

Mongolian-medium schools in Tongliao: Language of instruction between 2007 and 2015

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Abstract

Cultural diversity is one of the main topics in today's world. As a country with 56 ethnic groups, China's diversity is a potential source of both joy and worry. The joy comes from the rich and diverse cultures brought by the 56 ethnic groups. However, China also has to face the reality that some of these ethnic cultures are vanishing. One measure to sustain China's ethnic diversity, ethnic education, has been getting increased academic and government attention in recent years.

This thesis is grounded in the theory of ethnic education. By employing a qualitative descriptive research method, I describe the language of instruction of Mongolian-medium schools in Tongliao from 2007 to 2015. Then, by employing a qualitative narrative research method, I explore reasons for the varied patterns. Finally, by discussing the problems in the current Mongolian-medium education system, I suggest relevant solutions.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Nowadays, a large number of experts believe that the Mongolian-medium education is in decline. However, through my research of the experience of Mongolian-medium schools in Tongliao between 2007 and 2015, I find it is not the case. In recent years, the Mongolian-medium education is getting better little by little. The aim of this paper is to reveal the situation of Mongolian-medium schools in Tongliao from 2007 to 2015, and encourage people to hold positive attitude towards Mongolian-medium education. In the meantime, we need to face the reality that there are still problems in current Mongolian-medium education system which should not be ignored. What we need to do is to identify these problems and propose strategies to correct them. In this way, the Mongolian-medium education will make a progress. I believe the advancement of Mongolian-medium education has a significant meaning for both Mongolian people and China as well.

In this chapter, there will be three sections: background information, research questions, and research methodology. They jointly provide readers a guideline for reading about this study.

Background Information

In this section, I introduce the general situation of China as a multi-ethnic country, Mongolian as an ethnic minority in China, and the target city of my study—Tongliao. This information provides readers with a contextual background for the study.

China is a multi-ethnic country with 56 ethnic groups. Among them, Han is the main ethnic group, while the other 55 are ethnic minorities. Minorities are determined by their

numbers in the overall population. According to 2010 population census, about 1.23 billion, or 91.51% of the overall national population, is Han. The other 55 ethnic minorities (e.g., the Zhuang, the Hui, the Mongol, the Tibetan, etc.) constitute only eight percent of the total population.

Geographically, all ethnic groups are scattered over the vast areas of China, while some ethnic minorities live in concentrated communities in small areas. This is the basic spatial pattern of China's ethnic groups. After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, in order to follow the complex situation of China's ethnic distribution with respect to guaranteeing the rights of ethnic minorities to manage their internal affairs, the Chinese government implemented the Policy of Regional Ethnic Autonomy in some ethnic minority communities.

Within the territory of China, the ethnic minorities establish the autonomous regions and set up organs of self-government in their communities under the unified leadership of the highest organ of the state (National People's Congress). According to the *Constitution of the People's Republic of China* and the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional Ethnic Autonomy*, ethnic minorities have the right to manage their local and internal affairs in their autonomous regions (Chen, 1999, p.4). It should be noted here that each ethnic minority autonomous unit is an inseparable part of China instead of a member state of the federation.

Since 1947, five ethnic minority autonomous regions have been established. They are: the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, established on May 1, 1947, where the main ethnic minority is Mongolian; the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, established on Oct. 1, 1955, where the main ethnic minority is the Uygur; the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region,

established on Mar. 5, 1958, where the main ethnic minority is the Zhuang; the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Oct. 25, 1958, where the main ethnic minority is the Hui (the Chinese Muslim); and the Tibet Autonomous Region, established on Sept. 9, 1965, where the main ethnic minority is the Tibetan. These five autonomous regions share the same status as province which is the highest administrative unit in China. Beyond these five autonomous regions, there are many other autonomous prefectures and autonomous counties located in non-ethnic-minority provinces and scattered over the mainland of China.

In China, the human rights of ethnic minorities have been well respected and protected. The rights of ethnic minorities to serve in the state and self-government organs are guaranteed. Up to now, the chairmen of the autonomous regions, the prefects of autonomous prefectures, and the heads of autonomous counties are all occupied by the citizens of ethnic autonomous areas. Meanwhile, there are a large number of ethnic minority officers serving in key positions in local and national organizations.

In addition, minority languages and cultures are adequately protected. At present, there are 8 million ethnic minority students using over 30 minority languages as their medium of instruction (Chen, 1999, p.6). Years of practice has proved that implementing the Policy of Regional Ethnic Autonomy meets the condition of China as a multi-ethnic country, and plays an essential role for the development of both ethnic minorities and the whole country.

Mongolian: An Ethnic Minority in China

Originally, Mongolians were nomads moving across East Asia. Nowadays, Mongolians constitute China's ethnic minorities and the main ethnic group of People's Republic of Mongolia as well. Additionally, there are a number of Mongolian people residing in other

countries in Asia and Europe, such as Kazakhstan and Russia.

Mongolian people in China mainly live in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region which is in the north of China and joins the People's Republic of Mongolia and Russia. The Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region is the first autonomous region of China. According to 2010 population census, the population of Mongolian people is 5.98 million on a national scale which makes up about 0.45% of the total population of China. While in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, the population of Mongolian people is 4.23 million which makes up about 17.11% of the total population of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. From these data, we could say that Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region is the most populous with Mongolians within China and its autonomous regions.

As the first established autonomous region, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region is one of the earliest areas using a minority language as the medium of instruction. To a large extent, the inheritance of ethnic cultures has countless ties with schooling. Therefore, the national and regional governments have always regarded ethnic education as the focus of their work. According to Su's (2005) research, the ethnic education in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has developed greatly since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Su (2005) points out that during the early years after the establishment of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, there were only 377 Mongolian-medium primary schools with 22600 students and four Mongolian-medium secondary schools with 524 students. By the end of 2004, there were 1073 Mongolian-medium primary schools with 216573 students and 263 secondary schools with over 160,000 students.

Higher education in the Mongolian teaching system has also developed rapidly. Several

top universities in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, such as Inner Mongolia University, Inner Mongolia Normal University, Inner Mongolia Medical University and Inner Mongolia University for Nationalities, provide Mongolian-medium majors and degree programs.

From the data above, we can see that the Mongolian teaching system has developed greatly during these 70 years and formed a rounded system including basic and higher education. However, development and problems often tend to co-exist. Some scholars point out that, in recent years, the lack of students in Mongolian-medium schools and the reduction in size of the schools are becoming increasingly prominent problems. In the past ten years, there is an increasing number of Mongolian children choosing Chinese-medium schools instead of Mongolian-medium schools. There will be further discussion on this topic in the following chapters.

Tongliao: The Target City of the Study

Located in the east of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Tongliao is an important city. It is the biggest transportation hub city and is the sub-center city of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. There are two reasons of choosing Tongliao as the location for my study. First, Tongliao has the most concentrated population of Mongolian people throughout the country. According to the result of the Sixth Population Census (2010), among the 3.14 million permanent residents in Tongliao, the population of Mongolian people in Tongliao is 1.44 million, or 45.91% of the total. Owing to the population of Mongolians in the area, the Mongolian teaching system is relatively mature. It has the qualification of potentially representing other such areas on a national scale, and makes sampling much easier. Thus, conducting the research in Tongliao should increase the validity, reliability, and credibility of

the findings. Secondly, as a Mongolian born in Tongliao, I would love to contribute to the educational field of my hometown. My familiarity with this city also gives me an advantage in terms of selecting target schools, negotiating with relevant experts, and getting access to libraries and archives.

Research Questions

This study aims to identify language instruction within Mongolian-medium schools in Tongliao from 2007 to 2015. The following questions will be addressed in this thesis:

- Are the numbers of Mongolian-medium schools increasing or decreasing? Why?
- Is the student population of Mongolian-medium schools increasing or decreasing? Why?
- What are the problems in the current Mongolian-medium educational system?
- What might be some strategies to address identified problems?

Research Methodology

I consider this study a case study. As McMillan (2012) explained: “A case study is an in-depth analysis of one or more events, settings, programs, social groups, communities, individuals, or other bounded systems in their natural context” (McMillan, 2012, p.279). A case study aims to “obtain a detailed description and gain an understanding of the case” (McMillan, 2012, p.280). In this study, I will use Tongliao as the target city, and explore the changes over the last few years of Mongolian-medium schools in their natural setting.

Descriptive Research

To deal with my first research question regarding the language of instruction trends of Mongolian-medium schools in Tongliao from 2007 to 2015, I have applied a descriptive approach. In the book *Educational Research: Fundamentals for the Consumer*, there is an

exhaustive explanation of Descriptive Research: “A descriptive study simply describes a phenomenon. The description is usually in the form of statistics such as frequencies or percentages, averages, and sometimes variability. Often graphs and other visual images of the results are used” (McMillan, 2012, p.176).

To better explore the question of “What is the language of instruction pattern over the last several years of Mongolian-medium schools in Tongliao?” I use two sorts of data. First, I concentrate on the numbers of Mongolian-medium schools in Tongliao. The data are collected with the help of the Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau. In order to find out how many Mongolian-medium schools exist in every single year from 2007 to 2015, I consulted the relevant documents and records in Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau. After these data were collected, I used them to show the trend in the form of line graphs.

Secondly, I concentrated on the population of changes of Mongolian-medium schools in Tongliao over the same period of time. By consulting relevant data, I listed school enrollment in every year from 2007 to 2015 from primary schools to senior high schools in Tongliao. In this part, other factors are also considered to increase the validity of the result, such as birth rate. Then, I used these data to show the pattern of school enrollments in the form of line graphs. Thus, by the description of both the number and the school population in the form of line graph, the enrolment profile over time of Mongolian schools in Tongliao will be illustrated clearly.

Narrative Research

To deal with the rest of my research questions regarding the causes of the trend and the problems in current Mongolian-medium schools, I applied a narrative research model.

As for narrative research, Trahar says,

Narrative inquiry is based firmly in the premise that, as human beings, we come to understand and give meaning to our lives through story. Grounded in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology, it is a form of qualitative research that involves the gathering of narratives—written, oral, visual—focusing on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences, seeking to provide insight into the complexity of human lives (Trahar, 2009, N/A).

In order to better explain how to conduct narrative research, I take my second research question: “What are the causes of such trends?” as an example.

I invited fifteen Mongolian people to be the participants of my interview. The data collected by interviewing are more about the internal world of the Mongolian people. With the permission of the interviewees, I use two ways to record our dialogues—taking notes and sound recording.

The participants, who are the parents whose children are currently studying in Mongolian-medium schools, and Mongolian-medium university undergraduates, volunteered to take part in my study. The participants were asked to respond to some questions in the form of face-to-face interview. Every interview lasted for about 10 minutes. The nature of the study was explained to them orally and in writing, and they were asked to sign a consent form.

To answer the question of what causes certain language of instruction and population trends in Mongolian-medium schools, I needed to know why some Mongolian parents want their children to receive Mongolian-medium education. Their choices directly influence the student enrollment of Mongolian-medium schools. Thus, I invited nine parents to be the

participants, and engage in semi-structured interviews.

The questions for the parents were as follows:

- At home, what language do you use to communicate with your child, Chinese or Mongolian?
- What are the reasons of choosing Mongolian-medium school for your child?
- If the choice is made by your child, which type of school do you prefer, Chinese (or Mongolian) school? Why?
- What is the location of the school to home? How is the school's reputation? What other factors have you or your child considered when choosing the current school?

All of the questions above are designed according to the second research question: "Is the student population of Mongolian-medium schools increasing or decreasing? Why?". During my research, I developed different interviews related to the rest of the research questions. After recording and analyzing the interviews, I was able to integrate the data and arrive at a number of conclusions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

After providing the general background of the study, I introduce readers to the theoretical background and prior researches in this chapter.

Theoretical Background

Definition of Term: Ethnic Group

An *ethnic group* is a form of human community which exists commonly in the society. It is a complex social phenomenon, and scholars give it different definitions depending on the historical and cultural background being studied. In the following paragraphs, I will introduce the term in the context of this study and explain how to understand it in the Chinese context, including the many aspects of the term that should be considered.

1. *Language*: language is the most important medium of communication for human beings. People use language to preserve and transfer achievements of human civilization. Language is also a main characteristic of an ethnic group. Ordinarily, almost every ethnic group has its own language. If emphasizing the shared language or dialect, the type of ethnolinguistic group may be identified, such as Germanics whose native language is German and Atayalics whose native language is Atayal.

2. *Polity or national identity*: if emphasizing the shared polity or national identity, the type of ethno-nationality may be identified, such as the Chinese nation and the Japanese nation.

3. *Race*: biologically, all the human beings belong to the same race—the *homo sapiens*. However, as a result of human beings trying to adapt to their local environment over thousands of years or even millennia, their skin colors, eye colors, hair colors, facial shapes,

heights, and other physical characteristics gradually became different. Thus, the conception of different races came into being. If emphasizing shared physical appearance, various ethno-racial groups can be identified, such as Africans and Mongolians.

4. *Region*: there is an old saying in China that the unique features of a local environment always give special characteristics to its inhabitants. If emphasizing the common region and the sense of belonging, the type of ethno-regional group can be identified, such as: the Southerners who live in South China and Northerners who live in the northern part of China.

5. *Religion*: religion is “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful [...] motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (Geertz, C. 1993, p.87). If emphasizing shared religion, the type of ethno-religion group may be identified, such as the Amish whose religion is closely related to Mennonite, and the Malays whose religion is Shafii.

Observing the categories mentioned above, it is clear that ethnic group is a broad term. According to different sources of group identification, one person could be classified into different ethnic groups. Consider, for example, a Chinese who has American citizenship. If we emphasize his or her nationality, then he or she is an American. If we emphasize his or her place of origin, then he or she is called overseas Chinese.

Using such a broad concept as “ethnic group” might confuse readers. Thus, in the following paragraphs, I would like to narrow it down and explain how to understand it in the Chinese context. On the website of The State Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), there is an official explanation of ethnic group: An ethnic group

refers to a stable community which shares the common language, region, economic life, and psychology or worldview within a particular cultural environment. An ethnic group is a product of the development of human society to a certain historical stage. It has its process and law of generation, development and disappearance.

The famous ethnologist, anthropologist, and historian in China—Lin (1997) pointed out in his book *Minzuxue Tonglun* (which means the general theory of ethnology): ethnic group is a historical phenomenon in the development of human society. Thus, in order to understand it, we need to take a look back on the history.

First, China is a socialist country. That means it has inextricably links with Marx, Lenin and Stalin. At the beginning of the 20th century, people in Russia, especially ethnic minorities had been brutally exploited and oppressed (Lin, Y.H., 1997, p.102). In order to fight against the oppression, Russian people had launched all kinds of ethnic movements. Stalin realized it was impossible for the prole'tariat to win the victory of revolution without solving the problem of ethnic issue. After in-depth study, Stalin (1929) gave his definition of ethnicity in the article *Этнические вопросы и Ленинизм* (which means ethnic issues and Leninism):

...ethnic group is a stable community formed in the history which shares the common language, region, economic life, and psychology or worldview within a shared cultural environment. The common language, region, economic life and worldview under common cultural environment are the four basic features of an ethnic group (Lin, Y.H., 1997, p.103).

During the time when Stalin's article was published, China's ruling party, the Communist Party of China, was in the early days after its establishment in 1921. Stalin's definition of

ethnic group was warmly welcomed by Marxists all over the world. In the late 1930s, *Этнические вопросы и Ленинизм* was translated into Chinese and adopted by the Chinese Communist (Lin, Y.H., 1997, p.105). At the beginning of 1950s, Stalin's definition of ethnic group became the standard in the ethnic identification held by the Chinese government. According to the four features of ethnic group which has been mentioned above, 56 ethnic groups in China have been identified including the Han, the Mongolian, the Tibetan, and etc. Thus, the phrase "ethnic group" employed in this study refers to the 56 ethnic groups which have been identified by the Chinese government within the Chinese territory.

Theoretical Foundation: Ethnic Education

I contextualize this paper within the theoretical foundation of *ethnic education*. In the following paragraphs, I will define ethnic education and the significance of its existence and development. There are different opinions throughout the world as to how this term is defined, and different experts have their own preferences. For example, in a mono-ethnic country, ethnic education usually equals national education. In a country of immigrants, ethnic education sometimes refers to cross-cultural or intercultural education.

By analyzing ethnology and pedagogy, Ha and Teng (2001) explain ethnic education both in its broad and narrow senses. Ethnic education in its broad sense refers to the education accepted by a group whose members have the same nationality and share the same culture, such as Chinese people, Canadians, and Argentineans. The aims of ethnic education in broad sense are to cultivate and inherit shared cultural values. On the one hand, ethnic education cultivates its people to adopt the modern society and attain better personal

development. On the other hand, ethnic education inherits and promotes a group's national language and culture.

Ethnic education in the narrow sense only exists in multi-ethnic countries. It also refers to ethnic minority education, such as the education of Mongolians in China and the Inuit in Canada. The aim of ethnic education in its narrow sense is to help minorities adapt to mainstream society and attain better personal development, while also protecting the culture and traditions of ethnic minorities. Ethnic minority education is an important part of education in ethnically diverse countries.

Whether considering its impact nationally or globally, people should admit that multiculturalism, created by all kinds of ethnic groups, ideally makes human life rich and colorful. Therefore, we should try to protect these valuable cultural heritages and maintain the cultural diversity which has been created by human beings for thousands of years. People still believe that once a certain culture or civilization disappears, it won't be recreated or replaced.

However, there are nearly 200 sovereign states with over 2000 ethnic groups in today's world. Except for a few mono-ethnic countries, such as the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, most countries are multi-ethnic and multilingual. Admittedly, the trend of multiculturalism in the global arena is inevitable, but many multi-ethnic countries are faced with the same problem: how to deal with the contradiction between the challenge of developing a multi-cultural society and the threat of national division caused by multiculturalism. Regarding this problem, the power of education could be emphasized. On the one hand, ethnic education maintains ethnic culture and language

through schooling. On the other hand, ethnic education teaches learners to understand what are “us” and “them.” In this cognitive process, people may gradually understand how to deal with the relationships among different people and how to find harmony in a pluralistic society.

Prior Research

Since the Mongolian people constitute an ethnic minority in China, much less attention is paid to the Mongolian education system than the mainstream education (i.e., Chinese-language education). As a result, the amount of research on Mongolian-medium schools is quite limited. However, according to most of the extant research, there is a common idea that the Mongolian teaching system is in danger. Su (2005) has mentioned in her paper that the Mongolian-teaching system, from primary school to higher education, has developed greatly since the establishment of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The entire system has not only cultivated talent within Mongolian society, but also improved the Mongolian people’s overall educational level. In spite of these improvements, Su (2005) points out that in the ten years between 1995 and 2005, there was an obvious decline in the Mongolian-teaching system. To be more specific, lack of students, shrinking school size, and limited employment opportunities for graduates have become increasingly prominent.

Faced with these problems, the government has implemented certain measures, but the results are not as satisfactory as expected. The development of education for ethnic minorities has become an important task for academia and the government. With the changes in the Mongolian-teaching system, more and more Mongolian people lose or give up the opportunity to receive Mongolian-medium education. As a result, the language of Mongolian,

which is one of the main symbols of Mongolian culture, is in danger (Su, 2005, p.77). After reviewing related literature and research, I have summarized three results of the decline of the Mongolian-teaching system.

The Shrinking of Number and Size of Mongolian-Medium Schools

Compared with the Chinese-teaching system which is the mainstream education in China, the number and the size of Mongolian-medium schools are shrinking and the resource of students and faculties is limited.

- The loss of students has become a potential threat for the development of the Mongolian education system. In Wu's (2007) research, she identifies Hohhot (the capital city of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region) as the object of study, and points out that students in Mongolian-medium primary and secondary schools are inadequate. There are 338610 students in primary and secondary schools in Hohhot, while only 3740 are studying in Mongolian-medium schools accounting for 1.1% of the amount (Wu, 2007, p.10). He (2007) mentions in her article that there is a phenomenon called "two highs and two lows" in the current Mongolian-medium education. Two highs are: high rate of dropout and high rate of repetition. The two lows are: low rate of enrollment, and low rate of graduation. Some eligible children from remote areas have to live in schools because of the traffic inconvenience. Understandably, the boarding fee becomes a heavy burden for poor families, and some of the children have to drop out of the school. Although the government has implemented various measures to curb this issue, the rate of dropout caused by poverty has not been controlled effectively. Furthermore, He (2007) argues that with increasing orientation toward a market economy, the Mongolian-teaching

system has encountered greater challenges. With their children's future success in mind, some Mongolian families have chosen Chinese-medium schools for their children in order to let them integrate into mainstream society as soon as possible.

- The shortage of teachers is one of the most serious problems in Mongolian-medium schools, especially in underdeveloped areas. He (2007) believes those schools have little attraction for the qualified and prominent teachers to give up their current living condition in cities and towns. In addition, most of the local graduates choose to move to urban areas for work. Furthermore, Wu (2007) refers that many teachers cannot adapt to the development of modern education. Wu (2007) points out in her research that there are 10246 primary school teachers in Hohhot, while 109 of them are in Mongolian-medium schools accounting for 1.06% of the total. There are 8503 secondary school teachers, while 158 of them are in Mongolian-medium schools accounting for 1.8% of the total (Wu, 2007, p.11). Although there is a great potential in Mongolian-medium teachers since the proportion of young teachers is quite large, but Wu (2007) indicates that there are several problems which should not be ignored. For example, their proficiency of Chinese and computers is limited, and this could restrict their ability to acquire the latest teaching methods and information. Most of the Mongolian-medium teachers are quite professional in their subjects; however, their scope of knowledge is narrow to a certain extent. This could be reflected in their lack of interdisciplinary knowledge. These issues could be remedied by educating the Mongolian-medium teachers to be more aware of modern teaching methods.

- There is a common view that, compared with Chinese-medium schools, the scattered distribution, the smaller scale, and the lower quality are the true portrayals of current Mongolian-medium schools. Wu (2007) reveals in her article, although the amount of Mongolian-medium students is declining, the number of Mongolian-medium schools still cannot meet the demand in Hohhot. There are 835 elementary and secondary schools while only 3 of them are Mongolian-medium schools (Wu, 2007, p.10). He (2007) mentions that since 2002, the government of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has implemented the policy of “centralized schooling” (which means closing small schools in the rural area, and centralizing the source of students and faculties to the schools in cities and towns). As of 2004, 498 primary schools and 18 secondary schools had been closed. Students in those schools were centralized to the boarding schools in the neighboring towns. The policy of “centralized schooling” has integrated educational resources to a certain extent; however, it has also brought some negative effects. After closing the schools in the rural area, schools in cities and towns have to take in a huge amount of students in a very short time. As a result, the shortage of instruments, equipments, and dormitories become a big problem. In recent years, by the combined efforts of governments of all levels, almost every Mongolian-medium school has set up distance education. However, due to the lack of funds, families and schools in remote districts cannot afford devices, software or even electricity bills. Thus, modern educational technology is barely used.

Employment Difficulties for Mongolian-Medium Graduates

Zhen (2015) mentions in her paper that with the progress of ethnic education, more and more Mongolians gain the opportunity for higher education. However, the present tough employment situation in China has disappointed students who expected to change their fate through knowledge. Sa (2012) reveals the contradiction between the huge number of graduates and the confined employment opportunities with the help of a series of data. According to the statistics provided by the Department of Human Resource and Social Security of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, there are 101,000 college graduates in 2011. Compared with the previous year, there is an increase of 6000 graduates, and the growth rate is 6.46% (Sa, 2012, p.10). Together with the unemployed graduates from last year, there are nearly 110,000 graduates waiting for employment. (Sa, 2012, p.10) However, there are only 14,900 positions available offered by government institutions and large enterprises (Sa, 2012, p.11). Furthermore, since Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region is in the northernmost part of China, serious environmental and transport issues make it difficult to develop its economy. It is difficult for enterprises in Inner Mongolia to play a leading role in absorbing graduates because of their limited quantity, and inefficient industrial structure.

Sa (2012) refers that, as a special part of the graduate employment group, Mongolian-medium students are faced with a more severe situation. First, with the development of economy, more and more enterprises from developed provinces have surged into Inner Mongolia, Chinese has gradually become the main language; second, most of the Mongolian-medium students come from remote areas where basic education is often lacking. Thus, there is a notable gap between Chinese-medium and Mongolian-medium students.

All of these problems have put Mongolian-mediums students in an unfavorable situation. According to the investigation into corporate recruitment, Sa (2012) reveals that there is only a small number of job opportunities for Mongolian-medium students, and the growth rate is quite slow. Currently, many large companies demand either talents of high-end technology knowledge or low-wage labor. Their need for graduates at intermediate levels are on the decrease. As for the Mongolian-medium graduates, their foreign language level, computer skills, and even Mandarin proficiency are at a disadvantage. They often seem to be the least favorite choice for the companies. By comparing the data in 2008 and 2009, the number of jobs provided by enterprises for the Mongolian-medium graduates only accounts for 2.3% and 1.5% of the total. And the proportion shows a downward trend. (Sa, 2012, p.12)

The tight job market for Mongolian-medium graduates has led to a waste of human resources. As a result, the phenomenon of “escaping Mongolian for Han (Chinese)” continues to spread and grow. Such a phenomenon has not only seriously affected the sustainable development of ethnic education, but also brought new challenge for the goal of constructing a harmonious multi-ethnic society in China.

The Attitude of Students and Teachers Towards the Mongolian Language

Su (2005) conducted a study on the language attitude of Mongolian-medium students. She posed four research questions:

1. Which is the most useful language in daily life, Chinese or Mongolian?
2. Which language is more useful for the College Entrance Examination, Chinese or Mongolian?
3. Which language is more important for your future jobs, Chinese or Mongolian?

4. If it is possible for you to give up learning Mongolian for a better development? And if you did so, would you feel regret?

According to the survey, Su (2005) reveals that over 50% of students chose “Chinese” for the first and third question. With the progress of society, more and more Mongolian children leave remote rural areas, and try to find jobs in cities and towns where the everyday language is Chinese. Besides, in rural areas, contacts between Mongolian herdsmen and Han people (the main group in China) are becoming increasingly frequent, especially in commodity exchange activities. Influenced by the idea that Chinese is more important, there is an increasing number of Mongolians who choose to go to Chinese-medium schools instead of Mongolian-medium schools. For the last question, only 7.5% people do not think it really matters if they give up learning Mongolian (Su, 2005, p.17). Most of them feel very sorry if they choose Chinese instead of Mongolian. It could be seen that there is a contradiction between their practical needs and the feeling of attachment to Mongolian culture and language.

With regard to the attitude of Mongolian teachers, Su (2005) puts forward seven research questions:

1. Which is the most useful language in daily life, Chinese or Mongolian?
2. Which language is more useful for the College Entrance Examination, Chinese or Mongolian?
3. Which language is more important for your students' future jobs, Chinese or Mongolian?

4. If it is possible for you to give up learning Mongolian for a better development? And if you did so, would you feel regret?

5. Which language do you prefer to use after work, Chinese or Mongolian?

6. Do you think the current frequency of Chinese courses provided for Mongolian-medium students per week is reasonable or not?

7. Do you think if it is necessary to offer Mongolian courses for Mongolian students who are studying in Chinese-medium schools?

Su (2005) reveals that, for the first question, 61.5% Mongolian-medium teachers choose the answer of “Mongolian;” and for the second one, nearly 70% teachers choose “Mongolian” over “Chinese.” These data could suggest that, compared with students, teachers have a more positive attitude towards their original language. However, for the third question, there are more than 75% of teachers who consider Chinese as the more important language for jobs. Here, there is one thing that we need to pay attention to. All these teachers have experienced the process of searching jobs, and they definitely have a voice in the third question. As for the last three questions, they have shown their preference for Mongolian, and over 83% of them say that they prefer to speak Mongolian in their daily life.

From Su’s (2005) research, we could conclude that although Mongolian people have a strong feeling of attachment to their mother language, they still sometimes have to choose Chinese for a better living. It seems to be a choice of Sensibility or Rationality, with many choosing the latter with regret.

Chapter Three

From 2007-2015:

Population and other Shifts in Mongolian-Medium Schools in Tongliao

The Trend of Numbers

In this section, I mainly focus on the trend of numbers of Mongolian-medium schools in different levels, from primary schools to senior high schools. First, I list how many Mongolian-medium schools are recorded by the Bureau of Education in Tongliao from the year of 2007 to 2015. And then, I use several tables and line graphs to show the variation in numbers of Mongolian-medium schools in a more visual way.

Primary Schools

According to the statistics provided by the Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, the situation of Mongolian-medium primary schools from 2007 to 2015 can be illustrated by the tables and graphs below.

In *Table 1*, the column of “Mongolian-medium” refers to the number of Mongolian-medium primary schools in Tongliao; the column of “Total” refers to the total number of primary schools, including both Chinese-medium and Mongolian-medium; the column of “%” refers to the percentage of Mongolian-medium primary schools within the total number.

Table 1

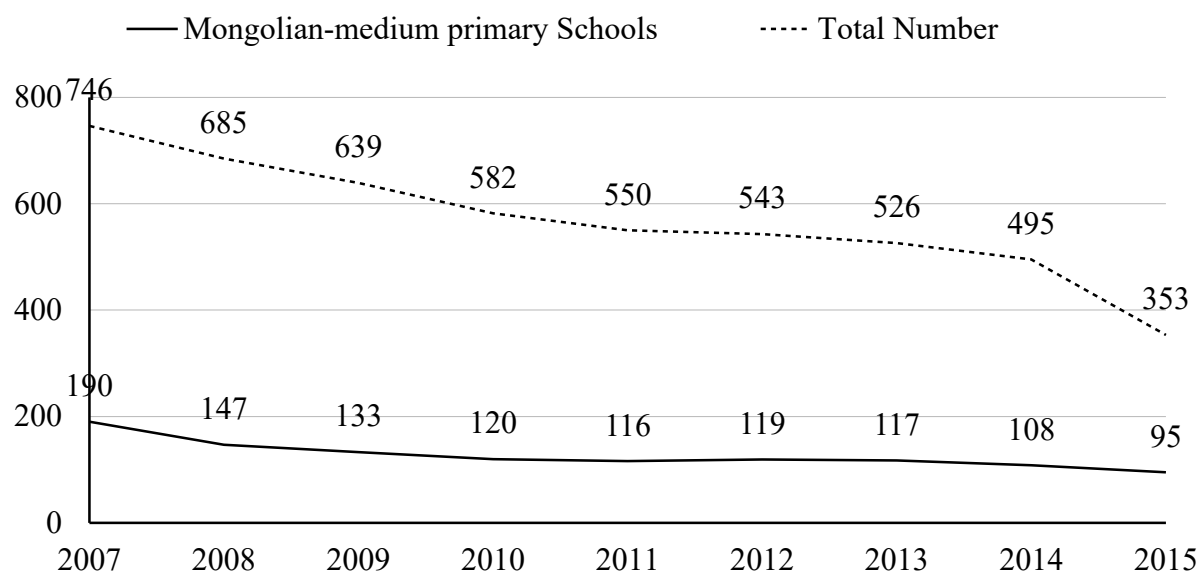
The number and proportion of Mongolian-medium primary schools.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Mongolian-medium</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
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2007	190	746	25.5
2008	147	685	21.5
2009	133	639	20.8
2010	120	582	20.6
2011	116	550	21.1
2012	119	543	21.9
2013	117	526	22.2
2014	108	495	21.8
2015	95	353	26.9

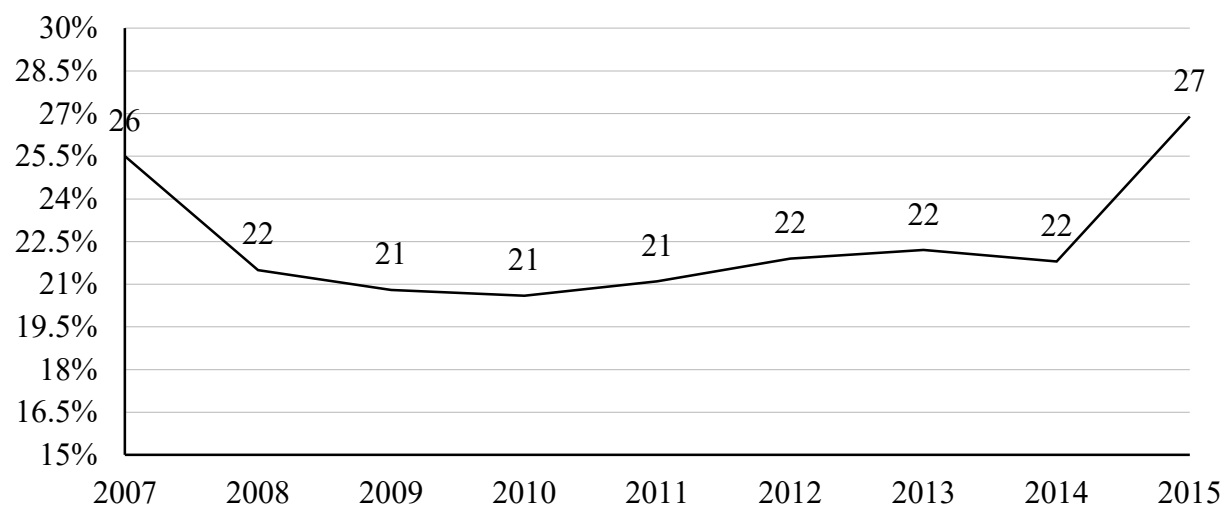
Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Ti Yao,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

In Figure 1.1, the x-axis is the year, while the y-axis is the number of schools. The number of Mongolian-medium primary schools is represented by the solid line, while the total number of primary schools in Tongliao is represented by the dotted line. In Figure 1.2, the x-axis is the year, while the y-axis is the proportion of Mongolian-medium primary schools within the total number.



Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Tiyao,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

Figure 1.1 The trend in the number of Mongolian-medium primary schools.



Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Tiyao,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

Figure 1.2 The trend in the number of Mongolian-medium primary schools.

From these two figures above, it could be seen that both the number of Mongolian-medium primary schools and the number of primary schools decrease from 2007 to 2015. However, the percentage of Mongolian-medium primary schools in total has

increased, especially in the year of 2014. 26.9% of the primary schools in Tongliao are Mongolian-medium as of the end of 2015.

Junior High Schools

In China, after six years in primary school, children of age 13 to 14 begin their three years of study in junior high school. The table and figures below show the changes of Mongolian-medium junior high school in Tongliao from 2007 to 2015.

In *Table 2*, the column of “Mongolian-medium” refers to the number of Mongolian-medium junior high schools in Tongliao; the column of “Total” refers to the total number, including both Chinese-medium and Mongolian-medium; the column of “%” refers to the percentage of Mongolian-medium junior high schools within the total number.

Table 2.

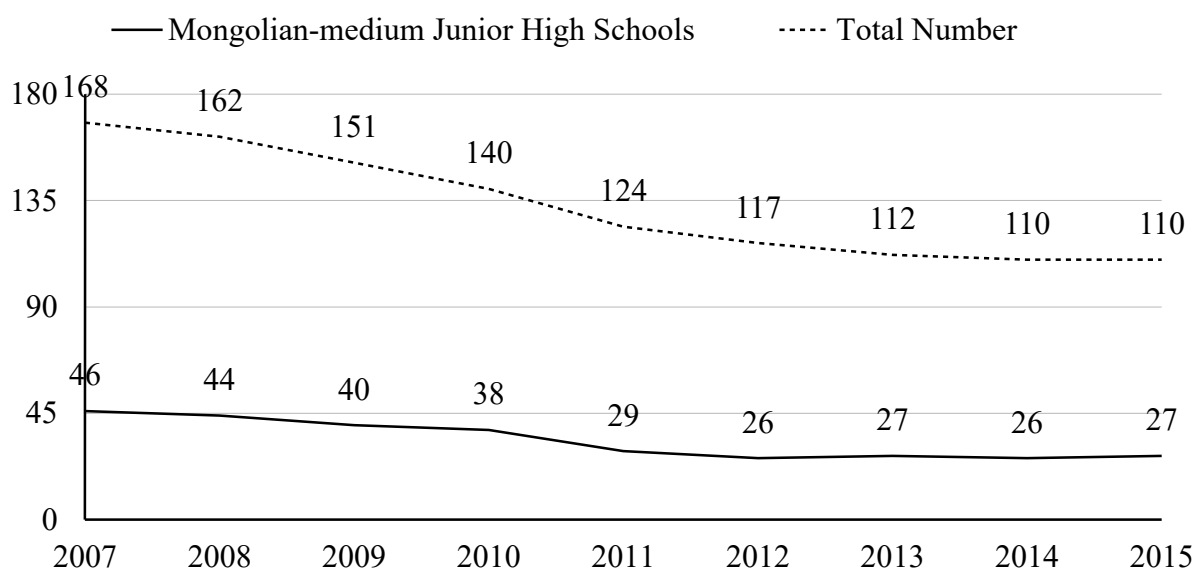
The number and proportion of Mongolian-medium junior high schools.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Mongolian-medium</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
2007	46	168	27.4
2008	44	162	27.2
2009	40	151	26.5
2010	38	140	27.1
2011	29	124	23.4
2012	26	117	22.2

2013	27	112	24.1
2014	26	110	23.6
2015	27	110	24.5

Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Tiyaoyao,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

In Figure 2.1, the x-axis is the year, while the y-axis is the number of schools. The number of Mongolian-medium junior high schools is represented by the solid line, while the total number of junior schools in Tongliao is represented by the dotted line. In Figure 2.2, the x-axis is the year, while the y-axis is the proportion of Mongolian-medium junior high schools within the total number.



Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Tiyaoyao,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

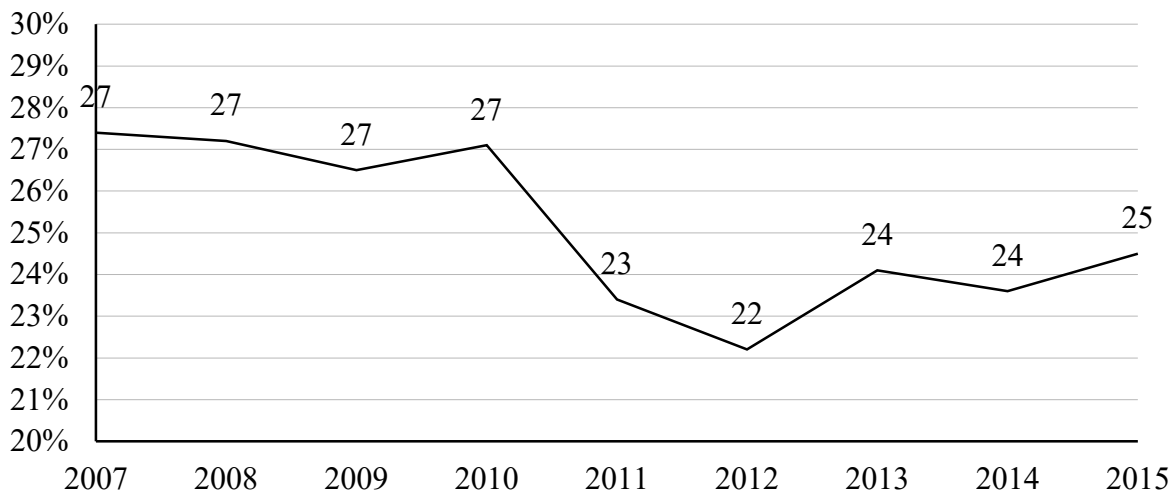


Figure 2.1 The trend in the number of Mongolian-medium junior high schools

Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Tiyaoyao,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

Figure 2.2. The trend in the proportion of Mongolian-medium junior high schools

From the table and figures above, the total number of junior high schools in Tongliao is decreasing from 2007 to 2015, while, as for the Mongolian-medium junior high schools, there is an obvious declining trend from 2007 to 2012. However, starting from 2012, the number of Mongolian-medium junior high schools tends to be constant around 26 or 27. Thus, the proportion of Mongolian-medium junior high schools within the total number has shown a rising trend since 2012.

Senior High Schools

After finishing junior high school, youths at the age of 16 or 17 start their study in senior high schools. The three-year's study in senior high school is their final dash before the College

Entrance Examination.

In *Table 3*, the column of “Mongolian-medium” refers to the number of Mongolian-medium senior high schools in Tongliao; the column of “Total” refers to the total number, including both Chinese-medium and Mongolian-medium; the column of “%” refers to the percentage of Mongolian-medium senior high schools within the total number.

Table 3.

The number and proportion of Mongolian-medium senior high schools.

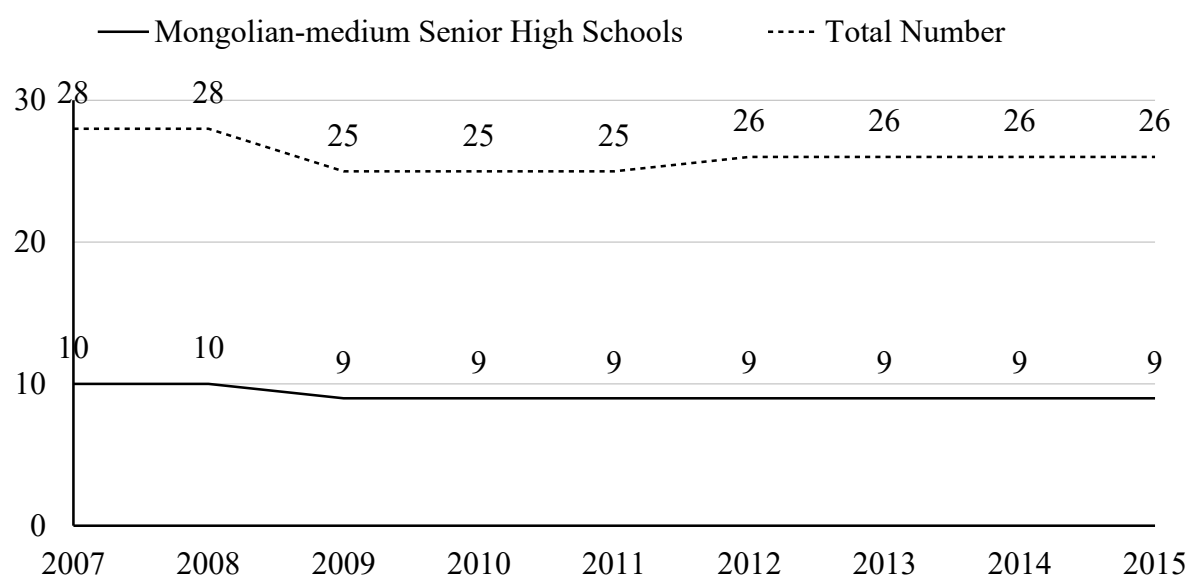
<u>Year</u>	<u>Mongolian-medium</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
2007	10	28	35.7
2008	10	28	35.7
2009	9	25	36
2010	9	25	36
2011	9	25	36
2012	9	26	34.6
2013	9	26	34.6
2014	9	26	34.6
2015	9	26	34.6

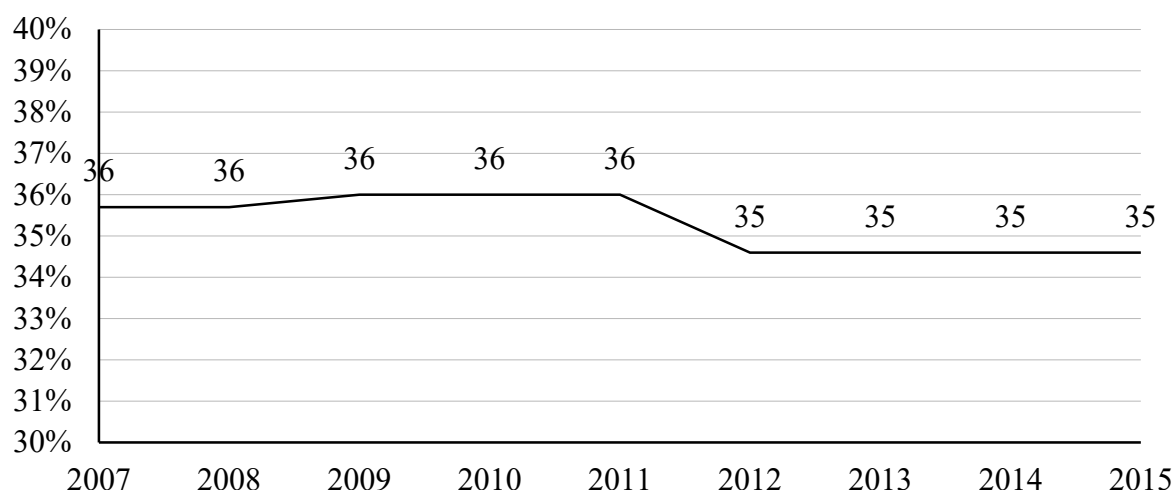
Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Tiyaoy,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

In *Figure 3.1*, the x-axis is the year, while the y-axis is the number of schools. The number of Mongolian-medium senior high schools is represented by the solid line, while the total number of senior schools in Tongliao is represented by the dotted line. In *Figure 3.2*, the x-axis is the year, while the y-axis is the proportion of Mongolian-medium senior high schools within the total number.

Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Tiyaoy,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

Figure 3.1 The trend in the number of Mongolian-medium senior high schools.





Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Tiyaoy,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

Figure 3.2 The trend in the proportion of Mongolian-medium senior high school.

From the figures, it could be seen that the lines representing both the number of Mongolian-medium senior high schools and the number of the total are quite stable. Only two schools, including one Mongolian-medium senior high school, have been closed from 2007 to 2015. Of note is the fact that the proportion of Mongolian-medium senior high schools is about 10% higher than both Mongolian-medium primary and junior high schools.

The Trend of Population of Students and Teachers

In this section, there are two parts. In the first part, two sorts of statistics are analyzed: one is the number of Mongolian-medium students from primary schools to senior high schools; the other one is the number of Mongolian students studying both in Chinese-medium and Mongolian-medium schools. The purpose is to show what percentage of Mongolian children choose to use their mother tongue to receive education. In the second part, there are also two sorts of statistics: one is the number of Mongolian-medium teachers from primary schools to senior high schools; the other one is the amount of teachers regardless of Chinese-medium or Mongolian-medium in Tongliao. All the data are presented in the form of

tables. And line graphs are used to show the variation in the numbers and the proportions from 2007 to 2015.

Mongolian-Medium Students

In *Table 4*, the column of “Mongolian-medium” stands for the Mongolian students who use Mongolian as the language of instruction; the column of “Total” stands for the number of Mongolian students in school, regardless of Chinese-medium or Mongolian-medium; “%” stands for the percentage of Mongolian-medium students within the total number.

Table 4.

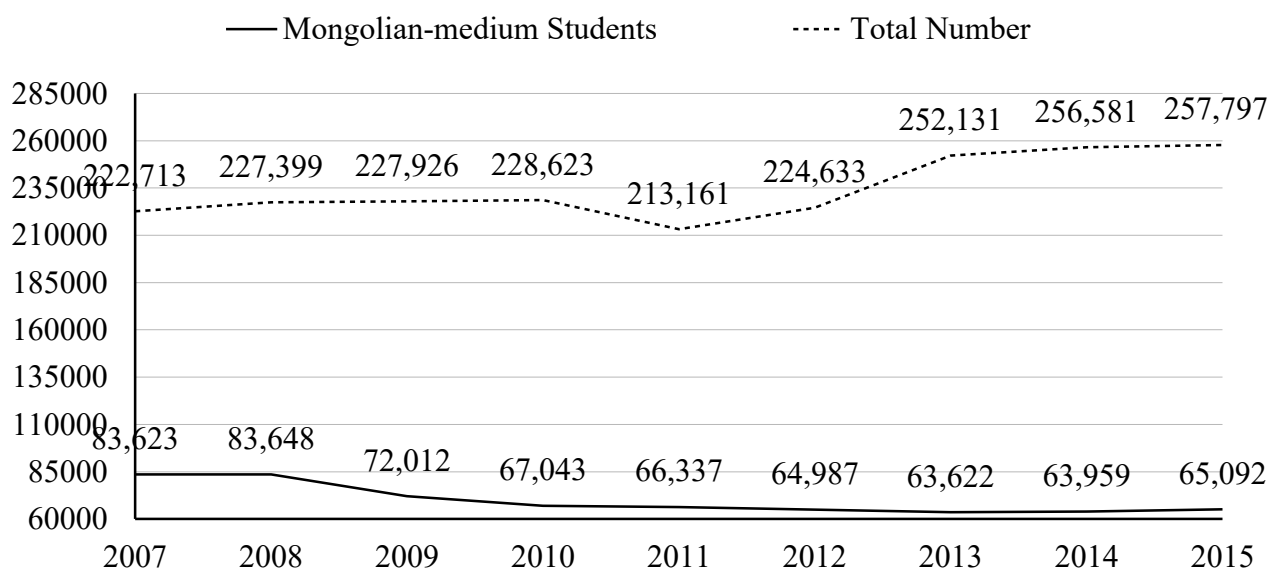
The number and proportion of Mongolian-medium students.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Mongolian-medium</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
2007	83623	222713	35.7
2008	83648	227399	36.8
2009	72012	227926	31.6
2010	67043	228623	29.3
2011	66337	213161	31.1
2012	64987	224633	28.9
2013	63622	252131	25.2

2014	63959	256581	24.9
2015	65092	257797	25.2

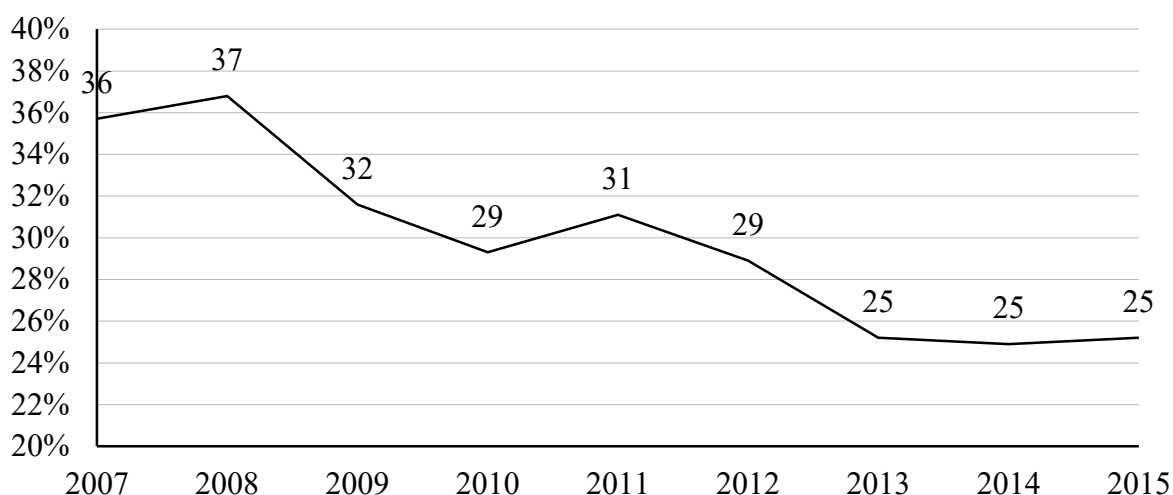
Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Ti Yao,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

In *Figure 4.1*, the x-axis is the year, while the y-axis is the number of students. The solid line indicates the number of Mongolian-medium student, while the dotted line indicates the total number of Mongolian students in school. In *Figure 4.2*, the x-axis is the year, while the y-axis is the proportion of Mongolian-medium students within the amount. *Note.* From “Jiaoyu



Tongji Ti Yao,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

Figure 4.1. The trend in the number of Mongolian-medium students.



Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Tiyaoyao,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

Figure 4.2. The trend in the proportion of Mongolian-medium students.

From Figure 4.1, we could tell that there is an overall upward trend in the total number of Mongolian students in school. For the Mongolian-medium students, the declining trend from 2007 to 2010 is obvious. However, after 2010, the declining trend tends to weaken. By the end of 2015, 65,092 Mongolian students choose to use their native language as instructional language, which is 1,133 more than last year. As for the proportion of Mongolian-medium students within the amount, the line presents a wave-type downward tendency. However, there is a slight recovery from 2014 to 2015.

Mongolian-Medium Teachers

In *Table 5*, the column of “Mongolian-medium” refers to the number of Mongolian-medium teachers from primary schools to senior high schools; the column of “Total” refers to the number of teachers both in Mongolian-medium and Chinese medium schools; the column of “%” refers to the proportion of Mongolian-medium teachers of the total.

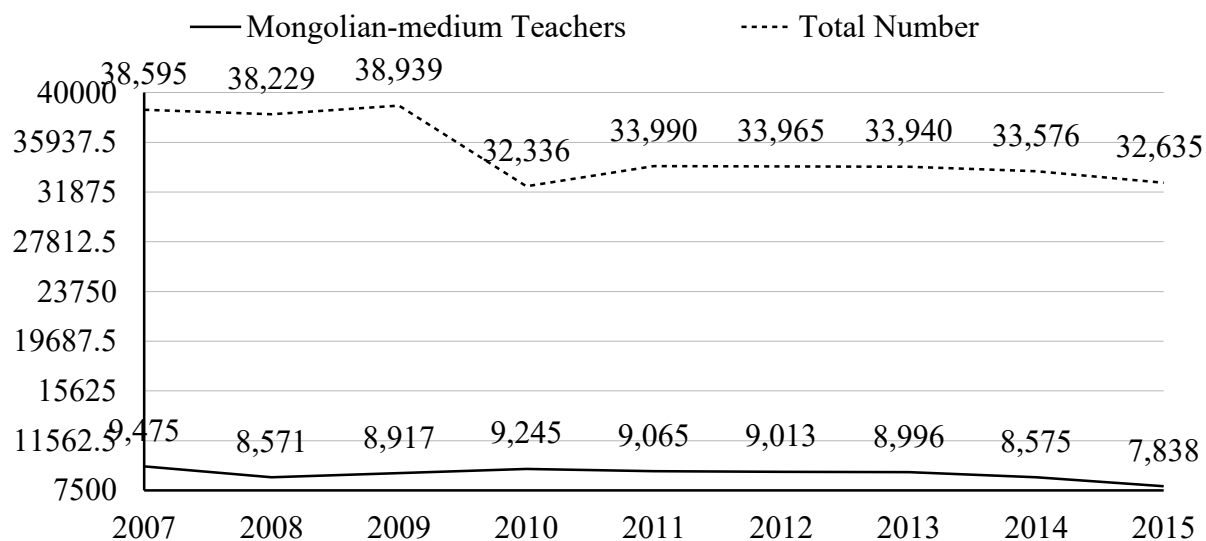
Table 5.

The number and proportion of Mongolian-medium teachers.

<u>Year</u>	<u>Mongolian-medium</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>%</u>
2007	9475	38595	24.6
2008	8571	38229	22.4
2009	8917	38939	22.9
2010	9245	32336	28.6
2011	9065	33990	26.7
2012	9013	33954	26.5
2013	8996	33940	26.5
2014	8575	33576	25.5
2015	7838	32635	24.0

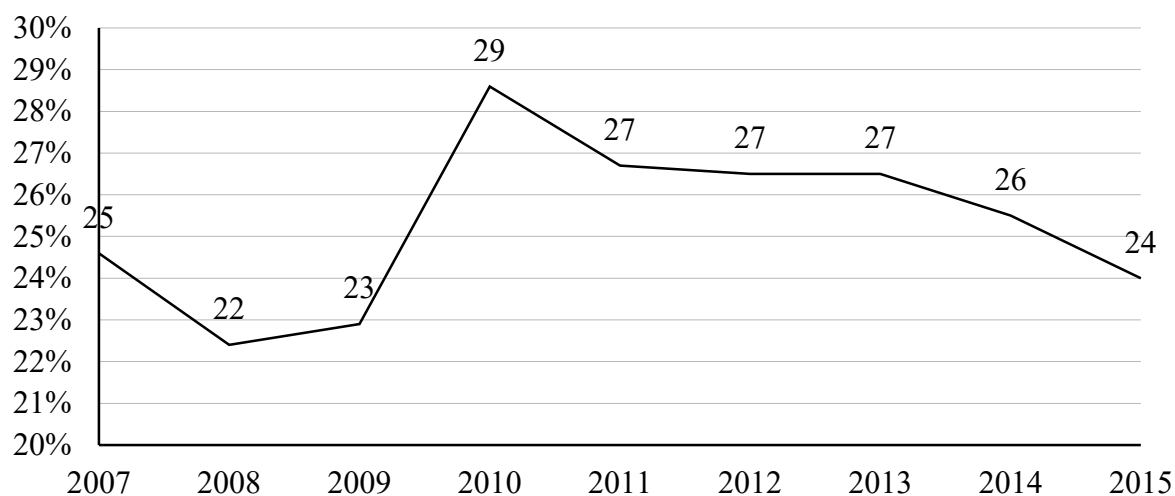
Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Tiyaoyao,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

In *Figure 5.1*, the x-axis is the year, while the y-axis is the number of teachers. The solid line indicates the number of Mongolian-medium teachers, while the dotted line indicates the total number of teachers, irrespective of Mongolian-medium or Chinese-medium. In *Figure 5.2*, the x-axis is the year, while the y-axis is the proportion of Mongolian-medium teachers of the total.



Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Tiyao,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

Figure 5.1. The trend in the number of Mongolian-medium teachers.



Note. From “Jiaoyu Tongji Tiyao,” by Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, 2007-2015.

Figure 5.2. The Trend in Proportion of Mongolian-medium Teachers.

According to Figure 5.1, the number of Mongolian-medium teachers presents a slowly declining tendency, while there is a substantial change in the amount of teachers in Tongliao from 2007 to 2015. Influenced by the change of the total, the proportion of Mongolian-medium teachers presents a sudden rise from 2009 to 2010. Afterwards, the line

begins to slide. However, the overall situation from 2010 to 2015 is better than in the past.

Summary

Based on these graphs, the changes within Mongolian-medium primary and junior high schools are relatively evident. From 2007 to 2015, the number of Mongolian-medium primary schools has decreased from 190 to 95, and the number of Mongolian-medium junior high schools has decreased from 46 to 27. However, the number of senior high schools remains more stable. Only 1 school has been closed by 2015. The thing which is worth noticing here is that, although the numbers are declining, the proportion of Mongolian-medium primary schools within the total number presents a rising trend, from 25.5% in 2007 to 26.9% in 2015. Furthermore, the proportion of Mongolian-medium junior high schools has witnessed a continuous upward tendency after 2012, from 22.2% to 24.5% in 2015.

With regard to actual student enrolment, there is an overall declining trend, from 83, 623 in 2007 to 65, 092 in 2015. However, the proportion of Mongolian-medium students within Mongolian schools regardless of Chinese-medium or Mongolian-medium has shown a slight increase, from 24.9% in 2014 to 25.2% in 2015. That means, in recent years, there is an increasing number of Mongolian students choosing to use their mother tongue as the instructional language.

Lastly, from the perspective of the number of Mongolian-medium teachers, there is a sustained downward trend from 28.6% in 2010 to 24.0 in 2015. However, the overall situation is still better than the years from 2007 to 2009. The problem is how to stop the declining tendency of Mongolian-medium teachers, and keep it at a stable state.

Thus, from the analysis above, there are still a lot of problems in the Mongolian-medium education system, such as the low proportions of schools, students, and teachers compared with those in Chinese-medium schools. However, the situation is not as pessimistic as some experts' assumptions. Contrarily, according to the statistics mentioned above, the situation of Mongolian-medium education is improving little by little. In recent years, more and more Mongolian families encourage their children to accept education in their native language. Then, what are the explanations of such situation? This is the question to be discussed in the following sections.

Chapter Four: Explanations for Findings Cited Above

During the research, I have interviewed 9 parents whose children are currently studying in Mongolian-medium schools (from kindergarten to senior high school), and 6 undergraduates in the Department of Mongolian-medium Preschool Education in Inner Mongolia University for the Nationalities. Some of the parents are Mongolian-medium teachers themselves, and have been in the Mongolian-medium education system for more than 30 years. These people definitely have voices on this topic. In the following parts, all my ideas are inspired by our conversations (translated from Chinese to English).

Government Support

During School Hours

Dialogue 1:

I: Do you know anything about the policies supporting the Mongolian-medium education in recent years?

Parent 1: Yes, especially the leaders of our autonomous region. They have paid a lot of attention to ethnic education. Some of them are Mongolians themselves; they know how important it is.

I: What kind of policies?

Parent 1: For example, Mongolian-medium students can receive allowances every month.

I: Are these allowances for all students, or the only needy ones?

Parent 1: As long as you are a resident in school, you can get these allowances.

I: I got it. But most of the resident students are from rural areas, right?

Parent 1: Yes, there is no need for local students to live in school. For those who do live on campus, they can get subsidies for food and accommodation.

After I get this information from her, I check on the official website of People's Government of Tongliao Municipality. In the column of "Government Affair Opening", I find a document (issued on Oct. 27, 2016) which could verify the conversation above. It states that for Mongolian-medium resident students, the standard subsidy remains 1350 RMB (approximately equals 270 CAD) per year for primary school students and 1620 RMB (approximately equals 324 CAD) per year for junior high school students. The fund which exceeds the standard of central government will be undertaken by the government of autonomous region [...] the norms of public funds per student in compulsory mainstream education are 600 RMB (approximately equals 120 CAD) per year for primary school student and 800 RMB (approximately equals 160 CAD) for junior high school student. On this basis, there is an extra 10% allowance for Mongolian-medium students. That is, 660 RMB (approximately equals 132 CAD) per year for Mongolian-medium primary school students and 880 RMB (approximately equals 176 CAD) per year for Mongolian-medium junior high school students.

These policies are not empty talks on paper. One of my interviewees happens to be a teacher at Mongolian Middle School of Tongliao. He tells me that every student in his school can receive a certain amount of benefit, especially the ones who live on campus.

Mongolian students from the rural areas are a main source for Mongolian-medium education. Most of their parents are farmers or herdsmen. Their family conditions are not as good as urban students'. In addition, due to the Policy of Education Resources Integration in

Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, schools at the village level are all closed. The purpose is to integrate finance and faculty resources together, and provide students with higher quality education. However, closing village-level schools means rural students have to leave home and reside in schools. This has increased burdens for those poor families unintentionally, such as fees for transport, food, and accommodation. After realizing this problem, the government has implemented the policies mentioned above. Such policies have encouraged families to send their children to Mongolian-medium schools in cities and towns and let children receive formal education without worrying about fees.

During College Entrance Examinations

Dialogue 2:

Parent 2: In earlier years, I often heard people saying that the College Entrance Exam scores of Mongolian-medium students are quite low. I do not agree with this. Why can't you see there is one more core course for them? Except for Chinese and Maths, they have to learn Mongolian. So, more recently, the government has packed two courses together.

I: Pack together?

Parent 2: Yes. For example, in the College Entrance Exam for Mongolian-medium students, if you regard Mongolian as a single subject (which is 150 points), then you put Chinese and English together, and each counts for 75 points. If you regard English as a single subject, then the scores of Mongolian and Chinese are packed, they jointly count for 150 points.

I: But then you will have two different total scores.

Parent 2: Yes, score 1 and score 2. The higher one will be your final score. This policy has been implemented for three or four years.

I: Wow, I didn't know that.

Parent 2: I like it a lot. Many Mongolian-medium students can enter famous universities within China.

Dialogue 3:

I: Your daughter has been in Mongolian-medium education from primary to senior high school, right?

Parent 3: Yes, but her major in university is Chinese-medium.

I: May I ask why?

Parent 3: Mongolian-medium students are able to apply for Chinese-medium majors and universities. It depends on your College Entrance Exam score. If your score meets the requirement of Chinese-medium majors, you can apply.

I: What if your score does not qualify?

Parent 3: Then you have to go to the universities which offer Mongolian-medium majors in our autonomous region. A few years ago, Mongolian-medium students were not allowed to apply for Chinese-medium majors. Their ideal choices were Inner Mongolia University or Inner Mongolian Normal University. They did not have many choices. But now, as long as you have good scores, you can choose whichever you like, even Tsinghua University or Peking University.

I: What about exam papers? Is there any difference between papers for Mongolian-medium and Chinese-medium candidates?

Parent 3: For Mongolian-medium students, their papers are translated into Mongolian, such as history and geography for students of liberal arts, and physics and chemistry for science students. And they use Mongolian to write their answers, except for the Chinese and English exam.

There is one thing which has been mentioned for several times in those two conversations—the College Entrance Exam. It is one of the most significant exams for Chinese people. Students usually take the exam at the age of 18 or 19, and the result will decide which university you are able to enter. A diploma from a good university could help you to get your dream job and a good salary. Thus, the College Entrance Exam is a great challenge, or chance for all the Chinese students to chase for a better life. In earlier years, it could be seen from conversations above, the situation of Mongolian-medium candidates were not easy. They were not allowed to apply for Chinese-medium majors. And there were only a few universities offering Mongolian-medium majors within Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, such as Traditional Mongolian Medicine, Mongolian Pharmacy, Mongolian Language and Literature and History of Mongolia. Their choices were quite limited. Such policies had kept many Mongolian students away from the Mongolian-teaching system. In recent years, the condition of Mongolian-medium students is getting better, just as the interviewees have told me.

On Oct.1, 2016, the Department of Education of Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region introduced a new policy: For Mongolian-medium candidates who apply for universities outside the autonomous region, there is a preferential admission under the same condition as Chinese-medium students. For Mongolian-medium students who decide to apply

for Mongolian-medium majors in universities inside the autonomous region, there is a 20% reduction in tuition fees. In addition, if they minor in a second degree or Chinese-medium applied courses which might be helpful for their future employment or entrepreneurship, part of the cost will be undertaken by the government.

After Graduation

Dialogue 4:

I: Since Chinese is the main language in China, do you have any concerns about your future jobs? For example, what if the employer has no intention of recruiting Mongolian-medium graduates?

Undergraduate 1: I don't think that's a problem at all. My Chinese is not bad, and I have the Certificate of Putonghua (Mandarin) Proficiency.

I: And they (employers) won't reject you since you are Mongolian-medium student.

Undergraduate 2: No, they will pay more attention on me instead, since I'm bilingual.

Undergraduate 3: Actually, the employment rate (of Mongolian-medium graduates) was quite low a few years ago. But now, the situation gets much better.

Undergraduate 4: And then, the number of Mongolian-medium students has increased.

I: Do you know any of the preferential policies (for Mongolian-medium students) recently?

Undergraduate 2: The "Minority Talent Backbone Plan." It is totally free.

I: What about employment?

Undergraduate 3: Some companies give priority to bilingual applicants. And there is a certain share for Mongolian-Medium talents in government offices.

I: Are these policies implemented in recent years?

Undergraduate 2: Yeah, I guess so. [The aim is] to insure that Mongolian-medium students could get desired jobs.

After graduating from college, there are usually two choices for graduates: one is to take up further studies in graduate schools, the other one is to take up occupations. For both of these two choices, the government has made its effort to offer convenience for Mongolian-medium students.

Since 2006, the “Ethnic Minority High-level Backbone Talent Program” (which is mentioned as the “Minority Talent Backbone Plan” in the dialogue above) has been implemented by the government. By consulting documents published on the official website of the Chinese Ministry of Education, the “Ethnic Minority High-level Backbone Talent Program” is an enrollment plan for ethnic minorities who wish to continue onto graduate school. Once their scores in postgraduate examination meet the standard, the government will offer them full scholarships and extra subsistence allowances. After they get their master’s or doctoral degree, they need to go back to their province of origin, and make contributions for their hometown for five years. After that, they can go anywhere they want. On the one hand, the program has helped ethnic minority students with domestic difficulties to fulfill their dreams of pursuing advanced studies; on the other hand, it has provided the talent support for the development of ethnic minority areas.

For Mongolian-medium graduates who are seeking to obtain employment, the government has also introduced corresponding measures. For example, according to Cai's (2016) article published on the *Legal Evening News*, there is a certain number of positions

being prepared for Mongolian-medium applicants in judicial organizations of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region every year. Take Damaoqi (a county of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region) as example, 24 new judges were introduced in 2016, and 8 of them are bilingual. (Cai, 2016, p.35) On the one hand, bilingual judges could make sure local litigants who are not proficient in Chinese understand the details of cases; on the other hand, Mongolian-medium graduates are guaranteed an opportunity to display their abilities.

Changes of Social Environment

Bilingual Environment

Dialogue 5:

Parent 3: Nowadays, the broadcasts and TV shows are all in Chinese, and the society is in a Chinese environment. Even though my daughter is a Mongolian-medium student, her Chinese level is almost the same as those Chinese-medium students.

I: Yes, after all you have to use Chinese in the society in most conditions.

Parent 3: Yeah. It's unlike the time when I was a child. Most of the people in my village were Mongolian. And there was no radio or television. Our connection with Han (Chinese) people was quite rare. So we barely spoke Chinese at that time. But the kids these days have a lot of opportunities to practice their Chinese in the daily life. Their Chinese ability is improved.

I: So, that means even if you are in Mongolian-medium schools, you don't need to worry about your Chinese. Instead, you will be bilingual.

Parent 3: Yes. So you learn your mother language in school, and you practice Chinese in society. It's a win-win situation. How nice it is!

A few decades ago, there were pure Mongolian villages in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. In these villages, all the residents were Mongolian. Due to the blocked transportation and self-sufficient economy, their connections between Han people were limited. Thus, just like the situation mentioned in the dialogue above, the language environment, especially in rural areas, was quite simple. However, with the development of the economy in recent years, the communication between Mongolian and Han people is increasing. On the one hand, the great economic potential in energy and land resources of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region has attracted more and more attentions from enterprises outside the autonomous region. On the other hand, Mongolian herdsmen are trying to utilize modern techniques to improve efficiency and productivity.

Thus, these two ethnic groups began to amalgamate continuously, and the chance for Mongolian people to use Chinese is increasing. Although there are still native Mongolian villages existing in the autonomous region, villagers are more and more exposed to the Chinese environment due to the popularity of modern means of transportation and communication. Especially for the Mongolian children who receive education in cities and towns, they constantly practice Chinese in their daily life. Their Chinese proficiency is sufficient to meet the need of work and everyday life. Just as the parent mentioned in our conversation, Mongolian children learn how to speak their mother language in school, and practice Chinese in society. The negative perception that Mongolian-medium students are not good at Chinese has been fading away.

Academic Pressure

Dialogue 6:

Parent 4: I think the situation (of Mongolian-medium education) is much better than in the earlier years. When my child just entered primary school, there were a lot of Mongolian parents sending their kids to Chinese-medium schools. But now, many of my Mongolian friends insist to let their children receive Mongolian-medium education.

I: What do you think is the reason for such changes?

Parent 4: To be more realistic, the pressure of Chinese-medium students is too much.

I: The academic pressure.

Parent 4: Yes, the academic pressure of Chinese-medium students for entering universities is horrible.

Dialogue 7:

Parent 5: The pressure on Mongolian-medium students is relatively less. Chinese-medium students have to face plenty of homework or exams. But in my school, we have a lot of extracurricular activities, such as Boke (Mongolian wrestling), Shatar (Mongolian chess), embroidery, singing and dancing. These activities are part of our everyday curriculum. They are called “expansion courses.”

I: This sounds great.

Parent 5: But such activities for Chinese-medium students are quite limited. Studying is their number one issue. Sometimes, if teachers decide to offer those so called “useless” activities or require less homework, parents are the first one to stand up against these decisions. Even in holidays, some of the Chinese-medium students are sent to after school classes. We are not willing to do that. We hope our students go back to their hometown, and

relax themselves in nature. They can herd the sheep or work the land. Sometimes, our (Mongolian and Han people) thoughts on education are quite different.

Among our 15 interviewees, five of them have pointed out that the academic pressure in Chinese-medium education is one of the reasons of choosing Mongolian-medium education for their children or themselves. Education in a globalized world is closely related to the economy and market. Commercialized education becomes another form of goods which obtains the relationship of supply and demand. There is a saying that “all resources are limited,” which is a statement about market values and could be assumed to include educational resources. Therefore, in order to get access to these limited resources, competition is unavoidable.

In order to better elaborate the imbalanced situation of educational supply and demand in China, I would like to give an example. In Tongliao, there are nearly 20 junior high schools while only two senior high schools are rated highly. Entering these two schools means you have more than 50% possibility to get access to a well-known university of China. When I was in junior high school, 500 students in my grade fought for less than 30 qualified positions. In such cruel conditions, teachers have to put their emphasis on how to help the students get higher scores in the High School Entrance Exams, while the students have to give up “irrelevant” courses, such as PE and art classes, and concentrate on the knowledge which might show up in the exams. Compared with Chinese-medium students, the situation today of Mongolian-medium students is much easier. According to the statistics provided by the Tongliao Municipal Education Bureau, there were 27 Mongolian-medium junior high schools and 9 Mongolian-medium senior high schools in 2015. Among the 5757 junior high school

graduates, 5211 of them had successfully entered the senior high school. That means over 90.5% of them were able to continue their studies. However, for the Chinese-medium students, there were 24575 junior high school graduates, while only 17453 were accepted by the senior high schools in 2015. The qualified students only counted for 71.0% of the total.

Some Re-Consideration of the Data

Dialogue 8:

Parent 6: In the past, people were busy with hunting jobs to make a living. They didn't have enough time or energy to think about problems on an ethnic or national level.

I: So, that's why my initial idea was Mongolian-medium education was declining.

Parent 6: The decline is a matter of the past. Now, people are paying more and more attention (to Mongolian-medium education). Many (Mongolian) people I knew are sending their second child to Mongolian-medium schools.

I: What do you think is the reason of such change in people's mind?

Parent 6: In the past, especially the time of my parents, they could feel the pressure of life as a Mongolian. But now, with the development of economy and the implementation of preferential policies in ethnic areas, there are a lot of employers who are willing to give priority to you if you are bilingual in Chinese and Mongolian.

I: So, from the age of your parents to now, people's thoughts are gradually changing.

Parent 6: At that time, life was too difficult. Even survival had become a problem. People tried their best to find proper jobs to support their families. Now, people have better living conditions, and their needs on the spiritual level are increasing, and their identity as Mongolians is stronger.

I: So the ethnic sentiment is gradually taken into account.

Parent 6: Yes. That's true.

Dialogue 9:

Parent 7: In recent years, our ethnic education is increasing. There is a common agreement among Mongolian people graduating from Mongolian-medium schools, and even Chinese-medium schools: the more ethnic, the more ready for the wider world. If we respect ourselves, others will respect you. Many of my students are studying in top universities of China. They often tell me that it is very important to maintain your ethnic speciality.

I: Self-identity.

Parent 7: Yes, self-identity. Some of my students say that people enjoy asking you questions once they get to know you are an ethnic minority. They would ask if you could speak your mother tongue. So, as a Mongolian, it is important for you to know your culture and even language. [Mongolian] people are gradually getting to realize this point.

Both of these two conversations impress me a lot. The rapid development of economy in China is a matter of no more than a few decades. Before that, people's living conditions were far beneath that of today. People were not able to think about spiritual things when their material life could not be guaranteed. How to solve the problem of food and clothing? Except for the farmers and herdsmen in agricultural and pastoral areas, the only solution for the residents in cities and towns was to find a job. During the interview, more than one parent or teacher mentioned that, in earlier years, the situation of Mongolian-medium graduates was not easy. Some of them even suffered from discrimination. Therefore, those Mongolian people who endured the frustration in looking for jobs decided to choose Chinese-medium

education for their children to avoid experiencing this problem. However, with the progress of the society and the government's attention on ethnic education, the condition of Mongolian-medium students has changed. Meanwhile, with the improvement of people's living standards, the abundance of material life is not enough to define the word of "happiness." People begin to value what is meaningful within their own culture. As a Mongolian, self-identity usually derives from the respect of his or her culture and language. Thus, more and more Mongolians choose Mongolian-medium schools for their children or themselves. Among the six undergraduates in my interview, five of them indicate that: "I have never thought about Chinese-medium education;" "Mongolians go to Mongolian-medium schools;" and "Entering Mongolian-medium schools is taken for granted."

Summary

In this chapter, by interviewing Mongolian parents, and Mongolian-medium teachers and undergraduates, I investigated the reasons why Mongolian-medium education is rising in recent years. Firstly, the support from the government has provided security for the development of Mongolian-medium education. As a representative of ethnic education in China, Mongolian-medium education has formed a complete system, from kindergarten to postgraduate school. During the school period, the government offers Mongolian-medium students financial support and preferential treatment in enrollment. After graduation, the government tried to provide equal employment opportunities for both Chinese-medium and Mongolian-medium graduates. Some of the positions even give priority to the bilingual talents of Chinese and Mongolian. Secondly, the economic changes of the society have

created conditions for the development of Mongolian-medium education. Due to the progress of the modern means of transportation and communication, the previously isolated Mongolian villages have gradually opened to the outside world. There is an increasing number of Mongolian villages exposed to the bilingual environment. Gradually, even Mongolian-medium students' Chinese proficiency could meet the requirement of employers in cities and towns, where the cultural majority is Han.

Thus, more and more Mongolian parents choose to let their children receive education in their mother language, and let them practice Chinese outside of school. In this way, Mongolian-medium students become bilingual. Furthermore, academic pressure for Chinese-medium students is intense in China. To avoid such great pressure, many Mongolian parents prefer to send their children to Mongolian-medium schools. Thirdly, the thoughts of Mongolian people have been changing during these decades. Since the social advancement and national support, people's attitude towards Mongolian-medium education has altered. The significance of ethnic language and culture has been widely recognized. And more and more Mongolian people are getting to realize the importance of shouldering the responsibility to inherit and develop Mongolian culture and language.

Chapter Five: Problems and Suggestions

From the data presented in the previous chapters, it would seem that Mongolian-medium education is progressing. However, this study also identified some weaknesses in Mongolian-medium education. These weaknesses are often in the details, and therefore seem insignificant at first glance. However, Mongolian-medium education is still put at a disadvantage, when compared to the comparatively mature system of Chinese-medium education. In this chapter, I attempt to summarize the deficiencies in the Mongolian-medium education system. Then, I put forward some suggestions aimed at these problems, and hope to make a contribution to the Mongolian-medium system in my hometown.

The Shortage of Mongolian-Medium Peripheral Industry

Dialogue 10:

Parent 7: Have you ever noticed the situation that both of the parents are Mongolian and they often use Mongolian to communicate with the kid in daily life, but finally they send their children to Chinese-medium schools?

Parent 7: Yes, I have.

I: Do you know why?

Parent 7: Even though some of the kids know how to speak Mongolian, the proficiency is much less than in Chinese, especially for kids growing up in cities and towns. Parents' concern is that their children's Mongolian is not fluent enough to keep up with the pace in Mongolian-medium schools. The cartoons they watch everyday are in Chinese, so their Chinese is quite good. All the cartoons or storybooks which could catch their attention are in Chinese.

I: Yes, you are right. Actually, there should be some Mongolian cartoons played on TV every day, to attract children's interest in Mongolian.

Parent 7: We have such children's programs on TV, but they are very rare. And the lyrics are delivered in pure outer Mongolian (which is the language in the People's Republic of Mongolia). It is hard for our kids to understand, unless your Mongolian is good enough. In Tongliao or in most areas of Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region, our special accent is quite heavy.

I: Yes, and I find that we mix two languages (Mongolian and Chinese) together.

Parent 7: That's right. Our children are accustomed to such a language environment. Once you let them listen to pure Mongolian, they just lose their interest since they cannot understand. Unavoidably, they turn to the Chinese-medium channel.

As for the matter of language acquisition, Krashen (1998) puts forward the *input hypothesis* in his book. It is a hypothesis of how second language acquisition takes place. Krashen (1988) argues that only when the learner come into contact with comprehensive input, and put the focus on the understanding of content and message instead of the linguistic form, the language acquisition could occur. Krashen (1988) believes that an ideal input should have the following features: comprehensibility, interest and relevance, lack of grammatical sequence, and quantity.

Therefore, during childhood (which is the best time to acquire a language), offering children some interesting materials such as cartoons and storybooks could quicken their speed of language acquisition. However, just as what the parent says in the conversation above, Mongolian-medium TV shows and books that could steal the spotlight of children are

quite limited. Furthermore, among the few Mongolian-medium TV shows, most of the language is delivered in outer Mongolian which is different from inner Mongolian in vocabulary and written characters. It is hard for such shows to catch children's interest. Contrarily, Chinese-medium shows and reading materials are rich and enormous. Looking back on my childhood, all the amusing cartoons that I could recall were in Chinese. That is one reason why many Mongolian children are better at Chinese than Mongolian.

After realizing this problem, it is not difficult to come up with corresponding solutions. First, develop the Mongolian media industry. Local TV stations could try to produce interesting Mongolian-medium cartoons or shows with local characteristics. And publishers could offer children attractive storybooks or comic books in simple Mongolian. Thus, children could acquire Mongolian by playing instead of learning in their daily life. During the interview, one teacher also mentioned that it was quite difficult for her students in grade one to learn Mongolian at the very beginning due to the lack of Mongolian language environment. Thus, in order to create a relaxing language environment, schools could try to utilize multi-media and interesting learning materials to provide children with lively classes.

The Language Gap

Dialogue 11:

Parent 8: Several days ago, I in'vigilated a recruitment exam, and I found that our Mongolian-medium students were at a disadvantage.

I: Why do you think so?

Parent 8: Even though students were allowed to use Mongolian or Chinese to answer the questions, the exam papers were in Chinese. I remember there was a reading comprehension

test, which was much more difficult for our Mongolian-medium students. They had to translate the Chinese reading materials into Mongolian inside the brain, and then answer the questions. The problem was if students choose to answer these questions in Chinese, there was still an essay question in the end. They definitely prefer to write the essay in Mongolian. However, using both of the two languages were not allowed, you could only choose one of them. So, I found that there were 6 or 7 Mongolian-medium students looking quite anxious. I thought: it would be much better to offer these students exam papers in Mongolian.

I: What was the exam for?

Parent 8: The exam was to select graduate talent to become cadres in villages and towns. If the paper was in Mongolian, I am quite sure our Mongolian-medium students could get better grades.

Dialogue 12:

Parent 9: I haven't thought too much about my son's college education. I think it depends on his score of college entrance exam.

I: So, there isn't a certain answer yet, Mongolian-medium or Chinese.

Parent 9: Actually, many Mongolian-medium students have to study in Chinese-medium classes, unless your major is totally Mongolian-medium such as Mongolian Preschool Education or Mongolian Language and Literature. For some hot and popular majors or courses, Mongolian-medium and Chinese-medium students are taught jointly in the same class.

I: In this case, the bilingual advantage of Mongolian-medium students is restricted.

Parent 9: Yes. If you have been in the Mongolian-medium education system since childhood, and then you end up in a non-Mongolian-medium major in the university, your advantage is limited. Take me as example: I have been studying in the Mongolian-medium education system, all the way from primary school to senior high school. And then, I was admitted as a Mongolian-medium candidate to the major of Economic Law at Inner Mongolia University. However, I had to take classes with Chinese-medium students, and the instructional language in class was also Chinese. So you could imagine that my ability of reading and listening comprehension was not as good as my Chinese-medium classmates.

I: I know you are a teacher at the Inner Mongolia University for Nationalities, right?

Parent 9: Yes.

I: Do you know if there is a corresponding policy in your school to help Mongolian-medium undergraduates with their Chinese?

Parent 9: I don't think we have such policies or Chinese tutorials in our school. I believe our Mongolian-medium students need such extra help.

According to different places of origin, Mongolian-medium students could be categorized into two sorts: students from cities and towns, and students from agricultural and rural areas. For the Mongolian kids growing up in urban areas, they have been surrounded by bilingualism: Mongolian at home and Chinese in society. Their Chinese is good enough for everyday needs. For Mongolian kids growing up in rural areas, their chances to use Chinese are fewer. Their exposure in the Chinese language environment only occurs by watching TV or communicating with non-Mongolian people. Thus, compared with Chinese-medium students or Mongolian-medium students growing up in urban areas, their Chinese proficiency

is still inadequate. In the previous chapter, I have mentioned that Mongolian-medium students are allowed to choose Chinese-medium majors once their scores on the College Entrance Exam qualify. However, enrolling Mongolian-medium students is just the first step, universities and colleges should consider a follow-up problem: In Chinese-medium departments, whether the former Mongolian-medium students are at a disadvantage or not.

After hearing the experience of our interviewee in Dialogue 12, the answer might be “yes.” We have to admit there is a certain gap of Chinese proficiency between some of the Mongolian-medium students and Chinese-medium students. Thus, universities and colleges should think about offering extra Chinese workshops or tutorials to reduce the gap. In addition, in examinations, especially for those important ones which relate to graduation or employment issues, Mongolian-medium students should be taken into consideration and exam papers in Mongolian should be provided. The aim of these exams is inspecting students’ academic level instead of their Chinese level. In this way, Mongolian-medium students’ true academic quality could be represented free of being negatively influenced by their deficiency in Chinese.

The Imbalance in Students’ Place of Origin

Dialogue 13:

I: What do you teach in school?

Parent 4: I teach Fine Art in grade one and two.

I: How many students are there in your class?

Parent 4: About 50.

I: How many of them are urban students?

Parent 4: There are only a few. Less than 10 in each class.

Dialogue 14:

I: How about the number of students in your school?

Parent 6: Quite a lot. In recent years, most of the parents in rural areas choose to send their children to Mongolian-medium schools. After all, the pressure for Mongolian-medium students is much less than those in Chinese-medium schools.

I: How many students are there in your class?

Parent 6: There are 30 students.

I: How many of them are from urban areas?

Parent 6: None. All my students are from villages. Their parents are either farmers or herdsmen.

From these two conversations above, it could be seen that most of the students in Mongolian-medium schools are from rural areas. According to my research, such a situation is very common. Mongolian families in urban areas usually choose Chinese-medium education, which is relatively mature. This has led to divergent results. First, compared with urban students, students from rural areas are at a disadvantage in families' social economic status or parents' educational level. Affected by these disadvantages, the quality of student resources from rural areas in Mongolian-medium schools is relatively low. And this usually leads to the impression that Mongolian-medium schools are falling behind Chinese-medium schools. Such impressions regarding Mongolian-medium schools keeps more potential students away. Second, for most rural students, there are farmlands and livestock back in their hometown. Some of them have to go back home to support their parents after graduating

from senior high school or even junior high school. Others choose to continue their study in universities or graduate schools. In this way, the amount of educated, talented Mongolian speakers in society is reduced.

In order to deal with the imbalanced situation, changing the minds of urban Mongolian families toward sending their children to Mongolian schools is a long term matter to consider. Most importantly, the government should figure out how to further improve the quality of Mongolian-medium schools to attract more students. By doing this, the impression that the Mongolian-medium education is lower quality compared to the Chinese-medium one will be disproven.

Conclusion

By analyzing the data of Mongolian-medium schools, and interviewing several Mongolian parents, teachers and undergraduates, I discovered that although Mongolian language education in Tongliao is still underused compared to Chinese language education, the situation is gradually getting better in recent years. This improvement is caused by several factors, such as support from the government, a changing social environment, and the change in attitudes of the Mongolian people. However, there are still some problems in the Mongolian-medium education system which should not be ignored. For example, peripheral industries of Mongolian-medium education are still weak; the gap of Chinese proficiency between Mongolian-medium and Chinese-medium students should be taken into consideration; and current Mongolian-medium students' place of origin is in an imbalanced condition.

In the project of developing Mongolian-medium education, the government of China and Mongolian people are making efforts. The ultimate goal is not only to improve the conditions of Mongolian-medium schools, but also protect traditional Mongolian cultures and languages. This has a significant meaning for both the Mongolian ethnic group and China.

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