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CHINA'S "BILINGUAL EDUCATION" POLICY IN TIBET

Tibetan-Medium Schooling Under Threat



China's “Bilingual Education” Policy in Tibet

Tibetan-Medium Schooling Under Threat

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Map



Summary

So this is bilingual education: In theory, it means you can do both [languages]. It sounds beautiful. But in practice, the working language [in schools and offices] even at the township [rural] level is becoming Chinese.

—Tibetan university professor interviewed by Human Rights Watch, 2018

China's education policy in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is significantly reducing the access of ethnic Tibetans to education in their mother tongue. The government policy, though called "bilingual education," is in practice leading to the gradual replacement of Tibetan by Chinese as the medium of instruction in primary schools throughout the region, except for classes studying Tibetan as a language. Since the 1960s, Chinese has been the language of instruction in nearly all middle and high schools in the TAR, where just under half of Tibetans in China live, but new educational practices introduced by the government in the TAR are now leading more primary schools and even kindergartens to use Chinese as the teaching language for Tibetan students.

The trend towards increased use of Chinese in primary schools in Tibetan urban areas has been noted for several years, but as detailed below, there are indications that it is now becoming the norm there and is spreading to rural areas as well. In interviews that Human Rights Watch conducted in September 2019, parents with children at rural primary schools in six different townships in northern TAR said that a Chinese-medium teaching system had been introduced in their local primary schools the previous March. There have been no public announcements of a government policy in the TAR requiring rural primary schools to teach their classes in Chinese, but an official working on educational issues in the TAR told Human Rights Watch that he expects the government to introduce a policy requiring all primary schools in the TAR to shift to Chinese-medium education.

China formally introduced a policy of "bilingual education" in 2010 for schools in all minority areas in China, an approach to minority education considered appropriate internationally when it promotes competency in both the local and the national language. The official position of the TAR authorities is that both Tibetan and Chinese languages should be "promoted," leaving individual schools to decide which language to prioritize as the teaching medium. However, Human Rights Watch's research suggests that TAR

authorities are using a strategy of cultivated ambiguity in their public statements while using indirect pressure to push primary schools, where an increasing number of ethnic Chinese teachers are teaching, to adopt Chinese-medium instruction at the expense of Tibetan, such as allocating increasing numbers of ethnic Chinese teachers who do not speak Tibetan to positions in Tibetan schools.

Chinese-Medium Instruction in Primary Schools and Kindergartens

There is almost no publicly available data about the medium of instruction currently used in primary schools or kindergartens in the TAR or other Tibetan areas. But Human Rights Watch's research found that local authorities in the TAR began preparations from about the year 2000 to encourage and facilitate a gradual shift to Chinese-medium teaching in primary schools in the region. These preparations started with instructions by the central authorities in Beijing that required local administrations throughout China to prepare to introduce bilingual education for communities that are not ethnic Chinese.

What form that policy should take has varied significantly from province to province, but in 2001, all primary schools in urban areas of Tibet began to teach Tibetan pupils Chinese language from Grade 1, instead of Grade 3 as had been the case previously. However, there was no mention by officials as to which language should be used as the medium of instruction in Tibetan pre-schools or primary schools.

In 2010, all provincial-level administrations throughout China introduced formal programs for the implementation of “bilingual education.” Chinese analysts distinguish between “Model 1” bilingualism, which emphasizes the use of the local or minority language in classrooms, and “Model 2” bilingualism, which emphasizes the national language, Chinese. But in its 2010 announcement on implementation, the TAR authorities once again did not specify whether Chinese or Tibetan was to be the medium of instruction in primary schools and have continued to use the term “bilingual education” ambiguously, without specifying its meaning. In public reports they imply that the only requirement is extra classes for Tibetans to learn Chinese and that individual schools can choose the medium of instruction. In practice, however, there appears to be considerable pressure to shift to Chinese and Model 2.

This pressure is strongly reflected in official Chinese media reports on the benefits of “bilingual education” in the TAR. In early 2015, a report by China’s official news agency, *Xinhua*, said that Chinese-medium instruction had already been introduced, not just into secondary schools, as was well-known, but also into urban primary schools in the TAR: “Different from the model widely implemented in pastoral regions, elementary schools in each of Tibet’s prefectures (and municipalities), some junior middle schools, senior middle schools, and Tibet classes in the interior adopt a teaching model that uses Chinese as the teaching language with Tibetan as an addition.” In January 2016, an article on Tibetan schools by China’s state-run *Global Times* confirmed that “increasingly schools, especially in urban areas, are using *Putonghua* [standard Chinese] as the primary language of instruction, with Tibetan being used only in classes where the Tibetan language is the topic of the class, if it is taught at all.”

Then, in June 2016, the Lhasa Education Bureau announced that Chinese was being used as the medium of instruction to teach mathematics in a majority of primary schools in the counties around Lhasa, including rural areas outside the region’s capital city. This was the first known direct admission by the government of a shift to Chinese-medium teaching in some classes within rural TAR primary schools.

Outside the TAR, the Chinese authorities have already imposed Chinese-medium instruction in primary schools in at least one Tibetan area. In the Golok Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, the prefectural government ordered primary schools to introduce primarily Chinese-medium instruction in the 2019-2020 school year. A similar plan to introduce Chinese-medium education was reported from Tsolho prefecture in Qinghai province in April 2017. Teaching in all schools in Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai is already conducted in Chinese. There are unconfirmed reports that similar policies will soon be introduced in other Tibetan prefectures in Qinghai.

Governmental pressure on Tibetan schools to use Chinese is also evident in the pre-school sector. According to China’s official media, the TAR government plans to ensure that by 2020, 80 percent of children in the TAR attend two to three years of kindergarten before entering primary school.¹ In 2016, TAR authorities announced that all kindergarten

¹ “250 bilingual kindergartens to be built in Tibet region,” *Global Times*, February 26, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/970539.shtml> (accessed December 29, 2019).

programs have to become “bilingual.” According to an academic paper published in *Xizang Jiaoyu* (“Tibetan Education”), an educational journal in the TAR, “bilingual education” was “basically universalized at preschool level” by 2017, which means that all of the 81,000 Tibetan children in pre-schools and kindergartens in the TAR above the age of 3 are already experiencing “bilingual education.”

In its January 2016 article on the Tibetan language, the *Global Times* explicitly linked the critical decline in the use of Tibetan language to the decrease in the use of Tibetan in schools: “urbanization and the increasing amount of the school day spent speaking Putonghua has left the Tibetan language in a precarious situation.” It added that “many Tibetan parents have found that their kids are not learning how to speak their mother-tongue.”

Human Rights Watch found that among ordinary Tibetans, there is widespread concern about the increasing loss of fluency in Tibetan among the younger generation as a result of changing school policies and other factors. As a former part-time teacher from Lhasa told Human Rights Watch:

In primary school, the Tibetan teachers are very united and have a strong urgency to teach Tibetan, but the biggest problem is that they lack method and materials, and a lot of the kids in a way don’t like Tibetan because they think it will be quite useless.... [Older] people always complain about the lack of Tibetan, [and] the fact that their grandkids cannot speak proper Tibetan at home.

Pressures on Tibetan Schools to Switch to Chinese-Medium Teaching

While public policy statements by the TAR authorities remain ambiguous, there are increasing signs that they are using a range of indirect mechanisms to pressure schools in the TAR to switch to Chinese-medium teaching. These measures require Tibetan schools to increase Tibetan children’s immersion in Chinese culture and language. They include “mixed classes,” “concentrated schooling,” the transfer of large numbers of Chinese teachers to Tibetan schools, sending Tibetan teachers for training to provinces where Chinese is the dominant language, and requiring all Tibetan teachers to be fluent in Chinese. The measures have indirectly increased pressure on schools in the TAR to reduce

the availability of mother-tongue education for Tibetan children over the last decade and are accelerating the gradual shift to Chinese-medium teaching in TAR primary schools.

The number of non-Tibetan-speaking teachers working in Tibetan schools tripled between 1988 and 2005, and under the current program, 30,000 will be sent to Tibet and the Xinjiang region, in the northwest, by 2020. None of the non-Tibetan teachers are required to know Tibetan and they presumably teach in Chinese. While many of them teach in middle schools and high schools in the TAR, there has been an impact even at the pre-school level, especially in urban areas: according to a Chinese study in 2017, 30 percent of teachers in one Lhasa county did not know Tibetan.

In addition, from at least 2016, hundreds of Tibetan teachers have been sent for further training in other provinces, and since 2017, all Tibetan teachers have been required to know Chinese. As early as 2003 the number of primary school teachers using Chinese for instruction in the TAR had increased threefold over the previous 12 years, from 1,698 in 1991 – then 20 percent of total teachers – to 4,228 or 33 percent of total teachers by 2003. We have not been able to find data showing the change since then.

Another measure that has contributed to the switch to Chinese-medium instruction has been the creation of “mixed classes,” the inclusion of non-Tibetan pupils in classes with Tibetan ones. Another measure, known as “concentrated schooling,” involves closing local schools in rural areas and consolidating them in a nearby town, where rural students usually have to board. While this brings benefits in terms of facilities and standards, it also reduces children’s contact with their family and with a Tibetan-speaking environment. These measures all improve Tibetan children’s exposure to Chinese but can weaken children’s access to and familiarity with their own language.

The imposition of teaching practices that encourage the switch to Chinese-medium instruction in the TAR is the result of increasing moves by the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP or the “Party”) since 2014 to shift away from encouragement of cultural diversity, which had been the official policy towards minorities since the early 1980s, including respect for the distinctive cultures and languages of minorities. As detailed in section III of this report, the new policy aims to increase the assimilation of minorities in China and requires officials to prioritize “ethnic mingling” (*minzu jiaorong*) of China’s nationalities and “identification” (*rentong*) by the minority nationalities with “Chinese

culture” (*Zhonghua wenhua*). The government contends that these measures are necessary to achieve not just economic development for minorities but also “nationality unity” and “national stability” within China.

Global evidence shows that children’s educational development is adversely affected, particularly in the case of minority and indigenous children, when they are not taught in their mother-tongue in the early years of education. Mother-tongue policy experts agree that children who have grasped foundational skills and literacy in their own mother-tongue are better placed to learn in a second or foreign language.

Human Rights Watch supports policies that promote genuine bilingual education, in particular through the use of mother-tongue instruction in the early years of education and through curricula sensitive to indigenous and ethnic minority customs and practices. China’s policies for Tibetan children in the TAR, however, show decreasing respect for their right to use their mother-tongue or learn about and freely express Tibetan cultural identity and values in schools. Rather, they embody an approach to schools and schoolchildren that appears to be eroding the Tibetan language skills of children and forcing them to consume political ideology and ideas contrary to those of their parents and community.

Justifications for Shifting to Chinese-Medium Instruction

Chinese officials usually justify the switch to Chinese-medium instruction in Tibetan schools by arguing that improved knowledge of Chinese will help Tibetans gain employment in later life, a claim that is widely acknowledged in Tibet. However, the justification for imposing Chinese-language teaching in Tibetan kindergartens is quite different, at least according to a 2014 report by the Chinese scholar Yao Jijun, who said the aim of bilingual education at the pre-school level is to “better integrate the Chinese language” into Tibetan kindergarten children as “a means of eliminating elements of instability in Tibetan regions” (“instability” is a term used in China to refer to political unrest). According to Yao, “Tibet’s stability” depends on the full development of “bilingual education” at the kindergarten level.

Concern with eliminating the risk of future political dissent or unrest is also explicit in Party justifications for its “ethnic mingling” and “cultural identification” policies, which were endorsed by the central leadership as the new direction of minority policy in 2014.

Children of minorities in kindergartens and primary schools undergo intensive political indoctrination that asserts the unquestioned benefits of the Party's policies of ethnic mingling and its other political objectives. The children have little access to alternative ideas, since the media reinforce the necessity of prioritizing the use of Chinese language in education, with little or no discussion of educational alternatives.

There are no signs of significant popular involvement in the decision-making process that leads to these policies, particularly when they involve the minority regions; the policies are designed and imposed by the Communist Party.

School Closures and Protests

Human Rights Watch has reported on protests in a number of Tibetan areas since 2010 against earlier attempts to introduce Chinese-medium education in Tibetan schools. It has also reported on the closure of privately-run schools in Tibetan areas and has received reports that three monastery-run schools were closed in Tibetan parts of Sichuan province in or around June 2018. It notes also an unconfirmed report of the forced closure of a private kindergarten in the TAR in 2008 for giving priority to Tibetan language teaching.

Tibetans in China already suffer extensive restrictions on rights to free speech and opinion, peaceful assembly, movement, and religion that are more severe than in ethnic Chinese-majority areas of China. Chinese laws preclude them from open discussion of their history, allow them little say in policymaking in their own areas, and place extreme restrictions on their religious practice, access to information, and foreign travel.

In January 2016, a Tibetan campaigner on language rights, Tashi Wangchuk, was detained by the authorities and charged with “jeopardizing state security” after giving interviews to the *New York Times* stating that there was no longer any provision for Tibetan to be taught as a language, let alone Tibetan-medium education, in Yushu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai. In May 2018, a court sentenced him to five years in prison for “incitement to split the country” by “distorting the state of education and cultural development in Tibetan areas, slandering the government by saying it restricts the development of minority cultures and eliminates minority language and culture,

undermining ethnic unity, social stability in Tibetan areas, and national unity,” according to court documents.²

Despite the risks of speaking out, Tibetan intellectuals continue to express concerns about China’s education policies in Tibetan areas. In response to the April 2017 announcement of a plan by the Party committee in Tsolho Prefecture in Qinghai to reduce or replace Tibetan-medium education in local schools, leading Tibetan scholar and lama Alak Dorzhi posted this comment online:

In recent years in Tibetan areas, self-deluding and arbitrary policy documents in violation of the national constitution and nationality laws, which do not fully respect the Party’s nationality policies or consult expert or public opinion have upset the public time and again. When this happens, the authorities resort to the use of force, those in authority go after the public and use the convenient brutality of stability maintenance measures to try and solve the problem....

Alak Dorzhi added that this issue “has not been considered carefully enough by the authorities.” Despite his cautious tone, his comment was quickly deleted from the internet, signaling the increasing limitations on public debate among Tibetans about language policies in their schools.

Domestic and International Law

The transition to Chinese-medium instruction in Tibetan primary schools is in tension with if not contradictory to some Chinese laws and policies. This includes the 2001 Law on Regional National Autonomy, which states that minority schools “should, if possible, use textbooks printed in their own languages, and lessons should be taught in those languages.”³ The law specifies that minority schools should teach Chinese language only

² “Translated court documents expose China’s sham prosecution of Tibetan language rights advocate Tashi Wangchuk, raise fears about use of torture,” Save Tibet, August 29, 2018, <https://www.savetibet.org/translated-court-documents-expose-chinas-sham-prosecution-of-tibetan-language-rights-advocate-tashi-wangchuk-raise-fears-about-use-of-torture/> (accessed December 29, 2019).

³ Law of the People’s Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy, art. 37, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/government/207138.htm> (accessed December 29, 2019).

from the early stages of primary education and does not direct that Chinese language be the language of instruction or even taught in kindergartens for minority children.

International human rights law obligates China to provide Tibetan-language instruction to the ethnic Tibetan population. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which China ratified in 1992, states that “a child belonging to a ... minority ... shall not be denied the right ... to use his or her own language.”⁴ The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which China has signed but not ratified, contains similar language.⁵ China also supported the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which both endorses rights to indigenous language education and the right of indigenous people to control their educational systems and institutions.⁶

Three UN human rights expert committees have repeatedly expressed concern at China’s handling of mother-tongue instruction, and have called on the government to ensure Tibetan children are able to learn in their own language, and to protect those who advocate for mother-tongue education. In 1996, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the international expert body that monitors state compliance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, called on the Chinese authorities “to ensure that children in the Tibet Autonomous Region and other minority areas are guaranteed full opportunities to develop knowledge about their own language and culture as well as to learn the Chinese language.”⁷ In a subsequent statement in 2013, the committee called on the government to “effectively implement the bilingual language policy to ensure use and promotion of ethnic minority languages and ensure participation by ethnic minorities, including Tibetan and Uighur children ... in the decision-making process of the education system.”⁸

⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted November 20, 1989, G.A. Res. 44/25, annex, 44 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 49) at 167, U.N. Doc. A/44/49 (1989), entered into force September 2, 1990, art. 30.

⁵ ICCPR art. 27.

⁶ UN General Assembly, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly, 2 October 2007, A/RES/61/295, art. 14.

⁷ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, “Concluding observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: China,” CRC/C/15/Add.56, para. 40, June 17, 1996, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC%2fC%2f15%2fAdd.56&Lang=en (accessed December 29, 2019).

⁸ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, “Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth period reports of China, adopted by the Committee at its sixty-fourth session (16 September – 4 October 2013), CRC/C/CHN/CO/3-4, para. 76(c), October 29, 2013, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/CHN/CO/3-4&Lang=en (accessed December 29, 2019).

In 2014, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) expressed concern that ethnic minorities in China continue to face severe restrictions in the realization of their right to participate in cultural life, including the right to use and teach minority languages. The committee specifically noted the restrictions faced by Tibetans and Uighurs, “in particular regarding the restriction of education in the Tibetan and Uighur languages.” The committee called on China to “ensure the use and practice of their language and culture.”⁹

China has failed to comply with several key requirements of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the recommendations of its committee. These include not providing adequate numbers of teachers trained to carry out bilingual education and enough textbooks in Tibetan, together with culturally appropriate teaching materials. In 2018, the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) expressed concern that “Tibetan language teaching in schools in the [TAR] has not been placed on an equal footing in law, policy and practice with Chinese, and that it has been significantly restricted.” It called on the government of China to preserve the language by encouraging its use in education and other fields.¹⁰

⁹ UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding observations on the second periodic report of China, including Hong Kong, China, and Macao, China, June 13, 2014, E/C.12/CHN/CO/2, para. 36.

¹⁰ UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, “Concluding observations on the combined fourteenth to seventeenth periodic reports of China (including Hong Kong, China and Macao, China),” CERD/C/CHN/CO/14-17, September 19, 2018, paras. 43 and 44(b).

Recommendations

To Tibet Autonomous Region Officials:

- Ensure that all Tibetan children are able to learn and use Tibetan in schools.
- End the forced imposition of “ethnic mingling” measures in Tibetan education such as concentrated schooling and “mixed classes.”
- Unconditionally release Tashi Wangchuk and others prosecuted for peaceful opposition to state education policies.
- End the suppression of any activities or organizations calling for increased mother-tongue education and reverse the classification of such activities as “organized crime.” Allow all public discussion of education issues without threat of reprisal.
- Publish the regulations used to assess education in privately run kindergartens and primary and secondary schools in the TAR.
- Make it mandatory to provide clear reasons and the factual basis for closing such schools. Ensure that such regulations do not restrict or prohibit a school’s ability to choose the Tibetan language as a medium of instruction and that inspectors do not unfairly target or discriminate against Tibetan-run schools in their decisions to close schools.

To National Officials:

- Reaffirm the established rights of minorities to mother-tongue instruction in schools.
- Revise the bilingual education policy to ensure the use and promotion of ethnic minority languages in schools, allow mother-tongue instruction in pre-school and primary school, and ensure voluntary and consensual implementation of language policy in schools, including by consulting with and ensuring participation of ethnic minorities during the revision process.
- Ensure that educational objectives and not political objectives hold priority in the formulation of education policy in minority areas.
- Ensure that promotion of “nationality unity” does not violate basic civil and cultural rights and does not restrict public debate over issues such as education and migration in nationality areas.
- End Communist Party political control over schools and their educational decisions.

- Ensure that all teaching and learning materials for pre-school and primary levels are available in ethnic minority languages and as feasible for secondary levels, and reflect culturally appropriate content.
- Ensure teachers who are moved to teach in autonomous regions, including those enrolled in Aid Tibet programs, are provided with in-service training in the relevant and appropriate minority language for the region they are sent to.
- End the layoff of teachers from autonomous regions caused by the current “bilingual” policy, and ensure that all minority teachers are provided with in-service training to match requirements for public school teachers.
- Comply with all outstanding recommendations on education from UN treaty bodies.

Methodology

Research into political and human rights conditions in Tibet faces severe limitations. The Chinese authorities do not permit access for foreign researchers to Tibet except in extremely rare cases, and then only on subjects that are not sensitive or likely to produce findings critical of the government. Foreigners are not allowed in Tibet even as tourists without special permits and guides. Tibetans face severe risks of repercussions including potential arrest and prosecution if they are known to talk or communicate with foreigners, whether in Tibet or abroad, about political issues or conditions in Tibet. Ethnic Chinese who are citizens of the People's Republic of China (PRC) also face risks if they work on politically sensitive topics, especially with an overseas human rights organization. Chinese officials and diplomats rarely make themselves available to researchers from human rights organizations, and if they do, almost always provide standardized responses that appear rehearsed or memorized.

As a result of these limitations, this report is based primarily on the study and translation of governmental publications in Chinese and Tibetan, such as newspapers, online news channels, and websites run by government offices. On some issues, we have also been able to draw on academic studies available in English or Chinese that feature extensive research carried out by ethnic Chinese scholars in Tibet or other minority areas, and a smaller number of studies in English by foreign scholars able to do research in Xinjiang, where similar issues arise. Only a handful of foreign scholars have ever been allowed to carry out educational or social research in the Tibet Autonomous Region itself.

The report is also based on interviews carried out between 2015 and 2019 with Tibetans from Tibet, detailed excerpts from six of which are in the appendices. We have not named these interviewees at their request and in relevant citations have also withheld details about the interviews that could compromise their identity and thus their safety. Six parents of current primary school pupils in rural areas or teachers in rural schools were briefly interviewed about language use in their schools in September 2019.

The term Tibet is used generally in this report to refer to areas within the People's Republic of China that are traditionally inhabited by Tibetans. The eastern parts of the plateau have been organized since the 1950s into "Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures" within the western

provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan. The term Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR), a province-level administration established by China in 1965, describes the western and central parts of the Tibetan plateau and is the only area designated by Chinese authorities as Tibet.

I. Erosion of Tibetan as Medium of Instruction in Primary Schools

When we entered the [Tibetan] elementary schools, everywhere they have these big signs saying “We have to use Mandarin,” “Speaking Mandarin is our responsibility,” “We are Chinese kids,” “We have to speak Mandarin,” or something like this, or “I am a Chinese child; I like to speak Mandarin.” On the wall it says, “Mandarin is our medium for teaching.”

—Former Tibetan part-time teacher from Lhasa, October 2018

When the reform era began in China in the early 1980s, the Chinese constitution promised all minority nationalities in China “the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages” as well as the freedom “to preserve or reform their own folkways and customs.”¹¹ In 2001, a law was passed aimed at ensuring that these freedoms applied to education, too; schools where most of the students come from minority nationalities, it stated, “shall, whenever possible, use textbooks in their own languages and use these languages as the media of instruction.”¹²

These legal commitments applied to Tibetan schoolchildren, among others, but in the TAR and certain other areas they were never fully operationalized. Over the last two decades they have been steadily eroded by a series of education policies bracketed under the name of “bilingual education,” and targeted particularly at primary schools and kindergartens. For many Tibetans and residents of some other minority areas, these policies have become a source of growing concern about the future of their languages and cultures within China.

This chapter shows how language policies for Tibetan schools in the TAR have gradually changed over the last 20 years, shifting from direct support for Tibetan-language teaching

¹¹ PRC Constitution, 1982, art. 4.

¹² Law on Regional Nationality Autonomy (amended February 28, 2001), art. 37, <http://www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/cen/laws/rnal300/> (accessed December 7, 2019). The 2001 revision of this law strengthened the original 1984 version, which had only said that minority schools “should” provide textbooks and teaching in their own languages.

in schools to greater emphasis on Chinese-language instruction, particularly in primary schools.

A Chronology of Language Policy in the TAR and Other Tibetan Areas

When the reform era began in China in the 1980s, almost all middle schools and high schools in the TAR were teaching Tibetan students through the medium of Chinese language, as they had been doing since the 1960s. However, buoyed by the promises of reform then current throughout China, including the provisions offered by the Law on Regional National Autonomy of 1984, local Tibetan leaders in the TAR drew up innovative legislation and policies that aimed to make Tibetan-medium education available at all levels. Their efforts led to a new language law in the TAR and had significant success in the primary school sector:

- 1982: An education policy was put in place in the TAR that stated that Tibetan was to be the primary language of instruction.¹³ This did not change in middle and high schools, where Chinese remained the language of instruction, but almost all Tibetan primary schools began to offer Tibetan-medium instruction for all classes except those teaching Chinese language (*Putonghua*) itself, which was taught as a single subject from the third or fourth grade onwards.¹⁴
- 1987: The TAR People's Congress passed a provisional law that outlined plans to introduce Tibetan-medium education at all levels in the TAR.¹⁵
- 1987: The TAR established four pilot projects providing Tibetan-medium teaching in middle schools for the first time.¹⁶
- 1996: 98 percent of primary schools in the TAR were teaching most classes in Tibetan rather than in Chinese.¹⁷

¹³ Ma Rong, "Bilingual Education and Language Policy in Tibet," in James Leibold and Yangbin Chen, *Minority Education in China* (Hong Kong University, 2014), pp. 83-106, p. 90 ("The second clause in 'Several Regulations for Learning, Using and Developing the Tibetan language in the TAR' issued by the TAR government on July 9, 1987 showed that the reformers even aimed to make Tibetan the main language of government too: it required that 'both Tibetan and Putonghua are to be used in administration but Tibetan is the main language.'").

¹⁴ Ma Rong in Leibold and Chen, 2014, p. 89.

¹⁵ The "TAR Regulations on the study, use and development of the Tibetan language" were adopted by the Fifth Session of the Fourth TAR People's Congress, July 9, 1987, at the behest of the 10th Panchen Lama and Ngabo Ngawang Jigme, and promulgated in March 1989, but were in draft form only.

¹⁶ Catriona Bass, *Education in Tibet: Policy and Practice Since 1950*, London: Tibet Information Network and Zed Press, 1998, p. 237.

¹⁷ Bass, *Education in Tibet*, p. 233.

By the late 1990s, reformers had succeeded in introducing Tibetan-medium education to primary schools throughout the TAR. However, their efforts to Tibetanize education in middle schools and high schools in the TAR failed; students in those schools continued to receive almost all teaching in Chinese,¹⁸ and this remains the case today.¹⁹ By the end of the 1990s, official statements no longer referred to the earlier aim of creating a Tibetan-oriented education system at all levels in the TAR, and in 2002, the TAR issued amended regulations that removed earlier references to the primacy of Tibetan language in the TAR education system.²⁰ There was, however, no mention at that stage of a Chinese-dominant teaching system being introduced. Instead, “equal weight” was to be given to both languages.²¹

- 1994: The TAR authorities dropped a previous legal requirement that Chinese students in Tibetan schools in the TAR had to learn Tibetan.²²
- 1997: The TAR government closed down experimental Tibetan-medium classes in middle schools and abandoned plans to introduce middle-school education in Tibetan, supposedly because of insufficient resources, although a 1995

¹⁸ According to academic studies, all subjects in junior middle and high schools in the TAR were being taught in Chinese except for the study of Tibetan language itself. See Zhimin Zhao and Steve Higgins, “When English meets Chinese in Tibet: Towards an understanding of Multilingual Education in Tibet,” in Anwei Feng and Bob Adamson, eds., *Trilingualism in Education in China: Models and Challenges*, Dordrecht, Heidelberg: Springer, 2014. In 2014, the scholar Ma Rong noted that about 4,000 middle school students (13 percent) had Tibetan-medium classes at that time, but this appears to refer to the short-lived experimental classes that were abruptly closed down by the TAR authorities by 1997. Ma Rong, “Bilingual Education and Language Policy in Tibet,” in Leibold and Chen, *Minority Education in China* pp. 83-106, p. 101.

¹⁹ In 2015, the Chinese government confirmed that “middle schools [in the TAR] (including inland Tibetan middle schools) have Tibetan language courses, and other courses are taught in Chinese.” See “Successful Practice of the System of Regional Ethnic Autonomy in Tibet,” White Paper, State Council Information Office, September 7, 2015, pt. 6, http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/2015-09/07/content_21807738_6.htm.

²⁰ Article 6 of the “Provisions of the TAR on the Study, Use and Development of the Tibetan Language,” issued on May 22, 2002, stated that “during the period of compulsory education, Tibetan and the language commonly used in the State shall be used as the basic languages of instruction” (available in Chinese from Chinalawinfo.com at law.chinalawinfo.com/newlaw2002/SLC/SLC.asp?Db=lar&Gid=16815114, accessed October 22, 2003).

²¹ In 2002, the revised “TAR Regulations on the Use and Development of the Tibetan Language” clearly provided that “the Chinese and Tibetan languages shall be given equal weight in the TAR.” See “西藏现代教育：让各族群众人生更美好” [Tibet’s Modern Education: Make the Lives of all the Nationality Masses Even More Beautiful], Tibet Autonomous Region Education Department, June 15, 2016, http://www.xzxw.com/xw/201606/t20160615_1281748.html. In an article issued on the same day as the new regulations, Xinhua reported that “The law approved at the 15th session of the Seventh Regional People’s Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region, says that the Tibetan language must have equal emphasis and legal status to the standard Chinese language in the region.” See “Tibet passes law encouraging use of Tibetan language,” *Xinhua*, May 22, 2002.

²² Ma Rong in Leibold and Chen, 2014, pp. 94, 97; “‘The nine-year compulsory education curriculum plan,’ issued by the Education Commission of the TAR in 1994, no longer mandated Tibetan language subjects in Han classes. As a result, bilingual teaching in the TAR shifted from a two-way to a one-way learning pattern. Tibetans must learn Putonghua, but Han are not required to learn Tibetan.”

study of the experimental classes had reported outstanding results, with 80 percent of Tibetan students in those classes passing school graduation exams compared to 39 percent of Tibetan students in Chinese-medium secondary schools.²³

- 2001: To improve students' abilities in the Chinese language, urban schools in the TAR began teaching Chinese as a language from the first grade upwards instead of from the third grade.²⁴
- 2002: The TAR issued regulations that ended the primacy given in local legislation to Tibetan-medium education and ordered that Tibetan and Chinese languages be given "equal weight" in TAR schools²⁵; the regulations also specified that some classes should be taught in Chinese, but did not say how many.²⁶

Although the 2002 regulations said that Chinese should be given the same degree of importance as Tibetan in schools, national-level legislation on minority affairs approved the previous year made no mention of giving equal treatment to both the local and national languages.²⁷ At the same time, the number of non-Tibetan classes being taught in Chinese in primary schools in the TAR began to increase:

- 2002: In July 2002, China's State Council ordered officials to "vigorously promote 'bilingual teaching' in minority nationality primary and secondary schools," but noted that schools should "correctly handle the relationship between usage of the minority nationality language as the teaching medium" and Chinese as teaching medium.²⁸

²³ "Policy Shift in Language Teaching in Tibet," Tibet Information Network News Update, May 6, 1997; Bass, *Education in Tibet*, p. 237.

²⁴ Ma Rong, in Leibold and Chen 2014, p. 97, citing Zhang Tingfang, ed., *Xizang shaoshu minzu hanyu jiaoxue gaikuang yu yanjiu* [Research on the situation for Chinese teaching and study for the Tibetan ethnic minority], Beijing: Zhongguo Zangxue Chubanshe. 2007, p. 40.

²⁵ See notes 21 and 22 above.

²⁶ "Tibetan language classes and classes in the commonly used language in the State shall be offered, together with foreign language classes at the appropriate time." See "TAR Regulations on the Study, Use and Development of the Tibetan Language," May 22, 2002; see note 10 above. See also "关于札西次仁先生「谨呈西藏自治区人大代表的信」的专家意见" [Expert Opinion on Tashi Tsering's "Letter to the Deputies of the National People's Congress"], Trimleng.com, November 10, 2016, <http://trimleng.cn/analysis-of-tashi-tserings-letter-2/> (accessed December 7, 2019).

²⁷ Law on Regional Nationality Autonomy (amended February 28, 2001), art. 37, <http://www.asianlii.org/cn/legis/cen/laws/rnal300> (accessed December 7, 2019). See note 2.

²⁸ "Correctly handle the relationship between usage of the minority nationality language as the teaching medium and Chinese-language education [少数民族语授课和汉语教学的关系]." See Ministry of Education, People's Republic of China,

- 2003: The percentage of primary school teachers using Chinese for instruction in the TAR increased from 20 percent in 1991 to 33 percent in 2003.²⁹ Human Rights Watch has not been able to find data on the number of non-Tibetan teachers at primary level in the TAR.³⁰

The early 2000s saw increasing official calls throughout China for “bilingual education,” but these statements gave no indication as to what this meant in practice. Initially, national- and local-level ordinances and policy statements, using ambiguous terms such as “popularize Chinese language,” continued to imply that the term “bilingual education” referred only to introducing the study of Chinese language as an additional subject in minority schools. There was rarely any public indication that this policy might mean introducing Chinese-medium instruction at all levels, but also no indication of any preference for instruction in the local language:

- 2005: China’s State Council issued suggestions for “minority nationality areas to gradually promote the ‘bilingual teaching’ of minority nationality languages and Chinese-language teaching.”³¹ It did not say what the balance should be between the two languages when used as mediums of instruction.
- 2008: A law on compulsory education in the TAR required that all schools introduce “bilingual education.” It specified only that this meant these schools had to “popularize” Chinese-language “education.” It did not state whether

“Decision on Deepening Reform and Speeding Up Development of Minority Nationality Education,” July 2002, http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xgk/gk_gbgg/moe_o/moe_8/moe_30/tnull_57.html and http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2016-09/23/content_5111248.htm.) See also, Hu Yanxia, *Guanyu shaoshu minzu shuangyu jiaoxue de sikao* [Thoughts on minority nationality bilingual education], Heilongjiang Minzu Congkan [Heilongjiang Nationality Series], 2013, Vol. 4, pp. 178-181.

²⁹ The number of primary school teachers using Chinese for instruction in the TAR had increased from 1,698, then 20 percent of total teachers, in 1991 to 4,228 or 33 percent of total teachers, in 2003. See Ma Rong, in Leibold and Chen 2014, p.97, citing Zhang Tingfang, ed., *Xizang shaoshu minzu hanyu jiaoxue gaikuang yu yanjiu* [Research on the situation for Chinese teaching and study for the Tibetan ethnic minority], Beijing: Zhongguo Zangxue Chubanshe. 2007, p. 40. The total number of full-time primary school teachers in the TAR in 2003 was 12,792. See National Bureau of Statistics, China Statistical Datasheet 2003, Table 20-32, Chinadataonline.org.

³⁰ The number of ethnic Chinese teachers in primary schools in the TAR is unknown but the number working in TAR middle schools and high schools increased from 1,145 in 1988 to 3,747 in 2005, though the number of teachers who were Tibetans increased sevenfold over the same period, including the number of Tibetans who were teaching in Chinese. Ma Rong, in Leibold and Chen 2014, p. 95, citing Minority Education Study Institute of TAR 1989, p. 295; Education Bureau of the TAR 2005, p. 70.

³¹ The key phrase here is “汉语文授课” *hanyu wen shouke*, “Chinese-language teaching.” (See “Some State Council provisions for implementing the ‘PRC Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law,’” May 11, 2005, http://www.gov.cn/gongbao/content/2005/content_64258.htm.)

this referred only to increasing the study of Chinese language, or whether it meant introducing Chinese-medium instruction.³²

- 2010: China's Ten-year Education Plan in 2010 announced that "no effort should be spared to advance bilingual teaching, open Chinese language classes in every school, and popularize the national common language and writing system ... to ensure that minority students [have] basic grasp and use of the national common language [Chinese]." ³³ It said "minority people's right to be educated in native languages shall be respected and ensured" and made no mention of using Chinese as the medium of instruction.
- 2010: The TAR's Ten-year Education Plan announced that "bilingual education" would be actively promoted, with the teaching of both languages. It did not specify which language should be used as the medium of instruction, saying only that schools should use "teaching models which are appropriate to the students' abilities and for adapting to a bilingual education system."³⁴

These documents implied that the term "bilingual education" referred primarily to providing students with knowledge of both languages. In Qinghai province, however, where over a million Tibetans live, the local authorities stated openly in 2010 that bilingual education refers to the introduction of Chinese-medium education. The Qinghai policy, which aimed to "forcefully promote the reform and development of 'bilingual' education," included the instruction that schools should "maintain the focus on using the state's common language and script at the same time as properly studying nationality languages and scripts [and] making the state's common language and script the *language of instruction*."³⁵ This was a reversal of Qinghai's previous policy regarding minority

³² "Article 32 of the "TAR Implementation Measures for the 'PRC Compulsory Education Law'" as adopted by the Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress of the Tibet Autonomous Region in 2008 [the Ninth TAR NPC] provides that, 'During the compulsory education stage, with education and teaching based on the usage of the Tibetan and national languages and texts, popularize putonghua education.'" See "西藏现代教育：让各族群众人生更美好" [Tibet's Modern Education: Make the Lives of all the Nationality Masses Even More Beautiful], Tibet Autonomous Region Education Department, June 15, 2016, http://www.xzxw.com/xw/201606/t20160615_1281748.html.

³³ "Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-20)," Ministry of Education, Beijing, July 2010, chapter 9 (27), p. 23, <http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s3501/index.html> (accessed December 7, 2019).

³⁴ "中共西藏自治区委员会西藏自治区人民政府关于贯彻《国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要（2010—2020年）》的实施意见" [The TAR CCP Committee and People's Government Suggestions on Implementation of the "National Mid- to Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)], China Education News, March 29, 2011, p. 6, Section 9, http://www.jyb.cn/info/dfjyk/201103/t20110329_422390.html (accessed December 7, 2019).

³⁵ "青海省中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要（2010—2020年）" [Qinghai Province Mid- to Long-Term Plan Outline for the Reform and Development of Education], Ministry of Education, Beijing, September 23, 2010, emphasis added,

education which, unlike the TAR, had previously encouraged what is known in China as the Model 1 form of bilingual education, whereby teachers prioritized the use of the local language as the medium of instruction in minority schools or classes for Tibetans pupils from minorities. (The Model 2 form of bilingual education refers to the prioritization of the national language as the medium of instruction in classes with minority pupils.)

In 2014, the central authorities announced a new policy for minorities that emphasized assimilationist objectives. This was followed by a major document issued by the Central Party Committee that appeared to call for the introduction of Model 2 bilingual education. A “Decision” on education policy from China’s State Council a year later, however, remained ambiguous about which model should be used:

- September 2014: At the Central Authorities’ National Conference on Ethnic Work, President Xi Jinping indirectly confirmed the moves towards Chinese-medium education in minority schools by announcing that overall ethnic policy would henceforth aim at promoting “ethnic mingling” and “cultural identification” with “Chinese culture.”³⁶
- October 2014: A major party document from the Central Party Committee instructed all schools in China, particularly those with minority nationality students, not just to “fully popularize the national language,” but also to

<http://www.qhnews.com/index/system/2010/09/17/010199743.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019). For a partial translation, see “Tibetan teachers write petition in support of Tibetan language; fears for students after detentions,” International Campaign for Tibet, October 26, 2010, <https://www.savetibet.org/tibetan-teachers-write-petition-in-support-of-tibetan-language-fears-for-students-after-detentions> (accessed December 15, 2019). The Qinghai plan also added the standard objective of “making minority nationalities basically familiar with and able to use the state’s common language and the nationalities’ own languages and scripts.” Ibid. For critical reporting on the Qinghai policy, see “Tongue-tied: Teaching Uighur children in Mandarin will not bring stability to Xinjiang,” *The Economist*, June 27, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/china/21656216-teaching-uighur-children-mandarin-will-not-bring-stability-xinjiang-tongue-tied>, and “Bilingual education policy in Tibet: the systematic replacement of Tibetan language with Mandarin Chinese,” TCHRD report, Dharamsala, April 7, 2017, <http://tchrd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/TCHRD-Report-Bilingual-Education.pdf>.

³⁶ These concepts were generally not included in English-language reports by official media on the Central Conference on Ethnic Work or in other reports on China’s policy towards minority nationalities, but appear in Chinese reports, such as “中央民族工作会议:增强文化认同反对大汉族主义”(Zengqiang wenhua rentong fandui da hanzu zhuyi, Strengthen cultural identification and oppose Great Han chauvinism), CCTV, September 29, 2014, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2014-09-29/192930934609.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019). They are discussed in James Leibold, “Xinjiang Forum Marks New Policy of ‘Ethnic Mingling,’” *China Brief*, Vol. 14, Issue 12, June 19, 2014, pp. 3-6. The concept of mingling is strongly implied in euphemistic terms in Xi Jinping’s description of ethnic policy in his keynote 2017 speech to the 19th CCP Congress: “We will encourage more exchanges and interactions among different ethnic groups, helping them remain closely united.” See “Full text of Xi Jinping’s report at 19th CPC National Congress,” *Xinhua*, Section vi (6), November 4, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpconationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm.

“resolutely push forward *education in the national language and script*” as well as to “fully hold *classes in the national language*,” seemingly indicating a requirement to switch to Chinese-medium education at all levels.³⁷

- 2015: China’s State Council issued its “Decision on Ethnic Education,” which required “bilingual education” to be “comprehensively popularized” in all schools in minority areas where use of Chinese is “weak,” but did not specify what this meant in practice.³⁸

The 2014 shift in the Communist Party’s policy towards minorities and in the Central Party Committee’s position on bilingual education was not reflected by public statements in the TAR, where the strategy of cultivated ambiguity continued. In their public statements, the TAR authorities remained largely silent about their aims. In 2017, they announced that they had achieved complete success with their introduction of “bilingual education” at all levels. But they continued to avoid stating in public what this involved:

- 2015: The TAR announced that it had “basically completed the bulk of its mission of building a bilingual education system”³⁹ and that 97 percent of all Tibetan students in the TAR were receiving “bilingual education.”⁴⁰
- 2017: The TAR announced that “bilingual education” in primary and middle schools had achieved “100 percent coverage,” but did not specify what this meant in practice.⁴¹

³⁷ Emphasis added. In October 2014, the “CCP Central Committee and State Council Suggestions on Strengthening and Improving Nationality Work in the New Situation” (Central Issue [2014] No. 9) was published, article 14 of which clearly states, “resolutely push forward education in the national language and text.” It required officials to “fully hold classes in the national language, fully popularize the national language, and ensure minority nationality students have a basic grasp and use of the national language and text.” See “西藏现代教育：让各族群众人生更美好” [Tibet’s Modern Education: Make the Lives of all the Nationality Masses Even More Beautiful], Tibet Autonomous Region Education Department, June 15, 2016, http://www.xzxw.com/xw/201606/t20160615_1281748.html.

³⁸ “Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education,” State Council, National Document [2015] 46, issued August 11, 2015, section 21, www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_10097.htm (accessed December 7, 2019).

³⁹ “The Tibet Autonomous Region completed the bulk of its mission of building a bilingual education system by 2015 after regional lawmakers in 2008 ordered that both Tibetan and Putonghua should be used during the region’s compulsory education that includes three years’ kindergarten”; Shan Jie, “Hyping ‘suppression theory’ misses the reality in Tibet: expert - Bilingual education progressing in Tibet,” *Global Times*, January 9, 2018, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1084099.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁴⁰ Shan Jie and Chen Heying, “Tibet denies textbook sinicization,” *Global Times*, June 17, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/988888.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁴¹ “2017ལོར་བོད་ཀྱི་སློབ་གསོའི་ཐད་100པེ་སྟོང་འབྲས་བུ་ཐོབ་པ།” [Tibet achieves five ‘100 percents’ in education in 2017], *China Tibet News Online*, January 15, 2017, http://tb.xzxw.com/kjws/jyxw/201701/t20170115_1657191.html (accessed December 7, 2019).

However, two articles in the official Chinese media and one announcement by a local government office on social media indicate that since 2014 a growing shift towards Model 2 bilingual education has taken place within schools in urban areas of the TAR, including primary schools:

- 2015: Xinhua, China's official news agency, said that Chinese was already being used as the language of instruction in primary schools in the TAR in urban areas: "Different from the model widely implemented in pastoral regions, elementary schools in each of Tibet's prefectures (and municipalities), some junior middle schools, senior middle schools and Tibet classes in the interior have adopted a teaching model that uses Chinese as the teaching language with Tibetan as an addition."⁴²
- 2016: The *Global Times*, seen as representing official news and opinions in China, reported that "while in the past many schools in Tibetan areas taught all courses in Tibetan, increasingly schools, especially in urban areas, are using Putonghua as the primary language of instruction, with Tibetan being used only in classes where the Tibetan language is the topic of the class, if it is taught at all."⁴³
- 2016: the Lhasa Education Bureau posted a list on its WeChat portal showing that all primary schools in five of the eight county-level areas under Lhasa administration were using Chinese-language textbooks for teaching mathematics.⁴⁴ It added that the main primary schools in the county seats of

⁴² "西藏双语教育体系基本形成" [Bilingual education system basically formed in Tibet], *Xinhua*, March 18, 2015 <http://iq.chineseembassy.org/chn/zt/jrxz/t1246668.htm> (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁴³ Huang Jingjing, "Private schools attempt to keep Tibetan language alive," *Global Times*, January 28, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/966193.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019). The article refers in part to the TAR but cites much of its research from the eastern Tibetan areas, making its findings more disturbing, since in many of those areas, particularly in Qinghai, education policies for minorities from the 1980s onwards had been more favorable to Model 1 bilingual education than in the TAR.

⁴⁴ The five county-level areas where all primary schools had switched to Chinese textbooks for mathematics were Chengguanqu (the inner-city area of Lhasa), Toelung Dechen, Chushul, and Nyemo; Taktse was due to switch in autumn 2016. The counties in which the main primary schools had switched to Chinese for mathematics were Medro Gongkar and Lhundrub. In the remaining county, Damshung, which is the furthest from Lhasa, "some classes in all grades use Chinese mathematics and other classes all use Tibetan mathematics; Longren [Lungring] Township uses Chinese in first through third grades, and all other grades use Tibetan completely." See Xu Kefeng, "拉萨部分小学改“汉数”，你怎么看？" [Some elementary schools in Lhasa are changing to "Han Mathematics." What do you think?], blog post, June 2016, <http://www.a-site.cn/article/406484.html>. See also "Bilingual Education with Chinese Characteristics: China replacing Tibetan textbooks with Chinese," TCHRD, Dharamsala, June 21, 2016, <http://tchrd.org/bilingual-education-with-chinese-characteristics-china-replacing-tibetan-textbooks-with-chinese/> and "西藏小学数学课本改版成汉文引反弹" [Tibet primary school mathematics textbook revised into Chinese], *Radio Free Asia*, June 15, 2016, <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/yataibaodao/shaoshuminzu/dz-06152016102805.html>. According to China's *Global Times*,

two of the other three counties were also using Chinese-language mathematics textbooks. It showed that only one county out of eight within the Lhasa area, plus some rural schools in two other counties, were still using Tibetan for teaching mathematics as of 2016. The list did not say whether other subjects in these schools were also being taught in Chinese.

The posting by the Lhasa Education Bureau caused an outcry among Tibetans on social media, who objected to the previously unannounced switch to Chinese-medium instruction in their primary schools. The day after the list was publicized, a Tibetan judicial official, Dekhang Jampa, wrote an open letter in her personal capacity to the Lhasa Education Bureau arguing that, under Chinese law, the decision to introduce non-Tibetan textbooks within Tibet was a violation of “a nationality’s right to use its own language” (see Appendix 3.1).⁴⁵ Other Tibetans wrote messages expressing similar opinions.

The response by the local government was aggressive: the TAR Education Bureau issued a statement describing Dekhang’s accusation as “extremely irresponsible,” and as either “lacking common sense or a result of ulterior motives.” The latter term implied that Dekhang’s view was a form of political opposition to the state, an allegation that can result in serious consequences, including imprisonment. The bureau added that opposition to bilingual education – ignoring the fact that the opposition was to the Model 2 form of bilingual education, not to other forms of bilingual education, some of which are widely welcomed by Tibetans – was depriving minority children “of the right to further their education in the interior or overseas,”⁴⁶ implying that only Chinese-medium education can lead to advanced studies, modernity, and progress.⁴⁷ Although the main participants in the online debate were Tibetan, it was conducted mainly in Chinese.

the Tibet Education Department denied the reports and said that “primary schools in the region can choose either version [of the textbooks] with the same content.” However, the report also noted that “In urban areas where there’s a greater mix of ethnic groups, it’s normal for more courses to be taught in Chinese, while in rural areas, courses taught in Tibetan are the standard.” See Shan Jie and Chen Heying, “Tibet denies textbook sinicization,” *Global Times*, June 17, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/988888.shtml>.

⁴⁵ “谁夺走了藏族孩子受藏语教育的权利？—为民族语言文字维权” [Who took away Tibetan children’s right to receive a Tibetan language education? – On defending the language rights of nationalities], June 14, 2016, <http://trimleng.cn/dekhang-chamba/> (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁴⁶ “西藏现代教育：让各族群众人生更美好” [Tibet’s Modern Education: Make the Lives of all the Nationality Masses Even More Beautiful], Tibet Autonomous Region Education Department, June 15, 2016, http://www.xzxw.com/xw/201606/t20160615_1281748.html (accessed December 15, 2019). The editor’s name was given as Deji Yangzong (Dekyi Yangzom).

⁴⁷ Xu Kefeng, a Chinese researcher into nationality education, wrote a detailed response to Dekhang’s complaint, saying “I am willing to believe that the writer [Dekhang] has no ulterior motives, and is using a certain ability to express themselves

In September 2019, Human Rights Watch was able to put questions to parents and teachers in six rural townships in Nagchu Municipality in the north of the TAR, asking what language was being used to teach their children in the local primary school for subjects other than the study of Tibetan language itself. All six replied that their local primary schools had switched as of March 2019 to using Chinese as the language of instruction.⁴⁸

The fact that six primary schools in remote rural areas were switching at the same time to Chinese-medium instruction suggests that they were following an instruction issued by the local authorities at county or prefectural level. In an additional interview conducted at the same time, an official involved in education policy implementation in the TAR, speaking on condition of anonymity, stated that a policy had been decided by the TAR government for a switch to Model 2 bilingual education. There is no public acknowledgment of the existence of such a policy, and if there is one, it may have been introduced only in certain counties or municipalities within the TAR so far.

Pressure on TAR Primary Schools to Shift to Chinese-Medium Education

The authorities in the TAR and some other Tibetan areas have used various means to pressure primary schools to shift to predominantly Chinese-medium education, despite elaborate efforts by officials to avoid saying this in public.

These methods include conveying the government's preference for Chinese-medium teaching through media articles that heap lavish praise on Chinese-dominant education,⁴⁹ and through linguistic pointers in regulations and policy directives that signal official preference for Chinese-medium teaching. China's Education Law, for example, says that Chinese language "shall be" the basic language for education, while it says only that minority schools "may" use the local language for teaching.⁵⁰ Other Chinese laws and

learned from using written language ... but it is based too heavily on the emotions of nationality sentiment, and it lacks any in-depth or comprehensive analysis." See Xu Kefeng, "Some elementary schools in Lhasa are changing."

⁴⁸ Five of the six interviewees had a child currently at the local primary school; the sixth was a Tibetan language teacher in the local township school student. One, a government official, added that all primary schools in the county now follow Model 2 bilingual education. Another interviewee said that when the students do not understand the Chinese text, the Tibetan teacher explains orally in Tibetan. At least one interviewee specified that teaching materials are now in Chinese. The names and dates of the interviewees and the location of their schools have been withheld. The locations were in remote rural areas.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Shan Jie, "Hyping 'suppression theory,'" above.

⁵⁰ Education Law of the People's Republic of China, 1995, art. 12, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/education/184669.htm#> (accessed December 15, 2019).

policy documents, including the Constitution,⁵¹ the Chinese Language Law,⁵² the Regional National Autonomy Law,⁵³ and the Ten-Year Education Plan of 2010,⁵⁴ use similarly strong terms to mandate the use of Chinese language while using weaker terms or qualified statements to permit or tolerate the use of minority languages.

The principal work of persuasion appears to be carried out by Party officials. The tasks of Party operatives are rarely revealed in public documents, but China's 2015 "Decision on Ethnic Education" ordered that "full play should be given to the central role of Party committee leadership" to "ensure the correct development of ethnic education" and ordered that Party-building must be strengthened in the educational system in minority areas as well as in each individual school.⁵⁵

A glimpse of Party influence on local language policy in schools emerged in April 2017 when a leaked internal document from Tsoho (Ch.: Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai was briefly made available online. Although it was soon deleted, it is clear from netizens' responses that it outlined a previously undeclared Party policy to impose Chinese-medium education in Tibetan schools in the prefecture.⁵⁶

⁵¹ "The people of all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages" and "the state promotes the nationwide use of putonghua," Constitution of the PRC, 1982, articles 4, 19. Emphasis added.

⁵² Article 4 of the Language Law describes a "right" to use Chinese, which the state is required to provide, while article 8 describes a "freedom" for minorities to use their own languages, meaning a privilege given by the state at its pleasure, the provision of which the public has no mechanism to enforce. See "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language," 2000, http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Law/2007-12/11/content_1383540.htm. Grey notes, in her study of language laws in Zhuang minority areas, "accountability and implementation mechanisms are also provided within the Putonghua Law, unlike the laws governing Zhuang and other minority languages." See Alexandra Grey, "A polity study of minority language management in China focusing on Zhuang," *Current Issues in Language Planning*, Routledge, 2018, p. 46.

⁵³ "Law of the PRC on Regional National Autonomy," amended February 28, 2001, art. 37, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/government/207138.htm> (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁵⁴ The plan said that "no effort shall be spared" to increase use of Chinese in schools, while the plan only required the use of minority languages to be "respected and ensured." See "Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development [2010-20]," Ministry of Education, Beijing, July 2010, chapter 9 (27), p. 23, <http://www.moe.edu.cn/publicfiles/business/htmlfiles/moe/s3501/index.html>. See also Alexandra Grey, "A polity study of minority language management," p. 19.

⁵⁵ "Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education," State Council, National Document [2015] 46, issued August 11, 2015, section 28, www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_10097.htm (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁵⁶ The document by Zhang Wenkui was briefly posted on Zine.la, <https://zine.la/article/30d35a0619211e786b352540d79d783/> but that site now says, "illegal content" and is otherwise blank. Numerous other Tibetans posted rebuttals to Zheng Wenkui's document, including the leading Tibetan educator and scholar Alak Dorshi, whose response was translated and published by HighPeaksPureEarth as "I Too Can Speak About Education," April 14, 2017, <https://highpeakspureearth.com/2017/i-too-can-speak-about-education-by-alak-dorshi> (accessed December 15, 2019). The Zhang Wenkui document is believed to have provided Party guidance for a government

In the leaked document, Zhang Wenkui, then-Party secretary of Tsolho, is said to have written, “We must push for a comprehensive transformation of the current bilingual education system and promote a reform of ethnic education.”⁵⁷ According to online Tibetan commentators who saw the document before it was removed from the internet, and according to later comments attributed to Zhang that circulated on social media,⁵⁸ this remark signaled that true bilingual education—the teaching of both Tibetan and Chinese equally, which had been instituted in certain Tibetan areas of Qinghai since about 2002⁵⁹—should be largely replaced in the prefecture by Chinese-medium education.

The leaked document from Tsolho led to impassioned online debate among Tibetan scholars and intellectuals, to whom Zhang reportedly responded: “I don’t know what the ‘experts’ and the ‘scholars’ are thinking.... Any minority nationality with the will and ability to develop should not sit complacently on their merits ... and those Tibetan experts and scholars in particular should be more farsighted, raise their heads to the era, and correctly lead in the direction of development” (see Appendix 3.3).

This led to further responses from Tibetan scholars in China, including the leading linguistics expert, Yeshe Osal Atsok, who wrote: “it’s surprising that there is a wish to abandon our own advantage of having a mother-tongue education system, and ... to consider this ‘transformation’ to be an ‘improvement in quality.’ This is as stupid as scaling a tree to catch a fish” (see Appendix 3.4).

document called “Implementation Suggestions for Promoting the Transformation and Quality Improvement Project for Bilingual Education Throughout the Entire Prefecture,” which included the “10 teaching reforms” as its primary content. The “Implementation Suggestions” are referred to in “海南州双语教学转型提质工程‘教改十条’有关情况答记者问” [A Brief Discussion about the Relevant Conditions of the “10 Teaching Reforms” in the Bilingual Teaching Transformation and Improvement Project in Hainan Prefecture], Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefectural Government, April 5, 2017, http://www.qhhn.gov.cn/xwdt/hnkb/201704/t20170405_9985.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁵⁷ Cited in “An Open Letter to Zhang Wenkui, Party secretary of Tsolho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture” by Tsering Kyi, an otherwise unknown Tibetan student from Tsolho. The letter was translated and published by HighPeaksPureEarth, April 11, 2017, <https://highpeakspureearth.com/2017/an-open-letter-to-zhang-wenkui-party-secretary-of-tsolho-tibetan-autonomous-prefecture-from-tsering-kyi/> (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁵⁸ A text attributed to Zhang Wenkui, circulated on WeChat on April 5, 2017, said, “May I ask, did the study of the sciences at the forefront of knowledge by means of foreign languages weaken the Chinese language? Was this bad for the people? Evidently it was not, and so I don’t know what the ‘experts’ and the ‘scholars’ are thinking.... Any minority nationality with the will and ability to develop should not sit complacently on their merits, but should have a fierce sense of crisis and an urgent sense of development, and those Tibetan experts and scholars in particular should be more far-sighted, raise their heads to the era, and correctly lead in the direction of development” See Appendix 3.3.

⁵⁹ See Adrian Zenz, “Beyond Assimilation: The Tibetanisation of Tibetan Education in Qinghai,” *Inner Asia* 12 (2010), pp. 293–315 (pp. 302-4).



A banner in Chinese outside the Lhalu primary school in Lhasa reads “I am a Chinese child; I love to speak Putonghua.” © 2010 Kunleng VOA

The leaked Tsolho document suggests that local Party leaders put pressure on educators to switch to Chinese-medium teaching, even if public statements by the government are ambiguous or do not explicitly require it.⁶⁰ This pressure is likely to have been even stronger in the TAR, where less space is allowed for public debate or criticism than in eastern Tibetan areas.

In daily life, the government’s preferences for Chinese-medium teaching is clear: it is made obvious through posters and slogans on the walls of primary schools.

⁶⁰ The Tsolho government said in a public document that its new education policy would maintain the use of Tibetan language in kindergartens, but it used much weaker language to describe this: it said that Chinese language teaching “must be” provided in kindergartens, but, with regard to teaching minority language, it said that this should happen “at the same time as letting the children grasp their own languages” and that “ordinary kindergartens in towns with relatively high numbers of minority nationality students should hold Tibetan-language conversation classes,” without mention of a requirement to do this, or a requirement to provide education in written Tibetan. See “海南州双语教学转型提质工程‘教改十条’有关情况答记者问” [A Brief Discussion about the Relevant Conditions of the “10 Teaching Reforms” in the Bilingual Teaching Transformation and Improvement Project in Hainan Prefecture], Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefectural Government, April 5, 2017, http://www.qhnh.gov.cn/xwdt/hnkb/201704/t20170405_9985.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

A former part-time Tibetan teacher from Lhasa told Human Rights Watch about the new conditions in some primary schools in the city that she visited in mid-2018, where she said she saw large signs “everywhere” exhorting students to speak Chinese. She said:

My friends who are Tibetan language teachers ... everywhere in school they have these signs, but they are the ones trying to teach the Tibetan kids not to lose their language, telling them that you have to speak Tibetan at home. But then they have these big signs. They are very uncomfortable.⁶¹

Tibetans told Human Rights Watch that primary schools have also come under pressure to switch to Chinese-medium teaching because of the gradual decline in the quality of Tibetan-language textbooks. In line with their legal obligations, local authorities in the TAR have produced Tibetan-language textbooks for all subjects, and primary schools in the TAR can still opt to use these in their classes.⁶² But, according to a mid-ranking Tibetan official from Lhasa interviewed by Human Rights Watch, “starting from kindergarten there is almost no option but to do Chinese[-medium] teaching with Chinese textbooks. In the Tibetan-language class you could learn in Tibetan, but with other subjects, it is almost impossible.” He explained:

My kid is in primary school [in a town to the east of Lhasa], but I never saw a reasonably translated Tibetan textbook, even in the Tibetan language class. [The books have] many mistakes, with different translations [of the same word] – it was very preliminary kind of work, there were many problems. As a student, they naturally go for the far finer book, the Chinese one.⁶³

⁶² “The Tibet Education Department said primary schools in the region can choose either version [of the mathematics textbook] with the same content,” Shan Jie and Chen Heying, “Tibet denies textbook sinicization,” *Global Times*, June 17, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/988888.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁶³ Interview with middle-ranking Tibetan official from Lhasa, May 2017; a longer excerpt from the interview is set forth in Appendix 1.5.

He added that the option of studying in Tibetan was becoming impossible because “most of the teachers come from mainland China; they don’t know Tibetan anyway.”⁶⁴

A Tibetan university student from Ngawa in Sichuan province, who interviewed a number of local teachers on this issue in October 2018, told Human Rights Watch that Tibetan-language textbooks produced by some Tibetan schools in Qinghai and Ngawa had been “banned” by the authorities and that “none of the local Tibetan schools [in Tibetan areas] is allowed to select or edit their own textbooks.” He also reported concerns about the reduction of culturally appropriate content in the latest Tibetan-language textbooks, which were also outdated:

“Chinese is the priority, since with this language you should understand all your tasks. Many Tibetan students [are] feeling very bad about the Tibetan, because they see that it is not important at all with that environment. It’s just an extra task.”

– Mid-level Tibetan official from Lhasa, interviewed May 2017 (for full text, see Appendix 1.5)

The last Tibetan textbook revision was made in 2005, during which they added many translated works (for example, stories from foreign languages, mainly from English and biographies of popular western figures) and old Indian stories from the Rig Veda. In contrast, they reduced a large number of works by Tibetan scholars. This is a big concern for Tibetan educationalists in Tibet.⁶⁵

The provision of culturally appropriate textbooks was defined as an obligation by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its 2013 statement on the condition of education in Tibet. It called on the government of China to “eliminate all restrictions ... that severely restrict the ability of Tibetan children to learn and use the Tibetan language in schools,” and to ensure that “all the teaching and learning materials for the primary and secondary

⁶⁴ The interviewee noted that “there are some kindergartens that are private and maybe teach in Tibetan but there are so many dangerous risks [because they are underfunded], and their conditions can’t compare to the fancy, modern ones. I didn’t hear of anything particular that happened that was dangerous, but it is not really ideal.” (Interview with middle-ranking Tibetan official from Lhasa, May 2017; see Appendix 1.5). The interviewee said that parents chose kindergartens based on safety rather than language: “So the family is not taking much care about the language, they are deciding where to send them based on security.” Almost the same words were used by the Tibetan university professor: “for a parent, safety is the first priority, more than language. If they think their children can learn Tibetan but doing it feels unsafe, then they will give up. They will give up the language question in that case.”

⁶⁵ Interview with Tibetan university student from Ngawa, October 14, 2018. [nb they’re all anonymous in this report]

level are also available in ethnic minority languages and with culturally sensitive content, as guaranteed by the Constitution of China.”⁶⁶

Consequences of Shifting the Teaching Medium

Human Rights Watch is not aware of any studies that track the impact of primary-level Chinese-medium education on the cultural and linguistic abilities of Tibetan schoolchildren, and it is not clear that the Chinese government would allow any independent study of the situation in the TAR. However, anecdotal evidence and findings from studies in other areas suggest that the impact has been far-reaching.

For example, an academic survey of 172 Tibetans sent to study at special Chinese-medium boarding schools for Tibetan children in other parts of China between 1985 and 2005 noted “a diminished capacity to work with rural people using the Tibetan language.” The survey found that “their written Tibetan was less than would be expected,” and attributed this to the sharply reduced time allotted to the study of Tibetan language in the senior years of these schools.⁶⁷ Another academic study noted that Tibetan students at a senior middle school for Tibetans situated in mainland China had staged a hunger strike to try to force their school to provide more Tibetan-language classes.⁶⁸

These studies were updated in a 2017 documentary film by a Chinese filmmaker about a high school in Shanghai that was entirely for Tibetans. It did not assess their competence in Tibetan language, but it documented current conditions at the school, which included

⁶⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, “Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth period reports of China, adopted by the Committee at its sixty-fourth session (September 16 – October 4, 2013), CRC/C/CHN/CO/3-4, October 29, 2013, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/CHN/CO/3-4&Lang=En, para. 76(d) (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁶⁷ See Gerard A. Postiglione, “Dislocated Education: The Case of Tibet,” *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (November 2009), pp. 483-512; see pp. 493, 505. Postiglione also notes that school teachers in the inland [neidi] boarding schools “viewed Tibetan ways as needing Chinese-style civilizing” (499) and that “religious items were not permitted in school, and many children grew skeptical of aspects of their religion ... [the schools convey] the view that religion is a stumbling block to modernization and development.... Neidi schools attempted to transmit Chinese culture while showing a token respect for Tibetan culture” (502). Also available in Gerard A. Postiglione, *Education, Ethnicity, Society and Global Change in Asia: The Selected Works of Gerard A. Postiglione*, Routledge, 2017, Chapter 7. The lack of Tibetan language teaching in the Tibet neidi [inland] schools is described in greater detail in Gerard Postiglione, Ben Jiao and Manlaji, “Language in Tibetan Education: The Case of the Neidiban.” In Anwei Feng (ed.), *Bilingual Education in China: Practices, Policies and Concepts*, Inbunden Engelska, 2007, pp. 49-71. The authors quote former students who staged a hunger strike in their inland school in order to force the school to provide more Tibetan language classes, but without giving the date or location of the protests (pp. 63-4).

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 63-64. The authors do not give the date or location of the students’ protests.

draconian limits on their use of Tibetan: the students, the director of the film reported, “aren’t allowed to return home or speak their native language while on campus” during their three years at the school.⁶⁹ The filmmaker Qingzi Fan also found that “at least 10 hours each week are spent on political thinking courses, which include lessons extolling the values of atheism and the backwardness of religion — including Tibetan Buddhism.”

There have been few published studies of language use among Tibetans from the general population, but one academic survey of 66 Tibetans of all ages in northeastern Amdo in Gansu province in 2011 found that, although all except one could speak and understand Chinese, 13 of the Tibetans could not speak Tibetan, 17 could not read Tibetan, and 18 could not write in Tibetan.⁷⁰ A video news item by a Chinese website in April 2017 recorded apparently random interviews with six Tibetan children and young adults in the eastern Tibetan town of Dartsedo (Ch.: Kangding) in Sichuan province, all of whom said they could only speak basic Tibetan or none at all.⁷¹

These reports are fragmentary and do not include the TAR. Nevertheless, they indicate the risks posed to Tibetan language and culture by immersion of Tibetan children in a teaching or social environment that from the earliest years is dominated by Chinese language. They also support concerns expressed by Tibetans about the risk of acute language loss within the Tibetan community, particularly in urban areas.

⁶⁹ The 2017 documentary “One Way Home” was directed by Qingzi Fan, who noted that “the concept of ‘cultural assimilation’ didn’t appear to have any negative connotations at the school ... They see it as a good thing that students are being culturally assimilated [with the Han Chinese ethnic majority]. They think they’re helping the students.” See “Documentary Depicts ‘Cultural Assimilation’ of Tibetan Students in Coastal China,” Asia Society, April 26, 2017, <https://asiasociety.org/blog/asia/documentary-depicts-cultural-assimilation-tibetan-students-coastal-china>.

⁷⁰ Chunlin Yao and Ghil’ad Zuckermann, “Language vitality and language identity—which one is more important? Tibetan-Chinese bilingual education in Maketang versus Huazangsi,” *Language Problems & Language Planning* 40:2 (2016), 163–186. Unfortunately, the authors do not say whether younger people spoke less Tibetan than older ones, or identify which ones had school education. As a result, they ignore the question of progressive decay/improvement and the role of state education. See also Nicolas Tournadre, “The Dynamics of Tibetan-Chinese Bilingualism: The Current Situation and Future Prospects,” *China Perspectives*, 45, January-February 2003, <https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/231> and David Germano, “A Brief Survey of Issues Relating to Tibetan Language in the 21st Century,” Testimony to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China, Washington D.C., April 7, 2003, sections 2-3, [https://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/documents/roundtables/2003/CECC percent20Roundtable percent20Testimony percent20- percent20David percent20Germano percent20- percent202004.7.03.pdf](https://www.cecc.gov/sites/chinacommission.house.gov/files/documents/roundtables/2003/CECC%20Roundtable%20Testimony%20-%20David%20Germano%20-%202004.7.03.pdf) (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁷¹ “藏汉大调查之藏语” [Tibetan language survey], video news item, 藏汉双语网 [Tibetan-Chinese Bilingual Network], www.zanghansy.com, April 11, 2017, <https://v.qq.com/x/page/s0392a3nrg4.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

Variations in Practice

The lack of clarity in statements issued by the central government about its “bilingual education” policy for minorities is likely partly due to recognized variations in implementation at the provincial and lower levels. In 1992, when the Chinese government first announced a “bilingual education” policy for minorities, it stated that implementation and interpretation of the policy would vary widely across different administrative areas, each of which was expected to apply the policy in different ways.⁷² This has in fact happened, with the result that some areas in China have interpreted the bilingual policy in ways more consistent with uses of the term outside China, where bilingualism usually refers to learning two languages without loss of one’s mother-tongue. Areas that have taken that approach have been more open about their educational objectives.

Inner Mongolia’s 2010 Education Plan, for example, indicated that the region’s bilingual policy would focus on providing education through the medium of Mongolian language. In practice, officials there have actively encouraged Mongolian-medium teaching, as well as providing preferential access to government jobs for Mongolian-speakers.⁷³ Authorities in certain Tibetan areas outside the TAR have also taken that approach. In Yunnan province, for example, the local government declared that the right of ethnic minorities to use their language as the teaching medium should be respected and protected.⁷⁴ In Sichuan province, at the local level, Tibetan is reportedly still used as the teaching language in most primary schools in the counties of Ngawa (Ch.: Aba), Khyungchu (Ch.: Hongyuan), and Dzorge (Ch.: Ruo’rgai), all within Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang

⁷² The initial 1992 policy document on bilingual education said that actual implementation in each province or area of language policy in nationality schools “should primarily be based on each of the province’s (region’s) adherence to the ‘Constitution of the PRC’ and the ‘PRC Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law,’ and [to] the principles of being beneficial to the long-term development of the nationality, beneficial to raising the quality of nationality education, and beneficial to scientific and cultural exchange for all nationalities, and decided in accordance with suggestions from a majority of the masses and the local language environment;” “Suggestions on strengthening some issues in nationality education work,” October 20, 1992, <http://www.reformdata.org/content/19921020/17228.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁷³ Human Rights Watch interview with prominent Inner Mongolian intellectual, October 11, 2018. The interviewee asked to remain anonymous. See, also, “The Outline of Mid- and Long-term Educational Reforms and Developmental Plan for IMAR (2010–2020),” cited in Qi Zhang and Ting Yang, “Reflections on the medium of instruction for ethnic minorities in Xinjiang: the case of bilingual schools in Urumqi,” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/13670050.2018.1442409, p. 16, Table 5. Xinjiang implemented “the Xinjiang Bilingual Education Project” in 2010, with nationality students being taught Chinese from first grade, and plans to have complete “bilingual education” in all schools by 2020; Chen Xu, Chen Jin, “The practice and development of the CCP’s minority nationality bilingual education policies in Xinjiang” [Ch.: Zhongguo gongchan dang shaoshu minzu shuangyu jiaoyu zhengce zai xinjiang de shixian yu fazhan], *Xinjiang Social Sciences Forum* [Ch.: Xinjiang sheke tanlun], 2011(2), pp. 30–33.

⁷⁴ See “the Outline of Mid- and Long-term Educational Reforms and Developmental Plan for Yunnan Province (2010–2020),” cited in Qi Zhang and Ting Yang, *Reflections* p. 16, Table 5.

Autonomous Prefecture.⁷⁵ In September 2018, Ngawa Prefecture passed regulations on Tibetan language use stating that the “national language [Chinese] and Tibetan are to be the basic languages of instruction” in primary and middle schools in Tibetan-populated areas, and that all other schools must teach Tibetan as a language.⁷⁶

Some of these efforts by lower-level administrations to promote mother-tongue education in their areas may be largely aspirational—the policy in Ngawa, one resident from the area told Human Rights Watch, is likely to face practical difficulties because there has been little or no training of teachers who can teach science, social sciences, mathematics, or information technology in the Tibetan language. As a result, these subjects are often taught and assessed in Ngawa in Chinese. In addition, according to the interviewee, the publication and updating of Tibetan-language textbooks in Ngawa is said to have slowed or stopped since 2005.⁷⁷

Furthermore, any local administration hoping to maintain minority-language instruction in its area is likely to be dependent on support from the larger administrative area within which it lies. Ngawa Prefecture is under Sichuan province, and provincial officials there appear to be emphasizing the Chinese-language dimension of bilingual education, judging from media coverage of the province's first-ever conference on training bilingual teachers in the province. At that meeting, which took place in November 2018, all the leading speakers were Chinese, and photographs of the event showed that the Tibetan script on the bilingual banners in the conference room was so small that it would have been hardly visible to participants in the room.⁷⁸

Other areas have interpreted and applied the bilingual education policy in a more aggressive way, focusing on promoting Chinese-language instruction. Xinjiang declared as early as 2004 that all its schools were to use Chinese as the main language of

⁷⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with Tibetan university student from Ngawa county (Ngawa prefecture), October 14, 2018. The interviewee asked to remain anonymous.

⁷⁶ “རྩ་བ་འོད་རིགས་ཆའང་རིགས་རང་སྤྱིད་ཁྲུལ་འོད་ཀྱི་སྐད་དང་ཡིག་གཟེ་སྒྲུབ་ཡིག།” [Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture Tibetan language law], Trimleng.com, November 17, 2018, art. 8, <http://trimleng.cn/2018/11/17/bodyig-law-in-aba/> (accessed December 15, 2019). The use of mother language medium for all subjects except Chinese language is referred to as “Type 1” (or L1) in official sources.

⁷⁷ Human Rights Watch interviews with Tibetan university students from Ngawa county (Ngawa prefecture) and Dranggo county (Kandze prefecture), October 14, 2018. The interviewees asked to remain anonymous.

⁷⁸ The leading speakers were Guo Qingyi, head of Sichuan Nationalities University; Liu Kangfei, party secretary of Kandze Prefecture Education Committee; Luo Chunlin, Head of Sichuan University Educational Affairs Bureau. See “སྐད་ལ་གྱི་ཚོགས་འདུ་གསལ་ཆེན་ཞིག” [An important meeting on training bilingual teachers], China Tibetan Language Radio Web (www.tibetcnr.com), November 10, 2018, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/7_Zyybrli71hMhiYoXnqJA.

instruction,⁷⁹ and Qinghai and Xinjiang were the only provinces or regions in China to have explicitly stated in their 2010 Education Plans that “bilingual” teaching for minorities should chiefly focus on Chinese-medium education.⁸⁰

One Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai, Yushu, where Tibetan-medium education had been introduced in the 1980s, had already switched to Chinese-medium in the 1990s and by 2015 was teaching Tibetan only in a single class.⁸¹

Qinghai faced some setbacks in implementation of its 2010 plan, which had specified that all schools in the province, including primary schools, should have Chinese-medium education by 2015.⁸² Its attempts in 2010 and again in 2012 to introduce Chinese-medium

⁷⁹ The authorities began full implementation of “bilingual education” in Xinjiang with the issuing of the “Decision to Vigorously Promote Bilingual Teaching” in 2004. The “Decision” “unambiguously affirmed that the ultimate goal of bilingual education in Xinjiang was type (III), i.e., all the subjects in schools are instructed in Chinese with minority language and script as a separate subject.” See Lingxia Zhou, op. cit. In the interim, schools were still allowed to choose for teaching to be in the local language rather than Chinese “where conditions permit,” such as rural schools with a lack of Chinese-proficient teachers (Qi Zhang and Ting Yang, op. cit., p. 6).

⁸⁰ “Only Xinjiang and Qinghai specify Mandarin Chinese as the Mol [medium of instruction], probably as a result of concerns for social stability. Interestingly, if only the ten-year plans are compared, the Mol policy for Xinjiang does not sound as forceful as the one for Qinghai. In fact, the strong promotion of Chinese in Qinghai, which almost forces schools to adopt it as the Mol, has led to local demonstrations.” See Qi Zhang and Ting Yang, “Reflections on the medium of instruction for ethnic minorities in Xinjiang: the case of bilingual schools in Urumqi,” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/13670050.2018.1442409, p. 15. In a blog, the US-based Tibetan blogger and former lawyer Dolma Kyab writes “in Qinghai, 6 bn yuan was given in 2010 for Chinese language education in Tibetan areas, and the Education Department took the money and illegally interfered with Tibetan language education. Since there was so much protest, they have not been able to get their way so far, but since there has not been loud protest in Lhasa, the Education Department there can pretend to have legal backing for what it is doing.” See “ཐྱུལ་ཁབ་དང་བོད་མི་མང་བར་དུ་འགལ་ཁྲ་བཟོ་མཁན་གྱི་རེད།” [Who is causing the contradiction between the state and the Tibetan people?], November 8, 2016, <http://trimleng.cn/2016/11/08/lhasa-language-case>.

⁸¹ “Yushu and Hualong prefectures in Qinghai ... 30 years ago ... started to abandon the L1 [mother-tongue dominant bilingual education] model and started to teach using the L2 [second-language dominant] model.” See Lü Cangwa, April 2017, Appendix 3.4. See also Adrian Zenz, “Beyond Assimilation: The Tibetanisation of Tibetan Education in Qinghai,” *Inner Asia* 12 (2010), pp. 293–315 (p. 311); Yao and Zuckerman, “Language vitality and language identity” pp. 174–6; see p. 302 for policies in Yushu, and Edward Wong, “Tibetans Fight to Salvage Fading Culture in China,” *New York Times*, November 28, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/world/asia/china-tibet-language-education.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁸² According to Qi Zhang and Ting Yang, the plan said that “teaching should chiefly focus on Mandarin and at the same time on studying the ethnic language well; Mandarin should be adopted as the Mol [medium of instruction], in order to make sure the ethnic students achieve fluency in both Mandarin and their own ethnic language. By 2015, primary schools should implement the use of Mandarin as the main Mol and the ethnic language as the supporting Mol. Meanwhile, ethnic secondary schools should accelerate taking steps to using Mandarin as the Mol and offering the ethnic language as a subject.” See “The Outline of Mid- and Long-term Educational Reforms and Developmental Plan for Qinghai Province [2010–2020]” cited in Qi Zhang and Ting Yang, *Reflections*, p. 16, Table 5. The accompanying “Suggestions” made no reference to the medium of instruction, instead calling obliquely on officials to “change the teaching and learning environment, create new training models and create innovative conditions for minority nationality students to receive a good education,” “转发省教育厅等四部门关于加强全省教育发展规划推进学校布局调整工作指导意见的通知” [Notice from four provincial departments including the Department of Education on guiding suggestions for strengthening the education development plan by promoting work on the adjustment of school distribution], Qinghai Government Information Office Document (2010) No. 126, Qinghai Government Information Office, June 21, 2010, <http://www.qh.gov.cn/html/284/150440.htm> (accessed

teaching in Tibetan schools—which included layoffs of Tibetan teachers with weak Chinese-language skills and the introduction of Chinese-language textbooks that lacked Tibet-specific content, according to the *New York Times*⁸³—had to be put on hold following a series of protests against the new teaching policies by Tibetan students in some areas of the province.⁸⁴ This led officials in Qinghai to delay full introduction of the scheme, reportedly until 2019.⁸⁵

The first confirmation that this plan is now underway emerged in May 2019, when a leaked copy of an order issued by the Education Bureau in Golok, a Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture within Qinghai, showed that Qinghai officials have started to roll out the new hardline policy in that area. The order requires primary schools in the prefecture to introduce Chinese-medium instruction for the 2019-2020 school year.⁸⁶ The document, which was not intended for public distribution, calls for Chinese language to be used for teaching all subjects except Tibetan language. It states that the shift is necessary “in order to innovate more opportunities for students to deepen their studies, to unify our prefecture’s teaching model, and regulate teaching appraisal systems in secondary and elementary schools.”⁸⁷

The Golok document reflects the normal pattern of policy statements in China: those at the central level are relatively vague, in part to allow for regional and provincial variation, while those at the provincial and prefectural level are more specific, even though the details are usually not made public. This does not explain, however, why statements issued by the TAR about its education policy, the details of which must have been settled on long ago, remain as unclear and evasive as those from the central government.

December 15, 2019). A 2018 survey of 12 linguists and scholars working on minority languages in eastern Tibet, including Qinghai, reported that half of them considered Chinese to be dominant in pre-school institutions and 80 percent of them thought it was already dominant in primary schools in the area. See Gerald Roche, “Draft Report on Tibet’s Linguistic Minorities,” University of Melbourne, February 21, 2018, p. 9, fig. 9, <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/sjnbk>. The survey reported dramatically lower rates of prevalence for the use in schools of non-Tibetan minority languages in Tibet. It did not give the full number of respondents, the date of the survey, or the administrative areas they were referring to.

⁸³ Edward Wong, “Tibetans Fight to Salvage Fading Culture in China,” *New York Times*, November 28, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/world/asia/china-tibet-language-education.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁸⁴ *Iron Hare 2011 - Flames of Resistance*, Dhoday Alliance for Freedom and Justice, Dharamsala 2012, p. 154, <http://www.reteccp.org/biblioteca/dossier/flamesofresistance.pdf> (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch interview with individual who asked to remain anonymous, April 2019.

⁸⁶ “Golok Prefecture plans to implement Chinese-language education,” *Voice of America*, April 16, 2019, <https://www.voatibetan.com/a/4920012.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁸⁷ See the critique of this decision in “བོད་སྐད་ཡིག་ལ་ཡིད་ཆེས་མི་བྱེད་པའི་མགོ་འགྲོ་བོད་རིགས་རང་སྐད་ཁྱུང་གི་སློབ་གསོ་ལ་སླངས་ལ་དགག་པ།,” <http://trimleng.org/2019/05/23/language-regulation-in-golog-bogeyig-is-need-to-be-held> (accessed December 15, 2019).

Cultivated Ambiguity: Official Descriptions of Bilingual Education in the TAR

Almost all official documents, laws, and media reports have avoided giving any information about the main teaching language used in “bilingual education” classes in the TAR’s primary schools. Instead, they only say that these schools have greatly increased the teaching of Chinese language—a development that is not controversial and is welcomed by many members of minorities—and note that these schools also teach the local language as a subject.

Official documents that have been made available by the TAR authorities to the public have been ambiguous or obscure. The region’s 2010 Education Plan said schools should use “the Tibetan language and the national language as the basic teaching languages,”⁸⁸ and implied that switching to Chinese-medium teaching would only be “promoted,” not required.⁸⁹

Apart from the leaked order from Golok prefecture and the single sentence in the Qinghai Education Plan, Human Rights Watch has so far found only two public documents from official sources that indicate what “bilingual education” has meant in practice in the Tibetan context. One is a 2016 media report on a “bilingual” elementary school in Sichuan noting that, except for Tibetan language and literature classes, “most classes are held in Mandarin, such as maths”—even though it said that 99 percent of the students at the school were Tibetan.⁹⁰

The other is a January 2016 article in the *Global Times* citing the famous Tibetan archivist and historian Derong Tsering Dondrub. The scholar, who is based in a Tibetan area of Sichuan, stated that “as the proportion of the school day spent speaking Tibetan gets

⁸⁸ “中共西藏自治区委员会西藏自治区人民政府关于贯彻《国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要（2010—2020年）》的实施意见” [The TAR CCP Committee and People’s Government Suggestions on Implementation of the “National Mid- to Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)”, *China Education News*, March 29, 2011, p. 6, Section 9, http://www.jyb.cn/info/dfjyk/201103/t20110329_422390.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

⁸⁹ Qi Zhang and Ting Yang, “Reflections on the medium of instruction for ethnic minorities in Xinjiang” p. 16.

⁹⁰ The school is “hidden in the depths of Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture” in a township called Gala. The article demonstrates the financial benefits for a school of switching to Chinese-medium instruction: it has received government investment worth “almost US\$43m” together with “state of the art technology.” Although 99 percent of the students are Tibetans, “half of the staff are indeed Han people.” See “Bilingual education in Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture,” CCTV, October 31, 2016, http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/life/news/201610/t20161031_5773991.html.

smaller, children's ability to use Tibetan is waning.”⁹¹ Neither of these documents refers to the situation in the TAR.

What may be the only official statement intended for foreigners about the medium of instruction in TAR schools is in a White Paper issued by the central government in 2015. It states that the teaching language in all primary schools in rural areas of the TAR and some urban areas is “mostly Tibetan for the major courses.”⁹² This claim cannot be confirmed, since no academic or other studies of this issue are known to have been published since 2014, even within China. As detailed above, other evidence, such as the Lhasa Education Bureau announcement in 2016 and the accounts of Tibetan parents in rural areas of Nagchu with whom Human Rights Watch spoke in September 2019, suggests that this is no longer the case.

It is unclear why officials in China have so persistently avoided identifying the medium of instruction used in Tibetan primary schools, particularly in the TAR. Their reticence may reflect concerns that the shift to Chinese-language instruction conflicts with domestic laws in China requiring minority schools to use the local language “whenever possible.”

Stifling Debate Over Teaching Medium for TAR Primary Schools

Officials have responded to concerns over the diminished place of Tibetan language in schools by stating repeatedly that the bilingual policies are flexible rather than required and do not infringe on China’s constitutional undertakings because the schools continue to provide classes in which Tibetan and other minority children can be taught their own languages.⁹³ They also note that existing laws protect the right of Tibetans and other

⁹¹ See Huang Jingjing, “Private schools attempt to keep Tibetan language alive,” *Global Times*, January 28, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/966193.shtml>. The article can be read as a suggestion that the resulting “sense of crisis” among Tibetans about the loss of mother-tongue education should be offset by private schools established by Tibetans.

⁹² “Full Text: Tibet's Path of Development Is Driven by an Irresistible Historical Tide,” *Xinhua*, April 15, 2015, http://www.china.org.cn/china/2015-04/15/content_35325433.htm (accessed December 15, 2019). “To facilitate language learning, the [Qinghai] education authority has translated more than 130 sets of books from Mandarin to Tibetan. The province spends 17 million yuan a year publishing books on mathematics, physics, chemistry, art and physical education in Tibetan, and provides them free of charge to students.” See “Qinghai makes teaching Tibetan a priority,” *Xinhua*, June 22, 2018, http://eng.tibet.cn/eng/life/health/201806/t20180622_5981816.html. As usual, the article describes the teaching of Tibetan language at a Tibetan school but does not reveal the teaching language used at the school for any other subjects.

⁹³ Shan Jie, “Hyping ‘suppression theory’ misses the reality in Tibet: expert - Bilingual education progressing in Tibet,” *Global Times*, January 9, 2018, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1084099.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019); quoting Xiong Kunxin, a professor at Minzu University of China in Beijing: “Some Western media have been hyping the idea that Tibetan education is suppressed in China because they do not know the real conditions in Tibet.... Learning Putonghua and Tibetan is

minorities to use their own language in public meetings, courts, hospitals, public signage, and official publications in their areas.⁹⁴ In addition, they almost always point to the fact that many Tibetan parents want their children to become fluent in Chinese because of the vastly improved job prospects that exist for fluent Chinese speakers.⁹⁵

These claims are broadly correct, but they avoid discussion about whether Tibetan-medium education is being reduced and whether it needs to be reduced, particularly in primary schools. Many Tibetans we spoke to and many who have spoken to others on the subject have expressed the view that acquiring fluency in Chinese language, while desirable, does not require learning all subjects through Chinese and is not incompatible with Tibetan-medium education at the primary level. Some Tibetans who hold this view cite international academic research that shows that students learn faster and better when taught in their mother-tongue.⁹⁶ From around 2002 until the recent shifts in policy, bilingual teaching systems based roughly on this view were implemented in middle as well as primary schools in the counties of Trika (Ch.: Guide), Chabcha (Ch.: Gonghe), Chentsa (Ch.: Jianza) and Pema (Ch.: Baima) in Qinghai, and in the Tibetan township of Bindo (Ch.: Wendu), also in Qinghai.⁹⁷

not contradictory. China is a multi-ethnic country and learning Putonghua could allow Tibetans to communicate with other ethnic groups and know about the world outside Tibet.” Note that, like almost all PRC media articles on this issue, it claims that Western critics are wrong to say that the teaching of Tibetan language is being suppressed but does not discuss the argument that Tibetan-medium education is being reduced.

⁹⁴ See “Law passed to protect Tibetan language,” *People’s Daily*, May 23, 2002, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2002/May/33109.htm>. Similar regulations regarding Tibetan language were passed in the Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures of Gannan (adopted June 1, 1996), Hainan (May 20, 1989), Guoluo (April 24, 1993), Huangnan (May 30, 1993), Haibei (March 21, 1994, amended January 6, 2004), Yushu (May 13, 1994), and Ganzi (November 21, 1997); the Mongolian and Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Haixi (March 4, 1991, amended November 27, 2007); and the Tibetan Autonomous County of Tianzhu (January 18, 1999). See also Nicolas Tournadre, “The Dynamics of Tibetan-Chinese Bilingualism: The Current Situation and Future Prospects,” *China Perspectives*, 45 | January-February 2003, <https://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/231>.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Adrian Zenz, “Beyond Assimilation: The Tibetanisation of Tibetan Education in Qinghai,” *Inner Asia* 12 (2010), pp. 293–315 (p. 311), and “Language vitality and language identity”, pp. 174–6.

⁹⁶ See, for example, “Education in the mother-tongue does better in helping children to quickly accept new knowledge. I’m a beneficiary of such education, too. Even in college, the lessons were taught in Tibetan, which didn’t stop me successfully learning Putonghua and English, said Jiacao,” a Tibetan teacher in Xining; Huang Jingjing, “Private schools attempt to keep Tibetan language alive,” *Global Times*, January 28, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/966193.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019). See also, “A child’s ability to skillfully utilize their mother language will help the child’s study of a second language and furthermore will not cancel out that child’s utilization of its mother language,” Yixi Lamucuo [Yeshe Lhamo Tso], Online Responses to Zhang Wenkui, Appendix 3.4; and “On the need for clarification of some issues and practical standards related to pre-school education in Tibetan areas” by Sayul Trowo Gyaltzen <http://ti.tibet3.com/edu/learning/2019-01-11/34412.html>.

⁹⁷ See Zenz, pp. 301–4.

In the TAR, however, it appears that officials have not presented parents or schools with the option of providing high-quality teaching of Chinese at the same time as using Tibetan-medium teaching for other subjects. It is also hard to find evidence of any public discussion of the option of a “true” or “balanced” bilingual education system in which Tibetan and the national language are given equal prominence. There also appears to have been no discussion in the TAR media of the benefits of Tibetan-medium education systems.

II. “Bilingual Kindergartens”

In 2005, Chinese authorities began a nationwide drive to increase the number of children in kindergartens.⁹⁸ From around 2011, the TAR authorities began to organize the provision of kindergarten education across the region.⁹⁹ Similar drives occurred in other Tibetan areas.¹⁰⁰ Between 2011 and 2015, the number of state kindergartens in the TAR increased fourfold from 198 to 885,¹⁰¹ and by April 2017 there were 1,028 kindergartens in the TAR, with 4,736 trained staff providing teaching to more than 96,700 children, typically ages 3 to 6.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ China's State Council issued “Some State Council Suggestions on the Current Development of Pre-school Education (SC issue [2010] No. 41)” in 2010, <http://www.waizi.org.cn/law/4933.html> (accessed December 15, 2019). The TAR's Ten-year Education Plan, published in March 2011, then issued a plan to provide two-year pre-school education for 80 percent of rural children and three-year pre-school education for 80 percent of urban children by 2020, with no mention of “bilingual kindergartens” (see Section 3.1 of “中共西藏自治区委员会西藏自治区人民政府关于贯彻《国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要（2010—2020 年）》的实施意见” [The TAR CCP Committee and People's Government Suggestions on Implementation of the “National Mid- to Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan [2010-2020], China Education News, March 29, 2011, p. 6, http://www.jyb.cn/info/dfjyk/201103/t20110329_422390.html). In late 2011, the TAR government announced that education in the new kindergartens would be free in the rural areas and for poor families in towns, Suolang Dajie, Luobu Ciren, “西藏自治区将免费教育扩大至 15 年” [TAR to extend free education to 15 years], China Broadcast News, January 17, 2012, http://www.ce.cn/xwzx/gnsz/gdxw/201201/17/t20120117_23007542.shtml (accessed December 15, 2019). In 2017, the Ministry of Education issued the “Suggestions on Implementing Phase 3 of the Pre-school Education Action Plan” as part of the 13th Five-year Plan (2016-2020). The TAR implementation of Phase 3 began in 2017 and is due to be completed by 2020.

⁹⁹ “[F]rom 2011 to 2012, 154 township level bilingual kindergartens were built across the TAR.” See “The glorious blossoming of childhood: the rapid growth of pre-school education in TAR,” *China Tibet News Online* (first published December 11, 2013), http://tb.chinatibetnews.com/kjws/jyxw/201505/t20150508_451349.html. In Xinjiang, by comparison, the authorities formally began “bilingual education” at pre-school level in 2005 with the issuing of “Opinions regarding the Strengthening of Pre-school Bilingual Education for Minorities,” Qi Zhang and Ting Yang, “Reflections on the medium of instruction for ethnic minorities in Xinjiang: the case of bilingual schools in Urumqi,” *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/13670050.2018.1442409, p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ In February 2017, Sichuan province, which includes over 1 million Tibetans, announced that it would fund the implementation of a “one village, one kindergarten plan” for all Tibetan and other minority nationality autonomous counties within the province. See “四川将选派 700 名优秀教师到 32 个藏区县支教” [Sichuan to dispatch 700 outstanding teachers to the 32 counties in Tibetan areas as teaching support], February 18, 2017, <http://www.sc.gov.cn/10462/12771/2017/2/18/10414484.shtml>. Sichuan action plan for bilingual kindergartens announced that the province would “support the construction of bilingual kindergartens and their supporting facilities, and improve conditions for establishing publicly run bilingual kindergartens (bilingual classes)” in its Tibetan areas. See “四川省第三期学前教育行动计划” [Sichuan Province Third Pre-school Education Action Plan], Sichuan Provincial Department of Education Sichuan Provincial Development and Reform Commission, Sichuan Province, Sichuan Education Network, September 7, 2017, <http://www.scdjy.gov.cn/newsInfo.aspx?pkId=120202>.

¹⁰¹ “Educational investment in Tibet exceeds 60 billion in the past 6 years,” *China Tibet News Online* (January 2015), http://english.chinatibetnews.com/tt/201601/t20160113_1031097.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁰² This enrolment was said to represent 66.3 percent of eligible children in the region. See “广覆盖 保基本 有质量 —我区学前双语教育发展情况” [Broaden coverage, ensure a foundation, provide quality - The development of pre-school bilingual education in our region], *Tibet Daily*, April 7, 2017, https://www.sohu.com/a/132001786_160909.

Human Rights Watch views the increasing availability of kindergartens as a positive step and recognizes the value of teaching children the national language alongside their mother-tongue. However, as detailed below, there are reasons to be concerned that training pre-school children in the Chinese language is unnecessarily coming at the expense of children's fluency and ability to adequately speak Tibetan. And the pupils in the TAR kindergartens are still overwhelmingly Tibetan: according to official figures, 93.4 percent of the 87,000 children in kindergartens in the TAR in 2016 were Tibetans, with the proportion rising to 99.7 percent in the region's 684 rural kindergartens.¹⁰³

The initial announcement in 2010 of the plan to introduce near-universal pre-school education in the TAR made no mention of the language to be used in those kindergartens, but references to the term “kindergarten” [幼儿园] in official publications about minority education since then almost always use the qualifier “bilingual” [双语]. The Ten-Year Education Plan for Qinghai in 2010, for example, called for “kindergartens for pre-school bilingual education in nationality areas” and “combined ethnic and Han kindergarten classes,”¹⁰⁴ and a 2015 State Council “Decision” described the 2020 goal for education in minority areas as “universal two-year bilingual education” for pre-school children.¹⁰⁵ In 2016, the TAR announced that it would make “bilingual kindergartens” available throughout the region.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ “By the end of March 2016, there was a total of 882 kindergartens in the TAR, and 87,951 persons were attending kindergarten, of whom 82,141 were minority nationality children [93.4%]; of these kindergartens, 62 were urban [Ch.: chengqu] kindergartens with a total of 20,572 children of whom 16,959 were minority nationality children [82.4%]; there were 136 town kindergartens [Ch.: zhenqu] with 28,398 children of whom 26,314 were minority nationality children [92.7%]; and 684 rural [Ch.: xiangcun] kindergartens with 38,981 children of whom 38,871 were minority nationality children [99.7%].” See Zhao Xuemei, “A survey into the current state of bilingual teaching in kindergartens in Tibet’s agricultural and pastoral regions, and suggestions for its improvement – Based on a survey of sample kindergartens in the agricultural and pastoral regions of Chushul County in Lhasa City,” *Xizang jiaoyu* (Tibet Education), Issue 5, 2017, pp. 52-55.

¹⁰⁴ See note 26 above. The 10-Year Education Work Plans issued by the TAR and some other Tibetan areas in 2010 or 2011 specified that future kindergartens must be “bilingual.” See also “西藏农牧区双语幼儿教材开始使用” [Bilingual kindergarten teaching materials start to be used in Tibet’s pastoral and agricultural regions], State Council Information Office website, September 20, 2011, citing Xinhuanet, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zhzc/8/1/Document/1012463/1012463.htm>. Xinjiang stated in its Education Plan for 2010 that 2-year pre-school bilingual education would be introduced there in 2012 and would be established throughout the province by 2015. See Chen Xu, Chen Jin, “The practice and development of the CCP’s minority nationality bilingual education policies in Xinjiang” [*Zhongguo gongchan dang shaoshu minzu shuangyu jiaoyu zhengce zai xinjiang de shixian yu fazhan*], *Xinjiang Social Sciences Forum* [Ch.: Xinjiang sheke tanlun], 2011(2), pp. 30-33.

¹⁰⁵ “Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education,” State Council, National Document [2015] 46, issued August 11, 2015, section 21, www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_10097.htm (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁰⁶ “250 bilingual kindergartens to be built in Tibet region,” *Global Times*, February 26, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/970539.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019). In late 2011, the TAR had already undertaken to build free “bilingual kindergartens” in rural areas, “西藏 2012 年将新建 251 所“双语”幼儿园” [Tibet to newly

While the meaning of “bilingual” was left ambiguous, government statements and media reports suggest it means the kindergartens must emphasize the use and teaching of Chinese. Officials sometimes imply that this approach involves Tibetan-medium instruction in some unspecified measure, but emphasize the need to promote the national language and are typically silent on the importance of children also mastering their mother-tongue.¹⁰⁷ And as indicated by the survey results summarized below, teachers, at least in the Lhasa area, see improving Chinese language ability as the main goal of bilingual kindergartens in the TAR. A 2016 central government directive on education policy in Tibetan areas, for example, states that the purpose of “bilingual education” at all levels including pre-school is to “effectively improve the ability of ethnic minority students to adapt to social development and employment,”¹⁰⁸ meaning to improve their ability in Chinese language.

Kindergartens and Their Purpose: Survey Findings and Interviews

A 2017 survey of 50 kindergarten teachers in Chushul, near Lhasa, found that 67 percent of the teachers believed the “most important objective” of bilingual teaching is to improve children’s ability in Chinese.¹⁰⁹ The designer of the survey concluded that the bilingual kindergartens were largely failing because “after school, among friends and in their families, [the Tibetan pre-school children] only use Tibetan in their exchanges.” This extraordinary remark demonstrates that the designer of the survey assumed from the start

construct 251 “bilingual kindergartens” in 2012], Tibet News Net, December 29, 2011, <http://www.vtibet.com/news/2011-12/29/cms221765article.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁰⁷ The strongest statement found of official concern for Tibetan language in bilingual kindergartens is in an internal publication from the Tsoho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai, which required that “all minority nationality kindergartens throughout the entire province must hold national language conversation classes, and focus on strengthening oral exercises in the national language,” but also noted that “At the same time as letting the children grasp their own languages, ordinary kindergartens in towns with relatively high numbers of minority nationality students should hold Tibetan-language conversation classes, thereby creating a study environment and conditions for strengthening both languages and improving both languages.” See “海南州双语教学转型提质工程‘教改十条’有关情况答记者问” [A Brief Discussion about the Relevant Conditions of the “10 Teaching Reforms” in the Bilingual Teaching Transformation and Improvement Project in Hainan Prefecture], Hainan Tibetan Autonomous Prefectural Government, April 5, 2017, http://www.qhnn.gov.cn/xwdt/hnkb/201704/t20170405_9985.html.

¹⁰⁸ “Opinions of the Ministry of Education on Strengthening the Work of Supporting Tibetans and Tibet Provinces in the 13th Five-Year Plan Period,” Ministry of Education, Beijing, December 30, 2016, http://www.moe.edu.cn/srcsite/A09/s3082/201701/t20170112_294684.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁰⁹ Zhao Xuemei, “A survey into the current state of bilingual teaching in kindergartens in Tibet’s agricultural and pastoral regions, and suggestions for its improvement – Based on a survey of sample kindergartens in the agricultural and pastoral regions of Chushul County in Lhasa City,” *Xizang jiaoyu* (Tibet Education), Issue 5, 2017, pp. 52-55. The survey of kindergartens in Chushul, apparently conducted by an ethnic Chinese teacher, makes no substantive reference to the teaching of Tibetan and appears not to have given the interviewees any option for stating that promoting Tibetan language might be an objective of bilingual education.

that the purpose of “bilingual kindergartens” in Tibet is the promotion of Chinese language, regardless of the cost in terms of Tibetan language ability among pre-school Tibetan children.

A 2016 article based on a survey by two Tibetan teachers of 11 kindergartens in Lhasa found that 14 percent of the teachers were ethnic Chinese, and noted that, “due to a lack of teacher resources,” very few of these or other teachers in the kindergartens had qualifications to teach at pre-school level or any other level,¹¹⁰ meaning that they were not qualified to teach in either language—another key shortcoming. This was contrary to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which has stressed the importance of having teachers in minority schools be appropriately trained to deliver a bilingual education.¹¹¹

The same article reported that smaller classes were mainly taught in Tibetan, but teachers consciously increased the use of Chinese in middle-sized and larger classes. It noted that “extremely few Chinese kindergarten teachers were proficient in daily Tibetan” and said that textbooks provided by donors from the mainland areas, as part of the “Aid Tibet” program, did not have “strong applicability” but that few others were available; the most widely used were in Chinese, with only the titles in each section translated into Tibetan. Citing inputs from Tibetan teachers who were surveyed, the authors of the article observed:

[Tibetan teachers said] they had no choice but to translate the books into Tibetan in order to use them for teaching, and integrate ordinary Tibetan people’s daily life routines to explain them, while other teachers expressed [the view] that the teaching materials lacked even the most basic Tibetan letters or Tibetan honorifics, and that such a lack of a basic Tibetan language foundation and of a Tibetan cultural foundation would directly impact upon the children’s future study of the Tibetan language.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Gengzang Zhuoma and Danzeng, “A survey and study of the state of bilingual education at kindergartens in the seven counties of Lhasa City,” *Xizang jiaoyu* (Tibet Education), Issue 12, 2016, pp. 60-62.

¹¹¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of China, adopted by the Committee at its sixty-fourth session (16 September–4 October 2013), CRC/C/CHN/CO/3-4, October 29, 2013, para. 75.

¹¹² The most widely used textbooks were the “Autonomous Regional Agricultural and Pastoral Regions ‘Bilingual’ Kindergarten Children’s Books” series (Gengzang Zhuoma and Danzeng, op. cit.).

Tibetans interviewed by Human Rights Watch have expressed concern that the increased focus on Chinese-language use in the new Tibetan kindergartens puts children of pre-school age at risk of losing their Tibetan-language ability. Several interviewees reported that, at least in urban areas, though their children now had excellent Chinese, their ability to speak, and especially to write, Tibetan had diminished significantly. A Tibetan university professor said that although Tibetan language is still used in rural kindergartens,¹¹³ this was not the case in the city:

I went several times with my friend to the kindergarten, it was near our compound, in the city. It was, in terms of facilities, quite modern, they have lunch there so that the children ... don't have to go back home, they have lots of pictures, like the English alphabet, on the walls. There is nothing in Tibetan.... My friend told me there is no Tibetan language in that kindergarten. On the wall there was a colorful picture for each letter in the English alphabet, but no Tibetan.... When we went to pick up his son, the son came out and said "bye bye" to the teacher, who is Chinese, *laoshi zaijian*.... [N]ow the small children do not have an accent when they speak Chinese. They speak just like [people in] Beijing.

A Tibetan from Lhasa in his 40s, working in the tourism industry, told Human Rights Watch in 2017 that parents who want to improve their children's future employment opportunities or want them to attend the best kindergartens may have no choice but to send them to kindergartens that teach in Chinese, because the remaining private kindergartens that still teach in Tibetan have inferior conditions:

All of those kindergartens with good conditions are teaching in Chinese, so some parents are sending kids there for safety So, the family is not taking much care about the language, they are deciding where to send them based on safety. There are some kindergartens that are private and maybe teach in Tibetan, but there are so many risks, and their conditions can't compare to the fancy, modern ones.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ "In my [remote, rural] area, one of my cousins worked for the kindergarten run by the government, so I know that was using Tibetan. I think it is still like that, in that place." [Writes on paper: 'In economically backward places, Tibetan identity is better maintained.']. Interview with Tibetan university professor, November 2017; see Appendix 1.6.

¹¹⁴ See interview with staff member in the tourism industry, Lhasa, April 2017; see Appendix 1.4.

In August 2017 a poem circulated on WeChat by a Tibetan from Gansu. Using the pen name Do-lho Drengbu, he explained his decision not to send his daughter to the local municipal kindergarten:

I won't send you to the municipal kindergarten

not because I do not see the value of pre-school education, but
because I am not comfortable with a principal telling an
audience "A Tibetan-speaking child is not a good child." ...

I won't send you to the municipal kindergarten

not because I do not respect and admire the abilities of trained
teachers, but because I call you by a true Tibetan clan name
with a certain cultural background.

I won't send you to the municipal kindergarten

not because of any idea that it is all right not to learn the
majority language, or any partiality at all, but because it scares
me that the time will come when you cannot communicate with
the elders in your own homeland, and can barely read or write
our recorded history....

I won't send you to the municipal kindergarten

especially because I want to take an interest in everything you
are learning, and be in charge of what children are told in the
classroom.

A Tibetan former part-time teacher from Lhasa said that some Tibetan parents in Lhasa wanted to find half-day kindergartens to lessen the impact of the Chinese-language teaching environment. “The hours are 8:30 to 4:30 – very long,” she said. “But you can’t find a half-day one.”¹¹⁵

Interviewees from Lhasa told Human Rights Watch they believed the purpose of the program was in large part political. An interviewee working in the tourism industry said:

The government’s policy of teaching [very young] Tibetan children Chinese in kindergarten has not been clearly and widely announced, and it has nothing in common with the special provisions for autonomous nationality regions, and the constitutional guarantees of respect for nationality religion and culture.... Building kindergartens in the villages and teaching Chinese to the [very young children] is about changing the language environment for the next generation, or, to be blunt, it is an aggressive policy to disrupt the continuity of language transmission between generations of Tibetan society. If it succeeds, it is not difficult to foresee that Tibetan religion, culture, consciousness and identity will become Sinicized.¹¹⁶

The university professor from Lhasa linked the policy to proposals by prominent Chinese academics to increase “stability” in minority areas like Tibet:

So [bilingual] kindergartens are something new, only over the past 10 years. Right from the beginning there were private Chinese ones where of course they hired Tibetan workers, but the owner was Chinese. It seems that the government indirectly encouraged it—they think that if these children are fluent in Chinese when they are 3 years old, it’s better for them because, like [the sociologist] Ma Rong says, they can get a better chance of jobs. And it’s better for the stability issue, that’s their thinking.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Interview with former part-time teacher, October 2018; see Appendix 1.1.

¹¹⁶ Interview with staff member in the tourism industry, Lhasa, April 2017; see Appendix 1.4.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Tibetan university professor, November 2017; see Appendix 1.6.



Children at Unity Kindergarten in Lhasa perform a dance to celebrate the “Day of remembrance of the liberation of tens of thousands of Tibetan serfs.”¹²⁵ © 2010 Tibet Daily

kindergartens in Chushul county near Lhasa in 2017 noted that “it can be seen that kindergarten teachers in Qiushui [Chushul county] strongly propagandize ‘bilingual’ teaching, with 20 percent of the county’s kindergarten teachers writing the phrase ‘bilingual education’ on their class noticeboards.”¹²² Pictures in official newspapers show kindergarten children in Lhasa performing dances in front of the portrait of Chairman Mao Zedong to celebrate political events such as “Serf Liberation Day,”¹²³ and wearing military uniforms for “national defense training.”¹²⁴

cultivate these values are those where “the national flag should be displayed and the national anthem played and song [sic]” and “red tourism.” See “Core socialist values,” *Xinhua*, October 12, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-10/12/content_33160115.htm.

¹²² Zhao Xuemei, “A survey into the current state of bilingual teaching in kindergartens in Tibet’s agricultural and pastoral regions, and suggestions for its improvement – Based on a survey of sample kindergartens in the agricultural and pastoral regions of Chushul County in Lhasa City,” *Xizang jiaoyu* (Tibet Education), Issue 5, 2017, pp. 52-55.

¹²³ “‘Serf Emancipation Day’,” *Tibet Daily*, March 28, 2010, http://tb.xzwx.com/zt/328lzn/gdjin/201505/t20150513_553240.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹²⁴ “Children in Military Uniforms,” *China Tibet News Online*, July 19, 2016, http://tb.xzwx.com/fz/fzxw/201607/t20160719_1339527.html (accessed December 15, 2019). The children were from the kindergarten run by the Tibet Military District, which is based in Lhasa.

¹²⁵ “‘Serf Emancipation Day’,” *Tibet Daily*, March 28, 2010, http://tb.xzwx.com/zt/328lzn/gdjin/201505/t20150513_553240.html (accessed December 15, 2019).



Kindergarten children in Lhasa carry out “military training.” © 2016 China Tibet News Online

In mid-2018, a Beijing-based Tibetan activist posted a number of videos on her social media accounts of kindergartens in Tibet where young children, apparently Tibetans, were performing as Red Army soldiers with toy weapons,¹²⁶ reenacting a battle scene of Chinese soldiers fighting the Japanese,¹²⁷ and singing a song in a local dialect of Chinese.¹²⁸ One video showed a political song being broadcast over a kindergarten’s loudspeaker system,¹²⁹ while another showed kindergarten teachers in Lhasa staging a parade demonstrating traditional Chinese dress.¹³⁰ The celebration of Han Chinese culture in

¹²⁶ The activist Tsering Woesser posted the videos on her Twitter account @degewa showing a performance by children for parents at the Lhasa Earth Kindergarten, which she said has several branches in the city. Some videos showed children dressed as Red Army soldiers with toy weapons, waving the PRC national flag, and rounding up other children acting as enemy prisoners. The banners above the stage were in Chinese only and the presentations and introductions were mostly in Chinese, although most of the children and audience appeared to be Tibetans. See @degewa, July 12, 2018, <https://twitter.com/degewa/status/1017313438895226880> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹²⁷ Tsering Woesser, Facebook account, July 3, 2018, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10156677221369802&set=a.10151704150399802&type=3>; Tsering Woesser, Twitter account @degewa, July 3, 2018, <https://twitter.com/degewa/status/1014005540442132480> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹²⁸ Twitter account of @degewa, July 12, 2018, <https://twitter.com/i/status/1017312223654342656> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹²⁹ Twitter account of @degewa, September 19, 2018, <https://twitter.com/degewa/status/1042622623048380419> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹³⁰ Facebook account of Tsering Woesser, July 12, 2018, <https://twitter.com/degewa/status/1017335211271454720> (accessed December 15, 2019).

kindergartens and schools follows a call by Xi Jinping for China to “advance and enrich outstanding traditional Chinese culture (*Zhonghua youxiu chuantong wenhua*),”¹³¹ including in schools. The State Council accordingly requires teachers in minority schools to give “full play to education in Chinese traditional culture,”¹³² alongside the drive to create “identification” of minorities with Chinese culture.

Attendance at Kindergartens: Effectively Compulsory

Tibetan interviewees also expressed concern that attendance at “bilingual kindergartens” appears to be effectively compulsory. While kindergarten attendance is in itself a positive practice that is strongly encouraged internationally,¹³³ compulsory attendance at these bilingual kindergartens in the TAR means that Tibetan children are likely to suffer from diminished linguistic ability in their mother-tongue. Their school readiness, linguistic development, and skills acquisition may also suffer as a result of not being allowed to learn in their mother-tongue.¹³⁴ International evidence shows that early learning is most effective in the child’s mother-tongue, and that children who learn in their mother-tongue in the first years of education perform better, and build richer language and social skills.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Jing Qi and Cui Xiantao, “Chuancheng he hongyang Zhonghua youxiu chuantong wenhua—xuexi Xi Jinping zong shuji xilie zhongyao jianghua tihui” [Inherit and Promote Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture – Learning from General Secretary Xi Jinping’s series of important speeches], July 22, 2015, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2015/0722/c83859-27343299.html>, cited in Zi Yang, “Xi Jinping and China’s Traditionalist Restoration,” *China Brief*, Volume 17, Issue 9, July 6, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/xi-jinping-chinas-traditionalist-restoration> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹³² “Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education,” State Council, National Document [2015] 46, issued August 11, 2015, section 7, www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_10097.htm (accessed December 15, 2019). In May 2016 primary and secondary school textbooks throughout the country were revised in order to “immerse students in traditional Chinese culture.” See “Textbooks to include more about culture,” *China Daily*, May 25, 2016, http://english.gov.cn/news/top_news/2016/05/25/content_281475356975834.

¹³³ Sustainable Development Goal, Target 4.2, calls on states to “ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education,” United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, 2019, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4> (accessed December 15, 2019). The Committee on the Rights of the Child has expressed regret when “at least one year of pre-school was not made compulsory.” See Albania CRC/15/Add.249, para. 60, March 31, 2005, <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/crc/albania2005.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹³⁴ UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2007 – Strong Foundations: Early childhood care and education, 2008, p. 163, <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2007/strong-foundations-early-childhood-care-education> (accessed January 8, 2020), Arnold C., et al, “Is everybody ready? Readiness, transition and continuity: lessons, reflections and moving forward,” 2006, Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2007, https://www.akdn.org/sites/akdn/files/media/documents/various_pdf_documents/2006_akf_edu_-_ecd_-_is_everybody_ready.pdf (accessed January 8, 2020).

¹³⁵ UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2007 – Strong Foundations: Early childhood care and education, 2008, <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/report/2007/strong-foundations-early-childhood-care-education> (accessed January 8, 2020), pp.158 – 159; UNESCO, “Mother-Tongue Matters: Local Language as a Key to Effective Learning, 2007, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000161121> (accessed January 8, 2020).

From around 2011 until 2014, the TAR government had announced that kindergarten attendance was compulsory,¹³⁶ as had the authorities in Tibetan areas of Sichuan and Qinghai.¹³⁷ But, as noted by the former Tibetan lawyer Dolma Kyab, “there is no legal requirement for children under 6 to attend pre-school” and requiring attendance at kindergartens was in contravention of China’s Regional Nationality Autonomy Law.¹³⁸ The Ministry of Education confirmed in March 2017 that only the central authorities can change the length of compulsory education in China, currently set at nine years, and that provinces are not allowed to declare pre-school attendance to be compulsory.¹³⁹

According to the former part-time teacher from Lhasa, however, by 2018 a new policy was in force in Lhasa that requires children to prove they have attended a kindergarten before they can be admitted to a primary school:

The kids have to go to kindergarten, it is kind of mandatory, by, I think, the age of 4.... There is a whole new system, they need to have a report book or credit report in order to enroll in the elementary school, and it carries in it

¹³⁶ A school teacher from a county just outside Lhasa, interviewed by Human Rights Watch, described an earlier pilot project for compulsory pre-school education that was introduced in Chushul county, Lhasa: “Since about 2004, when crèches were included in TAR compulsory education,” the teacher said, “the government gave funding for many more crèches to be built all over [the county], which were called kindergartens.” (Interview with retired schoolteacher, October 2016; see Appendix 1.3.) The TAR continued to announce that pre-school education was compulsory as late as November 2015 – see “截至 2014 年底 西藏落实 15 年义务教育免费 ‘三包’ 政策.” As of the end of 2014, Tibet is implementing a policy of 15 years’ compulsory education and the “Three Includes,” “谈全面从严治党，习近平这 7 段话掷地有声,” *China Tibet News Online*, November 26, 2015, www.xzxw.com/xw/xwtp/201511/t20151126_941995.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹³⁷ “15-year Free Education to Be Implemented in NW China,” *Xinhua*, March 24, 2016, http://www.vtibet.com/en/news_1746/focus/201603/t20160324_387534.html (accessed December 15, 2019); “Sichuan Provides 15-Year Free Education in Tibetan-Inhabited Areas,” *China Tibet News Online*, March 27, 2015, http://www.vtibet.com/en/culture/news_1735/201504/t20150408_290904.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹³⁸ The exile Tibetan lawyer and blogger Dolma Kyab refers to article 37 of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, which covers education in minority areas. “བྱིས་སྐོར་ཁང་ལ་སྒྲིག་གཉིས་སྒྲིབ་གསོ་དགོས་པོ་མེད།” [There is No Need for Bilingual Kindergartens], April 30, 2017, <http://trimleng.cn/kindergarden-tibetan-education/> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹³⁹ “教育部：不提倡某些省 15 年免费教育 要从国情出发” [Ministry of Education: Do not advocate for certain provinces to have 15 years free compulsory education, it must be a national endeavor], March 12, 2017, <http://news.sohu.com/20170312/n483084757.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019). From around 2014, authorities in the TAR and in Tibetan areas of Sichuan and Qinghai stopped referring to pre-school education as compulsory and instead described it as part of its “15-year free education system” See “Tibet First Achieves 15-Year Free Education in China,” *China Tibet News Online*, January 16, 2014, http://www.vtibet.com/en/news_1746/focus/201401/t20140116_171890.html. However, other official reports continued to refer to education in the TAR as a 15-year compulsory education system, as in “截至 2014 年底 西藏落实 15 年义务教育免费 ‘三包’ 政策.” As of the end of 2014, Tibet is implementing a policy of 15 years compulsory education and the ‘Three Includes,’ “谈全面从严治党，习近平这 7 段话掷地有声,” *China Tibet News Online*, November 26, 2015, www.xzxw.com/xw/xwtp/201511/t20151126_941995.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

all the details of your schooling years, which teachers need to sign, saying from which year you began in the kindergarten.... It is very difficult to enroll at the elementary school, you have to have kindergarten signatures in there to enroll, you must have a record from kindergarten, it should be two years or three years, at least in Lhasa city, I don't know elsewhere.

The reason I know is that my cousin's son just enrolled this year in the kindergarten, although they wanted to keep him at home another year. But in order to get enrolled later [in an elementary school] they had to do that, to get the record – it is called a *xueji* card. So, she didn't want to, but she had to send him by the age of 3 to the kindergarten in order to get that *xueji* card.

By making kindergarten attendance a requirement for primary school enrolment, the authorities appear to have found a way to make attendance at “bilingual kindergartens” compulsory without explicitly declaring this.

The use of the term “bilingual” to describe pre-school education for minorities is particularly questionable, if it is supposed to imply equal use of both local and national languages, as kindergartens often have only one class for all the children in each year. Unlike primary or middle schools, there is no option in kindergartens to separate Tibetan-language and Chinese-language users into different classes or streams.¹⁴⁰ In urban kindergartens, which are more likely to include Chinese children, this further reduces the chances of Tibetan being used much in the classroom. “In the kindergartens,” according to one interviewee from Lhasa, “there are no separate Tibetan or Chinese classes: they are mixed together, all with one language, and the teachers have to speak in Chinese.”¹⁴¹

Overseeing Private Kindergartens and Schools

The Chinese government has recently taken steps to exercise stricter control of private kindergartens run by Tibetans, which typically use Tibetan in their classrooms. International law obligates governments to give parents the freedom to choose alternative

¹⁴⁰ In Xinjiang, separate schools for minorities were abandoned, at least in urban regions, where “all Chinese and ethnic schools had been merged by 2008.” See Zhang and Yang, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁴¹ Interview with middle-ranking official from Lhasa, May 2017; see Appendix 1.5.

forms of education, and, in the case of those from minority and indigenous communities, to establish their own educational institutions.¹⁴² International law expects governments to ensure that these schools conform to minimum education standards.¹⁴³

Private kindergartens existed in considerable numbers in the TAR before the “bilingual kindergarten” policy was introduced,¹⁴⁴ and at the end of 2014, nearly half the kindergartens in Lhasa were “community-run.”¹⁴⁵ These kindergartens are officially encouraged, with significant rewards and major bonuses if their teaching methods meet official preferences: in 2011 and 2012 the TAR allocated 10 million Yuan (US\$1.4 million) and other resources to improve conditions at privately run kindergartens that were classified as “outstanding” or as “kindergartens with strengths.”¹⁴⁶

Little is known about the extensive checks that these private kindergartens now have to undergo, and the standards by which they are assessed do not appear to be publicly

¹⁴² International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), December 16, 1966, article 13(3), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx> (accessed December 15, 2019). The UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992), article 4(3) provides that: “States should take appropriate measures to allow persons belonging to minorities to have adequate opportunities to learn their mother-tongue or to receive instruction in their mother tongue.” Article 4(4) further states that the history, traditions, and cultures of minorities should be reflected in education. Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted by General Assembly resolution 47/135 of December 18, 1992, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/minorities.aspx> (accessed December 15, 2019). See also, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, adopted by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of December 16, 1966, Article 13 (3) and (4), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>.

¹⁴³ ICESCR, article 13(3); see also, Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment 13: the right to education (article 13) (1999), para. 49, December 9, 1999, <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4538838c22.pdf>.

¹⁴⁴ The senior official told Human Rights Watch: “Earlier, in the 1990s, there were crèches in Lhasa and larger cities, but they did not come under the government’s compulsory education program, and there was no clear policy towards them. [...] Under those conditions, there were many privately run crèches, and apart from cities like Lhasa, Shigatse, Tsetang, Nyingtri, etc., there were a lot of [Tibetan] people running private primary schools as well” (see Appendix 1.3). The first privately run bilingual kindergarten in the TAR was the Lhasa City Central Bilingual Kindergarten, founded in 1992 by Gende Wangmu, who at Gende Wangmu had previously headed the Tibet Daily’s kindergarten. See Baidu entry at <https://baike.baidu.com/item/拉萨市中心双语幼儿园> (accessed December 15, 2019). The first government-run kindergarten in the TAR was the TAR Experimental Kindergarten, which opened in 1986, “Tibet’s government kindergartens joyfully celebrate 6-1 [children’s day],” *China Tibet News Online*, June 3, 2017, http://tb.xzxw.com/kjws/201706/t20170603_1833012.html (accessed December 15, 2019); and it opened its first village-level kindergarten in 2011, “First government kindergarten at village level in TAR opens,” *China Tibet News Online*, October 18, 2011, http://tb.xzxw.com/fz/fzxw/201505/t20150507_434533.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁴⁵ Of 119 kindergartens in Lhasa at the end of 2014, 80 were government-run and 39 were community-run (*dmangs gnyen*). See “*ལྷ་ས་ཡོད་པའི་ལོ་མཁུག་བར་དུ་གཞུང་གཉེན་གྱི་བཅོམ་ཁང་ལྷག་སར་དུ་བསྐྱུར་གྱུ་*” [Lhasa to construct 31 new government kindergartens by the end of 2015], *China Tibet Online*, January 9, 2014, http://tb.tibet.cn/2010news/xzxw/whjy/201401/t20140108_1965483.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁴⁶ Suolang Dajie, Luobu Ciren, “*西藏自治区将免费教育扩大至 15 年*” [TAR to extend free education to 15 years], *ChinaBroadcastNews*, January 17, 2012, http://www.ce.cn/xwzx/gnsz/gdxw/201201/17/t20120117_23007542.shtml (accessed December 15, 2019).

available. As a result, it is unclear if the authorities penalize or downgrade kindergartens that fail to make sufficient use of Chinese-language instruction. But it is clear that private kindergartens that have failed to meet government standards and have been declared “unauthorized” have been subjected to “vigorous inspection, one-by-one checking, admonition and rectification” and in some cases have faced serious disciplinary measures, including forced closure.¹⁴⁷ The Tibetan university professor interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that “the government closed many kindergartens – Tibetan-run ones – and schools run by monks, they also closed them.”

A local parent reported that a privately-run Tibetan pre-school and primary school in a county near Lhasa was closed down by the government in early 2008. The interviewee said that this was because the children had been encouraged to make offerings of butter lamps and water bowls to the Buddha each morning. According to the report, which is unconfirmed, the school’s headmaster was fined 20,000 Yuan (US\$3,000) and detained for three months for petitioning against the closure order.¹⁴⁸

Private Tibetan-run primary schools have also faced difficulties. Few if any exist in the TAR, and the small number that have been able to continue operating in Tibetan areas outside the TAR have faced restrictions. According to exile organizations and foreign media reports, authorities have closed down several unofficial or privately run Tibetan schools,¹⁴⁹ and reportedly stopped Tibetan language classes at an informal school run by monks, at some local monasteries, and at a private school in Jyeku (Ch.: Yushu) in Qinghai in 2015.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ “དཔྱིད་ཀྱི་དཔལ་ལ་རོལ་བའི་བྱིས་དུས། བོད་ཕྱངས་ཀྱི་སྒྲོ་བ་ཞུགས་གོང་གི་སྒྲོ་བ་གསོལ་འཕེལ་རྒྱས་འགོ་མཁུགས་པ།” [Childhood spent enjoying spring glory: the fast development of pre-school education in TAR], *China Tibet News Online*, May 2015 (Original dated December 11, 2013), http://tb.chinatibetnews.com/kjws/jyxw/201505/t20150508_451349.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁴⁸ Interview with retired schoolteacher, October 2016; see Appendix 1.3.

¹⁴⁹ See, for example, “Chinese Officials Order School for Tibetan Monks Shuttered,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 15, 2014, www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/school-04152014164706.html; “Tibetan Private School Ordered Shut in China’s Qinghai Province,” *Radio Free Asia*, May 8, 2014, www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/school-05082014212328.html; “China Threatens Closure of Tibetan Nomad Children’s School,” *Radio Free Asia*, May 22, 2014, www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/closure-05222014160121.html; “Privately-Run Tibetan School is Closed in Qinghai,” *Radio Free Asia*, January 28, 2015, www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/school-01282015161822.html; and “New Controls on Tibetan Language Study in Qinghai’s Pema County,” *Radio Free Asia*, January 20, 2016, www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/controls-01202016160851.html.

¹⁵⁰ Edward Wong, “Tibetans Fight to Salvage Fading Culture in China,” *New York Times*, November 28, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/world/asia/china-tibet-language-education.html> (accessed December 15, 2019) and “China forces closure of academic workshop by a monastery in Kyegudo,” *Phayul*, January 23, 2015, <http://www.phayul.com/news/article.aspx?id=35709> (accessed December 15, 2019).

Officials also closed down two monastic schools in Sershul county, Sichuan province, in July 2018.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ “*ཇ་ཅུ་ཁའི་གྲ་རྒྱུང་ཚོ་དགོན་པ་ནས་ཕྱིར་འཕྱད་བཏང་།*” [Dzachukha young monks made to move from monastery], *Tibet Times*, July 10, 2018, <http://tibettimes.net/2018/07/10/170607/> (accessed December 15, 2019).

III. “Ethnic Mingling”

Efforts to introduce “bilingual education” for minorities in China began in the early 1990s, an era during which government policies toward minorities and its approach to social and civic rights was comparatively mild. But in 2014, shortly after the bilingual policy had been formally expanded to all areas of China, the government announced a major change in China’s overall approach to minorities. This shift in state ideology represented a historic transition from the 1950s ideal of China as a “multinational state” to a new conception of the nation in which the nationalities within China are fused together by a process of “ethnic mingling.”

This chapter outlines the main ideological features of China’s new policy for minority nationalities and shows how the underlying objectives of the “bilingual education” policy can now be seen as clear expressions of the new nationalities policy.

The Ideological Framework: Ethnic Mingling and National Security

Since at least the early 1980s, China has guaranteed ethnic minorities legal rights to use their own language, including in education,¹⁵² as part of what it calls its “regional ethnic autonomy” system. China’s current leader Xi Jinping said in 2014 that this system would remain in place,¹⁵³ and China has continued to develop laws protecting local language use in courts, street signs, official documents, and certain other contexts.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² “Schools (classes) and other educational institutions whose students are predominantly from ethnic minority families should, if possible, use textbooks printed in their own languages, and lessons should be taught in those languages. Chinese language courses shall be offered at different times of the primary school period depending on the particular situation, to propagate the use of putonghua (standard Chinese),” State Council Information Office, “Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China,” White Paper, February 28, 2005, Article III.7, <http://www.china-un.org/eng/zt/xzwt/t418939.htm> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁵³ In September 2014, Xi reportedly stated, “We must stop suggesting that the system of ethnic autonomy should be abolished!” James Leibold, “China’s Ethnic Policy Under Xi Jinping,” *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation, Vol. 15, Issue 20, October 19, 2015, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-ethnic-policy-under-xi-jinping/> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁵⁴ See, for example, “བོད་རང་སྐྱོད་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་བོད་སྐད་ཡིག་སྐྱོད་སྐྱོད་ཟེམས་གསུམ་གྱི་ལས་དོན་བཞོད་སྒྲིག་བྱས་པ།” [TAR sets out work on the study, use and development of Tibetan language], People’s Daily Online, August 5, 2017, <http://tibet.people.com.cn/15675403.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

However, in 2014 the basis of China's policy towards minorities shifted from an approach based on concepts of diversity and rights towards a security-based approach.¹⁵⁵ This change likely was driven primarily by unrest in Tibet and Xinjiang, particularly in 2008 and 2009, and was apparently further fueled by widespread popular resentment in China regarding preferential policies and benefits given to minorities by the state. These allow members of minorities lower pass-marks in some national Chinese-language examinations, on the basis that Chinese is not their mother-tongue, and until recently allowed them to have more children than members of the majority ethnic group.¹⁵⁶

In addition, a group of senior sociologists and political scientists in China who make major policy proposals directly to upper levels of the government¹⁵⁷ had pushed for a major change in China's nationality policies: they called for a reduction in the scope of official recognition given to ethnic identities and in the number of concessions given to minorities, which they argued had encouraged separatist ambitions.¹⁵⁸ The government did not implement these proposals, but when leading Chinese scholars Hu Angang and Hu Lianhe presented them in 2011 in a less explicit form, they were soon incorporated into official policy.

The "two Hu's," as they became known, proposed that China's nationality policies should aim to produce "ethnic mingling" (*minzu jiaorong*), along with "interethnic contact and exchange" (*jiaqiang minzu jiaowang jiaoliu*).¹⁵⁹ They stopped short of calling for the existing system of concessions to be removed and did not call outright for the minority

¹⁵⁵ "From a deep reading of current statements by PRC leaders, one can notice a change of discourse in the policy and attitudes adopted towards minority groups" since around 2008 so that now "stakeholders at the top level believe national unity and harmony are the cornerstones of China's socioeconomic development... [This] can be seen in the policy shift from mother-tongue education to Putonghua monolingual education." See Linda Tsung, in James Leibold and Yangbin Chen, *Minority Education in China*, Hong Kong University, 2014, pp. 160-185; see pp. 163-64.

¹⁵⁶ See for example Xiaoran Yu, "Lowering Education Standards for Ethnic Minorities: Rethinking Preferential Policy in China," *Education Policy Talk*, May 14, 2014, <https://educationpolicytalk.com/author/sharonyue>.

¹⁵⁷ See, for example, the case of Hu Lianhe, described in James Leibold, "Hu the Uniter: Hu Lianhe and the Radical Turn in China's Xinjiang Policy," *China Brief*, vol. 18, issue 16, October 10, 2018, <https://jamestown.org/program/hu-the-uniter-hu-lianhe-and-the-radical-turn-in-chinas-xinjiang-policy>.

¹⁵⁸ Mark Elliott dates the beginning of the second-generation ethnic policy debate to at least 2005, Mark Elliot, "The Case of the Missing Indigene: Debate over a 'Second-Generation' Ethnic Policy," *The China Journal* 2015 (73), pp. 186-213.

¹⁵⁹ In the Xinjiang Work Forum, the statement includes the controversial phrase "strengthen interethnic contact, exchange and mingling" (*jiaqiang minzu jiaowang jiaoliu jiaorong*), which the influential Qinghua University economist Hu Angang declared a "new policy orientation" when he outlined his contentious proposal for a "second generation of ethnic policies" in late 2011 (Aisixiang, March 31, 2012)." See also James Leibold, "Xinjiang Forum Marks New Policy of 'Ethnic Mingling,'" *China Brief*, Vol. 14, Issue 12, June 19, 2014, pp. 3-6, and Mark Elliott 2015, above.

nationalities to be assimilated, but they clearly contemplated a strong move in that direction.

In May 2014, President Xi formally endorsed the concept of ethnic mingling. In September 2014, at a major meeting on China's ethnic policy, Xi said that the new approach should also aim at ensuring "identification" by minority nationalities with the culture of the "Chinese nationality" or "China race" (*Zhonghua minzu*).¹⁶⁰ This policy was confirmed at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, leading the sinologist Jessica Batke to write that "it appears that the PRC's perceived security needs have finally trumped the CCP's historical attachment to the idea that it supports and represents all the country's ethnic groups equally." She added that this "may signal the point at which even nominal support for protecting ethnic minority culture begins to fade away, being subsumed by the notion of the 'Chinese race.'"¹⁶¹

The significance of this shift in ideology regarding nationalities was reflected in the metaphors used by leaders to describe them. Since the 1980s, China's leaders had generally referred to the principle of "nationality unity" in terms that implied that nationalities should retain their individual identities within the Chinese system. Xi's predecessor Hu Jintao had referred to nationalities as strands of hemp that are woven together to form a rope,¹⁶² and Xi stated in March 2017 and again in March 2018 that

¹⁶⁰ The term "China nation" (Ch.: *Zhonghua minzu*), when first coined in the early 20th century, referred only to the ethnic Chinese population, but is now used by the PRC to refer to all Chinese citizens, including the 8.5 percent who are not ethnically Chinese or "Han." The principles of "ethnic mingling" and "identification" were generally not included in English-language reports by official media on the Central Conference on Ethnic Work, but appear in Chinese-language reports, such as "中央民族工作会议:增强文化认同反对大汉族主义" (Zengqiang wenhua rentong fandui da hanzu zhuyi/Strengthen cultural identification and oppose Great Han chauvinism), CCTV, September 29, 2014, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2014-09-29/192930934609.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019). They are discussed in James Leibold, "Xinjiang Forum Marks New Policy of 'Ethnic Mingling,'" *China Brief*, Vol. 14, Issue 12, June 19, 2014, pp. 3-6. The concept of ethnic mingling is referred to euphemistically in Xi Jinping's description of ethnic policy in his keynote 2017 speech to the 19th CCP Congress: "We will encourage more exchanges and interactions among different ethnic groups, helping them remain closely united." See "Full text of Xi Jinping's report at 19th CPC National Congress," *Xinhua*, Section vi (6), November 4, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm.

¹⁶¹ Jessica Batke, "Party All the Time: Governance and Society in the New Era," *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 55, p. 8, <https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/clm55-jb-final.pdf> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁶² James Leibold notes Xi Jinping's use of the phrase "bind the people of each ethnic group into a single strand of rope," which first appeared in the early 2000s, but was not favored by Hu Jintao. Leibold recalls that even the term "ethnic mingling" was initially considered too strong: "In his interview with Phoenix, Zhu Weiqun admits the concept of interethnic 'mingling' elicited a strong response following its inclusion in Hu Jintao's remarks at the Fifth Tibet Work Forum in January 2010. This was due to fears that, in his words, 'this would mingle the ethnic minorities out of existence,' and thus the phrase was subsequently left out of the official statement that concluded the First Xinjiang Work Forum," James Leibold, "Xinjiang Forum Marks New Policy of 'Ethnic Mingling,'" *China Brief*, Vol. 14, Issue 12, June 19, 2014, pp. 3-6, <https://jamestown.org/program/xinjiang-work-forum-marks-new-policy-of-ethnic-mingling/> (accessed December 15, 2019).

China's nationalities should cluster together as "tightly as pomegranate seeds."¹⁶³ But in March 2017, addressing the TAR delegates at the annual meeting of China's national parliament, Prime Minister Li Keqiang had used a new analogy to describe ethnic unity, referring to "sticky rice" or "*qingke* [*tsampa*, roasted barley flour] dough":

Qingke is the staple Tibetan food, which is squeezed together with butter and tea to make dough. I am from Anhui, and grew up eating sticky rice. These two foods have different composition but are prepared in a similar way. The unity of nationalities should also be like kneading *qingke* dough or squeezing sticky rice into a firm ball.¹⁶⁴

The following month an editorial in *Tibet Daily*, the official Party paper in the TAR, repeated Premier Li's analogy by describing nationality unity work as the kneading of *qingke* dough.¹⁶⁵ The editorial said that the "sticky rice" approach to "nationality unity" is for "building the strongest castle for the defense of the nation's south-west border, and making the finest contribution to the safeguarding of national sovereignty and security."

The analogy suggested that some top Party leaders had come to see nationality unity as a process of fusing nationalities into a single entity without the components retaining their distinctive identities. This metaphor has not been widely used since then, but its underlying implication has become a key part of mainstream thinking on minorities: allowing minorities to develop overly distinctive cultural or political identities is now seen as a risk to national security.

¹⁶³ The pomegranate simile seems to have first been used by Wang Huimin in a *People's Daily* article, March 4, 2014, Chang Liu in Sāmi Ludwig (ed.) *American Multiculturalism in Context: Views from at Home and Abroad*, 2017, p. 509. In 2017, at the annual parliament, Xi said "the relationship between various ethnic groups resembles pomegranate seeds assembling tightly together," Han Xu, "Cartoon Commentary on Xi's two sessions talks ⑤: Let national unity flowers bloom," *Xinhua*, March 13, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2017-03/13/c_136125196.htm (accessed December 15, 2019). At the 2018 annual session of China's National People's Congress, Xi called for efforts to create ethnic unity, "so that all ethnic groups could be together 'like seeds of a pomegranate,'" "Chinese president stresses focus of developing high-quality economy," *Xinhua*, March 5, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/05/c_137018303.htm (accessed December 15, 2019). He also used the phrase in his speech to the 19th CCP Congress. See "Full text of Xi Jinping's report at 19th CPC National Congress," *Xinhua*, Section vi (6), November 4, 2017, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-11/04/content_34115212.htm.

¹⁶⁴ "ཁི་ལེ་ཆང་གིས་བོད་མངའ་སྡེའི་མི་རིགས་མཐུན་སྦྲེལ་ནི་རྩ་མ་པ་བཞིས་ནས་སྤྲུགས་གཏོང་བ་དང་འབྲས་བཙོས་མ་བཞིས་པ་བཞིན་དམ་ཁིང་གཅིག་ཏུ་བསྐྱེལ་དགོས་ཞེས་གསུངས་པ།" [Li Keqiang tells Tibet delegates "Nationality unity must be bound together as tight as a ball of *tsampa* or sticky rice], CCP News, March 9, 2017, <http://tibet.cpc.people.com.cn/15649440.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁶⁵ "མི་རིགས་མཐུན་སྦྲེལ་དོན་རྩ་གཅིག་ཏུ་སྐྱེལ་དགོས།" [We Must Consolidate Nationality Unity], *China Tibet News Online*, April 9, 2017, http://tb.chinatibetnews.com/sylm/syyw/201704/t20170409_1754243.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

The basis for the reframing of minorities policy as a security issue was explained in a widely circulated 2017 essay by the influential Chinese sociologist Ma Rong, in which he argued that education in a local minority language leads to “promoting separation” because it “constructed a cultural divide between the nationalities” and “was deleterious to minority nationality youths establishing a ‘China culture’ (*Zhonghua wenhua*) sense of cultural identity.”¹⁶⁶ According to Ma, “it is only when the entire nation’s peoples establish a national-level cultural identity that a modern nationality state’s ‘nation-building’ (*minzu goujian*) can be successful, and that a national political identification with the state can have an enduring emotional basis.”¹⁶⁷

This articulated the national security thinking behind the new policy of ensuring “identification” by minority nationalities with the overall China nation. It also explained an important aspect of education policy for minorities. From at least 2010, policy papers explaining the new “bilingual” model for minority education policy had stated, in line with Chinese academic research at the time, that “studying the national language is beneficial to minority nationalities’ employment, access to modern science, culture and knowledge, and their inclusion in society.”¹⁶⁸ They typically argued in addition that study of Chinese was also needed to help minority nationalities “catch up” with mainland Chinese.¹⁶⁹ But, as explained by Ma in his essay, since the Tibetan and Uighur protests of 2008 and 2009, officials have argued that knowledge of Chinese language among minorities is needed not only to improve their access to employment, but also to improve the nation’s security.

¹⁶⁶ Ma Rong, “马戎 | 汉语学习与中国少数民族的现代化” [The study of the Chinese language and the modernization of China’s minority nationality masses], April 1, 2017, Section 3, <http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/usdECKLoS1drjEsmqizsRA> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ The Fourth Central Minority Nationalities Work Conference also stated that “promoting bilingual education in some relevant minority nationality regions requires minority nationalities to study the national language,” Ma Rong, “马戎 | 汉语学习与中国少数民族的现代化” [The study of the Chinese language and the modernization of China’s minority nationality masses], April 1, 2017, Conclusion, <http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/usdECKLoS1drjEsmqizsRA> (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁶⁹ See, for example, the “Qinghai Province Mid- to Long-Term Plan Outline for the Reform and Development of Education” (see note 26 above).

The influence of this new view of minorities education is apparent in the “Decision on Ethnic Education,” a key policy document issued by the State Council in 2015. It requires minority schools to provide “nationality unity education” and calls on them to:

guide students of all nationalities to strengthen their belief in the path of Socialism with Chinese characteristics, their belief in its theory and their belief in the system, establishing the correct national outlook, ethnic outlook, religion outlook, history outlook and culture outlook, deeply appreciating that China is a nation jointly created by all of the country’s nationalities, that Chinese culture includes the culture of the 56 nationalities, that Chinese civilization is the civilization jointly created by all nationalities, and that the Chinese nationality is a great family of all nationalities together.¹⁷⁰

The growing perception among Chinese scholars and officials of minority distinctiveness in culture, thinking, and language as a security threat has led to extreme examples of extra-legal or forced education of minorities, such as the unannounced and undocumented detention of several thousand Tibetans for three to four months of political re-education in January 2012,¹⁷¹ and the detention since 2016 of an estimated one million Uighurs and other Muslims in re-education centers in Xinjiang.¹⁷²

The economic rationale for bilingual education is supported by the fact, often pointed out by Chinese politicians and scholars,¹⁷³ that many Tibetans actively seek to enroll their

¹⁷⁰ “Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education,” State Council, National Document [2015] 46, issued August 11, 2015, section 4, www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_10097.htm (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁷¹ See “China: End Crackdown on Tibetans Who Visited India – Detentions, Re-education on a Scale not Seen Since Late 1970s,” Human Rights Watch news release, February 16, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/02/16/china-end-crackdown-tibetans-who-visited-india>. The mass detentions of Tibetans for re-education in 2012 appear to have served as a trial for the ongoing, much larger-scale mass detention of Uighurs and other Muslims for re-education in Xinjiang since 2016. Both drives were carried out under the direction of the same official, Chen Quanguo.

¹⁷² Human Rights Watch, “*Eradicating Ideological Viruses*”—China’s Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang’s Muslims, September 9, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs>.

¹⁷³ “In order to uphold the right of minority nationalities to use their own language, the government once established nationality language schools in Tibet and many other nationality areas, but the minority nationality masses wanted more to send their children to study at schools where Chinese was the primary language. What’s even more interesting is that there are minority nationality scholars and cadres who on the one hand loudly call for protecting the nationality language but on

children in Chinese-medium schools, since most salaried jobs in China require advanced knowledge of Chinese. One interviewee argued that this reflects structural features of the Chinese employment system, particularly in government offices:

Ma Rong wrote an article in which he said Uighurs [and Tibetans] need to learn Chinese to be competitive in the job market. This is totally right. But the question is why did they have this problem in the first place? ... The reason that they cannot get jobs is because only the translation and broadcasting bureau require Tibetan or Uighur language. The others all use Chinese language as a requirement. So, I want to ask Ma Rong about this. Of course, I cannot ask this openly.¹⁷⁴

Although the theory behind bilingual education assumes Chinese-speaking Tibetans will have greater access to employment, interviewees told Human Rights Watch that job opportunities for educated Tibetans with fluency in Chinese have become scarcer. This is because the effort to promote such employment coexists with “ethnic mingling” measures that largely contradict it: governmental recruitment drives and other initiatives, carried out at the same time as the bilingual programs, give preference to non-Tibetans from the mainland areas for government and professional positions in the TAR. These measures, known collectively as *rencaiyinjing* or “importing human resources,” include preferential recruiting of non-Tibetans for high-value jobs in the TAR;¹⁷⁵ *yuanzang* (“Aid Tibet”) programs for cadres (Party and government officials in managerial positions) who are delegated by mainland provinces to work in the TAR; schemes for volunteer graduates from the mainland who get preference for a government job in their home area if they work for a year in the TAR after graduation; and teachers imported to the TAR as part of bilingual education drives, where they receive much higher salaries and bonuses than elsewhere in China.

the other hand they do everything they can to send their own children to schools where Chinese is the primary language.” Xu Kefeng, “Some elementary schools in Lhasa are changing”; see Appendix 3.2. Zhang Wenkui, the Tsoho party secretary, reportedly made the same comment in his response to Tibetan critics on social media (see Appendix 3.3).

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Tibetan university professor, November 2017; see Appendix 1.6.

¹⁷⁵ See, for example, “西藏自治区从区外高校引进急需紧缺专业非西藏生源毕业生工作办法（试行）” [TAR Working Measures for Attracting Graduates from Universities Outside the Region for Urgently Needed Professions from Non-Tibet Sources (Tibet Organization), Issue [2017] No. 286], and “西藏自治区西格办中学 2018 年度教师招聘简章” [2018 Teacher Recruitment Guide of Xigema Middle School, Tibet Autonomous Region], September 9, 2018, Tibet Affairs Office Middle School in Golmud, <http://ntceol.com/zhaopin/xizang/18583.html>.

These “mingling” measures are seen as helping the government’s economic and development goals in Tibetan areas, and are probably motivated by security concerns as well. But their effects on educational outcomes for Tibetans are seen locally as negative. “There are plenty of very qualified Tibetan graduates – even from Beijing Normal University – who are finding it very difficult to get Tibet jobs” in urban areas, the part-time teacher from Lhasa told Human Rights Watch. “People are really very mad at this program.”¹⁷⁶

Combining Chinese-Language Study with “Ethnic Mingling”

The “Decision on Ethnic Education,” issued by the State Council in 2015, lists multiple ways in which officials are required to achieve “ethnic mingling,” “ethnic exchange,” and “cultural identification,” the main objectives of China’s new policy for minorities. The measures require schools to arrange for minority students to interact and study with ethnic Chinese students, to live in “mixed accommodation,” to go on joint study tours, and to engage in community and “mutual learning” activities together, as well as other forms of organized inter-ethnic integration.

Such activities do not in themselves infringe on the rights of minorities and may have positive educational aspects. In addition, international human rights law expects state school systems to include material about the nation’s culture, values, and language as part of the curriculum, as well as about a child’s own cultural identity, language and values.¹⁷⁷ However, these measures further reduce the likelihood of school time being dedicated to Tibetan-medium teaching or teaching Tibetan values and customs in school, and are explicitly part of Chinese government efforts to impose political orthodoxy on national minorities. Indeed, school officials are strictly required to complement efforts at social and cultural integration with special courses in political education.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Interview with former part-time teacher, October 2018 ; see Appendix 1.1.

¹⁷⁷ The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that education shall include “the development of respect for ... the national values of the country in which the child is living.” CRC, article 29(c).

¹⁷⁸ See for example, བསམ་ཆོ་ཆབ་མེད་རིགས་པའི་ལུང་ལུགས་ཀྱི་ཆོས་ཚན་རྒྱུ་བཅོས་གསར་གཏོང་ལ་སྒྲུལ་འདེད་གཏོང་རྒྱུ་ལུགས་ལྟན་ཆུག་དགོས། (Innovation and reform of political and ideological theory classes must be strengthened: on the study and implementation of President Xi Jinping’s key speech to the conference of school political and ideological theory teachers), *China Tibet News Online*, March 22, 2019 http://tb.xzxw.com/sylm/syyw/201903/t20190322_2559040.html. TAR Party Secretary Wu Yingjie told a 2016 conference on political work in higher education to “...build a Red and Expert teacher work force. Strengthen teachers’ conduct and behaviour and guide them to teach and lead through moral example, to raise a force of political experts who know how to teach, and educational experts versed in politics” (All-TAR conference on political and ideological work in higher education, *China Tibet News Online*, December 28, 2016, http://tb.xzxw.com/zw/ldhd/wyjzw/201612/t20161228_1627961.html).

According to the 2015 “Decision,” these courses are required to provide minority students with “unremitting propaganda and education on socialism with Chinese characteristics and the China dream” and “ideological and political courses to strengthen nationality unity education content,” using special teaching materials taught by specially trained “nationality unity education teachers.”¹⁷⁹ The purpose is to subject students to “patriotism education and nationality unity education,” and to guide all ethnic students to firmly establish “three cannot-do-withouts” (Ch.: sange libukai) thinking (“the Han cannot do without the minorities, the minorities cannot do without the Han, and neither can do without the other”). A nationalities school in Gabde (Ch.: Gande) in Qinghai, for example, described “many study projects on the theme of nationality unity” and “two to three sessions a week on exchanging ideas about nationality unity” so that “nationalities and school classes are linked in a ring of unity.”¹⁸⁰ Human Rights Watch found no evidence that Tibetan or other minority students could opt out of such programs, and assumes that anyone trying to do so would come under suspicion and be at risk of persecution.

Besides these integrationist activities, which are required by national directives, TAR authorities have implemented additional “mingling” measures. These are explicitly political in their objectives, since they follow the TAR’s declared policy for the education of minority nationalities, which is to “strengthen education in accord with the General Secretary’s important guidance on exchange, movement and mingling” and “to promote the exchange, movement and mingling of nationalities.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ “Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education,” State Council, National Document [2015] 46, issued August 11, 2015, section 5, www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_10097.htm (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁸⁰ “མཐུན་སྦྲེལ་དངོས་གཞིར་གྱི་དགའ་བདེ་རྫོང་མི་རིགས་བཅའ་ཁྲིམས་སྒོ་བ་གྲྭ།” [Unity in practice at the Gabde Nationalities Boarding School], Qinghai Tibetan Language Network Radio Broadcasting Office, July 28, 2016, originally posted at <http://www.qhtb.cn/news/shehui/2016/07-28/42954.html> and <http://www.qhtb.cn/2016xuanchuan/meiligxgs/2016-08-05/43351.html> but since removed.

¹⁸¹ TAR Party Secretary Wu Yingjie, cited in “བོད་རང་སྐྱོང་ལྗོངས་མི་དམངས་འཕུས་ཚུགས་སྐབས་བཅུ་གཅིག་པའི་ཚེགས་འདྲ་ཐེངས་དང་པོ་ལྷ་སར་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ཁོ་བོ་འཛུགས་པའི་དང་གོ་ལ།” [First session of the 11th TAR People’s Congress concludes triumphantly in Lhasa], *China Tibet News Online*, January 31, 2018, http://tb.xzwx.com/zw/ldhd/201801/t20180131_2107601.html (accessed December 15, 2019). The TAR’s Ten-year Education Plan required schools “[to provide] education on the fine culture and traditions of the Chinese nationality [Ch.: Zhonghua minzu] and education on their revolutionary traditions, and [to] guide students towards further strengthening their identification with the great Motherland, their identification with the Chinese nationality [Ch.: Zhonghua minzu], their identification with Chinese culture, and their identification with socialism with Chinese characteristics, consolidating the ideological foundations for upholding the unification of the Motherland and the unity of the nationalities,” “中共西藏自治区委员会西藏自治区人民政府关于贯彻《国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要（2010—2020年）》的实施意见” [The TAR CCP Committee and People’s Government Suggestions on Implementation of the National Mid- to Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)], *China Education News*, March 29, 2011, p. 6, section 10, http://www.jyb.cn/info/dfjyk/201103/t20110329_422390.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

These measures include a program for 100 kindergartens and schools in Tibet to form a “heart to heart, hand in hand” relationship with counterpart kindergartens and schools in the mainland.¹⁸² The Tibetan students in these partnerships are to carry out exchanges by mail, email, and texting with ethnic Chinese students in other areas of the country who are connected to them via real-time computer video feeds and microblogs. These activities too have primarily political objectives: they are designed to show “that both sets of students understand each other [and] broaden their horizons, [thus] enhancing mutual affection and creating an atmosphere of ‘the Motherland is a family.’” Similar “pairing” programs for Tibetans have been set up by the Sichuan government in order to help Tibetan schools “change their educational philosophies,”¹⁸³ while Qinghai province’s government has ordered minority schools to hold joint activities with Han students in order to create “a social atmosphere of studying and applying ‘bilingual’-ism.”¹⁸⁴

“Mingling” in Practice: Relocating Teachers from Elsewhere in China

The most prominent “mingling” measure has been a major drive by the government to send large numbers of Chinese-speaking teachers from outside Tibet to work in the TAR and other minority areas. They are part of a program that aims to send 30,000 teachers from predominantly Chinese-speaking provinces to the TAR and Xinjiang by 2020, with 4,000 going as a “first cohort” in 2017 and early 2018. Once there, they replace a similar number of local teachers who are sent to mainland China for further training.¹⁸⁵ Similarly,

¹⁸² These activities are known as “I have friends in the Mainland, I have friends in Tibet” activities. See “教育部关于加强‘十三五’期间 - 教育对口支援西藏和四省藏区工作的意见” [The Ministry of Education’s Suggestions on Work to Strengthen Counterpart Support for Education in Tibet and Tibetan Areas in the Four Provinces During the Period of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan], Ministry of Education, Beijing, “Teach People [2016] No. 5,” December 30, 2016, http://www.moe.edu.cn/srcsite/A09/s3082/201701/t20170112_294684.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁸³ The Sichuan government announced in 2017 that almost 1,000 schools in the mainland would be paired with Tibetan schools in Tibetan areas of Sichuan to help the Tibetan schools “to change their educational philosophies.” See “四川将选派 700 名优秀教师到 32 个藏区县支教” [Sichuan to dispatch 700 outstanding teachers to the 32 counties in Tibetan areas as teaching support], February 18, 2017, <http://www.sc.gov.cn/10462/12771/2017/2/18/10414484.shtml>.

¹⁸⁴ Qinghai’s 2010 Education Plan called for each individual class at nationality boarding schools to have a television, “for teachers and students to watch such Chinese-language programming as ‘News Broadcast’ every day,” and for “specialized programming for minority nationalities to study the Chinese language and script” alongside Han students, so as to create “a social atmosphere of studying and applying ‘bilingual’-ism.” See “转发省教育厅等四部门关于加强全省教育发展规划推进学校布局调整工作指导意见的通知” [Notice from four provincial departments including the Department of Education on guiding suggestions for strengthening the education development plan by promoting work on the adjustment of school distribution], 青政办〔2010〕126 号 (Qinghai Government Information Office Document (2010) No. 126), Qinghai Government Information Office, June 21, 2010, art. 7, <http://www.qh.gov.cn/html/284/150440.html>.

¹⁸⁵ The State Council’s guideline “announced that 30,000 teachers from other areas of China would be dispatched to work in Tibet and Xinjiang by 2020, displacing over 90 percent of local science teachers, who will receive off-the-job training,” Shan Jie and Zhao Yusha, “W.China education gets boost,” *Global Times*, June 16, 2016. The announcement related to the Ministry



Tibetan students at a middle school in Anhui join classmates in a “pledge to uphold the unity of nationalities and be patriotic citizens.” © 2017 Peoples Daily

700 teachers from mainland areas are to be sent every two years to work in Tibetan areas of Sichuan from 2016 to 2025,¹⁸⁶ with hardship and border area bonus payments, living expenses, travel expenses, and accident insurance covered.¹⁸⁷ A further 500 teachers from eastern China were sent to Tibetan schools in Qinghai in 2018.¹⁸⁸

of Education’s “Ten-Thousand Teachers’ Education Aid Program in Tibet and Xinjiang,” which is “designed to alleviate the shortage of highly skilled teachers and improve the teaching quality in local schools in Tibet.” See “Review of China’s education reform in 2017,” *China Education Daily*, January 5, 2018, item 20, http://en.moe.gov.cn/News/Top_News/201801/t20180130_326023.html.

The first batch of these teachers arrived in Tibet in early 2018, at commencement of the spring semester, or at latest by the start of the autumn semester. Previous “Aid Tibet” programs were run and financed by inland provinces, but this one is run and financed by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, the Reform and Development Commission and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security. See “教育部谈援疆援藏教师鼓励政策：保障收入待遇、职称重点倾斜” [The Ministry of Education talks about the policy of encouragement for Aid Tibet teachers: Guarantee income, focus on job titles], *The Paper*, December 25, 2017, <http://www.thepaper.cn/baidu.jsp?contid=1920561>.

¹⁸⁶ 504 were sent in 2016 as part of Sichuan’s “Ten-year Thousand-People Education Support Plan in Tibetan Areas” of Sichuan. See “Suggestions for Implementation of the ‘Ten-year Thousand-People Education Support Plan in Tibetan Areas,’” Sichuan Department of Education (2016) No. 62, http://img.abedu.gov.cn/UploadFolder/file/201608/24101905_9208.pdf. See “四川将选派 700 名优秀教师到 32 个藏区县支教” [Sichuan to dispatch 700 outstanding teachers to the 32 counties in Tibetan areas as teaching support], February 18, 2017, <http://www.sc.gov.cn/10462/12771/2017/2/18/10414484.shtml> and “ཡང་དགེ་ཆན་ ༧༠༠ བོད་དུ་གཏོང་བྱ་རྒྱུ་” [Another 700 teachers to be sent to Tibet], *Tibet Times*, March 30, 2017, <http://tibettimes.net/ཡང་དགེ་ཆན་-༧༠༠-བོད་དུ་ག>.

¹⁸⁷ “Suggestions for implementing the Ten-year Thousand-people Education Support Plan in Tibetan areas,” Sichuan Education Bureau Document (2016) No. 62. Issued by the Sichuan Province Department of Education, Sichuan Province CCP Organization Department, the Sichuan Province Department of Finance, the Sichuan Province Department of Human Resources and Social Security, and the Sichuan Province Poverty Alleviation and Migrants Work Bureau, [August 2016], http://img.abedu.gov.cn/UploadFolder/file/201608/24101905_9208.pdf (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁸⁸ “མཚོ་ཁྲོན་གྱིས་ཤར་རྒྱུད་ས་ཁུལ་ནས་དགེ་ཆན་ཁྲ་བརྒྱ་བཏོང་གཏོང་བའི་ཕྱི་བར་ཁ་གསལ་གྱི་སྒྲིག་གཞི་བྱ་བར་ཁ་གསལ་གྱི་ལྷན་ཁྲུང་ལྷན་ཁྲུང་གིས་” [The Eastern provinces send 500 teachers to aid education in southern Qinghai], *China Tibet News Online*, September 2, 2018, <http://www.qhtb.cn/news/china/2018-09-02/1083485.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

The effect on local teaching numbers appears to have been significant, judging from an academic survey of 15 kindergartens in a rural area outside Lhasa in 2017, which found that 30 percent of the teachers there were ethnic Chinese.¹⁸⁹ The proportion of ethnic Chinese or non-Tibetan teachers in urban areas of the TAR is likely to be higher.

A retired schoolteacher told Human Rights Watch in 2016 that this is a result of government policy regarding the allocation of resources. He said that despite the rights described in China's nationality autonomy laws:

The actual reality is quite different. The crucial point in this is that it depends on deciding in which language the 18 [main school] courses are taught, which [in turn] is up to government policy and [depends on] resources for teacher allocation and training – and so far the TAR has not trained [enough] Tibetan teachers to teach all these 18 courses in Tibetan, while there is a fully trained corps of teachers capable of teaching them in Chinese. The corps of Tibetan teachers is small, poorly resourced, neglected by the school directors, and so on. So although the teaching materials are in both languages, the actual teaching of the classes will often be Chinese.¹⁹⁰

From the outset, the “importing teachers” drive was described in political and ideological terms rather than academic terms. In 2017, when 800 teachers were sent from the mainland areas of China to teach for three years each in the TAR, the stated purpose was not just to improve teaching quality but also “to clearly develop the train of thought.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Zhao Xuemei, “A survey into the current state of bilingual teaching in kindergartens in Tibet’s agricultural and pastoral regions, and suggestions for its improvement – Based on a survey of sample kindergartens in the agricultural and pastoral regions of Chushul County in Lhasa City,” *Xizang jiaoyu* (Tibet Education), Issue 5, 2017, pp. 52-55.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with retired schoolteacher, October 2016; see Appendix 1.3.

¹⁹¹ “ཤུགས་ཅན་དཀོན་མཆོད་བརྒྱ་པོ་དུ་སློབ་སྦྱོར་ལ་ཡོང་ནས་གངས་ལྗོངས་སུ་སློབ་སྦྱོར་གྱི་དབུངས་བརྒྱུ་ལཱ་” [Since the renowned 800 teachers came to assist education in Tibet, the snowland has sung to the melody of assisted education: educational assistance by “grouped” professionals spurs development of education in Tibet], *China Tibet News Online*, September 10, 2017, http://tb.xzxw.com/kjws/201709/t20170910_1961383.html (accessed December 15, 2019). The 800 teachers were sent from the mainland areas of China in teams of 10-50 to the TAR to help 20 primary and secondary schools there. This was part of “the Ten Thousand Teacher Education Program in Tibet.” See “教育部关于加强“十三五”期间 - 教育对口支援西藏和四省藏区工作的意见” [The Ministry of Education’s Suggestions on Work to Strengthen Counterpart Support for Education in Tibet and Tibetan Areas in the Four Provinces During the Period of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan], PRC Ministry of Education, “Teach People [2016] No. 5,” December 30, 2016, http://www.moe.edu.cn/srcsite/A09/s3082/201701/t20170112_294684.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

Official recruiting notices indicate that in many cases these non-Tibetan teachers are not employed primarily to teach Chinese language, but to teach other subjects using Chinese as medium of instruction, such as mathematics, physics, or politics.¹⁹² Although most government job notices calling for teachers from outside Tibet to work in the TAR say only that the teachers must be from outside the TAR, without specifying their ethnicity, an interviewee from Lhasa told Human Rights Watch that in recent years only non-Tibetans are being hired for these positions, and that even Tibetans from outside the TAR who are fluent in Chinese are not hired.¹⁹³

Employing more monolingual Chinese-speaking teachers in Tibetan schools means that fewer students will have Tibetan-medium teaching in their classes.

The importing of non-Tibetan teachers has led to difficulties in the classroom, including “an inevitable emotional distance and major cultural barriers,” according to Zhong Qiuming, a high-school teacher from Hunan in eastern China who was sent to teach in a high school in southern Tibet in 2017. Zhong, writing in an official education journal, described the visiting Chinese teachers as excellent and blamed the problem entirely on the “poor” quality and “weak foundations” of the Tibetan students, a view found in much Chinese writing about Tibetans:

¹⁹² For example, one recruiting notice posted in September 2018 called for five high school teachers from outside Tibet to come to Tibet to teach Chinese, English, Physics, History, and Psychology. The primary requirements were that they not be from TAR colleges or schools, have teaching degrees, and “have high ideological and political qualities, supporting the leadership of the Communist Party of China, resolutely implementing the party's line, principles, and policies ... a firm political standpoint, consciously safeguarding the unity of the motherland and nationality unity, and opposing division.” See “西藏自治区西格办中学 2018 年度教师招聘简章” [Tibet Autonomous Region Xigema Middle School 2018 Teacher Recruitment Guide], Jiaoshi zige kaoshi wang (Teacher Qualifying Examinations Web), September 9, 2018, <http://ntceol.com/zhaopin/xizang/18583.html>. The “Ten Thousand Teacher Education Program in Tibet” emphasizes the provision of mainland Chinese teachers for Chinese language and science classes: “In provinces and cities in the interior ... for training in Tibet and the four provinces’ Tibetan regions ... focus on the cultivation of teachers in urgently needed subjects as bilingual languages and the sciences [shulihua].” See “教育部关于加强“十三五”期间 - 教育对口支援西藏和四省藏区工作的意见” [The Ministry of Education’s Suggestions on Work to Strengthen Counterpart Support for Education in Tibet and Tibetan Areas in the Four Provinces During the Period of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan], Ministry of Education, Beijing, “Teach People [2016] No. 5,” December 30, 2016, http://www.moe.edu.cn/srcsite/A09/s3082/201701/t20170112_294684.html.

¹⁹³ “They recruit very few Tibetans who graduate in mainland China. Every year people can take the civil exams, but very hard for Tibetans to get those jobs. I heard from “X” and some friends ago that it is no longer Amdo or other Tibetans from those areas getting these jobs, there is some limitation on the nationality for getting these jobs. It is very difficult for a Tibetan from outside of TAR to get these jobs, it says you must be outside the TAR but it is not publicly said that it does include Tibetans from outside the TAR,” (interview with former Tibetan part-time teacher from Lhasa, October 13, 2018; Appendix 1.1, pt. 3).

The [Tibetan] students' ability to express themselves in Chinese is poor. Teachers express themselves very well and in a lively manner, but the students are indifferent. Not only is communication poor, the teachers are also frustrated. Bilingual education in Tibet is now basically universalized at pre-school, and for a high-school student, daily communication in Chinese should not be a problem.... Individual Aid Tibet teachers consider that the main reason for this is that the student base is poor. Compared to students in the mainland, Tibetan students' educational foundations ... are generally weak, but the children themselves don't consider this to be so because they are surrounded by classmates who are also like this.¹⁹⁴

Zhong recommended that the authorities should “expand the scope of bilingual education” to improve the students' skills in Chinese. At the same time, Zhong advised, “Aid Tibet” teachers should carry out such means as “home visits” and “joint school-home education efforts” in order to “cultivate strong nationality sentiments” and “heart-to-heart dialog” with the students.

“The county middle schools and township primary schools in particular are the foundations of Tibetan education and the breeding ground of the next generation. Earlier, a lot of school principals were Tibetan, at least in the county and township schools. This has changed – now you hardly see Tibetan principals in county schools, and it's the same in township primary schools. The government sends a lot of teacher training graduates from China to work in Tibet, who are more qualified than Tibetans to become school principals, and automatically meet the political qualification of nationality unity, I have noticed. School principals have to be Party members, and they control all the school activities and teachers, and have full powers to decide what is good.”

—Retired schoolteacher, interviewed April 2017 (for full text, see Appendix 1.3)

In December 2016 the central government announced a program to increase the number of Chinese teachers in the TAR by recruiting Chinese graduates straight out of college. Part of a high-profile measure called the “Ten-Thousand Teachers Education Program in Tibet,” the “Non-Tibet Students

¹⁹⁴ Zhong Qiuming, “Some thoughts on ‘group-style’ education in Aid Tibet,” *Xizang jiaoyu* (Tibet Education), Issue 9, 2017, pp. 14-16. Zhong is a teacher from Hunan in eastern China deployed to Lhokha municipality, TAR, as part of an “Aid Tibet” group teaching team.

Tibet-employment-oriented Enrollment Plan” will train non-Tibetan Chinese-speaking students already in the TAR or other Tibetan areas and then employ them in schools in Tibetan areas directly after graduating.¹⁹⁵

All teachers are required to prioritize political objectives in their work. The 2015 “Decision on Ethnic Education” expressly aims to “deepen the promotion of nationality unity education in the school, in the classroom, [and] in the brain” and requires schools to use these measures to “constantly enhance the great motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture, the Chinese Communist Party, socialism with Chinese characteristics,” which are known as the “four identifications.”¹⁹⁶

At the same time, Tibetan teachers are being retrained to improve both their Chinese and their political reliability, and at least 400 Tibetan teachers from the TAR as well as 300 teachers from Tibetan areas of Sichuan have been sent annually to the mainland since 2016 to improve their ability at “nurturing bilingual education.”¹⁹⁷ The TAR authorities have stated that the purpose of training Tibetan teachers through exchanges with the mainland is again largely ideological: they are sent for training in order to “establish the correct national standpoint, the minority nationality standpoint, the culture standpoint and the religion standpoint, thus strengthening the student teachers’ ideological understanding of

¹⁹⁵ “The Ministry of Education’s Suggestions on Work to Strengthen Counterpart Support for Education in Tibet and Tibetan Areas in the Four Provinces During the Period of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan,” Ministry of Education, Beijing, “Teach People [2016] No. 5,” December 30, 2016, sections 2 (2) and 2 (6), http://www.moe.edu.cn/srcsite/A09/s3082/201701/t20170112_294684.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁹⁶ These are known as the “four identifications” (*sige rentong*). The term was formally introduced into Party policy at the 17th Party Congress in 2007. In 2015, Xi Jinping added a fifth element to this principle: identification with the Chinese Communist Party, “Xi Jinping yong wu ge ren tong gong gu sheng ming xian,” *Xuexi Zhongguo*, September 30, 2015, <http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2015-09-30/doc-ifyimezxo782769.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019); see also James Leibold, “China’s Ethnic Policy Under Xi Jinping,” *China Brief*, Jamestown Foundation, Vol. 15, Issue 20, October 19, 2015, <https://jamestown.org/program/chinas-ethnic-policy-under-xi-jinping/>. In 2017, Xi called on “all ethnic groups to enhance their sense of identity with the motherland, Chinese nation, Chinese culture, the Communist Party of China (CPC), and socialism with Chinese characteristics,” Han Xu, “Cartoon Commentary on Xi’s two sessions talks ⑤: Let national unity flowers bloom,” *Xinhua*, March 13, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2017-03/13/c_136125196.htm (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁹⁷ Besides the 400 Tibetan teachers from the TAR and other Tibetan areas who are to be sent annually to the mainland between 2016 and 2020, 300 teachers from Tibetan counties in Sichuan were sent on “work-study placements” in the mainland as part of Sichuan’s “Tibetan areas 1000-people education support plan,” announced in February 2017. See “The Ministry of Education’s Suggestions on Work to Strengthen Counterpart Support for Education in Tibet and Tibetan Areas in the Four Provinces During the Period of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan,” PRC Ministry of Education, “Teach People [2016] No. 5,” December 30, 2016, http://www.moe.edu.cn/srcsite/A09/s3082/201701/t20170112_294684.html; “Since the renowned 800 teachers came to assist education in Tibet, the snowland has sung to the melody of assisted education,” China Tibet News Online, September 10, 2017, http://tb.xzxw.com/kjws/201709/t20170910_1961383.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

the ‘five identifications’ and the ‘three cannot-do-withouts.’”¹⁹⁸ Training in the “three lessons on national unification” was added for TAR teachers in 2018,¹⁹⁹ and similar training began in 2016 in Gannan, a Tibetan autonomous prefecture in Gansu province, to turn minority teachers in Chinese language into “politically reliable” teachers who will be “facilitators of socialism in Tibetan areas.”²⁰⁰

The surge in the hiring of non-Tibetan teachers to work in Tibetan schools comes amid increasing pressures on the provision of Tibetan-language teaching and on Tibetan teachers. Tibetan teachers already had reason to fear being replaced by non-Tibetan teachers,²⁰¹ and increasingly strict laws and policies in China now require all teachers to be proficient in Chinese. In April 2017, China’s Ministry of Education and State Language Commission announced that all new teachers “must meet national Mandarin-speaking standards before being hired by schools.” The statement listed methods specifically designed “to ensure all ethnic teachers speak standard Mandarin.”²⁰² These policies will make it illegal for Tibetan schools to employ teachers who only speak Tibetan.

There have been reports in mainstream foreign media of a downturn in the hiring of Tibetan-speaking teachers,²⁰³ and in 2014 a number of Tibetan teachers in Qinghai staged a protest saying they had been marginalized and underpaid,²⁰⁴ a trend that could increase

¹⁹⁸ “The Ministry of Education’s Suggestions on Work to Strengthen Counterpart Support for Education in Tibet and Tibetan Areas in the Four Provinces During the Period of the Thirteenth Five-Year Plan,” PRC Ministry of Education, “Teach People [2016] No. 5,” December 30, 2016, http://www.moe.edu.cn/srcsite/A09/s3082/201701/t20170112_294684.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

¹⁹⁹ “བོད་ཀྱི་རྒྱལ་ཁབ་ཀྱི་གཞིག་གྱུར་སྒྲོལ་ཚན་ཁག་གསུམ་གྱི་བསྐྱབ་གཞིའི་གསོ་སྦྱང་འཛིན་གྲུ་སྒྲོལ་འགོ་ཚུགས་པ།” [Tibet’s ‘Three lessons on national unification’ ideological education training for teachers begins], *China Tibet News Online*, June 5, 2018, http://tb.chinatibetnews.com/sylm/syyw/201806/t20180605_2246273.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁰⁰ Their training in Chinese was said to be needed in order to achieve “long-term historical successes in economic development, social stability and nationality unity.” See “ཀན་སུ་ཞིང་ཆེན་གྱི་བོད་རྒྱ་སྐད་གཉིས་ཀྱི་སྒྲིག་སྒྲོལ་གསའི་གཞི་ས་བཙུགས་ནས་སྒོ་བྱང་བཀའ་བ།” [Gansu province opens Tibetan-Chinese language teacher training center], Southern Amdo (Mdo lho) Net citing, *China Tibet News Online*, December 26, 2016, <http://www.tibet3.cn/news/tibet/gs/2016-12-26/16252.html>.

²⁰¹ “In the kindergarten there are a lot of young teachers who are [not Tibetans], and that is a very big issue in Tibet right now: they are recruiting a lot of Chinese from the mainland area, so these newly graduated Tibetans can’t get jobs nearby,” (interview with former Tibetan part-time teacher from Lhasa, October 13, 2018; appendix 1.1, pt. 3).

²⁰² “China to increase Mandarin speaking rate to 80 percent,” *Xinhua*, April 3, 2017, http://english.gov.cn/state_council/ministries/2017/04/03/content_281475615766970.htm (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁰³ See, for example, Edward Wong, “Tibetans Fight to Salvage Fading Culture in China,” *New York Times*, November 28, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/world/asia/china-tibet-language-education.html>.

²⁰⁴ In May 2014 about 160 predominantly Tibetan “substitute teachers” from Rebgong (Ch.: Tongren) county in Malho (Ch.: Huangnan) prefecture offices in Qinghai held a peaceful protest about work conditions, low pay, and related issues. See “Plight of Tibetan ‘substitute Teachers’ in Rebkong County,” TCHRD, May 26, 2014, <http://tchrd.org/plight-of-tibetan-substitute-teachers-in-rebkong-county>.

as requirements for their jobs are raised and as increasing numbers of Chinese teachers are brought in from mainland areas. In June 2018, a group of Tibetan students in Qinghai sent a letter to local authorities complaining that there were not enough qualified teachers of Tibetan in their area, claiming that, out of 359 newly hired teachers, none could teach in Tibetan.²⁰⁵

Restrictions on the employment of monolingual Tibetan-language teachers and their replacement in some cases by Chinese teachers have been matched in some areas by official attempts to restrict unofficial Tibetan-language teaching taking place outside schools. A number of local Tibetan organizations and university student groups, notably in some areas of Qinghai, have sought to compensate for the reduction in school classes in Tibetan by holding informal workshops teaching Tibetan language to the public. In some cases, however, these have been shut down by local officials, apparently because of the perception among officials that they might generate political dissent or increase the risk of unrest.²⁰⁶

In December 2018, for example, officials in Qinghai's Nangchen county issued an order banning informal classes in Tibetan that were run by monks during the school holidays. The order described the unofficial classes in Tibetan language as by their very nature "ideological infiltration among the young," "dangerous," and "harmful."²⁰⁷

Mixed Classes, Concentrated Schooling

Another measure that is increasing Chinese-medium teaching in Tibetan schools is known as "mixed classes," which can reduce the chances for Tibetan pupils to learn in their

²⁰⁵ According to Radio Free Asia, the students were from Tsoshar (Ch.: Haidong) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Their letter said that there were only 270 teachers with Tibetan-language teaching ability working in two counties of the prefecture. See "Tibetan Students in Qinghai Appeal in Letter For Teaching in Tibetan," *Radio Free Asia*, June 04, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/students-06012018150420.html>.

²⁰⁶ In 2016 attempts by local Tibetans to run an annual public workshop teaching Tibetan language to members of the public in Pema (Ch.: Banma) county in the Golok (Ch.: Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai had to be cancelled because of "the restrictive climate." (See "New Controls on Tibetan Language Study in Qinghai's Pema County," *Radio Free Asia*, January 21, 2016, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/controls-01202016160851.html>.) Human Rights Watch received similar reports about teaching workshops run by students from Qinghai Nationality University in Xining.

²⁰⁷ "China: Tibetan Children Banned from Classes: Authorities Declare Informal Sessions in Monasteries 'Dangerous,'" Human Rights Watch news release, January 30, 2019, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/01/30/china-tibetan-children-banned-classes>.

mother-tongue if Chinese speakers are present in a given class. The education law is ambiguous as to which language should be used in such circumstances.²⁰⁸

As of 2006, 95.6 percent of all primary school students and 94.5 percent of junior-middle school students in the TAR were Tibetans, meaning that few classes in the Tibetan stream would normally have had non-Tibetan students in them.²⁰⁹ However, since 2010, the Chinese authorities have stepped up moves to encourage or require schools and kindergartens to arrange “mixed classes,” where ethnic Chinese students are placed in classes of Tibetan students in order to promote “nationality unity.”²¹⁰

The policy of promoting mixed classes in minority schools first emerged at local level in 2010. It has since been endorsed by the central authorities as part of national-level policy for minority schools and is now being implemented in the TAR:

- 2010: In Qinghai, the provincial government announced a plan to institute “combined ethnic and Han kindergarten classes” and “to actively promote ethnic and Han joint campuses,”²¹¹ and to have “ethnics and Han co-education” in schools.²¹²

²⁰⁸ This is suggested by the phrase “where conditions exist” in the Education Law (1995), which says “In schools which mainly recruit students of minority nationalities, textbooks in languages of minority nationalities concerned should be used where conditions exist.” Education Law, art. 37. This is discussed by Alexandra Grey, who writes in her study of the Zhuang minority. See “‘Where conditions exist’ is an ambiguous standard not otherwise defined in policy documents, and according to my research, if Zhuang-speaking students were a minority in a school, this article would not apply to them, regardless of their linguistic needs,” Alexandra Grey, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

²⁰⁹ The percentage of Tibetan students was slightly lower at high school level in the TAR at that time, at 86 percent. See Ma Rong, in Leibold and Chen 2014, p. 98.

²¹⁰ “The separation of nationality-Han classes and schools [in the 1980s] objectively constructed a cultural divide between the nationalities, which was deleterious to minority nationality youths establishing a ‘Chinese [Ch.: Zhonghua] culture’ sense of cultural identity commonly shared with all nationalities. [...] and was not] conducive to constructing the cultural cohesion of the Chinese [Ch.: Zhonghua] nationalities. [However,] the 2014 Minority Nationalities Work Conference clearly stated, ‘We must actively promote nationality-Han integrated schools and mixed classes, creating an atmosphere and conditions of joint study and joint progress.’” See Ma Rong, “马戎 | 汉语学习与中国少数民族群的现代化” [The study of the Chinese language and the modernization of China’s minority nationality masses], April 1, 2017, Section 3, <http://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/usdECKLoS1drjEsmqizsRA>. The system of mixed schools and mixed classes already exists in Xinjiang: “By the late 1990s, Joint Minority-Han Schools were once again encouraged. They grew to 778 throughout Xinjiang in 2009, with all schools in Ürümqi falling into this category.” See Xinjiang Region Bureau of Education 2009, Table 6.3. “Today [2014], the XUAR government promotes the joint minority-Han school model throughout the region. Needless to say, the merger of minority and Han schools serves a very important agenda for eliminating ethnic segregation and incorporating minority education into the national educational system. Putting minority and Han students in the same environment breaks down barriers and contributes to their mutual communication and understanding.” Zulyati Simayi, “The Practice of Ethnic Policy in Education: Xinjiang’s Bilingual Education System,” in Leibold and Chen 2014, pp. 131–59; see p. 139.

²¹¹ See note 26 above.

²¹² “转发省教育厅等四部门关于加强全省教育发展规划推进学校布局调整工作指导意见的通知” [Notice from four provincial departments, including the Department of Education, on guiding suggestions for strengthening the education development plan by promoting work on the adjustment of school distribution], 青政办〔2010〕126号, Qinghai Government Information

- 2014: The National Conference on Ethnic Work in 2014 ordered all officials to “actively promote nationality-Han integrated schools and mixed classes” in order to promote “joint study and joint progress.”²¹³
- 2015: China’s State Council issued a “Decision on Ethnic Education,” which required officials “to promote the teaching of mixed classes.”²¹⁴
- 2016: In his annual report to the TAR Party Congress, TAR Party Secretary Wu Yingjie noted the “manifest results” of “blending students in Tibet classes” and prioritized the plan for “students of different nationalities to study together in the same school and same class” in order to “make them complementary social components and to enlarge the neighborhood environment.”²¹⁵ He also stressed the need to have “students of different nationalities study together in the same school and same class.”²¹⁶

A retired school teacher told Human Rights Watch that “in practice, mixed classrooms have been set up, and Tibetan students have not only a daily language class but classes on Chinese history and political study mostly alongside the Chinese students, a new system which both students and parents find very disturbing.”²¹⁷ The Tibetan university teacher interviewed by Human Rights Watch said that creating mixed classes appears to be a way of “forcing Tibetans into studying in the Chinese language.”²¹⁸

Office Document (2010) No. 126, Qinghai Government Information Office, June 21, 2010, art. 7, <http://www.qh.gov.cn/html/284/150440.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

²¹³ See note 199 above.

²¹⁴ “Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education,” State Council, National Document [2015] 46, issued August 11, 2015, section 6, www.gov.cn/jzhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_10097.htm (accessed December 15, 2019).

²¹⁵ Speech by Wu Yingjie to the 9th TAR Party Congress on November 15, 2016, *China Tibet News Online*, November 23, 2016, http://tb.xzxw.com/zw/zwxw/201611/t20161123_1563725_4.html (accessed December 15, 2019). See also “四川将选派 700 名优秀教师到 32 个藏区县支教” [Sichuan to dispatch 700 outstanding teachers to the 32 counties in Tibetan areas as teaching support], State Council, February 18, 2017, <http://www.sc.gov.cn/10462/12771/2017/2/18/10414484.shtml> and “Lhokha Municipality perfects the ‘concerted’ approach to Aid Tibet in education through ‘Six Minglings,’” *China Tibet News Online*, January 24, 2017, http://tb.chinatibetnews.com/xw/yz/201701/t20170124_1669490.html. In June 2016, the State Council announced that “30,000 teachers from other areas of China would be dispatched to work in Tibet and Xinjiang by 2020, displacing over 90 percent of local science teachers, who will receive off-the-job training,” as part of “boosting the development of education in central and western regions, stressing the improvement of efforts to set up secondary school classes for ethnic minority students from Tibet and Xinjiang in other regions of China.” See “W.China education gets boost: Govt to send 30k teachers to Tibet, Xinjiang,” *Global Times*, June 16, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/988626.shtml>.

²¹⁶ Speech by Wu Yingjie to the 9th TAR Party Congress, November 15, 2016, *China Tibet News Online*, November 23, 2016, http://tb.xzxw.com/zw/zwxw/201611/t20161123_1563725_4.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

²¹⁷ Interview with retired schoolteacher, October 2016; see Appendix 1.3.

²¹⁸ Interview with Tibetan university professor, November 2017; see Appendix 1.6.

Another education measure that has increased the likelihood of Chinese being used as the teaching language is the practice of combining rural schools into centralized units in nearby towns. This too leads to an increase in mixed classes and effectively compels schools to switch to Chinese-medium education without the state directly forcing them to do so.²¹⁹

The policy, known as “merged” or “concentrated schooling” (*slob grwa mnyam bsres* in Tibetan), was introduced in 2001, and led to the closure of village primary schools in place of enlarged township- or county-level primary schools, which usually required children to board.²²⁰ In its 10-year Education Plan, issued in 2011, the TAR announced that “it is necessary to ... focus on promoting the concentration of schools in the pastoral areas and remote areas.” The plan said it was necessary to “speed up boarding school construction” because of “changes in school-age population and the construction of the new socialist countryside,”²²¹ which is probably a shorthand reference to urbanization, although in fact, as of 2015, 72 percent of the TAR population was still living in rural areas.

The “concentrated schools” policy may, as it claims, improve teaching standards and resources, but by leading to more mixed classes, it also results in more teaching being exclusively conducted in Chinese. At the same time, it dramatically reduces the time that children spend with their families and thus their exposure to their mother-tongue and culture.

In September 2012, China’s State Council checked the trend towards merged primary schools in China as whole by ordering that primary schools in the first three grades should in principle be non-residential throughout the country.²²² It ordered local administrations

²¹⁹ Note that in May 2018, 2,000 Mongolian teachers staged a street protest in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, saying that they had been dismissed without adequate or any compensation in or after 2002, when local community-run rural “minban” Mongolian schools were merged into larger stage schools. See “2,000 teachers took to the streets in Southern Mongolia,” Southern Mongolia Human Rights Information Center, May 28, 2018, http://www.smhric.org/news_636.htm.

²²⁰ “ཐྱིང་རེ་ལ་སློབ་གྲྭ་ཞེ་ ཡོད་ན་བོད་པའི་བྱིས་པ་སྦྱོར།” [A school in every village would be contentment for Tibetan children], Trimleng.cn (Dolma Kyab), May 4, 2017, <http://trimleng.cn/bring-school-back-to-village/> (accessed December 15, 2019).

²²¹ “中共西藏自治区委员会西藏自治区人民政府关于贯彻《国家中长期教育改革和发展规划纲要（2010—2020 年）》的实施意见” [The TAR CCP Committee and People’s Government Suggestions on Implementation of the ‘National Mid- to Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020)’], China Education News, March 29, 2011, p. 6, http://www.jyb.cn/info/dfjyk/201103/t20110329_422390.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

²²² “关于规范农村义务教育学校布局调整的意见” [Suggestions of Office of the State Council on Adjusting the Distribution of Rural Compulsory Schools], State Council Issue [2012] No. 48, State Council, September 6, 2012, http://www.gov.cn/zwggk/2012-09/07/content_2218779.htm (accessed December 15, 2019).

to “resolutely stop the blind withdrawal of rural compulsory education schools,” required them to hold hearings with the public before closing any rural school, and pointed out the legal responsibility of local administrations to provide school facilities within reach of children’s homes.²²³

However, this ruling seems not to have been applied to minority nationalities. The 2015 “Decision on Ethnic Education,” which was also issued by the State Council, required officials to do exactly the opposite: it called on them to “strengthen boarding school construction” in minority areas and ordered them “to achieve the goal that students of all ethnic minorities will study in a school, live in a school, and grow up in a school.”²²⁴ This is reflected in the current policy in the TAR for school construction, which is described as needed to “perfect rational distribution” and “optimize resources” – it aims for kindergartens to be in villages, primary schools to be in towns and townships, junior middle schools to be in county towns, and senior middle schools in cities.²²⁵ This policy would appear to impose disproportionate harm on Tibetan communities that are already struggling to ensure access to schools that provide mother-tongue education.

Because of their location in towns or cities, most classes in these “concentrated schools” are likely to include non-Tibetan students, and therefore will likely use Chinese-language textbooks for all classes except for Tibetan language classes.

An extreme variant of concentrated schooling has also been developed in the TAR: known as the “education city” concept, it refers to relocating a number of schools within a single compound or area. In September 2014, the TAR authorities completed the construction of

²²³ “In underpopulated areas with no particular educational facilities, these [village-level schools] should be built, and those already in existence should be continued. According to point 12 of the Compulsory Education Law, “Local governments have the responsibility to provide education facilities within reach of registered populations” (see “ཕྱི་བ་རེ་ལ་སློབ་གླ་རེ། ཡོང་ན་ཁོད་པའི་བྱིས་པ་སློབ་ཀྱི་ཤིང་།” [A school in every village would be contentment for Tibetan children], Trimleng.cn (Dolma Kyab), May 4, 2017, <http://trimleng.cn/bring-school-back-to-village>).

²²⁴ “Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education,” State Council, National Document [2015] 46, issued August 11, 2015, section 19, www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_10097.htm (accessed December 15, 2019).

²²⁵ “In the words of the Lhasa City Party Committee Secretary Qi Zhala: an appropriate level of concentrated schools would be the development mode of ‘villages running kindergartens, towns, and townships running elementary schools, counties running junior middle schools, cities running senior middle schools,’ further perfecting the rational distribution of all levels of school, optimizing education resources, and promoting the balanced development of urban and rural education.” See Wang Xiuxiu, “中国梦·拉萨篇”系列报道之十六：拉萨倾力打造西藏最大教育城” [China Dream – 16th Report in the Lhasa series: Lhasa strives to build the largest education city in Tibet], People’s Net – CCP News Net, April 4, 2014, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n/2014/0404/c359404-24830022.html>).

the first Tibetan “Education City.”²²⁶ Situated in a single compound on the southeast outskirts of Lhasa, it cost approximately 3.7 billion Yuan (\$533 million),²²⁷ and was due to include some 17 kindergartens, elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. It also comprises schools for vocational training, special education, and teacher training, together with a staff dormitory area. The compound, which also includes “an original village with Tibetan nationality characteristics left as it was,” was expected to have a population of over 50,000.²²⁸ When the “city” opened, some 300 “Aid Tibet” teachers from Beijing, Jiangsu, and other mainland areas were brought there to establish “a Tibetan-Chinese integrated progressive “bilingual” education model and a teaching model that will put deep roots down in Lhasa.”²²⁹

²²⁶ “ལྷ་སའི་སློབ་གསོ་གི་དུས་སྐབས་དང་པོའི་རྒྱ་ས་གསུལ་གཞི་རིག་དཔྱད་མཚར་འབྲུབ་པའི་རེ་བ་ཡོད།” [Nine major projects in Lhasa Education City phase 1 may be finished this year], *China Tibet News Online*, November 16, 2013, http://ti.tibet3.com/news/tibet/xz/2013-11/16/content_479462.htm (accessed December 15, 2019).



Modern 'Education City' in Tsal Gungtang township, Lhasa Municipality, concentrating preschool, compulsory education, upper middle school and university departments in one place for greater efficiency.
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Migration Policy and the Impact of Demographic Change

The number of mixed classes in Tibetan schools also reflects the size of the non-Tibetan population in Tibet. Officially, the non-Tibetan population of the TAR is around 8 percent, and in the past, while Chinese officials have encouraged Chinese migrants to go to Tibet to work or trade, they have not publicly suggested long-term settlement by non-Tibetans there. But in November 2016, the TAR Party secretary, Wu Yingjie, told the annual Party Congress that “masses from the region should be encouraged to go to the mainland for employment, and masses from the mainland should be encouraged to come to the region to work and to live.”²³¹ The statement implied that non-Tibetans should move to Tibet not just to work, but also to live there with their families.²³² As with the “sticky rice” or “qingke dough” analogy, this change in official language appears to reflect the current nationality policy of promoting “ethnic mingling, contact and exchange.”

²³¹ Speech by Wu Yingjie to the 9th TAR Party Congress, November 15, 2016, *China Tibet News Online*, November 23, 2016, http://tb.xzxw.com/zw/zwxw/201611/t20161123_1563725_4.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

²³² Ibid.; see also Du Yongbin, “Two-Way Flow of People Between the Ethnic Tibetan Regions and the Chinese Hinterland is Conducive to Social Harmony and Development,” *Renmin Ribao* (Overseas Edition), March 28, 2012, <http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrbhwb>.

Tibetan interviewees also anecdotally referred to a sharp increase in Chinese families moving to Tibet:

Maybe 10 years ago, the Chinese who came to do construction in Tibet, or professionals and skilled workers sent by “Aid Tibet” tie-ups or mainland cities, they didn’t used to bring their whole families, and when their term of employment was over, they went straight back. But ...the fact is that things have changed a lot since the 18th Party Congress.

These days, mainland Chinese like construction workers and skilled workers bring their whole families with them to Tibet at the outset. If either the husband or the wife is unemployed, the employer or company provides income support for the unemployed spouse, their kids go to school in the town where their parent is employed, and they are equally entitled to the school fees and welfare policies [designed] for Tibetan students.

Around 40 percent of the students qualifying for Tibet-adjusted education policies [preferential policies for TAR students, such as lower pass marks in Chinese language exams at national level] are Chinese migrants.... Most of the Chinese who settled in and around Chushul county are those who came to do construction work.... Since they don’t have separate schools for their kids, they send them to the existing county primary and middle schools.²³³

To encourage migration by families to Tibet, the TAR government has introduced new measures designed to facilitate the incorporation of non-Tibetan migrants into Tibetan society. These measures will increase the incidence of mixed classes in Tibetan schools and thus the use of Chinese-medium teaching. They are part of a China-wide program known as the “management and service of floating population,” which provides migrant workers with full access to social services and facilities, as well as a simplified registration process for residence permits.²³⁴ This includes giving the migrant children access to local

²³³ Interview with a retired schoolteacher, October 2016; see Appendix 1.3.

²³⁴ In 2017, municipalities in the TAR started issuing citizen ID cards to residents with *Hukou* (household registration) in mainland provinces, e.g., “བོད་ཁྱིམ་ཞིང་ཆེན་གཞན་གྱི་ཡུལ་མིའི་ཐོབ་ཐང་ལག་ཁྱུང་གཞིར་འགོ་རྟུགས་བཟ།” [Tibet starts servicing citizen cards for residents of other provinces], http://tb.xzxw.com/xw/sz/201701/t20170105_1642430.html (accessed December 15, 2019). In 2016, Qinghai was included in a group of mainland provinces that began offering Hukou registration for migrants registered

government-run schools, which until recently was almost impossible anywhere in China.²³⁵ In the TAR, this is designed not just to improve conditions for migrants, as with such measures elsewhere in China, but also to attract more to move to the area. For example, in February 2016, Cheng Zhejiang, an official in Shigatse, Tibet's second city, wrote:

conditions for the floating population of different nationalities to participate in the municipality's economic, social and cultural life must be gradually put in place ... so that people of various nationalities coming into the municipality can progress from temporary to permanent employment, and from seasonal to permanent residence.... The municipality should perfect arrangements with respect to employment, school attendance, and social security, etc., in order to attract a floating population of various nationalities.²³⁶

Since 2010, Chinese authorities have stopped releasing population figures that show breakdowns of ethnic populations below provincial level, but figures for the period 2000-2010 show significant increases in the ethnic Chinese or Han population. In that decade, the number of Tibetans increased by about 12 percent in the TAR, by about 11 percent in Lhasa municipality as a whole, by about 17 percent in Lhasa's inner city district (Chengguanqu), by about 16 percent in Toelung Dechen, a county adjoining Lhasa that is now incorporated within the urban area of the capital. In the same decade, the ethnic Chinese population increased by about 55 percent in the TAR, by around 50 percent in Lhasa municipality, by about 40 percent in the Lhasa inner city district, and by about 269 percent in Toelung Dechen county.²³⁷

Although more recent figures are not available for the Lhasa urban area or surrounding counties, figures given on a local government website indicate that between 2000 and

in other provinces (except Autonomous Regions), even though six of its seven prefectures have 'Nationality Autonomous' status. See "Qinghai starts general issue of Hukou to residents of other provinces," *China Tibet News Online*, October 18, 2016, http://tb.chinatibetnews.com/xw/zqxw/201610/t20161018_1481080.html.

²³⁵ Lim Yan Liang, "China's migrant children dilemma," *Straits Times*, February 3, 2018, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east-asia/chinas-migrant-children-dilemma> (accessed December 15, 2019).

²³⁶ "Municipalities must use new methods to do a good job in nationality work," *China Tibet News Online*, February 2, 2016, http://tb.chinatibetnews.com/xw/xwpl/201602/t20160203_1068740.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

²³⁷ See China's National Statistics Bureau website and the 2016 annual report of the Congressional Executive Commission on China, a US-Congress affiliated body, p. 9, <http://www.cecc.gov/publications/annual-reports/2016-annual-report>.

2014 the total population of Nyingtri (Ch.: Linzhi), one of the seven prefectures of the TAR, went up by 28 percent (44,000) while the Tibetan population remained almost the same, pointing to a significant rise in the non-Tibetan population.²³⁸

Even at the time of the 2000 census, nearly 25 percent of children in the Lhasa urban areas were already non-Tibetans, according to figures in the 2000 census. The number of children accompanying migrants and attending local schools is likely to have significantly increased since that time. This has led to growing concerns among some Tibetans that it will contribute to more mixed classes and further weakening of Tibetan-language instruction. One interviewee, a retired teacher from a middle school in a county adjoining Lhasa, explained in 2015 how this process, together with increases in administrative and political control, had changed the ethnic composition of classes:

There are 345 students at Toelung Dechen county middle school which has classes 6-12. Classes 6-9 are middle school and classes 9-12 upper middle school. About 10 years ago, we used to have about 50 to 60 Chinese students in our school, but the number has gone up a lot since then. Today, we have 112 Chinese students. It is because of the increase in migrant workers all over the county, and the number of Chinese government employees in townships and villages. For example, since the authorities removed seven Tibetan cadres from their posts for political reasons, we no longer have Tibetan Party secretaries in the townships, they are all Chinese. There are at least five Chinese cadres in each administrative village, and there are many Chinese cadres among the work-teams stationed in each village as well.²³⁹

²³⁸ The Tibetan population of Nyingtri prefecture (later municipality) went from 121,450 in 2000 to 122,000 in 14 years, while the total population went from 158,647 to 203,000 in 2014. See 2000 Census figures, China Data Online, http://chinadataonline.org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/AdvSearch_County2000/AdvSearch.asp and “林芝市民族基本情况” [Basic situation of ethnic groups in Linzhi City], December 8, 2016, http://www.xzml.gov.cn/lswl_2551/201612/t20161208_1592747.html. A Tibet Daily report following the creation of Nyingtri Municipality noted, “Nyingtri has the conditions and foundations for promoting urbanization. Tibet’s ‘green and beautiful’ region has a high capacity for population absorption, and at present the municipality is using commercial means to energetically build conditions for attracting larger population.” See “TAR gives strong impetus to urban construction: a review of TAR urbanisation work during the 12th five-year plan period,” *China Tibet News Online*, http://tb.chinatibetnews.com/zw/dzjg/201603/t20160323_1136940.html.

²³⁹ Interview with a retired schoolteacher, October 2015; see Appendix 1.2.

Another retired schoolteacher interviewed by Human Rights Watch in October 2016 claimed that the number of non-Tibetan children in Tibetan schools has increased, leading to changes in classroom priorities:

The number of Chinese workers and officials in the counties has increased many times over, and their children are attending the schools ... With the increase in numbers, many education systems follow the example of mainland schools in prioritizing Chinese students, and this is becoming more evident. Tibetan students are not the focus, they are ignored, courses based on Tibetan language get neglected, and education and school organization are geared to the Chinese students.²⁴⁰

Other measures to promote “ethnic mingling” and “cultural identification” have also been introduced since 2014, including “actively encouraging the intermarriage of the various fraternal nationalities throughout our region” in order to “promote the great unity and fusion of all ethnic groups in the TAR,” and requiring all religions to be “Sinicized.”²⁴¹

Taken together, these “mingling” measures serve to increase the number of primary schools in the TAR that have to switch all or some classes to Chinese-medium instruction, and at the same time promote the ideological objectives of China’s new policy for ensuring “mingling” and “cultural identification” by minority nationalities with the larger Chinese nation.

²⁴⁰ Interview with a retired schoolteacher, October 2016; see Appendix 1.3.

²⁴¹ The National Conference on Religion Work in 2014 changed the guiding policy and objective for religions in China to “sinicization (Zhonghuahua) of religions.” In 2017, a senior Chinese official, Zhong Yijiong, executive vice-minister of the United Front, stated that in the case of Tibetan Buddhism the new policy “is mainly about introducing or incorporating fine results of Chinese culture in the teaching of Tibetan religion” so that “Chinese culture can nurture the teachings and tenets of Tibetan Buddhism, [and] its teaching can take in the latest fine results of Chinese culture.” See “Dalai Lama a politician under the cloak of religion, meeting or hosting him an offence, China’s warning to world leaders,” *Times Now*, October 21, 2017, <http://www.timesnownews.com/international/article/china-dalai-lama-tibet-warning-buddhist-religious-leader-offence-chinese-government-xi-jinping/110349>.

IV. Protests and Resistance

If the Chinese put all the articles in the regional autonomy law and the constitution into practice, then many Tibetans would be perfectly happy. We would not need extra laws and would not need to make a change. The problem is you promised many things, but now you didn't keep them. Then there's a problem – and it's not our problem, it's your problem.

—Tibetan university professor, interviewed by Human Rights Watch, 2018

Since China's "bilingual education" policies were formally introduced in 2010, Tibetans have staged a number of protests against them. These took place mostly in Qinghai province in 2010 and again in 2012 when officials tried to introduce new textbooks or exam requirements in particular schools or colleges overnight. Since then, officials in Qinghai and other Tibetan areas have pursued more gradual methods for introducing the new policies and have so far avoided triggering major unrest. Nevertheless, written documents by students, scholars, and others attest to continuing concern about the direction of China's education policies for Tibetans.

Student Protests Over Language Policies in Qinghai

Until recently, Qinghai had by far the strongest record among Tibetan areas for allowing Tibetan-medium education at all levels of schooling, but in 2010 the Qinghai authorities tried to reverse their education approach. Alone among the provinces and regions in China with large minority communities, Qinghai declared a specific intention to switch minority schools to Chinese-medium teaching. This led to a protest by about 1,000 Tibetan high-school students in Rebkong (Ch.: Tongren), Malho (Ch.: Huangnan) prefecture in Qinghai in October 2010,²⁴² which ended with the arrests of some students.²⁴³ About 200 to 300 Tibetan students staged sympathy protests in Beijing to show support for the Rebkong

²⁴² Edward Wong, "Tibetans in China Protest Proposed Curbs on Their Language," *New York Times*, October 22, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/23/world/asia/23china.html> (accessed December 15, 2019). See also Edward Wong, "China: Tibetan Students March To Protest Education Policies," *New York Times*, October 21, 2010, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/21/world/asia/21briefs-TIBET.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁴³ At least one of the student protesters was given a five-year prison sentence, according to an unconfirmed oral report from the area provided to Human Rights Watch in 2016.

protesters,²⁴⁴ and several hundred Tibetan teachers and students signed a joint letter appealing for the government to continue to provide Tibetan-medium education in Qinghai:

Using the mother-tongue as the language of instruction for nationality elementary and middle school students does not imply a weakening of the Chinese language.... But we cannot sacrifice the study of other subjects for the sake of properly studying the Chinese language and text and the English language. We should understand the difference between teaching a language and the language of instruction....

In order to raise the quality of teaching and education and to amply reveal a person's intelligence, we should use a language of instruction most easily understood by the students, at the same time as strengthening the teaching of language itself. Therefore, all trainees [the signatories to this letter] maintain that it is scientific to continue using the mother-tongue as the language of instruction.²⁴⁵

A group of retired Tibetan officials submitted a much more detailed petition on the same topic to the Qinghai government in the same month.²⁴⁶ Qinghai authorities did not go through with the intended switch to Chinese-medium teaching in 2010.

²⁴⁴ Tania Branigan, "Thousands of students have demonstrated in Tibetan areas in the past week over language curbs in schools," *The Guardian*, October 22, 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/22/tibetan-school-pupils-protest-language-china> (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁴⁵ "Tibetan teachers write petition in support of Tibetan language; fears for students after detentions," International Campaign for Tibet, October 26, 2010, <https://www.savetibet.org/tibetan-teachers-write-petition-in-support-of-tibetan-language-fears-for-students-after-detentions/> (accessed December 15, 2019). For translation, see Appendix 2.1.

²⁴⁶ See Appendix 2.2. By far the most detailed and cutting critique of the Chinese-language-dominant approach to "bilingual education" in Tibet was the 11,000 character statement produced by a group of scholars and experts who were convened by the State Nationality Affairs Commission in a meeting on July 7-8, 2007, to respond to a letter by a Tibetan, Tashi Tsering, which had protested strongly against the revised "TAR Regulations on the Use and Development of the Tibetan Language" in 2002. The experts strongly endorsed Tashi Tsering's criticisms of the 2002 Regulations. See "关于札西次仁先生「谨呈西藏自治区人大代表」的信」的专家意见" [Expert Opinion on Tashi Tsering's "Letter to the Deputies of the National People's Congress (of the TAR)"], Trimleng.cn (Dolma Kyab), November 10, 2016, <http://trimleng.cn/analysis-of-tashi-tserings-letter-2/> (accessed December 15, 2019). The original letter by Tashi Tsering: "扎西才让写给西藏自治区人大的信" [Tashi's Letter to the People's Congress of the TAR], Trimleng.cn (Dolma Kyab), November 10, 2016, <http://trimleng.cn/2016/11/10/tashi-tserings-call-in-chinese/> (accessed December 15, 2019).

Two years later, officials in Qinghai and neighboring Gansu province again tried to introduce Chinese-medium teaching and Chinese-language textbooks in Tibetan schools,²⁴⁷ leading to protest marches in March 2012 by Tibetan students in Rebkong, Tsekhok (Ch.: Zeku), and Kangtsa (Ch.: Gangcha) counties in Qinghai.²⁴⁸ In the same month a Tibetan student in Gansu, Tsering Kyi, 20, set fire to herself and died after her high school changed its main language to Chinese, according to her relatives.²⁴⁹ In November of that year, about 1,000 students staged a protest after being made to study a government booklet promoting “bilingual education” in Chabcha (Ch.: Gonghe), in Tsolho (Ch.: Hainan) prefecture, Qinghai province.²⁵⁰ The authorities responded with force to these protests, and eight participants in the November 2012 protests later received sentences of up to four years in prison.²⁵¹ Authorities again postponed the plan to switch to Chinese-medium instruction.

Further incidents occurred from 2014 onwards. One involved “hundreds of high school students” from Tsekhok and Rebkong counties in Malho Prefecture who, “without seeking permission from their teachers or listening to their teachers’ advice against doing so, rushed madly into the streets shouting slogans, making trouble, disrupting traffic, etc.,” according to a local government announcement.²⁵² The protest appears to have been

²⁴⁷ Edward Wong, “Tibetans Fight to Salvage Fading Culture in China,” *New York Times*, November 28, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/world/asia/china-tibet-language-education.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁴⁸ “Language Policy Comes Under Scrutiny,” *Radio Free Asia*, March 14, 2012, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/students-03142012213524.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁴⁹ Andrew Jacobs, “Tibetan Self-Immolations Rise as China Tightens Grip,” *New York Times*, March 22, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/23/world/asia/in-self-immolations-signs-of-new-turmoil-in-tibet.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁵⁰ “China alienates, angers Tibetan students with political education,” Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy, November 29, 2012, <http://tchrd.org/china-alienates-angers-tibetan-students-with-political-education> (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁵¹ Qinghai News Network News reported that on April 10, 2013, “the People’s Court of Gonghe County issued a public first-instance verdict on a case of illegal demonstrations by some students of Hainan Vocational and Technical School on November 26 [2012].” “共和县人民法院宣判 ‘11·26’ 非法游行示威案” [The Gonghe County People’s Court pronounced judgment concerning the ‘11·26’ illegal demonstrations], Qinghai News Online, April 17, 2013, <http://www.qhnews.com/newscenter/system/2013/04/17/011064621.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2019). A student named Sangye Bum was sentenced to four years in prison; Kunsang Bum, Lhaten, and Jampa Tsering each received three years and six months of imprisonment; Wangyal Tsering and Choekyong Kyap were sentenced to three years and three months; and Tsering Tashi and Dola were each sentenced to three years. “The Gonghe County People’s Court held a trial concerning the case of the ‘11·26’ illegal demonstrations,” China Tibet Network, April 17, 2013, http://ti.tibet3.com/news/tibet/qh/2013-04/17/content_457369.htm (accessed December 15, 2019). For English summary, see “Chabcha student protesters sentenced up to four years,” Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy, April 17, 2013, <http://tchrd.org/chabcha-student-protesters-sentenced-up-to-four-years>.

²⁵² The notice says the protest occurred on March 14, but it is unclear if this was in 2014 or 2015: the Tibetan version of the notice is dated February 27, 2014, but the Chinese version is dated April 24, 2015. The notice added that “The above incidents were neither spontaneous nor casual. They were staged in a secretive and organized manner by the Dalai Clique in

against another proposed change to their teaching system. The announcement said that all the participants were punished, without giving further details. Another protest by Tibetan students took place in November 2014 in Dzorge (Ch.: Ruo'ergai), a Tibetan area of Sichuan province, after a Chinese education official said Tibetan students and teaching should focus on Chinese language and Chinese-medium teaching rather than Tibetan.²⁵³

Petitions and Letter-Writing

More recent actions have involved posting letters online or writing petitions. In May 2015 and again that September, the Tibetan language-rights campaigner Tashi Wangchuk tried to file petitions in Beijing about the absence of Tibetan-language teaching in Yushu, Qinghai, and a court later sentenced him to five years in prison for interviews with the *New York Times* about these actions.²⁵⁴ In November 2015 and again in January 2016, Tibetans published petitions or open letters on WeChat, the Chinese messaging app, calling on officials to open a Tibetan-language primary school in Qinghai's provincial capital, Xining, which has 30,000 Tibetan children but no public schools that teach in Tibetan.²⁵⁵

In January 2016, a group of Tibetans and Muslims from Yadzi (Hualong) county in Qinghai staged a small protest against lack of support for Tibetan-language teaching in their

collusion with Western hostile forces.” See “བཟང་མཐོང་མིན་པའི་དོན་ཆེན་གྱི་ནང་དུ་ཞུགས་པ་ནི་ཁྲིམས་འགལ་བྱ་རྒྱུ་ཡིན་པ་གསལ་བཤད་བྱ་དགོས།” [It must be made clear that involvement in an incident of instability is a crime], The “Make Malho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture a Prefecture Advanced in Nationality Unity Campaign,” February 27, 2014 (date as given), <http://www.hnztzb.gov.cn/QHCMS/Template/hntzb/news/154/1392864424069.html> (Tibetan version) and <http://www.hnztzb.gov.cn/QHCMS/Template/hntzb/news/81/1390553807734.html> (Chinese version), both dated April 24, 2015 (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁵³ “Tibetan Students Protest Official’s Call For Instruction in Chinese,” *Radio Free Asia*, November 6, 2014, www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/instruction-11062014151550.html (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁵⁴ See “Translated court documents expose China’s sham prosecution of Tibetan language rights advocate Tashi Wangchuk, raise fears about use of torture,” International Campaign for Tibet, August 29, 2018, <https://www.savetibet.org/translated-court-documents-expose-chinas-sham-prosecution-of-tibetan-language-rights-advocate-tashi-wangchuk-raise-fears-about-use-of-torture/> (accessed December 15, 2019). See also “China: Tibetan activist handed grotesquely unjust 5-year prison sentence after featuring in New York Times video,” Amnesty International, May 22, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/05/china-tibetan-activist-unjust-sentence-nyt-video>.

²⁵⁵ The leading Tibetan writer and intellectual Derong Tsering Dondrup posted a letter online calling for a Tibetan public school to open in Xining for the more than 30,000 Tibetan children living there. See Huang Jingjing, “Private schools attempt to keep Tibetan language alive,” *Global Times*, January 28, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/966193.shtml>. An online petition calling for a public school in Xining attracted 61,000 signatures in 2015 before it was blocked by censors. See Edward Wong, “Tibetans Fight to Salvage Fading Culture in China,” *New York Times*, November 28, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/29/world/asia/china-tibet-language-education.html>. An earlier petition was submitted in 2008. See “A proposal to establish a Tibetan-language school in Xining,” High peaks pure earth, January 12, 2008, <https://highpeakspureearth.com/2008/a-proposal-to-establish-a-tibetan-language-primary-school-in-xining>. The petitions appear to have been unsuccessful so far.

area.²⁵⁶ In July 2016 students at both the Nationality Middle schools in Chentsa (Ch.: Jianza) county, in Malho (Ch.: Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai province, presented a petition to their school saying that the number of Chinese teachers in their schools was increasing, with the school at risk of “becoming a nationality school in name only.” The petitioners cited constitutional guarantees about the use of the nationality language in autonomous areas and called for Chinese teachers working there to be studying Tibetan.²⁵⁷ A similar letter was sent by students from Tshoshar (Ch.: Haidong) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai in early 2018.²⁵⁸

Criminalization of Support for Mother-Tongue Education

Some local governments, particularly in Qinghai and some parts of Sichuan provinces, encourage activities that promote the use of the Tibetan language, such as displays of Tibetan calligraphic art. However, in other areas, activities promoting Tibetan culture have become politically sensitive, since they can be defined as challenges to “nationality unity” and national security.²⁵⁹ A Tibetan scholar cited by the official paper *Global Times* explained that “some local officials have politicized bilingual education” by treating support for Chinese-language study as “patriotic” and support for Tibetan-language study as “narrow nationalism,” potentially putting those who call for more Tibetan-language teaching at risk of serious punishment.²⁶⁰

The risks for those who criticize Tibetan language policies escalated significantly in Malho prefecture in Qinghai in 2015 when the local authorities issued an edict that banned “organizing illegal groups and illegal movements in the name of ‘language rights’ [and]

²⁵⁶ “དཔལ་ལུང་གི་བོད་དང་ཁ་ཆེ་མི་རིགས་ཚོས་མཉམ་དུ་བྱ་འཛུགས།” [Tibetans and Muslims from Hualong protest], *Radio Free Asia*, January 25, 2016, <http://www.rfa.org/tibetan/sargyur/protest-in-hualung-01252016165106.html> (accessed December 15, 2019) and “Tibetan, Muslim Students Join in Protest For Equal Education,” *Radio Free Asia*, January 28, 2016, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/join-01282016171530.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁵⁷ “ཡང་དགེ་ལྷན་ ༧༠༠ བོད་སྐད་གཏོང་རྒྱ་རེད།” [Another 700 teachers to be sent to Tibet], *Tibet Times*, March 30, 2017, <http://tibettimes.net/ཡང་དགེ་ལྷན་-༧༠༠-བོད་སྐད་གཏོང་རྒྱ་རེད/> (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁵⁸ “Tibetan Students in Qinghai Appeal in Letter For Teaching in Tibetan,” *Radio Free Asia*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/students-06012018150420.html> (accessed December 15, 2019).

²⁵⁹ See, for example, “Tibetan Language Promotion Event Blocked by China,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 22, 2014, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/language-04222014150658.html>.

²⁶⁰ The scholar, named by the paper in Chinese phoneticization as Chuwu Jianze, from Barkham (Maerkang) Normal College for Minorities in Sichuan, had made his comment in a post on his WeChat social media account in November 2015. See Huang Jingjing, “Private schools attempt to keep Tibetan language alive,” *Global Times*, January 28, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/966193.shtml>.

‘literacy classes.’”²⁶¹ The situation for any critics of language policy in the TAR became more acute in February 2018, when TAR police issued a public notice that declared organizations campaigning on “mother-tongue” issues not just illegal, but a form of “underworld gang crime.”²⁶²

Since that time, the Chinese authorities have launched a nationwide campaign against “underworld gang crime” that in Tibetan areas appears to have been used to detain and imprison local Tibetan social and cultural activists. Significant numbers of arrests and prosecutions under the campaign have been reported in official media,²⁶³ but as these reports admit no distinction between political and criminal offenses, the extent of political arrests is unclear.

Two recently publicized cases appear to have involved the framing of community activists with criminal charges: on April 14, 2019, a court in Rebkong (Ch.: Tongren) sentenced a group of nine elders to up to seven years in prison for forming an “illegal organization” to “take control of grassroots administration,” apparently because they had led community opposition to a case of village land acquisition by the government.²⁶⁴ Twenty-one Tibetans from a village in Nangchen (Ch.: Nangqin), also in Qinghai, said to be members of an environmental protection group, were sentenced in June 2019 for up to six years. They had refused government compensation payments for confiscated grassland and urged others

²⁶¹ See “‘Illegal Organizations’: China’s Crackdown on Tibetan Social Groups, Human Rights Watch, July 30, 2018, Appendix VIII, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/30/illegal-organizations/chinas-crackdown-tibetan-social-groups>.

²⁶² See “‘Illegal Organizations’: China’s Crackdown on Tibetan Social Groups, Human Rights Watch, July 30, 2018, Appendices II and III, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/07/30/illegal-organizations/chinas-crackdown-tibetan-social-groups>.

²⁶³ For example, on May 23, 2019, the Lhasa Municipal Public Security Bureau announced at a press conference that since the beginning of the year they had “cracked down on illegal organizations 4 times, investigated 14 dangerous security cases, investigated and handled 9 administrative cases, registered 21 criminal detentions, 15 administrative detentions, and sent 174 for education and training.” See “China: Stop the witch hunt in the campaign to crush ‘black and evil’ crimes; Release all Tibetans unjustly held in detention,” Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy June 27, 2019, <http://tchrd.org/china-stop-the-witchhunt-in-the-campaign-to-crush-black-and-evil-crimes-release-all-tibetans-unjustly-held-in-detention>. An unofficial report of a June 6, 2019 Public Security conference in Xining, published in *Tibet Times*, an exile newspaper, stated that 646 arrests had been made under the campaign in Qinghai province, and 333 arrest warrants issued in the first half of the year. See “Thirteen Tibetans arrested from one village in Golok,” *Tibet Times*, June 15, 2019, <http://tibettimes.net/2019/06/15/178314>.

²⁶⁴ “First sentences in our prefecture for gang-crime cases announced,” Malho Tibetan News, April 18, 2019, https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzAwNzk2ODMoNA==&mid=2247490648&idx=1&sn=f095eebe8f40b4446548d4b197b5ecb4&chksm=9b775f6fac00d679ffe234b9c725fc60ce5e4b73f5e0d0945c7a943b5ebc072428f319fd86fd&mpshare=1&scene=1&srcid=&pass_ticket=m1luGibp%2FBK0jY%2FLFsmo9gCgGAJDrPiFOC7c4SbsPDLBcCuoP5ja%2BjyF2V2RPeSE#rd (accessed December 15, 2019).

to do the same, and were similarly charged with “taking control of local affairs and disrupting social order,” as well as illegal sand mining and land excavation.²⁶⁵

So far, Human Rights Watch does not know of actual arrests or harassment as a result of the February 2018 classification of support for “mother-tongue education” as a form of gang crime. However, as the politicization of education and the securitization of minority policy increases throughout China, it may be only a matter of time before more Tibetan language activists are detained for questioning China’s new educational policies in the TAR and other Tibetan areas.

²⁶⁵ “Cases of illegal mining emerge in Nangchen,” Qinghai Legal News, cited by China National Radio, June 30, 2019, <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/KayTnXMTAPYo7ajj9tFGig> (accessed December 15, 2019).

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Tibetan-Medium Schooling Under Threat

Human Rights Watch urges the Chinese government to ensure that all Tibetan children can learn in and use Tibetan, to end policies that erode access to mother tongue education, and to end repression of peaceful activism in support of language rights.

