

3-day seminar opens 'to preserve culture, serve society' of Tibet

By LI YAO in Beijing and DA QIONG in Lhasa

An international seminar on Tibetan studies started in Beijing on Thursday, attracting 246 academics from 21 countries and regions including Mongolia, India, Japan, France, Australia and the United States.

The 5th Beijing International Seminar on Tibetan Studies is aimed at "preserving culture and serving society". The topics of discussion focus on social development in Tibet.

Tibetan studies are expanding in China, with the government investing heavily in the protection of traditional heritage, printing of historic texts in the Tibetan language and the cultivation of young researchers, Lhagpa Phuntsok, director-general of the China Tibetology Research Center in Beijing, said at the opening ceremony.

Sitar, vice-president of the China Association for Preservation and Development of Tibetan Culture, said China has been steadily endeavoring to preserve the Tibetan language, cultural relics, folk arts such as the *Epic of King Gesar*, and the religious practice.

Tibet has more than 1,700 places of worship, and China has invested massively in the renovation of major monasteries, such as Labrang Monastery, a 303-year-old school of Tibetan Lamaism in Gansu province, Sitar said.

Eleven topics — including religion, sustainable development and people's livelihoods, culture, and Tibetan medicine — will be discussed at the seminar.

The three-day conference has been held in Beijing every four years since the 1990s.

Nancy Levine, from the Department of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles, shared findings on the experiences of nomads who settled in new towns, compared with those who rely on the traditional herding economy, from a recent pilot study in the Gannan Tibetan autonomous prefecture, Gansu province.

She warned that regional exceptionalism should be avoided because urban migration and nomadic resettlement are phenomena throughout the world. She called for other panelists to foster research networks, share information and not isolate their findings.

Losang Dradul, a researcher at the China Tibetology Research Center, said Tibetan people have benefited greatly from government subsidies and preferential policies in access to healthcare, education and job opportunities.

The annual per capita income in an average Tibetan household has seen double-digit growth in successive recent years. Last year, it grew by 17 percent to reach 5,000 yuan (\$785), Losang Dradul said.

Tibetan students have access to free education before university. Pre-school and first, second and third grades are community-based and help parents take care of their young children, and graduates of vocational schools often land good jobs, he said.

Rigzin and Degyi, a couple from Gepel village in Lhasa, said they are grateful for government subsidies. With the farming machinery the subsidies enabled them to buy, their second son, Tashi, and his wife can take care of the household's 1.3-hectare farmland.

Tashi and his brother, Puntshogs, missed proper education, because when they were school age, the family needed help with the work.

The two other sons, Pasang and Galsang, and the youngest daughter, Tsamgyi, all landed good jobs after university study.

Rigzin, the 62-year-old patriarch, said he is proud that his oldest grandson, Losangchoipel, went to Changzhou Tibet Middle School in Jiangsu province in 2009.

"Because tuition fees and room and board at schools are all covered by the government, we experience no economic stress from sending children to school", Rigzin said.

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Protecting the public 140 words at a time

Millions of fans following police micro blogs

By CAO YIN
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Public security authorities are most influential of all the government departments with micro blogs on Sina Weibo, China's Twitter-like website, according to an analysis.

Authorities nationwide began signing up for Sina accounts two years ago, and there are now 25,866 official micro blogs, 8,583 of them administered by police authorities.

According to a new report by Sina, four public security micro blogs are on the list of the 10 government micro blogs with the most followers.

"The work done by public security authorities is closely tied to people's everyday lives," said Shan Xuegang, an expert on social media who worked on the analysis report. Shan is a researcher at the website of People's Daily, the Communist Party of China's flagship newspaper.

"That's why their micro blogs can get great attention and attract many followers."

During the heavy rainstorm and subsequent floods on July 21, Beijing police published constant updates on its micro blog about dangerous roads and the rescue efforts.

Zhao Feng, a publicity official at the city's public security bureau who manages the account, said he received hundreds of thousands messages from residents asking the police



LIN SHANCHUAN / XINHUA

Chen Hang, an officer of the Mawei district border defense brigade in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian province, shows local primary students how to update a micro blog. Chen runs the official micro blog for his brigade.

for help, as well as with tips about the places hardest hit by the downpour.

"We posted 59 times on Sina Weibo that night, hoping to explain traffic and rescue situation to the public," he said, adding that the 110 police hotline received more than 8,000 calls that night, causing a jam on the line.

But it was the micro blog that was able to send important information out and was not affected by the rain, helping residents and the police, Zhao said.

"We gave rescue information to different departments in our bureau, aiming to integrate police resources and give residents the help needed," he said.

Five police officers currently work on the bureau's micro blog, which was launched in August 2010 and now has almost 3.5 million followers.

"We often invite followers to face-to-face talks with us, hoping they can give us suggestions and understand more about our work," Zhao added.

Public security departments in other cities have also created their own ways to improve communication with residents and their effectiveness.

Sun Haidong, an officer responsible for the micro blog of the Jinan public security bureau in Shandong province, said the bureau has established a team of officers specialized in various fields to address followers' varying problems. "Although we have only four part-time officers to update the micro blog, we are able to solve problems in a timely manner," he said, adding they have invited senior police officers and experts on fire control and laws to join the group.

"We don't focus on the amount of followers. Instead, we focus more on solving residents' problems effectively," he said.

Unlike the Beijing and Jinan police micro blogs, which are run by police publicity officials, the Guangzhou police micro

BLOGOSPHERE EXPLORED

While police micro blogs are booming, some government departments have also been diversifying their micro blogs to attract and serve residents.

The Ministry of Railways has been developing the interactive "Summer Holiday on Railways" via its micro blog. In cooperation with local museums and tourist attractions, it tells followers about out-

ings they can make on their travels.

Meanwhile, the high people's court in Henan province gives live text reports about the judges' work and what is going on in the court. The initiative is intended to give the public a glance at law practitioners' work and put the court under tighter scrutiny.

CAO YIN

GLANCE

TOP GOVERNMENT MICRO BLOGS ON SINA WEIBO

(Based on number of comments, followers and forwarded posts.)

1. Shanghai government information office
2. Beijing public security bureau
3. Chengdu government information office
4. Shanghai railway police
5. Henan provincial public security department

6. Ministry of Foreign Affairs
7. Guangzhou public security bureau
8. Nanjing government information office
9. Shandong provincial tourism bureau
10. Shanghai Metro

CAO YIN

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OFFICE BLAST TRAGEDY

PHOTO BY SUN RONGHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

Firefighters in Nanjiang county, Southwest China's Sichuan province, extinguish a fire in an office building caused by a blast on Thursday. One person was killed and 25 injured. An initial investigation indicates the blast was caused by a natural gas leak.