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A Mission For Tibet

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The Qinghai poverty reduction plan would move 57,000 desperately poor people from one of the most barren areas of China to a more fertile area to the west. Viewed in strictly economic terms, as the World Bank is doing, it makes perfect sense.

Daja Meston of Newton and a companion traveled to China earlier this month to encourage a broader examination of the project in the context of China's campaign to eradicate Tibet as an independent culture and replace it with dominance from Beijing. Meston was seriously injured after being detained by police in Qinghai Province last week. He should be released from China for medical treatment, and his case ought to prompt renewed examination of the Chinese threat to Tibetan culture. Qinghai, once called Amdo, was the northeasternmost province of independent Tibet until Mao Zedong's Red Army conquered it in 1949. Mao's troops completed their seizure of Tibet two years later, and Tibetans have suffered ever since.

Meston and his Australian companion, Gabriel Lafitte, were accused of taking photos of a prison camp in Qinghai's Dulan County, where the resettlement project would be located. These camps are part of a network set up in China's arid west and north to house those who did not fit into the society being constructed by Mao's Communists. They are visible proof of Beijing's continuing tyranny.

While the World Bank approved the Qinghai project in June, it promised to release none of the \$40 million until an inspection team examines the impact on the environment and ethnic minorities.

A spokesman for the bank said it is constrained by its charter, which states that its purpose is the reduction of poverty. But politics and poverty are often intertwined. Tibet has suffered horribly under the Chinese, and so have the

border lands, since Mao treated the national economy as if it were a mad scientist's experiment.

Meston has endured much. So, in all probability, have his Tibetan guides, and without the help of foreign diplomats, their fate may be far worse. They have raised a question that the World Bank should not duck: Is it sensible policy to subsidize a campaign that has resulted in the subjugation of the Tibetan people