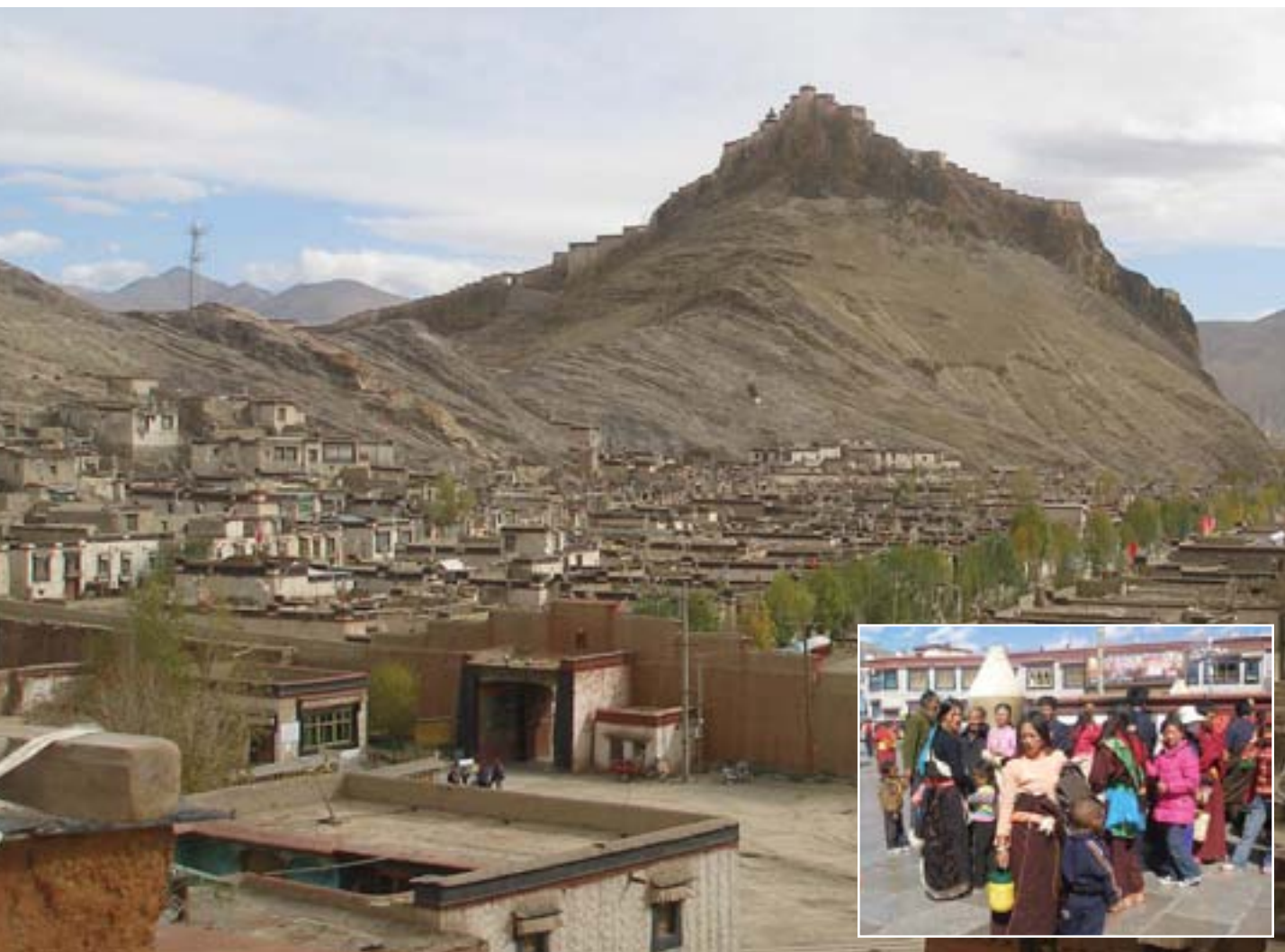


China's Policy and Programme Priorities for Mountain Area Development

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Tibetan community in Tashilhumpo, Shigatse, PR China; Inset – The mountains are home to a majority of China's many ethnic minorities

Mountains, mostly located in the western regions, comprise 69% of China's national territory. This vast mountainous territory is home to a majority of Chinese ethnic minorities and is characterised by economic underdevelopment and environmental fragility as well as by many other historical and institutional constraints.

To reduce east-west regional economic disparity within China, mitigate environmental degradation in these areas, and pursue a more balanced and sustainable development, China's central government has endeavoured on the one hand to renew and update its development philosophy by advocating for scientific development and 'building a harmonious society', and on the other, to launch a batch of operational initiatives, notably, the **West Development Strategy (WDS)** and **New Countryside Construction**.

Rural and mountainous development is highlighted in both the national and provincial 11th Five-Year Development agenda for advocacy and programme implementation. Priority policies and programmes have also been formulated to enhance mountain development and conservation during China's 11th Five-Year Development phase.

Formulating priorities: the planning cycle, processes, and key actors

As China is transforming from a centralised planning economy to a market-oriented one, the country's planning and programming cycle tends to be more anticipative rather than obligatory as it was in the past. Development and reform commissions at national, provincial, prefecture, and county levels are currently in the position to review, endorse, and monitor government planning and programming while inspection and evaluation tasks remain in the hands of the National People's Congress and its standing committee.

Developing a Five Year Plan (FYP) is a long and open process which takes about three years. Take the nation's **11th Five Year Plan**: basic studies and needs assessment were started and carried out by different ministries as early as 2004, a draft for further consultation was delivered in 2005, and a final endorsement of the Plan witnessed in March 2006 at the National People's Congress. Provincial, prefecture, and county 11th FYPs follow the same procedures and administrative structure.

The policy development cycle involves various actors or stakeholders including power holders, duty bearers, implementation agencies, and various target groups, among others. In addition to the top administrative structure such as the National People's Congress, the Ministries and Commissions of Finance, Agriculture, Land Resources, Water Resources, Environmental Protection, Civil Affairs, Science and Technology, Forestry, Poverty Reduction, Tourism, Ethnic Affairs, and Education under the State Council, are involved in rural development and the environment to certain degrees. Similar government bodies are set up at provincial, prefecture, and county levels. Elected village committees are authorised as both owners and managers of collective resources and affairs. In practice, the village committee's role varies depending on capacity, accountability, and relationship with the local government. Civil society is playing an increasing but ambiguous role in promoting transparency and reliability of decision-making at different administrative levels.

Mountain development-related priorities of the 11th Five Year Plan

Despite a large proportion of mountains and plateaus, there is not a single government agency in China at present established for mountains. Instead, over half of all 29 ministries and commissions under the State Council are appointed various functions and duties related to the sustainable development of mountain

areas. Their development remains a comprehensive and integrated task among many involved ministries, which take either a small or large proportion of the tasks. For instance, the Ministry of Land and Resource assumes responsibility for the protection and utilisation of land and mineral resources of mountain areas. The Ministry of Water Resources is in charge of protection and utilisation of river and lake resources. The Ministry of Forestry is responsible for the protection of forests and natural reserves. Yet, coordination and cooperation among different ministries remains a challenge.

Correspondingly, China lacks an integrated strategy for the sustainable development of mountain areas. This does not mean that the country does not value the sustainable development of its mountain areas. On the contrary, the substance of a large number of laws, rules, and regulations are released for the sustainable utilisation and protection of resources in mountain areas. Huge fiscal investments have also been put into protecting the environment and natural resources including forestry reserves, soil erosion control, biodiversity protection, and many other aspects. Particularly, the National 11th Five Year Plan is a milestone in prioritised initiatives towards mountain area development, as illustrated below.

Principal function zones

The concept¹ of principle function zones is highlighted in the 11th FYP considering the resource-environmental bearing capacity, existing development density and development potential, population distribution, geographical distribution of different sectors of the economy, territory utilisation and urbanisation patterns. The plan proposes four types of principal functional zones for optimal development, key development, restricted development, and prohibited development, respectively.

A set of classified zone management policies have been proposed accordingly. Financial policies shall be inclined to increase transfer payment for restricted/prohibited development zones in the interest of the public good. Investment policy shall preferably support restricted construction of public service facilities and protection of the ecological environment in the prohibited development zone. Industrial policy shall guide the development in the restricted development zone of a characteristic industry but shall restrict industrial expansion. Land use policy shall be directed towards ensuring basic farmland and strict land use control for restricted/prohibited development zones, and shall prohibit change in ecological land use for these land uses.

¹ This concept, proposed by the State Environmental Protection Administration, is now accepted officially.

Rural development

The 11th Plan emphasises the development of a 'new socialist countryside'. The proposed programmes include 1) the development of modern agriculture, 2) increase in peasant incomes, 3) improvement in agricultural quality, 4) training in new rural development types, 5) increasing investments in agriculture and the rural areas, and 6) deepening rural reform.

Regional development priorities

A balanced development is among the goals of the 11th FYP. Large sections of the regional development priorities focus on the western provinces, especially ethnic minority regions and border areas closely related to the HKH mountain belt. They enjoy greater aggregate financial transfer payments, investments, and support under the new development plans through the following means:

- Protection of the natural ecology and improvement of infrastructural conditions
- Development of pre-school education, accelerated popularisation of compulsory education, ethical junior and senior high school classes in central cities, and strengthening ethical universities and higher education in minority nationality regions
- Reconstruction of traditional ethnic cultural community, support for publications and establishment of a bilingual teaching demonstration zone
- Enhanced cultivation of talents in minority nationality regions
- Support for the development of an ethnic industry, ethnic commodities, ethnic medical industry, and other industries
- Bias for alleviation of extreme poverty in ethnic minority areas, support for the economic and social development of underpopulated ethnic groups, promotion of booming border areas, and improvement in people's incomes
- Continuing support for the development of Tibet and Xinjiang.

Energy, natural resource management, and environment protection

Water and land conservation and ecological preservation are highlighted in China's development agenda. Key ecological protection projects listed in 11th FYP for the HKH region cover the following aspects.

- Natural forest resource protection
- Conversion of sloping farmlands into forests and grasslands

- Limited grazing for pasture land restoration
- Building a protective forest system
- Wetlands protection and remediation
- Ecological protection and construction of the Qinghai Sanjiangyuan Nature Reserve

Public security and disaster management are also highlighted under the 11th FYP. Under the Plan the process of industrial structure optimisation and upgrading emphasises ecological protection, resettlement of affected residents, environmental management and flood prevention, and nautical navigation. Preferential finance and taxation and investment policies are also provided to encourage the production and consumption of renewable energy resources.

Social management and service development

The 11th FYP mentions developing the road network in the western region to support the expansion of a large-scale airport, construction of a medium-scale airport and a number of small-scale airports, and increased airport density in the central, west, and northeast regions. Listed key projects include the Lanzhou-Chongqing, Taiyuan-Zhongwei (Yinchuan), and the Qinghai-Tibet railway extension line projects, all targeting the western mountain region. Tourism development planning is also mentioned although there are no concrete projects yet. Agricultural tourism as a new concept has also been raised. In terms of social management and service development, the construction of a harmonious socialist society is highlighted as the plan's grand goal.

Conclusion

The 11th FYP concludes with a long list of key fields ranging from the development of a new socialist countryside, to public service, resource environment, and infrastructure construction supported by central government investment. Following the National 11th FYP, provincial 11th FYPs are also being developed in the provincial contexts.

All levels of the 11th FYP plans have set out concrete priorities connected with mountain area development. Specific development programmes and policies will need to be further implemented and effective mechanisms and innovative instruments carried out before a desirable integrated mountain area development can be realised in China.