

Tibet Faces Extinction.

an essay by Brandon Wilson © 2004-2011



Travel has a unique way of opening your eyes, or "shifting the paradigm." Or so we found especially in Tibet. During our brief time there, we were witnesses to the heavy cloak of Chinese-sponsored control and suspicion permeating all aspects of the Tibetan

daily life.

While *Yak Butter Blues* is a tale of our survival in a sometimes-hostile land, it's also a story of survival for the average Tibetan struggling to maintain their culture, dignity and even their very existence. That is the true meaning of those "yak butter blues."

I hope my book becomes a message in a bottle for those who showed us so much unexpected kindness, generosity and bravery in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

During our journey across Tibet in the early '90s, we witnessed the breadth of injustice for ourselves. But don't just take our word for it. The cruelty has been well documented.

Over the past five decades, since China's bloody occupation in 1950, Tibet has experienced turbulent changes, bringing it to the brink of extinction. The Communists have killed over 1.2 million Tibetans. Hundreds are political prisoners are tortured. Freedom of speech and the press is long gone.



Over 6,000 Tibetan temples have been destroyed; tens of thousands of monks or nuns were or sent to concentration camps. Remaining lamaseries limit monk recruits to those who "love the Communist Party." Tibetan public schools teach only in Chinese, however most villages have no schools, electricity or running water. Tibetan infant mortality is extremely high.

China's logging denudes Tibet's forests. Their mining rapes the land. Its hills now may house

nuclear weapons. Perhaps worst of all, China floods Tibet with the resettlement of Han Chinese, creating a disintegration of traditional Tibetan values, culture and way of life. Bars, prostitutes and soldiers now blanket the holy city of Lhasa.

With the recent completion of the railway lines extending from Beijing to the capitol, the Tibetan is a stranger in their own land. Over two million visitors have come the past year from China to Tibet. The "assimilation" and cultural genocide is nearly complete.

Meanwhile, China wages an active campaign to correct world opinion about Tibetan repression by calling it "progress" and promoting tourism in its new Lhasa "theme park."

The Western world has been all too silent. In granting China "most favored nation" trade status—worth billions of dollars—our stores have been flooded with their cheap exports. Meanwhile, our workers have lost their jobs. By selling China billions of dollars of treasury bonds, we have made the world's largest violator of human rights our friendly banker.

If we truly believe in fighting for democracy, how can we turn our backs on Tibet, as one of the world's oldest, most peaceful, and more spiritual societies is destroyed?



What can we do? Those who cherish freedom and self-determination must pressure their Congress or Parliament today to support a free Tibet. Support groups like The International Campaign for Tibet and Amnesty International, learn more about Tibet, boycott Chinese and prisoner-made goods, protest at the

upcoming Chinese Olympics, demand that the Panchen Lama (kidnapped by the Chinese at the age of six) be released, educate your children, and stand by Taiwan and other Asian nations in their quest to remain free and independent.

For today, we are all Tibetans. And no man is free—until all men are free.

For information on how you can become involved, visit www.pilgrimstales.com links section.

Brandon Wilson is a Lowell Thomas Award-winning author/photographer/explorer. He has walked ten long distance paths, including the Camino de Santiago (twice), the Via de la Plata, the Via Francigena to Rome, and the St. Olav's Way across Norway. In 1992, he and his wife Cheryl became the first Western couple to hike an ancient pilgrimage trail 650-miles across Tibet, as chronicled in his IPPY award-winning book, *Yak Butter Blues*. In 2006, he and a friend founded a pilgrim's path following the route of the First Crusades from France to Jerusalem, naming it the Templar Trail. Their adventure is told in Brandon's book, *Along the Templar Trail*, named 2009 Best Travel Book by the prestigious Society of American Travel Writers. His other books include: *Dead Men Don't Leave Tips: Adventures X Africa* and *Over the Top & Back Again: Hiking X the Alps*. They are available from Amazon.com or from your favorite bookstore. Visit <http://www.pilgrimstales.com> for a preview.