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Hybridity and Tibetan language education policies in Sichuan

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Abstract

Recent research shows that many political, economic, and socio-cultural factors explain the difficulties faced by minority communities. However, this study focuses on two factors: China's minority/bilingual education policy discourse, and discursive shifts in policy enactment process in Tibetan school community. A qualitative research methodology involving an ethnographic case study approach was employed. Three theoretical lenses provided the conceptual framework: policy genealogy, discourse theory, and policy enactment. Documentary, interview, and observational data was collected from Badi Primary School, a semi-agro-pastoral town primary school in Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Sichuan Province. Findings show that a *moral-cultural order* fostering monolingual and bicultural education was identified in this school, in which Tibetan students developed instrumental linguistic dispositions, characterized by cultural distance and alienated Tibetan identities. The article reveals the hybrid nature of neoliberal globalisation processes in China's minority education policies and describes the role such hybrid discourses play in shaping public representations and policy enactments in Tibetan school community.

Keywords: hybridity; Tibetan language education policy; discourses

Introduction

Over the past two decades, research in Chinese ethnic relations within the context of globalisation has become an increasingly prominent area in the field of ethnic minority education (Johnson & Chhetri, 2002; Feng, 2009; Mackerras, 2011; Postiglione, 2017). The major motivation of China's policy towards minorities has been to integrate minority groups' life patterns, cultures, institutions and social structures with both Han and Communist Party (Yi, 2011), so as to avoid separatism (Mackerras, 2011). While the changes in the economy and society have been far-reaching, political change has lagged far behind (Saich, 2011). For minorities, the policies regarding the development of minority regions according to the rule of law represent a combination of economic development and separatist suppression. This was an attempt to solidify national unity and stability within certain minority areas. Such integration, on the one hand justifies the process of civilizing "backward" minorities to raise their economic levels; on the other hand, it constructs and reifies images of their 'ethnic' 'backwardness' (Yi, 2011).

Therefore, national integration has meant a constant tussle between Han universalism and any kind of ethnic nationalism with the potential to lead to demands for independence (Mackerras, 2011).

Previous research shows that many political, economic, and socio-cultural factors explain the difficulties faced by minority communities. However, this study focuses on two factors: China's minority/bilingual education policy discourse, and discursive shifts in policy enactment process in Tibetan school community. China's minority/bilingual education policy is more a process than an entity, involving a mixed mode of governing that incorporates colonial and neoliberal strategies. By exploring the relationships between policy contexts, actual policy enactment processes, and policy outcomes, and by seeking to explain the complex relation between the policy's formulation and its practice, I hope to reveal the contradictions inhering in both colonial and neoliberal discourses. These tensions and contradictions are my study's focus.

Following Foucault, discourse is seen in this study as constituting set of social practices and needs to be considered as productive rather than merely repressive (Foucault, 1980). As such, discourse at one and the same time reflects and produces social change. Policy is seen as a framework for the enactment of political and economic discourses. These discourses become invested with the status of 'truth' in the day-to-day interactions of policy actors within the existence of school communities. Policy enables a set of discursive articulatory practices (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) which are realised and struggled over in local settings (Ball, 1994). In this study, policy enables sets of agenda texts, actions, and artefacts, particularly in relation to local practice. Policy is therefore used to study how power relations are enacted in discourse, through examining what similarities and differences in policy enactment. In defining discourse and policy in this way, I am drawing on Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory, and also on Ball, Maguire, and Braun's work on policy enactments, both of which have shared roots in Foucault's ideas of genealogy and governmentality.

Ball et al. (2012) take policy making in schools as a complex set of processes of interpretation and translation, through which policy actors are involved in making meaning of and constructing responses to multiple policy demands. In the process of policy enactment, actors will use tactics that include discursive sets of teaching and learning activities and the production of cultural artefacts (Ball et al., 2012). Foucault writes that discursive formations are conjunctions of discourses, knowledge and practice and carry meanings that may be common to a whole period (Foucault, 1986, p. 118). In these terms, this study emphasises the discursive formation of educational subjects and practices through the processes of educational policy enactment.

Following the above discussions, I argue that the policy discourses shaping public representations and practices of China's minority/bilingual education policy are embodied in the discursive shifts comprising policy enactment processes. Such discursive processes can be captured by employing three complementary theoretical ideas, suggested by Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe, and Ball, et al. These theoretical ideas form the basis for understanding the interactions between policy discourses and policy enactments, and ground my practice of examining the genesis of China's minority/bilingual education

policy development and discursive shifts in policy enactment in Tibetan school of China.

With theoretical insights drawn from the studies on policy genealogy and governmentality, Discourse Theory, and policy enactments, I focus on the following research question:

How are minority/bilingual policies enacted (or not enacted) in a Tibetan school community?

The research question guide procedure of this qualitative inquiry. In addressing the research question, a qualitative research methodology involving an ethnographic case study method and a particular focus on discourses shaping China's minority/bilingual education policy was designed for this study. Such a design seemed manageable and analytically effective. The following section explains the methods of this study.

Data and methods

This study unfolds by addressing the question through discussing official documents, providing methodological details of how I conducted this analysis, and identifying interviewing officials, scholars and students for the case study. This qualitative research is conducted against the backdrop of a social constructionist epistemology. This, in turn, informed the data collection and analysis, which involved generating contextualized, situated and in-depth understandings through documents reviews, interviews, and observations.

I collected archival data in relation to minority/bilingual policies issued by the local school and governments respectively: Annals on Work Plans, Summary Reports and Regulations, pamphlets about school working process were delivered by local administrators, as well as textbooks for the courses of history, Chinese and ideology and politics from grade five to grade six, and teachers' research projects and students' compositions. In addition, some teacher participants provided photocopies of teachers' research projects and students' compositions. These documents were examined for evidence of local discourses on China's minority/bilingual education policy and case study of the policy enactment in the Tibetan school. Discourses of China's minority/bilingual education policy and policy enactment at school community in China are under researched (Kayongo-Male & Benton Lee, 2004), with little known about the situation in Tibetan Autonomous County of Sichuan available. Under these circumstances, a Tibetan school in Sichuan Province was selected as policy enactment sites, within which three students', three teachers' and three parents' perspectives were garnered through interviews. I discussed the field research with the local officials, scholars, teachers and students for the case study, enabling me to capture something of the voice of the participants. A wide range of contextualising data was also collected from the school community: demographic information about student intake, background, buildings and material resources of wall displays and posters. According to Laclau and Mouffe, non-linguistic practices and objects are also part of discourses (Philips & Jørgensen, 2002). Thus, these school documents, curricula materials, environmental artefacts and cultural signs, belong to the discourses of education policy and are good examples of the re-appropriation and transformation of

cultural symbols. I also observed the classes and attended the staff and parents meetings of the school. I focused on the overall Tibetan language use and the cultural environment of the school community, the Tibetan language profile of the teachers and other staff, the interactivities between teachers and students in classrooms and in non-learning activities. I also participated in some social activities to comprehend the social contexts of the school community, for example, weddings and family celebrations. Sharing their everyday life and watching and listening to what people naturally do and say, allowed me close contact with the study subjects.

To explore policy enactments in school community, I organized the data by site: school and community, and then organized the data in each site by type: interviews, observations, documents, photograph and other visual materials. I focused on what I call the ‘four As’ analytic framework of policy actors’ activity and experiences: 1) attitudes towards minority/bilingual education, 2) agendas for education development, 3) actions for implementing curricula, and 4) artefact production. These are detailed in this section.

The ‘four As’ at the microscopic level are valuable to tease out important elements which shape educational policy enactment processes in the school community. They also suggest a framework for analysing the fieldwork data, highlighting the day-to-day interactions of policy actors. To analyse the complexity of education policy enactment processes, this study brings together contextual, historic and cultural dynamics into a relation with policy actors, agendas, actions and artefacts (four As). Importantly, the four As are bidirectional and inter-influenced (see Figure 1).

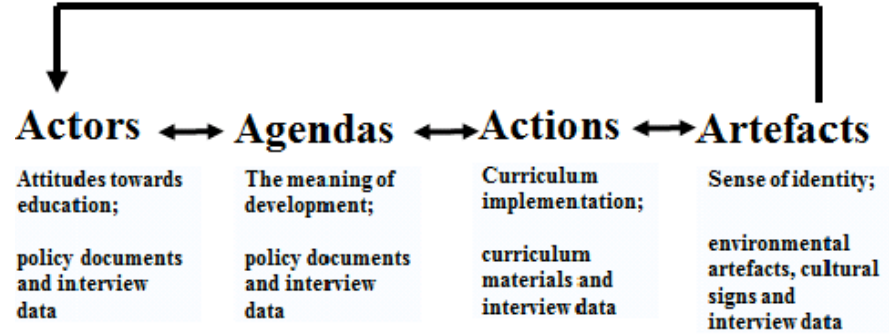


Figure 1: The ‘four As’ analytical framework

Specifically, I present the hybridity in policy discourses and discursive strategies in school community, using the following aspects in relation to data and data analysis:

- 1) policy documents and interview data about policy actors’ attitudes towards minority/bilingual education, along with their different interests and perspectives, emphasising the power of actors to resist or transform education policy discourses;

- 2) policy documents and interview data about policy agendas for education development;
- 3) curriculum materials, observational data, and interview data about policy actions of engaging with curricula, which make up, reflect and carry within them key policy discourses that are currently in circulation in my case study school;
- 4) environmental and cultural signs and interview data about the discursive production of artefacts. The production of artefacts encounters a contested terrain absorbs different voices and justifies the dominant ideology.

These aspects of ‘four As’ are highlighted as contextual factors which are crucial to education policy enactment and its implications for Tibetan students. The ‘four As’ analytical framework is operationalized in a critical analysis of how policy actors make interpretations from positions of their identities, and how governmentality takes place around the manipulation of the integrated agenda through sets of actions and the production of discursive artefacts (Foucault, 1979, 1991). With the help of the ‘4as’ analytical framework, based on data of documents, interviews and observations, this study illustrates how China’s minority/bilingual education policies are enacted in a Tibetan school community.

According to social constructionist tenets, the theories of Foucault’s genealogical work and governmentality, Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory, and Ball, et al.’s work on policy enactments are valuable in providing insights into the seemingly most advanced Han educational forms, and the ‘backwardness’ of rural minorities. Underpinned by this, I cast doubt on the viability of this ‘Minority = backward versus Han = advanced’ distinction. To this end, this article has discussed the import of Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of discourse analysis in opening up investigations of relations within and between the discursive practice of policy enactments in school community context and in the contexts of tensions between the logic of equivalence in terms of ‘Tibetan = backward versus Han = advanced’ and the logic of difference in terms of ‘cultural and linguistic diversity’. The full use of an exploratory case study approach using qualitative data, particularly the voices of stakeholders, has been made in this study of policy enactment processes. The ‘four As’ analytical framework offers my thinking about policy enactment. By exposing the processes by which such hegemonic practices are achieved within texts and discursive actions and artefacts, policy enactment research may contribute to the dissolution of those hegemonic practices. The applicability of the theories to the study of China’s minority/bilingual education policy context and the case study of policy enactment within Badi Primary School community will be explored in the following sections.

The context of Sichuan’s Tibetan language education policies

In this section, I offer an analysis of the context of Sichuan’s Tibetan language education policies at two levels, namely, the town and the school. The selected case school community was Badi Primary School, a farming town school in Danba County of Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Sichuan Province.

This school community relates to the particular nature of Sichuan Province in southwest China – regional social and cultural changes. As a political, economic and cultural transition zone between Tibetan and Han, Sichuan Province has a significant population of Tibetans as a main ethnic minority group, and the other significant minorities of Yi, Qiang and Naxi, reside in the western areas (Harrell, 2001a; Nima, 2013). Geographically, these rural minority communities are located along China's western, northern, and north eastern border areas. As a basin surrounded by the Himalayas to the west, Sichuan borders Qinghai province to the northwest, Gansu province to the north, Guizhou province to the southeast, Yunnan province to the south, and the Tibetan Autonomous Region to the west. Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture and Aba Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture in western Sichuan have vast territories and abundant resources, diverse Tibetan dialects and cultures, as well as a unique character that is shaped by thousands of years of Tibet Buddhism. Here, these features of the fieldwork site enabled me to consider the education policy enactment processes of Tibetan school community from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Thus, this case school community represents the merging of the local Tibetan culture, Han culture and diverse socioeconomic background. On the one hand, Danba County is officially considered as the gateway for introducing 'advanced' technology, scientific culture, and management experience from inland Han areas to Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. Danba County, a mountain county in the eastern border of Ganzi, 368 km away from Chengdu, the provincial capital of Sichuan province (about ten hours by bus from Chengdu). Badi Primary School had all the enrolment body of 966 children with 171 classes. Among the 966 students, 792 students are Tibetans and 160 Han Chinese. 530 students is the average population of primary schools in the semi-agricultural-pastoral area of Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture (*Badi Town Annual Plan (2011-2012)*). With the insistence of the educational ideology that primary schools and educational resources should be concentrated in cities and towns, boarding schools are founded by merging the surrounding village primary schools. A ground-breaking document, the *Decision on Further Strengthening Rural Education* was issued by the State Council and the MoE in 2003. Rural education is advocated as the most important part of education work to achieve educational equality and social justice, as well as being an essential requirement of socialist education (Article 2). To this end, the town government is shifting the pattern of rural schooling by replacing village schools with town central boarding schools. Thus, when I conducted fieldwork in the town, I found village schools had been incorporated in the town's central primary school, and the rural village schools were empty. The older people, pre-school children, and single men were left-behind in the local villages. On the other hand, bilingual education policy was introduced earlier here than the other Tibetan cultural areas (Nima, 2013). Danba County is the birthplace and the cultural center of the Jiarong Tibetan nationality. Here, Tibetan parents and teachers are most Jiarong Tibetan nationality. Together with diverse cultural and socioeconomic background, these socio-cultural contexts are of great importance when analyzing education policy enactment process within the case school community.

Context of the town

This section presents a picture of the site of Badi Primary School, a town in the semi-agricultural-pastoral area of Ganzi Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. As we will see, there are two distinct discourses on education policies and curriculum relating to the subjects of cultural diversity and national unity that have been espoused over the past two decades by key policy actors in this town: a discourse of the development of political morality and a discourse of local community involvement.

The discourse of the development of morality

In 2007, an important report on the composition of teachers' morality was produced by the Party committee of the town:

We must adhere to lifelong learning for strengthening the development of teachers' morality. Teachers must uphold Deng Xiaoping's Theory and Jiang Zemin's theory of the 'Three Represents'. Political learning makes our teachers learn the series of documents and education regulations, notably, the Professional Moral Standards for Teachers and the Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Moral Education in Schools.¹

Han universalism is the privileged sign around which the discourse of the formation of political morality is organised. The use of the slogans (*Deng Xiaoping's Theory and Jiang Zemin theory of the 'Three Represents'*) demonstrates that the Party committee consists of believers who were instilling Chinese nationalist values among teachers. The Party committee required teachers to learn the central government policies (the *Professional Moral Standards for Teachers and the Opinions on Further Strengthening and Improving Moral Education in Schools*), in which China is presented as a monolithic entity, with Chinese nationalistic values and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership uncontested.

In 2008, the Party committee promoted a project on the *Importance of Chinese Listening and Speaking Ability in the Jiarong Tibetan Area*, relating to the development of morality:

In order to improve Jiarong Tibetan children's ability to listen to and speak in Chinese, teachers should promote Mandarin in the community and among parents. The community and parents should understand that Mandarin is the essential tool for mastering knowledge and the foundation of communication. Importantly, learning Mandarin is a manifestation of patriotism!

The Party committee is encouraging Han universalism, embodied in the *ability to listen to and speak in Chinese*, which is equated at the end of the quote with '*a manifestation of patriotism*'. Mandarin is represented as *the essential tool for mastering knowledge and the foundation of communication* – that is, Han universalism is something that can be inculcated through education and put to use in a range of contexts, including the Tibetan community. Furthermore, the Party committee insists that Tibetan students are essentially in need of enlightenment, which should be conducted in Chinese, especially

¹ In the following discussion, terminology from this extract and others will be in italics, to distinguish them from other sources.

the cultural transmission of advanced moral standards (*learning Mandarin is a manifestation of patriotism*). In other words, the discourse of moral development reflects the collapse of the logic of difference, in terms of ‘ethnic cultural and linguistic diversity’, into equivalence, in terms of ‘Tibetan = backward versus Han = advanced = Mandarin = skill = patriotism’.

The discourse of local community involvement

The discourse of the development of political morality reveals a Han-only perspective, emphasising enlightenment as a tool to transform the Tibetan population, including their language and culture. However, some school-based teacher-researchers in this town suggest that the usage of local language and culture should be involved within curricula:

Teachers should creatively combine the local language and culture within curricula implementation. Teachers will find valuable curricula resources in the surrounding environment and from their everyday life. Educational resources in the local community will make up for the shortcomings of the national unified curricula. (Qi, Interview, Tibetan school-based teacher-researcher in Badi Town, July, 2011)

Here, the discourse of local community involvement is organised around the nodal point ‘identity’. Identity is filled with meaning by being equated with local community-based signifiers (*the local language and culture*), and contrasted with others (*the national unified curricula*). This discourse ascribes a valuable identity to the local community in relation to *Tibetan language and culture*. They should be actively engaged in the problems regarding *the shortcomings of the national unified curricula*, and they should recognise their role as an integrated part of curricula implementation.

Thus, contradictions and conflicts are evident between the local religious community and national schools. As such, Badeng Nima proposes a community-school co-operational model:

A culture-based centre was established to serve as a tool for the local community, focusing on the vitality of the local language, culture and traditions. The Jiarong Tibetan linguistic and cultural heritage is attainable through this cultural centre and relate to its culturally relevant educational activities. In doing so, a unique Tibetan curriculum will protect the unique Jiarong language and culture. (Nima, Interview, Tibetan researcher in Badi Town, July, 2011)

Badeng Nima, who hails from this town, holds the first doctoral degree in education ever earned by a Tibetan in China. Naturally, his principal concern is how to improve education for and with his people relating to the local *linguistic and cultural heritage*. When asked his idea of involving local educational resources through establishing a community-based culture centre, Nima replied that Tibetan children’s psychological development is, particularly, deeply rooted in spatial knowledge, which connects their memories and social identity. However, it is hard for Tibetan children to feel this power and identity in current school life (Nima, Interview, Tibetan researcher in Badi Town, July, 2011). Some school-based teacher-researchers also indicate that not enough attention is given to maintaining the Tibetan language alongside the addition Mandarin. Rather, the Tibetan

language is being replaced with Mandarin. In terms of bilingual education for Tibetans, this does not adequately meet the needs of the people and their society and culture. Thus, the construction of cultural centre is particularly useful when the two fields in terms of the state school and local community are difficult to reconcile.

Context of the school

This section presents a picture of Badi Primary School. As with the distinct discourses of moral development and local community involvement apparent in the town, key policy actors in this school considered that education for Tibetans should incorporate two distinct discourses: the discourse of national standardisation and the discourse of local characteristics.

The discourse of national standardisation

The School Manager, or Deputy Principal (zhuren in Mandarin), in his introduction of the pamphlet on Badi Primary School, wrote about the school aim of *cultivating talent with national standardisation*:

We must uphold Deng Xiaoping's Theory and Jiang Zemin's theory of the 'Three Represents' for the purpose of cultivating talent with national standardisation. To this end, we must strengthen students' moral education, notably, the education of the 'five loves'. We must develop students' patriotism and guide them to establish a correct outlook on life and the world.

Here, the discourse of national standardisation is formed by the partial fixation of meaning around Han universalism. The School Manager is in his early 40s and is of the Han nationality. The School Manager was the second most senior member of the school's administration after the principal. For this school leader, *cultivating talent with national standardisation* was understood to be equivalent to fostering and promoting political loyalty to the CCP (apparent in the terms *Deng Xiaoping's Theory and Jiang Zemin's theory of the 'Three Represents'*). It is assumed that students can and should establish a *correct outlook on life and the world* through Han universalism education. The education of the 'five loves', for example, refers to the love of the motherland, people, labour, science and socialism. Such moral-political apothegms have long been assumed to prepare Tibetan students with correct moral-political outlooks. Thus, the purpose of *cultivating talent with national standardisation* is equivalent to the promotion by the school, and the appropriation by students, of Chinese nationalist values.

A similar view regarding the national standardisation of Tibetan students was expressed in more detail by some teachers, as shown below, highlighting the revitalisation of China.

We must cultivate students who love the motherland, love the people, and serve the people. We must make students understand the crimes of imperialist aggression against our country and the West's capitalist exploitation. (Cao, Teaching Plan of 2011, in the semi-agro-pastoral town school of Danba County)

The discourse of national standardisation shows a vision of moral conservatism relating

to foreign power (*make students understand the crimes of imperialist aggression against our country and the West's capitalist exploitation*), and emphasizes how moral education cultivates talent with national standardisation (*love the motherland, love the people, and serve the people*). Cao, a Han teacher, was recommended by the School Manager. In her teaching plan of 2011, Cao expressed a positive attitude towards the ideal of integrating moral education into her Chinese class and such views had a significant influence on some students' attitudes, particularly in relation to identity issues and Sino-Western power relations. I will return to this in the discussion of the hybridity in discourses and discursive strategies in this school.

It is worth mentioning that the School Manager and some teachers have intentionally avoided the local Tibetan culture in their cultivation of talent. For example, the School Manager promoted Cao's study of 'Measures of Improving the Quality of Chinese Language Teaching in Tibetan Schools, where it is highlighted that Mandarin communication should be used anytime, anywhere. In terms of approaches promoting Mandarin only, Cao emphasized two methods:

First of all, it is necessary to popularize Mandarin in our students' daily life. We should ask our students to speak Mandarin inside and outside the classroom. Second, teachers should popularize Mandarin in the households and local community. It is helpful for parents and villagers to understand the importance of Chinese in their children's study life, daily life, and future life. Thus, our students' Chinese communication ability will be improved in the 'Mandarin only' environment (the project on 'Measures of Improving the Quality of Chinese Language Teaching in Tibetan Schools').

Within such a vision of promoting Mandarin only, there is no room for cultural diversity. When asked their views on the Tibetan language and culture, some teachers demonstrate a problem-orientated attitude towards Tibetan language and culture. Cao explained this view as follows:

In short, our teaching effectiveness can be described as '5+2=0'. We fear their [the students] staying at home [with their parents] for 2 days [on weekends], because they will forget what they learnt during the 5-day boarding school. How can we introduce Tibetan culture in the class? Additionally, the students grew up in the village, and they have a better understanding of the local culture than us, thus we do not need to teach them local knowledge. (Cao, Interview, Han teacher in Badi Primary School, August, 2011)

In the eyes of these teachers, there is a strong nullification of the local community-based Tibetan culture, literally embodied in the description of 'our teaching effectiveness' as '5+2=0', in which the five days spent studying at school are negated by the two days spent at home with a consequent zero in terms of learning effect. During their study at school, Tibetan students can recite the texts fluently, including the moral-political slogans with little meaningful content. Within this discourse of 'forgetting Chinese', however, some Tibetan students are indeed 'quiet' in Chinese class. Thus, making links between quiet behaviour and poor performance in Tibetan students of diverse backgrounds is not all

that uncommon for teachers in China. This is because “his or her silence is interpreted as rural, backward” (Bartlett & Holland, 2002, p. 15). It is assumed that the backwardness of rural community-based Tibetan culture is significantly responsible for Tibetan students’ ineffective academic outcomes or poor school performance. This assumption consolidates Han superiority. In other words, arbitrariness is a striking feature of the discourse of national standardisation.

The discourse of practical education with local characteristics

The discourse of national standardisation embodies a pejorative view of Tibetan language and culture, particularly in relation to Chinese nationalist education. However, the majority of the Tibetan teachers interviewed support an education grounded in local culture as the basis for addressing the problems relating to the unsatisfactory outcomes of the current Mandarin language teaching for Tibetan students.

When asked for their comments regarding the issue of education for Tibetans, some Tibetan teachers noted that Jiarong Tibetan cultural resources should be utilised in classroom practices:

Jiarong Tibetan culture and knowledge, such as folk songs and dance, folk handicrafts, oral literature, and architecture, are dying and disappearing. Teachers should involve these valuable curriculum resources within their classroom practices. The unique Jiarong Tibetan culture is not only good for ethnic multi-cultural development in the long term, but also good for the development of the greater Chinese nationality. (Xiajia, Interview, Tibetan teacher in Badi Primary School, July, 2011)

Identity is a privileged sign around which other signs are ordered within this discourse of culturally relevant pedagogy. Xiajia, a Tibetan teacher, strongly argues that culturally relevant teaching should be linked to Jiarong Tibetan culture and knowledge (*teachers should involve these valuable curriculum resources within their classroom practices*). Furthermore, Xiajia provides an in-depth reflection on the relationship between the traditional Tibetan cultural heritage and its potential contribution to *the development of the greater Chinese nationality*; that is, a perspective of cultural sharing for co-prosperity and mutual development.

For this co-prosperity, Tibetan teachers hope that local officials will learn about *the traditional Tibetan culture and knowledge*:

Teaching was always led by officials. They [officials] always remind us, in a tactful way, that we’d better not arbitrarily add to the contents of teaching. There is not much room to use the valuable local educational resources within classroom practices. We hope the government officials will get some training in the traditional Tibetan culture and knowledge in order to develop practical education with local characteristics.

Here, a balanced bilingualism that sees Tibetan language heritage and Mandarin as ‘resources’ is promoted by Tibetan teachers. Due to the limited space for developing *local educational resources within their classroom practices*, local teachers propose

that local government officials take responsibility for promoting *practical education with local characteristics*. These associations are significant, since they clash with the major discourse of national standardisation in this school. Compared with the School Manager's and some Han teachers' deficit orientation towards Tibetan language and culture, most Tibetan teachers see Tibetan language and culture as 'valuable resources'.

Hybridity in discourses and discursive strategies in the school

By tracing key signifiers through a chain of texts, I identified two distinct discourses on education policies that are currently in circulation in Badi Primary School: a discourse of national standardisation and a discourse of practical education with local characteristics. This section examines how these antagonistic discourses are combined and inscribed into the discursive practices of school life.

Actors: ambivalent attitude towards development

The school's administrative leaders include a Han principal, Dai, and the Han School Manager. Dai is in his 40s. In 2011, the principal received China Education Administrator Training at the Party School of the CCP Sichuan Provincial Committee (Dai, Han principal, Interview in Badi Primary School, July, 2011). The nature of principals' training which emphasised the Chinese state system heavily influenced him, and this is reflected in his ambivalent attitude towards education development for Tibetans. The school's administrative leaders attempt to integrate 'national standardisation', stressing Han universalism, and 'local characteristics', emphasising Tibetan identity, in an attempt to meet the needs of the school and the local community. The following excerpt from the *Annual summary report* produced by the school's administrative leaders in 2010, combines the different discourses in hybrid forms:

We must adhere to the educational philosophy of 'establishing a life-long foundation for development', the goal of 'creating a county-level model primary school', the motto of 'unity, civilisation, good thinking, and good study', and school-based training. In doing so, we will lead teachers and students towards becoming intellectuals in accordance with national standardisation; meanwhile, we stress individual characteristics. Thus, we will establish a school model of 'national standardisation + individual characteristics'.

Here, the use of the plus sign "+" suggests that the school's administrative leaders are aware of the latent tension between the two discourses relating to *national standardisation* and *individual characteristics*. This was interpreted as the general development goal of establishing a school of *national standardisation + individual characteristics*. To this end, the leaders attempt a discursive compromise, balancing the viewpoints of both sides in the creation of a Han model school (*county-level model primary school*) and stressing their responsiveness to ethnicity and locality (*school-based training*). Within this hybrid ideology, cultural diversity (*individual characteristics*) is

desirable only in the context of developing political loyalty with Chinese nationalist values (*lead teachers and students towards becoming intellectuals in accordance with national standardisation*). However, the signs, such as *unity, civilisation, good thinking, and good study* can only be read as empty signifiers, and employed to signify the absence in the school of fully achieved identities. These signifiers are determined in and through political struggles for hegemony (Torfing, 1999).

Thus, the meaning of *intellectuals* is both limited and made ambiguous by its association with the school model of '*national standardisation + individual characteristics*'. It could be taken to mean either the fostering of national qualified loyalty or the creation of individuals with local characteristics, or both. However, in either case, its inclusion within a hybridised discourse suggests that *intellectuals* are only attainable through a school system. The empty signifiers *unity, civilisation, good thinking, and good study* add to the confusion.

In the following sections I will discuss the use of agendas, actions and artefacts in fostering *intellectuals* and how, through that use, the school's administrative leaders are trying to move from conflict to consensus.

Agendas: tying national standardisation and local characteristics to the needs of the school and local community

The school's administrative leaders attempt to unify signifiers that derive from disparate discourses in their construction of hegemonizing signifiers as noted above. These signifiers often have too much intertextual baggage attached to them for the project of fostering *intellectuals* to succeed.

I next review the key signifiers that appeared in the school's agenda about *the use of distance educational resources for improving student quality*, which combines elements from different perspectives:

Using distance educational resources, we organize our students to watch programs on the sciences, patriotism, and the environment. The science programs enable our students to understand the development of science and the power of science, and inspire our students' creativity. Patriotic education enables our students to understand that personal fate is linked to that of the motherland's future, that is, individuals' good prospects are based on the construction of the motherland. Environmental education enables our students to understand the importance of local environmental protection.

The school's administration leaders try to improve educational outcomes in *the sciences, patriotism, and the environment* through the integration of classroom teaching with the help of distance education resources, as well as catering to the students' environmental reality. With the development of the Internet and satellite technology, resources for conducting distance education are now established in several rural schools. Distance education resources refer to educational resources from the national central education training satellite broadcasts or Sichuan Internet resources for universal basic education. In this agenda, there are attempts to bind the two discourses together, hegemonically

appropriating a discourse of individuality and locality (*students' creativity, personal fate and local environmental protection*) to encourage social development and moral conservatism (*the motherland's future and the construction of the motherland*). The extract above equates individuals with citizens, implying that individuality is only acceptable within the context of a person's duties as a Chinese national.

Moreover, the content of universal education within Han universalism is fixed in and through political struggles for hegemony, in which particular demands (Han values) are universalised and others (Tibetan culture) are marginalised. For example, according to the requirements of the central government, the school organized students to watch 100 patriotic films through the distance education resources. The operations and content of these patriotic films are tightly controlled by the CCP. Controlling and determining what appears in the films allow the CCP to disseminate propaganda supportive of government policies.

Actions: Han model curriculum implementation

Within the school's agendas around *the use of distance educational resources for improving student quality*, notably their cultural and moral quality, the school's actions serve the cultural-political mainstream. From my observations and interviews, the curriculum is fully implemented in accordance with the national unified curriculum, focusing on and fostering national loyalty.

As discussed earlier, the Han teacher, Cao, expressed a negative attitude towards *the West's capitalist exploitation*, emphasizing the idea of moral education to cultivate talent with national standardisation and promote the revitalisation of China. This has heavily influenced local students' views on the West:

We are flowers of the motherland. We must study hard and learn more about our history. When we grow up, we can also put the Western imperialists in their place. We can make the Western imperialists know how it feels to be attacked. (Zeshe, Interview, Tibetan student in Badi Primary School, June, 2011)

Here, the association between Tibetan identities and Han universalism is a result of the discursive construction of a common enemy (*the West*). Zeshe, born in this town, is of the Tibetan nationality. Zeshe understands the importance of study for gaining knowledge. He views imperialist aggression as a national humiliation. For Zeshe, the way of revitalising China is related to aggression (*make the Western imperialists know how it feels to be attacked*). The discursive operation that sanctions this construction involves a displacement (Torfing, 1999), in relation to how the aggression is conceived (*we can also put the West imperialists in their place*). This displacement binds the school political leaders and the Tibetans in opposition to a common enemy. The national loyalty to the party-state is the outcome of curricula implementation.

In terms of Tibetan teaching, the Tibetan language class was taught by Cairang, who was originally a member of the local community. At the time of this study, he lived in a local temple. In interviews he voiced a strong commitment to improving education for students like himself and felt that Tibetan language literacy would improve the local

students' chances for employment after graduation. Interestingly, Cairang, was of the same ethnic group as his students but did not use the local dialect during instruction. From my observations, during Tibetan language arts, the students' Tibetan dialect – Jiarong Tibetan – was devalued during instruction. Cairang regularly corrected the lexical, phonological, and syntactic features of students' speech as they contributed to lessons that stressed analysing the language rather than using it for communication. Often, his corrections were accompanied by evaluative explanations that gave the students' Jiarong Tibetan an inferior status. He held very elitist views regarding the superiority of the standard variety of Tibetan and believed it was necessary for success. Although his efforts were well meaning, they actually contributed to the abandonment of the native language during class and a shift to Mandarin.

The lack of recognition of correct and appropriate community language for some smaller minority groups adds an extra burden to students in bilingual schools and dampens the vitality of native language use in the local community (Harrell, 2001b; Kolås, 2003). In fact, Badi Primary School is located in a semi-agro-pastoral community, and Tibetan-centred curricula should be conducted in accordance with the minority policy. However, the academic context of this school is overshadowed by the cultural-political mainstream. Due to the lack of bilingual teachers and a bridge between non-standard Tibetan languages and Chinese mandarin, the Tibetan-medium model has been replaced by the Mandarin-medium model in current practice.

Moreover, the school has little contact with parents and the local community, although parents meetings are held each semester. As previous discussed, Han teachers here are trying to create a Han cultural atmosphere on campus. Notably, they did not even stay in the school's town during the weekend, but went to the city, as far away as possible away from the local community. Due to the teachers' unwillingness to accept the local culture, Tibetan children's rights relating to language and culture are overlooked in curricula implementation. Thus, we can see how the hegemony in Badi Primary School, involving the privileged position of Han universalism and nationalistic values, is continually reproduced through the actions of particular actors in the school.

Artefacts: environmental and cultural artefacts

The production of environmental and cultural artefacts visualises policy, highlighting the contradictions that reflect and shape identity and power relations in this town school. However, these visual artefacts are “only meaningful, only ‘work’ alongside written texts, practices, organization and talk” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 132).

The campus of Badi Primary School is similar to that of Han schools. This is quite different from what I had imagined. I had been visualising the primary school in a magical valley, surrounded by green grass and trees, with golden corn-fields and a river. It was only the few students wearing Tibetan robe that made me feel that this was a Tibetan school. The school buildings are very different from the Tibetan housing style. Compared with the household buildings' thick walls and small windows, the school building had thinner walls and larger windows. It is cold inside the classroom in the winter, so much so that some Tibetan teachers ask the students to take classes outside the classroom, when it is a

sunny day. The principal, Dai, explained that the government unified the planning and design of the school campus (Dai, Han principal, Interview in Badi Primary School, July, 2011).

In many ways, this town school seems to be captured by a vision of education that is intimately tied to schooling for *improving student quality* around themes such as *science*, *patriotism*, and *the environment*, as noted previously. For example, in a Grade 5 classroom, there is a wall display where large Chinese characters proclaim: “Accumulate [knowledge]” (right), “Chinese heart”, and “Environmental protection” (left) (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: “Accumulate” (right), “Chinese heart”, and “Environmental protection” (left) on the wall display

The mixed messages for improving quality are reinforced by the visual messages produced by the school, which combines Han universalism and Tibetan identity (see Figure 3). The state symbol “Accumulate” provides Tibetan students with moral slogans to inspire them. “Chinese heart” appears frequently in the texts on the wall display, promoting Chinese nationalist values. It forms a nodal point of the moral conservative discourse in this town school. “Environmental protection” reflects the school’s awareness of *environmental protection*, representing Tibetan environment and cultural signs. As such, this school should be praised for providing an education that affirms students’ identity, grounding them with a sense of their relationship to the local environment. As previously discussed, the entire way of life for most Tibetans is closely integrated with the physical environment, and thus a culturally sustainable education for Tibetans must also incorporate environmental education. However, it is noteworthy that the three themes around promoting quality are all written in Han Chinese characters on the wall display, thus suggesting that Mandarin is in the only way of guaranteeing quality education as well as the integration of accumulated knowledge relevant to local environmental challenges.

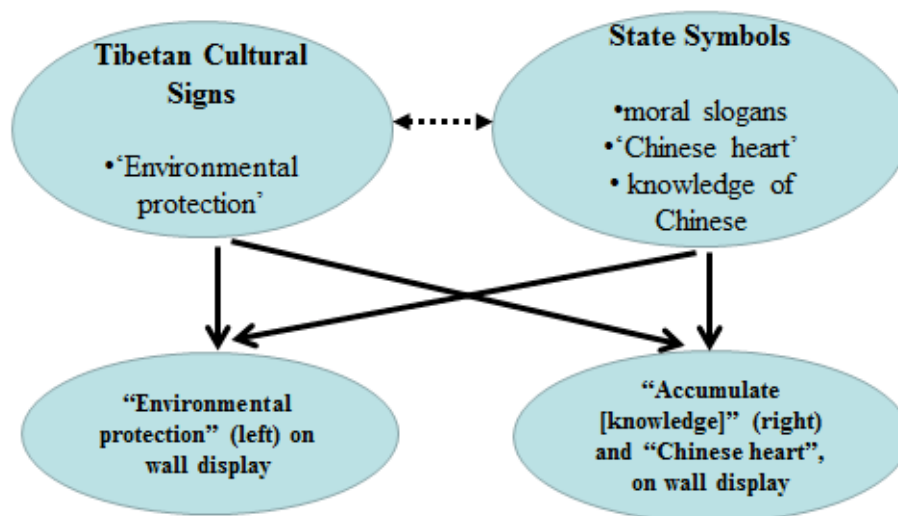


Figure 3: Wall displays representing Tibetan cultural signs and state symbols in Badi Primary School

Thus, the activity around the education on science, patriotism, and the environment is directed towards the aim of *improving student quality* with the help of physical tools, including these environmental artefacts and cultural signs. These physical tools play a crucial role in identity formation. As one Han teacher noted:

The school building's style is different from the housing outside. The campus environment is very Han Chinese. In such a Chinese cultural environment, Tibetan students can learn more about Chinese culture, its habits, and ways of thinking. (Gan, Han teacher, Interview in Badi Primary School, July, 2011).

Here, the Han teacher, Gan, and several other Han teachers explained that a Han-centric cultural campus makes Tibetan students aware of the importance of Han education for gaining high cultural quality and social status, exemplified by “the *ideal end-result for Tibetan students is becoming a government official*” (interviews with several Han teachers). This in turn shapes a “virtuous circle” (Yi, 2011, p. 405). It was argued that cultivation of Tibetan students in a Han-centric cultural campus could eventually enable the Tibetan community to transform the quality of its population (Yi, 2011).

In fact, such a cultural environment is very different from the community's culture. Within such a Han-centric cultural environment, there is no room for teachers to include the local culture within their teaching practice alongside the unified assessment standards provided by the county government. Thus, the school focused on exam-based subjects, such as Chinese and Maths. From the interviews with local parents, the students with good exam scores are always envied by their peers and other parents. Besides being favoured by their teachers, the students with good exam scores are encouraged by the school through award certificates: the ‘good student three ways (good in study, attitude and health)’ and the ‘excellent student cadre’. Here, the neo-liberal ideal of self-improvement is evident in these award certificates, which individualizes responsibility for excellence and ignores the role of local resources, such as local environment, culture

and religion, all of which may play a significant role in Tibetan students' performances.

The production of these artefacts has heavily influenced the local parents and students. In Tibetan student, Namu's, extract notes, I found her favourite excerpt:

In my memory, my childhood was enveloped in the green grass, green trees, and green hills around. I was a growing green tree. After I entered primary school, red became the main theme: red flags, red scarves, and red certificate for 'good student three ways'. . . The color in front of us had changed.

Here, the hybridized discourse of 'two colours, two cultures' demonstrates how contradictions reflect and shape identity and power relations in that context (Freeman, 2008; Gee, 2000). Colours can produce affective meanings and are loaded with social, political and cultural signification (Carmen & Rick, 2008). Here, the local environment colour (green) and the Chinese flag colour (red) are apparent. Studying and living in the context of a bilingual and a bicultural community, Tibetan students struggle with their identities. Some students could feel inferior because they are unable to be Han Chinese. Issues of acculturative social stress, as a consequence of assimilation into Han culture and disconnection from the local language, culture and knowledge, all of which heavily influence the students psychosocially, remain unexplored in relation to the current bilingual model. In other words, the national school culture inscribes itself through the discursive production of artefacts and signs of "intolerance and fantasmatic representations that invoke the need to purify the social body, to preserve its identity, to protect it from all forms of mixing" (Balibar, 1991, pp. 17-18). By emphasising Han universalism/culturalism (*red flags, red scarves, and red certificate for 'three good student'*), Tibetan ethnic identity is folded into a Han Chinese context.

Summary

This paper presents the discourses and discursive strategies in educational terms, of a town school community in a semi-agro-pastoral area of Danba County. Some general findings from this case can be drawn as follows.

First, this case involved two distinct discourses. They are a moral conservative discourse, promoting political loyalty to the CCP, and a discourse of ethnic characteristics, emphasizing local community involvement and linked to the integrated economic environment. The former sees a strong nullification of the local community-based Tibetan culture. The latter discourse sees Tibetan language heritage and Mandarin as 'resources'. This discourse was drawn upon by some local critics to promote the ideal of establishing a co-operational community-school model. Each discourse is marked by signifiers which are structured around nodal points such as Han universalism/culturalism, identity and cultural diversity.

Secondly, the cultural-political mainstream in this case combined these antagonistic discourses into an integrated agenda of modernisation. In employing these antagonistic discourses for the school aims: *national standardisation + local characteristics*, the cultural-political mainstream produces a hybridized but ultimately incoherent discourse

fostering *intellectuals* around the education of *science, patriotism, and the local environment*. In order to move from conflict to consensus, the ambivalence and ambiguity of the integrated actions of curricula implementation serve the cultural-political mainstream, reflecting the marginalisation of Tibetan language and culture. Thus, governmentality takes place around the manipulation of these contested signifiers, through the discursive production of environmental artefacts and cultural signs.

The hybridity in discourses and discursive strategies in this town school community reveals significant power shifts within policy enactment processes. On a surface level, the bilingual model is transferred from a Tibetan + Chinese model to Chinese + Tibetan model in this town school, where Tibetan knowledge, culture and language are virtually non-evident in school, and where the model of education enacted is virtually undifferentiated from an urban school in any Han area in China. This model treats language as a neutral communication tool, separate from culture, while simultaneously revealing a deficit orientation towards Tibetan language and culture. As such, Badeng Nima and some local Tibetan teachers criticize the transitional bilingual education for shifting prematurely to an all-Mandarin medium instruction, leading to low literacy in both the Tibetan language and Mandarin. This argument has considerable support in bilingual education research outside China, which has found that maintenance bilingual education typically leads to higher proficiency in both the first and second language than does transitional bilingual education (Baker, 2001; Cummins, 2000, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2004). In other words, the collapse of the logic of difference into the antagonistic and hierarchical logic of equivalence will tend to involve a loss of cultural identity and meaning.

However, the students in the semi-agro-pastoral school experience a cultural distance, in terms of linguistic and cultural capital, between boarding school and the shrinking local communities. Studying and living in a boarding school, Tibetan students' practices of understanding and inheriting traditions and knowledge are interrupted. This is also reflected in the change and shrinkage of the population and cultural ecology in Tibetan communities. Students are developing instrumental linguistic dispositions, characterized by cultural distance and dislocated Tibetan identities. To some extent, this reproduction has consolidated and strengthened the urban-rural dual structure of China.

Badi Town's current and historic cultural heritage means that its hybridity in discourses and discursive strategies is changing rapidly. As we have seen, the town is lurching between accelerating the process of *technologisation and modernisation of education* and accelerating the protection of Tibetan culture and religion. While I was writing this paper, I found my own feelings lurching between despair at the depressing nature of the deficit orientation towards Tibetan language and culture, and hope inspired by the views that see the heritage of the Tibetan language heritage and Mandarin as 'resources'. In other words, neoliberalism in this case can be seen as a counter-hegemonic discourse in relation to Han universalism, to the extent that it has managed to redefine the terms of the political debate and set a new agenda, which encourages environmental and cultural conservation. For example, the establishment of local community-based cultural centre

and the education on environmental protection are both important consequences of this hybrid neo-liberalist discourse.

However, when these aspects appear to be in conflict, the priority of the party-state is usually to justify and legitimize its regime by focusing upon and fostering political loyalty in the masses. It does this by centring on economic development at the expense of so-called 'second-rate' Tibetan culture (Yi, 2011). We can see the overall operation of the logics of equivalence and difference in accordance with economic criteria and expectations, reflecting neoliberalism's signature theme of the operation of markets (Dean, 2009). For example, hegemonisation works on signifiers (*building 'large and strong' school in minority areas, and the technologisation and modernisation of education*) that simultaneously employ the logic of difference, in terms of 'cultural and linguistic diversity', and the logic of equivalence, in terms of 'Tibetan = backward versus Han = advanced'. Within such a context of the displacement of political questions by economic considerations, *the process of technologisation and modernisation of education* reflects how the neoliberal discourse has worked to align education for Tibetans with "the imperatives of the market and managerial technologies of performativity, thereby naturalising a view of education as a technical, instrumental, rather than inescapably political, enterprise" (Clarke, 2012, p. 307). As a consequence, their political nature, including the deep implication of these discourses with issues of sociocultural and political power, is effectively backgrounded.

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