

Protectors of the Sacred Homeland and Builders of Happy Homes Relocation Policy on the Tibetan Plateau



"Do Not forget the Original Intention; Keep the Mission in Mind" is the new slogan used by President Xi Jinping, China's new Great Helmsman to unify the masses behind the Communist Party of China (CPC); in the recent past, Xi has been trying to build an idealist society, strictly under the Party's rules. The Party's mission for 2020 is to provide a materially decent life to all in the Middle Kingdom, more particularly in the restive areas of Tibet and Xinjiang. In order to fulfill its objectives, Beijing has started in a massive relocation scheme in Tibet, redrawing the demography of India's borders which will affect India's defence, directly or indirectly.

Beijing admits that though the rural poverty rate was more than 97.5 percent in 1978, it took 22 more years for Beijing to launch a serious program for aid development in the poorest areas of Western China.

In 2012, 98 million Chinese people still lived below the poverty line; a year later, 128,000 villages remained classified as impoverished.¹

According to the *China Daily*, Tibet is living today a historic moment:

“Chinese people felt excited and proud by the news that the local government in the Tibet Autonomous Region [TAR] had decided to strip 19 counties of their poverty labels, after 55 Tibetan counties cast off such labels in 2018.”²

On December 9, Tibet’s Poverty Alleviation Office published a notice saying that the last batch of counties and county-level districts had finally shaken off poverty: “Tibet was a tough nut to crack in China’s poverty relief campaign due to its harsh natural conditions and complicated historical reasons. In 2015, the occurrence rate of poverty in Tibet was as high as 25.32%,” said the Chinese website.³

Eliminate the Two Worries

‘Relocation’ has been one of the main tools for poverty alleviation in the TAR and Xinjiang.

China’s aim was to eliminate the ‘Two Worries’, the lack of food and sufficient clothing. While more than 100,000 villages were stripped of their ‘poverty label’ in entire China, the main ‘battle’ seems to have taken place in Tibet and Xinjiang, the two restive provinces which had been ‘liberated’ by the Communists in 1950.

¹ *250,000 Tibetans relocated to new homes in anti-poverty fight*; see:
http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/index/rolling/201909/t20190930_6688299.html

² *Tibet lifts out of poverty*; see:
<http://en.tibetol.cn/html/News/Tibet/ES/2019/1224/8056.html>

³ *Tibet eliminates absolute poverty*; see:
<http://en.tibetol.cn/html/News/Exclusive/2019/1224/8054.html>

This obviously raises the question, why have these areas, 'liberated' nearly 70 years ago, remained so poor? Beijing has a lot to answer for. What was the Party doing all these years?

Unfortunately, poverty alleviation in Tibet has been achieved by large population relocations, often near the Indian borders.

On December 24, *China Daily* cited Liu Yongfu, director of the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development in Beijing, admitted that the TAR and four provinces where ethnic Tibetan people live (particularly in three prefectures in Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan) as well as the southern part of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region had been clubbed together: "Officials commonly refer to these regions as the Three Areas and Three Prefectures, the deeply impoverished areas."⁴



The Xiaogang Historical Model Villages

⁴ 10m expected to escape poverty; see:

<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201912/23/WS5dfff611a310cf3e3557fd60.html>

Linked with poverty alleviation as well as defence of the borders, the scheme carries the name of 'Xiaogang villages', or moderately well-off villages.

It has a historical connotation. Remember, the 40th anniversary of "China's reform and opening up" was celebrated across China in 2018; the idea was to put the emphasis on an event which took place in 1978, when 18 farmers in Xiaogang village, in Anhui Province, signed a secret agreement to divide collectively-owned farmland into individual pieces and drop the collectivization of the Great Leap Forward (GLF), which between 1958 and 1960 resulted in some 40 million casualties; in Xiaogang itself, 67 villagers out of 120 had died of starvation between 1958 and 1960.

Forty years later, the name Xiaogang is used for the new project of the building of a large number of 'model' villages along the Indian border.

On October 19, 2019, *China Tibet News* reported that since the beginning of 2018, Tsona County, north of Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang District, has been "vigorously promoting the construction of border 'Xiaogang' villages".

The new project was started and given publicity soon after President Xi Jinping sent a reply to two young Tibetan herders who had written to him introducing their village, Yume.

Xi Jinping Adopts a Village

In October 2017, President Xi Jinping answered a letter of two young Tibetan herders who had written to him introducing their village, Yume, north of Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh.

According to Xinhua, Xi "encouraged a herding family in Lhunze [Lhuntse] County, near [sic] the Himalayas in southwest China's Tibet Autonomous Region, to set down roots in the border area, safeguard the Chinese territory and develop their hometown."

Xi acknowledged "the family's efforts to safeguard the territory, and thanked them for the loyalty and contributions they have made in the border area.

Without the peace in the territory, there will be no peaceful lives for the millions of families," he wrote⁵.

The two Tibetan girls, Choekar and Yangzom had written to the CCP's Secretary General about their "experiences in safeguarding the border area and the development of their township over the years."

Interestingly, the girls' village, Yume⁶ is located a few kilometers north of the McMahon Line, not far from the remote Indian village of Takshing.

Xi further hoped that the girls' family could "motivate more herders to set down roots in the border area 'like galsang flowers', and become guardians of the Chinese territory and constructors of a happy hometown."

The Chinese media reported that Yume is China's smallest town in terms of population.



⁵ Xi encourages Tibetan herders to safeguard territory; see:

http://www.china.org.cn/china/2017-10/29/content_41811017.htm

⁶ Also spelt Yumai or Yulmed.

The protectors of the sacred homeland and the builders of happy homes

“Govern the nation by governing the borders; govern the borders by first stabilizing Tibet; ensure social harmony and stability in Tibet and strengthen the development of border regions,”⁷ thus spoke President Xi Jinping about China’s relations with Tibet several years ago.

The authorities in Tibet have faithfully implemented the theory; the Party’s propaganda is doing its best to entice the local Tibetan population to side with the Communist Party.

In the last two years, the Tibetan plateau and particularly the border with India, has witnessed a mushrooming of these model villages.

A new formula can be found in every speech of the local satraps, the inhabitants of China’s borders (with India) should be “the protectors of the sacred homeland and the builders of happy homes.”

It has taken concrete shape with the growing number of new ‘model’ villages on the Tibetan side of the Indian border, mainly north of Arunachal Pradesh, but also in Himachal and Ladakh.

Several senior Communist leaders have visited these new villages, either north of Kibithu in the Lohit valley; in Metok, north of Upper Siang district; in Yume, north of Takshing in Upper Subansari or in Lepo, Marmang and Tsona, north of Khenzimane and Tawang.

Wu Yingjie, the Party Secretary of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) even gave an interview to *The People’s Daily* on the development in the border areas.

A Few Examples

In December 2018, *China Tibet News* reported about the “Relocation of Jisong village: moving towards happiness”

⁷ *All-out efforts for long-term development and stability of Tibet: Wu Yingjie*; see:

http://m.tibet.cn/eng/news/tibetan/201804/t20180416_5657684.html

Gyasum (or Jisong in Chinese) village in Tsona County is located near the trijunction Bhutan-Tibet-India at 4,500 meters above sea level. The Chinese website commented: "With bad environment, frequent frost damage, poor living conditions and lack of public facilities, the villagers have a very difficult life."

We are told that in June 2017, "after deeply investigating Jisong Village, the first phase of Jisong Village's high-altitude ecological relocation project was decided to be launched by implementing measures such as appropriate separation of production and living areas, special feeding of livestock in pastoral areas and labor liberation into the tertiary industry."⁸ This probably means that the main income of the village will be tourism.

So far, Beijing has invested 72.8 million yuan (11 million US \$) to build this 'modern' border village "with convenient transportation, good environment and complete facilities, so that the villagers of Jisong Village can truly lift themselves out of poverty and live and work in peace and contentment."⁹

As the article speaks of 'relocation', one can presume that the dwellers are brought from outside. Being in the border areas, a mixed population of Tibetans and Hans is probably considered 'safer' for Beijing.

China Tibet News further notes: "After more than a year of construction, all houses, commercial streets, village service centers, cultural and sports squares and roads have been completed."

It is said to be the sixth border Xiaogang 'well-off village' in Tsona County alone and the first high-altitude ecological relocation and resettlement site in the county. (see map)

The description continues thus: "The new village is not only spacious, comfortable, and equipped with complete facilities, but also laid with geothermal heating facilities for each household. Villagers no longer have to

⁸ *Relocation of Jisong village: moving towards happiness*; see: <http://en.tibetol.cn/html/News/Tibet/ES/2018/1227/5260.html>

⁹ Ibid.

endure the pain of cold winter, living conditions have achieved a qualitative leap." China is pampering its border populations to 'defend the frontiers'.



On the other side of the Indo-Tibet border

A couple of thousand kilometers away, in Ngari Prefecture, north of Uttarakhand/Himachal Pradesh, model villages are also coming up. *China Tibet Online* reported: "Ngari: a microcosm of changes in China's borderlands".¹⁰ Tsosip Sumkyil¹¹ is located north of the Sumdo sector of Kinnaur district (Himachal Pradesh).

The Chinese website said: "Chusong Village, a remote village more than 2,000 kilometers from Lhasa, is located in Chulu Songjie Township, Zanda County, Ngari Prefecture."

According to *China Tibet Online* "Chusong means 'land formed by a dried-up lake' in Tibetan: "The altitude here is about 4,000 meters above sea level, and snow cover on the mountains lasts for half a year, making this a veritable 'snow island'. In the past, it is really hard to get here. However, today, when you see the brand new, white, two-story buildings and the old

¹⁰ *Ngari: a microcosm of changes in China's borderlands*; see: http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/life/news/201812/t20181224_6467250.html

¹¹ Also called Chulu Songjie or Chusong.

houses nearby, you see how dramatically China's border regions have changed."¹²

Villagers were interviewed to tell stories about their changed life.

The Extent of the Project

On September 30, 2019, *Xinhua* said that 250,000 Tibetans had been relocated to new homes in the anti-poverty fight: "Nearly 250,000 people in Tibet have moved into 910 new settlements as part of poverty alleviation efforts by August 2019."

The official News Agency noted that China had planned to invest 19.78 billion yuan (US\$ 2.8 billion) in a relocation program to build 60,931 houses in around 970 settlements for 266,000 poverty-stricken citizens in the TAR. It was said that by the end of August, 93.6 percent of the investment fund had been used and 56,000 houses had been completed: "Tibet seeks to lift 266,000 residents out of poverty by relocating them from harsh living conditions and ecologically fragile areas, of whom 3,359 from 939 families originally lived at an altitude of over 4,800 meters."

Again according to *Xinhua*: "Tibet has been using relocation as a means of poverty reduction. By offering job opportunities in industrial parks and cities, the relocated residents are ensured ways to make a better living."

Though 'industrial parks and cities' are mentioned, the relocations are often done in new villages, far from 'industrial parks'.

Visit of the Chinese Premier in Tibet

One of the first times that the 'relocation' scheme got prime coverage in the Chinese media was in July 2018, when Premier Li Keqiang made an

¹² Ibid.

'inspection tour' in Tibet.¹³ *China Tibet Online* reported that Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visited Southern Tibet on July 25.¹⁴

Li went directly to Nyingchi (Nyingtri) prefecture (City) bordering Arunachal Pradesh. He visited a village¹⁵ in Mailing County in Nyingchi City; it is a new village now inhabited by Monpas. According to the press release, the inhabitants of this 'Monpa' village have been relocated from 'impoverished areas'.

Surprisingly, the 'impoverished' region is located in neighbouring Metok Dzong (County). This raises a serious issue, why move a population from one area near the border to 'relocate' them in another place not so far away. We shall see that this pattern will change and a year later, most of the relocation will take place from interior Tibet (primarily from nomadic areas) to new villages on the Indian border.

The Premier went to the new house of a Tibetan named Kunsang. He sat with the 'migrant' family and talked to the six members of the household about their daily life. He asked: "What is the main source of income? How much could you make in a year? What about your health care and children's education? What kind of difficulties do you still have now?"¹⁶

The Chinese media said that Premier Li listened patiently. Kunsang told Li that his family moved from Metok County, where "road travel is fairly difficult".

This is rather surprising considering that since 2013, when a tunnel was opened, the Chinese propaganda has been insisting on the 'changes' in

¹³ Note that this happened just a year after Doklam.

¹⁴ *Chinese Premier Li Keqiang tells Buddhist leaders to defend ethnic unity on rare trip to Tibet*; see: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/policies-politics/article/2157217/chinese-premier-li-keqiang-tells-buddhist-leaders>

¹⁵ Shiga village

¹⁶ *Premier Li Keqiang makes inspection tour in Tibet*; see: <http://en.tibetol.cn/html/News/Tibet/Politics/2018/0726/4316.html>

Metok, principally mentioning better communications. The question is, why move people to a nearby County, if the living conditions had improved so much in the first place?

Kunsang explained to the Premier that his family now has an income of 150,000 yuan a year (US \$ 2,400), thanks to farming and tourism. Further, the State “ensured health care service and children’s education program.” We are told that there are a total of 72 households in the new village and 90% of families have a similar income.¹⁷

Li was said to have been really pleased “to see that the villagers have cast off poverty through the relocation program and lived a prosperous life.” The Premier wished the family an even more prosperous life in the future. It is difficult to understand why this family was shifted from Metok to Mainling County. Were they creating problems for the Chinese government in Metok, near the Indian border?¹⁸

Reallocation of Restive Populations in Xinjiang

Another article clearly shows that relocation is linked with the ‘ethnic issue’. On July 6, 2018, *The People’s Daily* spoke of relocation and mentioned the situation in Xinjiang; Beijing had relocated “461,000 poverty-ridden residents to work in other parts of the region during the first quarter of the year.”¹⁹

An ‘expert’ explained to the mouthpiece of the Party that it is a bid to ‘improve social stability and alleviate poverty’. The report asserted that the

¹⁷ Premier Li stresses sustainable development, prosperity in Tibet; see: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-07/29/c_137354330.htm

¹⁸ Incidentally, the visit of the Chinese Premier to Tibet took place just before the yearly summer retreat of the Party’s top bosses in Beidaihe, which was always the occasion to discuss ‘new’ policies.

¹⁹ *Crackdown in Xinjiang: Where have all the people gone?*; see: <https://www.ft.com/content/ac0ffb2e-8b36-11e8-b18d-0181731a0340>

Xinjiang government planned to further transfer 100,000 residents from southern Hotan and Kashgar prefectures by 2019, to get employed somewhere else.

Yu Shaoxiang, another 'expert' at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, admitted to *The Global Times*: "poverty alleviation in Xinjiang is more difficult compared to other places because, aside from poverty, Xinjiang also faces ethnic issues."²⁰

Yu further commented: "Organizing people to work away from home would help them better integrate with the rest of China, and take their advanced skills back to Xinjiang later. The relocation also helps maintain regional security."

Xinhua News Agency said that in 2017, 'occupational education programs' covered 1.26 million people in Kashgar and Hotan, where 47,000 poor people found jobs while 317,400 individuals and 331 villages were lifted out of poverty. It is obviously a pretext in an area which is the hub of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

²⁰ Ibid.



Another Example

Another article in *China Tibet News* speaks of the happy life brought by the relocation: "the name of 'Gongkang Village' originates from the slogan of 'Thanks to the Communist Party', and construct a well-off society together."²¹

The story says: "Starting eastward from Shannan (Lhoka) City²² after a three-hour driving, one can arrive at Gongkang Village²³ in Lingda Town of Gyatsa County, with an average elevation of 3,269 metres."

The village is not far from the site of the 360MW Gyatsa (Jiacha) Dam on the Yarlung Tsangpo.

Are the new settlers to be engaged in dam construction?

In August, 2016, this place was designated as the targeted poverty alleviation relocation centre: "At present, there are 369 households and

²¹ *Gongkang Village: happy life is brought by relocation; see:*
<http://en.tibetol.cn/html/News/Tibet/ES/2019/1120/7895.html>

²² Formerly prefecture.

²³ 29°05'17"N 92°38'40"E

1,269 people in Gongkang Village. The project of advancing relocation covers an area of 472,000 m², and its total investment reaches 210 million yuan (US\$ 34 million)," said Xinhua.

Social Benefits for All

All the villagers are said to benefit from a medical insurance, while the children enjoy favorable policies "at the stages of compulsory education and senior high school" and college students receive regional subsidies.

The enrollment rate of the village's school-age children is 100%.

The description of the 'paradise' continues: "To ensure income of villagers, the village subsidizes the disabled with disability allowance, ensures basic supply for the most vulnerable groups, provides employment training for those who have the force, and increases the income of those who work at ecological positions."²⁴

The article cites 168 people who have been trained, 401 ecological positions created and 218 impoverished people who have been provided with jobs:

"With the help of county, town and village, Gongkang Village Industrial Development Co., Ltd has been established. The company has five mutual-aid teams, namely ecological breeding team, agricultural and animal products processing team, labor-force exporting team and agricultural machinery promoting team. All 574 workers have been arranged for each mutual-aid team, realizing the goal that everyone has a platform, everyone has things to do and everyone has income."

It sounds like the propaganda during the Great Leap Forward in China.

The list of benefits goes on, before the article concludes: "Nowadays, a harmonious and socialist new countryside has been built beside the Yarlung Tsangpo River under the Party's policy of benefiting people and Gongkang villagers."

²⁴ Ibid.

The Place of Tourism in the Scheme

One important angle is admitted by the Chinese authorities: "Tourism has also been a major poverty-alleviation measure."

Huang Yongqing, head of the regional tourism development department told Xinhua: "The regional government has encouraged rural residents and herdsmen to open family inns. The average annual income of the total of 570 family inns surpassed 100,000 yuan (US\$ 16,000), and some even reached 300,000 yuan (US\$ 48,000)."²⁵

It was observed that the number of tourists to visit Tibet reached 33.7 million, up 31.5 percent year on year; while income from tourism increased by 29.2 percent to 49 billion yuan (US\$ 8 billion): "The region helped 32,000 people rise out of poverty by developing rural tourism last year. It plans to help another 100,000 farmers and herdsmen gain employment through rural tourism in 2019".

Of course, these figures always need to be taken with a pinch of salt, but still there is no doubt that Tibet receives millions of Han visitors and their number is increasing.

Relocating Population to Build Dams?

On January 20, 2020, an article in *China Tibet News* spoke of "Moving into new houses to get rid of poverty"; it mentioned a village located in Zogang [Dzogang] County, Qamdo [Chamdo] City, in the Tibet Autonomous Region. The name of the village is said to be a relocation site for poverty alleviation, with a total residential gross floor area of 79,918.51 m² (very precise!). 'Sifangxianghe' is the name for the new 'village'; 'Sifan' is possibly linked to a tribe from Yunnan.

²⁵ *Rural tourism helps 32,000 shake off poverty in Tibet*; see: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2019-04/27/c_138015422.htm

The article concludes: "The housing is multi-storey with frame structure, is equipped with water, electricity, road and network. Now, 4,803 people from 902 households in 7 towns have moved into new houses."²⁶

Nearly 5,000 people relocated out of nowhere is really strange, especially when the place is not far from the Indian border in Arunachal Pradesh. The only plausible thought is that this new village could be a shelter for migrant workers for the construction of a dam.

Two of the major Asian rivers with their source on the plateau flow through Dzogang county, the Salween and the Mekong.

The Salween or Nu River 2,815 kilometres (1,749 mi) long, flows from the Tibetan Plateau into the Andaman Sea in Southeast Asia; according to Wikipedia: "It drains a narrow and mountainous watershed of 324,000 km² that extends into the countries of China, Burma and Thailand. Steep canyon walls line the swift and powerful Salween." A large number of dams are planned on the Salween.

The Mekong has a length of 4,350 km; it flows from the Tibetan Plateau to China via Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

The Dzogang county is served by two major National Highway (214 and 318). China National Highway 318 (G318) runs from Shanghai to Zhangmu on the China-Nepal border.²⁷

China National Highway 214 (G214) runs from Xining, Qinghai to Jinghong, Yunnan. It is 3,256 kilometres in length and runs south from Xining towards Tibet, and ends in Yunnan Province.

Though the Chinese propaganda speaks of 'poverty alleviation', the new 'village' is probably used for migrant workers building a dam on the Salween.

²⁶ *Moving into new houses to get rid of poverty; see:*

http://english.chinatibetnews.com/gdtp/202001/t20200120_2882630.html

²⁷ It is the longest China National Highway with a length of 5,476 kilometres.

Some Conclusions

The 'relocation' will probably continue on a war-footing in 2020, bringing along millions of Han Chinese to the border...and Happiness to the Party.

The issue is that the new settlers are not Tibetans only, Hans too are brought to the borders to take the lead in the implementation of the Party policies, such as poverty alleviation.

For India, the change of demography on her borders is a serious issue, though it can only watch for the time being.