

---

---

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

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

---

**Briefing Paper No.13**

---

The Status Quo and Trial Models of  
Zhuang-Han Bilingual Teaching in Guangxi

**Binlan HUANG**

May 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 fieldwork 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:

Huang, B.L. (2013). *The Status Quo and Trial Models of Zhuang-Han Bilingual Teaching in Guangxi*. Briefing Paper, Models of Trilingual Education in Ethnic Minority Regions of China Project. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Institute of Education.

© Binlan Huang, 2013

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

## **The Status Quo and Trial Models of Zhuang-Han Bilingual Teaching in Guangxi**

### **Context of the Program**

Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region

- Located in southwest China, in the core of the Beibu Gulf between Guangdong, Guizhou, Hunan and Yunnan;
- Shares a border with Vietnam;
- A southern coastline along the Beibu Bay;
- A diverse mix of ethnic minorities, with the Zhuang people making up a significant proportion of the Population. In recognition of this, Guangxi became Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in 1958.

Total population: 46 million

Zhuang People: 17million

Area: 23.7 million sq km

Ethnic Groups: Zhuang, Han, Yao, Miao, Dong, Mula, Maonan, Hui, Gin, Yi, Sui, and Gelao

Climate: Subtropical monsoon climate, mild winters and long, hot, humid summers.

Language: Zhuang

Established in 1955

Based on Latin alphabet

Promulgated & promoted in pilot schools in 1957

But trial implementation stopped due to the Cultural Revolution

Resumed from 1981 to 1989

- From the 1980s to 2010, the 16-character regional policy ““以壮为主、壮汉结合、以壮促汉、壮汉兼通” (“focus on Zhuang, combine Zhuang and Han, using Zhuang to enhance Han, achieve Zhuang and Han bilingualism”) has been upheld.

- Trial Zhuang-Han teaching failed in most schools due to various reasons, e.g. ignoring the regional contexts, the global and regional economic change, social, family and personal needs, overemphasizing Zhuang language literacy, etc. Some schools just “advertise wine but sell vinegar”.
- However, trial implementation are claimed to have been quite satisfactory/successful and encouraging in some pilot schools

## **Our Study**

**Questionnaires:** 8 counties, 20 schools

Group A (unsuccessful trial schools): 70 parents, 40 teachers, 260 pupils

Group B (successful trial schools): 80 parents, 40 teachers, 300 pupils

**Observations:** 8 Chinese and mathematics classes

**Interviews:** 10 policy-makers, 20 parents, 20 pupils

## **Language Use ( pupils: Group A=260 → Group B= 300)**

- 8% (21 pupils) → 90% (270 pupils) have learnt Zhuang before attending primary school;
- 72.3% (188 pupils) → 81% (211 pupils) → daily communication language is Zhuang;
- 4.2% (11 pupils) → 46.3% (139 pupils) usually answer questions in class in Zhuang;
- 95% (247 pupils) → 78.3% (235 pupils) usually answer questions in class in Putonghua;
- 98% (254 pupils) → 93.3% (280 pupils) prefer that teachers teach classes in Putonghua.

## **Language Attitude (pupils)**

- 11.2% (29 pupils) → 47% (141 pupils) learning and using Zhuang is very useful;
- 81.2% (211 pupils) → 36.3% (109 pupils) learning Zhuang is somewhat useful,
- 7.7% (20 pupils) → 16.7% (50 pupils) no comment.

- 12.7% (33 pupils) → 43% (129 pupils) think Zhuang is a relatively important language for them;
- 88.5% (230 pupils) → 45.7% (137 pupils) Putonghua is relatively important for them;
- 63.5% (165 pupils) → 32.7% (98 pupils) English is relatively important.
  
- 9.6% (25 pupils) → 62.3% (187 pupils) would like to learn Zhuang;
- 83.8% (218 pupils) → 17.7% (53 pupils) do not like learning Zhuang;
- 6.5% (17 pupils) → 13.7% (41 pupils) no view.
  
- 95% (247 pupils) → 72.7% (218 pupils) think they learn Putonghua because it is the most widely used language in China;
- 50% (130 pupils) → 27.7% (83 pupils) think speaking Putonghua makes communication convenient;
- 63.5% (165 pupils) → 28.7% (86 pupils) think learning Putonghua is necessary to work in society;
- 34.6% (90 pupils) → 7% (20 pupils) think learning Putonghua well helps to secure a better future.

### **Zhuang Language Teaching & Learning (pupils)**

- 1.9% (5 pupils) → 67% (201 pupils) think learning Zhuang is quite helpful;
- 96.2% (250 pupils) → 19.6% (59 pupils) think it is not helpful;
- 80% (208 pupils) → 38.3% (115 pupils) think learning Zhuang will add stress to those who are learning Putonghua;
- 1.5% (4 pupils) → 55% (165 pupils) think it would not add stress;
- 18.5% (48 pupils) → 8.7% (26 pupils) no comment.

- 19.2% (50 pupils) → 50% (150 pupils) think textbooks are better if bilingual in Zhuang and Han;
- 0.38% (1 pupils) → 4.7% (14 pupils) think textbooks in Zhuang is better;
- 76.9% (200 pupils) → 37.7% (113 pupils) think textbooks in Chinese is better;
- 3.5% (9 pupils) → 6.7% (20 pupils) no comment.
  
- 3.8% (10 pupils) → 62.3% (187 pupils) are happy that the school is offering Zhuang class ; 71.2% (185 pupils) → 16% (48 pupils) dislike ;
  
- 22.3 % (58 pupils) → 55.7% (167 pupils) parents support their kids to learn Zhuang ; 46.2% (120 pupils) → 18% ( 54 pupils ) parents against their kids to learn Zhuang ; 31.5% (82 pupils) → 27.7% (83 pupils) parents do not care.

### **Questionnaires for Parents (Group A =70, Group B=80)**

- 78.6% (55 parents) → 82.5% (66 parents) know that Zhuang has a written form;
- 21.4% (15 parents) → 13.8 % (11 parents) do not know that Zhuang has a written form ;
  
- 28.6% (20 parents) → 86.3% (69 parents) think it is useful for their children to learn Zhuang;
  
- 71.4% (50 parents) → 3.8% (3 parents) think that the value of learning Zhuang is limited.
  
- 21.4% (15 parents) → 66.3% (53 parents) think their kids need to learn Zhuang;
  
- 78.6% (55 parents) → 26.3% (21 parents) no view.
  
  
- 7.1% (5 parents) → 67.5% (54 parents) want their children to learn Zhuang;
  
- 14.3% (10 parents) → 22.5% (18 parents) think it does not matter;
  
- 78.6% (55 parents) → 10% (8 parents) do not support it.
  
  
- 2.9% (2 parents) → 55% (44 parents) support the school offering Zhuang classes;

- 17.1% (12 parents) → 8.8% (7 parents) do not have a strong opinion;
- 80% (56) → 36.3% (29 parents) no comment.
  
- 11.4% (8 parents) → 63.8% (51 parents) think that learning Zhuang is helpful for learning Chinese and English;
- 88.6% (62 parents) → 25% (20 parents) not sure about it or have no comment.
  
- 35.7% (25 parents) → 86.3% (69 parents) think that the purpose of learning Zhuang language is to use their minority language;
- 21.4% (15 parents) → 48.8% (39 parents) think learning Zhuang is very useful for schooling;
- 28.6% (20 parents) → 25% (20 parents) think it is valuable to learn Zhuang to study their own minority culture;
- 71.4% (50 parents) → 15% (12 parents) think learning Zhuang is not useful after graduating from schools.

### **Questionnaires for Teachers (Group A =40, Group B=40)**

#### **Language Attitude**

- 20% (8 teachers) →55% (22 teachers) think learning Zhuang is very useful;
- 80% (32 teachers) → 45% (18 teachers) think learning Zhuang is somewhat useful.
  
- 25% (10 teachers) →47.5% (19 teachers) urgently wish that Zhuang minority would have more bilingual students;
- 75% (30 teachers) →42.5% (17 teachers) think the status quo is acceptable;
- 1 teacher does not have a view.
  
- 95% (38 teachers) →75% (30 teachers) usually teach in Putonghua;

- 15% (6 teachers) → 50% (20 teachers) use the local dialect to teach in class;
- 1 teachers uses the local Chinese dialect to teach;
- 50% (20 teachers) → 52.5% (21 teachers) use Zhuang and Chinese bilingual teaching.

### **Language Teaching & Learning**

- 30% (12 teachers) → 85% (34 teachers) think it is appropriate for school to have Zhuang classes;
- 70% (28 teachers) → 15% (6 teachers) no comment.
- 25% (10 teachers) → 47.5% (19 teachers) think the parents support their students learning Zhuang;
- 52% (21 teachers) → 22.5% (9 teachers) think that the parents are against it;
- 22.5% (9 teachers) → 30% (12 teachers) think do not have a view.
  
- 12.5% (5 teachers) → 67.5% (27 teachers) think the local bilingual schools are better than monolingual schools;
- 40% (16 teachers) → 2.5% (1 teachers) think the local bilingual schools are not as good;
- 47.5% (19 teachers) → 30% (12 teachers) think the bilingual teaching is at a mediocre level.
  
- 12.5% (5 teachers) → 47.5% (19 teachers) think their students want to learn Zhuang;
- 62.5 % (25 teachers) → 32.5% (13 teachers) think their students do not want to learn Zhuang;
- 25% (10 teachers) → 15% (6 teachers) think the students do not care either way.



## **Language Teaching & Learning**

- 72.5% (29 teachers) →67.5% (27 teachers) think it is better to start Zhuang classes in preschool
- 20% (8 teachers) →15% (6 teachers) think it is good to start Zhuang class from Primary 1 or 2;
- 7.5% (3 teachers) →15% (6 teachers) think it is good to start learning Zhuang from Primary 3.
  
- 67.5% (27 teachers) →17.5% (7 teachers) think that a bilingual curriculum tends to give students more stress;
- 7.5% (3 teachers) →50% (20 teachers) think the bilingual curriculum does not add stress to students;
- 20 % (8 teachers) →7.5% (3 teachers) think the difference is not significant;
- 17.5% (7 teachers) → 2.5% (1 teacher) are not sure.
  
- 12.5% (5 teachers) →80% (32 teachers) think learning Zhuang can improve students' Chinese learning ability;
- 25% (10 teachers) → 7.5% (3 teachers) think learning Zhuang cannot improve students' Chinese learning ability;
- 37.5% (15 teachers) →27.5% (11 teachers) think it is not significant;
- 25% (10 teachers) → 2.5% (1 teacher) not sure.
  
- 87.5% (35 teachers) →82.5% (33 teachers) think that what Zhuang schools need the most is support on policy;
- 100 % (40 teachers) →95% (38 teachers) think it is financial support that they need the most;
- 80% (32 teachers) → 72.5% (29 teachers) think it is teacher development that they need the most;
- 45 % (18 teachers) →60% (24 teachers) think it is the good textbooks that they need the most;

- 82.5% (33 teachers) → 67.5% (27 teachers) think it is parents' support that they need the most;
- 72.5 % (29 teachers) → 42.5% (17 teachers) think it is the value of Zhuang in society and in government offices that is most important.
  
- 87.5% (35 teachers) → 82.5% (33 teachers) think the biggest problem they face is they lack of Zhuang minority policies that favour them to improve;
- 95% (38 teachers) → 92.5% (37 teachers) think they lack financial support;
- 80% (32 teachers) → 55% (22 teachers) think they lack teachers;
- 70% (28 teachers) → 35% (14 teachers) think the biggest problem they face is that the Zhuang language has no future in society;
- 62.5 % (25 teachers) → 40% (16 teachers) think the biggest problem they face is society and parents;
- 25% (10 teachers) → 10% (4 teachers) think the biggest problem they face is the design of schools;
- 50% (20 teachers) → 10% (4 teachers) think there are not enough students.

## **Impacts on Schools and Pupils**

### **Academic, cognitive and affective**

1. Overall achievement in bilingual schools much better than non-bilingual schools
2. Excellent rates—ranking the first eight places in unified examinations (Chinese and Mathematics)
3. More graduates got enrolled into key high schools, colleges and universities
4. More awards in various contests
5. Schools teaching quality much better
6. Pupils/students' overall quality higher
7. Year-one primary pupils from Zhuang-Han bilingual preschools learn Hanyu Pinyin, and English (year-three/four) faster and better, with weaker local

accent. (Pinyin learning time for bilingual scholars is less than 5 weeks, but more than 7 weeks for non-bilingual scholars.)

8. Zhuang-Chinese bilingual scholars' literacy is better. They read faster, and understand better and deeper, accelerating the progress of teaching
9. Scholars' thinking is more active, richer, wider, etc. (thinking in Zhuang), thus express and write better.
10. More willing to learn, to be involved in in/after-class activities.

### **Social**

1. Social recognition higher: more parents are willing to send children to Zhuang-Han Schools.
2. More preschools and primary schools express willingness to participate in Zhuang-Han trial bilingual teaching.
3. People's support rate is higher, 70-80%. Parents hope schoolchildren can be dressed in school uniforms of Zhuang ethnic characteristics, and parents bought curtains and stationery for the schools.

### **Government support**

1. The government regains confidence in bilingual teaching.
2. Government investment more than doubled. From 1981 to 2012, the annual funding for Zhuang-Chinese bilingual trial implementation is 4.14 millions. This year, the funding is 10 millions.
3. More encouragement in research on teaching reforms and models. Policy-making more open and flexible.

### **The Newly Promoted Model**

- Models implemented in different regions :

Focus on the minority language, Chinese is complementary subject. (Type 1 model)

Focus on Chinese, minority language is complementary language. (Type 2 model)

Some subjects are taught in Zhuang, some subjects are taught in Chinese.  
(Type 3 model)

- Based on the success and lessons from the trial schools, it is believed that Model 2 is best suited to the regional contexts.
- Those schools which are believed to have been successful have been following this model, also called Zhuang-Han Tongbu 壮汉同步 (Synchronous Teaching Model), which is a bit different from the 16-character catchphrase “以壮为主、壮汉结合、以壮促汉、壮汉兼通” (“focus on Zhuang, combine Zhuang and Han, using Zhuang to enhance Han, achieve Zhuang and Han bilingualism”).
- From Autumn 2012, it has been implemented in the preschool classes of 15 trial schools in 14 different counties, and this trial implemented will extended to all classes for primary-one pupils from Autumn 2013.
- Trial schools have the right to adjust their teaching and the model based on their contexts.
- Basically, preschools give priority to the teaching of Zhuang language (Zhuang alphabet, literacy). Preschoolers are taught consonants, vowels, tones and Pinyin, the aim being to enable scholars to develop competence in Zhuang.
- From Primary One, two versions of Chinese and Mathematics textbooks (nationally compiled textbooks, one in Chinese, the other Zhuang; the content is nearly the same) are taught synchronously. About 3 to 4 weeks are spent teaching scholars Hanyu Pinyin by way of contrasting and comparing the Zhuang alphabet and Hanyu Pinyin.

### **Contact details 联系信息**

Dr./Prof. Binlan HUANG, College of Foreign Languages, Guangxi University  
[jfshi@gxu.edu.cn](mailto:jfshi@gxu.edu.cn)