

International Training Program (ITP)

On-site Education of Practical Languages for Area Studies

Report in 2011

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Graduate School of Asian and African Areas Studies

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My Research Theme

My research area is Mizoram state in the north-eastern part of India. The area is considered as a frontier region, however, its Human Development Index is higher than the national average, and the literacy rate is the second highest in India.

Mizoram state became one of the Indian states in 1987 after two decades of secessionist independence movement. Under this historical background, research on Mizoram's political history has mostly focused on the relation between the evolution of regional party and the administration of the central government. Research on its social history tended to give importance to the British colonial rule and Christian missionaries. I would like to describe the history of the social transformation focusing on the local people's actual activities. My research object is a youth association in Mizoram, Young Mizo Association. It performs various social, political and religious tasks, and more than one third of the state population belongs to it. It was spreading many part of Mizoram soon after its establishment. And it engaged in various works of mutual help maintaining close relationships with regional parties or leaders of the secessionist independence movement. The social transformation and its unique process of development could be found through researching how the association present a vision for a united 'Mizo' nation and extended its roles.



Photo1 View of Aizawl city, Mizoram



Photo2 Youth association carrying a coffin

Features of the Language

Mizo language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese language family. It is spoken mainly in Mizoram state and its neighboring areas. Mizo and English are the official language of Mizoram state. Originally Mizo was not a written language. J. H. Lorrain, a Baptist missionary who entered Mizoram in the end of 19th century created the alphabet with English letter. Christianity has a profound influence on Mizo society, and the holy bible is often referred for the correct grammar.

Contents of the Course

In the first one month, I learnt basic grammar and conversation from a Mizo who is working as a school teacher at Delhi. He taught me traditional culture, history and modern political issue of Mizoram as well. A junior high school English textbook written in Mizo was used at the lesson because Mizo language textbook was not available. After going through the textbook, the teacher brought me useful lists of words and conversations related to my research topic. I recorded words and sentences in IC recorder every time to review the lessons.

After shifting to Mizoram, I learnt practical conversation from an ex-lecturer who was my host family. I took the class 1-2 hours a day and 4-5 days a week. I developed good relationships with her as the days went by because we are close in age. We often visited a market or church together in the later part of the stay. I learnt a kind of the socializing patterns through this experience as well as the language. Associating with neighbors was also quite important for learning language. I got acquainted with a family that runs a general store two doors down from my host family. They were serious Christians and taught me some hymns. It was really fun and meaningful for me to sing or hang out with neighbors in the shop.



Photo 3 Lesson at Delhi



Photo 4 With Ms. Tetei at Aizawl

Impressive Experience

I was stuck on a mountain road far from town whole night because of a landslide soon after entering Mizoram. The landslide was not removed in the next morning. I could not do anything about it because there was no signal for mobile phone. However, suddenly my friend's acquaintance appeared and took me to his house for food and rest. My friend and her family were searching for the place of the landslide whole night and asked the acquaintance to rescue me. Though I realized how close Mizoram's human network is, I was not able to express my thanks well in Mizo. I would like to visit him again and express my appreciation in fluent Mizo when I take the route next time.

Self-assessment of the extent of achievement

There were so many opportunities to practice daily conversations that I could develop the basic speaking skill enough for the first time. Furthermore, through the communication by the basic conversation skill, I was able to establish human relationships that will be a base for my future surveys. However, my vocabulary and aural comprehension skill were not sufficient to conduct proper interviews. Though it was possible to interview in English this time because the field was the state capital and most of people have received English education, I will have to interview old or rural people in the future. It is necessary for me to expand vocabulary and improve aural comprehension skill.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude towards many people in Mizoram who always welcomed and helped me. And I am extremely grateful to Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, ITP office and professors of ASAFAS for providing me with this invaluable opportunity.