

# Introduction to Kham Tibetans in Qinghai Province, China

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**Introduction:** (The following is an outline of a film made by a local Tibetan herding community) The UYO (Upper Yangtze Organization) was the first grassroots Tibetan NGO in China. Plateau Perspectives is their main International Partner. It took time for people to understand how a local NGO could help them. Once local leaders came on board they helped people understand and membership increased among nomad families.

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**Medical situation:** This is the big issue for local people. Local women describe how the lack of female doctors makes it difficult for them to discuss their problems. Others describe how far they have to travel on tracks and how some never even make it to the hospitals. Those that do pay high prices for transport and for accommodation in the city. “When I got ill the whole thing cost over 2000 CNY, I had to go around the offices and houses begging for money”

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**Transport and Marketing:** The nomads feel at the mercy of the traders who arrive when prices for animal products are low and sell them goods at exorbitant prices, eg flour costs 10-20x more than in the town. Transport is seen as key; they can't travel to town as the costs are high and distances great. UYO plan to establish a central trading point to achieve higher prices for all. They plan to finance it through ecotourism, grants or loans.

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**Conservation:** Five wildlife reserves were set up by UYO in 1998. Local community leaders in the area are encouraging local people to promote conservation and protect the flora and fauna. The film exposes the conflict between conservation and sheep rearing. Now snow leopards no longer fear humans and often attack domestic animals. Shepherds thus pay the price for conservation. The hope is that they will eventually benefit from ecotourism.

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**Policy, science and Research:** The household responsibility policy is discussed and the question of whether the leasing and fencing of land is well suited to these high altitude pastures. Overgrazing can be clearly seen around the fences and many feel that the pastures are being ruined by grazing all year round as opposed to traditional winter-summer migrations.

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**Degradation:** “The Pastures are turning to sand, there is flooding in China, are these things really due to what the nomads are doing to the land. Is it possible?” It has been decided that the headwater region must be protected and the nomads moved out. Locals ask scientist to help them understand the true causes of the problem and how to improve it. They also mention the need to improve livestock quality.

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**Education:** For the adults their illiteracy makes them feel lost and confused when they go to the cities, they often get cheated and these experiences damage their self-esteem: “When I travel to the city I am like a yak. Because I can’t read I don’t want them to be like that.” Every family wants their children to be educated and find jobs in the city where they feel there is a better quality of life.

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**The Future of our community:** Many feel out of touch and left behind: “Everywhere is developing fast, but out here there is no economic development, things have changed very little.” Some nomads are leaving for the cities although many remain poor and unhappy once they are there. One participant mentions computer training as a means to keep in touch and learn about the new developments in society.