Issues on Revitalization of Endangered Languages From Eco-linguistic View: An Exemplary Analysis of Manchu Language

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Abstract
Ecological view of languages advocates linguistic diversity, endangered language protection and revitalization. Critically endangered Manchu, Altaic Tungus language, has intrigued worldwide interests. Manchu revitalization has been propagated for decades in China, which achieved some kind of success. However, the wholly effects are not optimistic. This paper aims at discussing the existing problems and strategies in Manchu revitalization from the ecological facets of Manchu vitality factors so as to reassess the revitalizing project, which consequently has constructive significances.

Key words: Manchu; Endangered language; Language revitalization; Vitality

1. INTRODUCTION

Since Haugen proposed the concept of language ecology in the 1970s, the relationship between language and ecology has attracted much attention from the academic community. This research model is called the Haugenian Dogma. In Haugenian Dogma it is believed that "language has its own ecological environment, which includes both the social environment in which language is used and the language attitudes of language users" (Huang, 2016, p.8). By borrowing the metaphorical model of language ecology, people expect the integration of language and environment to form healthy and developing language ecology as a whole. Subsequently, in the 1990s Halliday called on scholars to pay attention to language systems and the impact of language use on environmental ecology, which is referred to as Hallidayan Dogma. The two researches Dogma are the two main models adopted in the affinity of ecology and linguistics. Between the year of 2016 and 2017, Huang and He brought ecological linguistics to domestic scholars through academic conferences and established the disciplinary status of ecological linguistics in China. They pointed out that its disciplinary connotation is the same regardless of the research Dogma, which all explore the mutual influence of language and environment from an ecological perspective (He, 2018, p.10). Ecological linguistics research encompasses important topics such as language diversity, language conservation, endangered languages, and language revitalization.

The study of endangered languages in China has been ongoing for over 20 years. The study of endangered languages has received attention from some linguists and gradually become a hippest topic in the field of linguistics. Dai (2014) believes that the main feature of endangered language research in China is to record and preserve endangered language data lacking a theoretical system of endangered language research with Chinese characteristics, and he suggested analyzing endangered languages from four aspects: definition of endangered languages, language characteristics, endangered factors, and language attitudes, and constructing a theoretical system. However the viewpoints that endangered languages cannot be saved have led them to the fate of extinction and put the protection and revitalization of

endangered languages in a passive state. Although social factors have been fully considered, the characteristics of language acquisition have been ignored to some extent. In his doctoral thesis, Xu (2010) elaborated on the ecological factors of Manchu language, such as politics, economy, culture, population, etc., which contributed to the endangered situation of Manchu language. She proposed to improve the ecological environment of endangered languages from the macro level, such as language policy, language attitude and language protection. Unfortunately, specific measures to revive Manchu have not been suggested. Language is the carrier of culture, and the extinction of language signifies the disappearance of culture and the extinction of race as well. Language is the home for human survival. Without language, we are homeless wanderers, and we are nothing at all. To maintain the ecology and environment of our home, we inevitably need an ecological language (Qian, 2005).

2. ENDANGERED STATUS OF MANCHU LANGUAGE

There are approximately 7,000 languages in the world, however the population and distribution of language use are extremely uneven. The top 10 most widely used languages only account for 40% of the world's total population(Austin,2008). In other words, over half of the world's population is using the remaining thousands of languages. further pointed out that 96% of the world's people speak 4% of the world's languages, while 4% speak 96% of the world's languages (Crystal, 2000). Due to economic, political and other social factors, and the boost of global globalization, language contact has become increasingly frequent, language conflicts have become more and more intense, and language endangerment has seriously emerged. Since the mid-20th century, almost one language has disappeared every three months. In recent years, the situation of language extinction has worsened, with one language becoming extinct every two weeks, posing an unprecedented threat to humanity's intangible cultural heritage, which is truly regrettable.

According to the UNESCO the safety status of language can be divided into six levels: safe, vulnerable, definitely endangered, severely endangered, critically endangered, and extinct. In the Atlas of the World's Languages in danger, Manchu, a minority language in China, has already fallen in a critically endangered level (Moseley, 2010). Critically endangered languages refer to the youngest speakers are grandparents or even older, with few numbers of speakers when they partly use the language or seldom. Critically endangered is the highest level of danger, only one step away from extinction. According to the seventh national population census in China, the Manchu population is 10423303, next to the Zhuang ethnic group and the second largest minority group. However, no more than a hundred people are adept at using Manchu language, with only over ten native speakers of Manchu (Cao & Zhang, 2017; Zhu et al., 2018).

3. THE PAST AND PRESENT LIVES OF MANCHU LANGUAGE

The Manchu people always seem helpless when choosing between national integration and their own national emotions. The popular Manchu language (spoken and written Manchu) developed from the tribal dialect that supported Nurhachi in the 16th century and ultimately formed the Southern Manchu language. In 1599, Nurhachi mandated Erdeni and Kagai to use Mongolian letters to create Manchu script, forming the "no circle Manchu script" (Old Manchu script). Later, through the addition of 12 prefixes by Dahai, it was improved to form the "circled Manchu script" (New Manchu script), which played an important role in the fields of proclamation, official documents, education, commerce, and daily communication in the Late Jin Dynasty. This process marks the formation of a mature system of Manchu language both in spoken and written form. With the Qing Dynasty's accession to the Central Plains, Manchu existed as the official language "Mandarin". In the mid 18th century, in order to consolidate the ruling position of the Qing Dynasty and strengthen Manchu identity, the Qing court implemented "Manchuization", with two important standards being equestrian archery and Manchu, especially Manchu spoken language (Gorelova,2002). During the reign of Emperor Qianlong, Manchu language received unprecedented attention and development. Qianlong himself made great efforts in the purification and protection of Manchu language, completing the transformation of Manchu identity from military to national culture. However, as a minority language and a tool for the ruling class, Manchu seems destined to decline in the face of strong Chinese culture. In order to integrate with other ethnic groups, Manchu people need to master at least two language skills, switching from a monolingual environment to a bilingual or multilingual environment, and ultimately being assimilated and replaced by a dominant language. After the Xinhai Revolution, Manchu culture and language were rejected and vilified by anti-Manchu sentiment, gradually resulting to a decline. Rome was not frozen in a day, and the decline of Manchu language was not overnight. It went through a process of development, maturity, and decline.

There is a viewpoint that compares language to living organisms, following the principles of inner life. It is a normal social history phenomenon that language, like other species, is regulated by the natural law of survival of the fittest and undergoes a process from birth to death. However, language has a social nature: a governing group

reflecting human thinking, and it is a product of social progress. Language is the carrier of human culture and important components of it. Every language can express a specific ethnic worldview, way of thinking, social characteristics, culture, history, etc., and it is a precious intangible heritage of humanity. Language is a tool for disseminating culture and values, a core component of national identity, and a fundamental element of cultural diversity and existing cultural heritage. Protecting language diversity is equivalent to protecting cultural diversity.

Since the 1960s, the world's attention to Sanjiazi, a Manchu Village in Fuyu County, Heilongjiang Province has brought Manchu back to the public eye. The reasons for the revival of Manchu language are intertwined and complex. Firstly, the decline of natural Manchu villages was the direct trigger for the revival of Manchu language. Guo (2015) emphasized that this decline "makes people realize the importance and urgency of Manchu language protection and inheritance". Secondly, the opening of the First Historical Archives of China to ordinary scholars in the 1970s provided those who were interested in studying Qing history and Manchu culture with the opportunity to access first-hand Manchu materials. A person must be proficient in Manchu language when studying Manchu documents, which fertiled a breeding ground for Manchu language learning. Third, the development of today's global social and political environment has made ethnology an urgent and important research topic, prompting us to rethink the historical role of ethnic minorities(Elliott,2001). Finally, the ethnic emotions and identity recognition of the Manchu ethnic group have stimulated the enthusiasm for learning Manchu.

4. THE PROBLEMS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE REVIVAL OF MANCHU LANGUAGE

Although the revival of Manchu has been going on for decades, the efficacy is not significant. Guo(2015) admitted the results are not satisfactory even though there are many teaching bases, various forms, and high enthusiasm for Manchu language courses. The efficacy mentioned here refers to the poor performance of Manchu as a common mother tongue of ethnic minorities. The revival of language itself is a complex and arduous project. The revival of Manchu lacks a systematic theoretical system, a balanced interdisciplinary development path, and a complete set of scientific and healthy revival models. UNESCO uses language vitality elements to measure the strength of language vitality. Language vitality consists of nine elements (UNESCO, 2003, p.17):

   1) Intergenerational Language Transmission;
   2) Absolute Number of Speakers (real numbers);

   3) Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population;
   4) Shifts in Domains of Language Use;
   5) Response to New Domains and Media;
   6) Availability of Materials for Language Education and Literacy;
   7) Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies, including Official Status and Use
   8) Community Members' Attitudes towards Their Own Language;
   9) Type and Quality of Documentation.

These nine elements complement each other and together weave the umbrella of language vitality. The weakening, alter, or absence of any element directly affects the vitality of language. By measuring the vitality elements of Manchu language, a series of problems and weak links that exist in the process of Manchu language revival can be diagnosed, and improvement strategies have been suggested. According to these nine elements, three aspects of language vitality have been furtherly condensed: speech community, language practice, and language ideology (Figure 1).
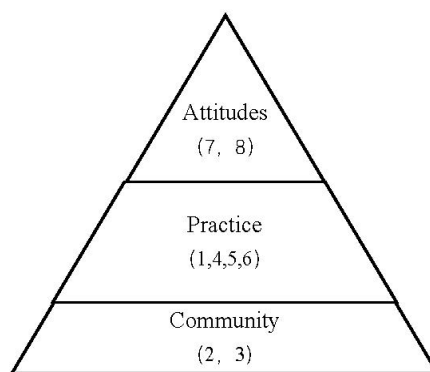

Figure 1
Three Layers of Language Vitality

4.1 Lack of a Pure Manchu Community

The Manchu community is a group of natural individuals who use Manchu as their mother tongue. According to the form of residence, it can be divided into two types: settled Manchu communities and scattered Manchu communities. Sanjiazi Manchu village belonged to a settled Manchu community. This Manchu language community is relatively specific, with low language mobility and fine language protection, belonging to a language group in a narrow sense. The scattered Manchu community is not limited by time and space, belonging to a Manchu community in a broad sense. The rapid development of economy and the process of urbanization have broken the habitat pattern of the Manchu people based on region and blood ties (Guan, 2017, p.145). Though throughout the country, the scattered Manchu community is still a collection of native Manchu speakers who can still communicate in Manchu via media, letters, telephones, books, and the internet.

The transformation of Manchu communities from the settled to the scattered has directly contributed to the gradual loss and crisis of Manchu communities. Because language contact is frequent and language conflicts are intense in multilingual environments, scattered community members are liable to abandon their native language and switch to other domain languages. The absolute number and proportion of Manchu language users are key indicators for building Manchu language communities. At present, the absolute number of Manchu speakers is extremely small, with less than a hundred people. Based on the Manchu population of 10 million, it accounts for less than one in a hundred thousand. The language community is the physical foundation of language existence any language is dependent on. Without the carrier group, language tends to disappear.

The primary task of revitalizing Manchu language is to activate the Manchu community to a concentrated one, and expand the absolute number and proportion of Manchu language users. Guan (2017) examined that the inheritance ability of Manchu language was strongest due to the best guarantee of the frequency and usage scenarios in densely populated language communities. The slow decline of Sanjiazi Manchu language was precisely the result of relatively enclosed Manchu community environment at that time. Other ethnic minorities in China, such as the Korean, Mongols, and other language communities are traditionally inhabited, consequently language protection is in good condition. More than 10 million Manchu people are potential targets of the Manchu community, and they can also attract groups interested in Manchu language to expand the capacity. The community includes Manchu academic researchers, Manchu second language learners, Manchu native speakers, and Manchu devotees. It is advisable to centralize and integrate dispersed Manchu language users to build a relatively enclosed Manchu language community. The combination of geographical and linguistic settlements creates a pure speaking environment for Manchu language, enabling it to maximize its role in daily communication. A community based on Manchu language could have hospitals, schools, shopping malls, offices, work positions, etc. on its own, meeting the needs of daily life. Apart from this, another construction of Manchu language community is to integrate Manchu Culture Research Institute, Manchu Language Research Institute, and Qing History Research Institute of various universities into a pure, multi-level, and benign Manchu language community environment. Cao (2016) proposed the idea of "building an international Manchu language experimental zone triggered by the Manchu cultural tourism industry, and conducting Manchu language popularization, application experiments and daily communications". The settlement type of Manchu language community is conducive to the transformation of Manchu from academic language to naturally spoken language.

Some may hold a skeptical attitude towards such community construction. With increasingly frequent social communication and economic development, is the construction of such enclosed language community feasible? Difficulties are ineluctable. Edwards (2011) admitted that the possibility of language revival has always existed, and there may even be a totally new group of people moving this language from libraries to real spoken context. The construction of communities can not be achievable without the support of government policies and social forces, the enthusiasm of the Manchu people, the selfless dedication of experts and scholars, and the abandonment of bustling life.

4.2 Lack of Systematic Manchu Language Practice

Over the years, good results have been achieved in Manchu language practice in high-end fields such as research institutions, universities, and archives. The translation of Manchu language archives, Manchu language teaching, Manchu language research, and Manchu culture promotion have born fruits. The large amount of historical literature and written materials of Manchu language are the advantages that other endangered languages are difficult to possess(Tong,2017). The majority of Manchu language records are based on Manchu archives, with a large quantity and high quality, which has created unique conditions for the revival of Manchu language. The digital protection of Manchu language, through recording and videoing, preserves the original phonetic and audiovisual data, and establishes a spoken language corpus or live language audiovisual database. This also provides an important perspective and method for language research (Huang & Li, 2018).

To reverse Manchu from academic language to oral language maintaining its daily communication function is the key to truly revive Manchu and make it full of vitality. Some dispute that such goals are too idealistic and difficult to achieve through generations and centuries of effort. It is easier to speak a language than to research a language? The daily use of language is a fundamental survival requirement of humanity, while language research is a higher pursuit of humanity. On April 15, 2018, relying on the National Ethnic Culture Work Base of Shenyang Normal University, North China Ethnic Minority Culture Research Center in Shenyang Normal University, Manchu Research Institute in Hebei Normal University for Nationalities, Xinbin Manchu Culture Research and Development Center, School of History and Culture in Jilin Normal University, Beijing Art Museum, Shenyang University of Technology and other units were gathered to jointly establish China Manchu Language Proficiency Test Center, which is a milestone in affirming the daily use status of Manchu language.

Higher education institutions should readjust the disciplinary positioning and training methods of Manchu

language. At present, there is an increasing number of research institutes and centers related to Manchu language and culture in China, for example, Manchu Language and Culture Research Center of Heilongjiang University, the Manchu Culture Research Institute of Jilin Normal University, and the Manchu Research Institute of Hebei Normal University for Nationalities, with a positive trend and commendable achievements. However problems parallel the achievements as follows.

Firstly, there is a deviation in the disciplinary positioning. Currently, the usual practice in most universities is to focus on teaching Manchu history and culture along with Manchu language. For example, the Northeast Regional History major at the School of History and Culture of Northeast Normal University, the doctoral program in Manchu History at the School of History and Culture of Minzu University of China, the undergraduate program in Manchu History and Culture at the School of History of Liaoning University, and the doctoral program in Manchu Language and Culture at the School of History and Culture of Jilin Normal University, etc., who offer related courses such as Manchu language, Manchu history, or Manchu culture. It is questionable to examine Manchu language from the perspective of historical linguistics rather than applied linguistics. Moreover, it is not appropriate to place Machu language under the discipline of Chinese language at the School of Humanities, as Manchu comes from a different language family, not a dialect of Chinese language. Only a few universities have positioned Manchu language as a major of Chinese minority language and literature (Manchu) at the College of Humanities. There are departments of Mongolian, Korean, and Uyghur while no Manchu language department. Manchu has been placed in an awkward position of being non-history and non-linguistics. Therefore, it is urgent to recognize the disciplinary attributes of Manchu as a language and a minority language distinct from Chinese language. Thereafter Manchu language departments should be established in higher education.

Secondly, the training objectives are not balanced. Most of the skilled high-level specialized talents as master's and doctoral programs in national institutions, cultural and educational institutions, and museum archives are cultivated, while undergraduate talents who meet teaching needs is relatively small and in short supply. Although talents are always inadequate compared to vast Manchu archives, the demand for professional research talents has eased recently. Universities should transform from cultivating research-oriented talents to teaching-oriented talents, establishing the status of Manchu language teaching, and guarantee Manchu language teachers in primary and secondary schools.

Thirdly, the training system is not sound. It is rare that there is a higher education system for Manchu language majors ranging from undergraduate, master's, to doctoral

levels in Manchu Language and Culture Research Center of Heilongjiang University. However few schools are able to persist facing enrollment difficulties. It is not an unusual case that there may be intermittent enrollment or suspension, lacking of a continuous training system. Many universities utilize summer camps to hold Manchu language training classes, intensive training classes, etc., and the limited class hours are of no use for language acquisition. Although the form of social Manchu language training courses is flexible, catering to the enthusiasm and needs of Manchu language enthusiasts, and playing an important role in promoting Manchu language, it is difficult to become an effective way for Manchu language revival (Guo, 2017). Universities should collaborate across schools, integrate social resources, standardize Manchu language teaching to form a comprehensive environment. randomness, dispersion, and non-continuity of Manchu language teaching should be shunned.

Fourthly, the Manchu language textbooks are not standardized and systemized. There is no series of Manchu language textbooks for learners at different stages. In most primary and secondary schools or training classes school-based textbooks and self-compiled lecture notes were used. At present, the only textbooks related to Manchu language are "General Theory of Manchu Language Research" written by Liu Jingxian and coauthors, published by Heilongjiang Korean Ethnic Publishing House in 1997, and "Primary Manchu Language" written by Jin Biao et al., published by Liaoning Education Publishing House in 2016. Experts and scholars need to collaborate to develop a set of universal textbooks for Manchu language teaching in various schools like standards of Korean or Japanese language. In addition to textbooks, it is also necessary to develop channels for the dissemination of Manchu language in media such as television, radio, and the internet, so as to bring this language into the public eye. Making full use of new media digital technology to digitize ethnic minority languages and characters, making them media languages of network and promoting faster and wider dissemination of minority languages and cultures will greatly promote the inheritance and development of ethnic languages (Zhu, 2018).

Appropriate language education policies should be formulated in ethnic regions. Primary and secondary schools in various Manchu autonomous counties can learn from the educational experience of Korean and Mongolian schools and offer Manchu language courses. According to the teaching standards of foreign languages, exposure of Manchu language should be increased and status should be elevated to the same level as English, Korean, and Russian. Learning one's own ethnic language is more practical and significant for students in ethnic areas rather than learning English. Although learning Manchu language through school may not make them native-like, it can ultimately lead to an increase in second language

acquisition learners. The revival of Manchu language needs to go through a process of language environment from monolingual Chinese to bilingual and then to monolingual Manchu language. At least Chinese-Manchu bilingualism is also a major historical progress in saving a national language. There's no denying the fact that there are some Manchu primary and secondary schools in Jilin, Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Hebei and other provinces offering Manchu language. However fewer class hours, insufficient teachers, and poor teaching effectiveness ultimately resulting in a mere formality.

The intergenerational inheritance of Manchu has been broken. Liu (2015)found that the young people are forced to go out to work under economic pressure, while the elderly are facing death, which leads to inheritance barriers. Although the likelihood of parents receiving Manchu language education is low, the likelihood of the younger generation learning Manchu language and inherit it to the next generation is not impossible. The younger generation has strong receptive abilities, and it is possible to cultivate their bilingual abilities. Bilingualism is not something unattainable. Many people master bilingualism in their daily life. Even many illiterate people are able to freely switch between two languages, let alone the one who receive comprehensive and systematic language education.

4.3 Lack of a Solid Concept of Manchu Language

There is no universally definition of what constitutes a minority. Smith (1991) stressed that ethnic minorities should meet the following conditions at the same time: collective proper noun, common ancestral legends, common historical memory, multiple common cultural elements, specific homeland, cohesive forces in important fields. Manchu nationality, formerly known as Manchus. Jurchen and Sushen, have been inhabiting between Changbai Mountains and Heilongjiang River, sharing a common tribal history, mythological stories, traditional customs, common language, and a sense of national identity. Simon (2012) believes that ethnic minorities must be distinguished from the main ethnic group in terms of race, religion, and language. A common language is a key factor in national identity and a watershed for maintaining national identity. The identity of ethnic minorities refers to the identification of their mother tongue, religious beliefs, and customs. Only by having a positive self-national identity, that is, a strong sense of pride and confidence in one's own language, culture, religion, and beliefs, can boost their national cohesion (Xia, 2010). Therefore, the identification of ethnic beliefs depends on the group's attitude towards their own language to certain extent. The language attitude of the language group, which is, whether to inherit or give up their native language, is a fundamental condition that affects language endangerment (Kamilijiang, 2013).

Language concepts, also known as language attitudes, have been the focus of scientists since the 1950s. The concept of language is a tacit and natural idea about the status, form, user, and use of language, which leads to inequality between language and society due to the assimilation of "established principles" (Blommaert, 1999; Dorian, 1994). It is widely believed that "deserve" can easily marginalize non-dominant language. Specific historical stages and political factors have made Manchu people's insecurity in using their mother tongue and thereafter switching to the dominant language. This is the subjective abandonment of mother tongue by language community groups. The belief that language and culture are "identical" is a common sense not only among dominant language groups, but also among ethnic minority language groups. Due to economic and political needs, they lack the freedom to choose language and further internalize the concept of language inferiority, resulting in a sense of insecurity and unwillingness to use that language, and eventually leading to a transformation of their language and culture (Jaffe, 1999; McCarty, 2011).

Language concepts influence the rise and fall of language. Revitalizing language requires people to revive their language concepts and regain their national identity. Austin and Sallabank (2014) believe that "language awareness and language concepts can provide unique insights into the causes of language decline and revival, helping us evaluates the success or failure of language revival projects". Language concepts include vernacular ideology and institutional ideology. The current rise of various learning and training classes, as well as financial support at all levels, indicates that government and research institutions attach great importance to the revival of Manchu language, affirming the value of Manchu as a minority language and the necessity of its revival, which has a positive significance in promoting Manchu language revival.

The language concepts of community members are relatively complex, and Manchu people with high educational levels and deep ethnic emotions have a positive attitude towards Manchu language. For example, a survey conducted by Xia (2010) on the ethnic identity of Manchu university students found that the absolute majority of university students have a positive attitude towards Manchu and have a high level of identification with their own national language. Native language speaker in an endangered state have a pessimistic attitude, believing that the extinction of Manchu is only a matter of time. Manchu language learners in primary and secondary schools have a more confused attitude towards Manchu language, believing that learning Manchu has nothing to do with educational prospects or work, which seems to be of no use. Jin(2018) commented "Manchu inheritance is not for usefulness, but because Manchu is the bond of Manchu national emotion, the foundation of Manchu

culture, the core of Manchu cultural identity, and the basic characteristics of Manchu as a member of the big family of the Chinese nation". In addition to teaching Manchu in primary and secondary schools, it is also important to cultivate students' Manchu language concepts and national identity, so that they can recognize the position and value of Manchu language in Manchu identity from an early age. The most effective way to protect the traditional culture of the Manchu people is to enhance their recognition of their own national culture, affirm its importance and true value from the depths of their hearts, and voluntarily adopt the correct way to protect and inherit it (Guan, 2017).

5. CONCLUSION

The metafunction of language emphasizes the language itself, which is the academic research of language, that is, literature linguistics. The metafunction of language can also refer to the sociality of language, emphasizing language community and reflecting the relationship between language and society. It is a field study of language, namely sociolinguistics. Manchu literature research has received sufficient attention and has successively cultivated a large number of professional talents. Language is the language in society, and Manchu education should not only focus on academic purposes, but also on "popularization" and returning to society. Language revitalization must be a "community driven, bottom-up" movement to ensure the enduring achievements of language maintenance (Grenoble,2006). Under the guidance and protection of laws and regulations, a considerable number of Manchu language communities can be cultivated with the widespread participation of the masses at various levels. Ideally a solid Manchu language concept and national consciousness can be established. Only by this way can language revitalization have lasting vitality.

Language protection only delays the process of language extinction, and language inheritance can provide a source of fresh blood for language revival. Language revival has always been a situational practice, in which socio-cultural, economic, political, and other factors are applicable to the specific historical configuration of one language or another, making the use of a certain language possible. By correcting and strengthening the weak links and gradual guidance and scientifical practice in the vitality of Manchu language, Manchu language revitalization project has achieved phased results combining "artificial cultivation" together with "returning to the natural setting".

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