

It pays to pray

March 11 2011, by Albert Sikkema

Pastoralists in rural Tibet who spend more time on religious activities earn more than their counterparts who pray less. This is the striking conclusion drawn by Wageningen University development economist Qin Tu.

Tu visited Tibetan villages to investigate how much time the pastoralists spend every day on their Buddhist religion, and correlated his data with their incomes. His assumption was that pastoralists who spent more time at the temple would have less time to earn money. But when he put devotional activities and income into a graph, he got a U curve. The poor in [Tibet](#) spend a lot of time at the temple, but so do the top earners. Most of the pastoralists were found in the rising curve of the U: the more intensive their religious activity, the more they earned.

Buddhists believe in both a previous life and a life to come. Their belief in an afterlife has a positive effect on the work ethic and on the inclination to save now, claims Tu. Moreover, pastoralists with a good income go to the temple more often because this gives them status and social exchange. Interaction at the temple brings them market information and is therefore also good for business.

Qin Tu, postdoc with development economist Erwin Bulte, published his research this month in the *China Economic Review*.

Provided by Wageningen University

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