Social Development in the Tibet Autonomous Region: A Contemporary and Historical Analysis

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Abstract

Purpose This paper seeks to historically examine social development outcomes in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) in respect to poverty eradication, education and employment, health care and social integration. Moreover, it will aims to offer tangible advice for improving future social development work in TAR.

Design/methodology/approach The main theoretical approach is a literature and policy review of social development in TAR from 1951 to present.

Findings Seemingly, Tibet's social development strategy has been achieved through a strong top-down approach. However, the road ahead for TAR once basic needs are satisfactorily met, is a move towards a participatory approach, whereby Tibetans can directly contribute and have a stake in their own futures.

Originality/value This paper will be of interest to those who want a definitive account of recent historical social development strategies and outcomes in TAR; and subsequently, the future possibilities and challenges for development in the region.

Keywords Social policy, Tibet, China, Economic development

Paper type General review

Almost exclusively, world interest in the conflict between China and Tibet has hitherto been concentrated on the political and military aspects of the problem, ignoring, by and large, the far-reaching socio-economic transformations, which have taken place in the Tibetan way of life... (Ginsburg and Mathos, 1960, p. 102).

Written in 1960, this analysis cannot be more applicable today. Social development in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) has largely been pushed aside to accommodate political wrangling at the expense of the Tibetan people. The purpose of this paper is to discuss social development in TAR through a contemporary and historical lens. Ironically, to contextualize the modern social development situation in TAR we will begin by briefly discussing the political background conditions. This will be followed by defining social development, both in an international and Chinese context. The remaining bulk of the paper will assess social development in TAR, notably in the areas of poverty eradication, education and employment, health care, social integration, and, economic infrastructure. The paper will conclude by offering considerations for future development work in TAR, bearing in mind the lessons learned over the past century.

1. Political background conditions

For the most part of the twentieth century, Tibet has remained under Chinese rule. The end of the Qing dynasty in 1911 created great turbulence and brought to the forefront a system of change led by the nationalist Dr Sun Yat-sen. It is in this period
that the 13th Dalai Lama took the opportunity to declare Tibet’s *de facto* independence from China, however, with little tangible attention received from the international community of nation-states. In spite of the situation, the 13th Dalai Lama attempted to pursue a limited modernisation program from 1912 to 1950 that sought to establish a standing military and secularise education.

Tibetan society prior to 1951 was highly stratified, sharing similarities with the European feudal system. Land was divided among three classes of society: the Central Government of Lhasa, the monastic clergy, and the lay nobility. A majority of the people did not belong to a formal religious order and thus, possessed no land. The bulk of the population was considered serfs, bound to their masters, working the land.

With the entry of Chinese troops into Tibet in 1951, the Chinese saw themselves as liberators of the Tibetan people from an oppressive society and Western imperialistic forces that had penetrated Tibet. The Chinese “liberation” met little resistance from the ill-equipped and poorly trained Tibetan forces. The Sino-Tibetan Seventeen Point Agreement of 1951 sought to solidify the liberation and integrated Tibet into the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Chairman Mao articulated that Tibetans were culturally and socially different people. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) entering Tibet were not there to rule, but rather too assist Tibetans (Norbu, 2001).

The period from 1951 to 1959 was one where the Chinese Government sought to further justify its presence and to incorporate Tibet into the PRC, culminating with the creation of the Preparatory Committee for the Autonomous Region of Tibet (PCART) in March 1955. The aims of PCART were to gain greater responsibility of Tibet’s governance; encourage local industrial development; promote a non-class based society; and, to allow freedom of religion (Grunfield, 1987). The initial PCART comprised of 46 Tibetans and five Han Chinese, later the representation increased to 50 Tibetans and the number of Han Chinese remained the same.

The relative stability of this period was overturned by the Tibetan revolt against the Chinese in 1959. In response, Chinese rule now accompanied harsh and repressive policies in Tibet. Moreover, this period culminated in the young 14th Dalai Lama going into exile. After 1959, the push to further assimilate TAR into greater China became even more apparent. The Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) campaigns denounced the backwardness of Tibetan society and the destructive nature of the Dalai Lama’s politics of independence for Tibet.

To bring Tibet into the “Communist Modern World,” the CCP instituted a two-stage campaign. The first stage focused on anti-rebellion, anti-slavery, and to reduce land holdings by the aristocratic. The second stage sought to remould the social system through the redistribution of land to the people. The intense nature of these campaigns and the perceived suppression of the Tibetan religion as a means of achieving the CCP’s goals in Tibet, came under attack from the West and from Tibetans in exile. In fact, the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) in its 1959 report The Question of Tibet and the Rule of Law outlined three main charges against China. The charges related to the:

1. Systematic disregard for the obligations under the Seventeen Agreement of 1951.
2. Systematic violation of the fundamental rights and freedom of the people of Tibet.
(3) Wanton killing of Tibetans and other acts capable of leading to the extinction of the Tibetan as a national and religious group, to the extent that it becomes necessary to consider the question of genocide (ICJ, 1959, p. 17).

Similarly, Berkin criticised the desire to maintain China with various ethnic minorities as an “invention of capitalist dictatorship structured around the artificial concept of greater China” (Berkin, 2002, p. xxii). This suggests that the concept of China is one that is conveniently devised by the government to advance China’s economy with disregard for universal values, such as human rights, with reference to Tibet. The Tibetan Government in exile (TGIE) as headed by the current Dalai Lama, at the time also contested the Chinese control of Tibet:

The invasion and occupation of Tibet was an act of aggression and a clear violation of international law. Today, Tibet is under illegal and repressive Chinese occupation (TGIE, 1996).

These claims further suggested the disputed legal status of Tibet. While the Chinese Government dismisses such claim, arguing “Tibetan independence,” which the Dalai clique and overseas anti-China forces fervently propagate, is “nothing but a fiction of the imperialists who committed aggression against China in modern history” (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, 1992). Seeing that the rule of the CCP in Tibet is questioned and vehemently objected by some, we cannot dismiss their claims as simply arbitrary and/or self-serving. Whether we agree with the ICJ, TGIE or the CCP, Tibet suffered tremendous domestic and international political quarrel, which ultimately influenced the conditions for social development in TAR for most of the twentieth century and present day.

2. The many definitions of “social development”

From a macro-perspective, social development can be seen as policies to improve the livelihood of the individual through a lens of poverty-reduction and empowerment. However, recent advances in this area have sought to embrace and demarcate the notion of social development through a more holistic participatory approach. The emergence of social development as an area of analysis in the wider development framework can be historically traced. The notions of development in the 1950s-1960s were largely dedicated to the building of physical infrastructure and often a state led process. Although poverty alleviation had been a concern of the development agenda since the end of World War II, the poor were seen as passive targets, homogenous and faceless. For example, Harry Truman in his 1949 “Fair Deal” for the world was adamant that poverty had to be tackled:

More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate, they are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and threat to both to them and to more prosperous areas (...) we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realize their aspirations for a better life (Escobar, 1995, p. 1).

Here, we see that poverty is recognised as an impediment to development. The approach to reduce poverty is centered on the US’s desire to share their technical knowledge to raise the standard of living for all humankind. Truman’s “Fair Deal”
placed heavy emphasis on science and technology, and modern education of developed
nations, as a way of bringing development to the underdeveloped regions of the world.
There emerged a growing discontent over this sort of development due to the sense of
paternalism that was embedded onto the target state, notably in former colonies. Those
in the South and selected academics led the charge to cause a gradual paradigm shift in
how development ought to be conducted. Ultimately their efforts led to the prominence
of social development practices.

The apparent inequality that increased throughout the 1970s between nations led to
a consensus that economic growth alone was insufficient to reduce poverty.
Accordingly, the “Basic Needs” approach was introduced by the International Labour
Organization (ILO, 1994) in the 1970s, focusing on the needs of the poor. The emphasis
of such strategy still firmly placed its beliefs in growth-oriented policies. The focus in
the 1980s and early 1990s shifted to bringing the poor to the forefront and to recognise
that their empowerment and participation was a necessary component to the
development process. Since, the 1990s, the idea of participation and empowerment of
the poor has underpinned the idea of social development. Thus, according to Green,
social development thinking has moved away from the welfare-social policy
conception of basic needs, towards a discipline that has the capacity to analyse,
inform and influence the implementation of development policy, and that the
implications of social development affects all areas and sectors (Green, 2002, pp. 52-3).

2.1 A working definition
Our ability to assess social development possibilities in TAR will largely depend upon
our working definition of the term. We will consider the usage of the term as offered by
the United Nations (UN) and World Bank and evaluate it in contrast to the Chinese
Government’s use. The UN has to an extent been at the forefront of advocating for a
social development dimension in national economic policies. The United Nations
Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development as adopted by the Social Development
Summit in 1995 has set out a very broad framework to assess and implement social
development policies. The underlying principle of the Summit was essentially a pledge
to eradicate poverty due to its “rediscovery” (Mkandawire, 2001, p. 4). This
“rediscovery” is largely a realisation by policy makers that economic “success” did not
necessarily affect poverty levels. The response from the Summit on the realisation of
this fact, came in the form of a “people-centered framework” and sought to alleviate
those “who are most affected by human distress” (WSSD, 2000). The awareness on
poverty-reduction has consequently resulted in a series of commitments and actions
from the Social Development Summit. It is worth quoting the Social Development
Summit’s Programme of Action at some length:

Policies to eradicate poverty, reduce disparities and combat social exclusion require the
creation of employment opportunities, and would be incomplete and ineffective without
measures to eliminate discrimination and promote participation and harmonious social
relationships among groups and nations … The well-being of people also requires the
exercise of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, access to the provision of good
education, health care and other basic public services, and the development of harmonious
relations within communities. Social integration, or the capacity of people to live together
with full respect for the dignity of each individual, the common good, pluralism and diversity,
non-violence and solidarity, as well as their ability to participate in social, cultural, economic
and political life, encompasses all aspects of social development and all policies … It calls for
a sound economic environment, as well as for cultures based on freedom and responsibility. It also calls for the full involvement of both the State and civil society.

From the Programme of Action, we can delineate four main commitments. The first is the urgency to eliminate poverty. Second, the issue of employment is critical to the inclusion and integration of those affected by poverty into society. Third, the overall well being is in part determined by access to public services such as health and education. And last, the concern of social integration is again reiterated. These four sets of commitment along with others will guide our analysis.

Poverty eradication as a pillar of social development principle is also recognised by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. While they are aware that economic growth is closely linked to poverty alleviation, they argue it is essential:

... that social policy must be designed not only residually to cater to social needs, but as a key component of policies that ensures the wherewithal for their own sustainability (Mkandawire, 2001, p. 23).

Social development according to the UN therefore requires a holistic approach, incorporating the need for economic growth and less tangible obligation of social inclusion.

The World Bank offers a similar position to the UN on the definition of social development. Although its conceptual framework is more nebulous, it is resolute that social development carries intrinsic value. "It is a form of poverty reduction as well as a means to development effectiveness" (World Bank, 2004, p. 6). Social development is reflected, according to the World Bank, to positive social change and to allow for effective progress, we must account for all the stakeholders in the process. Moreover, the World Bank (2004, pp. 8-11) offers three main operational tenets of social development. The first is the notion of inclusion, which similar to the UN conception, is a critical factor. Inclusion refers to allowing the disempowered greater access and opportunities. Secondly, it stresses the idea of cohesion, where harmonious relationships are created to allow for common concerns to be addressed. The third factor is accountability. Institutions must be open and transparent to successfully meet the needs of the people. We see that the UN and World Bank offer similar positions on the notion of social development in that it is primarily addressing poverty alleviation.

The Chinese Government may seem to present a contrasting definition of social development but on closer inspection, we see its convergence with the UN and World Bank. In the 2004 Draft Plan for National Economic and Social Development, the Chinese Government outlined the necessity to balance urban and rural development with economic and social development. The targeting of human resources and creation of employment are key characteristics of the social development aspects of the draft plan. In direct relation to Tibet’s social development, the Chinese Government’s White Paper on “Tibet’s march toward modernization,” incorporates similar objectives. It is clear that the concept of modernisation is intrinsically linked to social development. “Modernization has been the fundamental question in the social development of Tibet in modern times” (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, 2001).

The idea of rationality is an interesting aspect of the Chinese Government’s characterisation of social development. Rationality in this sense is reflected in the development of industries, whereas the irrational would be the socio-economic structure of pre-modern Tibet. We therefore see the Chinese Government promoting
itself as the agency that brings about modernisation and rationality into Tibetan society. Increasing industrial development is seen as a key method to bring about social development hence the establishment of “pillar industries” — that paves a path towards modernisation. Ultimately, social development is fundamentally related to the poverty alleviation in TAR, and this aim is the task of the Chinese leadership: “We must establish a system of leadership responsibility in helping the poor” (LTDRN, 1994, p. 48).

Having presented three views on social development, we can see that the objective of the UN/World Bank and that of the Chinese Government is not so different. Poverty alleviation is the primary goal for all institutions concerned. Nevertheless, they diverge in the process and tools used to achieve this aim. In the next section, we will take the main tenets of social development as outlined by the UN/World Bank and Chinese Government as a focal point of analysis.

3. Tibetan social development
Tibet’s social development history since 1951 has largely been state-led and projects were often implemented at the macro-level. To ensure the possibility of social development, the PLA’s entry in 1951 “liberated the social productive forces in Tibet, and opened up the road toward modernization” (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, 2001). Accordingly, the abolishment of the feudal structure allowed for social development and modernisation to occur. One of the “greatest harbingers of change” in TAR has been the construction of roads, setting TAR forth on the path to modernisation (Grumfeld, 1987, p. 117). The first road of 2,400 kilometers from Yanan, Sichuan province to Lhasa opened in December 1954 and the Qinghai-Tibet highway opened in the same year. These roads allowed for faster and cheaper transportation of goods. The price of tea dropped by two-thirds due to new methods of transportation. Prior to 1954, there was no industrial development in TAR. With the opening of roads into TAR came industrialisation. By 1974, industrial output accounted for 22 percent of the region’s output in 1974 compared to 8 percent in 1965 (Norbu, 1988, p. 223). Nonetheless, the industrialisation that did occur, albeit slow, was mainly in the Lhasa area, with hydroelectric power plants. The industrialisation of Tibet depended greatly on skilled Han Chinese technicians and to this dependency continues in present day.

The establishment of the commune system also affected social development in TAR. By 1970, 666 communes were created. The implementation of irrigation projects that went along with the establishment of the communes prevented water loss and was hence a significant benefit of collectivisation. Between 1959 and 1970 agricultural output doubled due to the commune system and assistance of new technology (Karan, 1975, p. 39).

The opening of new schools and an increase in enrolment rates for TAR during this period further suggests some level of social development. Whilst the CCP claim that there was “not a single school in the modern sense” before 1951, this is somewhat far-fetched (Information Office of the State Council of the PRC, 2001). The 13th Dalai Lama did establish Western style schools in Gyanste dedicated to Western learning. Education pre-1951 took the form of monastic education and those who did not enter the religious order generally had little to no opportunities in schooling. Although the education system and the availability of it to rural Tibetans was and is still problematic, the number of primary schools opened by 1957 stood at 78, with 6,000
students enrolled. By the end of the cultural revolution, a revival of education occurred which was reflected in the number of students attending school. This was largely an urban trend, where 80 percent of Lhasa’s children were enrolled, compared to 30 percent in rural areas in the period after the Cultural Revolution (Grunfeld, 1987, p. 172). Simply looking at figures is insufficient to gauge the real level of social development in TAR, but due to the lack of accurate information available, it is often difficult to provide more than beyond numbers. However, it cannot be disputed that the greater availability of education in a secular manner provided schooling opportunities to a greater number of people. It is possible to discern that social development did occur in TAR between 1951 and 1978 but mostly at the infrastructural level.

3.1 Poverty eradication
Poverty alleviation measures have emerged to be a central component of social development thinking in the last decade or two. The CCP’s approach to social development across China reflected this trend, partly in the realisation that economic growth is insufficient and required government intervention in the form of anti-poverty programs. However, it was only in 1986 that TAR became part of the national poverty alleviation strategy. The RMB 278 million (US$35.94 million) investment in “aiding the poor” in Tibet in the 1990s has lifted 122,000 Tibetans out of poverty by 1996. Government support in poverty eradication continues to this date. In 2003, RMB 290 million (US$37.49 million) were allocated to this task, and the regional government of TAR provided RMB 60 million (US$7.76 million) (China Daily, 2004). Poverty largely affects rural Tibet and the central government has targeted the agricultural structure of TAR to eradicate poverty. The government has encouraged the cultivation of improved forms of barley, Tibetan medicinal herbs, raising chickens and other livestock. The nature of poverty alleviation policies has changed from meeting basic needs:

Now it aims to focus on the social and economic development of the agricultural and pastoral areas and the overall improvement of the living standards and comprehensive quality of farmers and herdsmen in the areas... (China Tibet Information Center, 2003a)

The role of the government in poverty eradication is evident and the need for focused targeting is emphasized:

In helping the poor, we must avoid scattering our funds or relying mainly on relief. We must spend our money on the 18 counties incorporated in the region’s help-the-poor plan... We must use our funds primarily on crop cultivation, livestock breeding, farm produce... (Goldstein et al., 2003, p. 768).

The standard of living in TAR has certainly increased since the 1978 reforms, particularly in meeting basic and immediate needs of rural Tibetans. Goldstein et al. (2003) study of 780 households in 13 rural villages, totaling 5,590 people, indicated that since the end of decollectivisation, the standard of living has improved. About 55 percent of households have built new houses or completed extensions of the old house. The average cost of home improvements is RMB 5,078 (US$656), a significant cost for most rural households when the average income in 2000 was RMB 1,325 (US$171) (Sautman and Eng, 2001, p. 35). Rural incomes have slowly increased from a base of RMB 120 (US$16) in 1978 to RMB 380 (US$49) in 1988, RMB 1,158 (US$150) in 1998 and RMB 1,325 (US$171) in 2000. Urban incomes have also improved more
dramatically than rural incomes. In 1994, average urban income was RMB 3,596 (US$ 465), jumping to RMB 6,385 (US$ 826) in 2000. It is clear from these figures that urban and rural inequality within Tibet is highly pronounced despite the Chinese Government’s anti-poverty programs. Poverty in TAR remains predominantly in the rural areas.

A further problem for Tibetans to contend with is the overall regional inequality that exists at a national level. Over 80 percent of China’s officially poor 300 counties in the 1990s were located in the Western regions and minorities lived in nearly half of the total counties. A glimmer of hope does exist for rural Tibetans. Their ownership of fixed assets has translated into an equalising factor between the rural residents of PRC and Tibet. Rural households in TAR own 7.3 times more animals than elsewhere in China; animals account for 57 percent of productive fixed assets in Tibet (Sautman and Eng, 2001, p. 36). Decollectivisation can account for this phenomenon. The building up of assets can potentially mean rural Tibetans may rely less on income to overcome poverty and use their assets as a safety net. It is evident that social development is occurring in TAR, and this is largely in the form of anti-poverty programs implemented at the macro level. We can see that these programs meet the fundamental objectives of the UN/World Bank’s conception of social development, but also of the Chinese Government’s. In spite of these achievements, to further improve conditions in TAR we need to consider more specific targets such as education and employment. Social development as we have seen in our definition is one that requires a people-centered approach. Consequently, access to education and employment for those marginalised in society will assist the inclusion of all in society.

3.2 Education and employment

Education and employment are two essential factors in the social development of Tibet. Through state-led programs in TAR, the Chinese Government has sought to address social development issues through the establishment of schools, laws regarding compulsory education, and employment creation through industry building. However, these policies often lack the participatory element and many do not target local needs. The push towards an educated population is no doubt evident, based on the efforts of the CCP. Education policy in TAR has undergone several phases since the 1950s. The first conference on education amongst ethnic minorities in September 1951 emphasised the CCP ideology. Science and the teaching of minority characteristics were stressed in the curriculum. The late 1950s saw a marked shift to even greater emphasis on nationalist ideology with ethnic characteristics, but regressed in March 1963. With the onset of the cultural revolution, there was a significant decline in the tolerance for minorities, due to the promotion of the class struggle based on Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, which attempted to suppress the ethnic consciousness. The economic liberalisation of Chinese economy to an extent has also influenced liberalisation in the education sector. In February 1981, the Ministry of Education and the State Nationalities Affairs Commission established education along the lines of autonomy, where the teaching of minority languages was permitted. However, this has changed to only three years of formal instruction in Tibetan in Tibetan primary schools, thus making Mandarin Chinese the main language of instruction. A compulsory nine-year education law was passed in 1986, first to be implemented in cities of developed regions and gradually spreading nation-wide. In spite of this
ambitious aim in a population of 1.3 billion, Tibetans had an average of only three years of primary education in 1993 (Mackerras, 1995, p. 141).

The structure of primary and secondary education is very much uniform across China, using the same textbooks and there is little space for the history and culture of minorities. Historically, the CCP has attempted to affect social development through the education curriculum by emphasising science and technology, and thus framing it around notions of “rationality.” Thus, social development through education is intrinsically tied to the CCP’s ideology. It is only recently that there has been an awareness to positively affect social development in TAR by making education more relevant to the Tibetan society. According to Nima (1997, p. 7), the structure of Tibetan education does not “conform to the realities of social development”; it does not reflect Tibet’s agricultural position or its need for technology. By adapting the curriculum to the realities of the Tibetan society and culture, it may assist retention rates amongst students. A third of TAR’s students enrolled in primary school complete the six years. In the late 1990s, only 42,000 Tibetan students were enrolled in secondary schools and 20,000 Tibetans in high school or university (Sautman and Eng, 2001, p. 41). Greater attention needs to be devoted to curriculum design to suit regional needs to improve the human capital of Tibet.

Education is an important element of social development which will reinforce the likelihood of social integration between the Tibetans and Han Chinese. Despite the progress made in education by the CCP, Tibetans still remain the lowest on the UN Human Development Index in education, with adult literacy rate in TAR at 38.82 percent, compared to 91.32 percent in Shanghai (UNDP, 2002, p. A6). Social development from the education perspective indicates that more can be achieved to incorporate Tibetans in the development process. This is attainable if both social and cultural needs of the region are accounted for. As the level of education stands in positive correlation to employment opportunities, Tibetans are expected to benefit from further progresses in the educational sector.

Similarly, a poor level of education across Tibet affects the level of social development in TAR. The education acquired by most Tibetans is inadequate for them to compete in the market economy and at a national level against the Han Chinese. The inflow of Han and Hui (a Muslim ethnic minority group) people into urban TAR is “crowding out [Tibetan] rural migrants from limited urban employment opportunities, precisely at a moment when rural to urban migration is becoming imperative” (Fischer, 2003, p. 2). Later we will discuss the matter of social integration and it is this inter-regional migration that has caused significant tension in TAR. However, it will suffice to mention that this conflict manifests itself in the form of greater competition within the labour market in Tibet. In Goldstein et al. study, 48.8 percent of the 780 households had one member of the family engaged in non-farming activity (Goldstein et al., 2003, p. 775). The money earned from non-farm employment is a significant part of the household income. The median income of non-farm work stands at RMB 1,280 (US$ 166), which is 29 percent of the cash value of agricultural output, even though 52 percent of the workers were employed in low paying and low-skilled employment. The Chinese Government has recognised the need to improve the skill base of Tibetan workers in line with creating further employment opportunities.

At a time when rural-urban migration is increasing rapidly, job creation for rural Tibetans is crucial. It is estimated that more than 60,000 rural Tibetans will move into
urban areas of TAR between 2001 and 2005 (Australia Tibet Council, 2003). One of the major ways in which job creation has occurred is through large infrastructure projects, such as the Qinghai-Tibet railway. Nonetheless, the wage differences will continue to exist amongst Tibetan and non-Tibetan workers. One example of this difference is reflected in the Golmin-Lhasa railway project, where Tibetans earn RMB 1,500-1,800 (US$ 194-233) a month compared to skilled non-Tibetans, who can earn as much as RMB 6,000 (US$776) (Goldstein et al., 2003, p. 775). While the Chinese Government has to an extent sought to redress these problems through job creation and education programs, social development in TAR will be fraught with difficulties if Tibetans cannot be treated in an equitable fashion. Such contestation and conflict will inhibit the social development process, and consequently further marginalise the Tibetan workers within the developing market economy. To prevent this situation from worsening, access to basic social services such as health care will also be a crucial mitigating factor.

3.3 Health
Access to healthcare is one of the main indicators of social development. Like poverty and education indicators, the general health expressed in terms of life expectancy rates or infant mortality rates have improved in the last 50 years. These advances are largely the result of top-down CCP campaigns. Despite progress, various diseases continue to affect Tibetans that are either eradicated in the rest of China or under effective control. Social development in the area of health is only limited. The structure of the healthcare system is based on administrative units of prefecture, county, township and village. At the village level, health workers generally have only attained primary level of education and minimum health training. The township is the administrative center for a group of villages and the township clinic is equipped to deliver babies, and tend to wounds and infections. A hospital is often present at the county level. The number of hospitals and clinics has increased since the 1950s from 11 in 1959 to 819 in 2000 (China Information Centre, 2002). Statistically this may appear to be impressive, but we must bear in mind the conditions of these hospitals and the facilities available to patients. The facilities available are often in its basic form. Moreover, due to the requirement of a deposit prior to being given medical treatment, this is a deterrent for many who require assistance, but cannot afford the deposit. Equally important to the issue of access is the type of coverage available. The Co-operative Medical Services in Tibet only covers partial hospital care for serious illness or surgery. The refund that operates with the Co-op is generally 70 percent at the village or township level, and 35-45 percent in county hospitals (TIN, 2002). Regardless of the rebate, the need to produce the initial cost of the treatment is likely to affect patients who seek treatment.

A report by Médicins Sans Frontier of Linzhou County in Lhasa Prefecture with a population of 47,683 showed that at the three county level hospitals surveyed, only two out of 111 medical staff were university trained (van Driel and Golton, 1991). Several problems identified by the report were common amongst all hospitals in Tibet, including the poor state of the buildings, with variable electrical and water supply; many county level Tibetan doctors had several years of training, but most of the time was spent learning Mandarin Chinese; and, the prevalence of tuberculosis and kashin beck disease. In relation to the education of medical workers, it ties back to our argument that education needs to be in line within the Tibetan context to ensure
successful education results. With Tibetan doctors spending the majority of their time learning Mandarin, it will impede their ability and time to acquire valuable medical skills. Greater health care access to the local population and adequate training and facilities for its delivery is certainly required to increase social development in TAR.

The relationship between health care access and socio-economic development in Tibet is recognised by the Chinese Government. By 2010, the Chinese Government and related departments of TAR have pledged to create a “hygiene service system, including medical preventive care, health protection, and hygiene supervision” that will meet “the needs of the people and socioeconomic development in Tibet” (China Tibet Information Center, 2003b). However, the manner in which this project, as well as others, is conducted is one of top-down and steeped in Han chauvinism:

After the reform of democracy in Tibet in 1959, Tibet established sanitation and hygiene committees in its cities and counties, which helped Tibetan people develop a habit of washing and bathing, encouraged haircuts, eliminated louse and ensured human beings lived apart from domestic animals (van Driel and Goltron, 1991).

For social development to occur in a meaningful context and to be seen as legitimate by Tibetans, it is necessary to involve the participation of Tibetans themselves. Social development is not about bringing “civilisation” to the “uncivilised,” but rather for each individual to have a stake in his or her own future. For this to occur in TAR, a better relationship between Chinese and Tibetans is fundamental.

3.4 Social integration
The notion of cohesion and inclusion are two major features of social development as defined by the UN/World Bank. In the previous sections, the issue of social integration or exclusion was mentioned in relation to education and employment of Tibetans. The under-education and lack of skills in the Tibetan population have largely prevented their participation in the workforce. The claim that Tibet is being “swamped” by non-Tibetan migration is a common discussion topic among supporters of Tibet. The Chinese government officially acknowledged its support for migration into Tibet as a result of the Third Work Forum on Tibet in September 1994. This policy is aimed at fast-track social and economic development by providing TAR with the most able personnel. This is evident in education policies under the 10th Five Year Plan where the development of TAR is dependent on a skilled workforce: “We must put existing qualified personnel to good use and actively recruit from outside [the TAR] the qualified personnel we urgently need” (Quoted in TIN, 2002, p. 70).

As we have seen in relation to education and employment, the transferring of Chinese workers into Tibet creates conflict that climaxes in a battle for scarce employment opportunities. A survey of Tromzikhang market in Lhasa found 756 stalls were Chinese owned compared to 305 Tibetan (TGIE, 2000). It is precisely this phenomenon, the perception of Sino-isation of Tibet from economic activity to society, which is mitigating or at least slowing the process of social development. Moreover, once the main language of work is Mandarin Chinese, the government have placed Tibetans, notably the older population, in a marginalised position. Such types of policies have created tangible ethnic tension in Tibet, with Tibetan farmers staging protests with the encroachment of Chinese migrants on pastures belonging to Tibetans. The disharmony that has resulted in the competition of work and marginalisation of Tibetans will impede further social development in TAR.
Despite the negative connotations and perceptions that surround the policy of population transfer, we often overlook the data available. Huang (1995) in his research into the Chinese population transfer policy analysed the following documents: Renshi gongzou weijian xuanbian (Selections of Documents on Personnel Work) from the Ministry of Labour and Personnel of 1984 and 1986; Liudong diaopei gongzuo zhinan (Guidebook on Rotation and Transfer Work) by the Department of Rotation and Transfer under Ministry of Personnel 1991 and a final unpublished 1989 paper by the Institute of Sociology of Beijing University’s statistics on cadres transferred in and out of Tibet. Huang concluded from his scrutiny of these three sources, that the largest group of skilled workers transferred to Tibet in the 1980s were involved in economic management, 32.61 percent of all cadres, followed by those engaged in tourism at 26.57 percent (Huang, 1995, p. 191). This indicates that the economic and social development of TAR is of highest importance with the majority personnel engaged in these areas. The out-transfers of cadres play an equally significant role, a fact that is often neglected in Western reports. In 1989, 10,677 cadres were transferred back to other parts of the PRC, 4,156 retired and resettled elsewhere. In total 14,823 cadres withdrew from TAR. Cadres as a percentage of total Tibetan population in 1981 stood at 3.23 percent and 2.597 percent in 1987. Huang’s research clearly indicates that there is merit in examining the data, as it illustrates that the migration in TAR occurs not only with an inflow of Chinese workers, but also is coupled with an outflow of Chinese workers. In spite of the data available, the perception of the CCP’s population transfer policy into Tibet will continue to cause considerable tension among the ethnic groups that live there. This reality will prevent further meaningful social development in Tibet, even more so, if tension results in conflict or segregation to pacify the situation. Despite this, the development of TAR’s comparative advantage sectors or “pillar industries” according to the Chinese Government is to be achieved through the transfer of skills by able Chinese personnel.

3.5 Developing Tibet’s “comparative advantage”
The projects initiated by the Chinese Government towards social improvement of Tibet have always been primarily on the macro-scale. The current development strategy for Tibet, incorporated into the overall western development strategy (WDS) initiated by the CCP in 1999, continues this trend. The principal element of the WDS is to reduce the disparity between the regions within China. In conjunction with the 10th Five Year Plan, this is to be achieved through economic guidance of the state, notably in the form of economic support of key industries. Regardless of the methods chosen, “the ultimate objective of developing the Western Region is to make its people better off” (Asia Development Bank, 2002, p. 20). Such an objective can be firmly placed in our social development framework, in that the objective of the UN/World Bank and the Chinese Government’s theoretical and action-oriented strategy is to first and foremost improve the quality of living. How this goal is attained is where the UN/World Bank and the Chinese Government diverge. At the Fourth Forum for Work on Tibet held in June 2001, the then Premier of China, Zhu Rongji observed on Tibet’s social and economic progress that:

... economic development should adhere to three safeguards: ... safeguarding accelerated economic growth; safeguarding overall social progress; and, safeguarding constant

It is evident from his speech that the economic development of Tibet is intrinsically linked to its social development. To this point, we have seen that a level of social development has taken place in various sectors.

The focus on developing “pillar industries” dominates the economic and social development strategy of Tibet. These industries are divided into three main sections: the primary sector, which includes forestry, animal husbandry and fishing; the secondary sector, relating to mining, manufacturing and exploration of natural resources; and, the tertiary sector, which includes trade and services. The main source of income other than from central government subsidies comes from agriculture and husbandry, involving 86 percent of the Tibetan population. However, the total value of agricultural output increased by only 4 percent in 2002, and it is less than a third of the overall GDP growth (TIN, 2003). The restructuring of the Tibetan economy under the WDS and 10th Five Year Plan has sought to increase the tertiary sector, which now accounts for 50 percent of the region’s GDP. Growth figures of Tibet’s GDP are highly impressive, with an increase to RMB 15.8 billion (US$ 2.04 billion) in 2002, a 12.4 percent jump from 2001 (TIN, 2003). However, central government spending and subsidies particularly in construction and tertiary sector mainly fuel Tibet’s growth during this period.

Viewed from an historical lens, we can see that the CCP’s financial support has dominated TAR’s economy. Between 1952 and 1959, 89 percent of TAR’s income derived from central government subsidies. In the 1960s this stood at 84.3 percent, and in the 1970s it reached 106.7 percent (Ma, 1998, p. 180). Such targeted spending should not necessarily be regarded as negative. According to Tibet Information Network (TIN, 2003), “deficit spending is in principle appropriate for poor and economically depressed regions, and the Western provinces have been clamouring for such increases for years.” To further impress the notion of a state-centered development approach, in 1996 the central government committed RMB 4 billion (US$ 517.2 million) to 62 projects including hydro power stations, mines, schools, and others. We can consider such infrastructures as steady foundation to which social development can prosper in TAR. Furthermore, the establishment of pillar industries are arguably the economic engine behind TAR’s progress. As we saw in the UN/World Bank’s definition of social development, it is one that cannot be divorced from economic growth.

4. Future Considerations

Future social development possibilities in Tibet will rest on considerations that are not presently a great concern for the development policy agenda. The development practices as presently manifested are in large infrastructure projects that have caused ecological imbalance. Population growth is another concern, which needs to be taken into account as the pressure on the land is increasing, and is exacerbated by environmental damages. Without considering these issues the possibility of sustainable social development will be in question.

4.1 Development within Tibet’s carrying capacity

Future improvements in the lives of many Tibetans will depend to a large extent on the population size of TAR. In the face of declining resources and relatively constant
high-birth rates, TAR’s ability to sustain its growing population will be challenged. In the 1950s, the central government encouraged population growth, linking it to the economic and social, and development capabilities of a nation. Tibetans are officially permitted three children per couple without penalty, however this has not been strictly enforced especially in rural areas. The average family size in Tibet in 2000 was 4.77 persons, 3.03 for urban households and 5.45 for rural areas (UNESCAP, 2004). The number of Tibetan births from 1982 and 1999 increased by 33.5 percent. Planning measures are needed, otherwise such a growth rate will be unsustainable. In Goldstein et al. (2003, p. 772) study, 33 percent of the households interviewed in 1997 did not produce enough grain for consumption. Land per capita after economic liberalisation in the 1970s was 2.5 μm but this has decreased to 1.5 μm (Sautman and Eng, 2001, p. 42). In conjunction with these factors is the issue of migration into Tibet, which similarly affects resource availability. The net migration rate in 2000 stood at 4.35 percent (UNESCAP, 2004). We can see that a combination of these various factors, will pose challenges to sustainable development in TAR.

However, since the 9th Five Year Plan (1996-2000), greater efforts were made by the TAR Government to provide, educate and communicate the importance of family planning measures. TAR’s family planning program has been linked to poverty alleviation, and this is framed in such a way to “help the poor to eliminate poverty and become rich” (UNESCAP, 2004). Progress is evident in the extent of the family planning policies. In an attempt to encourage families to adopt family planning, the CCP have provided lectures and sanitation classes to women of childbearing age, particularly in the rural areas. Practicing family planning is more prevalent amongst TAR’s urban residents, especially amongst cadres where in 1997, 98.71 percent of cadres and urban residents followed TAR’s family planning guidelines. The contraceptive prevalence rate for rural Tibetan women in 1997 was 53.55 percent compared to 81.5 percent amongst Tibetan cadres and urban residents (UNESCAP, 2004). This discrepancy between rural and urban Tibetans suggests that future difficulties in social development will primarily be a challenge in the rural regions combined with land per capita shrinkages. The dependence on land as a means of living for rural Tibetans will require policy measures to ensure that population growth is in line with land availability.

4.2 Environment
Social development in Tibet is undermined by unsustainable economic development. The Tibetan environment is undergoing significant changes due to the process of development over the last 50 years. To ensure sustainable future development in TAR, it is vital to include environmental considerations in economic development policies. According to the UNDP (2002, p. 24), China has two choices in its development path, one of the “perilous path” and the other the “green reform path.” Should China choose the first path of environmentally unstable development policies, it will lead to social instability with the possibility of conflict over scarce resources. However, if the second path is selected, the rate of development will be more sustainable and also allow an environment in which various partnerships can be fostered to protect the environment. Despite the future prospects, environmental issues are yet to play a significant role in development policies.
A major environment concern is the desertification of Tibetan grasslands. Although desertification is occurring at a natural rate, it is also exacerbated by human factors. The population growth rate has exerted pressure on natural grasslands and its resources. “[T]he conflicting demand between increased food and fuel supply and diminished land productivity is becoming acute” (Zou et al., 2002, p. 192). Livestock overgrazing on grasslands has also contributed to its desertification. With 40 percent of China’s geography classified as grasslands and found predominantly in the Northwest of China, 90 percent of the grasslands have been degraded to various levels (UNDP, 2002, p. 24). Worst, the environmental damages that are occurring under Chinese development policies in TAR may marginalise Tibetans even further. Environmental issues must be placed on the Tibetan social development agenda for a successful and sustainable development.

5. Conclusion
We have seen the future to a more meaningful process of development and sustainable outcomes, whether in an economic, environmental or social sense, will require the inclusion and participation of the Tibetans in TAR. It is without a doubt that a degree of government involvement is required to address issues such as poverty alleviation. The history of Tibet since 1951 has indicated that a level of social development is achievable through a strong top-down approach. However, the road ahead for TAR’s social development once basic needs are satisfactorily met, is a move towards a participatory approach, whereby Tibetans can directly contribute and have a stake in their own futures. Having said that, we must be realistic in our assessment. Engagement with international development organisation will provide ideas for the central government in creating its development policy. But we must bear in mind past experiences have illustrated that the Chinese state is the dominant actor in the development of its provinces and territories. We can safely extrapolate that in the near future the CCP will also determine the level of participation from both the government and Tibetan side in TAR. It is in the best interest of the CCP to conduct social development in TAR by recognising and preserving the unique culture of Tibetans, in lieu with promoting Chinese interests. Social development in Tibet can operate more effectively in an environment of peaceful coexistence between the mosaic of various cultural minorities and Han Chinese. Suffice to say, Tibet’s future will rest on social development possibilities. Without creating opportunities and policies that address the social needs of Tibet such as education, employment, health and the like, the future of Tibetans in TAR will be one of increased marginalisation.

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