

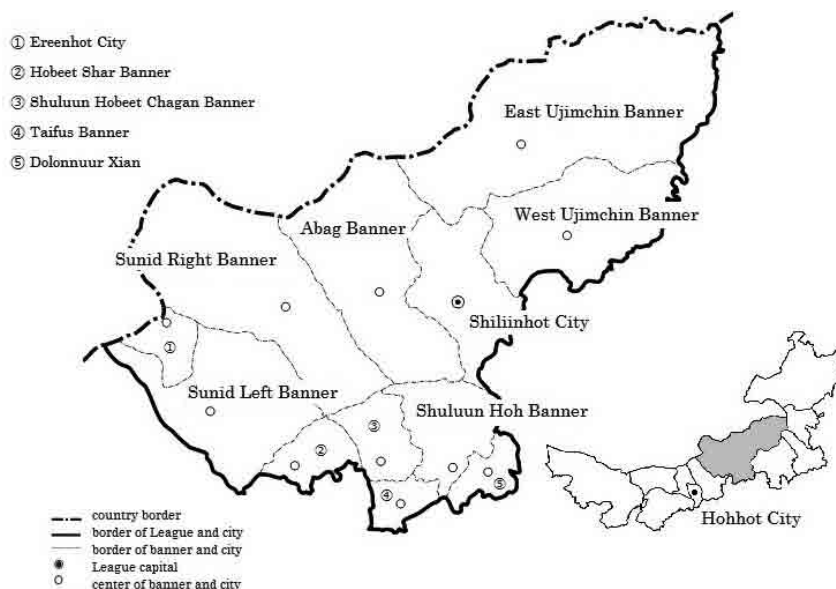
A case study of Language education in the Inner Mongolia

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Keywords: Inner Mongolia, language education, curriculum

1. Introduction

This paper is a report about research on the issues pertaining to the minority language education of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. It focuses on the Mongolian minority schools in pastoral areas, such as Shiliingol League (Map.1). Shiliingol League is located in the middle of Inner Mongolia, and has jurisdiction over 9 Banners (*qusiγu* in Mongolian), 2 cities and 1 *Xian*. I will compare the curriculum in a Mongolian minority school with that in a Chinese school in the region then compare it with a Japanese school and a Korean school in Japan. I'll focus on the teaching of the mother tongue in the curriculums and will examine the influence on other subjects.



Map.1. Map of Shiliingol League, Inner Mongolia (Monkbat 2012:8)

2. Language education in Inner Mongolia

The minority education policy in China has mainly focused on two-language education (*Shuangyu jiaoyu* in Chinese). It is different from the 'bilingual programs' of the West, so I will use the term 'two-language'. In this program, two languages are taught from the elementary school level. The main language is different in different areas and is based on the minority groups that live there (Okamoto 1999). In Inner Mongolia, there is two-language education: Mongolian and Chinese. The pastoral areas teach Mongolian as the main language and Chinese as the second language. However, in the bigger cities or agricultural areas, Mongolian minority schools teach Chinese as the main language and Mongolian as the second language. Students also have to learn English as a foreign language in elementary school. In 2010, the languages students learn in the curriculum in the elementary school are as follows. In the 1st grade, Mongolian and Chinese are 10:3 times in one week. In the 3rd grade, Mongolian, Chinese and English are 6:4:3 times in each week. In order to study English, the hours of learning Mongolian have decreased from 10 to 6 times in one week (Monkbat 2012:13). That raises some concern about the effect on the learning of Mongolian. One teacher of the Mongolian language explained the influence of the three language study on the acquisition of Mongolian as below:

From in the low grades in the elementary schools, studying Chinese and English is a hindrance to thinking and speaking Mongolian for the Mongolian pupils. It also causes Chinese-Mongolian mixed language. Also having too many subjects in elementary school is a barrier to developing knowledge systematically and has a bad influence on the motivation to study. In addition, most of the text books are translated from Chinese to Mongolian, so the contents of these books are not suitable for the culture of nomadic areas, and their living conditions. All these factors contribute to deadening pupils' enthusiasm for study (from interviews during field surveys).

3. Language education in East Asia

In Table.1, we can see the situation of the language education in elementary schools in Japan and China. The schools are a Japanese school and a Korean school in Japan, and a Mongolian minority school and a Han Chinese school in Inner Mongolia. The research focuses on the same grade in elementary school in each case.

In Japan, fundamentally Japanese (*Kokugo* in Japanese) is the mother tongue for Japanese people. At third grade they study 10 kinds of subjects, and have 27 lessons in one week in which the subject of Japanese is taught for 6 lessons, and it accounts for 22% of all the lessons in each week. However, they don't study any foreign language in the third grade. In a Korean school in Japan, Korean (*Kokugo* in Japanese) is their mother tongue. They also have to study Japanese, as a second language. They have only 8 kinds of subjects, and 26 lessons per week. Consequently, the subject of Korean accounts for a higher percentage at 27%. Japanese is a second language and is taught 4 times a week; it accounts for 15%.

Table.1: Language education of elementary schools in the East Asia

countries	Japan		China	
schools	Japanese	Korean	Mongolian	Chinese
grades	third	third	third	third
mother tongue	6(22%)	7(27%)	6(17%)	12(34%)
language 2	—	4(15%)	4(11%)	4(11%)
language 3	—	—	3(8%)	—
mathematics	5(19%)	5(19%)	4(11%)	10(28%)
number of subjects	10	8	16	9
week total lessons	27	26	35	35

Notes: 1. Unit is periods per week.

2. Data is based on materials collected during field surveys.

In Inner Mongolia, in the Mongolian minority schools, Mongolian is their mother tongue, and then they have to study Chinese and English, which are second and third

languages. A notable thing is they have 16 kinds of lessons and 35 periods of lessons per week. Among them, Mongolian is taught 6 times, which accounts for 17% a week. The lessons of Chinese and English are 11% and 8% respectively. In Han Chinese school, Chinese is their mother tongue basically, and besides this they study English as a foreign language. The conditions are noticeably different from minority schools. During one week, they have 9 sorts of subjects and 35 lessons in one week. Chinese lessons account for the highest percentage of time spent on teaching the mother tongue among these schools.

With regard to the mother tongue and second or third languages in the curriculums in these schools, what are the suitable conditions for mother tongue acquisition in elementary schools? In the case of the Mongolian school, they have to study three kinds of languages from early childhood and have many kinds of subjects in one week. As a result of language study, are there any influences on the other subjects? This is a serious question. Concerning mathematics in all these schools, in Japanese and Korean schools, math is taught 5 times a week for 19% of the time every week. The Chinese school has 10 classes, taking 28% of the time. In the Mongolian school, math is taught 4 times per week, and it only accounts for 11% of the whole week. Through these figures, we can say language study does have an impact on the other subjects.

4. Conclusion

By comparing curriculums in the cultural sphere of East Asia, I investigated the conditions of mother tongue education, specifically in Inner Mongolia. In Inner Mongolia's elementary schools, pupils have been studying three languages from the 1990's onward. Mongolian is their mother tongue, Chinese is the second language and English is a foreign language. The balance of teaching these languages in minority elementary schools are shown by the numbers of language lessons in one week. In the first grade, Mongolian and Chinese are 10:3; in the third grade, Mongolian Chinese and English are 6:4:3. However, the interviews proved that language teachers did not

evaluate the language education of the mother tongue highly. One Mongolian teacher said, in the lower grades in the elementary schools ‘three language education’ causes some negative influences on learning the mother tongue, Mongolian. Due to the conditions surrounding of the language context in Inner Mongolia, at the elementary school stage, more effort needs to be put into teaching the mother tongue.

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内モンゴル自治区における言語教育について

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【要約】

本稿では、内モンゴルにおけるモンゴル学校の言語教育について考察をする。牧畜地域であるシリントグ盟におけるモンゴル民族学校の事例を中心にみる。内モンゴルの民族学校と漢族学校状況の比較分析から着手する。先ず、内モンゴルで実施されている「二言語教育」は、他の多民族社会のその状況とくらべてみてどの程度のものかを比較してみる。教育カリキュラムにおける母語教科科目をモンゴル民族学校と漢族学校、さらに日本の小学校と在日朝鮮人学校の状況と比較し、本来の母語の教育について考察をした。漢族学校では民族語と算数が一週間の総授業の中で3割以上という高い割合をしめ、真の国民教育の姿が見える。日本の学校と朝鮮学校からも民族語の教育については2割程みられる。それらに反して、モンゴル民族学校ではモンゴル語の割合が2割に満たないし、学年が上がるにつれてその割合が減少するという致命的な問題を孕んでいることがわかる。それに算数の授業が1割しか占めていない。内モンゴルではモンゴル語、漢語、英語の3つの言語を小学校の低学年から履修され、言語科目の数が他の地域と異なる。それがやがて算数など他の教科科目にも影響を及ぼしていると考えられる。