

Living Conditions and Career Development of Mountain Guides in Tibet

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Abstract. With the increasing popularity of mountaineering in China, Tibetan Mountain guides have become valuable to study as an indispensable group for the sport. This study studied the Living conditions and career development of mountain guides in Tibet by means of questionnaire survey, semi-structured interview and literature comparison. The results show the characteristic of mountain guides in Tibet and The Chinese government still needs to improve and enhance many policies for Tibet to ensure that Chinese Tibetan Mountain guides make outstanding contributions to the mountaineering industry in China and the world and have a positive development trend in the future. This study discusses the current situation and future trend of mountaineering in Tibet, analyzes the present and future role of mountain guides in Tibet, and direction for further studies are discussed.

Keywords: Tibet; Mountaineering; Mountain guide.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, with the development of society and the improvement of people's quality of life, more people begin to pay attention to some outdoor sports, such as high-altitude mountaineering activities [1]. One of the essential elements of this activity is a mountain guide to lead you up the mountain. Mountain guide originated in Europe, as early as the last century this profession has had a general development, however, in China in recent years with the increasing interest in high-altitude snow mountains and the establishment of Chinese mountaineering teams, more people choose mountain guide as a career to live and develop [2].

The main research object of this study is mountain guides in Tibet, China, because Tibet has the world-famous Himalayan Mountains and the world's highest peak, Qomolangma. As the origin of mountaineering in China, there has been a rapid and remarkable development in the field of mountain guides. Because mountaineering in China started relatively late, a complete system of mountain guides in Tibet has not yet been formed, and are more likely to imitate the work of Sherpas on the other side of the Himalayas [3]. Most of the local mountain guides in Tibet are from Tibet, China, and they provide excellent service to their customers through their good adaptation and experience of high altitude [4]. **This research will examine** the characteristics of Tibetan guides, including living habits, family background, and career development. At present, there is almost no research on Tibetan Mountain guides in domestic academic circles, especially on their family and social background and career development. This study can fill the research gap in this field.

As an important part of high-altitude mountaineering, the study has a certain value for the development of mountaineering in China and even in the world. Since there is few research on the background and career development of Tibetan Mountain guides, **this study** can help more people better understand this profession in the future. **It also aims to inform potential policy improvements by the government**, so as to better promote the development of this profession, and thus improve the quality of life and even GDP of local people in Tibet.

2. Method and Data

The data of this study mainly came from the questionnaire of 33 participants and the face-to-face semi-structured interview of three Tibetan Mountain guides. In the part of questionnaire survey, a total of 33 comprehensive and detailed questions **were designed** for 33 mountain guides to answer.

These questions include basic personal information (nationality, birthplace information, education, family status, climbing experience), some questions that are closely related to the profession of mountain guides, as well as their future development and vision. **These specific questions can be seen in the Appendix. This comprehensive survey approach facilitated the acquisition of intuitive statistical data and desired results.** In addition, **face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with** three Tibetan mountaineering guides with rich climbing experience. These three mountain guides have 16, 12 and 8 climbing experiences of Qomolangma respectively. As extremely representative figures in Tibet mountaineering industry in China, they can provide a lot of important and valuable content and information for **this** research. **The interviews with** these three Tibetan Mountain guides **were** very detailed. Through 22 detailed questions, **key information was obtained regarding** characteristics, background and future development of mountain guides, as well as the problems faced by mountain guides in Tibet in China today, the policy support they need, and even some suggestions and suggestions for the future development of this industry.

3. Results

3.1. Family and Personal Background of Mountain Guides in Tibet

The survey data show that most mountain guides come from the Tibet local, with a small percentage hailing from Sichuan. They are predominantly male, with a low representation of females; male mountain guides account for 100% of the total. The vast majority belong to Tibetan nationality, comprising 96% of the total, while the Han ethnicity represents only 4%. Their age ranges from 21 to 48, with the middle-age group concentrated between 26 and 35.

About their family background, 6.06% come from extremely impoverished families, 90.91% come from ordinary households, some belonging to moderately prosperous families (see Table 1).

Table 1. Survey Respondents' Family Economic Status at Birth.

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Below Average	2	6.06%
Average	30	90.91%
Well-off	1	3.03%
Wealthy	0	0.00%
Total	33	100.00%

Note: Based on 33 valid responses.

In terms of educational attainment, 3% have completed primary school, 21% have finished junior high school, 51% have graduated from high school or vocational school, 21% have a college degree, and 3% hold a graduate degree (see in Figure 1).

Figure 2 illustrates the language proficiency among the 33 survey respondents. The data indicates that Tibetan is the most widely spoken language (93.9%), closely followed by Chinese (87.9%). Additionally, a significant portion of the group, 45.5%, reported being able to use English.

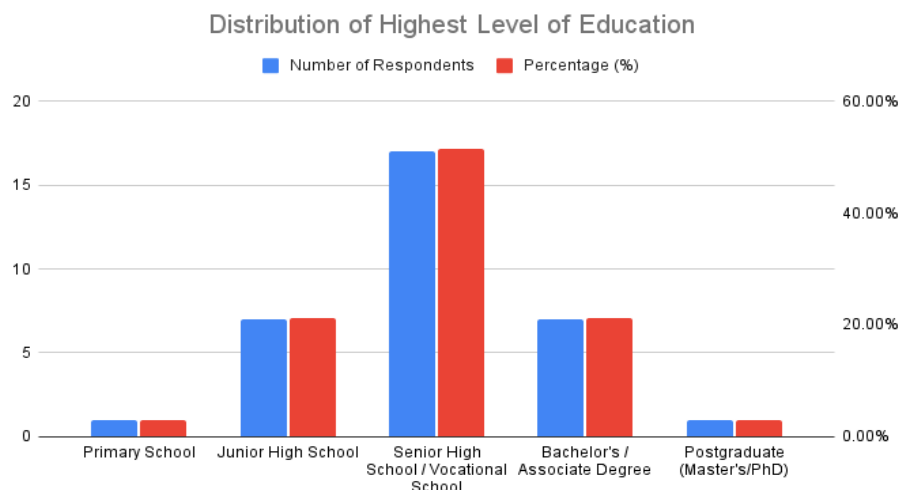


Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents' Highest Level of Education.

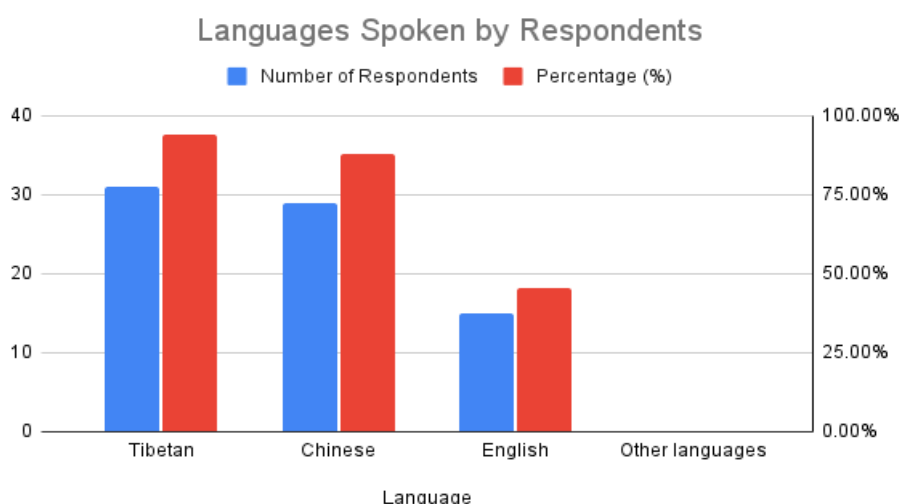


Figure 2. Languages Spoken by Respondents.

3.2. Professional Research on Mountain Guides in Tibet

Among these Tibetan Mountain guides, from the youngest 16 years old to the oldest 47 years old, all began to climb mountains. Besides, most mountain guides (97%) were trained at the Tibet Mountaineering School. Tibet Mountaineering School is a school dedicated to training mountain guides and national mountaineers, funded by the local government and caring people.

As shown in Table 2, the choice to register was mostly based on personal interest, with a leading 81.8% of people mentioning a "love for outdoor games and mountain climbing." Social pressure came next, with 24.2% of learners saying "told by friends." However, "arranged by parents/elders" was much less of a cause and was only said by 9.1% of the students.

Table 2. Reasons for Enrolling in the Mountaineering School.

Reason for Enrollment	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Passion for outdoor sports and mountaineering	27	81.82%
Recommended by friends	8	24.24%
Arranged by parents/elders	3	9.09%
(Blank) / No answer	2	6.06%
No other school options	0	0.00%
Other reasons	0	0.00%

**Note: This was a multiple-choice question; respondents could select more than one reason. Percentages are based on the total of 33 respondents. Blank responses are included for data completeness.*

Data show that intrinsic factors are the main motivators to choose a job as a high-altitude mountain guide, see in Table 3. A large majority of over 81.8% are driven by a love for mountaineering, also with 63.6% who want a change in lifestyle and environment. Other external factors like the chance to socialize more (39.4%) and to earn a good income (9.1%) seem to be the second most powerful motivations and less strong.

Table 3. Motivations for Becoming a High-Altitude Mountain Guide.

Motivation	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Passion for mountaineering	27	81.82%
Desire for a change in lifestyle and environment	21	63.64%
Opportunity to meet more people	13	39.39%
Good income to improve quality of life	3	9.09%
Forced by life circumstances	0	0.00%
Other reasons	0	0.00%

**Note: This was a multiple-choice question; respondents could select more than one motivation. Percentages are based on the total of 33 respondents.*

Respondents show vast experience at high altitudes. Table 4 shows that most (54.5%) have climbed over 10 unique peaks that are over 6000 meters, so there is great breadth to their climbing careers. This is supported by great depth, with a rather even spread among different frequencies of climbs; significantly, almost 43% of the respondents have done over 20 high-altitude climbs in total.

Table 4. Respondents' Overall 6000m+ Climbing Experience.

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Number of 6000m+ Peaks Climbed		
1-3 peaks	3	9.1%
3-5 peaks	5	15.2%
6-10 peaks	7	21.2%
10+ peaks	18	54.5%
Total Frequency of 6000m+ Climbs		
1-10 times	10	30.3%
11-20 times	9	27.3%
20-30 times	8	24.2%
30+ times	6	18.2%

**Note: All percentages are based on the total of 33 respondents.*

Table 5. Respondents' Mount Everest Summitting Experience.

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Have you summited Mt. Everest?		
Yes, have summited	28	84.8%
Not yet	5	15.2%
Frequency of Summits (if yes)		
1-3 times	9	30.0%
4-6 times	5	16.7%
7-9 times	6	20.0%
10-12 times	4	13.3%
13+ times	6	20.0%

**Note: Q17 percentages are based on 33 total respondents. Q18 percentages are based on the 30 respondents who answered this specific question.*

Table 5 represents that large majority of the group (84.8%) has made it to the top of Mount Everest. Among these best climbers, the number of summits varies, as described by those who answered. While 30.0% have reached the top 1-3 times, an amazing 20.0% have done these 13 or more times, showing the very high level of skill in the surveyed group.

All of the mountain guides surveyed had more than 10 years of experience climbing high-altitude snow mountains. According to these mountain guides, the main reason they become mountain guides is because of passion for mountaineering, lifestyle and environmental change, and interact with a broader range of individuals.

3.3. The Impact of the Mountain Guiding Profession on Personal Lives, Regional Economy, and the Advancement of Mountaineering in China and the World

The occupation of a guide at high altitudes is seen as having a very positive effect in personal, economic, and community terms-most notably the economic effects. While all but a few noted that the occupation had changed their personal/family economy, most-75.8 percent-classified it as a "some change." This positive financial ripple expands to the greater community, with 97 percent of the composite believe their job is at least "some help" to local economies, and 57.6 percent view it as "very helpful." At the same time, the effect on personal lifestyle is also felt entirely, with 100 percent noting there has been "some" or "significant" change in their lives due to the occupation. These details can be seen in the Table 6.

Table 6. Perceived Impact of the Mountain Guiding Profession.

Impact Dimension & Response Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
1. Personal Lifestyle Impact		
Significant change	13	39.39%
Some change	20	60.61%
Not much change	0	0.00%
2. Personal & Family Economic Impact		
Significant change	8	24.24%
Some change	25	75.76%
Not much change	0	0.00%
3. Community Economic Impact		
Very helpful	19	57.58%
Some help	13	39.39%
Not much help	1	3.03%

**Note: All percentages are based on the total of 33 respondents.*

The data in Table 7 shows very high job satisfaction and retention. A full 100% of respondents say they love what they do. This ebullience converts straight into retention, with an overwhelming 97% planning to carry on in the avocation. This is significantly long-term commitment, with more than one-half (54.5%) planning to stay in the role "forever," and over 75% in total planning to work for more than 10 additional years.

Table 7. Job Satisfaction and Future Career Plans.

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Job Satisfaction		
Love it very much	25	75.8%
Love it	8	24.2%
Intent to Continue		
Yes	32	97.0%
Not sure yet	1	3.0%
Planned Career Longevity		
"Forever"	18	54.5%
10+ years	7	21.2%
6-10 years	3	9.1%
1-5 years	3	9.1%
Not sure yet	2	6.1%

**Note: Q26 asks about future plans for those who intend to continue. The data shows all 33 respondents answered. We present the data as collected.*

An interesting difference comes when those answering think about recommending the job. The results can be seen in Table 8. There is so much excitement for suggesting the career to friends and family (69.7%). But this changes to careful and unsure when thinking about their own kids. A lot are not sure about it (48.5%), and much more would strongly say no to it (36.4%) than would say yes to it (15.2%). This shows that while the guides are very happy about their profession, they know quite well about its risks or difficulties, which they do not want for their own children.

Table 8. Recommendation of the Guiding Profession.

Category	To Friends/Relatives (Q28)	To Own Children (Q27)
Will Recommend	23 (69.7%)	5 (15.2%)
Will Not Recommend	1 (3.0%)	12 (36.4%)
Undecided	9 (27.3%)	16 (48.5%)

Respondents show great optimism about the future of their profession. As shown in Figure 3, almost all believe in their relevance to China's mountaineering scene (97% very high). This confidence is still very strong at the global level (88% “Definitely will”). Compared to the world-famous Sherpas, 91% in aggregate believe they will “definitely” or “very likely” exceed them—this shows high confidence and ambition.

Future Outlook and Confidence

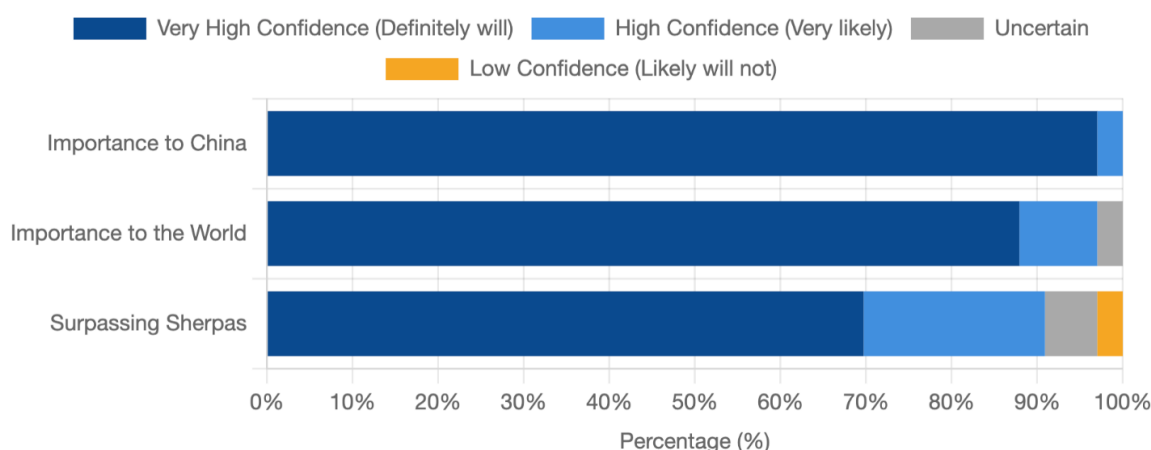


Figure 3. Confidence Index for the Future of Tibetan Guiding.

A clear problem-solution narrative comes to the fore in mapping the way forward. Table 9 shows the factors most cited in development are “Skills education & training” (48.5%) and “Government policy” (45.5%). In like manner, the solutions most endorsed are “Increased government support” (60.6%) and “Scientific training & education” (57.6%). This strong alignment indicates a clear consensus: if Tibetan guides are to go forward in the future and make greater impact in the industry, strategic government backing with establishment of robust, scientific training systems is required to take it to the next level of professionalism.

Table 9. Factors and Solutions for Development.

Factors Influencing Development	(%)	Solutions for Cultivation	(%)
Skills education & training	48.5%	Increased government support	60.6%
Government policy	45.5%	Scientific training & education	57.6%
Income level	39.4%	Popularization of mountaineering	54.5%
Public awareness & promotion	36.4%	Change in mountaineering concepts	54.5%
Market size & value	27.3%	Support from social institutions	48.5%
Other	15.2%	Increase in guide income	45.5%

3.4. Factors influencing the professional development of mountain guides and how to cultivate better mountain guides.

The questionnaire data indicate that 28 mountain guides listed a number of factors that will affect the career development of mountain guides, such as: government industrial development policies, mountaineering skills education and training, the income level of mountain guides, mountaineering awareness and promotion, and the scale and value of the mountaineering market. Among them, the proportion of mountaineering skills education and training is the largest, because the biggest problem facing Chinese mountaineering guides is the shortage of human resources, which is mainly due to the extremely high requirements for physical and technical details to become a guide, only a few people can learn skills through teaching and meet the requirements, and finally become a qualified mountaineering guide [5].

Ranking of cultivating the mountain methods: government support and assistance, popularization of mountaineering, scientific training and education, support from social institutions and funding, changes in the perception of mountaineering, and improved income for mountain guides. At present, only Tibet mountaineering school provides training for local Tibetans and Chinese mountaineering athletes [6]. This school also has very strict requirements on physical talent and hard work. Although the quality of guides from this school is high, the number of guides is not high. Therefore, the Chinese government's development policy on mountaineering is particularly important, and reasonable and high-quality policies—**which would include robust emergency response systems** [7]—become an important factor for the future development of this industry. According to the survey **results**, government support and policies, professional education and training, and reasonable income levels play a crucial role in the development of mountain guiding careers and the growth of future industries.

4. Limitations and Next Step

Due to time constraints, the research could not be carried out in more depth and the number of respondents was only 28 and the number of face-to-face interviews was only 3, which failed to conduct a complete and more comprehensive interview and investigation. Also, there was no comparative study of mountain guides outside Tibet, including in Nepal. And no interview research on foreign mountaineers who have been mountain guides in Tibet, and there is a lack of research from the perspective of international industry. Finally, due to the particularity of this research, **the available literature for reference was limited. Future research will involve field investigations in the** high-altitude snow-capped mountain areas of Tibet for field investigation and interview with more diversified and abundant guides. In addition, there will be a comparative study of Sherpas in Nepal and mountain guides in other parts of China and study more relevant overseas literature about the topic. Only when theoretical saturation is reached, can more comprehensive, complete and clear investigation results be obtained.

5. Conclusion

After a series of analysis of questionnaire survey results, interpretation of interview materials and overall research, **the initial research questions can be addressed. This study has successfully gathered information on** the current situation of mountaineering in China, the professional characteristics, background and future development of mountain guides in Tibet, China. Discussions and interviews with individual guides revealed their **perspectives** on the future development trend of this profession in Tibet and their suggestions for the future development of this industry. It also concludes what decisions the Chinese government should make in the future to help China's mountaineering cause make better development and progress.

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Appendix:

1. Questionnaire

Part 1: Personal Background

1. What is your gender?
2. What is your ethnicity?
3. What is your age?
4. Where is your birthplace?
(Rural / Pastoral / Urban)
5. What was the altitude of your birthplace?
6. What was your family's economic status at birth?
(Below average / Average / Well-off / Wealthy)
7. What is your highest level of education?
(Primary School / Junior High / High School/Vocational School / Bachelor's/College / Graduate)
8. Which languages can you use?
(Tibetan / Mandarin Chinese / English / Other)
9. What is your level of English proficiency?
(Poor / Average / Good / Fluent)

Part 2: Career and Experience

10. At what age did you first get involved in mountaineering?
11. Have you ever studied at the Tibet Mountaineering School?
(Yes / No)
12. At what age did you enter the Tibet Mountaineering School?
13. Why did you decide to study at the mountaineering school?
(Family arrangement / Friends' recommendation / Passion for outdoors and mountaineering / No other school options / Other)
14. How many years have you been working as a mountain guide?
15. Why did you choose to become a mountain guide?
(Love for mountaineering / To change living environment / To meet more people / Good income / No other choice / Other)
16. How many snow mountains above 6,000 meters have you climbed?
17. How many times have you climbed snow mountains above 6,000 meters?

18. Have you reached the summit of Mount Everest?
(Yes / Not yet)
19. If yes, how many times have you summited Mount Everest?
20. As a guide, have you served foreign climbers?
(Yes / No)
21. As a guide, have you served climbers under the age of 18?
(Yes / No)

Part 3: Perspectives and Future Development

22. Has being a mountain guide changed your personal life and lifestyle?
(No significant change / Some change / Major change)
23. Has being a mountain guide changed the economic situation for you and your family?
(No significant change / Some change / Major change)
24. Has your work as a guide contributed to the economic development of the area where you live and work?
(Not much help / Some help / Very helpful)
25. Do you love your job as a mountain guide?
(Very much / Love it / Average / Not really)
26. Do you plan to continue working as a mountain guide in the future?
(Yes / No / Uncertain)
27. If you continue, for how many more years do you plan to work?
(1-5 years / 6-10 years / Over 10 years / Forever / Uncertain)
28. Would you let your children pursue a career as a mountain guide in the future?
(Yes / No / Haven't decided)
29. Would you recommend this profession to your relatives and friends?
(Yes / No / Haven't decided)
30. Do you believe Tibetan mountain guides will make a significant contribution to the mountaineering industry in China?
(Definitely / Very likely / Uncertain / Unlikely / Impossible)
31. Do you believe Tibetan mountain guides will make a significant contribution to the global mountaineering industry?
(Definitely / Very likely / Uncertain / Unlikely / Impossible)
32. Do you think Tibetan mountain guides will surpass the Sherpas of Nepal in the future global mountaineering industry?
(Definitely / Very likely / Uncertain / Unlikely / Impossible)
33. Which of the following factors do you think will affect the career development of Tibetan mountain guides?
(Government policies / Skills education and training / Market size / Income level / Public awareness and promotion / Other)
34. In your opinion, what is the best way to cultivate better Tibetan mountain guides?
(More government support / Support from social institutions and funds / Popularization of mountaineering / Scientific training and education / Change in public perception / Higher income / Other suggestions)

2. Interview Outline

Part 1: Personal Background

1. May I have your name? His age? Place of birth?
2. What is your family background (rural or urban)? What was your family's economic status at birth (poor, ordinary, well-off, rich)?
3. Are you married now? Do you have children? How many?

Part 2: Career Development

4. Have you ever climbed Mount Everest? How many times? About when?

5. How old and when did you first start your career as a mountain guide?

A: Give the age and time.

6. What did you think at that time that you wanted to take this sport as your career?

A: Some reasons (I like mountaineering, family arrangements, friends, good income or other reasons)

7. What do you think of your career? Are you happy at work? Do you enjoy the work?

A: I really enjoy it. I love it

8. Around you, including your friends or colleagues According to your knowledge, how many people are engaged in mountaineering today?

9. What difficulties have you encountered in the process of doing this work?

A: Tell some stories about difficulties

10. Do you plan to make a living from this career in the long term? Or just work for a while? About how long?

A: Give a reply, maybe change careers or something, to help young people to provide jobs

11. Do you think this career, has changed your life? If you weren't in this profession, what would you be doing right now?

12. You engaged in this occupation, is it helpful to the improvement of your family's economic life? Will you introduce your friends and relatives to the industry?

13. Can you briefly talk about the current prospects or future development of this industry?

Part 3: Comparative Research, Future Development Research

14. Do you think China needs its own mountain guides? Especially mountain guides in Tibet? Why?

15. Can you compare the advantages and disadvantages of a Tibetan Mountain guide and a Nepalese Sherpa?

16. Can the emergence of Tibetan Mountain guides help the development of high-altitude mountaineering in China?

17. Will the cultivation of mountain guides in Tibet promote the economic development of the local area and the guide's hometown?

18. Do you think that more and more people today are getting involved in mountaineering, which is helpful to your career development and the development of Tibet's mountaineering industry and Tibet's economy?

19. Have you heard of the Tibet Mountaineering School? Have you ever attended the Tibet Mountaineering School? How long? If yes, did Tibet Mountaineering School help you develop your career?

20. In your opinion, what is the significance of Tibet Mountaineering School for cultivating mountaineering talents in Tibet and China?

21. What difficulties and problems do you think mountain guides and their profession still face? How to change this status quo in order to better development?

22. Will you let your children or grandchildren become mountain guides in the future? Why