

Tibetans Protest China Language Policy

Tibetan students have taken to the streets to protest the Chinese government's announcement that Mandarin is to be made the official language of all schools.

Estimates of the number of protestors last weekend range from 1,000 to 9,000. The activist organization Free Tibet said that "all subjects will be taught in Chinese and all textbooks will be in Chinese" as a result of the educational reforms. The new rules have already been enforced in elementary schools across the Tibetan region.

Tibet was taken over by the People's Republic of China in 1959, and its people have fought ever since to retain their language and culture. It has been known as the Tibet or Xizang Autonomous Region since 1965.

The weekend's protests took place in Tongren, also known as Rebkong, spreading to other cities in the Qinghai province.

Police were present, but did not intervene to stop the protests.

"The Chinese are enforcing reforms which remind me of the Cultural Revolution," a Tongren teacher told Free Tibet. "This reform is not only a threat to our mother tongue, but is in direct violation of the Chinese constitution, which is meant to protect our rights."

Government officials responded to the protest by saying the policy would not be enforced "where conditions are not ripe."

According to The Hindu (Chennai), Woesser, a Tibetan author, said China was trying to "weaken Tibetans' identity as an ethnic minority" to unify the country.

She was suspicious of the Chinese government's suggestion that it would hold back on the proposals.

David L Rattigan
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