





Tibetans are one of the 55 recognized 'minority ethnic groups' (shaoshu minzu) in China. In addition to mastering their own language, Tibetan schoolchildren are compelled to have proficiency in Chinese if they are to get a job later on. Chinese is the common language in towns, but in remote high-altitude herding areas the language spoken is Tibetan, and children from rural areas have difficulty in following a school curriculum taught in Chinese. An emphasis on maintaining their own language combined with the large geographical distances has encouraged the establishment of local primary community schools, often with an interior signaling local values more than seen in township public schools. The schools vary between day- and boarding schools. With limited funding, a simple tent makes it for a temporary classroom. Education takes place in many different 'spaces', be it village or township levels but also the domestic sphere, when a monk teaches a child within the encampment of nomad summer tents. The photos here are from my fieldwork amongst rural Tibetans settled as nomadic herders at the altitude of 3,500–4,500 m. in mountainous areas at Shiqu in Sichuan, Zeku in Qinghai and rural areas at Medrogonkar in Tibet (TAR). My positioning as a foreign female researcher traveling alone, speaking Tibetan but no Chinese and obviously having some knowledge of Tibetan culture helped without any doubt the positive reception: my questions and inquiries were met with less suspicion by local Tibetan nomads than if I had been part of a larger research team asking all households to fill out survey questionnaires.





Photos on this spread by Ellen Bangsbo

Ellen Bangsbo, an anthropologist with a BA in Tibetan Studies, has been affiliated at NIAS as a researcher. Her research focuses on education for Tibetans in Nepal, Tibet, Qinghai and Sichuan.

