

The Reintroduction of the Mongolian Script in Mongolia

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Introduction

Over five million people worldwide use the Mongolian spoken language (Janhunhan 2012), primarily in Mongolia, Russia (Kalmyks and Buryats), and China (chiefly Inner Mongolia, Liaoning, Qinghai and Xinjiang). The Mongolian script is the traditional writing system for the Mongolian language, and is also the earliest form of written Mongolian, adopted from Ancient Uyghur alphabets during the 11th–12th centuries (Janhunhan 2012: 6). Today, the linguistic map of the Mongolian script, as the written form of its spoken language, is significantly smaller than the linguistic map of spoken Mongolian. Mongols in Mongolia and Russia use the Cyrillic alphabet to write Mongolian, whereas Mongols in China use the Mongolian script. In Inner Mongolia, even though Mongolian enjoys the status of an official language along with Chinese, its future is uncertain as a result of China's New Bilingual Education Policy introduced in September 2020 to reduce the Mongolian-medium instruction at ethnic Mongolian schools.

In contrast, Mongolia is now reintroducing the Mongolian script. The reintroduction began in the mid-1980s (Grivelet 1995), a few years before the Democratic Revolution (1989–1999). The fall of the Soviet Union (1991) further boosted the revival of Mongolian history and traditions, including the Mongolian script and interest in Chinggis Khan, which had previously been restricted. Post-Soviet reformers considered Cyrillic 'a visible example of Mongol subservience to the USSR' (Campi 1991: 6) and the reintroduction of the Mongolian script as 'a symbolic return to the Mongolian tradition' (Grivelet 1995: 49). Mongolia has undergone three national programmes to revitalise the Mongolian script. There have been three state-sponsored campaigns within a thirty-year time frame: The National Mongolian Script Programme I 1995–2005 (Programme I); the National Mongolian Script Programme II 2008–2015 (Programme II); and the presently ongoing National Mongolian Script Programme III 2020–2024 (Programme III). Programmes I & II led to the initiation of the instruction of the Mongolian script at schools and its partial usage in government administration (Cabinet.gov.mn 2020). However, Programmes I & II were largely unsuccessful 'since a change of script would have been too costly financially as well as socially, to a large swathe of the population' (Billé 2010: 231), and since they were unable, 'to change the solid use of Cyrillic script as it has now been used for more than a half-century' (Grivelet 1995: 102). The two programmes have not made significant inroads to the nationwide literacy of the Mongolian script in Mon-

golia and the script's use in education, public services and government administration remains limited to the present day.

Programme III has an ambition to 'incorporate the Mongolian language and script into national values and foster its proficiency and use by every citizen' (Cabinet.gov.mn 2020: 3). Minister L. Tsevedsuren announced that 'the "National Mongolian Script Programme-III" has ensured inter-sectoral coordination at the national level, integrated with the policy of education, culture, science and information technology, and used innovations and technological advances to create an environment for the universal use of the Mongolian script' (Meds.gov.mn 2020 para:6).¹ In December 2020, the State Great Hural of Mongolia released nine articles with the objective of 'incorporating the Mongolian language and script [i.e. the Mongolian script] into our national values and of fostering its proficiency and use by every citizen' (Cabinet.gov.mn, 2020: 3). These articles explain the criteria of how to conduct the nationwide promotion of the Mongolian script: proclaiming the Mongolian script as mandatory in civil servant examinations, official documentation and name plates; emphasising the correct spelling of the Mongolian script; encouraging the learning and promotion of the script by means of publishing learning materials and training teachers; as well as requesting the need for creating Cyrillic/Mongolian transcription software by 2025 (Cabinet.gov.mn, 2020: 4).

This paper examines the current implementation of Programme III from the perspective of language policy to explore how this programme is practised on the ground, how it is supported by its users and how it is managed by the authorities. The term 'language policy' in this paper follows Spolsky's definition: 'Language policy is a study of language practices, language beliefs and management' (Spolsky 2012: 5). It is worth noting that there is no single definition of language policy, and its definition varies, depending on where language policy is codified, which is why an overall assessment is needed. This is what Spolsky aims to reflect in his definition, and this definition is widely accepted by language policy scholars (Curdt-Christiansen 2012; Cadier and Mar-Molinero 2012; Meylaerts and Nunez 2018). Each of his three aspects – practice, belief and management – is defined as 1) day-to-day practice of language policy, 2) an assigned value attached to a language, and 3) efforts in shifting speakers' language choices, respectively (2012: 5).² In the context of this paper, these three are

1 Minister L. Tsevedsuren's (Сайд Л.Цэдэвсүрэн) original pronouncement: "“Монгол бичгийн үндэсний хөтөлбөр-III” нь улсын хэмжээнд салбар дундын уялдааг хангаж, боловсрол, соёл, шинжлэх ухаан, мэдээллийн технологийн салбарын бодлоготой цогц уялдуулсан бөгөөд монгол бичгийг бүх нийтийн хэрэглээний орчин бүрдүүлэхэд инновац, технологийн дэвшлийг ашиглан төрийн болон төрийн бус байгууллагууд хамтран ажиллах шаардлагатай гэдгийг онцлоод урьдчилж санал авсны дагуу ‘Монгол бичгийн үндэсний хөтөлбөр-III-ыг хэрэгжүүлэх арга хэмжээний төлөвлөгөө’-ний төслийг боловсрууллаа. Төлөвлөгөөний төсөлд Монгол хэлний тухай хуулийн холбогдох зүйл, заалт, Монгол бичгийн үндэсний хөтөлбөр-III заасан 4 зорилт, 46 үйл ажиллагааг хэрэгжүүлэхээр 64 арга хэмжээг төлөвлөсөн гэв” (Meds.gov.mn 2020 para:6).

2 The first element refers to the actual language practice of the members of a speech community: what variety do they use for each of the communicative functions, what variants are used with

interpreted as 1) the use of the Mongolian script in everyday life across education, public services and government administration; 2) local people's attitude towards different sets of values projected from the Mongolian script and the Cyrillic script; and 3) the policy enforcement of the Mongolian script use by means of legislation.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first section is based on recent fieldwork (April 2022) findings to analyse how the Mongolian script is taught at schools and used in other language domains such as public spaces and home environments. The second section uses interview data to observe local people's views on the introduction of the Mongolian script. The final section of this paper discusses the management of the script-related policies.

The Mongolian Script Practices

The practice aspect of the Mongolian script presents the real picture of how this script is exercised on the ground. Scholars such as Grivelet (1995) and Billé (2010) have previously argued that the Mongolian script is mainly used for ritualistic purposes and this situation does not seem to have changed significantly since the introduction of Programme III, with the Cyrillic script remaining the dominant written language used in all language domains. One powerful example of this ritualistic practice is the usage of the Mongolian script in the Sukhbaatar Square in front of the Parliament Building (Fig.) where the Mongolian script alone is used without the Cyrillic translation. Today it is more common to find the Mongolian script, conveying this symbolic purpose, alongside the Cyrillic script on name plates, on shops signs, government buildings and headed letters (Figures 2 and 3).

A typical example of symbolic use of the Mongolian script is found on book covers, for illustrative purposes. The aesthetic value of the vertical script is adopted in publications that 'inside' are dominated by horizontal writings. Although the majority of Mongolian books are written in the Cyrillic script, it is common to see the same books with Mongolian script on the covers, followed by Cyrillic transliteration. The Mongolian script usually appears on the spine of books (Figure 4). There is arguably a practicality in the appearance of the Mongolian script on a narrow long rectangular space, considering the rest of the book space is given to horizontally-written Cyrillic.

various interlocutors, what rules do they agree on for speech and silence, for dealing with common topics, for expressing or concealing identity. The actually practised, 'real' language policy of a community, described in sociolinguistic terms as the 'ecology' or the 'ethnography' of speech, exceptions to which may mark the speaker as alien or rebellious. The second component, formed in large measure by the first and confirming its influence, is made up by the values assigned by members of a speech community to each variety and variant, as well as the assumed importance of these values. At times, the beliefs may be organised into ideologies (Blommaert 2006; Silverstein 1998), or elaborate combinations of the values shared by certain members of the community (Spolsky 2012: 5). The third element is what used to be called 'planning' and what I prefer to call 'management', efforts by some members of a speech community who have or believe to have authority over other members to modify their language practice, such as by forcing or encouraging the use of a different variety or even a different variant (Spolsky 2009) (Spolsky 2012: 5).

The usage of the Mongolian script increases when it comes to language learning (e.g. on the Mongolian script, for calligraphy practice) and dictionaries. Those books written entirely in the Mongolian script, such as literary and classical texts requiring a high level of literacy, are only sold in a small number of shops in Mongolia (e.g. Pigeon Bookstore Тагтаа номын дэлгүүр), usually founded by Inner Mongolian migrants.



Fig. 1: Sukhbaatar's sculpture at Sukhbaatar Square in front of the government building (Berkowitz 2011)



Fig. 2: A bi-script banner of the State Department Store (Teneg 2022)

Education is the domain where the Mongolian script is most used, primarily for teaching purposes. The instruction of the Mongolian script at primary and secondary schools received particular attention during my fieldwork in 2022. I visited two public schools and stayed at both for three weeks auditing a total of eleven lessons between Grade 6 to Grade 12. On that occasion, I identified three main concerns, on the basis of how educators have responded to Programme III to pave the way for the eventual universal adoption of the script.



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ГАДААД ДАХЬ МОНГОЛ ХЭЛНИЙ БАГШ НАРТ ЗОРИУЛСАН МЭРГЭЖИЛ, АРГА ЗҮЙН ЦУВРАЛ СУРГАЛТ

2023.01.14, Бямба гарар. 20:00-22:00 (GMT+8. УБ цагаар)



Сэдэв № 18:
**“ХЭЛ СУРАХ ЯВЦЫН ХЭЛ ЗҮЙ, ЗӨВ БИЧИХ ДҮРМИЙН АЛДААГ
 ЗАСАХ НЬ; ХЭЛНИЙ ХИЧЭЭЛИЙН ГЭРИЙН ДААЛГАВАР”**

Сургагч багш: Доктор Мягмарын САРУУЛ-ЭРДЭНЭ

*(ХБҮЗ-ийн Гадаад дахь салбар зөвлөл хариуцсан мэргэжилтэн,
 АНУ-ын Конгрессын номын сангийн монгол номын мэргэжилтэн)*

Зохион байгуулагч: Монгол Улсын Гадаад харилцааны яам
 Хэлний бодлогын үндэсний зөвлөл

Meeting ID: 836 9033 4745
 Passcode: 2022
 Чиглүүлэгч: Доктор А.Мөнхцэцэг

Fig. 3: An example of the Mongolian script written emblem used together with Cyrillic on the top of an announcement (Language Council of Mongolia 2023)



Fig. 4: A selection of books from a book shop in Ulaanbaatar (Teneg 2022)



Fig. 5: A grade 12 student using translation software to translate the Cyrillic script into the Mongolian script (Teneg 2022)

The first concern is that the instruction in the Mongolian script may be insufficient to achieve a nationwide use of the script. The time allotted to the Mongolian Script Lessons is two hours per week, sixty-six hours per year, according to the regulation set by the Ministry of Education of Mongolia. Students learn the Mongolian script from the age of ten or eleven, Grade 6, which is the final year of primary school. The Mongolian Script Lessons are taught until Grade 12, which is the final year of high school. Staff members at this school raised concern over that two hours of instruction in the Mongolian script are insufficient for the goal of making use of the Mongolian script universal for all citizens, a concern echoed in my observations of students' performance. I examined over twenty Grade 6 and 7 students to determine whether they could write their names in the Mongolian script. None of them was able to do so. When asked to write down a dictated sentence without recourse to a dictionary, top final-year students who claimed to have a good grasp of the Mongolian script were unable to do so at a normal speed without spelling mistakes (Figure 5). The Mongolian language teachers at this school have repeatedly requested that the school authorities increase the class hours, but it has been difficult to make changes, as the Mongolian Script Lessons are competing for teaching time with English (three hours per week) and other compulsory subjects.

The second problem concerns the late stage of introducing the Mongolian script at schools. Students are learning the Mongolian script from Grade 6, five years after developing literacy in Cyrillic. Given the fact that the two writing systems differ in their morphology,³ it is difficult for students to accept another writing system of the same spoken language after they have developed a solid knowledge of the Cyrillic script. The head of the Mongolian teachers' group at the same school complained that Mongolian script instruction should start earlier, at least from Grade 3, since younger children adapt more quickly. Teachers also complained that the school had not received any form of government support for their Mongolian script instruction since December 2020, denting their confidence in Programme III.

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3 On the difference between the 'phonemic' Cyrillic and the 'morphophonemic' Mongolian, see Grivelet 2001: 82.

Should the Mongolian script be taught from a lower grade, the supply of sufficient Mongolian language teachers could become an issue. According to a working plan of the Ministry of Education (the Education Sector Mid-Term Development Plan 2021–2030), there were 3808 Mongolian script teachers in the elementary and secondary education systems in 2020, at both state-managed and private schools (Ministry of Education 2021: 37). The number of teachers is expected to increase rapidly, from 5257 in 2025, although our fieldwork has shown that at the examined schools there has been no new recruitment of Mongolian language teachers between 2019 and 2022. On the contrary, schools often experience staff shortages, with eleven teachers at one school teaching Mongolian script to over two thousand students in forty-six classes. For teachers on maternity leave, there is often no new recruitment.

The final concern is that the assessment criteria of the Mongolian script in primary and secondary education occupy a small proportion of student assessment, which marginalises its teaching. There is no independent examination system for the Mongolian script, its assessment being part of the general Mongolian language examination, counting for merely thirty percent.⁴ The remaining seventy percent are allocated to Mongolian language and literature. To provide an example of what is being assessed in a final-year examination at Grade 12, students are given a spelling test, as well as a simple grammar test (noun cases), its aim being to show proficiency in recognising syllables and words in Mongolian script. A high level of writing skills in common narrative or in technical texts (e.g. formal letters, journals, diaries) is not required. Our fieldwork findings show that many final-year students cannot write a complete text in the Mongolian script without relying on a dictionary or on machine translation software. This forms an extra burden on higher education, in that universities need to continue with the provision of Mongolian script teaching, especially for future civil servants who are required to write official documents and diplomatic materials in the Mongolian script from 2025 onwards.

In summary, present-day Mongolian script practice is used for two main two purposes: ritualistic and educational. The ritualistic use of the Mongolian script has existed long before the implementation of Programme III. It was not obvious from the fieldwork data that Programme III has strengthened this aspect of usage. Although the educational use the Mongolian script use was obvious in comparison to its ritualistic use, it must be stressed that the Mongolian script is not used as the principal language of literacy in the education system. This role is still reserved for the Cyrillic script as the prime medium of instruction for learning all subjects. This is understandable given the nationally low literacy rate in the Mongolian script, reducing its usefulness. Our fieldwork data records comments indicating that learning the Mongolian script can

4 See Article 3.2.9. of Programme III: 3.2.9. ерөнхий боловсролын сургууль төгсөгчид монгол хэл, бичгийн шалгалтыг заавал өгөх, шалгалтын тестийн монгол бичгийн агуулгыг 30-аас доошгүй хувьд хүргэх, шалгалтын босго оноог 400-аас эхлүүлж цаашид тодорхой хугацаанд үе шаттай нэмэгдүүлэх; 3.2.11. их, дээд сургуульд суралцагчдаас монгол бичгийн чадварын шалгалт заавал авч, дүнг бакалаврын дипломд баталгаажуулах эрх зүйн зохицуулалтыг бий болгох;’ (Montsame 2020).

feel as alien as learning a foreign language like English. Furthermore, the Mongolian script is arguably less useful than a foreign language such as English, as the latter as a school subject is given greater importance than the Mongolian script, judging by the number of class hours and the independent examination system. What can be surmised from the current arrangement at schools is that Mongolian script courses are regarded as being of lesser importance, equivalent to arts lessons (e.g. calligraphy) or leisure-time courses on aspects of traditional culture, with less pressure by examination. It is questionable if this manner of instruction is in the long run sufficient in pursuit of fostering the universal use of the Mongolian script. As a direct consequence of the current vague approach, the successful reintroduction of the Mongolian script via the implementation of Programme III has questionable prospects of success.

Mongolian Script Beliefs

Since the reintroduction of the Mongolian script is based on inherent beliefs premised on national identity, its proponents value the script as an indispensable vehicle of Mongolian tradition, culture and religion. These beliefs arguably become the ideological backbone of the Programme. Alongside the positive connotations of the Mongolian script, this fieldwork has also identified a negative undercurrent concerning the Mongolian script that in turn creates resistance to its practice. Such factors can be reduced to two types of belief systems evidenced by historical and linguistic narratives. The historical narrative refers to how the value of the traditional script was devalued when Cyrillic was introduced eighty years ago, with a depreciating impact on the usefulness of the Mongolian script. The linguistic narrative focuses on its differences compared to Cyrillic and how these differences, real and imagined, are perceived by the proponents of Cyrillic.

Historical Narratives

The historical narrative starts with the introduction of the Cyrillic script in 1941, when it was made mandatory by Mongolia's Government and quickly gained dominance in Mongolia (Grivelet 1995). Presented as the 'New Script' or the 'New Mongolian Script', both fashionable and forward-looking, it fully reflected the political environment of Mongolia after it declared its independence from China and as a token of success of the democratic revolution. The Mongolian script was designated as the 'Old'/'Classical'/'Traditional Script', with the implication of being backward-looking and of evoking memories of the Mongolia's feudal past under Qing control. The USSR's involvement in Mongolia's domestic affairs brought further marginalisation of the Mongolian script, which was banned during the Communist period, its promoters being regarded as enemies of the USSR (Dulam 2021). The Mongolian script was ascribed a series of disparaging connotations: as an antiquated script for a feudal society, with vertical lines incompatible with the 'modern' horizontal writing systems. Although the dissolution of the USSR did inspire nationalistic enthusiasm for reviving the Mongolian script, most Mongols nowadays prefer the Cyrillic script. This narrative feeds the continuing existence of the historical derogatory representations in the

modern era, which has become a resistance factor against the reintroduction of the Mongolian script.

Our interview partners reflected the perception of the Mongolian script being ‘outdated’, in particular now in the digital era. The fact that the Mongolian script is currently not supported by search engines and web browsers, further solidifies the image of the Mongolian script as being ‘old-fashioned’. Most participants believed that the Mongolian script could not be used to represent advanced science and knowledge, preventing Mongolia from actively participating in the global community.

A few participants extended this meaning of ‘old’ by politicising the Mongolian script with reference to Inner Mongolia, where the script has been in use until the present day. If Inner Mongolians have been using the Mongolian script for over eight hundred years, a news agency worker mused, then it forms part of Inner Mongolia’s identity as Chinese citizens. Mongolians did not want to appear like Inner Mongolians, who lacked their own nation-state, thus rendering Mongolia into an ‘Outer Mongolia Autonomous Region of China’. Others, such as a retired official, saw a political narrative in the Mongolian script ‘as symbolising the revival of feudalism’. It follows from this argumentation that since the Mongols had been suppressed by the Ming and Qing empires, the Cyrillic script came to symbolize Mongol independence. Although these views are not representative of all people in Mongolia, it is not uncommon for such extreme views to be voiced. The historical belief patterns associated with the reintroduction of the Mongolian script remain controversial, due to emotional or practical reasons.

Linguistic Narratives

Linguistic narratives are associated with how the Mongolian script compares to the Cyrillic script. Although both writing systems are alphabetical, for locals, the Cyrillic script has a preferential position for the following two reasons. The first reason stems from the morphological differences of the two writing systems that make most Cyrillic script users think that the horizontal writing system is easier to learn and use than the vertical writing system. The second reason is based on phonetic features within both writing systems, based on the conviction that the Cyrillic writing system better reflects the predominant Mongolian dialect and is therefore easier to learn and use in comparison to the Mongolian script.

Firstly, the Mongolian script vertically connects the graphemes for each letter of the Mongolian script that has variations of the independent, initial, middle, and final forms, which require strict rules for vertical connection. For example, the vowel ‘a’ is written in five ways: ᠠ , ᠡ , ᠢ or ᠣ which are the initial, middle, final, and the independent form of the vowel ‘a’ respectively. In contrast, a horizontal writing system such as the Cyrillic script only distinguishes large and small cases, for example ‘A’ and ‘a’. The Mongolian script also has variants that are graphically the same but phonetically different. Learners must thus remember the rules and exceptions for their accurate use, as well as memorising all variants.

Secondly, phonetically speaking, the Cyrillic writing system is created on the basis of the Khalkha dialect, the dominant spoken Mongolian language of Mongolia. For example, the word ‘father’ is pronounced as the single syllable word [a:v] and also written in a single syllable form *aaε* [a:v]. The same word in the Mongolian script is written in two syllables *ᠠᠨᠠ* [a:] [bo] while in spoken Mongolian it is pronounced in one syllable [a:v]. The Mongolian script in this way creates an impression that the writing system does not follow its spoken pattern while the Cyrillic script spells a word as it is pronounced. The particular creation of the Cyrillic script for Khalkha speakers, the dominant spoken form of Mongolian in Mongolia, makes it more convenient for locals to learn the Cyrillic script. The morphological and phonetic features of the Mongolian script make the participants believe that the Mongolian script is not only difficult to learn but also impractical to learn. As witnessed by one participant, ‘it is also torture for kids to learn the useless language’.

Overall, it is hard to conclude from the fieldwork data that most people in Mongolia support Programme III. The belief matters of the Mongolian script shows a degree of disagreement towards whether the Mongolian script should be a national script of Mongolia. Both historical and linguistic narratives contain subjective views, such as the script used for the past feudalistic society as well as being made for today’s Inner Mongolians, which may prove difficult or even impossible to alter in a brief time. Objective views, such as the Cyrillic script being tailored to Khalkha speakers, and that the Mongolian script has not been fully digitised to serve everyday use, become valid justifications used by those who are not supportive of Programme III.

Management

This section examines the management aspects of Programme III by looking at how this language policy is set to modify speakers’ language choices to encourage the use of the Mongolian script. The management aspect of any language policy is crucial, particularly in dealing with a bi-scriptual environment where one writing system is privileged over the other. In this section, I first review how Programme III is legislated, then analyse the detailed work plan set out to inform the procedural management of Programme III.

Legal Validity of Programme III

A clear example of language management is its legal or constitutional establishment (Spolsky 2012: 5). Reviewing the legal provision of Programme III helps to understand the overall management of this language policy. The legal provision of Programme III may be observed from two places. Firstly, the Mongolian script is the national script (*үндэсний бйчиг*) as stated in the Mongolian Language Law (Legal info.mn 2015). Secondly, the Mongolian script will become a co-official writing system of Mongolia by 2025 (Med.gov.mn 2020). Both provisions provide the legal definitions for the Mongolian script. In theory, the Mongolian script enjoys an equal or more privileged status than the Cyrillic script. However, in practice, as reflected in our fieldwork, being the national script or a prospective official script has not made

the Mongolian script more popular than the Cyrillic script. The section below explores how the gap between theory and practice may be associated with the enforceability of Programme III.

Programme III is not a strict legislative measure as its implementation is non-enforceable. How strict Programme III is legalised can be proportional to the intended depth of the programme. Unlike the way that Cyrillic was enforced in 1940s, when it was taught from the Grade 1 of primary school as the principal literacy language (Grivelet 1995), there has been no law (*хууль*) released from law-making bodies of Mongolia (e.g. through the Constitution, by Parliament or the Supreme Court),⁵ to enforce, regulate and monitor the use of the Mongolian script. Current official documents that provide instruction on the script revival have ‘action plans’ (*ажиллагааны хөтөлбөрт*), ‘work outlines’ (*төлөвлөгөө*) and ‘programmes’ (*хөтөлбөр*), their legal validity arguably falling short of ‘law’.

An absence of the Mongolian script law for Programme III, as with the previous two programmes, creates a breathing space for its implementation. Language policy with no legislative power is devoid of a legal phrase that provides clarity of practice. A legal phrase is a linguistic expression that must elaborate or represent ‘the intended meaning correctly, consistently, clearly, naturally, and efficiently’ (Nomura 1994:46). The linguistic expressions in the ‘action plan’, ‘work outline’ and ‘programme’ contain little trace of legal phraseology. For example, Article 3.1.9 aims to ‘support the publication of literary works in Mongolian’ and Article 3.4.3 posits to ‘protect Mongolian, literacy, and literary heritage, to use and study Mongolian texts’ (Montsame 2020: section 3).⁶ The verbs chosen, to ‘support’ and ‘protect’, are lacking in obligation and prohibitive force, without having clarified the consequence of ‘non-supportive’ or ‘non-protective’ behaviour. This means that whoever breaches the implementation of Programme III will not be punished, therefore the implementation can be regarded as voluntary. This also means that the management aspect of the Mongolian script revival does not require legal intervention to supervise and monitor its practice. Programme III without institutional management makes its implementation non-mandatory. This is not conducive in achieving the universal use of the script, given the current resistance against the reintroduction of the Mongolian script, as stated above.

Procedural Management of Programme III

In the eventual implementation of the universal use of the script, three transitional stages – short-term, medium and long-term – may be identified. I argue that the long-term goal is to ‘incorporate the Mongolian language and script into national values

5 There are six main bodies that are allowed to generate laws in Mongolia: the Constitution; international treaties; parliamentary laws; other types of legislative acts; and interpretations (resolutions) of the Supreme Court.

6 Article 3.1.9 Утга зохиолын бүтээлийг монгол бичгээр хэвлэхийг дэмжих; Article 3.4.3 Монгол хэл, бичгийн дурсгал, соёлын өвийг хамгаалах, монгол бичгээрх оюуны өв сан болох олон зүйл ухааны монгол бичгээрх сурвалж бичгүүдийг сургалтад хэрэглэх (Montsame 2020: section 3).

and foster its proficiency and use by every citizen' (Cabinet.gov.mn, 2020:3). The medium goal is to achieve the parallel use of both scripts by 2025 in a single language domain: government administration via Programme III. The short-term goal, finally, is the four-years guided phased plans of Programme III, in three annual revival plans (2020–2021; 2021–2022; 2023–2024). It is possible to identify the procedural management plans of Programme III from two existing documents: Article 4 Outcomes and Criteria section of Programme III (Montsame 2020) and the 2020–2024 Work Outline of the Implementation of the National Mongolian Script Programme III (Ministry of Education 2020a).

Article 4 explains the bi-annual expectancy (2020–2022–2024) of this programme under four main categories:

Article 4.1.1 to create the language environment of the Mongolian script;

Article 4.1.2 to elevate the instruction of the Mongolian script to whole new level;

Article 4.1.3 to achieve dual script usage to as a pathway to achieving the universal use of the Mongolian script;

Article 4.1.4 to improve the Mongolian script related research (Montsame 2020: section 7).

These articles and the sub-section show important instructions on how the Mongolian script is meant to be used between 2020 to 2024. For example, media coverage of the Mongolian script should increase from a third of one percent (in 2020) to twenty percent in 2022 and thirty percent by 2025 (Article 4.1.2), while the proportion of Mongolian script usage in government administration is expected to reach thirty percent in 2022, attaining one hundred percent by 2025 (Article 4.1.4). The proportion of Mongolian script expertise is expected to reach fifty percent in 2022 and seventy percent in 2025 (Article 4.2.3). The numbers of nameplates of the departments sectors were five percent in 2020, increasing to eighty percent in 2022 and one hundred percent in 2025 (Article 4.1.7).

For the 2020–2024 Work Outline of the Implementation of the National Mongolian Script Programme III, three out of ten articles of this outline provided annual revival rates of the Mongolian script:

Article 1.15 The stock of the Mongolian script digital heritage database should reach forty percent in 2021, increase to seventy percent in 2022 and reach one hundred percent in 2023.

Article 1.20 The Mongolian script traditional and digital publication should reach forty percent in 2021, increase to seventy percent in 2022, culminating in a full degree of restoration by 2023.

Article 1.21 The government officials' public profile should achieve a one hundred percent display in the Mongolian script 2021 (Ministry of Education 2020a: 1–2).

The fieldwork data cannot fully reflect the implementation of all Articles mentioned above, but it does reflect the following. Firstly, the implementation of Article 1.21 was obvious. The officials' profiles on the official state-funded broadcaster MNB – Mongolia National Public Television are displayed with the Mongolian script on the right and the Cyrillic script on the bottom. However, it was unclear whether Article 1.15 has started its implementation. When visiting the National Library of Mongolia in April 2022, I was shown to one of their technology rooms and told that Ministry of Education has invested money in 2021 to import a brand-new book scanner to enable digital storage of the Mongolian script in old books. This does respond to Article 1.15, albeit the library had not started using the scanner. This means that at least in this library, implementation of Article 1.15 had not started at the time of my fieldwork in April 2022. It remains unclear whether the digital heritage storage rate of the Mongolian script has even reached forty percent or more.

Secondly, as to Article 1.20, of the fifteen most important bookstores (Internom Bookstore, Nomin Bookshop, Azkhur Bookshop, Mir Nom Bookshop, etc.) in Ulaanbaatar, there were two Mongolian script calligraphy practice books and alphabet-learning materials, primarily designed for children. However, there was no literature or other materials available in the Mongolian script that were published in Mongolia between 2020 and 2022. Notably; there was imported Mongolian script literature from Inner Mongolia. This not only shows that the overall literacy rate for the Mongolian script remains low in Mongolia, but it also shows that the reading public literate to a high degree in the Mongolian script is extremely small. A visit to the head office of a Mongolian script newspaper in 2022 revealed that there had been no increase in sales between 2020 and 2021. Even more surprising was the discovery that only one official in the entire Central Government of Mongolia had a subscription to this Mongolian script newspaper. Although the decline of print media may explain the low order of print newspapers, a single order from all government offices reduces the state's credibility in showing their determination in assigning this script as a national script. In terms of the field of digital publications, not all government websites have the facility to display Mongolian script. Only a few websites, for example the Office of the President,⁷ have the Mongolian script displayed, quite often with misspellings. Major government websites⁸ such as the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, still do not display Mongolian script.

Overall, the current existence of a procedural plan does not seem to fully address the requirement for main language domains, particularly in education and publishing (especially digital publishing). In the educational field, there has been no provisional

7 <https://president.mn/en/>

8 Cabinet Secretariat of Government of Mongolia <https://cabinet.gov.mn/?lang=en>. Ministry of Foreign Affairs <https://mfa.gov.mn/en/>. Ministry of Education <http://en.meds.gov.mn/>.

plan to delineate what exactly is needed to strengthen the teaching of the script. The quality and depth of the script education in schools and universities lacks clarification, in connection with Programme III. This vagueness continues in the publication field. The most urgent issue with the use of the Mongolian script in the publication field is its digitisation status. The Mongolian script, a prospective national language, is not digitally searchable on the Internet and no search engine or web browsers support this script. A regulation is in place to encourage the digitalisation and computer input of the Mongolian script (Montsame 2020) which, however, is lacking in detail and does not provide a timeline to fully computerise the Mongolian script.

Conclusion

It is debatable whether the implementation of Programme III as a ‘comprehensive restoration’ (Ministry of Education 2020b, as cited in News.mn) is functioning as initially planned. This can be justified by various issues relating to the practice, the beliefs and the management of the Mongolian script. The lacking practice of the script forms an impediment to countering popular perceptions and to strengthening its management. Six years of instruction of the script in schools seems unable to yield fluent Mongolian script users which contributes little to the average national literacy of local populations. Low literacy of the Mongolian script creates low demand for its daily use in Mongolia from an everyday use in social media, text messaging to a formal use in education or government administration. These situations further solidify those negative attitudes towards the Mongolian script and create additional resistance to the practice of the script, thus also reducing the need for a clear actionable set of regulations to support the use of the Mongolian script.

On the other hand, the current management of the script with insufficient procedural plans and enforceability creates latitude in the implementation of Programme III. A direct consequence of this is to obscure the definition of what is really meant by a ‘successful revival’ of the Mongolian script in Mongolia. The evident example can be seen from different judgements towards the former two programmes: the National Mongolian Script Programme I and the National Mongolian Script Programme II. While scholars consider these two programmes largely ‘unsuccessful’ (Grivelet 1995; Billé 2010), Mongolia’s government interprets these two programmes in a more diplomatic manner. In their view, Programme I and Programme II have yielded certain results (Meds.gov.mn 2020, para. 6).⁹ Lacking in enforcement, in addition to low procedural management practice for reintroducing the Mongolian script, Mongolia does not produce or require any indicative figures that present periodic or annual revival rates or progression over a specified time. This situation blurs the definition of what

9 ‘Монгол бичгийн үндэсний хөтөлбөр-I, II’ нь тухайн цаг үедээ үр дүнгээ өгч, үндэсний бичиг соёлоо дээдлэх, сурах, хадгалах, өвлүүлэх, сурталчлах, хэрэглээнд нэвтрүүлэх хүсэл сонирхол, үндэсний сэтгэлгээ тэлсээр байна гэлээ’ Programme I and Programme II have yielded results at the time. They have encouraged people to respect, learn, preserve, inherit, promote the Mongolian script and have also elevated people’s awareness to use the Mongolian script to strengthen the national spirit (Meds.gov.mn 2020 para. 6).

is really meant by a successful reintroduction of the Mongolian script. To what degree and by what means Mongolians want to achieve its universal use in future remain contentious.

Illustrations

Figure 1: Sukhbaatar Square – Ulan Bator Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia – Улаанбаатар. Source: Berkowitz, David. (2011), Available at: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki> (accessed: 29.08.2023).

Figure 1: A Bi-scriptual Banner of the State Department Store, source: personal collection (2022).

Figure 3: An Example of the Mongolian Script Written Emblem Used Together With Cyrillic on the Top of an Announcement, source: Language Council of Mongolia Facebook Official Page (2023).

Figure 4: A Selection of Books from a Book Shop in Ulaanbaatar, source: personal collection (2022).

Figure 5: A Grade 12 Student Using Translation Software to Translate the Cyrillic Script into the Mongolian Script, source: personal collection (2022).

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