

# Reexamining Choice, Dependency and Command in the Tibetan Social System: "Tax Appendages" and Other Landless Serfs

by

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## Introduction

In 1968, 1971 (a-c) and 1973, I published a series of articles depicting the structure of Tibetan society in which it was argued that Tibet was characterized by serfdom. Since these appeared, four other researchers (Aziz (1978), Dargyay (1982), Michael (1982), Miller (in press)) have written about traditional Tibetan society but have consciously and pointedly avoided the use of the term serfdom asserting that its use is inappropriate for Tibet. The congruence of these later studies has created an erroneous impression that there is a new scholarly consensus which holds that there was no serfdom in Tibet.

The invitation to contribute an article on Tibetan social philosophy for this special issue of *Tibet Journal* has coincided with new data collected by the author during five months of fieldwork in urban and rural Tibet in 1985.<sup>1</sup> These new data have clarified critical dimensions of the nature of the control of lords over their peasants (serfs). They have also reinforced my earlier view that there was considerable flexibility in the traditional Tibetan social system. However, unlike Miller (in press), who also argues that traditionally there was substantial mobility in Tibetan society, it is argued here that this flexibility is not incompatible with the presence of a system of serfdom. This paper will argue that while the traditional Tibetan society, clearly possessed opportunities for social and physical mobility, there was an intrinsic element of *control* by lords over the labor of their hereditary serfs.<sup>2</sup>

## The Concept of Serfdom in Comparative Perspective

There is considerable scholarly controversy over the nature of serfdom and feudalism and the relationship between the two. Marxists tend to see serfdom as one type of economic exploitation in which elites controlling land resources also hereditarily control the surplus labor of the peasantry; they generally see this as inseparable from feudalism which, they argue, is a universal stage in the evolution of society. On the other hand, some non-Marxist historians see serfdom as unique to European feudalism which they define narrowly in terms of voluntary relations of vassalage between

military elites. Still others, however, see serfdom as a part of feudalism (or feudal society), but do not see this as restricted only to European medieval society. Finally, some see serfdom as not at all necessarily linked to feudalism.

Let us now examine several of these approaches beginning with two characteristics of any cross-cultural "serf" type necessarily derives.

In his classic study of European feudal society, Marc Bloch (1965, Vol. I. and II), the famous French historian, emphasized that the idea of *involuntary and hereditary control over a subordinated* was central to the concept of serf. He saw medieval French serfdom as the result of a process whereby voluntary submission or vassalage had been transformed into hereditary servitude, and saw serfs as existing in marked contrast to free peasants. He wrote:

To have a lord seemed in no way inconsistent with freedom. Who was without one? But the notion arose that freedom was lost when free choice could not be exercised at least once in a lifetime. In other words, every hereditary tie was regarded as being marked by a servile character. The inescapable bond that claimed the child while still in its mother's womb had been one of the greatest hardships of traditional slavery. The feeling of this almost physical compulsion is expressed to perfection in the phrase *homme de corps* forged by common speech as a synonym for serf. The vassal whose homage was not inherited was, as we have seen, essentially 'free.'...

Now heavy as these obligations might seem, they were, in one sense, at the opposite pole from slavery, since they were based on the assumption that the person liable to them possessed a genuine patrimony. As a tenant the serf had exactly the same duties and the same rights as anyone else; his possession of his holding was no longer precarious, and his labour, once rents and services had been paid, was his own... Of course the lords sought to retain their peasants. What was the estate worth without labour to work it? But it was difficult to prevent desertions because, on the one hand, the fragmentation of authority was more than ever inimical to any effective police control and, on the other, the great abundance of virgin soil made it useless to threaten with confiscation a fugitive who was almost always certain of finding a new place for himself elsewhere. Moreover, what the masters tried with varying success to prevent was the abandonment of the holding itself...

The tie between a man and man was almost unanimously accorded a sort of primacy. It was considered that the serf who committed a crime...ought not to have any other judge than the lord of his body ...his [the serf's] distinguishing feature...was that he was so strictly dependent on another human being that wherever he went this tie followed him and clung to his descendents. (Ibid : 261-64)

Bloch, therefore delimited three main components of French serfdom: 1) the serf was hereditarily tied to land and lord, 2) the serf, unlike the slave, had rights and possessed (but did not own) productive resources (land) from which he derived his livelihood, and 3) the lord had the legal right to command his serfs including judicial authority.

A study of Russian serfdom similarly characterized the essence of serfdom using the following definition of a serf:

[a serf is] the individual peasant who is (1) legally bound to a plot of land, (2) legally bound to the person of his lord and who continues to pay taxes, or (3) who is subject in a meaningful way to the administrative and judicial authority of his lord rather than the crown. (Hellie 1971: 15)

Part of the confusion over the nature of serfdom derives from the common linkage of it with feudalism and feudal society. Most marxist scholars, in fact, define feudalism in terms of serfdom, e.g., feudalism is "an economic system in which serfdom is the predominant relation of production, and in which production is organized in and around the manorial estate of the lord." (Sweezy 1978: 34-35) Serfdom is here considered as the appropriation or enforced transfer of the surplus labor of peasant cultivators by landlords in feudal society.

However, far more common is the tact taken by Bloch (Ibid. Vol. 2.: 446) who characterized the essence of feudal society broadly as having:

A subject peasantry; widespread use of the service tenement (i.e. the fief) instead of salary, which was out of the question; the supremacy of a class of specialized warriors; ties of obedience and protection which bind man to man and, within the warrior class, assume the distinctive form called vassalage; fragmentation of authority—leading inevitably to disorder; and in the midst of all this, the survival of other forms of association, family, State, of which the latter, during the second feudal age, was to acquire renewed strength—such then seem to be the fundamental features of European feudalism.

The differentiation of feudal society from serfdom is also seen in the writing of some marxist scholars such as Sweezy (1978: 33) who considered serfdom as the non-economic compulsion used by landlords to acquire the labor of peasants. Writing in criticism of Maurice Dobb, another marxist, he said:

Dobb defines feudalism as being 'virtually identical with what we usually mean by serfdom: an obligation laid on the producer by force and independently of his own volition to fulfill certain economic demands of an overlord, whether these demands take the form of

services to be performed or of dues to be paid in money or in kind... In keeping with this definition, Dobb uses the two terms, 'feudalism' and 'serfdom', as practically interchangeable throughout the book.

It seems to me that this definition is defective in not identifying a *system* of production. *Some* serfdom can exist in systems which are clearly not feudal; and even as the dominant relation of production, serfdom has at different times and in different regions been associated with different forms of economic organization. (Ibid.: 33)

My own position follows that of Bloch and Sweezy in contending that it is not heuristic to restrict use of the term serfdom solely to medieval Western European society. The same social forms that characterized serfdom in Europe can be identified in very different kinds of societies. For example, it is both possible and useful to interpret social systems such as the traditional Tibet as one exemplifying a variant of serfdom even though the broader political relations encapsulated in Bloch's summary of feudal society were not present in Tibet in, say, the 20th century. By treating serfdom as a cross-culturally relevant type, one is then able to examine the set of conditions producing serfdom with vassalage and feudalism in some settings but without it in others.

It seems useful, therefore, to define serfdom in a comparative sense so as to both capture the essence of classic European serfdom yet illuminate basic structural characteristics which can be identified in other settings. Thus it is suggested here that serfdom is a system of productive relations consisting of four distinctive components:

- 1) Peasants (serfs) who are hereditarily tied to land and obligated to provide free labor on the landholding elites' agricultural estates. The holders of these estates, the lords, possess the legal right to command this labor from their serfs on demand without recompense,<sup>3</sup> although there may be customary or legal limits to this extraction.
- 2) Such peasants (serfs) subsist primarily by means of agricultural fields provided on a hereditary basis by their lord. This land, however, was not owned by the serfs and could not be sold by them.
- 3) Serfs do not have the choice or legal right to terminate this relationship. They are hereditarily bound to serve and cannot unilaterally relinquish their land and obligations.
- 4) Lords exercise a degree of judicial control over their serfs, although a central government may also exercise judicial authority over the serfs.

Serfdom, therefore, is a system of economic production in which an elite controls both land resources and the critical labor force (serfs) it needs to produce foodstuffs from that land. Serfdom guarantees this labor force without burdening the lord with the need to either provide direct food and

housing for the laborers (as would be the case in a system of slavery) or compete for labor in a market context. It may exist as one alternative system of production in a society or as the only one.

Keeping these delimitations of the concept serfdom in mind, let us now turn to the arguments of those authors who contend that the Tibetan socio-economic system did not structurally resemble "serfdom."

### The Non-Serf Perspective in the Western Literature on Tibet

Two of the four studies on Tibetan society mentioned above rejected the use of serfdom but failed to develop any systematic or coherent argument either against serfdom or in support of their own position.

One of these (Dargyay 1982 : 98) stated, "Goldstein renders the term [*mi ser*] by using the word "serf" that seems to me ambiguous and prejudiced against the Tibetan system of society till now not very well known." However, Dargyay's study never specifically addressed why the earlier description and explanation of the Tibetan social system is "ambiguous" or why the term "serf" is inappropriate and prejudicial for Tibetan society. It simply asserts it is so.

Another study (Aziz 1978 : 52) similarly objected not only to the use of "serf," but even to the term "subject people." However, it also failed to articulate a sustained argument against the validity of the concept serfdom for Tibet. Stating somewhat obliquely that "writers who applied this term were dealing only with the gross economic and political status of the commoner Tibetan and overlooked his social attributes" it then begged the question by using the Tibetan term *miser* untranslated. Both of these studies, therefore, failed to construct a detailed argument comparing their view of the Tibetan social system with classic serfdom in Europe although they categorically rejected the validity of the term serfdom for Tibet.

The most specific argument against the use of serfdom was presented by Michael (1982 : 46), a historian of China who does not himself speak or read Tibetan. He said:

Another frequent misinterpretation of the Tibetan social and political order is to describe the ordinary Tibetan people by translating the Tibetan term *mi-ser* into the Western term *serf*. Except for the substantial number of monks and nuns, the small number of aristocrats, and a small number of outcastes (*yawa*) or professional beggars, the majority of the Tibetan people were called *mi-ser*, a term that is best rendered in English as "subject" or "commoner." The misinterpretation that word and the status it signified is based on the fact that some *mi-ser* were obligated to cultivate the land or tend the herds of government, monastic or aristocratic estates, an obligation that was inherited from father to son. *This obligation was, however, combined with a hereditary and contractually documented right to one's own land,*

*and it was entirely an economic obligation. It did not carry the meaning of physically "subject to the will of the owner"—as is indicated by the term serf or the German term Leibeigener—the position of the peasant in medieval Europe. Also, only a minority of the mi-ser were obligated to cultivate government or private land in exchange for their property rights. (Emphasis added)*

A final study (Miller, in press) argued in a similar fashion emphasizing the apparent contradiction between the presence of substantial physical mobility in Tibet and the characterization of Tibet as having "serfdom."

It is extremely unlikely that sheer coincidence accounts for the fact that colleagues who suggest the possibilities of... "freedom from dependence" reject "serf", as a totally inappropriate English term for *mi ser*, and instead use "commoner", or "subject".<sup>4</sup> Happily this rejection is becoming far more widespread as we have become more familiar with Tibetan society...

In traditional Tibet, there were "bonds" that seem peculiarly flexible, and "bound" individuals who could absent themselves for years. We find *formal* institutions sanctioned by government and/or by custom [e.g. "human lease"], which opened paths for individuals who were willing to gamble their security on the chance that they could improve their lot... *Whether or not a particular individual took full advantage of the possibilities, their existence was known and—to a large extent—the choice was there.* In short, all these mechanisms conspire to demonstrate that we still have far to go and much to study, before we can claim to fully understand the nature of physical and social mobility in Tibet. (Emphasis added).

Of these four publications, Michael has presented the most detailed attempt at an argument against the presence of serfdom in Tibet. As seen above, he makes two basic points:

1. The term used for serf in Tibet is *miser* and this is best translated as "subject," or "commoner." The reason for this is that "serfs" or "subjects," though tied to the land hereditarily, themselves hereditarily held land and therefore had rights. They owed labor to their landlord *solely as a result of their possessing their own land.* This was a *limited and contractual economic relationship without any wider element of compulsion or command.* Thus, *miser* were not subject to the "will" of their lords.
2. Only a minority of Tibet's *miser* were obligated to cultivate land. The rest were not tied to land and lord and had social and physical

mobility, particularly due to the institution of *mi-bo* or "human-lease."

3. To these, Miller added that there also were formally sanctioned institutions of mobility such that peasants "to a large extent" had the choice of whether or not to seek social and physical mobility.

The key to understanding the nature of the traditional Tibetan social system lies in understanding the nature of the control of lords over their *miser* and the nature of physical and social mobility among the *miser*. However, contrary to Michael's and Miller's assertions, this paper argues:

- (1) that *all* Tibetan *miser* were tied or bound to a lord/estate whether physically present on an estate or not, and
- (2) that lords had authority to control the labor of their serfs regardless of whether or not the "serf" (*miser*) held hereditary land. In fact, it was precisely the subordination of all *miser* to their lord—even those who appeared to possess the right of physical mobility—that typified the Tibetan social system.

This paper suggests that characterizing the Tibetan peasantry as "commoners," a term which could also be used for the citizens of England, is an unwelcome distortion of the true nature of the Tibetan social system. However, the paper also demonstrates that the existence of serfdom in Tibet did not preclude the presence of considerable flexibility and social mobility and that one of the distinctive features of the Tibetan variant of serfdom was that a large proportion of the serfs were not physically tied to an estate on which they were compelled to provide corvee labor, although they were still bound to lord and estate.

In the sections that follow, the reader is asked to keep in mind the two major issues raised by Michael and Miller: (1) the presence or absence of control and dominance of *miser* by their lords, particularly those not tied to land on estates, and (2) the presence or absence of choice on the part of the serfs as to whether they want to be bound to an estate or not. Regardless of what we call the Tibetan peasantry, these elements are basic to understanding the nature of the asymmetrical relations between lord and *miser*. To highlight lord-serf relations and avoid prematurely focusing attention on the word "serf" rather than the data, I shall refrain from using the term "serf" until the conclusion and will instead refer only to *miser*, the Tibetan term.

#### **The Organization of Production in Tibet: Lords, Estates and Miser**

There were two basic types of economically productive land holdings in Tibet:

- 1) the manorial estates held by lay aristocrats, monasteries and incarnate lamas
- 2) the land directly held by the government.

Recent Chinese accounts state that the former comprised 62% of the total land resources, 37% in the form of religious estates and 25% in the form of aristocratic estates (Epstein 1983: 406).<sup>5</sup>

The estates of the aristocracy and monasteries/lamas were hereditary, and like the manorial estates of Europe, were the main source of their wealth. Their essential characteristic was that they consisted of arable land together with a hereditarily bound labor force, the *miser*, who were obligated to farm this land for their lords. The *miser* were essential to the Tibetan system of production and all Tibetans with the exception of the aristocracy and monks<sup>6</sup> were *miser* who hereditarily belonged to an estate held by a lord<sup>7</sup>. If the lord of an estate changed, the *miser* remained tied to the estate<sup>8</sup>.

### Linguistic Terminology

This concept of *belonging* to an estate and having a lord was expressed in Tibetan in *several* ways: first, by the term *miser* which literally means "yellow person." Michael, as we have seen, stated that linguistically the term *miser* is "best rendered subject or commoner" and Miller and Dargyay agreed. Dargyay's (1982: 17) reason for this is somewhat bizzare. She claims that since "the only person in Tibet not to be called a *mi ser* was the Dalai Lama," this explains her "preference for "subject" as a translation of the Tibetan term *mi ser*." However, as was stated above, in point of fact, the nobility, the incarnate lamas and the monks were also not called *miser*, and this argument, therefore, is meaningless.

Another possible reason for using "commoner" or "subject" to translate *miser* derives from the fact that Tibetans have come to use the term *miser* to indicate a citizen or subject of another country. Thus *ko inji gi miser re* means "He is an English subject or citizen." This, however, does not mean that Tibetans perceived the status of *miser* in Tibet as equivalent to that of a citizen or subject of England.

When we examine in more detail the manner in which Tibetans linguistically expressed their linkage with a lord we find that the term *miser* is completely interchangeable with two other terms and phrases which *very clearly convey the idea of belonging to someone else or being under the power of someone else*. One such term is *mikhung* which literally means "person" + "belong" or "belonging to a person."<sup>9</sup> A very common way to ask a person whose *miser* he or she was, is to say "*kerang gi mikhung su re*" ("Who is/was your *mikhung*" or "To whom do/did you belong?"). Another common way to express the relationship of lord/estate and *miser* is conveyed by the term for lord or ruler: "*bombo*."<sup>10</sup> For example, one commonly asks a person "*kerang gi bombo su re*" ("Who is/was your lord?"). All three of these



expressions elicited a reply citing the person's lord, e.g., "*ngey mikhung kundeling re*" ("I belong(ed) to Kundeling"). Thus, there is no question but that Tibetan linguistic usage conveys the notion that one person, a subordinate, *belongs* to a superior.

However, the nature of the traditional Tibetan social system has to be determined by legal norms and actual practices not by linguistic terms and usage.

### The Manorial Estate

Tibetan manorial estates consisted of two distinct sections:

- (1) a *demesne* section comprising the fields from which the lord received the total yield. These usually contained about 1/2 to 3/4ths of an estate's total arable land.
- (2) a *tenement* section which contained the remaining fields which were divided among the *miser*. It was from these that the *miser* retained the yield and derived their subsistence.

The primary function of *miser* was the cultivation of the lord's *demesne* fields. They did *all* the agricultural work on these fields at the times specified by the estate lord. They, in general, were required to provide a worker for the lord for practically the entire year. On the days they worked for their lord they not only received no wages, but generally no food. The lord, however, provided the seed and plowing animals for his own fields. There were many, many variations and local differences in the way the *miser/estate* system operated in Tibet, but in general, in addition to labor on the lord's *demesne* fields, *miser* also were responsible for providing other labor services such as repairing the lord's house, transporting his crops, collecting firewood, doing his wool work, etc., as well as often having to provide some payments in-kind or money. There were, moreover, a number of lifetime labor obligations such as service as a soldier, monk, nun, and house servant that some serfs had to do. *Miser* chosen for these lifelong obligations normally were selected in childhood and served for the rest of their lives, (from 12-60 years of age). A child so chosen did not have the right to refuse.

In the indigenous Tibetan social theory *miser* were obliged to provide this free labor because they held what Tibetans call a *tre-ten* or "tax-base" of land.<sup>11</sup> This "tax-base" land was actually the hereditary fields the *miser* held from their estate tenement section. They had complete control over these fields with the major exception of the right to sell such land; they clearly did not own their land. However, they planted what and when they wanted and retained the entire harvest. They could also lease out their fields to others. *Miser* who held this "tax-base" were known as *trepa* or "taxpayers."<sup>12</sup> Within any given estate, the amount of taxes the *miser* were obligated to provide was specified in written documents which were held by the lords and the *miser*. Within this overall tax obligation, the percent of the total labor and

tax obligations that fell on any single *miser* family theoretically was directly proportional to the percent of the total tenement fields it held, although historical anomalies and concessions sometimes (or perhaps even often) resulted in specific families deviating from this.

Let me give an example. In the Nyare valley east of Sera monastery, Pema (pseudonym) grew up in a taxpayer family whose members were serfs of Sera monastery (Sera Chiso). They had two types of "tax-base," one directly from the monastery and the other from the central government and thus they had to pay taxes to each. They held 42 sonke<sup>13</sup> of land which was a substantial amount that is much larger than the amount now held by the largest families in that valley.<sup>14</sup>

Pema's family's obligations, however, like their land holdings, were heavy. They were primarily obligated to provide labor and had to send one worker every day (with a few exceptions such as New Year's holiday) to work on the lord's *demesne* fields and do an assortment of other tasks such as carrying manure, collecting dung from the pasture areas, collecting firewood, and doing wool work. In essence they did whatever work the lord needed done. In addition to this, they had to provide another person (laborer) during the 6 month period from the 6th of the Tibetan 7th month to the 20th of the Tibetan 12th month, and then another worker in autumn for 61 days. They also had to provide the monks of Sera a type of fried cookie (*kapse*) when the monks went on retreat for 16 days in the 7th Tibetan month. Moreover, they had to provide horses and carrying animals (yaks, mules) for transporting goods to nearby district headquarters. To fulfill these obligations they kept a number of servants who they sent to do their corvee labor. Without such servants Pema said the family could not have managed.

It is essential to reiterate here that the relationship of *miser* to estate and lord was *not* voluntary, i.e., it was not freely entered into nor vacated. *Miser* were hereditarily tied to their estates and could not leave them permanently *without the permission of their lord* even if they were willing to return all their hereditary tenement fields to the lord/estate. *Miser* moreover, theoretically had to obtain their lord's permission even to marry out (i.e. marry a *miser* belonging to another lord), or leave the estate to join a monastery. Although lords rarely objected to such requests, they clearly had the jural right to do so, and if *miser* ran away from their estate without permission, the lord could, on his own, apprehend and punish them corporally. The relationship between taxpayer *miser* and lord, however, was regulated in part by a written document that specified the *miser's* obligations,<sup>15</sup> but that arrangement was not freely entered into by the taxpayer nor could he or she unilaterally abrogate it. Moreover, a *miser's* linkage to an estate continued in perpetuity, being passed on to descendents by parallel descent; sons inherited the estate (the lord) of their mother. Marriage, as we shall see, had no effect on these inherited ties, and females and males (siblings, spouses, etc.) often had responsibilities to different lords.

The organization of manorial estates, however, extended beyond the

economic sphere into the judicial. Lords had the unilateral right to punish their own tied *miser* if they tried to run away or if they refused to serve. Most large aristocratic and religious lords also had the right to adjudicate disputes among their *miser*, including inflicting punishment. In theory, the right to adjudicate disputes among one's *miser* was called *trimgo rangtsen*<sup>16</sup> or "legal independence." It had been granted by the government to different lords over the centuries and does not appear to have been held by all lords, although all appear to act as local magistrates and adjudicated disputes among their *miser* whether or not they actually held this.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, it is clear that Tibetan *miser* did have legal rights and could challenge their estate steward's decision by taking the case directly to the person of the lord in Lhasa. Moreover, in very serious cases they could also dispute their lord's decision and bring the case to the Central Government which claimed ultimate authority over all Tibetans. This generally occurred only in major cases involving land tenure and taxes.

However, despite these rights, manorial lords clearly had extensive authority over their *miser*, and local judicial authority was commonly exercised within the framework of the estate. The very fact that there were *no local government magistrates* beneath the district (*dzong*) level reflects the lack of direct government intervention on the local level. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that disputes between *miser* of different lords could not be settled by a single lord and had to be brought before the Central Government for settlement if local mediation between the two lords failed.

#### Government *miser*

There were two types of *miser* who had the central government as their lord. One type of government *miser* (or *shungyupa*) was identical to the "taxpayer" *miser* who belonged to aristocratic and monastic estates. The other type differed substantially from these in that they were not a part of a manorial estate with *demesne* and tenement lands. The later type of government *miser* did not, consequently, have an obligation to cultivate a lord's *demesne* fields nor were they under the direct authority of a lord's appointed estate steward. Instead they fell under the authority of the more distant Central Government's District Commissioner and were typically responsible both for sizable taxes in-kind/money as well as labor in the form of the very difficult corvee transportation (tax) obligation known as "*tawu khema*."

The transportation corvee obligation was one of the backbones of the Central Government's administration of the country. Tibet was divided into major routes which were subdivided into "stations" (*satsi*) each of which was located a 1/2 day's walk from the next so as to ensure that *miser* in the catchment of one station area would be able to make a round trip to the next one in a single day.<sup>18</sup> The system operated simply. The Central Government issued permits (*lamyik*) authorizing holders to receive (demand) transportation and riding animals upon presentation of the permit at a "station."

These authorizations were often immense and the animals required could number into the hundreds. Such permits also allowed their holders to obtain shelter and food and relieved them of the necessity to negotiate any arrangements. All of these services were either free or minimal in cost.<sup>19</sup> This system enabled the government to effectively move people and goods throughout its vast territory at no expense to itself and with no need to employ officials in villages throughout the countryside. From the *miser's* point of view, however, this was one of the most difficult labor obligations because animals had to be provided to the permit holder on demand, and permit holders only arrived at a station the afternoon before the animals were required. The *miser*, therefore, had to maintain sizable numbers of carrying animals in their houses rather than in more distant pasture areas to ensure that animals would be available when an official arrived.<sup>20</sup> In turn, this meant that they had to either grow or purchase enormous quantities of fodder for these animals.

The non-estate government *miser*, therefore, were both an important source of government revenue and a critical component in the government's administration of the nation. Although these *miser* were not attached to manorial estates and therefore had more autonomy than the aristocratic and monastic *miser* described earlier, like them they were hereditarily tied to their land and were unable to unilaterally abrogate this linkage.

The *miser* system prevalent in Tibet, consequently, was intrinsically linked with economic production and labor. It was an efficient system of economic exploitation that guaranteed the country's religious and secular elites both land resources and a permanent and secure labor force to cultivate that land without burdening them with any direct day-to-day responsibility for the *miser's* subsistence. It was a system of production for use rather than for market, that served the needs of an elite who were detached from direct production. From the lord's perspective, the object was to ensure that he had enough competent *miser* to make optimum use of the means of production he held (the estates) and to run his household, etc. As we shall see, to accomplish this, a lord had authority and power over the labor of all his *miser* and could compel his *miser* to change locations and work in other areas in accordance with his productive needs. Lords were interested fundamentally in productive efficacy—in ensuring that their labor needs were always met. It is critical to keep this in mind, for it is central to the somewhat paradoxical co-existence of mobility and fluidity within a production system based on compulsion, dependence and exploitation.

#### Social and economic mobility between categories of "taxpayer *miser*"

Tibetan *miser* were neither a homogeneous category nor inevitably impoverished or abused with no chance of social or economic mobility. As the author indicated in earlier publications, the differences between sub-categories of "taxpayer *miser*" were sometimes as great as those between the

aristocracy and the *miser* themselves. Suffice to say here that some *miser* such as Pema with large corvee labor obligations also held substantial amounts of land and were generally quite affluent. They very likely, as did she, had their own servants and numerous tenants<sup>21</sup> who provided agricultural labor in return for the use (lease) of some of their fields. The following example from an aristocratic estate will illustrate some of this intra-"taxpayer *miser*" mobility.

Wangdu was a *miser* of the aristocratic family named Phala and lived on their estate in Gyantse District. This estate's tenement lands were divided between two categories of *miser*: 1) "taxpayers" with large land holdings who paid heavy taxes in-kind and in corvee labor (both persons and animals), and 2) small "taxpayer" families holding only subsistence size fields and who were basically only obligated to provide human corvee labor for the lord. Technically the latter were also "taxpayers" since they each held a hereditary "tax-base" in land and paid taxes, but the smaller families were considered lower in status than the larger "taxpayers."

These *miser* were grouped into two villages, Upper and Lower Salu. The former village had fourteen larger "taxpayer" families, and the latter, eight of the smaller and poorer type "taxpayer" families.

Wangdu was born in the small *miser* village of Lower Salu to a very poor family. When he was thirteen his lord sent him to serve as a "tax appendage" (explained below) to a taxpayer family who was looking after a large herd of sheep.<sup>22</sup> He was in essence a servant who worked as a shepherd. He was paid no salary but received food and clothes from the head of the herd. Wangdu stayed there for about 10 years. At that time, one of the families in Lower Salu gave up his land to manage one of his lord's herds so Wangdu's father petitioned his lord's steward to give that man's land to his son. This was approved and Wangdu was given a small amount of land.

Wangdu and his wife then moved in with his father and step-mother and they jointly worked their fields. His wife belonged to another lord but had obtained "human-lease" (explained below) status and thus paid a fee to her lord each year and did not have to stay on her estate. However, internal friction soon occurred and Wangdu separated from his father, setting up his own household with his wife. After this, Wangdu found he had some extra time. He hired himself out to the land-holding families of the large "taxpayer" village since they were always short of labor. He generally took plots of land on lease, paying for them with his labor. There was also some fallow land near his regular fields and he worked hard to open these up to cultivation. However, since he had no animals for plowing and no farming implements, he had to borrow them from the larger "taxpayer *miser*", paying, e.g., one day's labor for one day's use of a team of animals.

Wangdu worked very diligently, particularly with respect to collecting manure, and for the first few years after he separated from his father, got very good yields. He then had enough excess grain to begin lending grain to others. He considered trading too risky and saw farming and lending as the

main vehicles for producing profit. Lending grain was very lucrative in Tibet as interest rates varied from 10 % to 20 %. In Tibet, however, it was common for borrowers to be unable to pay back the principal when the loan came due and to only pay the interest. After a few years of this, the annual interest had repaid the principal and the lender was then receiving profit. Moreover, sometimes when the borrower could not repay even the interest, this was added to the principal, making the debt plus interest higher. Similarly, often the lender took possession of a field of the borrower as pawn in lieu of interest, and farmed it as his own until the loan was repaid in full. Thus if the borrower could not repay the loan he lost use of this segment of his land.

The next thing Wangdu did was to lease more land from an old couple who were unable to provide the corvee labor due to the lord because they had only small children who were too young to work. Wangdu got a section of that family's land for 3 years, after which the couple's children would be old enough to go for the corvee labor. Wangdu provided the seed, did all the work on the fields as well as the corvee labor due the lord from this land, and kept 80 % of the yield. The remainder went to the old couple.

After a few more years, Wangdu began a series of maneuvers which would bring him into the more wealthy "taxpayer" village. One family in that village was in difficult straits. It had been one of the village's richest in the past generation but had since undergone hard times. The head of the family, Dorje, had been married twice but his wife had run away both times. In the meantime he had lost almost all his animals, and to get seed for his fields and animals for his animal corvee transportation tax, had to continuously give out his land on lease and pawn. When Wangdu first met Dorje the latter had only one bull and one horse left. Wangdu took two fields on lease and repaid Dorje by doing most of his animal transportation tax. In addition to this, Dorje often borrowed grain and butter from Wangdu. One day Dorje asked Wangdu if he and his wife would like to set up a joint household with him in his village, i.e. Dorje would in effect join the marriage. Wangdu and his wife agreed and moved in with Dorje.

When the other households in the larger taxpayer village found out about this they were angry since they felt that if Dorje couldn't handle the tax obligations his land should first be made available to the other households in his village who were willing to take the extra tax burden. They claimed also that Wangdu was born into the lower *miser* village and had no right to move to the higher one. These villagers took their case to the steward of the lord who lived in nearby Gyantse. Wangdu, suspecting he would lose his chance to become a large "taxpayer" *miser* if he let the dispute be heard in Gyantse where the rich "taxpayers" knew the lord's official well, secretly went to Lhasa with Dorje to plead his case before Phala, the lord, himself.

Phala listened to their plea and after deliberating for three days said that Wangdu could stay with Dorje that season and plant, but left the future in abeyance. He gave them a written document to this effect. When Wangdu returned to the village the other "taxpayer" *miser* were furious and some even

suggested challenging the lord and taking the case before the Central Government. They decided against this but did agree to ostracize Wangdu.

That year Wangdu got a bumper harvest. However, in the meantime, the other families were urging Dorje to kick Wangdu out, and finally Dorje one day told Wangdu he should leave. Wangdu refused, and as the time for spring planting approached, the issue came to a head since only one of them could plant the land. Wangdu this time secretly went to Gyantse to meet the lord who had come there to make his winter rounds. He explained his predicament and the lord decided that Wangdu should remain in the large "taxpayer" village and should keep almost all of Dorje's land and house but also his tax obligations and debts. Wangdu had to provide Dorje household utensils, but Dorje was ordered by his lord to go and live in the lower *miser* village.

Wangdu, therefore had risen from sheep herder's servant, to a land holder in the small *miser* village, to an affluent surplus farmer in that village, and finally to a higher "taxpayer" *miser* with large land holdings and large obligations. This type of mobility was not uncommon and individual capableness clearly could lead to increased wealth and social status. Dorje, on the other hand, had moved downward in status and wealth. Both of these examples of mobility, however, reflect the basic Tibetan social equation—it was the lord who approved and enforced the upward mobility for one and the downward mobility for the other. This case also illustrates the basic interest of the lord, i.e., having efficient and capable *miser* who could fulfill all his labor and tax obligations.

#### Physical Mobility Among Tied "Taxpayer Miser"

Miller (in press), as we have seen, argued strongly that the ability of *miser* to leave their estate, for example to go on a pilgrimage, illustrates the freedom and ready mobility that characterized Tibetan society. She says, "All the authors [Goldstein, Aziz and Dargyay] agree that it was perfectly possible—and permissible—for *mi ser*...to absent themselves from their local responsibilities for the purpose of trade/pilgrimage even for a period of years."<sup>23</sup> She is correct in saying the "taxpayers" had the freedom to leave their estate but is incorrect in adding that they *were also leaving their local responsibilities*. In reality, just the opposite was true; they could only leave *if* their local responsibilities were fulfilled.

This flexibility was possible because of the nature of the Tibetan tax/labor obligation system. The landholding *miser's* obligation to provide goods in kind and corvee labor to his/her lord fell primarily on households, not individuals. From the lord's point of view, the *miser* family as a collectivity was responsible for fulfilling the obligations to him, and the lord therefore dealt primarily with it rather than with each *miser*.<sup>24</sup> For example, if a family of four owed 20 ke of grain, the lord did not expect each member to provide 5 ke. Rather it was the family's responsibility (actually the *miser* who was

head of the family) to see that all the taxes were paid. Thus, hypothetically, if this same household of four had to send one person every day to do corvee labor for its lord, the other three were free to do what they liked. Or if they were wealthy and were able to hire a servant to do their corvee labor, they were all free to do what they wanted. *So long as their corvee labor obligations to the lord* were fulfilled, there were no restrictions on day-to-day movement or activity and a particular *miser* could leave his estate to do business, visit a relative, make offerings at a monastery, etc., without having to obtain any kind of permission from the lord or his steward. As has been emphasized, lords were not interested in controlling *miser* or interfering in their lives as an end in itself. They were only interested in ensuring that *their own demesne land* and other resources were optimally utilized in production. The whole point of this system was to minimize the need for the lord to be bothered with the workers. However, this "freedom" of physical movement was predicted on the *miser's* fulfillment of the lord's labor requirements.<sup>25</sup> They were not free to leave, and say, postpone their obligations to their lord.

It is important here to note that there was a difference between the large land-holding "taxpayer *miser*" and the smaller ones with regard to this physical mobility since the large "taxpayers" with their servants usually had less of a problem fulfilling their labor obligations to their lord.

#### Landless *Miser* and Their Lords: "The Concept of Derived Serfs"

Until now we have discussed only those *miser* who held hereditary "tax-base" fields from their lord and were physically bound to manorial estates. These bound "taxpayer" *miser* to all the classic definitions of serfdom which include the control of arable (and pasture) land by serfs on a hereditary basis as a major component. However, in the Tibetan social system, large numbers of *miser* had statuses that did not include hereditary control over a "tax base" (arable land) from which they derived their subsistence, *i.e.*, they were *landless*. Since these "landless *miser*" were probably the majority of the *miser* population in Tibet, a clear understanding of their situation is critically important. Micnael, as we have seen, argued that the landless *miser* were not under the control of their original lords and used this as a cornerstone of his argument against the presence of serfdom in Tibet. He, however, was incorrect in this assertion. As we shall see, these landless still *belonged* to their lord and estate just as did those *miser* who held tax land, and like the physically bound land-holding *miser*, they were obligated to provide services to their lord at his command. These landless *miser* can be thought of as "derived" *miser* in the sense that their dependency to a lord *derived* from their original status of once having held taxpayer *miser* land in either their life-time or in past generations.

There were five major types of *miser* without hereditary land: 1) human-lease or *mibo*,<sup>26</sup> 2) tax appendage or *tre-non*,<sup>27</sup> 3) hereditary servant or *tsheyog* (this type closely approximated slaves),<sup>28</sup> 4) *miser* without any status



(this tended to be a temporary status), and 5) *miser* who were illegally free as a result of running away from their lord and estate. The latter status was viable only so long as his lord was unable to locate and apprehend the *miser*. The names for these statuses varied somewhat in different regions but the categories existed regardless of nomenclature.

Let me demonstrate how such "landless" *miser* statuses could come about by means of two hypothetical examples based on real cases.

1. A son in a small taxpayer family got married and separated from his father and brothers. His father did not give him any of his tax-base land so the son set up a new household in the same village area and earned his living by leasing other people's land. He also engaged in petty trade, e.g. selling firewood, dung, etc.
2. A daughter in that same family was married (sent as a bride) to a family that was under a different lord.

The key questions here are what was their status after they left their original family, and what authority did their lord have over their labor and person?

Some authors in the anti-serf camp would undoubtedly say that since these two had no "tax-base" land of their own, their lord could not command them to work for him; they were, in essence, now free to do what they liked. This, however, would be incorrect. The *misers'* situation actually depended ultimately on their lords' needs and attitudes, and, as we shall see, *their lords still controlled their labor*. Let us look at the options available to this boy and girl.

One option for them would have been to request "human lease" status (*mibo*) from their lord.<sup>29</sup>

The Tibetan term for "lease," as in the lease of an acre of land, is *bo-ma*.<sup>30</sup> Tibetans utilized the idea of leasing land as an analogy for *miser* leasing freedom of physical movement from their lord, and thus the term *mi* ("person, human") *bo* ("lease"). When land was leased from its owner the leaser had *rights of use* but not of *disposal*. He also had an obligation to the owner. Similarly, when an individual obtained *mibo* or "human lease" from his lord, he or she still *belonged to that lord* and had to fulfill obligations, but otherwise was free to make use of himself as a human resource as he pleased. The *mibo miser* were not physically tied to an estate and could live and work elsewhere. They quite literally leased their freedom of movement from their estate by paying an annual fee to their lord and providing some labor obligations.

Granting of this status, however, was not automatic or easy and *was the complete prerogative of the lord*. Miller (in press: see above quote) is in error when she implied that the *Miser* had the CHOICE of whether to take an option such as this. She cites no evidence for this and I know of none, even in the work of Aziz, Dargyay or Michael.

Michael (1982: 118), has translated *mibo* as “retainer fee” although he gives no reason for using this rather than “human lease” as others have done. He is, however, correct in saying that “In general an estate manager was reluctant to let a *tral-pa* [“taxpayer”] or the members of his family go, because of the chronic shortage of labor in rural Tibet.” However, in cases of marriage outside the estate and becoming a monk, he says that:

Permission was easily granted in exchange for the payment of a *mi-bog* (“retainer fee”), in practice a very small amount. The same retainer fee was then also applied to others who wished to leave the estate in order to become traders, craftsmen, or even laborers in the towns, provided they received permission. . . .

He goes on to say:

In many such cases, the agreed-upon retainer fee, nominal in comparison to the former *tral-pa*'s other income, might still be paid by him regularly as a gesture of respect for the estate owner rather than as any real obligation.

If I understand Michael correctly, it appears that he believes that the *mibo* was a one-time payment which was then sometimes *voluntarily* continued annually. In this he is *completely* wrong. “Human lease” or *mibo miser* were obligated to pay their *mibo* fee annually. For example, in a *mibo* document obtained by the author in India, the relevant section said of the *miser* in question that: “henceforth he shall pay fifteen *srang* to the Labrang [his lord] before the 25 of the tenth month each year without excuses” [i.e., before the Ganden Ngamcho religious holiday]<sup>31</sup>

The institution of *mibo* (“human lease”) provided a valuable escape-valve to the otherwise rigid system by allowing *miser* who would otherwise be tied to an estate to physically leave the estate *with a legal identity*. This allowed the *miser* the opportunity to earn a living either here or elsewhere. The “human lease” *miser*'s offspring of the same sex inherited his/her lord (i.e., this linkage was transmitted by paralleled descent) as described above. When the “human lease” *miser* had a child of the same sex, it was registered with the lord who generally—but not necessarily—issued it “human lease” status as well. Goldstein (1968: 55-56) cited an actual “human lease” receipt document which illustrated the manner in which a lord, in that case, the government's Lhasa Nyertsang Office, kept precise track of the payments of their “human lease” *miser* and their children.

My interviews in Tibet, however, indicate that obtaining “human lease” status was not nearly as simple or easy as many believe. Lords had complete control over granting physical mobility to their *miser*, and exercised it in a non-uniform way, depending on their personalities, labor needs and relations with the *miser* and his/her family. Some lords issued this status easily, while with others it was difficult and required influence with the lord or his

staff and/or presentation of a substantial gift (see, for example, cases 6 below). Logic supports this for if "human lease" status were very easy to obtain there would have been no need for any *miser* to run away.

Moreover, "human lease" status did not mean the *miser* was free of his/her lord. It normally obligated the *miser* to provide various labor services to the lord in addition to the annual money payment. For example, in the above mentioned *mibo* document (cited in Goldstein, 1971b), the *miser* had to pay the sizable fee of 15 sang a year to his monastic lord. If he paid that, the *mibo* document said that he was "relieved of all taxation and labor obligations." However, his lord also added in that document the stipulation that the lord "*can call him [the miser] for service when the need arises on occasions such as celebrations and trips*" [Emphasis added]. In other words, even though the *miser* had no land and was paying a sizable annual fee, he still clearly belonged to the lord who reserved the right to call him to provide labor *whenever he, the lord wished*, or as the document euphemistically put it, "when the need arises." Thus the terms cited in any given "human lease" documents varied, and were critically important.

Moreover, the manner in which this residual clause was implemented depended entirely on the lord. In the above case the lord could, if he wanted, call his *miser* to work frequently and the *miser* had to drop what he was doing and come. Or, for example, if a lord's "human lease" *miser* was a tailor, the lord could (and did) call him to work for him (free) whenever the lord needed tailoring work. Similarly, as one of the examples below shows, a lord could increase the amount of the "human lease" fee if the *miser* became successful. Furthermore, as we shall see below, a lord could also rescind the "human lease" status and send his/her *miser* to serve as 1) a *tre-non* or "tax appendage" to one of his "taxpayer *miser*," 2) a *micha*<sup>32</sup> or "person conscription" (house servant), or 3) as *mije*<sup>33</sup> or "person-exchange" to another lord. These three options, however, when exercised, normally involved sending unmarried teenagers rather than adults with nuclear families. But this does not mean that lords did not have the right to do so. The "human lease" holding *miser* had leased their physical mobility *only so long as the lord did not need it and was willing to accept cash in lieu of labor service*. The Sambo case below will illustrate this. This discontinuity between the right of the lords to command their landless *miser* and the empirical reality that most landless *miser* were basically left alone, accounts for much of the endemic confusion regarding the role of physical mobility in the traditional Tibetan social system.

Let us return to the two hypothetical cases cited above and examine what would have happened if the lord had refused to issue them "human lease" status. These two would still have been the *miser* of their lord, but they would have had neither a "tax-base" of land nor "human lease" status. Consequently, they would have provided neither labor nor money to the lord *so long as he (the lord) did not specifically command them to serve*. However, it is critical to understand they still belonged to him and he could command their labor

whenever he wanted. If he needed labor, it was, in fact, usually these statusless *miser* who were first summoned. This, therefore, was a highly undesirable status since it was likely that the lord would one day order such persons to serve somewhere.

Let us now examine some of the standard types of service a lord might require from these landless *miser*.

First, as was indicated earlier, the lord was interested in his "taxpayer *miser*" since it was these who tilled his land and did all his productive work. Thus he was interested in seeing that they were able to fulfill the obligations they owed him. Consequently, it was not uncommon for the larger "taxpayer *miser*" to request labor assistance from their lord. Saying that they needed a worker to fulfill their obligations to him, they would ask him to send them one of his landless *miser* who would then serve the "taxpayer" as a servant. This landless *miser* would be paid no salary but only food and clothes. This was theoretically a lifetime position. This status was known as *tre-non* or "tax appendage" [to the taxpayer].<sup>34</sup>

Thus one day the lord's estate steward could have come to the young man in hypothetical case one and told him he had to go to serve as a "tax appendage" in village Y. Or he could have gone to the girl and ordered her to go. In terms of Tibetan legal and political norms, the lord had the right to so command the labor of his *miser*.

When a *miser* from another lord came as a bride or bridegroom to a family, the receiving *miser* family sometimes asked their lord to send one of his other *miser* to the incoming spouse's lord in exchange. This was called *mije* or literally "person exchange." If this was done, the in-coming bride or groom would then become the *miser* of his spouse's lord and the person sent in exchange would become the *miser* of the in-coming spouse's original lord. Thus, the lord could have gone to the boy in case one and said he was sending him as a "person exchange" to another estate where he would serve as a "tax appendage." Similarly, if the lord found he was short of maid-servants in his manor, he could command the girl to leave the village and come to his house to act as his servant for life. She, like the "tax appendage," would get food and clothes but no pay. Or if the monastery needed a new kitchen-servant (*thabyog*) it could order the boy in case one to do this. Legally the landless *miser* were bound to comply. Moreover, the lord could order the boy or girl to do fieldwork on his fields if he needed this. Although this was commonly done with landless *miser* who did not have "human lease", possession of "human lease" status was no *guarantee* against being sent as "tax appendage."

The following seven examples illustrate aspects of the right of lords to command the labor of their landless *miser*, as well as the counter-options and strategies of the *miser*.

CASE 1. Drokar was a *miser* of Sera monastery (Sera Chiso). She came to Nyare with her mother and grandmother and all had "human lease" status from Sera. One day, however, when they went to pay their annual "human

lease" fee, they were asked to show their "human lease" document. They couldn't find it and their lord then sent Drokar as "tax appendage" to a "taxpayer" family where she acted as a servant, doing whatever work was needed, including fulfilling the family's labor obligations to the lord. In this case, after some time, a relative of Drokar who lived in Lhasa sent a message saying he had found the "human lease" documents in his house. She then took these to the lord and said that since they really had been granted "human lease" she shouldn't be sent as "tax appendage." The lord agreed and relieved her of that obligation. However, since Drokar was a good worker, he offered her a house and some of his "tax-base" land that had become vacant in that same valley. She accepted and became a landed "taxpayer *miser*" of the small variety.

CASE 2. In this case, a boy named Wangchen was made a monk to preclude his lord sending him as a "tax appendage/servant."

Wangchen's father's lord was Sera Monastery (Sera Chiso) and his mother's lord was Namkye Tratsang (the Dalai Lama's monastery). His father had been born on a Sera Chiso estate in the Phembo region north of Lhasa but when he was a youth he was sent to Sera Monastery in Lhasa to serve as a life-long servant. He worked as a kitchen servant and sweeper. It was there he met his wife who was from the adjacent Nyere valley where she was a "taxpayer" with land from Namkye Tratsang. They got married and soon after Wangchen was born. However, while Wangchen was an infant his father died. When Wangchen's father married, he neither obtained "person-exchange" from his wife's lord, nor did he obtain "human lease" from his own lord. He simply continued to serve his lord as a kitchen servant while his wife served her lord as a "taxpayer." Wangchen, therefore, from birth, belonged to Sera Chiso, his father's lord. However, like his late father, he had neither "taxpayer" land and taxes nor "human-lease" *miser* status.

His mother anticipated that Sera Chiso would not give her son "human-lease" when he became eligible to serve at age 12-13, but instead would come to claim him (his labor) for the same life-long servant work his father had done. Being astute and not wanting her son to spend his life as a kitchen servant for the monastery, she decided to outsmart Sera Chiso by making him a monk in Sera Monastery when he was 5 years of age. By doing this she effectively exempted him from any tax liability to Sera Chiso since monks did not have to fulfill any *miser* labor obligations.

Sure enough, when Wangchen was 13 years old, two officials from Sera Chiso came to his mother's house and asked where the boy was for they wanted to send him as "person-exchange" to another lord's estate where he would have been a "tax-appendage." His mother explained that he was already a monk in Sera and this ended the issue. What is important in this case is that Wangchen, though physically a part of a land-holding "taxpayer" household, was *legally* not a part of it since he belonged to a different lord. The system of inherited *miser* status therefore could play an important

role in family structure and dynamics when the parents belonged to different lords. His lord clearly had command over his labor and in this case had every intention of making use of this by taking him from his mother at 13 and sending him as a "tax appendage" servant to help one of his other "taxpayers."

CASE 3. This case illustrates both the inherent control of lords over their *miser* and some dimensions of the flexibility in the way the system actually operated.

Nyare valley had estates from many different lords including both Sera Monastery (Chiso) and Sera Che College. On one occasion, a capable young teenage boy from Sera Chiso's estate went as a bridegroom to a "taxpayer" family which belonged to Sera Che. That family had some influence and connections and asked their lord, Sera Che, to send a "person exchange" to Sera Chiso so that their new bridegroom could become a *miser* of Sera Che and fulfill his tax obligations as a "taxpayer" of Sera Che. The two lords (Sera Che and Sera Chiso) discussed this and Sera Chiso agreed to the exchange if Sera Che sent them a young, healthy and able person to compensate equally for the lost male *miser*.

The Sera Che officials had just such a person in mind. She was a "human-lease" *miser* living in that same valley. This was the girl Yanchen. She was living with her father, who was a *miser* of the government's Agricultural Office, and her mother, who was a *miser* of Sera Che. She, therefore, had inherited her mother's lord—Sera Che, and both she and her mother held "human lease" status. However, they were very poor and subsisted by collecting dung in the hills and pastures and selling this in Sera Monastery and in Lhasa. One day some Sera Che officials came to them and said that they needed Yanchen as a "person-exchange" to go as a "tax appendage" to a family on Sera Chiso's nearby estate. Yanchen, who was obviously capable, argued with them that she didn't want to go because that particular family was virtually bankrupt and had no *tsampa* (food) for themselves, leave alone for her. She told them that if she went as their servant on a permanent basis, who would give her food? She beseeched them not to send her there as "person-exchange" telling them instead to send her elsewhere or give her work in the monastery where she would at least be assured of getting enough food, but not to send her to that incompetent family. Then she threatened them that if they did insist on sending her there, she could not subsist and would inevitably have to run away. The Sera Che officials said they would think about it and let her know if some alternative arrangement was possible. They discussed the matter with the Sera Chiso officials who ultimately agreed to provide Yanchen a small "tax-base" of 7 *sonke* of land (from a family that had either died out or fled) and a two pillar house on their estate. She therefore became a small "taxpayer *miser*" of Sera Chiso fulfilling Sera Che's obligation to provide Sera Chiso with a capable "person-exchange."

What is important to note in this case is that Yanchen did not question the *right* of her lord to send her as a "tax appendage," despite the fact that

she had "human lease" status. She only objected because she knew the family she was to be sent to could not provide for her. It seems clear that a less capable person would simply have gone. On the other hand, her ability to work and express her interests resulted in her obtaining a small amount of land and becoming a "taxpayer."

CASE 4. This example switches the focus to the lord's perspective. The case involves the Sambo family, one of the oldest and wealthiest aristocratic families in Tibet. It illustrates the residual control of lords over their "human lease" holding *miser* when they felt there was some need for their labor.

In the period between 1923-29, the Tibetan government under the leadership of Tsipon Lungshar instituted a new tax called "*babshi*" which was to involve additional taxes for all estate holders, particularly the largest ones. In the case of Sambo, Lungshar levied a tax of 2,500 extra *ke* of grain a year (i.e. roughly 41 tons). The enormity of this shocked the family who immediately appealed the decision to the government saying it was impossible for them to meet this new tax. This appeal apparently contained some harsh and insulting language regarding the tax, and this ended up coming before Lungshar. He induced Sambo's nine subordinate estate-holders (i.e., sub-aristocrats who were under Sambo's rule and paid taxes to him, not to the government) to notify the government that if Sambo could not pay the 2,500 *ke* of grain they would be willing to take possession of all of Sambo's lands and pay *twice* that amount annually. Sambo then backed down but as a result of this had to now pay 5,000 *ke* of grain each year.

Sambo then took leave from government service and went to his estates to reassess and restructure the land and taxes. He found, much to his surprise, that he could easily raise revenue as many of his large taxpayer *miser* paid only small taxes. He reexamined the yields of the land and established a new expected yield which was 7 times the amount sown. Each landholder then had to pay him 3.5 times the amount of grain sown per unit (*kang*) with the leaseholder providing his own seed. The large landholders were willing to pay that but said they would be unable to both hire labor and pay the dramatically increased fees. Sambo then recalled about 3,000 of his "human lease *miser*", allocating six of these *miser* as "tax appendages" for each unit (*kang*) of land.<sup>35</sup>

CASE 5. This revealing case again illustrates the command of lords over the labor of *miser*, but this time their hereditary servant *miser*.

The case involved a man who was sent as a corvee tax from a taxpayer *miser* household to Lhasa to serve as an *itrugpa* of the 13th Dalai Lama. These *itrugpa* wrote letters and maintained the daily diary of the Dalai Lama and as such had excellent handwriting. When the 13th Dalai Lama died in 1933 this *itrugpa* was returned to his original estate which was held by an aristocratic family. The head of that family, his lord, discovered that the most powerful official in Lhasa at that time, Trimon Shape, was looking for a

good secretary and decided that his *miser* who had just been returned to him was perfect as he was literate and had a very good handwriting. He apparently believed he would curry favor with the powerful Trimon by lending him his *miser*. He, therefore, arranged with Trimon that his *miser* would go to live with and serve Trimon for the duration of Trimon's life, but when Trimon died, the *miser* would revert back to him (i.e., his original lord).<sup>36</sup>

CASE 6. Another interesting case is that of Lhundrup. He was born in Lhobra-Dotsong. His mother had been "*micha*," which meant that she was conscripted by her lord to serve as a house servant. Lhundrup's family at that time consisted of his mother, his brothers and one sister. The sister belonged to her mother's lord and when her mother was too old to work, i.e., had passed beyond 60 years of age, the daughter was taken in her place as a servant by the lord. The sons, however, appeared to have had no lord. It is not clear why this was so but it is assumed to have resulted from their deceased father running away from his lord or having left a "taxpayer" household in the area. The boys, therefore, only had to do labor taxes on the infrequent occasions when the District Commissioner of the Central Government ordered *all* households in the area to come to work.

There was a powerful monastery in Lhundrup's area which at this time had many of its monks leave to become laymen. To investigate this, the government dispatched a lay and monk official there. They issued these monks "human-lease" documents and in the course of their investigations also discovered that these five boys had no legal status and no labor obligations. They sent Lhundrup and an older brother as "tax appendages" to a poor aristocratic family, and two other of his brothers to another family. The youngest brother was given "human lease" and left with the mother to look after her. Lhundrup was 18 years old at this time.

Lhundrup then went to serve as a "tax-appendage" servant. He received food and clothes from this family but not wages. Moreover, after some time this family sent him to one of their relatives who lived in another nearby area to work for them as "tax appendage." After one year there, that family's daughter got married and went as a bride to another family in that area. Lhundrup was thus again sent as a servant ("tax appendage") to that family to help the bride. After six months of this, in about 1932-33, the new family needed a soldier to fulfill one of their tax obligations and decided to send him as their corvee soldier. They didn't pay him any salary. However, Lhundrup didn't want to be a soldier so he ran away from his regiment and then stayed in Lhasa where he survived by begging for food. While doing this he met a woman from the Nyare valley who hired him as a servant. He worked there for a few years collecting dung and looking after her animals. Then he left her and worked for another "taxpayer" family in Nyare. He convinced this family to help him become a monk, after which he lived in Sera monastery for 14 years. Later he was placed in charge of the monastery's mill in Nyare.



CASE 7. This case reveals the flexibility of those on "human-lease" but also the lord's right to increase the size of the "human-lease" payment if the *miser* was successful.

Tentsing's father was from Yamdro and was a *miser* of a monastery called Yamdro Ganden. At first his father was a *miser* of a small aristocrat but he and his father were exchanged as "person-exchange" to Yamdro Ganden monastery. There his father worked first as the monastery's cook and then as manager of one of the monastery's herds. Tentsing's mother, however, had a different lord. She was a "taxpayer" from Yamdro Riwotrag (an aristocratic family) in Nangatse Lingdzong.

Tentsing had five brothers all of whom were doing corvee work for their lord, the monastery. He, as the youngest, had "human-lease" due to his mother's efforts and was designated to stay with her. He paid only 3 *sang* as his "human-lease."

When he was 21, Tentsing was sent to do roadwork since the government told the related districts to send workers and they in turn told the various lords to send *miser*. He was in that group. This was in 1953 after the Chinese had arrived. He worked for 6 months at this and then returned to his home.

His mother had "taxpayer" land from her lord which her three daughters worked with her. However, as one of their labor obligations, all the "taxpayers" of the village had to provide a corvee soldier. As it happened, when Tentsing came back from roadwork the village needed a new soldier to serve on their behalf. He told the "taxpayers" there that he would go as their soldier but that it was not easy to be a soldier so he asked them how much they would pay him in salary. The "taxpayers" offered to pay him 45 *dotse* a year (a large amount) and he accepted. He was then 22 years of age. Before leaving for the army he went to tell his lord (the monastery) he was leaving. When they heard of his new salary, they insisted on raising his "human-lease" from 3 *sang* to 3 *dotse* (1 = 50 *sang*) before issuing him a new "human-lease" document.

These seven cases reveal both the legal control and command lords exercised over their landless *miser* as well as some of the flexibility that characterized the actual operation of the system.

Tax appendage *miser*, as was seen, could be sent from either the landless *miser* without "human-lease" status, or those with it. They could be sent when a "person-exchange" was needed by their lord, or simply when a large taxpayer needed extra help. Once sent somewhere, such *miser* were expected to remain there permanently or until sent somewhere else, and commonly this status was hereditarily passed on to their children (of the same sex). *Miser* serving as "tax appendages" received food and clothing from the taxpayer family they were attached to but almost always received no wages. They could later appeal to their lord to send them elsewhere or give them tax land, but the *choice* of whether to allow them to do this *lay completely in the hands of the lord*.

These cases, therefore, reveal the unquestionable physical command of lords over their *miser*. And it is precisely this right to command the labor of their *miser* that was the essence of the traditional Tibetan social system.

These cases, however, also reveal the possibility of physical and social mobility between different status of *miser*, for example, the possibility of moving from landless to landed taxpayer status or from small taxpayer to large taxpayer. They also reveal that being born a *miser* did not mean being forced to live a life of poverty for as we saw there were very large and wealthy *miser*. They also demonstrate the possibility of obtaining "human-lease" status which usually meant release from being tied to an estate. However, what they do not show is the typicality of cases where lords commanded their landless *miser*'s labor (and indirectly therefore their lives) when they needed it. Unfortunately, there is no empirical data on this critical question, and this appears to be one of the main factors producing the conflicting reports on the nature of the Tibetan social system. It is suggested here that the heart of this confusion is the difference between the jural structure of the social system, that is to say the legal structure of lord-*miser* relations which gave lords control over their *miser*, and the actual operation of that system which in general allowed for significant physical mobility.

To understand the de facto flexibility of the traditional Tibetan social system, another critical element must be examined, namely, the feasibility of fleeing from one's estate and lord.

#### **Runaway *miser***

One common way that *miser* ended up having neither "tax-base" land nor "human-lease" status was when they ran away from their estate. This occurred as a result of all sorts of factors, but several typical situations are explained below. It was not untypical for taxpayer families to fall heavily into debt due to misfortunes such as bad crops, illness, lack of laborers, or due to incompetence, as in the Dorje case. Normally such families had to pawn or lease-out substantial portions of their "tax-base" land to get enough grain to subsist and plant the next year's crop. However, although they lost the right to use these portions of their land until their debt was repaid, they were still responsible for providing the labor taxes to their lord. This often precluded their working for wages for others and not uncommonly ended with the family being unable to fulfill the lord's labor taxes and still produce enough food to subsist. Under such circumstances, the *miser* had little option but to run away from their debts and labor obligation to their lord. If they succeeded in doing this, they could work for others and at the very least earn enough to subsist. A second typical cause of running away occurred when a "tax appendage's" lord or "taxpayer" family either abused their "tax-appendage *miser*" or the *miser* committed some mistake that he/she thought would result in a whipping or other punishment. A third common reason for *miser* running away was when the *miser* did not want to be sent where the lord had ordered,

for example, being sent to serve as a soldier.

Whatever the precipitating cause, once a *miser* ran away there was no national or local police system to check for him, and he/she could be caught only if the lord himself was able to trace them. This was obviously difficult if the *miser* left the nearby area where they were known by sight, and thus most runaways fled to another rather distant area and were able to escape capture. However, running away was not a trivial decision. The *miser* who ran away obviously could not return to their area without risking capture and punishment, and therefore were cut off from contact with their relatives, friends and parents. In the majority of such cases the runaways fled to another area where they had a relative, but economically their potential was limited. The main prospect for unskilled villagers was working as a servant for another family or trying to lease land in a new area. Rather than the somewhat glamorous lives as successful traders that some authors suggest these "runaway" *miser* experience, those without special craft skills could normally expect only to subsist. Thus, in the initial generation, running away from one's lord in Tibet was not seen as the road to "the good life," but rather as a move of desperation. Yet, there is no question but that the case of being able to run away greatly moderated the potential and actual abusiveness of the *miser's* subordination to their lord and resulted in large numbers of *miser* moving to different areas where they in effect had no lord and thus had actual (though not legal) physical mobility. And though they might still be working as servants for large *miser* families, the elements of legal compulsion was no longer present and they could quit a servant job whenever they wanted.

However, without a lord for support, there was always the risk that another *miser* would take advantage of the runaway's "illegal" status if a dispute arose. Because of this, at several times in modern history the Central Government attempted to rationalize this situation and provide such "runaways" a legal status by decreeing that *miser* who had been without a lord for three years could become the *miser* of the government's Agricultural Office which would give them "human-lease" status at a nominal annual cost. The very fact that large numbers of lordless and statusless *miser* flocked to obtain this status, and thus a new lord, reveals clearly that *miser* was having a lord and legal status as advantageous.

The benefits of having a lord are illustrated by a famous historical incident. As indicated above, manorial estate lords exercised judicial authority over their own *miser*. They could decide disputes between their *miser* and could inflict fines and corporal punishment. Reciprocally, lords were expected to support and defend their *miser* in disputes and litigations with *miser* of other lords as is seen in the following example.

In autumn of 1942 some farmers from Betsang village near Lhasa went to the Tsona region in southeast Tibet to barter salt for rice. At Jora, one of the estates of the 14th Dalai Lama's father, they were met by the headman who wanted to buy salt. The Lhasa area villagers, however, refused. The Dalai

Lama's father had a reputation for being high handed and they were afraid that they would be forced to accept an unfavorable exchange rate and then be unable to protest since to do so would be disrespectful to the Dalai Lama's father. Thus they refused to do business. The headman got angry and complained to his lord, the Dalai Lama's father. Being hot-tempered, the latter got furious and immediately ordered his servants to tell the Betsang headman to come to see him. As soon as the headman came, the Dalai Lama's father imprisoned him.

Betsang village, however, was an estate of Drepung's Loseling College. Since lords were expected to support and protect their *miser* the Abbot of Loseling went personally to the place where the headman was being kept and released him, sending him to Drepung for safety. Then he went to the Dalai Lama's father's house, told him what he had done, and asked by what authority he had imprisoned the headman in the first place. The Dalai Lama's father became livid with anger. He cursed the abbot and threatened to shoot him with a pistol. The Abbot, not used to such treatment from a layman, is said to have coolly invited the Dalai Lama's father to shoot if he wanted. He didn't, but continued to berate the abbot who left and immediately filed a case against the Dalai Lama's father in the Yigtsang Office (the office in charge of religious affairs). Soon after, the Dalai Lama's father filed a counter suit with the Kashag (the highest lay office). This ended in September 1942 when the Dalai Lama's father withdrew his suit and the Abbot did likewise.<sup>37</sup> However, this incident clearly illustrates that lords took seriously their role as defenders of their *miser* against others.

It is also important to note that even the Agriculture Office innovation mentioned above did not alter the basic structure of the Tibetan estate/*miser* system. As the *miser's* new lord, the Agriculture Office had unilateral control over the labor of their new *miser*, and soon after initiating the policy, utilized this right. After large numbers of runaways became its *miser*, "government taxpayers" began to petition the Agricultural Office to help them fulfill their taxes to the government by sending some of the Agriculture Office's new "human-lease" *miser* to them as "tax appendages." This practise came to be called *khab-gong-sar* which literally means "(fasten) a needle to a lapel." As tax appendages, "these *miser* then had to work at whatever the "taxpayers" needed. In the case of one village in Tsang called Samada, the Agricultural Office gave them a document saying that the *miser* they were sending could be made to do anything including serving as the village's soldier (Goldstein, 1968). In this case, although the *miser* had no choice about going, it appears as if they were paid a salary.

There is another critical point to consider with regards to the inconsistency between the fact that lords could and did control the labor and lives of their *miser*, while the system also manifested looseness and physical mobility.

It appears that lords generally summoned the least adventurous and least likely to run away when they needed *miser* to serve as "tax appendages" and "person exchanges." For example, they tended to select youths from poor

families who were unmarried since these had no special skills, no capital and there was no need to break up a family, an act which might precipitate the whole unit trying to flee. Individual ability and resources seem to have been important in determining not only the material situation of *miser* (just as it now is in India and in Tibet), but also in determining who would be selected by lords for the undesirable "tax-appendage" status. Thus, though lords clearly exercised their rights of command over their *miser*, in actuality the situation operated such that most "human lease" *adults* were never sent as "tax appendages," and once a *miser* obtained "human lease" status he/she could, in general, expect to maintain physical mobility so long as he/she paid their "human lease" fee annually and performed whatever other intermittent labor the lord wanted. The majority of landless *miser*, therefore, did have physical mobility from their estates without much, if any, bother from their lords, although structurally and jurally they were still under their control. Still, the considerable flexibility provided by the availability of "human lease," the ease of being able to run away, and the selectiveness of the lords in exercising physical control over their *miser*, do not in any way negate the legal fact that all *miser* hereditarily belonged to lords (estates) and these lords had the right to command their labor and exercise judicial control over them. The Tibetan monastic and aristocratic elite generated their great wealth by means of their control over hereditary *miser*.<sup>38</sup>

#### **Tibetan Miser: Serfs, Subjects, Tenants or Commoners?**

Having presented this brief overview of the Tibetan estate/*miser* system, let us now return to the arguments of those who contend there was *nothing like serfdom* in Tibet. Michael contended that the "subjects" who were tied to the land had hereditary rights to land and thus were not subject to the will of the lord. Moreover, he argued, most of the subjects in Tibet were not tied to land at all and thus were free to go where they chose unfettered by the will of their lord. Thus he argued that because there was no "command" by lords over their *miser*, the use of "serf" was a misinterpretation of the Tibetan social system and the term "commoner" or "subject" was the most appropriate term.

This paper has shown, however, that while the "taxpayer" *miser* did in fact have rights in the sense that their obligations were spelled out in documents, lords retained control over the labor of all their *miser*, landed and landless. The "taxpayers" worked when the lord summoned them and the *miser* could not give up their land and leave without his permission. They had to stay and work whatever their personal wishes. This linkage to a lord was passed on hereditarily to their same-sex offspring. Moreover, those to whom the lord gave permission to leave the land via "human-lease" had to pay their lord an annual fee in money and often also labor as determined by the lord, and then were still liable to be called by the lord if he felt a special need for their labor. Their same-sex children had to ask the lord for "human-

lease" status and he did not have to grant it. Instead he could command their labor whenever he pleased and send them as servants or tax appendages." Moreover, those who had neither tax-base land nor "human-lease" status were especially liable for arbitrary delegation as a "tax appendage" or servant to some other estate or village. Finally, the small stratum of hereditary servants could be and were traded, lent and given away. Thus, even though Michael is correct in saying that "taxpayers" were a minority of the Tibetan *miser* population and thus the majority of Tibetan *miser* were not *tied* to land, these *miser* were, in fact, still *tied* to their lord/estate. The landless *miser*'s labor was under the authority of their lord, and their subordination to their lord *derived from their ancestral hereditary status of having been tied to an estate and lord either in their own generation or in the past*. Their status *derived from an original status of tied "taxpayer" miser*.

The interpretation that Michael presents for Tibetan *miser*, or "subjects" as he calls them, bears little resemblance to the actual situation that existed in Tibet. Though *miser* could and frequently did run away from their estates as the presence of large number of Agricultural Office *miser* attested, and although many *miser* had "human-lease" status and could go and work where they liked, the fundamental characteristic of the Tibetan social system was that lords had the right to command the labor of their serfs as they saw fit, within traditional custom and written documents. Whether *miser* were wealthy or impoverished, satisfied with their position or bitter about it, they were involuntarily linked to an estate and lord from the time of conception, and subject to the will of that lord with regard to their labor and to a large extent, their lives. Moreover, there was a political/judicial dimension to the lord/*miser* relations since lords could and did settle disputes among their own *miser* and could even inflict corporal punishment on them. Reciprocally, *miser* expected their lord to act on their behalf in disputes with *miser* from other lords.

- This situation clearly fits the definitions of serfdom cited in the beginning of the paper, including those applied to European serfdom and it is difficult to see how the Tibetan system can be considered anything but a variant of the same basic set of social and economic relations.<sup>39</sup> To argue that Tibetan *miser* were not serfs but "commoners" or "tenants" distorts the reality of the Tibetan social system and flies in the face of the evidence. Tibet, to be sure, did differ markedly from European serfdom in the absence of a class of "free peasants," in the tremendous number of "derived" landless serfs, and in the fact that Tibetan serfs had legal identities. However, these do not mitigate the essential isomorphism that existed between serfdom as a system of economic production in medieval Western Europe and later in Eastern Europe/Russia, and that which existed in Tibet.

Social science and history set as their goal not simply the description of events, but their explanation. A fundamental component of this objective is comparative analysis. Without this, broader generalizations are impossible and we are left with hundreds of idiosyncratic and unrelatable empirical

portraits. Consequently, it is important to attempt to place any economic/social system such as the traditional Tibetan one within a broad comparative framework. Future research on the traditional Tibetan social system should be directed precisely to determining both regional variations in the Tibetan system and the historical and historico-ecological determinants of these differences, as well as explicating the similarities and differences between the Tibetan serf system and other examples of "serf" systems.

#### NOTES

1. Research in Tibet was conducted in 1985 under a grant from the U.S. National Academy of Sciences' Committee for Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China and sponsorship from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Tibetan Academy of Social Science (TASS). I particularly wish to express my gratitude to Lhagpa Phuntsog, Director of TASS and Wangchung Namgyal (TASS) for the extraordinary cooperation they offered me during my stays in Tibet. I was permitted to select the areas where I wanted to work and to interview villagers and urbanites as I wished. Virtually all the households in 2 of 7 ruga units were interviewed in the Nyare Valley and almost all the households in 4 traditional apartment complexes (gora) in 3 different sections of Lhasa (*Zhol*, *Ba skor*, and *Byang phyogs*) were also interviewed. My thanks also go to the local officials in Nyare for their gracious cooperation. And last but not least, I offer my sincere appreciation to the subjects who not only shared their experiences, attitudes and feelings with me but also showed me unusual personal hospitality. Note should be taken that the research in Tibet was not specifically focused on serfdom or the traditional social system and the new information actually resulted from my attempt to elicit "normal" extended speech by discussing with subjects aspects of their lives. However, the significance of their accounts for understanding traditional Tibetan society was immediately perceived, and follow-up interviews were conducted where necessary to clarify issues. Data utilized in this paper also derive from research on modern Tibetan history funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (RO-20886) and the Smithsonian Institution.
2. Note should be taken that there is reason to suspect that the contemporary political implications of the use of the term "serfdom" have played a large role in the refusal of many diaspora Tibetan and Western scholars to accept the applicability of this term for Tibet. Many Tibetans and Westerners appear to object to the use of the term serf, even if it is carefully defined in a scholarly fashion, because they feel it is used by the Chinese communists in a pejorative fashion and as a rationalization for their taking over control of Tibet in 1951. Some have said privately that its use lessens the Tibetan exile community's claims to an independent Tibet since this use appears to justify the Chinese contention that the old society was oppressive. I disagree. The validity of the Tibetan exile community's claim that Tibet was independent does not depend on the absence of serfdom in Tibet. The People's Republic of China did not "invade" or "liberate" Tibet in 1950 to free it from serfdom or feudalism. To the contrary, China publicly pronounced that it would respect the old society including the serf system and religion, and this was formally embedded in the Sino-Tibetan 17 Point Agreement signed in May of 1951. Furthermore, the traditional estate-serf system continued to function in Tibet until *after* the uprising and flight of the Dalai Lama in 1959. In 1950-51, the Chinese proclaimed that they were "liberating" Tibet to free it from *imperialist* influences, not the serf system (Goldstein ms). Thus, whether or not there was a set of relationships we can call serfdom in Tibet has no bearing on the controversy over the political status of Tibet and there is no reason to attempt

- to glorify or gloss over exploitative aspects of traditional Tibetan peasant-lord relations because of contemporary political expediency.
3. For example, the lord's demand for labor on any specific day took precedence.
  4. Miller appears to have overstated this. For example, the possibilities of "Freedom from dependence" were first discussed in detail by this author (Goldstein 1971c) who did not then or later reject the use of the term "serf" as the most appropriate one for the traditional Tibetan social system.
  5. The late Surkhang Shape (interview) estimated that monastic and lay estates comprised slightly more than 50% of the total land including Kham, and of course a higher proportion of land and serfs in Central Tibet. This supports Epstein's data which were taken from official figures exhibited in Lhasa (personal communication).
  6. Monks, while originally *miser*, were relieved of *all* obligations to their lord when they entered the monastery. If they left the monastic system, however, they reverted to the status of *miser* of their original lord.
  7. Research on the social system in Kham is inadequate and this paper is, therefore, limited to Central Tibet. Within Central Tibet, the Tibetan concept of hereditarily belonging to an estate appears to have been relevant for both farmers and nomads, but at present the manner in which this actually operated among nomad groups has yet to be studied. Thus, this discussion is also limited to agriculturalists.
  8. Although the *miser's* link with the *estate* is stressed here, at any specific point in time, Tibetans expressed their link as belonging to a *lord*.
  9. "Khung," in general means "belonging to or being a part of something else," e.g., one territory belonging to another country. In Tibetan the term *mikhung* is spelled *mi khungs*.
  10. In Tibetan: *dpon po*.
  11. In Tibetan: *khral rten*.
  12. In Tibetan: *khral pa*.
  13. Tibetans measure land size by the number of "ke" of seed (*sonke* or *son khal*). That is to say, by the amount of seed that can be sown on a field. "Ke" (*khal*) is a volume measure which is equal to roughly 33 lbs of barley.
  14. In the old society, however, a few of the largest "taxpayers" in Nyare held as much as 80-150 *sonke* of land, while the smaller and poorer ones only held 6-9 *sonke*.
  15. There were also customary obligations not specified in any written document.
  16. In Tibetan: *khriims 'go rang btsan*.
  17. The extent to which lords exercised judicial authority over and above the right to compell their *miser* to serve them is unclear both with regard to the extent of their judicial authority and whether this was de jure or merely defacto. Future research with Tibetan legal case records is sorely needed.
  18. There was also another kind of *tawu khema*, where transport went to different *Dzongs*.
  19. Surkhang, Intv. The 13th Dalai Lama initiated payments on the heavily used route to India via *Gyantse*.
  20. Animals such as yaks, mules and horses were normally kept in mountain pasture areas several days from the village.
  21. This use of "tenant" differs from those authors who call all *miser* "tenants." The term is used here specifically to refer to those who *lease land* from someone else.
  22. This type of *miser* will be discussed in detail below.
  23. Miller (in press) includes both landless and land-holding *miser* in her statement, but this is only an issue for those *miser* tied to their land.
  24. This presupposes a situation where all family members were *miser* of the same lord, or, if *miser* of a different lord, did not hold land from the second lord.
  25. In reality, lords rarely tried to or could apprehend runaway *miser*.
  26. In Tibetan: *mi bogs*. This was discussed in detail in Goldstein 1971b.
  27. In Tibetan: *khral snon*.
  28. In Tibetan: *tshe g.yog*.



29. *Mibo* can also convey the meaning of the "lease fee" 'itself.
30. In Tibetan: *bogs ma*.
31. This *mibo* document was issued in 1949. It was published in transcription and translation in Goldstein 1971b. Michael does not list this reference (or any of the others mentioned above) in his bibliography.
32. In Tibetan: *mi 'phyags*.
33. In Tibetan: *mi brje*.
34. It was also sometimes called *trero* [*khral rogs*] or "tax helper."
35. Sambo, Interview.
36. *Chi med mgon po*, Interview.
37. Dargyay (1982: 24-25) states that religious lords were more lenient on their *miser* than aristocratic lords and that many former monastic *miser* she interviewed would return to live under the old system. This is contrary to all information I have collected in both India and Tibet. Monastic landlords in general were notoriously the worst lords since collection of taxes was placed in the hands of administrator monks who were appointed for only very short periods of time and this encouraged them to have a very short-sighted perspective. Thus, if a region had bad crops for a few years the monk collectors typically were inflexible with regards to concessions since they were obligated to pay for certain prayer ceremonies in the monastery whether or not they collected all the income from the *miser*. If they gave the *miser* a concession for a year, they had to pay for that year's ceremony out of their own money. Thus, the *miser* of monasteries and lamas tended to be the worst off, not the best. The Lhundrup Dzong incident of 1944 in which the Sera Che loan collector monks murdered the government's District Commissioner, is one of the most famous examples of this. This Monastic inflexibility is well known among Tibetans who, however, often feel uncomfortable criticizing the monasteries and lamas and thus focus their criticism on the aristocracy who are disliked both in Tibet and among the refugees in India.
38. Records of the India Office, LIPS/12/4201, Lhasa letter from British Mission for the week ending 30 August, 1942.
39. Michael (1982) equates serfdom with feudalism and then erroneously contends that since European feudalism is centered on voluntary vassalage and political decentralization and since this was absent in Tibet, there could be no serfdom in Tibet. He apparently was not aware of the literature differentiating serfdom from feudalism and the discussion of the inapplicability of the concept "feudalism," but not serfdom for Tibet in Goldstein (1968). Clearly 19th century Russia had serfdom but not feudalism. Consequently, his contention that there was no feudalism in the European sense in Tibet is both nothing new and irrelevant to the question of whether there was serfdom in Tibet.

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