

Reconstructing the relationships: Network of Support and Debt among Tibetan Refugees in Dharamsala, India

Seollan Pyeon (National Museum of Ethnology)

This paper presents an examination of how Tibetan refugees, especially *gsar 'byor* (new comer) in Dharamsala, reconstruct their social relationships. I argue that communality is constructed through everyday practices, although traditional social relationships based on Tibetan regions (such as U-tsang, Kham, Amdo) have been regarded as important features of communality in Tibetan society. Specifically, this study explores the electronic money exchange on Wechat called '*khug dmar gtong ba*' as a tool to visualize the relationship among *gsar 'byors*.

Investigations of social relationships and the communality of *gsar 'byor* are crucially important for two reasons. First, unlike *gzis chags* (settlers), *gsar 'byors* are usually alone when they arrive in India. Because they are separated from their mainland family, reconstructing their social relationships in India is an important task for them. Secondly, In Dharamsala, people are moving so fast that it is sometimes called 'the International Airport'. The members of *gsar 'byor* change one after another because many acquaintances and friends are leaving Dharamsala.

Under such circumstances, blood and regions cannot be the most important criteria for reconstruction of social relationships for *gsar 'byor*. Social relationships are important resources for livelihood of *gsar 'byor*; their maintenance is related to the problem of survival in India. For *gsar 'byor*, of course, region is the first standard, and Tibetan regionalism has always been an important feature among Tibetan refugees. Relationships, however, do not mean that a boundary is clearly defined or identified. Everyday practices must be described by analyzing when they exchange the *khug dmar*, how they use *khug dmar* in India, and how it affects the Tibetan refugees' community.