

# HOLIDAY PEOPLE



From left: A student thanks Qiu Xiaoqiang with a khata after receiving financial support to return to school. Qiu attends the unveiling ceremony for the Phoenix Bookshelf reading program in November. Principal Qiu Xiaoqiang interacts with students at Lhasa-Jiangsu Experimental Middle School. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## The sun rises over a plateau middle school

A principal from Jiangsu finds meaning in aiding Xizang's education development

By GUO YANQI and PALDEN NYIMA in Lhasa

On a winter morning in Lhasa, when the temperature drops below -10 C, Principal Qiu Xiaoqiang walks from classroom to classroom at Lhasa-Jiangsu Experimental Middle School, his breath visible in the thin air.

High altitude makes every step laborious. Yet Qiu, in his 40s, arrives early and stays late, moving through classrooms and dormitory blocks to interact with teachers and students and attend lectures. It's a routine he rarely breaks.

Before coming to Xizang, Qiu worked as a deputy principal in Jiangsu province. Back then, the towering plateaus in western China were little more than poetic sentimentalism to him. Now, he is on a three-year mission to play a pioneering role in its education aid initiatives.

In 2014, Lhasa became the first city in Xizang to launch a structured, group-based education aid model, leveraging the educational strengths of Beijing and Jiangsu. Under the approach, each team is deployed to support a school by disseminating effective practices and leaving behind a sustainable local teaching workforce.

"Upon arrival, poetry turned into responsibility, and the distant land gradually became a second home," Qiu said. His optimism is admirable considering the strenuous transition he faced.

The school faced long-standing challenges, and Qiu saw specific opportunities in institutional

framework, management, and teacher training. Two areas that would be easy to measure were water and power supplies.

As if these weren't obstacles enough, Qiu had to adapt to the altitude. Lower oxygen levels in the air meant he fatigued easily, a moment-to-moment test of his resolve. "There were times when I felt overwhelmed," he admitted. "Sometimes frustration and exhaustion came together, and I wondered if I could really keep going."

What steadied him, he said, were the people he saw every day. "The warm smiles of the students and their cheerful greetings renewed me. Supported by a dedicated administrative team, all my frustrations, difficulties, and pressures would vanish."

Qiu began his development approach with these interpersonal relationships. The mind is the first step of his vision for the school's future. He introduced educational philosophy, pedagogic strategies, and management practices long used in Jiangsu's schools, adapting them to local conditions and needs.

In October, he initiated a project to modernize campus policies with a new school charter and management manual. To encourage broader participation from faculty, he introduced bi-weekly administrative meetings. The aim, he said, is to help staff sharpen management and educational concepts, iterate planned and scientific approaches to daily work, and develop skills. Along the way, he uses these meetings to instill a sense of responsibility and cultural identity.

As the new norms take shape, Qiu has also moved forward with a train-



Qiu Xiaoqiang conducts a routine inspection at a campus building to understand the conditions of the students and teachers in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ing program to jumpstart the teaching staff's professional development.

"Experienced teachers and subject experts from renowned inland schools are invited to conduct lectures and demonstration lessons at our school," said Rigzin Gyatso, a Tibetan physics teacher and deputy head of grade 12. "Now, we have access to cutting-edge educational philosophies and first-hand experience of efficient teaching models without leaving Xizang."

As the minds sharpen, so too must the campus's physical infra-

structure. A school-level subject research center has been set up, where teachers can propose and undertake research projects. Regular workshops foster a culture of professional learning.

"Over the past months, the school has changed dramatically," said Zhang Jiaojiao, a 37-year-old teacher and head of grade 12. "We're finding more satisfaction in our work as we begin to see the infrastructure problems getting fixed."

Improvements include a stable

supply of clean and hygienic tap water, upgraded bathrooms and showers, and a backup power supply. A Phoenix Bookshelf reading program has brought numerous books to campus, and study tours to inland areas have also been organized.

Funding has helped make these changes possible. Apart from approximately 9 million yuan (about \$1.3 million) secured from the Jiangsu Aid Xizang Working Group and the Lhasa education bureau, Qiu also raised tens of

thousands in donations from Jiangsu and Xizang through personal efforts. The funds have been used to reward teaching excellence and support scholarships.

"The study tour to Nantong and Yangzhou led by our principal allowed us to experience the development and cultural richness of inland cities," said Ngakwang Tsegyen, a 12-year-old Tibetan student who joined a trip to Jiangsu during the National Day holiday last October.

For students, these material changes translate into opportunities that didn't exist before. In the face of these achievements, Qiu is quick to acknowledge that this progress is not the work of one person.

He works with a team of 19 teachers from Jiangsu who arrived with him, group-based education aid program. In addition to teaching full-time, they take on administrative responsibilities, conduct research, and mentor local teachers to support their growth and solidify teaching standards.

For many educators, Qiu said, professional satisfaction extends beyond test scores. It comes from moments that reaffirm why they came, such as helping a student from a remote farming and herding family return to school after being at risk of dropping out.

As the winter sun rises over the plateau, the campus fills with voices. Qiu continues his morning walk, prepared for another day.

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## Beijing pioneer transforms high-altitude healthcare

By PALDEN NYIMA and DAQIONG in Lhasa

When Zhang Ning arrived in Lhasa in July 2024, he stepped into a healthcare system shaped as much by geography as by policy. At more than 3,600 meters above sea level, Xizang's thin air complicates everything from emergency response to sleep quality, while distance and terrain limit access to routine care. For many residents, advanced medical services have traditionally meant long journeys outside the region.

Zhang's posting to Lhasa People's Hospital is part of Beijing's group-based medical aid initiative, which pairs leading hospitals in east China with counterparts in Xizang. The aim is to raise medical standards, train local professionals, and strengthen hospital management.

Speaking about his time in Xizang, Zhang said the ultimate goal is to bring healthcare closer to the people by addressing immediate needs and empowering local talent to sustain progress in the long term. That balance between delivering results and building capacity has shaped how reforms have unfolded at the hospital.

### Culture and trust

Zhang knew that the success of the reforms would only go as far as his staff had belief in him. He focused on building trust within the hospital by learning basic Tibetan phrases such as "Kukhamsang" (hello) and "Thukjeche" (thank you). These small gestures helped narrow the cultural distance between him and local staff.

Tenzin Yangdron, a Tibetan nurse at the hospital, said Zhang listens to staff and addresses prob-

lems personally rather than relying on directives alone. When delays arose during the installation of DR equipment, she recalled, he stepped in to help resolve the issue rather than leaving it to others. "Zhang is not only a leader but also a mentor," she said.

### Training for future

Alongside clinical reforms, Zhang emphasized developing local medical talent that could carry the torch forward. One of the foundational changes Zhang ushered in was a mentorship and department pairing program linking 12 leading Beijing hospitals with Lhasa People's Hospital.

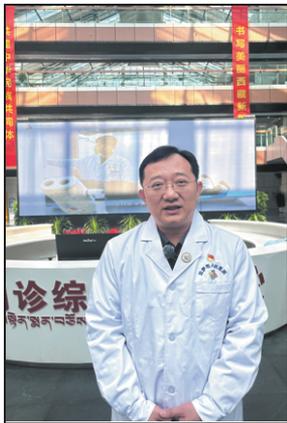
Under this model, local doctors work closely with experienced specialists from Beijing. A key example comes from the hospital's gastroenterology department, where a local physician became the hospital's first home-trained PhD under the mentorship of Liu Kuiliang from Beijing Friendship Hospital.

"This mentorship model is ultimately about self-sufficiency," Zhang said. "We want to equip local practitioners with the skills and confidence to lead, innovate, and deliver top-quality care for their communities."

Zhang has described this approach as a "hematopoiesis model," aimed at ensuring the hospital's development can continue after external support winds down.

### High-altitude solutions

At high altitude, low oxygen strains the body, causing acute altitude sickness and worsening sleep or heart issues. Symptoms often mimic other emergencies, complicating triage. For hospitals in Xizang, this means unique care challenges.



In May 2025, Zhang Ning, president of Lhasa People's Hospital and an aid-Xizang doctor from Beijing Obstetrics and Gynecology Hospital under the Capital Medical University, attends the inauguration ceremony of the Medical Diagnosis and Treatment Center for Congenital Hand and Foot Deformities at Lhasa People's Hospital. PHOTO BY PALDEN NYIMA/CHINA DAILY

One of Zhang's priorities has been addressing how altitude-related illnesses were handled. Previously, patients suffering from altitude sickness were treated alongside general emergency cases, often leading to delays and confusion.

In 2025, the hospital launched the High-altitude Sickness Treatment Center, separating altitude-related cases from the emergency department. According to Zhang, the center treated more than 10,000 cases in its first six months, providing affordable and effective care to locals and visitors.

Emergency department director Liu Mingsen said the change was transformative. With clearer triage and dedicated staff, patients with altitude-related symptoms could receive timely treatment. For tour-



ists, he added, the center has made their travels worry-free.

The hospital also established a High-altitude Sleep Medicine Center to address sleep-related issues exacerbated by Xizang's thin air. The center has treated over 600 patients and filled a critical gap in regional healthcare.

### Infrastructure practice

Zhang has overseen several landmark initiatives designed to address structural gaps in Xizang's healthcare. The High-Altitude Health Management Center, for example, received more than 106,000 patients from July to the end of December in 2025, many seeking treatment for altitude sickness. According to Liu Mingsen, a one-hour oxygen inhalation session is

just 6 yuan, with the overall cost of a visit around 40 to 50 yuan.

The hospital also opened a Day Surgery Center, where visiting ophthalmologists from Beijing Tongren Hospital performed 97 cataract surgeries within six months. Zhang said day surgeries, with shorter recovery times, are well-suited to the demands of high altitude environments.

Other practical additions include a 24-hour Animal Bite Clinic, which consolidated wound treatment and vaccination services. The clinic has handled over 2,000 cases, about half of Lhasa's annual total.

For patients like Li Yueyun, a migrant worker from Sichuan province who often experiences altitude sickness, the specialized treatment center has eased the challenges of

living and working in Lhasa. She said the availability of affordable, round the clock oxygen and treatment has been a significant help.

### Measurable progress

Under Zhang's leadership, Lhasa People's Hospital has developed into a more capable tertiary hospital, with improved medical services, management, and facilities. For locals, this has reduced the need to travel far for advanced care.

These changes reflect the broader trends linked to China's medical aid initiative in Xizang. Regional health commission data from November 2025 shows that more than 2,400 medical professionals have supported Xizang's healthcare development since 2015. In that time, maternal mortality rates in the region have fallen from 108.86 per 100,000 live births to 48, while infant mortality declined from 16.81 per 1,000 live births to 7.6. Average life expectancy has risen to over 72.

Tan Xiangdong, deputy director of the regional health commission, noted that paired assistance among 184 hospitals nationwide has strengthened talent training and hospital management through mentorship programs. He cited thousands of development plans, research projects, practice integrations, and academic exchanges as evidence of growing institutional capacity.

He added that these efforts have produced even more development plans, research projects, advanced practices, and academic exchanges, greatly elevating local medical capacity.

Within that larger effort, Zhang's work at Lhasa People's Hospital offers a case study in how national policy is translated into local practice.

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