


A Study on *nang zan*: On the Reality of the “Servant Worker” in Traditional Tibetan Society

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 Although various scholars such as Goldstein,¹ French,² Fjeld,³ and Bischoff⁴ have written about *mi ser* or commoners in pre-1959 Central Tibet, many uninvestigated topics concerning Tibetan social history remain. One such topic is the *nang zan*,⁵ or the servant worker in Central Tibet. The aim of this article is to shed new light on the category of people called *nang zan*, a word often translated and interpreted as “house slave” (Ch. *jia nu*) in the historiographies on traditional Tibet published in contemporary China.

1. Introduction

Previous studies on Tibetan social stratification can generally be classified into two main groups: studies by scholars in the West and studies by those in China. Interestingly, there is a clear contrast between these two groups regarding the existence of *nang zan*. While the numerous studies on the traditional Tibetan social system conducted by Western scholars make little reference to *nang zan*, Chinese studies⁶ mention *nang zan* as one of the most basic categories of social stratification.

In Chinese historiographies on traditional Tibetan society, *mi ser* or commoners (referring to non-aristocrat lay people)⁷ are divided into three categories: *khral pa* (taxpayer), *dud chung* (small

¹ Goldstein 1968, 1971abc, 1986.

² French 2002.

³ Fjeld 2005.

⁴ Bischoff 2013.

⁵ This word is also spelled as *nang bzan* or *nang gzan*.

⁶ All translations from Chinese sources in this article are my own.

⁷ The definition of *mi ser* had been a point of contention between Goldstein 1988, 1989 and Miller 1987; 1988.

householder), and *nang zan*.⁸ In contrast, Western understanding of Tibetan commoners produces a twofold model.⁹ According to this, Tibetan *mi ser* comprised *khral pa* and *dud chung*. Therefore, the main point of difference between the two was regarding the existence (or absence) of *nang zan* as a distinct social class. What does this imply? In this article, I make use of the six-volume *Research on Tibetan Society and History* (Ch. *Zangzu Shehui Lishi Diaocha*, hereafter ZSLD) as a source. This is a corpus of reports by Chinese ethnographers based on their fieldwork in Central Tibet in the 1950s. Since most of the research and studies in these volumes were done prior to 1959 and the abolition of the Dalai Lama government by the Chinese Communist Party's "democratic reform" (Ch. *minzhu gaige*), traditional Tibetan society had not yet become a thing of the past for the researchers. In that sense, ZSLD consists not of historiographies of a past period, but ethnographies of an existing society. Therefore, the reports tend to be milder compared to the present-day more aggressive and dogmatic Chinese writings on old Tibet. Most importantly, these reports include many descriptions of the social conditions of *nang zan* that are different from the depictions in the present-day official Chinese discourses.

2. Representations of *nang zan*

ZSLD reports reveal interesting differences from today's Chinese scholarship on old Tibet,¹⁰ especially regarding *nang zan*. Modern-day studies in China portray traditional Tibetan society as a backward, dark, and cruel feudal serfdom. *Nang zan* is described as the lowest social class and as a symbol of the oppressed people in old Tibet. For example, according to *The Historical Status of Tibet* (Ch. *Xizang Lishi Diwei Bian*),¹¹ an influential Chinese official publication on Tibetan history,¹² *nang zan* was represented as follows:

Nang zan literally means a people "who are fed in the house," indicating house slaves in a landlord's manor. [...] They were completely under the control of their lords and were treated as if they were "livestock that speak the human language," [...] *nang zan*'s children all became *nang zan*. They were born into slavery and lived

⁸ For detailed explanations about *khral pa* and *dud chung*, see Goldstein 1968; 1971abc. In this article, I will concentrate on *nang zan*.

⁹ Okawa 2014.

¹⁰ Heberer (2001) discussed this Chinese image of old Tibet as a "hell on earth."

¹¹ Wang et al. 2003.

¹² Jiang Zeming once gave this book's short English version to Bill Clinton as a gift (Wang et al. 2003: 2).

in poor and miserable conditions. Their existence represented the residual traces of slavery of the former Tibetan feudal serfdom.¹³

This is one of the most typical representations of *nang zan*. According to the official Chinese understanding, *nang zan* inherit their social class since their children too “became *nang zan*.” They comprised the third and lowest group within the threefold model of Tibetan commoners.¹⁴ This kind of writing is found elsewhere, too, in studies published in China on the old Tibetan society. For example, a passage on *nang zan* in a historical study of the Phala estate (*Pha lha gzhis ka*)¹⁵ by present-day Chinese ethnographers mentions the following:

For the eyes of the landlords, the only difference between *nang zan* and livestock lies in the fact that *nang zan* could speak the human language. The landlords were concerned only with how long they could continue to exploit the *nang zan*. Violence was used against the *nang zan* to make them work hard and obey the landlords.¹⁶

We thus find similarities in the various descriptions of *nang zan* in present-day Chinese discourse. They were regarded as the most oppressed and poorest social class. This is not surprising given the fact that the Chinese Communist Party always depicted the traditional Tibetan society as a “dark, backward, cruel feudal serfdom.” However, in a few cases, we do find a different representation, even within academic publications in China. For example, in ZSLD mentioned above, we can note a difference in the representation of *nang zan*:

Case 1: *Nang zan* in Gyama (*rGya ma*) estate

In this Gyama estate, *nang zan* are envied by *dud chung* (small householders) in most cases. They are relatively well off and have no

¹³ Wang et al. 2003 : 457.

¹⁴ In contrast, the twofold model or Western understanding does not suppose the possibility of *nang zan* comprising an independent social stratum. Take the Goldstein-Miller debate I mentioned above as an example. In the debate, Goldstein cited the case of “servant serf Nyima” to support his insistence that freedom of the *mi ser* was limited (Goldstein 1988). According to the “human lease” document that Goldstein cited, Nyima was actually a *nang zan*. However, no emphasis was placed on that point in the debate. Nyima was only mentioned as a *mi ser* or “servant type” *mi ser*.

¹⁵ This estate’s manor house has now been reconstructed as a Patriotic Education Base (Ch. *Aiguo zhuyi jiaoyu jidi*) and opened to the public like a museum. The exhibitions, including figures that describe scenes of landlords abusing their serfs, are in line with the party’s official propaganda that stresses the cruelty of traditional Tibet.

¹⁶ Xu and Zheng 2005: 76.

responsibility and do not have to work hard.¹⁷

This is inconsistent with today's Chinese writings about the traditional Tibetan society in general and on *nang zan* in particular, where *nang zan* is the third and lowest class of Tibetan commoners. *Dud chung* or small householders form the second stratum, and they are considered higher than *nang zan* in status. However, in the ZSLD based on fieldwork done by Chinese ethnographers, this order was turned upside down.

This can be explained by the nature of the reports. The quote above is based on field research conducted by a Chinese research team in 1958, a year before "democratic reforms" were implemented in central Tibet, under a Dalai Lama government that still functioned under the Chinese Communist Party's official recognition. ZSLD is therefore characterised as an ethnography that depicts a society that existed while the research was conducted and not a historiography that describes a past. As is clearly stated in the Seventeen Point Agreement concluded in 1951, the Dalai Lama's governance of central Tibet was approved by the Chinese government until the day Tibetan leaders and people voluntarily wanted to reform its social system.¹⁸ This meant that the traditional Tibetan social system, described as "a dark, cruel, and backward feudal serfdom," in present day China, continued under the official approval of the Chinese government, at least until 1959 when the Tibetan uprising (or the Tibetan riot, according to Chinese phraseology) happened and "democratic reforms" had to be enforced. Therefore, in the 1950s, the Chinese government did not have a strong motivation to condemn the old Tibetan society (it was not an "old" society at that time) as a backward society. To clarify further, the Chinese government had strong intentions to introduce reforms in Tibetan society even in the 1950s. However, technically speaking, it was inconsistent with the Seventeen Point Agreement, the official recognition that allowed the social system of the Dalai Lama government to be continued. This dilemma was clearly articulated in the speech by Mao Zedong in 1954 when the Chinese Communist Party tried to establish a new constitution. If the new constitution had been established, elections would have had to be conducted for the People's Government in Tibet. This would change the *status quo* of the Dalai Lama government resulting in a clear violation of the Seventeen Point

¹⁷ ZSLD, vol. 1: 148.

¹⁸ "The Central government will not change the current political system of the Tibetan government" (Article 4). "The Central government will not impose any reforms in Tibet" (Article 11).

Agreement.¹⁹

Since this was the situation in Tibet in the 1950s, the underlying tone of the ZSLD is different from that of present-day Chinese representation of Tibet. The reports were more objective than later studies in China, and the six volumes comprising 2,000 pages include descriptions of over 30 estates and villages in central Tibet. A careful reading of these reveals important information about traditional Tibetan society. In the following part, using ZSLD as a corpus, I will reconstruct the reality of *nang zan* in traditional Tibetan society.

3. Case Studies: Realities of *nang zan*

I begin by examining the conditions of *nang zan* in the aristocratic estate (*sger gzhis*) of the Dosur family (*mDo zur*). Dosur estate was in Lhatse district near the public road connecting Shigatse and Dingri:

Case 2: *Nang zan* Tsamchö from Dosur estate

Tsamchö (*bTams bcod*) is a female servant in the manor belonging to the Dosur family. Her husband Norbu (*Nor bu*) also worked in the same house as a servant and a needle worker. When there was no work in the manor, both went to do needle work for other villagers in the estate. Since they are born to *khral pa* (taxpayers) of this estate and have a child of their own; their parents always offer to help them when there is a need. Except for Norbu's hand-operated sewing machine, they do not own any land or animal. However, their incomes are relatively high because of their skill in needlework. In this estate, needle workers are also called *nang zan*. However, they are also in some ways considered as employed laborers.²⁰

First, an interesting point in this case is that Tsamchö and her husband are both *nang zan*, but they are children of *khral pa* or taxpayer families. This contradicts the basic premise of the threefold model or the Chinese understanding of Tibetan commoners' social stratification. As shown above, there existed three strata according to official Chinese understanding (*khral pa*, *dud chung*, and *nang zan*), which constituted mutually independent and inherited social classes. However, this was not the case according to the Chinese ethnographers dispatched to Tibet by the Chinese government in the 1950s. In this case, the children of a *khral pa* family could become *nang zan*.

¹⁹ "I'm afraid that the Dalai will possibly reject this. He will reject this based on the Seventeen Point Agreement that we concluded with him. What can we possibly do?" (Mao 2008: 105).

²⁰ ZSLD, vol. 6: 221.

The second point is that the couple, Tsamchö and Norbu, possessed the right to go and seek work outside the manor as paid employees. This is inconsistent with the official representation of *nang zan* as house slaves.

Although the ZSLD were official reports, the descriptions in it are so observation-based that they sometimes bring out interesting inconsistencies within the framework of the official representation of old Tibet. As already mentioned, these writings and the research are from the 1950s when the Dalai Lama government still existed under the Chinese Communist Party's official approval. Not that the misrepresented and bold Marxist understanding of Tibetan society was nonexistent then, but it was not expressed with impunity as it is done today. The last part of the quote above, where the ethnographer has added the note that the usage of the term *nang zan* in this estate somehow differed from the general usage of the word, proves this fact. The threefold model was formulated in 1957 by Li Youyi, the team leader of this research project and a leading Tibetologist in China. The ethnographers conducting research on Dosur estate were aware of Li's theory and found a discrepancy between the reality they perceived in the field and Li's premise about *nang zan*. Many such cases can be found in the ZSLD:

Case 3: Lhunpo (*IHung po*) estate in Medro Konkar (*Mal dro gung dkar*) district²¹

Nang zan originally means house slave. However, here in Lungpo estate, they are heterogeneous in their family origin. Most of *nang zan* here are not house slaves but paid workers. There are nine *nang zan* within this estate. They are descendants of soldiers of the Tibetan army, or of *khral pa*, *dud chung*, or nomads. Only one among the nine was born to *nang zan*.²²

This also indicates that *nang zan* was not an inherited status. *Nang zan* in this estate include *khral pa* and *dud chung*. This fact clearly contradicts the threefold model. The ethnographers of the ZSLD were in a dilemma when they found that many facts were inconsistent with their guidance framework. However, they wrote down all the troublesome facts and did not discard them. This makes the data of ZSLD valuable for its facts.

These facts indicate the possibility of *nang zan* and *khral pa*, or *nang zan* and *dud chung* being interchangeable. The same idea is

²¹ Lungpo estate is a government estate (*gzhung gzhis*) located near Lhasa. Note that this village complex was called "estate" (*gzhis ka*). Goldstein once insisted that a government village could not be called an "estate" (Goldstein 1968: 142, n. 2). However, according to ZSLD, this was not the case.

²² ZSLD, vol. 1: 172.

mentioned in an article written by Liu Zhong, a leading researcher of the ZSLD team.²³ “*Nang zan* hold a relatively special status in Tibetan serfdom. They do housework and other chores in landlords’ manors and hence include *khral pa* and *dud chung*.”²⁴ Since this article was originally published in 1959, the facts remain untouched. We find similar supporting evidence from other sources published in China. The following extract is from an official report on Tibetan old society:

Case 4: Photang (*Pho drang*) estate in Lhoka (*lHo kha*) region

There exist six *nang zan* working for the landlord. These are sent by *khral pa* families on the estate. The cook remains the same, while the other five are assigned different jobs such as putting out the horses or cattle to graze; drawing water from the river; carrying letters to nearby villages; or clearing up the manor house.²⁵

In this case, providing *nang zan*, or people who worked for the landlord, became a kind of tax obligation for the *khral pa* or taxpayer families. *khral pa* families occupied the highest and wealthiest strata in both the twofold and threefold models of Tibetan commoners. Since their tax was levied based on the household and not as per the individual,²⁶ the usual strategy they adopted was to maximise the number of family members preparing for corvée labor. In this estate, providing *nang zan* for the landlord’s house was one such obligation. If a family had enough labor resources within, family members could be sent as *nang zan*. If not, they had to employ a freelance laborer²⁷ and send him or her to the manor house. Therefore, *khral pa* families were usually relatively large, resembling a small company managed by a family leader and it included many non-family members such as their own servant workers. There is more evidence of this in the following passage in ZSLD:

Case 5: Gyama estate in Medro Konkar district

Nang zan means house slave. However, in reality, there is a huge internal diversity among them. *Nang zan* not only existed in the landlord’s manor, but also in wealthy *khral pa* houses, or even in ordinary *khral pa* houses.²⁸

²³ Liu uses the pseudonym Ye Lu in this article.

²⁴ Ye and He 2001: 100.

²⁵ Xizang Fengjian Nongnu Zhidu Shehui Ketu Zu 1992: 27.

²⁶ Goldstein 1971b.

²⁷ Usually *di bogs dud chung* (“human lease small householder”) or *nud gnam* (“smoke householder or outsider laborer”) were in charge of this work.

²⁸ ZSLD, vol. 1: 144.

The Chinese ethnographers conducting this research certainly based their work on the premise that *nang zan* are house slaves in a manor house. However, they admitted that there were facts that contradicted this premise. The following example shows a case where servants are not called *nang zan* (Ch. *lang sheng*) but “servants” (Ch. *yong ren*). However, they might be *nang zan*. *Nang zan* were also called *g.yog po* in some areas.²⁹ Although *g.yog po* means “servant” in most cases, in some areas in traditional Tibet, this word indicates a certain type of laborer who lived with and worked for his or her master’s house without monetary salary. They were instead paid in barley, 1.5 *khal* or 21 kilograms a month. This amount of barley was just the same as that given to *nang zan* in Central Tibet. Therefore, *g.yog po* can be a variant of *nang zan*, and not a general word for servant in this case. Note that the extract in case 6 is not a literal translation but my own reconstruction:

Case 6: Servants in Taxpayer Tago (*bKra sgo ?*) family in the Dunkar (*Dung dkar*) region

The Tago family is very large and wealthy with 25 servants in the house. These servants cannot leave the house without their master’s permission. If they wanted to leave and look for another job in another place, they had to pay an annual fee to the family as the price of freedom. Some of them are those who have run away from their original land and come to this village and have become Tago’s servants on a contract base. Others are Tago’s servants by birth. Their parents were Tago’s servants and hence they automatically took on the same profession. They helped in farming, cooking, fetching water, shepherding, milking, and other activities.³⁰

This *khral pa* family is relatively large and wealthy. It is also interesting to note that the servants in this house could free themselves by paying an annual fee to the family. This practice reminds us of *mi bogs* or “human lease,” which is discussed by Goldstein.³¹ According to Goldstein, *mi bogs* is a contract held between lords and *mi ser*. However, in this case, the contract was practiced among *mi ser*. Tago is a *khral pa* or a taxpayer, not an aristocrat. Although it is not clear from the description of the ZSLD whether this practice of human lease was also called *mi bogs*, this case widens our understanding of the mobility of *mi ser* in traditional

²⁹ Interview with Losang Namgyal (*Blo bzang rnam rgyal*), 2006/08/25, Lhasa. He was a minor aristocrat and had worked in his father’s estate as a labor manager. He had also served in the Dalai Lama government and managed a craftsmen’s guild group in Lhasa in the 1950s.

³⁰ ZSLD, vol. 1: 35.

³¹ Goldstein 1971c.

Tibet. It is clear that *nang zan* existed not only in landlord's houses, but also in other *mi ser* or commoners' houses.³² Moreover, we also find *nang zan* without lords or masters to whom they belong. See the following extract as an example:

Case 7: *Nang zan* in Lhungpo estate

Having safely escaped from their original place and become *nang zan*, a serf could go anywhere he or she liked and expect to be treated well. According to the estate's landlord, the reason why these outsider *nang zan* must be treated well is clear. Since they are not the landlord's own serfs, if he does not treat them well, it is hard for him to retain them on his estate [...] If a *nang zan* wanted to become a *nang khral pa*,³³ or even a *khral pa*, it was possible when a vacancy for the position arose or when the landlord agreed to it.³⁴

We now understand that *nang zan* did not always live in their masters' houses. Some were freelance laborers on contract. Since traditional Tibet had a small population scattered over a vast land, there was always a lack of labor resources³⁵ and this resulted in landlords devoting most of their energies to retaining as many *mi ser* as possible on their estate. For example, the Dalai Lama government, the largest landlord in the traditional society, attempted to invite runaway *mi ser* onto government land and give them the status of government taxpayers. Therefore, runaway *mi ser* found it relatively easy to get a new job. These wandering runaway *mi ser* would be of *nang zan* origin. In addition, since the status of *nang zan* was interchangeable and varies depending on the situation, it is clear that *nang zan* were not a monolithic stratum in society and it is hard to simply interpret them as "house slaves" or the third and the lowest class in the threefold model. However, we do find some commonalities in the characteristics of the labor of *nang zan*.

There are at least two kinds of *nang zan*. The first type represents

³² This is why the author is reluctant to use "serf" as a fixed translation for *mi ser*. It sounds strange that a "serf" employs another "serf" as their servants or that a "serf" pays an annual fee to their master "serf" to buy their physical freedom.

³³ In my previous article (Okawa 2014), I translated this term "inner taxpayer." Note that this category did not appear in previous Western studies on Tibetan social history. Actually, this category is not compatible with either the threefold or the twofold models that classify Tibetan commoners based on their inherited status, which I consider to be a status-centered perspective. The term *nang khral pa* belongs to another taxonomy of human classification that existed in traditional Tibetan society. I reconstructed and named this folk taxonomy as "land-centered perspective." See Okawa 2014 for further discussion of the question of the human classification of Tibetan commoners in general and *nang khral pa* in particular.

³⁴ ZSLD, vol. 1: 174.

³⁵ Goldstein 1968.

those who worked as servants in their master's house. Labor management was the most typical work done by these types of *nang zan*. The other *nang zan* are those who worked as simple physical laborers. The following case shows an example of the first type of *nang zan*:

Case 8: Labor Manager (*las dpon*) in Gyama estate

Las dpon means "labor manager." *Las dpon* were selected from *khral pa* or even from *dud chung*. The people in this estate recognise *las dpon* as *nang zan*. However, *las dpon* and slave-like *nang zan* are completely different from each other.³⁶

In short, *las dpon* were selected from *khral pa* and *dud chung* and recognised by locals as *nang zan*. They were in charge of allotting labor in the estate fields. This clearly indicates that the Chinese threefold model is not valid. Now, we can properly understand the mysterious description mentioned before. Case 1 showed that *nang zan* were relatively well off, had no need to work hard, and were envied by *dud chung*.³⁷ This description certainly contradicts the Chinese threefold model. Therefore, the *nang zan* in Case 1 was a labor manager of the type of *nang zan*.

Nang zan were not necessarily born with such a status, unlike the *khral pa* and *dud chung*. The term *nang zan* rather indicates people who do a certain kind of labor. *Nang zan* represents people who work as a subordinate and perform minor works in an organisation. For example, in the Dalai Lama's government, there existed *nang zan* who were lower officials. It is well known that the bureaucracy of the Tibetan government consisted of aristocratic lay officials and monk officials. However, this does not mean that all lay officials in the government were from the aristocracy. There were many *mi ser* or "commoner" status low-ranking officials. In his dissertation, Goldstein makes a fleeting mention of such *nang zan* who worked as low-ranking government officials:

Case 9: *Nang zan* officials in Gyantse (*rGyal rtse*) district

The most important administrators under the District Commissioners were four secretaries called Ledrung (*las drung*) [...] It will suffice to mention here that government officials were dichotomised into shung-shab (*gzhung zhabs*) or government officials and an incomparably lower category of employees called nan-sen (*nang zan*) or government clerks. Their positions were hereditary [...] they had considerable potential influence over district affairs.³⁸

³⁶ ZSLD, vol. 1: 119.

³⁷ ZSLD, vol. 1: 148.

³⁸ Goldstein 1968: 27.

The point to note here is that these *nang zan* inherited the position of working as government clerks. This is somehow exceptional. What they inherited was not the status of *nang zan* itself, but the right to become government clerks in this district. In this sense, *nang zan* does not indicate a social class but the position of a clerk. In any case, it is surprising that "house slaves" worked in the government body as powerful local officials. Here is a retrospective autobiography of an older generation who were *nang zan* in traditional Tibetan society:

Case 10: Losang Tendzin (*Blo bzang bstan 'dzin*), manager *nang zan* in the Tibetan government

Losang Tendzin was born in 1906 in a *mi ser* farmer's home in aristocrat *lHa sding's* estate in the Medro Konkar region. When he was six years old, he started to learn reading and writing from his father. He moved to Lhasa when he was eight years old and went on to study at *Kho bo'i khang gsar*, a famous private school. When he became fourteen, he started to work in his master *lHa sding's* house in Lhasa as a servant. He also studied Tibetan grammar in the *sman rtsis khang*. When he turned eighteen, he knew that the *bla phyag las khungs* (treasury office in charge of finance and treasury of the Potala palace) was accepting applications for the post of four new official *zha'u li*³⁹ and he applied for the job. He successfully passed the selection test and became *phyag mdzod nang zan* (*nang zan* belonged to *bla phyag las khungs*).⁴⁰

This record shows that the practice of job-hunting for *nang zan* prevailed in those times. From these cases, we now understand that *nang zan* were so diverse that the term includes powerful local officials, estate labor managers and poor physical laborers. Moreover, the word *nang zan* does not indicate a status inherited by birth but doing a certain kind of work. All this leads us to conclude that the threefold model is not valid and is mistaken in its categorisation of traditional Tibetan society.

4. Conclusion

Nang zan is a diverse and heterogeneous category. The last task here is to show the logic behind this diversity. Why was this single term applied to such a variety of people?

Although diverse, as in most cases I referred to, *nang zan* share some common characteristics. First, they were all *mi ser*, not

³⁹ This word has its origins in the Chinese word *Xuli* meaning a low-ranking official.

⁴⁰ *Blo bzang bstan 'dzin* 2004; reconstructed by the author.

aristocrats or monks. This means that all of them were subordinate and had a master to whom they belonged (except in the case of runaway *mi ser*). Second, and more important, most *nang zan* did not occupy any arable fields. Although some *nang zan* served as physical laborers in their masters' fields, they did not occupy that land. In traditional Tibetan society, most *mi ser* would have had a right to inherit their parents' land and use it as a resource for their living.⁴¹ Although landlords retained a partial right to confiscate their *mi ser*'s land, rarely was this right used without serious reason. However, *nang zan* did not possess this right of inheritance.⁴² They made their living based on crop yields such as barley or other food grains given by their masters who were lay aristocratic landlords, monasteries, wealthy peasants, or the Tibetan government. This commonality is shared by powerful government official *nang zan* and poor slave-like *nang zan*. In this sense, they did not work in a primary industry.

They were landless people and this is an important characteristic given the fact that traditional Tibet was characterised as a primary industry society. *Nang zan* literally means "those who are fed in a house." They were outsiders in this agricultural and pastoral society. This anomalous character made their existence exceptional in traditional Tibetan society. They were not, as the Chinese threefold model proposes, inheritors of this status of commoners; nor were they the lowest and most oppressed people. Of course, many such poor *nang zan* did exist in reality, but it would be misleading to consider it as an independent status. The term *nang zan* rather indicates a special group of people defined not only by their inherited status but also by the characteristics of the job they performed.

Another common characteristic I found among all the *nang zan* I referred to is that they were all "minor workers" in the given organisations. In the governmental body, aristocratic and monk officials were the main forces and *nang zan* only served as lower and minor workers. In the local estate context, aristocrats or monastic landlords were the main holders of power and *nang zan* only served as managers. No matter how powerful they were, they remained minor workers. In the manor house or local peasants' fields, *nang zan*

⁴¹ Goldstein insisted that only *khral pa* had a right to inherit their parents' land and *dud chung* had no right of inheritance (Goldstein 1971b). However, it is clearly not the case according to ZSLD. It provides descriptions of *dud chung*'s inheritance of land at e.g. ZSLD, vol. 1: 121.

⁴² The government clerks in case 9, as reported by Goldstein, differ slightly in this regard. They inherit their father's clerk status along with the salary given in the form of produce by the local government. However, this would mean interpreting that the clerk's position is inherited along with the lands attached to that position. Further investigation is needed for the government clerk *nang zan*.

worked as physical laborers who had no power. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that *nang zan* were minor workers in the given organisation. This is why I chose the word "servant worker" in the title of this article. This would include both powerful and also lower local officials, government clerks, craftsmen, estate stewards, and simple physical workers. This understanding is, in most cases, closer to the reality and the native's point of view in traditional Tibetan society.

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