

Invitation to an ONLINE lecture at University of Graz

The Chinese "multi-language policy" and the situation of the Zhuang language in Guangxi (China).

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This research examines the impact of China's 'multi-language policy' on the Zhuang ethnic group in Guangxi following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Initially, the term 'Zhuang' was introduced in 1950 as an official designation for Tai-speaking peoples in the southwestern region of China, near the Sino-Vietnamese border, making the Zhuang the largest among China's 55 ethnic minority groups. This recognition led to the creation of distinct identities and control over access to state programs and political representation for minorities. Consequently, Guangxi was formally designated as the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (GZAR) in 1958.

Initially, language equality symbolized China's ethnic policy, resulting in research efforts to support ethnic minority languages. In 1955, a new Zhuang writing system (Zhuangwen) based on the Latin alphabet was created and endorsed by the central government. Zhuangwen was utilized in various sectors, including education, administration, and media.

However, during the Cultural Revolution, all minority language schools and publications were shut down. These efforts resumed in the post-Mao era, aligning with the CCP's promotion of ethnic diversity and multicultural unity. China's 1982 Constitution and the 1984 Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy guaranteed the right to self-government in minority regions and the freedom for minorities to use and develop their languages.

This study employs an anthropological methodology, utilizing informal interviews, fieldwork observations, and interactions with Zhuang cadres, scholars, and local participants in the Guangxi region. Chinese linguists have grouped Zhuang languages into two main categories: Northern Zhuang, which has seven sub-dialects, and Southern Zhuang, which has five sub-dialects. These languages have unique features in different areas. Because of these differences, the use of a standardized Zhuang script based on the Northern Zhuang dialect spoken in Wuming County is not very common.

Additionally, learning Zhuang doesn't provide significant socio-economic benefits. The research reveals that while government offices and organizations are legally mandated to use Zhuang-Chinese bilingual signage and materials, the Romanized Zhuang script is not widely used by the Zhuang people. Instead, ordinary people and those involved in religious practices prefer the traditional Zhuang script, which uses Chinese characters to record cultural aspects like folksong lyrics, traditional opera, history, and religious texts.



Dr. Somrak is an assistant professor at the Research Institute for Languages and Cultures of Asia, Mahidol University, Thailand. Her research interests encompass cultural anthropology, cultural heritage, and the sociolinguistic aspects of transnational ethnic movements in Thailand and Asia. She holds a Ph.D. from the National University of Singapore, where her doctoral dissertation focused on the cultural politics of promoting Zhuang minority language and traditional cultures in China.

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