

# RAJIAI. UNREMINNATION IN IIRPI



राज्यातील अज्ञानाचा प्रभाव

**TCHRD**  
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The issue of race has always been of great significance in ancient Chinese mythology, which traditionally equated degrees of remoteness from the imperial centre with levels of cultural savagery and physical coarseness. The term 'barbarian', associated so closely with animality and ignorance, was first used over 2000 years ago in the interpretation of classical Confucian texts, but still finds expression today in official Chinese references to Tibetans as a 'backward' and 'barbaric' race. This is not to suggest China has not advanced intellectually in the last two millennia, but rather that it has adapted and incorporated ancient racial prejudices and hierarchies to serve its contemporary goal of 'motherland unification'. Reducing 'minority nationalities' to manageable, subordinate stereotypes - which can then be subdued through derogatory propaganda, economic pressures and sheer force of numbers - have long been tactics of the Party in defusing resistance. Furthermore, the shameless cultivation of Han Chinese superiority by Party leaders remains largely unchecked by the western media, which focus their criticism on the occasional torture and imprisonment of individual political activists, rather than the broader demographic changes affecting the grassroots survival of the Tibetan population as a whole.

Official Chinese propaganda blames only the westerners for guilty of racism and places itself in firm opposition to such 'imperialist' tactics. Yet China has, from the very beginning, refused to treat Tibet on a basis of equality. It justified its 1949 invasion of the peaceful country on the principle of the 'civilized' Chinese 'liberating' the 'backward' Tibetans, instantly invoking a structure of racial hierarchy that would intensify over the next 50 years. Indeed, the rhetoric of Han superiority has constituted a fundamental component of the Chinese world-view for centuries, and it is from within this ethnocentric framework that perceptions of other races have always been constructed. However, it would be wrong to deduce from this that the Chinese people are, by way of the ideology that has shaped their country, innately racist. The extent to which Communist Party tenets infiltrate and control Chinese society cannot be underestimated, and the horrific suppression of Tiananmen Square protest in 1989 illustrates the intimidatory lengths the ruling elite are willing to go to ensure civilian subordination. The more important question lies, therefore, in determining just how much of the

prejudice Tibetans have reported reflects a passive submission to the cult of nationalist egotism, and how much actually arises from a genuine feeling of superiority.

## DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT

With the massive population transfer of Chinese migrants into Tibet, with priority continually accorded to Chinese workers the employment sphere has become intensely competition. Fluency in the Chinese language has become a determining factor in candidate selection, marginalising Tibetans who must learn it as a second tongue. As a result, many Tibetans have reported of obtaining employment only through bribery and Guanxi (connections with officials). Thinlay, an 18-year-old man from Lhasa, tried to get a job in Mentsekhang, but did not succeed. "The people in charge expected me to pay them a large sum of money to secure a position, but I did not have enough. In Tibet, everything works on money. To get a job one has to pay bribes, buy expensive presents, offer dinner invitations and so on. How do they expect us to bribe them when we don't have sources of income?"

Biased regulations concerning the allocation of business permits have also ensured Chinese domination in the commercial sector, where illegal practices of copying and underselling have driven local Tibetans out of business. Those who depend on agricultural subsistence for survival in the rural areas also find themselves forced to trade with the local Chinese officials, who buy from them at much lower prices than those the farmers would receive at market. Huge discrepancies in the wages of Chinese workers and Tibetan workers have been reported with Tibetans receiving salaries that are half their Chinese counterparts' and sometimes even less. Many Tibetans who had held steady jobs also suffered unexpected discriminatory dismissals in order to make room for the ever-increasing Chinese work force arriving from outside Tibet. Finally, Tibetans are made to complete long periods of compulsory, unpaid labour, often constructing residential and office buildings destined for Chinese occupants. 20-year-old Sonam from Pashoe County, Chamdo Prefecture, reported that in April 1999, the county authorities ordered the village heads in his district to recruit villagers for the

construction of a power station. "We had to contribute work-hours according to the number of our family members. Most of the workers at the site were Tibetan villagers of 15 years and above, but they were also some Chinese workers from outside. They were on a contract, which would apparently give them about 10,000 yuan after the construction was completed, but we were paid nothing. We were given all the hard works, such as carrying very heavy loads up the mountain side. Work was from 8 in the morning to 7 in the evening, and if a villager refused to attend, he was fined up to 500 yuan. When I left my village, the construction was nearly finished. Some of the other villages in the area will receive electricity generated by the power station, but not mine. How can they say this is for our benefit?"

## **DISCRIMINATION IN HEALTH CARE**

The Chinese government continues to claim that primary healthcare is free in Tibet, but refugees escaping across the border cite numerous discriminatory charges that are implemented throughout the country. The most significant of these is the hospital deposit, which may be as much as 5000 yuan, required for admission into hospital regardless of the severity of illness. Many Tibetans who are already economically marginalised through the aforementioned discriminatory employment practices cannot afford these charges, and have died of being denied treatment. Tsering, a 13-year-old boy from Lhasa told TCHRD, "One night our neighbours wife (Tibetan) became seriously ill and they had to call an ambulance. Even before they reached the hospital, they were asked to pay 150 yuan for the ambulance. Arriving at Mimang Menkhang hospital, they were then asked for another 5000 yuan for a deposit. Our neighbour was helpless, as he had no such amount of money and no means of getting it on time. He had to go back home with his wife and she died the next day."

Because of the lack of drugs at all levels, many Tibetans, particularly nomads, are purposefully given expired or wrong medicine because the doctors know they are illiterate and unable to detect this malpractice. Admitted patients are also subject to highly discriminatory treatment, with the Chinese receiving priority access to the best facilities, often free of charge as opposed

to Tibetans, who are put in dirty wards and charged. As an 18-year-old man from Nye Shi village, Derge County in Kandze "TAP" reported, "there were no Chinese people living in our area, so we had no electricity, no roads, no schools and no health services. The authorities have no interest in developing areas where they have no benefit and so if anyone in our village became sick, we had no one around to help us."

Those Tibetans who have been injured by Chinese police during or after a political demonstration also report being denied treatment for alleged 'disloyalty to the Chinese motherland'. Tibetans are also subject to strict birth control regulations, and are frequently forced to undergo forced sterilization and abortion to fulfil official quotas. This is in spite of the current high level of infant mortality rate among Tibetan children, which is three times that of Mainland China.

## **DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION**

The structure and funding of the education system in Tibet today is highly discriminatory, with government expenditure largely diverted developing schools in areas with high populations of Chinese settlers. Tibetan parents and children also report of having to pay extortionate fees and miscellaneous expenses 'inapplicable' to Chinese students, despite claims of the central Chinese government that primary education is free. As 22-year-old Gonpo Sonam from Dzoqe County in Ngapa "TAP" reported, "I attended Nubjang Higher Nationalities School for three years from 1993 to 1996, but I had to drop out because of the fees. Tibetans had to pay 700 yuan per semester, but the Chinese students paid nothing. I could not understand this. When a group of Tibetans complained, we were told that the school was really just for Chinese and that we were lucky to be there." Perhaps the greatest problem is the biased curriculums, which focus on Chinese history, language and economics and forbid any teaching of Tibetan history or culture. Those children who do manage to make it to secondary education then find themselves largely disadvantaged by the widespread use of the Chinese language, in which they have had no formal tuition.

Students also report discriminatory examinations, whereby Tibetans must obtain higher pass marks than Chinese students, and where 'under table' money once again determine the future of the candidates. As a result, some Tibetans have opted to send their children to school outside the "TAR", but in China they are indoctrinated with communist ideology and are encouraged by their teachers to cut off all contact with their Tibetan heritage. Those who escape to India risk their lives in the process. It is because of this discrimination in education that so many Tibetans are disadvantaged in all other sectors later in life.

## **DISCRIMINATION IN HOUSING**

Tibetans face large-scale discrimination in this sector, mainly as a result of the aforementioned population transfer into Tibet. Discriminatory allocation procedures ensure that Chinese immigrants are either guaranteed housing on arrival in Tibet or are put at the top of the waiting list. 37-year-old Tsering from Kyirong in Shigatse, escaped to India in January 2000. "My family and I were forced to live in a mud house for many years, despite being on the public housing waiting list. The concrete houses, which were of much better quality than our mud walls, were always given to the Chinese families migrating from the east. By the time our turn came for possible accommodation, the rent was far too high and we could not take it." To make room for the new arrivals, huge numbers of Tibetan families and even whole neighbourhoods have faced eviction from and demolition of their traditional residences. Those relocated were often given no compensation, and forced to pay new rents up to ten times as much as for their previous dwellings. The Tibet Heritage Fund in Lhasa reported a case that in April 1998, residents of Dhakpo Trumpa House were told that the house was to be demolished to make way for a new block of apartments, and that they would have to move out. They were only given two days notice but were told that they would receive an apartment equal in size to their old one once the construction was complete. They were given 40,000 yuan as compensation only to then be charged 80,000 yuan for the 'upgrade' of the new flat allocated to them.

The official justification for this destruction is 'beautification' - creating modern, 'socialist' cities in accordance with Chinese interpretations of 'beauty'.

This has invariably resulted in cities dominated by the monotonous uniformity of Chinese concrete blocks, where a small number of superficial 'Tibetan-style' buildings constitute the sole architectural expression of Tibetan culture. Those Tibetan communities that survive this 'beautification' find themselves dwarfed by modern Chinese settlements, where residential segregation has led to the development of discriminatory facilities. Government subsidies for the development of basic resources such as running water, electricity and proper sanitation are concentrated solely upon Chinese areas, while Tibetan communities are left to fend for themselves. Nor do Tibetans have the chance to leave their dwellings and move to better areas, for the Chinese household registration system places heavy restrictions on their freedom of movement and residence, and rarely awards the necessary permission for such movements to Non Chinese settlers. To ensure that illegal transfers of residence are kept to an absolute minimum, the Chinese security police also regularly subject Tibetans to arbitrary searches, breaking the rule enshrined in the Chinese Constitution itself concerning the intrusion of privacy. Together, these discriminatory practices have not only lowered the standard of living for Tibetans inside Tibet, but also substantially increased the number of homeless street dwellers.

## **DISCRIMINATION IN PUBLIC REPRESENTATION**

In 1965, China declared Tibet an 'autonomous' region, able to govern itself and make its own administrative decisions. 35 years later, the label 'autonomous' rings as false as it did all those years, for the country is still tightly under the thumb of Central Party rule. Communist control penetrates every level of society, and Tibet enjoys no more political freedom of expression than it did during the Cultural Revolution. While there are a number of Tibetans holding key positions of authority within this system, they constitute only a token representation, and do not actually have any say in decision making. This is equally true of the Tibetan cadres who work within the government - their every action is carefully monitored and, if necessary, censored by Party officials appointed to ensure that the 'stability of the motherland' is not compromised. The vast majority of those holding power in the "TAR" are Chinese or Tibetans who have been carefully vetted and selected by higher authorities, and only they are permitted to stand in the

farical elections. 39-year-old Dorje Tongmey experienced 'elections' in both Kande "TAP" in Sichuan Province and Lhasa, where he lived for 17 years before escaping to India in February 2000. "Tibetans have very little opportunity to participate in government decisions at any level. Elections are pointless pieces of propaganda- democratic facades that hide an internal selection process. Leaders and officials are always elected from the top down: prefecture officials will appoint those in county administration, and they in turn will choose those to run the township. We are called upon to 'vote' during these proceedings, but as the candidates are all chosen by the Party, whatever we do makes no difference-the decision have already been made. Even if, for some strange reason, an independent candidate was allowed to stand against a Party candidate in a genuine election, there are more Chinese than Tibetans in most areas now, so the result would only preserve the status quo."

The few attempts the government has made to allow the voice of the people to be heard, such as the introduction of 'Village self-government and Neighbourhood Committees, have in fact transpired to be facilities whereby the grass-root loyalty of Tibetans may be more effectively monitored, and if necessary, 'enforced'. No political group may be set up by the people without prior endorsement from the central Party government, which not only violates the Tibetan's right to freedom of association, but also denies them any effective avenue to make complaints. This is of particular importance to this report, as it prevents Tibetans from fighting the discrimination practiced in all other sectors of society, such as employment, healthcare, education and housing.

N.B. For more detailed information, please see "Racial Discrimination in Tibet", September 2000, TCHRD.

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