

Changing Models of State-Building and Language Ideology in Contemporary China

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This paper reviews the change of models of state-building, examines the impact of this change on language ideology and order, and analyzes the consequences on language policy making and implementation in education for minorities in contemporary China.

Since the collapse of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the PRC has quietly replaced the failed Soviet model of multinational state-building with a Chinese model of one-nation with diversity (中华民族多元一体) (Zhou 2007a). The change of models of state-building has significant impact on China's language ideology and order, two key notions in a conceptual framework I have proposed for the analysis of political, social, and economic relationship among languages during globalization (Zhou 2006).

As defined in the Marxist tradition (see Marx & Engels, 1846/1947: 1-78), language ideology is considered a system of ideas, presuppositions, and beliefs about the relationship among languages in a society. There are two general types of language ideology: Monolingualism and multilingualism (see Galindo, 1997; Gonzalez & Melis 2001; Hornberger, 1988, 2003; Kasuya, 2001; Macias, 1985; Ruiz, 1984). Monolingualism as an ideology is the representation of linguistic nationalism that is based on the belief of one nation speaking one common language, while Multilingualism as an ideology accommodates linguistic diversity, acknowledging language as a right and as a resource.

As a social reality, language order is a hierarchical relationship among languages, an order that is legitimized by language laws and policies as well as institutionalized by official, educational, media, workplace, community, and family language use. This order generally has three strata: the super language(s), the national/regional languages, and the local languages (Zhou 2006), while in China the strata are specifically the state/common language, regional languages/dialects, and local languages/dialects, being ranked by their access to political, legal, social, institutional, and financial resources (Zhou, 2007c).

The relationship between language ideology and order is dynamic and interactive: the former acts upon the latter while the latter seeks a representation in the former. The Soviet model assumed a more or less parallel (actually satellite) linguistic relationship among its nationalities (Zhou 2007b), but the Chinese model supposes a strictly-structured linguistic relationship among its ethnic groups. Language ideology brought about by the Chinese model has changed China's language order in the past decade and half. This paper analyzes how the current ideology has influenced the making and implementation of language laws and policies and changed the institutionalization of language use, particularly in education. It also investigates how the new language order has shaped people's beliefs about language relations in contemporary China.

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