

EDITORIAL

The steppe and desert plains of central and inner Asia form the world's largest contiguous stretch of pastures, interspersed with the mountain ranges of the Himalayas, Pamirs and Tien Shan, the lower reaches of which provide summer pastures for pastoral livestock. These rangelands have been exploited by culturally-diverse groups of pastoralists, encompassing the Muslim Turkic-speaking Kyrgyz, Kazakhs and Turkmen, the Buddhist Mongol-speakers of Inner Mongolia and Mongolia, and the Buddhist Tibetan-speakers of China's Tibetan plateau.

These pastoralists experienced collectivisation under centralised socialist governance in the twentieth century. By the close of that century, the communist political programmes of both the USSR and China had given way, leaving pastoralists with new privatised herding systems – largely by default in the case of the former Soviet Union and by plan in China's case.

Collectivisation was primarily driven by two linked concerns; reassigning property rights over land and livestock to the state, and eliminating (usually by force) the control of these rights by a wealthy, powerful elite. The intensity and length of the collectivisation experiment varied, however. In the Soviet Central Asian republics, several generations of pastoralists underwent fundamental social, economic and political upheavals over the six decades from the 1930s to the end of the 1980s. The abrupt end of socialism in the 1990s thus had profound consequences as state support withered away. But in China the communes were strictly imposed for only several decades from the late 1950s to the end of the 1970s. The shift to private property was gradually introduced but a partially socialist ethos is still enjoined by government authorities that seek to reshape the pastoralist landscape and methods of production.

This special issue of *Nomadic Peoples* offers case studies of how some of these pastoralists have fared in the post-socialist reform period, and in particular, the ways in which herd management has been reorganised. There are intriguing points of similarity as well as contrast across the historical Sino-Soviet divide. Common to both is a decline in seasonal mobility or nomadism, brought about by impoverishment and loss of state infrastructure in post-Soviet central Asia, but due to state intervention in the case of western China. Sedentarisation is increasing, with implications for rangeland ecology and also for socio-cultural relations.

A major transformation described by some of the articles are the new forms of privatised rangeland tenure appearing in China, a process not yet readily discernible in central Asia where pastures are now held communally or still under state administration. Fencing is rare indeed across the former Soviet rangelands of central Asia, but is proceeding apace in the Tibetan plateau of China and Inner Mongolia.

The first five articles in this issue deal with the laws, policies, practices and consequences of fencing rangelands on the Tibetan plateau. This area extends

across the Tibet Autonomous Region and parts of four adjoining Chinese provinces, covering 1.65 million km², by far the most expansive area of alpine grassland in the world. The plateau accounts for roughly half of China's rangeland and supports about five million ethnic Tibetan pastoralists, and agropastoralists predominately from China's minority groups.

The opening article by Emily Yeh gives a comprehensive account of regulations from 1998 onwards about how China's rangelands are to be managed, ostensibly to preserve ecological integrity and encourage economic growth. Her work has the advantage of having access to primary documents in Chinese, combined with a broad historical scope. Millions of hectares are being closed off to grazing and their nomadic inhabitants required to relocate to towns or to settle permanently with fenced pastures and barns. Few areas of the pastoral world can have undergone such immense changes on this rapid time scale.

Yeh's article sets the scene for the next three articles, each of which considers how these regulations have affected the Tibetan pastoralists and their land. In the article by Yan Zhaoli, Wu Ning, Yeshi Dorji and Ru Jia we learn that there is considerable variation from one county to another in the way central government policies on fencing and pasture management are put into practice. They examine the wider consequences of fencing and sedentarisation, which are mostly negative in terms of social cohesion, gender roles and income prospects. Nevertheless, they call for an objective assessment of whether privatised land tenure and the more intensive grazing systems these entail will result in the desired ecological goals.

Protection from further human-induced land degradation is one of the pillars of the fencing drive in China. The ideological underpinnings of this policy are critically examined by Ken Bauer in his case study of one locality in the Tibetan Autonomous Region. He notes that Tibetan pastoralists have generally reacted positively to fencing and linked credit packages, perhaps to avoid missing out in the inevitable parcelling out of grazing land that was formerly used under customary tenure rules. Bauer's article brings the immediacy of the process into view, as we see how government propaganda on gaining individual wealth through privatisation is understood by pastoralists as well as local administrations that are charged with applying regulations constructed by central government.

The article by Fernanda Pirie also studies the Tibetan plateau but renders a different perspective on adjustments and continuities in the cultural identity of Tibetan nomads confronted with political reforms emanating from the external Chinese state. On the issues of land reform policy, Pirie finds that fencing is perceived as an infringement of customary access rights that remains an ever-present cause of conflict. She points out that the traditional role of Buddhist religious leaders is still relevant in resolving disputes over land and other matters, while the primary social division is seen as between tribal nomads and the Chinese state.

Last in the set of articles on Tibetan pastoralists is a brief insight into pastoral development efforts fostered by foreign non-government organisations. Camille Richard relates how the social disruption resulting from settling the Tibetan

nomads can be channelled into some beneficial community-based actions as local pastoralist groups are assisted in developing their own grazing plans, businesses and cooperatives.

Changing land use and mobility patterns among Kazakh pastoralists in western China are the subjects of the article by Don Bedunah and Richard Harris. They raise some of the themes addressed in the articles by Yan Zhaoli et al. and Bauer, namely that ecological conditions of the semi-arid rangelands do not readily admit to a standardised policy of private land tenure. They debate the assumptions that mobile communal access causes overgrazing and degradation. In the case studies, sedentarisation and localised overgrazing is increasing, although seasonal movement of livestock persists in one of the Kazakh areas and is likely to benefit wildlife biodiversity.

The Chinese Autonomous Region of Inner Mongolia provides another example of the impacts of policies to reduce mobility, as pastoralists have had to adjust and rangeland vegetation is affected. A different approach to the previous articles is taken in the work by Lindsey Christensen, Shauna BurnSilver and Michael Coughenour, who have compiled socio-economic, land use, vegetation and climate data into a model which generates predictions of how the rangelands are likely to respond to changes in grazing intensity associated with the settlement of Mongolian nomads. The debate about the relationships between communal access, mobile land use and overgrazing is raised again, as the model shows that sedentary grazing has negative effects on pasture quality. Furthermore, as evidence accumulates on climate change in the Asian grassland region, the authors note the risk that some resulting vegetation changes would affect pasture output.

The final three articles relate significant changes in the pastoral grazing systems of three post-Soviet Central Asian states, within the deserts of Turkmenistan and mountainous regions of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Each of the first two of these countries contains several million people who primarily depend on livestock. The article by Roy Behnke, Abdul Jabbar, Akmohammed Budanov and Grant Davidson discusses how the Turkmenistan state has relinquished some control over livestock while maintaining ultimate rights to rangeland, in contrast to the Chinese push for rangeland privatisation over the past decade. The effects of a series of policy experiments are recounted for two case study areas, where pastoralists have manipulated some of the various regulations to suit their own purposes, though the state retains an extractive grip on their livestock assets. Seasonal mobility is still spontaneously practiced by pastoralists in one of the areas, but has been foreshortened in the other area as government infrastructure has deteriorated.

The article by John Farrington deals with the different pastoralist adaptations necessitated by the complete collapse of state livestock farms in Kyrgyzstan in the mid 1990s. He finds that while traditional Kyrgyz pastoralist values and techniques have not been entirely lost, many families can no longer migrate seasonally with their animals and have had to herd animals nearer to villages and to diversify their income sources. In doing so, they have adopted an array of grazing management

practices involving various combinations of kin, neighbours and hired herders. Perhaps not surprisingly, older pastoralists preferred the security of their lives within the Soviet state farms.

In the last article, Sarah Robinson describes the current situation of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists in eastern Tajikistan. Again, having to face the loss of state subsidies and farms as in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, the mountain pastoralists have suffered a great decline in livelihood security. Seasonal livestock mobility remains important in one of the sub regions, but as in Kyrgyzstan and among the Kazakhs in China, it is the largest herds and flocks that are moved more frequently between seasonal pastures as their owners can afford the costs of movement.

Taken as a whole, this collection of articles on pastoralism in the Asian post-socialist context shows the tenacity of ways of life that have been subjected to numerous and substantial shocks originating from centralised political authority. In China and Turkmenistan, the hand of government still lays firmly on pastoral property relations; although in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, indigenous land management practices have arisen, new government regulations on rangeland property and management are being devised.

Several of these articles on Asia refer to the new rangeland ecology paradigm and debates on pastoral mobility. It is therefore appropriate to refer back to the African context from which these ideas evolved, and this is provided in a review by Hanne Kirstine Adriansen.

I would like to thank Ken Bauer for his contribution as co-editor of this issue. He has recruited several of the authors who submitted articles, while his knowledge of the Tibetan region has supported my editorial efforts.

Carol Kerven