CRISE • Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity

Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, Mansfield Rd, OX1 3TB, UK
Tel: +44 1865 281810; Fax: +44 1865 281801; http://www.crise.ox.ac.uk/

# Educating for Exclusion in Western China:
## Structural and institutional dimensions of conflict in the Tibetan areas of Qinghai and Tibet

Andrew M. Fischer

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*Abstract*
This paper examines the conflictive repercussions of exclusionary processes in the Tibetan areas of western China, with a focus on Qinghai Province and the Tibet Autonomous Region. In both provinces, the implementation of competitive labour market reforms within a context of severe educational inequalities is argued to have accentuated exclusionary dynamics along linguistic, cultural and political modes of bias despite rapid urban-centred economic growth and increasing school enrolments since the mid-1990s. These modes of bias operate not only at lower strata of the labour hierarchy but also at upper strata. The resultant ethnically exclusionary dynamics, particularly in upper strata, offer important insights into conflictive tensions in the region.

At a more theoretical level, these insights suggest that exclusion needs to be differentiated from poverty (even relative poverty) given that exclusionary processes can occur vertically throughout social hierarchies and can even intensify with movements out of poverty. Indeed, the most politically contentious exclusions are often those that occur among relatively elite and/or upwardly aspiring sections of a population. Therefore, the methodological challenge that faces studies of exclusion (as with the horizontal inequality approach) is to find ways of measuring structural asymmetries and disjunctures and institutional modes of integration that move beyond either absolute measures, as per mainstream human development approaches, or relative measures, given that both are only capable of identifying potential exclusions occurring at the bottom of a social hierarchy.

*The author*
Andrew M. Fischer is Lecturer in Population and Social Policy at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague.

Email: fischer@iss.nl

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# Educating for Exclusion in Western China: structural and institutional dimensions of conflict in the Tibetan areas of Qinghai and Tibet

**By Andrew M. Fischer**

## Introduction

In March 2008, a wave of large-scale demonstrations quickly spread from Lhasa to the Tibetan areas[1] of Qinghai, Sichuan and Gansu over the course of about three weeks.[2] Despite evident premonitions of tensions and discontent that had been brewing for years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) argued that the 'riots' (in reference to the riot in Lhasa on 14 March) were due to political meddling and manipulation from abroad, particularly from the Tibetan exile community and their Western supporters. Given that the region had been experiencing ample development and rising prosperity, local Tibetans had no valid cause for grievance. This line was supported by some Western scholars and commentators who, at the extreme, tended to interpret the events as the covert handiwork of US neoconservatives.[3]

Indeed, absolute economic and human development indicators offer little insight into the reasons why Tibetans might have been so aggrieved. Poverty rates had been falling, average household incomes rising, and levels of educational attainment moderately improving. Were it not for some restrictions on cultural or religious practices and the worrisome rise in inequalities and persistent political repression, many argued that the government had been attending well to the disadvantaged position of Tibetans in China. Many Chinese commentators went so far as to conclude that Tibetans, catered to by Central Government subsidies to a far greater extent than any other minority nationality in China, were quite simply spoilt – 'complaining with their stomachs full'.[4]

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[1] In this article, 'China' refers to the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) and 'Tibet' refers to all of the Tibetan areas in China, including the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and the Tibetan areas that are incorporated into the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan. Often known as 'Greater Tibet' or 'cultural Tibet,' this region is about the size of Western Europe or about one-quarter of China. This larger understanding of Tibet is actually not controversial given that it conforms to administrative definitions in China, which identify Tibetan autonomous areas at various levels of jurisdiction. The TAR is equivalent to a province, whereas Tibetan areas incorporated into the other provinces are designated as either autonomous prefectures (TAPs) or counties (TACs). With the exception of some disagreements in the borderlands of Eastern Tibet, the Chinese administrative definitions are almost identical to the definition of Tibet used by the Tibetan Exile Government and they conform to the areas that Tibetans consider to be Tibet. Most of these highland areas, at average altitudes of well over 3,000 metres, are also clearly differentiated from non-Tibetan lowlands by topography and population density. While the TAR is the administrative area that the PRC government and most of the Western media usually mean when they refer to 'Tibet,' it only accounts for just over half of the Tibetan autonomous areas in China and less than half of the total Tibetan population in China. The boundaries of this region were determined by the territory controlled by Lhasa at the time of the PRC invasion in 1950.

[2] For background on the protests and their aftermath, see Fischer (2008c) and Shakya (2008).

[3] For the most prominent Western scholar in this regard, see Sautman (2008). For extreme versions, see Engdahl (2008) and Zizek (2000). See Yeh (2009) for an excellent critique.

[4] Again, see Sautman (2008) for allusions to these arguments.

This paper explores why this was probably not the case. In so doing, it offers insight into the conflictive repercussions of what I call 'exclusionary growth' (Fischer 2005a). Notably, Beijing's conviction that minority nationalism can be solved through the force of economic growth and improved livelihoods implies that grievances derive from developmental 'backwardness' and poverty. However, conflict appears to have intensified alongside development in Tibet and other parts of West China such as Xinjiang (East Turkestan), suggesting that the concept of poverty is ill-suited to explaining these conflicts. The concept of exclusion might be better suited, albeit only insofar as it is differentiated from poverty.

Critical in this regard is the interaction between education and urban employment systems, here examined through the cases of Qinghai Province and the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), which together account for about three-quarters of the Tibetan areas and Tibetan population in China. Despite the pertinent differences between these two provinces as political and economic entities, considerable similarities exist across the Tibetan societies in both provinces, which help to explain the strong sense of nationalist resentment that is widespread across this region the size of Western Europe. Even though Tibetans in both provinces had experienced periods of indirect rule by various empires emanating from China through the centuries, their forcible integration into the People's Republic of China in the 1950s represented their first ever experience of direct Chinese rule. This was followed by the dramatic upheaval of the Cultural Revolution and the complete collectivisation and then de-collectivisation of their rural areas in the space of less than 15 years. Both provinces became the most subsidised in China under the Maoist interior industrialisation and militarisation strategies of the 1960s and 1970s. Both endured attempts at population transfer during the same period, although these were largely unsuccessful.[5] When regional systems of redistribution unravelled with the advent of reform in the early 1980s, both provinces quickly became the worst economic performers in China up to the mid-1990s. By the late 1990s, Tibetans in both provinces remained among the most rural in China and with the worst educational levels of all the major nationalities (i.e. ethnic groups) of the country.

In response to economic lagging in its western hinterlands, the central government started several major policy initiatives in the early to mid-1990s to correct rising regional inequalities, from poverty alleviation campaigns to western development strategies. These were implemented alongside ongoing efforts to raise school enrolments, in line with the national goal set in 1986 of achieving nine-year compulsory education for all by 2000. These initiatives were accelerated in 1999 when the government launched its 'Open the West' campaign (OWC; *xibu da kaifa*), in conjunction with its Tenth Five-Year Plan starting in 2000. The combined efforts brought a return to westward subsidisation, in which Qinghai remains the second most subsidised and the TAR the most. These efforts did indeed resuscitate growth; both Qinghai and the TAR have seen very rapid, above-national-average growth since the mid-1990s. However, the side effects included rapidly rising inequalities, particularly in the TAR, where most measures of inequality rose far beyond those observed elsewhere in China.

Within this context, the implementation of competitive labour market reforms and educational campaigns, in a situation of underlying educational inequalities and political and economic subordination, became crucial mechanisms by which rapid growth resulted in an accentuation of ethnically exclusionary dynamics in these areas. In particular, the mechanisms accentuated linguistic, cultural and political

[5] See Fischer (2008d) for background on these population issues and as background for this paper.

modes of bias deriving from characteristics of the dominant cultural and political group, such as Chinese fluency, Chinese work cultures, and connections to government or business networks in China proper. While labour market reforms have also generated problems elsewhere in China, such as high rates of unemployment among university graduates,[6] the Tibetan areas manifest an exceptional structural asymmetry whereby the most educated category of local residents (urban Tibetan men) is much less educated on average than even the least educated category of inter-provincial migrants competing in local urban labour markets (i.e. rural women from Sichuan). Moreover, even university-educated Tibetans face disadvantages in this context, which are simply not reflected in the relative quantitative comparisons. In other words, on top of facing an institutional environment where opportunities created in the local economy are dominated by state-centred and externally oriented networks of power and wealth, Tibetan urban middle classes and elites also have to contend with the fact that they do not profit from natural educational advantages over the average Han migrant coming from elsewhere in China, contrary to all other regions of China. The resultant disadvantages, particularly in upper labour strata, offers important insights into recent tensions, even before considering the more blatant proximate causes such as prejudice, discrimination or political repression.

These observations are important because they imply that two critical dimensions of current Tibet policy need to be seriously addressed in order to lessen both extreme economic polarisation and social instability. On the one hand, urban employment for locals requires protection and promotion at both the lower and upper strata. On the other hand, the linguistic and cultural disadvantages faced by Tibetans in urban employment need to be lessened, albeit in ways that do not undermine Tibetan language and culture. It is suggested that the existing national minority laws in China already provide ways to resolve both issues if their full implications were put into practice, as exemplified by the recommendation by the Tenth Panchen Lama that public sector employees working in Tibetan areas should have at least some working knowledge of the Tibetan language, supported by a strong promotion of bilingual education in the minority areas.

At a more theoretical level, the insights from this study suggest that absolute indicators such as education levels or poverty rates, or even relative indicators such as educational or income inequalities, only offer partial insights into processes of exclusion or discrimination. Rather, attention must be placed on structural disjunctures and asymmetries and institutional modes of integration occurring across social hierarchies, not just at the bottom. Particular attention needs to be focused on qualitative educational inequalities and/or biases occurring among comparable educational cohorts sharing similar types of employment expectation. Such an approach brings to light the importance of differentiating exclusion from poverty (even relative poverty) given that exclusionary processes can occur vertically throughout social hierarchies, among the poor and the non-poor, and in many cases they might intensify with movements out of poverty, such as during urbanisation or rising education levels. Indeed, the most politically contentious exclusions are often those that occur among relatively elite or upwardly mobile sections of a population. Therefore, the methodological challenge that faces studies of exclusion, as with the horizontal inequality approach (i.e. Stewart 2002), lies in finding ways to measure structural disjunctures and asymmetries and institutional modes of integration that move beyond either absolute measures, as per mainstream approaches to human

[6] For analyses of these issues in China, see Li (2002), Guo and Chang (2006), Li (2008) and Liu (2008). For an excellent survey, see Roulleau-Berger (2009).

development, or relative (i.e. inequality) measures, given that both are only capable of identifying potential exclusions occurring at the bottom of a social hierarchy.[7]

The paper is based on quantitative analysis of official statistical data and over a year of accumulated fieldwork in West China between 2003 to 2007 (see the Methodological Appendix for details of the methods and data used). The first section presents a brief analysis of the structural patterns of rapid urban-centred economic growth since the mid-1990s. The second section examines the stagnant levels of educational outcomes and the exceptional educational asymmetries of the Tibetan areas. The third section offers an institutionalist analysis of the resultant ethnically exclusionary dynamics at both the lower and upper strata of the labour hierarchy, and how these dynamics are in turn reinforced by political and social subordination. It also delves into some of the Tibetan nationalist responses. The conclusion returns to some of the broader theoretical insights that this study brings to light.

## 1. Rapid growth and polarisation

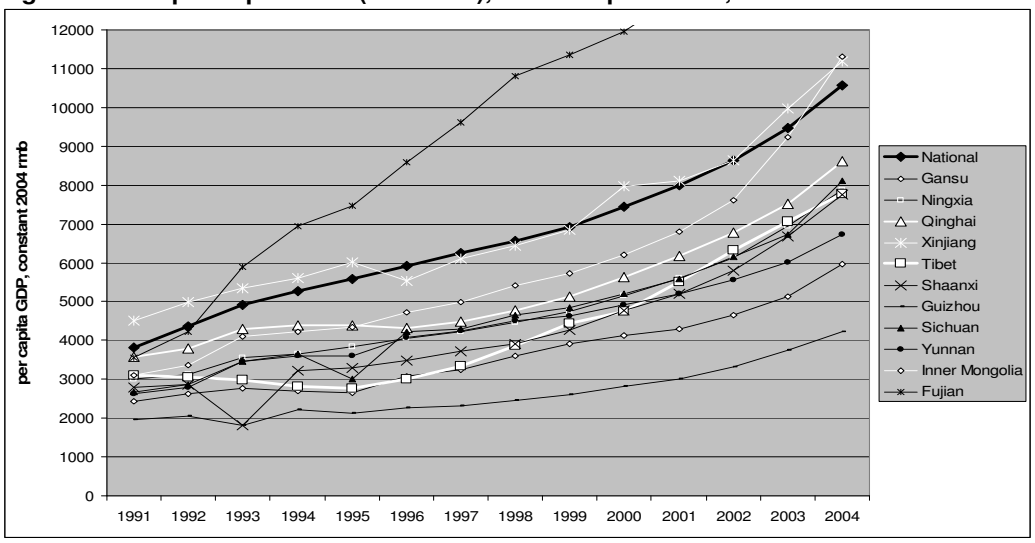
A variety of structural disjunctures emerged within the context of development in the TAR and Qinghai from the mid-1990s onwards. Four dimensions of rapid economic and social change can be highlighted as a means to clarify these disjunctures. These include: the initiation of rapid subsidy-induced growth; rising urban-rural inequality; rapid shifts of the Tibetan labour force out of agriculture and into urban areas; and rapidly emerging intra-urban inequalities.

In the first case, as noted in the introduction, after a period of stagnation and even recession in both the TAR and Qinghai up to 1995, the central government managed to initiate very rapid growth in the TAR from 1996 onwards and in Qinghai from 1998 onwards (see Figure 1 below). This was achieved through the injection of massive volumes of direct budgetary subsidies and subsidised investments. In the case of the TAR, combined direct and indirect subsidies exceeded 100 per cent of GDP from 2001 onwards.[8] As a result, real per capita growth rates in the TAR surpassed the national average from 1996 to 1999 and again from 2001 to 2003, and they were the highest in western China for most of these years, exceeding 10 per cent a year. In Qinghai, they exceeded 10 per cent from 2003 onwards. Hence, the once-laggard performance of these two provinces was corrected and they started catching up with national average per capita GDP. To give an idea of the speed of such growth, the aggregate real GDP of the TAR grew by about three times between 1996 and 2004 and by about two and a half times in Qinghai, whereas it only doubled in China as a whole, which was nonetheless one of the most unprecedented growth rates witnessed in modern history.

In this sense, the western development strategies were quite successful in reversing the trend of worsening regional inequalities in the first two decades of the reform period. However, these strategies were very polarising within western regions and a sharp rise in intra-provincial inequalities accompanied the aggregate catch-up. This was particularly the case in the Tibetan areas, where heavy dependence on subsidies led to an excessively urban-centric strategy. Inequalities in the Tibetan areas were thereby structured according to the manner by which subsidies were channelled into the local economy, in contrast to other western areas, where inequalities were more rooted in patterns of local capital accumulation.

[7] For further discussion on these theoretical implications, see Fischer (2008a).
[8] See Fischer (2007; 2009) for further detail.

**Figure 1: Real per capita GDP (2004 rmb), selected provinces, 1991-2004**




Sources: calculated from CSY (2005: Tables 3-1, 3-11 and 9-5) and equivalent in CSY (1993-2004).

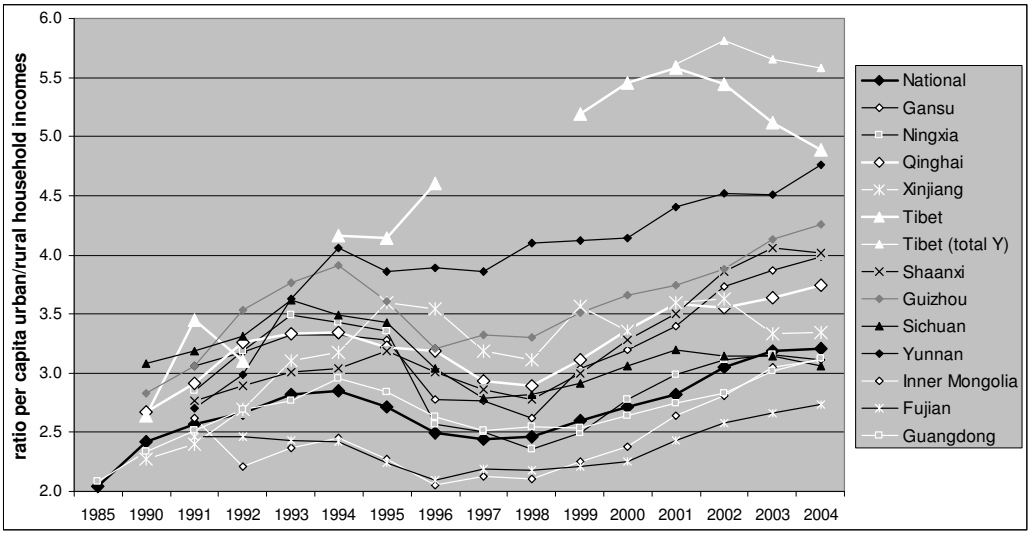
The TAR offers the most extreme case; extreme and inefficient dependence on government sources of finance from outside the Tibetan areas (mostly from Beijing), together with the fact that such finance was predominately targeted at urban areas, led to an urban bias far stronger than that witnessed elsewhere in China. The fact that subsidies were channelled through the vehicle of the government itself or through state-owned enterprises from outside the Tibetan areas, with much of it focused on either administrative expansion or large-scale construction projects, led to a sharp distinction between those in positions of access to state-centred networks of wealth and those without. Local sources of accumulation offered little mitigation to these polarising dynamics, given their increasingly marginal role in driving change in the economy. While subsidisation was less generous in the Tibetan areas outside the TAR, de-industrialisation in these areas also resulted in intensified dependence on subsidies. In all of these cases, the dominance of Han Chinese in the state-centred networks of wealth and power meant that the opportunities generated by these strategies largely advantaged workers and entrepreneurs with Chinese fluency, Chinese work cultures, and connections to government or business networks in China, in addition to the obvious political biases accorded to central government spending in this contested region as well.[9]

The resultant ethnically exclusionary dynamics are best reflected by sharply rising inequalities far above the national experience. Such inequality is evidenced in Figure 2, below, with respect to urban-rural inequality, one of the dimensions of inequality most commonly referred to in China. Figure 2 measures the ratio of per capita urban disposable household income (of households registered as permanently residing) to per capita rural household income, both deflated by their respective urban and rural consumer price indices. Note that there is a significant discrepancy in the TAR urban household income data from 2002 onwards, in that 'total income' starts to exceed 'disposable income' by a considerable margin. The source of this discrepancy is explored in Fischer (2007: 185-86); suffice to say that the upper range probably more accurately reflects the spans of wealth in the TAR. Both sets of data are used for the TAR from 2002 onwards in order to show the alternative trends, which is not

[9] Again, see Fischer (2007; 2009) for detailed analyses of these economic dynamics.

necessary for the other provinces given that the slight discrepancy between disposable and total incomes is insignificant.

**Figure 2: Urban-rural inequality, selected provinces, constant 2004 rmb**




Sources: calculated from CSY (2005, Tables 9-5, 10-15 and 10-21) and equivalent tables in previous yearbooks.

To put these data into perspective, urban-rural inequality is generally higher in western China than in eastern China due to the fact that urban state-sector wages are equalised to a national standard while rural incomes are not. The poverty of the western rural areas results in a greater divide between the western urban and rural areas than is the case nationally, particularly in comparison to coastal China, where many rural areas have profited from rural industrialisation. As a result, it is generally the case that the poorer the rural area, the greater the urban-rural divide. One would therefore expect that urban-rural inequality would be highest in the Tibetan areas, given that rural incomes have been among the lowest in China according to official data.

Indeed, as observed in the figure above, by the mid-1990s, the highest ratio is observed in the TAR, followed by Yunnan. However, the ratio in the TAR increased sharply in the mid-1990s, precisely at the same time that it was falling nationally and in every other western province due to a combination of pro-rural poverty reduction strategies and good agricultural performance from 1994 to 1997. In all of the other western provinces, the fluctuations in urban-rural inequality more or less followed the national pattern, multiplied by a factor to account for heightened disparity. In contrast, the sharp increase in the TAR reflects the fact that real rural incomes, according to official data, were stagnant throughout the 1990s, and only recovered to their real 1992 value by 2003. On the other hand, urban incomes in the TAR were above the national average, largely due to a surge in the average money wages of staff and workers (mostly state-sector), which reached the highest in China in 2002.[10]

These data reflect the fact that the take-off of the TAR in the mid-1990s was primarily urban and excessively de-linked from the local rural economy, at least up until the early 2000s. Urban-rural inequality reached a dizzying height of 5.8 in 2002 (according to the total income data), i.e. the average urban per capita income was 5.8 times higher than the average rural per capita income – a level never before seen

[10] See Fischer (2005a; 2007) for detailed analyses of these wage data.

in the PRC, where urban-rural inequality is nonetheless a serious concern. This measure of disparity started to fall in the TAR after 2002, converging with the next most unequal western provinces except at much higher levels of inequality than in the early 1990s given that urban-rural inequality started to rise again throughout China from 1998 onwards. The fall in the TAR in part reflects strong growth in per capita rural incomes after 2002, most likely due to a variety of initiatives to increase rural incomes from 2003 onwards.[11]

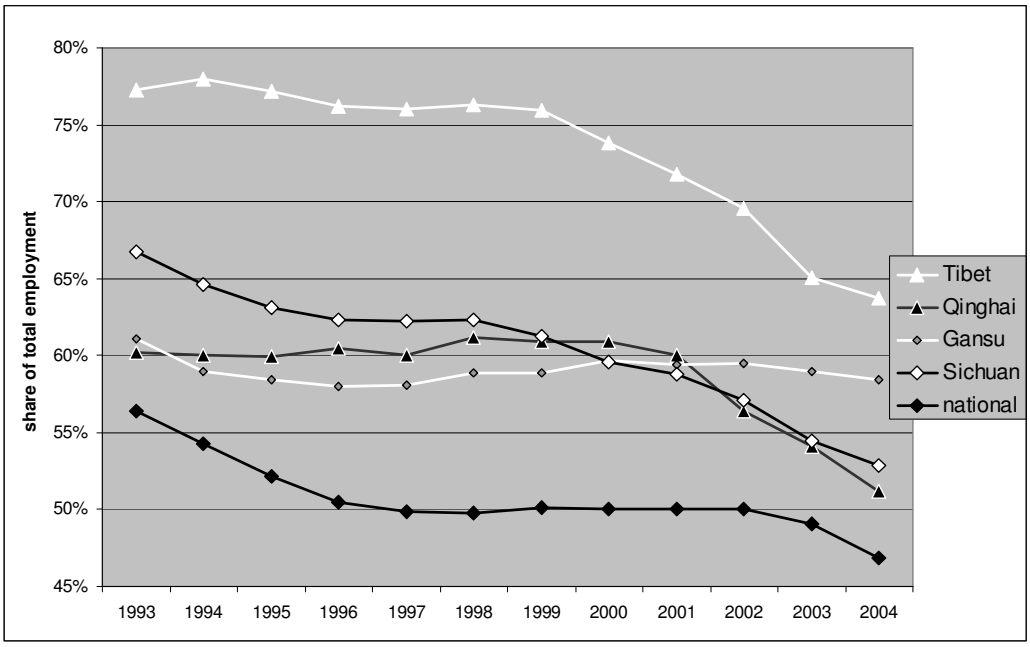
If these data do in fact represent real changes, the reversal in urban-rural inequality in the TAR from 2001 onwards might also be explained by the fact that the Tibetan labour force experienced one of the fastest, albeit latest, shifts out of agriculture from the late 1990s onwards. In Tibetan areas, a shift out of agriculture implies urbanisation, given the relative shortage of rural off-farm economic opportunities, in contrast to more central and coastal areas of China where much off-farm labour remains in rural areas. For instance, township and village enterprises, private enterprises or self-employment outside of household production accounted for only 4.8 per cent of rural employment in the TAR in 2004, versus 21.6 per cent in Qinghai, 23.5 per cent in Sichuan, and 36.9 per cent for China as a whole (calculated from CSY 2005: Table 5-4). Thus, while the Sichuan labour force was less urbanised than that of the TAR, it was also much less agrarian. The sheer scarcity of off-farm rural employment in the TAR (and other Tibetan areas) implies that most movements out of agriculture by and large imply movements to towns and cities, and urban labour markets are relatively much more central to labour transitions in the Tibetan areas than in other parts of western China. Therefore, while the measurement of urbanisation is very problematic in China,[12] it can be inferred for the Tibetan areas through employment data. These are shown in Figure 3 (p. 10 below), with reference to shares of the labour force in the primary sector (mostly farming and herding).

The shift of labour out of the primary sector was more gradual in China broadly and in Sichuan, albeit still rapid from a comparative international perspective; the share in Sichuan dropping from 67 per cent in 1993 to 53 per cent in 2004. In contrast, the shift started later and faster in Qinghai and the TAR. In Qinghai the primary share suddenly fell after 2001, dropping almost 9 per cent between 2001 and 2004. At the beginning of this period, the TAR had the most agrarian workforce in China, with 78 per cent of the labour employed in the primary sector in 1994. As with Qinghai, this primary share was stable until 1999 and then fell sharply, by more than 12 per cent up to 2004, although it still remained one of the most agrarian provinces in China, with almost 64 per cent of the surveyed labour force working in agriculture.

[11] See Goldstein et al (2008). These initiatives were also indicated to me in an interview with a Tibetan government official dealing with rural development policy, conducted in Lhasa in November 2004.

[12] Temporal comparisons of urbanisation rates below the national level in China are rendered very difficult given that urban definitions are quite different in each of the five censuses (see Yixing and Ma 2003). On the other hand, annual surveys on population change are only based on people registered as permanently residing. They therefore provide no basis for evaluating changes due to migration.

**Figure 3: Share of labour force in primary sector, selected provinces, 1993-2004**




Sources: CSY (2005: Table 5-3) and equivalent tables in yearbooks from 1994 to 2004.

The declining share in the TAR also represents an absolute decline, suggesting that the Tibetan rural areas are starting to enter a phase of depopulation. The absolute number working in the primary sector in the TAR reached its peak in 1999 at 922,000 people, and then fell to 860,000 in 2004, despite relatively rapid rates of natural population increase in these rural areas. While it is difficult to know the degree to which migrant labour is included in these aggregate labour statistics, primary sector employment in the TAR is almost entirely composed of Tibetans given that the rural areas were 98 per cent Tibetan in the 2000 population census, and these rural Tibetans in turn accounted for about 85 per cent of the total Tibetan population in the province.[13] Thus, the drop in absolute numbers in primary employment demonstrates that this remarkably rapid transition in the local labour structure was happening regardless of the influence that non-Tibetan out-of-province migrants might have had on relative employment shares in the urban areas.[14] This is strongly in line with the field observations by Goldstein et al (2008), who argue that a rapid 'paradigm shift' had taken place between 1997 and 2005 in the three villages they surveyed in Central Tibet, from a predominantly subsistence agricultural economy to a new mixed economy in which non-farm income plays a dominant role. The aggregate trends in Qinghai, supported by my own qualitative field observations, suggest similar transitions among the indigenous Tibetan Buddhists and Muslims of this province, who accounted for about 56 per cent of the rural population of Qinghai in the 2000 census.

[13] See Fischer (2008d) for a detailed analysis of these population data.

[14] Of course, a counter-argument might be made that these trends could partly reflect arbitrary changes in the administrative status, such as government attempts to encourage urbanisation by giving urban non-agricultural status to people living near small county seats but who are effectively still working in agriculture. However, to the best of my knowledge, the labour surveys represent different definitions of the population to those used in the population surveys, based as they are on employment status rather than population registration status.

Rapid urbanisation would tend to balance out urban-rural inequality if only by reducing the absolute number of people in the rural areas. This would increase per capita incomes by simple arithmetic, provided that the transfer of labour out of agriculture and the rural areas more generally does not lead to a decrease in aggregate rural household output or income (a condition behind the concept of surplus labour). However, the subsequent impact of declining urban-rural inequality on overall inequality depends on the trends in both intra-rural inequality (inequality between rural households) and intra-urban inequality (inequality between urban households). In terms of the former, Goldstein et al observed sharp increases in both the farming and the pastoral areas they studied in western Tibet between the late 1990s and 2005.[15] Intra-urban inequality is more difficult to measure, in part due to the fact that household income surveys only include households registered as permanently residing, thereby excluding most migrants. Moreover, tabulated income distribution data from urban household surveys are not regularly provided for the TAR and other western provinces, making trend analysis difficult.

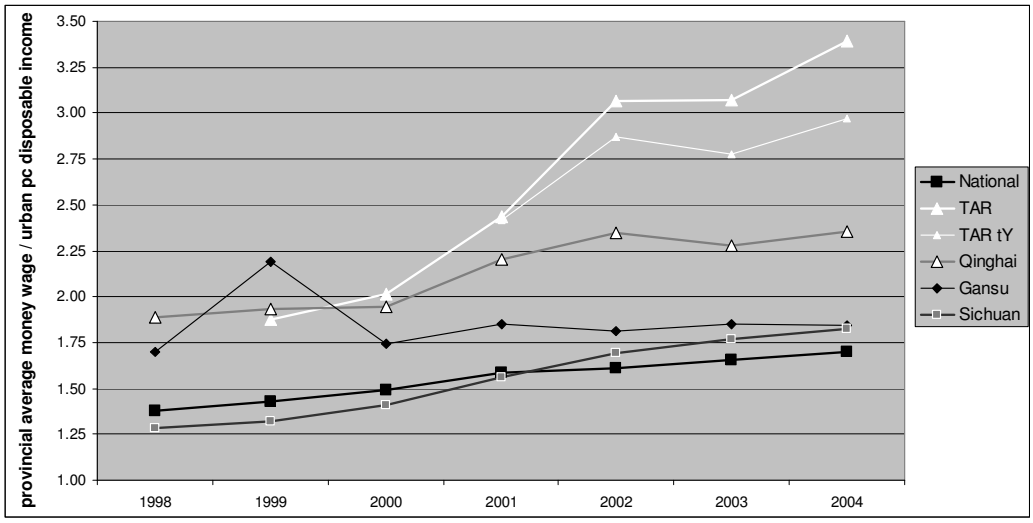
A round-about method can be used to circumvent these data limitations for measuring intra-urban inequality, which I innovated in Fischer (2007). Two sources of data are available in most years; average money wages of staff and workers and per capita urban incomes. In the former case, 'staff and workers' are a relatively privileged sub-category of urban employment in China, referring to persons working (permanently or on contract) in units of state ownership, collective ownership, joint ownership, share holding ownership, and foreign ownership (including Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan).[16] There is no publicly available data for wage rates other than for staff and workers, i.e. none is available for those in the lower strata of the urban labour hierarchy, such as construction workers not working under contract. However, the money wages of staff and workers would cover many of the privileged temporary migrants working in the state-sector of the TAR and other Tibetan areas, typically for terms of two to three years. In the latter case, urban household incomes are derived primarily (entirely in the TAR in 2004) from salaries and wages earned by all households registered as permanently residing (i.e. not including migrants) from all forms of employment, not only staff and workers. In others words, urban household incomes reflect an average of all forms of remuneration by all urban residents registered as permanently residing (about three-quarters Tibetan in the TAR).

Therefore, the comparison of average wages of staff and workers to average per capita urban household incomes can give an indirect indication of wage inequality between the privileged upper strata of urban employees (including migrants and about half of the registered urban workforce in the TAR) and the average of all (permanently registered) urban employed. While it is to be expected that average money wages would be marginally higher than per capita urban household incomes even in a relatively egalitarian setting given that per capita household calculations include both working and dependent household members, rising inequality can be inferred by a rising ratio. Figure 4 below shows this proxy measure of urban wage inequality for a selection of western provinces from 1998 to 2004.

[15] In the case of the farming communities in Shigatse Prefecture in the TAR, see Goldstein et al (2008). In the case of the pastoral communities, findings were presented by Melvyn Goldstein at two conferences in 2006 (Bonn, August 2006; and Harvard, December 2006), and through personal communications from November 2005 to August 2007.

[16] Staff and workers do not include persons employed in township or private enterprises, urban self-employed persons, retirees, re-employed retirees, teachers in the schools run by local people, foreigners, persons from Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan, and other persons not included by 'relevant regulations' (CSY 2005: explanatory notes for Chapter 5).

**Figure 4: Proxy measure of urban wage inequality, 1998-2004 (current values)**




Sources: calculated from CSY (2005, Tables 5-21 and 10-15) and equivalent in previous yearbooks.

Figure 4 reveals sharply increasing urban wage inequality in the TAR, more accentuated with respect to disposable incomes and less accentuated with respect to total incomes, but in both cases far above the next most unequal province of Qinghai. The ratio of staff and worker wages to urban disposable incomes in the TAR rose from below 2 in 1999 to 3.4 by 2004, versus 2.4 in Qinghai, 1.9 in Gansu, 1.8 in Sichuan and 1.7 in China as a whole. This confirms the suggestion that intra-urban inequality has taken over from urban-rural inequality as the main source of rising disparity in the TAR since 2000.

Two main trends explain this sharp rise. A rising wage/income ratio could represent rising wages of staff and workers relative to the average of all urban wages. Or, it could represent a falling share of staff and worker employment in total urban employment (among households registered as permanently residing), thereby reducing the weight of staff and worker wages in average urban incomes. Both cases appear to apply to the TAR.

First, the money wages of staff and workers in the TAR, which were always above the national average due to 'hardship' considerations,[17] suddenly rose even further, from 1.5 times the national average money wages of staff and workers to two times in 2002. Notably, they became the highest in China in 2002 and again in 2004.[18] This represents an upward revaluation of hardship compensations exclusive to the TAR, regardless of general considerations in the rest of the country. In contrast, per capita urban disposable household incomes in the TAR fell below the national average for the first time in 2004, in stark divergence from the jump in wages of staff and workers (previously, urban incomes in the TAR had been somewhat higher than the national

[17] The TAR ranks at the highest of 11 levels in a ranking of so-called 'hardship' posts in public sector employment in China ('hardship' defined according to a lowland Han Chinese perspective).

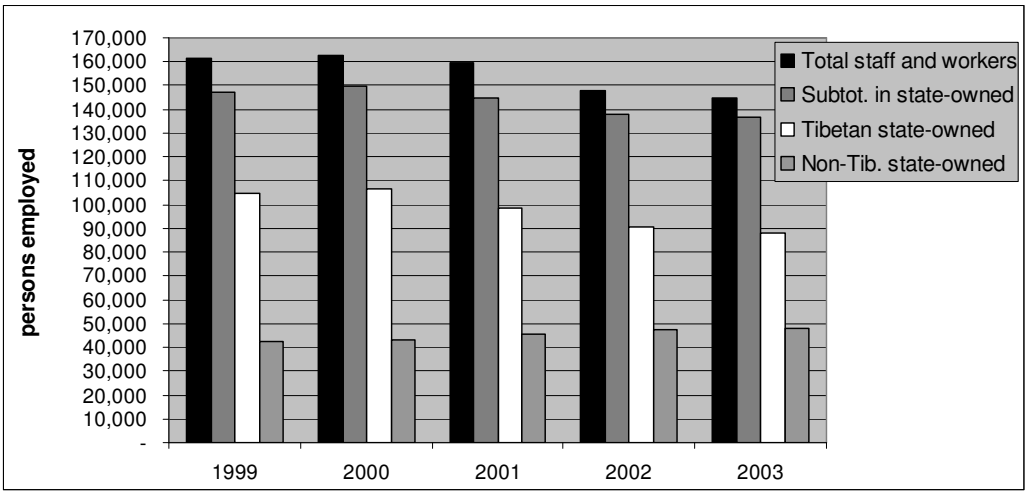
[18] Annual average money wages of state-sector staff and workers in 2004 was 30,873 yuan for the TAR, 29,674 yuan for Beijing, 16,024 yuan for the national average, and 13,623 yuan for Gansu, the second poorest province in China according to per capita GDP. In contrast, per capita urban household incomes in the same year were 9,106 yuan for the TAR, 9,422 yuan for the national average, and 7,377 yuan for Gansu. Per capita rural household incomes were 1,861 yuan for the TAR, 2,936 yuan for the national average, and 1,852 yuan for Gansu.

average). This implies that the incomes of those without state-sector employment were increasingly lagging behind.

Second, these sharp increases in nominal and relative staff and worker wages took place simultaneously with a reduction in the absolute number of Tibetan staff and workers in state-owned units between 2001 and 2003, while the number of non-Tibetans rose. The fall in staff and worker employment in state-owned units was not compensated by a rise in staff and worker employment in non-state-owned units, as was the case elsewhere in China where reductions in the state-sector were matched by increased corporate-sector employment. To the contrary, the state-owned share of total staff and worker employment in the TAR actually rose from 92.2 per cent in 2000 to 94.4 per cent in 2004. The reductions in Tibetan employment appear to be related to a streamlining of public employment, given that the total number of all state-sector staff and workers also fell, although by less than the fall in the number of Tibetans employed, whereas the number of non-Tibetans employed increased (see Figure 5 below). As a result, the share of Tibetans in total staff and worker employment in state-owned units fell from 71.3 to 64.6 per cent, while that of non-Tibetans rose from 28.7 to 35.4 per cent.

Underlying this shake-up, there was an even sharper fall in the Tibetan share of the more privileged category of cadre employment, which accounted for two-thirds of permanent state-sector employment in 2003. Overall cadre employment increased from 69,927 cadres in 2000 to 88,734 in 2003, while the number of Tibetan cadres fell from 50,039 to 44,069, or from 72 per cent of total cadre employment to just less than 50 per cent. While Tibetans have reportedly always been underrepresented at the higher levels of the cadre hierarchy, this shift, particularly in 2003, reveals a sudden move away from Tibetan representation in the government more generally, with non-Tibetan cadres outnumbering Tibetan cadres for the first time since 1980. Thus, government assertions that Tibetans were the dominant beneficiaries of the increasing state-sector wages, thereby contributing to an emerging 'middle class' of Tibetans,[19] became much more tenuous by 2003, after which the government stopped publishing this particular disaggregation of employment data for the TAR.[20]

**Figure 5: Total numbers of staff and workers in the TAR, 1999-2003**




Source: calculated from TSY (2004: table 4-5).

[19] See PRC (2001). For an academic version, see Sautman and Eng (2001).
[20] Coincidentally, I published a report on these data in early 2005 (see TIN 2005) on the basis of data provided in TSY (2004). The subsequent TSY (2005) no longer reported this data.

In sum, employment in the TAR, especially Tibetan employment, was shrinking in precisely the parts of the economy that were growing fastest, i.e. the urban state sector. Conversely, many of the non-Tibetans in this category were probably temporary residents on short terms of official duty in the TAR. Therefore, many were probably not included in any of the household income data, although they would have been reflected in the employment and wage data. While their inclusion into the household income data might temper the appearance of rising urban inequality, this does not take away from the fact that these data clearly reflect that local, permanently registered urban Tibetans bore most of the brunt of rising inequality, primarily by being squeezed out of state-sector employment, which accounts for almost all privileged forms of employment in the province. As a result, the sharp wage increases were decidedly and disproportionately captured by non-Tibetans and by a shrinking share of permanently registered urban households.

Outside the state sector, the whole array of so-called 'spontaneous' migrants (i.e. migration not organised by the state, as it is referred to in the China literature) are simply not included in any of these data sources. We have little means to fill this lacuna in the Tibetan urban areas except through informed speculation. These migrants include Han Chinese, Chinese Muslim, or even Tibetans from other parts of Tibet, who largely come on their own initiative to ply their trades independently in the urban areas, such as businessmen, construction workers, shoe menders, restaurant owners, cooks, tailors, rickshaw or taxi drivers, sex workers, or even beggars.[21] Such migrants are not necessarily competing for state-sector employment, except in the cases of state-owned construction companies hiring out-of-province migrants (albeit in these cases hiring is often arranged outside the province altogether). Except in such state-sector construction work where wages (and entire project funding) are subsidised, direct monetary incentives are not necessarily being offered by the state to these migrants.[22] Nonetheless, high state-sector wages do offer some indication of the indirect incentives derived from the subsidy-induced affluence in the urban areas of the TAR relative to the average conditions found in most other areas of western or central (or, in some cases, even coastal) China. While it is difficult to deduce the impact of these migrants on inequality, perhaps more importantly, it is precisely the confluence of these different streams of migrants in the Tibetan urban areas, together with local urbanising rural Tibetans and permanent urban Tibetans, that creates the playing field for competition over urban employment opportunities. The best way to assess how level this playing field is is through an examination of education levels.

## 2. Educational Inequality

The education and skills imbalance between locals and inter-provincial migrants in the Tibetan areas is best portrayed by inter-provincial comparisons of education levels, expressed as illiteracy rates or as the proportion of the population with education up to certain levels. Illiteracy or no schooling usually implies few skills beyond subsistence agriculture, basic trades or localised commerce. Literacy in any official language qualifies one as literate in the Chinese surveys. Therefore, this measure does not necessarily offer a good evaluation of Chinese literacy, given that

[21] For instance, see Ma and Lhundrup (2006) on temporary migrant occupational patterns in Lhasa.

[22] The idea that 'spontaneous' migrants are directly subsidised by the state is a common Tibetan belief (exile and local). However, during fieldwork in the TAR in 2004, I could find no indications of this except in state-sector construction projects such as the railway, where wages on offer are higher than normal wages.

the government itself estimates that about 80 per cent of the rural population of the TAR does not speak or understand Chinese, whether literate or illiterate.[23] A primary level of education can be considered at best low or semi-skilled (outside agriculture). Moreover, the medium of most rural primary education in the TAR (and other Tibetan areas) is the Tibetan language and thus a primary level of education in these areas probably precludes literacy in Chinese or even functional proficiency in spoken Chinese. Significant skills formation starts to take place at the secondary and vocational levels, as well as Chinese fluency in the Tibetan areas, where most secondary education switches over to the Chinese language medium. Completed senior high school or tertiary education would be a necessary qualification for state-sector staff and worker employment.

Four provinces suffice for this comparison. Sichuan is the most important source of emigration to the TAR and to the Tibetan areas of Sichuan and Qinghai, while Gansu is the second most important source.[24] Education indicators in these two provinces and the national average therefore give a broad indication of the average skill levels in the sources of emigration to the Tibetan areas. As pointed out in much migration research, migrants often have higher levels of education than the average in their sources of emigration. In other words, those who migrate are not necessarily the most destitute or deprived in their communities, but rather tend to be among the more educated, entrepreneurial and even wealthy (given that it generally requires resources to finance migration). This insight is confirmed by several surveys in Lhasa among both Tibetan and Han temporary migrants.[25] Nonetheless, levels of education in the sources of emigration reflect the general culture of education and skills that the migrants have been influenced by, are leaving from, and maintain networks with, throughout the course of their migration.

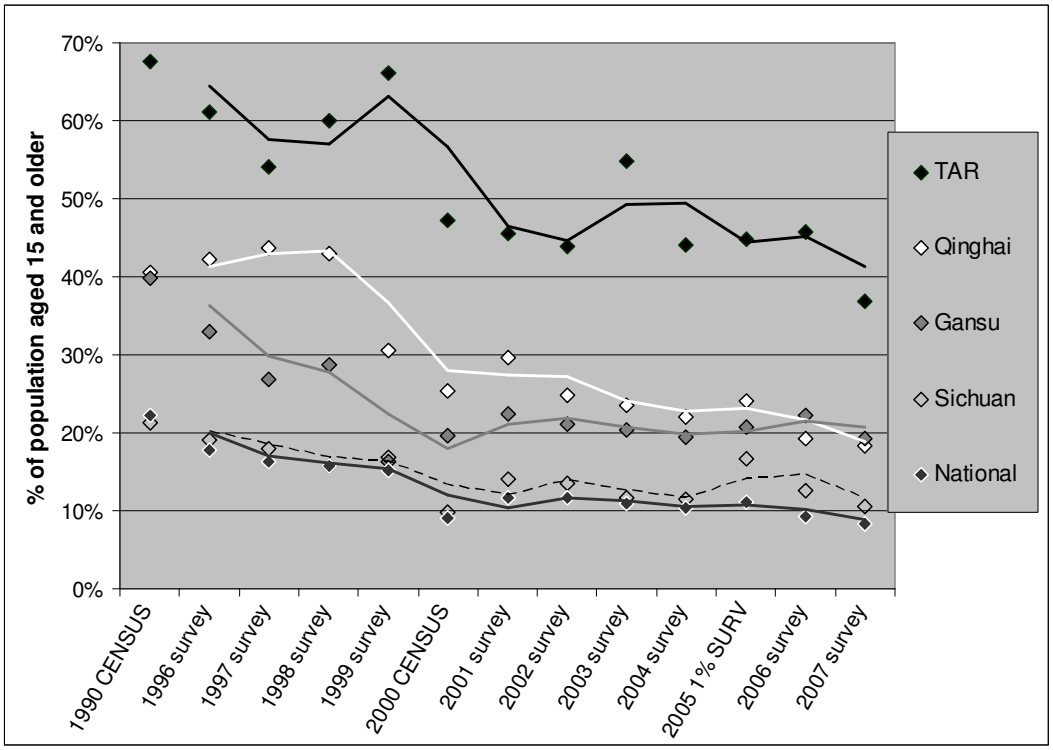
The illiteracy rates among the population aged 15 and older from 1990 to 2004 are shown in Figure 6 below. In all provinces shown, illiteracy rates appear to have declined over time, although variability between censuses and surveys makes exact evaluation difficult. Very high illiteracy rates (over 60 per cent) were recorded in the TAR throughout the 1990s, but then the 2000 census recorded a significantly lower rate (47 per cent). This was probably due to more accurate measurement given that the 2000 census is considered as the most accurate measure of the population. From this adjusted level, illiteracy rates in the TAR recorded no significant change up to 2006. The pattern in the other provinces appears similar, albeit at much lower levels of illiteracy. Such stagnancy in literacy improvements throughout the country is perturbing, particularly considering that the economy more than tripled over the same period. It definitely points to some important structural impediments within the Chinese growth model.

[23] This government statistic came from a presentation by Robert Barnett on the television content of *Xizang TV*, which mostly broadcasts in Tibetan, during a conference in Vancouver in April 2004.

[24] According to the 2000 population census, 63 per cent of the population in the TAR with their place of household registration based outside the TAR were from Sichuan, or 68,496 people out of a total of 108,669 (Tibet Census Tabulation, Table 7-2). Lower shares for Sichuan were measured by Ma and Lhundup (2006: 16-17) in their survey of 1,470 migrants in Lhasa in September-October 2005, in which 30 per cent were from Sichuan and 24 per cent from Gansu, including both Tibetan and Han. However, it is not clear to what degree their survey was representative of the broader migrant population.

[25] For instance, the education levels of both Han and Tibetan temporary migrants in Lhasa in Iredale et al (2001: 156), based on two surveys in the mid-1990s, and Ma and Lhundrup (2006: 16), based on a survey in 2005, are significantly higher than the corresponding national average or the local Tibetan levels. The authors do not make this observation; I have drawn the insight from comparison to official statistical sources, as analysed below.

**Figure 6: Illiteracy rates in selected western provinces and the national average and two-period moving averages, 1990-2007**




Source: CSY (1999: Tables 4-8 and 4-9) and equivalent tables in earlier and later yearbooks.

Indeed, at first sight the stagnation in literacy improvement is surprising given the degree to which official government discourse emphasises education and human resources within its western development strategies. Moreover, my own field observations, as well as those of Bangsbo (2008) also in Qinghai, and Goldstein et al (2008) in the TAR, clearly seem to indicate that there has been a strong push towards schooling from within Tibetan communities since the late 1990s, although this might vary from place to place. My own observations in Qinghai apply most strongly to Rongwo Town in Rebgong County (Ch. Tongren) and Chabcha Town in Chabcha County, both located in farming regions close to Xining City and serving as cultural and educational centres. However, based on discussions with several Tibetan teachers and scholars and one Western scholar during fieldwork in 2004, it seems that there was still considerable resistance towards schooling in the more remote pastoral areas of Golok and Yushu.[26] Nonetheless, even in these contexts, overall enrolment rates appear to have increased since the mid-1990s.

Several possible reasons might explain the stagnant literacy rates despite these field observations. One is simply the issue of a time lag; if educational drives started in the late 1990s or early 2000s and targeted enrolments among primary-school-aged children, these initiatives would still take five to 10 years before appearing in the population aged 15 and older. Age-specific education data would offer a much better

[26] This was due to a combination of very poor conditions in the boarding schools of these remote prefectures, disappointment with the employment outcomes of many recent graduates, and the fact that families preferred to keep their children, particularly their sons, engaged in pastoral activities. Notably, students, teachers and parents unanimously agreed that, once sent to boarding schools in county towns for several years, particularly at the secondary level, students rarely return to farming or herding.

evaluation of changes in this respect, but these are not available in the official data.[27] Indeed, the largest cohort in the 2000 population census was in the 10 to 14 age group. Much of this cohort might have missed out on earlier educational drives in the mid to late-1990s but nonetheless would have had a disproportionate impact on illiteracy rates in surveys for several years after 2000 as they reached the age of 15 and above but before younger more educated cohorts would have started to reach the same age threshold. Perhaps this explains the sudden drop in the illiteracy rate for the TAR to 37 per cent in 2007, which was the lowest level ever recorded. However, given the large variations from year to year in the illiteracy rates measured by the population surveys, it is too early to tell whether this sharp drop in illiteracy in 2007 represents a sustained trend. Notably, the One-Percent Population Survey of 2005, which is considered to be the most accurate measure of the Chinese population since the 2000 census, recorded an illiteracy rate of 45 per cent in the TAR.

One alternative explanation is also plausible and worth considering. It is possible that the poor quality of many rural schools has resulted in a situation of poor educational outcomes despite improving educational participation. This possibility is supported by numerous field observations. For instance, I visited one village school in Yushu where three grades of primary-level students were taught more or less the same class from year to year by a teacher who was regularly absent and often inebriated when present. In the context of a survey, such students would be recorded as enrolled and having achieved some level of primary education, although they would probably fail the basic literacy test of the same survey. Similarly, Tashi Rabgey notes cases from her fieldwork in the Tibetan areas of Sichuan where students who completed five years of primary education were still unable to read or write their names.[28] Hence, if the official data do contain some element of objectivity, it is probable according to this reasoning that improving levels of education are consistent with stagnant levels of educational outcome as measured by literacy. In other words, increasing levels of primary enrolment might not result in improved literacy outcomes if such enrolments are taking place in already poorly funded, low-quality and often overcrowded rural schools. Indeed, this is one of the important fallacies of educational strategies that push enrolments within poorly funded and dysfunctional school systems without regard for equally if not more intensive complementary efforts to improve and increase educational infrastructure.[29]

This argument is further supported in the Tibetan areas by the notable undersupply of primary, secondary and vocational education infrastructure in the TAR relative to other western provinces or the national average (measured in terms of number of schools and teachers per person). Although the TAR has one of the youngest

[27] In personal communications from December 2007, Melvyn Goldstein provided me with age-specific education data from their surveys of three villages in Shigatse Prefecture, TAR. These data definitely showed strong increases in education levels between 1998 and 2006 among cohorts aged 15 to 20 years old.

[28] Presentation made in Oslo, December 2008, and personal communications.

[29] Notably, rural schools in much of rural China are severely constrained in terms of funding due to the policy of requiring rural areas to be more or less fiscally self-sufficient (see Wong 1997). In this context, the strategy of simply abolishing tuition fees can be crippling to such schools given that it removes one of their few sources of funding. The strategy can ironically reinforce poor educational outcomes even though motivated by the aim to assist poor families in sending their children to school. This is not an argument for tuition fees but, rather, that policy needs to focus on infrastructural supply-side issues as much as, if not more than, the current mainstream emphasis on demand-side interventions such as conditional cash transfers, vouchers and other such policy devices deriving from New Public Management practices, such as those promoted by World Bank (2003).

populations in China, it had less than the national average number of primary schools and primary school teachers per capita in 2001, almost half the number of regular and senior secondary schools and teachers per capita, and one-quarter the number of vocational schools per capita. This undersupply persists despite relatively high levels of per capita government revenue spent in education, which is largely explained by higher costs of providing education in the Tibetan areas, particularly in terms of much higher salaries than elsewhere in China (mostly with reference to urban schools), and the fact that the education system in the TAR is top-heavy, i.e., tertiary education is oversupplied relative to the rest of China, in contrast to the primary and secondary levels (Fischer 2005a: 65-69).

Regardless of the reasons for these literacy outcomes in both Tibet and elsewhere in China, inter-provincial comparisons reveal several exceptional asymmetries faced by Tibetan areas, both at the lower end of attainment in terms of literacy and at the upper end in terms of secondary education and above. In the first case, Table 1 below disaggregates the 2004 illiteracy rates by rural, town and city. The data is taken from the annual survey on population changes, which is based on the population registered as permanently residing, unlike the 2000 census which made some attempt to include temporary residents (i.e. migrants). As a result, the city and town survey data for the TAR represent a sample that is around three-quarters Tibetan.[30] The category of 'city' in the TAR survey refers to the two main cities of Lhasa and Shigatse (TSY 2005: Table 3-7). The town category is not reported in these statistics for the TAR, although many of the small towns are effectively rural in any case, whereas they are more urban in the more densely populated areas of China. All the Tibetan urban centres in Qinghai, Gansu and Sichuan would be classified as 'towns.'

**Table 1: Illiteracy rates among the population aged 15 and older, 2004 survey**

| | Total | Rural | Town | City | Rural/City |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **TAR** | 44.0% | 42.6% | --- | 47.4% | 0.9 |
| **Qinghai** | 22.1 % | 31.9 % | 9.1 % | 5.9 % | 5.4 |
| **Gansu** | 19.4 % | 25.4 % | 5.3 % | 5.6 % | 4.5 |
| **Sichuan** | 11.5 % | 14.4 % | 6.9 % | 3.6 % | 4.0 |
| **China** | 10.3 % | 13.7 % | 7.7 % | 4.8 % | 2.9 |

Source: CPSY (2005: Tables 1-27, 1-28, 1-29, 1-30)

The exceptionally high level of city illiteracy in the TAR is remarkable; in 2004 it was actually higher than the rural rate (47 versus 43 per cent), which was already very high for China. Obviously, the small city sample of the TAR (n=586) would tend to lead to more substantial measurement errors from year to year in comparison to the larger provinces, although these results are broadly consistent with earlier surveys. Some of these changes might also represent administrative expansions of Lhasa and Shigatse, whereby semi-rural peri-urban areas and their less educated populations are absorbed by the expanding boundaries of these cities.

In contrast, city rates in the other provinces were only small fractions of their respective rural rates and quite close to the national average. Comparisons with older data also show that their lag with the national average was narrowing due to consistent improvements in city rates since 2001. Slower improvements were made in the rural rates of these other provinces, with the result that the ratio of rural/city illiteracy rates rose sharply in most cases, revealing the urban bias in current

[30] More than half of the Chinese in the 2000 census were temporary residents and thus not surveyed in the non-census years. This can be extrapolated by comparing the census data to the data reported from Public Security Department (PSD) sources in the non-census years (see Fischer 2008d: 658-659).

education strategies across China. The TAR was the only exception, in the perverse sense that high rates of urban illiteracy were sustained despite the heavy urban bias in economic strategy.

Out-of-province Han migrants in the TAR are best described by the rates of Sichuan, which were close to the national average and to other core western provinces such as Shaanxi. The most extreme comparison is between the city illiteracy rates of Sichuan and the rural illiteracy rates of the TAR, which is appropriate given that many of the Sichuanese migrants in the TAR emigrate from urban conditions, whereas local urbanisation in the TAR involves migration from Tibetan rural areas. In this case, the rural TAR rate of 42.6 per cent contrasts appallingly with the city Sichuan rate of 3.6 per cent. Iredale et al (2001: 156) measured a similar spread between Tibetan and Han migrants in Lhasa in the mid-1990s. Even in the least extreme comparison, rural Sichuanese are more than three times less likely to be illiterate than city residents in the TAR, at 14 and 47 per cent respectively. This strong educational advantage of (Han) rural migrants over (Tibetan) city residents is an anomaly that is simply not observed anywhere else in China.

In Qinghai, there was a sharp difference between the rural rate, the second highest in the country and similar to the TAR rural rate up to the early 2000s, and the city and town rates, which were much closer to the national norm. This city-rural disparity within Qinghai is plausibly equivalent to the inter-provincial comparison between Sichuan and the TAR given that it essentially reflects the contrast between the urbanised Han northeast core of the province and the Tibetan areas. Similarly, many of the Han (and Muslim and Tibetan) migrants in the Qinghai Tibetan areas emigrate from the northeast core of the province, while Qinghai Tibetans were 91 per cent rural in the 2000 census and likely had education levels very close to those of the TAR on average. Illiteracy for all Tibetans in China (about double the population of Tibetans in the TAR) was identical to the TAR in the 2000 census (see CPSY 2003: Table 2-2), implying that illiteracy rates among Tibetans inside and outside the TAR were almost identical on average.

The severe educational asymmetry between local Tibetans and non-Tibetan migrants is even more evident in Table 2 below, which decomposes the data by sex. A Tibetan woman migrating from the rural areas of the TAR was about 35 times more likely to be illiterate than a male city resident migrating from Sichuan. Inversely, a woman in rural Sichuan was almost 1.7 times more likely to be literate than a permanent-resident man in Lhasa in 2004, despite the fact that she was less than half as likely to be literate than her male counterpart in rural Sichuan. Again, the exceptional anomaly of the Tibetan areas is to be noted; the most educated local cohort (male city permanent residents) is much less educated on average than even the least educated cohort of inter-provincial migrants coming to Tibet and competing in local urban labour markets (female rural residents from Sichuan).

**Table 2: Illiteracy rates among the population aged 15+, by sex, 2004 survey**

| | Total | | Rural | | City | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| TAR | 33.5% | 54.0% | 33.5% | 51.8% | 33.2% | 58.8% |
| Qinghai | 13.6% | 30.9% | 20.1% | 44.1% | 2.8% | 9.1% |
| Gansu | 13.1% | 26.0% | 17.7% | 33.4% | 2.1% | 9.2% |
| Sichuan | 7.2% | 15.8% | 9.3% | 19.7% | 1.5% | 5.6% |
| China | 5.8% | 14.9% | 8.0% | 19.4% | 2.2% | 7.4% |

Source: CPSY (2005: Tables 1-27, 1-28 and 1-30).

The upper end of educational asymmetries can be examined through the data on education levels attained among the population aged six and older (Table 3 below).

No-schooling and illiteracy are treated as synonymous in these data, given that the two terms are used interchangeably from year to year; they generally corroborate the above illiteracy data, except that they are much more consistent from year to year and the implied illiteracy rates are generally lower than the previously cited illiteracy rates. However, for the reasons discussed above, we cannot assume that a child with primary education is necessarily literate, which would explain both the consistency and the discrepancy. Primary education includes literacy classes. Secondary education includes junior and senior middle schools, specialised secondary schools, and vocational schools. Tertiary education includes junior college, university and postgraduates.

**Table 3: Education levels of the population aged 6+ by sex, 2004 survey**

| | 6+ population with education including and above: | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Primary | | | Secondary | | | Tertiary | | |
| | Sub-Total | Male | Female | Sub-Total | Male | Female | Sub-Total | Male | Female |
| TAR | 62.8% | 71.4% | 54.6% | 15.9% | 17.7% | 14.2% | 0.9% | 1.3% | 0.6% |
| Qinghai | 80.2% | 87.4% | 72.6% | 44.5% | 50.0% | 38.7% | 4.5% | 5.2% | 3.8% |
| Gansu | 83.3% | 88.6% | 77.7% | 48.4% | 54.6% | 42.0% | 5.7% | 6.4% | 4.9% |
| Sichuan | 89.8% | 93.6% | 85.9% | 50.0% | 53.8% | 46.2% | 3.6% | 4.1% | 3.1% |
| China | 90.8% | 94.7% | 86.8% | 58.5% | 63.6% | 53.2% | 5.8% | 6.6% | 4.9% |

Source: CPSY (2005: Table 1-23).

In addition to the high levels of illiteracy/no-schooling, the sheer drop-off at the secondary level in the TAR is notable in Table 3. This indicates not only that the TAR was highly illiterate, but skilled (and Chinese-fluent) labour is also in extremely short supply. Only 16 per cent of the TAR population had some form of secondary education in 2004, versus 45 per cent in Qinghai, 48 per cent in Gansu, 50 per cent in Sichuan and 59 per cent nationally. The share of the surveyed population with tertiary levels of education in the TAR was also far lower in 2004 than in all of the other cases. Hence, following the same comparison as before, a woman from even Qinghai was more than twice as likely as a man in the TAR to have some form of secondary schooling, or almost three times as likely to have some form of tertiary education.

**Table 4: Education levels of population aged six+, rural and city, 2004 survey**

| | 6+ population with education including and above: | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Rural | | | City | | |
| | Primaru | Secondary | Tertiary | Primary | Secondary | Tertiary |
| TAR | 64.1% | 13.1% | 0.4% | 59.5% | 22.6% | 2.3% |
| Qinghai | 72.2% | 29.5% | 0.4% | 94.4% | 69.2% | 9.3% |
| Gansu | 78.7% | 37.4% | 0.6% | 94.6% | 76.3% | 18.7% |
| Sichuan | 87.4% | 41.1% | 0.5% | 96.6% | 73.0% | 11.9% |
| China | 88.2% | 48.3% | 0.9% | 95.4% | 76.3% | 15.1% |

Source: CPSY (2005: Tables 1-24 and 1-26).

According to the rural/city breakdown (Table 4 above), a rural Sichuanese was almost twice as likely to have secondary education as a TAR city resident. Only in the area of tertiary education is a TAR city resident more likely to have the upper hand against the rural dweller from Sichuan. Nonetheless, a city resident from Sichuan is more than five times more likely to have tertiary education than his or her city Tibetan counterpart in the TAR. Again, these types of asymmetry are simply not observed across any other provinces in China.

## 3. Institutionalist analysis of ethnically exclusionary processes

The economic and educational inequalities discussed in the previous two sections highlight a variety of structural disjunctures underlying rapid economic growth. The following section explores the exclusionary implications of these disjunctures through an institutionalist analysis based on more qualitative research findings.[31] This interdisciplinary synthesis is essential for understanding actual exclusionary processes; the previous quantitative analysis offers clues to these processes by revealing the spaces within which we might expect to find exclusions operating, but it does not actually provide a means of identifying exclusions. In other words, a disparity in itself does not necessarily imply exclusion. For instance, if farmers choose to remain in farming, they do not necessarily face exclusion despite poorer incomes or educational outcomes. Similarly, rural people migrating to cities and towns might face much stronger exclusions than those remaining behind even though they also tend to be upwardly mobile, with better incomes and education on average, as noted in the last section. Following this example, the purpose of studying exclusion is not to identify whether urbanising migrants are excluded in an existential sense. Indeed, they are definitely more 'included' into the urban economy than their rural compatriots, even while simultaneously facing much stronger exclusionary pressures. In this sense, exclusion and inclusion work together dialectically, in that exclusion plays a role in determining the subordinate integration of migrants into the urban economy, whether or not this results in greater income. Indeed, migration might lead to an increase in exploitative or degrading work performed by migrants; the fact that this would be reflected as rising incomes tells us nothing about the exploitation or degradation involved in such work.

This approach to the study of exclusion differs from dominant approaches in the literature which tend to focus on the identification of excluded states by way of deprivations or disparities, implying that exclusion is more or less synonymous with poverty (see Fischer 2008a). As a way to step beyond this dichotomous view, an interdisciplinary approach helps to identify institutional modes of integration and/or segregation operating across social hierarchies, in ways that can reveal biases and advantages operating among comparable cohorts with comparable education levels and employment expectations, such as between Tibetan and Han high school and university graduates, most of whom do not register in any deprivation or disparity measures. Understanding exclusion in this way is important precisely because it sheds light on other related social processes such as 'ethnic' nationalism and conflict.

As background to the overall setting, western development strategies in the Tibetan areas can be seen to have accentuated linguistic, cultural and political modes of bias deriving from characteristics of the dominant cultural and political group, such as Chinese fluency, Chinese work cultures, and connections to government or business networks in China proper. These modes of bias can be observed across a variety of structural disjunctures and institutionalised patterns of integration. In terms of structural disjunctures, educational inequalities between locals and inter-provincial migrants in the Tibetan areas obviously disadvantage locals in urban employment

[31] 'Institutionalist' here refers to the modalities of social ordering (i.e. the instituting of social order), as per sociological or historical institutionalist approaches (see Hall and Taylor 1996). The definition of institutions that is popular in the recent political science literature is included within this broader understanding, e.g. the formal and informal rules and norms guiding regularised social interactions, although the liberal bias within this latter definition is also to be noted; violations of rules and norms can play as much of a role in social ordering as their observance.

from the outset. This 'original' disadvantage is exacerbated by a striking misfit between the employment demands of growth, which are strongly driven by urban services and large-scale construction projects, and the actual skills among the large majority of Tibetans, most of whom have either no education or only primary level. Migration reinforces this disjuncture by saturating the demands for skilled and/or educated labour within the structurally polarised growth model, thereby enabling its extension while also allowing for equivalent skills formation at the local level to remain under-prioritised. Local educational improvements at the primary level do little to overcome this disjuncture in the short to medium term given that they take at least 10 years or more to affect labour supply.

These structural disjunctures are compounded (or, in many cases, caused) by the institutionalised patterns of subsidised integration into China. The bulk of lower-skilled employment that is generated by subsidised growth is concentrated in sectors targeted by subsidies, such as tourism and other urban services, construction run by out-of-province companies, and commerce. The subsidies themselves are mostly directed through state channels centred outside the region. Consequently, the channels and targeted sectors confer strong advantage to workers and entrepreneurs with Chinese fluency, Chinese work cultures, and connections to government or business networks in China proper. Conversely, employment creation has been the sparsest in rural-based off-farm industries and services oriented towards indigenous demand, in which Chinese fluency would not necessarily be a competitive factor. Indeed, this linguistic mode of bias constitutes an important cultural dimension of how education confers advantage within a setting of occupation and cultural dominance.

As a result, the majority of locals with no education above the primary level (about 84 per cent of the TAR in 2004) are severely disadvantaged in competing with out-of-province migrants. Indeed, these aspects of disadvantage in the lower labour strata are well inferred by the various indicators of disparity, as discussed in the previous section. Implicit within these data is the qualitative understanding that functional proficiency in Chinese mostly starts at the secondary level in Tibetan areas. This implies that the 84 per cent of Tibetans with no secondary education also probably had little or no proficiency in Chinese and thus few significant connections to the Han Chinese business circuits dominating most urban economic opportunities. While there is little doubt that some increased opportunities for these Tibetans accompanied the deluge of subsidies, these would have been concentrated in subordinate positions (e.g. in the lowest skill levels of construction on Chinese-run job sites) or else in protected niches (e.g. servicing Tibetan clientele or supplying Tibetan demand). In most other areas of the urban economy, lesser-educated Han Chinese migrants (relative to lowland standards) would easily out-compete such Tibetans. Obviously, as noted above, Tibetans in rural areas do not have to contend with these competitive pressures from migrants. Rather, it is primarily the upwardly mobile urbanising rural migrants, together with the less-educated half of urban residents, who are the most confronted by these types of competitive pressures.

Therefore, expansion in the urban secondary and tertiary sectors in the Tibetan areas has, to a significant degree, been absorbed by inter-regional migrants, both skilled and unskilled, rather than by local rural migrants or the urban poor, ironically short-circuiting the whole logic behind urbanisation as a means to 'modernise' Tibetan labour. These processes of marginalisation in urban employment are difficult if not impossible to portray with the publicly available employment data, given that these are not broken down by ethnicity and, in any case, they do not capture much of the temporary migrant labour nor do they accurately represent unemployment even

among permanently registered residents.[32] Nonetheless, my own field observations and interviews with Tibetan and Chinese scholars and officials, ordinary Tibetans, and INGO workers strongly suggest that unemployment is already a substantial and possibly increasing burden among urban Tibetans.

### *3.1 Exclusionary processes at upper labour strata*

In contrast to this more general situation facing the large majority of Tibetans, the upper labour strata in the Tibetan urban areas are essentially dominated by state-sector employment (i.e. staff and workers in state-owned units). Hence, exclusionary processes in these strata are structured by institutional modalities within such state-sector employment. Since the early 2000s, these have played out through the implementation of state-sector employment reforms (i.e. the end of guaranteed public employment for graduates and the introduction of competitive systems of recruitment), on top of the continuing institutional norms of political and economic subordination and linguistic and cultural biases implicit within the wider development strategies, and persistent structural disparities in qualitative educational outcomes at similar levels of educational attainment. The synergy of these institutional and structural factors, some changing and others not, effectively reinforces linguistic and cultural modes of competition and bias within state-sector employment. This leads to disadvantages for even those Tibetans with higher levels of educational attainment (i.e. those with some level of secondary education and above, at around 16 per cent of the TAR population in 2004) and who are thus best suited to overcome the disadvantages described above, in that they are the most likely to meet the educational and linguistic attributes of advantage relative to the average Han migrant.

Therein lays the fallacy of simple intergroup comparisons, because effectively these educated Tibetans are not competing with the average Han migrant for the same types of employment, but with equivalent cohorts of equally if not more educated Han migrants. In other words, the apparent advantages of educated Tibetans with respect to lower-skilled employment, as indicated by the comparisons of educational attainment, are irrelevant because these lower employment strata are not the targets of their employment expectations or strategies. Rather, exclusion operates in the employment strata that they do target (i.e. state-sector employment) through similar modes of bias as those operating at lower strata (i.e. quantity and/or quality of educational outcomes and linguistic biases), albeit through different institutional mechanisms.

For instance, the first section discussed the absolute and relative reduction of Tibetans employed in the state sector of the TAR and the corresponding increase in non-Tibetans (Han) employed. The processes underlying this sudden shift in the ethnic balance of state-sector employment do not necessarily imply explicit discrimination; they might be as much circumstantial as intentional. The reductions in state-sector employment in the TAR, cited above, may have been targeted at employment categories with higher representations of Tibetans, such as loss-making state-owned enterprises, without explicitly intending to discriminate against Tibetans per se. Similarly, the increases in employment may have been targeted at categories where Chinese representation is the highest, such as in departments related to the construction of the Qinghai-TAR railway or in security-related government posts. Nonetheless, the result is effectively discriminatory in the sense that it results in

[32] See Hussain (2003: 21-24) for more detail on the problems with official unemployment data.

discriminatory outcomes regardless of whether discrimination is specifically or entirely intended.

This is all the more striking because the restructuring of state-sector employment was likely the result of generalised national initiatives by the central government to restructure, rationalise and standardise state-sector employment.[33] Rationalisation refers to the implementation of means-based entry requirements for public employment. Standardisation refers to bringing employment, management, accounting, contracting, production or other standards in line with the rest of the country. As with most major policy decisions stemming from Beijing, these initiatives were implemented with reference to the core regions of China, according to criteria determined externally to the Tibetan areas. This tendency is reinforced by the intensified reliance in the Tibetan areas on external flows of capital and labour for the upper layers of the local economy, as analysed in the first section with regard to the TAR. This externalised dependence in turn feeds back into demands for increased rationalisation and standardisation within the bureaucratised modes of accumulation due to concerns from the centre regarding accountability.[34] Indeed, principles of standardisation might be applied even more stringently in the TAR than in other parts of China where local governments are more likely and able to subvert such principles to their own needs and agendas.

As with exclusionary dynamics at the lower end of the labour hierarchy, these policies effectively discriminate by way of educational disadvantage. The group with less educational advantage (i.e. in terms of quality of education, status of degree and schooling, or linguistic ability) loses out in the shift towards principles of greater procedural equality. Furthermore, the implicit dominance of one group (Han Chinese) within rationalisation and standardisation accentuates this imbalance through linguistic biases that are imposed in selection criteria (e.g. use of Chinese in examinations) or cultural networks that informally underlie the practice of power in political and economic units (Ch. *guanxi*). For example, exams for permanent public sector employment, which were introduced in the TAR and other Tibetan areas in the early to mid-2000s, are conducted entirely in Chinese, as per the national standard. Many local Tibetans and foreign observers in the TAR noted that this placed Tibetans competing for such positions at a distinct disadvantage, particularly those who might have excellent Tibetan language skills (and are thus ideally suited for governing Tibetans), but mediocre or limited Chinese language skills.[35]

Employment reforms have similarly intensified competition in public employment throughout China.[36] However, as analysed in Section 2 above, the situation in the Tibetan areas is unique due to the educational asymmetry between locals and migrants, whereby urban Tibetan locals have much worse education levels on average than incoming Han migrants, even Han migrants emigrating from rural areas. Interestingly, a similar tension exists between Tibetans in the remote pastoral

[33] For instance, see Saich (2004) for discussion of the national reforms in 2003, which cut 1.5 million state-sector jobs, mostly at higher administrative levels and in the richer provinces.

[34] Similar dynamics plausibly underlie the trend towards harmonisation of international aid among bilateral and multilateral donors at the international level.

[35] This was noted repeatedly in interviews with INGO staff and Tibetan scholars in Lhasa during fieldwork in November 2004. Similar dynamics were noted in interviews in Qinghai in 2003 and 2004.

[36] For instance, this was noted in one interview with three Han government officials in Sichuan in September 2007. They therefore suggested that the problems that I was describing in the Tibetan areas of Sichuan were not particular to Tibetans but were a general quandary throughout China. This is true, although the educational asymmetry between urban permanent residents and migrants is not.

areas of Golok or Yushu in Qinghai, where better-educated non-local Tibetans from the farming areas of Rebgong, Chentsa or Xunhua squeeze out less-educated locals in competition over local public employment.[37] Thus, in the context of increasing migration from higher to lower-educated regions, large educational lags combined with inferior cultural or social connections to regional centres result in severe disadvantages for locals competing for public employment, educated urbanites included.

This is the inverse of the norm in most areas of China, where urban residents benefit from a natural form of protection in coveted upper strata employment given their higher education levels in comparison with rural or western migrants (on average). As a result, reforms that promote more merit-based selection procedures for public employment tend to privilege local urban residents elsewhere in China. In these situations, migrants mainly intensify competition at the lower levels of the labour hierarchy, which is a problem for the erstwhile privileged urban working classes, many of whom are now laid off (Ch. *xiagang*), but much less so for the new educated elites.[38] In addition, urban governments elsewhere in China have had more autonomy to protect or promote local skilled labour.[39] Tibetan areas have had very little autonomy in this regard given their particular situation of political disempowerment combined with austerity in public employment more generally, particularly outside the TAR. The exceptionality of these educational and political asymmetries reflects the observation made by Emily Yeh that Han migrants in Lhasa consider themselves of higher 'quality' (Ch. *suzhi*) than local urban residents, in contrast to everywhere else in China where migrants are generally considered to be of lower 'quality' than local urban residents.[40]

Quantitative literacy rates or educational attainments in this sense underestimate the qualitative disadvantages faced by Tibetans in their increasingly Sinicised urban economies, given that they include those who are literate in only Tibetan. In other words, one can find very literate Tibetan elites with limited Chinese skills (more so in the TAR, less so in Qinghai or other areas of eastern Tibet). Indeed, if knowledge of Tibetan were a prerequisite for public employment in the TAR, Tibetans would have an obvious advantage over Chinese in finding employment in the public sector. This argument influenced the policies of the 1980s, when the CCP leadership emphasised ethnic competence, based on the idea that local people knew best how to implement party policy. However, under current policies, non-hegemonic groups (Tibetans and Muslims) are left with the choice to assimilate or be excluded from privilege, yet their capability to assimilate is inhibited by their severe lags in quality of education. Ultimately, such policies further encourage the external orientation of institutional incentives given the competitive demand for Chinese-fluent labour.

[37] This was noted to me by Susan Costello during a field visit to Darlak, Golok Prefecture, in May 2004. Much local conflict pertains to local and non-local Tibetans, symbolised by the divisions between 'nomads' and 'farmers'. Non-local 'farmers' play a dominant role in public employment given that they tend to be better educated, more Sinicised and better connected than locals due to the proximity of their home counties to Xining.

[38] Again, for detailed analyses of these issues in China, see Li (2002), Guo and Chang (2006), Li (2008) and Liu (2008). As mentioned in the introduction, for an excellent survey of these issues see Roulleau-Berger (2009).

[39] For instance, see Solinger (1999; 2002), Zhang (2001), Hussain (2003), and Lee and Warner (2005a; 2005b).

[40] Emily Yeh made this argument at a conference in Oslo in December 2008 based on research with Han residents in Chengdu who had recently returned from Lhasa. For similar earlier expressions, see Yeh (2007).

Educational inequality need not have produced such results if the government remained committed to policies of proportional ethnic representation in public employment, as had been the earlier reform consensus. Tibetan representation in state-sector staff and worker employment in the TAR reached a peak of 89 per cent in 1982, just after Hu Yaobang encouraged Tibetanisation of government employment and permitted the departure of a large contingent of Han cadres. This high level was quickly reversed the following year and fell back down to around 70 per cent, where it remained throughout most of the 1980s and 1990s. The change in 2002-03 was therefore unprecedented throughout the entire reform period and marks a distinct departure from the implicit institutional compromise between Tibetan elites and the state in the first two decades of reform. More generally, these state-sector employment dynamics reflect shifts in the dominant paradigms of minority area governance in China rather than Tibetan capabilities,[41] given that Tibetan education levels were much worse on average in the 1980s and 1990s than in the 2000s. Thus, the implementation of labour market reforms in these areas has reinforced the widespread perception that the Chinese leadership does not trust the loyalty of Tibetan cadres and is antagonistic to even the limited forms of political space that had been maintained up to the early 2000s.

### *3.2 The case of employment reforms in Qinghai*

The Tibetan areas in Qinghai provide a particularly illustrative case of these dynamics related to the implementation of the national reforms of state-sector employment. According to my discussions with a variety of officials, scholars, teachers and students,[42] the phasing out of guaranteed graduate employment elsewhere in China started in the early 1990s. In Qinghai, the reform had been planned since 1997 and was implemented in 2001 for university students and in 2002 for high school students.[43] Prior to this time, employment for graduates had been more or less guaranteed by either county governments or various work units (i.e. a medical student would be given a job placement by the health department, a student from the 'normal' teachers schools by the education department, etc), although students could opt out if offered private-sector employment. Employment allocation since 2001 has become more competitive and, thus, purportedly more meritocratic and rationalised. Each work unit has a fixed number of posts and hires through open competition. The delayed implementation of these reforms was in line with the typically gradualist manner of applying national reforms to the western or poorer provinces more slowly than in central or coastal provinces, and in deference to discretion at the provincial level.[44]

[41] Notably, the timing of the employment restructuring in the TAR, particularly with respect to cadre employment, also suggests links with the new leadership of President Hu Jintao in Beijing. As party secretary in the TAR during the Lhasa uprisings in March 1989, Hu ordered martial law and was associated with the end of the relatively liberal period of the 1980s.

[42] In particular, I had several key interviews between June and August 2004 with one senior Chinese official of Malho Prefecture, two senior Tibetan officials of Rebgong County (both meetings in Rongwo Town, Rebgong County), and a group of three Tibetan officials of Chabcha County, four Tibetan high school teachers and one Tibetan graduate student in Chabcha Town. In addition, over the course of my fieldwork I had numerous occasions to discuss these issues with high school students and teachers in Rongwo and Xining.

[43] Information regarding the timing of the reform is based on my interviews mentioned in the previous footnote.

[44] Apparently, these reforms were delayed in the Tibet Autonomous Region, the most sensitive of all provinces in China, until 2006 (personal communications with Melvyn Goldstein, October 2007).

Those affected most by the reforms tended to be graduates with a medium quality of senior-secondary or tertiary education. For instance, a senior Han official from Malho Prefecture noted that the bottom range of students tend to drop out as early as lower middle school and return to work in farming or herding, or else engage in self-employed trades or small-scale business. The top students (mostly Han) tend to leave the area, either for universities elsewhere in China or for jobs in larger cities such as Xining or beyond. The next top students, those who might not have succeeded in entering universities outside the province yet who nonetheless have a strong provincial university education in the mainstream (Han) system, tend to return to the area and compete relatively well in the new labour market.

The middle range of students, particularly those from the minority high schools and universities,[45] is squeezed by these new competitive conditions. This range represents the bulk of Tibetan (and Muslim) students, especially those from rural areas who are attracted (or restricted) to the minority educational track due to the lower fees and entry requirements in the minority system. As background, the minority education system is largely viewed as a means to gradually bring about the assimilation of Tibetan students into a Chinese-dominated system and thus there is a humanities bias in minority education that derives from this official attitude.[46] Despite functioning as minority schools, the focus in these schools is on learning Chinese language and Chinese subjects and only limited content in Tibetan is offered. Moreover, Tibetan content has been progressively cut back in recent years due to the competitive pressures induced by labour reforms, which have increased the demand for Chinese content. On the other hand, subjects that would be useful for the transitional context in Tibet, such as vocational, managerial or scientific education, are severely undersupplied compared to other western provinces, as noted previously. These biases were not pressing problems in the past so long as graduate employment was guaranteed, but under the new competitive system of employment the value of degrees from minority schools is depreciated both by the mainstream school system as well as by employers, given that competition places a premium on the perceived quality of education (defined by the standard of the mainstream Han culture). Thus the two-tiered education system, which since the early 1980s had been an important part of the political compromise offered to minority elites in minority autonomous areas, is increasingly perceived as leading to fast-track assimilation as well as redundancy and marginalisation.

It is important to note that many of these upwardly aspiring Tibetan youths possess among the highest levels of education in their respective communities and come from families that can afford such levels of education, particularly at the tertiary level, where tuition fees far exceed average rural per capita incomes in these areas.[47] In

[45] in the Tibetan areas outside the TAR, a system of minority education, from primary up to tertiary levels, parallels the mainstream Han schools, which will be discussed further below. See Yi (2005a; 2005b) for two excellent studies of these parallel systems in Rebgong.

[46] On this point, all of the Tibetans with whom I discussed these issues during field work in 2003 and 2004 expressed the same contention, including more than 20 teachers, more than 100 students, 10 scholars, eight officials from county or prefecture education departments, and five Western scholars and INGO workers with long-term experience working in education in Tibet. This perception was shared in all Tibetan areas that I visited. I therefore take this insight as common knowledge, deriving from the fact that the minority education system is explicitly focused on assimilation and does have a humanities bias. Also see Bass (1998; 2005) and Yi (2005a; 2005b).

[47] For instance, in the case of one family interviewed in Chentsa County in 2004, their daughter had just entered the Qinghai minority nationality university in Xining, for which they were paying a total of 7,000 yuan per year through borrowing. Average per capita rural household income in 2004 was 1,958 yuan.

the case of rural students, many are the first of their household to reach a secondary or tertiary level of education and they therefore carry their own as well as their family's aspiration to join the relatively elite workforce of public employees. The senior official mentioned above admitted that it was precisely this middle range of students that experienced the most dislocation under the new system, given that they had difficulty competing for higher-status jobs but they did not want to work in lower-status jobs, particularly in jobs considered unworthy of a senior secondary or tertiary education. These perceptions were confirmed to me repeatedly in numerous interviews and conversations with scores of Tibetan high school and university students or recent graduates from the minority education system, who consistently stressed that it was very difficult to obtain appropriate employment that corresponded to their level and type of education.

In this context, many of my interviewees commented that wealthy Tibetans, and in particular Tibetan cadres, are increasingly sending their children to mainstream Chinese schools, which have higher entry criteria and are more expensive than the minority schools (although even minority high schools and universities are very expensive for the average rural Tibetan). Those who cannot afford the mainstream schools are left with the reinforced impression that secondary and tertiary minority education is of diminishing value, given that it is no longer able to secure coveted public sector jobs and is thus no longer worth the investment. As a result, in the face of increasing tuition fees and the chronic unemployment of graduates, many poorer rural families are opting out of secondary education or, at the very least, placing it at a lower level of priority within their household livelihood strategies.[48] Therefore, the issue of educational inequality has increasingly become intra as well as interethnic.

These various disjunctures present a catch-22 between the choices of integration or segregation, both of which ultimately place educated Tibetans at a disadvantage within the context of intensified competition over the limited employment opportunities. In recent years, there has definitely been a strong and self-aware push from within Tibetan society to educate their young people. However, Tibetans educated in Chinese and in mainstream schools are disadvantaged within these schools on linguistic and cultural grounds, as well as by less supportive conditions for competing in education.[49] Yet, while the minority education system is more accessible to Tibetans, the lower standards in these schools, particularly according to the needs of an increasingly competitive commercial economy, leave graduates at a strong disadvantage after graduation, compared to graduates from the mainstream schools.

Furthermore, since the reforms, official government employment strategies for unemployed high school and university graduates, as well as for laid-off staff or workers, have largely focused on encouraging self-employment or small private business start-ups. For instance, during a visit to Chentsa in June 2004, I interviewed one young unemployed male Tibetan university graduate who was attending a county-run workshop on how to set up and run a small business, based on ILO course material on this subject translated into Chinese. Attendance at these workshops was required in order to receive unemployment benefits of 150 yuan a

[48] Most of the teachers, scholars, officials and field workers mentioned in footnote 46 noted these trends.

[49] For instance, Chinese middle-class children in Xining or Rebgong at the secondary level typically receive private tuition throughout their summer holidays, whereas most of the rural Tibetan students that I interviewed, particularly the young women, were required to perform farm or herding work during these same holidays and few besides those from elite families could afford extra tuition.

month. This system of welfare conjoined with training was new, coinciding with the end of guaranteed employment.

This strategy effectively promotes a downward move into stigmatised intermediate positions of the labour hierarchy, such as in private urban services and commerce. In particular, these intermediate positions in Tibetan areas are precisely those that were traditionally and newly dominated by Muslims. In light of Tibetan stigmatisation of these types of activity and of Muslims,[50] these programmes likely added insult to unemployed status or upward aspirations by implying that such relatively privileged Tibetans should rub shoulders and compete with Muslims over common types of activity deemed the domain of the uncultivated. Combined with the more general disadvantages faced in obtaining employment, such experiences create a powerful fusion of feelings of discrimination, dislocation and indignation. Indeed, in recent years, the fusion has often mutated into forms of anti-Muslim activism by Tibetans in Qinghai.[51]

Disadvantages in obtaining employment also intensify out-migration from these Tibetan areas. For instance, five different rural families that I interviewed in Qinghai in summer 2004 were planning to send one of their teenagers to India, even though the teenager was already successfully progressing in their secondary schooling. All five families explained that this was due to the cost of education. When I noted that the cost of illegal refugee migration to India was even greater, two answered that 'the Dalai Lama' was taking care of the students in India through his schools, while three replied that the county-level secondary education was worthless for securing employment after graduation. Four of the families also noted that the minority education system was causing their children to lose their culture. In other words, the catch-22 between integration and segregation as perceived in various ways by these families reinforced their impression that development was undermining Tibetan society, particularly through the assimilation of its most educated youth into mainstream Chinese society while at the same time marginalising them from respectable employment opportunities.

These dilemmas, which were described to me in a very similar manner by most of the Tibetan teachers, scholars and officials I interviewed, led most of these respondents to the logical conclusion that increased autonomy at county and prefecture levels is required in order to reverse such disadvantages in local employment, albeit in ways that are in accordance with the China National Minority Regional Autonomy Law (adopted in 1984). For instance, Tibetan language proficiency could be made a requirement for employment in local governments, which would be an affirmative action stipulation permitted under the 1984 law. Ideally, this would be supported by an integrated regional Tibetan education system and curriculum, consolidated across all of the Tibetan areas in China in order to achieve a scale necessary for institutional self-sufficiency. Notably, in explaining these solutions to me, my respondents explicitly or implicitly echoed the advocacy of several Tibetan leaders inside Tibet, particularly the late Panchen Lama, who argued in the 1980s for precisely these uses of the National Minority Law as a means to support effective rather than merely nominal minority nationality autonomy in China.[52] They also echoed the ongoing

[50] See Fischer (2005b; 2008b; 2008e) on the stigmatisation of Muslims and of these forms of work.
[51] See Fischer (2005b; 2008b).
[52] Much of my understanding of the Panchen Lama's non-secessionist nationalist advocacy comes from extensive conversations in 2000 and 2001 with a exiled ex-monk from Tashi Lhunpoe, the head monastery of the Panchen Lama in Shigatse, TAR, during my time in the Tibetan refugee community in India. This was supplemented with many more discussions with

advocacy for increased Tibetan autonomy by the Dalai Lama, including his emphasis on the importance of modern secular education for preserving Tibetan culture.[53]

In the course of my fieldwork in 2004, one event occurred that is representative of such advocacy. On 21 September 2004, a demonstration of at least 200 mostly Tibetan students started outside local government offices in Dawu, the prefecture capital of Golok in Qinghai. The protest was peaceful and was supported by local officials through the provisioning of tents and food (RFA 2004). Based on my own further inquiries with Golok Tibetans in Xining, the protest continued into November. The purpose of the protest was to demand employment, particularly considering that the students' families had been encouraged to pay high college fees with the promise that their children would secure good jobs after graduating. The students therefore claimed that officials had failed to deliver on these promises and were instead giving jobs to outside candidates brought into the area. They demanded that local applicants should be given preference (ibid). The contestation underlying this event refers precisely to the employment reform in 2001, which was implemented while these students were studying, as well as to austerity in public employment over the same period. A similar event in Lhasa took place in 2006, in conjunction with the beginning of the labour reforms in that province. According to RFA (2006), a group of graduates protested after only two of 100 public jobs where given to ethnic Tibetans following an open exam competition (conducted in Chinese). Ironically, in the face of marketising labour reforms, these events appear to signal the predilection of relatively elite Tibetans within China to advocate for a return to earlier socialist legacies of labour market regulation as a means for assuring preferential and representative treatment in public employment.

## 4. Conclusion: dislocating hierarchies and conflict

In the context of educational inequalities and urban labour market reforms, the minority education system of the Tibetan areas, while originally devised to offer preferential treatment to minorities, ironically results in a catch-22 for minority groups between assimilation and segregation. On the one hand, they are educationally disadvantaged in the mainstream system due to linguistic or cultural biases, or even economically disadvantaged due to the higher costs of such education compared to the minority system. On the other hand, the segregated option ultimately leads to later disadvantage in urban employment, given that the value or content of minority education is devalued by the dominant group. This situation has been exacerbated by the fact that employment reforms curtailed guaranteed or preferential employment in favour of more meritocratic principles (defined according to the dominant group), combined with intensified inter-group competition over employment opportunities due to increased migration.

Improving absolute education outcomes does little to improve this institutional disjuncture between education and employment systems; if anything, it exacerbates

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Tibetans in Amdo during my fieldwork in 2004, such as those mentioned in the footnotes above. For academic references, see Schwartz (1994), Hilton (1999), Barnett (1998; 2006), and TIN (2004).

[53] Again, my knowledge of this mostly comes from having attended numerous teachings by the Dalai Lama during my time in the Tibetan refugee community in India from 1995 to 2001. In particular, several thousand Tibetans from Tibet usually legally or illegally cross the border and attend his annual Spring Teachings, or his occasional teachings and empowerments held in various locations in India. During these events, the Dalai Lama usually talks at length about the importance of modern secular education as a means of preserving Tibetan culture and identity.

it. Indeed, the end of preferential employment strategies risks accelerating the redundancy of the minority system precisely at a time when education policy is pushing for an increase in absolute education outcomes within this same minority system. Within this context, urban employment exclusion increasingly pivots on axes determined by the changing qualitative aspects of education demanded by urban employers, such as language ability or status of degree. Logically, minority (non-secessionist) nationalist responses to this have increasingly advocated for local minority control over employment. The impasse highlights the very valid importance of designing educational strategies in conjunction with urban employment strategies, along with the need for effective political representation and decision-making by minority groups within these designs.

These insights, particularly at upper strata of local labour hierarchies, put into question the mainstream human development focus on absolute levels of education as a means of addressing the exclusion of ethnic minorities in the context of social and economic transition. The research instead directs attention to the structuring of both quantitative and qualitative educational inequalities among comparable cohorts with similar types of employment expectation in their respective labour hierarchies. For this, structural disjunctures must be examined, not simply to identify disparities, but in order to directly and/or indirectly identify the spaces in which we might expect to find exclusion operating. Further insight then requires an interdisciplinary institutionalist exploration of the modes of integration operating within these spaces. Exclusion in this sense is not the same as a disparity, in that a disparity merely indicates the potential for disadvantages to actualise in the context of polarised social encounters. Nor is exclusion necessarily a disadvantage, in the sense that exclusionary processes, whether structurally or institutionally determined, set the conditions for disadvantages to be actualised. Disadvantages, like exclusions, are relative to the social strata in which a person wishes or needs to enter and/or participate; exclusionary obstructions or repulsions faced in attempts to enter or participate thereby set the terms of disadvantage within these social strata, although not necessarily in other strata.

Indeed, such an approach brings to light the importance of differentiating exclusion from poverty (even relative poverty) given that exclusionary processes can occur vertically throughout a social hierarchy, among the poor and the non-poor, and in many cases these processes might intensify with movements out of poverty, such as during urbanisation or other forms of migration. Indeed, the most politically contentious exclusions are often those that occur among relatively elite and/or upwardly mobile sections of a population. Therefore, the methodological challenge that faces studies of exclusion, as with the horizontal inequality approach (i.e. Stewart 2002), lies in finding ways to measure structural disjunctures and institutional modes of integration that move beyond either absolute measures, as per mainstream approaches to human development, or relative (i.e. inequality) measures, given that both are only capable of identifying potential exclusions occurring at the bottom of a social hierarchy.[54]

Along these lines, the Tibetan context suggests that exclusionary processes are particularly significant for Tibetan elites given the potential loss of both position and dignity. Many of these elites who have positioned themselves as junior partners within Chinese rule have undoubtedly been better placed than many commoners to weather the dislocations caused by recent developments. However, the relative employment security that they managed to maintain up to the 1990s has since been

[54] For more detail on the implications of these insights for the study of exclusion, see Fischer (2008a).

considerably eroded, with no guarantee of similar security for their progeny. Instead, the future offers the threat of downward mobility for many in the local social hierarchy. Government strategies of self-employment and small business start-ups potentially irk the dignity of these once-privileged Tibetans, as well as that of upwardly aspiring graduates, if not openly insulting them by suggesting that, after all of their education and/or privilege, they should compete shoulder to shoulder on an equal level with Muslims and low-cultured Han migrants in a variety of socially scorned activities.

Thus, precisely as the state made stronger efforts to expand education, it also moved towards a stronger assimilationist position together with strong exclusionary pressures in labour markets. Ultimately, the situation breeds considerable frustration and alienation, while the additional elite option of full assimilation further accentuates class polarisation among Tibetans themselves. In particular, the seemingly dead-end scenario reinforces the belief among many quarters of both common and elite Tibetans that the only solution is found in nationalist (although not necessarily secessionist) politics, i.e. increased local control over education and employment in order to create the conditions whereby Tibetan-prioritised education can be supported by Tibetan-prioritised employment.

In other words, within these modes of integration predicated by the assimilating drives of the state, there is a tight synchronicity between experiences of exclusion and contestation. These experiences are most notable at the middle and upper levels of the urban labour hierarchy, i.e. among those who have been able to afford secondary and tertiary education (which mostly takes place in urban areas), or who can afford unemployed status (or to support an unemployed family member in an urban area). In contrast, perhaps those who face least exclusion are those who have decided to remain in rural areas and to tie their fortunes to the fate of agriculture, and who are typically considered among the poorest in contemporary China. While such poverty is deserving of our normative attention, exclusion among the non-poor is deserving of our analytical attention precisely because of its importance in determining the trajectories of various social processes such as conflict.

**Methodological Appendix**

This study is derived from a larger interdisciplinary research project examining Chinese development strategies in Tibet. Given limited access to data and the difficulties of conducting field work, quantitative and qualitative research methods were iterated in an attempt to innovate a research method capable of examining politically sensitive issues within a tightly controlled field setting characterised by occupation and repressed political dissent.

Quantitative data were mostly obtained from publicly available official statistical sources, such as the 2000 census tabulations, the China Population Statistics Yearbook from various years, and the China (and various provincial) Statistical Yearbook from various years. While the precise accuracy of these official sources is often doubted, the alternative of conducting independent household surveys was impossible given the political situation. However, in defence of these data sources, I have generally found that they corroborate fieldwork in terms of representing broad structural trends over time. The issue of precise accuracy was therefore not an overwhelming obstacle for the inductive nature of quantitative analysis required for this study.

The data is nonetheless limited by what has and has not been divulged in official sources. Outside of population censuses, official Chinese sources do not disaggregate data by ethnicity. Thus some creative extrapolation is often required in order to circumvent the data limitations and to tease out insights from the available data. This includes using the rural data for the TAR, which represents an almost entirely Tibetan experience, as a proxy for the general experience of Tibetans outside the TAR. The rural data of the other Chinese provinces containing Tibetan autonomous areas is overwhelmed by the population weight of non-Tibetans in the non-Tibetan areas of the respective provinces. Using the TAR data to approximate broad trends outside the TAR is arguably a valid approach, at least with respect to rural areas, given strong similarities across Tibetan areas and stark differences between these areas and everywhere else in China in terms of topography, population density, patterns of land-use and livelihood, levels and composition of average rural household incomes, education levels, and health indices. Nonetheless, effort has been made throughout this study to find suitable sub-provincial data for Tibetan areas outside the TAR in order to render this proxy method more rigorous.

Similarly, the qualitative methods of this study were somewhat eclectic given the broad scale and political sensitivity of the issues researched. Formal surveys were not possible and thus the field methods were basically ethnographic in nature. Nonetheless, a wide variety of field sites was sampled, each with much less depth than would be normally accorded by purely ethnographic methods. This approach was taken partly to avoid spending too much time in each community for political reasons, and also partly as a means to trace broader processes of circulation across the regional Tibetan system. The resultant fieldwork was analysed along the lines of Grounded Theory (i.e., Glaser 1992), in the sense that the commonalities or similarities that appeared throughout the fieldwork have been emphasised as a means to generate deeper insight into patterns found in the quantitative data and also to guide new lines of quantitative (and qualitative) inquiry, up until a point where no new data, whether quantitative or qualitative, substantially alters or challenges the emerging theory. Again, this interdisciplinary systemic approach offers particular scientific value even though it requires some creative eclecticism. While it is true that there are enormous variations across Tibet and even between two valleys, strong commonalities can nonetheless be observed across this cultural and topographic

region the size of Western Europe, giving credence to indigenous notions of Tibet that transcend modern political boundaries.

The fieldwork included 12 months spent in Tibet and China between June 2003 and January 2005, and two subsequent one-month visits in December 2005 and September 2007. This was more generally informed by seven years of pre-doctoral field experience living in Tibetan refugee communities in India and Nepal from 1995 to 2001. The fieldwork in Tibet was conducted in all three of the major Tibetan regions (Utsang, Kham and Amdo) and in four of the five Chinese provinces containing Tibetan areas (the TAR, Qinghai, Sichuan and Gansu). The largest portion of time was concentrated in Amdo/Qinghai due to a range of concerns, from logistics and freedom of movement to research interest. Extensive visits were made to both farming and pastoral areas in Qinghai, Sichuan and Gansu, including repeated and extended contact within eight rural communities. Limited rural travel was also undertaken in the TAR, although this was restricted due to the heavy controls over the movement of foreign researchers outside Lhasa. Urban areas visited included (Tibetan names used for Tibetan towns): Lhasa and Shigatse in the TAR; Xining, Xunhua, Chentsa, Rebgong, Sogwo, Chabcha, Mangra, Jyeku, Dawu and Darlak in Qinghai; Lanzhou, Linxia and Labrang (Ch. Xiahe) in Gansu; Chengdu, Sershul, Derge, Manikango, Kardze, Drango, Dawu, Tagong, Dartsedo (Ch. Kangding) and Ngawa in Sichuan; and several short visits to several research centres and universities in Beijing. The urban areas were chosen because of their importance as regional centres for local government administration, education, business, off-farm employment, and migration.

Fieldwork entailed informal and unstructured interviews, conversations, focus groups, participant observation, and general living experience within households in several of these settings, in both rural and urban areas. Interviewee selection was determined through snowball sampling; the politicised nature of the research precluded both representative sampling as well as extended ethnographic contacts. Some interviews were conducted by myself in Tibetan (mostly in Central Tibet), some were conducted by myself in English with Tibetans or Chinese who spoke English, and about half were conducted with the assistance of either a Tibetan translator (in the case of interviews with Tibetans, particularly those from Eastern Tibet) or a Chinese translator (in the case of interviews with Chinese or Muslims and some educated Tibetans). The exact number of informants is difficult to quantify because in many cases contact was made in very fluid social settings. However, it is possible to enumerate roughly 228 key informants, in terms of contacts that resulted in significant and substantive field insights. This sampling was disproportionately weighted towards more elite informants, particularly local Tibetan, Chinese or Muslim scholars who have a wealth of knowledge but are considerably more constrained than foreign researchers in the dissemination of their findings.

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