Tibet Action Institute
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SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES, HIDDEN FROM THE WORLD

CHINA'S VAST SYSTEM OF COLONIAL BOARDING SCHOOLS INSIDE TIBET

SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES, HIDDEN FROM THE WORLD

China's Vast System of Colonial Boarding Schools Inside Tibet

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SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

> In 2020 in [name removed] county, the authorities converted [the village] schools to nursery schools and prohibited children from studying in their own village. The families are forced to send their children to schools in cities now.
> **– Parent in eastern Tibet**

The Chinese government has established a vast network of colonial boarding schools in Tibet where students live separated from their families and are subjected to highly politicized education, primarily in Chinese. Touted by the Chinese government as a means of providing education to a sparse and far-flung population, the schools are the cornerstone of an assimilationist agenda advanced by Chinese President Xi Jinping himself, intended to preempt threats to Chinese Communist Party control by eliminating ethnic differences. The impact of the colonial boarding school experience on Tibetan children and their families – including psychological and emotional trauma – and the implications for whole generations of Tibetans and the long-term survival of Tibetan identity are grave. It is imperative that the United Nations and concerned governments urgently call on China to halt its implementation of this system in Tibet.

This report finds that:

- Tibet's education system has become primarily residential; official data shows that approximately 800,000 Tibetan children aged six to 18 – 78% of Tibetan students – are living in colonial boarding schools;

> In [my area] it is mandatory to send children aged four and above to boarding schools...Teachers only speak in Mandarin and conduct all school curriculum in Mandarin, including nursery rhymes and bedtime stories. When they join primary school at age seven, hardly any of them can speak Tibetan.
> **– Teacher in eastern Tibet**

- Tibetan parents are compelled to send their children to boarding schools due to a lack of alternatives and are unable to advocate for other options in Tibet's repressive environment. Individual accounts show that intimidation and threats are used to coerce reluctant parents to send their children to such schools;

- Students are at risk of losing their mother tongue and connection to their cultural identity because:

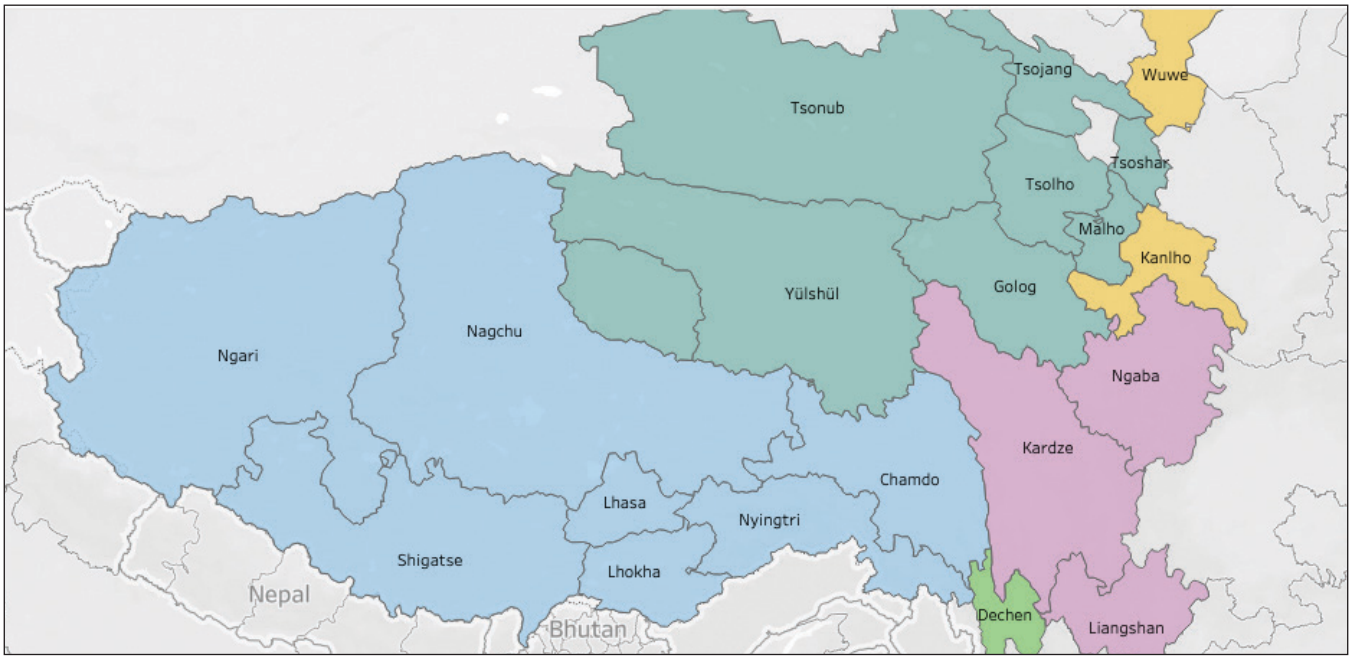
  1) classes are primarily taught in Chinese;
  2) they live apart from their families and communities and are, therefore, unable to practice their religion or access the most authentic expressions of Tibetan culture and traditions; and
  3) they are subjected to a highly politicized curriculum intended to make them identify as Chinese;

- China's boarding school policy is discriminatory in that it targets Tibetans and other "ethnic minorities," while the rate of Chinese students in boarding schools is dramatically lower, even in rural areas;

- Researchers have shown Tibetan boarding school students to be experiencing great emotional and psychological distress, including extreme feelings of loneliness and isolation, as a result of being separated from their families, communities, and culture; and

- China's colonial boarding school system in Tibet violates multiple international human rights treaties, including those to which China is a party, as well as China's own domestic laws.

MAP OF TIBET IN PREFECTURES



- Tibet Autonomous Region
- Sichuan
- Yunnan
- Qinghai
- Gansu

INTRODUCTION

Changes to education policies in Tibet over the last 10-15 years, combined with Chinese President Xi Jinping's frontal assault on Tibetan culture, language, religion, and identity, have resulted in a vast system of colonial boarding schools in Tibet, which shares marked similarities with other colonial schooling systems. Conservative estimates based on official figures suggest that at least 800,000 Tibetan children are now housed in these state-run institutions.[1] This number represents approximately 78% of Tibetan students between the ages of six and 18 and does not include an unknown number of four- and five-year-olds who are also living in boarding schools.[2]

The colonial boarding school system in Tibet is a core element of the Chinese Communist Party's systematic effort to co-opt, undermine, and ultimately eliminate Tibetan identity in an attempt to neutralize Tibetan resistance to Chinese rule. Thirteen years after Tibetans participated in a nationwide uprising for rights and freedom, even the previous semblance of regional autonomy and ethnic accommodation toward Tibetans and other minority groups is disappearing. While officials still claim that Tibetan identity is protected, an explicit policy of Sinicization is altering fundamental aspects of Tibetan life – language,[3] livelihood,[4] and religion.[5] (Sinicization refers to a focused effort by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to bring non-Chinese societies into conformity with Chinese culture, language, and societal norms, as well as to enact ethnic identity acculturation, policies of assimilation, or more direct policies of cultural imperialism.) This approach seeks to achieve long-term political control through cultural uniformity, supplanting the identities and distinct cultures of Tibetans, Uyghurs, and other groups under CCP rule with – in Xi's words – "a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation" in order to ensure the "enduring stability of the Party and the country."[6]

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1 See our research detailed on page 24 for sources and student locations.

2 Source 1, Online Commenter 1, Appendix 1.

3 For example, see Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet," 2020, available at: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/tibet0320_web_0.pdf (accessed November 21, 2021).

4 For example, see Human Rights Watch, "'They Say We Should Be Grateful,' Mass Rehousing and Relocation Programs in Tibetan Areas of China," June 2013, available at: https://www.hrw.org/report/2013/06/27/they-say-we-should-be-grateful/mass-rehousing-and-relocation-programs-tibetan (accessed November 23, 2021).

5 This is extensively documented. Recent examples include Xi Jinping's statement that "Tibetan Buddhism should be guided in adapting to the socialist society and should be developed in the Chinese context," from CGTN, "China sets policy directions for building a modern socialist Tibet," August 30, 2020, available at: https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-08-29/Xi-addresses-seventh-Tibet-work-forum-in-Beijing--TlGiGamKcM/index.html (accessed July 6, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20210913091617/https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-08-29/Xi-addresses-seventh-Tibet-work-forum-in-Beijing--TlGiGamKcM/index.html and International Campaign for Tibet, "New measures tighten control over religious clergy, accelerate CCP's Sinicization policy," February 25, 2021, available at: https://secureservercdn.net/198.71.233.167/4vo.170.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/02252021-Analysis.pdf (accessed July 6, 2021).

6 Xinhua, "Xi Focus: Xi stresses high-quality development of Party's work on ethnic affairs," August 28, 2021, available at: http://www.news.cn/english/2021-08/28/c_1310154568.htm (accessed November 5, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20211021193455/http://www.news.cn/english/2021-08/28/c_1310154568.htm.

Children in colonial boarding schools[7] live apart from their families and communities, separated – often at a young age – from the language, religion, and traditions that are part of home life. For most students, Chinese is the primary teaching language. Students are allowed access to only a CCP-approved version of Tibetan culture, often revolving around song and dance.[8] At the same time, political indoctrination is a priority, to "unremittingly... guide students of all ethnic groups to...establish a correct view of the country, nation, religion, history, and culture."[9] Loneliness and homesickness are extreme; a former boarding student describes, "Every day for three years, I never felt happy starting a day or going to class...my only thought was, 'When I get to go back home.'"[10] The colonial boarding school experience has the potential to inflict devastating psychological and social harm on entire generations of Tibetan children and parents, including the permanent alienation of Tibetans from their language, culture, religion, and traditions.

> Political indoctrination is a priority, to "unremittingly... guide students of all ethnic groups to...establish a correct view of the country, nation, religion, history, and culture."
> **– China's State Council**

Parents are compelled to send their children to these schools by several interlinked factors. China's settler colonial project in Tibet has led to the transformation of Tibetans' livelihoods, increased urbanization, growing dependence on a cash economy, dominance of Chinese language in many arenas, and structural racism that disadvantages Tibetans seeking jobs or accessing services. In this context, Tibetan parents view education as a necessity for equipping their children to survive in a rapidly changing world. Simultaneously, the Chinese state has actively eliminated rural village schools, even at the elementary level, and replaced them with centralized boarding schools, while also forcing monastery schools and other Tibetan-run schools to close. Finally, increasing criminalization of Tibetan identity, ever-present surveillance both on- and offline, and lack of access to justice mean that Tibetans are unable to advocate for alternatives to the boarding school system. First-hand accounts detailed in this report show that those who resist sending their children away face threats, fines, and other punitive measures. Together, these factors create a fundamentally coercive environment in which Tibetan parents are left with no choice but to send their children to boarding schools.

> Every day for three years, I never felt happy starting a day or going to class...my only thought was, "When I get to go back home."
> **– Former Boarding School Student**

There is strong evidence that the colonial boarding school system for Tibetans is designed to achieve the same end as the residential school systems in Canada and the United States, and the state-run training schools and institutions for the "Stolen Generations" of Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their families in Australia. Colonial boarding schools and other similar state- and missionary-run institutions in these countries were intended to erase the

7 We are using the term "colonial boarding schools" to describe what is commonly referred to in Tibetan as བཅའ་སྒྲོན་ཟླ་ཁྲི། (chardoe) or གཏན་སློབ། (tenlop) and in Chinese as 寄宿制学校 (jisuzhi xuexiao).

8 Seen for example in a CGTN propaganda piece, "A Day in the Life of a Tibetan High Schooler," (Video, minute 1:27), available at: https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514e79557a4e33457a6333566d54/index.html (accessed June 20, 2021).

9 State Council, "Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education," National Document [2015] 46, issued August 11, 2015, section 19, available at: www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_10097.htm (accessed November 5, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20210629235302/http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_ 10097.htm.

10 Testimony 5, see Appendix 3.

identities of First Nations, Inuit, Métis, Aboriginal, Native American, and other Indigenous Peoples and force them to adopt the colonizers' culture and religion. Key features of these systems included removing children from their families and communities, forcing them to abandon their mother tongues, and breaking their connections to cultural identity and traditions – all policies designed, in the words of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, to "assimilate Aboriginal peoples so that they no longer existed as distinct peoples."[11]

Three critical factors that distinguish these colonial school systems from other boarding school systems:

1) attendance is not a free choice (whether due to requirements enforced by authorities or lack of alternatives for education);

2) the school experience is intended to influence or even erase students' cultural identity and indoctrinate them with the beliefs (religious or ideological) of the colonial power or dominant group; and

3) students live apart from their parents, families, and communities.

The destructive elements of the Canadian, American, and Australian systems may or may not all be present in the Tibetan case. In particular, lack of access makes it nearly impossible to assess the prevalence of abuse (physical, sexual, and emotional) and neglect in Tibet's boarding schools today, all of which were devastatingly central to the experiences of children in Canada, the United States, and Australia. However, we see three critical factors that distinguish these colonial school systems from other boarding school systems:

1) attendance is not a free choice (whether due to requirements enforced by authorities or lack of alternatives for education);

2) the school experience is intended to influence or even erase students' cultural identity and indoctrinate them with the beliefs (religious or ideological) of the colonial power or dominant group; and

3) students live apart from their parents, families, and communities.

These factors are all present in China's state-run boarding school system in Tibet.

The colonial boarding school program is an insidious tool in the larger project of forcing Tibetans to adopt a homogenous, patriotic, Chinese identity in order to eliminate challenges to the Party or the state. While it differs in some ways from the residential school and "child removal" systems in Canada, the United States, and Australia, it contains many of the same hallmarks and similarly seeks to subjugate and control an entire population. In this way, it is also reminiscent of China's policies in East Turkistan (Chinese: Xinjiang) where the government separates children from their families through boarding schools, boarding preschools, and by incarcerating parents in Chinese-run re-education camps. The potential damage these actions will have on today's generation of young people, and on generations to come, is staggering. It demands urgent action from the United Nations, governments around the world, and from the Chinese government itself.

11 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, "Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," p. 153. The Commission also described residential schools as a central element of "cultural genocide," elaborating: "Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next." (p. 1)

METHODOLOGY

Research for this report was constrained by the extreme control China maintains over information flow into and out of Tibet. Foreign researchers, including Tibetans based outside Tibet or China, are not permitted access to Tibet, except in rare instances. Online communication is monitored, and Tibetans face serious repercussions for discussing topics viewed by the government as sensitive, particularly with people based abroad.

Our report, therefore, relies on a combination of sources. First-hand accounts from inside Tibet give examples of how China's education policies affect the lived experience of Tibetans on the ground. These were provided to our researchers by Tibetans in exile who have close ties with contacts in Tibet. Identifying information for sources in Tibet has been withheld due to the extreme risk to their safety. We also gathered statements from Tibetans in exile with strong knowledge of developments inside Tibet and/or who attended colonial boarding school themselves. We reviewed related research by scholars within China as well as reports and articles by other academics and human rights organizations. Finally, we extrapolated the number of Tibetans enrolled in boarding school based on data we collected from the 2010 and 2020 censuses, national and provincial-level statistical yearbooks, government reports at the prefectural and county levels, academic papers, and media reports.

The Chinese government's statistical data are often viewed with skepticism – though this is particularly the case with economic data[12] – as it is not uncommon for provincial and prefectural authorities to inflate their numbers to meet targets or quotas. This is a shortcoming endemic to all studies that use Chinese administrative data. Regardless of this potential vulnerability, the statistics we provide help to illustrate the scale and scope of the current colonial boarding school system. As mentioned above, we have also sought to supplement the quantitative data with firsthand accounts and testimonials from Tibetans themselves, as well as those of scholars within China. Both the high number of Tibetan students reportedly enrolled in boarding schools and the increasing number of elementary-school-aged children attending are supported by Chinese policy documents, observations from Tibetans, and, for some locations, by Chinese state media. Additionally, because of the nature of Tibet's administration (discussed in the following paragraph), these numbers are drawn from many different sources and many different levels of government, and yet still show similar trends across almost all Tibetan areas.

"Tibet" is defined here as the three Tibetan provinces of Amdo, Kham, and Ü-Tsang. In the 1960s, the Chinese government split Tibet into new administrative divisions: the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and Counties within Qinghai, Gansu, Sichuan, and Yunnan provinces. (See map on page 2.) This significantly complicates efforts to study Tibetans as a group because population data are fragmented between many jurisdictions. When the Chinese government references Tibet, it is referring only to the TAR. According to the 2010 Chinese census (2020 census numbers for all Tibetan areas are not yet available), the total Tibetan population is 6.2 million, and the Tibetan population of the TAR is 2.7 million, or 44% of the total.

12 For example, see Wallace, Jeremy L. "Juking the stats? Authoritarian information problems in China." *British Journal of Political Science* 46, no. 1 (2016): 11-29.

HISTORY OF COLONIAL BOARDING SCHOOLS IN TIBET

> literally, a military-style boot camp in how to be "Chinese" and how to conform to acceptable ways of acting, thinking and being.
> **– Ethnic Policy Scholar James Leibold**

Under the People's Republic of China, education policy in Tibet has gone through many changes and has varied by area. Boarding school has been seen as a viable model for decades because of Tibet's small and geographically dispersed population.[13] While personal accounts of life in early Tibetan boarding schools indicate that they were deeply problematic, the system that has emerged in Tibet over the last ten years is far more destructive.

A prominent precursor to the current boarding school system for Tibetans was the Inland Schooling program *(neidi minzu ban* or *neidiban* in Chinese, referred to by some scholars as "dislocated ethnic schooling"). This project, which targets only the TAR, began in 1985 and has expanded in the last decade.[14] Its goals are transparently political: cutting students' bonds with their home communities and instilling new norms around language, culture, and loyalty. Ethnic policy scholar James Leibold describes it as "literally, a military-style boot camp in how to be 'Chinese' and how to conform to acceptable ways of acting, thinking and being."[15] Despite its assimilationist aims, it is seen as an elite program for which families compete to send their children.

Separate from the Inland Schooling program, boarding schools existed in Tibet in the 1980s and 1990s. Individual accounts suggest that students were undernourished, healthcare and hygiene were minimal, and bullying and abuse were commonplace.[16] In the 1980s, major changes in national and regional policies allowed for "minority areas to develop their own education programmes, including kinds of schools, curriculum content and the language of instruction."[17] The TAR saw concerted, successful efforts to increase Tibetan-medium education[18] and such efforts continued through the 2000s outside the TAR.[19] However, local village schools were underfunded, with few resources for buildings, teaching materials, salaries, and localization of the school curriculum,[20] causing both the quality of education and enrollment rates to remain very low.[21]

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13 Cao, Gazang. "Alienation of Tibetan adolescents in rural boarding schools. "*Frontiers of Education in China* 11, no. 4 (2016): 505.

14 Leibold, James. "Interior ethnic minority boarding schools: China's bold and unpredictable educational experiment." *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (2019): 1.

15 Leibold, James, and Timothy A. Grose. "Cultural and political disciplining inside China's dislocated minority schooling system." *Asian Studies Review* 43, no. 1 (2019): 2.

16 See personal testimonies in Appendix 3.

17 Catriona Bass, *Education in Tibet: Policy and practice since 1950* (London: Zed books, 1998), 50.

18 Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet," p. 16.

19 Zenz, Adrian. "Beyond assimilation: The Tibetanisation of Tibetan education in Qinghai." *Inner Asia* 12, no. 2 (2010): 293-315.

20 Postiglione, Gerard A. "Dislocated education: The case of Tibet." *Comparative Education Review* 53, no. 4 (2009): 489.

21 For example, see Fischer, Andrew Martin. "Educating for exclusion in western China: structural and institutional dimensions of conflict in the Tibetan areas of Qinghai and Tibet." (2009): 17.

In 2001, China embarked on a "school consolidation policy" through which village schools would be closed and education would be concentrated in larger centers.[22] This was accompanied in 2004 by the Chinese Ministry of Education's "Construction of Boarding Schools in Rural Areas" project. These projects were ostensibly intended to increase the quality of education received by students in rural areas, while reducing costs and overcoming transportation challenges. Tibetan researcher Huatse Gyal reports that 371,470 rural schools in China, or 81.3 percent, were closed between 2001 and 2010.[23]

The policies reached Tibet after several years. Triga county (Chinese: Guide) in Tsolho (Chinese: Hainan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture was a Qinghai pilot for the school consolidation project.[24] From 2008-2011, 87 elementary and secondary schools were merged into 11 boarding schools based in the township and county seats. Most villages previously had either an elementary school or a teaching post.[25] The number of elementary and secondary schools in the prefecture as a whole dropped from 372 to 66 in 2010.[26] One school with 2,749 students, all Tibetan, became the largest in Qinghai, "merging 18 schools and combining another 44 schools."[27] According to sources for this report, the consolidation policy is still being implemented in Qinghai.[28]

In the TAR and Sichuan, it appears that the consolidation policy began taking effect in the last decade. In 2014, an "Education City" opened on the outskirts of Lhasa, intended to house 17 schools and their students. Human Rights Watch reports that "the compound, which also includes 'an original village with Tibetan nationality characteristics left as it was,' was expected to have a population of over 50,000." Students from Lhasa reportedly board at the schools – despite having homes in the same city[29] – as do Tibetan students from parts of the TAR almost 900 miles away.[30]

Reports suggest the consolidation policy reached at least one area of Ngaba (Chinese: Aba) Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan in 2013.[31] It reached Kardze (Chinese: Ganzi) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture by 2011; during her 2011 fieldwork, a Chinese

22 Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet," p. 76 and Ying, Yumjyi Ji. "'To be included among people': families' perceptions of schooling and contingent negotiations in a rural Tibetan community in China." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* (2021): 2.

23 Gyal, Huatse. "'I am concerned with the future of my children': The Project Economy and Shifting Views of Education in a Tibetan Pastoral Community." *Critical Asian Studies* 51.1 (2019): 25.

24 Ying, p. 2.

25 Ying, p. 6.

26 Cao, "Alienation of Tibetan adolescents in rural boarding schools," p. 506.

27 Cao, "Alienation of Tibetan adolescents in rural boarding schools," p. 506.

28 See Testimony 5 in Appendix 3 and Ying, p. 4.

29 Confidential conversation with a Tibetan in exile originally from Lhasa, May 2021; Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education Policy in Tibet," p. 92.

30 CGTN, "Teaching in Tibet: China rolls out changes in education," March 27, 2019, available at: https://news.cgtn.com/news/3367544f32494464776c6d636a4e6e62684a4856/index.html (accessed June 22, 2021) and CGTN, "A day in the life of a Tibetan high schooler," April 1, 2019, available at: https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514e79557a4e33457a6333566d54/index.html (accessed June 22, 2021).

31 Gyal, "'I am concerned with the future of my children,'" p.14.

researcher in Rongdrak (Chinese: Danba) County "found village schools had been incorporated in the town's central primary [boarding] school, and the rural village schools were empty."[32]

> "achieve the goal that students of all ethnic minorities will study in a school, live in a school, and grow up in a school.
> – **China's State Council**

In 2012, China's State Council curbed the trend of school consolidation for China as a whole due to popular outcry. The Council ruled that the first three grades of elementary school should, in principle, be non-residential throughout the country, while students in the upper grades of elementary school should be day students and "those in real need can board."[33] The directive stated that villages and areas with small populations, remote locations, or poor transportation should set up primary schools or teaching posts. It went on to order local authorities to "resolutely stop the blind withdrawal of rural compulsory education schools," requiring any future school closures to follow detailed procedures including hearings with the public.[34] On a national level since then, the percentage of boarding students has remained constant at approximately 22%.[35]

However, this reversal was not applied to minority regions. In fact, the 2015 State Council "Decision on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education" called on officials to do exactly the opposite: "strengthen boarding school construction" in minority areas and "achieve the goal that students of all ethnic minorities will study in a school, live in a school, and grow up in a school."[36] The decree – one of the aims of which is to "realize the long-term stability of the country"[37] – is being actively implemented in Tibet, resulting in fewer and fewer children being able to access education while living at home.

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32 Yang, Bai. "Hybridity and Tibetan language education policies in Sichuan." *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education* 28, no. 2 (2018): 6.

33 State Council,"Guanyu guifan nongcun yiwu jiaoyu xuexiao buju tiaozheng de yijian" [Suggestions of Office of the State Council on Adjusting the Distribution of Rural Compulsory Schools], State Council Issue [2012] No. 48, September 6, 2012, available at: http://www.gov.cn/zwgk/2012-09/07/content_2218779.htm (accessed November 5, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20200611115120/http://www.gov.cn/zwgk/2012-09/07/content_2218779.htm.

34 Suggestions of Office of the State Council on Adjusting the Distribution of Rural Compulsory Schools, 2012.

35 According to data published by the Ministry of Education, the percentage of boarding students at the compulsory education stage (grades 1-9) was at 21.97% in 2010 and 21.65% in 2017. For the 2010 data see Ministry of Education, available at: http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A03/s180/moe_633/201203/t20120321_132634.html (accessed August 20, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20211125150652/http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A03/s180/moe_633/201203/t20120321_132634.html. For the 2017 data see UNICEF, "Figure 8.20 Number of boarding students in primary and junior secondary education, 2017," available at: https://www.unicef.cn/en/figure-820-number-boarding-students-primary-and-junior-secondary-education-2017 (accessed August 20, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20211125151051/https://www.unicef.cn/en/figure-820-number-boarding-students-primary-and-junior-secondary-education-2017.

36 Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet," p. 77, citing "Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education."

37 State Council, "Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education," National Document [2015] 46, issued August 11, 2015, section 19, available at: www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_10097.htm (accessed November 5, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20210629235302/http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_10097.htm

The divergent policies for Chinese students and minority students means that the Chinese government is placing Tibetan children in boarding schools at a drastically higher rate than their Chinese counterparts. Government figures for all students in China (including Tibetans) indicate that 14.1% of rural elementary school children are boarding.[38] However, in the TAR alone (home to approximately 44% of Tibetans), that rate is more than five times higher, with 79.8%[39] of elementary school children boarding.[40] In comparison to individual provinces that are primarily Chinese but that, like Tibet, have large rural populations, there is still a 50-60% difference.[41] In Henan, for example, an inland province that is 98.8% Chinese and largely rural, only 18.58% of elementary students are boarding.[42] In Hunan, an inland province that is 89% Chinese and also largely rural, only 28.11% of all elementary and junior high students are boarding.[43] Tibetans are experiencing the effects of a policy that, today, deliberately targets non-Chinese children.

Although boarding school has been part of the education system in Tibet for decades, it wasn't until the school consolidation policy of the 2000s that the move from village day schools to boarding schools was so drastically undertaken, especially in the case of younger children. Researcher Yumjyi Ji Ying notes that the policy "has been unprecedented in its scale of establishing centralised primary boarding schools [in Tibet]."[44] While the policy has been reversed for Chinese areas, Tibetan village schools continue to be closed and replaced by boarding schools – an explicit tool in the CCP's effort to assimilate Tibetans and neutralize potential threats to Party control.

38 Ministry of Education, "Jiaoyubu jiedu 'Guowuyuan bangongting guanyu quanmian jiaqiang xiangcun xiao guimo xuexiao he xiangzhen jisuzhi xuexiao jianshe de zhidao yijian'" [Interpretation of the "Guiding Opinions of the General Office of the State Council on Comprehensively Strengthening the Construction of Rural Small-scale Schools and Township Boarding Schools] by the Ministry of Education, May 11, 2018, available at: http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-05/11/content_5290308.htm#1 (accessed July 7, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20210913090759/http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-05/11/content_5290308.htm.

39 Department of Education of the Tibet Autonomous Region, "Xizang zizhiqu jiaoyu shiye tongji ziliao (jichu jiaoyu)" [Statistics on Education in the Tibet Autonomous Region (Basic Education)], 2018, pp. 166-172, as cited in Xing Jun-li, "Xizang jisuzhi xuexiao jiaoshi gongzuo manyidu, lizhi yixiang jiqi guanxi" [Teachers' Job Satisfaction, Turnover Intention and Their Relation in Tibetan Boarding Schools], *Teacher Development Research* 3, no. 2 (2019): 44.

40 Both numbers are from 2018.

41 Data were not available for all provinces that fit these criteria, but those for which there were show the same trend.

42 "2020 nian Henansheng jiaoyu shiye fazhan tongji gongbao" [Statistical Communiqué on the Development of Education in Henan Province in 2020], March 24, 2021, available at: https://www.163.com/dy/article/G5SS66QS0536B4AI.html (accessed August 31, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20210913091112/https://www.163.com/dy/article/G5SS66QS0536B4AI.html.

43 Hunan Bureau of Education, "2019 nian quansheng jiaoyu shiye fazhan gaikuang" [Overview of the province's education development in 2019], March 11, 2020, available at: http://jyt.hunan.gov.cn/jyt/sjyt/xxgk/ghjh/tjxx/202003/t20200312_11810778.html (accessed August 26, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20210913091332/http://jyt.hunan.gov.cn/jyt/sjyt/xxgk/ghjh/tjxx/202003/t20200312_11810778.html.

44 Ying, p. 4.

REMOLDING SOULS AND MINDS[45]

The colonial boarding school system for Tibetan youth is at the heart of the CCP's effort to subsume Tibetans into Chinese culture and identity and eliminate all but token elements of their "Tibetanness."

Since coming to power in 2012, Xi Jinping has embraced a fundamental change in policy toward Tibetans, Uyghurs, Mongolians, and other non-Chinese groups under CCP rule. The Party now seeks to remake non-Chinese identities into a single Chinese identity as a means of suppressing dissent and ensuring continued CCP control over regions like Tibet, East Turkistan (Chinese: Xinjiang), and Inner Mongolia. Xi has made this strategy explicit, proclaiming that, "Only through fostering a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation and all ethnic groups jointly safeguarding national security and social stability, can the infiltration and subversion of extremist and separatist thoughts [i.e., opposition to Chinese rule by minorities] be resisted and the aspiration of the people of all ethnic groups for a better life be fulfilled."[46] Inspired by the "second generation ethnic policies" put forward by a number of Chinese scholars, this is a major shift away from earlier approaches of nominal respect for diversity and distinct cultures.

The transformative policies under Xi are driven by a paternalistic and racist attitude toward non-Chinese groups under Beijing's control. As ethnic policy scholar James Leibold describes, the policies "work to actively alter the thoughts and behaviors of what Chinese authorities perceive to be a 'backward,' 'deviant,' and innately 'dangerous' sub-section of its population by uplifting their 'bio-quality'...and overseeing their rebirth as loyal, patriotic, and civilized Chinese citizens."[47] Scholar Gray Tuttle notes that, although consolidating control over border regions is a central aim of China's ethnic policies, they are "also an expression of deep-seated ethnic prejudices and racism at the core of contemporary Chinese society."[48] The Chinese view that other ethnic groups are inferior, backward, and uncivilized is not new, and assimilation has long been used as a tool to overcome these perceived deficiencies while simultaneously quelling resistance and dissent. However, Xi's embrace has given this racist frame new life. These attitudes and policies from Beijing are incorporated into the education system in a variety of ways: making Chinese the primary language throughout the education system and downgrading other native languages; ensuring ideological identification with the Party and the Chinese state; displacing Tibetan teachers with Chinese teachers; and breaking social, community, and family connections.

The colonial boarding school system for Tibetan youth is at the heart of the CCP's effort to subsume Tibetans into Chinese culture and identity and eliminate all but token elements of their "Tibetanness." When students are separated from their families, they lose the daily influences of language, culture, and religion that exist at home, and become more vulnerable to the norms and ideology of their school environment. If they have family nearby, some schools permit contact every weekend or every 10 days. Others see their families once a year at best (see more details on pages 30-31).

45 Leibold, James, "Beyond Xinjiang: Xi Jinping's Ethnic Crackdown," *The Diplomat*, January 7, 2021.

46 Xinhua, "Xi Focus: Xi stresses high-quality development of Party's work on ethnic affairs," August 28, 2021, available at: http://www.news.cn/english/2021-08/28/c_1310154568.htm (accessed November 3, 2021).

47 Leibold, "Beyond Xinjiang."

48 Tuttle, Gray. "China's Race Problem." *Foreign Affairs* 94 (2015): 39.

CCP ideology and political objectives are heavily integrated into boarding school life. In 2018, the State Council bolstered these efforts by ordering officials to "actively carry out educational and teaching activities [in boarding schools] that are conducive to promoting ethnic unity and integration, and guide students to widely use the national language [i.e., Chinese] in school life and learning."[49] The 2015 State Council "Decision on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education" requires "unremitting propaganda and education on socialism with Chinese characteristics and the China dream" and calls for guidance for students to "continuously strengthen their recognition of the great motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture, the Communist Party of China, and socialism with Chinese characteristics."[50] James Leibold noted in 2019 that schools are seen as the "main 'battlefield' in ethnic unity education," requiring that "patriotism 'enter classrooms, enter teaching materials, and enter pupils' minds so the seed of ethnic unity can take root and blossom in the youth and students of all ethnic groups.'"[51] This propaganda is central to the school experience.

The 2015 State Council "Decision on Accelerating the Development of Ethnic Education" calls for guidance for students to "continuously strengthen their recognition of the great motherland, the Chinese nation, Chinese culture, the Communist Party of China, and socialism with Chinese characteristics."

A Tibetan now in exile who boarded at elementary school from 2000-2005 describes the patriotic education he received:

> After finishing lunch, we had to gather in the dining room to watch documentary films about how much destruction and violence [was] caused by [the] Japanese during the War between China and Japan. We would not get dinner if anyone missed the film, [as] a punishment....Chinese History [class] was all about the great achievement of [China's] military force during the war with Japan...the Great Wall of China, [and the] military and economic supremacy of China....I had no idea about my own country Tibet, and I didn't know anything about other countries in the world when I was in Chinese boarding school. I always thought China was my country and Japanese people were my greatest enemy in my life....[52]

Such indoctrination leaves students who are living away from their communities extremely vulnerable to losing their connection to their history, their cultural roots, and the very aspects that make them Tibetan.

Students additionally lose access to their religion while at boarding school. China has a policy of separating religion and education, but when students are always on campus, this effectively means that religious observation is eliminated. Such bans often do not exist on paper and are missed by research that relies purely on documentary evidence, as are actions

49 News briefing by the Ministry of Education on the Document No. 27 issued by the State Council in 2018, "Quanmian jiaqiang lianglei xuexiao jianshe, tuidong chengxiang yiwu jiaoyu yitihua fazhan" [Comprehensively strengthen the construction of two types of schools and promote the integrated development of urban and rural compulsory education], June 30, 2018, available at: https://zgszcpjy.com/details_show?NEWS_ID=360df1f4d8954fdcbc055c7381aafbc8 (accessed July 5, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://zgszcpjy.com/details_show?NEWS_ID=360df1f4d8954fdcbc055c7381aafbc8.

50 Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet," p. 65.

51 Leibold, James. "Planting the seed: Ethnic policy in Xi Jinping's new era of cultural nationalism." *China Brief* 19, no. 22 (2019).

52 Testimony 3, Appendix 3.

by school administrators that restrict Tibetan students' access to religious activities.

One boarding school principal in the TAR, for example, detailed how on major religious holidays, his school assigns personnel to intercept students on the street and escort them back to school if they try to take part in local religious events.[53] A teacher in Mili (Chinese: Muli) Tibetan Autonomous County in Sichuan stated that for those "who [wish to] take a leave of absence on the pretext of going home to participate in religious activities, we generally do not give approval."[54]

One boarding school principal in the TAR, for example, detailed how on major religious holidays, his school assigns personnel to intercept students on the street and escort them back to school if they try to take part in local religious events.

For Tibetan students, this ban on religious activity can also extend beyond school grounds. In Lhasa, for example, school children – along with Tibetan government workers and retirees – are barred from visiting the Jokhang Temple,[55] widely considered to be the most important and sacred temple in Tibet. Such strict control of religious pursuits combined with long periods away from home means boarding school students are growing up with very little contact with the religious and cultural traditions that form an integral part of Tibetan life.

Meanwhile, the Tibetan language is facing unprecedented attacks from the highest levels of the Chinese government, with schools being the main domain of this assault. China's deceptively named "bilingual education" policy is in reality a system of linguistic imperialism where the instruction is in Chinese and Tibetan is relegated to the status of a second language. Although this policy is presented as a means of enabling minority groups to succeed, in practice it makes Tibetans lose their own language at a young age. In January 2021, a committee of the National People's Congress ruled that local regulations permitting schools to use minority languages are "incompatible with the Chinese Constitution."[56] In July 2021, the Ministry of Education ordered that all "ethnic and rural" kindergartens (usually ages three to five) must operate in Mandarin by fall 2021.[57] These follow other earlier

53 He Nengkun, "Xizang Nongmuqu jiaoyu tiaoshi yanjiu" [Adaptation of the Basic Education in Rural Tibet: An Empirical Study from the Perspective of the Social System Theory], (PhD Thesis, Southwest University, April 20, 2012), 94.

54 Xu Jianhua, "Duo Minzu jisuzhi xuexiao zhong de minzu wenhua guanzhao wenti yanjiu--jiyu Daliangshan Muli zangzu zizhixian de kaocha" [A Study on the Cultural Perspective in Multi-Ethnic Boarding School—Survey on Muli Tibetan Inhabited Areas] (MA Thesis, Southwest University, April 11, 2017), 29. See Appendix 2 for full quote.

55 Tibet Watch, "Tibetans Blocked from Buddhist Site in Lhasa While Chinese Tourists Allowed In," August 7, 2020, available at: https://www.tibetwatch.org/news/2020/8/12/tibetans-blocked-from-buddhist-sites-in-lhasa-while-chinese-tourists-allowed-in (accessed November 22, 2021).

56 Human Rights Watch, "China Signals Roll-Back on Minority Languages," January 28, 2021, available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/01/28/china-signals-roll-back-minority-languages (accessed November 5, 2021).

57 This plan includes all areas of Tibet as well as "ethnic and rural" areas that include other minority groups such as Uyghurs and Southern Mongolians. Ministry of Education, "Jiaoyubu bangongting guanyu shishi xueqian ertong putonghua jiaoyu 'tongyu tongyin' jihua de tongzhi" [Notice of the General Office of the Ministry of Education on the Implementation of the "Children's Homophony" Plan for Putonghua Education for Preschool Children], July 23, 2021, available at: http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A18/s3129/202108/t20210802_548318.html (accessed August 24, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20210910183948/http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A18/s3129/202108/t20210802_548318.html.

policies that were aimed at eliminating Tibetan-medium instruction in the few areas in which it still remains.[58]

Targeting children in both boarding and day schools with Chinese-language instruction is causing Tibetan children to lose their facility with their own language, [59] [60] as well as their ability to communicate with their grandparents and, in some cases, parents. As one Tibetan from Lhasa told Human Rights Watch, "Bilingual education is about breaking the continuity between my generation, with a fair knowledge of Tibetan, and the next." [61]

Chinese scholar Yao Jijun states that bilingual education at the preschool level is intended to integrate Chinese language into Tibetan children as "a means of eliminating elements of instability [political unrest] in Tibetan regions."

Like schools and preschools more generally, most boarding schools now operate in Chinese. An elementary school teacher in eastern Tibet shared how boarding preschool leads to loss of language:

> In [my area] it is mandatory to send children aged four and above to boarding schools. Most of these children are from nomadic backgrounds. Usually there are very few Tibetan teachers; the majority are Chinese. So teachers only speak in Mandarin and conduct all school curriculum in Mandarin, including nursery rhymes and bedtime stories. *When they join primary school at age seven, hardly any of them can speak Tibetan.*[62] (emphasis added)

There has also been a dramatic expansion of non-boarding Chinese-language preschools over the past decade.[63] Chinese scholar Yao Jijun states that bilingual education at the preschool level is intended to integrate Chinese language into Tibetan children as "a means of eliminating elements of instability [political unrest] in Tibetan regions."[64]

In the TAR, Chinese is explicitly designated as the primary language of instruction,[65] and nationally standardized Chinese language textbooks for elementary and junior high students

58 Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet," pp. 15-36; Radio Free Asia, "Tibetan Schoolchildren Lose Fluency in Native Language as Schools Switch to Mandarin," April 16, 2020, available at: https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/language-04162020170950.html (accessed August 24, 2021).

59 Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet."

60 According to one source, "If you go to the Chinese-run schools, your Chinese and English becomes good but your Tibetan becomes weak. If you go to the schools run by monasteries you can be good at all three." See Source 3 in Appendix 1. Also see Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet," pp. 31-32.

61 Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet," p. 119.

62 Online Commenter 1, see full comment in Appendix 1.

63 Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet," pp. 41-47.

64 Cited in Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet," p. 6.

65 TAR People's Government Office, "2019 nian Xizang zizhiqu zhengfu gongzuo baogao" [2019 Tibet Autonomous Region Government Work Report], June 27, 2019, available at: http://www.xizang.gov.cn/zwgk/xxfb/zfgzbg/201911/t20191114_123622.html (accessed August 24, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20200927102310/http://xizang.gov.cn/zwgk/xxfb/zfgzbg/201911/t20191114_123622.html.

have been mandated.[66] The textbook content revolves around the lived experience of Chinese students, (e.g., focusing on traditional Chinese holidays) and Tibetan students have been reported to struggle with the all-Chinese curriculum.[67] According to recently published plans by the Chinese Ministry of Education, these textbooks will soon put particular focus on "Xi Jinping Thought," the "outstanding traditional culture of the Chinese nation," "revolutionary tradition," and state security,[68] furthering the Party's ideological goals.

The enforcement of Chinese-language education on this scale is a major new development that reflects Xi Jinping's determination to remake "ethnic minorities" after a Chinese model. It has enormous negative implications for the maintenance of familial bonds, for the intergenerational transmission of culture, and for Tibetan students' sense of identity and self-worth beyond the school compound. A Tibetan from Lhasa interviewed by Human Rights Watch describes the motivation they see behind Chinese-language kindergartens (preschools):

> The government's policy of teaching [very young] Tibetan children Chinese in kindergarten has not been clearly and widely announced, and it has nothing in common with the special provisions for autonomous nationality regions, and the constitutional guarantees of respect for nationality religion and culture....Building kindergartens in the villages and teaching Chinese to the [very young children] is about changing the language environment for the next generation, or, to be blunt, it is an aggressive policy to disrupt the continuity of language transmission between generations of Tibetan[s]...If it succeeds, it is not difficult to foresee that Tibetan religion, culture, consciousness and identity will become Sinicized.[69]

Tibetan suspicions that Beijing seeks to achieve nothing less than the eventual eradication of the Tibetan language are reinforced by the attitude some Chinese teachers have displayed toward minority languages and cultures, and their conscious attempt to replace Tibetan with Chinese not only in the classroom but also outside it. "First of all, it is necessary to popularize Mandarin in our students' daily life. We should ask our students to speak Mandarin inside and outside the classroom. Second, teachers should popularize Mandarin in the households and local community," Cao, a Chinese teacher at a Tibetan boarding school in Sichuan recommended in a study. The same teacher later explained in an interview why

66 Starting in the autumn of 2018, the TAR has strengthened the "bilingual" curriculum, and all elementary schools, and first and second grades of junior high schools in the region began using the state-compiled textbooks of "Morality and Rule of Law", "Language" (i.e., Chinese), and "[Chinese] History" (《道德与法治》《语文》《历史》), see Appendix 2.

67 Yang Liu, "Ali diqu yiwu jiaoyu tongbian 'san ke' jiaocai shiyong qingkuang diaocha yu fenxi" [Investigation and Analysis of the Use of the Centralized Compiled "Three Subjects" Teaching Materials for Compulsory Education in Ngari Prefecture], *Xizang Jiaoyu*, 2020(9), pp. 5-8. For more details, see Appendix 2.

68 Guangming Daily, "Peigen zhuhun tigao kecheng jiaocai jianshe shuiping" [Fostering Roots and Casting Souls: Improving the Quality of Curriculum and Teaching Material Construction], August 25, 2021, available at: http://edu.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0825/c1006-32206845.html (accessed August 25, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20210825013518/http://edu.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0825/c1006-32206845.html.

69 Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet," p. 47.

they opposed allowing Tibetan students to go home to their parents on the weekends: "In short, our teaching effectiveness can be described as '5+2=0'. We fear [the students] staying at home [with their parents] for two days [on weekends], because they will forget what they learned during the five-day boarding school."[70] The assumption of Chinese cultural superiority and implicit dismissal of the value of Tibetan language and culture reflects a common outlook among Chinese teachers.[71]

> In short, our teaching effectiveness can be described as "5+2=0". We fear [the students] staying at home [with their parents] for two days [on weekends], because they will forget what they learned during the five-day boarding school.
> **– Chinese Teacher at a Tibetan Boarding School**

The transformation of "Tibetan religion, culture, consciousness and identity" is being carried out by design, developed at the highest levels of the Party. Boarding school is a particularly effective tool in this effort because children are removed from the influence of their family and community and kept under the eye of the state around the clock. Replacing Tibetan with Chinese as the medium of instruction and dwelling heavily on the importance of patriotism to the Chinese nation and loyalty to the Party, these schools employ a range of tools, tactics, and strategies to reshape the hearts and minds of Tibetan students.

70 Yang, "Hybridity and Tibetan language education policies in Sichuan," p. 10.

71 For example, see Yang, Miaoyan. "Moralities and contradictories in the educational aid for Tibet: contesting the multi-layered saviour complex." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 41, no. 7 (2020): 620-632.

PARENTAL "CHOICE" IN A COERCIVE ENVIRONMENT

Multiple factors drive parents to enroll their children in the colonial boarding school system. Parents want their children to have a quality education that equips them in their rapidly changing world: a world in which traditional Tibetan ways of life have been replaced by the dominance of the cash economy, increased urbanization, and systemic racism that disadvantages Tibetans' access to employment and services. Because China's school consolidation measures are still being aggressively implemented, schooling for Tibetans is now primarily residential, even at the elementary level. Options Tibetan parents used to have – monastery day schools, other privately-run schools, or education in exile in India – are steadily being eliminated.[72] In this situation, Tibetan parents are compelled by a lack of viable alternatives to send their children to boarding school.

Because China's school consolidation measures are still being aggressively implemented, schooling for Tibetans is now primarily residential, even at the elementary level. Options Tibetan parents used to have – monastery day schools, other privately-run schools, or education in exile in India – are steadily being eliminated. In this situation, Tibetan parents are compelled by a lack of viable alternatives to send their children to boarding school.

Simultaneously, a more direct and systematic form of coercion is at work. Accounts we have obtained from Tibet describe measures such as fines, other penalties, and outright threats being used to force parents to send their children to boarding schools. More importantly, it cannot be ignored that Tibetans live in a political environment that is fundamentally coercive and colonial, where the heavy hand of the state guides even the most personal of decisions. Xi Jinping's effort to force Tibetans, Uyghurs, and others to adopt a homogenous Chinese identity means that simply being Tibetan has become increasingly criminalized. For example, live-streaming in Tibetan is not allowed on China's most popular video-sharing apps, Tik-Tok (Douyin) and Kuaishou,[73] language preservation associations and chat groups are targeted,[74] and advocacy for Tibetan-language teaching is punished with imprisonment.[75] An intensive

72 For example, see Tibet Watch, "Tibetan Monks Holding Classes for Children will be Punished, China Warns," February 26, 2019, available at: https://www.tibetwatch.org/news/2019/6/17/tibetan-monks-holding-classes-for-children-will-be-punished-china-warns (accessed November 28, 2021); Radio Free Asia, "Tibetan Private Language Schools Closed Down in Sichuan," June 3, 2021, available at: https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/schools-06032021165545.html (accessed August 28, 2021); and "China Closes Tibetan School in Qinghai, Leaving Many Students Adrift," September 14, 2021, available at: https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/school-09142021135447.html (accessed November 20, 2021).

73 It has also recently been banned from another streaming app and removed from a language-learning app: Protocol, "Chinese tech companies appear to censor Uyghur and Tibetan," November 8, 2021, available at: https://www.protocol.com/china/bilibili-talkmate-uyghur-tibetan-tech (accessed November 17, 2021).

74 For example, see the recent case of Dza Wonpo: Tibet Watch, "Over 100 Tibetan detainees released in Dza Wonpo after month-long torture and interrogation," October 5, 2021, available at: https://www.tibetwatch.org/news/2021/10/5/over-100-tibetan-detainees-released-in-dza-wonpo-after-month-long-torture-and-interrogation (accessed November 19, 2021).

75 For example, see Human Rights Watch, "China: Activist Convicted for Promoting Tibetan Language," May 22, 2018, available at: https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/23/china-activist-convicted-promoting-tibetan-language (accessed November 19, 2021); Tibet Watch, "Two Tibetan youngsters detained for chat group in Tibetan language," September 9, 2021, available at: https://www.tibetwatch.org/news/2021/9/9/two-tibetan-youngsters-detained-for-chat-group-conversation-in-tibetan-language (accessed November 19, 2021); and Tibet Watch, "Teenage Tibetan petitioner arrested in Ngaba by Chinese police authorities," August 18, 2021, available at: https://www.tibetwatch.org/news/2021/8/18/teenage-tibetan-petitioner-arrested-in-ngaba-chinese-police-authorities (accessed November 19, 2021).

surveillance regime monitors Tibetans' daily activities and communication both off- and on-line. What little space has existed at times for views diverging from those of the Party has largely disappeared. In this context, Tibetans do not have to be explicitly threatened to know that any protest about the colonial boarding schooling system or the lack of alternatives will have serious repercussions.

Tibetan parents' views of state-sponsored schooling have shifted, beginning in the 2000s, from skepticism about both the value and intent[76] to a belief that attendance is necessary in order for their children to survive in their profoundly changing world. Starting in the mid-1990s, Tibetans were subjected to a series of state projects and policies that led to extremely rapid shifts from farming or nomadic life on the grasslands to settled housing in urban or semi-urban areas and from livelihoods based on the land to dependency on state subsidies and migratory work.[77] Huatse Gyal describes the unhappy calculus that parents face in one area of Ngaba (Chinese: Aba), Sichuan:

> As the cash economy has become paramount...and traditional communal grazing practices have become less and less feasible [due to government policies] most villagers are acutely aware that their way of life is changing in ways over which they have no control. As most parents today often say, "I am concerned with the future of my children."....This has forced them to consider other livelihood prospects for their children. Sending their children to school, with the hope of them becoming *lishaypa* [government officials] is one such option.[78]

The sense of both the necessity of education and the lack of desirable schooling options is reflected in this account from a Tibetan parent:

> My only son was sent to [a] state-run boarding school at age seven....At that time, my wife and I both strongly believed that without proper education, it would be very hard for my son to be able to lead a good life, so we made the decision with heavy hearts. In the meantime, we also talked with other parents who were [experiencing] similar hardship and tried to talk to government officials, but all our effort was in vain.[79]

Another Tibetan described how boarding elementary school creates a lose-lose situation for parents:

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76 Gyal, "'I am concerned with the future of my children,'" pp. 16-18; Postiglione, Gerard, Ben Jiao, and Li Xiaoliang. "Education change and development in nomadic communities of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR)." *International Journal of Chinese Education* 1, no. 1 (2012): 93-96.

77 Andrew Fischer highlights how these state development policies, coming on top of high levels of outright poverty and illiteracy in Tibet, actually compounded the pre-existing educational, economic and political inequalities for Tibetans and therefore increased, rather than decreased, the exclusion they experience. (Fischer, p. 5).

78 Gyal, "'I am concerned with the future of my children,'" p. 22.

79 Source 5, see Appendix 1.

> True, compared to earlier, the [enrollment] age for boarding school is much younger now. One of the reasons is probably that it has become a part of the regulations of the public [government] schools...If we look at it from another angle, it is part of surviving in the competitive nature of society today, to be able to compete with other children. If we don't have our Tibetan children in school at an early age, there is a fear of falling behind. Either way it is not good for us.[80]

In the highly repressive environment of Tibet today, parents neither have the space to oppose or resist the state's decisions or policies, nor do they have the freedom to demand the kind of educational systems they would like their children to have. Collective action, which has always held high risks for Tibetans under Chinese rule, has become almost unthinkable during Xi Jinping's reign.

Tibetan researcher Yumjyi Ji Ying finds that 12 parents and grandparents she interviewed in Tsolho (Chinese: Hainan) supported their [grand]children's attendance at boarding school out of hope that it would translate into social mobility, while also expressing concern about loss of language and culture.[81]

As Tibetans seek out educational opportunities, the school consolidation policy has been a critical factor in driving students into colonial boarding schools. Tibetan researcher Tsering Bum describes how families in one prefecture of Qinghai seek access to the healthcare and educational services that are available only in towns. But two national educational policies – one that requires that every child have nine years of compulsory schooling, and a second that requires rural Tibetan schools to be eliminated through consolidation – "indirectly force pastoralists off their grazing lands with threats of monetary fines and denial of state financial and material subsidies if families do not send their children to schools."[82] In fact, in eastern Tibet, the desire to access education for their children or to be closer to children already in boarding schools has led Tibetan nomads to participate in resettlement projects and migrate to urban areas.[83]

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Parents who do attempt to resist sending their children to boarding schools are met with a variety of coercive measures. One person in Amdo (Qinghai) reported:

> I know of children aged four to five who don't want to be separated from their mothers. They are forced to go to boarding schools. In some cases, the children cry for days, sticking to their mother's laps, begging not to be sent away and even refusing to go back. Both the children and the parents are unwilling.[84]

I know of children aged four to five who don't want to be separated from their mothers. They are forced to go to boarding schools. In some cases, the children cry for days, sticking to their mother's laps, begging not to be sent away and even refusing to go back. Both the children and the parents are unwilling.

– A Tibetan from Amdo (Qinghai)

80 Online Commenter 2, see Appendix 1.

81 Ying, pp. 10-12.

82 Bum, Tsering. "Translating ecological migration policy: a conjunctural analysis of Tibetan pastoralist resettlement in China." *Critical Asian Studies* 50, no. 4 (2018): 3-4.

83 Ying, p. 4 and Elisa Cencetti "New Settlements on the Tibetan Plateau of Amdo-Qinghai: Spatialized Power Devices," in *On the Fringes of the Harmonious Society: Tibetans and Uyghurs in Socialist China*, ed. Trine Brox and Ildiko Beller-Hann, (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2013) 159–182.

84 Source 1, see full text in Appendix 1.

Another Tibetan recounted a process of pressure and intimidation after their village opposed sending children in Grades 1-3 to boarding school. They described one of multiple visits from authorities:

> Two heads from the township, the education head from the county as well as around six police officers attended. They said, "....Today is the last day we will come. If we have to come back tomorrow, it won't be good....You have been discussing this on WeChat, we have heard about this, and if you don't listen [to us] we will squeeze [pressure] you one by one. That is easy for us to do.
>
> If you continue to choose not to acknowledge this policy and refuse to send your children to the schools, we will consider this to be a protest....In our county there are many education projects coming from the province. If you don't listen you will ruin all those future plans. You will be held responsible for that."[85]

Radio Free Asia reported in September 2020 that in Rebkong (Chinese: Tongren), eastern Tibet, "local primary schools have been closed by government order, and Tibetan children are being forced against their parents' wishes into boarding schools in areas far away." They continue:

> The Tibetan parents have appealed to Chinese authorities not to separate their children from them by sending them off to other regions for schooling and when the authorities did not heed their request, some of them staged a protest. The parents' protest quickly triggered a crackdown by police, with police vehicles and blaring sirens responding quickly to the protest scene, and one male protester was taken into custody...[and] later released. The children's parents were finally forced to send their children away to the Chinese government-designated boarding schools."[86]

Similarly, Tibet Watch reported in September 2021 that 1,216 Tibetan children from Matoe (Chinese: Maduo) County, Golog (Chinese: Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture had been sent to boarding schools in Xining, Golog County and Zogan Rawar township months after the area was hit by an earthquake. At a public meeting held by Chinese authorities, "Parents were instructed to raise their hands if they accepted the relocation as arranged by the government. However, they found themselves in a situation where no option to refuse was at their disposal."[87]

Some families have been told that if they do not send their children to boarding preschool, the children will not be allowed to enroll in elementary school. Parents also face financial penalties or threats that their other children will not be able to attend in the future:

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85 Source 2, see full text in Appendix 1.

86 Radio Free Asia, "Tibetan School Year Begins Under New Restrictions, Mandarin-only Instruction," September 12, 2020, available at: https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/school-09122020104223.html (accessed July 5, 2021).

87 Tibet Watch, "Survivors of Earthquake under Surveillance and Uncertainty," September 20, 2021, available at: https://www.tibetwatch.org/news/2021/9/30/survivors-of-earthquake-under-surveillance-and-uncertainty (accessed November 5, 2021).

> From the age of four, the local officials tell the family it is mandatory to send the children to boarding schools and if families do not comply, they are asked to pay a fine. Sometimes the officials tell the families that if they don't send their [first] child to boarding school, then their second or third child will never be allowed to enroll. With [these] different methods, they are coercing the family to comply. So, usually out of fear, the family sends their children to boarding schools.[88]

These reports and testimonials attest to the overwhelming pressure that Tibetan parents feel to place their children in colonial boarding schools. This pressure is experienced in a variety of ways: as fear for their child's future in an environment of structural racism and radical socio-economic change; as manipulation through direct threats and intimidation; and finally, as powerlessness due to an abject lack of other schooling options, options that have been actively eliminated by the state. In sum, Chinese authorities have created a system in which Tibetan parents see no alternative but to send their children away.

88 Source 1, see full text in Appendix 1.

THREE OUT OF FOUR TIBETAN STUDENTS ARE IN COLONIAL BOARDING SCHOOLS

At least 806,218 Tibetan students out of a total of 1,039,370 are living at boarding schools. This number represents 78% of all Tibetan students from ages six to 18.

The policies discussed above have resulted in the shift of Tibetan schooling to a system that is almost entirely residential. Calculations based on official data suggest that at least 806,218 Tibetan students out of a total of 1,039,370 are living at boarding schools.[89] This number represents 78% of all Tibetan students from ages six to 18.[90] While this might seem like a shockingly high number, even more shocking is the fact that this is a conservative estimate, as explained below. We believe the number is likely closer to 900,000.

As noted earlier, official statistics in China can be inflated to meet targets or quotas, so they cannot be viewed with absolute certainty. Nonetheless, the sheer size of these numbers is an indication of the scope and scale of the colonial boarding school program in Tibet, whether or not they are precisely accurate. In Canada, it is believed that approximately one-third of all school-aged Indigenous children attended the country's devastating residential schools at their height.[91] Considering the extent of the intergenerational trauma and harm done to Indigenous communities as a result of the residential school system there, it is not difficult to imagine the potential toll China's current colonial boarding school system could wreak on generations of Tibetans.

It is challenging to find statistics on how many Tibetan students are in boarding schools. Although the colonial boarding school system is discussed in state media reports that expound on its "life-changing"[92] benefits, we could not find a central source detailing how many Tibetan children are currently enrolled. Data collection was further hampered by Tibet's division between numerous different administrative jurisdictions, many of which include Chinese areas.

Therefore, we arrived at the number 806,218 by:

1) estimating the number of Tibetan students in a particular area by first taking the percentage of the population reported to be Tibetan[93] and multiplying it by the total

89 See table on page 25 and footnotes 98-106 for location and sources.

90 See table on following page.

91 National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, University of Manitoba, available at: https://web.archive.org/web/20160420012021/http://umanitoba.ca/centres/nctr/overview.html (accessed July 5, 2021).

92 For example, see CGTN, "A day in the life of a Tibetan high schooler," April 1, 2019, available at: https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d514e79557a4e33457a6333566d54/index.html (accessed November 25, 2021) and Xinhua, "#ProsperityOnThePlateau: Free education for 15 years from pre-school to high school," December 12, 2020, available at: http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-12/02/c_139558901.htm (accessed November 25, 2021).

93 Numbers released so far for the 2020 census provide an ethnic breakdown for the TAR but not for other provinces that include areas of Tibet. Therefore, we used 2020 census data for the Tibetan population in the TAR, 2010 census data for Tibetan prefectures in Qinghai and the most recent available Statistical Bulletins and Communiqués issued by local governments in the remaining areas that are part of Sichuan, Gansu, and Yunnan provinces.

student number for that area;

2) finding the percentage of students in the particular area reported to be enrolled in boarding school; and

3) applying the percentage of boarding students to the number of Tibetan students.

Detailed explanations of the sources and steps used for deriving each number by location are provided in the table below and corresponding footnotes.

There are several reasons that the estimates presented in the table are likely low. Most importantly, they assume that the percentage of Tibetan students from the TAR or a given Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture who are boarding is the same as the percentage of Chinese students from the same area who are boarding. However, the colonial boarding school system is specifically aimed at Tibetans: as described in earlier sections, "ethnic minorities," not Chinese students, are being targeted by the school consolidation policy today. Additionally, Chinese populations in Tibet are concentrated in urban areas – Lhasa in the TAR and other cities in eastern Tibet – while the consolidation policy is focused on rural areas. Other policies, like the TAR's "Three Guarantees" which provides food, tuition, and lodging to students, also target farmers, herders, and marginalized urban families,[94] the vast majority of whom are Tibetan.[95] Other sources also explicitly state that boarding programs are for "rural areas" or "pastoral plateau areas."[96] This means that Tibetans are almost certainly represented in boarding schools at higher percentages than Chinese students.

As well, the total number of Tibetan students is likely underestimated in the first place, because Tibetans have higher birth rates than Chinese people and, therefore, likely make up a larger proportion of the student-age population than of the population as a whole.

In addition, most of the available data on boarding enrollment rates are several years old, but the boarding system and school consolidation have continued to expand up to the present. Enrollment rates will have continued to grow in the intervening years as more village schools were shut down.

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94 China Tibet News, "Xizang quanmian shixian 15 nian mianfei jiaoyu jinnian yi luoshi zijin chao 5 yi yuan" [Tibet fully realizes 15 years of free education: Over 500 million yuan have been invested this year], available at: https://www.xzdw.gov.cn/xxz/whjy/201808/t20180808_48102.html (accessed October 22, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20211122145221/https://www.xzdw.gov.cn/xxz/whjy/201808/t20180808_48102.html.

95 Andrew Fischer notes, for example, that "Tibetan areas manifest an exceptional structural asymmetry whereby the most educated category of local residents (urban Tibetan men) is much less educated on average than even the least educated category of inter-provincial migrants competing in local urban labour markets (i.e. rural women from Sichuan)." (Fischer, p. 5).

96 Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, "'Shisan wu' qi wozhou jiaoyu shiye gaige fazhan jishi" [Report on the reform and development of education in our prefecture during the "13th Five-Year Plan" period], December 15, 2020, available at: http://www.gzz.gov.cn/gzzrmzf/c101413/202012/50e4339996fe4d92917721f69d0e40ae.shtml (accessed July 5, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20210913134626/http://www.gzz.gov.cn/gzzrmzf/c101413/202012/50e4339996fe4d92917721f69d0e40ae.shtml.

Finally, there have been individual reports of four- and five-year-olds boarding in Qinghai and TAR,[97] and this age group is not represented in the number above.

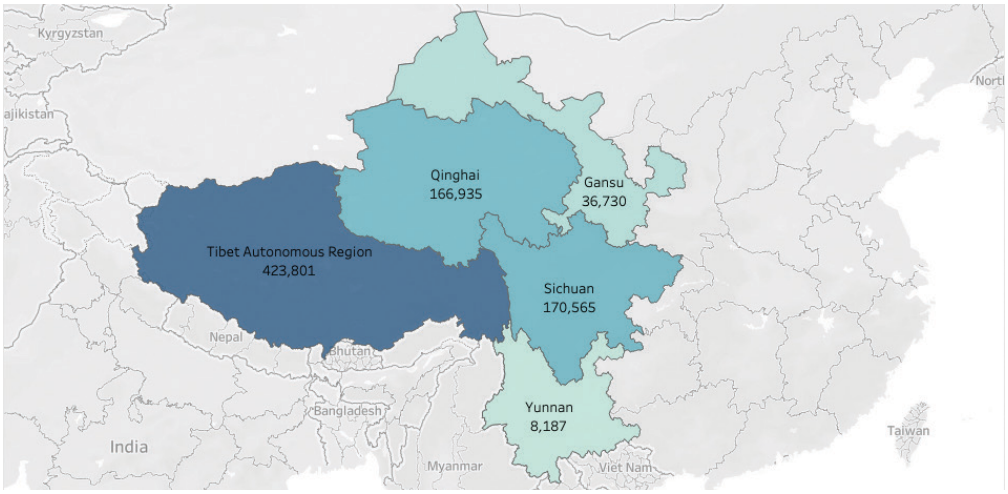
Minimum Number of Tibetan Children Ages 6 to 18 Estimated to Be in Colonial Boarding Schools

Region/Provinces	Year	Total Tibetan Students	Total Tibetan Colonial Boarding School Students	Percent
Tibet Autonomous Region *(Includes TAR Inland Schooling program)*	**2019**	**521,715**	**423,801**[98]	**81%**
Qinghai	**2019**	**215,027**	**166,935**[99]	**78%**
(Includes Tsojang (Ch: Haibei), Tsolho (Ch: Hainan), Malho (Huangnan), Golog (Ch: Guoluo), Tsonub (Ch: Haixi), and Yülshül (Ch: Yushu))				
Sichuan	**2016-2019**	**220,370**	**170,565**	**77%**
Ngaba (Ch: Aba)	*2019*	*64,065*	*47,467*[100]	*74%*
Kardze (Ch: Ganzi)	*2019*	*149,027*	*118,116*[101]	*79%*
Mili (Ch: Muli) County	*2016*	*7,278*	*4,982*[102]	*68%*
Gansu	**2019-2020**	**64,840**	**36,730**	**57%**
Kanlho (Ch: Gannan)	*2020*	*58,901*	*33,456*[103]	*57%*
Bairi (Ch: Tianzhu)	*2019*	*5,939*[104]	*3,274*	*55%*
Yunnan *(Includes Dechen (Ch: Diqing))*	**2020**	**17,418**	**8,187**[105]	**47%**
Total		**1,039,370**[106]	**806,218**	**78%**

97 Source 1 and Online Commenter 1 in Appendix 1; Testimony 2 in Appendix 3.

The following map illustrates the distribution of Tibetan colonial boarding students across the Chinese provinces that encompass Tibet, based on the numbers above.

Number of Tibetan Boarding Students by Province



98 At the beginning of the 2017-18 school year, 79.8% of primary school students and 80.5% of junior high school students in the region were boarding (Source: Department of Education of the Tibet Autonomous Region, "Xizang zizhiqu jiaoyu shiye tongji ziliao (jichu jiaoyu)" [Statistics on Education in the Tibet Autonomous Region (Basic Education)], 2018, pp.166-172). A percentage for senior high school students was not provided. To calculate the total number of Tibetan boarding students in TAR, we first applied the 2017-18 percentages listed above to the TAR elementary and junior high school populations as of 2019 (for a total of 384,625 boarding students out of 480,760 students overall) and then applied the percentage of Tibetans (86.02%) of the total population of TAR to those (for a total of 330,854 Tibetan students in boarding schools). The 2019 numbers were drawn from the 2019 Educational Statistics Yearbook of China, "Part I: The Development of the Educational Undertaking," December 2020, which put the total student population (elementary, junior, senior, and vocational high school) at 571,662. For senior and vocational high school, we applied the same percentage as for junior high schools, that is, 80.5%, for a total of 73,176 boarding students out of an estimated 90,902 total students (same source), at least 62,945 (86.02%) of whom are Tibetan. (This is a conservative estimate as generally more senior high schools are boarding schools than any other level is, as noted by the People's Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region in 2017 that senior high schools should be "concentrated in the cities" and "managed in a centralized fashion" (Source: People's Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region, "Zang zheng fa (2017) 18 hao 'Xizang zizhiqu renmin zhengfu guanyu tongchou tuijin xianyunei chengxiang yiwujiaoyu yitihua gaige fazhan de shishi yijian" [Document No. 18 (2017): Implementation Opinions of the People's Government of the Tibet Autonomous Region on Promoting the Integrated Reform and Development of Urban and Rural Compulsory Education in the Counties], August 2, 2017, available at: https://www.waizi.org.cn/policy/22960.html (accessed July 5, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20210913092605/https://www.waizi.org.cn/policy/22960.html.) Finally 30,000 students from the TAR Inland Schooling program (Ch: 内地西藏班 Neidi Xizang ban) have been added to both the total boarding and the total TAR student numbers; this includes an unknown number of post-secondary students. (Source: TAR CPC Committee, "Xizang quanmian shixian 15 nian mianfei jiaoyu jinnian yi luoshi zijin chao 5 yi yuan" [Tibet has fully realized 15 years of free education, this year alone more than 500 million yuan in funds implemented], August 8, 2018, available at: https://www.xzdw.gov.cn/xxz/whjy/201808/t20180808_48102.html (accessed July 6, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20210913092723/https://www.xzdw.gov.cn/xxz/whjy/201808/t20180808_48102.html).

99 Citing the "Concise Statistical Analysis of the Development of Education in Qinghai Province (2015)" published by the Qinghai Department of Education, Ma Cun-fang, a professor with the Institute of Political Studies of Qinghai University For Nationalities, writes: *The proportion of secondary and elementary students in boarding schools is as high as 85.98% and 72.53%, respectively, and there is a trend of boarding students getting younger.* (Source: Cun-fang, Ma "Qinghai zangqu jisuzhi xuesheng qingxu zhili yu xinli jiankang guanxi yanjiu" [Study of the Relationship Between Qinghai Tibetan Boarding Students' Emotional Intelligence and Mental Health], *Journal of Qinghai Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)* 39, no. 4 (July 2017): 5) **Note:** In this case, secondary schools include both junior and senior high school. We applied these percentages to the total student population of the six Tibetan prefectures in Qinghai Province (student population data are drawn from the Qinghai Statistical Yearbook 2020, "18-5 Basic Statistics on Primary Schools in Main Years" in Ch.18, Education, Science and Technology, August 2020, p. 451, and "18-4 Basic Statistics on Regular Secondary Schools in Main Years", p. 450). We then used the percentage of Tibetans in each prefecture as noted in the 2010 National Census prefectural communiques to determine the number of Tibetan students in each prefecture.

100 A representative of the Ngaba Prefecture Education Bureau posted online on July 9, 2020 that Ngaba Prefecture had 281 residential schools (elementary through senior high school) with 79,790 students (73.53% of all elementary and middle school students) boarding. Of those, 40,721 students (63.88%) were in elementary, 25,252 (89.36%) in junior high, 13,663 (87.11%) in senior high school, and 154 (86.52%) in special education; https://ly.scol.com.cn/thread?tid=2811516&display=1&typeid=5&act=type&page=1 (accessed July 5, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20210913093023/https://ly.scol.com.cn/thread?tid=2811516&display=1&typeid=5&act=type&page=1. According to the 2019 Ngaba Statistical Bulletin, the total number of students in Ngaba Prefecture is 107,690. The same bulletin lists the percentage of Tibetans in the prefecture as 59.49%. Ngaba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture 2019 National Economic and Social Development Statistical Bulletin, April 23, 2020, available at: https://tjj.abazhou.gov.cn/abztjj/c103833/202004/400e620e8cc84cf19dff973f0d8e97bf.shtml, (accessed July 5, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20211122141234/https://m.ahmhxc.com/tongjigongbao/18355_5.html.

101 The number of boarding students is sourced from the Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, "'Shisan wu' qi wozhou jiaoyu shiye gaige fazhan jishi" [Report on the reform and development of education in our prefecture during the "13th Five-Year Plan" period], December 15, 2020, available at: http://www.gzz.gov.cn/gzzrmzf/c101413/202012/50e4339996fe4d92917721f69d0e40ae.shtml (accessed July 5, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20210913134626/http://www.gzz.gov.cn/gzzrmzf/c101413/202012/50e4339996fe4d92917721f69d0e40ae.shtml. Based on the 2020 Ganzi Statistical Yearbook, the percentage of Tibetans in Kardze is 83.77%, and the total student population (elementary through high school) is 178,056 (2020 Ganzi Statistical Yearbook, p. 212 and p. 448).

102 Muli County paid 25.51 million yuan in boarding living allowance, benefiting 15,006 students of all nationalities. (Source: Muli County Government Office, "Mulixian 2016 nian guomin jingji he shehui fazhan tongji gongbao" [2016 Statistical Communiqué on National Economic and Social Development of Muli County], March 20, 2017). According to the most recent source, Tibetans make up 33.2% of the population in Mili (Ch: Muli) (Source: Muli County Government Office, "Muli zangzu zizhixian jiben qingkuang" [Basic situation of Muli Tibetan Autonomous County], January 1, 2021, available at: www.muli.gov.cn/zjml/rsml/201511/t20151104_762361.html (accessed July 5, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20210119210444/http://www.muli.gov.cn/zjml/rsml/201511/t20151104_762361.html). The number of Tibetan students in boarding schools is therefore estimated at 4,982.

103 The Gannan Prefecture Statistics Bureau reports that in 2020 the total number of boarding students is 58,901, representing 51% of the total student population of 115,499. The same report lists the percentage of Tibetans in the prefecture at 56.8% of the total prefectural population (Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture's 2020 National Economic and Social Development Statistical Communiqué, April 9, 2021, available at: http://tjj.gnzrmzf.gov.cn/info/1194/5660.htm (accessed October 26, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20211026042220/http://tjj.gnzrmzf.gov.cn/info/1194/5660.htm).

104 In December 2020, Tibetans made up 30.31% of the population in Bairi (Ch: Tianzhu) (Source: "Tianzhu zangzu zizhixian" [Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County], Baidu Baike, available at: https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%A4%A9%E7%A5%9E8%97%8F%E6%97%8F%E8%87%AA%E6%B2%BB%E5%8E%BF/8746531 (accessed July 8, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20210913141659/https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%A4%A9%E7%A5%9D%E8%97 %8F%E6%97%8F%E8%87%AA%E6%B2% BB%E5 %8E%BF/8746531). Official sources put the student population (elementary, junior and senior high school) of Bairi in 2019 at 19,593 (Source: "2019 Tianzhu zangzu zizhixian guomin jingji he shehui fazhan tongji gongbao" [Statistical Communiqué on the National Economic and Social Development of Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County in 2019], June 8, 2020, available at: http://www.gstianzhu.gov.cn/xxgk/xzfgbmxxgk/tjj/gkml_1354/qtxx_1360/202007/t20200701_1200000.html (accessed July 8, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20210913142332/http:// www.gstianzhu.gov.cn/xxgk/xzfgbmxxgk/tjj/gkml_1354/ qtxx_1360/202007/t20200701_1200000.html). The number of Tibetan students is therefore estimated at 5,939. According to the county government, in 2011, 15330 (55.12%) of all students were boarding. (Source: Tianzhu County Government Office, June 3, 2016, available at: https://www.jaoixu.com/20160603/4467355.html (accessed November 21, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20211122120536/https://www.jaoixu.com/20160603/4467355.html). We applied this 2011 data point to the total student number from 2019 to estimate the number of students boarding.

105 In 2020, Tibetans made up 36.18% of Dechen's total population. In 2019, 47% of all students in Yunnan were boarding (Source: Department of Education of Yunnan Province, "Yunnansheng 2019/2020 xuenianchu quansheng jiaoyu shiye fazhan tongji gongbao" [Statistical Bulletin of Yunnan Province's Educational Development at the beginning of the 2019/2020 school year], March 25, 2020, available at: https://jyt.yn.gov.cn/web/ac1f1eb64e6d4e36999869a47598935d/9d03708b61fc4b6b982355b4e1d8b8fd html (accessed May 28, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20210913142954/https:/jyt.yn.gov.cn/ web/ac1f1eb64e6d4e36999869a47598935d/9d03708b61fc4b6b982355b4e1d8b8fd html). After applying these percentages to the total number of students in Dechen, we arrived at an estimated 8,187 Tibetan students in boarding schools. **Note:** 47% is the percentage across all of Yunnan, but it is likely that Tibetans and minorities make up a higher percentage of boarding students.

106 This figure does not include Tibetan students in cities like Xining, Chengdu, or Beijing.

IMPACTS OF THE COLONIAL BOARDING SCHOOL SYSTEM

A vast body of research has established that grave long-term and intergenerational harm is associated with attending residential school.[107] The experience of Tibetans cannot be fully assessed due to the strict controls placed on Tibet by the Chinese authorities. However, accounts from Tibetans in exile of life in earlier Tibetan boarding schools illustrate serious deprivation and abuse. Scholars from within Tibet and China have also documented high rates of mental and emotional distress in colonial boarding schools today, suggesting that students are likely to suffer long-term, adverse effects.

In interviews, Tibetans who attended early boarding schools in Tibet that were precursors to the current colonial boarding school system described the emotional challenge of being separated from their families and the psychological toll of bullying, beatings from teachers, regimented schedules, and poor living conditions.[108] One man who started colonial boarding school at age seven explained how teachers sometimes would not talk to him and other students, telling them they smelled bad because they only had one uniform to wear. He went on to describe other hardships and the effects he feels today:

> The bullying that I faced from...seniors left me very afraid....My parents were old and couldn't come [to visit], my brother and sister were busy... That also left a huge emotional scar on me.
>
> I think [attending colonial boarding school] affected me as a person. My family often told me that I have become like a Chinese person.[109]

One woman experienced constant fear and abuse over three years of junior high school:

> There were rampant cases of rape, sexual harassment, beatings, bullying and theft in the dormitory. Random men climbed into the girls' dormitory at night...Many times, it was just random men and they were not even from school. It was not uncommon that a Chinese male teacher barged into the girls room, and raped or sexually assaulted the school girls. Day or night, we were not safe, constantly in fear of something happening to us. At that time, most of us were 11-13 years old. When the girls didn't comply, they were slapped and kicked. The Chinese male teachers used to call me in their chamber and inappropriately touched and sexually harassed me. I don't know how I survived it, my mother had already passed away then. I couldn't tell anybody what was happening to me.

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107 In Canada, for example, a public health review study identified that the long-lasting effects of residential schools included "health problems, substance abuse, mortality/suicide rates, criminal activity, and disintegration of families and communities." The study noted that these impacts are experienced collectively, beyond the effect on individual Survivors. (Wilk, Piotr, Alana Maltby, and Martin Cooke. "Residential schools and the effects on Indigenous health and well-being in Canada—a scoping review." *Public health reviews* 38, no. 1 (2017): 2.)

108 See interviews in Appendix 3.

109 Testimony 3, see full text in Appendix 3.

> And the corporal punishment in school was unimaginable....When teachers were furious, they beat with anything like a chair, iron rod, sticks, etc., to the point of bleeding. The beatings were so severe and frequent that everyone had to live in constant fear.
>
> Three years of my secondary school in the colonial boarding school was a complete nightmare. It was physically, emotionally, and psychologically tormenting and exhausting. I didn't have any sort of joy in learning, or the meaning of education.... I was just surviving. I was so traumatized, all I could think or worry about was how to get away from bullying, beating, sexual harassment, or hunger.[110]

Such testimonies highlight the conditions of physical, mental, and emotional stress and trauma that some students were forced to endure.

Tibetan researcher Huatse Gyal described how he absorbed a sense of inferiority while attending boarding school in the late 1990s:

> Apart from teaching [Chinese and Tibetan], the school had a larger mission: to alter our fundamental values and minds. Through interactions with our teachers —Tibetans from the lowland farming areas who had recently graduated from Chinese universities—we came to realize that our bodies were not "clean" enough, that our speech was not "civilized" enough, and that we had to seek out a "better" life. Anything could be done to mold us into this ideal modern subject. Beating was more than acceptable; thus, the pain was constant....
>
> Our teachers drove us to hate our heritage, our elders, and even our parents. As embodiments of the state, they were there to plant the sense in us that a good life was on the outside, and not in our communities. They were there to punish us for being the children of Tibetan nomads. We felt ashamed of our cultural background; we developed an antipathy to our socio-cultural world itself.[111]

Although academic research is limited, a number of scholars have documented the psychological and social harm that Tibetan students have experienced in the current boarding school system. In a study of boarding students in Tibetan areas of Sichuan, two researchers named varying degrees of mental health problems, like apathy, anxiety, and interaction disorders. They pointed to the "semi-military and closed management" of boarding schools as a reason for students' decreased capacity to engage with and understand the outside world, "resulting in a closed vision and narrow thinking...."[112]

"Three years of my secondary school in the boarding school was a complete nightmare. It was physically, emotionally and psychologically tormenting and exhausting... I was so traumatized, all I could think or worry about was how to get away from bullying, beating, sexual harassment, or hunger.
– Former Boarding School Student

"In a study of boarding students in Tibetan areas of Sichuan, two researchers named varying degrees of mental health problems, like apathy, anxiety, and interaction disorders. They pointed to the "semi-military and closed management" of boarding schools as a reason for students' decreased capacity to engage with and understand the outside world, "resulting in a closed vision and narrow thinking...."

110 Testimony 1, see full text in Appendix 3.

111 Gyal, Huatse, "Our Indigenous Land is Not a Wasteland," American Ethnologist website, February 6, 2021, available at: https://americanethnologist.org/features/reflections/our-indigenous-land-is-not-a-wasteland (accessed November 15, 2021). See longer excerpt in Appendix 2.

112 Xiaoping, Wang and Dengzhu, Zhaxi, "Zangqu jisuzhi xuexiao youxiao zhiru jiating jiaoyu celüe fenxi."" [An Analysis of Effectively Implanting Family Education Strategies in Boarding Schools in Tibetan Areas], *Industry and Information Technology Education* (2014): 89.

A survey-based study by Tibetan researcher Gazang Cao showed "alienation" in Tibetan adolescents attending rural colonial boarding schools in Qinghai. Cao used a random sample of 897 Tibetans attending Grades 7 to 12 at two schools. The questionnaire, as well as interviews with students, teachers, and administrators, revealed that more than one in three children were experiencing high levels of alienation.[113] Besides a sense of anguish or loss, adolescent alienation was said to describe an inability to connect in a meaningful way with others. In addition, the author cited academic research showing behavioral issues, substance abuse, and suicide as associated with high levels of alienation. "At the heart of alienation are powerlessness, normlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation/estrangement. Alienation has a dramatic impact on levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-direction."[114]

A parent from a Tibetan area of Sichuan reflects on the costs of sending their young child to colonial boarding school:

> For parents, it was mainly a challenge of not being able to let go of your child, but for the children themselves, it was a range of multiple challenges, from not being able to take care of themselves to having to endure others' abuses and bullying, plus the suffering of being separated from parents at such a young age. When we weighed the overall cost and benefit of sending children to boarding schools, it became clear to me that the cost outweighed the benefits. It became particularly evident as children grow older [that] the costs are reflected in their behavior.[115]

Anecdotes and research from areas across Tibet point to a loss of family connection and support as factors in elevated levels of alienation, homesickness, and forms of physical or emotional distress. For example, in Sichuan, researchers Wang Xiaoping and Zhaxi Dengzhu documented that, due to distance and difficult travel, as many as 80% of Tibetan children do not return home during the school year (even for holidays), only meeting their parents halfway or staying with relatives or friends who live closer to the school.[116] At one school, children are only allowed three minutes a day to call home from a landline in a security guard's office.[117] This lack of connection to home is further displayed in Qinghai by a school policy that requires children to turn in their cell phones while they are at the school, only getting them back for the monthly break.[118] One Qinghai teacher commented:

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113 Cao, "Alienation of Tibetan Adolescents in Rural Boarding Schools," p. 503.

114 Cao, "Alienation of Tibetan Adolescents in Rural Boarding Schools," p. 504

115 Source 5, see Appendix 1.

116 Wang, Zhaxi, "Zangqu jisuzhi xuexiao," p. 89.

117 Fu Jingyi, "Sichuan Zangqu tansuo muqu jiaoyu: cong 'you shu du' dao 'du hao shu'" [Sichuan's Tibetan Areas Explore Pastoral Education: From "Having Access to Education" to "Enjoying Good Education"], June 9, 2015, available at: http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2015/0609/c70731-27126607.html (accessed June 8, 2021), *Internet Archive*, https://web.archive.org/web/20210913144503/http://politics.people.com.cn/n/2015/0609/c70731-27126607.html.

118 Cao, Gazang, "Liudong, jisu yu guishu: zangzu qingshaonian yu jiating-shehui guanxi xianzhuang yanjiu" [Mobility, Boarding and Belonging: A Study on the Status Quo of Tibetan Youth and Family-Social Relations], *Qinghai Social Sciences* 4, (2019): 23.

> Nowadays, students have no one to talk to. In the past, if they were criticized by teachers, they would go home, [and] even if they didn't have parents...there would be elders, and they could release the unhappiness and stress of school in family conversations, and the next day would be a new day. But now boarding school students, without this outlet for family release, have been holding it in their psyche, and over time, they are developing illnesses.[119]

When chatting with fifth grade children they will happily talk about how they're grazing the yaks at home and how, in summer, you can sit under the yak's belly to shelter from the rain. When talking about the various things at home, their faces are glowing with pride and happiness, but when talking about whether they miss home and their parents while at school, they seem shy, embarrassed, and frustrated.

At a school in Tibet's capital of Lhasa, researcher Guo Tingting collected data from a questionnaire and held in-depth interviews with students from five regions of the TAR. The study determined that the level of homesickness and longing for parents and their traditional way of life was extremely high across grades, with students speaking specifically of missing Tibetan cultural staples like butter tea, tsampa, and grazing their yaks in the grasslands. The study went on to report:

> When chatting with students and asking if they were homesick, 99% of the students would say that they miss home and their parents...Senior students also tell me very rationally that it's better to stay at home...When chatting with fifth grade children they will happily talk about how they're grazing the yaks at home and how, in summer, you can sit under the yak's belly to shelter from the rain. When talking about the various things at home, their faces are glowing with pride and happiness, but when talking about whether they miss home and their parents while at school, they seem shy, embarrassed, and frustrated.[120]

Guo went on to describe her observations of parents attempting to visit their children in Lhasa. Shut out of the school grounds, family members periodically tried to meet their children at a perimeter fence in order to bring them treats or daily necessities. However, this was discouraged by administrators and teachers, who told the children they would lose academic points if they went to the fence.[121]

Shut out of the school grounds, family members periodically tried to meet their children at a perimeter fence in order to bring them treats or daily necessities. However, this was discouraged by administrators and teachers, who told the children they would lose academic points if they went to the fence.

> I saw a little boy from second grade talking to a parent across the fence, looking back while talking, frowning, worried that the teacher on duty would catch him and deduct points...The students hurriedly took things from their parents and ran back. The expression on the little boy's face [indicated] that he wanted to cry....[122]

> A girl in the fourth grade told me her parents did not come, I asked her if she wanted [her] parents to come? She replied that she didn't want them to come. She told her parents not to come to school because points would be deducted if they came to the school. "If the points [were] not deducted, [would] you want them to come?" She nodded while carrying on cleaning.[123]

119 Cao, Gazang, "Liudong, jisu yu guishu," p. 23.

120 Guo, Tingting, "Xizang nongcun jisuzhi xiaoxuesheng de qinggan xuqiu yanjiu" [A Study on the Emotional Needs of Rural Boarding School Pupils in Tibet] (MA Thesis, Southwest University, April 21, 2018) p. 51.

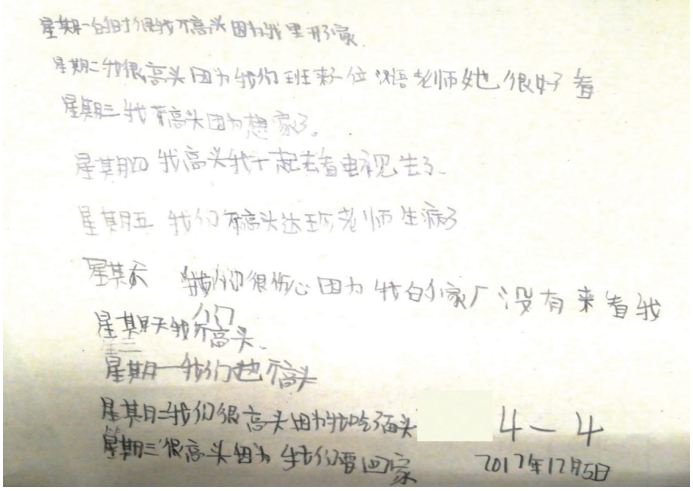
121 Guo, "Xizang nongcun jisuzhi xiaoxuesheng," p. 49.

122 Guo, "Xizang nongcun jisuzhi xiaoxuesheng," p. 49.

123 Guo, "Xizang nongcun jisuzhi xiaoxuesheng," p. 50.

Images taken from Guo Tingting's 2018 thesis, "A Study on the Emotional Needs of Rural Boarding School Pupils in Tibet"

Tasked with writing in Chinese about things that had made them happy and sad, many fourth-year students in a colonial boarding school in Lhasa expressed their longing for home. Guo Tingting recorded the following answer given by one of the students:



On Monday, I was unhappy because I had to leave home.
On Tuesday, I was happy because a new Chinese teacher came to our class and she was very pretty.
On Wednesday, I was unhappy because I missed home.
On Thursday, I was happy because I could go watch TV with the others.
On Friday, I was unhappy because Teacher Dhardon was sick.
On Saturday, I was really sad because my family didn't come to see me.
On Sunday, I was unhappy.
On Monday, I was unhappy as well.
On Tuesday, I was happy because I had mantou to eat.
On Wednesday, I was so happy because I could go home.[124]

124 Fourth grader, cited in Guo, "Xizang nongcun jisuzhi xiaoxuesheng," p. 52.

The consequences of isolation and lack of family upbringing become even more devastating as the colonial boarding school system in Tibet grows to include younger and younger students. At a Tibetan school in Qinghai, childcare workers are hired to teach the young children how to brush their hair and wash their faces since they cannot yet do such tasks on their own. According to state media, many students come to rely on these school employees for their physical and emotional needs, some even referring to them as "mother."[125] One worker explains: "The first-year students are still young. If they leave their parents and live with their classmates, they will inevitably experience a lot of discomfort."[126] The potential long-term consequences at both the individual and societal level are deeply concerning.

At a Tibetan school in Qinghai, childcare workers are hired to teach the young children how to brush their hair and wash their faces since they cannot yet do such tasks on their own. According to state media, many students come to rely on these school employees for their physical and emotional needs, some even referring to them as "mother."

125 Wang Mei, "Zangzu xuesheng Wanma Zhaxi: Xin xuexiao bi jiali hai yao hao" [Tibetan Student Pema Tashi: The New School is Even Better Than Home], January 2, 2014, available at: http://www.humanrights.cn/cn/zt/tbbd/44/5/t20140102_1131293.htm (accessed July 15, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20211124155539/http://www.humanrights.cn/cn/zt/tbbd/44/5/t20140102_1131293.htm.

126 Wang, "Zangzu xuesheng Wanma Zhaxi."

INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC LAW

China's boarding school system for Tibetan children constitutes a fundamental violation of the rights of parents and children to preserve their cultural, religious, and linguistic identity.

China's colonial boarding school policies in Tibet violate multiple international human rights treaties, including those to which China is a party, as well as China's own domestic laws. In effect, China's boarding school system for Tibetan children constitutes a fundamental violation of the rights of parents and children to preserve their cultural, religious, and linguistic identity.

Two core themes that are reiterated throughout international human rights law, including multiple international treaties that China has either ratified or at least signed, are the notions that children's best interests are protected when children are embedded within their families and that children have the right to family integrity without interference from the state. This results in the recognition that, except in cases of extreme abuse or neglect by parents, it is parents who must have primary authority over fundamental decisions involving their children, including what type of education they receive, which religion they practice, and how they are exposed to their own cultural heritage.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) recognizes the family as a unit entitled to protection from the state, both in general and in terms of parents' choice regarding their child's education. In general terms, Article 16(3) provides that "[t]he family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State." Article 26(3) of the UDHR further states that "parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children."[127]

The International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), which China signed in 1997 and ratified in 2001,[128] reiterates this principle of parental agency in educational choice for their children. Article 13(3) notes that "[t]he States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions."[129]

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which China signed in 1990 and ratified in 1992,[130] refers to the family as "the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children" and recognizes that a child "for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow

127 United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," December 10, 1948, available at: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights (accessed November 25, 2021).

128 UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies, "UN Treaty Body Database," available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=36&Lang=EN (accessed November 25, 2021).

129 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, Article 13(3)," December 16, 1966, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx (accessed November 25, 2021).

130 UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies, "UN Treaty Body Database."

up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding."[131] That same convention provides that "States Parties shall ensure that a child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when competent authorities subject to judicial review determine, in accordance with applicable law and procedures, that such separation is necessary for the best interests of the child."[132] Similar language is found throughout international human rights standards, including those specifically addressing educational matters.[133] By compelling Tibetan parents to send their children to colonial boarding schools, including by removing any other options, Chinese authorities interfere with their right to preserve the integrity of their family units and strip them of their right to choose the educational direction of their children.

By compelling Tibetan parents to send their children to colonial boarding schools, including by removing any other options, Chinese authorities interfere with their right to preserve the integrity of their family units and strip them of their right to choose the educational direction of their children.

Additionally, China's colonial boarding school system and its increasing use of Chinese as the medium of instruction, as well as the way in which it alienates Tibetan children from their own cultural heritage, violates parents' and children's internationally enshrined rights with regard to linguistic and cultural choice and freedom. The CRC states that "a child belonging to a...minority...shall not be denied the right...to use his or her own language,"[134] and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (CCPR), which China signed in 1998 (though has not ratified)[135] contains similar language.[136] As recently as 2020, in a communication to the Chinese government, a United Nations Committee (the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination) raised concerns about the Chinese government's replacement of Tibetan with the Chinese language as the medium of instruction in schools, and its persecution of Tibetan language rights advocates.[137] Over the past several decades,

131 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Convention on the Rights of the Child, preamble," September 2, 1990, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/ pages/crc.aspx (accessed November 25, 2021).

132 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 9."

133 UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, "Convention Against Discrimination in Education, article 5(b)," December 14, 1960, available at: http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=12949&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html (accessed November 25, 2021).

134 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 30."

135 United Nations Human Rights Treaty Bodies, "UN Treaty Body Database."

136 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, article 27," December 19, 1966, available at: https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx (accessed November 25, 2021).

137 UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, "Communication of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination dated 24 November 2020 to the government China," available at: https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CERD/Shared%20Documents/CHN/INT_CERD_FUL_CHN_43684_E.pdf (accessed November 25, 2021).

other UN Committees have expressed similar concerns.[138]

The Convention on the Rights of the Child also notes that states have an obligation "to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations...."

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) has explained that the right to take part in cultural life means that the state must abstain from both "interference with the exercise of cultural practices and [interference] with access to cultural goods and services" and that this right is recognized in multiple human rights declarations. These include the UDHR, the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as multiple human rights treaties that China has signed and ratified, such as the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).[139] The CESCR added that this right is "intrinsically linked" to the right to education "through which individuals and communities pass on their values, religion, customs, language and other cultural references." The CRC also notes that states have an obligation "to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference."[140] By interfering in Tibetan children's participation in their families' and communities' cultural lives and practices and by exposing them only to a CCP-approved version of Tibetan culture, the Chinese government is in violation of Tibetan children's internationally enshrined rights.

The manner in which China's colonial boarding schools stifle Tibetan children's freedom to participate in religious practices and traditions violates both the children's and their parents' rights as set forth in Article 18(4) of the CCPR, which China has signed though not ratified,[141] and which notes that "[t]he States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions." The same convention provides that everyone shall not only have the right to freely choose their religion but to "manifest [their] religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching." As noted above, the CESCR and various other conventions and declarations similarly protect these rights.

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138 UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, "Concluding observations on the second periodic report of China, including Hong Kong, China, and Macao, China, paragraph 36," June 13, 2014, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/53c77e524.html (accessed November 25, 2021); UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, "Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of China (including Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions), adopted by the Committee at its sixty-fourth session (16 September – 4 October 2013)," October 4, 2013, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/5263de9d4.html (accessed November 25, 2021); UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, "Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: China" June 7, 1996, available at: s (accessed December 6, 2021).

139 UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General comment no. 21, Right of everyone to take part in cultural life (art. 15, para. 1a of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), December 21, 2009, E/C.12/GC/21, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ed35bae2.html

140 UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 8."

141 Human Rights in China, "UN Treaty Bodies and China," available at: https://www.hrichina.org/en/un-treaty-bodies-and-china (accessed November 25, 2021).

The colonial boarding school system in Tibet also violates domestic Chinese law. China's own Constitution and statutes provide express protections to Tibetans' language rights, and do so specifically within the context of education. The Chinese Constitution states that "[a]ll nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages and to preserve or reform their own folkways and customs."[142] The 1984 *"Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy"* (Article 37) further provides that "[s]chools (classes) and other educational organizations recruiting mostly ethnic minority students should, whenever possible, use textbooks in their own languages and use these languages *as the media of instruction*"[143] (emphasis added).

Moreover, the *"Law on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language"* notes in its general provisions that "[a]ll nationalities shall have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages. The spoken and written languages of the ethnic peoples shall be used in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Constitution, the Law on Regional National Autonomy and other laws" (Article 8). While it later requires all schools to use Mandarin and standard written Chinese as the language of instruction, this is only "*unless otherwise provided by law*" (emphasis added) (Article 10).[144] The "*Education Law*" provides for the exception to that general requirement by specifically stating that at ethnic minority schools, "the spoken and written language used by the specific ethnic group or commonly used by the local ethnic groups may be used *for instruction*" (emphasis added) (Article 12).[145] The Chinese government's so-called "bilingual education policy" – especially in the context of the coercive colonial boarding school system – thus constitutes a violation of China's own system of laws.

142 The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, "Constitution of the People's Republic of China, article 4," available at: http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Constitution/node_2825.htm (accessed November 25, 2021).

143 Congressional-Executive Commission on China, "Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China," available at: https://www.cecc.gov/resources/legal-provisions/regional-ethnic-autonomy-law-of-the-peoples-republic-of-china-amended (accessed November 25, 2021).

144 National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language," October 31, 2000, available at: http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/englishnpc/Law/2007-12/11/content_1383540.htm (accessed November 25, 2021).

145 National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, "Education Law of the People's Republic of China," March 18, 1995, available at: http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdwenglishnpc/Law/2007-12/12/content_1383710.htm (accessed November 25, 2021).

CONCLUSION

More than three-quarters of school-age Tibetan children are now living separated from their families in Chinese state-run colonial boarding schools across Tibet, or what China designates as the Tibet Autonomous Region and the Tibetan Autonomous Prefectures and Counties outside of it. By closing local village schools, eliminating non-state schooling options that would allow children to stay at home, and, in some instances, directly forcing parents to send their children away, the Chinese government is not only disconnecting entire generations of Tibetans from their families and communities, but also alienating them from their distinct religion, language, and culture. This is part of a deliberate effort by the state to eliminate the core of Tibetan identity and replace it with a hollowed-out version compatible with the Party's aims – one that is politically loyal to the CCP and that complies with the Party's idea of a homogenous Chinese people. Other elements of this ambitious project are well-known, such as China's plans to install a fake reincarnation of the Dalai Lama outside the bounds of traditional Tibetan Buddhist practice, and its removal of Tibetan nomads from their ancestral grasslands. However, the colonial boarding school system – perhaps one of the most insidious aspects of the project – has largely escaped international attention until now.

The Chinese government is violating international human rights law as well as its domestic laws by coercing Tibetan parents to send their children to colonial boarding school. Beijing is denying these children their fundamental right to live with their families, to practice their religion and culture, and to speak and learn in their own language. It is well established that young children learn best when in the loving care of their own families and when educated in their mother-tongue, but Tibetan children today are being raised apart from their families and immersed in a politicized curriculum taught in Chinese. Many of these children are enduring emotional and psychological harm as a result of this policy.

The discovery of more than a thousand unmarked graves of Indigenous children at former residential school sites in Canada has catalyzed a deeper reckoning with the long-term effects of these state-backed institutions in Canada and the United States, and drawn condemnation from the international community. It is incumbent upon all countries to ensure that this legacy of forced assimilation by national governments in historical colonial boarding school systems is not replicated in Tibet. Therefore, it is imperative that governments join together to call for an end to China's present-day colonial boarding school system across Tibet.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE UNITED NATIONS

- The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights should exercise her independent monitoring and reporting mandate to collect information – including reports that Tibetan parents were coerced to send their children to colonial boarding schools – speak out publicly on her findings, prepare reports on the human rights situation in Tibet, and keep the Human Rights Council regularly informed;

- The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights should urgently visit Tibet and ensure immediate, meaningful, and unfettered access to investigate the situation of Tibetan children in China's state-run colonial boarding schools; and

- The United Nations Human Rights Council should act on the recommendations made in the joint statement by the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council on June 26, 2020, *"UN experts call for decisive measures to protect fundamental freedoms in China,"* and take all appropriate measures to monitor Chinese human rights practices, including in Tibet (both inside and outside the Tibet Autonomous Region).

TO UN MEMBER STATES AND AGENCIES

UN Member States and Agencies should urge the Government of China to:

- Allow the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Special Procedures immediate, meaningful, and unfettered access to Tibet and ensure they are granted access to colonial boarding schools;

- Ensure that the best interest of the child is taken into account as a primary consideration in all decisions concerning Tibetan children, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Priorities should include protection of every child's right to: 1) privacy; 2) a family environment; 3) education; and 4) physical and mental health;

- Provide reliable data on the exact number of Tibetan children currently enrolled in China's colonial boarding schools;

- Reverse the deceptively-named "bilingual education" policy that replaces Tibetan with Chinese as the medium of instruction and ensure that all Tibetan children are able to use Tibetan in every aspect of their schooling;

- Hire and train greater numbers of qualified Tibetan teachers in Tibetan areas, especially in rural communities, and halt their displacement by Chinese teachers, to ensure that Tibetan students have access to high quality education in the Tibetan language and in their home communities, without being separated from their families;

- Halt the use of state propaganda, political ideology, and indoctrination at all levels of the school curricula and ensure that Tibetan students are permitted to learn about their own history, culture, and religion; and

- Uphold in a timely manner its reporting obligations to the UN treaty bodies, including by submitting its report to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which has been overdue since March 31, 2019.

TO CONCERNED GOVERNMENTS

In coordinated bilateral or multilateral action, governments should:

- Urgently express serious concern at all levels about China's state-run colonial boarding school system in Tibet and call on the Government of China to halt the implementation of the colonial boarding school system;

- Call on the Government of China, and in particular on the National People's Congress Standing Committee of China, to uphold and enforce the current constitutional and statutory protections for Tibetan language promotion and preservation and to condemn any effort to erode laws protecting the use of minority languages in the education context;

- Impose targeted sanctions on Chinese officials, including the Provincial Party Secretaries and heads of government bodies overseeing the colonial boarding school system, under the U.S. Global Magnitsky Act, the E.U. Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime, and other human rights sanctions regimes in place in Canada, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere, and review the use of other punitive measures available; these sanctions will be more effective if pursued collectively; and

- Underwrite programs by Tibetans around the world to promote and preserve Tibetan language and culture.

APPENDIX 1: STATEMENTS FROM TIBETANS ON CURRENT COLONIAL BOARDING SCHOOL SYSTEM

The testimonies and comments here were gathered by several researchers over the course of 2020 and 2021. Some conversations or comments took place before this report was underway, and others were collected specifically for the report. All identifying information for those in Tibet has been withheld because of the extreme risk to their safety.

SOURCE 1

Confidential conversations with a Tibetan in Amdo (Qinghai), 2021

I know of children aged four to five who don't want to be separated from their mothers. They are forced to go to boarding schools. In some cases, the children cry for days, sticking to their mother's laps, begging not to be sent away and even refusing to go back. Both the children and the parents are unwilling. The sudden change in the environment has a serious impact on the children's physical and mental wellbeing. It takes a lot of time to get used to food that is provided in the schools and this has led to malnutrition and serious health problems. The school clinics don't look after the children unless it is deemed urgent and important enough. Such negligence leads to long-term health issues as many seasonal illnesses or contagious diseases often go untreated.

Parents are coerced to send their children to boarding schools. Despite not wanting to send them, most of the parents do not have a choice as it is mandatory. The age might differ slightly from area to area, but when you reach a certain age, the family has to send [their child], otherwise there will be a penalty where they must pay monetary compensation for not sending their child. There are also instances where the local authorities have told families that if they don't send their children to boarding kindergarten schools, then they would not be allowed to enroll in elementary or primary school.

Usually at the beginning of the year or the new academic year, the local authorities and relevant departments hold a meeting where they check the household registration of each family. From that, they know how many children each family has and their age. From the age of four, the local officials tell the family it is mandatory to send the children to boarding schools and if families do not comply, they are asked to pay a fine. Sometimes the officials tell the families that if they don't send their [first] child to boarding school, then their second or third child will never be allowed to enroll. With [these] different methods, they are coercing the family to comply. So, usually out of fear, the family sends their children to boarding schools.

SOURCE 2

Summary of an audio recording by a Tibetan in Amdo (Qinghai), 2020

The authorities keep coming back to give the community lectures on the need to send their children to the [boarding] schools for Grades 1-3. Two heads from the township, an education head from the county, as well as around six police officers attended. They said:

> "In other townships the community is being squeezed [pressured] to send their children to the schools, but we don't have to do that here. Today is the last day we will come. If we have to come back tomorrow, it won't be good.
>
> Some people are misrepresenting the policy, if you do that it won't be good. Moving forward you have to take responsibility. You have been discussing on WeChat, we have heard about this, and if you don't listen [to us] we will squeeze [pressure] you one by one, that is easy for us to do.
>
> If you continue to choose not to acknowledge this policy and refuse to send your children to the schools, we will consider this to be a protest from you. If you stay like this, we will consider it to be like a silent protest.
>
> In general when it comes to education, in our county there are many education projects coming from the province. If you don't listen you will ruin all those future plans. You will be held responsible for that."

SOURCE 3

Confidential statement from a Tibetan monk in India originally from Kardze, Kham (Chinese: Ganzi, Sichuan), 2021

The families are coerced to send their children to schools, and they are often discouraged from sending their children to private schools which usually have better facilities and also some environment of Tibetanness. So, they are forced to send their children to state-run schools. At the village level, there is an increasing number of kindergartens where little children between the ages of two to four get enrolled, but it's only day school. Most of the families send their children to these kindergartens. Boarding school starts from age six to seven and when children are in their first standard of the primary school, they can come back home but again from second standard and above, they have to stay at school except during vacation.

There is rarely anybody who doesn't send their child to school these days, there is an increasing sense of competition amongst the families. Even during the two month summer and winter vacations, those families who can afford it hire tutors for their children and send them to tuition classes. They are often encouraged to send their children to the public schools and discouraged to send in private schools as some of these private schools are run by monasteries or some Rinpoches [incarnate Buddhist lamas] (they also have opportunity to learn Tibetan in these Tibetan private schools). If you go to the Chinese-run schools, your

Chinese and English become good but your Tibetan becomes weak. If you go to the schools run by monasteries you can be good at all three.

SOURCE 4

Confidential conversation with a Tibetan in Amdo (Qinghai), 2021

In the past few years, [name removed] Prefecture and [name removed] Prefecture in Qinghai Province have started boarding for elementary schools. The boarding for middle schools has been available [for many years]. In [name removed], from 2020 they were strictly ordered to send their children to boarding for elementary school. As of now, the children as young as class one students (six years old) are in boarding school. One of the [name removed] boarding schools that I know of has about 850 students.

In every village, there is a complete education school up to class six. In 2020 in [name removed] County, the authorities converted these schools to nursery schools and prohibited children from studying in their own village. The families are forced to send their children to schools in cities now. And since there are no facilities for school buses, the parents and children face difficulties dropping and picking their children, but they continue to do so. Tibetans in [name removed] Prefecture go through the same difficulty.

SOURCE 5

Confidential statement from a Tibetan in Sichuan, 2021

I am from [location removed]. My only son was sent to state-run boarding school at age seven. Looking back at that moment, my heart still hurts. It was the first day of fall semester in 2006, when I was about to leave for home after moving him into the boarding school, when he came to me with an extremely sad face and tears started rolling down his cheeks. He started murmuring that he did not want to stay. It was such an emotional torture for me to leave my only son in boarding school. I can't even think of how miserable I felt at that time.

As weeks turned into months and months into years, my son reached third grade and was able to take care of himself a lot better. At that time, my wife and I both strongly believed that without proper education, it would be very hard for my son to be able to lead a good life, so we made the decision with heavy hearts. In the meantime, we also talked with other parents who were in similar hardship and tried to talk to government officials but all our effort was in vain.

It's not just my family that endured such a difficult experience; there were many others who went through similar challenges. For parents, it was mainly a challenge of not being able to let go of your child, but for the children themselves, it was a range of multiple challenges, from not being able to take care of themselves to having to endure others' abuses and bullying, plus the suffering of being separated from parents at such a young age. When we weighed the overall cost and benefit of sending children to boarding schools, it became clear to me that the cost outweighed the benefits. It became particularly evident as children grow older [that] the costs are reflected in their behavior.

SOURCE 6

Confidential statement from a Tibetan in India originally from Kardze, Kham (Chinese: Ganzi, Sichuan), 2021

One serious problem/narrative coming from Tibet in recent days...is that the purpose of the colonial boarding school system is "to root out Tibetan identity and reproduce in Chinese characteristics." In this process of cultural and psychological erasure, the children are treated as a consumable commodity and undergo a series of physical and psychological abuse. Physical torture such as sexual molestation and beating by the teachers and school managers have been ongoing silent practices and have caused many children to experience enduring mental traumas. The psychological torture includes spiritual abuse by cutting the connection with their religious and other tradition-based practices while forcefully introducing Chinese value systems. As a means to escape such an abusive environment, many cases of substance abuse and suicide attempts among the children in the Kardze regions have been reported in recent years.

In the early 2000s, every child from a village was asked to attend either colonial boarding schools or local day schools for at least two years in Kardze. However, in recent years since 2012, the duration of schooling has been extended and [it has been] mandated [that children must] attend colonial boarding school. For instance, in Kardze regions alone, the students were forced to stay in colonial boarding school until they graduated from high school, and such polic[ies] ensured their forceful stays in colonial boarding school for more than seven to eight years in total.

Boarding school enrollment is not [optional] and it is more of [a] systematic enforcement than explicit coercive actions. Tibetan families who refuse to send their children to colonial boarding schools are deprived of or cut off their rights to government support systems such as health care, the right to register in any school, and the right to receive national identity cards (which means seizing citizenship rights) which are required for every activity such as banking, receiving essential licenses and inner-movement permission from one place to another. Such enforcement has been a more powerful tool than direct threat and punishment.

Boarding schools established in Tibet [are] based on systematic discrimination. The nature and explicit purpose of teaching in the schools have been more colonizing disempowerment than educational empowerment. Children are often taught to embrace Chinese values and look down at their language and cultural roots. One who speaks [a] local dialect and embraces their faith system is ashamed of and looked down on.

ONLINE COMMENTER 1 (2021)

In [my area] it is mandatory to send children aged four and above to boarding schools. Most of these children are from nomadic backgrounds. Usually there are very few Tibetan teachers; the majority are Chinese. So teachers only speak in Mandarin and conduct all school curriculum in Mandarin, including nursery rhymes and bedtime stories.

When they join primary school at age seven, hardly any of them can speak Tibetan. At the primary school, they appoint only Chinese teachers as the main class teacher and prioritise Chinese as the main language. Even the parents give more importance to the Mandarin, e.g., they tell children to finish the Mandarin homework first and they will be favoured by the head teacher. In this way, children lose interest in learning Tibetan and this is the status of our language today.

ONLINE COMMENTER 2 (2021)

True, compared to earlier, the [enrollment] age for boarding school is much younger now. One of the reasons is probably that it has become a part of the regulations of the public [government] schools....If we look at it from another angle, it is part of surviving in the competitive nature of society today, to be able to compete with other children. If we don't have our Tibetan children in school at an early age, there is a fear of falling behind. Either way it is not good for us.

APPENDIX 2: STATEMENTS DRAWN FROM SECONDARY SOURCES

Statement 1: Excerpts of Human Rights Watch Interview with a Former Part-Time Teacher from Lhasa, TAR[146]

Part 1, 2015

Yes, "education villages" – *jiaoyucun* – are being set up. These are boarding schools, sometimes primary and almost always middle schools. There are *xianxiao* or county primary schools now, and they will have the children with most confidence in Chinese. But some, especially *xiang* [township] schools, will have terrible conditions and be a long way from home, so it's not easy for the children to go home. The new education "village" or compound in Lhasa, near Tselgungthang [about half a mile from Lhasa, to the southwest on the south side of the river], is a kind of showcase. Yes, once it opens and the schools are all moved from the city to the new compound, children will only get to go home every two weeks usually. They'll be boarders from Lhasa boarding within Lhasa, basically.

Part 2, 2017

From our village, it's just outside Lhasa, in [name withheld] county, they go for middle school and high school to a place near Lhasa, they board there. It would take about an hour to drive there. There is a primary school in [name withheld] township, it's about a 20-minute drive. They don't walk there anymore, not with all the traffic nowadays. It's the township, the pre-school there is combined for several villages. That's where they teach Chinese language, in that kindergarten. The kids from there can speak such fluent Chinese. For their grandparents, it's really worrisome, but for their parents, many of whom I taught, they were drop-outs from school, they are very lost. Their grandparents are a bit older than my parents, their parents are illiterate, and are looked down upon, they didn't receive a good standard education like the city kids get. But their kids are not willing any more to work on the farm.

These students who have stayed in school for a few years imagine that they are going to get a government job in the end, they won't have to work on the land, and they look down on their parents. They're close to the city and they lose their identity. And when they get to exam for middle school, then 90 percent of them fail and that's the end of it. They go to work on construction sites, or do anything, nothing. They might lose contact with the family back in the village....

[Older] people always complain about the lack of Tibetan, the fact that their grandkids cannot speak proper Tibetan at home. And the kids feel more themselves, more comfortable, if we talk to them in Tibetan. They feel lost in Chinese-medium teaching.

146 Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual Education' Policy in Tibet," pp. 94-95.

Statement 2: Excerpt from "Our Indigenous Land is Not a Wasteland" by Huatse Gyal[147]

In 1997, the local government built a boarding school in my nomadic pastoral village. Based on a lottery, I was one of seven students recruited by the school for its inaugural class. Most families in the village were against sending their children to the school. As a result, they had to pay heavy monetary fines. The school itself only offered hot water and steamed bread for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Thanks to our mother-like yaks, we grew up consuming yak yogurt, yak butter, and milk. The temperature in the sparse concrete building sank to below twenty degrees Fahrenheit (-7 Celsius) in the winter. All the students had cracks on their hands and feet; our cheeks were mostly red. The teachers instructed us in both Chinese and Tibetan.

Apart from teaching these subjects, the school had a larger mission: to alter our fundamental values and minds. Through interactions with our teachers—Tibetans from the lowland farming areas who had recently graduated from Chinese universities—we came to realize that our bodies were not "clean" enough, that our speech was not "civilized" enough, and that we had to seek out a "better" life. Anything could be done to mold us into this ideal modern subject. Beating was more than acceptable; thus, the pain was constant. One's freezing hands getting hit with a bamboo stick is truly the worst. As Tibetans say, "Pain may get old, but one never forgets it."

"If you don't want to lead the backward lives of your parents, study hard"; "If you don't study hard, you will be nothing but a stupid nomad." Our teachers drove us to hate our heritage, our elders, and even our parents. As embodiments of the state, they were there to plant the sense in us that a good life was on the outside, and not in our communities. They were there to punish us for being the children of Tibetan nomads. We felt ashamed of our cultural background; we developed an antipathy to our socio-cultural world itself.

Statement 3: Teacher at a Colonial Boarding School in Mili (Chinese: Muli) Tibetan Autonomous County[148]

"First of all, the quality of our education here is definitely not comparable to that of many Han areas. There are many reasons for this. In addition to the poor quality of personnel and material conditions that people talk about, there is also a very important reason that many students' families believe in religion. The most typical are the Tibetan and Mongolian students, almost all the members of these two ethnic groups believe in Tibetan Buddhism. Some students even take time off during the semester to go home to participate in religious activities. Because of this problem, we communicated with the parents of the students many times but to no avail. Not only did they not listen to us, they also had some complaints against us. This was very troubling for us. Anyway, we do not agree with students participating in such religious activities. In my opinion, these are feudal and superstitious activities which not only affect learning but also do not benefit the long-term physical and mental development

147 Gyal, Huatse, 2021. "Our Indigenous Land is Not a Wasteland."

148 Cited in Xu Jianhua, "Duo Minzu jisuzhi xuexiao zhong de minzu wenhua guanzhao wenti yanjiu," p. 29.

of students. Because of this problem, we have approached the cadres in the village many times and asked them to persuade the parents of the students with us. In addition, our school stipulates that as long as there are students who take a leave of absence on the pretext of going home to participate in religious activities, we generally do not give approval. Some parents listened to us after persuasion, some were unhappy, and even came to school to pick up their children, and some students went back to participate as usual under the excuse of taking sick leave and so on. In general, the series of measures we have taken have not had much effect."

Observation 1: Excerpts from He Nengkun's 2012 PhD Thesis, including Statements made by a Principal of a Colonial Boarding School in the Tibet Autonomous Region, Parents, and Students

For example, when there are major religious activities in the area, students always find ways to participate. Whenever encountering major religious activities, the school faces the phenomenon of a large number of students skipping school. According to a principal, in order to prevent students' participation in religious activities from affecting regular classes, in addition to strengthening precautions and guarding against [such behaviour], they also assign personnel to stand at the intersections the students must pass through to intercept them, and then send them back to the school by car.[149]

[...]

Because children and their parents spend less time together, the opportunity to communicate with their parents is significantly reduced, and the parent-child relationship is greatly affected. Many of the students' characters, values, and labor skills cannot depend on modern school education, but can only depend on learning from their parents' example when they get together with their children or the influence of the environment. It may be a religious ceremony, or a family experience, a major event, etc. Students have a short time at home and a long time at school. They often find it difficult to communicate with their parents after returning after a long time. As a result, parents form a negative mentality that it is difficult to raise their children and the resulting resistance to school education is affecting parents' decisions on whether to let their children go to school. Some parents said that before going to school, they looked like Tibetan children and were easy to raise. Once they go to school, they don't listen to what their parents say, and they lack understanding for many important aspects of daily life, and they become less and less like Tibetans.[150]

[...]

Some children who cannot go home for various reasons during the monthly vacation cannot bear the loneliness and fear of the dormitory, so they came up with the idea to put quilts and

149 He Nengkun, "Xizang Nongmuqu jiaoyu tiaoshi yanjiu," p. 94.

150 He Nengkun, "Xizang Nongmuqu jiaoyu tiaoshi yanjiu," p. 135.

blankets directly on the floor and sleep together. Whenever school is over, some children see the parents of other students come to pick them up while their own don't come and they get this lonely look on their face. During my interviews, many students expressed a feeling of "I just miss home, I'm afraid of staying at school." They should enjoy family affection at home, enjoy the affection of their parents, enjoy the care of their older brothers and sisters, and enjoy the carefree childhood life in nature, but today's education system lets them sacrifice all this to a certain extent.[151]

[...]

A little Lama named Tashi, who had studied at middle school for a while, told me that he prefers to be in the monastery. Compared with school, the monastery has no language barriers, life barriers, or understanding barriers, no psychological barriers to communicate with teachers of other ethnic groups, no difficult homework, students are seldom criticized, and you can go home whenever you want. In short, life in the monastery is joyful and happy. I'm unable to investigate the specific details of monastery education in detail, but the fact that the children are willing to stay indicates that the monastery is attractive to children.[152]

Observation 2: By the Deputy Director of the Bureau of Education of Ngari Prefecture Regarding Mandated All-Chinese Textbooks[153]

Regarding Tibetan elementary school students in Ngari using the "Language" textbook:

The content of some texts has relatively few Tibetan cultural features, and the proportion of local features from Tibet is insufficient. For example, the traditional cultural content in the texts such as "Dragon Boat Festival Zongzi" and the "Surname Song" are all Han Chinese traditions, there's a certain difficulty for Tibetan elementary school students to understand them. It takes a long time to explain the background of the text and the meaning of the words.(...)

In its content design, the textbook compiled by the Ministry focuses on students' literacy and handwriting ability. It arranges for Chinese characters to be taught first and then Pinyin, while traditionally, Chinese textbooks have put Pinyin first and Chinese characters second. For Tibetan students who are rarely exposed to Chinese, especially those from pastoral areas, it is extremely strenuous to learn [that way].

Regarding Tibetan elementary and junior high school students in Ngari using the "History" textbook:

The rare characters have no Pinyin and explanation. For the students in Ngari who have

151 He Nengkun, "Xizang Nongmuqu jiaoyu tiaoshi yanjiu," p. 134.

152 He Nengkun, "Xizang Nongmuqu jiaoyu tiaoshi yanjiu," p. 171.

153 Yang Liu, "Ali diqu yiwu jiaoyu tongbian 'san ke' jiaocai shiyong qingkuang diaocha yu fenxi" [Investigation and Analysis of the Use of the Centralized Compiled "Three Subjects" Teaching Materials for Compulsory Education in Ngari Prefecture], *Xizang Jiaoyu* 9 (2020) pp. 6-7.

relatively poor Chinese skills, the classic stories and classical Chinese materials in the textbooks are also very difficult to understand. The process of learning history still shows that there exists a certain gap in the language learning of the students in Ngari.

Examples of Mandated Textbooks: TAR Elementary Schools & Two Years of Junior High[154]

"Morality and the Rule of Law," 1st grade textbook, 2016 ed., People's Education Press.

"Language" [i.e., Chinese], 1st grade textbook, 2016 ed., People's Education Press.

"Chinese History," 7th grade textbook, 2016 ed., People's Education Press.

Lesson 1 "I am Chinese," taken from the 1st grade textbook "Language," 2016 ed., People's Education Press.

154 Fang Fengwen et al, "Xizang jiaoyu jingzhun fupin tuopin de jingyan yu kunnan fenxi" [An Analysis of the Experiences and Difficulties in Tibetan Education Precision Poverty Alleviation], thepaper.cn, September 16, 2019, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_4434666 (accessed June 26, 2021), *Internet Archive,* https://web.archive.org/web/20211126151623/https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_4434666.

APPENDIX 3: TESTIMONIES FROM FORMER TIBETAN BOARDING SCHOOL STUDENTS

Our researchers spoke to a small number of Tibetans in exile who attended early boarding schools in Tibet. Dates of attendance ranged from 1986 to 2009. Although just a small sample, these accounts offer a glimpse into life at these schools, which were the foundation for the colonial boarding school system that has developed in the past decade.

Testimony 1 (Interview, 2021)
Attended Boarding School in Badzong County, Tsolho Prefecture, Amdo (Chinese: Tongde County, Hainan Prefecture, Qinghai)

[At my secondary school in the 1990s] living conditions were extremely poor with a bare minimum of food. We had to manage with small portions for three meals a day, which was nowhere near enough to fill the stomach. It was so poor that many students often stole food or rations from the school storeroom or surrounding areas. Whenever that happened, either the students involved were suspended from school or severely beaten. Water was very scarce, including the drinking water. Girls had to go out from the school compound to fetch water from far away for drinking and other daily needs. We bathed only once or twice a month.

There was no education or facility on health and hygiene, and the school was least bothered about it. The seasonal flu and other contagious diseases like conjunctivitis (pink eye) spread fast and went unattended most of the time. Once I suffered this eye infection, and it got so bad. My vision got blurred and stayed that way for so long. Almost everyone had lice on their clothes and hair.

There was zero safety for women in the dormitory or generally in school. There were rampant cases of rape, sexual harassment, beatings, bullying, and theft in the dormitory. Random men climbed into the girls' dormitory at night. There was no electricity. Many times, it was just random men and they were not even from school. It was not uncommon that a Chinese male teacher barged into the girls room, and raped or sexually assaulted the school girls. Day or night, we were not safe, constantly in fear of something happening to us. At that time, most of us were 11-13 years old. When the girls didn't comply, they were slapped and kicked. The Chinese male teachers used to call me in their chamber and inappropriately touched and sexually harassed me. I don't know how I survived it, my mother had already passed away then. I couldn't tell anybody what was happening to me.

And the corporal punishment in school was unimaginable. Though, I myself didn't get much beating as my Mandarin was fairly good compared to other students who were from remote places or had no Mandarin background. When teachers were furious, they beat with anything like a chair, iron rod, sticks, etc., to the point of bleeding. The beatings were so severe and frequent that everyone had to live in constant fear.

Three years of my secondary school in the boarding school was a complete nightmare. It was physically, emotionally, and psychologically tormenting and exhausting. I didn't have any sort of joy in learning, or the meaning of education. I am sure that I didn't learn anything either. I was just surviving. I was so traumatized, all I could think or worry about was how to get away from bullying, beating, sexual harassment, or hunger....

[Later] my son attended boarding school for two years....The general facilities and living conditions, it seems there wasn't much improvement. Some of the vegetables, he doesn't even want to taste now as he said it brings back the bad memory of those days. Even the corporal punishment, in his school, he was once caught for smoking, and his teacher pushed a whole pack of cigarettes into his mouth. For another student, this Chinese teacher put a whole packet of cigarettes in a cup of water and made him drink it....

Their class schedule is inhuman, they have class from morning 7 to 9 at night. No time for rest, no time for play. Three times a meal break and half an hour or an hour of self study time. It was rigorous and regressive and repelled them from studying. If today I tell him to study, he literally begs me, he said it reminds him of his time in boarding school, how he never got time to rest or think. He was in a county level boarding school [Triga County, Tsolho Prefecture, Qinghai] for 2013 and 2014.

Testimony 2

Attended Boarding School in Chapcha County, Tsolho Prefecture, Amdo (Chinese: Gonghe County, Hainan Prefecture, Qinghai)

Part 1 (Excerpt of a Written Article, 2020)

When I was studying in middle school in Chapcha, Domey (Amdo), I had three friends who were 14 years old, and we were classmates too. One night while we were sleeping in the boarding school dormitory, we were choked by carbon monoxide. My three classmates were killed. The real experience of fear and panic about the boarding school remains in my heart.

Part 2 (Interview, 2021)

I attended Serchen Dzong Nationality School from 1986-1989....When I think back to boarding school, I have a bad feeling about it. It has left a sad impression, a feeling of never wanting to go back to school. [I understand now that] its main purpose is to dilute the Tibetan way of living, scatter Tibetans, and in the long run, destroy the language, culture, traditions, etc.

The living conditions were extremely poor with a lack of facilities. Poor sanitation facilities, poor food, no hygiene, no safety and security, no hot water facility. We had to bring our own stove to heat ourselves, and fetch water from outside.

The school didn't provide enough food, so we had to spend our own money and buy rations - in one kitchen they had to make food for around 200 people, so it was not enough. We had to bring our own mattress, quilt, bed sheets, etc.

There was no freedom to do anything. The schedule was planned from 6am to 10pm. There was no free time. We were not allowed to leave the school grounds.

There were extreme beatings and all.

Before joining the boarding school, I had a huge interest in music and singing, I was outspoken. But after joining boarding school, due to so many regulations and restrictions, I became timid and introverted.

Testimony 3
Attended Boarding School in Markham county, Chamdo Prefecture, Kham (Chinese: Mangkang County, Changdu Prefecture, TAR)

Part 1 (Written Account, 2021)
I was born in a small village of Markham. Children from my village were sent to boarding schools in Gatho which is 300 kilometres [186 miles] away from the village I was born in...I was sent to primary boarding school for five years from 2000-2005. On weekends, we were not allowed to go home....

In 2000, there was no dormitory when I got to school....But fortunately or unfortunately, we got a newly built dormitory after waiting more than seven months....There was no canteen or separate kitchen for us after we were admitted to the school dormitory but they called some men from the village to cook for us....They would cook for us at the corner of the school playground. The school director asked them to get donations from local villagers and buy all the necessary things....

One thing that I still regret is that I wasted so much time in the boarding school. We were not allowed to attend regular classes and we had to go out to plant trees, harvest radish, clean the water tank and drainage of the school. We didn't have good teachers and teachers would intentionally miss our class when they knew that it was our class because our parents were not with us and they had no idea what was going on in the school and particularly about what subjects we were learning in the school.

One thing I remember clearly is that we were not allowed to go to the market during the school weekend and we were asked to work with cooks....and after finishing lunch, we had to gather in the dining room to watch documentary films about how much destruction and violence caused by Japanese during the War between China and Japan. We would not get dinner if anyone missed the film. It was a punishment. I think this is how they strategically tried to develop a strong sense of love and patriotism toward China, and hatred towards Japanese people by showing different documentary films.

When I reached India I realized that this is how students were being brainwashed from ground level by the Chinese government. We had more than seven subjects: Chinese, Social Science, Chinese History, mathematics, and Tibetan which is available only for primary students. They didn't teach Tibetan in secondary and higher school. Chinese History was all about the great achievement of their military force during the war with Japan. It's also about Chinese historical places like the Great Wall of China, military, and economic supremacy of China. They would never teach about other countries, other scholars of the world rather than

something related to their own country. I had no idea about my own country Tibet, and I didn't know anything about other countries in the world when I was in Chinese boarding school. I always thought China was my country and Japanese people were my greatest enemy in my life and that was how Chinese teachers had changed or transformed my mindset completely.

Not only that, they would take us to a funeral gathering at a graveyard when Chinese authorities took Tibetan prisoners to kill them, and it happened many times. Local Chinese authorities described Tibetan prisoners as traitors, rebellious groups, and illegal distributors of Chinese confidential documents to the outside world. In the class, teachers would remind us of the same consequences we would face if we do not choose to be a good Chinese citizen.

[...]

My whole family including my two parents, all of them had never been to school and they had no idea what I was learning in school. My father used to ask me about my examination and scoring divisions. In the school during the examination, subject teachers would not let us fail in order to create a better picture of their work for students but gradually I realized that I was not qualified to sit for examinations because questions were really difficult and I could not write the answers in my own words even if I knew the right answer....

In the school, we had a lot of school programs organized by the school cultural and sport committee. It was a big pressure every time they organized this kind of event among students from different places because my family wouldn't be able to come for the event, and I also didn't get new clothes for the event preparation. I would wear new clothes that were not mine as I borrowed them from my school friends....The school teachers and committee members would not allow us to perform on the stage if we didn't wear the clothes they wanted us to wear during the performance....

Sometimes in the class, female teachers would not talk with some of us saying we smelled bad due to the lack of clothes and uniforms to change. We could only get the uniform they gave us and we also couldn't pay if we wanted to have one more uniform.

Part 2 (Interview, 2021)
I was seven years old when I went to boarding school. I attended from Grade 1 to 6. All subjects were taught in Chinese and Tibetan was taught as a language class. There was one child in my class who was four years old.

My parents were old, they couldn't come [to visit], sometimes my brother used to visit me when he had work in the town.

Students were not allowed to keep phones, only some teachers had phones at that time, but we were not allowed to use them. My family sometimes sent messages through people.

The Chinese students and also Tibetan students whose parents are bureaucrats or officials had special treatment. They had special classes with better facilities, special tutors, and they

didn't have to do any chores in the dormitory or school. But for other students like us they assigned tons of work like vegetable planting, cleaning, gardening, dishes, heavy carrying, etc.

Being away from home was very difficult. My family was not so well off economically. Among roommates, there was a huge difference [economically] so it was very difficult. And the bullying that I faced from the seniors left much fear in me. I knew my parents were old and couldn't come, my brother and sister were busy, so it was hard for them, especially my parents. That also left a huge emotional scar on me.

I think [attending boarding school] affected me as a person. My family often told me that I have become like a Chinese person.

Testimony 4 (Interview, 2021)
Attended Boarding School in Lhasa, Ü-Tsang (TAR)

I went to secondary and senior secondary school from 2003 to 2009 in Lhasa. There were 1,500-2,000 students for the secondary school but our school has both residents and non-residents – around 60% are residents. Five percent were Chinese and 95% Tibetan.

There was limited sanitation and not enough facilities. For the girls' dormitory, there were around 11-12 dormitories, but only one toilet and two bathrooms. They were far from some of the dormitories and it was very difficult to walk at night. We had to turn off the lights at 9:30 and were not allowed to turn them on again. The toilets were open and extremely dirty, far from classes and dormitories. We were often late to class when we had to go to the toilet right before class. My school is considered one of the best schools in Lhasa.

Sometimes, there were cases of bullying by older students. There were many cases of extreme beating by teachers to the point of causing physical injury and humiliation in front of other students.

There was no sex education at all....There was a lack of menstrual hygiene, many girls got serious diseases....It stayed in my mind.

We had two hours for lunch break, so we got around an hour free, other than [that] we didn't have free time. On the weekend, they gave loads of homework. We really didn't have time for ourselves or to engage in any other activities.

It was difficult, and many times I thought of quitting school. In my senior seconday school first year, a girl in my school committed suicide, and the school did not allow any of us to discuss or talk about it. We don't know the exact reason even now. It left a huge fear and sadness in me.

Testimony 5 (Interview, 2021)
Attended Boarding School in Rebkong County, Malho Prefecture, Amdo (Chinese: Tongren County, Huangnan Prefecture, Qinghai)

I was 12 years old when I went to boarding school. I attended [Rebkong Dzong Nationality School] from Grade 7-12, from 1997 to 2003. The school was two hours walking distance from my home. I went home every weekend. But in my school, there were students who were from far off, they couldn't go home on the weekend as they couldn't get there by walking and they didn't have the bus fare. So usually they just stayed back and went home only if there was some emergency. There was no phone facility at that time. We had to buy our own bedding, food, etc. In the common kitchen, they provided soup for lunch.

....In Rebkong, there were separate schools for Chinese and Tibetans. In the Chinese school, there were some Tibetans, mostly officials' children.

We had no free time. The schedule started at 6:00 a.m. with exercise, then self-study, class, lunch break, class, another class, then self-study in the classroom. Teachers gave so much homework, we tried to finish it during lunch break. There was literally no free time to do anything, 6:00 a.m. - 10:00 p.m., every day it was the same.

The living conditions were extremely poor, there was only one toilet far from the dormitory, no light, no bathroom. For morning washing, we had to go and get water from far away. In a room, there were around 30-40 students. There was no hot water, and a coal stove (but they didn't provide enough coals to keep us warm).

Extreme beatings from teachers were commonplace and also bullying from the seniors.

....The initial months were difficult, I wept almost every night missing my home. The general conditions were so poor and beatings were rampant, and we often were hungry. For the first year there were 52 students in my class, and for the second year, only 18 were left. That was very sad. Even thinking about it now, I feel it was such a loss. But conditions were such that they couldn't continue.

Separation from home, heavy pressure from school, extremely poor living conditions. Everyday for three years, I never felt happy starting a day or going to class...During secondary school – three years – my only thought was, "When I get to go back home."

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SEPARATED FROM THEIR FAMILIES, HIDDEN FROM THE WORLD

China's Vast System of Colonial Boarding Schools Inside Tibet

Chinese government policies are forcing three out of every four Tibetan students into a vast network of colonial boarding schools, separating children as young as four from their parents. The schools are a cornerstone of Xi Jinping's campaign to supplant Tibetan identity with a homogenous Chinese identity in order to neutralize potential resistance to Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule.

Separated From Their Families, Hidden From the World: China's Vast System of Colonial Boarding Schools Inside Tibet finds that an estimated 800,000 to 900,000 Tibetan students aged six to 18, as well as an unknown number of four- and five-year olds, are in these state-run institutions. China's colonial boarding schools in Tibet function as sites for remolding children into Chinese nationals loyal to the CCP. Removed from their families and communities, students must study primarily in Chinese, are barred from practicing their religion, and are subjected to political indoctrination.

Tibet Action Institute urges the United Nations and concerned governments to investigate the situation of Tibetan children in China's colonial boarding schools and to press the Chinese government to immediately restore the right of all Tibetan children to receive a high-quality, mother-tongue education without being separated from their families.

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