



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Tibetan students campaign to defend Tibetan language in schools, Tibet and China, 2010

19 October

2010

to: 26 October

2010

Country: Tibet

Country: China

Location City/State/Province: *Rebkong, Chabcha, Mangra, Machen, Tsigorhang, Chentsa, Trika, Themchen, Amdo (Chinese: Qinghai) province*

Location Description: *mostly "minority" high schools in multiple cities throughout the Amdo (Chinese: Qinghai) region of Tibet.*

Goals:

To preserve the use of Tibetan language in schools with primarily Tibetan students, and to promote integration of Chinese language to classrooms in a gradual manner that did not impede upon Tibetan language use.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 4th segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions › The International Campaign for Tibet and the United Nations Human Rights Council made statements calling for world governments to take action in support of the protests and protestors.
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 5th segment:

- 002. Letters of opposition or support
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support

Methods in 6th segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions › 300 Tibetan teachers submitted a letter to the Qinghai government stating that Tibetan language should remain in area schools.

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

National/Ethnic Identity

Group characterization:

- Tibetan students and teachers in Tibet

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Not known.

Partners:

Not known.

External allies:

International Campaign for Tibet, Students for a Free Tibet, United Nations Human Rights Council, group of Tibetan ex-Chinese government officials and educationalists

Involvement of social elites:

United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education, United Nations Independent Expert in the field of cultural rights, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance: Githu Muigai, United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Students for a Free Tibet

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

- International Campaign for Tibet
- Members of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Groups in 5th Segment:

- group of Tibetan ex- Chinese government officials and educationalists

Groups in 6th Segment:

- group of Tibetan teachers

Segment Length: *approximately 1 day*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Qinghai Chinese government

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known.

Campaigner violence:

Not known.

Repressive Violence:

Qinghai police detained around 20 students inside the Tibetan Middle School in Chabcha on October 22.

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The students stopped protesting because they were told by school administrators that more Tibetan language instruction would take place in schools. A few days after the protests ended, the Qinghai director of education stated that “in places where conditions are not ripe, the authorities won't forcefully push the reforms.” However, in interviews, students reported that Mandarin continued to be the primary language in classrooms and that Tibetan language usage had not increased. Therefore, the researcher believes that the goals of the student protestors were not reached.

On September 30, 2010, an article in People's Daily, a Communist Party magazine in China, quoted Qiang Wei, Qinghai Province's party secretary as saying that "mandating Chinese language was crucial" in all schools throughout the province. The majority (around 70%) of the students and teachers that lived in the Qinghai Province was ethnically Tibetan, and many considered themselves Tibetans living in China rather than Chinese citizens. However, the national majority, Han Chinese people, exercised the most authority in the region. High schools and university entrance exams already used Mandarin exclusively, but these measures would eliminate the Tibetan language classes in schools.

On October 19, 2010, in Rebkong County, Malho, Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Tibetan students aged 14 to 20 started protests against the reforms, which would make Mandarin the default language both in textbooks and in classrooms. Students from the National Senior Middle School of Rebkong County, in school uniforms, filled the streets beginning at 7 AM and shouted slogans like "Equality of ethnicities, freedom of language" (translations vary) and demanded "greater equality and expanded use of Tibetan language". They marched through the streets and were joined by students from the National Middle School of Rebkong, Teachers' School of Malho, Medical School of Malho, Rebkong Yifu Middle School and the Boarding School of Rebkong County. Buddhist monks are reported to have joined protests as well. Other slogans included "Return the authority of the Tibetan language." Police vehicles surrounded the protestors, but took no further action. The protestors gathered at the People's Government Building in Rebkong. Outside sources estimated that 1,000 to 7,000 students took part in the protest. The students ended the protest in the early afternoon after talking to some government officials. That evening, the Governor and the Director General of the Education Department visited one of the schools whose students had taken part in protests. They assured students that no changes in the language policy would occur if they remained in office, but also stated that if the protests continued, the "ringleaders" would be expelled.

The next day, these students were reported to be back in classes, but about 2,000 students in Chabcha County, Tsolho, protested in the streets from 6-10 AM, again in school uniforms, demanding the following: 1. Return the authority of the Tibetan language, 2. Equality Among Nationalities, 3. Expand the use of Tibetan language. The students, aged 11 to 18, carried banners in Tibetan and Chinese that read "Equality Among Nationalities" and "Expand the Use of the Tibetan Language". Protests also took place in the towns of Chenza, Tsigorhang Khrigha, and Drakar.

Students in the surrounding area began to protest in the following days. On October 21, around 3,000 students from Teachers Training College, Town Middle School, and County Middle School in Golok protested, demanding "Equality of People, Freedom of Language". 700 students protested again in Rebkong from the Gedun Choephel Middle School.

At noon on October 22, around 400 Tibetan students in Beijing at Minzu (the Chinese word for "nationality") University of China protested against the language reforms. The students used the slogan "Preserve National Language and Expand National Education". The International Campaign for Tibet issued a statement outlining the details of the protests and making formal recommendations to the world's governments for action, including engagement with representatives of the Dalai Lama, Tibet's leader-in-exile at that time, whom the Chinese government denied had any authority. Also on this day, four members of the United Nations Human Rights Council (United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education, United Nations Independent Expert in the field of cultural rights, United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and the United Nations Independent Expert on minority issues) issued a "joint urgent appeal" to China, stating that the policies would have a "negative impact on those of Tibetan origin and the preservation and promotion of the Tibetan language generally." Chinese authorities denied the detainment of protesting students and stated that all grievances had been addressed.

On October 23, twenty students from the Tibetan Middle School in Chabcha were arrested after attempting to escape from security forces. The next day, several hundred high school students and teachers from Chentsa, Malho County took to the streets to protest and voice support for the continued use of Tibetan in classrooms. The same day, a group of Tibetan former Chinese government officials and educationalists from Qinghai sent an extensively detailed petition to the provincial education department that argued against the language reforms. The letter pointed out that the laws that officials were using to support the

reforms had explicit provisions against eliminating minority languages and that enacting the reforms would be “in serious contempt of the authority of the nation’s laws.” (The text of the letter is available here: <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/retired-chinese-g...> [4].)

On October 26, approximately 300 students staged a protest in Themchen Tsongon, and students at a Tibetan school in Tsayi, Sangchu County, Labrang voiced support for the student protest. A report released by International Campaign for Tibet dated October 26 cited reports from Tibetans in the area that students in Chabcha were possibly detained in their schools, that security was tighter in areas where protests occurred, and that students involved in some of the protests were being investigated by authorities.

On October 26, more than 300 Tibetan high school and middle school teachers in Qinghai sent a formal letter to the Qinghai authorities stating that “in order to raise the quality of teaching and education and to amply reveal a person’s intelligence, we should use a language of instruction most easily understood by the students”. The letter had been written after a government-mandated conference from October 11-16. In the letter, the teachers listed reasons for maintaining Tibetan language as the teaching language and encouraged the gradual introduction of Chinese into classrooms in a manner more suitable to the needs of the students. It was signed by all the teachers and some Tibetan students. (The letter is available at <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/tibetan-teachers-...> [5].)

Supporters of the Tibetan students’ protests staged solidarity protests and actions throughout the world through organizations such as Students for a Free Tibet, beginning shortly after the protests began and continuing until December.

China issued a statement on November 18, 2010 assuring the world that Qinghai authorities had met with citizens to “publicize the State’s minority education policy, listening extensively to the views and opinions of teachers, principals and students” and claiming that “Today the matter has been resolved satisfactorily, and the situation in the schools has quickly returned to normal.” The statement did not mention the letter from the Tibetan teachers or the increased number of troops in areas where the protests had taken place.

The students stopped protesting after October 26 because they were told by school administrators that more Tibetan language instruction would take place in schools. A few days after the protests ended, the Qinghai director of education stated that “in places where conditions are not ripe, the authorities won't forcefully push the reforms.” However, in interviews, students reported that Mandarin continued to be the primary language in classrooms and that Tibetan language usage had not increased. Therefore, the researcher believes that the goals of the student protestors were not reached.

The researcher notes that similar protests occurred again in March 2012.

Research Notes

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Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

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[4] <http://www.savetibet.org/media-center/ict-news-reports/retired-chinese-government-officials-submit-daring-petition-urging-education-reforms-be-sc>

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