

Chapter 7

Case 4—Xishan Primary School, Yunnan Province



7.1 General Background

7.1.1 *Background of Xishan Township, Luxi City, Yunnan Province*

The Xishan Township is composed of six village communities, 40 natural villages, and 48 villager teams. According to the census at the end of 2005, there were 2635 households and a population of 11,292 in the Xishan Township in total, including an agricultural population of 10,849 (96.07%). The ethnic groups of Jingpo, Han, and De Ang have been living there for a long time, among which 87% are Jingpo (9482 in total).

The soil of the Xishan Township is fertile. The sunshine is sufficient (rainfall ranging from 1300 to 1653 mm). Thus, the climate of the land is suitable for tropical plants. However, we have seen a number of abandoned lands in the township. In addition, there is only one road heading to the Xishan Township, which is long and hilly and has been called the “Rolling Stone Road.” Since the hilly pathway to Xishan is limited and dangerous, there is a farmers’ market at the center of Xishan Township (Nongbing village) every five days. The native people called this kind of market “Gaizi.” Most of the goods are daily supplies sold by the people from Zhefang Township. People from Xishan Township only sell mostly homemade vegetables or rice wine. They seldom sell commodities.

The biggest festival is the traditional Jingpo festival called “Mu Nao Zong Ge.” The festival takes place in the central square of Nongbing village. When the day comes, thousands of Jingpo people gather. They wear traditional clothes. The men carry the Jingpo sword, and the women carry a small basket. They perform a professional folk dance around the totem-pole. They twist into couples and dance to the sound of Jingpo music.

7.1.2 Basic Information About Xishan Primary School

There are four village-based complete primary schools at Xishan Township. The Central School is located at the center of the Township, where the Township's government is located. Maojiangmingde Primary School is located in the south of Xishan Mountain. Bengqiang Primary School is in the southwest of Xishan Mountain. Yingpan Primary School is located in the southwest of Xishan Plain.

In 1952, the Frontier Executive Plan Commission of Yunnan Province established an educational program called Brother Ethnic Minorities Educational Plan based on the decisions from the Department of Culture and Education in Yunnan. They decided to launch a public elementary school at the Xishan Township, where most of the Jingpo people live. This program aimed to assist ethnic minority people to achieve political and economic development. This was seen as a starting point for the rapid development of the public education of Xishan Township (Gao, 2010, pp. 72–81).

In 1984, the Yunnan's Department of Culture and Education advocated a policy about launching "semi-boarding schools" (He, 2009). The Xishan Township added semi-boarding schools in its location. The village schools only had classes from Grades 1 to 3. After Grade 3, students were sent to elementary schools in Xishan Township. This action promoted the graduation rate and the enrollment rate of Xishan Township. The admission scores were set comparatively lower for minority students. Reflecting on the policy for promoting minority education of the state in the 1980s, the educational development in Xishan Township became more rapid because of the developments of free education and bilingual education (He, 2009, pp. 66–72).

After 1983, Xishan Primary School conducted an education system reform. The elementary schools shifted their five-year primary system to a six-year system. In 1989, 8 of 80 classes changed into the six-year system and started using new textbooks. In the spring of 1995, Xishan Township launched its experimental courses for bilingual education and started teaching the Wa language (He, 2007). In March 2003, Xishan Township processed its institutional reforms. The township closed its Central Primary School. Based on the policy of centralizing the resources for schooling, Xishan started to close small schools. Five more schools were closed, while six complete schools were kept opening. In 2006, two more complete schools were closed. Four complete primary schools remained, among which there was a Central School managing the other three village schools.

There is no fence or gate at Xishan Primary School. The school covers an area of 20,000 m² and a building area of 4472 m². There are two teaching buildings, one administration building, one canteen, and nineteen dorms for teachers and one restroom. There are several facilities donated by the Chen Yixin Family Foundation, including a computer room, a distant education room, a young pioneer activity room, and a library. The dorms and classrooms are very crowded because of the layout adjustment policy. There is no playground except a basketball court and a couple of nearly abandoned pingpong tables. The canteen does not have enough tables or seats to hold all the students to have meals at the same time. There is a clinic room for a doctor. Some commonly used medicines and simple medical equipments are

available. More than 400 students and teachers share the restroom. There's no room for students to take a shower.

At the time of the study, the Xishan Primary School had eleven classes which held 398 students (291 of them were minorities, 73.1% of the student population). 337 of them were boarding students at school (85% of the total number of students). There were two preschool/kindergarten classes, which held 89 students. The rate of enrollment in the schools at Xishan Township was 100%.

As to the staff in Xishan Primary School, there were 28 teachers in total in 2010. Among them, 12 of them were from the Jingpo ethnic group. Fourteen of them were Han, and two of them Dai. They were ten males and 18 females. Among them, one had obtained a BA degree. Eighteen of them were junior college graduates. Four of them were high school graduates. Three of them were from a junior teachers' college. One was a technical school graduate, and another one was a junior high school graduate. There were dorms for teachers. Two or three teachers shared a dorm about of 40 m² (1/3 are roofless) with a kitchen and without any restroom or bathroom.

The Xishan Primary School covered all the school-aged children for the two villages of Nongbing and Gongwai. Most people in the villages of the township were Jingpo residents. The students living further away from school needed about one and a half hour to walk to school. The Xishan Township Government was located at the center of Nongbing village which is about five minutes' walk from the school. The only bank, cultural center, market, restaurant, and supermarket are located in an area of less than 2000 m². The relationships between the school and the government/community were very good. For example, the school teachers had participated in planning some governmental projects in the villages, such as daily administrative tasks, pension projects, and the plans for one-child policy and social welfare for low-income families.

7.2 Research Methods and Process

The survey lasted from May 17–June 3, 2010, and adopted an up-down module. Interviews were conducted in the Education Bureau and teaching and research centers at Xishan Primary School and Xishan Middle school. The research methods included questionnaires (for school leaders/teachers/students), interviews, and observation forms (in class/school/dorms/canteen). The targeted students for the questionnaires were Grades 4 and 5 in the primary school and all grades in the middle school. The valid questionnaires of the primary school were 120 copies and that of the middle school 174 copies. The valid questionnaires of the primary school teachers were 22 copies and that of the middle school teachers 13 copies.

7.3 Policy Description

7.3.1 *Layout Adjustment*

There was one secondary school, one primary school, six semi-boarding schools and some teaching sites in the villages (including one-teacher school). The teaching sites had all been closed and were merged into primary schools in 2006. The six semi-boarding schools were reduced to four at the end of 2006.

The administrator reported that the decision of school closing and merging was based on a community survey. The total number of the schools had declined from over 300 in 2003 to just over 100 at the time of the study. But what actually happened? We conducted a detailed survey about the closing of Bangjiao Primary School.

The director of the Luxi Education Bureau told us that he had visited lots of schools and conducted sufficient community survey to decide which schools to keep. In 2001, the city had received a decision about the State Council's "Basic Education Reform and Development" from the Educational Board of the Autonomous Prefecture. The policy emphasized that "we should not impose uniformity on the implementation of the policies." According to the director, based on the decision from the central government, many other provinces had started to process the procedure of closing teaching sites and establishing boarding schools, such as the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. He explained, "We decided to implement the policy before the official release date in Yunnan, since other provinces such as Inner Mongolia had already started it. No matter if there was such a policy, we had upgraded some schools, since many schools had only one teacher." As a result, the Luxi Education Bureau started to close some schools with just one teacher in 2002. Most of them were merged into primary schools in 2005.

The director of the Dehong State Education Department addressed the outcomes of the layout adjustment policy in Chuxiong State at the State Education Summing-up Conference in December 2005. He confirmed that the reduction of schools had demonstrated the achievement of the policy implementation. The director also confirmed that the policy was adequate and would be continued.

The principal of Bangjiao Primary School Mr. Yang asked the vice director of the Luxi Education Bureau if the principal could decide about the closure of certain schools. He believes that he was the one who knew the school best. But the vice director gave him a vague answer: "You know the director's idea perfectly. Now you need to do research back in the schools with your colleagues and the village government to find out an answer and tell us."

Within one week, the Luxi Education Bureau received a report about "the Layout Adjustment of the primary schools in Xishan Township" from the Xishan Township Government and the Central Primary School. Xishan is a less developed township in Luxi City in terms of economic, cultural, or educational conditions. The current director revisited the former director's decision and said, "Xishan has already been the worst one, so there's no harm to try new things since it can't be worse." Mr. Yang, the principal of Xishan Central Primary School, and Mr. Mu, the Party Secretary

of Xishan Township, received the following order in March 2006: “the Bangjiao Primary School and Mindong Primary School can be closed but communication with the community and post-closing affairs office is necessary.”

While talking about the choice to close Bangjiao Primary School, Mr. Yang gave three reasons behind the closure of the school. First, the condition of the Bangjiao Primary School was very poor. The teachers were aged and less qualified. The age structure of teachers was imbalanced. Second, there were dangerous buildings, which would have needed a big amount of money to repair. The cost could be saved if the school was merged with another. Third, the distance between Bangjiao Primary School and the Central School was only five kilometers. Although commuting took longer for some students, the teaching and learning environment were obviously better.

The villagers’ committee was dissatisfied with the decision and claimed that the closure was against the central government’s policy (“Decision on reform and development of primary education”). In order to calm down the villagers and teachers of Bangjiao primary school, the Mindong Primary School provided a suggestion for closing to the villagers’ committee. Mr. Yang brought the files and plans of “The Closing and Merging of Bangjiao and Mindong Primary Schools” to meet the Party Secretary of Xishan Township in November 2002.

The amendment project of the dangerous buildings of Bangjiao primary school had always been a problem for the township government. The township government was still taking charge of monitoring the project, although it did not control the finances anymore. The government had submitted the budget for the project, but it had always been turned down. The township government was blamed by the leaders from the Prefecture Education Department.

Mr. Mu thought this represented a chance to solve this problem in order to meet the requirements of the Education Bureau. Bangjiao Primary School was closed down through an arrangement between the Party Committee, the People’s Congress of Xishan Township, and the principal of the Central Primary School.

Almost all the teaching sites of Xishan Township were closed in 2005. The former one-teacher schools were merged into boarding schools. The number of students in Bangjiao Primary School increased from over 60 to over 110. It received students from seven closed village schools. The classrooms and dorms were shabby and dangerous. The canteen building was a D-level dangerous building, which was supposed to be torn down. But the project was delayed because of a lack of funding. With an increasing number of students, the school’s conditions of living, studying, and dining became more inconvenient. Accommodation was also affected, with one bed shared by two students. The teaching of so many students made teachers exhausted.

Mr. Li said, “I really didn’t know (that the school would be closed down) until Mr. Yang asked me about that.” But Mr. Li believed that the leadership team of Bangjiao Primary School needed to govern a giant school district and was a boarding school itself. It should not be merged into another school with a similar scale. Although he was shocked to hear that the school would be closed, he was told by Mr. Yang that the government already provided benefits for him. Mr. Yang said, “It was the leaders’

idea. Getting you a job at Bengqiang Primary School close to your home is already a privilege.” The teachers were silent. Angry parents blamed Mr. Li for the situation.

Yang Deguang was informed with the other teachers that Bangjiao Primary School would be closed on September 3, 2006. He was astonished but had nowhere to turn to. The students were excited hearing that they would not have to go to school but they did not know how hard the future would be for them. The parents did not understand the reasons for closing the schools and gathered for a protest.

The students and their parents of Bangjiao Primary School had not realized that the school would close down until September 2006. Mr. Li took some parents to meet Mr. Yang. Mr. Yang took them to Mr. Mu. Mr. Li kept asking the reasons why Bangjiao Primary School was closed with the kind persuasion of Mr. Mu. The parents calmed down after Mr. Yang hosted them for a dinner. Only some parents who did not go to the dinner kept resisting in their own ways.

The Xishan Central Primary school did the closing affairs of Bangjiao Primary School. Three out of eight teachers of Bangjiao Primary School went to the Central Primary School. Two of them went to Maojiang Primary School and three others to Bengqiang Primary School. All the students were moved to the Central Primary School. During the arrangement, one of the teachers suggested to have an opinion poll. But Mr. Yang refused this suggestion, and presented a report clearly mentioning that “we have already done enough surveys and the affirmative rate is 85%. We still need to communicate with those who haven’t come to an agreement yet.”

The current principal of the Central Primary School told us that the former principal of the primary school asked all the male teachers to bring rice wine in order to communicate with the influential people in the villages. The parents had no choice but to sign “agree” on the survey forms, because there were no teachers left. Only the parents of preschool students kept resisting. They believed that the children were too young to travel so far to school. The principal had to leave a female teacher to guide the preschoolers. After the female teachers’ retirement, the preschool was merged into the Central Primary School in 2008.

Yunnan Province released an official notice in December 2009: *The Announcement of Primary and Secondary Schools’ Layout Adjustment in Yunnan Province* (Yunnan, No. [2009]241). It aimed to “concentrate schools and close all the one-teacher schools; to close down all the primary schools of less than 300 students; each township focuses on one complete boarding central primary school and a certain number of village primary schools, and gradually ensure that there are more than 300 students in each school... and this work would be done within three years. 10% of school-merge work would be done by the end of 2009, while 50% by the end of 2010, 80% by the end of 2011 and the entire process would be finalized before the end of 2012.”

The aim of the layout adjustment policy is to “concentrate the limited resources to enhance the quality of education.” The administrators and teachers of the Luxi Education Bureau all agreed that this policy showed that “its greatest advantage is centralizing the resources,” “gather everybody’s ideas to produce giant power.”

Only two more teachers were hired in Xishan Primary School after the layout adjustment, and one of them was a dorm teacher. The student–teacher ratio increased,

so did the work burden of the teachers. The policy seemed to “concentrate on the limited number of teaching staff to tackle the shortage of teachers,” but the truth was otherwise. The number of teachers was almost the same while the student number increased by one-third. Opening new classes and thus hiring new teachers were not options, which meant more work for the current teachers.

The teachers agreed that the layout adjustment brings flexibility for the teachers, but also worse living conditions, malnutrition, and longer distances from home to school.

The living conditions were unsatisfactory after the layout adjustment. The increase of students and insufficiency of infrastructures caused difficulties for the teachers and leaders to manage the school.

7.3.2 Boarding School Policy

Xishan Primary School administrates four semi-boarding schools. Two of them hold 1011 students of which 885 are minority students (88.7%). Children’s enrollment rate is 100%. There are six prep classes in total including 232 students.

The school merged two classes due to the lack of classrooms in September 2009. It brought a lot of pressure to the administrators, while the number of students reached 60 in one class. Now, there were still 75 students living in very poor rooms. Sixty out of them had to share beds with other students.

Since the layout adjustment policy was implemented, the head teacher of one class had to do extra work and take care of the students’ daily life, but also of safety and accommodation due to the increasing number of students and the lack of teachers.

For many students coming to school at a very young age, the teachers had to do parenting work for them. The students often got sick.

Through our observations in the community, we found that the distance between each village was long. Lots of families did not have enough young and healthy workers, so women had to work in the farms. The parents “had to take their children to schools,” based on the requirements of compulsory education. But they also needed to do labor work in the farms. In fact, the students were too young to go to school by themselves.

This contradiction led to parents’ neglecting their children’s studies. Only the parents who had received a certain level of education would go to see their children and encourage them to learn well.

After the layout adjustment, the school hired two dorm teachers and temporary staff for canteen, who were mainly paid by the school budget. The dorm teachers had not received any training, so they improvised and learnt from the experiences of former dorm teachers. They were required to “stay in the dorm building for 24 h.” The annual salary for the dorm teachers was 80,000 RMB in total. The salary was paid by the Education Bureau.

85% of the students of Xishan Primary School lived in dorms since their homes were far away from the school. Some parents went out of their hometown to work so no one looked after the children. Most of them had to live at school.

The layout adjustment could not be implemented if there was no boarding policy.

7.3.3 Two Exemptions and One Subsidy

The financial administrator of the Luxi Education Bureau told us that “We are all ‘exempted’ for Luxi is in a border area.”

According to the financial administrator, “the subsidy comprises 80% of national fund and 20% of local fund. The subsidy for low-income people covered all the boarding students and for non-residential students it was called extended subsidy. 50 yuan for each student per month available for ten months per year.”

According to the rule, the subsidy “has to be allocated to the students or the parents.” But the principal of the Central Primary School told us that “normally the head teacher disseminates the subsidy to the students and recollect them right after that” because “the primary school students don’t have a sense of financial management and they may spend all of it within one week.”

Mr. Sun, the general principal of Xishan Primary School, believed that “the students would leave school if they got the money. There’s no drop-out student due to the financial subsidy. The national government has done a lot with the Two Exemptions and One Subsidy. Every meal costs eighty cents and if the student brings rice from home, then it costs nothing. Fifty yuan for each student per month is for the vegetables and meat. Nine meals per week cost 7.2 yuan. Students would have some pocket money if the family could afford it. We advocate the students spend 10 yuan per week and don’t compare themselves with each other. But if the students already spend all the money in their hands and still want to have snack food, some of them may steal, which increases the difficulties for the school to manage.”

The financial allocation was not always on time so that the students’ living costs had to come from the school budget. The textbooks for school-based curriculum were not free of charge. The food was not completely free. Students needed to bring rice to school or pay for it. The school advocated the reuse of textbooks but the necessary disinfection equipments were not available. Besides, some pages were missing in some textbooks so it was not convenient.

7.3.4 Teacher Training

According to the interview with the Education Bureau, there were low requirements for teachers’ educational background during the recruitment. The lack of teachers was still an issue, especially in Xishan Primary School. The imbalance and lack of staff directly caused heavy burdens to teachers.

The Luxi Education Bureau arranged teacher training during the holidays, including school tours or lectures. But only part of the teachers was able to take part.

Teachers' payment comprised of a basic salary and merit pay. The merit pay was deducted from the total monthly payment and would be allocated according to the pay rules by the school. It was meant to encourage the teachers to work with enthusiasm and to promote teaching and learning.

Ms. Zhang Li, a teacher at Xishan Primary School, was assigned directly to the school without any test, which was a privilege policy three years earlier. But the test is now a prerequisite for joining the school. The enrollment of the teachers became more professional progressively. The test required not only knowledge of educational theory, but also other relevant knowledge.

The year of 2010 is the "Dehong Education Quality Enhancement Year." The Luxi Education Bureau organized a "Cross-district teaching and researching activity" in forms of attending, discussing, assessing, and analyzing the open classes to implement "reducing the burden and enhance the quality" and to promote the balanced development of both rural and urban areas. This was meant to activate the education and teaching reforms. This was also meant to strengthen exchanges between schools and teachers, provide a stage for talented teachers who could show good examples and finally enhance the teachers' ability and education quality.

Forming a sufficient and qualified team was the basic requirement for promoting quality and quality-oriented education. In order to avoid the imbalance of the teachers' body in rural areas, only the teachers with a working period longer than 3 years could apply for a job in urban areas. The selection test was flexible (written tests and interviews). The teachers could go to the urban areas only when they met the requirements.

The allocation of teachers' merit pay varies in different schools. Mr. Dong revealed that the salary depended on the students' scores. Secondly, the time a teacher spent in classrooms also mattered. There was an extra subsidy for the head teacher of one class, 1.5 yuan for each student/month. The more the students the more the subsidy.

7.3.5 Bilingual Education

Yunnan is a province where various ethnic minorities live together. According to 2005 statistics, only 5.7% of the students received bilingual education in the whole province. Xishan is a township of the Jingpo ethnic group and it started conducting bilingual education since the Liberation (1953). The history of local bilingual education is eventful.

According to our interviews with the Luxi Education Bureau, the Teaching and Research Center and the leaders and teachers of Xishan Primary School, we found that there are three offices that mainly deal with bilingual education issues, the Dehong Prefecture Minority Education Department, the Luxi Education Bureau, and the Luxi Teaching and Research Center. The bilingual education policy was

passed down from the Provincial Education Department, the Prefectural Education Department, the City Education Bureau, the Central Primary School and subordinated primary schools in forms of documents and conferences memos. The governments and schools from different areas and of different ethnic groups have the right to adopt flexible measures according to the actual situation.

The prefecture education department released a [Prefecture] File No. 186 to encourage bilingual education and require the prep-school to Grade 3 to have compulsory bilingual education. The higher grades can adopt different ways depending on the actual situation. We did not identify any provincial-, municipal-, nor county-level policy texts regarding this.

Mr. Yin Xueliang, the bilingual education representative of the Teaching and Research Center introduced three types of bilingual education in Luxi City: culture-transmitting type, bilingual type, and bilingual–biscript type. The Culture-transmitting type focuses on transmitting ethnic languages and this type of bilingual education starts from the prep class. The teaching and research group suggested having a one-year course for students in higher grades to learn the script of ethnic languages but the suggestion was not adopted. The bilingual type aims at assisting teaching by learning ethnic languages. For this type, at the lower grades, the culture-transmitting type is still used. The bilingual type was mainly adopted in rural and ethnic areas. The bilingual–biscript type is meant to teach ethnic scripts on the basis of the bilingual type. Only one class of Fengping Primary School was using the biscript type. The other courses were mainly taught in Chinese.

Through communication with a couple of teachers from this center, we found that the local administrators share one idea: bilingual education helps to learn Chinese and other courses. Ms. Yang, the director of the center emphasized again and again that “all our efforts aim at enhancing education quality.” Mr. Yin supplemented that “take Dai ethnicity as an example, the transmutation of culture, language and script mainly existed in the community and family but not in schools. We couldn’t afford to lose ethnic languages, but if we don’t focus on bilingual education, the knowledgeable ethnic elites would diminish.”

Since Xishan Primary School is located in the area of the Jingpo people, the students of this school are nearly 100% from this ethnic group. We also found a common concept about the understanding of bilingual education among the administrators and teachers of Xishan Primary School, which emphasized that bilingual education was very important for learning Chinese.

Bilingual education was mainly arranged in preschool classes and lower grades. There was only one preschool class in this school and all the courses were taught by Ms. Mu who had worked here for more than 30 years. The main content of the lessons was learning Chinese and the Jingpo alphabet. If the lower grade students were still not good enough in the Chinese language, the teachers who knew the Jingpo language would use it as support, but for the teachers who did not know the Jingpo language, they would only use other ways to teach.

Ms. Zhang Li, a Han Chinese who did not know the Jingpo language, taught Chinese lessons for the lower grades. She gave us an example “there would be some difficulties in language and that was a problem that the preschool class didn’t solve.

They could only understand simple things. It was magical to explain the words to them... They couldn't distinguish /h/ and /f/... They did not understand the word 'extremely'. I would pick a flower and compare it in and out of the classroom to show the contrast, helping them to understand the word 'extremely'. It is much easier for them to understand in a concrete way."

There were no specialized bilingual courses in nine-year compulsory education but the "folk course" would provide 3–5 h per semester for ethnic character learning. The prefecture government used to provide free bilingual education textbooks for Xishan Primary School. The allocation of the textbooks was stopped in 2008. Mr. Xu, the director of teaching, picked up a book from his desk and showed us. He said, "This was the old textbook we used to use. Since the prefecture government has stopped giving free bilingual textbooks, there were only dozens of them left. We have to use them year after year and the teachers would arrange lessons [of Jingpo language and script] on ethnic culture."

Mr. Xu is a half Han and half Jingpo. He told us that "My Jingpo speaking was not so good, not to mention reading and writing. I started speaking the Jingpo language in class from junior high and just started to learn the characters last year at a bilingual training. I also used this textbook to learn the Jingpo script and, lucky for me, it's not hard because this language uses the alphabetic writing system. You can read it after learning these scripts as long as you can speak the language."

Most of the teachers in Xishan Primary School were similar to Mr. Xu. They knew little or no Jingpo language, especially the young teachers from urban areas. It was almost impossible for them to teach in both languages. Ms. Mu from the preschool class would retire in less than a year. She had no idea who would teach these children after her retirement, and whether there were qualified bilingual teachers. Some teachers also said that the bilingual teachers were supposed to be Jingpo people, but very few of them could go to college.

The meaning of bilingual education for Xishan Primary School was perceived as support for students to learn Chinese and other courses. Mr. Mu, who had been a teacher in the school since the 1980s, told us: "go back to the time when we used to have the interpretation manual, the students learned so fast! I taught them with the manual and thought: our Jingpo children are not dull, they could master Chinese! Once they have solved the language problem they could understand the teachers of other courses. They could be confident and had an interest in learning. But now this (bilingual education) has been stopped, lots of students can't follow the teachers and the courses after entering higher grades."

There is a huge difference between the bilingual education in northern and southern parts of China. In the South, various minorities live together and the total population of each minority is not big. Bilingual education was thus not to transmit the ethnic language but to improve their Chinese (He, 2009).

We found that, in fact, the students spoke fluent Jingpo. They could communicate with the teachers in mandarin, but when they were playing around or having meals, they would naturally talk in the Jingpo language and use a little Chinese occasionally. Almost all the students here know how to speak Jingpo; lots of Han students could

“understand some and speak a little.” The teachers and parents explained that “the minorities are ‘Hanized’ while the Han are ‘Jingponized.’”

7.3.6 *Ethnic Culture in Schools*

There were two class hours called “folk course” at Xishan Primary School each week. It mainly consisted of ethnic culture, regional introduction and Anti-Drug/HIV/AIDS education.

Physical exercises between classes were adopted by Ms. Tang, the Jingpo teacher of Xishan Primary School and they replaced national exercises from the first half year. There were ten sections, which combined Jingpo dance and provided physical training for the students.

The school usually took a three-or-four-day break when the Munaozongge Festival came. The students would go back home to spend this grand festival with their family and villagers. The school also holds a Jingpo aerobics campaign for Children’s Day. The students all wear their festival costumes to attend this event. Mr. Xu told us that Xishan is an experimental area for Jingpo aerobics and that it would spread to other Jingpo areas.

The textbooks for the folk courses were provided by the Education Bureau of Luxi City for free. They mainly introduced the natural resources and ethnic culture of Luxi City. The textbooks for visual art were published by Yunnan Art Press. They mainly focused on tourism resources of Yunnan Province but there was no introduction to Jingpo Culture.

Teachers for ethnic culture were usually the class head teachers who did more than one jobs. The head teacher would have advantages teaching ethnic culture if she or he was of Jingpo ethnicity but the teachers of other ethnic groups mainly relied on the textbooks. The teachers did not attend any professional training about ethnic culture and no community crafters were hired as ethnic culture instructors.

Mr. Mu was a special teacher at the school. He was a Jingpo and had been living here since he was born. He combined the traditional and contemporary factors perfectly. On the one hand, he took loans to buy a house and a car in such a low per-capita area. On the other hand, he kept transmitting and spreading Jingpo Culture. He taught lessons about Jingpo music, dancing and folk tales, and played a vital role in spreading ethnic culture in the school.

The ethnic culture into school policy intended to transmit ethnic culture and to enrich students’ folk knowledge and their ethnic identity. Since the ethnic culture courses were not tested in the secondary school entrance exam, they were irrelevant to the teachers’ merit pay. Teachers’ motivation was thus affected, and the ethnic culture lessons were often replaced by other classes (Li, 2009).

The shortage of teachers had been a long-lasting problem for Xishan Primary School, especially teachers for music, PE and visual art, not to mention the ethnic culture teachers. The lack of teachers caused an exhausting situation for the staff.

The class head teacher often teaches ethnic culture lessons as well. Teachers' low level of specialty had a negative effect.

Ethnic culture learning needs supplementary materials such as instruments, costumes, craft materials, etc., which all require financial support. The Education Bureau did not set a special fund for this since the school's budget is limited, which limits the implementation of this work (Li, 2009).

7.3.7 New Curriculum Reform

During our investigation, we conducted in-class observations in Xishan Primary School. Ms. Kang was the Chinese teacher of Grade 1. She carried a recorder into the classroom. This class was about teaching the characters from a new text. Before teaching about the new ones, Ms. Kang led the students to review the last lesson. Ms. Kang was reading loudly with rich facial expressions. Although the observers were sitting at the last row of the classroom, they could clearly hear her voice. She pointed at the new characters with the teaching rod and led the students to read again and again. The students were concentrating, although some of them were fiddling with things, or looking out of the windows every now and then or talking to their desk mates. Ms. Kang kept asking the students to stand up for answering the questions.

Mr. Mu (Jingpo) was an ethnic culture teacher. The observer also attended his Jingpo music lesson. The students walked into the classroom slowly when the bell rang and Mr. Mu had already transcribed the lyrics on the blackboard. There were neither instruments nor contemporary appliances. Mr. Mu sang a line, the students followed. The students were shy and giggling at first, but gradually they sang well. The primary school teachers were so enthusiastic in class and the students were learning slowly, following the teachers' instructions.

Although the New Curriculum Reform had been implemented for a while, the teachers of Xishan Primary School told us that "this school is still waiting in line." The newly graduated teachers only had an idea of the basic requirements of the New Curriculum Reform, such as "asking the students to talk more and think more instead of telling them the answers directly." No teacher training focused on the New Curriculum Reform. No requirement and no enthusiasm. Thus, we can draw the conclusion that the teachers' understanding of the New Curriculum Reform was neither deep nor professional.

Although the New Curriculum Reform was not fruitful, there was still some good news. Mr. Sun, the principal of the Central School, praised Mr. Xu... "he is good... he has an understanding that teaching and learning are about the cooperation between teachers and students." During the seven years that followed the implementation of the New Curriculum Reform, the students changed. Mr. Sun told us that the students used to be frightened and anxious in the classroom but that they were much more active at the time of the study. The objective of active behavior was to benefit teaching and learning but it also brought problems to discipline. The teachers changed their teaching approaches from reading the textbooks to interactive instruction. As the

observation in the classrooms showed, students in the Grade 2 followed the Chinese teacher, reading new characters and texts carefully and loudly. The teacher would ask the students to read and spell words one by one, which created an open and active atmosphere in the classroom.

The New Curriculum Reform required multiple criteria to assess the progress of students. But the teachers told us that if any students wanted to go to schools outside Xishan, the score of the entrance exam was still the only criterion and requirement.

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