

# The History of Ethnic Minorities' Language Education in Inner Mongolia

Jin Xu<sup>1,\*</sup> Feng Wang<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>College of Literature and Journalism, Inner Mongolia University, Hohhot, Inner Mongolia 010020, China

<sup>2</sup>School of Literature, College of Humanities & Sciences of Northeast Normal University, Changchun, Jilin 130117, China

\*Corresponding author. [xjwynd@126.com](mailto:xjwynd@126.com)

## ABSTRACT

The paper adopts the research methods of literature, historical research, comparative research, and studies the history of minority language education in Inner Mongolia before and after the founding ceremony of the People's Republic of China. The paper draws the following conclusions: before the founding of the People's Republic of China, most of the Daur, Oroqen, Ewenki, and Russian people received formal ethnic language education were noble persons, and ordinary people can only rely on their families to realize intergenerational language inheritance. However after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the party and government promulgated a series of policies conducive to the development of ethnic education, and established policy and regulation system for bilingual education of ethnic minorities so that common people had the freedom to learn, use and develop the language and characters of the ethnic group, Chinese general language education has been widely implemented in the settlements of ethnic groups.

**Keywords:** ethnic minorities, language education, Inner Mongolia

## I. INTRODUCTION

Ethnic education is an important part of China's national education and an important content of China's ethnic work. Ethnic language is an important carrier of ethnic education. Every ethnic language has a natural connection with education. Ethnic language education includes two aspects: one is whether ethnic minorities have the right and obligation to receive language education of their own ethnic minorities; the other is the language in which ethnic minorities receive education in educational institutions at all levels. [1]

Inner Mongolia is the earliest minority autonomous region established in China, the birthplace of regional autonomy system for ethnic minorities in China, and also the main area where Daur, Ewenki, Oroqen and Russian ethnic minorities live. From the perspective of history, ethnic minorities in Inner Mongolia have historical traditions that value language education. However due to differences in the natural environment, social environment, and cultural traditions of the four ethnic minorities, their ethnic language education has shown different development track.

## II. HISTORY OF DAUR'S ETHNIC LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Daur has had a good tradition of emphasizing education since ancient times. The Qing Dynasty was an important transition period for Daur to transform from traditional social education to modern school education, and was also the time when various kinds of school education and private school education emerged. According to research, in the 34th year of Kangxi period (1695), the Morgen School was established under the recommendation of the General in Heilongjiang. Since then, the "Eight Banners" official schools had been established successively in the vast area where Daur people were active all over China. In the early years of Qianlong period, Hulun Buir School was established in the Hailar area. The Daur students mainly studied Manchu and Mongolian. Following after the "Eight Banners" official school, private school education became a complementary form of Daur school education. In the third year of Guangxu period (1877), the famous Daur poet Aola Changxing founded the first private school in Daur's history in Nantun, Hailar. Previously, there was no record of establishing schools and private schools in the Lingdong area of Hulun Buir. From the years of Yongzheng period, school children in Lingxi area of Hulun Buir were sent to attend schools in Morgen, Qiqihar, Aihui and other

---

\*Project: The National Social Science Fund's major project "Sorting and Research of Chinese Multi-ethnic Proverbs" (16ZDA178).

places. [2] After the establishment of private school in the Hulun Buir area, more than 20 Daur children with surnames of Guo and Ao were recruited in total. Aola Changxing also specially selected and hired excellent teachers from Qiqihar to teach here, focusing on teaching Manchu, Chinese and related literary works. In the second year of Xuantong period (1910), villagers of Moheertu in Hulun Buir Solon Banner built a stone school "stone-house school" which mainly recruited Daur and Ewenki students. The school followed the traditional Chinese teaching methods, and Chinese education mainly included teaching of "Three Character Classic", "Thousand Character Classic", "Four Books and Five Classics", "The Book of Songs" and "Tongjian Gangmu" in Manchu, followed by the addition in Chinese. Since then, with the decline of the Manchu language's social communication function, official schools or private schools in Daur living area gradually transitioned from Manchu-Chinese bilingual teaching to Chinese monolingual teaching.

During the period of the Republic of China, Chinese language was gradually popularized in Daur primary education in Hulun Buir area. In 1918, Guo Daofu and Fu Mingtai and other progressive youths jointly raised money and established the first new school in Hailar of Hulun Buir area, Hulun Buir Private School, which enrolled more than 100 students from the Daur, Ewenki, Mongolian and other ethnic minorities. The course focuses on Mongolian and Chinese, as well as Manchu. After that, Guo Daofu founded Moheertu Female School and hired teachers to teach Russian, Chinese and Manchu. In 1922, the Hulun Buir Mongol Banner Middle School was established. The teachers included Daur, Manchu, Buryatian and Russian from the Soviet Union. They taught Chinese, Manchu, Mongolian, Russian, and Buryat. Guo Daofu also used the Latin alphabet to create the Daur characters and tried to teach such characters in the middle school. In July 1927, the Northeast Mongol Banner Normal School was established, and Guo Daofu served as the principal. The school mainly recruited Mongolian and Daur young students from the three northeastern provinces and Inner Mongolia. School education created a large number of Daur intellectuals proficient in Manchu, Mongolian, and Chinese languages. They wrote books and set up theories in Manchu, Mongolian, and Chinese characters, and their achievements played a huge role in carrying forward Daur ethnic tradition and creating a new pattern of Daur cultural development. During the period of the Republic of China, a large number of bilingual and even multilingual talents appeared in the Daur ethnic group, which laid a solid language foundation for their future promotion to universities in mainland China and for overseas studies.

After 1931, Daur fell into 14 years of Japanese reign. The Japanese invaders vigorously promoted

enslavement education. One of the important measures was to set Japanese as the national language, and Japanese course as the main course of school education. Some elementary schools were even forced to adopt the uniform textbooks issued by the Puppet Manchurian Ministry of Education.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, bilingual education was widely practiced in schools in Daur communities. In 1966, the enrollment rate of Morin Banner school-age children reached over 95%, and 500 high school students were trained, of which 200 were Daur. [3] Since 1979, local preschool classes have also taught simple Chinese daily expression and Pinyin. After the reform and opening up, the teaching languages of Daur schools were mainly Daur language and Chinese language. Schools at all levels, especially elementary schools, took various measures to develop students' proficiency in Chinese language. Consequent, a large number of Daur people mastered the usage of Chinese language. The Daur living adjacent to Mongolian even mastered Mongolian; the phenomenon of dual language and language conversion of the Daur people presented a complex feature.

### **III. HISTORY OF EWENKI'S ETHNIC LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

Ewenki has a long tradition of family education. Young children receive education through elders telling stories, myths, proverbs, riddles, ballads, and various festivals. After they are seven or eight years old, they follow their parents to participate in productive labor and learn production techniques such as grazing and hunting. The school education of Ewenki started in the Qing Dynasty. In the 28th year of Kangxi period (1689), the Qing government established the Butha government office in Nenjiang to oversee Daur, Ewenki, and Oroqen people. The three ethnic groups were later unified into the Manchu Eight Banners. In the tenth year of Yongzheng period (1732), the Qing government transferred 3,000 Daur and Ewenki soldiers in Butha to Nantun and Xitun in Hulun Buir, which made Hulun Buir, Inner Mongolia, one of the main settlements of Ewenki people. Both belonging to the Manchu Eight Banners, Ewenki and Daur received the education from the "Eight Banners" official schools. The "Eight Banners" official schools aimed to train children of the Eight Banners, and advocated learning the Manchu language and riding and shooting. Therefore, it had become a common practice for children of the Ewenki Banner in the Qing Dynasty to learn Manchu language and perform riding and shooting. In the 8th year of Guangxu period (1882), the deputy Dutong Yamen of Hulun Buir built the "Eight Banners" Manchu and Mongolia School, enrolling children of Mongolia, Daur and Ewenki Banners. The education of Ewenki school in the Qing Dynasty mainly

aimed at the children of the noble families, adopting the Manchu-Chinese teaching mode, first teaching Manchu, and then guiding the students to learn Chinese characters in Manchu.

After 1931, elementary schools were established in Nantun, Huihe and other places, teaching Mongolian and Japanese, with less than 300 students. During the Japanese puppet reign, Yakut Elementary School was established to teach Japanese and promote slavery education. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Ewenki children generally got the opportunity of receiving education. In 1952, Ewenki elementary school was established in Qiqian, teaching in Chinese language. In 1956, Huisumu elementary school was built, and enrolled 150 children of Ewenki herdsman. In 1958, there had been nine ethnic primary schools of the Ewenki Autonomous Banner, with a total of 956 students, a 4.6-fold increase over the number of students in the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China. After the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, over the reform of education system, Ewenki Autonomous Banner designated Nantun No. 2 Middle School, Xini Hexi Middle School, and Ewenki Middle School as the ethnic middle schools, teaching in Mongolian. Among them, Ewenki Middle School mainly recruited Ewenki students, and the shortages are supplemented by other minority students. In 1989, central elementary schools were basically provided in the settlements of Ewenki people, with the number of elementary school students reached 4,160. Primary schools in farming areas teach in Chinese, those in pasturing areas teach in Mongolian, and some of them teach in Chinese. [4]

#### **IV. HISTORY OF OROQEN'S ETHNIC LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

Before the Qing Dynasty, the Oroqen had no schools, and hunting experience and hunting techniques were taught through social education and family education. The establishment of schools in the Oroqen region began in the 34th year of Kangxi period (1659). Like Daur and Ewenki, the early school education of Oroqen started in the Morgen region of Heilongjiang. One school was set up on each wing of the Morgen area, and provided with one teacher. Each officer of the new Manchu including Oroqen would select one pretty child from each school and teach them knowledge in the textbooks. Although Manchu had been introduced to the settlements of Oroqen people in Kangxi period, only a few Oroqen people mastered Manchu because most educated people were from noble families and Oroqen had no character.

During the period of the Republic of China, the Oroqen region promulgated the "General Regulations on Oroqen Ethnic Education"; wherein, the Article 36 emphasized the importance of education for the

development of Oroqen. From the 3rd year to the 20th year of the Republic of China, hundreds of Oroqen children received education. They not only learned Chinese language, but also learned Manchu and Daur in their communication with various ethnic groups. In addition, some Chinese history books and classical classics, such as "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms", "Water Margin" and "Dream of Red Mansions" began to spread among the Oroqen people. After the Japanese imperialists occupied the Oroqen region, several Oroqen elementary schools established during the Republic of China were severely damaged. The Japanese invaders set up several primary schools in the Oroqen settlements, teaching in Japanese and promoting enslavement education.

Before liberation, the socio-economic form of Oroqen was still in primitive commune system. After liberation, Oroqen was led to settle downhill, and the party and government helped Oroqen to develop education. The Nawen Middle School in Zhalantun first set up the "Oroqen Youth Class", which was later reconstructed into the Oroqen Primary School. In 1953, Oroqen Primary School was relocated, and the teaching materials were changed from the original Mongolian textbooks to Chinese textbooks. The Oroqen vocabulary reflects the production and lifestyle of hunting and is not compatible with the development of modern science and technology. Therefore, in the early days of the founding of the People's Republic of China, language problems once became an important factor affecting the Oroqen's academic performance. [5] Coupled with the lack of local Oroqen teachers, many Oroqen children encounter language difficulties as soon as they enter elementary school, which in turn causes learning difficulties. Since then, the Ewenki Autonomous Banner had actively carried out teaching reform experiments and conducted conscious, planned, and effective pre-school Chinese training for Oroqen children in the Oroqen settlement. In the two or three years after the establishment of Oroqen Banner, more than 90% of school-age Oroqen children scattered in mountainous areas were enrolled. By 2005, there were 601 students of the Oroqen ethnic group in Oroqen Banner, Inner Mongolia, accounting for 21.7% of the total number of students in the primary and secondary schools of the whole banner.

#### **V. HISTORY OF RUSSIAN'S ETHNIC LANGUAGE EDUCATION**

At the end of the Qing Dynasty and the beginning of the Republic of China, there were many Russian and Russian immigrants living in Ergun and Shiwei. Russian was one of the local languages. The Russian attached great importance to cultural education on their children. From the early 20th century to the 1950s, Russian immigrants opened a large number of Russian schools in the Hulun Buir region of Inner Mongolia.

From 1929, Russian immigrants started to run education locally. By 1949, they had successively run 16 primary and secondary schools. In 1948, the Federation of Russian Immigrants raised funds to run schools and successively established 15 schools in Ergun Banner, with a total of more than 1,200 students. Before 1945, Hailar, Manzhouli, Yakeshi, Sanhe and other places had had primary and secondary schools run by Russian immigrants so that their school-age children could go to school in time. Most of the teachers in schools run by Russian immigrants were Soviet Union young immigrants. At that time, Chinese and Russian descendants and some children of the Han ethnic group had studied Russian at Russian schools. In 1955, a large number of Russian immigrants returned to Soviet Union, followed by which the local Russian schools were closed. Many schools were changed to Han ethnic schools. Chinese and Russian descendants began to receive Chinese education and no longer learn Russian. At that time, there were about 1400 students in the schools. [6] After that, schools in the Ergun region intermittently organized Russian teaching. For instance, Enhe Russian ethnic town once offered Russian course. Parents and children were very interested in learning Russian, but such language course was always not provided due to lack of professional Russian teachers. In the 1990s, as the Sino-Russian border trade heated up, those with good family language education were recruited as Russian teachers, and some Russian who understood Russian became Russian interpreters.

In 1988, Enhe Ranch Middle School set up Russian language course. Russian teachers were hired from Labu Dalin. Each class took 4 lessons per week. The textbook used the middle-school Russian textbook published by the People's Education Press. The setting of Russian course played an important role in promoting the traditional Russian culture and Sino-Russian border trade. Later, due to the cold border trade and the restrictions on students studying Russian in the college entrance examination, it was difficult to offer Russian courses. Offering Russian language course was a characteristic ought to be possessed by the Russian ethnic school. But in 1998, after 10 years of Russian teaching, the Russian language course was ended locally and changed to English course.

For Russian in Ergun region, their study of their mother tongue mainly depended on intergenerational family inheritance. In villages of Ergun, every Russian or Chinese-Russian descendant family has elderly Russian-speaking people who became the best Russian teachers for their children. However, these elderly Russian people have limited Russian proficiency. They can neither write nor read Russian texts, but only use simple daily expressions in Russian. So, the language inheritance of Russian ethnic group had long been stopped early.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Ethnic language education is a teaching activity for ethnic minority area to cultivate and improve the language knowledge and ability of ethnic minority students in ethnic areas. The value of ethnic language education lies in realizing the ethnic language inheritance and cultural inheritance by language education. In recent years, the problems and phenomena of language education in ethnic minority areas have become the focus of controversy in policy making, academic discussion and educational practice. [7] As can be seen from the history of ethnic language education for ethnic minorities in Inner Mongolia, before the founding of the People's Republic of China, most of the Daur, Oroqen, Ewenki, and Russian people received formal ethnic language education were noble persons, and ordinary people can only rely on their families to realize intergenerational language inheritance. However after the founding of the People's Republic of China, especially after the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of Chinese Communist Party, the party and government promulgated a series of policies conducive to the development of ethnic education, and established policy and regulation system for bilingual education of ethnic minorities so that common people had the freedom to learn, use and develop the language and characters of the ethnic group, and the cultural heritage and essence of the ethnic group could be passed on and developed. In addition, Chinese general language education has been widely implemented in the settlements of ethnic groups, which has blocked the intergenerational transmission of poverty in ethnic minorities and also promoted the unification and integration among the ethnic groups.

## References

- [1] Wang Yuanxin. "A Course Book of Linguistics". China Minzu University Press. 2009, p.303. (in Chinese)
- [2] Ao Bilige. "Data Album of Daur Literature Master Aola Changxing". Inner Mongolia Cultural Publishing House. 2010. p.771. (in Chinese)
- [3] Liu Shihai. "Inner Mongolia Ethnic Education Research". Inner Mongolia University Press. 1989. p.201. (in Chinese)
- [4] Tao Zengpian. "History of National Education in the Northeast of China". Liaoning University Press. 1994. p.625. (in Chinese)
- [5] He Qun. *The Process of Settlement: Tragicomedy of Cultural Collision — Oroqen people society around 1958*. Manchu Studies, 2007(2). (in Chinese)
- [6] Wang Xihong. "Ethnic Education in Chinese Border". China Minzu University Press. 1990. p.606. (in Chinese)
- [7] AO Jun-mei QI Jin-yu : *A Study of China's Laws and Regulations to Promote Equality in Language Education—Based on a Text Analysis of Ethnic Education Ordinances*, Journal of Research on Education for Ethnic Minorities , 2018(5). (in Chinese)