

Woollen Mill on Tibetan Plateau

by Tsang Jen

LOCATED 420 kilometres southeast of Lhasa at the foot of the Himalaya Mountains, the Linchih Woollen Mill was the first woollen mill built on the Tibetan Plateau. It was built during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution.

Tibet did not have a single factory, still less any wool industry, before liberation. Always regarding the Tibetan Plateau as a forbidden zone for that industry, plunderers from abroad and the old Chinese rulers greedily looted the cheap wool there and shipped it to the remote hinterland or to foreign countries for processing. The million serfs who produced the wool wore rags.

The democratic reform and the development of production after Tibet's liberation provided the conditions for developing the industry.

Construction of the Linchih Woollen Mill began in June 1966 at the time the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was launched. More than 300 workers from a Shanghai vinylon mill who came to help build the mill arrived at a deserted beach of the Nyang River at the foot of the Himalaya Mountains. Joining with the Tibetan workers on the "roof of the world," they were determined to put an end to the situation where Tibet abounding in wool had no woollen mill.

The climate on the plateau 3,000 metres above sea level is dry and the temperature is so variable that the days are sweltering and the nights are freezing. Mill machinery is subject to abrasion and yarn breaks easily. This was a big problem in setting up the mill.

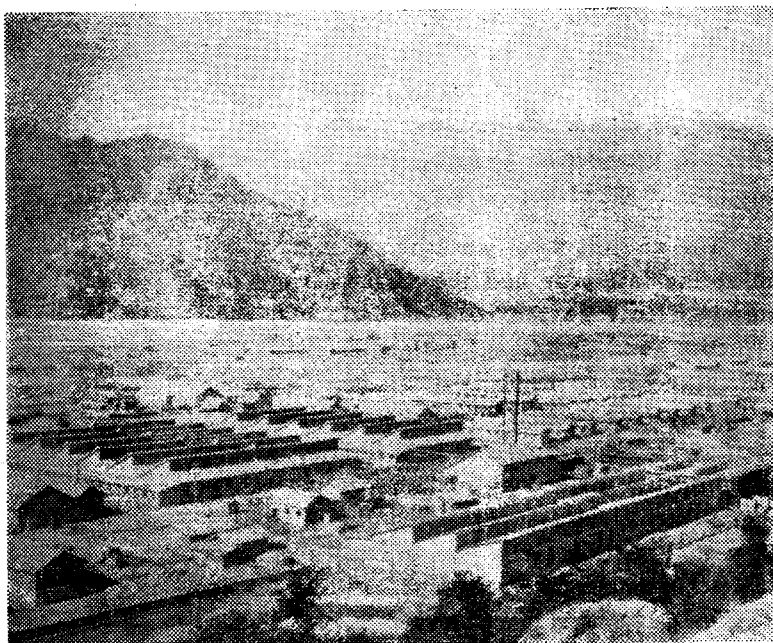
The storm of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution swept across the Tibetan Plateau. Studying Chairman Mao's works, the first generation of Tibetan woollen workers relentlessly criticized the renegade, hidden traitor and scab Liu Shao-chi's counter-revolutionary revisionist line. This helped them understand the far-reaching influence the development of the wool industry would have on the Tibetan people's production and livelihood. They poured out grievances against the three big feudal estate-holders—the local government, aristocrats and monasteries—in the old society under whose reactionary rule there was no

wool industry. The Han workers criticized Liu Shao-chi's fallacies of "relying on specialists to run factories" and "the doctrine of trailing behind at a snail's pace."

Revolutionary mass criticism strengthened the confidence of the Tibetan and Han workers in victory. They conscientiously studied how to improve their operational methods. They lowered the daytime temperature in the mill they built, maintained a steady temperature at night, increased the moisture and reduced the number of broken ends by simple methods. Veteran worker Ku Chin-mei taught the Tibetan workers the technique of joining broken ends and the latter in turn helped her adapt herself to the local conditions. In this way, they quickly created conditions for work on the plateau.

Repairing and making machine parts later became an outstanding problem of the mill. At first, some parts had to be made in Lhasa or even Chengtu in Szechuan, 1,700 kilometres away. This seriously affected production. The workers were determined to do the work themselves.

Making or repairing machine parts calls for a foundry, which is no easy job on the Tibetan Plateau.



Linchih Woollen Mill

Though the workers had twice experimented on casting, they did not succeed. Seeing that machines had long been idle for want of one or two parts, Hsin Teh-hsiang who came from a worker's family was very concerned. He volunteered to solve the problem. He had covered a distance of over 1,000 kilometres on the plateau in order to learn the technique and find needed materials. He joined the workers in finding ways while experimenting and finally succeeded in turning out the needed castings.

Initially the Linchih Woollen Mill could produce only woollen fabrics. The Tibetan people, however, need coarse blankets. The machines in the spinning workshop are for fine wool. Thus renovating the machines was required. Feng Yung-sheng, called a "locally trained engineer" by the workers, made up his mind to solve this technical problem. Remaining at the machines, he forgot his meals, lost sleep and paid no heed to the heat and cold. Working hard alongside the workers for two weeks, he and the workers finally succeeded in renovating complete sets of machinery — carding machines, roving frames and cone winders, and turning out the coarse blankets.

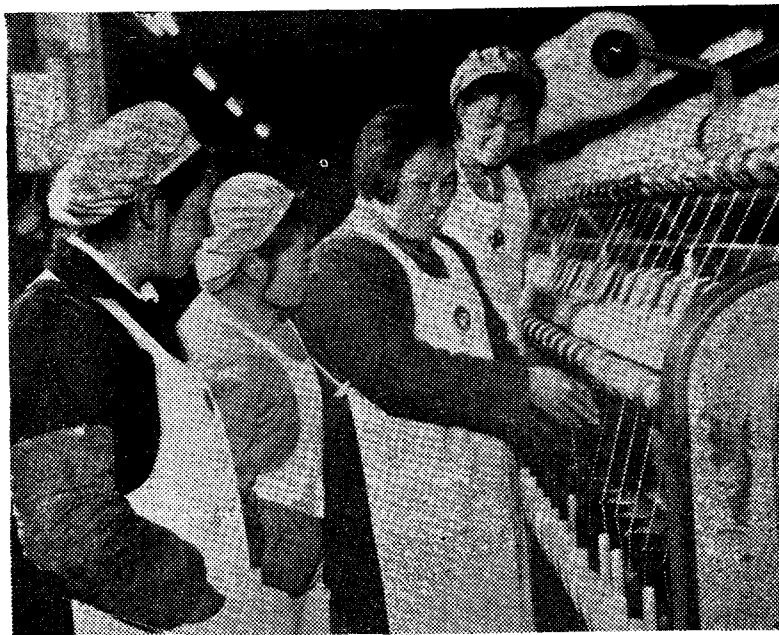
As production developed, the growing amount of discarded wool was piled up in a corner. Exposed to the elements, a great deal of it rotted. Seeing this, veteran worker Peng Ta-yao gave the matter much thought. He made a proposal: Produce a felt-making machine to turn "waste wool" into felt. This proposal immediately won the support of the mill's leadership and the broad masses of workers. They called together experienced workers from every workshop to form a designing and manufacturing group. They first drew a sketch of the machine on the ground and then planned to manufacture it. After 14 days, Tibet's first felt-making machine was finally produced. A test run proved that it operated very well. Once in operation, it will produce 10,000 pieces of felt every year.

The knitting wool workshop was expanded in spring last year and the workers were determined to take the road of designing, constructing and installing with greater, faster, better and more economical results. Together with the construction departments, they have formed a designing and building group, adopting the method of simultaneously designing, constructing and making the necessary materials. At the same time, the mill's workers and staff members were mobilized to fill in earth and lay stones for the workshop and burn lime in their spare time. They set about install-

ing machinery before the workshop was completed. Unfamiliar with the technique, the workers tried to fix the screws on the machines one by one, learning while doing. The workshop which has an annual output of 150,000 *jin* of knitting wool was finished in six months — from construction to operation.

The growth of the Linchih Woollen Mill has opened up bright prospects for developing Tibet's wool industry. From a small mill with several hundred workers and producing only woollen fabrics, it has developed into a factory with more than 1,000 workers and produces 50 designs and varieties, including woollen fabrics, knitting wool, blankets and felt. This is an outstanding result of Mao Tsetung Thought on the Tibetan Plateau. Following Chairman Mao's revolutionary line, the workers continue their efforts to produce fine woollen cloth, fine wool, chemical fibres and other products. In the not too distant future, the Tibetan people will completely solve the problem of making clothing and blankets by themselves.

The first generation of Tibetan woollen workers are maturing. Many of these former slaves have become activists in the living study and application of Chairman Mao's works. Some are leading members in workshops or are production group leaders while some have been elected to the mill's revolutionary committee and hold important leading posts. Tibetan workers have taken part in the technical innovation groups of all the workshops and made many proposals and innovations.



Tibetan and Han workers study how to improve spinning technique.