

Property Relations in Tibet Since Decollectivisation and the Question of Fuzziness

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Property relations in contemporary Tibet are often ambiguous. Their 'fuzziness' has origins in both the legacy of post-socialist transformation and the ongoing struggle over state incorporation. This article examines the ways in which these two sources of ambiguity contribute to two related types of fuzziness, one found in a departure from idealised images of exclusive private property, and the other arising from political constraints on the exercise of legally defined rights. The article examines these two related sources and types of ambiguity by chronicling on-the-ground property relations since decollectivisation in peri-urban Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, China. This includes discussions of the length of Household Responsibility System contracts in Tibet, the extent and variation in village land reallocations, degree of management rights, and reasons for and villagers' responses to village land expropriation. While the heterogeneity of property forms in Tibet is similar to that in other parts of China, Tibetan farmers are also more constrained than their Han counterparts in exercising the 'bundle of powers' that constitute property.

'The sky belongs to the Communist Party, the earth belongs to the Communist Party, the water belongs to the Communist Party!'

Tibetan villager near Lhasa

INTRODUCTION

IN A RECENT review of the institutional framework of land rights in post-reform China, Peter Ho (2001: 400, 407) suggests sanguinely that the Chinese leadership

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has deliberately sustained institutional and legal ambiguity in land rights to avoid social conflict. He also states that this ambiguity allows the current land tenure system to 'function at the current stage of economic reform'. China is not, however, the only country characterised by ambiguous property relations. Katherine Verdery (1999) finds that particular forms of ambiguity, or what she calls 'fuzziness', are a key characteristic of post-socialist property relations more generally. This volume explores Verdery's concept of fuzziness through an examination of property rights in land in different post-socialist contexts.

I address this larger issue through an examination of how property rights are practised in peri-urban Lhasa (capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region [TAR]), a peculiar case that is not only post-socialist 'with Chinese characteristics', but is also situated in a context of 'internal colonialism'.¹ Here, I use this term to refer to the period after the People's Liberation Army entered Tibet in 1951, including the interpellation of Tibetans as one of fifty-five groups of 'minority nationality' (*minzu*) citizens of the PRC, and half a century of state policies emphasising political 'stability' (loyalty to the Chinese state and the Communist Party) and control.²

I suggest that certain types of fuzziness arise primarily from the legacy of socialist transformation, whereas others emerge more forcefully from the ongoing struggle over state incorporation into the PRC. I begin with a discussion of Verdery's concept of 'fuzziness', followed by a brief overview of the political place of the TAR in the PRC.³ Next, given the paucity of published material about the political economy of contemporary Tibet, I chronicle in some detail the process of decollectivisation and on-the-ground property relations in the TAR, highlighting similarities and differences from other parts of China. This is followed by an analysis of farmland reallocation and management rights. Finally, I end with cases of land expropriation, in which I show how Tibetan peasants are more constrained than their Han counterparts in exercising the 'bundle of powers' (Verdery 1999) that constitute property.

FUZZINESS IN POST-SOCIALIST PROPERTY RELATIONS

Verdery (1999: 55) uses the term 'fuzzy property' to draw attention to the ironies in 'simplistic notions of private ownership', but adds that she 'leave[s] the notion somewhat vague since property rights can appear indistinct for a variety of reasons'. In my reading, Verdery formulates fuzziness in two ways that are frequently interconnected and sometimes mutually constitutive, but that can be distinguished analytically. In the first, the fuzziness of post-socialist property rights is located in the gap between actual property arrangements with their complex interrelationships and multiple actors, and the idealised neo-liberal image of exclusive private rights and obligations held by normative individuals. Fuzziness is found 'precisely in the lack of routinised rules and crystallised practises around private property in the context of post-socialism' and the term fuzzy property thus covers many forms of indistinct, ambiguous and partial property rights (Verdery 1999: 55). I will refer to this as 'type 1' fuzziness. The second formulation

of fuzziness (which I call 'type 2') is focused more squarely on the question of power. Fuzziness lies in 'constraints on exercising bundles of power' (*ibid.*), and results from situations in which 'what should be bundles of power are still far from empowering' (*ibid.*: 75). I consider each in turn.

The first formulation follows from Verdery's extensive ethnographic work in Romania, which has followed the 'European model' of post-socialist transformation, characterised by land restitution and compensation to pre-revolutionary owners, decollectivisation of family farms and corporations, and rapid privatisation of land ownership (Watts 1998: 154). However, as Verdery notes in her essay in this volume, the term 'socialist property' (and thus also 'post-socialist property') homogenises a complex reality that varied in time and space. Indeed, China and Vietnam have followed a very different path of economic transformation than has the former Soviet bloc. Communal land has not been restituted to pre-revolutionary owners, as was the case in Romania (Verdery 1996), but rather leased to individual households in long-term contracts based in principle on household size and land quality. Land has not been fully privatised as it has in Eastern Europe, though privatisation in Vietnam has proceeded further than in China.

Thus, the sources of fuzziness differ insofar as property rights to land in Eastern Europe are now modelled at least theoretically on the 'idealised image of exclusive private property' (Verdery 1999: 55). In Eastern Europe 'property understood collectively lacks the clear edge of an ideologised notion of exclusive private owning; it is, in this sense, fuzzy' (*ibid.*: 75). In other words, in the Eastern European context, all collective property forms are, by definition, fuzzy because they do not conform to the image of individual property subjects exercising exclusive rights.

China, by contrast, has created a diverse set of property forms, including state, collective and private property, as well as hybrid forms that mix the characteristics of ideal-typical state, collective and private rights.⁴ The assumption has not been made in China that 'capitalist private property would naturally spring forth from the ashes of 'formerly existing socialism' (Verdery 2004) because private property was not reinstated as the single, predominant form of ownership (despite the creation of a legal framework in which private property can flourish). In contrast to Eastern Europe, the continued existence of collective forms of property in China are hardly surprising, given that the state has mandated neither restitution nor universal privatisation. Thus, this particular formulation of 'type 1' fuzziness is not as analytically powerful in China as it is in Eastern Europe.

Instead, the more surprising and important arena of ambiguity in China is the fact that Chinese property forms are characterised by such tremendous heterogeneity or variation (Brandt et al 2002; Putterman, 1995). Local governments often have considerable latitude in shaping property rights in response to factors such as administrative pressure and availability of state support (Guo 1999). This heterogeneity across villages in China of patterns of land reallocation, land transfer, management and other tenure rights has emerged out of China's particular trajectory of economic reform.⁵ The category of 'type 1' fuzziness can usefully

encompass this heterogeneity, or diversity, in the sense that the property system as a whole differs from the idealised neo-liberal image of private property rights as being standardised and uniform. In other words, diversity of property forms is a specifically Chinese form of ‘type 1’ fuzziness. In this article, I show that heterogeneity, characteristic of landed property rights throughout post-decollectivisation China, exists in Tibet as well.

Turning now to what I have identified as Verdery’s second type of fuzziness, we can see that property also looks fuzzy when there are systemic economic, cultural or political constraints on exercising rights and obligations, even if they are clearly specified in law (Verdery 1999: 65). For example, Hann (1993: 313) finds that in Hungary after decollectivisation, ‘there are many persons and families . . . for whom the current rhetoric about widening choice and extending property rights must seem a sick joke . . . they cannot become entrepreneurial farmers because they lack the basic capital resources, and their social rights are being whittled away all the time’.

It is the degree to which this second form of fuzziness is found that distinguishes peri-urban property relations in Tibet from those in many parts of eastern China. Although both types of ‘fuzziness’—and indeed all property relations—are power-laden and thus political, this second source follows more directly from Politics with, as it were, with a capital ‘P’. Here, I refer to the fact that everyday life in the TAR is characterised by significantly more political constraints than in most other places in the PRC. Thus, in addition to the lack of capital resources and whittling away of social rights cited by Hann, this ‘type 2’ fuzziness in Tibet is also produced by a de facto lack of political rights.

I argue that this in turn fosters confusion about land rights, leading villagers to become hopelessly resigned in the face of land expropriation. They believe that all land belongs to the Communist Party, and that it is, therefore, pointless to protest. The state’s desire to maintain ‘stability’ produces a disjuncture between legally defined property rights and peasants’ understanding of and power to claim those rights. The effect—preventing citizens from exercising their legally defined rights—is part of a larger process of marginalisation.

POLITICAL CONTROL AND RESISTANCE

Politics saturates life in Tibet in general and Lhasa in particular. Beijing has exerted particularly tight control in the TAR vis-à-vis other provinces because of the ever-present shadow of the geopolitical ‘Tibet question’, which takes the form of both resistance within Tibet and pressure exerted by the transnational Tibet movement. The state deals with its territorial anxieties about Tibet through the exercise of disciplinary power that turns surveillance into self-surveillance and cultivates a ‘politics of fear’ in which subjects circumscribe their own engagement with actions that they fear might be construed as ‘political’.⁶

A period of relative liberalisation and religious tolerance in the TAR that began in 1980 ended after major demonstrations broke out in 1987–89 and martial law

was imposed for over a year. The 1994 convening in Beijing of the Third National Forum for Work on Tibet launched a new set of policies of high-speed economic growth, which greatly increased the influx of Han entrepreneurs and migrant farmers to Tibet. It also further tightened political and religious control, with an aggressive anti-Dalai Lama campaign and a ‘patriotic education’ campaign to attack Tibetan youth support for independence (TIN 1996). The recurrence of small-scale nationalist protests and the conviction that Western countries are seeking to undermine China by encouraging ‘splittism’⁷ encourages the state to suspect, and thus restrict, actions and speech that are considered acceptable in other parts of the PRC.⁸

Also in 1994, participants in a small, non-violent tax protest in Lhasa were arrested and assaulted by the police, marking the first time an economic complaint was treated as political protest. According to the Tibet Information Network (1996: 10–11), a new phrase, ‘hot topic’ was ‘coined to describe concerns such as price increases and tax increases which were now . . . to be interpreted as antagonistic contradictions’ (that is, fundamental protests against Party rule). A 1994 TAR government work report states, ‘Exploiting “hot” topics in society, [the Dalai clique and international hostile forces] incite the masses, sow dissension . . . and create incidents to undermine political stability and unity and to interfere with reform’ (ibid.). The scope of unacceptable dissent was broadened to include economic protests, a situation that keeps quiet the ‘polyphony of conflict and contention’ (Perry and Selden 2000: 7) characteristic of reform-era China at the level of everyday resistance rather than open protest and demonstrations, or even legal appeals and petitions (Bernstein and Xiaobo 2000; Zweig, 2000; O’Brien 1996 on various forms of open peasant protest).

Local Officials and State–Peasant Relationships

This saturation of everyday life with politics creates a reified notion of the state for Tibetans by making the state seem more powerful, thing-like and real. Categories such as ‘state’ (and ‘society’) must be disaggregated to make sense of the complexities of Chinese economic reform.⁹ The interests and experiences of local officials—who are responsible for much of the variability in property rights throughout China—are not the same as those of higher-level government cadres. This is particularly important at the very lowest level, where village leaders are not technically state cadres. In peri-urban Lhasa these leaders are paid 10 RMB (roughly US\$ 1.2; approximately 8.26 RMB per US dollar) per day that they work rather than on a monthly basis.¹⁰ This salary is drawn from village collective funds rather than disbursed from higher administrative levels. The rest of the time these village leaders are agricultural labourers who live and interact on a daily basis with their families, neighbours and friends. Furthermore, unlike township and county leaders who are rotated in and out of a variety of places and positions, village leaders usually serve only in their home villages. Thus, these lowest-level leaders tend to share villagers’ experiences and attitudes about higher-level policies.

Township officials, on the other hand, are state cadres. O'Brien and Li (1999) have found that township officials across rural China often selectively implement policy, conscientiously enforcing terribly unpopular policies (such as birth control) while refusing to carry out welcomed measures. They attribute this situation to a variety of reforms such as the end of mass campaigns and the spread of responsibility systems, which have increased cadre insulation from social pressure, while at the same time giving incentives for career advancement to those who implement the policies. This, in turn, leads to a 'sandwich strategy', a 'structurally induced conflict between the centre and local leaders and the villagers and these same local leaders' (ibid.: 180).

In peri-urban Lhasa township cadres also enforce unpopular policies, and sometimes use their positions to gain material benefits unfairly. However, because of Tibet's particular historical trajectory as well as strategies of control deployed by the state, there are also differences between the 'sandwich strategy' O'Brien and Li find in other parts of China and the peasant-state relationship in Tibet. Tibetan peasants rarely view the state with the 'bifurcated state' (Guo 2001) image that many Chinese peasants hold. In the latter, peasants perceive the central government as benevolent. It is only as lower-level officials re-interpret and implement the central government's policies that they become distorted and unfavourable. As a result, many peasants across China send petitions to higher levels of government—often to the central government itself, which is seen as an ally against corrupt local officials (Guo 2001; Li and O'Brien 1996).

For example, Han migrant farmers in Lhasa expressed such sentiments when talking about high taxes and low income at home, complaining that the problem was being 'too far from Beijing'. As a result of the distance, the proper (and beneficial) policies made at the central level were never implemented. One Han woman quoted a saying to me: 'The sky is red, the middle is grey, and the ground is black.' She explained that this referred to policies that are good (that is, red) at the top levels of government, but then become murky in the middle, and then truly terrible once they reach the bottom—the peasants. Tibetan villagers, by contrast, rarely refer to the central government at all. When they do, it is not in a way that suggests the centre's benevolent policies. While they do complain about their village and township leaders, Tibetan peasants do not see appeals to higher levels of government as an effective solution to their local problems.

Finally, it is also worth noting here that until recently all township officials in the TAR were ethnically Tibetan. This situation worried higher officials, who believe these township cadres to be the state's weakest link in maintaining 'stability'. Thus, steps have recently been taken toward the placement of Han cadres as township officials.¹¹ This dynamic of state suspicion towards some Tibetan cadres also helps explain why Tibetan peasants do not share the same 'bifurcated state' view of many peasants across China, and thus why they do not generally appeal to higher-level state officials to act as allies against local leaders.

DECOLLECTIVISATION IN TIBET

In broad outlines, the process of decollectivisation in the TAR was similar to that of other parts of China. Beginning in 1978, the government increased the scale of household usufruct plots (*ziliudi*) and encouraged households to engage in sideline industries (Yu et al. 1998: 7). Between 1978 and 1980, some communes implemented *baochan dao zu*, contracting of output to households (the initial form of which retained unified accounting and collective control), as well as *baochan dao lian hu*, contracting of output to groups of households. Production teams were allowed to experiment with a variety of payment systems as long as collective ownership and management were retained (Xiao 1994). After 1982 various forms of the Household Responsibility System were implemented.¹² Of these, by far the most common (more than 80 per cent) was *baogan daohu*, the contracting of all tasks to individual households, under which households were required to meet a specified quota but allowed to keep the surplus (ibid.; Yu et al. 1998).

Although it was implemented slightly later, this basic process was similar to that in other parts of China. One difference, however, is that impetus for reform came entirely from above rather than from the peasants themselves, as was the case in some parts of China such as in the Anhui province.¹³ Yu et al. (1998: 8–9, 42) claim that the process was much more costly to implement in Tibet because reform in other parts of China 'basically came from the peasants achieving it themselves. The government only approved and promoted it afterwards.' By contrast, in Tibet 'rural reform was basically a process of forced change, which was initiated by the government . . . the government had to rely on its monopoly of power [to implement the new policies]' (ibid.).

But the most exceptional feature of the Household Responsibility System in Tibet is the unspecified contract period. Across China the first contracts were awarded in 1980 for one-year terms. These were then extended for a three-year term (Kelliher 1992: 179). In 1984 Central Document No. 1 announced that peasants would receive land contracts for fifteen years or longer (ibid.: 182). In 1993 the government increased land lease periods to at least thirty years (Oi 1999: 619). By contrast, after the Second National Forum for Work on Tibet convened in Beijing in 1984,¹⁴ officials promulgated the 'two long-term no changes' policy (*liangge changqi bubian*), according to which 'livestock is turned over to the household to be raised privately and to have rights of management for the long-term without change; land is turned over to the household for use and to have rights of management for the long-term without change'.¹⁵ These contracts were distributed much later than actual decollectivisation in some areas (for example, the Phenpo State Farm was disbanded and its land decollectivised in 1985, but contracts were not distributed until 1987). Furthermore, in some villages around Lhasa, contracts were never issued to households. In all cases—in contrast to other parts of China—the Household Responsibility System in Tibet has no specified number of years. They are simply 'for the long term'.

This ambiguous phrasing is the only *de jure* difference between the Household Responsibility System in Tibet and other parts of China (although there are other *de facto* differences). Chinese policy makers and analysts have asserted that this is advantageous for Tibetan peasants. Yu et al. (1998: 41), for example, state:

First, in terms of the period of time during which peasants contract use rights to land, in *neidi* ['inland China', here referring to all non-TAR China] there is a period of 30 years without change, whereas in Tibet, it is no change in the long term. From the perspective of the stability of contracting of land use rights, the situation in Tibet is better than that of *neidi*. This lets Tibetan peasants, to a certain degree, overcome the problem of *neidi* peasants who are unwilling to make long-term investments because they lack the feeling of security of long-term use of land. However, the long-term nature of household contracting of land in Tibet causes the *collective ownership* [emphasis mine] of the land to be empty [of meaning].¹⁶

This positive view of long-term stable use rights is not shared by Tibetan peasants. One elderly Tibetan woman mused, 'Who knows? They might take the farmland back whenever they feel like it.' I objected, 'But what about the "two long-term no changes" policy? How long is that supposed to be?' The woman's granddaughter, a politics teacher in a nearby high school, insisted (incorrectly) that 'long-term' referred to fifty years. The grandmother disagreed, 'They tell lies! It won't be fifty years.' She went on to explain, '[The government] will make the land collective again. I saw it on television. I am very worried about the things I might see before I die. I hope I die before they happen, but then I worry about them [pointing to her granddaughter]. I'm worried about having to give the farmland back.'

This understanding of land tenure differs from other parts of China, where Croll (1994: 22) states that 'informally in villages the allocations of land were frequently and increasingly referred to as "permanent", "for the long term" or "for ever", suggesting a sense of security despite having a fixed number of years written into the household contracts.'¹⁷ Also surprising is the degree of ignorance about the Household Responsibility System among Tibetan village leaders, whom (even if not official cadres) one would expect to know the letter of the law on a matter of such importance to the village. Several village Party secretaries around Lhasa insisted that in fact the policy was '100 years no change' rather than 'long-term no change', again suggesting a lack of clarity about legal property rights at the village level. This lack of clarity can bolster state incorporation by closing off avenues of 'rightful resistance'—forms of popular contention that entail 'innovative use of laws, policies, and other officially promoted values' (O'Brien 1996: 33). Practitioners of rightful resistance skilfully use the rhetoric and commitments of the government, and often seem to 'demand little more than scrupulous enforcement of existing' policies and commitments through such measures as

legal tactics and political pressure (*ibid.*). This, however, cannot happen when state commitments and policies themselves are not understood.

By the end of 1984 95 per cent of Tibet's rural districts had implemented the 'two long-term no change' policy (after which it was 'gradually adopted by the households'), and by 1985 the work of disbanding the communes and reconstituting the townships was 'basically finished' (Xiao 1994: 7–8). Nevertheless, according to Xiao (*ibid.*: 8), 'of course, in some areas the collective management persisted and was welcomed by the masses'. In fact, even in 2001, *dGar-Tsho* township of Shuanghu county, a very remote pastoral region of Nagchu prefecture, was sometimes referred to as 'the last commune in Tibet'. A Chinese scientist who had visited in 2000 claimed that it has retained much of its communal form. As such, it is a socialist legacy—one that highlights diversity of property forms as a 'type 1' fuzziness of post-decollectivisation property relations in the PRC. In the next section I further examine this type of fuzziness.

DIVERSITY IN THE HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITY SYSTEM

Land Reallocation and the Question of Insecurity

Household contracting gave peasants across China rights to manage land and use residual income, but not the rights of land alienation and disposal. Furthermore, according to Oi (1999: 618), 'more disturbing, it left the collective—either the village or in some cases the village small group—with the right to take that land and redistribute it to someone else'. Because land was first allocated based on the number of household members at the time of decollectivisation, readjustments are usually based on changing household demography. However, the central government has not issued strict rules concerning whether, how and when the readjustments are to take place. Since the initiation of the Household Responsibility System, at least 80 per cent of villages across China have adjusted land allocations at least once, with some adjusting five or more times (Oi 1999: 618).

Land reallocation since decollectivisation has been an important source of 'type 1' fuzziness in property relations, both because of the diversity of ways in which it has been implemented and because reallocation hybridises the principles of private and collective property rights. Many analysts suggest that readjustments constitute *the* major source of tenure insecurity for peasants, and that because of this deviation from exclusive private property, peasants do not make needed long-term investments (for example, Jacoby et al. 2002). A World Bank newsletter, for example, recommends that the Chinese government prohibit land readjustment (Schwarzwalder 2000: 23), despite some research which suggests that peasants do not always want long contracts (Oi 1999: 618). In fact, insecurity for Tibetan peasants arises not from reallocation itself, but rather from the absence of what is perceived as fair reallocation. The insecurity arising from the 'two long-term no changes' policy is also perceived to be far more problematic than insecurity that might arise from fair reallocation.

Around Lhasa there seem to be a few general rules about land adjustments: land is not reallocated to new brides and grooms who move into the village (usually from other nearby villages), nor to children born after decollectivisation. The land of those who have passed away since decollectivisation is not confiscated and reallocated, but stays with the household. These commonalities aside, however, there is a great deal of diversity in the way village leaders reallocate land. For example, in the peri-urban village of Kyichuling, village leaders have reallocated land twice since decollectivisation—in 1994 and again in 1997. If villagers acquire salaried urban jobs, the village leaders require that they return their Household Responsibility land to the village. However, because land is not reallocated every year, the land temporarily reverts to village collective land. Until 2000 all villagers were required to work on collective land (with the amount of work determined by the amount of Household Responsibility land). Starting in 2000, however, village leaders required families with land designated for return to the village to pay a yearly rent to the village (collective fund) until the next reallocation.¹⁸ Families may choose either to pay 150 yuan/*mu*/year to the village,¹⁹ or to lease this land to migrant Han vegetable farmers. In the latter case, new village rules stipulate that they must turn half of the Han lease fee over to the village.

At reallocation, *only* those current villagers who were present at decollectivisation in 1984 receive a share of the new land. Therefore, families who had few family members and received little land at decollectivisation continue to be allocated a proportionately smaller amount of land, even though their family size may have grown significantly. Furthermore, the villagers complained that at the first reallocation in 1994, each eligible member (those who were village residents in 1984) received 0.19 *mu* of land. In 1997 each received an additional 0.2 *mu*. These pieces of land were so small (some only a metre wide) as to be almost completely useless.

This system was viewed by the villagers with whom I spoke as extremely unfair. They agreed that land *should* be reallocated, but suggested that allocation should be based on *current* family size, not family size in 1984. Each person now living in the village should be entitled to have a share of land in order to reduce income disparity, or at least to ensure that disparity arises from factors other than inequitable land distribution. In their views on land reallocation, villagers appealed to a specific notion of fairness rooted in socialist principles from the collective era—which began, it should be remembered, with land redistribution ('democratic reform').²⁰

Although Tibetan villagers around Lhasa are not generally nostalgic for the collective period, the socialist legacy has left multiple traces in the present. This includes not only the idea that all villagers should have access to land, but also the practice of household labour exchange, which was introduced with the Mutual Aid Teams in 1959.²¹ For these villagers, unfair reallocations lead to economic insecurity, which they perceive to be a far greater problem than land tenure insecurity from reallocations. Their assessment differs from that of economists who recommend that China eliminate reallocations in favour of stricter conformity to exclusive

private property. Such preferences show that the cultural and historical meanings given to work and labour have an important role in local evaluations of post-socialist property relations (Verdery 1999: 74).

There are many variations on Kyichuling village's reallocation scheme. For example, in one peri-urban village, villagers can choose whether to give the land back to the village or to pay a fixed yearly fee to the village. In a second village, households can retain a child's land for two years after she becomes a cadre and her household registration is transferred. After two years, however, her land must be given back to the village, upon which it is rented by the village (as a collective) to land-poor households within the village for 150 yuan/year. This fee is then put into the village collective fund to be used for the village as a whole. In accordance with villagers' ideas of reciprocity, and in contradiction to a capitalist land market, rentals within villages are always much less expensive than those to outsiders (thus far all outsiders are Han migrants). These internal rental rates are not commonly perceived as unfair.

Furthermore, there are quite a few villages, especially those further away from the city centre, where there has been no readjustment or reallocation of any kind since decollectivisation. In many of these same villages, however, local leaders theoretically stipulate that villagers who become urban cadres must give their land back to the village, but in practice, 'no one cares' and the land is left with the household. The diversity in these forms of reallocation, and their difference from capitalist property notions, grow out of China's particular path to economic transformation.

A further puzzling ambiguity lies in the decision not to reallocate land to new villagers. Legally, representatives of the collective authorise the periodic redistributions of the land (which is collectively owned).²² In theory, then, village leaders should decide the rules of reallocation. In practice, individual village leaders do indeed make decisions about some minor aspects of these rules, but they believe that they are explicitly forbidden by higher-level regulations from allocating land to new villagers (those who have moved in or were born after decollectivisation). The dozen village leaders with whom I spoke were uncertain as to where this policy originated, but they all agreed that it was 'from above'. A township leader concurred, adding, 'The villagers really have a lot of opinions about [the fact that reallocations are not based on current family size]. However, there is nothing we in the township can do. This rule is a *policy* that comes from the central government. It is the policy of the "two long-term no changes"; thus we can't do anything about it.'

In fact, as Yu et al. (1998: 45–46) observe, this interpretation of the 'two long-term no changes' eviscerates the meaning of collective ownership: 'Ownership of land by the collective means that each member of the collective (including new members) has the right to an equal share of the use and profit from the land. However, under the "two long-term no changes" policy, new members of the collective basically have no way of enjoying this type of benefit.' It seems unlikely that this particular evisceration of collective property rights was the explicit intention of

regional-or central-level officials when they formulated ‘the two long-term no changes’ policy. The fact that each level of government endorses this particular interpretation of the policy to lower levels can be understood as an unintended consequence of the ambiguity and thus easy manipulability of the ‘two long-term no changes’ policy.²³ This confusion over the rules of land reallocations can be understood as an instance of ‘type 2’ fuzziness—the slippage between legal property rights and the ability to exercise them (this is particularly true because the ‘two long-term no changes’ policy is peculiar to Tibet). Land reallocations thus combine ‘type 1’ (heterogeneity of forms and implementation) and ‘type 2’ fuzziness.

Land Management

Although peasants now theoretically have rights to manage cropland as they wish, in practice officials at various levels may still force villagers to grow crops according to plans and quotas. A few years after decollectivisation, the Lhasa Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Department (AAHD, *nongmu ju*) decided that the new small household plots were inefficient. It tried to encourage the planting of large contiguous fields (composed of many household plots) by signing contracts with townships and villages to do so. If a township agrees to sign such a contract specifying what area of land must be cropped contiguously in barley and wheat, the AAHD provides a subsidy or other payment to them. Consequently, some townships give villages under their jurisdiction responsibility to plant barley or winter wheat in specified plots, and fine villagers who do not follow the yearly plans.²⁴

In some villages this system met with little success, and township leaders rescinded the plan after a few years. At the opposite extreme, Donggar urban township (*zhen*) in Dulong county on the outskirts of urban Lhasa has been experimenting since 1995 with a new policy that county officials have dubbed ‘the eight unifieds and the two separates’. The ‘eight unifieds’ refer to tasks and inputs that are to be applied and undertaken collectively by the village: seeds; chemical fertilisers, pesticides and other agricultural chemicals; the land itself; the sowing of seeds; the harvest; threshing; ploughing; and irrigation. The ‘two divides’ are dividing the grain harvest and the stalks (for fodder) according to the area each family was allocated at decollectivisation. The township has, in effect, recollectivised its farmland.

The impetus for this recollectivisation is rooted in Dulong’s ‘model’ collective past. Dulong was the site of one of the TAR’s earliest communes, and Donggar has frequently been a trial area for new seed varieties. One county official explained that Donggar is implementing the ‘eight unifieds’ before other counties in Dulong because it is closest to Lhasa and, moreover, ‘Because it is the window to Lhasa, we must have agriculture with special characteristics. Whatever other places do, we must do better. What other places lack, we have to do. And we have to do it well.’ Other officials view the ‘eight unifieds’ as a way of increasing productivity, saying, for instance, ‘In the past some people did not have [good economic

conditions. As a result, they did not want to buy chemical fertilisers, and their production was very low. But this is no longer a problem with the “eight unifieds” . . . It is very beneficial for production.’

The introduction of production contracts in Najing township to the east of urban Lhasa is another case in which villagers’ ability to autonomously manage their land has been reduced. Since 1996 this township has signed yearly contracts with each of its fourteen villages specifying output responsibility targets, including targets for net income and crop production. Each village in turn must sign contracts with each household specifying, for example, net income per capita; income from sideline industries, potato and radish sales, and grain; and how many pigs each family must raise. Enforcement varies. Some villages have instituted rules whereby families who exceed their quotas are awarded cash prizes, and those who fail to meet quotas are fined. Other village leaders require families who do not meet the goals to brew barley beer and present it at an annual meeting to families who have exceeded the quotas. Still other leaders present ceremonial scarves, teapots and thermoses to families that meet their goals and publicly chastise the others.

These variations on the extent of de facto recollectivisation and contracts stipulating production quotas are examples of ‘type 1’ fuzziness in that they are quite different from idealised forms of private property, and also insofar as there is a wide diversity of arrangements and heterogeneity in implementation. At the same time, the varying degrees to which villagers can now actually manage their farmland also suggests an element of ‘type 2’ fuzziness—constraints that shape ‘what actors are able to do with property, modifying the “rights” to which they may be entitled and the “obligations” to which they can be held’ (Verdery 1999: 65). Both examples of fuzziness discussed in this section arise primarily out of China’s post-socialist path to transformation and only to a lesser degree from Tibet’s specific historical situation. In the next section, I turn to the politics of land expropriation and local understandings of property relations as a starker example of ‘type 2’ fuzziness, with origins more clearly in internal colonialism.

FARMLAND EXPROPRIATION

Expropriating Farmland for Retirement Homes

With the deepening of economic reform in China, what Zweig (2000) calls ‘externalit[ies] of development’, government confiscation of rural collective land for resale at enormous profits have become increasingly common. Guo (2001), for instance, describes a village in north-east Yunnan in which twenty-two out of thirty households lost between 20 to 100 per cent of their contracted land to the establishment of a county ‘development zone’. Croll (1994: 101) found one village near Beijing which lost 30 per cent of its best arable land to a railway line; a second which lost 90 per cent of its land to factories and housing; and a third which lost its land to a golf course for tourists. These cases are broadly similar to those in villages around Lhasa, where the state is rapidly expropriating peasants’

Household Responsibility land with minimal compensation, leaving worried and frustrated villagers who cannot choose not to sell their land. However, there are also three interrelated differences between land expropriation in Lhasa and that in many other parts of China: the primary purpose for which the land is expropriated ('retirement homes'), the scope of villagers' resistance and, most importantly, understandings of land ownership.

By far the most common cause of land expropriation in peri-urban Lhasa is the building of 'retirement homes', the local name for all new private homes. Since the early 1980s when policies again permitted the construction of private homes, the state has allocated cadres a certain area of land, depending on rank and number of years worked, for the building of a retirement home.²⁵ Some work units also help their cadres finance these homes through loans or outright subsidies. There are three types: those built privately by the owner (least common), those built by work units (which usually pay a portion of the costs), and those built by the real estate office (*fangdichan ju*) of the Lhasa municipal government. Villages do not have the right to refuse the sale of land for these projects.

Retirement homes are currently the single largest force in Lhasa's urban expansion. In contrast, suburban land expropriation around other urban centres in China is driven more prominently by industrial and commercial 'development zones', and housing for suburban commuter communities (see Guo 2001; Zweig 2000). The economic structure of the TAR, heavily tilted towards government work units, officials' salaries and other administrative costs helps account for such differences.²⁶ This economic structure may also explain the widespread use of the term 'retirement homes' for almost all private housing: until recently, retired work unit cadres were the only people who could afford to purchase private homes.²⁷ Furthermore, the state is determined to please what it perceives to be its loyal cadres who have spent their lifetime 'constructing' Tibet—that is, furthering the project of state incorporation.²⁸ This, too, may account for the allocation of land and relatively luxurious housing for cadres, particularly (ethnically) Tibetan government officials who have worked in other more remote districts of the TAR. These retirees flock to Lhasa upon retirement for the city's relative abundance of amenities.

In the summer of 2002 ordinary urban residents speculated and gossiped about a government plan to disburse large sums of money to all cadres for the purchase of retirement homes.²⁹ 'They will get rich, while we stay poor,' was a common refrain. Cadres, on the other hand, complained that the government had been promising this for years, but that the money was unlikely to materialise. Some said that the state had many 'tricks' to ensure that cadres would not receive the amount of money originally promised. In saying so, they displayed a sense of entitlement for houses built on peasant farmland.

Zweig (2000) and Guo (2001) find that Chinese villagers facing land expropriation often engage in forms of open protest, including civil disobedience, presenting petitions to authorities at higher levels, marches, demonstrations, going to court and even direct confrontations between villagers and the police or army.

Tibetan villagers, if they do anything at all, have only made disdainful jokes and sarcastic remarks such as, 'The sky belongs to the Communist Party, the earth belongs to the Communist Party, the water belongs to the Communist Party.' These differences between Tibetan and Han peasant-state relationships vis-à-vis open protests and views of the 'bifurcated state' (Guo 2001) result from the 'politics of fear' in the TAR and Tibetan (mis)understandings of landownership.

Legally, suburban and rural land is owned by the collective (Ho 2001: 403). However, ambiguity about who exactly represents the collective leads to conflicts. For example, Guo (2001: 426) describes cases in Yunnan in which 'to the villagers, the village collective held the power [over land], but to the local state, it did not'. This slippage enabled the township government to expropriate land from villagers by exercising control over the management of village collective property. Nevertheless, the villagers were well aware that the ownership rights to the land legally resided with village collectives; land expropriation (publicly contested by villagers) was enabled not by a misunderstanding of legally defined property rights to the land, but rather by economic incentives that compelled the village leaders to cooperate with the township government. Other researchers working in rural Sichuan and Yunnan provinces have also found that villagers are aware that the legal owner of Household Responsibility land is the collective rather than the state or Party. (Janet Sturgeon, personal communication; Elisabeth Grinspoon, personal communication).

In peri-urban Tibet I found not only ordinary villagers but also several village Party secretaries³⁰ who insisted emphatically that ownership rights to recently expropriated contracted land are held not by the collective, but by 'the state' (*guojia*) or the Communist Party. I asked the Party secretary of one village whether the villagers had had a choice about selling their land for a government-built 'retirement home' complex. She responded:

No, the land belongs to the Party, not to us. The state policy is that we only have use rights to the land, and nothing else. The land does not belong to the villagers. That is the policy, right? [She turned to the village leader, who was also sitting in the room, and asked her half jokingly, 'That is the policy, isn't it?'] In a few years, we [everyone in the village] will all become beggars We do not have the power, by ourselves, to decide whether to sell the land; the decision must come from above. We can not choose to sell, or to not sell.

Although a Party member herself, this woman spoke consistently of both the state and the Party as something 'out there', distinct and different from herself. Like her fellow villagers, she does not see the Party as acting in the interests of the village. Based on this experience, Tibetan peasants in a neighbouring village worried that their land would be expropriated as well. According to one neighbouring villager:

When the city bought the land in [the neighbouring village], some old grannies went to the leader [she did not specify whom] and said, 'Please don't take our

land. We need to [be able to] eat our *spags* [the staple of roasted barley flour].’ But the leader said, ‘Ah! You have no right to say this. This land does not belong to you. Do you think this land belongs to you? The mountains, the earth, the water are all owned by the state. You are only borrowing the land from the state. You have no right to interfere. You only have the right [*dbang-cha*; authority, power] to work on the land.’

There is nothing particularly fuzzy about property rights in the minds of Tibetan villagers near Lhasa as they contemplate the prospect that urbanisation will leave them landless and unemployed.³¹ These peri-urban villagers believe that the state owns collective land and thus has the legal, if not moral, right to expropriate their farmland. If property is ‘nothing but a basis of expectation’ (Bentham (1931), cited in Macpherson 1978: 51), why do Tibetan villagers expect something so different from what the law states? There is something more significant at work here than mere ‘low legal awareness’ (Ho 2001: 397) that could be solved through ‘education’, though that certainly plays a role. Instead, the slippage between villagers’ understandings of collective land as being state- or Party-owned and the actual legal definition that rural and suburban property rights lie with the collective suggests an understanding of property relations that is technically incorrect but actually expresses a deeper comprehension of political realities than may be found in the words of the law. In fact, theirs is precisely the analysis of socialist property which Verdery (2004) emphasises in her essay, in which state property was ‘more inalienable’ than other property forms, particularly because the state exercised its rights as both property owner and sovereign power. In this sense, Tibetan peasants may have a clearer perception of state power and the political nature of property rights than their Han counterparts. However, this clear perception of state power is also a case of (‘type 2’) fuzzy property in Verdery’s sense, insofar as it both stems from and contributes to a constraint on power to exercise legally defined rights.

This interpretation of state property leaves villagers with fewer resources and possibilities with which to mobilise against land expropriation, thus reinforcing state power and marginalisation. In addition, another key constraint on Tibetan peasants is the fact that since 1994 economic issues have become classified as ‘hot topics’, that is, economic protests are now to be recognised as political protests, with punishment meted out accordingly. It is no wonder, then, that ‘rightful resistance’ (O’Brien 1996) is so uncommon; there have been no petitions, protests or acts of civil disobedience to report when it comes to issues of property rights and land expropriation.³² Instead, villagers use only sarcasm to express their dismay:

At meetings, they always tell us ‘the farmland, the mountains, the water, and the trees are lent to you by the state, they do not belong to you. They belong to the state.’ They tell this to us at meetings. However, some people say, ‘They didn’t bring the water and the mountains with them from *rgyanag* [inland China] did they? The water and the mountains were always here before!’

Compensation is also problematic. Although land expropriated for retirement homes is usually compensated at 100–110 yuan/sq. m, only 40 per cent of this is given to village households. The remaining funds are kept by the village, which in this context is almost always still referred to as the *myamlas*, collective, or *rukhang*, production team. The village committee uses these funds for collective investment, frequently for hotels.³³ Although low, this compensation follows legal requirements, which stipulate only that compensation be paid to the tune of six to ten times the value of the average annual crop output calculated over three years (Guo 2001: 427).

In one case a county government appropriated a large piece of land to build a road and another retirement home complex. Villagers claimed that a television report about their village situation showed the government promising that all residents would receive 60,000 yuan/*mu* (90 yuan/sq. m) in compensation for expropriated land. However, they later received only 10,000 yuan/*mu* (15 yuan/sq. m) each. More disturbingly to them, county officials explicitly informed villagers that this compensation was to last for 20 years and that the government would offer no assistance of any kind should that compensation be insufficient in the interim. Villagers also complained that they did not even learn that the farmland had been sold until the county notified them afterwards. The township leader, they said, was similarly uninformed until later. Worst of all, the villagers were notified of the expropriation only after they had already sowed the yearly grain crop on the field. The state did not wait for the harvest to begin construction; instead, the ripening crops were ploughed up and discarded.

Again, when I asked the villagers why they did not try to submit their grievance to a higher level, one responded, ‘There is nothing we can do about it. Whom could we go tell? They say that the land doesn’t really belong to us. The real owner of the land is the state.’ I asked, ‘Doesn’t the land belong to the collective?’ ‘No, no, not the collective, the state. It’s not our land.’ Fear that economic complaints might be classified as ‘hot topics’ or ‘political problems’ also loomed large in villagers’ hesitation to complain publicly. These examples show how property relations are ‘constituted only within a total field of relations among institutions, policies and social actors’ (Verdery 1999: 65). Such relations look fuzzy from the vantage point of idealised neo-liberal property rights—individualised, apolitical, clearly defined—because they are imbricated with complex questions of historical narratives of state legitimacy and uneven power relations.

Expropriating Land for Greenhouses

A final example of ‘type 2’ fuzziness of property involves a case of village land expropriation for a government greenhouse construction project. In 1996 the Lhasa municipal government, under the World Food Programme-sponsored ‘3357 project’, built thirty-two greenhouses, each 1 *mu* in area, on land belonging primarily to a village I call Phuntsokling. The original intention of the project was to rent these greenhouses at a low price to Tibetan villagers in order to help them

enter the growing vegetable market in Lhasa. The programme placed the greenhouses and project implementation under township management. However, because the township as a collective unit does not own any land, each of the nine families of *Phuntsokling* whose land was occupied by the new greenhouses was given substitute (generally lower quality) land by the village, rather than by the township.

After the greenhouses were built, the township declared that any villager could rent a greenhouse, but on the condition that villagers must cultivate the vegetables themselves. Thus, the township forbade the practice of re-renting greenhouses to migrant Han vegetable farmers at a higher rent. Most village families then declined to rent the greenhouses from the township for multiple reasons, including lack of vegetable cultivation skills, start-up capital and labour power. In the end, only six village families rented greenhouses. Three of these were village leaders who (ignoring the township regulation) rented out the greenhouses to the migrant Han farmers at a large profit rather than cultivating vegetables themselves. Of the other three Tibetan farmers, one quit after two years and the other two, finding two greenhouses too much to handle, scaled back to one each. The township then rented the remaining greenhouses to migrant Han farmers at a significantly higher yearly rate. After the two remaining Tibetan farmers gained experience in vegetable cultivation, each tried to rent another greenhouse from the township, but both were repeatedly denied. Other Tibetan families who tried to rent later were also rebuffed with the excuse 'you Tibetans won't be able to pay the rent'.

What provokes the greatest anger from the villagers is that the township has not shared the high profits that it has earned from renting the greenhouses to migrant Han farmers. This is particularly galling because the greenhouses are located on land that had been allocated to village households, not to the township. Villagers asked the township to return the greenhouse land to their control, but these pleas have fallen on deaf ears. In the words of one villager, '[This situation] is like giving someone else [that is, the township] your best food and eating the crumbs yourself'. Nevertheless, villagers are afraid that they may suffer serious repercussions if their complaints are seen as 'political'. Thus, they have not lodged any formal protests with higher-level officials. No 'sandwich strategy' of villagers teaming up with high-level officials against local cadres (O'Brien and Li 1999) or 'rightful resistance' of demanding legal property rights, have been deployed here. Instead, this situation is reminiscent of Hann's (1993: 313) 'sick joke' and is an example of property fuzziness in the 'constraints on exercising bundles of power' (Verdery 1999: 55).

CONCLUSIONS

In its broadest sense, fuzziness or ambiguity of property relations can hardly be unique to post-socialism. Legal scholar Carol Rose (1994: 7) finds 'inconclusive property regimes, where property arrangements seem to wobble between opposite

poles' even in the contemporary US context. However, different types of ambiguity have different sources, and some are products of the particularities of post-socialist trajectories. In this essay I have made several arguments concerning the fuzziness of property relations in the Tibet Autonomous Region, particularly in relation to other parts of China.

First, because China, unlike Eastern Europe, has not consciously tried to model its property regimes on a Western, capitalist, private property blueprint, it comes as no surprise that China's heterogeneous and frequently hybrid forms of property rights in land are fuzzy in relation to this model. The wide diversity in the ways in which decollectivised land is managed is an outcome of China's gradual path to economic transformation—as compared to the property restitution and 'big bang' approaches in Eastern Europe. As such, heterogeneity is pervasive in Tibet as well as other parts of China. This 'type 1' fuzziness is evident in the heterogeneity of village practises vis-à-vis land reallocation as well as management rights to Household Responsibility land.

Second, the material presented here reminds us that property relations are, first and foremost, political. This is particularly obvious in considerations of 'type 2' fuzziness. Although the processes of land expropriation for urbanisation in Lhasa are quite similar to those documented in other parts of China, the range of possible reactions for Tibetan peasants is relatively constrained. Han citizens of the PRC generally have more opportunities to claim their rights through both open protest and 'rightful resistance' in the form of petitions and lawsuits. Han farmers call upon central government officials to 'do the right thing' and uphold their legal property rights against local officials. These appeals are sometimes unsuccessful, leaving a gap between citizens' legally defined 'bundle of powers' and their actual ability to exercise them. In other words, instances of 'type 2' fuzziness are found throughout China.

However, I have also presented evidence here of other instances of 'type 2' fuzziness that seem unique to the TAR and its historical and geopolitical situation of internal colonialism. This includes the slippage between legal definitions of collective property and villagers' interpretations that their land is actually owned by the Party. Furthermore, the 'politics of fear' and disciplinary power exercised in the TAR make open resistance to land expropriation—or any sort of economic issue—almost impossible. These additional instances of 'type 2' fuzziness have their origins in the ongoing process of state incorporation. This is reinforced by the ways in which fuzziness is sometimes written into policies themselves—particularly the TAR's exceptional 'two long-term no changes' policy, with its unspecified, and thus easily manipulated, contract period for Household Responsibility land. This uncertainty is mutually constitutive of political uncertainty and fear in structuring citizens' opportunities for making property claims vis-à-vis the state.

In sum, the fuzziness of property relations in the TAR does not rise out of a blank slate. It has very specific historical, social and political origins. These ambiguities of property relations call for us to 'look beyond the labels of socialism

and capitalism' (Selden 1998: 142) and seek instead to understand specific moments of meaning and power in property relations.

Notes

1. This essay is based on ten months of ethnographic field research conducted in and around Lhasa, TAR, PRC, between 2000 and 2002.
2. Michael Hechter's (1975) model of internal colonialism as a way of explaining exploitative core-periphery relationships has been widely criticised for being under-specified, deterministic and too general. Gladney (1998) notes that as a result of these critiques, Hechter's theory was discarded before being tested on the PRC. Here, I follow Gladney (*ibid.*), Oakes (1995) and Goodman (1983) in their application of the term 'internal colonialism' to various peripheral regions of the PRC. It is worth noting, though, that the TAR case has much more in common with Xinjiang, with its separatist movement (Gladney 1998) than with Guizhou (Goodman 1983; Oakes 1995). In other words, I use 'internal colonialism' to refer to ongoing political and ethnic tensions and the processes of marginalisation and peripheralisation, rather than to a strict adherence to the rather mechanistic picture presented by Hechter's model. (The latter could be shown not to apply to the TAR). See Yeh (2003) for a detailed discussion of both political control and the political economy of development in the TAR.
3. For convenience, I use 'Tibet' as shorthand for 'Tibet Autonomous Region' in this paper. Note, however, that whereas the PRC defines the two as equivalent, the Tibetan government in exile also includes in the definition of 'Tibet' the ethnically Tibetan regions of Amdo and Kham. In official PRC administrative categories, these areas are now divided into parts of Yunnan, Sichuan, Qinghai and Gansu provinces. Some scholars make a distinction between 'ethnographic' Tibet and 'political' Tibet, (that is, the TAR (see, for example, Goldstein 1994) whereas others (for example, French 1995) refer to all regions as 'Tibet'.
4. For examples of such forms in property rights to enterprises, see Oi and Walder (1999).
5. Brandt et al. (2002: 3–4) suggest that there are four reasons why reallocations take place: as a substitute for missing land rental and farm labour markets; to ensure equal access to land among members of the village; to facilitate tax and quota fulfilment; and as a by-product of rent-seeking behaviour on the part of local leaders. These reasons are made relevant by China's particular approach to economic reform. The fact that the conditions behind these four reasons are highly variable helps explain why forms of reallocation are so heterogeneous.
6. These elements of political control and fear are certainly widespread across China—witness the recent national crackdown on Falun Gong—but, as I argue in detail elsewhere (see Yeh 2003), the degree is intensified in the TAR. The state's own insecurity provokes it to produce a politics of fear. Robert Barnett (cited in Lehman 1998: 195) sums up the situation well: 'The response of the authorities to [the demonstrations in Lhasa in 1987] revealed the fear within the Chinese leviathan of the pinprick of Tibetan dissent. That fear, as seen in the decision to open fire on the protestors in Lhasa, was an indication that the dragon is more fragile than its fiery breath would have its subjects believe.'
7. For example, the following is an excerpt from Document No. 5 of the Sixth Enlarged Plenary Session of the Standing Committee of the Fourth Congress of the TAR Branch of the CCP:

The Dalai clique hopes to gain 'Tibetan independence' by relying on the hostile forces of western countries, and those western hostile forces use the Dalai clique's demand for 'Tibetan independence' to cause disturbances in the hope of splitting our country. To secure stability in Tibet is . . . to oppose western hostile forces so that their hopes of 'westernising' China and splitting China disappear into thin air. (TIN 1996: 155).
8. For example, texts with religious content are used as part of the curriculum for Tibetan majors at the Southwest Minorities University in Sichuan, but the same texts are forbidden in Tibet University in Lhasa.
9. Nevertheless, the 'state' is sometimes a useful reification in that it facilitates discussion. In this paper, when I use the term the 'state', I refer to the higher (central and provincial) levels of the administrative hierarchy, whereas I use 'village officials' and 'township officials' for those at these lower levels.
10. Ten RMB is also the standard daily wage for Tibetans working in construction in Lhasa. Average annual income in these peri-urban villages was reported in 2001 as being approximately 2500 yuan (US\$ 305) per capita. This is much higher than the average TAR rural income (also 2001) of 1,325 yuan (TAR Statistical Yearbook 2002).
11. Most notably, a cohort of seventy Han students entered the Tibetan language department at Tibet University for the first time in 1999 and graduated in 2003. Western observers believe that they are now being sent to rural and urban townships (*xiang, zhen*) across the TAR to serve as officials. In addition to facilitating control at the township level, this also appears to be part of a state project of urbanisation, as many smaller townships are being consolidated into larger administrative units.
12. Different variations on the Household Responsibility System included *shuangbao daohu* ('double guarantee to the household'), *shuangbao dao zu, zhuan ye cheng bao* ('specialised [industry] contract'), *lian chan cheng bao* and *lian chan jichou*, among others (Yu et al. 1998: 7–8).
13. China scholars debate whether decollectivisation was a result of elite power struggles and guided by reformers in the leadership (Fewsmith 1994), or whether it was begun by a few farmers in Anhui, who unleashed a force across China that the leaders were unable to stop (Kelliher 1992; Zhou 1996), or some combination of both.
14. The First National Work Forum on Tibet, which met in 1980, suspended the agricultural ('patriotic grain') tax until 1985. This suspension was later extended to 1990, and continues to be in place.
15. *Xumu gui hu he si yang zi zhu jing ying chang qi bu bian; tui gui hu si yong zi zhu jing ying chang qi bu bian*
16. As I explain below in discussing land expropriation, the collective ownership of the village farmland does indeed become rather devoid of meaning, but not in the positive way that Yu et al. (1998: 41) are implying here. They go on to claim in the same passage that the policy implemented in *neidi vis-à-vis* grain was 'give enough to the state, save enough for the collective, the remainder belongs to the individual', whereas in Tibet the policy implemented is 'save enough for the individual, given any leftover to the state'. This seems to be a reference to the suspension of agricultural taxes in 1980, but it is not clear why Yu et al. suggest that this is linked to 'two long-term no changes'.
17. Note that I am not arguing that peasants in other parts of China do not experience post-decollectivisation tenure insecurity. Grinspoon (2002), for example, finds that wasteland auctions in rural Sichuan have provided opportunities for the local elite to appropriate collective forest land for personal benefit, and further that post-decollectivisation changes in forest land tenure have contributed to social instability. However, in the cases that Grinspoon describes, land expropriation was not enabled by villagers' fears that they would or should return their Household Responsibility plots to the state, as I am arguing is the case in peri-urban Lhasa.
18. At decollectivisation, land was not divided by single parcels allocated to individual persons. Instead, a certain total area (spread over many plots) was allocated to each household based on household size. Thus, when land is to be returned to the village for reallocation, there is no pre-specified parcel that corresponds to that particular individual. In this village, households can choose to give either a small 'good' plot together with a small 'poor' plot, or a larger 'medium' plot back to the village.

19. There are 15 *mu* per hectare. At decollectivisation, each villager received approximately 3 *mu* of land.
20. The idea that all should have equal access to land does not appear to grow out of deeper cultural or social legacies. Prior to 1951, central Tibetan agricultural society was highly stratified, including aristocratic estate owners as well as *dud-chung*—landless, poor peasants (sometimes referred to as one of several types of 'serfs').
21. These were uncommon in these particular villages before 1959, although Aziz (1978) finds that a reciprocity system (*dg'a-nye*) was more systematic in Tingri.
22. In these cases the representatives were village leaders. I found no cases in which villagers themselves decided the rules as a group.
23. Unfortunately, records documenting the explicit intentions behind this policy are unavailable.
24. It seems, however, that the subsidy from the AAHD to the township for following these plans is not shared with the village. Villagers report that they do not receive compensation for following these cropping plans.
25. However, cadres could pay extra to purchase land beyond the quota that matched their rank. As land has become increasingly marketised, these quotas have lost their significance.
26. By 2001 government and Party administration had grown to 13 per cent of total economic activity in the TAR (TIN 2003; TAR Statistical Yearbook 2002). Administration costs for the TAR comprised 18.34 per cent of total expenditures in 1993 and 21.8 per cent in 1996, neither of which included 'operating expenses' of other departments, pensions or social security costs (TIN 1998: 58). The TAR is the only province in China where the secondary sector is smaller than both agriculture and the tertiary sector (TIN 2003). Industry in Lhasa is quite limited, but includes a beer factory, three cement plants, a Tibetan medicine factory, vehicle repair, and small-scale handicrafts and leather factories.
27. Note that in other cities in China the term 'retirement home' is not usually used as a catch-all term for any and all types of private homes (which are usually referred to as *shangpin fang*). More recently, some young work unit staff, far from retirement, and businessmen have also started to buy 'retirement homes' in Lhasa.
28. Reported average urban incomes in the TAR (US\$ 786 in 2001, US\$ 868 in 2002) are higher than the national average because of inflated military and cadre salaries. The average wage paid to work unit staff and workers in the TAR was 19,144 RMB (US\$ 2,334) in 2001, compared to a national average of 10,879 RMB (US\$ 1,325). As such, it was third highest in the entire country, lower only than Beijing (19,155 RMB) and Shanghai (21,781 RMB) (TAR Statistical Yearbook 2002: 258). The TAR is reported to rank first in China in per capita urban living space (Xinhua News Agency 2001).
29. Ordinary urban residents speculated that 'the government is paying cadres 60,000 RMB—some get 60,000, some get 80,000, some 120,000'. Some cadres concurred that this was the case, but that it was a total, rather than additional, subsidy for housing (for example, if a cadre had already received 50,000 RMB in assistance toward the purchase of a house, he or she would only be entitled to an additional 10,000). Still others claimed that the government also calculated a current property value of the land and house, subtracting that from the eligible subsidy. By using an inflated rate, the government can then claim that it owes the cadre very little ('It's just a trick'). This, however, was not the understanding that ordinary urban Tibetans had of the cadres and the state.
30. These village Party secretaries were all ethnically Tibetan. It was only at the township level (and above) that I found Tibetans aware of the fact that ownership rights belonged to the collective, not the state or the Party.
31. Even if this results eventually in a change from rural to urban household registration status, older farmers, most of whom are not very educated nor have much proficiency in Chinese, will not be able to obtain salaried employment.
32. My point here is emphatically *not* that Han farmers' protests against farmland expropriation in other parts of China are always successful, and that if only the Tibetans would protest, they would not be subject to expropriation. Though accurate statistics are unavailable, it is safe to

say that most Han farmers' protests against land expropriation are not successful. This is even more true of *urban* redevelopment and loss of urban housing across China, often with little or no compensation (for example, the remarkably fast disappearance of the old *hutong* neighbourhoods in Beijing). A spate of suicides and self-immolations in Tiananmen Square (and other areas around China) in October 2003 by both urban and rural Han citizens who lost their homes and farmland to urban redevelopment (Brahm 2003) testifies to the fact that 'type 2' fuzziness and power relations are clearly important for Han lives and livelihoods as well. However, my point here is to draw attention to differences in understandings of property rights on the one hand (which, for Tibetans, close off the very imagination of resistance) and the degree of political control on the other. (That is, although Han farmers' protests are frequently unsuccessful, the possibility of success is not insignificant either. The same cannot be said of Tibetan peri-urban villagers at the present time).

33. Hotel revenues are meant to benefit the entire village through yearly distributions of a percentage of profit, as well as through employment of a few villagers as hotel staff. In most cases, however, village- or neighbourhood-run hotels have not been very competitive, and often earn little if any revenue.

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