

China lithium boom harming fragile Tibetan plateau: report

November 1 2023



About 3.6 million tons of China's lithium lies in hard rock deposits in Tibet, according to new research.

China's booming electric vehicle industry is fueling a lithium rush in the Tibetan plateau that risks damaging the troubled region's fragile ecology

and deepening rights violations, research published Wednesday said.

China is the world's biggest EV market but largely relies on other countries to supply the lithium used in the batteries that power low-carbon vehicles.

That is set to change as Beijing begins to exploit vast deposits on the Tibetan plateau—around 85 percent of the country's total lithium reserves.

But this "white gold rush" has led to Chinese miners polluting the [local environment](#) with "quick, cheap and dirty" extraction and processing techniques, according to the report by Turquoise Roof, a network of Tibetan researchers.

The group used [satellite data](#) and [public resources](#) to chart the impact of lithium mining in culturally Tibetan areas and its links to carmakers, including Elon Musk's Tesla and its Chinese competitor BYD.

Those firms, it said, are "increasingly reliant on Tibet's lithium exploitation".

"Bigger, faster [electric cars](#) require larger capacity lithium batteries—which cannot be done without a hidden footprint in Tibet," it said.

Citing Chinese geological research, Turquoise Roof said about 3.6 million tons of China's lithium lies in hard rock deposits in Tibet and the adjacent provinces of Sichuan and Qinghai.

Miners exploiting those resources risk creating "devastating" pollution in biodiverse regions particularly vulnerable to [climate change](#), the report says.

It pointed to a mine in Sichuan whose activities reportedly killed thousands of fish in a local river and harmed grasslands home to Tibetan herders.

"Tibetans have no voice in this latest rush to riches... there can be no informed local consideration of whether there should be extraction," it says.

In one example, the report cites a patch of land in a Tibetan autonomous county in Sichuan province found to have rich lithium deposits that sparked a bidding war between firms, eventually won by Chinese battery giant CATL.

But local Tibetans, it said, "were not informed that their hill pastures were being sold, let alone consulted in any way about the land being drilled beneath their feet."

Tibet has alternated over the centuries between independence and control by China, which says it has brought infrastructure and education since taking over the region in 1951.

But many exiled Tibetans accuse China's ruling Communist Party of repression, torture and eroding their culture, with rights groups and some Western governments backing their claims.

About a million Tibetan children have been separated from their families and put through "forced assimilation" at Chinese residential schools, UN experts have said.

Wednesday's report comes as China seeks to shore up domestic supplies of critical minerals in the face of fraying ties with Western exporters.

Beijing imposed curbs on the graphite used to make EV batteries after

the United States restricted outflows of high-tech microchips to China.

The European Union has also angered China by launching a probe into Beijing's subsidies for its homegrown EVs.

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Citation: China lithium boom harming fragile Tibetan plateau: report (2023, November 1)
retrieved 27 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2023-11-china-lithium-boom-fragile-tibetan.html>

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