

State of Education in Tibet

A human rights perspective

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Foreword

The Tibetan Centre for Human rights and Democracy (TCHRD) has for many years monitored and reported on the human rights situation in Tibet. The Centre through its reports and publications has kept the world informed of the gross human rights violations taking place in Tibet. Special reports covering specific cases of human rights violations have also been published. Education in Tibet is one particular area of focus that TCHRD finds imperative to examine and report.

State of Education in Tibet: *A human rights perspective*, is a special report by TCHRD that examines the overall system of education in Tibet from a human rights perspective - the obliteration of fundamental human rights through government policies that have and continue to have a huge negative consequence on the Tibetan people – their identity, their culture and their very existence as – a people.

This report looks at some of the Chinese government's educational policies in Tibet that fails to benefit the Tibetan people but rather helps achieve Beijing's political aims. It also studies China's compliance with its own laws - the Constitution, its various regional, ethnic and minority laws that clearly promise the right to education to its people. The report also studies Beijing's compliance with various international human rights laws and treaties that it has signed and ratified.

The findings of the research reveal a grim picture of the state of education in Tibet. In the 45 years of China's forceful occupation and domination of Tibet, it can also be ascertained that Beijing is half way through its unwritten policy of the - Sinicisation of Tibet.

Tibetans in Tibet do not have a say in the planning of education policy in Tibet. The few who do represent the Tibetan people are handpicked by the authorities and have no choice but to agree with the government's policies.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Education, Ms. Katarina Tomasevski's description of the state of education in

Tibet as *horrendous* at the United Nations High Commission on Human Rights (UNHCHR) in Geneva in April 2004 was sufficient indication. Similarly, her report on the general state of education in China after her visit in September 2003 was a wake up call to China to improve the quality of education for her people.

The Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, through this report aims to put into perspective the state of education in Tibet. There is no dearth of research materials on the state of education in Tibet, however, TCHRD through its interviews of Tibetan refugees reaching Nepal and India has much to share and be concerned about.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The modern institution of formal education is meant to perform the dual function of teaching people the essential knowledge and skills necessary for the (re)production of the material conditions of social life, and at the same time orienting them towards acceptance of the norms and conventions of the existing social order. In a liberal democracy, the goal of socializing students is often balanced by other considerations, such as the principle of free choice. In a socialist country, where collective well-being takes precedence over individual rights, the education authorities are given a more prominent role and have a greater power to indoctrinate students.

At different points of time in the history of China, the pendulum of education policies swings between two extremes. During the Cultural Revolution teachers and academics were defiled as “intellectuals” and education was denigrated. In the modern era, the People’s Republic of China(PCR) acknowledges the importance of education for a child’s personal growth and for the development of the society. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution the PCR has made great strides in the field of education and the literacy rate of its people has risen considerably. For Tibetans, a minority in their own land, Chinese education policies have marginalized Tibetan’s unique and ancient religious and cultural heritage such as Tibetan language, history and their customs are superimposed by those of the majority Chinese.

Education must not only be available to Tibetan children, it must also meet the right to receive instruction in Tibetan related subjects and in the Tibetan language. The United Nation’s Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stresses the need to make the curricular messages compatible with the processes of education: consistency in the methods used in international education and its messages. The institutional environment of schools and the processes of teaching and learning should be consistent with the objectives of peace, co-operation, justice, human rights and ecological sustainability.

This report reviews China's education policy in today's Tibet, its policy on school curricula and the lack of the mother tongue in Tibetan schools. It studies Beijing's minority education policy and the implementation of those policies at the ground level. The report does not deal with conceptual theme of education but aims to provide a description of development of education in Tibet within the framework of China's education policy. The report also critically discusses the shortcomings of the education system in Tibet from a human rights perspective.

- The general education policies of China, especially of its so-called “minority nationalities,” have sought mainly to secure territorial integrity, attain unity of the motherland, ideological education, cultural assimilation and advance the economic and strategic interests of China.
- China's bid to improve education in Tibet has produced some good results, however, research also reveals that many of the impoverished region's children are still without basic schooling.
- The change and emphasis in the medium of instruction from native Tibetan language to Chinese has resulted in Tibetans not speaking or writing in their own language anymore.
- Education in Tibet suffer from under-funding, enrollment, widening urban-rural disparity in enrolment, poor infrastructure, low access to education, discrimination against Tibetans in terms of fees structure, and repression of Tibetan culture history and religious expression.
- China's law does not yet conform to the international legal framework defining the right to education. Although provisions regarding parental freedom to choose education for their children form part of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), this is not recognized in Chinese law.
- China is different from most countries in the world that it has chosen not to specify in the law the percentage of Chinese Gross National Product (GNP) that should be spent on education.¹
- The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Ms. Katarina Tomasevski issued a scathing report on education in China after her visit in December 2003. The report makes specific

Introduction

reference to “minority education”, saying it violated their religious and linguistic rights. The government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) denounced the report.

- Similarly the Executive Director of UNICEF, Ms. Carol Bellamy has criticized the level of access Tibetan children have to the primary education in “TAR”. According to the press statement on 30 August 2004, she stated, “only 31% of children in Tibet have access to the compulsory nine years of education”, adding that “although conditions in Western China and in Tibet have dramatically improved in recent years, growth has occurred at a significantly slower pace than in the East, creating fears of a widening poverty gap.”
- The UN Development Program (UNDP) released Human Development Report of China in 2002 and it has listed literacy in Tibet as the lowest in all of China against China’s other 31 provinces.
- The Education system in Tibet indicate that Tibetans in Tibet are being educated through a system that seeks to sever the new generation and even posterity from their past. Complete sinicization of educational system and by teaching distorted history attempting gradual assimilation of Tibetans, eradicates nationalist sentiment of Tibetan is finally leading to a gradual de-generation of the Tibetan tradition, culture and language.
- Today, schools in Tibet follow a curriculum that does not benefit the Tibetan children. The curriculum is designed in a manner that Tibetan children do not have a choice but to learn Chinese. The Tibetan medium of instruction is taught only at the elementary school level. Though the separate schools for Tibetan children use the Tibetan language as the medium of instruction, the secondary and higher studies are in the Chinese language.
- These are some fundamental reasons why many Tibetans risk their lives and jobs in Tibet to send their children all the way to India to enroll in educational facilities run by the exile Tibetan government based in India.

Chapter 2

INTERNATIONAL LAWS RELATED TO EDUCATION

The Right to Education in International Law

At the international level, the right to education has been recognised by several universal and regional instruments. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)² provides the foundation for the right to education. Article 26 of the UDHR states:

- 1. Everyone has the right to education. Education should be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be equally available and higher education shall be accessible to all on the basis of merit.*
- 2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*
- 3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children*

The right to education is also mentioned in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)³ and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)⁴.

Article 18(4) of the ICCPR and article 13(3) of the ICESCR recognise the fundamental role of parents in directing their children's education. States Parties undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and legal guardians "to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions".

Article 13 of the ICESCR recognises the right of everyone to education, which “*shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.*” Education “*shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.*” The full realisation of this right includes access to primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education.

Article 2(1) of the ICESCR creates obligations for States Parties to fulfil their duty by means of positive action: each party undertakes to take steps “*to the maximum of its available resources, with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of the rights recognized in the present Covenant.*”

Similarly, the UN Human Rights Committee, the body of experts that supervise implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which China has signed but yet to ratify, has commented that article 27 of the ICCPR confers upon individuals belonging to minority groups a right distinct from - and in addition - rights specified in common for all persons elsewhere in the treaty.⁵

The U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

On November 20, 1989, the international community adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). This Convention was the first international legal instrument to lay down guarantees for the human rights of the child and it is today’s primary source on the human rights of the child.

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) signed the CRC on August 29, 1990. On December 29, 1991, the PRC ratified the CRC, which formally took effect in China on April 1, 1992.⁶ In 1994, in the initial report of the PRC on the CRC, the PRC described itself as “a consistent respecter and defender of children’s rights”.⁷

The CRC makes State Parties accountable for their actions towards children and calls on states to create the conditions in which children may take an active and creative part in the social and political life of

their countries. The CRC explicitly codifies the child's right to education in articles 28 and 29.

“States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and ... shall...make primary education compulsory and available free to all;...make[secondary education] available and accessible to every child...; make higher education accessible to all...; make educational and vocational information and guidance available and accessible to all children...; take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates...States Parties agree that ...the education of the child shall be directed to... the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own⁸.

Other provisions of the CRC which must be considered in the context of education are the freedom of thought and religion (article 14(1)), the freedom of expression (article 13 (1)), the principle of non-discrimination (article 2 (1)) and the protection of minority rights (article 30).

The United Nation's Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stresses the need to make the curricular messages compatible with the process of education: consistency in the methods used in international education and its messages. The institutional environment of schools and the processes of teaching and learning to be consistent with the objectives of peace, co-operation, justice, human rights and ecological sustainability.

Chapter 3

THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN TIBET: A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Pre-Chinese Invasion - 1949

The formal system of religious education began to be developed around the reign of 33rd Tibetan King, Songtsen Gampo, in the seventh century. At the same time there existed a private system with individual religious teachers giving instruction to small groups of disciples. An institutionalized form of religious education was introduced for the first time when the first monasteries were established around 860 CE⁹.

The general literacy in Tibet before its invasion by the Communist China began to be developed primarily on a formal system of religious education given in major monasteries, others from family members or by attending a home school led by government officials in small towns. There were over fifty small, privately run schools for boys and girls in Lhasa. The curriculum in these schools included elementary mathematics, history, and poetry.¹⁰ It was also reported that 67 percent of the males and 21 percent of the females in the Tibetan refugee community knew how to read and write Tibetan language before they came into exile in India¹¹.

The only two schools outside the monasteries ran by the Tibetan government were in Lhasa. These government schools trained monks and lay students to assume roles in the government. One was the *Tse Laptra* (school) that trained Buddhist monk officials of the government who were to become ecclesiastical officials in the government. Apart from the two government schools, secular education was based on a private tutorial system established by the traditional elite for the education of their children. Wealthy landowners or traders would make arrangements with religious or lay scholars to educate their children in basic literacy and arithmetic.

The graduates of *Tse* school went to the *Yigtsang* School, under the supervision of the monk council. The other was a school run by the *Tsikhang* (the finance office). The lay officials were trained in *Tsikhang* School, and they could be graduates from any private or home school or even from other government institutions. The curriculum mainly emphasized the three 'R' s-reading, writing and arithmetic. There were two medical colleges: Chagpori and Mentsikhang. Chagpori trained Buddhist monk students, while Mentsikhang trained laymen and women in traditional Tibetan medicine. Besides, there were schools for training artisans all over Tibet¹².

The teachers usually did not receive a fixed salary but the parents would offer gifts in kind according to their means and the students in turn would perform domestic services in return for the tuition¹³. Some wealthy and aristocrat Tibetan families invited tutors from neighboring countries to educate their children and others sent their children to British public schools established by the Raj at the hill stations of Darjeeling and Kalimpong in North east India¹⁴.

The 13th Dalai Lama, Thupten Gyatso, in the early 20th century made numerous attempts to develop a modern secular education system in Tibet. In 1913, the Dalai Lama sent four boys to be educated at Rugby School in England (1913-1917) to acquire knowledge from the outside world. On their return to Tibet, they were able to make considerable contributions to the modernization of Tibet in the areas of electricity and telegraphic networks. They also acted as interpreters for the Dalai Lama in his dealings with the outside neighboring countries.¹⁵ Such gamble did not prove successful and no more Tibetan students went to Britain for schooling simply because of the fact that many parents were disinclined to part with children and send them to distant place for long time.¹⁶

In 1923, the Tibetan government invited a British educationalist, Frank Ladlow to establish a school in Gyantse, based on the English Public School system. The Dalai Lama initiated many new reforms in Tibet and believed that an English based education would help his people. However, the school faced closure in 1929 due to pressure from the monasteries. From the outset, foreign secular establishments faced extensive opposition from the traditional conservative groups

The Education System in Tibet: A Brief Historical Background

among the clergy, aristocrats and monasteries. The representatives of the three monasteries then (Sera, Drepung and Gaden) maintained that the school would be used as a vehicle for introducing Western ideas into Tibet and argued that an English type of education would harm and undermine Tibet's cultural religious traditions. A similar government school project, set up by Mr. Parker in Shigatse suffered the same fate of closure surviving only for five months for the same reasons¹⁷.

Chapter 4

FOCUS ON TIBET: HISTORY OF CHINESE EDUCATION POLICIES AND LAWS

China has signed and ratified some of the important international instruments under the auspicious of the United Nations namely: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), the Convention against Discrimination in Education and the Convention on the Rights of the Child(CRC). China has signed but not ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). These covenants and treaties have important bearings on the right to education and on the rights of the child. Ratification of a convention requires the incorporation of the conventions provisions into domestic law. However, the CRC provisions are not reflected in China's domestic law.

In 1949, the Communist China invaded Tibet. From the outset, China made many ambiguous promises about educational development in Tibet and set different priorities for the education of Han Chinese and for the minority nationalities. On 23 May 1951, representatives of the Tibetan Government headed by Ngapo Ngawang Jigme signed the Seventeen-point Agreement with the Chinese leaders in Beijing. The agreement stated that: “*spoken and written language and the school education of the Tibetan nationality shall be developed step by step in accordance with the actual condition in Tibet.*”¹⁸

Since China's invasion of Tibet in 1949 and its occupation thereafter, China destroyed almost all centuries-old Tibetan learning hubs. The learned scholars and intellectuals, the repositories of Tibet's rich religious, philosophical intellectuals and literary heritage were

prosecuted and purged. Most of them were executed or done to death under various forms of persecution. Education gradually began to be used as a tool to systematically discriminate against Tibetans. It was used to inculcate loyalty to the Chinese Communist Government in Beijing rather than to cultivate the human and social development of the Tibetan children. Such an exercise of power is a blatant violation of international law.

In September 1951, three months after signing the 17-point Agreements with China, the first National Conference on Minority Education took place in Beijing. Education Minister Ma Xulun outlined education priorities for the “minorities” in China, where he pronounced the need for political education, preserving minority cultures and enhancing patriotism and support for the government. He stressed the need for indigenous languages to be used in primary and secondary school and their modification in the curriculum to meet the local conditions and also need for training of minority teachers was also discussed. Initially the Chinese allowed the monasteries to retain the privilege of being the key educational institutions.

In order to win the trust of the Tibetan people, 600 children from selected wealthy families were sent to China’s Central Institute of Nationalities in Beijing in 1951 to be educated as cadres and teachers. During the 1950s, the Chinese authorities made changes in the Tibetan curriculum by introducing various subjects to promote communist, propagandist education. Even institutional examples used by teachers in the classroom contained propaganda and represented the Communist ideology. According to Prof. Dawa Norbu, mathematics teachers would give such examples as “ I have five eggs. I offer three to the People’s Liberation Army. How many have I left?”¹⁹

Gradually in 1952, the Chinese Government schools replaced the traditional Tibetan schools and set up its first state primary school in Lhasa, *Lhasa Primary School*. The curriculum was taught entirely in Tibetan which included subjects such as party policy, science, Tibetan literature, mathematics, general knowledge, music, arts, physical education, history and geography. Initially, the curriculum included religious instruction, but this was discontinued by 1956. The first

secondary school established by the Chinese government in Tibet was the *Lhasa Secondary School* founded in 1956, offering three years of the standard six-year secondary course²⁰.

Tibetan youths handpicked by the communist government for further studies in Beijing on their return were to train and indoctrinate their fellow countrymen with Chinese communist ideologies. They even acted as interpreters for the Chinese cadres to spread the idea of communism among Tibetans.

General Policies

Throughout communist Chinese history, the general education policy has oscillated between two broad philosophies namely: “quality” and “quantity” theories. The quantity theory emphasizes mass ideological indoctrination. Mao and other hard-line communist cadres promoted this philosophy in an effort to mould China’s youth into a strong and model socialist society. The quality theory, on the contrary push for directing resources toward the academic and technological training of a selected educational elites, in an effort to accelerate China’s economic development²¹. The latter theory predominate the educational policy in the early period of founding of PRC and reemerged during the liberal era under Deng Xiaoping leadership.

At different points of time in the past decades under various communist regimes, the goal of education development has shifted between emphasizing and imparting basic socialist ideology education for all citizens, and focusing on the training of skilled technicians and experts. Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping, played a significant role in influencing education policy from the mid 1950s to the early 1960s. They propagated the importance of academic learning and the training of the best students in order to accelerate economic development.

Mao Zedong believed in promoting mass education and the moulding of China’s young cadres through ideological education to create the ‘socialist constructors’ forces of China. The idea was introduced at the time of the Great Leap Forward and reintroduced in a more systematic fashion during the Cultural Revolution decade 1966-1976.

During the Cultural Revolution under the leadership of Mao, all culturally specific education for its nationalities was abolished; the political nature of the education policy during those periods almost consisted of launching attacks on the traditional Tibetan culture and prime target was the Tibetan language. Distinctive education of the non-Han minorities with its unique traditional culture and mother-tongue instruction was also pronounced as elitist and abandoned. Class background of an individual rather than academic talent became the yardstick for educational advancement. Children from intellectual families were sent to work on the field as manual laborers, while the education of children from ‘workers, peasants, soldier’ families became the priority. Mass education at primary and secondary level became the main funding priority.

Deng Xiaoping as vice premier in charge of Education in 1977, reverted the education policy emphasizing importance of education for economic development. Technical and higher education for rapid economic development became the priorities. This resulted in the reduction of ideological and political doses in the curriculum and its classes hold less importance. However, the Tiananmen square student pro-democracy movement of 1989 in Beijing, brought the hard-line conservatives or leftists to power in Beijing and education development was once again laced with strong political ideology in the curriculum.

However, the political unrest and protest that erupted in Lhasa in 1987, caused China’s hard-liners to reintroduce the quantity theory in Tibet and to advocate a reversion to mass political indoctrination as a tool of social control²². This political indoctrination with ideological education persists even today in school and monasteries around Tibet. The sole objective behind the content of education in Tibetan schools reveals the state’s underlying goal of fostering political loyalty and implanting the principles of the “unity of the motherland,” the “Defense of the fraternity of Nationalities” and “Opposition to Splittism” among Tibetan children and to ensure their ideological and social conformity.

Education development in the “TAR” has been greatly affected by changes of political climate in China over the past decades. In the

80s when more moderate leaderships took the echelon of power, education strategies returned to focus on enabling China to compete internationally in economic and technological fronts. Promoting higher education and education in urban areas became the main funding priority. But there has been no provision for the promotion and development of basic education in the poorer countryside regions such as Tibetan Autonomous Region “TAR”.

In 1990s, after the initiation of the open door policy by Chinese authorities, the importance of developing education alongside the economy was approved at the highest levels of government. The education development in Tibet fluctuate with the change in political climate at Beijing with “patriotic education” and politicization of Tibetan language taking roost. In other words, education policy in Tibet remained a function of political meddling in Beijing.

In comparison, the development and achievement of modern education in China as a whole over the past five decades has been faster and broader than in the “TAR”. The illiteracy rate among the Tibetan still remains one of the highest in whole of China. The gap between urban and rural enrolment ratio is widening, further handicapped by linguistic barriers and native Tibetan students suffer various forms of discrimination in education.

Language Education

The first Constitution of the People’s Republic of China since 1949 ‘Common Programme’ guarantees China’s nationalities, in principle, the right to use their own languages in administration and in education. It states: “All minorities have the freedom to develop their languages and writing scripts and to maintain or modify their customs and religious beliefs.”²³ During the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, Tibetan language suffered a brunt of the society and in education. In the post temporary period of liberalization in the 1980s, attempts were made to reinstate Tibetan language as the official language of the “TAR”. The use of the language was deemed to be important not just for the preservation of Tibetan culture but for economic development and for the dissemination of government policy and information.

In the early 1980's, the Chinese Government attempted to reinstate the Tibetan language as an official language of the "TAR" as the majority of the native Tibetan population in the "TAR" do not speak Chinese. The use of Tibetan language was deemed to be important not just for the preservation of Tibetan culture but for economic development and for dissemination of the Chinese government policies among the general Tibetan populace. The implementation policies did not succeed despite various guidelines and laws issued by the government.

Resurgence of Ideological Education

After the 1987 uprising in "TAR", a campaign spearheaded by monks of different monasteries, sprang a new perceived threat to the authorities that sparked off a new period of increased political control. Towards the end of 1980s, liberal party heads were replaced by more conservative leaders in order to control the resurgence of nationalist sentiments and political unrest. The education policy took a u-turn by promoting more ideological education than academic education.

To quell the nationalist sentiment among the Tibetan, the "TAR" Party Secretary, Chen Kuiyuan, at the Fifth "TAR" Conference on Education in 1994, announced that stability, allegiance to China and ideological education should take precedence over the academic goal of education. He told that:

*"The success of our education does not lie in the number of diplomas issued to graduates from universities, colleges, polytechnic schools, and secondary schools. It lies, in the final analysis, in whether our graduating students are opposed to or turn their hearts to the Dalai clique and in whether they are loyal to or do not care about our great motherland and the great socialist cause. This is the most salient and the most important criterion for assessing right and wrong, and the contributions and mistakes of our educational work in Tibet. To successfully solve the problem, we must improve political and ideological work in schools."*²⁴

Tibetan Language

Former Prime Minister, Li Peng's speech on 20th anniversary of the founding of the "TAR" on 31 August 1985 stated "*given that the majority of Tibetans do not speak Chinese, neither socialist modernization nor the economic development of the "TAR" could take place without the use of Tibetan.*"

The 1987 Regulation-Provisions on the Use of Tibetan- required that proficiency in Tibetan language was a qualification for recruitment and promotion in government jobs. The 1987 regulation also promised to set up Tibetan-medium junior secondary schools in the 'TAR' by 1993, and that by 1997 most subjects in senior middle schools and secondary schools would be in Tibetan and to have 'most' university courses available in Tibetan shortly after the year 2000²⁵. However, in reality higher education in Tibet is entirely conducted in Chinese language.

In 1995, the alternative has been placed in the Education law for non-Han Chinese nationalities to provide teaching in their own languages. Article 12 of the law states that "[s]chools and other educational institutions primarily for 'minority' nationalities may use the spoken or written language in common use among the ethnic group or in the locality as the language of instruction."²⁶

Beside these guarantees, as a matter of fact, many Tibetans simply do not speak Chinese. Chinese authorities recognize the connection between the Tibetan language and the Tibetan people's consciousness of a distinct national identity. Tibetan language which theoretically remains the official language of Tibetan Autonomous Region, is marginalized. Although the Law of the PRC on Regional Autonomy of Nationalities guarantees the freedom to use and develop their own written and spoken languages and ...to preserve [their] own culture²⁷, yet Chinese is the prevailing medium of instruction in Tibet's primary schools.

Primary Education

In the modern era it is commonly recognised in international conventions and national constitutions, that free primary education enriches to all members of the society. Every member of the society should at least be able to read, to write and to calculate and should

have the same chance to take a responsible part in his or her society. Article 28(1) of the CRC states:

States Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

a) make primary education compulsory and available free to all;

This principle of free primary education applies particularly to countries like China with a wide range of income. Primary education should be available to all, regardless of their personal economic situation, and China itself acknowledges in national legislation that compulsory education (in which the State includes education at the primary and the junior middle school level) shall be free of tuition fees.²⁸

Free education, for Tibetans, has even greater significance as they tend to be economically marginalised in their country. Due to lower average income of Tibetans in Tibet in comparison to the Chinese settlers, the imposition of school fees in Tibet has a far greater negative impact on Tibetans.

In 1994, China adopted a compulsory education policy for Tibet. Despite this policy, Tibetans did not benefit as the government did not change post-1984 economic policy devolving the education funding and made rural dwellers to fund their own primary education, with only minimal assistance from county-level government for capital construction and teachers' salaries. These economic policies disadvantaged Tibetans from reaping the benefit of the compulsory education policy as majority of the population dwell in the rural regions.

Article 12 of the PRC's Education Law stipulates that: "*schools and other educational institutions primarily for minority nationalities may use the spoken or written language in common use among the ethnic group or in the locality as language of instruction.*"²⁹

In 1987, a major policy document on the use of the Tibetan language in the “TAR” was drawn up by the “TAR” People’s Congress at the instigation of the Xth Panchen Lama and Ngapo Ngawang Jigme, a senior Tibetan official in Chinese People’s Political Consultative Congress’ Standing Committee. The provisions on the study, use and development of Spoken and Written Tibetan (for trial implementation)’ (‘Provisions on the Use of Tibetan’) was a detailed document that set out procedures for implementing Tibetan language policy in education and public life³⁰.

In 1989 four experimental Tibetan-medium classes in secondary schools were established at the initiative of the Xth Panchen Lama. The “TAR” Education Committee in 1995 acknowledged the success of these experimental classes and gradual expansion of Tibetan medium education to cover rural secondary schools. However, the Chinese authorities abandoned the project in 1996 as it was seen to breed Tibetan nationalist sentiment³¹.

But these noble plans were never put into practice and to make the matter worse, in April 1997 an official announcement was made to reverse the 1987 policy on Tibetan language. The regulations allowed the use of both Tibetan and Chinese, but Tibetan was to be the first language³². It also outlined a strategy for extending Tibetan medium instruction into secondary education. This coupled with distinct promotion of standard Chinese itself, especially with regard to the “Law on Common National Language” passed in October 2000 which stated that “Local governments and other relevant organs at all levels must adopt measures to popularize Putonghua[Mandarin] and to promote standard Han characters,” Tibetan language was cornered and marginalized, from the policy standpoint itself.³³

The Chinese government’s Education Law stipulates “*every citizen shall enjoy equal educational opportunities regardless of race, nationality, sex, occupation, financial status and religion.*”³⁴

China’s 1995 Education Law provided for teaching nationalities in their own languages. Article 12 of the Education Law states that,

*“Schools and other educational institutions primarily for ‘minority’ nationalities may use the spoken or written language in common use among the ethnic group or in the locality as the language of instruction.”*³⁵

In October 1995 Communist Party leaders in the ‘TAR’ reportedly circulated a document arguing that separatism was partly caused by schools teaching too much religion and using the Tibetan language³⁶.

Most recently, in May 2002 the ‘TAR’ People’s Congress enacted regulations encouraging use of the Tibetan language. But instead of encouraging the development and expansion of Tibetan language, the regulation placed more emphasis on assigning equal status of Chinese language with Tibetan. These rules do not so much protect local language. Despite the existence of a committee whose goal was to implement the 1987 policy, it was never actually carried out, instead withdrawn in 1997.³⁷

In the Article 6 of the New Regulation of the Education Law in 2002 redefine the language protections of the constitution: “During compulsory education, Tibetan and the national language [Chinese] will be the basic educational languages.” In which both Tibetan and Chinese will be used as the basic educational languages was mentioned even though there has been some alteration in the wording but in fact the law does not guarantee the protection of the local language instead employ Chinese as a standard language for Tibet in economic and educational fronts. This represents a distinct shift in focus from the sole promotion of Tibetan, at least in some stages of the education system such as primary grade levels, to a focus on both Tibetan and Chinese simultaneously and throughout the education system. The law clearly saw the promotion of standard Chinese, especially with regard to the “Law on Common National Language” passed in October 2000 that states that “local governments and other relevant organs at all levels must adopt measures to popularise Putonghua[Mandarin] and to promote standard Han characters,”

The Tibetan language policy in the ‘TAR’ was not implemented successfully despite the various guarantees in the constitution and law. There has been gap between the apparent statistical success of the policy and the ability of schools to implement it. This is due to lack of financial and human resources such as additional cost of providing Tibetan language training for teachers and lack of qualified teachers. In the early period of communist rule in 1950s, Han Chinese officials were given Tibetan language training before joining the offices

in “TAR”. However, this no longer remain prerequisite for Han Chinese officials in the beginning of 1980 as they were encouraged to learn Tibetan once they arrived in the “TAR”.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), makes a number of provisions for participating states, including the agreement that:

*...the education of the child shall be directed to...the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living , the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.*³⁸

Article 46 of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) provides for the right to education by stipulating that, “*Citizens of the People’s Republic of China have the duty as well as the right to receive education. The State promotes the all-round moral, intellectual and physical development of children and young people.*” The PRC law of Compulsory Education (1986) has guaranteed to make education accessible to every child over the age of six. However, this law has been thwarted in its implementation for Tibetan children due to reasons cited of practical difficulties arising from the remoteness of some parts of Tibet.

Children in Tibet, however, are far away from realizing a reasonable and sound education system. China despite being a signatory to several important international conventions, the gap between the promises and practical implementation remains wide. China has failed miserably in adhering to the rights guaranteed in them.

Chapter 5

ETHNIC MINORITIES EDUCATION IN CHINA

There are 56 officially recognized ethnic groups in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Han majority has 1,186 million people, while the remaining 55 ethnic minority groups have nearly 109 million (census 2000) who are officially defined as non-Han nationalities as *Shaosbu Minzu* 'Minorities nationalities'.

In total, the 'minority nationalities' of China form about 109 million people, or 8.41 percent of the whole population.³⁹ Tibetans, Mongolians, Uigurs, Koreans are some of the larger minority nationalities in China with Han dominating the total population. The education of the minority nationalities holds great significance because of both economic and political reasons. The vast territory of the PRC is inhabited by these minorities, which share very sensitive border region with other neighboring countries and are gifted with rich minerals and huge water resources, forest and grasslands.

Chinese authorities deem it vitally important for other minority nationalities to identify themselves with China for its future stability and prosperity. This has been one of the main political reasons for promoting minority education which differed from the education policy for the majority Han Chinese. One of the principal goals of the education for minorities was to guarantee the unity and territorial integrity of the nation and to encourage political allegiance of the minorities towards China. And the education curriculum for minorities were meant to achieve those objectives.

The education's purpose should not be confined only to teach a child skill in reading, writing, calculation and some abstract academic knowledge. It should also empower and enable the child to understand his or her cultural heritage so that the child can grow up to be a responsible member of his or her cultural group. The survival of the unique Tibetan culture is under threat due to China's policy of massive

population transfer into Tibet, with the result that Tibetans have become a minority people in their own land. Chinese today outnumber Tibetans in many urban areas of Tibet. Tibetan children growing up in a Chinese dominated environment may gradually be devoid of their rich cultural identity, language and traditional values.

The CRC acknowledges that development of cultural identity, language and values should be incorporated into a child's education:

Art. 29(1): State Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

c) the development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilisations different from his or her own.

It was found that Tibetan children attending Chinese schools received almost no education about their cultural heritage.

Minority groups, by their nature, are more susceptible to human rights abuses. As they are frequently under-represented or unrepresented in the larger community, therefore, lack input into national decision-making and are at risk of being assimilated into the more powerful majority group. Children of a minority represent an even more vulnerable group and are thus in particular need of protection, as recognised in the CRC:

Article 30: *“In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.”*

Minorities Education

Ethnic minorities enjoy enhanced educational rights under international law and also under Chinese constitution⁴⁰. This is significant for Tibetan children as China classifies Tibetan as one of its 55 ethnic “minorities nationalities”. China is obligated to ensure that Tibetans enjoy the enhanced protections that ‘ethnic, religious

or linguistic minorities' received under certain international treaties; the CRC establishes the rights of each minority child *'to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or to use his or her language'*.⁴¹

In China it has been found that the general education policies of China especially of its so-called "minority nationalities" have been mainly to secure territorial integrity, unity of motherland- leading ideology in education, cultural assimilation and broaden economic and strategic interest of China.

The National Conference on Education for 'Minority' Nationalities which took place in Beijing in 1981 adopted various measures including the establishment of Department of Minority Education under the State Ministry of Education with corresponding departments or appointments at provincial, prefectural and county level, the use of special funds for minority education and encouragement of 'minority' nationality languages, culture and traditions.

On 4 December 1982, the Fifth National People's Congress adopted the Fifth Constitution of the People's Republic of China. The language rights of all the Chinese nationalities have been enshrined in Chinese law since China's first constitution. There were certain guarantees given under the constitution for the education of non-Han Chinese nationalities:

Article 119 stated that autonomous regions should have autonomy in the administration of education and should protect their cultural heritage in order to 'vigorously to develop their cultures'.

Article 121 allowed 'minority' nationalities to employ written and spoken language in common use.

Article 122 guaranteed that the state would provide financial, material and technical assistance to the 'minority' nationalities in order to accelerate economic and cultural development.⁴²

The Law of the PRC on Regional Autonomy, 1984, also included the right of 'minority' nationalities to conduct their affairs in their

own languages, and to ‘independently develop education for nationalities...in order to train specialized personnel of ‘minority nationalities.’⁴³ But this is not the case while putting into real practice, dominant Han Chinese have occupied majority of the high offices, business and even schools where medium remain the Chinese and importance of native language have taken a backseat.

Funding

Since the communist government came into power in China in 1949, the direction and contents of education and priority in education funding have dramatically altered with the changes of power and political swings that have rattled the country in the early period of rule. Till the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, the poor funding of education was partly due to policies that ignore the importance of education in the economic development. Mao Zedong believed in the social reconstruction (the objective of the new communist government’s plan to boost the Chinese economy, which has been dragged down by years of conflict and war) of China through construction of heavy industry and agriculture through commune system. Indeed until the implementation of the 1995 Education Law, the costs of education were included as a part of the figure for cultural expenditure in government budget at every level, with no separate figure being given for education. (The 1995 Education Law stipulated that every province should list education expenditure as independent unit in their fiscal budget)

However, after the enactment of educational reform after the Cultural Revolution 1976, the financial responsibility for subsidizing education from central government was shifted to local governments, which in turn has resulted in a situation where education investment was directly dependent on the local economy. Therefore, the poorest areas of China including Tibet, became the regions with the least funds at their disposal because of insufficient community taxation. The poorest regions of Tibet are unable to provide even the elementary education.

The issue of education funding has remained ambiguous even though NPC promulgated the Chinese Education Law in 1995, yet the suggestion that it should be ‘gradually’ increased and determined by the State council ‘Program for China’s Educational Reform and

Development’, and ‘Education Law’,⁴⁴ hasn’t given clear direction on the responsibility of Education funding.

Pre-1985, all revenues from regional and provincial government were presented to the central government which would then allocate them wherever necessary. However, this system changed with the CCP’s ‘Decision on Education’ made in 1985, which shifted the responsibility for expenditure to local governments, who were allowed to keep the majority of their revenue for allocation. As a result of this dramatic change, funding for education became completely dependent on the local economies. In the “TAR” the majority of the government investment was directed to urban areas of the “TAR” dominated by a large influx of Chinese immigrants, whereas the impoverished rural areas, home to more than 80% of the Tibetan population were neglected and deprived of educational funding. This had spillover effects on the accelerating disparities between the urban-rural and the Tibetan-Chinese populations.

Chapter 6

EDUCATIONAL FUNDING AND THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE

For any nation to develop and prosper, investment in the human resources development is one of the primary fronts that includes government and private investment in the provision of education facilities for its citizens.

China is different from most countries in the world in that it has chosen not to specify in law the percentage of Chinese Gross National Product (GNP) that should be spent on education. In the recent years, the Chinese government has been steadily increasing its financial assistance for education⁴⁵. In 1992, China came 145th of 153 countries tabulated by UNESCO, allocating only 2% of its GNP to education⁴⁶.

The Chinese authorities have not provided any extra funding towards the investment on education in the poorer rural areas instead it introduced what it calls the “Hope Project”- a system of funding which depends on voluntary labour and the donations of local people to build ‘Community’ schools or ‘*Mangtsuk lobchung*’ in Tibetan. As former Chairman of the “TAR” People’s government, Gyaltzen Norbu, stated at the Fifth “TAR” Conference on Education,

“Wherever possible, local governments should mobilise and organise peasants and herdsmen to reconstruct unsafe village schools, build new schools, and improve teaching conditions by contributing their labour service or construction materials on a voluntary basis.”⁴⁸

Rural inhabitants in the “TAR” were forced to finance and construct educational institutions on their own. The majority of the population in Tibet is living below the poverty line, this system of financing and constructing schools by their own put immense strains on an already impoverished people and their personal resources. The

final outcome of such a discriminatory policy has denied education for those children whose parents could not meet the needs of the authorities while others find themselves paying for a service that should be free by the constitutional right of the country.

According to the report issued by U.N. Special Rapporteur on the right to education on the People's Republic of China, the ratio of education expenditure to GDP has been increased for years in a row, from 1997 to 2002 it was respectively 2.5%, 2.59%, 2.87%, 3.19% and 3.41%. However, given the level of economy the percentage allocated for educational development is not sufficient.

Although the Chinese government deemed it important to achieve the goal of nine-year universal compulsory education in its ninth "Five-Year Plan" which include eliminating illiteracy, namely nine-year compulsory education should cover 85% of the population, the gross school enrollment rate of junior high school should reach 85% and the illiteracy rate among young people should decrease below 5%.⁴⁹ Though it pronounced to have achieved elimination of illiteracy and great improvement in education in Tibet through the building of schools. But most of these are confined mainly in urban districts built to meet the education needs of Chinese children and those of Tibetan government officials, In Karze Prefecture, *"the educational investment from various government from 1996 to 2000 was 55 million and 640 thousand yuan and the national fund for compulsory education program in poor areas was 3 million and 37.62 million."*⁵⁰ Though there has been increase in investment in the education yet it couldn't achieve the end objective of providing nine-year compulsory education and qualified teachers in the rural areas.

For the majority of the Tibetan children, lack of access to schools can be accrued to distance of school from the village, discrimination, and highly biased educational fees are some major reasons why many Tibetan children are still illiterate in the rural Tibet. Another major prejudice in the education is use of Chinese language as the medium of instruction in schools. All higher levels of education and most employment, rely upon fluency and proficiency in Chinese language. As a result Tibetans are inherently at a disadvantage to native Chinese

language speakers, mostly Han Chinese immigrants. Beside this, schools follow the Chinese language medium and culturally biased curriculum that not only deny education to many Tibetans but also Tibetan culture related education to Tibetan students.

China adopted a compulsory education policy for Tibet in 1994. Despite this policy, Tibetans did not benefit as the government did not change post-1984 economic policy devolving the education funding and made rural dwellers to fund their own primary education, with only minimal assistance from county-level government for capital construction and teachers' salaries thus shifted the burden to the impoverished local Tibetan residents. Apart from registration fees and supply costs, the families in rural areas must pay to supplement teacher salaries.

These economic policies disadvantaged Tibetans from reaping the benefit of the compulsory education policy as majority of the Tibetan population dwell in the rural regions. Moreover, Tibetan parents in the rural areas find themselves subject to pay various 'miscellaneous' fees to the school authorities in order to supplement teacher's low salaries and to cover the maintenance cost of the buildings, expenses which should be covered by the local government. Since the promulgation of Education Law in 1995, education funding was decentralized and responsibility shifted to the local government⁵¹.

A new guideline was drawn up which put a larger proportion of responsibility for education funding to the central government. (Directives included in the 1994 Fifth "TAR" Conference on Education specified that from 1995, operating expenses for education were to amount to 17% of the annual "TAR" government expenditure, with a targeted increase to 20% in 2000).

The Post 1984 economic policies have also resulted in an extreme urban-rural disparity in education as most state-run schools-which receive substantially greater government funding- are located in urban areas where the Chinese population predominates and rural areas inhabited by Tibetans were neglected in providing state assistance for education.

Urban-Rural Education

In the “TAR”, access to education for Tibetan children remains poor and in some cases absent. Access to schools in the remote regions of Tibet dominated by farmers and nomadic population is much poorer than in urban areas. The state funded primary schools are mostly located in urban regions. The lack of uniform and impartial education facilities were accrued to factors such as lack of political will, demographic factors, economic and others. Children raised in cities and other developed regions enjoy better access to generally higher quality-educational institutions. Survey showed that resident of Lhasa, the capital city of “TAR”, “spends as much as 20 percent of their incomes on education.”

Long Distances

Many of the rural and nomadic children do not have access to school and have to travel considerable distances to reach the nearest primary school. An eleven-year-old child from Kham revealed that neither he nor his four siblings attended primary school because the closest school took over an hour to reach by truck⁵². Other children managed to attend school for few years, but their families then needed them at home to tend herds, for milking or assist with farming. According to Chinese official news portal, “Illiteracy rate for the whole of “TAR” is 30%. But in Lhasa it is 10%”⁵³ Such disparities speak volumes on the educational level and access to them in the urban and rural regions of Tibet.

Low Population Density

In 1994, Lhasa Municipality had 538 primary schools compared with 44 in Ngari (which comprise of one quarter of the total areas of the “TAR”) Ngari has only one general secondary school and no vocational schools. In 1994, only 249 students graduated from primary school, 67 from junior secondary school and 20 from senior secondary school⁵⁴. The enrolment rates for the same regions in the early 1990s were roughly seventy percent and twenty percent respectively⁵⁵. In some way this disparity should be attributed to the lower population density in Ngari region and other rural regions of Tibet where majority, around 80 percent, dwells. The majority of Central government funding however, goes to support urban regions, which are increasingly predominated by Han Chinese settlers.

Many rural residents are forced to contribute construction materials and ‘voluntary’ labor to building schools.⁵⁶ The poorest Tibetan families thus often bear the greatest financial burden in providing their children with a basic primary school education, which was presumably free for children over the age of six as stated in the compulsory education law enacted by China.

In *China: National Development and Sub-national Finance*, the World Bank in 2002 found poor counties spend one quarter of all their funds on education but the poor state of financial condition can guarantee only the minimal. The final outcome is the worst state of affairs in schools. Classrooms without chairs or desks are common sight, some even lack to provide proper shelter for the students especially in the harsh Tibetan winter.

According to a recent TIN report, the “TAR” government has chosen to devolve the funding of education from central government to the local prefectural government and shifted the burden to the impoverished local Tibetan residents. Apart from registration fees and supply costs, the families in rural areas must pay to supplement teacher salaries.

Devolution of Funding Responsibilities

The burden of finance is passed on to schools and parents, who are expected to raise much of the finance needed to keep school running, even if the poor rural families are already barely surviving at subsistence levels. In some cases this result in the requirement of the children and parents to work as labourers rather than taking classes. In such a scenario children cannot pay much attention towards their education. Poor families pay six to eight percent of their cash income as school fees, World Bank states, “*Surveys have consistently found the high cost of schooling to be an important cause of drop outs and non-enrolments.*” Other causes are the poor quality of the education, under qualified teachers and the racist contempt of Chinese teachers and curriculum for Tibetan pupils and their culture. This remains the exact condition for schools for children of nomadic families which stand at the bottom of system of deprivation ladder. The few who continue their primary education in these impoverished schools almost never qualify for secondary schools because of language barriers and financial stress. Future doesn’t hold any prospects for these nomadic children with modern education and many are not ready to return to their traditional nomadic life and they remain the lost generation.

In the rural areas of Qinghai plateau, the local government estimates that currently only 20 percent of children attend school. The restriction on the number of places and the cost of school fees approximately USD 20 per year is unaffordable for most families.⁵⁷ The nomadic lifestyle of the majority of Qinghai Tibetans also means that the few government schools placed in townships are too remote for children to attend them.

At the fifth “TAR” Conference on Education in 1994, TAR government chairman, Gyaltzen Norbu acknowledged that the disparity in the provision of education between different areas to the level of commitment of local authorities of different prefectures. He said;

“We should also be aware that educational reform and development in our region are still not fully meeting the needs of the new situation and tasks. Localities differ in their understanding of the strategic importance of giving priority to expanding education. Each locality carries out its educational policy in its own way and some localities are far from achieving the expected goal.”⁵⁸

The persistent low level of commitment of the authorities is reflected in the disparities in the provision of education between different areas of Tibet.

The very low rural per capita income makes it even more difficult for many families to bear the children’s school fees. According to a website on the Kham Aid Project, a request has been placed for the funding donation.... it has given an average per capita income in Lithang county as 590 yuan (Less than USD 100) per year and with primary school tuition fee running at 600 yuan, it’s visibly impossible for many average families to afford an education for their children⁵⁹.

Numerous reports indicate the huge differences between the village school and urban school in terms of facilities, student composition, fee structure, attendance and standard of teachers. The schools in the cities have good educational facilities and better teachers both Chinese and Tibetan. It can also be noted that most of Chinese students live in the urban areas and majority of Tibetans in the rural areas of Tibet.

Chapter 7

ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has adopted a Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education which defines educational discrimination as: “any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference which being based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing equality of treatment in education and in particular:

1. Of depriving any person or group of persons of access to education of any type or at any level;
2. Of limiting any person or group of persons to education of an inferior standard;
3. Of inflicting on any person or group of persons conditions which are incompatible with the dignity of man.

Discrimination against Tibetan children in Tibet is made possible by the existence of two particular factors: that public education in Tibet is not organised by the Tibetans themselves and that Tibetans today are a minority in their own country.

Despite signing the UN Convention on the Rights of Child and stipulation in the Chinese government Education Law, ethnic discrimination is rampant in the Tibetan schools-in the admission process, in the fee structure, funding by the state, school facilities and school curriculum. In the “TAR” Chinese migrant children enjoy lower school fee, receive free food and supplies whereas Tibetan children have to purchase themselves and even at some mixed schools, Chinese students enjoys separate and better quality classrooms.

In some cases, there have been instances of Chinese teachers ignoring or encouraging the harassment of Tibetan children by Chinese

students. A child from Lhasa reported that the ‘Tibetan’ classroom would frequently flood from rain and a broken faucet, while the classroom for the Chinese was new, well situated and dry. Some Tibetan children reported of being forced to perform labor and other tasks such as, cleaning toilets, sweeping, cooking for the teacher or being sent on work errands’ while the Chinese peers were exempted from doing such ‘errands’⁶⁰.

The principle of non-discrimination forms the basis of many human rights principles, particularly with regard to economic, social and cultural rights. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognises the importance of this principle as does article 2(1) of the CRC, which states that:

States Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child’s or his or her parent’s or legal guardian’s race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

China’s White Paper on Minorities Policy of 1999 states that the education of China’s “minorities” to be “*of paramount importance to the improvement of the quality of the minority population and to the promotion of economic and cultural development in ethnic minority areas.*”⁶¹

Despite these guarantees, the gap between formal adherence to policies and actual practice is very wide. Independent studies and anecdotal evidence from all over Tibet show that there is minimal educational development in the “TAR” and in the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan and Yunnan which now incorporated most of the traditional eastern provinces of Kham and Amdo province. Discriminatory policies and practices in the field of education continue to marginalize Tibetan students, particularly in the rural areas with little or no Chinese populations and education standard remain very poor⁶².

The effectual fulfillment of the right to education requires non-discriminatory access to public education facilities. The importance of the principle of non-discrimination with regard to educational rights finds expression in article 28(1) of the CRC which places an obligation on States Parties to recognise the right of the child to education with a view to achieving the right progressively ‘on the basis of equal opportunity’. All other aspects of the child’s right to education laid down in article 28 (1) of the CRC thus follow on from this fundamental tenet.

Before 1950, general literacy in Tibet was primarily gained from family members or by attending a home school led by government officials⁶³ but it cannot be denied that literacy was largely confined to the elite classes, monasteries or those government officials of old Tibet. Although Chinese government ceaselessly mock and highlight the negligence of old Tibet in providing universal education, the system of Chinese education currently introduced in its place is equally condemnable and defective. From the evaluation of past education system, Tibetan have succeeded in developing a broad and democratic system of education that demands far greater admiration than the current Chinese education system and policies imposed on Tibet, which is not only discriminatory and distorted in nature, but also inadequate.

The Chinese Government pledged to ensure the realization of the human right to education for all its citizen at various international summits and conferences-Earth Summit in Rio De Janerio, the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, the International Women’s Conference, Beijing, the Habitat II conference in Istanbul. However, the discrimination in education of its minority population exist in different stages of education.

At the Beijing World Conference on Women, China initiated a Platform for Action which stated:

“ Education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development and peace... Actions to be taken... Advance the goal of equal access to education by taking measures to eliminate discrimination in education at all levels on the basis of gender, race, language, religion, national origin, age or disability,

or any other form of discrimination... By the year 2000, provide universal access to basic education and ensure completion of primary education by at least by 80 per cent of primary school-age children; close the gender gap in primary and secondary school education by the year 2015.... Reduce the female illiteracy rate to at least half its 1990 level.... [Ensure] that women have equal access to career development, training...Improve...quality of education and ...equal...access...to ensure that women of all ages can acquire the knowledge, capacities,...skills... needed to develop and to participate fully... in the process of ...development...’’⁶⁴

Education policy of minorities especially in the restive regions such as “TAR”, education has been merely used as a tool to control and inculcate the forced nationalism towards the ‘motherland’ and indoctrinate young novice and students with communist ideologies.

The students reported that they rarely received any lessons on Tibetan culture or history; that they were not allowed to honour any Tibetan holidays except for the Tibetan New year and were forced to celebrate Chinese holidays; that they were forbidden to wear Tibetan clothes to school. Tibetans students were often forced to renounce Tibetan history and the Dalai Lama and were told they were stupid, dirty or inferior human beings⁶⁵.

Entrance Exams as a “Chinese Gateway”

A widespread inequality regarding the right to education is the entrance examination, which is commonly held completely or mostly in the Chinese language. Even if a Tibetan student has a satisfactory command of the Chinese language and passes the exam, this does not mean that he or she will necessarily be accepted. Many students said that it was not academic ability that decided which Tibetans would attend school but rather the amount of bribes paid by the parents. A long-standing requirement that all students pass an entrance examination in Tibetan was reported to have been dropped in 1997 and all except one of the 17 university courses are now taught in Chinese, despite the fact that 80 percent of students and many of the teachers at Tibet University are Tibetans⁶⁶.

The quality theory apparently continues to exert some influence on education in Tibet. Secondary education and particularly higher

education (college or professional school) remains the exclusive privilege of an elite selected by entrance exams. These tests are administered mostly in Chinese language.⁶⁷

China as one of the permanent members of the United Nations is bound by article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) which states that everyone has a right to education. Clause of 2 of the same article states that, *“Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.”* It also guarantees that, *“Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.”* Articles 28 and 29 of the CRC, which China signed and ratified, also guarantees the child his or her right to an education.

For example, one boy from Lhasa said; *“For the first three grades, school staff placed him with other Tibetans in a separate Tibetan stream. His Chinese peers learned in Chinese from the beginning. After the third grade, the sections combined. Chinese became the medium of instruction for all classes except in the Tibetan language class.”*⁶⁸

As Beijing claims that in order to promote education in Tibet and as part of its preferential measures towards the local ethnic groups, a flexible method of enrolment is applied in all schools by minimizing the passing marks of local ethnic groups.⁶⁹

Although the grade requirement for student seeking admission in Tibet University in Lhasa is kept low to encourage Tibetan students-however, the most students fail to get through the compulsory entrance exam of the Chinese language. Chinese students from mainland China who do not make it in the their universities in mainland China due to the high standards come to Tibet and easily clear the entrance exams due to their command over mother tongue language.

The Chinese Government started separate primary schools for Tibetans and Chinese in 1984. Under it, Tibetan children go to a Tibetan primary school where the medium of instruction is Tibetan and Chinese children go to a Chinese medium primary school, the

Chinese language is taught for two years - grade three and four. At the end of primary school, both Tibetan and Chinese study different subjects in secondary school and because Chinese is the medium of instruction, Tibetan students tend to perform poorly. This abrupt change in the medium of instruction and introduction of new language posed enormous obstacles to the educational advancement of Tibetan students. Tibetan schoolchildren, who receive no Chinese language instruction until the fourth grade of primary school, not only have to study in an alien language but also have to compete with the Chinese peers using their mother tongue to get into the Chinese-language secondary school. Thus most Tibetan children cannot gain access to education beyond the primary level⁷⁰.

Education is one parameter of measuring a society's economic and social success. Conversely, as a society develops further and further, educational requirements similarly escalate. The article 28 (1) b. of CRC makes this link by allowing the development of secondary education to be progressively established. The CRC clearly stipulates that secondary education should be available to every child on the basis of equal opportunity.

Corruption

In "TAR" schools, even if a Tibetan student has a sufficient command of the Chinese language and passes the entrance examination, this does not mean that he or she will necessarily be accepted. Many students reported that it was not the academic capacity which decided whether he or she would attend a middle school but rather the amount of bribes the parents were willing and able to pay. In many cases it was not the brightest students who were admitted to the middle schools but those who paid the most money. This violates the right of admission on the basis of equal opportunity by discriminating mainly against the Tibetan children whose average family income is much lower than that of Chinese in Tibet. The use of *guanxi* (connections) to get children admitted in Tibetan schools means that many low-achieving students from China are able in this way to enrol, unofficially, in the final year of Tibetan secondary schools in order to pass the secondary school graduation examination which is much lower in Tibet than in China.

In addition, only those Tibetans born in the “TAR” are allowed to attend Tibet University, whereas, a Chinese student is eligible if they are either already settled in the “TAR” or if they quickly migrate there and get registered and change their residential status to reflect that they live in the “TAR”. Han Chinese students have often misused the preferential minority policies by re-classifying themselves as Tibetan or other minorities in order to take advantage of university programs.⁷¹

Manipulation of Exam Cutoff Scores

A Tibetan who escaped into exile recently gave a detailed account to TCHRD on how Tibetan students were denied higher university education and how Chinese students take over seats meant for Tibetan students.

In 2001 approximately 300 Tibetan students were denied their opportunity for higher education. These courses included specialised fields such as medicine, secretarial studies, banking, accountancy, police force etc. According to an exclusive bulletin on exam results published on 30 July 2001 by the “TAR” Department of Education, the cut off score was 225. Four days later, a revised higher score was announced on TV causing great distress to the students and their families who had already been celebrating their admittance into university. Approximately 300 Tibetans including parents and students gathered at the office of the Lhasa City Education Department to present their grievances. Receiving little response from heads of this department, they then proceeded to the “TAR” government office, and protested against the abrupt and unexplained change. With the evidence of the original published bulletin, they presented their case.

A junior officer of the department played down the whole episode as an unfortunate typist error. He then demanded to know who was heading the protest and stated it was “not healthy to do things like this.” This intimidated the angry and distressed parents, and the more assertive parents and students were even singled out for insinulative threats.

The protest and fears of escalation of unrest forced the government to attempt to rectify the situation. They offered the students the opportunity of remaining for an additional year in their current class

with an exemption of fees. In reality, this is in no manner an effective solution, as it is of no benefit for the students to repeat a year successfully completed, and they then face no guarantee of entrance into university the following year.

One of the students stated that, “*Chinese officials take bribes to recruit Chinese students in the reserved seats meant for the Tibetans in the category of ‘ethnic minority group.’*” In a nutshell, Chinese are snatching those opportunities meant for Tibetan students. This fact is supported by the fact that in 2001, of the 1019 students who qualified for these specifically allocated positions, only 405 were Tibetan and the remaining 515 were Chinese students.⁷²

These facts clearly reveal the reality of the state of education for Tibetan students in Tibet despite claims by Beijing that enormous investments are made into developing education within the “TAR” that do not benefit the Tibetans. These claims are contradicted by the fact that one third of all Tibetans fleeing Tibet each year are children seeking education in exile. In 2001 alone, 750 children below the age of 18 arrived in exile, mostly in search of educational opportunities.

Similarly, the introduction of a unified university examination and age restriction put non-Han nationalities, including Tibetans, at an immediate disadvantage in enrolment to higher education; Students from ‘minority’ regions were at a disadvantage since they are likely to start school later than in Central China (primary enrolment is delayed to the age of nine in some parts of the “TAR”).⁷³

Ideological Testing as a University Gateway

In March 2003, “TAR” Board of Education (TARBOE) issued a new directive to inhibit the educational advancement of Tibetan youth by instituting new testing procedures for government-funded college education. The TARBOE mandates that every student applying for standard government educational funding undergo ideological testing prior to the conventional written exam for admission to college or vocational training programs.

This political test comprises of four parts and it became the selection yardstick for candidates to get selected; the first part examine

the candidate's respect for the four principles of the Party and sought to ensure that he or she do not engage in cult or illegal worship. Examples of "illegal" worship are reverence for the Dalai Lama and the practice of the Falung Gong. The second test eliminated any candidates with a history of separatist activities. The third and fourth questions sought information regarding anti-social and criminal activity of the candidate, which would include a record of arrest for political speech. In order to prove the candidate innocent and clean, he or she had to procure a letter of recommendation from the local authorities.

Such preplanned stumbling blocks demonstrate that even affiliation with a political dissident may hinder an individual's eligibility for further studies, earning government scholarship for college education or for vocational training. No Tibetan has a future education, either in Tibet or at a university in mainland China, or in vocational training, unless they clear this examination, which depends upon the government's attitude towards Tibetans and perceived loyalty to the Party.

The existing Chinese education policy has become seriously damaging for the widespread promotion and development of Tibetan language in Tibet. China's superficial effort at the outset in the legal realm to secure Tibet's mother tongue language and promote Tibetan language as a valuable and widely used gradually diluted into a shallow attempt at appearance to make progress when the existing real situation clearly demonstrates otherwise. Tibetan language has been merely used to disseminate government policies and propaganda effectively⁷⁴.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has acknowledged the importance of higher education access for Tibetan children, recommending that the PRC "*ensure their [the Tibetan students] access to higher education on an equal footing.*"⁷⁵

Preferential Treatment

The visible gap existing between Chinese law and practice virtually put Tibetans at a disadvantage. Tibetan children are required to pay tuition fees to attend the primary school, although in theory, Chinese law forbids primary schools from charging tuition or school fees⁷⁶. These include charges for administration, registration, desks, chairs, books, uniforms, fines for alleged misbehavior and extra fees to

augment teachers' salaries. The remarkable high fee in view of the average per capita income in rural Tibet create a serious barrier to Tibetan children's access to education.

The provision of nine-year compulsory education was also a key goal of the 1986 Chinese Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China, Article 10 of which stated that "The State shall not charge tuition fees for students attending compulsory education." Due to the above mentioned reforms in education, the State was left with acute shortages of funding for education that resulted in increased schools' fees to cover the deficit in their budget. In order to manage the spiraling deficit schools were forced to charge exorbitant fees upon the school children of "TAR"- so much so that in 1993 approximately one third of school-age children in the "TAR" could not afford to go to school⁷⁷. Although the government later admit the failure of its intended reforms in education⁷⁸. The "TAR" Party Committee set up an inquiry into the charging of exorbitant fees, following which six kinds of education fee were cancelled.⁷⁹ A new guideline was drawn up which put a larger proportion of responsibility for education funding to the central government. (Directives included in the 1994 Fifth "TAR" Conference on Education specified that from 1995, operating expenses for education were to amount to 17% of the annual "TAR" government expenditure, with a targeted increase to 20% in 2000).

Despite various conventions and guidelines on education, the situation is still far from resolved. This is evident from the numerous interviews conducted by TCHRD of fleeing Tibetan refugees. Majority of them are below the age of 18 years whose testimonies reveals that children across the regions are being charged illegal and often exorbitant fees that are directly discriminatory in nature. Chinese students attend the same schools, but with less school fees or even free of charge. Therefore, discrimination coupled with high school fees compel many Tibetan students to cut short their academic career and lead an idle life without work in their villages whereas Chinese peers are able to meet the high education fee and pursue higher education.⁸⁰

Parent's work also become a deciding factor in child's school fee. For those children whose parent work for the State, children education

is paid for by their work-unit. “State workers who are in the wealthiest sectors of society, have their children’s education paid by their work-unit. Non-state workers have to pay their own educational costs.”⁸¹

14-year old Namsel from the Barkhor area of Lhasa, fled Tibet in January 2000 with the hope of being admitted to a school in India. He said,

*“Primary school is compulsory in Lhasa, and parents are fined 1,000 Yuan if they fail to send their children to school. I attended Shol Primary School for seven years from the age of 5 to 12, along with just under 1000 other children, most of whom were Chinese. The parents of all the Tibetan children had to pay an initial fee of 400 Yuan for admission, and then 600-700 Yuan as a school fee every six months. The Chinese parents were charged very differently- they had to pay only 200 Yuan for admission and no more than 450 for the school fees. I know this because my mother talked to many other Chinese mothers. Similarly, Tibetans had to pay 160 Yuan for the school uniform and 100 Yuan for general stationery, while the Chinese were charged only 75 and 60 Yuan respectively. Furthermore, the teachers at Shol would often collect a little extra money from the Tibetans to buy equipment for the classrooms such as brooms or curtains for the windows, but they never asked the Chinese children. Nobody dared to ask why these charges were so different- we are just generally looked down on as backward, dirty Tibetans.”*⁸²

Gonpo Sonam, 22-year-old from Dzongse County in Ngaba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture ‘TAP’ arrived in India in June 1999. He reported,

*“I attended Nubjang Higher Nationalities School for 3 years from 1993 to 1996, but then I have to drop out because of the high tuition fees. Tibetans had to pay 700 yuan per semester, but the Chinese students paid nothing. I couldn’t understand this, but when a group of Tibetans complained, we were told that the school was meant for Chinese and that we were lucky to be there.”*⁸³

Such cases are in total contravention of article 26 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that, “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the

elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.”

Another instance of discrimination testified by Buchung, a young nomad from Damshung County in Lhasa Municipality, who arrived in India on the 30 January 2000. He said, “I attended the community primary school in my village for a year, but left because we had to bring so many things from home to give to the school, We had to bring our own food every day, money to buy the school equipment—even a big sack of firewood to keep the school warm in winter. Sometimes we weren’t even told where our money was going. There were no official fees as such, but we were always pushed to ‘donate’ money and materials to the school, and my family eventually decided that they couldn’t afford to give any more, so I had to leave.”⁸⁴

Tibetan parents in the rural areas find themselves subject to pay various ‘miscellaneous’ fees to the school authorities in order to supplement teacher’s low salaries and to cover the maintenance cost of the buildings, expenses which should be covered by the local government. Since the promulgation of Education Law in 1995, education funding was decentralized and responsibility shifted to the local government⁸⁵.

According to Tibet Justice Center, school fees varied depending on whether they possessed a ‘*themto*’ pass(a document or list that exists within each local Chinese government office which authorizes the listed persons to live in that area). To receive the right to send children to school, to receive subsidized healthcare, to own a home, to buy rations in government shops and to obtain a job remain a function of possession of ‘*themto*’. This system is enforced more strictly in urban areas than rural or nomadic regions of Tibet. But the Chinese coerced family planning devoid of children born in violation of family planning rules⁸⁶. In order to acquire ‘*themto*’ pass, Tibetan parents pay bribe to officials for every additional child beyond the limit put by the authorities. Apart from charges for ‘*themto*’ pass and monthly tuition, Tibetan students pay for school uniforms, books and any furniture that broke during school⁸⁷.

State of Education in Tibet: A Human Rights Perspective

While in the rural areas, educational access for Tibetan children appears to be restricted in few cases by their parents' lack of connection or *Guangxi* with school officials or within the Party circle. Within schools, some teachers apparently demand 'gifts' in exchange for favorable treatment or better teaching for students. Rural poor parents rarely can afford gifts and as a result their children may suffer from wealth-based discrimination in school. Some children, admission to state-funded primary schools requires connections. In some cases some Tibetan students in his region need government connections to obtain the *themto* pass

Chapter 8

THE STATE OF TIBETAN LANGUAGE IN "TAR" SCHOOLS

Tibetan language, the root of Tibetan ancient culture, is under attack from all sides and the education system is one of the fronts. The apparent protection of Tibetan language under various laws and regulations is inconsistent with the reality of the situation in Tibet. Although it is valid to say that in most areas Tibetan students still receive primary education in Tibetan language-mother tongue. Students in the urban areas have started receiving their primary education in Chinese language.⁸⁸

Tibetan students face abrupt linguistic shift and change from primary to secondary education, where the medium is universally Chinese. Tibetan students in order to pursue further studies beyond the primary education or to enter the Chinese job market under the booming economy must have the knowledge of Chinese language. This system has made it particularly difficult for students who live in rural areas where they are less likely to have Chinese language reinforcement outside of school⁸⁹. Tibetans in urban areas can make an educational choice: traditional culture or a job, the latter can be attained only by embracing an alien culture.

In 1997, Chinese language was introduced from grade one for Tibetans in urban primary schools but not in rural schools⁹⁰. Many of rural Tibetan students simply do not speak Chinese⁹¹. In some cases, many Tibetan children found learning in Chinese both alienating and an obstacle to their understanding. A boy from Lhasa who knew several Tibetan students who dropped out because they were frustrated with being "forced to study Chinese."⁹² Tibetan students generally pay less attention in the class because they had difficulty understanding the lessons taught in Chinese.

In July 1997, Chen Kuiyuan attacked Professor Drungkar Lobsang Trinley for demanding the inclusion of Buddhism in Tibetan studies. Chen criticized Drungkar by saying, “*some people, claiming to be authorities, have made such shameless statements confusing truth and falsehood.*” This Chen said, “*is similar to separatists’ attempts to use the spoken language and culture to cause disputes and antagonism between nationalities.*”⁹³

A 19 year-old girl from Amdo, Qinghai Province, Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture ‘TAP’ says of her experience,

*“I couldn’t understand Chinese well enough to learn another subject through it, so I had to keep asking the teacher for help again and again. Many of the Tibetans in the class were like me, and when we didn’t understand the teacher, the other Chinese students would laugh and call us ‘stupid Tibetans’ and ‘dirty Tibetans’. Pretty soon, we gave up asking for help, and just sat there, waiting to fail. It was useless.”*⁹⁴

Tibetan language instruction outside of the ‘TAR’ appears to be regarded as an unimportant and futile subject. A teacher in a Lhasa primary school told a student that Tibetan “*won’t get you any food.*”⁹⁵

Chinese language has found niche in every aspect of Tibetan life and advanced Chinese language skills appear to be a prerequisite for most good jobs in Tibet.⁹⁶

A girl from Lhasa described her difficulties at school after escaping to India late 1999. *“From class three, mathematics was taught in Chinese. I didn’t understand anything the Chinese teacher said, and so could only sit idle in the class and wait for the lesson to end. I used to fail all of my math tests, but my teacher didn’t care that I couldn’t understand Chinese-She said it was because I was stupid.”*⁹⁷

These difficulties experienced by the above mentioned Tibetans reaffirm the broad issue of low academic performance among Tibetan students because of imposing language barrier. This often results in Tibetan students being relegated to the lower stream classes, which not only result in the poor academic result of the Tibetan students but also have a negative psychological effects ultimately resulting in serious deprivation of confidence of the children.⁹⁸

A study published in the journal 'Xizang Yanjiu' (Tibet Studies) in 1996 found that *“National minority students, when they enter secondary school, do not have anywhere near the required levels of Chinese to cope with classes in other subjects. Students suffer real hardship while studying and teachers teach until they are exhausted. This results not only in reduced marks in school work and a reduction in teaching quality, but it also affects students’ physical and mental health and all round development.”*⁹⁹

The medium of instruction in schools mainly being Chinese cause extreme challenging situation for Tibetan students having to compete with Chinese peers at the secondary schools where they are required to switch to Chinese as the medium of instruction. This narrows the academic advancement of Tibetan and creates difficulties defined along cultural borders, generating an artificial sense of Han Chinese supremacy. It further discriminates Tibetans against Chinese students in the schools in “TAR”. As one Tibetan parent explained: *“In the end, in a natural way there is a comparison between the Tibetan and the Chinese pupils; a Chinese pupil will wonder why a Tibetan in the same year has less knowledge than he has, so he will easily conclude that the Tibetans are backward and stupid. The seed is also planted for Tibetan students to consider themselves as stupid.”*¹⁰⁰

Medium of Instruction in “TAR” Schools

Teaching is a form of communication. It is the teacher’s task to communicate a certain amount of given information to the student and the student is only capable of being educated if she or he understands the language the teacher is speaking. In most of the government-sponsored primary schools in Tibet the main teaching language is Chinese, whereas in primary schools sponsored by the local community the teaching language is mostly Tibetan.

The Tibetan government in exile in 1980 sent a second fact-finding delegation to Tibet headed by Jetsun Pema, sister of the Dalai Lama and Director of Tibetan Children Village School, to study the education situation existent under the communist rule in Tibet. The delegation saw only 70 establishments during their entire tour of Tibet from 18 June to 23 September 1980. They were told, however, that

the schools were closed everywhere for the summer holiday. This claim was strange in a country where schools are inevitably open in summer due to the extreme winter climatic condition. In addition, it came to the light that, of the 70 schools the delegates were able to visit, 16 taught no Tibetan at all, and in eight others it was taught only after primary school. In these schools, the delegates found that only 40 percent of the students were Tibetan with 70 percent Chinese teachers. Most of the community schools and the state primary schools listed in Chinese statistics had very low academic standards. Most of the teachers themselves had no education beyond primary school¹⁰¹.

In 1985 education reforms in Tibet ensured that the medium of instruction in primary education for Tibetans would be in Tibetan language, except in the sections that had a majority Chinese population, in which case the medium of instruction would remain Chinese. Thus in most of the big towns and cities where the children of Chinese cadres and migrant employees dominate school strength, in such case, the medium of instruction remains Chinese with a curriculum to suit and focus on Chinese culture and history.

A 23-year-old teacher from Toelung Dechen County, Lhasa City, reported on the Teacher Training College in Lhasa and his first job in the primary school in Ngachen Township in Lhasa Municipality.

*Most of the Chinese students from China come to Tibet to sit for the examinations when they fail to pass the examination in China itself because in China the percentage requirement is much higher than in Tibet. So when they fail China they come and sit for the examination in Tibet. And as a result, they do quite well in Tibet and then they take away the seats that were meant for Tibetans.*¹⁰²

Lack of proficiency in bilingual education put Tibetan students at a disadvantage while competing for seats in college and universities. While Tibetan remain medium of instruction in a few Tibetan schools up to primary level and those who excel in the state-run primary schools remain at a disadvantage as entrance tests for the higher education were conducted in Chinese. “My students who graduated from lower and middle school, fail to pass the university entrance exams, return home and then stay herding the animals.”¹⁰³

And secondly, Chinese children are effectively given greater educational opportunities than Tibetan students. With this, more and more Chinese students are occupying seats meant for Tibetan students. “In the second round of “TAR” university admission for 2003, 648 students got through the entrance exam. Out of which, 231 were admitted to human science programme, out of which 128 seats went to Han [Chinese] students and 103 towards national minorities. And 417 students admitted to the natural science program (Han are 229 and national minorities are 188).¹⁰⁴ This coupled with other factors such as poor financial status, *guangxi* (connection with official) and bribery often prevent bright Tibetan students from continuing the higher quality secondary schools attended by their Chinese peers. All these factors contribute to the exclusion of Tibetan children from attaining the academic achievement and professional training they need to improve their social and economic status.

To augment the existing problem of lack of educational opportunities among Tibetan students, a further denigration of Tibet’s language, history, culture and religion tradition reinforces a prevalent sense of cultural inferiority in the minds of Tibetan children.

Practically with most officials and workers being Chinese in “TAR”, this allows for Chinese to replace Tibetan in government offices, job markets and even in schools and have prejudices towards the Tibetan language in education and threatened the very survival of Tibetan language.

Chinese Medium: A dominant language in Tibetan schools

Despite numerous laws guaranteeing the promotion, protection and the use of a native language, there have been indications that Chinese has become the main medium of instruction in most schools in “TAR”¹⁰⁵.

Use of Chinese language remains the principal language of civil affairs and at government levels. Reasons for such policy are, implementing a Tibetan language policy among the largely Chinese social and political elite has proven difficult and it also recognizes the Tibetan language as an important element of Tibetan distinct national identity and culture. These conditions marginalized the

Tibetan language which otherwise is the official language of the “TAR”.

The teaching of mathematics in Chinese- and English in some schools through Chinese medium is one of new changes in the provision of education in the “TAR”. If this new change is fully implemented, this would mean that the only subject taught in Tibetan in primary and middle schools would be Tibetan language.

A pilot project was started to experiment with the possible provision of secondary education in the Tibetan medium for few schools in different regions of Tibet in 1989. But it was ended in 1996¹⁰⁶. In 1997, new plans were drawn up to introduce Chinese classes from grade 1 of primary school instead of from grade 3; only urban primary schools.

There is also a concern among teachers and parents that the plans to teach lessons in Chinese rather than Tibetan may lead to under-achievement among Tibetan primary school pupils, as Tibetan is their first language.

A boy from Lhasa reported that, while both Tibetan and Chinese were taught at his primary school, far more emphasis (four hours per day) was placed on the latter than the former (one hour per day)¹⁰⁷.

Many Tibetan children found learning Chinese both new and difficult to understand. A boy from Lhasa knew several Tibetan students who dropped out because they were frustrated with being ‘forced to study Chinese.’¹⁰⁸

Tibetan students in the “TAR” looking for degree in science and humanities outside of Tibetan language and literature have to find places elsewhere, in mainland China or abroad. At Tibet University in Lhasa they can only pursue these subjects in the context of teacher training. In order to gain admission to a University in Mainland China they have to compete with students throughout China on national exams, admission cut-off scores depend on the performance of the pool of candidates and the number of seats available, with the requirements varying from year to year.”¹⁰⁹

According to a report by Tibet Information Network, some Tibetan teachers fear losing their job as subjects like mathematics and Chinese - and English in some schools- and mathematics are taught more and more through the Chinese language medium, if this policy is implemented they will face lay off. The competition faced from Chinese teachers from mainland China is likely to increase if the medium of teaching changed to Chinese in the primary schools. The recruitment of teachers from China to develop education in the region has been stated in the 10th Five-Year Plan for the "TAR". An excerpt from the plan, published by Tibet Daily on 9 June 2001, stated: *"we must put existing qualified personnel to good use and actively recruit from outside [the TAR] the qualified personnel we urgently need."* It also added: *"Outstanding personnel must be attracted to join the teaching profession. At the same time, we must rely on institutions of higher education in the interior to establish training bases for senior-level teaching staff for Tibet in order to speed up the building of a teaching corps for Tibet."*¹¹⁰

Since the 1985 education reform, Tibetan parents have been facing a difficult situation where they have to send their children to a Tibetan medium primary school where culturally relevant subjects were taught in their mother tongue and perform better. On the other hand, Tibetan children will be less equipped to compete for secondary education or to compete in the stiff job market where Chinese language is prerequisite. Chinese being the working language in most of the government services and employment in a state work-unit, fluency in Chinese is of vital importance. Some parents in urban areas enroll their children in Chinese medium primary school-given that they have sufficient connection with higher authorities to duck the system¹¹¹, where their children were introduced Chinese from the first grade itself. This apparent advantage will give them greater access to secondary and tertiary education, as well as equip them to compete for jobs in the state, although they have to hone their Chinese language skill before they can learn other subjects.

On the darker side, most Tibetans who have been educated in Chinese medium education lose the ability to read and write Tibetan and gradually lose touch with their own mother tongue, which remain the basis of any culture. Subsequently embracing Chinese culture among the Tibetan youths posed a serious threat to the very identity of the Tibetan people, their culture and language.

To make the matter worse, Tibetan medium education is losing popularity, partly because it is considered inferior to Chinese medium education and partly because of its irrelevance in academic, social and economic advancement. A deliberate failure to increase the use of Tibetan medium has led to the degeneration of the language itself. On top of this, a partial implementation of 1987 provision on the Use of Tibetan has led to lack of coherence for its proper functioning. As all secondary and tertiary education is still taught in Chinese, mother tongue education for Tibetans only at primary level creates an obstacle to further educational advancement.

Chapter 9

CHINA'S PATRIOTIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGN IN TIBET: RACISM IN DISGUISE

The re-emergence of nationalist sentiment and political unrest, which came to the fore in 1980s, was not witnessed since the Chinese occupation of Tibet in 1949. Other nationalist movements reappeared in other parts of China especially after the crushing of pro-democracy student demonstration at Tainanmen Square in Beijing in 1989. At the beginning of the 1990s, the Chinese Government was struggling hard to find a way of uniting the country, which it feared was reeling under the political unrest.

The late 1980's were trouble period for China with much political unrest within China as well as in regions far away as Tibet. As a matter of raising nationalist sentiments of the people and controlling freedom of thought and expression, China introduced the "Patriotic education" campaign initially in schools, in September 1994 which involved the daily raising of the Chinese national flag in every school and the chanting of the national anthem. It also included study of books and films approved by the authorities.

However, when the campaign was launched in the "TAR" in May 1996, the focus shifted to religion; monks and nuns became the main targets. The *Tibet Daily* on 15 September 1994 announced that *education in patriotism was to be given to primary and secondary schools in Tibet and that this would last three years and initially would focus on raising the PRC flag and singing the national anthem each Monday*¹². The fundamental objective behind the "Patriotic education" campaign in Tibetan areas was to tighten party control over the religion and to undermine the influence of the Dalai Lama in society and religious institutions.

The CCP launched a three-year "Patriotic education" campaign to "quash youthful visions of an independent Tibet or the return of

the Dalai Lama” The basic message of the campaign was loyalty to the state. This campaign targeted ideological reform of Tibetan students and was based on racial superiority of Han over Tibetan and hatred. The campaign was in total violation of article 4 of Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

China is bound by the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) (1965) which it signed on 31 March 1996 and ratified on 29 December 1981. Article 4 of the CERD states that:

“State parties condemn all propaganda and all organisations which are based on ideas or theories of superiority of one race or group of persons of one colour or ethnic origin, or which attempt to justify or promote racial hatred and discrimination in any form, and undertake to adopt immediate and positive measures designed to eradicate all incitement to, or acts of, such discrimination and, to this end, with due regard to the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the rights expressly set forth in article 5 of this convention, inter alia: (a) shall declare an offence punishable by law all dissemination of idea based on racial superiority or hatred, incitement to racial discrimination, as well as all acts of violence or incitement to such acts against any race or group of persons of another colour, or ethnic origin and also the provision of any assistance to racist activities, including the financing thereof...”

A BBC report on 11 November 1994 broadcast the CCP education policy:

“Tibet University is Tibet’s highest educational institute. Over 90% of its students are Tibetans. To contentiously carry out the guidelines of the CCP Central Committees Third Work Conference and the sixth plenary session of the fourth Autonomous Regional Party Committee, University party committee members give top priority to “patriotic education” while conducting ideological and political education among students. This year the university enhanced patriotic education among students and organized the study of “outlines on education in patriotism”. From 6th October to 24th November, the University propaganda department held a series of “forums on patriotism” and invited Comrade Huang Yesheng from the Propaganda Department

of the autonomous regional party committee present a report entitled “see clearly the true colour of the Dalai clique, oppose separatism and safeguard the unification of the motherland” to help students recognize the Dalai Cliques’ intention of splitting the motherland. The University’s Propaganda Department will hold a contest to test students’ understanding of patriotism, appraise and select civilized units of patriotism, and launch the “month for reading patriotic books”.

On 3 December 1994 Tibet daily published a party committee circular on implementing the program on patriotism. The circular stated that all should:

“Conscientiously study the program to enhance ideological understanding; grasp the contents of the education and emphasize fighting splittism, step up education in Tibet’s sovereignty and human rights and the law on regional autonomy; make the program “down to earth” by raising the national flag, singing the national anthem and hanging the national portraits of prominent Chinese historical figures in schools”. Schools in Tibet should be linked with those on Beijing and youth organisations should be involved in making speeches, staging performances, writing bulletin boards and giving lectures on patriotism and “bring into play the role of the family” in youth education. The media should publicise China’s “glorious traditions and brilliant culture” and publicise those who safeguard the unity of nationalities. This should be done in a practical way.”

In 1994, the Guidelines for “Patriotic education” provided a handbook on the development of patriotic education in schools. The goals of patriotic education were defined as being: (1) to rejuvenate China’s national spirit; (2) to strengthen the unity of nationalities (*minzu tuanjie*); (3) to reconstruct a sense of national esteem; and (4) to build a broad coalition under the Communist party.¹¹³ China’s fight against ‘hostile forces’ trying to split motherland or preventing China from reunification were important components of the patriotic education curriculum set out in the ‘Guidelines for Patriotic Education’. Children in schools were discouraged from expressing religious faith and practicing devotional activities as part of a campaign by the authorities in middle schools and some primary schools in Lhasa. Monasteries and schools in the “TAR” became main targets of this campaign.

The “Patriotic education” campaign was meticulously launched to instill patriotism in China’s citizens with special emphasis placed on national unity and territorial integrity. “Patriotic education” campaign was blended with political doctrine in education particularly in ‘minority’ education. In the Tibet Autonomous Region, the younger generation became the prime target and school became springboard for launching patriotic education. The use of patriotism as a legitimizing ideology in “TAR” education system was to ensure the stability and to renew emphasis on ethnic unity, which resulted in the idea that prioritizing the education of Tibetan language as unpatriotic.

The “Patriotic education” campaign was extended to the lay community in the Tibetan areas in November 1997¹¹⁴ Spreading patriotic education for stability of the motherland and undermining the influence of the Dalai Lama remain the main aim behind the campaign in the “TAR”. Beijing authorities view the Dalai Lama as the root cause of instability in Tibet and have labeled the monasteries and nunneries as “breeding ground of political dissent”. Since 1994, after the Third Tibet Work Forum, anti-Dalai Lama campaign was stepped up vigorously in various parts of Tibet. The primary political role of ‘minority education’ (Ch: *minzu jiaoyu*) was to ensure stability, and ethnic unity.

The anti-Dalai Lama campaign involves ban on portraits and celebration of the Dalai Lama’s birthday, severe sentences and punishments for were imposed for expressing faith and support for the Dalai Lama. The campaign is aimed to minimize or to erode influence of the Dalai Lama as Beijing authorities link Tibetan Buddhism with Tibetan nationalism. Monks and nuns are viewed with suspicion for having similar political ideologies of the Dalai Lama or for possible involvement in political activities, which China considers as “endangering State security”. For Beijing, national stability is of supreme importance and in the name of ensuring that stability, violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms of Tibetan began to take place.

Jampa Kelden, a former head of Nationalities and Religious Affairs Commission in “TAR”, announced that steps should be taken to “*spread patriotic education in the agricultural communities, towns,*

*cities, government organs and schools.” Jampa went on to add that measures were needed to “eliminate the Dalai’s influence and win people’s hearts. Otherwise, if we only carry out the patriotic education in temples, the instability will continue....The influence of the Dalai Lama on the peasants, in the townships, schools and government organs is still serious.”*¹¹⁵

In many areas, children of various schools were affected by the “Patriotic education” campaign that discouraged from expressing religious faith and practicing devotional activities. According to TIN report, children between age seven and thirteen in schools targeted by the “Patriotic education” campaign and were taught about Tibetan Buddhist practice as ‘backward behavior’ and an impediment to progress. Promotion of a “new socialist Tibetan culture” depicted traditional Tibetan society as dark, barbarous and backward.¹¹⁶ Chinese intellectuals use the phrase “5,000 years of Han Culture” to prove the cultural backwardness of Tibetans and other minority nationalities. This was used as pretext for the need to reform Tibetan culture, which, they believed, could be done only by showing the backwardness of Tibetan heritage. The combination of this intellectual superiority and the government’s political agenda has led to a series of campaigns in Tibet.

More recently, there have been reports of political education creeping into the academic realms. At Tibet University in Lhasa, for political reasons, some ancient or religious texts have been banned. The authorities reportedly require professors, particularly those from the Tibetan language department, to attend political education sessions in an effort to prevent political and religious activity on campus.¹¹⁷

The monks and nuns are generally not allowed to visit the campus for fear of instilling the religious sentiments. Private religious practice is severely restricted at the University. Tibetan and foreign students are not allowed to keep photographs of the Dalai Lama in their living quarters. Students participating in political activity or those who join a religious group are expelled from college, the Tibet University in Lhasa, Pema Tashi told western journalists visiting the TAR on a press trip¹¹⁸.

The Third Tibet Work Forum (Third forum) also stressed that stability was essential for reform. Following the forum, curriculum reform was carried out to signal the new priorities of “Patriotic education” in the “TAR” region. Three years later, in 1997, China repealed the regulations and a further shift in emphasis took place with announcement of plans to introduce Chinese language study from the first year of schooling.

Tenzin, former Deputy Party Secretary in the “TAR” who was removed from his post and sent to Beijing himself recalled the 1987 policy as ‘impractical’ and ‘not in conformity with the reality of Tibet...As a result, both Tibetan and Chinese languages are being taught at school in the autonomous region’¹¹⁹ and that “the decision to allow grade one to three boys and girls to be taught only in the Tibetan language will do no good to the children growth”¹²⁰ This shift in policy allowed for the use of Chinese language in primary grades. Until that point, Tibetan had been the medium for Children from ages 6 to 13. But, the sudden change in the medium of instruction after age 13 ‘resulted in widespread underachievement among Tibetans in secondary and higher education’¹²¹ The Chinese authorities rather than implementing Tibetan as a medium beyond age 13, essentially abolished Tibetan in the lower grades in favor of Chinese. Tibetan is now primarily used in Tibetan language class, which is optional¹²².

Guidelines on History Teaching

Party control over the teaching of history in schools is almost watertight. History teaching guidelines (Ch: *jiaoxue dagang*) and textbooks are compiled by committees that work under the supervision of Party organizations in the State Education Commission. Leading members of these committees are usually Party members handpicked by the Party. The principal requirement for teaching guidelines and textbooks is that they must be politically correct, that is, they must conform to the current Party line. Thus, every major shift in the Party line necessitates a corresponding revision of the guidelines and textbooks.

Political and Ideological Education in China

The ultimate aim of political-ideological education is, of course, to foster support for the Chinese Communist Party’s version of socialism and its one-party rule. After Mao Zedong’s death, however, the credibility of the Party’s version of socialism, and indeed, of the Party

itself, was at a nadir. Party leaders were thus desperately searching for an alternative integrative ideology that would have a broader appeal than socialism to reunite the Party and the nation.

As early as 1981, the then-Premier Zhao Ziyang had already proposed to the Fifth People's Congress that education and patriotism should be strengthened, and that this could be done by strengthening the teaching of history and geography in schools. A document issued by the Party propaganda department in 1983 endorsed Zhao's proposal, admitting that not all Chinese people support, or can be made to support socialism, but most Chinese at home and overseas still love China, their motherland. Patriots who are willing to work for strong and prosperous China are, in effect, supporting the socialist cause, regardless of their political persuasion. The strategy of "soft-packaging" socialism under the more appealing rubric of patriotism has continued to be adopted by the second generation leadership that ousted Zhao Ziyang after the Tiananmen Incident.

Indoctrinating Political Ideologies

The use of indoctrination in the education system is an intrinsic part of China's grand plan to sinocize Tibetans. It is most effectively used on children who, in the process of developing their thoughts and character, are most easily influenced by the opinions propounded by those in authority. Teachers have a direct, extremely influential impact on the development of a student's beliefs.

Chen Kuiyuan, the former "TAR" Party Secretary candidly proclaimed at the Fifth Regional Meeting on Education in the "TAR" on 26 October 1994, that the paramount goal of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Ch: *Zhong Guo Gong Chan Dang*) educational policy in Tibet is to secure the "loyalty" of Tibetan children to the "great motherland and the great socialist cause." To paraphrase, the primary objective of school in Tibet is not to educate the child for its overall development but to indoctrinate the young Tibetan minds with politically correct ideologies. Proper Political ideology and loyalty take precedence over basic education in the "TAR". This approach violates China's International legal obligation to direct education toward the child's development and well-being as it only aims to serve state's political interests and control.

The purpose of education, on the other hand, is to allow a child to develop his or her own ideas and perceptions, as article 9(1) of the CRC recognises that “*States Parties agree that the education shall be directed to: a) The development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.*” Article 14(1) and 13(1) of the same Convention states that, “*States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.*” And “*The child shall have the right to freedom of expression*”.

These principles are clearly violated where education takes the form of indoctrination. A child’s freedom of thought and expression is necessarily restricted by an authoritarian system which imposes its own perception of “truth” upon students and punishes the child who diverges from the official ideology.

In the situation where a student must provide fixed answers to ideological questions in an exam, the child is not free to express his or her own thoughts. The student must conform to the theory which is supported by the State or face grave repercussions. The language and curriculum policies in Tibetan schools provide clear evidence of this trend. Chakjam Gyal, a student from Bokor village, Jhado township in Tsolho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture “TAP” (Ch. *Hainan*) arrived in exile on 13 April 2004, reported, “*The school provide education from primary to higher secondary education. On my first year in the higher secondary school, we were introduced to a book entitled ‘Chinese language’ in which a separate chapter on the Potala Palace was given. Fostering an everlasting friendship between Tibet and China was given as the prime reason behind its construction.*”¹²³

On a very recent China sponsored press trip of number of foreign journalists to Tibet in August 2004, one journalist who interviewed a young monk near Jhokhang temple in the Tibetan capital Lhasa, openly expressed his remorse for the lack of freedom of thought in Tibet and compulsion to study the distorted version of Tibet history. He said, “*If someone from China says something about our history, and we know it is not true, because it is not what our scholars teach as the real history, but we cannot say so. We are not free to dispute. There is only one version of history allowed.*”¹²⁴ It is very evident from these testimonies that Tibetans are forced to learn in Chinese language, about Chinese culture and the Chinese version of Tibetan history and politics.



Tibet University students marching in Lhasa in 1988- one of the demands was promotion of Tibetan language and culture

State of Education in Tibet: A Human Rights Perspective



Tibet University administration meeting in progress, the Principal in the centre is also the Secretary of the University Communist Party Committee (2003)



Tibetan students in their class room in Machu County with pictures of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiopeng and Chinese flag in the background

State of Education in Tibet: A Human Rights Perspective



Group picture of Ngaba Kirti Monastic School (1998)



Novice monks of Ngaba Kirti Monastic School wearing school uniform after Chinese authorities intervention in the school in 2002. The School was closed down in 29 July 2003

State of Education in Tibet: A Human Rights Perspective



Dawa Tashi, a Tibet University student who fled into exile after facing expulsion from the University for political literatures

Chapter 10

TARGETING PRIVATE AND MONASTIC SCHOOLS

Education in Tibet being dominated by the Chinese coupled with increasing cost of high school fees, discrimination and lack of proper infrastructure facilities- Tibetan particularly in rural areas are looking more and more towards private and monastic schools for education. This in spite of the high risk of unemployment after school, as Tibetans have become weary of the attitude of the Chinese authorities. Tibetans see the advantage of the monastic and private Tibetan schools that not only teach in Tibetan language but also charge low fees as well as the opportunity to learn ones own culture, history and religion through one's own people. Before Chinese invasion of Tibet in 1949, Buddhist religion played an intrinsic role in the whole of Tibetan society and religious Institutions were hub of spiritual center but also an educational learning center. Individuals were free to practise their religious beliefs in every stage of life and the religious traditions were passed down from adult to child.

The child's freedom of thought and religion has a special mention in the CRC. Article 14(1) states, "*Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.*" Art. 30 states, "*In those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority ... shall not be denied the right ... to profess and practice his or her own religion.*"

School teachers must respect a child's freedom to hold certain beliefs even where they may be contrary to the teacher's own. Children are not, by reason of their age and lack of experience, incapable of forming their own opinions on different topics and the CRC recognises that it is not the purpose of the state, and thus state educators, to repress this freedom.

Chinese language is gradually replacing Tibetan in all higher education, and the study of Tibetan is often viewed as being anti-Chinese and unpatriotic. Poor educational access in rural regions have

prompted many Tibetan parents to send their children to monastic-affiliated or private schools. The former forms a major center of learning in the early period of Tibet¹²⁵. These schools often represent the only feasible alternative to distant and poorly funded government institutions. One positive thing about studying in such institutions was because Tibetan remained the primary medium of instruction and they learned about their own Tibetan history, culture and religion. However, the popularity of these private and monastic schools have made them the target of government authorities that have led to subsequent closure or reconstruction to suit the needs of the Chinese authorities.

For instance, according to information received by TCHRD, in April 1994 one Tibetan school in Lhasa was seized by the Chinese authorities with arrest of the founder and director of the school, a Tibetan lama who is known as Shabdrung Rinpoche, in late February of the same year, for suspected involvement in “counter-revolutionary activities”. The school started as a language school but later expanded into an education centre offering classes in Tibetan language, Chinese, astrology etc.

In May-June 1994, according to information received by TCHRD, the Chinese authorities forcibly closed three privately-run schools in Lhasa in February 1994 and briefly detained their founder and principal Shabdrung Lobsang Tsultrim. The schools: Tibet Autonomous Region Centre for unemployed youths, Lhasa Shiljong Language School and Lhasa City part time(or evening) school, which reportedly handled an estimated 1000 students. Shabdrung Lobsang Tsultrim established schools in the eighties with the noble objective to educate Tibetan children and train unemployed youths in various job skills. Tibetan medicine, performing arts, secretarial practice, typing and accountancy are part of curriculum in these schools.

In the early 90s, after the launch of “patriotic education” campaign in various monasteries and nunneries in the “TAR”, there have been many instances of peaceful protests and demonstration against the forced denunciation of their spiritual mentor, the Dalai Lama. Subsequently many schools and institutions faced closure and demolition. For instance, Rakor(Rago) Nunnery was closed and

demolished. Around fifty nuns- the entire population of Rakor Nunnery- reportedly refused to express opposition to the Dalai Lama and his ‘splittist’ policies as required by a Chinese “work team”, and they left the monastery in summer 1997. After their departure, officials reportedly ordered local villagers to demolish living quarters at the nunnery, which is situated 12 km from Lhasa in Toelung Dechen county¹²⁶.

Jonang Kumbum Monastery, 61 km from Lhartse County town on the south bank of the Yarlung Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) river in western Tibet, was completely closed following a “patriotic education” campaign. Patriotic education classes had been carried out by a ten-member “work team” at Jonang Kumbum in May 1997 every day for up to ten hours daily with barely a break, and that the monastery was completely closed by spring of 1998. “There was not one monk left in the monastery and the monks’ rooms were either locked or filled with straw and animal dung, probably to be used as stables,”¹²⁷

In 2002 and 2003 Chinese authorities closed down two popular monastic schools: Ngaba Kirti Monastic school in Ngaba Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture “TAP” and Tsa-Sur school, popularly known as Tsang-Sul school in Lhasa for alleged charges of teaching “splittist” ideologies. Both these schools were privately funded schools.

Ngaba Kirti Monastic School located in Ngaba County (Ch: *Aba Xian*), Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan, was established in 1994 through the generous donations of Soepa Nagur, a rich businessman. More than 3,000 monks formerly studied there¹²⁸. Kirti Monastery also ran a separate school beside the monastery and it functioned as a primary school for roughly 500 of its young monks who were provided culturally based educations through Tibetan medium of instruction.

Three years after its establishment in 1997, Chinese authorities accused Kirti Monastic School of “dealings” with foreigners. But timely intervention by one official apparently delayed its closure for a time being. But a year later in August 1998, Chinese authorities took over the school management and renamed it “Chathang Nubsang” School and implemented new mandatory policies. Afterwards

authorities restricted class by former teachers and recruited Chinese teachers to revise the curriculum. Socialist theories class and Chinese was made the medium of instruction in the school except in the Tibetan language class. Students had to purchase and wear special Chinese suits instead of their traditional monastic wardrobes and school couldn't receive any fund from outside sources.¹²⁹

Kirti Rinpoche, the school headmaster was replaced by Chinese appointee and 'patriotic education' was imposed in the monastery school curriculum. Tibetan teachers were authorized to participate in a "reeducation" program that focused on Chinese history and culture. They were informed, by year 2000, there would be no more jobs for Tibetan language teachers. In the ensuing years, most Tibetan teachers fled and many Tibetan parents withdrew their children from the school.¹³⁰

However, on 29 July 2003, when the school was closed for vacation, Chinese officials visited and brought down the Chinese national flag hoisted in the school compound and declared the school officially closed. Since the school session was to resume on 20 August, the authorities declared that students could join Bontse school (a government run co-education school in the Ngaba county) if they wished to continue their studies. Students were ordered not to return to the school. Ngaba Kirti Monastic School was closed on 29 July 2003 and its patron, Soepa Nagur disappeared on 31 July 2003¹³¹.

Tsa-Sur School (translit: tsha zur) popularly known as Tsang-Sul School, a private Tibetan school in Lhasa was first founded in 1988 through the joint efforts of three Tibetan individuals to promote and preserve Tibetan language. In its initial years the school ran on voluntary contributions by the students and later it attracted funding from abroad. The majority of the teachers were former political prisoners or people with a history of political activism. Tsang-Sul school earned its popularity from its minimal school fees and high standard of teaching. A similar curriculum was followed up to the middle school as in other schools, except that Tibetan was the main subject, followed by Chinese, Mathematics, and English.

In 2002, the school had 500 students. Sixty students who were orphans received free education while the others, who generally were unable to pay the fees asked by other schools, paid a nominal fee of 20 yuan per semester. Twelve teachers taught at the school with Topgyal as the director, administrator and the main teacher. The school was progressing well until 2001, when parents started removing their children from the government school- Yuethong School no. 1- to admit them to Tsang-Sul school. The authorities blamed Tsang-Sul School for their dwindling student population at Yuethong school no.1.

Local residents believe that the rising popularity of the school as well as the school's failure to follow the government's program to collect higher school fees led to the closure. The Chinese authorities alleged that the school was affiliated with the "Dalai Clique." The school campus and classrooms had been rented from a local family. After the government ordered the school closed at the end of July 2002, the landlord was no longer permitted to rent the premises for schooling purposes¹³².

Another respected Tibetan educationalist and scholar, Gyaye Phuntsok, 68-year old from Tsolho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture(TAP) in Qinghai province was detained and sentenced to six years in prison. Gyaye Phuntsok had founded a school, funded partially by United Nations' Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which caters for some of the region's poorest Tibetan families and focuses on the study of the Tibetan language¹³³.

The above mentioned cases are some of the few instances of authorities' heavy-handed diktat and repressive actions against Tibetan schools and individuals and ultimately closure of emerging schools, which cater to the education needs of the general Tibetan populace especially in the impoverished rural Tibetan areas.

Ban on Sending Children to Tibetan Schools in India

In June 1994, Chinese authorities in Tibet put a ban on children of cadres and government employees going to schools run by Tibetan exile government in India. Subsequently number of Tibetan students studying in schools in India was reported to be withdrawn in the

following months. Many parents working for the Chinese Government went to India to bring back their children to Tibet¹³⁴.

Following the Third Work Forum held in June 1994, during annual meeting of the ‘TAR’ Communist Party Committee held on September 5, 1994 delegates discussed the decision taken in June and it reasserted that children of all party members, especially the leading party members *“will not be allowed to be sent abroad to study in schools run by the Dalai clique. Those cadres who do not correct the above mistakes immediately after this meeting should never be promoted. Those who are leaders and who are in important positions should be transferred to other places without hesitation.”*

*“As for those who have sent their children abroad to be educated in schools run by the Dalai clique, if the parents are citizens, peasants or herdsmen we should enhance our work on educating them, but if they are Party members in government departments or are cadres, then we should let them call back their children within a specified period. Those who do not call back their children should be dealt with seriously, and their children’s residence cards should be cancelled. Those graduates from schools of the Dalai clique who have come to work in Tibet should be controlled strictly; they should not be allowed to work in the Party or the government or in other important departments. Those who are already working in Tibet should be checked, and they should be dealt with in different ways according to the different cases.”*¹³⁵

When the ban was first introduced in mid 1994, 37 children in total returned to Tibet and most of them took up jobs as tour guides upon their return. But subsequent crackdown on the tour guides left 29 tour guides jobless and as they were all exile returnees¹³⁶. These instructions not only violated the article 26(3) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in which it state; *“Parents have prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children”* and also universal freedom to leave and enter one’s own country.

In 1998 among the known cases, three parents came to India to take back their children to Tibet as they were facing serious reprisals

including suspension from work unless complied with the order. This put Tibetan cadres and government employees at dilemma as many of them had sent their children to secure modern and traditional Tibetan education in schools administered by the exile Tibetan government. On the other hand, parents risked losing their job if they failed to comply with the authorities' decree. Parents were issued with travel document by the authorities when they found out that parents had not left and were ordered to pay 1,000 yuan as a deposit until they had returned with their children¹³⁷.

This exodus of children fleeing into India was perceived as deserting the idea of 'unity of motherland' and fostering nationalism. The ban was aimed to freeze ties between the exile Tibetan and Tibetans in Tibet thereby enabling the Chinese authorities to exercise total control over dissident activities in Tibet.

The Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy received numerous reports from Tibetans who recently fled into exile and tell startling stories of their parents having been fined after learning about their children attempt to escape to India or known to have escaped.

The 6th General Body meeting of the Discipline Commission of the "TAR" Party Committee held from 15 to 17 March 2000 clearly underlined that "*all party cadres and government employees are strictly instructed to observe the orders prohibiting their children to study in schools administered by the Dalai Lama.*"¹³⁸ Parents were threatened with punitive measures including sanctions, expulsion from jobs and the party, freeze in promotion and salary increase and forfeiting the residential permits of their children.

According to Tsamchoe Lhamo, who'd reached Tibetan Reception Centre, Katmandu after escaping into exile on 25 April 2004 stated,

"In June 2003, PSB officials of Shigatse Prefecture made an official announcement in 29 villages under Dingri County to prevent family from sending their children to study in Tibetan schools in India and instead make it compulsory for families to send their children in Chinese administered schools. The authorities also warned that those parents who failed to send their children to study in the Chinese schools

would even face the prison sentence.” She continued, “In Yuljong village, around 20 families were fined 1500 yuan each for their inability to send their children to Chinese school and severe punishment from sending their children to schools in India is very apparent from such threat.”¹³⁹

Another Tibetan, Passang’s family was fined 6000 Yuan for taking her three children to school in India¹⁴⁰.

Chinese Educational Performance

The Chinese claim unprecedented achievement in the field of education in Tibet since it’s ‘liberation’ in 1951. According to Chinese statistics, by 2000:

*There were 985 primary schools with 31, 1993 pupils; 111 secondary schools with 78,529 pupils; 100 Middle Schools with 71,710 pupils; and 4 Institute of Higher learning with 6,793 pupils*¹⁴¹.

UN Evaluation

However, in 2003, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Katarina Tomasevski, became the first human rights investigator to visit China in nearly a decade reported that the illiteracy rate in Tibet was as low as 39.5 percent¹⁴². She doubted whether this low figure was because the literacy test was done in Tibetan. But if this is indeed the case, it would mean that only 39.5 percent of Tibetans in Tibet did not know how to read and write Tibetan, their mother tongue. There have been numerous streams of statistical figures from Chinese authorities that illustrate improvements in education in “TAR” and other Tibetan regions outside of “TAR” however, the Special Rapporteur in her report after tour to Beijing revealed the other side of the coin and it says in her report;

Figures are, as is well known, interpretations rather than facts...The thirst for documenting success, with deflection of criticism the reverse side of the coin, requires figures...Figures are apparently published as reported, without independent verification.¹⁴³

She gave a scathing report on the country’s education policies, blasting the government’s restriction and ban on religious schooling and a system of arbitrary school fees that forces many families into debt.

She was even critical of the role of ‘minority’ education, stating that, *“Education imposed upon minorities, enforcing their children’s obligation to receive compulsory education, violates human rights when it denies their religious or linguistic identity.”*

UNDP Index

Within China, Tibet’s educational system is the worst of all present day provinces. According to China Human Development Report 2002 released by the United Nation’s Development Program, the educational index for Tibet ranks last against China’s other 31 provinces. The gross enrollment rate and adult literacy rate for Tibet are also the lowest in comparison with other provinces of China.

Universities in China require students to take a foreign language paper in the entrance examination for further studies and, although the marks are not counted in the total assessment, the paper has a bearing on the success of the candidate; to paraphrase, that Tibetan students are blocked from many higher education courses, and particularly science and foreign language courses¹⁴⁴.

The dislocation between primary and secondary education in Tibet lies at the center of debate over Tibetan-medium education. Most Tibetan students study entirely in their mother tongue till the end of their primary school. However, all secondary education for Tibetans in the ‘TAR’ are taught in Chinese. This division in the languages of primary and secondary school shows the promotion of gap and division on the basis of language between Tibetans and Chinese. Tibetan children in order to climb the ladder of education step towards secondary education and in job market must acquire knowledge of Chinese that is not used in their home environment.

The primary political goal behind the minority education was to make the unity of the motherland the leading ideology in education. Anything that deem to challenge this unity and stability comes under threat. Tibetan language is increasingly associated with Tibetan nationalism and ‘splittism’, with the result that efforts to develop its use in society and education are undermined.

The standard of school facilities particularly in the rural areas with little or no Chinese population is very poor. The pathetic state of school facilities with substandard construction made from cheap construction materials couldn't withstood the harsh weather condition, which led to the dilapidated school building in perilous state. According to statistic compiled by the Sports and Education Department, "in the whole of Chamdo Prefecture, 20% of school buildings are in a perilous state,"¹⁴⁵ and at the end it is the Tibetans who are paying the price of poverty.

According to information on "Karze Reform and Development" website in *Karze Prefecture* in Sichuan Province on the evaluation of ninth five-year education plan for Karze Prefecture between 1996-2000, illiteracy rate among the young people is 30.1% in Karze Prefecture. One third of the counties do not have universal elementary education. Only 13% of the towns have universal nine years compulsory education. Almost 30% and 35% children do not receive elementary education and middle school education. Only 2.49% of the whole population has ever received middle school education. And only 0.84% have ever received higher education.¹⁴⁶

Such rampant illiteracy rate among the youth clearly highlight the lack of universal elementary education which Chinese constitution and Law on Regional Autonomy has guaranteed to provide in China. The failure to implement the education policy of the State correctly and in a rightful manner has cost the loss of precious human resource in this prefecture. Only 13% of the towns receiving universal nine-year compulsory education clearly demonstrates true picture of the state of education in the rural areas that has been neglected for very long period. Such lack of basic education among the population further aggravates the low family annual income. The website further give the level of income of peasants and herdsmen in the region, The annual income of peasant and herdsmen reduced from 942 Yuan in 1998 to 721 Yuan in 1999.¹⁴⁷ Such comparative studies can give a basic idea that in many cases the level of income is indirectly proportionate to the literacy rate. Moreover, the lack of qualified teachers is another factor responsible for low enrolment and literacy rate in the region. One third of the teachers do not have the qualified educational background, for middle school. For high school teachers only 39.4% meet the required qualification.¹⁴⁸

Although there has been various erratic attempts made by the Chinese authorities towards improving minorities education, the education level of the minority nationalities are much lower than the majority Han Chinese. In the “TAR”, the educational levels are lower than in any region in China.

The low educational levels in the “TAR” are due to a combination of many factors such as historical, political, geographical and economic factors. Historically, in pre-invasion period, the monastic education was prevalent and was one of the major learning centers in Tibet. When the Communist Chinese came into power, monasteries and other religious centres were seen as one of the greatest stumbling blocks for its development and modernization. During the Cultural Revolution these centers of learning came under attack and suffered the brunt of the communist regime. These learning centers were severely scrutinized and controlled after 1987 peaceful demonstration led by monks of Drepung Monastery in Lhasa.

Tibetan Autonomous Region “TAR” with very thinly populated in proportion to its vast territory covered by mountainous ranges remained one of the most inaccessible region of China. Such factor amounts to lack of proper education in Tibet where cost of education remains practically unfeasible and as such education underdeveloped in the region. But economic factor remains one of the most significant reasons for the low levels of education in the “TAR”. The economy of the “TAR” is one of the poorest and least developed among other four autonomous regions of China and investment in education by the government has been very low over past decades.

Since the founding of the PRC, considerable advances and effort has been made with the enrolment rate in the primary education, however, China still ranks very low in the enrolment rate especially in the remote regions of “TAR”. The lack of education facilities and investment not viable with government education policy has led to huge drop-out rates and low enrolment rate among the minorities. Within China, Tibet’s educational system is the worst of all present day provinces: According to China Human Development Report 2002 released by the United Nations Development Program, *the educational index for Tibet ranks last against China’s 31 other autonomous prefectures. The gross enrolment rate and adult literacy rate for Tibet are also the lowest in comparison with other prefectures and provinces of China.*¹⁴⁹

Low Funding Allocation

In 1992, according to statistics presented in UNESCO's World Education Indicators, of the 153 countries tabulated, China ranked 145th, allocating a meager 2 percent of its national income to education. China, unlike most countries around the world, has chosen not to enshrine in law the percentage of GDP that should be spent on education¹⁵⁰.

With respect to education, the CRC in 1996 noted that school attendance in minority areas, including the "TAR", is lagging behind, that the quality of education is inferior and that insufficient efforts have been made to develop a bilingual education system which would include adequate teaching in Chinese. These shortcomings may disadvantage Tibetan and other minority pupils applying to secondary and higher level schools.¹⁵¹

China conceded this fact in a prior report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in which it stated that almost one-third of the children in the "TAR" receive no education at all: the figure for China as a whole is only one and a half percent. As a result the gap between Tibetans and Chinese literacy widens. About sixty percent of Tibetans in the "TAR" are illiterate in comparison with only nine percent of Chinese adults.¹⁵²

Due to dwindling government subsidies after 1984 economic policies, minority educational institutions began to enrol more and more non-Tibetan students, mostly Han Chinese students to meet their expenses. Han students account for half or more of the enrolment in most minority colleges now.¹⁵³

In addition, most rural Tibetans could not afford the expense of sending their children to school. That was acknowledged by the chairman of the "TAR" government, Gyaltzen Norbu on June 4, 1994; *"...one third of children in the "TAR" cannot afford to go to school."*¹⁵⁴

In the 1980s, the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Yaobang, led a working group to the "TAR" during the First Tibet Work Forum held in Beijing. Hu Yaobang stated that, Tibet's special characteristics should be taken into consideration, and that *'the socialist orientation is upheld, vigorous efforts be made to revive Tibetan culture, education and science'*.

Chapter 11

THE FATE OF TIBETAN LANGUAGE IN MODERN TIBET

The Law of Ethnic Regional Autonomy and China's Compulsory Education Law provide that schools and classes enrolling mainly students of ethnic minorities may use the oral and written language of the ethnic groups in teaching and use the oral and written language commonly used nationwide as the subordinating method of teaching¹⁵⁵.

It might sound simple to say that students in Tibet should study Tibetan for the purposes of cultural preservation and national identity. In fact ethnic minorities of China have the right to study their ethnic language under the Chinese constitutional law, Law of Ethnic Regional Autonomy and China's Compulsory Education Law. However, Chinese policy fosters a society of economic, social and linguistic domination in which the cultural pursuits of minority populations are made almost entirely unfeasible and beyond the reach of many. Tibetan students are faced with dilemma of choice whether to pursue Tibetan or Chinese, on the one hand of maintaining Tibetan-ness intact or gives way to more practical considerations that are often decided by the existing modern economic situation in China.

Tibetan was declared the official language of the 'TAR' in 1988, but it is a distinction made only on paper¹⁵⁶. The existing real working language in Tibet is Chinese, for government, for business, and for day-to-day activities. Tibetan language has gradually and essentially lost practical value in Tibet itself, especially in the urban areas which are dominating by Han Chinese majority although in the small rural towns and among nomadic group, Tibetan language still continue to hold some place.

In many urban areas, Tibetan parents have no choice but to send their children to Chinese schools. A parent observes: "*After they*

*graduate from school they don't get any work. If they study Tibetan they cannot survive in society. So I thought, what is the use of studying Tibetan?"*¹⁵⁷ These parents maintain that college entrance exams require efficiency in Chinese and English, not Tibetan. In order to find a job in the government-controlled and Chinese dominated job market, student should study and acquire a proficiency in Chinese language as it is most widely used language in the new economy.

“At Lhasa first Secondary School, one half to two thirds of the students in Chinese classes are native Tibetans. The parents see no advantage in them becoming literate in their native tongue. It is only a burden, many say, to study both Tibetan and Chinese, and university entrance exams require Chinese and English, not Tibetan. Those who may choose the Tibetan track may begin to study English in senior high, if at all, while those on the Chinese track begin English at the junior high level. Since English is required in college entrance exams and Tibetan track students lose out on English studies, those who seek competency in their own language and chance for higher education at the same time face an uphill struggle.”¹⁵⁸ Due to existing prejudice in the government-control job market and Chinese being the predominant language, it has adapted to incorporate modern vocabulary that does not exist in Tibetan language which is useful in many modern professions. This makes Tibetan unsuitable for many modern professions¹⁵⁹.

Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok, author of *Thunderous Secrets to the People of the Snowland*¹⁶⁰ wrote,

“Actually, the Tibetan language has no value in present-day Tibet. For instance, if a letter was mailed with an address written in Tibetan, it wouldn't reach its destination even within Tibet, let alone outside. In the case of travels, no matter how literate a person is in Tibetan, he would not be able to know the bus timing or read the seat number on his ticket. Even if one has to look for a hospital or a shop in the county headquarters or a city, the knowledge of Tibetan is useless. A person who knows only Tibetan will find it difficult even to buy daily necessities. If our language is useless in our own country, where else will it have any use? If the situation remains like this for long, the Tibetan language will become extinct one day...Rare in Tibet are schools where one can study Tibetan language and culture.”...Moreover,

parents have developed the habit of not sending their children to school. This is because the primary school teaches Chinese rather than Tibetan. Even if the students learn Chinese and graduate from the middle school, there is no employment scope in Tibet. They end up herding cattle and working in fields. There is, of course, a slight opportunity for learning Tibetan. But the parents know that Tibetan language is useless in day-to-day life. Therefore, they have no motivation to send children to school¹⁶¹.

“...In the cities and county headquarters there are serious cases of people being unable to speak Tibetan, although both their parents are Tibetans. Many of them have lost their Tibetan characteristics. Moreover, the Tibetan officials cannot speak pure Tibetan. One-fifth or two-thirds of the words they use are Chinese. That’s why common Tibetans can’t understand their speech.”¹⁶²

In a report published in the early 1990s, Dherong Tsering Thondup wrote that out of the 6,044 Tibetan party members and officials in the nine districts forming “Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture”, only 991 could speak Tibetan. This represents 16.5 per cent of the total number of Tibetan government officials. Dherong cited three principal reasons for this: The first, he said, is the Chinese government’s chauvinistic policy, which accelerates the process of sinicization; the second is the notion of Tibetan being a worthless language in today’s society; and the third; the inferiority complex suffered by Tibetans, which hampers their initiatives to protect their own language. Based on the increased marginalization that has occurred since that study was published, one can imagine what those numbers would look like if released today.¹⁶³

Further elucidating on China’s chauvinistic policy, Dherong said that the socialist era calls for joint efforts to promote all nationalities, and not wipe out any particular nationality. The Chinese constitution guarantees each nationality freedom to manage its own education, science, culture, health and hygiene, and the right to protect the nationality’s cultural heritage. However, these rights guaranteed and enshrined had never been fully implemented for Tibetans.

“The failure to promote the significance and use of the nationality language, in effect, represents a slight on the nationality. If Chinese is

used as the lingua franca to the neglect of the nationality language, if all are sinicized through the policy of nationality chauvinism, and if the nationalities are pushed to...assimilate into one another for the purpose of helping to bridge economic and cultural disparities, it is totally against the provisions of the constitution regarding the freedom to use and promote one's language.”

A similar survey of a Tibetan school in Lhasa Municipality revealed that among twenty teachers, ten of whom were Tibetan, only three were qualified to teach in Tibetan, and two of these spoke such poor Tibetan that the students could not understand them.¹⁶⁴

China's state program encourage massive population migration into the TAR as a result of state-promoted economic incentives which is one of the most difficult obstacles Tibetans face today in the effort to preserve the Tibetan language. It is part of a policy of demographic aggression that will marginalize already thin minority population of Tibetans economically and linguistically by the sheer numbers of Chinese influx into Tibetan areas.

This kind of malevolent Chinese policy has gradually eroded the practical value of Tibetan in modern Tibetan society and younger generation see no incentives to pursue studies in Tibetan. In fact it simply adds unnecessary burden on the shoulders of young Tibetan students who already find it difficult being academically successful and translating that success into a lucrative job in Chinese dominated market. Students in secondary education and higher education are expected to be skilled in both English and Chinese as Tibetan language ceased to be useful in higher education. This put enormous burden on the Tibetan students who grow up speaking Tibetan at home, linguistic obstacles faced by Tibetan students give Han Chinese settler children advantage in enrolment and enabling them to enter further education and relegates Tibetan to an academically tertiary status with virtually no benefit.

The diminishing importance and use of the Tibetan language on its home soil is a matter of grave concern for many Tibetan scholars, some of them have openly criticized and voiced their protest to the authorities. Professor Dungkar Lobsang Trinley, one of the leading

cultural and intellectual figures of modern Tibet and recognized by the Chinese authorities as a “national treasure”, once said: *“In spite of Tibetan being declared the first language to be used in all government offices and meetings, and in official correspondence, Chinese has been used everywhere as the working language”*. Such alarming situation, he argued, resulted in native inhabitants losing control over their own destiny. Professor Dungkar added that, *“All hope in our future, all other developments, cultural identity, and protection of our heritage depends on this (Tibetan language). Without educated people in all fields, able to express themselves in their own language, Tibetans are in danger of being assimilated. We have reached this point.”*¹⁶⁵

In May 1994, members of the “TAR” Political Consultative Committee complained against the drastic cut in the budget for Tibet University, Lhasa, and the mass transfer of staff members from educational institutions to other departments.¹⁶⁶

Unsurprisingly, these critical observations by Tibetan scholars went without due consideration. Instead, a number of backward steps were taken in 1996 in line with the recommendation of the Third Forum on Tibet. The budget for Tibetan academic and literary publications was drastically cut back. The “TAR” Guiding Committee was disbanded and its senior members transferred to the Regional Translation Bureau. Pilot projects for extending Tibetan medium education to secondary schools, along with four experimental classes, met the similar fate. At the same time, Tibetan language courses at Tibet University, Lhasa were discontinued and university staff were ordered to rewrite textbooks in order to remove their religious content.

The situation deteriorated further in 1997 when the “TAR” Deputy Party Secretary Tenzin disclosed a decision to make Chinese mandatory for Tibetan students right from primary schools. In his meeting with US Ambassador to China Mr. James Sasser, Tenzin said that the 1987 policy was “impracticable” and “not in conformity with the reality of Tibet” and that “the decision to allow grade one to three boys and girls to be taught only in the Tibetan language will do no good to the children’s growth. “TAR” Deputy Party Secretary Raidi stated that an ethnic nationality which studies and uses only its own spoken and written language definitely is an insular ethnic nationality

which will have no future or hope.¹⁶⁷ Within a decade, the 1987 legislation had been revoked.

The Chinese authorities' policy to undermine Tibetan language and culture is carried out in all regions of Tibet- not only in the "TAR". This is clearly reflected in the recent statement by Zhou Yong-kang, the Communist Party Secretary for Sichuan province(which incorporates large chunk of Eastern Tibet). At a meeting of China's National People's Congress in March 2000, Zhou announced that the teaching of Tibetan in schools was "a drain on government resources."¹⁶⁸

It is clear that there has been a systematic effort in Tibet to wipe out Tibetan cultural and national identity through the education system in the name of development. Tibetans are gradually assimilated into the main stream Chinese culture. There has been steady decline in the status of the Tibetan language, a language that has been part of Tibetan culture for over 1,300 year's being wiped out in five decades after its occupation by the Chinese forces. China instead must make a genuine effort to revive the status of the Tibetan language is helping to marginalize and eliminate it through politically hidden stroke that run inconsistent with their own policy and violates the basic human rights of the Tibetan people.

High Drop Out Rate in Tibetan Students

High school drop out is a serious concern especially in the rural areas of the "TAR". According to the book entitled "*Development and Change in Rural Tibet: Problems and Adaptation*"¹⁶⁹ It said; "19.4 percent of children aged seven to 15 had never been to school(69.4 percent of these were females); only 17.3 percent of individuals had ever gone to school had completed primary school (six years). Furthermore, only 7.1 percent had gone beyond primary school.

In some areas there may be low dropout rates, that is because many children in these rural areas are unable to attend school, and many of those for whom schools are available may receive one to three years' education at the most only as such low dropout rates in these regions cannot be concluded as any indication of educational success.

Although the authorities of the “TAR” have plans to make the nine years compulsory education universal in order to eliminate illiteracy basically among the young and middle-aged over the next decade¹⁷⁰, However, due to low-income level of families and existing widespread poverty, the fees of compulsory education, which needs to be paid by the parents remains a distant mirage for many poor families. High school drop out rates and low enrolment go hand in hand in Tibetan rural areas are also due to factor such as severe under funding of state education in Tibet, particularly in rural areas and lack of government will. The universal elementary education is compulsory but not free in “TAR”.

With hardly any intensives, ironically some parent see more advantage by not sending their children to school. According to TCHRD’s interview with a former village primary teacher in Dragyab County in Chamdo Prefecture “TAP”, “Most of the school children cannot go to school. The biggest problem is that there are families who do not have good financial resources. The children of these families have to do a lot of work, they have no time to study much.”

Tibetan students drop out of school at a younger average age and at a much higher rate than Chinese students. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), obligates states to “*take measures to encourage regular attendance and the reduction of drop-out rates.*” The measures that Chinese has taken such as providing counseling and vocational education, qualified teachers have been much less for Tibetan students as compared for Chinese students.

Education and Unemployment

The structural imbalance in the education system contributes to serious unemployment among Tibetans. Tibetans have greater difficulty in getting a job in state work units where, despite official pronouncements, the working language is still Chinese. In addition there is a serious illiteracy problem in the “TAR”. More than one third of Tibetan population in the rural areas has no access to education. Tibetan language in Tibet itself has become a moribund language where new generations especially in the urban and bigger towns were overexposed to Chinese culture and language that they

embrace the alien culture in all walks of their life as a result of creeping cultural invasion in urban areas.

The 1982 census showed that of the Tibetan population of 3.2 million, 78.3% were illiterate or semi-literate. The average percentage of population in China who are illiterate or semi-literate was 15-88%¹⁷¹ “In year 2003, in the whole “TAR”, 8829 people were employed or re-employed. Among them were 4998, who were laid off previously, were re-employed. The local government want to provide 10,000 new jobs and to control the unemployment rates at around 4.5%”¹⁷² Such promise also imply that unemployment rate was more than 4.5% at that time.

Knowledge of Chinese language does not always guarantee job in the market dominated by Chinese migrants, although it help individual to penetrate and absorb the economic benefits and to get government job in the “TAR”.

*“[M]any human rights can only be accessed through education, particularly rights associated with employment and social security. Without education, people are impeded from access to employment. Lower educational accomplishment routinely prejudices their career advancement. Lower salaries negatively affect their old-age security.”*¹⁷³

Discrimination in education affects students’ abilities to get rewarding and well-paying jobs. Unemployment is greater among Tibetan than it is among Chinese.

Chapter 12

TIBETAN CHILDREN RISKING LIFE TO GET ENROLL IN EXILE SCHOOLS

The situation of Tibetan children's education in Tibet is very bleak. Lack of access to proper health and education; indoctrination through Chinese medium of instruction and content of the curriculum including Chinese history, politics and culture, various forms of discrimination suffered by native Tibetan children such as having to study in inferior schools with least required infrastructure or having to pay higher fees, or no access to schools- are few instances. It all comes down to a cruel choice for the children or either giving up the right to education or abandoning their Tibetan identity. Therefore, the hope of receiving proper Tibetan education at schools in exile is one of the primary reasons of Tibetan refugees, even minor children risking their lives by crossing treacherous Himalayas every year. This statement underline the quality of education offered to them by the Chinese government and its belief that equates modernization with complete sinicization of the Tibet with tool of education which quell the cultural differences with dominance doctrine of Chinese supremacy. Due to prevailing lack of education opportunity in Tibet, many parents risk everything to have their children and including tiny toddlers brought to India with unflinching hope to receive a good education and will be brought up with their Tibetan culture and tradition intact.

In "TAR" Tibetan students were not taught the Tibetan history instead it is expressed as a 'backward' and 'barbaric' land 'liberated' by China, and making them feel ashamed of both their background and identity. Chinese authorities attempted to dissociate Tibetan culture from the younger generation by demeaning the rich and old Tibetan culture. Whereas it has failed to suppress it among the older generation-by education means such as campaigns mounted to denounce the Dalai Lama in the education curricula and increasingly

turning the education into nationalistic 'indoctrination' of the Tibetan youth. Under such circumstances learning in the schools has become a constant process of erasing and rewriting than meeting the academic needs of the children.

Children under the age of 18 constitute majority of the Tibetan seeking asylum in India every year. In 2002, 715 children under the age of eighteen- mostly in the age group of seven to thirteen- arrived at the Tibetan Reception Centre in Dharamsala, North India¹⁷⁴. Since the early 1980s well over 7,000 children have risked everything to journey across the Himalayas in the hope that they will receive education in exile what they have been denied way back home: health, education and a sense of security and well being. In the past eight months this year, 2416 new refugees have reached Tibetan Reception Centre, Dharamsala. Out of which children under the age of thirteen constitute 20.98% while youth between the age of 14-25 constitute 40.23 %. Therefore, young Tibetan refugees made 61.21% of the total number of new escapees into India in eight months. In the month of September, 238 new Tibetan refugees arrived in Dharamsala. And 81.93% of which comprise of youth below the age of 25. The total number of Tibetan refugees who arrived at Tibetan reception centre from 1991 till June 2004 was 43,634, of which 59.74% constitutes youth below the age of 25. Certainly, not so many children and youth would undertake such a high risk for the sake of an education if the facilities and opportunities existed in Tibet.

There are so many instances of death, losing limbs by frostbite, drowned while trying to cross swift rivers, losing eyesight and immense psychological and emotional trauma on children for parting with their parents as they risk their life by crossing the treacherous and sometimes fatal journey across the Himalayas. The primary hope to undertake such risky journey is to get enrolled in exile schools and receive broad-based modern education. Most are sent by their parents by paying guides and with trusted relatives or even strangers to accompany. The sheer lack of viable education, and discrimination is the driving force behind Tibetan parents making the choice to send their children to schools in India.

Tibetan Children Risking Life to Get Enroll in Exile Schools

Those minors braving the treacherous journey into exile on reaching India receive free and high quality modern education in a sprawling network of schools set up in exile by the Tibetan government in India. Such success stories of the refugee community in providing the modern education not only awe the local and international supporters but also became a major source of inspiration. Claude Arpi wrote that, “*Whoever has gone to Dharamsala will acknowledge that the education of the refugee children is a success story.*”¹⁷⁵ Therefore, risking lives and sacrifices made by parents and their children in undertaking such a perilous journey speaks volumes about the quality of education offered to them by the Chinese government. Sadly, if these students decide to go back to their homeland after completing their education, they will face difficulties overcoming prejudices from Chinese employers or institutions and become virtual pariah in their own homeland.

In the past most refugees were monks seeking freedom of religious practice and children seeking a Tibetan language education.¹⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

The resumption of pro-independence demonstration in 1987 since China's occupation of Tibet, has had China increasingly associating Tibetan culture and language with Tibetan nationalism and 'splittism' activities. Beijing government fears political unrest in Tibet. To quell out potential threat and unrest, education has been used as the preferred channel for inculcating loyalty to the State. Therefore, the primary political role of minority education was to reassert and make the unity of the motherland the leading ideology in education, to sinicize the Tibetan population and indoctrinate them with communist ideologies; anything that was deemed to subvert came under threat. This significantly narrowed the curriculum for Tibetan children, and resulted in an erosion of time for academic study. Education in Tibet no doubt underwent a sea change since China occupied Tibet in 1949 in its objective, direction, means, practice etc. However, it remains a matter of question if that change happened for better or worse and for whom. Beijing has exercised its might against the Tibetans in every aspects of their life.

Tibetan language despite illustrious provisions in the Chinese law and government directives on the use of 'minority' language, the implementation of the use of Tibetan language has been unsuccessful. Tibetan language has been gobbling under negative State policies on education and limping towards extinction as Chinese medium is taking precedence over Tibetan in all aspects of mass communications in Tibet. It is quiet clear that the deliberate attempts from outside alien culture is slowly but gradually submerging the rich and unique cultural heritage and language of native Tibetans in their home soil.

Beijing's minority education policy has created enormous unemployment among Tibetans. The new economic development model Beijing has initiated in Tibet demand proficiency in Chinese language if Tibetans have to adapt in pace with development. And those who insist on cultural and linguistic preservation come under close scrutiny and face consequences of being clout with accusation of having separatist sentiment and inciting people against government.

Conclusion

Although significant advances were made in the development of distinctive Tibetan education system yet the lack of funding brought about by economic reforms in the 1980s as with the government turning from socialism and central planning to embrace a free market economy, led to the decline in infrastructure facilities and enrolment of students.

China's rapid economy boom in the 90's drew increasing numbers of Han Chinese into the region with their children who had to be accommodated into the main stream education system. Simultaneous growth of strong pro-independence sentiments in the region brought about entry of more conservative political influence in the echelon of power and gradually their commitment to provide an education system specifically for minority- the Tibetans was eroded and laced strongly with political ideologies. The patriotic education took the roost in the education system especially in monasteries and nunneries in the "TAR" after various demonstrations spearheaded by monks and nuns.

The Law of the PRCs on Regional Autonomy in 1984 guaranteed right of minorities nationalities to conduct their affairs in their own language, but it existed only on paper. Chinese language became the pre-requisite for Tibetan students to get admitted in higher schools. And seats meant for Tibetans in institution of higher education are seized by migrated Han Chinese who gets their identity and housing registration changed.¹⁷⁷ False identity and housing registration were issued to the mainland Han Chinese students on bribe and the officials played significant role in obtaining these bogus identities.

In 90s, the development of the "TAR" economy had begun to take precedence over the longer term goal of training Tibetans to enable them to play role in economic development. Moreover, the increasing Han Chinese population has had to be accommodated within the education system. As their number grew their educational needs and priorities carried even more weight. As a result, additional pressure was mounted on the educational system. Such practices had particular implications for the education of Tibetans in secondary schools where Chinese is the medium of instruction. This linguistic barrier faced by native Tibetans gave Han Chinese an advantage in enrolment and further disadvantaged the education of Tibetans.

From 1990, the program of sending Tibetan students to schools in mainland China was initiated to include the children of Han Chinese residents in the TAR.¹⁷⁸ These children were thoroughly brainwashed with serving cocktail of socialist and communist ideologies. On their return to “TAR”, they will act as community leaders for China and aid further consolidation of China’s grip over Tibet and for tighter communist control over religion, culture and language of Tibetans. The disparity in the urban-rural education is widening with urban areas - overcrowded with Han Chinese migrants receive better facilities than rural areas inhabited by Tibetans. Han Chinese children were effectively given greater educational opportunities than Tibetan children. The extremely low enrolment rate among Tibetan children in the secondary school due to change in medium of instruction and declining proportion of Tibetans in higher education will result in the less participation of native Tibetan in the administrative and skilled technical jobs that are taken over by resident Han Chinese.

Discrimination in education still exists in schools in the “TAR” in terms of funding, admission, medium of instruction and curriculum etc. These were some of the main factors for Tibetan parents sending their children even minors by risking their lives to get admitted in schools established by the exile Tibetan government.

China’s development of infrastructure in building huge dam and railway track and others cannot be complete with the investment in the human resources development in Tibet, without which there cannot be a sustainable development in the long run. Until government improve the education in Tibet, it cannot guarantee the basic social and economic human rights of its people. The lives of Tibetan people have not improved in comparison to Chinese counterparts. As Hu Yaobang, the General Secretary of the CCP Central Committee, candidly told a gathering of 5,000 cadres in Lhasa in May 1980 after the First Work Forum on the TAR convened, that, “*We feel that our Party has let the Tibetan people down. We feel very bad! ... We have worked for nearly thirty years, but the life of the Tibetan people has not been notably improved. Are we not to blame.*”¹⁷⁹ This is true even today as Chinese rule for more than past four decades has let the Tibetan people down in almost every aspects of their lives with not even guaranteeing the right to education.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

Though visible improvements have been made in the field of education in Tibet, at least in the number of student enrolment and few new infrastructures, yet China still fail to meet International obligations regarding the rights of the Children to receive an adequate education. TCHRD calls upon the Chinese government to respect the Tibetan people's fundamental right to control the content of the curriculum and medium of instruction in their children's education as stipulated by Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which China ratified on 2 March 1992.

TCHRD demands an end to the "Patriotic Education" Campaign in primary, secondary schools and even in the monastic schools, for education requires the freedom to study, think, and learn without the threat of force for straying from Communist ideology. Education of children should be directed at developing his or her personal capacities and not to fuel support for a particular ideology or political agenda. The education of Tibetan children should not be used to forcibly propagate Chinese communist thought. Article 14 of the CRC insists that "*States parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion.*"

TCHRD laments the current educational opportunities in Tibet, in particular the lack of rural education. Build more schools to ensure that education is available to children in remote areas of Tibet. Furthermore, it regrets the numerous obstacles to education.

TCHRD encourages the provision of subsidies for Tibetan children to attend school and stop discrimination of Tibetan school children and discriminatory practices such as differentiation between Tibetan and Chinese school children with regard to teaching attention, academic grading, non-educational activities and should be eradicated immediately.

TCHRD call for all education in the primary and secondary schools in Tibetan language. Tibetans should be entitled to sit in entrance examinations in their mother tongue. By not allowing the

use of Tibetan Language, Chinese authorities discriminate against Tibetan students because their command of the Chinese language is clearly inferior to that of the Chinese students. Tibetan children will only have the chance to receive a proper education and to compete with their Chinese peers if they are taught in their native Tibetan language.

TCHRD is deeply disturbed by the college admission policies of the “TAR”. The “TAR” Board of Education ought to immediately cease the policy of March 2003, which requires political, ideological, and social history exam before college subsidies become available to a university candidate. It should ensure non-discriminatory entrance examination. Stop targeting those private and monastic schools which caters to the needs of local Tibetan education needs as these schools tend to give greater attention to the cultural rights of Tibetan children than schools administered by Chinese authorities.

TCHRD condemns the conscious and rapid importation of Chinese teachers to Tibet. The policy is clearly designed to displace Tibetan teachers and make them obsolete among their own people, language, and culture. Tibetan teachers are more likely to have a better understanding of the Tibetan children’s cultural background and are able to teach the Tibetan children in their mother tongue. Allow Tibetan children to speak their language, eat their food, dress in their clothes and celebrate their national and religious holidays. Beijing’s 2001-2005 Five-Year Plan must be revised in order to be in compliance with international laws against cultural genocide and racial discrimination.

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