

The Historian's Gaze

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China's Ethnic Relations in Historical Perspective: From the Qing to the People's Republic

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Abstract The geographical region known as 'China' has historically been inhabited by many ethnic groups, with the Han (漢) emerging as numerically the largest. Throughout China's history, ethnic relations have been the most important issue, with direct bearing on political unity or division, war or peace in the region. China's ethnic relations were marked by incessant conflicts and incorporations between the majority Han and other ethnic groups, or by fighting and integration among the minority ethnic groups themselves. This essay reviews the intricate, historical evolution of China's ethnic relations in the modern period from the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644-1911) to the People's Republic. We focus on the formulation and implementation of the 'nationality policy' by the central governments, investigating policy intentions, goals, strengths, and weaknesses. Special attention is paid to some sensitive regions and ethnic groups.

Keywords Minzu (ethnicity and nationality). Autonomy. Segregation. Migration. Minority regions.

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1 Defining the Term *Minzu* (民族)

Let us start with an anecdote. A friend, whose ethnicity is different from his nationality, said he would, when asked, identify himself as Chinese in *ethnicity* and Malaysian in *nationality*. This anecdote calls our attention to the different meanings of these two Chinese terms - 'ethnicity', translated as *minzu* (民族); and 'nationality', translated as *guoji* (国籍). Different in Chinese, the two terms are alternatively used in English. We are trying to understand the Chinese term *minzu*, its origin and its evolution in history, and its various English translations, in order to start our investigation into the so-called 'nationality problem/issue' (*minzu wenti* 民族问题).

There is no consensus among Chinese scholars as to when the two-word term *min-zu* came into being, whether the term originated from the Chinese language itself or was a borrowed expression. The Chinese Encyclopedia sources the term to Liang Qichao, who in 1903 introduced the concept of 'nationalism' from Germany to China, as an appeal to the Chinese to fight against imperialist encroachment as a united Chinese *minzu*. More meticulous research into the vast volumes of Chinese historical records and literature, with the help of e-technology and capacity, has revealed the term *minzu* in this exact form appeared as early as the 400s AD. In the Chinese context, the term denotes the genus of clan (*zongzu zhi shu* 宗族之属) and differentiates between Chinese and barbarians (*hua yi zhi bie* 华夷之别) (Hao 2004).

The importance of tracing the origin of this term does not lie with its linguistic ascendancy; rather, it is about the concept, the meaning it signifies and how it is understood by the Chinese people in its historical context. In this respect, a general consensus exists among Chinese scholars. It is not surprising that it was during the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when China was in crisis, that the concept of *minzu* entered the Chinese consciousness and played a significant role in defining the target of the Revolution led by Sun Yat-sen. By this time, *minzu* was infused with connotations that were not incorporated in its original meaning. The word 'people' (*ren* 人) as in 'Manchu people' (*manren* 满人) and 'Han people' (*hanren* 汉人) were on the way to become *Manqing minzu* (满清民族) and 'Chinese *minzu*' (*Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族). This transformation in the language demonstrated the influence of the Western concept of 'nation-state', or one nation, one state. As a result, the Chinese term *minzu* could have several different equivalents in the English language, each embodying layers of implications, political and cultural (Ma 2013).

As the term *minzu* was more widely adopted by the Chinese, its usage was still confusing. For example, the radical faction among the revolutionaries after 1911 advocated restoring the eighteen provinces as the new republic, which were composed of the Chinese nation

or *minzu* (中华民族), excluding other peoples. In the end, the Republic of Five (Nationalities) (*wu zu gonghe* 五族共和), a more inclusive agenda, won, over the narrowly defined Chinese nation as composed of the Han people only. Sun Yat-sen's nationalism (*minzuzhuyi* 民族主义), as one of his Three Principles of the People, defines nationalism as 'country-zu-ism' (*guozuzhuyi* 国族主义). The two terms co-existed during the Republican era until the People's Republic decided *minzu* would be the official term. Since then, the term 'Chinese nation', or *Zhonghua minzu* (中华民族), embraces the diverse populations living in China.

While *minzu* is uniformly used in China, its English equivalents are multiple: nation, nationality, ethnicity, ethnonational groups, people, or even race. In this essay, the Chinese term *minzu* will be used alongside its various English translations.

2 Before the Qing Rule: No Consistent Ethnicity Policy

Although ethnic relations were of utmost importance to the stability and survival of a dynasty in China, most dynasties before the Qing never developed a systematic and long-term policy in the management of ethnic relations. As the Han nationality had formed an absolute majority in number, the Han ruling house adopted policies variably, depending on the status of its political power. When it was strong and unified, its policy towards non-Han peoples tended to rely on its military power to either drive them out of China's territorial confines or to establish military settlements on the frontier, forcing peoples on the borderlands to assimilate or resettle further inland. This approach was more often applied to the North or Northwest of China. The Han rulers may also adopt a seemingly more peaceful and benevolent policy in the South and the Southeast. For example, the imperial court would, on surface, recognise the existing political structure under the rule of various chieftains (*tusi* 土司), while flooding these frontier regions with numerous Han settlers. After Han settlers reached sufficient numbers, formal local administrative structures would be created with tax and *corvée* labour obligations and direct central administrative control. This is known as *gai-tu gui-liu* (改土归流) in the historical term.

The Mongol Empire of the Yuan in the thirteenth century stood out in China's imperial history as one composed of non-Han minority ruling a land with the Han majority and many other groups. It showed differentiated approaches to various groups under its rule, but did not formulate an official nationality policy. In practice, the Mongol ruling class adopted a rather rigid discriminatory racial policy, placing the Han, a majority people, at the bottom of the political-social scale. In contrast, the Mongols treated peoples of Central Asia and

of Tibet with more respect and trust. For example, many hereditary ruling houses in Central Asia were granted Mongol noble ranks and even inter-married with members of the Mongol ruling class.

With Tibet, Mongols expressed respect to Tibetans' Lamaism. Of course, such an attitude was based on both practical and political considerations. The Tibetan plateau, so mountainous and high in altitude, was extremely difficult for the Mongol cavalry to conquer by force. Showing a special favour to the religion of the Tibetans was a way to win the support and allegiance of the leaders and people of Tibet. Eventually most Mongols became followers of Lamaism, and the Tibetans returned their rulers' fairness by offering their loyalty to the Mongol Khan.

The Ming dynasty, which succeeded the Yuan, returned to a Han-centred nationality policy, and the Ming rule was largely confined to regions inhabited by the Han people. Not until the Manchus became new rulers of China would there emerge an ethnicity policy created and managed by the central government.

3 The Qing: Formulating a Consistent Ethnicity Policy (1644-1911)

An overview of various components of the Qing's nationality policy highlights these core concerns and approaches: religion, segregation, and appeasement through marriage. With these key components in mind, the following review will focus on the policy's implementation in three regions in particular - Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang.

It may seem that the Qing inherited the Mongol policy of granting special favour to the Tibetans. However, the Qing had developed its ethnicity policy based on its own historical experience of having co-inhabited with multiple ethnic groups for generations in the Changbai Mountains before rising to become the dominant people in the region of China's Northeast. In the year 1635, these people created the name of *Man* (滿) to mark the birth of an ethnically amalgamated nation. The adoption of the name *Man*, aka 'Manchu' in English, therefore provided a unified new identity for different ethnic groups in the northeast region (Rigger 1995).

Unified, Manchu people successfully conquered China, along with Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Tibet. Facing the majority Han population, as well as other nationalities now under its dominance, the ruling house soon realised that it needed to adopt a consistent nationality policy to both recognise the complex composition of the population in the newly created empire and to secure its own political control over the empire.

3.1 Religion: Tibetan Lamaism and Islam

One key component of the Manchu's nationality policy was its management of religion. The ruling house recognised Tibetan Lamaism, particularly the Yellow Sect, as being widely accepted by Tibetans and Mongols. The religious leaders known as 'Living Buddhas' were located widely in Tibet, Qinghai, and Inner and Outer Mongolia. In recognition of this fact, the Manchu royal court showed great respect to those Living Buddhas, particularly to the Dalai Lama, the most prestigious among the followers of this religion. The royal court extended invitations to the Dalai Lama to visit Beijing several times. The official visit of the Dalai Lama to Beijing in 1653 turned out to be a grandiose reception, marking the high plateau of the special favour shown to a religious leader.

History reveals the reason for this special treatment. In the early part of the seventeenth century the Dzungar Mongols, rivals to the Manchu power, established a powerful nomadic empire in present-day Northern Xinjiang. The Dzungars had a close relationship with the Dalai Lama. The Manchu rulers were aware of this tradition, and they wanted to pull the Dalai Lama away from the Dzungars. By the early eighteenth century, when the Manchu Qing Empire had completely defeated the Dzungars and established military control over Tibet, it changed tactic. The Qing court began to promote the status of the Panchan Lama as well as other Living Buddhas in Qinghai and Mongolia, to make them nearly equal to the Dalai Lama. Furthermore, the Qing court proclaimed strict regulations regarding the choice and recognition of the 'reincarnates' of all Living Buddhas, including the Dalai Lama. The Qing proved to be simultaneously sensitive and respectful, as well as forceful and authoritarian, in its approach to Tibetan religious affairs (Xiao 1962).

As for Islam, the imperial court restrained itself from interference during the early years of its rule. It adopted a non-interference policy towards Muslims and even provided police protection to Islamic leaders and to various mosques. However, beginning from the reign of Emperor Qian-long (1735-96), the empire experienced a series of revolts by the Muslim population in Northwest. By suppressing the uprisings, the Qing court began to tighten its control over the Muslim population and abandoned the 'hands-off' policy of the earlier time (Zhang 2001).

3.2 Segregationist Policy

Beyond a religious policy, the imperial house also developed a policy of segregation with rigid control over the various ethnic groups that inhabited the vast regions of Mongolia and Xinjiang. For the rule of the Mongols, the Qing largely followed the traditional division of *qi* (旗), or 'Banner', which numbered about 200 different Banners. People living in each Banner had a designated geographical area and were not allowed to cross into the territory of another Banner. Leaders of these Banners were hereditary, known as 'Zhasake', or Zasad. They were given the power of administrative control and taxation. However, each Zasad must be appointed and sanctioned by the imperial court and given a noble title.

The Qing administrative policies over Tibet and Xinjiang were similar to those in Mongolia. Tibet was administratively divided into four parts, each headed by a hereditary Tibetan nobleman known as a 'Gebulun', but each must receive official appointment from the Qing court. The same was true for the various 'oasis cities' in Xinjiang; each was headed by a Beg as its administrative chief, and all received appointment from the imperial court and were provided with stipends. However, the Muslim Begg were not accorded the same high respect shown to the Living Buddhas of Lamaism.

On the whole, with the exception of the military suppression of the Dzungar uprisings previously mentioned, the segregationist policy that managed the vast regions of different ethnic groups was relatively successful in maintaining peace and control for the Qing court (Xiao 1962).

The Qing's segregation policy extended to the operation of its own military. For example, Qing troops stationed in various parts of the vast territory were segregated by categories, such as Manchu Banner troops, Mongol Banner troops, Han Banner troops, and Han soldiers of the Green Battalion (*luying* 绿营). They all had separate barracks and were not allowed to make direct contact with each other or with the local civilian population.

In social and economic life, Han immigrant farmers in Eastern Xinjiang were not allowed to live in Muslim areas or intermarry with Muslims. Han merchants must obtain special permission and a kind of passport before being allowed to enter Xinjiang. Merchants from Central Asia could come to Xinjiang only with special permits they had obtained beforehand, and their business activities must be put under the supervision of the local authorities. Such a rigid segregationist policy was maintained until the 1860s (Lin 1988).

A similar segregationist policy was also imposed over Tibet. After the Dzungars were defeated and their influence eliminated, the Qing court began to station troops in important areas in Tibet to inspect all persons entering Tibet. Members of the Mongol nobility

who wished to visit Tibetan high-ranking clergy for religious matters must request permission for their journey from the Qing court. Han or Mongol merchants must also obtain permission from the authorities to enter Tibet. The same policy applied to Tibetan clergy or nobility trying to travel to Mongolia or inner parts of China.

The segregationist policy adopted by the Qing court was installed to maintain national stability and safeguard the peace and security of the frontier regions. Such a policy of controlling contacts among different ethnic and religious groups was conceived to prevent potential conflicts among various groups of the population. Some may consider this policy an ultra-conservative strategy to uphold the political, economic, and cultural status quo, leaving no room for change and development.

3.3 **Appeasement Through Marriage**

Combined with the harsh and restrictive policy of segregation was the Qing's reliance on the practice of intermarriage between imperial court members and members of leading families among selective minority groups. Noble ladies of the Mongol, Tibetan, and Uyghur families were encouraged to marry young members of the Manchu nobility; and Manchu princesses, through royal arrangement, were married to leaders of ethnic minority groups important to the Manchu royals. This intermarriage tradition had been long established since even before the Manchu conquest of China led by Nurhaci (1559-1626). A particular subgroup of the Mongols, the Horqin Mongols in Eastern Mongolia, was accorded special attention. Through several generations of high-level intermarriages, many Horqin Mongol ladies became mothers to younger generation Qing emperors. This kind of intermarriage guaranteed the high loyalty of the Horqin Mongols to the Qing imperial house (Xiao 1962).

In addition to the practice of intermarriage at the top level of the ruling class, the Qing court also adopted the policy of ennoblement and official appointment for traditional leaders of the Mongols, Tibetans, and Uyghurs. They enjoyed near equal status of high-ranking Manchu nobility. They were also richly rewarded with an annual salary and periodic permission to journey to Beijing to have imperial audience as a special honour (Lin 1988).

3.4 **Policy Assessment and Legacy**

The importance of Mongolian and Tibetan affairs in the Qing nationality policy was essentially based on political and strategic considerations. The early expansion of Manchu power would not have been

possible without the support of eastern Mongol tribal groups. After the establishment of the Qing Empire, the imperial court was most concerned with the peace and security of its vast frontier regions, mostly inhabited by the Mongols, Tibetans, and Uyghurs. As early as 1636, before the Manchu's conquest of inner China, the Manchu ruler Huang-tai-ji (皇太极) ordered the creation of the Office for Mongolian Affairs. Two years later, its name was changed to *Li-fan Yuan* (理藩院), or 'Bureau for the Management of Dependency Affairs', mainly in charge of Mongolian affairs. During the reign of Emperor Kang-xi (1661-1722), the authority of this bureau was expanded to include Tibetan and Xinjiang affairs and its status was elevated to that of the Six Ministries in the government. It took charge of such matters as arranging imperial audiences of all Living Buddhas and members of high nobility, the distribution of food and money for disaster relief, and the settlement of local judicial matters in Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang (Zhao 1986).

The Qing policy for the control and management of Mongolian and Tibetan affairs was fairly successful. The Mongols and Tibetans remained loyal to the Qing imperial house, and peace and stability were largely achieved in these regions throughout the Qing dynasty. In contrast, the Qing policy towards other ethnic minorities in the empire was difficult and often caused disturbances and even rebellions. The main reason for these conflicts was the oppressive and exploitative nature of the Qing policy. Ethnic minorities had to pay heavy taxes and were forced to serve *corvée* labour. In various areas of the Southwest, ethnic minorities lived side by side with Han people, but local officials were often biased in favour of the Han when settling disputes between them. By the nineteenth century, when the dynasty was showing signs of decline, ethnic minority groups in the Southwest often rebelled against the central authority. From the 1850s to the 1870s, there were prolonged rebellions of the Miao people in Guizhou and of the Hui in Yunnan (Guo 1980).

The least successful minority policy of the Qing was its policy towards the Hui people. During the High Qing era between late seventeenth century and the late eighteenth century, the imperial policy towards Muslims in Xinjiang was moderate and tolerant. However, its policy towards the Hui was problematic. The Hui people were descendants of Muslim trader-merchants who settled in various parts of China long before the founding of the Qing dynasty. They were culturally and linguistically amalgamated with the Han, and most adopted Han surnames. However, they managed to retain their religious belief and continue to observe the Muslim dietary tradition (Yang 1988). Anti-government incidents of Hui people occurred in Gansu and Qinghai during the eighteenth century. Such incidents were sometimes caused by the rivalry between Islamic sects and sometimes by disputes between Hui and Han neighbours. Local ad-

ministrative officials often mismanaged these disputes, resulting in violence and bloodshed (Ge 2002; Zhang 2001). The most serious rebellion in the Southwest originated in Yunnan and was led by the Hui leader Du Wen-xiu (杜文秀). The conflict, which continued under the Qing authority for 16 years (1856-72), effected very high casualties on both sides. The Hui protest against the central authority soon spread to the Northwest. The Qing court appointed General Zuo Zong-tang (左宗棠) to command the newly created Hunan Army to restore order and reconquer all lost land from rebels in Shannxi, Gansu, and Xinjiang. The last of the rebellion was not resolved until the year 1877 (Ge 2002; Zhang 2001).

After more than two decades of Hui rebellions, the Qing court recognised the importance of the principle 'to use the Hui pacifying the Hui'. The imperial court began to adopt the policy of appointing local Hui leaders and enlisting Hui soldiers to maintain local law and order. This paved the way for the rise of Hui military leaders in the Northwest during the early years of the Chinese Republic (Ge 2002; Zhang 2001).

4 The ROC: Reformulating a Modern Policy (1912-49)

The Republican Revolution established the Republic of China (ROC), with the Han Chinese taking the leadership of the new regime. Due to political instability and coloured by their views of the Manchu Qing's incompetence and corruption, the new leaders of the Republic did not prioritise, nor did they have time to, develop a long-term and strategically sound nationality policy.

4.1 Sun Yat-sen's Five Nationalities (*wuzu* 五族) and Chiang Kai-shek's *zongzu* (宗族)

The success of China's Republican Revolution depended on the wave of anti-Manchu Han nationalism. However, after the Qing Empire was overthrown, the leaders of the new Republican government faced the reality of the Chinese state being a multi-ethnic country. A few leaders maintained their anti-Manchu attitude, but the most prominent leader, Sun Yat-sen, had promoted equality for all nationalities within China. Sun recognised the equality of China's 'Five Nationalities', namely the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan. This idea was formally adopted by the new Republican government and was written into its new constitution. The new 'five-colour' National Flag (1912-27) displays red, yellow, blue, white, and black, in equal shape and size, signifying that China was a multi-ethnic nation and that each ethnicity was an equal member of the country.

The recognition of Five Nationalities obviously did not accurately reflect the much more complicated ethnic composition in China. A number of ethnic minorities in the Southwest, such as Yi (彝) and Miao (苗), were numerically larger than Manchu, Mongol, and Tibetan, but were not included in the recognised Five Nationalities. Furthermore, the use of the term *Hui* (回) during the Republican period was ambiguous. It generally referred to all Muslims, rather than a particular ethnic nationality.

One of Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles, the 'Principle of Nationalism' (*minzuzhuyi* 民族主义), was derived from an ideal that the Chinese nation was a great harmony of ethnic groups. Thus, the religious, cultural, linguistic, and even physical differences of the Five Nationalities were to evolve and amalgamate into one Chinese nation/nationality (*Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族). Sun's 'brand' of nationalism was largely accepted by those in power, including the Beiyang military leaders who dominated the young Republic (Zhu 1985).

Recognising these four minority nationalities - Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan -, the early Republic demonstrated its deep concern for frontier security. The Qing court had established a special relationship with Mongol, Tibetan, and Uyghur leaders, and with their assistance, the Qing was able to secure the loyalty of their peoples to the imperial court and keep peace in the vast frontier regions. After the fall of the Manchu dynasty, such a special relationship was no longer in place, and the frontier was open to challenges and threats from these peoples.

Both the Beiyang government (1912-27) with its capital in Beijing, and its successor, the Nationalist government (1928-49) based in Nanjing, generally embraced Sun Yat-sen's idea of the Principle of Nationalism. However, a deep probing into Sun's idea of nationalism reveals more complexity to this principle of equality among all nationalities. The core of this 'equality' depends on the 'peripheral' minority peoples' eventual assimilation with a 'superior' Han Chinese (Zhu 1985; Leibold 2004).

Political leaders of the Republican period could not reconcile these two seemingly contradictory views. While Sun Yat-sen evaded making a concrete policy towards his Principle of Nationalism, Chiang Kai-shek wiped out the principle of equality between the Han and other ethnic minorities by denying the difference of all ethnic minorities. He upheld a firm conviction in Han nationalism. The book attributed to be authored by him, *Zhongguo zhi mingyun* 中国之命运 (The Destiny of China), published in 1943, unequivocally states that all nationalities in China were descended from a 'common ancestor' (*zongzu* 宗族), and therefore the Chinese (or Han) nation was a unified single nation without multiple nationalities (Jiang 1943).

4.2 Government's Ineffective Attempt at Formulating a Nationality Policy

Notwithstanding the policy differences between the Qing and the Republic, there was evidence of continuity in policy and practice. Both central authorities were concerned about the security of their frontiers and made efforts to secure collaboration and loyalty from people living in the vast borderlands. One example was the continued importance accorded to Mongolian and Tibetan affairs. The Republican government set up a Department for Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs. Its name later changed to the 'Commission for Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs', but was given equal status as other government ministries. Even though the power and status of this Commission could not compare with the previous Qing office, the office represented the government's continued concern and effort in appeasing these two groups.

Both the Beiyang and the Nationalist governments, in public announcement, always proclaimed republicanism and equality for all nationalities in the country. However, there was little real progress towards a concrete nationality policy. In his idea of the Principle of Nationalism, Sun Yat-sen mentioned the right of self-determination for ethnic minorities, but the central government during the Republican period never officially acknowledged this right in its constitution or law codes (Zhu 1985).

Ideology aside, China's Republican government faced the imminent challenge of the separation of these two regions - Mongolia and Tibet -, from the very beginning. The political instability of the central government, coupled with the imperialist powers' active attempts at influencing and controlling Mongolia and Tibet, resulted in Mongolia and Tibet declaring independence from China in 1912. The Beiyang government responded with military pressure to try to restore China's sovereignty in these two regions, but it was severely limited by its own weakness as well as the fear of military intervention from Russia and Britain. Eventually, through the mediation of these powers, a compromise was reached that favoured Britain and Russia's position, with Mongolia and Tibet maintaining their own separate status but recognising China's suzerainty (Guo 1979).

The other immediate challenge to China's integrity came from the Hui. Acknowledging Hui people's broad-based discontent with the Qing rulers, the early Republican government reached out to the Hui's local leaders, offering a conservative policy of maintaining the status quo and appointing them as government officials at both provincial and central levels. To demonstrate the government's acknowledgement of the distinction between the Uyghurs who were Muslims and non-Uyghur Muslims elsewhere, a new term was created to refer to the Uyghur Muslim: *Chan-Hui* (缠回, 'Muslims with Head-wraps'). In the early years of the Republic, the term of *Huizu* (回族), or the

'Hui nationality', was used to refer to the Uyghurs, whereas those other non-Uyghur Muslims living elsewhere in China and linguistically using Han language were referred to as *Huimin* (回民), or the 'Hui people'. At times confusing, these terms demonstrate the Chinese central government's intention to recognise the differences among various groups of minorities and its attempt to formulate a nationality policy that would reflect these distinctions. These terms were in use well into the 1950s (Ge 2002).

The Hui co-inhabited vast regions of China's western and north-western frontiers with other ethnic groups. In many areas they did not form a majority and therefore were ruled by Han or other ethnic groups. In their apprehension of being oppressed, the Hui began to establish their own local military organisations for self-protection. Gradually the Hui military organisations expanded and gained power and influence. By the early years of the Republic, the Hui military leaders became local rulers of Ningxia, Qinghai, and Gansu Provinces. This situation lasted more than three decades. The Nationalist governments not only tolerated the situation but sought close cooperation with the Muslim Hui rulers. This occurred because a new and more menacing threat to the Nationalist government emerged, that of the CCP. Because the Hui leaders were Muslim and fundamentally anti-Communist based on religious grounds, they became reliable allies of the central government. They served as vanguards in the battleground defending the Nationalist government against the CCP and its troops (Shi 1989; Chen 1981).

The history of the whole Republican period was long on intentions and short on concrete results. Incompetency was one of the problems, but constant and numerous conflicts caused by political division and fragmentation, frequent civil strife, and the intervention and invasion of foreign imperialist powers deprived the government of time and energy to focus on this important issue. From 1912 to 1949, China faced severe and relentless challenges. It was left without any real power to initiate a new and effective nationality policy.

4.3 Nationality Issue Under the Japanese Invasion

The outbreak of an all-out Anti-Japanese War in the summer of 1937 brought urgency to the very survival of China as an independent country. The utmost priority for the central government was national unity to fight the powerful invader. It appealed to all ethnic minorities to support this effort. Overall, a lot of members of minority groups joined China's war effort (Li 1999). There were, however, at least two serious cases of minority groups trying to break away from China and gain independence during the Anti-Japanese War period.

The first case was Mongolian separatism. The movement began in 1933 after the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, when the Japanese Kwantung Army advanced into Inner Mongolia. Led by Mongol Prince De-wang (德王), a group of Mongol noblemen took advantage of this moment of weakness of the central government and appealed for a high degree of 'self-determination'. When they did not receive a satisfactory reply, they began to communicate with the Japanese military authority and obtained Japanese financial and military help. In May 1936, they declared the formation of the 'Mongolian Military Government'. After the outbreak of the Anti-Japanese War, a Mongolian army under the command of Li Shou-xin (李守信) openly assisted the Japanese army. In 1939, a 'United Mongolian Self-Rule Government' declared its formation in Zhang-jia-kou, with Prince De-wang as its head. This collaborationist regime became the earliest puppet regime under the control of the Japanese military. The regime came to its natural termination when Japan surrendered in August 1945 (Yasui 1989).

The second serious incident happened near the end of the war period. In September 1944, a group of Kazaks in northern Xinjiang raised a separatist banner against the central government. Their justification was heavy taxation. This movement soon spread to Uyghurs who formed the majority population in Xinjiang. Before the end of the year, the rebel forces declared the formation of the 'Provisional Government of East Turkestan People's Republic'. The Nationalist government was unable to suppress the movement by force, and the negotiation for a settlement led nowhere until 1949. When the People's Liberation Army units entered Xinjiang in October 1949, the separatist movement came to an end (Ge 2002).

However, it is inaccurate to believe that all Hui people in China desired separation from China. During China's Anti-Japanese War, the Hui identified with China's war aim and participated in its war effort. Between 1937 and 1941, Hui and Uyghur organisations in China sent several 'visitation missions' to various places in Southeast Asia and the Middle East to inform fellow Muslims of the true nature of Japan's aggression in China. These missions directly countered Japan's propaganda of being a good friend and ally to the whole Muslim world and solicited support for China's cause. Although we have no definite proof of the effectiveness of this counter-propaganda effort, these visitations did cause special Japanese attention and made Japan aware that its policy of seeking Muslim support had its limitations (Bao 2020).

5 The PRC: Creating Its Nationality Policy (1949-90s)

In comparison to the ROC, the PRC developed a complex set of policies, laws, and rules, and established approaches and practices to manage the country's vast population, of which nearly 9% are identified as 'minority nationalities' and more than 91% are of the Han nationality, in a country with 1.4 billion population.

5.1 Early Policy and Its Theoretical Foundation

In the early days of the Chinese Communist Revolution from 1929 to 1934, the Party did not develop its own nationality policy but generally followed the Marxist principles and the nationality policy of the Soviet Union. As a party confined to limited space and with little freedom to traverse the vast territory, the CCP had little experience dealing with ethnic groups. This changed during the 'Long March'. The march forced the Communists into remote areas to flee from and evade the Nationalist pursuit. There, they encountered various minority groups whose cooperation and assistance were essential to the CCP's survival. This experience led the Party's leadership to realise the necessity of having its own nationality policy with the goal of winning the support of the broad ethnic population.

At the end of the Long March, the CCP re-established its base area of control in northern Shaanxi, a region long inhabited by many Mongol and Hui people. Not having formulated a consistent nationality policy, the CCP nonetheless took on the task of reaching out to these two groups of people. On December 20, 1935, the 'Central Government of the Chinese Soviet' issued a declaration specifically addressing the Mongol population in Inner Mongolia to support their fight against the Japanese and to ask for their collaboration with the Red Army. A few days later, Mao Zedong made a speech reconfirming the message previously issued:

The minority people, particularly the Mongols in Inner Mongolia, are under the direct threat of Japanese imperialism. They are rising in their struggle. Their future is tied closely to the struggle of Chinese people in north China and the struggle of the Red Army in China's northwest. (Quoted in Yasui 1989)

With the Hui people in Ningxia, the Party had a different call. Ningxia at the time was outside the path of the Japanese advancement, and the CCP appealed for Hui's support of the Party's political and social agenda of land reform.

After the outbreak of the all-out Anti-Japanese War, the CCP gradually developed its United Front policy, which, in regard to ethnic

minorities, aimed to gain support to fight against Japan as well as rivals against the Nationalist government. Under this policy, the CCP declared its respect for the special characteristics of the minority peoples in terms of religion, languages, and social customs. It recognised the existing political system and leadership of the ethnic minorities and promised them complete equality under the law. The core of the policy was still under the influence of the Soviet Union, which recognised national self-determination.

In the Sixth special session of the CCP's Sixth National Congress held in November 1938, Mao Zedong made the following remarks:

[We] allow equal rights to Mongol, Hui, Tibetan, Miao, Yao, and Yi people with the Han. Under the principle of a United Front against the Japanese, minority people have the right to administer their own affairs and establish a united country with the Han. (Quoted in Chen 1986)

The CCP's implementation of this policy was first aimed at the Mongols in Inner Mongolia and the Hui people in Ningxia. The Party established a 'Mongolian Working Commission' and a 'Frontier Stabilisation Working Commission' to investigate the economic and social conditions for each group, respectively. In Yan'an, the Party created a training centre for the youth of minority peoples. Later, the Party established self-governing Mongol and Hui counties and villages. These policy developments laid the foundation of CCP's nationality policy after it won political control of the whole country in 1949 (Yasui 1989).

5.2 The Three Pillars of the Nationality Policy Since the 1950s

With the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, a more systematic nationality policy was developed by the CCP. At the core of the policy was the principle of equality among peoples, or *minzu*, recognising their unique identities distinguishable from the Han people. This was in contrast to the Nationalist argument that China was home to only the 'Chinese people' (*Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族), and other groups were merely sub-varieties of a 'common heritage' (*zongzu* 宗族).

Still under the influence of Marxism and the Soviet example, the CCP initiated the 'Ethnic Identification project', or *minzu shibie* (民族识别), as the first of the three main pillars of its nationality strategy. Over a course of three decades, this project engaged many Chinese social scientists, who travelled into the areas where minority peoples lived, to identify and determine ethnonational composition of the country. Out of more than 400 groups applying for the *minzu* identity, 56 distinct peoples emerged as the 'finalists'. The phrase of "56

minzu” came into being in 1979, when the 56th group, that of Jinuo people (*Jinuo* 基诺族) was added to the list of 55. Despite criticism of the soundness of the investigation, this number and definition became official and is widely used in the present day (Mullaney 2012).

The second major pillar in China's ethnonational management was the establishment of 'autonomous regions' under the principle of self-governance for ethnic minorities. In fact, two years before the founding of the new regime, the CCP had already established an 'Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region'. After the founding of the PRC, four other autonomous regions were established. These five autonomous regions were top-level administrative units, equivalent to provinces. At the second administrative level were 31 autonomous prefectures, overseeing about 120 autonomous counties and banners with several thousands of townships. These autonomous regions occupy 64% of the total territories of China (Chen 2002).

The theoretic foundation for the establishment of all autonomous units was laid by Li Weihai (李维汉), who served as Minister of the United Front Department at the time. Li was not agreeable to the adoption of the Soviet model of 'Nationality Republics'. He insisted that the best policy was the creation of autonomous units under a centralised national government. He explained that China's minorities often had mixed habitation, and the total number of ethnic minorities occupied a relatively low percentage of China's total population. The conditions, therefore, were different from the Soviet Union. He further argued that ethnic minorities in China were a part of China's revolutionary process to expel imperialist influence and gain national unity and liberation. Therefore, the ethnic minorities must first achieve a 'democratic revolution' to abolish serfdom and feudal institutions. Then, the second step of the revolution would be 'socialist', in the realisation of socialism (Li Wei-han, quoted in Chen 1986).

Li's suggestions were accepted by the CCP leadership, and the framework was reflected in 'The Common Programmes' of China's People's Political Consultative Congress adopted in September 1949. It stated: "In areas inhabited by national minorities, the programme of self-governance be implemented. In accordance with the number of population, various autonomous units will be established". This principle of self-governance for national minorities was adopted into the country's basic law in 1952, and later written into the Constitution of the PRC in 1954. However, the process of setting up various autonomous regions was not without dispute. The best example was Guangxi, which was inhabited by numerous minorities with no clear majority among them. For the establishment of a single autonomous region, a great deal of effort was made to create a new identity, the Zhuang ethnicity, incorporating several closely related minority groups. The result was the establishment of the 'Guangxi Zhuang Nationality Autonomous Region' (Kaup 2000).

The development of the autonomous regions demanded leaders from these groups who would head the top administrative position in their governments. Cadre training became both necessary and urgent. In 1951 in Beijing, a 'Central Nationality College' (*Zhonghua minzu xueyuan* 中央民族学院) was established, marking the beginning of such an endeavour. In the following decade, more than ten nationality colleges were set up in China's northwestern, southwestern, and southern regions. In 1978, the central government announced that about 800,000 minority cadres were trained. This educational work was temporarily halted during the Cultural Revolution, but it was resumed from the early 1980s with greater scope. By 1988, the government declared that a total of 1.8 million minority cadres were trained to serve as administrative and technical officials in their respective regions (Chen 1989). The number reached 3 million by the year 2004.

In addition to the training programmes, the central government also established a 'Nationality Affairs Commission' under the State Council. This Commission was supposed to direct all major affairs relating to minority regions. However, due to China's political system, the ultimate authority of state affairs lies with the Communist Party, particularly the Party's Central Committee and its Politburo. The Central Committee of the CCP had already created an executive committee to take charge of nationality affairs. Membership in the executive committee also included a few chosen from ethnic minority leaders.

In principle, training ethnic minority cadres and officials to administer the affairs of minority regions would be a positive policy. The trained cadres would serve as the medium or bridge connecting the Beijing government to respective regions and the peoples living there, and would bring to the attention of the central government any issues needed to be addressed. However, in reality, minority cadres often find themselves between two hard choices. In performing their duties, their loyalties could cause them to either lose their official position or earn disrespect from the people they call their own. This conundrum is further complicated by the presence of a large number of Han officials among them, some of whom may be their superiors.

The Third Pillar is a set of preferential policies only applicable to and possible to be enjoyed by ethnic minorities. In three areas these policies illustrate unequivocally the preferential nature of the pillar's intention. First, the central government provides financial incentives, investment, various subsidies, and other assistance to these areas. Without the support from the central government, the local governments would not have enough funds to cover their expenses. For example, in 2008, the financial assistance from the government to a local government amounted to nearly 440 million RMB, the local financial incomes stood at almost 220 million RMB, and the local government's expenses came to nearly 650 million RMB (Li, Qian s.d.).

The ethnic minority peoples also enjoy preferential treatment in the following areas: college education, job promotion, and birth rate. For the first two categories, a minority person can be admitted to college and promoted in job rank with a lower grade point or by adding additional points based on minority status - privileges not afforded to a Han peer. For birth rate, during the time when Han Chinese were strictly under the restriction of the one-child policy, minority peoples were allowed to have two children, and even when families exceeded two children, they were not subjected to local authorities' similar draconian treatment of the Han. This last privilege is moot now as China has reversed its controlling birth policy to a policy encouraging multiple births.

Even the penal code regards criminal acts by a minority person differently. The central government in 1984 approved the 'two less and one more (leniency)' policy (*liang shao yi kuan* 两少一宽): less arrest, less pursuit, and even when arrested, apply greater level of leniency.

These preferential policies purely based on *minzu* identity inevitably generates criticisms from the majority Han population. 'Unequal treatment', 'reverse discrimination', 'unfair', and even 'illegal' and 'unconstitutional' - these terms express discontent and resentment towards these preferential policies by the Han.

5.3 Continuing Tensions

5.3.1 China's National Unity Vs. Minorities' Regional Autonomy

The CCP policy of equality for all nationalities and the principle of regional self-governance were gradually formulated in the 1950s. However, the policy was suspended during the Cultural Revolution. In fact, the section dealing with autonomy for ethnic minorities was deleted from the Constitution. After the end of the Cultural Revolution, the CCP once again placed emphasis on its nationality policy. The introduction to the newly revised Constitution in 1982 states:

The Chinese People's Republic is a united multi-ethnic country founded by all nationalities. Equality, unity, and mutual assistance under socialist ethnic relations have been firmly established and will continue to strengthen. In the struggle for national unity, we are against Greater Han Nationalism, and at the same time we are against local nationalism. Our state will do its best to promote the prosperity of all nationalities in the country.

In the Guideline of Chapter One of the 1982 Constitution, emphasis is placed on the protection of all legal rights of ethnic minorities, and it forbids discrimination and oppression against them. It allows the

establishment of autonomous administrative units in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities. And it guarantees the freedom of using their respective spoken and written languages, as well as the freedom to seek reform of their own customs. Freedom of religion was mentioned in the Constitution in general, with no particular reference to ethnic minorities (Benson, Svanberg 1998).

In 1984, China proclaimed the 'Law of National Autonomy' (*minzu quyu zizhifa* 民族区域自治法). It made no major change to the nationality policy adopted since the 1950s, reiterating the principle of equality and self-governance of the minorities. However, in Chapter Six of this 1984 *zizhifa* (自治法), under the title "Leadership and Assistance from the Superior Government Offices" (*shangji guojia jiguan de lingdao he bangzhu* 上级国家机关的领导和帮助), "Leadership and Assistance" is highlighted, implying government help is available to the ethnic minorities in developing a social system aligning to the Han majority. Obviously, the revived nationality policy did not resolve the contradiction between central control and regional autonomy or desire for political unity and respect for cultural diversity. In later years, when conflicts emerged in these regions, the government often relied on its authority to 'render guidance and assistance' to ethnic minorities, but it placed respect for their right of self-governance in a secondary position.

This is where the core problem rests: maintaining a balance between national unity and the regional autonomy of ethnic minorities. While the central government proclaims an even-handed policy of remaining simultaneously vigilant against 'Greater Han Nationalism' or 'Han Chauvinism' (*dahanzuzhuyi* 大汉族主义), and against 'regional (Nationalist) separatism' (*difang/minzu fenliezhuyi* 地方/民族分裂主义), its implementation of the policy inevitably vacillates between the two poles under different times, circumstances, and priority considerations (Yang 1990).

5.3.2 Han Migration into Minority Areas

Migration of the Han people into minority areas has its historical precedence but has become an acutely contested issue in the last few decades. The Qing court, in the early years of the dynasty, proclaimed a strict prohibition on Han immigration to Manchuria. Manchuria was considered the ancestral holy land for the Manchus. However, the prohibition became relaxed over the slow decline of the power of the Qing court, and it practically ended by the early years of the twentieth century. The attitude of the Qing court had changed in regard to Han immigration to Manchuria due mainly to the growing pressure from foreign imperialist powers, particularly from Russia and Japan. The net result was the mass migration of the Han people

from nearby provinces to Manchuria. This trend continued through the early years of the Republican period, with the Han farming population migrating to less populated areas of the Yellow River Loop and Manchuria in the North, and to Guangxi and Yunnan in the South. On the whole, such massive migration was voluntary and not sponsored or operated by the government.

The Han migration to frontier regions virtually stopped in the 1930s and 1940s due essentially to wars: the Anti-Japanese War and the civil war. After the establishment of the PRC, peace and social order was restored, as was the resumption of Han migration to frontier regions. The central government never formally declared a policy in favour of the migration, probably due to its concern about the sensitivity of the issue. However, judging from the massive number involved, we can safely assume that Beijing was aware of the situation and the leadership of those provinces and regions concerned probably gave their tacit approval. On one hand such migration could relieve the population pressure from densely populated provinces, and on the other hand the immigrants could help develop the local economy of the more sparsely populated regions. The other important element that the Chinese government must have viewed favourably was that the growth of the Han population in frontier regions could shift the balance of Han-minority population ratio, strengthening the centripetal trend in the frontier regions.

The Han population growth in Xinjiang after 1949 illustrates how several factors converged to create the result. In late 1949 during the final stage of the civil war, units of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) entered Xinjiang and reached a 'peaceful liberation' of the region when the Nationalist Army in garrison duties surrendered en masse. The surrendered soldiers were quickly integrated into PLA units, and most of them were ordered to serve their garrison duties in various parts of Xinjiang. In the early 1950s, with the regime consolidated and peace secured, a large number of PLA soldiers in the region were demobilised and transferred to work in the newly established 'Xinjiang Plantation and Construction Corps' (*Xinjiang shengchan jianshe bingtuan* 新疆生产建设兵团). It is said that out of 200,000 soldiers in the Xinjiang Military Region (*Xinjiang junqu* 新疆军区), 175,000 were incorporated into the Corps, along with their families. This decision was driven by a military-strategic consideration as Xinjiang borders the Soviet Union, as well as an economic opportunity to reclaim more land for farming. 'Reclamation and garrison' (*tunken shubian* 屯垦戍边) is thus at the core of the Corps' creation and its continued existence.

There were two additional major influxes of the Han population into Xinjiang. Between 1959 and 1961, the devastating consequences of the Great Leap Forward created a severe problem of famine. Tens of thousands of impoverished peasant families moved to east-

ern Xinjiang to avoid starvation. At the time, it was called *mang-liu* (盲流) or 'involuntary movement' of people. Within a few short years the Han population increased rapidly in eastern Xinjiang (Tian, Lin 1986). Then, with the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in the mid-1960s, the policy of sending a large number of urban educated youth to be "re-educated" in rural areas moved many Han youths to frontier regions, including Xinjiang. Between 1963 and 1966, Shanghai alone may have sent 80,000 to 90,000 youths to Xinjiang. However, most of these 'sent-down youths' returned to their home cities after the Cultural Revolution.

In the forty years from 1950s to the 1990s, there was mass migration of the Han to frontier regions. The most drastic change took place in Inner Mongolia, where the total percentage of the Mongol population dropped from 25% to 8%, while the Han population rose from 75% to 82% (Benson, Svanberg 1998). In Xinjiang, the percentage of all minority nationalities, including Uyghurs, Kazaks, Mongol, and Hui dropped from 90% to 60% and the Han population increased from 8% to 40% (Benson, Svanberg 1998). The changes in Tibet were not as drastic, probably due to its high plateau climate that was not suitable for the farming life of the Han. Until the early 1980s, the Han population in Tibet was essentially limited to party, government, and military personnel. After China shifted to an open and reformist policy in the 1980s, Tibet began to attract a larger number of Han immigrants who were involved in the development of tourism. However, the Han were basically concentrated in Lhasa and a few big cities in Tibet (Heberer 1989).

The ratio clearly indicates the Han nationality's growing presence in the minority regions, but it does not reveal the growth of minority populations. As explained earlier, the 'one child' policy successfully curtailed the growth of the majority Han population but was largely disregarded in minority regions. Xinjiang, for example, had a Han population numbering 5.13 million in 1978, while the Uyghur population was 5.55 million. In the population figure for Xinjiang in 2019, the Han population numbered 7.85 million while the Uyghur population had increased to 11.67 million.¹ With the rapid population increase of minority nationalities compounded by continued influxes of the Han population, this combination is likely to intensify the tension in the minority regions and set off crises. It will severely challenge Beijing's ability to continue to navigate in the very treacherous course; it may also provide a great opportunity for the regime to devise a more balanced policy to accommodate desires of all inhabitants.

¹ National Bureau of Statistics of China publishes the official census at <http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/Statisticaldata/CensusData/>. *Zhongguo minzu tongji nianjian* 中国民族统计年鉴 (Statistical Yearbook of Chinese Ethnic Groups) can be found at <http://www.tjcn.org>.

In reviewing the history of China's nationality policy under the PRC, we realise that the policy has been inconsistent, changing from time to time due to the political environment. During the first thirty years of the CCP's rule, the desire for national cohesion was the priority, followed by the aspiration of a social revolution. The control of the frontier regions was under the military, and the rule over local inhabitants high-handed. Beginning in the 1980s, as the country moved to its 'Reform and Opening-up' era, the nationality policy shifted away from the legacy of the Cultural Revolution and showed signs of being more balanced, as indicated by the 1982 Constitution reaffirming the principle of ethnic autonomy. There are signs that the relative 'liberal' nationality policy in the 1980s and 1990s is changing. However, this is a contemporary issue beyond the scope of this essay.

6 Conclusions

China became a truly multi-ethnic state under a centralised government during the Qing dynasty. The Manchus, a minority nationality ruling the Chinese majority, were conscientious of the nationality problem. They developed a nationality policy that was not based on the principle of equality, giving preferential treatment to Mongols and Tibetans while handling Muslims forcefully. But this was a practical policy, clearly designed to garner support, and prevent and suppress opposition. In practice, the Manchus would not hesitate to adjust their policy from one of conciliation to one of severe punishment. This policy ensured loyalty and obedience to the ruling élite and secured the dynasty's vast frontier territories for more than two centuries.

A fundamental weakness in this policy was its ultra-conservative aim of the maintenance of the status quo, with no desire to make changes to the system. It is questionable if such a policy could be maintained in the twentieth century, even if the Qing dynasty did not fall in 1911. This policy failed to recognise the more precipitate economic and social changes taking place in Mongolia and Tibet, as well as the increasing identity trend of Mongols and Tibetans in their own national consciousness.

The special favour accorded to Mongols and Tibetans by the Qing court was not offered to other ethnic minority people. In fact, the Qing nationality policy towards other ethnic minorities was exploitative and oppressive, resulting in severe dissatisfaction among those minority peoples. After the Qing power declined, these minority peoples often rebelled openly against the government. Such rebellions became a major source of political disturbance during the latter half of the Qing dynasty. Therefore, on the whole, it is difficult to consider the Qing nationality policy successful.

The fall of the Qing dynasty immediately caused political uncertainty in Mongolia and Tibet. The old loyalty and ties were broken, and the Mongol and Tibetan leaders soon declared their independence and separation from the newly established Republican government in China. The interference of foreign imperialist powers made the situation more complex, and the new central government was too weak to take back those territories by force. Eventually a compromise was reached for Mongolia and Tibet to loosely recognise China's suzerainty and each kept their own *de facto* independence.

After the founding of the Republican government, the political leaders embraced Sun Yat-sen's idea of the equality of the Five Nationalities. However, the central government did not include minority leaders in governance of the country, and the principle of setting up 'nationality self-government' remained a lip service. While Beiyang government was too weak and too involved in civil strife to give attention to nationality problems in the country, the Nanjing government did not earnestly promote the Principle of Nationalism that involved minority nationalities. Like the Beiyang government, the Nanjing regime did not have much time to develop its own nationality policy, and the outbreak of the war against Japan stalled the Nationalist nation-building effort in this respect.

Soon after the CCP came to power and established the PRC in 1949, it began to formulate a nationality policy on the foundation of the principle of minority self-governance. Rather quickly, the central government organised and sponsored groups of social scientists to conduct field investigations of the situation of ethnic minorities in the country. This project ultimately identified 56 nationalities.

The project [...] was neither a Communist-imposed scheme whose ethnological dimensions can be dismissed as pseudoscience, nor a purely social scientific endeavor that can be treated apart from the broader history of modern Chinese ethnopolitics. (Mullaney 2012)

At the same time, various autonomous administrative units were established. However, the implementation of this nationality policy often came into conflict with the highly centralised Party organisation. When such conflict happened, the Party authority made final determination. The state also began programmes for the training of minority cadres and officials. Similarly, the coexistence of Han officials often curtailed the power of minority cadres. The nationality policy was severely limited in its implementation.

Another serious problem in the nationality policy of the PRC was the shift from an early policy of seeking collaboration of traditional leaders in the minority regions to a 'revolutionary policy' of socialist construction. It caused a great deal of confusion for the people and cadres in the minority regions. Many minority cadres and

officials were placed in an uneasy position of whether to obey orders from the Party or retain a sense of loyalty to their own tradition in their own community.

One other practical problem in the nationality policy was Han migration to minority regions. Although such migration had happened in historical times, the massive number of Han migrants to frontier regions during the first two decades of CCP rule was significantly different. The migrants included military and Party personnel and members of farming families from overly populated areas not far from frontier regions. Later on, the political movement of sending down educated youth to rural areas also reached more remote frontier regions. After the 1980s, when the Party changed its policy to an emphasis on economic development, frontier minority regions attracted many Han people to invest and work in the tourist industry. Decades of Han migration to minority regions changed the population ratio and caused suspicion from the minorities. It also sowed seeds for racial conflict and raised serious doubt about the sincerity of the central government's attitude of respect to the minority peoples.

As this essay outlines, Chinese powers recognised the diversity of peoples among the country's population. The Qing rulers were the first to attempt formulating and implementing a nationality policy. Subsequent regimes developed respective policies based on the legacy of the Qing and other political frameworks. We have seen how the various governments, with different objectives, favoured or suppressed different ethnic populations accordingly. Today, the same opposing considerations for the Chinese government remain intact: the competing interests for central control and regional autonomy, and for political unity with equal respect for cultural diversity.

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