



# MARGINALIZATION



*“It feels as though the city’s going to burst; prices for food are getting more and more expensive... going to the temple to pray, it’s hard to move through the mass of tourists, and furthermore the tourists speak so loudly, they spit on the ground and the men smoke and the women bare their flesh; go to a shop or a restaurant and the owners ignore the locals, with the Han just looking out for the Han, and Tibetans truly becoming marginalized.”*

– A local Tibetan from Lhasa



*Tibetan nomads walking on a highway*

The Tibetan quoted above is not alone in his sentiments of marginalization. The implementation of the Western Development Strategy

has increased the gulf between Tibetans and their migrant Chinese neighbors who benefit from state-supported policies and investments



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**creating opportunities, which largely advantage workers and entrepreneurs with Chinese fluency, Chinese work cultures and connections to business networks in China. Government finance channeled into Tibet continues to be targeted at urban areas and sectors where Tibetans have the hardest time competing with better-educated Chinese migrants.**

Development economist Andrew Fischer explains: *“This combination in turn exacerbates inequality and the exclusionary dynamics of growth, given that the majority of Tibetans have more and more difficulty accessing the state or private networks that control the dominant sources of wealth in the economy. Therefore, the most urgent problem within these developments is what can be called ‘ethnically exclusionary growth.’”*<sup>1</sup>

Such exclusionary growth both results from and fuels the influx of Chinese migrants entering Tibet since the completion of the Qinghai-Tibet Railroad. It has been made clear in various official statements that China’s Western Development Strategy actively encourages China’s professionals, experts and workers to go with their families to “develop and pioneer in ethnic autonomous areas,” a phrase which is enshrined in legislation as a part of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law (REAL). While subsidies are not explicitly given to Chinese, various other incentives are offered to those willing to relocate to Tibet, including university loan repayments for Chinese graduates who agreed to work in “western or remote areas” of the People’s Republic of China (PRC)—placing even educated Tibetans at an economic disadvantage to their new neighbors.

A case which exemplifies this tendency is the incident, which occurred at the Gyama copper and gold mine near Lhasa on March 29, 2013. An avalanche of rock, mud and debris struck the mining site, killing 83 miners. Leaving out the concerns of environmental protection and workplace safety in Tibet that this case raised once again, the 83 miners who died in the accident revealed an interesting figure. As it turns out, only two of them were local Tibetans, while the rest were Chinese migrant workers.

This marginalization of Tibetans is further compounded by the forced resettlement of nomads into urban environments where they lack the adequate education and skills to compete with Chinese workers. Amid explicit concerns about unemployment among Tibetans, the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) Labor and Social Security Bureau estimated in May 2007 that 20,000 to 30,000 Tibetan herders and farmers were leaving the land each year and therefore in need of work. This compares with the bureau’s forecast of 200,000 to 300,000 Chinese arriving each year on the train in search of work.

Chinese enterprises operating in Tibet almost invariably prefer to hire migrant Chinese employees, who are more familiar with the Chinese work culture and Chinese practices, not to mention the Chinese language. Furthermore, the family and business networks among Chinese and Hui (Chinese Muslim) settlers in Lhasa, which effectively exclude Tibetan from significant participation in the economy, are replicated throughout all economic activities in Tibet, often exclusively employing non-Tibetan staff for ventures intended to benefit

<sup>1</sup> *Perversities of Extreme Dependence and Unequal Growth in the Tibetan Autonomous Region*, A. Fischer, Tibet Watch Special Report, August 2007. <http://www.tibetwatch.org/Tibet%20Watch%20Special%20Report%20Andrew%20Fischer.pdf>



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non-Tibetan interests.

In urban Tibet, the migrant population from rural areas of the PRC is better educated than the local urban population. Everywhere else in the PRC urban populations are ‘protected’ to some degree by a job market, which favors their higher levels of education. In urban Tibet, however, the average female migrant worker from rural China is better educated than the average Tibetan urban male. Tibetans are hampered further by a lack of any meaningful access to vocational training which could prepare them to compete with Chinese migrants—and what little vocational training there is on offer serves to prepare people for menial jobs that have little prestige or prospects. On the question of education alone, therefore, Tibetans face an immediate disadvantage when competing for work with the migrant population.

Describing the systematic marginalization of Tibetans, development economist Andrew Fischer states that while the state may have moved to increase educational opportunities for Tibetans, “it also moved towards a stronger assimilationist

*position together with strong exclusionary pressures in labor markets. Ultimately, the situation breeds considerable frustration and alienation, while the additional elite option of full assimilation further accentuates class polarization among Tibetans themselves.”<sup>2</sup>*

Current development plans in Tibet seem to focus on what China needs, what China can extract, and how the Party can consolidate its power over the PRC, rather than what would most skillfully lift Tibetan incomes. By continuing to pursue a model of development that appears to increase rather than close the gap between urban and rural, rich and poor, Chinese and Tibetan, the Chinese state risks further marginalizing and alienating the Tibetan people, potentially undermining the political objectives of its current development: a stable Tibet, united within China.<sup>3</sup>

For further information on this topic, please refer to ICT’s report “Tracking the Steel Dragon” specifically, the chapter entitled “Social Exclusion and China’s Economic Policies” available online at [www.savetibet.org](http://www.savetibet.org).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> For further information, see ICT’s report “Tracking the Steel Dragon” (chapter “Social exclusion as a result of China’s economic policies”): <http://www.savetibet.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/TrackingTheSteelDragon.pdf>