The Education of Ethnic Minorities in Beijing

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Abstract
This article investigates the operations of minority schools, and the subsequent on-the-ground experiences of ethnic minorities in Beijing at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The article suggests that the 'inter-sectionality' of ethnic identities, particularly minority-majority, rich-poor and urban-rural, must be factored in when examining the varying differences between minorities who have graduated from Beijing's minority schools and non-Beijing ethnic minorities, who have enrolled in the capital city's universities. The article draws upon recent statistical data, interviews with minority actors and public stakeholders, and participant observation in the city's schools and universities.

Keywords: China; Beijing; ethnic minorities; educational outcomes; academic performance; ethno-development.

At the onset of market reforms Suzanne Pepper (1980) critically examined the development of Chinese education in the Communist era. Her assertion was that China had devised two strategies for educational development: (1) an egalitarian strategy introduced during the Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s and again during the Cultural Revolution; and (2) a hierarchical strategy used in the early 1950s and briefly in the early 1960s. The main intentions of the egalitarian strategy were to abolish tenets of 'elitist education' (tiancai jiaoyu) and to reduce inequalities experienced by different types of students by eradicating educational practices based on hierarchical strategies, such as separating students into ability groups in schools sorted by entrance examination scores; or eliminating special schools for cadre children and national minorities. The egalitarian strategy thus encouraged all students to be streamed into 'ordinary' schools in their own neighbourhoods.
irrespective of ability or considerations of existing gender or ethnic inequalities. As Pepper demonstrated, the cost of this egalitarian strategy in the 1970s was a sharp reduction in academic standards, notably at the tertiary level. Against this unpropitious background, an educational policy based on a hierarchical strategy was being restored to reverse this trend at the time of her writing in the late 1970s. For instance, in 1978, the Ministry of Education issued recommendations to strengthen the management of primary and secondary schooling by allowing the control of education to once again be the domain of the educational bureaus at the local level who were better equipped to factor local considerations.

The legacy of this dual strategy for educational development can likewise be understood by examining the recent history of ethnic minority education. Since the founding of the People’s Republic, schools have generally appeared to be oriented towards fostering conformity directed by the state’s centralized mechanisms, rather than providing a platform for initiatives in education that recognize ethnic distinctiveness. There are three historical phases during Communist rule where this can be observed, in varying degrees. From 1949 to 1959 the state’s goal of promoting rapid economic development, culminating in the Great Leap Forward, meant that educational opportunities had to be increased to meet the demands for skilled labour. This was complicated by the fact that selection mechanisms for educational institutions during this period favoured an egalitarian strategy, with strong preference for those from less skilled, proletariat backgrounds (Zhou, Moen and Tuma 1998). Notwithstanding the prevailing egalitarian strategy during this period, the education of ethnic minorities was framed with the idea of emphasizing Han ideology with ‘ethnic minority characteristics’ – that is, incorporating local teaching practices and the local ethnic language.

After the economic disaster that followed the Great Leap Forward, the 1960s witnessed a significant decrease in educational opportunities for both Han and ethnic minorities. A large part of this trend can be attributed to the Cultural Revolution during which numerous educational institutions were closed or severely disrupted. The onset of the Cultural Revolution also meant that tolerance for Han education with ‘ethnic minority characteristics’ was effectively abandoned given the Revolution’s philosophy of suppressing ethnic minority consciousness and utilizing an egalitarian strategy in education (Lin 1997). Ethnic minority schools during this period employed a strict Mandarin-only policy and a nationalized standard curriculum which teachers and students were expected to follow.

Since the beginning of the economic liberalization process in 1978, the state has actively sought to increase educational opportunities for shaoshu minzu (minority nationality) by focusing on a hierarchical
strategy for educational development, namely providing special assistance to ethnic minority students enrolled in primary, secondary and tertiary level schooling. As one case in point, in February 1981 the Ministry of Education and the State Ethnic Affairs Commission for the first time permitted the teaching of minority languages in schools. Moreover, inspired in part by the now defunct State Education Commission and the Ministry of Finance’s ‘Opinion on Reforming the Administration of Basic Education’ in 1987, all students enrolled in ethnic minority schools are entitled to tuition-cost bursaries, regardless of their location. In many boarding and semi-boarding primary and secondary schools, ethnic minority students get monthly stipends to cover their food, clothing and accommodation costs. Salaries have increased for teachers working in minority schools, encouraging a more stable teaching infrastructure (Lin 1997).

In fact, the overall level of investment in formal education in China has tripled since the beginning of market reforms. Total public expenditures on elementary, secondary and tertiary schooling alone totalled approximately US$42.1 billion or 3.41 per cent of 2002 GDP (Ministry of Education 2006). Coiled in the heart of this financial commitment, among other things, is an appreciation that education fosters an ethnic minority’s potential to integrate within the community at large, as well as providing a strong potential for greater inter-generational ethnic group integration. In particular, theories of ethnic minority schooling suggest that the communities in which ethnic minority children grow up impact the quality and quantity of their human capital investments, and inter-generational transfers in education (Chiswick 1988). This may suggest differing educational processes and outcomes for minority children in various parts of China.

While there are numerous studies that examine ethnic minority education in China, there is a general tendency to focus on the national level (see Lin 1997; Zhou, Moen and Tuma 1998; Zhou 2000; Xiang and Jun 2001; Hannum 2002) and/or on the educational experiences of ethnic minorities in the less-developed bordering and rural areas, or on an examination of a single ethnic minority group who are the majority in a poorer region of the nation – which may risk conflating poverty issues with ethnic minority issues (see Gladney 1999; Xiang 2002; Yi 2005). The little that has been written about the education of ethnic minorities in the relatively developed urban areas such as Beijing, where resource constraint issues are not very pressing, suggests that their experiences require exploration.

Ethnic minorities in Beijing refer to 584,692 residents constituting nearly 5 per cent of the total population (NBS 2005). In fact, there are four major segments of ethnic minorities who have settled in the city in different periods. The first segment is the well-entrenched, multi-generational group of ethnic minority groups who comprise the largest
ethnic populations in the capital city – the Hui (235,837), Mongolians (37,464) and Manchus (250,286) (NBS 2005). All three groups have historically migrated to the city in search of improved economic prosperity and/or after the establishment of their ethnic group lead dynasty. For instance, the Hui people in Beijing are descendants of a diverse group of Central and Western Asian, Persian and Arab Muslim merchants, traders and officials who arrived in the city as early as the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and subsequently established a permanent ethnic enclave – in present day Niujie – by the time of the Yuan Dynasty (see Weng 1992). Further, Mongolians and Manchus settled in the city after the establishment of their dynasties, the Yuan (1271–1368) and Qing (1644–1912) respectively (see Rawski 2001).

The second segment of ethnic minorities are ‘elites’ from various communities of the nation who have been brought to Beijing since the establishment of the People’s Republic, to be educated and trained in the government cadre (ganbu) system. To this end, the state has established special institutions of higher learning for such training around the nation, with the Central University for Nationalities (CUN) in Beijing one of the largest and most important institutes. The third segment is ethnic minority students who are annually recruited across the nation to the approximately seventy universities and colleges in the capital city; upon graduation, many subsequently remain in the city in search of employment (see Hasmath 2007, 2008). And the fourth segment are ethnic minorities who comprise the estimated 2.5 to 3.5 million migrant workers (min gong) in the capital city.

It must be acknowledged that all four ethnic minority segments have varying educational experiences in Beijing. However, due to the study’s limitations, the article will specifically examine the schooling experiences of the first three segments of this population, with the migrant ethnic minority population not fully captured in the methodologies applied. The study will draw upon recent statistical data and qualitative data collected in the city in late 2006 and 2007. The qualitative sample includes fifty-three semi-structured interviews with ethnic minorities in Chongwen, Haidian and Xuanwu Districts, querying their educational experiences in primary, secondary and tertiary schooling. Ethnic minority groups represented in the sample include a representative sample of the major ethnic group populations in Beijing (population percentages in parentheses): including Hui (40.3 per cent), Uyghurs (0.5 per cent), Mongolians (6.4 per cent), Tibetans (0.5 per cent), Manchus (42.8 per cent), Koreans (3.5 per cent), Zhuang (1.3 per cent) and Miao (0.9 per cent) (NBS 2005). The most notable exception not captured in the qualitative sample are Tujias who constitute 1.4 per cent of the ethnic minority population in the city. Each interview, conducted by the author, lasted approximately
three-quarters of an hour. Responses were analysed using emergent theme coding, whereby each response is coded into as many themes as the statements warranted. Emerging themes from semi-structured interviews were reinforced by participant observation in eight minority primary and secondary schools in three districts; interviews were conducted at four universities, Central University for Nationalities, Beijing University, Tsinghua University and the Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU); and consultations were held with public stakeholders such as government officials, NGOs and think tanks with relevant educational and ethnic minority portfolios.

The article will first present a picture of the operations of minority primary and secondary schooling in the capital city, followed by an assessment of Beijing’s experiences relative to the national experience. This will be followed by a discussion of the tertiary level experiences of ethnic minorities, including an examination of the varying differences between minorities who have graduated from Beijing minority schools versus non-Beijing ethnic minorities, who have enrolled in the city’s universities.

**Primary and secondary schooling**

**Administration and curriculum**

In spite of procedural changes for ethnic minorities in the education system at the onset of market reforms, the uniformity of primary and secondary schools administration is a reality, irrespective of minority school status. In all of Beijing’s minority and non-minority primary and secondary schools the year is divided into two semesters based on a five-day week. Further, primary schools have thirty-eight weeks of instruction with an additional week in reserve, and thirteen weeks of vacation time for the students; junior secondary schools have thirty-nine weeks of instruction with an additional week in reserve, and twelve weeks of vacation time; and senior secondary schools have forty weeks of teaching instruction, with one to two weeks of reserve teaching time and ten to eleven weeks of vacation.

According to the current education law, the curriculum is to be planned, coordinated and governed by the Ministry of Education, with the implementation of the curriculum to be conducted at the local level. Practically, this means that the curriculum of primary and secondary minority schools in Beijing mirrors a national one, utilizing virtually the same textbooks and curriculum content. One problem with this practice is that the common curriculum seldom stresses a concern for knowledge about ethnic minority groups to be incorporated (Lin 1997). Instead, it focuses on Han experiences, which can be impractical for meeting the needs of ethnic minority groups. This has led commentators
to suggest that there is little space in primary and secondary school education for the history and culture of minorities – thus reinforcing education as a vehicle to assimilate ethnic minorities via a core curriculum dominated by Han experiences (Zhou 2000).

Nevertheless, there is some flexibility, at least in theory, to engage with local minority content in Beijing. Since 1993, the Teaching Scheme has been divided into two categories: state-arranged subjects and locally-arranged subjects. The Principal of a Hui minority school in the Niujie area of Xuanwu District elaborates on the operationalization of this Scheme in respect to her school:

Although they [the students] are educated in China’s Teaching Scheme, we supplement their education with an Islamic one. However, our first priority is to ensure that the Teaching Scheme is taught, as it is the case for all students in Beijing, so our students are not left behind.

In the city’s minority primary schools it is especially important to ensure that students receive the core state-arranged education, so that they not only pass the required Chinese language and mathematics examinations to enter junior secondary school, but are equipped to socially integrate within a junior school that may or may not be minority-specific. In the words of a Han senior teacher in a minority school in Chongwen District:

It is important to ensure that the children integrate very well when they move to secondary school. Students have the option of attending a minority school or any Beijing school, so it is necessary to ensure that they learn to respect all nationalities and ‘all in the family’ attitude. We are all Chinese after all.

An instructor at a Hui minority primary school in Xuanwu District continues this train of thought:

The children are not taught about differences at all. They learn to respect each other. I have been teaching for 19 years, 7 years at this school, here they are always taught by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. This ensures that the children are able to integrate when they get into higher schooling and into the society very well.

School officials in the minority schools observed were quite mindful of preparing students for life in junior and secondary schools. Instruction by both minority and non-minority teachers was always in Mandarin Chinese, even when providing minority education (e.g. Islamic teachings). The students observed spoke a very clear and standard
dialect of Mandarin, commonplace among their age group in Beijing. In fact, one would be hard pressed to distinguish between Han school children and the minority school children observed on the basis of their linguistic skills alone. It was fascinating that in all minority primary schools the rate of failure for the Chinese language examinations was quite low. Although exact figures were unavailable, a ‘virtually zero figure’ was proudly echoed by school administrators.

Outcomes: Beijing versus the national experience

Suffice to say, the Chinese state views the development of education among ethnic minorities as being of ‘paramount importance to the improvement of the quality of the minority population and the promotion of economic and cultural development’ (IOSC 2000). While it appears the government has created measures to increase procedural equality in education to achieve this goal, such as providing bursaries and monthly stipends, substantively these measures nationally seem to have done little to diminish the high dropout rate characteristic of ethnic minority schools, to the point that only two-thirds or less of ethnic minority students complete primary schooling in some areas (Chen Kai et al., quoted in Lin 1997, p. 194).

This, however, is not an observable trend in Beijing’s ethnic minority primary and secondary schools, as demonstrated in Table 1. Among the national ethnic minority population, 45 per cent have their highest educational attainment as primary school education; whereas in Beijing this figure is a relatively paltry 15.8 per cent. Put another way, the odds ratio in Beijing at the primary school level is 0.12, increasing rapidly to 1.35 at the junior secondary level, and 11.35 at the senior secondary school, indicating a considerable advantage for ethnic minorities in Beijing relative to minorities nationwide. In terms of a gender bias among the ethnic minority cohort, only at a senior technical school level do disproportional outcomes exist in Beijing, which is not the case at the national level. However, at both junior and senior secondary school a gender bias does exist among ethnic minorities nationally, which is in line with the general (Han-inclusive) national population (Hannum 2002).

There are at least four major reasons why Beijing’s ethnic minorities have high primary and secondary school attainment levels relative to the national average for ethnic minorities. The first is an economic argument. Beijing’s economic development is at such a high level (GDP 772 billion yuan (~ US$113 billion)) in comparison to most of the nation, especially ethnic minority regions, that the trickle-down effect means spending, in real dollar terms and as a percentage of Beijing’s GDP, on primary and secondary school infrastructure, is maintained at an equally high level. According to Beijing’s Municipal
Table 1. Highest educational attainment (primary and secondary levels) by ethnic minority population in Beijing and nation, ages 6+, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Primary school</th>
<th></th>
<th>Junior secondary school</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (%)</td>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Total population (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>87,759</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>42,947,560</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odds ratio*</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior secondary school</td>
<td>Male (%)</td>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Total population (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>50.1</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>105,597</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>59.8</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>5,396,605</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odds ratio*</td>
<td>8.27</td>
<td>16.82</td>
<td>11.35</td>
<td>4.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The odds ratios compare the odds of educational attainment \(p(\text{attainment})/(1 - p(\text{attainment}))\) for ethnic minorities in Beijing (numerator) and ethnic minorities nationally (denominator). An odds ratio value of 1 thus indicates geographical equity; an odds ratio value that is > 1 indicates the educational attainment segment is more likely to occur in Beijing; conversely, an odds ratio value that is < 1 indicates the educational attainment segment is less likely to occur in Beijing.

Education Committee, annual spending on the education sector is expected to rise to meet the 4 per cent of local GDP target in the next few years, approximately 40 billion yuan (~US$5.9 billion), a significant jump from 2006 levels at 23.5 billion yuan (~US$3.5 billion) or 3.04 per cent of Beijing’s GDP. Most of Beijing’s primary and secondary schools are equipped with new classrooms and recently-built labs, funded by an injection of increased local spending on education – evident in the minority schools observed.

Second, retaining teachers is also not an issue, which is often the case in ethnic minority regions. Among Beijing’s primary and secondary schools there is an oversupply of teacher applications every year, mostly from new graduates from Beijing’s universities. The Municipal Education Committee has also sought to increase teachers’ income to be at least equal to that of government employees, ensuring that high retention levels for teachers will continue in the city’s schools.

Third, the Child Quality-Quantity model can aid in this interpretation. According to the model, the size of a family is a good indication of the time investment a parent potentially has for a child, and has a high correlation with a child’s educational attainment (Becker and Lewis 1973; Chiswick 1988). The idea here is that parental investment can increase the child’s productivity in schooling, akin to the way teacher investment and quality increase academic test scores. Although official ethnic minorities are exempt from the one-child population policy, or have a higher quota, family size in minority regions in the nation, especially in rural areas, is usually larger than for minorities living in Beijing. It is actually quite rare for ethnic minority families in Beijing to have more than two children; one is the norm. This equates to less competition for parental time among Beijing’s ethnic minority families, and more time for providing non-formal education which is equally instrumental in a child’s early education.

And fourth, a crucial element in explaining Beijing’s success versus minority regions in primary and secondary school education lies in a linguistic argument which is tied to the family environment. Students throughout the nation, minority regions included, are required to sit official examinations at the primary and secondary school levels in Chinese. For most minority regions, Mandarin is the second language, with the first language being their respective ethnic language. A senior official from Action Aid International China in Beijing points out:

The majority of ethnic minorities speak their mother tongue for everyday communication in the family household, and this trend increases a lot among those in minority regions and in their thirties and over.
An ethnic minority scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences adds:

It has become increasingly clear that teaching in Mandarin is too difficult for minority children, particularly for those who have never been in contact with the language before. Bilingual education has come to be seen as a crucial component of schooling if learning is to be improved among minority students.

In interviews with public stakeholders the consensus was that all ethnic minority students should learn Mandarin and understand Han culture in order to succeed in primary and secondary schooling and, later on, in the workplace. The reasoning for this stance ranges from the simple notion that Mandarin is the common language used in all aspects of life in China, to the idea that a compulsory Chinese education for ethnic minority children provides the means and ‘tools’ that allow for integration into Chinese mainstream culture and its values. In essence, the Mandarin language is ‘the avenue to opportunities and social acceptance, whilst minority languages are limited in use and [are] of low social status’ (Lin 1997, p. 196).

In Beijing, the teaching of Mandarin Chinese to minority students is aided by the fact that the majority of students’ family members speak Mandarin at home. Of course there are exceptions, as one senior secondary school ethnic minority pupil vividly recalls:

It was sometimes difficult [for me], especially when I was young, as many ethnic minorities must be bilingual... at home I speak my ethnic language, in school I speak Hanyu [Mandarin]. However, now I just speak Hanyu and very little of my ethnic language at home.

Situations such as this arise because not enough attention has been paid to employing a multi-lingual teaching policy in primary and secondary minority schools in the capital city, or at the very least discussing ethnic minorities’ histories and traditions in textbooks. Although encouraging these practices can increase minority students’ learning in primary and secondary schools this is rarely practised in Beijing. The practical reasons for this are twofold: the textbooks made mandatory by the Ministry of Education are conceived for native Mandarin speakers; and are used by teachers in minority schools who have little or no training in teaching languages and cultures other than Han.

Finally, it is interesting to note that while the Beijing Municipal Education Committee strives to provide nine-year compulsory education to all school-age children, minority or otherwise, this does not
meet the demanding aspirations of Beijingers. Some experts have proposed that Beijing, as a locally perceived international metropolis, should adopt a twelve-year compulsory education. Binxian Zhang, an education specialist from Beijing Normal University, argues: 'The average number of years at school for Beijingers lags far behind New York and Tokyo... we should [thus] extend the compulsory education period by three years' (People's Daily 2007). Thus the disparity between the resources and aspirations of Beijing's primary and secondary schools and those of ethnic minority regions is further pronounced. This also suggests a stronger emphasis on a hierarchical strategy for educational development that will potentially increase the disparity in educational opportunities for Beijing's minorities and minorities in the rest of China.

**Tertiary schooling**

The Chinese government views itself as the 'enlightened element' and sees its mandate as raising the standards of the people (see National Minorities Policy, Section IV, Paragraphs 23–6). This, mistakenly or not, has been the thinking behind the egalitarian and hierarchical strategies in education development post-1949. One current measure the Chinese state has taken in pursuing this mandate is to increase the formal skills of ethnic minorities. The government views tertiary education as an important outlet to improve the economic development of ethnic minorities and, in the long term, attain a Xiaokang (well-off) society, inspiring 'equitable' and 'harmonious' stability among the ethnic minority population. Universities are expected 'to contribute to national integration and the breaking down of ethnic hatred, and to help encourage a national identity' (Mauch 2000, p. 26). As part of this effort, the government has sought to increase opportunities and expand access for minority students at the tertiary level with a battery of carefully designed policies.

One such measure is the establishment of national minority universities. The formation of national minority universities was an opportunity for minorities to be educated based on Communist ideologies, and to provide a platform to integrate minorities into the mainstream. The first of these, the Central University of Nationalities (CUN), was established in Beijing in 1951 and was originally designed to train minority cadres whose familiarity with local languages and customs would, it was envisioned, serve as a liaison between local ethnic minorities and the government. Today, CUN is part of Project 211, a strategic initiative of almost 100 universities which obtain additional funding from the central government to groom talented students. In addition to traditional course offerings, CUN differs from other universities in Beijing by making available
subjects and majors such as minority literature, ethnic languages and ethnology. However, a common aim throughout university education in China is to foster a sense of Chinese patriotism (Rong 2001). In this vein, CUN promotes Communist ideology by requiring students to take modules and courses on Chinese minority theories and Marxism.

Another measure is to provide preferential treatment in university admissions. This usually equates to lowering minimum requirements for the National University Entrance Examination (scored out of 900), which is a mandatory exam for all students to enter university (see Table 2 for percentile ranks of scores). A highly selective university in Beijing such as Beijing University and Tsinghua University may lower its threshold slightly from its normal requirement of a score of 850 (99.98 percentile); while other universities may lower the threshold from their normal requirement of only 600 (85.31 percentile). At the Central University of Nationalities, a minimum score in the mid-400s (<50 percentile) is accepted, ranking it as having one of the lowest minimum entrance requirements among all Beijing universities. In exceptional individual circumstances,14 if a student scores slightly lower than the minimum score they may be accepted at the discretion of the university. Some universities may set ratios between ethnic minorities and Han applicants for their student intake. The Central University of Nationalities allocates fixed quotas to ensure each of the fifty-five ethnic minority groups are represented each year, to the extent that on several occasions minimum university entrance scores have been lowered further to ensure that the least represented ethnic groups are admitted. Further, minority students

Table 2. China’s National University Entrance Examination score percentile ranks (five examinations), 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Percentile ranks</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Percentile ranks</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Percentile ranks</th>
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<tr>
<td>500</td>
<td>51.99</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>92.65</td>
<td>780</td>
<td>99.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>510</td>
<td>55.96</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>93.94</td>
<td>790</td>
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<tr>
<td>520</td>
<td>59.87</td>
<td>660</td>
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<td>800</td>
<td>99.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>530</td>
<td>63.68</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>95.99</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>99.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>540</td>
<td>67.36</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>96.78</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>99.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>550</td>
<td>70.88</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>97.44</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>99.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>560</td>
<td>74.22</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>97.98</td>
<td>840</td>
<td>99.97</td>
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<tr>
<td>570</td>
<td>77.34</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>98.42</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>99.98</td>
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<td>82.89</td>
<td>730</td>
<td>99.06</td>
<td>870</td>
<td>99.99</td>
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<td>600</td>
<td>85.31</td>
<td>740</td>
<td>99.29</td>
<td>880</td>
<td>99.99</td>
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<td>89.44</td>
<td>760</td>
<td>99.60</td>
<td>900</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>630</td>
<td>91.15</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>99.70</td>
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</table>

enrolled in ethnic minority-oriented specialties, in practice mostly relating to ethnic languages and literature, are provided with generous scholarships and often pay no tuition and are granted a monthly stipend of around 100 RMB (≈ US$14.7). There are even bridging programmes – with tuition paid in full by the government – designed to select high-achieving ethnic minority secondary school students to attend the Central University of Nationalities to prepare them to enter Beijing’s top universities. Conversely, there are additional preparatory courses for minority students who were not adequately prepared in secondary school for university, including remedial Mandarin Chinese language tutorials, and a one-year tutorial course which revisits the last year of secondary school to enable minority students to enrol in university.

In spite of the government’s attempts to improve the education levels of ethnic minorities, deep challenges remain – as is evident from examining minorities educated in Beijing versus minorities nationally. Similar to the situation in primary and secondary schools, ethnic minority students struggle nationally at the tertiary level. As Table 3 illustrates, 0.9 per cent of ethnic minorities nationally have attained a university (undergraduate) education; this is in comparison to 10.8 per cent of ethnic minorities in Beijing. A major contributor to this discrepancy is a linguistic dimension, as discussed earlier. For many minority students, especially outside of Beijing, the university entrance exam can be challenging given that it is written in Chinese and not their native language.15 To remedy this situation, certain ethnic groups are allowed to sit the exam in their native language if they are applying to a nationality university such as CUN or to certain universities located in minority regions. At present, one can take the university entrance exam in six minority languages, including Tibetan, Uyghur, Mongolian, Korean, Kazak and Kirgiz. Yet, this has not significantly altered the situation given that at the most basic level many minority schools outside of Beijing are plagued by poor facilities and a lack of university-educated teachers (Postiglione 1992). As mentioned, these problems do not exist to the same extent in Beijing, partially explaining the high rate of tertiary attainment among the minority population in the capital city. Also, the Beijing Municipal government has recently pledged an additional 50 million yuan (US$7.3 million) to help poverty-stricken students through Beijing’s universities. According to the Beijing Municipal Education Committee, among the 700,000 students attending Beijing-based universities, 15 to 20 per cent are from poverty-stricken families. In the optimistic words of the vice-director of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, Dainzhub Ongboin: “The government will do its best to ensure the schooling of each ethnic student . . . [I] too [being a Tibetan] was a poor student
Table 3. Highest educational attainment (tertiary level) by ethnic minority population in Beijing and nation, Ages 6+, 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Junior college</th>
<th>Total population (%)</th>
<th>University (undergraduate)</th>
<th>Total population (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (%)</td>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Male (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>51,761</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>59.1</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>1,735,138</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odds ratio*</td>
<td>17.60</td>
<td>42.07</td>
<td>26.39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-graduate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male (%)</td>
<td>Female (%)</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Total population (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>41.9</td>
<td>7,538</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nation</td>
<td>63.8</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>36,372</td>
<td>0.0(4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Odds ratio*</td>
<td>1092.70</td>
<td>1648.32</td>
<td>1273.77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The odds ratios compare the odds of educational attainment \([p(\text{attainment})/(1-p(\text{attainment}))]\) for ethnic minorities in Beijing (numerator) and ethnic minorities nationally (denominator). An odds ratio value of 1 thus indicates geographical equity; an odds ratio value that is > 1 indicates the educational attainment segment is more likely to occur in Beijing; conversely, an odds ratio value that is < 1 indicates the educational attainment segment is less likely to occur in Beijing.

many years ago... and [I] understand the bitterness of poverty at school' (quoted in Beijing Review 2007).

Min kao han versus min kao min

Those minority students who choose to sit their examinations in one of the six minority languages (referred to as min kao min\textsuperscript{16}) are often directed to major in their home language and literature. For instance, Tibetans who took the university examination in Tibetan may find that they are encouraged to major in Tibetan literature and language.\textsuperscript{17} As an expert of Mongolian literature and language at CUN suggests, this is a logical progression.

Min kao min students are at a disadvantage since their Chinese is not to a level in which they can benefit from all the courses that are on offer at the university. The majority of the courses are taught in Chinese, which benefits min kao han students [minority students who take the university examination in Chinese] ... given this difficulty, it makes sense that min kao min students major in their own literature and language.

The number of min kao min students at CUN is statistically low in comparison to its overall student population; nevertheless the comparison with min kao han in many ways is a microcosm of Beijing outside the university context. Typically, min kao han students have studied in Mandarin-only primary and secondary schools, either alongside Han students or in minority schools where the entire instruction is in Mandarin Chinese (as in virtually all minority schools in Beijing); they are therefore able to adapt to CUN's ethnically diverse environment with ease given the common spoken language of Mandarin. It is typical for min kao han students in Beijing's universities to form social groupings irrespective of ethnicity. In contrast, among min kao min students, who are generally educated in minority areas, social groupings are forged in line with their own ethnic background.

The comfort level of ethnic differences at CUN is such that during introductions it is quite common to enquire about a person's ethnic background, which may not be the most immediate question asked in other social interactions in Beijing. Of course, the extent to which this is utilized can be limited, as evidenced by an interview with a Mongolian student:

Q: What do you think about hyphenated ethnicity [for instance, Mongolian-Chinese]?
A: I'm Chinese first. I know in the West people use that [hyphenated ethnicity to identify themselves]. But, at CUN I am Mongolian. Outside of CUN, I am Chinese.
Q: You can't have both identities at one time?
A: That's a tough question, but the answer is no. At CUN I feel like I have to be Mongolian to represent my nationality. I was born in Beijing. I have never been to Inner Mongolia. But my father is Mongolian. My mother is Han. I am Mongolian here [at the university], not there [pointing to the streets].

While the environment at CUN provides a level of acceptance that encourages students to promote their ethnic identity, it is quite unusual for this to occur. At Beijing University, Tsinghua University and the Beijing Language and Culture University, ethnic minorities interviewed had more discomfort discussing their ethnic identity. When the same discussion on hyphenated ethnicity was raised, participants candidly thought it was an absurd concept that could not exist in China. They were Chinese first, and, if pressed, they could (sometimes reluctantly) claim to be Zhuang, Miao or Manchu, etc. This occurred to the extent that a Beijing-born, Miao minority BLCU student remarked: 'I am only Miao when I go to a Miao restaurant. Otherwise, I'm Chinese.'

There are numerous positives that can be observed from encouraging ethnic diversity on university campuses in Beijing. Although many minority students have lived their entire lives in Beijing, at CUN they were more aware of their ethnic identity and engaged more with their ethnic culture than at any other juncture of their lives. As one min kao han Xibo student poignantly puts it: 'only at CUN, I started to think about what it means to be a Xibo... I feel like I am representing the Xibo group in my class'. Although she has spent her entire life in Beijing, in her time at CUN she has gained an opportunity to discover her own ethnicity and to understand other ethnicities as well.

Whether min kao han students are representative of their official ethnic group is another question. For the min kao min students interviewed, min kao han were Chinese and were loosely representative of their ethnicity only at the surface level. This was more pronounced among Uyghur and Tibetan min kao min students. At the very heart of this divide is a question of representativeness, whereby min kao min students thought they were more representative of their ethnic group, given that they spoke the language, 'practised the culture' and did not readily assimilate into Han culture. Many min kao han students were disappointed that they did not speak their ethnic language, or practise the traditional customs. However, as a Tibetan PhD student at Beijing University articulates:
I may be a second generation Beijinger, but I am still Tibetan at heart. I may not be seen as a pure [sic] Tibetan, but I am still Tibetan... I know this because I am not fully accepted as Han... even though I understand the Han.

It appears that many min kao han students suffer from a torn identity. On the one hand, they are perceived as an ethnic minority by Hans in spite of the fact that they have lived their entire lives in Beijing. On the other hand, they are not fully accepted by the various min kao min ethnic communities, as many are unable to speak the ethnic language or unable to relate fully to min kao min experiences. In other words, although they are officially categorized as shaoshu minzu, different ethnic boundaries arise within the perceptual context of min kao han and min kao min students.

In a possible reaction, a curious pattern emerges among many of the min kao han students interviewed. The Tibetan PhD student asserts that although she may not be fully accepted by the Tibetan community she believes she has the best of both worlds. 'Due to my education, my outlook is much more progressive than many "pure Tibetans" who still have old-fashioned thinking.' This sentiment, the idea of benefiting from a Chinese education in Beijing, was repeatedly echoed in the interview narratives. Many ethnic minority students preferred to learn English as their second language, rather than learning their own ethnic language, as it was seen as more progressive and beneficial to their future career prospects.

Conclusion

This article suggests that local ethnic minorities in Beijing have a higher educational attainment in primary, secondary and tertiary level education than the national average. Part of the reason for this relative success is due to the operations of minority primary and secondary schools which are constantly mindful of preparing students following the common curriculum, as well as providing minority content beyond the curriculum. The main goals echoed throughout the primary and secondary schools observed were to prepare minority students for tertiary education and, implicitly, their integration into the wider Han-dominated community. Of course, ethnic minorities in Beijing are aided by the fact that they are not penalized from a linguistic standpoint, with the overwhelming majority fluent in Mandarin without any discernible cues to ethnic minority status (e.g. accent); and by the spending power of Beijing's educational authorities which allows schools to be equipped with new facilities and to retain qualified university-educated teachers.
From another perspective, the article suggests that when it comes to educational development, the ‘intersectionality’ of ethnic identities, particularly minority-majority, rich-poor and urban-rural, must be strongly factored in the context of China. Ethnic minority children in Beijing, who are at the intersection of not very poor and urban, are in a relatively advantageous position compared to children who are at the intersection of poor and rural. The widening disparities in educational outcomes between Beijing minorities and the rest of the nation further suggest that the egalitarian strategy for educational development prevalent for the majority of the pre-market reform era has become practically ignored. This is troubling given that higher educational outcomes bode well for integration via the labour market and the community at large (see Hasmath 2008). An interesting juxtaposition of potential differences between minorities educated in Beijing versus minorities educated elsewhere can be seen in the realities of min kao han and min kao min students in the city’s universities. While min kao han students find it easier to forge social groupings irrespective of ethnic status, min kao min students tend to group on the basis of their own ethnic background. Is this a sign of the relative struggles for ethnic minority integration in the near future?

These findings should not be construed as advocating for the removal of hierarchical strategies in educational development. On the contrary, given the modern history of China these strategies must be employed in order to ensure that educational standards continue to improve. However, a careful calculus must be enacted to ensure that the educational development of ethnic minorities in Beijing does not surpass the national level to the point that two classes of ethnic minorities are created.

Notes

1. As an anonymous reviewer pointed out, the Ministry of Education published a memorandum (80 minjiadaezi 012 hao [1980 minority education document #012]) in June 1980 promoting the compiling and publishing of textbooks in minority languages. However, it was only in 1981 that a policy was codified into action. Nevertheless, the life-span of this policy was short-lived. One can argue that the Compulsory Education Law in 1986 curbed the effectiveness of the 1981 policy by stipulating nine years of instruction primarily in Mandarin.

2. After the restructure of the State Council in 1998, the State Education Commission, an entity existing since 1985, became part of the Ministry of Education.

3. This does not factor the estimated dollar value of time parents spend nurturing and teaching their children.

4. Note, figures quoted throughout the study represent the legal population as defined domestically.

5. Local participants were recruited from sites known to have large numbers of ethnic minority members in Beijing, i.e. ethnic associations, universities, ethnic enclaves, ethnic restaurants, and near religious sites.
6. A policy that promotes an egalitarian-inspired equal access to opportunity in education.
7. Unlike measures of difference, odds ratios are not influenced by ceiling and floor effects. See tables for further explanation.
8. This observation holds true regardless of whether an individual is brought up under state socialism. There is however one reservation. Although parental and teacher investment can increase a child's productivity in schooling, the centralized nature of a socialist state may mean it can theoretically transfer resources among different social groups at a faster pace and on a larger scale than market economies. For example, when analysing the Cultural Revolution period, children with cadre or military class backgrounds had higher odds of entering senior secondary school in comparison with children from middle- and upper-class families who were more vulnerable to the Revolution's policies.
9. One can theorize that parents of minority children in Beijing with previous or current cadre backgrounds are more educated than the national average. Thus, their offspring may benefit from greater odds of higher inter-generational transfer of human capital than the national average.
10. This is generally the case for ethnic minority families who derive from the well-entrenched multi-generational groups, and cadre backgrounds.
11. An observer may argue that the state's approach here is not entirely altruistic, but rather carefully designed to gain the favour of the ethnic population and to legitimize the state (Hansen 1999).
12. Formerly called the Central Institute of Nationalities.
13. Project 211 has been incorporated as a key national development project in the 9th Five Year Plan (1997–2002). For more information, see China Education and Research Network (2001).
14. Often related to factors beyond the student's control, e.g. minority students who come from poorer-income geographical clusters.
15. Twenty-one ethnic minority groups have unique writing systems.
16. This connotation is sometimes used in studies looking at the Uyghur population in Xinjiang (see Smith 2002).
17. It was not uncommon for students in the same program/major to share the same dormitory room (which often had six to eight students per room). This ultimately meant min kaa min students would often primarily interact with other min kaa min students from their own ethnicity.

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