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Land-centered Perspective: A New Way of Looking at Tibetan Traditional Society

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Introduction

The study of the Tibetan social system under the Dalai Lama regime or the Lhasa government is not an easy task. Geoffrey Samuel once pointed out that to treat the society under the Lhasa government as typical of Tibetan societies is misleading (Samuel 1994: 698 and *passim*). Although this claim itself is true, the problem is rather the fact that the study of the society under the Lhasa government itself is still in its infancy.

It is an interesting fact that when Samuel elaborated his famous scheme, namely, Sherpa-centrism and Lhasa-centrism, he made use of phrases such as “Sherpa-centric anthropologists” versus “Lhasa-centric textual scholars” (Samuel 1994: 700). However, as Samuel knows, studies of the Tibetan social system, which are an important part of Lhasa-centric studies, were investigated by anthropologists, not by textual scholars. Since this is so, the dichotomy of Sherpa-centrism and Lhasa-centrism is not always a dichotomy between anthropologists versus textual scholars. Rather, at least when it concerns the history of the early twentieth century, Samuel’s scheme could be understood as two different approaches *within* the anthropologists, not a dichotomy between the anthropologists and historians.

The reason is very simple. For a long time, academic access to primary documents of the Lhasa government, which are indispensable for the study of the Tibetan social system, had been very much limited not only for foreign scholars but also for domestic scholars in the People’s Republic of China (PRC). This explains why anthropologists, not textual scholars, are in a leading position in the study of Tibetan social history. The oral history approach of anthropologists, which aims to reconstruct the social life of pre-modern Tibet, is the only possible way to access the old Tibetan society. We can refer to Melvyn C. Goldstein as a representative figure of this school.¹ The results of

¹ The early works of Goldstein (1968; 1971a, b, c, d; 1973; 1986) are mainly focused on the Tibetan social system under the Lhasa government in the early twentieth century. We can give more examples such as

these researches, which started as ethnography and gradually transformed into historiography, have now become a precious corpus and testimony of Tibetan society under the Lhasa government's rule.

Recently, thanks to the Digitalized Tibetan Archives Material (DTAM) project of Bonn University, several thousands of Tibetan official documents have been opened to the public.² The impact of this change would seem to be tremendous. By using these documents, researchers can do purely "textual" studies of the Tibetan social system which was the area formerly developed by anthropologists. Although the results of this newly unfolding paradigm are still limited today, the new paradigm of the study of Tibetan social history will start to develop in the very near future.

However, before starting to shift our focus from the Western anthropologists' "surrogate ethnography" to more authentic textual studies of historiography, there remains another academic corpus of historical material on traditional Tibetan society which was not seriously consulted before. These are the Chinese sociologists' ethnographic works in the 1950s. In this article, I will use the six volume reports of *Xizang shehui lishi diaocha (XSLD) (Research on Tibetan Society and History)*, which was written by Chinese scholars based on their fieldwork in central Tibet just after the "liberation," as a corpus to know the reality of Tibetan traditional society. Many people think that Chinese official works on the Tibetan social system are not reliable. This doubt is not an ungrounded one. Because of political reasons, Chinese discourse on the Tibetan society before "liberation" overly stresses the cruelty and backwardness of the old Tibetan society. While these claims are true to a certain degree, however, through careful reading, we can make use of these vast amounts of early Chinese ethnographies as a rich corpus of the social life before the "liberation." The important fact is that the researches which the *XSLD* was based on were mainly done in the 1950s, when the Dalai Lama government still existed under the PRC's official recognition. As clearly expressed in the Seventeen Point Agreement, the liberation of Tibet meant liberation from foreign imperialism, not liberation from serfdom, at least from the PRC's understanding in the 1950s (Okawa 2013). The old Tibetan society had not yet become the past. So the reports in the *XSLD* were not historiographies of a past time, but ethnographies of an existing society. In such a sense, the tendencies of these reports are

Huber (1999), French (2002), Rinzin Thargyal (2007), and many others such as Cassinelli and Ekvall (1969), Aziz (1978), and Dargyal (1982). For more on the context of such anthropological reconstructive works see (Huber 2007). I once made use of the word "surrogate ethnography" to categorize these works (Okawa 2010).

² See the DTAM website <http://www.dtab.uni-bonn.de/tibdoc/index1.htm>.

different from today's more dogmatic Chinese writings on old Tibet. Their tone of criticizing the old society is milder. Above all, the reports include hitherto many unutilized first-hand accounts of Tibetan social life under the Dalai Lama regime. Based on the *XSLD*, this study tries to examine the land system of Tibetan aristocratic estates in the early twentieth century and aims to propose a new way of looking at Tibetan traditional society. At first glance, the accounts of the *XSLD* are so descriptive that it seems difficult to use them as a historical source. Since this is the case, this study will also be a demonstration of how to extract the information from this bland and boring corpus.

Status-centered Perspective: Definition and Evaluation

The Tibetan social system in the early twentieth century has been studied by two distinctive groups of scholars. The first and more well-known group is comprised of Western anthropologists who carried out their fieldwork among Tibetan refugees in India, Nepal, and elsewhere in the world, mainly outside Tibet. The other group is comprised of Chinese sociologists and ethnographers who did their research on Tibetan society in the 1950s, right after the establishment of the PRC. Although their academic presumptions are quite different, these two trends have many points in common. The most important similarity between the two is the manner in which they look at Tibetan society as a status-centered society. This attitude can be categorized as a status-centered perspective (hereafter SCP). In this article, I attempt to propose the land-centered perspective (hereafter LCP) as a new and different way of looking at Tibetan society before the collapse of the old society. LCP is a way of classifying people according to the land by they made a living and owed their obligations. In the same way, SCP could be defined as a way of classifying people and their social life according to their inherent statuses. A clear example of the presuppositions of SCP appears in the following citation.

To understand Tibetan social organization and social processes, cognizance of (1) the different types of villages and (2) the ascriptively differentiated statutes within these villages is of critical importance. (Goldstein 1971a: 1; underlining and numbering are mine)

We can point out that the second underlined phrase is a premise of SCP.³ Another citation from the same author more clearly illustrates the point.

There were three basic serf sub-statuses which were instrumental in establishing behavioral parameters and defining an individual’s rights and obligations with respect to a broad range of activities. (Goldstein 1971a: 4)

This citation could be used as a definition of SCP. According to Goldstein’s early works, the above-mentioned “three basic serf sub-statuses” are so important that it decides many aspects of social life for Tibetan peasants. For example, Goldstein’s famous article on Tibetan polyandry (1971b) insisted that social stratification should be of crucial importance for deciding Tibetans’ choice of marriage form. This is illustrated in Table 1, which is based on Goldstein’s early works (1971a, b, c).

Table 1: SCP’s understandings: Hereditary status decides tendencies of social life

	Marriage type	Land tenure	Family type	Residence type
Taxpayer	Polyandry (preference) ⁴	Hereditary, Large	Extended family	Patrilocal or Matrilocal
“Tied” Small-householder	Monogamy ⁵	Life long, ⁶ Small	Nuclear family	Unclear ⁷
“Human Lease” Small-householder	Monogamy	Contractual, Small	Nuclear family	Neolocal

It is clear that, from the previous studies’ point of view, social stratification is so important that it decides many aspects of social life such as marriage, residence type, land tenure, and family type. I will call this way of thinking SCP. In other words, SCP could be defined as a way of classifying people and their social life according to their inherent statuses. Now we can understand that the citation above was not a natural logic

³ The first underlined phrase also shows another interesting premise of previous studies. I called that other premise “estate-centered perspective” or ECP. However, because of limited space, I cannot go into detail about ECP in this article.

⁴ As many previous studies had pointed out, Tibetan polyandry is usually practiced as a preference marriage and does not cover all the communities as a compulsory rule. Even in very “polyandrous” communities, the percentage of polyandrous couple was hardly over 50 percent.

⁵ According to the *XSLD*, polyandrous families existed even in the small-householder status (cf. *XSLD* vol.1: 189).

⁶ However, in Gyama estate, small-householders’ fields were hereditarily succeeded (*XSLD* vol.1: 138). This is because these small-householders were inner taxpayers. The occupation rights of inner taxpayers’ fields were hereditary whether they were taxpayers or small-householders.

⁷ This is unclear from Goldstein’s early works. Usually “tied” type peasants’ residence type was patrilocal or matrilocal whether they were taxpayers or small-householders.

but a particular strong assertion. Fundamentally, I am not against this perspective. It is doubtless that hereditary divisions of status had strong influences on people's social lives. This is why the previous studies attached critical importance to the inherent statuses of Tibetan peasantry. However, from the native's point of view, SCP is not the only perspective from which to look at the reality of Tibetan society in the early twentieth century.

As is clearly shown in the diagram above, the dichotomy between taxpayer (*Khral ba*) and small-householder (*Dud chung*) is critical in SCP. Although Goldstein had mentioned a threefold model (①taxpayer, ②“tied” small-householder, and ③“human lease” small-householder) of social stratification, the most important dichotomy in its premise is that between taxpayer and small-householder. This twofold model has strong similarities with the Chinese threefold model. The Chinese threefold model presupposes that the Tibetan peasantry consisted of taxpayers, small-householders, and nangsen (*Nang zan*) or “house-slaves” in Chinese translation.⁸ While differences between the twofold and threefold models exist, both Chinese and Western previous studies have one point in common. They both share the premise that the Tibetan peasantry could be classified according to their inherent status. Such folk taxonomy had existed and I am not against the premise, however I will point out that the SCP is not always valid in certain cases, especially in aristocratic estates (*Sger gzhis*).

For examining this, we can look at the case of lower Salu Village, which was reported by Goldstein (1968).⁹ Lower Salu village (*Sa lu smad*) was a part of the Trong-dö Estate (*Grong stod gzhis ka*), an aristocratic estate of an aristocrat Phala (*Pha lha*). Goldstein took the data of this village as typical of aristocratic estates. Interestingly, he used two slightly different terms to describe the very same villagers. He used both “taxpayers like small-householders”¹⁰ and “small-householders like taxpayers”¹¹ to describe a peasantry who were attached to aristocratic estates. It is not clear from these descriptions whether they have taxpayer status or small-householder status. This slight confusion shows the fact that the SCP's dichotomy between taxpayer and small-householder is not always valid. These villagers of lower Salu were “tied” small-householders in the threefold scheme of Goldstein. If so, they are

⁸ In Chinese, they are expressed as *Cha ba*, *Dui qiong*, and *Lang sheng* or *Nang sheng*. About the reality of nangsen and critiques of the Chinese threefold model, see (Okawa 2007). Nangsen's Tibetan spelling has variations such as *Nang zan*, *Nang bzan*, and *Nang gzan*.

⁹ For more on Tibetan aristocratic estates in general and this village in particular, see chapter 4 of Goldstein's dissertation (1968).

¹⁰ Originally, “dü-jung like tre-pa” (Goldstein 1968: 46).

¹¹ Originally, “tre-pa like dü-jung” (Goldstein 1968: 104).

small-householders in theory. However Goldstein carefully avoided stating that they belonged to the small-householder category. He only described that those villagers “in many ways resembled to the dü-jung described in the last chapter” or were “dü-jung-like serfs” (Goldstein 1968: 112, 113). It is also interesting that Goldstein has never given the original Tibetan term for what he called “tied” dü-jung or “tied” small-householder. “Tied” dü-jung is a phrase that mixes terms from different languages. If “tied” is English and “dü-jung” is Tibetan, then what is the Tibetan term that is a counterpart for this concept? As far as I know, Goldstein did not show the original Tibetan counterpart for this concept. This point is illustrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2: SCP’s Human Classification and Its Tibetan Counterparts

English translation by Goldstein	Tibetan terms
Taxpayer	<i>Khral pa</i>
“Tied” dü-jung	?
“Human Lease” dü-jung	<i>Mi bogs dud chung</i>

To solve this riddle, I will look for the reality of the “tied” dü-jung in the context of the Tibetan estate system. To understand the Tibetan estate system, comprehension of its tax system is indispensable. By reconstructing Tibetan aristocratic estates, I will demonstrate the way to grasp the Tibetan estate structure.

Case Studies: Comparison of Two Aristocratic Estates

Generally, Tibetan estates had two kinds of taxes to be performed, namely, an inner tax (*Nang khral*) and an outer tax (*Phyi khral*). I call this coexistence of two kinds of taxes as a double tax system. The double tax system has rarely been referenced by previous studies.¹² Both taxes were performed as an obligation in return for the approval of peasants’ occupation of tenement fields as a base for their living. An inner tax was a tax paid to the direct lord in each village or estate. In many cases, an inner tax was performed as a free labor service on the lord’s demesne fields. On the other hand, an outer tax was a tax directly paid to the government in Lhasa. Originally, the outer tax was performed as transportation services and military services.¹³ By using the data of the *XSLD* as a corpus, I will reconstruct the land system in the case studies of Gyama

¹² Kuo Guangzhong’s article on the relationship between inner and outer tax is good exception (Kuo 2003). Kuo worked in the Tibet Work Committee in Lhasa and did field research on the Tibetan estate system in Central Tibet in the 1950s.

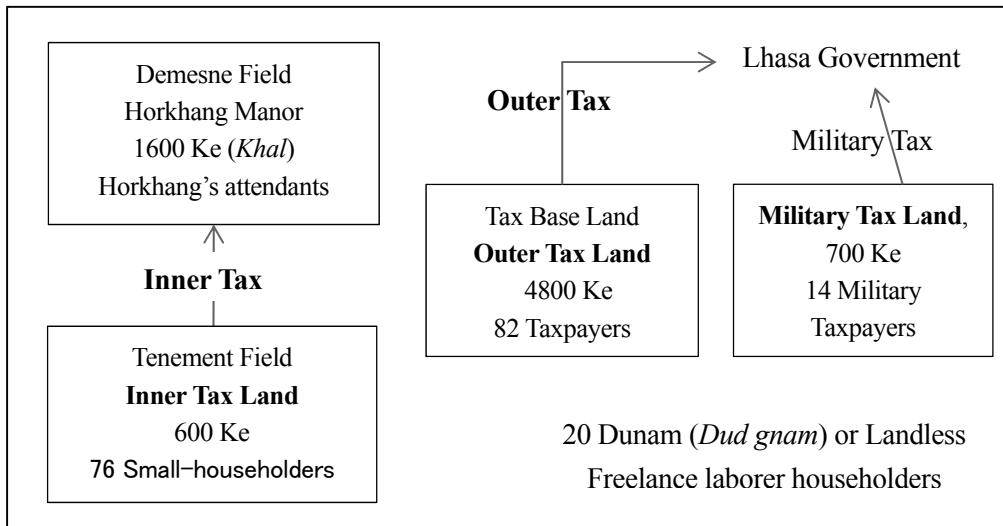
¹³ However, according to the *XSLD*, in the early twentieth century the outer tax had already transformed from transportation or military services into monetary taxes in many estates.

Trigan Estate and Namseling Estate.

Case 1: Gyama Trigan Estate (*Rgya ma khri gan gzhis ka*)

Gyama Trigan (Hereafter Gyama) Estate was a main estate of the aristocrat Horkhang. The estate was situated in the Metro Gunkar (*Mal gro gun dkar*) region. Gyama Estate was a complex body of five estates: Trigan (*Khri gan*), Shingsang (*Shing tshangs*), Panne (*Sban rne*), Tsongshung (*rtsong zhung*), and Chamchen (*byams chen*). Horkhang's manor house was located in Trigan, the center of the whole Gyama Estate. The following diagram is a reconstruction of the structure of this estate. I made this reconstruction with special reference to the land and peasants' obligations recorded in the *XSLD*.¹⁴ The original *XSLD* research was done in 1956. It must be noted that *ke* (*Khal*) in the following diagram is a Tibetan unit of weights and measures. This concept is a rather complicated one. When it concerns the weight of barley, one *ke* equals fourteen kilograms. When it concerns land size, one *ke* of land indicates an area where one *ke* of grain could be sown. Because of this, the actual extent of the land area of one *ke* was not fixed.

Diagram 1: Land Structure of the Gyama Estate



Source: (*XSLD*, vol.1: 115-161), Reconstruction in diagram form by author.

¹⁴ Although I heavily depended on the data from the *XSLD*, the way of reconstructing the land structure of the estates is my original work. Although the academic premises of the *XSLD* were varied widely and depended on each research team, however it is safe to say that the basic presumptions of the reports were SCP, rather than LCP. This is why the *XSLD* sometimes shows surprising similarities with previous Western works, and especially with Goldstein's early works.

The diagram indicates that there were 76 families of small-householders, 82 families of taxpayers, 20 families of *dunam* or landless freelance workers, 14 families of military taxpayers (*Dmag khral pa*), and the Horkhang family¹⁵ and his attendant families. The *dunam* worked in the Horkhang's demesne field and outer tax lands on a contract basis.¹⁶ Seventy six families of small-householders who made their living from the harvest of inner tax lands had the obligation to perform an inner tax. In this case, they had the obligation to work in the Horkhang's demesne field. Because of this, those small-householders were called inner taxpayers (*Nan khral pa*). Eighty two families of taxpayers who made their living from the harvest of outer tax lands had the obligation to perform an outer tax; in this case transportation service, corvée work in Lhasa, providing foodstuff and money for the army stationed in Lhasa, et cetera. On top of that, over 50 nangsens or servant-type workers existed in the Horkhang manor house as stewards and in peasants' houses as minor workers. If we just look at demesne and tenement fields, it seems similar to the simple corvée economy. The relationship between the lord and inner taxpayers seems very similar to the ideal type in a Leninist corvée economy. Previous studies' understandings of the Tibetan estate economy presupposed that the land of an aristocratic estate was divided into two: the demesne and tenement. However, in this estate, arable land was divided into three, not two. Although a clear twofold model of demesne and tenement had existed in the Gyama Estate, that was only a part of the whole estate. In Gyama, there also existed a huge amount of tax base land (*Khral rkang*). This land had also been called the outer tax land (*Phyi khral rgyus sa*), because those peasants who made their living by this land had an obligation to perform an outer tax to the Lhasa government. The land was the Horkhang's field and the 82 taxpayers who cultivated this land were also Horkhang's subjects, not the government's subjects. However Horkhang got no harvest from this land. Horkhang had arranged huge amounts of his land as an independent land for fulfilling the obligation to the Lhasa government and attached his own taxpayers to that land. Horkhang made this arrangement in return for the approval of his estate tenure by the Lhasa government¹⁷. In short, the Gyama Estate had included three kinds of land

¹⁵ The Horkhang family usually lived in Lhasa and the Horkhang manor house was managed by his steward.

¹⁶ The *dunam* (*Dud gnam* or *Du gnam*) or smoke-householders were outsiders of the Tibetan estate. *Dunam* had existed in almost all Tibetan estates in the early twentieth century and functioned as freelance laborers. Because of a chronic shortage of labor power, their existence was indispensable for managing estates.

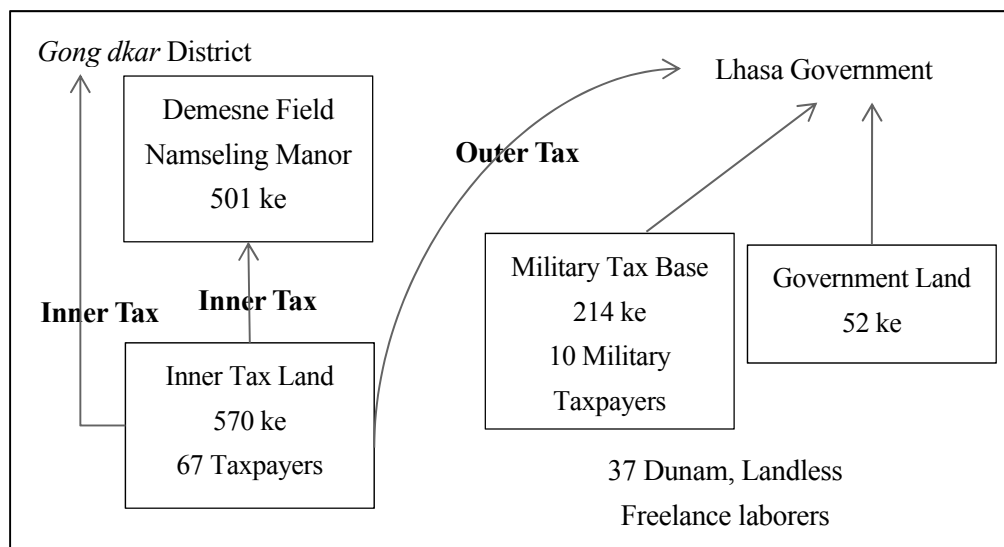
¹⁷ Goldstein had pointed out the power relationship between the Lhasa government and local lords. "All those lords who predated the coming to power of the Dalai Lama's government at some time had to have their hereditary tenures over their estates confirmed" (Goldstein 1968: 105).

(demesne field, tenement field or inner tax land, and outer tax land) and three groups of people (outer taxpayers, inner taxpayers, and dunam).¹⁸ This land structure and human classification somehow differs from what previous studies had assumed. The most important difference is the fact that the hereditary divisions of taxpayers and small-householders are not so important in the Gyama Estate. In Gyama, such hereditary divisions of status did not decide peasants' social life and behavior. Rather, the kind of land to which they belonged (outer tax land, inner tax land, and landless) decided their social life. However, it is hard to say that this kind of social structure was typical of Tibetan aristocratic estates in the early twentieth century. To examine this, now we will look at another aristocratic estate, the Namseling Estate.

Case 2: Namseling Estate (*Rnam sras gling gzhis ka*)

The Namseling Estate was a main estate of the aristocrat Namseling. This estate was located in Lhoka (*Lho kha*) and famous for its magnificent seven-storied manor house. The following reconstruction is made according to the LCP point of view.

Diagram 2: Land Structure of the Namseling Estate



Source: *XSLD*, vol.2: 112-164

¹⁸ Military taxpayers and military tax lands were frequently called outer taxpayers and outer tax land. It seems very natural because military service for the Lhasa government from rural estates resembled the outer tax, which meant a rural tax directly performed for the Lhasa government. Because of this, for the clarification of these points, I will classify the military tax land as a kind of outer tax land.

The diagram indicates that there were 67 families of taxpayers, 10 families of military taxpayers, Lord Namseling, and the attendants and 37 families of dunam in this estate. In addition, there might have been unknown numbers of peasant families who made a living cultivating the 52 *ke* of government land (Tib. *Gzhung sa*).¹⁹ Arable fields of the lord had been divided into demesne and tenement lands and, like Gyama Estate, the peasantry who made their living from the harvest of tenement land had an obligation to perform an inner tax. However, unlike Gyama, those peasants who performed an inner tax were of taxpayer status, not small-householder status.²⁰ The other important discrepancy between Gyama and Namseling is, as I showed in Diagram 2, the fact that those peasants who made their living on tenement fields had obligations to perform not only an inner tax but also an outer tax.²¹ In such a sense, the dichotomy of inner taxpayers and outer taxpayers were not important in this estate. Regarding land tenure, this estate included certain amounts of outsiders' land. The *XSLD* recorded that within Namseling Estate, only 71 percent of arable fields were the land of Lord Namseling (*XSLD*, vol. 2: 116-121). Besides Namseling's field, there also existed government land, military tax land, and the enclave field which belonged to Mindroling Monastery (*Smin grol gling dgon pa*) in this estate. Having clarified these points, we may now proceed to an analysis of the reconstructed data in the context of the study of the Tibetan social system.

Analysis

Goldstein defined the Tibetan manorial estate (*Gzhis ka*) as "an estate divided into demesne and tenement lands with attached serfs" (Goldstein 1968: 104). This definition reminds us of Lenin's famous definition of a corvée economy. According to Lenin's *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, the characteristics of the corvée economy is that "the entire land of a given unit of agrarian economy i.e., of a given estate, was divided into the lord's land and the peasants' land" (Lenin 1972: 191). This passage from Lenin's book was adopted by the Tibet Work Committee as a basic characteristic of the Tibetan estate in the 1950s before they started to undertake *XSLD* research. So this demesne/tenement model was adopted by both Western and Chinese academia to

¹⁹ However, it is unclear from the *XSLD* and it is impossible to reconstruct an internal structure of this 52 *ke* of government land.

²⁰ It is clear that the lower Salu village reported by Goldstein was similar to this Namseling estate where Taxpayer status peasants had obligation to perform Inner tax. Inner taxpayers were always "tied" whether they were Taxpayer status or Small-householder status.

²¹ Under the estate steward's guidance, three Genbo (*rgan po*) or managing leaders had arranged the labor power of this estate to perform Inner and Outer tax.

understand the Tibetan aristocratic estate. However, as we have confirmed above, the arable land of an aristocratic estate was usually divided into three, not two parts. The most striking difference between the purely corvée laborer model and the reality of Tibetan aristocratic estates is that the latter had government land within the estate. Although Gyama seems simpler and closer to the corvée model, the estate still chose to establish an independent outer tax land for providing the obligations to the Lhasa government. We may say that the existence of this independent land where the peasants exclusively served the Lhasa government within the aristocratic estate indicates the centralizing power of the Lhasa government. Namseling Estate had a more complicated structure. In this estate, unlike Gyama, the inner and outer taxpayers were mixed up. Namseling's Estate steward had arranged his inner taxpayers to perform outer taxes too. In this estate, aristocratic rule over the peasants was stronger than in Gyama. These differences among aristocratic estates may reflect the process of struggle between the centralizing powers of the Lhasa government versus the local aristocracy's rule over its subjects.

The lesson we can learn from this is clear. There existed strong diversity within Tibetan estates. Although both Gyama and Namseling estates were aristocratic estates, however, the land structures within them were totally different from each other. Because of this, in the study of the Tibetan social system, we cannot easily rely on folk typologies such as *Gzhung sger chos gsum* (a threefold estate typology of government estate, aristocratic estate, and monastic estate) as useful for grasping the realities of Tibetan rural society. While such a folk typology had certainly existed, there was no typical aristocratic estate. To pay more attention to such diversities within the Tibetan aristocratic estates themselves may help us to understand the power relations between the Lhasa government and local aristocrats, local lords and peasantry, and the Lhasa government and peasantry.²² Samuel insisted on the diversity of Tibetan societies and asserted that to treat the society under the Lhasa government as typical of Tibetan societies is misleading. He also claimed that there existed a clear contrast between the centralized society under the rule of the Lhasa government and the decentralized statelessness of Sherpa society (Samuel 1993). Although this claim has certain persuasiveness, if we sincerely go into a detailed study of the Tibetan social system under the Lhasa government, then we have to pay much attention to internal diversity *within* the society under the Lhasa government.

²² The power balance between centralization and decentralization is a very important theme. Goldstein's early articles (1971d, 1973) have dealt with this issue.

Conclusion

We have already confirmed that the twofold concept of demesne and tenement model is not always valid for grasping the realities of the Tibetan estate system. Tibetan aristocratic estates were not fully under the control of local lords. The influence of the Lhasa government was omnipresent even within the aristocratic estate. The ways in which its influence manifested within each estate were very diverse and depended on the situation of each estate.

Regarding the human classification of the Tibetan peasantry, data from the Gyama Estate indicate that, in some cases, the LCP threefold model (outer taxpayer, inner taxpayer, and smoke-householder) is more valid. Inner taxpayers were, as mentioned above, those who belonged to a land where they owed an obligation to pay an inner tax *whether they were taxpayer status or small-householder status*. Inner taxpayers were usually “tied” whether they were taxpayer status or small-householder status. Now we can answer the question of what is the Tibetan counterpart for the “tied” dü-jung. The answer is the inner taxpayer (*Nang khral pa*).²³ The following table illustrates the differences in human classification based on SCP and LCP.

Table 3: Comparison of SCP and LCP

Classification based on SCP	Classification based on LCP
Taxpayer	Outer Taxpayer (<i>Phyi khral pa</i>)
	Inner Taxpayer (<i>Nang khral pa</i>)
“Tied” dü-jung	
“Human Lease” dü-jung	Smoke-householder (<i>Du/Dud gnam</i>)

The Tibetan equivalent of the concept of a “tied” dü-jung is the inner taxpayer. This concept includes both the taxpayer and small-householder at the same time when they owe an obligation to perform an inner tax. Therefore, this folk concept had nothing to do with the peasants’ inherent statuses. The division between taxpayer versus small-householder was not important in some local understandings. For example, Liu Zhong, a Chinese scholar dispatched from the Central Party School who did research on the Tibetan estate system in central Tibet in the 1950s, mentioned an interesting custom in the Metro Gunkar region:

In this region, serfs use the name of the land as their group name. For example, those who cultivate the outer tax land call themselves “outer taxpayers” (*XSLD*, vol.1: 65).

²³ Now it has become clear that this term should be analyzed as “those who perform an inner tax (nang khral + pa).” It was not a subcategory of the taxpayer (nang + khral pa).

This way of local understanding is LCP, another way of looking at the Tibetan traditional society. From the LCP's point of view, peasants were classified according to the land where they cultivated and owed their tax obligations. To avoid possible misunderstandings, I reiterate that this idea is not totally against nor contradictory of the idea of SCP. SCP is also a means of social theory based on local realities. However, in certain cases, SCP contradicts the local reality, especially with the concept of inner and outer taxpayers because those concepts were not based on an inherent status. This is why the previous studies rarely mentioned the existence of the double tax system. SCP's premise is not compatible with the double tax system. This system may indicate the history of negotiation between the centralizing power of the Lhasa government and de-centralizing power of local lords. LCP is another way of looking at the realities of traditional Tibetan society. This perspective is, in some cases, closer to the native point of view than SCP. Serious studies of a given society should be done from various angles. LCP will help us to widen the ways by which we look at the realities of the Tibetan social system.

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