

# **Unemployment in the Tibetan Community in Exile**

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## Introduction

At the time Chinese troops entered the country, Tibet had very few human resources; barely a quarter of the population was literate, there was no modern technology to speak of and only an elite few children attended school. Despite the lack of a modern education system most people were able to earn a living. They were farmers and craftsmen following their ancestral profession as their fathers and grandfathers had before them. Now, in exile, the literacy rate is over 75% and it can be assumed that almost every child under the age of 13 attends school.<sup>1</sup> However, unemployment plagues the community in exile. Tibetan policy makers must now battle unemployment in a social system with no history of a job market. In 2004 the Basic Education Policy for Tibetans in Exile passed through the Tibetan Parliament, mapping the future direction of education in the community. In the new Basic Education Policy the government addressed two main problems: the constantly arriving refugees from Tibet who have to be integrated into the exile community and unemployment.

Although the goals of Department of Education and private organizations all mention the importance of finding a career, barely any headway has been made in battling the problem. One of the Tibetan Children's Village main goals is to, "to help our boys and girls become self-reliant, contributing members of our society and the larger human community."<sup>2</sup> The Tibetan Children's Village is a non-profit organization founded in 1960 to "care for orphaned and destitute Tibetan children in exile."<sup>3</sup> The Tibetan Children's Village (TCV) now runs dozens of schools and has educated over 15,000 children. Until recently, however, no attention has been paid to children after the

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<sup>1</sup> *Planning Council*, 2004

<sup>2</sup> Pema, Jetsun

<sup>3</sup> Pema, Jetsun

completion of their education. Since the founding of Tibetan settlements, education has been strongly emphasized, but economic growth was never mentioned.<sup>4</sup> According to the

Dalai Lama:

Our goal for now and the future should be to keep abreast with other people of the world in all aspects of educational progress and development. Therefore, after coming to India as refugees, our primary initiative has been the education of our children, the future seeds of Tibet who will carry out our national task, be it political or spiritual.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the investment in developing human capital and educating Tibetan children, the Tibetan community in exile never focused on building economic outlets or investments in exile. Now the education system produces highly qualified people, but there is no outlet for their potential within the Tibetan community in exile. Therefore, highly educated Tibetans become teachers or employees of the Tibetan Government in Exile, despite the fact that if they left the Tibetan community, more jobs would be available to them.

Academic scholarship programs, vocational schools, and career counseling have all proliferated since the millennium. Counseling now extends to after graduation, with employment placement programs for Tibetans of all ages. The new Basic Education Policy based by the Central Tibetan Administration directly addresses unemployment and encourages career counseling and job placement activities. Tibetan policy makers have realized that “as unemployment increases so does alcoholism, drugs and violence.”<sup>6</sup> Unemployment extends beyond economic life; it can destroy entire societies, especially ones as fragile and insular as Tibetan communities in exile.

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<sup>4</sup> Shastri, Tenzin Tephun, March 2005

<sup>5</sup> Dalai Lama, May 1998

<sup>6</sup> Schindler, J

### **Basic Education Policy**

The first wave of Tibetan refugees arrived in India in the wake of their leader, the XIV<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, in 1959 and naturally turned to him for guidance. Although the hope was to return to Tibet as soon as possible, the Dalai Lama acknowledged the need to provide for the youth of his nation. The government of India, run by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru offered a special place for Tibetans in the Indian schooling system, but the Dalai Lama declined, preferring to create a uniquely Tibetan school system. The Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) along with various private organizations such as the Tibetan Children's Village and the Tibetan Homes Foundation established their own schools, reflecting the importance of education and Tibetan culture within the community. However, the goal of a uniquely Tibetan education system is still to be realized.

All branches of the Tibetan community's education system in India retain affiliation with the Central Board of Secondary Education in New Delhi and thus base their curriculum on that of the Board. Furthermore, the Tibetan Children's Village draws its method of education from the SOS Kinderdorf International organization in Austria. In an attempt to develop an education system tailored to the needs of the Tibetan community in exile, the parliament of the CTA approved the Basic Education Policy for Tibetans in Exile (BEP) in September 2004. The policy is yet to be fully implemented and thus has yet to be proven useful to the Tibetan youth.

The Basic Education Policy for Tibetans in Exile supports a holistic approach to education, placing priority on creating well-rounded individuals. Based on principals of

unity, freedom, truth and peace, the policy was written in accordance with the 1984 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Policy-makers built the BEP under Buddhist principals not merely focusing on a child's ability to earn a living but to actually live. The policy aims to provide education rather than just schooling. Schooling is defined by Geoff Childs as "a state organized or regulated institution of intentional instruction," while the broader definition of education encompasses "cultural practices and local forms of knowledge."<sup>7</sup> Cultural practices and traditions have held a place in Tibetan schooling since 1959, and the Basic Education Policy does not aim to change this fact. The BEP emphasizes self-reliance with a connection to the community and places more importance on the well being of the society than the individual. According to Norbu Tsering, the rector of a Tibetan school, the new education system has the ability to build a character foundation; it will teach students "not to be upset if they fail to get a certain job, but rather be content with any job."<sup>8</sup> Communal integrity and values hold tremendous importance for elder policy-makers and so it will be passed on to the children. Since the Tibetan education system in India relies largely on donations, the policy abides by donor demands for "modern, child-centered learning." Emphasis is placed on individuals' ability and importance but only within the greater scheme of the Tibetan community. Children are taught to ask themselves: "What can I do for my nation? And how can I give back to the Tibetan community?" This altruistic attitude makes them good Buddhists but it does encourage entrepreneurship.

The Tibetan Government in Exile intends for the Basic Education Policy to "serve as a basis for the education policy of Tibet when a self-governing status is attained

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<sup>7</sup> Childs, Geoff

<sup>8</sup> Norbu Tsering

there,”<sup>9</sup> but in the mean time, it will be implemented in exile. However, implementation has proven difficult as the policy has been plagued with issues since its inception.

Due to the complex structure of the Tibetan schooling system in India, implementation of the policy has proved to be a bureaucratic nightmare. Although the Central Tibetan Administration serves as an umbrella organization in control of all the Tibetan schools, private organizations such as the Tibetan Children’s Villages and the Tibetan Homes Foundations retain some autonomy. The Central Schools for Tibetans (CST) has been the most difficult aspect of universal implementation, by far. The Central Schools for Tibetans retains strong ties to the Indian Government and national schooling system, adding another obstacle to be surmounted before changing anything within the school. In fact, CST schools reflect a certain tension between Tibetans and Indians, especially on the governmental level. One CST rector, Norbu Tsering, expressed a desire for more autonomy and freedom from Indian restrictions in his school. In explaining the differences between the goals of the communities, he stated, “Indians are forgetting their culture in an effort to modernize, but we (Tibetans) are trying to preserve.”<sup>10</sup> In Norbu Tsering’s school all an entirely Indian teaching staff teaches a student population that is 80% Tibetan.

Beyond the administrative level, the policy also needs dedicated teachers, counselors, and students if it is going to succeed. The BEP reads, “as nothing is more important than the teacher in the work of imparting education, a teacher-centered education system shall be followed.”<sup>11</sup> In the past, the method of teaching employed in Tibetan schools was archaic and flawed for the Tibetan situation, and the general result

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<sup>9</sup> BEP

<sup>10</sup> Norbu Tsering

<sup>11</sup> BEP



was mediocrity. The strong student-teacher ratio encouraged in the BEP cannot be achieved with the current human and monetary capital available to the CTA. Thus, teacher training programs have proliferated in an effort to produce more qualified teachers. Teaching provides a great means of giving back to the community and with the scholarships provided by the Department of Education more people have chosen it as their path in recent years.

Since the new system of education will “have traditional Tibetan education as its core and modern education as its essential co-partner,”<sup>12</sup> the medium of instruction shall be gradually shifted to from English to Tibetan language from primary school until graduation. Currently, only the youngest children learn in Tibetan; classes are all taught in English starting in class four. Using English as a medium of instruction was meant to ensure proficiency in a global language, but the method has failed. Several studies, conducted in Japan, Russia and elsewhere, reveal that children learn best in their native language.<sup>13</sup> The shift from English to Tibetan language classes involves a complete renovation for course syllabi, teacher training, and classroom supplies, not to mention the resistance that has come from the community at the suggestion.

The Educational Development and Resource Center (EDRC), located at the Upper Tibetan Children’s Village in Dharamsala, was established in 1985 to restructure the medium of instruction from English to Tibetan.<sup>14</sup> At the time only the beginning levels of school were changing languages, but the EDRC will prove useful as all classes will soon switch to Tibetan. It serves the purpose of designing curriculum, producing

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<sup>12</sup> BEP

<sup>13</sup> Norbu Tsering

<sup>14</sup> Pema, Jetsun

textbooks and publishing teaching aids. As off the spring of 2009, text books in Tibetan are only available up to class eight.

The resistance to moving towards Tibetan language instruction centers not only on its inconvenience, but also out of fear of isolation due to lack of communication skills. Candidates require a language other than Tibetan in order to compete on the international job market or in the tourist industry. Protestations arise from individuals who fear that changing all classes into Tibetan language will decrease the English proficiency of students. Furthermore, students in Tibetan schools in India must still pass both the All India Senior School Certificate Examinations (AISSCE) and the All India Secondary School Examinations (AISSE) in order graduate.<sup>15</sup> Donkar Wangmo, the Central Counselor for the CTA and a strong proponent of the BEP assures skeptics that, “ultimately it is not the language that matters; it is the cognitive level of thinking.”<sup>16</sup> And according to Donkar, learning in one’s native language improves cognitive thinking levels. Due to globalization, the need to compete in an international job market and the growing role of English as an international language, it will continue to be emphasized in a side by side learning system. Donkar came to the conclusion that graduates of the old system of education could not communicate completely in English or Tibetan. If Tibetan is to be the focus, students can grasp more complex concepts and then upon their learning of English should be able to express those concepts.

Samdong Rinpoche, the Prime Minister and father of the BEP, hopes that the policy will eventually decrease the number of “unemployed youth who have been created

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<sup>15</sup> Sherig.org

<sup>16</sup> Donkar Wangmo

by the system of education pursued so far.”<sup>17</sup> However, further measures must be taken to address unemployment immediately. The Central Tibetan Administration, as well as various private organizations, are currently making moves to address the issue and produce fast results. One of the programs, the Career Counseling and Resource Cell of the Department of Education, aims to provide guidance and continued education to the Tibetan youth in their struggle with unemployment.

### **Career Counseling**

The Career Guidance and Counseling Cell of the Department of Education, although formally founded in April 1998, has only recently gained momentum and efficiency in its work. In the next year, the Cell will expand even more to include one more full time counselor and an office assistant elevating its employee population up to five full time counselors. The primary objectives of the Counseling Cell as stated at its inception include helping students to know their personal strengths and abilities, as well as the opportunities available to them. As stated earlier, Tibetans in the past had no job market mentality, and so career counseling or counseling in general remains a completely foreign concept. Counseling in the Indian school system is also a relatively new concept, one which the British failed to introduce during colonization.

All schools affiliated with the Central Tibetan Administration have counseling systems under the supervision of the Career Guidance and Counseling Cell. Some schools have their own resident counselor, but most use the regional counselor assigned by the Department of Education. The regional counselor spends approximately one week at each school, but every school has a teacher who is provided with some counseling

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<sup>17</sup> BEP

skills and methods. When the regional counselor attends a school every student at class six or above has mandatory classroom guidance sessions in order to “prevent future issues.”<sup>18</sup> The Counseling Cell also provides regular newsletters and a publically available website.

Personal issues, specifically ones of mental health, were traditionally stigmatized in Tibetan culture; however, with the aid of the Counseling Cell these important issues have entered the public arena and are now being addressed. This process is one of desensitization and of a new opening, according to Donkar Wangmo.<sup>19</sup> She states that “everyone wants to say ‘my child has no problems’ or ‘my school has no problems,’ but addressing the problems is half the job.”<sup>20</sup> Focusing on the personal aspect of each child and not solely the career choice is important for the Counseling Cell as directed by Donkar Wangmo. The overall development of the individual child factors into his or her life goals and successes. For this reason, the Counseling Cell encourages a basic knowledge of psychology for teachers, so that he or she can understand the mentality of the student.

From her work in the West, Donkar Wangmo believes that child development is universal and that every child experiences the same core issues and problems. Sonam Dhakpa, a counselor at the Mussoorie Homes School echoes this basic sentiment. He believes that it is difficult for anyone to choose a career because one must first have, “adequate knowledge of his/her own personality, aptitudes, availability of funding plus the nature of the job.”<sup>21</sup> The difficulty of choosing a career path is further complicated

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<sup>18</sup> Donkar Wangmo

<sup>19</sup> Donkar Wangmo

<sup>20</sup> Donkar Wangmo

<sup>21</sup> Sonam Dhakpa

by new entrance tests and complex scholarship applications. Young, modern Tibetan children cannot rely solely on their parents to supply guidance in this realm and must therefore turn to the counselors provided by the Department of Education. According to Tsepak Rigzin, most parents are either uneducated and feel unqualified to advise their children, or they are too busy to do so accurately.<sup>22</sup> Children have moved from being an asset to their parents in traditional Tibetan culture to being an investment<sup>23</sup> in exile, and so parents pressure children to choose the path they believe to be correct for their child.

Sonam Dhakpa of the Mussoorie Homes School believes that about half of Tibetan students choose their own path, while the other half is strongly influenced by their families. Family influence does not dictate negative results, but many career counselors find compromising with a parent's ideas to be difficult, especially if said parent has had little to no work experience in the modern job market. Certain careers hold greater prestige in the community, although other careers may be more lucrative or stable. For example, Tibetans generally disregard the potential created in vocational schools, preferring academic paths, for which the competition is much greater. Norbu Tsering of the Central School for Tibetans- Mussoorie paints a picture of controlling parents over-riding his ability to encourage his students.<sup>24</sup> He states that parents dictate the career path of a child regardless of abilities, citing the story of one of his students who had great potential to be a traditional Tibetan doctor yet was forced into nursing by her parents.

The Tibetan education system in exile utilizes boarding schools regularly. This method aids children who are orphaned or whose family is in Tibet. In fact, the Tibetan

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<sup>22</sup> Tsepak Rigzin

<sup>23</sup> Barnett, Robert

<sup>24</sup> Norbu Tsering

Children's Village, which has educated over 15,000 Tibetan children, began as an orphanage.<sup>25</sup> To serve in cases such as these, the Department of Education developed a mentoring program as a branch of the Counseling services. Children are matched through their stated interests with experienced and successful adults who can provide guidance and support for them.

Recently, career guidance has expanded to provide for Tibetans who are not in school. The Tibetan Children's Village runs a Career Placement Cell in the Delhi Tibetan Youth Hostel to aid youth in finding employment within and outside the exile community,<sup>26</sup> and the CTA recently established an Employment and Placement Bureau, in New Delhi in an effort to aid both educated and uneducated Tibetans. A separate non-profit organization, Empowering the Vision Project (ENVISION), is patronized by the Dalai Lama and funded by the United Kingdom's Tibet Relief Fund. The project aims to "build successful young Tibetans for a successful nation."<sup>27</sup> ENVISION hosts initiatives such as role model conversation sessions and workshops intended to build self-confidence and self-reliance in Tibetan youth. The Youth Opportunity Trust (YOT), in New Delhi also provides avenues for Tibetans to find employment and receives funding from the United Kingdom's Tibet Relief Fund. Founded in 2003, YOT acknowledges the accomplishments of Tibetans in exile, but wishes to further empower the youth with the skills necessary for self sufficiency. Tsering Dolma, the director of YOT, proposes "entrepreneurship as the key to future success" and "encourages the youth to broaden the horizon of business ventures and to move out of the self imposed business choices of

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<sup>25</sup> Pema, Jetsun

<sup>26</sup> Pema, Jetsun

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.empoweringvision.org>

sweater selling and trading alone.”<sup>28</sup> The Youth Opportunity Trust provides training to develop professional and personal skills, offers networking opportunities, and provides career guidance.

Since the millennium, career guidance and counseling has proliferated in the Tibetan community. Educating graduates about options, as well as teaching them how to gain employment has increased general productivity and decreased the unemployment rate.

### **Serving the Community**

Communal ties form the net on which Tibetan culture rests, and this strong sense of community can be felt in the education and career placement systems. A stated goal of the Department of Education remains “to address the human resource requirement of the Tibetan community in exile and a future free Tibet.”<sup>29</sup> Tibetans are educated for the purpose of providing for their community, and most express a strong desire to benefit the greater Tibetan people. However, economic growth has been stagnant in Tibetan communities in exile, while the number of Tibetans with Masters and Bachelors Degrees increase, the number of available jobs remains the same. The exile community’s infrastructure and services have obviously not kept up with the increase of educated youths. The tension between wanting to remain in a Tibetan community and limited opportunities within the community has left many recent graduates lost.

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<sup>28</sup> *Career Focus*

<sup>29</sup> *Education in Exile*

The Career Counseling Cell places, “implementing career education programs in relation to the manpower requirement in exile and for an independent Tibet”<sup>30</sup> as one of its primary objectives. The cell plans on not only fulfilling the current needs but on planning for the future of an autonomous Tibet, but the current needs of individual Tibetans must not be overlooked. The head counselor, Donkar Wangmo, hopes that exile will serve as a “period of human resource cultivation”<sup>31</sup> for Tibetans. She fears that upon Tibet’s liberation, Tibetans will not be prepared to run their own country. This in turn would open up the area to domination by foreigners, possibly repeating the events of the 1950’s. Although not all professions are available in Tibetan communities in exile, in the future Tibet all these positions will be sorely needed. She wants young Tibetans to understand that in order to help their community for the long run, they must branch out and develop a specialization, a stance recently adopted by the Dalai Lama as well.

Although many scholarships, such as Fulbright and vocational training programs, are available, the goal is always to benefit the greater community rather than the individual. The Department of Education provides teacher training, but only if the graduate works for the department after completion of the program. The Tibetan Children’s Village also expects something in return from their former students. One teacher at the TCV vocational school at Selakui stated that he was “requested to come teach at the school”, although he was employed in Delhi at the time. However, he also stated that he does not mind returning to teach, since it is his duty and honor to serve the community, not to mention he owes his education and success to TCV.<sup>32</sup> Lobsang, a recent teacher training graduate, attended school at the Tibetan Transit School and

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<sup>30</sup> Sherig.org

<sup>31</sup> Donkar Wangmo

<sup>32</sup> VTC Journal



returned there to teach after graduation, although he had much more prestigious opportunities available.<sup>33</sup> However, his long term goals do not involve teaching but rather translation and research. Perhaps, he feels the need to at least donate some of his life to returning the favor to an institution that got him started on his path to higher education.

For those who do not pursue teaching, many wish to join the Central Tibetan Administration in some way or form. Competition for a place in Tibetan Administrative Services grows annually. Candidates must have a firm grasp of English language, further pushing some citizens to protest the Basic Education Policy's proposal to teach all classes in Tibetan.

Besides a strong desire to serve the Tibetan community through teaching or government work, many other Tibetans have no desire to leave settlements. Despite the limited employment opportunities within Tibetan settlements, recent graduates and the unemployed remain hesitant to travel outside in search of jobs. Some Tibetans in India, specifically young ones, wish to travel to the West, but only in regions where there are established Tibetan communities. Sonam Dhakpa laments this trend, stating that "there is no place for business in Tibetan communities,"<sup>34</sup> and thus students should be open to the possibility to living elsewhere. The trend, as acknowledged by various career counselors and teachers, is a hesitance to working in non-Tibetan areas of India or even communities other than Dharamsala.<sup>35</sup>

The stigma to working outside of the Tibetan Community appears inexplicable to education administrators interviewed; however, various scholars have made hypotheses

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<sup>33</sup> Lobsang at TTS

<sup>34</sup> Sonam Dhakpa

<sup>35</sup> Tenzin Pao

on the issue. Melvyn Goldstein of Case Western Reserve cites the Tibetan government's policy of "boundary maintenance" as a primary concern.<sup>36</sup> Upon arrival in India, Tibetans clearly differentiated themselves from local populations in an effort to preserve their culture. Due to their position within a different, greater community, Tibetans in exile must clearly maintain their culture as separate from all others, to prevent assimilation. This method has worked in that Tibetan culture continues to survive, but it causes negative, unexpected byproducts, one being an overarching hesitance for unemployed Tibetans to live in regions of India without Tibetan communities. Whatever the cause, Tibetan youths need to start looking beyond the community for employment.

### **Vocational Training**

Vocational training in Tibetan communities has never been encouraged for youths. Academic pursuits prevail in popularity, but vocational schools seem more practical for life in exile in many ways. If a Tibetan wishes to move to a Western country, the best way to do this is through having a concrete, technical and marketable skill such as nursing or massage. Technical careers provide more stability, after all people will always need plumbers, but translators are somewhat of a luxury. Still vocational training remains slightly stigmatized in Tibetan communities.

The first vocational training centers were funded by the Dalai Lama in Dalhousie and Dharamsala in 1959 and 1963.<sup>37</sup> These were quickly followed two by more Traditional Handicraft Centers built in the 1970's by the Tibet Children's Village in

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<sup>36</sup> Goldstein, 1978/Childs

<sup>37</sup> Pema Dojee

Ladakh and Dharamsala.<sup>38</sup> Now dozens of handicraft centers exist, teaching Thangka painting and tailoring in places such as the Tibetan Transit School for new arrivals from Tibet and the Mussorrie Homes School. Generally, these schools are not meant for Tibetans with artistic talent or who wish to pursue art out of passion; rather, the schools are meant students who are “bad in studies.”<sup>39</sup> Teaching marketable skills to Tibetans would certainly help with the current unemployment problem, but vocational institutes lack popularity within the community.

The Dalai Lama founded the Tibetan Handicraft Society (THS) located on Jogiwara Road in McLeod Ganj with his personal funds in 1963. The Tibetan Handicraft Society trains individuals in producing handicrafts but also employs them after the training. THS aims to produce high quality Tibetan goods for tourists, telling people to “add value to your souvenir, buying as a social service.”<sup>40</sup> According to Pema Dojee, the general manager, THS is meant to aid the destitute, people who have no other options or assistance.<sup>41</sup> Unlike some other vocational training centers, the Tibetan Handicraft Society does not require its applicants to have passed up to a certain class level; rather they choose employees based on need. Pema Dojee, who has been with THS for over two decades, has noticed a sharp decline in applicants in the last decade. In the 1970 and 1980’s the society had more than 300 members, but now it has less than 80. Pema Dojee sees two possible reasons for the decrease. One being that Tibetans are better off and wealthier than they once were, and the other being that the young generation is too lazy.<sup>42</sup> Weaving carpets is hard work, and perhaps the young, Westernized Tibetans in

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<sup>38</sup> Jetsun Pema

<sup>39</sup> Norbu Tsering

<sup>40</sup> Tibetan Handicraft Society

<sup>41</sup> Pema Dojee

<sup>42</sup> Pema Dojee

Dharamsala are not willing to do it. Aside from training and employing individuals, the society also provides accommodation, assists in children's education, runs a pension plan for retired workers and coordinates medical needs and funeral expenses.

Three main vocational schools exist for Tibetans in India with comprehensive programs featuring trades such as cooking, housekeeping and car mechanics in Selakui, Ladakh and Mundgod. The Selakui Vocational Training Center (VTC) was founded in 2000 under the umbrella of the Tibetan Children's Village. It now teaches 11 trades, but recently canceled both carpentry and plumbing due to lack in interest. However, other trades, specifically hair styling and massage have grown tremendously in popularity. The beautician program received over 100 applicants in fall 2009 for a program which has room for only 30 people. In order to limit applications, classes are restricted to people between 18 and 25 years old. However, the program remains competitive. The school was founded "to serve weak students who failed at class 8 or 10,"<sup>43</sup> and were thus unable to pursue academics. Since admission is on a merit basis and many people who have passed up to class 12 cannot find employment, highly qualified students are applying for training, leaving the 'weaker students' with limited opportunities. The competition is restricted to a few of the most popular programs, for example all the students in chef training and beauty school have passed class 12, yet the electrician and auto mechanic areas usually do not fill to capacity. In this way, the school boasts a mere 5-10% rate of student rejection; hardly anyone is turned away, but in many circumstances students cannot enter their top priority trade. Those few that are turned away have other vocational opportunities, mostly Thangka painting or tailoring. Many students join the Indian military, which runs a special troop for Nepalese and Tibetans.

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<sup>43</sup> VTC Journal

Opportunities for vocational training are not limited, yet many people still remain uninterested despite high unemployment rates. Tenzin Pao, the director of Selakui VTC, envisions vocational training increasing in popularity and a reversal of the stigmatization of technical trades.<sup>44</sup> Dismissal of technical trades is a social construct kept alive by traditional elders. Donkar Wangmo wishes to remind conservative parents that “everything is new here; we cannot continue along our old paths.”<sup>45</sup> Perhaps the trend is slowly shifting, and vocational training will proliferate providing skill training and more jobs for Tibetan youth.

### **Teacher Training**

Teachers serve as a vital element to imparting education, even if the school infrastructure and curriculum are perfect, quality teachers are still needed for an education system to succeed. In 1998, approximately 60% of teachers in Tibetan schools were untrained, and many of them were not of Tibetan descent.<sup>46</sup> As per the Current Status Report also in 1998, 92% of teachers acknowledged a desire to improve their qualifications<sup>47</sup>. In an effort to improve the efficiency of the schooling system and to provide jobs for Tibetans, various teacher training institutes have been established within the last two decades. The CTA’s Department of Education runs some teacher training institutes, including one at The Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, College for Higher Tibetan Studies-Sarah Campus. Private organizations, like the Tibetan Children’s

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<sup>44</sup> Tenzin Pao

<sup>45</sup> Donkar Wangmo

<sup>46</sup> Barnett, Robert

<sup>47</sup> Demographic Report, 1998

Village, run other programs, and the Government of India funds the Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies in Varanasi.

Tibetan teacher training programs do not divide classes by subject, rather teachers are trained in all subjects and are expected to teach based on need. Since even private schools, such as the Tibetan Children's Villages or the Tibetan Homes Schools, fall under the umbrella of the DoE, the DoE does all the teacher hiring and placement. The Department of Education controls all teachers, transferring them as they see fit. Teachers are allowed to make their preferences for placement known, but there is no guarantee that they will influence their placement. Bhutuk Shastri, the director to the Tibetan Transit School, has been a teacher for over 20 years in South India, and yet in 2008 the Department of Education forcibly placed him at the Transit School in Dharamsala.<sup>48</sup> Trained as a primary teacher, Bhutuk's passion does not reside with the 18-30 year old students at his new school. However, he either had to move to the Transit School or lose his job as a teacher. Recent IBD- Sarah graduates lamented over the same problems. Since the DoE pays for their training and provides a small amount of pocket money, graduates of IBD-Sarah's teacher training program are expected to donate at least two years to the Department of Education after the completion of their course, before they can pursue other careers. Ani Delek Palmo was placed at TCV Selakui near Derhadun, but wishes she could stay near her nunnery outside of Dharamsala, and Namdol will be working at the Tibetan Transit School rather than in Shimla, where her family lives.<sup>49</sup> Most graduates request to stay near Dharamsala, but certain people expressed a desire to move to Ladakh or other isolated areas, where they feel they can make more of an impact.

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<sup>48</sup> Bhutuk Shastri

<sup>49</sup> Ani Delek Palmo, Namdol

The desire to help others prevails among people who have chosen teaching as a career, again showing a will to give back to the Tibetan community. Ani Delek Palmo, a recent graduate of the teacher training program at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics-Sarah, outlined her career goals as either a nurse or a teacher, two professions which enable her to aid others thereby fulfilling Buddhist ideals.<sup>50</sup> Dordam, another recent graduate, knew he wanted to either be a doctor or teacher from a young age and due to his aptitude ended up being a teacher, a job he intends to keep for the rest of his working life.<sup>51</sup> Other teacher training students entered the program when offered the scholarship and intend to find another career later in life. Lobsang Ngawang graduated from IBD-Sarah's Tibetan Studies program and accepted the offer to continue on to teacher training due to lack of other opportunities.<sup>52</sup> Either by desire or necessity, teacher training programs have proliferated and are producing teachers by the dozens.

The Tibetan Children's Village established a teacher training center in Dharamsala in 1994, later moving it to Bangalore. The center offers a two year program in which young people are trained to become teachers. It is open to TCV students directly after class 12, eliminating the need for college. However, some students prefer to attend college prior to enrolling in a teacher training program. Dordam, a teacher training student at IBD-Sarah acknowledged the stability that a general degree can offer and thus decided to attend college prior to entering teacher training. He also stated that in his opinion TCV training lacks certain resources and is only really sufficient for primary school teachers.<sup>53</sup> However, TCV teacher training has improved, recently adding a final

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<sup>50</sup> Ani Delek Palmo

<sup>51</sup> Lobsang Ngawang

<sup>52</sup> Lobsang Ngawang

<sup>53</sup> Dordam

course involving child psychology, handicraft and physical education in order to produce well-rounded teachers. Generally, only former TCV students are accepted into TCV run teacher training programs as they are given priority. Out of the 1,159 TCV employees in 2004 approximately 60% were former students.<sup>54</sup> Buchun, a TCV teacher and alumni of the teacher training program, chose to go straight to teacher training as opposed to college, because “college spoils people.”<sup>55</sup> His mother, an employee at IBD-Sarah discouraged Buchun attending college, but approved of TCV teacher training

The Institute of Buddhist Dialectics-Sarah offers both a Primary Teacher Training course and a Bachelor of Education. The Department of Education offers scholarships for both programs in return for at least two years of service after graduation. Students are selected through testing and interviews. Officers visit various high schools, monasteries and nunneries choosing the best and offering them a chance to become a teacher. In this way the human resource potential of the community can be realized at the same time as quality teachers are provided for the next generation

### **Employment Opportunities**

The lack of employment opportunities within Tibetan communities in exile remain although schooling is improving tremendously, leaving educated Tibetans with nowhere to work within their community. The general consensus among educators is that these people should expand their job searches, accepting the possibility that they might have to leave a Tibetan settlement to find steady employment. However, efforts are

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<sup>54</sup> Pema, Jetsun

<sup>55</sup> Buchun



underway to provide more employment opportunities within the community, but the majority of these new avenues are for uneducated, extremely poor Tibetans.

Tenzin Tephun Shastri, a reporter and reformer of Tibetan society in exile, calls for a change of attitude and approach to the unemployment problem in Tibetan communities in exile. He disagrees with the Department of Education's focus on preserving Tibetan culture stating, "a people's obsession with religious and cultural heritage should not get in the way of achieving economic development."<sup>56</sup> He examines the parameters of potential and realized achievements of Tibetans in exile, acknowledging a great deal of cultural, social and religious achievements but a stagnation of human resources and a lack of any large scale economic achievement. Since Tibetan leaders did not address economic progress at the start of exile, the problem has expanded. Instead, the Tibetan Government in Exile focused on educating the youth, who now have a strong desire to help their community, yet few avenues for doing so.

The Department of Welfare runs an employment and placement bureau to help both newly arrived Tibetans and those born in exile find employment. The Welfare Officer of Dharamsala, Tsering Phuntok, finds his job taxing yet necessary.<sup>57</sup> He is one of 39 officers in India, as well as 12 in Nepal and 7 in Bhutan, who serve as government representatives and liaisons for their smaller communities. Working at the Welfare Officer in Dharamsala can be particularly trying since the community is so large, and it is the hub of newly arrived people from Tibet.

Tsering Phuntok also heads the Green Campaign in Dharamsala, which employs people to collect garbage, recycle it and produce goods for resale. Garbage collectors can

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<sup>56</sup> Shastri, Tenzin Tephun, April 2005

<sup>57</sup> Tsering Phuntsok

earn as much as 100 rupees a day, and people who make products from the garbage, such as recycled notebooks earn much more plus free medical care and training enabling them to live a comfortable life. However, young Tibetans are not willing to work for the Green Campaign. Although it is run by a branch of the CTA and founded to aid Tibetans, not enough Tibetans are willing to join, forcing the Green Campaign to hire Indians and Nepalese. There are 33 workers and 3 bosses employed by the campaign. The goal is to provide employment while also cleaning up the Upper Dharamsala area, and so it also organizes volunteers for mass cleanups, usually foreigners. Tsering Phuntok estimates that maybe 5 or 10 families in the area collect garbage on their own, sort it then sell it to a recycling center, earning themselves a decent living.

The Central Tibetan Administration's Department of Home hosts programs aimed with combating unemployment, in conjunction with local Welfare Departments. The Youth Empowerment Support (YES), previously known as the Promotional Agency for Development of Micro Enterprises, serves to provide small skill training and micro-credit loans to young Tibetans. According to Phuntsok, the director, its main aim is to "sustain small Tibetan settlements,"<sup>58</sup> by training citizens who in turn return back to their community. He states that this plan has not been successful, since graduates of the program usually relocate to larger cities with their newly acquired skills instead of creating businesses in Tibetan settlements. However, the website makes no mention of the desire to sustain Tibetan settlements, instead choosing to focus on "making Tibetan youths productive and independent with self-employed in various trade and skills."<sup>59</sup> YES provides training free of cost to the student with assistance by the Norwegian

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<sup>58</sup> Phuntsok from YES

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.tibetgov.net/yes.html>

Church Aid. In the last session, the program received over 200 applicants for 60 spaces. In order to apply an individual must be between 18 and 40 years old and have completed up to a certain class level. Individuals are recommended through their settlement's local Welfare Offices by means of their character and family's financial status, with poorer people receiving priority. Phuntsok approves of routing the process through the Welfare Office, since "local people know better."<sup>60</sup> Once accepted into the program, students receive specialized skill training, counseling, motivation, Buddhism lessons, basic English classes as well as basic accounting and marketing skills that should help them in their future. YES aims to build the whole person, realizing that running a business takes much more than just a specialized skill. The Youth Empowerment Support also provides loans to encourage Tibetans to set up alternative businesses and diversify the economy by not merely selling sweaters. The loans are meant to encourage graduates to start businesses. Other organizations also offer loans to Tibetans in exile.

The Tibetan Refugee Shopkeeper Welfare Association is part of the CTA's Finance Department but is registered under the Himachal Pradesh local government. It serves to collect money, pay taxes to the Indian government, offers loans and provides shopkeeper certificates. In Dharamsala alone, the office has over 100 members, mostly because running a Tibetan business in India is so difficult. In Dharamsala, hardly any Tibetans own land, rather they rent from Indians. One of the roads in Upper Dharamsala, Tipa Road, actually belongs to the Indian Forestry Department, yet they have agreed to let Tibetans live on it. Many Tibetans set up stands on the side of the road to peddle their goods although it is technically illegal, and at times the Indian magistrate and police break up the stands. Instead, the Indian government encourages Tibetans to set up their

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<sup>60</sup> Phuntsok from YES

stands off of TCV road in Dharamsala; but there are no tourists there, and so they do not comply. The CTA does not force Tibetans to tear down their stands, recognizing that this is a large source of income for their families.<sup>61</sup> In order to run a legitimate store, Tibetans must have a certificate signed by the Indian Deputy Commissioner of Sales Taxes, and the Shopkeepers Welfare Association helps with the obtainment of the certificate. The Shopkeepers Association also provides Challan Forms, necessary for people who sell sweaters in Delhi or elsewhere. This certificate verifies that the goods being transported are legal. Furthermore, the office provides loans from the State Bank of India of up to 200,000 rupees. According to the administrator, Tsering, these loans are not too popular, which is odd considering that so many endeavors, such as sweater selling, needs prior monetary investment. Tsering thinks that most people receive money from their families or friends.<sup>62</sup> Overall, the Tibetan Refugee Shopkeeper Welfare Association along with the Green Campaign is making headway in providing for destitute Tibetans.

### **Conclusion**

The Tibetan community is considered one of the most successful refugee communities in the world. The Tibetan community in exile basically made a “huge transition straight from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”<sup>63</sup> The literacy rate jumped from just 25% to 70% in just two generations.<sup>64</sup> Tsering Dolma articulated it well when she said, “we should feel proud of our accomplishments, yet this in no means should be

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<sup>61</sup> Tsering Phuntsok

<sup>62</sup> Tsering from Tibetan Shopkeepers Association

<sup>63</sup> *Career Focus*

<sup>64</sup> Rigzin, Tsepak

reason for complacency.<sup>65</sup> Young Tibetans are graduating in droves, but have nowhere to go after completing school. They are instilled with a desire to give back to the Tibetan community since birth, yet lack of employment opportunities within settlements limit their options. Tibetan youth in exile basically have three options: work for the Central Tibetan Administration, become teachers, or sell sweaters.

Vocational and teacher training institutes aim to provide young Tibetans with tangible skills, and private organizations are encouraging entrepreneurship in new avenues. Economic growth in Tibetan communities in exile has been stagnant, and it would be unrealistic to think that a people without a home could develop into an economic powerhouse. By placing an emphasis on education but not economic development, the community forces the youth to choose between unemployment or leaving the community.

So far, the Tibetan schooling system has succeeded in instilling traditional values and practices in the youth, even those born into exile. Now, as people are forced to leave the community to find employment, the system must adapt to help those outside the community retain a connection. If the new methods to increase entrepreneurship succeed, more people will move away proliferating the Tibetan diaspora. The new hurdle for Tibetans in exile will be maintaining connections with Tibetans not living in settlements.

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<sup>65</sup> *Career Focus*

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