

# RAILWAY FOCUSES THE WORLD ON TIBET

BY NAMLO YAK

Opinions vary widely on the pros and cons of the new Qinghai-Tibet Railway, including the impact it might have on negotiations between envoys of the Dalai Lama and the Beijing authorities.

## Domestic public opinion

This writer surveyed opinions on the new railway posted on blogs hosted on the Tibet Culture Blog Web site ([www.tibetcul.net](http://www.tibetcul.net)) from June 22 until July 5, 2006. Following are some of the postings:

“They say [the railway] will develop tourism, but in fact Tibet, with its relatively backward culture and economy, will be unable to protect itself against the large-scale onslaught of material culture from the outside, which is sure to have a destructive impact on the local culture and environment. . . .”

“They say [the railway] will develop Tibet’s economy, but it’s really just an economic encroachment on the weak by the powerful . . . the Tibet Plateau is the so-called no man’s land, and harsh natural conditions limit the exploitation and utilization of natural resources there. The opening of the railway will facilitate the exploitation and transportation of resources in Tibet. The key point here is that the final user and biggest beneficiaries of these natural resources will not be Tibet. Tibetans will at most be paid a minimum for providing labor to exploit and extract these natural resources. The ones receiving the greatest benefit will be the people at the other end of the rail line.”

“Because of natural conditions, historical and other factors, the education and overall qualifications of Tibetans are on average lower than in coastal areas, and the competitive ability of individuals and groups is relatively weak. The massive number of people from outside Tibet pouring in as a result of the railway will make it relatively easy for these outsiders to surpass the local people, making the environment for their survival even grimmer, and further widening the already sig-

nificant gap between rich and poor, with Tibetans making up the bulk of those standing on the poor side of the line.”

“The opening of the railway will increase the level of military control, making a Tibet with a high level of autonomy an even more distant prospect.”

These postings indicate that Tibetans are becoming increasingly aware of their disadvantages and of the necessity to improve their survival capabilities. The influx of tourists and immigrants will put pressure on local food supplies and housing, resulting in higher prices, while the wages of local Tibetans will remain low, making it difficult for them to sustain



Photo: Associated Press

their daily lives. Under such conditions, the ties between China and Tibet may become even more complicated.

Another poster wrote:

The Tibet railway has really opened  
Mona Lisa has fermented bean curd in her mouth  
Dong Cunrui<sup>1</sup> is holding a dead mouse in his right hand  
Clinton is dancing a striptease in front of Lewinsky  
Ye Zimei<sup>2</sup> has grown a sixth breast  
Dao Mingsi is washing Shan Cai's underwear<sup>3</sup>  
The 2008 Olympics has started ahead of schedule  
Nursery schools are renting out their chastity for 1 Euro  
Hitler went to the Tibet Plateau to plant sweet potatoes  
Eskimos have gone to Hainan to escape the summer heat  
Tripitaka personally cooked food for Guanyin<sup>4</sup>  
Faye Wong wrote a love letter in the delivery room<sup>5</sup>  
Einstein shook his booty on the moon  
Bill Gates is selling clothing on Nanjing Road  
Lin Zexu loves to smoke Marlboros<sup>6</sup>  
Xiang Yu and Liu Bang have become husband and wife<sup>7</sup>  
The black widow has married her 3,500th husband  
True love has cheated Allah  
Oh my God, the Tibet railway has really opened!

This posting uses poetry to express how the opening of the railway will bring change to this land. Statements like "nursery schools have rented out their chastity for 1 Euro" are hardly an exaggeration. Tibetans' human and environmental resources for survival have set the preconditions for this to happen. This is also the direct consequence of a policy of crippled education that has continued for half a century. However, the Dalai Lama has offered conditional support to the rail line, and has made a point of distancing himself from Free Tibet activists who are boycotting it.

Even Chinese people have expressed differing opinions. Chinese President Hu Jintao has said, "The completion and opening of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway is another great achievement in the building of China's socialist modernization."<sup>8</sup> The spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said: "The opening of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway in changing Tibet's backward transportation system has raised the living standards of all the minority peoples and has played a very significant role in the promotion of the development of the tourism industry in the area."<sup>9</sup>

But on the other side, Zhao Feiyue, a Shandong teacher, wrote: "The establishment of the railway has in fact destroyed Tibet. A long, black penis has penetrated the hymen of the Tibetan virgin . . ." Furthermore, the famous Chinese writer Wang Lixiong<sup>10</sup> recently emphasized in an interview with *Yazhou Zhoukan* that a culture is as deserving of preservation as the natural environment. He said it should be possible to establish a refuge for the preservation of Tibetan culture, like a nature preserve—moving out the majority of outsiders, and not allowing outsiders to enter.<sup>11</sup>

## Broader implications

Over the past few years, Indian governmental departments and think tanks have held several meetings to discuss the effect the Tibet railway will have on India and the entire South Asian subcontinent. *India Today* ran an article with the following warning:

The opening of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway has significantly boosted the mobilization and logistical capabilities of the Chinese military. It will enable China to transport five million tons of materials into Tibet each year, and deploy as many as 12 divisions of infantry into the area within one month. Furthermore, news media have reported that the railway has greatly strengthened China's ability to launch an attack against India, and to ship in mid-range guided missiles and other equipment.

Regarding the effect on the China-Tibet negotiations, the chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), Jampa Puntsok,<sup>12</sup> held a news conference for foreign journalists in Lhasa on July 4 and said that the Dalai Lama's request for a high level of autonomy for the Tibet region lacked sincerity, and that the representatives of the two sides had not made any progress in their several rounds of negotiations. However, he publicly acknowledged that the communication channels between the representatives of the Chinese government and the Dalai Lama remain open. At the same time, TAR Party Secretary Zhang Qingli crudely described the launching of the new round of "patriotic education" as a "battle to the death with the Dalai Lama and his supporters."<sup>13</sup>

Kate Saunders, communications director for the International Campaign for Tibet, said recently,

Vice Minister Zhu Weiqun said that 'the Central leadership of the Chinese Communist Party attached great importance to the contact with His Holiness the Dalai Lama.' This is significant. But there is no quick fix; this is likely to be a long-term process . . . For more than ten years, the Dalai Lama has made the pragmatic offer to relinquish the goal of independence in favour of genuine autonomy, a proposal that is consistent with China's governing Constitution. While the official Party line is that the Dalai Lama is a dangerous 'splittist', commentaries and discussions on the Chinese-language Internet and among analysts in China indicate a growing interest in engaging in talks to resolve the situation.<sup>14</sup>

Everything has a good and a bad side. On the one hand, the opening of the Qinghai-Tibet Railway has allowed the People's Republic of China to strengthen its ability to control Tibet, but it has also caused the Tibet question to become more rapidly internationalized. Furthermore, the rail line has clearly not yet damaged contacts between Tibet and China. Actual progress in the talks will depend on the overall international climate, changes in China, and whether the climate within Tibet is conducive to the talks. In addition, one has to take into consideration the interaction between policies and interests of different countries.

The well-known Tibetan writer Woeser, in discussing the

new railway with her Internet friends, had this to say: “I feel that, regarding Tibetans, in a situation where real autonomy cannot be achieved, the most important thing is not rights, but being awoken. Only those who have awakened can know what they themselves really want.”<sup>15</sup> This may be the biggest gift brought by the railway, as well as the crux of the issue of whether or not actual progress can be made in the negotiations between Tibet and China. Lodi Gyaltzen Gyari, the Dalai Lama’s envoy, has often said: “The Tibet government in exile cannot be rushed or forced into reaching any sort of agreement with the Beijing government because achieving progress takes time. At this stage, achieving meaningful progress is the objective of the Dalai Lama’s special envoy.”

Translated by Paul Mooney

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#### NOTES

1. Dong Cunrui (1929–1948) was proclaimed a hero of the People’s Liberation Army in 1963. During a battle between China’s Communist and Nationalist forces, the advance of the PLA was blocked by a pillbox built on a bridge. Dong pressed a pack of explosives against the bridge with his hand and blew the pill-box off, dying in the explosion. In propaganda posters, he is inevitably depicted holding the pack of explosives.
2. Also known as Amy Yip, a buxom Hong Kong starlet.
3. Based on a Japanese manga series of Yoko Kamio, the popular Taiwanese drama “Meteor Garden” centers on a love story between the poor girl Shancai and the rich and hotheaded Dao Mingsi.
4. Tripitaka is a Tang Dynasty Buddhist monk who in the Chinese classic *The Journey to the West* joins the Monkey King and his companions Pigsy and Sandy to retrieve Buddhist sutras from India to bring back to China. Originally named Xuan Zang, Tripitaka was chosen by the goddess Guanyin for the task.
5. A Hong Kong singer and actress originally from mainland China, Wong had her second child at a Beijing hospital on May 27, 2006.
6. A Qing Dynasty scholar and official, Lin is most famous for his fight against opium smuggling in Guangzhou, which set off the First Opium War with Britain in 1839.
7. Following the death of the Qin emperor, Xiang Yu defeated the Qin army, after which Liu Bang invaded the Qin capital, and the Qin Dynasty collapsed.
8. “Qingzang tielu tongche, Hu Jintao fabiao zhongyao jianghua,” Xinhua News Agency, July 11, 2006, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/video/2006-07/01/content\\_4772631.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/video/2006-07/01/content_4772631.htm).
9. Xu Bo, “Dalai Lama you tiaojian huanying Qingzang tielu jiancheng,” Voice of America, June 30, 2006, <http://www.voafanti.com/gate/>

## Reverberation

BY A. E. CLARK

When the last shrine shall have been converted into a gift shop;  
When three dice rattle below the neon lights of the Potala,  
And Milarepa’s songs are all extinguished;  
When the prayer wheel shall be stopped  
And none can tell the beads which a curator placed beneath the glass;  
When the prairie’s been peeled off the copper and chromite,  
And the shepherds are settled in cities,  
Where some may find work as bellhops in quaint uniforms;  
When the fire burial is finally cold,  
The Presence blown into the blue, a windwraith . . .

Strike singing bowl, wait long for deepest sound.  
Though callous hands don’t feel the mace recoil,  
A blow, once dealt, rebounds within the mind  
To dislocate the world the violent know:  
What dripped in the Dangqu may yet flood to the sea.  
Then the superior man, shocked by the taste  
Of ashes at his feast, will stagger out  
To search for healing—for a word not hollow,  
For an authority by love ennobled—  
And rue the gentian trampled in the West.

By Namtso, look! Reflected in the lake  
At dusk, ice glints on Nyenchen Tanglha’s peak:  
The herdsmen say, a jeweled door into  
That darkness which engenders and enshrouds.  
The door swings open, multitudes surge through:  
Some dance with grace, some butt and shove their way.  
A mounted guardian, whip hand high,  
Sits poised with an inhuman smile  
To marshal all that rise  
And fall: all that has been and shall be.

big5/www.voanews.com/chinese/archive/2006-06/w2006-06-30-voa25.cfm.

10. A long-time advocate on Tibet and environmental issues, Wang is married to the Tibetan writer Woesser.
11. “Zhuanfang ‘Huanghuo’ ‘Tianzang’ zuozhe Wang Lixiong: Qingzang tielu dui Zang wenhua you he chongji?” *Yazhou Zhoukan*, June 24, 2006, posted on Chinese Newsnet, [http://www6.chinesenewsnet.com/MainNews/Forums/BackStage/2006\\_6\\_24\\_9\\_15\\_53\\_204.html](http://www6.chinesenewsnet.com/MainNews/Forums/BackStage/2006_6_24_9_15_53_204.html)
12. Pinyin: Qiangba Puncog
13. See Yang Ming, “Xizang gaoguan tam tong Dalai Lama daibiao duihua,” Voice of America, July 4, 2006, <http://www.voanews.com/chinese/archive/2006-07/w2006-07-04-voa62.cfm>.
14. Quoted in *Tibetan World Magazine*, August 2005, [http://www.tibetanworldmagazine.com/Read/interview\\_kate.html](http://www.tibetanworldmagazine.com/Read/interview_kate.html).
15. The original source of this quote could not be located, probably because Woesser’s blogs have since been shut down.