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Sociological Perspectives on Ethnicity and Education in China: Views from Chinese and English Literatures

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Keywords

sociology of education, ethnicity, China, minorities

Disciplines

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Abstract

This paper reviews Chinese- and English-language literature on ethnic minorities and education in China. Six major research topics emerge from the Chinese-language research: (1) Marxism and ethnic minority education; (2) patriotism and national unity in education for ethnic minority students; (3) multicultural education; (4) determinants of ethnic differences in education; (5) school facilities and teacher quality; and (6) preferential / affirmative action policies. Four research themes are identified from the English-language literature: (1) policy overviews; (2) education and ethnic identity; (3) incentives and disincentives for buy-in to the education system; and (4) educational stratification. The majority of quantitative research from both Chinese- and English-language literature investigates ethnic minorities as a collective group. Qualitative research focuses on individual ethnic groups, although no one group is the focus of particular attention. More qualitative studies currently exist, but the number of quantitative studies is growing, given the growing availability of survey and census data containing information on ethnic minorities. Both literatures focus on the complex interrelationships of ethnicity with cultural, policy, development, and language issues. Yet, these literatures draw on different ideological starting points, conform to different norms of academic composition, and speak to different audiences in different sociopolitical contexts. For these reasons, the English literature tends to adopt a more critical tone. Overall, very little of the work in either language comes from the field of sociology of education. More comparatively and theoretically framed work is needed to enable the Chinese experience to be informed by and inform global research in sociology of education.

Introduction

Since China's market reforms and opening up in the 1980s, growing literatures in Chinese and English have addressed issues associated with educational opportunity for ethnic minorities. Overall, despite certain similarities in subject matter and, in some cases, common authorship, these literatures have emerged in different forms. Consistent with a Marxist perspective that pervades both minority education policy and much of the scholarly writing about it, much of the Chinese literature faults underlying economic underdevelopment at the regional level and poverty at the household level as key sources of minority disadvantage. Some newer pieces, a few of which draw from a multicultural education framework, offer critical perspectives on minority education policies, but this body of literature is still small. Cultural disconnects between home and school are featured in this literature, but with a few exceptions, cultural attitudes of particular groups are cited as the barrier to educational success, rather than aspects of the organization and content of educational institutions or labor market conditions that might exacerbate unfavorable attitudes. Finally, much of the empirical work is applied and focused on problems, generally associated with poverty or underdevelopment, that need to be solved to support the goals of development, patriotism, and integration of minority populations.

Like the Chinese literature, a substantial portion of the English literature could be characterized as policy discussion, with emphasis on the integrative goals and implications of minority education policy. Moreover, the English-language literature recognizes the significance of economic poverty and geographic disparity in contributing to educational disparities. However, while some of the work is descriptive and neutral in tone, much of the work has a more critical edge

than found in the Chinese language literature. The operating premise of much of the literature is one of deep questioning of the goals and tactics surrounding minority education policies. Empirical work has focused on characterizing the nature and scope of educational stratification by ethnic group, and on illuminating links between schooling processes and the conveyed and constructed ethnic identities of students, cultural disconnects between home and school, and incentives and disincentives for school continuation.

This chapter provides an overview of the Chinese and English language scholarship related to ethnicity and inequality in education. We begin by providing an overview of China's ethnic classification and education systems. Next, we present the search strategy used to identify papers for this literature review. Finally, we describe Chinese and English-language research. We close by discussing key differences and similarities between the two literatures, and by highlighting the need for both literatures to connect more directly to comparative sociological research on ethnicity and education.

National Context

Ethnic Minorities in China

The name used to refer to ethnic groups in China today, *minzu* (民族), is a 20th century adaptation of the cognate Japanese term, *minzoku* (民族), and is often translated as “ethnic nation,” “ethno-nation,” or “nationality” (Gladney, 2004). The specific categories in use today were largely set in place after the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, as the State set out to identify and recognize as minority nationalities those who qualified among the hundreds of groups applying for national minority status. Following the Soviet model, decisions were based on the “four commons”: language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up, meaning that ethnic minorities were identified as having common linguistic, economic, geographic, or cultural characteristics that distinguished them from the so-called Han majority population (Fei, 1981; cited in Gladney, 2004). Scholarly debates about their aptness notwithstanding, these classifications have become fairly set over time, with few new categories created in the ensuing years (Gladney, 2004; see Tsung, 2009, pp. 72–74 for examples of the complexity of the initial classifications). Today, the Chinese government officially recognizes 55 minority nationalities (少数民族, *shaoshu minzu*), along with the Han majority nationality (汉族, *hanzu*), a “naturalized” category, and an unknown category that encompasses about 350 other ethnic groups not recognized individually (Wong, 2000, p. 56).

The officially-designated minority population in China grew from 5.8 percent of the total in the 1964 census to over 8 percent by the fifth population census in 2000 (West, 2004). According to the sixth national census conducted in 2010, the total minority population of mainland China was 113.79 million, accounting for 8.49 percent of the total population and roughly the size of the total population of Mexico. Compared with 2000, the minority population increased by 7.36 million, which is an increase of 6.92 percent. The growth rate for the Han population in the same year was 5.74 percent (National Bureau of Statistics, 2011). China's minority populations are culturally and linguistically diverse, as suggested by the fact that they span the Sino-Tibetan, Indo-European, Austro-Asiatic, and Altaic language families (Hannum & Wang, 2012, Map 1).

China has designated a system of regional autonomous areas in locations where large numbers of ethnic minorities reside (China, 2000, sec. 3). At the highest levels are the five provincial-level autonomous regions: the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, founded in 1947; the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, founded in 1955; the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, founded in 1958; the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, also founded in 1958; and the Tibet Autonomous Region, founded in 1965. Also, below provincial-level administrative divisions are

autonomous prefectures and autonomous counties, which can exist outside of autonomous regions. China's regional ethnic autonomous zones are in 21 provinces and 741 county-level administrative regions (Ma, 2007).

Ethnic minorities disproportionately reside in the poor western region of China, with 71.63 percent of minorities living in this region. In the central region, 15.95 percent of the total ethnic minority population of China resides, and 12.42 percent reside in the eastern region. The western region accounts for 91.63 percent of all ethnic autonomous counties, or 741 regions, the majority of which reside in five minority autonomous regions. 5.13 percent of ethnic autonomous counties are located in the central region and 3.24 percent are in the eastern region. Among these county administrative units, almost 40 percent are designated as national poverty counties (National Bureau of Statistics, 2011). However, there is great variability across individual groups in patterns of residence and vulnerability to poverty (Hannum & Wang, 2012).

China's Educational System

China has a centralized education management system, and there has been much uniformity across the country in terms of curricula, textbooks, and examinations, particularly at the transition from high school to college.¹ With the exception of some special preparatory education classes, the education system for minorities and China's national educational system are very similar (Figure 1). China's educational system includes general education, vocational education, and adult education, with the greatest resources and attention invested in general education. General education consists of nine years of compulsory education, divided into six years of elementary school and three years of junior middle school. Compulsory education plus three years of high school are considered basic education. Children six years of age are required to attend primary schools, most often located near their residence, and there is no examination requirement to transition in junior middle school. Junior middle school graduates, however, generally have to pass an entrance examination to enroll in upper secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 1983; 2001).² An entrance examination is also typically required for entrance into the university system, and remains the primary entrance requirement for the majority of universities in China (Hannum, An, & Cherng, 2011).

More than ten years ago, China initiated a large-scale expansion of its education system. Before this time, many students from rural areas or poor households enrolled in technical schools. However, after expansion, many junior high school graduates entered academic high schools that focused more on preparation for entry into colleges and universities. In 2009, 44.8 percent of all junior middle school graduates entered academic high schools, 47.2 percent entered vocational education schools, and 8 percent entered the labor market (Ministry of Education, 2010). Higher education has expanded very rapidly in China, but the job market for college graduates has become much less favorable.³

¹ The high degree of uniformity remains true today in relative terms, despite policies that have promoted more local content and the development of some non-standard admissions procedures in higher education (Hannum, An, & Cherng, 2011).

² In 2009, a very small proportion of elementary school students, 0.17 percent, enrolled in vocational junior high schools (Ministry of Education, 2010).

³ The rising number of college graduates in urban areas of China, coupled with dwindling number of jobs that demand college degrees, has created a concern over whether higher education can lead to middle-class attainment (Jennings, 2010). In 2009, over 6 million new college graduates entered the labor market, many with the goal of finding white-collared employment in major cities (Ministry of Education, 2010). However, a dearth of jobs in industries that many graduates would find desirable has led many to settle for low-paying

[Figure 1 about here]

Minority Education Policies

In 2009, 17,391,000 ethnic minority students were enrolled in basic education (Table 2) (Ministry of Education, 2010). In ethnic minority areas, the proportion of primary school students receiving pre-school education is lower than the national average⁴. Ethnic minority students are more likely to enroll in secondary vocation school, as opposed to academic high school, than the Han.

[Table 1 about here]

In recent decades, educational access for ethnic minorities has expanded rapidly due to governmental efforts. In 1980, the Ministry of Education and the State Ethnic Affairs Commission strengthened its commitment to the education of ethnic minorities by introducing the “Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy” and also recommending that funds subsidize minority education in areas with a large number of ethnic minorities, in addition to standard education funding (Ministry of Education, 1983). In 2002, The State Council released a policy which emphasized accelerated development for minority education, and in China’s tenth Five-Year Plan period (2001 – 2005), the central government invested 60 billion yuan for construction, of which 57 percent was designated to develop the western region and ethnic minority areas (Ministry of Education, 2010). In 2004, the central government also invested heavily to support the construction of boarding school in rural areas and to further develop ethnic minority universities (Ministry of Education, 2004). From 2006 on, the government also decided that students attending school in rural areas of the western region would be exempt from all tuition and fees. China also implemented the “Three Guarantees” – guaranteed learning, food, and housing – in rural Tibet. In 56 counties in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the government provided free books and waived many schooling fees, and subsidized boarding costs (Ministry of Education, National Commission on Development and Reform, Ministry of Finance, 2007). Beyond these policies, there are numerous policy issues relevant to education in minority areas, ranging from language and curriculum policies, inland boarding school policies, to affirmative action policies. Many of the studies in both Chinese and English focus on policies and policy implementation issues; we will discuss additional policies in turn at relevant points in the review.

Methodology

We review Chinese- and English-language literatures in turn, rather than integrating the two throughout; we close with a discussion of connections and disconnects. Though there are, of course, exceptions, studies in these two language traditions often operate from disparate theoretical starting points, conform to different norms of academic writing, and speak to different audiences in different sociopolitical contexts. Consequently, there are domains of discourse that are prevalent in one tradition that are much less common in the other. For example, there is a body of Chinese-language literature that analyzes the Marxist philosophies that underlie China’s ethnic minority education policies. While this literature and perspective is acknowledged in the English literature, there is not really a cognate body of work engaging this topic in English. A key

manufacturing jobs. Recent media has described college graduates, who live in cramped conditions in cities and swarm to work each rush hour, as members of the “ant tribe” (Jennings, 2010).

⁴ In 2009, the primary school enrollment rate was 17.25 percent in Tibet, 75.24 percent in Xinjiang, 78.04 percent in Ningxia, 89.39 percent in Guangxi, 94.97 percent in Inner Mongolia. The enrollment rate for the country was 89.94 percent (Ministry of Education, 2010).

disconnect is that much of the literature in Chinese is implicitly about solving a highly sensitive problem in national educational and economic development, whereas much of the literature in English speaks to an academic audience fundamentally concerned with inequalities and identities. We discuss disconnects and connections between the different language literatures in the conclusion.

For our Chinese language search, we restricted our study to Chinese language literature focused on mainland Chinese ethnic minority education. We excluded literature about Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao. The literature we reviewed was published from 1980 to 2010 and encompassed research drawing on sociological, pedagogical, and ethnological perspectives on minority education and inequality. We employed three specific search protocols. First, we searched China's largest periodical and journal database, the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), for titles with combinations of the following key words: nationality, education, and equality/equity. We also searched online for books in China's National Library, which is China's largest professional book collection. Initial searches yielded close to 400 articles and 150 books, of which 80 articles and 30 books were selected for quality and relevance.

For literature in English on ethnic minority education in China, we searched Sociological Abstracts and ERIC for articles with titles containing the words China, education, and ethnic or minority. We then performed the same search on WORLDCAT to obtain books. Given the relatively recent emergence of literature in English on this topic, we did not put date restrictions into our search, but no work found predated the 1980s. We supplemented the materials found in these systematic ways with other material we were aware of that was related to ethnic minorities and the context or outcomes of education.

Chinese-language Traditions

We organize the Chinese-language research into six themes: Marxism and ethnic minority education, patriotism and national unity in education for ethnic minority students, multicultural education, determinants of ethnic differences in education, school facilities and teacher quality, and preferential / affirmative action policies. These traditions focus on the guiding ideology of ethnic minority education and its emphasis on national unity, ethnic differences in educational experiences and outcomes, and ways in which policies should address these educational differences.

Marxism and Ethnic Minority Education

One line of research has described the influence of Marx, Lenin, and Stalin on China's ethnic minority education system. Jia (2000; 2007) traces how China's definition of ethnicity borrows heavily from Marx, Engels, and Stalin; that is, the notion of ethnicity, or groups that share a common history of formation, language, geography, economic life, and culture, arises when societies transition from local, tribal communities to states which encompass different ethnic groups. Ma (2007) analyzes the influence of Stalin and Lenin on the goals of ethnic minority education. The author finds that Stalin and Lenin both argue that ethnic distinction is a large source of conflict among the common people, and that assimilation of all groups will eliminate ethnic differences and contention. As a socialist state, China should therefore create policies which assimilate all ethnicities under one mainstream culture. Because Marxism is the guiding ideology of the Communist Party of China, it is difficult to find sociological studies that offer direct criticism of Marxism or educational inequality in China.

Patriotism and National Unity in Education for Ethnic Minority Students

The Marxist ideology of assimilation and unity serves as the foundation for the second tradition found in Chinese-language research on ethnic minority education. This second research

tradition focuses on the implementation of the Marxist ideals of integration, unity, and improvement in ethnic minority education. Emphasis on national unity and patriotism in ethnic minority education traces its policy origins to as early as 1983, when the Ministry of Education studied and implemented views which strengthened patriotism and propaganda in education in schools in minority areas (Ministry of Education, 1983). Scholarship in this tradition states that the integration of ethnic minorities into mainstream society through schooling is necessary for both the development of ethnic minority regions and the preservation of social stability. Most authors who do mention issues of ethnic minority identity argue that students who integrate into mainstream values do not compromise their minority identities.

One body of literature focuses on inland class and boarding schools for ethnic minority students, and argues that these programs improve education for ethnic minority students and promote national unity and the culture of minority groups. In 1985, the central government launched “Tibetan classes” (*Xizang ban*), which are cohorts of mainly Tibetan students in classrooms and provinces in majority-Han areas of China (particularly major cities). The overall purpose of these classes was to accelerate the development of Tibet and strengthen patriotism (Ministry of Education, the General Office of Tibet Autonomous Region People's Government, 2007). The State deemed these classes an early success, and in April of 1988, the State Education Commission stated that these schools were vital in order to reform and develop education in Tibet. As of 2007, Tibetan classes across China included 4,840 junior high school students, 6,780 junior vocational students, 13,000 high school students, and 9,100 college and university students (Ministry of Education, the General Office of Tibet Autonomous Region People's Government, 2007). Similarly, “Xinjiang classes” (*Xinjiang ban*) were established in 1987, and have expanded to 1.5 million students in recent years (Ma, 2011; Xia, 2007). One ethnographic study of middle school students enrolled in a “Tibetan class” in an eastern city argued that students were able to accept both the State ideology of ethnic unity and integration while also claiming a sense of Tibetan culture through the students’ attachment to common Tibetan symbols (Zhu, 2006).

Other work investigates language programs that educate ethnic minority students in Chinese, called “*min kao han*, 民考汉”. This body of Chinese-language literature argues that these programs are highly beneficial to ethnic minority students. Ma (2008) surveyed parents of ethnic minority students in Xinjiang, and found that parents increasingly favored that their children learn Mandarin in lieu of their native language. This same study also found that students themselves were willing to learn Chinese and preferred Chinese language programs. Zu (2009) argued that “*min kao han*” students not only benefited from Chinese-language education, but also from exposure to “mainstream” cultural values. The author found that students who integrated into mainstream society did not necessarily lose their ethnic identity, and that many ethnic minority students enrolled in “*min kao han*” programs formed “double identities” of Chinese and minority cultures.

One notable study of implementation of patriotic education in Tibet found that curricula did not sufficiently address contradictions between mainstream knowledge taught in schools and local cultural values (Zhu, 2007). In qualitative case studies of townships in primary schools in rural areas, the author found that the nuances of each school environment were not always incorporated into teaching, and that parents mentioned tension arising from this conflict. The author recommended that formal school curriculum should present traditional Tibetan culture, including local culture, history, and geography.

Multicultural Education

A third line of research discusses the viability of multiculturalism in the Chinese context. Multiculturalism, as defined by Chinese literature, encompasses the notions that different cultures are equal and mutually influence each other (Teng, 1997). Some scholars argue that multicultural

education can teach ethnic minority students about both mainstream and minority cultures while emphasizing the value of national unity (Ma, 2007; Teng, 1997). Learning about different cultures can also help eliminate ethnic and cultural discrimination experienced by many ethnic minority students (Teng, 1997; Wan, 2006).

Other scholars have compared multicultural education in Western countries with China's Marxist ideology. In comparative studies of the teaching objectives and theories of Western multicultural education and minority education in China from a historical perspective, Wan and Bai (2006; Wan and Bai, 2008) conclude that issues addressed by Western multicultural and minority education are very distinct from China's ethnic education issues, and Western multicultural models could not simply be adopted in original form for the China context. The authors argue that in the West, the principle responsibility and demand of multicultural education is to address issues with rights and political equality. However, in China, the authors argue, the concerns with ethnic minority education focus on economic, social, and cultural development. Scholars also state that current ethnic minority education policies, such as a set of reforms in 2001 that require schools to address the cultural heritage of ethnic groups (Ministry of Education, 2001), already promote diversity and mutual interaction (Wan, 2006; Yu, 2010).

Multicultural frameworks have also been used to criticize education that is based on one mainstream culture. Yuan (2010) argues that a dominant Han culture permeates much of the education system in China, and much of this "official knowledge" is different from ideas taught in various ethnic minority cultures. This knowledge is found in unified standards, curriculum, and textbooks that often ignore the diversity of local culture, ethnic minority languages, and cultural differences. Qian (2007) found in a study of ethnic minorities in the northwest a curriculum that contradicts local customs in favor of more mainstream values. The author argues that students gradually lose their ethnic identity as they progress in their education, and that this is of growing concern since curricula that emphasize national unity are replacing ones that emphasize diversity in the schools in ethnic minority areas.

Determinants of Ethnic Differences in Education

This tradition of research relies principally on quantitative analysis of education data, and focuses on "uneven development" of the educational systems in ethnic minority regions in China⁵. Some authors argue that the educational disadvantage experienced by many ethnic minority groups is due to regional and urban-rural differences in education, while others argue that economic and cultural differences are also important.

First, a body of literature documents regional differences in educational systems. In general, the eastern region has the most developed educational system and the highest quality of education. The western region, in comparison, is significantly underdeveloped. Urban areas in most regions provide much better access to quality schools than rural areas. There are also differences in educational access and allocation of educational resources among ethnic groups (Ma, 2003; Wang, 2002). For example, in 2000, 15.14 percent of individuals aged 15 and over in China were illiterate (Development Planning Division of the Ministry of Education, 2000). In minority regions in the West, the percentage was 22.43 percent. A number of other educational gaps exist, such as compulsory education enrollment rates, dropout rates, and retention rates, shown in Table 3. In addition, there are also substantial differences in school conditions and funding between western minority areas and the eastern region. For example, only 0.28 percent of school facilities and campuses in the eastern region were officially classified as being in a "dilapidated state", but 2.62 percent of schools were dilapidated in the northwest region in 1999 (Yang, 2006). Provincial

⁵ Literature in this tradition uses the Chinese phrase for unbalanced development, or 不均衡发展 (*bujunheng fazhan*).

funding for education was also 4.86 times greater in five eastern provinces (Beijing, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Guangdong) in 2003 than five northwestern provinces (Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Xinjiang) (Yang, 2006).

[Table 2 about here]

Other studies emphasize the importance of urban and rural educational systems in explaining ethnic differences in education. Hong (2010), using survey data from western regions, found that ethnic differences in enrollment in basic education enrollment are due to urban-rural divides and class inequality, not ethnic inequality. The author also found that while the probability that ethnic minority children are enrolled in high school is still significantly lower than for Han children, the difference can be explained mainly by urban and rural, regional, and class differences. Ma (1998) found that in 1990, the illiteracy rate in rural areas of Tibet was 77.2 percent, but only 37 percent in urban areas. There were also differences in school attendance rates between urban and rural children (Table 4).

[Table 3 about here]

Other work argues that economic poverty is an important factor in explaining educational inequality. One study found that financial difficulties were the primary reason minority children from poor families were not in school (Liu & Yang, 2007). Another study, based on survey data from the Autonomous Prefecture of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, described ethnic minority education in this region before and after the implementation of compulsory education with guaranteed funding (Teng, 2004). The author found that even after reform, many families could still not afford average school fees. Some scholars have proposed that provincial and local governments establish priority development areas to improve education in impoverished ethnic minority areas (Hu and Wen, 2001; Wan, 2006).

Finally, another body of literature suggests cultural reasons for ethnic differences in education. A number of studies which focus on specific ethnic minority groups, such as the Yao, argue that there is not sufficient parental support and encouragement of children's education (Qian, 2007; Yuan, 2004). One study of two Muslim minority groups, the Salar and Bonan, found that the drop-out rate of students who reported strong religious beliefs was higher than those who were non-religious. The author argued that parents, who were instrumental in passing on cultural and religious values to their children, should also emphasize the value of education (Qian, 2007). Similarly, Bo (1986) found that Yao parents in mountainous regions did not see formal education as a wise investment, and preferred their children to help cultivate local farms. Wang (1990) found that there was still widespread resistance among Tibetan families in rural areas to send their children to school, despite rewards for school attendance and fines for non-attendance. Related work focuses on gender differences in schooling for ethnic minorities. One study of ethnic minority schools with high female dropout rates argued that parents resisted sending girls to school (Qian, 2007). However, research on the Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture in Guizhou, researchers found that families cited safety as an important factor, and argued that this concern could explain why dropout rates for girls were generally higher than for boys (Han, 1999; Wang, 2006). Studies proposing cultural explanations have not developed or tested systematic theories about the educational, social, economic, or policy conditions under which cultural resistance to local educational systems emerges.

School Facilities and Teacher Quality

Another thread of work focuses on school facilities and teacher quality. Most research in this body of literature focuses on compulsory education and regions with a large number of ethnic minorities, including Guizhou's ethnic minority regions and minority autonomous areas of Gansu, Xinjiang, Tibet, and Yunnan (Zhou, 1985; Bai, 1986; Ma, 2004; Teng & Su, 1998; Wang, 2006). These studies employ a number of methodological approaches, including ethnography,

questionnaires, and interviews. Overall, these studies find that impoverished ethnic minority areas lack educational resources. Many scholars working on this topic recommend that governing bodies adopt preferential policies to increase educational investment in these areas and help teachers understand and integrate local culture and social norms into teaching.

One body of literature emphasizes problems of teacher quality in ethnic minority regions of China. In 2009, many provinces and prefectures had a higher percentage of teachers that were substitutes than national average (Table 5). For example, in Linxia Hui Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu Province, substitute teachers comprised 15.99 percent of total primary school teachers and 24.04 percent of fulltime teachers (Minority Education Department of Gansu Provincial Department of Education, 2010). Of these teachers, only a small number of substitute teachers had a college degree or higher and most had no professional training in pedagogy (Zhao, 2010). Other work also finds that there is a severe shortage of bilingual teachers in many ethnic minority areas and that there are no bilingual teacher training institutions (Ma, 2007; Teng, 2001; Xu, 2009).

[Table 4 about here]

Another line of research in this tradition focuses on the shortage of investment in education in ethnic minority regions. Studies which focus on primary and secondary education in ethnic minority areas find that schools often lack laboratory equipment, library materials, and other resources (Teng & Su, 1998; Xu, 2009). In a case study of schools which serve Yao children, Yuan (2004) found that the far distance that students had to travel to school hindered their attendance, resulting in a large number of school drop-outs.

Preferential / Affirmative Action Policies

The final research tradition of Chinese-language literature focuses on the purpose of preferential policies towards ethnic minorities. China currently implements a number of preferential policies for ethnic minorities which affect education, employment, family planning, and Communist Party membership. In October, 1980, the government addressed issues of representation of ethnic minorities in higher education by stating that the proportion of ethnic minorities enrolled in higher education should not be less than the proportion of ethnic minorities in the population (Ma, 2007).

The limited number of articles and books in this tradition rely more on theoretical arguments rather than empirical study. Some authors argue that affirmative action policies are necessary to address unbalanced economic development of ethnic minority regions, while others discuss the negative consequences of these policies. Some scholars argue that due to a disproportionate number of ethnic minorities residing in impoverished areas of China, policies should be created to foster educational development and “mainstream language and values” in these areas (Hu & Wen, 2001; Wan, 2006).

However, other scholars believe that these policies may have a number of negative consequences. Zhang and Liu (2010) argue that bilingual education may hinder the integration and upward mobility of ethnic minorities. Specifically, the author argues that because only ethnic minorities can enroll in “*min kao min*, 民考民”, or ethnic minority classes taught in the minority language, students’ future options may be limited. Other scholars also argue that affirmative action policies for ethnic minorities should only target individuals who live in remote or impoverished areas and not ethnic minorities who live in more affluent regions (Ao, 2006; Wang, 2007). Another argument is concerned with “reverse discrimination”, in which the favoring of ethnic minority students may disadvantage Han students (Ao, 2006; Teng & Ma, 2005; Wang, 2007).

English-language Traditions

English-language literature on ethnic minority education can be categorized into three broad traditions: policy overviews, analyses of the relationships between education and ethnic identity, and studies of educational stratification. Policy overviews are in some cases exploratory cataloging projects, and in others, more serious critical investigations of the nature of relevant policies such as affirmative action, higher education, and language policies. Much of the research on education and ethnic identity focuses on the role of the state and of students themselves in constructing ethnic identities. Finally, literature on educational stratification, which is not generally highly theorized, has sought to establish empirical patterns and trends in access, attainment, and the economic context and outcomes of education.

Policy Overviews

A number of studies have undertaken a basic descriptive task of cataloging existing minority education policy in the contemporary period. Many scholars have noted the pendulum shifts in minority education policy, with the Cultural Revolution marked by extreme assimilationist policies and the subsequent reform era dating from the late 1970s marked by a broad variety of policies aimed at promoting minority education and development (Bass, 1998, pp. 18–21; Dai & Dong, 2001; e.g., Postiglione, 2009; Tsung, 2009, Chapter 4). Iredale et al (2001) and Hannum and Wang (2012) provide brief reviews of reform-era minority education policies in the context of broader development policies and demographic trends, highlighting provincial “twinning” of rich provinces with poor and minority provinces and autonomous regions for educational support; preferential treatment of minority areas in poverty alleviation targeting; and various affirmative action policies for matriculation into colleges and universities; subsidies for minority students, and establishment of inland (*neidi*, 内地) minority boarding schools in China’s heartland (Hannum & Wang, 2012; Iredale, Bilik, & Su, 2001). Zhou and Hill have compiled an extensive series of studies addressing multiple dimensions of affirmative action policies in China (Zhou & Hill, 2010). Clothey (2005) has catalogued policies related to higher education, including university admission quotas that reserve spots only for minorities at universities, admissions policies under which minorities can be accepted with lower entrance scores on the Unified Examination for University Entrance (*gaokao*, 高考), and the establishment of twelve national minority institutes and one national minority university dedicated specifically to the higher education of minority students (Clothey, 2005; see also Lang, 2010 on this topic). Candidates for nationalities institutes may sit the *gaokao* in their native language, some applicants to minority region comprehensive universities and polytechnic institutes may also take the exam in their native language, and minority students may take higher-education courses in their region’s main nationality language (Clothey, 2005).⁶

A related line of work has considered language policies (for a recent review covering the course of the PRC period, see (Tsung, 2009, Chapter 5). The Chinese constitution has two provisions concerning language (Ma, 2007): Article 4 states that each ethnic group has the freedom to use and develop its own language and writing system, and Article 19 states that the national government will promote a common language to be used throughout the country. The reform era dating from the late 1970s has seen increased support by policy makers for the use of minority scripts in literacy education and for increased bilingual education, with the goal that schools with a majority of minority language users can use minority languages as the primary medium of instruction (Adamson & Feng, 2009, p. 323; Ministry of Education, 1986, Article 6; Ministry of Education, 1995, Article 12; Lin, 1997; Ross, 2006, p. 25; Sautman, 1999, p. 289). In a 1980 publication,ⁱ the Ministry of Education and the China State Ethnic Affairs Commission required that

⁶ See Zhang and Verhoeven (2010) for a discussion of access to higher education among ethnic minorities in Yunnan Province, based on what appears to be a purposive sample of higher education freshman students.

every ethnic group with a language and writing system use that language for educational instruction, while also learning spoken and written Mandarin (Ma, 2007). 1986 and 1995 education laws emphasize popularization of Mandarin, as well as use of minority languages. For example, the 1995 law states, “The Chinese language, both oral and written, shall be the basic oral and written language for education in schools and other educational institutions. Schools or other educational institutions which mainly consist of students from minority nationalities may use in education the language of the respective nationality or the native language commonly adopted in that region. Schools and other educational institutions shall in their educational activities popularize the nationally common spoken Chinese and the standard written characters” (Article 12).

Ross’s (2006) review notes a significant commitment to minority language maintenance and bilingual education in China’s language laws. At the same time, scholars have observed that there are gaps between policy and implementation, and that there are immense discrepancies in bilingual practice across minority regions, with regard to both state policies and local arrangements (Adamson & Feng, 2009; Feng & Sunuodula, 2009; Gao, 2010; Postiglione, 2009). Regional and local considerations—linguistic, demographic, and political—shape the ways in which bilingual and multicultural education can be and are incorporated into education across China.⁷ Linguistic and demographic factors matter a lot: Ma (2007), referencing Zhou (1989, p. 31), states that when governmental educational authorities were planning and developing bilingual education, the principle they employed was consideration of the existing local language environment, along with social and economic development needs, pedagogical benefits, and preferences of residents. Scholars classify the modes of bilingual education in China as falling into transition models (transitioning to Mandarin) or maintenance models (maintaining the origin language), with the determination between the two affected by the existence of a well-established writing system and the ethnic composition of local areas (Feng, 2005, p. 534; Lin, 1997; Teng, 2002).

Political considerations are also important. Scholars have argued that the design and implementation of minority language policies relates to the histories and political statuses of the groups and regions involved (Adamson & Feng, 2009; see also Feng & Sunuodula, 2009).⁸ For example, Catriona Bass notes that in the wake of the resurgence of a pro-independence movement in Tibet in the late 1980s, the primary political goal for minority education—ethnic unity—was reasserted, and concessions to Tibetan language and culturally relevant curriculum made in the 1980s partially eroded (Bass, 1998, p. 4). This development also led to retrenchment on some preferential policies to promote secondary and higher education among Tibetans, due to fears about these policies causing tension between nationalities.

Postiglione (2009) notes that *neidi* middle schools accepting Tibetan students in the 1980s recruited mainly from elementary schools where the medium of instruction was Chinese, although students were still instructed in Tibetan for one year to ease the language transition. In later years, these schools started to accept more students from Tibetan-language elementary schools, and in 1993, students were no longer categorized by the language of instruction in elementary school. In interviews with students, the author found that *neidi* schools did not improve Tibetan language skills, and in many cases, students reported their knowledge of Tibetan language had deteriorated.

⁷For a discussion of legislation from different regional and local governments in China, see (Zhou, 2005); for in-depth case studies of bilingual education in Yunnan and Sichuan, see (Xiao, 1998) and (Teng, 2002).

⁸ Feng and his colleagues (Adamson & Feng, 2009; Feng & Sunuodula, 2009) present a case study of the status in the curriculum of minority languages, namely Uyghur, Yi, and Zhuang, vis-à-vis standard Chinese and English in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Their arguments draw on field visits to each site, including interviews with stakeholders and policy document analysis.

Similar to the case of Tibet, in Adamson and Feng's (2009) assessment, the difficult and contentious climate for political control in Xinjiang is reflected in the value attached to a distinct cultural identity by the people and a somewhat coercive edge to the promotion of standard Chinese as a language of instruction early on in school careers. The provision of English is mandated from the third year of primary school, but English teaching is very limited compared to other many other parts of the PRC (Adamson & Feng, 2009, p. 328; Feng & Sunuodula, 2009, p. 696; see also Tsung & Cruickshank, 2009 for a case study in two schools in Xinjiang consistent with the notion of very limited English availability). Adamson and Feng write, "The coercive nature of the language policies implemented in Xinjiang suggests that the rhetoric of a collaborative approach to language policies in minority areas uttered at the state level is not always translated into reality at the regional level, when national cohesion is deemed to be at stake" (2009, pp. 330–331).

At the other extreme is the case of the Zhuang, a group that Adamson and Feng characterize as highly assimilated and "until recently, [demonstrating] little interest in cultural diversity" (2009, p. 330). Adamson and Feng argue, in this case, that the prime status accorded to standard Chinese and the lower "vernacular" status accorded to the Zhuang language in the curriculum appeared consistent with a consensus (at least as observed in their fieldwork) about the appropriate roles for the languages, although the authors also argue that there is a lack of regional government commitment to "genuinely collaborative" language policies (2009, p. 326). English is offered, by policy, from the third year of primary school, but the predominance of standard Chinese as the language of instruction for English classes disadvantages Zhuang students.

The challenge of balancing preservation of minority languages against instrumental pressures favoring Chinese, and sometimes English, is a common theme. In Adamson and Feng's (Adamson & Feng, 2009) assessment, the Yi in Liangshan Autonomous Prefecture in the Sichuan Province, in an impoverished area of western China, attach high value to maintaining a distinct cultural identity. Yet, Yi stakeholders face the systemic pressure for academic success in standard Chinese in the form of high stakes tests. This situation inhibits the capacity and motivation of teachers to teach the Yi language, and the engagement of some Yi students. Here, English teaching is characterized as piecemeal. Gao's (2010) study found certain parallels in a bilingual school in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture, despite dramatic differences in context. Koreans in Yanbian live in the rustbelt Northeast, an area in the old industrial heartland that was reasonably advantaged prior to the massive shut-downs of state-owned enterprises. Koreans are a group with a history of very high educational attainment and they are a group whose home language is increasingly an economic asset—relevant to rising cross-border trade with Korea. Yet, as in the case of the Yi, the author of this study found a strong tension among school teachers themselves between the desire to preserve Korean culture and identity, and the strong push toward promoting a curriculum that would enhance high performance in standard Chinese for test-taking, and thus economic mobility (see also Choi, 2010, p. 172; Gao, 2010).⁹

Adamson and Feng (2009, p. 331) conclude that "additive trilingualism", in which the learning of three languages is without mutual detriment, must address "the low social status ascribed to minority languages because of their lack of associated economic and political capital; the high status accorded to standard Chinese and English; reinforced by systemic mechanisms, such as university entrance exams; geopolitical tensions...; and a lack of resources to teach English to the level achieved in more affluent parts of the PRC". As Ma (2007, p. 11) observes, the low perceived value of minority languages in general is reflected in the low number of Han people who learn minority languages, even where those languages are considered official languages. Language policy

⁹Consistent with the Korean case just cited, Ojijed's (2010) study of attitudes toward Mongolian, standard Chinese, and English amongst a small purposive sample of students at Inner Mongolia Normal University was suggestive of a high instrumental value attached to the latter two languages, relative to Mongolian.

can be linked very directly to issues of equity. Standard Chinese and, increasingly, English are key to the strong test performance necessary for promotion in the Chinese educational system and for economic mobility.¹⁰

Education and Ethnic Identity

The “Civilizing Project” of the State

As Postiglione (2009, p. 5) writes, “...the extent to which schools in China create an atmosphere that has positive institutional norms toward diverse cultural groups is limited by notions of cultural backwardness.” A significant line of research in English is grounded in this observation. Drawing on critical anthropological and sociological perspectives, much of this work focuses on the ideological objectives of the state, and their impact on students.

Citing Stevan Harrell’s work, many of the English-language publications on ethnicity and education refer to education as an element of the “Civilizing Projects” of the Chinese State (Harrell 1995, p. 3). As Hansen notes, “...through the state educational system, the Chinese government transmits its ideology of the nation and of the relationships among the peoples in China who have come to be categorized into static ethnic groups. Education of minorities plays a central role in implicitly reproducing notions of cultural inequality while explicitly promoting [ethnic unity (*minzu tuanjie*, 民族团结)]” (Hansen, 1999). Minorities are taught the names of the groups to which they belong, and the implications of belonging to that group, versus the Han majority, as indisputable, scientific facts (Hansen, 1999). They learn that minorities were “backward” at the time of liberation, relative to the Han majority, in economy and culture, and that the CCP helped them to develop so that they could live in a multi-ethnic socialist society, and they also learn ancient history that highlights common ties to the Chinese (Hansen, 1999). Schools take as an explicit goal to “enhance the cultural quality”—to civilize—minority populations (160).

More recent work focusing on boarding schools for minority children has taken up this theme. Zhiyong Zhu’s (2007, p. 256) ethnographic study of Tibetans in an inland (*neidi*) boarding school makes the argument that in these schools, the identity of “Tibetan” comes to the foreground in organizing students’ daily school life. Tibetan primary school graduates are selected and sent to boarding schools far from Tibet—and not allowed to return home for years at a time¹¹. The boarding schools have a clear mission of inculcating students with an integrative message: creating ties between Tibet and China’s inland areas. Schools convey a notion of Tibetan identity that includes membership in the Chinese nation, along with cultural distinction that is part of the “treasure trove of Chinese culture” (2007, p. 277). The identity conveyed by the schools—and indeed the premise for their existence—is the economic and educational “backwardness” (*luohou*, 落后) and premodernity of Tibet, and the superiority of the Han. This idea is reinforced in the perceptions of Tibet and Tibetans, reinforced by official narratives, which pervade the community surrounding the school.

Yangbin Chen has conducted a parallel study of Uyghur students in an inland school (Chen, 2008). The work focuses on inland “Xinjiang classes.” Like the Tibetan boarding schools, the

¹⁰ While much work has catalogued minority education policies and discussed potential impacts, it is striking that few studies have sought to investigate in a direct manner the impact of specific policies around language use in schools. An exception is Tsung and Cruickshank’s (2009) comparison of a minority mother tongue school and a mixed school in Xinjiang, which, the authors suggest, indicated that mixed schooling will not address disparities in educational outcomes, as learning materials in the minority language remained poorly resourced.

¹¹ See Wang and Zhou (2003, p. 99) for a list of inland Tibetan schools and classes.

existence of these “Xinjiang classes” is also predicated on the assumption of backward, poor quality education in Xinjiang proper. Policy documents laying out the plan for “Xinjiang Classes” highlight the goals of patriotism, national unity, modernization, and development of the homeland. The classes aim “to train quality senior secondary school graduates, who achieve overall developments in morals, intellect, physics, and atheism. The graduates must possess ideals, morals, culture and discipline, uphold national unity, and are dedicated to the Great Development of the Western Region.” (Chen, 2008, p. 45). Minority customs are to be respected, but at the same time, any religious practice is prohibited (Chen, 2008, p. 45). Chen details the integrative aims of these schools, which are very similar to those laid out in Zhu’s (2007) work.

Construction of Ethnic Identity

The other side of the “Civilizing Project” is the ethnic identity constructed, partly in response, by students. Hansen (1999: p. 159) notes that, “the classroom is an arena where processes of ethnic identification become highly relevant to students, who are confronted with the government’s monopolizing interpretation of their identity”. Hansen’s and Shen and Qian’s fieldwork in the Southwest and Yi’s fieldwork in the Northwest suggest that students are also confronted with a daily curriculum that suggests to them the uselessness, or at least low level of relevance, of their own language, history, religion and customs to state education (Hansen, 1999, p. 159; Shen & Qian, 2010, p. 57; Yi, 2006).

Zhu’s study of Tibetans in an inland boarding school suggests a high degree of internalization of the narratives of identity offered in schools, but Zhu also discusses additional dimensions of identity asserted by students that diverge from the official narrative. Zhu highlights identities and values rooted in Buddhist religion and ethics as a key dimension of identity that diverges from state ideologies. Chen’s work on inland Xinjiang classes similarly highlights Muslim religious traditions as an area of resistance to state ideologies of ethnic identity (Chen, 2008). Yi (2006) argues that minority education policy in China is shaped by a strong perception that religious-based allegiances undermine the capacity of minority people to be loyal political and cultural citizens of the Chinese state—particularly in the case of the northwest, and particularly for Tibetans and Uyghurs (p. 41).

Students in Zhu’s (2007) and Chen’s (2008) studies seem to reflect on their identities and their responsibilities to their homelands in ways that reflect the overt and implicit goals of the schools in which they study and the attitudes of the Han people they encounter there. The students discuss their religious identities and values, as well as the extreme personal and family sacrifice involved in being selected and attending an inland school. Chen, moreover, argues that these students’ ethnic social capital is *strengthened* by the schooling experience, as these students become highly dependent on family support back home, and on co-ethnic support in the school environment, to succeed (Chen, 2008)¹².

Hansen argues that the impact of state schools on student identity has been ambiguous: Chinese state education is part of a “hegemonic project” to modernize society and define the nation, and thus plays a role a resurgence of ethnic identities all over China. This project has had fragmenting, as well as intensifying, effects on ethnic identities, as illustrated in profoundly different responses to the expansion of formal education of the historically-integrated Naxi and the more marginalized Dai (Thai) minorities in Yunnan. Consistent with this view, Zhu and Chen highlight that the context of boarding schools brings ethnic identity to the fore in Tibetan and Uyghur students’ daily lives—and not always in ways that are consistent with the policy intentions. Postiglione, Zhu, and Jiao (2004) studied the ethnic identity formation of rural Tibetan children in

¹²In another paper, Chen (2010) focuses on the continuing importance of the family element of social capital for Uyghur students, despite the impediment of distance.

schools in Tibet proper, and use multiple sources of data, including policy analyses, student recruitment and curriculum data, and interviews with students and teachers. The authors find signs of resistance: despite official policy rhetoric that emphasizes national unity and patriotism, there are still many symbols of Tibetan culture that reinforce Tibetan identity. The authors argue that this dual representation of State and local interests lends support for a more “even-handed” approach to cultural policies. Clothey draws a similar conclusion based on her study of students at the Central University for Nationalities (*Minzu Daxue*, 民族大学, now known in English by the transliterated name Minzu University): the university’s overt goal is promoting ethnic unity and a sense of Chinese patriotism, but the experiences of students there foster a sense of individual ethnic identity, not necessarily in line with official goals (Clothey, 2005; Clothey, 2005).

Incentives and Disincentives for Buy-in to the Educational System

Field-based studies in China have suggested that members of ethnic groups develop unfavorable attitudes toward education if they do not observe tangible economic benefits from education among members of their own communities or if they perceive that the school system is incompatible with aspects of their own cultures (Hansen, 1999; Harrell & Mgebba, 1999; Postiglione, 2007). Harrell and Mgebba (1999) showed that expectations of rewards decisively influence educational participation among the Yi ethnic group in Sichuan. On the basis of fieldwork in schools in Qinghai Province, Lin Yi argues that the devaluation of Tibetan culture within the state school system in Northwest China precludes activation of the cultural capital possessed by Tibetan children, and can create atmospheres in the schools that are socially hostile. As a result, the social mobility of these children can be hindered (Yi, 2006).

In Tibet proper, Postiglione and his colleagues found that despite alleviation of school tuition and fees in efforts to address high dropout rates in rural Tibet, many families preferred to have their children work at home due to a perceived low quality of education and inability of schools to provide graduates with competitive jobs (Postiglione, Jiao, & Gyatso, 2005). Postiglione’s (2007) fieldwork illustrates a number of problems that serve to disincentivize children from engaging with education. Poor rural schools attended by Tibetans have little of the income-generating potential of urban schools, and for these schools, attracting good teachers is difficult. Further, poverty has a reinforcing effect, as parents in poor rural villages do not necessarily observe examples of education leading to economic improvements and thus are often unwilling to provide financial support for children’s schooling. Yet, as important as regional and economic factors are in explaining ethnic differences in education, additional factors are also significant. Postiglione also highlights that the content of schooling may be perceived as being inconsistent, or even oppositional, to Tibetan traditions.

Similarly, Hansen (1999) argued that educational disparities between the Dai, Naxi, Hani, and Jinuo in Yunnan can be traced to ethnic differences in perceptions of the economic benefits of education and the accord or opposition between their cultural heritage and the educational system. Focusing on the two cases of the Naxi and the Dai, Hansen argues that the Naxi were thoroughly enmeshed in Confucian education during the Qing dynasty. Due to this long history of acceptance of Chinese education, the Naxi have been able to obtain a degree of social mobility and status that has made it possible to express an educated identity that is at the same time an ethnic identity – within acceptable political bounds. Educated Naxi are in a position to influence the educational system from the inside (see also Yu, 2010 on this point).

In contrast, Hansen notes that the Dai first encountered Chinese schools in the Republican period, and experienced them as a colonial-style imposition—a forced alternative to the monastic educational institutions in place previously. Chinese education is more widely available than ever, but Hansen suggests that there persists a wide range of problems in convincing Dai children to remain in school, and that the practice of Buddhism and monastic education are thriving with

economic modernization and increased cross-border contact with Thailand (Hansen, 1999, p. 165). She suggests that educated Dai, unlike the Naxi, are likely to dissociate themselves from their village's cultural heritage (Hansen, 1999). Shen and Qian's (2010) fieldwork suggests that education is not necessarily widely viewed as a viable route to social mobility among the Dai.

A "cultural rupture" between home and school may contribute to the problem (Shen & Qian, 2010). Shen and Qian's (2010) fieldwork among the Dai in Yunnan suggests that there are considerable differences between Dai students' home and school lives, in terms of the content of a curriculum that is highly exam oriented and contains little material on Dai daily lives, history, religion, or culture, and in terms of expected orientations and behaviors. Language use in school may also contribute to this disconnect, bilingual policies notwithstanding. Shen and Qian's (2010, p. 57) fieldwork indicated that most students reported difficulty learning standard Chinese, and that the use of the Dai language by students is "peremptorily reprimanded" by teachers. Similarly, Bass notes that Chinese language of instruction in upper secondary creates a barrier to enrollment and promotion to the "fast" stream for Tibetans, vis-à-vis Han students in Tibet (Bass, 1998). Yet, Bass also connects this issue, at least in part, to politics: she argues that political considerations have hindered balanced reflections on what language policies are most sensible, from a pedagogical perspective (p. 258).

Educational Stratification

Detailed empirical attention to documenting the scope of educational inequalities by ethnic group has been limited in the English language literature. Much of the quantitative work on access and attainment, executed by stratification researchers in sociology and development economists, has been exploratory. It addresses both access and attainment, and the economic context and outcomes of education. This work links conceptually to many of the issues raised in the field-based studies cited above, but those connections are not generally explicitly present in the work.

Access and Attainment

Analyses of data from a 1992 survey of children demonstrated substantial ethnic differences in enrollment among rural 7- to 14 year olds, with rates for ethnic Chinese boys roughly double those for girls from certain ethnic groups (Hannum, 2002). The same study showed that the ethnic gap could be attributed, in part, to compositional differences in geographic location of residence and socioeconomic background (Hannum, 2002). There is no general tendency of a greater gender gap for minorities than for the ethnic Chinese, but significant differences in the gender gap emerge across individual ethnic groups. Evidence from census data showed that ethnic disparities in junior high school transitions increased between 1982 and 1990. More recent analyses of national census and survey data show generalized improvement in educational attainment for China's ethnic minority groups, but considerable gaps still persist across individual groups (Hannum & Wang, 2012; Sun & Qi, 2007). Language fluency in standard Chinese appears to matter for educational attainment, but in different ways in different regions (Hong, 2010). Work has yet to really theorize the patterns of advantage and disadvantage that exist across individual groups.

The Economic Context and Outcomes of Education

As theorized in the anthropological, field-based studies of ethnic differences in the experience of education, the likely outcomes of schooling are an important potential factor feeding back into the educational attainment process. Several studies have established the different context and outcomes of education by ethnic group. Minorities, on average, are poorer than the majority in China, though the trend is toward poverty reduction for all groups and a reduced ethnic poverty gap (Gustafsson & Sai, 2009; Hannum and Wang, 2012). On the other hand, an income gap favoring

the Han appeared to have widened between 1988 and 1995 (Gustafsson & Shi, 2003). Analyses of data from the early 2000s show that minorities as a group are less likely to have access to wage employment and earn less than Han, though estimates of the scale of the gap differ widely by data source (Hannum and Wang, 2012). Yet, minorities also had higher returns to education, on average, compared to the ethnic majority population (Hannum & Wang, 2012; see also Sun & Xu, 2010 for evidence from Gansu Province).

A major part of the story of income, poverty and employment gaps has to do with segregation: many ethnic minority groups live in much more disadvantaged contexts, from a development perspective (Gustafsson & Ding, 2006; Hannum and Wang, 2012). This situation also raises the potential problem that social returns to schooling are less likely to be enjoyed by minority regions, to the extent that brain drain is an issue in these places (Zhang & Wang, 2010, pp. 23–24).

However, studies have also indicated that the “average” labor market situation of minorities is unlikely to apply in a uniform way. For example, studies of particular ethnic groups’ labor market experiences show considerable diversity of experience. An analysis of 1982 and 1990 census data from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region revealed that the Uyghur population was more likely to be working in agriculture, and that rising ethnic disparities in occupational attainment point to a growing ethnic gap in educational credentials as the most likely source of this change (Hannum & Xie, 1998). More recent analyses of the 2005 mini-census showed a continued Han-Uyghur difference in non-agricultural employment (Wu & Song, 2010) Excluding those in agriculture, Uyghur were more likely to work in government or institutions than either Han locals or migrants, and also more likely to become self-employed. Earnings inequality was negligible in government or institutions, but it increased with the marketization of the employment sector (Wu & Song, 2010). More recently, a resume audit study focusing on firms indicated discrimination against applicants with Uyghur names in China’s urban labor market (Maurer-Fazio, 2011). In neighboring Gansu Province, a different story emerges for the urban Hui and Han populations. A study of labor market inequalities between the Han and Hui minority in urban Lanzhou shows evidence of labor market discrimination in access to state sector employment: ethnic differences in the likelihood of state-sector employment persisted net of education and other background differences (Zang, 2008). At the same time, gaps were lessened at higher levels of education, highlighting the implications of education for broader stratification patterns.

Discussion

In some sense, there is a great deal of common ground connecting the Chinese- and English-language literatures. These literatures focus on similar case studies, settings, and problems. It is striking that much of the work in both languages comes from scholars working outside of the field of sociology of education. Much of the existing work comes out of educational stratification, anthropology, or development economics traditions, or is conducted by educational researchers operating outside of sociological traditions and frameworks altogether.

Yet, there are certain differences across the two literatures. These literatures draw on different ideological starting points. They conform to different norms of academic composition and speak to different audiences in different sociopolitical contexts. In one realm, authors write carefully on topics that are both highly sensitive and highly salient to the national development agenda, and often seek to provide direct suggestions about improvement strategies. In the other realm, authors speak primarily to an academic audience. As a consequence, the focus and tone in the two literatures sometimes diverge. Certain lines of policy-related work appear primarily in Chinese. For example, there is a debate in the Chinese literature between Marxist and multicultural perspectives that is not prominent in the English literature. Many Chinese-language studies espouse and explicate a Marxist ideology of ethnic minority education. These studies focus on the

ways that education can and should emphasize national unity and patriotism. Although most of the policy literature supports this ideology and policies and programs based on this framework, there are a handful of scholars writing in Chinese who are critical of this perspective. These authors argue that assimilative schooling often ignores other values, which may lead to the disappearance of distinct cultures. Many of these scholars favor what they call a multicultural approach, which places equal emphasis on all cultural groups.

In the remainder of this concluding section, we discuss a few key themes, noting where relevant when and how interpretations differ significantly in the two literatures. We discuss how the literatures on ethnic disparity address the role of poverty, the role of culture, the role of policy, and the tensions between language offerings that prioritize cultural preservation and those that prioritize social mobility in a globalized China.

The role of poverty

A discussion and empirical documentation of “uneven development” of educational systems, facilities, and teachers is prominent in the Chinese literature. Much of this research suggests that ethnic differences can be explained by regional economic development differences and class disparities, as well as associated differences in access to adequate school facilities and teachers. This work parallels a line of quantitative work in English that has sought to establish empirically the disparities across ethnic groups in educational outcomes. The English literature on educational stratification by ethnicity in China attests to successes in expanding access to schools to previously excluded groups, to persisting disparities across many groups, and, like the Chinese literature, to the significance of economic and geographic context in contributing to persisting ethnic disparities in education. While it is clear in both literatures that many of the ethnic gaps in outcomes can be explained *statistically* by incorporating variables accounting for geographic location, what this fact really tells us is very unclear. In the Chinese literature, and in some of the English literature, a prominent interpretation is that the problem of minority education is one primarily of poverty and insufficient economic development. Without discounting the obvious importance of poverty as a significant contributing factor to educational disparities by ethnic group, the qualitative work in both languages certainly suggests that other issues are also at play.

The role of culture

Cultural issues are commonly cited in the qualitative literature as contributing factors. Some of the work in Chinese puts forth what might be termed a cultural deficit model – characteristics of groups such as religion or gender norms may depress educational levels. Some of this literature does not really reflect on the school structures or practices that may contribute to unwillingness to attend schools. There is a contrasting notion of cultural disconnect in the multicultural tradition in Chinese and in much of the ethnographic literature in English. The cultural disconnect literature describes school and classroom settings where members of certain ethnic minority groups face discouraging, dis-incentivizing messages of linguistic and cultural inferiority; however, there is tremendous variation in experience across minority groups.

The role of policy: the education project, intended and unintended

A related strand in both literatures includes a substantial number of papers that catalogue existing minority policies and highlight the integrative goals of policies. The assimilative functions of minority education as promoting development and national unity are problematized in some of the multicultural literature in Chinese, and quite commonly in the English literature. Further, the English-language research and a few of the Chinese studies suggest that the assimilative mission of minority education utilizes tactics that devalue or suppress certain minority identities. Yet, a few

studies in English suggest that ethnic identities and networks are in some cases strengthened by the experience.¹³

Tradeoffs? Globalization, instrumentalism and language preservation

A theme in both language literatures is the instrumental pressure for language assimilation, even in the context of language policies that seek to preserve minority languages. Both literatures describe an educational system that has policies in place for preservation of minority languages, and both describe a system that tends to promote the dominant culture and standard Chinese language acquisition. Scholars writing in both languages acknowledge the instrumentality of this latter approach for fostering economic mobility, and highlight the rising economic incentives faced by schools, teachers, and students to privilege standard Chinese and English over minority languages. However, the English literature focuses strongly on the costs of an approach that devalues minority language and culture, whereas even the more critical Chinese language literature tends to frame the problem as an omission, and not a devaluation, of minority language and culture. In both literatures, the pressures outside the purview of the school system for students to be fluent in standard Chinese and proficient in English are challenging the preservation of minority languages.

Conclusions

This review has sought to provide an enumeration of some key themes emerging in two linked literatures: themes of the complex interrelationships of ethnicity with cultural, policy, development, and language issues. We have also highlighted certain divergences in the literatures, and suggested certain reasons why this divergence is present. While there are of course many exceptions, a key element of the divergence is that economic development and poverty alleviation are key orienting issues in the Chinese literature, while much of the English literature is oriented to a largely academic audience interested very centrally in issues of inequality and ethnic identity.

Studies in both languages pave the way for comparative sociologists of education to learn from the case of China. Close analyses of China's diverse groups and institutional arrangements hold great potential for theoretical and policy-relevant insights. Yet, certain new work is needed to move forward in this direction. Few studies in either language develop a strong comparative framework for investigating or characterizing the policies in China or the problems associated with education amongst minority communities. In addition, though some of the studies are very well theorized, most are not framed in a way that facilitates dialogue with comparative scholarship in the sociology of education, or comparative theories about ethnicity and education. This situation is understandable, given the still-nascent state of the field and the need for empirical description to aid in theory building. However, more heavily theorized work, and more comparatively framed work, will be needed to enable the Chinese experience to be informed by and inform the development of the field of sociology of education.

¹³ An interesting example of the disconnect between these viewpoints is the tension between China-based and overseas scholars' interpretations of the boarding school phenomenon, according to Postiglione finds that North American and Australian scholars' reactions to boarding schools are highly critical, due to their very overt assimilation agenda and, likely, the extremely unfortunate histories with ethnic boarding schools elsewhere. A prominent view in China is that boarding schools provide a high quality education to students who would otherwise be unable to access it. These schools explicitly seek to strengthen ties between minority areas and China's heartland, but certain research suggests that students' ethnic identities are actually reinforced by the boarding experience (e.g., Chen, 2008).

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Tables and Figures

Figure 1. China's Education System

| Age | Number of years | | | | |
|-------|-----------------|-----------------------------|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 25-27 | 3 | Doctorate | | | Post-graduation / work |
| 22-24 | 3 | Masters | | | |
| 18-21 | 4 | Undergraduate | Vocational education (tertiary education) | Tertiary level technical schools | Self-study |
| 15-17 | 3 | Academic high school | Secondary vocational education | | Adult secondary education |
| 12-14 | 3 | Academic junior high school | Junior vocational school | | Adult literacy programs |
| 6-11 | 6 | Elementary school | | | |
| 3-5 | 3 | Pre-school / kindergarten | | | |

Source: Ministry of Education, 2010

Table 1. Ethnic Minority Students in 2009

| Level of School | Number of Ethnic Minority Students | Percent of total student population |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Academic high school | 1,787,100 | 7.34 |
| Secondary vocation school | 1,072,000 | 17.23 |
| Junior high school | 5,012,200 | 9.22 |
| Primary school | 10,591,200 | 10.52 |
| Special education | 32,800 | 7.66 |
| Preschool education | 1,894,200 | 7.13 |

Source: Ministry of Education, 2010.

Table 2. Averages of Educational Indicators in Different Regions of China in 2000

| Enrollment rate of Primary school aged | Dropout rate of Primary school aged children | Primary school enrollment rate | Primary school 5-year retention rate | High school entrance rate |
|--|--|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| National | 99.09 | 0.90 | 94.37 | 92.48 | 49.52 |
| East | 99.72 | 0.25 | 97.24 | 98.10 | 52.56 |
| West | 97.86 | 1.13 | 89.96 | 84.02 | 45.70 |
| Western minority areas | 95.78 | 1.50 | 84.37 | 74.84 | 47.43 |

Source: Development Planning Division of the Ministry of Education (2000)

Table 3. Enrollment Rates for Primary School-aged Children (7-11 years) in Tibet Autonomous Region

| | 1988 | 1989 | 1990 |
|-------------|------|------|------|
| City | 88.8 | 87.3 | 89.4 |
| Town | 69.0 | 86.2 | 54.6 |
| Rural areas | 49.4 | 43.3 | 50.7 |
| Total | 55.7 | 53.1 | 54.6 |
| All girls | 54.3 | 47.6 | 63.1 |

Source: Tibet Autonomous Region Bureau of Statistics: 1989:549; 1991:396.

Table 4. The Number and Percentage of Substitute Teachers of the Teaching Workforce in Ethnic Minority Autonomous Regions and Western Multi-Ethnic Provinces, 2009

| | Elementary school | | Junior Middle School | |
|----------|------------------------------|--|------------------------------|--|
| | Number of substitute teacher | Percent workforce that are substitute teachers | Number of substitute teacher | Percent workforce that are substitute teachers |
| China | | 4.14 | | 1.97 |
| Xinjiang | 7761 | 5.46 | 2858 | 2.51 |
| Tibet | 416 | 2.18 | 0 | 0 |
| Guangxi | 16410 | 6.92 | 2210 | 1.37 |
| Inner | 3399 | 2.87 | 2345 | 2.39 |
| Ningxia | 1697 | 4.83 | 1291 | 4.59 |
| Guizhou | 8036 | 3.88 | 1044 | 0.74 |
| Yunnan | 13586 | 5.49 | 89 | 0.57 |
| Sizhuan | 17806 | 5.49 | 4112 | 1.45 |
| Qinghai | 3404 | 11.27 | 1921 | 8.27 |
| Gansu | 12872 | 8.42 | 2238 | 1.88 |

Source: Development Planning Division of the Ministry of Education, (2010). "The 2009 National Educational Development Statistical Report"