



Old Script Comes Back (图)

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Banned for more than half a century, the traditional Mongolian script is attracting an increasing number of young people who are keen to learn about their national culture and history.

Introduced in the times of Chinggis Khaan, some eight centuries ago, it was widely used until 1942, when Stalin decided that Asian nations including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Mongolia must all use Cyrillic instead of their native script. Scholars readily came up with proper grammar rules, and nation wide educational campaigns were launched to re-educate people.

Within 40 years, traditional script was abandoned and forgotten as new generations began learning only Cyrillic. By 1990, a mere 10 percent of Mongols, mostly the elderly, could read and write in old script.

But thanks to the democratic changes of the early 90s, the old Mongolian script was not only rehabilitated but recognized as a backbone of national culture.

Written vertically, from the top downwards, the fast flow of the script is also a beautiful artistic expression.

Nowadays, about a hundred old script fans gather at the Agula Center once a year to test their skills. The center was set up in 1996 and soon become the focal point for the revival of calligraphy, an ancient art of writing.

The Center regularly holds an annual contest together with The Open Chronicles and The Khumuun Bichig weeklies, the latter being published in old Mongolian script. This contest has become increasingly popular, attracting both young and old from all walks of life.

The Agula Center's director S. Badral, 36 says: "When I was a student in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) back in the 1980s, I often used to go to the Hermitage Arts Museum where the stone stella from Chinggis Khaan's time is preserved.

"I would stand for hours in front of the stone stella, fascinated by the fine, ornament-like scripts. Even the name 'Chinggis Khaan' seemed to have been done in his own handwriting. Sometimes, when the guard was not around, I would touch the stella with my forehead to express my homage to the wisdom of my forefathers.

"Mongolian traditional script is very expressive, and the longer you look at it, the more you admire its perfection. Rejecting the old script inflicts irreparable damage to national culture. What was created by the genius of the nation shall not disappear without a trace in the river of time."

"When I was a small child, my grandfather who was a painter at the Lamyn Gegeen Monastery, one of the largest at his time, taught me the traditional script. Now I teach other young people. Perhaps, this is the essence of what is called the bond of generations. I hope this link will help to preserve the treasures of our culture to future generations."

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