



ကွေးဘာတန်သျှင်ကောန်ဂကူမန် (ညီသာ)

Education Reform and National Reconciliation in Burma

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Presented at 2014 Western Conference Association For Asian Studies

October 03, 2014 - October 04, 2014

Arizona State University

Tempe, Arizona



Introduction

- Burmese education policy does not reflect its diverse population.
- Burmese education system has been very centralized.
- The government has been using it to indoctrinate Burmanization and political ideology into public.
- Medium language is dominated by Burmese language and school curriculum is dominated by ethnic Burman culture and history.
- Until recently, ethnic languages had been banned to teach in government schools and have still been prevented to use as medium of instructions.
- Over sixty years of civil war, the quality of Burma education has been degraded.
- The state budget for education has been only 4% of the national budget while the military budget is about 21% of the national budget in 2013.

Burma's ethnic background

- Population- 55 million (CIA factbook)
- Major ethnic groups: Mon, Karen, Chin, Karreni, Kachin, Shan, Arakanese, and Burman
- Smaller groups: Wa, PaO, Palaung, Padaung, Naga, and Kokang
- 135 languages or dialects (E.g. Chin has 53 dialects and Kachin has 28 dialects).
- Ethnic composition: Burman (69%), Shan (8.5%), Karen (6.2%), Arakanese (4.5 %), Mon (2.4%), Chin (2.2%), Kachin (1.4 %), Karenni (0.04 %), and others including Chinese and Indians (5.4%) (1983 Census)
- Burmese government collected national census in April this year, but the result has not yet been released.

Current status of ethnic languages

- Teaching of ethnic languages was granted during U Nu's administration in 1950s and it was banned in 1962 when General Ne Win took over the power.
- After President Thein Sein took office in 2010, the government started reforming education system.
- Government granted the teaching of ethnic languages in government schools in some ethnic areas but outside normal schools hours.
- Ethnic leaders were not satisfied with the results and demanded that the teaching should be within normal school hours.

Fighting for identity survival

- “If we lose the language so does identity”, Mon leaders often said.
- Therefore, maintaining ethnic languages is very important for the survival of ethnic identities.
- Banning of ethnic languages became a great threat to ethnic identity and it became part of armed struggle of ethnic armed groups.
- In order to maintain identities of ethnic groups,
 - Ethnic languages have been taught during Summer.
 - Ex. Mon Summer schools under Buddhist monks’ leadership
 - Ethnic armed groups established ethnic national schools under their control areas.
 - Ex. Mon National Schools and Karen National Schools
 - Teaching of ethnic languages in government schools became part of cease-fire agreement between ethnic armed groups and the government.
 - Ex. Cease-fire agreement between NMSP and Burmese government.

Education laws

- Burma 2008's constitution
 - Section 22 (a), “The Union shall assist to develop language, literature, fine arts and culture of the National races”.
 - But, it does not clearly state that ethnic languages are legally allowed to teach in government schools.
 - Section 450 of General Provisions of the Constitution: Burmese language is the only official language

Education law continue...

- Education Bill



Students protested against education bill (photo: Irrawaddy)

- The bill was approved by Parliaments on July 31, 2014. The draft gives power to divisional and state governments to teach ethnic languages in government schools at primary level.
- The bill has been criticized by scholars and activists for excluding mother tongue-based education and for lack of academic freedom

Recently, Mon state's Parliament passed a law to allow the teaching of ethnic languages in government schools in Mon State during normal school hours.

- But it is still lack of funding to support for teachers' salaries, teacher training and curriculum development

Curricula Conflicts

- Government historical texts embrace Burman kings, queens or leaders who fought against non-Burman ethnic kingdoms.
- Ethnic schools' curricula embrace their respective kings, queens or leaders who fought against ethnic Burman/Burmese governments.
- Government textbooks present ethnic armed groups as terrorists and destructive elements
- Ethnic text books present the government as oppressor who oppressed their people.
- Political sensitive issue such as Pinglong Agreement is rarely mentioned in government text books.
- Some scholars such as Metro Rosie criticized government school curriculum as “fraught with political imperatives” and “for exacerbating ethnic tensions.”

The importance of mother tongue language

- Many of ethnic children have not spoken a single word of Burmese by the time of starting their school days.
- Since school curricula are conducted in Burmese language, most of ethnic children have found difficulties to understand schools materials.
- According to UNESCO, children learnt best with their mother tongue because children could participate in learning process in early age
- Many researches have suggested that mother tongue education:
 - Improves reading and learning in early age
 - Improves educational achievements
 - Improves access to education
 - Facilitates learning a second or foreign language.
 - Maintains identity and culture

Existing Mother Tongue Education in Burma

တင်ရန်တုံ့ ဣနုပရေင်ပညာ ကောန်ဂကူမန်

ဣပိကောန်ဂကူမန် သိုက်ကောန်ဂကူ၊ သွေအိသို အရေဝိတာသာမိ၊ လိက်ပတ် သိုက်ကီ အနိက်ကော့ကော့ ညှိင်တုံ့ဇွေမော်ဖိုင် လိုက်ကာလကီ၊ ကကူမ္မဲကီမ္မဲ စိုတ်မိတ် မစန်စန် ညှိသွဟ်ညးညးအိကို ခုတ်ပယ်ကီတုံ့ စိုတ်မိတ်မိက်ကုံပိုင်တော့ မိင်စိင်အာမ္မဲမ္မဲပာန် ပွဲမညကီကောဝ်ဆာန်ကီနိ ကရေဝ်ကောန်ဂကူမန်အရေဝိတုံ့



Mon National Schools

- Mon National Education Committee (MNEC)
 - Manage 142 schools, 13,155 students, 784 teachers
 - At primary level, all subjects are taught in Mon except Burmese and at secondary level, Mon literature and history are taught in Mon and other subjects are taught in Burmese
 - Karen National Education Department
 - Manage over 2000 schools in KNU administrative areas.
- Since these schools are lack of funding and located in conflict areas, they have been struggling in providing better quality education.

Studies on mother tongue education

- Nyein (Shalom) foundation, a Burma based non-governmental organization
 - Conducted experimental study from April to June of 2011 on 699 students at primary level.
 - Evaluated the language skills of non-Burman students in 21 villages in six states.
 - The study was conducted by giving out students to both Burman and non-Burman to read a paragraph of Myanmar/Burmese text.
 - Compared to Burman students, ethnic minorities were found more difficult in reading and understanding Burmese/ Myanmar text.
- My field research also found that ethnic Mon students were found more difficult in understanding Burmese/Myanmar text.

Studies on mother tongue education continue...

- Saikia & Mohanty's (2004) study
 - Conducted a well controlled study of indigenous/tribal Bodo children in Assam, India.
 - The objective of the study was to test performance of children under mother tongue education system.
 - The study compared three groups of students in Grade 4 from two different ethnic groups.
 - Each group had sample size of 45 students.
 - The result was measured in languages and mathematics competencies.
 - The study also controlled other factors such as the students socio-economic status, the quality of schooling and the ecological conditions of their villages.
 - The results shows that,
 - Bodo students who were taught in the medium of Bodo performed significantly better in all tests.
 - Assamese students who were taught through medium of Assamese performed better in two tests.
 - Bodo students who were taught through the medium of Assamese performed the worst.
 - Mother tongue education system showed positive performance in schools for the Bodo children.

Studies on mother tongue education continue...

- Skutnabb-Kangas (1987) study
 - Conducted a study among Finish minority working class students in Stocholm in Sweden
 - The objective of the study was to evaluate students performance in second language.
 - The study compared Finish minority students and Swedish students in reading competencies.
 - The study was measured by offering a difficult reading test in Swedish.
 - The Finish students were taught in Finish as medium of instruction and Swedish as second language and Swedish students were taught in Swedish.
 - **The result showed that Finish students performed better in reading than Swedish students.**
 - This study confirmed that students who are in the mother tongue education system performed better in second language or foreign language test.

Studies on mother tongue education continue...

- The Ramirez et al. (1991) study
 - Studied a group of 2,352 Spanish-speaking students in the United States.
 - The study compared three groups of Spanish speaking students in their educational achievements.
 - The study was divided into three groups.
 - The first group was taught through the medium of English only.
 - The second group had one or two years of Spanish-medium education and was then transferred to English-medium class.
 - The third group had 4-6 years of Spanish-medium education before being transferred to English-medium class.
 - The students who had least exposure to English-medium education and had most Spanish-medium education showed the best results.
 - This study explained that students who had longer mother tongue education did better in educational achievements.

Studies on mother tongue education continue...

- Thomas, Wayne P. and Virginia P. Collier (2002) study
 - Conducted the largest longitudinal study on the education of minority students.
 - The study involved a total of more than 210,000 students in both urban and rural areas in the United States of America.
 - The study tested across different types of educational models.
 - Of these tested models, mother tongue education system model was found to be the best model in providing education to bilingual students.
 - The study also found that the length of mother tongue education students had is a strong predictor to students' achievement, competence and learning second language such as English.

Studies on mother tongue education continue...

- In Brief

- The length of having mother tongue education is the most important factor predicting educational success of bilingual students in schools.
- Therefore, the mother tongue education is very important for indigenous students or bilingual students to be competence and successful in schools.
- With mother tongue education, students are able to think, learn, to communicate, understand, and discuss school materials in early age.

Mother tongue education around the world

- There are many countries around the world that are using mother tongue as the medium of instruction in public schools for ethnic minorities.
 - Ex. China, India, Canada, and Belgium
- China and India are Burma's neighbors. The two countries have different political systems but have similar diverse ethnic groups and education policy which allow the citizens to be educated in mother tongue education system.
- Both countries have diverse ethnic groups like Burma.
- Constitutions and education laws in both countries guarantee the rights of using ethnic languages as medium of instructions.

Language policy in China and India

- China recognize 55 ethnic groups in addition to the Han.
- The Han is the largest ethnic group in China. It constitutes 91.9 percent of the total population.
- Since People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded in 1949, education for ethnic minorities has been the top priority on China's education policy agenda.
- The Chinese government has been supporting mother tongue education in ethnic minorities' regions.
- The use of mother tongues as media of instructions in ethnic regions is guaranteed in People Republic of China's constitution, regional autonomy law, and education law

Language policy in China and India

- According to the article 4 of the PRC's constitution,
 - ... All ethnic groups have the freedom to use and develop their own spoken and **written languages** and to preserve or reform their own folkways and customs.
- Article 37 of China's Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law,
 - [s]chools (classes) and other educational organizations recruiting mostly ethnic minority students should, whenever possible, **use textbooks in their own languages and use these languages as the media of instruction.**
- China's Compulsory Education Law,
 - “[s]chools in which the majority of students are of ethnic minorities **may use the spoken and written languages of those ethnic minorities in instruction.**”
- **As a result, in autonomous regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet, mother tongues are used in public schools as instructing languages.**

Language policy in China and India continue...

- India is also ethnically diverse country.
- It has over six hundred tribes and about 1,652 languages.
- Of those languages, 22 of them are recognized as official languages by the India's constitution.
- The majority of the population speak Hindi which constitutes 41 percent of the population.
- The second largest linguistic group is Bangli which constitutes 8 percent of the population.
- Ethnic minority languages are widely used in both public and private sectors in India.
 - Ex. 58 languages are used in school curricula and 48 languages are used in public administrations
- The Indian constitution guarantees linguistic rights to all citizens.
- Ethnic minority groups are granted special rights to use their mother tongues as the media of instructions in public schools.
- Thus, Indian education policy which is derived from those rights formulated a tri-language policy where students are taught in Hindi, English and one regional language.

Mother tongue education and international law

- Various United Nations and non-governmental organizations charters and provisions guarantee the rights of learning one's own language, rights of using mother tongue in schools, and rights of accessing high quality education.
- Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights
 - The right to be recognized as a member of a language community
 - The right to the use of one's own language both in private and in public
 - **And “the right for [one's] own language and culture to be taught.**

Mother tongue education and international law

- The Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 30 of The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the right to enjoy the use of one's own language
 - “In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origins exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right... to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practice his or her own religion, or **to use his or her own language.**”

Mother tongue education and international law

- The articles 4.3 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 1992 urge the states
 - To provide opportunities to ethnic minorities to learn their mother tongues or use them as instructing languages.
- According to Article 4.3,
 - [s]tates should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities have adequate opportunities **to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue.**

Mother tongue education and international law

- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.
 - The declaration articles 14 provide the rights of indigenous peoples to use their own languages, writing systems, educational system and institutions and to have access education that is provided in their own languages.
- According to Article 14.1,
 - [i]ndigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions **providing education in their own languages**, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
- and Article 14.3 states that,
 - [s]tates shall, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, **to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.**

Mother tongue education and international law

- The prevention of teaching indigenous or ethnic minority languages could also be implied as **a crime against humanity**.
 - According to the article II (b) and (e) of UN Genocide Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, imposing dominant language to ethnic minorities in education systems would result of committing genocide or cultural genocide.
 - Article II (b) and Article II (e) of convention provide that states or persons would commit genocide if they intend to destroy, in part or in whole, a national or ethnic group by “[c]ausing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;” and “[f]orcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

Mother tongue education and international law

- Regarding the implication of the convention on cultural genocide, Dunbar and Skutnabb-Kangas (2008) stated that,
 - “subtractive educational policies, implementing in the full knowledge of their devastating effects on those who suffer them, **constitute international crimes, including genocide**” Dunbar and Skutnabb-Kangas (2008).
- When dominant languages are learned at the cost of mother tongue, they can become the killer of languages.
- Under such policy, children do not only perform well in schools but also cannot read and write their own language.
- Such policy causes serious mental harm to children because it is lack of the promotion of academic and cognitive growth of children.

Conclusions and recommendations

- **Decentralization of education system**
 - Decentralization
 - Increases the efficiency of education management
 - Allows state and division governments to have more autonomy in providing education needs to their respective state and division citizens
 - All regions do not have the same education needs.
 - Ex. Teaching Mon language is important in Mon State and may not be important in Rangoon/Yangon.
 - Allows local governments to have more power in raising fund for supporting ethnic language curricula
 - Allow schools to have the freedom in selecting a language of instruction

Conclusions and recommendations continue...

- **Promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity in schools**
 - Ethnic languages, cultures and histories are also rarely presented in school text books. Thus, they should be equally represented in school curriculum.
 - Ethnic should be taught in government schools during normal school hours
 - Ethnic languages should be part of the school curriculum and need to be taught as a mandatory course in ethnic populated areas.
 - The government should create a language policy that reflects the ethnic diversity of the country.
 - Ex. The bilingual (Burmese and a regional ethnic language) or tri-lingual (Burmese, English, and a regional language) policy

Conclusions and recommendations continue...

- **Recognition ethnic languages as official languages in ethnic areas**
 - Ethnic languages such as Shan, Mon, Karen, Arakanese, Chin, and Kachin should be recognized as official languages in their respective states.
 - State governments should have the power to select an additional official language beside Burmese language.
 - For example, Mon state can choose two official languages: Mon and Burmese since the majority of population in the state is Mon.
 - Recognizing ethnic languages as official languages provides an incentive for ethnic children to learn their own languages and allows them to use their ethnic languages in employments and other official purposes.

Conclusions and recommendations continue...

- **Implementing mother tongue education system in ethnic areas**
 - Implementing the mother tongue education system in ethnic areas is very important in Burma.
 - The system would not only help promote and maintain ethnic languages and cultures but also helps ethnic children to be successful in schools.
 - Many studies have pointed out that the mother tongue education system shows a strong indicator of educational achievement for bilingual children.
 - The right to learn one's own mother tongue or to have instruction in one's own mother tongue is also recommended by many charters and provisions of the United Nations and other non-governmental organizations.
 - Last, but not least, it helps national reconciliation and peace process in Burma

Thank you



Giving a speech to students at a Mon National School