

COMMENT

Wang Wenling and Du Juanjuan

Policy support has transformed people's lives with tangible progress

The Xizang autonomous region was peacefully liberated in 1951. In the 75 years since, the region has undergone a historic transformation from a feudal serfdom frozen in hierarchy and deprivation to a socialist society marked by expanding opportunities and improving livelihoods. For people of all ethnic groups in Xizang, the rights to subsistence and development have not only been protected, but steadily advanced to an unprecedented degree.

These changes are clearly reflected in universal education, broader access to healthcare, rising incomes among farmers and herders, and large-scale housing improvements that have directly benefited ordinary people.

Before 1951, education in Xizang was largely reserved for aristocrats and senior monks. There were very few private schools, and enrollment among children was extremely low. With the vast majority of serfs denied access to education, the illiteracy rate was more than 95 percent. Generations were cut off from knowledge and modern learning.

Things began to change after the peaceful liberation. The central government continuously promoted educational development in Xizang and established a modern education system. Fifteen years of publicly funded education have been implemented, along with subsidies covering boarding, lodging and basic study expenses for children from farming and pastoral areas, as well as those from families in urban areas with financial difficulties. These measures effectively did away with the financial burden of schooling.

Today, schools of all levels can be found across urban and rural areas alike, and children have access to education from preschool to higher education. The gross enrollment rates have risen significantly, with major educational indicators having reached or even exceeded the national average.

Children in farming and pastoral regions are able to attend schools close to home. A growing number of talented young people are emerging from the region. Educational equality has helped break the cycle of illiteracy and opened new opportunities for countless families to improve their lives through knowledge.

Healthcare conditions in old Xizang were equally bleak. Modern medical services were virtually nonexistent, and limited healthcare resources were controlled by aristocrats and upper-ranking monks. Infectious diseases such as smallpox and cholera spread unchecked for years, while ordinary people often had no access to medicine or treatment. Average life expectancy stood at only 35.5 years, and infant and maternal mortality rates remained extremely high.

Since Xizang's peaceful liberation, the central government has invested heavily in building a comprehensive healthcare system in the region. A three-tier medical network covering counties, townships and villages has been established, while Tibetan medicine has also been preserved and developed. Policies providing free medical care for farmers and herders, together with universal medical insurance coverage, have dramatically improved access to healthcare.

Basic medical services, health screenings and vaccinations are now available across the region. Serious infectious diseases have been controlled and people can now receive treatment for both common and major illnesses much more easily. Average life expectancy in Xizang has risen to 72.19 years, while maternal and child health indicators have also improved substantially. The steady expansion of healthcare services has provided a solid foundation for protecting people's right to life and development.

The livelihoods of farmers and herders have also improved dramatically. In old Xizang, agricultural and pastoral production methods were extremely backward. Farming tools were primitive, improved crop varieties and fertilizers were rarely available, and production depended heavily on the weather. Serfs and slaves owned no land and most of what they produced was taken away by serf owners. They struggled to secure enough food and clothing, while incomes remained extremely low and poverty was widespread.

After Xizang's peaceful liberation, the central government promoted modernization in agriculture and animal husbandry through land reform and democratic reforms in pastoral areas, granting farmers and herders land-use and grassland management rights. Scientific farming methods, improved seeds, greenhouse cultivation, disease prevention measures and infrastructure construction were introduced on a large scale, greatly boosting productivity.

Modern agriculture and animal husbandry industries are now developing rapidly in Xizang. A range of policies benefiting rural residents has helped sustain double-digit growth in disposable income among farmers and herders, placing the region among the fastest-growing areas in the country.

Housing conditions have seen equally profound changes. In old Xizang, most serfs and slaves possessed no property of their own and lived in crude mud houses, tents or even animal sheds. Since the peaceful liberation, improving housing conditions has remained a key priority. Large-scale programs including housing projects have transformed living conditions across the region.

New homes have been built with attention to both practicality and comfort, while infrastructure such as roads, electricity, running water, internet access and sanitation systems has also been expanded. Public service and recreational facilities have been developed alongside residential areas.

Currently, people of all ethnic groups in Xizang are living in safer, brighter and more comfortable homes. Communities that once lacked stable shelter now enjoy cleaner environments, greater convenience and a much stronger sense of security and belonging.

The changes witnessed in Xizang over the past 75 years are not abstract slogans, but tangible improvements visible in everyday life. Roads have been built, homes have improved, healthcare has become accessible and children can now attend school. These achievements have been made possible through the strong leadership of the Communist Party of China, sustained national support policies for Xizang and assistance from across the country.

Wang Wenling is the deputy director of the Institute of Marxism at the Xizang Academy of Social Sciences and Du Juanjuan is an assistant researcher at the same institute. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Chen Aidong and Zhao Zhengnan

Xizang turns ecology into economy

As the core region of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, the Xizang autonomous region serves as a vital ecological security barrier not only for China but for Asia as a whole. In recent years, Xizang has consistently treated ecological protection as a top priority, taking proactive steps to strengthen China's ecological security barrier, advance ecological civilization and contribute to the country's carbon reduction strategy.

The progress of ecological compensation in Xizang has relied on strong national-level policy support as well as tailored implementation at the local level.

Over the years, China has introduced a series of laws and regulations that provide a legal foundation for improving the ecological compensation mechanisms in Xizang.

The region has gradually established a framework centered on fiscal transfer payments, supplemented by inter-regional compensation payments, expanded through market-oriented approaches. In the past five years, the region has introduced a series of regulations covering forests, grasslands, wetlands, water ecosystems, glacier protection and wildlife conservation. Between 2018 and 2024, Xizang received 95.4 billion yuan (\$13.9 billion) in ecological protection subsidies and rewards.

At the same time, Xizang has adopted some of the country's strictest ecological protection measures. More than half of the region's land area has been placed under ecological conservation red lines, while 37.95 percent has been designated as protected natural areas of various levels. These measures have effectively curbed disorderly development and established firm boundaries for ecological preservation and green growth.

The most profound impact of ecological compensation has been the transformation of public attitudes toward development. Through the principle that "those who protect the environment should benefit from it", local communities have understood that protecting the environment also protects their livelihoods and well-being. The result has been a shift from passive compliance to active participation.

A vivid example is Galai village in Bayi district of Nyingchi. In the past, villagers cut down peach trees for



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firewood while struggling economically. With the implementation of ecological compensation policies, the area established ecological protection zones and organized professional forest ranger teams. Villagers pooled their land into a tourism cooperative, with 30 percent of scenic area revenues distributed as dividends and 30 percent reinvested into ecological conservation.

By developing eco-tourism centered on peach blossom landscapes, the village transformed its peach blossom festival into a well-known cultural brand. In recent years, the per capita disposable income in Galai village has risen to more than 40,000 yuan. What was once merely a source of firewood has become a source of prosperity.

In recent years, Xizang has also used ecological stewardship jobs as a key tool for ecological compensation, enabling farmers and herders

to become environmental guardians while increasing their incomes. Most of these jobs are located in remote rural and border areas, allowing local residents to find employment close to home. Eco-environmental protection has provided around 516,000 jobs a year from 2016 to 2024, producing an annual per capita income of 3,500 yuan.

To address the plateau's diverse ecological challenges, Xizang has implemented differentiated ecological compensation policies across key sectors, ensuring comprehensive environmental protection.

From 2021 to 2024, Xizang has invested 6.93 billion yuan from the central budget in ecological benefit compensation funds for forests, and has effectively managed and protected 11.87 million hectares of State-owned and non-State-owned forests, bringing significant growth

in forest resources.

Protection efforts also cover wetlands, water ecosystems and wildlife conservation. Nearly 900 million yuan was spent on restoration work at the Lhalu Wetland, while large-scale wetland rehabilitation projects were carried out along the south bank of the Yarlung Zangbo River and in the Tangbei area of the Sanjianguan National Park.

Xizang has also invested tens of billions of yuan in water conservation projects over the past five years. As a result, the health rates of rivers and lakes have reached 100 percent.

Wildlife damage compensation has likewise played a critical role. The mechanism of compensation has eased herders' concerns about wildlife-related losses and helped transform human-wildlife conflict into coexistence. Populations of rare species such as snow leopards, Tibetan antelopes, Tibetan wild asses and black-necked cranes have continued to recover steadily.

Building on its ecological strengths, Xizang is gradually developing a modern and environmentally friendly industrial system led by eco-tourism, clean energy and green agriculture and animal husbandry, turning ecological assets into long-term economic advantages.

The region's total clean power generation ranks first nationwide. Electricity transmitted from Xizang now reaches more than 10 provincial-level regions.

Tourism has become a major pillar industry supporting local livelihoods. In 2025, Xizang received over 70.73 million tourist visits, generating 81.68 billion yuan in tourism revenue.

Today, Xizang stands at a crucial stage of high-quality development, and practical exploration of ecological compensation mechanisms continues to deepen. By prioritizing ecological protection and improving ecological compensation systems, Xizang has successfully pursued a path that balances economic growth with environmental preservation and promotes harmony between humanity and nature.

Chen Aidong is dean of the School of Finance and Economics at Xizang Minzu University and Zhao Zhengnan is a lecturer at the same university. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Kunsang Dolma

Epic efforts to preserve a rich legacy

In the Xizang autonomous region, *The Epic of King Gesar* is a monumental narrative, crafted collectively by the Tibetan people and passed down orally for over a thousand years through generations of storytellers. Widely regarded as the world's longest living epic and often described as "The Iliad of the East", it remains one of the few great epics still actively performed today. It was included in China's national intangible cultural heritage list in 2006 and added to the UNESCO list of world intangible cultural heritage in 2009.

While *The Epic of King Gesar* is still performed on stage by children in Xizang, the key question is how this "living heritage" can be sustained and not become a passing fad. The answer lies in understanding the unique nature of *The Epic of King Gesar*. Unlike conventional literary classics, the epic has no definitive written version. Its vitality lies not in books or archives, but in oral performance. For centuries, storytellers have conveyed the epic through memory and performance, making each performer a living carrier of the tradition.

Young storytellers learn the Gesar epic tradition from their ancestors. This is precisely why preserving the

cultural environment surrounding the epic matters as much as preserving the text itself. The essence of the Gesar epic exists in everyday life. Therefore, the key to safeguarding the tradition is to protect the cultural soil that allows it to grow organically, rather than turning it into a commercialized performance industry or packaging children as "little celebrities" for commercial purposes, which runs counter to the spirit of living cultural transmission.

At the same time, living traditions require institutional support. China's efforts to preserve the Gesar epic began in the 1980s. In recent decades, major projects have been launched to document, compile and publish versions of the epic. Nagqu, known as the "hometown of Gesar epic storytellers", has established a four-level inheritance system covering national, regional, municipal, and county levels. The city is home to more than 170 recognized Gesar epic storytellers and five dedicated storytelling centers.

The protection efforts go beyond symbolic recognition. Authorities and researchers are building detailed archives for storytellers, recording vocal styles, oral histories and unique narrative versions. Extensive digital recording projects have preserved thousands of hours of audio and video from some senior performers. Training programs bring together scattered performers from pastoral regions to exchange techniques and traditions, while government subsidies allow many storytellers to continue practicing without relying solely on commercial performances for their livelihood. These measures have provided critical support for the Gesar epic during rapid moderniza-

tion and globalization.

Yet institutional support alone cannot ensure the epic's future. Preservation must move from simple recording toward active engagement. Digital archives should become more open, interactive and accessible, incorporating multilingual annotations and searchable databases for researchers and younger audiences alike. More importantly, new forms of participation need to be developed.

Interactive mobile applications, for example, could allow young users to learn different singing styles, explore story maps and upload their own performances. Such tools could help children encounter the Gesar epic naturally through the digital platforms that already shape their daily lives.

However, much of today's online content is limited to gala shows and interviews with storytellers. To truly connect with younger generations, creators should be encouraged to reinterpret the epic through animation, graphic novels, contemporary music and even games inspired by the Gesar epic. This should not be seen as diluting tradition, but as part of the natural evolution that all living cultures undergo over time.

Equally important is cultivating long-term interest among younger generations. Some schools in Nagqu have already incorporated elements of the Gesar epic into arts education and extracurricular activities. In recent years, efforts have also been made to support female performers and young inheritors.

The goal should be to make the Gesar epic part of everyday cultural life rather than a distant heritage symbol. Storytelling clubs, illustrated books, school performances and

interactive learning activities can help children feel that the epic belongs to their own lives and imagination.

At the same time, the cultural significance of the Gesar epic extends far beyond the Tibetan ethnic group alone. Versions of the epic are also found among other ethnic groups as well as in some neighboring countries and regions influenced by Tibetan culture. The epic embodies centuries of cultural exchange across ethnic groups, languages and regions.

In this sense, the Gesar epic belongs not only to Xizang, but to a broader cultural landscape shaped by a shared history and human connection. Expanding international and cross-cultural exchanges among Gesar performers, researchers, and institutions could strengthen both cultural dialogue and global awareness of the tradition.

Today, the transmission of Gesar stands at a pivotal generational moment. Children are still listening, learning and singing. But listening is not the same as inheriting, and inheritance is not the same as sustaining a living tradition.

That requires both respect for the cultural logic that has sustained the Gesar epic for centuries and openness to new technologies, new forms of expression and new audiences. Finding the balance between preservation and innovation may ultimately determine whether this ancient epic continues to thrive far into the future.

The author is an assistant researcher at the Xizang Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huixin Dongjie Chaoyang District,
Beijing 100029

News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
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China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254(0)20 692 0900 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com