

DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY: A PARTIAL SURVEY OF OVERSEAS TIBETAN STUDIES ON A BASIS OF LITERATURE REVIEW REGARDING ECONOMY AND ECOLOGY

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Abstract: In the past decades, the economic system of free-market swept across the globe and ideologically government's regulation was viewed as a negative intervention to the self-regulated market. Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is renowned for its rich natural resources that are crucial to economic development in Tibet and beyond. Regarding managing natural resources, overseas academia of Tibetan Studies has done remarkable work in field research on the relationship between state and market. This article suggests that government policies have played a vital role of coordinating Tibet's economic development in regards of managing natural resources, cultivating market economy and securing Tibetan people's welfare. We believe these policies will have a positive impact on sustained economic development in Tibet in the long term.

Keywords: land use, market economy, ecological and environmental protection

Introduction

China's Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and its neighboring autonomous prefectures have unique characteristics in terms of culture and political economy due to its geographical marginality. The transformation of Tibetan societies has also been enormous since 1951 and steadily Tibet has embraced modernity under the leadership of the Chinese government, firmly being integrated into the Community of Chinese Nation (*Zhonghua minzu gongtongti* 中华民族共同体). Meanwhile, Tibetan Studies or Tibetology (*Zangxue* 藏学) has also experienced prosperity across the globe. As Prof. Wang Qilong points out that Tibetan Studies is academic activities and achievements that are conducted via modern scientific research methods and concern all the Tibetan people.¹ Thus, a holistic approach to studying Tibet is an inevitable trend in academic theory and practice, involving disciplines of linguistics, literature, history, philosophy, religion, anthropology, sociology, and so on. Following this train of thought, this paper surveys the overseas scholarship of undertaking Tibetan Studies for exploring the comprehensive development of Tibet's economy and ecology as part of China's greater contribution to the international community.

Land Use and Market Economy

Tibetan land use includes industries of agriculture, pastoralism, forestry, gathering, tourism, and so on. The relationship between state entities and land use has been the focus of academic research for decades. The key argument is the role played by the agency of the state in disposing resources and spatial management. The market economy in Tibetan regions has boomed since the policy of economic reform was carried out in the 1980s. Research by Angela Manderscheid et al. shows that pastoralists of Dzoge county (*Ruo'ergai xian* 若尔盖县) have well coped with the economic realities of the market economy.² In their fieldwork, researchers found that most nomads had little difficulty marketing their livestock products because the traders frequently drove their trucks to visit the pasture lands and

¹ Wang Qilong 王启龙 (2018), *Guowai Zangxue yanjiu fazhan yuanyin* 国外藏学研究发展源流 (Retrospecting the Development of Overseas Tibetan Studies), *Chinese Social Sciences*, 7: 17.

² Angela Manderscheid (2004), From Subsistence to Market Economy: Responses of Tibetan Pastoralists to New Economic Realities, *Rangifer*, 15: 29-37.

purchased the goods on sites, and some nomads also sold their produce at the local markets.³ In the study area, investigators further discovered that different ethnic groups lived in harmony,⁴ which exemplifies an interdependent relationship of establishing a market economy with little stress of competing against one another for profits maximization. Thus, in the transition from a subsistence-oriented economy to a market-oriented economy, a commercial network was sufficiently built up among the local residents, with an optimistic future of connecting into the national market.⁵ The market-oriented products have generated decent income for the nomads to improve their living conditions, but securing a sustainable future requires more. Awareness of environmental protection and education must be emphasized in the long run, as researchers mentioned,⁶ and government participation in establishing laws and relevant enforcement is much required.

Resource and space management becomes more important alongside with the development of the market economy in Tibetan regions to ensure good conditions to support economic growth. Through a case study at Zhabka, Porong, which is close to Peiku Tso Lake (*Peikucuo bu* 佩枯错湖) in the Nyelam county (*Nielamu xian* 聂拉木县) of Shigatse prefecture (*Rikaze shi* 日喀则市), Kenneth M. Bauer mapped Porong's herder lands and analyzed the limitation of resource management of the place.⁷ I Bauer's research aims to manifest remarkable changes that took place in western Tibetan regions from political and economic perspectives, through a case study upon state regulations that coordinate the relationship between different pastoral groups. This research confirms the state's positive support in regards of defining and legalizing public lands, resources and properties.

The transition from traditional nomadic pastoralism to modern animal husbandry is not an easy process. In the early 1980s, economic reform came to TAR and accordingly Tibetan herders started to explore a new way of integrating their stock-raising into the modern market system. Accessing city markets required an unconventional network, which resulted in unexpected difficulties for the nomads, as Bauer pointed out; nevertheless, pastoral locals preferred reliability

³ Angela Manderscheid (2004), *Rangifer*, 15: 32-33.

⁴ Angela Manderscheid (2004), *Rangifer*, 15: 29.

⁵ Angela Manderscheid (2004), *Rangifer*, 15: 36.

⁶ Angela Manderscheid (2004), *Rangifer*, 15: 36.

⁷ Kenneth Bauer (2006), Common Property and Power: Insights from a Spatial Analysis of Historical and Contemporary Pasture Boundaries among Pastoralists in Central Tibet, *Journal of Political Ecology*, 13: 24-47.

more than maximizing economic profits.⁸ Thus, the state's policy plays a vital role in assisting nomads in realizing a sustainable life in a market economy. Due to the arid environmental circumstances, the economic development of TAR calls for the collaboration of both the state and the people. Bauer observed that fencing the pastures brings benefits in both short and long runs for the pastoralists, who enjoyed less investment of labor but more access to resources and government's aid to resist natural disasters.⁹ Thus, one can find that in regards to developing economy, state's regulation and personal endeavor are necessary conditions, which build up each other for greater achievements.

At Khawa Karpo (*Kawa gabo* 卡瓦噶博) of Deqin county (*Deqin xian* 德钦县) in Yunnan province, Jan Salick et al. found that besides agriculture, forestry and herding, land use can be coordinated by the government for developing tourism.¹⁰ Furthermore, researchers suggest that the market economy will grow stronger if trade-offs are conducted between villages on the high mountain and lower hills or in the valleys, due to the complementary advantages of their industries.¹¹ The symbiotic relationship is highlighted for coexistence in the market system, though in which competition is an ordinary state.

Due to the arid ecosystem situated on the high plateau, it is strenuous to maintain large livestock populations while preserving rangeland and wetland areas from degrading. Research based on high-plateau sites of Sichuan, Gansu, Yunnan, Qinghai and TAR shows that both individual household responsibility and collective management are indispensable for maintaining the long-term productivity of livestock, resisting land deterioration and preventing risks.¹² Moreover, policymakers noted that it takes different strategies to manage these non-arable lands by flexibly interpreting laws to invigorate nomads for developing a stronger household economy.¹³ This study reconfirmed that governmental regulations can

⁸ Kenneth Bauer (2005), Development and the Enclosure Movement in Pastoral Tibet since the 1980s, *Nomadic People*, 9.1: 56-59.

⁹ Bauer (2005), *Nomadic People*, 9.1: 71.

¹⁰ Jan Salick et al. (2005), Tibetan Land Use and Change near Khawa Karpo, Eastern Himalayas, *Economic Botany*, 59.4: 312-325.

¹¹ Jan Salick et al. (2005), *Economic Botany*, 59.4: 316-318.

¹² Camille Richard et al. (2006), The Paradox of the Individual Household Responsibility System in the Grasslands of the Tibetan Plateau, China, *USDA Forest Service Proceedings RMRS-P*, 39: 83-91.

¹³ Camille Richard et al. (2006), *USDA Forest Service Proceedings RMRS-P*, 39: 89.

serve as an efficacious force to shield the individual rights of herders and guard economic growth.

Regarding the economy and market of Tibet, Andreas Gruschke inquired about the business of caterpillar fungus (Tibetan: *yartsa gunbu*, Chinese: *dongchong xiaocao* 冬虫夏草) in Qinghai's Yushu region.¹⁴ Due to the rapid growth of the human population and decreasing number of livestock, some local people changed their profession of herding into digging caterpillar fungus, which turns out to be an enormously profitable trade. This fungus has been highly valued in Chinese medicine and its products are sold to China's inland, Korea, Japan, Southeast Asia, the USA and other parts of the world where people appreciate its effect of nourishing health. Gruschke estimated that the caterpillar fungus yield of Qinghai fluctuates between 20 to 50 tons per year and the annual income is between 1 to 2.5 billion RMB, according to the prices of the time.¹⁵ Integrating Tibet's economy into the world market system is beyond doubt and local Tibetans, who are Yushu inhabitants in this case, did harvest abundantly in personal finance. Nonetheless, ecological and environmental issues emerged gradually due to over-harvesting the caterpillar fungus. A market-oriented economy has a natural tendency of maximizing profits regardless of consequence. Therefore, government intervention for preventing environmental degradation is always in urgent demand. Follow-up research of ecological damage caused by digging Yartsa gunbu should be conducted repeatedly to inquire about the sustainability of this business so that the short-term economic benefits won't cause long-term damage to Tibetan people's future economic development.

Since the Chinese economic reform was implemented in 1980s, pastoral areas of TAR have experienced an accelerating pace of social transition. Pastoralists started to face transitional difficulties that emerged in the process of reform, in which the local economies were being integrated into larger economic bodies, even in a global level. Nevertheless, the transitional pressure was mainly dissolved within the regional level, being guided and subsidized by the central authority of China. Strains such as unemployment, low income, poor health care, resettlement of nomadic population, enhancement of education level, etc., as Andrew M. Fischer argued, may not be quickly eased as expected, but the average rural Tibetan

¹⁴ Andreas Gruschke (2011), From Yak Herders to Yartsa Traders: Tibetan Nomads and New Market Options in Qinghai's Yushu Region, *China Tibetology*, 1: 95-118.

¹⁵ Andreas Gruschke (2011), *China Tibetology*, 1: 105.