

Trilingualism and trilingual education symposium report

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The first symposium for the research project, *Trilingualism and trilingual education in minority regions in China: Comparative multiple-case studies in minority autonomous regions*, was held at Hong Kong Institute of Education, on 18-19 December 2009. The event was opened by Professor Andy Kirkpatrick, the Director of RCLEAMS.

The symposium marked the launching of a major project to investigate how communities in general and schools in particular in ethnic minority areas of China are coping with the curriculum demands that call for the development of trilingualism in the minority language, Putonghua and English.

The project is currently jointly funded by RCLEAMS and the ESRC Bilingualism Research Centre at Bangor University in the UK, and future funding is being sought from different sources. The Principal Investigators are Prof Bob Adamson (RCLEAMS) and Dr Feng Anwei (Bangor University).

The symposium brought together scholars from across China: Yunnan, Sichuan, Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Jilin, Gansu, Qinghai, Guangdong and Hong Kong. The purpose was to share participants' analyses of the current state of trilingualism in these areas, and to decide on common approaches to future data collection, analysis and presentation.

The sessions focused on different areas of China and identified the issues and dilemmas relating to the implementation of trilingual education policies. A common theme was the difficulty in finding sufficient teachers of English who could teach through the ethnic minority language. In many areas, primary students had to learn English through Putonghua, adding to the cognitive and linguistic load in mastering an already complex and alien language.

In the next phase, the research teams in each area will carry out further investigations using ethnographic and survey instruments and it is planned that they will meet again later in 2010 to share their new findings. The project is intended to make a significant contribution to the research literature in the area of trilingual language education, and to shape future policies in both mainland China and Hong Kong.