I am a linguist therefore I am Kalmyk

Reclaiming my ethnic identity

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Focus

- Reclaiming my ethnic identity
- The value of the linguistic heritage
Oirat is a Western Mongolian language spoken in China, Russia, and Mongolia

In Russia it’s called Kalmyk [xal’mg]

In China and Mongolia it’s Oirat [oerd]

Oirat = Kalmyk
400 years between Oirats in Russia and Oirats in China
Causes of Kalmyk language and culture loss

Soviet policies

- Fight with illiteracy (early 20s)
- Introduction of the Cyrillic alphabet (1924)
  (Losing touch with the written heritage)
- Eradication of the religion
  (killing of about 2000 Buddhist monks)
- Deportation to Siberia as a major blow
  (13 years of humiliation)
- Decidedly assimilationist policies
  (Drastic cuts in native language education (1960-70s)
  the last Kalmyk national school was closed in 1963)
In 1980s about 98% of Kalmyk pupils entering school at the age of seven don't speak their mother tongue.
CPR for the Kalmyk language

Revitalization policies

• Russian and Kalmyk languages are declared the state languages of the Republic of Kalmykia (1991)

• The Concept of the National System of Education (1993)

• National schools are opened again (30 years later)

• New Terminology Committee
As a result we have it all

- Oriental architecture, sculpture
- Billboards with scenes from the traditional epic
- Signs written in the old Kalmyk vertical writing
- CDs with national folklore songs
- National dance ensemble
- Traditional celebrations
- National school (subjects taught in Kalmyk)
- Radio
- A newspaper
- Books and dictionary
- TV programs
Kalmyk remains a “Hidden Language”
Sponsors

- The Hans Rausing Foundation, SOAS, London, UK (Field Trip Grant 0020)

- National Science Foundation (Dissertation Improvement Grant, solicitation 05-574 BCS (proposal # 0617695))
Duration of the fieldwork

Period 1: three months (June - August 2005)

Period 2: five months (April – August 2007)
Ethnolinguistic situation in Xinjiang

- **Great Diversity**
  47 ethnic groups
  Borders by eight countries: Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tadzhikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

- **Population in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Province**

  Uyghur nationality - more than 6 million (45% of the entire population)
  Han nationality (Mandarin Chinese) - 5 million
  Kazax - 900,000
  Hui nationality - 600,000
  Mongol nationality (Oirat) - 170,000 (0.8%)
  Kirgiz nationality - 120,000
  Xibe nationality - 30,000

  Mandarin Chinese is used by the representatives of all the nationalities
## Ethnic groups in Xinjiang (2000 census) [1]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uyghur</td>
<td>8,345,622</td>
<td>45.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>7,489,919</td>
<td>40.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakh</td>
<td>1,245,023</td>
<td>6.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>839,837</td>
<td>4.55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kirghiz</td>
<td>158,775</td>
<td>0.86</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mongol</td>
<td>149,857</td>
<td>0.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dongxiang</td>
<td>55,841</td>
<td>0.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tajik</td>
<td>39,493</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xibe</td>
<td>34,566</td>
<td>0.19</td>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>about 90,000</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total (census 2004)</td>
<td>19,630,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Situation in Xinjiang (China)

BETTER but NOT for too long
Recent language policies detrimental for Oirat

Influence of Chinese

• Raise the level of education in minority schools (1978)
  a. Elimination of grass-root Oirat schools
     (boarding schools > 4 months away)
  b. Promotion of Chinese schools

Influence of Chakhar

• Unification of Mongolian educational system (1982)
  Replacement of traditional writing system with Classical Written Mongolian
Statistics

Beginning of 1990s - 167 Mongolian schools
By 2005 out of 167 schools 137 (82 %) are closed
What have been found out?

- Situation in Xinjiang is very similar to the situation in Kalmyk Republic 25 years ago
- Reclaiming native language highlights the language as inseparable part of culture
- Reconnection with heritage language and culture elevates self-esteem and awareness of ethnic identity
- Linguistic heritage stripped of its material and communicative value still plays an essential role in self and ethnic identity
- The value of linguistic heritage deserves and needs thorough investigation
References


Hanjanav

Thank You