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ARMENIAN SCHOOLS IN FRANCE FROM THE VIEWPOINT A JAPANESE SOCIOLOGIST

Keywords: Armenian School, communautarisme, Tebrotzassère, Hamaskaïne, Barsamian, language preservation, western Armenian, bilingual school

Armenians living in France* have created and administered several schools called “Armenian schools”.* These schools are authorized by the French National Education System, whereas no other educational establishments in France represent a particular ethnic or national community, or are dedicated to the cultivation of the specific symbols of a community such as their language and culture. The author visited some Armenian schools in France to observe these Armenian schools from a sociological perspective based on interviews conducted from 2011 to 2018.

The main purpose of this paper is to shed light on why and how Armenians built schools in France while avoiding the French notion of “*communautarisme*” of “ethnic schools.” For this purpose, three Armenian schools were examined: the Tebrotzassère School in the

* France has between 250,000 and 750,000 Franco-Armenians. Most of them are the descendants of refugees who survived the great massacre of 1915 under the Ottoman Empire. There are also refugees or immigrants from the upheaval in the Middle East after World War II, and then from the breakup of the USSR.

* In French, they are called “les écoles arméniennes”

suburb of Paris, the Hamaskaïne School in Marseille, and the Barsamian School in Nice. These schools were examined from the dual perspective of both France and the Armenian community.

“Minority” in France and French “*communautarisme*”

Before beginning the analysis of Armenian schools in France, we must confirm the French notion regarding “minority” and “community”.

France is referred that "in principle, minorities do not exist in France". But France is one of the most "immigrant-receiving countries" in Europe, and we have seen the actualization of many demands for immigrants' rights and of many immigration issues that symbolize minorities over the past three decades. We also have seen the rise of an extreme right force that advocates anti-immigration policies, which is still a major force even now. From another point of view, we also know that an act which lifts the same-sex marriage ban for gay and lesbian people has been in effect since 2013. Despite these examples of various minorities, France doesn't have an intention to recognize the existence of minorities. What does it mean that "minorities do not exist" in France?

It is derived from the ideals of the Great French Revolution of 1789. Under the ideals of “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”*, the people of France became, or were forced to be, equal under the law, regardless of religion, origin, ethnicity, or any other attribute. And the members who participated in the French sovereignty were treated as "individuals". The individual was considered as an isolated, universal, homogeneous one, similar to others, and only this mode of individual was a citizen (citoyen) recognized by France. The nation was likewise considered to be a "one and indivisible republic" that could not be

* This slogan is called “Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité” in French.

divided by any "attribute" such as a particular religion. The state consists of a social contract between an individual of equality, abstracted and atomized under the law, and the unitary and indivisible state, that is free of all attributes and affiliations. This is the "republican" philosophy that has sustained France for more than two centuries. Thus, the French people were "liberated" from the three-status system¹ under the *Ancien Régime*.*

If people were liberated from the status system and became individuals, or were forced to become individuals, what happened to the various attributes that had existed until then? Needless to say, France also has ethnic groups, religious groups, regional groups (Basque, Corsican, Alsatian, and other groups), guilds, and other "communities" that exist as self-evident concepts in other countries, or in a more neutral term, "intermediate groups" that exist in reality. However, as we have just confirmed, these intermediate groups are denied and have no power in the French public space because of the condition that France, since the Great Revolution, is based on a radical contractual relationship between the individual and the state. Therefore, "there is no majority or minority in the attributes of people, only one equal "French citizen".

Thus, France is a society in which minorities "should not" exist. It is easy to imagine that such a society would also tend to avoid the word and image of "community", which is the supporting group of

¹ The first category was the clergy, the second was the nobility, and the third was the commoners. *"People were granted different rights depending on their status and intermediate groups (such as trade unions and religious groups) to which they belonged, and the way their society was organized was unequal."* 石川真作、渋谷努、山本須美子編『周縁から照射するEU社会—移民・マイノリティとシティズンシップの人類学』世界思想社、2012年、49頁 (Ishikawa S., Shibuya T., and Yamamoto S.(eds.), *EU Society from the Marginality: Immigrants, Minorities, and the Anthropology of Citizenship*, Sekaishissha, 2012, p. 49).

* the "old regime" prior to the French Revolution.

minorities. If minorities must not exist, then the "community" that serves as a receptacle for them, doesn't exist, nor must not exist either.

In fact, as it turns out, the image of "community" is often negative in France. Communitarianism, in English terms, which seeks to construct community-centered spaces, is called "*communautarisme*" in French terms, but France still has a particularly negative image for this word, and the word "community" is not used as neutrally as in Japan. Of course, the image of "*communautarisme*" differs from person to person, even among French people, but in France, it is generally regarded as "a closed mindset that violates the equality of citizens", "a special framework that destroys the unity of France", or "bad collectivism".

For example, in books on French society published in Japan, the word "*communitarianism*" is often used in its katakana form after conveying the negative image described above, or translated into Japanese as "closed" communitarianism.² This is the opposite of the positive image of the Anglo-Saxon "communitarianism", such as "a way of thinking based on the free solidarity of citizens" and "a framework within which individuals can freely build and belong".

We must bring the discussion back to the Armenian Schools. How does the Armenian School exist in France and in this French social context? How does it avoid the prejudices of *communautarisme*

² For example, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, a French politician, one of the founders of the French Socialist Party (PS) and honorary leader of the leftist party, the Republican Civic Movement (MRC), juxtaposed *communautarisme* with nationalism "in a bad sense" when speaking on the idea of a universal world republic, and he stated as follows. "*On the other hand, we also see the reaction of communautarisme [closed communitarianism]. It is a tendency for people to define themselves not as citizens, but by their [ethno-religious] roots, and to retreat into their shells*". J.P. シュヴェヌマン、樋口陽一、三浦信孝『＜共和国＞はグローバル化を超えられるか』平凡社、2009 年、152 頁 (Chevènement Jean-Pierre, Yoichi Higuchi, and Nobutaka Miura, "*Can the Republic Transcend Globalization?*", Heibonsha, 2009, p. 152).

and how does it exist as a French school?

The author presents two axes of analysis. The first is the French socio-cultural axis. It is the reconciliation of the National Education programs and the education of the Armenian language. The second is the political-linguistic axis that underlies the Armenian community. We will see how Armenian schools, both schools on French territory and community schools, function and what role they play.

History of Armenian Schools in France after the 1980s

First, we briefly review the history of Armenian schools in France. We can divide history into two different periods: before the 1980s and after the 1980s. The author mentions the history mainly after the 1980s due to paper limitations. In addition, it is because the story after the 1980s is more closely related to the French educational system.

From the second half of the 1970s, a project for new Armenian schools was set up. It was based on two aspects: the National Education program for a "school of the Republic" and the teaching of Armenian language and culture for a "school of the community". This movement can be linked to the movement of French regional language schools. In September 1980, a school was inaugurated in Marseilles as the first school for the Armenian community: the Hamaskaïne School.

This school was constructed under the direction of the French section of the Armenian cultural association "Hamaskaïne", whose base is an Armenian political party "Dashnaksoutioun" based in Lebanon. The building was constructed by the volunteers of the community. As for the site, the school rented it from the city of Marseille, whose rent was twenty francs for 99 years. It was a symbolic rent. This school was launched with only four kindergarten children and two teachers. Many people doubted its success, worried about the participation of a particular party Dashnaksoutioun, and the

novelty of this project. But the number of students quickly increased. The children kept on coming to Hamaskaïne school. The primary school was established in 1982, the middle school in 1987, and the high school in 1991. In 1994, the Hamaskaïne high school produced its first baccalaureate students. Today, it contains over 300 students and over 40 teachers from kindergarten to high school.

In September 1988, eight years after the inauguration of Hamaskaïne, two schools were launched at the same time: the Barsamian School in Nice, and the Markarian-Papazian School in Lyon. They are also under the direction of the community; thanks to the donations of the benefactors whose names are on the front of the schools. The Tebrotzassère School, which had started as a girls' school at the beginning, was affiliated under contract to the French Ministry of Education in the same year.

In 1997, the Tarkmantchatz School was inaugurated in Issy-les-Moulineaux in the southwestern suburbs of Paris, then in 2007 the Hrant Dink School, in Arnouville in the north of Paris. In addition, in 2016 the Kevork Arabian Middle School was inaugurated in Alfortville, in the southeastern suburbs of Paris, in 2021, thanks to the same benefactor as the school in Alfortville, the Kevork Arabian School was inaugurated in Valence, in the south of Lyon.³

Currently there are 10 Armenian schools as community schools under contract with the National Education.

Administration of Armenian Schools

Second, we discuss in detail the teaching and administration of Armenian schools, looking at three schools: Barsamian, Hamaskaïne and Tebrotzassère.

³ All of these towns, with the exception of Le Raincy where Tebrotzassere is located, are populated by French Armenians.

First of all, we can confirm that all three are the "schools of the Republic", which implement the French National Education Program. In short, they are not limited to Armenians only, but are general private schools, whose admission requirements do not take into account either their origin or beliefs.

The full name of each school is "Barsamian Bilingual School", then "Hamaskaïne French-Armenian Bilingual School", and finally "Tebrotzassère French-Armenian School".⁴ All three schools consider themselves bilingual schools⁵, whose bilingual languages are French and Armenian. We can understand that although they are schools where "Armenian language" is taught, they are not reserved for "Armenian people only".

In reality, we must confirm if this is the case.

In the Barsamian School, 25 to 30 percent of the students used to be of various non-Armenian origins: ethnic French, Italians, Spanish, Greeks, etc. Nowadays this percentage has gradually decreased. Non-Armenian parents find several advantages in the school: accessibility from their homes, safety of the school and its surroundings, and small group teaching. The school explains this situation mainly by the possibility of enrolling a child without any selective criteria, and by the difficulty of accommodating only Armenian children, because the Armenian community is not so big in Nice.

In 2003, there were four non-Armenian children in the Tebrotzassère School: two Polish and two Vietnamese. They were from the neighborhood. In the Hamaskaïne School, the admission

⁴ In French, "École bilingue Barsamian", "École bilingue franco-arménienne Hamaskaïne", and "École franco-arménienne Tebrotzassère".

⁵ Although the word "bilingual" is not attached to the Tebrotzassère School, the school also self-defines itself as a school that features bilingual education, as the school's motto begins with the phrase "practice of bilingualism". Association des Dames Arméniennes Amies des Ecoles Tebrotzassère: *120^{ème} Anniversaire*, Association des Dames Arméniennes Amies des Ecoles Tebrotzassère, 1999.

requirements are not restrictive either. But no non-Armenian applied for admission. Consequently, there have been only Armenians.

Here is a very interesting case. The Hamaskaïne School conducts entrance exams in French and Armenian for students over ten years old. As a result of this examination, some Armenian students just arriving from Turkey have been refused their admission. The author confirmed the similar case in the Tebrotzassère School. In fact, some Armenians from Turkey do not understand either French or Armenian. They speak only Turkish because of the anti-Armenian policy that persists in Turkey.

Of course, the situation varies from school to school. But we can confirm this: if the three establishments are schools "to teach the Armenian language and culture within the framework of the National Education", they are never "for Armenians only".

Relationship between France and Armenian Schools

Third, we must observe the relationship between the state and Armenian schools. In France, there are two types of contracts for administering private schools, which aim to reinforce the foundations of the National Education within the private school. These are the so-called simple contract and the contract of association.

Thanks to the contracts, the schools can receive teachers, for example those of French language or mathematics, their salary, their social security and a subsidy for school management from the National Education budget. The contract of association has a stronger control than the simple contract, but the former allows for a larger subsidy than the latter. The three schools operate under a contract between two. In short, we can confirm that the state considers the three to be general private schools that meet the government standard and deserve a subsidy.

The frequent visits of politicians and administrators from the

Ministry of Education should be noted when observing the relationship between the state and Armenian schools. The visits are not for remedying problems. We can confirm that these visits show a good relationship between the two. Moreover, we see that the schools welcome them. Because they inform positively about the visits in their brochures or on the Internet.

Thus, we can say that the three schools are schools of the Republic, open to all children in France, and characterized by the teaching of Armenian language, without being limited only to the Armenian people.

Armenian Language Education in Armenian Schools

Next, we must observe how Armenian schools teach the Armenian language. What is taught in detail?

In the Tebrotzassère School, the teaching begins with Armenian language and geography, and then progresses to Armenian history, mythology and literature. The number of hours increases over the years. Singing and dancing are also included as complementary courses. The Hamaskaïne School offers even more: geography, history and culture. It extends the education to the high school level and offers private lessons of Armenian as a modern language for the baccalaureate.

In the Barsamian School, only Armenian language and Armenian culture are on the curriculum. Singing and dancing are additional courses. All classes are taught in Armenian and are mandatory.

Thus, these classes, outside of the National Education program, are all taught in Armenian. Each school gives importance to the practice of Armenian language above all, in the idea of "the practice of bilingualism". In fact, two schools, except for Barsamian, which has the largest number of students, require a French and Armenian language test for admission.

It should also be noted that only Western Armenian is taught in these schools. Eastern Armenian is spoken in the Republic of Armenia Republic today. The Western Armenian spoken by the Diaspora is not the official language of any country.⁶ All the directors of the three schools feel the threat of "the disappearance of the language". For example, "as for the Armenian we speak, it is not an effective way to go to study in Armenia, unlike other immigrations"⁷ or "acquisition is very difficult without early education. Even if it is successful, this diaspora language will easily disappear without practice in everyday life".⁸ Two studies⁹, published in the mid-1980s, also point to the decline in the use of Armenian as generations pass. These studies conclude that an urgent remedy is needed to preserve the language.

Here we can confirm that Armenian schools are not only a space where Armenian is taught, but are considered as "community schools", defenders as well as inheritors of Armenian. We can understand this fact by the relationship between each school and each community. Community members often participate in some school celebrations, even if they are not parents of the students.

In the Barsamian School, the author met adults who are not parents at some parties. As for the parties, they are always reported in

⁶ Therefore, the textbooks used here are not those of the Republic of Armenia, but rather textbooks that are either created by the Armenian language teachers at each school (Barsamian Schools) or textbooks used by the Armenian community in Lebanon (Hamaskaïne Schools). Incidentally, there are also a significant number of Armenian schools in the United States, but for the three schools mentioned in this case study, American textbooks are not used.

⁷ in January 2003, from an interview with the then director of the Tebrotzassère School.

⁸ in June 2003, from an interview with the then PR manager of the Barsamian School.

⁹ Périgaud J., Hovanesian-Denieuil, M., Krimian, A.: *Reconquête de l'Identité par la pratique de la langue arménienne*, CRDA, 1985; Léonian R.: *Les Arméniens de France sont-ils assimilés?* éd. par l'auteur, 1986.

"Parev Côte d'Azur", the community magazine. In the Tebrotzassère School, bazaars are held regularly. In the Hamaskaïne School, concerts and conferences are held. They often offer the premises for the community. Thus, we can confirm that Armenian schools exist not only for the students but also for the community.

Conclusion

We must come to the conclusion. From the point of view of the French state and society, Armenian schools are general private schools, characterized by the teaching of Armenian language alongside French. They have never been schools for the exclusive use of Armenians. We can confirm their strategy, which try to avoid *communautarisme* and to respect French educational principles, and as a "school of the Republic" open to all students in France.

From the point of view of the community, the schools are the organizations that defend and transmit the language of the diaspora, Western Armenian. They are currently the place where Western Armenian is practiced daily. At the same time, they are a "community school", which functions as a community center open to all. Thus, this dual function of "school of the Republic" and "school of the community" is one of the forms of French "integration."

Finally, the author poses some problems. First, this model is only confirmed in the Armenian community. We cannot say that it is a universal model of integration at this point. Such schools are not necessarily effective for immigrant students who are economically deficient because private schooling is not free. The Armenian community has reached a socially and economically well-to-do standard of living as a result of long-standing immigration. It has also had enough time to reflect on its identity. On the other hand, could the lack of social and economic progress be the reason for the lack of schools built by the new immigration after the 1960s?

Secondly, we must imagine that the French state would be more suspicious if this type of school became widespread. For it is possible that the private school would pose as a "bastion of *communautarisme*", or that the school director would actually develop it. As a result, the private school would become a buffer between the state and communitarianism. As a result, it would be just as possible that private schools would be pressured to develop a particular education instead, or that they would be against a particular education.

ՇԻՆՈՍՈՒԿԵ ՄԱՅՈՒԻ, պ.գ.թ.

*Միլադակի համալսարան, Լեզվի և մշակույթի
ուսումնասիրությունների կենտրոն, դոցենտ*

**ՀԱՅԿԱԿԱՆ ԴՊՐՈՑՆԵՐԸ ՖՐԱՆՍԻԱՅՈՒՄ ՃԱՊՈՆԱՅԻ
ՍՈՑԻԱԼՈԳԻ ՏԵՄԱՆԿՑՈՒՆԻՑ**

ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ

Հիմնաբառեր՝ Հայկական դպրոց, կոմունիտարիզմ, «Դպրոցասեր» վարժարան, «Համազգային» դպրոց, «Բարսամյան» դպրոց, լեզվի պահպանում, արևմտահայերեն, երկլեզու դպրոց:

Ֆրանսիայում ապրող հայերը ստեղծել և ղեկավարում են մի քանի դպրոցներ, որոնք կոչվում են «Հայկական դպրոցներ»: Այս դպրոցները լիազորված են Ֆրանսիայի ազգային կրթական համակարգի կողմից, մինչդեռ Ֆրանսիայի ոչ մի այլ կրթական հաստատություն չի ներկայացնում որոշակի էթնիկ կամ ազգային համայնք կամ նվիրված չէ համայնքի հատուկ խորհրդանիշների պահպանմանը, ինչպիսիք են՝ լեզուն և մշակույթը:

Հեղինակը 2011-2018 թթ. այցելել է Ֆրանսիայի որոշ հայկական դպրոցներ՝ դրանք սոցիոլոգիական տեսանկյունից դիտարկելու և հարցազրույցներ վերցնելու նպատակով:

Հետազոտման նպատակն է լույս սփռել այն հարցի շուրջ, թե ինչու և ինչպես են հայերը դպրոցներ կառուցել Ֆրանսիա-

յում՝ խուսափելով «էթնիկ դպրոցների» նկատմամբ ֆրանսիական կոմունիտարիզմից: Ուսումնասիրության նպատակով դիտարկվել են 3 հայկական դպրոցներ՝ Փարիզի «Դպրոցասեր» վարժարանը, Մարսելի «Համագգային» դպրոցը և Նիսի «Բարսամյան» դպրոցը: Դպրոցները դիտարկվել են թե՛ Ֆրանսիայի և թե՛ Հայկական համայնքի տեսանկյունից:

Ֆրանսիայի տեսանկյունից հայկական դպրոցները համարվում են ստանդարտ մասնավոր դպրոցներ՝ երկլեզու կրթությամբ (ֆրանսերեն և արևմտահայերեն): Դրանք «հանրապետական դպրոցներ» են, որոնք հասանելի են բոլոր երեխաների համար: Այստեղ կարելի է տեսնել հայկական դպրոցների ռազմավարությունը, որի շնորհիվ հնարավոր է դարձել խուսափել ֆրանսիական կոմունիտարիզմից:

Հայ համայնքի համար այս դպրոցները համայնքի առանցքն են, որտեղ ամեն օր դասավանդվում և կիրառվում է սփյուռքի լեզուն՝ արևմտահայերենը: Ուստի պարզ է, որ դրանք «համայնքի դպրոցներ» են, որը նաև հավաքատեղի է ոչ միայն աշակերտների և նրանց ծնողների, այլ բոլոր հայերի համար:

Այսպիսով, ամփոփելով կարելի է ասել, որ հայկական դպրոցները և՛ «հանրապետական», և՛ «համայնքի դպրոցներ» են, և որպես այդպիսին կարող են լինել ինտեգրման իդեալական մոդել Ֆրանսիայի համար: