



# XIZANG AUTONOMOUS REGION

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But things are completely different today. A three-person township decades ago, it is now home to over 200 people and oversees two villages. Pasang Tsering has become the Party chief of one village, also called Yulmed.

With improved infrastructure, such as roads and telecommunications, the locals can access the latest information via social media and have online orders delivered to their doorstep, just like people in Beijing, Pasang Tsering said proudly.

“If a place like Yulmed can thrive so much in less than two decades, the development of Xizang as a whole is even more extraordinary,” he said.

People have to get through two mountain passes at an altitude above 5,000 meters to get to Yulmed from Lhunze, Shannan city. Besides the stunning view of the snow-capped mountains and grand valleys, the 10-kilovolt power transmission line extended by the State Grid to Yulmed in 2019 along the well-paved road is also hard to miss.

The reconstruction of a 50-kilometer paved road connecting Yulmed to a neighboring township was completed in the same year with investment of over 500 million yuan (\$69.67 million) by the state, which stopped it being snow-bound every year.

“Before the reconstruction of the road, Yulmed would become inaccessible to vehicles when it started to snow in October, until at least the following June. The widened and hardened road has fundamentally changed people’s life,” Pasang Tsering said.

Since 2018, Yulmed has built itself into a prosperous border township with steel-framed houses, an electricity grid, roads, a 5G network, medical care and financial services facilities.

“As life in Yulmed has become more convenient than ever, more young people are willing to come and run businesses including shops, restaurants, family inns and teahouses,” he said. “The children can also receive good education via online courses, which is something I wouldn’t even dare to dream about when I was a teacher.”

### Family patrols

Tenzin Samdrup came to Yulmed about 10 years ago, married and had children. The couple run a courier business, which has become increasingly busy.

Delivery services can now reach Yulmed after roads were improved, and it’s very convenient for residents to buy things online. In the past, people had to travel for days to buy daily necessities from nearby townships, Tenzin Samdrup, 31, said.

“Nowadays, there are hundreds of express parcels arriving in Yulmed every day. More and more people are shopping online. It’s quite something considering how remote Yulmed is.”

With improved infrastructure, tourism is also booming, especially between June and September. By the end of 2024, a total of 55 families in the township had set up homestays to accommodate tourists.

Rinchen Phuntsog, the township head, said a tourist service and reception center has been built and is expected to begin operating by the end of this year. “It will be helpful to attract tourists and increase the income of our village collective.”

Although the population in Yulmed has continued to grow, between 1964 and 1996 only three people lived in the township — Yangzom, her sister Zhoigar, and their father Sangye Chopa, the



**Left:** Yangzom (left) and her sister Zhoigar are given a national flag that flew on Kaishan Island, an outpost in the Yellow Sea by national role model Wang Shihua (right) in 2019. WU ZHENGXIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY **Right:** The two sisters pay their respects to their father. PHURBU TASHI / XINHUA



## YULMED: FROM REMOTE OUTPOST TO THRIVING BORDER HUB



**Left:** Zhoigar holds her grandson and talks to her daughter via a WeChat call on Oct 15 in Yulmed. DING TING / XINHUA

**Right:** The owner of a convenience store arranges the goods on a shelf. PHURBU TASHI / XINHUA



Tourists admire the beautiful scenery of Yulmed from the roadside in Shannan, Xizang autonomous region in 2023. ZHANG RUFENG / XINHUA



**Left:** Wei Xin, a representative of the Hunan aid team, presents Children’s Day gifts to students at the primary school in Yulmed on June 1, 2022. YANG HUAFENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE **Right:** Pan Long (left), a doctor from Chuzhou, Anhui province, provides medical check-ups to a Tibetan resident in Yulmed on July 20, 2020. SONG WEIXING / FOR CHINA DAILY



former township head.

The family was determined to protect a total of 3,644 square kilometers of township land on the border between China and India.

Yangzom, 62, began patrolling the border with her father when she was 16 years old. He passed

away in 2001, but he instilled in her the attitude that protecting the land beneath your feet is to protect your country, she said. Their old residence has been turned into a museum that faithfully recreates the former poor living conditions of the family.

“Many people moved away because life in Yulmed was too tough to endure back then,” Yangzom said.

“I asked my father why we must stay. He said if people all moved away, the land beneath would be lost, which is something he

wouldn’t allow. They were his exact words,” she said.

### Father’s legacy

Zhoigar married a herdsman named Pasang who took on the family responsibility of patrolling the border while also herding his

yaks. From the outset, he upheld the traditions established by his wife’s father.

“We wanted people to see that there are Chinese people guarding the border. We all do it from our heart and proudly,” he said. “As shown to us by Sangye Chopa, we put the Chinese national flag at key intersections near the border to show our presence, which is very important.

“We had to make those flags all by ourselves. Even the red cloth for the flags was hard to source back then, so they were the most valuable things,” said Pasang.

A giant slogan in red on a hillside that reads our “Home is Yulmed, country is China” once uttered by Sangye Chopa, is now the most famous landmark in the township.

“Everyone in the village knows the family and its story. Those words still represent the spirit of the Yulmed people,” Pasang Tsering, the teacher, said.

Since setting foot in Yulmed, Pasang Tsering has also been taking border patrol trips regularly in the mountains lasting three to five days.

The family’s legacy has become well known in China after President Xi Jinping replied to the letter they wrote to him in 2017 introducing Yulmed.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and chairman of the Central Military Commission, acknowledged the family’s efforts to safeguard the territory, and thanked them for the loyalty and contributions they have made in the border area.

“Without the peace in the territory, there will be no peaceful lives for the millions of families,” Xi wrote.

Xi also expressed his hope that the family would motivate more people to set down roots in the border area and become guardians of the Chinese territory and constructors of a happy hometown.

In 2021, Zhoigar was awarded the July 1 Medal, the highest honor in the Party established by the CPC Central Committee, for her decades-long guarding of the country’s territory.

Since 2018, Xizang has launched a campaign to develop its 624 villages along the 4,000-kilometer border with India, Nepal, Myanmar and Bhutan, which is of great significance to the long-term peace of the region and China’s sovereignty.

The region has ramped up policy support for the project, sped up construction in those border areas, and made extensive efforts to improve the livelihoods of residents living there.

Nowadays, the border villages in Xizang have been provided with paved roads, while all the border townships in the region are now connected to power networks and mobile internet services.

Furthermore, local people’s access to safe drinking water has been guaranteed, and public facilities have been further improved to make sure local residents can enjoy education and medical care. Specialty industries have also been developed in the region’s border areas to promote prosperity for rural residents.

Yangzom now mainly runs a homestay and takes care of her naughty grandson who she believes spends too much time watching cartoons on an electronic tablet.

“I am sure my father would be very happy to see how Yulmed has been developed and transformed,” she said, “and I have nothing to worry about now since the younger generation of villagers can have a good life here.”

“More importantly, they all understand the importance of protecting the homeland, just like we do,” she said.

## Village patrols guard sovereign land with dedication

By CUI JIA in Yulmed, Xizang

For most Chinese people, the country’s border is only a line on a map. But for people living in Yulmed township, Xizang autonomous region, sitting among the closest townships to the China-India border, the meaning of Chinese territory is more concrete.

Since the 1980s, grazing and patrolling the border have been a practice of the local people who live in a township in the southern lower reaches of the Himalayas.

Lhapa Tsering, leader of one of the Yulmed border patrols, said everyone wants to join the team.

“In the eyes of the villagers, it’s an honor,” he said.

Each team normally consists of eight or nine villagers who always carry the national flag with them during the patrols. These patrols have become better organized and standardized in recent years, said 33-year-old Lhapa Tsering.

“We place the flags at key spots when necessary to claim the territory. They show others that the land belongs to China and there are people who care about it and guard it,” he said.

The villagers’ patrol routes are either in the steep mountains or valleys covered with dense

untouched forests. During the patrols they sometimes need to make their way through flooded rivers and landslides. Very often, it takes a few days to complete a

patrol task. In case of heavy rain or snow, for instance, it may take more than a week, said Lhapa Tsering who is a herdsman.

“The villagers are more familiar

“We place the flags at key spots when necessary to claim the territory. They show others that the land belongs to China and there are people who care about it and guard it.”

Lhapa Tsering, leader of one of the Yulmed border patrols

with the routes and conditions in the mountains and forests so no suspicious activities can escape our eyes. And we all understand that we are protecting the land for all Chinese people,” he said.

Besides young men, many young women have also signed up to become border guards. In 2021, Tenzin Yangjen moved to Yulmed’s Niulintang village, which has 11 households, with her husband. She immediately applied to join the village’s border patrol team, which was established in 2019.

“All of the village’s eight border guards are women. We can take on full responsibilities although the

mountains are very difficult to climb sometimes,” the 36-year-old said proudly.

Since 2024, a regular collaboration mechanism has been established between immigration police officers and border guards. They jointly conduct five to six hours of border patrols every week, and the cumulative patrol mileage has exceeded 1,800 kilometers.



### Online

Watch the video by scanning the code.