

Appendix 2: Petitions

1. Petition by Teachers and Students, Rebkong, Qinghai

October 15, 2010²⁶⁷

Raising the quality of nationality education requires adhering to teaching the mother-tongue as the dominant language

Under the correct leadership of the Qinghai Province Department of Education, Tongren County in Huangnan Prefecture arranged and held Tibetan Language Course Reforms Training from October 11 to 16, 2010 for elementary and middle school teachers. More than 300 teachers from Tibetan elementary and middle schools across Qinghai province attended the training, and the outcomes of the training were exemplary. However, trainees engaged in deep discussions during the training, and consider that there must be thorough changes to the backward state of Tibetan education, requiring adherence to teaching of the mother-tongue as the dominant language.

Violating regulations on teaching and study and not using a scientific medium of instruction are major factors restricting the quality of teaching and study at nationality elementary and middle schools. Our province's Tibetan students come from the vast farming and nomadic areas and have never been in a Chinese-language environment. Even though they have studied Chinese for several years by the time of their elementary school education, they cannot communicate in Chinese. If our province were to address such a group as this by adopting Chinese-language tuition, the outcome would be that the students would not understand what the teacher is saying, not to mention be able to actually learn anything. The choice of language of instruction should depend entirely on those being taught. The purpose of education is for teachers and students to convey and receive knowledge by the most easily understood means between teachers and students. As far as the Tibetan students in our province are concerned, they are not familiar with Chinese and so they are not able to think about or express their ideas in Chinese, not to mention being able to use Chinese to creatively analyze problems. However, in daily life

²⁶⁷ The open letter from the teachers and students was written in both Tibetan and Chinese. This translated was published by International Campaign for Tibet and is used with their permission.

the Tibetan mother-tongue is the most familiar tool for analyzing problems and expressing ideas, and therefore it should be the most effective tool for study in their lives at school. As an example, with regard to normal middle-school students, their mother-tongue is Chinese, the language they are most familiar with, and they take to teaching in the Chinese language like a fish to water. But what would happen if the language of instruction we used for ordinary middle school students was English, with which they are unfamiliar? Obviously, the quality of education for the vast majority of ordinary middle school students would suffer significantly.

Using the mother-tongue as the language of instruction for nationality elementary and middle school students does not imply a weakening of the Chinese language. Quite the contrary: aside from teaching classes such as Chinese and English using the mother-tongue, the study of Chinese should be strengthened, and the study of English should gradually be strengthened.

A Tibetan scholar put it well: if one wishes to stand up, one must study one's mother-tongue well; if one wants to leave one's home, one must study Chinese well; if one wants to go out into the world, one must study English well – there is no point therefore in belaboring the importance of the Chinese language and script and the English language. Relatively speaking, in accordance with the realities in Tibetan areas it is more important to study Chinese. At present, there are many problems with the Chinese language and script as taught in Tibetan elementary and middle schools, such as with the teaching methods and the chosen teaching materials not conforming to the real conditions of Tibetan students. In many places in our province, Tibetan students have studied Chinese for 10 or more years – from elementary school until upper middle school – but they are still unable to communicate in Chinese. In order to thoroughly change this situation, we must renew our understanding of how we can effectively teach Chinese to Tibetan students, and even carry out research into this topic. In many countries in the west, there has been much research into methods and materials for teaching English as a second language.

As a result of this research, there have been positive outcomes in English teaching in non-English speaking countries. In recent years, our country has also adopted these teaching concepts and there have been great changes in English language teaching from the teaching methods to the teaching materials, which has made English language teaching more practicable, and increased students' interest in study. Such progressive foreign

teaching methods should also be used for Tibetan students studying the Chinese language, and for teaching the Chinese language and script as a second language. The relevant education departments should formulate appropriate measures to this end, and focusing on the real conditions of Tibetan students, compile Chinese language and script materials and train Chinese language teachers in the new teaching concepts and practices, thereby making Tibetan students' study of the Chinese language more effective and more practical.

But we cannot sacrifice the study of other subjects for the sake of properly studying the Chinese language and text and the English language. We should understand the difference between teaching a language and the language of instruction. The choice of which language is used for instruction should be decided entirely upon which language is not an obstacle to the student's studies. An individual's wisdom and their ability to analyze problems is intimately connected to the development of their language abilities. Therefore, 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, at the same time as strengthening the teaching of language itself. Therefore, all trainees maintain that it is scientific to continue using the mother-tongue as the language of instruction.

2. The Entire Body of Trainees at the Qinghai Province Elementary and Middle School Tibetan Language Course Reforms Training Class

October 15, 2010

(The names and affiliations of the trainees are as follows: [names and affiliations withheld])

3. Retired Officials' Open Letter After Student Protests in Qinghai

October 24, 2010

*Material in square brackets represents summaries of longer sections.*²⁶⁸

Suggestions on the Issue of Long-Term Reforms to Tibetan-Han Bilingual Education in Qinghai Province

[The writers express effusive praise for education achievements in the province and note Qinghai's education development plan and the allocation of 7.6 billion Yuan and a determination to make new breakthroughs in bilingual education.]

Because the Qinghai development plan touched upon such major issues as the primary and secondary distinctions between the Chinese and Tibetan languages and unification of the language of instruction, added to which was the urgent resolve, speed and strength of implementation by education administrative authorities and individual jurisdictions, this gave rise to dissatisfaction among students and parents in some areas, leading to various forms of protests at middle and elementary schools such as street demonstrations and rallies on campuses in the four Tibetan autonomous prefectures of Huangnan, Hainan, Guoluo and Haibei, which continue to spread and extend to other places beyond schools, and which had an extremely adverse impact both domestically and internationally.

[The writers express their concern about the stability of Qinghai's Tibetan areas. Comments by the head of the Education Department were published in full in Chinese and Tibetan, helping us to understand the students' demands.]

With regard to the Education Department submitting in the "Qinghai plan" that Chinese will be primary and Tibetan will be subsidiary, with Chinese as the language of instruction and Chinese language extended to pre-school, and disregarding the normal requests by such interest groups as students and parents to hasten implementation, the Director of the Education Department Wang Yubo put forward the "three complies", which are the center's

²⁶⁸ "关于青海省藏汉双语中长期改革问题的意见" (Suggestions on the issue of long-term reforms to Tibetan-Han bilingual education in Qinghai Province), October 20, 2010. As posted at www.khabdha.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/bod-shuang-yu.doc.

spirit, national laws, and the fundamental interests and wishes of the masses. [But all our experience tells us that these are not being complied with.] We consider that:

First: There is no basis for “complying with the spirit of the center,” and qualitatively, to do so would contravene the center’s requirements. Having been submitted numerous times for public feedback and comments, it can be said that the “National Mid- to Long-Term Education Reform and Development Outline Plan (2010-2020)” had collated public opinion, chimed with public opinion and complied with public opinion. In the “Chapter Nine – Nationality Education” section on “vigorously promoting bilingual education”, it emphasizes, “Comprehensively carry out Chinese-language syllabuses, comprehensively promote the national language and text. Respect and protect the right of minority nationalities to use their nationality’s own language to receive and education.” Obviously, this is formulated based on the reality that Chinese is the second language in minority nationality areas (particularly Tibetan areas). The Han population is large, Chinese is broadly used, and the international influence of Chinese as a global strategy is ceaselessly growing. The Tibetan cadres and masses are as keen to voluntarily learn Chinese as they are to learn English, and the comprehensive carrying out of a Chinese-language syllabus has never been questioned, and even less has it been resisted. We believe that the provisions of the “preceding clause” are accepted and promoted by all areas. But it is immediately followed by “to use their own nationality’s language to receive an education, which defines it as a right granted by law which is to be respected and guaranteed, while significantly there is no “requirement” for Chinese to be the language of instruction for such non-language elementary and middle school syllabuses such as mathematics, physics, politics, geography, ethics and science and technology.

Does the government have a responsibility to respect and protect the national language as the language of instruction or the subsidiary language? But Wang Yubo emphasizes setting the target as, “upholding teaching in the national language and text as the primary while at the same time studying well the nationality language and text, and making the national language the language of instruction,” and furthermore, the public implementation timetable says, “By 2015, elementary schools will realize ‘bilingual’ teaching whereby the national language and text is primary and the nationality language and text is subsidiary,” which not only bypasses the teaching setting of conducting syllabus teaching in the Chinese language, it also pilfers and tampers with the concept of “a right to an education in the nationality language” proposed in the “National plan.”

Second: the so-called “complies with national law” is in fact out of context, and there are serious unconstitutionality and illegalities. [The writers provide a long analysis of the relevant laws, policies, guidelines, etc.]

Third: By making a language the sole official language of the PRC because it is understood is ignorant and sophist, and even more so it ignores the basic characteristic of China as a unified multi-ethnic nation, and the basic system of national autonomy. [Wang Yubo’s argument that Chinese is the sole official national language does not stand; it contravenes numerous legal and policy provisions.]

Fourth: since there is affirmation of the successes of bilingual teaching, there is no reason to make the Tibetan language the scapegoat of reform, and no reason to blame difficulties with bilingual education on Tibetan. Wang Yubo said, “Bilingual education has made great progress, with a basic bilingual teaching system in place from foundational education through to higher education, which has nurtured a batch of socialist constructors and successors fluent in Chinese and nationality languages, who are playing an important role on all battle-fronts throughout the entire province”, and that they have an “important and irreplaceable role” can be said to be objective, fair and realistic. Many of us retired cadres have experienced for ourselves this historic process, and some have even dedicated their entire lives to this undertaking. And so if education departments understand that these achievements are so significant, why are they still abolishing bilingual education, separating languages into primary and subsidiary, and unifying the language of instruction to Chinese, and so thoroughly denying nationality education, bilingual education that has taken decades to explore, repeated practices, hard-won development, and the cultivation of other great achievements? We are at a loss to understand it! Attributing the many problems with bilingual education to Tibetan as the language of instruction is biased and sophist, with no scientific basis. And so it was recently in the first such demonstration on September 19 in Longwu Town in Huangnan Prefecture, that aside from the three language syllabuses of Tibetan, Chinese and English at two high schools, in the remainder of the non-language syllabuses, in Tongren County Nationality Middle School the vast majority of courses use Tibetan as the language of instruction, and the Huangnan Prefecture Nationality Middle School uses Chinese and Tibetan as the languages of instruction for different grades. Teaching practice has shown that the Tongren school does better than the prefecture school, and the prefecture school’s Tibetan-language classes do better than the Chinese-language classes. How is this to be explained? Furthermore, the two

prefectures of Huangnan and Hainan have over the long term both used Tibetan as the language of instruction for the majority of bilingual teaching, and the three prefectures of Haibei, Haixi and Yushu have used Tibet curricula (or for elective courses), and the popularization and quality of bilingual education in the former far exceeds that of the latter – again, how is this to be explained? Ignoring good results and good experience for the sake of “reform”, it is perfectly understandable why students and parents find this difficult to accept.

[Having long considered the issue of bilingual education], we consider that the choice of a language of instruction in a school must “be decided in accordance with the wishes of the majority of the masses and the local language environment” (“Some suggestions on strengthening nationality education work” [issued by the National Education Committee and State Ethnic Affairs Commission, 1992]), and not changed at the will of the leader of a provincial-level administrative department.

Based on the above understandings and considerations, we propose:

1. Immediately halt illegal provision for implementing Chinese as the sole language of instruction [i.e., properly enforce the relevant parts of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, etc.].
2. Based on reality, with respect for science and adherence with the law, use Tibetan to jointly promote and jointly strengthen the teaching of both the Chinese and Tibetan languages as well as other language classes. [Making better use of the experiences with bilingual education already noted above; improve students’ abilities in Chinese by means of language instruction, and not by such tangential means such as “arithmetic, painting, and sports”; hiring genuinely bilingual teachers – i.e., Tibetan teachers are expected to be bilingual, but Han teachers are not.]
3. By defining a certain proportion and quota of “nationality students sitting the university entrance examination in that nationality’s language” [Ch.: min kao min], broaden the avenues for bilingual students to advance their studies and employment option, strengthening their adaptability to the Chinese-language world. [It isn’t the students’ fault that opportunities are limited; good examples from all of the nationality areas in the country should be studied.]

4. Honor commitments to strengthen and make progress in nationality language teaching, eliminating people's worries and doubts about bilingual reforms. Wang Yubo proposed, "Continue strengthening and reforming minority nationality language teaching, increase investment, improve conditions, and raise the quality of education." Such empty parlance is all too common and painful to our ears. In our experience, a "twin-track system" of two models of bilingual education were introduced in tandem in Qinghai in the 1980s, which were focused on two different regions: implementation of bilingual teaching with Chinese as the language of instruction and the sole nationality language in the varied nationality schools in areas of Xining and Haidong, and implementation of bilingual teaching in the six autonomous prefectures with Tibetan as the language of instruction and Chinese as the only other language. After 30 years of development, in Xining and the varied nationality areas of Haidong (aside from Xunhua, which in recent years has started to recover), bilingual education practically existed in name only in other areas, and practically no nationality-language teachers were deployed, meaning that bilingual Tibetan-Chinese, Tu-Chinese and Sala-Chinese elementary and middle school education was just a fiction. Bilingual teaching in the nationality language alone seemed to become the initial stage for promoting the practice of monolingual Chinese teaching. Such a history was unwilling to be seen within the entire province, and instead it needed to be corrected and improved upon. Now, with such determination and great efforts to promote Chinese at the provincial-level education department, a blind eye is being turned to nationality language education in these areas (including some townships and some pastoral and agricultural areas of Haibei and Haixi), and so how does this prove "language equality"? We call on the provincial department of education to take up a program of nationality language curricula in rural nationality schools in Xining and Haidong within 60 days of receipt of this petition, and to provide a clear answer to thoroughly prove that "one language is being used to weaken another", in exchange for the trust of the Tibetan masses at home and abroad.

We strongly call for:

1. Reflection on the positive and negative experiences since the Cultural Revolution, and by means of mutual respect between Han and minority nationalities and the study and use of language, further consolidate good ethnic relations. [Han should learn local languages in accordance with the provisions of the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law, etc.]

2. The protection and development of the Tibetan language is a requirement for the harmonious co-existence of language cultures and the continuation of human civilization; please pay respect and attention to this. (Tibetan is an international language; its preservation is not merely a domestic issue. There is great uncertainty at the moment – post 3.14 [March 14, 2008 riots and protests] – about the center’s Tibet policies and what changes may be afoot, so any changes to language policy are particularly worrisome at this time.)

3. With relevant social groupings aside from education and nationality work departments taking the lead, carry out in-depth studies, discussions and experience exchanges on the issue of bilingual education, upholding social stability and the unity of the nationalities and avoiding the Tibetan language becoming a political factor affecting ethnic relations and national security....

Some Retired Tibetan Cadres and Old Education Workers from Xining District.

October 24, 2010.

Copies to: the Central United Front Work Department (UFWD), the National People’s Congress (NPC) Nationalities and Religion Committee, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, the National Ministry of Education, the National Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), all standing members of the provincial Party committee, the provincial people’s congress, the provincial government, the provincial CPPCC leadership, their departments, the provincial UFWD, the provincial Nationalities and Religion Affairs Committee, the Party committees, NPCs, governments and CPPCCs of the six prefectures, and the education bureaus of the six prefectures.