Unheard Voices, Open Eyes:  
A Study of Ethnic Minority Women in Higher Education in Northwest China

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts 
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning 
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Abstract

China is a land of many nationalities and languages. In the past, studies of this great nation were conducted using quantitative research methodology. At present, a particularly challenging area of research is on China's minority peoples.

This thesis investigates minority education through the eyes of fifteen participants who work in the field of higher education in China. A feminist qualitative methodology is used to capture the stories, opinions and reflections of the participants about their involvement in higher education. The entry point of this work is through the joint Canada-China Special University Linkage Consolidation Project 1996-2001 (SULCP).

Participants come from five ethnic groups including: Han, Hui, Zhuang, Manchurian and Tibetan. By listening to participants' experiences it is possible to glimpse what is really happening at the grassroots level of minority education. The frontline workers, the teachers and administrators, are key players in the development of minority education in China.
Acknowledgements

There are many people, both in Canada and in China, that contributed to the creation of this thesis that deserve recognition and thanks. Professor Ruth Hayhoe provided the initial inspiration for the possibility of conducting research in China. She was responsible for introducing me to Dr. Julia Pan and Dr. Sandra Gillespie at OISE/UT. Dr. Pan was both a member of my thesis committee and my link to organizing my fieldwork experience in China. Dr. Pan also arranged my contact with three visiting scholars to OISE who became valuable participants in this study. Sandra Gillespie, a supportive friend, mentor and fellow student, provided proof that doing meaningful research in China is possible. Thank you also to OISE/UT for the emergency bursary award which allowed for my research trip to China.

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Professor Wang Jiayi of Lanzhou’s Northwest Normal University, Gansu Province, China, was my gracious host and provided the guidance I required while overseas. I must also thank all of the staff and students at the university and the individuals I met in Lanzhou who were so friendly and helpful to me, making my short stay in Northwest China a very pleasant and rewarding experience.

There are two individuals that deserve special mention, Wen-Hsing Luo and Han Hui. Without the help of these two fellow graduate students my research adventure would
not have been possible. In China, Han Hui spent every day with me during my time in Lanzhou. She contacted participants, arranged interviews and acted as my translator and co-researcher during the interviewing process. She also acted as my tour guide and host in her city. In Canada, Wen-Hsing Luo spent endless hours, both before my trip to China and after, translating consent letters and participant interviews, creating participant pseudonyms, offering analytic ideas and being a very supportive friend and collaborative researcher.

A handful of dear friends and classmates provided both emotional and intellectual support during this learning journey. Thank you to Kara Pierson, Mary Hodgson and Andy Reed for being the best of friends. Thank you also to Penny Kinnear for your friendship, patience and talent as a reader.

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Lastly, I must thank the fifteen participants of this study, women and men, who trusted me with their stories and shared their life experiences. You have inspired me with your love for life, determination, courage and hard work. This thesis is dedicated to you.

Xie xie ni.
People's original natures are nearly the same. But due to different educations and environments, they grow further and further apart.

Confucius
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Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis aims to contribute to an understanding of Chinese ethnic minority education: most specifically, from the perspective of ethnic minority women living in Northwest China, and working in the field of higher education. The main focus of this work is at the micro level, the local and the interpersonal, the grassroots experiences of China’s minority people. What follows is an attempt to provide an avenue for minority voices to be heard, to share their experiences and stories in education, with each other, with China and with the world.

Six chapters comprise this work. In this chapter, I outline the organization of the study and situate myself as a researcher in the investigation. The main research question is then explained, along with information about the Canada-China Special University Linkage Consolidation Project 1996-2001 (SULCP), the second phase of the Canada-China University Linkage Program 1988-1995 (CCULP). I then provide a brief background history of Gansu Province, the city of Lanzhou in Northwest China, and Northwest Normal University, the fieldwork site visited. In Chapter Two, a comprehensive literature review is provided exploring several key areas on the topic of minority women in higher education. Chapter Three discusses the feminist qualitative research methodology employed in this inquiry. Data collection and data analysis processes are described and participant profiles are provided. In Chapter Four, eight of the nine themes that emerged from the analysis are explored and analyzed. In Chapter Five, participants’ recommendations for minority higher education, the ninth theme of this study, are discussed. Chapter Six, the concluding chapter, highlights the key findings of this study and their present and future implications for Chinese minority education. I
will also offer some of my own thoughts and suggestions for minority higher education in China.

**Situating Myself as Researcher**

China has long been a place of fascination for me. For five years I enjoyed teaching elementary school in Hong Kong. I have also been fortunate enough to travel to many locations in this diverse country. During these adventures, I have gradually developed a special place in my heart for China and its vibrant people. This thesis is an opportunity for me to give something back, hopefully meaningful, to a country that has taught me so much. China has enlightened my thinking about my chosen career path in the field of education, about how to merge the ways of the West with those of the East, and about how to be a good person and a life-long learner.

I believe that women in China, especially teachers as agents of change, play a key role in the country’s present and future political, economic and social development. As a female teacher myself, I take great interest in my sisters’ personal and professional struggles. During this project, we worked together as collaborative researchers. Hence, I feel an enormous sense of responsibility to my participants, to tell the stories they so generously shared with me. Their voices deserve an attentive audience. The beginning of this new millennium proves to be an auspicious time to reflect back on the last fifty years of Chinese minority education and to celebrate the pivotal role that China’s women play in this area.
The Research Question

Initially, one main question framed this study. I asked participants to answer the open-ended question: Can you tell me the story of your involvement with the joint Canada-China Special University Linkage Consolidation Project (1996-2001)? I wanted to find out, from the participants themselves, what SULCP was contributing to the building of education in China, specifically the role of female teachers in Chinese minority education. Chapter Three provides a detailed description of how this main research question expanded during the course of the fieldwork experience.

Special University Linkage Consolidation Project 1996-2001 (SULCP)

SULCP was the project that provided my entry into China and the framework for my fieldwork experience there. SULCP links the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) and the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia with six educational institutions in China. These collaborative Chinese institutions include: Shaanxi Normal University in Xi’an, Northwest Normal University in Lanzhou, Northeast University in Changchun, Central China University of Science and Technology in Wuhan, Nanjing Normal University in Nanjing, and East China Normal University in Shanghai.

The project identifies women and minority teachers in the educational system as key agents for educational and social change and development. SULCP focuses on the professional development of women and minority teachers at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education in China. These individuals take part in collaborative and participatory training and research initiatives that correspond to the three levels of education in China. Researchers working with the project have developed specific goals
for each of these levels of education and the teachers involved with them. The main objective of the primary level is to help minority teachers integrate indigenous knowledge into the curriculum through bilingual education to ensure the inclusion of minority cultures and values into the mainstream educational system. At the secondary level, the project supports female and male teachers in their role as moral educators and reflective practitioners in this current era of rapid social change. At the tertiary level, the project focuses on women faculty and students in institutions of higher learning. SULCP offers these women opportunities to participate in forms of teaching and research which will enhance their professional and social leadership capacity. A shared objective of all three levels of education is to help teachers challenge both the way in which knowledge is constructed and the traditional methodologies of the existing system. Participants of SULCP are encouraged to write about and publish their own learning experiences. There are also several publications based on these training initiatives.

**Background History of Gansu Province, Northwest China**

Traditionally, the Chinese have regarded the province of Gansu as marking the outer limit of China. Looking at a map, the region appears to lie in the northern, central area of the country. In fact, both culturally and politically, the province remains remote from the great eastern cities of the nation. During the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD), the first serious effort was made to expand the power of the Han empire into the west, mainly as a means to ensure control over the thriving Silk Road trade. Prefectures were established and Gansu eventually became a Chinese province during the Mongolian Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368).
Gansu has notable geographical features: the great Yellow River, dense with silt, winds through the middle of Lanzhou, and the mountains and deserts of the Hexi Corridor; the narrow route between mountain ranges running through the middle of the province. The Silk Road caravans came down this path and crossed the great river at Lanzhou. The Great Wall even found its way into this remote region. Gansu is a harsh and barren land. Frequent droughts make agriculture a barely sustainable activity. Life is hard for the inhabitants who live there. In the Northwest, Gansu is one of China’s poorest provinces.

Historically, Gansu’s strategic importance has been as the gateway from China to Central Asia, along the Silk Road starting in Xi’an and going west. Its key location on this ancient travel and trading route has allowed the province to develop into a region of many nationalities rich in cultural diversity. The Silk Road was the birthplace of friendship, union and cooperation among the different ethnic groups who met there, having a strong effect on the history and culture of each nationality in the area. The population of the province is approximately 25 million, with 3 million residing in the capital city of Lanzhou. Hui, Zhuang, Man (Manchurian), Kazakhs, Mongols and Tibetans are but a few of the many minority groups present in Gansu. Chinese Muslims (Hui) and Tibetans make up the largest minority groups in the province. As a result of the interaction of the various agricultural and nomadic cultures, Gansu became the crossroads to the regions to the West. The influx of ideas made possible by the Silk Road includes the spread of Buddhism into China from India by both land and sea. This religion has had a great influence on China and its culture. Gansu was the base from which Buddhism spread throughout the country. Some of the best known Buddhist holy places are in
Gansu including Binglingsi and the Majishan Grottoes. In addition, Tibetan Lamaism spread throughout the province.

**Lanzhou**

The provincial capital of Gansu is Lanzhou. It is the largest industrial center in China's Northwest. Lanzhou is 1,600 meters above sea level. For centuries, this city has been a transportation hub, first for ancient caravans, then for shallow boats and now for modern rail lines, the only ones in western China that link the nation to Central Asia and the West. The Communist era helped Lanzhou become a larger population center as the city’s industrial sector grew. The majority of the city’s population is Han Chinese. Entering into China from the West, this is the first really major Chinese city one will encounter. In the downtown core, there is a large public area called East is Red Square. It is here that one can see the fabulous minorities mural that is proudly and prominently displayed, celebrating Gansu’s diverse minority peoples.

**Northwest Normal University (NWNU)**

Northwest Normal University (NWNU), the Chinese fieldwork site of this study, is located at the western end of Lanzhou, on the outskirts of the city. There are about ten thousand students at this institution of higher learning. NWNU is a medium-sized university. ‘Normal’ universities in China specialize in educational studies, teacher training and curriculum development. Students wishing to become teachers at the secondary and tertiary levels of education attend normal universities. Those who are to become primary school teachers attend teachers colleges. Although NWNU is primarily a provincial teacher training institution, there are also smaller departments of law,
accounting and computer technology. The majority of students live on campus in
dormitories and appear to enjoy a variety of university activities. Most graduate students
at NWNU are pursuing Masters degrees in Education. Current graduate students are
working on theses in minority education in the areas of curriculum and language. It is
hoped that some of these pieces of work will be published, perhaps in English, in book
form by next year. Chapter Two follows with a comprehensive literature review.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter provides a literature review of the topic of ethnic minority women in higher education in Northwest China. Several areas of literature are covered including: general writing on the PRC, Northwest China, ethnicity in the PRC, higher education, women in China and feminist literature, and indigenous knowledge literature. A synthesis of these areas coming together ends the chapter.

“As in most countries, the situation in China has rarely been all black or all white; almost always it has been some shade of gray” (Barnett, 1993, 4). China, the world’s most populous nation, is a highly complex place. Geographically, it is one of the largest countries in the world and has a varied topography. The nation is also ethnically and linguistically diverse creating a land rich in culture. In the modern era, China has undergone continuous and turbulent changes in an effort to come to terms with the problems and challenges of development and modernization it faces in an increasingly global world. The People’s Republic of China (PRC) is also of great international importance for the contributions of its rich cultural past to world history, and for its enormous future economic potential. These particular features and ever-changing and interacting variables make any study of China and its people a great challenge.

Literature on China

Today, in the West, a vast amount of literature exists on this great nation of the East. For many decades, Western writers, generally writing in English, have written about
many aspects of Chinese society ranging from politics and economic growth to indigenous agricultural techniques, the controversial One Child Policy, education, and the changing role of women, to name just a few (Andors, 1983; Angelasto and Adamson, 1998; Bailey, 1990; Barlow, 1994; Chang, 2000; Hayhoe, 1992; Hayhoe, 1996; Hayhoe and Pan, 1996; Rofel, 1999; Stacey, 1983; Wolf, 1985). Far fewer Chinese authors have managed to get their writing published in English, thus limiting their audience to one which is literate in difficult Chinese. In spite of this language barrier, some of these authors have written in English or have had their work translated and allowed those of us in the West a chance to read their valuable insights on the PRC (Chu and Yanan, 1993; Hsiung, 1998; Mak, 1996; Pan, 1996; Pun, 1997; Zhong, 1992). Perhaps one important reason why literature on China has become more available in the last twenty years or so is the opening up of China to the world through Deng Xiaoping’s Open Door Policy of 1978. The Communist idea of isolationism against the decadence of the West gradually decreased as the nation learned how to deal with its emerging market economy. Chinese leaders realized that in order for the PRC to be part of the international community it would have to open itself up to the world.

“The destiny, fall, or rise of China depends to a large extent on the development of education today” (Zhu in Hayhoe, 1992, 183). Thus, in order to make sense of the nation as a whole, and to articulate what role education plays in the country, it is necessary to delve into China’s political, economic and social background. Today in the PRC, modernization and a transformation in the overall economic structure of the nation is under way. A key government policy designed to meet these goals is the Four Modernizations. A Chinese indigenous term, the Four Modernizations are to promote
growth in the areas of agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology, and to achieve a favourable ratio of agricultural productivity to population growth through policies that attack both sides of the production-population equation (Stacey, 1983, 269).

In order to achieve these ambitious goals education plays a crucial role.

In addition to this national strategy, Beijing, now more than ever, is concerned with the development of China’s minority areas and follows economic and social policies aimed at making minority regions modern and prosperous within the early years of this new century. In theory, the Four Modernizations are stressed in minority areas in the same way as they are in the rest of China. However, China’s West, and home to many of its nationality groups, has been largely ignored by China’s modernization schemes (Barnett, 1993; Gladney, 1998). This remote interior area of the country lags behind the rapid economic growth and overall development seen in the eastern coastal areas. Moreover, in China, “The financial conditions for national minority education have been said to be lower than in most Third World countries” (Postiglione in Hayhoe, 1992, 324).

As the Chinese proverb goes: If we do not change our direction, we will likely end up where we are headed. In order for the PRC to meet its economic modernization goals for the entire country, development of China’s West and its minority peoples is crucial, especially in the important realm of education. After all, Confucius, like Mao Tse-Tung, saw education as the medium through which to mold the character of the Chinese people in the spheres of politics, society, economics and culture. In a time when the term ‘the global village’ is frequently heard around the world, China cannot afford to neglect this pivotal issue.
Another highly significant area of study that has been gaining popularity and interest in recent years among both Chinese and international scholars is China’s female population. In a strongly patriarchal, Confucianist society women’s lives, historically, were given little, if any, consideration in literature. In addition to this, research on China in general was done using mainly quantitative methods at the macro level. As the world grows smaller through globalization and improvements in modern technology, and with a growing international interest in feminist interpretations of events, women have become a key focus in research and writing. More work needs to be done on this segment of the population that Mao Tse-Tung often quoted as “holding up half the sky”. If China’s females are to contribute effectively to the economic development of their country their pivotal role in this process must be examined. According to feminist theory, qualitative research methodology may be the most useful way of gaining this knowledge (Beck, 1990; Devault, 1990; Hsiung, 1998).

**Literature on Northwest China**

China’s Far West compromises the nation’s least-developed, minority inhabited, outlying provinces including Shaanxi, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai and Xinjiang. Known as one of the remotest regions of China, the Northwest is a land with a long history. It is home to and beginning of the ancient trading route, the Silk Road. Traditionally, minorities in the Northwest have been animal breeders and nomadic pastoralists. In modern times, the Northwest region has drawn the attention of top Beijing policy makers. Ever since Deng Xiaoping began opening China’s economy to the outside world in 1978 with the Open Door Policy, the eastern coastal provinces such as Guangdong and Zhejiang have reaped a great share of the wealth and benefits.
In recent years, the most important and pressing challenge for China’s policy makers has been to draw jobs and foreign investment to the country’s rough interior. Much of this area is home to China’s fifty-five nationally recognized minority groups. These minority lands are of great strategic and economic importance. The lands are under-populated, contain important mineral resources and the bulk of China’s forest reserves. Many of the most western provinces and autonomous regions stretching from Yunnan in the south to Xinjiang in the north form China’s inland poverty belt. This area makes up more than half of China’s land mass and is home to 286 million people (Roberts, 2000). At present, the Ministry of Education is helping with the “Great Development of the West” as it allows minority high school students from Xinjiang Autonomous Region to study in twelve eastern cities including Beijing and Shanghai. “It is good to cultivate high-level manpower with the economic and educational resources in developed areas and it would promote the great unity of the various ethnic groups and people” (China Education News, 2000, September 20). In spite of these facts, little is known about China’s Northwest, even by the majority of Chinese living on the East Coast of the country. To most foreigners the Northwest is “terra incognito” (Barnett, 1993, 34). Even less is known about the local dynamics in higher education in this remote hinterland of Outer China. Thus, adding to the knowledge about the Far West could help fill a serious gap in understanding China as a whole.
Literature on Ethnicity in China

Defining Ethnicity in China

The Chinese word for minority is ‘minzu’. This single compound term represents meanings for people, nation, nationality and ethnos. It was first conceptualized in 1903 in an effort to find a political rationale for the state. ‘Min’ or the notion of people, and ‘zu’ the fiction of descent, are understood in China to mean a group that does not share the ethnic or national characteristics of the majority of the population. Characteristics of a group may include such things as race, language, religion, customs, diet, morals, traditions, dress, and social organization. ‘Minzu’ is only used for the fifty-five recognized minority groups in China. The rest are simply referred to as ‘peoples’ or ‘renmin’ in Mandarin Chinese.

“Analyzing China’s national minorities as a single entity is virtually impossible. Great cultural, regional, and development differences exist between them” (Postiglione in Hayhoe, 1992, 308). There are many ways of differentiating minority groups in China according to various criteria. Such things as population size, location, size and terrain of the region occupied by a minority group, and the degree of importance of a religious tradition are types of criteria used by many researchers today and in the past. In Western terms, an ethnic group can generally be defined as a group of people who share a common origin and a commonality of cultural features such as language, food, clothing and customs. These traits distinguish a minority from other such groups (Brown, 1996, 2). Recently, rapid global modernization has made ethnic distinctions even more pronounced in the PRC. The ‘have’ groups of the booming East Coast contrast with the ‘have nots’ of China’s interior.
China's Ethnicity Policy History

The PRC has never been at all homogenous or monolithic in nature. At present, the country lists fifty-six officially recognized nationalities. Currently, there are fifty-five 'shaoshu minzu' or national minority groups. Minorities make up about 8%, or 91.2 million, of China's population (Hayhoe, 1992, 308). More than three-quarters of China's minorities belong to the nine largest groups. Four of these groups are represented in this study. The Zhuang minority numbers 15.5 million. The Manchurians total 9.8 million and the Hui 8.6 million. The Tibetans are fewer in number at 4.6 million (Buck in Van Horne, 1997, 281). These figures are difficult to confirm as many minority people live in China's remotest areas making data collection extremely difficult. These minority population figures may continue to grow if minority families enjoy their two-child policy allowance.

It was during the Long March (1934-35) that Chinese Communist leaders became very aware of the highly varied ethnic mix of peoples they encountered in China's interior. The Communists were forced into making promises to these minority peoples if and when the Chinese Communist Party came to power. After the revolution in 1949 and Chiang Kai-Shek's forces had fled to the island of Taiwan, over four hundred different ethnic groups applied to Beijing for state recognition. Only fifty-five of these four hundred were officially recognized by the national government.

The Chinese Communists adopted the Russian Stalinist method for determining nationality categories, or ethnicities, in post-1949 China. Stalin, in Marxism and the National Question (1914), believed in "the four commons". He wrote that, "A nation is a historically formed stable community of people arising on the basis of common language, common territory, common economic life and a typical cast of mind manifested in a
common culture” (Herberer, 1989, 30). Thus, if groups could prove that they had these four elements to the Chinese government they were rewarded with official minority group status.

China’s minority policies have historically emphasized a Marxist evolutionary model which places nomadic society at an earlier stage of development than agricultural society. In 1949, all people within the borders of the PRC were divided into five major stages of modes of production; primitive, slave, feudal, capitalist and socialist. It just happened that the Han ethnicity, itself not a homogenous group, found itself higher on this scale than most of the other nationalities. Tibetan culture, for example, was believed to be less developed than Han culture as it could be found at the feudal stage of production. In spite of this, it appears that today China’s minority groups are given favourable official treatment in many ways. Two examples stand out. Minority families are allowed and encouraged to have two children versus their Han majority counterparts who are officially only allowed to produce one offspring (Hayhoe, 1996, 133). In addition, minority students, especially those from rural areas, are given an extra ten points on their university entrance exam scores in order to make them more competitive with their ‘better-educated’ Han majority peers.

Information about China’s nationalities has become more widespread only in the last twenty years or so (Herberer, 1989, 6). Minority peoples are now well known for their ability to evolve rich material and spiritual cultures that act in harmony with the harsh environments in which they tend to live (Harrell, Bamo and Ma, 2000; Wan, Jia and Ma, 1999). “Since national minorities can be used or exploited for or against a country’s interests, in multinational states the stability of a country quite often depends
on the system of relations woven among its different peoples" (Herberer, 1989, 3). On paper, the new Chinese Constitution of 1982 enhanced the rights of China’s minorities. The document stated that greater education would be provided for the minorities; higher national investment in national minority areas and further guarantees of cultural freedom, including the right to religion and language (Burger, 1987, 223). Presently, there are benefits attached to ethnic identification in China. These include birth-planning exemptions, educational advancement, employment opportunities, tax reductions and political mobility. The dialogue is ongoing between ethnicity and cultural identity and is regularly defined in changing social contexts. All of these measures were designed to act in liaison with the Four Modernizations policy.

“In theory, the socialist regimes offer the most enlightened policies towards minority peoples” (Burger, 1987, 222). However, in reality, the Chinese policy towards the minorities remains one of eventual assimilation through education and Han settlement of indigenous homelands. Ethnic separatism has always been a major concern to leaders in Beijing. Moreover, although cultural diversity and racial traditions are allowed to thrive, Beijing, in accordance with the Four Modernizations, will not allow minority groups to flourish at the cost of backwardness and poverty. “Any policy which is supposed to be in the interests of the minorities concerned is inseparable and intrinsically linked to development measures” (Herberer, 1987, 3). The reason why minorities are so critical to the Chinese scheme of modernization is threefold. Minority groups occupy 62% of China’s total land area. Minority groups occupy over 90% of the border region of China. The greatest portion of the country’s natural resources, including forestry, mining, medical bases, tropical crops, and animal husbandry industries are located in minority
regions. Thus, there are many rich natural resources and security interests in minority areas (Postiglione, in Hayhoe, 1992, 308). For this reason, "Great stress is laid on the education of the minorities' children with advanced technical, medical and agricultural higher education built on a framework of compulsory basic learning in the national tongue, Putonghua" (Sinclair, 1987, 113). The central government wants to ensure that China's interior progresses along with the rest of the country.

**Local Versus National Ethnicity Identification**

"Nationalities do not live in vacant spaces but influence and enrich each other" (Herberer, 1987, 5). The notion of nationality identity in China depends, in part, upon local situations of power which are constantly in flux. Thus, central national policy coming from Beijing often has little to do with what actually happens at the local level. Each particular place, down to the individual village level, is unique in the way national identity is defined and fostered. In addition to this, individuals from the same minority group living within the same community might have different ideas about national identity. There are also many variables at work that one must consider when trying to make sense of minority area progress at the local level. Such things as low levels of industrial development, urbanization, health care quality, communication and transportation infrastructure, educational provisions and general standard of living all play a role in the state of affairs and power structure at the grassroots level. Thus, "local identity is, more than anything else, fluid. It is composed of overlapping potential groups or categories tied together by different kinds of ties of commonality. State classifications, by contrast, are rigid, boxing every person into one and only one of a set of non-overlapping groups. Both kinds of identity are negotiated: local ethnic identity is
negotiated continuously; state ethnic classification is negotiated only during periods of classification or change” (Harrell in Brown, 274). Perhaps one reason why the categories of national minorities have never really been challenged is because of the traditional Confucian preoccupation with order and harmony in a society held precariously together by proper relationships (Gladney, 1998, 116). The original notion of classifying Chinese people into different ‘minzu’ in the early 1950s was an important part of maintaining balance within the Chinese nation-state. At present, there appear to be no political threats or challenges to the legitimacy of the Chinese nation-state. The United Nations has even accepted Tibet as part of China. Therefore, at this point in time, China can afford to have a more open policy towards its minority population. However, if outside threats appear, strictness on minority policies will, without question, increase.

Existing literature explains how academic experts, using their own terms, define ethnic groups. Unfortunately, what are obviously missing are ethnic members’ own definitions and descriptions of themselves. “We do not know the characteristics of the members of a particular ethnic group as seen through their own eyes.” In addition to this, systematic analyzes of opposing viewpoints among members of the same ethnic group are needed (Hsieh in Gladney, 1998, 96).

**China’s Northwest Minority Population**

Some anthropologists explain that there are two Chinas, Inner and Outer. Inner China lies within the Great Wall to the east of Tibet where the population is densely settled and farming is a key industry. This is the home of the Han majority; about 95% of the nation’s people live there. Outer China lies both in the far north in Mongolia, and in the Far West in Tibet, Qinghai, Gansu and the deserts of Xinjiang. Only one in twenty of
China’s people live in this part of the country (Sinclair, 1987, 10). In broad terms, China’s minorities live in Outer China. The Road of the Emperor was the earliest name given to the route which connected the court of the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) to a fabled barbarian kingdom named Rome in the west. The famous land route then took on the names of Jade Road and Fur Road before, only a century ago, becoming known as the Silk Road. Many different peoples travelled along this ancient path of trade in China’s West including bandits, herdsmen, nomads, imperial garrisons and adventurous merchants (Sinclair, 1987, 67). The multinational descendants of these groups remain today and make Northwest China a highly diverse and multiethnic place.

**The Hui Chinese Ethnic Minority**

Of all of China’s official minority nationalities, probably the most is known of the Hui, the nation’s second largest minority group (Gladney, 1998, 109). For this reason, and the fact that almost half of the study participants are Hui, this chapter will focus primarily on this ethnic group. There are nearly twenty million Muslims in the People’s Republic of China with the Hui group making up about half of this figure (Gladney, 1991, vii). The Muslim Chinese are descendants from intermarriages between Arabs, Persians, Mongolians, Turkish Muslims and Chinese over the last 1,200 years. The Hui nationality makes up the PRC’s largest Muslim group of the ten nationalities recognized by the state as taking Islam as their nationality religion. The Hui are the most numerous religious minority outside the broad Buddhist-Confucian-Taoist mainstream. This minority represents nine percent, or 8.6 million, of the total Chinese population (Gladney, 1998, 33).
The Hui are an interesting minority group as, "For the Hui, there is no "we". There is no community, nor individual, that even begins to represent all the Hui in China" (Gladney, 1998, 5). The Hui do not have a language of their own that unites them, making them stand out compared to the other nine Muslim minority groups in China which speak mainly Turkic-Altaic dialects. The Hui also don't have a distinctive nationality costume, music or literature that distinguishes them from some of the more vibrant ethnic minority groups in China. The Hui, or Muslim Chinese, are made up of a widely varied group of communities living in differing geographical areas around the country. They are the most widely distributed of all of the minority groups in China. Each group of Hui scattered throughout China experiences their ethnicity in a very different way. Hui identity is rooted in local, shared ideas of descent based on accepted texts and rituals. Thus, each Hui community is affected differently, depending on unique circumstances in each area. There is a strong Hui presence in China's Northwest.

Although the religion and the practice of Islam are strongly associated with the Hui people, as Dru Gladney notes, even religion is unable to define the Hui as an ethnic group (Gladney, 1998, vii). The Chinese translation and interpretation of Islam are central to understanding Muslim identity in China. Gladney’s thesis of what it means to be Hui in the Chinese nation-state, is helpful in our understanding of this minority group. The Hui are China’s major urban ethnic minority. As stated earlier, the Hui are typical in the Northwest. Xinjiang, Ningxia, Gansu and Qinghai make up China’s "Qur’an (Koran) belt" (Gladney, 1998, 33). The Hui even have their own autonomous region in Ningxia in the rural Northwest. In this area, religious identity is the most important aspect of Hui identity. "In these communities, to be Hui is to be Muslim, and purity (qing) derives from
the individual’s moral and religious integrity” (Gladney, 1998, 52). One’s ancestors hand down Islamic tradition. “Hui identity in the Northwest is more than an ethnic identity; it is ethnoreligious, in that Islam is intimately tied to their self-understanding” (Gladney, 1998, 58).

The Chinese characters for ‘pure and true’, qing zhen, are encountered wherever Hui people are found in China. ‘Pure and true’ stand for the two aspects of Islam: purity (qing) in the sense of ritual cleanliness and moral conduct. Chinese Muslims see the ‘pure’ aspect of their belief system as a reflection of their concern to morally legitimate themselves in a Confucian society, preoccupied with moral propriety and order. Truth (zhen) comes with the notions of authenticity and legitimacy. ‘Truth’ distinguishes Chinese Muslims as monotheists in a place where polytheistic belief and practice historically predominated. Thus, for Chinese Muslims, “The concept of qing zhen governs all of one’s life” (Gladney, 1998, 28).

Thanks in large part to the recent works of Dru Gladney (1991, 1998), much is known about this diverse and populous minority group. As the Hui and other ethnic minority groups in China “interact with local contexts, both their ethnic identity and the government policies influencing them will change” (Gladney, 1991, 337). Gladney and the author of this study believe that this interaction has led to the Hui emerging as a minority people who are an important thread in the fabric of China’s rich nationality society. In order to make sense of how various minority groups are interacting in their local contexts with the variables of modern living more qualitative grassroots research must be conducted.
The Tibetan Ethnic Minority

Tibetans are another minority group that has a strong presence in China’s Northwest. This ‘minzu’ is primarily defined by its practice of Tibetan Buddhism or Lamaism which combines the spiritual world with the political one. Tibetans have many chances to improve their lives through reincarnation. This practice “provides a distinctive approach to human existence and to the passage of time” (Karan, 1976, 14). Tibetan Lamaism is a unique form of Buddhism. “To a greater extent than any other nationality in China, the Tibetans live their faith. It is part of every waking moment, and even as a nomad herdsman cuts the throat of a sheep that provides his basic diet, he utters prayers of forgiveness” (Sinclair, 1987, 83). The traditional role that local monasteries (lamaseries) played and continue to play in Tibetan language and religious education is significant (Wan, Jia and Be, 1999), both inside the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) and in Tibetan communities throughout China. Many Tibetans feel the intense need to preserve their unique traditions or face losing their distinctive cultural identity.

The Tibetans are known to live in the highlands where the climate is cold and dry. In 1958 there was a large scale Tibetan revolt against the Chinese government causing the Dalai Lama, the spiritual and political leader of all Tibetans to flee to northern India. The Tibet question has always been a key issue in the nationality policy of the PRC. Beijing’s concern is that Tibetans may try to break the existing political order to establish their own states or to associate with pre-existing nation-states.

The Zhuang and Man (Manchurian) Ethnic Minorities

Both the Zhuang and the Man are among the largest ethnic minority groups in China. Many Zhuang and Man peoples still live in their traditional homelands on the
western periphery of the Chinese state. The foreign Manchurians ruled China during the Qing Dynasty from 1644 to 1911. Since the beginning of their association with China, they have tried to maintain their identity as separate from the Han Chinese. However, the Qing rulers found it difficult to establish an administration that protected minorities, including themselves, from the increasing pressures of sinification. Continuous Western Han settlement and modernization have resulted in the Man and Zhuang slowly losing their ability to live any kind of traditional rural life. Thus, the Zhuang and Man minorities have a long history of assimilation into Han majority culture and way of life, making their cultural differences to Han society fairly minimal in comparison to other less assimilated ethnic minority groups present in the Northwest region of the country.

For the many ethnic groups in China, government policy exerts a tremendous influence on ethnic change and identity. The religious question is intricately linked to the nationality question for ethnic minorities. “Professing one’s religion means professing one’s own nationality, and demonstrates a heightened awareness of nationality” (Herberer, 1989, 116). For this reason, the PRC will have to make adjustments to its treatment of China’s minority peoples in order to respond to the greater role that ethnic and religious identity have in today’s world. In addition, researchers must pay careful attention to fluctuating power relations between the government and local ethnic groups, both externally and internally (Gladney, 1998, 174). The Northwest will most likely continue to get more and more attention as Beijing tries to bring the area into the successful economic realm of the East.
Much has been written about higher education in China (Angelasto and Adamson, 1998; Hayhoe, 1996; Hayhoe and Pan, 1996; Hayhoe, 1989; Martin, 1986; Pan, 1996). In order to understand China's modern system of higher education, it is necessary to make sense of traditional Chinese education which was heavily influenced by Confucius. One important area that both Western and Chinese writers have written about continuously over time is the role that Confucianism, classical learning (jingxue) and moral education have always played, and will continue to play, in Chinese society. Therefore, when speaking of Chinese higher education one cannot ignore the significant role of this indigenous Chinese way of life.

Confucianism is the “state religion” and is comprised of a set of social structural principles, ethical precepts and behavioural norms (Stacey, 1983, 203). Confucianism aims at achieving balance and harmony in Chinese society. Since ancient times, China has stressed the importance of ethical and moral education in the training of government officials and citizens alike, with the aim being consolidation and maintenance of the feudal political system. During the 7th century in the Tang Dynasty, comprehensive civil examinations were created. These exams were based on the literature and thoughts of Confucius. These ancient examinations can be seen as the precursors of the modern day Chinese university entrance exam.

Confucius and his followers saw Chinese culture as superior to any other culture. This culture was something that outsiders could acquire. The Chinese state and the Chinese family were perfect forms of organization as they were based on the truest moral principles, such as loyalty and filial piety. Maintaining these principles made China
Chinese. Confucianism offered limited grounds “for erecting barriers against absorption of outsiders and indeed saw expansion of China through transformation or assimilation of non-Chinese as the natural state of affairs” (Eberly in Brown, 1996, 19). The spread of Confucian education has always been a part of an ambitious program to unify the empire through moral and cultural transformation of the non-Han population. In today’s Chinese universities, building students’ character can take on greater importance than passing on knowledge. This harks back to the ancient and prominent role played by Confucianism in Chinese society.

As many scholars and government officials studying China have found, quantitative data is useful in terms of supplying macro and demographic trend information. However, descriptive, rigorous qualitative research conducted at the grassroots level is necessary in order to help us understand and identify “when local conditions have shaped a program that should be evaluated in ways which are not generalizable” (Hayhoe and Pan, 1996, 149). Thus, investing in the study of China’s higher education system, particularly in the Northwest, is an investment in the nation’s future.

**Higher Education of China’s National Minorities**

National minority education is one of the most difficult areas of research within Chinese educational studies (Postiglione in Hayhoe, 1992, 332). Most research on minority education has focused on the form of education, goals, bilingual education and academic achievement. “Fewer studies have used local research to examine how the content and form of state education influences members of different minority groups’ ways of conceiving of their status as minorities, their ethnic identification, and
expressions of ethnicity (Hansen, 1999, 7). Until recently, foreign educational researchers have largely ignored the specific problems of education among China’s minority peoples. Most Chinese studies of minority education in the PRC focus on the usual elements: enrolment, retention, and graduation rates among minority students.

The study of minority higher education and minority education in general is also the study of power relations and the authority to define and categorize minority groups. Since the reform period of the 1980s, the Chinese government has paid increasing attention to the development of education among the non-Han majority population. Yet, minority areas are still characterized by low levels of school enrolment and educational attainment at all levels. Education is seen by some scholars as the reproduction of culture which is the most guarded element of national minorities. Culture assures a minority’s existence. Education, then, can provide a measure of the state of national minority modernization in China (Postiglione in Hayhoe, 1992, 307). The main goal of education policy with regards to China’s national minorities is thus to assimilate them into the mainstream Han system.

Generally, there are significant gaps between the educational accomplishments of minority groups and the Han majority. Simply increasing the provision for education of minority students is most likely not enough to compensate for the economic and societal factors that have a strong impact on these groups. “Affirmative action policies can isolate, identify, and stigmatize minorities as often as they homogenize, unify, and naturalize majorities” (Gladney, 1998, 1). The current Chinese indigenous concept of ‘minority education’ implies education that is geared to all of the minority groups in China. It is believed that this group is largely homogenous and therefore requires pretty
well the same special considerations in education. Moreover, it is widely believed in China that standardized education will acculturate or assimilate, ‘ronghe’ in Chinese, all minority people with their various languages, religions, family structures, customs and economic lives. Another dilemma in minority education is that most national minority educational research is done by Han Chinese rather than by minority scholars themselves. The continued and expanded study of national minority education, by minority, Han majority and foreign researchers is paramount to both the educational and cultural survival of China’s minority peoples, those officially recognized by Beijing and those applying for future recognition.

It is in the field of education that the Chinese government is trying to improve the standard of living of China’s minority peoples. Bright young students are encouraged to further their studies, especially in the fields of agriculture, science, medicine and education, fulfilling the goals of the Four Modernizations. Yet, it remains that, “Of all the areas in the field of Chinese education, the gaps between policy and practice are particularly difficult to discern in regard to national minority education” (Postiglione in Hayhoe, 1992, 315).

It has therefore been suggested that outsiders, foreign scholars, be used as qualitative researchers to help identify the parts of the higher education system in China that deal with the largest portion of cultural ‘difference’, the minority groups (Lincoln in Hayhoe and Pan, 1996, 150). Lincoln believes that the views of outsiders could help to identify sharp cultural contrasts and aid Chinese educationalists in making sense of their system, evaluating it effectively and designing appropriate curriculum for the future.
Women in China And Feminist Literature

There are several Chinese folk sayings that reflect the attitude towards females in China. "Girls are maggots in the rice." "It is more profitable to raise geese than daughters." (Evans, 2000, 92). The Chinese woman's destiny over time can best be captured in the following quotation from an older woman to a younger one: "I want you to remember this: in China a woman is nothing. When she is born she must obey her father. When she is married, she must obey her husband. And when she is widowed, she must obey her son" (Evans, 2000, 93). Traditional Confucian thought based on social order and harmony, require each person to fulfil his or her designated role in society. Individual interests are subordinated to the higher interests of party, class and nation.

In 1982 the new Chinese Constitution offered women equality with men. The document guaranteed that women could enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life. In 1992, a decade later, the government went on to pass the Women's Rights Protection Law. This document was to 'protect' women's health, which equated to their reproductive capabilities. In reality, the laws put limits on the types of work women were allowed to perform. Women were being treated solely along biological lines, thus reinforcing the stereotype that the primary role of women is reproduction. Thus, establishing equal status for China's female population has not yet been achieved. Gender discrimination continues, both in the cities and in rural areas.

In modern Confucian, patriarchal China, women are still seen as the weaker sex. Women today have two jobs. They are part of the Four Modernization's effort by day and wives and mothers at night. Although this is the plight of women around the globe, Chinese women feel the pressure more intensely. In this Confucian society where women
are nothing, to work "the second shift" (Wolf, 1985, 57) is that much more of an effort. Chinese women, both rural and urban, majority and minority, are constantly being judged. During the day, they are judged on their performances in the economic work world outside the home. At night, they are judged on their traditional roles as caregivers, wives and mothers. In a country where patriarchy has such historically firm roots, women are easy targets.

Feminist literature in general is voluminous, varied and based on "the belief that women experience oppression and exploitation and that this experience varies, considering the multiple identities of race, class, culture, ethnicity, sexual preference, age and physical abilities" (Glesne, 1998, 12). Feminist writers thus interpret their topics in a critical way (Bunch, 1987; Miles, 1996). Much has been written about Chinese women, especially in recent years (Evans, 2000; Gilmartin, Hershatter, Rofel and White, 1994; Hayhoe, 1996; Mak, 1996; Rofel, 1999). In spite of this, the language barrier continues and limits Western access to writing and research coming from female writers in China to the outside world and vice versa. There thus appears to be a void in connecting this style of critical feminist writing with current literature on China written by, and/or on, the nation’s women. On top of this, the important subgroup of China’s minority women is even less visible in academic writing. China’s minority women are in fact a gendered minority within an overall national ethnic minority population. There is an inadequacy of data on the attitudes, opinions and stories of these particular women in the PRC. Moreover, the research that is done often focuses strongly on women living in the urban areas of the vast country as they are easiest to access and to study. There is much to be done regarding researching women in China’s vast countryside and interior regions, again
at the local, grassroots level. Author Jing-qiu Liu adds, “gender disparity in education is so pervasive that it is difficult for a person to understand unless one has experienced it” (Journal of Educational Thought, 1998, 43).

In the past, researchers have looked at women’s income, job opportunities and access to education from a quantitative perspective. However, like all aspects of the vast and complex nation of China, you can’t generalize Chinese women. One, big problem with research today on women in China is that the country is so large and so populous; “a handful of women in Beijing are no more typically Chinese than are fifty women in Xi’an, or for that matter in Taipei” (Wolf, 1985, 55). There are a variety of identities, locations, and voices to be heard at different moments in time from women around the country; from eastern cities to the rural inland and remote mountain areas. It is therefore vital that researchers study the complex ways that women are caught up in relations of power at the local level in which they live on a day-to-day basis, and to make sense of their united role as female members of the Chinese entity. Studying individual minority women and their personal stories at the grassroots level would be an effective way of making sense of women who have always been considered as members of a family or a community, “not as autonomous, isolated individuals” (Woo in Wolf, 1985, 289). These women each have their own, personal stories to tell.

Some authors argue that women in modern, post-Mao China are curiously still playing their ancient role, that of good wife and mother more intensely than any other role (Hayhoe, 1996). If women in China are ever to change their plight, they will need to unite and make sense of their experiences as women. They must be treated as real actors in the development process of their nation as it moves into the modern, global
marketplace at full speed. As one gender and development expert writes, “if women’s self-empowerment is seen as a key route to gender equity, an important first step is the efficient provision of space, resources and time that will allow women to articulate their own interests”. In the end, “the main actors must be those whose voices have been suppressed for so long within the different arenas of development” (Kabeer, 1994, 304). Women in China must have their voices heard and their stories told. To a great extent the fate of women in China in the future depends on how the government proceeds with economic modernization. The question is, will Beijing listen to half of China’s population, it’s women?

**Chinese Women in Higher Education**

“Educational level, as a basis for women’s social participation and their potential for development, is both an important criterion for measuring women’s social status and a major condition affecting all aspects of their social status” (Chinese Women and Society, May-June 1993, 9). It is obvious then that studying women in higher education in China makes good sense if one is to understand the nation as a whole. Ruth Hayhoe has written a great deal about women in higher education in China. She has collected telling statistics on women in higher education and eloquently outlined current issues facing both female students and faculty. Hayhoe notes that one of the most significant issues faced by women in China today is the difficulty in obtaining graduate degrees. Without a basic graduate qualification, promotion in the academe is impossible. “Thus a whole category of young faculty is taking shape, the majority of them women, who will carry heavy teaching loads, while lacking the opportunity for career development” (Hayhoe, 1996, 132). Hayhoe has also suggested that Chinese women in the academic world may not
only be held back by barriers they face within China’s developing market economy and in the traditional Confucian society where men are more valued than women, but also by the “lack of resolve within themselves, and a degree of eagerness to take up feminine roles, earlier denied to them, under the greater personal freedom of the reform era” (Hayhoe, 1996, 132). In addition to this, Hayhoe notes that in the Northwest, some women academics, both at the entry level to university as students and those seeking faculty positions, received their appointments by a kind of default. Male students and faculty have and continue to choose going east to the highly developed and economically rich coastal areas, thus opening up positions for women in their local university settings. Hayhoe has also written that the difficulties noted above are intensified for China’s minority women in higher education (Hayhoe, 1996).

Li Xiaojiang is one of the key figures in the development of a Chinese feminism. She is a well-known national leader of this cause in China and has been working hard to develop a strong women’s studies movement in Chinese higher education and a women’s literature that gives voice to Chinese women. She is sometimes called the ‘guojia baoku’ (national treasure) of Henan province (Jaschok, 1998, 328). Li was the inspiration and architect of the first institution of higher education with a women-centered program in China; the Zhengzhou International Women’s Institute in Zhengzhou, Henan province. The goals of this institute, that opened in 1993 and closed twenty-two months later, included supporting women in their pursuit of a meaningful higher education and raising female self-awareness (zijue). This institution gave female students with low national university entrance exam scores who had attended poor rural secondary schools a chance at higher education. Li is known nationally and internationally for her research on women
and her organization of women’s studies conferences in the PRC. Much has been written about the obstacles facing China’s women both in life in general and in the sphere of education. However, there appears to be a definite need for more inquiry into the success stories of women who have been able to overcome the many boundaries associated with being female in China. Perhaps more research in the area of women in higher education in China will help promote Li’s feminist goals and aid China’s females in their quest for personal, educational and political development. After all, “Higher education, an international indicator of status for women, imparts skills that create options for women economically, socially and politically” (Adamson, 1998, 299).

**Indigenous Knowledge Literature**

**Western Literature on Indigenous Knowledge**

Ethnic groups around the world each have their own particular body of cultural and societal knowledge which is constantly evolving. For this reason, it has always been extremely difficult to come up with an all-encompassing definition for the troublesome western term ‘indigenous knowledge’. In order to help breakdown the paradigm of ethnic minority women in higher education in Northwest China it is essential to make an attempt at understanding this multidimensional expression. At any given time, distinguishing what is indigenous versus foreign knowledge, or information obtained from ‘the outside’, by a group or an individual, is a great challenge. One might ask if there is a distinction to be made between knowledge, beliefs and values. Moreover, is it necessary to define what is personal or individual versus shared cultural knowledge? The stories that minority women tell, in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis, include varying degrees of
indigenous knowledge. The role that this knowledge plays in both their personal and professional lives as women is key to making sense of their particular individual lived experiences. Understanding the important role that indigenous knowledge plays in Chinese society, both majority and minority, also helps to explain how these women identify and define themselves as a gendered minority in higher education, and to articulating what they see their roles are in developing a modern China.

In the West, indigenous knowledge is believed to be the basis for local decision-making in areas such as agriculture, health, and natural resource management. Indigenous knowledge (IK) is an integral part of community practices, institutions, relationships and rituals. Indigenous peoples themselves are most likely the most disadvantaged group in the world. They are at the bottom of social indicators in almost every country and have among the lowest levels of literacy and expenditure on education (Van de Fliert, 1994, 56). For this reason and many others, scholars, researchers and development planners have, in recent years, become very interested in the role that IK plays, particularly in the area of international development. Achieving a balance between theory and practice is key. Peter Croal, a senior environmentalist at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has compiled an up-to-date Canadian definition and information bank of indigenous knowledge. Croal notes that with the birth of the global village and the interconnectedness of the world in all spheres, especially the economic one, indigenous knowledge has become an important variable to modernization in this new century. Croal believes that working together with a wide and hybrid knowledge base as a global community is key and should be the goal of modern development planners and national leaders. Croal states that traditional knowledge systems should be respected and applied,
where appropriate, in development planning. Traditional knowledge systems around the world are slowly being eroded or overtaken by industrialization and resource extraction. This is a great shame for "indigenous peoples embody knowledge, even wisdom, that we may have lost, or never had. Their loss would impoverish us for, just as the world needs genetic diversity of species, it needs diversity of knowledge systems" (Labelle in Croal, 2000, 4).

Today, indigenous peoples live in unison with their IK in the framework of modern national barriers (Burger, 1987, 6). IK is not static in nature. It is always being updated and revised. IK incorporates the fusion of local knowledge systems with modern, external sources of information such as radio, television or other media. IK is highly specific to gender, community role and age (Croal, 2000, 7). Vocabulary that helps to describe IK includes: holistic, spiritual, broad in time, narrow in geographical focus, focused on people, valuing age and wisdom, and a partnership with the land. IK is always changing according to context. Indigenous knowledge is dynamic. It is seen by economists as social capital because "it represents generations of learning about how to organize productivity which is one of the most valuable forms of capital any people has with which to pursue its economic development goals" (Croal, 2000, 9). At present, research is needed at the micro level. Little information is available on what IK is in the local, grassroots communities of the world.

Alan Emery, another expert on indigenous knowledge, prefers the term traditional knowledge (TK) to Croal’s IK. Emery sees traditional knowledge as a process of acquiring and passing on knowledge and understanding. TK contains information collected over time. Traditional knowledge can be in the form of values, stories, language
and social relations. TK is about experience-based relationships with family, animals, places, spirits, and the land. Traditional knowledge is a world-view (Emery, 2000, 23). TK includes a group’s sense of identity which is often intricately tied to the land. Elders in a group often speak in the form of metaphors and parables that can have many levels of meaning. Traditional knowledge is the work of a group of people sharing their ideas in order to gain insight into the world around us. TK has four elements: respect, trust, equity and empowerment. Storytelling is the traditional way for many peoples to talk about their lives. Emery recognizes that women have a distinct perspective and values that are crucial elements of the whole body of traditional knowledge. These ideas cannot be represented by men and thus deserve special attention of their own (Emery, 2000, 7).

Author Seana McGovern adds more to current Western thinking on indigenous knowledge. In political terms, McGovern believes that education helps to generate a sense of national identity among the citizens of a country. The diffusion of certain knowledge through formal education is thought to intensify the modernization or development of traditional societies. There is therefore a need for serious consideration within international and comparative educational discourse for indigenous ideas and methods of producing and transmitting knowledge. “Indigenous systems of knowledge and educational processes differ across communities in relation to the knowledge and activities that are considered valuable, productive and necessary for a society to function” (McGovern, 1999, 105). This means that the quantification of indigenous knowledge is not very useful. Qualitative descriptions of particular communities and personal narratives of experience and understanding of indigenous beliefs and practices help to provide us with valuable information about these societies. Effective, meaningful
research at the grassroots level is necessary and should focus on how these ways of knowing interact with the dynamic variables in the political, social, and economic realms of a society.

Another expert on indigenous knowledge, Ladislaus Semali states that indigenous peoples use IK to enhance their lives. For Semali, IK does not exist in a vacuum. Language and the environment are intimately connected and language is key to maintaining indigenous knowledge systems. IK involves living in harmony with one’s environment and using intuition and creativity to find solutions in daily life. Indigenous knowledge tends to be strongest in rural areas and is deeply connected to sustainable development. IK cannot be segmented into disciplines like Western knowledge is. Unfortunately, tension often exists between what indigenous people consider important skills for the community and what schools sanction as curriculum (Altbach and Kelly, 1978, 1984). Unfortunately, academic gatekeepers tend to overlook the importance of indigenous knowledge as an integral and meaningful element of the curriculum. Semali believes that indigenous knowledge can be transformative in nature and can be used to foster empowerment and justice. There are therefore substantial benefits to be gained by re-examining the role that IK plays in the academic curriculum. A rethinking of our purposes as educators is needed (Semali, 1989, 33). Academics at all levels should become researchers in order to bring IK into curriculums at every level of education. In short, “a scholarly encounter with indigenous knowledge can enrich the academy” (Semali, 1989, 44).
Chinese Indigenous Knowledge

How do these complex Western notions of indigenous knowledge relate to the distinctly Chinese definition? Chinese IK has a long history of over 5,000 years of culture and learning. IK in China has its roots in the ancient philosophy of Confucianism. Moral education, including how to be a good person, entwined with religion, make up an important part of this nation’s definition of the problematic term. Another specific trait of Chinese IK that is relevant to education is the emphasis on collective versus individual interests. The Chinese definition is multi-layered in nature. There is a national definition, accompanied by individual majority and minority group definitions. In many minority groups women tend to be the primary carriers of indigenous knowledge. In fact, with so many variables playing a role it can even be said that each individual Chinese citizen, majority or minority, urban or rural, has his or her own unique IK. Where then do one’s personal knowledge and the shared knowledge of a culture meet? It is important to realize that the economic policy of the Four Modernizations, a Chinese indigenous term, has strongly influenced how the term indigenous knowledge has been interpreted and used in China’s recent history. Thus, like its Western counterparts, Chinese indigenous knowledge definitions, at all levels, are constantly changing and evolving. Defining the term indigenous knowledge in a Chinese context is therefore extremely challenging.

Lu Jie, a specialist in Chinese moral education, states that there is a strong disposition in China to rely on Western pedagogical theories. She feels that Chinese IK should frame the future of the development of learning in China and that the nation needs to develop its own indigenous pedagogical theory as a contribution to world pedagogy. Lu also sees the need for the integration of Western and indigenous Chinese cultures.
"The more opportunities for international communication through cultural exchange, the greater the understanding and ability to absorb appropriate outside cultures. This is important, given that the development of a nation's culture and pedagogy require strong indigenous roots blended with exotic ones" (Lu in Hayhoe, 1994, 274). Lu points out that China has a population of approximately 1.1 billion, 1 billion of which are farmers (Hayhoe, 275). This means that the development of Chinese pedagogy must be independent in nature and not just an imitation of foreign educational systems. Basic educational problems in China must therefore be solved in a Chinese context, where national dignity and self-confidence can be fostered. Lu concludes, "we must support indigenousness in the long run, but face the world with an open door" (Hayhoe, 276).

Economic globalization is a challenge to China's minority groups and to the maintenance of their indigenous knowledge bases. A weak link in Chinese higher education appears to be the disregard shown to indigenous/ traditional culture and knowledge. IK is seen as being feudalistic in nature and thus not useful to China's quest for rapid economic development and inclusion in the world economy. However, perhaps both national Han majority and various minority Chinese indigenous knowledge bases can, in fact, be transformative in nature and play an important role in Beijing's plan for modernization, especially in the sphere of education. The questions to be posed then are: In today's China, what is the modern role of both majority and minority traditional Chinese indigenous knowledge? Who are the current and future stakeholders in Chinese IK? What are the implications of ignoring minority indigenous knowledge in minority education at all levels? And finally, will minority IK survive in a quickly changing China?
A Synthesis: Ethnic Minority Women in Higher Education in Northwest China

In spite of all of the literature already mentioned on the PRC in the areas of Northwest China, ethnicity, higher education, women and feminism, and indigenous knowledge, there appear to be significant gaps in available information. How do these interwoven topic areas interact with each other at the local level around the country, especially in the Northwest region? The research topic of ethnic minority women in higher education in Northwest China has been addressed in academic discourse in a very limited way. Academic study on this geographically and ethnically distinct group of women needs further exploration. New documentation in the form of rigorous, feminist qualitative research will increase both our Western understanding of this particular group of ethnic minority women active in higher education, and explain how they themselves are making sense of their own lived experiences. As the anthropologist Ruth Behar writes: "Emotion has only recently gotten a foot inside the academy and we still don’t know whether we want to give it a seminar room, a lecture hall, or just a closet we can air now and then" (Behar, 1996, 165). Perhaps it is time to give emotion and women’s storytelling a front row in the lecture hall of the modern academe. Most importantly, future writing in this area will allow the women themselves to have their voices heard, both individually and as a distinct group in China. These voices could help them, and us, make sense of the direction of China’s quickly changing future. This research might also shed some light on China’s higher education evaluation system and current curriculum; how both can be recreated to help the nation deal effectively with the complex challenges of the global world. Continued dialogue between all of China’s peoples, all of its stakeholders, must occur. After all,
Information is power. It is an essential tool that enables you to get by in an increasingly complex world. It opens doors to those who possess it and closes them to those who have no access to it. For this reason, information has become a fundamental human right which all women, men and children of the planet should benefit from, without distinction. (Roulet, 1999, 121)

As one China expert notes, we must be wary of generalizations about China that "are not rooted at least partially in study, observation and experience at the grassroots level. Unfortunately, the images of China prevalent in the West have too often lacked such a basis" (Barnett, 1993, 3). An old Chinese saying "zouma guanha" meaning "viewing the flowers from horseback" captures this sentiment (Barnett, 1993, 32). It is therefore necessary to get down off the horse, walk wide-eyed with ears open, along the mysterious and dusty trail in order to truly understand this great nation and its people and, in particular, its ethnic minority women.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to contribute to an understanding of minority higher education in Northwest China, with a particular focus on the experiences and opinions of minority women working in the field of higher education. This chapter discusses the research methodology used in conducting this inquiry. Steps in the actual research process are explained from conducting the interviews, to participant profiles and data analysis techniques. Limitations of the study and triangulation are also mentioned.

Methodology Rationale

The choice of method depends on the goal of one’s research and on the phenomenon being studied. To achieve an understanding of the phenomenon of minority women in higher education in Northwest China, qualitative research conducted within a feminist framework is most appropriate. Important characteristics distinguish feminist research from traditional, hierarchical quantitative designs. Feminist strategies can be linked to qualitative techniques that are especially helpful in understanding women. “Collaborative work has always been a key part of feminist practice” (Behar, 1995, 227). Feminist interviewing techniques allow data gathering to occur in a highly interactive and interdependent way between interviewer and the interviewee, allowing both individuals to benefit from the research process. Feminists believe that language is a potential source of power for women. Good listening between women talking to other women results in learning about differences and our common experiences (Devault, 1990). The researcher
thus takes on the role of therapeutic listener. Rapport is established early on in the research process and contributes to the building of a rich database through the telling and sharing of stories among women. Through the use of feminist research techniques information about women’s lives can be gathered that is unattainable through traditional interpretative methods. Both the researcher and the interviewer can participate in collaborative consciousness-raising, a key component of feminist theory. All participants become important and active stakeholders in the research process.

Although employing a Western qualitative methodology in this study, I have not tried to arrange and analyze the participants’ views, experiences and understandings in terms of categories deriving from Western theories. This thesis is not an attempt to evaluate participants’ observations through Western eyes and ears. The categories present in this work derive from what the participants themselves said in response to open-ended questions I asked them during the interviews. My objective has been to represent and give voice to, as faithfully as possible, the stories and opinions of my participants.

**Research Question**

Initially, one main question framed this study. Participants were asked: Can you tell me the story of your involvement with SULCP? If, near the end of an interview, a participant had not touched on certain points, I planned to ask additional questions (Appendix A). I discovered that all three visiting scholar participants were familiar with SULCP and could easily answer my proposed questions. However, in China, most of my participants had no idea what SULCP was. Thanks to her impressive interviewing skills and a clear understanding of my research interests, my translator Han Hui managed to elicit rich and highly useful information about ethnic minority women in higher education.
from each interviewee. The combination of interviewing professors who are liaison officers in SULCP and active members in the planning and running of the study with actual minority women on the frontlines of education at Northwest Normal University was highly effective. Based on the ideas of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985), the research progressed and themes naturally appeared and evolved throughout the inquiry process.

**Participants**

Participants for this study were selected in two ways. In Canada, OISE Professor Julia Pan introduced three visiting Han majority and minority professors at OISE/UT to me. These scholars, two men and one woman, had come to OISE/UT from different areas of the PRC to participate in the SULCP program. In China, twelve ethnic minority women working in higher education, as teachers, minority administrators or office staff in various departments at Northwest Normal University in Lanzhou, Gansu Province, were chosen for me to interview by Professor Wang Jiayi, my China contact at the university and host of my fieldwork experience. These women come from four different minority groups in China namely Hui, Zang (Tibetan), Zhuang and Man (Manchurian). Most of these women completed their undergraduate degrees at Northwest Normal University and have gone on to work there upon graduation from their programs. Each female participant currently lives in the city of Lanzhou.

I did not know any of my participants before the commencement of this study. In Toronto, I arranged one-to-one interviews with the visiting scholars which I conducted in the OISE building. Interview lengths varied from 1 to 1.5 hours. Two of the visiting scholar interviews were conducted in mid-May 2000, a month before I left for China.
Only one interview out of a total of fifteen used English as the primary language of communication. The majority of interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. The last visiting scholar interview was conducted in August 2000, about a month after my return from fieldwork in China. This was the last interview I conducted and was in both English and Chinese. In China, my translator and assistant, Han Hui, a graduate student at the host university, arranged interviews for me. Interviews ranged in length from 1.5 to 3 hours. The longest interviews were with Tibetan participants. Locations of the interviews included participants’ offices on campus and my room in the visiting scholars building. I was in Lanzhou for only twelve, short days from mid to late June 2000. In this time, all twelve interviews were conducted, sometimes up to two and three interviews a day. Professor Wang Jiayi agreed to sign the administrative consent form for university participants in China. At the commencement of each interview, participants were given my business card in order for them to be able to contact me in the future. They were also given a bilingual consent form (English and Chinese) outlining my study and asked to sign and return it to me. Anonymity was a condition of participation in this study. Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

**Participant Profiles**

Fifteen participants were interviewed for the purposes of this study including two males and thirteen females. Broken down by number and ethnicity the participants fall into the following groups: (1) two Han majority; (2) seven Hui minority; (3) four Zang (Tibetan) minority; (4) one Man (Manchurian) minority; and (5) one Zhuang minority. Participants range in age from twenty-eight to the early fifties. Following, is an individual profile of each participant. These brief profiles are meant to give the reader a fuller
understanding of where participants are coming from, making an interpretation of their opinions more contextualized and meaningful.

**Visiting Scholar Participants**

1. DeChang

   DeChang is from a famous village in Jiangsu province on the East Coast of China. He is a member of the majority Han ethnic group. He is in his forties. DeChang holds a doctoral degree in educational psychology from Nanjing Normal University. He is currently a professor at this institution. His areas of interest include educational and learning psychology and secondary school moral education. DeChang has visited OISE three times in the past nine years as a visiting scholar and member of the SULCP team. He has been involved with SULCP since its inception in 1995.

2. ChengMing

   ChengMing is a member of Lanzhou’s Tibetan community in Gansu province in Northwest China. ChengMing is currently a professor at the Northwest Minority College in Lanzhou and is very proud of his role of liaison officer between the international scholarly and Tibetan communities. He is in his forties. ChengMing’s area of interest is minority education, particularly the training of Tibetan teachers and the development of bilingual (Tibetan and Chinese) curriculum materials for Tibetan minority students. He has visited OISE twice in the past four years and has been part of the SULCP team since 1997.

3. XianMing

   XianMing lives in Shaanxi province. She is of Han ethnicity and is in her late thirties. She has a degree in educational administration. XianMing currently works at the
Institute of Education Studies in Xianyang as both an associate professor and as an administrator in the teacher development program at her university. She is very interested in Tibetan minority education, especially the education of girls and women. XianMing has been part of the SULCP team since 1997 and really values her role in this project. She has visited OISE twice in the last four years.

**Northwest Normal University (NWNU) Participants**

The following twelve ethnic minority women staff members at Lanzhou's Northwest Normal University share many things in common. They are all strong, brave, busy women who enthusiastically and eloquently articulated and shared their opinions and personal stories about their experiences of minority higher education with me. All twelve consider themselves to be life-long learners with a passion for living. Every single woman expressed her feeling of closeness with the minority community at the university and her desire to offer ideas to help make changes to minority education. These women play many roles simultaneously: wife, mother, educator and student. The married participants all have very strong, supportive husbands who have contributed to their wives' successes in the academic world. Interestingly, many of these women completed their undergraduate and/or graduate degrees at the university for which they now work. Moreover, these women graduated at the top of their class in their various disciplines. They all serve as strong role models for future female minority students, both in their own communities and throughout China.
**Hui Participants**

1. **FengLin**

   FengLin is from Lanzhou. She received a scholarship from and studied at Beijing Normal University and is one of the few full female faculty members at NWNU with minority ethnicity. FengLin is the oldest participant in this study. She is particularly interested in elementary education and teacher training. FengLin has heard of several international cooperation projects in education over the years. She is very committed to her students and feels a special bond to those with a minority background. She works very hard to make her students’ university experiences meaningful.

2. **YunXian**

   YunXian is a member of the Ningxia tribe. She is from Ningxia province, grew up in the city and was educated in Han culture. YunXian is therefore not very familiar with the culture and religion of the Hui nationality. She is thirty-two years old. Her husband is Hui. She has a Master’s degree and would very much like to pursue studies towards a Ph.D. She is very interested in conducting research on and developing the role and usefulness of informational technology in bilingual minority university curriculum. YunXian believes that language is the key barrier to minority students’ progress at university.

3. **YuoFang**

   YuoFang is from Lanzhou. She is forty years old. She grew up in the city and identifies herself as Muslim. Her husband is also Hui. She holds a Master’s degree and has just begun a doctoral program (September 2000). YuoFang’s academic background is in the field of biology. She is both a teacher and an administrator in her department.
YuoFang is very interested and works very hard on behalf of all of her students but feels a special connection to those who have a minority background. She feels it is her job to ‘cultivate’ her students as well as to educate them in her field of expertise. YuoFang has strong views on women’s treatment in the academe.

4. KeZen

KeZen is currently a Master’s student and teacher in the Mathematics department at NWNU. She is one of the youngest participants in this study at twenty-eight years of age. KeZen has a very strong work ethic in both her personal and professional lives. She identifies herself as Hui and makes sure her students realize her shared minority status. She tries to be a role model for all of her students. KeZen very much wants to continue her education and enrol in a Ph.D. program. She is also very interested in the possibility of studying abroad. However, her strong Hui upbringing creates a contradiction for her. She feels that she must pause in her studies and fulfil her traditional role of wife and mother at this point in time. Her husband is Hui and supports both her desire to study and her dutiful sense of becoming a mother.

5. ChenGung

ChenGung is from rural Jiangjiasun, a traditional Hui community near Tianshui. Her husband is also Hui. She is twenty-eight years old. She has an undergraduate degree from NWNU in Chinese and currently works in administration. ChenGung contributes her strong work ethic to her strict Hui upbringing. She feels that the Hui religion (Islam) has had a significant impact upon her life. ChenGung would very much like to change jobs. Her dream job is to be a high school teacher or a journalist. Administration is not her area of interest. She has many ideas about how to improve minority education.
6. GaoJia

GaoJia was born in Xi’an, Shaanxi province but considers herself as originally from Kaifung City in Henan province. She is one of the oldest participants in this study at forty-eight years of age. GaoJia studied music at NWNU and currently works in the university’s Student Work Center. She has worked for the university for over twenty years. Although raised in a traditional Hui community, GaoJia feels she has more in common with Han people. During the Cultural Revolution she went to the countryside to serve her nation. She was the only minority person in her group. This experience changed her lifestyle so much that she consciously married a Han man because she felt that she had more in common with Han culture than with her own native Hui ethnic group. In spite of this, GaoJia is very committed to minority student administration and works very hard on behalf of minority students.

7. HaiBo

HaiBo is Hui. Her father is Hui and her mother is Han. She is from Ningxia Autonomous Region. She studied chemistry at NWNU and currently works as a cultural exchange officer in the university’s Foreign Affairs Office. HaiBo has studied in Europe and loves to travel. Her husband is Hui but they will probably educate their future children in the Han system. HaiBo considers herself to be a good Muslim. She is thirty-two years old. She hopes to study overseas again if she has the chance as she feels that this is a very good way of learning. HaiBo feels strongly about allowing minority students the chance to compete equally with their Han counterparts at university.
Tibetan Participants

1. AnNing

AnNing is from the rural Ganan area, a place of both agriculture and animal husbandry. She is in her early thirties. She went to elementary school in her hometown where she studied both Hanyu (Mandarin Chinese) and Zangyu (Tibetan language). She feels that this early strong bilingual education is the reason for her academic success at university. At NWNU she studied political science and law. She would like to continue her studies and earn a Master’s degree. AnNing’s husband is Han. They were classmates at university. AnNing is currently working as a minority student administrator. She is very interested in returning to her hometown area to do research on Tibetan culture and religion and to find out how these things affect education there. AnNing if very committed to improving minority education. She feels especially close to Tibetan students.

2. TianQing

TianQing is from the Ganan area of Gansu. She works in the data information office of the History department at NWNU. She is not a teacher. She is thirty-six years old. TianQing majored in Tibetan language at the Northwest Minority College in Lanzhou. Her husband was her classmate there. He is Mongolian. TianQing is very interested in improving her skills in English as she needs to pass an exam in this particular foreign language before she can be promoted. She feels regretful about her age and the limited time available to study for this exam. She has instead taken on the primary role of supportive wife and caring mother. TianQing has many ideas about how
to improve minority education. She is very concerned about ensuring that her daughter’s education is the best it can be.

3. MeiYen

MeiYen is from the rural Sunan Tibetan community. She studied music at Tianjin Conservatory and was the first minority student to pass through this institution. Her own limited elementary education (horseback elementary school) caused her to take two years of preparation courses before she could begin her undergraduate program. Six years of studying made her want to begin her work life, even though her professors strongly encouraged her to continue on in a Master’s program. MeiYen’s husband is Han. She is in her mid thirties. She came to NWNU to teach in the music department after her graduation. She is passionately committed to her students, both Han and minority. MeiYen is an outspoken advocate of the preservation of the Tibetan culture and way of life and works as a mediator on campus between minority and majority students. She is passionate about Tibetan people and their precarious place in modern China. MeiYen worries about a vanishing Tibetan culture. She feels minority education, especially for women and girls, must be improved.

Man (Manchurian) Participant

BaoYu

BaoYu is in her late thirties. She first majored in geography and then went on to study philosophy at Jiaotong University in Shanghai. BaoYu currently teaches Marxism in the Philosophy department at NWNU. She would like to go directly into a Ph.D. program at some time in the future. Her father is Man, originally from Harbin. Her mother is Han from Shanghai. BaoYu’s husband is Han. She feels that she has been very
much assimilated to the Han culture. Her family rarely celebrates traditional Man festivals anymore. However, if she still lived in a Manchurian settlement she says she probably would. She considers Lanzhou her home. BaoYu is very concerned with her minority students’ inability to comprehend her teaching due to their lack of knowledge of Hanyu (Mandarin language). She is very interested in developing a textbook written in language that is easily accessible to minority students.

Zhuang Participant

LiLin

LiLin is thirty-two years old. She began studying at NWNU in 1989. She majored in Biology. LiLin is originally from Guangxi province. She doesn’t speak Zhuang language at all. LiLin’s family observes very few Zhuang traditions. She admits that she has been assimilated into the Han culture. LiLin works at the Minority Students Center at NWNU. She is single and very much enjoys her freedom. She feels meeting a man that isn’t intimidated by her intelligence is a difficult thing to do. LiLin has many ideas to improve minority education. She feels that the education of China’s female population is crucial to the successful development of the nation’s future. LiLin is interested in continuing her studies and accessing information that can allow her to serve minority students effectively. She would like to learn more about minority student management. She feels it is her role to serve the minority community of which she herself is a part.

All participants were very co-operative and very eager to describe their experiences to me. An interpretive analysis of participants’ ideas, opinions and stories is provided in Chapters Four and Five.
Data Collection

Data was primarily collected through semi-structured interviews. All participants were interviewed only once. Though semi-structured interviews provide structure to the question-and-answer interview format, there is an opportunity to address issues raised independently by participants. The interviewer’s role as therapeutic listener is crucial during this type of interview. I kept a comprehensive journal including observational, methodological, theoretical, personal and analytical notes and memos, and detailed daily progress reports throughout the entire research process. All interviews were audiotaped. Following the interviews, the audiotapes were transcribed in two lengthy stages. My OISE friend and translator, Wen-Hsing Luo, listened to the Chinese language interviews and translated what she heard, in detail, into English onto another audiotape. This additional, time-consuming stage was very useful as it allowed me to ask clarifying questions and to hear the ideas and initial analysis of Wen-Hsing. I also took detailed ‘field’ notes during this stage which served as another means of triangulation. When all interviews had been translated into English, I then transcribed them verbatim into a computer file. Fieldnotes taken during and immediately preceding interviews were added onto each interview transcript. English language copies of the transcripts were then emailed to participants themselves, if they had access to email. All other transcripts were emailed to my China translator who then forwarded them, on my behalf, to individual participants. They were asked to review their transcripts for accuracy and make comments that would help me better understand their experiences. Only three participants responded with corrections and additional information. All three respondents were the
visiting professors to OISE who had a good command of English and access to their own email accounts in China.

While doing fieldwork, I also collected data informally by observing the happenings at the university and exploring the city and outlying areas of Lanzhou. A trip to the Gansu Provincial Museum and conversations with locals I encountered proved to be very useful and provided me with a local view of Lanzhou’s interesting and vibrant history.

**Data Analysis**

All transcripts, fieldnotes and various types of notes recorded in my journal were reviewed and coded continuously during data collection in order to identify themes. Data collection and data analysis are simultaneous activities (Glesne, 1998). The Chinese to English translation process, followed by my own transcription in English of interview data, allowed me to become very familiar with my participants’ views and ideas. All information was analyzed throughout the research process because data analysis leads to further data collection.

My first step in formal data analysis was to read through all transcripts and underline whatever jumped out at me without any self-censoring. I tried to keep in mind my initial research question, along with the main topic of minority women in higher education. In the beginning, I was particularly interested in participants’ ideas about indigenous knowledge, how they defined it and how they saw its role in minority and mainstream Chinese education, their own particular role in education, and their opinions on international joint projects, like SULCP, that China has with other nations. Each segment of data that fit with my preconceived hunches was underlined in pencil, but was
initially left formally uncoded. I then recorded all possible themes mentioned by all participants in my research journal. Data was then re-examined chunk by chunk. Short phrases or one to two word codes were attached to each segment to represent the participants’ topics of discussion. Colours were used to indicate coded material in the transcripts, fieldnotes and research journal by highlighting data segments. Each data unit was then recorded separately onto an index card noting the source and location of the data, the respondent’s name and the possible themes it might fit into. Two sets of transcripts were used in the evolving coding process to allow for clearer viewing of codes and themes. This step also acted as a form of initial triangulation allowing for crosschecking and verification of codes and themes from one transcript set to another.

After all fieldnotes and transcripts were coded, all data units were re-examined for themes. These emerging, overlapping themes were reviewed during meetings with my thesis committee members to verify their accuracy and relevance. Names were given to the themes and they were constantly examined during the entire research process and subject to revision, elaboration and deletion. I continuously referred back to the main research question and to the general topic of minority women in higher education to see if evolving themes appeared to be relevant to the nature of the inquiry. Themes were also compared to each other noting overlapping ideas and connections. Data units were then recategorized and placed into a theme or themes. Each theme was then compared to all the others. Relationships between themes were noted. Miscellaneous data units were kept in the most appropriate theme files and left for later revaluation. The constant comparative method of data analysis was used throughout the research process (Glaser
and Strauss, 1967). I have included, in Chapters Four and Five, extensive quotations of my participants to make their own voices be heard.

**Limitations of the Research**

As researchers are the main data-collection instruments in qualitative studies, conducting a value-free inquiry is next to impossible. I constantly recognised my dual role of both insider and outsider. I, like many of my participants, am a teacher and a learner. I had to be very conscious of my own background in Western education and its influence on how I interpreted data. As a foreign researcher in China, I was conscious of my role as an outsider in the research process. How much information could I really gather as an outsider? How much were my participants really telling me?

The language barrier was the most difficult limitation for me. From the very beginning, with the written translation of my consent forms and question sheets into Chinese, through to the actual experience of the interviews and the final translation of interview data, I found that my ability to participate as fully as I wanted to in my capacity as primary researcher was linguistically limited. Although I had studied Mandarin part-time over a three-year period, my ability to communicate orally was still at a very basic level. As for reading and writing, my skills were even more limited. I was therefore very dependent on my two language helpers through every step of the process. I am extremely fortunate to have had such tremendous and supportive linguistic and analytic help at each stage of this research journey. Without both Wen-Hsing and Han Hui, I would have been unable to conduct my research at all. As both women are graduate students themselves and familiar with the research process, I felt comfortable relying on their language and research expertise to help me in my inquiry, both in Canada and in China. Moreover, as
we spent more time together trying to make sense of the data, both women voluntarily offered their ideas on possible developing themes and further questions to investigate. A connected issue, the written consent and question forms I presented to my participants were written in traditional Chinese characters. My participants could read these forms but it appeared that they might have been more comfortable reading simplified script with which they are more familiar. In addition, when I emailed transcripts back to participants in China they were in English, which is a second or third language for most of these individuals. If I had translated the transcripts into Chinese the completion of this thesis would have been prolonged. The ability of most respondents to understand their English transcripts was limited as were their chances of commenting on them, as most participants do not have access to email facilities.

As language was a major barrier to my research, I have to wonder about the quality of information that I could have collected had I been able to conduct the interviews by myself. During most interviews, I found myself unable to interact with participants on the collaborative, feminist level at which I would normally wish to be involved. I was limited in my initial understanding of what participants were saying and could often not ask for clarification or elaboration of issues and themes they brought up until it was too late, after the interview. Thus, I had to trust and rely on my translators, my collaborative researchers, to use good judgement and collect rich data on my behalf. I feel very confident in saying that although my own role in the actual interviews was more one of attentive observer than primary researcher, Han Hui conveyed my research questions very successfully to participants and elicited information that is meaningful and highly relevant to this study.
The issue of rapport is an important one in any investigative study. Amazingly, rapport didn’t seem to be a problem for my participants and me. Even though I had never met any of my participants before and couldn’t communicate with them effectively in Chinese during the interviews, data collection went as smoothly as could be expected under the circumstances. As a visitor to China, I question whether I would have been allowed to interview participants on my own anyway. Overall, I felt very welcome in the three-way conversations that took place during interviews, between myself, the translator and the participants. Woman-to-woman conversation is a very effective feminist interview technique, even across language and cultural barriers.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation of the data was therefore an important element in the analysis process. Triangulation also helped in verifying emerging themes and codes (Glesne, 1998; Matheson, 1988). Triangulation strategies included: (1) using member checks, taking data and interpretations back to the participants to check for accuracy; (2) having my thesis committee and study group comment on my findings and challenge any biases or concerns with the data; (3) analyzing my fieldnotes, journal entries, participant transcripts and additional ‘field’ notes taken during the crucial Chinese to English translation stage; and (4) providing rich, thick descriptions of the data so that readers could make decisions on the transferability or comparability of it to other contexts.

The following two chapters outline the findings of my study. Chapter Four focuses on themes one to eight and Chapter Five discusses the ninth theme, participants’ recommendations for minority higher education.
Chapter Four: Findings – Themes One to Eight

Introduction

This chapter describes and begins to analyze the many rich findings of the fieldwork experience, both in Canada and in China. Nine themes were uncovered during the coding and analysis stages. All of these themes are intricately related and intertwined. For clear writing and reading purposes, the themes will initially be explored one by one. The themes of this study are: (1) Special University Linkage Consolidation Project (SULCP) and other joint international scholarly programs between China and other nations; (2) minority teachers and administrators; (3) influential individuals in participants’ lives; (4) identity; (5) the ‘double’ dichotomy: rural versus urban and majority versus minority; (6) indigenous knowledge; (7) Tibetan issues; (8) men versus women; and (9) participants’ recommendations for minority higher education. This last theme of participant recommendations is extensive and thus deserves a chapter of its own. Chapter Five is devoted to this last theme. Each section begins with a brief description of the theme followed by participants’ interview explanations. Subheadings have also been used to help organize the material.

Theme #1: Special University Linkage Consolidation Project (SULCP)

SULCP was the starting point of this thesis. The original research plan involved asking participants about their involvement with SULCP (Appendix A). The three visiting scholars provided most of the data on this theme, as many of the participants in China knew little or nothing about this particular joint international project. However,
insightful general comments about international cooperation are noted and play an important role in coming to understand the role of international cooperation in the development of China’s minority higher education.

**Visiting Scholars’ Comments**

When DeChang visited OISE for the first time in 1991 as a visiting scholar, before joining SULCP in 1996, he enjoyed taking courses in the Applied Psychology Department. He then returned to China to pursue doctoral studies. DeChang said that he really enjoys his learning and sharing experiences at OISE. He has been there three times. “In 1991 I studied for almost ten months and got some new knowledge from Canada. When I went back to China, I spread this knowledge and published my book.” ChengMing explains SULCP as a cooperative effort between the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Chinese government. During his most recent OISE experience, he thanked the Canadian government, CIDA and Professor Julia Pan for their help in the continuance of Tibetan culture and education. “We’ve devoted ourselves to minority education. I hope that in the future the international community will cooperate directly with minority people. This kind of cooperation will help the global understanding of our minority people.” Both of these Chinese scholars see their participation in SULCP as highly meaningful. They are both learners and teachers when they visit OISE and when they are in China, playing host to visiting Canadian scholars. DeChang notes that knowledge produced by SULCP endeavours goes to many levels; university pre-service teacher training students, secondary school students, and teachers and school administrators working in the field. DeChang notes that “I have also been invited to explain this new knowledge (what was learned in Canada) to local and provincial school
teachers. They invited me to come and speak to them.” DeChang’s key area of concentration in the SULCP project is the development of secondary school moral education programs and teacher training of this curriculum. “In this five year project, we’ve organized eight secondary school teachers to do lessons of moral education. We have also held two conferences on this topic.”

DeChang said that visiting Canada is important because “some western knowledge is more modern than Chinese knowledge, like in the areas of Psychology and Educational Psychology.” By studying at OISE this knowledge transfer from West to East is accelerated. When asked about his specific role in SULCP DeChang answered that his role has four parts.

The first part of my role is as a professor at the university where I organize secondary school teachers to teach moral education. The second part of my role is to spread new knowledge from western countries to China. I am also a liaison between Canadian and Chinese scholars and teacher participants. My third role is to teach this new knowledge. The fourth part of my role is to let Canadians know about China. We invited three OISE professors to China and helped them to know China’s situation. They also talked to students. These Canadian academics will help promote Chinese educational ideas in Canada. We cannot only just import new knowledge from Canada or Western countries. We should also contribute to the world.

DeChang noted that when he published his book a few years ago most parents and teachers were very interested in what he wrote. They thought the information would be useful to Chinese education. DeChang said that the information produced would be published in Chinese journals, allowing many people to read the findings, like teachers and university students. He believes that it is crucial to increase the readership of Chinese scholarly work. He says Canadian academics should help their Chinese counterparts to publish their work in English language journals.
Sharing knowledge is very important for the development of education in China. By remaining only in China and not learning from western countries, China is asking to slow down its educational progress. By sharing knowledge across borders, cultures, and learning systems, China’s own educational system will grow and modernize more quickly.

Like DeChang, ChengMing is very proud of his role in SULCP. His area of work is Tibetan minority education. Most recently, he has worked as an editor and as a translator on a Tibetan elementary school textbook. “If I can act as a bridge between the international and Tibetan communities I will be very proud.” ChengMing believes that it is very meaningful to work on international comparative education. “From the first day of school, if we teach children concepts about global education and international comparative education it will be very meaningful for their cultural development later on.” ChengMing also feels that it is best if international scholars work directly with the minority people themselves. “In this way, the results will be better.”

XianMing’s area of concentration within SULCP is female minority education. She, like her male counterparts, believes that Canadian expertise can be incorporated into the Chinese project. When remembering her OISE experiences she notes, “I got inspiration and enlightenment from learning about research methodology in Canada where there is a lot of research being done on women’s issues and women’s studies. I hope that China can continue doing research on women’s issues.” Her interest in qualitative research methods is notable.

I’d like to learn more in Canada about qualitative research and to improve my understanding of it. When I go back to China I can use this research method better in order to realize some questions people have never really looked at before. So far I have published one article in Chinese about qualitative research methodology.
XianMing also admitted that before SULCP she didn’t have any ideas about indigenous knowledge and its role in higher education. “Working on an indigenous knowledge project can help me look and care about reality.” She believes that Canadian and Chinese participants can look at their ideas and incorporate and collaborate with each other.

XianMing says she comes to Canada to learn. “I came to Canada to learn, things I can’t learn or don’t have access to in China. After having been to Canada my vision has widened. My eyes are open wide to new things.”

**Northwest Normal University Participants’ Comments**

FengLin knows little about SULCP but is familiar with other joint international programs. She said that help from the international community is appreciated in terms of financial support; “financing the cultural exchange”. She said this kind of help is meaningful. “It is very helpful for underdeveloped minority communities.” FengLin also noted that this help is limited in certain ways. “This help is only for the short term. Still change is happening. I really appreciate this. You can see the changes happening in China. It’s becoming a state of law and order.” In addition to this, FengLin noted that the reaction of many minority teachers on campus (NWNU) to a past Canadian project was disappointment. Only one person controlled this project. These teachers believe that it should have been cooperative in nature. “Lots of minority teachers participated in the project. They should be informed about what’s going on.” FengLin also stated that control of joint international projects should be at the grassroots level. “It’s supposed to be that all participants have their voices heard in the project but minority teachers feel that their voices have not been heard. There has been no opportunity to voice our opinions.” Project participants have no ownership of the project. FengLin says that it’s
not right to waste participants’ time. In addition, she feels that money often falls into the wrong hands. Funding should go directly to the grassroots level, “where change is occurring and where teachers and students are working hard for positive change.” Funding should not go to the policymakers but to the frontline workers who are familiar with what is happening at the grassroots level. Another problem with joint programs is that in some cooperative projects a minority scholar is needed. FengLin said that a minority scholar is quickly chosen, without consideration if he/she is the right person or not. “This is not fair. Sometimes, even the minority scholar has never been in the minority area under investigation. This makes no sense.”

On a more positive note FengLin reflects, “From the current situation in China, it’s quite often that people from the outside are more persuasive, more convincing than people inside China are.” In non-Chinese countries emphasis is put on minority education and minority people can compete with majority people equally in their countries. FengLin feels that in the PRC a lot of government officials don’t understand minority culture and language and fail to emphasize minority teachers and minority education. “In China the status of minority teachers is lower than their counterparts in other countries.” By participating in joint programs FengLin hopes that Chinese minority education will benefit from international experience with other minority populations. ChengMing agrees with this idea. He says Canada itself has a large minority population and is therefore interested in developing minority education, making it a good partner for China.

YunXian has a strong interest in joint projects and knows about SULCP’s work in promoting female minority teachers. She would like to study in Canada but feels that she must first develop a better understanding of the research environment there. She believes
that attending conferences is a good way to share information. Likewise, YuoFang is keen to participate in knowledge and cultural exchanges. She says she learns a lot at these events. YuoFang reflected on the differences in higher education between Canada and China. “In Canada, if you want to and you have the money you can study. In higher education in China there are fewer female teachers. It is more difficult for females to be successful in higher education in China.” At the end of her interview, YuoFang acknowledged that “Talk is freedom.” Sharing information amongst different people is important and she appreciated the chance to express her views to another woman and foreign researcher.

BaoYu pointed out that since the beginning of China’s Open Door Policy in 1978 and the nation’s subsequent modernization, Chinese people accept a lot of concepts from industrial countries. BaoYu questions this.

Should we just learn from others? People here just take whatever from the West and think it’s great. They give up their own traditions. I hope we can revive old ideas. We are not against anything from the outside. There is good stuff but we need to keep our good Chinese concepts too.

KeZen admitted that she had participated in a similar interview about women in higher education with another researcher. This is a topic that is consciously on her mind. HaiBo noted that she too thinks about higher education a lot. However, her focus is more on the cultural exchange aspect. Through her work in the university’s Foreign Affairs Office she sees herself doing frontline work. “I’m doing promotion for our school. It’s very important work. It’s like a window to the world with the eyes of NWNU. A lot of foreign students bring something new and different to our school.” MeiYen’s ideas about international joint programs are also encouraging. She said that there are very few opportunities to be interviewed about minority culture, education and life by both
foreigners and Han majority people. She said she very much enjoyed expressing her views, telling her stories and letting her thoughts be documented.

When asked, all participants considered themselves to be learners first and educators second. Those who commented believe that international scholarly exchange, like SULCP, provides important opportunities for meaningful learning. However, China must be careful when letting foreign information in to not lose traditional Chinese concepts and culture. There must be a balance of knowledge transfer. All study participants, both the visiting scholars and female minority staff at NWNU had many thoughtful suggestions to improve and expand upon SULCP and future joint international programs. These suggestions will be described in detail in Chapter Five.

**Theme # 2: Minority Teachers and Administrators**

Minority teachers and administrators share many things in common. In this section these two groups of people will be described, both on their own and in conjunction with each other. The primary goal of this study became to uncover the feelings, opinions and stories of female minority educators in higher education. Initially, only minority teachers and visiting scholars were going to be interviewed. Once in China, the opportunity to speak with female minority administrators presented itself. This supplementary participant group’s valuable contribution adds significantly to the rich findings of this study and helps to explain the crucial role played by administrators in minority education. Subheadings are used to distinguish different parts of the main theme. These parts include: the qualities of a good minority teacher, the many roles of minority teachers and administrators, minority administrators, and Tibetan minority teachers.
The Qualities of a Good Minority Teacher

There are many qualities that a minority teacher should possess in order to be both an effective educator and a leader in the minority community. These characteristics were noted by participants as being especially important for minority versus majority Han educators. "Minority teachers are more responsible for what they are doing. They have a stronger sense of responsibility than other teachers towards minority education." FengLin believes that minority educators work hard for their own people. These teachers have strong love and compassion for minority groups. FengLin elaborates; "Being a minority teacher I have a deeper understanding about minority education and a deeper feeling about developing it. Without minority culture, we (minority peoples) won't be able to make something different about ourselves." FengLin believes that because minority teachers understand their own cultures they are better communicators with minority people. It is therefore the responsibility of these teachers to promote education back home in their own minority communities. Several participants noted that minority teachers have significant advantages over Han majority teachers, namely language, innovativeness in their teaching and love and compassion for minority people.

Another characteristic particular to good minority teachers is that they are very interested in issues related to minority students in general, or more so than their Han teaching counterparts. YunXian states, "minority teachers are interested in all minority students, not just those from their own specific minority group." Although she herself is Hui, YunXian is fascinated with researching the many issues associated with Tibetan culture. She has travelled to Tibetan settlements to learn more about this topic and to contribute to Tibetan minority education. YunXian believes that minority teachers must
know and be familiar with the indigenous knowledge of all of their students. Teachers must pay respect to the cultural backgrounds of their students. “That’s a basic requirement.” LiLin agrees. As a minority administrator, she needs to know what is related to the religion, customs and traditions of her minority students. Moreover, “Government regulations must be clear to you. This is very important for an administrator.” LiLin comments that teachers need to know about educational psychology because minority students might have different psychological development than their Han counterparts. This collective minority consciousness appears to be very important to both minority teachers and administrators.

A good minority teacher sets an example for his/her minority students and must therefore have high standards, both for his/her own teaching and for the students. KeZen always tells her minority students that she is a minority person herself. “Based on this mutual understanding the reaction in class is quite positive.” KeZen feels minority teachers should not lower their standards no matter what the ethnicity of their students. “As long as they got into university, they need to be at a certain level. Students need to compete with each other, equally and fairly.” KeZen goes on to say that she herself must work hard and help her minority students. However, “they shouldn’t be favoured just because they are minority. They should study as hard as Han students do.” KeZen feels it is her responsibility to pass on her strong work ethic to her students. She hopes to set an example for them of what minority people are capable of achieving in the academic world. KeZen also stated that Han teachers are often more lenient towards minority students than minority teachers are. Han teachers generally don’t have high expectations for their minority students. KeZen feels that this is unfortunate.
HaiBo thinks that the good nature of females makes them naturally effective teachers. Women are especially good at teaching early childhood education. MeiYen agrees: “Female minority teachers are like mothers to their students. There is a natural, loving connection. Female minority teachers open up the eyes of their students and increase their interest in life.” MeiYen keeps in regular touch with her students. She talks to them on the phone. Like a loving mother she says, “Don’t be so strict and critical of formalities. You need to look into the nature or quality of your students. Look at everybody as individuals. The good nature of a person is very different from his/her cultural development.” MeiYen believes that it’s crucial not to judge minority students based on where they are from, especially if they come from impoverished areas “where the underdevelopment of culture is evident.” MeiYen says that Han teachers often judge minority students and label them as slow learners. AnNing feels that minority teachers must have a good heart, be friendly and understanding and be able to communicate with their students in their native languages. She affirms that in rural Tibetan communities, “girls go to their teachers for help, for advice and knowledge. They are too shy to go to their own mothers.” Thus, minority teachers take on the role of mother and effectively also become surrogate sex education teachers to their rural students, explaining how to live a good life, body care practices and sexual relations information. According to participants, this additional mothering role is especially important for minority teachers. Their Han counterparts simply fill only the one role of teacher.

FengLin believes that “education is not just simply conveying knowledge. It’s about educating people on how to be better human beings.” Yuofang provides the perfect example. Part of being a good person involves continuously pushing yourself to improve.
"The good thing about being a minority teacher is you always have opportunities to improve yourself because you always need to think of your students looking at you. You need to evaluate your own behaviour and improve yourself, keep learning." As a busy teacher and administrator, YouFang comes into contact with many new students every year. "I need to be able to deal with people to do my job." In order to improve herself she reads and listens to literary shows on her Walkman on the way to work. YouFang sees herself as a role model for her minority students. "You have a very deep effect on the people you are working with. If you are doing a good job, then you have a good effect on people and vice versa." This notion that minority teachers serve as constant positive examples of what can be achieved by minority students is important. These teachers feel extremely dedicated to helping their students improve themselves. Participants noted that Han teachers generally do not share this same level of devotion and dedication to their own minority students.

Several other qualities of a good teacher were noted. Minority teachers are very innovative, more so than their Han counterparts. Several participants explained that being a minority person involves surviving in a predominately Han environment. Keeping one’s minority identity requires being innovative. Many participants stressed that teachers should be encouraged to use this quality in their teaching. LiLin believes that "you need to think about the whole picture, not just part of it. You must be flexible in your thinking. If you are compassionate and enthusiastic in your job, you will do well." Having a strong ability in one’s subject area is also key to good teaching. MeiYen recalled her own experience as a young learner struggling under the guidance of a minority teacher who was barely literate herself. In the West, being able in one’s subject
area is taken for granted. In Chinese minority schools, many teachers may not have a strong ability in their subject areas.

YouFang believes that a positive image, good manners and grooming, are important characteristics of a minority teacher who represents the potential of minority people. She also believes that appearance is key to good teaching. This stress on appearance is foreign to the Western reader. YouFang feels that these specific visual characteristics promote minority education. All participants agreed that having a good heart and being tolerant are necessary as well. Minority students often have many issues to deal with that their majority peers do not face, like being away from home while attending university in the city surrounded by a foreign language and way of life. Minority teachers and administrators must also be very hard workers and life-long learners. They must serve as constant examples to their minority students. HaiBo reflects, "When I stop living my life I will stop learning. There is a Chinese saying: 'How old you can live, how long you can learn.' There is constant learning until death." Minority educators realize that their minority students will look primarily to them, versus going to their Han teachers, for guidance.

The most important trait shared by both minority teachers and administrators that contributes to their strength is their ability to communicate with minority students in their native languages. Linguistic and cultural bilingualism is integral to being a successful minority educator. Most Han teachers don't speak and are not interested in learning minority languages in order to communicate more effectively with their minority students. Communication between teachers, administrators and students, majority and minority, is vital if progress is to be made in minority education. This particular
characteristic of the importance of language is addressed again in much greater detail in Chapter Five.

**The Many Roles of Minority Teachers and Administrators**

The roles played by minority teachers and administrators are numerous. Participants agreed that minority teachers’ main role, like their Han counterparts, is to teach their students well. FengLin feels, “If I teach with love and compassion for minority people my students will learn better. Education and schooling can help one be a real human being with a good spirit and a good heart.” MeiYen says that for her, good teaching means treating each student individually. This differs from the standard Han Chinese method of teaching where emphasis is placed on the collective group versus the interests of the individual student. MeiYen admits that she feels closer to her minority students. “I think I care more about my minority students because of my love and compassion for my own people. We are from the same place.” Understanding the particular, rural backgrounds of some minority students is often missing from Han educators’ knowledge base.

Part of this notion of good teaching is to be strict with one’s students. FengLin notes, “I’m harsher on minority students than on majority ones. I don’t mean anything bad. I am never lenient to students who don’t study hard. Being lenient is not responsible.” She goes on to say that if her students can’t do well at university, how can they become good teachers? “They have to help themselves. No one else can.” KeZen takes this idea further:

The most important thing you need to bring back home is the idea that students have to develop ability which can help them learn by themselves rather than learning from their teachers. Educators should help their students develop the ability and confidence which can help them learn on
their own. No matter how long a teacher can teach students, there is a limit, an end there. But, if students can learn themselves, they can just keep on learning.

FengLin agrees that one of the most important jobs of a minority teacher is to help students keep on learning. “What we can teach our students is very limited. But if they can keep on learning and continue studying, their achievements will be much higher than their teachers’ will. Minority teachers should give their students direction on how to be life-long learners.” This promotion of life-long learning is an especially important role of minority teachers. They must constantly encourage their minority students to become independent learners. Participants stated that majority teachers might not be as committed to this role because the opportunities for learning are more accessible to their Han students, therefore making their teacher’s role strictly limited to teaching. Moreover, Han students don’t have to consciously seek out positive learning experiences in their formal education as much as their minority peers do. By instilling the notion of life-long learning in their students, minority teachers hope to promote independent learning that extends beyond the formal classroom.

TianQing reflects, “Minority teachers on campus are good role models for younger minority students who see them at university in successful roles with higher education qualifications.” YuoFang’s notion that taking care of your appearance fits with this idea. “Being a female minority teacher I always care about my appearance from head to toe. It’s part of my good teaching. If you look good, the results of your teaching might be better. The way you dress yourself is part of cultural cultivation.” This notion of dressing for teaching as showing one’s cultivation may seem strange to the Western reader. MeiYen continues. Part of being a good role model is to constantly improve
yourself. "As minority teachers we need to pursue our own interests, to continue our studies, related to teaching or life or anything one is interested in. This will make you more motivated to do your job better." MeiYen reflects that she often applies what she herself learned as a student to her own teaching.

YunXian explains her thinking on education:

There is no difference between Han and minority families. If you don't send your children to school they won't improve themselves. Only families who understand the importance of education will realize the difference that education can make to their children and how they can improve themselves through learning.

YunXian goes on to say that for minority people to improve themselves, they need to be educated. FengLin adds that minority students are born unequal to their Han counterparts, not in terms of schooling, but because of their ethnic minority identity. FengLin sees this as a possible setback for some minority students. She notes that minority people make up the highest percentage of illiterates in China. Most of these are women. YunXian explains how she can improve herself as a minority woman. "Being a female teacher, I need to improve myself as a teacher. The first thing I need to do is really work hard, put in the effort. Teachers have to show their students how to be hard workers. If I can do this, I will gain the respect of my students." KeZen elaborates, "You should have high expectations for yourself. Push yourself, always do your best." TianQing believes that reading is a good way to improve oneself. "You cannot just stay where you are here. You can't stop moving. You need to move on." This idea of movement and continuous learning came up in several interviewees' comments. LiLin states that it's good to take a break from working and go back to school, learn new ideas and "improve yourself, to better your future job performance. Retraining is a good way to help resolve problems."
Self-improvement means life-long learning for these women. MeiYen believes that minority teachers need to pursue their own interests, to continue their studies related to teaching or anything one is interested in. “If you can do something that you are interested in then you can make your life more interesting and be motivated to do your job better. It’s very important for female minority teachers to improve both their personal and work lives and the quality of them.”

FengLin states that minority teachers must also ensure that their minority students understand the very important role they will play in minority education and society upon graduation. It is therefore crucial to transmit the spirit of minorities (cultural traits, values and ideas) to future minority teachers. They, versus their Han counterparts, will be the future conveyors of minority IK. FengLin adds that female minority teachers must realize their uniqueness. “If you don’t express yourself as a female educator and don’t express your feelings about being a minority, then other people will ignore you. But if you do express yourself people will appreciate your efforts and recognise your achievements.” Teachers must instruct their students on how to behave themselves, how to be good role models in the future. MeiYen affirms, “I am very proud of being a female minority teacher. There are very few of us. When I am able to help my students, I am generous to give.” Setting a good example of what being a good minority teacher entails is necessary.

BaoYu expressed her view that minority teachers are responsible to teach what’s good and bad about western culture and knowledge. In effect, they are like gatekeepers. She feels this can be accomplished by having minority teachers examine the media with their students. FengLin agrees that minority teachers must constantly remind their minority students about their ancestors, rather than just absorbing everything new (Han)
around them which is the current trend in China. BaoYu believes that she must guide her students correctly. She gives the example of teaching Marxism. “This philosophy can be a useful guide, connecting the theoretical, book world with the practical, every day one in which we must live.” BaoYu hopes that by teaching her students in this way they might be able to grasp the usefulness of Marxism to their individual situations. She goes on; “It’s just like a compass you have when you are sailing in a big sea. Marxism can give you some kind of direction.”

AnNing feels that minority teachers are able to absorb the good elements of Han culture and incorporate them into their teaching. MeiYen explains that part of her role as a Tibetan teacher is to answer Han students’ questions about Tibetan culture. MeiYen’s job also includes acting as a mediator between Han and minority students on campus and maintaining peaceful relations between these groups. She believes that minority students need more guidance from their teachers than Han students do. Whenever she can, MeiYen helps her Tibetan students with their language difficulties. “I always explain to them using examples. Sometimes I might explain in Zangyu. They can get things very quickly once they understand what I am saying.” Minority teachers must be able to effectively communicate with their students. All minority and administrator participants agreed that a key part of their role is to try their best to develop minority education. Participants agreed that starting from the base, as early as elementary school, is most effective.

**Minority Administrators**

LiLin says that since becoming a minority student administrator she has visited a lot of minority communities and has developed compassion towards minority people.
“Now I feel I have a much greater responsibility. I understand much more.” LiLin really wants to contribute to improving minority education. “Since I’m from a minority community I serve minority students and the larger minority community. That’s how I see my role here.” Her role as an administrator is to figure out how to improve the curriculum for minority students. “There are more minority students than ever before now coming to university. Policies need to be put in place.” She feels that if you approach minority students in the same way, the results are not good. LiLin believes that when working in minority student management one need’s to understand the personality of the different groups as well as the different traditions and customs, and government policies for the different groups. “If you have this understanding then you can deal with conflicts properly. You have the background knowledge.” GaoJia has observed that minority administrators are really trying to promote education for girls. She feels this goal is very important. She goes on to say, “We need to have empathy towards minority students as administrators. If you are indifferent, very distant from the students, that is discrimination. We need to communicate with the students.” Minority administrators have a great responsibility to minority students. Administrators, like minority teachers, must be very strict with minority students when the university recruits them. GaoJia noted that it is not essential for minority administrators to be minorities themselves. Doing a good job is most important. Some dedicated Han educators who are passionate about minority education do, presently, fill this role.

**Tibetan Minority Teachers**

So many participants mentioned the Tibetan minority group and its significant place in minority education in Northwest China that the topic deserves special attention
in this theme. ChengMing states that in Tibetan communities elder Tibetans are being asked to be teachers as they are natural experts in Tibetan culture and language. In addition, he believes that Tibetan teachers should work towards bilingual education, learning Tibetan language in Tibetan and Mandarin in Chinese. ChengMing hopes that the most qualified minority teachers in an area of Tibetan indigenous education can be recruited to be teachers of that particular topic. He feels that minority teachers must be devoted to minority education. Their role is to spread Tibetan cultural and linguistic knowledge to Tibetan students. XianMing adds that all Tibetan students at her university will return to their Tibetan communities to work and teach there. This need for Tibetan minority teachers to teach Tibetan minority students was emphasised by both Tibetan participants and other minority groups. AnNing, TianQing and MeiYen and ChengMing mentioned the idea of lamas (always male) in Tibetan monasteries being natural teachers of Tibetan culture and language. Lamas’ important role in Tibetan minority education is an interesting issue that requires more attention.

Minority teachers and administrators agreed that as members of China’s minority population they are very responsible to work towards the development of minority education. All participants conceded that one must have love and compassion for the minority community in order to become deeply involved in minority issues and to be an effective educator. Finally, being able to communicate with minority students in their native languages is crucial to those who work in the field of minority higher education.
**Theme # 3: Influential Individuals in Participants’ Lives**

Most participants volunteered information during their interviews about influential individuals in their lives who have had a great impact on their thinking about minority culture and education. In various ways, these people helped to significantly shape participants’ academic lives and current situations. Influential individuals include SULCP members, participants’ own family members, university professors, and minority religious figures.

**SULCP Members**

XianMing described how much she has learned from Canadian SULCP scholars and what their influence has had on her own thinking. “I got inspiration and enlightenment from learning about research in Canada.” She also believes that because of her involvement with SULCP individuals, she has developed and conceptualised ideas about indigenous knowledge. This information will help her proceed with her research of Tibetan minority students. ChengMing considers his international colleagues at OISE and CIDA to be very influential in the continuance of Tibetan culture and children’s education. He admitted that one of his reasons for recently visiting OISE was to thank these people for their support of Chinese minority education. DeChang mentioned three OISE professors who have been supportive of his learning and involvement with the SULCP program over the years. He feels the sharing of knowledge that has taken place has been key to his own learning and development as an academic. He hopes that these colleagues can promote publishing Chinese scholars’ work in English as part of their partnership/leadership role.
Participants’ Family Members

Several participants mentioned their parents as being influential to their thinking. Among the Hui minority participants, religious influence appeared to be paramount. Yuofang shared that she was brought up in two cultures, Hui and Han; her father is Hui and her mother is Han. Religion has always been a constant in her life. She has kept several “good habits” from the Hui culture because of her strict upbringing, such as eating Muslim cuisine, going on a religious pilgrimage to Mecca, and trying hard to be a good person. ChenGung admits that the strictness of her parents regarding Hui religious beliefs has continued with her into her own adult life. “I really appreciate my parents because of what they have done for me. I attribute my success right now to my parents. They educated me well in various traditional religious concepts and beliefs. My sisters and I turned out well. I can’t see any deficiencies in our characters.” KeZen says:

My parents encouraged me to go to school. Consequently, I have the same mindset that I need to study hard. My father is a medical doctor. He has always thought education to be very important. Schooling is very important. Only schooling can help you make a difference in your life and in others’ lives by helping them with your education. My father insisted that we go to school. He called me recently to see if I would like to study further. He said as long as I can go further, then go. He will never stop me. If I can study abroad he will be very pleased. He has a very deep effect on my thinking.

KeZen pointed out that there seems to be a very strong correlation between the educational level of parents and their children; the higher the level of parental education, the higher the level of their children’s education. Value is given to education. Yet, in AnNing’s case, her mother only finished middle school and her father didn’t get much further. Of her mother AnNing says, “She knows from working in the factory that it is
very difficult without education. Mom and Dad still encourage my husband and me to study further.”

For a majority of the minority women interviewed at NWNU, male members of their families, especially their fathers, were chosen as the most influential. Many fathers appeared to be quite progressive in their thinking in terms of how they interpreted education for their minority daughters. FengLin talked of her father as being very influential in his children’s lives.

My father emphasized education very much. He earned his Ph.D. in Psychology and studied foreign languages. In a sense, we all benefited a lot from my father, but for many minority families that is not the case. Especially in Hui concepts, men usually don’t want their women to have a higher education.

She also mentioned her paternal grandfather who had started the first elementary school in a Hui community. KeZen recounted a painful experience in her middle school days involving two female classmates who were competing for positions with her at teachers’ college (senior high school in Chinese education terms). KeZen discovered that these girls had cheated on the entrance exam. One had even pretended that she was someone else because she was too old to compete for a position. “I was thinking about reporting the girls. I gave up. My father was open to my decision and he said it was up to me.” KeZen said that he supported her through this very difficult time in her life. “My father told me that I was still young and I should aim higher than just going to teachers’ college. He said I should try harder, and have a higher expectation for myself. Maybe it’s a good thing for me that I didn’t go to teachers college.” KeZen’s father always told her that she could make a difference in her own life and her family’s life with knowledge and education. “He said that I could also do something for my community and my hometown
if I am educated. My father feels that it is my responsibility to give something back to the world with my education.”

Likewise among the Tibetan participants, fathers have played a key role in their daughters’ educational lives. AnNing’s father refused to allow her to attend sports college. “After I got into junior teachers’ college dad told me to study hard and I might have a chance to go to university. So I studied very hard. He said that I needed to be educated.” TianQing’s father used to be a lama and knew the Tibetan alphabet and language. He taught his children what he knew and encouraged them all, boys and girls, to study.

Dad was very sick when I finished senior high school. At that time not many people had ambitions to go to university, especially in my hometown. My father told me that if my mom agreed I could go to university. Then, my father died. It was a heavy burden for my family to provide me with a higher education, a sacrifice for me from them.

TianQing believes that her father’s thinking or mentality was different from his counterparts. “He thought it was very tough for girls to do hard labour. He encouraged me to go to school. Parents’ mentality makes a lot of difference.” She also noted that her father was open-minded to new concepts and that he was a life-long learner. “He taught himself very eagerly. He was happy with what he had. I learned a lot from my dad that I couldn’t learn from school like religious concepts, beliefs and knowledge. I got a lot from my father.”

A few participants focused on their mothers as being highly influential in their educational lives. YuoFang stated that her mother used to be a teacher too. “She hoped I would be a teacher. When I first started teaching, I rehearsed my lectures in front of my mother. She gave me suggestions and ideas about how to improve my teaching.” LiLin
talked in general about how important mothers are for their children. “If we emphasise women in education, women can be good and produce better children in the future.” LiLin noted that intelligence and good health are passed from mother to child. “Mothers teach children about life and how to be a good person. Mothers are very important.” As a child, MeiYen used to ask her mother many questions. She recounted two important educational stories that her mother had shared with her. In one story, she asks her mother why some trees (white poplars) have eyes (bumps) on them.

She said God had given the eyes to the tree. So, if I did something wrong or bad, the tree and God would be watching me. My mom taught me lessons this way. I was so impressed with this story at that time in my life. Now, whenever I see people doing something bad, I always remember the eyes on the poplar trees. The eyes are always watching me.

In the second story, MeiYen’s mother teaches her daughter about respecting the environment. “Because of my mother, I have a very strong environmental consciousness.” MeiYen’s mother also taught her about Tibetan Buddhism. In 1997, MeiYen’s mother died. Her husband has since become her support. For all married participants, strong, supportive husbands who allow their wives to be independent women are the norm.

KeZen mentioned her older brother as another influential person in her life. He used to study theology.

Because of my brother, I understand some of the writings in the Koran. Some people misunderstand the meaning, the essence of the scriptures. My brother told me that the Koran says that men and women are equal in terms of education. Both genders should have equal opportunities to attain education. Men and women need to be educated in order to make a difference in one’s life. My brother also told me that the Koran says that women are more noble than men because women have the responsibilities of motherhood.
Like KeZen, HaiBo’s older brother has had a strong influence in her life. When asked why she chose to study in a certain European location her answer was simply, “My brother told me that he wanted me to go there.” ChenGung believes that her husband has had a great effect on her. “My marriage has helped me a lot. I can see the bright side of life. My husband’s personality is good. He helps me see the good side of myself.” Likewise, TianQing spoke of her husband. She said he has a strong work ethic and is still studying himself in order to earn extra income for his family. “My husband is the oldest sibling in his family. He has a strong sense of responsibility.” AnNing says, “In my family women and men are equal. My husband does housework and helps me with family chores.”

**University Teachers**

In addition to family members, participants’ university teachers were noted as having a positive effect on them. MeiYen remembers an old professor. “During my six years studying he taught me throughout. I never skipped any of his courses. I respect this professor very much. He thought I studied hard, especially as a minority student.” For YuoFang, she is impressed and influenced by an elite group of scholars in China called yuanshi (academy member). She says that only 5% of this prestigious group are women. This is something for her to work towards, entry into this elite academic group.

**Tibetan Religious Figures**

All Tibetan participants mentioned the strong influence of Tibetan monasteries and the lamas who work and live in them on their education, whether these religious and cultural institutions affected them directly or indirectly. ChengMing talked about the lamas’ integral role in compiling information for the textbook he had recently written. “I
literally went to the monasteries and asked Tibetan monks for their help in gathering traditional cultural information.” AnNing, TianQing and MeiYen emphasised the significance of monasteries in Tibetan cultural development and in their own educational upbringing. This is quite interesting as monasteries are strictly for male students. Thus, influential individuals and institutions in participants’ lives must be considered as being an important element in explaining how they became who they are today.

**Theme # 4: Identity**

Influential individuals in participants’ lives have contributed, in part, to the formation of participants’ sense of their identities. Interviewees spontaneously reflected on their identities during the interview process. For most, defining their identity involved explaining a multi-layered, complex part of themselves. One’s occupation, feelings about minority membership, and belonging to a small group of female minority educators and learners made up some elements of their complex identities.

**Occupational Identity**

LiLin epitomises participants’ feelings about the difficult term: “Identity is a complex thing.” For some participants, their jobs primarily define who they are. YuO Fang believes that her identity has changed over time. She identifies herself first as a professional academic, then as a wife and mother. Her academic role is her most important one. “Twenty years ago I had many interests. I had to give them up in order to be successful.” YuO Fang offered that in addition to her heavy professorial workload, she is also active off campus in the world of politics. For AnNing, a wife and mother, the most important thing is “my work, is my future, my career.” Bao Yu thinks of herself as a
teacher, a model. “I need to be a good example of a teacher, a role model.” Likewise, MeiYen identifies herself as a teacher. ChenGung talked of her dissatisfaction with her current office administrator job. “The best career for me would be a high school teacher, or being a journalist. I really love work that has energy in it. It’s not just a routine job, but a job with a challenge.” For LiLin, the only single female minority participant, her identity was completely about herself. “I am not Superwoman, just very satisfied with my life and work. I am not eager to get married.” Opposite to this were TianQing’s comments on identity. “It’s kind of like I’ve made a sacrifice. It seems that I’m not so ambitious about my career. I feel that as long as my husband and child can do well, I am fine. I am satisfied. Maybe I am the traditional type of woman. In terms of my career goals, I am content with what I have.” For HaiBo she admitted that she has been searching for her own role for a while, being a good mother, a good teacher or a good staff member. “Now, I think, my best role is doing some kind of cultural exchange job.”

Minority Identity: Individual and Collective

For many participants, their individual minority status was mentioned as being an integral part of their identity. YuoFang stated, “I never feel inferior being a Muslim.” FengLin relived a disturbing memory. While studying at Beijing Normal University she was mistaken for a French person because of her height. “I was not proud of this at all. It was a terrible mistake. I never wanted to hide my own identity. I don’t believe you have to give up something about your identity in order to get something that you really want.” AnNing believes that her strong bilingual education has allowed her to remain somewhat invisible as a minority. “If I don’t tell people I’m a minority, I don’t think they realize I am one.” For XianMing, a Han majority scholar, her identity as a woman is pronounced
when she is working, researching Tibetan female students at her university. “Sometimes when doing my research I cry because I can feel what my participants feel.” For others, like BaoYu, ethnic belonging is absent in everyday living. “I rarely think about my ethnic minority identity.” HaiBo adds that it’s hard to see what it’s like to be a minority outside of Lanzhou. “I have never limited myself or positioned myself as a Hui minority person to Lanzhou only.”

The idea of having a collective minority identity came up in several interviews. MeiYen discussed the idea of identity at length. First and foremost, “I am Tibetan. Like all Tibetans, my personality is straightforward and direct. I am easy going. I have a strong personality.” With pride, MeiYen went on to mention that she was the first minority student from Gansu Province to study at her undergraduate university. LiLin noted that her main professional role is to serve the minority community.

As a minority administrator, I’ve never forgotten my minority identity. I grew up in a Han community with very few Zhuang people. I went to school with Han students. In elementary school when people asked me if I was a minority student I realized that I was. I had a strong consciousness of being a minority person from that point on.

When discussing her work life, LiLin reflected, “After starting to work my minority consciousness got much stronger. When dealing with minority students I have a stronger position than Han workers do. We are at the same level. I now have a much bigger responsibility to minority people.” ChenGung commented that whenever she talks to minority teachers on campus she feels very close to them. “I just feel like we are a family. I am happy when minority students do well.” KeZen stated, “I never forget my Hui identity.” TianQing says that at work she is not discriminated against because of her minority identity. “But still, I always think that I am a minority and they (her colleagues)
are Han majority people.” FengLin described the Chinese term ‘xinggang’, as the personality or conscience of minority peoples. She believes that this is what keeps minority groups together and makes individuals feel a sense of belonging to their ethnicities. In addition, because of xinggang, she believes that minority educators have a stronger sense of responsibility to minority education than Han teachers do.

GaoJia’s story of growing up during the Cultural Revolution explains her thoughts on her minority identity and provides an example of FengLin’s concept of xinggang. GaoJia was the only minority person in her work group that went to the countryside, causing her traditional Hui lifestyle to vanish quickly. “Being a minority, I don’t have my own language, my own words. I know Han. There is no Hui left at all.” This loss of her minority roots led to her choice to marry a Han man whose culture she was most familiar and comfortable with. GaoJia thinks she is different from minority people. “I’m assimilated to Han culture.” Like GaoJia, BaoYu feels close to Han people. “Only when I need to put down my ethnicity on my resume do I think about my minority identity. Other than that, I can’t see any difference between Han people and myself. I have been in Lanzhou for a long time. My habits, my customs are the same as Han peoples’ are.” This idea of adopting Han culture, or some elements of it, and creating a hybrid identity and culture is significant and will be addressed again in detail in subsequent themes in this chapter and again in Chapter Five. Hui, Man (Manchurian) and Zhuang participants spoke about the high degree of this hybridness in their identities versus the Tibetans who remained closer to their traditional minority Tibetan culture.
Female Minority Educator and Learner Identity

For twelve of the fifteen participants, another level of identity involves being a female minority educator and learner. Along with occupational identity, one’s gender is an integral part of participants’ identities and has shaped many of their views on education and life in general. MeiYen states, “I am proud of being a female minority teacher because there are very few of us.” She goes on to say that being a minority person in higher education is an accomplishment in itself, but being a female minority member at this level is an even greater feat. KeZen says that her minority identity, combined with her female gender makes her students pay close attention to her in class. At present, her identity is both teacher and learner. She has always considered herself to be a competitive learner. “Since my early days as an undergraduate, whatever I do I always try my best without considering my minority identity. I will compete with everyone.”

FengLin believes that “being a female, if you don’t express yourself as a female educator and don’t express your feelings about being a minority, then other people will ignore you. But if you express yourself and you let people know then they will appreciate your effort and also recognise your achievements.” FengLin acknowledged her elite status of being one of the few full female faculty members from a minority group. She also noted that female minority teachers have a much deeper and better understanding about minority education and how to develop it than even their male minority counterparts do. TianQing currently identifies herself as her daughter’s teacher or language guide. She looks out for her daughter’s future well-being and her connection between the old, minority world and culture and the new, global ‘Hanized’ (adoptive of Han culture and language) way of life that is taking shape in Lanzhou. “My daughter can
speak Tibetan, Mongolian, Mandarin and English.” TianQing watches carefully over her
daughter’s educational development to ensure the best chance at a good future for her, as
both a female and as a minority person. These women are very conscious of their
gendered status in Chinese society. They realize that being female impacts their
academic, professional, and personal lives significantly.

Thus, identity is not static in nature and can change continuously throughout an
individual’s lifetime. HaiBo’s closing comment on the identity issue summarises the
complexity of this theme:

If someone asks me who I am, I say the following: If a Chinese person
asks me, I say that I am a staff member at NWNU. If a foreigner asks me,
I say I am Chinese. If a minority person asks me, I say I am Hui. So, there
are many different sides to me depending on whom I am interacting with.
Identity is multi-layered and complex.

Theme # 5: The ‘Double’ Dichotomy: Rural Versus Urban and Majority Versus

Minority

Throughout China the rural versus urban dichotomy is prevalent. The nation’s
thriving East Coast is home to the main Chinese urban centers while the inland regions to
the west are mainly rural in nature. However, in the Northwest of the country, home to
many of China’s minority peoples, the rural versus urban situation, combined with the
added variable of majority versus minority, still plays a key role in determining how
society in that part of the PRC is constructed and functions. The combined and
intertwined variables of rural versus urban and majority versus minority must therefore
be examined simultaneously.
**Rural Versus Urban**

In China’s Northwest, most minority communities can be found in rural, often isolated, areas. The percentage of minority peoples living in the cities is minimal. All twelve female minority participants interviewed consider Lanzhou City their current home, even though some of them grew up in rural minority communities. Yuofang stated that the rural versus urban dichotomy includes key factors like education for females and vastly differing lifestyles. She says that women, especially in inland, rural China need to be stakeholders in their local and national societies. “Many women, especially in rural areas, don’t have their own hopes. They only hope that their children can do well. It seems that people are kind of blind because they don’t have any personal hope. They are doing nothing for themselves.” She mentioned that there is a big gap between women in the cities and those in rural areas. “Those in the countryside are behind those in urban areas. The situation might be much worse in minority communities.” Yuofang discussed the rural concept of keeping women at home with their children versus a watered-down version present in the cities. She went on to say that even though city women may be more equal to their male counterparts, women everywhere still perform two jobs, wife and/or mother, and worker. Tianqing adds to this saying that, in general, less educated women in rural areas tend to be satisfied with what they have versus their more educated counterparts who are always looking for something more. “From my city point of view, rural women are working so hard. Their view is so narrow and they don’t know much about the world outside of their own environments. We have different views.”

Yunxian notes that although peoples and cultures keep developing, little communication exists between isolated rural regions and urban centers. This severely
limits the transfer of information from one community to another. YunXian sees education as a potential key medium for increased communication between rural and urban areas. FengLin adds that some rural villages are very difficult to enter as they hold a very strong concept about community. “No outsiders or foreign ideas are let in.” She also states that in these closed communities, the more educated people are the most lenient to information from the outside, often welcoming new ideas in. This is the case in both majority and minority communities. KeZen believes that there is an urban to rural knowledge transfer in place. “It’s not widespread though. City people still hold a prejudice that rural people are living in poor environments, are less educated and are far, far behind city dwellers (in all aspects of life). The city people think they can’t do much for the poor, rural dwellers.” AnNing says that in the last ten years or so her rural, agricultural hometown is receiving more information from the outside. “Because of this information exchange, now more people go to school.”

KeZen feels students in the city have an advantage over those in the countryside because the urban residents have access to, and the opportunity, to communicate in English with foreigners. Moreover, in minority areas the level of English teaching is low. MeiYen notices at the university (NWNU) there are many groups and levels of students from many areas, both rural and urban. “For many minority students, because their foundation is weak and their mother tongue is not Hanyu (Mandarin), they need to do extra work. Most students who grew up in the cities had better teachers and facilities than they did in rural areas.” MeiYen’s own educational experience captures this ‘double’ dichotomy.

I was born in a tent in a remote animal husbandry area. I had school on the grasslands. It was horseback elementary school. My teachers were not
very well educated. They were only literate, not well enough educated to be teachers. That's why my foundation was very, very weak, because I didn't have good teachers to teach me. I had to take two years of preparation in order to pass the university entrance exam.

For HaiBo, when applying for university, key universities to the east in Beijing and Shaanxi Province were her automatic first choice. She considered these schools as top institutions of learning. Along the eastern coast of China the big cities have more money for education than the inland, poorer provinces. It is very difficult to get talented teachers, majority or minority, to leave the coast and travel inland to work in the remote, poorer regions. LiLin says that minority students who have lived and learned in the countryside are not as successful as minority students who have lived and learned in the big cities, surrounded by Han culture and language during their pre-university years. “If minority students had grown up in Han environments they would do just as well as Han students.” AnNing adds that if rural students actually do make it into the cities to study they may have many problems dealing with being away from home. “They don’t know who they can turn to for help.” The biggest problem for these students is their limited knowledge of Mandarin, the working language of the university. This means that minority students from the rural areas have to pay more attention and work harder at university than their Han counterparts.

KeZen adds that some minority groups, like her own Hui population, are very busy working at making a living. “In Hui communities education is not believed to be a good way to spend a family’s money.” Poverty is another reason. “A lot of parents think that their children should only go as high as they can in education. When they can’t go any further it’s time to go back to work on the family farm where manpower is always needed.” In addition, the traditional Chinese concept about females, that women should
be wives and mothers and stay in the home serving the males in their lives, is very strong in rural minority communities. Thus, opportunities for higher education, are very limited for women in these areas. Strict religious practices in rural areas add to the dichotomy between rural and urban areas. ChenGung notes, "In the city, one loses one’s Hui religion. But in minority areas, there are stricter rules and stricter religious practices." This is also the case for cultural festivals. Their presence is strongest in the countryside. Minority cultures and ways of life are strongest in the countryside.

MeiYen observes several points about Tibetan minority culture and the 'double' dichotomy:

Nowadays in the city you don't see Tibetan culture, only people wearing Tibetan clothing. You can only see real Tibetan culture in the rural areas in Tibetan minority settlements. Tibetan people are so honest, sincere and innocent. They are not sophisticated like the city people. More than 99% of Han people don't understand Tibetan culture beyond a superficial level. They just know what's on the surface.

AnNing distinguishes that Tibetans living in agricultural areas are more educated than those living in more remote animal husbandry areas. LiLin adds that majority people have hardly visited any minority communities and have very limited knowledge and understanding about minority people. It's hard to get involved in minority education if you have a limited understanding of minority culture.

**Majority Versus Minority**

FengLin thinks that the minority personality is less bonded or limited to Chinese traditional society than the Han majority group is.

Minority people don't care what others think and don't confirm themselves as representatives of a nation. Minority people therefore have a more innovative spirit versus the Han who are more stereotyped as they need to observe certain standards. This is a heavy burden for the Han people. They always think that they are the only mainstream culture in
China. Their responsibility is to carry on this mainstream, dominant culture.

She also believes that minority people have been oppressed by majority people and have grown accustomed to living in rural areas. They have developed an ability to survive in harsh environments. Out of this history comes the “very special and particular minority personality and characteristics.” Minority people value their traditional culture more than Han people do. GaoJia explains that minority people have a very strong sense of self-esteem because “they feel they are inferior to Han people so they need to keep high self-esteem, otherwise people might look down on them. It’s self-preservation.” FengLin says majority Han people have a traditional, unchanging bias or prejudice towards minority people. “Some people think that being a minority is kind of a front or a cover, that minority people can take advantage of their minority status, taking more and more. This is not true.” YunXian articulates a crucial point that unites majority and minority groups in this complicated educational discussion. “There is no difference between Han and minority families. If you don’t send your children to school they won’t improve themselves.”

Several participants noted specific problems or obstacles encountered by minority students upon entering NWNU that majority students never encounter. According to KeZen, the quality of teachers in minority areas is not as good as it is in Han communities. AnNing states that there are significant differences between minority and majority schooling which places minority students at a disadvantage when writing the national university entrance exams. Communication problems in not fully understanding Mandarin, the language of instruction, are key. KeZen noted that in general, minority students are grouped into one class when they begin their studies. Some of these students
might be very good academically but, because of their minority status, are kept away from being in class and competing with their Han counterparts. “Some teachers have a bias against minority students and they think these individuals got into university with lower entrance exam scores so that must mean their ability level is low too. These teachers are not very eager to teach minority students.” GaoJia notices the barriers between minority and majority students as perceived by administrators and teachers.

There are still some gaps between teachers and administrators. For teachers, minority students don’t have to do as much as Han students do. For administrators, we need to keep the same standard for Han and minority students. We need to be fair to both groups, otherwise it’s some kind of discrimination against both groups.

LiLin feels that because of her own minority status she is more effective when talking with minority students than her Han colleagues are. “Majority staff are afraid of using strong words and hurting minority students’ feelings. For me, I can just say strong things. We share the same voice.” Being able to speak in minority students’ first languages is also a strong asset of minority teachers and administrators. For Han teachers who travel to rural or remote areas to teach, they often require a translator to help them communicate with their students. In addition, Han student teachers generally don’t want to work in minority communities because they think they are poor and underdeveloped.

**Hybrid Majority and Minority Culture: The Best of Both Worlds**

FengLin feels that “if you can grab the good parts of the new culture (Han) and incorporate them into your own culture then there is a process of local combination, of putting them both together, creating a strong hybrid culture.” She believes that if minority people keep saying that they want to keep their own identities without learning anything good from the Han culture then they are limiting themselves. At the same time though,
FengLiu has observed that minority student teachers that come to study at NWNU return to their villages with this new hybrid culture. They have passed through the process of assimilation in the city university setting. It is important for these students to realize that they will be welcomed back into their minority communities as successful individuals. They must remember to appreciate and recognise their minority culture, and not consider themselves to be in a higher position because of their experiences living in the Han culture of the city.

Mainstream and minority cultures, there is no contradiction between them for me. The concept is like leaders and followers. It depends on how the leader can really direct the followers. For minority teachers and people, they must remind themselves what their ancestors had rather than just following the global trend of absorbing everything Han. People should get along in peace rather than contradict each other.

YunXian shares this feeling. She believes that minority culture needs to improve and be innovated all the time. Majority culture has a big influence on minority cultures. “They need to be related to each other. They need to be part of each other.” This symbiotic relationship between the cultures is important for YunXian. ChenGung feels that it’s been good for her to accept two cultures, her minority Hui culture with its religion and strict moral education, and good aspects of the Han majority culture she has accepted through a lifetime of Han education.

These two cultures could be two sides of a coin. For minority people, we have to accept both cultures. I don’t think they both contradict each other. Hui people are not like other minority groups. The Hui are very assimilated to Han culture already. Accepting both cultures might be a good thing for me. It’s necessary to be assimilated to Han culture since I live in this society. But, on the other hand, being familiar with Hui culture can help me regulate myself, my own behaviour. I am better than other people who only accept one culture.
HaiBo supports ChenGung's analysis. She thinks that every culture has its advantages and disadvantages. She feels that both cultures, Hui and Han, are compatible with each other. Her own life is a good example of this notion of cultural compatibility. "All of my life I have been hanging around with two groups, Hui and Han. I think Han culture has influenced me more than Hui culture has." BaoYu also feels that she has been assimilated into the Han culture and has a hybrid cultural identity, leaning more towards a Han rather than a Man (Manchurian) identity. LiLin explains that nowadays, people living in rural Zhuang minority communities are "the best group of people. They've gone to university and are educated. They can speak Hanyu, Zhuangyu and Cantonese languages. Their employability is much better than others and they can work in different areas. This group is the most advantaged, the luckiest." MeiYen feels that the mingling of the good parts of majority and minority cultures to create a hybrid Chinese national culture is very hard to do. She also comments on the negative aspects of the modern Han hybrid culture. She says that Han people today have dual characteristics. "They don't care about or keep their own culture. They just take whatever they want from western culture. Now Han people have very ugly dual personalities. This is very bad. They are compromising their Chineseness (within the boundaries of Chinese culture)."

It is important to remember that of the four minority groups represented in this study, each one has a different relationship with the Han majority group. Hui, Zhuang and Man participants see themselves as more assimilated and closer to their majority counterparts, whereas the Tibetan participants see their traditional culture and way of life as being far removed, in most respects, from Han traditional living.
Theme # 6: ‘Bentu Zhishi’ Indigenous Knowledge (IK)

The term ‘indigenous knowledge’ is a western invention yet it is often applied to non-western societies. Participants spoke of this term to varying degrees when asked about it by the researcher. Their responses may prove to be helpful in understanding minority higher education in Northwest China. Participants commented on various aspects of indigenous knowledge. Areas covered include: definitions of the term, Confucianism and moral education, minority indigenous knowledge, religion, and Tibetan indigenous knowledge and education.

Indigenous Knowledge: A Difficult Term to Define

In Chinese, indigenous or traditional knowledge is a very difficult term to express in one, all-encompassing way. Each ethnic group in China may have their own way of presenting the idea of indigenous knowledge so that it makes sense to that particular cultural and linguistic group. DeChang admitted that before his interview he had never really thought about this term before. His eloquent response was the result of some reflection. DeChang sees three levels of IK. The first is the knowledge of a country. This is national knowledge. The second level is local knowledge which is needed in order to function at the local level in every day situations. “Maybe it’s different in the North and South, East and West. IK may be different in big cities and the rural countryside because of different lifestyles.” The third level of IK is based on an individual’s own life experience. Each person’s individual knowledge is different and affects how he/she functions at the local and national levels. XianMing admits to not having any ideas about IK until she began participating in the SULCP project. “Working on an indigenous knowledge project can help me look into reality and to care about it.”
The Tibetan minority women interviewed seemed to have the most trouble with the term. AnNing had heard of it before but didn’t understand from what perspectives the research questions were being asked. She did say that indigenous knowledge is related to the local culture of an area and is not static in nature. After some reflection, TianQing felt that IK might be ethnicity knowledge and might include customs, religion, habits, geography and the environment, medicine, history and culture; “macro level stuff”. MeiYen said, “I’ve never heard of this term. It’s very strange to me.” One of the Hui participants HaiBo explained, “IK doesn’t exist as a concept in my mind. Just like when you ask a child who was born in a tropical country who has never seen snow to tell you about snow.” ChengMing who had recently been in the field, explained the Chinese term ‘xingtu’ which means local or aboriginal teaching material. He talked of visiting Tibetan communities in order to collect this material. He said that in every cultural area there is a different IK. He also noted the differences in traditional Tibetan knowledge between agricultural and animal husbandry areas. For YunXian, IK includes lifestyle and language. Each minority group has its own IK characteristics. FengLin affirmed that culture and education interact with and affect each other. HaiBo explained: “The culture of the place that I’m from and also the culture of the places that I’ve visited are all part of my IK. Once you’ve adjusted to the environment you’re in, then you are influenced by indigenous knowledge.” She spoke of her study time in Europe and how that experience changed her traditional knowledge, expanding it beyond simply Chinese indigenous knowledge to include foreign elements of Western IK. For ChenGung, indigenous knowledge should be renamed ‘indigenous culture’ because it includes national and local cultural knowledge.
From the macro level, IK is Chinese culture and knowledge like diet and customs. Every different culture in China is included in this. From a micro level, IK is only for people living in a particular local area. It might include your working or living environment. Religion and your knowledge structure, epistemology, are also part of IK.

LiLin said that in China IK is rarely talked about, even in books. Her definition follows:

IK is about the knowledge and understanding of one group. Knowledge might include a lot of things like culture, tradition, science, concepts, mentality and values. It’s all part of IK. Your habits are part of your heritage. Everyone has been doing the same things generation after generation. What’s special about Zhuang culture and tradition might be something specifically related to Zhuang people like language and lifestyle.

BaoYu mentioned that indigenous knowledge is passed from generation to generation in Chinese culture. She said that today’s problem is that young Chinese get taught Chinese IK but they are influenced by western culture as well. Education and the media play important roles in conveying knowledge to the populace. For YuoFang, there is no one definition of indigenous knowledge. “So, in Lanzhou, whether you are minority or majority there is Lanzhou IK that everyone shares. It is regional.” KeZen says that indigenous knowledge is connected to the local attitude about education. In Lanzhou, majority and minority cultures overlap and create a hybrid IK. She adds that only one group of people cannot define indigenous knowledge. “Nowadays, people have greater opportunities to interact and communicate with each other and with other groups of people. There are many different definitions of indigenous knowledge.” LiLin mentioned that mothers pass indigenous knowledge on to their children. Mothers are the first teachers. Girls are especially affected by their mothers. This applies to all Chinese culture, all ethnicities.
Confucianism and Moral Education

Confucianism is the ‘roots’ of China’s 2,000-year-old national indigenous knowledge. For BaoYu, Confucianism includes traditional knowledge and values of the Chinese culture. She feels open policies and modernization are eroding this national IK. "IK is especially valuable to Asia. We need to keep the foundation." ‘Congzi’ or Confucianism plays a very strong role in Chinese education. For BaoYu, Confucianism or Chinese national IK is made up of two elements: religion and moral education. “We need to start reviving indigenous knowledge in education.” YuoFang sees the most important element of religious or moral education as being how to be a good person. Moral education is an important area of study in Chinese higher education. DeChang says that moral education programs in China vary. There are ‘xiangtujiaocai’ or local textbooks containing local knowledge and ways of life, local IK. YunXian says that religion is very important for minority people. For her, how to be a good person, how to deal with one’s surroundings and how to treat your family and friends, colleagues and animals is crucial. This concept of being a good person is common to all Chinese religions. For the Hui people, the Koran’s main teaching explains this universal concept of how to be good. YunXian adds that minority cultures are immersed in mainstream culture. In fact, all different Chinese majority and minority indigenous knowledge finds its roots in Confucianism.

Minority Indigenous Knowledge

Indigenous knowledge is important to minority groups. It is part of minority tradition. MeiYen states that minority cultures are very close to the natural world. Each minority group has different ideas and perceptions about education. FengLin believes that
“no matter whether it’s minority or mainstream education, the culture, customs and traditions must be included. These things have much to do with minority education. Minority IK is incorporated into curriculum naturally. There is no separate course.” She also says that an important part of minority IK can’t be described in a few words. “It’s a general realization about the minority personality.” FengLin uses the metaphor of a tree to capture the essence of minority indigenous knowledge:

If we take a tree growing as an example, there is the trunk and the roots. The roots include the mother tongue and the knowledge of your local history and local geography. All of these are included in the root knowledge. If you forget your roots whether minority or majority, your existence is not real. It’s like floating in the air. You are nothing inside. If you deny your identity, your roots, then you are denying yourself and denying your own traditions.

FengLin added that the roots don’t necessarily mean something old or underdeveloped. IK also includes innovation because so many things are happening and changing in China and in the world today. “If we forget our roots, we forget our culture.” FengLin believes that the roots should be the starting point of education.

Religion

LiLin says that in order for her to do her job as a minority administrator well she must be familiar with minority indigenous knowledge. Yet, LiLin, herself a minority person, is not in the habit of celebrating traditional Zhuang festivals as they are still practised in rural Zhuang communities. BaoYu reflects that her family has become very ‘Hanized’. They don’t perform traditional religious ceremonies anymore since living in the big city. Their local IK has become a mixture of Han and Man practices. However, for YunXian and many of the Hui participants, religion is the essence of parents’ ideas about indigenous knowledge. IK is taught in Hui households starting from a religious
base. “IK is the culture, the education, the knowledge that minority people have. Being a minority teacher I need to know about religion, beliefs and culture because I must teach paying attention to my students’ beliefs.” For the Hui participants, religion is the most important element of their minority IK. HaiBo reflects: “Muslim people say that Allah is inside of you. I watch my own behaviour. I never do anything wrong or hurt anyone.” The Koran, the scriptures, is the core document around which Hui indigenous knowledge is based. YunXian believes that “religion can help minority people develop themselves and be cultivated.”

**Tibetan Indigenous Knowledge and Education**

MeiYen notes, “Tibetan people have their own concepts about their environment. They have their own ways of interpreting their lives.” ChengMing discussed his recent hands-on experience with Tibetan ‘bentu zhishi’/indigenous knowledge. He feels that the elementary level textbook he helped put together is the best example of traditional Tibetan knowledge. Tibetan monks or lamas are well educated in both religious and cultural knowledge. They preserve the intellectual and elite cultural knowledge of Tibetan society. Monks can read and write the Tibetan language. ChengMing says that these monks helped him retrieve Tibetan national IK and compile it into an educational text that can help both revive and continue Tibetan traditional knowledge. The textbook is bilingual, Tibetan and Chinese, and explains Tibetan history and how the Tibetan culture got to where it is today. The text is very comprehensive and includes several areas of IK: language arts, history, science, customs, folk songs and religion. ChengMing talked to older Tibetans and collected information that has never before been recorded in a formal educational document.
The Tibetan population is very interested in this book. Before its publication, "Tibetan people didn’t think their children could learn anything about Tibetan culture at school." ChengMing hopes that this book will be used in Tibetan communities all over China and the world. He also hopes that elder Tibetans will become the teachers of this traditional knowledge in the schools. MeiYen explains that Tibetan religious education is very important. Monasteries are a permanent part of Tibetan society. In the monasteries lamas are the teachers and promote life-long learning. There is a living Buddha or ‘houfou’ at each monastery who is very knowledgeable. If a male goes to a monastery he gets indigenous knowledge from there, and if one goes to a school, he/she gets IK from the school. Monasteries are not just for religious educational purposes. They also promote general Tibetan education and language literacy. In a broad sense, monasteries provide education for many Tibetan families. AnNing commented that it’s important to consider combining this Tibetan IK with Han indigenous knowledge in education.

Although, initially, most participants couldn’t understand the term indigenous knowledge, they managed to express rich views on the connection between culture, education and traditional knowledge. ‘Bentu zhishi’ obviously plays a key role in both minority and majority education. Understanding the part Chinese IK will play in China’s educational future is a challenge facing educational planners and researchers, both in the PRC and around the world.

**Theme # 7: Tibetan Issues**

Although only four participants in this study are Tibetan, the issues associated with educating this minority group in Northwest China were discussed by the majority of study participants, making Tibetan issues a strong theme of its own. Out of the four
minorities interviewed, Tibetan, Hui, Zhuang and Man, the Tibetan minority group sees itself as the least assimilated to Han culture. This helps to explain why Tibetan indigenous education is such an important current issue. The main contradiction observed by participants is between surviving in the reality of modern China while, at the same time, preserving traditional Tibetan culture and language. ChengMing notes that in the last fifty years, there has been a dual directional change in Tibetan culture. It is being both pushed and pulled into the future of modern China, and back into the past of ancient Tibetan society.

All four Tibetan participants identified themselves as Tibetans within the first minute of interviewing. Their particular minority identity is important to them. Each one sees his or her role as being a bridge, a liaison, between traditional Tibetan culture and modern China. Participants feel that preserving traditional Tibetan culture and language, indigenous knowledge, is paramount. They are all very proud to be Tibetans but have realized that living in a city environment requires fitting into Han majority culture and way of life. All four speak Mandarin and Tibetan. For the female minority educators at NWNU, their professional working language is Mandarin. Two of them have Han husbands and also speak Hanyu (Mandarin) at home. Participants discussed their personal educational histories and the difficulties with Tibetan minority education.

**Education in Tibetan Communities**

Most Tibetan communities, whether they are agricultural or animal husbandry based, are located in rural and often remote areas. This makes educating the youth of these regions a great challenge. The disappointing calibre of past teachers in Tibetan communities, access to and opportunities in basic education for females, Tibetan
monastery education and language instruction are key points that were mentioned. Understanding these topics helps to explain what challenges Tibetan students face in their educational careers, culminating in their entry into institutions of higher education. MeiYen recounts her early experiences of horseback elementary school. Her barely literate teacher would ride into her remote grassland community on horseback one day a week to teach. “There were no books. We had to sit on the grass because there were no chairs and no tables.” Consequently, MeiYen learned most things about her minority culture and life in general through listening to folk songs which talked about Tibetan history, listening to her grandfather’s stories about Tibetan life and hearing stories with built-in moral lessons from her mother. She admits that during her university years, she tried to learn more about her minority heritage by reading books from the university about Tibetan traditional knowledge and history. MeiYen worked very hard while at university and was required to take a two-year preparation course in order to make up for lost years of basic education. She admits to sometimes feeling forced to accept Han culture, although she tried to adjust herself to her changing environments as best she could.

AnNing discussed issues of financing education. For most Tibetans, selling the products of agriculture or animal husbandry generates their income. Education is a great expense for the average Tibetan family. In part, money to pay for tuition and other fees comes from selling agricultural produce or cows. “To sell a family’s cows to pay for university fees is a big sacrifice. Selling cows often doesn’t cover the high cost of university fees.” MeiYen says that, traditionally, Tibetans prefer to have their children educated in monasteries where they can receive both traditional Tibetan cultural and
religious education together with Han education. Unfortunately, monasteries provide education for males only. Combined with the traditional Tibetan belief that women are to be wives and mothers, this does not encourage education for girls and women. Male chauvinism is still prevalent in many Tibetan communities. Men are considered to be the leaders and women are their subordinates. Men go out to make money and women stay at home. As a result, Tibetan girls usually only complete elementary school and then stay at home to help their families with farm work until they are married. Manpower is such an important concern in Tibetan life that tradition dictates that new husbands move in with their new wives’ families. The traditional Tibetan lifestyle is very hard. Yuofang remembers seeing young Tibetan women in rural areas where she’s conducted research. “They work so hard and look much older than their age.”

**Tibetan Monastery Education**

Tianqing spent some time explaining in detail Tibetan monastery education and its central role in Tibetan society. Monasteries are the main keepers of Tibetan indigenous knowledge and are considered special cultural communities in Tibetan society. Monasteries are just like school systems. There are different levels of teachers and professors. Subjects covered are numerous, including philosophy, science, geography, astrology, medicine, religious studies and even English. Students are encouraged to use reason over rote learning and they need to work hard in order to advance in the system. Learners who are not too bright have the opportunity to pursue more occupational activities. All male learners are accommodated. There is no formal graduation as learning is a life-long activity or career. There is no tuition for monastery education. Families often donate food and clothing to the monastery to show their
appreciation and support. Generally, if there are three sons in a family, only one will be sent to the monastery and the remaining two will stay at home and participate in labour-intensive agricultural activities.

Monasteries provide a place where male Tibetans can go to become literate in Tibetan. In the past, there were not many regular schools in Tibetan communities. Monasteries were therefore the best place for males to get an education. TianQing says that monasteries have done a lot to promote literacy and education for many Tibetan families. However, in recent times, life has become much more competitive as China’s modernization has progressed. Tibetan parents are realizing that a monastery education doesn’t necessarily guarantee students a good job. Nowadays, more Tibetans are going to Han schools where modern math and science are taught. Tibetans believe that Han education will help their young people get jobs and survive in a predominantly Han society.

**Language of Instruction**

A key issue for Tibetan students is language of instruction. TianQing recalls her own education. She studied Tibetan language as an elementary and university student. She says because of the current situation in China, Tibetans are quickly forgetting their own language and culture. She feels that in order to study Han language and culture successfully, one needs to know his or her own cultural language first. In addition, this makes second language acquisition easier. Yet, she also says that “it’s better for Zang people to learn Han language. We need to have a bigger view. We are living in China and Han is the major official language.” Especially in the cities, Mandarin is a necessary language for gaining university entry and for securing a job upon graduation. TianQing
spoke of Tibetans from her home community who can only secure jobs that require Tibetan language skills as they don’t speak any Mandarin. For the two Han scholars interviewed, both are or will be, working with Tibetan students in education. Neither one of them speaks Tibetan because their minority students can communicate with them in Mandarin. AnNing recalls her elementary teacher painstakingly having to translate Han textbooks into Tibetan. This proved to be very difficult for both the teacher and students involved. AnNing feels that bilingual education, like ChengMing’s elementary textbook example, is best.

MeiYen is very upset over the loss of Tibetan language. “I feel like I can’t do anything, just give in. Maybe it’s a necessary political approach, the best way for a country to dominate or control groups of people is by controlling their language and their culture.” She says that there is little investment in Tibetan language education now because Tibetans are realizing that speaking Zangyu doesn’t get them anywhere. Students know that eventually, they will have to take exams in Hanyu anyway so why bother learning their own language? MeiYen identifies the least advanced Tibetan students as being from Xinjiang and the Tibet Autonomous Region. For them, learning Mandarin is the most difficult. Many educated Tibetan parents, like TianQing, are becoming very interested in their children’s education. TianQing wants her daughter to be deeply influenced by Tibetan culture and language. At the same time, she realizes that the world is shrinking and her daughter needs to be exposed to Han education, including English and computer classes in order for her to have a good future. Trying to find the time to accommodate and balance all of these interests is challenging to say the least. MeiYen, the most outspoken of the Tibetan participants, feels that Tibetans have been assimilated
into the Han system. “I don’t think assimilation is progress.” Participants believe that Tibetan opinions must be accommodated in future educational reforms.

**Theme # 8: Men Versus Women**

Confucianism, the base philosophy of Chinese society, explains a lot about how men and women live their lives and interact with each other in China. The philosophy states that men have certain jobs and women have others. Men are strong and women possess qualities of gentleness and tenderness. Men are the leaders and women are the followers or subordinates. Men go out and make money and women stay home and take care of the family. Men are yang (solar) and women are yin (lunar). There is a natural balance between the two. Many participants talked about the relationships between men and women in China, both in general terms and in academic life.

Yuofang had a lot to say about the relationships between men and women. “Looking around at women, they are not like women anymore. They want to be men. They look like ‘no gender’ people. Yin and yang are not working together anymore because women are competing with men. The balance is gone.” Several participants called themselves different or rebellious. They said that they don’t conform to the traditional minority and majority idea of a woman who stays at home serving her family. FengLin notes that in traditional Hui thinking, husbands don’t want their wives to have a higher education. When YunXian recently wrote the doctoral exam she found herself explaining her hard work to those around her. “They said that just being average is okay for women, especially for women getting older like me.” Yuofang was surprised when she met an Arab woman at a conference who asked her why her husband allows her to work. “From my point of view, being a professor makes me proud of my job. This Arabic
woman doesn’t have freedom. She needs to stay at home. I, on the other hand, can be a professional.” Yuofang also carefully described her trip to Mecca.

I had an interesting experience. I was completely covered, except for my eyes. I wore a veil. I could see everything through the veil. Men complained that they couldn’t see our women’s faces. I felt powerful because I could see all of the men but they couldn’t see me. This felt very good.

Participants are obviously not typical Chinese women. Each one possesses incredible inner strength and a strong desire to pursue her goals. Most participants admitted that their husbands were special as they helped them in some way with the housework and family chores making their wives’ academic/professional lives more central to living.

Kezen explained that minority people, like the majority Han population, prefer boys to girls, especially in poor, rural families. “Families think it’s not good for girls to study too much because eventually they will get married and leave home. On the other hand, boys can stay at home and help with family work. They contribute something.” HaiBo stated that if she were a rural minority mother faced with deciding which child to send to school, she would choose her son. “Do you think I would have any reason to send my daughter to school? Men can do more important things for society. It’s not sexism; it’s the truth. You can’t change it.” GaoJia thinks that in the cities women’s status has improved a lot in recent years. But, she thinks in society in general, there is still a strong favouritism for boys over girls. She admits that she has sacrificed her own work and hobbies to support her husband’s professional goals.

HaiBo discussed women’s innate good nature. She believes that they make good secretaries because they are detail-oriented, friendly and organized. If given the chance to compete for a high-powered position against a man with equal qualifications, HaiBo
wouldn’t try because she doesn’t think that she could do the job well. “There are certain limitations for women. They are weak and scared and not courageous enough. They don’t have any self confidence.” She seems to have forgotten her own courageous foreign study experience in Europe. In spite of saying that women are the weaker sex, HaiBo admitted that she doesn’t like the traditional Hui concept of men being superior to women. “I hate it. Sometimes I even make announcements to recommend that women should stand up and speak for themselves instead of always hiding behind a man.” Perhaps she developed this notion while she was studying overseas. The main question that needs asking then is this: How can these highly educated minority women rectify the great contradictions that they are living in their every day lives?

**Academic Relationships**

TianQing believes that, in general, less educated women are satisfied with what they have versus the more educated women who are always looking for something more. In rural areas, women are happy if they have enough food to eat and clothing to wear. “From my viewpoint, they are working so hard. They have a narrow view of life and don’t know much outside of their own environments.” TianQing says that women her age finished their elementary schooling, or at most, junior high, and then waited for their families to marry them off. They had no chance of obtaining a higher education. LiLin says that the government doesn’t look at women in education. The government believes that women’s responsibility is to be mothers and wives.

YuoFang states that in higher education there are fewer female teachers. It is more difficult for females to be successful in higher education because they need to take care of their families and work simultaneously. “I feel very unbalanced. People need to
appreciate more what women have done for their families. They have done so much, sacrificed themselves.” BaoYu agrees. Her husband is in business and he socialises a lot and comes home late. She is stuck doing all the housework and taking care of her child after working as a professor all day. She says that employers see women as spending more time and energy on their families than on their professional work and are therefore not as productive as male academics. She says this is not true and unfair. She gave the example of applying for yearly leave. “Men get first choice and women need to wait and reapply again for the next term.” YuoFang admits that she works night and day to do a good job at the university and then goes home and does all the family chores. She has four roles to play every day: wife, mother, professor and administrator. BaoYu also said that men always come first when it comes to promotions. Yet, she admits that she can’t fight the system. “I think they are right. They require male teachers to do more. They have higher requirements and expectations of service.” She feels that women in her department have a heavier workload than their male colleagues. MeiYen feels that men and women academics are equal in terms of salary. YunXian agrees and adds that female academic’s self development depends on the individual’s own efforts. “You can’t rely on somebody else. You must work hard.”

Several women mentioned the differences in physical abilities between men and women impacting on their academic lives. Men can go on if they want to continue studying but women have to put their family responsibilities first. KeZen says that women get tired because of this double day they work. Men, on the contrary, finish their jobs at the university and “go home to do nothing.” They have more energy than women do. “Sometimes I feel I can’t keep up in terms of my physical condition.” KeZen says the
discrimination is strongest in the areas of promotion and housing. "We will apply for housing using my husband’s name." She also pointed out that male academics have more opportunities for retraining than female teachers do. She thinks this is because male educators are more qualified and therefore more competitive than female teachers. For KeZen, her desire to continue on with her doctorate is an issue. She wants to continue studying but feels that she must put her family responsibilities first and start her family. She is concerned as she has heard that there is a regulation which states that Ph.D. students cannot get pregnant while studying. She will most likely put off her academic dream for the future. TianQing complained that her age, thirty-six, is a factor in her chances of continuing her education. Right now, her three goals are to support her husband in obtaining higher education, to support her daughter’s education and to serve her family. TianQing’s professional and personal needs come last.

LiLin explained the hardships of being a woman minority administrator. When travelling to minority areas she has to adjust to the difficult working environment. Being the only female in her office she doesn’t have anyone else to discuss these issues with who understands her situation. LiLin says that women have to pretend they are strong even when they are not. If a position is open and a man and a woman with equal qualifications are competing for the job, the man will get it. Men are more aggressive. There are so many contradictions that women face in the academic world. They are torn between their family responsibilities and their desire to study and/or to teach. LiLin also notes that it is difficult for intelligent women to find husbands because men think that it is difficult to control a woman who is more intelligent than they are.
The contradictions that participants face in their daily lives between their traditional role as mothers and wives and their professional roles as educators are significant. Being minority women, a minority within a minority, compounds this struggle. Chinese women today are working the double shift more than ever before. “Holding up half the sky” is becoming an extremely difficult thing to do. Yuofang says it best, “I feel emotional. I don’t feel peaceful and balanced between family and work. I need to face the reality. I am what I am now. I have no choice but to keep living and do the best that I can.” Women, especially minority women, are struggling to achieve a balance between making sense of the concept of being a good woman while simultaneously being a professional in a modern and quickly changing China.

In Chapter Five, the eight themes presented in this section will be analyzed further. In addition, theme nine, participants’ many suggestions of how to improve minority higher education will be examined in detail.
Chapter Five: Findings – Theme Nine

Introduction

This chapter examines the ninth theme of the study, the recommendations of the participants for minority higher education. In addition, further analysis of the themes and related ideas that emerged during the research process will be included. Participants voiced many ideas for restructuring and improving minority higher education in China. These recommendations will be broken down into the following areas: (1) joint international scholarly projects; (2) the role of China’s government in education; (3) a return to Confucianism and traditional Chinese society; (4) rebuilding the curriculum; (5) policies and structure of minority higher education; (6) minority teachers and administrators and the promotion of women in higher education; (7) Tibetan minority education; and (8) the development of a dynamic framework for minority higher education.

Joint International Scholarly Projects

Joint international scholarly projects, like SULCP, play an important role in China’s educational development. DeChang articulated several suggestions that could increase the intellectual and educational sharing across borders between China and the rest of the world. He feels that the continued sharing and exchanging of ideas is crucial to China’s educational advancement. Western thinking on educational psychology, for example, has been very helpful to DeChang’s own learning and teaching about the subject in China. He sees Canadian and other Western scholars taking on leadership,
mentoring and translator roles, helping Chinese academics to promote their work in English language journals. This will significantly increase the accessibility of current Chinese thinking on education to the rest of the world, not just to the international scholarly community but also to the frontline workers, the teachers. Knowing and understanding what is happening in one part of the globe can positively influence and enhance what takes place in the educational system of another. This is a step forward. DeChang also sees China’s role as being one of contributing knowledge to the planet from a uniquely Chinese perspective. He says that the world needs to know what is happening in China. Moreover, by learning from other countries, by sharing knowledge across borders, cultures and learning systems, China’s own educational system will grow and modernize more quickly. Lastly, DeChang would like to see an increase in Chinese scholarly publications within China itself be made more accessible to a wide variety of readers, including academics, pre-service teaching students and frontline educators working in the field. Publishing SULCP activities and achievements along with other joint programs’ work will spur future growth, new ideas and development in China’s educational system. XianMing expressed her strong interest in participating in future joint Canada-China projects, like SULCP, and in publishing her research on Chinese women and their education in both English and Chinese.

In terms of minority education, ChengMing believes that it is crucial for international scholars to work directly with China’s minority people. “If this happens, results will be better because minority people will participate more actively and in a positive way, knowing that they are working for their own people.” FengLin supports this idea. She believes that joint international projects should be cooperative in nature.
Minority teachers, the frontline workers who know the most about the real situations in China's schools, should be informed regularly about what is happening in their particular project. "Control should be concentrated at the grassroots level." Minority teachers play an important role as change agents in society. Minority teachers' voices must be heard. They need an opportunity to speak. This will ensure high quality projects and active participation and satisfaction among minority participants in the future. Moreover, minority teachers need to have ownership of the projects they are involved with. "Teachers are extremely busy people who don’t have time to waste on superficial projects run by high-level policy makers who don’t really know what’s happening at the base level." FengLin suggests that funding should go directly to the grassroots level in joint projects, to where teachers and students are working hard for change. FengLin's comment about outsiders being more persuasive than those in China is an interesting idea. Perhaps foreign researchers and educational experts can increase their involvement with Chinese education and act as a helpful outside voice and support system for those in the PRC. Foreign scholars should be encouraged to conduct research in China and to publish it. Sharing ideas across borders is helpful not only for China but for the rest of the world as well.

FengLin discussed how important the project evaluation process is. She would like to know who and how projects are evaluated and if the evaluation has been efficient or not. FengLin suggests that the Chinese government or minority groups themselves establish some kind of standard of project evaluation to replace the current system of foreign partner control. "Evaluation needs to come from the Chinese side of the project."

FengLin adds that many government officials do not understand minority culture and
language and do not emphasize minority teacher development and education. This must change if minority education is to be improved. YunXian feels that Canada is a good partner for China in developing the nation’s minority education because it has very interesting projects and good research resources of its own. She knows of a Canadian long distance education project that could be very applicable to Chinese minority education. YunXian encourages continued cooperation between Canada and China. She hopes to participate directly in a future joint project, both as a researcher and as a learner.

FengLin suggested a program for female minority teachers that would help them build their self-confidence. This program could include how to educate one’s children and how to develop oneself. She would also like to see a more international research on teaching elementary education in China. FengLin says more investigation is needed in this particular area. AnNing wants to see a project that will promote the status of female teachers and help them develop further. “The best way is to start from girls’ education.”

Several participants thanked the researcher for her interest in female minority teacher education and for bringing the issue up for discussion. Participants stated that this meaningful topic is not well recognized in China. FengLin says foreign research allows the world to see how female minority education has developed. LiLin affirms that women’s education has been overlooked in the past. “If you look for some articles related to this issue you can hardly find any valuable ones.” She is looking forward to reading the findings of this particular study. “It will be very valuable to women in education in China.” YuoFang thanked the researcher for speaking with her. “Talk is freedom.” She believes that women around the world need to communicate with each other and share their thoughts and feelings about being women and their place in the world. MeiYen
admitted that she has very few opportunities to talk to Han people or foreigners about minority culture, education and life in general. She feels that it is important to express her views, tell her stories and let her thoughts be documented. AnNing looks to the future. She hopes that other joint projects like SULCP will continue to have increased meaning in their application to teacher education and development in China. AnNing believes that research is very important and leads to future development.

Over half of the participants mentioned the idea of cultural and study exchanges as a way to enhance learning. HaiBo is very interested in promoting exchange programs for Chinese university students and staff that will allow them to live, study and travel abroad. She believes that travelling allows one to adjust to new environments. This skill will be extremely useful in minority teachers' future lives in education. HaiBo is interested in continuing her study of languages and would go abroad again if given the opportunity. BaoYu and KeZen share her enthusiasm. BaoYu says, “Studying abroad can broaden my horizons and open my eyes to different cultures. If they (SULCP or similar projects) could provide me with opportunities to study abroad that would be helpful.” Joint international programs may prove to be very supportive in allowing some of these talented women to study overseas and subsequently contribute to the development of education in China.

**The Role of China’s Government in Education**

Several participants mentioned the role played by China’s government in promoting both minority education and the education of the nation’s females. The funding issue was central to this discussion. AnNing explained that obtaining a university education is an expense the majority of minority families just can’t afford. Some families
will even have members take on extra jobs in factories and other industries in order to make enough money to pay for a university education for one member of the family. It’s very difficult for people in this environment. Although many minority students express a strong interest in attending an institute of higher learning, they are often unable to go due to financial constraints. Minority females are the most disadvantaged group. They represent a minority within a minority. AnNing suggests that the government and the universities reduce fees for minority students, not just for university level studies but all the way through starting from elementary school, supporting students from an early age and promoting the establishment of a strong educational foundation. AnNing is also a strong advocate for developing education for girls and women.

AnNing would also like to see the government provide some individual financial help to minority students and support for the retraining of teachers already working in the field. She believes that this will allow more educated individuals to help those who do not have the opportunity of attending school themselves. Teachers thus become key players and agents of change in China’s social and economic development. HaiBo discussed the gender inequalities for minority students pursuing higher education. She said that government policies, combined with traditional minority views on women’s role in society, favour male minority students. She feels that if the government could create a favoured policy especially for minority women by funding between 70-80% of female students’ education, this would encourage their application to university and balance the inequality which currently exists between male and female minority students. Families could pay the remaining 20-30% of university fees for their daughters. HaiBo feels that the government must take responsibility for promoting both minority education and the
education of China’s females, especially those living in rural minority areas. She mentioned that if she came into money herself, she would donate it to rural Gansu, to the children. HaiBo would like to give more chances of education to minority people living in the countryside. She believes that this would be more powerful than becoming a teacher herself. “I can influence more people with money than by being an individual teacher. This is a big dream.” MeiYen has a similar dream. She agrees that without money, programs will not improve. If she had money MeiYen would run her own course for minority teachers and have them spread their knowledge to people around them.

LiLin described the vastness of her country and the various groups of people living in it. She believes that problems in education occur for many reasons. One of these is that the government provides schools nation-wide with a very vague framework which they are to follow, both in terms of setting up an educational system and the curriculum to be administered. Thus, individual schools are left to deal with details on their own, without any strong guidance from Beijing. Female minority education often gets neglected as schools try to target their mainstream populations. LiLin fears that by neglecting female education the government is affecting the future mothers of China. “Children inherit intelligence from their mothers. We need to emphasize education for females to have better children in the future. This is good for national and biological development.” LiLin warns that girls who miss out on elementary education cannot catch up later on. Thus, further research on the topic of education for girls and women is very valuable for China’s future development. Participants agreed that the government has a key role to play as both a funding body and administrative leader in China’s educational present and future.
A Return to Confucianism and Traditional Chinese Society

About half of the participants interviewed were quite concerned with the idea of China's present cultural erosion. YouFang believes that the natural balance in China is collapsing. "We must get it back." She would like to see people retreating back to the old ways and good manners of the past. YouFang feels that her students are increasingly less well behaved and need more cultivation, more training in what it means to be Chinese. ChenGung agrees that poor behaviour due to the gradual increase in leniency in education, both in school and at home, is contributing to a weakness in young people's characters. GaoJia says teachers and administrators need to communicate with their students, be strict with them and help them increase their confidence in themselves. This notion of strictness versus leniency is indigenous to Chinese educational thinking yet foreign to most Western educational philosophy. YouFang is especially concerned about the welfare of women in China today. She wants the government to put more emphasis on the 'cell' family unit, as it is the base of traditional Confucian and modern Chinese society and community. "The contribution of women to their families should be considered a contribution to society. Family work should count." Women's important roles in modern society, both as mothers/caregivers and as professionals, along with their constant struggle to make sense of the contradiction between these two roles deserves serious and immediate attention.

BaoYu feels that Confucian education, Congzi, is very important for China. She sees the problem now as being the strong influence of western culture on young Chinese minds. BaoYu would like to have her students get out of the classroom, open their eyes and minds to the world around them and try to connect the world of theory to the one of
practice. She feels that China’s openness to the world is decreasing the role of Chinese indigenous knowledge, both in majority and minority communities. “We need a revival of Chinese indigenous knowledge, national IK. We need to keep the foundation.” BaoYu feels that Chinese IK is a necessary component of education. She sees her role as a teacher being one of leading her students into the future. MeiYen commented on present day Chinese society as being totally out of control because of the deteriorating state of education. Parents are too lenient with their children. Traditional Chinese characteristics of good nature and personality are vanishing because of this leniency. MeiYen says China must return to Confucianism and moral education. “Without education there is barbarism.” By reviving traditional Chinese knowledge and ideas about strictness in the educational system, from elementary through to the university level, Chinese young people will become better human beings and stronger learners who are able to actively contribute to the building of their nation.

**Rebuilding the Curriculum**

Issues related to the rebuilding of the university curriculum were plentiful and came from all fifteen of the study participants. Tibetan minority education and curriculum issues became a sub-theme of its own and will be addressed separately later on in this chapter. Participants identified several key areas of curriculum reform including: the central role of indigenous knowledge in university education, language of instruction, and English language learning.
The Central Role of Indigenous Knowledge in University Curriculum

Numerous comments were made about educational curriculum in China. ChenGung feels that the current educational model of China is unsuccessful because creativity is not encouraged and students don’t push themselves hard enough. She spoke of her early minority education which made her work hard and develop a traditional Hui mentality and work ethic. For the Hui population, the influence of Islam in their early educational upbringing is significant. It helps them go on and succeed at the university level. BaoYu commented that modernisation and open policies have been detrimental to curriculum development in China. The traditional Chinese foundation is vanishing. “We need to revive Chinese indigenous knowledge in education. We need to lead students.” She sees her subject area of philosophy as one way of accomplishing this goal. “Marxism can provide a method of thinking and global concepts. Marxism can give students direction.”

YunXian stated that no matter whether it’s minority or mainstream education, the culture and traditions of students must be included in the curriculum. FengLin mentioned a very successful Hui minority curriculum daycare system in a Ningxia Province Hui community that has a 90% enrolment rate. She sees this as a good example of a powerful curriculum for young minority students. Like YunXian, she feels minority students need to learn about their own culture and traditions and develop feelings of love and compassion for their minority identities. Minority teachers must help their students understand their minority identity as members in mainstream Chinese society. Minority indigenous knowledge is thus a crucial element of minority curriculum. FengLin
explained that the good elements of Han culture should be incorporated into minority learning creating a combined and strong curriculum.

LiLin noted that minority students face a difficult contradiction between preserving their minority traditions and keeping up with the times. For her, dealing with this contradiction is a curriculum issue. She also says that the content of courses is not designed for different minority groups. The same curriculum is supposed to meet the needs of various minority students, whether they come from Gansu or other provinces like Sichuan and Yunnan. The current curriculum is the same for students who can speak Mandarin as for those who can speak only their mother tongue. The official curriculum is unchangeable and affects students’ character development. “In students’ minds they think they have to study the same things whether they are good or not very good students. As a result, we see a lot of average, mediocre students who cannot do things very well.” This applies to both minority and majority learners.

FengLin’s tree metaphor describes the central role of indigenous knowledge in the university curriculum. The roots of the tree are the minority IK from which everything else grows. “If you forget your roots whether minority or majority, your existence is not real . . . If you deny your identity, your roots, then you are denying yourself and denying your own traditions. It’s the same with education. We need to start with the roots.” The main question which must then be asked is this: How can the university curriculum integrate different minority groups’ indigenous knowledge, while simultaneously teaching a standard Han curriculum that is useful to all students, majority and minority throughout the country? This is the challenge that faces NWNU and all other institutions of higher learning in China today.
YunXian points out that students' individual and collective IK, religions and lifestyles, have an effect on their personalities and characteristics. Understanding these things is important for minority teachers. FengLin recommends that minority teachers be taught about their own cultures, traditions and customs and to love the land that minority people live on. Teaching future educators how to communicate this love for minority IK to their students and acknowledging students' individual IK should be a major goal of restructuring the curriculum. “It’s very important to help or direct minority students (pre-service teachers) to get more involved in minority education and to have a deeper understanding of their own people.” YunXian adds that minority teachers must help their students understand their identity as minority members in mainstream Chinese society.

YouFang articulates the fact that Lanzhou’s indigenous knowledge is regional, encompassing several minority cultures and Han majority culture as well. All of these individual ways of life come together and mix, creating a hybrid city culture and indigenous knowledge base. Although each culture and ethnic group must promote their own traditions, they must also work together to live in harmony with one another. University curriculum should reflect this rich cultural and linguistic hybridity.

**Language of Instruction (‘Shuangyu’/Bilingualism)**

Most participants voiced their opinions regarding the language of instruction of teaching, from elementary through to the university level. AnNing says that if students have a good, bilingual teacher in their own minority community it could be just as good as travelling to the city for an education. The language problem becomes an issue when minority students arrive in city schools and universities. TianQing feels that promoting bilingual education, Hanyu (Mandarin) and the minority students’ languages is most
effective in dealing with this problem. In the Tibetan minority group for instance, students require Mandarin if they want to eventually work outside of a Tibetan community. These same students also require Tibetan language (Zangyu) in order to maintain their minority culture. AnNing considers herself a successful ‘product’ of this type of bilingual Tibetan/Mandarin education. “My early bilingual education made me a stronger student than non-bilingual educated children.”

Minority teachers therefore have a strong role to play in this bilingual language teaching. Being experts in their own minority languages, they can instruct their students, both in the set curriculum and minority IK, through using their native minority languages and Mandarin as dual languages of instruction. YunXian adds, “If you cannot overcome the language barriers the quality of teaching and learning is in doubt. If you can instruct students in their native languages the results of learning will be much better.” YunXian is working on developing bilingual teaching material using information technology for her courses. According to FengLin, the creative spirit of minority teachers should be used in educational planning and curriculum development. BaoYu adds that minority teachers should be encouraged to use their innovative ideas in their teaching. LiLin described young, Zhuang minority community members as powerful examples of a bilingual education program. These individuals can speak three dialects of Chinese: Cantonese, Mandarin and Zhuang language, making them university graduates that are highly employable, both in their home communities and elsewhere in China. Linguistic ability in both Mandarin and minority dialects is the key to success in the modern work world for minority people living in China.
YunXian spoke about the important role being played by the media and technology in language education in Northwest China.

Using the media and television you can communicate information about how minority people live in local communities to those living in the city and vice versa. I hope that through the use of media I can teach my students about how different people are living, no matter how old they are, children to old people.

For YunXian, information technology is a powerful tool in teaching. She creates bilingual teaching resources, like overheads to help teach her courses. “Information technology allows me to use images and graphics, which are forms of non-verbal communication, to help my students understand my instructions.” By using technology, YunXian can overcome the language barriers her minority students face and facilitate communication in the classroom, both in Mandarin and in students’ native languages. She sees long distance education as being very promising and very applicable to minority communities in China. She also believes that the use of radios and videos has a lot of potential in minority teaching. Shuangyu or bilingual education is necessary in YunXian’s view. Keeping students’ first languages for cultural transmission and promoting Mandarin in order for students to be able to communicate with the rest of China is crucial. For YunXian, language is the most important feature of minority education. Her responsibility to her students is great.

**English Language Learning**

Although learning Mandarin and one’s minority language are crucial to success in modern China, being able to communicate in English is also highly marketable. All participants agreed that being able to communicate in English is a very important skill to have. KeZen had a lot to say about English as a subject at university. KeZen stated that
minority English classes are very different from Han student English classes. “In minority English classes there is not much interest in learning, by the students or their teachers and sometimes there is no teaching, just idle chat.” ChenGung believes that English classes shouldn’t be divided in terms of ethnicity, majority and minority. She says English classes are simplified for all minority students because the current thinking is that minority students are less qualified than Han students. “My teacher told me that the way I’m learning English is like learning to swim on a beach. I don’t have the chance to go in the water. There is no use learning to swim this way. It’s very difficult to learn a language without immersing yourself in the environment.”

ChenGung feels that minority students’ English levels might be better than Han students’ English. “It’s unfair that I had to take a simplified class simply because I’m a minority student. Teaching shouldn’t discriminate against minority or majority students. It’s a big issue here right now.” She agrees that classes should be simplified for those minority students who need extra help. There should be many levels to accommodate all learners’ needs. “Minority students need to be independent and need to help themselves first. They need to adjust themselves to their new (university) environment quickly.”

ChenGung feels that high level minority students should push themselves and take exactly the same English class as Han students do. LiLin has noticed that many minority students, especially those from poor, rural areas, have not studied English before arriving at university. For them, Hanyu is a foreign language too. They need to start from scratch with both Mandarin and English. Universities need to consider where minority students are from in order to understand their entry level of English and then provide the appropriate courses for them. TianQing admitted that, age-wise, it is almost too late for
her to learn English. A person is required to pass an English test in order to get an academic promotion at NWNU. Instead, TianQing is concentrating her efforts on ensuring that her daughter learns English well and benefits from it.

The English teacher levels in minority communities are very low. KeZen and other participants say that English language education needs to be improved, from elementary school through to university. LiLin states that advanced minority students who study at NWNU, like those from Xi’an, easily get bored in minority English classes. She feels that different minority students have different English language needs, depending on where they are from. No matter what their levels of English, students should push themselves to learn. Different levels of English classes are needed to accommodate the needs and levels of all minority students. KeZen says, “Learning English is a big issue for me. For students in the city they can at least communicate with foreigners.” KeZen says that there is no listening comprehension in class. There are no opportunities for language immersion. At present, English is only offered for two years of a four-year undergraduate program. KeZen suggests extending the current English program to four years. In the first two years of an undergraduate degree students could study listening and speaking. In years three and four they could work on reading and writing.

According to KeZen, at the graduate level students only receive one year of English training per degree. With this, they are expected to be able to read foreign English resources and process information from them for their own academic purposes. She says this limited training is not enough for graduate students. She would like NWNU to review its policy of learning English for minority students. LiLin feels that minority
administrators need to study English too. “Language is a very important tool. As an administrator, I should be able to learn and speak English.” As China continues to integrate with the world at large, it’s learners will require more and better skills in English, the key western language of global economic communication.

**Policies and Structure of Minority Higher Education**

During the interviews participants discussed existing policies and structural elements of minority higher education and their suggestions for improving these areas. Topics explored include: favoured policies for minority people, university entrance exams, restructuring learning environments, educational administration, and sister schools.

**Favoured Policies For Minority People**

Minority groups in China enjoy the benefits of specific government policies created solely for minority people. For example, all minority students living in the countryside are given ten extra points on their university entrance exams to help them compete with their better-educated Han counterparts for a coveted place at university. Another favoured policy states that minority families are allowed to, and are often encouraged to, have two children. During the interviews participants admitted that they knew very little, or were somewhat unclear on, the favoured policies for minority people. YuoFang discussed the favoured policy of ten extra points being given to minority students on the university entrance exam. She noted that although minority students might be accepted into university based on their lower entrance scores, as a teacher, she sees no difference between minority and Han students’ work once at university. YuoFang
felt it important to mention that once accepted into a university, the process of learning is the same for all students. Everyone must work hard in order to do well. YuoFang pointed out that the favoured policies are only available to first year minority students. There was no favoured policy for her when she recently wrote the doctoral exam. AnNing added that pre-university level minority schooling is different from Han schooling, causing minority students to have a disadvantage when writing the university entrance exam. Thus, in her eyes, the extra points make sense. However, she also pointed out that some minority students, including herself, are very capable learners who don’t require favoured policies in order to succeed academically. Unfortunately, many minority students don’t ever have the opportunity to study at all. AnNing says that blaming the universities for failing to financially support more minority students and to encourage their pursuits in higher education is unfair as these institutions, along with the government, have their own serious chronic monetary issues to deal with.

When first asked about the favoured policies, ChenGung said that the government has good intentions in taking good care of minority students, especially those from rural areas. "They are not starting at the same level as others. Without the policies, those students wouldn’t have a chance to go to school. They need the extra exam points given to minority students." However, at a later point in the interview, she contradicted herself by saying the following: "People always think that the government has favoured policies for minority students. So, I must have been accepted to university because I’m a minority student. When we took the exam, we were all at the same level." ChenGung may have been referring to the fact that some Hui and Tibetan minority students who have grown up in the cities, in the Han educational system, have a foundational advantage over their
rural counterparts. Hui students, especially, are quite assimilated into the Han educational and cultural system. She also mentioned the unfairness of the so-called ‘favoured’ policies. She stated that Han students from urban areas have a second chance to write the national university entrance exams if they fail the first time. “Minority students can’t do this. There’s only one chance for them. Once you fail, that’s it. So the favoured policies aren’t doing good things for those kids from very poor rural areas.” As an administrator, GaoJia believes that it is best to have one standard for all students, minority and majority. Favoured policies don’t help minority students. She feels that being strict with minority students instead of giving them special treatment is best for their academic and social development. KeZen agrees that minority students shouldn’t be given any special treatment. They should study as hard as Han people and compete directly with them. Favoured policies are not the answer.

*University Entrance Exams*

Most participants identified the university entrance exam as a key barrier faced by minority students wishing to obtain a university education. GaoJia groups minority students into two areas. The first group of students comes from Ningxia, Qinghai, and Shaanxi provinces. Students from these places are quite advanced. They have a solid understanding of Han language and score high on the entrance exam. The second group of students come from Xinjiang and Xizang (Tibet Autonomous Region), areas that are quite remote and rural. The exam scores from this group are generally the lowest of all minority students. HaiBo has noticed these gaps among minority students in terms of achievement levels on the entrance exam. Her solution is to lower the accepted passing score for those minority students who have a weak foundation and come from rural,
underdeveloped areas. She also recommends allowing minority students to attend university in their home provinces. Being in a familiar environment will make the challenge of university life less intense and more manageable for these students, especially for those who come from remote regions of the country.

In terms of NWNU, HaiBo says that students coming from urban Xi’an in neighbouring Shaanxi Province have a very strong foundation and, therefore, a built-in advantage over other minority students. Their entrance exam scores could be lowered while students applying from Xinjiang, where the foundation of education is very weak, could have their scores increased to allow them to compete for admission with the students from Xi’an. ChenGung recommends that rural minority students be given favoured treatment, in the form of having two chances to write the entrance exam, just like what their Han counterparts enjoy in the city.

YunXian believes that the entrance exam is so difficult for many minority students because it is usually administered in Mandarin, a second and foreign language for most minority students. Even in places like Xinjiang where the exam has been translated into students’ first languages, communication problems develop, as errors in translation are common. YunXian pointed out that her own recent research on minority students’ scores on national exams shows that there is no correlation between entrance exam scores and students’ subsequent achievements at university. This means that the ideas of equalizing exam scores for students from different areas and providing learners with a second chance won’t have any real effect at all on their achievement once admitted into university programs. The national university entrance exam system thus warrants a detailed study of its own.
Restructuring Learning Environments

Participants shared ideas about how to improve learning environments for minority students. KeZen would like to see academically strong minority students put into Han classes. At present, the minority class is separated from the Han class at NWNU. KeZen would like minority students to have equal opportunities to compete directly with Han students at the university. She feels that minority teachers must watch for bright minority students and help them gain entry into the advanced Han class. BaoYu would like to have teaching time available to have more discussions with her students and increase their interest and involvement with their own learning. She would like to take them on fieldtrips off campus. Unfortunately, time restraints make lecturing the main mode of information transfer in her teaching. TianQing wants to see the quality of university teaching increase and an improvement in students’ attitudes towards studying. YunXian adds, “When I go to class I sometimes don’t feel like teaching because students don’t like to study nowadays. This is a big issue now.”

BaoYu has a makeshift idea. She lowers her standards of student achievement by accepting mediocre class test scores from her minority students, thereby also lowering her own teaching standards, in order for these students to pass her course. She admits that having minority students from both the cities and the countryside in one class creates a mix of various ability levels making teaching at a high level a great challenge. Minority students are not accustomed to the foreign atmosphere prevalent at the big city universities. AnNing says that these students experience “severe culture shock when coming to the city to study.” The adjustment to city living is very difficult for many of them. BaoYu has begun work on creating a textbook for her department aimed at
addressing the language levels and academic needs of the minority students that she teaches. BaoYu hopes that this text will increase communication and understanding between minority students and their teachers. Like BaoYu, YunXian also lowers the quality of her teaching. “When teaching in class I need to present the average standard. I can’t lower the average to meet the lowest level of students from the rural areas.” She believes that learning should be based on individual differences. How to accommodate all of her students’ varying levels in her teaching is the constant dilemma.

**Educational Administration**

Effective administration of minority education was an issue brought up by a few of the participants in this study. LiLin’s major concern as an administrator is how to promote advanced students while encouraging the slower ones. “We need to design a curriculum according to students’ many needs and levels and their future development. We need different assessment systems for various levels of student achievement.” She says that course content is not specifically designed for minority students. NWNU does, however, now have a one-year preparation course for minority students who are behind when they first begin university. LiLin says that students from Xinjiang really benefit from this program. “A lot of them have never learned English before.” LiLin would like to see more work done in the area of curriculum development on preparation courses and their content. She says that minority administrators need to learn more about learning theories, educational psychology and educational theories. GaoJia feels that minority educational management requires keeping the same standard for both minority and majority students. “We have to regulate minority students strictly. Just because they are away from home doesn’t mean that they can get away with anything. It’s not right to be
lenient. It’s another form of discrimination.” GaoJia says promoting minority education involves implementing standards and regulations and promoting staff development. “Female administrators need to improve themselves in terms of their specialties and their expertise and knowledge in their fields. Women aren’t as ambitious in learning expertise as their male colleagues are because they are so tired from working the double shift.” Women administrators therefore need support in advancing their careers.

LiLin has several suggestions for improving minority school management. She feels school management should follow the ideas of business management. “The recruiting of students could use business management ideas. Student quality might be one criteria of how to measure if a school is good or not. You have to evaluate how good a company is.” Student achievements can be dealt with in the same way using a quality control system. “If students are not good enough, we won’t let them graduate and teach. We need to set up standards. As long as students are meeting the criteria, they are good.” GaoJia says that NWNU can learn from other universities about successful methods of minority student administration. “We need to be strict with recruitment of minority students. We can’t just take whomever.” GaoJia feels that minority administrators have an important role to play in changing traditional concept of preference for boys over girls. She also feels that women make good administrators. The government needs to support and help them grow in their specialties and expertise in their knowledge fields. Females are good workers and pay attention to details. She says the goal at present is to figure out how to combine women and men working together and doing a good job in minority administration.
Sister Schools

Sister schools are an idea that should be developed further. KeZen explains, “We need to try our best to develop minority teacher education. The best way to bridge the gap between cities and rural areas is through creating sister schools.” This involves making connections between high-level city schools and lower level rural schools. Exchanges, workshops and lectures can be used to convey new ideas about education from the city schools to their rural sister schools. Information flows in one direction, urban to rural. KeZen feels that city school teachers can support teaching in rural areas for about half of each year. Although this program is already in place in some areas, KeZen feels that it isn’t working as well as it could because city people continue to hold a prejudice that rural people are less educated.

AnNing would like to see Han teachers going to the countryside to teach, taking knowledge from the cities and spreading it in rural areas. She feels that it’s easier for Han teachers to adjust to minority lifestyles than vice versa. Moreover, minority students might feel less pressure staying and learning in their own minority communities. By bringing Han culture to students in their home environments, meaningful learning can be achieved. In this way, information is flowing in two directions. Rural dwellers can absorb the best elements of Han culture and Han teachers can absorb the best elements of minority culture, taking it back to the city with them when they leave. This is an extension and an improvement on KeZen’s one directional transfer of information. Important areas of knowledge that could be spread from the cities to the countryside by female minority teachers are feminine hygiene, sex education and how to keep healthy. City teachers have access to information that rural minority women simply don’t have.
By sharing this information with their rural sisters, city women could help improve the quality of life of women in the countryside. AnNing says that rural female students are more comfortable talking to their teachers about their bodies than to their own mothers. Students can share information they learn from their city teachers with their families.

Finally, if minority teachers study at city universities, when they graduate they can take new ideas back home with them and help develop their minority communities. KeZen feels that the most important idea that teachers can bring back to their communities is that students have to develop the ability to learn by themselves, rather than learning only from their teachers. Developing their students’ confidence and promoting life-long learning are important goals of minority teachers upon returning to teach in their communities. Minority teachers can be powerful change agents in their society. FengLin notes that minority teachers who return to their communities have advantages over their Han colleagues and can therefore contribute more to minority education.

**Minority Teachers and Administrators and the Promotion of Women in Higher Education**

**Education**

All twelve female minority participants expressed their views about how to promote women in higher education and women’s status in society in general. AnNing says, “The best way to promote the status of female teachers and help them develop further is to start from girls’ education. You need to start here to ensure there are female teachers in the future.” She also believes that nine-year compulsory education must be strongly supported. “You need to have a strong foundation in order to build up women’s education.” AnNing says China must nurture its females from the bottom up. Girls must
be encouraged to attend school. “If we start from the foundation of girls’ education, the benefits for society in general will be much greater.” YunXian agrees. She feels that females must be supported in their educational pursuits but must also realize that it is their responsibility to improve themselves and that they must work hard to fulfil their goals. FengLin adds that minority students, female and male, must realize that they don’t have to give up their minority identity in order to get something that they really want, whether it be something academic or job related. TianQing feels that women need examples of professional women who are also good mothers and wives, women who can do it all successfully. YouFang would like to see women become active stakeholders in Chinese society.

Several participants mentioned their desire to do research on minority education. AnNing says, “If I have a good career, I’d like to go back and do some research about my hometown community issues, Tibetan culture and religion. I’d like to study how these two things affect education there. Taking courses in this field would also be interesting.” MeiYen sees part of her minority teacher role as being a mediator, liaison person or bridge between minority and Han students and staff. She is an ‘information center’ for different ethnic groups. TianQing would like to see minority academic personnel be allowed to write the promotional exam in Mandarin, a language that is much more familiar to them than English. This would allow minorities, especially women who have limited time to study because they work the double shift, to compete more fairly for better positions at the university. YouFang notes that some female minority teachers hope to develop minority indigenous knowledge to a higher level. With this, they then go back
to their minority areas and develop education and contribute to society and the building of the nation.

Female minority teachers and administrators must work towards resolving the daily contradiction they face between trying to balance their home lives as caregivers with their busy work lives as professionals. As stated earlier, working the 'double shift' is a great burden for all women in China. YouFang admits that having an older person like a grandparent to help care for her daughter would significantly reduce her home workload.

Minority teachers and administrators are role models for all minority women. Participants should work together to break down the barriers that exist between themselves and their rural minority counterparts so that they are able to share their lived experiences with each other and learn from them. By coming together as a united group and communicating, participants can make improvements to the status of women and to women’s education.

YouFang had a lot to say about the re-education or cultivation of men and its role in promoting women in Chinese society and education. She believes that men’s attitudes towards women must change. She suggests developing some kind of a course to re-educate China’s men. “It might take twenty years to cultivate men.” YouFang believes that promoting understanding between men and women is the key. Males and females have different views on so many topics. Communication must occur if positive change is to take place. YouFang notes that the most work needs to be done in rural minority communities where male chauvinism and traditional ideas about women’s place in society run strong. She feels that men need to appreciate the contributions that women have made to their families. YouFang feels that women’s salaries at work should include what they have done in the kitchen. “Men must realize that women go to the kitchen and
cook. This is a woman’s contribution not her responsibility. Men must make a contribution too.” Women’s economic power and status must be valued. “Women and men are like yin and yang. They should be cooperative instead of contradicting each other.” BaoYu feels that the existing system, which favours men, cannot change unless the whole environment changes. “You can’t just count on one or two people for a revolution. It’s very difficult.”

**Tibetan Minority Education**

Tibetans are a unique minority group in this study. Out of the four minorities represented, issues of Tibetan minority education received the most attention, by both Tibetan and non-Tibetan participants. This is probably because Tibetans are the furthest away from Han culture, the least assimilated or integrated into it, out of the four groups studied. Hui, Zhuang and Man (Manchurian) participants openly admitted that they are more familiar with and assimilated into Han culture and way of life than they are with their individual minority practices.

The main overriding issue regarding Tibetan minority education is the preservation of language and culture. In a modern, quickly-changing China, how can Tibetan language and culture be incorporated into the existing Chinese educational system, from elementary school through to university? All of the Tibetan participants feel that bilingual education; in Tibetan and Mandarin, started as early as possible, is the answer. ChengMing’s elementary level bilingual textbook is an excellent example of this bilingualism or shuangyu. Thanks to ChengMing and other dedicated educators, Tibetan students now have a text that will help them learn about traditional Tibetan indigenous knowledge and language, while at the same time advancing their studies and learning in
Han culture through Mandarin, the official language of the PRC. Tibetans’ place in ancient Tibetan history and in modern Chinese society comes together in this textbook. By creating more bilingual texts and resources like ChengMing’s reader, Tibetan students will have access to their ethnic culture and to the national language and culture of China. If this dual learning occurs from an early age, the chances of Tibetan students going on to and being successful at university are higher. At the university level, more energetic, passionate and talented Tibetan teachers like MeiYen are needed to act as liaisons/bridges between Tibetan society and mainstream Han culture. These minority teachers act as powerful role models to their Tibetan students of all ages.

MeiYen explained that Tibetan students are very hard workers. “Once they grasp the meaning of my teaching they can catch up very quickly. If they don’t understand something, they keep asking questions until it makes sense.” These future teachers must be trained in both Mandarin and Tibetan if Tibetan culture and language are to be preserved. TianQing believes that Tibetans, along with other minority groups, need to enlarge their vision beyond minority culture. “Minority people shouldn’t be content with what we have. We must move on and learn new skills to improve ourselves.” The government could help improve and promote Tibetan minority education by providing help in the form of manpower in animal husbandry communities, thus freeing up children to go to school. Participants targeted further research on Tibetan education, particularly on Tibetan women and girls, as a means of learning more about what is happening in remote communities and how education for females can be promoted and enhanced. Further research can also help to figure out how the conservation of the Tibetan way of
life can continue in a fast-paced world where many cultures are constantly interacting and affecting one another.

The revival of monastery learning was another area addressed by participants. Traditionally, monasteries have promoted literacy and provided education to Tibetan communities. The issue of how to expand the monasteries’ role in modern education as a way of preserving and sharing Tibetan culture and language is an important one. Male children can receive both Tibetan and Han education at monasteries. These cultural institutions are generally located in or near minority communities making them more accessible to rural Tibetans than faraway, expensive Han city schools. Monastery education is free. Participants did not articulate how to use this precious cultural resource most effectively in modern China. Perhaps male Tibetan children could be educated in a monastery setting, freeing up precious spaces at local schools for Tibetan girls? The Tibetan communities of China will have to work hard with minority, national and international educational experts to address the many issues facing Tibetan education and cultural and linguistic preservation.

**A Dynamic Framework for Minority Higher Education**

Several different kinds of recommendations have been articulated during the course of this study on minority higher education. How do they all fit together? Participants described a possible framework that could prove useful. It involves the integration of Han and minority cultures, taking the best elements of both, to create a vibrant hybrid Chinese culture. Majority and minority cultures are thus combined to create a flexible, workable, grassroots model for modern Chinese education. This model can then be easily adapted to reflect the particular minority and majority cultural
combinations present in certain locations. For example, the hybrid culture of Lanzhou may be slightly different from the hybrid culture in Xi’an, a province away. YunXian explains further: “Minority culture needs to improve and be innovated all the time. The mainstream culture has a big influence on minority culture. They need to be related to each other. They need to be a part of each other.” In Lanzhou, there is a multi-ethnic society. Each ethnic group needs to improve, to promote its own culture and traditions. AnNing adds, “In terms of global development, you can tell that different cultures are interacting with one another. So, you just can’t exclude yourself in one area without any contacts with others.” All participants feel that both cultures can learn from each other. Thus, minority groups all over China, not just in the Northwest, must find ways to both preserve their own ways of life while simultaneously coexisting within the Han system.

Several participants admitted that accepting two cultures, minority and majority, might be a good thing. ChenGung affirms, “It’s necessary to be assimilated to Han culture since I’m living in this society. Maybe Hui people who accept both cultures, Hui and Han, might have a better personality or a better development.” Several participants noted that minority students growing up in a Han environment can do just as well as Han students can. Better communication is what is needed between minority and majority students to promote the best learning. Better communication also involves listening to new ideas that come from minority educators and communities themselves. HaiBo sees the whole process as a circular one.

If we had more minority teachers the dropout rate of minority women would decrease. This would improve minority female education from the top and the bottom. Minority teachers are examples to minority students. If minority students come to school, they help promote minority learning. It’s all connected.
TianQing notes one problem that may inhibit the development of this framework. She says that in rural areas people are often content with what they have and with the way things are. Progress is very slow. Modernization and change are still foreign terms to many remote minority communities. In spite of this, China is changing at a very rapid pace. Minority peoples face a contradiction between preserving their minority traditions and ways of life and keeping up with the times. If the trilingual, highly employable, young Zhuang minority university graduates that LiLin described in her interview can be seen as the potential of what bilingual education can produce, China’s minority peoples can become very competitive and successful in a Han majority China. Language learning and cultural symbiosis seem to be the keys to success in modern China. Several participants spoke of their own hybrid identities, combining the best of their minority cultures with the best elements of Han culture. Perhaps this participant group of strong, well-educated female minority women will prove to be the best example of what can be expected of a dynamic framework for minority higher education in China.

In the following and final chapter, the main findings of this study will briefly be reviewed, along with their present and future implications for minority education in China. The researcher’s own ideas and suggestions for minority education will also be explored.
Chapter Six: Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter is made up of four parts. The first section provides a brief summary of the study. Key findings of this inquiry, along with their present and future implications for Chinese minority education, are highlighted in the second section. This is followed by an exploration of the researcher's own thoughts and recommendations. Chapter Six ends with some final comments and a look ahead into the future of Chinese minority education.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study has been to contribute to an understanding of Chinese ethnic minority education from the perspective of minority women working in Northwest China in the field of higher education. In addition, it is hoped that this thesis has become an avenue through which minority voices can be heard.

The initial research question asked participants to comment on their involvement with the SULCP program. By using feminist interviewing strategies, participants' stories were vividly expressed providing a rich source of data, far richer than could have been achieved by using traditional quantitative methods of data collection. The nine themes that emerged during the research process came from the participants themselves as they shared their stories and life experiences during the interviews. These themes are very much interrelated and show the complex and multi-layered nature of the topic, and related topics, of ethnic minority women in higher education.
Participants' views, experiences and understandings have not been arranged and analyzed in terms of categories derived from Western theories. This work has not been an attempt to evaluate participants' observations through a Western lens. The categories described come from what the participants themselves said in response to open-ended questions asked during the interviews. The researcher's objective has therefore been to represent, as faithfully as possible, the stories and opinions of the participants themselves. This particular sample of women, and men, represents a unique group that cannot be thought of as necessarily representative of the experiences of all ethnic minority women, and men, in higher education, in the Northwest region or anywhere else throughout the country. It is hoped, however, that this study will promote a clearer understanding of one particular educational paradigm in a remote area of China.

**China in Review**

Modernization and globalization are affecting China in many diverse ways. Recent economic reform and desire for China to become part of the world market economy have helped to fuel the growing demand for education. "Economically, China is attempting to surface to the top in the world arena, competing with other developing countries or regions of the world market. Economic development will benefit the entire country" (Liu, 1998, 43).

China's population has doubled in the last forty years, causing the Han push westward. This gradual population shift and pressure to be part of the market economy is undermining the protection of minority languages and cultures in China. The government cannot afford to translate documents into minority languages or send teachers to remote locations. Yet, at the same time, the market economy and its promise of riches is drawing
people to the border areas of the nation. As a result, massive migrations are disenfranchising minority peoples who live there (Buck in Van Horne, 1997, 282). Current policies being carried out by Beijing to develop the western part of the country will no doubt have a significant effect on education, both Han and minority. There is thus a strong correlation between the Chinese economy and education. Increased funding available through this policy initiative may make all the difference to the future of minority education in the PRC’s hinterland regions. Another great obstacle to China’s development is the vast difference in educational equality opportunities available to females versus males. Education is a necessity if women are to perform successfully in a market-driven economy. “Disadvantaged by a womb-centered culture and patriarchal expectations of woman’s place in the domestic sphere, women are ill-prepared for the newly competitive pressures from a growing market society” (Jaschok, 1998, 323).

Every minority group in China has different perceptions of, and ideas about, education. Out of the four minority groups represented in this study, the Tibetans were the most concerned with preserving their particular minority culture. The Tibetans are the most different from the Han majority population, in terms of culture and ways of life, and the least assimilated to Han culture. Zhuang, Manchurian and Hui participants spoke of their nationalities as being very much assimilated into Han culture. Historically, the government in Beijing has defined, planned and implemented minority education programs in one, all-encompassing way, meaning that all minority groups, despite their many differences, must follow the same standard curriculum. In China, the particular learning needs of individual minority groups generally go unnoticed in educational planning at all levels. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights provides for the
right of all peoples to learn and use his/her mother tongue. In many instances, this provision is non-existent in the PRC.

**Key Findings and Their Implications**

In Chapters Four and Five, all participants explained both their personal educational experiences and their suggestions for improving minority higher education. In this section some of their key ideas will be examined. It is necessary to first try and comprehend how the twelve female minority participants of this study have become the successful, well-educated women they are today. Coming to terms with their development as female minority educators will allow for a clearer understanding of their suggestions.

**‘Miracle’ Women**

The female minority participants interviewed represent gendered educational ‘miracles’. These twelve women have managed to overcome many obstacles throughout their educational careers, including their gender and their minority status. What differentiates these twelve women from the bulk of Chinese minority women in the PRC? What propelled these individuals through successful elementary, secondary and, finally, university educational experiences? What holds other Chinese women, both minority and majority, back from their own educational development? In short, how did the twelve minority females interviewed in this study become ‘miracle’ women?

“The variables that contribute to the issues of female education include pressure of traditional customs, poverty, geographic location, and an individual’s motivation for social upward mobility. These variables work independently and interdependently for the
advancement or deterioration of the education of Chinese women” (Liu, 1998, 49). The females in this study have, and continue to deal with, all of these variables in varying degrees. Their minority status must also be added to the list. There are several traits shared by the female minority participants in this study that help to explain their educational success. All twelve women are brave, strong, and able to clearly articulate and express their views on minority education and on life in general. Most of them are passionate about their current work. They can play many difficult roles simultaneously: wife, mother, teacher, student and administrator. Most were top academic students in their university programs. The participants were also able to adjust to different learning and living environments during their years of education, especially at the university stage. Several females admitted that being able to adjust to one’s ever-changing environment, especially in this era of globalization and rapid change, is an integral skill to have when promoting academic and personal success.

These women share a strong, collective minority personality that is different from the conservative Han majority one. Minority people, including the female participants, are less bonded to Chinese traditional ways than Han people are. Minorities do not confirm themselves as representatives of the Chinese nation. This trait has allowed the participants to express themselves without the fear of not fitting in. Many recounted memories of particularly difficult events in their lives, probably made better or more intense and meaningful to them by the possession of this trait. One of the most significant characteristics shared by the female participants is the presence of very supportive, influential people in their lives who encouraged, and continue to encourage, their educational and professional careers. Parents were noted as playing a key role in
promoting their daughters’ education. Many women spoke of their fathers as being the most influential variable in their careers of academic success. Participants articulated a distinction between personal, family curriculum and formal, school curriculum that they had experienced. Both types of education interacted to create the strong individuals of this study.

The most important characteristic present in the female participant group is the strong belief that self-improvement is an individual’s responsibility, requiring lots of determination, hard work and life-long learning. The metaphor of movement surfaces in the narratives of many of these very busy women. For them, movement is equated with learning, being a good person, and happiness. The opposite of moving, standing still, is associated with sadness, stagnation and limited, if any, learning and development. Participants regretfully noted that men have many more opportunities in life for movement than women do as men are expected to work outside of the home. Women must therefore work very hard to create opportunities for movement in their lives.

The concept of minority happiness came up during the interviews. Minority happiness is defined differently from the Han term. Several participants explained that for minority peoples, happiness means enough food to eat, wearing culturally rich minority clothing, leading a traditional, rural lifestyle and having few worries. Participants stated that every individual must figure out how to achieve happiness in his or her life. In addition, educated women in China’s cities look for more in life than females residing in the countryside do. These rural women are generally less educated and satisfied with their lot. Again, the reference was made to movement being positive (the city women) and being stationary (rural women) as stagnant. Participants believe that encouraging
communication between rural and urban minority women might allow for more movement, learning and growing on the part of their rural sisters.

Several times during the research process references were made to eyes. MeiYen recounted a childhood story about eyes on trees being the eyes of God following her everywhere. TianQing spoke about the fact that women may have many different views on the same topic, it just depends on whose eyes you are looking through as to what view you get. Women in the cities have different views from those in isolated, rural areas. Educated women see the world through a different lens. Participants stressed the need to open their eyes in order to see the world and thus gain knowledge. They reflected on the fact that in rural areas, many minority women don’t have much hope for a better life. They are, in a metaphorical sense, blind. Their eyes are closed to learning and growth. Possessing no vision, no hope, these women are doing nothing for themselves. Their lives are solely devoted to their husbands and children. Participants noted that female minority teachers share the difficult job of opening the eyes of their students and fellow minority citizens.

These ‘miracle’ women are therefore successful examples and role models to other minority females in the realm of higher education in China. More examples of these ‘miracle’ women must be found. Knowledge of their presence can most likely help to promote ethnic minority women in higher education in the future.

**Key Findings**

In Chapter Five, participants’ recommendations for minority higher education are explained in detail. Several important points deserve attention. To date, little has been written about the state of education for minority women living in Northwest China. What
is known about the multicultural and multilingual remote region brings to mind the importance of issues associated with identity. Recognising the ever-changing levels and scales of identity present in this region of the PRC, and how they influence minority education, is crucial to understanding Northwest China. The shifting nature of ethnicity impacts on the important distinction between local and national identities. These identities are negotiated continuously. China’s participation in the current era of globalization is affecting how identity is interpreted all over the country. Globalization can be seen as the opposite of localization. In China today, there is a rise of localization and therefore an urgent need for the building of a local sense of identity.

The city of Lanzhou, the site of the fieldwork for this study, is known to be a vibrant place where the cultures, languages and ways of life of many different ethnic groups meet and mingle. One’s identity in this place can therefore incorporate many elements. One can identify him or herself along many lines, including gender, ethnicity, worker or student status to name but a few. Making sense of, and being able to articulate, one’s identity can therefore be a highly complex challenge. Individuals’ own articulated definitions and descriptions of themselves will aid the government in Beijing to come to terms with national policies on ethnicity in a time of great global flux. Minority peoples at the local level must play a role in this policy formation at the macro level.

This notion of negotiating one’s identity relates to the literature in Chapter Two on indigenous knowledge. In general, participants did not require much time to think about most of their interview answers. Their ideas were already in their conscious minds. The questions asked about indigenous knowledge were the only ones that required thinking time. An individual’s indigenous knowledge (IK) base affects how she/he
functions in every day society. Chinese IK is rooted in the ancient philosophy of Confucianism and moral education. It thus becomes very difficult to define problematic terms such as indigenous knowledge, culture and nation in strictly Chinese terms. In the PRC, there is a strong connection between the terms culture, education and indigenous knowledge. In this current era of rapid globalization, determining the differences between exogenous (foreign) knowledge and Chinese indigenous knowledge is extremely difficult. Where does one end and the other begin?

Several participants questioned whether culture and indigenous knowledge are, in fact, the same thing. Where and when does one’s personal knowledge and the shared knowledge of a culture or an ethnic group meet? Moreover, in today’s China, what is the modern role of both majority and minority traditional Chinese indigenous knowledge in education and in mainstream Chinese society? The nature of culture, particularly in modern times, is that it is not static but constantly evolving. The need for information about IK at the micro, grassroots level of the world’s communities is therefore vital. Western indigenous knowledge experts emphasize the need for the nurturing of a global, hybrid knowledge base which encourages the use of traditional knowledge in development and educational planning (Croal, 2000; Semali, 1989). There is also a belief that women have a distinct perspective on indigenous knowledge. Their views can therefore not be represented by men (Emery, 2000). The IK of a nation should thus play a key role in educational curriculum design and implementation, as culture is an integral part of education.

In Chinese terms, one expert believes that Chinese IK should frame the future development of learning in China. The nation needs to develop its own indigenous
pedagogical theories (Lu, 1994). Basic educational problems must be solved in a Chinese context using Chinese terms and definitions. The preservation of minority IK in the university curriculum, for instance, makes learning Mandarin as a second language easier for minority people. Starting with a familiar minority knowledge base, students are able to pick up the new language quickly. There is thus a strong need for constantly redefining terms, like culture and indigenous knowledge, in a specifically Chinese way. Western definitions and solutions are often impractical for Chinese educational paradigms. Many questions remain. What is the modern role of traditional Chinese IK, majority and minority, in today’s China? What are the implications of ignoring Chinese minority indigenous knowledge in minority education at all levels? And finally, to what extent can minority IK survive in a quickly changing China?

**Researcher’s Thoughts and Recommendations on Minority Education**

Many of the following observations and recommendations overlap and support those put forward by the participants in this study. Looking through female, Western eyes several ideas and suggestions come to mind. People working on the frontlines, as teachers and administrators, know the most about the true situation of Chinese minority higher education. Policy makers in Beijing who are physically removed from the action know little about what is going on at the grassroots level in China’s universities and other institutions of higher learning. Thus, local research by foreign, Chinese ethnic minority and Han majority scholars, and frontline workers (teachers) themselves, is needed, not only in Gansu, but also in other remote provinces of China where minorities live and study.
Female researchers, Chinese and Western, minority and majority, interested in studying various issues in minority education should be encouraged. Women work well with other women (Miles, 1996). Employing qualitative feminist research methodologies enhances the potential for this growth of positive communication and learning. In China, language dilemmas can be minimalized if minority dialects are used amongst minority researchers and their participants. Research should also be conducted on minority women before they arrive at university. By studying women in their rural, minority environments researchers can unravel what obstacles these individuals face and how they manage to surpass them and end up in university. Linked to this, is the crucial need to investigate individual minority indigenous knowledge and identities. How do young minority women see themselves as women, as minority citizens and as members of the Chinese nation? How do these visions change upon their arrival in urban, Han university settings? Further research is also needed on the powerful role that Confucianism plays in minority education in China, particularly as it relates to women and their subordinate roles in all facets of society.

Qualitative research methodology is gaining momentum and popularity in China’s educational research circles. The use of this methodology in China should be encouraged by visiting Western scholars as quantitative methods have proven to be ineffective in explaining the individual stories and experiences of China’s citizens. Only four out of fifty-five minority groups in China were represented in this study. More research needs to be done on the different ethnic groups, not only those residing in the Northwest, but all around the country. It would be interesting to compare the educational success of minority women living in remote regions to minority women living along the booming
Eastern coast of the PRC. "Public exposure to the gloomy realities of educational disparities would awaken the entire nation's sense of responsibility toward improving the status of female education" (Liu, 1998, 49).

Research on particular minority groups is also required. The Tibetan minority stands out. All participants in this study agreed that of the four ethnicities studied in this work more attention is needed in the area of Tibetan minority education as the unique indigenous knowledge of this group is most threatened by Han assimilation practices. In short, more qualitative research is needed in the areas of ethnicity in the PRC, the role of indigenous knowledge in Chinese education and minority women in higher education.

Females involved in higher education are currently isolated from each other. They are so busy working the ‘double shift’ that they have no time to meet each other, talk and share their feelings and ideas about minority education. Learning can come from exchanging educational success stories with each other and the young female students with whom they work. These women don’t have a sense of belonging to a strong, united group who can make a difference to minority education. Communication between all parties is important; between government and universities, teachers and students, minority teachers and minority communities, among minority teachers, and among women around the world. Communication between all of these groups and individuals must be vigorously promoted.

The re-education of men is a topic that deserves attention. Several participants mentioned the need for this particular kind of education in China. Dealing with Confucianist philosophy and its effects on Chinese women is necessary. The significance of gender is paramount. Gender equity must find its place in the modern Chinese
educational curriculum, from the beginning of the educational process in elementary school, and on through to higher education. This is only possible if men help by playing an active role in the learning process. Therefore, there is a need for gender and development programs in China’s educational sector and also in mainstream Chinese society. Giving women’s voices an opportunity to be heard, along with documenting their words, will help empower Chinese women. They can then work towards re-educating their men. Girls’ education is a related topic, especially in remote rural minority areas where traditional thinking is the strongest and where girls are the most disadvantaged members of society. Girls’ education must be supported and developed. Fostering the building of positive social identities for females is key. A strong base makes for a strong system.

The creation of rural minority institutions of higher learning is a potential area for growth. Providing ways for minority students to adjust to predominantly Han university culture in China’s urban centers has proved to be a challenge. Why not bring the universities to the students in their rural, home environments? Students will then have fewer adjustments to make when first attending university. Being close to home might promote more potential students applying for university positions, versus going directly into the world of work. Moreover, minority indigenous knowledge will be supported and strengthened in these institutions. Students will not have to leave their particular ethnic ways of living at home. They can be proud of their heritage and take it to school with them. Minority students who come from the countryside are more comfortable learning in a minority environment. In minority education, urban to rural transfer of knowledge has been happening for some time. Why not encourage rural to urban knowledge transfer as
well? This would decrease communication barriers between the populations living in the
two different areas and increase understanding about the various ways of life. In minority
communities, minority teachers can also be used as liaisons between minority members
and Han government officials. Minority teachers will most likely be best able to convey
national policies and new concepts to minority people versus Han government personnel.

Language is a key issue in modern Chinese education. Participants mentioned the
benefits of bilingual education for minority students and for the maintenance and
promotion of minority culture in general. In addition, bilingual education allows minority
students to profit from the best elements of the Han educational system. There is a need
for bilingual education, shuangyu, at all levels. Language can be seen as either a barrier,
if one doesn’t have it, or as a golden ticket if one does. Bilingual textbooks written in
both minority languages and in the national language (Hanyu), combined with bilingual
teaching resources, will promote meaningful, contextualized learning. It is imperative
that minority teachers be able to communicate linguistically with their minority students
in both Mandarin and native minority languages for effective teaching and learning to
occur. Some Han academics and frontline teachers and administrators are very interested
and talented in developing and promoting minority education. These scholars should be
encouraged to continue their meaningful and supportive work.

The pivotal role that religion plays in minority culture and education must be
recognized and investigated. In the Tibetan minority community, the promotion of the
education of Tibetan girls may be possible by sending Tibetan boys to monasteries for an
education, therefore making room for Tibetan girls in regular school classrooms.
Amongst the Hui minority, investigations could be made into the strong Hui religious
influence on Hui students’ learning. Han majority Confucianism and the idea of being a good person, from both Muslim and Buddhist cultures, have created a hybrid religious culture amongst China’s minority peoples. Religion’s effect on students’ motivation for studying and learning must be explored.

Promoting teachers as change agents in the social, educational, political and economic realms is necessary. One way to do this is to pay teachers more. The current teacher salary system must change in order to encourage women to pursue higher education to ensure the availability of future teachers. “This is a critical emerging issue in the current system. A college graduate earns much less than a barber. A university professor earns less than a taxi driver does” (Liu, 1998, 52). Teachers teaching in remote rural areas could leave their postings unless they are very devoted to their profession. “Such teachers deserve respect as well as a salary. Societal support for teachers would be an effective way to help keep them in the teaching profession. It could also have a great impact upon improving education in those areas” (Liu, 1998, 51). One way to promote the profession of teaching is to make teachers active curriculum makers. Using their expertise and hands-on experiential knowledge of what they have learned in their classrooms, working with their students, these valuable individuals can make recommendations for the development of minority education in China. Teachers must be made into active stakeholders in all aspects of education.

One of the most important recommendations of this study is to recognize that self-determination and self-commitment are key to the success of minority women, and to females in general, in education.

Ideally, the female’s self-commitment to education is the determining factor in emancipation from gender discrimination. Enhancing self-
commitment entails much courage and conscientiousness by females. This is especially important for the females in the poor rural areas who need to break the vicious circle they find themselves caught in. (Liu, 1998, 51)

Having a voice, an opportunity and an obligation to express oneself with that voice is crucial. China’s minority women must play an active role in their own educational development and in promoting an attentive audience for their voices.

**The Hybridization of Chinese Culture**

All recommendations put forward in this study point in one direction. A new theoretical framework for understanding and making sense of minority education in China is desperately needed. Establishing a framework for minority higher education that accommodates all minority groups and is flexible enough to allow for changes in social, political and economic realities of modern China is the challenge. This new framework must incorporate the elements of responsibility and accountability. All stakeholders in education must be held responsible and accountable for minority education in China, from the policy makers in Beijing, to the young first year minority students at Lanzhou’s Northwest Normal University. The strong relationship between majority and minority cultures must be emphasized in this model. The constant pull between the old, traditional world and the new, globalized one is a contradiction faced by all Chinese citizens in varying degrees. There is an imperative need to resolve the contradiction between how to preserve minority culture and how to keep up with the times (Hanization and globalization) faced by minority educators and students.

Education in modern China involves the ability to accept two cultures, majority and minority. This can be seen as a symbiotic relationship. The best elements from each culture are integrated with the other, producing a hybrid, strong culture; the best of both
worlds. Identity is a very complex and confusing thing. By using integration and collaboration versus assimilation, multi-layered identities can be fostered. In this study, Hui, Manchurian and Zhuang groups are most assimilated to Han culture versus the Tibetan minority group which is the furthest away with the most to lose, culturally and linguistically with the Hanization of education. Figuring out how to keep Han majority culture alive in this era of globalization is also a concern.

One of the greatest challenges of the future will be how to integrate all of China’s different minority indigenous knowledge bases, or roots, with the Han majority knowledge system in the university curriculum. It is possible to imagine a continuum or spectrum of integration with pluralism at one end and assimilation at the other:

In an archetypal pluralistic system, integration is achieved with minority groups retaining their respective cultures and other distinguishing characteristics, presumably with the full approval of the majority group. At the opposite end of the spectrum, assimilation implies that members of minority groups have absorbed the characteristics of the dominant group to the exclusion of their own and become indistinguishable from members of the majority. In essence, they have ceased to exist as groups. (Dreyer, 1976, 12)

FengLin’s tree metaphor comes to mind. A tree must have roots which represent minority education and indigenous knowledge. A tree needs to be familiar with its surroundings in order to get nutrients to stay alive. Environments change. A tree must therefore be able to adapt to its constantly changing surroundings in order to survive. Thus, maintaining and nurturing healthy roots, minority knowledge, first and then incorporating or integrating national majority Han knowledge makes good sense. The metaphorical hybrid tree of Chinese education will grow and keep growing in its changing environment if this method is followed. YunXian said it best: “There is no difference between Han and minority families. If you don’t send your children to school
they won’t improve themselves.” Education is the key for all Chinese citizens, majority and minority alike.

The negotiation of identities is constant, especially in multiethnic Lanzhou. There is a need for a dialectical approach that is interconnected and dynamic in nature. Members of marginalized groups, minorities, have the role of promoting unity. Members of the privileged, majority group promote diversity. The unique role played by ethnic minority women working in higher education will be an interesting one to watch develop in the future. The particular case studied, minority women in higher education in Northwest China, is likely to contribute to an understanding of similar cases around the country. Participants in this study were appreciative to be able to express their voices. There needs to be hope for a better future for women in education in China, especially minority women. All voices need to be heard. Guan Yin, Goddess of Mercy and the Protector of Women will be watching.

**Final Comments and a Look Ahead**

This study has aimed to add new information to the limited body of literature on the topic of ethnic minority women in higher education, specifically in the area of Northwest China. Several big questions have developed from this work: How can institutions of learning, at all levels, especially the university, best prepare young people for the 21st century in China? How can national Han indigenous knowledge be combined with minority indigenous knowledge to make learning for both minority and majority students meaningful? And, finally, what role will minority women play in China’s future?

As China is a developing country and Chinese women constitute a large proportion of the world population, improvement in the education of Chinese females will play an important role in enhancing the value of
human capital. It could produce a worldwide effect upon the accomplishment of the themes of equality, development, and peace. (U.S. Department of State Dispatch)

There is therefore a definitive need for the creation of a highly flexible educational model that can be adapted to individual minority communities. Participants in this study are a minority within a minority. Their particular characteristics, especially influential parents and sheer hard work, allowed them to become ‘miracle women’, without the help of favoured policies for minorities or a Han basic education. These miracle women must be studied further in order to understand how they got to where they are today, how they overcame so many obstacles.

In September 1995 the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. Here it was announced that the world community must recognize that the issues of women and gender must be at the heart of all political endeavours for social change. A key objective of the conference was the empowerment of all women. The Beijing Platform for Action focused on the inequalities and inadequacies in and unequal access to education and training for women. Recommendations stated “the need to continue the search for development, peace and security and for ways of assuring people-centered sustainable development. The participation and leadership of the half of humanity that is female is essential to the success of that search” (United Nations, 1996, 505). In addition, the platform drew attention to the increased total burden of work for women around the world, women working the ‘double shift’. The plight of women living in rural and remote areas deserves special attention given the stagnation of development in such areas. “Women make a great contribution to the welfare of the family and to the
development of society, which is still not recognized or considered in its full importance” (United Nations, 507).

Lastly, in the last fifteen years, there has been a growing recognition of the unique interests and concerns of indigenous women. Their identities, cultural traditions and forms of social organization enhance and strengthen the communities in which they live. Moreover, “Indigenous women often face barriers both as women and as members of indigenous communities” (United Nations, 507). Discrimination against women begins at the earliest stages of life and must be addressed from then on. Thus, the women of this planet, not just those living and studying in China, must unite as women and work together as agents of economic, political, educational and social change. Women need to be active stakeholders in their societies. Female teachers play an especially important role as they are mothers, nurturers, caregivers, educators, moral leaders, and conveyors of knowledge.

We women are visible and valuable to each other, and we must, now in our billions, proclaim that visibility and that worth . . . we must each of us walk to a clear pool of water. Look at the water. It has value. Now look into the water. The woman we see there counts for something. She can help to change the world. (Waring, 1989, 264)

MeiYen shared a story during her interview about Tibetan tribal chiefs told to her by her grandfather when she was a young girl. He said that each Tibetan tribe has a chief. Each tribe has its own symbolic tattoo. The chief wears this tattoo on his body. When a chief is dying, he has the right, the privilege, to pick who his successor will be, the next tribal leader after his death. When he picks the new leader, he passes on the tattoo to him. The dying man transfers everything to the new chief, all of the knowledge of the tribe. The tattoo symbolizes this tribal knowledge. Perhaps female minority teachers and
administrators are the new ‘chiefs’ of minority education in China. The tribal tattoo is the minority indigenous knowledge being passed on to the next generation of educators, the carriers and keepers of minority culture. The future and time alone will tell.
References


Longwe, Sara Hlupekile. (1997). Education for Women’s Empowerment or Schooling for Women’s Subordination. In Carolyn Med el-Anonuevo (Ed.), Negotiating and


Appendix A

Proposed Interview Questions for Participants

I initially plan to let my participants tell me the story about their involvement with SULCP (Special University Linkage Consolidation Program 1996-2001). If, near the end of an interview, a participant has not touched on certain points, I may ask the following questions:

1.) Please recount any personal reactions, opinions, stories and/or reflections that you have about your involvement with the SULCP Project.

2.) How do you define the term ‘indigenous knowledge’?

3.) How long have you been involved with the SULCP Project?

4.) What do you see as your role, as a minority participant, involved with the SULCP Project?

5.) How do you go about fulfilling the requirements of this role?

6.) How do you see your role changing in the future?

7.) How do you feel about the Canadian interest and contributions to the project?

8.) How do you see Canada’s role in SULCP?
Appendix B

Interview Consent Form for Participants

Dear

I am a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. I am conducting research as part of my thesis on ethnic minority Chinese teacher participants involved in the SULCP Project (Special University Linkage Consolidation Program (1996-2001)). The success of this joint project depends, to a large degree, on the work that you do, as a teacher. I plan to use valuable information gathered during this study as a part of my Master’s thesis. I believe that by interviewing you I can gain a clearer understanding of the SULCP Project from your perspective as a teacher/administrator in the program.

I would like to emphasize to you that your voluntary participation in this work is of great significance. Ideally, the findings of this research will contribute on both a practical and theoretical level to all concerned parties. The results of this study will help to broaden the understanding of the SULCP Project for everyone involved with it. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You should only agree to participate if you really want to, and to change your mind at any time, you should feel free to withdraw. There will be no negative consequences if you don’t want to be part of the study or if you want to stop participating. If you do choose to participate in this project, I would ask you a series of questions about how you perceive your role as a Chinese teacher participant in the project, what you actually do with regards to the project and your opinions, stories and reflections about the SULCP project in general.

For my research, I will be conducting tape-recorded interviews of approximately one hour each with about fifteen Chinese teacher participants who are involved with the SULCP Project. You are under no obligation to participate in this study. If you do choose to participate, it may be very difficult to protect your anonymity within the context of the project. I will not use participants’ actual names. However, the name of the project will appear in my thesis and the project administration and participants will receive a summary of the research findings if they wish to receive it. Because of the small number of participants in the project, subjects may be identifiable even though we will not be using participants’ names. However, at any time during the process, you will be free to comment, request changes or completely delete data collected from your interview. I will show you a copy of the transcripts of your interview so that you can check the accuracy of the data and remove any part of it that you do not want used in the final study report. Again, I will use the results of this study as part of my OISE/UT Master’s thesis.

If you are interested in taking part in this study, please sign the consent form attached to this letter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone at (416) 932-9668 or by email at: bhajplik@oise.utoronto.ca You can also reach my

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supervisor, Dr. Joseph Farrell by telephone at (416) 923-6641 ext. 2361 or by email at jfarrell@oise.utoronto.ca

Sincerely,

Brenda Haiplik
M.A. Candidate
OISE/UT

I have read the attached letter by Brenda Haiplik concerning her research on the role of Chinese teacher participants involved with the Special University Linkage Consolidation Program (1996-2001). I agree to participate in an audio-taped interview in the study that she outlined in her letter.

__________________________________________
Signature of the participant                  Date

__________________________________________
Signature of the researcher                   Date

I would like to receive a copy of the summary of the findings of this study after the research has been completed.
Appendix C

Map of China
Locations of provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities