

**BUILDING NATIONAL IDENTITY
THROUGH LANGUAGE POLICY:
RECENT DEVELOPMENT IN
CHINA'S ETHNIC POLICIES**

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EAI Background Brief No. 1723

Date of Publication: 10 August 2023

Executive Summary

1. Since 1949, China's policy towards ethnic minorities has been based on the Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities (RAEM), where local ethnic groups enjoy various preferential policies, including the right to education in their mother tongues.
2. Around 2010, a series of violent incidents in Tibet and Xinjiang led some Chinese scholars and policymakers to question the ethnic policies.
3. The critics argued that the policy of RAEM reinforced ethnic divides and failed to effectively shape a sense of Chinese identity among ethnic minorities. They proposed a set of measures to strengthen a common identity of the Chinese nation, known as the "second-generation ethnic policies".
4. While the Chinese government has never officially accepted the "second-generation ethnic policies", certain aspects of these proposals, particularly language policies, have been implemented under President Xi Jinping.
5. The new language policy focuses on the sinicisation of ethnic minorities. In Xinjiang, Tibet, Inner Mongolia and areas in Jilin where the Korean ethnic group resides, the use of minority languages in primary and secondary education has been significantly reduced, with major subjects being taught in Mandarin Chinese.
6. These reforms have raised concerns about the potential erasure of ethnic minority cultures and sparked protests in minority regions.
7. Despite these concerns, the Chinese government remains determined to push forward with these sinicisation policies and employs an iron-handed control to maintain stability in regions like Xinjiang, Tibet and Inner Mongolia.
8. In the long run, the impact of this new language policy remains uncertain, as it could either contribute to long-term stability or lead to heightened ethnic tensions.