

Proposal for 100 Peace Projects

Lu Bian'09, Mo Zhou'09

China is internationally recognized for having one of the best education systems in the developing world. It promotes advanced instruction in math, the sciences and foreign languages, and this emphasis on education has helped to ensure China's rapid development on the world economic and political stage. However, beneath the prosperity lays vast inequality of education in China. There is a great economic gap between sophisticated areas in the east part of the country and the large portion of rural areas in the Central China, in which people are still struggling to make a living. The barriers of culture in multi-ethnic West China also leads to regional isolation and conflict. Thus, many Chinese, especially people in the border regions, such as Tibet and Inner Mongolia, lack access to educational resources. This short of educational assets results in fewer opportunities for these people to participate in the China's booming economy, to fight for their political rights, and religious belief. We see this scarcity of access to education as a denial of basic human rights, without which there can be no lasting peace.

Tibet, located on the Chinese border with Nepal and India, has been struggling for recognized equality and independence from the Chinese Communist Party for over fifty years, often developing relationships with foreign hostile power to create conflicts with Mainland China. Part of the struggle has included trying to maintain its plateau culture and teach children about its thousands of years' history. However, China's centralized standards and curriculums enforce policies in favor of Mandarin Chinese language and philosophy in college entrance examinations and a Tibetan culture course is absent from the curriculum. Moreover, the limited educational resources, such as foreign language teachers, lead to the slow social and economic development in Tibet. The situation is relatively identical in Inner Mongolia.

The Chinese Communist Party has just clarified its guidelines for future educational policymaking, in which it attached special emphasis on peaceful development and the importance of national appreciation of multi-cultural and multi-ethnic differences. We are heartened by this news and hope to be able to implement and study these kinds of changes in schools and communities on the border regions. We propose a summer peace project in which we will strive to make a difference in some small ways through tutoring, researching and publications both in border areas and Beijing. With a better understanding of the world and its multiple cultures, younger generations, we believe we will seek to avoid conflict and in favor of cooperation to achieve peace.

For the three-month peace project, we plan to take three approaches to make a lasting impact on education in Tibet, Inner Mongolia and Beijing. Before our trip, we would go to Nepal and work in its prestigious peacemaking organization, The Nepal Human Rights News, as a preparation to this peace project. After a rewarding process, we would first embark on Tibet. We are going to take a grassroots approach by teaching English in local schools with the support from county governments and actively engage with ordinary people by hearing their concerns. With a basic command of English, the international language, children will be able to communicate with foreigners, receive information through broader channels and potentially change their social and economic conditions.

Our second approach is to do research both on-site and in Beijing. With the support from provincial governments, we would have an opportunity to observe how these regions

implement education policy and talk about their future plans. When we finish our field research in Tibet and Inner Mongolia, we plan to visit Beijing University and the Education Bureau of China, where we would undertake intensive research on the history of educational policy in China and exchange ideas with contemporary scholars. This part of the project will offer us a chance to answer our questions in practical and theoretical ways: How the inadequate curriculum is affecting students? How should we redistribute social resources? What are the possible resolutions to peacemaking between Mainland China, Tibet and Inner Mongolia?

The last part of our proposal involves interning in the Tibet branch office of China's major newspaper, The Nanjing Daily. Through this internship, we plan to collaborate with NGOs in Tibet and Inner Mongolia to establish a world-wide website intended for international peace volunteers who want to contribute their knowledge and love for peace development. By asking volunteers to pay a modest program fee, agencies under local governments could assign volunteers to all kinds of positions within the region, especially rural areas. This platform would not only fill the large demand for global English instructors, but also provide an opportunity for foreign people to witness the current situation of Tibet and Inner Mongolia instead of relying on second-hand information from exaggerated news reporting. Serving as weekly columnists to the newspaper, we could also make public the central government's policy and connect the reality of conflicts with the priceless experiences we gained from research to encourage more appreciation of various cultures and maintains harmony while difference coexists.

This project involves two teammates: Lu Bian from Grinnell College and Mo Zhou from Bowdoin College. Both of us are sophomores now and we both have experience in social research and journalism. Lu Bian has served as a columnist for national newspapers for more than ten years in China, and Mo Zhou has been interning at numerous influential media companies such as CNBC Asia, StarTV, SMG and CCTV. We will first start our project in Tibet and Mongolia in June. After one month, we will continue our research in Beijing; then we would travel through more than half of the country back to the West in August. When we finish our project, we plan to write a book introducing our experience and reflections on education and peacemaking in order to let more people in China and abroad pay attention to this issue.

We really appreciate the generous help from *100 Peace Projects*. Throughout the process of preparation, we have encountered many social issues we had never before considered and learned a lot from our research. We genuinely consider this peace project a precious opportunity to explore inequality in our own country and to help achieve better intercultural understanding, which we think is a path to realizing lasting peace.