



INTERNATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TIBET

Chinese authorities force closure of popular Tibetan school

<https://savetibet.org/chinese-authorities-force-closure-of-popular-tibetan-school>

July 18, 2024

Amid an ongoing government campaign to close private Tibetan schools, the Jigme Gyaltzen Nationalities Vocational School in Golog (Chinese: Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Qinghai, was shut down on July 12, 2024.

The school, which was founded three decades ago, had a successful academic record and a strong focus on Tibetan language and culture.

Amidst a widespread outburst of sadness at the closure, the school's founder, Ragya Jigme Gyaltzen, issued a brief message on July 14, stating that the school is shutting down "in accordance with the standards for vocational schools, and Qinghai provincial government and party [policy] documents." He added that current students will be enrolled in government vocational schools within the prefecture, and teachers' job contracts will be transferred to these government schools as per the agreement.

This closure aligns with a broader pattern of the Chinese government shutting down Tibetan educational institutions and relocating students to state-run schools as part of the Chinese government's ongoing effort to exert control over Tibetan education and culture to Sinify – or assimilate – Tibetans. This coercive policy has become a trademark of President Xi Jinping's ongoing and possibly indefinite rule.

The International Campaign for Tibet is deeply concerned about the Chinese authorities' systematic violation of the right to education, which guarantees the establishment and maintenance of private schools. This right is enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention of the Rights of the Child, both of which have been ratified by the PRC.

Education Policies

Prior to Xi Jinping becoming General Secretary of the CCP and China's President in 2012, the Chinese government implemented various education "reform plans" aimed at assimilating minority groups, with Tibetans being a primary focus. While Tibetans have vocally objected to these policies and achieved some small victories in protecting their cultural heritage, Xi's presidency has gradually reversed these gains and incrementally implemented more coercive ethnic policies to assimilate Tibetans and other minority groups in the PRC.

Under Xi Jinping's signature "rural revitalization" policy, which is ostensibly aimed at [modernizing](#) and developing rural areas, the trend of establishing Chinese language instruction in state-run schools is expanding to rural regions. This mirrors practices already established in urban areas as reported by [Human Rights Watch](#). The [rural revitalization strategy](#), introduced in 2017, focuses on changing

various aspects of rural life, including education, industry, and culture. While the policy doesn't explicitly target language instruction, it does emphasize overall [rural development and modernization](#), which includes educational reforms.

The Chinese government's efforts to implement Chinese-medium instruction in Tibet is a part of China's broader national strategy outlined in key policy documents. These include the National Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) and the Thirteenth Five-Year Development Plan for National Language Works (2016-2020), which aimed to establish Chinese as the primary language of instruction in "minority regions" by the end of 2020.

The National Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) was a comprehensive policy framework designed to overhaul China's education system. One of its key objectives was to promote the use of Mandarin Chinese as the medium of instruction across all educational institutions, including those in "minority regions". The plan emphasized the importance of a unified national common language to foster social cohesion and economic development. By prioritizing Chinese-medium instruction with state-controlled curriculum, the government aimed to assimilate the Tibetans more closely into the broader Chinese society.

The Thirteenth Five-Year Development Plan for National Language Works (2016-2020) further reinforced these objectives. This plan specifically targeted the promotion of Mandarin Chinese in educational settings and public life. It outlined measures to enhance the teaching of Mandarin in schools, improve language proficiency among minority students, and ensure that Mandarin became the dominant language in all official and educational contexts. The plan was part of a broader strategy to standardize language use across China, thereby reducing linguistic diversity in favor of a single national common language.

In 2010, Qinghai province introduced its own education reform plan (2010-2020) in alignment with these national objectives. However, the policy faced significant resistance from the local Tibetan population. Thousands of Tibetan students took to the streets in [protest](#), arguing that the policy threatened their linguistic and cultural heritage. The protests were a clear indication of the deep-seated concerns among Tibetans about the erosion of their language and identity. In response to the widespread opposition, the Qinghai provincial government temporarily suspended the policy.

Despite the initial suspension, developments in recent years reveal that authorities are now moving forward with the implementation of these planned policy actions. The closure of private Tibetan schools, such as the Jigme Gyaltzen Nationalities Vocational School, affirms a renewed push to enforce Chinese-medium instruction in state-run schools. This move aligns with the broader national strategy to standardize education and language use across China. These actions reflect a concerted effort to complete the policy objectives outlined in the national and provincial education reform plans.

Jigme Gyaltzen's socio-economic projects

The Jigme Gyaltzen Nationalities Vocational School was founded in August 1994 by [Ragya Jigme Gyaltzen](#) (b. 1965), then a 29-years-old monk from a herdsman family in Machen County. Initially starting with 86 students primarily from inner Qinghai, the school experienced significant growth over the years. By 2021, the institution had expanded to accommodate over 1,000 students, predominantly from Tibetan areas, including from Qinghai, Sichuan, Gansu, as well as from Inner Mongolia. The school also attracted some Chinese and Mongolian students.

“I started the Jigme Gyalsen Nationalities Vocational School in 1994 out of a wish to contribute to the promotion of Tibetan culture and education,” the monk says in an [interview](#) in 2010. Remarkably, in 2014, at the annual political consultative conference held in Xining, Qinghai province, Jigme Gyaltzen was able to convey his [thoughts](#) on Tibetan language, education and society. In extraordinary detail, he outlined what he saw are the problems with education in Tibet, from the shortage of teachers to the language of instruction. Notably, over the past years, official educational policies have become more rigorous and repressive.

The school offered a unique blend of traditional Tibetan culture with modern science and technology with a student body of monks and laymen. As a vocational institution, the school offered specialized programs in Tibetan language, English language, computer science, engineering, medicine, video production, and physical education. Since its establishment in 1994, the school has produced at least 2,259 graduates who have gone on to join universities, workforce in the tertiary sector or become entrepreneurs. Jigme Gyaltzen’s vision was [supported with funds](#) from the Trace Foundation, Associazione Per LaSolidarieta Internazionale InAsia (A.S.I.A), the Royal Netherlands Embassy, the Embassy of Finland, the Bridge Fund, and other organizations and individuals.

Recognizing that “education of girls is a weak link in education sector in Tibetan areas,” Jigme started a second school, [The Prairie Talent Girls’ School, in November 2004](#) with funds collected from home and abroad, as he [envisioned](#) that the “education of girls is also education of mothers, which is the fundamental education for human beings.”

In another successful project to give edge to the herders to gain access to the global market, Jigme invited cheese experts from the US, Italy, Nepal and Switzerland with help from the US based [Trace Foundation](#) to make yak cheese combining traditional Tibetan techniques with modern technology. Snowland Treasure Co., Ltd., a cooperative of herders registered under Jigme’s school was established in November 2000 to take the Tibetan yak cheese to the domestic and foreign markets. Participating at the Terra Madre event in Turin, Italy, in 2006, the [New York Times](#) reported, “Made on the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau from boiled curds, Ragya yak cheese smells a lot like aged pecorino and has twice the fat of cow’s milk cheese. The yak cheese enterprise is one of 200 Slow Food projects designed to safeguard artisan foods, and much of the money from the cheese goes to support a small school founded by a Tibetan monk.” The yak cheese was well received by the domestic and foreign consumers, with demand outpacing supply.

Last assembly

Following multiple harassments to shut down the school, Jigme Gyaltzen Tibetan Vocational School was formally closed on July 12, 2024; a few days after the school held a graduation and book distribution ceremony on July 7 on the open grassland.

Videos clips from the last assembly show emotional students with their heads down during the assembly and crying as they offer *khatas* (a traditional Tibetan scarf) to their teachers during the departure ceremony.

Videos: [The last assembly of the Jigme Gyaltzen Nationalities Vocational School - 1](#)
[The last assembly of the Jigme Gyaltzen Nationalities Vocational School - 2](#)



International Campaign for Tibet (ICT) | 1825 Jefferson Place NW | Washington, DC 20036 | United States of America
Phone: (202) 785-1515 | Fax: (202) 785-4343 | info@savetibet.org

ICT Europe
Funenpark 1D | 1018 AK
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Phone: +31 (0)20 3308265
Fax: +31 (0)20 3308266
icteurope@savetibet.nl

ICT Deutschland e.V.
Schönhauser Allee 163 | 10435
Berlin, Germany
Phone: +49 (0)30 27879086
Fax: +49 (0)30 27879087
info@savetibet.de

ICT Brussels
11, rue de la linière | 1060
Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 (0)2 609 44 10
Fax: +32 (0)2 609 44 32
info@savetibet.eu