



## INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

### **Analysis: Sinicizing Tibetans in a Chinese nation-state**

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For implementing the top-level design of “Sinicization” of Tibetans in a Chinese nation-state, the Chinese Communist Party convened an “ethnic work conference” in Lhasa, Tibet’s capital, in early February. The provincial leaders of the Tibet Autonomous Region’s Communist Party, government, political body, judiciary, military and armed police attended the meeting on Feb. 9, 2022. According to the state media outlet Tibet Daily, the “ethnic conference” was convened for its importance to the “unity of the motherland, border stability, national unity, social stability, long term happiness of the country and rejuvenation of the people.” The “ethnic conference” follows the tenth TAR party congress in late November 2021. Describing the coercive implementation of the party’s policies and strategies in Tibet as Chinese President Xi Jinping’s “benevolence,” TAR Party Secretary Wang Junzheng extolled the party’s success, among other issues, in Sinicizing Tibetans in the past five years in his report to the 10th congress. In following up on the congress, the party convened the latest Tibet ethnic conference to further entrench Beijing’s agenda of “forging a sense of community of the Chinese nation.” The phrase “forging of Chinese communal consciousness” was enshrined in the party’s constitution at the 19th party congress in 2017.

With the Tibetan resistance firmly repressed through various preemptive “stability maintenance” mechanisms, the party appears to be readying to roll out more governance measures while also being vigilant to “look for and prevent major risks and hidden dangers in the ethnic field.” Two areas of concern jump off in analysis of the discourse during the latest Tibet party ethnic work conference and the 10th party congress. The party appears to be bringing changes to the governance system in terms of “capacity for ethnic affairs in Tibet” and stepping up bidirectional migration into and outside Tibet.

### **Using ethnic minority cadres for legitimacy**

During the 2014 Central Ethnic Work Conference, Xi Jinping stated that “to do a good job in ethnic work, ethnic minority cadres are important bridges and bonds. Let them deal with lot of the matters for us because they are more likely to be accepted by ethnic minorities; they will show up at critical moments, and the effect will be better.” When applied to Tibet, this is a strategic move to step up Tibetans controlling Tibetans for the party’s domestic legitimacy while the central leaders who pull the strings sit 1,600 miles away in Zhongnanhai, the Communist Party’s central headquarters in Beijing.

The party knows that its legitimacy in Tibet is shallow and recognizes the need to weed out and straighten out the ideology of its 82,000 TAR Tibetan party members by targeting their political and religious views. For example, the party issued a code of conduct to its Tibetan members mid-last year ordering them not to engage in any religiosity—a measure that has been repeatedly taken in various forms. In February 2021, the TAR party standing committee in its “fight against underworld forces” reiterated its resolve to “identify and eliminate ‘two-faced people’ hidden in the ranks of party members and cadres.” Numerous Tibetan party members and government employees have been investigated as “two-faced people” by the party’s commission on discipline inspection and supervision and subsequently expelled from their positions for holding onto their Tibetan identity and values. These expulsions are reported ambiguously in the state media as expulsion for “violating party’s political discipline, organizational discipline, integrity discipline, work and life discipline.” The latest expulsion of Apo, the Tibetan party secretary of Chamdo city, on Feb. 11, 2022, like that of the expulsion of former accountant Phurbu Tsering of Lhoka’s Nakartse county in September 2021 and TAR government official Tashi Gyatso’s expulsion in May 2020, follows a pattern of such expulsions in the name

of cracking down on corruption, a structural problem with no real progress since the launch of an anti-corruption campaign in 2012.

In emphasizing the role of cadres in party building in the TAR, Wang Junzheng calls for comprehensive strengthening of the party's leadership by "adhering to the standards of good cadres in the new era and the political standards of good cadres in ethnic areas to consolidate the grass-roots foundation for ethnic work and the party's leadership." With China sending scores of officials and party cadres to the countryside under the "Benefit the Masses" program beginning from 2011, Wang seems to be focusing on managing the performance of the cadres for party building in Tibet. Emphasizing the performance of cadres in party building has been pointed out in local government work reports in the recent past. For example, Dranggo (Chinese: Luhuo) County People's Government's 2021 annual report (webpage now deleted) on the construction of a rule-of-law government pointed out the deficiencies in the implementation of the rule-of-law government by the party members and cadres, and the consequences thereof for lapses in discharge of duties. Rule-of-law government in the Chinese context in essence means the rule of law as defined by and for the CCP. The top leaders pressuring local level party members and cadres in the past resulted in misreporting of local conditions to appease the leaders in the high echelons of the party-state. In the early revolutionary years, misreporting by party members had led to Mao's disastrous Great Leap Forward campaign; a campaign originally meant to meet China's industrial and agricultural problems that led to the death of millions in China due to starvation.

## **Bidirectional migration**

The second concern is that of bidirectional migration into and out of Tibet. With the official designation of a poverty-less Tibet at the end of 2019, Wang Junzheng at the CCP's ethnic work conference in Lhasa signals the importance of migration in the "new journey" toward a "socialist modernized new Tibet." In stating "it is necessary to further promote the exchanges and integration of all ethnic groups, and strive to create social conditions for the people of all ethnic groups to live together, learn, build and share, work together, have fun together and hug tightly like pomegranate seeds," Wang signals gradual roll out of a migration strategy; an important component in the CCP's ethnic policy to dilute the majoritarian Tibetan voice by emphasizing the equality of all ethnic groups in an area. Tibetan majority demography in Tibet and China's early Soviet inspired autonomy law have been perceived as problematic in forging a consciousness of Chinese-ness in the Tibetan population. For over a decade, China's influential ethnic policy public intellectuals like Ma Rong and Hu Angang have been advocating for the removal of China's ethnic autonomy law and instead laying emphasis on "equality" of all, which would mean to Sinicize all ethnicities. Although once a fringe voice, the central leadership had seriously considered the intellectuals' thoughts in the party's search for a new ethnic policy, culminating in the 2014 Central Ethnic Work Conference in Beijing.

In addition to articulating it as "common movement of all ethnic groups towards socialist modernization...allowing people of all ethnic groups to build a better life and share development results, and jointly promoting national unity," the state media carried quotes from a local party leader of a Trading Company in Lhoka (Chinese: Shannan) City and the Publicity and Education Section of the Chamdo Ethnic Affairs Committee highlighting that "people of all ethnic groups work side by side, hand in hand, heart to heart" and "people of all ethnic groups blend and learn from each other, help each other and jointly build a beautiful home." By prominently highlighting the movement for success of all ethnic groups in the state media, the party sends a clear message in development language that migration is key to tackling the ethnic question.

On the heels of the ethnic conference in Lhasa, conditions and restrictions on urban household registration in Lhasa were abolished last week. The International Campaign for Tibet observes that although unrestricted urban household registration was publicized in fall 2021, the policy took effect after the ethnic conference in Lhasa. Presented as a "Zero threshold" settlement policy, the abolishment of restrictions on urban hukou (household registration) in effect paves the way for the non-hukou population to settle in urban areas. With the unrestricted urban household registration in effect now, state media quoted one excited Mr. Zhang, a migrant worker from Sichuan, as saying, "It's great to finally be able to settle down!"

Within the past decade, the demography of Lhasa underwent a rapid 55% change from a 559,423 population in 2010 to 867,891 in 2020. As in the past censuses, the very large seasonal Han migrant workers in Lhasa were

not counted in the 2020 census. With the new urban household registration in Lhasa in effect now, ICT is anxious at the influx of Han settlers in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa with effects gradually spilling across the officially redesignated urban areas in Tibet. With an 80% increase (245,263 in 2010 to 443,370 in 2020) in the Han population in the TAR, the new urban household registration policy compounds the fear of an official beginning of settler colonization of Tibet under the guise of a long-term natural process of development assistance.



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