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Anwei Feng
Bob Adamson *Editors*

Trilingualism in Education in China: Models and Challenges

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Trilingualism in Education in China: Models and Challenges

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This book is dedicated to teachers in the PRC working to promote trilingualism.

Preface

Trilingualism in Education at the Crossroads

Trilingualism has a long history. One of the first examples is the 6th century BC "Behistun inscription", which is a carving in a cliff authored by Darius the Great in Iran, near the city of Kermanshah. The text is in three languages: Old Persian, Elamite and Akkadian. Another example is the "Letoon Trilingual Stele" dating from the 4th century BC with texts in Aramaic, Greek and Lycian. This inscription was discovered in the Letoon Temple complex and is displayed in the Fethiye Museum in Turkey. A better known inscription displayed in the British Museum is the Rosetta Stone dating from 196 BC. It was found in the town of Rashid in Egypt and it is a text praising Pharaoh Ptolemy V. The inscription was written in two languages (Egyptian and Greek) but uses three scripts – hieroglyphic, demotic and Greek. Another example of a trilingual inscription is the 9th century trilingual inscription at Karabalgasun (Mongolia) in Old Turkic (Uighur), Sogdian and Chinese.

Trilingualism was also present in the Middle Ages. Latin, English and French were used in England and performed different functions for many years after the Norman Conquest in 1066. The "Glosses of Emilianus" (Glosas Emilianenses), a Latin codex with marginalia in Spanish and Basque, dating back to the 11th century is yet another example of trilingualism in the Middle Ages.

Trilingualism has gained increasing currency in the globalised world of the 21st century. The spread of English as a language of international communication has often added a third language to the linguistic repertoire of speakers in different parts of the world and to the school curriculum in many bilingual regions. In spite of its long history and its relevance in today's world, the study of trilingualism in education has not received much attention until recently. It is in fact only in the last two decades that we have witnessed a surge in publications, conferences and journals that go beyond the teaching and learning of two languages in education.

This volume reports research conducted in some areas of China where three languages are used in education: a minority language, Chinese as a national language and English. Three languages are also used in education in many other parts of the world. There is variation in the type of languages used at schools and the linguistic

aims of schools, but today a common factor for most schools in China and elsewhere is that English is one of the languages in the curriculum.

The study of trilingualism in education is multidisciplinary because it brings together linguistic, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic and educational dimensions. The languages that are an integral part of the multilingual repertoire of schoolchildren in trilingual education may differ in terms of linguistic distance; they may or may not share the same writing script. The process of language learning is not only related to psycholinguistic factors such as aptitude and strategies, but also to the vitality of the languages involved in the sociolinguistic context where the schools are located. As can be appreciated from this volume, the educational dimension allows for great diversity with regard to the linguistic models adopted by the school and the human and material resources employed therein.

The study of trilingualism at school not only brings disciplines together but also the areas of second language acquisition (SLA) and bilingualism. SLA has traditionally focused on the process of acquiring a second language by looking at different stages of acquisition and factors affecting this process. Bilingualism is more product-oriented and looks at the way languages are used by bilingual individuals and/or in bilingual communities. In the context of trilingualism in education the boundaries between learning and usage are blurred. Schoolchildren come in contact with three languages at school and they are able to use their multilingual resources as a scaffold when learning these languages. They are learners and users of the three languages at the same time. In view of this, the study of trilingualism in education is not merely one sided, in that it does not study only the process or only the product, or just one language or two languages at a time. The study of trilingualism in education focuses on the complete picture and can provide more insights than other perspectives that simply focus on acquisition or language use.

The combination of a minority language, a national language and English that we see in this volume provides a truly rich context because it relates education to the vitality of the different languages as reflected in their demography, status and institutional control. The volume also demonstrates how minority languages in China share some fundamental characteristics because of their status as minority languages. At the same time, the studies in this volume indicate that minority languages in China occupy different positions with reference to their demography, legal status and prestige. Trilingualism in education in China and other contexts is related to the specific characteristics and challenges of using the minority languages in education, including their legal status and recognition, the availability of qualified teachers and teaching materials, the standardisation of the languages, and finally, the attitudes of the people towards the use of minority languages in education. All of these issues are discussed in this volume, in addition to being shared by other minority languages (Cenoz and Gorter 2008; Cenoz 2009). One of the key points that can be illuminating for scholars outside China, who often refer to China as a linguistically homogeneous country, is the enormous linguistic diversity that is reflected in this book. This diversity is related to the linguistic characteristics of the languages, the demography and socioeconomic status of the minority language speakers in different parts of China.

The spread of English as a world language and a lingua franca in China and elsewhere is clearly seen in the case of Chinese education, where English has become one of the languages in the curriculum (see also Adamson and Feng 2014; Feng 2007, 2011; Ruan and Leung 2012). This volume clearly illustrates how the prestige commanded by the English language is extremely high, even when it is not used in everyday life. English is perceived as being associated with social mobility, although there are important differences between urban and rural contexts in terms of access. Moreover, the volume confirms the strength of the national language, Chinese, as compared to the many minority languages in the provinces. This situation shares several characteristics with trilingual education in some Spanish-speaking countries such as Bolivia or Peru, where there are speakers of minority languages such as Quechua and Aymara, who have Spanish, a widely spoken language, as their national language and English as a third language. Trilingual education in China also shares characteristics with minority languages in Spain (Basque, Catalan, Galician), where Spanish is the national language and English the third language or in France (Basque, Corsican, Breton) where French is the national language and English the third language.

This volume contributes very significantly both to China and other parts of the world for different reasons. It provides valuable information that brings together the different models of trilingual education in China, which in turn can serve as an important reference point for scholars, policy makers and educators in regions with three languages in education, to enable them to effectively learn from other contexts. It can also be of interest for other areas of China, in raising awareness about the diversity of situations and the policies developed in regions where a minority language is spoken. *Trilingualism in Education in China: Models and Challenges* provides pertinent and relevant information for scholars, policy makers and educators outside China. This volume will definitely appeal to a wide and varied global audience interested in multilingual education. Apart from making useful information available, this volume is crucial for studies on trilingualism in education because it goes beyond a mere description of the situations into a conceptual and theoretical discussion of different types of policy models. It correspondingly explores the differences on the subject of support for the minority language at school and its vitality in the Chinese regions, where trilingualism can be found in education. Anwei Feng and Bob Adamson have accurately managed to identify in this volume four major themes that can be used to compare the different regions: linguistic distance, the sociolinguistic context, attitudes of stakeholders and the use of the languages in education. At the same time, the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods when conducting the studies allows for triangulation and more reliable outcomes.

This fascinating volume brings together a large number of models and contexts where trilingualism is developed in education and displays their dynamics in relation to the status of the languages and their use in the school curriculum. Finally and most importantly, the volume highlights the importance of being more knowledgeable about the interactions between languages. This is a central issue in the agenda for research on trilingualism in education in China and elsewhere in the world

because of the importance of enhancing the resources multilingual schoolchildren have at their disposal as a result of their wider linguistic repertoires.

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Contents

Researching Trilingualism and Trilingual Education in China 1
Anwei Feng and Bob Adamson

Part I Meng-Chao-Xin

Four Models of Mongolian Nationality Schools in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region 25
Fang Dong, Narisu, Yanhui Gou, Xinggang Wang and Jia Qiu

Trilingual Education in China's Korean Communities 47
Zhen'ai Zhang, Liting Wen and Guanghe Li

Language Learning and Empowerment: Languages in Education for Uyghurs in Xinjiang 65
Mamtimyn Sunuodula and Yu Cao

Part II Qing-Zang-Chuan

Ethnolinguistic Vitality, Language Attitudes and Language Education in Tibetan Schools in Qinghai 103
Fu Ma and Renzeng

When English Meets Chinese in Tibetan Schools: Towards an Understanding of Multilingual Education in Tibet 117
ZhiMin Xiao and Steve Higgins

A Multi-case Investigation into Trilingualism and Trilingual Education in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture 141
Chengyu Liu, Hongdi Ding, Hong Wang,
Lijuan Yu and Mingzhong Yang

Part III Yun-Gui-Yue

A Survey Report on Trilingualism and Trilingual Education in Yunnan 175
Yichuan Yuan, Deying Hu, Peng Li, Honghua Zhu, Jinjun Wang, Yun Shang and Hongbin Ba

Emerging Trilingualism among the Dong Minority in Guizhou Province 199
Jacob E. Finifrock and Doerthe Schilken

Language Attitudes of Secondary School Students in Guangdong 223
Qiyun Zhu

Trilingualism in Education: Models and Challenges 243
Bob Adamson and Anwei Feng

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Researching Trilingualism and Trilingual Education in China

Anwei Feng and Bob Adamson

Abstract The introductory chapter gives the rationale and methodology of the chapters included in this volume. All chapters are research reports that emerged from a nationwide project on trilingualism and trilingual education in China. Traditionally, research in this area of study was conducted mostly in isolation in different minority regions or prefectures in the country. There was no known investigation done for gaining a comprehensive, comparable, and critical understanding of the contemporary situation of languages in use and language provision for indigenous minority groups. This chapter, firstly, provides the underpinning ideology and rationale for the nationwide project conducted through concerted efforts of research teams from key minority regions or prefectures and Guangdong Province which provides a particularly interesting case study. It then presents a detailed account of the design of the research, from the establishment of the nationwide network, the formulation of research questions, the methodology and methods used, the designing of research tools, to the organisation of the volume. The strategies used to deal with all these are clearly crucial from the point of view of comparability, validity and trustworthiness of research findings. Finally, the chapter lists the target audience of the volume, including policy makers, teachers and researchers in minority education.

Keywords China's ethnic minority groups · *Sanyu Jiantong* (mastery of three languages) · *Sanyu Jiaoyu* (trilingual education) · Policy making · Ethno-linguistic vitality · Additive trilingualism · Empowerment · Multiple case studies · Mixed methodology · Target audience

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1 Introduction

Trilingualism and trilingual education have long histories in China in various guises—the manifestation investigated in this book is a development of the twenty-first century—as schools have taught foreign languages (most notably English, but also at various times and locations Russian, Japanese and Albanian, *inter alia*), since the latter days of the Qing Dynasty, while local mother tongues have also been learned alongside standard versions of Chinese. The local mother tongues include Chinese varieties such as Cantonese, Shanghainese, Fujianese, Chiu Chow and thousands of dialects, and the languages of indigenous ethnic minority groups that mainly inhabit the borderlands of the country. The roles and status of local, national and international tongues have shifted over time under the influence of changing political ideologies and pragmatism, as reflected in education policies. Varieties of the Chinese language have tended to be neglected in the face of powerful promotion of a national unifying standard, and the fortunes of ethnic minority languages (along with those of English) have risen and fallen at different stages of nation-building. In recent times the confluence of disparate policy strands, each supporting the development of one component of trilingualism, has created an environment in which serious attention can be paid to the implementation of trilingual education. Ethnic minority languages are promoted (or side-lined or even covertly suppressed), Mandarin Chinese is emphasised, which has always been the case, and the learning of English is encouraged from upper primary school. These three policy strands have arisen independently, and therefore lack an underlying coherent theory of trilingual education, but policy implementation has increasingly demanded that education authorities weigh up their approach to fostering trilingualism. These developments form the central focus of this book, although we do acknowledge that trilingualism is not solely a matter for ethnic minority groups.

There are 55 officially recognised ethnic minority groups in the People's Republic of China (PRC), and a substantial body of literature was developed on the diverse languages in use and in education for these groups, much before the current moves towards trilingualism in education occurred in the early years of the twenty-first century. Much of this literature, as Dai et al.'s work (2000) indicates, traces the history of minority languages and scripts, examines their features and interrelationships, explores the phenomena of bilingualism in regions where minority people live as a dominant group or in mixed communities, and debates issues surrounding bilingual education. Since the turn of the century, this body of literature has expanded even more rapidly. The increase is indubitably attributable to the fact that English language education has been officially promoted across the PRC, including minority dominated regions, much more robustly than ever before (Feng 2011). The spread of English has had a huge impact on minority groups and language provision for these groups has consequently become an even more complex and diversified task. While discussions on traditional bilingualism and bilingual education for minority groups continue, the past decade has witnessed a speedily-growing scholarship on *Sanyu Jiantong* (mastery of three languages, namely, the indigenous minority home language (L1), Mandarin Chinese (L2), and English (L3), or simply

trilingualism) and *Sanyu Jiaoyu* (trilingual education)[1] (Adamson and Feng 2009; Feng and Adamson 2011). While this seemingly new phenomenon has been studied and discussed by many, research is usually conducted in different regions in isolation and conclusions are normally drawn on the basis of limited empirical evidence. This volume aims to fill this gap. It provides an evidence-based, comprehensive, comparable and critical analysis of the contemporary situation of languages in use and language provision for the indigenous minority groups, as well as touches on issues affecting speakers of Cantonese.

2 Complexity of the Context

Investigating any aspect concerning minority groups in the PRC requires awareness of the complexity and dynamics of the overall context—more specifically, the interrelationship between centrality and diversity and between periphery and resilience. Very few researchers have questioned the notion that ethnic minority groups have much in common for the simple reason that they have been ruled by the same regime for more than six decades. As citizens under the highly centralised government, ethnic minority groups are subject to the same legislature and laws as the Han majority group and are constitutionally mandated equal rights. At the state level, for example, all five Autonomous Regions[2] and other areas where minority groups are concentrated are bound by China's *Constitution* (1982) and its language law (*[the] Law of …, 2001)* as well as by the Regional National Autonomy Law (*[the] Law of* …1984), which specifically applies to minority groups. A common clause included in all these documents promotes Putonghua, the standard Chinese language, throughout the country including minority-dominated communities, though they are also granted constitutional rights to use and maintain their language and culture. These regulations create an apparent contradiction (Stites 1992, cited in

[1] Like many other authors in China, we use the terms, trilingualism and trilingual education, to refer to education and competency in three languages—minority home language, Chinese and English—for minority groups in China. This is the situation *most* minority groups are facing today. However, it is important to note that the real situation is much more complicated than the terms suggest. Some groups had been traditionally trilingual or multilingual (Dai and Cheng 2007) before English was introduced into the school system, while some such as Hui, Manchu, She and Tujia have lost their L1 and speak Chinese as their home language due to historical reasons. Also some school programmes may be claimed to be trilingual, but the hidden aim is in fact monolingualism or limited bilingualism. Thus, the terms are simplistic labels for a very complex situation.

[2] Though indigenous minority groups are spread across the country, there are primarily five autonomous regions designated for the five largest minority groups in China, namely the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the Tibetan Autonomous Region, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region and the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. Each region, as the name suggests, is given power to exercise self-governance, though critics such as Lundberg (2009) and Mackerras (1994) argue that due to the principle of 'democratic centralism', the model actually practised in these regions provides little real autonomy, particularly from the political point of view.

Lin 1997). Consequently, the past decades have seen a pendulum swing between the promotion of linguistic and cultural assimilation and of bilingualism, depending on the socio-political situation in the country. This phenomenon is particularly evident in regions, in which their ethnolinguistic vitality is relatively strong. In most regions, however, assimilation has been prevailing as governments at various levels have taken strong measures to promote L2, the standard Chinese, in schools and in society.

Ethnic minority groups, currently numbering over a hundred million people, are hugely diverse in terms of history, culture and language. Even within the 'same' group, substantial differences exist in all domains. Linguistically, any relatively large ethnic minority group, Tibetans, for instance, may speak several mutually unintelligible 'dialects' (Denwood 1999). There can also be vast differences in terms of state policies for various minority groups because of geographical, demographical, socio-cultural, historical and political factors. Let us consider the high stakes national college entrance examination for example. This examination is administered in Mandarin Chinese and six minority languages, namely Tibetan, Uyghur, Mongolian, Korean, Kazakh, and Kirghiz (Mackerras 1994). This is viewed as imperative, as these six languages are spoken by groups with a large population and long-established linguistic and cultural traditions, and they all live in strategically important areas bordering foreign lands. In addition to the visible differences, diversity among minority groups can also be attributed to individuals and groups with various socio-political and cultural backgrounds who determinedly stand up to negotiate their cultural identity and linguistic rights in specific contexts. In these situations, a more dynamic relationship exists between the minority group and the state or regional government (Schluessel 2007).

There appears to be a consensus in the literature that indigenous minority groups are often disadvantaged because most live in rural, desert or mountainous areas. According to statistics, nearly a third of the counties officially defined as poverty-stricken are located in the west mainly inhabited by minority groups (Yang 2005). Many minority schools, therefore, lack basic resources. Without access to modern facilities and qualified teachers, minority students are usually found to be poorer performers than their Han majority counterparts (Hu 2007; Jiang et al. 2007; Tsung 2009) and their dropout rate is usually high. Besides economic and geographical factors, some scholars believe that educational failure for many minority students often arises from the inappropriate use of languages in education. Although minority languages and cultures were widely seen as more respected in the PRC in the 1950s and in the 1980s, the goal of policy makers and educators since 1949 appears to have been to create a standardised education system—in terms of the syllabuses, textbooks and pedagogical activities—characterised by cultural and linguistic homogeneity and socialist orientation (Hansen 1999). The assimilationist stances adopted by key policy makers and the associated lack of value ascribed to minority languages are clearly reflected in the chauvinistic statement made in the early days of the PRC by Hu Qiaomu, the then personal secretary of the paramount leader, Mao Zedong, that the 'government must eliminate Han dialects within 10 years and

eliminate minority languages after we develop them into *Hanyu Pinyin*[3] scripts' (Tsung 2009, p. 88). When competence in Chinese became the determinant of their prospects in life, many minority students struggled to compete for scarce academic opportunities with the Han majority, for whom Chinese was the mother tongue. As a result, for decades they have had to depend upon 'preferential policies', which have proved to be double-edged swords (Feng and Sunuodula 2009). One key preferential policy, for example, is to allow minority students with lower marks than required in the high-stakes National College Entrance Examination to enter a higher education institution. However, once in the university, these minority students often fail to prosper in their academic studies, with many failing to graduate (Lin 1997; Adamson and Xia 2011), and even if they do succeed in completing their studies, they are stigmatised as recipients of preferential treatment, which substantially affects their prospects in the job market.

Despite the peripheral position in which many minority groups are situated, research proves that some groups have displayed persistent robustness in protecting their languages and cultures. For example, while some minority parents—especially those living in urban areas and those possessing socially privileged positions—might send their children to Chinese medium schools, many others are resistant or reluctant to do so, particularly from the point of view of literacy development (Postiglione 1999; Zhou 2000, 2004). These parents opt to send their children to minority language medium schools, where available. This is particularly true in rural areas in Xinjiang (Tsung 2009). In Yunnan, temple education is another way for minority children to develop literacy in their own language (Hu 2007). Hansen (1999) points out that despite its drawbacks, temple education tends to provide a window of opportunity for boys who cannot pass high stakes examinations in the state system. Furthermore, some researchers observe that minority groups seem to be seeking opportunities to negotiate their linguistic identity and rights. During the 1980s, minority groups sensed a favourable atmosphere and many schools returned to minority language medium instruction, particularly at the primary level (Tsung 2009). Some groups such as Uyghur, Yi, Dai, and Kazak even forced the reversal of a policy made in the 1950s that had reformed their writing scripts, and restored the originals. All these indicate that indigenous minority groups might be disadvantaged in geographical, demographical and socio-economic terms but they are resilient, taking advantage of any opportunities to claim their rights and negotiate their identity.

It is worth noting that not all indigenous minority groups are marginalised in the country. In statistical terms, some minority groups appear to be even more privileged than their majority counterparts. Comparing the educational level of 56 ethnic groups including the Han, Zhou (2001) established that some minority groups—most notably the Koreans and Russians—could boast a higher percentage of college degree holders than the national average. The Korean group are particularly strong because of the high demand for Korean graduates in neighbouring South Korea and

[3] *Hanyu Pinyin* is the system used in the PRC to transcribe Chinese characters into Romanised script.

in companies set up by Korean entrepreneurs within the PRC (Lin 1997). In cases such as the Koreans, it is important to note that their empowerment does not stem from linguistic or cultural assimilation into mainstream society: on the contrary, they gain power by developing their multilingual competence and their economy, and by confidently claiming their identity.

As mentioned above, the turn of the century ushered in the era of *Sanyu Jiantong* (mastery of three languages or trilingualism) and *Sanyu Jiaoyu* (trilingual education). This shift from bilingualism to trilingualism or multilingualism, we argue, is attributable to various forces of globalisation in the wider context which triggered the promulgation of the official documents (Ministry of Education 2001a, b, c); to promote English language education at all levels throughout the country. Increasing tourism in many minority regions, joint ventures, international economic activities, such as the hugely impactful China-ASEAN Expositions held annually in Guangxi and other 'open-door' activities (Huang 2011), have all helped fuel enthusiasm for gaining English language competence not only in metropolitan areas such as Shanghai (Zou and Zhang 2011), but also in remote minority communities (Blachford and Jones 2011). Some minority students at universities, who find themselves in difficulty competing academically with their Han counterparts, perceive the requirement to learn English as an opportunity to demonstrate their learning capabilities (Sunuodula and Feng 2011).

Inevitably, the recent shift from traditional bilingualism to *Sanyu Jiantong* and *Sanyu Jiaoyu* in indigenous minority regions has made the complex situation even more intricate and perplexing. How do stakeholders in minority education react to the new need? How does the new need for English impact on the existing languages in use and in education? What is happening in minority schools and classrooms? Are there genuine efforts made and models developed for improving *trilingual* competence in pupils? If yes, how effective are these models? Over the past decade, as noted earlier, there has been some research and various discussions in an attempt to answer these questions, but there has been hardly any systematic and comprehensive endeavour to examine and assess the situation and its related issues. Hence, a nationwide project on trilingualism and trilingual education was initiated 5 years ago by the authors of this chapter and has been conducted in key regions in China to research into the diverse yet interrelated features of *Sanyu Jiantong* and *Sanyu Jiaoyu*. The majority of the chapters included in this volume are the reports of research in these specific regions.

3 The Trilingualism-in-China Project

As a nationwide project targeting such a huge population, it is necessary to give a detailed account of the process of the research, so as to gauge its validity and reliability. Because of the complex, dynamic and politically sensitive nature of the issues the research covers, we have taken a cautious, yet rigorous approach to ensure that what we report in any publication, including this volume, is thorough,

consistent and most importantly based on valid and reliable evidence. To this end, prior to the launch of the project, we spent about 2 years in 2006 and 2007, planning and piloting the project on a small scale. Since 2009, we have congregated and worked closely with a national network of researchers in ten key regions in the country. The following pages describe how the project evolved and the specific strategies and methods which we adopted to ensure its value as well as validity.

3.1 Initial Research

Back in 2006, with the publication of a review paper by the first author of this chapter on bilingual education and bilingualism for both the majority and minority groups in the PRC (Feng 2005), a small-scale project was initiated with the aim of gaining first-hand information on *Sanyu Jiantong* and *Sanyu Jiaoyu* in minority regions. Three case studies were conducted into trilingualism and trilingual education among minority students in a few universities in Guangxi, Sichuan and Xinjiang. These studies were essentially semi-structured interviews with students using a convenient sampling method. Data collected from the studies were richer and more significant than expected, and subsequently several papers were published on the basis of these case studies (Adamson and Feng 2009; Feng 2008; Feng and Sunuodula 2009). These papers helped shed light on the new phenomenon. However, we were well aware of the limitations of the initial studies in terms of scope, depth and rigour. For practical reasons, the subjects for our studies were chosen primarily from minority students and teachers at some universities in the three regions visited. We had neither the time nor financial resources to investigate primary and secondary schools in areas where indigenous minority groups concentrate. Key stakeholders such as primary and secondary school heads, teachers, parents, pupils and policy makers at various levels were absent from this initial research. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the situation with comparable data, a project to investigate the situation on a larger scale appeared to be the logical answer given the purpose of the study and diversity, in terms of ethnicity and sheer size of the minority population in each region.

3.2 The Concept of Additive Trilingualism

No research is conducted in a vacuum where a researcher could remain absolutely neutral. As critical educational researchers argue, research should not merely aim to give an account of the society and behaviour, but also to redress inequality and to promote good practice (Fay 1987). The initial research identified many issues in language provision for minority groups and gave clear evidence of the essential role of pupils' home language in education in general and trilingual education in particular. This led to our belief that the large-scale project would, first of all, examine the inter-play of all three languages in education, and on that basis it should aim to

promote strong models in trilingual education. This belief was built upon the literature and research findings on the benefits of additive bilingualism and trilingualism. In an additive bilingual/trilingual situation, the addition of one or more than one language and culture does not replace or displace an individual's home language and culture. Moreover, there is overwhelming evidence that shows positive cognitive and affective outcomes of additive bilingualism or trilingualism (Cenoz 2003; Cummins 2000).

Although *additive trilingualism* is conceptualised differently in different contexts, we define it, bearing the Chinese context in mind, as *the development of very strong competences both in L1 (minority pupils' home language) and L2 (Mandarin Chinese), given its wide use and absolute importance for life opportunities in China, and peer appropriate competence in L3 (a foreign language, usually English). Peer appropriate competence in L3 refers to oral proficiency and literacy in L3 comparable to that of the peers of the majority Han group*. This definition takes into account many key aspects essential for minority education in the new century: cognitive and affective imperatives for L1 maintenance and development; economic and socio-political needs for competence in L2; and international mobility and competitiveness for L3 learning. It is this conceptualisation that underlies the entire project, from formulating the research questions, designing the instruments, collecting and analysing data, to dissemination research findings. Indeed, additive trilingualism thus conceptualised is the guiding ideology for some on-going regional projects that aim to apply strong models of trilingualism (see Chap. 11 in this volume) to minority school classrooms.

3.3 Research Questions

One of the challenging tasks at the planning stage was to decide what questions the research project aims to answer (Thomas 2009). The major research questions for this national project were primarily derived from the small-scale study described above and identification of discrepancies between theories developed internationally and the reports concerning trilingual education in minority regions in the PRC.

There seems to be general consensus in the literature of trilingualism and trilingual education that bilinguals outperform monolinguals at learning a third language (L3) and thereby, gain a cognitive advantage over them (Cenoz and Jessner 2000; Clyne et al. 2004; Hoffmann and Ytsma 2004). Research by Cenoz (2003) and Cenoz and Valencia (1994) demonstrates that students who are bilingual in Spanish and Basque tend to achieve higher levels of proficiency in English than students who were starting to learn English from a monolingual base. As Baker (2006) points out, this can be explained by Cummin's (1986, 2000) interdependence hypothesis that suggests academic language proficiency transfers across languages with regards to phonological, syntactical and pragmatic abilities. In the emerging literature in China, however, despite occasional reports that give support to the hypothesis, many educators and commentators seem to claim that the reverse is true (e.g., Jiang et al. 2007; Yang 2005; Zhang 2003). Instead of advantages, they report cognitive,

cultural and psychological problems minority students experience in learning L3. Therefore, not surprisingly, some scholars such as Bastid-Bruguiere (2001) argue that the national drive for English language education in China is bound to empower the already powerful Han group, leaving indigenous minority people even further behind. As minority pupils are required to learn Mandarin Chinese as a priority and because of the fact that minority groups usually live in impoverished and remote areas, Beckett and MacPherson (2005) conclude that the current expansion of English language education is inevitably widening the gap between the majority Han and minority groups and further augmenting the educational inequities that the minority peoples already face in the traditional system.

To address these commonly perceived issues, some educators in China suggest that special policies should be enacted for minority students (Yang 2006; Zhang 2003). This would actually signify setting standards for English language proficiency lower than the required levels specified in official documents issued by the Ministry of Education (2001a, b, c). Sunuodula and Feng (2011) point out that those making this suggestion seem to ignore the obvious consequences that, once such a special policy is made, minority pupils with lower standards than their majority counterparts in a school subject of ever-increasing importance will inevitably find it more difficult to compete for academic and career opportunities, and will be destined to be further marginalised.

What seems to be neglected in the literature is the essential role of pupils' L1 in education as their performance in L2 and L3 acquisition is often the focus of attention (Adamson and Feng 2009; Feng 2008). With this understanding, it was made explicit from the start that the project was not intended to be one focusing solely on L3 teaching and learning of minority pupils. Unlike many researchers working on *Sanyu Jiantong* and *Sanyu Jiaoyu,* this project would examine in-depth the inter-play of all three languages. Thus, the aim of the project was to address three interrelated issues as follows:

1. The objective and subjective ethnolinguistic vitalities of the minority group under investigation, plus an analysis of the language policies and other contextual factors.
2. Perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders towards *Sanyu Jiantong* in minority regions, including policy makers, teachers, parents and pupils, focusing on how they value each language, including L1, and how they react to the new phenomenon.
3. Languages in education. Is *Sanyu Jiaoyu* genuinely implemented in schools? That is, are all three languages taken into account in the curriculum? If not, why not? If yes, to what extent do political, cultural, economic and sociolinguistic factors affect *Sanyu Jiaoyu*?

All three are challenging, multiple questions. The first suggests a thorough investigation into the contextual factors in *Sanyu Jiaoyu*. They include language policies at macro-, meso-, and micro-levels and the objective and subjective ethnolinguistic vitalities. Contextual factors determine whether and to what extent *Sanyu Jiaoyu* could be implemented in a region. The second question signifies major empirical

studies to find out the perceptions and attitudes of the stakeholders. Their perceptions of and attitudes towards *Sanyu Jiantong,* including pupils' L1, are of great importance as they not only provide in-depth evidence to explain the forms of trilingual education, weak or strong, practised in a specific region, but also best reveal the subjective ethnolinguistic vitality that is characteristic toward making an ethnic group "likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intercultural situations" (Giles et al. 1977, p. 308). The perceived ethnolinguistic vitality demonstrated by minority language speakers, according to Giles (2001), is even more important than the objective ethnolinguistic vitality, for maintaining their language and their culture. The third question queries whether *Sanyu Jiaoyu* is actually on the school agenda. The literature and our initial studies indicate that many schools in ethnic minority regions have only L2, or L2 and L3 (if English can be offered), in their curricula. L1 is either inadequately incorporated or missing. A major task toward answering this question is to identify contextual factors that shape the policies and practices in schools. A comprehensive investigation into socio-political, cultural, historical, economic and linguistic dimensions is required for acquiring valuable data to address this question.

3.4 The National Network

The next task was to establish a network of researchers, which was done through our social and academic connections. Armed with a proposal, researchers in many regions were contacted. These included Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Jilin, Guangxi, Yunnan, Tibet, Sichuan, Qinghai, Gansu and Guangdong. Most researchers contacted responded very positively, although some, such as a Tibetan researcher, had to withdraw from the project, because permission was not given by the relevant authorities to conduct this study. At a later stage, the network expanded to include researchers working in Guizhou and a Ph.D. candidate researching Tibet at a UK university. These regions and provinces represent minority territories reasonably well, as they are either dominated by minority group(s) or have a mixed population living in autonomous prefectures or counties and are often the focus of attention when ethnic minority groups are researched. The selected regions also host the three types of minority communities defined by Zhou (2000, 2001) mainly on the basis of ethnolinguistic vitality. Type 1 consists of those minority communities, such as Uyghurs and Kazaks in Xinjiang, and Mongolians, Tibetans, and Koreans in Jilin, who have enjoyed a relatively stable form of bilingual education since the founding of the PRC in 1949[4]. Their language exists in both the spoken form and traditional written form and is widely used. Type 2 groups including the Dai, Jingpo, Lisu, Lahu, Miao, Naxi, Va and Yi living mainly in the southwest of the country have had only occasional bilingual education since 1949, while their functional writing systems are of only limited usage. The remaining 42 minority groups belong to

[4] 1949 was the year when the PRC was founded. Many social scientists and educators use this year as a demarcation line in their discussions on society and education in China.

Type 3 which comprises those minority groups that have had limited or no access to bilingual education and whose writing systems were barely functional prior to 1949.

Type 1 and Type 2 minority communities are represented to a higher degree in this volume because of their stronger ethnolinguistic vitality than that possessed by the Type 3 communities—many of which are being increasingly assimilated into mainstream society. Some, such as the Manchu, Hui, She and Tujia groups, have either already adopted or are increasingly using Mandarin Chinese in both formal and informal domains (Tsung 2009). The concepts of trilingualism and trilingual education could hardly be applicable to these communities. However, recent developments confirm that huge efforts have been made in some Type 3 communities to revitalise the minority languages in language education for minority groups (Finifrock 2010; Huang 2013).

4 Methodology

The establishment of the national network for large-scale research enabled us to aim for findings that are comprehensive, comparable and generalisable. For this reason, there had to be a certain degree of consensus with regard to the approach and methods to be used for data collection and analysis by regional teams across the country. On the other hand, diversity in terms of the focus of research, data to be collected and methods to be used was not only inevitable but in our view, to be encouraged for the very reason that regions vastly differ in many crucial aspects of their geographical, historical, economic and socio-political contexts, as do the researchers' backgrounds, personal philosophies and ideologies, and available resources. Throughout this project, therefore, a balance had to be struck between consensus and diversity and this could be achieved by establishing general guidelines for the approach and data analysis, while simultaneously encouraging pragmatic measures taken by teams in their specific contexts. This diversity is reflected in the varied topics covered in the individual chapters of this book.

4.1 Single and Multiple Case Studies

As the chapters affirm, investigations conducted in some regions are typically single case studies of specific instances of trilingual education in action. According to Cohen et al. (2007) and Thomas (2009), this instance could be an individual, a particular school, a village, a county or an even larger community. Such a case study helps us understand a complex instance in a temporally, spatially and institutionally bounded system in great depth and enables us to perceive the dynamic interactions between this instance with others located in specific contexts, so as to lucidly illustrate a general phenomenon, i.e., to generate a theory that helps us understand and appreciate other similar cases and situations (Robson 2002). The studies conducted in Guizhou and Tibet are instances of such single case studies with a focus on one particular school.