

Globalization, China's drive for world-class universities (211 Project) and the challenges of ethnic minority higher education: the case of Yanbian university

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Abstract This case study of Yanbian University, a Korean minority university in China, examines the challenges faced, strategies employed, and resources mobilized by a minority university in its attempt to become a world-class university. Specifically, this case study focuses on how the University is attempting to reach its goals within the context of the 211 Project, China's plan to create 100 world-class universities capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century. The rise of the knowledge economy has resulted in an increased link between economic prosperity and higher education. Thus, higher education reform has explicitly tied higher education to economic development and attempted to transform economic structures by turning the labor force into a highly skilled, technologically competent, educated work force capable of competing in a global economy. The socioeconomic changes that have occurred as a result of globalization and China's transition to a market economy have also created new imperatives and challenges for higher education institutions, particularly among minority higher education institutions endeavoring to carve out a unique place in China's higher education landscape.

Keywords Globalization · Chinese higher education · 211 Project · Minority higher education · Higher education reform · Yanbian University · Ethnic Koreans in China

Introduction

The transition to a market economy began in China in 1979 and directly stimulated changes in higher education. One of the consequences of this transition has been a remarkable expansion of higher education. In 1990, enrollment in higher education was a mere 3.4%. By 2006, less than two decades later, enrollment in postsecondary institutions had reached 22%, securing China's entry into the era of mass higher education. Since 1990, China has experienced a threefold expansion in the number of tertiary institutions, over a fivefold increase in the number of full-time faculty, and over a 13-fold increase in student enrollment (Zhao and Sheng 2008). Two of the challenges resulting from such tremendous expansion have been the difficulty of providing enough jobs for graduates of higher education and assuring higher education institutions produce quality graduates. To address these issues, the Chinese government has sought to link economic development with higher education.

In the early 1990s, the Chinese government, spearheaded by the National Education Commission (now the Ministry of Education), developed the 211 Project as a strategic centerpiece to "Reviving the Nation by Science and Education" (Hao 2004, p. 176). In order to be included in the Project, universities must meet scientific, technical, and human resource standards, as well as offer a set of advanced degree programs. Currently, there are 114 universities (approximately six percent of the nation's total) participating in the 211 Project. The 211 Project universities receive focused support from the government and train four-fifths of all doctoral students, two-thirds of all graduate students, half of all international students, and one-third of all undergraduates. Further, 211 Project universities house 96% of the key laboratories and receive 70% of all scientific research

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funding (Project 211 2009). From 1996 to 2000, during the first phase of the project, the government distributed funding worth approximately 2.2 billion US dollars to participating universities (Project 211 2009). Currently, the 211 Project is in its second phase.

Yanbian University, a university established to educate the ethnic Korean minority, was selected to be part of the 211 Project in 1996, at which time it began to receive significant support from the Ministry of Education. Currently, Yanbian University consists of 19 colleges, which offer 70 programs for Bachelor degrees, 78 programs for master degrees, eight programs for doctoral degrees, and one postdoctoral program, many of which have gained national and provincial repute (Meeting 2009). This study documents the case of Yanbian University as it faces the current reform efforts required by the 211 Project. Through this case study, I will examine the following questions: What is the role of minority higher education institutions in a state transitioning to a market economy and entering the global economy? What are the challenges and opportunities faced by such institutions? How will the significant social and economic changes now facing China impact higher education institutions, particularly those serving minority populations? I begin with a discussion of how globalization has impacted higher education both in worldwide and in China. Next, I explain how economic development and educational reform efforts currently underway in China have altered student demographics and created the potential for drastic changes in the mission and identity of minority universities. Finally, I turn to the specific case of Yanbian University.

Globalization and the development of world-class universities in China

While the term is frequently used in both popular and academic literature, “globalization” remains a contested concept that holds different meanings for different people (Burbules and Torres 2000). In *Defining Globalization and Assessing Its Implication on Knowledge and Education*, Stromquist and Monkman observe that globalization comprises multiple and drastic changes in all areas of social life, especially in the areas of economics and culture. Globalization is often associated with ideological perspectives, including neoliberalism, critical theory, and postmodernism. These ideological perspectives are couched in debates about the effects of globalization, including convergence/divergence, homogenization/heterogenization, and local/global (Stromquist and Monkman 2000, p. 3).

There are also contrasting perspectives about the nature of globalization’s impact. As Stromquist and Monkman assert, “most observers see a tendency toward homogeneity

of values and norms; others see an opportunity to rescue local identities” (Stromquist and Monkman 2000, p. 7). The development of English as a global language and the tendency toward an “American way of life”, especially among the elite and middle class around the world, represent the homogenizing effect of globalization. For Cvetkovich and Kellner (1997), the cultural forces represented in the global media influence roles, understandings, and identities (p. 10). In this view, traditional identities and worldviews have been challenged, and new identities and worldviews are being constructed out of the “multifarious and sometimes conflicting configurations of traditional, local, national, and now global forces of the present time” (p. 10). The authors argue, “although global forces can be oppressive and erode cultural traditions and identities they can also provide new materials to rework one’s identity and can empower people to revolt against traditional forms and styles to create new, more emancipatory ones” (p. 10).

As a result of globalization, countries and regional blocs are positioning themselves as competitive entities that will enter the global market with (it is hoped) “superior strengths and abilities” (Stromquist 2002, p. xiii). According to Stromquist, the globalization process in education paradoxically involves the simultaneous mechanisms of centralization and decentralization (Stromquist 2002). Scholars agree that the outcome of globalization in a particular society depends on historical and cultural differences and in particular a willingness among political players, including university administrators, to permit substantive academic autonomy (Wagner 2004).

Higher education affects globalization just as globalization affects higher education. In this global era, universities are playing an ever more prominent role as they increasingly influence social and economic affairs in modern societies. Indeed, education has become a key venue supporting globalization in which “advanced skills and sophisticated knowledge (heavily weighted in favor of science and technology) are deemed essential to the construction of the ‘knowledge society’” (Stromquist 2002, p. xiii). A recent global study has shown that universities and research institutions, rather than firms, are the driving forces of scientific advances in biotechnology patent generation (Cookson 2007).

Today, with China’s transition to a market economy serving as a clear indicator of the reach of globalization, the Chinese government has begun to rely on the ability of the market to release creative energies and minimize inefficiencies, including in the realm of education. In fact, the recent development and expansion of China’s higher education sector indicate that China’s higher education sector has been transformed by the forces of globalization from an elitist to a mass system (Wu and Zheng 2008). Yet at the same time, the 211 Project is, in its essence, China’s

attempt to maintain a two-tiered system of higher education that is comprised of both mass higher education to meet public demand and an elite system of world-class schools, the latter of which is embodied by the 211 Project universities.

World-class universities are generally thought to include the following characteristics: highly qualified faculty; excellence in research; quality teaching; high levels of government and non-government funding; international and highly talented students; academic freedom; a well-defined autonomous governance structure; and a robust student life (Altbach 2004; Khoon 2006; Niland 2007). Another important criteria for recognition include producing well-qualified graduates who are international in origin and in high demand on the international labor market (Mohrman 2005; Salmi 2009).

An excellent university system must also be grounded in the culture of the society in which it is located, yet China's vision of world-class universities is largely imitative of the dominant American and Western European ideals for higher education. Rather than being creative, the system is currently focused almost exclusively on visible factors such as increased publications in international journals, up-to-date laboratories, more buildings, star professors, and additional funding (Mohrman 2005). Altbach identifies additional obstacles in China's drive to achieve world-class universities, including rapid expansion at the expense of maintaining quality, an academic culture that demands quick results and that hampers innovative and long-term research efforts, poor undergraduate training, and lack of academic freedom (Altbach 2003). Because they must meet the demands induced by globalization, including the development of world-class universities, while simultaneously preserving their mission to serve minority cultures, China's minority universities are now in a particularly unique position.

China's minorities and their education

China has 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups. According to the 2000 census, these ethnic minority populations comprise only 8.4% (106.4 million) of the total Chinese population yet are dispersed across 50% of China's land, with heavier concentrations in borderlands and remote areas. While minorities' geographical location at the periphery makes them largely invisible to mainstream society, the Marxist-Leninist political ideology upholds and promotes ideals of equality, unity, and mutual assistance among all nationalities in the country and allows for regional autonomy in the areas of education, culture, and language. The Chinese constitution provides that minorities shall have the freedom of cultural practice, including using

their spoken and written native languages, though all minorities must also learn Mandarin Chinese, China's official language (Sharpes 1993). In spite of the policies promoting such ethnic autonomy, studies indicate that there are problems with ethnic relations in China, as demonstrated by recent conflicts between Han Chinese and Uyghurs in Xinjiang (Bovingdon 2004a, b, 2002) and between Han Chinese and Chinese Muslims (Gladney 2003; Gladney 1998, 1996a, b). Furthermore, cultural bias in curricula (Alles 2003; Lamontagne 1999; Lin 1997, 2008; Postiglione 2000, 1999; Postiglione et al. 2006; Postiglione et al. 2004), lagging educational access, and the limited achievement and social mobility of ethnic minorities all point to persistent ethnic tension in the education sphere (Gladney 1999; Lamontagne 1999; Lin 2008; Macpherson and Beckett 2008; Wang 2008).

The Korean minority in China, comprised of approximately 2 million people, is largely geographically concentrated in China's three Northeastern provinces of Jilin, Liaoning, and Heilongjiang, which are the provinces closest to the North Korean border. Approximately, 42% of these ethnic Koreans reside in the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture of Jilin Province, popularly known in the West as Manchuria. While Korean history in the region is believed to date back to 37 BC, when Korea's ancient kingdom of Koguryo (37 BC–668 AD) included sections of the Manchurian region, there has recently been some controversy between South Korea and China regarding the historical status of Koguryo.¹ Because of this controversy as well as the concentration of ethnic Koreans in the three northeastern provinces facing the North Korean border, the region is a politically and historically sensitive area for the Chinese government.

There has also been more recent Korean immigration to the area. Much of the recent immigration is the product of the turbulent history of the region, including famine in the Korean peninsula in the late nineteenth century and the Japanese colonization of Korea from 1910 to 1945. At the end of WWII, the Korean population in the Yanbian area

¹ China's western region includes six provinces (Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, and Yunnan), five autonomous regions (Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, and Xinjiang), and one municipality (Chongqing). In these western regions, predominantly minority areas have been lagging behind the economic development seen in the flourishing coastal regions. While this region contains 70% of mainland China's land mass, 2002 statistics indicate that the region holds only 29% of the country's population and produces only 17% of the country's total economic output. The Western Development Program, also called the Western China Development, Great Western Development Strategy, or the Open Up the West Program, aims to address these inequalities by stimulating the development of minority areas through the building of infrastructure, including transportation, hydropower plants, energy, and telecommunications, the enticement of foreign investment to the area, increased efforts toward ecological protection such as reforestation, and the promotion of education.

was estimated to be 80% of the total local population. In 1952, after many Koreans returned to their homeland after its liberation from Japan, the Korean population in the region dropped to approximately 60%. In spite of this outward migration, however, many Koreans remained and participated in the development of the area. In 1952, following China's civil war, Koreans were permitted to establish their own autonomous region in Yanbian.

Ethnic Koreans are frequently considered a "model minority" in China. They have among the highest levels of educational achievement, the highest standard of living, the lowest illiteracy rate, and the lowest birth rate of any Chinese ethnic group, including the Han Chinese (Han and Kwon 1994; Lamontagne 1999; Lee 2002; Ma 2003). At the same time, ethnic Koreans are proud of their contribution to China's nation-building process and express satisfaction in belonging to China's political community (Choi 2004, 2006; Han and Kwon 1994). Such accomplishments confer among ethnic Koreans a confidence in their culture and a pride in their ethnic identity. Perhaps because of their achievements and their resulting confidence and pride, ethnic Koreans have maintained peaceful relations both with mainstream society and with other ethnic groups (Choi 2008).

However, globalization and China's transition to a market economy are resulting in changes in traditional Korean communities (Han and Kwon 1994). To seek higher wages, many ethnic Koreans have migrated to urban areas or to South Korea, causing the depopulation of the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. In addition, the transition to a market economy has influenced educational choices. Traditionally, nearly all Korean minority students were educated in ethnic Korean schools and retained a high level of Korean literacy and culture. However, since the late 1990s, the Koreans in the region have begun to assimilate into Chinese language and culture at an accelerated rate. Increasing numbers of Korean parents are opting to send their children to Chinese schools in order to help them successfully compete in mainstream Chinese society. While more than 90% of ethnic Korean children in Yanbian Autonomous Prefecture attend Korean ethnic schools, this represents a decline from the recent past, when nearly all students attended ethnic schools (Choi 2008; Gao 2008; Lee 1986).

The changes described earlier necessitate new leadership, institutional structures, and delivery of services to this minority group. Yanbian University, in particular, is trying to grapple with these changes and provides a new direction for the Korean community.

The case of Yanbian University

Yanbian University is located in Yanji, the heart of Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture. Yanbian University

was founded in 1949 under the direction of the National Education Policy. Before the establishment of the University, Koreans in the region had to send their children to Korea for higher education. The University's primary mission at the time of its establishment was to educate the ethnic Koreans in the region. Since its inception, the university has provided leadership and direction for the ethnic Korean community not only in the region, but in China as whole.

Since its founding, Yanbian University has educated over 100,000 graduates who work throughout China (Meeting 2009). The University's impact on regional development is especially noteworthy. According to a Yanbian University faculty, over 80% of local government cadre and community leaders in various areas such as education, business, arts, and music are graduates of Yanbian University. Yanbian University alumni also include several Han Chinese who work as high-ranking government officers. Recently, Yanbian University has begun to attract more international students, the majority of whom are from the neighboring countries of South Korea, Japan, and Russia.²

With the commencement of the 211 Project, the Chinese government sought to employ market model efficiency in higher education through "higher standards and economies of scale" (Postiglione 2005a, b) and encouraged the consolidation of higher education institutions. In 1996, this policy resulted in the merger of seven colleges: Yanbian Medical College; Yanbian Agricultural College; Yanbian Teachers College; Jilin Province Art College; Yanbian Extension and Yanbian University of Science and Technology, a Chinese-American cooperative private institution established by a Korean-American (Meeting 2009). In the next sections, I explain the nature of my study of Yanbian University and turn to the findings discovered by my research.

Methodology, research questions, and limitations

The methodology of this study centered on interviews and document analyses of academic publications, the Ministry of Education website, newspaper articles, the Yanbian university bulletin, and Project 211 reports. In the fall of 2006, I conducted open-ended interviews with five senior faculty, two high-ranking administrators, and two community leaders. In the summer of 2007, I visited Yanbian University for additional study. To respect the cultural

² South Koreans consider the old kingdom to be one of their ancestral dynasties during the three kingdom period, but some historians in China claim it was merely one of China's vassal states. Because of this controversy as well as the concentration of ethnic Koreans in the three northeastern provinces facing the North Korean border, the region is a politically and historically sensitive area for the Chinese government.

sensitivity of the interviewees and encourage candid expression about the 211 Project, I relied on summary notes rather than recording the interviews.

Due to my lack of familiarity with Yanbian University and the surrounding area, I relied on a Yanbian University faculty member with whom I am acquainted and who is familiar with the project to identify the interviewees. I then sent out interview protocol and requested interviews. All of those identified interviewees who were contacted agreed to be interviewed. Interviews were conducted at the interviewees' offices. In most cases, interviewees invited their colleagues to the interview, which added a new dynamic to the interviews and provided different perspectives. The language used for the interviews was Korean. However, at times, English or Chinese terms were utilized to clarify meaning. Many of the interviewees were familiar with the education systems of other Asian countries, including South Korea, Japan, and, in some cases, North Korea.

The atmosphere in the interviews was friendly and informal, and the interview protocol served mainly as a guide. Interviews were scheduled for approximately 40 min, but often continued for 2 h. The questions explored included the following: (1) What does Yanbian university see as its primary mission at this critical juncture? (2) How have globalization and China's drive for creating world-class institutions influenced or altered the mission and goal(s) of Yanbian University? (3) What is the appropriate balance between integrating with mainstream China and continuing to serve the ethnic Korean community? (4) Explain the dynamics between Yanbian University and the resources upon which they draw.

There are limitations to this study. First, this is a case study of only one university serving only one of China's minority populations. Thus, while it is possible to draw conclusions about Yanbian University, it is difficult to generalize to other ethnic minority universities. However, conclusions drawn from this study can be reviewed at other ethnic minority universities in order to explore whether common characteristics exist. Second, while interviewees and I share similar ethnic origins, a cultural and historical separation existed between us. Since we realized the difficulties cultural, educational, and linguistic differences presented, we worked together until we achieved clear understanding. Third, in order to overcome the shortcoming of not being able to record the interviews, I reviewed my notes and tried to clarify ambiguous points immediately following the interview.

Findings and discussion

In this section, I will explain how the rearticulation of Yanbian University's mission and the growth of the

University reflect the impacts of globalization and the 211 Project.

Rearticulation of mission

At the time of its establishment, Yanbian University's mission was to educate ethnic Koreans and assist regional development. As detailed earlier, at the onset of joining the 211 Project, Yanbian University was merged with five other colleges and went through a series of debates, resulting in the rearticulation of its mission. The new mission placed a greater emphasis on integrating into the mainstream and serving the broader population in order to gain a comparative edge for the institution and its graduates, while simultaneously maintaining the University's Korean character.

As discussed earlier, the ethnic Korean community in China is now experiencing social, cultural, economic, and demographic changes. Most notably, ethnic Koreans are now assimilating into Chinese culture and adopting Chinese language and young adults are migrating to urban areas or South Korea, resulting in a decrease in the Korean community in Yanbian. Some ethnic Koreans are concerned that if this trend continues, Yanbian may no longer maintain its status as a Korean autonomous prefecture. One faculty member I interviewed emphasized that such changes require developing new strategies to provide leadership and services to Korean communities. Thus, rearticulation and reenvisioning of the Yanbian University mission have paramount importance practically, philosophically, and symbolically, for it will either signify directional changes or affirm the need to continue the path set forth in the previously defined mission. After a series of debates, the university reaffirmed its traditional mission of serving the Korean community in China. The current administration, which came on board in 2003, has decided to emphasize cross-cultural and multicultural competencies in education (Meeting 2009).

Interviewees asserted that cross-cultural and multicultural values are the essence of Koreanness—one can be multiculturally competent while maintaining Koreanness. Three elements of cross-culturalism and multiculturalism emerged in faculty interviews: First, cross-cultural/multiculturalism as an ethical imperative. Accordingly, respect for diversity is an ethic that the whole human race should practice, regardless of time and place. Moreover, respect is especially important in this global era in which our livelihoods depend on respecting and understanding each other.

Second, cross-cultural/multiculturalism has pragmatic elements. Namely, it is a useful tool for navigating the global economy. Interviewees asserted that language training is an important means of multicultural/cross-

cultural training. In addition, interviewees emphasized that the cross-cultural competencies gained through the acquisition of foreign languages give a competitive edge in the labor market and translates into economic gains. Interviewees expressed their opinion that Yanbian University can capitalize on these advantages. Ethnic Korean students at the university are fluent in both Korean and Chinese, and non-Korean students acquire a level of proficiency in Korean.³

Third, cross-cultural/multiculturalism as self-preservation. While it was not discussed in interviews, the focus on a cross-cultural and multicultural component in the university's new mission is perhaps an indication of the awareness of the vulnerability of ethnic minority status. Many Koreans remember the suffering experienced during the Cultural Revolution, when ethnic minorities were often charged and persecuted for being ethnic loyalists. Indeed, Koreans in the Yanbian area, including many university faculty, teachers, and community leaders also suffered psychologically and physically because of the Red Guards. In this sense, the emphasis on cross-cultural and multicultural competencies is a way to ensure the security of ethnic minority Koreans in China.

Growth of the university: enrollment, infrastructure, and faculty

There are several indicators of institutional growth, including growth in student enrollment, infrastructure, technology, faculty-student ratio, and teaching loads, as well as the academic reputation of faculty and research outputs. As Yanbian University transitions from a regional minority institution to a specialized institution of national and international significance, it is demonstrating growth in enrollment, infrastructure, and faculty reputation and output.

Enrollment

Joining the 211 Project was an opportunity for Yanbian University to usher in a new era of quantitative and qualitative growth in student enrollment (Table 1).

Indeed, the university experienced exponential growth in student enrollment since its participation in the 211

Project. Between 1990 and 2005, the annual average growth rate of student enrollment was 52% (49% at the undergraduate and 258% at the graduate level). During the same period, total growth of the university was 775%: 699% at the undergraduate and an astronomical 3,863% at the graduate level. The phenomenal growth at the graduate level in particular can be understood as part of the university's attempt to transform itself from a teaching institution to a research institution, an important criteria for participation in the 211 Project.

Among the disciplines, the natural sciences and technology were the biggest beneficiaries of the enrollment growth. From 1990 to 2005, data show 1,429% total growth and 95% annual growth in these disciplines. The biggest enrollment increase occurred during 1995–2000 with a staggering 132% average annual increase. Especially, noteworthy is the five percent increase in enrollment growth in the natural sciences and technology between 1990 and 1995, during which time there was an overall decline in enrollment in the university. Social science disciplines also showed consistent growth, with 58% annual average growth during phase one of the 211 Project. For the same period, the humanities showed a 17% average annual growth, and 256% total growth—meager growth when compared to other disciplines. Thus, the data support the university's new focus on practical knowledge.

Yanbian University's status as a 211 Project university enables its growth. In the past, Yanbian University drew students from the region only. After joining the 211 Project, however, the University began to recruit students from all over China. The opening of student recruitment to all of China has also brought another benefit: interviewees proudly mentioned that the academic quality of Yanbian University has risen since it expanded its geographic reach. Indeed, the university has benefitted from the higher academic quality of the newly admitted students, especially among the Han Chinese who now comprise a majority of the students.

Yanbian University has set aside a quota for ethnic Korean students of up to 40% and, according to government policy, as an ethnic minority, Korean students can be admitted with lower exam scores than Han Chinese students. Yet since China's transition to a market economy, ethnic Korean students of high academic caliber have begun to consistently choose traditional elite universities in Beijing and other locations, making it difficult to meet this quota. Interviews revealed two trends that have led to concerns about maintaining the Korean character of the university. First, in general, ethnic Korean students attending Yanbian University exhibit lower academic preparation. Second, female Korean students attending the university consistently outperform male students. While interviewees insist that there is no gender discrimination in

³ In a passing note, I was impressed to that see non-Koreans, including shopkeepers and street vendors, spoke Korean—albeit rudimentary—when I was visiting Yanbian. I was also informed that several high-ranking Han Chinese provincial government officials, themselves graduates of Yanbian University, speak fluent Korean. Several interviewees told me that those Han Chinese officials who speak Korean are more respected than those who do not and are viewed by ethnic Koreans as more capable as well as friendlier toward Koreans. Thus, many non-Koreans in the area are making an effort to learn Korean.

Table 1 Student enrollment (1990–2005)

	1990	1995		2000		2005		1990–2005	
	A (#)	B (#)	C (%)	D (#)	E (%)	F (#)	G (%)	H (%)	I (%)
Natural Science/Technologies	525	659	5.1	5,008	132.0	8,025	12.0	1,429	95
Social Sciences	389	488	5.1	1,263	31.8	3,796	40.1	876	58
Humanities	1,025	743	−5.5	2,180	38.7	3,644	13.4	256	17
Undergraduate Total	1,939	1,890	−0.5	8,451	69.4	15,485	16.6	699	47
Graduate	48	184	56.7	562	41.1	1,902	47.7	3,863	258
University Total	1,987	2,074	0.9	9,013	66.9	17,387	18.6	775	52

Source: modified from Lin et al. (2010)

Key A: student enrollment, 1990; B: student enrollment, 1995; C: average annual growth (1990–1995); D: student enrollment, 2000; E: average annual growth (1995–2000); F: student enrollment, 2005; G: annual average growth (2000–2005); H: 15 years aggregated growth (1990–2005); I: annual average growth (1990–2005)

education, I inferred that this trend could be a modified version of traditional Korean values, which prioritize the education of male children. High-achieving males may be encouraged to attend elite universities in other regions while females may be persuaded to stay near home and attend the ethnic institution. Such trends could result in a new dynamic in the gender relations in the ethnic Korean community. While this is an interesting topic to explore, it is beyond the scope of this study.

Infrastructure

Concomitant with the rise in enrollment has been growth in the University's infrastructure. Interviewees proudly pointed out improvements in the physical infrastructure of the university that were made possible through financial support from the central government. Recently, the university has added an administration building, a gymnasium, and a science building equipped with laboratories, as well as expanded the university library both in terms of volumes of books and the physical building. While I was visiting, Yanbian University completed the construction of a new undergraduate dorm.

Faculty

Faculty interviewees expressed that, due to the university's geographic location combined with its reputation as a second-tier minority university, there are difficulties in recruiting and retaining faculty with good academic reputations. However, though it will take more time and greater resources for Yanbian University to reach the status of elite university, data indicate that it is headed in the right direction. Between 1995 and 2005, for example, the proportion of full professors rose from seven to sixteen percent of the University's teaching force (See Table 2). Data also

indicate a significant numeric and proportional increase in senior faculty and associate professors, as well as a decline in teaching assistants (see Figs. 1 and 2). As Yanbian University attempts to transform itself into a research university and concurrently expands graduate programs, increasing the proportion of full professors and senior faculty is an important element of assuring quality instruction. While one side effect of the change in enrollment coupled with changes in the composition of the faculty appears to be an increase in the teacher–student ratio (see Tables 2, 3), the increased number of full professors may be one reason Yanbian University is producing more research and educating more graduate students.

While I do not have statistics, all of the interviewees agreed that faculty research output has increased many fold, particularly in the areas of natural science and technology. Interviewees noted that one exemplary research project is the Changbai Mountain development project, which explores the natural resources and the ecosystem of nearby Changbai Mountain. Social science researchers have conducted studies on regional issues involving economics, education, and health. By exploring and developing abundant natural resources, capitalizing on the region's geographical location as a crossroads between China, Russia, Japan, and the two Koreas, interviewees argue that Yanbian University could become a catalyst for regional, national, and international development and peace. Although humanities research has experienced comparatively little growth in recent years, Yanbian University is still contributing to the development of literature, art, and music of the region. Furthermore, Yanbian University's Korean language and literature are considered the best in China and graduates serve in key roles in the nation's elite Korean language and literature departments. Yanbian University also has plans to reach world-class status in Korean Language, Literature, and Culture, Korea Studies

Table 2 Faculty growth (1990–2005)

	1990		1995			2000			2005			1990–2005
	A1 (#)	B1 (%)	A2 (#)	B2 (%)	C1 (%)	A3 (#)	B3 (%)	C2 (%)	A4 (#)	B4 (%)	C3 (%)	
Professors	20	4	42	7	22.0	117	8	35.7	209	16	15.7	945
Associate Professors	141	28	128	23	−1.8	330	23	31.6	406	32	4.6	188
Assistant Professors	170	34	254	45	9.9	570	39	24.9	399	31	−6.0	135
Subtotal	331		424			1,017			1,014			
Teaching Assistants	172	34	143	25	−3.4	431	30	40.3	264	21	−7.7	53
Total	503	100	567	100	2.5	1,448	100	31.1	1,278	100	−2.3	154

Source: modified from Lin et al. (2010)

Key A1: faculty numbers (1990); A2: faculty numbers (1995); A3 faculty numbers (2000); A4: faculty numbers (2005); B1: proportion among ranks (1990); B2; proportion among ranks (1995); B3: proportion among ranks (2000); B4: PROPORTION among ranks (2005); C1: annual average growth rate (1990–1995); C2: annual average growth (1995–2000); C3: annual average growth (2000–2005); D: aggregated growth (1995–2005)

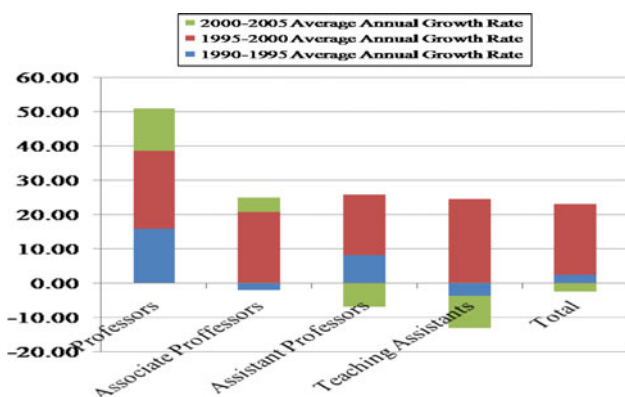


Fig. 1 Growth of teaching forces (1990–2006)

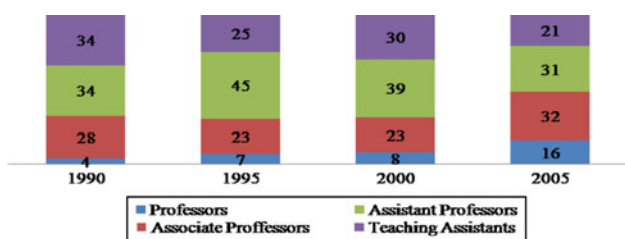


Fig. 2 Proportion of teaching force by ranks

Table 3 Teacher–student ratio

	1990	1995	2000	2005
Faculty only	1:6	1:5	1:8	1:15
Teaching assistant included	1:4	1:3	1:6	1:12

(North and South), Northeast Asia Economic Cooperation, and Regional History (Meeting 2009).

However, missing in the discourse was concern for academic freedom. Instead, I often heard, particularly among the older interviewees who tend to be in leadership

positions, praise for the Chinese Communist Party for its superior ethnic policies and generosity toward ethnic Koreans. Despite this gap in the discourse, the literature discussed earlier suggests that academic freedom is especially indispensable for a minority institution occupying a nation’s frontier and endeavoring to specialize by exploiting its historical and geographical location.

Conclusion

As with universities elsewhere, Chinese universities operate in local, national, and global contexts. This study demonstrates the complex interplay between globalization, national demand, and local needs in the context of Yanbian University.

The 211 Project, which grew out of China’s efforts to take a leading role in the global economy, could bring different consequences for minority institutions such as Yanbian University than those experienced by mainstream institutions. Under the new market economy, motivated by career advancement and economic returns, ethnic Koreans are increasingly moving out of their traditional areas, a trend that has resulted in the demographic minority status of Koreans in Yanbian Korean Autonomous Region. In higher education choices, the Korean minority is also demonstrating an increased preference for mainstream traditional elite institutions for future career advancement.

The demographic changes described earlier have resulted in the expansion of Han Chinese student enrollment and a diversification of the campus culture, as well as a movement toward mainstream Han Chinese culture. With exponential growth in enrollment, faculty, and facilities, it is a propitious time for Yanbian University. However, in spite of the apparent optimism of the campus community, as a minority university, Yanbian University also faces

significant challenges. Many of these challenges will likely derive from the University's newly affirmed dual functions of maintaining the traditional mission of preserving Korean ethnic character and serving the Korean community and the new mission of mainstreaming the institution and its graduates.

At the structural level, enrollment expansion and the concomitant numerical and proportional majority status of Han Chinese students require reconsideration of the university's governance policies and priorities. Certainly, one can anticipate the challenges of balancing an identity as a minority institution serving its minority population while at the same time giving due consideration to its majority student population and the desire to achieve institutional excellence in mainstream society. At the same time, one can also anticipate the possibility that in its effort to cater to the majority student population and facilitate the integration of ethnic Korean students into Chinese society, the university might gradually retreat from its founding mission of serving the ethnic Korean community and begins to devote less attention to the community.

The impact of the 211 Project on minority higher education institutions will depend upon the balance between economic growth, cultural autonomy, and academic freedom, which in turn is affected by political actors and historical and cultural traditions of both the mainstream and the minority communities. In its effort to achieve world-class university status, Yanbian University must continue to play a critical and positive role in the development of the Korean economy, culture, and education in China at a time of intense social and economic change. Further, the 211 Project and other reforms should be based on the long-term trajectory of the development of the Korean community and balance the need to foster integration into mainstream culture and economy with the desire to strengthen the university's traditional focus on Korean-related studies.

This study revealed that prudent planning and the recognition of unique institutional needs, backed with financial and logistical support by the central government, could facilitate institutional growth and, in turn, serve regional and national growth. While it is unlikely that Yanbian University will soon join the ranks of world-class universities, the 211 Project released remarkable energy on this historically neglected minority institution, allowing it to specialize and differentiate, as well as reach for world-class status. Thus, Yanbian University has the potential to provide a model for the development of other minority universities in China.

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