

Ethnic Relations in Contemporary China¹

----Cultural Tradition and Ethnic Policies since 1949

Comparing with other ancient civilizations, China has very unique characteristics of a continuing written history throughout a series of successive dynasties over at least 3,000 years. The intensive interactions among different groups in the East Asian Continent in those years finally resulted in a multi-ethnic political entity with a huge population and a special culture-centered identity. In the era of globalization and complicated situation both in domestic and international affairs, the lessons the Chinese may learn from their ancestors should benefit China in viewing and guiding ethnic relations at present time.

Around the beginning of the 20th century, when China's last dynasty faced prevailing foreign military invasions and the risk of possible collapse of the country, the Chinese leaders and social elites felt it was necessary to reform China and started to learn and adopt the concepts of "nation-state" and the strategies from the West for survival. Some of the new political perceptions came from European industrial countries, and some came from the newly born Soviet Russia. Since then, Marxism, especially Stalin's ideas and practices in the USSR, has strongly influenced the views and policies of the China Communist Party regarding ethnic relations. After assuming the power in 1949, a Soviet model has dominated the theories, system establishment, and policy designing of the PRC government in ethnic affairs until today.

This paper will discuss the historical experiences of the Chinese tradition in dealing with different minority groups, try to summarize a Chinese Model of cultural diffusion and integration, and review the official policies of the People's Republic towards ethnic minorities since 1949. Several issues will be discussed regarding to "Ethnic conflict is indeed a class struggle" (Mao Zedong) and "equality *de facto* among ethnic groups". There will be two key policy issues in the future policy designing or adjustment in ethnic relations in China. The first is whether China should continue the Soviet Model to "politicize" ethnicity or return to the China's traditional route of "culturalizing" minorities at the national level, and the second is how to understand and what measures should take to reach "equality" and social justice at the societal level.

I. The Chinese Tradition: Culture-Centered View of Ethnic Relations

In any countries, the version of the social mainstream and government policies has always played a key role in guiding group identity and adjusting boundaries of political entity. The Constitutions, laws, and regulative policies of a country present its basic ideas and strategies in managing ethnic relations and guiding its future trends. In general, government policies in ethnic affairs can be classified into two major types: the first one more emphasizes racial and ethnic minorities as distinct political groups/entities and tries to establish a political framework in which each group has its position. For example, there were hierarchy systems in many ancient empires with one group in the "core" area

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as “superior group” and the others were “subordinated class” (e.g. the Romans in the Rome Empire); the second type distinguishes different groups by “culture/civilization standards” and emphasizes the differences among the groups in social norms and moral ethics. Assimilation or acculturation has been the “core” idea of the second type of ethnic policy.

The territory of today’s China has been an area where many groups have lived for thousands of years. Among them, there was Han Chinese group who lived in fertile central plains (the “core” area) were more advanced in technology and cultural development, while “barbarians” in grasslands and mountain peripheries had different life styles and relatively less advanced in technology. Since the appearance of Confucianism (700 B.C.), the Chinese tradition to distinct “civilized” and “barbarians” was mainly based on their cultural achievement. This distinction does not refer to any physical differences, languages, religion, and customs. It mainly emphasized the differences in social norms and behavior regulations.

Although there were differences between the agriculture-based civilization in the “core” Han regions and the other civilization developed among the groups in grasslands and mountain environments and each of them had the advantages in survival under the corresponding environment, the ancient Chinese viewed their traditional culture as the most advanced civilization among the others. It was true that their knowledge and technology in bronze ware, pottery, architecture, textile, medicine, astronomy, literature, and arts were much more advanced compared with nomads in the north and jungle tribes in the south. Their “barbarian-civilized” distinction in fact referred to the differences between the development stages of a “civilization”, not referred to different civilizations with hostile and exclusiveness in nature. On the other side, the “barbarians” in peripheries had also an active attitude to learn technology, social norms, administrative system and other knowledge from the Chinese civilization. The dream of their chiefs was to conquer and rule the central empire in the prosperous “core” areas. When they succeed in doing so (e.g. Mongolians in the Yuan dynasty and Manchu in the Qing dynasty), they adopted and reinforced the Confucianism and Chinese norms, and by this way they were able to maintain the social order and economic prosperity in China. Also by this way they were able to be accepted by the huge Han population who felt that their “culture” was respected and secured under the new regimes. Therefore, the interaction between these groups was not hostility and destruction but cultural diffusion and learning. The pattern was quite different compared with the group interactions in the ancient Europe or Middle East where different civilizations or religions tried to destroy each other.

Any barbarians, individuals or groups, when ever they accepted and practiced the Chinese civilization, would become the “members” of the Chinese “civilization”, and then a part of Chinese nation. Ambrose King emphasized the basic characteristics of the Chinese tradition, “it was a political-cultural entity or what is called the civilized state which was marked by cultural rather than ethnic differentiations, and consequently followed a unique civilized order” (King, 1997: 177).

John King Fairbank also emphasized the similar point.

“Undoubtedly this universalism has meant that culture (the way of life) has been more fundamental in China than nationalism. Early Chinese emperors asserted that they ruled over all civilized mankind without distinction of race or language. Barbarian invaders who succeeded them found it expedient to continue and reinforce this tradition. To any Confucian ruler, Chinese or alien,

the important thing was the loyalty of his administrators and their right conduct according to the Confucian code. Color and speech were of little account as long as a man understand the classics and could act accordingly”(Fairbank, 1979: 98).

In China, the two sides of the “civilized - barbarian distinction continuum” are transferable since culture can be learned and taught. Some Han people who abandoned the Confucianism might turn to “barbarian” behavior while some “barbarians” in peripheries who practice Confucianism should be viewed as civilized *Han*. This view represents a dialectic philosophy and echoes an opening and absorbent attitude of the Chinese culture towards other cultures and groups. In the Chinese tradition, all groups were considered equal. In his famous phrase, Confucian said that “all people around the four seas are brothers” (*The Analects of Confucius*). He emphasized that all groups should be treated equally and their differences in race, language, religion, and customs should not override their common traits in basic ethics and norms as well as their peaceful co-existence. He believed that all people would finally accept his ideas and then the world would reach the stage of “great harmony”, a “harmony with differences” (*The Analects of Confucius*).

It is no doubt that any group identities and ethnic relations are more or less related to political interaction. But in the Chinese history, “majority-minority relations” or “civilized – barbarian relations” in both theory and practices has been “culturalized” or “culture-centered”. This version and relevant strategies greatly facilitated the “core” group to unify minority groups.

Wang Tongling, a Chinese historian, described 5 measures of the Han to assimilate the barbarians: (1) promote residential mixture by moving the minority groups who showed allegiance to the “core” regions (he provided 13 tables listing the “relocation records” in history) and moving *Han* into peripheries; (2) encourage intermarriages, Wang summarized the information of intermarriages in two groups, 7 tables listed the intermarriages of the royal families during the dynasties established by “barbarians” and 38 tables listed the intermarriages of the royal families during the dynasties established by Han group²; (3) encourage to change surnames and given names from minority style into Han style (41 tables), it has been an important symbol of acculturation in China; (4) encourage adoptions from other groups as sons or daughters (3 tables), it certainly led to amalgamation; (5) encourage to adopt Chinese language, dress, and social norms (Wang1934: 4-17). All these tables presented names and the dates of events in detailed citation from written historical chronicles³.

Milton Gordon proposed a framework in measuring assimilation in 1964. This framework contains 7 variables: cultural-behavioral, structural, marital, identificational, attitude receptional, behavior receptional, and civic assimilation (Gordon, 1964: 71). Compared with the above 5 measures summarized by Wang, we can find that they share something in common (acculturation, intermarriage, identity, etc.) but also some

² The intermarriages occurred among the ordinary people, even high rank officers, were not recorded in official history of dynasties. But the intermarriage records of royal families also provided a window for us to view the intensive and coverage of intermarriages in Chinese history.

³ It has been a unique tradition in China that every newly established dynasty has the responsibility to write a detailed historical chronicles for the last dynasty. The structure and style of these records are very similar since the first one (*History Records* by the Court History Recording Officer Sima Qian) in the Han dynasty (about 100 B.C.). The total Chinese history of over 2100 years was written in the form of 25 dynasties. All of them have separate sections on periphery minority tribes and regimes.

differences based on their social environment respectively. Because Chinese concern about family very much, changing surname or being adopted by other group has been a very serious transition in people's identity in measuring assimilation. On the other hand, as an immigration country, migration and keeping original family surnames generally was not a big issue in the US⁴. Regarding the study of ethnic relations, a systematical framework to measure ethnic assimilation was presented by Wang, 30 years before Milton Gordon.

The Chinese tradition in practice had its great success in "transforming barbarian into civilized", and many minority groups whose names appeared in records (e.g. *Xianbei*, *Qidan*, *Dangxiang*) finally disappeared among the Han population in the past. One example is that there was a group of Jewish population moved to China in history, their religion and language still can be traced in Kaifeng City along the Yellow River (Pan Guangdan, 1983; Abraham, 1999). They finally vanished among the Han who had no prejudice and discrimination against those Jews.

Through the practices of this tradition for about 3,000 years, the population of Han as the "core" group of China reached 1.2 billion and China became a unified pluralist nation. Fei Xiaotong proposed a theory of "a pluralistic unity of the Chinese Nation" (Fei Xiaotong, 1989). Based on archeological evidences and historical records, he described the whole picture of the assimilation process throughout thousands of years of Chinese history. His theory has become the most influential framework to interpret historical ethnic relations in the Chinese academic society today.

Although the remarkable characteristics of the Chinese tradition in guiding ethnic relations had been stable for about 3,000 years, this tradition was in serious debates and has been switched into a different direction influenced by external forces, first by the western invasions and theories of "nation-state", then by the Leninism and Stalin's theory of "nationality" and the relevant practices in the former USSR.

II. The European Tradition of "Politicizing" Ethnicity since the Industrialization and Its Continuation in the USSR

Accompanying the process of industrialization, a new trend of "politicizing" ethnic groups emerged in Western Europe and followed by the "nationalism" movement. By advocating regrouping of political entities based on "national identity", the essence of the "nationalism" was to establish "nation states" through "national self-determination". The "nationalist" movement was an important landmark of "politicizing" ethnicity in human history.

"Nation states" were established first in the Western European continent as the achievement of "nationalist" ideology and "self-determination" movements in the 17th century. Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius viewed independent "nation state" as the principal unit of the international law or the sole authority of the state. In resistance against the armed forces of other monarchical states, the French "citizens" were enthused with nationalism in defending their motherland. During the American War of Independence in the 18th century, the idea of "all men are created equal" inspired the people to establish their own independent state by "self-determination". There were various types of nationalism in the countries with different social conditions and history. Anthony Smith

⁴ Some immigrants were asked to change surnames to fit into the American surname list.

discussed the “civic model of nation” in the Western Europe and “ethnic model of nation” in Eastern Europe and other regions. The former has a stronger emphasis on historical territory, legal and political system while the later emphasizes community of birth and native culture (Smith, 1991: 9-11).

From the very beginning of its birth, communism appeared as the radical political movement in Europe. It was deeply rooted in ideological orientation and thus has a tendency of “politicizing” cultural and social differences among ethnic groups. Before assuming the power, communist parties used “nationality” and “ethnic” issues to agitate masses of ethnic minorities to join the revolution. “Class struggle” was claimed to be much more essential compared with cultural and ethnic conflicts (Connor, 1984:5). Even before the “October Revolution”, the Bolshevik had made the promise to all groups the right to secession in order to get their support. During the civil war after the revolution, Lenin and the Soviet leaders established the Union and Russian Federation to unify the ethnic minorities.

Under the socialist political system and planning economy, the Soviet leaders continually used “administrative measures” to deal with group differences and social issues. By emphasizing political rights of minority groups and establishing political-administrative entities for their “self-domination”, the Soviet government created a new administrative system to regulate ethnic relations. At the macro level, the political entities such as “the Soviet Union Republics”, “Autonomous Republics”, and “Autonomous States” together established an administrative hierarchy with all groups having their own territory. These groups thus became “territorialized” and their group consciousness was strengthened based on “territory” and their “republics” which have their own constitution, congress, state council and the government. Ukraine and Belorussia even had their independent votes in the United Nations. The Soviet Constitution granted all these Republics the right of secession and it became the legitimate basis for the disintegration of the USSR. But for a long time, the central government of the USSR was still able to control the whole nation by its hierarchy Party system, which allowed the top leaders in Moscow kept the authority to appoint the First Party Secretary in each “republic”, and these secretaries were real leaders and authorities in local administration.

At the micro level, a “nationality recognition” campaign was implemented in the 1930s. Every resident of the USSR was identified their individual “nationality status” and this status has been formally registered in his/her internal passport. “An internal passport system that lists the owner’s nationality has had a negative impact on integration because it has created a ‘legal-psychological deterrent’” (Rakowska-Harmstone, 1986:252). The membership boundaries of ethnic groups were officially fixed and this situation certainly had a negative impact on interaction and integration between the groups.

Meanwhile, the government policies favoring minorities in aspects of language, education, promotion of cadres, and financial aids further strengthened group identification and boundaries. When Marxist ideology reduced its influence among the people and when Gorbachov voluntarily prohibited the function of the Soviet Communist Party in administration and military force. The two essential linkages, spirit and administrative, between those “republics” and the central government were cut off. After practice of Stalin’s theory and strategy for about 7 decades, the USSR finally fell into apart. With all internal and external factors working together, these systems finally led to collapse of the Soviet Union, one the two super powers for several decades. All recent

national separatist movements took place in the communist nations that had been more or less practicing the USSR model in political, economic and ethnic aspects. As the result, 23 newly independent states were established on the land of the former three states: the USSR, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. Now at the beginning of the new century, it is the time to review the dynamic process in the past century and to discuss the lessons we might learn from the former USSR and other nations.

III. The Policies of the PRC Government Since 1949

In the thousands years of Chinese history, the mainstream of the governments through all dynasties has always been the “culturalism” in ethnic relations and cultural diffusion of the “core” group to the groups in peripheries. This process had lasted until the 1950s that was the turning point of the direction. Under the international circumstances at that time such as the Korean War and forced isolation enforced by western nations, the Chinese leaders had no other choice besides to seek the support from the USSR. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) won the civil war within 3 years and it had no experience in administration and social management in the past. In order to quickly put the country in order and to establish the whole social system in the area of 9.6 million square kilometers, the newly established central government of the PRC copied almost all the Soviet models in administration, education, economy, health care, armed force, and jurisdiction in the early 1950s. The PRC then established a centralized political-administrative system, state-owned planning economy, and “revolutionary” educational and cultural systems.

Since the date of its birth, the CCP had continually influenced by the Soviet Union. The CCP accepted the Leninist’ idea of “self-determination” of minority groups in the early 1930s, but after 1949 it turned to the new policy announcing that “equality” and “regional autonomy” would be practiced among ethnic minorities after the success of the revolution (Connor, 1984:87). The Chinese Constitution (1954) did not have the items for “the right of secession” of minorities. Instead, regional autonomous systems were established in the 1950s. This probably is one of the few differences between the USSR and the PRC regarding the ethnic policies.

(1) “The recognition of nationalities” campaign

Following the USSR’s model, the PRC government organized a nation-wide campaign of “recognition of nationalities” in the early 1950s (Dreyer, 1976:141-146). Many scholars and government officers worked in teams in all provinces to interview people and collect the relevant records and materials. Stalin’s concept of “nationality” with four key and indispensable elements (common territory, common language, common economy, and common identity based on cultural heritage) was applied in “nationality” identification with some adjustment according to local circumstances⁵.

There were some “artificial” grouping varied from one place to another in the process of identification. One group who living crossing the Sichuan-Yunnan border was identified as “Mongolian” in Sichuan Province, and as “Naxi” in Yunnan Province, though they shared same language, life style, and customs and have been relatives for a long time. Dongxiang, Sala, and Baoan were used to be considered as the branches of the

⁵ For example, several groups (Hui, Manchu, etc.) do not have or keep their distinct languages, but they still be recognized as “nationalities”.

Hui group in the past, and the three became independent “nationalities” during the “recognition” process. Table 1 shows the population sizes of the 56 officially identified “nationalities”. Their population sizes ranging from 718 (Hezhe in 1964) to 547,283,057 (*han* in 1953). There were still some people, one million in 1953 and 734,438 in 2000, remained as “un-recognized” group. These people wanted to become independent “nationalities” but their request did not receive enough support from scholars and government.

Table 1. Population of Ethnic Groups in P.R. China

Ethnic group	1953	1964	1982	1990	2000
<i>han</i>	542,824,056	651,296,368	936,674,944	1,039,187,548	1,137,386,112
Zhuang	6,864,585	8,386,140	13,383,086	15,555,820	16,178,811
Manchu	2,399,228	2,695,675	4,304,981	9,846,776	10,682,262
Hui	3,530,498	4,473,147	7,228,398	8,612,001	9,816,805
Miao	2,490,874	2,782,088	5,021,175	7,383,622	8,940,116
Uygur	3,610,462	3,996,311	5,963,491	7,207,024	8,399,393
Yi	3,227,750	3,380,960	5,453,564	6,578,524	7,762,272
Tujia	-*	525,755	2,836,814	5,725,049	8,028,133
Mongol	1,451,035	1,965,766	3,411,367	4,802,407	5,813,947
Tibetan	2,753,081	2,501,174	3,847,875	4,593,072	5,416,021
Dong	712,802	836,123	1,426,400	2,508,624	2,960,293
Yao	665,933	857,265	1,411,967	2,137,033	2,637,421
Korean	1,111,275	1,339,569	1,765,204	1,923,361	1,923,842
Bai	567,119	706,623	1,132,224	1,598,052	1,858,063
Hani	481,220	628,727	1,058,806	1,254,800	1,439,673
Kazak	509,375	491,637	907,546	1,110,758	1,250,458
Li	360,950	438,813	887,107	1,112,498	1,247,814
Dai	478,966	535,389	839,496	1,025,402	1,158,989
She	-	234,167	371,965	634,700	709,592
Lisu	317,465	270,628	481,884	574,589	634,912
Gelao	-	26,852	54,164	438,192	579,357
Gongxiang	155,761	147,443	279,523	373,669	513,805
Lahu	139,060	191,241	304,256	411,545	453,705
Shui	133,566	156,099	286,908	347,116	406,902
Wa	286,158	200,272	298,611	351,980	396,610
Naxi	143,453	156,796	251,592	277,750	308,839
Qiang	35,660	49,105	102,815	198,303	306,072
Tu	53,277	77,349	159,632	192,568	241,198
Molao	-	52,819	90,357	160,648	207,352
Xibe	19,022	33,438	83,683	172,932	188,824
Kirgiz	70,944	70,151	113,386	143,537	160,823
Dawur	-	63,394	94,126	121,463	132,394
Jingpo	101,852	57,762	92,976	119,276	132,143
Maonan	-	22,382	38,159	72,370	107,166
Sala	30,658	34,664	69,135	87,546	104,503
Bulang	-	39,411	58,473	82,398	91,882
Tajik	14,462	16,236	26,600	22,223	41,028
Achang	-	12,032	20,433	27,718	33,936
Pumi	-	14,298	24,238	29,721	33,600
Ewenki	4,957	9,681	19,398	26,379	30,505
Nu	-	15,047	22,896	27,190	28,759
Jing	-	4,293	13,108	18,749	22,517
Jinuo	-	-	11,962	18,022	20,899
Deang	-	7,261	12,297	15,461	17,935
Baoan	4,957	5,125	9,017	11,683	16,505
Russian	22,656	1,326	2,917	13,500	15,609
Yugu	3,861	5,717	10,568	12,293	13,719

Ozbek	13,626	7,717	12,213	14,763	12,370
Menba	-	3,809	1,140	7,498	8,923
Oroqen	2,262	2,709	4,103	7,004	8,196
Dulong	-	3,090	4,633	5,825	7,426
Tatar	6,929	2,294	4,122	5,064	4,890
Hezhe	-	718	1489	4,254	4,640
Gaoshan	329	366	1,650	2,877	4,461
Luoba	-	-	1,066	2,322	2,965
Un-recognized	1,017,299	32,411	799,705	752,347	734,438
Foreigner	1,004	7,416	4,937	3,498	941
Total	577,856,141	691,220,104	1,003,913,927	1,130,510,638	1,242,612,226
Minorities%	5.89%	5.77%	6.62%	8.01%	8.46%

*: Those groups had not been recognized yet in that census.

Sources: Hao Wenming ed. 2001: 761-762; Census Bureau of State Council, 2002:18-46.

After the recognition, all Chinese citizens were registered by his/her “nationality status” in the official household registration and personal identification. The system is still in practice today. Any changes regarding “nationality status” can only be applied by the children of intermarried couple and only after they reached age 18⁶.

(2) The regional Autonomy for Ethnic Minorities

The “autonomous area” system was in practice for all ethnic minorities. The 1954 Constitution of the PRC contains the item mentioning that “the People’s Republic of China is a united multi-nationality country, and regional autonomy should be in practice in the areas where minority population concentrated”. These autonomous areas were gradually established. There are 5 autonomous regions at the provincial level, 30 autonomous prefectures (Table 2) (Figure 1), and 120 autonomous counties in China.

Table 2. Autonomous Regions and Prefectures in the PRC

Autonomous Area	Major ethnic groups	Date of establishment	Major ethnic group in total population	Total population when established	% of minority group	Date of data	Location of Autonomous prefecture	Number in Figure 1
Inner Mongolia AR*	Mongol	1947.5.1	888235	6100104	14.56	1953	-	
Xinjiang Uygur AR	Uygur	1955.10.1	3607609	4783608	75.42	1953	-	
Guangxi Zhuang AR	Zhuang	1958.3.15	6496141	19560822	33.21	1953	-	
Ningxia Hui AR	Hui	1958.10.25	646961	2107490	30.70	1964	-	
Tibet AR	Tibetan	1965.9.1	1208663	1251225	96.60	1964	-	
Kantse Tibetan AP**	Tibetan	1950.11.24	369354	506311	72.95	1964	Sichuan Province	4
Ngawa Tibetan-Qiang AP	Tibetan	1953.1.1	179421	345370	51.95	1949	Sichuan Province	6
	Qiang		38150		11.05			
Kanlho Tibetan AP	Tibetan	1953.10.1	172237	314684	54.73	1953	Gansu Province	18
Chub chub Tibetan AP	Tibetan	1953.12.22	83064	114031	72.84	1977	Qinghai Province	22
Tso nub Mongol-Tibetan AP	Mongol	1954.1.25	7013	20585	34.07	1953	Qinghai Province	25
	Tibetan		8432		40.96			
Tso chang Tibetan AP	Tibetan	1953.12.31	21459	131763	16.29	1964	Qinghai Province	23
Tso lho Tibetan AP	Tibetan	1953.12.6	79310	115721	68.54	1953	Qinghai Province	21
Golog Tibetan AP	Tibetan	1954.1.1	50875	56067	90.74	1964	Qinghai Province	24
Yushul Tibetan AP	Tibetan	1951.12.25	131026	422664	31.00	1964	Qinghai Province	20
Dechen Tibetan AP	Tibetan	1957.9.13	64611	158683	40.72	1953	Yunnan Province	14
Liangshan Yi AP	Yi	1952.10.1	797528	1976113	40.36	1964	Sichuan Province	5
Yanbian Korean AP	Korean	1952.9.3	551025	904077	60.95	1953	Jilin Province	1

⁶ In the former USSR, the legal age for the children of intermarried couple to apply for changing “status” was 16.

Changji Hui AP	Hui	1954.7.15	36563	272698	13.41	1954	Xinjiang AR	29
Yili Kazhak AP	Kazak	1954.11.27	361655	675125	53.57	1949	Xinjiang AR	30
Dali Bai AP	Bai	1956.11.22	466210	1459318	31.95	1953	Yunnan Province	13
Chuxiong Yi AP	Yi	1958.4.15	355446	1486894	23.91	1953	Yunnan Province	17
Xishuangbanna Dai AP	Dai	1953.1.24	121645	212015	57.38	1953	Yunnan Province	10
Xiangxi Tujia-Miao AP	Tujia	1957.9.20	393958	1826111	21.57	1964	Hunan Province	3
	Miao		351351		19.24			
Qiandongnan Miao-Dong AP	Miao	1956.7.23	696498	1804259	38.60	1953	Guizhou Province	7
	Dong		436723		24.21			
Enshi Tujia-Miao AP	Tujia	1983.12.1	1070587	3251614	32.92	1982	Hubei Province	2
	Miao		177573		5.46			
Lingxia Hui AP	Hui	1956.11.19	270300	298700	90.49	1950	Gansu Province	19
Bayinguole Mongol AP	Mongol	1954.6.23	24058	243170	9.89	1958	Xinjiang AR	26
Boertala Mongol AP	Mongol	1954.7.13	10532	41435	25.42	1954	Xinjiang AR	27
Kezilesu Kurgiz AP	Kirgiz	1954.7.14	47355	136553	34.68	1954	Xinjiang AR	28
Dehong Dai-Jingpo AP	Dai and Jingpo	1953.7.24	176000	406767	43.27	1953	Yunnan Province	11
			100500		24.71			
Nujiang Lisu AP	Lisu	1954.8.23	110661	207496	53.33	1953	Yunnan Province	12
Honghe Hani-Yi AP	Hani	1957.11.18	234856	1674156	14.03	1953	Yunnan Province	15
	Yi		394780		23.58			
Wenshan Zhuang-Miao AP	Zhuang	1958.4.1	388598	1303124	29.82	1953	Guizhou Province	16
	Miao		158042		12.13			
Qiannan Buyi-Miao AP	Buyi	1956.8.8	566546	1795497	31.55	1964	Guizhou Province	8
	Miao		201028		11.20			
Qianxinan Buyi-Miao AP	Buyi	1982.5.1	638256	2166337	29.46	1982	Guizhou Province	9
	Miao		105176		4.86			

*AR: 5 Autonomous Region; **AP: 30 Autonomous Prefecture.

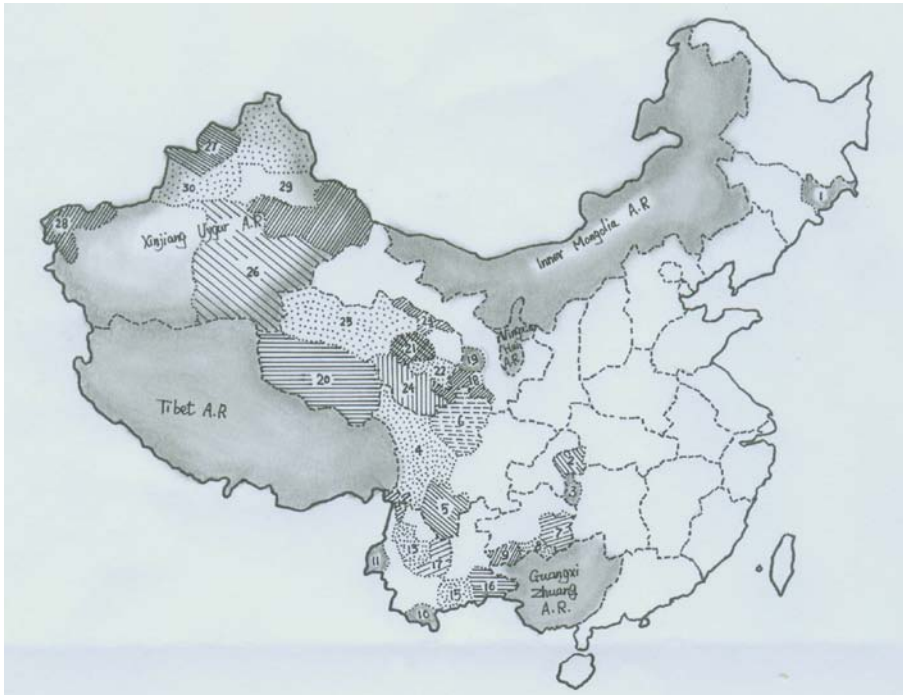


Figure 1. The Main Autonomous Areas for Minorities in China
Numbers in this map: 1-30: autonomous prefectures (cf. Table 2);

The total autonomous areas together make 64% of the Chinese territory while the total population of these ethnic minorities only consisted of 6% in 1953 and 8.5% in 2000. The boundaries of these autonomous areas were decided mainly in consideration of the concentration of minority residents and their future development regardless whether they were majority or minority in these regions. For example, Mongolians consisted of 15% of the total population of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in 2000. When more than two ethnic minorities lived in the same area, a joint autonomous area was established.

The system was established to secure that minority groups play a leading role and manage their own affairs in autonomous areas. The Autonomy Law of Minority Nationalities in the Peoples' Republic of China was passed in the National Congress in 1984. It contains detailed items regarding the administration, jurisdiction, education, religious and cultural affairs, and local regulations in the autonomous areas and it has become one of the basic laws in practice in the PRC. The chief officer of government divisions at all levels in administration is required to be appointed or elected from the main ethnic minority group. Meanwhile in fact, the Communist Party secretaries at all levels have been mainly selected from the Han majority. This is a system adopted from the former USSR for keeping power balance between administrative system and Communist Party system and unified authority through Party system.

(3) The Policies in Favor of Ethnic Minorities and Their Autonomous Areas

The government has designed and practiced a series of policies in favor of ethnic minorities in aspects of administrative, educational, economic, and cultural development. First, the central government provides large amounts of financial aids to these autonomous areas each year. The aids covered 38-94% of the total budget of the 5 autonomous regions in 2002 (Table 3). The farmers and herdsmen in the Tibet Autonomous Region have been exempted from tax since the early 1980s.

Table 3. Income and Financial Subsidy from the Central Government
in 5 autonomous Regions in China (in 10,000 RMB)

Year		Tibet Auto.	Inner Mongolia	Xinjiang Auto.	Guangxi	Ningxia
1990	Subsidy of CG	124389	279,257	243,644	180,691	82,213
	Total income	126198	609,019	529,648	763,135	144,520
	CG(%)	98.6	45.9	46.0	23.7	56.9
1995	Subsidy of CG	313,440	258,322	522,571	611,470	85,051
	Total income	376,088	1,021,780	1,026,007	1,405,892	174,843
	CG(%)	83.3	25.3	50.9	43.5	61.0
2000	Subsidy of CG	635,957	1,054,731	1,190,159	1,114,327	608,380
	Total income	689,805	2,610,629	2,031,417	2,584,866	400,136
	CG(%)	92.2	40.4	58.6	43.1	65.8
2001	Subsidy of CG	1,018,566	1,682,399	1,838,294	787,823	660,042
	Total income	944,776	3,359,808	2,917,322	2,574,529	935,787
	CG(%)	92.8	50.1	63.0	30.6	70.5
2002	Subsidy of CG	1,398,795	2,065,230	2,150,323	1,187,761	880,936
	Total income	1,311,470	4,133,327	3,614,451	3,055,081	1,145,650
	CG(%)	93.8	50.0	59.5	38.9	76.9

Sources: Ma Rong, 2004: 524.

The government set up a series of policies in favor of ethnic minorities in education. The students from ethnic minorities usually receive additional points in national

examinations or through a quota system in university enrollment. For the large minorities with their own language, the government established an educational system from primary school to university using their language as the teaching language. Bilingual teaching is common in many minority areas. But in recent years, due to the previous job assignment system under the planning economy now has been transferred into the competition in job market, some university graduates of minority schools face some problems in employment because their capacity of the Mandarin (the Han majority language) is not good enough and that is required commonly in job market. On one hand, the present bilingual educational systems of minority groups need to be adjusted according to market regulations; on the other hand, the cultural and linguistic heritages of minority groups should be carefully reserved through government programs to keep the cultural diversity of China.

Another favorable policy for minorities has been the exemption of the family planning programs. The couples of Han majority are only allowed to have one child and this policy has been implemented with many enforce measures. Because the social security system has not been established in rural areas of China, many peasants wish to have at least one son to support them when they get old, so they so admired the privilege of minorities to have second even more children. These favorable policies together attracted many Han people try to change their “nationality status”. This may explain why the population of Manzhou and Tujia doubled in size during 1982-1990 (cf. Table 1) when the administration loosened the control of “status change” after the “Cultural Revolution”. Besides, almost all the children of intermarriages between Han and minorities were registered as minorities.

IV. “Ethnic Conflicts, indeed, are Class Struggle”

Mao Zedong had been a very prestigious leader of the CCP since the 1930s. All his life had engaged in political struggles: first struggle against warlords, then the KMT government, then the Japanese invaders, and finally the KMT government again after WWII. He was born in a peasant family and had his special interpretation of Marxism and Leninism according to his personal experiences and social situation of China. He was very successful in those battles against the enemy of the “people”, and this “crusade” was still kept in his mind after 1949.

As the top leader of the PRC, the successive central government of all the dynasties of China, as well as a Communist, he had a dual personality. For example, he had handled the Tibet issue in a very smooth way. He treated the Dalai Lama as a respective religious leader, invited him to visit Beijing and made him a national leader, acting like an emperor of the past dynasties. But at the same time, he claimed that “religion is the opium” and claimed that “ethnic conflicts, indeed, are class struggle”. During the “Cultural Revolution”, the Red Guards destroyed many temples and Buddha statues, burned non-revolutionary books, and accused many minority leaders with the charge of “nationalist separatists”. Many policies favored minority autonomous areas were abandoned. One example is that a large part of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region was broken into several pieces and transferred to the nearby provinces. Only after his death in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping returned to power in 1978, the policies had returned to the situation before the 1966. As one of the results, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region restored its authority over these areas.

Walker Connor draws a figure to show the Marxist perception of ethnicity-nationality in comparison with nationalist perception (Figure 2). This refers to the situation before Communist parties assuming the administrative power.

Figure 2. Perceptions

Marxist perception			Nationalist perception		
Bourgeoisie (German)	Bourgeoisie (English)	Bourgeoisie (French)	(Bourgeoisie)	(Bourgeoisie)	(Bourgeoisie)
Proletariat (German)	Proletariat (English)	Proletariat (French)	(Proletariat)	(Proletariat)	(Proletariat)

Source: Conner, 1983:5.

The situation may change after the success of revolution and the Communist party took the power. It was very likely that there was another picture in Mao's views (Figure 3). Those people who asked for "ethnic interest" or "secession" should be the enemies. They should be the members or the "agents" of previous oppressive class from ethnic groups who were fighting against proletariat leadership of the nation (the right part of Figure 3). The revolutionary mass of different ethnic groups (the left part) will certainly support the proletariat regime to against those "federal or Bourgeoisie ethnic separatist".

Figure 3 New Perception in China after 1949

Communist perception			"Separatist perception"		
Proletariat leadership (han)	Proletariat leadership (Tibetan)	Proletariat leadership (Mongolian)	Oppressive class (Tibetan)	Oppressive class (Mongolian)	Oppressive class (other groups)
farmers	farmers	farmers			

The Mao's phrase was very influential during the "Cultural Revolution". "Regional nationalism" and various "separatist groups" of ethnic minorities became the targets of the mass political movement. After a big nation-wide debate on this topic in the early 1980s, Mao's phrase was finally claimed to be wrong and the perception of ethnic relations in China returned to its previous channels. In China, always the top leaders decide the direction of policies in ethnic relations. Under the tolerate atmosphere, the opinions of scholars might have some influences within the academic society and there are seldom chances for the communication between scholars and top leaders.

After the "Cultural Revolution", the government leaders (e.g. Hu Yaobang) tried to compensate the damages made during that period. The policies towards religions became very loose and the government top leaders continually apologized to ethnic minorities for the situation during the "Cultural Revolution". At the same time, the prestige of communist ideology has been seriously damaged by the actions against innocent citizens during the "Cultural Revolution". The group consciousness has strengthened among some ethnic minorities by these factors working together.

The policy of "opening door to outside world" allowed thousands of Chinese Muslims to visit Saudi Arabia on pilgrim. Some of them accepted the Islamic extremism and seek to establish an Islamic regime in Xinjiang following the model of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The Tibetans in exile in India also became active under the

leadership of the Dalai Lama. The collapse of the USSR, the Western military intervening in the ethnic/religious civil wars of the former Yugoslavia, and the “color revolutions” in the former Soviet republics reminded the PRC leaders of the political risk in managing ethnic relations and made them very cautious in dealing with the new phenomena in ethnic relations in China. The new phrase of the PRC government is to maintain its national unity and “against terrorism, religious extremism, and separatism”, but there are no significant changes or adjustment in basic institutions and policies related to ethnic affairs.

V. The Reasons behind the Ethnic Policies in China since 1949

There were several reasons for the PRC government to adopt the Soviet model and systems in ethnic relations in the 1950s. First, the Marxism and Leninism became the ideological foundation of the PRC. These theories clearly request the proletariat regimes to support minority groups for their political rights, including “self-determination” which only could be interpreted by “right of secession” (Lenin, 1913: 236). Therefore at least, a Communist government should support “regional autonomy” of minority groups. Meantime, Communist parties must help sincerely those less developed minorities with all possible measures.

Second, in practice of these policies, the USSR did provide a successful model in national construction, ethnic solidarity, economic development, and strong power in the war against foreign invaders. The Soviet Union enjoyed very high prestige among the Chinese peasants and workers. Besides, many Russian “experts” were sent to China in the 1950s to help establishing the new socialist system in China and the USSR provided necessary support to the new People’s Republic to build its industry and develop sciences and technology.

Third, the central government of the Chinese dynasties had a tradition in history to subsidize the periphery areas with grain, products and money. The fertile central plains have provided enough resources to the central government to carry out such policies. For example, during the Qing dynasty, the emperor gave Tibet and the Dalai Lama financial aid annually (Ma, 1995:49). The PRC government succeeded this tradition after 1949.

Fourth, the total population of ethnic minorities only consisted of 6% of the total population of China in the 1950s. Therefore, it was feasible and affordable for the Han population to provide such a support to ethnic minorities. In contrast, Russians consisted about 50% of the total population of the USSR. During the Soviet period many Russians complained that they had provided too much to subsidize other groups in central Asia and Caucasus areas, and they would be much better off without those groups.

Fifth, in order to implement the policies in favor of ethnic minorities, their status, both in group and individual, must be identified first. Therefore, the “nationality recognition” campaign and the individual “nationality status” system were really necessary to practice those policies and regulations.

Sixth, the planning economy provided the system basis to secure the power of the central government to distribute resource (money, materials, energy, personals, etc.) to minority regions. All these resources were allocated by the detailed plans of the central government. Actually, the financial aid for minority regions has become an important part of the government budgets in these autonomous areas.

The above factors may largely explain why the PRC government adopted and practiced these systems and policies in ethnic relations since the 1950s. In general, these policies helped these minorities to catch up the socioeconomic development, reduced the gaps between groups, and established a cooperative relationship among ethnic groups in China. But since these policies targeted clearly at specific groups, these policies also strengthened the group consciousness while the boundaries between ethnic groups and their membership status became clear and stable.

VI. “Legal Equality” and “Equality *de facto*”

How should a proletarian government treat inequality left by the previous regime after assuming the power? Lenin emphasized two points: (1) the revolution only provides “legal equality” for all groups, a proletarian government and workers in power should move forward to help the minorities to reach the “equality *de facto*”; (2) in order to reach “equality *de facto*”, proletarian internationalism should not only observe the equality of nationalities in legal forms, but observe “inequality” towards previous oppressive nationality (majority group) as well. “This inequality may compensate for the inequality existing in people’s daily life”(Lenin, 1919: 102). The approach follows this logic in process: first identifying the membership of minority groups, then practicing the policies in favor of minority members and helping them to catch up with the majority members, and finally, the equality between majority and minority groups will be achieved based on accumulated progresses among the minority members.

Therefore, the policies in the former USSR and the PRC in favor of minority groups were legitimate and required by the Orthodox Leninism. These policies were designed at the selfless and good willingness to help those disadvantaged groups in the process of modernization, but there are still some issues that should be examined carefully according to the practices in the reality.

In the process of establishing and implementing the policies and the institutions, there are several outcomes:

First, there has been an obvious strong emphasis of “equality between ethnic groups” instead of “equality among citizens”.

Second, it will inevitably politicize and institutionalize these groups and strengthen their group consciousness, their political identity, and potential desire for “national self-determination”. In other words, these policies pushed them away from the end of “cultural groups” and turned them to the direction of “political entities” at the ethnicity – nation continuum.

Third, these policies actually resulted in complains from both sides: the members of more developed group who provide help and the members of less developed groups who receive help. The members of the first group complained of social “injustice” and they feel to be “discriminated against” because of their “majority status”. For example, a Han Chinese student in Inner Mongolia failed for university admission because his score in national examines was 5 score lower than the “admission standard”, but his Mongolian classmate with 9 score lower than that standard still can enter university because he received 10 additional score by his “minority status”. This Han student complains about the discrimination against him since the two live in the same neighborhood, and went through kindergarten, primary school, and middle school together. He made his point based on a comparison between individual citizens.

Some Mongolians also have the complaints, they said that, on average, the percentages of scientists, engineers, doctors, and the CEO of big companies in the Mongolian population are still lower compared with those of the Han group. Since Lenin emphasized the equality between the groups, so the present favoring policies should be further strengthened to reach that goal. This argument is based on the group level, not the individual level. Then, how should we solve this dilemma?

The policies of “inequality” towards majority only can be practiced for a period of time after the revolution. First, at that time the people of the majority group still remember the discrimination of the previous regime towards ethnic minorities and they accepted these new policies by their strong sympathy under the Communist atmosphere; second, the Communist parties enjoyed a high prestige among all groups and their policies usually got people’s support.

But after several decades, the young generation of the majority group will have a new vision of these policies and the consequences. They would call for changing the “discriminative policies” for social justice. Since they are the majority, the democratic measures may be used to reach the goal. On the other hand, the young generations of the minority groups would reduce the gratefulness and appreciation that their parents/grandparents used to have to these policies and majority group, they began to consider the benefits provided by these policies are their “legal rights”. When they visited the prosperous metropolitans such as Beijing and Shanghai, they feel angry because their hometowns are not so modernized, then “equality” is still far away. Therefore, these policies no longer bring majority and minorities together emotionally, but create social distance between them. These policies then should be reviewed very carefully and be adjusted accordingly.

If we refer to the framework of “liberal pluralism” vs. “corporate pluralism” (Gordon, 1981:183), Lenin’s approach is similar to the “corporate pluralism” which is emphasizing the equality between majority and minorities in resource distribution at the group level. In contrast, “liberal pluralism” emphasizes equality at the individual level in social competition.

These two approached should be combined in practice. After assuming the power, a political party or a government who supports ethnic equality principles should consider to reach this goal in two steps. For the first period of time (for several decades), the “corporate pluralism” (equality in results of resource distribution) should be practiced to help the disadvantaged minority groups who do not have the proper capacities to compete for resources and opportunities. As the second step, the policy should be gradually transferred into the direction of “liberal pluralism” (equality in competition for opportunities) for social justice at the individual level.

VII. Discussion

In his speech at the Tanner Lecture (1988 at the Chinese University of Hong Kong), Prof. Fei Xiaotong proposed a framework of “a pluralist-unity structure of the Chinese nation” to describe the basic pattern of ethnic relations in the Chinese history (Fei Xiaotong, 1989). Based on our discussions, this theory might be further developed into a theory of “political unity – cultural pluralism” which clarifies the two levels in this structure. The new framework emphasizes “the national identity” for all citizens at the

nation level while emphasizes the cultural diversity and prosperity of all groups at the group level by guiding ethnic identity into the aspect of cultural characteristics.

The precondition and political basis for this framework must include group equality and social justice among all ethnic groups. On one hand, the unification and integrity of the nation should be protected for social stability and economic prosperity; on the other hand, all the rights of citizenship should be guaranteed by the Constitution and protected by the legal system. The social members who have some disadvantages in social competition should receive necessary and efficient help from the programs established by government and social organizations. All groups should be able to maintain and develop their own cultural traditions (including language, religion, customs, etc.). In general, this framework combines political unity, ethnic equality, social justice, and cultural diversity.

The strategy of “culturalizing” ethnic minorities had been very successful in the Chinese history. But the China’s ethnic policy since the 1950s has turned to another direction. The ethnic relations in today’s China are cooperative, but the differences among ethnic minorities in national identification still remain. Meantime, many complicated issues related to ethnic relations need to be carefully studied. We should learn from our ancestors and their experience for thousands years in guiding ethnic relations. We also should learn from other nations for both positive and negative lessons. In the new century, China might consider switching the direction of guiding ethnic relations from the “politicizing” since the 1950s to “culturalizing” route in the future. The new route might lead China to a new direction, to strengthen national identity among ethnic minorities while guarantee the prosperity of their cultural traditions.

Any social systems or policies that have functioned for a long period of time certainly have their inertia. People get used to them and any significant changes of these policies may make people feel unsecured or being disturbed especially when their interests are involved. The people or groups benefited from the present institutions (nationality status and autonomous areas) and favorable policies might have reactions against the changes. Therefore, any action related to ethnic policy adjustment should be very carefully designed and implemented. Before any actions being taken, the discussions among scholars and government officers on relevant issues will be very helpful to reach the consensus for further policy adjustment.

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