

China's policy towards minority languages in a globalising age

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Introduction: is globalisation a threat to the future of minority languages?

One of the main linguistic issues facing the world in the 21st century is the extinction of a substantial proportion of the world's languages. The technological, social, cultural, and, economic trends of globalisation seem to contribute towards the endangerment of languages. The age of globalisation refers to the current times of growing interdependence and interconnectedness of the modern world. People around the globe are more connected to each other than ever before through increased international communication and travel. Information and money flow more quickly than ever across countries. Goods and services produced in one part of the world are increasingly available in all parts of the world. This phenomenon has been titled 'globalisation.'

The 'free market' ideology of globalisation appears to demand cultural and linguistic homogenisation leading to the extinction of minority languages around the world. Some six thousand languages are spoken today throughout the world. This number was probably higher in the not so distant past because many languages have become extinct due to various reasons, including globalisation. The process of extinction is still going on all over the world. The threat to linguistic resources is now recognized as a worldwide crisis. Hale (1998) and Woodbury (1998) believe that only 600 out of the 6000 plus present languages are fully secure. Krauss (1992) believed that a language with fewer than 10,000 speakers is probably at risk. This is a crude generalisation, but it may nonetheless be useful as a first approximation. Nearly 60 percent of world languages are already endangered. The Percentage of languages with fewer than 10,000 speakers was higher in North (78%) and South America (77%), and Australia/Pacific (99.5%) compared with for example, in Asia (53%) (Nettle & Romaine, 2000).

Language loss is a natural phenomenon in the development of society and language. Nationalism is one of the main reasons why small groups come to be conceived as minorities. Nationalism and nation building often favour linguistic assimilation to make sure that every member of a community is able to use the dominant language. This results in transferring prestige to, and asserting the superiority of the dominant language. In extreme cases, linguistic minorities are given little or no rights. All nation-states, despite their political ideology have persecuted minorities in the past, and many continue to do so today through the policies designed to assimilate indigenous people into the dominant culture.

Moreover, the world languages do not all have the same function, the same vigour or the same prospect. According to Romaine (2002, p.1) 'Fewer than 4 per cent of the world's languages have any kind of official status in the countries where they are spoken... most languages are unwritten, not recognised officially, restricted to local community and home functions and spoken by very small groups of people...' The future of a vast majority of languages is in doubt, and more and more efforts are being made to document, describe or even preserve them. Languages, like some animals, can be regarded as endangered species.



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Globalisation is accelerating extinction of minority languages around the globe. 'Competition between languages in a globalising world is considerably more fluid and languages are more susceptible to change now than in a less technologically advanced world' (Maurais & Morris, 2003, p. 5). Thus, the number of languages will disappear much more quickly than before. The arrival of new types of media: Internet, radio and television satellites forces language adoption of technical norms for facilitating the transfer of computerized data. Standardisation of new technologies could have consequences for the destiny of many world languages. New information technologies make most minority languages excluded de facto from the World Wide Web. They 'are first and foremost handicapped, because they do not represent sufficiently profitable markets for the software giants' (Thomas, 2002, p. 2, cited in Maurais, 2003).

Global economic influences are prompting the young to leave isolated villages for the urban area in search of better lives. Thus the native languages and cultures will be abandoned for the sake of social mobility. The age of globalisation confers privilege upon those prestigious language speakers. It inevitably elevates the widespread languages over others.

Nowadays, the more and more tightly integrated world generally favours the spread of English. English is a strong language, accepted, and used as the medium of international communication. English is being accused of threatening the existence of other languages. But this is not unique to English. The French authorities are still being accused of suppressing minority languages within their borders, and so are Spain, Norway, and several other states (Jóansson, 1996).

The future of the world's major languages is at stake in the age of globalisation, including the 100 or so tongues officially recognized by governments or sub-national regions, such as the constitutional languages of India and the languages of the Russian nationalities. Most of the thousands of sometimes struggling minority languages are in danger of extinction. In this context, how do multicultural countries respond to the issue of endangerment of minority languages? In this paper, I attempt to present an overview on China's policies aimed at preserving minority languages. The paper is divided into three sections. Following this introduction, in section one, I have provided details on how loss of minority languages is an issue in the age of globalisation. In section two, I have given an overview on China's attempts towards protecting endangered minority languages. In section three, I have provided few recommendations for the Chinese government to further protect the minority languages from extinction and these are followed by conclusions to this paper.

International attention to endangered languages

The sheer scale and speed of language shift and loss have led to a heightened interest in the fate of the minority languages of the world in the last two decades. Linguists started making language loss as the focus of major international meetings. For example, in the conferences on maintenance and loss of minority languages, held in Netherlands, in 1992, the conference on language endangerment held at Dartmouth College in the United States in 1995, and the conference on language rights in Hong Kong in 1996, international attention was drawn into the issue of extinction of world languages.

Ever since its creation in 1945, UNESCO has recognized the importance of cultural diversity. One of its missions has been to encourage mutual knowledge and understanding between people using every means of mass communication. In 1993, UNESCO set up the 'Endangered Language Project', a programme to record the world's disappearing languages before their last speakers died. At the Stockholm Inter-governmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development in 1998, cultural diversity was perceived both as a basic building



block of the 'emerging global civic culture' that required global ethics and values, and as a major source of social energy for individual nations.

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity 2001, places diversity at the heart of the development process understood not only in terms of economic growth, but also as a means of achieving a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual existence (Article 3). This Declaration also firmly links cultural diversity to a respect for universality, indivisibility, and the interdependence of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Article 4). Cultural rights are identified as the right to freedom of expression and the dissemination of one's work in the language of one's choice, the right to good education and training, and the right to participate in the cultural life of one's choice and to conduct one's own cultural practices with respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of others (Article 5).

UNESCO's Thirty-Second General Conference in October 2003, decided that the matter of the protection of the diversity of cultural contents and artistic expression should be the subject of an international convention, and invited the Director-General to submit a preliminary draft of such a document to its next session in 2005.

In October 2003, UNESCO's General Conference adopted two standard-setting measures that emphasise the potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to contribute to the promotion of freedom of expression, linguistic, and cultural diversity, education, and access to information, particularly information in the public domain. The Recommendation adopted by this conference promotes multilingualism. It recognizes that language is the foundation of communication between people and is also part of their cultural heritage. For many, language has far-reaching emotive and cultural associations and values rooted in their literacy, historical, philosophical, and educational heritages. The harmonious development of the information society is therefore, only possible if the availability of multilingual and multicultural information is encouraged (UNESCO Publications for the World Summit on the Information Society, 2003).

Need for protecting world/minority languages

There are several arguments advanced for protecting minority languages around the world. They can be summed up as follows:

First, language is a valuable resource. According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, language is the carrier of the knowledge and experiences accumulated by a nation, or a group throughout history. It conveys the core values of the community and builds ambition and spurs invention essential to strengthening the aspirations of people. Language structures provide a means of perceiving the world of which the speakers are unaware. The loss of a language is the permanent, irrevocable loss of a certain vision of the world, comparable to the loss of an animal or a plant. Traditional knowledge may indeed linger even after a native language is lost, but the richness and diversity of that knowledge cannot survive even one generation of language loss (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). When a language disappears, there is likely to be a serious loss of inherited knowledge and cultural legacy to the nation and to the world as well.

Second, language is an essential element of a person's identity that should be respected. Language spoken by somebody and his or her identity as a speaker of that language are inseparable. Languages are dependent on the users; they cannot be seen separately. They are robust markers of group membership. You are what you speak. Sir James Henare, a Maori leader, expressed such sentiments about the Maori language by saying that 'The language is the life force of our Maori culture and mana ['power']. If the language dies, as some predict, what do we have left to us? Then, I ask our own people who are we?' (Nettle & Romaine, 2000, pp. 22-23).



Third, languages constitute an irreplaceable resource for understanding the work of the human brain. Languages provide us with information about the way the human brain processes thoughts. Thus, preserving the thousands of human languages that currently exist may help scholars to understand how language works. Linguists need to study as many different languages as possible if they are to perfect their theories of language structure, and to train future generations of students in linguistic analysis. 'If every linguistic system finds a slightly different way for individuals to conceptualise, reason, communicate, be expressive and so on, then the loss of one way takes away a building block that might allow us to understand the process more clearly' (Wright, 2004, p.228). One consequence of declining use of a language is a loss in its complexity and richness of expression.

Fourth, linguistic and cultural diversity embodies Linguistic Human Rights (LHR). The overwhelming majority of endangered languages are an indictment of the history of injustice towards minorities and their languages (Skunabb-Kangas, 2000). Owing to deficient education programs and urbanisation unequal distribution of access to literacy and language study for minority languages ends with unfair competition in the globalised 'linguistic market'. Minority languages and cultures are stigmatised as being traditional, backward, narrow, and inferior. They are marginalised, deprived of resources for their development and use. Freedom to name your people is one of the essential human rights. Cultural, linguistic, and other human rights should act as a strong corrective to the market economy. LHR are situated both on an individual and collective level, supporting free identification with the mother tongue and allowing a group to exist and to reproduce its language and culture. They are 'necessary rights' to maintain linguistic and cultural diversity. Human rights are guarantees of linguistic and cultural diversity. The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. It implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those of indigenous peoples. Multilingualism is a cultural and personal fortune, and in many countries it is necessary for the protection of human rights. Skunabb-Kangas (2000) states that maintenance programmes will become natural human rights only when the state and educational authorities stop being a problem by looking at minorities as if they were the problem. Linguistic diversity is essential to freedom of thought and the survival of modern people. Linguistic Human Rights support the existence of minority languages and they should be used prevent further loss of linguistic and cultural diversity in the world.

China's attempts to protect minority languages: multinational and multilingual China

The People's Republic of China is a united multi-ethnic country. So far, 56 ethnic groups have been identified and recognized by the central government. The population of various ethnic groups differs greatly. While the Han ethnic group has the largest population, the other 55 ethnic groups with relatively small population are customarily referred to as 'ethnic minorities.' According to the fifth national census, conducted in 2000, the population of all the 55 ethnic minority groups totalled 104.49 million, accounting for 8.41 percent of the total population of China. People of all ethnic groups in China have made important contributions to the creation of a unified multi-ethnic country and the creation of the time-honoured Chinese civilisation, as well as Chinese historical progress (Facts and Figures: Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China, 2005).

Modern Standard Chinese is the most widely spoken of all Chinese languages or dialects. It is the language of Hui and Man ethnic groups, in addition to the Han majority, which belongs to an independent branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. The speakers inhabit a huge area of the mainland, running diagonally from the extreme southwest to Manchuria in



the north and along the entire east coast north of Shanghai. Although Chinese speakers write the same language, there are some specific dialects mainly including Mandarin, Wu, Min, Yue (commonly known as Cantonese), and Hakka (Kejia). The Beijing-based standard dialect is known as Modern Standard Chinese or Mandarin. This dialect is the standard for the national language, which is officially called Putonghua in China, Guoyu in Taiwan, and Huayu in Singapore. To increase linguistic and cultural homogeneity, the government is making an effort to standardize and spread the national language.

The other 53 ethnic groups speak over eighty languages (such as Tibetan, Uighur, Kazakh, Mongolian, Korean, Zhuang, Yi, Miao, Buyei, Dong, Hani, Bai, Dai, Li and Yao), spoken by around 6% of the population, and 30 of them have written forms. Most of them belong to the four different language families including Altaic, Sino-Tibetan, South-Asian and Indo-European language families. 'Among them, more than 20 languages are used by less than 1,000 people and on the verge of extinction, said Sun, president of the Chinese Association on Minority Languages. The situation is no better with languages of larger ethnic minorities' (Researchers Work to Save Endangered Languages, 2001). The Manchurian ethnic group with a population of several million has only about a dozen elderly native language speakers in the Fuyu County of northeast China's Heilongjiang Province. The same is true with many other languages. In the small regions where an ethnic minority concentrates, their own language is retained mostly among the elderly people. The younger generation has shifted to Putonghua.

During the last 20 years, in search of a better life more and more young people leave their hometowns for the urban areas and gradually shift their language. Whaley (2002, cited in Wright, 2004) documented the language shift among the Oroqen, a group living on the northwest frontier of China. The Oroqen tried to save their language when they became conscious that their language was not being transmitted to the next generation. However, their initiatives did not turn out to be successful, because the language has no unitary standard written form. Also, substantial populations of Zhuang – Dong – (Thai-) language speakers were assimilated into the Ye' (Cantonese) over several millennia, and in the last millennium many members of minorities in the southwest, including quite a few Yi, have amalgamated themselves into the Chinese population who speak south-western Mandarin (Bradley, 2001).

China's policies towards endangered minority languages

As a multiethnic and multilingual country, how is China preserving the many cultures and languages in its society? What are the government's policies towards minority people and minority languages? The initiatives of the government to protect minority people and salvage their languages are evident in China's many policies, and are presented below in the following sections. All the following texts are based on details sanctioned by the state government of the People's Republic of China.

Political policy towards minorities: equality of all ethnic groups and local autonomous governments

China has been a multi-cultural and multi-disciplined society for a few thousand years. All minorities in China today have the same rights as the Han Chinese. Since minorities reside in the remote areas that are usually poor, the Chinese government has a preference policy to provide training for the minorities to progress, govern, and manage themselves. The essential principle in China's policies towards minorities is that people of all ethnic groups are equal. This is guaranteed in Act 4 of the constitution of the People's Republic of China. It prescribes that 'people of all ethnic groups are equal in the People's Republic of China. The government will guarantee the rights and interests of all minorities, and develop a good relationship



between all ethnic groups. People are equal and should be united and help each other. Any oppression of minorities or prejudice against them will be prohibited in order to avoid the damage of national unity and division of the state' (Selected Rules and Policies Towards Minorities in the People's Republic of China, 1996, p.28).

The basic political policy is the establishment of local autonomous governments in ethnic regions. Regional autonomy for ethnic minorities in China means that, under the unified leadership of the state, regional autonomy is practiced in areas where people of ethnic minorities live in compact communities. In these areas, organs of self-government are established for the exercise of autonomy. The implementation of this policy is critical to enhancing the relationship of equality, unity, and mutual assistance among different ethnic groups, to upholding national unification, and to accelerating the development of places where regional autonomy is practiced and promoting their progress. These areas are recognized in the PRC's constitution and are given a number of rights not accorded to other administrative divisions. This means that under the leadership of the central government, there is a special autonomous administration in charge of the affairs in minority-intensely-populated regions. Autonomous regions, prefectures, counties, and banners are covered under Section 6 of Chapter 3 (Articles 111-122) of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, and with more detail under the Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy. The constitution states that the head of government of each autonomous area must be of the ethnic group as specified by the autonomous area (Tibetan, Uyghur, etc). The constitution also guarantees a range of rights including independence of finance, independence of economic planning, independence of arts, science and culture, organization of local police, and use of local language. In addition, some important concessions are made to the non-Han, such as the non-imposition of the one-child family. From 1947 to the end of 1998, 155 ethnic autonomous areas have been established in China, including 5 autonomous regions, 30 autonomous prefectures, 120 autonomous counties, and 1256 autonomous villages. They encompass 75% of the total minority population and inhabit 64% of the total area of China (Wu, 1997).

Language policy towards minorities: the right of all ethnic groups to use and develop their native languages and writing systems

China's minority-language policy is based upon its minority-political policy. People of all ethnic groups have the right to use and develop their native language and writing systems. The right was first written into the provisional constitution of the PRC passed in 1949, elaborated upon in the first constitution passed in 1954, simplified in the constitutional revision of 1975, and fully elaborated in the constitutional revisions of 1978, 1982 and 1999 (Huang, 1992, cited in Zhou, 2000). Legally, the right to use one's native language is especially guaranteed in ethnic autonomous areas. Act ten of the Laws of Autonomous Governing of Minority Regions prescribes that 'authorities of autonomous minority should guarantee that all ethnic groups are free to use and develop their native languages' (Selected Rules and Policies Towards Minorities in the People's Republic of China, 1996, p. 40). Regulation 20 of Urban Minority Working Regulations passed in 1993 is that 'urban governments should guarantee that minorities have the right to use their native languages' (Selected Rules and Policies Towards Minorities in the People's Republic of China, 1996, p. 81).

Efforts to create and improve writing systems for minority languages

Soon after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the work of creating writing systems and improving imperfect writing systems of minority languages began in order to



reduce the mass illiteracy of minority communities. In 1951, the Editorial Board of Contemporary Chinese Nationality Work was established to undertake this task. In the following years, research was conducted on a few minority languages, and few recommendations were suggested.

The policy, Tentative Language Planning towards Minority Languages, was passed during the first national conference on minority languages in December 1955. It was determined that during 1956 and 1957, a general survey of minority languages would be conducted, the plan for creating and improving minority languages would be formulated in the following three years and for those unstudied minorities, the work would be finished by the end of 1960 (Jiang, 1994, p. 377, cited in Zhou, 2003).

Surveys were conducted on up to 40 minority languages by the end of 1958. In the late 1950s, fourteen writing systems, using Latin scripts were created for the minority languages spoken by the ten minorities. They are Zhuang, Buyei, Yi, Miao, Hani, Lisu, Naxi, Dong, Wa and Li. Among these fourteen writing systems, four are for Miao, and two for Hani. In real communication, the Li preferred Mandarin instead of the newly created writing system, the Hani used one and abandoned another, and the Yi did not like the new writing system created for them, but preferred the improved and standardized traditional one instead. Thus, to date, eight minorities are using eleven new writing systems created for them. In the beginning of the 1980s, plans were designed for language writing systems of Tu, Jingpo, Bai, Dulong, Qiang and Tujia. Since the last biennium (2002/2003), with the assistance of the UNESCO Beijing Office, the Chinese Academy of Social Science has been making a special effort to preserve and revitalize endangered languages of selected ethnic minority groups in China. Research has already been completed for the six minority languages Uygur, Anong, She, Manchu, Lakkia and Tujia. In 2005, research has focused on two more languages, Hezhen and Ersu (Safeguarding and Revitalizing of Ethnic Minority Groups in China, 2005).

Protection and fostering of traditional minority cultures

The following information is quoted from Regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities in China (Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2005, section 5.4)

From the 1950s to the 1980s, the central authorities organized over 3,000 experts and scholars to compile and publish five series of books on ethnic minorities, totalling 403 volumes and over 90 million Chinese characters. The series are: The Ethnic Minorities in China, A Series of Books on the Brief History of the Ethnic Minorities in China, A Series of Books on the Brief Record of the Languages of the Ethnic Minorities in China, A Series of Books on the Survey of Autonomous Areas of Ethnic Minorities in China, and A Collection of Research Materials on the Societies and Histories of the Ethnic Minorities in China. Over 500,000 copies have been distributed. Today, each of the 55 ethnic minorities in China has its own brief written history.

The 55 ethnic minorities in China, except for the Chinese-speaking Hui and Manchu, each have their own language. The Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur, Korean and Yi languages have coded character sets and national standards for fonts and keyboard. Software in the Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur and Korean languages can be run in the Windows system, and laser photo-typesetting in these languages has been realized. Applied software in languages of ethnic minorities are emerging one after another, and some achievements have been made in research into the OCR (optic character recognition) of languages of ethnic minorities and machine-aided translation.

The state has set up special institutions to collect, assort, translate, and study in an organized and programmed manner the three major heroic epics of China's ethnic



minorities, i.e., Gesar (an oral Tibetan epic), Jangar (a Mongolian epic) and Manas (an epic of the Kirgiz people). In the past decade, the state has appropriated over 30 million yuan for the collation and publishing of 160 volumes of the Buddhist Tripitaka in the Tibetan language. It has also earmarked a large amount of funds for the renovation of the Drepung, Sera and Ganden monasteries in Tibet, the Kumbum Monastery in Qinghai, and the Kizil Thousand-Buddha Caves in Xinjiang, and many other key national cultural relics. From 1989 to 1994, the state invested 55 million yuan and 1,000 kg of gold in the first-stage renovation of the Potala Palace in Lhasa, capital of the Tibet Autonomous Region, and in 2001, 330 million yuan for the second-stage renovation

Policies in favour of the use of minority languages (1) political selection

It was prescribed in Act 19 of Organization Laws of the State Peoples' Representatives of the PRC passed in 1982, which 'interpreters should be provided for minority representatives in the congress of the state peoples' representatives'. This was repeated in rule 30 in Rules of Procedure of the Congress of the State Peoples' Representatives.

The use of minority languages was guaranteed in rule 22 of the Selection Laws of the Congress of the State Peoples' Representatives and Various Local Peoples' Representatives. It was written that in autonomous regions, prefectures, and counties 'promulgated selection documents, name lists, selector cards, name lists of representative candidates, representative certificates and seals of the selection committee should be written in both the local popular minority language and modern standard Chinese' (Zhou, 2003, p. 264).

Ever since the first congress of the state peoples' representatives in 1954 there have been simultaneous interpreters for minority representatives. Interpreters of minority languages are provided in all kinds of important political congresses and activities in the national and local governments. There are minority language versions for all important documents, laws and administrative rules issued by the Central Communist Party, the State Congresses, and various local committees of the Communist Party and governments with areas containing multinational populations.

Policies in favour of the use of minority languages (2) administrative management

Minority languages are the working languages of ethnic autonomous governments. This is guaranteed by laws and working regulations (Selected Rules and Policies Towards Minorities in the People's Republic of China, 1996). It is stated in Act twenty-one of Laws of Autonomous Governing of Minority Regions that minority languages should be adopted to conduct regional autonomous government business. It was guaranteed in the 1993 Working Regulations of Minority Village Administration that local minority languages should be the working languages in autonomous minority villages.

Minority languages coexist with modern standard Chinese in the seals of ethnic autonomous authorities and organizations, identity cards of minorities, and the names of businesses in ethnic autonomous areas. RMB Notes are written in Mongolia, Tibetan, Uighur, and Zhuang, in addition to Chinese (Zhou, 2003).

Policies in favour of the use of minority languages (3) lawsuits and arbitration

It was prescribed in Act of 134 of the 1982 constitution that 'people of all ethnic groups are entitled to file suit in their own native language. People's courts and people's procuratorates should provide translators for the defendants who do not know Mandarin. In areas which are heavily populated by minorities, cases should be tried in the local popular language and all documents concerned with lawsuits including indictments, court verdicts, notices should be



written in one or several local popular languages' (Selected Rules and Policies Towards Minorities in the People's Republic of China, 1996, p. 31).

It was prescribed in regulation 5 of Regulations of Economic Contracts Arbitration of the PRC that 'in intensely minorities or multi-ethnics populated areas the processes of mediation, arbitration and the awards of them should be in one or several local popular languages. Interpreters should be provided for the agents' (Selected Rules and Policies Towards Minorities in the People's Republic of China, 1996, p. 346).

Policies in favour of the use of minority languages (4) education

Bilingual education in minority communities is guaranteed in laws and regulations. For example, Act thirty-seven of the 1984 Law of Autonomous Governing of Minority Regions states that 'in schools where minority students are in the majority, text books should be in minority languages and courses should be taught in minority languages when conditions are permitted. Chinese courses should be offered in the late years of elementary schools or middle schools in order to spread modern standard Chinese throughout China' (Zhou, 2003, p. 266). It was restated in the 1986 Compulsory Education Laws of the People's Republic of China, 1988 Regulations for the Work of Eradicating Illiteracy, as well as the 1989 Management Regulations for Kindergarten as Issued by the State Council. Also it was re-emphasized in the Notice about Contemporary Language and Scripts as Issued by the State Language Commission Approved by the State Council in 1992.

In some minority schools, all courses are conducted in minority languages such as Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur, Kazak and Koran, and Chinese is offered only as one of the courses. In some other minority communities, Chinese is the language of instruction. Minority languages such as Miao and Jingpo are offered as a subject, or as an auxiliary language of instruction.

Policies in favour of the use of minority languages (5) publications and translation

Government funds are offered to minority language journals or magazines according to the 1984 Notice of Journals and Publications by the State Council. Special privileges are offered to minority language authors and translators according to 1990 Provisional Regulations of Publication Payment and 1990 Copyright Laws of the People's Republic of China. There is no limit for minority language books to publish and the stripe code is free. This was officially guaranteed in 1996.

By the end of 1998, there were thirty-six minority language publishing houses. There are five in Beijing including the Ethnic Press and the China Mongolian Press. With the assistance of the state and efforts of the ethnic autonomous areas, by 2003, 4,787 titles of books in ethnic minority languages had been published, totalling 50.34 million copies. There were also 205 magazines and 88 newspapers in such languages, totalling 7.81 million copies and 131.30 million copies, respectively. The ethnic autonomous areas had set up 513 art performance troupes, 566 libraries and 163 museums (Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2005, section 5.4).

Moreover, the Centre of China Minority Language Translation was established in 1978 in Beijing. Works of the state officials and government documents are translated into Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur, Kazak, Korean, Yi and Zhuang and Speeches in national conferences are simultaneously interpreted.

Policies in favour of the use of minority languages (6) the mass media



Ever since May 22, 1950, sixteen minority languages have been used as the programs languages of CCTV for those minority-intensely- populated regions or areas where people cannot understand programs in Chinese. Some of these minority languages are Tibetan, Mongolia, Korean, Uighur, Kazak, Zhuang, and Yi. Now more than twenty minority languages are used on China's national radio broadcasting, over thirty on local radio broadcasting, and 3,410 movies in minority languages. There are 10,430 translated movies and TV programs in minority languages (Zhou, 2003).

In 2003, the ethnic autonomous areas had 122 radio broadcasting organizations with 73 radio stations and 523 radio transmitting stations, broadcasting in 15 ethnic minority languages; 111 TV broadcasting organizations with 94 TV stations and 830 TV transmitting stations, broadcasting in 11 ethnic minority languages. There were also 254,900 satellite radio and TV receiving and relaying systems (Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2005, section 5.4).

Policies in favour of the use of minority languages (7) minority language organisations

The Committee of Minority Language Research and Instruction was established in 1951. It is in charge of research, coinage and the improvement of state minority languages. Changes were made to the management of minority languages in 1998. Since then the State Ethnic Committee is in charge of minority languages concerning translation and publications of minority languages; the educational department is in charge of the standardization of minority languages and the research and application of minority language information. Ever since 1977, with the permission of the State Congresses, Mongolian associations have been set up in eight autonomous areas and Korean associations in the three north-eastern provinces, and there are also Yi and Tibetan associations in other provinces.

China has about 300 minority language translation organizations with part-time and full time staff of more than 100,000. According to Xinhuanet on July 4th 2005, China will build a new training and proficiency authentication system to standardize minority language translation, said Dainzhub Angbon, director of the China Translation Association's minority language translation commission. The official said that the China Translation Association has already granted certificates to 70 senior translators and the Tibet Autonomous Region, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region and Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region have already made rules and regulations concerning minority languages (Vorontsov, 2005).

As a multiethnic and multilingual country, China has been assisting people of different ethnic groups to live in harmony and respect each other's cultures so that every one can enjoy their human and language rights. The information presented in this section indicated that both in theory and in practice, Chinese policies are supportive of multilingualism and that they are aimed at protecting minority languages in China.

Where to from here?

China has been attempting to salvage and maintain the endangered minority languages by investing money, time, and, people into the development of successful minority education policies, and constantly reaffirming its superiority in this regard in media and policy discourses. Language policies in China are becoming more inclusive of minority language use. Further, to the initiatives presented in this paper, it is vital for Chinese Government to continue to:

- train more qualified minority language teachers and compile suitable material resources (texts and materials in minority languages);



- promote bilingual education/programmes in many Chinese schools;
- revitalize local and indigenous knowledge transmission; and
- encourage minority people to make more handicrafts to stimulate economy.

The impacts of economic and social trends worldwide, improved transportation and the global reach of telecommunications tend to continue to pose a threat to many minority languages. The number of endangered languages is still on the increase in China. In this context, it is imperative that research is being done on the effectiveness of the Chinese language policies in preserving minority languages and in promoting linguistic diversity in China.

Conclusion

The philosophy of the Chinese central government is that people of all ethnic groups are equal, and there should be no prejudice or discrimination against minorities and their languages. Dictated by this political principle, several language policies are formulated in China, favouring the existence of minority languages. The details presented in this paper appear to indicate the significance of policy initiatives in preserving minority languages and their cultures. However, there is little empirical evidence to indicate their effectiveness in preserving minority languages or cultures. Given that minority languages are in danger of extinction in the globalised age, it is important that the degree of success of these policies throughout China needs to be established by undertaking research on this topic.

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