The census of November 2000 put the majority minzu in China, called the Han, at 91.59 per cent of the total population of 1,265,830,000, or about 1.159 billion people. The remaining 8.41 per cent of China’s total population, or just over 106 million people, belong to fifty-five state-recognized “minority nationalities” (shaoshu minzu). By far the most populous of the minorities is the Zhuang, with 16,178,811 people.²

Although the minorities are a tiny proportion of China’s total population, they take up about five-eighths of China’s total territory, including almost the whole of the western half and many of its south-western regions, including provinces like Yunnan and Guizhou. This lends them an importance politically and socially out of all proportion to their population. It is true that over the centuries and especially under the PRC, Han migration to the minority areas has been ongoing and extensive. What is the basis for the claim that the minority areas should belong to China? What is “China,” and which territories should it include? Are the minorities really “Chinese”?

What is China? History and territory

Both the Republic of China (ROC) and the PRC based their territorial claims upon the greatest extent of China as it had become under the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). There are two points of great interest about this empire:

1. China was very much larger under the Qing than under the preceding Ming dynasty (1368–1644), having taken varying degrees of control over the Tibetan, Mongolian, Turkic Muslim, and Manchurian territories to the south-west, west, north-west, and north-east.

2. The ruling family of the Qing dynasty belonged to the Manchus, an ethnic group that was to integrate itself into the Han Chinese majority to the extent that most of the markers of its ethnicity like language declined greatly during its reign.

Some suggest that it was “Qing imperialism” that led to the enlargement of China under the Manchus.⁹ Yet Western and Japanese imperialism exonerated the Manchu dynasty from the taint of imperialism from the early 1840s onwards by their own onslaughters onto the decaying empire that was China. It is hardly surprising that the ROC was not interested in giving up over half its territory. Countries do not behave like that unless some force compels them to do so. When there is a major change of regime, such as the overthrow of the monarchy in China in 1911, what happens is that regimes take over the same territory as the predecessor, frequently adding claims over unfairly lost regions, such as Hong Kong to Britain in the case of Qing China. Yet it is extremely striking that the Manchus, who were not part of the Han Chinese majority, took over this foreign country, doubled its territorial size, and then were removed from power in favor of a Han Chinese regime, which chose to hold on to the enlarged territories as far as it could.
affairs, and Sheng Shicai even joined the Soviet Communist Party. In 1944, local Uyghurs and other minorities declared an independent East Turkestan Republic, but it proved impermanent.\textsuperscript{14} There was no repetition of the situation in Mongolia, where Soviet occupation had led to independence.

Finally, we may note that the heartland of the former Manchu rulers to the north-east became very Sinicized after restrictions against Han migration there were totally lifted at the end of the 19th century. There was a spectacular rise in the population from about 10 million at the turn of the 20th century to just over 30 million in 1932, the year Japan set up its puppet state of Manchukoku, most of the increase being due to Chinese immigration.\textsuperscript{15} The irony here is that the expanding Sinicization coincided with the time Japan took the territory over and formally proclaimed it an independent Manchu state under the protection of Japanese bayonets. With Japan's defeat in 1945, there was no doubt that the territory would return to China.

So what does this history tell us about what China is and about its legitimacy? The answer is that it depends on how strongly the past weighs upon the present. PRC governments have always insisted that the minority areas are legitimately part of China because the PRC state inherited these territories from earlier governments, making them “integral parts of China.” For all Chinese governments, the unity of China – defined as the China enlarged by the Qing conquerors with the exception of Outer Mongolia – has ranked at or near the top of their priorities, and that includes the ethnic territories. However, even the cursory glance offered above shows that the inheritance of the ethnic territories is uneven in legitimacy. During the republican period, Chinese control over its territories was uneven at the best of times, but weaker over Xinjiang than Inner Mongolia, and weak to negligible over Tibet. Over Manchuria, it was non-existent from 1931 to 1945, but the sections of the international community that won the Second World War had never been happy with the fact of Japanese rule, and were more than happy to see the territory return to Chinese sovereignty after the war. The defeat of Japan in 1945 obliterated any semblance of legitimacy it had ever enjoyed in controlling parts of China in the view of any power. All those territories Japan had taken over from China since the end of the 19th century, including Manchuria and Taiwan, reverted to China at the end of the Second World War, and were claimed as “China” by the incoming PRC government in 1949.

Foreign governments have generally accepted Chinese claims over its minority areas, because it would be virtually impossible to redefine a country's territory every time it underwent a change of regime. Redefining territory leads to instability and even warfare. Moreover, if we went back in history to allocate territorial boundaries, the decision of which period was most appropriate would cause endless troubles. If the boundaries of the Qing were considered illegitimate, why should it go back to the much smaller Ming in preference to the quite extensive Tang dynasty boundaries? What would prevent Turkey reclaiming the boundaries of the Ottoman empire at
its largest extent? Of course, one major exception to such a pattern is Israel, which was re-established in 1948 after a hiatus of more than two millennia, but this is very much a special case and shows the amount of trouble restorations of old states and boundaries can cause the international community. So it comes as no surprise that the international community continues to recognize the ethnic areas of China as part of the country.

The general principle that a nation has the right to inherit its territorial boundaries from its predecessor is a legitimate one. So it appears unnecessary to challenge the legitimacy of the Chinese boundaries in terms of the minority areas. I see little merit in the suggestion put forward by some scholars that China might well return to its Ming size because it can only be problematical to decide on which period's boundaries are legitimate if not those of the predecessor regime.

The most controversial and problematic of all those territories the current Chinese government claims as part of China, and the most likely to cause conflict, is Taiwan. However, it is outside the scope of the present chapter, because the legitimacy of the various claims concerning its status has little to do with Han-minority relations.

History is an important criterion for the legitimacy of a state's intervention in ethnic areas. However, history can be subject to differing points of view. Moreover, history is not the only criterion to establish legitimacy. A regime may be legitimate in the eyes of the international community, but not in the eyes of its own ethnic minorities. It is also possible that ethnic relations may deteriorate to such an extent as to affect legitimacy. If relations with the majority deteriorate to the point where rebellions break out, or dissatisfaction becomes extreme, then the legitimacy of Han rule is again called into question.

Who is Chinese? Ethnic identity and Han–minority relations

"What is China?" raises another question: "Who is Chinese?" Are all those people who live within the borders of "China" equally "Chinese"?

The second sentence of the 1982 PRC Constitution, which remains in force as the 21st century begins, says that "The people of all nationalities in China have jointly created a splendid culture and have a glorious revolutionary tradition." Article 4 states that all the nationalities are equal; its ban on any action that might undermine "the unity of the nationalities" or instigate their secession. This inclusiveness suggests that all citizens of China regardless of ethnicity are indeed equally Chinese, but that any attempt to secede from China's family of nationalities will be firmly suppressed.

Part of this policy toward minority nationalities is a system of autonomy. In essence, this means that the government establishes "autonomous" areas in places where there are concentrated communities of minority ethnic groups and allows them a limited degree of autonomy. This includes the need for the government head of the autonomous place to belong to the nationality exercising autonomy, although this privilege does not extend to the CCP, which holds the real power. It also includes the right of the minority group to use their own language in the government and elsewhere, to follow their own customs and religion, provided there is no threat to the state, and to exercise some control over the local budget. In reality, practice has not always corresponded to theory, and some ethnic languages have recently declined in use, including in government.

Also involved in "autonomy" is a system of "preferential policies" (youhui zhengce), such as exemption from the one-child-per-couple policy, preferential access to higher education, such as the ability to enter university with lower marks than comparable Han students, and favorable treatment for entry into the job market. The primary aim of these policies is to allow the minorities to "catch up" with the Han. The implication is clear: minorities are inferior to the Han. In general, minorities are poorer than the Han; but not all minorities are economically behind the Han. Affirmative action policies of one sort or another have now become commonplace in a great many countries throughout the world, even if they are under challenge.

Many people have drawn attention to a haughty, even racist, streak in Chinese culture. One scholar argues that the concept of "Chinese nation" (Zhonghua minzu) is "deeply infected by racism" because as an inclusive concept it presumes the Han as its core. My own personal observations over many years in China lead me to think that many Chinese care little for minorities, let alone their cultures, and tend to look down on them. Racism is not a weakness exclusive to China, nor is it particularly dominant there. But it is certainly quite strong enough to cause serious resentments among those who suffer from it.

In the period of reform, there have been contrary tendencies concerning ethnic identity. In some cases, ethnic consciousness is extremely weak and probably getting weaker. One scholar researched Tuja and Miao communities in the far north-west of Hunan and came to the conclusion that ethnicity had no clear meaning to them, their accepted identity as Tuja and Miao being nothing more than a classification imposed from outside. Another scholar, focusing attention on a Hubei prefecture classified as Tuja-Miao, also found that many people consider themselves Han, even though legally classified as Tuja. Both scholars agree that people whom outsiders classified as Tuja have little or no sense of ethnic consciousness as Tuja.

On the other hand, many of China's ethnic minorities have indeed experienced an increase in ethnic identity. One example is the Yao people of Guangxi and other parts of south-west China (population 2,637,421 in 2000). Ralph Litzinger concluded from field research in the late 1980s and early 1990s that Yao identity was undergoing a strengthening process. Indeed, he found that "elite members of the Yao nationality" had been "active agents in the making of a modern socialist and, more recently, postsocialist Yao identity." It is noteworthy that Litzinger calls his book
Other Chinas and uses the term “national belonging” in the subtitle, suggesting that the Yao are “another China” along with the Han.

Another nationality of interest is the Hui, usually identified as Chinese Muslims. The 2000 census put their population at 9,816,805. Dru Gladney’s intensive study of the Hui suggests a significant rise in their self-identification by the late 1980s. He concluded that this identity was ethnic, not merely religious, with Islam being only one of the markers of ethnic identity.24 What is striking about this finding is that the Hui are among the very few ethnic minorities in China who lack their own language. They are culturally very similar indeed to the Han, except for their Islam. It is evident that the revival both of Hui identity and of Islam gathered momentum strongly during the 1990s and beyond.25 I have heard credible reports that the revival of Islam is beginning to exercise a negative effect on relations between Hui and Han in some places, and that the Islamic clergy has even managed to gain influence and power in some Hui villages at the expense of the CCP.

One ethnic group in a rather special category is the Koreans, whose population the 2000 census put at 1,923,842. The Koreans have a very specific language and culture, and, despite living in China, remain very close culturally to their co-nationals in Korea. There is a strong sense of identity among the Koreans, and it appears to have grown stronger during the 1990s.26 On the other hand, Korean identity poses no threat to the Chinese state or to the CCP, and relations between Han and Korean appear to be comparatively free of serious tensions. The reasons for this favorable situation are highly complex, but might include the following:

- The Koreans on the other side of the border (in North Korea) do not in any sense constitute a model that could inspire co-nationals in China to wish to secede.
- The Koreans in China have done remarkably well economically and socially, with a standard of living just as high or higher than that of their Han counterparts.
- Historically, Chinese influence over Korea was heavy, including sharing Confucianism-based culture. Koreans in China are far better disposed to the CCP than almost any other major ethnic minority in China, partly because they shared a strong hostility and resistance to Japanese imperialism in the first half of the 20th century.
- Religion is not a factor in Han–Korean relations.

China is diverse. And so are China’s minorities. Even within minority communities there is a great deal of difference, just as there is among the Han and indeed other communities worldwide. At the same time, there are quite a few commonalities as well. All the minorities have been affected by the broad outlines of CCP policy. So, during the Cultural Revolution, traditional cultures and religions suffered persecution all over China, though it is true that the extent of pressure was not uniform everywhere. The thrust toward modernization that began in the late 1970s has also had a major impact just about everywhere in China, although again the extent of influence has varied greatly. In general, the cities have modernized much more quickly than the countryside, and Han areas more quickly than minority areas.

Yet it appears that many minority members are quite keen to participate in the economic benefits that go together with modernization. Many perceive more tangible and stronger advantages in the integration of their people into the Han Chinese economy, even if it means a decline in those special features that set their nationality apart. They may remain proud of belonging to their own ethnic group, but that does not mean they have to disavow being Chinese; or isolate themselves from China’s economic rise. A very good example of this process is China’s most populous nationality, the Zhuang. One scholar claims that many Zhuang villagers, who might never have even heard the name “Zhuang” in 1949, “today boast of their membership in China’s large minority nationality.” At the same time, she states that these same people, whose villages were once remote and isolated, “have now begun to participate in a modernizing integrated market economy.”27

Modernization presents minorities with a challenge. As Stevan Harrell notes of the Nuosu, the name applied to the Sichuanese part of the state-recognized ethnic group called Yi, with which the chapter began:

The challenge now for Nuosu who have some knowledge of the wider world (and they are still a minority) is to manage wisely the tension between cultural survival and economic development. It would be a great loss for the Nuosu if development passed them by, for Nimu [a Nuosu area in Sichuan] is still a poor, unhealthy, and often brutal environment, despite its natural and cultural beauty. It would be an equally great loss for the Nuosu and for the world if development and consumer culture finally smothered the exquisite mountain patterns that have survived the efforts of so many regimes to tame them and have regenerated themselves so spectacularly after the dark years of the Cultural Revolution.28

Harrell’s argument applies equally well to many minority communities.

During the “dark years” of the Cultural Revolution, the CCP tried quite consciously to stamp out ethnic cultures, including those of the Han. It was following a clearly assimilative policy, determined by the needs of the class struggle, as Mao Zedong (1893–1976) interpreted it. In the period of reform, on the other hand, we see a range of processes pointing in different directions. On the one hand, traditional cultures have revived. On the other, modernization processes are whittling away differences as globalization gathers momentum.

What follows from this material is that most members of minority ethnic groups are reasonably well integrated with the Han majority and
enjoy relations with them that are not necessarily any more rancorous than those the Han have with one another. They are keener to take advantage of economic progress and a rise in the standard of living than to assert their national status by breaking free of China. Some care nothing for their ethnic identity, even when it is offered. That suggests that there is no crisis of legitimacy on the grounds of ethnicity in most of the ethnic areas. It is likely that most members of ethnic minorities are quite happy to consider themselves Chinese, even if they do have a sense of ethnic consciousness that has strengthened over the years.

The Tibetans

In terms of legitimacy, by far the most problematic of the minority areas is the Tibetan heartland. I suggested above that China’s claim to sovereignty over Tibet was less well grounded historically than its claims over other ethnic areas currently part of the country, in part because of the weakness of central government influence in Tibet during the republican era. China sent troops into Tibet in 1950, and the following year its representatives signed an agreement with the Tibetan authorities under which Tibet would become part of the PRC but remain autonomous within it, including enjoying freedom of religion. However, in March 1959, a rebellion broke out, which the Chinese suppressed quickly and brutally. The head of the Tibetan government, the 14th Dalai Lama, fled to India and set up a government-in-exile there, while in Tibet itself both sides went back on the 1951 agreement. During the Cultural Revolution of 1966–76, radical Han and Tibetan Red Guards made active attempts to stamp out traditional Tibetan culture and religion. However, the early 1980s saw a drastic change in policy, with a consequent revival of Tibetan culture. Great improvements in conditions did not prevent large-scale demonstrations for independence from 1987 to 1989. The Chinese authorities suppressed these firmly, and imposed martial law from March 1989 to May 1990. They also implemented policies promoting rapid economic development, coupled with some degree of freedom of religion, but zero tolerance for separatism or any religious activities with the potential to promote it.29

Even though China’s claim over Tibet is not as strong on historical grounds as its claims over its other territories, countries that establish diplomatic relations with the PRC all recognize Tibet as part of China. In the sense that international recognition of territory is one criterion of legitimacy, then China’s claim may actually have strengthened under the PRC. On the other hand, international criticism of China for human rights abuses in Tibet reduces at least the perception of legitimacy. In the United States and elsewhere, there are movements that advocate Tibetan independence, some of them enjoying support in the high echelons of power. In 1989, the Dalai Lama won the Nobel Peace Prize, which greatly raised his already high prestige. Since that time, his trips abroad have multiplied in frequency and he has become an icon of the new spirituality that is so widespread in Western countries. However, although governments have mostly welcomed him, none has moved towards granting him diplomatic recognition. Criticism of Chinese policy and actions in Tibet has mainly stayed at the level of condemning human rights abuses, few challenging that Tibet is part of China.30

Since the disturbances of the late 1980s, Tibet has been reasonably stable. There has been no repetition of the large-scale disturbances of the late 1980s. There were no serious disturbances during the March 1999 40th anniversary of the 1959 uprising and 10th anniversary of the 1989 demonstrations that led to the imposition of martial law. And state-organized celebrations in 2001 commemorating the 50th anniversary of the 1951 agreement passed without incident.

The Tibetan standard of living has risen greatly, especially in the cities. I visited Tibet in 1990, 1997, and 2002 and found economic conditions improving dramatically each time, with people better dressed, better educated, and apparently in better health. It is true that this rise in living standards is uneven. A study of development at the end of the 20th century in Tibet came to the conclusion that “an extreme form of ‘urban bias’ skews development in Tibet, stratifying society across the ethnic divide and disparately benefiting the Han population mainly because it is urban.”31 The main site of disparities is urban/rural, not ethnic.

According to the 1990 and 2000 Chinese censuses, the Han population in the Tibet Autonomous Region rose from 81,217, or 3.68 per cent of the total, in 1990 to 155,300, or 5.9 per cent of the total, in 2000.32 These figures are open to debate. For instance, they do not include the army or the short-term floating population, both of which are overwhelmingly Han. However, there seems little doubt that there was an acceleration of Han migration to Tibet in the last decade of the 20th century. The floaters are mostly Han from other parts of China seeking employment in cities, especially the capital Lhasa.

As the 21st century dawns, Tibetan culture is alive and in no danger of dying out. Tibetans are still overwhelmingly dedicated to traditional Tibetan Buddhism, with no shortage of young men keen to enter the monastic life. One writer’s reference to “dozens of robed novices, many no older than 12” amid 300 monks in a Tibetan monastery in Sichuan province early in 2003 accords with my own findings both in Tibet itself and in other Tibetan areas of China.33 In mid-2002, the Tibetan government actually issued regulations promoting the study, use, and development of the Tibetan language.34

At the same time, modernization is exercising a weakening effect on Tibetan traditions, as it tends to do everywhere. According to a Tibetan college student, “The more money we Tibetans have, the higher our living standard is, the more we forget our own culture. And with or without the Chinese, I think that would be happening.”35 Tibetan language is tending to decline in use in favor of Chinese, because it opens more doors toward a
good career and prosperity. And religious persecution persists. At the end of 2002, two Tibetan monks were tried for allegedly being accomplices in bombings and separatist activities. The younger monk was executed in January 2003. Although the Chinese government no longer suppresses Tibetan culture unless it perceives it as a threat to CCP rule, the Chinese authorities keep an eagle eye out for "dangerous" activities, and may be quite happy to see traditions weakening among the people.

What does all this tell us about Han–Tibetan relations? The political protests of the late 1980s suggest that relations reached a low ebb at that time. Since then, however, economic development has to a large extent relieved tensions. But the very strong Han presence in the cities appears to me still (again, from random interviews I have undertaken) to arouse strong resentments. Moreover, Chinese authorities can hardly expect the Tibetan population to approve crackdowns on Buddhism and monks, who still enjoy great respect and affection among the Tibetan people.

On the other hand, according to one survey, relations may not have been as bad in the mid- to late 1990s as most in the West believed. Covering 586 families from various Tibetan areas, it was carried out in 1996 by a team of eighteen people led by Herbert Yee (Yu Zhen) of Hong Kong's Baptist College and including four Tibetans. In answer to one question relating to Tibetan integration into China, 546 people responded to the statement that the Han were honest and reliable, 12.5 per cent strongly agreeing, 62.5 per cent agreeing, 9.7 per cent disagreeing, and 1.3 per cent disagreeing strongly, the remaining 14.1 per cent holding no opinion. Surprisingly, the survey also found strong support for intermarriage between Han and Tibetans.

The Uygurs

The Uygurs are a Turkic people, and the great majority believe in Islam. Their language, culture, and lifestyle are closer to the Turkic peoples further west than to the Han Chinese. According to the November 2000 census, their total population at that time was 8,399,393, almost all living in Xinjiang.

In the early 21st century, Han relations with the Uygurs are worse than with any other ethnic minority in China, including the Tibetans. Since 1990, there have been repeated violent political disturbances. And since 2001, the war against terrorism has compounded the problem.

In April 1990, a small-scale rebellion erupted in Baren Township, Akto County, in the south-west of Xinjiang. Inspired by the Islamic doctrine of the "holy war" (jihad), it gained some support but was quickly suppressed by the Chinese state. Yet the 1990s saw a series of violent incidents aimed against Chinese rule, all of them suppressed by the authorities. Amnesty International was among worldwide human rights organizations that accused the Chinese authorities of serious abuses. In a long April 1999 report, Amnesty International charged, among other serious abuses, that torture was systematically used against Xinjiang's Uygur separatists.

Several studies have suggested that Han–Uygur relations in Xinjiang deteriorated over the 1990s. A major reason for this deterioration is increasing Han immigration into Xinjiang. This is not a new phenomenon, but appears to have gathered momentum in the 1990s. One study found a distinction in Uygur attitudes toward the original Han settlers who came in the early decades after 1949 and the new Han immigrants. Uygreens are not so badly disposed toward the old settlers, but hate the new ones intensely. The reason is that many of the "original settlers" were prepared to learn Uygur and adopt Uygur customs like giving up pork, while the new ones behave like colonial masters, adopting "great Han chauvinist attitudes."

Despite "preferential policies" and rising living standards among virtually all people, including ethnic minorities, Uygreens feel a growing marginalization in education and work. Han immigrants tend to get the better jobs, while Uygreens "end up doing blue-collar jobs or remain in traditional agricultural roles." In the cities, the presence of more prosperous Han gives the Uygreens something to compare themselves with, adding to resentments.

The war against terrorism that followed the 11 September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon has also affected Han–Uygur relations. As in many other countries, the war has increased mutual fear and mistrust among the Han and Muslim populations. Since the early 1990s, Muslim extremists have indeed occasionally targeted civilians. On the same day as the funeral service for Deng Xiaoping, 25 February 1997, terrorists planted four bombs in buses in the Xinjiang capital of Ürümqi, killing at least nine people and wounding numerous others, mostly children on their way home from school.

With the war against terrorism, the Chinese authorities were quick to claim connections between the al-Qaeda network and Uygur and Muslim separatists and extremists. At first, the United States was cautious in accepting the link, continuing to condemn PRC crackdowns as human rights abuses. However, in August 2002, both the United States and the United Nations formally listed the most important of the Uygur separatist organizations, usually known as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, as "terrorist." Uygur diasporic groups denounced the move, but won little international support.

The deterioration of Han–Uygur relations, combined with the fact that the Uygurs direct greater hatred toward the newly arrived Han than toward those of longer residence, suggests strongly that the legitimacy of Chinese rule in Xinjiang has suffered as far as the Uygurs are concerned. However, for its part, the Chinese state seems more determined than ever to maintain stability in Xinjiang, irrespective of the cost in terms of Uygur resentment. The international attitude, as expressed by the UN and US labeling of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement as terrorist, suggests that the war against terrorism may actually have improved China's claim to legitimate rule in Xinjiang.
The Mongolians

Inner Mongolia (or Southern Mongolia) has always remained part of China. Indeed, there are still far more Mongolians in Inner Mongolia than there are in the Republic of Mongolia. Censuses taken in China and Mongolia in 2000 showed 5,813,947 Mongolians in Inner Mongolia and 1,877,410 in Mongolia. The 2000 Chinese census had the total population of Inner Mongolia at 23.76 million, Han outnumbering Mongolians four to one.

Of all ethnic minority leaders, it was a Mongolian, Ulanhu (1906–88), who reached the highest leadership positions in China. He not only led the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region from its foundation in 1947, even before the PRC itself was established, to 1966, but was a member of the CCP’s Politburo from 1977 to 1985. Ulanhu was personally involved in drafting the Nationalities Autonomy Law of 1984. He became an icon of loyalty both to the Chinese state and to the Mongolian people, a remarkable achievement. His son Buhe to some extent inherited his status (though never his power), calling in 1997 for extension of the provisions of the 1984 Autonomy Law.

However, the Mongols of Inner Mongolia enjoyed more rights during Ulanhu’s rule than at the turn of the 21st century. Uradyn Bulag argues that despite Buhe’s 1997 efforts, autonomy has actually declined since the 1990s, due to a combination of economic development and suppression of Mongolian dissent. However, like other ethnic minorities, the Mongols have been enthusiastic and successful in making money. Increasing numbers learn Chinese to advance their job and career opportunities. A Mongolian incarnate lama I met told me that although he taught Mongolian in a secondary school because he felt passionately about its survival, he believed it was a language with very limited use or potential in the modern world, and that he was pessimistic about its future in Inner Mongolia.

Separatism and state legitimation

The Tibetans, Uyghurs, and Mongolians are the three minorities that history has shown to have the greatest potential for separatism from China. Were they to secede from China, the Mongolians would doubtless join up with the Republic of Mongolia, while the Tibetans and Uyghurs would form their own independent states. However, the likelihood of this occurring seems slighter in all cases at the beginning of the 21st century than it was in the early 1990s. The Chinese have won over enough members of the economic and political elite and the power of the Chinese army is such that successful secession today is more or less out of the question.

Because of the large Han population in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia, ethnic conflict might be worse in an independent East Turkistan Republic and united Mongolia than at present. A united Mongolia including Inner Mongolia would have far more Han than Mongolians, a prospect no Mongolian leader could welcome.

Separation of any territory from China would require:

- the collapse of the Chinese state; and/or
- armed foreign intervention.

By the collapse of the Chinese state, I mean more than the overthrow of the CCP; rather, a disintegration involving social, political, and economic turmoil, and probably civil wars. The imminent collapse of China has indeed been predicted, but seems unlikely as long as the economy continues to grow. Long-term economic downturn could trigger social instability and political fragmentation. However, the model of Indonesia suggests that one case of successful secession need not necessarily lead to national disintegration.

At present, the likelihood of foreign intervention to assist any separatist movement in China seems remote. The war against terrorism has made such an eventuality in China less likely than ever, because the most likely candidate for intervention – the United States – is much more interested in keeping China as an ally in the struggle against terrorism than in turning it into an outright enemy through provocations that affect its vital interests. Neither the United States nor any other power has any interest in intervening militarily in China.

Tibetan independence enjoys a great deal of support in the West, including the United States, but supporters of an independent East Turkistan and united Mongolia are still comparatively few and not well organized. The Free Tibet lobby may wish for American diplomatic recognition of the government-in-exile and later an independent Tibet, but hardly for armed intervention. American recognition of Tibetan independence would most certainly arouse fury in Beijing, and in the foreseeable future is most unlikely to be a cause worth the trouble that would undoubtedly result in Washington and elsewhere.

A farmer begins a fascinating autobiography by observing: “I am, of course, Chinese; however, I should like to add one more word: I am Bai Chinese. I belong not to the great Hans of Central China but to the Bai National Minority.” For him, being Chinese comes before being Bai. At the beginning of the chapter, we discussed the case of Lolo, a Lolo/Yi musician who said, in contrast to the Bai farmer, that he was Lolo/Yi first and Chinese only second.

What this shows is that members of different ethnic groups frequently have different attitudes toward being Chinese. There are most certainly quite a few Tibetans and Uyghurs, and doubtless members of other minorities in China, who would deny being Chinese altogether. And among the same ethnic group, not all people hold the same view of their identity.

In the period of reform, the Chinese state has responded to the minorities in large part according to their loyalty to the Chinese state. It has reserved
coercive responses for those ethnic groups with separatist tendencies, and violence has been sharpest when separatism flared into open rebellion, such as the Tibetans in the late 1980s and the Uygars throughout most of the 1990s. Methods used toward other ethnic minorities have generally been more in line with what most would regard as legitimate. One thinks of ethnic groups like the Yi or Koreans, both with very strong ethnic consciousness but no separatist movements. Though these two peoples are extremely different in their histories, cultures, and economic levels, the Chinese state has been able to handle them without provoking excessive hostility. Indeed, the Koreans are a “model” ethnic minority in terms of economic development, literacy, and lack of opposition to the Chinese state, despite their strong culture and language, including their own script.

I have argued that the Chinese state has some legitimacy in its territorial claims, with Tibet being much more doubtful than any of the other ethnic territories. But the question remains: to what extent are the members of the ethnic minorities challenging the legitimacy of the CCP and the current Chinese state? The answer to that question is that the situation varies greatly from ethnic group to ethnic group and within ethnic groups themselves. The revival of Islam that several scholars have noted in the Hui, the Uygars, and several other ethnic groups cannot fail to reduce their sense of CCP legitimacy, because of the strength of monotheistic belief among Muslims.

For members of ethnic minorities, ethnicity may be the most important issue in determining CCP legitimacy but it is not necessarily so. Among ethnic groups that have experienced separatist movements, notably the Uygars and Tibetans, ethnicity is bound to weigh more heavily than among those better integrated into the Chinese state, such as the Zhuang or Tujia. Ethnicity counts far more in determining how Tibetans or Uygars feel about the legitimacy of the CCP than it does among the Koreans or Zhuang, because their sense of identity is stronger and based more solidly on resentments against injustice.

Class analysis may not be the same among ethnic minorities as it is among the Han. There may be as many Korean intellectuals and workers proportionately as Han, but among the Tibetans, rural people are even more numerous, as a percentage of their total population, than among the Han. One class that has gained a considerable amount of press in China at the turn of the 21st century is the entrepreneurs. As Bruce Dickson’s chapter of the present volume (Chapter 7) notes, Jiang Zemin showed himself very keen to introduce them into the CCP in the late days of his formal rule, and actually had the CCP Constitution changed at the 16th CCP Congress in November 2002 to encourage their entry. The question that arises is: are there enough entrepreneurs among the minorities to form a class substantial enough to affect how the minorities view CCP legitimacy?

My answer is that this varies from place to place, but overall it will indeed make some difference. We do not yet know how entrepreneurship will affect CCP legitimacy among the Han, let alone the minorities. But, as Harley Balzer notes (see Chapter 12), it is likely that entrepreneurs, plus others prosperous enough that they could be said to make up a new “middle class,” will become more important in Chinese politics. Already there is beginning to be a significant body of private entrepreneurs among virtually all the most populous minorities. Some may find it in their interests to join the CCP and exercise some impact on its direction.

With China’s accession to the World Trade Organization at the end of 2001, China is increasingly becoming part of the globalized world. This does not necessarily mean the end of ethnic cultures. Indeed, there are cases where globalization provokes localization as a form of resistance. I do not see the imminent demise of Yao or Miao culture in China, let alone Tibetan or Uygar. But the overall impact of the globalization of markets, consumer practices, communications, and tourism is to reduce the differences between cultures. Among the tensions operating in China and intensified by globalization is that between the CCP’s Marxist-Leninist ideology and the non- or anti-Marxist tendencies in society. This cannot fail to weaken the legitimacy of the CCP overall, among both the Han and the ethnic minorities.

Notes
4 The terms minzu, or “people,” and zzu, or “tribe” or “race,” have existed in the Chinese language for millennia. However, the combination minzu in the modern sense of nation was first used by Liang Qichao in 1899. See Wu Shimin and Wang Ping et al., Minzu wenti gailun (Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin chubanshe, 1999), p. 6.
6 According to Wu Shimin and Wang Ping (Minzu wenti gailun, p. 7), Stalin’s definition “summarizes the essential features of a nationality quite completely.”
8 The figures given here do not include Taiwan, Hong Kong, or Macau. They come from Zhongguo tongji nianjian 2002, pp. 95, 97.


Chih-ju Shih, "Ethnicity as policy expedience: clan Confucianism in ethnic Tuja-Miao Yongshun," *Asian Ethnicity* 2(1) (2001): 88. According to the 2000 census, the total Tuja population in China was 8,028,133, while that of the Miao was 8,940,116. See *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 2002*, p. 97.


Tournadre, *The dynamics of Tibetan–Chinese bilingualism*, p. 35.

Eckholm, "From a Chinese cell."


Yu and Guo, "Xizang," p. 81.

Ibid., p. 82.


There are quite a few studies of the situation in Xinjiang during the 1990s, with some reference or a focus on Han–Uyghur relations. The main ones include Nicolas Bequelin, "Xinjiang in the nineties," *China Journal* 44 (July 2000): 65–90, and Gardner Bovingdon, "The not-so-silent majority: Uyghur resistance to Han rule in Xinjiang," *Modern China* 28(1) (January 2002): 39–78.


Smith, "Making culture matter," p. 173. The point about job discrimination looms large in other accounts, such as Amnesty International, *Gross Human Rights Violations*.

For the number of Mongolians in China according to the 2000 census, see *Zhongguo tongji nianjian 2002*, p. 97. According to the provisional figure for the 2000 census in the Republic of Mongolia, the total population was 2,392,500, of whom 78.8 per cent were Mongolian peoples, i.e. 1,877,410. See Barry Turner (ed.), *The Statesman's Yearbook: The Politics, Culture, and Economics of the World* 2003 (Houndmills and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 1140.

12 State and society in transitions from communism

China in comparative perspective

Harley Balzer

How might the accumulated knowledge about state–society relations in transitions from communism in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe inform our understanding of China? Sinologists focus overwhelmingly on whether the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will be able to rule an increasingly diverse China, one ever more integrated into the global economy. Can the Party maintain its monopoly of political power? Or will the Party be compelled to liberalize, creating an opening that could lead to the end of its monopoly on political activity? Can the CCP maintain stability, and what are the costs and benefits of that stability?

Drawing on insights offered in the preceding chapters, this chapter offers a comparative perspective on evolving state–society relations in China today. It begins with a discussion of the essential condition for a reciprocal state–society relationship, the development of "civic society." The next section describes the evolving regimes in Russia and China, a system I call "managed pluralism," and the ways those regimes seek to both co-opt and constrain civic society. Assuming that elites do not willingly divest themselves of wealth and power, the potential counterweight to managed pluralism is contestation, and in the third section I explore the diverse forms of social and political contention evolving in China in a comparative context. This is followed by a discussion of the potential for political change, focusing in particular on the role of business and the middle classes. Communist ideology and charismatic authority (for now) have been discredited as bases for regime legitimacy. This leaves economic success (the Mandate of Mammon), stability, some form of nationalism/national greatness, or democracy as potential bases for legitimacy. These sources of legitimacy are mutually contradictory. Rapid economic development and the requirements of World Trade Organization membership involve structural changes that threaten stability; integration with the global economy requires muting nationalist rhetoric; while democracy, which may be the only long-term solution, is perceived by China's leaders to undermine both stability and national greatness, as well as their own power.