

Language Conditions in Central Asian Countries and the Development of Chinese Language Education*

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Abstract—The language policies of Central Asian countries are characterized by text Latinization, language localization, and diversification of foreign language teaching. Against the background of the rising status of Chinese, it's necessary for Chinese teaching to establish and spread correct concepts, promote localized teaching in Central Asian countries, strengthen professional Chinese teaching such as business and tourism, and actively boost language exchange with Central Asian countries. The advantages of the inland provinces of northwest China shall be given full play to support the Chinese education in Central Asia.

Keywords—Central Asia; language status; language policy; Chinese international education

I. INTRODUCTION

As a newly independent country with a short history of nation-building, Central Asian countries have typical characteristics of multilingualism and multi-ethnicity, and they are still working hard to consolidate an independent nation-state. This important feature is prominently reflected in its language policy. Language policy is a national policy that is dominated by the government and has a strong influence on language use, language education, language development, and may further affect ethnic and diplomatic relations. In multilingual countries, language policy is an important means for the government to handle and regulate ethnic relations and multicultural relations. In the era of globalization, language policies also reflect the attitudes and processes of a country's external contacts and integration into the world system. Central Asian countries are also very sensitive to foreign language teaching issues. They have complicated attitudes towards language transmission and cultural exchanges in big countries. Therefore, we must comprehensively and accurately grasp the development and promotion of Chinese language education in Central Asia, and forecast possible problems and resistances. It

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is of utmost importance to study the language policies and language situation in Central Asian countries.

II. CHANGES IN MANDARIN LANGUAGE POLICY AND RUSSIAN STATUS

Tsarist Russia has had more than two hundred years of influence in Central Asia, so that Central Asian society has been almost completely Russianized. The Soviet government advocated the development of national languages in the early days, and during the Stalin era, it strongly promoted the reform of language Russianization and word Kirilization. From 1926 to 1940, various ethnic groups in Central Asia experienced Latinization and Russianization, and they finally completed the transformation from the Arabic alphabet to the Cyrillic alphabet. In 1938, the resolution of "Russia and Nationalities Must Learn Russian" finally established the status of Russian in educational standards, and stipulated that Russian is a required course for high schools. In 1961, in the 22nd National Congress of the Communist Party of Soviet, the position of the dominant language in Russian was stipulated in the "inter ethnic communication language". By 1989, the total population of the Soviet Union was 286.7 million, while the Russian-speaking population had accounted for more than 80%. Russian has become the de facto national language. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Central Asian countries continued to find a balance between the main ethnic language and Russian language, and adjusted their language policies. However, due to various factors such as history, ethnicity, religion, and economy, the language life in Central Asia presented a multi-level trend and language conditions showed more complex situations.

First, the national language status of the main ethnic language was established. After independence, Central Asian countries established the status of national languages by means of language legislation, language planning, reform of the language education system, and the tilt of resource allocation to promote the use of national language. All the five Central Asian countries stipulated the legal status of its main national language as the official language through *the Language Law* and *the Constitution*, and emphasize the nationalist representation function and the use (force) scope of the language while ensure the absolute priority of the official language in the fields of education, media, culture and public affairs. From the point of view of educational media language,

the number of national language learners in various countries is constantly increasing. For example, in Kazakhstan, in 2006/2007 school year, 57.9% of high school students attended Kazakh language school and 38.3% attended Russian school. Tajikistan stipulated that Tajik language is a required course for all types of schools in Tajikistan. Avista's information analysis portal quoted the news of Tajikistan news center of national inspection department, as saying that since 2018, all graduates of secondary and higher education institutions in Tajikistan must use Tajik language to complete the thesis. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have made "grasp of National language" a necessary condition for the presidential campaign. Countries have also initiated the Latinization reform of ethnic languages in order to replace the use of the Kiril alphabet. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have been fully implemented, and Kazakhstan has also made significant progress.

Policy formulation is often not based on reality, but it forces the reality to meet the goals. The formulation and subsequent adjustment of language policies in Central Asian countries are typical products of balanced realities and goals. "Language policy is struggling between two kinds of pressures. The one is the top-down pressure to maintain the status of native languages while the other is the bottom-up pressure to ensure linguistic diversity and the implementation of language rights."^[1] After referring to some of the scholars' views, Thomas Lisanto put forward a comprehensive framework for language policy and planning goals, including the dimensions of six language / literacy planning. The vertical dimensions include the three levels of "status planning", "acquisition planning" and "nomenclature planning"^[2]. The language planning of Central Asian countries basically completed the first dimension, and only then started to promote the latter two dimensions and they still have a long and hard way to go on the road of "nomenclature planning". Even if the influence of mutation factors is excluded, it will take a long time to truly realize the unity of the national language at the legal and practical levels and make up for the absence of language body.

The trend of the Central Asian countries in advancing the development of the national language and the reform of the words has not changed. In 2017, the words reform in Kazakhstan has attracted a great deal of attention from all parties, embodying to a certain extent the future development strategy of Central Asia as a whole. In April 2017, Nazarbayev published a signed article in the "Sovereign Kazakhstan", expounding the significance, role, and influence of the Kazakh reform, and proposed a requirement for timetable formulation, which offered a plan that start to train Latin-language facilitators and edit Latin-language high school textbooks from 2018. And it is planned that by 2025, all publications shall be used Latin. In May 2017, the chairman of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Education and Scientific Committee, Porat Abdouskisuoli, stated at the press conference that the special working group of Kazakh Latin alphabet reform has been established, and the reform that Kazakh text returns from Kirill to Latin letters has been officially launched. Although the word reform will need a process from the legal policy level to all-round realization, the prospects for the reform of Kazakh

Latinization are very optimistic because of the strengths of the Latin text itself, the historical basis of the use of the Latin alphabet by the Central Asian countries, and the decisive force of the national policy. The Latinization of the text is a major move by Kazakhstan to perform "de-Russianization", reflecting the urgent desire of Kazakhstan to accelerate its integration into the globalization process and heralding the direction of its cultural choice. In addition, in the process of cultural Latinization, Kazakhstan also plans to clear up some historical and literary works recorded using the Kiril alphabet as an expression of its historical outlook.

III. FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

Promoting linguistic diversity seems to have become the mainstream trend in the world. In 2003, the EU Commission's "Promotion of Language Learning and Language Diversity: A Three-year Action Plan for 2004-2006" document proposed an eclectic approach to the use of the language in the European Union. That is to say, the European Union won't be limited to a general language. All countries in Central Asia have adopted a strategy to promote multilingual development, firstly protecting the development rights of other languages from a legal perspective and adopting an equal and tolerant multilingual policy in principle. The new "Language Law" promulgated by Kazakhstan in 1997, the "Government Program for Language Functions and Development" in 1999, and the "National Program for the Role and Development of Languages during 2010-2020" all expressed the guarantee for the use power of various languages in Kazakhstan. In 2004, President Nazarbayev first proposed the concept of a "three-language policy". In 2007, in the State of the Union, "New Kazakhstan in the New World", Nazarbayev proposed to gradually implement "three-language policy" and he also stated that "Kazakhstan deserves to be regarded as a country with a high level of education throughout the world. The people of this country can use three languages, namely, Kazakh (national language), Russian (inter-ethnic communication language) and English (the language that smoothly integrates into the global economy)."^[3] We must vigorously develop national language, support Russian, and learn English. On October 18, 2013, Nazarbayev pointed out that young people must master three languages - Kazakh, Russian and English in the ruling party congress of "Light of the Motherland" while in the future, Chinese may also become a promising language. Article 4 of the National Language Law of the Republic of Tajikistan (2009) stipulates that "all nationalities and tribes residing in the Republic shall have the right to freely use their mother tongue".

A. Russian Status Has Declined to Inter-ethnic Exchange Language and Foreign Language

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there was a decline in Russian language. At present, the serious sluggish of the Russian economy and the relative decline of the international status have also led to the shrinking of Russian language on a global scale. The issue of National Language Law of the Republic of Tajikistan promulgated in 2009 did not refer to the legal status of Russian, which signaled a further

decline in the status of Russian. Russian is an inter-ethnic communication language in Kazakhstan. It is widely used in urban areas. In the public institutions, Russian is used together with Kazakh. Due to the high proportion of the Russian population, in 2001, Kazakhstan began to implement the "National Outline for Language Use and Development 2001-2010", explicitly stating that the use of Kazakh as a national language to handle official documents, and Russian language shall fully retain the language function of inter-ethnic exchanges and refuted the idea of canceling Russian in the public domain. In May 2000, Kyrgyzstan's new "Language Law" stipulated that Russian language as the official language would be protected by the state and state organs created necessary conditions for its development. In February 2003, it was once again confirmed that Russian is the official language. In April 2004, President Akayev stressed that Kyrgyzstan would firmly protect Russian, and Russian and Kyrgyz languages would always co-exist. At present, many universities in Kyrgyzstan teach in Kyrgyz and Russian. In 1992, Uzbekistan's Constitution eliminated the official language status of Russian and stipulated that Russian is only an interfamilial language. In the National Language Law, which was revised in 1995 and added in 2004, as a de facto inter-ethnic language, Russian has become a foreign language. In November 2012, the Ministry of Justice of Uzbekistan issued an announcement that since November 2, 2012, citizens can use two languages when registering births, deaths, conclusions and abolition of marriages, namely Uzbek (Latin) and Russian, which showed that Russian status have got some restoration to a certain extent. Of the five Central Asian countries, Turkmen was the most thoroughly of de-Russification. In 1996, Russian lost its legal status as an inter-ethnic language but just a foreign language.

There is no doubt about the legal status of the national language, but at the realistic level, due to the historical inertia of use, the strong influence of Russia, the imperfect national language rhetorical system, low standardization, lack of scientific and technical terminology, etc., national language is still unable to replace the social functions of Russian in some respects. A survey of the language use of Central Asian students at Northwest Normal University¹ shows that the ethnic groups in Central Asia are mostly bilingual or multilingual. Only 18% the students of non-dominant ethnic (mainly Donggan) can use their national language, but 100% of the respondents are proficient in the grasp and use of Russian. All students of different nationalities and ethnic groups tend to communicate with each other using Russian. Russia has implemented measures to establish Russian teaching institutions and provide financial support in Central Asia. Russian will continue to assume the role of inter-ethnic communication language for a long time to come, and will play an important role in employment, study abroad, and business.

¹ In June 2016, the author conducted a survey of the language situation of Central Asian students at Northwest Normal University. A total of 110 questionnaires were distributed and 96 valid questionnaires were retrieved. The survey targets included 92 Dungan students from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, 5 Kazak students, 8 Kyrgyz students, 2 Turkmen students, and 3 students from other nationalities.

B. English Maintains an Absolute Dominant Position

The desire for globalization of Central Asian countries is urgent. Therefore, the direction of Central Asian countries in advancing national language and English will not change. As one of the official working languages of the United Nations, English is a de facto universal foreign language. It is increasingly valued in Central Asia, and it has continued to develop steadily. The number of students studying has been growing year by year. In 2015, when Nazarbayev met with women representatives, he said that English learning should start from the first grade and all courses in grades 11-12 should be carried out in English. The development of English education in Kyrgyzstan is continuously improving. In addition to mastering the national language and Russian, English is the preferred foreign language for Kyrgyz. From kindergarten to middle school and university, English is always a required course for the school, and English majors have a wide range of employment.^[4] Uzbekistan has implemented a new foreign language teaching program since 2013, stipulating that English must be studied from the first grade and all teachers must be required to carry out English classes in accordance with the requirements. Moreover, and in order to accelerate the popularization of English, it is required that all subjects in the classroom shall be started from the greetings of "Welcome, Children", trying to build English into inter-ethnic language. Although when speaking of "linguistic imperialism," there are still some people pointing their finger at English, with the collapse of colonialism in the world, English is more responsible for the function of international lingua franca, and after the development of regional variations, most countries no longer set the limit on English education. What's more, Central Asian countries regard English as a necessary means to get rid of Russia's influence and integrate into globalization.

C. Turkish Status Has Declined

During the reign of Soviet Russia, Turkey and Central Asian countries were basically isolated. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Turkey first tried to strengthen the links with Turkic² of Central Asia and Azerbaijan through educational means. Carry out cooperative education with Central Asian countries and provide scholarship programs and other measures to support Turkish education in Central Asian countries. For example, it has launched some programs, such as the Great Students Exchange to attract Turks from other countries and regions for higher Turkish education in Turkey. The Turkish school in Central Asia was established in the 1990s. The courses of the school are generally established in the national language, Russian, Turkish and English. The schools are favored by parents because of the good conditions for running schools and the quality of education. At present, Kazakhstan has 29 Turkish high schools, 3 educational institutions jointly organized by Kazakhstan and Turkey, and 1 international high school. Kyrgyzstan currently has 16 Kyrgyzstan-Turkish high schools, 2 international high schools, and an international university. Turkish language policy makers have a positive attitude

² The term "Turkic" refers to Turks living in Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan. "Turkish" refers to the Turks of the Turkish Republic today.

towards the implementation of the language policy in the country. They believe that this policy will help strengthen the links between Turks in different countries and help develop the political and economic relations between Turkey and these countries. However, scholars pay more attention to this policy issue and believe that if sufficient scholarships and superior teaching conditions cannot be provided, students' resources will be lost (mainly flow to the United States and Europe), and private schools established by some Islamic religious organizations will surpass the the project of study abroad of Turkish government; Turkey's education system and standards are different from those of other countries, resulting in students' difficulties in adapting; in addition, Central Asian students also displayed problems such as the the conflict between "Russification" and Turkish religious life styles.^[5] In recent years, due to religious, political and other factors, Turkish schools in some Central Asian countries have been closed, and the Turkish language has experienced a declining trend in Central Asia. The Uzbek government closed six Turkish schools in 1999 and canceled all cooperation with Turkey in education in 2008. In August 2015, Tajikistan reorganized six Tajikistan-Turkey boarding schools in the country into national secondary schools. The Turkmen government's closure of Turkish schools began in 2011. After the Turkish incident in 2016, the last Turkmen--Turkish educational institution - the International University was reorganized as Turkmen Oguz Khan University of Engineering and Technology.

D. The Development of Chinese Is Promising

Central Asia is the "heart zone" of Eurasia. It is a necessary place for China to enter Europe via land and is the commercial throat on the economic belt of new Silk Road. According to the list of overseas investment enterprises published by the Ministry of Commerce, as of January 5, 2016, there are 900 Chinese companies in Central Asian countries. Among them, there are 362 in Kazakhstan, which expresses the largest amount, 202 in Uzbekistan, 174 in Kyrgyzstan, 126 in Tajikistan and 36 in Turkmenistan.³ With the expansion of economic and trade cooperation, the demand for Chinese language talents in Central Asian countries will surely continue to expand. The Chinese language teaching in Central Asia relies mainly on the Confucius Institutes and their branch teaching sites. As of now, China has 11 Confucius Institutes in Central Asia: 4 in Kazakhstan, 3 in Kyrgyzstan (with 12 Confucius Classrooms), 2 in Uzbekistan and 2 in Tajikistan. After several years of development, the scale of the Confucius Institutes in the four countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbek, and Tajikistan has been expanding year by year, and the forms and venues of teaching have been continuing to expand. The influence of the Chinese exam has also been progressing with each passing day accompanied by the increasing number of examinations and candidates each year. Turkmenistan also set Chinese and Japanese as the second foreign language in middle school and higher school education (before this, the foreign teaching language was English,

³ Information released by the "going out" public service platform of Ministry of Commerce Website of People's Republic of China. URL link: <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/>.

German, or French) in 2015. And six secondary schools in the capital of Ashgabad and ten secondary schools in other states. All set up Chinese language courses. What's more, some universities have set Chinese as a required course for non-linguistic students.

IV. DEVELOPMENT OF CHINESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

At present, it seems that the promotion of Chinese language in Central Asian countries has broad prospects. However, given the complexity of Central Asian geopolitics and culture, and in the face of strong pressure from Russian and British languages, it is necessary to continuously optimize the methods of Chinese language teaching to suit the needs of Central Asian countries. First of all, we must establish and promote the concept of our language communication in disregarding competition and valuing harmony.

Second, we must clarify the object of education and specific goals. We should conduct a thorough investigation of Chinese language needs in Central Asian countries, identify target groups, and provide language learning products that meet the needs of the market. As Chinese educators, it is necessary to consider not only the issue of language promotion, but also how to meet and improve the specific issues of Chinese teaching in Central Asia. Related parties should actively integrate and mobilize teaching and academic resources, optimize the work of the Confucius Institute in Central Asia, and actively send Chinese teachers and volunteers; it is also necessary to further optimize the level of Chinese teaching, highlight teaching features, cultivate corresponding faculty and achieve a good reputation; finally, we must deepen cooperation with enterprises and strengthen the teaching of professional Chinese language in trade, tourism, and traditional Chinese medicine. According to our survey of overseas students of Central Asia, more than 65.3% of students are motivated to study for employment, 27.1% of students are interested in Chinese and Chinese culture, and 83.1% of students enjoy learning Chinese while only a very small number of students say that they did not like Chinese very well but they still feel that Chinese has practical value in the future development of themselves.⁴ Therefore, Chinese language education has emphasized the teaching, business, travel, and application writing and other related aspects, which has been welcomed by Central Asian students.

Third, we will accelerate the localization of Chinese language teaching in Central Asian countries. "Localization" teaching means specifically the localization of teachers, teaching materials, and teaching methods, which is the guarantee of the sustainable development of Chinese teaching in Central Asia. There are certain problems in native Chinese education in Central Asian countries: the number of Chinese teachers is insufficient, the gap of ration between teachers and

⁴ In June 2016, the author conducted a survey of the language situation of Central Asian students at Northwest Normal University. A total of 110 questionnaires were distributed and 96 valid questionnaires were retrieved. The survey targets included 92 Dungan students from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, 5 Kazak students, 8 Kyrgyz students, 2 Turkmen students, and 3 students from other nationalities.

students is large, the team is unstable, and the structure is unreasonable; indigenously developed Chinese books and Chinese textbooks are scarce; teachers did not receive systematic training of reaching theory and methods of Chinese as a foreign language, so that they cannot perform well in classroom teaching. In addition, with the continuous increase in the number of Chinese learners, it is impossible for expatriate Chinese teachers to satisfy the needs of the target countries in Central Asia, and local teachers can play roles that cannot be replaced by external communicators and play parts that are difficult for external communicators to achieve. Therefore, to ensure that Chinese language education in Central Asia achieves lasting development, it is necessary to train qualified local Chinese language teachers in Central Asia and jointly develop and promote regionalized and nationalized Chinese language teaching materials with local teachers and hold timely Chinese teaching seminars or training to improve the teaching methods of local teachers, ensure the use of nationalized textbooks in specific targets, and make full use of the cultural background and educational traditions of the host country.

Fourth, encourage multiple forms of commercial operation. At present, the development of training programs for Chinese as a foreign language in some developed regions of China is relatively mature. Overseas Chinese training institutions are mostly concentrated in Europe, the United States, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. However, Chinese language training schools in Central Asia are still at a preliminary stage of development. The rapid development of China's economy is obvious to all. The countries of Central Asia have generally adopted a positive attitude toward the "One Belt and One Road" initiative, and are full of expectation for the economic benefits that this strategy may bring. In the future, the links between China and Central Asia will inevitably become closer. Therefore, the development of business Chinese training institutions in Central Asia still has unlimited scope. It should actively guide private capital to enter this market, encourage various forms of commercialized operation modes, and encourage Chinese international education students and Central Asian students to start businesses and they shall be provided intellectual and policy support.

Fifth, we should actively promote language exchange between China and Central Asian countries. "Language interconnection" emphasizes the two-way nature of language communication and learning. That is to say, it is necessary not only to stimulate the enthusiasm of Chinese learners along the route, but also to actively study and understand their language and culture. Language communication is a concrete embodiment of the promotion of equal two-way exchanges and actively introducing foreign languages is conducive to outward output. Bidirectional language learning indicates the principle of equality and mutual benefit, which is an effective way of expressing goodwill and eliminating suspicion. Language is often associated with sensitive issues such as national sovereignty, national rights, and cultural choices. Many countries have started to guard against the erosion of "linguistic imperialism". For example, countries in continental Europe are very concerned about the influence of English on their national language. Denmark and Sweden have established

government policies to strengthen the status of national language in 2002 and 2003 respectively to cultivate "parallel" languages ability (That is to say to protect the equal status of national language and English). As the newly independent and developing countries, the five Central Asian countries have relatively weak economic foundations and high political sensitivities. Under the goal of consolidating nation-states, they focus on ensuring the absolute status of national languages and reducing the importance of Russian, and to a certain extent, they have some misgivings and doubts for the Chinese promotion. Against such contexts, it is necessary for China not only to provide Chinese language education services to Central Asian countries, but also to take the initiative to learn the national language of Central Asian countries. We should welcome them to promote their languages and provide language education support for them.

Finally, we should give full play to the advantages of the inland provinces in northwest China and support the Chinese language education in Central Asia. Northwest China is adjacent to Central Asia and is located on the golden section of the Silk Road, which provides it with geographical advantages and cultural advantages of exchanges and cooperation with Central Asia. Meanwhile, it is also a major Muslim settlement in China. So, in terms of dialects, eating habits, and religious life, Northwest China has many similarities with Asian countries and the cost of studying abroad is low. In the Northwest China and Central Asia, there are seven transnational ethnic groups of Kazakh, Kirghizia (Kirgiz nationality in China), Tajik, Uzbek, Uygur, Russian, and the Donggan nationality (Hui nationality in China). The Chinese Sala nationality is closely related with the Turkmen people in Central Asia and they have natural advantages in language and cultural communication. Up to now, there are six Confucius colleges in Central Asia, which are undertaken by Lanzhou University, Xi'an International Studies University, Xinjiang University and Xinjiang Normal University respectively. Many colleges and universities in northwestern China have strong strengths in Chinese teaching and have accumulated rich experience. In recent years, a large number of Central Asian students have entered Northwestern provinces and universities to learn Chinese with good results of favorable teaching performance and social repercussions. The relevant state departments should formulate preferential policies for foreign students, and tilt the support of the five provinces in the northwest in terms of capital investment, study abroad policies, and project support, which are helpful effectively for the reduction of education and living costs of overseas students in Central Asia as well as the opening up of the northwestern region and the economy development, matching the implementation of the "Belt and Road" concept.

V. CONCLUSION

For Chinese language education aimed at Central Asian countries, it is necessary to formulate long-term goals and concrete steps to implement them step-by-step, improve the quality of education, and explore suitable Chinese language teaching models for Central Asian countries. The direct goal of Chinese international education is to achieve a high level of Chinese language teaching. However, the fundamental and

long-term target is to promote China's outstanding cultural traditions and profound humanistic feelings. Through the medium of Chinese, the world will be made known to China.

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