

On the Modernization and Culture Transmission in the Ethnic Minority Areas in Western China: A Case Study on the “Hu-Bao-E Districts”

Wurijimusi^{[a]*}

^[a]School of Political Science and Public Administration, Southwest University, Chongqing, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 21 September 2015; accepted 14 November 2015
Published online 26 December 2015

Abstract

The economic level in the Hu-Bao-E districts, which is considered as the Golden Triangle district in Inner Mongolia, is catching up with cities in the southeast coastal developed areas in China. Rapid economic growth laid foundations for the progress of the public culture in cities. The cultural development in the Hu-Bao-E districts keeps up with the directions of the global culture and follows the steps of the mainstream culture in China. However, careful observation shows that the Mongolian culture is disappearing. The traditional culture of the ethnic minority cannot be out of date for today's modern city life; and the social development is usually delayed. These factors contribute to the fact that the more developed the cities are, the more quickly the traditional culture of the ethnic minority is collapsing.

Key words: Modern development; Public culture; The national culture

Wurijimusi. (2015). On the Modernization and Culture Transmission in the Ethnic Minority Areas in Western China: A Case Study on the “Hu-Bao-E Districts”. *Studies in Sociology of Science*, 6(6), 108-111. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sss/article/view/8061> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/8061>

INTRODUCTION

With the shock of economic globalization and foreign culture, the culture of the ethnic minorities in China has been discarded in the cultural transition and reconstruction. Generally, people have the following worries. Firstly, in

the time of the rising of globalization, people doubt the necessity for China to develop the culture of the ethnic minorities and propose to conduct Chinese and foreign languages education directly. Secondly, for individuals, people are afraid that taking too much time learning languages of the ethnic minorities will hinder them from entering into the mainstream culture and getting a better prospect in the mainstream culture (Liu, 2009).

1. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF CULTURE AND ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT IN THE HU-BAO-E DISTRICTS

1.1 The Current Situation of Economy Development in the Hu-Bao-E Districts

The Hu-Bao-E district consists of Huhehot, Baotou and Ordos. As the capital city of Inner Mongolia autonomous region, Huhehot is the political center. Baotou, as the leading city, is the biggest city and the biggest industrial city in Inner Mongolia. And Ordos is the newly emerged city in the prairie. Due to the rapid development, the Hu-Bao-E districts have become the most active economic circle and have been praised as the Golden Triangle district in Inner Mongolia.

Hohhot-Baotou-Ordos region is rich in mineral resources with 70% of world rare earth mineral reserves and 1/10 of coal and iron mineral resources in China. The region also has vast reserves of other minerals which are high grade and of various types. With abundant water supply from the Yellow River and matching conditions for natural resources, industrial mining is promising. Baotou is renowned for rich metallic minerals and rare earth minerals in Bayan Obo are treasures among all mineral resources nationwide. In this area, 74 elements have been discovered and there are 14 types of mineral

resources. Ordos, a vital coal base in China, possesses 1/8 of total national coal reserves and 80% of national high-quality steam coal reserves. These resources are of strategic importance to a lasting and stable gas supply in Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and neighboring cities and the sustainable and coordinated development of China's oil industry.

Statistics from the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region Bureau of Statistics shows that Gross Domestic Product value of the autonomous region reached 1,680 billion yuan, while the economic aggregates of Hohhot, Baotou and Ordos topped 1,016.9 billion yuan, accounting for 60% of the total volume in the autonomous region. Specifically, the GDP value of Hohhot was 271.039 billion yuan with a 10.0% annualized growth rate; the GDP value of Baotou was 350.3 billion yuan, growing by 9.3% annually; and the GDP value of Ordos was 395.59 billion yuan, increasing with an annualized rate of 9.6%.

1.2 The Current Situation of Culture Development in the Hu-Bao-E districts

In the 21 century, the Mongolian nationality is facing with the same difficulties as other minorities, that is, on the one hand, to integrate into the mainstream society through learning the mainstream culture (interlanguage, the language of the mainstream culture or the official language) and the mainstream knowledge (the knowledge of the mainstream society, the national ideology and the mainstream lifestyle); on the other hand, to acquire and preserve their own culture and tradition (Fu, 2005).

Tremendous knowledge has been accumulated and particular knowledge systems have been established by the ethnic minorities in China, including the Mongolian, through the vicissitude of the ancient dynasties and the effort fighting against the harsh natural environment. Those knowledge and experience cultivated the minorities generation after generation. School is a significant site for knowledge transmission and the essence of education is exploring a better way for human beings to fit into and take advantage of the environment through the knowledge transmission. Moreover it is the society that formulates the standards for the success and failure of school education and that is the key point for the survival of the minorities. Duties have been bestowed upon the Mongolian ethnic education enterprise to inherit and promote the Mongolian culture.

At present, what impedes the transmission of the ethnic minority culture is the tasks of modernization and the pursuing of GDP. The buildings with Mongolian totem and the Mongolian costume are rare today and have been replaced by the modern skyscraper, Gucci, LV, etc.. The cities are full with hundreds and thousands of people and various dialects except the Mongolian language.

It is through education, specifically home, school and social education the indispensable factor, the inheritance and development of the ethnic minority

culture realized. Some part of culture, including lifestyle, costume, convention, etiquette, thinking mode, etc, can be transmitted through social activities, home education and daily life. However, as a well-organized knowledge system, a better transition and development of the culture of the minority can only be achieved through systematic school education. At present, in Inner Mongolia, most Mongolian students leave their parents and homeland-the cradle for the Mongolian culture as early as the age for primary school, and receive modern education in towns and cities. Under such circumstance, the school education and the holistic social background stand at an important position.

Among the 280,000 Mongolians in Huhehot, there are no more than 50,000 people who can speak the Mongolian language. In Baotou, there are 85,121 Mongolians among whom only 20,000 people speak the Mongolian language. And in Ordos, 40,000 out of 176,912 Mongolians have already lost their ability to speak the Mongolian language. In conclusion, the modernization level and the population who lost their ability to speak the Mongolian are positively correlated. During the fifteen 15 years between 1980 and 1995, 1,409 Mongolian elementary schools and 142 Mongolian middle schools were closed; 25643 elementary school students and 8,663 middle school students transferred to non-Mongolian school; and the proportion of students, who were taught in the Mongolian, among the Mongolian students reduced to 23.7% in elementary schools and 20.2% in middle schools (Xing, 2009).

2. CAUSES FOR THE DEGENERATION OF THE MONGOLIAN CULTURE IN THE HU-BAO-E DISTRICTS

(a) Social background is the crux for the assimilation of the minority culture. There are several causes contribute to the facts that the social functions of the minority language is decaying and the minorities tend to learn and use Chinese for personal development so that the number of the minorities who speak both Chinese and the minority language or only Chinese increases. First, the process of globalization and regional economic development is accelerating; second, the roles of the internet and the news media have been popularized; third, the reforming and opening up policy has stepped into a deeper stage, the West Development Strategy has been carried out, and the minority districts have got promotion; forth, the government promote the role and function of the Chinese language.

(b) The high expectation of parents urges them to choose a shortcut for their children. Many children are sent to the Han nationality kindergartens by their parents for a better adaptation to the city life. Even 70%-80% of the teachers who are undertaking the ethnic minority education and have already cultivated generations of ethnic minority students sent their own children to the

Han nationality school expecting them for a better future. And those children do fulfill their parents' expectation and are admitted by the prestigious universities in Beijing. Another concern for the parents accounts for the following university education. In the Hu-Bao-E districts, only a few students from a small number of schools, like High School affiliated to Inner Mongolia Normal University, have the ability to be admitted by the universities in Beijing. While most of the other students from the ethnic schools, even those top students in the college entrance examination, are admitted by the local universities. Chances to go to the key universities out of Inner Mongolia are rare. Situations is getting worse in university. For some of the Mongolian students, they are found more often in parties, KTV, bars than in the self-study room. Some even rare attend the class. A satire goes like this---- I have to return the knowledge to the teachers, so when the tuition fees can be paid back to me? And when these students graduate and become teachers themselves, they have nothing but confusions.

(c) The employment circumstance for the Mongolian graduates is severe. Along with the rapid development of the society, graduates employment issues have become the focus of the society. Under the present situations where students from the 985 and 211 universities still have difficulties in finding a good job, the condition for the Mongolian graduates in local universities is even more harsh. The weakness and barrier for the Mongolian graduates are illustrated as follows. What goes first is the limitation of language. Facing with the Han nationality students, even though they do not have problems in daily communication, Mongolian graduates' ability of understanding and using Chinese is not competitive, not even the foreign language. The next problem is that their understanding of the professional knowledge and skills is at a superficial level, which put them in a disadvantageous position in the competition of personal ability. Mongolian students are easy to find that they cannot express what they have learnt thoroughly in China, which is a restriction for their career in the cities. Besides, excessive passion and the spirit of solidarity in the nature of the Mongolian people turn out to be a worry for companies. When they see their clansman stuck in troubles, the Mongolian people will give him a hand whether they know each other or not. In other words, the severe realities of the competition on employment urge them to attend the Han nationality school at the beginning.

3. COUNTERMEASURES FOR THE INHERITANCE AND PROMOTION OF THE ETHNIC MINORITY CULTURE IN THE HU-BAO-E DISTRICTS

(a) Providing chances for excellent Mongolian students to study in key schools in cities. The standards according

to which the Mongolian students be admitted to key universities out of Inner Mongolia should be lowered. And classes for minority students should be set up in key high schools in other major cities in China. The limitations for college entrances are broken, and more Mongolian students could study outside Inner Mongolia. Equipped with good education and supportive learning atmosphere, those Mongolian students would be as competitive as the Han students or even more excellent than them. The future of the Mongolian culture shines only when the Mongolian talents gain achievements in every walks of life. These students acquired the Mongolian language in a very young age; thus even though Chinese are employed in their study in university, their ability to understand and use the Mongolian language does not lose. And people like these meet the requirements of the rapid social progress and are the backbones for the prosperous prospect of the ethnic minority culture.

(b) Issuing policies encouraging the Mongolian language education. Economic and employment supports will encourage Mongolian students to study at the ethnic minority schools. Free education from elementary to high schools, a cut for tuition fees in university, awards for students who are admitted by the key universities, bonus for ethnic minority students who get the CET4/6 certificates and the increase of fellowship in ethnic minority school would stimulate students to work hard. And for the top talents, chances to study at the top universities and scholarships should be given. Employment opportunities for minority students should be increased so that they get a position in the society, which is a sign that ethnic minority education can also ensure a promising future. The reinforcement of the use of the Mongolian language in public places would make the Mongolian people feel comfortable and convenient, for example, signs in the Mongolian character in street, public square, market, etc, and counters providing services in the Mongolian language in hospital, bank, police office and supermarket, etc..

(c) Providing trainings for teachers. The teaching quality is one of the concerns that parents are worried about. The educational background of the teachers and the rigid text books makes it difficult to get satisfactory results. To increase the overall quality of the teachers, the ethnic minority schools are encouraged to recruit graduates in key universities. Besides, interviews, examinations and trails at different levels should be laid out to optimize the recruitment procedures. Short-term contracts, at the end of which the teachers could choose to stay or leave, should be signed. And for those who gain a good reputation in teaching practice could be offered with the permanent appointment opportunities. Last but not least, professional ethics should be an even more important aspect for the evaluation on teachers. Punishment shall never be suspended once inappropriate

behaviors are found, such as children from maltreatment, harassment, bribery, etc..

CONCLUSION

The living environment and the language environment for the Mongolians are being assimilated by the Han nationality. Step by step, it is converting into a society where the culture of the Han nationality takes the dominant role. These factors lead to the current situations that the Mongolian language is losing its social functions and its positions. In a society where competition is getting fierce and where the market economy which emphasizes personal value and development is approaching, the languages of the ethnic minorities is undergoing a transformation with the weakening of social functions and the declining of learners. Under such circumstances, duties are bestowed upon the Inner Mongolian ethnic minority education enterprise to inherit and promote the distinctive knowledge system of the Mongolians. Generally speaking,

the culture of the ethnic minority is transmitted through its language which is a critical component as well as a carrier of the ethnic minority culture. Moreover, the society, the individual family and the schools should work together to further development.

REFERENCES

- Liu, L. (2009). *On the transmission of the Mongolian culture in ethnic minority elementary and middle schools in Huhehot—A case study on the Hohhot Mongolian School, the Mongolian elementary school in Xingan road, and the High School Affiliated to Inner Mongolian Normal University*. Hohhot, China: Inner Mongolian University.
- Fu, G. J. (2005). The economic strategies on the half farming half grazing areas in Inner Mongolia. *Journal of Inner Mongolia Normal University*, 34(6), 76-81.
- Xing, H. (2009). *Theories and practices of ethnic minority culture—essays on the first forum on the ethnic minority culture*. Beijing, China: The Ethnic Publishing House.