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ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

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ABSTRACT

In the People's Republic of China, the term "minority nationality" denotes a member of one of China's 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups. Minority nationalities have traditionally been regarded as those who have cultures (particularly languages and religions) that are distinct from the Han Chinese majority. This article focuses on ethnic minorities in China—their significance to the PRC as a whole, the official classification system by which the government identifies them and the history of their interaction with the majority Han population. Higher education in the PRC is discussed with an emphasis on national minority institutes. Two macro issues relating to higher education for ethnic minorities in China are raised—affirmative action and educational attainment. Higher education for ethnic minorities is assessed using three perspectives—structural-functionalism, modernization theory and dialectical analysis.

In the People's Republic of China (PRC), the term "minority nationality" (*shaoshu minzu*) denotes a member of one of China's 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups. To be designated a "minority nationality" distinguishes an individual from the "Han majority" (Ma 1989, pp. 1-2). The name Han, used to designate people who consider themselves to be of fully Chinese descent, is taken from China's first long-lasting dynasty which ruled the country from 206 B.C. to 220 A.D. (Baker 1981, p. 183). Not until the 1950s did China decide officially what separated the Han, the supposedly pure ethnic Chinese, from the non-Han, the minority nationalities. The official classification system will be discussed in more detail later, but for now it should suffice to say that minority nationalities have traditionally been regarded as those who have cultures, languages and religions that are historically distinct from the Han Chinese.

The first part of this article will focus solely on ethnic minorities in China—their significance to the PRC as a whole, the official classification system by which the government identifies them and the history of their interaction with the majority Han population. The first section will conclude with an evaluation of the present situation of ethnic minorities and a look at their prospects for the future.

The second part of the article will examine higher education in the PRC. The

history of education for minorities will be traced through the imperial, Nationalist and Communist eras. Then higher education for minorities today will be discussed with an emphasis on national minority institutes.

The third and final part of the article will attempt to integrate the subjects covered in the previous two sections. Two macro issues relating to higher education for ethnic minorities in China will be raised—affirmative action and educational attainment. The article will conclude with a general assessment of higher education for ethnic minorities. Three perspectives will be employed—structural-functionalism, modernization theory and dialectical analysis.

The Significance of Ethnic Minorities

Although China has long been perceived to be an "empire of uniformity" (Diamond 1996, pp. 78-79), minority nationality people actually numbered 91.2 million in the 1990 census (Chen 1993, p. 14). Today officials describe China as "a unified multi-national socialist country" (Foreign Languages Press 1972, p. 14) with ethnic minorities comprising eight percent of the population (Liao 1990, p. 29).

Ethnic minorities are largely exempt from China's one-child birth control policy (Tien 1983, pp. 22-23), so the non-Han population is growing at a faster rate than the Han population. Minority population increased by 69 percent, while Han population increased by only 44 percent, between 1964 and 1982.

In short, the power of the minority nationalities should not be underestimated. Consider the following facts:

- The minority nationalities occupy more than 60 percent of the country's territory, much of it containing China's richest mineral and timber deposits and most productive meat and wool raising areas (Ma 1985, p. 1).
- The land occupied by the minority nationalities is sparsely populated and therefore of great interest to a country with more than 1.1 billion people, many of them living in seriously overcrowded conditions (Dreyer 1977, p. 101).
- Finally, most minorities live near China's borders (Diao 1967, p. 170) and are closely related to groups living under the jurisdiction of other states (Rupen 1970, p. 255). Such strategic considerations have influenced China's minority policy. The Chinese government has played a major role in changing and promoting ethnic identities. Cultural anthropologist David Y. H. Wu (1994, p. 156) maintains that "to classify a group as non-Chinese in China today is to reinterpret the meaning of minority culture rather than to preserve parts of a past tradition." What does Wu mean?

"Minority Nationality" Defined

Shortly after the founding of the PRC in 1949, the Chinese government launched a huge ethnographic project to determine which of the 400 groups claiming to be "minority nationalities" (*shaoshu minzu*) actually were. About 700 scholars, officials and college students fanned out across the countryside. Many had little prior ethnological or linguistic training other than the crash course they were given before being sent into the field (Wu 1990, p. 2). They used criteria, developed by Joseph Stalin to describe a "nation" (*minzu*), to decide which groups qualified as "minority nationalities." According to Stalin's definition, a nation has a common language,

territory, economic life and psychological disposition (or culture). Using these criteria, the Chinese government officially recognized 20 minority nationalities by 1957; since then the number has increased, up to the current 55 recognized groups.

Fei Xiaotong (Fei and Chang 1945; Fei 1979; Fei 1981) says that ethnic identification is a continuous and difficult task. (Fei, a student of Bronislaw Malinowski and now China's most prominent sociologist, has spent his lifetime studying ethnic minorities.) Political considerations may carry more weight than scientific criteria in deciding whether a group qualifies as a minority nationality.

For example, once a minority nationality is officially recognized, delegates can be chosen from the group to sit in representative bodies at all levels of government. In addition, the minority in question is given the chance to set up an autonomous nationality government administration. In some counties the government even stipulates that a given amount of its budget be spent on minority affairs. This makes it easier for minority entrepreneurs to secure loans to start businesses. In short, political and material benefits accrue to minority nationality groups which meet Stalin's four criteria.

China continues to pursue a minority policy based on the notion of fixed criteria used to classify "ethnic" groups. Western-trained anthropologists, like David Y. H. Wu (1990, p. 2), feel that "it is simply both theoretically and technically impossible to apply at one time all four criteria to all the ethnic groups." Wu explains that the recent trend in Western social sciences is to regard ethnicity as fluid, situational and changeable. Western scholars studying ethnic minorities in the PRC frequently note cases where there is more of a cultural gap between those identified as Han Chinese living in different regions of China, than there is between the Han themselves and any given minority nationality (Enloe 1986, p. 44). Political scientist George Moseley (1966, p. 9) describes "the more than ten million persons of the 'national minorities' in south China who have been to varying extents acculturated to Chinese ways—to the point, in some cases, that they had no awareness of being different, of being a 'minority,' until they were informed of the fact by workers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences who came to their area after 1949."

Ethnic identity in China today has a "two-sidedness" (Abrams 1982, p. 2)—fixed versus fluid—which will be examined in detail in the remainder of this paper. To understand how this present situation developed, let us take a brief look backward at the history of ethnic relations in China.

The History of Ethnic Relations

The early history of ethnic relations in China. The cradle of Chinese civilization is in the Wei and Yellow River valleys in central China near present-day Xian. Between 5000 and 3000 B.C., a silk-weaving, rice-cultivating, city-building culture developed there. During much of its early history the area now known as China was a collection of disparate kingdoms competing for supremacy.

At the end of the Warring States period (453-221 B.C.), the ruler of the state of Qin subdued all the rival states and proclaimed himself "Qin Shihuangdi, First Emperor of Qin." (The word "China" comes from the word "Qin.") The Qin Dynasty was short-lived—from 221-206 B.C.

The real unification of China occurred during the long and stable Han

Dynasty (206 B.C.-220 A.D.). During those years, the Han Chinese state expanded, and in the process, displaced many indigenous peoples. These indigenous peoples are the ancestors of today's "minority nationalities." The Han called the ethnic groups they displaced "the barbarians of the four directions" (*Man, Yi, Jung, Ti*), although these groups were not culturally or technologically inferior to the Han at this time (Dreyer 1976, p. 7).

The Han expanded primarily to the south because the lands to the west and north were cold, inhospitable and populated by warlike tribes. Historically the Han Chinese have feared the Central Asians, regarding them as "barbarians who swooped down periodically to grab the benefits of civilized life" (MacDougall 1990, p. 16). The Great Wall was built—unsuccessfully—to keep them out.

The Great Wall divided continental Asia into two worlds, not just physically, but also economically (Jagchid and Symons 1989, p. 24). Those living north of the wall were nomadic people, herdsmen and hunters—and ancestors of the present-day Tibetan, Uygur, Muslim and Mongolian minorities. Those living to the south of the wall were the Han, who were sedentary agriculturists. The Han eventually spread southward along the fertile river valleys in search of better farming land.

Throughout 2,000 years of imperial rule, ethnic minority groups in China remained relatively autonomous. Dynastic policy simply required the ethnic groups to abstain from outright aggression and to declare loyalty to the emperor. Minority languages and customs usually were not disturbed as long as they did not threaten the Chinese state (Dreyer 1976, p. 13).

Until the 20th century, what separated the "we group" of Han Chinese from the "they group" of so-called "barbarians," was seldom even debated. The Han were distinguished from the "barbarians" by cultural characteristics (Eberhard 1982, p. 13), primarily language (Poston and Jing 1987, p. 705) and religion (Schwarz 1979, p. 141). (Most Chinese—Han and non-Han—belong to the Mongoloid racial category, though some Caucasian minorities do live in northwest China.) Those groups which accepted the Chinese culture and administration in place of their own were considered Han. As political scientist June Teufel Dreyer (1977, p. 102) explains, "Non-Han dynasties (like the Mongols and the Manchus), could, and occasionally did, rule China; a crucial test of their legitimacy was their ability to employ Chinese administrative forms and Confucian philosophy. Those better able to do so were apt to endure; those who were unwilling or unable to were generally short-lived."

Ethnic relations in the 20th century. The last dynasty, the Qing (1644-1911), was overthrown in 1911. A republican form of government was then instituted under the Nationalist Party. The Nationalists' policy toward the minorities was based on two assumptions: "that all nationalities within China should be equal and that the interests of the minorities were best served by the process of assimilation" (Deal 1984, p. 23). Minority groups were denied all forms of autonomy. Their lands were to be incorporated into the regular administrative system. In addition, all minorities were supposed to learn to speak the pure Beijing dialect known in the West as "Mandarin" and in China as "common language" (*putonghua*). This meant that non-Han minority languages, like Uygur, Kazakh, Mongol and Tibetan, had to be abandoned. These Nationalist Party policies were met with intense hostility. Consequently, when the Chinese Communist Party wrested power from the Nationalist Party in 1949, the CCP

inherited a country with huge problems of ethnic cleavage.

Shortly after the Communist Revolution, the CCP created autonomous regions for ethnic minorities (the largest being Guangxi Zhuang, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia Hui, Tibet and Xinjiang Uygur) and allowed government business there to be conducted in both Mandarin Chinese and nationality language (Chen 1971, p. 61). The CCP also installed minority administrators in those autonomous areas in proportion to the number of minority people residing there. The results of these policy changes were apparent. "The animosities developed over many hundreds of years did not disappear overnight," Dreyer (1977, p. 105) writes, "but despite misgivings on both sides, the party's policies in minorities areas did seem to be achieving results."

Minority people have not been immune to the political turmoil that has affected all Chinese from the 1950s onward. Shifts in governmental policy—during the One Hundred Flowers Movement (1956-1957), the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960) and the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)—have sown the seeds of chaos and confusion among the minority nationalities (Drake 1992, p. 297).

The Cultural Revolution ended in 1976 with the death of Mao Zedong, the CCP chairman, and the purge of his supporters, the Gang of Four. Shortly thereafter, the CCP formally denounced the Cultural Revolution, declaring it an unmitigated disaster (Gill and Mackerras 1990, p. 15). The old Maoist regime was said to have violated the CCP's policy of respecting the culture of all nationalities. China then began moderating its stance toward the minority nationalities.

Ethnic Minorities Today—An Evaluation of Their Past, A Look at Their Prospects

"Anti-communists will sometimes cite examples (e.g. the Tibetans) to demonstrate that minorities in China are being exploited while various left groups present the diametrically opposed view that China has solved its minority problems or will shortly do so," write Richard Llata and Mario Barrera (1976, p. 380). The truth actually lies somewhere between these two extremes. Perhaps the best assessment of the present situation is the one offered by political scientist Thomas Heberer (1989, p. 6): "Ethnic minorities are subjected to discrimination, oppression, and persecution in the East and West as well as in third-world countries, and...so far not even the beginning of a solution has been found to the minority problem."

Today in China, the Han have a "minority problem," but the minorities also have a "Han" problem. The problem of the minorities is this: how to ensure the survival of indigenous cultures, i.e., the right to speak minority languages and practice minority religions, in the face of constant pressures to assimilate. Attempts by the Han to solve their "minority problem" and attempts by the minorities to solve their "Han problem" do not proceed independently. Instead these attempts condition each other. Each side is forced to respond to the actions of the other or to the consequences of those actions (Cornell 1988, p. 7). Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the provision of higher education for ethnic minorities and in the response of minority nationalities themselves.

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

Although the focus of this paper is on ethnic minorities and higher education,

this section begins more generally with an overview of minority education in the PRC. Reviewing educational policies of the government and their outcomes for minority people will make the subsequent discussion of higher education and ethnic minorities more understandable.

The History of Minority Education—An Overview of Policies and Outcomes

Imperial era. In imperial China, education was a reward and a resource to pass on to one's offspring. During the Sui Dynasty (581-618 A.D.), a system of Chinese education evolved based on private tutoring and academies (Bartels and Eppley 1995, p. 31). Privileged families spent years and fortunes supporting their sons while they studied the Confucian classics in hopes of eventually passing the civil service examinations. Those who passed became scholar-officials in the imperial court. They then used their positions to increase the power and privilege of their families. For centuries this self-perpetuating system virtually ensured that only the Han elite would receive formal education.

China isolated itself from the rest of the world from the start of the last (Qing) Dynasty in 1644 until the mid-1800s. In essence, China turned its back on the West while the West was experiencing the Renaissance, the Age of Exploration, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Consequently, when the Western powers began forcing China to "open up" for trade during the mid-19th century, that country lagged sadly behind in science and technology. To remedy this situation, Chinese students were sent abroad in droves to study. They brought back to China the tenets of educational philosophy from Japan and the United States. Of course, these foreign-educated scholars were still drawn from the Han elite.

Western missionaries followed on the heels of Western traders making their way into China. Many Christian missionary schools were located in minority areas. The aim, in the unfortunate words of one Protestant missionary, was the "Christian occupation of China" (Sivin 1988, p. 85). The result was a growing anti-foreign feeling that culminated in incidents like the Boxer Rebellion of 1900. Missionaries were the prime targets of the Boxers. The Western powers sent in relief forces to crush the rebellion.

The Qing Dynasty had grown too weak to prevent either foreign invasion or internal rebellion. The Qing government tried enacting a few reforms, modest at first, hoping these might satisfy the rebels. Then in 1905 the imperial examinations were abolished and with them the entire Confucian education system. This was a revolutionary change. The emphasis in education moved from moralism, based on a reverence for the Confucian classics, toward pragmatism, based on the needs of an emerging nation-state.

In 1909, a Mongol and Tibetan School was established in Beijing to train officials to govern in those two areas. This was "a new approach to the old objective of keeping the distant peoples under control" (Mackerras 1995, p. 40). The Chinese name for the school was *zhibian xuetang* which means "school to colonize the borders." The intent was to train "local people to use local knowledge to control local people, although still in the interests of the central government" (p. 40). The Mongol and Tibetan School was the forerunner of the nationalities institutes later opened by the Communists in order to train cadres for minority areas (Watson 1981, p. 103).

Nationalist era. A dramatic change in educational policy occurred when the Nationalist Party overthrew the Qing Dynasty in 1911. The Nationalists who assumed control were largely Western-educated. They were offended by the uprisings in Tibet (1910) and Mongolia (1911) which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Han Chinese. The Nationalists' goal was to create a new, unified state. Education was seen as the means for achieving the necessary assimilation of the ethnic minorities into mainstream Han culture.

The Nationalist Party never gained complete control over the ethnic minorities, in large part because the Nationalists never gained complete control over China. Nationalist rule got off to a disastrous start under the presidency of Yuan Shikai. After Yuan's death in 1916, a group of powerful warlords actually ran China. The Nationalist Party was forced to enter into an uneasy alliance with the Communist Party in the hope of regaining power. But in the Shanghai massacre of 1927, the Nationalists turned on the Communists, who were then forced underground. The Nationalists set up a new government with Chiang Kaishek as its head. This was considered the legitimate government of China from 1927 until 1949.

Despite its vast problems in effectively governing China, the Nationalists can claim to be "the first government in Chinese history to develop a formal and ostensibly nationwide education system for the minority nationalities" (Mackerras 1995, p. 49). The Ministry of Education established a new section solely to deal with the education of minority nationalities. Textbooks in minority languages and in Chinese were to be used together in primary schools; Chinese texts only were to be used in secondary schools. Starting in 1932, the Ministry of Education began producing textbooks in minority languages. While the educational system was attempting to respect minority cultures, its primary aim was not "to foster the national identities of particular nationalities, but instead that of the Chinese nation as a whole" (p. 51).

Remarkably, it was during the war against Japan (1937-1945) that the Nationalists' greatest strides in minority education occurred. Education rapidly expanded into remote minority villages. The minorities, however, generally resisted such educational efforts, supposedly undertaken on their behalf. Formal education, at least the sort provided to them by Han teachers, was regarded as rather useless. For some minorities, educating the young in life-skills like hunting was considered a family responsibility. In other minority areas with dominant religions, like Islam and Buddhism, classes were still taught in mosques and monasteries. Schools, as they are known now, were available in only the more accessible and prosperous minority areas and were run by either the provincial government or the local villagers. The Japanese built some schools in the minority areas they occupied in the Northeast. Similarly the CCP, even as the party in opposition, established schools for the Uygurs, the Kazhak, the Hui and the Mongols in Communist-occupied territories.

By the late 1940s, public schools were still few and far between in most minority areas (Kwong and Hong 1989, p. 230). Those government-run schools which did exist charged tuition. In the final analysis, under Nationalist rule, very little had changed in education. Until the Communist Revolution, only the wealthy-minority or Han- could afford to educate their children beyond the primary level.

Communist era. When the Communist Party came into power in 1949, a

dramatic shift in minority policy occurred. China became known as—and is still known as—a "unified multi-national country," one republic with numerous nationalities (Shama and Lan 1994, p. 97). Minorities are granted a degree of autonomy, but forbidden the right of secession. The PRC's first constitution, written in 1952, granted equal rights to all nationalities. The constitution contained promises to "develop minority languages and writing systems" and "implement political, economic, cultural and educational reconstruction" (Kwong and Hong 1989, p. 232). In practice over the past 45 years, this has meant the development of written languages (for groups which previously had none), the elimination of illiteracy and the provision of schools.

Since many minority areas had no schools whatsoever in the early 1950s, the first step was to expand primary education, usually to a length of about six years. Subjects offered in minority and majority areas were quite similar—reading, writing (both in Mandarin Chinese) and arithmetic. In minority areas, additional instruction was provided in nationality languages. All teaching was to be done in local language. Han teachers were expected to master the indigenous language of their particular area.

By 1956 the focus had shifted to secondary education. The new goal was to train enough teachers to staff the primary schools. To this end, normal schools (teacher-training colleges equivalent to secondary schools) were instituted. By 1980, 84 such normal schools had been constructed in minority areas (p. 233). The number of minority teachers increased 172-fold between 1952 and 1982 (p. 233).

With the government's adoption of the Four Modernizations plan (for industry, agriculture, defense, and science and technology) in 1976, secondary schools specializing in technical/vocational training, as opposed to pure academic courses, were introduced. In minority areas, the focus of these schools was on animal science and other agricultural fields related to the indigenous economies. The PRC has also continued to increase the number of regular academic secondary schools, and graduates from these institutions grew 25-fold between 1952 and 1982 (p. 233).

Higher Education for Minorities in China Today

The PRC laid the groundwork of a solid primary-secondary school system in the minority areas before tackling the problem of higher education. Today minority nationality students attend all the major comprehensive universities located in Han Chinese areas. Affirmative action policies, which will be discussed in more detail later, encourage this "to compensate for the scarcity of higher education institutions in minority areas and to integrate minority groups with Han Chinese for the sake of national unity" (Hu 1970, p. 12).

Far more important than the admission of minority students into Han institutions, however, is the introduction of higher education into minority areas. There are now 10 national minority institutes and 76 other institutions of higher education. Colleges of Tibetan and Mongolian medicine have also been established (Postiglione 1995, p. 270).

National minority institutes and their goals. The institutes for nationalities are "among the most significant and unique creations of the Communist regime for minority education" (Hu 1970, p. 13). They began shortly after 1949 to achieve several goals of the new regime:

1. The first and primary goal of the institutes is to train political activists from among minority groups. Western observers describe the institutes' curricula as having "a heavy ideological, but also a strong academic, content" (Mackerras 1985, p. 247). Most of the institutes' teachers are Han. They train the minority students to assume cadre (or leadership) positions in their home areas upon graduation. According to official statistics, between 1978 and 1981, the number of minority cadres increased from 830,000 to 1.02 million, a 22.9 percent increase (p. 248). In 1981 when minorities made up 6.7 percent of China's population, 5.4 percent of all cadres were from minority groups. The gap between the number of Han and minority cadres is decreasing, at least in part because of the institutes.

2. A second goal of the institutes is to prepare professional or technical cadres to enter fields such as teaching, agriculture, communication, transportation and economics. Because minority areas have historically been poorer and less productive than Han areas, a need exists for personnel who can assist with modernization. The institutes seem to be filling this need because between 1978 and 1987, they nearly doubled the number of students graduated (Postiglione 1995, p. 270).

Teacher training is the most critical concern that higher education for minorities must address (Dilger 1984, p. 162). This point needs further explanation. Most children living in minority areas now attend only primary school, despite a national law that stipulates that all children must receive nine years of schooling (Bartels and Eppley 1995, p. 34). The number of secondary schools in both minority and Han areas actually declined during the 1980s (Mackerras 1995, pp. 138-139). Today serious inequalities in terms of education exist between the minorities and the Han. Children of most minorities go on to junior secondary school, senior secondary school and university far less frequently than those of the Han. The 1982 census figures show illiteracy rates to be considerably higher among the minorities (43 percent) than among the Han (31 percent).

The main problem in improving minority education is the shortage of minority teachers (p. 148). Higher education does seem to be successfully addressing this problem. Between 1953 and 1992, the total number of minority primary and secondary teachers increased from 65,235 to 705,200. More importantly, the percentage of minority teachers as a total of all teachers increased from 3.8 percent to 8.6 percent at the primary level and from 3.9 percent to 7.3 percent at the secondary level during that same time period. This means that at the primary level, the percentage of minority teachers (8.6) has actually overtaken the percentage of minority population (8.04), according to the 1990 census (p. 149). Since 1985, China has been actively promoting compulsory schooling for all children through the junior secondary level (Sharpes 1993, pp. 80-81). To meet this objective, the PRC will need an increasing supply of trained teachers—minority and Han—for many years to come.

3. A third goal of the institutes revolves around the preservation and rediscovery of minority culture. (It will later be argued that the construction of minority culture could be added to this list.) The CCP attaches great importance to the role of "culture" in the social and economic development of the minorities. "Culture," in China, however, is not understood in the broad sense of encompassing material and non-material ways of life. "Culture," as used by the Chinese, refers simply to the development of spoken and written languages for minority groups (Kwong and Hong

1989, p. 232). In this limited sense, the institutes are making a contribution, since much of the research on minority languages is conducted there. As sociologist Gerard Postiglione (1995, p. 270) describes the institutes:

Minority languages are used as the medium of instruction. The state has supervised the translation, editing, and publication of textbooks, reference books, newspapers, and journals in national minority languages. Within national minority institutes or normal universities, students can major in the field of minority languages with specialties in twenty-one languages including Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur, Kazakh, Korean, Yao, Yi, Zhang, Va, and Jingpo.

The question of language in China has come to be regarded as a double-edged sword. Some scholars, like Colin Mackerras (1995, p. 141) argue that "if education is to play any kind of role in retaining ethnic identities, it must pay due regard to the cultural and language sensitivities of the minorities." Others, like He Zili (1988, p. 57) say that "the learning and using of Chinese language and writing provide the minorities with powerful instruments to participate in the economic and cultural constructions of the whole country, especially in higher education."

SOME MACRO ISSUES RELATING TO ETHNIC MINORITIES AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

This final part of the paper will draw together the issues raised in the previous two sections. Two macro issues relating to higher education for ethnic minorities in China will be discussed—affirmative action and educational attainment.

Affirmative Action

In the area of higher education, the PRC "provides a number of 'non-equal treatments' to minorities to bring them to equality with the Han" (Kormondy 1995, p. 176). Some of China's affirmative action policies have been discussed previously. Others are outlined below:

- The government has allocated special funds for equipment and personnel for higher educational institutions that serve minorities. Groups of teachers from inland areas have been sent to frontier territories where large numbers of national minorities live; such cooperative efforts between inland and frontier institutes are becoming more common.
- Between the late 1970s and the late 1980s the actual number of colleges and universities (and the number of teachers) in autonomous areas nearly doubled (Postiglione 1995, p. 270). So, too, did the number of minority students served. During that same time, the 10 minority institutes experienced similar growth, due in part to increased government support.
- The government gives preferential treatment to minority nationality students in the nationwide college entrance exam (Reed 1988, p. 33). The scores needed for college admission are lowered for students from minority areas. In the case of identical scores, preference is given to the minority applicant.
- Accommodations are also made for graduates of secondary schools where teaching is done in minority languages. In some cases, these students can write their entrance

exams in their own languages. In other cases, the examination is given in Mandarin Chinese, but the questions are modified to be considerably less rigorous. These testing procedures are designed expressly to allow more minority nationality students to enter universities.

- Many nationality colleges offer preparatory classes for minority youth who might not otherwise gain admission. Also, some universities and medical schools with mainly Han enrollments offer remedial classes for minority students who are admitted.

Educational policies such as these demonstrate "the great flexibility of the Chinese system of affirmative action in education" (Daniels 1984, p. 23). Doug Daniels (pp. 23-24), a Canadian university professor who spent a sabbatical in Inner Mongolia, explains the situation this way:

This wide range of choice belies the stereotype of the 'totalitarian' society and indeed should give western democracies food for thought. Underlying all these policy options lies a very rooted and coherent idea of all-nationality progress...Of course, affirmative action in education is not carried out without affirmative action in other areas as well...It is a concerted effort on all fronts—economic, political, cultural, in the health field and so on—that underlies the educational achievements.

Educational Attainment

Numerous affirmative action policies have been implemented by the Chinese government to ensure that national minorities will attain educational equality with the Han. Are ethnic minority groups in China making use of available educational opportunities? Data collected suggest that per capita there are more schools in minority areas than in Han areas. Despite this, the proportion of minority youth attending primary and secondary schools and going on to higher education is substantially lower than that of Han youth (Kwong and Hong 1989, p. 237). Per capita the minorities have far lower enrollment rates, retention rates and passing rates than the Han. More troubling is the fact that the academic achievements of minority nationalities are consistently lower than those of the Han even in urban areas, where the groups live side by side and have identical educational opportunities.

So what is the problem? Why does a gap persist between the educational attainment of the national minorities and the Han majority? The answer is multi-faceted and complex. In the West, educational attainment and social class are closely correlated. In China social class, defined in strict Marxian economic terms, does not exist. Social divisions, however, do persist, defined along the Weberian dimensions of class, status and party. It is these differences that contribute to the problems of low attendance, low retention and low pass-rate among minorities in ways not unlike those in the West (p. 238):

Economics. The income disparity between the Han Chinese and the ethnic minorities (Chai 1996, p. 46) suggests that minority families are more likely to withdraw their children from school than Han families. Beginning in the early 1980s, the Chinese family became the production unit. Consequently, each additional worker—including children—increases the family's earnings.

Lifestyle. "Dissonance between home and school cultures...makes learning difficult and irrelevant for the young" (Kwong and Hong 1989, p. 239). The uniform

national curriculum, produced in Beijing, often seems immaterial to minority students. For some minorities, going to school means abandoning a nomadic way of life or being separated from family and community. For others, the lack of solid Mandarin Chinese language skills puts them at a constant academic disadvantage.

Pover. "Parents' low level of aspiration for their children and the latter's lack of motivation only reflect a pragmatic evaluation of what is attainable" (p. 238). Parents' lack of education also prevents them from helping their children succeed academically, even when the desire to do so is present.

A. General Assessment of Higher Education for Ethnic Minorities

Having just looked at affirmative action and educational attainment, how can we more generally assess higher education for ethnic minorities in the PRC today? Certainly absolute growth should be considered. In 1993, there were 11.4 million minority students in primary schools, 3.5 million in secondary schools and 163,200 in tertiary-level institutions. These figures represent 12.1, 77.9 and 77.1 times the 1951 figures (State Education Commission 1995, pp. 19-20). In addition, the difference between the number of male and female minority youth attending school is gradually decreasing.

A further search of the literature reveals three perspectives that have been employed to assess higher education for ethnic minorities in China—structural-functionalism, modernization theory and dialectical analysis.

Structural-functionalism. One way to judge an educational system is by comparing what it intends to do against what it actually does. John N. Hawkins (1978, p. 148) says that in China, the educational system fulfills both a systems-maintenance and a conflict function.

- **Systems-maintenance:** "The ultimate goal of educational policy with regard to national minorities is to achieve national integration," writes Gerard Postiglione (1992, p. 37). The education of national minorities results in skill development, cadre training and political socialization (Hawkins 1978, p. 148), all of which help ensure a unified state. The *manifest function* is cooperation, acceptance and respect between the minority nationalities and the Han majority (Watson 1981, p. 114).

- **Conflict:** Ironically higher education for national minorities, which was undertaken to achieve integration, also has "obvious centripetal aspects" (Hawkins 1978, p. 148). Pluralistic language policy, the recruitment of minority personnel and the promotion of minority history and culture have all led to an unanticipated consequence (or *latent function*), i.e., a resurgence of ethnic identity and a resentment of Han interference (Watson 1981, p. 113). Marxist thinkers, including Mao, have referred to the dilemma of national unity versus ethnic autonomy as a "contradiction" to be overcome.

Modernization theory. A problem often occurs in trying to assess minority education in China: the use of an "etic" or outside viewpoint (Headland, Pike and Harris 1990) by Western observers. Colin Mackerras (1994, p. 272) comments on the tendency of Westerners "to hanker after the traditions of minorities:"

There is the suggestion that perhaps people were better off in the past before industrialization and development ruined their environment. This is not a view...very widespread among Chinese of either Han or minority nationality. With very few exceptions, the past of China's minorities were noted for their poverty and oppression

Benton Lee: Ethnic Minorities in the People's Republic of China
by both their own ruling elites and the dominant Han.

Modernization and education inevitably go hand in hand. Educated minority youth return to their home areas with the skills needed to bring about improvements in health care, the economy, communication and transportation. "Modernization processes have a way of diluting the distinctive features of nationalities, even those with strong cultures," Mackerras (pp. 270-272) writes. "China is still not nearly 'modern' enough to place a high priority on caring about the 'post-modern' concerns of such importance in Western countries."

Dialectical analysis. Perhaps the best way to assess minority education in the PRC is as the Chinese themselves would. Adopting an "emic" or inside viewpoint (Headland, Pike and Harris 1990) means using Mao's "contradiction" method of Marxian dialectical analysis (Moser 1985, p. 8). Doug Daniels (1984, p. 16) applies this line of reasoning in his study of affirmative action and minority education in Inner Mongolia:

If you do this action then what are the negative consequences? If you solve this problem what are the new problems that you create...What potential bad things can happen if Han people try to educate the Mongolians. Answer—potential assimilation, destruction of Mongol traditions. Well then, what if the Han majority choose *not* to assist the education of the Mongolians about modern technology, medicine, Chinese constitutional law etc., etc.? Answer—the Mongols might be left in a backward state subject to famine and diseases no longer experienced in the rest of China, and they might be prey to political bullies from the dominant nationality, to legal duress and so forth...The greatest protection of democracy is the democratic strengths of the people themselves. From such a perspective it is essential that "themasses"—ordinary people—learn to rely on their own means to defend themselves against high-handed bureaucrats, politicians, lawyers and overweening initiators of development projects...So what I am getting at here...is that there are positive and negative potentials from any action, and moreover there are positive and negative potentials from *not* acting as well...Some of them are major...Others, though they may be objects of the obsessive worrying of Western anthropologists, are really rather trivial and were long ago answered emphatically by Mongolians themselves. Since one cannot do *nothing*, one must do *something* and the real question is what the changes will be and who will direct them. Are the decisions made democratically? Is the development autocentric (self directed and primarily for the benefit of the local nationality) or externally directed for the benefit of exploitative outsiders?

Minority policy in general, and educational policy in particular, have followed a dialectical path from conflict in the Qing and the Nationalist eras, to integration in the early Communist era, back to conflict during the Cultural Revolution, and finally to a mix of conflict and integration at the present time. Due in large part to education, "cultural incongruity has been diminished without totally disappearing," writes John N. Hawkins (1978, p. 148). "While central power and authority clearly lie with the majority..., local power and authority representation are increasingly in the hands of the national minorities." Education has played a dynamic role in helping China achieve the unique form of "integrative pluralism" (p. 148) it practices today.

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Benton Lee: Ethnic Minorities in the People's Republic of China

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