

Education Stratification of Ethnic Minorities in China

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ABSTRACT

In today's world, education is an essential component of people's lives. It is a critical factor in propelling national growth. China, as one of the world's largest economies, is also working hard to promote an education strategy that benefits all citizens. However, despite the continuing fast pace of advancement, the voice of the minority groups should be heard to guarantee that they are not left behind. This paper looks at the right to get education and emphasizes on the difference between the access to education for Chinese minorities and the Han majority. Through literature research, comparative research, and statistical analysis, the paper discovers the reasons and influence of such inequality. The uneven allocation of education has been a norm for years through the history. Distinctiveness, Vulnerable and Content differences are the characteristics of Chinese minority education. It faces many problems in languages, the quality and quantity of minority teachers, teaching materials, and education investment. Overall, the development of ethnic minority regions requires numbers of elite leaders and cadres. Training local talents is of significant importance. Chinese authority can also learn from the strategies used by the United States to preserve minority groups' right to education.

Keywords: *Ethnic minority, China, Education, Language, Inequality, Public Policy*

1. INTRODUCTION

China is a united multi-ethnic country. In addition to the Han nationality, there are 55 ethnic minorities. According to the data from The Seventh National Census this year, the total population of China is 1411.78 million, of which the Han Chinese as the majority account for 91.11% and 55 ethnic minorities have a population of 125.47 million, accounting for 8.89% of the total population [12]. Within the 55 ethnic minorities, 53 have their own languages except the Hui and Manchu, 22 groups use a total of 28 languages, and ethnic minority languages are widely used in political and social life across China [12]. Ethnic minorities are mainly distributed in border areas. Due to historical, geographical, cultural, and religious reasons, China's economic and social development is uneven, and the educational development of ethnic minorities and ethnic minority areas is backward. Ethnic minority areas have different levels of economic development and different cultures. There is a big gap between people's life and education in ethnic minority areas and developed areas. To improve the comprehensive level in ethnic minority areas, it is necessary to rely on education. To date, policies and regulations developed by the Chinese

government to address these problems have met with limited success.

This paper investigates the reasons for the uneven education allocation in China and explores the importance of delivering equal quality for education to the ethnic minority groups. The paper gives an analysis on the right to education of minority education theory, the developing history of the education for the Chinese minorities, the problems faced by the minority education, and the enlightenment attained from the United States to protect minority education rights. To evaluate, this paper will use literature research, comparative research, and statistical analysis as the research method. This study will appeal to the attention for the right to education of ethnic minorities which is a social right and an important part of human rights. The paper also has important implications for policymakers seeking to address education inequality and ethnic stratification in China.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT AND FEATURE OF CHINESE MINORITY EDUCATION

2.1 Theoretical analysis on the right to minority education

Human rights to education are not only moral rights,

but also legal rights under international law. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to education and that “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms [3]”.

According to the Article 9 of the education law of the people's Republic of China published in 1995, it is stated that “citizens of the People’s Republic of China shall have the right and duty to be educated. and enjoy equal opportunity of education regardless of their ethnic community, race, sex, occupation, property or religious belief, etc. [3]”. A compulsory education policy in China started from then. However, compulsory education is different from higher education. Most scholars distinguish the right to equality in compulsory education from that in higher education and believe that these are two kinds of rights of different nature. Compulsory education is recognized as a basic right of citizens in all countries in the modern world, while higher education is not; basic rights refer to the most basic needs for human development, while non-basic rights are the high-level achievement for human survival and development. The equality in the proportion of the basic rights and the non-basic rights should be the general principle to judge fairness.

2.2 The developing history of the Chinese minority education

Prior to 1949, the majority of locations where ethnic minorities lived were socially and economically underdeveloped. Some were in the throes of feudalism, while others were still living in primitive societies or were nearing the end of slave societies. There was no such thing as modern education. In 1950, ethnic origins accounted for only 0.9%, 0.4%, and 0.2% of all students in institutions of higher learning, middle schools, and primary schools, respectively [10]. The percentage of students of ethnic backgrounds was significantly lower than the ethnic population, which made up roughly 6% of the total population at the time. There was no formal institution of higher learning for ethnic people anywhere in the country.

Following the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the government focused heavily on the development of education for ethnic minorities. On a policy level, the Constitution, the Ethnic Regions Autonomy Law (1984), and the Education Law (1995) all expressly state that ethnic minorities should be supported and assisted in their educational development [6]. The central government has also established preferential measures to aid ethnic minorities in education, such as the establishment of ethnic minorities' institutes and the launching of university preparatory classes for ethnic minorities. Preferential practices were increasingly standardized and legitimized during the

Cultural Revolution in the 1980s. It lowered the requirements for ethnic minority students seeking admission to all levels of education, particularly higher education such as university and college education. Every year, the government provides special subsidies to improve minority education, such as the Ethnic Minority Education Aid Special Fund and the Border Areas Construction Aid Fund.

2.3 The characteristics of education for Chinese minority education

Following the premise of “equal proportion of higher education for ethnic minorities”, the proportion of persons with higher education among 100000 people, either Han or ethnic minorities, should be equal to or commensurate with the national average. According to the fifth and sixth national censuses, as shown in figure 1, the Fifth National Census (2000) shows that there are 3611 college students per 100000 people, accounting for 3.6%; The sixth census (2010) shows that there are 8630 college students per 100000 people, accounting for 8.6% [13]. In 2013, according to the statistics of relevant departments, there were 9225 college students per 100000 people, accounting for 9.2%. However, “the minority population accounts for 8.41% of the country's total population at that time, while the proportion of minority students in Colleges and universities accounts for only 6.23% [13]”. Overall, the proportion of college students per 100000 people in China's minority population is lower than the national average, and the proportion of some ethnic groups with a small population may be smaller.

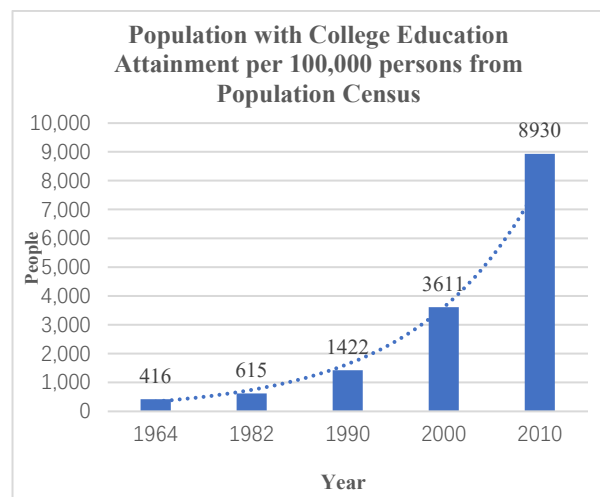


Figure 1 Population with college education attainment for 100,000 persons from population censuses [13].

The characteristics of the education for Chinese ethnic minorities can be summarized as the following three points: first, distinctiveness. There are 55 different ethnic minorities, each with its own cultural traits. Second, vulnerable. Due to the poor historical foundation,

late start and low starting point of ethnic education, ethnic minority education has not reached the national average level. Also, the economic development in ethnic areas lags behind, and the gap between the quality and level for education of ethnic minorities and the Han nationality is widening. Third, the education contents are different. In terms of educational content, apart from receiving formal national scientific, technological and cultural education, ethnic minority citizens also need to undertake the important task of protecting their cultural heritage.

3. MAIN PROBLEMS FACED BY THE CHINESE MINORITY EDUCATION

3.1 Language

Both Mandarin and minority languages are official languages in minority autonomous territories. In order to improve Mandarin's skill in ethnic communities. Since the 1950s, the Chinese government has built a dual educational system in autonomous areas that includes kindergarten, primary school, and university. In these autonomous zones, minority pupils typically attend one of two types of schools. One is the "ordinary school" system, which uses Mandarin as the primary language of

instruction while also teaching a foreign language such as English as a secondary language; the Han, Hui, Man, and members of other ethnic groups may attend these "ordinary schools" if their parents prefer their children to be educated in Mandarin. Another is the "ethnic school" system, which uses the local minority language as the primary medium of instruction while Mandarin is taught as a secondary language, with English or another foreign language being taught as a third language in some regions.

3.2 The quality and quantity of minority teachers

The quality of teachers in ethnic minority areas is the key factor affecting the protection of ethnic minorities' right to education. In China, teacher distribution is unequal, and there are considerable discrepancies in teacher quality between the East and the West, particularly in the Northwest, where teacher quality is significantly lower than the national average. According to Table 1, China has an insufficient number of minority teachers. The most serious issue is a shortage of bilingual teachers, whose number is unable to meet the demand for qualified teachers in rural areas, posing a serious threat to minority children's access to education.

Table 1 Number of minority teachers, staff & workers of schools of all levels & types; unit in 10,000 [2].

Level of Education	Total number of Teachers, Staff & Workers	TOTAL Number of Minority Teachers, Staff & Workers	Percentage (%) of minority teachers, staff & workers	Total number of Full-time Teachers	Total Number of Minority Full-time Teachers	Percentage (%) of minority full-time teachers
HEIs Offering Degree Programs	119.78	5.90	4.93	63.00	3.20	5.08
Non-university Tertiary	44.00	2.10	4.77	26.79	1.25	4.67
Regular Senior Secondary Schools	572.02	42.61	7.45	129.95	8.18	6.29
Vocational High Schools	38.93	1.39	3.56	28.25	0.96	3.39
Vocational Junior Secondary Education	2.40	0.24	9.84	2.02	0.21	10.32
Regular Primary Schools	613.22	62.15	10.13	559.25	56.93	10.18
Pre-school Education Institutions	115.20	4.68	4.06	72.16	3.12	4.32

Back in times, Before the 1950s, many minority groups in China did not have access to modern education. Many young people from minority groups were recruited and taught as the first generation of minority school teachers during the 1950s and 1960s through specific training programs. The general levels of academic background and teaching skills of minority teachers, especially in the domains of natural sciences such as physics, mathematics, chemistry, and biology, are comparatively inadequate due to the brief history of minority schools. In the Tibet Autonomous Region, for example, Tibetan instructors made up 24% of junior middle school teachers but only 2.7% of high school teachers in 1991 [7].

3.3 Teaching Materials

The knowledge of modern sciences and technology was introduced to many minorities in the 1950s for the very first time in history. In the 1950s, textbooks in several minority languages began to be published and edited. They were primarily translations from Mandarin textbooks. In a minority language, the expressions of formulae, definitions, concepts, phrases, examples, and interpretations must be tested and corrected repeatedly in the classroom, and the quality of textbooks must then be steadily enhanced over a lengthy period of teaching practice. The rate at which minority language textbooks are developed varies by group. For example, it took a long time until the early 1990s to finish the translation of high school textbooks from Mandarin to Tibetan. Textbooks in local minority languages are still only available in elementary and junior middle schools in Yunnan and Guizhou provinces [11].

Since the textbooks primarily contain stories and figures from the Han majority, as well as a lifestyle in urban or Han agricultural areas with which the minorities are unfamiliar, they may feel as if they are studying a foreign society, despite the fact that the teaching language is their home tongue. Due to the poor quality of rural education, it is very common for students to return to their home village and work as agricultural husbandry laborers, most likely in mountain areas, after graduating from junior middle or high school, where students have few chances of passing national examinations for college/university entrance. As a result, pupils concluded that the textbook's material is unsuitable for agricultural labor. And their parents believed that the money spent on their children's education was a waste. Some of them who could communicate in Mandarin left their homes to work as temporary laborers in cities. But those who acquired their education in a minority language, would have a tough time finding work in the city labor market.

3.4 Education Investment

The main sources of education funding in China are

central allocation and local fiscal revenue. Although the state has increased its investment in ethnic education, there is little investment in education for each student due to the difficult conditions that must be invested in the field of ethnic education, such as excessive funds for the construction of schools, the repair of dormitories, and the supplement of teaching equipment. "In 2004, the average budget of junior middle school students had a 1.8:1 ratio of public funding between the eastern and western areas. In the average budget of junior middle school students, the ratio of public funding in the eastern and western regions was 2.5:1 [1]". The vast disparity in funding allocation between the eastern and western areas has become a significant problem in ethnic education, which is extremely detrimental to the protection of the right to education of ethnic minorities, Increasing the inclination of funding for western ethnic areas is conducive to narrowing the education gap between the East and the West and ensuring the full realization of the right to education of ethnic minorities.

4. SUGGESTIONS ON IMPROVING THE EDUCATION IN MINORITY AREAS

4.1 General suggestions

Overall, the development of ethnic minority regions requires a large number of elite leaders and cadres. First, it is necessary to establish relevant ethnic colleges and specialized courses to train local high-level leaders in different fields. Second, to achieve self-sufficiency in teaching resources, teacher training institutes should be built to train exceptional local instructors. Third, the funding for school education should be increased and more scholarships and bursaries to students should be provided. It is also necessary to strengthen supervision to ensure that funds are used correctly. Fourth, it is essential to strengthen the provision of bilingual education and awareness in ethnic minority communities, in order to encourage all members of the ethnic minorities to speak both Mandarin and their mother tongue. Fifth, it is critical to attach importance to education on national unity and patriotism, hence improving mutual understanding among ethnic groups. Sixth, Ethnic arts and medical education should be paid attention to in school education, as well as the transmission of minority cultures. Thus cultivating the talent and skill among minority students, and at the same time, reminding their unique cultural knowledge so that the minority cultures will not be lost with the progress of the times. Seventh, it is important to strengthen the attention to the education of female ethnic minority students, therefore, to promote the concept of gender equality, create a better living environment within the society and increase opportunities for girls to go to school.

4.2 Enlightenment attained from the United States

The United States is a multi-ethnic country with a large immigrant population. The main ethnic minorities in the United States include descendants of more than 100 ethnic groups, including Asian Americans, African Americans, and Hispanic Americans, in addition to Native Americans. The United States has a well-developed legal system, with an education-law legal system that is nearly ideal. Since the 1960s, the legal protection of ethnic minorities' right to education in the United States has steadily improved, and there is an increasing number of laws protecting ethnic minorities' right to education. Here are a few examples: The 1965 Higher Education Act primarily comprises financial help for the growth of higher education, with a specific provision requiring that financial aid be offered to impoverished students in order to ensure their basic educational prospects. Elementary and Secondary Education Amendments of 1966 reinforced and improved the primary and secondary education support program and removed racial disparities [5]. In 1974 the Bilingual Education Act was passed, stating due to their unique cultural traditions, some children are unable to communicate in English and some assistance must be provided to enable local educational institutions to provide bilingual education and protect their equal educational opportunities [9].

There is some enlightenment in terms of the statutory protection of ethnic minorities' right to education in the United States. To begin with, most of the education regulations in place in the United States are highly operable, and many of the policies are enforced through economic means. Ethnic minorities' right to education is guaranteed and financially supported, as well as legalized. Second, the United States' National Education Law is subject to periodic revisions, usually every five years, which allows the law to better adapt to the current socioeconomic context and increase its applicability. Finally, legislation relating to ethnic minorities' right to education should be expressed not only in education law, but also in particular individual laws and regulations. The laws and regulations of the United States to protect ethnic minorities' right to education are primarily divided into two categories. First, general provisions in the law based on the general concept of education and human rights; and second, specific laws and regulations issued by the state to protect ethnic minorities' right to education. The benefit of this is that it can not only ensure that ethnic minorities' right to education is recognized and safeguarded by the state and every sector of society, but it can also ensure that different ethnic minorities receive more practical help through particular laws and regulations. The right to education of China's ethnic minorities can also benefit from the United States' experience. China can implement some specific laws and

regulations to provide special support for ethnic minorities' right to education.

5. CONCLUSION

The development of ethnic education in China is not plain sailing and it has faced numerous hurdles over time. Overall, the economic development of ethnic minority areas restricts the development of education. The diverse language culture, lack of quality teachers and practical teaching materials, and the unequal allocation of education investment are the main problems faced by the Chinese minority education and need to be solved. As seen in previous years in China, government attention and the introduction of policies have played a crucial role in reducing the gap between ethnic groups, so introducing precise and operable policies is the most important step to deal with the problem. In addition, Chinese authorities might also learn about the tactics used by the United States to preserve minority groups' right to education. Due to the time limitation, this research only looks at the main problems faced by Chinese minority education as a whole, whereas there might be different difficulties faced by different regions, and this is the detailed topic that the author would like to do further research on.

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