



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

China's seventh national census a tool for controlling citizens

<https://savetibet.org/chinas-seventh-national-census-a-tool-for-controlling-citizens>

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China began its seventh national population census on Nov. 1 this year with about 7 million staff scheduled to visit homes for registration work, according to Chinese state media. This is an exercise undertaken once every 10 years and involves the use of two types of questionnaires; 10% of households will be required to fill out a long form while the rest of the populace will be required to fill out the short form. The census information collection will end on Dec. 10.

While projected as a means to collect information needed for the government to shape its economic development plans, some changes in the forms this year raise questions about whether the census will be used to further tighten control over the people.

[Reuters reported](#) that survey respondents must disclose the number of family members who are residents in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan or are now foreign nationals. These requirements will have implications for the Tibetan people, some of who have family in the Indian subcontinent or who are citizens of countries in Europe, North America or Australia.

As a case in point, Lhamo, a 36-year-old Tibetan herder and mother of three, and her cousin were detained in June from Driru county in Nagchu in the Tibet Autonomous Region and charged with sending money to family members or other Tibetans in India, [according to Human Rights Watch](#). Lhamo subsequently died in a local hospital in August 2020. She had been in good health before her detention, according to the report.

In addition, state media outlet [Economic Daily reported](#) that for the first time, the ID numbers (found on their resident identity cards) of census subjects will be collected “in order to improve the quality of census data.” The resident identity card includes name, sex, nationality, date of birth, address of permanent residence, the citizen's identity number, the bearer's photograph, term of validity of the card and the issuing authority.

Thus, the census collection system will electronically link the information collected to ID numbers making it possible for authorities to use it for political ends. Economic Daily reported that the head of the Office of the Leading Group for the Seventh National Census of the State Council said that the ID number information will be kept confidential, adding, “It is strictly forbidden to disclose citizens' personal information to any institution, unit or individual.” However, in China, the Communist Party is in control of institutions and uses them to serve its own political agenda, so such an assurance by a senior official will not evoke much confidence.

Ethnicity classification in census form

The changes introduced in the latest census make communities like the Tibetans susceptible to being identified and selected for indiscriminate state persecution, since one's ethnicity has to be entered on the census form.

This issue of ethnicity classification, which was introduced in the first census in 1953, is of interest for a few reasons.

In general, the Chinese legal system does not have a clear definition of “ethnicity.” Whether it is the [Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China \(1984\)](#) or the [White Paper on China's Ethnic Policy And Common Prosperity And Development Of All Ethnic Groups \(2009\)](#), the definition of ethnic groups is merely assumed. In 2015, the National Ethnic Affairs Commission and the Ministry of Public Security issued “[Measures for the Administration of the Registration of Ethnic Groups of Chinese Citizens](#)” (Order No. 2) in which it stipulated that, “The ethnic composition of a citizen can only be confirmed and registered on the basis of the ethnic composition of his father or mother.” Interestingly, the order expanded on this, saying “parents” not only included biological parents, but also “adoptive parents and stepparents who have a parenting and educational relationship with their stepchildren.” As such, an individual from any ethnicity could theoretically adopt the ethnicity of his or her adoptive parents.

In the census form, respondents had to fill in their ethnicity in a blank space (on R2 in the 2010 census form), and this could not be changed for life. Children of parents with different nationalities had to select one.

There are no clear reasons cited for collecting ethnic statistics in the census, although it can be assumed that such information is required for planning the allocation of resources or development programs.

What is the Tibetan population?

The accuracy of statistics related to the Tibetan population have been an issue since the invasion of Tibet and the establishment of Chinese rule. The Chinese government regards only the Tibet Autonomous Region, which it established only in 1965, as “Tibet,” even though about half of Tibet is outside the TAR. Thus, whenever China cites the population of Tibetans in Tibet, it only mentions that of the TAR. On the other hand, Tibetans in exile (including the Central Tibetan Administration based in Dharamsala, India) [refer to all Tibetan areas when referring to Tibet](#). Secondly, China has also categorized some sections of the community in Tibet under separate “ethnicities” and not as Tibetan. In the TAR, there are ethnic groups like the Monpa and Lhopa who are considered by some Tibetans to be part of their broader ethnic family. In the east, the Pumi people in Mili (Chinese: Muli) and two other counties in Sichuan province are recognized as a separate ethnic group, although Tibetans feel they are Tibetan (even the name “Pumi” is believed to be a corrupted form of “Bodmi,” which means Tibetan people in the Tibetan language).

On account of the above-mentioned way of classifying “Tibet,” [Chinese officials have continued to maintain that the population of Tibet is a little more than 2 million](#) in response to claims by exiled Tibetans that the Tibetan population is six million. Furthermore, in response to [the charge that 1.2 million](#) Tibetans have died under Chinese rule, a White Paper on Tibet issued in 1992 referred to the 1990 Chinese census that put the population of “Tibet” (meaning the Tibet Autonomous Region) as 2.096 million and said, “On the question of the size of the Tibetan population, the Dalai clique has spread many rumors. The most sensational was that more than 1.2 million people were killed after the peaceful liberation of Tibet. In 1953, the Tibetan local government under the Dalai Lama reported the population stood at 1 million people. If 1.2 million inhabitants had been massacred, it would have been a case of genocide and certainly the population in Tibet could not have increased to the present 2 million.” The Chinese government maintains that the population of “Tibet” has [been increasing over the years](#). The 2010 census puts the [Tibetan population in “Tibet” \(meaning the Tibet Autonomous](#)

[Region\) as 2.7 million](#), yet it also puts the [overall Tibetan population as 6,282,187](#), which is in fact more than the figure quoted by Tibetans in exile.

Political implications of the census

Another question that emerges from the census is: Could the Chinese government be deliberately meddling with the figures for non-ethnic Tibetans living in Tibetan areas for political reasons? The Dalai Lama and Tibetans have always voiced concerns about the increasing state sponsored migration of Han Chinese into Tibetan areas, as that threatens the preservation of Tibetan identity, coupled with Beijing's oppressive rule. In May 2008, speaking to The Guardian, the Dalai Lama [talked about the implication of demographic transformation](#), saying, "There is every danger Tibet becomes a truly Han Chinese land and Tibetans become an insignificant minority. Then the very basis of the idea of autonomy becomes meaningless."

According to the 2010 census, the Chinese population in the TAR is 245,263, which is less than 9% of the total population of TAR in the same census. However, Tibetans in Tibet and visitors from abroad have seen an increasing number of non-Tibetan migrants to the region, mostly concentrated in urban areas, particularly after the [introduction of the rail link from Golmud to Lhasa in 2007](#). These are in addition to the sizable number of officials and military personnel settled in the region. There have been [reports of Chinese migrants](#) who have migrated to Tibet, attracted by business opportunities. In fact, even before the introduction of the rail link, [Jin Shixu, vice president of the Commission for Planning and Development in the TAR referred to the sizable migrant population in Lhasa, Tibet's capital city](#). Talking to reporters in 2002, he said, "About half of them are the migrant population," adding that "there will certainly be a large increase in these numbers." This also conforms with the justification used by Chinese leader [Deng Xiaoping in 1987](#) for "sending Han to Tibet." [Deng said](#), "Tibet is sparsely populated. The 2 million Tibetans are not enough to handle the task of developing such a huge region. There is no harm in sending Han into Tibet to help ... The key issues are what is best for Tibetans and how can Tibet develop at a fast pace, and move ahead in the four modernizations in China."

Therefore, in real terms, the census figures for the Chinese population in the TAR ought to be much higher than listed. This is particularly surprising, as the 2010 census, like those conducted earlier, was [supposed to be the first time the census counted people based on where they actually live](#), rather than where they are registered under the household registration system. That would have meant that the floating migrant population in the TAR, for example, ought to have been reflected in it.

Tibetan population from 2010 census

The following are the data on the population of Tibetans and non-Tibetans in Tibetan areas that ICT has compiled from the sixth national census of 2010.

[Tibet Autonomous Region](#)

Population of permanent residents: 3,002,166

Tibetan population: 2,716,389, accounting for 90.48% of the total

Chinese: 245,263, accounting for 8.17%

Others: 40,514, accounting for 1.35% (includes 10,561 Monpas and 3,682 Lhopas, considered by Tibetans to be part of their ethnic group)

[Sichuan total Tibetan population: 1,495,500](#)

[Kardze Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture](#) (Sichuan)

Population of permanent residents: 1,091,872
Tibetan population: 854,860, accounting for 78.29%
Chinese: 19,998, accounting for 18.24%
Others: 37,814, accounting for 3.47%

[Ngaba Tibetan-Qiang Autonomous Prefecture](#) (Sichuan)

Population of permanent residents: 898,713
Tibetan population: 489,782, accounting for 54.50%
Qiang: 157,969, accounting for 17.58%
Chinese: 220,679, accounting for 24.55%
Others: 30,283, accounting for 3.37%

[Mili Tibetan Autonomous County](#) (Sichuan)

[Population](#) of permanent residents: 138,555

Tibetan population: 46,012
Chinese: 24,267
Yi: 43,627
Mongolians: 9,031
Miao: 8,635
Naxi: 5,098
Others: 1,770, accounting for 1% of the total population (The Bodmi (Pumi) are included in this, although Tibetans consider them to be Tibetan. For Mili, we only have 2019 figures)

[Qinghai Province total Tibetan population: 1,375,000](#)

[Yulshul \(Ch: Yushu\) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture](#) (Qinghai)

Population of permanent residents: 378,439
Tibetan population: 365,169, accounting for 96.49%
Chinese: 11,685, accounting for 3.09%
Hui: 827, accounting for 0.22%
Tu: 281, accounting for 0.07%
Salar: 301, accounting for 0.08%
Mongolian: 62, accounting for 0.02%
Others: 114, accounting for 0.03%

[Golog \(Ch: Guoluo\) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture](#) (Qinghai)

Population of permanent residents: 181,682
Tibetan population: 166,895, accounting for 91.86%
Chinese population: 11,934, accounting for 6.57%
Hui: 1,739, accounting for 0.96%
Tu: 429, accounting for 0.24%
Salar: 247, accounting for 0.14%
Mongolian: 107, accounting for 0.06%
Others: 331, accounting for 0.18%

[Malho \(Ch: Huangnan\) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture](#) (Qinghai)

Population of permanent residents: 256,716
Tibetan population: 175,978, accounting for 68.55%
Chinese: 15,617, accounting for 6.08%
Hui: 16,741, accounting for 6.52%
Tu: 1,027, accounting for 3.91%

Salar: 1,696, accounting for 0.66%
Mongolian: 35,894, accounting for 13.98%
Others: 763, accounting for 0.3%

[Tsolho \(Ch: Hainan\) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture](#) (Qinghai)

Population of permanent residents: 441,689
Tibetan population: 292,888, accounting for 66.31%
Chinese: 109,694, accounting for 24.84%
Hui: 30,203, accounting for 6.84%
Tu: 3,993, accounting for 0.90%
Salar: 1,040, accounting for 0.24%
Mongolian: 3,096, accounting for 0.70%
Others: 777, accounting for 0.17%

[Tsonub \(Ch: Haixi\) Mongolian-Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture](#) (Qinghai)

Population of permanent residents: 489,338
Tibetan population: 53,498, accounting for 10.93%
Chinese: 322,996, accounting for 66.01%
Mongolian: 27,043, accounting for 5.53%
Hui: 65,828, accounting for 13.45%
Tu: 9,953, accounting for 2.03%
Salar: 4,665, accounting for 0.95%
Others: 5,355, accounting for 1.1%

[Tsochang \(Ch: Haibei\) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture](#) (Qinghai)

Population of permanent residents: 273,304
Tibetan population: 66,586, accounting for 24.36%
Chinese: 98,068, accounting for 35.88%
Hui: 86,152, accounting for 31.52%
Mongolian: 13,670, accounting for 5.00%
Others: 9,000, accounting for 3.56%.

[Tsoshar \(Ch: Haidong\) City](#) (Qinghai)

Population of permanent residents: 1,396,846
Tibetan population: 132,381, accounting for 9.48%
Chinese: 778,305, accounting for 55.72%
Hui: 273,672, accounting for 19.59%
Tu: 115,008, accounting for 8.23%
Salar: 89,741, accounting for 6.42%
Mongolians: 6,242, accounting for 0.45%
Others: 1,497, accounting for 0.11%

[Xining City](#) (Qinghai)

Population of permanent residents: 2,208,708
Tibetan population: 121,667, accounting for 5.51%
Chinese: 1,635,217, accounting for 74.04%
Hui: 359,138, accounting for 16.26%
Tu: 57,521, accounting for 2.6%
Mongolian: 13,701, accounting for 0.62%
Salar: 8,505, accounting for 0.38%
Others: 12,959, accounting for 0.59%

Gansu Province total Tibetan population: 488,400

Kanlho (Ch: Gannan) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Gansu)

Population of permanent residents: 689,132
Tibetan population: 376,565, accounting for 54.64%
Chinese: 266,702, accounting for 38.70%
Hui: 43,097, accounting for 6.25%.
Mongolian: 164, accounting for 0.02%
Salar: 335, accounting for 0.05%

Pari (Ch: Tianzhu) Tibetan Autonomous County (Gansu)

Population of permanent residents: 218,034
Tibetan population: 66,125, accounting for 29.87%
Chinese: 139,190, accounting for 62.88%
Hui: 12,633, accounting for 5.71%
Others: 86 people, accounting for 0.04%
(For Pari, we only have 2000 census figures)

Dechen (Ch: Diqing) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (Yunnan)

Population of permanent residents: 400,182
Tibetan population: 129,496, accounting for 32.36%
Chinese: 73,393, accounting for 18.34%
Lisu: 106,910, accounting for 26.72%
Naxi: 46,402, accounting for 11.60%
Yi: 16,765, accounting 4.19%



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