

**Development in pastoral community in perspective of herders' subjectivity:
the case of Dam Gzhung Rdzong in Tibet (TAR)**

Hong Chen
Inner Mongolia University
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I first became interested in the Dam Gzhung Rdzong County (Dangxiong xian 当雄县) due to its unusual history. According to historical records, in the 17th century Guushi Hhan of the Hoshuut Mongols—joined with the fifth Dalai Lama to establish the Gelupa hegemony in Tibet. The 13th Dalai Lama placed them under the jurisdiction of Sera temple, where they subsequently lost all privileges previously bestowed upon them by the Dalai Lama, and gradually, over time, came to lose their Mongolian identity, becoming Tibetan. As we can see, in the story above the boundaries between what constitutes Mongolians and Tibetans in Dam Gzhung is unclear, in that the cultures of the two peoples have become interwoven over the centuries. Nevertheless, another kind of boundary has become much more important: the boundaries between pastures.

The formation of grassland boundaries

The focus of this ethnographic account is a small village— which for our purposes here I will refer to as U—in Dam Gzhung Rdzong, a county of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), located to the northeast of Lhasa, and at the southern end of the Qiangtang Prairie. U village is a typical village with 34 herding families, and up to 250 people with their grassland separated into two sections— North and South—by National Highway 109. In the village Mrs. G, age 56. She recalls of the village grassland boundaries recently formed, and that these new boundaries have brought with them significant problems. As she explained, she needed to “fight” for the ability to do so. Subsequently, Mrs. G’s son recalled a popular story in the village about his mother’s “fight” and her subsequent apology. During the years between 2000 and 2005, the boundaries between village grasslands were formally delineated and cordoned off by long wire fences; nevertheless his mother continued to graze her yaks on the grasslands of other villages, again and again. When the villagers of neighboring areas protested, his mother made the now infamous argument, “the sky and the land all belongs to the Communist Party, so why can’t I herd my yaks here?” This new “reality”, beginning in the 2000’s, formed a new tradition as to how grasslands were to be utilized, that not only divided pasture between villages, but also officially divided grasslands between each individual household.

Within a bounded grassland

According to Dam Gzhung Rdzong County documents, the “rangeland household responsibility policy” had been successfully implemented in this village by the year 2005. In U Village, all families received a certificate of right of ownership for the use of a piece of rangeland, issued by the government, and demonstrating the boundary of each household's grassland; however, in practice household range lands continued to be used in a collective manner. Broadly speaking, after the boundary policy began to take shape in the village three changes began to appear: (1) herders required more labor to maintain equal herd numbers, which suggests a decrease in productivity; (2) fodder costs rose in order to keep an ideal number of animals, suggesting an increase in resource requirements; (3) some families even decided to give up their herds and relocate to cities in search of work or opening a business. These changes occurred mainly because of a collective effort to utilize pastureland in a sustainable manner so as to allow each family to make a living through pastoral herding practices.

Wealth and Money

When I joined the family to visit the monastery during Tibetan New Year, I witnessed as their son— caretaker of the yaks— stand before the Buddha and pray “please let me become wealthy this year”. When I inquired as to what kind of wealth he wishes to see, he told me cash to buy a wagon such as that that his elder brother owns so that he may become a driver. He boasted that in their village he and his good friends’ yaks are the strongest, and when he started herding in his teenage years, their family’s yaks number less than 20— and the small number was a source of shame. However, now with the larger herd, he is more confident and believes that it is due to Buddha’s blessing. In general, there were approximately three situations in which people of U Village associated blessings from the Buddha: (1) education and good jobs such as teachers, civil servants, and highly salaried company staff—all of whom are expected to be treated politely; (2) settled homes with traditional Tibetan furniture, and traditional Tibetan clothing complete with matching accessories are in high demand by people during festivals; (3) no diseases and no death. From a different perspective we can see that things associated with blessings from Buddha all have a cost in cash so as to circulate them. The things that are needed to properly tend a herd, such as feed etc., must be purchased in cash. In the cases mentioned above, we can say that villagers believe that wealth must be delivered in two ways: the wealth of blessings from Buddha for spiritual subsistence, and the wealth of cash for material provisions.

The criticisms on the village decision and the policy in Nagqu cases

From an opposing perspective, the village “informal system” of utilizing grassland in a collective method is often regarded as an obstacle to the effective implementation of rangeland policy. Fan Yuanjiang, in his book *The Study of Tibet Rangeland Property Rights Changes* gives an assessment of the rangeland ecological system in Nagqu county based on a series of official statistics and concludes that the main problem instigating a retreat of pastureland in Tibet is due to the public use of rangeland property. Here, “public” refers to the method of some villagers utilization of rangeland in a collective way, as mentioned above. The logic of the argument is essentially that “the informal system” (the public use of pastureland) hinders the implementation of rangeland policy and thereby producing the problem: the informal system is unsuitable to local rangeland animal husbandry development, and due to the lack of clarity of property rights causes the retreat of rangeland.

Furthermore, in the case of this Nanqu county village’s case, from a political ecology point of view Emily T.yeh, Yonten Nyima, Kelly A. Hopping and Julia A. Klein In their article conclude that the government’s decision to limit the mobility of herders has led to additional problems, making the herders rely more on the state, and furthermore both creating and exacerbating the vulnerability of pastoralists to snowstorms, while at the same time increasing both labor and resource costs.

Conclusion

Apparently, Wealth and money are fully recognized by the villagers as ever more significant measure of worth in their lives, and aspirations of material wealth have become a way of life. It is my opinion that due to these changes villagers are likely to become significantly more reliant on the state. However, in U village just how to use and protect the grassland is a common concern in all fields, but just how to practice this has remained largely decided by the villagers living in the new shaped boundaries.