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中国基本情况丛书 当代卷

ETHNIC GROUPS IN CHINA

by Wang Can



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ETHNIC GROUPS IN CHINA

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PREFACE

Some people have asked me, "There are so many ethnic minorities in China. Could you give us a brief account of them?" This would be really a challenging task. To get to know China's ethnic minorities, usually one has to know some basic data: for instance, there are 55 minority ethnic groups in China, and the largest among them is the Zhuang, with a population of over 16 million. Then one may want to know more about the lives and cultures of the minorities, which are so rich and colorful. As China is such a vast nation with so many ethnic groups, it is not easy for an ordinary Chinese to know every minority ethnic group, especially those distributed in remote areas of the country, which seem to be quite mysterious.

However, I believe people who have got some knowledge about the ethnic minorities in China would be attracted by them, even if just for the charms of their wonderful costumes, languages and music. It is with these ethnic minorities that Chinese culture is so prosperous. For outsiders, almost every ethnic minority and the area it inhabits constitute a small world quite different from the mainstream of Chinese society.

Some ethnic minority areas are still little known to the outside world due to their peculiar geographic locations. For instance, in Medog of Tibet Autonomous Region, there live the people of Monba and Lhoba, two ethnic minorities that other people are unfamiliar with. Monba and Lhoba people live among tropical forests in one part of the Tibetan Plateau, keeping their ways of life and customs that have changed little for decades or even a century. Medog was

the last county in China to be connected by highway, and it was in the 1980s that it was linked to the outside world. But such a situation is rapidly changing. For a long period of time no particular interest was paid to the rich ethnic cultural resources in the western region, where 80% of China's ethnic minority people live. Today more and more people are visiting the region, attracted by its ethnic minority cultures and extraordinary landscape.

With a brief review of the history of the People's Republic of China since its founding in 1949, we can see that great changes have been taking place in the ethnic groups, including their economic and social conditions, culture and education, folk customs, and values. The demographic distribution of the ethnic minorities has also extended far beyond their traditional areas. Ethnic minority people are found in nearly all cities, and the minority population in urban areas totals over 6 million, or 6.6% of the total population of ethnic minorities. In many ethnic minority areas, while elderlies still speak their native languages, which are almost illegible to outsiders, and sing ancient folksongs, youngsters now know it is necessary for them to study English well, and they show a keen interest in the Internet.... The ethnic minorities in present-day China have integrated many modern elements in their daily lives, but they still preserve their rich cultures and folkways. In this sense, we can say that to know about the ethnic minorities constitutes an important part of one's understanding of China, and that only by learning about their conditions can one understand the success of the ethnic affairs policy of the Chinese government in the past 50 years and more.

POPULATION AND DISTRIBUTION

China is a multiethnic nation, with 56 officially identified ethnic groups. Among them the largest is the Han, accounting for over 90% of China's total population, and the 55 others are known as ethnic minorities for their much smaller populations. All the ethnic groups have a long history, but due to evolution they used to have many offshoots and names. As a result, only half a century ago no one could tell the exact number of ethnic groups in China.

Beginning in 1950, the government organized tens of thousands of researchers and workers to carry out a large-scale investigation of the ethnic minorities, including their social history, economic life, folk customs, languages, and religions. The work lasted over a decade. Such an investigation that took huge human, material and financial resources was unprecedented in China, which was in national reconstruction after many years of war and still economically backward, and it was also an endeavor rarely seen in other countries with multiple ethnic groups.

As the investigation went on, the identification of ethnic groups also made progress. In the first national census in 1953, over 400 names of ethnic groups were registered. Careful Studies of their names, origins, distribution, languages, economic life and social history helped to identify 38 minority ethnic groups in 1954. By 1964 another 15 minority ethnic groups were recognized. In 1965 the Lhoba ethnic group was identified. In 1979 the Jino was recognized as a single minority ethnic group. By then the identification of ethnic groups was basically completed in China.



Uygur youngsters in Xinjiang.

After that, apart from investigations to identify a small number of ethnic bodies, efforts were mainly devoted to restoring or altering the ethnic status of a number of ethnic minority people in certain areas, and to classify the identification of certain ethnic bodies.

According to the fifth national census in 2000, the 55 minority ethnic groups in China rank as follows in descending order in terms of the size of population: Zhuang, Manchu, Hui, Miao, Uygur, Tujia, Yi, Mongolian, Tibetan, Bouyei, Dong, Yao, Korean, Bai, Hani, Kazak, Li, Dai, She, Lisu, Gelao, Dongxiang, Lahu, Sui, Va, Naxi, Qiang, Tu, Mulam, Xibe, Kirgiz, Daur, Jingpo, Maonan, Salar, Blang, Tajik, Achang, Primi, Ewenki, Nu, Gin, Jino, De'ang, Bonan, Russian, Yugur, Uzbek, Monba, Oroqen, Derung, Tatar, Hezhen, Gaoshan, Lhoba.

In China, the ethnic status of a citizen is determined either by that of the citizen's father or mother. The ethnic status of a child born or

adopted by parents of different ethnic backgrounds is determined by the parents before the child reaches 18 years of age. When the child reaches 18, he or she may choose to determine his/her own ethnic status. No alteration will be made in their ethnic status after such children reach 20 years of age. For remarried couples of different ethnic groups, their children under 18 from the previous marriage will have their ethnic status determined by their parent or stepparent, but children at or over 18 from previous marriage will not alter their ethnic status. Adults will not change their ethnic status due to adoption or marriage. The determined ethnic status of a citizen cannot be altered at discretion.

Population Size

China conducted its fifth national census on November 1, 2000. The census found the nation's population at 1265.83 million (the

Elderly Hui men in front of a mosque in Ningxia. The Hui is the most widely distributed ethnic minority in China, while Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region is the largest Hui community in the country.



Populations of the 56 Ethnic Groups (2000)

Ethnic Group	Pop.(,000 persons)	Ethnic Group	Pop.(,000 persons)
Han	1,159,400	Tu	241.2
Zhuang	16,178.8	Mulam	207.4
Manchu	10,682.3	Xibe	188.8
Hui	9,816.8	Kirgiz	160.8
Miao	8,940.1	Daur	132.4
Uygur	8,399.4	Jingpo	132.1
Tujia	8,028.1	Maonan	107.2
Yi	7,762.3	Salar	104.5
Mongolian	5,813.9	Blang	91.9
Tibetan	5,416.0	Tajik	41.0
Bouyei	2,971.5	Achang	33.9
Dong	2,960.3	Primi	33.6
Yao	2,637.4	Ewenki	30.5
Korean	1,923.8	Nu	28.8
Bai	1,858.1	Gin	22.5
Hani	1,439.7	Jino	20.9
Kazak	1,250.5	De'ang	17.9
Li	1,247.8	Bonan	16.5
Dai	1,159.0	Russian	15.6
She	709.6	Yugur	13.7
Lisu	634.9	Uzbek	12.4
Gelao	579.4	Monba	8.9
Dongxiang	513.8	Oroqen	8.2
Lahu	453.7	Derung	7.4
Sui	406.9	Tatar	4.9
Va	396.6	Hezhen	4.6
Naxi	308.8	Gaoshan	4.5
Qiang	306.1	Lhoba	3.0

populations of Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan were not included). The Han population was 1159.4 million, or 91.59% of the national total, and the population of the 55 minorities amounted to 106.43 million, or 8.41% of the national total.

Compared with the findings in the fourth national census conducted in 1990, the ethnic minority population increased by 15.23 million or 15.37%, or 5.48 percentage points more than the increase in the Han population. Most ethnic minority populations rose by a big margin. The populations of Gaoshan, Qiang, Maonan, Bonan and Tujia rose by over 40%, and only a few ethnic minorities had zero or negative growth in population. For instance, the Korean population of over 1.9 million increased by only more than 480 in the decade, the Uzbek population decreased by about 2,300, and the Tatar, by over 170.

Before 1949, many ethnic minorities were suffering from population decrease, and some were even on the verge of ethnic extinction. For instance, in the mid- and late-17th century, the Hezhens had a population of over 12,000, but it dropped to merely more than 300 by 1950. The tragedy came as a result of social and economic backwardness, disasters, wars, poverty, and diseases. At that time ethnic minorities had a low fertility rate and high mortality rate. A popular saying described the situation as "Many pregnant mothers but few walking babies." Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the government has extended substantial support to ethnic minorities in their economic and cultural development. Thanks to economic growth and improvement in living standards, the mortality rate of the population especially the newly born dropped greatly, and life expectancy increased. In the meantime the government had a much flexible family planning policy for ethnic minorities. Thanks to all this, the trend of population decrease was checked, and the ethnic minority populations boomed.



Sui women, carrying their children on their backs, go to a country fair in Guizhou.

Population Policy

China's population was 541.67 million in 1949, and it rose to 892.11 million in 1973.

As the rapid increase in population exerted great pressure on economic and social development, the government began promoting family planning. In 1981, the Chinese government declared for the first time, "China's population policy is to control the size and raise the quality of the population." The policy calls for late marriage, late and fewer births, and better prenatal care; and it encourages couples to have only one child. In September 1982, family planning was listed as a basic national policy.

In 2002 China enacted the Population and Family Planning Law, which went into force on September 1 the same year. Article 18 of

the law provides, "The State keeps its existing family planning policy stable, encourages citizens to practice late marriage and late birth, and encourages couples to have only one child. Couples that meet the requirements of relevant law and regulations may ask for permission to have a second child." This Article also stipulates, "Ethnic minorities shall also practice family planning."

In the past half a century, China's population policy for ethnic minorities has undergone major changes in three periods.

In the first period (1950s-1970s), the government encouraged population growth. Such a policy was adopted to promote the growth and check the decrease in the populations of ethnic minorities.

In the second period (1971-1981), the government reviewed its policy and considered the option of practicing family planning among ethnic minorities. Such a change was made due to the population boom that began in the mid-1960s, which exerted population pressures on some ethnic minority areas.

In the third period (1982 - present), the government decided that ethnic minorities should also practice family planning. In 1982, the Chinese government decided: Family planning should be promoted among ethnic minorities. The policy may have some flexibility, and governments of ethnic autonomous areas and relevant provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities will formulate specific requirements in the light of local conditions, to be enforced after approval by the next higher level of government.

As China's ethnic minorities are widely distributed in areas at different levels of economic, social and cultural development, local governments have formulated different requirements for family planning. The requirements may be classified into three groups.

One. The five autonomous regions, and the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou and Qinghai, which have a large proportion of ethnic minority population

The policy in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region allows a couple of the Mongolian ethnic group to have two children, and Mongolian couples not registered in urban areas may have a third child with permission. In this Region, Daur, Ewenki and Oroqen couples are encouraged to have fewer births with better prenatal care; if they ask for birth control service, such service should be provided. Couples of other ethnic groups rather than the Mongolian, Daur, Ewenki and Oroqen are allowed to have at most two children.

The policy of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region allows couples of ethnic minorities in urban areas to have two children and such couples in agricultural or pastoral areas to have three children. The policy also allows the above-mentioned couples to have an additional child in some particular conditions.

In Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, if both husband and wife are of the ethnic minorities of Yao, Miao, Dong, Mulam, Maonan, Hui, Gin, Yi, Sui or Gelao, which each have a population of less than 10 million, a couple may have a second child with

A medical worker in Huzhu County of Qinghai Province tells local Tu farmers about the practice of prenatal care and disease prevention.



permission.

In Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, if husband and wife are of ethnic minorities or one of them is of a minority ethnic group, a couple is allowed to have two children. In some mountainous counties farmer couples of ethnic minorities may be allowed to have three children.

In Tibet Autonomous Region, couples of the Tibetan and other minority ethnic groups in urban areas are encouraged to have no more than two children. In agricultural and pastoral areas, couples of ethnic minorities are encouraged to practice late marriage and late birth and have better prenatal care, but they are not subject to any limit of births; if a couple chooses to have family planning, technical guidance will be provided.

In the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou and Qinghai, the policy is roughly as follows: couples of ethnic minorities are allowed to have two children, and some in agricultural or pastoral areas may have an additional child with permission. But no limit of births is applied to couples of ethnic minorities that have very small populations.

Two. The provinces of Jilin, Liaoning, Heilongjiang, Hebei, Zhejiang, Hubei, Hunan, Guangdong, Hainan, Sichuan and Gansu

These provinces have either autonomous prefectures or autonomous counties with compact communities of ethnic minorities. There couples of minorities are allowed to have two children. In Jilin, a couple of minorities or with husband or wife of a minority is allowed to have two children. In Zhejiang, if both husband and wife are of a minority/minorities, a couple may have a second child with permission; if both husband and wife are farmers or fishermen and one of them is of an ethnic minority, a couple may have a second child with permission.

Three. The municipalities of Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai, and the provinces of Shanxi, Jiangsu, Anhui, Fujian, Jiangxi, Shandong,



A Tibetan community in Qinghai Province.

Henan and Shaanxi

In these provinces and municipalities, people of ethnic minorities are sparsely distributed. In their population policies the special conditions of ethnic minorities have been taken into consideration. In the three municipalities of Beijing, Tianjin and Shanghai, couples of ethnic minorities are allowed to have two children if they meet certain requirements. In other provinces a couple is allowed to have a second child if both husband and wife are of a minority/minorities.

With years of publicity efforts, people of ethnic minorities have had greater awareness of the family planning policy, and they are willing to observe the policy requirements. In the meantime, the traditional concepts of “carrying on the ancestral line” and “the more children the happier life” have also changed as time passes. Especially in urban areas, as people of younger generations pay more attention to the quality of life, many young couples choose to have only one



A Dong village in Guizhou. The province has many ethnic minorities.

child, for whom they can give better care.

But in rural and especially remote areas the conditions are different. Due to economic and cultural backwardness and influence of traditional ideas, people tend to desire more children especially sons out of the consideration of rearing children against old age. This is because the lack of social security in many areas. Other people may also want to have more children so that their families may have more hands. However, most families have realized that excessive births will have negative impacts and heavier burdens on society, families and individuals; therefore they are willing to observe the government's family planning policy.

Population Distribution

China's ethnic minorities are mainly distributed in the western part of the country, including the provinces and autonomous regions