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*Ethnic Configuration and State-Making: A Fujian Case**

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between ethnic configuration and state social policy in a Chinese context. Why did the Chinese communist government have to implement a preferential policy towards ethnic minorities, and to what extent has this policy come to reshape peoples' consciousness of their group membership? As well as analysing the reasons and intents of the Chinese Communist Party when dealing with the minority issue before and after it attained power, this paper argues that categorizing of the population served to establish the state apparatus. Why the project of ethnic identification was first initiated in Fujian (a province best known for its overwhelming Han culture) is also discussed. By unfolding the process of searching for ethnic representation in Fujian in the early 1950s, this paper further argues that the major concern of the party-state regarding ethnic minorities is to hold onto its power. Finally, this paper documents how government agents, when investigating ethnicity, interacted with the local population. The Fujian case implies as well as exemplifies how ethnicity can be invented, constructed or reconstructed as a particular representation in relation to state formation.

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Introduction

This paper examines the beginnings of ethnic classification work in Fujian. After discussing what happened in Fujian in the early 1950s, the paper suggests that the ethnic configuration we see in China today is a consequence of state-making, which concerned how the new government was to make itself more legitimate than and superior to the previous one in representing the population in its territory. I will first delineate how subsequent consequences came about after the government held its first three-state censuses. Second, by using government archives dating back to the early 1950s, this paper shows the agenda of the party-state in terms of constructing state apparatus and why local governments had to look into ethnic representation in their territories. Thirdly, drawing on data that I collected in the field, together with historical documents and governmental archives, I examine why Fujian started the project of ethnic identification (*minzu shibie*) in early 1953, earlier than anywhere else, and also its local effects when it was first carried out in the Quanzhou areas. This paper argues that as a project to categorize the population, ethnic identification was a relevant part of state-making in terms of power allocation and governmental apparatus construction. In considering the formation of the ethnic configuration in China today, our understanding of the situation must remain limited and partial.

A recent study adopts a purely cognitive approach towards ethnicity.[1] This approach suggests drawing 'ethnicity, race, and nationalism together rather than as separate subfields, and re-specifying the old debate between primordialist and circumstantialist approaches'.[2] Whether or not other studies have treated ethnicity, race, and nationalism as separate subfields is, however, questionable. I would argue that theorists of ethnicity such as Edmund Leach, Fredrick Barth, Clifford Geertz, Charles Keyes, and Abner Cohen, have long recognized that ethnicity formation takes place under the influences of external agencies.[3] Ethnicity is, as a result of

[1] Rogers Brubaker, Mara Loveman, and Peter Stamatov (2004), 'Ethnicity as Cognition' in *Theory and Society* 33: 31–64.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Edmund Leach (1954), *Political System in Highland Burma* (London: Athlone Press); Fredrik Barth (1969), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston: Little Brown); Clifford

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such approaches, generally no longer seen as something objectively measurable but anchored in assertions of identity, which, as Prasenjit Duara argues, is a 'subjective position produced by representations in relation to other representations'.[4] Identity is therefore manifested through exclusion of 'the other'. Such an understanding essentially implies ethnicity takes shape when 'self' and 'the other' meet. More recent studies have made clear how ethnicity phenomena may have come about as a consequence of formal categorizations of population.[5] Benedict Anderson, for example, has argued that governmentality, through modern political actions such as censuses and elections, produces bound seriality—'the finite total enumerable classes of population'—in Partha Chatterjee's phrase.[6]

If categorization is central to the function of human cognition, the power of governmentality is often sufficient for the categorizations made by external agencies to replace, change or strengthen those people may naturally have in their minds. Ways in which this has been done in China, for example, include school curricula, the media, museum representations, and other means after an initial categorization has been established. In the following, this paper deals merely with how and why the party-state in China carried out the project of categorizing the population in some relation to subjective reactions and responses.

Geertz (1963), 'The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiment and Civil Politics in the New States' in Clifford Geertz (ed.), *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity in Asia and Africa* (New York: Free Press) pp. 107–113; Charles Keyes (1976), 'Toward a New Formation of the Concept of Ethnic Group', in *Ethnicity* 3: 203–213; Abner Cohen (1969), *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

[4] Here I use Prasenjit Duara's phrase. See: Prasenjit Duara (1995), *Rescuing History from the Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) p. 7.

[5] See Edwin Ardener (1989), *The Voice of Prophecy and Other Essays* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell); Benedict Anderson (1990 [1983]), *Imaged Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso) pp. 163–86; Thomas H. Eriksen (1990), *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives* (London and Boulder, Colorado: Pluto Press); Charles Hirchman (1987), 'The Meaning and Measurement of Ethnicity in Malaysia: An Analysis of Census Classifications', *Journal of Asian Studies* 46(3): 552–582.

[6] Benedict Anderson (1998), *The Spectre of Comparison: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (London and New York: Verso) pp. 29–45; Partha Chatterjee (2004), *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World* (New York: Columbia University Press) p. 5.

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Ideology, state censuses, and the campaign for ethnic identification

An argument with which most China scholars would agree is that the ethnic identification campaign carried out in the early 1950s was a form of synthetic engineering by the new government as part of its nation-building programme in constructing state subjects. It was a way for the People's Republic of China to include those who had been considered as cultural 'others' throughout China's historical past as its subjects and therefore to change, or 'civilize', them, in order to construct a 'big family of socialist nationalities' (*shehuizhuyi minzu dajiating*).[7] Many scholars have explored the problems caused by the term '*minzu*' to which the People's Republic of China authority assigned 56 groups of people, arguing that it lacks meanings compatible with any of the concepts referring to human collectives in western languages.[8] This paper argues, however, that ethnic identification was such an important part of state-making that it was proclaimed in the very framework of nation-building; and that through the state perspective, *minzu* can be considered to be equal and fair when applied by the state in identifying and naming groups of people. The term in question articulates a stance of politically correctness; it, at least in theory, legitimizes those who, as a group of people, have rights to share in state power. This was not a policy, however, that the Chinese Communist Party practised towards ethnic minorities initially. The accomplishment of how the party-state copes with its ethnic subjects of ethnicities that we see today has gone through two stages, of self-determination and autonomy, respectively.[9] In the following discussion, I will first briefly delineate policy changes by the

[7] See Louisa Schein (1999), *Minority Rules: the Miao and the Feminine in China's Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press); Dru Gladney (1991), *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press); Katherine Palmer Kaup (2000), *Creating the Zhuang: Ethnic Politics in China* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers).

[8] Thomas Heberer (1989), *China and Its National Minorities: Autonomy or Assimilation?* (New York and London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.); Stevan Harrell (1990), 'Ethnicity, Local Interests, and the State: Yi Communities in Southwest China' in *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32(3): 515–48; Louisa Schein 1999; Ma Rong (2007), 'A New Perspective in Guiding Ethnic Relation in the Twenty First Centry: "De-politicization" of Ethnicity in China' in *Asian Ethnicity* 8(3): 200–17; Nicholas Tapp (2002), 'In Defence of Archaic: A Reconsideration of the 1950s Ethnic Classification in China' in *Asian Ethnicity* 3(1): 63–84.

[9] See Katherine Palmer Kaup (2000); Dru Gladney (1998), *Ethnic Identity in China: The Making of a Muslim Minority Nationality* (Harcourt Brace College Publishers); Colin

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Chinese Communist Party in terms of its consideration of the destiny of ethnic minorities in the revolutionary process in the past decades. I argue that the policy changes from self-determination to ethnic district autonomy (*minzu quyu zizhi*) showing the evolving process of understanding of ethnic realities in China by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. This understanding, however, was not just rhetorical, but a kind of contract signed-off by both the state and every separate ethnic minority under which the state assigns ethnic minorities licenses as beneficiaries. Therefore ethnic minorities fix their own local boundaries and hold on to identities constructed through this process whilst also affiliating to a national one. So, fundamentally, the campaign of ethnic identification has been an important component part of state-making and the key to the whole process is *control*.

From its outset, the Chinese Communist Party established its pursuit of interethnic equality as one of its revolutionary purposes. However, in the very beginning, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party knew little about the country's ethnic realities. It was party leaders' basic belief in the ideals of communism that led them to devise ways to cope with the national question in the first place.[10] Communist ideology, as Ja'nos Kornai has shown,[11] consists of some basic promises of 'Messianic delivery' of the population. The ethnic minorities in China were considered to be oppressed peoples who represented potential revolutionary power waiting for mobilization. Interestingly, during the early period of the communist revolution, the policy of the Chinese Communist Party towards the ethnic minority seems to have been embedded in a framework fraught with the meanings of nationalist ideology. Before the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), the party was strongly advocating 'self-determination' (*zijue*) as its only policy towards ethnic minorities. Several documents dating back to the period from the 1920s up to the 1930s suggest that the Chinese Communist Party even went so

Mackerras (1996), *China's Minorities Cultures: Identities and Integration since 1912* (New York: St Martin's Press).

[10] I take the concept of the national question in the sense of Walker Conner that is referring to 'the entire network of problems arising from the existence of nations and nationalities', see Walker Conner (1984), *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) p. XV. The Chinese Communist code phrase *'minzu wenti'* conveys the same message.

[11] Ja'nos Kornai (1992), *Socialist System: the Political Economy of Communism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press) p. 53.

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far as to declare that all minority peoples in China had their rights to separate from 'China Proper' (*Zhongguo benbu*) to establish their own Republics.[12] The policy change from self-determination to ethnic autonomy (*minzu zizhi*) took place just after the Long March (1934–1935). The reasons for this change are clear. First, as scholars agree,[13] it was as a result of political necessity arising from the war of resistance against Japan. Second, during the Long March, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party realized how complex the subject of ethnicity was in China, which increasingly suggested to them that the national question should be treated differently from what they had originally advocated in a Chinese context. And indeed, before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 the Chinese Communist Party had practised ethnic autonomy, first in the border areas (*bianqu*) and then in Inner Mongolia where the first ethnic autonomous district was founded in 1947. Several documents located in government archives show that the state government intentionally looked for ethnic representation as soon as the Chinese Communist Party attained power. The governments of the lower levels were assigned quotas to establish a certain number of ethnic-democratic coalition governments (*minzu minzhu lianhe zhengfu*), which was considered to be preparation for the further implementation of a system of autonomous ethnic districts (*minzu quyu zizhi zhidu*).

Obviously, carrying out a specific social policy towards ethnic minorities was a relevant component part of state-making, which encompasses a set of projects or scenarios aimed at creating an entire state apparatus and system. As a modern state, socialist China resembles states elsewhere in its formal constitution, laws, and legal regulations.[14] Nonetheless, since the ownership system essentially differentiates socialist states from other modern states, the fact of state-making in the People's Republic of China should be examined, among other things, in two respects: power structure and ideology. The leadership of the People's Republic of China, like that of any other newly established modern state, was above all concerned with the question of sovereignty. This is the reason that the state-making engineering of socialist China had to be implemented by carrying

[12] Zhonggong Zhongyang Tangzhanbu (United Front of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party) (1991), *Minzu Wenti Wenxian Huibian—1921.7–1949.9* (Compilation of Documents on the National Questions, 7.1921–9.1949), (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Chubanshe) pp. 22, 27–28, 86, 166, 323.

[13] See Mackerras, *China's Minorities*, pp. 9–12; Gladney *Ethnic Identity*.

[14] Kornai, *Socialist System*, pp. 36–37.

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out a specific policy preferentially towards national minorities, since most ethnic minorities live in the peripheral areas of the country. In addition to the political reasons, the original intentions that drove communists to undertake revolution also determined the new government to act benevolently towards ethnic minorities. Not only has the preferential social policy which has been adopted towards ethnic minorities demonstrated that the Chinese Communist Party keeps promises it made to the people during the revolution, but it was also a strategy to consolidate power and ensure the sovereignty of the country.

As to the power structure in the People's Republic of China, its constitution of power is based upon communist ideology, so that the fundamental logic and intent of the newly established Chinese state is, as Foucault comments on the modern state, to represent their peoples.[15] In other words, the penetration of bureaucratic power is considered as a matter of course since it means that the people are 'self-governed'. Moreover, because communist ideology itself consists of a set of promises, the socialist states should therefore be destined to realize them. The project of ethnic identification served this goal.[16]

Traditionally, ethnic minorities in China were considered 'backward' in all respects, ranging from culture to social economy, so that, according to communist revolutionaries, they had to be given special care. Available data demonstrates that fulfilling the promise of ethnic autonomy had concerned the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party long before the 1950s project of ethnic classification. In the process of establishing the state apparatus and the system of bureaucracy, the Chinese Communist Party had to think seriously about how to allocate power and other resources to each ethnic minority. Indeed, it could be suggested that a messianic form of charity prompted them to activate a preferential policy towards ethnic minorities.

[15] Michel Foucault (1991), 'Governmentality', in Graham Burchell *et al.* (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) pp. 87–104.

[16] For the question of how the modern state performs governing, see also Nikolas Rose (2005), *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller (1992), 'Political Power beyond the State: Problematics of Government', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 43(2): 173–205.

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In this sense, the relationship between the state and ethnic minorities presents a 'social contract'[17] or 'patron-client' relationship,[18] one of the essential aspects of state-society relations in socialist countries. It is the state's obligation to demonstrate its benevolence to its citizens, while in exchange the latter should accept the legitimacy of the regime. From the standpoint of the Chinese Communist Party, constructing a nation-state to include various ethnic groups had to be established specifically in terms of power-sharing arrangements. The policy of interethnic equality had to be envisioned in the constitution of all institutions, at all levels, for example, the system of the People's Congress had to make sure there were seats for representatives of all ethnic minorities. Ethnic representation was thus critical in the power structure of the People's Republic of China.

I have remarked that, on the eve of the People's Republic of China's establishment, the debate on the national question once again emerged among the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party. It was, however, the concept of sovereignty that was decisive in bringing them to final agreement. It was stated in the first meeting of the political consultation conference in 29 September 1949, that: 'all regions where minority nationalities live in a compact community should put the autonomy of ethnic districts into practice, setting up various kinds of ethnic autonomous bodies respectively, according to both compact degrees of the nationalities' populations and the size of districts'.[19]

In line with these considerations, we can argue that it was urgent for the state to secure a system of ethnic categorization. This was what the political meaning of ethnic identification was all about. Though the campaign of ethnic identification was officially launched in 1953, it actually began immediately after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and lasted over three decades.

Chinese academia has divided the whole experience of the campaign into four stages as follows: the first was the stage of initiative between 1949 and 1954; the next stage, called the climax, was between 1954 and 1964; the third stage from 1965 to 1978 was when the work was effectively halted; and the last stage from 1978 to 1990 was called

[17] Jan Adam (ed.) (1991), *Economic Reforms and Welfare System in USSR, Poland and Hungary, Social Contract in Transformation* (London: Macmillan).

[18] Jean Oi (1989), *State and Peasant in Contemporary China: The Political Economy of Village Government* (Berkeley: University of California Press).

[19] Zhanggong Zhongyang Tongzhanbu, *Minzu Wenti*, p. 1289.

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the stage of restoration.[20] This schema is inconsistent in terms of the length of each stage. This is of course not a problem as long as the division strictly follows some inner logic.

Except for the third stage, all the other stages were related to the 1953, 1964, 1982 and 1990 state censuses. Scholars have argued the importance of censuses to the construction of ethnic and national identities.[21] The China experience exemplifies this argument. But the China example is different in one important respect; the government did not classify the population prior to the census. In the first two censuses people were allowed to fill out whatever they believed they were. Some very interesting correspondence between the Central Office of the National Census and the Fujian government agencies about some problems in the census demonstrates that, in the 1953 census, the government encouraged people to submit their own ethnic identifications, though the census questionnaire did list some suggested names of nationalities. For example, the list left out Manchus, so that many people questioned if Manchu was a minority nationality. Some other questions were about how to deal with those who had been Han historically, but who were then identifying themselves as a certain minority nationality, and what to do with those who claimed ethnic identities which had never been heard of before.[22] The answers from the Central Office of the National Census were interesting and particularly pointed out that all the 'nationalities' listed in the census form were only examples and suggestions; ethnic identities listed on the form were not able to represent all nationalities in the country, so that people were allowed to fill out whatever they wanted.[23] In this regard, it is reasonable to attribute the campaign, its initiative and its finishing, to some technical problems resulting from the censuses. In other words, the work of identifying nationalities was actually a remedial exercise undertaken to deal with some particularly urgent political situations.

[20] Huang Guangxue *et al.* (1995), *Zhongguo de Minzu Shibie* (Ethnic Identification in China), (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe) pp. 147–159.

[21] Among others see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 163–186; Ardener, *The Voice of Prophecy*. Hirchman, The Meaning and Measurement, pp. 552–582.

[22] Fei Xiaotong (1981), *Towards a People's Anthropology* (Beijing: New World Press).

[23] See Fujian Provincial Archive (hereafter FPA), 138-1-298 (1953). Documents in Chinese government archives are listed by *juanzong* or *quanzong* ——both mean file, *mulu* (catalogue), *an'juan* (archive) numbers. This paper gives the three numbers instead of titles of the document. For example, FPA, 138–1-298 refers to a document located in the Fujian Provincial Archive, its file, catalogue, and archive numbers, respectively, are 138, 1, and 298.

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Although the censuses allowed the peoples freely to express their ethnic identities, the government already had some scenarios. Several dozen nationalities were quickly identified after the first two censuses. Among those identities officially listed, some had traditionally been acknowledged by the mainstream Han society, but were only somewhat accepted by the minority peoples, or vice versa. But, the likelihood is, the number of ethnic identities shown by the report from the 1953 census was so huge and therefore unacceptable, that the government had to regroup those identities. The formal campaign of ethnic identification was hence carried out.

As has been mentioned, the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party early on recognized the complexity of ethnic diversities in China. As soon as the People's Republic of China was established, the central government sent out five groups of delegates (*Zhongyang Fangwentuan*) to visit the Southwest, Northwest, Midsouth and Northeast, and Inner Mongolia between 1950 and 1952. There were more than eighty ethnic identities expressed amongst the peoples visited in Guizhou Province alone. Though the number of the identities turned out to be lower than expected, it still bothered the government. There had been at least one-hundred ethnic identities in the province, according to earlier reports.[24] What further surprised the government, however, was the result of the first national census, which took place in 1953 and used Soviet standards and communist *ethnofilia*, which showed more than 400 identities. Among these, about 260 came from Yunnan Province. This directly triggered the urgent need for the campaign. So, technically, the undertaking of this campaign was a treatment directed at an 'abnormal state'; it was essentially a case of 'urgent bureaucratic regrouping'.[25]

The ethnic identification campaign was therefore a completely political manoeuvre. As noted above, the preferential policy towards ethnic minorities was a direct part of the state-making process in the 1950s, so that one of its important functions was to recruit minority elites in order to install them in the state apparatus and all relevant bureaucratic bodies. But the number of ethnic identities from the census was definitely in excess of the recruitment capacity. The government therefore had to find an alternative way to regroup the identities.

[24] Huang Guangxue *et al*., *Minzu Shibie*, p. 149.

[25] Valery A. Tishikov (2000), 'Forget the "Nation": Post-Nationalist Understanding of Nationalism' in *Ethnic and Racial studies* 23(4): 625–650.

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The central government thus sent out several investigative teams of scholars and cadres soon after the 1953 census. Interestingly enough, the first group of people they investigated for identification were the She, an ethnic group of mountain habitants in the border areas both of Fujian-Zhejiang-Jiangxi and Fujian-Guangdong-Jiangxi provinces, although, for some reason, their ethnic identity was not officially recognized until 1964.[26] It is interesting to ask why the state did not choose ethnic groups in either Guizhou or Yunnan, or other provinces traditionally recognized as minority areas rather than Fujian, a southeast province best known for its overwhelming hegemonic Han culture.

As noted by Ma Yao, a high-ranking official in charge of ethnic investigations and studies in Yunnan, the ethnic identification campaign did not start until 1954 in that province because of its ethnic complexity. In 1952 Ma experienced difficulties when he took a work team to minority areas in Dehong, Yunnan. They announced that the new government would not change the local chieftainship system and moreover would not carry out any reforms unless the local ethnic leaders approved, and it was only in this way that they were able to negotiate with local minority individuals.[27] Other working teams in other areas also experienced the same situation.[28]

The problems that governmental agencies had faced in Yunnan might have reminded policy-makers that it would not be feasible to carry out the initial campaign of ethnic identification in areas of rich ethnic diversity. This could be one of the reasons why Fujian

[26] The She were in the situation of being culturally almost the same as their Han neighbours, but still strongly holding on to their ethnic identities, so that, for example, though the She were identified in 1953 and were confirmed to be a minority group, their separate ethnicity (*zushu*) was not yet certain because of a popular belief that both the She and Yao shared a common descent (*She-Yao tongyuan*). Thus, in 1955, the government started the second round of investigations by inquiring mainly into the relationship between the She and the Yao in Guangdong, and the She as a separate minority nationality (*danyi shaoshu minzu*) was thus finally confirmed. This, however, was not officially announced until 1964 after the second national census, see Huang Guangxue *et al.*, *Minzu Shibie,* pp. 174–187.

[27] See Ma Yao, 'Yunnan Minzu Shehui Lishi Diaocha Huigu' (Review of Investigation of Ethnic Social-histories in Yunnan) in Yu Baolin and Hua Zugen (eds) (2000), *Zhongguo Minzu Yanjiu Nianjian 1999 Nian Juan* (Chinese Minzu Studies Yearbook, 1999 Volume) (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe) pp. 59–74, cited in Bin Yang (2009), 'Central State, Local Governments, Ethnic Groups and the Minzu Identification in Yunnan' in *Modern Asian studies* 43(3): 741–775.

[28] Wang Lianfang (1999), '*Wang Lianfang Yunnan Minzu Gongzuo Huiyi* (My Experience of Yunnan Minzu Affairs) (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe) p. 16, cited in Yang, Central State, Local Government, pp. 741–775.

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was chosen for the early campaign. In addition to the 1953 census result, it is most likely (as some government archives indicate), that the provincial government in Fujian unilaterally pursued their own ideas of ethnic representation and so faced some trouble with claims the people made about their ethnic identity. What bothered the government in particular was that many of the people claiming obscure ethnic identities in Fujian were culturally quite the same as their Han neighbours, but were strongly convinced that they must be ethnically different and called themselves by a variety of ethnonyms which, ironically, were mostly derived from the Han. However, in contrast with other provinces, ethnic diversity in both Fujian and Zhejiang was not so conspicuous and was supposed to be not too complicated to identify. This could be another reason why the campaign of ethnic identification began in Fujian.

Other ethnic work considered to be important in this stage took place in the Northeast, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang regions. Investigators from the Central College for Nationalities differentiated the Daur (Tahur) from the Mongol, who therefore became a separate minority nationality. In Xinjiang, the investigative groups changed the name of *Guihuazu* to Eluosizu (the Russian nationality), because the term *Guihua* (naturalized) was considered an insulting word given previously by the old regime. The team also put the so-called Talangqi people in the Ili areas together with the Uygur. In a word, in the first year of the campaign, 38 out of over 400 identities were reportedly officially assigned as nationalities.[29] Many of them, however, were already singled out and traditionally recognized, such as Mongol, Tibetan, Korean, Miao, Yao, Manchu, Yi, and Hui. It is the case, as scholars have suggested elsewhere, that many of the identities assigned by the state to different minority nationalities had emerged long before, or even during, the early period under the Qing, and had continued through the Republican era.[30] This is to say that the campaign itself benefitted from the legacy of late imperial China.

[29] Huang Guangxue *et al.*, *Minzu Shibie,* p. 148.

[30] Heberer, *China and Its National Minorities,* pp. 11–18; June Teufel Dreyer (1976), *China's Forty Millions* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press) pp. 7–14; Stevan Harrell (1995), 'Introduction: Civilizing Projects and the Reactions to Them' in Stevan Harrell (ed.), *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press) pp. 1–36; Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang,* pp. 51–73; Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton (2006), *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press); Bin Yang 2009.

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Many of those identities, however, were floating and not yet fixed. From this point of view, peoples' identities were not firmly established or fixed until the time of the Chinese communist regime.

After the 1953 census, the identification of minority nationalities focused on *guibing* (incorporation). The next stage, considered to be the climax of the campaign, was from 1954 to the second census in 1964. Its central area was Yunnan. Its most impressive work was to identify an overarching population of three million people whose languages belonged to the Yi language family and who were thus incorporated into the Yi nationality. This *guibing* was derived from linguistic analysis, but some social customs were also taken note of. A similar methodology was applied to several groups of people related to the Zhuang and at least six ethnic groups were merged into the latter category. In sum, the campaign in Yunnan resulted in the merging of about 260 identities from the 1953 census into 22 nationalities.[31] Most of these were identified and officially announced after the census, showing clearly that the state had tried to reduce the number of ethnic identities. The most they did was lump 'fresh' identities together with 'old' ones. This seemed to be successful. But, surprisingly, the 1964 national census still reported a total of 183 identities. Again, after another urgent regrouping, 74 out of 183 groups were merged into 53 officially identified nationalities, including those who had been identified in between the two censuses but were not officially announced until the results of the second census were released. The rest of the 183 are said to have had their appeals concealed in the campaign following the 1964 census.[32]

After the Luoba were defined in 1965, as a separate minority nationality, China suffered through the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) for more than ten years. The ethnic identification campaign had no way to continue and was attacked by radical leftists. The planned third national census was not conducted. As some reports have noted, some not-yet-identified ethnic identities appeared in the media during this period.[33]

The reform and open policy was launched in 1978, stimulating people to pursue economic development. The government resumed

[31] See also Thomas Mullaney (2004), 'Ethnic Classification Writ Large: The 1954 Yunnan Province Ethnic Classification Project and Its Foundation in Republican-Era' in *China Information*, 18(2): 207–42; Colin Mackerras (2004), 'Conclusion: Some Major Issues in Ethnic Classification' in *China Information*, 18(2): 303–314.

[32] Huang Guangxue *et al.*, *Minzu Shibie*, pp. 148–150.

[33] Ibid., pp. 150–151.

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the work of ethnic identification. The situation had changed however, due to new policies benefiting the ethnic minorities more. The government suddenly received a pile of new applications from people who wanted to have their ethnicities officially recognized. People found ethnic identification could help them achieve many things and therefore asked to change or re-recognize their ethnicities. This was overwhelmingly apparent in the third national census in 1982. Over five million people made such claims. This was the most important factor pushing the central government to make the decision to stop the work of identifying ethnicities altogether. On 10 February, 1987, the campaign was officially announced to be completed. Huang Guangxue, the deputy director of the State Council of Nationality Affairs, said in an interview that the work of identifying nationalities was basically completed and there would be no more large-scale investigations for the purpose either of resuming or changing ethnic identifications.[34] Although appeals for new ethnic identifications, other than those of the 55 already recognized minority nationalities have continued to come in, they have all been refused by the government.

Searching for ethnic representation in Fujian in the early 1950s

The above description provides a background on how overall work on the issue of ethnic minority came about in Fujian in the early 1950s. In the remainder of this paper specific information about how the policy in question was carried out in Fujian is discussed, as well as the question of how the locals responded to government agents when asked about their ethnicity. It is often the case in China that governments of different levels will modify state policies in order to fit a specific regional situation. This kind of modification does not necessarily bother the higher authorities and, more often than not, does not imply resistance to central government. The conditions of the regional variation, however, should be taken into account.

Interestingly, regional variations in policy-making may be more radical than those of central government but still remain in line with the same objective. Available data shows that Fujian might have been more radical in the activation of identity politics. When the Committee of East China Military Administration stipulated

[34] Ibid., p. 157.

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the quota of establishing the ethnic autonomous districts at either township or county levels in Fujian, government agents were still not sure about the province's degree of ethnic diversity. Objectively, from an administrative standpoint, whether or not Fujian in fact had the requisite size of ethnic population to set up so many ethnic autonomous townships, with more than one hundred planned, according to a government document,[35] was problematic. Though central government did not officially order regional governments to establish ethnic townships (*minzuxiang*) until 1955,[36] the establishment of autonomous ethnic districts at different levels was encouraged. The response from both the Committee of East China Military Administration and the Fujian government could be explained as having a fondness for the grandiose. But, one way or the other, this approach did identify something interesting which directly influenced central government in its decision to take the first round of campaigning for identifying nationalities in the province seriously.

By and large, the diversity of local groups in Fujian has found full expression in identities based on places, languages, religions and ethnicity. In any area, for example, because of the existence of labour divisions, some places or linguistic identities are imbued with the meaning of ethnicity.[37] More often than not, each of these identities is polyhedral, shifting all the time in accordance with varying contexts. One finds in Singapore that the ethnic Chinese there put all the gods that represented different place identities in South Fujian and the Chaoshan areas of Guangdong Province together in one temple, indicating that the polyhedral (multi-based) nature of identity can be perceived to integrate people when situations change. However, this seems not to have been the case with Han-She relations until

[35] FPA, 138-2-293 (1952); FPA, 178-1-144 (1953).

[36] FPA, 138-5-449 (1955). According to this document, issued by the State Council in 1955, the system of ethnic townships is different than the system of autonomous ethnic districts because at the township level, the system of autonomy that the People's Republic of China Constitution stipulated cannot be completely carried out. This rule has been valid since then. For detailed information regarding the distinction between the system of autonomous ethnic districts and the system of ethnic township, see Zhang Hou'an (ed.) (1992), *Zhongguo Nongcun Jiceng Zhengquan* (The Political Power of Grass-roots Level in Rural China) (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe) pp. 235–247.

[37] G. William Skinner (1977), 'Introduction: Urban Social Structure in Ch'ing China' in G. William Skinner (ed.), *The City in the Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press) pp. 3–31; Emily Honig (1996), 'Regional Identity, Labor, and Ethnicity in Contemporary China' in Elizabeth Perry (ed.): *Putting Class in Its Place: Worker Identity in East Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press) pp. 225–243.

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quite recently. When the Fujian government activated the campaign to identify ethnic minorities, the She minority was the one the official agents first wanted to deal with. Accordingly, appeals for recognition of the She as a separate minority nationality in the province were overwhelming, even though they have called themselves by different names and identified themselves under different criteria.[38]

The campaign was first carried out in association with the establishment of an administrative system at regional and local levels in Fujian. The work was started in 1952 after central government sent out notifications to provinces to build up the local administrative systems. As for minority districts at local level, two kinds of organized political power were suggested. First, if an area had only one separate minority nationality living in a 'compact' community (*juju*), it should have an ethnic autonomous government; second, if an area had more than one nationality residing together (*zaju*) and their population reached a certain percentage, a nationalities' democratic coalition government would be the choice. Fujian was thus ordered by the Committee of East China Military Administration to establish its administrative system at local level with consideration for the minority nationalities' different residential situations.[39] The response from the Fujian government was very positive. At that time, the government was not sure how many kinds of ethnic minorities lived in the province, so that, in the official document, the boat people (*danmin*) were considered to be the most important minority people next to the She, whereas the Hui (Muslim Chinese) were not counted at all because of their limited population.[40] Thus, the Committee of East China Military Administration suggested to the Fujian government that it should consider setting up some autonomous governments in the communities of boat people, because the province had about 70,000 boat people.[41]

More specifically, the document from the Committee of East China Military Administration assigned the Fujian government some quotas, saying that the province should build up 77–88 ethnic autonomous districts at different levels and 125–140 ethnic-democratic coalition governments. The quotas were even assigned to specific counties and

[38] FPA, 138-2-447 (1953).
[39] FPA, 138-1-224 (1952); FPA, 138-2-239 (1952).
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid. Because the people were living on the water, the official document further pointed out that the government did not have to consider their autonomous area.

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cities. The practice of a preferential policy towards ethnic minorities in Fujian was thus initiated. The government soon delivered several kinds of aid to the areas in which the She and the boat people lived, including food, clothing, tools for agricultural production, and financial support, and proposed to popularize education and to cultivate cadres among the people. But, according to a report from the Fujian government, the establishment of the system of the autonomous government was not very successful due to lack of experience.[42] In the meantime, however, another reason that this work failed was because government agencies encountered particular problems within the peoples themselves. Problems stemmed from three situations: first, some of the She did not like to be called She because 'She' sounds the same as the character for snake, so it was insulting to them.[43] Second, the investigators found that most of the boat people refused to be recognized as a minority and could not find anything which characterized those people as different from other local people except for the fact that they had to live on the water.[44] Third, the government agencies discovered the existence of Muslim descent groups in the area of Quanzhou, a coast city in south Fujian, and particularly the Ding and Guo surname groups.[45] Again, both communities were 'accidentally' entering the national political life.[46]

The local response

The government agencies conducted their investigations amongst the Ding in the spring of 1953, such kinds of research visit being more like a political task. A report written by the Civil Administrative Department (*minzhengting*) of the Fujian government to central government in March 1953 indicates that the Fujian government proposed to set up an ethnic autonomous district in Chendai, where

[42] FPA, 178-1-144 (1953).
[43] FPA, 138-2-447 (1953); FPA, 138-2-445 (1953).
[44] FPA, 138-1-301(1953); FPA, 178-1-144 (1953).
[45] FPA, 178-1-144 (1953); FPA, 138-1-1139 (1953); FPA138-1-1140 (1953).
[46] Historically, both surname groups were reached by external Muslim agencies though most people of both groups were not regarding themselves as the Hui for many generations, see Fan Ke (2001), 'Maritime Muslims and the Hui Identity: A South Fujian Case' in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 21(2): 302–328; (2003) 'Ups and Downs: A South China's Local Muslim History' in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 23(1): 63–87. For other English accounts about the Ding Hui see Gladney, *Ethnic Identity*, pp. 135–155; Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*, pp. 261–292.

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the Ding lived, if their Hui ethnicity was confirmed.[47] The Fujian government wanted tentatively to carry out the system of autonomous ethnic districts there so that it could accumulate experience. If this was possible, said the report, the government would apply the experience to the whole province and hoped to complete 25–30 per cent of the task according to the quota assignment by the Committee of East China Military Administration[48].

Most people I interviewed among the Ding said that they knew nothing of the 1953 investigation. Some seniors, however, suggested that at that time nobody understood the Hui in the sense that people understand the term today and had never even heard the term *'Huizu'* (Hui nationality) until they met the investigators. A few months later in Baiqi, where the Guo Hui live, I heard the same from Guo informants. Although the term *'Hui'* or *'Huihui'* emerged to what it means today under the Ming, the two characters of *Hui* and *zu* did not constitute a meaningful term until the first half of the twentieth century.[49] At that time, however, the term referred to all China's Muslims, who have been classified into 14 separate minority nationalities today. Though the term might already have been understood in a narrower sense at this time by many leaders of the Chinese Communist Party due to the party's research work in the Border Region of Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia, it was still largely unknown or unfamiliar to most ordinary people, especially in Fujian, in the early 1950s.

The official term *Huizu* used to describe Chinese Muslims thus presented an obstacle to people such as the Ding and the Guo in their attempts to understand the government's intentions towards them. The investigators had carefully to introduce to them governmental policy towards ethnic minorities and to explain how they would benefit if they were the members of a separate minority nationality, and this in turn affected and shaped their responses. According to the report by these investigators, the informants among the Ding rejected the government's inquiry into their ethnicity and suggestions, though they had no problem agreeing that some of their ancestors had been Muslims and, as some of those informants acknowledged, had come from a certain foreign country:

[47] FPA, 178-1-144 (1953).
[48] Ibid.
[49] Also see Gladney, *Muslim Chinese,* pp. 135–155.

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It is alleged that the people surnamed Ding were descendants of Muslims, but they had changed their customs 500 hundred years ago, abolishing all religious practices and having no existing ethnic characteristic. Rituals, marriage, language and writing system are lumped together with the Han's. The local folk have never treated them as the Hui, **whereas they do not recognize themselves as the Hui either, and call themselves Han.** Their emotions about this seem reasonable.[50]

Therefore, the report suggested not considering the Ding as Hui. More information from that investigation can be found in the field report that is attached to the report cited above. That document includes detailed descriptions of the communications between investigators and informants. It also presents a detailed basic situation of the site at that time. Interestingly, what the Ding informants said to the investigators is not much different to what one might hear today, though the meaning has been switched to a contrary direction, as shown below.

The original report was divided into four parts describing the general situation, history, interethnic relations, and customs and habits. What most intrigues me is the third part. It thoroughly explains why the Ding did not want to consider themselves as Hui, but at the same time, it also acknowledges that the Ding seemed inconsistent about maintaining some connection with other Muslim communities. Among other examples, they had four young kinsmen recruited to the Chengda Normal School, a nationwide well-known school of Islamic education, then sponsored by Bai Chongxi, a Hui and a famous high-ranking general of the Guomindang army. But the investigators considered these details too slight to indicate that the Ding currently held on to the Hui identity. Those details could only be regarded as a reflection of the historical fact that the Ding had been Hui in the past.

The reason for this was that, according to the investigators, their informants all considered themselves to be Han (like the boat people) and did not want to think they were Hui any more:

Before our investigation took place, there was no one in all the villages ever knowing or asking about what their nationality was (*hezhong minzu*); nor have nearby residents ever treated them as the Hui. Some seniors who know the history of their ancestors only think that their ancestors were the Han, but converted to Islam. Therefore, in form they and the Han have no difference in the consciousness regarding what kind of people they should be. Also, no backlash that could be considered to be interethnic has ever happened there in

[50] FPA, 138-1-1139 (1953). [My translation and emphasis.]

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history. Though they had many feuds with nearby villages in their history, that was because Chendai has a large population sharing the same surname... and it was the phenomenon of big surnames eating small surnames (*daxing chi xiaoxing*), which was incited and manipulated by both the Guomintang gangsters, the local ruling class, and despotic landlords.[51]

The investigators could not find anything that could distinguish the Ding's ethnicity as Hui. Rather, they saw these people practising ancestor worship and folk religion as the Han did. Some of them had even converted to Christianity. The investigators particularly pointed out that Chendai had two Christian churches. Consequently, the investigators asserted, 'in their folk life or in their religious practice, there was no difference between Chendai "Hui" and the other Jinjiang locals'.[52] They hence suggested that there was no necessity to consider the Ding's ethnic status because the Ding simply did not care about it:

> Because their ancestors' ethnic status (*minzu chengfeng*) seems vague to them, there is no sense of ethnicity (*minzu guannian*) existing in their mind. So, when we came to the villages and put forth the question regarding their nationality, the folks there thought it was weird. After learning of their history through reading their own genealogy as a reference and visiting seniors, the people still have an indifferent attitude.[53]

In view of what the Ding said to the investigators, one can see that the investigation was actually turning into an exercise in political propaganda. It is reasonable to infer that this is what the investigators had to do otherwise the local folk would never have understood why they had to be ethnically different to their neighbours. Thus, communication between both parties turned out to be focused on what ethnicity meant to the people. According to the investigators, being a minority nationality in the historical past meant to be oppressed by not only the ruling class of their own society but also that of the Han, as well as the Han chauvinism of the old society. So, in the new society, minority nationalities in particular had to be taken care of by the people's government; it was the government's obligation to help

[51] Ibid. [My translation.]

[52] Jinjiang was promoted to a county-level-city (*xianjishi*) on 6 March 1992, ending its 1,275 years of history as a county. In the regional history, Jinjiang has been under the administration of Quanzhou, the city of which was the seat of Jinjiang County, see Jinjiangshi Difangzhi Bangongshi (City Office of Jinjiang Gazettee) (1994), *Jinjiang Shizhi* (Jinjiang City Gazetteer) (Shanghai: Sanlian Chubanshe) p. 7.

[53] FPA, 138-1-1139 (1953). [My translation.]

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minority people become masters of the country (*guojia de zhuren*). The responses from the informants to these views were dramatically ironic:

> After liberation and being under the leadership of Chairman Mao, everyone is equal; all people are the same no matter what nationalities they are. . . .even if the ancestor were the Hui, mothers and wives are hard to be thus included. It would be even worse to divide family members into different nationalities.[54]

These responses seem to represent what must have been most people's attitudes towards the investigation at that time, as we can see in the report; otherwise, the investigators would never have suggested not recognizing the Chendai Hui, because, as noted, the whole purpose of the investigation was to establish an ethnic basis for representation in the Fujian government.

The response from the Guo was essentially the same as from the Ding when they encountered a similar but separate investigation. The reasons that the Guo informants refused to accept ethnic recognition were grounded in their understanding of the situation of diverse religions coexisting in the area, and in the fact that some people in the Guo community had actually continued practising Islam until some time in the 1940s, so that Islamic beliefs were still fresh in living informants' memories.[55]

Investigators visited the Guo community in Baiqi, Hui'an County at about the same time as other investigators went to Chendai. The dates reports were sent out from Chendai and Baiqi were 10 and 17 April 1953, respectively. It is quite interesting to note the very different tones of these reports. The Guo, like the Ding, completely refused to be recognized as Hui, but some of them said that in the past, they had been forbidden to enter into marriage relationships only with those whose surnames were, for example, Jin, Ding, Ma, and Die, because they were convinced that they all shared common ancestors.[56] These surnames are locally well known for their 'foreign' Muslim descent. However, according to their genealogical records, many of them did actually marry with spouses of those surnames in the past. Either way, this information indicates that they felt they were on intimate terms with people of those surnames, though the latter did not necessarily think so. According to my experience, for example, the Ding do not feel they have anything special in common with the Guo or feel any

[54] Ibid. [My translation.]
[55] Fan, 'Maritime Muslims', pp. 302–328.
[56] FPA, 138-1-1140 (1953). Also see Fan, Ups and Downs, pp. 63–87.

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closer to them than with anyone else in the locale, although bonds may have existed a long time ago. Although the situation now is not the same as in the early 1950s, by comparing historical materials such as oral history, legends, and genealogies, we still can argue that, in all those surnames, the Guo were the last to lose an affinity that had once existed among them in the past.

Nevertheless, one transformation which occurred in this process of affinity is that, for the Guo informants, sharing a common identity with those surnames through the practice of Islam changed to claims of sharing a common ancestry. In other words, their interpretation of commonality with those surnames was anchored to the practise of ancestral worship. This by no means implies that the other surnames also adhered to some commonality between them. The fact is that some individuals from the Guo descent group thought their being on intimate terms with those surnames was, after all, an echo from the past. Nowadays, although one cannot find much data which strongly supports the assumption that those surnames felt intimacy with one another, Islam should certainly have brought them closer to one another in the past. Nonetheless, the interpretation of sharing a common ancestry in the eyes of government agents was not a distortion of existing historical fact, but rather evidence of an absence of Hui identity. This is because the Guo, according to the investigators,[57] were still practising Islam to some extent, and did not even think of the significance of the practice when they explained their relation with the surnames.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the comments given by the official investigators tended to dismiss the possibility of the Guo being a minority nationality, even though, according to the report, the investigators acknowledged the Guo as possessing some practices unique in the locale:

> What is different is that the dead here are not dressed in clothes but wrapped by cloth after washing the body. No candles are used, but fragrant woods are burned. Ahung is invited to read the *Koran* and the day for burying does not need to be selected, the deceased is simply put in the stone coffin, which was already prepared [when they were alive] and which looks attractive, like a rectangular, small cabinet with Arabic. . .on it. . . .Pork was forbidden. People are forbidden from offering pork to the ancestors, and the folks in all villages follow this rule. There were six people in three villages insisting on not eating

[57] Ibid.

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pork. Those who were put in the stone coffins are called 'believing in the big religion' (*xin dajiao*) or 'not opposed to the religion' (*bu fanjia)*.[58]

It seems that what the above information tells the reader, associated with religion and some customs, is what the Guo practised in the different historical periods. For example, only those graves that remained from the Ming dynasty would have had some Arabic inscriptions. But, people could have pointed out these past facts to the investigator, to demonstrate that practising Islam was still fresh in their memory. This, however, did not necessarily mean that they considered themselves to be people different to their neighbours, according to the conclusion of the report.

As to the interethnic relations (*minzu guanxi*, the report thus titled), the report says: there is nothing different between the Guo and other locals except for their funeral arrangements and forbidding pork in ancestor worship. Although in history the Guo had some warfare with other surnames in the locale, there was nothing to indicate that those fights had been related to ethnic differences. A legend was even repeated that the reason their ancestors converted to Islam was because of the strict system of interethnic hierarchy practised by the Yuan rulers, so that as a Han, it was not possible to be an official. In order to have a good future, their ancestors converted to Islam. This is a story they have traditionally heard from the Yuan dynasty: 'No Han can enter the palace'(*Hanren bu ru gong*). This wording further convinced the investigators that the Guo should not be regarded as Hui.[59]

Today, the Guo like to explain why they did not want to be Hui in the past. What the Guo informants said is quite the same as the views of the Ding previously. First, they had never heard the term *'Huizu'* at that time, only knowing that they had practised Islam (*huijiao*, in their own phrase). Second, they could not understand why they should be classified as different people just because of this. If this could be the case, then, why were not people who were Christians considered as such, like those in the neighbouring Dongyuan township? My informants used the phrase *'chijiao'*(dining on Christianity or 'rice Christians'),[60] a popular usage dating back to the nineteenth century

[58] Ibid. [My translation.]

[59] Ibid. Historical facts prove this saying is wrong. Han could become officials under the Yuan despite it not being so easy as under other dynasties.

[60] In early Christian missionary work, charity was employed by missionaries to convert Chinese. Many people converted to Christianity for food relief in the first

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that is still popular in rural south Fujian to refer to Christians, and said: 'the difference between those *jidutu* (Christians) in Dongyuan and us is that they are dining on *jidujiao* (Christianity), whereas we were dining on *huijiao* (Islam)'.[61]

Despite the fact that, in 1953, the investigators tended not to recognize the ethnic status of the Guo, they did not take a clear-cut position as regards the Guo's ethnic status. So, the result from the Guo investigation turned out to be slightly different than that of the Ding. The Ding were not considered to be Hui in the report because they did not seem to have any important features which made them culturally different from the local Han and they demonstrated no ethnic consciousness at all. But, with respect to the Guo, the report said: 'that the folks here believed in Islam is confirmed, but whether or not they are the descendants of *Huihuizu* (the Hui), we cannot make judgment'.[62] Obviously, the most important information these investigators received was that the Guo did not acknowledge their ancestors to be ethnically any different from the Han. The report did mention the Guo's general attitude towards the investigation. Some people, especially the grass-root cadres, thought that looking into their past ethnicity is insignificant and only makes trouble. But, there were a few people who already perceived that being members of a minority nationality might have some benefits, because the new government favoured minorities so highly. The report called this attitude *youdai sixiang*[63] —'thinking about how to get preferential treatment' in English.

Both investigations came essentially to the same conclusion. The difference was that the report from Baiqi only tended not to consider the Guo as Hui, whereas the report from Chendai suggested dismissing the possibility outright. The response from central government was significant. In the same file, a letter from the Central Government's Commission for Nationality Affairs[64] suggested that for the Chendai case:

place, so that *chijiao* was a joke regarding those converts' beginnings; but, now, in rural south Fujian, it has been used without any insulting meaning, and Christians are happy to apply it to themselves.

[61] My Field Notes. Interview, with Guo seniors, Spring, 1997.

[62] FPA, 138-1-1140 (1953).

[63] Ibid.

[64] Later, it changed its name to the State Commission for Nationality Affairs, known as *Guojia Minwei* in Chinese.

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Our opinion is that it is not urgent to confirm if they are Han or Hui, but to engage in both education and propaganda of policy towards nationalities among both the common and upper circles; make them understand the spirit of the central policy towards nationalities. It would be better to solve this according to the wishes of most people and of representative figures afterwards.[65]

This letter was sent out from Beijing on 30 April 1953. There was no response from the higher authority specifically on the Baiqi case. However, the letter was followed by an official notice from the provincial government indicating that a copy of the notice and the letter had been sent to Hui'an county at the same time, which was on 9 May 1953.

What followed was predictable. The Guo were officially listed as Hui in 1957, while the Ding were 'overlooked' until 1979.[66] The whole case shows that if the political power searches for ethnic representation, while the people are uncertain in this entirely new situation, then, cultural makeup turns out to be the key criteria in the official final decision. The case demonstrates that it was the government search for ethnic representation that made the Guo become Hui. Essentially, it was the same initiative for the Ding, who did not. Subjectively, they recognized the importance of ethnic representation, though this recognition came about 20 years later.

Conclusion

Through documents collected in field research and from government archives, this paper has examined how social policy towards ethnic minorities in China has been a component part of state-building, which, at the same time, signified nation-building. What came about in Fujian with regard to the national question in the early 1950s is

[65] FPA, 138-1-1139 (1953). [My translation.]

[66] See Gladney, *Muslim Chinese,* p. 261; Fan Ke (2006),'Traditionalism and Identity Politics among the Ding Community in South Fujian' in Tan Chee-Beng (ed.), *South Fujian*: *Reproduction of Tradition in Post Mao China* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong Press) pp. 35–68. Some leading figures in the Ding community have argued that the government did not overlook them at all. This was why they could get a quick response from the government soon after they had sent out their appeal for their Hui ethnic nationality assignment. They have also pointed out that though they were not officially the Hui, the government used to have special funds for them and sent them *Minzu Huabao* (the illustrated magazine for nationalities) regularly, see Fan, Traditionalism and Identity, pp. 35–68.

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discussed, as well as a brief review of how the policy in question has changed throughout recent history. I have suggested that the reason the Chinese Communist Party had to practise a preferential policy towards ethnic minorities was related to several concerns that came about because of communist ideology and that it is only under the conditions of the modern state that the issue of sovereignty has been one of the central concerns of the state in particular.

Marxist-Leninist sympathy towards the oppressed peoples has indeed been an ingredient in the communists' sense of superiority. For the communists, political ideology transcends both the cultures and traditions of peoples who are the objects of communist 'Messianic deliverance'. Moreover, no matter what the consequences of this deliverance, whether positive or negative, the dignity and loftiness of the ideology has to be examined as long as it involves itself in the 'nation-state system'. For example, as far as the notion of national sovereignty is concerned, it is somewhat contradictory to the proposition of national self-determination or ethnic autonomy; the proposition must hence be distanced from the original intention for which it was proposed.

So, we found that the Chinese Communist Party proposed to set up a system of ethnic autonomous districts, which was a way to keep the promises they gave to the people during the revolutionary period. To show that the regime represented the interests of all peoples the Chinese Communist Party leadership had to allow ethnic minorities to share power and to enable each separate minority to have representatives in the People's Congress. This is why they had to launch the project of ethnic identification.

By showing how the locals in south Fujian responded in different ways to the governmental inquiry into their ethnicity, this paper has tried to examine ethnicity in terms of subjective feelings which can themselves be seen as sentiments created largely in accordance with and in response to the needs of the state. It is the argument of this paper that the regrouping of population which occurred in twentieth-century China was the first exercise of political power in China that effectively reconstructed identities for ethnic minorities; it was a great chance for these groups to ponder and reflexively self-examine their own senses of subjectivity. This led to a predicament for the state as well as for those whose identities were being constructed, reconstructed, and invented. From the point of view of the state, the regrouping encouraged the minority peoples to be more concerned over ethnic delimitation and, consequently, forms of ethnic

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nationalism emerged. For the minority nationalities, their subjectivity has had to be manifested by their loyalty not only to different group memberships, but also to the modern nation-state, to the extent that they are included in the narrative of the Chinese nation (*Zhonghua minzu*).

Ultimately, both the construction of national identity and of ethnic identities must have brought about creative practices of invention in culture and in tradition. What concerns me here is that this process of construction led to other waves of identity construction at all levels in the land of China. Regardless of whatever these identities stand or stood for, the discourses on behalf of them, or production of meanings for them, have all been dramatically shaped within the same general framework of searching for power or accumulating capital of different forms in one way or another.

Nowadays, movements constructing identity have happened everywhere, and it is hard for us to believe the situation in China today is radically different from the outside world. The growing trend towards globalization itself tends to dismiss such a possibility. However, though modern high technology provides people with a broad space on which to give their cultural or ethnic performances for the whole global community, still, in China, it is the state that first grants people the 'licence' to mount these performances.

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