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Ligia Tomoiagă

**Multiculturalism
and the Need for Recognition
&
The Border:
World Reconfigurations
of the 21st Century**

E I K O N

2019

Medicalism
and the Need for Recognition
&
The Border
World Reconstructions
of the 21st Century

Editor

*A Peer-reviewed Volume of Proceedings of
the International Conferences on Philology
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Mare, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca*

Preface

Our Department of Philology and Cultural Studies has organized national/international conferences for a few years. After a successful six years with the Anniversary Conferences, the new series of conferences on multiculturalism was set up, on the specific purpose to bring together scholars of all academic walks, and gather them under the same 'umbrella' for a few days. The exchange between specialists in jurisprudence, social studies, literature, grammar, theology, philosophy, mass-media, postcolonialism, feminism, etc. was extraordinary for several reasons.

Firstly, the participants had the possibility to listen to various points of view, coming from different scholarly approaches, and illustrated with the most interesting examples. It was very pleasant for the literature people to listen to the 'philosophers', with their very strict definitions of concepts and their very sharp analyses; similarly, we could see the 'law people' fascinated by the literary and cultural approaches – they confessed they had very rarely had the opportunity to listen to such inspired literary presentations; specialists in economics were fascinated by the studies in contemporary multiculturalism, while anthropologists appreciated the insight of economic approaches. Interdisciplinary conferences, where presentations are not divided according to the profile of the presenter, but to the subject, prove to be tempting and profitable for all. There were moments when it was really difficult for participants to decide which panel to go to.

Secondly, this diversity in scholarly expertise was enough to lead to serious conversations about multiculturalism, about its

limits and advantages; many of the participants advocated that historical multiculturalism is much different from the ideological and activist forms that it has gained in our contemporary world, which, for some, is not necessarily a good thing. To address such issues – as many of the participants admitted – a scholarly effort to do more field and theoretical research is crucial, and if the effort is interdisciplinary and free of any kind of political constraints, it may both ‘save’ the concept, and find its rightful place in society.

Thirdly, the organizers have not limited access to the conference for anybody who proposed an interesting papers. Consequently, there were full and emeritus professors, young faculty, Ph.D. students, highschool teachers, independent scholars, which brought a new and fresh spirit to the gathering and the discussions. Both ‘senior’ and ‘junior’ participants benefitted from such ‘mixture’.

We are very thankful to our keynote speakers – Professors Mihaela Albu, Roland Boer, Paul Cliteur, Catinca Stan, Margot Kaszap, Adrian Otoiu – for their exceptional and exemplary contribution, as well as the Dean and Deputy Dean of our Faculty, Assis. Professor Mircea Farcaș and Assist. Professor Delia Suiogan for their invaluable support.

As the conference was interdisciplinary, diverse, mixed, the volume is rather un-even, as we preferred not to get a homogeneous aspect for each study; we preferred to preserve each author’s style, more or less, their preferences as to citation, to spelling (British or American), to including an abstract and keywords or not, and to the way they listed their works cited. We also preserved the language of presentation – this is something that ‘rhymes’ with multiculturalism very well – so there are articles in English, in French and in Romanian.

Organisers and editors

Ligia Tomoiagă and Anamaria Fălăuș

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Multiculturalism in a Multinational State: The Case of China

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Abstract: In the context of racial tensions in the USA, questions over the EU project from those who have not benefitted, the treatment of asylum seekers with increasing harshness in places like Australia, and the response to refugees in Europe, I examine a rather different example of multiculturalism – that of China. As the country with the largest population in the world and due to a complex history, China now has 56 officially recognized nationalities, including the Han, who number 1.2 billion. Even so, the next nine nationalities number 6 to 19 million each – larger than the total population of many countries in the world.

How does China deal with this situation? To begin with, the term *minzu* is badly translated as “ethnic group” or “ethnic minority.” It is better translated as “nationality.” In a large state like China, multiple nationalities exist within the one state. Indeed, the number of recognized nationalities has increase from 34 in 1954 to 56 today. This entails support for cultural traditions, language, education, literature and local political leadership. However, the policy has also created some paradoxes and problems. These include, among others, the inherent difficulties of government classification, the methodological problems of anthropological

research as the basis for government policy, the disruptions caused by economic improvement, narratives and backwardness and the challenge of "separatism."

Let me begin with a story. A few years ago, I was in the ancient Chinese capital of Xi'an, where the Tang Dynasty ruled some 1400 to 1100 years ago. At that time, Xi'an, in the more western parts of China, was the most populous city in the world. Tang power swayed across significant parts of China, culture and learning flourished, Buddhism was fostered and connections made with the western country of India. But what did I find in Xi'an? I had come for the inevitable invited lecture, at Shaanxi Normal University, after taking an overnight train from Jinan (in Shandong) province. One evening, my hosts suggested we go for a walk in the famous "snack street," where there was street food aplenty. I went along cautiously, reminding myself of the warnings concerning such food. Soon I was lost among the smells, sights and tastes of the endless foods on offer.

One feature really stood out: the many men and some of the women wore small white caps, and some of the older women (but by no means all) wore a scarf over their heads. Why? I asked my hosts. They are Hui people, I was told. Intrigued, I asked further and found out that the Tang Emperors had invited the Hui to Xi'an, since they had a reputation for hard work and the fostering of exchange (or what some call "trade"). They have been in Xi'an for more than a millennium.

But were they an identifiable ethnic group at the time? Not at all. As with all such groups, their history is mixed.¹ The Tang,

¹ The best historical study of the Hui remains that of Michael Dillon, *China's Muslim Hui Community: Migration, Settlement and Sects*, London, Routledge, 1999. With some caveats, see also Dru Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic*, Cambridge, Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1991.

Song and Yuan dynasties encouraged immigration to China of peoples from more western parts of the world, as far west as Persia. A long history of intermarriage with Han people led to the development of what is now known as the Hui. But the Hui include converts to Islam among the Han, as well as other Muslim groups on Hainan island, among the Bai people and Tibetan Muslims. The key to their identification is religion, even if such identification is restricted to certain customs, dietary patterns and dress, rather than religious practice per se. The vast majority of the Hui speak Mandarin and most of their customs are common to the Han. However, I cannot emphasize enough that the Hui have become strongly conscious of being a distinct nationality. This means that the complex and overlaid history of the Hui, with migration, intermarriage, state decisions and policies, had led to, if not produced, a strong sense of what some would call "ethnic" identity.²

Defining Nationality

Let me draw a few further points from this brief account of the Hui. First, since the Hui, as with any such group, is the result of a long history of movement, inter-mingling, and development, I suggest that no ethnic group is what might be called pure, for what counts as such a group is really a history of intermingling with many other groups, which are themselves the result of further mingling. Second, the Hui are one of 56 officially recognized groups in China. Out of these groups, the Hui are among the largest of the non-Han, with a population of 10 million. They are outnumbered by others, such as the Zhuang with 19 million (larger than the populations of many countries), but the Hui are

² Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*, 323.

far more numerous than the smallest groups, which number only a few thousand.

But what should we call these groups? I have tried to avoid using the term "ethnic minority" or 'ethnic' group, although it is commonly used. Why? The term "ethnic" often assumes a racial connection between those of the group, indeed that this is a primary defining feature. As my brief account of the Hui indicates, this is hardly the case (if indeed any group). Further, the Chinese term is *minzu*, made up of two characters: 民族. The first, *min*, has the basic sense of "people." The second character, *zu*, means a class or group of things with common features. So *minzu* means a group of people with similar or common features. The situation becomes even more complex: *minzu* is a word borrowed from Japanese in order to translate the Russian word, *natsional'nost'*, which designates a particular group within a state that overlaid common characteristics (to which I will return in a moment).³ The Russian terminology was itself the result of long debates and deliberations over the "national question," to which Chinese terminology and understanding is deeply indebted. So the best translation of *minzu* is "nationality."

Now a question arises. My passport lists my "nationality" as Australian, assuming that "nationality" refers to the modern liberal nation-state. I suggest that this is a mistake, resulting from the fusing of two senses of the word "nation." One sense is the result of the relatively recent category of "imagined communities," in which "nation" came to designate a major form of the modern

³ There has been some shift since the early 1990s, with efforts to retranslate *minzu* as "ethnic group," or to replace it with *zuqun* (族群), which refers to ethnicity. However, this remains at the level of scholarship rather than official policy: Uradyn Bulag, *Alter/native Mongolian Identity: From Nationality to Ethnic Group*, in Elizabeth Perry – Mark Selden (ed.), *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, London: Routledge, 2010, 262–287.

state, the bourgeois or nation-state.⁴ The problem is that this approach has overlaid an older – and, I would argue, a richer – tradition. Here it worth going back in a little more detail into earlier debates – from the turn of the nineteenth century – concerning what was called the "national question" in countries with significant diversity, such as Austria and Russia.⁵ Here a nationality designated a distinct group within a state, a group defined by language, location, cultural history, economic shape, and at times religion. Most importantly, such nationalities lived within a larger state, and they included majority and minority groups as "nationalities." All of which means that if we go back to my passport, it should really list my citizenship as Australian and my nationality as The Netherlands – with the caveat that the nationality in question is itself the result of a confluence of many currents.

Chinese Nationalities Policy

With this in mind, let me return to the Chinese situation. As I mentioned, the Chinese government identifies 56 official *minzu*, or nationalities. This includes the majority Han (themselves the result of a long history of intermarriage with other groups), and 55 other groups, ranging in number from almost 20 million to

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, revised ed., London, Verso, 1991.

⁵ See especially Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993; Gábor Egry, *Social Democracy and the Nationalities Question*, in Istvan Fejt – Balázs Sipos (ed.), *Regimes and Transformations: Hungary in the Twentieth Century*, Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó, 2005, 95–118. For a detailed engagement with these debates and the full list of references, see Roland Boer, *Against Culturism: Reconsidering Stalin on Nation and Class*, *The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review* 42 (2015), 247–273.

a few thousand.⁶ I will not go into more detail concerning each nationality, since I am interested in the broader picture.

The begin with, the policy itself is known as *Youhui zhengce* (优惠政策), which may be translated as “preferential policies” or “positive (action) policies.”⁷ The term appeared in its earliest form in 1949 in what was called the Common Program (from 29 September) and has been consistent in Chinese constitutions to the present. It was initially modelled on the Soviet Union, the world’s first “affirmative action” state,⁸ although China clearly developed its own approach in light of distinct circumstances and history.⁹ Theoretically, the definition first offered by none

⁶ For statistical details up to the early 2000s and for an overview of the development of the policy, see Colin Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities and Globalisation*, London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, 182–193; Ann Maxwell Hill and Minglang Zhou, Introduction, in Minglang Zhou – Ann Maxwell Hill (ed.), *Affirmative Action in China and the U.S.: A Dialogue on Inequality and Minority Education*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 3–8.

⁷ Minglang Zhou, Tracking the Historical Development of China’s Positive and Preferential Policies for Minority Education: Continuities and Discontinuities, in Minglang Zhou – Ann Maxwell Hill (ed.), *Affirmative Action in China and the U.S.: A Dialogue on Inequality and Minority Education*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 47.

⁸ Hill and Zhou, Introduction, 2. As Terry Martin observes, “no country as yet has approached the vast scale of Soviet Affirmative Action”: Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2001, 18. It also predates by a few decades the Indian “scheduled tribes” program, begun in 1951, let alone affirmative action policies in “Western” states.

⁹ Debate ranges over whether Moscow pulled the strings, whether China continued imperial and republican practices, or whether it developed its own approach. Obviously, each factor played a role depending on the circumstances. See J. Teufel Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1976, 43–60; Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, 87–88; Barry Sautman, Preferential Policies for Ethnic Minorities in China: The Case of Xinjiang, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 4,1–2 (1998), 86–118; Zhou, Tracking the Historical Development.

other than Stalin in 1913 formed the basis of determining different nationalities: “A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.”¹⁰ In the context of the Soviet Union, the key to fostering nationalities was not so much a tension between assimilation and recognition of differences, but a dialectical approach that went through the international category of class to generate a specifically local and national policy focused on difference.¹¹ In theory at least, this meant the production of diversity out of the unifying category of class. In the 1950s, this definition and its larger text were the subject of much study by Chinese scholars,¹² with the resulting identification of 40 nationalities (including the Han) in the national census of 1954. Ten years later the number was increased to 54, with two more added later, the last being the Juno, from Yunnan, in 1979.¹³

¹⁰ I.V. Stalin, Marxism and the National Question, in *Works*, vol. 2, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1913 [1953], 300–381. The term “psychological make-up” should perhaps be translated as “psychological storehouse” (*psikhicheskogo sklada*). Elsewhere in the same text, Stalin speaks of a “specific spiritual complexion [*osobnosti dukhovnogo oblika*],” which indicates the religio-cultural dimensions of this category. For a detailed analysis of this text in its context, see Boer, *Against Culturalism*.

¹¹ This point is entirely missed by Walker Connor, *Mandarins, Marxists, and Minorities*, in Minglang Zhou – Ann Maxwell Hill (ed.), *Affirmative Action in China and the U.S.: A Dialogue on Inequality and Minority Education*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 27–46; Zhou, Tracking the Historical Development, 58–59.

¹² Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities and Globalisation*, 2. Although not a few have decried, for political reasons, the restrictions of “Marxist-Stalinist” nationality theory in China: Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*, ix–x; Nicholas Tapp, *Minority Nationality in China: Policy and Practice*, in R.H. Barnes – Andrew Gray – Benedict Kingsbury (ed.), *Indigenous Peoples of Asia*, Ann Arbor, Association for Asian Studies, 1995, 195–220.

¹³ Mackerras and Zhou provide useful overviews of the history of Chinese nationalities policy, in theory and practice, from the revolutionary period to

However, with signs of problems in the Soviet Union already in the 1980s and especially after the union's breakup in 1991, Chinese scholars and policy makers carefully studied the situation and concluded that one of the factors concerned tensions and mistakes in the nationalities policy.¹⁴ These resulted in power imbalances and economic inequality, in complex ways. On the one hand, the autonomy and self-determination of nationalities had led to a desire in some parts for secession from the union; on the other hand, the need to develop a common culture and language based around the Russian majority had entrenched the economic and power inequalities in favor of the majority Russian nationality, a situation that exacerbated the desire to break away.¹⁵ So the Chinese approach was modified and significantly enhanced, leading to what some have called a shift from a Soviet model to a Chinese model, based on *duo yuan yi ti*, "one state with diversity."¹⁶

But what does all this actually entail? It is driven by three main principals: equality for nationalities, equality of all languages and cultures, and autonomy where appropriate. The Chinese constitution states that all nationalities in China have equal rights, and in order to promote such equality, the political, cultural and especially economic dimensions should be fostered.¹⁷ Let me take

the turn of the millennium: Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities*, 19–55; Zhou, *Tracking the Historical*, 58–63.

¹⁴ Hill and Zhou, "Introduction," 8–10.

¹⁵ See also Suny, *Revenge of the Past*, 127–160.

¹⁶ Hill and Zhou, Introduction, 10–13.

¹⁷ See <http://english.people.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html>. These principles may already be found in articles 50–53 of the Common Program from 1949, finalized a couple of days before the declaration of the People's Republic on 1 October, 1949: "All nationalities within the boundaries of the People's Republic of China are equal. They shall establish unity and mutual aid among themselves, and shall oppose imperialism and their own public enemies, so that the People's Republic of China will become a big fraternal and co-operative family composed of all its nationalities. Greater Nationalism

in turn these aspects, beginning with politics, and then moving to culture and economics.

Politically, this means that all nationalities are represented at the annual parliament, the National People's Congress, in which minority nationalities have an increasingly greater presence. There has also been a consistent long-term rise in the percentage of national minorities in the CPC. In 1980, only three percent of the total number of members were from minority nationalities. By 2001, the percentage had grown to 6.2 percent, albeit still behind the percentage of minority nationalities among the population as a whole, which is 8.14 percent.¹⁸ If we consider local areas where national minorities were strong, local participation is ensured through proportional representation in elections.¹⁹ Further, in the autonomous areas (which now number almost 160 with various levels) taxes are not directed to the central government but are kept in the local area and used for local purposes.

Culturally, I address briefly the issues of language and education, although it is worth noting that the government does not hesitate to censor material in the press and in publication that has the potential to harm unity in relation to nationalities.

and chauvinism shall be opposed. Acts involving discrimination, oppression and splitting of the unity of the various nationalities shall be prohibited." This includes the "freedom to develop their dialects and languages, to preserve or reform their traditions, customs and religious beliefs." See <http://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/mod/1949-ccp-program.html>.

¹⁸ In Xinjiang the proportion is almost 50 percent (although Uyghurs comprise 61.6 percent of the total population, while in Tibet membership stands at 75 percent, still below the proportion of Tibetans in the population of Tibet. Only in Inner Mongolia do cadres (at almost 20 percent) overtake the number of Mongolians in the local population, at 16 percent. See further Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities*, 42.

¹⁹ The constitution of 1982 significantly strengthened the rights of minority nationalities in relation to local governance (articles 112–22). See http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/Constitution/node_2825.htm.

Where appropriate, local languages continue to be fostered.²⁰ This entails media, education and literature. For larger groups, this is of course easier to achieve, but for the small groups of only a few thousand the task is much more difficult and the threat remains that such languages may die out. This at times entails the creation of new written languages where they had not existed before. Indeed, in some cases, the identification of a group has created a new nationality where none existed before in any clear way. In terms of education, school children receive classes in their local language, alongside the obligatory classes in Mandarin. At university level, a quota system applies, as well as extra points given to students from minority nationalities for the all-important entrance examinations (*gaokao*).²¹ To be added here is the practice of having *minzu* universities in all regions. Although all students may apply, these universities focus on students from minority nationalities.²² The result: between 1964 and 1982, the percentage of minority nationalities in universities rose only from 5.76 to 6.7 percent. However, from 1982 to 1990, the percentage rose to 8.04 percent.²³

²⁰ *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo Minzu quyue zizhi fa (Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy)*, Beijing, Ethnic Publishing House, 2001, article 37; Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities*, 131.

²¹ Tiezhe Wang, *Preferential Policies for Minority College Admission in China: Recent Developments, Necessity, and Impact*, in Minglang Zhou – Ann Maxwell Hill (ed.), *Affirmative Action in China and the U.S.: A Dialogue on Inequality and Minority Education*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 71–82.

²² Barry Sautman, *Affirmative Action, Ethnic Minorities and China's Universities*, *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal* 7, 1 (1998), 77–116.

²³ Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities*, 27. I add here a comment on the much-debated one-child policy (which has now become the two-child policy as a result of stabilizing the population). This applied to city-based members of the Han nationality. In the countryside, a family could have two children if the first was a girl, and among the larger nationalities apart from the Han

I would like to lay greater emphasis on the economic dimension of the nationalities policy, for reasons that will become clear later. Here the central government is crucial in the economy. For local governments, the central government provides significant additional resources for economic development,²⁴ which appears in terms of subsidies for infrastructure and higher levels of public works funding. Here we find that the expansion of the Chinese rail system – which now leads the world in terms of extent and technical prowess – has focused on providing transport infrastructure for areas of concentrated minority nationality presence. In businesses, both publically owned companies (the majority) and private companies (minority) are provided with incentives for preferential treatment in employing people from smaller nationalities. And businesses run by minority nationalities receive interest-free loans from the government. The underlying purpose is to encourage economic development in regions where minority nationalities live, for they tend to reside in parts of China that have yet to experience the full benefit of the economic progress in the east. Let me give two examples of this process. First, a distinct sign of success of this economic aspect is that the highest rate of economic growth is now in Inner Mongolia; second, as a signal of where much needs to be done, in response to the unrest in some parts of Xinjiang in the westernmost parts of China, the central and local governments resorted not only to extra security, but more importantly made an explicit commitment to improve economic conditions in a part of China that has lagged behind. This is on top of the consistent policies – such as a focus on cotton production in the 1990s – relating to Xinjiang which have already focused on improving its economy, let alone the increase in trade across the borders with

two children have always been allowed. However, smaller groups have always been able to have larger numbers of children as a way of fostering such groups.

²⁴ Hill and Zhou, Introduction, 13.

central Asian countries. All of this is predicated on a central plank of Chinese policy, which is also the human right most emphasized in China: each person and group should be enabled to have economic wellbeing. It is not for nothing that poverty has been reduced by well over half since the 1970s, which means that hundreds of millions of people have been influenced by this policy.²⁵

Apart from noting the significant, albeit mixed, success of such policies, even in Tibet,²⁶ I close with the following point. First, the preferential policies for minority nationalities have over time strengthened two keys elements: on the one hand, autonomy at all levels has been enhanced, as the amended *Law on Regional National Autonomy* of 2001 indicates (first promulgated in 1984). On the other hand, the Chinese government has insisted more strongly that the borders of the country as a whole will remain unchanged. Initially, this may seem like a tension, but I suggest that it attempts to follow a distinctly Chinese approach to contradictions. In other words, what are opposites – such as unity and diversity in this case – are not antagonistic but should learn to work and live together in a non-antagonistic fashion.²⁷ This point is not pure philosophical speculation, for significant evidence exists that cultural activism among the many nationalities (such as the Dai, Bai and Muslim Hui in Yunnan province), especially in terms of economics, but also with regard to language, education and religion, actually enhances and strengthens the sense of belonging

²⁵ *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo Minzu*, article 69; UNDP, *Human Development Report*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, 50.

²⁶ Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities*, 28–31.

²⁷ Or, as Mackerras puts in a more lapidary manner: “the two demands in some ways balance each other, because some people do in fact see advantages in remaining part of a comparatively successful state where their lives have indeed greatly improved.” Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities*, 39.

to China as a whole.²⁸ The key, of course, is economic, for the Chinese tradition stresses that economic wellbeing enhances one's desire to remain part of the larger whole.

Problems

At the same time, the nationalities positive (action) policy is not without its problems, to which I now turn. One problem, germane to any government policy, concerns how one defines a distinct nationality. What is the key determining factor? Is it language, culture, history, territory or religion? In policy terms, it seems to be determined mostly by religion and territory. For instance, the Hui (see above) have no definable territory, since they are to be found all over China (albeit with a concentration in the north-west). The determining factor in this case is clearly observance, at however a nominal level, of Islam.²⁹ However, the determination of the Zhuang is based on territory. When empirical research was first undertaken for the sake of identifying distinct nationalities, the social scientists in question found that the tribal groups in the south-western mountains of China saw themselves as distinct from all others, even those in the next valley. The problem for the researchers and government policy makers was that allowing full scope for such sensibilities would lead to thousands of distinct nationalities. So self-perception was relegated to a minor level. Instead, territory became crucial.

²⁸ Susan McCarthy, *Ethno-Religious Mobilisation and Citizenship Discourse in the People's Republic of China*, *Asian Ethnicity* 1, 2 (2000), 107–116; Gerard Postiglione, Ben Jiao, and Ngawang Tsering, *Tibetan Student Perspectives on Neidi Schools*, in Minglang Zhou – Ann Maxwell Hill (ed.), *Affirmative Action in China and the U.S.: A Dialogue on Inequality and Minority Education*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 127–142.

²⁹ As Mackerras points out, the minority nationalities tend to be far more religious than the Han majority. Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities* 114–126.

People with largely similar ways of life, customs and language lived in similar territory, so they were given a name and identified as a nationality.³⁰ Alongside religion and territory, a third factor has played a role: political affiliation in the past. So we find that the Hakka in southern China and the Mosuo, who live around Lugu Lake on the Sichuan-Yunnan border, are not recognized as nationalities. Instead, the Hakka are classified as part of the Han and the Mosuo as part of the Naxi, despite assertions by some of these peoples that they are distinct.³¹

A further problem is one that pertains to the practices of anthropology itself: the designation of characteristics. Minimally, rather than observing and recording a situation as it is, the very presence and involvement of the observer changes the situation, for the observer is never external.³² At a maximal level, the observer may identify what are supposed to be essential characteristics to a group, except that such characteristics are not germane to the group in question (as with the famous example of the New Zealand Maori ritual ...). The minimal position is actually not so much of a problem in a country like China, apart from the usual point concerning the fiction of scientific objectivity. The reason is that the Chinese project of the last seventy years or so has quite deliberately been one of social transformation and recreation. However, the maximal point is also relevant, albeit in a somewhat different way – tourism.

³⁰ Katherine Kaup, Regionalism Versus Ethnic Nationalism, *The China Quarterly* 172 (2002), 863–884.

³¹ Yet, as Mackerras points out, the vast majority of people agree with and accept the classifications, not merely because nationality is a rubbery term at best, but because in most cases the designations are reasonably valid: Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities*, 3.

³² The pioneering study remains Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

With tourism, which is massive in China, I return to the economic emphasis of my argument.³³ Everywhere one goes, whether for stunning mountains, key sites in the struggle for the socialist revolution (red tourism), food, or areas with concentrations of nationalities – they all have many, many visitors. And one can immediately tell who the target audience is, for the signs have nothing more than Chinese characters, although it should be said that China is also projected to be the top destination for international tourists by 2020.³⁴ Here we find the old tourism trap: regular visitors obviously bring money, which fosters the local economy. But the visitors come to find a certain image of what the local nationality should be like. In response, the local people assist in recreating such an image, even if it is outside their daily lives.³⁵ The focus is usually on exotic dress, music, song, dance, festivals, food and customs. Less on display are the all-important issues of language, education, literature and governance. For example, as part of the process of producing a MOOC on Chinese Marxism in 2016, I was engaged in filming in China. One of the places filmed was the Nationalities Culture Park (*minzuyuan*), which represents all of the 55 minority nationalities. Here you can visit typical homes, attend song and dance performances, see religious practices, and read material on rituals and festivals. While it attempts to be a celebration of diversity, the items represented are quite selective, with a distinctly touristic touch.

Tourism is but one feature of the economic stress on minority nationalities. Another level involves a double approach: the focus

³³ I leave aside the point that some people are keen to be identified as minority nationalities due to the economic benefits. However, rather than a criticism, this is a sign of success of the policy.

³⁴ Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities*, 58.

³⁵ Ben Hillman, Paradise under Construction: Minorities, Myths and Modernity in Northwest Yunnan, *Asian Ethnicity* 4, 2 (2003), 177–190; Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities*, 73.

on ensuring that everyone benefits from the economic growth of the last four decades and preferential treatment for minority nationalities. I have mentioned some features of this preference given to minority groups, so here I am interested in the problems. These include the uneven development of China, in which the eastern seaboard has in many respects leapt ahead of the rest of the world, while the central and western parts – where most minority nationalities live – have lagged behind.³⁶ While this situation means that China is able to absorb most economic shocks internally,³⁷ by shifting westward, it also means that some minority nationalities have not benefitted from economic development, where the highest levels of poverty remain. And where economic development is taking place, such as Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang and Yunnan, it also introduces many of the east coast's problems – massive movement from the countryside to the city, increased cost of living, pollution and social dislocation. Further, the sense at times is that the economic development is largely in the hands of Han Chinese, who move into the minority areas as jobs and economic prospects increase. Indeed, at this point a paradox emerges, in which fluency in *putonghua* (Mandarin) enables young people from minority backgrounds to gain employment. In Xinjiang, for example, it appears that Uyghur students who attend regular school with Han students have greater fluency than those who attend minority schools with Uyghur teachers, where Mandarin is taught as a second language.

³⁶ Hill and Zhou, Introduction, 3.

³⁷ Wang Hui, Contradiction, Systemic Crisis and Direction for Change – An interview with Wang Hui, *China Left Review* 5 (2012), <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2555-contradiction-systemic-crisis-and-the-direction-for-change-an-interview-with-wang-hui>. <https://u.osu.edu/mlc/2016/03/21/interview-with-wang-hui/>.

The outcome is that the former students do much better, even than Han young people, in attaining good jobs.³⁸

A further problem is the narrative of “backwardness,” which has always been part of such preferential projects. The minority nationalities are typically portrayed as backward, a portrayal enhanced by the exoticization of their cultures and the fact that they are mostly in the countryside where traditional assumptions (including those of gender) persist.³⁹ Thus, they need to be brought up the same cultural and economic level as the Han. While such an approach also has a socialist dimension (raising peoples to a socialist consciousness), it struggles to escape paternalism. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that most minority nationalities live in peripheral zones, or those that have not yet benefitted as much from social and economic development.

Finally, the question of what is sometimes called “separatism,” which can be but is not necessarily connected with religion. For many outside China, the question of nationalities conjures up images of “separatist” Tibetan Buddhists and the Uyghur Muslims of Xinjiang (as though there were no other Buddhists or Muslims in China). Apart from pointing out an anomaly in terminology – in Tibet and Xinjiang they are “separatists,” while the same type of movements in the Middle East are called “terrorists” – I would like to focus on two other related factors. To begin with, one might argue that it is precisely the nationalities policy and its fostering of local identities and cultures that has generated such movements (as had happened in the Soviet Union). By

³⁸ Rong Ma, Issues of Minority Education in Xinjiang, China, in Minglang Zhou – Ann Maxwell Hill (ed.), *Affirmative Action in China and the U.S.: A Dialogue on Inequality and Minority Education*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, 179–198.

³⁹ Reza Hamath, The Interactions of Ethnic Minorities in Beijing, *University of Oxford Centre on Migration, Policy and Society Working Papers* 14–111 (2014), 1–26.

giving minority nationalities the resources and encouragement for cultural, linguistic, education and political self-management, the potential is to create a desire for distinct identity separate from the state that fostered such identity. However, this point does not make sense of the vast majority of nationalities who are very keen on being part of China, nor indeed the explicit Chinese assessment of the failures of the Soviet Union and the efforts to ensure such failures did not happen in China.

So I suggest a second factor: the tension between globalization and regionalism. The two are intimately, if not dialectically, related. The greater the processes of globalization, the greater are desires for distinct identity, autonomy and separate existence as a state.⁴⁰ Even more, it is precisely through globalization that regionalism is fostered and exacerbated in new ways. The examples are many: Scotland, Quebec, Frisia, Tamils, Chechens, Basques, Kurds and so on. As for China, Tibet is an anomaly, since it has been part of China since the Qing Dynasty and the focus on the Dalai Lama ignores his aristocratic background, with a heritage of what was a rigid feudal system in which peasants lived in abject conditions until the 1950s. The Dalai Lama's efforts to undermine China have meshed closely with those of the USA, to the extent of CIA support for the former.⁴¹ As Mackerras observes: "However,

⁴⁰ Nick Knight, *Thinking About Asia: An Australian Introduction to East and Southeast Asia*, Adelaide: Crawford House, 2000, 242; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000.

⁴¹ Dawa Norbu, *China's Tibet Policy*, Richmond: Curzon, 2001, 263–282; Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities*, 32–35, 157–65. In this respect that Dalai Lama's heritage comes close to the slave system of the Nuosu (part of the Yi nationality), in which each level of slave could own slaves lower down the order, apart from the last and most wretched group. This system was eradicated by the Chinese government in the 1950s. It is also worth noting that the Dalai Lama himself agreed to the seventeen-point plan for inclusion within China on 24 October, 1951. The plan itself was the outcome of significant negotiation and recognition of Tibetan autonomy. Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities*, 20–23.

what strikes me most forcefully about the period since 1980 or so is not how much the Chinese have harmed Tibetan culture, but how much they have allowed, even encouraged it to revive; not how weak it is, but how strong."⁴² I would add that a crucial factor has been the significant improvement in economic conditions in Tibet. By contrast, Xinjiang is an excellent example of the rise of terrorism in response to globalization. Although the push for autonomy among some of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang dates back to the 1920s, this push took on a distinctly new look and fervor, with a significant rise in militant activities, in the last years of the twentieth century and has rolled on into the twenty-first. Part of this is due to influence from further west, especially from the complex currents of Muslim radicalism, but even this radicalism may be seen as simultaneously a form of globalization and one that fosters regional autonomy.

But let me return to a point I made earlier. From the moment renewed unrest began in Xinjiang in the mid-1990s, much analysis and policy revision followed. Above all, it became a core policy not merely to keep a tight lid on potential political opposition, but also – and more importantly – to focus on improving the economic conditions in a region that significantly lagged behind the rest of China.⁴³ This position has been reiterated consistently for the last 20 years, with the "Belt and Road Initiative" of 2014 being the most audacious. Although the initiative has far broader implications concerning Central Asia, Russia and even Europe, a major factor is that Xinjiang is to be a hub of the project.

⁴² Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities* 46.

⁴³ Mackerras, *China's Ethnic Minorities*, 53.

Conclusion: Reassessing Human Rights

The questions of Xinjiang and even Tibet lead one inevitably – at least in terms of a certain agenda – into the question of human rights. Working within a particular European framework of human rights, in which individual political rights are deemed paramount, groups such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch/Asia, and the United States State Department has issued routine criticisms of what they perceive to be China's failings in relation to minority nationalities.⁴⁴ The focus is telling: political representation, religious freedom, and Han immigration into these areas, although the reports typically rely on diaspora testimony rather than actual verification (which is usually not possible). They go so far as to suggest that the efforts to deal with terrorism and separatism are a smokescreen for systematic human rights abuses, largely agreeing with the Dalai Llama's phrase "cultural genocide."

What are we to make of this situation? One approach by Chinese sources is to counter such efforts by its own reports, although, in light of the situation, these tend to bend the other way and lay stress on the many gains made. For instance, the Information office has put out significant statements concerning human rights and minority nationalities, with an emphasis on "folkways and customs", politics and social demographics, and – notably – economic issues.⁴⁵ The risk of such a response is that it buys into a particular, European-derived framework for human rights. The situation is not assisted

⁴⁴ See, for example, Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2001*, London: Amnesty International Foundation, 2001.

⁴⁵ Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, China's Policy on National Minorities and its Practice, *Beijing Review* 42 (1999) 16–33. Opposition and low-level resistance of course continues and will do so for the foreseeable future.

by Chinese sources decrying the mantra of "human rights" as a screen for "Western" imperialism, or arguing that these matters are domestic concerns and of no interest for international bodies.

I prefer to take a different approach here, which seeks neither to condemn nor condone, but to understand. Closely related to, if not underlying the whole approach to minority nationalities is a Chinese philosophical approach to human rights. It has four main factors. First, one response to the assertion of Western human rights is to argue that they are focused on the individual. By contrast, "Asian" human rights focus more on the collective or the social – as we find with the "ASEAN Declaration of Human Rights" from 2012.⁴⁶ The Chinese approach is somewhat more nuanced. It recognizes that there should be a careful balance between collective and individual dimensions in human rights. This means that specific collective groups also have distinct rights: women, newborns, minority nationalities, classes and even whole societies. At the same time, individuals also have rights in relation to collective rights. Related to the previous point is the importance of sovereignty in the giving and exercise of human rights. This is based on the idea that human rights are given by a society and are not inherent in human beings. But if a country is colonized and subjected to another country, such human rights are not possible. Therefore, a sovereign country is crucial for human rights.

Third, one criticism of Western human rights is that it asserts universal positions on the basis of the specific history and experiences of Western Europe and North America. In other words, these human rights attempt to impose on the rest of the world specific concerns that arose in a particular context. The Chinese approach does not take this path. Instead, it agrees that there are universal human rights, but the emphasis on the

⁴⁶ See http://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/other_documents/section1/2012/11/phnom-penh-statement-on-the-adoption-of-the-asean-human-rights-declaration-ahrd-1.html.

most important ones depends on the specific history, culture and situation. Thus – the fourth point – the Western tradition of human rights tends to focus on political and civil rights, especially in relation to political expression, the press and religion. It neglects other central human rights. A Chinese approach sees human rights as a combination of economic, political and social. Of these the most important in a Chinese context is the right to economic wellbeing, which I mentioned earlier.

Let me put this in terms of a common example.⁴⁷ In theory, all children are born equal. Or, rather, in an ideal situation, a child should be born equal. However, the womb of a rich, upper-class mother has more nutrients for the embryo, thereby creating a better physical environment for the development of the embryo. This is apart from the advantageous conditions in which the child finds itself upon birth. By contrast, the womb of a poor, working class mother has less nutrients and potentially harmful substances. Thus, the embryo is already disadvantaged before it is born, let alone the poor conditions in which it will find itself after birth. For these reasons, in a Chinese situation the economic right to wellbeing is primary.

To conclude on a slightly different note: in light of this emphasis, the Information Office of the China State Council releases an annual report on human rights in the United States. While this may be seen as tit-for-tat, in reply to the US State Department's comments on China, it is worth noting the emphasis on economic rights. For these reports, the neglect of economic rights in Western countries is revealed through consistent abuses of such rights.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ I draw this from Human Rights Can Be Manifested Differently, *China View*, 12 December (2005), http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2005-12/12/content_3908887.htm.

⁴⁸ One may find a summary for 2016 here: http://english.gov.cn/news/top_news/2016/04/14/content_281475327546138.htm. And the full text of the report is here: http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2016/04/14/content_281475327578479.htm.

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