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By EDWARD A. GARGAN Special to The New York Times

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BEIJING, Jan. 8 — About 200 chanting African university students, reacting to a racial provocation, marched more than 12 miles across Beijing from their campuses to the capital's embassy district today to protest an apparently fraudulent letter slurring their behavior and manners.

More than 100 policemen, on foot, on motorcycles or in police vans, unsuccessfully tried to halt the protest march. All public demonstrations without a police permit have been banned in Beijing since Chinese students recently took to the streets to demonstrate for greater freedom.

The demonstration today was the latest in sporadic protests over the last five years by African students, who have been invited to study on scholarships at Chinese universities and technical schools. Many African students have complained of being targets of shouted insults and rude behavior by Chinese students and other citizens.

Attack on a Student Reported

Several African students said they saw the letter, which was photocopied and surreptitiously distributed on several campuses, two days ago. On the same day, they asserted, a Chinese student attacked a Sudanese student in the Beijing Hotel downtown.

"We are walking towards our great aim on a broad road opened to advanced and civilized world," said the letter, which was written in English and contained numerous errors in grammar. "It doesn't mean however, that we will feed the whole uncultured Africa with the results of our efforts and we will allow any Negro to hang about our universities to annoy Chinese girls and to introduce on our academic ground manners acquired by life in tropical forests, offending our traditional hospitality and broad mindedness."

Official Disclaimers

The single-page letter warned that if the African students did not "correct" their behavior, "new and even harder lessons of 'friendship' will follow." It added: "They will be based on the experience of Americans, who know very well what to do to curb the Negroes in their country."

The letter was signed, "Students Association." Photocopies were also reportedly sent to some African embassies.



An African student struggling with police officers during demonstration near the Moroccan Embassy in Beijing. Reuters

The official New China News Agency, in denying the letter's veracity, reported that it had not been written by any official Chinese student organization, but had been circulated "to cause friction between Chinese and African students."

According to the press agency, a spokesman for the All-China Students Federation "expressed strong indignation over the vicious trick of undermining Sino-African friendship."

'We Are Going Back'

Previous demonstrations by African students have embarrassed the Chinese, who have sought to widen their diplomatic role in Africa and who maintain military and special diplomatic missions there.

Last May, a riot erupted in Tianjin when hundreds of Chinese hurled stones at Africans holding a noisy party. In June, several hundred African students demonstrated in Beijing to protest the incident. The Chinese blamed foreigners for instigating the Tianjin riot.

In 1983, a student from Burundi was attacked by workers at the Friendship Hotel in Beijing and had to be hospitalized. The workers were punished later.

Today, as the protesting African students marched toward the Moroccan Embassy in the eastern part of the capital, they chanted and sang.

"We are going back!" a chant leader called. "Africa!" the marching students responded. Other students punctuated the rhythmic chant with whistle blasts.

"You are not allowed to disturb security," a policeman declared over a loudspeaker mounted on a police car. "You should obey the traffic policemen's orders."

Presenting Grievances

"We want to go back to Africa," one student marcher said. "We come here in the name of friendship. If there is no friendship we cannot stay in the country."

The Moroccan Ambassador, Abderahim Harkett, who is the dean of the African diplomatic corps, was greeted

with cheers and chants of "Africa! Africa! Africa!" when he emerged from his embassy to meet the students.

Two students, one speaking English and the other French, presented the grievances of the demonstrators to the ambassador.

"Our main objective here in China, which is studies, is also troubled," a student told the ambassador. "The contents of this letter just manifest what has been happening in the past here in China. Why should we stay here in these universities to study when they don't want us?"

The leader said some African students were boycotting their examinations in protest against the letter.

"I know that this problem is not a new problem," Ambassador Harkett told the students. "It not only concerns African students but African diplomats. This morning I contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for them to insure to me that the security and dignity of African students is maintained here in China."