

《Cable across gorge gives village a new lifeline》

CHENGDU - Resting in a level spot between precipitous cliffs, and hundreds of meters above the roaring Dadu River in Sichuan province, Gulu village has existed in isolation and poverty for hundreds of years.

Tram cables at Gulu village, Sichuan province, will soon begin carrying cars that can hold 40 passengers. XUE YUBIN/XINHUA

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Chang Zhaolin is among some 400 Yi ethnic residents of the community, known as the "village on the ladder to the sky". The name "Gulu" is said to come from the sound of a rock falling from a mountain.

In the past, before the government cut a zig-zag path through the cliffs to the village, residents used a ladder to leave the village.

"When I was little, we used to climb down the cliff with a ladder made of sticks and cane," recalled Chang, 50. "The wind was usually quite strong and often made the ladder dangle. When we looked down, our legs would be shaking."

The path, less than a meter wide, was carved out in 2003 to the cliff's base before snaking up the other side of the canyon. It takes more than six hours to make a round trip to or from the village.

"On a market day, we set off before dawn and always get back to the village at night," Chang said.

Soon the treacherous journey will be a thing of the past. A cable crossing the gorge has been installed, and tram operations will begin soon.

The cable is about 650 meters long and 700 meters above the river. Cable cars can hold up to 40 people each. A trip that once took three hours will now take only three minutes.

"We are currently looking for a company to operate the tram," said village official Luo Yunlian. "We will not only facilitate transportation for fellow villagers but also try to attract tourists to boost the local economy through the tram."

Legend has it that more than 400 years ago the forefathers of Gulu villagers had a fight with two other big families in Tianba town, and only six of the ancestors survived. Two of them climbed over the mountains and crossed Dadu River before reaching the cliff. They settled into the dangerous landscape, realizing that the spot was easy to guard

and hard to conquer. They could overlook their hometown from the top of the mountain.

For now, elementary school students in the village have to walk three hours down the narrow mountain path to go to school. Chang Zhaolin said that anyone walking the road must exercise great care, especially when carrying heavy baskets of goods on their backs.

"Everybody gets nervous when they go on the narrow path," he said.

In 2013, authorities began discussing how to tackle the village's transport problem.

Experts suggested that a cross-canyon cable would be a better choice than a road to connect the village to the outside world, but the idea met strong opposition.

"People were suspicious because no one had tried a cable car before," Chang said.

The villagers finally accepted the plan, and with government funding of 24 million yuan (\$3.5 million), construction began in August 2015.

The tram uses two parallel cables, which keep two cable cars stable even in strong winds. A separate cable has been installed near the main one for use by safety personnel in case of emergencies.

The tram underwent testing late last year. During the test runs, curious villagers came to the site every day.

"I didn't expect the journey out of the village to be so easy," villager Li Shucui said. "It will be fun to travel in the air."

Authorities plan to develop tourism to boost the local economy and eliminate poverty. A tourism service center has been set up near the tram station, and the local government has helped renovate traditional houses and build village roads and public restrooms to create what they call a "land of idyllic beauty".