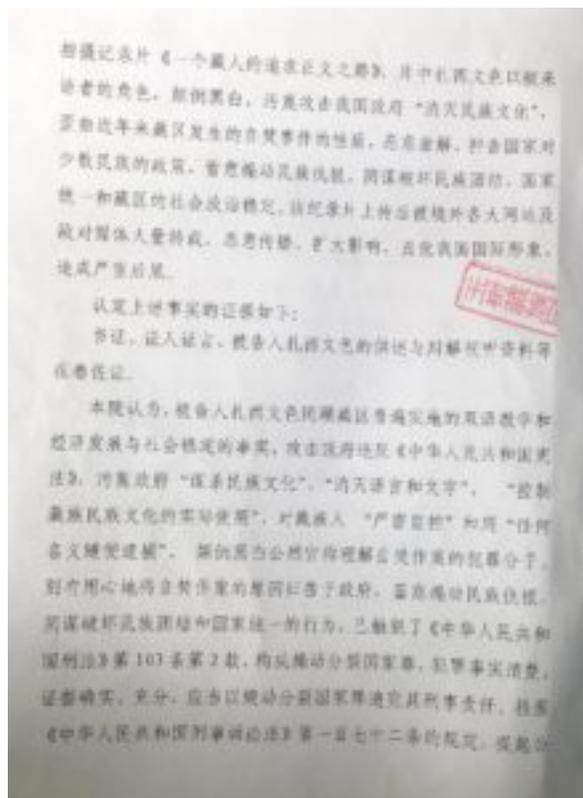


Trial of Tibetan language advocate today ends without known verdict

Date : January 4, 2018



One page of a court document from Tashi Wangchuk's trial. Click to enlarge. (Image: Liang Xiaojun)

The trial today of a Tibetan language advocate Tashi Wangchuk, who appeared in a New York Times video documentary, received global attention as he and his Chinese lawyer refuted charges of 'separatism'.

In unprecedented scenes in the courtroom in Yushu, Qinghai, the New York Times video was shown in which Tashi Wangchuk is seen travelling to Beijing to present an appeal about the rights of Tibetans to speak and learn their own language. Tashi Wangchuk and his lawyer pleaded not guilty, and no verdict has yet been returned.

Tashi Wangchuk's lawyer Liang Xiaojun said in a microblog today (January 4, 2018) that a judge heard oral arguments for four hours and will issue a verdict at an unspecified date. Liang Xiaojun also posted a summary of the case by the authorities at Yushu People's Intermediate Court, Qinghai, which stated that in the video documentary, Tashi Wangchuk had "intentionally attacked" the Chinese government, and "incited ethnic hatred". The statement also said that the New York Times video had conveyed a "negative image" of the Chinese authorities to the world.

In the video, Tashi Wangchuk, who ran a shop in Yushu, spoke about his anxiety over the survival of Tibetan culture, linked to the erosion of the language. China's Constitution specifies the right of 'ethnic minorities' to speak their own language. Tashi Wangchuk and his lawyer denied charges of 'separatism', with his lawyer stating to the Associated Press that: "The prosecutors are ideologically too strong." (Associated Press, January 4, 2018). In the documentary, Tashi Wangchuk says: "I want to try to use the People's Republic of China's laws to solve the problem."

A New York Times staffer involved in the video posted online comments by Tashi Wangchuk before his arrest in January 2016 saying not only that he wanted to thank Chinese people who "truly protect minorities" but also saying: "I want to thank President Xi, who has promoted a democratic and law abiding country these few years." (@jonah_kessel, January 2, 2018).

A full translation of the document issued by the court and posted on social media is as follows:

The documentary video 'A Tibetan's Journey for Justice' uses Tashi Wangchuk as an interviewee and switches fact for fiction,

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slandering and attacking our government for “destroying ethnic culture” and maliciously misinterpreting the nature of the self-immolation cases which have happened in Tibetan areas in recent years, deliberately opposing the government’s ethnic policy, inciting ethnic hatred and conspiring to undermine ethnic unity, the unification of the country, and the political and social stability of Tibetan areas. After this document was posted on the internet, it was reposted in large quantities by major media outlets outside China and anti-China websites and broadcast and published, maliciously spreading, with an expanding influence, a demonization of China’s international image on the world stage, which caused serious consequences.

Because of the factors stated above, the following evidence is to be firmly believed:

Written evidence, witness testimony, the defendant Tashi Wangchuk’s confession, and his defense for dealing with audiovisual materials

The court believes that the defendant Tashi Wangchuk disregarded the implementation of bilingual education system and social and economic development and social stability across Tibetan areas, in order to attack the government and violated the Constitution of the PRC. He slandered the government of “murdering ethnic culture,” and “destroying the written and spoken language,” and “controlling the Tibetan people’s actual use of Tibetan ethnic culture” and “tight surveillance” and “arbitrary arrests” for any reason, switching fact for fiction and openly claimed he understood the criminals who commit self-immolations, and he underhandedly blamed the government for the self-immolation crimes, incited ethnic hatred and undermined nationality unity and the unification of the country. Those actions, which are against Article 103 Section 2 of the Criminal Law of the PRC, mean that he committed incitement of separatism.

Chinese lawyer Liang Xiaojun [posted today](#) in Chinese (translated by ICT): “I know a lot of people care about Tashi Wangchuk’s final verdict. But I’m not going to predict the sentence, because we firmly believe that Tashi is innocent. The court is composed of mostly Tibetan staff, and in the supplementary defense stage I said: Speaking of the Tibetan people, I’m an outsider. But I, and many other people, appreciate Tibetan culture, and I hope that Tibetan culture won’t decline the way Chinese traditional culture did. I hope you will sympathize with the sincere heart of this outstanding Tibetan youth.”

In a [second tweet](#), Liang Xiaojun said: “After going from 9:30 to 1:30, a total of four hours, Tashi Wangchuk’s court trial for incitement to split the country concluded. The court adjourned the trial to choose a sentence. The trial was conducted in the Chinese language, with the video ‘A Tibetan Pursues Justice’ being a main point of evidence. Showing the relevant evidence, both the prosecution and the defense and Tashi Wangchuk himself expressed their points of view. Tashi Wangchuk used clear language and had a clear point of view.”

Indicating international interest in the case, the New York Times reported that China-based diplomats from the United States, Germany, Britain, Canada and the European Union went to Yushu, but the Chinese authorities did not permit them to observe the proceedings of the trial.

Matteo Mecacci, President of the International Campaign for Tibet, said: “It is absurd that a moderate, thoughtful young man who did nothing more than defend a cultural right to use one’s own language, and chose to do so consistent with China’s own laws and Constitution, should not have been imprisoned in the first place, let alone be facing criminal prosecution. If China really seeks to avoid the ‘negative image’ in terms of international opinion that prosecutors claim was the outcome of this short and balanced video, it must now do the right thing and release Tashi Wangchuk.”