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## **Common property over time : access to and distribution of resources among pastoralists in central Tibet (1884-2004)**

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**Key words** : Tibetan Plateau , pastoralism , land use change

**Introduction** Significant political and economic changes have occurred among Tibetan-speaking pastoralists in China . The goal of this research is to test whether the relative availability of common pool resources has remained constant or been transformed . Given the marginality of Tibet's environment , one may initially hypothesize that resource use and property regimes were determined by ecological factors like precipitation rather than socio-political or economic circumstances . In terms of rangeland management , one would presume stability in pasture boundaries and the distribution of grassland resources . Instead , boundaries and patterns of resource availability were found to be dynamic .

**Materials and methods** This research was conducted in Zhabka Township (Xaga , Nyelam County , Shigatse Prefecture , Tibet Autonomous Region , PRC) . The analysis is based on data from historical archives , field observations , interviews , remote sensing and satellite images . A boundary survey text written in 1884 was translated and used to identify historical pasture boundaries . Geographic Positioning System (GPS) latitude and longitude points were augmented with hand-drawn , participatory maps made by local pastoralists . Herders were engaged in structured and semi-structured interviews as were representatives of the government .

**Results and discussion** Despite the growth in both livestock and human populations reported by the Tibetan government , the historical and contemporary boundary maps indicate a consolidation in management units over time . Geographic information Systems (GIS) maps make graphically visible the fact that common property regimes are more complex and have been more elastic than an environmentally determined account would have predicted . Changes in the dimensions of various management units can be traced to the administrative restructurings during collectivization period (1967-1980) and the post-1980 era , which have resulted in new boundaries . Comparing bio-productivity levels within and between management units makes it possible to characterize differential availability of rangeland resources over time . Analysis of data shows that a significant leveling of overall average productivity has occurred within management units between 1884 and 2004 (based on mean NDVI values for period between 2000 and 2006) .

**Conclusions** Pasture boundaries have changed significantly over time , and in ways that cannot be wholly explained through ecologically driven factors . This analysis provides evidence that the boundaries of common pool resources were not equally distributed between management units . Shifts in the location of geographical boundaries clearly affected the resources available to pastoralists over time . These findings show clear temporal and spatial disparities in resource availability within and between historical and contemporary management units .