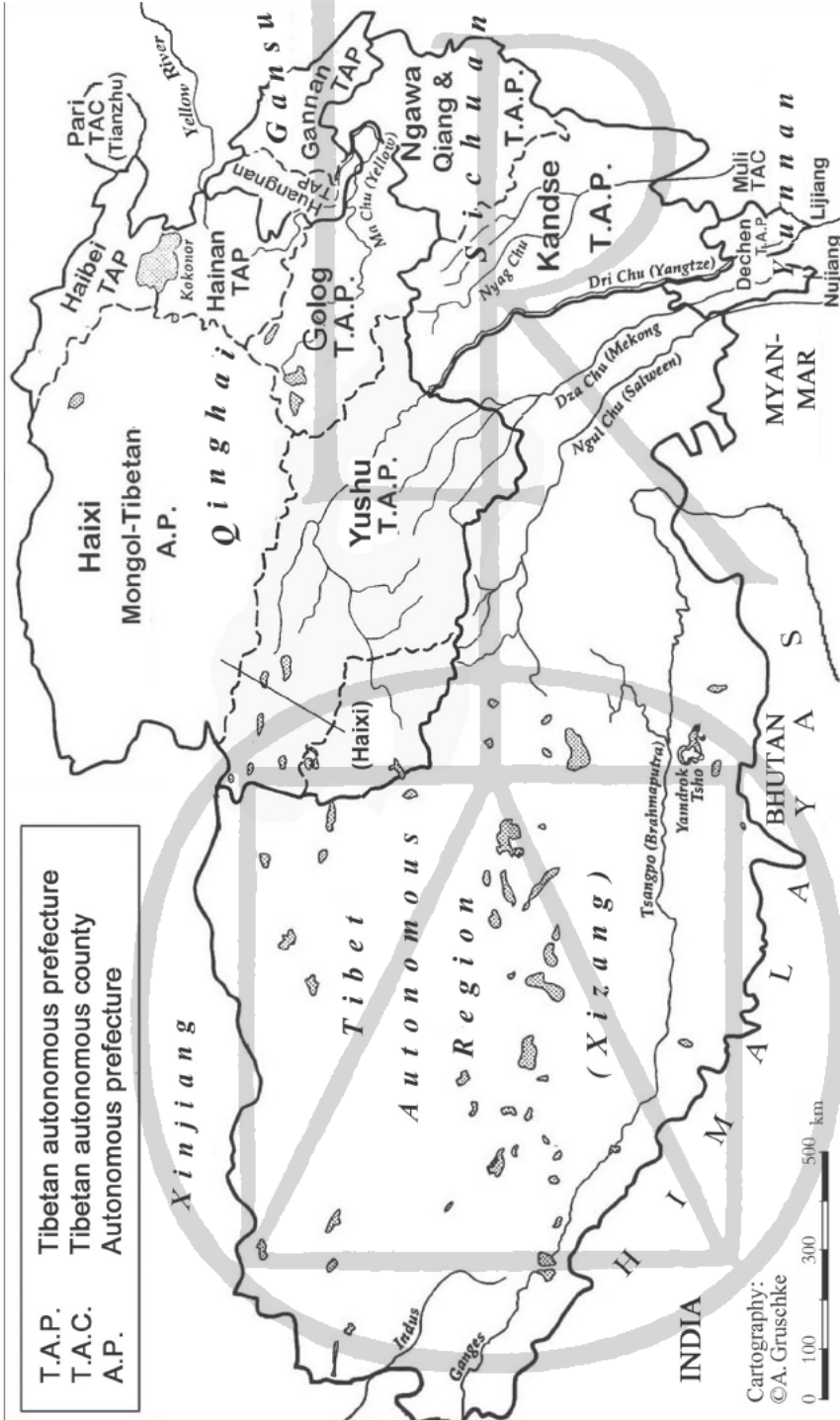
Tibetan Pastoralists and Development: Negotiating the Future of Grassland Livelihoods

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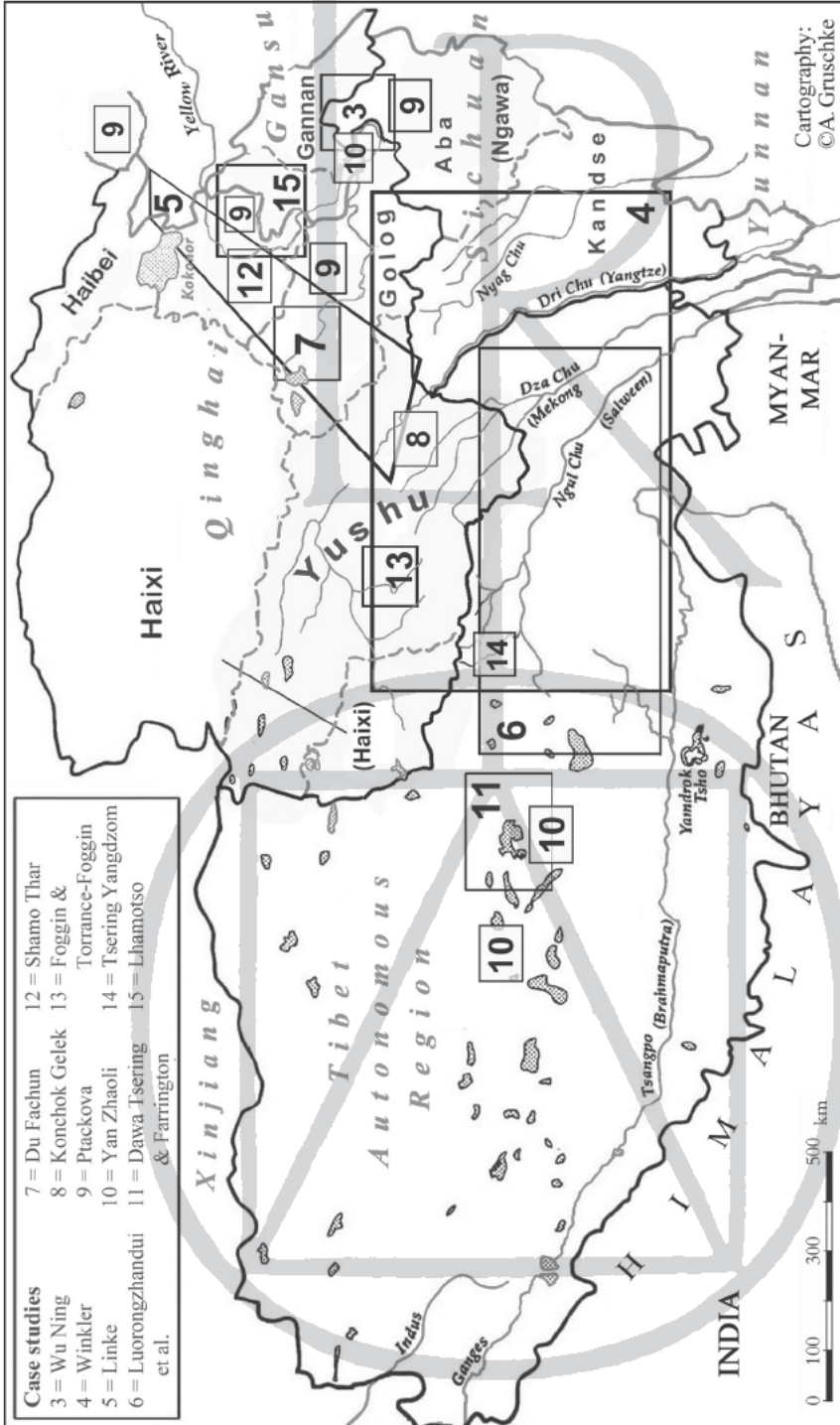
The Tibetan Plateau constitutes the world's vastest high-altitude rangeland. It has featured a unique pastoralist culture where, based on yak and sheep production, on complex exchange systems with agricultural areas and the lowlands, and in the context of ever-changing political conditions, pastoralists developed livelihood systems that helped them adapt not only to the harsh environmental conditions, but also to the ever-changing political and economic trends. The 20th century, most prominently the plateau's ever closer integration into the Chinese state, has brought profound changes to pastoral Tibetans. It has opened the plateau to the influence of a wide array of policies directed at 'developing', modernizing, and recently urbanizing the Tibetan pastoral areas. It has also connected even the remotest community to the booming Chinese markets and – indirectly – the world market. Pastoral communities, thus, are being opened up to new economic opportunities, exposed to new risks and integrated into increasingly complex commodity chains. Local consequences of climate change, the demographic transition, new lifestyles and consumption patterns, and new forms of wealth/poverty and social polarization further complicate the picture.

In the context of these recent transformations, the present volume discusses the question of possible futures of Tibetan pastoralism. The individual chapters take a perspective informed by the 'Sustainable Livelihood' approach, as discussed in numerous recent publications about pastoralism. We conceptualize a livelihood as comprising "the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living" (CHAMBERS and CONWAY 1992), which means that our perspective takes into account three aspects: The pastoralists' everyday survival strategies, their access to the resources (pastures, animals, cash, skills, and many more) these strategies depend on, and last but not least, the economic, political, and cultural contexts that shape both resource access and the strategies themselves. Each chapter of this volume, then, explores selected aspects of recent changes in the economic, social, political, and environmental conditions that determine how and whether pastoralism can be a successful strategy for Tibetans. Simultaneously, each chapter uses field-work based local case studies to show how these changes affect pastoralists' everyday lives, strategies, and livelihood security.

By the late 1970s, numerous scholars had declared the decline of Tibetan culture and, concomitantly, of the pastoral livelihood systems (cf. SHAKYA 1994, POHLE 1999): The last thirty years have proved the opposite: In the context of the 1980s' economic liberalization, the plateau witnessed a massive upsurge of pastoral systems, a phenomenon which some have referred to as



Map 1-1: Administrative Division of the Tibetan Plateau



Map 1-2: Location of Case Studies and Research Areas

re-nomadization (see, for example, MANDERSCHIED 2001, JANZEN 1999). Since the 2000s, this was followed by a stage of large-scale state-led development programs aimed to accelerate modernization. The scale of investments and the degree of state intervention and regulation even in very remote pastoral settings is perhaps unique to China. It makes the Tibetan Plateau a fascinating area to study how pastoral livelihoods change in such a context. The case studies of this volume are intended to show which kinds of regulations can be beneficial to local populations, but also, how (even well-meant) interventions can go wrong and create new serious issues. The individual chapters take a local, bottom-up view, highlighting how interventions are implemented in practice and what they mean in specific local settings. The geography-informed local perspective also puts two other facts into the focus: First, the pastoralism on the Tibetan Plateau is far from homogeneous; it comprises a wide array of local communities, each with a specific economic setting, history, social structure, and environmental conditions. Second, pastoralists are individual persons with their very own aspirations, their agency, their creativity, and a wide array of strategies which they have used not only in their 'traditional' realm (i.e. livestock production itself), but also to deal with the new challenges and opportunities of the 21st century.

One key question, then, is to which extent the plateau's pastoral livelihoods prove resilient to the recent changes that – seemingly – leave little space for a nomadic lifestyle. The answers that the present volume's chapters provide are nuanced and highly depend on the specific local context we are talking about. Yes, there is resilience, and pastoralism still fulfills multiple key functions in rural livelihoods on the plateau. As a whole, pastoralism is unlikely to disappear. As many of the chapters illustrate, however, pastoral systems have been subject to a great deal of social and economic fragmentation, perhaps even polarization. Modernization vs. an apparent conservation traditional lifestyles; hitherto unknown forms of wealth vs. new forms of poverty; economic integration vs. social marginalization; market liberalization vs. increased state intervention; livelihood diversification vs. the emergence of new one-sided dependencies (and increased vulnerability) – these and more dynamics currently play out in the pastoral society of the Tibetan Plateau. They have, as this volume will show, created a situation where pastoral communities are increasingly fragmented, with massive differences between individual households and social groups, and livelihoods that are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable coexisting with livelihoods that are not. The future of pastoralism thus increasingly depends on how local conditions and practices can be shaped and managed in a participative way, with local pastoralists themselves being empowered to bringing their very own 'ways of doing', their creativity, into the equation and take control of their own lives. Whether this is a future option in the current political climate in China remains an open question.

This volume, thus, presents a selection of current perspectives on recent changes and on their specific impact on pastoral livelihoods. It comprises fifteen chapters by Tibetan, Chinese, and Western scholars from the social and environmental sciences, such as geography, sociology, anthropology, and biology. The chapters offer detailed case-study based analyses of the key processes that drive current transformation of pastoral livelihoods on the Tibetan Plateau (Map 1-1 and 1-2).

In the first chapter, the *Andreas Gruschke* and *Ingo Breuer* give an introduction to pastoral livelihoods on the Tibetan Plateau. After introducing key concepts used throughout the volume, they review Tibetan pastoralism's status quo, recent developments and future perspectives. Their chapter gives a geographical and historical account of the general economic and social contexts

that shape Tibetan pastoralist livelihoods, providing background information against which the more specific subsequent chapters can be read.

Wu Ning then discusses possible impacts of climate change on Tibetan pastoral livelihoods, based on an analysis of data on climate, rangeland ecology, and pastoral development in Zoige, in the Eastern part of the plateau. Tibetan pastoralists, he concludes, will be particularly exposed to the effects of climate change, but may actually be able to successfully navigate these transformations because they have displayed highly effective coping strategies to ensure resilience to climatic fluctuations. Simultaneously, recent effects of climate change run in parallel to very fast economic change processes pastoralists may lack the capabilities to cope with. A realistic appraisal of pastoralism's future can thus not be derived from a perspective on climate change alone.

The three subsequent chapters examine a phenomenon that, perhaps like no other, has transformed Tibetan pastoralism during the last two decades: The emergence of highly lucrative markets for *yartsagunbu* (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*), a fungus used in Chinese medicine and found on pastures throughout the Eastern and North-Eastern parts of the plateau. *Daniel Winkler* gives a detailed overview of *yartsagunbu* ecology, production, its economy, and its relevance for local livelihoods. He describes how this commodity has developed into the economic mainstay of rural Tibet, reducing the importance of the traditional subsistence herding, bringing considerable wealth to certain communities, and enabling many households to give up livestock herding and move to towns. *Yartsagunbu* has, however, also created a pronounced dependency of pastoral households on one single commodity, with the economic sustainability of the current situation remaining questionable in the context of a possible decline in *yartsagunbu* productivity and a considerable volatility of its markets. *Janka Linke* takes a closer look at the *yartsagunbu* commodity chains that link even the remotest pastoral communities to consumer markets to the mega-cities of Mainland China. She examines the multi-layered strategies Tibetans have applied to participate in this highly lucrative market hitherto dominated by Muslim merchants. She investigates how certain pastoralists have been able to occupy advantageous positions within the market, whilst others are increasingly being excluded from it, the control over *yartsagunbu*-producing rangelands being the one decisive factor that determines how a given household can benefit. She also describes how the *yartsagunbu* trade is currently catalyzing a commoditization of pastureland which, albeit informal, appears to decrease pastoralists' exposure to market fluctuations and uncertainties. Finally, in their chapter, *Luorongzhandui*, *Andreas Gruschke* and *Ingo Breuer* examine how the actions and reactions of different stakeholders (village leadership, scholars, local and regional governments) have intersected to develop rules and regulations governing *yartsagunbu* access in the TAR. These rules, the authors show, are neither uniformly decreed nor implemented, but vary widely between locations and have emerged from specific local socio-political backgrounds; most significantly, they appear to favor local people and exclude outsiders from *yartsagunbu* harvesting. Accordingly, the authors conclude that these rules have had beneficial effects on pastoralists' livelihoods, decreasing poverty, mitigating local conflicts that were displaying increasing levels of physical violence, and providing pastoral groups with a unique resource to build their livelihoods upon.

Du Fachun's chapter provides an in-depth analysis of another phenomenon that is currently bringing radical transformations to Tibetan pastoralist livelihoods: *shengtai yimin* 生态移民, typically translated as 'ecological migration' or 'ecological resettlement', i.e. the resettlement of

Tibetan herders from grasslands into towns and newly built villages, accompanied by a grazing ban on their pastures of origin. He shows how this policy has been orchestrated and implemented by the government with the intention to alleviate rural poverty and protect ecologically fragile grasslands. He then explores the multiple issues that this policy has entailed, particularly: the herders' difficulties to build alternative livelihoods when left without livestock, the complex impacts on migrants' areas of origin and their host areas, and the cultural problems and identity issues resettled pastoralists are confronted with. Given these findings, Du Fachun concludes that both the rationale and the consequences of *shengtai yimin* need rethinking.

The three chapters by *Konchok Gelek [Gengqiu Gelai]*, *Jarmila Ptackova*, and *Yan Zhaoli* focus on the main pastoral resource – pasturelands. China's rangeland development policies, materialized via a plethora of governmental interventions and projects, have, during the last thirty years, reshaped the landscape on the Tibetan Plateau. Processes such as the individualization and privatization of rangeland use rights, the massive and widespread emergence of fences, the creation of permanent dwellings, and the closing-off of certain pastures, have left profound imprints on the pastoral economy. The three chapters provide three different perspectives on how pastoralists have coped with these changes, how they develop new strategies to make best use of the new pasture-landscape, and how pastoral livelihoods and everyday practice are being influenced by these recent transitions. *Konchok Gelek [Gengqiu Gelai]* uses case studies from his empirical work to look at the consequences of the Chinese government's Four Allocations (Chin. *sipeitao*) programme, examining social consequences of land division on the one hand, and the impact of new physical infrastructure on the other hand. He argues that land division has engendered an increasing awareness of private pasture use and, thus, a decline in social capital among pastoralists, leading to an increase in rangeland conflicts which pastoral communities have tried their best to address and resolve. *Konchok Gelek [Gengqiu Gelai]* also analyzes the nexus between the new physical infrastructure (sheds, fences) and herd productivity, showing the complex and ambiguous ways in which pastoral development programmes have influenced herders' livelihoods on the ground. *Jarmila Ptackova's* chapter offers an in-depth analysis of the practices and consequences of the so-called 'enclosure movement', i.e. fence-building following rangeland allocation to individual families, in rangelands of the Tibetan Plateau. In a context where fences can serve different purposes (environmental and socio-economic), she demonstrates that both the stakeholders' motivations to fence and the livelihood impact of enclosures vary extremely across the plateau's different local contexts. She argues that the enclosure movement, whilst limiting herding flexibility, has helped poor households to maintain their land use rights, but can, under certain conditions, contribute to environmental and socio-economic problems. *Yan Zhaoli*, finally, further elaborates on the consequences of rangeland the privatization of land use rights. The combined effects of policy changes and climate impact have, as she argues, added pressure on Tibetan pastoralists to actively respond by making use of their traditional knowledge. Based on case studies, she shows how pastoralists have – despite the changes in rangeland use rights – applied (or continued to apply) mobile strategies of livestock grazing, developed and operated under their own indigenous knowledge systems. Rangeland management decisions, *Yan Zhaoli* concludes, can be effective and successful only if local pastoralists are actively involved in decision-making and implementation processes.

The subsequent chapters highlight some of the major changes in environmental and social policies that both the Central and regional/local governments have brought forward during the

last two decades. Starting from detailed local case studies, these chapters investigate the repercussions these changes have had for pastoralists' livelihoods and their ability to make a living in remote areas of the plateau. The chapter by *Dawa Tsering [Dawaciren]* and *John G. Farrington* focuses on environmental policy, in a context where the conservation of the plateau's unique landscapes and wildlife has been declared a priority by the Central government. Related policies have led to the establishment of some of the largest nature reserves and a rebound of the plateau's wildlife species – such as the Tibetan brown bear, the snow leopard, the wild yak, and the Tibetan antelope – some of which were threatened by extinction by the early 1990s. In their case study from the Chang Tang region, the authors show how pastoral households cope with the concomitant sharp rise in incidents such as livestock killed or driven off, foodstuffs lost, dwellings damaged, and even herders being injured or killed. As the authors show, management of such conflicts has become an everyday livelihood issue for herders, and conflict reduction strategies are urgently needed to facilitate a sustainable coexistence of pastoral livelihoods and an efficient environmental protection.

How to bring education and other social services to remote areas and mobile populations has been an ongoing issue for development practitioners. *Shamo Thar [Xia Maotai]*, in this context, explores the role of schooling and education in the recent transformation of livelihoods in a remote pastoral community in Tsolho (Hainan) TAP. Her analysis is set against the background of a new policy of centralization of primary education in rural China, implemented in the pastoral areas of Qinghai since 2009. Based on an analysis of schooling patterns, herders' attitudes towards education, and of the sometimes heavy economic burden incurred by pastoralists who send their children to newly established boarding schools, she argues that the centralization policy may have considerable (and possibly negative) impacts on long-term education chances and livelihood perspectives in remote pastoral communities.

Marc Foggín and *Marion Torrance-Foggín* discuss how it can be possible to provide social services to pastoralists in remote areas of Qinghai. Based on their own experiences both as researchers and development practitioners, they show how such services can be delivered cost-effectively even to very remote communities on the plateau. They demonstrate that there may be sustainable alternatives to the government's strategy to re-locate the nomads to urban centers in order to combat poverty and improve access to social services. Their case study also sheds light on the potentials that may have been lost as a consequence of the government's decision to restrict the involvement of NGOs, both local and international, in the development process on the Tibetan Plateau.

The two final chapters of the present volume address the situation of women in Tibetan pastoral communities. They do so from two very different and complementary perspectives. *Ciren Yangzong [Tsering Yangdzom]* provides an analysis of the roles women and men play in social production and livelihood security in a pastoral area of the Northern TAR, highlighting how these roles change within a context of modernization. Her case studies demonstrate that the division of labor is still very clearly cut, which means that despite modernization, women's everyday lives remain characterized by very long hours of heavy manual labor, leaving little room for women's involvement in community development, higher education, or alternative livelihood strategies. *Lhamotso [Lamaocuo]*, who – as a feminist scholar and development specialist who grew up in a Tibetan pastoral area – is uniquely positioned, discusses how these gender roles are rooted in the cultural setup of Amdo Tibetan communities. Providing a feminist analysis of social expecta-

tions, traditional stereotypes, and cultural belief systems prevalent in Tibetan pastoral communities, she argues that traditional gender roles of Tibetan women are a strong social force that limits women's opportunities and prevents them from genuine participation in the development processes that are currently shaping the future of pastoralists on the Tibetan Plateau.

