

THE PEOPLES OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC: FINALLY IN THE VANGUARD?

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I pour my heart out to the white cloud
I, the homeless wanderer.
O, float back to my native land
And drop the tears I shed for my mother

— Wu'er Kaixi, 4 October 1989¹

Most studies of Chinese society and history have relegated a marginal place to the minority nationalities who make up less than 7 percent of China's one billion population. Concentrated primarily in China's border areas, these peoples, generally portrayed as exotic and insignificant, often have been thought to be on the verge of extinction as a result of China's assimilationist policies. It came as quite a surprise, then, when it was discovered that the minorities played a very key role, disproportionate to their population, in the recent Tiananmen uprising.

Just prior to the bloody June 4 crackdown, a lesser known protest took place. On Friday, May 12, over 3,000 members of the Hui and other Muslim nationalities took to the streets shouting, "Punish China's Rushdie!" They were protesting the publication of a book they found to be insulting to Islam, just, they said, "like the 'Satanic Verses.'" The book, entitled *Sexual Customs (Xing Fengsu)*, was an innocuous description of the history of sexuality around the world, which guaranteed it a strong market in China where few official books address the subject. Muslims in China would normally pay little attention to such popular literature.²

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1. The Wu'er Kaixi poem quoted above was reprinted in Richard Bernstein, "To be Young and in China: A Colloquy," *New York Times*, 7 October 1989, 11. The author would like to express his appreciation to the funding agencies that supported three years of field research in China: the Fulbright Foundation, the Committee on Scholarly Communication with the People's Republic of China, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. The author is especially grateful to the Harvard Academy for International and Area Studies program which provided him with the opportunity as a post-doctoral Ira J. Kukin Academy Scholar to become involved in the John King Fairbank Center for East Asian Research, whose response to the student movement in China demonstrated genuine concern among Asian scholars for the Chinese people. The author also wishes to extend his appreciation to his research sponsors and colleagues in China who are not responsible for the content of the article or his views.
2. They were violently incensed, however, by one section of the book which compared Mosque minarets to phalli, Muslim shrines to female reproductive organs, and the Meccan pilgrimage to orgies — with camels, no less. Three weeks earlier, this demonstration was presaged by an even larger protest of ten to twenty thousand Hui Muslims in Lanzhou. See "San qian musulun xuesheng beijing youxing: ti yaoqiu yancheng xing fengsu zuozhe" (Three thousand Beijing Muslim students protest: request severe punishment of the author of *Sexual Customs*), *Huaqiao ribao*, 13 May 1989, 3.

The Western press briefly noted the Beijing incident, but did not go on to make the interesting connection between the Muslim protest and the Beijing student uprising, which also was led initially by a Muslim Uigur from Xinjiang, Wu'er Kaixi (his Uigur name is Uerkesh Daolet). A few supposedly insignificant Muslims calling for more religious respect broke the lull following the Hu Yaobang memorial and the May 4 protests, which ended with the Beijing students resolutely promising they would not disrupt Gorbachev's visit. The state allowed these Muslims to protest the publication of a rather insignificant book; at the same time the state refused to permit the students to present their more crucial demands for democratization, representation and the right to dialogue. Angered by this lack of response, the very night of the permitted Muslim protest, Wu'er Kaixi and the other student leaders decided to call a hunger strike, the first such nonviolent action of social protest known to modern Chinese history.

The student fast had a devastating effect. It galvanized the attention of the entire Beijing society to the seriousness of the students' demands. They were willing to lay down their lives in order to have a voice in Chinese affairs. In the students' call for "No more phoney dialogue," one finds a crucial subtext: the demand for real participation of all the peoples who form the People's Republic of China (PRC). No longer content with past tokenism, the students expressed their frustration on posters, in such slogans (often in English) as: "You can't cheat all of the people all of the time," and "Why can't Li Peng, the people's Prime Minister, come out to meet the people?" — a protest especially appropriate when the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the People's Police were employed so devastatingly. Most survivors of the June 4 massacre say that what surprised them was not that the state had ordered a crackdown, but that the PLA, the so-called liberators of the people, had actually fired on the people.

It is notable that the largest pro-democracy demonstration ever to take place in China was led by a Uigur from Xinjiang: as a member of a Muslim minority he had a legitimate voice officials may have hesitated to silence. And, as Uigur money changers often have rationalized: if arrested, what could the police do, exile him to Xinjiang, the Uigur Autonomous Region? The participation of the Muslims in the recent political unrest demonstrated the wide complexity and force of the movement. A host of other minority nationalities, students and teachers, joined the Uigur student leader; at least two known minority members were killed during the crackdown, including one Kazak Muslim. The minority nationalities, always portrayed as colorful followers of the Party, are themselves, perhaps for the first time, in the vanguard of those demanding a true voice on behalf of the peoples of the PRC.

THE TIBETANIZATION OF CHINA

While this may be the first time that a member of a minority has led a student protest in China, it is not, of course, the first time that minorities

have borne the full brunt of the state's use of deadly force. On December 10, 1988, Han soldiers fired upon Tibetan protestors in Lhasa, killing many. Shen Tong, one of the Beijing University student leaders who escaped to study in the West, noted at a recent Tiananmen conference at Brandeis University that this was the first time that the state used the army to massacre its own people.³ It was not. It also was not the first time the state used tanks to suppress a local internal uprising. In 1972, three divisions of PLA units were dispatched to Shadian, in Southeastern Yunnan Province, to suppress a Hui Muslim protest over the closing of their mosque and the poisoning of their drinking water with lard during the Cultural Revolution.

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When the Hui, who earlier had sought a negotiated settlement by sending a delegation to Kunming, refused to surrender to the troops, the tanks destroyed their village and all those living within it. The village itself was reduced to rubble, and refugees interviewed in Hong Kong reported between 1000 and 9000 people were slaughtered.⁴

PLA troops have been dispatched to suppress uprisings in Yunnan, Inner-Mongolia, Xinjiang and Tibet. Yet for the first time, the Western media covered this action in Tiananmen. It thus verified the claims that the minorities have made for decades: that the state deployed army regulars and deadly force against its own largely unarmed citizens. It represents what Roderick MacFarquhar has referred to as the "Tibetanization" of all of China.⁵ The important involvement of minorities in the Tiananmen protest, long sensitized to the oppressive nature of the Chinese state in minority areas, should come as no surprise. Most accounts of the incident, however, hardly mention it. Yet their participation, and the question it raises regarding the place of the peoples in the PRC, is critical to understanding issues of democratization in China.

MINORITY INVOLVEMENT IN TIANANMEN SQUARE

To most outsiders, China is regarded as a homogeneous cultural whole, dominated by one ethnic group, the Han majority, with a few minorities on

3. "Perspectives on Tiananmen 1989," an International Conference of Students, Scholars, and Journalists, Brandeis University: 16-17 September 1989.

4. See "China: The Other 60 Million," *Asiaweek*, 21 December 1979, 35. See also Judith Banister, *China's Changing Population* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1987), 316-17.

5. Roderick MacFarquhar, "The End of the Chinese Revolution," in *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 36, No. 12 (20 June 1989): 10.

the fringe who rarely interfere in the daily affairs of the state. Western journalists were shocked, then, when the elected leader of the student movement in Beijing was identified as a Uigur from Xinjiang. Wu'er Kaixi quickly became the designated darling of the Western press. In interview after interview he was portrayed as a flamboyant and outspoken student leader who loved beer, the outdoors and rabble-rousing.⁶

Born to Uigur parents who raised him in Beijing, he went to high school in Xinjiang and spent summers with Kazak herdsmen in the Tian Shan mountains. His excellent speaking ability, combined with his fearless disregard for his own safety (he was the student leader in hospital garb who confronted Prime Minister Li Peng, chastizing him on national television for being late), led him to be elected chairman of the Beijing Universities Students Autonomous United Association, and after the crackdown, number one on the state's twenty-one most wanted list. While he tends to downplay his own ethnicity, the influence of his years in the grasslands is reflected in his poetry and fondness for the Taiwan Chinese song "Wolf," which was popular among many of the students on the square. At the Brandeis Tiananmen conference, Wu'er Kaixi sang the lines from the song, and described himself, and all of China's students, especially those now in exile, as "a wolf from the north," wandering through a desolate land, wandering full of nostalgia and longing for "that beautiful prairie."⁷

Wu'er Kaixi was not the only minority student leader on Tiananmen Square. Many were his former classmates from the Central Institute for Nationalities in Beijing where he had been a student for one year before transferring to Beijing Normal University. One of the few women student leaders in the square, now actively involved in the exile movement, was Ms. Liu Yan, at the time a student at the Nationalities Institute. With a Han father, and a mother of Mongolian and Russian descent, Liu Yan was allowed to choose her ethnicity according to Chinese law when she turned eighteen years old. She chose Mongolian, because as she explained, it was more "exotic." The elected leader of the Autonomous Student Association of the Central Institute for Nationalities, and later a member of the standing committee of the Beijing Universities Students Autonomous United Association, belonged to the Ku Cong people. The Ku Cong are an unrecognized group dwelling in Yunnan that was categorized in the 1950s as belonging to the Lahu nationality, but that has sought independent recognition for the last thirty years.

Cai Jinqing, another conference participant, comes from a middle class Hui family in Beijing. Her father is a bus repairman, yet her sister studies nuclear physics and her brother is training with the Boston Philharmonic conductor, Seiji Ozawa. As a sophisticated Hui minority urbanite, she became involved in the prodemocracy movement because she claimed it expressed the basic desire of all peoples in China for representation and democracy. "The protest

6. Ted Gup, "Portrait of a Hooligan: From Mao's Little Red Book to Embracing Democracy," *Time Magazine*, 26 June 1989, 35. See also Ann Ignatius, "China's Student Movement Leader Relishes Moment in the Spotlight," *The Wall Street Journal* 1 May 1989.

7. See "Perspectives," 17 September 1989. See also Bernstein, 11.

was a true mass movement," she stated, "that was effectively able to maintain order as the student leaders were conscious of the will of the people."⁸ When a rumor circulated that the Han might use minority soldiers who could not speak the Han language to suppress the students, Uigur and other minority students immediately went to the train stations to serve if necessary as translators to inform the soldiers of the true nature of their peaceful demonstration.

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Perhaps reflecting belief in such a rumor and traditional Han ethnocentric bias against minorities, Mr. Pei Minxin, a Harvard graduate student in government and frequent commentator on the Tiananmen movement, stated in an ABC "Nightline" interview with Ted Koppel on June 5, 1989, that "According to a phone conversation I made with a student in China today, most of the troops that made most of the killings were not Hans, not of Han nationality, but of those national minorities. So it is apparently easier for a different nationality, people from a different nationality, to kill people of a different nationality."⁹ He argued that since the 27th Army was based in Inner Mongolia, it probably was comprised of Mongolians. After being corrected by incensed Mongolian Chinese students residing in the United States that there are no Mongolians in the 27th Army, and that it was precisely the Han army which was used to suppress and execute many Mongolians suspected of being members of an underground counterrevolutionary movement during the Cultural Revolution, Mr. Pei retracted his statement on the June 7 "Nightline" and apologized for relying on false rumors.¹⁰ The above examples reveal that not only were many minorities involved in the pro-democracy movement, quite disproportionate to their population, but that the position of these peoples in the PRC is no longer marginal.

THE MINORITIES IN CHINA: A SMALL SLICE OF A HAN PIE?

Who, then, are these minority nationalities? And why are they so significant as we consider the past forty years of the PRC? Just after the founding of the PRC, the state sent teams of ethnologists, linguists and party officials to the

8. "Perspectives," 16 September 1989.

9. Pei Minxin, in "Strife Continues in China," ABC News "Nightline," Show No. 2096, 5 June 1989.

10. For a discussion of the use of the PLA to suppress Mongolians during the Cultural Revolution and the 1981-1982 protest strike, see William R. Jankowiak, "The Last Hurrah? Political Protest in Inner Mongolia," *The Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 21 (1989).

minority areas in the Southwest (Guangdong, Hainan, Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, and Tibet), the Northwest (Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, Inner Mongolia), and the Northeast (Heilongjiang, Jilin) to identify the minority peoples.¹¹ In a description of this process, Fei Xiaotong, the preminent Chinese anthropologist who was himself engaged in this endeavor, outlined how they applied the Stalinist theory of national identity, inherited by the Soviets, to determine who would qualify as a people.¹² These criteria defined an ethnic group, or nation, as those who shared a common economy, language, territory, or psychological makeup, which Stalin later broadly defined as "culture."¹³ Based on these criteria, according to Fei, the Chinese officials determined that there were fifty-four minority peoples of China, with the Han majority being the fifty-fifth nationality.¹⁴ Fei does not describe, however, what happened to the more than 350 other peoples who applied to become minorities but were denied.

Many of these peoples were combined with other larger groups to which the Chinese anthropologists thought they belonged, like the Ku Cong people mentioned above who were attached to the Lahu, and known as the "Yellow Lahu." Other groups, who had more well-defined historical national identities, like the Tibetans, Mongolians, and Manchu, were more easily classified. Others were invented as "umbrella groups" that encompassed several distinct sub-ethnicities, such as the Han majority, and the Zhuang, Yi, Qiang, Uigur, and Hui.¹⁵ A Chinese demographer who took part in the identification enterprise described how in some cases the Chinese ethnologists got several peoples together and asked them to come up with a common name, since the state chose not to recognize all of their groups individually. Even with this gerrymandering, the 1982 census revealed that there were still 799,705 people of unidentified ethnicity, and the State Council for Nationality Affairs, which decides these matters, revealed in a personal interview that there were at least fifteen groups who are being considered as minorities.¹⁶ As late as 1979, one new group, the Jin Nuo, was admitted as a minority nationality.

I have argued elsewhere that this identification by the state has led to the "objectification" or invention of identities previously ill-defined or, in some cases, nonexistent.¹⁷ It has led to the crystallization of various tribes, social

11. June Teufel Dreyer, *China's Forty Million: Minority Nationalities and National Integration in the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

12. Fei Xiaotong, *Toward A People's Anthropology* (Beijing: New World Press, 1981), 60.

13. J. V. Stalin, *Works*, 11 (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953), 349, 351.

14. *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu (China's Minority Nationalities)* (Beijing: People's Publishing Society, 1981).

15. For a discussion of the Yi, see Stevan Harrell, "The Invention of Ethnicity: The History of the History of the Yi," presented at the Association for Asian Studies Meetings, Washington, D.C., 17-19 March 1989. For a discussion of the Qiang, see Wang Mingke, *Zhongguo gudai qiang, shiqiang zhi yanjiu* (Research on China's Ancient Qiang and Qiang Descendants) (Master's Thesis, Taiwan Normal University, 1983). For a discussion of the Uigur, see Dru C. Gladney, "The Ethnogenesis of the Uigur," *Central Asian Survey* 9 (1990). For a discussion of the Hui, see Dru C. Gladney, *Pure and True: Hui Muslim Identity and the Invention of Ethnicity in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, forthcoming).

16. For a description of the 1982 census, see Population Census Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China and the Institute of Geography of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, *The Population Atlas of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 16.

17. Dru C. Gladney, "Imagining Tradition: The New Salience of Religion and Ethnicity in China," (Paper

groups, and kin-associations into official minority nationalities that have a pan-ethnic solidarity recognized by the state. The state's assignment of ethnonyms and national identities to these peoples has assisted their rapid ethnogeneses and the development of distinct identities. It also has led to the uncritical agreement by Chinese and Western scholars that the category "Han" exists as a monocultural ethnic people, with groups such as the Cantonese, Hakka, Sichuanese, Fujianese and Shanghainese accepted as merely regional variations on a Han theme. It was a politically necessary decision on the part of the early Chinese nationalist like Sun Yat-sen (himself a Cantonese, an Overseas Chinese from Hawaii) to downplay intra-ethnic differences among these divergent peoples, in order to unite and oppose the Manchu Qing state and the Western and Japanese imperialists — thus creating a large Han pie with a few small slices of ethnic minorities on the borders. Western sinologists have generally swallowed the Han pie whole, without critically questioning "sub-Han" ethnicity as something more than regional variation.

Minority recognition was desirable enough in the 1950s for many peoples to apply to be included in the fifty-five nationalities, even if they did not feel comfortable with the labels attached to them. It was still prized enough for them to be registered as such during the recent 1982 census, which recorded a marked population increase in minorities far above the Han population growth rate, partly as a result of the increasing inclusion of peoples who sought to be ethnic.¹⁸ Across Northeastern China, whole villages of Manchu, who were thought to have assimilated, or who formerly were reluctant to be identified as members of the feudal Qing dynasty ethnic ruling class, recently have shed their anonymity and declared their ethnic status, seeking recognition. Along the southeastern coast, large lineages of Hui, who had become assimilated several generations earlier into their Han neighbors, have been recognized recently as belonging to the Hui Muslim nationality upon their request, even though they no longer practice Islam.¹⁹ The vast majority of children of mixed ethnic parentage who choose minority status also reveal the value of minority identity, as was the case with the Mongolian student leader mentioned above.²⁰

MINORITY IDENTITY AND AFFIRMATIVE ACTION IN CHINA

In a country populated by a Han majority that has a traditional ethnocentric bias against its minority "barbarian" peoples, why would so many people

presented at a conference sponsored by the Joint Committees on Japan, Korea, Southeast Asia, and China of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, Hua Hin, Thailand, 1-10 May 1989). In arguing that the identification of nationalities in China has contributed to reification of their identities, the author follows Bernard Cohn's seminal study of the census in India. See Bernard S. Cohn, ed., "The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia," in *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 224-54.

18. Judith Banister, "An Analysis of Recent Data on the Population of China," *Population and Development Review* Vol. 10, No. 2 (1984), 241-71.

19. Dru C. Gladney, "Islam Preserved: Ethnic Identity and Adaptation in a Southeastern Hui Lineage," *Minority Nationalities in China: Language and Culture*, ed. Charles Li and Dru Gladney (The Hague: Mouton Press, forthcoming).

20. The author's survey of Hui-Han inter-ethnic marriages in Beijing revealed that over 90 percent of the children chose Hui ethnicity.

choose to be ethnic? Certainly, the privileges accorded to minorities have had much to do with it.

Minorities are generally exempt from the one-child birth planning program. They receive special educational advantages, more opportunities for political representation, and faster mobility in employment through affirmative action incentives. Muslim workers in the state sector receive a slightly higher wage than non-Muslims since they cannot purchase the cheaper state-subsidized pork products in the state markets. Minorities also have more holidays, more freedom to engage in religious practices thought to be feudal superstitions among the Han, and more assistance to develop dances, art, architecture, literature, and other cultural traditions generally discouraged as backward among the Han. Private entrepreneurial activity is also less restricted among minorities. Autonomous regions, prefectures, counties, and even villages, are allowed more discretion in spending taxes for local development, rather than remitting these funds to the central government as in other non-autonomous administrative units. These advantages, though minor, have been significant enough for many to desire minority status in China. The autonomous areas, once thought to have been autonomous largely in name only and to have been used for controlling restive minorities, are now thought desirable by many. The Manchu have requested an autonomous county in Jilin (they have no autonomous units), and the assimilated Hui in Fujian have applied for an autonomous county outside of Quanzhou.

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It is more than just practical advantages that make minority status desirable. Nationality identification in China accords the minorities more of a voice in their own affairs. It legitimates their position vis-à-vis the state, something that the state may not have foreseen when it created such identities and autonomous areas, according to the Stalinist method, which Alvin Gouldner has suggested led to "internal colonialism."²¹ Walker Connor's excellent study of Marxist-Leninist nationality policy in the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam and Eastern Europe reveals that these minorities were recognized in the first

21. Alvin W. Gouldner, "Stalinism: A Study of Internal Colonialism," *Telos* 34 (1978): 5-48.

place for only the short-term strategic goal of enlisting their support in the revolution.²²

After the founding of the PRC, the minority areas were brought under military control, awarded limited autonomy, and subjected to integrationist policies. The strategic importance attached to obtaining the support of the minorities lessened with the establishment of central authority — it was no longer necessary to promise or grant full autonomy. This dramatic policy shift is revealed strikingly in a cable from the central party propaganda office of the New China News Agency to the Northwestern branch office, which has only recently come to light:

On 20 October 1949, in document number 62, you reported the statement by Ma Gecai, 19th Army Corps Party Director, regarding the Communist Party's proposition: "Resolutely Oppose Great Han Chauvinism," and the slogan, "Nationality Self-Determination" . . . Today the question of each minority's "self-determination" should not be stressed any further. In the past, during the period of civil war, for the sake of strengthening the minorities opposition to the Guomindang's (KMT) reactionary rule, we emphasized this slogan. This was correct at the time. But today the situation has fundamentally changed. The KMT's reactionary rule has been basically destroyed and the party leaders of the New China have already arisen. For the sake of completing our state's great purpose of unification, for the sake of opposing the conspiracy of imperialists and other running dogs to divide China's nationality unity, we should not stress this slogan in the domestic nationality question and should not allow its usage by imperialists and reactionary elements among various domestic nationalities . . . The Han occupy the majority population of the country, moreover, the Han today are the major force in China's revolution. Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, the victory of China's peoples democratic revolution mainly relied on the industry of the Han people.²³

While the idea of the peoples was critical to the founding of the People's Republic, the real autonomy of the minorities was no longer necessary for garnering support. Upon gaining complete control, the Party was free to co-opt the leading role over all the peoples, with the Han majority in the vanguard. However, the minorities still possess a legitimized voice, and this enables them to organize and press their demands, unlike the students in Tiananmen Square, who were accused of unlawful association, a punishable

22. Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

23. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences News Research Institute, ed., *Zhongguo gongchandang xiwen gongzuo wenjian huibian* (Collected Documents of China's Communist Party's News Work) 1 (Beijing: New China Publication Society, 1980), 407-8. The author is grateful to Michael Schoenhals for bringing this source to his attention.

crime in China. As Barbara Pillsbury has perceptively observed, the Hui protest in Beijing was a "protest to the government" for redress by offended Muslims, not an uprising against the state.²⁴

MINORITIES IN THE VANGUARD OF REFORM

This is not the first time minorities have been at the forefront of social protest, as events in Tibet, Mongolia, Ningxia and Xinjiang have demonstrated. In many other respects the minorities have led the Han in reforms at the local level. In Ningxia, I found that as early as 1982, Hui Muslims had begun to rebuild their mosques with government approval, but there were few Han folk temples allowed at that time as they were, and still are, regarded as feudal superstition. Now, however, just as almost every Hui village has its own mosque in Ningxia, Tudigong (Earth God) and Mazu temples patronized by the Han dot the landscape. Local officials told me that the Han complained that the Hui were able to rebuild their mosques and that it was unfair to limit the Han. In other minority areas, practices such as shamanistic possession (whereby spirits communicate through median specialists), permitted among the minorities as part of their national tradition, are also being allowed to be followed by the Han, although it was previously illegal.

Just after the 1979 reforms, many private businesses were established in the countryside. While capitalistic enterprise was still regarded suspiciously in many areas, Fei Xiaotong publicly declared in a news interview that the Hui propensity for business was part of their ethnic heritage.²⁵ I have spoken with many Han in minority areas, who, when criticized for their capitalistic practice, have argued that they should be allowed to do business along with the Hui, lest they be disadvantaged simply for being Han. Resentments soar in ethnically tense areas when one group, no matter what their history, is seen as having an unfair advantage. Many Han argue that the government should not give a slightly higher salary to Hui workers in order for them to buy lamb, because they believe that the Hui might really eat pork at home and use the money for other things. As a result, local cadres seek to ameliorate tensions by assisting the Han with their local requests.

In some areas, the revitalization of many Han cultural traditions in folk art, dance and music can be seen as a direct result of the state's earlier encouragement of these practices among the minorities. Minority dance troupes, long the only officially sponsored national folk artists, have spawned a resurgence in local Han folk arts that bear regional distinction. The development and creation of the colorful textiles produced by Han peasants in Xian was related to its encouragement by the local party secretary who had travelled in minority areas and noted how foreign tourists frequently bought such colorful goods. State encouragement of these traditions has led not only to

24. Barbara Pillsbury, "China's Muslims in 1989: Forty Years Under Communism" (a paper presented to the International Conference on Muslim Minority/Majority Relations, City College of New York, 24-26 October 1989).

25. Fei Xiaotong, "Minorities Hold Key to Own Prosperity," *China Daily*, 28 April 1987, 4.

the revitalization of minority handicrafts and art-forms on the verge of extinction, but by extension has led to the recreation and in some instances, as in Xian, the invention of local Han handicrafts.

Another example is the birth-planning program. In most minority areas where populations are sparse, minorities are not required to follow the birth control policy, but rather are encouraged to restrict their births voluntarily. In rural areas of higher population, minorities like the Hui are allowed to have at least one more child than the Han. This policy is often ignored, with the result that the minorities have as many children as they wish. The Han in those areas have become upset with such selective enforcement of a national policy, arguing that it is overpopulation in general that is the problem, not overpopulation of a specific group, and they have used this as one more reason to reject the policy. Recent figures reveal an average of 2.4 children per couple in the countryside, and this may be one of the factors in the failure of the policy.

It is noteworthy that the public protest of Muslims in Beijing on May 12, and the permission they received by the state to engage in such activities, as well as the extraordinarily rapid response in which the central authorities met all their demands, came at the time of a well-publicized visit by Iran's Ali Khamenei to Beijing on May 11.

Voluntary associations are strictly limited in China. They first must be approved and registered by the local party apparatus, and the membership often is controlled tightly, generally by the local work unit, thus making them no longer voluntary. Several minorities and peoples who would like to be recognized as minorities have formed such organizations, which the state has tacitly ignored. In Fujian, the Ding lineage outside of Quanzhou organized a "Hui Lineage Association" in 1978 that sought recognition as members of the Hui minority, because they had not been included in the 1958 identification of the Hui in the area. This was a grass roots organization that the state did not sponsor. Not only was the organization later recognized, but its goal of being admitted to the Hui nationality was attained, and it received substantial state funding to refurbish its lineage temple and for local development projects.²⁶ Another unrecognized Hui group, the East Street Guo, has formed in recent years with similar goals. In addition, several Han lineages in the area have formed more formal associations that would be severely restricted and monitored if it were not for the Hui case.

26. Gladney, "Islam Preserved," forthcoming.

Minorities have played a crucial role in China's foreign affairs. China's positive treatment of its Muslim minorities has led to substantial investment by Middle Eastern Muslim governments, as well as increased exchange and tourism.

The Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang are playing an important role in re-establishing trade links with Pakistan and South Asia, across the newly opened Ili corridor. The Tibetan issue has hurt China's international image severely, and the awarding of the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama was a way of expressing not only international criticism of China's treatment of Tibetans, but also condemnation of its Tiananmen crackdown. It is noteworthy that the public protest of Muslims in Beijing on May 12, and the permission they received by the state to engage in such activities, as well as the extraordinary rapid response in which the central authorities met all of their demands, came at the time of a well-publicized visit by Iran's President Ali Khamenei to Beijing on May 11. During his official visit, Khamenei publicly reaffirmed that the Ayatollah Khomeini continued to uphold his demand for the execution of Salman Rushdie. The swift acceptance of the Muslim's demands by the Chinese Communist Party for the punishment of "China's Rushdie" could not have been lost on the foreign Muslim governments with which China trades.

The inexorable unification of peoples, once thought inevitable in Marxist theory, can no longer be guaranteed, and this is one reason assimilation theory is so inappropriate for the post-modern era. As James Clifford notes:

Throughout the world indigenous populations have had to reckon with the forces of "progress" and "national" unification. The results have been both destructive and inventive. Many traditions, languages, cosmologies, and values are lost, some literally murdered; but much has simultaneously been invented and revived in complex, oppositional contexts. If the victims of progress and empire are weak, they are seldom passive.²⁷

The Soviet "melting pot," once thought the most assimilative due to the application of thoroughgoing Russification programs since the Stalinist era, has now erupted in a cauldron of ethnicities.²⁸ The eruption of national feelings in the Soviet Union has as much to do with "taking the lid" off through the policy of openness (*glasnost*) as it has to do with the settling of national borders. The Sino-Soviet rapprochement and the ending of the war in Afghanistan, I would argue, has had more of an impact on local expression of ethnicity than any internal reforms. As one Kazak told me in Alma Alta in 1988, "The Russians have no right to suppress us any longer. In the past we were willing to go along with it for the sake of national security and the threat of being dominated by an outside power. Now there is no need for such centralized control." In China, for perhaps the first time, there is no

27. James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 16.

28. Manning Nash, *The Cauldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

longer any real perceived national security threat from her neighbors, the Soviets, Vietnamese, Indians, Japanese, Taiwanese, or even the British, as the Hong Kong withdrawal illustrates. All outside powers have accepted Chinese sovereignty fully. The encirclement doctrine, upon which the US-China normalization was based, is no longer relevant to current geopolitical relations. It ended with Gorbachev's visit to Beijing. It is no coincidence, then, that the students and the broader citizenry chose that moment to call for greater individual autonomy. The nationalities, having sought this for many decades, gladly joined in and may have helped lead the way. Participation of the minorities in China's national affairs has important implications for democratization. The plurality of the Chinese state is fundamental to its founding ideas and one of the main subjects of the 1980 reforms; it is also one of the main planks of the democratization movement in China.²⁹ It comes as no surprise that the minorities in Beijing flooded the streets, and that there were sympathetic outbursts in the minority regions for these reforms. The Chinese intellectual and reformer, Liao Gailong, in summarizing the 1980 reforms, noted that a necessary concomitant of Deng Xiaoping's position was the need for further pluralism and nationality autonomy:

Comrade Deng Xiaoping's speech on August 18 points out the principle for revising the constitution: our constitution must be perfected, must be clear and accurate, and must genuinely ensure that the masses of people can enjoy adequate democratic rights and the right to manage the state and various enterprises and businesses, that various *nationalities can really practice regional autonomy*, that the people's congresses at various levels will be improved, and so on. The principle of disallowing the over centralization of power will also be reflected in the constitution. These were Comrade Deng Xiaoping's words . . . In particular, we must take effective measures to *conscientiously strengthen the national autonomous power* of the autonomous regions of various nationalities and strengthen national unity. Because of the prolonged sabotage by Lin Bao and the "Gang of Four," the contradictions among nationalities are rather intense at present. In particular, we must correctly implement our policy of national autonomy in Xizang [Tibet] and Xinjiang to resolve the national contradictions in these regions [emphasis added].³⁰

ETHNICITY AND NATIONALISM IN THE CHINESE STATE

The state in China has the power to identify who is recognized as a people and who is not, to rewrite history and attempt to control it through editing

29. For a recent discussion, see Edward Friedman, "Democratization and Re-Stalinization in China," *Telos*, No. 80 (1989): 27-36.

30. See Liao Gailong, "The '1980 Reform' Program in China (Part IV)," *Policy Conflicts in Post-Mao China*, eds. John P. Burns and Stanley Rosen (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1986), 87-102.

of textbooks, locking of libraries, and censoring the press.³¹ It cannot control historical memory, however. Icons of ethnic history are not easily dislodged from the imaginations of minority peoples.³² The state can attempt to define art by strictly monitoring what is displayed in museums and what is collected or burned. An official in the Ministry for Art and Culture of the Ningxia Autonomous Region told me that the reason they did not collect the extraordinary Arabic-Chinese calligraphic representations only the Hui produce was that they are not art but religious items. Yet in the free market and in the home this genre is flourishing. Perhaps most dramatically in China, the state has exercised, in Foucault's words, "the hegemonic power over language."³³ "Standard speech" (*putong hua*) has followed the ideograph as the most effective state-imposed means of national control throughout Chinese history. Yet declaring that Cantonese, Sichuanese, and Shanghainese are but dialects has not stopped anyone from continuing to speak them, and to think their own thoughts in them. Among the minorities, language reform has meant the creation of some, the rewriting of others, and the loss of many vernaculars. Yet, for those groups that take language as the main marker of their ethnicity, much has been preserved.

Since the founding of the PRC, international and strategic considerations — particularly the desire for Third World, often Muslim, investment — have encouraged favoritism toward minorities, so that goals of pluralism and assimilation have constantly shifted depending on local and international politics. In recent years, Muslims have been significant players in China's efforts to maintain close political-economic ties with largely Muslim, Middle Eastern nations (which involves trade, development contracts, Silkworm missiles, and the like). It is no wonder then, that a small protest over a minor Chinese book, much less known than Salman Rushdie's, garnered such a vigorous response on the part of PRC officials: they immediately confiscated and destroyed all copies of the book *Sexual Customs*, fired the Shanghai editors and required official apologies from the authors. This is reminiscent of a strong and rapid response to a 1982 *Shanghai Youth News* article that also denigrated Islam.³⁴ In both cases, the state acted swiftly to preserve the image of fairness toward Muslims. This illustrates the perceived importance that nationalities have in influencing China's domestic and international relations from the point of view of the state. They have a voice to challenge accepted notions of nationality and legitimately struggle to redefine nationalism beyond the expression of power by those who regard themselves as representatives of all the people.

In his 1775 speech "On Conciliation with America," Edmund Burke declared, "A nation is not governed, which is perpetually to be conquered."

31. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Press, 1983).

32. Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

33. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice. Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 53-68.

34. Gladney, *Pure and True*, forthcoming.

China has found that it cannot continue to reconquer its minorities and force them into submission without risking internal division, like the Soviet Union, or international condemnation, as in the case of Tibet. As a result, it often has accorded many minorities more of a voice in their own affairs. This is to be applauded. Perhaps the state will discover that it must also allow this for the rest of its citizenry. The role of the nationalities in China, once relegated to the margins of power and identity, is drifting back to the center of debate. Now that China is no longer threatened by an outside power and cannot define itself in terms of opposition to any outside "other," the internal others, the minorities, may play an increasingly important role in questioning and delineating Chinese national identity, plurality, and democratization.