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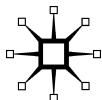
# A Comparative Study of Minority Development in China and Canada

Reza Hasmath, *University of Toronto*

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Minority Development in  
China and Canada*

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## *Introduction*

The management of urban ethnic minority development has become a topical and passionate subject, with the Canadian and Chinese experiences being no exception. Since the inception of Canada's multicultural<sup>1</sup> policies in the early 1970s, there has been much written, domestically and abroad, about the nation's changing social dynamics as a result of the growing ethnic minority populations, and the practice of multiculturalism as social policy (See Canadian Heritage 2006; Bissoondath 2002; McLeod and Kyrgyz-Smolska 1997; Bibby 1990).<sup>2</sup> In many respects, Canada has become a prominent leader in promoting multiculturalism in a programmatic manner, by designing specific, constitutionally protected policies to manage ethnic differences.

With 40 percent of its 4.6 million population represented by various visible<sup>3</sup> ethnic minority groups (Statistics Canada 2005a), Toronto is one of the most multi-ethnic communities in the world, and a symbol of Canada's efforts in urban ethnic management. Spurred by vast post-World War Two immigration from Europe, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Asia, the city encompasses numerous distinctive ethnic enclaves and economies. Toronto has attempted to accommodate ethnic differences through a variety of local policies and initiatives, which are supported and reinforced by federal and provincial efforts. Some examples of these include Toronto's Social Development (2001a) and Economic Development Strategy (2000); financial support for annual festivals and cultural events such as Caribana or Mabuhay Philippines Summer Festival; and, through its international and inter-provincial marketing efforts to promote the city's ethnic diversity to lure tourists and potential migrants (See Reiss, Forthcoming). Toronto's conduct in managing ethnic differences is seen as so successful it is often cited as exemplary and a model for other urban centers (UNDP 2004).

In contrast, although China is one of the most diverse nations with 55 official ethnic minority groups, comprising a population of nearly 105 million (NBS 2005), it is not usually thought of as multi-ethnic in Western nations. This is startling when placed in perspective: if China's ethnic minority population alone were a nation-state it would be the twelfth most populous nation or approximately 1.5 percent of the global population. Nevertheless, discussions of China generally

take ethnic uniformity for granted, and the nation is often tacitly portrayed in mainstream literature as a homogeneous mono-ethnic, Han dominated state, with few ethnic minorities in the bordering areas. It thus comes as no surprise that little is written in either English or Chinese about the current ethnic minority population in Beijing.

Urban ethnic minority management in Beijing is operated by a combination of central government decrees, social policy protections, and local attempts to promote ethnic minority culture via festivals, food, sport, or dance in the mainstream. In this megalopolis with a population of nearly 13.6 million legal<sup>4</sup> residents in 2000 (Beijing PSB 2005), local public officials are confident that they promote and respect the religious affairs, education and culture of ethnic minority groups. In my interview with officials from the Beijing Municipal Commission of Ethnic Affairs they went to great lengths to highlight the Islamic ethnic minority population as a successful case of managing ethnic differences. Beijing's Islamic population currently includes approximately 300,000 persons spanning 10 ethnic groups, including the Hui, Uyghur, Uzbek, and Kazak, who practice their religion in the city's 80-odd mosques. Officials argued the existence of these mosques, in an otherwise relatively atheistic state, demonstrably illustrate policies from the local to the national level are successful in promoting ethnic tolerance.

Contrary to the official stance on ethnic management in Beijing, the city has had a deep history of strained ethnic relations and tensions which are still in evidence today. For example, the separatist activities of the 1990s in Xinjiang and Tibet trickled down to the streets of Beijing, where severe crackdowns on Uyghur and Tibetan activities occurred. During the period of de facto former leader Deng Xiaoping's State funeral in February 1997, a bus bombing in Beijing's busiest shopping district, signaled Uyghur contempt for the Chinese state (See Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004; Baranovitch 2003; Mackerras 2001). Similarly, the Beijing government forbade meetings among Tibetan community associations in order to curb potential activities that may support the case for Tibetan sovereignty. In local government circles, ethnic minority community associations are often perceived as malicious and suspected of encouraging the drug trade or inciting "rebellious activities." As recent as March 2008, there were "unauthorized" sit-ins by Tibetans at the Central University for Nationalities aimed to express their solidarity and support for improved "cultural freedoms," and development for Tibetans in the Tibet Autonomous Region and elsewhere in China—a call that has often fallen under deaf ears by the central government for decades



(See Hasmath and Hsu 2007). Moreover, in the time shortly leading up to, and during the Beijing Olympics in August 2008, ethnic minorities in the capital city were random targets of surveillance and scrutiny by authorities—who justified their actions on the basis of increased security measures (See *New York Times* 2008). These observations illustrate, while the integration of ethnic minorities into the urban milieu is a matter of great importance for Beijing's development, it is often conducted in a background of tense ethnic relations.

In spite of contrasting experiences dealing with ethnic minority groups in Beijing and Toronto, this book will suggest a paradoxical convergence in ethno-development in both cities. When statistically examining local ethnic minorities' educational attainments, they outperform or are on par with the dominant population. In Beijing the dominant population will be cited as Han Chinese; in Toronto, this will be referred to those from European ancestries (See Balakrishnan and Hou 2004; Razin and Langlois 1996; Vallee et al. 1957).<sup>5</sup> However, when analyzing the ethnic minority demographics of those working in high-wage, education-intensive (HWEI) occupations, the dominant population is most prevalent. What accounts for this discrepancy? How far does ethnicity (as locally defined) affect one's occupational opportunities? What does this tangibly mean with respect to the management of urban ethnic differences in Beijing and Toronto? And, what steps can we take to improve this situation?

## Objectives

Drawing upon statistical data, interviews<sup>6</sup> and ethnography<sup>7</sup> in late 2006 and 2007, the aim of this book is to investigate the present ethno-development of Beijing and Toronto, with particular focus on the relationship between the educational and occupational levels of ethnic minority members. Both indicators have been chosen as they serve as excellent markers for assessing ethnic minority development. Empirically, one of the most compelling universal expectations is future occupational achievements and financial success based on higher educational attainments. This has been reinforced by studies that show the economic value of an education, that is, the added value a high school diploma or university degree has on an individual's working life earnings and occupational prospects (See OECD 2004; Day and Newburger 2002). One may argue this is the result of meritocratic selection procedures, whereby an individual's achievements in education is the main criteria for occupational advancement (See

Heath et al. 1992; Young 1958). This of course assumes that occupational outcomes are based solely on merit, which is often defined by educational attainment.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, studies have also suggested the higher the education and socio-economic status, the greater propensity for the individual to socially integrate within the community (See Muiznieks 1999; Bagley 1984; Otto 1976; Sewell et al. 1969). Measuring one's education attainment to occupational outcomes thus serves as a natural pairing to compare ethnic minority development.

There has also been relatively little scholarship explicitly examining the notion of an "ethnic penalty," defined as the disadvantages ethnic minorities experience in the labor market compared to the dominant group of the same human capital. Heath and Ridge (1983) look at this idea by making comparisons between two groups, "whites," and "blacks" in the United Kingdom. From their work, segmented differentials between "whites" and "blacks" suggest that this is a useful indicator to discern economic discrimination. Yet differentials within these racial<sup>9</sup> groupings also suggest that it is only a rough indicator and ought to be refined and expanded if feasible, to differentiate between distinctive ethnic minority groups, e.g., Hungarian-British, Kenyan-British, etc.

While the concept of an ethnic penalty has not been widely explored in China, there is a small body of academic literature on ethnic minorities that can be drawn upon. For instance, Mackerras' (1994) examines the historical development of ethnic minorities as a whole, with exceptional concentration on the Western provinces where the majority of minorities reside. Moreover, recent scholarship has focused on a single minority such as Harrell's (2001) work on the Yi in Sichuan Province, or Gladney's (1998) observations on the Hui. Due to a lack of available published data, modern academic literature on the economic differences between Han and ethnic minorities are few.<sup>10</sup> Utilizing relatively old data, Gustafsson and Shi (2003) and Hannum and Xie's (1998) discuss economic differences between Han and minorities in various contexts. In particular, Gustafsson and Shi examine survey information from 19 provinces in 1988 and 1995 to discern aggregate differences in rural incomes between Han and ethnic minorities. They find there is a per capita income gap of 19.2 percent in 1988, which increased dramatically to 35.9 percent in 1995. Using census data in 1982 and 1990, Hannum and Xie focus on the effects of market reforms on differences in occupational attainment between Hans and various ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. Their study found there is a gap in occupational attainment between Han and minorities, which widened further between the two base years. In

general, the available literature suggests that minorities are not faring well in China's market transition. Whether this is indeed the case in Beijing, a city with an ethnic minority population that is rarely studied, will be explored using the most recent census data in 2000.

In the Canadian case, there is increasing scholarship looking at an ethnic penalty nationally. Drawing from nationwide statistical data, Kunz et al. (2001) concludes that although visible minorities are the most educated groups, the benefit of higher education is often offset by their ethnicity. Her team statistically observes that even among those with a post-secondary education, visible minorities nationally have higher unemployment rates than those who are not members of a visible minority. Moreover, visible minority university graduates are less likely to hold managerial or professional jobs. For visible minority immigrants, they face the double jeopardy of being both "ethnic" and "foreign." While Kunz et al.'s study distinguishes between Canadian and foreign-born, similar to Heath and Ridge (1983) they do not examine specific ethnic groups. This task is adopted by Galabuzi (2001) who statistically observes that in spite of comparable average educational attainments, ethnic minority groups' labor market experiences nationally are plagued by barriers to access, limited mobility in employment, and discrimination in the workplace. While both studies statistically illustrate an ethnic penalty at the national level, they do not provide very specific, sociological or otherwise, explanatory reasons for this phenomenon rooted in detailed ethnography. In fact, this is a common trait in studies examining the ethnic penalty in Canada. Several statistical and econometric approaches, involving various data sets and time series, have been used over the years to evaluate whether ethnic minorities are at a disadvantage in labor markets compared to the dominant European groups (See Pendakur and Pendakur 2004; Stelcner and Kyriazis 1995); seldom is a sociological dimension rooted in interviews and ethnography added to the conversation. Moreover, given the focus of the majority of studies is at the national level, it is a valuable project to observe whether these results differ when analyzing the phenomenon at the micro-level, notably in an urban agglomeration such as Toronto.

Drawing from these lessons, this book will examine the relationship between educational attainments and occupational outcomes between different ethnic minority groupings in Beijing and Toronto utilizing quantitative and qualitative analyses (See appendix 1 for methodological considerations). The quantitative part of the book examines ethnic minority groups' educational attainments at primary, secondary, and tertiary school levels; and how this relates to

occupational attainment and income. The empirical analysis underpinning this research is based on over 80 interviews with local ethnic minorities in each city, inquiring about their educational and occupational experiences. The interviews examine topics such as perceived barriers to educational attainment; ethnic-stereotyping in the workplace; affirmative action; job-search, hiring and workplace promotion experiences; and more broadly, inter- and intra- ethnic group interactions. Local interviews are supplemented by long-term observations and consultations with government institutions, local academics, corporations, businesses, and ethnic minority stakeholders such as ethnic associations and NGOs. The overall objective of the qualitative part of the analysis is to explain the statistical findings examining educational attainments and its relationship with occupational outcomes for ethnic minority groups.

## Why Beijing and Toronto?

What makes this book compelling is the juxtaposition of similarities and contrasts of both cities. In the context of their respective nations, both Beijing and Toronto enjoy a likeness in their political and economic importance. As China's capital, Beijing is the centre of political power and can be viewed as an urban environment that has one of the highest levels of economic development relative to national standards.<sup>11</sup> Without hyperbole, Toronto's importance to Canada is similarly unquestioned as a financial and cultural capital. Beyond the surface of their urban iconic status in their respected nations, both cities have very different histories, with the population of Beijing shaped by a long history of dynasties and empires, and Toronto being a relatively new immigrant-receptive city (See chapter two). Arguably as a consequence, they both define ethnic groups in sharply contrasting ways (See chapter one). Put briefly, ethnic groups in Beijing fit pre-defined categories set out by the Chinese central government; whereas in Toronto, ethnic belonging is understood, in principle, by how the individual defines his/herself. How this ethnic categorization manifests itself in the educational and occupational market is a subject of interest. When looking at occupational differences between ethnic groups in Beijing and Toronto, there is a strong need to ask whether these differences are explained by their differing educational achievements. Thus, it could be the case that the lower occupational attainments of a particular ethnic group could be explained by the group's lower educational achievements. The concern in both cities,

therefore, ought to shift to address the problem why there are so few members of this ethnic group who have high educational attainment. Alternatively, if an ethnic minority group with the exact educational attainments as the dominant group is underrepresented in the labor market, in effect fail to reap the returns on their educational investments, it may be prudent to examine and discuss possible reasons behind an ethnic penalty.

While the presence of ethnic minority groups in Toronto is relatively recent, especially in comparison with Beijing, this does not necessarily translate into wide academic coverage. Literature on ethno-development in Canada and by extrication Toronto, is slowly increasing in scope and coverage, and as hinted, it is virtually non-existent in this sense and in broader ethnic group analyses in the Beijing context. The lack of literature on ethno-development in Beijing is not due to a lack of academic enthusiasm in relevant disciplines, but rather the sensitivity of the topic, coupled with logistical difficulties such as access to statistical information, institutional openness and research authorization (e.g., permits). By pairing the case cities together this book will present new information on urban ethno-development drawing from a mixture of primary and secondary sources; as well as discussing the concept of an ethnic penalty in both places by adding a strong ethnographic dimension.

## Outline

Having contextualized the parameters, the book will proceed in five chapters. Chapter one will ground the idea of ethnicity and ethnic differences as a subject of analysis for future chapters. It will detail what is meant by ethnic minority groups and outline its limitations as a category of analysis. The chapter will further elaborate on the idea of ethnicity in the Chinese and Canadian contexts, as the logic is fairly distinct between them.

This is followed by chapter two that outlines the historical conditions of Beijing's and Toronto's strategies for managing ethnic differences. Here, the history of Beijing's well-entrenched, multi-generational ethnic population will be contrasted with Toronto's relatively recent visible ethnic minority arrivals in the latter half of the twentieth.

Chapter three will examine the educational process for ethnic minorities and the various programs designed to assist in improving their educational attainment. Drawing upon interview findings and statistics, it analyzes and discusses ethnic minorities' experiences at the

primary, secondary, and tertiary school levels. A conversation on the notion of education as human capital investment is also presented.

In a similar vein, chapter four will look at the occupational experiences of ethnic minorities. It will expand on the major policies set up to support ethnic minority equity in the labor market. Moreover, it will highlight and discuss the narrative derived from interviews on the job search, hiring process, and workplace advancement both from the perspective of the (potential) employee and employer. Statistical outcomes for ethnic minorities in the occupational market is thereafter presented and analyzed.

Finally, chapter five discusses the idea of discrimination, an individual's social network, a firm's working culture, and a community's social trust, as potential factors explaining the paradox that high educational attainment for a member of an ethnic minority group does not necessarily equate to HWEI occupational outcomes relative to the dominant groups.

In short, this book will systematically examine ethnic minorities' experiences in Beijing and Toronto, from schooling to the job search, to hiring and promotion process. The interviews with individuals and employers, rich ethnography, and statistics will be used in such a manner that the reader can, after reading the book, vividly comprehend ethnic minorities' life course experiences from education to occupational attainment; and equally important, understand the operations and causes of an "ethnic penalty."

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