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## The Languages of Manchuria in Today's China

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## The Languages of Manchuria in Today's China

JUHA JANHUNEN  
*University of Helsinki*

Manchuria is a region often neglected in the circumpolar context because of its political adherence to China. In this paper, the author shows that a considerable part of the ethnic groups today living in Manchuria are closely associated with the rest of the circumpolar populations. Also, the problems of language endangerment and ethnic survival in Manchuria are similar to those encountered elsewhere in the North. There are, however, also specific problems and possible solutions peculiar to China.

### 1. THE MANCHURIAN LINGUISTIC REGION

By Manchuria I understand here the region comprising, basically, the hydrographic areas of the rivers Amur and Liao, both with adjoining tributary basins. The river Amur (*Heilongjiang*), with its major tributaries Ussuri (*Wusulijiang*) and Nonni-Sungari (*Nenjiang-Songhuajiang*), defines a region which, in terms of a very rough geographical division, may be generally specified as North Manchuria, in contrast to the Liao region, or South Manchuria. In the longitudinal direction, and in an arc along the middle course of the Amur, Manchuria is traversed by the Greater (*Da*) and Lesser (*Xiao*) Khingan Ranges (*Xing'anling*), which contrast with the relatively plain territory, or Central Manchuria, in the middle.

Geographically and culturally Manchuria is linked with Siberia in the north, Mongolia in the west, China in the southwest, and Korea in the southeast. All of these neighbouring regions have on equal terms contributed to the ethnic and linguistic composition of Manchuria and vice versa, but politically the connection with China has been of the most long-standing importance. Starting with the Neolithic period, Manchuria has formed a cradle of cultural innovation and ethnic expansion parallel to, and comparable with, the Yellow River (*Huanghe*) basin. Much of Chinese history is directly connected with the evolution of the relationship between Manchuria and China proper, with Mongolia as the third main actor.

From the early Middle Ages, several powerful political entities, so-called "barbarian" kingdoms and empires, originated in Manchuria, each of which was presumably dominated by a single monoethnic and monolingual core: Northern (*Bei*) Wei (386-534), Bohai (698-926), Liao (907-1125), and Jin (1115-1234). The ethnic names of some of the corresponding dynastic cores are known to us from historical sources: the Tabgach (*Tuoba*) of the Northern Wei, the Khitan (*Qidan*) of

the Liao, and the Jurchen (*Nüzhen* or *Ruzhen*) of the Jin. Although their linguistic affiliations are still a matter of dispute, it seems increasingly likely that Manchurian ethnic history has involved a cyclic alternation between Mongolic (Northern Wei, Liao) and Tungusic (Bohai, Jin) dominance.

The struggle for dominance between Mongolic and Tungusic was continued during the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) of the Mongols and the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) of the Manchu, both of which involved a political union of Manchuria and Mongolia with China proper. The foundations of the modern ethnic and linguistic map of Manchuria were completed during the Qing dynasty, when the region became permanently divided into a Mongolic western and a Tungusic eastern half, a division still reflected today by the administrative border, roughly following the Greater Khingan Mountains, between Inner Mongolia (*Nei Menggu*) and the provinces of the so-called Chinese Northeast (*Dongbei*). During this period we can already concretely identify a number of minor local languages, distinct from the dominant forms of Mongolic and Tungusic.

It was also during the Qing dynasty that the river Amur, together with the Argun' (*Eergunahe*) in the west and the Ussuri in the east, for the first time in history became a border between two politically equal states, China and Russia. Those parts of Manchuria that were located to the north of the Amur, to the west of the Argun', and to the east of the Ussuri, were gradually annexed by Russia, today forming the Chita and Amur provinces (*oblast'*) as well as the Khabarovsk and Maritime regions (*krai*) of Eastern Siberia and the Russian Far East. To guard the sovereignty of China over the rest of Manchuria, the Manchu were forced to open the region to Han Chinese settlement (after 1860).

In spite of the increasing Han Chinese ethnic and linguistic presence in the region, the political history of Manchuria south of the Amur during the twentieth century was long characterized by a conflict between Russia and Japan. The involvement of Japan in the region lasted for about two generations, starting with the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905) and ending with the collapse of the Manchukuo (*Manzhouguo*) state (1932–1945). During this period, Chinese, Russian and Japanese had roughly equal positions as dominant languages of culture and administration in much of Manchuria. It was only the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949) that definitively turned the balance in favour of Chinese. Of all the alien territories today controlled by China, Manchuria, with the exception of the parts historically annexed by Russia, is the one most securely dominated by a massive Han Chinese ethnic and linguistic majority. This is the situation that the local minority languages have to cope with.

Not surprisingly, the administrative framework of the People's Republic of China tends to ignore the integrity of Manchuria as an entity in its own right. The eastern and central parts of historical Manchuria today comprise the three Northeastern provinces (*sheng*) of Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning, officially treated as inseparable parts of China proper, while the western part is divided between the leagues (*meng*) of Hulun Buir (*Hulun Beier*), Khingan (*Xing'an*) and

Jerim (*Zhelimu*), as well as the city (*shi*) of Ulaanhada (*Chifeng*), all under Inner Mongolian jurisdiction.

Due to the assimilative pressure of China proper since ancient times, the linguistic diversity of Manchuria is best preserved immediately to the south of the Sino-Russian border, in Heilongjiang and Hulun Buir. The ethnic groups living here correspond well to the definition of "Northern Minorities", in that they are generally small and their languages are increasingly endangered. The demographic circumstances are in many ways parallel to those prevailing on the Russian side, and, in fact, many of the ethnic groups concerned have been divided by the state border. However, the very presence of the political border allows us to view the ethnic and linguistic developments on the Chinese side as a separate complex. The focus in the present survey will be on the languages of the "Northern Minorities" of China as viewed against the background of the general impact of China and the Chinese language in Manchuria.

## 2. THE LANGUAGES OF MANCHURIA TODAY

In view of their different historical relationships to the region, the languages spoken in the Chinese part of Manchuria may be divided into four distinct groups: (i) major non-indigenous languages, (ii) major indigenous languages, (iii) minor indigenous languages, and (iv) minor non-indigenous languages. The territorial identities and sociolinguistic positions of the languages belonging to each group are surveyed below.

(i) The major non-indigenous languages of Manchuria are Chinese, Russian and Japanese, all of which may also be characterized as basically alien or colonial state languages only recently introduced to or imposed upon the original ethnic and linguistic patterns of the region.

(1) **Chinese**, in its standard Northern Chinese or Mandarin variety (*putonghua*), is today the sole official state language used for both regional and extraregional administrative and cultural purposes in all of Chinese Manchuria. It is the native language of the overwhelming majority of the local population, in absolute terms almost 100 million people, both urban and rural. At the oral level, a number of dialectal varieties, notably the Shandong dialect, are also used, reflecting the geographical origins of the population. Most speakers of Chinese in Manchuria are first-to-third generation immigrants from the northern parts of China proper. Historically, several waves of immigration have taken place, connected, among other things, with the planned introduction of labour force for Russian and Japanese industrial projects (ca. 1900–1940) and the forced settlement programs during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). Even today, Manchuria, especially the Inner Mongolian part of it, is considered a frontier land, open to Chinese settlers looking for a better life outside of the crowded provinces in the south [BURTON & SALAFF 1993]. Both rural and urban development continues

intensively, increasing the majority pressure on the local ethnic and linguistic groups.

(2) **Russian** was once the dominant language for culture and education in many localities on the Chinese side of Manchuria, notably in the settlements along the Russian-built Trans-Manchurian Chinese Eastern Railway connecting the border towns of Manzhouli (Zabaikal'sk) and Suifenhe (Pogranichnaya). A large Russian-speaking peasant population also arose since the late nineteenth century in the Three Rivers Region (*Trekhrech'e*) of Hulun Buir [KAIGORODOFF 1970]. After the October Revolution (1917), there was an influx of Russian emigrants, and for a couple of decades the city of Harbin (*Haerbin*) in Central Manchuria was the largest Russian-speaking settlement outside of Russia. During this period, several local ethnic groups maintained a special relationship of economic and cultural symbiosis with the Russians, rather than with the Chinese. Today, after a wave of massive emigration and forced "repatriation" (ca. 1955–1960) by the Chinese authorities, there are just a dozen Russians left in Harbin and other cities, while very few individuals remain in rural villages. The regional importance of Russian is, however, increasing again due to the recent reopening of the Sino-Russian border.

(2b) There are also individuals and even coherent populations of mixed Sino-Russian descent in China. Some of these, notably several villages in the Three Rivers Region, retain features of Russian material culture and Orthodox Christian religion. Today officially classified as "Russians" (*Eluosi*) and recognized as a separate minority nationality, these people, altogether numbering more than 10,000 individuals, have become almost monolingual in Chinese, though Russian may still occasionally be used by old bilingual individuals.

(3) **Japanese** had hardly become nativized as a language in the continental parts of Manchuria, when it was eliminated again by the postwar operations of the Soviet and Chinese armies. It has, however, retained some status as a second language among the non-Chinese ethnic groups and may, in fact, be regaining some of its former regional importance very much like Russian. Interestingly, even in rural minority areas, there are still individuals of the old generation fully fluent in Japanese. However, a knowledge of Japanese, unlike that of Russian, always seems to point to a relatively high level of education of the individuals concerned.

(ii) The major indigenous languages of Manchuria are Manchu, Mongol (Mongolian) and Korean, all of which are, or have been, state languages in either Manchuria or the neighbouring regions.

(4) **Manchu** is notoriously one of those rare state languages that have declined to the verge of extinction in spite of maximal opportunities of official support in the past. The basic reason for this development was, without doubt, the fact that the Manchu ruling elite of China, itself massively Sinicized, chose not to protect the territorial integrity of the Manchu-speaking rural population that still remained in various parts of Manchuria until late Qing times. Today, with some 10 million officially registered individuals, the Manchu continue to be one of the largest ethnic

groups in China, but the Manchu language is among the most seriously endangered in the country. Individuals still speaking Manchu are reported to survive in three localities in Manchuria:

(4a) in the villages (*cun*) of Siji and Dawujiazi of the Heihe (Aihui) Region (*diqu*), in the Amur basin; four to five elderly active speakers and a few individuals with a passive knowledge of the Manchu language are known to have survived in Siji until recently (1988) [JANHUNEN 1989], while the situation in Dawujiazi is unlikely to be much better; additional individuals, but certainly not any coherent groups, may live in nearby localities of the Heihe Region;

(4b) in the village of Sanjiazi of Fuyu County, in the Nonni basin just north of the city of Tsitsikar (*Qiqihaer*); the current number of speakers is unlikely to exceed 50, being probably much less and containing no children speaking the language;

(4c) in the village of Daxing of Tailai County, also in the Nonni basin south of Tsitsikar; with a handful of speakers, all belonging to the oldest generation (over 60 years of age).

(4d) Additionally, and from the linguistic point of view most importantly, Manchu is spoken by a diaspora population transferred during the Qing period (1763) from Manchuria to the newly-conquered Ili (*Yili*) region of Sinkiang (*Xinjiang*). Most of the individuals originally transferred seem to have belonged to the Manchu-speaking Sibe tribe, and, accordingly, their descendants are today officially classified as a separate minority nationality, the Sibe (*Xibo*). The exact number of Manchu-speaking Sibe in Sinkiang is unknown but it may be as high as 10,000 individuals or more. In any case, the language is used for cultural and educational purposes and is apparently being transmitted to children in at least some families. Were it not for this diaspora group, the Manchu language would have to be classified as definitely moribund.

(5) **Mongol** (Mongolian) serves as the language of ethnic administration as well as primary and professional education for all the Mongols proper in both Inner Mongolia and the Northeastern Provinces of Manchuria [LATTIMORE 1935]. Additionally, Mongol is widely used as a second or third language by several other minority groups, mainly in Hulun Buir. At the written level, the language used is Written Mongol, a standard abstract and archaic enough to suit relatively well all the different Mongolic-speaking groups in the region. At the oral level, the normative language follows the Inner Mongolian standard of Hohhot (*Huhehaote*) and is close to Khalkha, the state language of the Republic of Mongolia. For casual purposes, several closely related dialects are used [TODAEVA 1985]. The prestige dialect in Hulun Buir is Khorchin, the native idiom of Khingan League.

(6) **Korean** is spoken, in addition to the inhabitants of the Korean Peninsula, by significant diaspora groups in all major cities of Northern China, mainly transferred during the Manchukuo period. The Korean rural population also extends across the North Korean border to what is now the Korean Autonomous District (*zhou*) of Jilin Province. For a short period starting with the late nineteenth century, Korean villages existed in the Russian Far East, until the whole

Korean population there was deported to Central Asia (1937) [KHO 1987]. Apart from contacts with the Chinese, Russians and Japanese, speakers of Korean have had little recent interaction with any of the smaller ethnic and linguistic groups in Manchuria.

(iii) The minor indigenous languages of Manchuria are all concentrated in the northern parts of the region and the corresponding ethnic groups may be identified as the true "Northern Minorities" of China. In terms of the official ethnic classification, four ethnic groups are involved: Dagur, Ewenki, Orochen, and Hejen. In terms of a linguistic taxonomy, also, four main entities are present: the two Mongolic languages Dagur and Khamnigan, and the two Tungusic languages Ewenki and Nanai. The correspondences between the four ethnic groups and the four languages are, however, not straightforward.

(7) **Dagur** may be characterized as an aberrant and in many respects archaic Mongolic language that has survived on the northeastern periphery of the Mongolic territory, always spoken by a relatively small population. From historical sources it is known that Dagur was once distributed in the Middle Amur region, particularly in the Zeya basin, today on the Russian side of the border. During an early phase in the development of the Sino-Russian relations, the Qing government of China moved the Dagur-speakers from this "original" location southwards (1654), to what is now the Chinese side of the border. The relocation programme continued later in several etapes, and, as a result, we have today four geographically separate groups of Dagur-speakers. The overall Dagur population is ca. 120,000 individuals, the majority of whom retain the Dagur language [SCHWARZ 1984].

(7a) A small Dagur-speaking community, reportedly some 400 individuals, remains on the Chinese side of the Middle Amur basin, in the neighbourhood of the last Manchu-speakers of the Heihe Region. The dialect of this remnant Amur Dagur group is poorly known but it seems to deviate from the other Dagur dialects in some respects. It is rapidly disappearing, with probably no more than 100 speakers left.

(7b) The principal Dagur-speaking population lives in the Nonni basin, today divided between Hulun Buir and Heilongjiang. In view of the fact that the whole Nonni basin is today densely populated by Han Chinese immigrant communities, the Dagur language in this region is surprisingly well preserved. There is, however, a clear contrast between the more vigorous Dagur communities on the Hulun Buir side of the Nonni, and the more rapidly declining remnant groups in Heilongjiang. Important subgroups of the Nonni Dagur include:

(7ba) the Morin Daba Dagur, in the Morin Daba (*Moli Dawa*) Dagur Autonomous Banner of Hulun Buir. In this single locality, the Dagur have been granted titular "autonomy", which may, indeed, have contributed to the relatively high status of the Dagur language all over North Manchuria. Since Qing times, the Dagur have been known as an ethnic group interested in acquiring higher learning through dominant languages such as Manchu and Chinese, and this cultural

tradition may still prove to be of major significance to the survival of the Dagur language in the future. Understandably, the ethnic and cultural activities of the Dagur are today concentrated in the Autonomous Banner.

(7bb) the Butha Dagur, in the Butha (*Buteha*) alias Zhalantun Banner (*qi*) of Hulun Buir, immediately south of the Morin Daba Banner. Historically, the appellation Butha Dagur has also been used in a more general sense, referring to the entire Dagur population in the Nonni basin.

(7bc) the Tsitsikar Dagur, in Tsitsikar City of Heilongjiang, and in the surrounding rural areas. Prospects of language survival are here reduced, but Dagur-dominated villages apparently still exist, and even children are learning the language on a more or less regular basis.

(7bd) the Nenjiang Dagur, in Nenjiang or Mergen County of Heilongjiang. The local Dagur today reportedly number only ca. 500 individuals, and the language is no more being transmitted to children.

(7c) Another major group of Dagur, comprising ca. 10,000 individuals, lives in the basin of the river Imin (*Yimin*), within the Ewenki Autonomous Banner of Hulun Buir, immediately south of Hailar (*Hailaer*) City. The Dagur population here is fully bilingual in Mongol and even the local Dagur dialect shows features of Mongol influence. Nevertheless, language-retaining rate is high and no significant abandoning of the native language in favour of Mongol or Chinese seems to be taking place.

(7d) Together with the Sibe Manchu (4d), a group of Dagur was transferred by the Qing government to the Ili region of Sinkiang (1763). The descendants of this group today comprise some 5,000 people, and there are individuals still retaining the Dagur language as well as archaic Dagur folklore. Contacts with the Manchurian Dagur have recently been resumed, but it is unlikely that the native language can be retained in the long run in this locality, distant from the principal territories of the Dagur.

(8) **Khamnigan** or Khamnigan Mongol is another peculiar Mongolic language with some extremely archaic phonological properties rendering it almost like a spoken form of Written Mongol [JANHUNEN 1992]. The original Khamnigan territory seems to have been located in the Amur source region, on the rivers Onon-Borzya and Argun'. After the formation of the Sino-Russian border (1689), the Khamnigan were divided between what are now Russia and Mongolia. The group remaining on the Russian side subsequently attempted complicated political manoeuvres between Russia and China but finally accepted Russian rule. Today, the descendants of the historical Khamnigan number hardly more than 5,000 individuals, probably less, divided between three political states:

(8a) In northern Mongolia, Khamnigan have been reported from a few localities in the Onon region, notably the Dadal Arrow (*sum*) of Khentei League (*aimag*) [U.-KÖHALMI 1964]. The available information suggests that the Khamnigan language here has by now been absorbed by the Mongol dialect of Khalkha, though dialectal features of Khamnigan origin may still be present in the



Khalkha speech of elderly individuals.

(8b) In eastern Trans-Baikalia of Russia, Khamnigan have long lived mixed with the dominant Russian and Buryat peasant populations, with a few villages possibly still remaining Khamnigan-dominated. A knowledge of the Khamnigan language, recorded in two dialectal varieties, is, however, today likely to be confined to very few individuals of the old generation. Otherwise, a shift to Russian and Buryat has taken place.

(8c) The only linguistically vigorous Khamnigan population lives on the Chinese side, in Hulun Buir [JANHUNEN 1990]. The Khamnigan here are the descendants of emigrants who crossed the border from Russia during the initial years of Soviet rule (ca. 1918–1932), accompanying White Russian and Buryat (10c) groups. These Khamnigan became soon divided into two communities, a smaller one today living along the river Shinekhen (*Xinihe*) within the Ewenki Autonomous Banner, and a larger one occupying the basin of the river Mergel, within the Ewenki Arrow (*sumu*) of the Old Bargut Banner. The latter community comprises more than 1,500 individuals, all of whom are fluent in Khamnigan Mongol. There is widespread native bilingualism in Khamnigan Ewenki (9d), and the population is officially classified as belonging to the Ewenki minority nationality. The main languages of interethnic communication are Mongol and, as a receding feature, Russian [JANHUNEN 1991a].

(9) Ewenki is the native language of the ethnic groups officially termed Ewenki (*Ewenke*) and Orochen (*Oroqen* or *Elunchun*). Although classified as two separate ethnic minorities, the speakers of Ewenki in China actually represent four historically and linguistically distinct subgroups, whose dialects, together with the Ewenki dialects spoken widely over Siberia, form a single large complex of mutually intelligible Northern Tungusic idioms [SHIROKOGOROFF 1929/1933].

(9a) The largest Ewenki group in China, comprising some 25,000 people or over 90 percent of the official Ewenki nationality, is formed by the Solon. The Ewenki dialects of the Solon are occasionally considered to form a separate Ewenki-related Northern Tungusic language, as opposed to all the other forms of Ewenki spoken in both Manchuria and Siberia. There is, indeed, evidence suggesting a basic dichotomy between two types of Ewenki dialects that may be termed Siberian Ewenki and Manchurian Ewenki, with Solon belonging to the latter. The internal dialectology of Solon is, however, an unexplored field, and the relationships of Solon with the other groups of Ewenki dialects may prove to be more complicated than would seem to be the case at first glance. Historically, the Solon form a satellite group of the Dagur. Like the Dagur, the Solon also used to live in the Zeya basin north of the Middle Amur, from where the Qing government relocated them to other parts of Manchuria (1654). Since then, the Solon have accompanied the Dagur, and wherever we have Dagur people we also find a corresponding (generally smaller) group of Solon.

(9aa) The only thing uncertain is, whether there remain any Solon individuals in the Amur basin who would correspond to the remnant population of the Amur

Dagur. There are Ewenki reportedly still living in the Zeya basin, today on the Russian side, but these seem to represent an Ewenki group basically different from the Solon and closer related to the Orochen [BULATOVA 1987].

(9ab) The Nonni basin certainly contains a small Solon population that has until recently retained contacts with the local Dagur groups. Solon communities and individuals are present in all major localities along the Nonni, with a particularly vigorous concentration of them living in Nehe County, between Fuyu and Nenjiang. There is information that, at least in a few villages in Nehe, Solon is being transmitted as a living native language to children.

(9ac) The largest coherent population of Solon (and the largest coherent Ewenki population anywhere), altogether comprising nearly 10,000 individuals, lives within the Ewenki Autonomous Banner of Hulun Buir, an administrative entity dedicated to Solon titular "autonomy". Solon communities are present both in the administrative center of the banner and in rural villages along the Imin and its tributary Hui. Additionally, there is a small group of some 10 families nomadizing in the Mergel basin, mainly inhabited by the Khamnigan (8c). There is evidence that all the Solon groups in Hulun Buir retain their native language well, in spite of inherited bilingualism in Dagur. A considerable part of the Solon population is also fluent in Mongol (formerly Manchu) and Chinese.

(9ad) A small group of Solon, also termed Ongkor Solon, was transferred together with Dagur (7d) and Sibe Manchu (4d) to the Ili region of Sinkiang. Out of the original population of perhaps no more than 200 individuals, a single speaker of Ewenki is today (1992) reported to survive in the region [BAI & JANHUNEN 1992].

(9b) The other major conglomeration of Ewenki-speakers in China is formed by the Orochen, officially a "nationality" distinct from the Ewenki. Originally indigenous to regions north of the Amur, the ancestors of the Orochen seem to have entered the Chinese side in several waves, mainly during the eighteenth century. The Orochen then gradually spread over the two Khingan Ranges, where four geographical and dialectal subgroups (9ba-9bd) may be distinguished. Today, the Orochen number around 7,000 people, who, in contrast to the Solon, are rapidly and irreversibly losing their native language in favour of Chinese.

(9ba) The Birarchen have long formed an idiosyncratic group of a few hundred hunters and fishermen in the Zhan (*Zhanhe*) river basin of the Lesser Khingan region. Most of the population is now concentrated in the village of "New Ewenki" (*Xin E*) of Xunke County, Heilongjiang. The group is rapidly becoming assimilated by the local Han Chinese, and knowledge of the native language is confined to a few individuals of the old generation.

(9bb) The Selpechen used to be mounted nomads, occupying the basin of the river Selpe (*Cierbinhe*) in the middle part of the Lesser Khingan Range. After the founding of the People's Republic they, like the Birarchen, were concentrated in a single village, in their case ominously called "New Life" (*Xinsheng*), located in the rural part of Heihe City, Heilongjiang. In this village, the Selpechen first formed the local majority until large numbers of Han Chinese settlers were moved to the

region during the Cultural Revolution. Today, of the approximately 150 Orochen individuals in the village less than one third are fluent in the native language, with the youngest speakers already exceeding 40 years of age [JANHUNEN & XU & HOU 1989].

(9bc) The Kumarchen occupy the basin of the river Kumar (*Humahe*), today especially in the vicinity of the village of Shibazhan of Heihe Region, Heilongjiang. Culturally and linguistically somewhat better preserved than the other Orochen groups, the Kumarchen may still have a few children learning the Ewenki language at home, though the details are unknown.

(9bd) The fourth section of Orochen population lives in Hulun Buir and may be termed the Orochen proper. The population is centered on the Orochen Autonomous Banner, but there are remnants of Orochen groups along the Greater Khingan Mountains as far south as the village of Honghaerji in the southeastern part of the Ewenki Autonomous Banner. Few results have been achieved in protecting the native language. The youngest speakers are generally over 40 years of age, though there is unconfirmed information that a few families may still use Ewenki in communication with growing children.

(9c) The Manchurian Reindeer Tungus or "Yakut" (*Yakute*), officially classified together with the Solon as "Ewenki", are a group of ca. 200 individuals in the region of the river Bystraya (*Jiliuhe*), today concentrated in the township of Aoluguya in the Argun' Left (*Eerguna Zuo*) Banner of Hulun Buir. In spite of their small-scale reindeer husbandry [HEYNE 1987], the Manchurian Reindeer Tungus are culturally close to the Orochen and very different from the Solon. Descending from a group of Siberian Ewenki who moved from the Russian side in the early nineteenth century, the Manchurian Reindeer Tungus were until recent times involved in a relationship of economic symbiosis with the Russians of the Three Rivers Region [HEYNE 1992]. In view of their small population size and the modern conditions of settled life, there seem to be no chances for them to retain the Ewenki language. Available information is scarce and contradictory, but the language is probably no more being transmitted to children.

(9d) The fourth group of Ewenki-speakers in China is ethnolinguistically the most curious one, in that it is more or less congruous with the population speaking the Mongolic Khamnigan language (8c). Though there are, and have probably always been, monolingual native speakers of the Mongolic Khamnigan language (Khamnigan Mongol), most of the Khamnigan population is, and has apparently long been, bilingual in Ewenki. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to tell which is the primary native language of any given bilingual individual, but, in any case, the Mongolic idiom is the dominant community language, while Ewenki is mainly used as an additional means of communication within many families. Moreover, the Khamnigan population today surviving in China uses two separate Ewenki dialects, both distinct from all other known Ewenki dialects and also relatively different from each other. The choice of dialect depends on family background, apparently reflecting differences in the original geographical source

regions. Thus, although we may speak of Khamnigan Ewenki as an ethnolinguistic entity, the dialectological picture is more complicated [JANHUNEN 1991b]:

(9da) One of the dialects may technically be called the Borzya dialect, referring to the Upper Borzya river on the Russian side of the border. This is a specific idiom in some ways reminiscent of Solon, and in a more elaborate dialectological classification the two may, in fact, turn out to represent early parallel branches of Manchurian Ewenki.

(9db) The other dialect may be referred to as the Urulyungui dialect, according to the river Urulyungui on the Russian side. This dialect is more reminiscent of the regular Siberian Ewenki dialects, to which the idioms spoken by the Orochen and the Manchurian Reindeer Tungus also belong. The balance between the two Khamnigan Ewenki dialects has probably long been even, but there are indications that it is gradually turning in favour of the Urulyungui dialect. On the other hand, there is no imminent danger that the inherited bilingualism of the Khamnigan would be lost, for both the Tungusic and the Mongolic language are still being consistently transmitted to growing children.

(10) **Nanai** is the Amur Tungusic native language of the ethnic group known on the Chinese side as Hejen (*Hezhe*). Mainly distributed on the Russian side of the border, Nanai comprises a dialectal continuum along the Lower and Middle Amur basin extending from Ulcha in the north to Bikin in the south. The language spoken by the Hejen in China adheres to the Bikin dialect, indigenous to the section of the Middle Amur between the lower courses of the Sungari and Ussuri. With a population of slightly over 4,000 people, mainly within Tongjiang County in Heilongjiang, the Hejen are one of the smallest officially recognized minority nationalities of China, a factor that could be supposed to increase the public support to this tiny group. Nevertheless the language is no more being transmitted to children, and the youngest speakers have probably long ago exceeded the age of 50.

(10b) It may be mentioned in this context that the Amur Tungusic neighbours of the Hejen, the Udeghe, an ethnic group indigenous to the Ussuri basin and the Sikhote Alin Region, today on the Russian side of the border, also have representatives on the Chinese side. Known as the Kyakala (*Qiakala*) "Kya Clan", the descendants of the Udeghe in China reportedly today comprise ca. 2,000 people, scattered over the eastern parts of Heilongjiang and Jilin. Linguistically, however, a complete assimilation, initially by the Manchu and subsequently by the Han Chinese, has taken place. It is even unknown what, exactly, were the linguistic features once characteristic of the Udeghe dialect, or dialects, spoken by the ancestors of the modern Kyakala.

(iv) To the minor non-indigenous languages of Manchuria we count here the two Mongolic languages Buryat and Oirat as well as Manchurian Kirghiz, the single Turkic idiom of Manchuria. The category is somewhat arbitrary especially as far as Buryat is concerned, and the division of minor languages into indigenous and

non-indigenous should not obscure the fact that, in both categories, it is a question of fully nativized local idioms, today under an increasing expansive threat of larger indigenous and non-indigenous languages.

(11) **Buryat** may historically be considered indigenous to the Baikal region, an entity not comprised by the definition of Manchuria [URBANAËVA 1994]. However, in Trans-Baikalia the Buryat language has long tended to expand towards the east, to the Onon-Borzya and Argun' basins, and for this reason it could also be considered indigenous, though marginal, to the Manchurian linguistic region. The eastern expansion of Buryat has left three linguistically distinct traces today present in China:

(11a) The most ancient Buryat-related group in the region is formed by the Old Bargut, today living as a population of perhaps some 15,000 people in the steppe region of their titular (not "autonomous") Old Bargut (*Chen Baerhu*) Banner of Hulun Buir. The history of the Old Bargut migrations is still unclear, but this group may have been present in Manchuria as early as the late seventeenth century. The Old Bargut dialect, still spoken by the old generation, may securely be classified as an aberrant variety of Buryat, though the younger generation seems to have completely gone over to what may be called the Modern Bargut dialect of Mongol, an idiom with only a few Buryat features remaining [JANHUNEN 1988a].

(11b) The Old Bargut were historically followed by the New Bargut, who seem to have arrived in Manchuria during the eighteenth century. The New Bargut today count some 50,000 people, occupying two titular (not "autonomous") administrative entities, the New Bargut (*Xin Baerhu*) Left (*Zuo*) and Right (*You*) Banners of Hulun Buir, and also extending to the Mongolian side of the border. Their dialect is better preserved and closer to regular Buryat than that of the Old Bargut, but a gradual transition to Mongol seems, nevertheless, inevitable in the long run. Both of the Bargut groups in China are officially classified as territorial varieties of Mongols (*Menggu*), and this classification seems to be accepted without questioning by the populations concerned.

(11c) The only group maintaining a conscious Buryat identity in China is formed by the Shinekhen Buryat, a diaspora group of less than 10,000 people descending from post-Revolution Buryat emigrants from the Russian side. Today occupying the Shinekhen Left and Right Arrows within the Ewenki Autonomous Banner of Hulun Buir, the Shinekhen Buryat have recently resumed contacts with the Buryat main population in Buryatia and Russian Trans-Baikalia. Though bilingual in Mongol, the Shinekhen Buryat retain the Buryat features of their native language without serious signs of linguistic interference. Some "remigration" of the Shinekhen Buryat to the Buryatian Republic on the Russian has recently started to take place, mainly among the educated part of the population.

(12) **Oirat**, a Western Mongolic language, has been spoken in Manchuria since the Qing government conquered the Oirat confederation of Jungaria in what is now northern Sinkiang (1757-1760) and, as a measure of "pacification", relocated a fraction of the Oirat-speaking Öelet tribe. The group, subsequently known as the

Manchurian Öelet, was soon divided into two sections, centered on the Imin and Nonni basins, respectively.

(12a) The Oirat in the Imin basin seem to have survived as a linguistic entity until the early twentieth century. Even today there are individuals in the Imin basin identifying themselves as Öelet, but the Oirat language has been fully replaced by the dominant local varieties of Mongol, notably the Khorchin dialect.

(12b) In the Nonni basin, however, Oirat is still spoken by part of an ethnic Öelet population comprising altogether some 2,500 individuals, mainly living in villages within Fuyu County of Heilongjiang. The language has undergone changes rendering it closer to the Mongol dialects indigenous to the neighbourhood, but it may still be identified as being basically a dialect of Oirat. Unfortunately, it has just reached the critical stage where it is no more being transmitted to children, with the youngest speakers being well over 10 years of age.

(13) **Manchurian Kirghiz** is a peculiar Turkic idiom whose speakers seem to have historically formed satellites to the Manchurian Öelet, in a way reminiscent of the relationship of the Solon to the Dagur. Although descriptive information on Manchurian Kirghiz is still insufficient (and may remain so, unless documented very soon), it may be taken for certain that the language was relocated from Jungaria together with Oirat. Taxonomic features connect Manchurian Kirghiz not with regular Kirghiz but with Yenisei Kirghiz or Khakas, the language indigenous to the Upper Yenisei basin (the Minusinsk region) in South Siberia. It seems, indeed, to be a question of a Khakas-speaking diaspora group who escaped the Russian conquest of the Yenisei basin (1703) by moving to Jungaria [JANHUNEN 1993]. Like the Manchurian Öelet, the Manchurian Kirghiz were also initially divided into two sections:

(13a) The section in the Imin basin became extinct by the early twentieth century, and the Turkic language may have disappeared even earlier.

(13b) The section in the Nonni basin today comprises no more than 900 people, of whom only nine elderly individuals have been identified as fluent speakers of the native language (1988). All of the last speakers are bilingual in Oirat, and some have a knowledge of Dagur (plus, occasionally, Solon) and Chinese as well. The middle generation of the Manchurian Kirghiz is generally bilingual in Oirat and Chinese, while the growing generation is monolingually Chinese-speaking [JANHUNEN 1991c].

### 3. SPECIFIC FEATURES OF ETHNIC POLICIES IN CHINA

China is a territorially large multiethnic state comparable with, for instance, Russia and India. On the other hand, China is a country with a unique history of centralized administration and cultural uniformity. The demographic proportions between the dominant Han Chinese ethnic group and the surrounding "barbarians" have always favoured the assimilation of the periphery by the center. In most of China, including Manchuria in its present-day shape, ethnic minorities are true

minorities, even at the very low local level, and they have no prospects of increasing their ethnic and linguistic independence by means of political confrontation [HEBERER 1989].

The framework of ethnic administration in the People's Republic of China was originally copied from the Soviet Union and follows the "Leninist-Stalinist" principle of titular territorial "autonomy" at various levels of the administrative hierarchy. However, in difference from Russia, the ethnic groups in China are rarely given explicit rights or obligations to use or develop their native languages even within their assigned territories of "self-administration". This is hardly due to any planned strategy of forced assimilation, but is more likely to be connected with the specific understanding of ethnicity and language that prevails in the Chinese culture.

Ethnicity in China is primarily a property granted to citizens by the administrative authorities and ultimately by the state itself. An ethnic group does not exist unless it is officially recognized. This is why there is always so much publicity about the "55 minority nationalities" of China, as if these were congruous with the whole non-Han part of the country's population. In reality, the canonical list of nationalities contains many errors, involving both under- and over-differentiation. If we take language as the primary criterion, the actual number of minority groups in China (including Taiwan) is at least 120, more than twice the official count [RAMSEY 1987]. In Manchuria, linguistically distinct groups not recognized as separate minority nationalities include the speakers of Khamnigan, Buryat, Oirat and Manchurian Kirghiz. By contrast, the speakers of Ewenki are arbitrarily counted as two official nationalities, Ewenki and Orochen.

All of this implies that ethnicity in China involves a bureaucratic moment connected with social and hereditary factors, rather than with the present-day ethnolinguistic realities. For this reason it is possible for ethnic units that have almost completely lost their native languages, like the Manchu in Manchuria, to continue to figure among major nationalities, as if they still were significantly different from the surrounding Han Chinese. An extreme case is formed by the Chinese-speaking Muslims (*Hui*), who probably never had a single ethnic language but are, nevertheless, counted as a separate minority nationality, in difference from all other religious groups in the country.

It is then not surprising that Chinese statistical sources, in clear contrast to their Russian counterparts, pay little attention to native-language retaining rate as an ethnic indicator. Actual differences in this respect are enormous, ranging from almost zero for dying languages such as Manchu to close to 100 per cent for vigorous languages such as Khamnigan. As can be seen from these examples, there is no correlation between native-language retaining rate and the overall population sizes on which the official Chinese statistics concentrate. The officially registered Manchu population, for instance, has varied from about two million during the Cultural Revolution, a period unfavourable to minority nationalities, to the current figure of ten million, but this statistical change, far exceeding the general rate of

population growth, does not reflect any true revigoration of the Manchu nationality, let alone its language.

As for language as an ethnic feature in the Chinese cultural context, it traditionally presupposes the presence of writing (*wen*). Moreover, since the Chinese writing system itself has a highly ethnospecific nature, any respectable non-Chinese written language will normally have to have a writing system of its own. From this point of view, there are very few fully-developed minority languages in today's China: in the north of China we have Mongol, Manchu and Korean, and in the west Tibetan and Uighur. This is, indeed, the level at which the ordinary naïve Han Chinese citizen (especially, after the unprofessional but politically still very influential conceptualization of ethnicity by Dr. Sun Yat-sen) often tends to think of the linguistic diversity of China. Those minority nationalities that do not have an inherited writing system of their own are primarily considered in terms of cultural diversity, while they are rarely thought of as independent linguistic entities.

The idea that unwritten forms of speech can be promoted to the rank of written languages by consciously developing an orthographical basis in some general phonographic system of writing, such as the Roman or Cyrillic letters, is basically alien to Chinese thinking, though historically there have been sporadic attempts to apply the writing systems of dominant languages to minor local idioms, an example being offered by the Manchu script, occasionally used to write Dagur in the past. More serious efforts to write previously unwritten minority languages started to be made only when a need was felt to standardize the Chinese language itself by using a unified alphabetic transcription. Activities in this direction increased considerably during the period of Sino-Soviet collaboration (ca. 1949–1958), when Cyrillic orthographies were projected for several languages of northern and western China, including Dagur [SHON 1987].

Most of the concrete results obtained in creating new literary languages in China were cancelled by the Cultural Revolution, and the situation today is that not a single minor language in the Chinese part of Manchuria has a functioning orthographical standard. Recent efforts have been concentrated on introducing Romanized standards for Dagur and Solon, and it may well be that these efforts sooner or later lead to practical results in the fields of school instruction and cultural activities [JANHUNEN 1988b]. However, irrespective of whether this happens or not, we should not underestimate the role played by the Written Mongol standard in the region. Written Mongol is a fully adequate literary language for speakers of several aberrant Mongolic idioms, such as Khamnigan and Buryat, while widespread native bilingualism in regular Mongol makes it also accessible to some other populations, particularly the Dagur and Solon.

It should be pointed out here that the presence of a written standard is not a rescue for a dying language, as may be seen if we compare the ethnolinguistic situations in China and Russia. During the Soviet period, the principles of ethnic policies in Russia involved the compulsory introduction of a literary norm for



almost every minor form of speech, but this did not stop their on-going absorption by the dominant Russian state language [JANHUNEN 1991d]. This situation is well exemplified by Ewenki, a language which for several decades has had a literary norm on the Russian side, but is nevertheless disappearing there, while in China it survives as a fully vigorous language under conditions of oral transmission only.

#### 4. SUGGESTIONS FOR A SURVIVAL PROGRAMME

As a general evaluation of the current ethnolinguistic situation in the region, it may be said that the languages of Manchuria, as well as China, in general, are neither more nor less seriously endangered than languages in other comparable parts of the northern hemisphere, notably Siberia and North America [EDMONDSON 1984]. Differences in the ideological frameworks or economic systems obviously mean little in this context. A factor of possible relevance is, however, economic prosperity. It is likely that ethnic minorities are least endangered in either very poor or very rich societies, while the greatest threat to ethnic diversity is posed by newly-rich environments, in which material abundance is still unevenly distributed. In this respect, China may be entering a critical stage, and the fate of her ethnic minorities and their languages will to a considerable extent depend on how quickly the Chinese society can be transformed from very poor to very rich.

If we look for ways to preserve the languages still spoken in Manchuria, we inevitably end up with a survival programme analogous to similar efforts elsewhere in the world. Some suggestions for such a programme are presented below, though it should be borne in mind that it is always easier to tell how things should be done than to get them actually done that way. The crucial moment of all survival programmes is how to get them properly appreciated and effectively implemented by the administrative authorities at all the relevant levels of the political apparatus. It is difficult to say, whether this goal is easier to achieve in a hierarchically-structured centralized bureaucracy of the Chinese type than in the more amorphous administrative framework of the Western "democracies".

(i) The first step is to **select the survivors**, i.e. those languages that still have concrete chances of being preserved indefinitely in the future. While other programmes may be created in order to document as much as possible of those languages that are already definitely dying, the goal of documentation should not be confused with that of preservation. Also, in some cases, the descendants of once-distinct linguistic groups may need social or cultural protection even after they have lost their original language, but it would be over-optimistic to think that such protection could result in a revigoration of the lost ethnic language. The focus of an effective linguistic survival programme has therefore to be placed on ethnic groups that still remain linguistically reasonably intact and vigorous.

In Manchuria, it is not difficult to divide the extant languages into potential survivors and those doomed to disappear. In addition to such obvious survivors as

Chinese, Korean and Mongol, the former group will comprise Dagur, Khamnigan, Buryat and Ewenki, while Manchu, Nanai, Oirat and Manchurian Kirghiz belong to the latter group. Manchu and Oirat are still retained elsewhere, in Central Asia, but the imminent disappearance of Manchurian Kirghiz is a more serious case, since its exact position as a Turkic idiom remains poorly investigated. As for Nanai, it is also spoken on the Russian side of the border, but the linguistic situation there seems to be as hopeless as it is on the Chinese side, so that the language as a whole can be judged to have entered a terminal stage.

At the more local level, Ewenki and Dagur are losing some geographical and dialectal subgroups, in that the Amur Dagur as well as the Orochen and probably the Manchurian Reindeer Tungus populations have already ceased to transmit their native languages to the growing generation. Fortunately, Dagur and Ewenki, in general, are in no immediate danger of disappearance, which means that their protection should have a high priority in a Manchurian linguistic survival programme. The language most urgently in need of protection is, however, Khamnigan, which, although still fully vigorous in its current environment, is spoken by a population so small that a single major project of forced resettlement or industrial development could wipe it out of the linguistic map of China and the world.

As for Buryat, the language is spoken in three different political states, China, Russia and Mongolia. The Buryat populations in Russia and Mongolia are relatively large, altogether numbering perhaps as many as half a million people, but absorption of Buryat-speakers by the dominant state languages is rapidly progressing, even within the formally "autonomous" Buryatian Republic in Russia. The two Bargut groups in China may already have lost the continuity of their Buryat heritage. Under such circumstances, the Shinekhen Buryat group of Hulun Buir deserves to be given all the support it needs, so that it can continue to contribute its share to the linguistic diversity of the region, even if it may be that the future of the Buryat language will never solely depend on it.

(ii) Second, it is essential to **protect the territorial integrity** of the survivors, so that no new alien elements are introduced to the remaining linguistically vigorous ethnic villages and nomadic territories. This is a problem for dispersed linguistic groups like the Dagur and the Solon, and it seems inevitable that they will continue to lose ground in their more marginal areas of distribution. Although some ethnic groups may be more adapted than others to living in dispersed communities, the basic need and right of every distinct linguistic entity is a concrete core territory where the idiom concerned is spoken by a local majority, however small the number of speakers may be in absolute terms.

Most of Manchuria has until recently provided rather favourable conditions for the survival of small linguistic groups, in that the transportation network has been poorly developed, with many rural areas remaining virtually isolated for a considerable part of the year. This situation is now beginning to change, with

major roads, telephonic connections, electricity supplies and television broadcasts being extended even to the most remote parts of the region. In China, a new road is automatically followed by a wave of Chinese-speaking settlers, and there seem to be only two ways to prevent ethnic catastrophes from taking place: either no new roads should be built to the smallest linguistic communities, or the communities concerned should be given sufficient administrative and executive powers to protect their native territories from alien infiltration.

The conventional solution to ethnic administration is local "autonomy", and there is, indeed, nothing wrong with this solution, except that the limits of "autonomy" are set by those who grant it. A common mistake, or, more probably, an inbuilt intentional characteristic, of the Russo-Chinese "Leninist-Stalinist" system of ethnic administration is that the "autonomous" units tend to be territorially so extensive that they actually exceed the demographic needs of the titular ethnic groups, which then inevitably remain in the position of minorities within their "own" territories. If ethnic and linguistic groups are really supposed to be protected by their local "autonomy", then the territories administratively assigned to them should be so defined that they are maximally free of alien elements. The key concept here is *ethnic cleansing*, as understood in a positive sense, and it may be effectuated in three ways:

(1) by removing alien elements from ethnic territories in terms of relocation programmes. In the case of China, the relocation of large populations is a standard procedure in connection with industrial and economic development projects, and it should not be technically impossible to revigorate some minority areas by removing recent Han Chinese settlers to empty regions elsewhere. The problem is that the ethnic minorities in need of protection will probably not be recognized to be worth the cost of such relocation programmes;

(2) by concentrating minority groups into compact territories with a minimum of other elements. This approach has, as a matter of fact, been used in China, where efforts have been made to transplant dispersed minority individuals and communities of certain nationalities, notably the Dagur and Ewenki (Solon), into their "autonomous" territories. The concentration of native communities into larger and more viable entities always involves delicate decisions, but there is nothing to lose if ethnic extinction is the only alternative. The historical examples of the Dagur, Solon and Khamnigan show that ethnic groups can remain both culturally and linguistically vigorous in new environments, if only the ecological circumstances continue to correspond to their needs;

(3) by limiting the boundaries of "autonomous" territories so that they only comprise areas actually inhabited by the titular ethnic groups. Obviously, there is no reason to place significant numbers of a dominant ethnic group under the administration of a local minority, for such a situation will only result in majority rule. The important thing is to give minorities rights to those territories that they still concretely possess, or, alternatively, to such new territories as are specifically assigned to them for their exclusive exploitation.

The administrative units crucial to linguistic survival in Manchuria are today all concentrated in Hulun Buir, and they comprise the Dagur and Ewenki (Solon) Banners, as well as the Ewenki (Khamnigan) Arrow of the Old Bargut Banner. Within the Ewenki Arrow, the Khamnigan still constitute the local majority, and alien elements, notably Han Chinese and Khorchin Mongols, have until the present day been arriving so slowly that many newcomers are actually being linguistically assimilated by the Khamnigan, rather than vice versa. Within the Dagur and Ewenki Banners, however, the titular ethnic groups are in a less dominant position, and it is questionable whether these "autonomous" units provide an effective protection for the native languages. A stricter demilitation of the ethnic territories and a continued concentration of the ethnic groups concerned within these territories would seem necessary if serious efforts are to be made in order to guarantee the future of Dagur and Ewenki (Solon) as living linguistic entities.

(iii) Third, efforts should be made in order to **promote a spirit of survival** among the linguistically viable minority populations. It is an unfortunate fact that not all endangered ethnolinguistic groups are concerned with their own survival, for, at the individual level, native language tends to be valued lower than social dignity or material prosperity. In a country like China, where access to higher education and political power is inseparably connected with a knowledge of the official state language, there is a danger that all other forms of speech are considered superfluous, and this is, indeed, how most Mandarin-speakers tend to think about the matter. However, minority languages can only survive, if they remain sufficiently attractive in the eyes of their own speakers.

As minority languages have the best chances of survival in their traditional environments, the goal of language preservation automatically involves an aspect of cultural protection also. One of the most common forms of ethnic violence in today's world is the forced introduction, often under the camouflage of "welfare" policies, of dominant cultural patterns, such as sedentarism, upon minority groups traditionally following other ways of living. In China, for instance, the rapid linguistic assimilation of the Orochen can be viewed as the direct result of the policies that forced the Orochen to give up their nomadic way of life in favour of fixed settlements. The most fatal period to minority cultures all over China was the Cultural Revolution, during which not only the economic foundation but also the social structures and religious heritage of ethnic minorities was systematically vandalized. While little can be restored of what has already been lost, the least that can be done now is not to interfere any more in what still remains of the traditional patterns of minority cultures.

Of course, there is no reason to require that ethnic minorities should continue to live in complete seclusion, with no access to the technological advances of the modern world. However, minority cultures, such as the pastoral adaptations of steppe nomads, are often highly specialized, and modern technology should not be used to disrupt this fundamental feature of minority subsistence. The generally

small size of minorities favours soft approaches, and any new technologies should be tested against the background of the practical knowhow accumulated by the native communities themselves. An example of a rather positive combination of traditional patterns with modern influences is offered by the Khamnigan in Hulun Buir, a population which, at least for the moment, is successfully applying new technological solutions (tractors, separators, electricity generators) while also retaining features of a basically seminomadic way of life (yurts, seasonal pastures, traditional food and clothing).

The subordinated status of ethnic minorities in the context of modern political states, including China, creates various types of social problems, which ultimately reflect the lack of confidence among minority individuals. A problem shared by all the minor ethnic groups in Manchuria today is that the males, having lost many of their earlier social roles, have become massively alcoholized, leaving most of the productive work to be carried out by the females. Accidents, murders and suicides connected with alcohol abuse are extremely common, and their indirect psychological effect is probably even worse than their direct demographic impact. The problem of minority alcoholization is well known from all over the world, and the ruling political structures are clearly both unable and unwilling to cope with it. A prerequisite to a positive solution is a spirit of survival among the affected ethnic minorities themselves.

(iv) Fourth, at a very concrete level, all preservation programmes should **concentrate on oral language survival**. Although the attempts to develop new written languages have been generally both less enthusiastic and less efficient in China than they were in Russia during the Soviet period, the Chinese traditional emphasis on written language priority might, paradoxically, create a situation where a language is thought to be able to survive if only it gets a written standard. The existence of a literary language is probably one of the reasons why Chinese official sources are never seriously concerned with the extinction of the Manchu language as a living means of communication.

To quote another concrete example, I have myself witnessed a futile attempt to revigorate the Ewenki language among the Selpechen subgroup of Orochen at Xinsheng. It was a question of teaching the "native" language to schoolchildren of Selpechen descent, themselves already monolingual speakers of Mandarin. Three fundamental mistakes were made in this connection, all of which reflect the misdirected Chinese understanding of language and writing [JANHUNEN & HOU 1984]:

(1) Although the children were learning the *Pinyin* system of Romanization as a regular part of their Chinese language curriculum, it was obviously thought that the "native" language should be distinguished by an alphabet of its own. In this case, the alphabet of the International Phonetic Association (IPA) was chosen as the basis, since scholarly materials on the Ewenki (Orochen) language in China had been previously published in that system of writing. For the children, however, the

“native” language classes turned into meaningless exercises in the phonetic transcription system concerned, and the whole attempt unnecessarily interfered with the parallel learning of the Pinyin system.

(2) The written shapes of “native” words taught to the Selpechen children were not based on the original Selpechen dialect, as still used by the local grandparent generation, but on the Ewenki dialects spoken by the more numerous Orochen (proper) groups of Hulun Buir. As a result, a conflict arose between the pronunciation of the teacher, a native speaker (and, as it happened, the youngest native speaker) of the local dialect, and the written shapes supposed to represent a “normative” standard of the Orochen “language”. Accustomed to logographic script of the Chinese type, the teacher was obviously unable to handle dialectal differences in terms of an alphabetic system of writing.

(3) No emphasis was put on the development of oral language skills, although this was what the children would primarily have needed. The “native” language curriculum basically comprised a list of unconnected vocabulary items, while no instruction was given in how to use them for sentence building in active communication. The whole was reminiscent of the methods well known from foreign language teaching all over China, and, needless to say, the results remained at a corresponding level in spite of the fact that native speakers of the local dialect would still have been available in the Selpechen village.

It may be concluded that the creation of a new literary language is a realistic goal only in the case of a fully vigorous ethnolinguistic group, and even then the written standard should allow a maximum degree of dialectal and individual variation. For populations that are already losing their original language, all efforts should be concentrated on the transmission of oral language skills to as many and as young growing children as possible. Playgroups, kindergartens and, of course, family communities are the natural growing grounds of minority languages. Schools and written education are of very little, if any, relevance.

(v) Fifth, languages should not be protected in isolation from each other but in the context of their entire ethnolinguistic environment, which surprisingly often involves the phenomenon of **stable bilingualism** [WURM 1997]. In today's Manchuria, the only massively monolingual population is formed by the Han Chinese speakers of Mandarin, while all the other ethnolinguistic groups are characterized by various degrees of bi- or even multilingualism. In addition to bilingualism in the Chinese state language, two other patterns may be observed, which may be termed regional and ethnic bilingualism respectively.

*Regional bilingualism* plays an important role on the Inner Mongolian side of Manchuria, in that most of the non-Han ethnic groups in Hulun Buir are more or less fluent in the local varieties of Mongol, with Written Mongol functioning as the principal language of literary education. The only minority populations remaining systematically outside of the Mongol influence are the Manchurian Reindeer Tungus as well as most groups of the Orochen, for whom Mandarin is the sole

dominant language. Among the Dagur, also, bilingualism in Mongol is territorially restricted, in that the Dagur groups in the Nonni basin, for whom the regional second language used to be Manchu, today tend to use Chinese for all purposes of interethnic communication.

*Ethnic bilingualism* is present in the cases of the Khamnigan (bilingual in Ewenki and Khamnigan Mongol), Solon (bilingual in Ewenki and Dagur), and Manchurian Kirghiz (bilingual in Manchurian Kirghiz and Oirat). In all of these cases bilingualism forms an integral part of the ethnic heritage, and the same patterns of bilingualism are observed wherever the ethnic groups concerned are present. The basis of regional bilingualism may, however, vary, and, for instance, many of the Khamnigan and Solon in Hulun Buir are trilingual, with Mongol as the regionally dominant third language.

Looking at the current situation in Manchuria, it seems, paradoxically, that bilingualism in languages other than Chinese favours the preservation of linguistic diversity. Two of the most vigorous ethnolinguistic groups in the region are the ethnically bilingual Solon and Khamnigan, while among the larger groups both the Dagur and the Shinekhen Buryat also preserve their native languages very well in spite of regional bilingualism in Mongol. The only significant exception is formed by the Manchurian Kirghiz, who are rapidly losing both of their traditional languages. In this particular case, however, the ethnically dominant language (Oirat) is rapidly disappearing among its proper speakers also.

The inevitable and perhaps trivial conclusion is that the main threat to the minority languages of Manchuria is formed by the Han Chinese state language (Mandarin). The homogenizing potential of the Han Chinese population in today's China is so immense that only the languages of the largest non-Han nationalities (Mongol, Tibetan, Uighur, Korean), all of them also spoken by significant populations outside of China, seem to be strong enough to remain viable under conditions of direct bilingualism in Chinese. Although there is no reason to prevent smaller ethnolinguistic groups from learning Chinese, it is definitely safer for them to approach Chinese through the intermediate levels of ethnic and regional bilingualism. Ideally, the goal of any language preservation programme should be linguistic diversity at all levels: national, regional, and individual. Polyglot individuals with a knowledge of both minor and major languages represent an important etape on the way towards achieving this goal.

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