



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Monastic schools in Ngaba targeted amid crackdown on Tibetan-language education

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In yet another assault on Tibetan language in eastern Tibet, Chinese authorities have forcibly removed younger monks from the [Taktsang Lhamo](#) Monastic School and pressed them into state-run schools over recent months.

China is implementing multiple laws and policies crafted over the years to forcibly convert Tibetans into so-called model Chinese citizens for the “Chinese nation.” The sophisticated assimilation program is being rolled out gradually to avoid international condemnation and to support the untrue argument that Tibetan assimilation into Chinese culture is a natural process.

Taktsang Lhamo Monastic School closed

Taktsang Lhamo monastic school, located in Dzoge (Chinese: Ruò'ěrgài) County in Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan, has been targeted by Chinese authorities for at least two decades. It was forcibly shut down multiple times in the past but reemerged each time as the focus of Chinese political policies and priorities shifted. Under Xi Jinping's rule, the school's continued survival is in doubt.

The monastic school, with its enrollment of over 500 minor monks, had remained relatively undisturbed by Chinese authorities in recent years. This cautious approach by the authorities was largely due to firm resistance from monks in the past, which even manifested as [self-immolation protests](#) in April 2013.

Chinese legal and regulatory framework requires minor monks to be unenrolled from monasteries and mandates that every minor undergo the state-imposed mandatory schooling. While these policies have been firmly implemented in many parts of Tibet over time, the Taktsang Lhamo monastic school was able to operate normally, despite routine restrictions, until recently.

The Ngaba Plan

The cautious approach seems to have changed after the [Ngaba \(Aba\) Prefecture Education Development Conference](#) that was held on July 8, 2024. The conference focused on “new goals and tasks for promoting the high-quality development of education in the prefecture”. The conference was focused on implementing the Ngaba Prefecture's 14th Five-Year Plan for Basic Education, the Sichuan Provincial five year education plan and the [National Ethnic Affairs Commission of China's](#) (NEAC) dictum on strengthening the sense of community of the Chinese nation.

NEAC broadly dictates that the “sense of community of the Chinese nation” be instilled and “to comprehensively strengthen national unity and progress and national common language and writing education, actively and steadily promote the integration of schools, mixed classes and mixed accommodation for all ethnic groups”. The Sichuan provincial ["14th Five-Year Plan" Education](#)

[Development Plan](#) states education is a major national and party strategy and the party's education policy must be fully implemented for the overall development of the Party and country.

It further states that the CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping's expositions on education should be fully implemented in all aspects of education development to serve the CCP's governance and for the consolidation and development of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics.

Taktsang Lhamo Kirti Monastic School, which falls under the jurisdiction of Dzoge County in Ngaba Prefecture, Sichuan, is obligated to follow the provincial and national level policies of the Chinese administrative system. Prior to the closure of the school, 69 kindergarten schools had already been closed, 8 kindergartens had been merged and the categories of 33 kindergartens had been changed to fulfil "14th Five-Year Plan for Basic Education School Layout and Construction in Aba Prefecture" according to [Ngaba Prefecture Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission](#) in July 2024.

With all kindergartens effectively closed in the prefecture, the focus seems to have shifted to the monastic schools in Ngaba. In July, another popular school, [Jigme Gyaltzen Nationalities Vocational School](#), established over three decades in neighboring Golog Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai, was shut down in accordance with Qinghai provincial government and party instructions. Although not strictly a monastic school, Jigme Gyaltzen school had a unique blend of students from both the monastic and lay community.

Assimilation campaign

The consecutive closures of private Tibetan language and culture focused schools indicates that the Chinese authorities in Tibet have relied on a flexible approach to education policy; allowing local officials to adapt laws and policies to local conditions with the long-term goal of achieving complete sinification, in which Tibetan culture is eliminated. As a result, Chinese authorities invoke applicable laws to gradually and steadily meet the set goals at hand for uniformity in implementation under the label of universalization of education. Since Xi Jinping took over the General Secretary of the CCP in 2012, private Tibetan schools offering Tibetan language and culture education have been repeatedly targeted in implementation of state education policies in Tibet. Taktsang Lhamo Kirti Monastic School is the most recent target and most likely not the last.

Prior to Xi Jinping's rise to the General Secretary of the CCP in 2012, the Central Committee of the Communist Party in May 1985 decided to change the education system. The Law of the People's Republic of China on Compulsory Education and the Outline of China's Education Reform and Development were promulgated in 1986 to implement the CCP central committee's decision to universalize nine-year compulsory education. The compulsory education law was amended by the Standing Committee of China's National People's Congress in June 2006 making receiving the compulsory education an obligation in accordance with the law. The coercive education policy holds parents liable if they do not send their children to state-controlled schools and are subjected to legal regulation. In essence parents do not have the choice to send their children to an educational institution of their choice, which an emphasis on the preservation of Tibetan culture and the inclination of the children.

While such education policy seems benign and fulfilling human rights obligations for the ethnic Chinese people. its implementation has had a different impact on the Tibetan people, especially given Tibet's status as an occupied country. These coercive policies to "modernize education" and promote "national unity" have affected Tibetans' traditional modes of learning and transmission of centuries-old knowledge, and most crucially denied parents and students the freedom to access culturally Tibetan education.

Effects of the Plan

For centuries, monasteries have served as critical centers of education for the Tibetan people, with children often beginning their monastic education as young as 5 or 6 years old, embarking on a lifelong journey of learning. Under the current environment of coercive implementation of education policies, parents who request to have their children stay in the monastery's school are not only being denied but accused of brainwashing their children.

Students resisting transfer from their monastery schools to the government run boarding schools are detained, subjected to political education, captured and forced back into school, even if they are suicidal at the thought of returning to the "prison-like conditions" in the state boarding schools. For instance, [four young monks](#) from Taktsang Lhamo monastic school were detained on Oct 2. for "political re-education" after resisting transfer and then forcibly placed in a state boarding school after their release on Oct 6.

In a disturbing video from early September 2024, some men who are presumably government employees [forcibly shove a young monk](#) into a white car to enroll him in a state boarding school. The young monk was one of the 140 monastic students from Muge monastic school in Muge, Ngaba. In another disturbing incident, [three young monks](#) from the same Muge monastic school, who were forced into a state boarding school, attempted suicide by jumping into a river to escape from the school. They described the school as "prison-like," noting corporal punishment and insufficient food as reasons for their desperate action.

Video clips via [Tibet Action Institute](#)

Will the school reemerge?

Since 1986, Taktsang Lhamo Kirti Monastery provided specialized cultural education classes to young monks before they began formal Buddhist studies. In 1993, the Taktsang Lhamo Tibetan Cultural School was established specifically for young monks, but it was forcibly closed in 2003 by Chinese authorities. Later, the Taktsang Lhamo Kirti Monastery established a Preliminary Buddhist Studies School, which was also forced to close.

Despite multiple restrictions placed on the monastery since the 2008 spring protests in Ngaba, the institution remained resilient, managing to keep the school open despite suffocating restrictions until July 2024. The monastic school demonstrated remarkable persistence, reemerging each time it was closed by Chinese authorities.

However, reemergence under the current political climate and coercive implementation of China's education policy has become increasingly difficult. The ongoing restrictions on educational institutions and state policies have created significant challenges for maintaining educational programs within the monastery with all the young monks forced into state run boarding schools to become Chinese.



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