SEDENTARIZATION OF PASTORALISTS IN ZEKU COUNTY

RELOCATION AND SEDENTARIZATION IN PASTORAL AREAS OF ZEKU County started as a response to immediate environmental challenges and as a tool for poverty alleviation. Gradually, the scale of sedentarization measures increased, with increased focus on population control.

FROM 2007 TO 2009

In 2007, after the Ecological Resettlement Project achieved top priority status in Zeku, mass sedentarization accelerated and gradually involved all the county’s townships, especially when these measures were extended to cover situations other than acute poverty and ecological deterioration during the Eleventh and Twelfth Five-Year Plans. Starting in 2007, from each office at the township and county levels, a member was selected to participate in the Ecological Resettlement Project as part of the new Sanjiangyuan office. These people were responsible for selecting future resettlement sites, planning the new villages, and supervising construction works and the resettlement process.¹

Most of the originally designed resettlement sites planned during the annual Ecological Resettlement conference in Zeku County in 2005–6 did not begin construction until May 2007. They became part of the second resettlement round in Zeku County, which targeted 765 households (3,627 people) from the core zones of the SNNR and other rTse khog areas.² It was now termed the Sanjiangyuan Ecological Resettlement Project in Zeku County, and the opening ceremony for the construction work was held on May 14, 2007, at the Laka resettlement site in Tongren. During this round, 125 households were to be resettled to the Laka site, 162 to the Communist...
Map 5.1. Orientation of settlement and resettlement sites in Zeku County, visited by 2015.
Party school site in Tongren, 71 to Longzang Village in Duofudun, 69 to the administrative center in Duofudun, 47 to Duolong Village in Duofudun, 51 to Zeku County town, 176 to the administrative center in Duohemao Township, and 64 households were to be moved to the administrative center in Ningxiu Township. In 2007 resettlement sites started to spring up on the grasslands without any prior announcement. In places where only grass had been growing a few weeks before, there suddenly appeared the first walls of new villages. Most of the resettlement sites were close to township centers, except those in Maixiu and Duofudun Townships on the border with the SNNR core zone of Maixiu Forest, which became part of the local villages. All of them were constructed close to an existing urban area.

The original timetable for the construction work was extremely tight, with only three to five months allowed for the establishment of each new resettlement site. According to public information sources, such as the banners displayed at the constructions sites, construction work that started in May 2007 was due to finish by August or October of the same year, and the pastoralists were to start their new lives in the resettlement areas as early as the winter of 2007–8. In reality, most of these spots remained under construction and uninhabited until the end of 2008. A report of the National People’s Congress, composed after an investigative journey in July 2007, also found fault with the construction delays at the resettlement sites. According to its findings, by July 5 only 30 percent of the construction work had been completed, which, according to the schedule, left only one to three months to complete the remaining 70 percent of all the construction work. The report complained about the lack of sufficient coordination between the offices in charge of the resettlement and about the insufficient speed of the construction work, which was in turn caused by the low number of workers and bad weather conditions. Additionally, the report criticized the quality of the construction work. The material used did not meet required standards, the employed workers had been trained poorly, and they did not follow the instructions provided.

The actual results of the sedentarization process are hard to measure on the basis of a single report. Additionally, regional variations depended on the previous local conditions and on the way the programs were carried out. However, it is particularly interesting that the preliminary results of sedentarization contrast strongly with many of the original aims, for example, preventing ecological deterioration, modernizing the “backward” and outdated way of life of mobile pastoralists, supporting urbanization, and involving the rural population in secondary and tertiary industries. The environmental benefits of sedentarization are hard to prove, and the social, economic,
and even existential circumstances the pastoralists continued to face after relocation often suggest a decrease in living standards, not significant modernization.

**RESettleMENT SiTES FOR PaSToRALISTS FROM ZEKU COUNTY IN TONGREN**

Two resettlement sites were planned outside the Zeku County area in the neighboring county of Tongren: the Laka site and the Communist Party school site.

The Laka resettlement, announced as part of the Ecological Resettlement Project, is situated about one kilometer from Tongren Town, the capital of Huangnan Prefecture, and adjacent to the prison on the new road to Xining. A banner displayed at the construction site, which comprises 7,500 square meters, claimed that work started on May 12, 2017, and will be finished by August 30 of the same year. The total costs were scheduled for ¥3.6 million. The buildings at the Laka site are two-family bungalows. Each house has two flats, each taking up half of the building. Most of the workers on the construction site in the summer of 2007 were Han or Hui Chinese Muslim seasonal workers from Ledu County or Gansu. Tibetan workers were rarely found on such construction sites at that time. In fact, even in 2016, when construction works became an important source of additional cash, Tibetan pastoralists were usually contracted to take on less sophisticated projects, such as paving village streets or building resettlement courtyard walls. These jobs were often created by the government to occupy former pastoralists, rather than to perform truly necessary tasks.

According to my worker informants, the houses at the Laka site were built for older pastoralists and small children from Zeku County. There was a plan to build a school within the site, which would make it easier for the children of the pastoralists to attend school regularly. The middle generation, the young parents of the children, were to remain on the grasslands to herd the livestock and support the family members in the resettlement with dairy products. This arrangement reflects the pastoralists’ practice of household splitting and was not part of the agenda of the resettlement project.

Even though the pastoralists selected for resettlement at the Laka site did not have to immediately give up all their pastureland, they did not appear enthusiastic about the opportunities that life in an urban resettlement area could offer them. While they felt that possessing a house and being on the government’s subsidy list was positive, they were nevertheless reticent to shift the focus of their life entirely to the village. Tsering, a
twenty-seven-year-old pastoralist from sTobs ldan, expressed the opinion of the majority of pastoralists affected by resettlement measures: “I do not know if we can split our family and leave someone on the grasslands [if we move to the resettlement]. I hope we can do so. Anyway, even though I do not want to move there, I do want the house.”

The social identification with their pastoral identity might mean that the resettled herders are less flexible in adapting to the new environment. The additional challenge has been the lack of income options for the resettled people. Dorje, a thirty-two-year-old pastoralist from sTobs ldan, described local concerns and attitudes toward the resettlement policy:

We do not know what to do [in the resettlement] for a living. If we really have to go there, then there is nothing we can do. At the moment, I do not intend to move there because I do not like the place. . . . Usually, I just follow the others in what they say or do. For example, the people from our village area who were assigned for resettlement wrote a proposal to the government that they should construct buildings where we could do business, a place with shops and restaurants inside, so we could make some money. The committee offered us the chance to join this [resettlement project] and said that if we succeeded, this project would be helpful for us. I do not have any ideas myself, so I just told them I was of the same opinion as the others.

. . . For me, being a pastoralist is best. We can do nothing in a city like Tongren because we do not speak Chinese and we do not have any skills. What can we do there? We are just hoping that we do not need to move at all in the future, as the prefecture leader has said that the new house is just a kind of help from the government to us. . . .

The villagers said that the resettlement houses were very good and that we would be stupid not to want them. So, we thought the resettlement idea must be something really good for the pastoralists.

. . . Sometimes, I feel happy and sometimes I am scared. I am happy that we received some support with the house, but I am scared when I hear about what happened to pastoralists who resettled in mGo log [rMa stod].
The pastoralists find themselves in a complicated situation. They increasingly desire the benefits from such government projects, especially since the demand for cash among pastoralist households has increased and it has become difficult to earn enough through animal husbandry alone. They know no occupation other than herding, and they do not wish to change their habits and adopt a sedentary lifestyle. Many pastoralists apply to participate in resettlement projects only because the government expects them to comply and they want to avoid trouble. They continue to retain the hope that the benefits will outweigh the negatives and that it will be possible to reduce the changes to a minimum. Some pastoralists, like the thirty-eight-year-old Nima from sTobs ldan, decide to resell the new house even though doing so is against the conditions set by the resettlement project:

I do not want to go to the [resettlement] house. I have some yaks, sheep and horses and I love being a pastoralist. If I go there, there will be nothing I can do. I do not speak Chinese and I do not even know how to read and write in Tibetan. Therefore, it would not be a good place for me to live. Because of that, I sold the house to my brother, but the government does not know what I have done. We changed the names and all the information. I did not give up my land and I did not sign my name to do that. . . . My brother paid me ¥10,000 for the house. I paid ¥6,000 to the government, so the actual amount I earned was ¥4,000.8

Reselling apartments built directly in the town of Tongren, such as those at the Communist Party school resettlement site, was even more lucrative. This resettlement site was designed for 162 households from Maixiu. Its position in the middle of an urban area and the buildings in the form of blocks of flats (figure 5.1) are completely different from all other resettlement sites designed to be built in 2007. It has no courtyard around it. Moving to such apartments will probably represent the biggest challenge for pastoralists since doing so will involve a major change of lifestyle.

Some of my older Tibetan informants from traditional farming villages that had been absorbed into the urban area of Tongren Town at an earlier stage expressed their discontent with the plan to move the pastoralists from Zeku County to Tongren. They described the pastoralists as dirty, lacking in any tradition of living in houses.9 The farmers were afraid that the pastoralists, having no work and not enough money, would come to town to steal and make trouble. Historically, Tibetan pastoralists and farmers have usually had a good relationship with each other. Each group had its own area
to live and to work, and the two partly depended on one another. Pastoralists supplied the farmers with milk products in exchange for grain. Both groups lived in areas defined by nature and their specific living conditions, and they met only for the purposes of trade. Both parties respected the lifestyle of the others. However, by moving from Zeku County to the resettlement site near Tongren Town, the pastoralists invaded the space of the farmers, who subsequently perceived such physical coexistence as a kind of threat.

**Figure 5.1. Ecological Resettlement site of the Communist Party school, Tongren County, June 2009**

**Resettlement Sites in Duofudun Township**

Other sites are situated within Zeku County. In the majority of cases, the pastoralists who become engaged with the resettlement project have a choice between local resettlement within the township or a resettlement site near the county center or in Tongren. In Duofudun Township, three sites were designed during the first resettlement wave. The resettlement site in Duofudun Township Administrative Center, designed as a part of the Zeku
Sedentarization of pastoralists

The Sanjiangyuan Ecological Resettlement Project plan for 2005–6, was built as an extension of the small town along the road between Tongren Prefecture town and Zeku County town. A public banner announced that at the resettlement in Duofudun the construction of shelters for sixty-nine households including communal water, electricity, roads, broadcasting connection, and hygiene facilities would be completed between May 8 and October 5, 2007. Each household would be allocated a total area of 467 square meters with a house and greenhouse of sixty square meters each. The courtyard should enable to keep a small number of livestock. The houses were built as two-family bungalows, same as at the Laka site in Tongren, which is also the type of house used in the majority of all recent resettlement sites in Zeku County (though some have single-family houses as well).

Other houses that belong to the resettlement project in Duofudun Township were completed in Duolong and Longzang Villages. In Longzang, close to the Maixiu Forest, the new resettlement site was simply integrated into the local village. The Maixiu Forest and surrounding area is the lowest part of Zeku County and is famous for the valuable medicinal herbs that are traditionally collected there for trade.

The Maixiu grasslands area is not large, so herding is not practical, nor is the local terrain suitable for farming. The pastoralist households resettled in Longzang had to pay for their new houses. In 2008 there were only around thirty households inhabiting these houses. The circumstances under which the houses were distributed did not comply with the guidelines of the central government’s Ecological Resettlement Project.

The final administration and distribution of the houses is under the jurisdiction of the county government, and this official body applies methods that are most suitable for the local situation, which often contradict the rules. In Longzang Village, local government officials offered the houses for public sale, which meant that several houses were sold to young married couples who originally came from Longzang Village and simply took the opportunity to buy a cheap house. About half of the constructed houses remained empty in 2008.

Local pastoralists from Stobsldan, such as seventy-year-old Drolma and thirty-three-year-old Tsering Lhamo, admit that life as a herder is full of hardship. Nevertheless, they prefer it to resettlement because as pastoralists they are self-sufficient:

It is nothing great being a pastoralist . . . but it is better to live on the grasslands and herd animals than to live down in the village.
[At the resettlement] there is no grass and no livestock; we would be hungry. The money will not rain from the sky on its own. . . .
[As pastoralists] we have our own food, provided by our own animals. Tsampa we must buy from the state. . . . We sell milk and yogurt and with the money we earn we buy other food. Some people from our village moved down into the new houses in Maixiu. . . . They do not like it there. There is no income. No one was forced to move. Those people went of their own free will. Those who wanted to are now living in a house.¹⁰

My informants from the resettlement in Longzang Village in Maixiu confirm this statement. They were unable to imagine how life in a village would be before they moved into the new houses. They sold all their herds and simply moved into the resettlement houses, and although the pastures still remain the contracted property of each household, without livestock it is impossible to return. However, the pastures are currently rented out to other pastoralists who still live on the grasslands, providing those who have moved into the village with some income. Longzang Village does not offer many alternative income possibilities; there are neither fields nor pastures belonging to the resettlement village. For women in particular it is difficult to find a new occupation, and the majority of the resettled people regard their new situation as worse than their former lives as pastoralists.¹¹

rGyal bo Community

The implementation of the sedentarization measures and the selection of participants are particular to each township and depend on the decisions of the implementing officials and community leaders. The following example is a standard pastoralist community from Duofudun Township in Zeku County, which I will call rGyal bo.¹² The community inhabits an area above four thousand meters near a river. In 2007 it had about 250 inhabitants, who all made a living from pastoralism, except for one government official, who received a salary of about ¥1,200 per month from the state. A local school that accommodated about eighty students in four classes was established in the community in 1998.¹³ In 2007 only one university student and two high school graduates lived in the community. Ninety-five percent of the inhabitants were illiterate, as no one older than forty had ever attended a school. Prior to 2007, before the government strengthened the regulations regarding school attendance, about half of the school-age children remained at home helping their parents herd animals.
In 2007 the community leader, instructed by the local government, introduced a project designed within the framework of environmental protection for the Sanjiangyuan. Even now, the pastoralists have obtained no further information about the project details, but the position of the rGyalbo community, near a river, would suggest it was part of the Ecological Resettlement Project. Moreover, the resettlement sites the families could choose from were among those built in 2007, which were equipped with information boards describing the agenda of the Ecological Resettlement Project. The pastoralists learned that the government would offer them a new house under advantageous conditions, either in the township center of Duofudun or in Zeku County town. The vicinity of Tongren Prefecture town was also an option. Furthermore, the community leader mentioned that sooner or later all of the pastoralists would have to resettle and that households should therefore take advantage of the currently offered benefits. It was argued that the resettlement measures that might follow would lack the original benefits for the pastoralist population.

Encouraged by the promise of advantages, almost the whole community applied for this project. Due to the lack of availability of houses (only thirteen in the first round), the community leader excluded all those households that had benefited from the government’s free solar panel supplement in previous years. The community leader then put the names of the remaining households into a hat, from which he selected the future participants of the housing project. Sandrub, a thirty-nine-year-old pastoralist from rGyalbo, described the selection process: “At first, all the families who had not received solar panels got together and put their names in a hat. Then the community leader selected thirteen names. My name was also selected and I was very happy about that. At that time, we did not know that we would have to give up 50 percent of our land to the government.”

After the participating households had been selected, their representatives were invited to the township to complete the contract with the government. This procedure was performed without the pastoralists’ being provided any more information about the project. Sandrub explains the second step in the process:

After our names had been selected, the community leader informed us that we had to go to the township government office to sign papers for the new house. So we went to the township government office. There were also people from other communities, but no one had a clear idea about what exactly we were expected to do there.
... We signed something, but I do not know if it was the contract or not. I think it was... We received a form from the official leader with several questions on it. The first question was about whether we already had a house in the township seat which was in as good a condition as the new resettlement houses would be. In cases where we had such a house, the government would provide us with financial support but would not build a new house for us. We would still have to move to that house and give the land to the government. The government would give us financial support for several years. I did not have such a house so I answered ‘no.’ Another question was about the number of livestock we kept. I wrote down the number of my yaks, sheep and horses... The form said, that I had to sell 50 percent of my livestock. Another question asked if I would be prepared to give either all my land or 50 percent of it to the government. When I read that, I felt very sad that I was going to lose my land. I did not know what else I could do so I wrote 50 percent of my land.

... At that time, I did not say anything. I asked other people about it but they were also really confused. Somebody suggested we should write that we would give up all the land, arguing that then we might get more support from the government. Somebody else said we should only give up half the land as we did not know whether we would get any benefits or not.¹⁵

Although many of the participants in the meeting did not know how to read or write, nobody explained the conditions of the contract to them. As Dorje explains, they were just expected to sign the paperwork: “I am not sure what we did there. I signed my name with my fingerprint on a piece of paper. I do not know how to read and write so I did not know what the paper said. No one explained it to us. I just followed the other people and put my mark on it... At that time, many people said that if we did not sign, we could not get any government help in the future. That is why I did it, to get help from the government in the future.”¹⁶

Although the majority of my informants from the rGyal bo community claim that the condition of the grasslands in their village had deteriorated in comparison with the situation before the 1980s, only 10 percent believe that the resettlement, as implemented by the government, will improve grassland vegetation. On the contrary, pastoralists such as forty-eight-year-old Norbu claim that a long period without livestock grazing on the pastures
will actually harm the ecosystem: “I do not think that the resettlement is favorable to the grasslands because the grasslands need to be grazed every year. . . . If livestock do not graze on the pastures for a long time, then this will be very bad for the land. The rotten grass left lying on the top would not allow the fresh grass to grow. Old Tibetan people say that if a grassland area is not grazed for nine years, then it becomes what they call useless land. The livestock will not eat such grass anymore.”

Primarily, the pastoralists blame the pikas living above- and below ground (Ch. *dishang shu, dixia shu*), and black caterpillars for the degradation of the grasslands and support the extermination program. The pastoralists also suggest that gold mining on the grasslands, which severely damages the land and vegetation, should be banned. In Qinghai mines can be found that have been set up without following professional advice. In such mines metals are extracted by using poisonous substances, and no measures are taken to protect the surrounding land.

According to the pastoralists, such mines affect not only the vegetation but also the wildlife inhabiting these areas.

Participation in resettlement projects officially happens by choice; individual households are usually not selected by the government and forced to move. However, the description of environmentally initiated resettlement as involuntary should not be dismissed out of hand. Although the policy is promoted as voluntary, the pastoralists do not have many options if they resist. While it is true that pastoralists have to apply to join the schemes, their decision is based on insufficient and sometimes misleading information. As described in the example of the *rGyal bo* community, even in 2016 the most frequent selection method for relocation and sedentarization in Zeku County was the lottery. In the case of the *rGyal bo* community, none of my informants who were involved in the project approved of the resettlement methods. Their main objection was the loss of land and livestock connected with the purchase of the new houses, as explained by Dorje: “I do not like living there [in the resettlement]. I liked the project because we could get a house for a very low price and they [the government] would also help us by providing some money. I mean that if the government had not insisted on taking our land away, it would have been a really good thing. In cases where they really do take the land, then we have no chance of survival.”

The pastoralists from the *rGyal bo* community paid ¥6,000 for each new house in the resettlement. For the years 2007 and 2008, each household received ¥3,000 per year in financial support from the government along with ¥500 for fuel each winter.

The subsidy is low, and there is uncertainty about whether it will be paid. The pastoralists speculate that the duration of the governmental subsidy will
be five years for households that moved into the township seat of Duofudun and ten years for households who chose to move out of the township, to Zeku and Tongren County seats. Because of the lack of income alternatives in the resettlement village, the majority of the pastoralists from the rGyal bo community who contracted to take part in the resettlement project still remained on the grasslands in 2009. Those who had already moved into the resettlement houses had split their households, leaving part of the family on the grasslands to continue herding animals and supplying their resettled relatives with food. Those who remained on the grasslands were prepared to remain there until they were forced to move. According to Kelsang, a thirty-nine-year-old pastoralist from rGyal bo, even then they hope it will be possible to split the household between the grasslands and the resettlement site: “The government did not tell us whether it was OK or not [to split the household], but we are doing it this way. Some family members live on the grasslands where we have some livestock left and other family members came to live in the new house. If the government people came to visit us and nobody was living in the house, they would stop giving us help. Therefore, some family members must live in the new house.”

If the government forces the pastoralists to give up their usage rights over the grasslands, it could be difficult to survive in the resettlement without the food supplements provided by the livestock. Tsampa, a thirty-eight-year-old pastoralist from rGyal bo, described the situation after moving into a resettlement: “Here we have nothing but an empty house. Our life is really bad here. We cannot drink milk tea as before. We even have to buy yak dung and meat, butter, cheese and everything else. It is very difficult if one does not have money. This is not a good place to live. We just hope to get some support from the government.”

According to my 2008 and 2009 interviews with ten of the thirteen households assigned for the first resettlement wave in the rGyal bo community, the pastoralists had already reduced their livestock numbers far beyond the lowest required quota of 50 percent mentioned in the contract that the pastoralists had to sign. In the participating households, the number of yaks had been reduced by 77 percent, the number of sheep by as much as 96.5 percent, and the number of horses by 63 percent. The people from the rGyal bo community did not have clear information about the project’s duration or about the possibility of returning to the grasslands. Nevertheless, they hoped that sooner or later a return to a fully pastoral way of life would be allowed again and viewed life in the resettlement as a temporary measure. Therefore, it was difficult for them to adapt their thinking regarding their main source of income and start a completely new life in an urban environment.
In the following years, the number of new houses at the resettlement site at Duofudun Township Administrative Center gradually increased, and new settlement sites were also added under the label of the Nomadic Settlement Project. The majority of the new houses were occupied. At first, pastoralists without livestock and with school-age children moved into the settlement, followed by elderly people who could not take care of the herds anymore. Some of them soon chose to rent out the houses and return to their original lands, giving the lack of alternative livelihoods as among the main reasons.

Over time, however, about 80 percent of the rGyal bo households came to own houses in the new settlement. The center of the pastoral community shifted to the new site, and owning a house became a sign of community affiliation. This approach meant that housing prices rose enormously, and by 2016 the average price was between ¥80,000 and ¥100,000. This was for a house with no private access to water and no toilet (in 2013 prices had still been about ¥6,000 for a house). However, this does not mean that the pastoralists have finally managed to integrate into modern society and have found new and sustainable urban livelihoods. In the community, only about five households have opened small shops, and one has managed to establish a motorcycle service business. Norwe had the opportunity to enroll in a training course organized by a nongovernmental organization and learned how to repair motorcycles. He now owns a shop in Duofudun Town: “For us, [the vocational training] was free, when I enrolled. At the end of our course they gave us certificates. Then you were able to set up in business if you could manage it. I worked as an assistant for six months over there before I started the short-term training course. I was helping there as best I could.”

Norwe’s shop has no regular business hours, and the majority of his customers come from his pastoral community and call in advance when they need his services. Sometimes, the shop remains closed for several weeks, for example during the caterpillar fungus harvest. This is not the best way for a business to survive when competing with many similar service providers in a settlement or town of only a few thousand inhabitants. However, Norwe claims that without caterpillar fungus his family would not be able to generate enough income:

I also collect caterpillar fungus. When I go, I have to close the business. There are many places over there which repair motorbikes [when this place is closed]. . . . For all of us, it is much better to collect fungus instead of working here. The income from it is good. You can earn ¥2,000 to ¥3,000 a day when you collect fungus. . . . And here, on a very good day, I can only earn
The rGyal bo community is one of the lucky few in Zeku County that has access to caterpillar fungus. This substance allows the majority of the community members to stay at home in the settlement and even give up herding or other seasonal occupations. Caterpillar fungus is treated here as a collective commodity. All community households can harvest it and pay ¥1.5 per harvested fungus into a communal cash box. This money is later divided among community members who are unable to actively participate in the harvest. This encourages people who left the traditional lands, such as young people who went in search of state jobs elsewhere, to buy a house in the settlement to demonstrate their community membership.

In comparison, other households in the same settlement, but from different pastoral communities where the grasslands have no caterpillar fungus, have a very different life. They fully experience the hardship of searching for alternative jobs and seasonal occupations. For people without qualifications or competence in Chinese, it is not unusual for them to only find work for one or two months per year. Although the development strategy has seen the establishment of numerous construction sites in the grasslands area, the contracted companies bring their own workers in or hire externally. They prefer to employ better qualified Han or Hui workers or Tibetan women, who are said to work harder than Tibetan men.

For such people the state offers vocational training to provide them with new qualifications. The most recent vocational training program in Duofudun, in 2016, was a cooking course to learn how to prepare Chinese food. A set quota of participants from the village had to take part, and people were paid to attend. The participants were required to speak Chinese, which ruled out those in greatest need of additional education. Participants were provided with recipes but no information on how to run a restaurant. Unsurprisingly, none went on to open a restaurant.

Since 2013 the new settlement in Duofudun Town has also been included in the Beautiful Countryside “rural beautification project,” which has brought additional funds to the village. The money has been used to build decorated water columns in the main courtyard, the place where the people go to fetch water. Each courtyard has also been provided with a wall including an incense stove, demonstrating regional Tibetan traditions. In 2013, after a significant delay, a public toilet was finally built at the settlement as part of another development project.
Ningxiu was one of the townships that saw the successful establishment of a resettlement village during the first wave, between 2003 and 2006. By 2008 the new village already exceeded the number of originally scheduled houses. As in the other sites in Zeku County, the houses erected here were one- or two-family brick bungalows (figure 5.2). A school building has also been provided on site.

Government reports describe a slight increase in income levels among the affected households after their move to the new urban site in Ningxiu. The 328 households scheduled to resettle there from Zhigeri during the first resettlement phase saw an increase in their income of 16.4 percent (from ¥1,224 to ¥1,424), 2.46 percent higher than the average township income. The report further stated that the income of the resettled households came from the following sources: planting vegetables, 60 households; fattening

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**Figure 5.2.** Ningxiu Township resettlement site constructed by the government, one-family houses with allocated yard to plant vegetables or graze animals, Zeku County, June 2008
cows and sheep, 18 households; providing transportation services, 12 households; business activities, 35 households; external construction activities, 46 households and; other activities, 48 households. The report does not comment on whether government subsidies were counted as part of the income of the resettled households, nor does it make clear whether only cash incomes were counted or if livestock, as an important part of the pastoral household economy, was included. Furthermore, no reference is made to monthly expenditure and the comparison between the cost of purchasing food in the settlement and living off the land in the grasslands.

Grasslands with a total area of 87,000 mu belong to the Ningxiu resettlement, of which 81,800 mu can be used for herding (implying about 17.9 mu per person). The official records say that in 2009, 4,845 livestock grazed on these grasslands. The pastoralists who moved permanently to this resettlement reduced their livestock by 6,174 sheep units. The records further state that livestock reduction, together with seasonal herding, helped to reduce the grazing pressure and improve the balance between grasslands and livestock. As a result, the vegetation coverage rate increased by 10 percent, and the grass density increased by 15 percent.

According to my pastoralist informants from the resettlement near Ningxiu Township Administrative Center, the people came here in search of an easier lifestyle. In the grasslands, the pastures had been deteriorating, and there was insufficient grass to feed the livestock. In Zeku County, the population is still growing, and in some parts the capacity of the grasslands has been exceeded. To reach the resettlement quota identified by the central or provincial government, local government officials visit the pastoralist communities to offer people the opportunity to give up herding and move into a modern house. State financial support has also been promised to those who move.

In Ningxiu the houses were not distributed at no cost; the pastoralists who moved in had to pay ¥3,000 per house. After settling down in the new houses, most of my informants stated they would immediately return to the grasslands if they were allowed to do so and if their pastures were not in such a poor condition that they would be unable to keep sufficient livestock. They agreed that making a living in the new urban environment was sometimes even harder than working as herders. Dawa Tsering, a sixty-one-year-old pastoralist relocated to the Ningxiu resettlement, summarized the situation:

The government built some houses here. It is good for the children and also we get some support from the state. That is why we wanted to move here. . . .
It used to be better in the grassland. We had our own livestock and we could wander around the grassland. We are pastoralists. We used to have our own milk and butter and we knew there was always something to eat. The disadvantage was that in recent years there has not been enough grass to feed our animals. Also, we have to keep our animals inside a fenced courtyard, while wild animals eat the grass. What shall we do in the future? There are more people and the grasslands are decreasing. They told us they had a solution for us, a house in the village. So now we are here, but there is no work to make a living. We have no pastures. There is a school for the children and a house, but what about the elderly people? The land belongs to us, but it is still not better than before. There is nothing to live on. . . .

They told us we would have our own garden where the elderly people could work, but we do not know how to grow vegetables. They told us that everything would be just great. A house provided by the government and electricity is great, but there is still nothing here to provide us with food. Where shall we get our tsampa? That is why the new place is truly bad. . . .

What do I wish for? An old person of 61 like me, a herder, I wish to be in the grasslands, full of flowers, herding my livestock, drinking milk and yogurt . . . to go where the good grass grows. . . . But recently, there was not enough grass and many animals died and so the people became unhappy. They went to the town and cried and asked the government for help. So the government built these houses for children and old people. So it is like this and we cannot return. Except for some vegetables there is nothing here. Old people like me must earn money, so we take what work there is, collect caterpillar fungus or work on road construction. Still we do not earn enough.29

RESETTLEMENT IN HERI TOWNSHIP

A more optimistic situation seems to prevail among the pastoralists from the Hor community in Heri Township in Zeku County. Because of the local tradition of stone carving in Hor, these households found it easier to adapt to the new living conditions in the resettlement; 185 households with 746 people belonged to the original Hor community. Between 2006 and 2009,
100 households (510 people) resettled in the Heri Township Administrative Center.

During the first stage, the Heri resettlement consisted of one hundred houses, each with an area of sixty square meters. The resettlement constructions also included thirty-two double-function greenhouses, a refuse tip, a public toilet, a hospital, an assembly room for public gatherings and performances, and an activity center for party members. The total poverty alleviation investment in the Hor community was ¥1.5 million, of which ¥600,000 was designated for subsidy payments to the resettled households, ¥740,000 was designated to alleviate poverty among the villagers, and ¥105,600 was designated for vocational training for the resettled pastoralists. The rest of the invested money was divided up as direct aid to the poorest and oldest people, to pay subsidies to party members, retired people, and members of the welfare program, for medical insurance and treatment, and as a subsidy for a demobilized soldier.30

The ¥600,000 designated for the resettled households works out at only ¥6,000 for each of the one hundred households in the Heri resettlement project. This calculation correlates with the statements of my informants, who claimed they had received ¥3,000 in annual subsidy, plus an additional ¥500 to buy coal or yak dung to provide winter heat in 2007 and 2008. Considering that each household in this village had to pay ¥6,000 to acquire a new house, the balance between income and expenditure was about zero, at least during the initial years.

In Hor the government also announced that resettlement was necessary because of the severe degradation of the pasturelands. Nevertheless, only two of my informants described the quality of their grasslands as being bad; none of them believed that the resettlement measures would improve the condition of the grasslands. However, local pastoralists said they actually agreed with the government’s resettlement proposal. In each of the interviewed households, at least one of the family members was involved in stone carving. There seemed to be a demand for their products, as all of the stone-carving households claimed to have achieved a higher income through selling these carvings from the resettlement, resulting in an improvement in their way of life.31 Rgyalo, a pastoralist from the Hor community, was one of those who decided to try out life in the new village: “We decided to move [to the resettlement]. We heard that the people who decided to move would be supported by the government. Our family does not have much livestock and we mainly depend on stone carving. That is why we wanted to move here, because we can make more money.”32
After moving to the new village, the people had more free time and could concentrate on the stone-carving business. Dondrub, a pastoralist from the Heri resettlement, confirms that there has been an improvement of his household’s living conditions: “In our community, everybody can carve stones, like my family. . . . Our life is getting better here [in the resettlement].”

In 2007 in the Heri resettlement, according to government records, there were 208 people engaged in stone carving, 100 people planting vegetables in the available greenhouses, and 236 people working elsewhere. The majority of these workers were involved in collecting caterpillar fungus, while the others collected droma (T: gro ma; Ch: juema; Potentilla anserina), which is desired for its tasty roots. Some people earned money by collecting and selling yak dung or were short-term workers on construction sites. As a result, the average income of the resettled pastoralists in Heri had increased. The highest six-month income figure in 2009 was achieved by people involved in the stone-carving business. They earned on average ¥1,680 per person, while caterpillar fungus harvesters earned an average income of only ¥1,115 per person.

The stone-carving tradition is also being promoted for purposes of tourism, which brings additional income to this resettlement village. Cepten Tashi, the leader of the Hor pastoral community, has stated that without the income opportunities provided by the local tradition of stone carving, Hor households would probably not be as enthusiastic about moving into the new village: “In the case of my community, I do agree with the resettlement methods as our community has a tradition in stone carving. Through this we can acquire an income. But in the case of other pastoral communities, I do not agree with resettlement, because they end up with nothing.”

However, the stone-carving success of the Heri resettlement would wane somewhat, and by 2013 the majority of resettlement inhabitants had moved into work on construction sites in order to earn money instead of continuing with stone-carving. This change occurred because of the absence of orders for carvings from the state. In previous years the state had placed large orders for carved stones with this village, creating artificial demand. However, with the end of such orders, it soon became obvious that no stable marketing infrastructure had been established, and the business collapsed.

Although during the first stage the majority of the resettled Heri inhabitants seemed to be satisfied with the resettlement conditions, as was also the case in other localities, the households were reluctant to exchange their
land for a life in the resettlement site. All of my informants split their households and kept family members on the grasslands as well as in the resettlement, or at the very least they rented out their pastures to other pastoralists. In contrast with the members of the rGyal bo community in Duofudun Township, the local pastoralists stated they had not signed any contract with the government. They believed that the land remained their property and that they had the right to return at any time. The community leader corrected such claims and said that the resettled households could only return to the grasslands in winter, not during the summer. He nevertheless confirmed that in his village no contract had been signed with the government. It is interesting that in the case of Heri, after the state orders had disappeared, the pastoralists did not actively seek to develop their own sales networks but instead took up work as seasonal workers on construction projects. In the pastoral communities I observed, there often seemed to be a lack of awareness of the need to develop new, sustainable, and long-term livelihoods. People still rely on animal products from their remaining herds, on caterpillar fungus, or on work at construction sites. Increasingly there is also a growing dependence on various kinds of government subsidies to counteract the growing socioeconomic problems at the household level.

EXAMPLES OF RESETTLEMENT IN HENAN COUNTY

In Henan, the second pastoral county of Huangnan Prefecture, the condition of the grasslands is better than in Zeku, in part because of the lower altitude of Henan. However, the government also decided to apply resettlement and grassland management measures there. The same Ecological Protection and Construction Project (table 2.1) that was implemented in Zeku County was also introduced in Henan. The major project was Ecological Resettlement. In Henan County, however, the Sanjiangyuan resettlement construction plans seemed to be more successful and more in line with the schedules. By 2007, 432 households had been resettled. These households reduced their livestock by 318,400 units and retained only 4.25 mu each to practice seasonal herding.38

According to the interviewed pastoralists, who moved into the new resettlement site near Henan County town in 2007, the houses were distributed free of charge by the government. The local pastoralists do not complain about the lack of forage for their animals, but present other reasons for participating in the resettlement, mainly the compulsory school attendance for children and the difficulty in getting to school from the grasslands. The households who obtained houses here also claim they were allowed to keep
their original grasslands and their herds. For this reason, they had no complaints about the implementation of the resettlement project.\textsuperscript{39}

However, the report from the Henan County Development and Reform Department admits that there were difficulties connected with the implementation of the above-mentioned ecological constructions. For example, it complains about the unequal implementation of the ecological construction projects throughout the county. Only a few townships implemented the projects according to the plan. And the implementation of scheduled projects sometimes brought about additional problems. For example, as a result of the closing of hillsides for tree planting, the size of the grasslands shrank, which caused a shortage of fodder for livestock.\textsuperscript{40} The project also included the planting of grass where the grasslands had already deteriorated. Each household had to plant grass on five mu of land, yet some households could not afford to do so and relinquished the land. As a result, these households often dig up the grassland in places where good grass already exists to avoid having to plant. This of course results in additional erosion, rather than an improvement in the condition of the grasslands. As with the resettlements in Zeku County, in Henan the livelihood of the resettled pastoralists was not secure, and there were not enough alternative opportunities to make a living without livestock. Therefore, some households, not being able or willing to remain in the resettlements, returned to their original grasslands and risked breaking the law.\textsuperscript{41}

**Completing the “Development” of the Pastoral Population in Zeku County?**

After numerous disturbances among the Tibetan population in China in 2008, the central government intensified its focus on the Tibetan pastoralists. Under the label Development of Tibetan Areas, the government designed additional projects, such as the Nomadic Settlement Project, to support Tibetan pastoralist households and complete their development and transformation as part of a modern Chinese society. The intention behind these projects was to persuade Tibetan pastoralists of the government’s good intentions. Additionally, by accelerating the sedentarization process, the government hoped to obtain better control of the pastoralists, who live on the grasslands and are thus physically disconnected from direct administration and the political system, which accords them a certain level of political autonomy.\textsuperscript{42}

As a result, since 2009 the majority of constructed settlements in the Zeku grasslands have been built under the Nomadic Settlement label. The
earlier Ecological Resettlement Project, according to Zeku local government officials in charge of grasslands management and settlement constructions, should have only affected pastoralists with land bordering rivers. The Returning Pastureland to Grassland Project was designed to stop erosion and the accumulation of mud in the watercourses, which had a negative impact on the China’s major rivers and their sources in the grassland areas of the Tibetan Plateau. Both of these projects required participating households to sell all their livestock and resettle. By contrast, the Nomadic Settlement Project was designed to affect the whole county and all remaining pastoralists registered as living on the grasslands. According to a local official, in 2009 new settlement villages were built in each township of Zeku County, targeting about 30 percent of the pastoralist population every year. At this rate, within only three years, by 2012, it was planned that all Zeku County pastoralists would be involved in the Nomadic Settlement Project.

At the beginning of the project implementation phase in 2009, each participating household had to pay ¥5,000 for its new house, with the balance, approximately ¥40,000, to be covered by the government. The pastoralists were allowed to keep their livestock and land and move only part of the household into the new house, as favored by the majority of my Tibetan pastoralist informants, who want to benefit from a comfortable house without giving up pastureland and livestock.43

At the beginning of the implementation process for the Nomadic Settlement Project, the affected pastoralists in Zeku County were not allowed to choose the location of their new houses. In 2009 all houses were built as part of uniform settlements, situated near existing administrative centers or at least close to a road so as to ensure easy access for the construction materials and workers. Often, the new houses were built on the same sites as the former resettlement villages and frequently ended up as a single cluster of houses or part of a small nearby settlement. Another settlement option in Zeku was the two-story houses along the streets of enlarged towns, such as the Zeku County administrative center (figure 5.3). It was envisaged that these houses would provide the pastoralists with the opportunity to start a business or open up a shop on the ground floor.

After two years of project implementation, the Tibetan pastoralists in Zeku County tried to negotiate with the officials and requested the right to construct new houses on their winter pasturelands (as had occurred in Maqin County, for example).44 The county government finally agreed, and since 2011 it has been possible in Zeku to choose between a house in a new village and a house near the original pastureland (figure 5.4).
The decision to construct homes on individual pastureland increased costs and led to a rise in the price pastoralists had to pay for their new houses, increasing from the original ¥5,000 required in 2009 to ¥18,000–¥20,000 per house in 2011. The practice of allowing the construction of homes on the grasslands seems to be a step backward in relation to the modernization policy, which aimed to establish a sedentary and centralized society. However, it might only represent a temporary loosening of the timeframe regulations, a response to the overwhelmingly negative results associated with the earlier settlements. At the same time, 2011 was also the year when the government intended to close down the primary schools in pastoral communities on the grasslands in Zeku County, thus increasing the pressure on pastoralists with children to move to the centralized settlements. The announced cancellation of small community schools was justified by the need to improve schooling conditions and the quality of education.45

**Figure 5.3.** Two-story apartment complexes, with commercial units on the ground floor, constructed as part of the Nomadic Settlement Project around Zeku County administrative seat, November 2011
the end, not all small schools in Zeku were closed, as the sedentarization process had not proceeded as fast as initially intended, and some of them still remained open in 2017.

Although the resettlement and settlement houses look the same from the outside and are often mixed together within a single urbanized area, the conditions for the inhabitants differ significantly, depending on whether the house was built within the Ecological Resettlement Project or the Nomadic Settlement Project. In the new village in Heri Township, for example, only the first one hundred households that relocated as part of the Ecological Resettlement Project are eligible for state subsidies. Households that moved later as part of the Nomadic Settlement Project receive no regular financial support. Even when state subsidies were augmented in 2013, due to the worsening economic situation caused by the lack of livelihood alternatives as well as the loss of state orders for carved stones, these subsidies only applied to the first one hundred households of the Ecological Resettlement Project.

![Figure 5.4. New house at the winter pasture, after the Nomadic Settlement Project allowed construction of houses on the individually allocated land, Zeku County, November 2011](image-url)
At the establishment of the resettlement site, the subsidy was ¥3,000 per year per household. Later it has increased to ¥4,500 and was granted to all children younger than sixteen and seniors over the age of fifty-six.47

Despite the obvious negative aspects of sedentarization projects, the majority of pastoralists still wish to acquire a new house. Simultaneously, they seek to identify ways they can benefit from the advantages associated with this policy, while avoiding the disadvantages. Such behavior often violates state regulations, but in the majority of cases the officials in charge do not police the regulations very carefully or simply ignore these activities. For example, one of the rules of the Nomadic Settlement Project states that at least some members of the family must inhabit the house. However, when checking on the project efficiency rate, officials frequently only check that someone is living in the house and do not verify the inhabitant’s identity. Thus, house owners are not prosecuted for violating project rules by renting out the houses.

Moreover, as we saw in the example of the rGyal bo community, houses obtained as part of the Nomadic Settlement Project are increasingly regarded as business assets. This situation convinces many pastoral households with sufficient livestock and good-quality grasslands to also apply for a new house in an urban area. Some households now own several such houses, each registered with a different family member, and they are occupied, rented out, or sold as necessary. The buyers are mainly households with pastoral backgrounds who, because of their work, are registered in the town and therefore have no right to obtain a house within the government sedentarization projects. These people want to own a house in the township of their origin, and the new settlement houses are the easiest way of achieving this aim. Such ownership can have also clear material advantages, as in case of the rGyal bo community, where the owners qualify for a share of the caterpillar fungus harvest. Obviously, it is up to the officials to react to recent developments and adjustments in the sedentarization projects. They can either adapt the policy to fit the current situation or make use of the abuse of sedentarization projects to introduce further restrictions targeted at individual pastoralists and the pastoral way of life in general. In the most cases, due to poorly conceived policies and implementation plans, as well as the lack of alternatives, officials until recently have usually decided to tolerate violations of the rules by pastoralists.48

In 2017 there were still pastoralists in the rTse khog grasslands who continued to follow the pastoral way of life while owning a new house. Many were still waiting for the allocation of a house as the project completion delayed. The need to increase subsidy levels and maintenance allowances to
existing settlements also probably contributed to slowdowns in implementation. The attitude of the interviewed pastoralists toward the sedentarization projects did not significantly change in the ten years of this research, and those families with sufficiently large herds remained lukewarm to the idea of relocating to the newly urbanized areas.

In 2017 the new Targeted Poverty Alleviation initiative took over the pastoralist settlement constructions. Additionally, the accentuation of countryside cooperatives significantly alters the traditional grassland pastoralism, proving that a Zeku County official responsible for grassland distribution and settlement constructions was right when he stated in 2009 that the whole system of “backward” Tibetan pastoralist activities was earmarked for modernization, a concept that is likely to entail a focus on the rapid fattening of animals in cattle sheds.\(^{49}\) He had already admitted that the government was preparing further initiatives “to protect the grasslands” and that these would also include the “protection” of Tibetan yaks and sheep, meaning pastoralists would not be allowed to kill these animals in an uncontrolled manner. Instead, yak and sheep products would be sold as medicine and organic food in eastern China.\(^ {50}\) In 2017 this policy was soon to be realized through the Zeku meat-processing factory, which, through a county-wide system of cooperative grassland management, would gradually oversee the grassland and livestock management in the whole county.