

EX ORIENTE LUMINA
HISTORIAE VARIAE MULTIETHNICAE

**Festskrift tillägnad Juha Janhunen
på hans 61. födelsedag 12.2.2013**

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Edited by

**Tiina Hyytiäinen, Lotta Jalava,
Janne Saarikivi & Erika Sandman**



Helsinki 2013

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CHALLENGES OF QINGHAI PROVINCE

Anja Labtinen

INTRODUCTION

Through the centuries, Qinghai has been an important link between Xinjiang and China proper. As a sub-route of the western Silk Road from Gansu to Xining, it is a place of different cultures and ethnicities. Qinghai is a vast land “in the middle of nowhere” with picturesque lakes and snow-capped mountains. It is the Wild West of China, also called the “Siberia of China” because of its reputation as a place for exiles. Cultivable land near Qinghai Lake was settled in prehistoric times and may have been the original home of the tribes who settled in Tibet. During the Han period (206 BC – AD 220), a military outpost was established near Koko Nor. In the seventh century, a Tibetan kingdom based in Lhasa had control over the region, with its power reaching a peak in the eighth century. Relations during the Tang period (AD 618–907) were friendly. Buddhist monks and pilgrims crossed Qinghai, while traders met near Koko Nor to exchange horses for tea from China. During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Tibetans living in what is now Qinghai province had strong religious affiliations but loose administrative ties with Central Tibet (Ü-Tsang).

Following the economic reform and opening-up policy initiated in the late 1970s, China has achieved robust economic growth. With an average annual GDP growth of 10 percent and accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2003, China has become the second largest economy in the world. In spite of this remarkable economic progress, disparities between regions within the country are widening. In 1994, the Human Development Report (UNDP) listed China as one of the countries where regional gaps had become excessively large. When the People’s Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, there were substantial differences in the levels of development of the various provinces and regions. Mao Zedong’s strategy with the first five-year plan (1952–1957) focused on heavy-industry with 156 major construction projects, mainly in the northwest and southwest regions, built with the assistance of the Soviet Union. The Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee in December 1978 was a watershed event that marked China’s change from a planned socialist economy

toward a socialist market economy. Shifting the focus of development from the western part of the country to the east only exacerbated the gap between regions.

In response to widening gap between the eastern and western regions, the central government launched the Western Region Development Strategy (*Xibu Da Kaifa*) in 2000. Its aim has been to accelerate economic growth in twelve underdeveloped provincial units (namely the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Qinghai Province, Gansu Province, the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Shaanxi Province, and the Inner-Mongolia Autonomous Region in the northwest of China, Chongqing Municipality, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Province, Guizhou Province, Sichuan Province, the Tibet Autonomous Region, and Yunnan Province in the southwest of China). The initiative also has political goals, as it forms part of China's Communist Party's (CCP) strategy of establishing *xiakokang* (a "well-off society") throughout China by the middle of the twenty-first century. Hence, the ultimate purpose of the central government and the party has been to ensure the overall growth of China in order to maintain social stability and further the country's unity. Over the last decade, during the tenth five-year plan (2000–2005) and the eleventh five-year plan (2006–2010), massive energy, telecommunications and urban infrastructure projects have been carried out in the western region.

Qinghai Province is one of the twelve provincial-level units included in the western region development strategy. Although Qinghai Province has seen large-scale infrastructure projects over the past ten years, it remains one of the most underdeveloped provinces in China and has failed to realize growth expectations. Why has Qinghai been so poorly developed? What are the factors hindering its development? And to what extent is provincial governance correlated with provincial development?

Research on this relatively little known province is still quite limited, particularly in the field of social sciences. Earlier Amdo-Qinghai research has been based on the studies and narratives of early missionaries, anthropologists, and explorers.¹ Robert Ekvall (1898–1978), an explorer, ethnographer, and missionary in the 1930s, focused on ethnic relations and the nomadic lifestyle in his *On the Kansu-Tibetan Border* (Ekvall 1938; 1983). His study *Fields on the Hoof* (1968),

1 Amdo is the historical name of the northeastern part of ethnic Tibet. Most of Qinghai (except Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, TAP), called Amdo in Tibetan, was long considered to be part of Tibet. Areas traditionally classified as Tibetan are Central Tibet, Amdo, and Kham. Central Tibet was considered to be the core, Amdo and Kham as outer provinces. Traditional Amdo corresponds today to the Tibetan areas in Qinghai, the Gannan TAP in Gansu, and the Aba TAP in Sichuan. Kham is now divided between the Tibetan Autonomous Region, Sichuan, and the southwest of Qinghai.

influenced by Buddhism, highlighted aspects of the social system and culture, as well as the ecological arrangements of pastoral nomadism, “the adaptation of man to animal and animal to man”. An American scholar, A. Doak Barnett (1993), witnessed a shift in government policies, economic development, and social customs, as well as the change in relations between ethnic groups, when he visited Inner Mongolia, the areas of Hui in the northwest, the Uighur and Kazakh regions in Xinjiang, the Tibetan areas in Qinghai and Western Sichuan, and multiethnic regions in Yunnan in the late 1940s and in 1988. David Goodman (2004) examined provincial politics and social change in China, and rightly condemned its lack of cultural strategy. As an editor, Toni Huber (2002) covered reflections on Tibetan responses to reform and opening-up throughout post-Mao China. Andrew Fischer (2005) focused on current social conditions in Tibetan areas, specifically in the TAR and Qinghai. Anja Lahtinen (2005) argued that in Qinghai it is necessary to obtain socio-economic perspective for sustainable provincial development instead of focusing solely on growth factors. Her (2010) main theme was the role of good governance in achieving sustainable development in the province. In addition, many prevailing problems in connection with the western region’s development policies are addressed in articles with scientific data. For example, Marc Foggin (2008) reviews several key policies affecting pastoralists, with special attention given to the protected Sanjiangyuan region of Qinghai Province. He has also criticized the development of pastoralism and animal husbandry in *Rangeland Utilization and Biodiversity on the Alpine Grasslands of Qinghai Province, People’s Republic of China* (Foggin & Smith 2001). None of these studies, however, focus on the role and impact of the provincial government in Qinghai Province.

This paper aims to demonstrate that the role of the provincial government is important and that governance (how to govern) has a decisive impact on provincial development and its future. To gain a deeper understanding of Qinghai, a holistic approach is used in order to examine current challenges (namely, the environment, economic development, and cultural diversity). The geography, history, and previous government policies of Qinghai are also briefly reviewed. Using a qualitative research methodology, findings are based on observations, interviews, and discussions with approximately two hundred people (and visits to some organizations on multiple occasions). Conducted in China between February 2004 and September 2009, fieldwork was based on a non-probability method of snowball sampling with specific predefined groups (e.g. academia, government, business, NGOs, and ordinary people). Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1976) drove data collection, while critical theory (as interpreted by Habermas 1978) provided a practical “rational-critical discourse” for the examina-

tion of research data, such as literature, government papers, and country reports derived from both Chinese and Western sources. This paper also serves as my contribution to the Festschrift of Professor Juha Janhunen from the Department of World Cultures (Asian Studies) at the University of Helsinki. As the distinguished head of the Amdo-Qinghai research group, for almost a decade Professor Janhunen has inspired and encouraged its members to conduct research on Qinghai. I believe that that this interdisciplinary research group and its support of an increasing number of studies on the region have enabled Qinghai to become better known and understood.

QINGHAI PROVINCE

Qinghai Province is located in northwestern China. As part of the Tibetan Plateau,² it is bounded to the north and east by Gansu Province, to the southeast by Sichuan Province, to the south and west by the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), and to the west and northwest by the Uyghur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang. Roughly 85 percent of the province lies at an altitude of 3,000 meters or more. The Yellow, Yangzi, and Lancang (Mekong) rivers all originate from the plateau's towering snow-capped mountains. Qinghai has a vast area of 721,200 sq. km, spanning 1,200 km from east to west and extending 800 km from north to south, making it the fourth largest provincial level unit in China (after Xinjiang, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia). The population of Qinghai Province is 5.18 million,³ consisting of Han (Chinese) and minority nationalities (e.g. Tibetan, Mongol, Hui (Chinese Muslims), Salar, and Tu (Mongour Tu)). The capital is Xining. The name of the province is derived from China's largest inland salt lake, Qinghai Hu (Blue Lake), historically known as Koko Nor in Mongolian and Tso Ngonbo in Tibetan. Qinghai is an area with a variety of natural conditions: high altitude, glaciers, deserts, plateaus, and grasslands. Living conditions are harsh, particularly in mountainous areas. Natural resources are abundant; Qaidam Basin possesses oil, natural gas, and mineral reserves. In addition, Qinghai Province has more than thirty salt lakes. Animal and plant resources are diverse, including the Tibetan antelope, the white-lipped deer, the

2 The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, also known as the roof of the world, is the largest plateau in China, covering 2.5 million square km, or nearly a quarter of the country's total land area. It is also the highest plateau on Earth with an elevation ranging between 3,000 and 5,000 meters. Its average temperature is about 6°C. It covers most of the Tibet Autonomous Region and Qinghai Province in China and Ladakh in Kashmir. Many major rivers originate from its snow-capped mountain ranges. The ecosystem of the plateau is unique and fragile, and it is home to rare wildlife such as the Tibetan antelope and snow leopard.

3 www.unescap.org/esid/psis/population/database/chinadata/qinghai.htm

snow leopard, the wild camel, and wild yak, and plants like caterpillar fungus, rhubarb, and medicinal herbs. As Qinghai enjoys plentiful sunshine and is the source of three rivers, new forms of energy – such as solar and hydro-electric power – have been developed in the province. Agricultural activities are largely restricted to the northeast corner of Qinghai, whereas the west and southern areas are often characterized by nomadic lifestyles based on animal husbandry.

In 1928, Qinghai became a province of the Republic of China (1911–1949). During this era, Qinghai was governed by Ma Bufang (1903–1975), a prominent Ma clique warlord in China. The repression of Tibetans was rampant during the regime of this Muslim warlord, as the Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) supported Ma Bufang and his army. Although Ma destroyed Tibetan Buddhist Temples, he established the Tongren and Kunlun middle schools for poor children (especially Hui), built small factories, and promoted trade. In August 1949, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) defeated Ma Bufang's main forces in Lanzhou (in neighboring Gansu Province). Ma's forces resisted until 1955, when the area (Golog and Yushu) was "cleaned out". Some remnants of Ma Bufang's cavalry survived for a while in Xinjiang Province until they went to Afghanistan, while the Kazakhs survivors eventually fled to Pakistan. (Barnett 1993: 279–281, 327)

CHALLENGES OF QINGHAI

The Qinghai-Tibet Railway (Qing-Zang) was opened on 1 July 2007. Before and after its opening, fierce international and national debate raged on about its impact on the environment, the economy, and Tibetan culture. Crossing La-nyag pass at 5,072 meters above sea level, it is the highest railway in the world. As such, it represents a remarkable example of the high level of Chinese engineering. The railway's damage to the fragile environment of the plateau has been criticized, however. It is also regarded as an attempt to completely Sinicize Tibet.⁴ While officials argue that the railway creates business opportunities in remote areas, some locals claim that the influx of the Han Chinese from the east coast into Tibetan areas, accelerated by the "Go West Han" policy, has resulted in lost employment for native inhabitants who are unable to compete with the newcomers. Either way, the ecosystem of Qinghai Lake seems to be threatened; the Qinghai-Tibet Railway brings 400,000 new visitors to the lake every year.⁵ Indeed, the railway demonstrates how challenges facing the province are intertwined.

4 www.tibet.net/en/pdf/diirpub/environment/2/rail_report.pdf

5 www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2007-07/11/content_5432972.htm

The Environment

Grass thrives on the vast plateau. Qinghai's grassland accounts for 53.6 percent of the total area of the whole province, being one of the five largest pastoral areas in China and some of China's best pasturelands for sheep, horses, and yaks. Grazing by nomadic people has been practiced in Qinghai for at least 2200 years. (Swift, Baas & Liu 2005) Even today, products such as Xining wool, carpets, leather coats, leather shoes, milk powder, and dried beef play an important role in the economy of the province, especially for Tibetans.

The grassland in Qinghai (as elsewhere in China) suffers from various degrees of degradation. According to one case study in Dari County in Qinghai Province, this degradation is serious, affecting 70 percent of all usable grassland areas. Three main factors causing grassland degradation are cited: livestock overpopulation, climate change, and the spread of a small rabbit (the Plateau pika). (Harris 2009) Although most Chinese scientists and officials blame overgrazing and climate change as the primary causes of grassland degradation, others argue that it is caused by rapid changes in the area's socioeconomic systems and the alteration of land tenure arrangements. In response to environmental degradation, the San Jiang Yuan National Nature Reserve in Qinghai Province was established in 2000. The aim of the government there is to protect the headwaters of the three rivers and to restore the ecology of grasslands suffering from overgrazing and desertification. The protected area covers 362,000 square kilometers and three prefectures (Golog, Yushu, and Haixi) with sixteen counties. Located at an average elevation of 4,000 meters above sea level, its population is predominantly Tibetan. Consequently, 100,000 nomadic Tibetans were ordered by the Chinese government to move by 2010 from this protected area into designated towns and villages where the government has provided new housing. The Chinese media reports "happy herdsmen" and how the government has helped herdsmen adapt to a new life, offering vocational training and setting up funds to encourage them to start their own businesses. However, the true sentiments of the resettled nomads are not always as the state media describes.⁶ "Actually, nomads are moving from the grasslands into poverty, and most of them are unhappy, as they have no means to adapt to a new life", as a scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences explained me in September 2009. "Relocated nomads have no stable income as there are no proper jobs for them and, in addition, most herdsmen do not speak the Chinese language, making it difficult to find a job." Housing compensation and other subsidies provided by the government can also create

6 www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com/node/573

unforeseen problems. For example, rather than being based on number of family members, compensation is the same for every household. Consequently, some households benefit more than others. Complaints are common about unfair land allocation and a corrupt bureaucracy that does not monitor the impact of policies. Increasingly, the opinion is that grassland conservation and development cannot be separated from the pastoralist culture of the people. For this reason, the Grassland Law (2003) and its policies that promote resettlement in varying forms – either by settling nomads on their own land or removing them altogether from rangelands through rural-urban migration (in the pastoral regions of China: Qinghai, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia) – have come into question. At the 16th International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences hosted by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) at Kunming in 2008, Hu Jingping, policy leader of the National Commission of Ethnic Affairs, affirmed that some policies have failed in many places and there are discussions within the government to re-think the relationship between the nomads and the ecosystem. Hao Bing, the coordinator of the People and Grasslands Network, said that “we need to pay more attention to herders’ opinions”.⁷

It appears that the nomads have little choice in the matter. Tibetan pastoralists in Qinghai are facing rapid changes that have an enormous impact on their traditional culture and livelihoods. Although offered compensation, the loss of traditional livelihood does not satisfy many Tibetans. Some argue that China is determined to destroy Tibetan culture, their way of life, and their traditional livelihoods. Many Tibetans consider that their voices have not been heard. Therefore, feelings are mixed, varying from uncertainty to social exclusion. However, there is no realistic way to return to a traditional herding lifestyle, and not even all nomads wish to do so.

Economic development

Industrial development in Qinghai began in the early 1950s. The Great Leap Forward (1958–1960) was a period of large-scale construction of factories at the expense of agriculture. During the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), large and medium-sized factories were transferred to the region from the northeast of China, Shanghai, and other cities. Pouring investment into the interior and western provinces came as a result of the Third Front strategy (*san zhan*), which began as a program for economic and social development but was later redesigned to serve as a strategic base for a defensive war (Hutchings 2001: 157, 226). This

⁷ www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com/node/1166

top-secret program was a response to the Sino-Soviet split, as Mao was afraid of war with the United States (Garver 2002: 300–301). Military industrial bases were constructed in the remote regions of southwestern and western China (e.g. Sichuan, Yunnan, Gansu, Shaanxi, Guizhou, Qinghai, and Xinjiang). In addition, Hubei and Hunan, the home provinces of several top leaders, became favorite investment destinations. The *san zhan* investments were extremely wasteful, however, because of poorly planned projects, a lack of raw materials, and the high cost of transportation. The Third Front strategy was drastically repealed after rapprochement with the USA and Kissinger's secret visit to China in July 1971. The subsequent "Open Up" policy and reforms in 1978 accelerated economic development in Qinghai. The province's four major industries – hydropower, oil and gas, salt production, and non-ferrous metals – were developed, as along with metallurgy, medicine, construction materials, agriculture, and animal husbandry. Nevertheless, many large state-owned enterprises remained unprofitable.

Qinghai has four major economic regions. The first region consists of the Xining Region (the capitol of the province),⁸ Haidong Prefecture,⁹ and Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture.¹⁰ The second region, concentrated in the Qaidam

8 Xining, the capital city of Qinghai province, lies to the east of the Qinghai-Tibet plateau and the upper reaches of the Huangshui River. It is the political, economic and cultural center of the province. Xining has one state-level development zone, namely the Xining Economic and Technological Development Zone. In 2007, Xining's GDP accounted for forty-five percent of the province's total. Xining has formed industrial chains based on machinery, textiles, chemicals, building materials, metallurgy, and leather and food processing. The major export products of Xining are ferrosilicon, machine tools, bearings, and cotton yarn. The most important trading partners of the city are Japan and South Korea. US tourism is designated as one of the pillar industries. Both the Ta'er Monastery (one of six famous monasteries belonging to the Gelugpa Sect of Tibetan Buddhism) and the Dongguan Mosque (one of the most famous mosques in the northwest region of China) attract visitors with natural scenic attractions such as Riyue (Sun and Moon) Mountain, Bird Island, and Qinghai Lake. (news.alibaba.com/article/detail/business-in-china/100133299-1-city-introduction-qinghai%252C-china%253A-xining.html)

9 The Haidong Prefecture, located east of Qinghai, covers an area of 17,010 sq. km and has a population of 1.6 million. The Qinghai-Lhasa Railway runs through the region. Ping'an County, the capitol of Haidong, is only 7.5 km from Xining Caojiabao Airport. In 2007, the region's GDP accounted for approximately 13.4% of Qinghai's total and ranked third after Xining and Haixi Region in the province. The agricultural sector generated value-added output of RMB 2.0 billion in 2007, accounting for 19.8% of the region's GDP, while the output of secondary industries (various industries and construction) accounted for 37.6% of the region's total. The service sector, the largest contributor to the region's economy, contributed 42.6% to the region's GDP. (news.alibaba.com/article/detail/business-in-china/100133322-1-city-introduction-qinghai%252C-china%253A-haidong.html)

10 The Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Region, located in the southeastern part of Qinghai Province, covers an area of 18,800 sq. km. Although it has a population of only 223,793, it is the home of fifteen ethnic minority groups including Tibetans, Mongols, and Hui (accounting for 65.9%, 13.5%, and 7.9% of the total population, respectively). Over 60 rivers and streams run through the prefecture, representing a potential hydro-electric energy source. Huangnan is fa-

Basin, is a major area for mining and industries that produce raw materials. The third region, around Lake Qinghai, is an area of pastureland that includes Haibei Prefecture,¹¹ the Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Region,¹² and one county in Haixi Prefecture.¹³ The fourth economic region, Qingnan (or South Qinghai), includes the Guoluo Tibetan Autonomous Region Guoluo¹⁴ and the Yushu Tibetan

amous for its Regong art, while Tongren County is reputed to be the “Home of Tibetan Culture and Art”. (news.alibaba.com/article/detail/business-in-china/100133303-1-city-introduction-qinghai%252C-china%253A-huangnan.html)

11 The Haibei Prefecture, located in the northeastern part of Qinghai Province, covers an area of 39,354 sq. km and has a population of only 276,466. Many ethnic minority groups live in Haibei, such as Hui, Tibetans, Mongols, and Tu (of which the Hui and Tibetans account for one fourth and one fifth of the total population, respectively). Haibei is rich in mineral resources. The Yellow River runs through the prefecture and Qinghai Lake. Folk songs, horse racing, wrestling, and archery – the cultural symbols of the Haibei region – are popular tourist attractions. Furthermore, the Qinghai–Tibet Railway runs through Haiyan and Gangcha, two of the southern counties under the administration of Haibei. (news.alibaba.com/article/detail/business-in-china/100133332-1-city-introduction-qinghai%252C-china%253A-haibei.html)

12 The Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Region is located in the eastern part of Qinghai Province, south of Qinghai Lake. It covers a vast land area of 46,000 sq. km and has a population of only 427,900. Hainan is rich in natural resources. The pasture area amounts to 3.3 million sq. km, accounting for about 74% of the prefecture’s total land area and 10.4% of the province’s total land area. The Yellow River runs through five counties of the prefecture. Reserves of copper, tin, mercury, tungsten, and marble as well as Tibetan medicinal herbs are found in Hainan. Tibetan-related tourism is increasing, and 1.1 million tourists visited the region in 2007. Transportation in Hainan mainly relies on highways: State Highway 109 (Qinghai–Tibet), State Highway 21 (Qinghai–Yunnan) and Provincial Highway 101 connect Hainan with other regions and counties. (news.alibaba.com/article/detail/business-in-china/100133318-1-city-introduction-qinghai%252C-china%253A-hainan.html)

13 The Haixi Region is located in the western part of Qinghai Province, bordering the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, Gansu Province, and Sichuan Province. It covers a vast land area of 325,800 sq. km and has a population of 560,000. Haixi is rich in mineral resources, including reserves of crude salt, potassium, magnesium, lithium, strontium, asbestos, mirabilite, bromine, and boron. Oil and natural gas production, electricity, non-ferrous metals, salt-chemicals, and coal mining are the pillar industries. The Haixi-based PetroChina Qinghai Oilfield Company, the local Qinghai Salt Lake Group, and the Western Mining Co. are the largest industries in the region. Haixi has access to transportation through the Qinghai–Tibet Highway, the Qinghai–Xinjiang Highway, and the Dunhuang–Golmud Highway intersects with Haixi. Golmud Airport is located in Golmud County. (news.alibaba.com/article/detail/business-in-china/100133307-1-city-introduction-qinghai%252C-china%253A-haixi.html)

14 The Guoluo Tibetan Autonomous Region, located in the southeast of Qinghai Province, bordering Gansu Province and Sichuan Province, covers a vast land area of 78,000 sq. km and has a population of only 157,695. Tibetans account for 89% of the total population. Guoluo has the largest forestry center in Qinghai, as well as hydro-electric reserves and nine hydropower stations currently working in the region. In addition, mineral resources such as copper, cobalt, sulfur, cadmium, gold, silver, coal, and limestone are abundant. The Guoluo-based Qinghai West Copper Company, a subsidiary of the Shanghai-listed company, Zijin Mining Group, operates in Guoluo. Transportation in Guoluo relies primarily on the Xijiu Highway, a provincial highway that runs through Guoluo and extends to Sichuan Province. (news.alibaba.com/article/detail/business-in-china/100133326-1-city-introduction-qinghai%252C-china%253A-guoluo.html)

Autonomous Region.¹⁵ It covers most of the south, being the remotest, highest, and coldest area of the province. For the most part, its inhabitants have been Tibetan herdsman engaged in animal husbandry. (Barnett 1993: 300–301)

From 1978 to 1994, the province's growth rates ranged between 5 percent and 12.6 percent. In 1994, Qinghai was the slowest growing province, with one of the lowest incomes in China (Wang & Hu 1999: 49–52). In 2007, the GDP of Qinghai increased from RMB 30.01 billion in 2001 to RMB 76.1 billion (*China Statistical Yearbook 2006*: 63). Yet this was nothing compared with the eastern provinces. For example, the per capita GDP of Qinghai was RMB 10,239 (in 2005), while in Shanghai it was RMB 51,474 – five times that of Qinghai (*China Statistical Yearbook 2006*: 54–66). In Guangzhou, the per capita GDP was ten times that of Qinghai. The economic performance of Qinghai Province remains one of the lowest in China, ranking as one of the bottom three provinces when measured by GDP and per capita GDP. Although the central government has promoted opportunities in the west, non-government investment and attracting of foreign investment have been quite moderate so far, particularly in Qinghai.

Cultural diversity

China is a multicultural and ethnically diverse country. The Chinese government officially recognizes fifty-five “national minorities” or ethnic minority groups. According to the census of 2000, these are comprised of 106 million ethnic minority people,¹⁶ accounting for 8.4 percent of the total population (while the majority of over a billion Han Chinese account for 91.2 percent of the population). Most ethnic minorities (*shaoshu minzu*) live in western China. In Qinghai, Han Chinese make up little over half of the total population of 5.43 million. There

15 The Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Region, located to the west of Qinghai Province, bordering Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and Sichuan Province, covers a vast land area of 267,000 sq. km and has a population of only 283,100. Tibetans constitute 97% of the population. Yushu is an important Tibetan area with vast grasslands. The Yellow River, the Yangtze River, and the Mekong River (the largest river in Southeast Asia) all originate in the Yushu Region. Reserves of hydro-electric energy and mineral resources such as gold, silver, copper, iron, aluminum, coal, sulfur, crystal, and jade are abundant. The agricultural sector contributes over sixty percent to the GDP of the region. (news.alibaba.com/article/detail/business-in-china/100133295-1-city-introduction-qinghai%252C-china%253A-yushu.html)

16 The Chinese government does not recognize the term “indigenous peoples” and does not agree with various concepts and definitions that have been accepted internationally. The official terminology is “ethnic minorities” or “minority peoples”. Mr. Long Xuequn, the Adviser of the Chinese delegation at the 53rd session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in 1997, stated that, “In China, there are no indigenous people and therefore no indigenous issues.” (ch.china-embassy.org/eng/ztnr/rqwt/t138829.htm)

are 43 minorities in Qinghai with a population of 2.38 million, accounting for 45.5 percent of the total population. The officially recognized minority (*minzu*) groups in Qinghai include Tibetans (21.96 percent), Hui (15.91 percent), Tu (4.14 percent), and Salar (1.75 percent).¹⁷ According to the World Bank (2005), ethnic minority groups often live in the deepest poverty. Tibetans constitute the biggest ethnic group in Qinghai. The total population of Tibetans is estimated to be 7.25 million, spread across the various Tibetan areas of China (the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), most of Qinghai Province, half of Sichuan Province, and a large portion of Gansu and Yunnan Provinces, consisting of one region, ten prefectures, and two autonomous counties that constitute a large part of the western region and nearly one fourth of the total land area of China). The major religions in Qinghai are Tibetan Buddhism (Lamaism) and Islam.

The level of socio-economic development in Qinghai, as in most Tibetan areas of China, remains low. The human development index (HDI) classifies Qinghai with an index of 0.684 (a low number); its life expectancy with an index of 0.730; and education with an index of 0.714. Based on these figures, Qinghai ranks in twenty-seventh place in comparison with other provinces. (The worst performing provinces are Gansu in 28th place, Yunnan in 29th, Guizhou in 30th, and Tibet in 31st place; UNDP 2005: 154.) Poverty and poor health are predominant in rural and pastoral areas, particularly in remote mountainous zones that lack accessible drinking water, adequate sanitation facilities, and access to education. Children tend to start school later and drop out earlier in spite of the fact that primary schools are tuition-free under the Law on Nine Year Compulsory Education. Long commutes to school, poor overall quality of schools with safety issues, and negative attitudes to education by parents contribute to reduced school attendance, especially as there is no guarantee of getting a job after graduation. Though official unemployment figures are reported by the government, the reality is quite different. Job losses are caused by ongoing urbanization. Employment opportunities are becoming fewer and fewer, particularly for those who are not literate and fluent in Chinese language. Hence, there are bitter sentiments and feelings of exclusion among some Tibetans. The Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy (2001) guarantees the equality of all nationalities in China, giving minority peoples the right to manage their internal affairs and freedom to practice their customs, speak their languages, and follow their particular religious beliefs.¹⁸ However, controversial practices are seen in China's language policy.

17 The PRC recognizes 56 *minzu* (meta-ethnic categories, of which ethnic minorities make up 55; all Han people form one *minzu*).

18 www.china.org.cn/e-white/4/index.htm

For example, the Compulsory Education Law specifies that “schools should promote the use of Mandarin (*Putonghua*), the common language which can be used everywhere in our country” (Ma Rong 2008: 137). The riots that broke out in Tibet in March 2008 and spread to Qinghai and other Tibetan inhabited areas represent a challenge to China’s government and its minority policies. Provincial governments are still wrestling with the question of how to maintain social stability and secure the unity of the country.

CONCLUSIONS

Qinghai has suffered from poor development because of harsh geographical conditions, its history and earlier government policies. These are realities that the government must still contend with today. The findings of the analysis that covered the environment, economic development and cultural diversity have correlations with how the province is governed. The findings are:

- Environmental degradation in Qinghai is severe, but the government’s policy of resettling nomads in Qinghai and in other grasslands may not solve this problem. Instead, this policy has stirred national and international debate around the survival of the traditional lifestyle of Tibetan herders and Tibetan culture in general.
- The province’s modest economic development is too dependent on infrastructure investments by the central government, and consequently there is little organic growth of business activities to support the province’s economy.
- The low level of social development in Qinghai has culminated in harsh living conditions, with many Tibetans living in poverty in remote areas at high altitudes. In addition, the low education level of Tibetans correlates with a high unemployment rate amongst Tibetans at a time when the province is in the process of urbanization.
- The cultural diversity of Qinghai is poorly managed. Together with the poor social-economic development of the Tibetans (minorities), this can cause social exclusion or social unrest, which in turn can jeopardize the attempt to build the so-called “harmonious society”.

Qinghai’s government faces three critical challenges in achieving sustainable growth and development. These are, first, to effectively protect the environment; second, to develop a mechanism for organic economic growth within the province; and third, to empower minorities to become more integrated in this economic development. The provincial government faces fundamental questions: how to advance economic progress and organic growth while also

protecting the environment, how to create new jobs for resettled Tibetan nomads, and how to improve access to education and health care to ensure sound economic development. The fragile environment of Qinghai cannot support polluting industries. Therefore, the province's economic development must be concerned with environmental protection (for example, by taking into account the possible consequences of business decisions on the environment and following nationally set environmental standards). For this reason, the growth model used in eastern China is not a viable model for the province of Qinghai. The resettlement policy to protect the environment has resulted in conflicting interests between the government and some Tibetan nomads. However, Tibetan nomads are undergoing a process of urbanization, both willingly and unwillingly, that will impact the culture of their livelihood culture and the overall economic development of Qinghai. The cultural diversity of the province should be fostered with a view towards moving from cultural nationalism to cross-cultural communication. This has been pointed out by Amartya Sen (2000: 244), who also adds that while each culture has a unique importance, there is a need to understand cross-cultural influences and to enjoy other cultures. In sum, all of these issues – the protection of the environment, the economy, and the management of cultural diversity – are intertwined. How Qinghai's provincial government will respond to these challenges remains to be seen.

Indeed, the role of provincial government is important; governance has a decisive impact on provincial development and its future. The capacity of the provincial government is also important, as key issues affect the quality of governance: how the provincial governor and the party leader cooperate together; how the provincial government collaborates with stakeholders and cooperates with the civil society; and how effectively the provincial government can negotiate and bargain with the central government. This study reveals that Qinghai has not been an important target of the western region development program and, accordingly, that it has not been a priority of the central government. Qinghai's government is actually weaker vis-à-vis the central government than that of many other provinces.

Governance is seen as fundamental to addressing rising inequalities, environmental deterioration, and other societal issues. The concept of good governance ideally defined by the United Nations (UN) includes universal qualities such as being participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, and in line with the rule of law.¹⁹ In China, aside from millions of bloggers, people are not heard. They are not allowed to participate in decision-making, with the exception of village elections. Instead, a one-party system combines the Chinese tradi-

19 www.unescap.org/pdd/prs/ProjectActivities/Ongoing/gg/governance.asp

tion of hierarchy and authoritarianism with the customs, practices, values, and beliefs of the past. The government of Qinghai has an inward-looking image, at least among some officials of the central government and academics. This reflects the governance of the province. Indeed, the provincial government of Qinghai has a complex task in managing the vast underdeveloped province with its large ethnic population while also implementing the policies of the central government to boost growth and development. In spite of the fact that democracy is not prevailing in China and that reform of the Communist party has yet to take place, my argument is that Qinghai's provincial government – as it has the major role in developing the province – can have a great positive impact on provincial development and on the lives of its people, if it decides to do so. Future development greatly depends on the capacity of the government to develop strategies for changing the life trajectories of people. The planning and implementation of these strategies necessitate transparency and empowerment through “community-driven” development, in order that they may be accepted by all the players involved in the process. To ensure participation is to follow the rule of law. The legal foundation for people to be heard already exists in China in key laws, such as the Environmental Impact Assessment Law (2003) and the Administrative License Law (2004). Although a national directive issued in 2008 stipulates that cities and counties must expand the scope of public hearings to solicit the opinions of citizens regarding laws, regulations, provisions, and major government administrative policies that are relevant to their interests, citizens still have little direct access to political decision-making processes above the village level (village elections) and the county level (People's Congress representative elections). Thus, public participation as a civil right is not used in China.

During a visit to Qinghai in September 2009, by chance I was invited to an Internet café that had opened only two weeks before. Surprisingly, the trendy place was packed with young Hans, Tibetans, and Westerners who were sipping their lattes, browsing the Internet, and singing old Western hits. This was an unexpected enjoyable moment in Qinghai. Is this café a sign of more liberal trends in the government? I am not sure what this may mean or even whether this place still exists.

How best to govern to benefit the people? As Amartya Sen (2000) writes, the economic growth of a country and an increase in the incomes of its individuals are important means to expanding freedoms, such as social and economic arrangements (education and health care) and political and civil rights (for example, participation in public discussion) while he questions the narrow view of development of the Washington Consensus. Sen points out that the opportunities and capabilities of the people can be increased by removing poverty and providing

freedom of choice and political participation. In his view, political freedoms promote economic development and social opportunities. Therefore, there is a strong argument for recognizing the positive and constructive role of expanding human freedoms. This process stimulates the capabilities of the government while it challenges governance. Mencius, the greatest Confucian thinker after Confucius, is pertinent in this context. He believed that “ultimate sovereignty lay with the people”. Therefore, the people should be allowed to indicate their choice of successor (by rejecting or accepting him) not only in times of dynastic change. The major policies of the government should reflect popular opinion in ordinary times as well. This type of government was called “Consulting the grass and firewood gatherers” (an expression used in the Ode “Pan” by a great officer in early Chou times). (Hsiao 1979: 158)

To conclude, good governance is about how to govern, about the quality of government, and about the choices of the government of how to promote good.

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