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# A Han vs. Minorities Dual Structure of Chinese Society

MA Rong

*While the “rural vs urban dual structure” has been a key issue for decades since China’s social reform in the 1980s, the “Han vs minorities dual structure” receives scant attention in contemporary China. In the latter, Chinese citizens are differentiated by aspects of ethnic identity, administrative units, academic disciplines, education and even in arenas like entertainment and sports. A series of preferential policies targeted at ethnic minorities has been implemented by the government, e.g., family planning, school enrolment, financial assistance, personnel promotion and even the judicature. This dual structure, based on Stalin’s theory and the Soviet system, emerged after China launched the “nationality/ethnic recognition” campaign in the 1950s. Many studies have proven that this system strengthened the “nationality” consciousness of each ethnic group but may otherwise be detrimental to national unity. This article offers a historical overview of China’s transition from a traditional “central kingdom of the earth” into a modern nation-state, and detailed discussions about the Communist Party of China’s new ideological framework on the “nationality/ethnic question”, as well as the role that the “Han vs minorities dual structure” plays in contemporary China.*

In academic studies of social structure and discourse relating to social contradictions in contemporary China, most attention has been focussed on the “urban vs. rural dual structure”.<sup>1</sup> Poverty alleviation in rural areas and the issues of rural migrant labourers in cities, which have become the focus of government’s policy-making and social concern in recent decades, are being discussed under the institutionalised framework of this dual structure. The residential registration system, implemented countrywide in the 1950s, divided Chinese citizens into two distinct groups of rural and urban residents. The system instituted differential treatment to rural and urban residents in the provision of housing, medical care, education, employment and other welfare benefits. This dual social structure gained traction when China was initially a centralised planned economy. Since the economic reform and opening up that resulted in an influx of hundreds of millions of rural people into the cities as well as a huge

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<sup>1</sup> The “dualism” and the “dual economic model” were first introduced by A. Lewis in 1954. In this model, a “dual structure” for developing countries is made up of a traditional agricultural sector in rural areas and a modern industrial sector in urban areas.

population movement between rural and urban areas, the question of breaking through the dual social structure to ensure that rural residents enjoy equal treatment becomes imperative. Many Chinese sociologists, economists, demographers and political scientists are using this analytical framework to examine the access to justice, the residential registration system reform, abolishing inequalities between urban and rural residents, and China's new urbanisation model.

This article discusses a different “dual structure” of segmentation within the Chinese society — the systemic institutionalised separation between Han and “ethnic minority” citizens in various spheres. I maintain that this type of group differentiation, which is prevalent and does exist objectively, has simultaneously divided the Chinese society into two dimensions, thus not only disrupting the building of the Chinese national identity, but causing social contradictions, conflicts of interest, lack of cultural understanding and even inciting national separatism.

## THE DUAL SEPARATION OF HAN AND “ETHNIC MINORITIES”: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

Among China's various ethnic groups, the Han people, who originally lived in the central plains region and since moved beyond and increased in population over the past 2,000 years, constitute the main ethnic group of China. According to China's 2010 census, the Han population is 1.226 billion, accounting for 91.5 per cent of the total Chinese population. The Han mainly live in the central and coastal regions with a very high population density while major minority groups live in the western part of China, which is geographically made up of mainly deserts, grassland, mountains and plateaus at around 3,000 to 4,000 metres above sea level. The geographic distribution of the various ethnic groups forms the spatial pattern of the “Han vs minorities dual system”.

The Qing dynasty (1644–1911) established by the Manchu group was the last multi-ethnic dynasty in Chinese history. It was weakened by a series of Western imperialist invasions (starting with the 1840 “Opium War”) and internal rebellion. Serious social crises and the introduction of Western ideologies of “race” and “nationalism” caused the Chinese people to make significant adjustments to their identity. Towards the end of the Qing dynasty, the Han revolutionary parties (e.g., *Xin Zhong Hui*) — which embraced nationalism but with racist tendencies — promoted the radical slogan of “expelling the barbarian Manchu, restoring China” (*Quchu Dalu, Huifu Zhonghua*).<sup>2</sup> After the 1911 Revolution, Sun Yat-sen proposed the founding of a “republic of five groups” (*wuzhu gonghe*), advocating the “joining [of] the homelands of Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui (Muslims) and Tibetan into one country, joining the various groups of Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui and Tibetan into

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<sup>2</sup> Sun Longji, *Meridian of Historians* (in Chinese) (Guilin: Press of Guangxi Normal University, 2004).

one nation, and it is called national unification".<sup>3</sup> He was clearly announcing that all ethnic groups under the Qing dynasty should be unified as the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*) in the "nation-building" process of China, which would re-establish China as the modern form of "nation-state".<sup>4</sup>

However, from the late Qing dynasty onwards, the concept of "nation" (in Chinese, "*minzu*"), has also been applied to various ethnic groups (the Manchu, Tibetans, Muslims, etc.) within China besides the original definition in the context of "Chinese nation". Many ethnic groups were also called "nations" (*minzu*) by Western scholars and governments in their writings and documents, such as "Han nation" (*Han minzu*), "Manchu nation" (*Manchu minzu*) and "Tibetan nation" (*Zang minzu*). The inconsistent terms used for referring to the various ethnic groups in China were also translated into Chinese and adopted by Chinese scholars in their writings, and this caused great difficulty in conveying a unified perspective and definition of "nation" among the Chinese people. In order to clear the confusion, both the Peking government (1911–1928) of the early Republic period and the Nanjing Chiang Kai-shek's government (1928–1949) strongly insisted that there is only one "nation" in China, that is the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*). They did not recognise other minority groups as "nations" or "nationalities", but only as lineage branches (ethnic minorities) of the Chinese nation, neither did they formulate any systematic "nationality policies" in the administration. In the entire Republican period (1911–1949), teaching materials in public schools were standardised throughout the country, speaking only of the "Chinese nation" (*Zhonghua minzu*), and thereby laying down the foundation of the modern nation-state, constructed on the basis of collectively grouped "Chinese nation" (*Zhonghua minzu*).

The Communist Party of China's (CPC) "nationality" (*minzu*) policy was different from that of the Republican government. Its policy can be traced back to its founding period in the 1920s when it espoused Stalin's theory and the Soviet model of "nationality formulation". After the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the CPC adopted various aspects of the Soviet model in the setting up of the new administration: party-government relations, residential registration, education system, military, healthcare system, etc. In 1949, the *Common Programme* of the People's Political Consultative Conference mentioned the establishment of a united "multinationality (ethnic) republic" (*duo minzu guojia*), ascertaining "nationality (ethnic) regional autonomy" as the basic system to solve the Chinese "nationality (ethnic) question". Although the CPC's "regional autonomy" is different from the federal system of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), it adhered to the Soviet model's basic theory of "nationality", system setting and policy formulation. In the

<sup>3</sup> Sun Zhongshan, *Sun Zhongshan Wenji (Collection of Sun Yat-sen)* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Ma Rong, "A New Perspective in Guiding Ethnic Relations in the 21st Century: 'De-Politicizing' of Ethnicity in China", *Asian Ethnicity* 8, no. 3 (2007): 199–218, 212.

1950s, a “nationality (ethnic) recognition” campaign was launched, officially recognising 56 “nationalities”,<sup>5</sup> which became the foundation in developing the series of policies towards “nationality (ethnic) minorities”. The terminology and system devised for ethnic groups by the old Republic had been changed accordingly, and since then, the Chinese term “*minzu*” has been applied at two levels: one is “*Zhonghua minzu*” (Chinese nation), and the other is 56 “*minzu*” within China (including Han and 55 minority groups (*shaoshu minzu*)), which has caused much confusion in shaping national identity.

The Constitution of the PRC and ensuing legal documents stipulate that all nationality (ethnic) groups of China be entitled equal status and rights. The Constitution also explicitly stipulated how to establish autonomous areas for minorities, and the proportional quota of minorities in local government organs, etc.<sup>6</sup> The “nationality recognition” campaign led to the identification of the “nationality (ethnic) status” for each Chinese citizen in his or her residence registration and in other identification documents. Five autonomous regions (at provincial level), 30 autonomous prefectures, 120 counties (banners) and a number of autonomous *xiang* (towns) were established according to the population size of the particular ethnic minority and its population density in the settlement areas. It should be highlighted that the minority population does not have to constitute a majority in the local population in order to set up an autonomous area, and that ethnic minorities can establish their autonomous areas even though they constitute only about 10 to 20 per cent of the local population. This explains why ethnic minorities made up only 5.8 per cent of the Chinese population in the 1964 census<sup>7</sup> while the autonomous areas together cover 64 per cent of the Chinese territory. Therefore, China is divided into two geographic administrations: the provinces and autonomous areas. Every ethnic minority group has its own “autonomous area”, and is entitled to equal rights with respect to language, religion, customs, education and economic development, etc.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Nationality” is the term the USSR used to refer to “minorities” in the English translation of Stalin’s works. After the founding of the PRC, the term “nationality” in English was also used widely in China in its translation to refer to the 56 groups upon their official recognition. The State Ethnic Affairs Commission of China (*Guojia Minzu shiwu weiyuanhui*) was previously known and translated as the “State Commission of Nationality Affairs”. Today, the English word “nationality” can still be found in the names of many official institutions related to “minorities” (e.g., bureaus, universities and research institutes, etc.). Referring to the common terminology used in Western countries related to racial and ethnic minorities, “minority nationalities” should be termed “ethnic minorities”. In this article, “ethnic minorities” is used to refer to “minority nationalities”, which is China’s official terminology.

<sup>6</sup> Jin Binghao and Wang Tiezhi, eds., *Zhongguo Gongchandang minzu gangling zhengce tonglun* (*General Introduction to the Nationality Policies and Outlines of the CPC*) (Harbin: Heilongjiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> The total minority population grew and its percentage share in China’s total population increased from 5.8 per cent to 8.5 per cent from 1964 to 2010, due to the high birth rate as a result of the minorities’ exemption from family planning regulations.

<sup>8</sup> The Ethnic Regional Autonomy Law was officially promulgated in 1984, but the basic principles had been in practice since the 1950s.

Since the 1950s, Chinese governments at all levels have established a series of preferential policies to benefit the ethnic minorities, who have resided in less developed border areas for a long time. The implementation of these policies had produced positive social results. It should be highlighted that these preferential policies — ranging from flexible family planning regulations, bonus points awarded at university entrance exams, education system in minority languages, cadre quota in administration of autonomous areas, financial subsidies, etc. — are applicable to “minority members” at an individual level and not based on region considerations, which therefore result in different treatment for residents within the same village but belonging to other “ethnic status”. The sentiment from ethnic minorities is obviously positive in that their “nationality (ethnic) status” has given them systemic preferential protection, while the Han people, on the other hand, attributed the reason for not being able to enjoy those preferential policies to their Han status. The Han Chinese even felt discriminated against as a result of these policies.

The 55 ethnic minority groups share, in many aspects, certain commonalities in policy-setting, which differentiated them from the Han. For example, each minority has its own “autonomous area”, but not the Han; and all levels of governments have concrete preferential policies in place for local minorities but not for the Han. This has thus precipitated the formation of “Han vs. minorities dual structure”, whereby minority citizens of the 55 ethnic groups that enjoy “regional autonomy” and preferential policies (though these differ in actual context) belong to one league, while Han citizens who do not enjoy these privileges belong to another league.

Indeed, one of the most often used words in Chinese today is “*minzu*”. The two common scenarios in which the word “*minzu*” is used in governmental documents and mass media are: when it means the “Chinese nation” culminating in a singular “nationalism” that involves the whole of China (e.g., “nationalism” in opposition to the Japanese imperialism during the War of Resistance against Japan before and during the Second World War); and when it refers to the 56 “nationality (ethnic) groups” (composed of the Han and 55 ethnic minorities), taking on the meaning of each unique “nationalism” at “*minzu*” level (e.g., “Han nationalism”, “regional minority nationalism”). The dual meaning of the word “*minzu*” is widely understood in China. However, the nuances of the word “*minzu*” in everyday language “Chinese nation” will not be evident for average Chinese people if they never step out of China. Meanwhile, though the preferential policies meted out to the ethnic minorities have distinctively accentuated the advantages and disadvantages of belonging to a particular “nationality (ethnic) status”. As a result, this has diluted the Chinese people’s identity consciousness of their nation.

The implementation of the “Han vs. minorities dual structure” in various aspects gave new interpretation to the terminology used for various minority groups in China. The word “*minzu*” is commonly used today to represent all non-Han minorities. For example, “*minzu*” students and “*minzu*” cadres refer to students and officers of ethnic minority origin. In “nationality theory” discourse, we refer to the mainstream Stalin theory of “nationality”, or the Western theory of ethnicity/nationalism by individual

scholars. Research on Han people cannot be subsumed under the category of “nationality theory”. Similarly, the research objective of “*minzu*” history is first and foremost the history of ethnic minorities, while the history of Han people and dynasties of the Central Plains falls under the “Chinese history” classification. “*Minzu* literature” refers primarily to literature of minorities, while the literature of successive dynasties and modern literature written in Mandarin Chinese language<sup>9</sup> all belong to the category of “Chinese literature”. In the same vein, “*minzu*” policies refer to policies that target ethnic minorities, “*minzu*” affairs are matters related to minorities, and the “*minzu*” (ethnic) affair commissions/bureaus at all administrative levels specifically manage all institutions that handle solely the affairs of ethnic minorities and do not attend to matters related to the Han. Although the “*minzu*” universities in China have started to enrol Han students in recent years, these universities were traditionally set up specifically to recruit minority students.

As evidenced by the actual and prevalent usage of the term in institutions, ethnic minorities are perceived as one assembled body that has been conveniently abbreviated as “*minzu*”, and that broad categorisation positions the Han people as another group in contrast to this body within the Chinese society. This Han-ethnic minority demarcation has already become a prescribed convention in the Chinese society. There appears to be a parallel between the “urban vs. rural dual structure” and the Han-ethnic minority demarcation in terms of social segregation and the consequences, hence the ethnic (*minzu*) division is considered as another type of “dual structure” in Chinese society.<sup>10</sup>

## SEPARATION OF STUDIES ON ETHNIC MINORITIES IN ACADEMIC CIRCLES AND ETHNIC SEPARATION IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Knowledge is imparted to students in schools, and sources of knowledge come from the school curriculum, textbooks, teachers and mandatory readings. Hence, if school graduates of the past or future generations are largely ignorant about the ethnic diversity of Chinese society, this reflects, to a great extent, deviations from the course syllabi, textbooks and extracurricular readings.

### *Ethnic Separation in Academic Communities*

The concept of hierarchy introduced by the Ministry of Education in the listing of academic disciplines forms the framework underpinnings for development of higher

<sup>9</sup> The “Mandarin” language is the common language used statewide in modern China. The term was used by foreigners, referring to the common language of the late Qing dynasty. It is also the mother tongue of several groups (Han, Manchu and Hui) and a large proportion of many other groups who also speak Mandarin. In official documents, the Mandarin language is called *putonghua* (ordinary language).

<sup>10</sup> There still exist specific questions related to the logic of this argument (for example, there are groups such as Manchu which in many aspects fall between the two categories).



education and academic activities.<sup>11</sup> Each academic discipline is pigeonholed as “field”, and then ranked accordingly as “first-tier discipline”, “second-tier”, “third-tier”, etc., under this framework. The ethnology discipline (*minzuxue*) is classified as a “first-tier discipline” under the “field of law science”. Yet, none of China’s leading comprehensive universities, such as Peking University, established ethnology discipline (*minzuxue*) as teaching and degree programmes, and none has set up a research institute that purely focuses on “ethnic studies”. What could be the reasons?

The root of this phenomenon can be traced to the changes implemented in the Chinese higher education system. In 1952, all Chinese universities carried out systematic reforms, and adopted the Soviet model of higher education. Comprehensive universities that were developed in the early 20th century and based on the United States/European model were abolished and subsequently reformed to focus on specific disciplines. In the process, sociology, anthropology and political science were considered as “bourgeois” disciplines and thus closed down.

At the same time, central/local minority colleges were established in order to train minority officers and carry out the “nationality recognition” campaign based on Stalin’s definition of “nationality”. Relevant surveys were carried out to investigate the historical background of each ethnic group, to study its spoken and written language, and to rationalise supporting principles of setting up autonomous areas. Thus “research on minorities” became very important and leading scholars who used to work in the fields of sociology and anthropology in various universities in Beijing were transferred to the Central College for Nationalities in 1952. The Chinese Academy of Sciences also established the Institute of Minority Research in the early 1950s, inducting several senior scholars from the anthropology field. “Research on ethnic groups” had since become an independent research field, not as a discipline, in central/local minority colleges.

After the death of Mao Zedong and the end of the Cultural Revolution, Deng Xiaoping led the work of making “order out of chaos”, which resulted in re-establishment of universities and student enrolment. Many disciplines including sociology, anthropology, political science, etc., were re-established in the late 1970s. In the process, research on ethnic minorities in minority colleges underwent disciplinary structure reorganisation, called “ethnology”. The ethnology discipline in today’s China is very different from the international academic tradition. In brief, anthropology and ethnology in the West share similar academic traditions and research objectives. In America and some European countries, anthropology is also known as social anthropology or cultural anthropology, while in other countries, e.g., Germany, it is called ethnology.

The ethnology discipline, which evolved in the early 1980s in China, differs from the anthropology/ethnology disciplines in the Western academic tradition in

<sup>11</sup> The Ministry of Education Secretariat of the Social Sciences Committee, ed., *Zhongguo gaoxiao shehui kexue fazhan baogao 2009* (*The 2009 Report on the Development Philosophy and Social Sciences in Chinese Universities*) (Beijing: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009).



terms of structure, academic training and thinking. There is no direct connection between ethnology and anthropology in the ranking of disciplines imposed by the State Council Office of Academic Degrees in 1997. Ethnology is an independent first-tier discipline, while anthropology is ranked as a second-tier discipline subsumed within sociology, a first-tier discipline. Under ethnology are five second-tier disciplines, namely: ethnology; Marxist nationality theory and policy; economics of Chinese ethnic minorities; history of Chinese ethnic minorities; and art of Chinese ethnic minorities. The latter four second-tier disciplines pertain to the scope of the original research on minorities, covering the theoretical aspects, economics, history and arts related to ethnic minorities. Further, the PhD programme in ethnology offered at the Central University for Minority Nationalities included several other second-tier disciplines, namely: sociology of ethnicity; principles of public administration of ethnic areas; education of ethnic minorities; political science of ethnic minorities; laws of ethnic minorities; and ethnic minority ecology. That said, the study of ethnic minorities under various humanities and social science disciplines can be integrated into independent second-tier disciplines under the ethnology discipline.

Therefore, whether it is the “research on nationalities/ethnic groups” during the 1950s to 1970s period or ethnology since the 1980s, both have defined “ethnic minorities” as the study objective. It appears that all topics associated with ethnic minorities must be included under the scope of ethnology and not in other disciplines. In addition, very few Chinese scholars from comprehensive universities in history, economics, sociology, political science, pedagogy, law and literature disciplines conduct research on ethnic minorities, because such studies are considered outside the scope of their discipline and should belong to “ethnology”. On the other hand, in consideration of competition over academic resources (e.g., funding and projects), scholars from the ethnology discipline do not welcome scholars of other disciplines to research on ethnic minorities. Through the conscious efforts of minority universities in promulgating ethnology and comprehensive universities for unconsciously and intuitively avoiding it, a separate discipline division called “ethnology-others” was formed in the Chinese higher education system.

Today, virtually all research on minorities is classified under the regular first-tier discipline of “ethnology”, and the teaching and research of it are concentrated in minority universities. This resulted in the systematic segregation of Chinese “ethnology” from the other disciplines, which became commonly accepted in comprehensive universities that had precluded studies of minorities from the scope of their research. Such a situation did not exist in Chinese universities before 1952.

In a multi-racial and multi-ethnic society, racial and ethnic relations are of major concern and are usually closely studied by academics in the humanities and social sciences. In the West, scholars from various disciplines can engage in research on ethnic groups, and they are not restricted by differentiation or division of disciplinary knowledge of ethnic groups. Many American universities, especially comprehensive ones, have established interdisciplinary “centres for racial and ethnic studies”. However, in China, disciplinary knowledge segregation is promulgated further, culminating in educational institutional separation.

*Ethnic Separation in Schools*

The Han vs. minorities dual structure exists within the higher education system in China. There are in total 14 formal minority universities in China which recruit mostly minority students. With the founding of the PRC, training a large number of minority officers from the border regions who would endorse the CPC and the PRC government was imperative. By rough estimate, about 90 per cent of all minority officers, technicians and teachers today are graduates of minority universities. They studied, lived and breathed the “minority part” of this “dual structure” and returned to work in minority areas, having in reality relatively little understanding of the Han society. The “nationality theory and policies” they learn in these universities are “Marxist theory” with Stalin’s works as the “core”. This will certainly strengthen their “nationality” consciousness of their own group, but are unfavourable in promoting their identity to the level of “Chinese nation”.

A large majority of the teaching and research faculty at minority universities as well as minority research institutes were minority graduates. Han scholars at ordinary universities rarely interact with minority scholars or engage in ethnic minorities research, hence they naturally show little interest in publication of minority studies. Connections and influences among minority universities have therefore resulted in “a small inner circle” being formed within the “minority part” of the “dual structure” in academic communities. Despite the location of these minority universities either in Beijing or other major cities, they continue to adhere to principles of mutual segregation of the dual system, confining their communication and academic exchange on their research publications within the enclosed university walls.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that in order to protect and develop minority languages and culture, the Chinese government set up a school system for minorities that runs parallel to the ordinary schools that use Mandarin as language of instruction. In many autonomous regions, local governments set up a “minority education system” across the board from kindergartens to universities. An important characteristic of these schools is that minority teachers use local minority language as the medium of instruction and adopt textbooks in their minority language. There are very few Han teachers and students in these schools.

In this respect, the “ethnic segregation” in the Chinese school system brought two negative consequences. First, minority students learn to master their mother tongue, but their proficiency in Mandarin language skills is weak since all knowledge and subjects are taught in their mother tongue. In job and labour markets, both in urban and town areas, ethnic minorities are expected to attain proficiency in Mandarin to communicate with co-workers and customers. Graduates of minority schools thus face great difficulty in their job searches. Second, the minority schools’ environment is hardly conducive to fostering knowledge exchange with the Han society and the mainstream, which then leads to a lack of mutual cultural understanding and poses challenges for minority students to integrate with society.

The disciplinary knowledge segregation differentiating the subject of research into minorities and Han, and school segregation based on ethnic status eventually evolved

into social segregation delineated by ethnicity — Han scholars, students and ordinary people do not know much and gradually care less and less about the minorities, while minority scholars communicate mainly among themselves, and are unable to integrate into the mainstream society. The use of minority language as the medium of instruction from primary school to university has also created “ethnic segregation” in both the software (language used as the medium of instruction) and hardware (divided campuses with teachers/students of the same ethnic group) of educational institutions. If this segregation is not addressed, it will have adverse effects on promoting cultural exchange among various groups and cohesion of the “Chinese nation”.

### *Enrolment and Training of Minority Students*

Minority intellectuals do play an important role in strengthening national cohesion. Minority officers are also graduates from the minority education system, which should place an emphasis on the complete transformation of minority intellectuals from “elites of their own ethnic group” into “national elites of China”. One way to effect the transformation is to gradually dismantle the dual structure in the education system. Another way is to expand the enrolment of minority students in top universities.

Many American leaders from the political, academic and business circles were educated in top universities. Nurturing and educating talented ethnic minorities in top universities to become “national elites” has a positive impact on race relations. For example, US President Barack Obama graduated from the Harvard Law School. The Ivy League universities are known to put a high emphasis on maintaining ethnic diversity in student admissions. As shown in Table 1, students from minority backgrounds accepted by the six Ivy League universities constituted 34 to 42 per cent of the total number of new students recruited annually from 2006 to 2009. In 2006, non-whites constituted 31 per cent of the total US population. In other words, the percentage of ethnic minority students accepted by these top American universities was significantly higher than the proportion of minorities in the total population. This can be explained by the abolition of school segregation during the “civil rights movement” in the 1960s and the related act on “affirmative action”, which allowed youths from minority groups to study in prominent primary and secondary schools, thereby laying the foundation for their admission into renowned educational institutions. Coupled with the implementation of preferential policies in the admission exercises of these top universities, there has been a high proportion of accepted minority students in the top universities in recent years. Besides intellectual development at Harvard and other universities; these minority students shared social bonds with their white teachers and schoolmates and deeply identified with the American spirit. These minority graduates should no longer be considered “Afro-American elites” for example, but as American “national elites”. Finally, a black president was elected by a high number of votes. This was not a historical coincidence, but a necessary outcome attributed to the efforts of American universities, particularly the eminent ones, to develop the potential of students of minority descent.

TABLE 1  
ENROLMENT OF ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS IN SIX IVY LEAGUE UNIVERSITIES (% 2006–2009)

	Harvard	Yale	Princeton	Brown	Pennsylvania	Dartmouth
2006	Black 8.9%	Ethnic minority 42	No data	Coloured 33	No data	Ethnic minority 37
2007	Black 10.2 Asian 16.2 Hispanic 3.6 Porto Rican 1.5 Other Western 3.7 Indigenous 1	Ethnic minority (not including 5 foreign students) 35	Ethnic minority 34	Coloured 35	Among them: Black 8.97 Hispanic 7.21 Native American 0.44	Among them: Asian 17.2 Black 10.15
Total	36.2	35	34	35	39.14	39
2008	Asian 18.9 (highest percentage) Black 10.3 Hispanic 9.5 (highest in history)	42 ethnic minority students (including 5% foreign students)	35 Ethnic minority students	Black 9 Asian 15 Western 9 Indigenous 2	Among them: Black 8.85 Hispanic 6.46 Indigenous 0.402	Among them: Black 9.1 Asian 16.1 Indigenous 2.9 Racially mixed 1.1
Total	38.7	38	35	35	37	36.7
2009	Black 10.5 Asian 17.8 Western 8.2 Indigenous slightly > 1	42 ethnic minority students (including 5 foreign students)	42 Ethnic minority students	No data	Black 9.38	The enrolment rate increased considerably for Black, Asian, Indigenous, Hispanic, Western, exact data not known
Total	37.5	38	42	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown

Source: <<http://ivysuccess.com/index.html>> [Dec. 2010]

In contrast, the questions to ponder for China's case are whether Peking University and other top universities actually vigorously recruit minority students, and when these universities will be capable of educating and moulding students of minority backgrounds (Tibetan, Uyghur, Mongol, etc.) into the highest state leaders. Students of Tibetan and Uyghur descent constituted less than one per cent of Peking University and Tsinghua University's total student admissions from 2005 to 2010. If the ethnic minority schools and universities continue to focus on educating minority students as "minority elites" with a strong sense of ethnic identity instead of "national elites" of the Chinese nation, and top Chinese universities make little effort to admit minority students, then the foundations upon which the unity of all ethnic groups and national unity are built will not be firm.

## NATIONALITY SEPARATION IN GOVERNMENT

The State Ethnic Affairs Commission, established by the central government, is one of the various ministries/commissions of the State Council, and the local governments also set up Ethnic Affairs Commissions with functions parallel to those of other professional bureaus. Issues related to minorities are under the ambit of the Ethnic Affairs Commission. That said, "professional segregation" is introduced at each level of government, separating "affairs of ethnic minorities" from the bureaus that handle "other affairs" (e.g., finance, trade, personnel, taxation, construction, etc.). Within the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, there are eight bureaus assigned with the following functions: (i) international liaison, (ii) finance, (iii) economic development, (iv) education and development of science, (v) policy and law, (vi) culture, (vii) personnel appointment, and (viii) general administration. These bureaus are responsible for ethnic minorities in their scope of service, whereas the various ministries take charge of Han affairs. Similar administrative structures can be found in the Ethnic Affairs Commissions at the local government level.

There are both advantages and disadvantages in such organisational and institutional arrangements. Ethnic Affairs Commissions are staffed by minority officers who have empathy for the rights and benefits of minorities. They are also familiar with the government policies towards minorities, and have expertise in minority history, language, religion and customs. The disadvantage is that "professional segmentation" leads to neglect, disinterest and lack of review in minority-related work by other government departments. In the course of time, this has significantly reduced the knowledge and understanding of ethnic minorities among other government employees.

Since the 1950s, the state established autonomous administrative units of all levels (province, prefecture, county and *xiang*/town/district) in places of high minority populations. This system led to the emergence of two distinct types of administrative units: autonomous areas and non-autonomous areas (Han areas). The state promulgated the Law on Ethnic Regional Autonomy, policies on governments of autonomous areas (ethnic composition of officers, tax and financial subsidies, etc.)

and policies towards “principal ethnic groups” of particular autonomous locales (family planning, bonus points on school exams, etc.), which differ from policies in non-autonomous regions. The establishment of “autonomous” and “non-autonomous” regions created a geographically-based dual “spatial segregation”.

Not all inhabitants of the autonomous areas, however, belong to the “principal ethnic group”, and many minorities in fact live and work in Han areas. Regardless of whether it is the Han and “non-principal” minority populations in the autonomous areas or minority populations in the Han areas, people feel that the “ethnic spatial segregation” has discriminated against them in varying degrees. For example, the Hui minority who live in Beijing do not enjoy the same preferential policies as those living in the Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. As indigenous minorities of Xinjiang (e.g., the Uyghur) receive additional bonus points in university entrance examinations,<sup>12</sup> the Han candidates in Xinjiang may feel “discriminated” against compared to the Han in Beijing. For those minority students/labourers who come to study/work in Beijing, the urban atmosphere and Han culture may seem “strange” to them, as they do not feel as at home as they would back in their own autonomous areas. The system and policies may have strengthened the implementation objectives of spatial separation but the feeling of estrangement between citizens of different ethnic backgrounds has been accentuated.

At the same time, we should not disregard the issue of large-scale population movement between the autonomous and Han areas that has taken place in the past three decades. During the pre-reform period of the planned economy, migration or travel across provincial borders was controlled. Since the beginning of the systemic reform and opening-up policies in the 1980s, people were able to travel freely. Meanwhile, the state carried out many construction projects in the autonomous areas and professional jobs (such as banking, postal services, water conservation, environment protection, information technology, etc.) in minority areas attracted Han personnel with these expertise. Some minorities moved into coastal cities and engaged in running businesses like restaurants, handicrafts, etc. There was a marked daily increase in the movement of all ethnic groups traversing traditional places of settlement, especially since the central government launched the “Developing the West” strategy in 2000. According to the 2000 population census, 7.4 per cent of the Tibetan population resided outside of the Tibetan autonomous locales and there was a seven-fold increase in the number of Uyghurs living outside of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region from 1990 to 2000.<sup>13</sup>

For generations, there has been little mutual understanding between the Han from the east and central parts of China and the minorities from the west about each other’s customs, language and religion. Hence the wide cultural and identity gaps have

<sup>12</sup> Ma Rong, “The Development of Minority Education and the Practice of Bilingual Education in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region”, *Frontiers of Education in China* 4, no. 2 (June 2009): 188–251.

<sup>13</sup> Ma Rong, “Guanyu dangqian Zhongguo chengshi minzu guanxi de jidian sikao” (On Current Ethnic Relations in Urban Areas of China), *Xibei Minzu Yanjiu* 1 (2009): 6–19, 13.

easily led to misunderstandings and conflicts. Ethnic segregation in the education system has also resulted in the lack of mutual knowledge as well as sentiments of alienation in the long term.

In addition, the Chinese central government issued a document (Document no. 5) in 1984 with the decree that all judicial procedures in China must follow the principle of “two less and one loose” (*liangshao yikuan*): that is, “in dealing with criminals of minority background, police departments and courts must insist on ‘arresting less, executing less’, and the charges against them should be more lenient in general” (*dui shaoshu minzu de fanzui fenzi yaojianchi ‘shaobu shaosha’, zaichulishang yibanyao congkuan*).<sup>14</sup> There are many debates in China over this policy on the Internet, especially after the 5 July incident in Urumqi in 2009. Some argued that this policy is one of the major reasons for the rise in ethnic conflicts in China today following massive migration between the western regions and coastal provinces.

In the “ethnic minority” part of the dual system, officials in the administration of ethnic autonomous areas, Ethnic Affairs Commissions and minority schools, etc., are entitled to proportional representation by “ethnic status” at all levels. Under this system, the promotion possibility of a minority officer largely depends on and is directly related to the population size and the administrative level (region, prefecture and county) of the autonomous area of his/her group. Thus, Tibetans and Uygurs find it difficult to imagine that one day China’s top leader would be a Tibetan or Uygur, even though the Americans have elected a black president, India has a Sikh premier and Vietnam once had a Tay ethnic communist party secretary. In the dual system, if a minority officer retires, the authority usually appoints a replacement of the same ethnicity. Though this has bolstered the awareness of ethnic identity and the associated special rights and benefits, officers and intellectuals from minority groups have not truly integrated into the Chinese “mainstream” society and established “Chinese citizen identity”.

## ETHNIC SEPARATION IN MEDIA AND ENTERTAINMENT

In Chinese literature and films, differentiation also exists, demarcating “general-themed literature and films” (non-minority films) and “minority literature and minority-themed films”. In “minority-themed” films, the main storyline must be minority-related and the main characters and cast must be of ethnic minorities. In “general-themed” films, minority characters or cast are a rarity, not even the Hui or Manchu, though they live and interact among the Han Chinese and are well spread out in urban areas. The two awards for film and television achievements familiar to all are the “Golden Rooster Award” and the “Hundred Flower Award”, yet many people do not know that in the 1990s, the central government also established special awards for minority-themed films — the “Soaring Dragon Award” and the “Spirited Horse Award”, which do not receive much mainstream attention.

<sup>14</sup> See <<http://bbs1.people.com.cn/postDetail.do?view=2&pageNo=1&treeView=1&id=92947891&boardId=1>>.



In this scenario, a comparison is drawn between China and another multi-ethnic and multi-racial country — the US. In the US, there is no such distinction between “minority-themed” films and ordinary (white) films. There are independent films, where the main storyline is about the blacks or Indians, but the vast majority of films do include characters of different races (especially those made after the American civil rights movement). For example, if the film narrative is about two heroic policemen, one is usually a white and the other is a black; or if the narrative is about a white heroic policeman or judge, then his supervisor will be a black or vice versa. Furthermore, a fair number of American news anchors and show hosts are blacks. Therefore, in their daily dosage of media and entertainment, it is deeply ingrained in the viewers that the US is a multi-racial society, where the whites, blacks and other minority groups live and work together, and the most important identity that defines them is being “American citizens”.

Reflecting the cultural pluralism of American cities, scenes in films are sometimes set in Chinatown or Italian neighbourhoods and restaurant scenes are sometimes set in Indian or Chinese restaurants. Scriptwriters, directors and television executives are very attentive to details in order to instil the notion of a multi-racial society and portray the US as a pluralist society. American art and film circles have made great efforts in this regard, playing subtle yet very important roles in the improvement of race relations in America. The same can be said of American television programmes and commercials always portraying the US as a multi-racial society.

In China, with the exception of advertisements that feature ethnic minorities at tourist sites in minority areas or in minority traditional medicine, there are very few television commercials (for cars, clothing, cosmetics, food, electrical devices, etc.) that use the faces of ethnic minorities. The percentage of ethnic minorities among TV reporters and popular entertainment programme hosts is very low.

Besides the National Games, the “National Traditional Games of Ethnic Minorities”, also billed as the “minority” games, is held every four years. There are two kinds of competitions: the sports and athletics medal event, as well as the traditional ethnic game performances. Each minority group will contribute and showcase its “traditional” sports. As most of the participants in this game are from the minority groups, it exemplifies the “Han vs. minorities dual structure” in entertainment and sports.

The continual ethnic segregation in media consumption has failed to pass the important message to both the Han and ethnic audience that “China is a multi-ethnic country and our society is a multi-ethnic society, and we belong to the same nation”. Learning about the histories, languages, religions and customs of ethnic minorities via entertainment and television is thus made even more difficult. Positive portrayal of characters in films and television is considered one of the easiest and effective ways to foster emotional bonding between groups. For instance, the depiction of blacks as positive, brave, honest and patriotic heroes on American screens has undoubtedly eliminated the white audience’s prejudice against the blacks. Today, very few minority heroes are being depicted in Chinese films. General audiences therefore

do not acquire in their everyday life any knowledge or information related to minority groups, let alone any basic awareness. If the Han come to China's western cities and towns to look for job opportunities, their blatant lack of knowledge about the minorities may lead to cultural misunderstandings and ethnic prejudice, which may harm people-to-people relations and economic development. As a multi-ethnic country founded on the tenets of unity and ethnic equality, China's recognition of all ethnic groups as members of the "Chinese nation" and its equal treatment to all citizens have laid the foundation for fostering social cohesion and enhancing its soft power.

## CONCLUSION

Prior to 1949, though there were differences between the cities and the countryside society, village dwellers (whether rich or poor) could quickly become "city people" when they moved to the cities because there was no social segmentation in China in terms of employment and rural-urban status. The residential registration system that was put into effect in the 1950s planned economy and differentiated policies towards "urban residents" and "rural residents" eventually created an urban-rural dual structure in the Chinese society. Although policies governing rural migration and employment have since relaxed, relevant government departments and academic circles are studying solutions to systematically break up the "rural-urban dual structure" by policy adjustment so that urban and rural residents can enjoy completely equal treatment as "citizens".

Before 1949, the differences between Han, Manchu, Mongols, Hui and Tibetans existed at the macro level, but their civic status was not differentiated by ethnicity. Many Manchu and Hui lived alongside the Han. If the Mongolian, Tibetan, Yi or Miao people were proficient in the Mandarin language, they were viewed by Han people as ordinary citizens. There was no explicit exclusion or discrimination in administration and law. Except for certain differences in customs and lifestyle, friendship and intermarriages among all groups were considered very common. The "civics" course, established by the Republican government in public schools and the textbooks it issued, continuously emphasised the "Chinese nation" and patriotism as the essential principle of "citizenship", thereby strengthening cohesion of the whole nation while it engaged in the War of Resistance against the Japanese invasion. The song, "March of the Volunteers", which later became the national anthem of the PRC, was used to stir the same patriotic fervour in youth, as well as the masses of all ethnic groups. At that time, the consciousness of the "Chinese nation" in the minds of all people was foremost, and more essential than the "ethnic consciousness".

The "nationality recognition" project after the founding of the PRC in 1949 determined the "nationality (ethnic) status" for every citizen, and developed a series of minority-targeted institutions and preferential policies, thereby gradually forming segmentation between "Han" and "ethnic minorities". Objectively, a new ethnic "dual structure" emerged. However, since its implementation, for more than half a century, this "dual structure" has eroded ethnic contact and communication and has

not been conducive to mutual learning and cultural integration. In terms of political identity, in particular, it has weakened the national consciousness of the “Chinese nation”. If we can discuss the current situation and systematically rethink its advantages and disadvantages, this would be of greatest importance for the national unity, social stability and promotion of common prosperity of all ethnic groups of the Chinese nation in the new century.

The collapse of the Soviet Union left the whole world dumbstruck. Not only did it shake Western politicians, it also had a tremendous impact on Western academics. They asked themselves: why, if Western countries for years invested so much money and human resources and set up so many projects researching the Soviet Union, had not a single scholar predicted disintegration? Where then was the problem in Western research on the Soviet Union? If we could say that the “collective aphasia” of Soviet scholars of ethnicity was due to the internal political atmosphere and academic restrictions, the loss of free Western academic scholars who were looking forward to the collapse of Soviet government indicated that there existed other problems.

In his review of American research on the Soviet Union, Ronald Suny from the University of Michigan pointed out that “a chasm, seldom crossed, existed between those who dealt with Russian studies proper and those who studied non-Russian peoples”.<sup>15</sup> In other words, these two groups of Western researchers did not communicate with each other, nor did they show any interest in either’s research findings. Such a “dual structure” resulted in drawing conclusions from incomplete data, making it impossible to engage in an overall, scientific analysis of Soviet internal conflicts. The likely reason why such a research model emerged is that American scholars were misled by the “research segmentation” of their Soviet colleagues, which was linked with the “segmental incorporation” of the Soviet system.<sup>16</sup>

Reflecting on Western scholars of the Soviet Union, should we not also reflect on Chinese researchers of ethnic issues? Who, among those Chinese scholars of ethnicity that have for years been familiar with Stalin’s nationality theory and have always talked about the “Soviet experience”, had foreseen the possibility of Soviet disintegration? Did academic segmentation exist between Chinese scholars studying mainstream Soviet society and scholars of Soviet ethnic minority issues?

In China’s current stage of development, there are many major economic, political and social issues: economic restructuring, democracy, diplomatic relations, corruption, environmental protection, unemployment, poverty and so on, but judging from the evolutionary trends of the former Soviet Union, China’s biggest social risk lies in its ethnic relations. The largest threat that China currently faces is break-up

<sup>15</sup> Ronald G. Sunny, *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Philip G. Roeder, “The Triumph of Nation-State: Lessons from the Collapse of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia”, in *After the Collapse of Communism: Comparative Lessons of Transition*, ed. Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 21–57, 35–7.

of the country's territory. The "March 14 incident" in Lhasa (2008) and the "July 5 incident" in Urumqi are clear warning signals. The existence of a "dual structure" in Chinese society today between "Han mainstream society" and "ethnic minorities" has caused government leaders, academics and the general public to lose knowledge of, and a sense of sensitivity towards, the issue. A thorough understanding of the various issues and immediate action to change the situation are imperative. Besides the Han-minority relations, relations among various minority groups also warrant close attention. The real situation in various regions is extremely complex and the problems are far more extensive than those posed by the "dual structure". We should at least start to deal with the problems arising from the "dual structure" and then gradually move into deeper analysis.

In sum, scholars doing research on Chinese (majority) society should begin to focus on the various issues concerning the ethnic minority areas, and reflect on the 60 years of implementation of China's nationality/ethnic theory and policy and their social outcomes in the backdrop of weak ethnic minority identification with the "Chinese nation" and the state. Also, scholars who study Chinese ethnic minorities should include the social, economic and cultural developments of ethnic minority groups within the broader framework of China's overall development. To disintegrate the existing "Han vs. minorities dual structure" will require concerted efforts from both the Han and ethnic minority peoples. The dissolving of the dual structure will ensure that the Soviet scenario in which breakaway states were created will not be replayed in China, and with citizenship of the Chinese nation as a unifying force in China, the country can maintain self-confidence along the development road in the 21st century. With a united China bounded by a common identity, China's varied ancestry will continue to be honoured and be a precious inheritance for the future generations.

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