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Jarmila Ptackova M.A.

**„The campaign to 'Open up the West' (*Xibu da kaifa*); New Settlements in Qinghai in  
the Area of the Three River Sources (*Sanjiangyuan ziran baohu qu*)“**



The last journey to Amdo this summer should have helped me to find out is the meaning of the campaign to 'Open up the West' in the grasslands in Qinghai Province and what is its impact on the life of the nomads that live in that area.

Everywhere along the streets there are boards with phrases promising big development for the region due to the implementation of the campaign.

But in most of the nomadic areas that are far from any tourist attraction that would be profitable for the government, not much improvement is to be realized. Only several roads have been built and the quota of 50% of electrification on the grassland was reached.

But especially during 2007 one new phenomenon was noticeable on the grassland. During this year many new resettlement sites have been built.

2. The government sustains the building of the resettlement sites with the new policy of environmental protection. In recent years shrinking wetlands, declining water levels of the rivers and lakes and increasing desertification of the grassland have impacted the region where the three most important rivers of China have their source in the Qinghai Province. And so the water supplement for the mainland China seemed to be endangered.

As a result, a big ecological movement was started in 2000 within the campaign to 'Open up the West'. A huge area around the three biggest rivers of China and their affluents was defined. It is the Sanjiangyuan Nature Preservation Zone.

On the 19th of August 2000 it was established by the State Forestry Administration and the Government of Qinghai Province, but not until January 2003 the preservation zone attained national status. The Sanjiangyuan Nature Preservation zone covers an area of 152 300km<sup>2</sup> around the three main rivers of China, the Yellow river, the Yangtze river and the Mekong River. Around 200 000 people inhabit this large area.

The Sanjiangyuan Nature Preservation Zone includes the whole Yushu 玉树 and Guoluo 果洛 Prefecture, the two counties Zeku 泽库 and Henan 河南 of the Huangnan 黄南 Prefecture, Xinghai 兴海 and Tongde 同德 County of the Hainan 海南 Prefecture and the Tangula 唐古拉 Township of the Haixi 海西 Prefecture.

It is divided into several conservation areas with three types of zones: core zone, buffer zone and experimental zone. The core zones cover the area around the major river sources, they shall protect endangered animals and plants. Within the core zone no human activities will be allowed. The buffer zones surround the core zones. They will serve to promote the environmental conservation, but a limited animal husbandry according to the capacity of pastures will be allowed here. The experimental zone shall remain a populated area, including towns, farmland and cultural relics, available for tourism and research activities.



*Map of Qinghai Province*

The main points that the SJY policy announced to realize is improvement of the ecological situation and conservation of the wildlife, improvement of the socio-economical situation of the households and improvement of educational and health system. But the main focus lies on ecological preservation. According to Qinghai News, "2003 to 2005 an amount of 1,23 billion RMB has been invested into the region by central and local governments. After 2005, 3,13 billion RMB will be invested within the project of China's Western Development Strategy to replenish 16 million acres of land traditionally used for grazing. Grazing will be prohibited for five years after the replenishment work...The project also includes infrastructure construction for local farmers and herdsmen, and other ancillary programs... It is hoped that a sustainable balance between environment and social-economy will be achieved in Sanjiangyuan by 2020."

Throughout different areas slightly different projects are implemented by the local governments. It depends on the ecological situation in each region.

The local government of Zeku concentrates on following projects.

- Retreat of pastures and reestablishment of grassland
- Ecological resettlement and complete set of facilities
- Close hillsides to facilitate afforestation
- Fencing
- Prevention and repair of the harm caused by mice
- Comprehensive administration of black earth banks<sup>1</sup>
- Wood and grassland fire prevention
- Constructions to raise livestock
- Energy sources constructions
- Drink water supply for people and animals
- Solar cooker supplement

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<sup>1</sup> Black earth banks (黑土滩 heitu tan): Due to worsening of the ecological situation, the water level in lakes and rivers on the grassland declines. The lakes are drying out, the rivers are shrinking and the glaciers are melting. This leads to degeneration of the plants and so big pieces of the grassland are turning into infertile 'black earth banks'.

From: 江河源环保世纪行 *Jiangheyuan huanbao shiji xing*; vol. 1, (1996 - 2000); Qinghai sheng jianghe yuan huanbaoxing lingdao xiaozu; Xining; 2006; pp. 198

The ecological resettlement is usually the result of all projects that serve to ecological preservation or economical and social development of the area. In Huangnan during 2003 - 2006 a plan for resettlement of 1093 families was announced by the local government, but only 400 families were actually resettled during this time.

2006 -2007 in Huangnan 851 families are planned to be resettled. And according to the advanced construction works on the settlements during this summer it seems that this plan will be accomplished by the end of 2007.

To imagine to population situation in Zeku; in 1995 there were 45 845 people, 8295 families on an area of 6658,06 km<sup>2</sup>. In only one year 3627 people, 765 families shall be resettled.

There are 8 ecological resettlement sites planned during the annual 'Ecological resettlement conference' in Zeku in 2005-2006 for Zeku families:

- Tongren county, Laka site (125 families)
- Tongren county, Longwu town, CP school (162 families)
- Duofudun township, Longzang village (71 families)
- Duofudun township, governmental site (69 families)
- Duofudun township, Duolong village (47 families)
- Zeku county town (51 families)
- Duokamao township, governmental site (176 families)
- Ningxiu township, governmental site (64 families)

These belong to the Sanjiangyuan ecological project and within this resettlement, inhabitants from areas with the worse grassland degeneration shall be resettled. Also according to local people, only poor families without livestock will be resettled. They will get house and money support from the government for uncertain time.

According to the provincial government the grass on the grassland is getting bad through overgrazing, because there are too many people living on the grassland.

The government wants to move 50% of the nomads, so the rest that remains in the grassland could prosper and get richer. Also the resettled nomads will profit from new house and governmental support.

Some nomads like this idea, as they were promised to keep their land on the grassland and livestock and on the top they will get house for free and money from the government.

Six from the eight settlements remain in Zeku county. Two of them were being built in Tongren county, near to the county town. The government is also making plans for future economical supplement in the resettlement areas.

The nomads resettled to the Laka site shall concentrate on farming, for those in Longwu town settlement, an income from caterpillar fungus and trading is planned by the government.

In Longzang village the exquisite natural landscape of Maixiu and the rich religious ambience shall be used for development of tourism in this area.

The Duolong village shall be called "The home of Caterpillar fungus" or "Basin of the High Plateau" and used as tourist attraction.

Also other settlements shall profit from farming, trading and showing Tibetan traditions to the tourists.

Resettlement site Duofudun township:



By each site stands a nice banner that describes the project. At the moment not more than a construction site can be seen.

## Project descriptions:

- Building site of the 'Sanjiangyuan' ecological resettlement project
- Beginn of the work: 8.5.2007
- End of the work (estimate): 5.10.2007
- Houses with courtyard
- Each family: 466,7m<sup>2</sup>
- Livestock settlement 60m<sup>2</sup>
- Greenhouse 60m<sup>2</sup>
- Community water, electricity, road, broadcast supply
- General sanitation facilities, other facilities in succession



## Construction site:



Basically, in this type of houses, 2 families shall inhabit each building. Each family will live in a half of the building.



Zeku county town with its new constructions:



The prison building in the middle (green) as an important part of the 'Open up the West' campaign development constructions.

Settlement next to Zeku county town:



Same type of houses as in Duofudun.



Some of the poor nomad families are looking forward to getting new house in the next year.



Laka site in Tongren:

- Zeku county ,Sanjiangyuan‘ resettlement project
- Size: 7500m2
- Costs: 3665788RMB
- Beginn of the work: 12.5.2007
- Estimated end of the work: 30.8.2007





In the Laka site again two-family houses are being built. Most of the workers come from the Gansu Province, it is very rare to find a Tibetan worker here.



Settlement on the Zeku border:

Nomads from Golok were moved here about a year ago.

They were not allowed to keep any animals and shall live from farming and business.

At the ground floor of the houses shops were built, but most of them are runned by people from nearby town.

Here it is the second type of buildings that are used for resettlement sites. The so called multilevel houses:



The nomads there spend most of their time playing pool or with similar occupations. Many of them don't want to look for other work not only because they haven't any qualification, but also because then they won't be able to go to collect Caterpillar fungus in spring.



Some greenhouses are part of the Golok-nomad settlement. Here they shall start with the farming work.



To compare, here are some pictures from the summer pastures in Zeku with the traditional daily activities and a traditional housing.



For next year another ecological settlements are planned and on the top also new resettlement sites in areas with fertile grasslands shall be build, as a step towards improvement of the living condition of the nomads. These new sites are built under the motto: Four improvements: everybody will have access to electricity and to water, they will get new house and a road access.

It is becoming clear that now the government is working hard on changing the lifestyle of the Tibetan nomads. It is trying to improve the socio-economical situation of the households and also to get the life on the grasslands under closer control. At the moment we can just wait to see, what the actual result of this policy will be.