

The Change of Identity on Chinese as a Heritage Language for Chinese Central Asian Students under the Belt and Road Initiative

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ABSTRACT. In the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, the number of Central Asian international students has reached more than 160 thousand in China. Among them, overseas Chinese students, with the advantages of multilingualism and integration of Chinese and foreign languages, play a unique role in serving the building of the Belt and Road Initiative, maintaining stability in border inspection and promoting people-to-people exchange. The identification of Chinese as the heritage language for Chinese Central Asian students from studying in China is a positive and dynamic language cognition, emotion and action for Chinese. In the new era, its identity of Chinese has also undergone a series of changes: from “ask me to learn” to “I want to learn”, from Chinese to Chinese + specialty and from Chinese learning to Chinese heritage.

KEYWORDS: Under the belt and road initiative, Chinese central asian students, Identity of heritage language, Change

1. Introduction

According to data provided by the Ministry of Education, students from 64 countries along the Belt and Road has become a new force for studying in China in 2018. Among them, the number of students from five countries in Central Asia reached over 160 thousand. 11784 international students were from Kazakhstan in Central Asia, which became one of the top ten source countries of students studying in China [1]. The cause of international student education plays an increasingly important role in serving the country's major strategy and educational reform and development.

Central Asia is located in the core section of the Silk Road Economic Belt, connecting the Eurasia and adjacent to the northwest of China. It is an important energy, security and transportation arteries. Under the Belt and Road Initiative, China and Central Asia have increasingly close contacts. Overseas Chinese have the advantages of multilingualism and integration with China and foreign countries. They have played a unique and important role in participating in the development of the Belt and Road, promoting national unity, border stability and connecting the people. Chinese students from Central Asia are a special group among foreign students in China. In terms of identity, they are of Chinese descent and have natural kinship and cultural ties with China. Overseas Chinese parents and Chinese communities also generally expect their offspring to inherit the Chinese language and culture. At the language level, they are in a diversified and multilingual environment. For Chinese learning, they often have certain learning motivation and foundation. This motivation originates from the guiding and supporting role played by the awareness and actions of the mother tongue inheritance of overseas Chinese, as well as from the development of China's economy, China's frequent appearances in the center of the international arena and its attractive traditional culture [2]. However, overseas Chinese students with multiple linguistic advantages are also faced with confusion and even crisis of multi-language identity and language identity. “How do I identify with Chinese language in the Chinese environment?” “What is my language identity?” These problems have become more serious. In addition, the Chinese identity of overseas Chinese students also faces the influence of gradual weakening of inter-generational transmission and changes in attitudes towards the inheritance of Chinese. At the same time, there are some phenomena such as individual differences within learners, resistance and disagreement with Chinese language. A targeted in-depth understanding of the mechanism and characteristics of Chinese students in constructing Chinese identity provides a scientific basis for the effective implementation of Chinese teaching and the formulation of language policies. Under the background of the new era, the recognition of Chinese as a heritage language has also changed for Chinese students from Central Asia studying Chinese or other specialties in China. Understanding and analyzing the change of identity is an important factor to promote Central Asian students to become spokesman of “knowing China” and “being friendly to China”. It is also conducive to giving full play to the existing kinship and national identity of Chinese students and their unique cultural advantages, training them to become professional Chinese talents badly needed in the construction of the Belt and Road

Initiative, effectively achieving international communication, telling Chinese stories well and inheriting Chinese wisdom.

2. The Change of Identity on Chinese as a Heritage Language for Chinese Central Asian Students

The identity of Chinese as the heritage language is the conscious reflection and practical action of the relationship between the individual and the external world constructed by overseas Chinese at the language level. It is also the positive and dynamic language cognition, language emotion and language action of overseas Chinese to Chinese as the heritage of language culture besides the main social languages [2]. This identity of Chinese is not an individual's independent cognitive behavior, but a situational activity. It is the product of the interaction of the objective world and subjective consciousness, and has the characteristics of construction and development. From the content point of view, the recognition of Chinese as a heritage language covers the rational cognition, subjective evaluation and practical actions of Chinese overseas students. Structurally speaking, the recognition of Chinese as a heritage language reflects the Chinese students' cognition of the importance and usefulness of Chinese in the process of construction. Emotionally, it reflects the evaluation of the attractiveness of Chinese, the sense of self-efficacy in learning Chinese, and the degree of other identification of native speakers. Behavior related to Chinese language consists of exploration of Chinese language, time and energy input in Chinese learning, and frequency and scope of active use of Chinese, which highlights the characteristic of recognition of inherited language that integrates consciousness and action. There is a significant positive correlation between cognition, emotion and action. Cognition of Chinese language is the foundation, the emotion of Chinese language is the core, and behavior related to Chinese language is the explicit concrete practice. All the factors echo each other in the form of expression, forming a complete identity of heritage language.

Overseas Chinese students' identity of Chinese as the heritage language is an internal driving force of Chinese learning, which can promote learners to give full play to their self-efficacy and initiative. In this paper, nearly 200 Chinese Central Asian college students of different grades from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and other countries studying in China were measured and interviewed on the identity of Chinese as the heritage language. The research found that the identity of Chinese showed the following three changes:

(1) From “ask me to learn” to “I want to learn”

In the past study of overseas Chinese on heritage language, it was found that the learning of heritage language of overseas Chinese learners originated from their special background, from the ubiquitous national belonging consciousness of their ancestors and fathers, that is to say, the learning of Chinese language of overseas Chinese mainly originated from the requirements and influence of other family members, such as parents, so it often has the passive meaning of “ask me to learn” [3]. In this interview, it is found that in addition to the communication and heritage from families and communities, the Chinese learning of Chinese Central Asian students is more from the “I want to learn”. For example, many learners said: “I fell in love with China since childhood, and I dream to come to China one day to learn Chinese”. “There are not many people who can speak Chinese well. I hope that I can find a good job in Chinese.” In the measurement of identity of Chinese for Chinese Central Asian students (Likert 5-degree measurement method is used in the scale), the overall attitude of Chinese Central Asian students to positive emotional variables of Chinese is high, the average score is 4.3, especially the measurement value of “I like Chinese and Chinese culture” is the highest (4.4); in addition, their importance and usefulness to Chinese are high, 4.16 and 4.13 respectively, especially the measurement value in “education promotion” and “finding a right job” is higher and its average score is 4.3. It can be seen that, in accordance with the interview results, the Chinese identity of Chinese Central Asian students integrates the emotional dimensions of positive emotion, self-efficacy and sense of belonging to Chinese and the cognitive dimensions of the importance and usefulness to Chinese, whose own recognition of positive emotion and usefulness to Chinese is high.

In addition, through multiple regression analysis, it is found that the usefulness dimensions (including the usefulness of language “economic capital”, “social capital”, “cultural capital” and “symbolic capital”) and the positive emotional dimensions (including interest, liking and pleasant listening) of Chinese Central Asian learners to Chinese have a significant positive impact on Chinese identity behavior (including Chinese learning exploration, Chinese learning investment and Chinese use frequency) will Rate). Therefore, the change from “ask me to learn” to “I want to learn” will significantly promote the emergence of Chinese identity behavior, thus positively affecting the learning process and learning effect of Chinese.

(2) From Chinese learning to Chinese + specialty

Since Xing Xin proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, the change in the mode of education for overseas students is increasingly obvious, and gradually transformed from Chinese learning to high-end, education, precision, hi-tech and specialization [4]. In this study, it is found that due to the inherent advantages of Chinese as the heritage language, the measurement value of Chinese Central Asian students on self-efficacy (4) and self-confidence (4.13) in Chinese

learning is generally higher than that of the non-Chinese overseas students in the measurement of Chinese identity, and the language foundation from general Chinese learning to Chinese + specialty is better. After the interview, it is also found that more overseas Chinese learners have made full use of the advantages of Chinese and gradually changed from specialized Chinese learning to studying more majors such as economy, commerce, tourism, education and others with Chinese as a tool.

This change from Chinese learning to Chinese + is also highly consistent with the demand of the Belt and Road Initiative for cross-border talents. In terms of the training mode of Chinese talents, in response to the industrial demand of the host country, domestic universities and vocational education have also launched the teaching mode of Chinese +specialty so as to spread specialty, technology and products to the cooperative country through Chinese. According to figures from the education ministry, China has carried out 351 international cooperation with the countries along the Belt and Road, and more than 100 thousand people have been trained. Thus, the previous pattern of focusing on Chinese learning is broken and the subject distribution is more reasonable.

(3) From Chinese learning to Chinese heritage

Since the Belt and Road Initiative, 13 Confucius Institutes and 22 Confucius Classrooms have been established and many Chinese universities, primary and secondary schools and kindergartens have been offering Chinese courses in Central Asia. The number of students studying in China has been increasing year by year. However, the “Chinese fever” is facing a serious shortage of Chinese teachers, far from meeting the needs of Chinese learning. In this study, it is found that many overseas Chinese students choose Chinese education or communication major due to the industry gap and hope to become local Chinese teachers after graduation, presenting the change from Chinese learning to Chinese heritage. Zhou Qingsheng proposed that language is mainly inherited through three ways: vertical (family), horizontal (community, school) and identity. Chinese Central Asian students pass on from generation to generation through their families, learn Chinese systematically in the Chinese environment and identify with Chinese in the new era, and jointly construct Chinese heritage through the path of time, space and heart [5]. In addition, as the strength of overseas Chinese heritage, they not only achieve the maintenance of Chinese language and cultural heritage, but also make contributions to the international and inter-ethnic spread of Chinese language, and play a role of bond in maintaining overseas Chinese communities and promoting people-to-people exchange.

3. Conclusion

Under the Belt and Road Initiative, the Chinese Central Asian students studying in China have changed from “ask me to learn” to “I want to learn”, from Chinese to Chinese +, and from Chinese learning to Chinese heritage in the construction of identity of Chinese as the heritage language. This change coincides with the development trend of the times and is conducive to sharing development opportunities, bringing common development between China and the countries along the Belt and Road.

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