

*SPECIAL REPORT*

ON

THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

IN TIBET

Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy



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# I. INTRODUCTION

The educational system of Tibet differs greatly from what is generally considered an “education” by the international community. In 1996, the United Nations’ Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) published their widely acclaimed report, “Learning: The Treasure Within” (“The Delors Report”).<sup>1</sup> The Delors Report is recognized as “the most important policy report on lifelong learning since the 1972 Faure Report” because of its major influence on education policy on a global scale, not only on UNESCO member countries but “also on some leading international agencies such as the EU.” The Delors Report’s most significant contribution to education policy was its introduction of the “four pillars of learning.”<sup>2</sup>

The “four pillars of learning” state that education should incorporate the following objectives:

- *“Learning to know, by combining a sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth on a small number of subjects. This also means learning to learn, so as to benefit from the opportunities education provides throughout life.*
- *Learning to do, in order to acquire not only an occupational skill but also, more broadly, the competence to deal with many situations and work in teams. It also means learning to do in the context of young peoples’ various social and work experiences*

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1 Sobhi Tawil, Marie Cougoux, “Revisiting *Learning: The Treasure Within*, Assessing the Influence of the 1996 Delors Report,” January 4, 2013, UNESCO Education Research and Foresight, Pg. 5. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002200/220050E.pdf>. Last accessed on October 3, 2014.

2 Id.

*which may be informal, as a result of the local or national context, or formal, involving courses, alternating study and work.*

- *Learning to live together, by developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence - carrying out joint projects and learning to manage conflicts - in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace.*
- *Learning to be, so as better to develop one's personality and be able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgement and personal responsibility. In that connection, education must not disregard any aspect of a person's potential: memory, reasoning, aesthetic sense, physical capacities and communication skills.”<sup>3</sup>*

The People's Republic of China's (PRC) current education policy does not follow this international framework. Instead the PRC's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) aims to reorient its education towards prioritizing “moral education”, a euphemism for “patriotic education”.<sup>4</sup> It states that the primary goal of “moral education, should be promoted to fortify students' faith and confidence in the Party's leadership and the socialist system.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, this plan transforms schools in both Tibet and the PRC into propaganda stations of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and less akin to the centers for individual and co-operative learning that would result from implementing the four pillars of learning.

This report will ultimately show that the problem facing the education system in Tibet<sup>6</sup> is two-fold. First, the Tibetan education

3 Jacques Delors and others, “Learning: The Treasure Within,” 1996, UNESCO, Ch. 4. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001095/109590eo.pdf>. Last accessed on October, 3, 2014.

4 Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), s4, para 4. (2010), Available at [https://www.aei.gov.au/news/newsarchive/2010/documents/china\\_education\\_reform\\_pdf.pdf](https://www.aei.gov.au/news/newsarchive/2010/documents/china_education_reform_pdf.pdf)

5 Ibid., para 2.

6 For purposes of this report, “Tibet” refers to the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) as well as all Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures (TAPs) in the provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan.

system is fraught with many real and tangible problems that will be difficult to solve. Second, although the PRC claims to value education in Tibet and recognizes the challenges it faces, the policies and strategies implemented by the Chinese government show that it is either too inflexible or simply unwilling to remedy these problems.

Accordingly, this report shall focus on many issues surrounding the quality of education provided in Tibet and address instances where the PRC is not fulfilling its obligations under both international and national legislation.

Particularly in “non-dominant linguistic and cultural groups,” a high quality education requires involvement and input from local stakeholders such as school governing bodies, principals and teachers so that educational institutions are accountable to parents, students and the local community.<sup>7</sup> The participation of local stakeholders in deciding the criteria for educational quality is vital given their intimate “knowledge and understanding of local values, culture and traditions that are an essential feature of sustainable development”.<sup>8</sup> According to UNESCO, educational quality requires the content be relevant to the local community because “imported and inherited curricula have often been judged insufficiently insensitive to the local context and to learners’ socio-cultural circumstances.”<sup>9</sup>

Chapter II begins by exploring the political and historical factors that led to the formation of Tibet’s current education system and its role as a tool for spreading anti-religious, pro-CCP ideology while at the same time manipulating and mis-portraying Tibetan history and culture. This chapter also demonstrates how the implementation of

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7 Stephen A. BAHRY, “What Constitutes Quality in Minority Education? A Multiple Embedded Case Study of Stakeholder Perspectives on Minority Linguistic and Cultural Content in School-Based Curriculum in Sunan Yughur Autonomous County, Gansu”, 2012, *Frontiers of Education in China*, 7(3): 376-16, DOI 10.3868/S110-001-012-0021-5

8 Ibid.

9 UNESCO (2004). EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005. Education for all: The quality imperative. Paris, France: UNESCO.

an education system modeled after that of mainland China fails to account for the specific needs of the Tibetan people and violates some of their human rights as set forth in various multi-lateral international treaties and in the PRC's own legislation.

Chapter III shifts focus to the specific issue of Mandarin being used as the primary language of instruction in Tibet. This chapter draws attention to the alarming issues facing Tibetan students in an education system supported by policies aimed at assimilation of minorities instead of the students' individual needs. This chapter suggests the adoption of a *true* bilingual education system ("mother-tongue based bilingual education") is much more inclusive, takes into account Tibetan students' educational needs, and does not violate their universal human right to the develop their native language.

Chapter IV explores the difficulties of rural education in Tibet. Tibetan students living in rural Tibet have limited access to high quality education for a few different reasons. First of all, the Chinese government has insisted on implementing an urban education model for Tibet, a highly impractical move since Tibet is one of the most sparsely populated areas in the world. Furthermore, this urban education model focuses on a highly centralized school system which is extremely problematic for Tibetans because it is irreconcilable with their nomadic lifestyle. Chapter IV then raises awareness about the problem of attracting and hiring qualified teachers in Tibet and the plight of its substitute teachers. These difficulties are not insurmountable and this chapter proposes a solution: the PRC can implement a mobile-learning system that utilizes new technology at a relatively low cost and will simultaneously increase the accessibility of education in Tibet. Finally, Chapter IV turns its focus to the issue of improving the problematic vocational education and training system in Tibet in order to increase overall regional productivity as well as provide Tibetan students with a more diverse skillset to enter the workforce with.



Chapter V paints a bleak picture of the Tibetan education system's landscape after analyzing current educational trends in Tibet using the most accurate of available data. Chapter VI concludes this report with the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights & Democracy's (TCHRD) recommendations for the Chinese government. If implemented, these recommendations can help the PRC address the problems facing Tibetan education as well as meet its national goals of statistically improving its overall education system. TCHRD also calls on the international community to do its part in protecting the fundamental human right of the Tibetan people to an inclusive and high quality education system by providing further recommendations for UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Kishore Singh.



## II. TIBETAN HISTORY AND RELIGION IN EDUCATION

The Chinese government has increasingly emphasized using education as a tool to legitimize its power, especially after the crackdown on the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests. Simultaneously, the Chinese government began to view Tibetan's national pride and religious beliefs as a threat to ethnic and national unity. This increased hostility towards threats to ethnic and national unity is evidenced by the then Tibet Autonomous Region's (TAR) Party Secretary, Chen Kuiyuan's proclamation at the 1994 Fifth Annual TAR Education meeting:

*"The success of our education does not lie in the number of diplomas issued to graduates from universities, colleges...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..."*<sup>10</sup>

Chen Kuiyuan's views were reiterated in the PRC's 1994 "Action Plan for Patriotic Education" (1994 Action Plan). The 1994 Action Plan asserted that "patriotic education must adhere to the policy of focusing on nation-building" and that "in contemporary China, patriotism is essentially identical to socialism."<sup>11</sup> It also urged "the entire people to fight resolutely against language and action that

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<sup>10</sup> The Office of Tibet, "Education under China," (*International Campaign for Tibet*, 10<sup>th</sup> of December 2001). <http://www.savetibet.org/executive-summary-of-tibetan-response-to-chinese-white-paper-on-tibet/>. Last accessed on July 2, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Action Plan for Patriotic Education. 2006, *Chinese Education & Society* 39(2), pp. 7-18.

betrays the interests of the motherland, damage national dignity, or compromise national security and unity.”<sup>12</sup> Later in 1997, Chen Kuiyuan declared that “the notion of a separate Tibetan culture is ‘obscuring the dividing line between classes’ and intended ‘to oppose Han culture.’”<sup>13</sup>

This emphasis on countering perceived threats to national unity resulted in particular importance being placed upon removing or falsifying areas of Tibetan history as well as disseminating anti-religious ideology in an effort to indoctrinate Tibetan students into China’s own idealistic, homorganic history and culture.

## **A. MANIPULATION OF TIBETAN HISTORY AND CULTURE**

The Chinese government has increasingly used the education system in Tibet as a way to combat threats to national unity. One of the ways it does this is manipulating Tibetan history and culture in an attempt to stymie potential unrest by denigrating their own history and culture in the eyes of young Tibetans.

TCHRD recently obtained and translated textbooks currently used in Tibetan schools in Tibet.<sup>14</sup> These textbooks demonstrate the high degree to which the Chinese government worked its version of history and culture into the Tibetan syllabus. For example, a Tibetan language textbook dedicates a chapter to Thangtong Gyalpo, the famous 14<sup>th</sup> century Tibetan yogi, architect, philosopher and engineer. Despite this honorific position, the contributions Thangtong Gyalpo made to Tibetan culture and Buddhist religion are completely omitted. The textbook does not mention that he was a Buddhist saint, mystic, and practitioner of Tibetan Buddhist meditation and medicine, nor does

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Catriona Bass, “Learning to love the motherland: educating Tibetans in China,” 2005, *Journal of Moral Education*, 34(4), 433-449, DOI: 10.1080/03057240500410194.

<sup>14</sup> For the purpose of this report, TCHRD conducted research on 11 Tibetan language textbooks on social science, history and ‘political thought’ used in primary and middle schools in TAR and Tibetan autonomous prefectures.

it credit him as the founder of Tibetan opera. Instead, the textbook portrays Thangtong Gyalpo as a proponent of Marxism, who built bridges throughout Tibet and Bhutan to aid Tibetans who were oppressed by the Tibetan aristocracy. That the bridges were designed to help Tibetan pilgrims traveling to religious sites is ignored. Also, despite the emphasis placed upon these bridges, the textbook does not mention the fact that the vast majority of these bridges were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution in Tibet.

The re-creation of historical Tibetan personalities, such as Thangtong Gyalpo, in the current textbooks is not new. There are numerous examples of Tibetan history being manipulated in an effort to portray Tibetan historical figures and events as having characteristics similar to the Chinese government's socialist ideology. In the 1996 textbook, "Standardised curriculum for the five provinces and one autonomous region, Tibetan language textbooks for Six Years Primary," there is a discussion on the great Sakya Monastery and its scholars.<sup>15</sup> However, throughout this discussion the textbook never mentions that the scholars at Sakya Monastery were Buddhist monks studying religious teachings.<sup>16</sup>

Othertimes, textbooks have been updated to reflect changes in the Chinese government ideology. For example, the discussion of the Potala Palace changed substantially between the 1980s and 2003. In a textbook from the 1980s, paragraphs describing the Dalai Lamas who lived in the Potala Palace and the Potala Palace's religious and political history were removed from the 2003 edition.<sup>17</sup> In some cases, these paragraphs were replaced with a paragraph on the Potala's architectural details. In other cases, the paragraphs were completely deleted.<sup>18</sup>

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15 Cathriona Bass, "Tibetan primary curriculum and its role in nation building," 2008, *Educational Review* 60(1), pp. 39-50.

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

The textbooks obtained by TCHRD go beyond deleting and rewriting parts of Tibetan history and culture. In the vast majority of cases, tales of Tibet's history and culture are shown as backward in comparison to that of the Chinese. In fact, the majority of these textbooks "retain a predominance of stories relating to Chinese Communist heroes."<sup>19</sup> This creates a situation where both "Tibetan and Chinese children are taught to denigrate the traditional Tibetan culture."<sup>20</sup> This denigration has materialized in schools in which many Tibetan students feel ashamed of the culture and traditions they grew up with and the character traits that distinguish them from other Chinese students.<sup>21</sup>

According to scholars Yuxiang Wang and JoAnn Phillion, "few texts [in schools in PRC's minority-language region] discuss minority experiences or concerns; none addresses struggles with poverty or economic and education inequalities."<sup>22</sup>

## **B. RELIGION UNDERMINED AND ANTAGONIZED**

Before the Chinese invasion, Tibetan Buddhism played an integral role in the education of young Tibetans who were traditionally educated in monasteries. Since then, the Chinese government has pursued policies that undermine Tibetan religion in education such as the practices of closing religious education facilities and imposing stringent quotas on the number of students allowed in monastic schools. For example, in early April 2014, Chinese authorities in Pema (Ch: Banma) county, Golog (Ch: Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous

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19 Catriona Bass, "Learning to love the motherland: educating Tibetans in China," 2005, *Journal of Moral Education*, 34(4), 433-449, DOI: 10.1080/03057240500410194.

20 Ibid.

21 Tsering Woeser, "My Chinese Education: Learning to Forget Tibet in China," August 14, 2014, The New York Times. [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/15/opinion/learning-to-forget-tibet-in-china.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/15/opinion/learning-to-forget-tibet-in-china.html?_r=2). Last accessed on October 3, 2014.

22 Minority Language Policy and Practice in China: The Need for Multicultural Education", *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2009), available at <http://ijme-journal.org/index.php/ijme/article/viewFile/138/312>

Prefecture (TAP) in Qinghai Province, ordered the closure of the “School for Love and Altruism,” a private school for young monks. The Chinese authorities claimed that officials from the local monastery were involved in “separatist activity.”<sup>23</sup> The reasons underlying this accusation, if any, remain unknown.<sup>24</sup>

In practice, religion is also antagonized in the education system, which is the primary distributor of both anti-religious and pro-CCP ideological material. For instance, in 2000, the “Materialism and Atheism campaign” was launched in direct violation of Chapter 2, Article 36 of the Constitution of the PRC, which prohibits the government from compelling citizens to believe or not believe in any religion or to discriminate against citizens because of their religious beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

The Materialism and Atheism campaign, however, urged teachers and parents “to increase children’s understanding of atheism, ‘in order to help rid them of the bad influence of religion.’”<sup>26</sup>

The Chinese government is not only pursuing policies that undermine and antagonize religion, it is seeking to compel students to accept atheism and pro-Chinese Communist Party ideology. This violates students’ rights under the Constitution of the PRC. Furthermore, it continues to teach Tibetan students to denigrate their own heritage as Buddhism has historically and still plays a fundamental role in Tibetan culture.

In early November 2014, China’s Ministry of Education and the Central Committee of Communist Youth League announced the “The Advice of Advancing the Socialism into Practice in the Long

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23 Kunsang Tenzin, Karma Dorjee, Joshua Lipes, “Chinese Officials Order School for Tibetan Monks Shuttered,” *Radio Free Asia*, April 15, 2014. <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/school-04152014164706.html>. Lasted accessed on September 12, 2014.

24 Id.

25 Constitution of the PRC, Art. 36.

26 Catriona Bass, “Learning to love the motherland: educating Tibetans in China,” 2005, *Journal of Moral Education*, 34(4), 433-449, DOI: 10.1080/030572405000410194.

Run” plan. According to the plan, schools at different levels should compile and teach nursery rhymes, songs and poems on Socialism and revise the materials of “moral education”, language, and history in order to “advance the core values of Socialism”.<sup>27</sup> The plan also required students and teachers of all school levels to undergo proper training in popularising and spreading the “core values of Socialism”.<sup>28</sup> Around the same time, Chinese state media quoted Wang Xuming, president of China’s state-owned Language and Culture Press that the government is considering plans to revise the textbooks of primary and middle schools to increase the proportion of guoxue, or the study of traditional Chinese culture by 35%, up from 25%.<sup>29</sup>

### **C. VIOLATING STUDENTS’ RIGHTS**

The PRC increasingly uses the education system in Tibet as a tool to promote its ideology. It also manipulates Tibetan history and undermines Tibetan culture by painting it in an inferior light to that of Chinese culture and Communist idealism. By doing so, the PRC violates Tibetan students’ rights under its own laws as well as rights under international law.

The teaching of a mainland Chinese oriented historical and cultural education in Tibet, first and foremost, violates Tibetans’ right to govern their own educational and cultural affairs. This right is protected under Chapter 3, Section 6, Article 119 of the PRC’s Constitution, which states:

*“The organs of self-government of the national autonomous areas independently administer educational, scientific, cultural,*

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27 Wang Hui (ed.) “Ministry of Education and the Central Committee of Communist Youth League Announced: Schools have to Compile and Teach the Socialism Songs”, The Paper, 3 November 2014, [http://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_1275176](http://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1275176)

28 Ibid.

29 Amy Qin, “China Weighing More Emphasis on Traditional Culture in Textbooks”, New York Times, 4 November 2014, available at [http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/author/amy-qin/?\\_r=0](http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/author/amy-qin/?_r=0)



*public health and physical culture affairs in their respective areas, protect and sift through the cultural heritage of the nationalities and work for a vigorous development of their cultures.”* (emphasis added)

The rights guaranteed in Article 119 do not exist in practice. Tibet does not truly and independently administer its own educational affairs. Furthermore, the practice of manipulating, or otherwise deleting Tibetan history while simultaneously teaching students to denigrate Tibetan culture does nothing to “protect and sift through the cultural heritage of the nationalities and work for a vigorous development of their cultures.” To the contrary, these practices do nothing more than stunt the development of the Tibetan culture in direct violation of the PRC’s own Constitution.

Furthermore, this failure to provide an apolitical and historically accurate account of Tibetan culture violates obligations of the PRC pursuant to multiple international multilateral treaties to which it has either signed or ratified.

The United Nations’ Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) recognizes the importance of education in preserving a child’s cultural identity, language and values. In two articles, the CRC requires State parties to design their education policies accordingly. Article 29(c), states in relevant part:

*“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 own;”* (emphasis added)

Article 30 of the CRC, which is identical to Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states:

*“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.”* (emphasis added)

The PRC is a State party to the CRC.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the CRC is legally binding on the PRC.<sup>31</sup> Also as a signatory to the ICCPR,<sup>32</sup> the PRC is required not to defeat the object and purpose of the ICCPR.<sup>33</sup>

The substantive articles in both of the CRC and the ICCPR are fundamental parts of the human rights system and binding on the PRC as part of customary international law. Customary international law is legally binding on all States and formed through widespread and consistent State practice coupled with the sense that a State is acting out of a legal obligation.<sup>34</sup> The CRC is customary law as evidenced by its almost universal ratification (196 signatories, 194 ratifications).<sup>35</sup> The ICCPR is widely regarded as one of the core human rights treaties, and along with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Political Rights,

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30 University of Minnesota, Human Rights Library, “Ratification of Human Rights Treaties – China.” <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/ratification-china.html>. Last accessed on September 11, 2014.

31 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, Art. 26.

32 University of Minnesota, Human Rights Library, “Ratification of Human Rights Treaties – China.” <http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/research/ratification-china.html>. Last accessed on September 11, 2014.

33 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, Article 18(a): “A State is *obliged to refrain from acts which would defeat the object and purpose of a treaty when: (a) it has signed the treaty or exchanged instruments constituting the treaty subject to ratification, acceptance or approval...*” (emphasis added)

34 North Sea Continental Shelf, Judgment, I.C.J. Reports 1969 p. 3 at ¶174.

35 United Nations Treaty Collection, Chapter IV, Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Status as of September 10, 2014. [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mdsg\\_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en). Last accessed on September 11, 2014.

makes up the International Bill of Human Rights.<sup>36</sup>

By its own terms, however, the PRC's National Education Plan directly conflicts with both CRC and ICCPR provisions regarding the protection of ethnic minorities' culture and history in a child's education. For example, one of the primary aims of the National Education Plan is to "further enhance education on the fine traditions of Chinese culture and on revolutionary traditions."<sup>37</sup> The National Education Plan also states that "socialist core values should be incorporated into the national education."

Ultimately, the educational policies employed by the PRC that promote socialist ideology while undercutting the value of Tibetan culture and history in the eyes of students violate their fundamental human rights. It is these exact rights that the PRC has explicitly promised to protect pursuant to the provisions of the CRC, the ICCPR and most importantly, its own Constitution.

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36 OHCHR, Fact Sheet No.2 (Rev.1), The International Bill of Human Rights. <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/FactSheet2Rev.1en.pdf>. Last accessed on September 11, 2014.

37 Outline of China's National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), s4, para 2. (2010)



### III. TIBETAN LANGUAGE IN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

A common language is often considered a quintessential characteristic of creating a common consciousness among an otherwise diverse group of people. In independence movements, a common native language frequently plays an instrumental role in efforts to create a distinct national identity.<sup>38</sup> This is the case in Tibet today. A common Tibetan language is seen as a symbol of unity between Tibet's diverse communities, despite the existence of various Tibetan dialects. This has become especially true since 2008, when the Tibetan language became the international symbol of Tibetan resistance to the PRC's repressive policies and forced assimilation in Tibet.

The Chinese government is well aware of the importance a common language can play in regards to nation building. As a result, it has increasingly used Mandarin Chinese, instead of Tibetan language, as the primary language of instruction.<sup>39</sup>

#### A. A "BILINGUAL" EDUCATION SYSTEM

In 2014, official Chinese news agencies claimed that Chinese government officials in Tibet have been working on a "new regulation

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38 William Safran, Amy H. Liu, "Nation-Building, Collective Identity, and Language Choices: Between Instrumental and Value Rationalities, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics," 2012, 18:3, 269-292, DOI: 10.1080/13537113.2012.707492.

39 This is despite the fact that the Education for All (EFA) project estimated in 2005 that "fifty percent of the world's out-of-school children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever, used at home..." Penelope Bender, Nadine Dutcher, David Klaus, Jane Shore, Charlie Tesar, "In their own language : education for all," 2005, Education Notes. Washington, DC: World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2005/06/7440673/own-language-education-all>.

[that] will provide a legal protection for the rights and freedom of the people of Tibetan ethnic group to study, use and develop their language.”<sup>40</sup> However, the policies that have actually been implemented up until now are inconsistent with this claim. The Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures in Qinghai Province provide a prime example of how Chinese government policies, in practice, are inconsistent with the Chinese government’s purported “dedication” to a bilingual education system, and can lead to negative effects such as lower quality of overall education and social unrest.

For instance, in 2003, the Qinghai provincial education department released guidelines aimed at improving bilingual education in Qinghai Province. The guidelines divide the education system into two models: Models 1 and 2. Model 1 is used “[f]or those areas where the Chinese language environment is not good.”<sup>41</sup> In Model 1 areas, the minority language of the area is to be used as “the medium of instruction” while “introducing [the Chinese language] as a subject.”<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, Model 1 specifically states that, in these areas, the Chinese language is “*not* the language of instruction” (emphasis added).<sup>43</sup> In Model 2 areas, the Chinese language environment is “relatively good.”<sup>44</sup> In Model 2 areas, “Chinese is the main language of instruction and the minority language is an assisting one.”<sup>45</sup>

However, the guidelines are vague and arbitrarily applied. For example, they fail to provide any standard or defining characteristics to distinguish a Model 2 “relatively good” Chinese language environment

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40 Endi, “Tibetan language to get more legal protection,” *China Internet Information Center*, April 7, 2014. [http://www.china.org.cn/china/Off\\_the\\_Wire/2014-04/07/content\\_32022885.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/Off_the_Wire/2014-04/07/content_32022885.htm). Last accessed on September 12, 2014.

41 Lou Chunfang, “Bilingual Education in Qinghai Province, China,” *Save the Children UK*, 2008, Pg. 2, [http://www.seameo.org/\\_ld2008/documents/Presentation\\_document/Bilingual\\_Education\\_in\\_Qinghai\\_Province\\_%20final\\_edits%20.pdf](http://www.seameo.org/_ld2008/documents/Presentation_document/Bilingual_Education_in_Qinghai_Province_%20final_edits%20.pdf). Last accessed on September 5, 2014.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

from a Model 1 “not good” language environment.<sup>46</sup> As a result, Model 2 has been arbitrarily applied to “[m]any pure pasturing areas where the language environment is predominantly the minority language.”<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately for these areas, Model 2 “does not support the policy and practice for minority children to receive education in their first language and show respect for minority culture and language.”<sup>48</sup>

The arbitrary application of the guidelines not only undermines the ability of Tibetan students to learn but also provokes student protests. Surveys demonstrate that Tibetan students prefer and are willing to advocate for the Tibetan language as the primary language of instruction. For example, in 2010, thousands of students from six schools in Qinghai Province staged six days of peaceful protests after the guidelines were directly contradicted by a government policy requiring Mandarin Chinese to be the medium of instruction after 2015.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, a 2014 survey demonstrated that Tibetans prefer teachers who can explain a concept in Tibetan.<sup>50</sup> Still, the Chinese government insists on imposing Mandarin Chinese as the language of instruction in Tibetan areas despite the overwhelming evidence that, (1) Tibetan students want to be taught in Tibetan and (2) they learn more effectively when they are.

It is difficult to say how much of the promised legal protection to Tibetan language in the 2014 regulation will be implemented given the chequered history of minority language protection in the PRC.<sup>51</sup> The 1987 “Regulation on the Study, Use and Development of Tibetan

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46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.

49 Kalsang Wangdu, “Minority education policy of China with reference to Tibet,” *Merabsarpa*, January 31, 2012. <http://www.merabsarpa.com/education/minority-education-policy-of-china-with-reference-to-tibet>. Last accessed on July 16, 2014.

50 G. Zheng, “Establishing Multicultural-Oriented Teacher Education System: An Empirical Research on Cultural Conflicts between Teachers and Students in Tibet,” 2014, *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 2, 409-416. doi: 10.4236/jss.2014.26047.

51 Zhou, Minglang. “Legislating Literacy for Linguistic and Ethnic Minorities in Contemporary China,” *Multilingual Matters*, 2007, *Language Planning and Policy: Issues in Language Planning and Literacy*, Anthony Liddicoat (eds), p. 109-111.

Language and Script” enacted by the TAR People’s Congress in 2002 was a milestone in that the law provided equal official status for both Tibetan and Chinese language in TAR<sup>52</sup> and Tibetan was to be used as a medium of instruction at junior middle school level in TAR. Despite the obvious contradictions with the China’s constitutional protections for minority languages,<sup>53</sup> this legislation, a result of persistent efforts by Tibetan leaders, was shortlived and ultimately abandoned due to precedence given to economic development in TAR and Tibetan remained medium of instruction for Tibetan students only at primary level in TAR.<sup>54</sup>

A frequently overlooked 2001 amendment to the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law (REAL) represented a sudden shift in China’s classroom language policy. The amendment eliminated Tibetan as the medium of instruction and replaced it with Mandarin Chinese as the compulsory medium to be taught as early as the beginning of primary school.<sup>55</sup> For instance, Article 37 of the REAL stipulates: “Beginning in the lower or senior grades of primary school, Han language and literature courses should be taught to popularize the common language used throughout the country and the use of Han Chinese characters.”<sup>56</sup> Strong local opposition has delayed the full implementation of the amendment. In 2010, a draft policy suggesting

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52 Zhou, Minglang. *Multilingualism in China: The Politics of Writing Reforms for Minority Languages, 1949-2002*, Walter de Gruyter, 2003, p.86

53 TCHRD Annual Report: Human Rights Situation in Tibet (2012), p. 24-25

54 Kolas, Ashild and Monika P Thowsen, “On the Margins of Tibet: Cultural Survival on the Sino-Tibetan Frontier, University of Washington Press, 2004, Print.

55 National People’s Congress. (2001). *Quanguo Renmin Daibiao Dahui Changwu Weiyuanhui Guanyu Xiugai ‘Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Minzu Quyu Zijifa’ de jue ding* [The National People’s Congress General Affairs Committee’s decision concerning the amendment of ‘The Law on Regional Autonomy for Minority Nationalities in the People’s Republic of China’]. *Quanguo Renmin Daibiao Dahui Changwu Weiyuanhui Gongbao* [National People’s Congress General Affairs Committee Notices] 2001 (2), 121-148.

See also DIIR (2007), *Tibet: A Human Development and Environment Report* (2007:59)

56 Congressional-Executive Commission on China, “Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People’s Republic of China (Chinese and English Text)”, available at <http://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regional-ethnic-autonomy-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-amended>



the suspension of Tibetan as language of instruction caused widespread discontentment and peaceful protests among the Tibetan students in Qinghai Province.<sup>57</sup> The Qinghai Province Mid- and Long-term Plan (2010-2020) for Reform and Development of Education sought to “forcefully develop ‘bilingual’ pre-school education in the farming and pastoral areas, strengthen teaching of the Chinese language in the basic education phase, basically resolve nationality students fundamental ability issues in speaking and understanding Chinese”.<sup>58</sup>

In January 2011, a few months after the student protests in Qinghai, the provincial authorities announced that at least 5,500 bilingual teachers will be trained by 2015 to teach in both Mandarin and ethnic minority languages in the province’s five Tibetan autonomous prefectures.<sup>59</sup>

Compared to other Tibetan autonomous areas, local regulations in Qinghai Province were the strongest in terms of promoting Tibetan as language of instruction in school education. For instance, article 10 of the 1995 Regulations on Compulsory Education in Golok Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture states that “minority primary and secondary schools should adopt Tibetan as the main medium of instruction and offer Chinese language courses at appropriate grades.” The provision further states that in non-minority primary and secondary schools where the medium of instruction is Chinese, Tibetan should be offered as language course.”<sup>60</sup> Likewise, the 1990 Measures on the Implementation of Compulsory Education Law of Gansu Province provides that while promoting Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese), minority schools may also use native languages and scripts as media of

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57 ICT, “Protests by students against downgrading of Tibetan language spread to Beijing”, 22 October 2010, available at <http://www.savetibet.org/protests-by-students-against-downgrading-of-tibetan-language-spread-to-beijing/#sthash.oVj0X0RU.dpuf>

58 Ibid.

59 Bi Mingxin (ed). 2011. Northwest China Province to Train Thousands of Bilingual Teachers for Schools in Ethnic Minority Areas, Xinhua, available at [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2011-01/28/content\\_21839240.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2011-01/28/content_21839240.htm)

60 Zhou (2007)

instruction, without any restrictions. Although Tibetan is still used as a medium of instruction in a number of some Tibetan schools located in farming and pastoral areas in Gansu and Qinghai, there is concern among many Tibetan teachers that it is only a matter of time before Mandarin Chinese will be adopted as the medium of instruction. In 2011, official figures released by Qinghai Province's education department claimed that over 196,500 students in 544 primary and secondary schools in six ethnic minority prefectures in Qinghai were being taught in their respective mother tongues.<sup>61</sup> The implementation of the 2001 amendment to the national minorities law will ultimately render hollow the series of local regulations aimed at preserving and protecting minority languages.

Understanding the importance given to the promotion of Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua) is a prerequisite for interpreting both the format of bilingual education in the PRC and the ways in which subsequent, relevant education legislation has affected the development of the Tibetan language. The current and future format of bilingual education for Tibetans, as well as the use and development of the Tibetan language exist within the parameters of primary goal of promoting Putonghua.

## **FAILING BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

One of the major causes for concern is the sheer lack of teachers capable of teaching in Tibetan. The fact that many of these teachers generally cannot speak Tibetan poses a major issue within a Tibetan education system where the overwhelming majority of its students are Tibetan.<sup>62</sup> This creates situations where Tibetan students are unable to fully understand subjects taught in Mandarin Chinese because the teachers cannot explain ideas the students do not understand in

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61 Bi Mingxin (ed). 2011. Northwest China Province to Train Thousands of Bilingual Teachers for Schools in Ethnic Minority Areas, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90782/90872/7276041.html>

62 Ibid., Pg. 3, Table 2 (used as a sample of the student census in a typical school in the TAR).

Tibetan.

In 2001 there was approximately “one Tibetan-language teacher for every two schools” in Kanlho (Ch: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province.<sup>63</sup> In 2014, the situation has not improved as over 40% of junior and senior high school teachers are now of Chinese origin (*see* Figure 1 below) as a consequence of Mandarin Chinese becoming the primary language of instruction in Tibetan areas.<sup>64</sup> Because of this disparity Tibetan students are not only deprived of a basic education in their own language, but are also severely disadvantaged, compared to their Han Chinese counterparts.

*Figure 1: Ethnic structure of teachers in Elementary school, Junior school, and Senior high school in the Tibet Autonomous Region.*<sup>65</sup>

	Elementary School		Junior School		Senior High School	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Minorities	11768	90.34	2899	58.29	865	58.13
Han	1258	9.66	2074	41.71	623	41.87
Total	13026	100	4973	100	1488	100

The failings of the bilingual education system in Tibet are further exacerbated because many Tibetans who are now teachers, did not learn Mandarin Chinese from qualified teachers. Before the influx of Chinese in the 2000's, Mandarin Chinese had little prevalence in Tibetan society. As a result, the majority of present day Tibetan teachers received an education in Mandarin Chinese from teachers who were not qualified to teach the language. This led to situations, particularly in rural areas, where “there is a shortage of Chinese language specialists, in which case teachers of other subjects who

63 Teng Xing, “Objects, Characteristics, Content, and Methods of Research in Ethnic Minority Bilingual Education in China,” 2001, *Chinese Education and Society*, pp. 54.

64 Ibid., Pg. 3, Table 1.

65 G. Zheng, “Establishing Multicultural-Oriented Teacher Education System: An Empirical Research on Cultural Conflicts between Teachers and Students in Tibet,” 2014, *Open Journal of Social Science* 2, pg. 409-416. doi: [10.4236/ojs.2014.26047](https://doi.org/10.4236/ojs.2014.26047).

are unqualified as language teachers, [took] on the role of teaching Chinese as a subject.”<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, this phenomenon perpetuates a generational cycle of diminishing quality of Mandarin Chinese language skill within Tibetan communities.

The situation is further exacerbated by the Chinese government’s plans to offer “all children in Tibet’s farming and herding areas... at least two years of free preschool education in both the Tibetan language and Mandarin Chinese by 2015.”<sup>67</sup> Although this proposal seems highly beneficial on its face, it is not.

A similar policy was enacted in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). The policy undermined the native Uyghur language.<sup>68</sup> A similar result can be expected in Tibet. Official statements supporting the XUAR kindergarden policy suggest that undermining the use of the native Uyghur language was intentional. Nur Bekri, chairman of the XUAR, claims that teaching Mandarin Chinese to Uyghur’s youth aids in the Chinese government’s fight against terrorism in the XUAR by making Uyghur’s youth a part of the PRC’s mainstream society.<sup>69</sup> This indicates that the government officials, such as Bekri, see bilingual education policies as another means of furthering the PRC’s nation building efforts in minority regions.

The consequences of introducing such policies that are aimed more at assimilation of minorities rather than their educational needs can

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66 Gerard Postiglione, Ben Jiao, and Li Xiaoliang, “Education Change and Development in Nomadic Communities of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR),” 2012, *International Journal of Chinese Education*, pp 89.

67 Fang Yang, “Tibet to ensure free bilingual preschool education by 2015,” *Xinhua News Agency* (Beijing, December 3, 2010) [http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-12/03/c\\_13633958.htm](http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-12/03/c_13633958.htm). Last accessed on July 18, 2014.

68 International Campaign for Tibet, “Tibetan teachers write petition in support of Tibetan language; fears for students after detentions,” *International Campaign for Tibet*, October 26, 2010, <http://www.savetibet.org/tibetan-teachers-write-petition-in-support-of-tibetan-language-fears-for-students-after-detentions/>. Last accessed on July 18, 2014.

69 Cui Jia, “Mandarin lessons in Xinjiang ‘help fight terrorism,” *China Daily* (Beijing, June 4, 2009). [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-06/04/content\\_8250223.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-06/04/content_8250223.htm). Last accessed on July 18, 2014.

be drastic. Critics argue that such policies threaten “Tibetan culture, and will leave students fluent in neither Tibetan nor Mandarin.”<sup>70</sup>

## **LESSONS LEARNED FROM TANZANIA**

The present day Tibetan education system resembles that of other States that have similarly introduced non-native languages as the primary language of instruction, such as Tanzania. Unfortunately, in most of these States the education in non-native languages has not been effective because forcing teachers to teach and students to learn in a second language creates unnecessary obstacles for both.

In Tanzania, English is used as the primary language of instruction. Similar to Tibet, where the teachers lack a strong understanding of Mandarin Chinese, in Tanzania the failure to provide the previous generation with a strong understanding of the English language has led to present day teachers being unable to teach effectively in English. As a result, students are provided with a rudimentary understanding of the English language. This, in turn, means that students’ understanding of concepts taught in the English language is also rudimentary, at best.

The ultimate implications of this phenomenon are immediately apparent. Using a foreign language as the primary language of instruction restricts the interaction between the teacher and the class and prevents students from being able to learn through discussions and debates, ultimately impacting the quality of education provided by these teachers. On the other hand, many cases in Tanzania also show that when teachers are allowed to use their native language to teach, the “teachers used a wider range of teaching and learner involvement strategies.”<sup>71</sup>

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70 Chris Buckley, Andrew Roche, “Tibetan student protests spread: overseas group,” *Reuters US* (London, October 21, 2010). <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/10/21/us-china-tibetans-idUSTRE69K3S320101021>. Last accessed on July 23, 2014.

71 EdQual, “Language of Instruction and Quality of Learning in Tanzania and Ghana,” *EdQual Policy Brief No. 2*, 2010. <http://www.edqual.org/publications/policy-briefs/pb2.pdf>. Last accessed on July 17, 2014.

Generally, when teachers speak the native language, they can explain a concept quickly, easily, and more effectively.<sup>72</sup> And although using a language other than the primary language of instruction potentially violates governmental policy, more importantly, it allows students to better understand what they are being taught.

## **B. MOTHER TONGUE-BASED BILINGUAL EDUCATION**

Despite the dissatisfaction with the current bilingual education system in Tibet, there is very little opposition to having a *functioning* bilingual education system in which students learn both Tibetan and Mandarin. Mother tongue-based bilingual education (MTBBE) refers to the practice of using two languages to educate students, with the primary emphasis being placed upon the student's native language or dialect. This form of language education is generally associated with education systems for minority communities and thought of as a reconciliation between two goals: (1) allowing the minority community to maintain and develop their language, while (2) removing the language barrier that separates minority from majority groups. Thus, MTBBE is often seen as an effective means of creating a collective consciousness between highly diverse groups. MTBBE has been successfully implemented in both Finland and Papua New Guinea.

### **FINLAND**

Finland is a prime example of a functioning MTBBE system. In Finland, 90.95% of people speak Finnish as their native language, and only 5.44% speak Swedish as their native language.<sup>73</sup> Despite this discrepancy, Finland has developed a highly effective education system that uses both Finnish and Swedish languages. One of the

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<sup>72</sup> See e.g., C. Jones Rubagumya, H. Mwansoko, "Language for learning and teaching in Tanzania," 1998, ODA, Dar es Salaam: British Council.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

primary factors that differentiate the Finnish bilingual education system from less effective systems, such as that in TAR, is that the minority language is not treated as inferior to the majority language. Not only are all Swedish-speaking students required to study Finnish but, more importantly, all Finnish-speaking students are required to study Swedish at lower and upper secondary school.<sup>74</sup> This Finnish bilingual education approach is effective because it eliminates any possibility that the Swedish speaking Finnish community will feel isolated from other Finnish communities.

In practice, both Swedish speaking and Finnish speaking groups are taught in their native language. The majority of students begin studying their second language in 7<sup>th</sup> grade (when they are roughly 13 years old), after they have developed an understanding of their native language.

Successive Finnish governments have also recognized the important role that language instruction plays in a student's ability to learn. Thus, Swedish is not the only minority language to receive this high degree of protection within the Finnish education system. Finland's Basic Education Act, Section 10 acknowledges the important role of the primary language of instruction. In addition to Swedish it allows a parent or carer to choose for a student to be educated in Saami, Roma, or sign language.

The introduction of a successful MTBBE system has not harmed education in Finland. In 2013, Finland was ranked 21<sup>st</sup> out of 186 nations in the United Nations' Development Program's "Human Development Index." In contrast, the PRC ranked 101<sup>st</sup> primarily due to its poor performance under the education indicators.

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74 Åsa Palviainen, "The Proficiency in Swedish of Finnish speaking University Students: Status and Directions for the Future," 2010, *Apples Journal of Applied Language Studies*, pg. 4.

## PAPUA NEW GUINEA

The success of MTBBE systems is not only limited to developed Scandinavian countries. Developing countries have also successfully implemented MTBBE systems. In Papua New Guinea (whose gross national income per capita is roughly a third of the PRC's), the people speak approximately 800 dialects. In 1995, the Papua New Guinea government successfully created a system that primarily uses community languages until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. After 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, both English and local dialects are used as the languages of instruction. Upon reaching 7<sup>th</sup> grade, English is then used as the formal language of instruction and local dialects are used as an informal language of instruction.<sup>75</sup>

Papua New Guinea has found a cost effective way of implementing bilingual instruction for hundreds of languages by using “shell books.” A “shell book” is a textbook with the text omitted. The textbook comes with a copy in English, Tok Pisin, or Hiri Motu, which is then translated by community literacy workers into the local language. The community literacy workers have the freedom to adapt and re-write the text to avoid phrases that would not make sense in the local language. A translated book is then tested in the community before the textbook is reproduced with the new translation.<sup>76</sup>

Compared to the Tibetan language textbooks translated by TCHRD, the “shell books” represent an entirely different way of thinking about minority languages. The Tibetan language textbooks contain numerous phrases and expressions commonly used in mainland China that either do not translate well into Tibetan or are not commonly used. For example, the PRC is commonly referred to as ‘the Motherland’ in these textbooks. However, in Tibet, referring to one’s nation of origin as one’s “Motherland” is confusing. Such

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75 Susan Malone, Patricia Paraide, “Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education in Papua New Guinea,” 2011, *International Review of Education*, pg. 705.

76 Dennis Malone, Susan Malone and Josie Villacorte, “Shell books’ for literacy,” 1991, *Journal of Educational Studies*, pg. 89.



lack of regard to native languages serves no purpose and lowers the quality of education provided to an already isolated and marginalized community.<sup>77</sup>

By following the examples of Finland and Papua New Guinea and implementing a more inclusive bilingual education system (such as implementing a MTBBE system), the PRC can potentially achieve the following goals simultaneously: (1) fulfill its obligations to the Tibetan people regarding the use and development of their language under the Constitution of the PRC and the Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China<sup>78</sup>, and (2) improve its educational performance and ultimately rank higher on global lists such as the United Nations' Development Program's "Human Development Index."

### C. OBLIGATIONS DISREGARDED

Finally, by using Mandarin Chinese, instead of Tibetan language, as the primary language of instruction in the Tibetan education system, the Chinese government has continuously disregarded its obligations to the Tibetan people under its own legislation.

First and foremost, Article 4(4) of the Constitution of the PRC promises that:

*"All nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages and to preserve or reform their own folkways and customs."* (emphasis added)

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<sup>77</sup> It is also worth mentioning that the Chinese policies, in an effort to create a monolingual society, target other minority languages as well. For instance, "[i]n early January [2014], the State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television, issued a notice stating that all TV and radio programs must use Mandarin and should avoid dialects and foreign languages." Xu Junqian, "Shanghai dialect locked in tug of war with Mandarin," *China Daily USA* (Shanghai, February 28, 2014). [http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2014-02/28/content\\_17313346.htm](http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2014-02/28/content_17313346.htm). Last accessed on July 25, 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China, [http://english1.english.gov.cn/official/2005-07/28/content\\_18127.htm](http://english1.english.gov.cn/official/2005-07/28/content_18127.htm)

However, contrary to this promise, Tibetans do not have the freedom to use and develop their language when the Chinese government perpetuates education policies in which Mandarin Chinese is required to be the primary language of instruction. This stunts the development of the Tibetan language in future generations rather than preserve and develop it.

Furthermore, Article 7 of the Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China states:

*“Schools (classes) and other educational institutions whose students are predominantly from ethnic minority families should, if possible, use textbooks printed in their own languages, and lessons should be taught in those languages.”*  
(emphasis added)

In practice this simply does not happen. With regard to the primary language of instruction, the Chinese government insists upon arbitrarily applying education policies that favor Mandarin Chinese instruction, even in areas where the majority of the student population speaks Tibetan as its native language. Furthermore, textbooks used in Tibet increasingly use Mandarin Chinese without any regard for appropriate vocabulary and phrasing to increase the ability Tibetan students to fully understand what is being taught. These problems persist despite lessons learned in other countries such as Tanzania, Finland, and Papua New Guinea. By continuing down this road, the Chinese government not only contradicts its obligations under the PRC’s own legislation but also completely disregards the educational well-being of Tibetan students.

## IV. RURAL EDUCATION

Rural education is a quintessential frontier in improving both the economic development and the standard of living of the Tibetan people. Tibet is one of the most sparsely populated regions in the world making accessibility to education a major issue. First of all, there is a major disparity in funding where urban cities in Tibet receive preferential treatment from government officials. As a result, the vast majority of Tibetans, who live in underdeveloped rural regions, have only poor educational services available to them. On the other hand, the urban economic power houses of Tibet, such as Lhasa, have higher quality educational services, but they are dominated by Han Chinese. The prospect of introducing a high quality education system in rural Tibet is a daunting task and the model used in urban mainland China will not translate well to rural Tibet for numerous reasons.

Furthermore, the knowledge and skills that schools should teach for life in rural Tibet differ vastly from those required in urban China. It is therefore vital that any education system within Tibet incorporates relevant vocational education and training (VET) for two reasons: (1) to cater to the needs of the primary labor sectors in the Tibetan areas, and (2) to diversify Tibetans' skill sets and allow them to compete at a higher level with the growing number of Han Chinese migrants that currently dominate the vocation sector in Tibet.

### A. UNDERMINING TIBETAN NOMADIC WAY OF LIFE

Tibet has a large and sparsely dispersed nomadic community. Thus, access to education is highly problematic. Requiring that nomadic children attend a traditional school forces them and their parents to

choose between an education and their traditional way of life.

Generally, “as education becomes a strategy in national integration and development, non-indigenous education wins out over that which is traditionally passed down through nomadic households and communities.”<sup>79</sup> In other words, “from the nomadic point of view,” such national integration efforts led by “the state’s agenda for education may represent an attempt to change [the nomadic] way of life.”<sup>80</sup>

## THE NOMADIC POINT OF VIEW

For any education plan to be effective the parents must be willing to send their children to school. Unsurprisingly, if the nomadic population in Tibet does not support the Chinese government’s national integration efforts, even the best plan will fail. Currently, the nomadic population believes the national integration efforts are an attempt to change the nomadic way of life and do not support them.

One of the reasons the nomadic population does not support the national integration efforts is because the curriculum does not address nomadic communities’ history or culture. Even attending school requires abandoning the nomadic way of life because the vast majority of education systems only provide highly centralized education facilities. These centralized facilities force nomads to choose between having to settle in a region for a prolonged time or sending their children away to boarding schools.

This concern is compounded by the nature of nomadic life in Tibet. The primary characteristic associated with Tibetan nomads is their “complete economic dependence on livestock, particularly yaks

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79 James Leibold, Yangbin Chen, “Minority Education in China: Balancing Unity and Diversity in an Era of Critical Pluralism,” Hong Kong University Press, HKU, 2014. *Project MUSE*. <http://muse.jhu.edu/>. Last accessed on July 28, 2014.

80 Ibid.

and sheep.”<sup>81</sup> For nomads to be self-sufficient, they must maintain relatively large herds. To take care of their herds, nomads “have [their] children begin herding at age eight or nine.”<sup>82</sup> The only way for the nomadic children to receive an education in a traditional, centralized education system, is for them to give up herding. The nomads are faced with another difficult decision between educating their children and maintaining their self-sufficiency.

The conflict facing nomadic parents is further exacerbated by the fact that nomadic parents fear “that rural schools in Tibet might not provide their children with useful knowledge and skills for non-farm[ing] jobs, and that their children [will] end up returning to rural nomadic life with a condescending attitude and poor [labour] habits.”<sup>83</sup> Indeed, formal education is seen as offering few practical benefits and doing little more than delaying nomadic children from learning and developing more realistic skills, as it “makes no (difference) for a nomad to acquire knowledge or not. Nomads can still herd cows, milk, and process dairy products even without school knowledge.”<sup>84</sup> The nomadic point of view is reinforced by the Chinese government designed curriculum, which portrays Tibetan nomadic culture as “backward, uncivilized, and even barbaric.”<sup>85</sup>

## BOARDING SCHOOLS WON’T WORK

One particular concern for nomadic parents is that their children will never return after attending boarding schools. There is a general

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81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 Gerard A. Postiglione, Ben Jiao, “Tibet’s Relocated Schooling: Popularization Reconsidered,” 2009. <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.1525/as.2009.49.5.895?uid=3738256&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21104406023417>. Last accessed on July 28, 2014.

84 Gerard Postiglione, Ben Jiao, Li Xiaoliang, “Education Change and Development in Nomadic Communities of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR),” 2012, *International Journal of Chinese Education*, pg. 89.

85 Xin Wang, “Participatory Communication and Cultural Continuity Perspectives Regarding Ecological and Environmental Migration (EEM) in China: A Case Study in Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau,” *US-China Institute*, January 15, 2014. <http://china.usc.edu/ShowArticle.aspx?articleID=3277&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>. Last accessed on July 28, 2014.

consensus between teachers, rural parents and rural students, “that once sent to boarding schools in county towns for several years, particularly at the secondary level, students rarely return to farming or herding.”<sup>86</sup> This is partially due to two factors: (1) what students are taught about the nomadic lifestyle; and (2) students who are educated in boarding schools become unaccustomed to the nomadic lifestyle.

Rather than address the concerns of nomadic parents or provide different educational opportunities, the Chinese government is pursuing policies intended to increase the number of students at boarding schools<sup>87</sup> and provide teachers that have little or no knowledge of the local community’s culture.<sup>88</sup>

To counteract the concerns about rural schooling, the Chinese government implemented the “Three Guarantees Policy” as a way to make boarding schools more attractive and increase the number of years students spend there. The policy does not aim to make the schooling better or more appropriate for the nomads but instead focuses on providing financial incentives. The Three Guarantees Policy reduces the cost of sending a child to school by providing the children with free food, accommodation, and clothing.<sup>89</sup>

However, the Chinese government’s solution of using “boarding schools as part of the state’s arsenal of (sedentarization) strategies” has been highly criticized as counter-productive.<sup>90</sup> This is because boarding schools do not provide skills or a cultural education to students that, upon completion, would allow them to integrate back into their nomadic communities. Despite all of its proposed benefits, the “Three Guarantees” policy does not address these criticisms.

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86 Andrew M. Fischer, “Educating for Exclusion in Western China: Structural and institutional dimensions of conflict in the Tibetan areas of Qinghai and Tibet.” (2009)

87 Outline of China’s National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020), s27, para 2. (2010)

88 James Leibold, Yangbin Chen, “Minority Education in China: Balancing Unity and Diversity in an Era of Critical Pluralism,” Hong Kong University Press, HKU, 2014. *Project MUSE*. <http://muse.jhu.edu/>. Last accessed on July 28, 2014.

89 Ibid., 125.

90 Ibid., 115.

One of the negative consequences of the widespread use of boarding schools in county towns is the dramatic decline not only in the actual number of rural primary schools but also in rural primary school enrolment. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, between 2000 and 2010 the number of rural primary schools nationwide fell by 52.1% while the total number of rural primary school enrolment declined by 37.1%.<sup>91</sup> The Chinese government maintains that beginning in the late 1990s, the policy of merging rural schools in central schools was done to optimise resources and to enhance educational quality.<sup>92</sup> But independent studies have demonstrated a host of problems caused by the merger policy including extra costs of educating children in faraway towns, transportation issues, loss of manual labour at home and, most importantly, making education less accessible to rural children. Some Chinese educational experts hold the merger policy responsible for the high drop-out rate among rural students.<sup>93</sup>

## **VIOLATING PARENTS' FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT TO CHOOSE EDUCATION FOR THEIR CHILDREN**

By creating a system in Tibet that requires nomadic communities to send their children to schools where the teachers have little or no knowledge of the nomadic culture and with a curriculum that describes the nomadic lifestyle as uncivilized and barbaric, the PRC violates the CRC, as well as the ICCPR.<sup>94</sup>

Article 29(1) of the CRC states in pertinent part:

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91 Wenjin Long, "Decline of Primary Schools in Rural China: Causes and Consequences", 3 December 2012, available at <http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/chinapolicyinstitute/2012/12/03/decline-of-primary-schools-in-rural-china-causes-and-consequences/>

92 Zhang Fang (ed), "China's rural education at risk", China.org.cn, 8 January 2013, [http://www.china.org.cn/china/2013-01/08/content\\_27618239.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/china/2013-01/08/content_27618239.htm)

93 Wenjin Long (2012)

94 See Page 6. "The PRC signed the CRC on August, 29, 1990, and ratified it on March 2, 1992...the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 30, which China signed on October 5, 1998."

*“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 own;” (emphasis added)*

Both Article 30 of the CRC and Article 27 of the ICCPR state:

*“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” (emphasis added).*

Obviously, teaching students that nomadic life is uncivilized and barbaric prevents the cultivation of respect for the nomad’s cultural identity pursuant to the CRC. Furthermore, forcing parents to choose between a centralized school system away from the nomadic life or no education at all undercuts CRC and ICCPR provisions guaranteeing the child’s right to enjoy his or her own culture. Rather than using education to protect Tibetan culture, Tibetan children must now choose between enjoying their culture or obtaining an education.

The Chinese government is also adopting policies to punish parents and families that choose to preserve their culture. The Chinese government, with its increased focus on compulsory education, has implemented a “reward and punishment system in which education work [is] linked to the assessing and appointment of cadres with responsibility specified for every unit and individual.”<sup>95</sup> “This mean[s]...[i]f the dropout rate in a certain township was high, certain officials would have to take responsibility, and the township

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<sup>95</sup> James Leibold, Yangbin Chen, “Minority Education in China: Balancing Unity and Diversity in an Era of Critical Pluralism,” Hong Kong University Press, HKU, 2014. *Project MUSE*. <http://muse.jhu.edu/>. Last accessed on July 28, 2014.



government itself would be responsible for its ineffective education work...”<sup>96</sup>

By holding officials and the township government responsible for increased dropout rates at a local level, the Chinese government has, in essence, given these government officials an incentive to punish nomadic parents who withdraw their children from these schools. The end result of this system is that the parents are denied the right to choose how their children will be educated.

## B. ACCESSIBILITY OF RURAL EDUCATION

Tibet is one of the most sparsely populated regions of the world.<sup>97</sup> Providing proper access to education in such a sparsely populated region in which many communities follow a nomadic way of life is therefore extremely challenging. Traditional solutions to improving access to education include measures such as building schools and staffing them with qualified teaching personnel. A great deal of government financial support and political will is required to implement these measures. Unfortunately, the Chinese government lack both.

## FAILURE TO SPEND

The Chinese government has been highly criticised for failing to give education the support necessary for it to develop simultaneously and uniformly across the PRC. In 2008, the PRC’s “direct public expenditure on educational institutions represented 3.3% of the country’s GDP.”<sup>98</sup> This figure illustrates two important facts. First, it is

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Tibetan Travel Service, “The Population and Population Density,” *Tibetan Travel Service*. [http://www.tibettravel.cn/Tibet\\_Discovery/Population\\_And\\_Density.htm](http://www.tibettravel.cn/Tibet_Discovery/Population_And_Density.htm). Last accessed on September 6, 2014.

<sup>98</sup> OECD (2011), Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing. doi: [10.1787/eag-2011-en](https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2011-en)

a little more than half of the 6% recommended by the UN.<sup>99</sup> Second, even though the Chinese government budgets 4% of its GDP on education, over 17% of the money is not spent.<sup>100</sup> These two facts call into question the Chinese government's commitment to education in both theory and practice.

The 1980s downshifting of responsibility for financing school education to local government is a key reason why poor counties have poor schools, sometimes so poor they are ineligible for central poverty alleviation funding that is offered only if the county matches central grants 1-to-1.

The failure to commit and spend money on education is particularly pronounced in rural Tibet. Without large scale government support, the low density and economically underdeveloped Tibetan regions cannot improve education quality or attract qualified teachers. This is further exacerbated because the Chinese government insists on using the boarding school model. At boarding schools, teachers, especially women, are required not only to teach but also act as care givers, medical personnel, and cooks.<sup>101</sup> Especially for women, these additional requirements disincentivize teachers from working in rural areas. Most of the primary and high school teachers in the PRC are women.

### **“SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS”**

Without enough teachers willing to work in Tibet, the education system is forced to rely on less qualified, “substitute teachers.” “Substitute teachers” are teachers who lack the minimum qualifications

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99 Jaime A. FlorCruz, “Remote classroom illustrates China’s education challenges,” *CNN* (Atlanta, December 10, 2013). <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/12/09/world/asia/china-education-jaime-florcruz/>. Last accessed on July 30, 2014.

100 Ibid.

101 Abhimanyu Singh, “Taking a stand for rural teachers in China,” *China Daily*, October 4, 2012. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2012-10/04/content\\_15796923.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2012-10/04/content_15796923.htm). Last accessed on July 31, 2014.

to be a teacher in the PRC. The Chinese government requires all primary school teachers to have “at least a three year college education and middle school teachers should have four years of university education.”<sup>102</sup> As “qualified teachers” are extremely difficult to hire or refuse to go to remote and/or poverty stricken areas, schools in these areas must rely on the work of dedicated substitute teachers to fill the gaps and provide an education to their children.<sup>103</sup>

The life of a substitute teacher is full of hardship. Not only do they live and work in areas other teachers refuse to go, but their workload is heavier, their working environment more harsh, and their pay is abysmal. Substitute teachers are not put on the official payroll and this unofficial status allows the school to pay them less.<sup>104</sup> Substitute teachers receive a mere 500 to 1,000 yuan per month, which is below the legal minimum wage (see Figure 2), compared to the 3,000 to 5,000 yuan per month that their “qualified” counterparts earn.<sup>105</sup>

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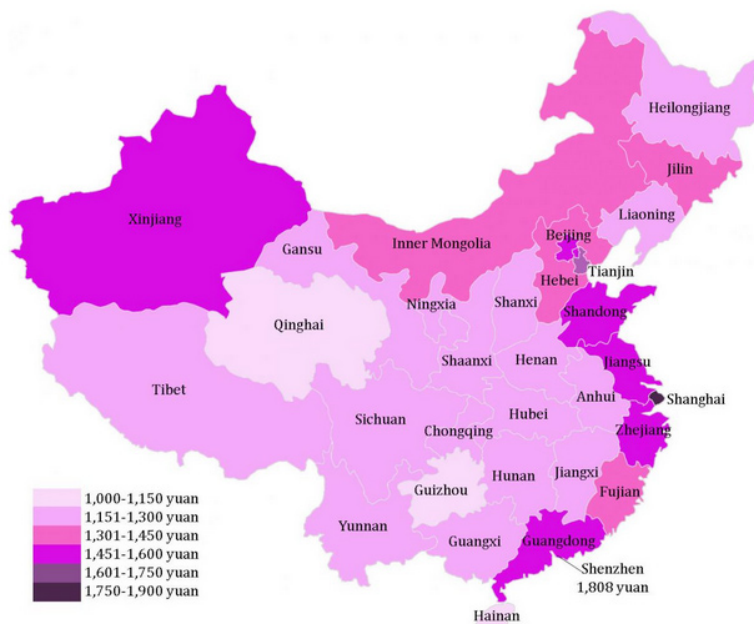
102 Abhimanyu Singh, “Taking a stand for rural teachers in China,” *China Daily*, October 4, 2012. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2012-10/04/content\\_15796923.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2012-10/04/content_15796923.htm). Last accessed on July 31, 2014.

103 CC & Key, “China, where is your conscience? The tragic curtain call of substitute teachers,” *ChinaHush*, January 7, 2010. <http://www.chinahush.com/2010/01/07/china-where-is-your-conscience-the-tragic-curtain-call-of-substitute-teachers/>. Last accessed on September 11, 2014.

104 TCHRD, “Plight of Tibetan ‘substitute teachers’ in Rebkong County,” *TCHRD*, May 26, 2014. [http://www.tchrd.org/2014/05/plight-of-tibetan-substitute-teachers-in-rebkong-county/#\\_edn6](http://www.tchrd.org/2014/05/plight-of-tibetan-substitute-teachers-in-rebkong-county/#_edn6). Last accessed on August 2, 2014.

105 Rigdhen Dolma, Chakmo Tso, Lumbum Tashi, Richard Finney, “Tibetan ‘Substitute’ Teachers Call for Benefits, Higher Pay,” *Radio Free Asia*, May 2, 2014. <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/teachers-05022014162845.html>. Last accessed on May 20, 2014.

*Figure 2: The PRC's and Tibet's minimum wage per month by region.<sup>106</sup>*



Even though the substitute teachers are paid only a fraction of what a certified teacher makes, they are expected to do more with the money. A considerable part of substitute teacher's income is spent on social welfare benefits provided to qualified teachers.<sup>107</sup> The poor wages and the lack of benefits put substitute teachers in a precarious position. In 2006, under the guise of improving the quality of education, the Chinese government launched a campaign to remove all substitute teachers from the education system, proclaiming "the term substitute teacher will become a part of history."<sup>108</sup> Despite this claim, substitute

<sup>106</sup> China Labour Bulletin, "Wages in China," *China Labour Bulletin*, June 10, 2013. <http://www.clb.org.hk/en/content/wages-china>. Last accessed on August 1, 2014.

<sup>107</sup> TCHRD, "Plight of Tibetan 'substitute teachers' in Rebkong County," *TCHRD*, May 26, 2014. [http://www.tchrd.org/2014/05/plight-of-tibetan-substitute-teachers-in-rebkong-county/#\\_edn6](http://www.tchrd.org/2014/05/plight-of-tibetan-substitute-teachers-in-rebkong-county/#_edn6). Last accessed on August 2, 2014.

<sup>108</sup> CC & Key, "China, where is your conscience? The tragic curtain call of substitute teachers," *ChinaHush*, January 7, 2010. <http://www.chinahush.com/2010/01/07/china-where-is-your-conscience-the-tragic-curtain-call-of-substitute-teachers/>. Last accessed on September 11, 2014.

teachers have not become a part of the PRC's or Tibet's history. PRC statistics estimate that, in 2010 there were 310,000 substitute teachers working predominantly in the rural regions of the PRC and Tibet.

On a local level, many Chinese government officials have grown to recognise that substitute teachers are the “backbones of education in these areas” and that they are highly dependent on substitute teachers to maintain recent gains in the increased accessibility of education in lesser developed rural regions of the PRC including Tibet. This recognition was evidenced on 8 May 2014 when, in Rebkong (Ch: Tongren) County, Malho (Ch: Huangnan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai Province, local officials agreed to implement substitute teachers' demands for improved pay and working conditions after eight days of protests.<sup>109, 110</sup>

Unfortunately, despite the local realities, the national policy of eradicating substitute teachers is unchanged. The Chinese government has continuously pursued various schemes in an effort to replace Tibetan substitute teachers. One of these schemes, the ‘Special Teaching Post Plan for Rural Schools,’ entails recently qualified teachers spending three years teaching “in rural schools of western China (including Tibet), mainly remote minority regions and educationally disadvantaged counties.”<sup>111</sup>

However, these schemes make a bad situation worse. The scheme introduces teachers trained in urban areas with little or no classroom experience to rural communities where they are unfamiliar with the culture or language. These teachers will find it difficult to adapt their teaching styles in order to provide an appropriate education in schools

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109 TCHRD, “Plight of Tibetan ‘substitute teachers’ in Rebkong County,” *TCHRD*, May 26, 2014. [http://www.tchrd.org/2014/05/plight-of-tibetan-substitute-teachers-in-rebkong-county/#\\_edn6](http://www.tchrd.org/2014/05/plight-of-tibetan-substitute-teachers-in-rebkong-county/#_edn6). Last accessed on August 2, 2014.

110 To date, the TCHRD, has not received any information relating to whether or not the demands made by the substitute teachers have been implemented by the local officials in the region.

111 Abhimanyu Singh, “Taking a stand for rural teachers in China,” *China Daily*, October 4, 2012. [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2012-10/04/content\\_15796923.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2012-10/04/content_15796923.htm). Last accessed on July 31, 2014.

that often lack the basic everyday educational supplies that are readily available in the cities.<sup>112</sup> Unsurprisingly, many of the graduates have little intention of continuing to teach in rural Tibetan regions once they have completed the mandatory three years.

On the other hand, substitute teachers are often born in the community in which they teach, have learned how to teach in that context, and are personally dedicated to the children of that area. Therefore, a drastic decline in the accessibility and quality of education received by children in rural regions of the Tibet and the PRC is a very real danger if the Chinese government is successful in its effort to eliminate these hard-working and dedicated individuals from the education system.

#### **ALTERNATIVE METHODS TO INCREASE THE ACCESSIBILITY OF EDUCATION: MOBILE LEARNING**

Nations that have large rural based populations can ill afford to neglect rural education without sacrificing the national increases in output that education is known to bring. However, for reasons mentioned above, centralized school systems or boarding school systems are impractical in Tibet. Therefore, alternative methods for providing quality education to rural regions of Tibet and the PRC are needed.

The growth of information technology has made “mobile-learning” or “M-learning” more feasible. For example, in the United States, there has been a huge increase in the enrollment of online based education, particularly at colleges and universities. During the fall term in 2009, almost one third of all college and university students in the United States, over 5.6 million students, took at least

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112 TCHRD, “Plight of Tibetan ‘substitute teachers’ in Rebkong County,” *TCHRD*, May 26, 2014. [http://www.tchrd.org/2014/05/plight-of-tibetan-substitute-teachers-in-rebkong-county/#\\_edn6](http://www.tchrd.org/2014/05/plight-of-tibetan-substitute-teachers-in-rebkong-county/#_edn6). Last accessed on August 2, 2014.

one online course.<sup>113</sup> One of the primary reasons for this growth is that, compared to traditional class rooms, the cost that a student is expected to pay in M-learning models is much lower. These savings are because requirements for physical infrastructure are decreased and there are no limits on class size.

Even without relying on modern technology, other States have succeeded in providing education to isolated populations without relying on centralized schools. Australia began implementing M-learning in 1948 by using radio transmitters to broadcast lessons to Australia's isolated outback communities. This means of delivering education became so successful that in 1956 the 'School of the Air' (SOA) was formally established. The initial purpose of the SOA was to provide elementary school education to rural youths. However, SOA's sheer scale of accessibility to Australia's population allowed it to expand to adult education courses. The SOA was so successful that it was able to expand into less isolated areas in Australia. By 2005, SOA's were estimated to cover a total distance of 1.5 million square kilometres and were present in all but two of Australia's eight states and territories.<sup>114</sup> In the Tibetan context a similar system could provide educational opportunities to Tibetan living in isolated parts of Tibet.

Despite its low-tech foundations, the SOA has successfully adopted new technology. For example, there is VSAT-based internet services. VSAT stands for "Very Small Aperture Terminal," where satellite dishes measuring less than 3 meters in diameter are used to provide internet services. VSAT-based internet services have allowed SOA's to provide lessons that have a greater resemblance to traditional classrooms with

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113 Martha H. Ginn, Augustine Hammond, "Online Education in Public Affairs: Current State and Emerging Issues," 2012, *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 18(2), pp. 247-270. [http://www.naspaa.org/jpaemessenger/Article/VOL18-2/03\\_GinnHammond.pdf](http://www.naspaa.org/jpaemessenger/Article/VOL18-2/03_GinnHammond.pdf). Last accessed on September 12, 2014.

114 Australian Government, "The School of the Air and remote learning," *Australian Government*, December 21, 2007. <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/school-of-the-air>. Last accessed on August 11, 2014.

features such as an interactive whiteboard and the ability for students to hold face-to-face discussions with their teachers.<sup>115</sup> Also, unlike traditional SOAs, course material and the student's course work does not have to be submitted by mail. This means that a modern day SOA teacher is able to provide their students with the same degree of course work as their urban counterparts.

M-learning has also been introduced and is used extensively in mainland China. In 2003, "VSAT services educat[ed] over 100,000 off-campus students."<sup>116</sup> The growth in ownership of mobile phones in the PRC<sup>117</sup> and the success it has had in the United States, Australia, and China demonstrates that M-learning can be implemented in the PRC. Furthermore, VSAT infrastructure is already in place in Tibetan areas such as TAR. According to the Chinese government, with the combined use of VSAT and optical fiber cables all of TAR has internet access.<sup>118</sup> If this is true, the implementation of an M-learning education system in TAR (and Tibet, generally) would neither be overly expensive nor time consuming. Furthermore, an M-learning system would help to counter-act the effect of the shortage of teachers in Tibetan areas as well as reduce the shortcomings of poorly resourced schools by making course material available online.

M-learning is ideal for rural Tibetan communities (nomadic communities in particular) because it allows students to pursue an education without sacrificing their traditional way of life. For example, Australia's Law School of the Air at Charles Darwin University, found that students chose decentralized courses primarily because these

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115 Australian Government, "The School of the Air and remote learning," *Australian Government*, December 21, 2007. <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/school-of-the-air>. Last accessed on August 11, 2014.

116 Michael J Santos, "VSAT Broadband in China," 2003, *Asia Pacific*, 2(14). <http://connect-world.com/~cwiml/index.php/component/k2/item/2492-vsats-broadband-in-china>. Last accessed on August 12, 2014.

117 Ibid.

118 Tibet facts & figures 2005, "Posts and Telecommunications," 2005, *China Internet Information Center*. <http://www.china.org.cn/english/zhuanti/tibet/%20facts/163688.htm>. Last accessed on August 12, 2014



courses allowed them to continue education without the substantial infringement that traditional class-based education would normally have on their lives.<sup>119</sup> For Tibetan nomads, such an education could allow them to participate in herding activities while simultaneously receiving an education.

The ability to both receive an education and participate in traditional functions of their culture will have two major effects: (1) it will improve nomadic Tibetans perception of the education system, increasing nomadic parents' willingness to enroll their children; and (2) it will increase the chance that students involved in nomadic activity will remain in the education system for longer periods of time. Also, by doing so, an M-learning system will not only aid the Chinese government in achieving its educational goals for rural Tibet but can also help it to fulfill its obligations under the CRC and the ICCPR by providing an education alternative to the formal centralized school system that better reconciles the Tibetan cultural identity.

### C. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The economic benefit of higher education in the PRC is questionable as the unemployment rate increases when students become more educated (*see* Figure 3).<sup>120</sup> In the PRC, some colleges and universities have started requiring "proof of imminent employment" to graduate.<sup>121</sup> This is because these schools depend on alumni employment rates to secure funding. Students have

119 Day, M. & Evans, J. (2004). Law school of the air: An example of adaptive technology in legal education. In R. Atkinson, C. McBeath, D. Jonas-Dwyer & R. Phillips (Eds), *Beyond the comfort zone: Proceedings of the 21st ASCILITE Conference* (pp. 249-253). Perth, 5-8 December. <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/perth04/procs/day.html>. Last accessed on September 12, 2014.

120 William McGuinness, "Half Of Recent College Grads Work Jobs That Don't Require A Degree: Report," *The Huffington Post*, January 29, 2013. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/29/underemployed-overeducated\\_n\\_2568203.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/29/underemployed-overeducated_n_2568203.html). Last accessed on August 9, 2014.

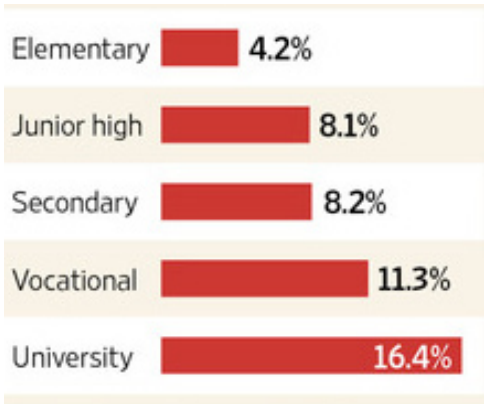
121 The Global Times, "Employment' contracts selling briskly in poor job market, say vendors," *The Global Times*, Beijing, May 21, 2013. [http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/783270.shtml#\\_UaJO9tgrcwP](http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/783270.shtml#_UaJO9tgrcwP). Last accessed on September 12, 2014.

resorted to purchasing fake employment contracts, suggesting that the unemployment rate for college and university graduates may be underestimated.<sup>122</sup>

While college and university graduates are struggling to find work, many manual labor sectors of the PRC’s economy are complaining that there are not enough students completing vocational education to fulfil demand.

With this phenomenon in mind, investment in vocational education and training (VET) has two particular benefits: (1) “up-skilling and integrating young people into the labor market” and (2) “providing high quality technical skills” that will likely increase production in that person’s society.<sup>123</sup>

*Figure 3: Unemployment rate for those aged between 21 to 25 years old, in the PRC, by level of education.<sup>124</sup>*



122 Ibid.

123 OECD, “China (People’s Republic of) Learning for Jobs: Vocational Education and Training in China Strengths, Challenges and Policy Options (Summary),” OECD, June 2010. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/45494135.pdf>. Last accessed on September 8, 2014.

124 Bob Davis, “Chinese College Graduates Play It Safe and Lose Out,” *The Wall Street Journal*, New York, March 25, 2013. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324678604578340530200654140>. Last accessed on August 2, 2014.

## PAYING LIP SERVICE

The Chinese leadership has recognized the importance of VET services in addressing the phenomenon where talented graduates cannot find jobs while a high demand for skilled workers to fill jobs that require vocational training remains.

For example, in the 2010 National Education Plan, the Chinese government claimed that:

*“Expanding vocational education must be given more precedence partly because it is a major channel through which to boost economic growth, promote employment, improve people’s livelihood and address issues pertinent to agriculture, rural areas and farmers, and partly because it is a key link in mitigating structural conflicts between (labour) supply and demand.”*<sup>125</sup>

Then, at a conference in June 2012, Lu Xin, vice education minister of the PRC proclaimed that:

*“[The PRC has] jobs and positions for which skilled workers cannot be found, and on the other hand, we have talented people who cannot find jobs; technical and vocational education and training is the answer”* (emphasis added).<sup>126</sup>

Despite its verbal dedication to VET programs, the Chinese government refuses to take a more comprehensive role in developing vocational education within Tibet and mainland China and delegates the responsibility of organising and developing vocational education to provincial and prefecture-level city governments.<sup>127</sup> This means that the pre-existing regional inequalities between vocational education

125 Outline of China’s National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020) 2010 (People’s Republic of China), s6, para 1.

126 Keith Bradsher, “The Education Revolution: Chinese Graduates Say No Thanks to Factory Jobs,” *The New York Times*, New York, January 24, 2014. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/25/business/as-graduates-rise-in-china-office-jobs-fail-to-keep-up.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/25/business/as-graduates-rise-in-china-office-jobs-fail-to-keep-up.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0). Last accessed on August 2, 2014.

127 Ibid.

service providers are likely to continue as long as the Chinese leadership continues to hand over its responsibilities to lower levels of administration who have shown an inability to organize these services effectively.<sup>128</sup>

## ISSUES FACING TIBET'S VET SYSTEM

The popular view that VET schools are “schools for people from peasant backgrounds”<sup>129</sup> is one of the main reasons the Chinese government lacks political support for these programs. This has led to VET being “treated as second-class general education that is offered parallel to regular high schools, but with less academic rigor.”<sup>130</sup> This stigmatization also paved the way for the PRC's college building boom in the early 2000's, in which vocational schools were simultaneously targeted for “college transformations.”<sup>131</sup> VET's stigma also means that vocational education schools do not receive the financial support necessary to offer high quality services to their students.

Also, VET for Tibetan nomads is particularly limited. The causes of this poor quality of vocational education is two-fold: (1) the Chinese government has focused on an academic-skills based education within Tibet; and (2) funding for Tibetan education is generally poor already. For instance, research conducted in 2007 found that “there was no pre-school education or vocational education center” at all in Nyerong (Ch: Nairong) County, Nagchu (Ch: Naqu) Prefecture, TAR.<sup>132</sup> Thus, the largely nomadic student population in Nyerong was forced to rely upon the non-vocational schools located in the area to

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128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 Ibid.

131 Bob Davis, “Chinese College Graduates Play It Safe and Lose Out,” *The Wall Street Journal*, New York, March 25, 2013. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887324678604578340530200654140>. Last accessed on August 2, 2014.

132 Gerard Postiglione, Ben Jiao, Li Xiaoliang, “Education Change and Development Nomadic Communities of the Tibetan Autonomous Region,” 2012, *International Journal of Chinese Education*, pg. 99. <http://www.case.edu/affil/tibet/tibetanNomads/documents/Educationchangeanddevelopmentinnomadiccommunitiesofthetar.pdf>. Last visited on September, 8, 2014.

provide a rudimentary version of vocational education and training.

Furthermore, the Chinese government violates various aspects of its own legislation by failing to provide adequate support for Tibet's VET system. For example, there is a great shortage of necessary basic teaching equipment forcing VET teachers to rely upon "textbooks that are out-dated and not related to the work that graduates might be expected to do."<sup>133</sup> This is a violation of the Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China (hereinafter, "Vocational Education Law"), Article 24, Paragraph 3, which states that vocational schools must:

*"...have teaching places which accord with the prescribed standards, and facilities and equipment suitable for the vocational education."*

Vocational teachers also typically do not have any practical experience regarding the subjects they teach and are frequently rotated between VET schools to academic high schools<sup>134</sup> by county education departments.<sup>135</sup> This is in direct violation of the Education Law of the People's Republic of China, Article 20, Paragraph 3, which declares:

*"...staff and workers engaging in technical work must receive proper training before going to their posts."*

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133 Ben Hillman, "The Causes and Consequences of Rapid Urbanisation in an Ethnically Diverse Region," 2013, China Perspectives. <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/6244>. Last accessed on August 4, 2014.

134 The use of academic high school teachers to teach vocational education is due to the fact that there is "a shortage of teachers who are qualified to teach vocational skills to their students" across the PRC, undoubtedly due to the stigma surround vocational education. Run-Zhi Lai, Nina Maturu, Elizabeth Stamberger, Nick Stephens, Pauline Sze, "Vocational Education and Training in China," 2012, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. [http://sites.fordschool.umich.edu/china-policy/files/2011/10/PP716\\_VET-Paper\\_Final\\_042911-1.pdf](http://sites.fordschool.umich.edu/china-policy/files/2011/10/PP716_VET-Paper_Final_042911-1.pdf). Last accessed on August 4, 2014.

135 Ben Hillman, "The Causes and Consequences of Rapid Urbanisation in an Ethnically Diverse Region," 2013, China Perspectives. <http://chinaperspectives.revues.org/6244>. Last accessed on August 4, 2014.

Upon completing VET programs, students' employability is negatively impacted by a lack of data on labor market demands, leading many VET providers to mimic VET services found in mainland China, highly limiting the value of VET for Tibetan students wishing to remain in their home region. This is also a violation of the Vocational Education Law, Article 23, Paragraph 1, which states that vocational education should be conducted in manner that would allow it to "*serve the local economic construction.*"

Other key issues facing VET programs within Tibet include:

- No clear minimum standards for VET schools in terms of equipment, teachers, etc.<sup>136</sup> Where PRC national guidelines do exist, they "are only implemented where resources are available."<sup>137</sup>
- Limited opportunity for student internships (which are considered a fundamental part of VET). Where there is an opportunity for student internships, there is a degree of variation regarding the length of time that students can expect to spend on an internship.<sup>138</sup>
- VET providers' ability to provide practical education is severely limited by laws requiring VET students to study a larger number of non-practical/theory-based classes like ideology, politics, and "vocational ethics,"<sup>139</sup> taking away from time that could be dedicated to more practical vocational education and training.

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136 OECD, "China (People's Republic of) Learning for Jobs: Vocational Education and Training in China Strengths, Challenges and Policy Options (Summary)," OECD, June 2010. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/45494135.pdf>. Last accessed on September 8, 2014.

137 Ironically, these guidelines are specifically designed to require "resources not available to most schools." Ibid.

138 OECD, "China (People's Republic of) Learning for Jobs: Vocational Education and Training in China Strengths, Challenges and Policy Options (Summary)," OECD, June 2010. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/skills-beyond-school/45494135.pdf>. Last accessed on September 8, 2014.

139 PRC's Vocational Education Law of the People's Republic of China, Article 4.

Despite the Chinese government's statements claiming strong support for VET program, the implementation of these programs demonstrates a lack of commitment to their success and the quality of education received by students enrolled in these programs.

### **AN EXAMPLE OF A SUCCESSFUL VET PROGRAM: GERMANY**

As with education in rural areas, there are successful examples of VET systems that the PRC can draw upon and emulate. Germany's VET system is one such example.<sup>140</sup>

First, the German system is effective due to its dual strategy of “combining theoretical reflection in vocational schools with practical in-company experience [that] not only ensures...the business world will have skilled workers with real-life training, but also facilitates the young people's transition into the (labour) market.”<sup>141</sup> One of the main issues facing the PRC's VET system is the limited opportunity for student internships. The PRC's VET program would improve if it incorporated Germany's dual strategy into its VET system's ideology. In practice, this means providing more meaningful and applicable internships so that its VET students get the “real-life training” that make German VET students successful.

Second, unlike the PRC, German VET has not been deprioritized by the government, especially in terms of funding. This is because Germany's economy heavily relies upon its manufacturing sector. The schooling required to support the manufacturing sector has always received a great deal of government support. As a result, German vocational schools are able to acquire highly skilled teachers from industries driving the German economy as well as the equipment necessary for students to gain practical knowledge of the everyday

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140 Dr. Dieter Euler, “Germany's Dual Vocational Training System: A Model for Other Countries?” 2013, *Bertelsmann Stiftung* 1(1). [http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/cps/rde/xbcr/SID-3-A192E26-71604707/bst/xcms\\_bst\\_dms\\_37644\\_37778\\_2.pdf](http://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/cps/rde/xbcr/SID-3-A192E26-71604707/bst/xcms_bst_dms_37644_37778_2.pdf). Last accessed on August 4, 2014.

141 Ibid.

tasks required in the economic sector they wish to join. There are also many vocational jobs waiting to be filled in various industries in the PRC.

To incorporate lessons from Germany the PRC needs to reprioritize VET programs and properly fund them. To do this the Chinese government must (1) pro-actively launch campaigns to fight the stigma that has become associated with VET; (2) reallocate a proportionate amount of resources to VET programs so that they can stand on a more equal footing with traditional university education programs; and (3) reform its laws and policies, diverting the time and effort of VET students away from non-practical ideology and politics classes so that students can focus on efficiently gaining a more practical and effective vocational education.

As an added benefit for the PRC, German Chancellor Angela Merkel has suggested that the German government might be willing to co-operate with the PRC in order to develop its VET sector when she “expressed special interest in the possibilities of vocational training in China” during her visit to the PRC in July 2014.<sup>142</sup> Thus, vocational education and training remains a necessary and promising area of education in which the Chinese government must not only pay lip-service to, but also take substantial steps to improve in Tibet (as well as other rural areas of the PRC).

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142 Wolfsburg, Chengdu, Peking, “German Chancellor Angela Merkel visits Volkswagen plant in Chengdu, China,” *Volkswagen*, July 6, 2014. [http://www.volkswagenag.com/content/vwcorp/info\\_center/en/news/2014/07/merkel\\_chengdu.html](http://www.volkswagenag.com/content/vwcorp/info_center/en/news/2014/07/merkel_chengdu.html). Last accessed on August 4, 2014.

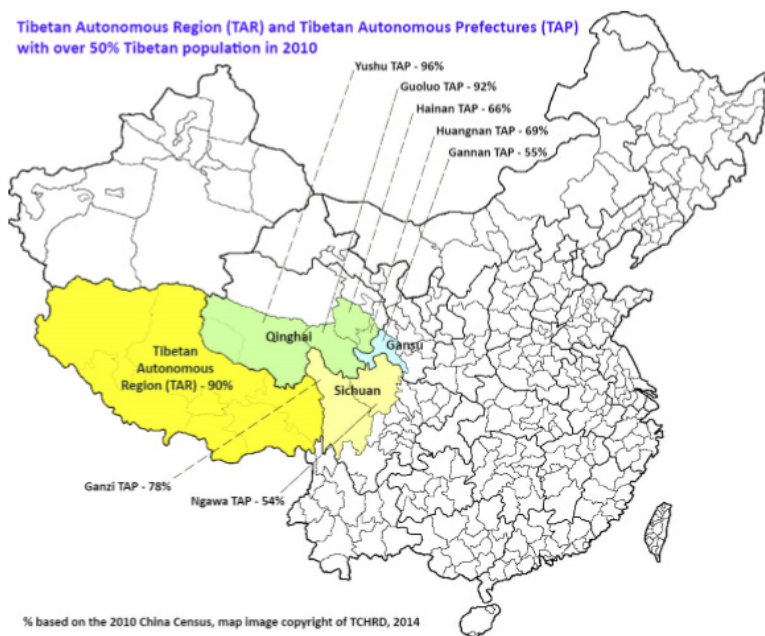


## V. CURRENT TRENDS WITHIN THE TIBETAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

This section uses data translated by the TCHRD from the PRC's 2000 and 2010 censuses, and to a lesser extent, data from the PRC's 2011 statistical yearbook, regarding the Tibetan education system. This data does not include all areas within Tibet due to both censuses' failure to use nationality/ethnicity as a variable within the data. This section only focuses upon regions where the Tibetan community comprise at least 50% of the overall population (*see* Figure 4).

Even by focusing solely on regions where Tibetans are the majority, the data is still skewed because of the stark contrast in educational indicators between the generally urbanized migrant communities from mainland China and the rural based Tibetan communities. Nonetheless, this data provides the most accurate available approximation of the Tibetan educational sector due to the fact that it does not include areas dominated by Han Chinese migrants (who generally have a much more developed education system). Also, this data was collected in the latter half of 2000 and 2010, and thus, is unlikely to be skewed by the large number of seasonal migrants from mainland China, who usually travel to Tibet in the first half of the year.

*Figure 4: Areas where the Tibetan population comprises of over 50% of total population.<sup>143</sup>*



## **A. DECREASES IN STUDENT ENROLLMENT AND THE NUMBER OF SCHOOLS DO NOT CORRELATE WITH AN OVERALL INCREASE IN POPULATION**

Throughout all of Tibet, the population increased by approximately 16% between 2000 and 2010 (see Figure 5). Based on this statistic, one could logically assume that the overall student population enrolled in schools would increase. Instead, enrollment at some schools has dropped. In Ngaba, enrollment dropped from 98,984 students in 2006 to 74,995 students in 2014. Also, the overall number and size of schools should naturally increase in order to accommodate an increase in population.

<sup>143</sup> 2010 National Population Census of China.

However, like the reduction in student population, the number of schools in Tibet has decreased as well, but even more dramatically. At the same time enrollment dropped by about a quarter, the number of schools was cut by about three quarters from 1195 in 2006 to 286 in 2014 (*see* Figure 6). This alarming statistic may indicate that the Chinese government has drastically increased the use of large boarding schools for Tibetan elementary school education at the expense of small local schools. This is particularly worrisome for Tibetan students because of the difficulties in reconciling the boarding school system with Tibetan culture and nomadic lifestyle.

*Figure 5: Tibetan populations by region and gender based on 2010 PRC Census.<sup>144</sup>*

Region	2010 Population of Tibetans	% of all Tibetans living in the PRC	Tibetan Males	Tibetan Females
Tibet (TAR)	2,716,388	43%	1,368,355	1,348,033
Sichuan	1,496,524	24%	747,138	749,386
Qinghai	1,375,059	23%	693,995	681,064
Gansu	488,359	7%	245,262	243,097
Yunnan	142,257	2%	71,239	71,018
5 Region Totals	6,218,587	99%	3,125,989	3,092,598
National Total Tibetan Population in 2010: <b>6,282,187 (6.3 million)</b>				
National Total Tibetan Population in 2000: 5, 416,021, (5.4 million)				

144

Ibid.

Figure 6: Educational Facilities, Personnel, and Student-Teacher Ratios by Region, 2006-2013.<sup>145</sup>

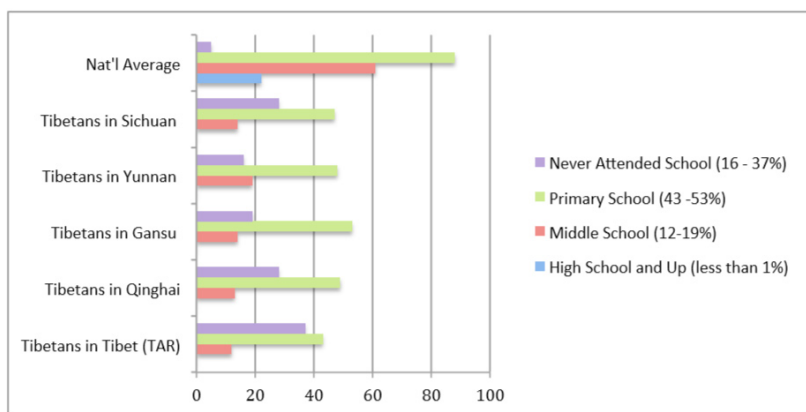
Region	# Kindergarten schools		# Enrolled students in kindergarten		# Kindergarten school teachers		Student-teacher ratio	
	2006	2013	2006	2013	2006	2013	2006	2013
<b>Tibet (TAR)</b>	42	480	9596	61495	378	1593	25.4	38.6
<b>Qinghai</b>								
- Tsolho TAP	11	252	3144	16811	89	584	35.3	28.8
- Malho TAP	5	74	1249	6209	52	121	24	51.3
- Golog TAP	5	6	740	3173	31	39	23.9	81.4
- Yushu TAP	5	26	749	2076	47	38	15.9	54.6
<b>Sichuan</b>								
- Ngaba TAP	27	64	8961	729	289	564	31	1.3
- Kardze TAP	30	332	6063	667	321	580	18.9	1.2
<b>Gansu</b>								
- Kanlho TAP	12	No data	3999	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
Region	# Elementary schools		# Enrolled students in elementary school		# Elementary school teachers		Student-teacher ratio	
	2006	2013	2006	2013	2006	2013	2006	2013
<b>Tibet (TAR)</b>	890	857	327497	292016	14267	18853	22.9	15.5
<b>Qinghai</b>								
- Tsolho TAP	344	54	51000	45141	2585	2563	19.7	17.6
- Malho TAP	191	142	34000	27882	1910	1636	17.8	17
- Golog TAP	59	53	14000	20694	943	1042	14.8	19.9
- Yushu TAP	187	131	33000	50923	1444	2102	22.9	24.2
<b>Sichuan</b>								
- Ngaba TAP	1195	286	98934	74995	6269	6204	15.8	12.1
- Kardze TAP	927	588	96596	107090	5364	6784	18	15.8
<b>Gansu</b>								
- Kanlho TAP	640	461	84713	89673	4394	5419	19.2	16.5
Region	# Middle & high schools		# Enrolled students in middle & high school		# Middle & high school teachers		Student-teacher ratio	
	2006	2013	2006	2013	2006	2013	2006	2013
<b>Tibet (TAR)</b>	118	122	154048	178091	8161	12640	18.9	14
<b>Qinghai</b>								
- Tsolho TAP	42	19	23167	26474	1179	1652	19.6	16
- Malho TAP	20	20	10777	15369	589	818	18.3	18.8
- Golog TAP	14	9	3188	9679	328	406	9.7	23.6
- Yushu TAP	16	12	6213	15606	448	686	13.9	22.8
<b>Sichuan</b>								
- Ngaba TAP	66	57	43468	49381	2865	3836	15.2	12.9
- Kardze TAP	36	46	28678	49892	1970	3009	14.6	16.6
<b>Gansu</b>								
- Kanlho TAP	56	51	32805	50930	1822	2745	18	18.6

145 The PRC's Provincial Statistical Yearbooks, 2006-2013.

Furthermore, with the exceptions of Kardze, Ngaba, and possibly Kanlho, there has been a large increase in the number of students attending kindergarten. This large increase in students attending kindergarten over a relatively short period of time suggests that the Chinese government's plan aimed at two years of free bilingual preschool education for children in rural Tibet<sup>146</sup> did increase enrollment. The fact that most areas report a massive increase in the number of kindergartners also suggests that this policy is becoming a standard practice. This is highly alarming because of the impact it may have on the students' fluency of the Tibetan language. As mentioned in section III(A), "Failing Bilingual Education," the use of policies aimed at assimilating minorities, such as the policy of offering nomadic children free education for their first two years of school in both Tibetan and Mandarin, raise the possibility that the children will end up fluent in neither Tibetan nor Mandarin.

## **B. ACTUAL ENROLLMENT AND ILLITERACY RATES CONTRADICT CLAIMS OF IMPROVEMENT**

*Figure 7: Percentage of Tibetans Receiving an Education.*<sup>147</sup>



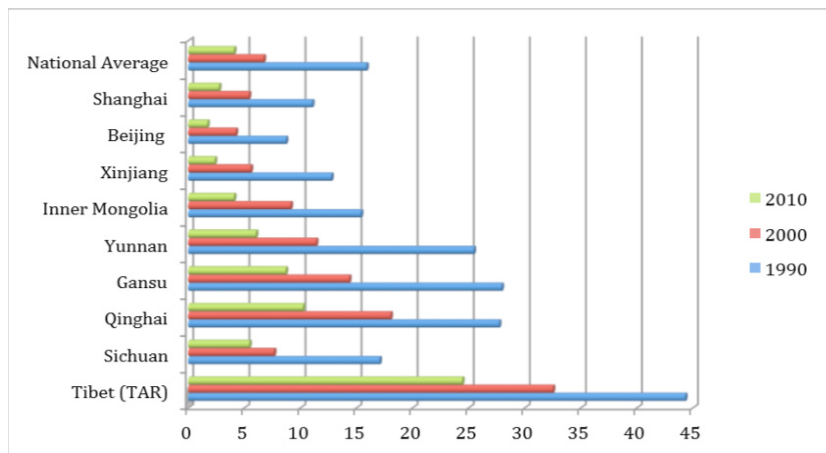
Source: 2010 National Population Census of China

146 Tibet to ensure free bilingual preschool education by 2015, Xinhua, 3 December 2010, <http://english.people.com.cn/90001/90776/90882/7220567.html>

147 2010 National Population census of China.

In the TAR, where the Tibetan community comprises 90% of the population (*see* Figure 5), roughly 38% of Tibetan youths do not receive an education. These data contradict China's claim that "Tibetans receive an average 8.4 years of education" in the TAR.<sup>148</sup>

*Figure 8: Illiteracy rates by region, 1990 to 2010.<sup>149</sup>*



Source: Major Figures on the 2010 National Population Census of China, pg. 35

Figure 8, which shows illiteracy rates in the PRC by region, illustrates the impact this lack of education has upon the Tibetan community. In TAR the illiteracy rate is roughly 23%. It is more than double the illiteracy rate in the next highest region and approximately five times higher than the national average. At its lowest, the illiteracy rate in TAR is almost ten times higher than claims made by PRC officials in 2008 that it was under 2.4%.<sup>150</sup>

148 Mu Xuequan, "Average Tibetans receives 8.4 years of education," *Xinhua*, January 15, 2014. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-01/15/c\\_126004698.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-01/15/c_126004698.htm). Last accessed on August 5, 2014.

149 Ibid.

150 Ben Jiao, "Remarkable Development of Basic Education in Tibet," *Tibetan Academy of Social Science*, June 18, 2012. <http://www.xzass.org/english/newsinfo.php?id=2016>. Last accessed on August 5, 2014.

China's functional definition of literacy rate is problematic. The Measures on Standards and Assessment of Illiteracy Eradication among Adults in Tibet do not distinguish between literacy in Tibetan or Chinese languages.<sup>151</sup> The law on illiteracy eradication stipulates that one is literate whether one can read and write in Chinese or Tibetan. As a result, in China's 2010 census data it is impossible to determine the literacy rate of Tibetans in their mother tongue given because literacy is by the ability to read and write in either Chinese or Tibetan. This does not decrease the importance of literacy, which is a social and cultural practice that plays an important role in maintaining and transmitting cultural values and beliefs.<sup>152</sup>

### C. GENDER INEQUALITY IN TIBETAN EDUCATION

There is also some evidence of gender inequality in the Tibetan education system. Females form the minority at all levels of education (*see* Figure 9 below) despite the fact that gender distribution amongst the Tibetan community is nearly equal (*see* Figure 6 above).

*Figure 9: 2010 Gender Disparities Among Tibetans Receiving an Education.*<sup>153</sup>

Tibetans age 6 & up (TAR and TAPs)	Never Attended School	Attended Primary School	Attended Middle School	Attended High School	Attended Higher Education
<b>Males</b>	41%	53%	58%	54%	53%
<b>Females</b>	59%	47%	42%	46%	47%

Of all the Tibetans that never received any schooling 59% is female. The large gender inequality is a substantial cause for concern and any new educational policies within Tibet must aim to bolster Tibetan females' inclusion in the education system.

151 Zhou, Minglang. "Legislating Literacy for Linguistic and Ethnic Minorities in Contemporary China," *Multilingual Matters*, 2007, *Language Planning and Policy: Issues in Language Planning and Literacy*, Anthony Liddicoat (eds), p. 109-111.

152 Ferdman, B M. *Ethnic and minority issues in literacy, an international handbook*, 1999.

153 2010 National Population census of China.

**D. THE NUMBER OF YEARS OF EDUCATION RECEIVED  
PREDICTIVE OF THE TYPE OF WORK STUDENTS WILL  
DO FOR A LIVING**

Finally, there is a direct relationship between the number of years of education received by Tibetans and their ultimate field of work. The less education received the more likely it is that the person will work in agriculture, livestock, or forestry (*see* Figures 10 and 11 below). On the other hand, more education creates only slight increases in the opportunity for more diverse work in the manufacturing field. On the whole, however, agriculture and livestock remain the predominant industries for students in Tibet. These data suggest that, at present, there is little economic incentive for the predominantly rural based Tibetan community to take advantage of Chinese government’s offer of 15 years of free education.<sup>154</sup>

*Figure 10: Number of Employees by Industry and Education Level in the TAR.*<sup>155</sup>

Education Level	Agriculture	Livestock	Manufacturing	Forestry	Mining
Never Attended School	30,852	19,790	467	77	30
Elementary School	36,111	12,000	1071	127	90
Middle School	7918	2353	931	61	99
High School	706	210	405	18	65
Higher Education	232	96	322	3	40

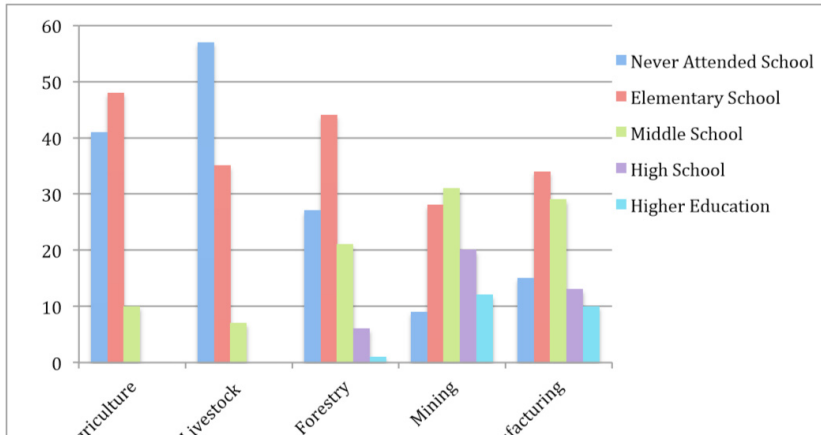
In order to make the education system more appealing to the Tibetan community, and thus increase the average number of years a Tibetan student spends in education, it is essential that the Tibetan education system focus on providing the skills required within the Tibetan economy as opposed to those required in mainland China’s economy. Any new education or development policy aimed at Tibetan regions must place greater focus upon developing a more relevant system (including a VET system) that caters to the local economies found in Tibet.

154 Mu Xuequan, “Average Tibetans receives 8.4 years of education,” *Xinhua*, January 15, 2014. [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-01/15/c\\_126004698.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-01/15/c_126004698.htm). Last accessed on September 12, 2014.

155 Ibid.



*Figure 11: Percentage of Employees by Industry and Education Level in the TAR.<sup>156</sup>*



<sup>156</sup> Ibid.



## VI. CONCLUSION

The problem facing the Tibetan education system is two-fold: (1) there are many real and tangible problems with the system that, (2) the Chinese government focuses much of its rhetorical attention towards, but in practice, does little to fix.

First and foremost, the system is fraught with many real and tangible problems that negatively affect the quality of education received by Tibetan students. These problems include the use of the education system as a tool to propagate pro-Chinese Communist Party (CCP) ideology. By doing so, the Chinese government simultaneously manipulates Tibetan history and denigrates Tibetan culture in the eyes of students. Not only is this a problem for the education system, but it is also a violation of the PRC's legal obligations to the Tibetan people under various international multi-lateral treaties such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Cultural and Political Rights. More importantly, this is also a violation of the PRC's own legislation, most notably, the Consitution of the PRC.

Then there are arbitrarily applied education policies aimed at assimilating minorities into the Han Chinese majority instead of taking into account their actual educational needs. The use of Mandarin Chinese as the primary language of instruction and the Chinese government's insistence on the use of boarding schools are examples of these policies. As a result, Tibetan students are not only alienated in their own education system, but they cannot learn and engage with their teachers effectively due to the obstacles imposed by language barriers. Furthermore, they are often forced to choose

between practicing their traditional way of life and receiving a formal education. In reality, this “choice” is no choice at all. These policies also violate international human rights provisions protecting every person’s universal human right to practice and develop their own cultural identity and way of life. Furthermore, these policies directly contradict promises to the Tibetan people to respect their culture and traditions, evidencing the PRC’s desire to phase Tibetan culture out through assimilation of Tibetan society.

Improving the quality and accessibility of rural education remains yet another daunting task to achieve in order to produce more highly skilled workers and improve the overall productivity of the Tibetan work force. As of now, the de-prioritization and substantial lack of funding for vocational education and training programs that would help better the quality of rural education also contradicts PRC promises to the Tibetan people under its own legislation, such as its 2010 National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development and its Vocational Education Law, Article 24, Paragraph 3.

Unfortunately, although the Chinese government uses rhetoric to claim that it values Tibetan education, the policies and strategies in practice show that the authorities are either too inflexible or simply unwilling to fix these problems. A prime example is the policy of eliminating rural substitute teachers from the landscape of Tibetan education, while they have yet to solve the problem of incentivizing more “qualified teachers” to come and teach in these areas for an extended period of time.

The PRC’s lip service to vocational education and training services is another example. While the Chinese leadership constantly recognizes the importance of VET programs in the overall productivity of the workforce, they simultaneously sidestep accountability by delegating the responsibility of organizing these programs to lower level

administration at the county and prefecture level; people who have proven that they cannot handle this task. And although the Chinese leadership's primary strength lies in propaganda campaigns, it does nothing to proactively fight the negative stigma that has attached itself to VET programs, making the speech it dedicates to the importance of VET programs just that: empty speech.

It is this dual-headed monster that faces the Tibetan education system. A system fraught with real problems, of which, those responsible talk about but take inadequate action to remedy. This happens while Tibetan students are continually alienated, disregarded, and left behind their Han majority counterparts. And the current education trends based on the most recent and accurate data available do nothing more than paint a bleak picture.

The Chinese government drastically needs to redevelop the education system to make it more inclusive, more relevant, and more accessible. The Chinese government needs to do this promptly.



## VII. RECOMMENDATION

For the Chinese government:

1. Immediately end its use of the education system as a tool to propagate its ideology and respect Tibetans' right to govern their own educational and cultural affairs, as outlined in the Constitution of the PRC, Article 119;
2. Respect organized religion and the rights of all followers to have and practice the religion of their choice and immediately remove all policies that violate the Constitution of the PRC, Article 36;
3. Introduce a more inclusive bilingual education system aimed not at assimilation but strengthening the use of native language and asserting native identity while respecting the commitment the Chinese government has made to the Tibetan people under its own Constitution;
4. End its policy of removing nomadic students from their local communities to be educated in boarding schools and consider the use of alternative methods of education (such as mobile-learning systems that utilize VSAT) that will not deprive the Tibetan nomads of their rights nor undermine their culture and way of life;
5. Increase its expenditure on education to meet the United Nations' recommended minimum 6% of its annual GDP;
6. Continue the use of substitute teachers in rural Tibetan regions in order to maintain, if not increase, the current level

of rural education accessibility;

7. Implement a policy of training substitute teachers so that they may become fully qualified teachers with knowledge and experience of teaching in Tibet;
8. Provide a more meaningful VET system (such as Germany's) in which qualified vocational teachers are employed in sufficiently well-equipped facilities in order to reorient Tibet's VET system, making it more relevant to the economic sectors found within the Tibet.

To UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Kishore Singh:

1. Seek a formal invitation from the PRC to conduct a fact-finding country visit in order to assess Tibet's education system;
2. Work with non-governmental organizations such as TCHRD who can help facilitate potential interviews and debrief the UN Special Rapporteur on various issues such as Tibetan culture, history, and language;
3. Specifically investigate how Tibetan history is manipulated in the current education system's curriculum;
4. Specifically investigate how Tibetan culture is portrayed in the current education system's curriculum;
5. Specifically investigate the overall effects of using Mandarin Chinese as the primary language of instruction on Tibetan students;
6. Specifically investigate the overall effectiveness of boarding schools on students with nomadic family backgrounds;



7. Specifically investigate the overall technological infrastructure in Tibet in order to assess the feasibility of VSAT mobile-learning alternatives in rural education;
8. Specifically investigate the current state of vocational education and training facilities;
9. Transmit an urgent appeal to the PRC based on the issues mentioned in this report.

