

Acculturation and Cultural Globalisation: Challenges for the Aoluguya Evenki

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Abstract: Globalisation has blurred the boundary that once obstructed people in different areas, benefiting China's development. However, it also promotes ethnic issues. For example, the failure of Ecological Migration (EM) policy implemented by the Genhe government on the Aoluguya Evenki (AE). In this paper, the author examines the acculturation challenges experienced by these people, particularly after the EM, and analyses the underlying causes of these challenges through the lens of cultural globalisation, using "The Evenki Trilogy," a series of Chinese documentaries, including *Aoluguya*, *Aoluguya* (2007), *Yuguo and His Mother* (2011), and *The Last Moose of Aoluguya* (2014). This paper finds that one of the underlying causes of the policy's failure was the inevitable exacerbation of unequal cultural diffusion driven by globalisation. To minimise the consequences caused by this trend, experts should carefully consider cultural differences and adopt a global perspective when developing ethnic policies.

Keywords: Acculturation, Acculturative Stress, Cultural Globalisation, Aoluguya Evenki

1. Introduction

Globalisation has blurred geographical and cultural boundaries, facilitating the movement of people, information, technology, and capital nationwide and worldwide. This phenomenon has generated multiple benefits. In China, rapid economic growth has improved the living standards of most citizens by integrating Western influences with its cultural heritage. However, the Aoluguya Evenki people (AE), an ethnic minority in China, have faced profound cultural disruptions brought about by external dominance, especially after the implementation of the Ecological Migration (EM). This process, often regarded as acculturation or assimilation, threatens people's cultural heritage and psychological well-being [1].

To explore these impacts and the underlying causes of the stressors during the AE's acculturation, this study examines the Evenki Trilogy (ET), a documentary series by Tao Gu including *Aoluguya*, *Aoluguya* (2007), *Yuguo and His Mother* (2011), and *The Last Moose of Aoluguya* (2014). Using an ethnographic approach, these films capture the psychological and behavioural impacts of EM on the Aoluguya Evenki people [2]. This series focuses on a tribe, with different characters featured in each episode, particularly two siblings, Liuxia, a single woman, and Weijia, Liuxia's brother. This study first introduces related concepts and contexts, and employs interpretative analysis within the framework of acculturation and cultural globalisation to examine the Evenki's acculturative stress and its root causes, offering insights for future research and practice.

2. Background

2.1. Acculturation and Acculturative Stress

Acculturation, a central concept in understanding the challenges faced by minority groups (e.g., immigrants, indigenous, and international students), refers to the psychological, behavioural, and cultural adjustments individuals or groups undergo during intercultural interactions [3-4]. It is a dynamic and negotiated process where individuals may adapt, integrate, assimilate, or experience marginalisation in response to dominant cultural forces [5]. While accumulation can lead to the enrichment of cultural identities, it can also induce acculturative stress—emotional and mental challenges arising from conflict with the dominant culture, economic pressure, and social exclusion [6]. These stressors manifest differently across individuals and contexts, leading to different outcomes.

2.2. Historical Context of the Aoluguya Evenki

The Aoluguya Evenki people are one of the three branches of Evenki groups in China, who have historically lived in the remote Greater Khingan Range in northeastern China, near the Russian border, for approximately 300 years [7, 8]. With a population of fewer than 300, they traditionally relied on reindeer herding and hunting in the forest [9, 10]. Despite their small population, the Aoluguya Evenki remained relatively insulated from mainstream Chinese society until the mid-20th century, when modernisation efforts began to reshape their way of life [11]. Industrialisation and government policies gradually integrated them into the national economy, leading to shifts in their traditional practices. These changes included a transition from subsistence hunting to more economically driven and commercialised patterns, such as reindeer farming and tourism [8,12].

Government intervention in the lives of the Aoluguya Evenki has been significant, particularly through relocation and material supports, which aimed to transition them from a nomadic to a settled lifestyle. However, before the 2000s, their fundamental lifestyle did not change. During that period, they led a dual-structured life with fixed settlements in the valley, while continuing to breed reindeer and hunt in the mountains [9,12]. The most transformative policy was the EM initiative launched in 2003, which relocated the Evenki to a new settlement in Genhen City, Inner Mongolia. This policy, driven by environmental conservation and modernisation goals, encouraged traditional reindeer breeding but replaced extensive herding with more domesticated practices, while banning hunting altogether [9,12]. These changes have forced the Evenki to adapt to a completely new socio-economic conditions.

3. Acculturation Stressors and Their Manifestation

3.1. Cultural and Emotional Tensions

The Aoluguya Evenki people traditionally adhere to Shamanism, a form of animism that emphasises a spiritual connection between human and nature [13-15]. This belief system fosters a harmonious, reciprocal relationship with the natural world, leading to profound reverence for all living beings, particularly animals [15]. For example, Weijia recalls an early lesson from his grandmother, a shaman, who reprimanded him for disturbing an ant nest, emphasising the Evenki's respect for all life. This reverence for nature is also reflected in the way Evenki individuals interact with animals. Liuxia treated her reindeer with tenderness akin to that shown to children, gently caressing and even kissing them. Similarly, her brother, Weijia, hesitated to harm a moose he affectionately called “Miekula” and noted that the Evenki refrain from hunting animals during their mating season, as this aligns with their respect for nature rhythms. These actions underscore the Evenki's deep-seated cultural belief in

a sacred relationship with nature. In contrast, the documentaries portray other peoples with a more utilitarian approach to nature. For example, poaching incidents were discovered by Evenki herders. In other scene, a Han herder harshly scolded and kicked a deer after harvesting its antlers, while Hexie, the son of a tribal chief, showed patience and concern for the deer. “Don’t let it bleed,” and “Don’t kick it!” came from his mouth after seeing the Han hunter’s improper behaviours. Such a distinct philosophy of nature probably serves as a underlying logic that shapes these people’s behavioural patterns, generating negative attitudes towards “outsiders”.

Tension also arise from changes in living conditions. The impact of modernisation is evident in changes in the Evenki’s primary livelihoods, hunting and herding. Weijia lamented the loss of hunting rights and the decline of traditional reindeer herding due to EM. Though reindeer herding continues, it has become increasingly commercialised and transformed into captive herding, undermining traditional practices that were once healthier and more sustainable [8]. Weijia’s nostalgic reflections on the “golden era” when they had guns and motorbikes, contrasted with his current sense of loss, clearly illustrate the emotional toll of these changes. This explains why Liuxia expressed her discontent with their new settlement, calling it a “full-of-shit place,” although the new settlement was more comprehensive modernised. These contrasting perspectives and dramatic changes reveal the cultural dissonance the Evenki experienced as they navigated imposed changes. The undermining and loss of these traditional values and practices have disrupted their cultural foundation, which have likely become important factors in their maladaptation, sense of loss, and negative emotions.

3.2. Lack of Effective Support

Liuxia and Weijia’s “puzzling” discontent with their new, well-equipped, and modern living environment indicates a more direct stressor that has been discussed in previous studies. That is, the AE have experienced systematic oversight by local government in terms of their culture needs [16, 17, 19, 20]. Although the local government provided a “resource-sufficient” environment, it failed to recognise that Evenki’s real needs were rooted in preserving cultural practices and community bonds. Instead, the development of EM and relevant measures prioritised mainstream ideologies, emphasising living standards over culturally sensitive support systems for Evenki in adapting to the radically different environment [7]. This absence of culturally sensitive support within the context of high efficiency policy implementation, therefore, unavoidably intensified negativity within the Evenki community [18].

3.3. Generation Gap

Intergenerational conflicts are implicitly reflected in the expressions and behaviours of characters in the documentaries. Weijia’s uncle criticised the younger generation for their declining proficiency in the Evenki language, remarking, “you guys are becoming Han people!” Similarly, Weijia blamed his nephew, Yuguo, for not being able to live by himself in the forest, as he always studied in a city and lacked Evenki subsistence practices. The differing interests between generations also highlight this gap. While the older generation such as Weijia and Hexie, enjoyed singing or listening to their traditional songs, while the video dose not show the engagement of young generation in traditional music activities. And Yuguo and his brothers soulfully sang pop music at a karaoke lounge. While the manifestation of these differences is minimal and subtle, it reflects the potential gap of cultural values between two generations. That is, compared to older Evenki, domestically or globally popular culture has more impacts on shaping younger generation’s values, which likely served as another stressor for AE during acculturation [19].

3.4. Alcohol Abuse

The documentaries also vividly capture excessive alcohol consumption among the AE as a significant manifestation of their acculturative stress. Due to the rapid change in the living environment after EM, acculturation and acculturative stress, as predictors of alcohol abuse, probably have significantly contributed to this phenomenon [20-22]. According to Weijia, this shift left those who had previously relied on herding and hunting with “nothing to do,” leading many to turn to alcohol, with right hunters drinking themselves to death. Prior to relocation, however, such issues were rare. After telling about the deaths caused by drinking, Weijia continued that these deceased people felt painful about the loss of their guns and hunting culture. This seemingly illustrates that alcohol dependence might have become one of common coping mechanisms for many AE people to alleviate or escape the stress, such as the anxiety and sadness about their cultural loss the EM policy promoted.

4. Unidirectional Cultural Influence Driven by Globalisation

Clearly, cultural conflicts, a lack of cultural support and generation gap are contributors found to the AE's psychological and behavioural stress during the acculturation to the new environment. While the lack of support is classified as one category, it reflects the disparity in culture (i.e., the understanding of ideal lifestyles between the AE and the dominant society). Therefore, the major causes of these people's acculturative stress can be concluded as the differences in cultural values and practices between the AE and the dominant society, and between generations.

The stress caused by such differences has been intensified within the increasingly globalised world, where multiple capitals can move more freely and effectively worldwide or nationwide through increasingly advanced technologies and integrated convergent economies. Such higher mobility and integration undoubtedly lead to more frequent, direct cultural contacts and diffusion worldwide and/or domestically, promoting ethnic identities and deeper cultural perceptions, as well as increasing the possibility of misunderstandings or tensions between cultural groups [23]. Hence, globalisation is an important underlying cause of the AE's cultural tensions, and its effects become more significant with its interaction with the characteristics of these people, thereby resulting in, at least at the macro level, high asymmetry of cultural contacts between them and the dominance. Specifically, in an era of developed communication mechanisms and global convergence towards market-oriented economic patterns, nations and organisations with economical, technological, political advantages facilitate the rapid dissemination of their influences [24, 25]. However, while those relatively disadvantaged peoples may benefit from this diffusion, many of them lack the effective mechanisms to appropriately navigate cultural integration [26]. This results in a largely one-way cultural influence, thereby likely contributing to cultural homogenisation. Examples include McDonaldisation and Americanisation in modern society. Only those peoples with unified and mature cultural systems, relatively advanced technologies and/or strong economies, have the capacity to achieve compromise with dominant cultural dissemination.

For the AE, such unidirectional influence is more effective. As mentioned earlier, historically reliant on hunting and herding, the AE, with their small population and economic disadvantages, were particularly vulnerable to external cultural forces. This vulnerability is evident in their history. For example, past interactions with Russians led to the adoption of Orthodox Christianity and Russian language skills, while more recent state-led governance and cultural integration efforts by the Chinese government have intensified sinicisation [7]. With modern infrastructure, advanced technologies, maturer governance systems and increasing continuous opening-up, the Han Chinese culture has increasingly permeated AE life, leaving little space for adaption or resistance [8]. The EM policy specifically reflects this overwhelming influence. Advanced technologies and mature governance system enabled the Genhe government to efficiently relocate these people, but as a

minority with multiple disadvantages, they lacked the capacity to resist or adapt. The sudden influx of dominant cultural elements, such as Mandarin and modern urban infrastructure, created inevitable cultural maladaptation, misunderstandings, and psychological distress [27].

The asymmetric cultural interaction means fewer outsiders truly understand AE culture. This lack of understanding may have contributed to the absence of supportive policies for cultural transition. EM policymakers, prioritising strategies like “Open up the West” and poverty reduction, may have failed to consider the compatibility of the new cultural pattern provided and these people’s unique cultural values and practices, thereby leading to the lack of adequate supportive measures for cultural transition in the EM policy. Moreover, in certain situations, when advantaged groups impose cultural influence on less advantaged ones, direct communication often becomes secondary. As they can directly avoid cultural interaction that could result in cost of time and resources through their absolutely advantaged capitals, thereby imposing influence without regard in order to reach their goals more efficiently. Given that EM policy overly focused on efficiency, ignoring differentiated, adaptive support for AE, this intention could have become another contributor to the policy failure and subsequent acculturative issues of the AE [7]. Put simply, to efficiently achieve targeted goals, the local government or some officials may have intentionally ignored the investigation, understanding and negotiation of cultural aspects that would cost more time and resources, thereby causing flaws in the policy.

Additionally, this cultural influence has unfolded in a progressive form, exposing successive generations to dominant influences [9]. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China, younger generations have shown increasing proficiency in Mandarin, greater acceptance of mainstream culture, and a declining familiarity with Evenki traditions. This gradual homogenisation leads to behavioural patterns and values gradually align with the mainstream across generations. This change inevitably causes differences in behavioural expectations across generations, resulting in misunderstandings and conflicts between generations, in turn becoming another possible reason for the negative emotions between different generations of the AE [19, 28].

In summary, globalisation accelerates the one-way cultural influence, which makes the dominant mainstream culture exert asymmetrical cultural pressure on the disadvantaged group, such as the Evenki, thus aggravating their acculturative stress. This influence is not only reflected in the cultural differences between AE and mainstream society, but also in the cultural gap between different generations within AE.

5. Conclusions

This paper investigates the acculturative stressors and stress experienced by the AE through examining the ET, and analysing and interpreting these factors in the lens of globalisation. Through analysis, it is evident that differences in life patterns, social norms, and values across peoples and generations are the major and common stressors that have contributed to negative psychological states and behaviours among the AE. The characteristic of one-way, deep spread of mainstream influence is reinforced during globalisation through advanced technology, as well as high level of capital mobility and monopoly, placing the AE in a more disadvantaged position in terms of cultural negotiation. This unequal process, in turn, accelerates the asymmetry in cultural communication, which may have been the primary cause of the Genhen government’s misunderstanding and/or oversight of the EV’s realistic demands, thereby causing barriers and challenges for these people during their process of adapting to the culture of the new environment.

The AE have undoubtedly been experiencing cultural homogenisation driven by the unidirectional influence. For people who are at a absolute disadvantage, it is a nearly inevitable process. However, for China as a multi-ethnic country, the consequences caused by this process should not disregarded in the process of modernisation. As equal, united, independent, and harmonious ethnic relations not

only align with the national ethnic policy, but also serve as stabilising factors for the security and prosperous development of nation, society and individuals. If not effectively addressed, ethnic issues could have even more harmful effects on national security in the context of a more connected and mobile world. In the future, researchers should place greater emphasis on the cultural patterns of ethnic minorities and collaborate with local governments, developing or investigating ethnic policies based on both national and global frameworks. In doing so, policymakers can gain more comprehensive perspectives on ethnic issues and develop more effective and tailored policies, thereby better achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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