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An Analysis of the Affirmative Action Program for Ethnic Minority Students at Hexi University in Zhangye, Gansu, China

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAM FOR ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS AT HEXI UNIVERSITY IN ZHANGYE, GANSU, CHINA

Caitlin P. Shea

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA

December 11, 2017

Karen Blanchard
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Key Words:

- Preferential policies *Youhui Zhengce* 优惠政策 – these policies are created for the advancement and support of ethnic minorities in China. They include policies on family planning, hiring and promotion, the financing and taxation of business, and regional infrastructural support

- Ethnic minorities *Shaoshu Minzu* 少数民族 – there are 56 recognized ethnicities in China, the term ‘ethnic minorities’ refer to the 55 ethnicities that are not Han Chinese

- *Hanzu* 汉族 / Han – The Han ethnicity is the dominant and majority ethnicity in China, over 91% of people in China identify themselves as Han

- Mandarin *Putonghua* 普通话 – Common Standard Chinese: this language is the national language of China

- College preparatory course *Yuke Ban* 预科班 - Ethnic Minority students can take a special preparatory course which is an extra year at the beginning of the traditional four years of University

- National College Entrance Examination *GaoKao* 高考 – entrance to university is standardized in China. All students who would like to enroll in university must take the National College Entrance Examination, which determines which universities they can enter.
ABSTRACT
This study investigates and critically analyzes the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) preferential policy for ethnic minority students (少数民族的优惠政策) through the use of a case study conducted at Hexi University in Zhangye, Gansu. This study examines how the national preferential policy for ethnic minority students is implemented at a university level and how it is perceived by teachers and students in order to better understand and assess the impact and purpose of the policy. The study is driven by three questions; how is the PRC’s preferential policy for ethnic minority students implemented at a university level? Is the preferential policy for ethnic minority students at Hexi University fulfilling its stated goals and purpose? If yes, how? If not, why? How is the preferential policy for ethnic minority students at Hexi University perceived by staff and students? The study’s findings show that teachers and students are unclear on the details and purpose of the policy and do not know how the policy is being implemented at the school. Within the study there was evidence from both teachers and students of a negative bias against ethnic minority students and a lack of knowledge on ethnic minority culture and issues facing ethnic minority students. The literature review provides evidence that structural inequality between ethnic minority groups and the dominant Han majority exist (Chen, 2016; Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013; Hannan and Wang, 2010) and that the preferential policies created by the Chinese government have done little to change these structural disparities (Jeong, 2015; Liebold, 2016). In order to more fully evaluate the preferential policy for ethnic minority students and how it can be improved, further research should be done on the following questions; what are the goals and purpose of the preferential policies for ethnic minorities in China? How much do Han students know about the experience of minority students? How much interaction with minority culture do they have? Why is there a smaller proportion of minority students in higher education than Han students?
INTRODUCTION

When I first arrived in China as a Peace Corps volunteer serving as an English language teacher at a university in Gansu province, I immediately knew I wanted my Capstone research project to focus on China’s ethnic minorities and their relationship to the Han-dominated government. The problem was that ethnic minorities can be an extremely sensitive topic in China. Most Chinese people avoid the subject completely and indeed local governments dealing with a minor public disturbance or criminal case involving ethnic minorities tend to resolve the case as quickly and quietly as possible, even if this means paying compensations (bribes) to the concerned parties, so adverse are they to discussing problems relating to ethnic minorities publicly (Tyson and Wu, 2016, 282-3). So I had a bit of a dilemma on my hands, how could I conduct a project on ethnic minorities in China and convince people to discuss a topic with me that is largely taboo? It wasn’t until a fellow teacher and friend of mine mentioned that she was teaching a special class of ethnic minority students that I began to formulate an idea. My friend claimed that the class was part of a government policy to encourage more ethnic minority students to attend university. Curious, I researched Chinese government policy surrounding ethnic minorities and found that the policy my friend was talking about was part of the preferential policies (优惠政策) the Chinese government has for ethnic minorities. In the U.S., we would call these policies affirmative action.

The People’s Republic of China (PRC) has 56 recognized ethnicities including the dominant Han majority, which makes up over 91% of China’s population (Hannum and Wang, 2010, 2). These 56 ethnic groups (minzu 民族) were officially recognized by the PRC after a country-wide study that began during the 1950s (Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013). One’s ethnic status appears on every Chinese citizen’s identity card and is based on the individual’s parents’
ethnic status. Chinese citizens are asked to provide their ethnic identity when applying for primary school, attending college, joining the armed forces, or becoming a member of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) or the ruling party in the PRC (Zang, 2016). They are also often asked about their ethnicity when applying for jobs. Although public policy in China often refers to ethnic minorities as one unified group they are, in fact, incredibly diverse. Fifty-three have their own language, including twenty-one with their own written language (Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013, 233), and there is a numerous variety of different religions (including Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, and unique indigenous religions), cultures, and ways of life among the fifty-five ethnic minorities (Mackerras, 2003). Today, there are five autonomous provinces in China: Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Tibet, Ningxia, and Guangxi Zhuang, which make up 45% of the land area in China (Tang, Hu, and Jin, 2016). Although these five provinces are considered autonomous ethnic minority regions, this does not mean that ethnic minorities hold the majority of the population. In fact, apart from Tibet, the Han ethnicity holds the majority in all of the provinces. There are also 155 autonomous counties and cities for ethnic minorities. Of the fifty-five minorities, forty-five have their own autonomous region (province, county, and/or city) (Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013, 236). Many of these autonomous regions are rich in natural resources; containing 75% of China’s natural grassland, 40-50% of forests, and much of its minerals, oil, precious metals, and gas (Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013, 236). Despite this, ethnic minorities are statistically less educated (Chen, 2016; Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013), less healthy (Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013; Hannan and Wang, 2010; Price and Elu, 2013), and less financially stable than Han people (Gustafsson, 2016; Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013; Campos, Ren, and Petrick, 2016).
Preferential polices for ethnic minorities (少数民族的优惠政策) in China are designed to decrease the inequality gap between Chinese ethnic minorities and the Han majority and promote economic and social development of ethnic minority areas (Yu, 2014). They have a stated aim of, “‘sustaining’ (支持 zhichi) and ‘supporting’ (扶持 fuchi) the minorities in order to assist them in keeping pace with the dominant Han ethnic majority.” (Liebold, 2016, p. 166) and include policies on higher education, family planning, hiring and promotion, the financing and taxation of business, and regional infrastructural support (Sautman, 2007, p. 86). The following Capstone research project is based on preferential policies specifically for higher education for ethnic minority students. These policies began in the early 1950s and allow ethnic minority students to enter university with lower admission scores than Han students (Wang, 2007). In China, admission to university is solely based on students’ scores on the National College Entrance Exam, known informally in China as the Gaokao (高考). The policy is enacted provincially through point systems depending on annual quotas, ethnic identity, and preferential designations (autonomous vs. non-autonomous regions) (Yamada, 2015). In 2002, the Ministry of Education stated that minimum college admission scores for ethnic minority students should be lowered no more than 20 points (Wang, 2007) out of the 750 total points that can be received on the Gaokao (Yamada, 2015). However, in recent years there have been instances where admission standards have been lowered by as many as 50 points for minority students (Sun, 2015). There are also regional differences in how the policy is carried out. In Gansu province, where this study takes place, 20 points are added onto the scores of minority students from autonomous regions and 10 points are added to the scores of Han students from the same region (Wang, 2016). Some universities also offer an extra year of preparatory classes (yuke ban 预科班) to ethnic minority students (Yamada, 2015) and the minimum admission scores can be
lowered up to 80 points for students taking these classes (Wang, 2007). There are also thirteen ethnic minority (minzu 民族) universities which specialize in educating minority students and assist minority students by offering them lower admission standards, extra points on entrance exams, and preparatory courses as well as post-graduation work placements in minority areas (Ives, 2010).

While there have been a plethora of studies done on ethnic minorities in China, few of these studies look specifically at the PRC’s preferential policies for minority students and the ones that do are decisively quantitative and focus either nationally or regionally. This study looks at preferential policies on a much smaller scale and on a more personal level in order to explore how the national preferential policy for minority students is executed at a university level and examines perceptions of the program both by students and teachers. This in-depth study aims to give a better of understanding of how this policy is carried out at a small-scale level and how it is viewed by students and teachers in order to assess if it is fulfilling its stated purpose (see page 3).

Questions:

- How is the PRC’s preferential policy for ethnic minority students implemented at a university level?
- Is the preferential policy for ethnic minority students at Hexi University fulfilling its stated goals and purpose? If yes, how? If not, why?
- How is the preferential policy for ethnic minority students at Hexi University perceived by staff and students?
LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnic minorities in China have long been a topic of heated discussion in the academic world both in China and around the world. There is a vast amount of research and studies done on ethnic minorities from everything to portrayals of ethnic minorities in Chinese media (Hoddie and Lou, 2009) to socioeconomic inequality of ethnic minorities compared to those of the Han ethnicity (Tang, Hu, and Jin, 2016; Sautman, 2014; Wu and Song, 2013; Gustafsson, 2016) to ethnic conflict (Sautman, 2012; Sun, 2014) to educational access of ethnic minorities (Gustafsson and Ding, 2014; Shimbo, 2017; Chen, 2016). The studies have been conducted on a national scale (Jiao, 2011; Tyson and Wu, 2016; Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013; Zhu, 2010; Campos, Ren, and Petrick, 2016) as well as focusing on the Western region of China (where the majority of China’s ethnic minorities live) (Jeong, 2015; Hong, 2010). There have also been many provincial case studies focusing on provinces such as Qinghai (Yamada, 2015), Xinjiang (Wu and Song, 2013; Sautman, 1998), Tibet (Guo, 2016), and Ningxia (Gustafsson and Ding, 2014; Shimbo, 2017). There is even a university-wide case study on the Minzu University of China in Beijing (Clothey and Hu, 2015). Many of the studies done on ethnic minorities focus specifically on one ethnic minority compared with the Han population. Tang Wenfang, Yue Hu, and Shuai Jin (2016) focus on the educational attainment and socioeconomic status of the Uighur minority, one of the largest ethnic minorities in China with 10 million people located mainly in the Western province of Xinjiang (Rashid, 2016), compared with the Han majority. Bjorn Gustafsson and Ding Sai (2014) and Atsuko Shimbo (2017) focus their case studies in Ningxia province on educational attainments of the Hui people. Emily C. Hannum and Wang Meiyan (2010) choose to focus their study on socioeconomic status and social welfare of ethnic
minorities in the five largest ethnic minority groups in China, which are the Zhuang, the Manchu, the Hui, the Miao, and the Uighur.

The majority of research on ethnic minorities seems to be focused on proving that inequality does exist between ethnic minorities and the Han majority (Tang, Hu, and Jin, 2016; Jeong, 2015; Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013; Zhu, 2010; Hong, 2010; Campos, Ren, Petrick, 2016; Gustafsson and Ding, 2014; Sautman, 2014; Wu and Song, 2013; Hannum and Wang, 2010). There is much less research on preferential policies for ethnic minorities in China. Of the little research and investigation into China’s preferential policies, Barry Sautman, a political scientist and lawyer in the division of social science at Hong Kong’s University of Science and Technology, is a leading expert. Sautman has four research papers discussing preferential policies and their implications for China. His first two papers were published in 1998. One is a case study on Xinjiang and gives a broad outline of preferential policies, how they are implemented in Xinjiang, and the theoretical assumptions underlying these policies (Sautman, 1998). The second focuses on preferential policies for ethnic minority students and the implementation and impact of these policies (Sautman, 1998). Sautman’s (2012) third academic paper on preferential policies discusses ethnic conflict and discrimination in China with references to riots in Lhasa, Tibet and Urumqi, Xinjiang in 2008 and 2009 and growing resentment of the Han population over these policies. Sautman’s (2014) fourth paper focuses on ethnic conflict and minority rights (including preferential policies) in China. Sautman gives detailed descriptions of what China’s preferential policies include and how they are implemented as well as changing public opinion on the policies and how this is affected by incidents of ethnic conflict. He also gives regional examples of how the policies are implemented in Xinjiang. Much of Sautman’s work is very broad and looks at preferential policies from a bird eye’s view.
This study contrasts from Sautman’s work by taking a smaller scale approach and looking at the implementation of preferential policies for minority students at a university level and the opinions of teachers and students on these policies in order to give an idea of how the average Chinese person views preferential policies and how these broad and at times confusing preferential policies for minority students are implemented within a university. 

Apart from Sautman there have been a few other studies surrounding preferential policies for minority students. Yamada (2015) focuses her research on preferential policies from research she conducted in Qinghai. She asserts that high tuition fees for preparatory courses and Han-centric education are major problems in implementing the preferential policies. Zhu (2010) discusses access to higher education by minority students and concludes that even with preferential policies there is a low number of minority students in higher education especially upper-tier universities like Beijing University. Lang Weiwei (2010), a professor at the school of the Study of Ethnic Minorities at Southwest Minzu University of China, wrote an opinion piece on preferential policies. While Lang is supportive of preferential policies and argues for China to keep these policies, she repeatedly emphasized that the PRC’s preferential policies are necessary because ethnic minorities and ethnic minority regions are “economically backward” (Lang, 2010). Wang (2007) gives an overview of and details behind these preferential policies, defends their implementation saying that they offer more opportunities for ethnic minorities and are inexpensive, and outlines the weakness of the policies as having a small effect on the number of ethnic minority students attending university, with only a .4 percent increase in the number of minority students attending university from 1990 to 2000. Leibold (2016) argues that the purpose of China’s preferential policies is less to emphasize social equality and cultural recognition and more to ensure state control, Han dominance, and social stability.
Within research on Chinese ethnicities, there are two viewpoints found in this literature review. The first comes mainly from Chinese sources and presumes that the inequality between ethnic minorities and the Han people is due to the fact that minorities are economically, socially, and otherwise “backwards” or the dismissal that inequality between ethnic minorities and the Han majority exists (Lang, 2010; Guo, 2016; Wang, 2007; Chen, 2016). Chen (2016) claims that the phrase ‘inequality in minority education’ does not exist in official educational research publications in China. While conducting a search in the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure online system, Chen claims that when she typed in the search term ‘inequality in minority education’ (民族教育不平等) there were zero entries, but when she searched for the opposite (equality in minority education/民族教育平等) she found six pages of entries (Chen, 2016, p.317). As mentioned in the introduction, Chinese people tend to be adverse to discussing any issues relating to ethnic minorities and it is interesting that this avoidance also occurs in the academic field.

Some Chinese academics also show a negative bias towards ethnic minorities. Lang Weiwei (2010), as noted above, frequently calls ethnic minorities backwards. This is found in her paper “Entrance Exam Admissions Policies on Ethnic Minorities and Equal Educational Rights for Minorities in China”. In reference to ethnic minority students she claims, “their talents will serve to improve the backward economic conditions of minority regions and eliminate the backward conditions of minority education and thus promote the advancement of minority society” (Lang, 2010, 44). Guo Rongxing (2016) discusses a pairing-aid program started by China in the 1950s where the economic leading provinces in the east (Han majority provinces) helped the “economically backward” provinces in the west (these provinces tend to have more ethnic minorities) (Guo, 2010, p. 21). Guo’s (2016) work paints a picture of the Han
people and the Han-dominated government lifting ethnic minorities, and in particular, Tibetans, out of poverty and illiteracy. In her discussion on reasons that ethnic minority students often perform more poorly on national exams than Han students, Wang Tiezhi (2007) asserts that, “apart from the language barrier, other unique ways of thinking, behavioral patterns and social values of ethnic minorities are also incompatible with modern education development” (p.155). While these three authors do make some valid points, their overall picture of minorities is too simplistic and they proceeded with their studies and work under the assumption that Han culture is more advanced than the various cultures of ethnic minorities. First, all three authors refer to ethnic minorities as though they are one unified group while in fact they are linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse. Second, the authors do not take into account outliers such as the fact that Koreans, Manchus, and Mongols ethnic groups actually outperform the Han majority in some educational and economic aspects (Chen, 2016) or that in Jiangsu province those of the Hui minority are actually more prosperous than those of the Han majority (Sautman, 1998). Lastly, these authors diminish the importance of other factors for socioeconomic and educational inequality such as the importance of rural and urban settings when analyzing economic inequality (Hong, 2010; Campos, Ren, and Petrick, 2016; Tapp, 2014) and the influence of wealth on educational attainment (Gustafsson and Ding, 2014; Shimbo, 2017; Chen, 2016).

The second viewpoint is found mainly in Western sources and media. These sources seem to be looking specifically for evidence that ethnic minorities in China are suffering, treated unfairly, and overall unequal. Yamada (2015) argues that the Gaokao (高考) is in Mandarin (普通话) and that this is particularly unfair to ethnic minorities who have a different native language. However, Sautman (1998) points out that ethnic minorities can actually take the Gaokao in their
own language or take an easier exam paper in Mandarin to compensate. In his report on Muslims in China and their relations with the Chinese government, Lee (2015) mentions religious and cultural restrictions placed on Muslims particularly the Uighur and the Hui groups and calls for extensive preferential policies. However, Lee does not mention the preferential policies already in place. Sautman (1998) claims that when compared with affirmative action in other countries China’s preferential policies are broader (containing a wider range of different policies), deeper (affecting more people), and more variegated (decentralized). Liebold (2016) also acknowledges that China’s preferential policies are some of the most consequential and extensive minority entitlements in the world.

Previous research and work on ethnic minorities in China, preferential policies, and education of ethnic minorities in China are crucial to understanding the backdrop on which this study takes place and key issues regarding ethnic minorities and their relationship to the Han government, the implementation of preferential policies, and public opinion surrounding preferential policies. Understanding the complex and oftentimes confusing national preferential policies for China’s 55 recognized ethnic minorities is vital when seeking to understand the way they are implemented at a university level and how the students and teachers think of the policies. There is an immense amount of statistical data on ethnic minorities in China and information on the history, development, and implementation of preferential policies on national, regional, and provincial levels. However, there are very few university-wide studies done on ethnic minorities and as far as I know none analyze preferential policies. Furthermore, most of the previous research, with a few exceptions, is decisively quantitative in nature. While this has produced a surplus of data, few researchers thought to discuss these issues with ethnic minorities and Han people themselves. What is their experience with these policies? What do students and teachers
think of these policies? This study aims to answer these questions in order to create a clearer idea of how preferential policies are being implemented within Chinese universities and how the communities of teachers and students at these universities view them.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research Site and Background Information:

The research site of this paper took place at Hexi University (河西学院) in Northern Gansu province in the city of Zhangye (张掖). Gansu is a province located in the Northwest of China. It borders Mongolia and the autonomous region of Inner Mongolia to the north, the Hui autonomous region of Ningxia and the province of Shaanxi to the east, Sichuan and Qinghai provinces to the south, and the autonomous region of Xinjiang to the west (Cheng and Falkenheim, 2016). As of 2010, the population was about 25.6 million people (Cheng and Falkenheim, 2016). The provincial capital is Lanzhou, a city of over 2.5 million located in central Gansu on the south bank of the Huang He (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017). Traditionally Gansu is an area of poverty due partly to the frequency of natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts, and famines as well as low agricultural productivity of the province (Cheng and Falkenheim, 2016). The land area of Gansu is made up of mountains, plateaus, and desert. The city of Zhangye borders the high Qilian mountains (average elevation of 12,900 feet above sea level) to the southeast (Cheng and Falkenheim, 2016) and the urban center has about 217,000 people (China National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). The population of Gansu is mostly Han; other major ethnic groups include Tibetan, Hui, Mongol, and Turk (Cheng and Falkenheim, 2016). There are also two small ethnic groups native to Gansu. The nomadic Yugur ethnic group is one of the smallest found in China with only about 15,000 people and have their own autonomous county (Wong and Piao, 2016) located just outside of Zhangye city. The Dongxiang
people are a slightly larger group of about 513,000 and also have their own autonomous region (Yardley, 2006), which is located just south of the provincial capital of Lanzhou. Unfortunately the Dongxiang people are also among China’s poorest and most illiterate (Yardley, 2006).

Hexi University is the only university located in Zhangye and while the university is not well-known in China, not even making the list of the top 500 universities in China (http://www.shanghairanking.com/), it is considered to be one of the better universities in Gansu province. It has two campuses, the main campus and a smaller medical campus. There are about 20,000 students studying at the university and of these students 1,024 are ethnic minority students (Interview 3, 2017). It is a four year university with the exception of the ethnic minority students who enter the year-long preparatory course (预科班) and therefore study at Hexi University for five years (Interview 1, 2017). Due to convenience, the study was conducted mainly within the Department of Foreign Languages as I was working within this department and knew some of the teachers and students. The department of Foreign Languages is one of the largest at the university and employs about 70 faculty members. This is because all students in China, regardless of their major, are required to study English and they must pass the College English Test (CET 4) in order to graduate (Yonggang, 2011).

**Data Collection Methods:**

I conducted four individual interviews with teachers in the department of foreign languages, one group interview with three ethnic minority students (two Hui female students and one male Tibetan student), and an online survey for students that resulted in 59 valid responses (three student participants who completed the survey did properly indicate that they were willing to participate under the paragraph on informed consent). The interviews were chosen through convenience sampling (Hesse-Bieber and Levy, 2016) and made through my connections to the
teachers and students in the department of foreign languages. The survey was created through Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com), an online program for creating and analyzing surveys. The questions for the survey were in English and also were translated into Chinese with the help of several friends. Students were told they could write their responses in English or in Chinese. Information about the survey was spread mainly by word of mouth. I used my connections with students to let them know about the survey and encouraged them to ask their friends to participate. The Vice Dean of the foreign languages department also assisted me in sending out the survey link to students through email. Any willing and able student currently enrolled at Hexi University could complete the survey. However, due to my strong connection with the department of foreign languages it is likely that most of the students who completed the survey are from this department.

Data Analysis Methods:

Previous research and studies done on ethnic minorities, preferential policies, and education in China discussed in the literature review were used to inform my analysis. I compare the data I collected to information I have read on preferential policies and ethnic minorities. I also used my knowledge of key issues surrounding preferential policies and ethnic minorities to shape my questions and line of inquiry in the survey and in my interviews. The five interviews have been transcribed, coded, and organized according to themes and categories that emerged (Hesse-Bieber and Levy, 2016). I also translated (when needed), coded, and organized survey responses into themes and categories as well as creating a list of frequently used words and phrases. Apart from the group interview of minority students, the teachers and students were asked the same questions regarding their opinions and knowledge of preferential policies for minority students. From the responses gathered from teachers and students the
emerging themes and categories and frequently used words of each are compared and contrasted. Unfortunately response from ethnic minority students was minimal with only four ethnic minority students completing the survey, so a comparison on responses from Han students and ethnic minority students was inconclusive. The data collected is then analyzed using theories from Bolman and Deal’s (2013) four frames, theories of linear stage growth such as Rostow’s (1960), and Galtung’s (1969) theory of structural violence.

Limitations:

There are several methodological limitations involved in the study. Logistical limitations included limited amount of time, location, and convenience. I left the site of research in July of 2017 and therefore all field research that required me to be physically present needed to be completed before July. Secondly, since I was serving as a Peace Corps volunteer at Hexi University in Zhangye, Gansu, travel and research at other locations was not possible because of obligations to Peace Corps and Hexi University. Thirdly, the seven participants for interviews were selected on a basis of access, language, and convenience (Hesse-Bieber and Levy, 2016). The four individual interviews were conducted with members of the foreign languages department, so I had access to them through professional connections made by teaching at Hexi University for three full semesters prior to the start of the research. The three group interview participants were introduced to me through a colleague who also translated for me during the interview.

Another limitation was that the individual interviews were conducted in English, which is not the first language of the four participants. Although all four participants have Master’s Degrees in the English language they were not as comfortable speaking in English as they would have been in their own language. However, since the level of English of the participants is far
higher than the interviewer’s level of Chinese, the interviews were conducted in English. For the most part, this was not a problem. I made an effort to speak slowly, repeat myself when need, and ask questions to clarify the interviewees’ meaning. Three of the interviewees seemed very comfortable with speaking English during the interview and we had few problems. However, the fourth interviewee was significantly less comfortable. This could have been because the interview with this person was the first time that we had met. Alternatively, this could have been because the interviewee’s level of English fluency and proficiency was less than that of the other interviewees. During the interview this person was visibly nervous and sometimes I needed to repeat questions four or five times or even translate my meaning into Chinese. I tried my best to make this person more comfortable by speaking slowly, repeating myself, smiling, and using encouraging language. Nevertheless, the interviewee seemed visibly relieved when we finished the interview.

The group interview was conducted in Chinese and my friend and colleague was present to help with translation. Although I think allowing the students to use Chinese allowed for more fluency with their thoughts and made them more comfortable, my friend who was translating is not a professional translator and her translation may not have been perfect. It is quite likely that some details were lost. Using a translator also caused the interview to take more time as the students had to wait for my friend to translate their responses and I had to wait to allow my friend to translate my questions and clarifications.

Trustworthiness of the information is also a potential limitation. Participants may not have felt comfortable disclosing certain information especially since ethnic minorities can be a sensitive topic in China. With three of the individual interviews conducted it seemed that the interviewees were, for the most part, very comfortable and relatively open about their opinions.
The fourth interviewee due to reasons discussed above did seem a little less comfortable than the other three people interviewed.

Lastly, only .3% of the student population at Hexi University participated in the survey (59 valid responses vs. 20,000 total student population) and .4% of minority students at the university participated (4 out of 1024). Therefore the scope of data from the survey is very limited and may not be representative of what most students at the university think.

**ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS: Individual Teacher Interviews, Group Interview, and Survey**

**I. Individual Teacher Interviews:**

The four teacher individual interviews lasted between eight and twenty-three minutes. I will refer to the four interviewees as interviewee A, B, C, and D respectively. I began each interview by asking the interviewee to tell me about the preferential policy for minority students at Hexi University. Then I asked each person three questions and follow-up questions depending on their response (see appendix A for Individual Teacher Interview questions). The three questions I asked each interviewee were; what is the purpose of the preferential policy for minority students? Is this policy fulfilling its purpose? And what is your personal opinion of this policy? I also asked each interviewee to tell me about the minority students at the university. Interviewees C and D had experience teaching the preparatory course (YuKe 预科) for minority students, so I also asked them to tell me specifically about their students in the preparatory course. Of the four teachers I interviewed, I had a professional relationship with interviewees A, B, and D. Interviewee D is a friend who I also had a personal relationship with and interviewee C I had not met before the interview and was introduced to me by a colleague. Interviewees A and B both hold high positions at the university.
When conducting the interviews one of the first things I noticed was that the interviewees did not seem to be very familiar with the preferential policy for minority students. When speaking about the policy, Interviewee A tended to speak more broadly about it and described preferential policies at a national level, frequently mentioning the Chinese government and emphasizing that the policy was part of these national preferential policies. She gave very little detail about how Hexi University is implementing this policy and seemed confused and unclear on how it is being implemented. I learned from interviewee B that there are 1,024 minority students at Hexi University and 20,000 students total. This would mean that only 5% of students at Hexi University are minority students. At the beginning of the interview, interviewee A claimed there were about 4,000 minority students at the university (20% of the 20,000 students at the university), then at a later stage of the interview when asked to confirm this number she claimed that there were just 100 each year.

“I think they cover the total enrollment of the ….freshman of the freshman every term every year I mean- every year after the enrollment the minority students only cover …..less than …every year if we have just 100 students compared with 2..20,000 students together so they covered a very little percentage …because in China minority the number the population ..the number of the minority population is…” (Interview 1, 2017)

Later, in a follow-up email she agreed that the number of minority students was 1,024. From interviewee A’s response (giving three different answers on the number of minority students at Hexi university over the course of the study) above it can be concluded that she was unclear on how many minority students attend the university. When she realized how little the percentage of minority students is, she quickly defended the government claiming that the population of ethnic minorities is much smaller than the Han people, so the percentage is still “helpful and fair” (Interview 1, 2017).
When I first arranged to meet with interviewee B, I sent him a list of the questions I was going to ask and ideas of what to include (number of minority students, what ethnicities some of the students are, etc.). After looking over the list of questions, he sent me a message saying that he needed more time to prepare for the interview as he could not answer the questions and needed to ask some colleagues for the answers. During the interview with interviewee B, he was able to clearly answer the questions that I had given him, but when asked follow-up questions about some of the information he provided, he seemed unsure. For example, when speaking about minority students he mentioned that all the minority students in the department of foreign languages were placed in the same dormitory, but when asked if this was intentional he seemed unsure, “uhhh no no no, I-I do not think we just intended put them together I’m not sure I don’t know how to the t-teaching s-staff how to assign students” (Interview 2, 2017). Furthermore, Interviewee D admitted at the beginning of her interview that she had not even heard of the preferential policy for minority students before I told her about it.

There also seemed to be some confusion about how the policy was implemented at the university. Interviewees A, C, and D claimed that ethnic minority students can enter the university with a lower score than Han students. However Interviewee B believed that each minority student (regardless of where they live or what ethnic group they belong to) is given five extra points on their Gaokao exam. Interviewee A later agreed with this opinion in a follow-up email. Interviewees A and B claimed that every year 100 ethnic minority students are enrolled in the preparatory course. However, Interviewee D believed that there was just one class of about fifty students. While interviewee B asserted that there was one class of preparatory students studying an arts discipline and one class of students studying a science discipline, interviewee C claimed that she taught students in three different majors: Chinese language and literature,
politics, and physics. All interviewees did agree that the preparatory course lasts one year and all students in the course must identify as an ethnic minority. Interviewee D also described their courses saying that along with studying courses regarding the major they are enrolled in, they study subjects such as Mandarin Chinese, English, geography, and history as well as taking Physical Education classes (Interview 4, 2017). This description of the courses involved with the preparatory course is in line with Yamada’s (2015) research on preparatory courses in Qinghai province.

Some of the interviewees exhibited the negative bias towards ethnic minorities discussed in the literature review. Interviewees A and C stated again and again during their interviews that minority students struggle academically and compared them negatively to Han students. Interviewee A claimed that, the “enrollment score of the minority students they have a standard their standard is much lower than the …..the other students” (Interview 1, 2017). Interviewee C also mentioned that minority students enter Hexi university with lower grades than Han students and claimed that their learning foundation wasn’t as good as Han students. Each interviewee used the phrase “normal students” when comparing Han students to minority students several times during their interviews. Interviewee A used this phrase twice and interviewee C used the phrase six times. It seems to suggest something negative or abnormal about minority students or that these students are in some way lower or inferior to Han students. Indeed each time the phrase was used, minority students were compared in a negative way to Han students with the interviewees saying phrases like, “maybe lower than other normal students”, “it’s (the preparatory course textbook) similar to the normal students and uhh ….but our textbook is not very uhh difficult”, or “I think ….it’s a challenge for ….for the teachers to teach the minority students to have the same level with the normal students together”.

20
When asked why they thought that minority students had lower scores than Han students, interviewees A and C suggested many different reasons. Interviewee C believed the lower scores could be attributed to inconvenient transportation and low quality teaching materials and instruments. She also gave some examples of young Tibetan and Hui boys “in the street” (Interview 3, 2017) and helping their parents in restaurants and a pregnant 17-year old Hui girl she saw a few days prior to the interview. When asked if she meant that education is less of a priority to minorities, she said yes education is less of a priority, “so you can see many Hui nationalities deal with the restaurant business” (Interview 3, 2017). Interviewee A stated that while she wasn’t clear on other majors she and the other teachers could really sense the difference between minority students and “other normal students” (Interview 1, 2017). She asserted there were several reasons for this; first, because many minority students do not learn English until after primary school whereas Han students start to learn English in primary school and second because there aren’t enough English teachers to go to all the rural areas (Interview 1, 2017). She also gave one last reason,

“…on the other hand it’s cause …some of the minority people lived in the like the valleys mountains you know they refuse to accept new things even the government support them you know they …..I think maybe just like the Native….Indian Americans like they… even you want to help them to receive the modern civilization but for some of them you know lived in the mountains in the remote part places so….for these reasons their English is very poor honestly.” (Interview 1, 2017)

This reason seems to suggest that while the Han government does its best to help minority students, they are unwilling or uninterested in this support; that there is something inherent about the culture of ethnic minorities that simply will not accept change. This ideology runs in a similar vein to Wang’s (2007) assertion that ethnic minorities ways of thinking are incompatible with modern education.
When the interviewees were asked to describe the purpose of the preferential policy for minority students they all gave slightly different answers, although all interviewees mentioned that minority students have more opportunity to enter university because they can enter with lower scores. Interviewee A claimed that the policy was to support and protect rights, “let minorities every minorities to enjoy the …..enjoy the equal rights ….equal social welfare and uhh equal things with uhh with the ….main like the m-m-majority … nationalities like Han” (Interview 1, 2017). She went on to say that the government helps minority children to receive education and have equal opportunity to enter into university (Interview 1, 2017). Interviewee B said the policy was simply to help give minority students the opportunity to go to university and emphasized that the students could then return home and develop the economy of their hometown. Interviewee A stated a similar opinion in a later point of her interview. When asked if students are required to return to their hometowns, Interviewee B said he thought they didn’t have to, but most of the students apart from “some very good students may …may go to some other places” (Interview 2, 2017). Interviewee C claimed that the purpose was for equality, unity, and prosperity of ethnic groups and that it gives students opportunity to attend university because they can enter with a lower score. Interviewee D asserted that the purpose was to let minority students have more chance to study because they live in remote regions and don’t have fair education opportunities. In light of the wide variety of reasons and answers I received it appears that the policy does not have a clear purpose or goal. Indeed in a follow-up email Interviewee A claimed that “the college has no special goal for enrolling the minority students. The goal is to enroll the students according to the central government policy”.

All four of the interviewees seemed mostly to have a positive opinion of the policy. Interviewee D had the most neutral opinion saying, “its okay for the government to put more
priority to minority people to minority students” (Interview 4, 2017). Interviewee A said the program was good, helpful, and necessary, claiming that China does not want negative feelings. She also insisted that China does not have any “negative discrimination”, saying that “we don’t have ….like the …discriminative policies or discriminative actions to make minority people think they are in-inferior” (Interview 1, 2017). She went on to say that there are 56 ethnicities in China and all the cultures should be mixed together to “follow one great country forward” (Interview 1, 2017). Interviewee B said that the policy was useful and important and that there should be more. He again emphasized that the students could return to their hometowns after graduating, “I know yeah most of these students just come from very poor areas. Yeah just give them more chance yeah to have a higher education yeah when they return home they can really play their role yeah” (Interview 2, 2017). Interviewee C said that “the minorities are part of our national family” and that it was an important policy to deal with “ethnic problems”. She also claimed that the policy was “suitable to our national condition” and Hexi University was responding to the country’s policy (Interview 3, 2017).

Interviewees A, B, and D briefly described the minority groups at the university saying that there are 21 different ethnic groups (Interview 2, 2017), including Hui, Tibetan (Interviews 1, 2, and 3, 2017), Dongxiang (Interviews 2 and 3, 2017), and Yugur (Interview 1, 2017). Interviewee B mentioned that most of these students were from Gansu province and Interviewee C noted that most of the students in her class were from Linxia (a small city south of Lanzhou). Interviewee D described her students during a later part of the interview saying that her students were mostly from Linxia, but there were also some from Wushan, a small county outside the city of Tianshui city in Gansu province, and Xining, the provincial capital of Qinghai province. She
also said that most of her students are Hui, but there are a few Yugur, Dongxiang, and Tibetan students.

Interviewee C said that she taught the preparatory course in 2014 and found that the learning foundation of the minority students was not good and their English was poor apart from a few of the students. She claimed that some of her students had not even learned their English letters and that when she wrote the answers on the blackboard for students to check their answers some could not even copy it down. On the other hand, she said that her students were very friendly and liked learning, but had difficulty making progress with their English.

Interviewee D said that she taught the preparatory course during the academic years of 2015/2016 and 2016/2017. She claimed that for the most part they were not good students and were not disciplined, but she thought this was due to the fact that their grades and performance during their preparatory year was not taken into account for the following four years at the university, so the students felt that it didn’t matter whether they went to class and they had a low requirement for themselves. However, she said that some of their English was quite good in listening, speaking, and reading and she thought the preparatory course was helpful to them because most of the students need the extra time to study and prepare and if they went directly into their Freshman year they may find their English classes very difficult. Interviewee D also described a lack of good English teachers in their educational experience as a real problem for many ethnic minority students. She said that her students in the preparatory course told her that they didn’t have good teachers in primary, middle, and high school, but contrary to interviewee C’s assumption that minority students have poor technology and facilities in the schools, they did have good facilities and technology. In order to illustrate her point Interviewee D described a class she had where she was telling her students about the new multimedia touchscreen that Hexi
University had just gotten in a few classrooms. She said the students told her that they all had them in their high schools and middle schools. She then gave another example of her own personal experience of teaching in a rural area of Inner Mongolia in a small town of only 5,000 people. She claimed that the middle school where she taught also had good facilities and equipment, but there weren’t any young teachers there and the teachers that did teach in this area struggled with their health due to the harsh climate and high altitude. She also asserted that having no young teachers was a problem for this school, but did not say why she thought so. I, personally, have also had a similar experience to interviewee D. During a teacher-training course in rural Gansu, I was surprised to find that the primary school where the training course took place had better technology than the classroom I taught in at Hexi University. I was also surprised to find, although all the teachers in the training course were English teachers, many of them could not speak a full sentence in English.

II. Group Interview:

The group interview was conducted with three students, two Hui female students and one male Tibetan student in the preparatory course. They were taught English by Interviewee D who served as a translator during the interview. The interview was about thirty-nine minutes long and was conducted in Chinese. The students were invited to the interview because of a meeting for minority students the previous week that they had all attended and were invited to share their experience of and information about the meeting (See appendix B for student interview questions).

The Meeting for Ethnic Minority Students-Background Information:

The meeting for minority students was a two-hour long formal meeting and fourteen students and four heads of department attended. During this meeting they discussed the status of
minority students on the campus, problems, suggestions, and anything else the students wanted to say. Students were not required to speak, but if they wanted to they could volunteer their ideas. While the students were speaking the department heads wrote down their ideas and suggestions in a notebook. Most students at the meeting were chosen to go by their teachers, but for the students in the preparatory course their head teacher told them she needed three volunteers to go to the meeting and the three student interviewees volunteered to attend. Some of the other students at the meeting had taken the preparatory course, but they were freshman or sophomore students at the time of the meeting. The meeting had three main parts. First, there was a discussion on problems or concerns that the ethnic minority students had relating to Hexi University and how the University treats ethnic minority students. Second, there was a discussion on the experience of minority students studying at Hexi University. Lastly, the heads of department addressed some of the students’ concerns.

**Problems addressed during the Meeting:**

During the interview, the students claimed that the biggest problem they discussed at the meeting was the Halal cafeteria on campus. Indeed this problem was brought up on four separate occasions during the interview. The students said that there are two halal cafeterias; one on the south campus and one on the north campus, but the halal cafeteria on the northern campus did not have good quality food since there was just one station with no other competitors, so the standards for the food were not very high. The students believed that if the cook was in a good mood then the food was okay, but if not it was terrible. Moreover, on the medical campus, there was not a halal cafeteria at all.

Another major problem raised was the tuition fees for and management of the preparatory year. Tuition for the preparatory year is 15,000RMB ($2263) and dormitory fees are 900RMB
($136) if books and other expenses are included the resulting amount is around 20,000RMB ($3017). The student interviewees felt that this amount was too high. The students also claimed that they did not feel the preparatory year was well-managed and that they felt that it would be better if students enrolled in the preparatory course were given grades, which as interviewee D noted in her interview, they are not.

**Discussion of the Experience of Ethnic Minority Students at Hexi University:**

While discussing their experience at Hexi University, the students shared two stories with me. The first was of a student that was present at the meeting, but was not at the interview. This student was of the Yi ethnicity (a large ethnic group in China located mainly in the South) and was from Yunnan province, which is a province along China’s southern border. When this student first arrived in Zhangye, it was very difficult for him. He was very far from home and felt that everything was different and during that first semester all he wanted to do was go home. However, he received a lot of support from his roommates and he gradually became used to life in Zhangye and at Hexi university and he came to enjoy studying there. After sharing this story the students emphasized the importance of bringing together individuals from different ethnic groups, in particular placing them in the same dormitory, and encouraging bonds of union and friendship. It is interesting to note here that Interviewee B mentioned in his interview that all the ethnic minority students in foreign languages department during the academic year of 2016/2017 had been placed in the same dormitory and the same class. While this may encourage bonds of friendship between ethnic minority groups, it excludes the dominant Han ethnicity from engaging in this same process.

The second story I was told in relation to the students’ experience studying at Hexi University was a personal story that one of the students at the interview told about herself. She
said that, much like the student from the first story, she felt confused and unsure when she first arrived in Zhangye. Furthermore, due to the fact that she was studying in the preparatory course, she felt inferior to some of the other students especially those not studying in the preparatory course. She felt lonely and had a difficult time making friends. At the end of her first semester, she went to Southern China (for a reason she did not feel uncomfortable sharing) during the winter holiday and when she came back to Hexi University she felt that she had more direction and purpose and began making new friends. She suggested that if other students felt confused or were having a difficult time adjusting to life at university they should go out and travel to see society and visit old friends and classmates to get a new perspective and help them to find direction and purpose.

**Heads of Department Address the Concerns of Minority Students:**

After discussing some of the problems they had and sharing their experience at the university, the leaders answered some questions and offered some solutions for their problems and suggestions. One leader said he could solve the problem of the food on the north campus and that a halal cafeteria was in the process of being built on the medical campus. Male Muslim students got their dormitory curfew extended from 11:00 pm to 11:30pm, so they could attend evening prayers at the mosque. According to the two Hui women, the Muslim Female students preferred to have their evening prayers in the dormitory because they feel it isn’t safe or convenient to go out late at night. While the students thought the atmosphere was good and they felt comfortable bringing up their problems with the heads of department, they were worried that no constructive actions would be taken. When the heads of department gave solutions they did not have many constructive actions and tended to merely show concern and say that the
problems would be solved. In particular the students mentioned the management of the preparatory year as an issue that was not solved.

**Interviewees Reasons for Attending the Meeting:**

After the student interviewees shared information about the meeting for ethnic minority students, I asked them why they had wanted to attend the meeting. The two women admitted that it was mainly to change their majors. One of the women said that when she entered university she could only choose English as her major, but she did not want to spend the next four years studying English and her teacher and department would not let her change her major. She went to the meeting to discuss this problem with one of the leaders, but when she arrived at the meeting she decided to wait until afterwards since she thought it was inappropriate to bring it up during the meeting. After the meeting, she and the other woman discussed changing their major with one of the heads of the department and he said that while he didn’t have a solution for them at the moment, he would speak to the administrative department and see what he could do. The second woman said she wanted to go to the meeting to discuss changing her major, but she also wanted to see and experience the meeting and observe how the heads of department gave solutions and answered questions. Before attending the meeting she thought they didn’t pay much attention to the students, but after the meeting she felt that the school does care and wants to improve their situation and help them to study better. The male student thought that since there are five ethnicities in their class and the two women are Hui, other ethnicities should go to the meeting, so he volunteered and he also was curious and wanted to see the meeting.
III. Survey Response:

Of the 59 responses, fifty-four students identified as Han, one student as Hui, one student as Yugur, one student as Dongxiang, one student as Yao, and one student skipped the question (see appendix C for survey questions). The data for the second and third questions (‘were you let in through the affirmative action program for ethnic minority students’ and ‘did you take a preparatory course before beginning your studies’) is invalid. The preferential policy (affirmative action) for ethnic minority students and the preparatory course are only for ethnic minority students. It seems that some of the survey respondents did not understand these questions because for both questions there were students that identified as Han who said answered ‘yes’. Therefore these two questions will not be considered in the data analysis.

The fourth question in the survey was, ‘what is the purpose of the affirmative action program? Is the program fulfilling its intended purpose? Why or why not?’ There were many different answers to this question. Fifty-four of the respondents answered this question and five skipped the question. Forty-one students chose to answer this question in Chinese and thirteen chose to answer in English. Since the preferential policy for ethnic minority students mainly has to do with the education of ethnic minorities I expected the majority of students would mention education and ethnic minorities in their responses. However, this was not the case. The majority of students mentioned neither ethnic minorities nor education in their response. There could be several reasons for this. First, the students could have been confused over the meaning of the question. The question did not say anything about ethnic minority students. In English it used the words affirmative action and in Chinese it simply said preferential policies (优惠政策). Although there was a paragraph at the beginning of the survey briefly describing China’s preferential policies for ethnic minorities it is possible that many students did not read through
this clearly. Second, the students may not have a clear idea of what China’s preferential policies for ethnic minorities are. The second largest group of students mentioned both ethnic minorities and education. The third largest group mentioned ethnic minorities, but not education and the smallest percentage of students mentioned education, but not ethnic minorities. Please see the chart above for more detailed information.

The most frequently mentioned subject in students’ responses was equality with fifteen students mentioning this. There were also a high number of students who used the Chinese wording in the question to answer. In the Chinese translation of the question it said preferential policies in Chinese *Youhui Zhengce* (优惠政策) and in parentheses it described preferential policies as protecting the interests of socially disadvantaged groups (旨在维护弱势群体的权). This was put in to give the students a clearer idea of what I meant by preferential policies, but unfortunately it seemed to confuse them more than help them. It would have been much better to direct them to the explanatory paragraph at the beginning of the survey. Twelve students used the phrasing in parentheses ‘protect the interests of socially disadvantaged groups’ to answer the question. However some of these students changed the phrase ‘socially disadvantaged group’
(弱势群体) to ethnic minorities. The unity of ethnic groups was also frequently mentioned and an equal number of students did not answer the question or admitted that they were unsure.

Please see the chart below for respondent answers to the fourth question.

For the second part of the fourth questions ‘is the program fulfilling its intended purpose?’ twenty-four students believed it was, eight said it was not, eight said it partly was, eighteen did not answer at all, and one student said they were unsure. Of the forty students that answered the question only twenty-four students gave a reason for their answer. These answers contained a wide variety of reasons which are layed out in the chart below (p. 33). The orange bars show the reasons for students that said the program had somewhat fulfilled its purpose, the green bars show reasons for the students that said the program had not fulfilled its purpose, and the blue bars show reasons for students that said the program had fulfilled its purpose. It seems as if each of the fifty-nine students have a different opinion. The reasons range from everything
to talking about more people showing concern for ‘socially disadvantaged groups’ to the creation of social stability to local government corruption. There are seemingly no patterns other than to say that most students gave no reason for their opinion.

The fifth and last question in the survey was, ‘what is your personal opinion about the affirmative action program at Hexi University? What do you think of it?’ All fifty-nine students wrote an answer for this question. Twenty-six students had a positive opinion of the program,
two had a negative opinion, thirteen said there were both good and bad aspects of the program, and eighteen had no opinion or they felt neutral. Of these fifty-nine students, twenty-five students answered the question using a reason for why they thought so or used an example to support their opinion. Nineteen students did not have a reason or an example for their opinion and had responses such as, “it’s okay” or “it’s good”. Eighteen students did not directly answer the question, did not have an opinion, or did not understand the question. One of these students asked who the socially disadvantaged groups are and asked if they are students receiving financial aid. Of the twenty-five students that did give a reason, there were a variety of answers. Several students used the example of the halal cafeteria on campus to say that the university is doing well and really care about minority students. In contrast to this viewpoint, when speaking with minority students during the group interview, they brought up this cafeteria as one of the major problems they had with the school. Another student claimed that the school was supporting ethnic minorities because they let minority students see a dance performance about ethnic minorities for free. In reality, the performance was very loosely based on the history of the Hui minority in Gansu, but was a fictional love story. Another student, one of the few ethnic minority students who took part in the survey said that putting Han and ethnic minority students in the same dormitory creates mutual understanding and respect. A Han student writes that ethnic minority students can learn more about Han people and culture, while a Hui student writes that one of the flaws is that ethnic minority culture is not introduced. Previous studies have
shown that some Han people find the preferential policies unfair (Sautman, 2012; Lang, 2010),
and indeed while this was not evident in the individual interviews, there were two students that
believed the policy to be unfair and three students mentioned that there is not a preferential
policy for Han students. Please see the chart above (p.35) for other examples of student responses.

An analysis on word frequency in responses to question four (see chart below) shows that the most frequently used word by far is the Chinese or English word of ethnicities and ethnic minorities, the second is the Chinese or English word for safeguard or protect, and the third is the Chinese word for ‘socially disadvantaged groups’. Another word that showed up in students’ responses was the Chinese and English word for ‘unity’ or ‘ethnic unity’. This word showed up eleven times in students’ responses and was a little surprising as I had not considered this to be an important part of the policy when I did research on it. However, after looking through some Chinese articles on preferential policies I noticed the words ‘ethnic unity’ (民族团结) and the words for safeguard/protect (维护/保障) showed up again and again (Yu, 2014; People’s Daily, 2015). The first is an article from People’s Court Daily and talks about protecting ethnic unity (维护民族团结), promoting national unity, and the economic and social development of minority areas (Yu, 2014). The second article is from People’s Daily. The article mentions

<table>
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<th>Q4: frequently used words</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>学生 (student)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>利益/权益 (interests)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>少数民族/民族/ethnicities, ethnic minorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>少数民族/民族/ethnicities, ethnic minorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>少数民族/民族/ethnicities, ethnic minorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>小学生 (primary student)</td>
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<tr>
<td>生活 (life)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>保护/保障/维护/protect/ safeguard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>和平/和平/安定, peace, peaceful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>发展/发展/development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>公平/平等/平衡/equality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>团结/民族团结/unity/ethnic unity</td>
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<td>教育/education</td>
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[chart showing word frequency]
promoting national unity, improving people’s livelihoods, and protecting ethnic unity. The words “民族团结” ethnic unity actually show up in the title of the article (People’s Daily, 2015).

It is therefore likely that the students got their ideas and information about preferential policies from the Chinese media.

In question five the most frequently used word is again the Chinese and English words for ethnic minorities with the word being mentioned twenty-one times. The next most frequent word is the Chinese and English words for student, which was used twelve times. The third most frequent word is the Chinese and English words for help. Unity or 团结 is much less common in the answers for this question and it was only mentioned once. Please see the chart above for more information.

Conclusion:

Throughout the study the most noticeable finding is the fact that there seems to be little consensus over what the purpose of the preferential policy for ethnic minority students is and
that many people seem to know little about this policy and especially very little about how it is being implemented at Hexi University. Almost every person who took part in the study had a different opinion on the purpose of the policy. Some thought it was for the economic and social development of minority areas, some believed it was for prosperity, others believed it is meant to help ethnic minority students, and one person even said it was for democracy. When it came to discovering how the policy was being implemented at Hexi University, it seemed little was known about it and perhaps little was being done. Hexi University seems to have no goal in terms of accepting minority students and interviewee A even stated that the goal was to enroll students based on the government’s policy. Students and teachers, mostly of the Han ethnicity, alike seemed to know little about ethnic minority students on campus. Several Han students mentioned the presence of a halal cafeteria on campus as a sign that the school was doing well, while in the group interview with minority students they mentioned this as one of the major problems that they had with the university. Interviewee A, who holds a high position at the university, did not know how many minority students are at the university. Furthermore, there is evidence among the individual interviews that the negative bias against ethnic minorities discussed in the literature review is present on campus with interviewees A and C repeatedly comparing minority students to the “normal students” and saying that minority students struggle academically. Interviewee A goes so far as to say that perhaps there is something inherent about ethnic minorities that makes them unwilling to change.

DISCUSSION

The first question this study seeks to answer is how the national preferential policy for minority students works at a university level. In order to understand how this preferential policy is being implemented at Hexi University, you must first understand how the university functions
as an organization. Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal (2013) created four frames for understanding how different organizations operate; structural, human resource, political, and symbolic (Bolman and Deal, 2013, p.6). During my four semesters teaching at Hexi University I noticed a proclivity for the structural frame. The structural frame views the organization as a factory and tends to have a hiearchical chain of communication. According to Bolman and Deal (2013), there are six underlying assumptions of the structural frame. The six assumptions are as follows; organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives, efficiency and performance can be increased through division of labor, coordination and control ensure that individuals and units mesh, rationality prevails over personal agenda, and problems arise through structural deficiencies (Bolman and Deal, 2013, 47). The underlying assumptions that are relevant to the implementation of the preferential policy are that efficiency and performance can be increased through division of labor and organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives. Each department and each person at Hexi University has a specific role and function at the University and rarely do these roles overlap. The department of foreign languages, of which all four interviewees work within, has very clear goals and objectives. These goals include cultivating in students a solid English language foundation and the practical skills necessary for teaching English in primary and middle schools and other posts related to English teaching and translation, to expand students’ knowledge of foreign cultures, and to improve students innovative spirit and adaptability. Nowhere within these goals is the mention of ethnic minority students. Therefore the staff at the foreign languages department would not view the implementation of the preferential policy for minority students as part of their role at the university and are unlikely to know specifics about the policy, which indeed I discovered while conducting my research. Due to this clear division of labor at the university among the different
departments and because this study was conducted mainly within the department of foreign languages, unfortunately I was unable to learn much information about the implementation of policy.

The second question this study sought to answer was, ‘is the preferential policy for minority students at Hexi University fulfilling its stated goals and purpose? If yes, how does it fulfill its stated goals and purpose? Can it be improved?’ In seeking to answer this question, I was presented with another question, ‘what is the goal and purpose of the preferential policy for minority students?’ In asking the question of whether the goals and purpose were being fulfilled I was under the assumption that there was a clear goal and purpose for this program. However, through the process of research I discovered that this was not an easy question to answer. The policies have a stated aim of ‘sustaining’ and ‘supporting’ minorities in keeping pace with the Han majority (Liebold, 2016). However, what does this actually mean? Some claim that the education of ethnic minorities is more geared towards assimilating them into Han culture than creating better economic opportunities for ethnic minority students (Liebold, 2016; Yamada, 2015; Zang, 2016). Zang (2016) claims that preferential policies are based on the idea of Confucianism, which encourages the integration of ethnic and cultural groups politically, economically, and culturally in order to promote a harmonious society (Zang, 2016). Dr. Sun Yat-sen, who was influenced by Confucian thought, claimed that anyone who was willing to accept Han culture and customs could be part of the Han community (Zang, 2016). This idea emphasizes assimilation of ethnic minority groups into Han culture and supports an underlying assumption that Han culture is superior. Yamada (2015) claims that the goals of the preparatory course for minority students are improving their Mandarin ability while also emphasizing and encouraging sociopolitical goals of unity and development. Liebold (2016) even asserts that the
preferential policies for ethnic minorities is to uphold territorial sovereignty, preserve social stability, and to protect the power of the Han elite. Indeed when asking teachers and students at Hexi university what the purpose of the preferential policy for minority students is I got a wide variety of answers. While I expected student respondents in the survey to mention both ethnic minorities and education, the majority of students answered the question mentioning neither ethnic minorities nor education. While some students did say the purpose was to give ethnic minorities more educational opportunities, many more identified equality and ethnic unity as important. One student even said the purpose was to protect the natural resources in minority areas. When speaking with teachers they were much more likely to mention ethnic minorities and education than the students with each interviewee mentioning these subjects. However, the interviewees also mentioned subjects such as equal rights and social welfare, economic development (as students return to their hometowns), and the equality, unity, and prosperity of ethnic groups.

Whatever the preferential policies for ethnic minorities in China are attempting to achieve they seem to have made little difference in the lives of ethnic minority groups; many students have not even heard of them. Jeong (2015) claims that income inequality and gaps in economic development between the developed Eastern coast of China and the Western provinces has improved little since 2000. Furthermore, inequalities between ethnic minorities and the dominant Han majority still exist in terms of education (Chen, 2016; Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013), health (Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013; Hannan and Wang, 2010; Price and Elu, 2013), and income (Gustafsson, 2016; Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013; Campos, Ren, and Petrick, 2016). If China’s preferential policies are some of the most comprehensive in the world as Sautman
(1998) and Liebold (2016) say, why are they not having more of an impact on ethnic minority communities?

One reason may be that preferential policies for ethnic minorities are based on linear stage models of growth such as Rostow’s (1960) *The Five Stages of Growth* and Inkeles and Smith’s (1974) *Becoming Modern*. These theories of development state that traditional or perceived backwards societies and individuals advance along a linear path to a socially and economically advanced society (Rostow, 1960; Inkeles and Smith, 1974). While Rostow (1960) focuses more broadly on a country’s development and progress, Inkeles and Smith (1974) focus on development at an individual level, describing the “modern man” and what individual attributes and characteristics are most conducive to development. One of the problems with linear stage models of growth is that they view development as synonymous with economic growth and do not take into account other important factors for development such as the provision of basic human and civil freedoms and improvements in health and nutrition, but rather assumes that these will fall into place after economic growth occurs. Second, linear stage models of growth hold up the developed world, in this case Han culture and ways of thinking, as what the developing world, in this case ethnic minority groups, should aspire to and it simplifies the category of ethnic minorities as the “other”, marginalizing other modes of thinking. Presence of this style of thinking can be found throughout this study’s findings.

First, while speaking with interviewee D she noted that many of her minority students are from rural areas, but their schools have good technology such as touchscreen multimedia in the classrooms. Interviewee D also mentioned that while teaching in a rural community of Inner Mongolia the school where she worked also had good technology. I also noticed this at a rural primary school in Gansu where I taught. After further inquiry into why schools in these rural
areas are able to get such good technology (even better than the university where I was teaching), I was told that the schools receive funding from the Central government. While it’s great that these schools are able to receive funding from the government to buy new technology for the classrooms, funding cannot buy qualified and experienced teachers. Interviewees A and D both mentioned a lack of teachers in rural areas as a problem for minority students. These examples seem to suggest a focus on economic growth over other important aspects of development.

Second, in the research findings there was evidence of bias against ethnic minorities groups and assumptions that ethnic minorities don’t value education or even that their culture and way of thinking is incompatible with modern education. Wang (2007) even asserts that, the culture and way of thinking of minority groups is “incompatible with modern education development” (p.155). Interviewee A seems to support this opinion when she says, “you know they [ethnic minorities] refuse to accept new things” (Interview 1, 2017). Interviewee C also supported this idea using examples from her own personal experience of Hui and Tibetan boys “in the street” and a pregnant 17-year-old Hui woman to say that ethnic minorities value education less than Han people (Interview 3, 2017). Both Interviewee A and C mention ethnic minority students in comparison with “normal students”, seemingly categorizing ethnic minorities as the ‘other’. One of the student survey respondents even claims that the policy is good because ethnic minority students can learn more about the “Han personality”.

The third and last question this study sought to answer was, ‘how is the affirmative action program at Hexi University perceived by staff and students?’ The findings of this study show that the majority of staff and students who participated in the study have a positive opinion of the policy, but at the same time do not seem to know too much about it. Three of the interviewees had a decisively positive opinion and the fourth interviewee had a neutral opinion and suggested
some improvements. Of the student survey respondents 44% (twenty-six students) had a positive opinion of the program and only 3% (2 students) had a negative opinion of the program. There were also a high number of students had no opinion (eighteen students), many admitting that they know little about the program. Several students simply wrote “不清楚”, which means not clear. One student wrote in English “sorry I do not know some policies about minority”. One student even admitted that, “I didn’t know about the aspect before, so I am not clear. In the past, I usually think it’s not clear for most people”. Very few of the participants in the study had concrete suggestions on how the program could be improved or reasons for their opinion. However, there were a few suggestions of note. First, Interviewee D claimed that the policy could be improved by getting better teachers in rural areas and giving grades to the students in the preparatory course. The students in the group interview agreed with interviewee D that they would prefer to have grades for the preparatory course. They also hoped the halal cafeteria would be improved and the tuition fees for the preparatory year lowered. One of the student respondents in the survey suggested that ethnic minority culture be introduced in education. Apart from Interviewee D, these suggestions all come from people identifying as one of the fifty-five ethnic minorities. Han participants in the study seem to be more unaware of the policy and issues facing ethnic minority groups as a whole.

It is clear from previous studies that structural inequality is present (Chen, 2016; Myers, Gao, and Cruz, 2013; Hannan and Wang, 2010; Price and Elu, 2013; Gustafsson, 2016; Campos, Ren, and Petrick, 2016) and that the preferential policies for ethnic minorities while comprehensive have little impact (Jeong, 2015; Liebold, 2016) on the lives of ethnic minorities. In Johan Galtung’s 1969 article Violence, Peace, and Peace Research, Galtung redefined the term ’violence’ as the difference between the actual and the potential. He further states that there
need not be an actor for there to be violence. Stating that, “the violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (Galtung, 1969, p. 170). This is how the term ‘structural violence’ was created. Using Galtung’s (1969) definition of structural violence and evidence from previous studies it can be said that structural violence against ethnic minority groups does exist in China. Acknowledging this is crucial for China to move forward in recreating preferential policies for ethnic minorities and policies to support minorities should be aimed at increasing understanding and integration of Han and ethnic minority cultures rather than assimilation and the assumption that Han culture and way of life is more advanced and superior to that of ethnic minority cultures.

**FURTHER RESEARCH:**

Over the course of this study there were several questions that arose unexpectedly and others that were left unanswered. First, what are the goals and purpose of the preferential policies for ethnic minorities in China? Why were they created and what are the theoretical assumptions behind this creation? Should the purpose be reevaluated? Second, how much do Han students know about the experience of minority students? How much interaction with minority culture do they have? Third, what is the educational experience of minority students? Why is there a smaller proportion of minority students in higher education than Han students? Separate studies could and should be conducted on each of these questions. Answering these questions is vital for the creation of policies that will improve the quality of life for ethnic groups in China. This study has raised a number of subjects that students find important in describing the purpose of China’s preferential policy for minority students. Further studies could utilize these subjects in the creation of categories in a survey in order to further investigate the purpose behind preferential policies. One of the major limitations of this study was that there were very
few ethnic minority students that took part, but these few students were crucial in the discovery of how the preferential policy for minority students is actually functioning and how it can be improved. Speaking with ethnic minority students is central to discovering how the preferential policy for ethnic minority students can be improved and unfortunately very few, if any qualitative studies on ethnic minority students have been done.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A: Individual Teacher’s Interview Guide

Dean and Vice Dean of the English Department:

Tell me about the affirmative action program 反歧视行动 fǎn qíshì xíngdòng [旨在维护弱势群体的权益] at Hexi University in your own words.

(Prompts: How many students? How many minority students? What minorities? How many students are let in through the affirmative action program? What is the purpose of the affirmative action program? Is the program fulfilling its intended purpose? Why or why not?)

What is your personal opinion about the affirmative action program at Hexi University? What do you think of it?

Teachers:

Tell me about the affirmative action program 反歧视行动 fǎn qíshì xíngdòng [旨在维护弱势群体的权益] at Hexi University in your own words.

(Prompts: How many students? How many minority students? What minorities? How many students are let in through the affirmative action program? What is the purpose of the affirmative action program? Is the program fulfilling its intended purpose? Why or why not?)

Tell me about your students that have been let in through the affirmative action program.
(Prompts: Do you think the program is helpful to your students? Why or why not? How does this class compare to other classes?)

What is your personal opinion about the affirmative action program at Hexi University? What do you think of it?
APPENDIX B: Student Interview Guide

Tell me about the meeting for ethnic minority students.
(Prompts: How many students? How long? Who participated? What was discussed?)

What was your experience during the meeting? How did you feel while you were there?
Afterwards?

Why did you decide to attend the meeting?
APPENDIX C: Survey Questions

Informed Consent:
This survey asks questions about the affirmative action program for ethnic minority students. You are under no obligation to complete this survey; your participation is anonymous and will in no way impact your grade, your academic record, or your ability to graduate. Your name and contacting information will not be recorded; all answers are anonymously recorded. You can write your answers for the survey in English or Chinese.

The Affirmative Action program in China for minority students is part of the preferential policies for ethnic minorities, which are national policies in China. The Affirmative Action program is designed to allow minority students to have better educational opportunities and consists of special privileges for minority students entering university. Depending on a student’s minority status and also what region they live in, minority students can enter university with lower gaokao scores than a Han student entering the same university.

Do you understand that you are not obligated to take this survey? (Answering yes indicates that you are consenting to participate in this study. You will not be compensated.) Yes/No

Survey Questions:
1. How do you identify? 你是什么族？
   - Han 汉族
   - Hui 回族
   - Uighur 维吾尔族
   - Yugur 裕固族
   - Zangzu 藏族
   - Zhuang 壮族
   - Manchu 满族
   - Miao 苗族
   - Yi 彝族
   - Tuji 土家族
   - Mongol 蒙古族
   - Dong 侗族
• Buyei 布依族
• Yao 瑶族
• Bai 白族
• Korean 朝鲜族
• Other 其他的- ____________________________
• Prefer not to say

2. For ethnic minorities students 少数民族的学生的问题:
Were you let in through the affirmative action program for ethnic minority students? Yes/No
你是否曾参与过关于少数民族学生的反歧视行动？是/否

If yes, what was your experience? 如果是，你有什么经历？

3. Did you take a preparatory course before beginning your studies? Yes/No
If yes, what was your experience? Did you enjoy the course? Did you think it was helpful?
在开始你的学习（研究）之前，你是否修读过预备课程？是/否
如果是，你有什么课程学习的经历？你喜欢这些课程吗？你认为这些课程对你有帮助吗？

4. What is the purpose of the affirmative action program? Is the program fulfilling its intended purpose? Why or why not?
优惠政策（旨在维护弱势群体的权益）的目的是什么？该计划是否达到其预期目的？
为什么？为什么没有？

5. What is your personal opinion about the affirmative action program at Hexi University? What do you think of it? 你对河西学院的优惠政策（旨在维护弱势群体的权益)有何看法？你觉得它怎么样？