
Research Grants Council of Hong Kong (General Research Fund 840012)

**Models of Trilingual Education in
Ethnic Minority Regions of China
Project**

Briefing Paper No.1

**Bai Language Program in
Jianchuan, Dali**

Zhang Xia and Wang Ge

April 2013

Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project

This research project offers a holistic and descriptive account of trilingualism and trilingual education in China. Policy changes have led to the introduction of English language teaching and learning in primary schools. These reforms pose particular challenges to communities in ethnic minority areas, where Putonghua often competes with the minority language, and English is often taught in under-resourced schools with teachers with the requisite training in short supply.

The project involves extensive and intensive research comprising investigations into school- and community-level practices, policies and perceptions relating to trilingualism in such key regions as Xinjiang, Yunnan, Inner Mongolia, Sichuan, Gansu, Guizhou, Guangxi, Qinghai, Jilin, Tibet and Guangdong. Using first-hand data collected from each region, the researchers examine language policies and curricula, as well as language allocation in the classroom and in the community, and analyse them in their specific historical, socio-political, demographical, economic, geographical and cultural contexts.

A distinctive feature of the project is its presentation of a new methodology and approach to researching such phenomena. This methodology encompasses policy analysis, community language profiles, as well as school-based field work in order to provide rich data that facilitates multilevel analysis of policy-in-context.

This series of Briefing Papers presents information about different aspects of the project.

Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project Briefing Papers
Series Editors: Anwei Feng (University of Bangor), Bob Adamson (Hong Kong Institute of Education) and Yi Yayuan (Hong Kong Institute of Education)

Please cite as:

Zhang, X. & Wang, G. (2013). *Bai Language Program in Jianchuan, Dali*. Briefing Paper, Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Education.

© Zhang Xia and Wang Ge, 2013

The authors acknowledge the generous funding received from the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong (General Research Fund 840012). Views expressed are those of the authors.

Bai Language Program in Jianchuan, Dali

Context of the Program

Location: Shilong Village, Jianchuan Dali

Ethnicity & population: Bai

Population: 1097

Project: Bai language program

Partnership: SIL, Yunnan Ethnic Minority Affairs Committee & Yunnan Ethnic Minority Language Committee

Time Frame: 2004-2010

Why to choose Shilong Village?

- Educational needs (教育需求)
- Language needs (语言需求)
- Cultural needs (文化需求)

Figure 1—Educational Level of Shilong Villagers in 2008

Educational level	Number of villagers
Illiteracy	144
Elementary education	500
Junior education	400
Senior education	30
Tertiary education and above	23
Total	1097

Language needs

- 90% villagers are the Bai
- Almost all daily communication is in Bai
- Preschool children cannot speak Mandarin Chinese
- All textbooks are written in Chinese

Cultural needs

- Shilong is famous for folk art (dance of Bawang whip and Bai folk songs)
- The endangered local folk arts are in need of salvation and protection

The Program

Goals

- Promote basic education for local people via Bai-Chinese bilingual bi-literacy education
- Promote the newly-created Bai script and save the endangered local Bai culture
- Facilitate the hardware construction for the schools in poverty-stricken areas and help create harmonious and comfortable school environments
- Fund the poor students and reduce the financial burdens on their parents

Actions

- a) Design of School Curriculum
 - ◆ 2 years' preschool bilingual education—Bai is used as the medium of instruction (MI) and taught as a subject.
 - ◆ 3 years' early school bilingual education—Bai is the medium of instruction (MI) for the year one students and from the 2nd year, Chinese is introduced gradually as MI and the Bai is used less than before and in the year four Chinese becomes the dominant MI
- b) Teacher Development
 - ◆ Recruit Bai teachers with junior school education from the local communities
 - ◆ Provide a teacher training program (July-August 2008)
- c) Content of Training
 - ◆ Review and consolidate Bai literacy
 - ◆ Understand teaching principles and learn some teaching methods.
 - how to motivate students
 - how to teach through games
 - how to make use of daily used objects as teaching tools
 - how to manage the classroom
 - how to prepare lessons
 - how to use computers
 - how to write a story in Bai
 - how to apply Bai nursery song in teaching
 - ◆ Search, record, categorize Bai songs and compose stories in Bai
- d) Teaching Material Development
 - ◆ 58 preschool textbooks and other bilingual reading books were compiled. Materials such as teaching plan, teaching tools like illustrations, nursery songs, and flashcards



e) Teaching Principles

- ♦ Mother tongue first to achieve a natural transition
- ♦ Student-centered interactive instruction
- ♦ Learning embedded in entertainment to enjoy happy learning
- ♦ Learning by doing to resolve problems



Project Outcomes

✓ **Dramatic change in learning attitude**

Many students would come to my home and ask me to give lessons in advance

“Madam, I want to live with you so that I will not miss the first day of the new semester (PSs).”

✓ **Impressive learning outcomes**

L1 literacy

Expression and self-confidence

Teacher development

Local culture salvation and inheritance

Community development

Students are active learners

Students perform confidently in public in festivals and holidays

Students fluently express themselves in Bai

Academic achievement improved (see Table 1)

Table 1—Academic achievement

	Average scores	Average scores
Test in Bai for Daban (July, 2007)	85.9 (Daban)	81 (Xiaoban)
	Chinese	Mathematics
Test in Chinese for Y1 students (Sep 2008)	90.1	86
Average score for Y1	44.5	66.5

Notes: “Daban” and “Xiaoban” is the studying level in the pre-school class set in the Shilong village. “Xiaoban” usually accept 5-6 years old children. These children will go to “Xiaoban” for 1 year+1 year in “Daban” then go to primary school. Capable students in “Daban” can write a passage with 6 or 7 sentences.

Capable students in “Xiaoban” can read and write simple words and sentences in Bai.

Adult students achieve a very high level of Bai literacy: e.g., some can write stories and folk songs in Bai and some can teach preschool students.

Shilong village community has jurisdiction over 1 natural village and other 3 groups of villagers. There are 237 families and 1097 people living in the village, among which 710 are labour. Among the 3 groups of villagers, there are 2 Bai minority groups and 1 Yi minority group. Yi minority comprised 12% of the population in the village.



✓ **Teacher development**

Despite little formal training, they have become skilful and professional teachers through training and practice. Their classroom performance is highly praised by external experts.

✓ **Local culture salvation and inheritance**

The trainees are able to collect, document folk songs and tales. A series of trilingual books on Bai language, folks and customs were published. Two sets of VCDs documenting Bai nursery and folk songs are circulated in Yunnan. Teach yourself Bai script- <http://www.jianchuanxc.cn/jianchuanshipin/jiaonixuebaiwen/>

✓ **Community development**

Publicizing Jianchuan and Bai culture
Attracting external funds to improve the infrastructure of more than 10 junior and primary schools
Local governments began to invest more (about 1 million RMB) in the construction of village facilities and environment
The project becomes a focus of interest of Yunnan University

✓ **Extra gains**

Yi and Lisu students acquire both Chinese and Bai.
Zero barrier to bilingual education program has been developed based on the success of this project
Some other local schools decided to introduce English to their school curriculum by adopting the Shilong bilingual bi-literacy education model.

✘ **Difficulties and challenges**

On-going funding

Sustainability

Bridging preschool education and compulsory education in terms of perceptions, human resources, teaching methods, textbooks, assessment, etc.

Issues for Further Study

The prospect of localizing western teaching philosophy and methodology: how could we modify them and make them fit the local circumstances?

How can we avoid high dropout rates?

How can we develop an effective partnership between academic institutions, local government and local schools in administration, curriculum development, teacher training and textbook writing?

How can we empower policy “takers” to become policy makers?



Contact Details

张霞 (Zhang Xia)

单位：云南省民语委 (Yunnan Ethnic Minority Language Committee)

地址：中国云南省昆明市环城西路 170 号民族大厦 6 楼 (Huancheng xilu 170, 6th floor, Minzu Dasha, Kunming, Yunnan, PRC)

E-mail: Zhangxia-baizu@163.com

Wang Ge

王革

建设路 235 号

昆明理工大学莲花苑 70-3-406

邮编 650033

电邮：wge72@yahoo.com.cn

Lianhua Yuan 70-3-406

Kunming University of Science and Technology (West Campus)

Jianshelu 235, Kunming, Yunnan, China

Postcode: 650092

Email: wge72@yahoo.com.cn