



China: Minority Exclusion, Marginalization and Rising Tensions

A report by Human Rights in China
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SPECIAL FOCUS: Inadequate protection of cultural identity

Integrationist policies, implemented alongside minorities' political and economic exclusion, have the practical effect of assimilating minorities into the dominant Han Chinese culture. Accompanied by systematic violations of minorities' civil and political rights, these policies make protection of cultural identity increasingly difficult.

HAN CHINESE DOMINANCE IN AUTONOMOUS REGIONS

- The massive influx of Han Chinese settlers has made it difficult for minorities to maintain distinct cultural identities.
- In this imposed process of Han-centric cultural assimilation, minorities are regularly exoticized, conveyed as 'backwards' and in need of 'modernization.'
- Ethnic individuals publicly expressing their cultural identities face possible retribution and being labeled as 'separatists.'
- Nationalist 'patriotic education' takes place in education and religious learning centers.

DECREASED USE OF LOCAL LANGUAGES

- The imposition of Mandarin means that ethnic minority children have limited opportunities to become fluent in their own language and to enjoy native language or cultural education.
- An official PRC survey, reported in the *People's Daily*, conducted in April 2005 found that nearly 40 minority languages in the PRC are on the verge of extinction.
- An increasing proportion of Han Chinese teachers in autonomous regions do not speak the local minority language.

Consequences of ineffective implementation of bilingual education:

- ⇒ High drop-out rates after primary school, especially for minority students who are unable to acquire Mandarin fluency
- ⇒ Long-term effects of social exclusion based on cultural identity

"Personally, I think I will be forced to learn the Chinese language, as will other teachers. Because word is spreading that if you don't learn Chinese, you can't keep your job. We are feeling the heat."

*- Uyghur teacher,
Radio Free Asia Interview*

LIMITED ACCESS TO ETHNIC EDUCATION

Restrictions on religious education

- ⇒ **Minority children** are currently subject to curricula that do not reflect their religious or cultural traditions.
- ⇒ It remains virtually impossible in the **Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)** to obtain a full religious education.
- ⇒ In the **Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR)**, Buddhist materials cannot be read outside the temple.
- ⇒ In the **Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR)**, students and civil servants are not allowed to publicly engage in any religious activity other than observing the Muslim abstention from pork.

- Existing regulations do not adequately address minority groups' histories, traditions, languages, and cultures in education.
- Education in Tibet serves to indoctrinate children and instill a sense of inferiority regarding Tibetan culture, religion and language relative to Chinese culture.
- Many minority parents send their children to Chinese cities for education to ensure that they acquire useful professional skills, but at the risk of losing their cultural identities.

"Denying minorities the possibility of learning their own language and of receiving instruction in their own language, or excluding from their education the transmission of knowledge about their own culture, history, tradition and language, would be a violation of their obligation to protect their identity."

- Commentary of the UN Working Group on Minorities

CHRONOLOGY:

PATRIOTIC EDUCATION & TENSIONS

In *May 2006*, acting **TAR** CPC Secretary Zhang Qing Ling called for the intensification of the "patriotic re-education" campaign in monastic institutions.

In *November 2005*, one monk died under mysterious circumstances during a patriotic re-education campaign session in Drepung Monastery in **Lhasa**, which was followed by a mass sit-in protest by the monks. The protest was crushed rapidly. Five monks were expelled from the monastery and placed in detention centers.

In *July 2002*, the **State Council** issued its Decision Concerning Deepening the Reform and Expediting the Development of Education for Ethnic Minorities, emphasizing education that strengthens national unity.

In *March 2002*, the authorities announced that the Islamic scripture schools would train 8,000 'patriotic religious personalities'.

From *March 15 to December 23, 2001*, a patriotic reeducation campaign was launched under the auspice of Beijing's United Front Work Department and the **XUAR** State Bureau of Religious Affairs to target some 8,000 *imams*, who were summoned to undergo 'political reeducation'.

In *Summer 1997*, in one ethnically Tibetan area of **Sichuan Province**, five Tibetan monks were arrested for being in possession of the Dalai Lama's picture during regular 'patriotic reeducation' sessions in the monastery.

"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..."

- Chen Kuiyuan,
former Secretary, CPC TAR Committee

PATRIOTIC & NATIONALISTIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS

- In place of ethnic education, 'patriotic education classes' are promoted by the government to strengthen minorities' national loyalty.
- These efforts have been significant in **Tibetan and Uyghur areas**, which the central government perceives to be major sources of ethnic discontent.
- Young people are particularly targeted by these campaigns, leading to the politicization of their education when schools become the major forum for patriotic education.

"We have an autonomous region, and we have an official language, the Uyghur language. From 1950 until the Cultural Revolution...every official meeting had to be conducted in Uyghur and then translated into Chinese. Then it changed. Is Chinese translated into Uyghur? No, now it's changed, no Uyghur. [This is a] direct change: everyone must learn Chinese."

- Uyghur activist

ADDITIONAL READING

- ⇒ Barnett, Robert. *Lhasa: Streets with Memories*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- ⇒ Bulag, Uradyn. "Mongolian Ethnicity and Linguistic Anxiety in China." *American Anthropologist* 105:4 (2003), 753-63.
- ⇒ Human Rights in China and Human Rights Watch. *Devastating Blows: Religious Repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang*. New York, 2005.
- ⇒ Dillon, Michael. *Religious Minorities and China*. London: Minority Rights Group International, 2001.
- ⇒ *China Rights Forum*: Ethnic Groups in China, 4 (2006).

For the full HRIC/MRG report, contact:

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