

Nation-Building of China's Pluralist Unity and the Future Perspectives¹

According to the official recognition, there are 56 ethnic groups (or nationalities) in contemporary China. There are also several other minority groups left as "un-recognized groups" in China. They are called "people" with the local names they called themselves such as "Deng People" in Tibet region. By the cultural tradition, we call these ethnic groups "Chinese ethnic family" as a united whole.

The population size of "Han" group consists 91.6% of the total, 9 groups have a population over 4 millions, at the other end, 7 groups have a population less than 10,000. The gaps among population size show the significant differences between the "core group" (Han), the border ethnic groups with a middle size population, and some marginal groups with very small populations. There is a framework to connect those various groups into a united "nation" as an "ethnic family".

There are three reasons why it called "ethnic family": (1) all these groups live in a relatively closed geographic area in East Asian continent. This area has deserts and snow forests in its north (Mongolia Steppe and Siberia), seas and ocean in its east, jungles in its south (Burma and Indo-China), the highest mountains and plateau in its west and Southwest (Himalaya and Pamir). All these groups are "natives" in this large area of East Asian continent.

(2) For thousands' years, these groups living in this area have had more frequent and essential contact among themselves than their contact with other groups outside this area. These contacts were in all aspects, not only in political and economic, but cultural, intermarriage as well. Actually, these groups have merged, split, re-merged among themselves, and shaped in the historic process of the contact, integration, and assimilation. Some groups have disappeared, and some groups have emerged or semi-emerged as the result of assimilation.

(3) These groups developed around a "political, economic, and cultural core," which is Han majority group. Han has been more advanced in many aspects, has a strong influence on other minority group, especially by its cultural tradition. Han group emerged and grew as the result of cultural and economic (agriculture) assimilations, itself is a mixture of different ethnic groups in history and finally became an "ethnic group" with a 1.1 billion population. Of course, other groups also played important roles in history, such as Mongolians during the Yuan Dynasty and Manchu during the Qing Dynasty. But when these minority groups dominated whole China, they obviously accepted Han culture and assimilated with Han.

How to describe this "ethnic big family" with its history of thousands' years? How to describe the patterns of its development? How to summary the relationship among these groups? What hold

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them together for such a long time and finally became a “modern nation” when they faced the invasion of the West, which started with the “Opium War” in the middle of 19th century? Compared with ethnic relations in other multi-ethnic countries, what Chinas share them in common and what China has as its unique characteristics? When the USSR fallen into apart, will China follow its example? If not, why? These are the questions sociologist and anthropologists are so interested in and often discussed.

Most countries in today’s world are multi-ethnic nations, ethnic tensions and conflicts as a key issue are always social problems and the challenge faced by their leaders. China has experiences several crises of ethnic conflicts in the past, and she survived. What people learn from the historical experiences of China to handle “ethnic issues” might provide some insights in understanding peaceful integration and pluralist unity.

I. Professor Fei’s Theory of "the Pluralistic Unity of the Chinese Nation"

Professor Fei Xiaotong presented a keynote speech at the Tanner Lecture at Chinese University of Hong Kong in December, 1988, with a title of "The Pluralistic Unity of the Chinese Nation". Up to now, it is considered the most important theory to interpret the framework of the historical process of nation-building of pluralist unity. Before I discuss the issue in more detail, a brief introduction of this speech will be helpful. Generally, the basic points of his speech can be summarized as following:

1. Based on archaeological findings, the conclusion can be reached that there were many human groups living throughout where China is now located during the period of primitive society (Fei, 1989: 2). Therefore, there have been natural relationships among these groups by their geographic sharing of the common motherland.

2. These groups had different places of origin, they did not come from one place; they were native to China, not migrants from other lands (Fei, 1989: 2). This is the reason to explain why the characteristics of each group persist for such a long period of history and will continue to persist in the future. The multi places of origin indicate that the pattern of multiethnic structure of Chinese nation will last for a long time.

3. The archeological findings proved that, there have intensive cultural exchanges and merging between different groups since New Stone Age (Fei, 1989: 3). A combined, merged common “cultural base”, which is shaped in thousands years, is the foundation of political unity today.

4. Han group was formed before the Han Dynasty, when the name "Han" became popularly used. “Han” was the name by surrounding groups to call the people living the central plain, it was not a single group as others but a merged jointed group with a cultural orientation. This group was mainly engaged in agriculture and became the "core" of the Chinese nation, because of its advanced culture and technology at that time as well as its large population, which grew rapidly by both natural increase and assimilating other groups. The “Han” became the name of self-identification.

Therefore, today's Han should not be ranked at the same level as other minorities in ethnic structure.

5. These ethnic groups gradually merged into two sub-unions: the nomadic kingdoms or empires in the north and west, and the agricultural kingdoms or empires in the south and east. There have been many migrations and integration between the two throughout history.

The Han has been the "core" of the south sub-union. The historical pattern has been that, whenever a minority group adopted agricultural activity from the Han, it gradually became a part of the Han. Han language became the common language for communication among groups. In the Qing Dynasty, two sub-unions unified into one. Finally, a pluralistic unity appeared with Huge Han population as its "core". Under the invasion of the west, this pluralistic unity gradually obtains a sense of "modern nation" of western culture around the beginning of the 20th century (Fei, 1989:1-19).

Generally, this theory described the macro-theoretical framework for us to understand the historical process of the nation-building of Chinese ethnic groups. "Ethnic groups" is a western term, we can borrow this term but the most important thing is to understand the real contact of Chinese history based on our own experiences, the development of our sense of "groups" and "nation" based on our cultural traditions.

II. Three Periods in the Development of the Pluralistic Unity of the Chinese Nation

First, I would like to discuss the process of national-building of China in a more macro-perspective, covering the past and contemporary time.

1. Generally, the nation-building process can be divided into three periods based on the characteristics of the relationship between these ethnic groups. The first period is its formation period, which is also can be divided into two stages.

After a long period of communication, wars, migration, and integration among these ethnic groups, a sub-union of nomadic groups and a sub-union of agricultural groups appeared around the Qin and Western Han Dynasties (221-0 B.C.). The nomads occupied the grasslands in today's Inner Mongolia, Qinghai, Gansu, Xinjiang, and the Republic of Mongolia. The agricultural groups (integrated into the Han) occupied the Central Plain of China. The direction of the expansion of the nomads used to be the Han regions where was a more developed economy (occasionally the nomads moved into Central Asia, as did Hsiung-nu and Chinggis Khan). Since the construction of the Great Wall and grasslands in the north, the expansion of the Han has been toward the south searching more arable lands (Fei, 1989: 15). The two sub-unions existed side by side, and were economically interdependent. This was the first stage of the formation period.

After this stage, conflicts between the two sub-unions were chronic. Either the northern nomads occupied most or all parts of the South (e.g. the Northern and Southern Dynasties (A.D.420-581) and the Yuan Dynasty (A.D.1271-1368)), or the agricultural groups expelled the nomads into the Gobi Desert or the Central Asia (e.g. the Western Han (200-0 B.C.) and Tang Dynasties (A.D.

618-907)). Only around the middle of the Qing Dynasty, Manchu, Mongolian, Han, Hui, Uygur, and Tibetan, which are the major ethnic groups in China, unified under the domination of the Qing emperors. The two sub-unions finally were unified into a stable political and economic body. This was the second stage of the formation period.

The question is why it was the Manchu, rather than the others, who could unify the two sub-unions. Neither the great leaders of the Han (the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty and Wu Di of the Han Dynasty) (Hook, 1982: 173) nor Chinggis Khan and his successors had been able to create a nation which could really combine the two kinds of economies and relevant cultures. During their expansions, the Mongolians turned the cultivated land in Henan and Shandong into grasslands for animal husbandry. The Han turned the grasslands of Inner Mongolia into cultivated lands during their occupation. Each side insisted on expanding its own economy at the cost of the other. The conflict between animal husbandry and agriculture for land use persists today in Inner Mongolia and other minority regions in northwest China.

The homeland of the Manchu people is Manchuria, the north-eastern part of China. There were good grasslands, forests, and many rich plains which could be cultivated. The primary economic activity of the Manchu was hunting (Ma, 1981: 28). Later, they learned animal husbandry from their Mongolian neighbors in the west, and learned agriculture from the Han in the south. To some extent, the Manchu could be classified as a group in between the agricultural sub-union and the nomad sub-union. The Manchu could understand the economic activities, social organization, culture, customs, ideology, and emotions of both. On the one hand, the Manchu tried very hard to maintain the traditional culture and customs of a northern hunting group. On the other hand, they learned and assimilated by the Han culture to a great extent. Therefore, the Manchu were accepted by the two sub-unions and helped to unify the two.

2. The second period was the crisis period, from the Opium War to the founding of the People's Republic (1840-1949). Because of invasions of the western imperialist powers, all Chinese were facing a serious crisis. The threat came from the sea first, with invasions led by the British and the French. During the Opium War and the war with Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1851-1864), the Qing Dynasty weakened rapidly, then the Russian and Japanese joined with the British and French to divide China. One of their methods was to preach and support the separation of minority groups from the Chinese nation.

During this crisis period, the traditional productive organizations and economy of China declined in the competition with western technology and merchandise. The western ideology and Christianity also entered China accompanying their warships and merchandises. Because of its series of failures in the wars against western invasions, China had to cede its territories piece by piece, which caused some minority ethnic groups in these areas to be separated from China. After the Revolution of 1911, the Qing Dynasty was overthrown and China entered a period of separatist warlord regimes, the pluralistic organic whole of the Chinese nation still faced the danger of disintegration. Outer Mongolia became independent with the support of the Russian Red Army.

The relation between Tibet and the central government also weakened with British encouragement (Bell, 1924).

3. The third period, from 1949 to the present, has been one of re-establishing the pluralistic unity. During this period, the ethnic groups of the Chinese nation have been re-unified under the leadership of the Communist Party. The "Revolutionary government" of three districts in Xinjiang agreed to remain as a part of China, the treaty for the peaceful liberation of Tibet was signed by the representatives of Dalai Lama and the central government (Karan, 1976: 89-91), all ethnic groups were represented in the National People's Congress in Beijing. The nation overcame the crisis and entered a new period.

The Marxist principles on ethnicity are equality and development. First, to establish political and legal equality among all ethnic groups and all citizens regardless of their ethnic status, then to establish policies to help the social, economic and cultural development of minority groups in order to achieve eventual de facto equality (Lenin, 1919:760). Regional autonomy has been in practice for the regions, prefectures, and counties where minority groups are concentrated. Although there have been a number of difficulties and complications in carrying out these policies and problems between different ethnic groups, remarkable socioeconomic development has taken place in the minority regions after the efforts of forty years. In general, the unity of Chinese ethnic groups has been re-established. Up to now, although there are still many problems and conflicts, the basic trend is co-operation not conflict, unity not separation. Hong Kong became part of China in 1997, and Macao will follow the same model in 1999. Political, economic, and cultural exchanges across the Taiwan Strait have developed rapidly in the past several years. These also indicate the Chinese nation's basic trend towards unity.

III. The New Conditions for Re-establishing the Pluralistic Unity of the Chinese Nation

The Chinese nation experienced a period of crisis during 1840-1949 because major changes occurred in the political, economic, cultural environment in East Asia during the period. Because of these changes, the conditions for re-establishing the pluralistic nation have been very different from those that established it in the first place. There are three major differences:

1. Before the Opium War, compared with other minority groups in China, the Han were more advanced in social and administrative organization, economy, trade, sciences, technology, education, and culture. Although the Qing Dynasty was founded by the Manchu, it retained the traditional culture of the Han, Mandarin was still the popular language, and Confucianism remained dominant. This pattern resulted in a strong centripetal force among the minority groups toward the Han. Economically, these minority groups have been dependent on the products of the Han agricultural regions to a certain degree. The traditional "exchange of tea and horses" was necessary to the nomadic groups' economy and daily life (Fei, 1989: 10). The administration of the central government was complex and effective, and had a strong military force. The minority groups always

tried to master the organization forms of the central government, but found it difficult to compete with it in a long term. Culturally, the literature, medicine, education, art, handicraft, music, dance, religion, ceramics, porcelain, metallurgy, cultivation skills, etc., in the Han regions have flourished throughout history. The Han region was considered a cultural center not only by the minority ethnic groups in China, but also by such neighboring countries as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam which used the Han characters in their writing for centuries. For centuries, many students from nearby countries came to the capital city of China to study.

Western civilization entered East Asian around the time of the Opium War, representing a new culture with more advanced science, technology, administration, and military force compared with the traditional Han culture. Therefore, western civilization became a new culture power in East Asia. Since then, many students from the Han and minority groups have been learning English and other European languages, because they want to extend their knowledge beyond what is available in the Mandarin language.

Historically, there was another great cultural center (India) near China, and Indian culture did have some influence on the ethnic groups in China, especially in the southwest areas (Tibet). But generally, the ethnic groups of China accepted the superiority of the Han culture. Since the crisis period, the minority groups as well as the Han have tried to learn from other cultures. Sooner or later, these ethnic groups will be involved in this historical trend of opening, learning and reforming. The monist cultural center became pluralistic cultural centers in East Asia, and the Han culture has gradually been losing its traditional role among the minority ethnic groups. The cultural centripetal force is weakening. This is a very important difference in the conditions for re-establishing the Chinese pluralistic nation as compared with the past.

2. For both the south sub-union before unification and China as a whole after unification, China's core has been the central empires with the Han as its "core" ethnic group. These empires had many levels in their administrative hierarchy. The basic pattern was that the administration was most rigorous in the center and exercised less control toward the frontiers of the nation.

The Han provinces have been the "core" region with most rigorous administrative organizations and directly under the control of the emperors.

The administration in the regions inhabited by both the Han and minority groups (the second zone) was relatively loose. Some leaders of the minority groups were appointed as the chief officials of the regions.

In the minority regions outside the second zone -- the third zone which comprised Inner Mongolia, western Sichuan, Qinghai, Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangxi, etc., the authority of the central government was exercised through the hereditary princes, nobles, and headmen ("Tusi") of the native minority groups.

In the outer regions (the fourth zone), local authorities had more power. In Outer Mongolia and Tibet, native groups were dominated by the local government under the supervision of officials of the central government.

The vassal states (Korea, the Ryukyu Islands, Vietnam, and Burma) were the fifth zone. These were independent countries but paid tribute to the Qing Dynasty as their suzerain nation. This pattern of desalination of administrative control from the center to the frontiers was based on the historically strong cultural centripetal force among the minority groups and nearby countries. This lasted for centuries.

The situation changed rapidly after the Opium War as strong neighbors emerged along China's borders. In the east, Japan occupied the Ryukyu Islands, Korea, and Taiwan. In the south, France occupied Vietnam. In the north and northwest, the Russians occupied Central Asian states and Siberia. In the southwest, the British occupied India and Burma. In order to protect China from invasion by imperialist countries, the central government had to strengthen the administrative control of the border regions. A pattern developed of rigorous controls in the core and border regions, but less so in between. But this adjustment was not easy to make and usually caused dissatisfaction among the leaders of the native minority groups in the border regions, because it weakened their traditional power. The adjustment was often accompanied by Han migration into border regions, which also disturbed the traditional local order. These factors made it more difficult to re-establish the pluralistic nation, and cannot be ignored even today.

3. In the past, in order to maintain the stability of the pluralistic nation with the Han culture as its "core", it was necessary to maintain the superiority of the Han regions in social, economic, cultural, and educational development. This was a policy goal of the Ming and Qing Dynasties as well as the Kuomintang government. In fact, the distance in socioeconomic development between the Han and the minority groups did strengthen the cultural centripetal force of minority groups, and in favor of the stability of the pluralistic nation at that time.

But the present central government has to be concerned about the development of these minority ethnic groups, and concerned about how these groups will be modernized. If the gap between the Han and the minority groups in socioeconomic development increases, this could undermine the stability of the nation. In the past decade of reform in China, the coastal Han provinces have developed much faster than the frontier regions of the minority groups and the gap increased significantly. This trend has attracted many people's attention. Because they are worried about the unity of the nation, they have repeatedly emphasized that "the common prosperity of all ethnic groups in China" should be the national goal in the process of modernization. How these ethnic groups, with their different stages of development, can be modernized parallelly in a high competition of the modern world economic system, is a new issue and new challenge to the Chinese nation. There are no lessons in the past that we can draw on and we have to solve the problems in practice.

IV. How Can Minority Ethnic Groups in China Move toward Modernization?

The central government was very successful in improving ethnic relationships for a while after

1949. First, the social reforms following the liberation of the minority group regions benefited the mass of these groups. The Yi slave system and Dai and Tibetan serfdom were abolished with encouragement or compulsion of the central government (Ma, 1981: 19). These former slaves, serfs, poor herdsmen and peasants got rid of their masters and were happy. They were the majority among their groups and they gave their support to the central government. Second, the central government helped to arrange exchanges of productive materials, consumer goods between the regions, which had been difficult because of regional barriers controlled by the separatist leaders of the native groups. These exchanges and trade improved the local economy and people's life. Third, the central government sent many medical teams to the minority regions (e.g. teams to cure venereal disease in Inner Mongolia in the early 1950s) and improved the health conditions of the minority groups. Fourth, many minority groups, for the first time, had representatives in the National People's Congress and the central government, and could have some influence on government policies.

In addition, the policies regarding minority affairs were relatively practical and realistic from 1949 to 1965. Meanwhile, the cadres were relatively honest in performing their duties, and discipline in the army was good. So the central government and the Communist Party enjoyed great authority among the mass of the minority ethnic groups as well as among the Han. The centripetal force among the minority groups was the strongest compared with any period in history.

But during the "Cultural Revolution", many events occurred under the ultra-left domination which destroyed the traditional culture and religion of the minority groups, and persecuted some minority cadres and people. These events reduced the authority of the government and the Party, damaged the relationships among the ethnic groups, and weakened the centripetal force of the minority groups. Since the late 1970s, the central government has tried to compensate for the damage but the impact of these events cannot disappear in a short term.

Since 1979, all Chinese, including the Han and minority ethnic groups, have been facing a new challenge: the reform of the social and economic systems and opening to the world. In the past ten years, the gap between the Han regions and the autonomous regions of the minority groups in socioeconomic development has increased. Now what should these minority groups do? What will be the future of these groups? What is the best way for them to modernize? These are the issues many cadres and people of the minority ethnic groups are considering, as are all people and scholars concerned about the unity of the nation.

From the experience of several thousand years, it is clear that strong social, economic, and cultural connections have been built up between these ethnic groups in China. The prosperity of each ethnic group has been closely related to the unity of the pluralistic nation and its development. When unity was strong and the relationship between ethnic groups was good, the minority groups developed faster socially, economically, and culturally. When there were problems between these ethnic groups, outside powers would take advantage of the situation, the Chinese nation would be in crisis and every group damaged. To expect foreign countries to help the socioeconomic development

of an ethnic group in China without concern for their own economic or strategic benefit, is only a very naive dream that ignores history. Therefore, the unity of the Chinese nation and good relations between the ethnic groups are basic conditions for the modernization of both the Han and the minority ethnic groups.

To reach the goal of modernization for all Chinese groups requires that the central government has both long-term theories and strategies for socioeconomic development as well as practical plans and methods in the short term. All these plans and methods should lead the minority groups to be satisfied with their social, economic, and cultural environment as well as to their speed of development, not too fast, not too slow. For strengthening the unity of the nation while improving the relationships among its ethnic groups, it will be helpful to learn from the past. The methods which the central government used for helping the socioeconomic development of the minority group regions in the past forty years can be summarized as below:

1. Sending Han cadres to work in the minority group regions while training cadres from the minority groups (Li, 1982: 639). It was necessary to have some Han cadres working there to link these regions with the central government and keep these regions stable, especially in the early 1950s. But one standard to evaluate the success of this policy is whether many cadres emerged from these minority groups with the help of the Han. These minority cadres should be intelligent, capable, but most importantly, they should enjoy high authority among their people and be real leaders of their own groups. Because they know the historical, cultural traditions of their groups and understand the possible response of their groups toward the policies of the central government, these leaders can help the central government from making mistakes while protecting the rights of their own people. Without such a leader or leaders, a minority ethnic group could lose its balance psychologically. Throughout history, the leaders of these minority groups have played very important roles in maintaining the relationships between the central government and minority groups and the unity of the Chinese nation. We should learn from these experiences.

2. Supporting the administration and development of the minority regions financially. Since 1949, the central government has given these regions a large amount of money, which has become the local government's major source of income for administration, construction of public facilities, investment in production, education, health care facilities, and welfare. In all, the central government gave about 58 billion Yuan to minority regions for basic construction during 1950-1978 (Ma, 1981: 21). This policy has had two results. First, basic construction (cities, roads, hospitals, schools, bridges, etc.) and production in these regions developed rapidly with the financial support of the central government. Second, these regions became heavily dependent on the money of the central government, and this is certainly not the result expected.

Both the Han who provided the funds and the minority groups who received the funds are unhappy about this situation. For instance, the Eluenchuen group in Northeast China is supported by the government financially. Every adult in this group has a stipend, either as a government employee

or with the title of "forest protector". But many of them are unhappy because this dependence makes them feel lost and they cannot see the future of their group. The central government gives the Tibet Autonomous Region about 900 million Yuan each year, Tibetan peasants and herdsmen do not pay any tax and are provided with free health care and education taught in the Tibetan language. But some of them are still unhappy. We should know how the people of these minority groups think about these funds and their use. We cannot consider this issue only from a Han perspective. Besides, an ethnic group without economic pressure and the promotion of creativity cannot modernize.

3. Encouraging social reform in these regions. Originally, the idea for this policy ("democratic reform") was to abolish the slave system, serfdom, and feudal master system in minority regions and to liberate the mass of these groups. During these reforms, slaves, serfs, poor peasants and herdsmen obtained legal rights and productive materials (land, animals and tools) (Ma, 1981: 19-21). This policy is still considered as positive to the development of these groups.

But, with the "collectivization movement" in the mid 1950s, the government started to impose administrative, economic, and educational systems and policies in many minority regions and these systems and policies were similar to those in the Han region. These systems and policies are considered good and effective in the Han region and could promote socioeconomic development anywhere. After forty years of experience, the results should be examined very carefully.

In the early 1950s, the central government emphasized considering the local specialties of minority groups and their regions in policy making. But with the "ultra-left" group in control, a series of wrong viewpoints and policies appeared. Ethnic characteristics were even denied to exist during the "Cultural Revolution". Similar opinions persist among some people today. They fail to recognize the protracted nature of the pluralistic organic whole of the Chinese nation, emphasize ethnic integration ignoring the historical conditions, and think the socialist system should be the same among all the ethnic groups or socialism will be weakened and damaged. These people, including some cadres from the minority groups, consciously or unconsciously impose Han political and economic activities on the minority regions, to "develop" these minority groups in the Han model. Actually, this is a very narrow-minded and lopsided view of development.

The systems and policies might be good and effective in the Han regions, but not necessarily in the minority group regions. In addition, there are very big differences among these minority groups themselves aside from their differences with the Han. The traditional forms of social, religious, and economic organizations and their culture are the results of a historical process of thousands of years. Some of these differences between ethnic groups will last for centuries. So how can a development model of one group be used to develop other groups. Japan did not copy the experience of the United States in modernization and China cannot copy Japan. Nor can minority groups in China simply copy the Han. In the process of modernization, each ethnic group will find its own way by carrying forward its traditional culture while absorbing the experiences of other groups in their development. Each group's path will have something in common with others' (e.g. application of modern sciences and technology) while developing its own special characteristics (related to the

cultural tradition and development history of the group).

V. Several Issues Regarding the Modernization of Minority Ethnic Groups in China

1. Many reports have addressed the development of minority regions with statistics on industrial production, power consumption, trade, etc. But the development of a minority region does not necessarily mean the development of the native ethnic group. In most minority autonomous areas, local industry is located in cities and towns where the Han form the majority of the population. For instance, Baotou contributes a large proportion to the industrial production of Inner Mongolia, but less than two percent of Baotou's population are Mongolians (Song, 1987: 351). Therefore, when we examine the development of minority groups, it should be kept in mind that we cannot simply look at regional statistics but need to examine the income level and other indexes of the minority people.

2. Modernization does not necessarily mean industrialization. Many minority groups have their traditional economic activities: animal husbandry, handicraft, trade, etc. If these activities can be managed in modern ways, thereby raising incomes and consumption as well as improving education and health care, the minority groups will be modernized. Some policies emphasize having members of minority groups working in modern industry or mines, but the results have not been encouraging. For example, several hundred Ewenke herdsman were recruited by a modern coal mine in northern Inner Mongolia, but several months later all of them left because the working conditions and requirements were too different from life on the grasslands. Every group has its superiority in its traditional activities. Mongolians and Ewenke herdsman will do better than the Han to develop modern animal husbandry if they are provided with some new ideas and technology. Different groups might develop different branches of a modern economy and supplement each other. This pattern could benefit all ethnic groups while strengthening the unity of the Chinese nation.

3. To a certain extent, reform means the adjustment of social, economic organizations (in their structure and functions) and the adjustment of the benefits among different groups or regions. These adjustments might have some positive or negative impacts on the economy of the minority regions as well as the income of minority people. Because the government controls the prices and market, and many industrial productions are actually managed by the ministries of the central government, it is natural that the government would like to keep the raw materials and agricultural products at a lower price (the government is the buyer) while raising the prices of industrial products (the government is the seller). Because the raw materials and agricultural products (including products of animal husbandry, and fishing) are the major income source of minority regions, the benefits of these regions and their people are jeopardized by such adjustments. Complaints related to this issue have been raised for years and it has become one of the important sources of tension between the Han region and minority regions. Economic factors always play an important role in ethnic relationships (Blazer and Moynihan, 1984: 7).

4. Regional autonomy is confirmed by the National Constitution and has been in practice since

the 1950s. The Law of Regional Autonomy for Minority Group Regions was passed around 1986 with many provisions. Theoretically, these provisions can meet the most requests of the minority ethnic groups, regarding their equal right in the aspects of culture, religion, language, education, employment as well as economic benefits and regional development. But especially in recent years, some minority groups complained about that the Law is too general and their right of autonomy has not been respected in reality. Therefore, the questions are raised: (1) what are the differences between autonomic areas and the Han areas in reality? (2) Whether there need more detailed provisions in the Law of the Regional Autonomy for Minority Groups? (3) Whether there should be differences in the level of autonomy among these autonomic regions because of the traditional relationship of these regions with the central government? (Their requests are also different, e.g. Tibet vs. Guangxi). In the near future, the systematically and carefully designed studies of regional autonomy in China, regarding the official documents and real situation, historical experience and current request, are really necessary. It is the basic research work for adjustment in administrative formation of the relationship between ethnic groups in China.

5. Nationalism might strengthen along with socioeconomic development. In such communist countries as the Soviet Union and China, minority groups had very limited communications with other countries in the past. But recent social and economic reforms in these countries changed this. They opened their eyes to western culture and systems and new things often seem attractive especially with economic prosperity. Reform itself means necessary changes in traditional ideology and systems and correcting the mistakes in the past. It is easy that the authority of the central government to be weakened in the reform process, because the government has to say it made mistakes and regional autonomy becomes stronger with the development of the market economy. Nationalism becomes stronger in minority groups, especially among more educated people and local government officials. The trend emerged first in Yugoslavia, which was the first to practice reform, then the Soviet Union and China. The ethnicity issue has even become serious in Romania under the influence of reform in Hungary. When the door is open, it cannot be closed in a simple way. This could be a new crisis period for these multi-ethnic countries depending on how the central government handles these problems.

VI. Summary

Many ethnic groups in China have lived and worked in a pluralistic organic whole for thousands of years. They have been dependent each other economically and have exerted strong cultural influences on each other. It is clear that there are new historical conditions for re-establishing the pluralistic unity of the Chinese nation. All these groups are facing a new challenge of modernization. The administrative, economic, and cultural relationships between the Han and the minority groups, and between the central government and the minority group regions, need to be adjusted in many ways. Only with these necessary adjustments, a pluralistic nation can become

stable in a long term and develop smoothly. There are many problems and will be more problems in development and ethnic relationship in the process of reform. But if these problems are studied very carefully employing all knowledge of social sciences (sociology, economics, anthropology, demography, political science, religion studies, ethnicity studies, culture studies, etc.), we will be able to solve these problems and strengthen the unity of the Chinese nation.

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