



# POLITICAL REPRESSION INTENSIFIES AS TIBET RAILWAY OPENS



A report by the International Campaign for Tibet  
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**Cover Photo: New trains at the terminus at Golmud, Qinghai.**





Chinese workers came from all over China to work at the site of the railway station in Lhasa. The picture depicts a Chinese worker who has been working at the Lhasa railway station for the past five months posing in Tibetan dress for a souvenir photo in front of the monument 'Tribute to the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet' which dominates the Potala Square.

education" campaign, as he said the Party is engaged in a "fight to the death struggle" against the Dalai Lama and his supporters.<sup>2</sup> Zhang, who was formally appointed as TAR Party Secretary on May 26 from a senior post overseeing the immigration of Chinese into ethnic Uyghur areas in Xinjiang (East Turkestan), described the Dalai Lama as "the biggest obstacle hindering Tibetan Buddhism from establishing normal order".

TAR Party leaders also focused on the need to "strike hard" against any possible "illegal activities along the railroad" and to "assure the harmony and stability of the Qinghai-Tibet area, particularly the safe operation of the railroad" through legal mechanisms, at a conference in Lhasa on June 15.<sup>3</sup> Over the past ten years in Tibet, administrative and legal mechanisms have been developed by the Chinese government that enable them to clamp down on any activities such as religious practice or peaceful protest that could be described as a threat to social stability and national unity, while claiming that they are operating according to a "rule of law".

This report is accompanied by new images of the development of Lhasa and the construction of the railway, demonstrating its impact on the Tibetan landscape and people. The Qinghai-Tibet railway is the most visible and costly element of China's "Great Leap West" (Chinese: xibu da kaifa),<sup>4</sup> a high-profile political campaign, initiated by the then Party Secretary and President Jiang Zemin in 1999-2000. This drive to develop the Western regions of the territory claimed by the People's Republic of China affects 56% of China's land area and almost a quarter of China's population, including Tibetans, Uighur Muslims and other "national minorities".



A Tibetan worker early on in the laying of tracks. Most workers on the railroad have been Chinese, with Tibetans doing largely unskilled manual labor.

## INTRODUCTION

The world's highest railway across the Tibetan plateau opened on July 1, 2006 in Lhasa in an increasingly repressive political climate. Security was tight in Lhasa as the government stepped up its patriotic education and "strike hard" campaigns, and Tibet's Party chief emphasized a "fight to the death struggle" against the Dalai Lama and his supporters.

Completion of the 1,142 kilometer rail link from Golmud (Ge'ermu) in Qinghai province to Lhasa in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) despite the high cost and considerable technical difficulties reflects the Beijing leadership's political and strategic objectives in the region. Described by the official press as the "center-piece" of China's high-profile campaign to develop the Western regions, the \$4.1 billion rail link<sup>1</sup> connects Lhasa with Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu and Guangzhou via Xining, bringing Beijing much closer to achieving the goal set by Mao Zedong over 40 years ago to integrate Tibet with China.

Chinese President Hu Jintao, a former Party chief of Tibet, was in Golmud for the opening as Beijing drew attention to its technological and engineering achievements in constructing the railroad, approximately half of which is built on permafrost, or frozen earth. New methods have been pioneered in order to build a fixed track on the unstable, moving ground of the high plateau.

In the buildup to the railroad opening, senior Party leaders intensified their focus on the "anti-separatist struggle" in Tibet, indicating their determination to crack down on any dissenting views and actions. At a meeting in Lhasa, the new TAR Party Secretary Zhang Qingli called for the intensification of the political "patriotic

## LHASA THIS WEEK: PREPARING FOR THE ADVENT OF THE RAILROAD

Security was stepped up in Lhasa and Golmud to prepare for the opening of the railway, with several military convoys of some 50 vehicles each traveling from Qinghai into the TAR, and army patrols in the area the railway passes through. Residents in villages along the rail route are required to display Chinese red flags to display on the roofs of their houses, and slogans honoring the railway placed along the route.

In Lhasa, work was almost complete on the Lhasa railway station, which has four platforms and a total of ten rail tracks. The large station compound includes a building hosting the Public Security Bureau (PSB) headquarters (Lhasa PSB Branch of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway Public Security Bureau), an engineering department for maintenance and a public transportation office.

The Lhasa station compound covers an area going beyond the original site of the Tibetan village of Ne'u (Chinese: Liuwu), which was demolished to make way for the construction (see images online of resettlement and relocation). More than a hundred families have been moved to the new Ne'u village, a uniform set of housing blocks approximately 2.5 kilometers away from the former village of small housing compounds with courtyards. According to reports received by ICT, the villagers did not have a choice about relocation and lost their traditional farms and family fields. Some received a limited amount of compensation. Although some of the young villagers asked for work at the construction site, only a few locals were employed, mainly for unskilled work such as cleaning, security and heavy manual tasks.

This reflects the pattern of employment on a railway which has been constructed by Chinese companies. Most workers are Chinese, with some unskilled work going to Tibetans.<sup>5</sup> Tibetans face increasing competition for employment and marginalisation within their own communities due to the numbers of Chinese migrants entering Tibet, including those employed on the railroad, and others who will be attracted by the greater accessibility of Tibet via the railroad.



A poster stating 'Welcome to the July 1st Test Run of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway' in large Chinese characters in one of Lhasa's old streets leading to the ancient Ramoche monastery. Although both Tibetan and Chinese are the official languages in the TAR, during the railroad construction mostly the Chinese language has been used on prominent billboards, with Tibetan used either in small characters or not at all.



A billboard in Lhasa near the Kyichu River bearing the slogan both in Chinese and Tibetan: 'Disseminate the good news about the Qinghai-Tibet railway and Lhasa will spring anew'.

Chinese census in 2000, Tibetans currently have the highest rate of illiteracy of any major ethnic group in China.<sup>6</sup> Primary school is the only level of educational attainment for which data show Tibetans nearly on par with the national average. There are disparities in the level of educational attainment between urban and rural Tibetans - Tibetans living in towns or cities are more likely to reach higher levels of educational attainment. Approximately 85% of Tibetans living in the TAR live in rural areas, and this is the most disadvantaged group in terms of facing competition for employment.

According to Tibetans from Qinghai, a similar pattern was evident when the railroad was extended from Xining to Golmud (work began on the route in 1958 and concluded in 1984). Local officials apparently claimed that the opening of the station and route would benefit local Tibetans, but they became further marginalized because of competition from incoming Chinese migrants. A Tibetan in his twenties from Xining who is now living in India told ICT: "My family lives on the other side of river from the Xining train station in Qinghai. But among the thousands of officials, I knew of only one Tibetan official who worked at this huge rail station. Outside the station, there are still a lot of opportunities, for instance, hotels, restaurants, shops, and transportation, but in my experience there were no Tibetans running these businesses. The situation in the railway stations along the line is very similar - there are only few Tibetan people are employed, and all businesses are running by new Chinese immigrants."

Chinese government statistics show that most Tibetans are not equipped to compete for employment and business opportunities in the Chinese-dominated economic environment in today's Tibet. According to the

## A “FIGHT TO THE DEATH STRUGGLE AGAINST THE DALAI LAMA”: THE STEPPING UP OF SECURITY AND INTENSIFICATION OF “PATRIOTIC EDUCATION” IN TIBET

In the buildup to the opening of the railroad on July 1, senior Party officials in Tibet announced the need to step up the “anti-separatist struggle and the management of religious affairs”, with an emphasis on undermining the continued influence of the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama.

The new Communist Party Secretary of the TAR, Zhang Qingli, told senior Party officials meeting in Lhasa in May that because the Party is engaged in a “fight to the death struggle” against the Dalai Lama, it must intensify the patriotic education campaign to include a broader population and restructure the government committees (known as Democratic Management Committees)<sup>7</sup> managing each monastery and nunnery in the TAR (Tibet Daily report in Chinese, May 16). Patriotic education is carried out in monasteries and nunneries throughout Tibetan areas with the aim of undermining the Dalai Lama’s influence, indoctrinating monks and nuns in Party policy and ideology and identifying dissident monks and nuns.<sup>8</sup> Zhang Qingli described the Dalai Lama as “the biggest obstacle hindering Tibetan Buddhism from establishing normal order”.

Sections of the Chinese leadership view the Dalai Lama as the main obstacle to political “stability” in Tibet. The practice of Buddhism and the display of a picture of the Dalai Lama have become, for many Tibetans, a means of expressing their Tibetan identity, and occasionally their dissent to the Party, as well as their loyalty to their religious leader. Issues relating to religion are perceived as being highly relevant to political control and the suppression of “separatism” in Tibet - both factors underpinning China’s strategic concerns and development aims in Tibetan areas of the PRC.

The Dalai Lama’s representatives have been engaged in dialogue with the United Front Work Department of the Party on the future of Tibet since 2002, after a decade-long diplomatic stalemate. The US-based Chinese newspaper Singtao Daily report on June 10 noted that: “Just as the Dalai Lama keeps extending olive branches to Beijing to signal his desire to come home after spending many years living in exile overseas, the [TAR People’s Congress] Standing Committee ...held a special meeting in Lhasa a few days ago to ‘expose and criticize the crime of the Dalai Lama’s separatist political group’.”<sup>9</sup>

Zhang Qingli, who replaces Yang Chuantang as Party Secretary, is a political ally of China’s President Hu Jintao. Hu previously served as Party Secretary of the TAR, presiding over the imposition of martial law in 1989 after a series of pro-independence demonstrations. Zhang and Hu both served in the Communist Youth League from 1979-1986.<sup>10</sup> Zhang was posted to Tibet after serving as commander of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) which promotes the immigration of Chinese people into the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR, or East Turkestan), as well as protecting border security and “stability”. Zhang Qingli’s tenure as commander of the XPCC coincided with a period of severe repression of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, which is ongoing, and he became known for a hardline “anti-splittist” position in public statements. Before his departure from the restive region, Zhang clearly aligned the “struggle against separatism” to economic development based on agriculture as inter-related elements of “national security”. He said: “As long as we have enemies in the world who want us dead, as long as Xinjiang has separatists and religious extremists causing trouble, the [XPCC] corps will live forever. It has two roles, to open up wasteland [to agriculture] and protect the frontiers, both an aspect of national security. In peacetime the farming role becomes more important, and in times of tension the security role is more important. The two roles are inseparable.”<sup>11</sup>

Official statements have emphasized the need to develop the Western regions of China, including Tibet, in order to “promote unity” and “ensure stability”, meaning to maintain control over the region.



**The facade of the Lhasa railway station. The station is a large brick-red and white structure that is intended to echo the architecture of the Potala Palace, the Dalai Lama’s former winter home. Many Tibetans in Lhasa are angered by the appropriation of one of their most important religious and cultural symbols in this way.**

**The entire area of the Lhasa railway station occupies more than the original site once occupied by a traditional Tibetan village, Ne’u (Chinese: Liuwu). Each platform is more than 8 meters wide - approximately the width of three trucks parking next to each other. Ne’u has been demolished - images on page 4 show before and after images of the village and the resettlement site for villagers.**





The traditional Tibetan township of Ne'u, prior to development as a 'high-tech' center and the site of the new Lhasa train station



An image of the new buildings in the Ne'u area. The expanse of land around the new construction appears to call into question the need for resettlement



The Qinghai-Tibet Railway reaches elevations over 16,000 feet. Chinese scientists suggest that global warming may start to melt the permafrost within 10 years, endangering the \$4.1 billion rail line.

According to Singtao Daily, which is also published in Hong Kong, a meeting held in Lhasa by the TAR People's Congress Standing Committee emphasized the "need to step up legislative work in the area of the anti-separatism struggle and the management of religious affairs" (10 June). According to the newspaper, Standing Committee Vice Chairmen Zhao Lian and Bai Zhao stated during the meeting that the Dalai Lama intends to "reject the autonomy system in minority regions, restore his rule in Tibet, and once again condemn the Tibetan people to slavery". The "autonomy system" is a reference to the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law under the Chinese Constitution. While some provisions of this law could help protect Tibetan culture and religion, they are rarely implemented. Under China's legal system, the focus is on the assertion of state control as opposed to the commonly understood concept of autonomy, as in Article Seven of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law: "The organs of self-government of national autonomous areas shall place the interests of the state as a whole above anything else and make positive efforts to fulfill the tasks assigned by state organs at higher levels."

The Dalai Lama renounced his call for independence in the late 1980s, calling for a "genuine autonomy" in Tibet, and in March he made a public statement expressing his wish to visit China.

The emphasis on the "struggle against separatism" in connection with the railroad's opening was also asserted at a conference on "The Judicial Response to the Opening of the Qinghai-Tibet Railroad" in Lhasa on June 15 (China Court Network report, June 16, reported by the Congressional-Executive Commission on China at [www.cecc.gov](http://www.cecc.gov) on 26 June 2006). Wang Yibin, head of the TAR Public Security department and a TAR Party Standing Committee member, said that there was a need for the legal system to support "striking hard against illegal activities along the railroad and assuring Tibetan political and social stability".

These statements follow concern at high levels in the Party over increasing numbers of protests in China, including strikes, demonstrations, and petitions directed at government departments. Public Security departments have been urged to "strike hard" against the unrest.

In Tibet, the 'Strike Hard' campaign focuses on undermining the influence of the Dalai Lama, and identifying potential dissident elements in monasteries, nunneries and lay society. "Strike Hard" has served as an opportunity for the authorities to investigate and monitor Tibetans as part of the attempt to eradicate "splittism" and ensure "stability".

## THE “POLITICAL FRONT-LINE OF THE MOTHERLAND”: CHINA’S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND THE RAILROAD

China’s drive for fast-track modernisation prioritises the development of administrative and military apparatus in order to maintain state control over Tibet. Meanwhile, Tibetans suffer from increasing poverty, rural-urban inequality, the worst education indicators in the People’s Republic of China, and little or no health care provision in most areas.

Beijing’s economic development policy for the PRC’s western regions neglects “soft” infrastructure such as health and education provision. Official Chinese statistics show that the GDP value of the health care sector in the TAR decreased in nominal value between 2001 and 2003, and fell from 6.8 to 4.5% of the tertiary sector despite frequent government proclamations that it is been pouring money into health care. The failure of the health system to reach rural areas, coupled with prohibitive medical costs, is leading to large numbers of Tibetans dying from easily treatable conditions such as diarrhoea, dysentery and pneumonia. The proportion of resources allocated to education in the TAR has also dropped, and parents often cannot afford to send their children to school.

Despite the Chinese government’s official line that the railway is good for Tibet and Tibetans, concern has been expressed - even by Chinese officials - about the economic viability. Lou Thompson, a former advisor at the World Bank who has been involved in loans to China for nine other railway projects, estimates that freight capacity for the line will be around two million tons a year - meaning that it will take 300 years at best to pay off the invested capital, even taking into account an increase in tourism.

Based on his analysis of Chinese official demographic and economic data, Canadian economist Andrew Fischer, based at the London School of Economics, says: “The railway might increase tourism, although it might just shift tourists from air and bus to rail. Also, tourism has already been increasing rapidly, more than doubling over the last five years to an estimated 1.8 million tourists in 2005 according to official figures. The railway will therefore simply add to a whole range of ongoing government efforts to boost tourism and its impact in this regard is due more to government policies rather than the existence of the infrastructure itself.”

According to the official Chinese media, approximately 4,000 tourists will arrive in Lhasa daily on the railway after it begins operation on July 1 2006 (Xinhua, May 21). Tibet Tourism Bureau expects the railway to bring an additional 400,000 visitors to the TAR during the remainder of 2006.

Fischer says: “Like other industries in the TAR, much if not most of the tourist industry (particularly in the higher-value areas) is controlled by Chinese companies based outside the TAR. Similarly, tenders for most or all of the large construction projects in the TAR are contracted to out-of-province companies - the Qinghai-Tibet railway involves a consortium of state-owned



Train at Golmud at the beginning of the Golmud-Lhasa railway. Sign reads: “A new starting point of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway. Build the Qinghai-Tibet Railway to benefit peoples of all ethnicities”.



Lhasa railway station under construction in winter 2006.



New trains at the terminus at Golmud, Qinghai.



Ne'u county tunnel (Tibetan: sNe'u rdzong brag phug; Chinese: Liuwu suidao) at 620 m. In typical official language, the billboard states: "Fight the plateau and resist the lack of oxygen. The flag of electrification shakes the Kunlun mountains. Safeguard security and create national excellence. Prestige is displayed on the Qinghai-Tibet Line - China Railways Electrification Bureau Group".

in the region: "National interest in the railroad derives at least in part from its strategic military value, and the construction and eventual maintenance of the railway also contribute to the perceived need for increased military presence in order to protect the new installations. Therefore, as in the past, military concerns probably guide much of the developmental policies in the TAR, indirectly soaking up much of the subsidies as well."<sup>12</sup>

Beijing has not hidden its political agenda in relation to the railroad construction. In 2001, the New York Times quoted the then President and Party Secretary Jiang Zemin as saying: "Some people advised me not to go ahead with this project because it is not commercially viable. I said this is a political decision." (August 10, 2001).<sup>13</sup> Wang Derong, a chief government architect for China's transportation planning, said recently: "One of the most important reasons [for the railroad] is political stability. They [government officials] don't try to hide that purpose" (Fortune magazine, June 2006).<sup>14</sup>

The railway will facilitate greater militarization of the Tibetan plateau - it has been described in the Chinese press as "the political [front] line" in "consolidating the south-western border of the motherland" (Qinghai Daily). A report by Tibet Daily prior to construction of the railroad stated: "The unity of the nationalities and consolidation of national defence necessitate the urgent construction of a railway linking Tibet with the hinterland" (12 December 2000). Creation of supply lines to China and branch lines off the main trunk will enable an expansion of military bases throughout the region and quicker mobilization of personnel. Feeder lines or access roads could be used to service army bases and airfields hundreds of kilometers from the main route.

The railway could also enable the deployment of rail-car missile launchers. A report in the Hong Kong press in November 2004 stated that the Second Artillery of the People's Liberation Army is developing the DF31, an improved version of intercontinental ballistic missile for mobile deployment which can be carried on rail. According to the Hong Kong Commercial Daily, quoting Kanwa Defense Review: "In order to increase their mobile strike capability and survivability, rail-carried versions of the DF31 intercontinental ballistic missiles similar to the SS-24 of the former Soviet Union have been developed. They are transported by rail at ordinary times and launched from predetermined locations to implement nuclear strike in times of war. Sources said China had repeatedly dispatched relevant personnel to Ukraine to learn the technology of designing silos for the launch of ballistic missiles as well as the designing of SS-24 rail-transported intercontinental ballistic missiles."<sup>15</sup>

## THE COSTS OF GLOBAL WARMING

The geographical conditions of the high plateau have not only made the railway very expensive to build, but could bring it to a grinding halt within ten years. Statements in the English-language Chinese media this year have warned that rising temperatures on the Qinghai-Tibet plateau are likely to lead to melting permafrost and an increase in the instability of the ground, threatening the stability and viability of the railway in just a decade's time.

construction and engineering companies from around China, including many from the coastal areas. This in turn leads to a high degree of polarization in the local TAR economy, given that wealth in these booming sectors is highly concentrated in few hands and has little time to circulate in the local economy before exiting the province. Thus, there has been a sharp rise in all measures of inequality in the TAR since the late 1990s, far beyond most other provinces in China. A good example is urban-rural inequality, which is much higher than that of any other province."

Fischer also uses government statistics to show how "huge increases" in the government administration category of the GDP in 2000 and 2001 may indirectly reflect a military build-up, indicating that an expansion of the control apparatus of the state in the TAR (and in Xinjiang) was seen as an essential pre-condition to the subsequent spending and investment targeted to the TAR under the fast-track economic policies currently being pursued in Western areas of China. He concludes that the construction of the railroad is in part understood in the context of Beijing's concerns for security



**Bus bringing Chinese immigrants to Xinjiang on new roads - four to six lane highways replacing dirt tracks - on the southern Silk Route.**

Unlike Alaska or Siberia, where freezing temperatures keep permafrost well below the thawing point, the subsoil on the Tibetan plateau can best be described as barely permanent permafrost. When it thaws, the ground can drop by as much as a foot, and can heave up again the next time it freezes. In order to build the railway on such terrain, Chinese scientists had to predict the rate of climate change, and then design a system that would keep the ground frozen and the train's foundation stable even if the air warms. In some areas an elevated track has been built, allowing cold air to flow beneath the track and cool the ground. In other areas, sections of the railway are lined with vertical pipes that circulate liquid nitrogen, or ventilation tunnels have been built below the tracks.

The impact of thawing permafrost on the plateau was first reported in the Chinese press last year, but it was estimated then that the railway would be threatened only after 45 years.<sup>16</sup> But on January 22, Professor Wu Ziwang, a senior expert at the Chinese Cold and Arid Regions Environmental and Engineering Research Institute, was quoted as saying: "Due to the melting permafrost, I am worried that after 10 years the railroad will be unsafe" (Chinese-language report, Beijing News). Professor Wu, who has been studying permafrost for 45 years, told an American journalist who visited Tibet recently that if temperatures on the plateau increase by 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2021, assuming there is no improved monitoring or additional construction to the railroad, "several hundred kilometers" of track could bend out of shape. (Wired magazine, July 2006).<sup>17</sup>

## A PRECEDENT IN KASHGAR

The extension of the railway line from the provincial capital of Xinjiang, Urumqi, to Kashgar sets a disturbing precedent for the railroad from Golmud to Lhasa. It has transformed the desert oasis town and led to increasing despair among many of the indigenous Uyghur Muslim population. The rail link opened in autumn 1999 for the transportation of goods, and passengers began to travel on the railway in 2000, during the period when the TAR's current Party Secretary Zhang Qingli held a senior role in the province. The 1,000 km journey from Urumqi to Kashgar takes about 24 hours.



**A statue of Mao Zedong in Xinjiang, intended to convey the message of China's help to the Uyghur people. New statues of Mao are being built throughout the region. Similarly, a 35-ton statue of Mao - the biggest in China - has been built in Gonggar county, near the airport and en route to Lhasa, in Tibet. The statue will rise 7m from a 5m pedestal strengthened to withstand earthquakes. Mao Zedong ordered the Chinese takeover of Tibet in 1949-1950.**

The opening of the rail link had an immediate impact on the number of people, particularly Chinese migrants, coming to Kashgar, which was once an oasis town on the Silk Road. To create the railway station, houses and shops - mainly belonging to Uyghurs - were demolished, so many people, including those who had small stalls by the station building, lost their livelihoods. Many other Uyghurs lost their jobs transporting goods by road, as goods are now transported by rail. A Uyghur scholar currently living in the West told ICT: "The government says that the railway will help the economic development of Xinjiang, but it is further endangering the survival of Uyghur Muslim culture and identity in the region. The Uyghur people, who are already facing increasing pressure to survive due to the numbers of Chinese migrants arriving in the region, are simply unable to compete and to participate in the development of their own economy."<sup>18</sup>

A Western tour operator who has traveled frequently to the region told ICT: "Western development has meant massive road building in Kashgar and along the Silk Route reminiscent of autobahns in pre-war Germany. In recent years, it seems to me that the spirit has left the old town of Kashgar which is effectively being strangled by the growing Chinese city. Kashgar people are losing the will to resist. Some years ago, the town was full of tough, swaggering Uyghurs, whereas now everyone just seems cowed and resigned to their fate, as if their identity and culture have been taken away from them. A diaspora is developing in central Asia and elsewhere as wealthier Uyghurs leave. The tea-shops are full of unemployed Uyghur people despite all the construction that is going on in the town due to Beijing's drive to develop the area, and labor is brought in from China. One Chinese worker told me this is because Uyghurs are 'too stupid'. If Uyghurs are employed, there always seem to be Han foremen. Uyghurs are being moved further and further out of town, and in towns that were once almost entirely ethnic Uyghur 15 years ago, it is now hard to find any Uyghurs at all, particularly in Korla and to an extent in Turfan. In many ways what has happened in Xinjiang mirrors the American Wild West, with the coloniser convincing themselves of the right to do what they are doing as the original inhabitants are turned into second-class citizens and effectively herded into reservations, or at least onto the outskirts of town."

## “EVEN THE BUDDHA CAN’T STOP IT”: PERSPECTIVES ON THE RAILROAD

*“Tibet is reached by railway  
Indeed, it is ruining Tibet  
A black construction is snaking into the heart of Tibet  
..... This time, even the Buddha can’t stop it”*

- Extract from poem by well-known Chinese writer, posted on a Chinese-language chatroom. The poem uses a metaphor of Tibet as a beautiful virgin, with the symbol of her purity defiled by the coming of the railroad.

*“These days the so-called ‘Western Development’ project is underway. This project aims to transfer large numbers of Chinese people for permanent settlement into areas inhabited by minority nationalities, exploit mineral resources and above all to bear down heavily on people for political intransigence. Contrary to the claims of a ‘rare opportunity’ for the minority nationalities, this project represents a period of emergency and darkness.”*

- Former political prisoner, the late religious teacher and scholar Yulo Dawa Tsering. Yulo Dawa Tsering, who served seven years in prison in Lhasa for expressing his views on politics to a foreigner, died in 2002.

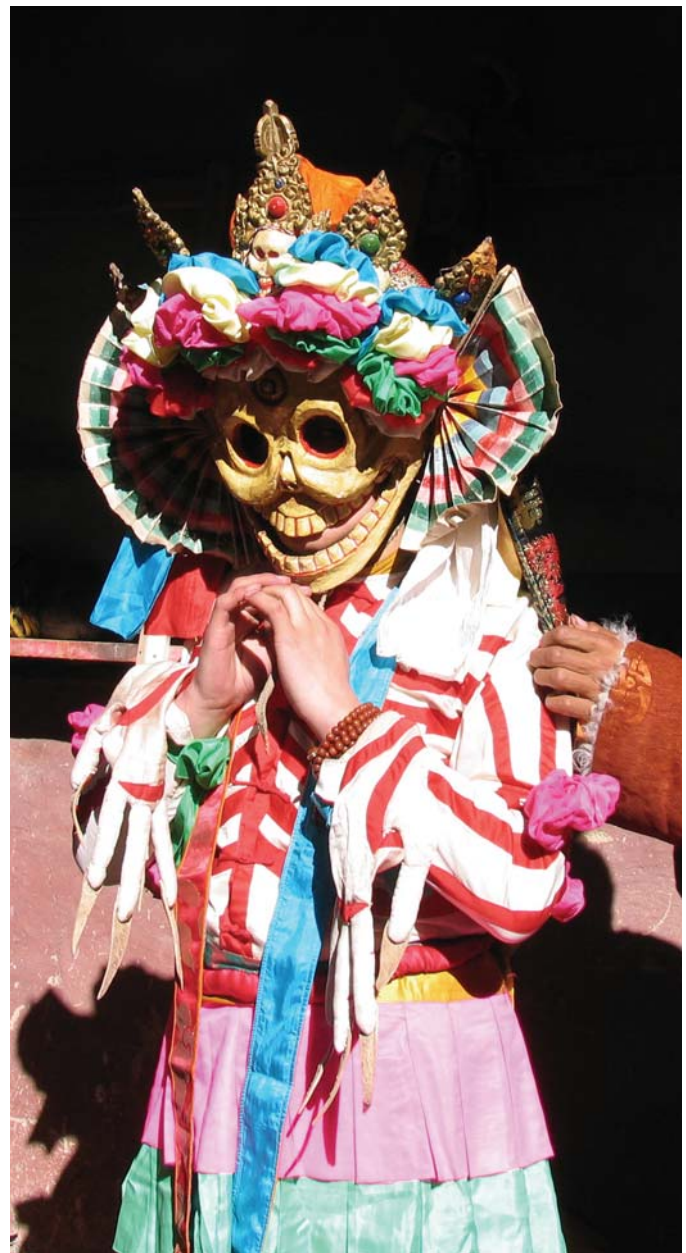
A senior Tibetan scholar who worked for a county government in Tibet with a role on a local Party committee, and who left Tibet to live in exile several years ago, gave ICT the following account of his views on the Qinghai-Tibet railroad.

“According to what the Chinese government says about the railway construction from Golmud to Tibet, they made the railway to Tibet in order to enhance the standard of living of the Tibetan people through developing infrastructure and communications in Tibet. When the Chinese finished constructing the railway from Xining to Golmud in Qinghai, they also said then that they made the railway for the benefit of the Tibetan people, but so far all the advantages have only been for the Chinese people and there has been no any benefit to the Tibetan people. They made the railway and took all of Tibet’s minerals such as gold to China, and they brought in a large number of Chinese immigrants.

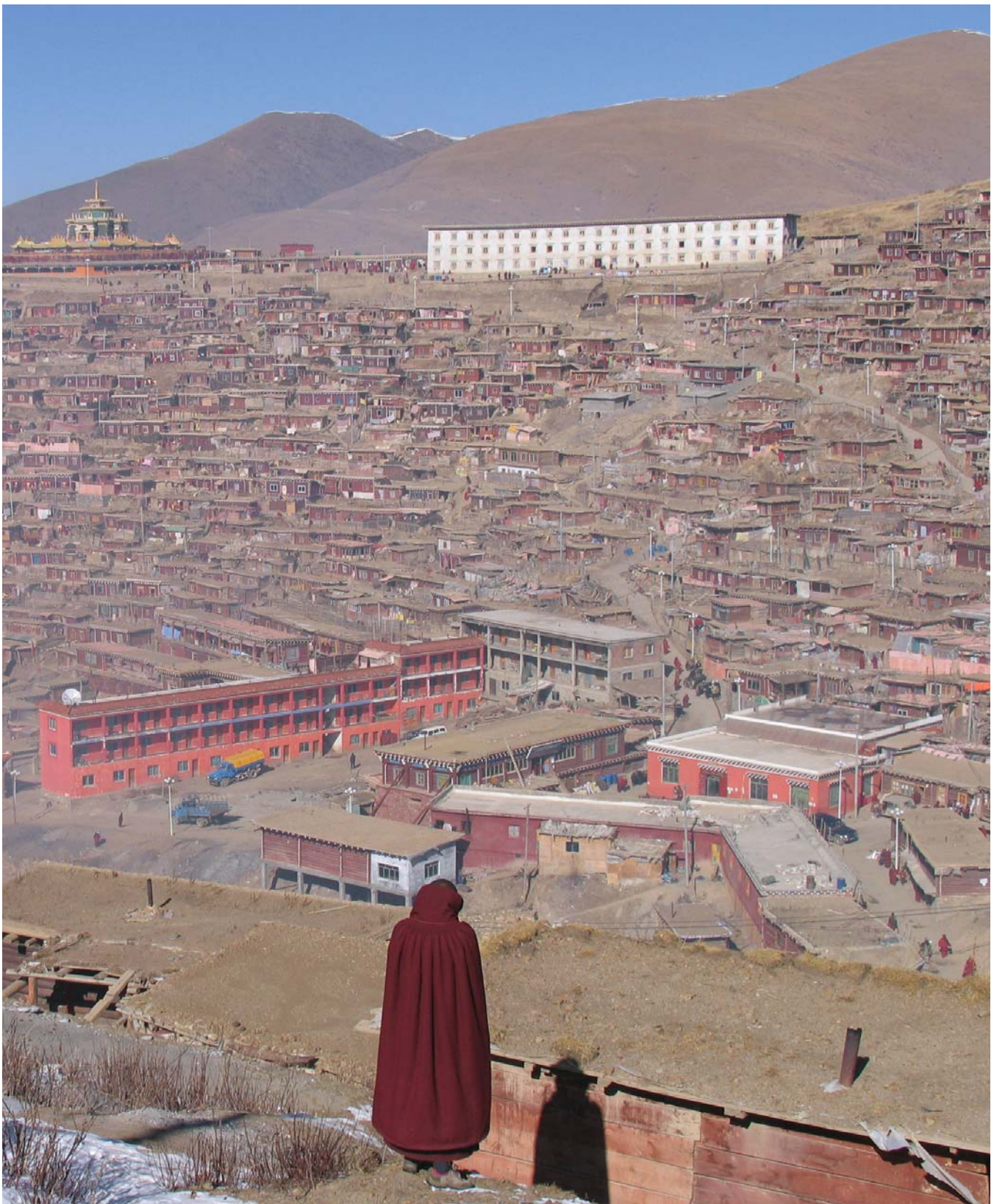
Now, many Chinese graduates from universities, such as Beijing University, Lanzhou University and Shanghai, can come easily to Tibet, and Tibetans will not be able to compete with them. There will also be an impact on our sacred sites. Many of Tibet’s mountains and lakes are believed to be sacred, and Tibetans have always believed that the spirits live in the mountains and lakes and that these help to protect wild life, but the Chinese authorities do not regard these sites with respect. Chinese [government officials have been using the phrase ‘Western development’, which in Chinese is ‘xibu da kaifa’. In fact in Chinese ‘kaifa’ means to exploit, it doesn’t mean ‘to develop’. This gives a more precise definition of what is really being achieved. The railway is like a tsunami engulfing Tibet, because the railway, like a tsunami, will wash away Tibetan traditions, culture and minerals.”

### TIBETAN RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Government policy, and in particular the Western Development program including the railway, is exerting increasing pressure on Tibetan culture and heritage. Even so, Tibetans today still find ways of expressing their devotion to the Dalai Lama, expressing their views through pop music or poetry, and protecting their Tibetan identity by keeping their language and traditions alive.



A Cham (ritual monastic) dancer at a monastery in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi), Sichuan (the Tibetan area of Kham) during a celebration of Tibetan Buddhist protector deities at the monastery in winter 2005. The deity depicted by this dancer, Mahakala, represents the cosmic nature of time.



A solitary monk at the Larung Gar religious institute, Serthar, Sichuan province (the Tibetan area of Kham) in winter 2006. The institute was founded in 1980 to revive Tibetan Buddhist scholarship and practice by the late Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog, and housed the largest concentration of monks and nuns, including some Chinese Buddhists, in Tibetan areas. In 2001, more than a thousand dwellings of nuns and monks were demolished by Chinese work teams following an order from Beijing and hundreds of nuns and monks expelled. Today, studies and religious practice continue at Serthar with a smaller population of monks and nuns and in the absence of the institute's founder and primary teacher, Khenpo Jigme Phuntsog, following his death in January 2004.



Cham dancers rest during a performance at a monastery in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi), Sichuan (the Tibetan area of Kham) during a celebration of Tibetan Buddhist protector deities at the monastery in winter 2005.

## BACKGROUND BRIEFING

### CHINESE MIGRATION TO TIBET AND THE RAILROAD

Li Dezhu, one of the founder members of the Leading Group for Western Development set up under the State Council in February 2000, stated in June 2000 that “two-way population flow” was “an inevitable trend” of Western development. In an article for the Party Committee publication *Qiu Shi* on 1 June 2000, Li Dezhu referred to people from the western regions moving to the east as a result of the rapid development of the coastal regions in China, and also stated: “In carrying out the strategy of large-scale western development, development of the west will be greatly accelerated and human talent will flow westward if the country favors the western regions in policy and capital. It is conceivable that a phenomenon of ‘the peacock flying west’ will appear in keeping with the execution of large-scale western development.”

The ongoing reform of the household registration system in China is likely to facilitate the movement of more Chinese workers, both skilled and unskilled, and college and university graduates to live and work in Tibetan areas. China is one of only a few countries that practises residency registration, which requires people to transfer their registered residence whenever they change their residence. The reforms to the residency system are China-wide, but are linked to Western development strategy in that the authorities are aiming to make it easier for Chinese people to go to work in the west, have residency there if they wish to do so, while retaining residency in their home area so they can return if necessary.

In a survey of temporary migrants in Lhasa in 2005, two leading academics, Chinese and Tibetan, reported on the increasing immigration of Chinese workers as a result of Western development, and the likely increases as a result of the railroad construction: “Around the beginning of the 1980s, temporary migrants from Sichuan, Gansu, and other areas mainly engaged in activities such as carpentry, sewing, bicycle repairing,



Chinese migrant workers carrying cement poles in a remote area of eastern Tibet. The photographer, who has monitored developments in Tibetan areas over the past five years gave the following report to ICT based on his experience traveling in remote regions of Eastern Tibet: ‘First roads, then electrical lines, then phone lines. I’ve seen it in so many remote areas on Kham and Amdo in the last five years. But in the last two years, there has been a real acceleration. This is the road in Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture at 4,600 meters, where they were setting the cement poles for telephone lines. No Tibetan workers at all were seen, only Chinese. The authorities know that they only have to build roads and the migrants will come. They no longer need to move Han (Chinese) themselves or to provide the incentives that they did in years before. Not having a job in Sichuan or Yunnan province is incentive enough for migrants to follow the roads west and search out secondary or tertiary jobs to all the construction in the larger cities. But to the remote areas, they just build roads and the migrants follow.’

shoe-making, watch or tape-recorder repairing...etc. They came in small numbers and worked individually. Since the late 1980s, temporary migrants came in the forms of construction teams, vegetable gardeners, and restaurateurs. Their numbers increased rapidly since 2000 when the central government launched the national strategy of 'Developing the West' following the huge amount of investment and construction projects in the TAR and other regions in the west of China...In future, the temporary migrants in Lhasa are expected to grow, partly due to the numbers of the Tibetan rural population who will gradually join the migration flow, and partly due to the completion of the Qinghai-Tibet railway which will provide a much more convenient transportation to link Lhasa and other cities in nearby provinces."<sup>19</sup>



Nomads on motor-bikes in eastern Tibet (Qinghai). Under Chinese policies of urbanization, more and more Tibetan nomads are required to settle in towns.

## THE QINGHAI-TIBET RAILWAY - THE ROUTE

The Qinghai route starts from south of Golmud at Nanshankou, where the Xining-Golmud line currently terminates. It follows a similar route to the current Qinghai-Tibet highway to Lhasa, via Kyegudo (Chinese: Yushu) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai and Nagchu prefecture in the TAR. In 2000, before construction began, initial estimates of cost were given at \$2.34 billion.

Starting at Golmud (approximately 2,800m), the route gradually ascends to cross the Kunlun mountains, probably via the Khunula pass (4,722m). The railway then takes a long climb up to the Dang-la (Chinese: Tanggula) pass which, at over 5000m above sea level, marks the boundary between the TAR and Qinghai. The route then descends, more steeply than the ascent, to Amdo (Chinese: Anduo) county town (4,600m) and the rich pasturelands of Nagchu (4,300m) and Damshung (Chinese: Dangxiong), passing through Lhasa municipality to terminate at Lhasa city (3,590m). According to the Tibet Daily article, 2.8 per cent of the route will consist of tunnels and bridges.

The new railway could accelerate the development of the gold mining industry in Nagchu (Chinese: Naqu) prefecture in the TAR and also facilitate the exploitation of oil reserves in the Lhunpola oil basin, in the Jangtang (Chinese: Changtang) region in the north of Nagchu prefecture and south Kyegudo (Chinese: Yushu) TAP in Qinghai. According to the TAR Specialist Plan, an internal document that maps out the development of Tibet up to 2020, "Tibet has a wealth of natural resources [...] all of which are ripe for exploitation, but, constricted by the condition of basic communications infrastructure, the level of exploitation and utilisation of these natural resources is extremely low".<sup>20</sup> The Plan states that in the future, given the expected development in the TAR and the needs of stability and national defence, to rely only on roads would be "far from adequate to suit the needs of Tibetan economic and social development". It goes on to say that "more and more people are coming to the conclusion that construction of a railway into Tibet will have an extremely important role in providing impetus for the vigorous development of the TAR economy."

## FOOTNOTES

- 1 Initial estimates increased dramatically during construction. A China Daily report on October 15, 2005 gave the total investment on the project as 33 billion yuan (\$4.1 billion)
- 2 Meeting of Party officials on May 16, reported by Xinhua in Chinese on 21 June
- 3 China Court Network report, June 16, quoted in a report by the Congressional-Executive Commission on Tibet at [www.cecc.gov](http://www.cecc.gov), report
- 4 Xibu da kaifa is most commonly translated into English as the “Great development of the West”. The word “kaifa”, however, is more accurately translated as “exploitation”
- 5 A senior official supervising work on the railway, Huang Difu, admitted to a Western journalist during construction of the railway that while 6000 Tibetan laborers were employed at the time, none of the estimated 27,000 semi-skilled workers and managers for the railway are Tibetan. Huang Difu added that this is because most work has been sub-contracted to enterprises based elsewhere in China (Asia Business Week, 9 September 2003). In a similar example, the Shanghai Daily reported in April that more than 200 Chinese workers, mostly from Anhui province, were taking Tibetan language lessons in order to prepare for work on the Shanghai-Tibet route, as opposed to simply hiring Tibetans (Shanghai Daily, April 19 2006)
- 6 Tabulation on Nationalities of 2000 Population Census of China, Department of Population, Social, Science and Technology Statistics, National Bureau of Statistics, and Department of Economic Development, State Ethnic Affairs Commission (Beijing: Ethnic Publishing House, September 2003). The rate of illiteracy of Tibetans (47.55 percent) is more than five times higher than China’s national average (9.08 percent), according to 2000 census data. Table 2-3, based on persons aged 15 and over, shows that the Dongxiang, Salar, Baoan, Monba, and Lhoba nationalities have higher rates of illiteracy than Tibetans. Table 2-3 provides rates of illiteracy for Mongols and Uighurs of 8.40 and 9.22 percent, respectively. A useful summary of this data is published in the Congressional-Executive Commission on China’s Annual Report 2005, available from [www.cecc.gov](http://www.cecc.gov).
- 7 Democratic Management Committees virtually all consist of monks appointed or elected in monasteries, and lay cadres of Tibetan ethnicity. Their members are responsible for the distribution of official documents and the publicizing of government policy as well as finance and security of monasteries
- 8 In recent years, the Party has enforced state-specified limitations on monastic life and taken new measures to control the activity of senior and influential religious leaders. In 2005, resistance to patriotic education, and the requirement to denounce the Dalai Lama, led to detentions and expulsions from monasteries and nunneries. At Drepung monastery in Lhasa in November last year, several monks were expelled, and one monk died in an apparent suicide as a result of the campaign.
- 9 See report “TAR Party Secretary calls for tighter control of Tibetan monasteries, nunneries”, [www.cecc.gov](http://www.cecc.gov), 21 June
- 10 See report “Xinjiang Communist Party official Promoted to Acting Secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region”, the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/>.
- 11 CECC report (ibid), and a November 2004 South China Morning Post report, FBIS November 8 2004
- 12 Andrew Fischer’s book, “State Growth and Social Exclusion in Tibet: Challenges of Recent Economic Growth” is published by the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (2005)
- 13 See ICT’s report, “Crossing the Line: China’s Railway to Lhasa, Tibet”, which can be downloaded from ICT’s website at [www.savetibet.org](http://www.savetibet.org)
- 14 “Next Stop, Lhasa: A Railroad to the Top of the World” by Abrahm Lustgarten
- 15 Hong Kong Commercial Daily (Chinese: Hong Kong Hsiang Kang Shang Pao), a daily newspaper owned by PRC paper Shenzhen Tequ Bao, November 17 2004, quoting as a source the Kanwa Defense Review, date not given
- 16 See the Congressional Executive Commission on China report, “Thawing permafrost may threaten Qinghai-Tibet railroad in 10 years” at <http://www.cecc.gov/pages/virtualAcad/index.phpd>.

17 Article by David Wolman, [www.wired.com](http://www.wired.com).

18 “China’s Great Leap West”, Tibet Information Network, 2000

19 Paper by Ma Rong from Beijing University and Tenzin Lhundup, Chinese Center of Tibetology Studies

20 An internal document obtained by the former Tibet Information Network, London





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The International Campaign for Tibet works to promote human rights and democratic freedoms for the people of Tibet. ICT was founded in 1988 and has offices in Washington DC, Amsterdam and Berlin.

