

ASIA PROGRAMME

# TIBET: A FORGOTTEN COUNTRY?

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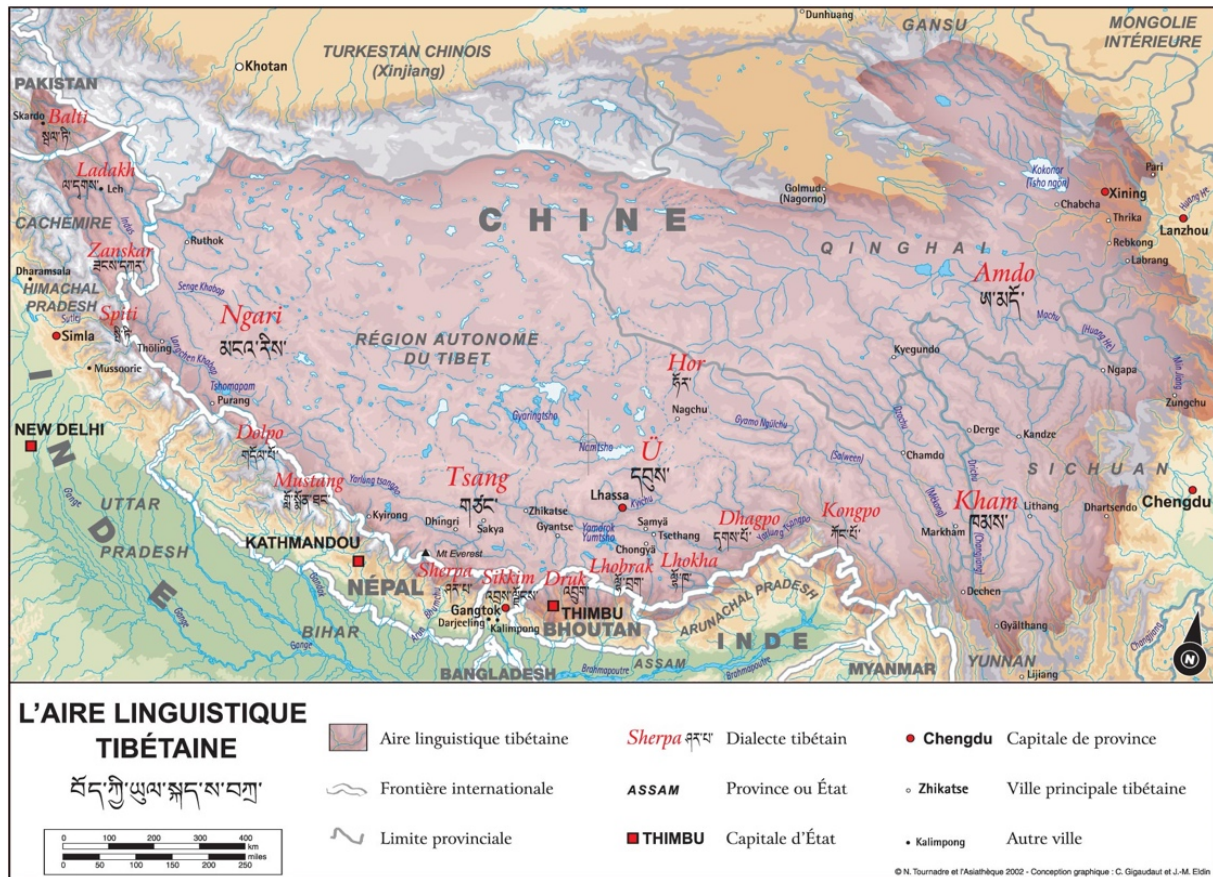
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ASIA FOCUS #163

For decades, no one in the West had heard of the Uighurs and few knew who they really were. Tibetans, on the other hand, benefited from the aura of the Dalai Lama who travelled widely and met with heads of state and government. Tibet and its people continued to be the stuff of dreams, and the old clichés attached to the country continued to live on. Then, just after the 2008 Tibetan uprisings, the inter-ethnic clashes in Urumqi occurred in 2009. They were followed by the Tiananmen Square incident in 2013 and the knife attack at Kunming railway station in Yunnan in 2014, all of which were attributed to Uighurs and brought them out of the shadows into the international spotlight. The rise of China, the increasingly authoritarian rule of Xi Jinping, the hyper-sensitivity of the Chinese authorities with regard to the Dalai Lama, and the timidity, not to say weakness, of Western countries faced with a now economically powerful China, have led numerous governments to stop receiving the Tibetan hierarch. On top of all this, complicated, difficult, and often worrisome, national and international political situation have contributed to the media losing interest in Tibet and Tibetans little by little.

On the Uighur side, it took a long time for the West to wake up, but finally, thanks to the hard work of researchers, human rights defenders and activists, the situation in Xinjiang has been brought to light, overshadowing that of Tibet, which, although less dramatic, is actually no less disquieting.

The four objectives laid out in China's new 14<sup>th</sup> five-year plan (2021-2025) give an idea of the direction the authorities have chosen for Tibet. Four axes have been set up: "ensuring national security and regional stability, increasing national income, protecting the environment and consolidating border security and defense." The time is long gone when Deng Xiaoping told Gyelo Döndrup, one of the Dalai Lama's elder brothers, that "everything could be discussed except independence".



Map from Nicolas Tournadre, Manuel de Tibétain standard : langue et civilisation (*L'Asiatheque*. 2003)

## ENSURING NATIONAL SECURITY AND REGIONAL STABILITY

While all movement defending any field of Tibetan culture has been criminalized with the *Campaign against Criminal Gangs* launched in 2018, it is quite clear that Tibetan religion, language and history, but also environmental preservation are in the authorities' crosshairs when they speak of ensuring "national security and regional stability". The Sinicization of religions, and thus of Tibetan Buddhism, and their adaptation to socialism with Chinese characteristics will continue. This is reflected in increased government control of the religious sphere and a continually increasing demand that the Tibetan clergy be at the service of the state. Any religious organization and its members must demonstrate absolute loyalty and allegiance to the Party. The clergy is asked to "maintain national unity, ethnic unity, religious harmony and social stability" and thus to oppose "separatism", a term which in reality refers to any

expression of interest in Tibetan culture, religion and language, the Dalai Lama, and of course independence — even the Middle Way policy advocated by the hierarchy.

Furthermore, since 2007, as far as the Chinese government is concerned, reincarnation can only be recognized through state approval.

Religious restrictions on lay people are numerous and have increased since the beginning of the Covid pandemic which is being used as a pretext to further restrict religious freedoms. For example, in large monasteries such as Labrang in Amdo (present-day Gansu Province) and Rongwo Gönchen, also in Amdo (present-day Qinghai Province), the organization of the New Year's religious celebrations in February had been taken over by local religious affairs committees and the number of authorized participants had been small due to covid.<sup>1</sup> The Jokhang in Lhasa, the most important temple for Tibetans, as well as the Potala and the key monasteries of Drepung and Sera were closed during the holidays. In any case, students in the Tibet Autonomous Region had already been banned from participating in any religious events for over a year as were all party members and government employees.

Under the guise of an environmental clean-up campaign, the Chinese authorities even ordered the removal of prayer flags (*lungta*) from mountains, monasteries and villages in the Golog Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Amdo.<sup>2</sup>

Just possessing photos of the Dalai Lama or his religious teachings on smartphones leads to jail where torture is commonplace. Sharing information about the situation in Tibet, and even simply talking to relatives in exile is punished with imprisonment as in Lhasa where the inhabitants have recently been forbidden to speak with their families and relations abroad.<sup>3</sup> This is why many Tibetans in exile have given up calling their relatives in Tibet. The suppression of WeChat in India has only added to the difficulties of communication between Tibetans abroad and those in Tibet.

Political re-education campaigns are carried out in monasteries but also in villages, schools and workplaces in the TAR to remind people that only religious practices in line

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/events-02232021195218.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://bitterwinter.org/tibet-the-ccp-launches-a-campaign-against-prayer-flags/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/controle-lhasa-au-tibet-il-ne-faut-plus-parler-sa-famille-letranger>

with the religious policy of the Party are tolerated.

The two large monastic camps of Larung Gar and Yachen, in Kham (Sichuan), have undergone numerous expulsions of clerics and major destruction. Larung Gar, which housed several tens of thousands of monks and nuns (the figure of 40,000 has been put forward), including many Han Chinese disciples, had to reduce the number of practitioners to 5,000 and exclude all Han Chinese). Photos taken in 2020 at Yachen, where more than 10,000 nuns lived, showed that half of the camp has been demolished.<sup>4</sup> It is well-known that many of the expelled nuns and monks had to undergo long months of political re-education.

The *Regional Ethnic Unity Law*<sup>5</sup> adopted in January 2020, which came into force on 1 May, requires all levels of government, but also all villages, schools, religious centers, etc., to work together to strengthen ethnic unity and fight ‘separatism’. While Communist China adopted Soviet style policies in the 1950s and granted the 55 ‘ethnic minorities’ separate autonomous status, yet since 2014 it has turned to an assimilationist policy. This is theorized not only by researchers such as Ma Rong, himself a Hui, a sociologist at Beijing University whose research focuses, among other things, on ethnic relations, but also by two researchers from the Center for China Study, Hu Angang and Hu Lianhe. All three share the idea that China's future depends on the practical fulfillment of the idea of *zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nation).<sup>6</sup> Ma proposes the use of national laws to deal with the various ethnic groups (*minzu*) that, so he writes, “make up the Chinese nation”. He advocates the assimilation of Han and non-Han into one nation and thus promotes a China in which ethnic identities are replaced by a national identity, a vision that fits perfectly with that of the Chinese authorities. Thus, on 1 May 2020, China implemented the “Regulations on the Establishment of a Model Area for Ethnic Unity and Progress in the Tibet Autonomous Region”. These regulations aim at “strengthening and promoting the socialist ethnic relations, firmly establishing the consciousness of Chinese national identity, to join different ethnicities into one entity

<sup>4</sup> <https://tibet.net/destruction-of-buddhist-education-institutes-in-tibet-china-must-answer/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/law-05012020182336.html>

<sup>6</sup> Mark Elliot, 2015. “The Case of the Missing Indigene: Debate Over a “Second-Generation” Ethnic Policy”. The China Journal, no. 73.

James Leibold, 2018. “The Rise of Hu the Uniter”, *China Brief*. Volume 18, Issue n16. October 10

like the seeds of a single pomegranate.”<sup>7</sup>

Attacks on the Tibetan language have reached new heights, since in Lhasa, Mandarin has become compulsory even in kindergarten. In 2019, Tibetan language disappeared from the education system in the Golog Autonomous Prefecture from primary school onwards.<sup>8</sup> Then, in April 2020, as schools were preparing to reopen following a lull in the Covid epidemic, the prefecture of Ngawa (Amdo, now Sichuan province) announced that all classes would henceforth be taught in Chinese.<sup>9</sup>

Eventually, on 20 January 2021, the head of the Legal Affairs Committee of the National People's Congress, Shen Chungyao, announced that schools in “minority areas” were no longer allowed to teach their own language, declaring that such education was ‘unconstitutional’. He stressed the superiority of national laws over local laws in the provinces and autonomous regions, stating that all local regulations violate “the country's major reform directions” and “the provisions of the higher-level law”.<sup>10</sup> As the Kenyan writer Ngugi Wa Thiong'o so aptly put it, it is language that “transmits the representations of the world that it carries”.<sup>11</sup>

As for history, the fight against “historical nihilism”,<sup>12</sup> i.e. any skepticism about the Chinese Communist Party's description of past events, is well underway, social media are increasingly controlled and the authorities encourage the denunciation of discourse “demonizing or attacking” official history.

Since the 1950s, when Tibet was invaded and occupied, China has also endeavored to rewrite the history of Sino-Tibetan relations. The issue at stake is obviously the status of Tibet and the question of the legitimacy of its incorporation into the People's Republic of China.

The Tibetan poetess Tsering Woesser<sup>13</sup> relates that, in 2020, two Chinese-style pavilions

<sup>7</sup> Third Session of the Tibet Autonomous Region's Eleventh People's Congress of concluded, China Tibet Network,11 January2020, available at [http://www.tibet.cn/cn/news/yc/202001/t20200111\\_6734443.html](http://www.tibet.cn/cn/news/yc/202001/t20200111_6734443.html)

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/tibetan-language-05162019211809.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/classroom-04092020184114.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://freetibet.org/news-media/na/teaching-tibetan-language-declared-unconstitutional>

<sup>11</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong'o, [1986] 2011. *Décoloniser l'esprit*. Paris, La fabrique Éditions.

<sup>12</sup> <https://rcf.fr/actualite/la-chine-de-xi-jinping-un-contre-modele-occidental-pour-francois-bougon>

<sup>13</sup> <https://highpeakspureearth.com/shocking-during-the-epidemic-two-chinese-style-pavilions-appear-in-front-of-the-jokhang-temple-part-1-by-woesser/>



were placed over two steles that stand in front of the Jokhang. One dates from 821-822 and bears the text, in Chinese and Tibetan, of the peace treaty signed between the Tibetan Empire and Tang China in which Tibet and China are considered as two sovereign states. The treaty defines the borders and proclaims that “Tibetans shall be happy in Tibet and Chinese shall be happy in China”.<sup>14</sup> The second stele erected in 1794 by the *amban* (representative of the Manchu emperor) then posted in Lhasa, indicates the measures to be taken to fight against smallpox. The Chinese authorities’ intention of these additions would, of course, be to further their idea, despite all historical evidence, that “Tibet has been an integral part of China since ancient times.”

Not only is a sophisticated global surveillance system used to arrest ‘criminals’ who share censored information (sometimes just pictures of the Dalai Lama), but also it is common practice for the contents of Tibetans’ phones to be monitored. Telecommunications offices in Tibetan villages now check all telephone conversations.<sup>15</sup>

In addition, there are regular reports of the arrest of influential figures, such as writers, singers, clerics, activists, etc., in short, anyone who continues to speak out and can create a following through their charisma.<sup>16</sup>

While the first axis is clearly detrimental to Tibetan culture, the second axis might hold elements that could be more helpful to them.

## INCREASING NATIONAL INCOME

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Even the victory in the fight against poverty announced in 2020 raises many questions. It should be borne in mind that for the Chinese authorities, but also for the majority of Han Chinese, Tibetans (like other “minorities”) are considered backward and lazy, which explains their poverty. Adrian Zenz, a sinologist specializing in Tibet and Xinjiang, works with official Chinese documents that he “tracks” on internet. He has collected a number of phrases used in Chinese working documents that clearly reflect Chinese officials’ view of “their minorities”: for example, the poverty reduction reports declares that the state must “stop raising up lazy people”. They affirm that the “strict military-style

<sup>14</sup> H.E. Richardson, 1985. *A Corpus of Early Tibetan Inscriptions*. Royal Asiatic Society, p. 125.

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/extends-03222021183626.html>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/views-04222021163150.html>

management” of the vocational training process “strengthens [Tibetans'] weak work discipline” and reforms their “backward thinking”. Tibetans need to make the transition from being very “unwilling to move to being willing to participate, a process that requires diluting the negative influence of religion”.<sup>17</sup>

As a result, in order to escape poverty, they have to adopt the culture and system of the Chinese colonizer. To this end, military-style training centers for Tibetan nomads and villagers have been established.<sup>18</sup> The aim is to educate them to do low-skilled work in the manufacturing or service sector and thus to bring them into the global economy of factory workers. In these centers, only Mandarin is allowed, a language that few of them master satisfactorily. The goal is also that the education they receive in these centers help them get rid of religion, which the authorities see as contributing to the backwardness of their ideas. *Xinhua News Agency* proudly announced on 7 February 2021 that the TAR would help 700,000 farmers and nomads find work in 2021.<sup>19</sup> The article explains that “in order to encourage farmers and herders to find jobs outside the region, Tibet plans to raise their travel fee from 1,000 to 2,000 yuan.” Whether or not these displacements are forced,<sup>20</sup> even if they take place within the TAR and not in mainland China, they involve leading people to leave their usual environment and thus, abandon places in which their own life system and traditional beliefs are embedded. Such displacement of peoples from poor regions to peri-urban areas or small towns is seen to be a central component of Chinese poverty alleviation practices.<sup>21</sup>

To such social engineering must be added the displacement of entire populations living in areas where dam projects are planned. Tibet is the “water tower” of Asia since nine of the largest rivers have their source there: the Yangtze, Yalong, Mekong, Yellow River, Karnali, Tsangpo (known as the Brahmaputra when it reaches India), Indus, Salween, Sutlej. Multiple dams have been built with myriad consequences. The Czech ethnologist Jarmila Ptackova has documented the consequences of the Longyangxia dam on the Yellow River in Qinghai. Its construction lasted from 1976 to 1992. The arguments for

<sup>17</sup><https://jamestown.org/program/jamestown-early-warning-brief-xinjiangs-system-of-militarized-vocational-training-comes-to-tibet/>

<sup>18</sup><https://jamestown.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Read-the-09-28-2020-CB-Issue-in-PDF-rev2.pdf?x41322>

<sup>19</sup>[http://www.china.org.cn/china/2021-02/07/content\\_77196369.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2021-02/07/content_77196369.htm)

<sup>20</sup> It is impossible, at the present time, to say whether or not these movements were made under duress. It is always difficult to interpret propaganda documents which tend to be exaggerated. The impossibility of verifying the situation on the spot means that researchers can only work on sources found on internet or on testimonies and fragmentary knowledge.

<sup>21</sup> <https://rukor.org/#ftn1>



building the dam focused on hydropower, flood control, irrigation water supply and protection of the Yellow River downstream from damage due to floating ice. According to official guidelines, this project was to lead to a reduction in poverty. Ptackova's research clearly shows that the displaced Tibetans face even greater difficulties than they did prior to the project. While her fieldwork took place some 30 years after the completion of the dam and the launch of the hydropower plant, the water level continues to rise leading not only to new communities being displaced, but also to some households or even entire villages being forced to change their habitat again and again. These communities are “half farmers-half nomads” (*samadrok*), and in their new location there is no space for grazing animals. As the communities have sometimes relocated to colder areas, their farming activities have had to change. Their traditional life has also been greatly affected and often villagers no longer have access to a monastery and are not any more able to call on monks for rituals. Lastly, the new concrete houses were built without asking the opinion of the Tibetans who find them very uncomfortable. Only those with sufficient means can build a second wooden house that suits their tastes and which become their main home.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, even the mass tourism experienced in the TAR is of little benefit to Tibetans. Instead, it only accelerates the folklorization and Sinicization of their culture. According to official figures, 40 million tourists<sup>23</sup> (composed of more than 96-97% Han Chinese) would have visited the TAR in 2019. Comparing this number to the mere 2,716,388 Tibetan population in TAR (as stated in the 2010 census)<sup>24</sup>, coupled with the fact that everything infrastructure-wise is done to create an environment that is comfortable for the Han-Chinese visitors, makes the extent of the associated cultural and environmental destruction clear, where Tibetans are further alienated from their own lands and its potential wealth.

## PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

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On 22 April 2021, Xi Jinping attended the *Leaders' Climate Summit* where he gave a speech, described by the Chinese press as very important, entitled “For Man and Nature:

<sup>22</sup> Jarmila Ptackova 2020 *Tibetan Herders and Chinese Development projects*. University of Washington Press.

<sup>23</sup> [http://english.cqnews.net/html/2020-01/10/content\\_50771299.htm](http://english.cqnews.net/html/2020-01/10/content_50771299.htm)

<sup>24</sup> The detailed results of the 2020 census are awaited.

Building a Community of Life Together”.<sup>25</sup> One can only regret that his words do not begin to match his actions. Without repeating the whole speech, we can simply focus on a few points and learn that “Mountains, rivers, forests as well as farmlands, lakes, grasslands and deserts all make indivisible parts of the ecosystem. We need to follow the innate laws of the ecosystem and properly balance all elements and aspects of Nature.” The PRC has only 7% of the world’s freshwater resources, yet is home to 20% of the world’s population.<sup>26</sup> In order to combat the very unequal distribution of water resources, the authorities have built a system of canals to export water from the southern to the northern provinces. This project is said to have benefited 67 million people according to the *People Daily*, the Party’s mouthpiece,<sup>27</sup> which neglects to underline the enormous population displacements and the environmental impacts such as soil salinization.

Hydropower is the preferred solution for electricity generation as an alternative to coal. But the construction of a multitude of dams equally poses many environmental, economic, social and political problems. Dams disrupt the healthy functioning of rivers. It has been demonstrated that controlling the flow of water blocks the migration of fish and modifies a river’s capacity to transport sediments, but it also concentrates pollutants in the water retention basin. Dams pose a threat to fisheries, agriculture, forests, the natural habitat of rare species, not to mention the countless human problems caused by the associated population displacement. What is more, Tibet is an earthquake zone, which poses additional dangers. Cascading dams on the Mekong River are known to have exacerbated the drought in the lower Mekong. Moreover, while some researchers attribute the 2008 Sichuan earthquake to the weight of the water in the Three Gorges Dam, a new study “illustrates the clear relationship between water incursion into a specific rock type and the triggering of earthquakes on a previously unrecognized fault.”<sup>28</sup>

One project in particular is causing great concern in India, the Yarlung Tsangpo dam, which is expected to produce more than twice the output of the massive Three Gorges

<sup>25</sup> [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/zxxx\\_662805/t1871057.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1871057.html)

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.ceres.ens.fr/IMG/Trois-Gorges.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <http://french.peopledaily.com.cn/Economie/n3/2020/1120/c31355-9782449.html>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.slu.edu/news/2018/september/earthquake-research.phpv>

Dam.<sup>29</sup> Yet, the construction of this dam has led to a decrease in the flow of the Yangtze. The Yarlung dam and hydro-electric project is now listed in the 14th *Five-Year Plan* as one of the China's major energy development projects for the period 2021-2025. It is known that this hydropower base will be built on the lower Tsangpo River, but the precise location has been kept secret. The recent disaster in India, where a glacier break-up in the north of the country causing floods and landslides that swept away a hydroelectric dam, raises fears for the worst.

This fear is motivated, according to Gabriel Lafitte, an Australian researcher specialist in environmental issues in Tibet, by the placement of “the bed of the Yarlung Tsangpo [which] is literally located at the point where the Indian and Eurasian continents collide.”<sup>30</sup>

The construction of such large-scale works highlights the colonial relationship between the center and the Western Provinces. Such gigantic works do not benefit the Tibetans at all. On the contrary, they disadvantage them: they attract large numbers of Chinese migrant workers and allow for the transfer of electricity to China's heavily populated coast, thus enhancing the development of the China coastal elite, and not Tibet and its people.

It is also very surprising to hear Xi Jinping talk about environmental protection with the great number of mining projects underway. This mining is constantly increasing because the Chinese manufacturing machine relies on minerals<sup>31</sup> (lithium, copper, uranium, gold, silver, etc.), all of which are found in Tibet. In addition, the improvement of transport and the construction of a network of railway lines make it much cheaper to transport minerals from Tibet to mainland China. The subject of mining logically links with the subject of dams since the industrial-scale extraction of rarer minerals, such as copper, requires huge amounts of electricity for the preliminary refining of the ore. And all the heavy resource extraction is taking place without taking into account the beliefs of the Tibetans. For them, the landscape is inhabited and the various elements that make up the landscape are home to deities who play an important role in the life of the

<sup>29</sup><https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-05-25/chinas-plan-to-build-mega-dam-on-yarlung-tsangpo-brahmaputra/>  
<https://jamestown.org/program/beijing-boosts-its-position-as-a-himalayan-hegemon-through-hydropower/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://asialyst.com/fr/2015/11/13/le-tibet-sous-le-poids-des-barrages-chinois/>

<sup>31</sup> The best book on mining in Tibet is: Gabriel Lafitte 2013, *Spoling Tibet. China and Resource Nationalism on the Roof of the World*. London-New York, Zed Books.

communities. For example, mountains are often the home of the territorial god (*yul lha*) who is said to protect a specific territory and the people living on it. People know that they can expect protection, posterity and prosperity from this god if he is “pleased”, but they also know that if he is disturbed and upset, he can send hail and other calamities. Mining is a particularly disruptive and destructive activity. A very important sacred mountain, Amnye Machen in Amdo, contains copper and a mine is being operated there. The extraction causes a lot of ecological damage, the despoliation of the nomads’ land and the desecration of their sacred space, without forgetting that, for the Tibetans, these minerals are the origin of the vital essence of this land which sustains human communities and animals. A Tibetan poet, who chose the name “Plateau is my home” to remain anonymous, expresses his pain in these lines:<sup>32</sup>

“To Amnye Machen”

By: The Plateau is my Home

Even though I have never seen you  
 Even though I have never been at your side  
 I know your stalwart figure  
 Standing firmly in the boundless space between heaven and earth  
 On your venerable forehead that has passed through thousands of years  
 Are the clean snowflakes shining in the sun of the plateau  
 Under your vast, peaceful and smooth feet  
 Is the sound of praises sung to you by the plateau herders.  
 You are one of the nine sacred mountains of Tibet  
 Your fame is firmly established throughout the world.  
 You are the Dharma defender of Amdo  
 Your good name is widely known.  
 However, today, the wheels of greed  
 Are running over the grassland, entering directly under your feet  
 They bring bombs, trucks, and excavators  
 And other bizarre tools that are used by demons  
 To excavate the hidden gems in your body

<sup>32</sup> <http://highpeakspureearth.com/2012/poem-to-amnye-machen/>

The people who have been guarding you for millions of years  
Are unable to guard you anymore  
They can only endure in silence  
Their only choice is to wait helplessly...

One day they will be forced to move out  
Saying goodbye tearfully to your beautiful and warm embrace.  
Where will they go?

They will be placed on the edge of the barren desert

Henceforth, on our sacred Amnye Machen  
The white flocks of sheep will never be seen again  
The song of the herders will never be heard again  
Those filthy greedy people will soon mercilessly stifle you.

## **CONSOLIDATING BORDER SECURITY AND DEFENSE**

This fourth axis pertains in the over 3440 km of border shared between Tibet and India, a significant proportion of which is still disputed between the two countries. In recent times, several border incidents have indicated a high level of tension between Indian and Chinese authorities. The *7<sup>th</sup> Tibet Work Forum* underlined the geostrategic importance of Tibet in China's foreign policy towards India. Xi called on the officials present at the meeting to "strengthen the construction of border areas and adopt special support policies to help border residents improve their production and living conditions and solve their worries".<sup>33</sup> He added: "We must adhere to the strategic thinking that to govern the nation, we must govern our borders; to govern our borders, we must first stabilize Tibet."

In April, for example, a ban on fifteen border activities in the TAR was announced, as the region prepared to celebrate in May the 70th anniversary of the "peaceful liberation of Tibet".<sup>34</sup> Prohibitions include: entering the border management area without valid documents, evading border inspection, organizing or assisting others, crossing the border illegally, and hunting or collecting nationally protected rare animals and plants.

<sup>33</sup> <https://savetibet.org/tibets-importance-seen-at-major-meeting-promising-more-repression/>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202104/1220366.shtml>

The circular note also stresses that it is strictly forbidden to transport or distribute newspapers, books or electronic products whose content endangers national security and undermines ethnic unity. What is more, the bans also cover flights by private aircraft, the removal of communication and water supply facilities, or beacons marking the location of the border, and the damaging of military installations. In addition, it has just been reported that nomads in Tsang (a region near the border with Nepal) are being driven off their land, which is being used to build military bases.<sup>35</sup>

The Chinese authorities are certainly nervous about the two forthcoming commemorations: the 70th anniversary of the “peaceful liberation of Tibet” on 23 May, and the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party in July.

Long gone are the days when more than 2,500 Tibetans (mostly young people) were smuggled across the border to India each year to receive Tibetan education or monastic instruction under the aegis of the Dalai Lama.

However, the incidents that have punctuated the last few years suggest that China is not content with only protecting the Sino-Tibetan border and border regions, but does not hesitate to seek provocation at times. The construction of several villages inside Bhutan<sup>36</sup> and in Arunachal Pradesh<sup>37</sup> are examples of this.

In addition, following the Sino-Indian war of 1962, India recruited Tibetan refugees for a secret paramilitary unit called “Special Border Forces”. While there is little press coverage of it, the death of one of the soldiers in August 2020 near Pangong Lake on the border of Tibet and Ladakh has highlighted the presence of Tibetans for border surveillance. Accustomed to high altitude, they are capable of conducting operations in particularly difficult terrain. The press has reported on intercepted intelligence reports showing that the Chinese army is seeking to recruit more Tibetans to train them to guard the borders.<sup>38</sup> Should this occur, a border conflict could arise one day where exiled Tibetans and Tibetans from Tibet would face off with each other.

<sup>35</sup> <https://tibettimes.net/2021/05/17/212768/>

<sup>36</sup> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/05/07/china-bhutan-border-villages-security-forces>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/china-has-built-village-in-arunachal-pradesh-show-satellite-images-exclusive-2354154>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/pla-steps-up-drive-to-recruit-tibetans-101618685001861.html>



The future looks bleak for Tibet. It is therefore all the more important to highlight the resilience of the Tibetans who continue, through their books, films, songs and other activities, to perpetuate an exceptionally rich culture that colonialist China seeks to destroy. ■

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## ASIA PROGRAM

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