The People’s Republic of China and its National Minorities: A Focus on Shifting Policies

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Preface

I am an old man now. Age has robbed me of my strength and fate has stolen all that was ever dear to me. From this lofty peak of my old age, I look back towards the memories of my young days, and they will stand before me, vivid and clear as the crystal streams of my land Nyarong. It was a beautiful land, and the lives we led there, though simple and hard, were happy.

Then the Chinese came. At first with soft words and bright silver, and later with guns and death. They took away my fields, my animals and my home. They looted, desecrated and burnt the temples and monasteries I worshipped in. Like vermin, they slew my friends, relatives, lamas, and all the people dear to my heart. On a frozen wasteland, thinly covered with wind-swept snow, I left behind me the twisted, bullet-ridden (bodies) of my family and my only little daughter.

I was forced to live in the high mountains like an animal and like a thief to hide by day and to move by night. Hunger and thirst, exhaustion and pain were my constant companions. Bullets ripped and tore though my flesh and muscles. My wounds putrefied and rot ate the flesh until my world was a haze of dull pain and the overpowering stench of gangrene. So much sorrow, so much men pain and death…Not only did they prey upon my life and the lives of my countrymen then, but still now it exists and feeds on my poor people back in Tibet. They live in despair night and day, in a country that has become an endless nightmare. Everything has been taken away from them; their faith, their dignity, their manhood and their freedom…except perhaps, the freedom to starve, to slave and to die. Yes, I remember it all. Pain and bitterness have etched every moment and event forever into my mind. ¹

Rapten Dorje (Aten), from Warriors of Tibet (1974)

The aforementioned account portrays one perspective of how the People’s Republic of China impacted Tibetans during the twentieth century. The sentiment expressed by Rapten Dorje is not uncommon. In fact, many minorities within China have echoed such feelings of exploitation and oppression in the hands of the Chinese. This research focuses on exploring the minority policies that caused such experiences among millions of minorities in China. There is a specific focus on the drastic shifts from the

conservative gradualist policy that was followed from the inception of the Communist Party to the radical policies that were followed during the Cultural Revolution.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Despite its history that spans several millennia, China’s most recent century marks one of the most tumultuous periods of Chinese history. The rise of the Chinese Communist Party in 1949 ushered in a period of drastic changes that were aimed at creating a clear break from the past. From the perspective of the Communist Party, China had developed several major national concerns over the turbulent decades leading up to 1949. One of the most troubling concerns was that China had clearly fallen behind industrially in comparison to the developed Western nations. Another major concern was the social stratification that had become rampant throughout the preceding Republican era. Those two problems quickly became the focal point of many national policies implemented shortly afterwards. One area of Chinese national policy greatly affected by the drive to modernize and foster social unity dealt with the national minorities.

Upon Communist takeover, the government initiated efforts to identify what later came to be the official minority groups of China. History proved such a task to be immensely difficult given China’s long history and large ethnically diverse population.\(^2\) Much had happened since the first emperor was successful in unifying a multitude of nationalities into a cohesive state in 221 B.C.\(^3\) Factors such as migration, forced assimilation, oppression, and extinction have all greatly contributed to the difficulty

\(^3\) Fei, *Toward a People’s Anthropology*, 25.
associated with identifying minority groups. 4 Despite the immense difficulty, once the Communist Party came into power, it became clear that identifying the nationalities would be necessary in order to fulfill their promise to promote ethnic equality. 5 For example, in order to appropriate a fair proportion of seats to minorities within the government, it would be necessary to know who the minorities in the area were. 6 Therefore, in 1953, the Party initiated its first attempt at tackling the difficulties of identifying the national minorities by conducting a nationwide census. 7 People who identified with a certain minority group would file a petition that indicated their ethnicity in order to be recognized as an official minority group. 8 After the petitions were filed, extensive and lengthy investigations were conducted by state ethnologists beginning in 1953. 9 The results of the petition indicated that the total number of ethnicities within the nation exceeded four hundred, and the Party quickly realized how politically unfeasible it would be to accommodate such vast diversity within the government. 10 Therefore, the Party established and deployed teams of state ethnologists under the Yunnan Ethnic Classification Research Team to conduct investigations that scrutinized migration patterns, cultural practices, religious beliefs, and language systems. 11 Despite such detailed research, determining the official minority groups was still an extremely difficult undertaking. For example, migrations of Han into minority areas over time caused some Han people to consider themselves as a member of a separate ethnic group. 12 On the other hand, minorities who were politically aligned with the Han sometimes failed to identify

4 Fei, Toward a People's Anthropology, 32.
5 Fei, Toward a People's Anthropology, 60.
6 Fei, Toward a People's Anthropology, 60-61.
8 Thomas Mullaney, "Introduction: 55+1=1 or the Strange Calculus of Chinese Nationhood." (China Information 18, no. 197 2004), 3.
9 Mullaney, "Introduction: 55+1=1 or the Strange Calculus of Chinese Nationhood," 1-3.
10 Mullaney, "Introduction: 55+1=1 or the Strange Calculus of Chinese Nationhood," 3.
11 Mullaney, "Introduction: 55+1=1 or the Strange Calculus of Chinese Nationhood," 3.
12 Fei, Modernization and National Minorities in China, 62.
with their own ethnic groups because they oftentimes became assimilated over time. As a result, such people did not file petitions when the Communist Party came to power despite their minority backgrounds.\textsuperscript{13} Both those examples show that the petition system adopted by the government was by no means an exact science despite the meticulous investigations conducted by ethnologists. Indeed, Chinese history has proven that racial categories have been very fluid over time. However, from the hundreds of petitions submitted, there are currently fifty-six official nationality groups within China.\textsuperscript{14} Fifty-five of them are comprised of minorities, which make up six percent of the entire Chinese population.\textsuperscript{15} The remaining population belongs to the Han nationality, which makes up the vast majority of the people in China.

China has historically been home to a vast number of national minorities that many scholars believe to extend far beyond the official fifty-five groups identified today, and the approach to dealing with them has varied throughout its long history.\textsuperscript{16} From the perspective of the Communist Party, the compounding effects of previous policies were responsible for much of the backwardness and social inequality that are particularly salient among the minorities.\textsuperscript{17} Such a view certainly has its valid points, especially since history has continuously documented instances in which certain minority groups have been exploited and subjugated by the group in power.\textsuperscript{18} However, it is also important to note that the degree of backwardness was not the same across all groups. Some minority groups were highly advanced while others lagged behind significantly.

\textsuperscript{13} Fei, Modernization and National Minorities in China 62-63.
\textsuperscript{14} Fei, Towards a People’s Anthropology, 24.
\textsuperscript{15} Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 10.
\textsuperscript{16} Frank Dikotter, The Discourse of Race in Modern China. (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1992), 3.
\textsuperscript{17} Fei, Towards a People’s Anthropology, 31.
\textsuperscript{18} Fei, Towards a People’s Anthropology, 32.
A cursory look farther back into Chinese history reveals the complexities of past minority policies. According to Confucian thought, the earliest distinctions were made between the Chinese and the barbarians.\(^{19}\) Those that did not follow “Chinese ways” were categorized as barbarians, which indicated that one’s culture was more important for categorizing people than race was.\(^{20}\) That was to say, if you held the same cultural beliefs and practiced the same traditions as the Chinese people, then you were Chinese. In those days, efforts to assimilate barbarians were heavily favored by the Chinese. Yet, there is also some evidence that the divisions during early Chinese history were not solely formed on cultural grounds. In an early feudal document from the 4\(^{th}\) century B.C., known as zuozhuan, the following idea is expressed: “If he is not of our race, he is sure to have a different mind.”\(^{21}\) Clearly, such indicates that race did play a certain role in early Chinese history.

Thousands of years later, the conflict between culture and race was seen again during the Qing dynasty in the late nineteenth century and the subsequent rise of the Republican government in 1911.\(^{22}\) The political context of that period during the late Qing dynasty was largely influenced by the growing foreign presence within China, which eventually affected certain minority groups.\(^{23}\) The British had cultivated ties with various Yunan minorities and the Tibetans. The Russians had established growing relationships with Tibet and other Northern Chinese regions. The French presence grew as their missionaries spread Christianity to the numerous minority groups in Southern...

\(^{19}\) Dikotter, The Discourse of Race in Modern China, 6-7.
\(^{20}\) Dikotter, The Discourse of Race in Modern China, 6-7.
\(^{21}\) Dikotter, The Discourse of Race in Modern China, 3.
\(^{22}\) Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 12.
\(^{23}\) Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 11-13.
China.\textsuperscript{24} In response to the encroaching foreign powers, the Qing state implemented measures to tighten control within those minority regions.\textsuperscript{25} Therefore, the government strongly encouraged Han migration to the affected areas, which was previously illegal in certain cases. The increased Han presence was aimed to foster assimilation that would enable the state to better control the more independent minority populations.\textsuperscript{26} Furthermore, the Qing state founded the Mongolian and Tibetan School in 1909 in an effort to revolutionize education for officials within minority regions.\textsuperscript{27} The ultimate objective of such an education was to make the officials of the Qing state more relevant in minority regions, which would have caused the minorities to become more accepting of imperial rule. The overall goal of the Qing minority policy was to integrate the different groups to a degree that would enable the state to assert their power without any major challenges or conflicts.\textsuperscript{28}

Within the larger scope of events during the late nineteenth century, the implications of the foreign presences within China were not simply limited to the minority regions.\textsuperscript{29} Throughout the nation, the encroaching foreign powers caused a surge of nationalism, especially from the younger generation that studied abroad in Japan and Western nations. The people who embodied the nationalistic spirit rejected the principles of imperial loyalty and Confucius that were central to the Qing rule. Rather, people sought to build a new Chinese state upon the Western principles of nationalism that would focus on strengthening China against the foreign powers.\textsuperscript{30} From such an ideology,
the concept of the term *minhzu* emerged for the first time in 1903.\textsuperscript{31} In Chinese, *min* means “people,” and *zhu* means “descent.”\textsuperscript{32} The term *minhzu* was then applied to the debate regarding minority policy during the early twentieth century. Reformers, who were people in favor of the emperor and Confucian principles, were in favor of establishing *da min zu zhu yi*. *Da min zu zhu yi* was an approach to minority policy that focused on all “yellow people living within the borders of China.”\textsuperscript{33} On the other hand, revolutionaries who favored the state and race advocated *xiao min zu zhu yi*, which focused only on the Han people.\textsuperscript{34} Such an approach was greatly influenced by the political and social environment of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At that time, China was overrun with terrorism, militarism, factionalism, and warlordism. The rural areas suffered greatly from oppression and famine while the urban areas were rampant with corruption.\textsuperscript{35} From the perspective of leading revolutionaries, all of those social and political ills were further aggravated by the factionalism caused by the growing foreign influences.\textsuperscript{36} The solution to the problem was to adopt a minority policy that emphasized the need for everybody in China to adhere to a single racial standard. The rationale behind such an approach was explained by Sun Yatsen, who later became the co-founder of the Republic of China, as follows:

> Considering the law of survival of ancient and modern races, if we want to save China and to preserve the Chinese race, we must certainly promote Nationalism. To make this principle luminous for China’s salvation, we must first understand it clearly. The Chinese race total four hundred million people; of mingled races there are only a few million Mongolians, a million or so Manchus, a few million

\textsuperscript{31} Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 97.
\textsuperscript{32} Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 97.
\textsuperscript{33} Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 97.
\textsuperscript{34} Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 97.
\textsuperscript{35} Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 16-17.
\textsuperscript{36} Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 159.
Tibetans, and over a million Mohammedan Turks. These alien races do not number altogether more than ten million, so that, for the most part, the Chinese people are of the Han or Chinese race with common blood, common language, common religion, and common customs- a single, pure race. 37

Ultimately, the xiao min zu zhu yi perspective ultimately won out when the revolutionaries successfully came into power with the founding of the Republic of China in 1912. 38

The impact of the xiao min zu zhu yi ideology favored by the Republican government could be recognized shortly after the birth of the Republic. The founding father of the Republic, Sun Yat-Sen acknowledged the multi-ethnicity of the nation, and sought to adopt a policy that would unify those different groups with the Han. 39 The rationale behind Sun’s ideology can be noted his explanation of the term “Republic of Five Nationalities.” 40

Although there are a little over ten million non-Han in China, including Mongols, Manchus, Tibetans and Tartars, their number is small compared with the purely Han population. China is one nationality…The name ‘Republic of Five Nationalities’ exists only because there exists a certain racial distinction which distorts the meaning of a single republic. We must facilitate the dying out of all names of individual peoples inhabiting China, i.e., Manchus, Tibetans, etc… we must satisfy the demands of all races and unite them in a single cultural and political whole. 41

Sun’s approach to the minority issue could best be described as integration through assimilation. His intentions behind unifying the Chinese state included satisfying the

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37 Dikotter, The Discourse of Race in Modern China, 124.
38 Dikotter, The Discourse of Race in Modern China, 164-165.
39 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 16.
40 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 16-17.
41 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 16.
needs of all minorities, which would suggest that he favored equality among all the different ethnic groups. However, his intense drive to create a single cultural and political state most likely indicated that he found the minority groups to be obstacles that prevented him from establishing a strong unified nation. The actual effects of the ideology also support the notion that equality for the minorities was not a main concern for Sun and the Republican government. Unique aspects of different cultures were not appreciated, and many minorities lost certain rights and freedoms despite Sun’s on-the-record push for equality. For example, the Republican government heavily promoted education as the main means of assimilating the minorities. However, education advocated by the government oftentimes denied the minorities the opportunity to learn about their own culture and history. Rather, the lessons taught to the minorities reiterated that the Han people were superior and far more advanced than the minorities. In other situations, minority groups lost large tracts of their land to the Han people who were forced to migrate into minority regions, which caused economically disastrous results for minorities who depended on their land for a living. Therefore, there certainly was some truth in the assessment that the policies leading up to 1949 left many national minority groups as the most backward sectors of the Chinese population. Similarly, those populations were oftentimes also the groups that suffered a disproportionate amount of negative effects stemming from the social injustices that were inflicted upon them due to their ethnicity.

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42 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 15-17.
44 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 39.
46 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 40.
47 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 40.
Given the effects of the preceding minority policies, it is not entirely surprising that the Communist Party’s objectives behind the initial minority policies were centered on achieving modernization and social justice. To emphasize those objectives, the Communists continually stressed that their approach was different from that of the Republican government. The Communists portrayed themselves as the “good” Han people who sought to defeat the oppressive Republican Han people.\footnote{Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 101.} Much of the rhetoric about national minorities during the earlier period of the Communist rule spoke of righting social wrongs in order to help the backward minorities achieve modernity. For example, the Communists wanted to remedy cultural oppression by giving minorities the freedom to develop their own dialects and languages while preserving their unique customs and religious beliefs.\footnote{Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 95.} The Communists also wanted to ensure that minorities were adequately represented in the government, which was a commonly ignored issue during the Republican era. In general, the Communist Party vowed to fight against “Han chauvinism” or “great Hanism,” which they believed was responsible for the history of oppression.\footnote{Chang Chih-i, \textit{The Party and the National Question in China}. (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1966), 138.} The concept of “Han chauvinism” was best articulated by Chang Chih-i, the head of the United Front Work Department, which worked closely with the minorities.

When big nationalism appears among the Han people, it is known as great Hanism. Great Hanist thinking is, then, a manifestation in terms of nationality relations of the reactionary ideology of the landlord and capitalist classes; it is thus a Kuomintang ideal. We recognize that this great Hanist thinking has had a long history, reaching its ultimate development under Chiang Kai-shek’s reactionary governing clique...This ideology is as different from the ideology of the Chinese Communist Party and Chairman Mao as water is from fire; there is not the slightest connection between the two.\footnote{Chang, \textit{The Party and the National Question in China}, 138-139.}
Many government officials reminded Han Party members who were sent to work in minority regions to rectify the grave errors committed under “Han chauvinism” in the past. The logic was that the most backward and oppressed people of the nation must be able to reform if the nation as a whole was to have any hope of successfully achieving modernity and social equality.

While the goals set by the Communist leaders were certainly ambitious, it was initially agreed upon in the 1950s that the state should adopt a gradualist policy with regards to the “nationalities question.” The term “nationalities question” was a highly theoretical concept that was used by the Soviet model to define a methodology for dealing with issues regarding communities were classified as nations or nationalities. In the Chinese context, the term “nationalities” referred to the different minorities within China’s borders. The gradualist approach towards the nationalities question was strongly influenced by the Soviet minority policy, and it stipulated that minorities had a right to many of the freedoms previously denied by past governments. By recognizing and granting certain cultural freedoms, the Soviet model hoped to foster social unity that would counteract the “backwardness” associated with many minorities. The idea of promoting cultural differences may seem counterproductive to creating social unity among the people, and it seems likely that the Chinese government took that into account. However, the main focus of the government during initial stages of socialism was to adapt the Soviet model to fit the Chinese milieu rather than devising an original approach

53 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 43-60.
56 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 43-60.
that would have been more relevant to Chinese society.\textsuperscript{57} Therefore, the earliest Communist policies mandated that each national minority would be able to retain many of their customs, religious practices, and languages.\textsuperscript{58} Meanwhile, the Chinese Communist Party created autonomous regions in areas that were historically populated by minorities\textsuperscript{59}. Within those areas, the Communist Party intended for the minorities to play a significant role within the local government, which would enable them to decide when reforms should be introduced and adopted. Such an idea was best illustrated in a speech given by the Communist Party leader, Mao Zedong in 1956.

As for reform, the [agreement] stipulates that reforms be made; but the reforms need your agreement. [If] you don’t want reform, then we won’t have any. If in the next few years you don’t [want] reforms, then we won’t have any… if you say [let’s] reform, then [we’ll] reform; if you say no reform, then we’ll continue not to reform. Why [do we have to be in] such a hurry?\textsuperscript{60}

In other words, the culture of the minority groups was to be left intact until the minorities themselves demanded change. The government saw no need to rush cultural assimilation since it was not their primary goal.\textsuperscript{61} Once the goals of modernity and social unity were achieved, the government believed that the minorities would become assimilated on their own over time.\textsuperscript{62}

However, during the late 1950’s, nationalities policy began to deviate from the gradualist approach.\textsuperscript{63} In the beginning, there was a clear shift away from the moderate gradualist policies towards radicalism during the Great Leap Forward, which began in

\textsuperscript{57} Roderick MacFarquhar, \textit{The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao; From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward}. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Council of East Asian Studies, 1989), 182-185.
\textsuperscript{58} Chang, \textit{The Party and the National Question in China}, 98-120.
\textsuperscript{59} Chang, \textit{The Party and the National Question in China}, 80-97.
\textsuperscript{60} MacFarquhar, \textit{The Secret Speeches of Chairman Mao; From the Hundred Flowers to the Great Leap Forward}, 185.
\textsuperscript{61} Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 53-59.
\textsuperscript{62} Fei, \textit{Towards a People’s Anthropology}, 78-81.
\textsuperscript{63} Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 53-59.
1958. Then, there was a notable reversion back to the gradualist approach when it became evident that the radical measures of the Great Leap Forward were producing disastrous results.\(^{64}\) However by the time the Cultural Revolution officially began in 1966, minority policy had once again changed drastically.\(^{65}\) There was no sign of any gradualism, and many minority groups felt that their cultures were specifically attacked by the government policies. Minority customs were suppressed and destroyed while the people were persecuted for being backwards. Many of the policies aimed to modernize the nation seemed insensitive to minority customs and needs, which was in direct contradiction to the intended policies drafted in the earlier years. The reasons behind the drastic changes in minority policy are somewhat unclear according to many historians.\(^{66}\)

There is no clear consensus as to what happened between the original gradualist policies of the early 1950s and the push for radical assimilation that occurred during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. One proposed explanation is that Mao Zedong began to doubt the loyalty and cooperation of the minority groups as far back as the Long March, which took place from 1934 to 1935.\(^{67}\) The only reason that Mao may have agreed to grant social equality to the minorities was to appease them when their people were threatening to harm the Han cadres passing through during the Long March.\(^{68}\) And, therefore, it made sense that the gradualist policy never would have lasted long in practice since Mao never truly intended for it to work. Some aspects of that theory seem reasonable, especially since the scuffles between the Han and the minorities during the

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\(^{64}\) Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 53-59.  
\(^{65}\) Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 53-59  
\(^{66}\) Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 59-63.  
\(^{67}\) Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 63-71.  
\(^{68}\) Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 67.
Long March have indeed been documented.\textsuperscript{69} However, there is some question as to why the government would have adopted gradualist policies at all in the 1950s if Mao indeed suspected disloyalty from the minorities stemming from his Long March experiences.

Another explanation puts the blame on “Han chauvinism,” which is a concept that embodies supposedly superiority of the majority race over the inferior minority groups.\textsuperscript{70} Accusing “Han chauvinism” for oppressing minorities has been an age-old claim.

However, it is difficult to clearly argue that the central government intended to oppress minorities, especially given the state rhetoric and actions of the early 1950s. Although there were cases of purported discrimination on all government levels in minority areas, the official stance of the central government firmly stood by promoting the importance of gradualism. But, even so, the ways national policy affected the minorities leading up to the Cultural Revolution resulted in minorities feeling as if they were specifically targeted.\textsuperscript{71}

However, in my view, it can nonetheless be argued that the change towards rapid assimilation and oppression was actually not aimed to target minorities. A more holistic look at the circumstances indicates that minority policies corresponded with the general political context of the time. For example, the obsession with modernity leading up to the Great Leap Forward era was clearly seen in the initial policies adopted in the mid-1950s.\textsuperscript{72} At that time, the main goal for China was to rapidly transform the largely agrarian nation into an industrial powerhouse that would rival Western nations. The nation’s impatience with the lack of progress was not simply limited to minority regions. Likewise, during the Cultural Revolution many of actions taken against minorities fell in

\textsuperscript{69} MacFarquhar, \textit{China Under Mao: Politics Takes Command}, 27.
\textsuperscript{70} Fei, \textit{Modernization and National Minorities in China}, 34.
\textsuperscript{71} Fei, \textit{Modernization and National Minorities in China}, 34-35.
\textsuperscript{72} Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 220-222.
line with the general scheme of extreme repression and persecution that swept throughout China in an effort to break away from the past and reaffirm Party loyalty among the officials.  

In order to demonstrate that the shift between gradualism and radical reform was reflective of politics, this thesis takes into account three main perspectives. The first viewpoint explored within this paper is the voice of the government. Within this view, the main components that were explored deal mostly with the intended policies drafted by the government stemming from the late 1940s and the early 1950s. It takes a close look at the rationale behind the proposed policies and goals of the Chinese Communist Party. Secondly, this paper focuses on the political issues of the Cultural Revolution, which began in 1966 and ended a decade later with Mao’s death in 1976. Since there is a good deal of disconnect between the original Party objectives and the realities of the Cultural Revolution, it is important to examine that particular era in order to get a good sense of the changing political context. Such changes offer clues as to why there was a sudden break from the original ideology regarding minorities. The last perspective to be explored deals with the ways minority culture changed during the Cultural Revolution. In that section, there is a particular focus on personal narratives from people who had experienced the effects of the Cultural Revolution firsthand.

Within this thesis, I only specifically address a few minority groups due to the relatively large literature of memoirs available from those minorities. Also, the writings of those minorities are representative of many different people within those groups. For example, there is a good sampling of people from a range of socio-economic groups and political orientations. Also, the minority narratives that are incorporated within this thesis

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73 Fei, Modernization and National Minorities in China, 30.
are representative some of the most populous and politically contentious minority nationalities in China. Therefore, many minority policies were drafted with those specific groups in mind as opposed to some of the groups that were smaller and less politically significant. For example, the Tibet has received a significant amount of focus from recent Chinese governments due to its political ties to India and Great Britain along with its history of revolts against Chinese rule.\textsuperscript{74} In addition, the unified religious identity of Tibetans and their persevering fight for independence makes them a highly distinctive minority group. On the other hand, some of the smaller groups within the Southern China region of Yunan and Sichuan have been geographically isolated and insignificant within national politics for many reasons. Some of those groups find the Chinese rule to be irrelevant due to their lives as a result of geographical isolation and being politically disregarded throughout history.\textsuperscript{75} Other groups like the Miao are populous, but do not command the same attention within national politics since they do not have strong political ties with nations that threaten Chinese rule. Therefore, it is important to note that the effects of minority policy should not be over generalized and applied to represent the experiences of all minorities within China since the social and political circumstances sometimes varied greatly between certain groups.

Ultimately, I argue that it was precisely the overall changing political environment that contributed to the sudden shift from the gradualist policy towards a more repressive policy. While accusations of “Han chauvinism” are valid on the grounds that minority culture had been suppressed during the Cultural Revolution, political context makes it difficult to argue that the oppression minorities suffered during the time

\textsuperscript{74} Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 12-13.
\textsuperscript{75} Fei, Toward a People’s Anthropology, 25-27.
was the result of specific measures taken against them. When taking into consideration the full picture, it is clear that many of the negative effects endured by minorities were the results of general policies that were implemented to meet the larger Party goals that were focused on eradicating “backwardness.”

By examining the disconnect between the initial ideology of the Chinese Communist Party and realities of the Cultural Revolution, the tensions between the Han majority and the minority groups of China can be better understood. Such is especially relevant since the relationship between the Han people and the minorities have historically been fraught with complexities and conflicts. Even today, the tenuous relationship between the central government and certain minorities is still felt. Perhaps a look at the history behind major periods of disconnect between the two groups can contribute to a better understanding of the present tensions.
Chapter 2: State Policy

In order to fully understand the relationship between the People’s Republic of China and its minorities, it is important to understand the policies that were implemented by the Party. After the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949, it was faced with the task aligning the nation’s approach to the nationalities question with the Party’s ideologies and objectives. During the Republican era preceding the CCP takeover, racial solidarity was the overarching theme in official government policy. In order to achieve that solidarity, the Han nationality was promoted above all other nationalities primarily because it encompassed a clear majority of the population. By establishing policies that favored the Han Chinese, the government hoped it would help preserve the strength of the Chinese race as a whole. However, in doing so, many of the minority nationalities became increasingly downtrodden and underrepresented. By 1949, the Communist Party stated that many of the minority groups suffered from social injustice and backwardness due to the Republican government policies that viewed them as inferior nationalities. Therefore, reforms for the national minorities were certainly necessary if the Chinese Communist Party wanted to successfully establish a nation based on social unity and equality. It was also necessary for the Communist government to make a clear ideological break from the former government in order to gain support from the minorities. Specific attention was focused on reiterating the fact that the Han people also suffered under the

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1 Dreyer, June. *China’s Forty Millions*, 20.
2 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 20-21.
yoke of Republican rule. In the works of the eminent anthropologist, Fei Xiaotong, he notes the following conversation with a Miao minority.

> Who is responsible for this bloody history? Who has oppressed us? Who is our enemy? Many answered that it was the Han who were the oppressors. Some said dubiously, “But Chairman Mao is a Han. How is it that he helps us rather than oppresses us? Discussion continued. Someone said: “The poor Han have suffered just like us.”

It is unclear whether or not that conversation had actually happened as Fei Xiaotong described in his writing since his perspective was not entirely void of propaganda. However, the general idea behind such a statement was certainly characteristic of the Party’s approach. It was greatly emphasized that the cadres sent to the minority areas should highlight the differences between good and bad Han. The so-called good Han were the Communists while the so-called bad Han were the Republicans. The oppressive ways of the Republicans affected all of society. In essence, the cadres were careful to reinforce that social struggles were not between the Han and the minorities. It was between the oppressive landlord class and the subjugated working people.

The earlier nationalities policy that focused on gradually introducing changes to the minorities was very similar to the model created by Stalin. According to the Soviet model, successful class struggle could only happen if all workers united. In order to make unification possible, barriers between the groups of people must first be destroyed in order to create class equality. However, such a stance should not be confused with a nationalistic policy that only promoted the ways of the majority group while oppressing minority cultures. Rather, what Stalin meant was that the working class could not

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4 Fei, Modernization and National Minorities in China, 101.
7 Stalin, Joseph. J. Stalin Works. 31-62
possibly come together to fight for a singular goal if it was internally divided based on differences in civil liberties. Therefore, Stalin advocated that civil liberties be equal among all groups, which would then facilitate the fight for class consciousness and unity. The liberties granted by the government allowed minorities to retain many aspects of their culture. The policy essentially promoted diversity within unity. The Chinese also adopted similar measures that allowed minorities to continue their traditional customs. Generally speaking, neither the Soviet nor the Chinese sought to actively destroy the cultural aspects of minority life. In the works of Fei Xiaotong, an important distinction is made between socio-economic differences and ethnic differences. According to Fei Xiaotong, the Party only sought to destroy socio-economic differences and not any of the ethnic differences. Therefore, cultural aspects like religious beliefs, traditional dress, and minority languages were not issues the government was interested in curtailing. Party ideology at that time favored leaving cultural changes in the hands of the individual minority groups. There was to be no forced assimilation, although decisions made by the minorities to adopt assimilative ways of life would be welcomed by the government. Furthermore, it was believed that if unity and equality could be achieved among the people, such cultural differences would fade away over time on its own.

Another key aspect the Chinese borrowed from the Soviet model was the concept of gradualism. The idea that reforms should be introduced slowly was agreed upon since it was noted that different minorities were at different stages of social development.

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8 Stalin, *J. Stalin Works*. 31-62
9 Stalin, *J. Stalin Works*. 31-62
10 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*. 210
15 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*. 93-104.
Therefore, as stated by China’s head of state Liu Shaoqi, “It certainly cannot be assumed that all of the nationalities in the country can arrive at socialism at the same time and by the same means.”\textsuperscript{16} For example, some minorities were still at the pre-feudalistic stage during the 1950s, and the government felt that pushing forth a modernization agenda would simply be ineffective and perhaps even counterproductive.\textsuperscript{17} The First Premier of the Communist Party, Zhou En Lai, said the following:

Transformations are indispensable if the nationalities are to develop and gradually attain advanced status. Such transformations, however, must proceed in the light of the characteristics of their present stage of development, according to the wishes of the majority of their peoples, and be undertaken, in appropriate steps, by their own cadres.\textsuperscript{18}

The steps taken to ensure that the minorities played a significant role in their futures were further reinforced by the establishment of autonomous regions in areas that were traditionally inhabited by minorities.\textsuperscript{19} The autonomous regions aimed to give minorities more political power. A certain number of political positions within the region had to be occupied by a member of the minority group that traditionally lived in the area. In such regions, the government was responsible for making many decisions that directly impacted how and when the minority group would reform. In addition, many policies were drafted in order to allow ample opportunities for minority groups to adhere to their distinct cultures and traditions on a daily basis.\textsuperscript{20} Minorities were urged to educate themselves about their own history, language, traditions, and religious practices. In

\textsuperscript{16} Fei, \textit{Modernization and National Minorities in China}, 127.
\textsuperscript{17} Fei, \textit{Modernization and National Minorities in China}, 133.
\textsuperscript{18} Fei, \textit{Modernization and National Minorities in China}, 7.
\textsuperscript{19} Chang, \textit{The Party and the National Question in China}, 120-149.
\textsuperscript{20} Chang, \textit{The Party and the National Question in China}, 135.
addition, several government groups were formed in order to assist the minorities and
further encourage them to explore their own cultures while slowly becoming familiar
with the Party.\textsuperscript{21} Although recruitment among the minorities was a key objective for the
Communist officials, they were careful not to be too insistent. Their approach in many
areas was to “do good and make friends.”\textsuperscript{22} Many Han officials would first approach the
minorities and try to solve problems that were affecting the region. For example, many
regions suffered from diseases, and the Han would distribute medicine among them in
order to gain their favor.\textsuperscript{23} The establishment of healthcare centers was another way the
Han tried to build rapport with the local people. According to an account from Dr. Hu
Chu’uan-k’uei, providing medicine and healthcare was particularly effective for
establishing friendships and sound Party relationships in minority regions. He recalled the
following about a particular medical mission in Tibet.

\textit{[free medical treatment] served as a medium of
propaganda. For instance, when they got sick, the Tibetans
had hitherto gone to the monasteries for cure by drawing
lots, saying their beads, praying to God and following the
oracle. Now the lamas of the monastery told the sick to go
to the [medical] corps for treatment. During my stay at
Kumbum, I was told by responsible lamas of the monastery
that … 713 of their number had been cured or almost cured,
and that they felt grateful to Chairman Mao, and were quite
willing to contribute part of their land for agrarian reform.}
\textsuperscript{24}

Other popular techniques employed by the Han cadres in order to gain acceptance
included farming, establishing irrigation systems, and building infrastructure.\textsuperscript{25} All
contact made between the Han cadres and the minorities were aimed to be helpful in an

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{21}{Chang, \textit{The Party and the National Question in China}, 135-139.}
\footnote{22}{Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 108-114.}
\footnote{23}{Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 98.}
\footnote{24}{Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 101.}
\footnote{25}{Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 98-104.}
\end{footnotes}
effort to project a positive image of the Communist Party. In the event that the minorities were unwilling to accept the Han cadres, the cadres were instructed to leave them alone. Recruitment into Party ranks was to be secondary to establishing friendly ties with the minorities.

The ultimate objective behind all the aforementioned minority policies drafted in the early years of Party control was to achieve modernity.\textsuperscript{26} From the Party perspective, modernity was absolutely necessary if national independence was to be preserved. The Party feared that if China continued to lag far behind the industrialized Western nations, then China would become increasingly vulnerable to falling under foreign control.\textsuperscript{27} However, the government strongly believed that modernization must be done on China’s own terms without any help from the industrialized Western countries, as accepting such help would put the nation in a position vulnerable to subjugation by the more advanced states.\textsuperscript{28} Therefore, the push to modernize without foreign help was a powerful motivating force behind many of the measures taken at that time. In order for China to modernize effectively, it was decided that the minority groups would receive extra resources since they faced the greatest economic challenges.\textsuperscript{29} The importance of the government focusing on modernizing minorities was more complex than simply wanting to help a socially disadvantaged segment of the population. The government realized that in order to catch up to the developed Western nations, every part of the Chinese population would have to embark on the road towards modernization.\textsuperscript{30} Therefore, there were essentially two gaps the Chinese needed to close. The first gap was between China

\textsuperscript{26} Fei, Modernization and National Minorities in China, 13.
\textsuperscript{27} Fei, Modernization and National Minorities in China, 13.
\textsuperscript{28} Fei, Modernization and National Minorities in China, 14-17.
\textsuperscript{29} Fei, Modernization and National Minorities in China, 13-21.
\textsuperscript{30} Fei, Modernization and National Minorities in China, 10-12.
and other modernized nations. The second gap was between the various minority groups and the Han majority. As Fei Xiaotong, put it, “Modernization needs the minorities; the minorities need modernization.”

The need for modernization could be observed in many regions with a high percentage of minorities. Historically speaking, the minorities had been relegated to geographical areas that were not economically profitable since the agricultural Han would usually take over the lush farmlands. Therefore, there was clearly some social inequality between the Han and some of the minorities. In addition, there were plenty of examples of exploitation within the minority groups as well, which ultimately contributed to more social inequality and disunity. Fei Xiaotong noted many such instances throughout his travels to minority regions as an anthropologist. For example, serfdom was still in existence in areas like Tibet and Xinjiang prior to the Party takeover. In addition, certain minorities like the Yi practiced a highly complex system of slavery. Such practices put a significant sector of the minority population at an economic and social disadvantage. Yet, the central government never took an overt stance against such social inequalities. Rather, the government would quietly provide aid to the subjugated minorities if they actively sought the help of the Party cadres. Recruitment of minority cadres worked in the same way. Oftentimes, the Han cadres would not actively recruit among the minority populations unless the minorities themselves expressed an interest. For the first half of the 1950s, it seemed as if the gradualist policy would be more or less adhered to.

31 Fei, Modernization and National Minorities in China, 10-12.
33 Fei, Towards a People’s Anthropology, 45.
34 Fei, Towards a People’s Anthropology, 37.
35 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 104-108.
36 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 108-114.
The first sign that China was deviating from the gradualist policy became apparent with the Great Leap Forward. As the minority groups were supposedly making rapid progress throughout the 1950s, the entire nation was undergoing a major political shift that would ultimately impact minority policy. Throughout the 1950s, China was trying to make the transition from an agriculture-based nation to a developing industrial nation.\(^{37}\) This drive for progress reached an all-time high towards the latter part of the 1950s with the beginning of the period known as the Great Leap Forward, which began in 1958.\(^{38}\) During that period, Mao pushed forth a series of drastic economic plans that were intended to put China on the road to self-sufficiency.\(^{39}\) One main component of the economic plan was to form agriculture communes, which was aimed to produce a marked increase in efficiency and agricultural yield. Another important plan was to encourage the development of “backyard furnaces,” which Mao believed would enable ordinary citizens to engage in a massive grassroots effort to industrialize by producing steel within their own homes.\(^{40}\) From such plans, Mao expected fantastical results in agriculture and steel production, which would quickly enable China to surpass Great Britain economically.\(^{41}\) In order to meet the substantially higher standards, a more efficient workforce was necessary. Therefore, many leaders began to abandon accommodating the special circumstances of minorities in order to maximize worker efficiency. Some minorities were told to abandon studying their traditional culture in order to work in the collective fields while other minority women were told to stop wearing their traditional costumes.


\(^{40}\) Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 159-163.

\(^{41}\) Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 159.
since it hindered their ability to efficiently perform manual labor.\textsuperscript{42} Due to those changes, many minorities felt that the government was aiming to erase their traditional customs that were highly encouraged within the previous years.\textsuperscript{43} While it cannot be denied that minority culture suffered during those years, it is nonetheless difficult to argue that the policies were intended to destroy minority culture. Many of the actions taken in order to create a more efficient workforce also affected the Han people throughout China in similar ways.

Despite Mao’s optimism and high expectations for economic success, the Great Leap Forward proved to be disastrous. The collective farms were oftentimes poorly run or neglected in favor of producing steel.\textsuperscript{44} Therefore, the agricultural yield during that period was highly inadequate to feed China, which caused starvation to become widespread throughout a significant portion of the country.\textsuperscript{45} Furthermore, the “backyard furnaces” that were heavily encouraged by Mao himself proved to be absolutely ineffective at producing steel. In response to such grave failures, Mao was criticized by Party members, and his radical reforms were decidedly abandoned. The policies adopted after the Great Leap Forward fiasco reverted back to the gradualist approach.\textsuperscript{46}

However, as the Cultural Revolution neared during the early 1960’s, there were signs indicating that gradualism was again no longer the general guideline for minority policy. This departure from the conservative approach to the nationalities question was much more significant than the previous shift during the Great Leap Forward. There are several possible causes, and the first possible cause behind this shift in policy deals with

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{42} Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 165.
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{43} Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 165.
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{44} MacFarquhar, \textit{China Under Mao: Politics Takes Command}, 163-174.
\footnotesize\textsuperscript{46} Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 184.
the reported successes the Communist Party had supposedly achieved throughout the nation during the Great Leap Forward. According to Party leaders from all levels of authority, economic progress had enjoyed much widespread success that far exceeded expectations. Success was even reported frequently in minority areas despite the special accommodations and more lenient goals. Typical reports from minority areas were similar to the following:

Tariftauriti, a Uighur not 34 years old, was the son of a house servant. He was 16 at the time of liberation in 1949, and followed with intense interest the peasants’ movements in bringing charges against the landlords and demanding low rents. He joined the CCP during land reform in 1952, leading six families in his village in forming the first mutual-aid team and later the first agricultural cooperative. When Ucha Commune came into being in 1958 he became secretary of its Paotzuhugan Brigade Party Committee. He is also a representative to the Provincial People’s Congress.

Such stories were widely circulated, but they usually clashed with the realities of the minority regions. Even in the more advanced regions, progress towards modernity and Party support was much less than such stories suggested. In addition, any criticism was softened by ample reiteration of the positive effects associated with the gradualist concept. Thus, a false sense of achievement was widespread among the upper echelons of the Party, which prompted a good number of officials to take the reports of wide success as indication that the minorities were ready for modernization.

It has also been argued that the Party never actually expected to follow the gradualist plan, even though it had been heavily promoted during the previous years.

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47 Dryer, China’s Forty Millions, 197.
48 Chang, The Party and the National Question in China, 139.
49 Dryer, China’s Forty Millions, 111.
50 Dryer, China’s Forty Millions, 190-204.
51 Chang, The Party and the National Question in China, 143.
Many minorities were promised certain liberties before the Communist government actually gained control of the nation. Therefore, it has been suggested that the government made such promises in order to appease minorities and gain their support at a time when a Communist victory over the Republicans was far from guaranteed. Once the Communists successfully came into power, the government initially expressed intentions of keeping those promises.\textsuperscript{52} One reason for keeping those promises could be that the Party was simply blindly following the Soviet model despite the great differences between the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China. While China has a sizeable minority population, their population is still far overshadowed by the Han population. However, in the Soviet Union, the minorities make up a larger percentage of the entire nation. Therefore, intentions to celebrate and preserve minority traditions may have been beneficial to maintaining peace in the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{53} However, in the People’s Republic of China, the logic was less clear. It is possible that Mao realized that making concessions would not be necessary in order for the minority groups to cooperate with the new Communist government simply because the Han far outnumbered them.

It is difficult to definitively conclude why the policies shifted. During the time in which these shifts occurred, there was not much transparency from the Party. What is clear, however, is that there were major changes in minority policy. The transitions between the gradualist and radical policies impacted the minorities greatly. Many of the people who were previously promised certain freedoms felt that they were being oppressed by the government when the radical policy called for those liberties to be

\textsuperscript{52} Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 53.
\textsuperscript{53} Chang, The Party and the National Question in China, 162.
revoked. However, a closer analysis of the political and cultural contexts of the time period reveals that such a view may not be entirely valid.
Chapter 3: The Cultural Revolution and Politics

During the mid-1960s, China was consumed by rising political tensions that eventually culminated with the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. For China, the ten year period that would follow 1966 was marked by radical political, social, cultural and economic reforms that were aimed at speeding up the process of revolution and uniting an increasingly faction-ridden government. There were many factors that contributed to the sudden radical changes that occurred during that time period. Perhaps the most significant factor was the increasing political dissent among top Party officials that interfered with the efforts to unify China. In order to deal with the issue, Mao decided to implement the widespread radical reform measures that ultimately affected all Chinese citizens, including minorities. Therefore, in order to fully understand the reasoning behind many of the minority policies adopted during that time period, it is helpful to note the general political context leading up to the Cultural Revolution.

Growing political dissent was a particularly worrisome issue for Mao in the years leading up to the Cultural Revolution. In 1956 to 1957, the Chinese Communist Party began a movement that would later be known as the Hundred Flowers Campaign. The popular slogan for the movement was, “Letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend is the policy for promoting progress.” The idea was to encourage people to voice their true opinions about matters regarding politics and state policies. According to Premier Zhou Enlai, who led the campaign, the input of the Chinese people was needed in order to help the government find solutions to the

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2 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 147.
3 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 149.
problems the nation faced. Without the voice of the people, the Communist Party could not truly be a government of the people. Consequently, the Party leadership strongly urged people to freely express their thoughts about their government without fear of any possible backlash, and criticism was portrayed as healthy and necessary element for growth. At first the response was tepid, but with increased pressure from the government, the responses started pouring in by 1957. Many people, including minorities, responded to the government’s call for criticism. In general, there was a wide range of problems brought to the attention of the government. Some complained of Party corruption while others felt that the Communist Party should give up control altogether. Among the minorities, some particularly controversial grievances included the demand for independence and representation in politics by cadres of minority nationalities. In Mao’s opinion, many of the complaints that came to light during this period were actually harmful rather than constructive. Indeed, while Zhou Enlai sought to address the problem areas, Mao felt that the complaints served as grounds for legitimately suspecting people’s loyalty to the Party. Some scholars have even suggested that the so-called campaign was used to serve as a trap for weeding out quiet dissenters from within the government. There is no definitive proof that the government ever had such an intention, but the people who complained nonetheless did become political targets.

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4 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 182.
5 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 182, 189.
6 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 192-194.
7 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 193.
Further disagreement and unrest was provoked immediately after the Hundred Flowers Campaign by economic troubles that plagued the nation during and after the Great Leap Forward. In the years immediately leading up to 1966, the economy was in shambles due to the grave errors committed under the directives of the Great Leap Forward in a desperate attempt to speed up the modernization process. The reasons the movement failed were multi-faceted, but a simplified overview can be attributed to the gross misuse of labor. In order to reach the ambitious goals of modernization and prosperity envisioned by Mao and other top officials, people were forced to employ amateurish and ineffective methods with hopes of industrializing a historically agrarian nation. Consequently, millions of people starved or faced extremely challenging economic conditions due to the severe political missteps of the Great Leap Forward. The vast suffering caused much disillusionment among many people, including minorities and top Party officials. Such voices would eventually come to light and fueled Mao’s determination to purge and revolutionize the government.

In 1959, a meeting at Lushan brought to light the first major signs of growing internal factions within the Communist Party. During that meeting, Mao was harshly criticized by top Party official, Peng Dehui, for the mistakes he had committed during the disastrous Great Leap Forward. Although Peng Dehui later made revisions to his original statement in an attempt to soften his accusations, the impact was nonetheless monumental within the Communist Party. In essence, the meeting at Lushan had

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10 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 149.
14 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 179.
15 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 179-182.
16 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 182.
opened the door for differing political viewpoints to be expressed from within Party ranks. Furthermore, another Party official, Liu Shaoqi, was trying to phase out many practices associated with the disastrous Great Leap Forward after realizing that they were causing the economic havoc that was becoming increasingly hard-felt in many areas. From many perspectives, it was apparent that true political power was shifting towards Liu Shaoqi and other top officials who shared similar moderate political views. Mao was becoming more of a figurehead as the 1950s came to an end, which caused the leader to harbor an increasingly growing distrust for many of the Party’s members. The main target was Liu Shaoqi, but many others fell under the cloud of suspicion as well.

As the political and economic problems began to worsen, Mao decided to introduce radical changes to the Communist Party. He began by openly denouncing Liu Shaoqi and his supporters, whom he viewed as too conservative for effectively promoting class revolution. Instead, he advocated grassroots movements among the people, because they were believed to be the true revolutionaries. Mao encouraged the people to “make revolution,” and the response from the people was strong. Many groups that claimed to be pure Maoists were formed with aims to revolutionize and reform China into a socialist state. By the time the Cultural Revolution began in 1966, the Red Guards had been formed by junior and senior high school students and university students who had acceptable working class backgrounds. The people who joined displayed the revolutionary fervor Mao had hoped would sweep throughout the nation as China

18 Chang, The Party and the National Question in China, 89-91.
20 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 164-166.
progressed towards socialism. With Mao’s support, they were encouraged to carry on the reforms that would enable socialism and class struggle to develop to greater extremes. Party officials and the People’s Liberation Army were given orders not to intervene with the reforms carried out by those youth, which granted the Red Guards the ability to become major catalysts for the radical changes that directly affected millions of people during the onset of the Cultural Revolution.

Mao’s rising suspicions of Party members affected the minority populations along with the rest of the country despite having previously granted them special exceptions. According to the ideology of the past, political difficulties and slower economic development among the minorities would have been accepted and tolerated by the government. However, given the general chaotic context of the entire country, special exceptions came into contention. Therefore, the most noticeable effect politics had on the national minorities was the direct break from the gradualist policies. The minorities, along with the rest of the nation, were all expected to speed up all reforms in an attempt to remedy the precarious political and social situation. Any kind of gradualism became associated with the biggest political target, Liu Shaoqi, and his political faction. The main results of ending gradualist politics among the minorities were increased attacks on Party leadership and the destruction of minority culture in traditionally minority regions.

However, many of Mao’s concerns with minorities and the lack of overall progress made during the 1950s were not explicitly stated. Likewise, the government

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22 Lin, The Red Guards’ Path to Violence: Political, Educational, and Psychological Factors, 4.
23 Lin, The Red Guards’ Path to Violence: Political, Educational, and Psychological Factors, 7.
24 Fei, Modernization and National Minorities in China, 30-31.
25 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 175.
26 Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 175-178.
never issued any official directive that specifically ended gradualism and the special exceptions it allowed minorities in the past. Rather, many happy images of minority unity continued to be promoted heavily throughout China.\textsuperscript{28} They included large posters in public areas and the ever-popular slogans of the Communist Party.\textsuperscript{29} Rallies were held to emphasize the “people of all nationalities” in areas with large minority populations.\textsuperscript{30} While such images were being promoted, the end of gradualism began to come into effect, albeit somewhat quietly. Nevertheless, there were some speeches and drafted policies from within the Party that revealed the new direction in which minority policy was headed.\textsuperscript{31} For example, in 1968, there was a draft party constitution that stated the following:

The old party constitution stressed only the special characteristics of the nationalities and the conducting of social reforms according to their own wishes, but not the party’s leadership and the socialist revolution. It says “the development of many national minorities has been restricted” and “the party must make a special effort to improve the position of the various national minorities.” By emphasizing nationalism to the exclusion of patriotism and internationalism, it in reality creates national schism. The broad revolutionary masses maintain that the following directive from Chairman Mao should be stressed in the new party constitution of the Ninth Congress: “National struggle is in the final analysis a question of class struggle.” The unity of all nationalities on the basis of the thought of Chairman Mao Žedong and on the socialist road should be stressed.\textsuperscript{32}

However, that is not to say that the new policies affected all minorities in the same way.

In fact, quite the contrary was true. The radical policies of the Cultural Revolution and its

\textsuperscript{29} Dreyer, “China’s Minority Nationalities in the Cultural Revolution,” 96.
\textsuperscript{30} Dreyer, “China’s Minority Nationalities in the Cultural Revolution,” 96.
\textsuperscript{31} Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 209.
\textsuperscript{32} Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 209.
effects impacted minorities quite differently from region to region. Therefore, it is more helpful to address the effects the Cultural Revolution had on politics by focusing on particular regions.

INNER MONGOLIA

In the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, the arrival of the Cultural Revolution became most obvious within the political arena first. The overall changes that affected the region were similar to those that were occurring within the central government in Beijing. A main target of the Cultural Revolution in Inner Mongolia was party members who were deemed to be anti-Maoist and potentially insubordinate to the Maoist aims. The fear of political dissent was common throughout China, but it was perhaps particularly heightened given historical tensions between the Mongols and the Han.

The first signs of political upheaval occurred at the capital city of Huhehot where the municipal government was purged after being labeled as “splittists.” The evidence supporting the accusation came from what has generally been interpreted as a wild exaggeration of a seemingly harmless remark. The mayor of Huhelot was quoted saying that the Mongolians should first support fellow Mongolians. The likelihood that the mayor had serious intentions of undermining the power of the Chinese Communist Party with that statement is dubious to most people. However, such was precisely the sort of over exaggerated situations that were used to support Maoist claims of political subversion throughout the country. The Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region was no exception in that regard.

After purging the municipal government, the same kind of shaky circumstantial evidence was used in a case aimed at discrediting the leader of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The leader at that time was a native Mongol named Ulanfu who had essentially held all the important positions within the area since 1947. By the time the Cultural Revolution arrived in Inner Mongolia, Ulanfu had already enjoyed much political support from the Chinese Communist Party over two decades. For much of the two decades, Mongolia was able to function rather independently from the control of the central government. Yet, there is no solid proof suggesting that Ulanfu sought complete independence from the Chinese government. Over his two decades in power, Ulanfu had several chances to engage in subversive actions against the Communist Party with little serious repercussions, but there is no solid evidence to suggest that he took advantage of such opportunities. Yet despite the absence of dependable evidence suggesting any major attempt to break away from the Communist Party, Ulanfu fell under great suspicion during the Cultural Revolution. The Party accused Ulanfu for being too “soft” on Mongolians who were classified as class enemies. The general charge against Ulanfu was that he showed preferential support for Mongolians and Mongol interests. The term for putting minority issues before the national goals set by the central government was referred to as minoritization (minzuhua), and the central government

41 Hyer, "The Cultural Revolution in Inner Mongolia." 127.
believed it was grounds for suspecting Ulanfu for having subversive intentions. However, exact details and concrete proof were both lacking, and Ulanfu quickly faded from the public. A broadcast from Huhehot that highlights Ulanfu’s intention of undermining the central government was later aired in 1968.

After a struggle of several days, notable victories have been scored and several serious political cases involving the agents of Ulanfu, such as Wang I-lum, Wang To, and Ch’en Pi-li were brought to light. Bad elements sabotaging the proletarian Cultural Revolution and socialist construction either openly or behind the scenes were exposed, while a handful of bad leaders who had wormed their way into the revolutionary ranks were purged. Ammunition, blueprints for manufacturing guns, radio stations, material collected and plans hatched by Ulanfu’s remnant clique for attacking the new red power, badges, seals, name lists of the counter-revolutionary organization, incriminating funds, and goods obtained through illegal profiteering and speculation were also seized.

Similar to many Party members facing harsh denunciations at the time, the claims of Ulanfu’s wrongdoing was not accompanied by any concrete evidence that was available to the public. Whether or not Ulanfu’s actions were truly aimed to seize control and rid the Inner Mongolia region of the Han majority cannot be definitively determined. However, the lack of solid evidence suggests to many scholars that it was unlikely. The persecution faced by Ulanfu and countless other officials during the Cultural Revolution was not fueled by condemning evidence. And because many important political figures in minority regions were charged with such crimes, many believed that minorities in politics were being targeted by the Communist Party.

However, the general mindset of the Maoists in power was to exterminate any signs of dissent or threat to the central government.\textsuperscript{49} Therefore, while the persecution of minorities within the government in Inner Mongolia was indeed a reality, it was certainly not a case unique to the region. In other words, it is difficult to argue that the persecution the Mongolian Party members faced was the direct result of their minority ethnicity since such charges transcended ethnic divides throughout the Party.

TIBET

Another region whose minorities were heavily affected by the changing politics of the Cultural Revolution was Tibet.\textsuperscript{50} Unlike many other minority regions, Tibet actually had large numbers of minorities whose lifestyles retained many cultural traditions.\textsuperscript{51} Therefore, the radicalism of the Cultural Revolution became a concern for many in local Tibetan politics. The common concern was that the largely traditional society would not be ready for the rapid new changes that Mao insisted on implementing right away instead of taking the gradualist road.\textsuperscript{52} Even the progress made under the gradualist approach proved to strain Tibetan politics.\textsuperscript{53} The most notable result of building political unrest between the Tibetans and the Chinese was the revolt that occurred in 1959.\textsuperscript{54} It was quickly ended by Chinese military force, but the political tensions were neither adequately addressed nor resolved. Nonetheless, the military power used to end the revolt in 1959 was successful in creating a tentative sense of peace. In order to maintain the precarious peace in Tibet, the leader of the region, Chang Kuo-hua, warned the central

\textsuperscript{49} Hyer, "The Cultural Revolution in Inner Mongolia,"128.
\textsuperscript{50} Dreyer, "China’s Minority Nationalities in the Cultural Revolution," 105-109.
\textsuperscript{51} Dreyer, "China’s Minority Nationalities in the Cultural Revolution," 105-109.
\textsuperscript{52} Dreyer, "China’s National Minorities in the Cultural Revolution," 105-109.
\textsuperscript{53} Dawa Norbu, China’s Tibet Policy (Richmond, United Kingdom:Curzon Press, 2001), 228-242.
\textsuperscript{54} Norbu, China’s Tibet Policy, 228-242.
government against deploying the Red Guards and the Maoist ideologies of the Cultural Revolution. The Red Guards responded with scathing denunciations against Chang, who was accused of being the leader of a counter-revolutionary revisionist group in Tibet. Ultimately, warnings against allowing the Cultural Revolution into Tibet went ignored by the Red Guards. By 1967, factionalism and political chaos became increasingly problematic. Meanwhile, Chang was transferred into a different region without much explanation from the central government. He escaped much explicit condemnation at the time of his transfer, but it was later revealed that Mao’s wife, Chiang Ch’ing, had explicitly labeled Chang as a subversive who was working to suppress the Cultural Revolution.

Minorities who held Party leadership positions at that time were also accused of interfering with Party goals. A book written from a series of interviews with a Tibetan Communist Party member, Phuntso Wangye (Phunwang), further reveals the political complexities of the time. As a Tibetan Party member, he was an advocate on behalf of Tibetan interests as well as Communist reforms. Unlike most Tibetans, Phunwang felt that the future development of Tibet was dependent on Party reforms that would allow the region to modernize and achieve social equality. However, he was also a strong supporter of Tibetan nationalism, which caused him to fall under suspicion during the Cultural Revolution. Ultimately, Phunwang was arrested and imprisoned for eighteen years without any knowledge or proof of what he was being detained for. During prison, Phunwang felt that his case was a unique misunderstanding. Since he was previously cautioned about his Tibetan nationalism, he concluded that the Party had mistakenly

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created a trumped up charge based on his nationality and support of his homeland. It was not until eighteen years later, that he would realize his situation was neither unique nor related to his nationality. The account of his realization is as follows:

[My sons] explained…that Chairman Liu Shaoqi and Generals Peng Dehuai and He Long had been put in prison, where they had died…He also told me how our close comrade Topden had been hounded until he committed suicide during the Cultural Revolution. I was shocked to hear stories like these, yet oddly, I was also comforted. While I was in prison and cut off from any news of the world, I thought that my case was unique. Hearing about the fates of Liu Shaoqi, the generals, and my comrades made me realize that I was only one of many good cadres who had been wrongly persecuted and harmed.  

As Phunwang’s account mentions, many Han Party members of the central government also encountered great political problems. General Secretary of the Party, Deng Xiaoping was also viewed as a major contributor to the regional problems. More specifically, the 1959 revolt in Tibet and the ensuing political turmoil were viewed as a direct result of Deng’s advocacy of gradualist policies. The denunciations focused on Deng makes it difficult to argue that leaders of the minority regions were specifically targeted during the Cultural Revolution. Like many other Party members, they sustained criticism and were denounced by radical Maoists. However, their tribulations were hardly due to their positions among minority leadership.

XINJIANG

Xinjiang is another region that was heavily impacted by the sudden radical political policies of the Cultural Revolution. Similar to Tibet, Xinjiang is an autonomous

region that had traditionally high populations of minorities.\textsuperscript{62} The predominant minority group is the Uighurs, but many other Muslim groups inhabit the geographically isolated northwestern province as well.\textsuperscript{63} Even after the forced Han migrations that began in the 1950s, the Uighur population still overshadowed the Han population in the area. Therefore, due to the lack of significant Han presence and its geographical isolation, Xinjiang was able to enjoy relative political freedoms up until the Cultural Revolution.\textsuperscript{64}

The government of the region was not tightly controlled by Han leadership, as it was in some other minority regions. Most of the Party members were minorities and they retained considerable control over the everyday local affairs. During the period of gradualism, the Party slowly began to shift power from the hands of the local minorities to Han Party members who were more sympathetic to Maoist thought.\textsuperscript{65} The transition was deliberately slow, but some successes were achieved.\textsuperscript{66} However, in the years preceding the Cultural Revolution much of the progress was undone. At that time, the political environment was already beginning its shift towards ending gradualist policies in favor of more aggressive socialist measures.\textsuperscript{67} The result was disastrous for Xinjiang, and political turmoil began to spiral out of control. It ultimately led to a massive exodus of minorities to Kazakhstan in 1962.\textsuperscript{68} In the aftermath, the government began to scale back on the radical political measures that were becoming increasingly supported by the central government. Instead, it revived some of the more moderate gradualist policies of the past that had proven to be successful in maintaining peace between the minorities and the Han.

\textsuperscript{62} Dreyer, "China’s Minority Nationalities in the Cultural Revolution," 97.
\textsuperscript{63} Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 214-217.
\textsuperscript{64} Dreyer, "China’s Minority Nationalities in the Cultural Revolution," 97.
\textsuperscript{65} Dreyer, "China’s Minority Nationalities in the Cultural Revolution," 97-98.
\textsuperscript{66} Dreyer, "China’s Minority Nationalities in the Cultural Revolution," 97.
\textsuperscript{67} Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 226-227.
\textsuperscript{68} Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 226-227.
Despite the political unrest experienced in Xinjiang in response to radical measures, the drastic changes of the Cultural Revolution were not completely avoided. Although, during particularly unstable periods, the Cultural Revolution was suspended in order to prevent complete anarchy in the region. A main objective that was adopted by the Red Guards in Xinjiang was to purge the leader of the autonomous region. At that time, the leader was Wang En Mao, who was largely responsible for the successes achieved under the gradualist approach years earlier. From the perspective of the Red Guards and other Maoists, Wang was a revisionist who was developing his own independent kingdom. The accusations of being a revisionist was fueled by the gradualist policies he favored over the radical measures that proved to be both ineffective and politically polarizing. Ultimately, the extreme leftists succeeded in removing Wang from his post in 1969. In the years following 1969, several leaders were sent to fill the position left vacant by Wang’s departure. Those who tried to adopt the drastic measures encouraged by the Maoists ultimately discovered that such efforts were essentially useless in Xinjiang. Many eventually resorted to using the same moderately gradualist policies originally favored by Wang in order to maintain political order within the volatile region.

The political outcome of the Cultural Revolution differed a bit in the case of Xinjiang. However, the initial objectives behind the policies certainly were not devised to

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69 Donald H. McMillen, "Xinjiang and Wang Enmao: New Directions in Power, Policy, and Integration."
74 McMillen, "Xinjiang and Wang Enmao: New Directions in Power, Policy, and Integration." 590.
75 McMillen, "Xinjiang and Wang Enmao: New Directions in Power, Policy, and Integration." 590.
76 McMillen, "Xinjiang and Wang Enmao: New Directions in Power, Policy, and Integration." 591.
accommodate the unique circumstances of the region.\textsuperscript{77} Whereas, the government took many precautions in approaching areas that were heavily populated by minorities in the earlier years, the Cultural Revolution sought to take a completely different approach. The goals for Xinjiang were essentially no different than the goals the government hoped to accomplish throughout the country. Wang’s denunciation and dismissal was similar to the fates of countless Communist officials during the Cultural Revolution. Furthermore, the decision to disregard warnings against abandoning gradualism in favor of unsuitable radicalism was another aspect commonly seen in other areas.

The course of the Cultural Revolution affected the minority regions in a variety of ways, but there were nonetheless several commonalities that were observable across the groups. Many of those similarities shared by a number of nationalities could be further generalized on a nationwide scale. That is to say, many of the similarities found across minority regions were general overarching directives that were put into practice throughout China. The most obvious examples of these common themes shared all over China included the vicious denunciations of supposed revisionists and splittists who had deviated from pure Maoist thought. Of course, at that time, the term revisionist referred to the increasingly controversial gradualist policy. The accusations of splittism originated from the rising dissent from within the Party rank, and it became especially worrisome in the autonomous regions where minority nationalism was greatly feared. Much of the criticisms dealing with revisionists and splittists were ultimately supported by unclear or circumspect evidence. Oftentimes seemingly minute remarks about the Party would be taken out of context and over-exaggerated to support claims of Party disloyalty. Such was

\textsuperscript{77} Dreyer, \textit{China’s Forty Millions}, 229.
certainly not exclusive to the minority areas as it occurred on all levels of Party politics throughout China.
Chapter 4: Effects of Shifting Policies During the Cultural Revolution

While the Cultural Revolution impacted the politics of the Communist Party greatly, it was the social and cultural aspects of the movement that truly affected the everyday lives of the Chinese people. The reforms that took place during the decade beginning in 1966 produced widespread change that permeated all areas of Chinese life that included, but was by no means limited to, religion and education. The decade-long Cultural Revolution was a repressive time period that forced many people to abandon their unique cultural traditions and identities, which from the minority perspective was often construed as a movement that designated their people as specific targets for radical change. The particular position can easily be noted in memoirs and interviews from minorities, which reveal the extent to which the everyday lives of people were greatly transformed in a span of ten years. And while many of the struggles mentioned in the memoirs were certainly true, it would be incorrect to conclude that they were the result of policies the government introduced exclusively to those regions. Many of the specific instances recalled by minorities can be generalized to all members within China at the time. Such was simply due to the general political milieu during the time period, which compelled Mao to set the culturally repressive measures that have come to characterize the Cultural Revolution.¹

The ultimate Party goal of creating an equal society where social differences would virtually cease to exist had not yet been achieved to an acceptable degree throughout the 1950s.² Within minority areas, the progress was oftentimes even slower

¹ MacFarquhar, China Under Mao, 483-508.
² Dreyer, “China’s Minority Nationalities in the Cultural Revolution,” 100.
due to the many special exceptions made during the period of gradualism. Mao felt that the country was still too enmeshed within the culture and traditions of the past, which hindered their ability to embrace the radical social reforms that he envisioned for the nation. In order to jumpstart the needed reform measures; Mao introduced the goal of destroying the Four Olds, which became a crucial component of the Cultural Revolution. The so-called Four Olds Campaign was a directive to smash old customs, old culture, old habits, and old ideas. All Chinese people were expected to diligently work towards adopting new customs, culture, habits, and ideas that were in line with the socialist society the Party sought to cultivate. From the Party’s perspective socialism could never truly be achieved among the people if social and cultural aspects from the historically stratified Chinese society continued to be preserved.

The mass mobilization of the Red Guards played a key role in carrying out the destruction of the Four Olds. Most of the Red Guards were sympathetic to the Maoist thought and the new calls for radicalizing the revolution. Generally speaking, the actions taken by the Red Guards were ideologically driven, and they genuinely believed that radical destruction of the past was necessary in order to establish a better socialist society. Thus, the approach taken by the youth who composed the Red Guard ranks were often harsh and relentless, which was especially true in minority areas that were more entrenched within their traditional cultures. However, it is important to note that the approach taken towards the minorities were not particularly unique. Any person or group who adhered to tradition could have expected to be attacked by the Red Guards. Popular targets included religion, education, intellectuals, Western culture, old Han traditions,

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1 Dreyer, *China’s Forty Millions*, 217.
3 Lin, *The Red Guards’ Path to Violence*, 4-5.
minority customs, and etc.\textsuperscript{7} The campaign against the Four Olds was undoubtedly a massive movement that reached all kinds of people during the decade long revolution.

Within this section, the history of the Cultural Revolution and its impact will be examined through personal narratives that incorporate both minority and Han perspectives. The voices from the minority perspective will be limited to the experiences of Tibetans and the Muslim minorities. While countless groups of minorities were affected by the Cultural Revolution, particular attention will be devoted to those groups due to their distinctive traditional cultures which were heavily tied to their respective religious beliefs. Furthermore, unlike many minority groups, Tibetans and the Muslim minority groups throughout China had remained sizeable populations that retained a high degree of cultural independence.\textsuperscript{8} From the Han perspective, the experiences of Red Guards will be explored since their role in the Cultural Revolution allowed them to have a wide range of interactions with everyday people throughout the nation.

TIBETANS

The impact that the Cultural Revolution had on the Tibetan Autonomous Region was significant in many aspects of everyday life, which could largely be attributed to the fact that Tibetans had historically maintained distinct cultural and social boundaries from the Han people.\textsuperscript{9} Tibetan culture and society were both heavily influenced by the Dalai Lama and Lamaism, and for most Tibetans there was no clear boundary between a religious and a secular life. Furthermore, a number of factors have enabled the Tibetans

\textsuperscript{7} Lin, The Red Guards’ Path to Violence, 67-68, 93.
\textsuperscript{8} Dreyer, China’s Forty Millions, 214-217.
to retain their distinctive ethno-religious identity throughout history. One of the most important contributing factors is that Tibetans were rather isolated from outside influences, which meant that they were unfamiliar with many aspects of Chinese culture and society.  

Prior to the rise of the Communist Party presence in Tibet, there was a marginal Han population in the region. After 1949, the Han population grew due to forced Han migrations into the region. And by the time the Cultural Revolution had begun in 1966, there was a significantly increased presence of Han Chinese within Tibetan society, although it was still relatively minimal in comparison to a number of other minority areas. The effects of the increased Han population were compounded by the political power the Han Chinese asserted through minority policies from the central government, which resulted in an influx of new societal and political influences from the Han Chinese that ultimately had a significant impact in the everyday lives of Tibetans.

Throughout many Tibetan regions, the effects of the Party policies caused profound changes in the lives of ordinary people, which were reflected in a memoir written by Jetsun Pema. A common perspective expressed through her memoir dealt with the struggles and tensions the Tibetans encountered as a result of the Communist policies, which in turn caused many of them to feel as if their traditional ways of life were being targeted by the Communist government. Many of the accounts given in the memoir reflected the devastating realities faced by the Tibetans as the relative independence they previously enjoyed came to an abrupt end with the invasion of the Chinese people. However, the tragedy of the events that occurred cannot easily be attributed to policies

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that were specifically seeking to oppress Tibetans. In many instances, policies that were adopted in Tibet reflected the general national objectives of the time period.\footnote{Fei, \textit{Modernization and National Minorities in China}, 55.}

The memoir titled \textit{Tibet: My Story} tells the story of Jetsun Pema who was exiled after the Chinese took control of Tibet. As the sister of the Dalai Lama, Pema had a heightened awareness of many political, social, and cultural changes that Tibet underwent during the time.\footnote{Jetsun Pema, \textit{Tibet: My Story, An Autobiography}, (Rockport, Mass.: Element, 1997), 1-9.} The perspective expressed through her narrative emphasized the destruction of Tibetan culture and society that resulted from the Communist policies of the Cultural Revolution. Her memoir includes commentary on the personal experiences and stories from the people she encountered during her travels. Many of the events and experiences discussed by Pema reveal the multitude of ways Communist policy touched the lives of the ordinary Tibetans.\footnote{Pema, \textit{Tibet: My Story, An Autobiography}, 1-9.}

Under Chinese rule, religion was an aspect of Tibetan society that became increasingly oppressed during the Cultural Revolution. During a visit back to Tibet shortly after the Cultural Revolution was over, Pema noted her firsthand impression of the effects the impact the ten year period left on religion.

\begin{quote}
We were welcomed at Tashi Kyil by seven old monks, the only people there apart from a few workers engaged in renovating the monastery. This restoration work had been decided on after the first delegation’s visit and a large part of the buildings had been restored to their original appearance...However, the entire monastery was filled with an unreal atmosphere; it felt physically and spiritually empty...Instead of experiencing the serenity habitually associated with such a place, my companions and I felt distressed...Before the Chinese invasion, any devout person could go to the monasteries, which were also places of learning and an inherent part of our way of life. The Chinese occupying forces had transformed these places into
\end{quote
either sterile museums, visited only by a few carefully chosen visitors, or piles of stones.\textsuperscript{14}

Pema’s recollection of that visit reflects the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution’s attempt to free the nation from the “backwardness” of religion and tradition. During the Cultural Revolution, many monasteries were indeed either appropriated for secular uses or destroyed.\textsuperscript{15} For example, Pema returned to her old home in Tibet during her visit only to find that it was converted into an inn for Chinese officers.\textsuperscript{16} Countless religious figures were disrobed and forced into other occupations. Despite the lack of reliable exact figures, it can reasonably be believed that several thousand religious leaders in Tibet were subjected to torture, public humiliation, and even death.\textsuperscript{17}

Traditionally, religion played an important role in the education system of Tibet. Monasteries served as centers of basic education for Tibetan children, and religious figures made up a large portion of the teachers. Therefore, the unfavorable religious environment had a direct negative effect on the quality of education in Tibet. In addition, Tibetan was declared to be a religious language, and thus it became inappropriate to conduct lessons in the language. Tibetan textbooks were replaced with the works of Mao and other Party propaganda. The new Chinese curriculum was considered to be progressive whereas the old Tibetan curriculum was portrayed as backwards and ineffective. In the memoir, Pema argues that the realities of education under Communist rule were far from progressive and effective. During her travels, she was often given many statistics that portrayed great success and growth under Chinese rule. However, her

\textsuperscript{15} Pema, \textit{Tibet: My Story, An Autobiography}, 129-134.
\textsuperscript{17} Heath, \textit{Tibet and China in the Twenty-first Century}, 87.
personal experiences suggested that perhaps the success purported by the Chinese were at least somewhat, if not mostly, fabricated. In the memoir, Pema notes the following:

In some villages, the Chinese even went so far as to create a school just for the duration of our visit. In one school under a tent that we were shown, everything was brand-new: the tent, children’s clothes, tables and blackboard. Even the grass under the carpet was tender and green. A teacher explained the subtleties of Tibetan grammar to children who did not even know the alphabet! The situation was so ridiculous that even the Chinese officials accompanying us seemed embarrassed.  

Pema’s observations about the Tibetan education system under the Chinese reveal two major effects of the Cultural Revolution. Firstly, many aspects of Tibetan culture were no longer incorporated into school curricula, which meant that younger generations of Tibetans lost an important link to understanding their heritage and religion. Secondly, many of the schools were not the great successes that the Chinese officials claimed them to be. In Tibet: My Story, Pema recalls her skepticism in the following passage:

As we had expected from the beginning, at each meeting we were subjected to a relentless litany about the unprecedented progress that had been accomplished in the field of education. The Chinese statistics were as follows: 430 primary schools with 17,000 pupils; 55 secondary schools with 10,000 pupils; and 6,000 schools opened by the population itself, where some 200,000 pupils received government grants…Everywhere we went, the officials bombarded us with their figures, no doubt in this way hoping to hid a less impressive reality. I must stress that we were given no opportunity to verify these figures….We were told, however, that the schools were closed everywhere for the summer holidays. I could not understand the logic of shutting them in the middle of the warm season in a country where the winters are so long and hard. No real school buildings existed, let alone heated ones.

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18 Pema, Tibet: My Story, An Autobiography, 158.
Upon the conclusion of her travels in her native Tibet, she was strongly convinced that the so-called progressive objectives of socialism were nothing more than pretenses adopted by the Communists in order to destroy the Tibetan way of life. Many of her fellow Tibetans that she spoke with during her return to Tibet expressed the same point of view.

MUSLIM MINORITIES

The Hui people are a group of Muslims that can be found throughout China in many contained communities. The largest concentration of the Hui people is located in the Ningxia autonomous region, which was created in 1969 by the CCP.20 Many people within the Hui communities can trace their ancestry back to the Muslim traders and soldiers who intermarried with local Han women beginning in 8th century.21 Although most Hui people can claim a common ancestry based on Muslim ancestors who hailed from the Middle East centuries ago, the actual defining characteristic of the group is very much contingent on their religious faith.22 As Dru Gladney points out, religion has allowed the Hui to maintain an ethno-religious identity that can be summarized by the belief that “all Hui under Heaven are one family.”23

Unlike many of the minority groups in China, the Hui cannot be easily distinguished based on costumes, dances, and a unique language. In fact, prior to the

21 Dillon, *China’s Muslim Hui Community*, 11.
22 Dillon, *China’s Muslim Hui Community*, 12.
official state identification in the 1950s, the Hui were not considered to be a separate nationality (minzu).\textsuperscript{24} Before the 1949, the Hui people were simply referred to as believers of Islam (\textit{Huijiao} believers).\textsuperscript{25} Indeed, the distinction between Hui and Han can best be made on religious grounds. According to Gladney, “One was accepted into Hui communities and mosques simply on the basis of being a Muslim. If one stopped believing in Islam, one lost one’s membership in that community of faith. Han could become Hui through conversion, and Hui could revert to being Han through apostacy.”\textsuperscript{26}

The ethnoreligious identity that has long been associated with the Hui was profoundly affected after 1949, which was marked with the beginning of political campaigns that were aimed to promote “national unity” (\textit{minzu tuanjie}).\textsuperscript{27} Establishing “national unity” was an important national goal from an ideological standpoint, and it was further intensified to discourage any “separatist ideas” that the government feared would develop among the Hui minorities.\textsuperscript{28} For example, there was a particular suspicion among the central government that the Hui might try to split from China in order to form a religious state similar to Israel.\textsuperscript{29} Such a fear was quelled during the attempt to destroy the “Four Olds” during the Cultural Revolution. For example, certain restrictions were placed on the Islamic faith of the Hui people since religion was deemed to be representative of the “Four Olds.” The central government tried to consolidate worship, which would have made potential splittist conflicts easier to thwart in addition to ridding the region of its revisionist ways.\textsuperscript{30} Because of the prominent role religion plays in constructing the Hui identity, the movement also had a significant impact on the culture

\textsuperscript{24} Gladney, \textit{Muslim Chinese Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic}. 96.
\textsuperscript{25} Gladney, \textit{Muslim Chinese Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic}. 97.
\textsuperscript{26} Gladney, \textit{Muslim Chinese Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic}. 97.
\textsuperscript{27} Gladney, \textit{Muslim Chinese Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic}. 134-137.
\textsuperscript{28} Gladney, \textit{Muslim Chinese Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic}. 134-137.
\textsuperscript{29} Gladney, \textit{Muslim Chinese Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic}. 134.
\textsuperscript{30} Gladney, \textit{Muslim Chinese Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic}. 137.
of the people. However, when considering the ways in which religion and other cultural aspects were discouraged, it is important to remember the context of the Cultural Revolution. Although the Cultural Revolution affected the Hui people more than the Han people in certain situations, it is crucial to acknowledge that the objectives behind the movements were reflective of general national goals.

Changes in religious policy due to the Smash Four Olds Campaign caused some of the most drastic changes within Hui society during the Cultural Revolution. During that period, many mosques were either destroyed or closed and then converted into factories or lodgings for officers. Many Hui who were interviewed from the Na Homestead community of Hui people recalled an important mosque being transformed into a ball bearing factory. The leaders of the mosques were usually either sent away or assigned to work in the fields along with the people. The forced transition from religion towards work and industrialization was a salient theme of the measures adopted during the Cultural Revolution. As a result, there was a definite decline in religious freedom, despite previous reassurances by the government that religious faith would be preserved and respected.

A glimpse into how the lives of ordinary Hui people were changed by the Cultural Revolution is revealed in several personal interviews conducted by Gladney. The focus of the interviews was on craftsmen since many Hui people become skilled in a particular craft as a way of making a living. In one case, Gladney interviews He Keming, a 93 year old Hui artisan whose works include ornate paper and silk lanterns that featured a great

31 Gladney, Muslim Chinese Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic, 136.
32 Gladney, Muslim Chinese Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic, 137.
variety of life-like animals. During the Cultural Revolution, He suffered greatly since his art was considered to be “feudalistic.” On one occasion, Red Guards tried to persuade He to commit suicide since his life’s work was representative of the “Four Olds.” In response to the difficult situation, He recalls the following: “If they made me jump they would be opposing the revolution (fangemin), so they let me live. Allah protected me (zhenzhu bayou).”

However, the Hui people who were attacked during the Cultural Revolution were not only limited to those who could be easily classified as embodying one of the “Four Olds.” As the revolutionary fervor increased among the Red Guards, the methods for “making revolution” became increasingly ruthless. Many Hui remember incidences where they were shunned for being “backwards,” because religious faith was perceived as a key indication that a person was unable to break away from the “Four Olds.” Since there are many Muslim groups in China, the Hui certainly were not the only people who were subjected to verbal and physical abuse as a result of their Islamic faith. Members from other groups such as the Uighurs and the Kazaks in northwestern Xinjiang province also experienced discrimination and abuse at the hands of Red Guards and other people who had better political statuses. For example, a common derogatory term was to call the Hui people or their ancestors “pigs.” When the Muslims were surveyed about their identity, many of them had actually defined themselves as people who do not eat pork. Not eating the unclean meat of pigs is a common practice among people who practice the Islamic faith, but within China the issue of not eating pork has actually a major defining

34 Gladney, Muslim Chinese Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic. 242.
35 Dillion, China’s Muslim Hui Community, 43-45.
36 Dillion, China’s Muslim Hui Community, 46.
characteristic among Muslims. Therefore, calling a Chinese Muslim a pig is extremely offensive. Of course, the struggles the Muslims encountered did not merely end with verbal abuse. There are many documented cases of beatings and public humiliations that the Muslims suffered at the hands of the Communist government.

The minority perspectives portray the Cultural Revolution era as a time when oppression was rampant in everyday lives. Traditional ways were squashed by the Red Guards who were “making revolution” by ridding the nation of the “Four Olds,” and many minorities succumbed to the harsh physical and emotional abuses that were aimed to destroy a great number of people. What the accounts from the Red Guard perspective shows is that the people who suffered at their hands were truly diverse. As the drive to “make revolution” intensified, the list of targets swelled significantly. An account given by a former Red Guard illustrates that the Cultural Revolution affected an enormous body of people. She recalls the following:

The list of accusations grew longer by the day: hooligans and bad eggs, filthy rich peasants and son-of-the-bitch landlords, bloodsucking capitalists and neo-bourgeoisie, historical counterrevolutionaries and active counterrevolutionaries, rightists and ultrarightsts, alien class elements and degenerate elements, reactionaries and opportunist, counterrevolutionary revisionists, imperialist running dogs, and spies.

It must be noted that such accusations were applied to many people quite liberally, and in many cases, it was difficult to prove that the accused had actually been guilty. In general, the Red Guards had immense power in “making revolution,” and thus they were not

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usually concerned with holding themselves accountable for making fair accusations. Consequently, countless of people were unjustly accused and forced to endure the humiliating denunciations from the Red Guards.\textsuperscript{40} Virtually everybody in China knew somebody who was victimized in such a way, which makes it difficult to conclude that only the minorities suffered during China’s quest to destroy the “Four Olds” in order to create social equality.

In the sections focusing on Tibet and the Muslim minorities, religion was depicted as a major area of contention during the Cultural Revolution. While it is true that Tibet and the areas with large Muslim populations were affected more noticeably, the attempt to suppress religion has had an enormous effect on many Chinese people throughout the nation.\textsuperscript{41} While religious belief may not be a defining characteristic among all the people, China nonetheless contained followers of many faiths. For example, a significant portion of the Han population followed Buddhism, Daoism, and Christianity. Those believers were considered “backwards” as well, and many of them suffered some kind of punishment in the hands of the Red Guards as a result.\textsuperscript{42} One woman who was interviewed told about her family members who were targeted and beaten because of their religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{43} She recalled the following:

Many people on my mother’s side of the family suffered horribly at the hands of the Red Guards. My aunt who was a devout Catholic refused to give up her role as a leader within her religious community. The Red Guards tried to convince her to break ties with her religion by forcing her to participate in public denunciations where we witnessed

\textsuperscript{40} Lin, The Red Guards’ Path to Violence, 153.
\textsuperscript{41} McCarthy, Tears of the Lotus, 21.
\textsuperscript{42} Zi-Ping Luo, A Generation Lost, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), 38.
\textsuperscript{43} Luo, A Generation Lost, 39.
friends and neighbors shouting terrible things at her…Eventually, she committed suicide.  

As that particular account demonstrated, religious discrimination was the reality for many Chinese people. The radical measures that called for Red Guards to suppress religion were driven by the notion that religious belief was an impediment to social progress and equality.

Education was another area that the minorities focused on during their reflections of the Cultural Revolution. However, the idea of replacing traditional educational materials with books that promoted Maoist thought was certainly not unfamiliar within predominately Han areas. In fact, the attacks on teachers and education were some of the most notoriously brutal acts undertaken by the Red Guards. The below is an illustration of a typical struggle session that Red Guards forced upon their teachers.

Students stood in the roles of prosecutor, judge, and police. No defense was allowed. Any teacher who protested was certainly a liar. The indignities escalated as well. Some students shaved or cut teachers’ hair into curious patterns. The most popular style was the yin-yang cut, which featured a full head of hair on one side and a clean-shaven scalp on the other. At struggle meetings, students often forced teachers in the “jet-plane” position. Two people would stand on each side of the accused, push him to his knees, pull his head back by the hair, and hold his arms out in back like airplane wings.

When the Red Guards became more radical, their methods for combating class enemies also became more extreme. On one hand, one competing faction of Red Guards wanted to prove that they were more dedicated to pure Maoist thought than any other group.

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44 Luo, A Generation Lost, 39.
45 MacFarquhar, Mao’s Last Revolution, 112-116.
46 Lin, The Red Guards’ Path to Violence, 22.
Secondly, the government encouraged the often violent tactics adopted by the Red Guards. As Lin points out in

Again, a consistent theme in the reports is that the cruel deeds were done without a sense of shame or guilt. Rather they gave the Red Guards a sense of importance, of glory and power. In their minds, they were fighting for a great cause, and the more cruel they were the more courageous they were at upholding the great cause. 48

Indeed, later reports from teachers illustrate how many Red Guards eventually adopted punishment methods that were far more violent than the jetplane position. One teacher who was crippled during the Cultural Revolution remembers the following account.

Out there in the athletic field, every several days, several teachers or “Seven Black Categories” would be taken out there and shot in public. The family members were not allowed to cry, instead they had to praise the Red Guards that they were doing the right thing. Some teachers were buried alive. 49

With such a vast amount of teachers either missing from classrooms or viciously beaten, the education of many students suffered. As was the case in Tibet, the education system throughout the country was less dedicated to providing an adequate education to its younger generation. Instead, school became an environment for “making revolution” and learning about Maoist thought. 50

From the aforementioned accounts, it is apparent that the minorities were not the sole victims of the radical actions that the Red Guards adopted. The reality of the time period was that all the people in China suffered great cultural losses. 51 For example,

49 Lin, The Red Guards’ Path to Violence: Political, Educational, and Psychological Factors, 23.
50 MacFarquhar, Mao’s Last Revolution, 110-111.
51 Luo, A Generation Lost, 70-74.
many Han artists were also labeled as reactionary due to their classical style.\textsuperscript{52} Other artisans were accused of being imperialists if they emulated Western styles in their work. The charges that were brought against people based on occupation were common, especially since a wide range of jobs could be interpreted as one of the “Four Olds” that needed to be destroyed.\textsuperscript{53} The public ridicule that many minorities encountered was also rampant within the general Han society. As the accounts from the Red Guards indicate, public displays of humiliation were commonplace and applauded during the Cultural Revolution. While the Han Chinese may not have been called derogatory names associated with religion, class enemies throughout China were all subjected to verbal abuse.\textsuperscript{54}

A central idea of the Cultural Revolution was to bring public shame and guilt upon those who did not possess the ideal political background.\textsuperscript{55} And since it was difficult to accurately define a class enemy, the number of people who found themselves under severe emotional and physical attack was truly staggering. Personal accounts from people who experienced the effects of the Cultural Revolution and the so-called “Red Terror” that was unleashed by the Red Guards attest to the fact that acts of oppression indiscriminately affected people throughout the nation.

\textsuperscript{52} Luo, \textit{A Generation Lost}, 83.
\textsuperscript{53} Luo, \textit{A Generation Lost}, 65.
\textsuperscript{54} Luo, \textit{A Generation Lost}, 66-68.
\textsuperscript{55} MacFarquhar, \textit{Mao’s Last Revolution}, 113-131.


Conclusion

It cannot be denied that China’s minorities endured many extremely difficult struggles under the Communist rule. The personal accounts from both the Han Chinese and the national minorities document instances of horrifying abuse and oppression. The purpose of this thesis was not to discredit or doubt that oppression was indeed a reality throughout the twentieth century in China for many minority groups. Rather, this thesis was aimed at assessing whether or not it is valid to argue that the central government specifically intended to target minorities. The ultimate conclusion was that such an assessment is unfair based on the larger political and social contexts of the time.

From a political point of view, the minority policies corresponded with the general political trends of the time. Upon rising to power in 1949, the main goals of the Communist Party were to achieve modernity and to foster social equality. During that time, it was realized that the minorities could not be capable of making such a drastic transition due to their generally more backward economic situations. Therefore, reform was set to occur only when the minorities themselves wanted them. However, the drive to modernize grew increasingly greater, and it eventually resulted in the Great Leap Forward. During that time, there was the first minor shift in minority policy. In order to maximize output and meet the quotas for production, many officials were forced to ignore the special exceptions made for the minorities. However, this shift was then undone after it became clear to the government that the Great Leap Forward was a huge disaster. The dissenting voices that Mao encountered as a result of the Great Leap Forward began to fuel his suspicions of disloyalty. Mao believed that many Party officials were not taking the revolution seriously enough. Therefore, he called upon the
youth of the nation to “make revolution,” which consequently resulted in the destroying any old traditions, beliefs, or ideas. Consequently, minority policy was greatly affected. The cultural freedoms which were previously guaranteed were revoked very suddenly in accordance with the political goals of the Cultural Revolution.

The ways in which everyday lives of minorities were affected by the policies of the time was also not unique to their ethnic identities. Since the shifts in minority policy were consistent with the changes in political goals and ideologies of the time, minorities and the Han people were often affected in similar ways. During the Cultural Revolution, oppression and cultural destruction was commonplace throughout China, and such experiences certainly not limited to the minority population. While minority culture could easily be classified as something that needed to be destroyed during the Four Olds Campaign, it was clear that the movement greatly affected everyday lives of the Han people as well. For example, the Han people also held age-old traditions and religious beliefs that were deemed unacceptable during the Cultural Revolution.

Ultimately, the struggles endured by the minorities were not likely to have been attributed to specific Party intentions of oppressing China’s sizeable non-Han population. The trials that afflicted the minorities were reflective of the general political and social trends of the time. However, the fact remains that millions of minorities suffered greatly between the rise of the Communist Party in 1949 and the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976. The problems of that time period illustrate the complexities surrounding minority policies in a large multinational country. Even today, the conflict between the Communist government and the national minorities is still a highly relevant issue. China’s long history has proven that there is no simple solution to these problems, but it
is not necessarily impossible. After *A Tibetan Revolutionary* was published, Phunwang
continued his work in politics with hopes that one day his love for his native Tibet and
his faith in the Communist Party can be reconcilable. Eighteen years of isolated
imprisonment during the Cultural Revolution did not weaken Phunwang’s ambition to
advance both causes. Perhaps people like Phunwang who work relentlessly toward such a
cause can one day implement a policy that can be appease both minorities and the
Communist government.
Bibliography


