

# Analyzation of the Equity of Mark-adding Policy in China's College Entrance Examination

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**Abstract.** This thesis is looking at the issue of educational equity in China's educational system and college entrance examination. As the population of China and the number of test-takers are all tremendously increasing, the competition of college admission tends to be more fierce. For students, the threshold of college admission becomes difficult to meet, and entering universities becomes harder and harder, which lead to a controversy about the rationality and feasibility of the mark-adding policy. In order to explore the issue of educational equity in CEE and mark-adding policy, the author compares situations of people of ethnic minorities in educational accessibility and quality, with circumstances of students in major areas, and aims to provide solutions to the current mark-adding policy to balance negative effects on those two groups and guarantee the fairness of CEE test-takers. Solutions provided can also optimize the structure of China's educational system, and help more children enter universities and achieve their dreams.

**Keywords:** College entrance examination; ethnic minorities; educational equity.

## 1. Introduction

As the population of China is increasing drastically, academic involution, employment pressure, and traditional perceptions of the Chinese education system are intensifying. There are more and more people taking the college entrance examination (CEE also known as gaokao) in order to compete for enrollment in colleges. In the meantime, some preferential policies aimed at some particular groups, like people of minority ethnic groups, give rise to a heated debate on their equity and fairness. The policymakers from the government may consider and start from the point of unequal distribution of educational resources and facilities in some remote areas of minority ethnic groups, so they should gain extra points to neutralize their unfair treatment in educational resource designation. However, regular exam takers believe this policy is unequal for them, as those ten points or twenty points are exceedingly hard to gain. The fact is that even if they make double or even more than double efforts in preparing for the exam for years, it is almost impossible for them to get those ten to twenty points. In recent years, as the gap in educational resources between regions tended to be narrow, policies in some regions also experienced revisions and amendments, changing the number of extra points for ethnic minorities to enhance equity in higher education.

This thesis aims to explore the issue from the comparison of educational resources between different areas and also of policies of different places to view the whole picture of the issue. Advantages and disadvantages will be explored and analyzed in order to figure out what potential inequality may lead to. Plausible and practical solutions will be given, to a greater extent, to solve the issue and balance the educational equity between areas and ethnicities.

## 2. Historical Background

Since China's reform and opening up, due to certain historical problems left over and the unequal spatial distribution of domestic urban development, most of the ethnic minority settlements are in relatively underdeveloped areas. Over time, these minority areas inevitably have the problem of slow economic development, and gradually lead to secondary social problems, including educational problems. In order to promote fairness and cultural interaction, the Chinese government introduced the mark-adding policy to students of ethnic minorities who would attend the college entrance examination (CEE) [1]. Under this policy, students who are eligible can gain five to twenty extra

points to offset the influence of lacking educational resources. Since this policy has been kept for several decades, in the early stages, it played positive roles and could achieve the expected effect, helping students of ethnic minorities to enter colleges and receive higher education with students from major areas [2].

However, in recent years, as the overall educational level has been dramatically improved and equalized between regions, the mark-adding policy has led to controversies and may not fit the current educational circumstance. It gives rise to a new issue of educational equity. In addition, as there are more exam takers who make the competition much harder, just a couple of points will make considerable differences to students' college admission and future. In the 2022 CEE of Shandong Province, for example, there were 1,360 students who got 550 points and 1337 students who got 549 points [3]. It is simple to imagine the importance of just one point. More students in major areas realize the importance of even a single point that can make difference to their destinies, thus, they tend to strive for every possible point that they can possibly earn. In this case, the mark-adding policy is considered as a tremendous threat to primary students' personal interests, and it tends to be controversial and leads to the issue of whether it is still of reasonability and equality.

### 3. Discussion of the Mark-adding Policy

First and foremost, in an effort to fulfill educational equality between different regions, what is considered most needed is still to increase financial input to regions of ethnic minorities and remote areas rather than simply providing them with a mark-adding policy. There is a set of authoritative data showing that "by 2018, the educational outlays in the eastern, central, and western regions of China were CNY 178.214 billion, CNY 87.374 billion, and CNY 69.315 billion, respectively, accounting for 53.21%, 26.09%, and 20.70% of the national educational outlays, respectively" [4]. Most residential places of ethnic minorities are located in the western and mid-western regions, which have comparably much backward economic development, which is closely related to their education as well. The data above shows that with the funding and investment ethnic minorities' education from the government is still in a more disadvantaged and unfavorable position, which should be the essence of educational inequality. In this case, students of ethnic minorities cannot have a comfortable learning environment and gain access to advanced facilities, as students in major areas do, so it may fail to stimulate their interest to explore and study, and it will lead to lower learning efficiency which is a really disadvantage for them when participating CEE.

Furthermore, most people of ethnic minorities cannot afford high-quality education as well, because of low-income. Also, as ethnic minority families have more family members, comparably low income leads education to a burden. Usually, Han families can have one or two children, but families of ethnic minorities can have three or even more children [5]. In this case, it will be a difficulty and a problem for this variety of families to send their kids to study, due to limited budgets. Also, with limited educational attainment of parents, people in areas of ethnic minorities may hold the theory that "reading is useless", so they do not know the purpose of study and may refuse to send their children to systematically study, which further influence their children's legitimate right to get education [6].

Under these circumstances, in CEE, it will be hard for students of ethnic minorities to be as competitive as students in major cities or provinces, which may lead to undesired grades, so mark-adding policy sometimes may have limited effects on ethnic minorities. In other words, the mark-adding policy has a limited influence on comparably low score levels, rather than the critical range of score, whether or not adding a couple of points does lead to totally different consequences [7]. Also, a high dropout rate of students of ethnic minorities and low income of teachers in those regions are also problems to influence educational equality. [8] With no ideal incomes, even if teachers can use the enthusiasm of education to complete the relevant work in the short term, from the perspective of long-term development, it is not conducive to the healthy career development of teachers as an independent social individual. Students already in an inferior learning environment also cannot

acquire a sufficient amount of knowledge to help them succeed in CEE. In the long run, it will gradually form a vicious cycle for both teachers and students, so the top priority to enhance the educational quality and equality of ethnic minorities is for the government to increase funding, and without improvement on those aspects, the mark-adding policy will rarely have strong influences on them.

However, for students in major areas who do not have the opportunity to get extra points, the mark-adding policy will be considered unfair and unscientific by them and their parents. It is true that difference in educational resources and facilities does exist between regions, but students who make the same efforts in areas of ethnic minorities and major areas will receive different number of scores, and from time to time ethnic minorities will be preferred and credited more points, which are seemingly unfair. In this case, students who are actually in the same level will enter universities of different levels, which is why some students in major areas consider the mark-adding policy not fair to them. Also, some parents of major areas' students even complain that "many years of hard work cannot defeat a particular identity." [9] The particular identity here refers to the identity of a minor ethnicity, which can help earn extra points in CEE. This is possibly where the inequality situates.

In addition to those who objectively enjoy preferential policies, some frauds also occur from time to time, leading to a larger discussion of educational inequity. It is hard to avoid that someone in significant areas may be dishonest and create a fraudulent identity as an ethnic minority to illegally gain more points on examinations. For example, some students in major areas may go to regions of ethnic minorities, gaining a fake identity of the ethnic minority with the aid of their parents' social network or financial capability. Then they can utilize their fake identities to participate in the CEE and gain extra points by using the loophole of the mark-adding policy. In this case, the mark-adding policy may benefit some people who are not really eligible for the mark-adding policy, which will ruin the existing order of the CCE system and be a significant factor that negatively influences the equality of the CCE system. In the meantime, it also violates the original intention and purpose of the mark-adding policy. There are also examples of someone who was punished because of identity cheat. In 2009, there were 31 CCE test-takers in the city of Chongqing who used fake identities in examinations, being canceled qualifications for the CEE and admission to any university. [10] Even though the Chinese government has tried to eliminate the possibility of identity cheating through a variety of ways, by posting public notices and increasing punishments, it is still hard and not possible to weed out all evils of this variety of fraud. In this case, inequality will also be difficult to be avoided entirely.

#### 4. Solutions

In order to make up for the uneven distribution of educational resources and eliminate its negative influences on ethnic minorities, what is plausible and reasonable for the government to do is to offer them more financial support or to help them build up educational equipment and recruit capable and experienced instructors, instead of solely keeping the mark-adding policy. Assistance in those aspects, to a great extent, can improve the educational level and quality of ethnic minorities and guarantee their right to receive education as same as those of majorities in terms of environment and quality. With the enhanced educational quality, students of ethnic minorities can turn out to be more efficient in their studies, and learn as much as they need to take CEE. Once those regions' educational conditions catch up or have a much narrower gap with the majority of regions, students will have opportunities to be on almost the same stage and have competition in their knowledge storage and actual abilities, and also, they will be more competitive in the exam.

In addition, the government can offer more funds to improve the operation of current exchange programs for ethnical minorities, for example, dispatching more good teachers with extra bonus to remote areas as a good complement to their already existing educational mode. Those experienced teachers from major areas may be more capable of sufficiently pinpointing students' weaknesses, and they can employ their abundant teaching experience to help students in the methodology of problem-

solving and ways of learning. The government also needs to pay more attention to the issue of the incomes of local teachers in the area of ethnic minorities, which really determines their motivation and mindset to teach students. Adding funds to this aspect can enable local teachers to have the amount of income that they deserve, and also, they will get equal treatment in payment as teachers in major areas. Those measures can in some ways keep local teachers from quitting due to the dissatisfaction of payment, indirectly stabilizing the quality and stability of education for students.

Last but not least, with the more equalized educational resources and environments between regions, adding more conditions on the mark-adding policy will be of great feasibility and can eradicate identity fraud in CEE as much as possible, which gives every examiner an equal opportunity to take the exam. For example, mark-adding can be only applies to the admission of certain universities of nationalities, which are built as benefits for specific ethnic groups. Simultaneously, making mark-adding conditional can correct the attitudes of people of ethnic minorities toward the competition in CEE and other occasions, as preferential policies like mark-adding may lead ethnic minorities to a mindset of laziness, and someone even takes those favor and assistance from the government as granted. Just due to those preferential policies, they may lose their sense of going forward and making progress. Limiting the range of application of mark-adding policy may be an incentive to stimulate students of ethnic minorities to study if they want to attend major universities.

Those solutions can, in some ways, improve the inequality, in origin, of educational conditions and resources to guarantee the equality of students at the time of CEE. Also, they can be regarded as a suitable replacement for the mark-adding policy and further lead Chinese education in a better direction.

## 5. Conclusion

In this thesis, the author provides some background information on Chinese education and the gaokao (CEE) system, which is for most high school students to enter domestic universities. With the uneven economic development between regions which led to uneven distribution of educational resources, students from different regions would study under different conditions and in a different environment, which was considered a variety of educational inequality by the public and government. Because of the inequality, in order to achieve educational equality and encourage students of ethnic minorities to receive education, the Chinese government issued the mark-adding policy in order to improve the situation of educational inequality, and under the mark-adding policy, examiners of ethnic minorities could earn five to twenty extra points which were used to offset the negative influence of insufficient resources in their hometowns.

In the early stages, the mark-adding policy played a role in helping ethnic minorities enter universities. However, as China's population increased which gave rise to more students who competed for college admission through CEE, the mark-adding policy tended to be controversial and potentially affected the equality of CEE. Also, it might not be as effective as people expect ethnic minorities than before. In the next part, the author discusses the mark-adding policy and how it relates to and has influenced students of ethnic minorities. First off, given the inadequate fund for education in areas of ethnic minorities and the high dropout rate of ethnic minorities, the top priority to fulfill educational equality is to enhance even distribution of educational resources and improve their learning conditions so that they can make progress and be more competitive in CEE. Second off, for students in significant areas, it is seemingly not fair for them to get lower grades for putting in the same amount of effort, compared to ethnic minorities. Under the mark-adding policy, students of ethnic minorities do nothing extra, so they should not deserve the extra points. Furthermore, the mark-adding policy has loopholes that may be illegally used by someone of dishonesty. Some students in major areas may create fake identities of ethnic minorities, and enjoy the privilege of ethnic minorities, so the mark-adding policy from time to time does not offer help to someone who is really in need.

In the section of solutions, the author reiterates the significance of optimizing educational environments and conditions of ethnic minorities. The government should add fund to equalize the

distribution of educational resources and operate some teacher-exchange programs as an excellent complement to the study of ethnic minorities. Also, with more equal and even distribution of resources and educational levels, the mark-adding policy will become conditional so it can also eliminate the illegal use of fake identities to gain extra points in CEE.

In the end, due to the fact that the study may only limit on partial regions and groups of people, further research and study in the future is needed. As the circumstance of CEE and education in China is continuously changing, policies need to be modified to fit the more complex situation in the future, which will better and more effectively promote educational equity in China.

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