

**THE CHONGQING INCIDENT:  
THE HAN NATIONALIST BACKLASH AGAINST PREFERENTIAL  
MINORITY EDUCATION IN CHINA<sup>1</sup>**

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Introduction

On 22 June 2009, the state-run China News Service (CNS) broke the story that thirty-one Han students in Chongqing, including the top liberal arts student in that city, had altered their ethnic identity in order to receive twenty extra points in the nationwide college entrance exam (*gaokao* 高考). In the weeks that followed, a media furor erupted, as the nation discussed the reasons for this act of deception and its implications. “This incident,” leading education scholar and media commentator Xiong Bingqi 熊丙奇 declared, “reflects the urgency in reforming the current enrollment system.”<sup>2</sup> A sentiment with deep public support, as a *China Youth Daily* (*Zhongguo qiangnian bao* 中国青年报) poll of nearly three thousand citizens across China revealed that only 11 percent thought the education system was becoming more equitable, while 59 percent blamed the *gaokao*’s “extra points policy” (*jiaofen zhengce* 加分政策) for undermining educational equality: a long standing policy

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<sup>2</sup> Xiong Bingqi, “He Chuanyang shijian tishi gaige gaokao luqu zhidu” (The He Chuanyang incident suggests the need to reform the *gaokao* recruitment system), *Nanfang du shibao*, 6 July 2009, available at <http://news.163.com/09/0706/04/5DGV7EVO000120GR.html>

aimed at “encouraging” (鼓励性) and “looking after” (照顾性) different groups of advantaged and disadvantaged students on the exam.<sup>3</sup>

Like previous examples of corruption associated with the bonus points system, the Chongqing Incident refocused the spotlight on the extensive regime of affirmative action policies (*youhui zhengce* 优惠政策) that operates throughout the People’s Republic of China (PRC), referred to by Barry Sautman as “one of the oldest and largest programs of state-sponsored preferential policies” in the world,<sup>4</sup> and its relationship to educational equality. The scandal elicited extensive media and online debate with views ranging from sympathy for the students to outrage over a corrupt system. However, for a small group of Han nationalists, the incident was interpreted as yet another example of the continued marginalization of and discrimination against the Han majority within Chinese society, with sharply worded vitriol and hate-speak condemning the party-state and those minorities and Han traitors (*hanjian* 汉奸) who were undermining the natural racial order.

If the system of extra points for the national minorities continues, one blogger wrote on the popular Han nationalist website *Hanwang* (汉网), “the entire country will turn minority in a single turn of the head.”<sup>5</sup> Another contributor to *Hanwang* asserted: “Doesn’t the fact that the minorities are given extra points make it clear to everyone that they possess inferior intelligence?”<sup>6</sup> “Let them freely test for entry into the Nationalities University,” another wrote, “but don’t allow them to wreck the entire fair and open examination system where the superior win and the inferior are eliminated.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Xiao Shunian 肖舒楠, “Public sentiment 2009: Only 11.2% of people believe that education is impartial” (*gongzhong ganshou 2009: jin 11.2% de ren renwei jiaoyu gongping*), *Qingnian zaixian*, 15 Dec 2009, at [http://www.cyol.net/zqb/content/2009-12/15/content\\_2982361.htm](http://www.cyol.net/zqb/content/2009-12/15/content_2982361.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Barry Sautman, “Expanding access to higher education for China’s national minorities,” in Postiglione, ed., *China’s national minority education* (New York: Falmer, 1999): 173.

<sup>5</sup> Minzu yingxiong Ran Min, “Gaokao shaoshu minzu jiafen zai Chongqing keyi gaoda 20 fen gaizu le!” (Someone changed their identity status in Chongqing in order to get an extra 20 points on the university entrance exam), *Hanwang*, 23 June 2009 at <http://www.hanminzu.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=254830&page=1>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Later that week, during a sultry June 25/26 evening, violence erupted between Han and Uyghur co-workers in a toy factory in the Guangdong city of Shaoguan, resulting in the tragic death of two Uyghurs and scores of other injuries.<sup>8</sup> A few days later on 29 June 2009, a blogger on Hanwang wrote in reply to a post about the Chongqing incident: “These extremely wicked minority policies are lighting fuses across every capital city and the end result will be the raising of fists.”<sup>9</sup> A week later, on the evening of 5 July 2009, further rioting broke out in the Xinjiang capital of Ürümqi, with the most savage ethnic violence in decades resulting in the brutal murder of 197 mainly Han citizens and a further 1721 injuries, according to official Chinese accounts. In response to the Ürümqi riots, roaming bands of Han vigilantes sought to mete out revenge on the streets of the Xinjiang capital, while hate-speak filled Chinese cyberspace, with angry Han netizens calling for racial revenge.<sup>10</sup>

In the days that followed, opinion pieces in Hong Kong’s *Oriental Daily* (*Dongfang ribao* 东方日报), Singapore’s *Lianhe zaobao* (联合早报) and other Chinese language newspapers raised concerns about this unprecedented spike in ethnic tensions, which according to the *Oriental Daily*, was becoming “a powder-keg for social stability.”<sup>11</sup> These papers highlighted the growing frustration and envy among Han citizens towards the government’s conciliatory and long standing minority policies, with the *Oriental Daily* drawing a direct link between the party-state’s policy of “blind appeasement” (*yivei anfu* 一味安抚) and deepening ethnic estrangement and antagonism.<sup>12</sup> In response, Guangdong’s powerful party boss and rising CCP star Wang Yang 汪洋 admitted to foreign reporters that “the policies themselves will definitely need adjustment” in the wake of these incidents.<sup>13</sup> But as a collective, the

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<sup>8</sup> For a near comprehensive collection of English and Chinese news coverage of this incident see “The Shaoguan mass incident,” *EastSouthWestNorth blog*, available at [http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20090627\\_1.htm](http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20090627_1.htm)

<sup>9</sup> Minzu yingxiong Ran Min, “Gaokao shaoshu minzu jiafen zai Chongqing keyi gaoda 20 fen gaizu le!”

<sup>10</sup> Another aggregation of news coverage on this incident appears at “The Urumqi Mass Incident,” *EastSouthWestNorth blog*, available at [http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20090706\\_1.htm](http://www.zonaeuropa.com/20090706_1.htm)

<sup>11</sup> “Shaoguan wei-han dachongtu: minzu maodun mai yinyou” (The Han-Uyghur conflict at Shaoguan: Ethnic contradiction cover up lurking dangers), *Dongfang ribao*, 29 June 2009, available at [http://orientaldaily.on.cc/cnt/china\\_world/20090629/00182\\_001.html](http://orientaldaily.on.cc/cnt/china_world/20090629/00182_001.html)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.; “Zhongguo minzu maodun de xin tedian” (The new characteristic of China’s minzu contradictions), *Lianhe zaobao*, 8 July 2009, available at <http://www.zaobao.com/special/china/cnpol/pages2/cnpol090708c.shtml>

<sup>13</sup> Cited in James Pomfret, “China needs new policies after Xinjiang: official,” Reuters, 30 July 2009, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE56T1XJ20090730>

party-state remained unmoved, concluding in its 27 September 2009 “White Paper on Ethnic Policy”: “Sixty years of experience has proved that China's ethnic policies are correct and effective, and are in keeping with China's actual conditions and the common interests of all ethnic groups, winning the support of the people of all ethnic groups.”<sup>14</sup>

Without seeking to draw a direct link between the public furor over the Chongqing Incident and the ethnic violence that followed in Shaoguan and Ürümqi, this paper uses the Chongqing Incident as a case study of growing Han discontent towards preferential minority education policies in particular, and the party-state's increasingly troubled handling of the so-called “national question” (*minzu wenti* 民族问题). In the growing body of literature on the policies and practices of minority education in China,<sup>15</sup> these concerns are rarely discussed or taken seriously.<sup>16</sup> Han perceptions of minority education must be considered alongside studies which explore the effectiveness of these policies in promoting social mobility, belonging and integration, as the support of the ethnic majority community, especially one as large as the Han, is crucial to the success of any genuine form of multiculturalism.

In a 1999 article, Barry Sautman contended that Han resentment against minority educational preferences “is not strong enough to have been publicly manifested by any social group.”<sup>17</sup> Yet, the rapid acceleration of market reforms and the spread of

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<sup>14</sup> Information Office of the State Council, “White Paper: China's Ethnic Policy and Common Prosperity and Development of All Ethnic Groups,” 27 September 2009, available at [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-09/27/content\\_8743072.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2009-09/27/content_8743072.htm). See also Xinhua News Agency, “Full text of Chinese president's 29 September speech on ethnic unity,” *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*, London, 2 October 2009.

<sup>15</sup> Some of the key studies in English include Gerard Postiglione, ed. *China's national minority education* (New York: Falmer, 1999); Barry Sautman, “Preferential policies for ethnic minorities in China,” in Safran (ed.), *Nationalism and ethnoregional identity in China*, 86-118 (London: Frank Cass, 1998); Mette Hansen, *Lessons in Being Chinese* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); Rebecca Clothey, “China's Policies for Minority Nationalities in Higher Education,” *Comparative Education Review* 49.3 (2005): 389-409; Zhu Zhiyong *State Schooling and Ethnic Identity* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2007); Chen Yangbin, *Muslim Uyghur students in a Chinese boarding school* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2008); Linda Tsung, *Minority languages, education and communities in China* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009); Yu Haibo, *Identity and Schooling Among the Naxi* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009); Zhao Zhenzhou, *Minority Mongol Studies and Cultural Recognition in Chinese Universities* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> One notable exception is Lin Yi's examination of Han teachers and school children in Qinghai province, in Chapter three of Lin Yi, *Cultural Exclusion in China* (London: Routledge, 2008): 41-63.

<sup>17</sup> Sautman, “Expanding access to higher education for China's national minorities,” p. 194. Sautman suggests that the growing gap in social and economic status due to an acceleration of

new communication technologies appear to have altered this situation. By contrasting official and scholarly narratives with non-elite, online discourse on the “extra points” policy, I seek to also demonstrate how the Internet is opening up new platforms for public discussion and comment on highly sensitive and carefully control topics like ethnic relations,<sup>18</sup> and the resulting disconnect between Han public sentiment and party-state policy on minority education. Although the Han nationalists discussed in this paper remain a small yet increasingly vocal online community,<sup>19</sup> the Internet allows them to mobilize and, to a certain extent, shape public opinion, providing ready-set answers and easy scapegoats for complex social issues like educational and ethnic equality. Furthermore, the failure of the party-state to effectively deal with this movement, or take the concerns of Han detractors seriously, has important implications for social stability and integration in the PRC.

### The Chongqing Incident

Following a series of official investigations, the Ministry of Education announced on 18 July 2009 that those thirty-one students from the Chongqing Municipality who had falsified their ethnic identity would be denied entrance to university regardless of their scores. The Ministry referred to a joint directive issued by the Ministry itself, the State Council on Ethnic Affairs and the Public Security Bureau in April 2009, which clearly stated that anyone found falsifying their identity would be disqualified from the exam or university admittance, or even expelled from university if they were already enrolled.

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economic reform could make preferential admissions “a subject for debate, at least in elites circles,” but fails to anticipate the way the Internet revolution would broaden public discourse to include non-elite sentiment and contestation.

<sup>18</sup> An eight-month survey of 15 different China-based blog service providers (BSPs) in 2008 revealed that the level of censorship varies tremendously across BSPs and, as a result, “a great deal of politically sensitive material survives in the Chinese blogosphere, and chances for survival can likely be improved with knowledge and strategy. See Rebecca MacKinnon, “China’s censorship 2.0: How companies censor bloggers,” *First Monday* 14.2, Feb 09, at <http://www.uic.edu/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2378/2089>; Also see also Tashi Rabgey, “newtibet.com,” Barnett and Schwartz, eds., *In Tibetan Modernities* (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 333-352; Yang Guobin, *The Power of the Internet in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009): 25-63.

<sup>19</sup> For an overview on the Han nationalist movement see James Leibold, “More Than a Category: Han Supremacism on the Chinese Internet,” *The China Quarterly* 203 (September 2010): 539-59.

Of the thirty-one students, the case of seventeen year-old He Chuanyang 何川洋 attracted the most attention. In 2006, the boy's father He Yeda 何业大, head of the Wushan county admission office, drew on a favor from the county's ethnic and religious affairs bureau chief to have his son's identity switched from Han to Tujia 土家族, one of China's 55 officially recognized minority groups. Despite the fact that He Chuanyang was already enrolled at the city's best senior high school, his parents thought he might benefit from the extra twenty points available to ethnic minorities in Chongqing on the gaokao. Yet, their concern was unwarranted, as He Chuanyang received the highest score in the entire city's liberal arts exam even without the extra points. While his 659 out of a total 750 possible points qualified him for entry into Beijing University and other elite tertiary institutions in China, he was refused entry following the revelation of his illegal identity swap. The boy's parents were sacked from their government positions. He Chuanyang, on the other hand, pleaded ignorance, arguing that he was unsure of his real ethnic identity as his grandparents had always lived like members of the Tujia minority.

The media and the public immediately rallied behind He Chuanyang, viewing him as an innocent victim trapped in a confusing, unjust and exploitative exam system while calling for urgent reform. In a widely circulated opinion piece in the influential *China Youth Daily* (*Zhongguo qingnian bao*), Tian Guolei 田国垒 offered a scathing critique of the extra points system. First, he argues the target, nature and scope of the extra points system was in "a state of disorder," with the categories for extra points locally interpreted and selectively applied by different universities and colleges. These points are given not only to minorities, but to scores of other categories of advantaged and disadvantaged students. In Yong'an city in Fujian province, for example, ten extra points are even provided to sons and daughters of those families who purchase a house worth a quarter of a million *yuan*. Second, there is a lack of proper supervision and an inadequate appeal process. The subjective and locally implemented nature of the policy provides great scope for corruption and makes reporting crime and malfeasance related to the system difficult, and here he cites Associate Professor Yu Yafeng 余雅风 of Beijing Normal University and his call for a strengthening of inspection mechanisms and more public monitoring via the Internet. Third, Tian argues that there is a need for greater public consultation and

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openness regarding the workings of the system works and its beneficiaries. Not only should local governments hold open meetings to discuss the system, but they should also make rosters of extra point recipients publically available, including not only their names and number of bonus points but also information on the student's school and the reason for the extra points.

In another widely circulated opinion piece in the Guangdong based *Xinkuai bao* (新快报), it was claimed that there were up to 200 different categories under which students could obtain extra points on the gaokao.<sup>20</sup> Citing a report in *Oriental Outlook* (*Ke Dongfang Zhoukan* 瞭望东方周刊), this full-page exposé contended that the entire extra points system is shrouded in confusion and had become a playground for vested interest groups. According to the Ministry of Education's 2009 policy on extra points (*jiaoyubu 2009 nian gaokao jiafen zhengce*), there are five different situations where examinees can gain up to 20 extra points on the exam; five categories where one can gain 10 extra points; and three types of priority enrolment selection. Yet, media reports claim that in some areas students receive up to 200 extra points. Other reports circulating on the Chinese internet assert that, based on local interpretations of these Ministry of Education categories, there are actually more than 192 categories of students that receive extra points on the gaokao, including in one case those students whose parents pay their taxes on time.<sup>21</sup> Twenty-one percent of the fifty thousand plus people who responded to an online poll associated with a special issue of *Chongqing's Echo Magazine* (*Huixiang zhoukan* 回响周刊) were bitterly opposed to the decision by Beijing University and Hong Kong University to deny admission to He Chuanyang, agreeing that the extra points system is responsible for this tragedy, while nearly a majority expressed support or sympathy for his plight.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Gaokao jiafen zhenxiang qi di!" (Gaokao extra points really rise from the bottom! *Xinkuai bao*, 29 July 2009, available at [http://www.ycwb.com/ePaper/xkb/html/2009-07/29/content\\_554926.htm](http://www.ycwb.com/ePaper/xkb/html/2009-07/29/content_554926.htm))

<sup>21</sup> Iup, "gaokao jiafen 192 ting, ruhe tixian jiaoyu gongping?" (192 categories for extra points: How is this educational equality?," *People's Daily Strong Nation BBS*, 21 May 2009, available at <http://bbs1.people.com.cn/postDetail.do?boardId=18&treeView=1&view=2&id=92189500>)

<sup>22</sup> "zaojia men de wenke zhuangyuan, gai hequhecong?" (What course should the leading liberal arts fabricator take?), *Huixiang zhoukan* 62, 3 July 2009, available at <http://cq.qq.com/zt/2009/hxzk62/index.htm#1>

Others, writing outside the mainstream media, focused more directly on the politically sensitive issue of identity switching and the equity of providing minority students with extra points. In early July, the popular blogger Sima Pingbang 司马平邦 posted a widely circulated article in which he argued that the real guilty party in the Chongqing Incident was China's preferential treatment policies for its ethnic minorities.<sup>23</sup> Urging his readers to look beyond the surface level of corruption at the root cause of this Incident, Sima Pingbang questioned why the state provides minorities with preferential treatment if all citizens of the PRC are actually equal before the law. Does not the system create new inequalities? Or as another blogger on the *Tianya* 天涯 BBS wrote: "The real culprit here is the way the policy of minority extra points discriminates against the Han. The Constitution stipulates that all *minzu* 民族 are equal. He Chuanyang should report a violation of the Constitution to the Ministry of Education." Another blogger, writing in English on the *Fool's Mountain* blogsite, compared the preferential treatment policies to the pacifying of children with candy: "One day, kids will grow up and blame their parents for rotting their teeth."<sup>24</sup>

In his posting, Sima Pingbang goes onto express his shock about the way foreigners have blamed Uyghur discrimination for the Ürümqi tragedy:

If what they say is based on what the Han people in Xinjiang are saying about the Xinjiang authorities' attempts to appease the minorities during the Uyghur-Han conflict, often at the expense of the Han people's interest and allow the Uyghur people to take advantage of the Han people, how can they conclude that this is one of the sources of Han-Uyghur conflict? Why has the Uyghur's browbeating of the Han suddenly become responsible for the conflict between the Han and Uyghur people? Is it because the government appeases the Uyghurs or because the Han are browbeaten?<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Sima Pingbang, "Gaokao zhuangyuan zaojia de zui yuan shi minzu youhui zhengce" (Preferential minority policies are the original sin behind the gaokao's top-scorer's fabrication) *Sina blogspot*, 7 July 2009, available at [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_537fd7410100e19e.html~type=v5\\_one&label=rela\\_prevarticle](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_537fd7410100e19e.html~type=v5_one&label=rela_prevarticle)

<sup>24</sup> berlinf, "Chinese ethnic policies and the affirmative action," *Fool's Mountain*, 7 July 2009, available at <http://blog.foolsmountain.com/2009/07/07/chinese-ethnic-policies-and-the-affirmative-action-one-rationale-two-failures/>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Sima Pingbang argues that the media is distorting the incident, suggesting that He Chuanyang's crime is worth ten thousand deaths without exploring the unfair preferential treatment policies behind the Incident, which he argues are a fundamental violation of human rights and its principal that all men are born equal.

In another posting two days later, he suggested that the concept of a shared Zhonghua nation/race (*Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族) has failed to penetrate daily consciousness and remains a largely empty slogan. For example, the term cannot be found anywhere on one's permanent residence ID. Affirmative action policies, he argues, should be based on one's condition of poverty and not the *minzu* 民族 stamped on one's ID card.<sup>26</sup> Expressing a similar sentiment, a contributor to Tianya wrote in relation to the Chongqing Incident:

It [the extra points system] was originally aimed at strengthening minzu fusion in the interests of the country and its peaceful and stable development, but now it has become a policy of ethnic discrimination. I strongly support the abolition of the concept of minzu and afterwards only use Zhonghua minzu on the forms that we fill in.<sup>27</sup>

In Han nationalist chat-rooms, the Chongqing Incident was viewed as symptomatic of a different sort of social rot. Writing under the pen name Blue Lotus 青蓮子, an anonymous blogger admitted that He Chuanyang not only lied, but also betrayed his own race and thus could be labelled a Han traitor.<sup>28</sup> But for this netizen, He Chuanyang also deserves our sympathy, for it is the fundamentally perverse and unjust system of minority preferential educational policies that compels kids like him into this desperate situation. The extra points system not only violates the Constitution and its stipulation that all citizens and minzus are equal, but also its

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<sup>26</sup> Sima Pingbang, "bainian nei wancheng 'zhonghua minzu' qudai 56 zu de yitong" (Replacing the unity of 56 ethnic groups with a single 'Chinese nation' within 100 years), *Sina blogspot*, 9 July 2009, available at [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_49c2c43f0100eb86.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_49c2c43f0100eb86.html)

<sup>27</sup> Luodenglian, "He Chuanyang weizao minzu shenfen daigei women de sikao" (He Chuanyang's falsification of his minzu identity should cause us to ponder), *Tianya BBS*, 6 July 2009, available at <http://www.tianya.cn/publicforum/content/free/1/1613700.shtml>

<sup>28</sup> Qing lianzi, "Yong falu wei He Chuanyang men tao hui gongdao! (Using legal means to return justice to He Chuanyang and others like him), *Hanwang*, 4 July 2009, available at <http://www.hanminzu.com/bbs/viewthread.php?tid=255894&page=1>

protection against any form of minzu discrimination or oppression. “This bias toward minority intelligence is oppressing the rights of the Han people to receive education!”

Amidst this storm of public debate and criticism, the Deputy Chair of the State Council on Ethnic Affairs, Wu Shimin 吴仕民, defended the extra points system at a press conference on 21 July 2009.<sup>29</sup> He admitted that while some people might question the policy’s fairness to Han students, it is based on the specific conditions of China. Due to historical and geographic reasons, the national minority regions have lagged behind other regions in their development, and the extra points policy seeks to level out the playing field for these disadvantaged minorities. The system varies across the country, with minority students in places like Xinjiang and Tibet receiving the most points, while minorities in other places might receive only four or five extra points. “This is in the best interests of the entire country,” Hu asserted, emphasizing that minority students are still underrepresented at universities in China.

Online, a group of netizens also came to the defense of the party-state’s minority policies. For example, an anonymous blogger writing under the tag “Philosophy First” (第一哲学), offered a sharply worded critique of Sima Pingbang’s earlier posting.<sup>30</sup> Arguing that the preferential treatment policies were necessary to “rescue the gradual decline of minority cultural levels,” this blogger contended that the minorities were a valuable historical legacy of traditional Chinese civilization and part of its contemporary multicultural fabric. In response to the sort of Han chauvinist thought expressed in Sima Pingbang’s blog, the state needs to protect, study and make use of marginalized minority cultures while also recognizing the “historical debt” owed to the national minorities for their contribution to political unity and multiculturalism.

Yet, not all officials inside the party-state system were convinced by the merits of the system. Li Yuefeng 李钺锋, a respected lawyer with the Chongqing People’s

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<sup>29</sup> Zhongguo xinwen wang, “guojia minwei: shaoshu minzu kaosheng gaokao youhui zhengce hen biyao (State Council on Ethnic Affairs: The Policy of extra points for national minorities students on the gaokao is essential), 21 July 2009, available at [http://news.dayoo.com/china/200907/21/53868\\_10026011.htm](http://news.dayoo.com/china/200907/21/53868_10026011.htm)

<sup>30</sup> Diyi zhexue, “Bo Sima Pingbang ‘Gaokao zhuangyuan zaojia de zui yuan shi minzu youhui zhengce’” (Refuting Sima Pingbang’s ‘Preferential minority policies are the original sin behind the gaokao’s top-scorer’s fabrication’), *Sina blogspot*, 7 July 2009, available at [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_49c2c43f0100eb86.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_49c2c43f0100eb86.html)

Procuratorate and a member of the Chongqing People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), called for a public hearing on the extra points policy.<sup>31</sup> Referring to the Chongqing Incident, Li stated that the extra points system had evoked great controversy and that public opinion now clearly is of the view that it violates educational equality. For the sake of the innocent children who were becoming the victims of the extra points system, he proposed a public hearing where students, family members, teachers, scholars, officials and the media could discuss and debate the merits of the extra points system. Here, the party-state could collect a range of opinions on how best to make the system more reasonable, open and transparent. Another member of the Chongqing CPPCC, Wang Yueting 王月婷, suggested, among other reforms, that only minority students living in outlying frontier regions should be given extra points on the gaokao and not those who receive the same standard of education as Han students in urban centers.<sup>32</sup>

### Concluding Thoughts

In the PRC's idealized form of multiculturalism, exists a significant gap between rhetoric and reality. In terms of ethnic minority education, the rich diversity of Chinese society is not fully replicated or taught in the educational system, which remains dominated by the Han language, values, and cultural capital.<sup>33</sup> Lin Yi argues that public discourse in China "has not shown respect for diversity in spite of the fact that at the level of legal formalities it guarantees freedom of, for instance, religious belief," and that state policy on education "exercises exclusion of minority cultures" in comparison to the Han majority.<sup>34</sup> While certainly valid on one plane, this line of criticism misses the extensive series of affirmative action policies that aim to create, in theory at least, the type of social environment in which non-Han students can be both ethnic and Chinese, different yet successful.

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<sup>31</sup> "Chongqing zhengxie weiyuan jianyi: gaokao jiafen juxing tingzhenghui" (Proposal by Chongqing CPPCC member: Hold a public hearing on the issue of extra points on the gaokao), Chongqing zaowang, 21 January 2010, available at <http://edu.qq.com/a/20100121/000086.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

<sup>33</sup> Gerard Postiglione, "Introduction: State schooling and ethnicity in China," in Postiglione, ed., *China's National Minority Education* (New York: Falmer Press, 1999): 3-19; Dru Gladney, "Making Muslims in China," in Ibid., 58-62; Wang Chnegzhi and Zhou Quanhou, "Minority education in China," *Educational Studies* 19.1 (2003): 85-104.

<sup>34</sup> Lin Yi, "Muslim narratives of schooling, social mobility and culture difference," *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 6.1 (2005): 22 and 2; Also see Lin Yi, *Cultural Exclusion in China*

Rather than an insufficient respect for diversity, it is the tokenistic, pigeonholed, and increasingly commodified nature of China's multicultural masquerade that not only objectifies ethnic difference, but also engenders resentment among the majority and minority alike.<sup>35</sup> The multiple paradoxes of the PRC's museum-style multiculturalism seems to leave no one happy, and like the minority education system itself, propels minority communities in the direction of a dual form of alienation, "ethnic segregation" or "impact integration,"<sup>36</sup> rather than creating natural and meaningful opportunities for social interaction and mutual understanding. Like elsewhere in the world, ethnic apartheid and forced assimilation are recipes for tension and conflict, and I would suggest one of the root causes of the violence that erupted in Lhasa, Shaoguan and Ürümqi.

China's Internet Revolution has intensified this paradox. By shifting knowledge construction and public discussion online, Chinese society has fractured into a series of competing, and often isolated, interest groups. In the search for social recognition and belonging which has become central to online activism, Guobin Yang speaks of "a restive society alive with conflict and contention," yet one that is ultimately moving in a positive direction, marking "the palpable revival of the revolutionary spirit," while also laying "the social and cultural foundations for a democratic political system."<sup>37</sup> Central to Yang's argument is the conviction that the Internet has opened up new spaces for competing viewpoints, which "can challenge cultural stereotypes, correct misinformation, and resist symbolic violence (symbolic violence meaning violence inflicted on society by the ruling elites through labeling, categorization, and other discursive forms."<sup>38</sup> Even without formal institutional reform, "this communication revolution is expanding citizens' unofficial democracy" which undermines state control and generates greater political transparency."<sup>39</sup>

Yet, online activism in China is not solely progressive or liberal in nature. The fracturing of public discourse and state control has opened the door to the articulation

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<sup>35</sup> Dru Gladney, *Dislocating China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Gerard Postiglione, Zhu Zhiyong and Ben Jiao, "From ethnic segregation to impact integration," *Asian ethnicity* 5.2 (2004): 195-217.

<sup>37</sup> Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China*, 209, 214.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 213 and passim.

of more regressive and conservative sentiments, as demonstrated by the rise of Han cyber-nationalism. Frustrated by government policies that they believe are detrimental to the interests of the vast majority of Chinese citizens, Han nationalists use online activism and hate-speak to mobilize and expand public concern.