

Economic Reforms and Their Impacts on Household Patterns among Tibetan Nomads

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China's economic reforms since the 1980's, known as the "household responsibility system" in rural China, have shifted communities away from collectivization and towards entrepreneurship and privatization. This reform has led to major changes for rural Chinese families involving household composition, marriage arrangements, and childbearing (Davis and Harrell 1993:1-22). Local variations in culture and economy have also influenced those transformations in specific ways (Levine 1991; Gladney 1991). Therefore, the impact on the family system has not been uniform; rather there have been distinct consequences in different areas.

While changes in families in rural China have attracted the attention of many scholars of Chinese studies (Johnson 1993; Selden 1993; Yan 1997), little has been published on ethnic minorities and even less on Tibetans, who have also experienced far-reaching social and economic transformations. This paper attempts to explore how the reforms in the 1980's have affected domestic organization in three Tibetan communities in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and particularly how changes in market economics in ethnic Tibetan areas have affected family patterns. More specifically, the paper will demonstrate the extent to which domestic organization has changed in response to the new land tenure system and new economic and political circumstances. It also will examine factors beyond government policies that have influenced family patterns and structure among Tibetans.

Scholars also have differentiated families according to types. Murdock (1949) classifies families into five types based on kinship relationships (Nimkoff and Middleton:215):

- (1) The nuclear family, which consists of fathers and mothers with their

unmarried children. This type is also known as an “elementary family” (Levi-Strauss 1963) or “simple family” (Hammel & Laslett:92).

(2) Compound families, formed by uniting two or more nuclear families through a common husband and wife, as in polygyny or polyandry, respectively.

(3) Extended families, normally consisting of at least two siblings or cousins in each of at least two adjacent generations.

(4) Lineal families, comprising of at least one individual in the senior generation but at least two individuals in the next generations.

(5) Stem families, usually consisting of one or two related families, other than polygamous unions of the same generations.

Murdock defines lineal families as “small extended families”, and stem families as “minimal extended families.” Following Murdock, other researchers have divided families into two types, referring to lineal and stem families as “extended families”(Nimkoff & Middleton 1960), and nuclear and compound families as “independent families”.

This last definition is similar to the classification provided by Dargyay in her discussion of Tibetan families. According to Dargyay, Tibetan families normally fall into two types: the nuclear family, based on the relationship of husband and wife, and the extended family, consisting of kinsmen of various generations living in a common home (1982:33). In addition, polyandrous households were widespread in Tibet in the past (Ekvall 1968; Gelek 1991). Some nomadic areas still have polyandry even today (Wang, Cheng and Sonam 1993). This type of household, ordinarily with only one wife present in a generation, is described by Levine as generationally extended linearly and fraternally expanded laterally (1988:132).

Scholars of the Chinese family studies usually identify two types of families based on the number of couples in each generation (Pan 1987; Baker 1976; Davis & Harrell 1993; Cohen 1970). For this paper, we adopt a modified form of the

classification utilized by scholars of Chinese studies. We add to this the mono-parental family as a category since it is common among Tibetan nomadic pastoralists. We have classified the types of Tibetan families as follows:

- (1) Nuclear Families, consisting of a couple and /or their unmarried children.
- (2) Extended Families, consisting of parents with two or more children along with their spouses and children.
- (3) Mono-parental families, consisting of either an unmarried mother or father with his /her illegitimate children.
- (4) Other families, including families containing brothers and sisters, families of grandparents and grandchildren, nuclear families with either a husband's or wife's unmarried siblings, polyandrous families; or single-persons with adopted children and one-person families.¹

Traditional Theories of Family Type and Its Determinants

Before discussing changes in family structures in Tibetan nomadic areas, it is necessary to review various theoretical approaches to the subject. Comparative data suggest that most societies have small, nuclear family households; corporate extended families are rare (Wilk and Netting 1984:7-9). However, why do some societies have extended families while some have small, nuclear families? Is this determined by economic and social structures, as asserted by some scholars (Young and Salih 1987:352) or affected by religion and traditions in specific cultural contexts? Although efforts have been made to try to formulate a general theory of family systems and changes within them, the correlation between family type and a variety of determining factors is still a

¹Among the forty-six households surveyed in Yid-chab Village, only one was polyandrous prior to 1959, and it was sororal polygynous with two sisters sharing one husband. There have been no polyandrous and polygynous families since 1959. In a farming community in Southwestern Tibet, Levine (1994) found that co-residential families are decreasing. Instead, families of siblings are more common as a result of radically altered systems of land tenure and other economic and legal reforms introduced after 1959. However, there was only one family consisting of siblings in the village I studied, which dissolved after the democratic reform in 1959.

controversial issue (John 1992:3-7). If we can classify family systems as “independent” (nuclear) or “extended” (stem, lineal, or fully extended), we will find that extended families are more common among agricultural and nomads societies, and that nuclear systems are more prevalent among residents of Lhasa and other small towns.

It can be said that the mode of subsistence influences family type through demands for family labor. It is clear that there is some association between traditional agriculture, animal husbandry and extended family households. There are close correlations between specific types of families and particular subsistence systems. No matter what the production system is, the appearance of extended family is due to its ability to provide extra labor for various divergent activities within the family. The family becomes increasingly nuclear to fit the requirements of urban life because the nuclear family is the unit most compatible with industrialism and urbanization. It is clear that all of China as well as Tibet are moving towards industrialization and modernization. The family systems are also approaching some variant of the conjugal system.

According to Goode’s theory, the conjugal family is peculiarly appropriate to the needs of industrial urban society because of its geographic and social mobility and because its members can take up specialized occupational roles in a fluid labor market. As can be observed in Lhasa city, the nuclear family predominates among the land-less and animal-less laborers and waged workers. Yes, the nuclear family predominates widely, even in rural areas of Tibet. Furthermore, nuclear families existed even before urbanization and industrialization occurred in Tibet. Therefore, it may not be a necessary connection between urbanization or industrialization and the small, simple, nuclear family of contemporary Tibet. Even in Lhasa, maintaining the extended family kinship system constitutes the basis of the economic and financial power of privileged social groups. Goode’s model drew heavily on the experience of Western Europe and North America and has failed to explain family structure among many Asian and African populations.

In recent decades, scholars have conducted in-depth fieldwork among various rural communities in China and focused on the changes in rural family systems in response to the new economic reform policy. Their conclusions are diverse. Some have suggested that rural family structure in economically developed areas has changed from stem to small nuclear and husband-wife families. These changes in family structure have been attributed to industrialization and urbanization in those rural areas where non-agricultural employment opportunities are created by the reforms (Yang 1994; Lei 1991). Others, however, have proposed that the average household size increased due to increased demand for labor to fulfill various economic activities. They have further pointed out that trends in household size and composition have not been uniform, but rather vary by the economic incentives of the local economy or the strictness of the planned-birth campaign.

Although it is difficult to generalize about a nation-wide trend in family patterns, as Whyte (1992) has summarized, there are two alternative theories in the change of rural family structure, both responsive to the market-oriented reforms. One theory asserts that the reappearance of the family as a productive unit creates new incentives to delay family division and leads to larger and more complex households. The other theory maintains that the new non-agricultural labor employment leads to a continual shift away from the traditional family structure and values towards small, nuclear households.²

Two main policies, namely strict population control and liberal economic reforms, resulted in changes in family structure, composition, and family size. The effects of these policies are different: family size declined sharply in a close-to-town village due to the one-child policy. In contrast, the reduction in family size in the rural areas villages was less drastic since the enforcement of the population control policy was less strict, and families were allowed to have two or more children due to the relaxed family-planning policies toward ethnic minorities.³ Subsistence patterns have had a more diverse effect

² The Yi ethnic group comprises 0.55 percent of the total population in China and mainly inhabits Sichuan Province.

³ For detailed discussion about China's birth control policy, see Banister's *China's Changing Population*. California:

on family processes and composition. After decollectivization, in villages where subsistence farming is an economic resource the family composition retained a consistently higher percentage of nuclear families, as in the pre-reform era. By contrast, those villages with waged labor and non-farm production as the main economic resources have a higher percentage of stem families and correspondingly lower percentages of nuclear families.

Clarke, who is among the few western Tibetologists studying Tibetan communities, carries out his field research among a Tibetan pastoral nomadic community in Qinghai Province. He focuses on reform and its impacts on pastoralism in Tibetan areas. Clarke argues that with the introduction of the “responsibility system” into Tibetan nomadic areas, “the joint rights of the household to pasture, together with the economic and management advantages of a division of labor that can be made because of the larger numbers in an extended family, militate against fission into nuclear families” (1992:402). Thus, Clarke suggests that nomads in Qinghai retain extended families primarily for economic considerations. However, another case study in a southwestern Tibetan farming community (Levine 1994) shows that the new system of land tenure after the 1980’s has actually led few young people to establish traditional co-residential marriage and families; instead these young people prefer informal unions which require no co-residence of family members and pooling of resources. Since these young people tend to stay with their natal family members, this inevitably reduces the potential for the establishment of extended families involving a married couple, although it still could be a generational-extended family containing only siblings.

We suggest that in addition to the demographic and social factors that shape the developmental cycle of Tibetan families, economic reforms and transformation in land ownership also brought about changes in domestic organization. In what follows we will examine whether the household size changed in the Yid-Chab village over the past four decades and then offer possible explanations for this change.

Table 1. Household Size in Yid-Chab Village

No. of Household Members	--1959		1959---1966		1966---1980		1980---1994	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1 --- 3	9	23.7	11	26.9	12	27.3	9	19.6
4 --- 6	19	50.1	17	41.5	15	34.0	24	52.2
7 or More	9	23.7	13	31.7	17	39.4	13	28.3
Total households	38	100.0	41	100.0	44	100.0	46	100.0
Total persons	197		229		269		225	
Average household size	5.2		5.6		6.1		5.5	

Source: 1995 household survey.

Table one shows the household size in the Yid-Chab Village in Amdo. It is clear that the average household size in this village increased steadily between 1959 and 1980, while it has dropped in the most recent period. Before the democratic reforms, the average household size was 5.2 people. It grew to 5.6 in the period of the post-democratic reforms, and in the commune period reached its largest size: 6.1. In addition, the number of large households with seven or more members was the greatest, i.e., 39.4%, during the period of 1966-1980, the largest household having sixteen members. This statistic does not support Selden's (1993) hypothesis that collectivization inevitably resulted in a sharp reduction in average household size. With the limited data at hand, however, we still cannot account for why the large households with seven or more members were so popular during the Commune period, representing the highest percentage of household type for that stage.

After the "responsibility system" was implemented in the early 80's, household size in Yid-Chab village dropped slightly to 5.5 persons, on average. When questioned about this reduction in population in detail, we were told that some people married and moved out of the village, some found jobs in Amdo County, and some joined the army. According to the 4th nationwide census in 1990, the average household size in Amdo County in 1982 was 4.8 persons, and rose slightly to 4.91 persons in 1990. Meanwhile, the average household size in Nagqu Prefecture increased from 4.9 members in 1982 to

5.26 in 1990. Thus, one might presume that the average household size of the nomadic population in Tibet began increasing after the new economic reform policy was carried out in the 80's. However, our findings obviously run contrary to larger regional statistics. This contradiction might have resulted from the fairly active migration and mobility among the population under study, or it could be attributed to the inaccuracy of data coming from the defective questions we asked about family size. It also could be due to errors in the government statistics or the different ways they phrased the questions regarding families. It is also likely these minor variations might be due to chance or calculation error given the small sample.⁴ Table 1 also shows that after the new economic reform, four to six person households increased by 18.2% (from 34 in the commune period to 52.2%) while the smaller one-to-three person and larger seven-and-more-person households dropped 7.7 and 11.1 percent respectively.

However, changes in household size are insufficient to explain the changing patterns in family systems. More than size, it is the structure of the domestic group that is most significant because it reveals a certain form of organization which governs the transmission of practices and cultural values, and links family, work, power and possessions.

Table 2 shows clearly changing patterns in household structure. During the time prior to 1959 and during the Commune period, nuclear families were dominant, accounting for 52.6%, 46.3%, and 45.5% of the total families. After the 1980's, nuclear families decreased by 8.5%, while extended families increased by 13.8%. They now comprise a full 47.9% of family types. Extended families increased steadily, rose substantially (34.1%) during the Commune period and reached the highest percentage in the 80's (47.9%).

⁴Zhao (1991) noticed that, among the rural populations in China's Sichuan Province, the average size of the specialized households who engage in a single farming activity is larger than that of the non-specialized farmers. He therefore attributes this increase to the response toward the demands for more labored workers to fulfill diverse economic activities among the specialized farming households. However, this was not the case among the Tibetan nomadic populations.

As in other Chinese rural areas, nuclear families were the prominent type in the nomadic Amdo area. However, extended families increased during the Commune period and after the 1980's. The question is why this occurred. In the following section I will discuss whether this phenomenon is consistent with Whyte's hypothesis: That the reappearance of family as a productive unit creates new incentives leading to larger households. What is especially interesting is that these data suggest families, at least in

Table 2. Family Structure in Yid-Chab Village

Types of families	---1959		1959---1966		1966---1980		1980---1994	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Mono-parental families	5	13.2	8	19.5	7	15.9	3	6.5
Nuclear families	20	52.6	19	46.3	20	45.5	17	37.0
Extended families	10	26.3	11	24.4	15	34.1	22	47.9
Other families	3	7.9	3	7.3	2	5.1	4	8.7
Total	38	100.0	41	100.0	44	100.0	46	100.0

Source: 1995 Household Survey

Yid-Chab, have been moving toward becoming more extended and complex. Nor did extended families during the Commune period fade away as suggested by others (Selden 1993). The remainder of this paper, therefore, explores the factors responsible for these variations in household patterns. In particular, we will consider whether they are due to the unanticipated consequences of diverse legal and economic reforms, particularly land tenure system reforms, or the result of the expansion of the market economy, industrialization and urbanization. We will also consider yet another explanation: That this change is due to the resurgence of traditional cultural ideologies.

Changes in Household Patterns and Their Determinants

Many scholars of family studies held that economic factors should be primarily responsible for changes in family size. For instance, Pitkin (1959:169-73) indicates that

families tend to extend when they assume full economic responsibility for their subsistence. Hammel (1975:172) cites a diverse mix of “economic” or “ecological” variables, including; labor needs in production, defensive needs, care of children and taxation as the “underlying functional reasons” for the variation in the size of the domestic group. Regional diversity, developmental cycle of domestic groups, gender sex-role systems and kinship as a symbolic system should also be taken into consideration when studying domestic organization. This critique is supported by our fieldwork data in the sense that no single factor mentioned above could convincingly explain the various changes in the family system. Rather, changes in land tenure should be responsible for the changes in family system in Tibetan nomadic areas.

Adaptations to Reforms of Pastoral Management

The family as a basic economic unit needed enough members so that various essential activities could be carried out. Besides, households with more members benefited economically through shared expenses, labor, security and companionship. Thus, households welcomed more members to increase the work force. In addition to economic interests, a large family was favored because it could fulfill heavy corvee labor, for long-distance trade, and for military obligations to tribal leaders. In our data, the four-to-six person household accounted for 50.1% of the total thirty-eight households, and this was also found in Serthar, a nomadic community in eastern Tibet with 62% of the total households (Gelek 1983). However, the interesting difference was that, in the traditional society in Serthar, 50-60% of families were extended while only 26% were extended among the population we studied. Gelek attributes the prevalence of extended families in Serthar to the demands of labor in diverse pastoral activities.

Democratic reform between 1959 and 1966 did not cause significant changes in household size and structure because in the nomadic Amdo area after 1959, ownership of livestock remained the same as before- in the hands of the nomad families. The only difference was that the ownership of grassland was transferred from estate owners to the collective. This change did not lead to a reduction in household size. On the contrary,

the average size of household after the democratic reforms increased slightly. Among the twenty-three old households in Yid-chab Village, ten experienced an increase in the number of household members, seven remained the same, and the remaining six households became smaller. Meanwhile, the number of nuclear and extended families remained almost identical. Thus, it seems that the democratic reforms, which involved no devolution of grassland ownership to individual households, had no significant impact on household organization.

During the Commune period, as elsewhere in rural China, the collective owned not only grassland, but also livestock. In the North Wind Commune in Amdo County, each household member in the commune received three head of livestock for subsistence. Production and labor allocation were the responsibility of the “production teams.” Therefore, the productive functions of the traditional economic unit -- individual households -- were diminished. Collectivization not only weakened the household as a productive unit, but also reduced the power of the family-head over the sons because once the control over the utilization of grassland, livestock and labor that used to belong to the family-head was now taken by the collective. In this system, every family member made a living by earning points awarded by the production teams. This provided opportunities for siblings to separate from their natal family and set up their own families with the points each of them earned. Leaving one’s family had no impact on ownership of grassland and livestock. Therefore, it could be expected that the declining role of the family as an independent productive unit would lead to earlier division and reduction in the number of extended families (see Selden:147).

However, my research data call this logic into question. The average household size during this period of time was larger than in any of the other three periods: Families consisting of seven and more persons were numerous, and the number of extended families was also more than in the other two periods. My observation is also supported by Huang (1992:25-38) who found that the extended families prevailed in a farming

village in southern China. However, he did not explain this phenomenon. Johnson (1983:215-24), in his study of a northern rural community, claims that government policies restricting mobility and emphasizing village self-sufficiency have strengthened patrilineal extended families practice. Although the data available are not conclusive, I would suggest this might also have been the case in Yid-Chab, although they were not necessarily patrilineal.

Two additional factors could also be responsible for this change. First, before the 1980's, China's birth-control policy had not been enforced among the minority populations, and particularly not among the pastoral nomads in such a remote, isolated frontier region.⁵ Nomads did not use birth control. Besides, infant mortality declined due to the improved health care services. According to our data, the crude birth rate in Amdo is 33.1 per 1000. This is consistent to Goldstein's findings among another Tibetan nomadic community which is similar ecologically with the population I studied. Both data show that the CBR in Tibetan nomadic areas resembles the CBRs of high growth countries such as India and Mongolia. Therefore, families may have increased in size due to a high rate of reproduction and improved child survival. The second factor is related to the point system imposed during the commune period. At that time, each family member made a living by earning points which made it possible for children to separate from their natal families. Nevertheless, there were still a number of families that preferred to keep the family large. According to one of my informants, these families wanted to prevent the partition of a family to pool the points together to make a better life, operating on the presumption that everyone was equally paid by the commune. Thus the more labor force one family possesses, the more points it would accumulate, and potentially the richer it would become. Also, sharing might reduce living expenses of the whole family. Still, others may argue that, separation from the natal family was made possible since each could make a living with the points each earns and the partition would not diminish their own standard of living.

⁵For a detailed discussion of the birth control policy in Tibet, see Goldstein and Beall, 1991. "China's Birth Policy in the Tibet Autonomous Region: Myths and Realities" in *Asian Survey*, Vol. 31 (3): 285-303.

De-collectivization, in the early 1980's, followed by nationwide agricultural reform, was initiated in Tibetan nomadic areas. Pastureland and livestock were allocated to individual households. One feature that deserves close attention is that the livestock were allocated to individuals by head count. The grassland, however, were allocated to households as a whole, rather than individuals within each family. This allocation system actually makes dividing the household difficult to realize since members can bring the livestock with them upon separation, however, the grassland is impartable and it is very difficult for out-marrying children to bring a piece of grassland with them, although it happens in other nomadic areas. I would assume this as a potential factor that favors the increase of extended families in this nomadic community.

Besides, the household contract system weakened the former collective structure and strengthened the role of households as productive units in agriculture, in sideline production and in market activity. As elsewhere in rural China, capitalist reforms led nomadic pastoralists into market activities and stimulated various sideline occupations. Direct access to the Qinghai-Tibet Highway has provided the people of Amdo with new opportunities. It has stimulated some of them to pool labor resources to engage in pastoralism, while other carry out long-distance trade outside the local areas, or operating restaurants, tea houses and gasoline stations along the highway (also see Zhao 1991:206). The average annual income per capita among Amdo nomads, which was only RMBY 526.0 (US\$92.3) in 1986, jumped to RMBY 1,490.0 (US\$173.3) in 1994. From 1986 up to 1994, the incomes from transportation, handicrafts, commerce and restaurants increased from 14.9% to 41.1% of total annual per capita incomes (Zhou 1996:419). Once again, each family found that it needed to pool its labor to conduct various tasks, as it did during the pre-commune period of time. Although the average size of the household decreased slightly during this last stage, the number of extended families increased while the nuclear families decreased considerably. Thus, we may draw the conclusion that involvement in the market economy prompted nomad families to conduct

profitable sideline production in addition to subsistence production. We assume that the involvement in the sideline work also potentially favored the spread of extended families. However, this is merely a hypothesis requiring further investigation.

In addition to the land tenure changes that have considerably influenced household patterns of this nomadic community in the TAR, I also suggest that distinctive characteristics of the local economy might have favored the existence of the extended

Table 3. Laborforce and Incomes in Yid-chab Village, 1994

Income: RMBY

No. of Laborers	No. of Households	Mean per Capita Income
5	3	1181.6
4	2	994.5
3	1	910.5
2	4	544.1

Source: 1995 Household Survey.

family in nomadic communities. It should be noticed that the subsistence economy, particularly the mode of production, has remained unchanged for centuries in pastoral production and still heavily relies on the strength and size of the labor force because of the generally low technological level of the area and its challenging natural environment. Modernization has not altered the mode of production in Tibetan nomadic areas. Although certain kinds of machines, such as milk separators, have been introduced in pastoral production and have effectively reduced the intensity of labor, the size and the strength of the labor force decide the wealth of each family. Our data showed a strong

correlation between families with more members and a strong labor force and the income of the family. Extended families and those with more laborers were much better off than those with fewer members, a weak labor force and large numbers of dependents (Table 3).⁶ However, only small a sample is available, and this assumption is not conclusive. Nor do we have data to show whether the nomads we interviewed realized the potential relationship between the wealth being of a family and the labor forces.

Distinctive Ethnic Background and its Impacts on Household Pattern Changes in Amdo

We have mentioned earlier in this paper that Harrell (1993) attributes changes in household structure among the Yi people to the favorable government policy toward ethnic minorities. This argument is also supported by my study in that less regulation of birth control policy among the Tibetan nomadic population could also explain in part the large size of family households. Unlike some areas in rural China, where the restrictive population control policy was one of the main factors affecting family structure, the situation in Tibet is just the opposite. Early research among Tibetan nomads showed that no coercive birth control policy had been carried out until recently (Goldstein 1986). This is further confirmed by our research. Seventeen women of childbearing-age between twenty-five and fifty-nine in Yid-Chab village had given birth to seventy-six children between 1984-1994, 4.4 each on average. The average number of children for women of 45 years old and over is 6.1. In addition, 44.4% of the fifty-four women in this village had five or more children. One of them has given birth to twelve children, with seven still alive. Obviously, the number of children has an immediate effect on the size of the family and it will have important structural affects in the future. Members in 86% of the households surveyed also informed us that having more children would provide security when they get old.

⁶Also see Levine's "Household Composition and Domestic Economy: The Case of Nomadic Pastoralists in Serthar County," paper presented at the Second International Tibetan Conference in Beijing, China (1997).

Household Structure as the Ideological Reflection of Tibetan Nomads

Kinship as a symbolic system should also be given equal attention when domestic organization is being studied. Yanagisako asserts that “kinship enables us make sense of the diversity in family and kinship organization within a single society” (1979:193). In this sense, the existence of extended families throughout the four decades and its steady increase in numbers should not only be explained by nomads’ economic rationality, but also by the well-kept ideology of traditional life-style, both among pastoralists and agriculturalists. Traditionally, the ideal Tibetan family pattern was three generations living in one household (Dargyay 1982; Gelek 1991; Clarke 1992). According to Tibetans, large families bring good luck and prosperity. Being a research assistant in a research project conducted in the Summer of 1994 in another Tibetan nomadic community in northwest Sichuan Province,⁷ I collected data on the household structure there as well. In 1983, 76% of the seventeen households were nuclear households while 18% was extended family. In 1994, the total households in this village increased to twenty. The 60% of families were nuclear while the extended families accounted for 30% of the total households. Most significantly, the average household size increased sharply from 3.9 in 1983 to 7.1 in 1994. The two nomadic communities are similar ecologically. Both communities experienced an increase of extended households which we would not think due to coincidence. We argue that a large family is preferred among Tibetan nomads. If this is the case for Yid-Chab Village, one can infer that the extended family is not a new phenomenon appearing in Tibetan pastoral areas, but rather a revitalization of a traditional life style driven by traditional Tibetan ideologies. However, since our questionnaire did not inquire about the nomad’s attitude toward familial ideology, my assumption needs to be proved with further research.

⁷ This research was a joint project between the National Center for Tibetan Studies in Beijing and Professor Levine from University of California, Los Angeles.

One particular feature that distinguishes Tibetan nomadic areas from inland rural China is that mono-parental families have always existed. In nomadic areas, people may have children without being married. Some women never marry and remain in their parental tents. If they have had children with someone they are not blamed but can also gain a few animals and occasional assistance from the child's father when the time for seasonal migration comes. A number of children in our survey were born in these circumstances. Both mothers and the illegitimate children were accepted by the society, shared equal rights to family property and faced no discrimination. According to 1990 statistics, there were ten illegitimate children in Yid-Chab village and they enjoyed the same inheritance rights as legitimate children. As another example, in Washul Serthar, a Tibetan nomadic area in the northwest of Sichuan Province, there traditionally existed a tribal alliance consisting of forty-eight tribes, and the tribal leader was an illegitimate child from a mono-parental family.

Individuals as Social Agents and Their Impacts on Household Patterns

We have examined above the factors that might have brought about changes in family patterns in the Amdo nomadic community. They are mainly social, cultural, economic and political variables. However, we should keep in mind that individuals, who are agents of society also play a crucial role in the formation of the social system. This is evidenced by the prevalence of *magpa* households in the population under study. One notable and interesting feature in Tibetan kinship is the prevalence of *magpa*, or uxorilocal marriage, that is the change of residence of the man to his wife's tent. It is well documented that the Naxi people and Tibetans in Yunnan Province mostly practice matrilocal residence (Corlin 1978). Interestingly, among the twenty-two extended households in Yid-chab village in 1995, there were ten uxorilocal marriages, accounting for 45% of total extended households. Ekvall (1968:27) argues that this "called-in-son-in-law" marriage is to keep family wealth intact, which results in an extended family. He suggests that it occurs mostly in affluent households. When a family has only one daughter, or when all but one of the daughters have married and left, a son-in-law,

usually from a family of less wealth, is brought in as a surrogate son. Clarke (1992) also asserts that matrilocality is likely to happen if there is no son in the house of marriage for direct inheritance, or if there is lack of labor in that tent.

Can the above-mentioned hypotheses explain convincingly the situation that occurred in the Yid-Chab Village? According to my data, there existed three types of matrilocality. One was the typical family with only one daughter (see Figure 1-A) and there are six cases like this. The second was when there was one daughter and one son in the parental homes and the son-in-law married into the family while the son stays too (see Figure 1-B). There were three such marriages. The third occurred in unusual circumstances. The family had three daughters and one son. In 1989, the elder daughter brought in a *magpa*, with whom she had two daughters. In 1992, the second daughter married and she also brought in a *magpa* to live together with her parents, her sister's family and her brother (see figure 1-C). In family C, the parents were middle aged, and the son was also old enough to work as a full laborer. Thus, the lack of labor force or sons for direct inheritance were not sufficient to explain these two *magpas*. When asked about the reason, the household head just simply said:

My two daughters are very filial, and we just can not bear them leaving us and moving into other people's houses. Besides, the two daughters are also happy to stay with us after marriage.

Obviously, harmonious family relationships are highly valued in this *magpa* extended household. The head of another *magpa* household told me that it was because the son-in-law lived in another village which would take half a day of horse-riding. This made it inconvenient for the daughter to visit her parents frequently. Since the son-in-law has a young brother staying at his natal family, he moved into her family after marriage. From those two examples, we would find out that the type of family is largely determined by individuals' responses to their social and personal circumstances, even though the motivations which drive people to choose matrilocality have not been fully understood. However, we only interviewed several *magpa* marriages and did not explore them further. There are still more questions that could be asked, such as, do the *magpas* tend to come from a *magpa* family themselves? Do the *magpas* tend to marry late?

Since the sample is small and not enough data is at hand, it is not possible to generalize why the *magpa* marriage is commonly practiced although less preferred throughout the Tibetan nomadic areas.

Goldstein (1989), in his study among another Tibetan nomadic community in western Tibet, suggests that there is no rigid rule regarding who marries and moves out. One of Goldstein's respondents said that he decided to keep his daughter with him and the prospective groom had to move into his household although he still had other two unmarried sons living with him:

She is the best of my children --- the one most likely to look after me well when I am no longer able to work. My son (20-year-old) Shibus does not respect me well, and (10-year-old) Rinchen is too small for me to know how he will turn out (1989:56).

Goldstein further points out that, in reality, nomads decide which of the children should stay at their natal family upon his/her marriage depending who will take the best care of them as they grow old, rather than by following a fixed "custom." Basically, in the village we studied, matrilineal residence occurs no matter whether there are sons or there is more than one daughter staying at the natal family.

Apart from the fact that the *magpa* households result from decisions based on individuals' circumstances and by members of the two households- the son's family and the daughter's family, we also suggest that this type of family can be explained by women's domestic roles. Female labor in Tibetan nomadic areas is highly valued. Women's contribution is virtually identical among all Tibetan nomadic areas (see Gelek and Hai 1995). Women do the milking, churning, cooking, collecting dung for fuel, fetching water, taking care of tents and so forth. Women are not merely valued as child-bearers, but also as important members of the labor force and they make far greater contributions toward the subsistence economy of their society than the men do. This fact is well explained by a saying popular in Amdo area:

Calluses are on children' feet (herding); calluses are on women's hands (working); calluses are on men' bottoms (sitting and drinking tea).

This division of labor and the importance of women' labor is also well described from one summer time schedule of a nomadic household we collected in Yid-chab Village:

4:30 The elder daughter gets up, lighting the stove.
5:00 The mother gets up, milking their eighteen *dri* (female yak); then separates the baby sheep from the baby goats.
7:00 Two elder sons get up, go herding after breakfast; then the elder daughter makes butter while the mother cleans the shrine and does housework.
8:00 The father gets up and twists wool thread after breakfast.
12:00 The mother prepares lunch. After lunch, the mother and the elder daughter tie the baby yak and milk their *dri* and the female sheep. Afterwards, they return home making yogurt and cheese.
21:00 The son and the younger daughter bring the animals back home. The mother and the elder daughter milk the animals while the younger daughter cooks dinner.
21:30 Family dinner.

Although this time schedule is not complete, it still reveals that fact that women play an important role in the subsistence economy. Losing female labor means an enormous loss for the family. In order to keep their daughters working for them, some families would rather allow the daughters to bring in their *magpa* than having the daughters move away. This might be another factor that favors the existence of *magpa* extended households.

Conclusion and Discussion

In this paper, we have proposed that over the past forty years, the household pattern among three Tibetan communities has experienced considerable changes. The average family size increased steadily. While nuclear family households have always been the main pattern, except for a slight decrease after the 1980's, extended families increased

sharply after the 80's. During the Commune period, both the household size and the number of extended families were larger than during any of the other three historical periods of time. We attribute the change in household pattern among Tibetan nomadic populations largely to its adaptability to governmental reform policies concerning the changes in land ownership. The "Responsibility System" introduced in the area since 1980's empowered individual nomads with full rights to livestock- while the land is held by the household as whole, and not by individuals. This is the basic factor that made this post-reform period special because the joint rights of the households to pasture has made the partition of family members difficult to realize due to difficulties in dividing the pasture among the children. Besides, the economic and management advantages of a division of labor can also be made because of the larger numbers that exist in an extended family.

In addition, we have proposed that the local traditions, ideologies and special political circumstances might have also played a role favoring the formation of the extended households. We finally gave special attention to the prevalence of *magpa* marriage which shows how individual's decisions and individual preferences influence the formation of the extended families.

Studies among nomads in Africa, the Middle East and Central Eurasia show that the extended family is not only a common practice among the Tibetan nomads, but also a prevalent phenomena cross-culturally. Although pastoral nomads in different regions developed different patterns of social organization depending on their specific cultural, ecological, political and historical circumstances, they developed similar patterns of household.

Among camel herders such as Bedouin Arabs in Arabia, the extended family composed of a father or a mother, their sons, wives, and children prevails. One important reason for a larger tent is that Bedouin camel pastoralism requires a high degree of self-sufficiency. The extreme dispersion of camps during many parts of the year means that each tent must be capable of running its herd periodically without the aid of neighbors.

In such situations, an extended household based in a single tent is often the smallest possible social unit in which decision making and herding can be effectively organized (Barfield 1993: 71). Throughout Central Eurasia, camping groups composed of extended families are common. The typical description of the Kalmuk pattern was of the ideal:

After marriage a son may demand his livestock and move away, but ideally he should remain with his father and brothers. Moving away is a sign of trouble between kin. There is a tendency for extended family herd to be held in common as long as possible (Aberle 1953:9).

Furthermore, Barfield (1993:102) also notices that the extended household appears to be more common in regions where pastoralism is highly productive, such as Turkey and the Northern parts of Iran and Afghanistan, where seasonal pastures are dependable, in many cases privately owned, and pastoralists make relative few moves.

It should also be noted that I have mainly discussed the relationship between household patterns and external dynamics, such as the decisive role played by governmental reforms and economic changes. Less attention has been given to the role of the internal dynamic of the family, which is also important. Yan (1997), who has done his fieldwork among a northeast rural community in China, suggests that no matter whether families are nuclear or extended, economic incentives alone are insufficient to explain all changes in family life, and he stresses that conjugal intimacy and privacy in intrafamily relations are equally crucial and highly valued. Parish and Whyte (1978), who also emphasize the importance of affection and intimacy between spouses, further support this idea. We argue that close intrafamily relations, as a traditional ideology, are equally highly valued throughout the history of Tibetan nomadic areas and also played a role in the formation of the extended family. However, due to lack of data, we have not explored the role that the intrafamily relations play among Tibetan nomadic communities in the formation of different household patterns. Future studies should thus examine the rules of family formation throughout Tibetan nomadic communities to answer the question whether the change in family type is due to the resurgence of traditional ideologies, changes in land tenure, or an expansion of economic options.

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