

Do Ethnic Minorities in China Have Higher Accessibility to Tertiary Education With Extra Points Awarded?

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In the context of the withdrawal trend of educational preferential policy, it is vital to verify its rationale of existence and efficacy in promoting social justice, by evaluating whether such policies enhance ethnic minorities' accessibility to the tertiary education, taking China's policy of awarding extra points to ethnic minority candidates in the national college entrance examination (*Gaokao*) as an example. Using Rawls' theory of justice and ethnic identity theory, the paper analyses the rationale and effectiveness of this affirmative action policy. Through a comparative single-case study of China, the paper highlights the historical evolution of the policy and its role in promoting ethnic minorities' educational attainment. Findings suggest that while the policy enhances accessibility to higher education for ethnic minorities to some extent, it may also perpetuate new social injustices by ignoring intra-ethnic disparities. Therefore, this paper calls for future reforms to consider multiple factors, such as regional and economic differences, to achieve greater social justice.

Keywords: affirmative action, educational preferential policy, ethnic minority, social justice, extra points awarded policy

Introduction

Affirmative action programmes, functioning as remedying past and present discrimination, have been implemented globally to promote equal opportunity for historically disadvantaged groups (Urofsky, 2020). Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court decided to end racial preferences in college admissions nationwide (Justia US Supreme Court Center, 2023), which acted as “a tipping point” in the history of affirmative action in the United States of America (Rios & Stein, 2023). Similarly, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China has also decided to abolish a particular form of affirmative action in education, which is the policy that grants extra points to candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds in the national college entrance examination. This kind of withdrawal impacts its rationale of existence and raises concerns about its potential impact on interethnic relations and minority candidates' accessibility to higher education institutions.

The terminology of “Affirmative Action” was first introduced in Executive Order 11246, President Lyndon Johnson required federal contractors to “take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and employees are equally treated during employment, without regard to their race, colour, religion, sex, or national

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origin.” (Holloway, 1989, p. 9), later such proactive actions expanded to education and business contracting (Fryer & Loury, 2005). In terms of education, multiple educational preferential policies have been introduced. An example is that selective colleges and universities grant ethnic minorities preferential admission to ensure and expand their presence in higher education institutions. For instance, in the U.S.A., Harvard University employed an “unofficial lift” scheme, targeting applicants from race-minority groups; the University of Michigan automatically increased race-minority applicants’ score by 20 points when assessing applicants (Fu, 2006). In Brazil, public higher education institutions must guarantee a specific proportion of college admissions slots to applicants, according to ethnicity and/or class, mainly under quota-based programs (Telles & Paixão, 2013). In China, with the implication of the national college entrance examination, university applicants are scored on a point basis and college placement is determined only based on the points obtained by the applicant. In this process, ethnic minorities are awarded bonus points ranging from 1 to 20 points, with different regions and different ethnic groups being awarded different bonus points, as determined by each province.

These programmes mentioned above have been highly controversial since their implementation. Primary criticisms regarding affirmative action in education feared that such policies would reverse discrimination, undermine meritocracy, and reinforce negative stereotypes. They argue that such policies undermine the achievements of qualified individuals from historically privileged groups and perpetuate social stratification (Fryer & Loury, 2005). Conversely, many people hold a favourable opinion towards affirmative action, considering its promotion of ethnic diversity and social integration. Affirmative actions in college admission primarily raise the proportion of minorities (Maxwell & Garcia, 2019; Zeidan, de Almeida, Bó & Lewis, 2023), which promotes ethnic diversity in higher education institutions. Maxwell and Garcia (2019) argue that affirmative action in college admissions can help to level the playing field to ensure all students benefit from selective higher education and increase the social mobility of the underprivileged, which may then boost social integration. Hence, affirmative action enlarges the proportion of ethnic minority students on campuses. Whether such programmes indeed promote the accessibility to higher education institutions for ethnic minorities deserves further examination. To promote a meaningful conversation on this complicated topic, it is essential to carefully consider the ramifications of affirmative action as the debate over it heats up, balancing the perceived advantages against any potential disadvantages.

Therefore, this discussion focuses on the affirmative action policies implemented by China, particularly awarding extra points to candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds in the national college entrance examination. A comparison between past and present policies will be conducted to analyse their impact on ethnic minorities’ access to higher education, under the theoretical frameworks of Rawls’ theory of social justice and ethnic identity theory. Specifically, this paper verifies the rationales of existence of the policy of extra points awarded to ethnic minority candidates in the national entrance examination by evaluating its efficacy on promoting ethnic minorities’ accessibility to higher education. The findings will contribute to the ongoing discourse on affirmative action and its implications for social justice.

Methodology

In this section, an extensive overview of the comparative approach that serves as the foundation of our research will be provided in the following part. A comparison of a single country inspired by Landman (2008) formed the model for this paper. Based on the single-country approach, the past and recent policy of extra points

granted to ethnic minority candidates in the national entrance examination in China will be compared.

As Landman (2008) declared “single-country study allows for a more detailed look at underlying processes and mechanisms that simply cannot be investigated in studies that compare more countries.” (p. 90), the policy of interest is a strongly domesticated Chinese policy, as the overall college admission process is unlike that of the U.S.A. and other countries. Therefore, cross-country comparisons may not yield meaningful insights, whereas a single-country study can provide a deeper understanding. Additionally, the policy that awarded extra points to ethnic minority candidates in college admission has experienced multiple reforms since 1949, and a detailed analysis of these changes is best achieved through a single-country approach. Given China’s large population, vast territory, and standardized national college entrance examination, it is suitable to examine whether the policy of interest benefits candidates of ethnic minority groups’ access to higher education institutions. Furthermore, there are possibilities to break the unit of analysis down into smaller units, based on time, space, and level of analysis by single-country comparison (Landman, 2008). The comparison between different periods of policy could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the policy change and its efficacy on the accessibility to higher education institutions for ethnic minority candidates in the national college entrance examination. In sum, with the detailed contextual description of policy reformations, a comprehensive understanding of the policy of interest could be figured out.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that “generalizations from single-country studies will always be limited since the country unit itself is bound by particular characteristics” (Landman, 2008, p. 93). In the context of this research, it must be acknowledged that this study is exclusively centered on China. Consequently, it is important to exercise caution when attempting to extend the results of our comparative analysis to other nations. The inherent uniqueness of China, both in terms of its historical and cultural context, as well as its specific political and economic conditions, implies that the outcomes of this investigation may possess a certain degree of idiosyncrasy. Hence, it is essential to bear in mind that their applicability and generalizability to other countries might require further investigation and contextualization.

In conclusion, since the policy of interest is a highly localized issue of China and China has its unique college admission system and interethnic relations, comparing a single country may yield valuable insight into this research question, despite that the result of the analysis may be less generalizable worldwide.

Theoretical Frameworks

This section will present two theories that inspired this analysis, a brief introduction of them will be given: Rawls’ Theory of Justice and Ethnic Identity Theory.

Rawls’s Theory of Justice

Rawls (1971) proposed that a society is a self-sufficient group of individuals who adhere to specific rules of behaviour. Conflict and identity of interest are typical characteristics in the society and the distribution of societal resources is one of the factors contributing to conflicts of interest (Rawls, 1971). Specifically, the appropriate distribution of societal resources and burdens of social cooperation is the principle of social justice (Rawls, 1971). Rawls (1971) further defined the way of regarding these principles of justice as “justice as fairness” (p. 11), focusing on the appropriate distribution of resources and burdens of social cooperation.

Rawls (1971) proposed two situations. Firstly, under the “veil of ignorance”, no individuals are chosen “by the outcome of natural chance or the contingency of social circumstances” (p. 12). Hence, everyone in the society

is similarly placed and no one can design principles to favour his particular interest. In the other words, the parties in this situation are rational and mutually disinterested; under such circumstances, individuals are conceived as “not taking an interest in one another’s interests” (Rawls, 1971, p. 13). However, people cannot easily agree to such a situation since they are more likely to require fewer opportunities for others’ futures in exchange for a higher number of benefits for themselves (Rawls, 1971). Correspondingly, Rawls (1971) summarised that the previous requires equality in the allocation of basic rights and duties; whereas the latter reckons inequality in the distribution of social and economic resources, the justice only exists in the compensation process.

Later, Rawls (1997) summarized three principles of social justice: the greatest equal liberty principle; the difference principle; and the equal opportunity principle. The latter two are based on the second situation, which is that the distribution of social and economic resources is unequal. According to the difference principle, all positions must be available to everyone under fair conditions and with equal opportunity to succeed. On the other hand, the equal opportunity principle is based on the previous one, after the guarantee of equal distribution, “it is reasonable (objectively) to accept differences in exchange as long as it meets the requirements of *good faith and fairness*” (Said & Nurhayati, 2021, p. 31).

The aim of affirmative action is to provide equal opportunity to the disadvantaged, which could be regarded as a re-distribution of resources, falling into the scope of the difference principle. The policy of interest could also be regarded as a balance of interests between ethnic majority and ethnic minorities (Yang, 2010). Hence, it can be further discussed under the theoretical framework of social justice.

Ethnic Identity Theory

Based on Marx and Engels’s theories about ethnicity, Chinese scholars have developed a localized theory about ethnic identity.

An ethnic group is a stable community of people formed historically with a common language, a common territory, a common economic life and common psychological qualities expressed in common national cultural characteristics. Without one of these characteristics, ethnicity is not an ethnicity. (Hua & Chen, 2002, p. 5)

To summarize, four characteristics of forming an ethnic group are: “common language”, “common territory”, “common economic life”, and “common psychological state” (Wu & Li, 2011, p. 181).

In terms of recognizing ethnicity in China, the four elements are taken into consideration and viewed as fundamental criteria. As for “common language”, normally it stands for the language of the ethnic group (Wang, 2000). However, some groups use the language of another ethnic group, and there are also cases in which the same ethnic group uses the languages of different linguistic branches, groups, or even families, or in which a common language is spoken but there are many dialects that differ greatly from it (Chen, 2008). The “common territory” stands for the areas inhabited by specific groups (Wu & Li, 2011), which means that the territory in which an ethnic group resides and lives, is geographically united and not divided by great natural boundaries (e.g. mountains, oceans, etc.), and politically fundamentally unified and not divided for a long period by the state or other political divisions, and it is the material basis on which the people’s subsistence is based (Wang, 2000). Regarding “common economic life”, it refers to the economic ties within an ethnic group, where small local markets are concentrated into an ethnic market as exchanges between regions/areas increase in frequency and the flow of goods increases, making the regions/areas interdependent and bringing people together as a whole (Wang, 2000). The most complicated element is the “common psychological state”, it indicates each ethnic group’s psychological condition as it has developed over the course of its lengthy historical evolution and is manifested

in the cultural traits of that ethnic group, which reflects the characteristics of the socio-economic and living styles of an ethnic group and its geographical environment in the spiritual outlook of the ethnic group, and it expresses the love, interest, temperament, personality, and sense of pride of the ethnic group in the form of language, culture and art, social customs, living habits and traditions, religious faith, etc. (Wang, 2000).

The policy of interest is highly based on ethnicity, the beneficiaries are ethnic minorities, in the context of China, only Han-Chinese are officially recognised as ethnic majority and excluded from being awarded extra points in college admission. Hence, to understand the policy that grants extra points for ethnic minority candidates in college admission, it is important to know the underlying logic of how the Chinese government recognised ethnicity, and then figuring out the underlying reasons for awarding extra points to ethnic minorities turns out to be possible.

Policy Analysis

China's national college entrance examination, namely *Gaokao*, is organised by the admission committee of each province but guided by the central government and is held annually in early June. All applicants will be ranked within their province based on the grades they get. This ranking will largely determine the institutes of higher education and the major they will pursue in the future since the ranking of scores represents the available choice of higher education institutions and the major of candidates.

The policy that awarded extra points to ethnic minority candidates in the *Gaokao* has experienced reformations since its implementation. From the 1950s to the late 1970s, the government introduced and developed a series policy on promoting ethnic minorities to tertiary education, including included practices known as “care admissions” and “preferential admissions”, which were specifically designed to benefit students from ethnic minority backgrounds. Under this policy framework, candidates from ethnic minority groups were more likely to be accepted by higher education institutions while competing with their Han counterparts (Jin & Wang, 2007). Another reformation took place from the initial 1980s to the end of the 1990s. At that period, ethnic minority candidates were eligible to enter higher education institutions with lower scores (Wang, 2017), signifying that candidates can access higher education with lower scores than their Han counterparts. At the same time, higher education institutions set quotas for ethnic minority candidates to ensure their accessibility to higher education institutions (Wang, 2012). Besides that, some preferential policies were practiced for ethnic minority candidates to enter higher education, for instance, preparatory courses and programmes were set for ethnic minorities in universities and colleges; prolonging schooling years for ethnic minorities in higher education; setting specific classes for ethnic minority students, etc. (Jin & Wang, 2007). It could be seen that the educational preferential policy in China consists of multiple approaches.

In the 21st century, candidates are awarded extra points to the original scores they achieved in the national college entrance examination. Awarded extra points policy to ethnic minority candidates in the national college entrance examination is regulated in the *Regulations on Enrollment Work of Ordinary Higher Education Institutions* and is determined by each province's committee. Hence, extra points are granted differently across provinces. For example, in 2023, in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (Guangxi), all candidates from ethnic minority backgrounds are awarded extra points, ranging from 1 to 20 points; whereas in Hunan Province (Hunan), candidates from some specific counties/districts mainly inhabited by ethnic minorities are eligible to gain extra points. On the other hand, scores are awarded differently across ethnicities within the province. For instance, in the same year, in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region (Ningxia), candidates of Hui ethnicity are awarded 20 scores,

whereas candidates of other ethnic minority groups are granted less, only 10 scores. In sum, the policy of interest is guided by the central government of China, but every province can modify and specify those regulations, which contributes to the variety and complexity of this policy in China. Despite that, a common rule could be found in the reformations, which is that the policy ensures that the cultivation of ethnic minority talents to meet the socio-economic development at that time is strongly marked by the context of the times (Ma, 2014).

Extra points awarded are normally divided into different levels: national and regional. National-level extra points can be used for nationwide higher education institutions, while regional-level extra points are only utile for applying to colleges and universities within candidates' their own provincial administrative region. In 2019, under the requirement of the Ministry of Education, several provinces introduced a new implementation plan for the extra points awarded policy for ethnic minority candidates in *Gaokao*, featuring the long-term retention and reduction of the items of national-level extra points, the gradual abolition of the items of regional-level extra points, and the introduction of a new requirement of "three in one". "Three in One" stands for the candidates' place of schooling, place of the book of schooling (xueji), and place of the national identity card (hukou) in the same county. Take the Guangxi Region's policy reform as an example, which could be summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Analysis of Policy Reform

Level	Classification	Before-reform extra points (before and 2019)	Transition period extra points (eligible "three in one"/not eligible for "three in one")			Post-reform extra points (2023 and after)
			2020	2021	2022	
National level	Candidates from "10 long-dwelling ethnic minorities" ¹ other than those living in the "5 urban areas" ²	20	20/15	20/10	20/7	15
	Candidates from ethnic minorities in "28 autonomous, mountainous and border counties" ³					
	Candidates from ethnic minorities in "22 mountainous counties" ⁴	10	10/7	10/7	10/7	7
	Candidates from ethnic minorities other than "28 autonomous, mountainous and border counties", "22 mountainous counties", and "5 urban areas"	7	7/5	7/5	7/5	5
	Candidates from "5 urban areas"	5	5	5	5	3
Regional level	Candidates from in "28 autonomous, mountainous and border counties"	20	15/10	15/7	15/5	15
	Candidates from "8 border counties" ⁵					
	Candidates from "autonomous, mountainous counties"	20	15/10	15/7	15/5	0
	Candidates from in "22 mountainous counties" and Port District, Fangchenggang City	10	7/5	7/5	7/5	0

¹ "10 long-dwelling ethnic minorities" include Yao, Miao, Dong, Maonan, Gelao, Hui, Yi, Jing, Shui, Yaolao.

² "5 urban areas" include the urban areas of Nanning, Liuzhou, Guilin, Wuzhou, and Beihai.

³ "28 autonomous, mountainous and border counties" include: Rongshui, Sanjiang, Longsheng, Gongcheng, Longlin, Fuchuan, Luocheng, Huancheng, Bama, Du'an, Dahua, Jinxiu, Ziyuan, Lingyun, Xilin, Fangchenggang Fangcheng District, Dongxing, Jingxi, Napo, Pingshiang, Daxin, Ningming, Longzhou, Debaosu, Fusui, Chongzuo City, Jiangzhou District, Tianwait, and Shangsi.

⁴ "22 mountainous counties" include: Rong'an, Guanyang, Mengshan, Yujiang District of Baise City, Tianyang District of Baise City, Tiandong, Pingguo, Leye, Tianlin, Zhaoping, Jinchengjiang District of Hechi City, Yizhou District of Hechi City, Nandan, Tian'e, Fengshan, Donglan, Xincheng, Xiangzhou, Wuxuan, Shanglin, Long'an, and Mashan.

⁵ "8 border counties" include: Fangcheng District of Fangchenggang City, Dongxing, Jingxi, Napo, Pingxiang, Daxin, Ningming, and Longzhou.

Findings

The policy that granted extra points for ethnic minority candidates in the national college entrance examination in China has been implemented for a long period and experienced multiple reforms. However, with the withdrawing trend of such educational preferential policies in the global context, it is of great importance to verify its rationale of existence by evaluating its efficacy on whether promoting ethnic minority candidates' accessibility to higher education institutions, which deserves further discussion.

Ethnic Minority in a Disadvantaged Position

Based on the ethnic identity theory, different ethnic groups have different “languages”, “territories”, “economic life”, and “psychological states”. In the context of China, Wu and Li (2011) found that many ethnic minorities typically reside in the frontier, mountainous, pastoral areas, which are relatively poorer, with less high-quality educational resources; on the other hand, people of ethnic minority groups are more likely to use their language of the ethnic group as their mother tongue, which may impede their understanding of standard Mandarin Chinese, which is the official language used in the national college entrance examination and daily teaching (Jia, Lee, & Zhang, 2012). Furthermore, based on the common language the ethnic minority candidates apply in their daily lives, the common psychological state formed gradually in the ethnic community may influence their acceptance of Han culture, which may put them in a disadvantaged position in attending the national college entrance examination (Wu & Li, 2011). The national college entrance examination is not only conducted in standard Mandarin Chinese, but the content of its tests is mainly derived from the national curriculum standards, which are based on Han culture and their ideology (Jia et al., 2012). Hence, due to the various factors determining ethnic identity, ethnic minority groups are more likely to be disadvantaged in the national college entrance examination compared with their Han counterparts (Wu & Li, 2011).

A Compensatory Mechanism to the Disadvantaged

Rawls' difference principle refers that under equal conditions and opportunities, benefits are provided to the most disadvantaged. Hence, if the beneficiaries of the policy of interest could be considered as the disadvantaged, since ethnic minorities are in the disadvantaged position compared with their Han counterparts, as discussed in the previous paragraph, the beneficiaries are granted extra points in the scope of difference principle of justice. Though the educational attainment of ethnic minorities in tertiary education has gradually increased, it is still much lower than the national average, as shown in Figure 1, in the case of Han Chinese and ethnic minorities (non-Han) obtaining a bachelor's degree. However, it is of great necessity to remember that China's educational preferential policy for ethnic minorities is composed of multiple policies, the policy that granted extra points for ethnic minority candidates is a part of them, hence the growth may not be directly due to the policy of interest, but may provide an insightful view to testify the efficacy of educational preferential policies, including the policy that granted extra points. In a nutshell, it could be assumed that the extra points awarded policy functions as a compensatory mechanism, partially neutralizing these structural inequities. Therefore, with the increasing number of undergraduate degree holders among ethnic minorities, it is a glimpse that multiple educational preferential policies have a positive impact on promoting ethnic minorities' access to tertiary education, in other words, it is an effective compensatory mechanism to the ethnic minorities.

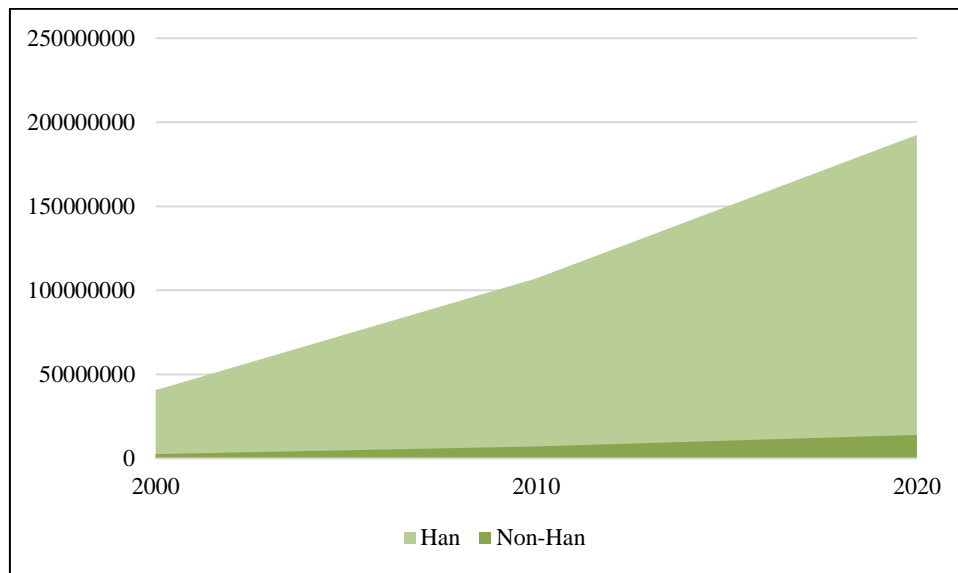


Figure 1. Number of undergraduate degree holders (2000-2020).¹

Higher Accessibility With Extra Points Awarded

Moreover, there are several empirical researches serving as a part of the evidence that the policy of interest may have a positive impact on ethnic minorities to attend higher education. For example, Gao (2014) uses the Ordered Probit Model to study the relevant factors affecting the extra points policy for ethnic minority candidates, then he figured out that the policy of admitting ethnic minorities to the college entrance examination with extra points plays a significant role in the admission of ethnic minority students to universities. Specifically, most ethnic minority students in universities and colleges take advantage of the policy that grants extra points in the national college entrance examination to gain access to higher education (Gao, 2014). However, Gao (2014) only collected empirical data in one west-northern province, which may be less representative and less generalizable. Guo and Li (2021) found that the expansion of university enrolment in western China has led to a rapid increase in the number of ethnic minority students entering higher education, but this result has not been discussed concerning the policy of interest. However, it could be assumed that the policy of interest may indeed boost the accessibility of higher education for ethnic minority candidates, to some extent, but some other preferential policies also impact the accessibility to higher education institutions.

Neglect of Equal Opportunity Principle

However, not considering differences within the same ethnic groups, including candidates' residence, types of upper secondary schools attended, and economic status, and other influential factors, the recent policy of interest is incompatible to the principle of equal opportunity. Yan and Li (2012) contend that the variation in access to higher education resources among candidates is primarily a result of disparities in the distribution of educational resources between eastern and western China, rather than being attributed by ethnic differences. Furthermore, numerous scholars argue that the recent policy of awarding extra points, solely considers ethnicity—this policy struggles to account for distinctions between the Han majority and other ethnic groups, disparities within the same ethnic group based on urban or rural backgrounds and social classes, variations among different ethnic minorities, and regional differences. Consequently, it leads to ambiguity in identifying the

¹ Data are collected from 2000 China Population Census, 2010 China Population Census, and 2020 China Population Census.

intended beneficiaries, with the risk of neglecting the primary recipients, thereby contributing to the emergence of new social injustices. This perspective is supported by scholars such as Zhang (2010), Huang, Qin, and Zhou (2013), etc.

Therefore, scholars argued that the only criterion determining whether the candidates can be awarded extra points is ethnicity and it is not enough to indicate justice and may contribute to new social injustice, since regional disparities, ethnic differences, and differences within ethnic groups are not taken into consideration (Zhang, 2010; Si & Lu, 2013; Huang et al., 2013). If all the factors mentioned are taken into consideration while granting extra points, the so-called “equal conditions and opportunities” may be real. In other words, comparing candidates who received upper secondary education in urban areas, with their counterparts who attended upper secondary schooling in rural areas, the gap in educational resources they received is obvious, regardless of ethnicity. As can be seen from the reforms in Guangxi, these controversies are being responded to, for instance, by adding the requirement of “three in one”, which takes candidates’ place of schooling (*xueji*) and place of the national identity card (*hukou*) into account, which replaces the single criterion—ethnicity.

Suggestions for Future Reform

The “three in one” reform takes the place and school of study of the candidates into account, which could be regarded as a manner to approach the principle of “equal opportunities”. Moreover, Chinese scholars are considering how to improve the recent policy framework to achieve a higher level of justice, for example, Yan (2008) proposes that the development of basic education should be strengthened and balanced between regions, and that enrolment programmes and quotas for ethnic minorities should be increased; while Wen (2014) proposes that the Dynamic Equivalence Model has implications for determining the quantity of extra points allocated to beneficiaries. This approach involves two levels of concepts: equal weighting and dynamic weighting. In the first concept, ethnic minority students receive varying extra points based on their test scores, with higher bonuses for those in the lower score range and lower bonuses for those in the higher range. According to the second idea, the number of extra points for students from ethnic minorities varies across years and is based on the provincial average for that year (Wen, 2014). This idea may be able to achieve a higher degree of social justice but needs further discussion.

To conclude, candidates from ethnic minority groups have different language, economic life, and psychological state compared with their Han counterparts, the extra points awarded to ethnic minority candidates fall into the scope of Rawls’ difference principle and promote ethnic minorities to attend higher education to some extent. However, using ethnicity only as the sole criterion for whether points can be added and ignoring other factors may overlook the principle of equal opportunity in social justice. Therefore, in the future, multiple factors should be included in the comprehensive consideration to promote the access of ethnic minorities to higher education.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to figure out whether the policy that awarded extra points to ethnic minority candidates in the national college entrance examination enhances the accessibility of ethnic minority candidates to higher education institutions. A comparative single case study was conducted, choosing China as the study case, since China has its complexity and uniqueness in ethnic relations. Furthermore, Rawls’ theory of justice and ethnic identity theory were employed to figure out the rationale and essence of the policy of interest. Later, the policy analysis section prevailed those reformations of policy that had taken place several times in China, but a common

rule could be found, which is that the policy of interest is set for cultivating ethnic minority talents, with the consideration of socio-economic development. Combined with theoretical frameworks and policy analysis, the policy of interest has its rationale of existence, since the differences in culture, language, economy, and other societal factors between Han and other ethnic minority groups may put ethnic minority candidates in a disadvantaged position, compared with Han counterparts. However, the only criterion for determining the beneficiary of the policy is ethnicity, which may arouse controversies among scholars, worrying about the production of new social injustice. Hence, the future reformation approach has been proposed. The answer to the research question is not quite sufficient from available empirical data, but a brief conclusion could be found that the policy of interest boosts the accessibility to higher education for ethnic minorities, serving as evidence to verify its rationale of existence. However, from the existing pieces of literature, the clear relation between the policy of interest and the accessibility to higher education for ethnic minorities cannot be figured out directly. Nevertheless, in the context of the global withdrawal of educational preferential policy, this paper verifies its rationale of existence, which is the most crucial, to some extent.

This article does not achieve the desired analytical results but identifies gaps in current research. Many current studies focus on the theoretical validation of the rationality of the policy that awards extra points to ethnic minority candidates in the national college entrance examination, but there is a lack of empirical verification of the rationality of the policy, therefore, future research can start from the empirical level, to carry out empirical analyses of the policy, to provide credible results for the existence of the rationality of the policy of interest, the direction of reformation. On the other hand, the existing research on the policy that grants extra points to ethnic minority candidates is limited to the research level of the policy; therefore, future research can be developed from the perspective of the individual. The policy that grants extra points for ethnic minority candidates is a highly localized Chinese policy, despite it having a similar function to affirmative action. Hence, future research could pay more attention to the context of policy.

Moreover, it is the era of rapid development of technologies such as Big Data and Artificial Intelligence, and whether the rapid development of technology will bring more challenges to education in ethnic minority areas is still a question that deserves further discussion. The digital divide has emerged, and whether this phenomenon impacts the accessibility of ethnic minorities to higher education also requires further consideration.

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