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**Facing the Decline of Minority Languages:  
The New Patterns of Education of Mongols and Manchus**

**Abstract**

This paper describes the different education systems for Mongols and Manchus. It aims to discuss the contexts in which minority language education emerges beyond the official system. Case studies on these nationalities investigate its varying impact on their culture and society.

**Keywords:** Mongols, Manchus, minority languages, education in China

**Opening remarks**

Although Sinitic languages are predominant in the People's Republic of China (PRC), there are minority languages spoken in different regions. Economic, political and sociological factors have significant impact on the non-Chinese language users. Many of them abandon minority language and become monolingual in Chinese. The decreasing utility of minority languages brings some of them to the edge of extinction. The decline of these languages has been noticed by both the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Deng Xiaoping's "reforms and opening" policy officially allowed ethnic minorities to practice their traditions and develop bilingual education.<sup>1</sup> Governmental language policy is often full of contradictions<sup>2</sup> but it is difficult to find a proper model which would take into account the need of integrating minorities into the society as well as preserving some forms of minority culture. There is also some room left for the non-governmental

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<sup>1</sup> Szykiewicz 2012: 187; Teng, Wang 2001: 443.

<sup>2</sup> According to Professor Teng Xing: "it is like trying to sell the cow and drink the milk" (鱼与熊掌不能兼得); Teng, Wang 2001: 443.

initiatives for developing their own idea on ethnic education.<sup>3</sup> Worth mentioning are initiatives which aim to preserve or revive minority languages. Given the dominance of the Chinese language it is quite a challenge, as they lack the full functionality of Mandarin in some fields of science and even daily life. The Mongols struggle to preserve their mother tongue as something more than the second language. The Manchus, whose language is on the edge of extinction, accept its role limited to existence only in narrow spheres of life. An aspect of learning Mongolian or Manchurian as a second language will also be mentioned.

The changes in China after the Cultural Revolution gave many possibilities for minority elites to reconstruct their national cultures and relearn ethnic languages. These movements were first observed in the 1980s among some Mongolian descendants of the uprooted generation of the Cultural Revolution. Later they became popular among many young Manchus. A common idea associating language with ethnicity influenced activists of Manchurian nationality to promote alternative education for the purpose of consolidating the descendants of the banner-men.

This article is a result of the Author's field research conducted over numerous visits to the PRC between 2005–2012. Another important source were documents such as schoolbooks and curriculum standards. The analyses were supported by scientific studies and information found on the Internet.

## 1. Selected issues in minority education

The main purpose of formal education in the PRC is to integrate the ethnic minorities with the Chinese society.<sup>4</sup> This goal is being achieved by the acculturation of the minorities, which might lead to their assimilation. Every educational system is an “ethnic education” because it reflects ways of thinking and values of the nationality which created it. The PRC's system of minority education is not always adapted to the minority culture and does not facilitate passing its own culture to the younger generation. As it is enforced and imposed by the alien ethnic group, it can lead to assimilation of the minority groups.<sup>5</sup>

The largest system of bilingual education is created by the state, especially the local governments in the autonomous units. Each of the provinces and autonomous regions have room for creating its own system within the general frame provided by the Ministry of Education. That is why Mongols in autonomous units across China do not study according to the same curriculum. The education in minority languages can be provided by various bodies. They can be divided into two groups: governmental and non-governmental. Supplementary education can be provided by both the local governments and by NGO's. Worth mentioning is that the difference between these structures is often very slight as some

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<sup>3</sup> Traditional education, such as within the family or religious institutions will not be discussed here.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Education 2010: 22–24.

<sup>5</sup> Teng, Wang 2001: 8–10.

of them are in fact grassroots initiatives.<sup>6</sup> In case of Mongolian the most important is the official system. Education in the Manchurian language is mainly the supplementary one.

When a community quickly loses its ability to use minority language the education system should be adapted to the changing situation. It is not surprising that the system of the official education is usually not preoccupied with re-teaching a minority language. Its limitations and shortcomings in this aspect are noticed by some of the minorities' elites. They use their political power or traditional social institutions to create special-purpose governmental institutions or establish (registered or not) NGOs in order to fill this gap. Initiatives aiming to preserve or revive the minority language are not popular among Mongols in the regions with the official system of bilingual education but are developing outside autonomous units in cities like Beijing, Mukden (Shenyang) or Chengdu. As the majority of the Manchus are Chinese-speakers, the NGOs-organised "Manchu classes" have been becoming popular among this nationality.

## 2. The Mongols

The Mongols in China are an interesting case because their bilingual education system is most likely to be the largest and the most complex in the PRC. This system includes not only primary and middle schools but also universities and kindergartens. Mongolian schools can be found not only in Inner Mongolia but also in different Western and Northern regions of the PRC. They offer basis for further studies in the Republic of Mongolia and Japan (which has become quite popular among Mongols in China). This increases the utility and prestige of the Chinese-Mongolian education, making it attractive to the Mongolised communities of other ethnic minorities (Evenks, Dagurs or Manchus).

The Mongolian native speakers are under social and economic pressure to choose the Chinese education. Scientific and even daily life terms often have no equivalents in Mongolian. At the same time technical and natural sciences or economics are believed to give better job opportunities than humanities. Public and private sector both have much more offers for those who are fluent in Chinese.<sup>7</sup> The alumni of Mongolian schools, if they do not get a position in a Mongolian institution, face a greater pressure from their Chinese-speaking workmates.<sup>8</sup> In the last three decades the mass migration of Han Chinese to the ethnic areas, urbanisation and changes in language policy<sup>9</sup> on central and local administrative levels intensified the sinicization processes. All these factors taken

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<sup>6</sup> Perinova 2005: 11, after Frolic.

<sup>7</sup> "A teacher of Chinese language in my middle school could not even pronounce the tones properly. [...] My few years younger workmates like to show off with their perfect Chinese." Buyandelger, female, age 34, civil servant, Bailinmiao, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Female, age about 25, interpreter, Tongliao/Höhhot, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> According to a Mongolian civil servant from Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in the 80-ties about 80% of the governmental documents were bilingual and 20% were issued only in Chinese. Nowadays the proportions are reverse. Hühbaatar, male, age over 50, civil servant, Hühhot, 2009.

together resulted in decreasing of utility of the Mongolian language. Han Chinese usually do not speak minority languages<sup>10</sup> and are not willing to learn them, even when they live in or govern the minority area.<sup>11</sup> It is also worth mentioning that in the 1980s in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region the Mongolian language was in the curriculum of some Chinese schools but was abandoned in the following decades. These circumstances influence the perception of its utility and prestige. According to Mongols, the most important reason why they lose bilingualism in favour to Chinese is “the [Han-dominated] environment”.<sup>12</sup> An incentive of an upward mobility in social hierarchy, which results in prestige or “social face” (面子), is also an important factor. Some students<sup>13</sup> mention college-entrance exams (高考)<sup>14</sup> which are regarded as a step forward to upgrade their social status. It is rare to find a Mongol saying that loosing skills of speaking Mongolian in favour of Chinese was a “progress”<sup>15</sup> (as many Han Chinese would see it). What the Author was told by some Mongols, until recent years job opportunities for Mongolian-school graduates were similar to those who used to study in Chinese schools. It was probably connected with the changing circumstances in the last two-three decades. In the 1980s there were different proportions among ethnic groups, especially significant over-representation of the Mongols in the local government bodies;<sup>16</sup> lower level of education (also among Han Chinese) and lower requirements for employees; wider use of Mongolian in daily and public life; many Mongolian speakers not only among Mongols; lower social mobility. Since that time the attitude to the bilingual education has changed. The common belief is that a new-born child has to go to a Chinese school to be able to compete with Han Chinese on the labour market in the future.<sup>17</sup> It is linked with a belief that among six million people who are registered as Mongols, only in Inner Mongolia almost two million can speak only Chinese.<sup>18</sup>

Despite of the increasing number of minorities who choose the monolingual path of education, there are some reasons for bilingual education. First of all, it still provides a chance for people who have poor command of Chinese to receive education. At the same time it gives a chance to extend qualifications in a native language. Despite the usually

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<sup>10</sup> The Author often was praised for her ability to speak a minority language, while the „Han Chinese live all their life in the region and can not say a single word.” Soyolbaatar, male, age over 50, scholar, Hôhhot, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Szykiewicz 2012: 191.

<sup>12</sup> On the question “Why children of Mongol-speaking parents cannot speak Mongolian?”, the usual answer is: “Environment is not proper” (“环境不好”). It is often repeated by Mongols in Inner Mongolia, Manchuria and Beijing.

<sup>13</sup> Female, age over 20, student, Beijing 2012.

<sup>14</sup> The ethnic minorities have cut-point handicap for entering the university. Even though, the competition is severe and the pressure is high, especially when the best universities do not need to respect this lower point ceiling.

<sup>15</sup> Jankowiak 1993: 42.

<sup>16</sup> Op. cit. 1993: 36.

<sup>17</sup> Mongols aged 30–50, Hôhhot and Xiliin Hot.

<sup>18</sup> Mankhan 2009.

mentioned fondness for the culture, history and language,<sup>19</sup> the reason for this choice might be pragmatic. In many areas of economic activity bilingual specialists are required.

Another problem with bilingual education is an administration-lead evolution of the minority language. The Mongolian language was shaped by the culture of this nationality. Translation of the schoolbooks from Chinese into Mongolian without cultural adaptation resulted in a situation, where the textbooks written in Mongolian language reflect the Sinitic ways of thinking. This makes them difficult to be understood by those, who are not familiar with the Chinese culture.<sup>20</sup> A good example could be a series of *Encyclopedia of Chinese Children*<sup>21</sup> which consists of ten volumes divided by topics. These textbooks were prepared by the cross-ethnic committee and they were supposed to be suitable for different national minorities in the country. The problem is that the platform of exchanging ideas for very different nationalities is the Chinese language and culture. Han Chinese naturally imposed the Sino-centric ideas which were understandable for the educated representatives of the minorities who are used to leading the cross-cultural dialogue.<sup>22</sup> Scholars from Han, Mongol, Uygur, Kazak, Hui, Tibetan, Manchurian and Korean ethnic groups had to find a consensus on the contents of these books. The results did not reflect intellectual and esthetical needs of any of these ethnic minorities. They rather shaped them to an artificial standard. “Although the minorities’ ways of thinking are much closer to Han Chinese than to Europeans, obviously they are far from being identical”.<sup>23</sup> Instead of writing various textbooks for different ethnic groups, the practice is to create education programmes for a “synthesised minority”.

Most of the textbooks link technological development with Han culture. It evokes positive connotations due to the state ideology of “scientific development” (科学发张观).<sup>24</sup> The minorities in contrast to Han Chinese are “backward” (落后), all what they can do is to sing and dance.<sup>25</sup> To catch up with socio-economically “advanced nationalities” is in fact to achieve the Sinitic cultural formation.

The mentioned-above elements can be linked to the result which is Mongolian-Chinese-Western blend in education which might create chaos in the ways of thinking. It may cause some disruptions in the process of passing the Mongolian culture to the younger generation. In an overloaded school curriculum the Mongols have to learn not only about the great Chinese civilization and common knowledge but also Mongolian ethical values. As the general education has to bring similar standards to various nationalities in China, the schoolbooks bring confrontation of the dominating Sino-centric stereotype with Mongolian national stereotype.<sup>26</sup> The nationality with a unique culture, which at certain

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<sup>19</sup> Jin 2008: 94–105 and other surveys.

<sup>20</sup> Szykiewicz 2012: 191–193.

<sup>21</sup> Compare with: Xu 2007a, Xu 2007b, Xu 2007c.

<sup>22</sup> Szykiewicz 2003: 358, Szykiewicz 2012: 191–193.

<sup>23</sup> Szykiewicz 2003: 358.

<sup>24</sup> Fewsmith 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Xu 2007b: 6–21.

<sup>26</sup> Szykiewicz 2003: 356.

periods had an empire, inside these books is “reduced” to just one of the Chinese ethnic minorities. The Yuan state has become a Chinese empire<sup>27</sup> with Mongolia as its province. There is nothing mentioned about Mongols outside China, especially the 20<sup>th</sup> century Mongolian state. What is more, not only states founded by the Northern nationalities were incorporated into Chinese history. Many elements of non-Chinese nationalities’ culture merged into “Chinese civilisation”. A good example could be Beijing Opera<sup>28</sup> which was described as an important heritage of Han nationality.<sup>29</sup> Nothing was mentioned about its beginnings in Yuan (Mongolian) period. Most popular form of the Beijing Opera was invented by the court of the emperor Qianlong of Manchurian dynasty and incorporated musical traditions of the Northern nationalities. This idea is connected with the new Sino-centric vision of the minority cultures. According to the official state doctrine the 56 national groups merge into a “Chinese Nation” (中华民族). This concept seems to be accepted by the Han Chinese but it is often rejected by the members of minorities. The policy of absorption of traditions and history of different peoples into Chinese civilization brings frustration to minorities’ elites, as they consider it as stealing their heritage. The Sino-centric school curriculum became an impulse to write their own textbooks which could be used in official and alternative education.

Mongols are active in creating their own educational proposals. Though the textbooks should include the general guidelines from Beijing, curricula reflect Mongolian values as well. Even when these proposals, like *Selected works of the Secondary School Pupils*,<sup>30</sup> are not used as the basic textbook, they can help to create a model for modern Mongolian patriotism. Many of Mongolian intellectuals have noticed the rapid changes of their culture and are aware that these processes are unstoppable. Some of them are focusing on creating a base for preserving the Mongolian language. Others notice its decline, so they are trying to back it up for the future generations.<sup>31</sup> There are also activists, especially outside the autonomous units, who focus on “bringing back” the Sinicized Mongols to the Mongolian culture.<sup>32</sup> They are working with these people who did not study in Mongolian schools, so they lack even the basic knowledge of their culture, not to mention the language. The descendants of the uprooted (“lost”) generation of the Cultural Revolution preserved the national consciousness – but not much more than that. Some of them want to “return to the roots” (at least in some aspects). There are also people who in their childhood were not interested in the “backward” minority language. After growing up they changed their attitude towards it. These people do not know written Mongolian. Often they even lack

<sup>27</sup> Xu 2007c: 40–41.

<sup>28</sup> In the described *Encyclopedias* the term referring to Beijing Opera is *Begezing si*, which is incorrect term in both languages, Chinese (京剧 *jingju*, seldom 京戏 *jingxi*) and Mongolian (*Begezing dayuri*). It is some sort of hybrid, most likely derivated from *jingxi*, which would not be clear to Mongols, and therefore 北 *bei* was added. In result, the term is not fully adapted to Mongolian culture but at the same time it broke the structure of a traditional Chinese name.

<sup>29</sup> Xu 2007a: 40–43, Xu 2007b: 62–63.

<sup>30</sup> Bökedelger 2012.

<sup>31</sup> For example Prof. Nasan-urt of Inner Mongolian University or Prof. Büren from Fuxin in Liaoning.

<sup>32</sup> For example in Mukden or Chengdu.

any skills in using the spoken language. There are books written for them in Chinese but focusing on introducing the basics of Mongolian history and language.

A good example is a reader *Textbook for the History of Mongols*<sup>33</sup> edited by the Department of Education of Fuxin Mongolian Autonomous County. It is focused on introducing inter-Mongolian relations, including Mongols outside China. Unlike the typical history schoolbooks for Mongols in China, it is focused on Mongols, especially the imperial period (Chapter II and III). After the collapse of the Mongol Empire another period is Northern Yuan (北元) with no reference to Ming dynasty (Chapter IV). The era of Manchurian domination (Chapter V) gives an opportunity to describe tribal-administrative divisions of Mongols, history of Volgan Kalmuks, spreading of Lamaism, etc. Quite interesting is an introduction to the modern history (Chapter VI) where characters like anti-Chinese leader Demchugdongrub (De-wang)<sup>34</sup> or an anti-feudal and anti-Chinese icon in one person – Gada Meiren<sup>35</sup> were described in the same manner as the founders of Communist Party, such as Ulanfu or Hafengga. Description of the opposite sides in this inter-Mongolian conflict is quite neutral in undertone. The authors even mentioned events in 1911–1921 in Outer Mongolia which lead to the foundation of the People’s Republic of Mongolia.<sup>36</sup>

The important change is that this textbook is written in Chinese with Mongolian words in brackets added for the names. It reflects a change which is using Chinese as a leading language and leaving Mongolian as a supplementary one. It also illustrates a paradox when some textbooks written in Mongolian transmit Chinese “cultural content”, while others are Chinese in “form” and Mongolian in “substance”. This way or another, it brings development of cultural hybrids, which could lead to assimilation but it might turn out to be the only way to preserve and develop Mongolian culture in the context of its vanishing cultural foundations.

Another example worth mentioning is the textbook which in the 1980s was supposed to be used to teach Mongolian to Han Chinese<sup>37</sup> as well as to teach Mongolian to Sinicized Tūmeds. This type of books is now re-edited<sup>38</sup> and used to teach Mongolian to Chinese-speaking Mongols across China. This way of Mongolian language teaching becomes popular in cities and peripheral (for Mongols) regions with relatively small and Sinicized populations.

The Mongolian supplementary education does not play an important role yet. Mongols in China still have important communities of people who are Mongolian native speakers. The urbanisation, migration of Han Chinese to ethnic regions, closing the Mongolian schools in communes and moving them to counties – all these factors put Mongols into

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<sup>33</sup> Wu, Lian, Zhang 2008.

<sup>34</sup> Wu, Lian, Zhang 2008: 140–144.

<sup>35</sup> Wu, Lian, Zhang 2008: 146. For discussion about Gada Meiren compare: Henochoicz 2013, Jankowiak 1993: 46.

<sup>36</sup> Wu, Lian, Zhang 2008: 120–132.

<sup>37</sup> *Textbook* 1981.

<sup>38</sup> Adiya 2009.

a Han-dominated environment. For generations brought up in such conditions it will be hard to preserve the language. It does not mean that they would quit being Mongols – this might even strengthen their national identity.<sup>39</sup> What possibly might happen in the future with many Mongolian communities could be observed on the example of the Manchus.

### 3. The Manchus

For centuries of their rule over China, Manchus adapted Chinese culture for governing the empire<sup>40</sup> and they have abandoned their language, traditional way of life and some customs. This deep acculturation of the banner-men<sup>41</sup> did not necessarily change their perception of the Chinese culture as “alien”.<sup>42</sup> The number of elements of their cultural system is decreasing but the key element of their identity,<sup>43</sup> which is the Qing Empire, remains unchangeable.

Officially there are less than a hundred native speakers.<sup>44</sup> Even when there are users of the written language (Sibe, Dagurs, etc.)<sup>45</sup> it does not radically change the situation. As most of the Manchus became monolingual in Chinese, the stereotype of their complete Sinicization occurred. The recent research of scholars like Mark C. Elliott<sup>46</sup> or Michael Lickorish<sup>47</sup> proved that many elements of Manchurian culture remained but they were kept in secret to avoid persecutions during the 20<sup>th</sup> century unrests. Those among the older generation who can speak Manchu are hesitant to use it in front of strangers. Not only the foreigners<sup>48</sup> came across this issue. Even the efforts of some young Manchus who tried to find the last native speakers to learn from them the vanishing oral tradition<sup>49</sup> turned out to be futile. Some of the old Manchus do not want to pass the language and traditional crafts, regarding them as “useless”,<sup>50</sup> even to their descendants. This might be the result of the experiences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when they were hiding their identity. The changing attitude towards national minorities in China, especially Manchus, has an impact on the modern banner-men. Although in the Chinese culture there is no “gentry” in the European sense, the banner-men gained the social respect and prestige. There is an

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<sup>39</sup> Heberer 2003: 64.

<sup>40</sup> Elliott 1999: 36–37.

<sup>41</sup> *Qi ren, gusai niyalma*. Elliott 2001: 13.

<sup>42</sup> Especially among those of Jurchen origin.

<sup>43</sup> The “national mythological complex” for Manchus would consist of Qing and Jin empires. Compare with: Gawlikowski 1983: 26–31.

<sup>44</sup> The users of the Sibe language were not included.

<sup>45</sup> Tulisow 2004: 12.

<sup>46</sup> Elliott 2001: 16–25 and others.

<sup>47</sup> Lickorish 2008.

<sup>48</sup> For example Manchurist Jerzy Tulisow or the Author.

<sup>49</sup> Most famous examples are singer Song Xidong (宋熙东 or Akesu) and blogger Xuke (许克) who travelled to rural areas aiming to collect songs and legends in Manchurian.

<sup>50</sup> Describing them as 过去的东西 – ‘the past things’. Nie Henghui, male, age over 40, merchant, Dalian, 2011.

increasing number of Han Chinese who want to benefit from it by searching their true or fake Manchurian roots. The former servants of the banner-men register themselves as Manchus whereas at the same time an unknown number of the actual banner-men descendants are unaware of their origin.<sup>51</sup>

Many Manchus are not satisfied with the status of “Chinese gentry” and they want to form a nationality being something more than an administrative entity.<sup>52</sup> It turned out that the descendants of banner-men form very active communities. All around China they have established “Manchu classes” to study the language of their ancestors. Their teachers are usually Manchus, Mongols, Dagurs or Sibe. In this situation for both – teachers and students, Manchurian is usually not a mother tongue. That is why the Manchu-readers are constructed in the same way as the mentioned before textbooks for Mongolian-learners.<sup>53</sup> They consist of dialogs in Manchurian, translations and comments in Chinese and transcription in the Latin alphabet. More advanced courses contain pieces of literature or chronicles.

Various governmental bodies are meant to promote Manchurian culture. If they were created in top-down political processes, the local communities show their distrust which can be an obstacle in fulfilling their mission properly. Some of them are considered as being just a “dummy”. When the foundation of specialised governmental bodies are results of grassroots initiatives, they seem to serve better to minority communities but they might also receive very little help from the government units of the higher level. Non-governmental bodies are the most difficult to trace, especially if they do not register.

In Mukden, the historical Manchurian capital, there is a Shenyang Manchu Association (沈阳市满族联谊会) which is active in promoting Manchurian culture. The Association publishes books about Manchurian folklore and history and its activities are run independently from the local government.<sup>54</sup> Among the various classes of the Manchurian language and calligraphy some turned out to be a success.<sup>55</sup> Beijing has the biggest and

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<sup>51</sup> One can come across numerous family stories when by an accident a young person learned the secret of their “noble” provenance which resulted in changes of ethnic identity. Liu “Sumulu Ethun”, male, 21, student, Fryeburg, 2012. Others make efforts to find a “Manchurian granny” to gain profits from being registered as national minority. Some of them even join the different Manchurian associations together with the banner-men. In the context of “changing identities” there are some similar stories in Polish cities when the passing away generation confess their Jewish origin, which sometimes brings change in national or religious identity of the younger generations. Following the current fashion, members of middle and higher class search for a prove of being a “chosen nation”, study Yiddish or Hebrew, join organizations promoting Jewish culture, etc.

<sup>52</sup> It may be interesting to quote a conversation which Author had with a young banner-man. The Author: „First you [the Manchus] were the banner-men who became a nationality, who changed into gentry.” The young banner-man: “We used to be a gentry that became a nation.” Uya Jalan, male, age 32, music composer, Beijing, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> He 2009.

<sup>54</sup> During the ritual of exchanging gifts, the head of the Association presented two historical books to the Author with a comment: “The first one is of our [local] government and is not very interesting. The second one is written by our Association and it is much better”. Na Guonan, elder gentleman, head of the association, Mukden, 2011.

<sup>55</sup> Among the participants was an elderly lady who used to know some Manchurian. She brought her grandson to the course to study with her. Zhan.renren.com (10.10.2012).

most wealthy Beijing Daxing Regency Manchu Association (北京大兴御苑满族联谊会). However, many young banner-men prefer less institutionalised organisations. They meet in private houses, hutongs or hired classes to teach the Manchurian language to one another. Usually, there is no admission fee for the courses, sometimes it is required to have one's own textbook. These type of courses are held at China's People University (中国人民大学), where volunteers rotationally teach people of different age and profession. Among about 30 students one was a Han Chinese and one a Korean from Manchuria, all the rest claimed to be Manchus. There are also some classes at the Central University for Nationalities (中央民族大学) which are outside the official academic curriculum. In this case, free admission is only for those who are registered as Manchus.<sup>56</sup>

The Manchurian organizations are found far from the North-East China – in the South (Guangzhou, Shanghai, Taiwan) or in the West (Gansu, Sichuan). The Chengdu Manchu-Mongolian Studies People's Committee (成都市满蒙人民学习委员会) promotes these cultures far beyond Sichuan province. The Mongolian branch is very active among Mongols in Yunnan and Guizhou and it cooperates with Mongols in other parts of China. This institution plays an important role in teaching Mongolian and Manchurian to Chinese-speaking members. The Committee organises Manchurian language classes at the South-Western University for Nationalities (西南民族大学) and other places. Chengdu Mongols are monolingual in Chinese but in Sichuan there are some communities of Mongols<sup>57</sup> who speak some archaic dialects.<sup>58</sup> The Manchu-speaking people are over 80 years old and the number of students is relatively small. The language issue is important but it is not a key element of the identity for this post-Qing community. The Committee shows the continuity of traditional social structures which manifest themselves in running projects promoting minority languages, cultures and history. There are many other places where Manchurian is taught in Chinese<sup>59</sup>, for example: Harbin, Changchun, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou, etc.<sup>60</sup>

The role of the Internet in spreading and coordination of various initiatives across the state and even beyond it is difficult to overstate. Sites like [manjusa.com](http://manjusa.com) or [manchus.com](http://manchus.com) provide information about events in which Manchus (and sometimes Mongols) are involved. The [zhan.renren.com/manjugisun](http://zhan.renren.com/manjugisun) is an information platform about formal and informal Manchu classes all over the PRC. The Manchus abroad use websites such as Manjuboo in Japan or Facebook<sup>61</sup> to connect with their co-patriots.

<sup>56</sup> Singer Song Xidong took there some classes.

<sup>57</sup> The communities registered as Yi (彝族) or Mosuo (摩梭) of Naxi (纳西族).

<sup>58</sup> Alatan 2004.

<sup>59</sup> There is one known exception which is Yanji (延吉, Kor. Yeong-gil). In this region with a majority of ethnic Koreans there was an instance of a Manchu reader written in Korean.

<sup>60</sup> See the map in the Appendix.

<sup>61</sup> There are 1600 Facebook users who declared in their profile to know Manchurian. This number is not reliable but it allows to trace the rise of Manchurian nationalism. For example, one resident of Harbin in his self-presentation wrote: "We are not Chinese nation. We are Manchus! Nikan [Manj. Chinese] robbed the territory of our Qing empire, again Chinese trample Manchus, pressing them to use the name "Chinese nationality". Since the Xinhai Revolution we, Manchus, suffer unbearable humiliations. Let's eliminate the Chinese dogs, destroy

There are also some educational projects which are included in the official system. There are primary schools: in Ilan Boo (三家子) in Heilongjiang or newly opened Xinbing Eternal Tomb Manchurian Primary School (新宾永陵满族小学) in Liaoning. Bilingual education is provided in Jilin City's Wulajie Manchurian Middle School (吉林市乌拉街满族中学) in Jilin. There are also some classes in Jinzhou Beizhen City's Manchurian Higher-Middle School (锦州北镇市满族高中) in Liaoning. On the academic level Manchu studies are provided by: South-Eastern Normal University (东北师范大学) in Jilin, Heilongjiang University (黑龙江大学) in Heilongjiang and Central University for Nationalities (中央民族大学) in Beijing. The Manchurian scholars of Heilongjiang University and Central University for Nationalities lead by Prof. Zhao Aping launched in the 1990s an educational project in Ilan Boo. Ilan Boo is probably the last place with a population of Manchurian native speakers, so it is suitable for creating a good environment for learning and using Manchurian.<sup>62</sup> The native speakers are relatively young and there are 18 people who use it as the first language. These 18 people are paid 200 yuan every month for passing the language to the youngest generation. This quasi-family language education is continued in primary school where until the fifth grade Manchurian is the basic language. At the beginning there were no qualified instructors. In 2006 Meng Shujin became the first teacher. He was a farmer with no formal education. All of his qualification was an oral "certificate" from his grandmother – Shi Junguang. Ms Shi is told to have the best knowledge of the Manchurian spoken language, so her statement on Meng's pronunciation was indisputable. In 2012 Meng concluded his pedagogical education in Heilongjiang University.<sup>63</sup>

The perception of the Ilan Boo project among Manchus was rather positive. The participators and many observers were stressing the need of maintaining the language.<sup>64</sup> They found it important as a tie connecting them with the Qing Empire which is a significant element of their identity.<sup>65</sup> An ability to read Manchurian literature was described as discovering a „forgotten world hidden behind Manchu language”.<sup>66</sup> The most important reason for learning Manchurian seems to be practising the rituals and communication with the ancestors.<sup>67</sup> Today's shamans often do not understand the lyrics

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Chinese-nikan heritage, revive our Qing Empire! The Qing Empire!" (我们不是中华民族！我们是满洲人！尼堪人夺走了我们大清的领土，再次以中华之名把我们满洲人压在他们尼堪人的脚底下，我们满族从辛亥革命至今受了不少的耻辱。消灭狗中华，打击汉遗尼堪人，恢复我满洲大清帝国！daicing gurun!). (Bayin Niman, male, age over 30, Harbin, 2012).

<sup>62</sup> 富裕县拯救三家子村满语文化 [Save the Manchurian language culture in Sanjiazi village in Fuyu County].

<sup>63</sup> *Much ado about Manchu*.

<sup>64</sup> 满语的活化石 “伊兰亭” [Manchurian language living fossil "Ilan Boo"].

<sup>65</sup> With some exceptions of those, who prefer to stress their Jurjen lineage.

<sup>66</sup> 满语背后隐藏着一个已经被遗忘的世界。

<sup>67</sup> An essay about the need to learn Manchurian by blogger Jin Zi begins with the following words: "In a nightmare, I heard as if my mother was crying, I seemed to see the ancestors are in front of me, cursing in rage their bad descendants, I deeply feel that the shaman's spirits whispered to me oracles, and all this made me feel sad, ashamed – I did not understand what they were saying." (在惶惶梦境中，我仿佛听到了母亲在啜泣，我似

of songs that they perform during the rituals.<sup>68</sup> Young people can not accept it, and they want to use the Manchurian language for the proper performance of the rituals.

The Manchus involved in the Ilan Boo project put a lot of effort and used many resources but the effects do not leave much hope for preserving the spoken Manchurian language for the next generations. Even Prof. Zhao Aping admits that these efforts seem futile, as most of the children abandon Manchurian after finishing the primary education. This does not prevent her from continuing works on this project. The failure would prove the intuition that the bilingual education does not seem to work well in Han dominated environment. From the same reason the projects of revitalisation of the Manchu language cannot succeed, as they are conducted according to patterns of another national group. It is thought of as a foreign language with the use of Chinese as a reference point.<sup>69</sup>

### Conclusions

The Mongols used to regard the Manchurian language as a prestigious one. Even now it is regarded as elitist, especially among Khorchins.<sup>70</sup> Their personal attitude towards former rulers of China is complicated. Today's Manchus regard Mongols as brothers who preserved „living culture and language”. Among the students in the Manchurian class, some also start to learn Mongolian (or at least declare that they do it). There are even some who quit studying Manchurian in favour of Mongolian.<sup>71</sup> For these people Mongolian seems to be more useful as it is a bridge to an existing traditional culture. As for the Manchus – “Manchus and Mongols are one family” (满蒙一家) – the mental distance is not far. The Mongolian language can be a substitute of their own language, therefore it can offer a language “attribute” for the reviving nationality. The Mongols cooperate with the Manchus mostly outside the minority units where they do not have any access to the official bilingual education and where the Sinicization process is widespread. In this situation they try to build together the educational system beyond the official one. These experiences might become useful for the Mongols in the future, when the Sinicization process is more advanced.

Though the Manchurian language is most likely to become extinct and Mongolian might share its fate in the further future, there is a chance for preserving the minority language as a second language. For Mongolian it would mean degradation, for Manchurian it is a chance to maintain any kind of existence. These processes have already begun and the Manchurian currently receives a status of the language that is close to Latin or Esperanto. It is even something more than that as it is used for strengthening the traditional

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乎看到了祖先正在面目狰狞的怒骂不肖后人,我深深感受到萨满神灵正给我喃喃神谕,而这一切,这一切令我感到惨然、羞愧的是——我竟不明白他们在说些什么。) [jirjing.blog.sohu.com](http://jirjing.blog.sohu.com) (10.10.2012).

<sup>68</sup> *Manchu shaman's lost world*.

<sup>69</sup> 世界满语活化石——三家子 [World Manchurian language living fossil – Sanjiazi].

<sup>70</sup> Ulaanbaatar, male, age over 50, dentist, Höhhot.

<sup>71</sup> Female informant, age over 30, Beijing, 2012.

social structures which were preserved by the banner-men. In case of Mongolian, in the peripheral regions it actually became a second language used only in written form<sup>72</sup> or in very narrow spheres of life.<sup>73</sup> Until this process is fulfilled, there is an unique opportunity to observe the changing status of the language inside the ethnic group as well as in a cross-ethnic exchange. When the cross-generational language transition fails, preserving or returning to a language becomes no longer a sign of backwardness but rather an intellectual luxury.

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<sup>73</sup> Mōngke, male, age about 40, economist, Mukden, 2011.

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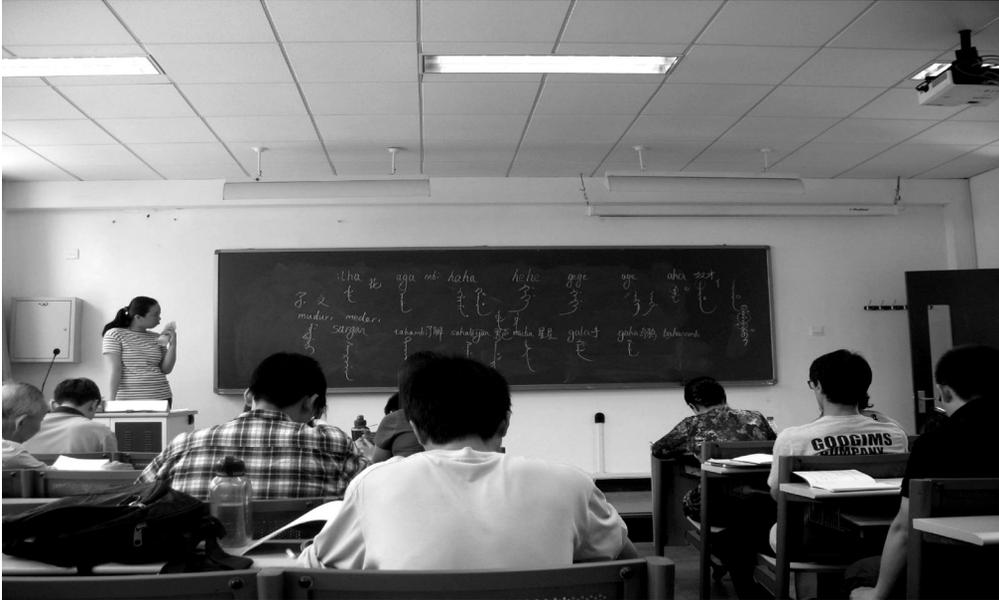
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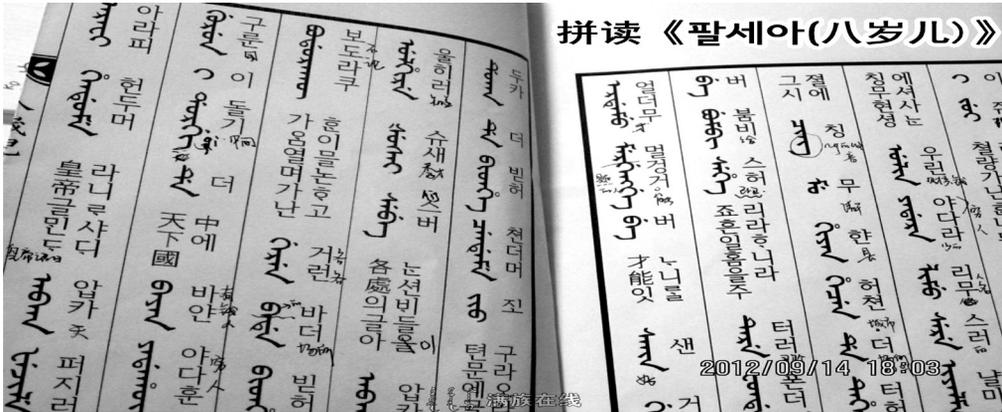
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Appendix



Manchurian class in Peoples' University of China, Beijing (Author's archive)



Manchurian reader in Korean from Yanji, Jilin (Renrenzhan.com/manjugusun)