Trilingualism in Education: Models and Challenges

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Abstract This concluding chapter discusses a number of themes emerging from the book, in order to present a consolidated view of trilingualism in education in China. It presents a detailed discussion of the four models of trilingual education identified in earlier chapters—the Accretive, Balanced, Transitional and Depreciative Models, and argues that the Accretive and Balanced Models of trilingual education possess substantial potential to foster additive trilingualism in students, thereby granting numerous social, political, economic and educational advantages to students and Chinese society. In comparison, models such as the Transitional and Depreciative Models, which promote limited trilingualism or essentially aim to achieve solely bilingualism or monolingualism, are weak. However, popularising the strong models of trilingual education requires overcoming considerable challenges, such as establishing a consensus among stakeholders, setting realistic linguistic targets, and flexibly taking local contextual factors into account when implementing the strong models

Keywords Trilingualism · Language policy · China · Chinese · English · Ethnic minorities

1   Introduction

As noted in Chap. 1, the authors of the chapters in this volume formed part of a research network that explored trilingual education, most notably in the ethnic minority regions, and the effectiveness of different models in fostering trilingualism. The project was a large-scale, multilevel study and it addressed a series of issues that include ethnolinguistic vitality, policy making and implementation, as well as

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the perceptions and attitudes of different stakeholders. The research involved documentary analyses, interviews, surveys, and field trips to a representative sample of primary and secondary schools. The selected schools were located in major cities, towns, and more remote rural areas; they had different mixes of ethnic minority and majority Han students; and they were supported by communities with different socioeconomic statuses. The research agenda of this network sought to fill a significant gap in knowledge caused by the scarcity of multilevel, comparative work aimed at mapping different forms of language policies across the country and assessing their impact.

This book has been selective in presenting the research. It does not aim to encapsulate the full complexity of the context—the large and diverse population, the different historical relationships among the groups, the geographical differences and so on—or for that matter, all the findings of the project. Instead, it focuses on the four main models of trilingual education that have emerged as a result of the expectation that students will learn a local language, Chinese and English. This chapter connects a number of threads from the book, in order to present a consolidated view of the phenomenon and a few of the factors that have created, shaped and sustained the four models. In conclusion, it attempts to consider some of the implications of the research.

2   Models of Trilingual Education

The four distinct policy models of trilingual education are explicitly mentioned in Chap. 2, in the context of the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. Other chapters describe similar models. It is not claimed that these are the only models—indeed there are several other forms that will be described later—but it is clear that these four models are found, to a varying extent, in different regions of the PRC. Each model is described below in detail.

2.1   The Accretive Model

The Accretive Model (Fig. 1) is found in areas where the minority language has strong ethnolinguistic vitality, such as the Korean-dominated parts of Yanbian and Changchun in north-east China or the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (IMAR). In these regions, the minority language tends to be well established and there is a powerful sense of cultural heritage and ethnic identity, which may also be supported by economic capital being associated with proficiency in the language—which is the case with Korean because of the potential for trade with both North Korea and South Korea, and with Mongolian because of trading links with Mongolia and the Mongolian-speaking parts of Russia. The Accretive Model can be seen as fostering additive trilingualism, in that all three languages are valued
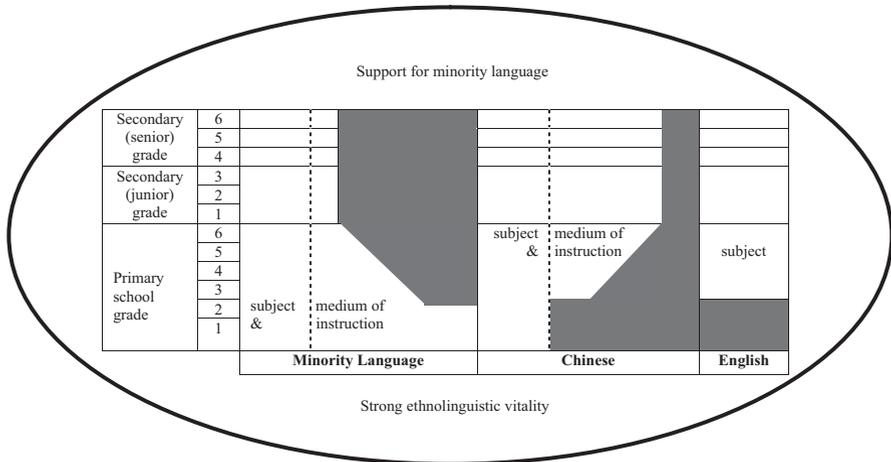
Support for minority language

Secondary (senior) grade	6					
	5					
	4					
Secondary (junior) grade	3					
	2					
	1					
Primary school grade	6			subject &	medium of instruction	subject
	5					
	4					
	3					
	2	subject &	medium of instruction			
	1					
		Minority Language		**Chinese**		**English**

Strong ethnolinguistic vitality

Fig. 1 Typical conceptualisation of the Accretive Model

and are taught at least as school subjects, throughout the primary and secondary curriculum (see Zhang, Li and Wen in Chap. 3), although to differing degrees. In the early years of primary school, the ethnic minority language is taught and also used as the medium of instruction. Chinese is taught as a language subject. Around the third year, the medium of instruction gradually shifts to Chinese, with the ethnic minority language still being taught as a subject. English is also introduced as a subject at this time. The model is accretive in the sense that the three languages are gradually strengthened in stages, the minority language first, then the national language and subsequently, the foreign language, with proficiency in the new language being built upon proficiency in the existing language(s). As a result, students are offered the chance to acquire a high degree of proficiency in the ethnic minority language in social domains of use. They also receive a durable foundation in the national language, Chinese, in both social and academic domains, thereby preparing them for access to further studies and other life opportunities in the PRC. English, which as a foreign language is less frequently used in private and personal life, receives less attention and the goal is purely to provide the students with basic proficiency that can be developed later in secondary and possibly tertiary education. Figure 1 illustrates the Accretive Model.

An example of this model can be found in Jilin Province, in the ethnic Korean primary school visited by project team members. The school principal explained that all the children hailed from families that spoke Korean at home, but that they were also proficient in using Chinese in their daily life. The first class observed was a Korean language lesson for Primary five students. The children were taught a Korean song and given an illustration on how to accompany the song with the aid of a traditional cylindrical drum beaten at both ends. (Due to a shortage of drums, most students used the two sides of their desk.) The teacher and students conversed

in Korean with each other, throughout the class. The second lesson was Chinese and consisted of a short story with a moral message that the students discussed. The lesson was conducted in Chinese, although the teacher did make occasional references to Korean equivalents when presenting new vocabulary. The third lesson was a Mathematics class, again conducted in Chinese. The fourth and final lesson of the morning was an English class, with simple English being used for instructions and questions; however, both Chinese and Korean were employed occasionally to clarify language points. The children appeared to adequately cope with the linguistic demands of the four lessons. All four teachers (indeed, all staff members) were bilingual in Korean and Chinese, and the English teacher possessed good proficiency in her third language. Pictures and decorations around the school and playground emphasised Korean culture. Notices were either bilingual or trilingual.

A similar example from Inner Mongolia is described by Dong et al. in Chap. 2. In both cases, the schools displayed a strong commitment to all three languages, with students being consistently exposed to appropriate opportunities to maintain a high standard in their ethnic language and to acquire an advanced level of competence in Chinese and a basic level in English. Both schools relied greatly on the availability of bilingual and trilingual teachers. Interestingly, the Jilin school example originated from a major city that was relatively affluent, while the Inner Mongolian school was located in a rural and relatively poor area.

2.2   The Balanced Model

Where the first model prioritises the minority language, at least in the early years of primary education, the second model (Fig. 2) offers a more balanced approach. This model is observed in areas where the demographics indicate a relatively even mix of the ethnic minority people and the majority Han group, as is typically evident in towns and cities (other than the provincial capital and other metropolitan areas) in Inner Mongolia, Sichuan, Qinghai, Guizhou, Yunnan and similar contexts in which there is a genuine desire for bilingualism (in particular) and trilingualism to be promoted. In such places, schools must cater to students from minority and majority backgrounds and there is sufficient community support for the minority language for it to be offered in schools. People's attitudes in these places reflect a desire for social harmony through mutual respect for different languages and cultures.

The Balanced Model seldom exists in secondary schools, as the student population often become more diverse in ethnicity at that level and it is difficult to maintain a fine balance. The model tends to be encountered in schools that have a roughly equal proportion of students and teachers from one particular ethnic group and from the majority Han group. This model focuses on the development of simultaneous bilingualism to a certain extent, because both the minority language and Chinese are taught as subjects and used as the medium of instruction from the beginning of primary school. Take for example the school in a town in Inner Mongolia visited by the research team and described in Chap. 2, where the ratio of Han teachers to Mongolian teachers was 33:67, and of Han students to Mongolian students was 60:40.
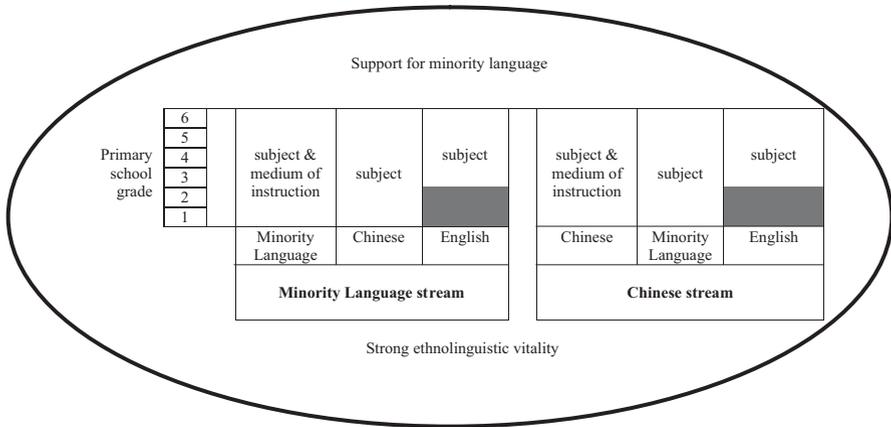
Fig. 2 Typical conceptualisation of the Balanced Model

The school had two streams, one that used Mongolian as the medium of instruction and the other had adopted Chinese. The school environment was bilingual, with signage and decorations in the minority language and Chinese or, more commonly, in both the languages. In the English lessons (which began in Primary 3 in accordance with state regulations) observed by the team, the teachers used either Mongolian or Chinese to explain vocabulary or points of grammar, depending on the preferred language of the students and the ethnicity of the teacher.

As with the Accretive Model, the aim of the Balanced Model is to achieve additive trilingualism, with different levels of competence. The ethnic language is supported, and the educational needs of the students to learn school subjects through a familiar language are respected through the use of the streaming system. The cross-referencing between languages facilitated by the bilingual environment permits the development of strong competence in both Chinese and the minority language and establishes a good basis for learning the third language, English. Unlike the Accretive Model, the Balanced Model allows for the minority language to be used as the medium of instruction throughout primary school, which could lead to some initial academic problems for the students when they enter secondary school, considering that Chinese is most likely to be used in secondary schools as the medium of instruction.

2.3   The Transitional Model

The Transitional Model (Fig. 3) is so-called because it prioritises Chinese ahead of the minority language. There are two variations of this model. The first is identified in areas such as towns and cities that have a significant Han presence and where one or more minority languages are spoken. The ethnolinguistic vitality of the minority languages tends to be moderate or less strong than that of Korean and Mongolian.
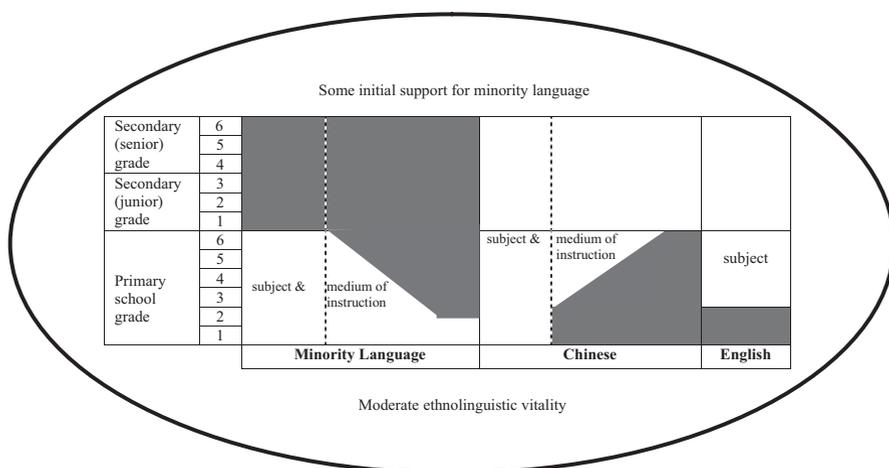
Fig. 3 Typical conceptualisation of the Transitional Model (Variant 1)

In some Type−1 communities (Zhou 2001; see also Chap. 1) in regions such as Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang, there is an interest to preserve the ethnic minority language and to propagate it among the Han population, while, Type−2 and Type−3 communities evince a desire to revitalise a weak minority language. Hence, in such areas the minority language is taught merely as a subject in the curriculum because it possesses a degree of vitality. However, the efforts made towards teaching the minority language are limited to primary education. Ultimately, Chinese becomes the dominant language in school and the minority language eventually disappears, prior to secondary education.

   As Fig. 3 illustrates, this variant of the Transitional Model is, on the surface, similar to the Chinese stream in the Balanced Model in that Chinese is used as the medium of instruction and the major minority language is taught as a subject to all students in the school, irrespective of their ethnicity or mother tongue. The similarity arises from the fact that both this variant and the Chinese stream in the Balanced Model serve to fulfil the needs and requirements of a student body with a notable Han presence. The difference lies in their support for the minority language. While the cultural value of the ethnic minority language tends to be acknowledged, its vitality in the community is often insufficient for the ethnic minority language to be adopted as the predominant language in the school. The minority language is seldom discernible in daily discourse or in the school environment and the parents and teachers do not appear to attach much importance towards students' proficiency in learning the language—this attitude may arise out of an ignorance of the potential cultural value of learning the ethnic minority language. Instead, Chinese and to a lesser extent, English are viewed as key languages for the children's futures.

   The second form of the Transitional Model (Fig. 4) resembles the Accretive Model in terms of curricular arrangement, but it also differs in that the degree of ethnolinguistic vitality supporting this model tends to be weak. This variant is typically
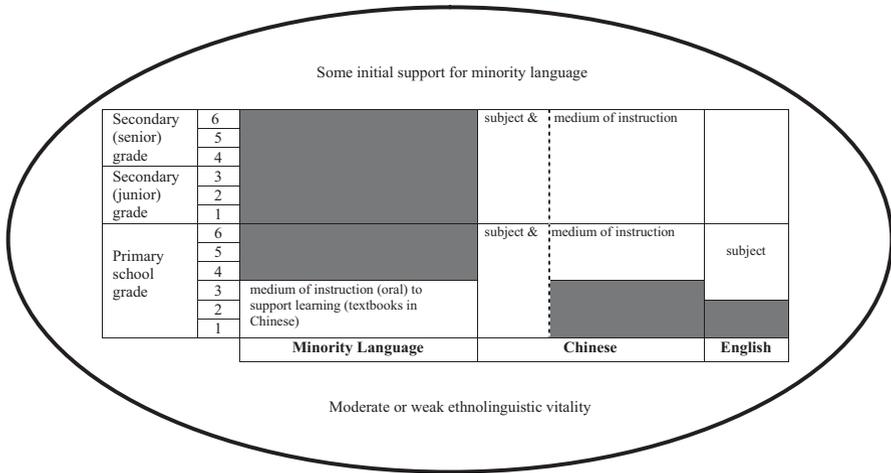
Some initial support for minority language

		Minority Language	Chinese	English
Secondary (senior) grade	6 5 4		subject & medium of instruction	
Secondary (junior) grade	3 2 1			
Primary school grade	6 5 4		subject & medium of instruction	subject
	3 2 1	medium of instruction (oral) to support learning (textbooks in Chinese)		

Moderate or weak ethnolinguistic vitality

Fig. 4 Typical conceptualisation of the Transitional Model (Variant 2)

noticed in schools in remote, rural settings where one minority group dominates. These communities may or may not have their own written scripts, although they generally maintain a strong oral tradition. According to this variant, the minority language is used as the medium of instruction for the first two to three years with Chinese taught as a subject. In many cases, the textbooks of school subjects are in Chinese. After two or three years, Chinese replaces the minority language as the medium of instruction from Primary 3 or 4, with all subjects being taught in Chinese. As with the first variant, English, if offered, is taught as a subject, with Chinese being used when necessary in those lessons to aid students' comprehension of language points. A common feature of these two variants is that the curricular arrangement is unlikely to foster additive trilingualism. Instead, the result is more likely to be a form of replacive or subtractive trilingualism, in that attention to the minority language is weak and students are being prepared to accept Chinese as their first language.

2.4 The Depreciative Model

The fourth model (Fig. 5) is characterised as depreciative on the basis that the potential for developing trilingualism is denied to the students in favour of bilingualism in Chinese and English. It is an explicit form of subtractive trilingualism.

This linguistic depreciation may occur even in schools that claim to offer trilingual education in their curricula. In reality, such schools are only trilingual for the simple reason that particular students and staff have the capacity to be trilingual because of their ethnic backgrounds. But no concrete provisions are put in place by the school leadership in terms of employing the minority language as the medium
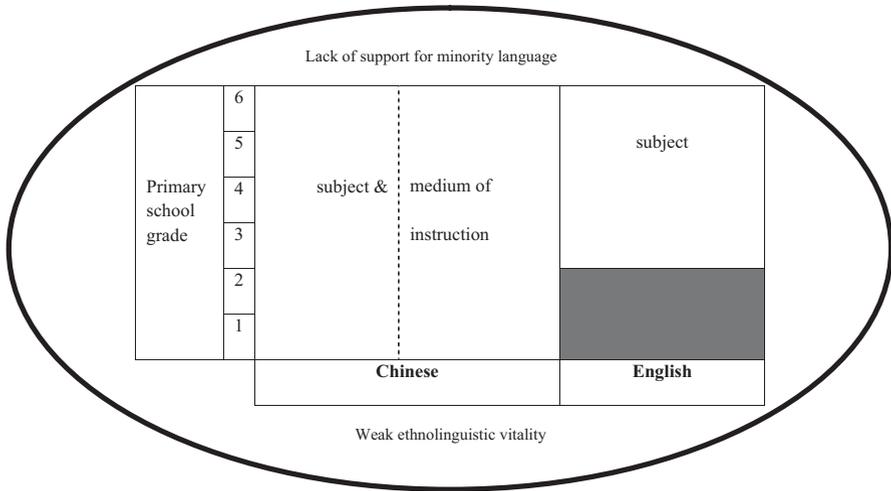
Fig. 5 Typical conceptualisation of the Depreciative Model

of instruction, or offering it as a subject or even encouraging its use as a language of daily discourse in the school. The ethnolinguistic vitality of the minority language in the local community is usually weak—occasionally because there are several different minority languages spoken and occasionally because the dominant minority language lacks a written form. The outcome is almost inevitably the loss of the minority language. This model is identified in numerous areas of Guangxi, Yunnan, towns or cities in Inner Mongolia, Sichuan, Gansu and Guizhou.

A case in point of the Depreciative Model is the school in a hilly and remote area of Yunnan visited by members of the research project. The students were mainly, although not exclusively, from the Yi minority group, as were several members of staff. As the school had received investment funds from the education authorities, several well-qualified teachers had been recruited from Kunming, the provincial capital, and most of these teachers belonged to the Han majority group. The School Principal explained that recruiting good Yi teachers was problematic, as suitable candidates often preferred to move to urban areas, whereas some young Han teachers were keen to experience rural life for a few years or to seek better promotion possibilities away from the highly competitive big cities. Discussions with students' parents revealed that there was a laissez-faire attitude towards the Yi language in their local community, and the students conclusively preferred that Chinese and English proficiency should be developed in order, as one father mentioned, that their children could enjoy a better standard of living than they themselves had experienced, with their little or limited Chinese and English language skills. Although the School Principal professed commitment to the Yi language and trilingualism, notices around the school exhorted students to ''Please speak Putonghua''. Almost inevitably, the Depreciative Model contributes to the weakening or even loss of the minority language and erodes the children's sense of ethnic identity.

The education model for speakers of Cantonese and similar varieties of Chinese is also a Depreciative Model, although schools would not claim to offer trilingual education. The status of these varieties is insufficient to merit official attention in the state school system.

2.5   Other Models

Around the country, the practice of trilingual education investigated by the project team members can be seen as corresponding to or nearly corresponding to the four models outlined above. However, some special arrangements have been made, often for ethnic groups from contexts that are deemed politically sensitive (Adamson and Feng 2009) and the relationship with the Han has been antagonistic at times, occasionally erupting into violence. The Tibetans and Uyghurs are representative of this category. Traditionally, these students would follow what are customarily termed as *min kao min* and *min kao han* routes in education. The former refers to a system in which minority students, particularly those in remote minority-dominated areas, take most, if not all, school subjects in their home language with Chinese only as a school subject, if it at all Chinese was offered. A foreign language is not usually offered, either due to a lack of resources or due to bilingual policies which ignore foreign languages (Sunuodula and Feng 2011; Tsung 2009). This model is frequently perceived as weak, for students will neither appropriately acquire Chinese (L2) nor a foreign language (L3). One of the consequences of adopting this model would be that, as tertiary courses are taught in Chinese, students who do manage to enter university would have to learn Chinese for at least one year before they were allowed to take the normal courses (Yang 2005). Alternatively, some minority pupils follow the *min kao han* route, by simply attending schools for Han pupils and following the national system. This would be characterised as a typical Depreciative Model.

A recent measure is the provision of *neidiban* (inland classes or Outside-Xinjiang Uyghur Class (see Chap. 4 by Sunuodulla and Cao)), whereby Tibetan and Uyghur students leave their home to attend schools situated in major cities nearer to the heartland of the PRC. The curriculum of these schools generally provides a Transitional or Depreciative Model of trilingual education, although the students come from minority groups that traditionally have strong ethnolinguistic vitality. The influence of that vitality is reduced when the students are relocated.

Yet another set of approaches is the *min han hexiao* (minority and Han merged schools) in Xinjiang described in Chap. 4. Under the Three Options Policy, possible models include one that involves teaching an increasing number of core academic subjects in Chinese, and cultural subjects plus a diminishing number of academic subjects in the minority language (such as Uyghur); a second model that teaches even fewer subjects using the minority language as the medium of instruction; and finally, a third model, in which the minority language is ignored completely as a subject and not used in any way whatsoever as the medium of instruction. The first variant is similar to the Accretive Model, with the difference being that policy

documents have a tendency to be tolerant rather than supportive of the minority language, meaning that the impact of this variant is more akin to that of a Transitional Model. The second variant inclines more emphatically towards the Transitional Model. The third variant is clearly a Depreciative Model.

Yet another model practised in particular Type−2 or Type−3 communities is what is ordinarily referred to as *minzuyu tuji kaoshi ban*—short courses that are set up for students who sit for examinations in minority languages. Thus, this model is examination-oriented. These classes would, for instance, train students for entrance examinations to tertiary education in universities that have special arrangements for minority students. By taking an examination in their home language, minority students add marks to the aggregate marks mandatory for entrance to tertiary education. Minority students achieving the requisite standard in the minority language would be allowed to enter universities, with lower scores in English than their Han counterparts, in recognition of the linguistic challenges that constantly confront them.

3   Factors Underpinning the Models of Trilingual Education

In this section, we identify contextual factors that play a role in shaping trilingual education policy and the different forms of implementation that have been discussed above. The factors explored below are not discrete and by no means comprehensive, but we identify them as having a noticeable influence on policy making and implementation.

3.1   Policy Making Factors

The fact that there are such wide variations in the models of trilingual education can partly be attributed to the nature of relevant policies and policy making in the PRC. The policies regarding minority language education, Chinese and English (or other foreign languages) were actually separate strands that came into force at different periods in time. There was no single coherent policy that espoused trilingual education. The promotion of minority languages is a singular feature of the recent decades of economic modernisation, when precise measures were implemented to develop western regions of China, which were relatively backward. The forced assimilationist policies that had prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s were replaced by increasing (albeit uneven) efforts to preserve and promote ethnic minority groups and their languages (Lam 2005; Adamson and Feng 2009). The propagation of standard forms of written (with simplified characters) and spoken Chinese dates back to the immediate aftermath of the founding of the PRC as an integral part of nation-building (Adamson 2004) and, of the three language policies under discussion, is the only

policy that has remained unwaveringly consistent across time. The emphasis on foreign language in education policy has veered from Russian in the 1950s, to English in the early 1960s, to the repudiation of nearly all foreign language teaching during the Cultural Revolution, to the massive investment in English since the turn of the millennium (Adamson 2004). The lack of a unified response to the confluence of the three strands may be explained by the decentralised nature of policy making that has allowed provincial and regional governments and, to some extent, lower levels of government, increasing autonomy over educational affairs since 1985 (Lewin et al. 1994). This decentralisation implies that local formulations of trilingual policies take into account the particular features of the contexts in which they are to be implemented. Several of these features are discussed below.

3.2   Ethnolinguistic Factors

In the four models illustrated earlier in this chapter, an important variable is ethnolinguistic vitality. Models of trilingual education that promote additive trilingualism tend to be found in contexts where the ethnolinguistic vitality of the minority language is strong. This suggests that the widespread community use of a vibrant minority language (usually existing in a written as well as a spoken form) and positive attitudes towards that language among members of the community can provide the impetus and support necessary for Accretive or Balanced Models of trilingual education in the local schools. However, strong ethnolinguistic vitality does not guarantee the presence of these models, as evidenced by some of the special arrangements for minority students such as the inland classes and the Three Options in Xinjiang.

3.3   Political Factors

Trilingual education policies also reflect the political attitudes of the Han majority towards the ethnic minorities in a particular region (Adamson and Feng 2009). Some ethnic groups have a long history of integration or of relatively harmonious co-existence with the Han. The Zhuang in Guangxi Province, for instance, do not display a heightened sense of differentiation, while several of the minority groups in Yunnan Province are viewed as living peacefully and cooperatively with the majority group. In such cases, the Han-dominated authorities have proved themselves to be amenable in supporting the preservation and revitalisation of the ethnic languages where there is local demand. The rationale for this support is that respect for the cultural heritage and identity of minorities can help to maintain social cohesion and provide economic benefits, such as advantages arising for the region from tourism.

On the other hand, some minority groups, as noted above, have been associated with independence movements that threaten the integrity of the state. Sporadic outbreaks of unrest have been reported involving Tibetans and Uyghurs, among

others. Their antagonism dates back to the initial integration of Tibet and Xinjiang into China, which was viewed by some minorities as being an outcome of military aggression by the Chinese empire. While portraying the relationship between the Han and these groups as one of stark confrontation would fail to reflect the more nuanced complexities of the reality, it is apparent that different approaches, generally more coercive and depreciative in nature, have been adopted in the language policies for schools in those regions (Tsung and Cruickshank 2009). The motivation for more vigorous promotion of Chinese is ambivalent—it could be viewed as a benevolent act of empowering a marginalised section of the population to enjoy greater access to the social, economic and political life of mainstream society, or as an act of suppression to fight against any separatist tendencies that might be aroused by ethnic pride (Adamson and Feng 2009).

3.4 Economic Factors

The instances of Additive and Balanced Models of trilingual education described in this volume usually benefit from economic capital in different forms. One form is economic investment that allows schools to recruit well qualified teachers proficient in the respective languages, including the ability to use the ethnic minority language as the medium of instruction. (The Transitional and Depreciative Models are more likely to occur when such teachers are unavailable because potential recruits have left the local community for employment in the cities.) Economic investment requires decision making. Resources for education have to be prioritised and investment in specific minority languages could be regarded as a worthwhile venture. Alternatively, if there is a mix of various ethnic minority groups, imparting education in all their languages could be considered economically inefficient.

    Another form of economic capital accrues from the prestige of languages such as Korean and Mongolian in view of the opportunities they afford for cross-border trading and the concomitant career prospects. However, appealing to this form of economic capital as the basis for promoting trilingual education is often a weak argument: it is vulnerable to market forces and political changes and furthermore, it runs a risk of excluding and endangering many minority languages, including some with a long history and strong ethnolinguistic vitality. Trade can also work against the minority language. The beautiful natural scenery that forms the backdrop to the habitats of many ethnic minority communities has attracted investors and visitors. Tourism may have greatly expedited the pace of opening up many remote regions to opportunities to display their culture; but tourism in turn builds enduring national and international connections, which only serve to reinforce the perception among ethnic minority groups that proficiency in Chinese and English is essential, to the detriment of their own language.

3.5   Geographical and Demographical Factors

Ethnic minorities live, study and work in diverse settings, including major industrial cities, medium-sized towns, mountainous regions, grasslands, and deserts. They can form homogenous ethnic groups or become an integral part of heterogeneous groups in which they constitute a majority, equal or minority proportion. The homogeneity often occurs in remote areas; heterogeneity occurs when populations become mixed, such as in towns and cities where trade draws different groups together. The economic modernisation drive in the PRC that was launched by the paramount leader Deng Xiaoping in 1978, initially concentrated on industrialisation, which consecutively produced rapid urbanisation. In many cases, this process diluted the ethnolinguistic vitality of the minority language in towns and cities. The Accretive and Balanced Models of trilingual education are more or less associated with homogenous, and therefore, more remote areas where ethnolinguistic vitality is strong; the Transitional and Depreciative Models are typically perceived in more urban areas that have a heterogeneous populace. These are generalities and there are exceptions to these trends, but the evidence of the chapters in this book—the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region is a prime example—suggests that they are valid to a large extent.

3.6   Educational Factors

The seclusion of many ethnic minority groups can lead to a number of disadvantages for students: educational supervision and provision can be limited, standards of literacy can be low, and the majority of teachers can be relatively poorly trained to meet the demands of trilingual education. On the other hand, students who develop additive competence in three languages through an Accretive Model can enjoy more cognitive and affective benefits than those who learn one or two languages, as indicated by the experimental study in the Dong-dominated area in Guizhou (see Chap. 9) as well as numerous other studies conducted in several parts of the world (for example, Cenoz and Jessner 2000; Hoffmann and Ytsma 2004). This argument for a coherent model of trilingual education has yet to be accepted throughout the PRC and educational factors are often outweighed by political and economic factors. Nonetheless, it provides added support for the development of strong models of trilingual education.

4   Challenges for Trilingual Education

In this book, we contend that the Accretive and Balanced Models of trilingual education possess substantial potential to foster additive trilingualism in students, thereby granting numerous social, political, economic and educational advantages

to students and modern Chinese society. By comparison, models such as the Transitional and Depreciative Models, which promote limited trilingualism or essentially aim to achieve solely bilingualism or monolingualism, are weak. There are, however, considerable challenges to overcome in establishing strong models of trilingual education. Some of the key factors listed in the previous section can be seen as facilitating or hindering the implementation of strong models. The challenges facing policy makers and implementers lie in strengthening the facilitating factors and working around the barriers.

The first challenge is securing a determined commitment from all key stakeholders towards additive trilingualism, which has the potential to enhance social harmony by boosting the self-identity of ethnic minority groups and empowering them with the linguistic tools to access opportunities in mainstream society and in the global community. This is in fact the stated goal of state policies at the national level, even though it is expressed somewhat incoherently across three different policy streams. Failure to maintain an expected standard and to fulfil the goals occurs at the regional and local levels as numerous contextual factors come into play, including the fear that cultivating linguistic and cultural diversity could weaken the integrity of the nation. Achieving consensus would necessitate engagement, debate, give-and-take, persuasion and investment in teacher professional development to engender creative and context-specific solutions that incorporate positive attitudes and a supportive environment for Accretive or Balanced Models.

Further empowerment arises from the cognitive and affective advantages that trilinguals command over bilinguals and monolinguals. All things considered, additive trilingualism possesses the potential to lift ethnic minorities from a marginalised and disadvantaged status in society to a position of strength. The capital amassed from the sum of three languages can be greater than that from the individual parts. A triathlete may not beat a champion swimmer, cyclist or distance runner in a single leg of a triathlon, but he does have a greater probability of winning the entire competition (Feng 2010). A related educational challenge is setting appropriate linguistic outcomes (and appropriate assessment mechanisms) given the available economic and human resources, prevailing ethnolinguistic vitality and demographical profiles in the areas in which additive trilingualism is to be cultivated. Clearly, high levels of proficiency across a wide range of social, academic and professional domains in all three languages are not a realistic target. Differentiated outcomes would be a better solution, with a curriculum design that aims to produce strong competence in the mother tongue (the minority language for ethnic students, Chinese for Han); a sound, functional competence in the second language (Chinese for ethnic students, the minority language for Han) and competence in English that matches the national standards set for all students throughout the PRC. The allocation of the three languages in the curriculum would also vary across the different ethnic minority regions, to take into account their specific contexts and language needs. Remedial action would be necessitated in remote areas, for instance, if the students' displayed weak Chinese and English skills, or in urban areas with poor proficiency in the ethnic minority language. Minority languages with no written script would need support, as has been provided in the past in numerous cases, to

enhance their sustainability. This diversity would require flexibility in formal assessments, although caution should be exercised to ensure that the downsides of affirmative action—especially the stigma attached to those who benefit from such action (see Adamson and Xia 2011)—are mitigated.

While we advocate the propagation of strong models of trilingual education, the significant challenges outlined in this section—in addition to others that have not been discussed—entail a pragmatic, incremental approach that sets achievable targets. Education authorities, schools and local communities should move towards establishing strong models at a pace that takes into account their capacity to change, with reforms being pitched within what Vygotsky (1978) terms the "zone of proximal development" of stakeholders.

5   Conclusion

The research reported in this book suggests that China is pioneering innovative approaches to trilingual education. Through the work of officials, educators, community leaders and other stakeholders, the PRC now has a platform for effective trilingual education in primary schools, with the potential for social, political, economic and educational benefits that could empower millions of citizens. However, there is still much to be done across the regions to establish ideal settings that support the development of additive trilingualism on a large scale, as the research also indicates that trilingual education in the PRC varies in its models and effectiveness. Where the conditions are supportive, two strong models have emerged—termed in this book as the Accretive and the Balanced Models—that have the potential to develop trilingual proficiency in students. Unfortunately, these models are not, at present, generally discernible across the ethnic minority regions. Instead, weaker models, the Transitional and Depreciative Models, prevail as regional and local forces counteract the intentions of national policies, which are haphazard in formulation and problematic to implement. In many cases, the gap between policy aspirations and grassroots realities is immense, thereby endangering some minority languages.

Considering all aspects, supporters of additive trilingualism have reason to be cautiously optimistic about developments in China. Additive trilingualism is a concept whose potential has been seized with alacrity in some regions, such as the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region and the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. The challenge lies in disseminating strong models of trilingual education around the country and throughout the education system as a whole, embracing secondary and tertiary education, where arrangements are currently sporadic and unsystematic. If China is successful in this task, it will make a powerful contribution to the theory of the study of trilingualism and to the practice of trilingual education in supporting national development.

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