

Appendix 3: Social Media Debates, 2016-2017

1. Social Media Post by Dekhang Jampa, Government Employee in the Legal Sector, Lhasa

June 14, 2016²⁶⁹

*Dekhang Jampa's posting was a personal response to the June 2016 announcement by the Lhasa Education Bureau of a switch to Chinese-medium instruction for mathematics classes in certain primary schools in Lhasa.*²⁷⁰

Who took away Tibetan children's right to receive a Tibetan language education? – On defending the language rights of nationalities

Username: Lhasa-school-1

Recently, there were crazy rumors going around that the TAR Department of Education was going to print all elementary school mathematics course materials in the Chinese language in the name of “improving effectiveness and simplifying procedures,” but as a legal worker and on the basis of my professional training I knew there wasn't a sufficient factual basis to accept such a rumor. It was only when I saw information on the Lhasa Education micro-blogging platform about the versions of textbooks used in elementary schools in all of Lhasa City's counties and districts that I knew that the online rumors were not unfounded. Yet the Constitution of the People's Republic of China provides that “The people of all nationalities have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and written languages.” The Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the People's Republic of China provides that “Autonomous agencies in ethnic autonomous areas guarantee the freedom of the nationalities in these areas to use and develop their own spoken and written languages,” “Autonomous agencies of an ethnic autonomous area persuade and encourage cadres of

²⁶⁹ 谁夺走了藏族孩子受藏语教育的权利？—为民族语言文字维权” (Who took away Tibetan children's right to receive a Tibetan language education? – On defending the language rights of nationalities), Dekhang Jampa, social media posting, June 14, 2016, reposted at Trimleng.cn, <http://trimleng.cn/dekhang-chamba/>. Dekhang Jampa uses the usernames “Lhasa-School-1” at the top of the article and “Young-Girl-Student-Lhasa-Tibet” as the sign-off at the end of the article.

²⁷⁰ See notes 34 and 35 above.

the various nationalities to learn each other's spoken and written languages,” and “The cadres and masses of the various nationalities must be educated to trust, learn from and help one another and to respect the spoken and written languages.” The Law of the People's Republic of China on a Common Spoken and Written Language provides that “The spoken and written languages of the ethnic peoples shall be used in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Constitution, the Law on Regional National Autonomy and other laws.” Several requests hereby made of the autonomous regional Department of Education in order to rectify the various areas of chaos in TAR education.

First, public schools must guarantee the implementation of nationality language education. Public schools are schools which are expressly established by the state to guarantee citizens' rights to culture and education. In Tibet, public schools must first guarantee the right to the use and development of the Tibetan language, and no work unit or individual may for any reason infringe upon citizens' legitimate rights, nor besmirch the solemnity of the “Constitution of the PRC” and the “Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the PRC.” Therefore, without exception, public schools must first guarantee the rights of nationalities to use and develop their own language.

Second, teachers should regularly receive training to protect against communication barriers between teachers and students. In the spirit of “mutual trust, mutual help, mutual respect for language,” various teachers within the nationality, through regular training, regular inspection and supervision measures, must ensure that all teachers including those from the local nationality are understood by students, and that students are understood by teachers as a means of promoting unity of the nationalities and the great goal of common prosperity.

Third, strictly forbid the unauthorized printing of textbooks, as it violates the fundamental rights of citizens and throws into chaos the normal order of education. At present, different versions of mathematics textbooks within Tibet has not only directly stripped the nationalities' right to use their own language, it has also thrown the normal order of education into chaos, leaving teachers and students not knowing what's good. Such chaos can make children in nationality areas receive an uneven education which is not only detrimental to the development of their own nationality, even more so it is detrimental to the future construction of the motherland, and must be urgently rectified.

Fourth, aside from Chinese-language subjects within the area of ethnic regional autonomy, entrance examinations must guarantee the use of the nationality's own language. As far as children, parents, schools and the Education Department are concerned, the greatest concern is the advancement rate for children. Children within Tibet study the language of their own nationality, but examinations are in the language of another nationality, which directly causes a drop in the child advancement rate.

So, I hope that the leadership will urge rectification of this. Thank you!

[Sign-off:] Young-Girl-Student-Lhasa-Tibet

Note: The national constitution, laws and regulations, and Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law of the state exist in order to protect and implement the rights and obligations of citizens of the People's Republic of China, and if a unit or individual through illegal means has committed a violation of personal or collective legal rights, citizens then have the right to make a request to the units or individuals, and the departments have the obligation to rectify or explain the actual situation. This article made a legitimate request to the autonomous regional education department in strict accordance with the existing laws and regulations of the country, and there is no personal will or ulterior motives behind the expression. If incorrect, please correct me!

2. Response by Xu Kefeng

Deputy Professor at Tibet Minzu University School of Education, PhD in education, and researcher in nationality education. August 6, 2016. ²⁷¹

Here Prof. Xu responds to the social media comments posted by Dekhang Jampa three weeks earlier (Appendix 3.1) about the switch to Chinese-medium instruction in some mathematics classes in Lhasa.

Some elementary schools in Lhasa are changing to “Han Mathematics.” What do you think?

1. All elementary schools are changing to “Han Mathematics”? It’s not like that.

²⁷¹ Xu Kefeng, “拉萨部分小学改“汉数,”你怎么看?” (Some elementary schools in Lhasa are changing to “Han Mathematics.” What do you think?), blog post, June 2016, <http://www.a-site.cn/article/406484.html>.

On June 13, a message about bilingual education in Tibet went viral, flying around friend circles. The original text is as follows:

The Education Bureau has right now changed all elementary school books into Chinese saying it's to improve efficacy, because if textbooks for mathematics, etc., were in Tibetan then procedurally it's too complicated, but, if it's going to be like this, Tibetan children from a very young age won't have the opportunity to study their mother language, not to mention carry forward their nationality's culture. I hope the relevant departments will consider this properly!!! Please resend!!!

This message didn't explain in what area this Education Bureau is, nor did it say whether other subjects aside from mathematics – in addition to Tibetan and English – are also taught in Chinese. It can be seen from the sentence, “The Education Bureau has right now changed all elementary school books into Chinese,” that almost all textbooks have apparently been changed to Chinese. But we can see from the statement “saying it's to improve efficacy, because if textbooks for mathematics, etc., were in Tibetan then procedurally it's too complicated” that seemingly only mathematics textbooks are to be changed to Chinese teaching. It's extremely important to consider how this issues relates to the Tibetan masses sense of nationality, so I urgently asked the friend who had [emailed] me about it, who said that the Education Bureau mentioned in the microblog was Lhasa Education Bureau; then I went to try and verify it with a friend who's an elementary school teacher but the outcome was that they weren't too sure. “I've heard maybe” that the mathematics teaching is to be in Chinese, but the other subjects are to be as before. At dawn on June 13, a circle friend who's a teacher in Tibet forwarded me an article sent out as a public message by the Lhasa Education Bureau entitled, “Mathematics textbook versions used in elementary schools in all counties and districts in Lhasa.” The complete text is copied below:

1. Cheng'guan District, Duilong Deqing District, Qushui County and Nimu County use the Chinese version mathematics teaching materials for first through sixth grades.

2. Mozhu Gongka County Elementary School uses Chinese mathematics, other schools use Tibetan mathematics in first grade and second grade, Chinese mathematics from third grade through sixth grade.
3. Linzhou County Elementary School uses Chinese mathematics, one third-grade class in the Bianjiaolin Township uses Chinese mathematics (as chosen by the teacher), and all other schools use Tibetan mathematics from first grade through sixth grade.
4. Dazi County transitioned to using Chinese mathematics for first through sixth grades in autumn 2016. Previously the County Elementary School used Chinese mathematics, and other schools ranged.
5. In Dangxiong County elementary schools, some classes in all grades use Chinese mathematics and other classes all use Tibetan mathematics; Longren Township uses Chinese in first through third grades, and all other grades use Tibetan completely. Other schools entirely use Tibetan mathematics.

This public message from “Lhasa Education” was published on June 13, and the message about how elementary schools “changed all elementary school books into Chinese” began suddenly going round my friend circle in huge numbers that afternoon (because of work connections, my friend circle has several hundred secondary, elementary and kindergarten school teachers in Tibet and in-college students), and I figured that the source of this “changed all elementary school books into Chinese” information was perhaps the article sent out as a public message by “Lhasa Education,” and it was just that the “Lhasa Education” article had been taken out of context by understanding or misinterpreting that the policy change in Dazi County to teach mathematics in Chinese meant that all elementary schools in Lhasa were going to do the same. Of course, it is not difficult to see from the “Lhasa Education” article that many elementary schools in Lhasa have already implemented “Chinese mathematics” teaching, but it’s just that every time there’s a teaching language policy change it inevitably raised concerns among the Tibetan masses on the issue of protecting and carrying forward their nationality language.

2. Will using “Chinese mathematics” lead to a Tibetan language crisis? This is not likely.

On June 14 at 14:48 in the afternoon, an essay by “Dekang Qiangba” was published (I can see what time it was published on the microblog, but not which platform was used). It was also rapidly resent by friends. This piece opened by citing clauses from the “Constitution,” the “Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law” and “The National Common Language Law” about using minority nationality languages, and then, “presented some requirements to the autonomous regional department of education with a view to rectifying all kinds of chaos in education within the Tibet Autonomous Region”: first, public schools must guarantee implementation of the Tibetan people’s language in education. Second, teachers must periodically undergo training to ensure that there are no impediments to communication between teachers and students. Third, strictly forbid the unauthorized printing of textbooks which deprives citizens of their fundamental rights and disturbs the normal order of education. Fourth, aside from the Chinese language as a subject within the area of ethnic regional autonomy, advancement examinations must be guaranteed to be in the language used by that nationality.

I am willing to believe that the writer of the above has no ulterior motives, and is using a certain ability to express themselves learned from using written language to express the thoughts harboured by many of the Tibetan masses and the deep anxiety they have about a crisis being faced by their nationality language and nationality culture. The Han nationality also have this sense of crisis and anxiety. Discussions over the past few years about English language education and the drop in the proportion of marks in the university entrance exam for English and the rise in the proportion of points for [Chinese] language are a reflection of this sense of crisis and anxiety. The Han are facing the internationally forceful language of English and they are trying to protect Chinese, and minority nationalities are facing Chinese which domestically is in a strong position and want to protect their minority nationality language – they have the same concerns and the same concerns for the same reasons. A nationality’s language maintains a link to nationality sentiment, and it is the carrier of nationality culture. The fading of a minority nationality language always gives rise to people’s worries about the fate of a nationality. Many people believe that without a nationality language and a nationality culture, qualitatively a nationality can no longer exist. Protecting a nationality language and culture is not only the contemporary international consensus, it is also consistently provided for in laws such as

the Constitution, the Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law and the Education Law. But the above-mentioned Internet posting is based heavily on the emotions of nationality sentiment, and it lacks any in-depth or comprehensive analysis:

First, changing mathematics to be taught in Chinese doesn't imply that all subjects are to be taught in Chinese. Tibetan language courses as well as ideological and moral courses, science, music, art and other courses are taught in Tibetan which helps to preserve Tibetan in its place as the primary language of teaching during elementary school, and helps students to lay a solid foundation in Tibetan. This point is extremely important, because the vast majority of bilingual people use their primary language as the strongest language for thinking. If there isn't the ability to develop strong language skills for thinking, it can affect future academic achievements.

Second, [China has constitutional protections for language use.] In order to uphold the right of minority nationalities to use their own language, the government once established nationality language schools in Tibet and many other nationality areas, but the minority nationality masses wanted more to send their children to study at schools where Chinese was the primary language. What's even more interesting is that there are some minority nationality scholars and cadres who on the one hand loudly call for protecting the nationality language but on the other hand they do everything they can to send their own children to schools where Chinese is the primary language, including schools in the interior...

Third, the online post says, "Children within Tibet study the language of their own nationality, but examinations are in the language of another nationality, which directly causes a drop in the child advancement rate." I don't know exactly what this means, but obviously it makes no sense. Since certainly, "Children within Tibet study the language of their own nationality," where is the crisis for the Tibetan language? And furthermore, what school teaches in one language and then holds examinations in another? Also, it is not so that there has been a drop in the study advancement rates. A decline in school advancement rates depends on the teaching, and a district and a nation's study advancement rates are not qualitatively restricted by teaching levels, but are decided by the scale of enrolment and admission scores at institutions of higher education. If the threshold is low enough, workers, peasants and soldiers could all go to university. If what the writer is truly trying to say is that Chinese-language teaching may lead to a drop in

students' achievements in mathematics, this would be a more rational concern; but is also an unnecessary concern, as discussed below....

3. Zhang Wenkui, Party Secretary of Tsolho Prefecture, Qinghai

April 2017²⁷²

In April 2017, Zhang Wenkui, party secretary of Tsolho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in Qinghai, proposed major changes to the bilingual education system in the prefecture. This led to strong criticisms online from Tibetan scholars and students in Qinghai. Zhang's alleged response was then circulated online.

If we look at the history of the development of the natural sciences in our country, following the “May Fourth” movement and following reform and opening up in particular when hundreds of thousands of our science elites went abroad to study, a huge number of people were raised not only using excellent Chinese but also excellent foreign languages, putting them among the world’s intellectual vanguard for the natural sciences. When they came home to serve the Motherland, they promoted the Motherland’s overall economic and social development to an enormous extent, in particular the leap-over style development of science and technology. We mastered our strengths, supplemented our weaknesses, and may I ask, did the study of the sciences at the forefront of knowledge by means of foreign languages weaken the Chinese language? Was this bad for the people? Evidently it was not, and so I don’t know what the “experts” and the “scholars” are thinking. We should focus our attention on the current state of development in Tibetan areas and on nationality education, and place ourselves at the head of the tide of minority education in the entire country and indeed the entire world. And there is something else that has me wracking my brains, and that is that around 45 percent of Tibetan state cadres in Hainan Prefecture as well as urban professionals send their children to ordinary schools, and these students and their families are all running around after the good quality schooling of an ordinary school, running around for a good university place afterwards, and running around for the good prospects that all that can bring, and this proportion is getting bigger by the year. If we don’t improve the achievements of minority nationality students and schools in all subjects, supplement their weaknesses and fail to

²⁷² Thanks to Timothy Thurston for re-posting these via Twitter, April 5, 2017, <https://twitter.com/taoyinkui/status/849730566610010112/photo/1>

do everything we can to improve graduation rates, then the sources of students from minority nationality schools will trickle away and disappear. We have to truly and thoroughly appreciate these issues and comprehensively raise the quality of education and teaching, thereby giving a good account to the broad masses of agriculturalists and pastoralists. Otherwise, those of us who are responsible for the minority nationalities shall be regarded as the villains of history. Any minority nationality with the will and ability to develop should not sit complacently on their merits, but should have a fierce sense of crisis and an urgent sense of development, and those Tibetan experts and scholars in particular should be more far-sighted, raise their heads to the era, and correctly lead in the direction of development.

Zhang Wenkui

[Party Secretary, Tsolho Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture]

4. Four Responses by Tibetan Scholars and Students to Zhang Wenkui

April 2017

A number of Tibetan scholars and intellectuals responded on social media to Zhang Wenkui's defence of the Party's decision to shift to Chinese-medium instruction in Tsholho prefecture.

[Response 1:]

Qinghai Province, and Hainan Prefecture and Huangnan Prefecture in particular, have always been models for bilingual education and Tibetan language mother-tongue education. A great number of elite talents have been nurtured to lead every trade and industry to comprehensively lead the way in the Tibetan areas of the five provinces. Just in contemporary literature and the arts, including film directing, etc., all are led by Qinghai with national and even international impact and all completely reliant on the advantage of a mother-tongue education. It's surprising that nowadays Hainan Prefecture isn't considering how to strengthen this advantage or how to meet the challenges of providing a mother-tongue education in the face of the new situation, and it's surprising that there is a wish to abandon our own advantage of having a mother-tongue education system, and instead to thoroughly relegate the L1 bilingual teaching [mother-tongue dominant] model

to an L2 bilingual teaching [second-language dominant] model and to consider this ‘transformation’ to be an ‘improvement in quality.’ This is as stupid as scaling a tree to catch a fish. As a region at the forefront of providing total mother-tongue education, Hainan Prefecture’s education reforms not only touch upon Hainan Prefecture itself but even more so they touch upon mother-tongue education across the entire Tibetan region. Such a retrograde measure must be resolutely opposed.

Yixi Weila A’cuo

[Yeshe Osal Atsok], Professor of Linguistics, Nankai University

[Response 2:]

Hainan Prefecture has upheld bilingual education since its own infancy, conscientiously setting down a provincial pre-school bilingual education demonstration zone, with three years of bilingual pre-school minority nationalities resolving the problem of minority nationality kindergarteners being able to speak the national language, and such a decision [to abolish bilingual education] is completely bureaucratic, and is completely contrary to the laws of children’s cognitive development. In the 1980s, the Canadian bilingualism expert Kaomengsi [Cummins] put forward the theory of ‘languages mutually reliant for their development.’ He pointed out that when a child is able to skillfully utilize their mother-language for communication in a mother-language environment and to master a certain size vocabulary, then thought processes in the mother language have already been formed. Such a child’s ability to skillfully utilize their mother language will help the child’s study of a second language and furthermore will not cancel out that child’s utilization of its mother language. In contrast, if the child’s foundation in their mother language is weak and it has mastered only a limited vocabulary, the child’s ability to think in its mother language has not reached a fully complete stage and starting to make the child study a second language will not only hamper the child’s development of the child’s language development in its mother language, it will also make study of the second language much more difficult. Such bilingual people will appear in our society who are good at neither of the two languages. We are most often surrounded by people who speak only one language who formulate policies on how to develop bilingual education for people who are bilingual. Such a phenomenon has been continuing for many years. I would just like to ask whether during the process of formulating this policy for Hainan Prefecture the opinions of

grassroots teachers were solicited? Were the opinions of Tibetan students solicited? Is there anyone there who understands the theory of children's bilingual study?

Yixi Lamucuo [Yeshe Lhamo Tso]

April 4, 2017

[Response 3:]

Dear Secretary Zhang,

In the education theories of the great education theorist Kaomeiniusi [Cummins?], "The direct use of the mother language for study lends support to the understanding of all topics of study, and it is the most flexible way of raising the quality of learning and promoting students' talents." This passage explains the importance of mother-tongue education, and similarly clarifies the directness of mother-tongue education.

After the May Fourth Movement, there was a wave of direct foreign language learning at universities including Beijing University, and the direct study of developed countries' science and technology by means of foreign language study. But ultimately it all failed. All of the schools in Hong Kong—which was then a British colony—abolished Mandarin, and the direct study of foreign languages and the study of western science and technology by means of foreign languages also failed, and so later there was no choice but for mother-tongue education. In the half-century and more since the founding of the New China in particular there has been the rapid development of education and the development of science and technology and of society and the economic [growth] has been incredibly fast, all of which has been because of mother-tongue education. May I ask: which of such countries as America, Britain, Germany, France, Russia and Japan does not use a mother-tongue to implement education and learning?

If indeed you insist upon upholding your stance, please consider for a moment the state of education in Yushu and Hualong prefectures in Qinghai, where 30 years ago they started to abandon the L1 [mother-tongue dominant] model and started to teach using the L2 [second-language dominant] model, and in just this 30-year period, how many students from Yushu and Hualong prefectures have sat entrance examinations for ordinary universities or nationality universities? Are their enrolment rates greater than Hainan Prefecture's? How many masters and doctorate students have they nurtured during these 30 years?

Lü Cangwa

[Response 4:]

In response to Secretary Zhang Wenkui:

A single leaf has blinded Secretary Zhang Wenkui so that he no longer sees the forest; he presents only the superficial and does not dig deeper. Most importantly, he does not listen to advice and suggestions, and instead is stubbornly set in his ways and making up his own reasoning!

First, may I ask, were these elites who were sent abroad educated completely in English from a young age? The answer is most certainly negative, and if they weren't, then your example simply cannot stand!

Second, the argument that the difficulty of raising the achievements and raising the low enrolment rates in the agricultural and pastoral regions can be put down to the idea of studying Tibetan is simply wrong. This completely confuses black and white, it is alarmist, and it must be called out!

Third, those who understand education at the very least appreciate that the primary task in raising achievement is to improve the overall levels of teaching and professionalism, and that it has nothing to do with the language used. If it was connected to the language of instruction, according to your understanding everything should be changed to English instruction because mathematics, physics and chemistry are such exotic goods!

Fourth, there are only two ways of directly improving the enrolment rates: either improve opportunities for admission to ordinary schools and colleges or increase bilingual professionals at schools and colleges. Anything else isn't worth talking about.

Fifth, leading cadres must themselves make efforts to improve their virtues and standing, they must take the long view, they must understand rational analysis and deepen their scientific spirit, and not do the opposite by besmirching professional elites and raising themselves up!

Those who suit their actions to the times are wise, and I ask Secretary Zhang to ponder well before taking a step back!

Ye Latai, M.A.