

Climate Crisis in Tibet – Part III

China's Rapacity for Mining Tibetan Resources: When Will the Greed End?

Webinar Report

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ABOUT ISDP

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LIST OF SPEAKERS



Martin A. Mills is Chair in Anthropology and Director of the Scottish Centre for Himalayan Research at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. Author of *Identity, Ritual and State in Tibetan Buddhism*, his research interests lie in the history of religious and constitutional organisation in Tibetan monastic and governmental life. On the public front, Mills has acted as member, briefings officer and parliamentary secretary to the Cross-Party Group on

Tibet at the Scottish Parliament since 2007 and speaks widely on Tibetan political and environmental matters.



Gabriel Lafitte has spent years living with Tibetans, in exile and in Tibet. Based in Australia, he researches the impacts of Chinese policies on the Tibetan Plateau, and regularly trains young Tibetan environmentalists and advocates. Decades of immersion in Tibetan culture, and a dozen journeys around China, have given him an insider/outsider perspective on two

great civilizations in conflict. He is an experienced public policy adviser with expertise in development, biodiversity and resource management. He has authored numerous reports, submissions and a 2006 book on the Dalai Lama's teachings 'Happiness in a Material World'. He has also authored the only book in English on mining in Tibet, <https://www.bloomsbury.com/au/spoiling-tibet-9781780324357/I> (in print).



Dr. Sriparna Pathak is an Associate Professor and the founding Director of the Centre for Northeast Asian Studies in the Jindal School of International Affairs (JSIA) of O.P. Jindal Global University, (JGU) Haryana, India. She also serves in the capacity of the Associate Director of the Jindal India Institute. She teaches courses on Foreign Policy of China as well as Theories of International Relations. Awarded a Doctorate degree from the Centre for

East Asian Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in 2015, Dr. Pathak is fluent in English, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, Bengali and Assamese. She has been a recipient of the joint fellowship awarded by the Ministry of Human Resources Development, India and the China Scholarship Council, Government of the People's Republic of China, and she spent two years in China, researching various aspects of China's domestic economy. Her

areas of interest are China's domestic economy, trade and economic relations between India and China and China's foreign policy and economic linkages with the world. She is currently working on a project on China's influence operations in India.



Dr. Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy is an Affiliated Scholar at the Department of Political Science of Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Associated Research Fellow at the Institute for Security & Development Policy (ISDP Stockholm), Head of the Associates Network at 9DASHLINE and Fellow at Agora Strategy, Munich. Based in Taiwan, Zsuzsa is Assistant Professor at the National Dong Hwa University in Hualien. Between 2008 and 2020 Zsuzsa worked as a political advisor in the European Parliament. Her latest book, "Partners in Peace. Why Europe and Taiwan Matter to Each Other" was published in October 2024. Zsuzsa is a regular commentator in international media outlets.



Dr. Lobsang Yangtso is a Senior Environmental Researcher for the International Tibet Network, India. Her research focuses on climate change in Tibet and the Himalayan regions, water security, and climate change on the major rivers like Brahmaputra, Drichu (Yangtse), and Upper Mekong River. She is a strong advocate and campaigner for the protection of the rights of local and indigenous people like the Tibetan people. She participated actively in COP meetings asking for the inclusion of Tibetan people in climate policy-making. She has also worked as a Research Associate at the Centre for China Analysis and Strategy, New Delhi.

Moderator



Dr. Jagannath Panda is the Head of the Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs (SCSA-IPA) at the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP), Sweden. Dr. Panda is also a Professor at the Department of Regional and Global Studies at the University of Warsaw; and a Senior Fellow at The Hague Center for Strategic Studies in the Netherlands. As a senior expert on China, East Asia, and Indo-Pacific affairs, Prof. Panda has testified to the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission at the US Congress on 'China and South Asia'. He is the Series Editor for *Routledge Studies on Think Asia*.

DISCUSSION

The webinar titled “China’s Rapacity for Mining Tibetan Resources: When Will the Greed End?” is the third in a webinar series on the Climate Crisis in Tibet, organized by the SCSA-IPA at the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP). It was held on January 21, 2025. Thanks to its distinguished panel of experts, the event constituted a significant contribution to raising awareness about Chinese mining activities on the Himalayan plateau, and the effects of China’s policies in Tibet at the geopolitical and environmental levels.

The Tibetan Plateau – Asia’s water tower and China’s major source for critical minerals like copper and lithium – is facing severe ecological degradation due to China’s extensive infrastructure projects, including mega-dam building, forced relocation of Tibetans, and mining. The increase in the so-called development projects such as the 2006 Golmud-Lhasa railway link among other such initiatives via China’s “Western Development Strategy,” or the “Go west”

policy have only facilitated exploitation of Tibet’s natural reserves including critical minerals.

Although, on paper China has referred to its development strategy in Tibet – which it has now renamed as “Xizang” to scuttle the region’s identity further – as a tool to provide economic reforms in the western provinces, at par to the high-quality development in other well-to-do parts. However, rather than reducing



poverty, industrial development and other such activities are wreaking havoc on the already accelerated rate of climate change in the region, which is threatening not only the water security of downstream nations like India and Bangladesh but also Tibet's own biodiversity and entire Himalayan ecosystem.

Systematic and large-scale mining of minerals in Tibet began decades ago soon after China's annexation of Tibet, which has significant reserves of the world's deposits of uranium, chromite, boron, lithium, borax, iron and graphite. Due to the push for green transition and high-tech manufacturing, there is a high global and domestic demand for critical minerals such as lithium and rare earths. As a result, China – which is one of the major countries for supplying rare-earth raw materials and is also an importer of critical minerals for its dominant refining/processing industry accounting for approximately 60% of world-wide production and 85% of processing capacity – is looking to consolidate its lead by exploiting Tibet.

Activists have also raised concerns about China's illegal sand and gravel mining from riverbeds (e.g., in Tsaruma village, the source of the Yangtze and the Yellow Rivers) for use in construction and other human activities. This impacts biodiversity, soil erosion, river flows, pollution, destruction of farmlands, and in turn, extreme events. Research has also revealed that high arsenic content in the water and soils in Tibet, in part being

attributable to the mining operations.

Unfortunately, China's large-scale extraction is happening at fast rate and using unethical measures. The Chinese government also uses a heavy hand against any protests by the Tibetan residents, which impedes any constructive action. So although the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has called for urgent action to avoid a "sand crisis," Tibet-specific calls-for-action are hard to find.

In addition, for many years now, China has also been mining Tibet's fresh water resources as a "new sustainable" economic growth pillar. This has no doubt boosted China's bottled water industry but is disastrous for the Tibetan ecosystem, as rivers are drying up faster. In tandem with the over-damming and mining of critical minerals, the ramifications are unfathomable.

For example, it has been widely reported that the Tibetan Plateau has been warming more than three times faster than the global average, with Tibet's permafrost thawing faster. Moreover, infrastructure activities particularly mining and pollution have a direct correlation with glacial retreat that has accelerated in the last decade.

Dr. Jagannath Panda, Head of the South Asia and Indo-Pacific Center at ISDP, opened this third session on the climate crisis in Tibet with a consideration of the transformations that the area has undergone in recent years due to Chinese intervention, ranging from massive

infrastructural projects to heavy modern militarization, and forced internal relocation of the Tibetan population. However, the extensive Chinese mining activities are still overlooked by the international community, therefore, this webinar stems from a necessity to provide an overview of the topic from an environmental and geopolitical perspective to address the following research questions:

- What is the extent and scope of the Chinese mining operations in the Tibetan Plateau? What does the latest data suggest?
- What is the extent of extraction of critical minerals, particularly of rare earths, in Tibet?
- What is the specific impact of such activities on the environmental degradation of the Tibetan Plateau? What are its implications for the regional and global community?
- How can the countries concerned about climate change due to excessive human activities like mining help to create awareness about the Tibetan issue?

Dr. Panda observed how the extraction process was not exempt from consequences: the region has suffered heavily from soil erosion, river flows, pollution, and destruction of farmlands. This has resulted in extreme events and health consequences for the local population, whose efforts to raise awareness of the issue are bluntly repressed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Dr. Panda pointed out that



“Despite the extent of the damages, there is scarce awareness both at the popular and institutional level, where international actors are reluctant to address precisely what is happening in Tibet.”

– Jagannath Panda

the environmental effects can also be seen in neighboring countries shared by the rivers originating in the Tibetan plateau, such as India, Nepal and Bangladesh. Despite the extent of the damages, there is scarce awareness both at the popular and institutional level, where international actors are reluctant to address precisely what is happening in Tibet and prefer to stay focused on the broader picture rather than address the Tibetan situation from a human rights perspective

He invited the participants to focus on the environmental impact of China’s mining activities in Tibet, their advancement state, and their impact on the Himalayan region.

Prof. Martin A. Mills opened the discussion by contextualizing the issue within the transformation of Chinese industrial policies. Tibet was initially regarded as a peripheral security domain, and during the Cold War Tibet was considered a naturally protected part of its core industrial era for nuclear, oil, and production. However, Tibet's industrial value underwent a hiatus in 1980. Followed by the opening of Chinese borders to external trade and the CCP's shift from West to the East regions for its core industrial focus, where raw materials could easily arrive through maritime channels. Nevertheless, in 2006 with the Great Development Strategy, the CCP once again shifted the spotlight on Tibet and Xinjiang as oil, gas, zinc, and lead resources became more pertinent, stepping away from previous copper and gold mining activities. This investment in infrastructural projects connected the regions to the manufacturing hubs in central China.

The Tibetan mining industry received an ulterior boost due to the high global demand for lithium and its pivotal role in producing electric cars, smartphones and other electronic appliances. The government upgraded the existing facilities through collaborations between state-owned enterprises and British and Canadian mining companies, the intensification of lithium mining and the beginning of its extraction from hydric basins. A instrumental factor was



“The Chinese state word that they use for Tibet means Western storehouse – this was always understood as a potential place for minerals because of the fractured nature of the Tibetan Plateau, which allows one to see a lot of minerals on the surface.”

– Martin A. Mills

the consistency of demand for Chinese electronic goods and the abundance of foreign direct investments (FDI). The environmentally harmful extraction of materials was conducted in Xinjiang and Tibet and then those materials were used to manufacture digital appliances in a cleaner way in the central regions. Dr. Mills concluded his intervention by briefly illustrating the CPP narrative in the area: where it positions itself as a developmental agent, casting new brilliance, and promoting the harmonious development of mining areas.

Following this, **Mr. Gabriel Lafitte** expanded the topic, providing insights on the domestic production and import of metals such as gold and copper, and its extraction activities of lithium. Regarding the former, China is the primary consumer of gold (mainly as a store value and as a fungible tool to move capital). This metal is mainly sourced through international trade, and only a small quota comes from domestic resources. While the situation follows similar trends for other metals, such as lithium: due to high internal manufacturing demand, China imports those resources specially from South America and Africa. This poses limits in the short term to the rapacity of China's extractivism into Tibet.

Connecting the situation to the latest events, namely the second election of U.S. President Donald Trump and a probable return to protectionist policies at a global level. Mr. Lafitte pointed out that China will have to rely more on its domestic production in the future, hence it will have to improve and expand its industry in Tibetan areas of Aunto, Yawa, and Kanze, which are still in an experimental stage, and accelerate extraction processes. Mr. Lafitte clarified how this does not actually benefit the local communities, since the Chinese corporations employ mainly Han Chinese people.

Furthermore, given the relation between foreign electric vehicle production and the Chinese lithium industry, Mr. Lafitte highlighted the monopoly that



“Given that we’re at the start of the second Trump presidency, that factor alone may mean that China sees the world that it lives in as far more precarious. And for the sake of security, it has to rely much more on domestic sources that it can completely control, namely Tibet.”

– Gabriel Lafitte

BYD has on salt lakes lithium extraction in Tibet. This is used for electric car batteries of renowned non-Chinese brands, such as Tesla. External demand comes also due to the policies of other actors, such as the EU, which is incentivizing the production of Chinese electric cars. External demand might also function as a possible propulsor for the improvement of R&D on the purification of lithium techniques, which will provide a boost in the efficiency of these types of batteries.

Dr. Sriparna Pathak focused on the evolution of the mining policies that led to the contemporary situation in Tibet, the scientific research that has advanced the industry and its environmental impact. She informed that a \$50-million project was born in 2007, prompting a seven-year government survey of the Tibetan Plateau and the subsequent discovery of 40 million tons each of copper, zinc, and lead. Along with more than 1 billion tons of high-grade iron. The following research has localized deposits of uranium, borax, and potash in the area. At present, the world's largest deposits of lithium can be found in the Chabui, Tamsung, and Taichenai salt lakes, where extraction is in its initial phases.

Moving towards rare earth minerals, Dr. Pathak illustrated the advancements of the industry, pushed by strategic and economic reasons: in 2023 the China University of Geosciences in Wuhan discovered potential reserves of rare earth minerals. This could give a boost to the national extraction capacities and make China the global supplier of these irreplaceable key strategic materials. These are pivotal for green energy, ICT and defense appliances, as well as allowing China to become a global leader in the AI industry, shifting the geopolitical equilibrium in its favor.

Dr. Pathak also provided further details on copper extraction, identifying a key actor in the industry: Zijin Mining Group, which is the biggest national gold producer. It has received strong government incentives



“In China, politics and economics cannot really be separated. As China’s economic growth rates continue to decline, there will be more mining as China tries to show itself as a responsible player in the realm of climate change. There will be more mining activities in Tibet. And this is just the beginning.”

– Sriparna Pathak

to keep copper extraction steady, despite fatal incidents for the sake of economic and strategic objectives. Those objectives cannot be divided, since as its economic growth decreases, the CCP must find new ways to diversify and boost its industries, and the mining one represents a profitable way to keep its economy afloat and to internationally demonstrate a commitment as a responsible player amid climate change.

The floor was then passed to **Dr. Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy**, who provided a European perspective on the issue, as well as a political contextualization of China's role in the critical raw materials market and an overview of the narrative Chinese strategies on the matter.

Dr. Ferenczy restated the importance of critical raw material control in the race for advanced technology and as a tool for becoming norm setters in this field and the green transition. China is asserting its leadership in the sector, and this is a propulsor for China's mining activities in Tibet.

Indeed, the PRC currently accounts for more than 80 percent of global solar cell exports, more than 50 percent of lithium-ion batteries, and more than 20 percent of electric vehicles. This was obtained thanks to its early approach in the mid-2000s, based on tax incentives and subsidies and engagement with other countries rich in raw materials deposits in Africa and Latin America. The EU is one of the actors which is inflating China's external demand of rare earth supply, especially lithium (97 percent).

Dr. Ferenczy highlighted the exclusive reliance on local researchers for data collection, particularly the Tibet Policy Institute in Dharamsala. The institute has framed a win-win rhetoric strategy where the state capitalizes on Tibet as a resource for economic growth, and in return provides increasing rural disposable



“There’s no difficulty in reading Beijing’s narrative: Clearly the goal has been to use and exploit Tibet for economic growth and to eradicate absolute poverty by increasing rural disposable incomes. So that has required displacing Tibetan nomads, farmers and forcing them to change their livelihoods.”

– Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy

income, omitting the forced relocation of nomadic communities, and their forced lifestyle change. Therefore, Dr. Ferenczy concluded by asserting that international cooperation should find a way to engage with China to be held accountable for its treatment of the Tibetan people amid these industrial policies.

The mention of the forced displacement of the Tibetan population offered an occasion for Dr. Panda to move on to the following panelist: **Dr. Lobsang Yangtso**, Senior Environmental Researcher for the International Tibet Network, India, and a campaigner for the protection of the rights of the local Tibetan population.

Her intervention focused on the lack of environmental safety course, which gives rise to company corruption and proliferation of irregular mining activities. Moreover, there is a lack of organized environmental groups which are instrumental in providing accurate data and raising international awareness on the matter. Local communities are affected not only by the displacement but also by land grabs, frequent especially during the industrial refocus on Tibet in the early 2000s. Dr. Yangtso highlighted how, during that period the expropriated land was not used exclusively for mining activities, but also for the creation of national parks, as in the case of the national reserve of Zatu in the San Jin area, and later transformed into a mining facility in 2013.

Transitioning to civic movements, Dr. Yangtso's intervention was fundamental to assessing one of the biggest challenges of the research on that subject, which explains why this has not been a subject of the wide public debate on the Tibetan issue: the lack of organized civil groups. This has resulted in a lack of proper data due to the impossibility for international scholars to access that area. She also elucidated



“There are no proper Tibetan organized environment groups to focus on the mining issue. So there has not been much international attention on mining because it is impossible to go to Tibet for fieldwork and research.”

– Lobsang Yangtso

on how the mining activities constitute damage to the Tibetan heritage, which is a profound propulsor for the protests of local communities, as in the case of the 2016 protest in the Akhori province against the industrial operations on Tibet's sacred Gong Ngon Lari Soul Mountain - the Buddhist second sacred mountain. Ms. Langtso also restated how the pollution of this industry affects neighboring countries crossed by the Yellow River, Yangtse, Mekong, and Brahmaputra. Hence, the issue is not just an internal one, but also a regional phenomenon affecting other countries.



Q&A

Following the initial overviews, **Dr. Panda** guided the discussion to the second focal point: how the international community should cooperate in addressing the Tibetan mineral exploitation issue. More precisely, he invited the panelists to reflect and share possible ways to create an awareness body constituted by the countries in the Himalayan region, and whether international fora like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) or the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) are viable platforms for dialogue with China. The gave the panelists occasion to advance different strategies while answering the audience's questions, bringing further clarity on the issue.

According to **Dr. Mills**, the situation regarding climate change is facing scarce improvements due to the objective of protecting the interests and the consumption patterns of the middle class that has grown in China, America, and Europe over the last 50 to 60 years, as exemplified by electric vehicle production. Governments are more concerned with how to preserve their political approval amid climate change, and are not engaging in drastic measures, but rather in palliatives. This aim is achieved through the control of resources from the hinterland.

Tibet is the exemplification of this global phenomenon: with the exploitation of mineral resources and control of water for the green economy, there are hydrogeological effects observable at the

local and regional levels. Specifically: water resources at the source are impacted by alterations of the permafrost and the underground hydrology, which is reflected in the Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Bhutanese areas. Therefore, according to **Dr. Mills**, one of the failures of the overall global approach is not considering the amount of energy required to produce green technology and staying focused on just the type of devices used. And that is particularly evident in China, where this failure is paired with the major governance concerns in ensuring its longevity.

Dr. Mills' considerations, coupled with the necessity of the Tibetan diaspora to create a solid network for advocacy, allowed **Mr. Lafitte** to advance a reflection on how this behavior, paired with unaware consumers on the production of lithium batteries in Tibet, China's rebranding as green power and Trump resurgence, may push the global population to rely even more on China and its technology with the intent of resolving the issue, sacrificing Tibet in the belief of a superior good. However, he reminded us that China is the biggest consumer of fossil fuels, to which the production of lithium batteries plays a contribution. Due to its governance approach, it is determined to stay that way.

Mr. Lafitte concluded with an invitation of caution over welcoming China's grandiose statements on resource availability – such as the recent claims of the discovery of 25 tons of gold reserves and 1,000,000 tons of lithium, based on

geological expeditions that have not thoroughly explored the area.

While previous considerations have focused on the environmental implications of the Chinese activities on the Tibetan Plateau, and future expectations of global warming, **Dr. Pathak** talked about international cooperation and the institutions available to raise awareness. In many cases, Tibet has been generally overlooked or just mentioned in a broader context of issues. This is due mainly to the fact that Tibet is recognized as part of China, a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Hence, due to issues on the sovereignty principle, expecting an intervention by official international organizations is unrealistic. Regarding ICIMOD, which is one of the few international organizations that has been steadily vocal about environmental issues on the Tibetan Plateau, **Dr. Pathak** invited us to be aware of possible agendas behind it.

Answering a question from the audience on the benefits for the local population, she illustrated the oppression of the Tibetan population and that they did not benefit from Chinese mining activities. Instead, they must face environmental degradation, land expropriation, decreased pastureland, and displacement, as well as a lack of consultation on government projects. Ultimately, **Dr. Pathak** exposed a fundamental contradiction in Chinese rhetoric on the subject: nowadays China still cultivates a developmental narrative

on Tibet, despite the Go West development strategy which was developed 25 years ago

Always addressing the effectiveness of international cooperation, **Dr. Ferenczy** provided a European point of view, starting from the European Commission President's declaration at the Davos World Economic Forum on climate change and constructive cooperation with China. Overall, there is a consensus on the international commitment to tackling climate change. However, there is not a clear perspective on how to achieve the objectives. Therefore, **Dr. Ferenczy** regarded parliamentary diplomacy as essential for finding a viable solution, bringing up the example of the European Parliament, which has been an active voice in raising awareness of the Tibetan situation among member-states.

Nevertheless, she highlighted how the discussion in this institution has been mainly tackled from a human rights perspective, and there is a need to raise awareness of the environmental situation. This, in turn, impacts human rights – i.e. the lack of economic benefits from the population. Therefore, according to **Dr. Ferenczy**, the European Parliament should take the chance to be an active player in addressing the issue with China with a positive engagement due to the global impact of climate change.

Dr. Yangtso addressed a question from the audience regarding the availability of data from sources present in the field,

elucidating on the most frequent type of source and in which occasion they become available: indeed, protests are a way to organize civic society stakeholders and efficiently gather data. Therefore, the most frequent type of resource available to the international audience are documentation of protests, shared with external institutions through smuggling. However, attention from media outlets is still scarce.

Regarding the main question raised by **Dr. Panda**, on the possibility of international institutional coordination, **Dr. Yangtso** highlighted the major impediment to the creation of effective advocacy in international institutions: China is a pivotal stakeholder and a major funder of major institutions such as the UN. Furthermore, Tibet does not have official representation to raise awareness effectively and no international organization has provided any venue for colonized populations to advance claims yet. Therefore, the situation is unfavorable for the Tibetan communities to engage in coordinated action at the international level.

Regarding neighboring countries, **Dr. Yangtso** has experienced a lack of direction in tackling the environmental situation in Tibet at COP, where the actors in question have preferred focusing on the general situation of the Brahmaputra River, without mentioning Tibet. Nevertheless, she reminded the audience that members of international organizations have the duty of mutually checking their respective

levels of transparency and accountability. This represents an occasion for state actors to start collective action regarding the Tibetan situation. **Dr. Panda** restated the necessity of neighboring countries, engaging in a collective effort and in talking more openly about this issue.

He invited the speakers to engage in a brief round of additional remarks to provide a practical point of view on how the issue could be tackled by the neighboring Himalayan countries to hold China accountable.

According to **Dr. Yangtso**, the Himalayan community should start by tackling the issue by emphasizing the visible systemic effects and hydric damages caused by the construction of dams on the Tibetan Plateau by China. She highlighted the recent earthquake in Nepal as a perfect example of a starting point. Indeed, this has been a demonstration of the risks posed by the fragility of the ecosystem of the Himalayan belt.

Dr. Ferenczy broadened the focus on how the Himalayan community should reinforce the partnerships to help balance China and tackle it directly, resolving the tensions at a global level. Further, explaining the reasons behind this option, she clarified that it is because developed countries have been major players in jeopardizing the climate, and at the same time, local knowledge is essential to create solutions for the problems surrounding the area.

Dr. Pathak raised an important point

regarding the possible coordination of neighboring countries: Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan do not have the same aims and position towards China. This gave occasion to have a better understanding of the dynamics of the region, where Nepal and Pakistan are receiving substantial amounts of investments for national projects. Previously, their foreign policy had been deeply influenced by China, as demonstrated by the continuous deportation of Tibetan citizens by the Nepalese government. Meanwhile, Bhutan does not have any official relations with China.

Dr. Pathak identified India as the only viable actor that may succeed in the intent since it has raised concerns about the Yalong Sankoh hydropower development project. Therefore, the first necessary step is to build partnerships between regional communities or civil society and actors outside the region, due to the global impact of climate change.

Mr. Lafitte agreed with **Dr. Pathak** on the considerable hardships in creating coordinated action at the regional level, especially if the issue is tackled from a geopolitical perspective. However, at the civil society level, local communities in neighboring countries like India and Nepal have been successful in stopping possible harmful hydroelectric initiatives by their respective national government. Therefore **Mr. Lafitte** suggested an alternative approach to the ones brought by the previous contributors – based on regional

and international cooperation – focused on regional civil society organizations as fundamental actors for advancing policies to curb China’s initiatives.

Dr. Mills advanced a counter-argument to **Dr. Ferenczy’s** purely global approach to climate change, since past initiatives have been proved ineffective, as demonstrated by the IPCC, which has always been reluctant to address regional challenges. He advanced a strategy focused on the involved regional parties to find more pragmatic solutions. Furthermore, **Dr. Mills** brought to the participant’s attention that so far, we have not considered unforeseeable natural events, such as earthquakes, that will disrupt those projects, asserting that “Nature

does not come to conferences, it does not negotiate”. Indeed, the international community has regarded itself as the sole agent responsible for both causes and solutions to climate change and always disregards natural balancing factors throughout all the processes.


In his concluding remarks, **Dr. Panda**, thanked all the participants, accentuating the significance of such academic debates on overlooked topics like the Chinese mining industry in Tibet, not only as an instrument of advocacy and awareness, but also as a tool for exchanging ideas and gathering data, encouraging the participants to pursue their respective researches, that contribute to the dissemination of this issue.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Since 2006, China has restarted mining activities in Tibet with an extensive and rapacious approach that has shifted the focus of activities from gold and copper to critical raw materials, with an ulterior emphasis on lithium.
- Amid President Trump's protectionist stance on international trade, and the increasing critical state of global warming, it is likely that China will increase its lithium mining activities for the green industry, positioning itself as one of the major players. This branding strategy is emphasized through ulterior claims of massive reserves of gold and lithium, though these claims remain speculative.
- This also suggests that China and other international actors are not taking into consideration the actual energy costs required to produce electric devices powered on lithium batteries due to an approach aimed at preserving the consuming rate of the middle class for political approval.
- The Tibetan Plateau is one of the most abundant reserves of rare earth minerals, extracted through rock mining and purification of water basins' salts, such as Chabui and Tamsung. However, the extractive technology is still in its initial phases, especially when it comes to salt purification. Nevertheless, it is deemed to grow amid the increasing external demand, since these rare earth minerals are crucial for vehicle batteries, solar cells, and green technologies, with China being already one of the major providers.
- The Tibetan community does not enjoy any benefit from those activities, since the job market of this sector is dominated by Han Chinese people. In conjunction with the displacement, loss of grazing lands, and lack of consultation, this only reflects the economic marginalization already being undertaken by the CCP.
- At the regional level, we can assess visible damages to the hydrology and the ecology of the rivers originating from the Himalaya chain such as the Yellow River, Yangtze, Mekong, and Brahmaputra, as well as deposits of pollutants such as black carbon deposits. This results in damage to the ecology of downstream countries like India, Nepal, and Bangladesh.
- Regional collaboration among Himalayan countries –India, Bhutan, Nepal, and

Pakistan— is crucial for raising awareness of environmental degradation in Tibet. However, creating a cooperation forum for countries in the Himalayan region might not be as straightforward as it seems, due to the influence that China exerts on Pakistan and Nepal through investments, while Bhutan does not have any formal relations with China. India stands out as a potential leader in rallying the region.

- Experts have also pointed out the option of leveraging international actors, focusing on civil society organizations and their coordination at the regional level to raise awareness on this issue, or parliamentary diplomacy, as seen in the European Parliament.
- At the moment, international fora do not seem a viable tool for addressing the mining industry in Tibet, since China is a major stakeholder of important institutions like the UN. Furthermore, Tibet is not internationally recognized as an independent country, hence issues concerning China's sovereignty over Tibet prevent direct action.
- Local advocacy groups and protests are key to raising awareness. However, the lack of organized environmental groups in Tibet and its inaccessibility to international researchers limits access to reliable data. The only data available now are protest documentation received through smuggling.



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