Undermined: China's Growing Presence In Tibetan Mining

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For decades, China has exploited ethnic minorities in the name of economic growth. To maintain control over the Tibetan Autonomous Region, the Chinese government has made steady supply of mining rights. The Chinese Government Policy of Tibetan Development Strategy is supply in its occupied territories, such as the Uyghur Region.[1] There, it has forced more than 1 million people into labor camps, and has made it illegal to practice Islam in the region, especially around the world.[2] Freedom and Human rights are the main threatened with Uyghurs.[3] Such practices have been referred to by the US Special Representative on Contemporary Forms of Slavery as possible harvesters of a crime against humanity.[4]

But the Uyghur Region isn't the only Beijing-controlled territory where the CCP targets and exploits controlled resources. The CCP has a long history of repression in another occupied territory: Tibet. Now, with Chinese sensibilities to extract and export rare resources, especially in Tibetan Autonomous Region, the CCP is using the same tactics that it used in the Uyghur Region, in a mining industry.

Tibet is shouted on a resource rich plateau in the southeast of modern-day mainland China. It borders Nepal and Bhutan to the south, and Indian-occupied Kashmir to the northwest. Wikipedia.[5] They have been called by the Dalai Lama in an independent Wikipedia entry dedicated to the practice of Tibetan Buddhism.[6]

In 1949, the Peoples Republic of China was established,[7] and from late 1949 into 1950, China invaded Tibet. Described by government as "peaceful liberation", the invasion, and occupation of Tibet, the CCP has been facilitating resettlement, Tibetans through numerous repression and forced labor camps. Tibetan Buddhism has been suppressed, and Tibetan Buddhist monks have been imprisoned, and their property, and holy sites have been subjected to colonial bombing schools.[8]

A key motive behind Chinese invasion of Tibet was to seize control of its natural resources. Currently, the CCP is interested in Tibet's abundant stores of minerals such as copper and lithium, which are used in electronics, and in the manufacture of batteries, and are in high demand, since Tesla and other electric vehicle manufacturers are expanding.[9]

To grow its economic strength, China aims to become a global leader in employing these minerals to develop renewable energy sources.[10]

To extract these minerals, Chinese state-owned companies have been recruiting Tibetan laborers, including herders and farmers, into industrial sector jobs. The government of Tibetan Autonomous Region has been offering "Tibetan herders and farmers" employment, since according to a broader regime policy of "poverty alleviation through industrialization". The theoretical intent is that by facilitating the transition of workers to substantial industrial jobs, the CCP is helping them to escape from poverty. In reality, however, the mining, the regime can give the impression of benefit while also exploiting its workers under an ex-ist of slavery, "left behind" in Tibet's economic growth.[11] While ostensibly meant to "alleviate poverty", the CCP's policy of "poverty alleviation through industrialization" has concerns about traditional Tibetan herders and farmers, who have been resettled in mining centers in which Tibetans hardly participate in the recruitment process." More broadly, such policies could be seen as contributing to the CCP's goal of "Sinicization" of Tibetans in the region.

A Brief History of Chinese Mining in Tibet

China's colonial mining in Tibet as early the "1950s,"[12] but greatly increased its activity in the 2000s.[13]

Much of these mines in Tibet originated in joint Chinese-Canadian ventures, with Canadian prospecting technical expertise and China supplying the labor force, and Tibetan workers.[14] China subsequently bought out the Canadian companies, turning these mines into state-owned enterprises.

In its recent efforts to develop the mining industry and extract resources, China has been recruiting Tibetan workers, including herders and farmers, into industrial sector jobs. Tibetans have been accounting for a broader regime policy of "poverty alleviation through industrialization". The theoretical intent is that by facilitating the transition of workers to substantial industrial jobs, the CCP is helping them to escape from poverty. In reality, however, the mining, the regime can give the impression of benefit while also exploiting its workers under an ex-ist of slavery, "left behind" in Tibet's economic growth.[15] While ostensibly meant to "alleviate poverty", the CCP's policy of "poverty alleviation through industrialization" has concerns about traditional Tibetan herders and farmers, who have been resettled in mining centers in which Tibetans hardly participate in the recruitment process." More broadly, such policies could be seen as contributing to the CCP's goal of "Sinicization" of Tibetans in the region.

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Consolidating CCP Influence Over Tibetan Mining

Currently, the Chinese Communist Party is consolidating its power over Tibetan mining through policies concerning the Tibetan "transfer" of "surplus rural laborers."[20] Under Chinese Communist Party Secretary Chen Quanguo, the CCP has been using "poverty alleviation" as a secondary or tertiary secondary focus in its efforts to control Tibetan mining. Chinese companies may employ Tibetan herders and other people working in the primary sector as miners or other secondary and tertiary sector jobs.

While there is a lack of transparency over the number of Tibetan labor transfer programs, it appears that such transfer are increasingly implemented in compliance with CCP state policy of poverty alleviation through the labor transfer "剩余劳动力" of rural surplus laborers.[21] Under Chen Quanguo, the CCP has been using "poverty alleviation" as a secondary or tertiary focus in its efforts to control Tibetan mining. Chinese companies may employ Tibetan herders and other people working in the primary sector as miners or other secondary and tertiary sector jobs.

Since the Chinese regime has selectively restricted access to Tibet,[22] by restricting journalists from people who have undergone labor transfer in Tibet, and there is scant opportunity for the ground investigation. Consequently, there is a lack of data on the extent of Tibet's labor transfer program is as extensive as the Uyghur Region's labor transfer program. However, the Uyghur Region's labor transfer program is a useful model for the kinds of policy technology and implementation Tibetans might see in the near future. Uyghurs have been subjected to state-mandated labor forces, joining, along with another forty-one million people, in the Uyghur Region's labor force.[23] Tibetan Buddhist monks have reported that Tibetans were recruited to "voluntarily" participate in Chinese-run "training centers" for Tibetans, and they were subjected to state-mandated labor transfer programs.[24] Tibetan Buddhist monks have reported that Tibetans were recruited to "voluntarily" participate in Chinese-run "training centers" for Tibetans, and they were subjected to state-mandated labor transfer programs.[25] Tibetan Buddhist monks have reported that Tibetans were recruited to "voluntarily" participate in Chinese-run "training centers" for Tibetans, and they were subjected to state-mandated labor transfer programs.[26]

Additionally, in 2018 Bulletin, training was reported to be "voluntary" for Tibetans.[27] Tibetan Buddhist monks have reported that Tibetans were recruited to "voluntarily" participate in Chinese-run "training centers" for Tibetans, and they were subjected to state-mandated labor transfer programs.[28] Tibetan Buddhist monks have reported that Tibetans were recruited to "voluntarily" participate in Chinese-run "training centers" for Tibetans, and they were subjected to state-mandated labor transfer programs.[29] Tibetan Buddhist monks have reported that Tibetans were recruited to "voluntarily" participate in Chinese-run "training centers" for Tibetans, and they were subjected to state-mandated labor transfer programs.[30] Tibetan Buddhist monks have reported that Tibetans were recruited to "voluntarily" participate in Chinese-run "training centers" for Tibetans, and they were subjected to state-mandated labor transfer programs.[31] Tibetan Buddhist monks have reported that Tibetans 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content/uploads/2017/09/2013-5-6.pdf. According to CCP media, many Tibetan villagers were also opposed to mining in Jiama town because it was disrespectful to the spirits—until they all miraculously changed their minds and went to work in the mines. Du Juan, "Mining to become key to Tibet's economy," China Daily, 2012, https://perma.cc/5DA2-LTZR. Relevant citations regarding China Gold International: China Gold International Resources Corp. Ltd., "Jiama Copper Gold Polymetallic Mine," (2023), https://perma.cc/WPXD-PJFL; Beijing Zhonghuan Geyi Technology Consulting Co. Ltd., "西藏华泰龙矿业开发有限公司甲玛铜多金属矿项目环保技术咨询服务 (Environmental protection technology consulting services for the Jiama Copper Polymetallic Mine Project of Tibet Huatailong Mining Development Co., Ltd.)," https://web.archive.org/web/20240410040633/https://www.china-eia.com/bjzhgy/sy_11525.fwal/202306/t20230602_1032337.shtml; Cynthia D'Cruz and Carole Samdup, "Request for Review Submitted to Canada's National Contact Point Pursuant to the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, Specific Instance Regarding: The Operations of China Gold International Resources Corp. Ltd., at the Copper Polymetallic Mine at the Gyama Valley, Tibet Autonomous Region," Canada Tibet Committee (2014); 2, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Association/NaturalResource/Canada_Tibet_Committee1_E.pdf; GlobalData, "The Five Largest Copper Mines in Operation in China," Mining Technology, July 21, 2023, https://www.mining-technology.com/marketdata/five-largest-copper-mines-china/?cf-view; Conversation with the Canada-Tibet-Committee December 19, 2024.

61 Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "习近平论脱贫攻坚 (Xi Jinping on Poverty Alleviation)," https://web.archive.org/web/20240404185939/http://www.moa.gov.cn/ztzl/xjpgsyngzzyls/zyll/202106/t20210615_6369587.htm.

62 For 377 Tibetans by 2018, and for them engaging in such employment in the context of government policy, see P.62–63 of China Gold International Resources Corp. Ltd., " 环境、社会及管治报告2018 (Environmental, Social, and Governance Report 2018)," (2018), https://perma.cc/XJ39-BJ6U: "公司在西藏、内蒙古高但少数民族地区大量吸纳和安排富地劳动力就业，精扶支持和帮勤地方经济发展。截至 2018 年底，内蒙古大平公司和西藏 泰鑫公司少数民族員工比例分别为 10% 和 36%。", with the recruitment of the 377 Tibetans being described as a case study of such absorption and arrangement of employment: "截至 2018 年，公司雇用藏族員工 通 377 人， 的占公司藏工總人數的 36%" and with the government policy being "两年脱贫，三 年巩固".

63 Id.: "大量吸纳和安排富地劳動力就業"

64 Id., 62–63.

65 Lhasa Municipal Development and Reform Commission, Beijing Tsinghua Tongheng Planning and Design Institute Co., Ltd., Urban Development Planning Institute, "拉萨市"十三五"特色产业, (2017), https://perma.cc/V592-2SSL. See P. 10 ("三年脱贫、两年巩固") "poverty alleviation in three years, consolidation in two years," and P. 83 ("两年脱贫，三年巩固") "poverty alleviation in two years, consolidation in three years" in the context of employing Tibetans in poverty. For instance, P.83: "围绕"两年脱贫、三年巩固"的目标，通过产业扶贫，实现12028 建档立卡贫困人口以业脱贫，带动 59280 名贫困人口通过发展产业脱贫;实现到2020年，建档立卡贫困人口年人均可支配收入达到 6150 元。"

Both wordings have been seen, and it is assumed that these objectives are interchangeable. For further references to policy mentioning "两年脱贫、三年巩固." and "三年脱贫、两年巩固" see: Lhasa Municipal Government Website, "拉萨市召开精准扶贫精准脱贫 (Lhasa holds a meeting on targeted poverty alleviation), People's Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region, 2016, https://web.archive.org/web/20240310042605/https://www.xizang.gov.cn/xwzx_406/ztzl_416/gdzt/tpgj/201901/t20190117_48449.html; Tibet Daily, "因地制宜才能 "摆得出留得住" (Only by adapting to local conditions can we 'move out and stay')," Tibet Autonomous Region People's Government (2018), https://web.archive.org/web/20240705152611/http://www.xizang.gov.cn/xwzx_406/xwrp/201812/t20181217_29762.html.

66 "该公司共吸纳转移就业农牧民435人," from China Tibet News Network, "西藏华泰龙吸纳转移就业农牧民435人 (Tibet Huatailong absorbs 435 farmers and herdsmen who have transferred to work)," Ali District Administrative Office (2020), https://archive.is/Xd2f#selection-1017.485-1017.626.

67 For 435 transferred herdsmen by 2020: "自脱贫攻坚工作开展以来，西藏华泰龙矿业开发有限公司在脱贫攻 坚工作中，通过有力措施力农牧民转移就业，截至目前，该公司共吸纳转移就业农牧民435人，每月增加 劳务收入逾300万元。" Id.

68 For additional cases of labor transfer in 2023, see China Tibet News Network, "拉萨市墨竹工卡县赤康村提升共商共议共治共享水平 (Chikang Village, Mozhugongkar County, Lhasa City Improves the Level Of Consultation, Discussion, Governance and Sharing)," Sina Finance, 2023, https://perma.cc/RQA7-NVPE. Finally, see Tibet Daily, "曙玛泽登在西藏华泰龙矿业和巨龙铜业调研时强调落实高质量发展要求 勇红政治责任 体现国企担当 推动矿山企业依法安全绿色健康发展 (During his research at Tibet Huatailong Mining and Julong Copper, Gama Tsedeng stressed the need to implement high-quality development requirements, shoulder political responsibilities, and demonstrate the responsibility of state-owned enterprises to promote the safe, green and healthy development of mining enterprises in accordance with the law)," Tibet Autonomous Region Ethnic Affairs Committee, (July 2024), https://archive.is/On4jT#selection-275.0-275.347, where Karma Zeden, the Executive Vice Chairman of the Tibet Autonomous Region, visited Tibet Huatailong and Julong Copper and instructed both companies to "absorb employment" ("吸纳就业").

69 This key form of financial assistance is known as "minimum living security allowance": "第六十四条 最低生活保障家庭中有就业能力但未就业的成员,应当接受人力资源社会保障等有关部门介绍的工作。无正当理由连续3次拒绝接受介绍与其健康状况、劳动能力等相适应的工作的,县 级人民政府民政部门应当决定减发或者停发其本人的最低生活保障金。" Such Tibetans will also be ineligible to reapply for minimum living security allowances. See General Office of the Autonomous Region People's Government, "西藏自治区人民政府关于印发《西藏自治区最低生活保障实施办法》的通知 (Notice of the People's Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region on Issuing the 'Implementation Measures for Minimum Living Security in the Tibet Autonomous Region')," Tibet Autonomous Region People's Government (March 2023), https://web.archive.org/web/20240423033159/https://www.xizang.gov.cn/zwgk/xxfb/zfwj/202303/t20230322_347178.html. For an example of Tibetans' reliance on minimum living security allowance, see Li Zaili, "Authorities Use Welfare Payments Against Tibetan Buddhists," Bitter Winter, 2019, https://bitterwinter.org/welfare-payments-used-against-tibetan-buddhists/.

70 An earlier 2017 law explicitly states that Tibetans who refuse to participate in labor transfer/export ("就业培训和劳务输出的") will be ineligible to apply for minimum living security allowance: General Office of the People's Government of the Autonomous Region, "西藏自治区人民政府办公厅关于印发《西藏自治区城乡最低生活保障实施办法（试行）》的通知 (Notice of the General Office of the People's Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region on the issuance of the 'Implementation Measures for Urban and Rural Minimum Living Security in the Tibet Autonomous Region (Trial)," Tibet Autonomous Region People's Government, (November 2017), https://perma.cc/P4VD-P6GQ.

71 These events took place in 2021. Sasa Dragojlo, "Like Prisoners': Chinese Workers in Serbia Complain of Exploitation," Balkan Insight, 2021, https://balkaninsight.com/2021/01/26/like-prisoners-chinese-workers-in-serbia-complain-of-exploitation/; "Workers At Chinese-Owned Mine In Serbia Protest For Better Wages, Working Conditions," Radio Free Europe Balkan Service, 2023, https://www.rferl.org/a/serbia-bor-mine-protests-working-conditions-wages/32221562.html.

72 Cynthia D'Cruz and Carole Samdup, "Request for Review Submitted to Canada's National Contact Point Pursuant to the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, Specific Instance Regarding: The Operations of China Gold International Resources Corp. Ltd., at the Copper Polymetallic Mine at the Gyama Valley, Tibet Autonomous Region," Canada Tibet Committee (2014), https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Association/NaturalResource/Canada_Tibet_Committee1_E.pdf.

73 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World 2023: Tibet," Freedom House, 2024, https://freedomhouse.org/country/tibet/freedom-world/2023.

74 ("经里面9/10是藏族人，需要克服的困多困多……") From "在 "紫金矿业" 工作或实习是一种怎样的体 验? (What is it like to work or intern at Zijin Mining?)," Zhihu (2023), https://perma.cc/L3PH-LAWU.

75 Id. This post has not been verified.

76 Also, in May 2024, Zijin signed a strategic agreement with the U.S.-sanctioned company Huawei to develop AI: "紫金矿业集团与华为签署战略合作框架协议 (Zijin Mining Group and Huawei sign strategic cooperation framework agreement)," Securities Times, 2024, https://web.archive.org/web/20240708154839/https://www.stcn.com/article/detail/1214755.html.

77 China National Gold Group Co., Ltd. Centralized Procurement Tendering Center, "西藏华泰龙矿业开发有限公司保安劳务服务项目招标公告 (Tibet Huatailong Mining Development Co., Ltd. Security Labor Service Project Tender Announcement)," China National Gold (Shanghai) Trading Co., Ltd. (2022), https://perma.cc/YQX6-6766: "盗窃、抢劫、斗殴、破坏等治安刑事事件" and "非法集会或活动."

78 China Gold, "扎根雪域铸伟业 开发建设树丰碑—中国黄金集团华泰龙公司服务西藏发展稳定大局、建设绿 色和谐共铸矿山的专题调研 (Taking root in the snowy region, creating great achievements, developing and constructing monuments–China National Gold Group Huatailong Company's special research on serving the overall development and stability of Tibet and building a green and harmonious pioneer mine)," Tibet Huatailong Mining Development Co., Ltd., (2014), https://perma.cc/F6N8-KGWD.

79 Ren Baorong, "西藏自治区首个企业型基层人武部成立 (The Tibet Autonomous Region's first enterprise-based grassroots People's Armed Forces Department was established)," The Lhasa Municipal People's Government, (2021), https://perma.cc/62PV-D4VS; Yang Bao Cizen, "华泰龙矿业开发有限公司人民武装部揭牌仪式举行 (The unveiling ceremony of the Ministry of People's Armed Forces of Huatailong Mining Development Co., Ltd. was held)," Lhasa Daily, Lhasa Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China, (2021), https://perma.cc/9G2L-LBRR.

80 Testimony also exists about children of pastoral Tibetans being coerced into vocational training schools such as the Tibet Vocational and Technical College. See: Dan Zhen, "西藏农牧民子女遭强制 爱国 教育 (Children of Tibetan farmers and herders are forced to receive "patriotic" education)," Radio Free Asia, 2019, https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/shaoshuminzu/dz-10292019122807.html. One graduate from the Tibet Vocational and Technical College was described as joining Julong Copper in the context of their rural labor transfer schemes: China Tibet News Network, "拉萨市墨竹工卡县赤康村提升共商共议共治共享水平 (Chikang Village, Mozhugongkar County, Lhasa City Improves the Level Of Consultation, Discussion, Governance and Sharing)," Sina Finance, 2023, https://perma.cc/RQA7-NVPE. Given this dynamic, a potential connection between these vocational schools and company recruiting initiatives deserves further investigation. If such a connection is present, it could suggest the existence of a second, possibly-related coercive pipeline, beginning with Tibetan children being forced into vocational skills training institutes, and ending with them graduating directly into these companies' workforces.

81 "Zijin Mining Group," Linkedin, (2024), https://perma.cc/M6JA-AW7D.

82 Yana Ermak, "Canadian government allows Chinese acquisition of Canadian lithium miner," Foreign Investment and National Security Blog, Baker McKenzie, (2022), https://foreigninvestment.bakermckenzie.com/2022/02/16/canadian-government-allows-chinese-acquisition-of-canadian-lithium-miner/.

83 "剩余劳动力" and "搬迁" Tibet Mining Development Co., Ltd., "Full Text of Tibet Mining Development Co., Ltd. 2020 Annual Report," Sohu.com, (2021), https://perma.cc/RD2V-TMBA.

84 Sheffield Hallam University et. al, "Steel," Driving Force: Automotive Supply Chains and Forced Labor in the Uyghur Region, (2022), https://www.shuforcedlabour.org/drivingforce/sector/steel/; Baowu/Tibet Mining Development Co., Ltd., "西藏矿业发展股份有限公司2023年半年度报告 (Tibet Mining Development Co., Ltd. 2023 Semi-Annual Report)," sohu.com, (2023), https://perma.cc/U3VD-4WD5: P. 24, explicitly refers to labor transfer, and P. 1 implicates Baowu as a parent organization of Tibet Mining. See also entry number 28 in the first attachment ("转移就业基地名单") at https://perma.cc/RW8U-FCKF from Municipal Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, "关于农牧民转移就 业基地奖励资金申报的公告 (Announcement on Application for Reward Funds for Farmers and Herdsmen's Transfer of Employment Bases)," Shannan Municipal People's Government, (2024), https://web.archive.org/web/20240422224931/http://www.shannan.gov.cn/zwgk/zfxxgkml/gsgg/202404/t20240412_133959.html, which lists Tibet Mining's Shannan branch as a "relocation employment base" in 2024.