

Division to Unification: Concept of the Chinese Nation Behind

Bilingual Education Policies in the Sichuan Tibetan Area

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Abstract

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The imagination of the Chinese nation is a process continuing up to the present. As the Ethnic Classification Project was significant in the initial construction of the Chinese nation, education played an essential role in the latter part of the story. This paper focuses on the changes in bilingual education policies in the Sichuan Tibetan area, whose self-identities were typically influenced by bilingual education policies, to show the change of the definition of the Chinese nation. In history, self-identities in the Sichuan Tibetan area stay blurred. The Tibetan identity in that area clearly appeared after the Ethnic Classification Project in the official scope. Before the 1990s, local people had little concern about Tibetan identity, so the bilingual education policies in the early reform era focused on the division between Han and Minority to cultivate self-identity and idealized others; in the 2010s, local people identified themselves but alienated Han, so the education policies in the era of Xi Jinping concentrated on the of unification of all ethnic groups.

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1. Introduction

The concept of the Chinese nation has been contested for a long time, as it was an imitation of the modern concept of a nation imported from Europe. In such a context, the Ethnic Classification Project categorized clear and comprehensive nationalities in China for the first time. After that, the central government carried out bilingual education movements to try to connect minorities' identification with the Chinese nation, while the resistance they faced made them change policies in the end. This paper aims to describe bilingual education policies and the concept of the Chinese nation behind them. This paper will focus on the development of bilingual education policies in the Sichuan Tibetan Area, especially Aba and Ganzi Prefecture which were influenced both by Han and Tibetan, based on ethnographies and official documents. The main body of this paper will follow chronological order and contain three parts: self-identity of Sichuan Tibetan area in the Republican era and background of bilingual education, and then two specific stages in the PRC (People's Republic of China), division, and unification. This paper argues that the concept of the Chinese nation remained

a binary structure between central Han people and marginalized minorities in the early reform era, while President Xi Jinping is trying to unify the Chinese nation.

2. Literature Review

This part will include two sections—first, research on Chinese minority education. Early in 1978, John Hawkins completed an introduction on national minority education in the PRC, which is a general description due to data limitation.¹ Research on this topic boomed in the 1990s after the end of the Cold War. Gerard Postiglione's volume *China's National Minority Education-Culture, Schooling, and Development* introduces of anthropology, education, and political science on ethnic minorities. It is divided into several topics about cultural challenges to state schooling, and study of disparities in ethnic minority schooling.² In *Lessons in Being Chinese: Minority Education and Ethnic Identity in Southwest China*, Mette Hansen traces the state's civilizing project through history and, using interviews, gives a clear picture of minority education for Naxi and Dai people. Hansen confidently explains why the Naxi and Dai receive the civilizing projects in opposite ways. For the Naxi, Chinese Confucian intellectuals have been in the locality for generations, and today's education carries the legacy of the past. In contrast, no such teachers are available to contemporary Dai students.³ In

¹ Hawkins, John N. "National-Minority Education in the People's Republic of China." *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (1978), pp. 147–162.

² Edited by Gerard Postiglione, *China's National Minority Education-Culture, Schooling, and Development*. New York and London: Falmer Press, 1999.

³ Hansen, Mette. *Lessons in Being Chinese-Minority Education and Ethnic Identity in Southwest China*.

Education in Tibet: Policy and Practice since 1950, Bass Catriona provides an overview of Chinese educational policy and practice in the 1950-98 period and its implementation in Tibet and then offers detailed analyses of each level of education. Catriona concluded that in the center of education policymaking, Tibetan culture was viewed as both a hindrance to economic development and a threat to security.⁴ These studies focus was modernization and globalization model to understand minority education policy.

Recent research provides a more comprehensive view. Minorities themselves are not passive receivers. Lin Yi's "Ethnicization through Schooling" explores the discourses of poverty or "stupidity" of the minority population which serves as a tool to draw symbolic boundaries for the cultural-political mainstream to retain its power, and correspondingly for minorities to avoid further marginalization in the larger society, where education, the cultural battlefield, is grounded.⁵ Adrian Zenz, in "Beyond Assimilation: The Tibetanisation of Tibetan Education in Qinghai," goes beyond straightforward portrayals of minority education as a device for sinicization by analyzing the historically situated expression and suppression of different aspects of Tibetan culture and language. By evaluating the development of Tibetan-medium education in Qinghai province, it is demonstrated that minorities are not just victims at the hand of a dominant state but agents who can creatively explore and expand the political and cultural space within which they operate.⁶ Minorities identified themselves through

Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999.

⁴ Bass, Catriona. *Education in Tibet: Policy and Practice since 1950*. New York: Zed Books, 1998.

⁵ Lin, Yi. "Ethnicization through Schooling: The Mainstream Discursive Repertoires of Ethnic Minorities," *The China Quarterly*, No. 192 (2007), pp. 933-948.

⁶ Zenz, Adrian. "Beyond Assimilation: The Tibetanisation of Tibetan Education in Qinghai," *Inner Asia*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2010), pp. 293-315.

education. However, existing works did not connect minority education with a broader context.

The second part will discuss Western research on Chinese national identification.

Several important works were done during the 1980s to 1990s when Western anthropologists could conduct field research in China. By examining several Yi communities in Panzhihua, Sichuan, Stevan Harrell concludes that the state recognized cultural criteria for ethnicity for a possible instrumental purpose.⁷ The reliability of the Yi identity is suspicious. He further develops this idea in *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China* and argues that even within the same regional social system, ethnic identity is formulated, perceived, and promoted differently by diverse communities at various times.⁸ Based on his field work in Chinese Muslim communities, Dru Gladney's *Ethnic Identity in China: The Making of a Muslim Minority Nationality* (1998) concentrates on four types of Hui communities with different features: ethnoreligious resurgence in a northwestern Sufi community; gender, marriage and identity maintenance in Chang Ying autonomous village; the urban Hui experience in Oxen Street, Beijing; and ethnic revitalization in Chendai, Fujian.⁹ These four Hui communities respectively represent several types of Hui nationality identity with gradual fading of Islamic characteristics. It is through the interaction between self-identity and state recognition that the Hui nationality finally becomes an ethnic group, or "minzu", after the state

⁷ Harrell, Stevan. "Ethnicity, Local Interests, and the State: Yi Communities in Southwest China." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 32, No. 3(1990), pp. 515-548.

⁸ Harrell, Stevan. *Ways of being ethnic in Southwest China*. University of Washington Press, 2001.

⁹ Gladney, Dru C. *Ethnic identity in China: the making of a Muslim minority nationality*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998.

institutionalizes it. Katherine Kaup studies Zhuang groups in Guangxi area in her book, *Creating the Zhuang: Ethnic Politics in China*. She explores the emergence of the Zhuang group with the development of the PRC, arguing that the case of Zhuang provides a good example for ethnic classification, since it was not a unique ethnic group with clear borderline before ethnic classification.¹⁰

If former research focused on the uniqueness in particular area and ethnicity, revealing the fact that the Chinese nation is an imagined community composed by ethnic mixtures, recent research tends to explore how those mixtures are situated in a broader unity, revealing a whole picture of the Chinese nation. Kevin Carrico holds the opinion that the Han community is also a dynamic process. Newly middle-class Han Chinese have begun to invent, celebrate, and aggressively champion Han Chinese identity by seizing upon the very strategies and technologies of identity first used in China to classify, celebrate, and manage China's ethnic minority communities.¹¹ Chris Vasantkumar argues that Non- Han transnationalism are increasingly vital to our understanding of Chinese nationalism and identity. He believes that such projects to achieve transnationalism have made it possible for the Chinese state to take advantage of "not just returned Tibetans but their kinfolk abroad as potential members of a deterritorialized, multiethnic Chinese nation."¹² Both of the formation of the Han and

¹⁰ Kaup, Katherine Palmer. *Creating the Zhuang: ethnic politics in China*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000.

¹¹ Carrico, Kevin. "The Imaginary Institution of China: Dialectics of Fantasy and Failure in Nationalist Identification, as Seen through China's Han Clothing Movement." PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 2013.

¹² Vasantkumar, Chris. "Han at Minzu's edge: what critical Han studies can learn from China's Little Tibet." *In Critical Han studies: the history, representation, and identity of China's majority*, pp. 234-255. University of California Press, 2011.

minorities communities are dynamic process, unified by the concept of the Chinese nation. As a result, the People's Republic has, from the 1990s onward, attempted to project a multiethnic national project beyond the confines of the territorial nation- state.¹³

If we want to further search for the truth about what is exactly the modern Chinese nation, we need to turn to the beginning of it, namely ethnic classification. Thomas Mullaney's work *Coming to Terms with the Nation* is a thorough narrative on this topic.¹⁴ In order to restore the original appearance of this enormous project, he traveled to libraries and archives in Beijing, Kunming, Chengdu, London for years, collecting historical materials from various sources and obtaining interviews with several participants of the Ethnic Classification Project in 1953-1954. He set the project in Yunnan province as the individual case to focus on. He relies on the theory of imagined community, viewing the ethnic classification project as a process to imagine the Chinese nation. The process of ethnic classification lasted for more than 30 years, and the whole process of imagining Chinese lasts until today. As Vasantkumar and Carrico narrates the results of the Chinese nation today, Mullaney describes the beginning of it in 1950s, the process on how it was transformed how is implemented to local ethnic minorities remain unclear. The latter part of this story—specifically minority education, will be the focus of this paper.

¹³ Vasantkumar, Chris. "What is this 'Chinese' in Overseas Chinese? Sojourn work and the place of China's minority nationalities in extraterritorial Chinese-ness." *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (2012), pp.423-446.

¹⁴ Mullaney, Thomas. *Coming to terms with the nation: Ethnic classification in modern China*. Vol. 18. University of California Press, 2011.

This research is mainly based on Mullaney's work. As Mullaney pointed out that ethnic classification is the very time for some of those marginal minorities to know themselves, the completion of the construction of the Chinese nation has been far from successful. As the first step of the construction is the identification of ourselves, the second step is to form a binary structure, dividing the typical opposition between minorities and Han people, and then the third step is the combination of "we" and "others" to create a whole concept of the Chinese nation. This research will focus on how the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) government implants Chinese nation's concept into those minorities through education. This paper will reveal education policies in the process of constructing national identity, trying to make a dialogue between two trends of research. The paper will start with the background of the Sichuan Tibetan area, for it overlaps Mullaney's story but is not covered by Mullaney; also, it provides a great place to tell the latter part of the story: after the classification of the Chinese nation, in what degree the concept of nation identity was accepted by local minorities.

3. Background of the Chinese Nation and Sichuan Tibetan Area

3.1 The Introduction of the Chinese nation

From the very beginning, the concept of "nation" in China was an external product, deeply influenced by the need politics. Western missionaries first transformed Zhongguo (中国) into China, "Zhongguo" is the "central country", derived from the traditional view of the Tianxia(天下) concept; "China", on the other hand, originally referring to porcelain, are the

products of nation-state ideologies.¹⁵ Those two different concepts independently developed from different cultural backgrounds and genealogies. With the communication of the Qing government and the Western Powers, the concept of "nation" was introduced into China, which made the concept of the Chinese nation undergo a series of changes from Tianxianism to the nation-state.

The traditional Chinese concept of "Tianxia" refers to a space dominated by the emperor of the Chinese dynasty and governed by certain universal principles of order. The areas directly controlled by the emperor was seen as the center of the world, which were called Zhongguo, distinguishing from the surrounding Yi (夷) or Barbarian areas. However, if these regions accepted the principle of order under the Chinese emperor, they were recognized. In the specific scope, the word Tianxia can be divided into broad and narrow sense. In the narrow sense, Tianxia is equal to Jiuzhou(九州) or China proper; while in the broad sense, "Tianxia" refers to Jiuzhou and surrounding Yi areas, which is the traditional world view of China.¹⁶

In the early 20th century, Liang Qichao began to use the word "nation" to refer the people under Qing emperor's rule. In some of his writings in 1901, "nation" begins to appear as an interchange of the word "race" which he used earlier.¹⁷ At this stage, the concept of nationality mainly went through discussions by Kang Youwei's theory of homology, which

¹⁵ Chen, Bo. "The Making of 'China' out of 'Zhongguo': 1585–1690", *Journal of Asian History*, No. 50 (2016), pp. 73-116.

¹⁶ Zhang, Qixian. "'中国'与'天下'概念探源." [Explore the Concept of "Zhongguo" and "Tianxia", *Soochow University Journal of Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (2009), pp. 169-256.

¹⁷ Jia, Yi. 1949 年前的“民族形成”问题讨论. [Discussion on the "formation of the nation" before 1949], *Journal of the Minzu University of China (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, Vol. 45 No.3(2018), pp. 32-45.

emphasized the origin of national culture, and Zhang Binglin's theory of assimilation, which emphasized the origin of blood tie. The homology theory starts from the roots of the Yellow Emperor and emphasizes the integration of different ethnic groups, while the assimilation theory regards the blood relationship of the Han nationality as the bond that binds the nation together. This discussion can be seen as the struggle between the variation of the old-style Tianxia and new nationalism in its infancy.¹⁸

By the Revolution of 1911, the nationalist assimilation theory of "expelling the Manchus and restoring China" had reached its heyday. Revolutionaries took use of eighteen-star flag to show Han dominance. However, the Han centrism in this period was more out of the political needs of the 1911 Revolution to overthrow the Qing Dynasty; after the establishment of the Nationalist Government, the five-color flag which, symbolized the republic of the five ethnic groups Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui and Tibetan, soon replaced the eighteen-star flag. Later, the theory of assimilation gradually developed to the stage of assimilation not only of the Han ethnic group but also of other ethnic groups.¹⁹ To the period of the anti-Japanese war, for the purpose of resisting aggression, Gu Jiegang and other scholars put forward the concept of "the Chinese nation is a whole", which was widely responded by the society, and even quoted clearly in the *"China's Destiny"* nominally written by Chiang Kai-shek in 1943.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Chiang, kai-shek. 中国之命运. [*China's Destiny*], Chongqing: Zhongzheng Press, 1943, p. 2.

3.2 Sichuan Tibetan Area in the Margin of the Chinese Nation

Sichuan Tibetan area includes Ganzi (Kardze) Prefecture, Aba (Ngaba) prefecture as well, as Muli County. In general, this area was known as the Kham area and the most crucial section of Xikang Province. Located in the southeast of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, western Sichuan contains about 150,000 square kilometers. In 1985, the population was about 520,000, of which 426,000 were Tibetans, accounting for 82%; 82,000 were Han people, accounting for 15.2%; there were more than 10,000 Yi, accounting for 2%; several other minorities took up less than 1% ethnic composition.²¹

Like Mullaney's cases in Yunnan, ethnic identity in the Sichuan Tibetan area stayed blurred before the Ethnic Classification Project. Historically, Kham region was ruled by several local kingdoms, which received religious influences from Lhasa but remain their own identity. In the 19th Century, in natives' perspective, the external territorial threats came from both Central Tibet and inland China. Local rebel leader Gönpö Namgyel strived towards a political unification of Kham and tried to challenge the authority of both Lhasa and Beijing.²² Local polymath Jamgon Kongtrul talked about twenty-five holy sites, stressing the spatial and religious unity of Kham as a reaction to the “‘looming annexation of his homeland’ by Central Tibet, which in 1868 he perceived as the ‘invader’”.²³ As Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa

²¹ Sichuan Province Editors Group. "四川省甘孜州社会历史调查," [A Survey of the Social History of the Tibetans in Ganzi Prefecture, Sichuan Province]. Chengdu: Sichuan Social Science Press, 1985, p. 1.

²² Gros, Stéphane. *Frontier Tibet: Patterns of Change in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands*. Amsterdam University Press, 2019, p. 56.

²³ Ibid.

pointed out, people in Kham region “ultimately conceived of themselves as their own centres, even as other centres tried to define them as the periphery.”²⁴

In the republican era, under the idea of "the Five Races Under One Union"(五族共和), the central government perceived Kham as a part of Tibet. However, since warlord Liu Wenhui took control of this area in the late 1930s, especially after establishing Xikang province, the terms "Khampa" or Kham People had gradually replaced the traditional terms Yi or Barbarians in the discourses of local grassroots Han officials and intellectuals. Thus, at this time, "Kham" gradually formed the dual meaning of place names and ethnic names. In some cases, when referring to the Kham people or Kham ethnicity, it referred to the people in the Kham area, including both the indigenous people and the Han people. In other words, "Kham" here became the name of the region.²⁵ As a powerful local faction, Liu Wenhui established a relatively effective rule in Kham District under military force and county heads cultivated by himself. His rule, however, still faced the dilemma of ruling legitimacy. Building a local identity was the key to Liu and his Xikang government's legitimacy in the face of the need to guard against military attacks and religious incitement from central Tibet, resist the political takeover from Chiang Kai-shek who was in cooperation with the local traditional forces in Kham. In this effort, how to give indigenous people an appropriate title is an important issue. He promoted the idea of "Kangzu"(康族). If Kham people represented Liu Wenhui's efforts

²⁴ Holmes-Tagchungdarpa, Amy. "Defining Peripheral Power: Writing the History of the Kingdom of Lhathog, Eastern Tibet". Included In *New Views of Tibetan Culture*, edited by David Templeman. Monash University Press, 2011, p. 8.

²⁵ Wang, Juan. "'藏族'康族'还是'博族'? ——民国时期康区族群的话语政治", ["Tibetan," "Kangzu" or "Bozu"?—The Politics of Discourses in Republican Kham Region]. *Northwest Journal of Ethnology*, No.2 (2012), pp. 115-128.

to build the inter-provincial identity of the Kham area, then "Kangzu" is the result of trying to distinguish the indigenous groups in Xikang province from those in the Tibetan government-controlled areas.

Local elites also formed their discourse. Gesang Zeren was born in Batang County, Ganzi, in 1905. He was educated in a local school and became the translator of Panchen Lama. Under the recommendation of the Panchan Lama, he entered the relevant departments of the central government of Nanjing and was appreciated by Dai Jitao. He became a member of the Mongolian and Tibetan Committee and the National Council. He was the first Tibetan party member of the KMT (Kuomintang, Chinese Nationalist Party) and served for a long time as the representative of Xikang Province and Tibet at the National Congress of the Nationalist Government. At the first meeting of the Fourth National Council of the Republic of China, held in 1945, Gesang Cering put up a proposal entitled "Please correct the name 'Tibetan' to 'Bozu'"(请将藏族名称改为"博族"以资正名案). Under the long-term military confrontation between Kham and Central Tibet, Gesang Cering represented the Tibetan in the central government. Therefore, it was necessary to emphasize the unity of "Kham" and "Tibet" in ethnic groups. On the other hand, to put Kham people under the name of the Tibetan group would undoubtedly put the Kham district in a marginal and subordinate position in its relations with Tibet. In order to avoid the unfavorable situation of these two sides, Gesang Cering used "Bozu" as the unified ethnic name and referred to Kham and Tibet as the domain name.²⁶

²⁶ Ibid.

The KMT government follow the policy to recognize Kham as a part of Tibet. Investigations of scholars also confirmed this idea. In 1939, the Ministry of Education organized a scientific mission to Sichuan to investigate Tibetan inhabited areas in Xikang province. Feng Hanji, a history professor at Sichuan University, served as the leader of the social sciences section of the league, traveling through Xikang to collect ethnological data. In 1943, the Frontier Research Institute of West China Union University organized a field investigation and study of Sichuan and Xikang Tibetan areas. Directed by Yu Shiyu, the research lasted for three months.²⁷ All those investigations became the foundation of the 1950s Ethnic Classification Project.

After the founding of the PRC, China's definition of nation and ethnic policies were mainly influenced by the Soviet Union's ethnic theories (especially Stalin's viewpoint) since the need of diplomacy. At the same time, the work of Ethnic Classification Project also served the need of strengthen local rules, as anthropologist Li Shaoming mentioned, “When we talked about the flexibility of the policy, it not only involves the theoretical basis of flexibility, namely the localization of Stalin pattern in China, but also involves the concrete work of ethnic classification, which requires full consideration of the interests of the local government.”²⁸

²⁷ Cao, Chunmei, "民国时期国人对西康社会的考察及其影响" [Chinese People's Investigations and Influences on Xikang Society in the Republican Era], Master dissertation, Sichuan Normal University, 2006.

²⁸ Li, Shaoming. “本土化的中国民族识别”[The Localized Ethnic Classification Project in China], *Journal of Southwest Minzu University (Social Science Edition)*, No. 12 (2009), pp. 29-33.

After the CCP government built up direct rule in the Kham area, they wanted to use Kham as a tie to unite Tibet. The former investigations combined political needs making Tibetan become the legitimate ethnic name in that area, while Kham was split and then mainly ruled by Sichuan. It was the ethnic Classification Project that finally confirmed the name of the Sichuan Tibetan Area. The blurred ethnic identity made it difficult to carry out an education career in unison. Traditionally, Tibetan people would be sent to monastery schools, but taking account only for a small population. According to statistics in 1940, the total population of all counties in Kang District was 640,370, with 122 schools and 6,518 students, accounting for 1.02% of the total population.²⁹ The plan of Tibetan-Chinese bilingual education in Tibetan areas of Sichuan came into being in the early days of the PRC. In November 1952, the First People's Congress of all ethnic groups in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of Xikang discussed and adopted the "Measures for the Implementation of the Development of Ethnic Languages in the Tibetan Autonomous Region of Xikang Province." (西康省藏族自治区关于发展民族语言文字的实施办法) to carry out bilingual education.

However, in Mao Zedong's era, it was the ideology of class struggle that was given high priority. Plans for education needed to make way for various political and social movements. In 1957, Mao started the Anti-Rightist Campaign to purge "rightists," which was actually referred to political dissidents inside the CCP. From 1958 to 1960, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward campaign to reconstruct the country from an agrarian economy into a communist society by forming people's communes, which caused economic disaster. In 1966,

²⁹ Ibid.

Mao started his last revolution, the Cultural Revolution. It was an unprecedented violent sociopolitical purge movement in China from 1966 until Mao died in 1976. Following the ideology of class struggle, the official tone usually tended to use "the Chinese People," a neutral reference to the inhabitants of China as a country and a state. After Mao's death, the state tried to unite different ethnicities to construct a great overarching Chinese nation, thereby promoting a new form of nationalism with racial overtones.³⁰ During this period, Tibetan education in Ganzi and Aba was not totally eliminated but limited as a means of preparing young children to enter elementary school.³¹ The development of Tibetan-language education was to more or less stagnate for about 20 years.³²

4. The Division of the Chinese Nation and Binary Structure Between Han and Minorities

4.1 Minority Education Policies in the Beginning of the Reform Era

When the state turned away from socialism and more fixated on nationalism after 1976, they formulated the ideology that The People's Republic of China is a unified multi-ethnic country. The focus on "unification" or "diversity" in different periods shows the changes in the policies

³⁰ Broudehoux, Anne-Marie. *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing*. Taylor & Francis Group. 2004, p. 11.

³¹ Upton, Janet. "The Development of Modern School-Based Tibetan Language Education in the PRC," included in *China's National Minority Education-Culture, Schooling, and Development*. New York and London: Falmer Press, 1999, p. 294.

³² Ibid, p. 296.

of the Chinese nation in different periods. At the beginning of the Reform and Opening era, the state concentrated on diversity, which was embodied in the Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional Ethnic Autonomy (中华人民共和国民族区域自治法, 1984), "The implementation of regional ethnic autonomy reflects the state's spirit of fully respecting and guaranteeing the rights of ethnic minorities to manage their internal affairs; and embodies the state's adherence to the principles of equality, unity and common prosperity of all ethnic groups."³³ There was a clear division of different statuses of different ethnic groups. The main task for the Chinese nation was to build socialist modernization, as "The people of all ethnic groups in ethnic autonomous areas and the people of the whole country,adhere to reform and opening up, follow the road of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, concentrate efforts on socialist modernization."³⁴

The bilingual education system finally began to be implemented after the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 1978. In 1980 and 1981, the Ministry of Education issued "The View on Strengthening Minority Education Work"(关于加强民族教育工作的意见) and "The Report on Further Strengthening Minority Education Career"(关于进一步加强民族教育工作的报告), stressing: "The development of national primary and secondary school education must be suitable for the characteristics of ethnic minorities in the education system, teaching contents, teaching methods. Most importantly, all ethnic groups with their own spoken and written languages should apply their

³³ 中华人民共和国民族区域自治法, [Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional Ethnic Autonomy], 1984. Accessed by http://www.gov.cn/test/2005-07/29/content_18338.htm.

³⁴ Ibid.

language teaching to both learn their language and Chinese."³⁵ Following the opinion of the State Education Commission on bilingual education, and in the light of the reality of ethnic education and ethnic languages in Sichuan, Sichuan provincial government had made the "Decision on Strengthening Ethnic Education." It put forward the system and policy of bilingual education in the whole province.

4.2 Bilingual Education Modes and Their Dilemmas

Bilingual education in the Sichuan Tibetan area contains two modes: the Tibetan track mainly teaches the Tibetan language with mandarin on a single subject; the Chinese track puts mandarin as the main language plus Tibetan on a single subject. During their stay in Aba, Kolas and Thowsen were told that the principal language and the language of instruction was taught for the entire six years of schooling, while the second language was taught as a subject only up to about the fourth grade. In the Chinese track, primary school students are required to reach the third-grade level of Tibetan for admission to middle school, and students in the Tibetan track were required to reach the same level in Chinese. In addition, students in both modes must attain the same level as ordinary students in all other subjects.³⁶

³⁵ Yang, Jiaming. "四川藏族藏汉双语教育教学概述," [An Overview of Tibetan and Chinese Bilingual Education in Tibetan Areas of Sichuan Province]. *Sichuan University Academic Journal (Philosophy and Social Science Edition)*, No.1 (1997), pp. 64-72.

³⁶ Kolas, Ashild, and Thowsen, Monika. *On the margins of Tibet: Cultural Survival on the Sino-Tibetan frontier*. University of Washington Press, 2011, p. 97.

According to Kolas and Thowsen's interview with local officials in Kakhok, nineteen of the twenty-three primary schools in their county were bilingual, with 2,594 out of 3,074 pupils in bilingual primary schools (84 percent). Of the 2,594 pupils in bilingual schools, 1,543 were in the Tibetan track (59.5 percent), while 1,051 were Chinese (40.5 percent). In the Tibetan track, Chinese was taught from the first grade, and in the Chinese track, Tibetan was taught from the third grade. In the Tibetan track, Chinese was taught four to six hours per week, and Tibetan was taught six to eight hours per week. Students had four to six hours of Tibetan per week in the Chinese track and six to eight hours of Chinese per week. The Tibetan track taught Chinese from the first year, and the Chinese track taught Tibetan from the third year. In the Tibetan track, Chinese lessons lasted four to six hours a week, while Tibetan lessons lasted six to eight hours a week. In the Chinese track, it was the opposite. When pupils finished primary school, they were expected to achieve a fourth-grade level of the other language.³⁷ Students usually continued their previous tracks in middle school.

To a certain extent, these models served as practical approaches to achieve cross-language education, but there were still several problems for students: It was not easy for students to handle two languages in two scripts; Students had to concentrate on Mandarin if they wanted to progress beyond primary school, due to high-level education was only offered in Chinese; also, standard Tibetan taught in school, namely Lhasa dialect, was greatly different from their own native spoken dialects.³⁸ A survey from China's Academy of Social Sciences reveals that many Tibetans in Sichuan speak languages other than Lhasa standard Tibetan. Of a total

³⁷ Ibid, p. 98.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 127.

of 308,467 Tibetans in Aba Prefecture in 1982, 153,000 reportedly use the Tibetan Amdo dialect, 91,000 use the Jiarong language, 41,000 use the Qiang language, 11,000 use the Ergong language, 4,000 use the Baima language, and 8,000 use Chinese.³⁹ In the fieldwork of Kolas and Thowsen, they were told that some Tibetan dialects were so different that they were mutually unintelligible. They believed that vast dialect differences created difficulties for bilingual education since local students had problems understanding the Central Tibetan taught by their teachers.⁴⁰

With all these difficulties, the bilingual education system had not achieved its goal. There is a survey on people's thoughts of their own identity in the 1990s. For old generations, they had no concern on this issue since most of them remained illiterate. According to the 1990 national census, 19.4 percent of all Tibetans had completed only primary school.⁴¹ Most of the parents of students at the Songpan County Tibetan-Language Secondary School, Aba, were never permitted to learn their language when they were in elementary and secondary school.⁴² Elders either looked down upon the effect of modern education systems or tried to get rid of useless old-fashioned education, "They(officials) almost always point to the fact that many Tibetan parents want their children to become fluent in Chinese because of the vastly

³⁹ Edited by China's Academy of Social Sciences, Institute of Ethnic Studies and State Ethnic Affairs Commission, Culture and Propaganda Office. 《中国少数民族语言使用情况》 [*Conditions and use of China's minority languages*]. Beijing: China Tibetan Study Press, 1994, pp. 215-221.

⁴⁰ *On the margins of Tibet*, p. 40.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 106.

⁴² "The Development of Modern School-Based Tibetan Language Education in the PRC," p. 310.

improved job prospects that exist for fluent Chinese speakers."⁴³ They showed little concern for Tibetan language study and their own cultural identity.

For younger ones, the situation was similar. They could not form an identity with others. According to one Tibetan education specialist, since the curriculum is based on conditions in central China, the educational content has no connection to Tibetan students' real-life experience or knowledge. Some interviewees confirmed this situation. One man commented that he was perplexed when reading about traffic lights in his textbook as a child in school since he had never seen such a thing. This type of education has very little to offer rural Tibetan children.⁴⁴

They lacked identity even toward themselves. There was an interesting case about local teacher's sympathy toward "The Final Lesson" when Upton visited Songpan, "During the course of my classroom observations, this became most evident as I witnessed a drawn-out lesson on the text 'A Final Lesson' a translation of the short story 'The Final Lesson' by Alphonse Daudet. The story's protagonist is a young boy from Alsace who is not very fond of his lessons. On his way to school one day, he contemplates all the things he could otherwise be doing and almost decides to play the truant. Eventually, he makes his way to school, however, and finds himself in the French class, for which he is woefully underprepared. As the lesson begins, however, he is startled to hear his teacher announce that this will be the last

⁴³ Human Rights Watch, "China's 'Bilingual' Education Policy in Tibet: Tibetan Medium Schooling Under Threat," accessed by <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/03/04/chinas-bilingual-education-policy-tibet/tibetan-medium-schooling-under-threat>, June 15, 2020, pp. 38-39.

⁴⁴ *On the margins of Tibet*, pp. 104-105.

French lesson-not just for that day, but for the near and possibly distant future. The boy's homeland has been invaded by the Germans, and from the next day on, all instruction will be held in German. This announcement stuns the class and sets the protagonist to reflecting on the error of his non-scholarly ways.Just before this text was covered in class, the students had taken their spring mid-term exam, and had generally done rather poorly. More than once, my presence (and the fact that, with generous grading and the liberal use of a dictionary, I did better than many of the students on the exam) was used to point out how disgraceful it was that they, as Tibetans, did not understand even the most basic things about their own language. With this as a backdrop, the instructor launched into 'A Final Lesson,' which over the course of the next few days was used repeatedly to drive home the message that one has a responsibility to learn one's own language, for one never knows when the window of opportunity to do so may (once again) be slammed shut. "⁴⁵ As a visiting scholar, Janet Upton did even better than most of local students in their native language. Local teachers' sympathy on "A Final Lesson" represented local students' indifference toward their own language and identities.

4.3 New Education Policies in the New Century

The Chinese state more explicitly clarified its education policy focus at the margin of the millennium to deal with problems in minority education, where they set "quality" (素质) as the century issue. In this sense, "Strategy of Invigorating China Through Science and

⁴⁵ "The Development of Modern School-Based Tibetan Language Education in the PRC," p. 310.

Education" (科教兴国战略, 1995) and "Action plan for the revitalization of education for the 21st century" (面向 21 世纪教育振兴行动计划, 1998) was set as the main pillar of the policies.⁴⁶ From this perspective, in the current world where the knowledge-based economy has emerged, the quality of a country's citizens, the degree of knowledge they possess, especially information and technological innovation, will become the key factors to decide a nation's position in the international competition. All of these will depend on education. "It is still an urgent and arduous task to realize the far-reaching significance and practical role of education and the Strategy of Invigorating China through Science and Education."⁴⁷ Since 2001, the Sichuan Provincial Government has taken the lead to coordinate with the Provincial Education Department, Provincial Ethnic Affairs Commission, and so on to launch the "Ten-Year Action Plan for revitalizing Education in Ethnic Minority Areas" (少数民族地区教育振兴的十年行动计划, 2001). It planned to invest 300 million yuan in ethnic minority areas annually from 2001 to 2010 to solve the problem of education development in ethnic minority areas. The concrete measures included: implementing the project of settling down in pastoral areas, making herders live together as much as possible, and reducing the dropout rate of herdsmen's children. In addition, the boarding school system is implemented for students who live far away from school, with a monthly subsidy of 30 yuan for ordinary boarding students and 50 yuan for students in key boarding school, thus solving to some extent the problem of

⁴⁶ Edited by Xie Qihuang and Sun Ruoqiong, 《中国民族教育发展战略抉择--中国少数民族教育 2000 年发展战略研究》 [*Strategic Choice for the Development of Minority Education in China--Research on the Development Strategy of Minority Education in 2000s China*]. Beijing: China Minzu University Press, 1991, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Edited by Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs, United Front Work Department of CPC Central Committee, "民族教育工作的形势与任务" [the Situation and Task of Ethnic Education], from 《中国民族工作五十年理论与实践》 [*Fifty Years Overview of Theories and Practices of Ethnic Work in China*]. Beijing: China Minzu University Press, 1999, p. 351.

students dropping out of school because of economic issue. Those new policies helped local students cultivate their own identity.

The development-focused education policies are embodied in textbooks. The bilingual schools used a set of textbooks known as the Tibetan Textbooks for in Five Provinces and Autonomous Regions. (五省区中小学藏文教材) These Tibetan textbooks are accomplished cooperatively by the five regions and provinces that contain Tibetan administration, including the Tibetan Autonomous Region, Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, and Yunnan. In the Five Provinces textbooks, which were edited by 1999⁴⁸, main contents were generally translated from textbooks in mainland China. In addition to teaching basic knowledge, these textbooks were also crucial to convey an understanding of Tibetan culture and a sense of Chinese identity to Tibetan children. They present both Tibetan cultural heritage and at the same time depicted China as the "great motherland" of all the different minorities. The Tibetan-related part dealt with Potala Palace and the Norbulingka in Lhasa as well as Kumbum Monastery, describing the beauty and construction of all those great works.⁴⁹ In literature, it contained the works of both Chinese writers like Lu Xun and Lao She, and Tibetan authors such as Potowa Rinchen Sal, Sumpa Yeshe Peljor in ancient time and like Don grub rgyal in contemporary.⁵⁰ It is more political in the Chinese part, including extracts from the collected works of Mao Zedong in Tibetan translation and other essential works written by modern Chinese authors; these tell a whole story of China's feudal and semi-colonial past,

⁴⁸ *On the margins of Tibet*, p. 114.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 115.

⁵⁰ "The Development of Modern School-Based Tibetan Language Education in the PRC", p.307.

revolutionary history, and then the finally need for science and technology.⁵¹ Upton believes that those texts though departs from a traditional monastic curriculum, they “nonetheless play an important role in establishing a sense of unified Tibetan culture and identity among young Tibetans.”⁵²

Also, there was a policy to send Tibetan students to inland boarding school, or called “neidiban”(内地班). Neidiban were established in provinces and municipalities across China. The majority of the Tibetan boarding students attend segregated classes in urban secondary schools in China’s metropolises. At least 18 of the schools were junior secondary schools, but later, three (Beijing, Chengdu, and Tianjin) came to have junior and senior secondary levels. A gradual conversion to senior secondary schools is underway. Complete Tibet Inland secondary schools are 4-year junior secondary schools, and some offer a further 3 years for senior secondary school. The first year is for review and catching up on anything missed in primary school, as well as for the Chinese language that students need for the rest of their education in the school.⁵³ From 2000s, a new vocational neidiban policy in Sichuan began to carry out. The “9+3” free education program in Sichuan Education Tibetan Areas mainly actively organizes junior high schools and colleges in Tibetan areas to receive 3 years of free secondary vocational education in the mainland Since 2009. For Tibetan students studying in inland “9+3” schools, all tuition fees are exempted and living allowances, transportation, accommodation, books, one-time winter clothing and other miscellaneous expenses subsidies

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 309.

⁵² Ibid, p. 290.

⁵³ Postiglione, Gerard, Jiao, Ben and Manlaji. “Language in Tibetan Education: The Case of the Neidiban”, included in *Bilingual Education in China*. New York: Multilingual Matters, 2007, pp. 53-54.

and schoolwork subsidies are provided. This policy could approximately cover 20% of middle school graduates.⁵⁴

Neidiban not only helped Tibetan students to receive better education in China's large cities, but also provided them with a platform to gather with Tibetan students from other regions. At the beginning, neidiban students were not easy to communicate due to dialectal variations. When neidiban students reached senior secondary school, many of them used Han Chinese for communication among themselves.⁵⁵ As they were all put in the boarding school far away from home and categorized as one group, they formed a sense of belongingness as Tibetan. After that, they tended to use Lhasa dialect taught in the textbook to communicate with each other. Many students began to feel that it is important to maintain their linguistic identity as Tibetan.⁵⁶

4.4 The Division Between Han and Minorities under Evolutionism

Though neidiban could serve the need of education aid and employment assistance in a certain degree, it represented a kind of Han centrism. Postiglione said that teachers in the inland boarding schools “viewed Tibetan ways as needing Chinese-style civilizing”⁵⁷ and that

⁵⁴ 四川省藏区“9+3”免费教育计划实施情况, Implementation of the “9+3” free education program in Tibetan areas of Sichuan Province.
http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/xw_zt/moe_357/jyzt_2015nztzl/2015_zt12/15zt12_fpcx/201510/t20151016_213726.html.

⁵⁵ “Language in Tibetan Education: The Case of the Neidiban”, p. 63.

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp.62-63.

⁵⁷ Postiglione, Garard. “Dislocated Education: The Case of Tibet,” *Comparative Education Review*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (2009), pp. 483-512; see p. 493.

“religious items were not permitted in school, and many children grew skeptical of aspects of their religionthe schools convey the view that religion is a stumbling block to modernization and development.⁵⁸ The policy of neidiban aims to cultivate secularism and Sinicized minorities who, in the CCP’s perspective, could lead modernization of the minority areas.

In this sense, what lay at the heart of the Chinese minorities education policies is the discourses of modernism. Thus, popularizing the significance of cultural and scientific knowledge to accelerate the development in ethnic minority areas was seen as of great significance by the Chinese state. It could be drawn that "the development of national education is the fundamental way to promote the nation's prosperity and the basic plan to enrich the family and strengthen the people and rejuvenate the country. It is not only an educational issue in itself but also an economic and political one."⁵⁹ They saw education as a tool to achieve economic prosperity and technological advantage, as well as a kind of ideological change. In state-sponsored media and publications and in public representations, the Han majority are described as the most "modern" and most "civilized." The Han people are frequently represented as somewhere near the "modern" end of a Marxist historical trajectory upon which China's minorities must journey.⁶⁰ This ideology followed a sequence of Marxist-Stalinist-Morganian paradigm. Gladney explained, “Chinese Marxist social

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 502.

⁵⁹ *Strategic Choice for the Development of Minority Education in China*, p. 2.

⁶⁰ Gladney, Dru. "Making Muslims in China: Education, Islamicization and Representation," included in *China's National Minority Education-Culture, Schooling, and Development*. New York and London: Falmer Press, 1999, p. 58.

science has been heavily influenced by stage evolutionary theory, particularly as represented in the writings of the American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan. In his famous 1878 treatise, *Ancient Society*, Morgan described in his first chapter, entitled the 'Ethnical Period,' the development of society from savagery to barbarism, and then to civilization. The Han, as representative of those at the 'higher' end of development, were thought to be more evolved, and were to lead the way for minorities to follow. While there are many nationalities in China, the Han are defined to be in the cultural and technical vanguard, leading the manifest destiny of all the minorities."⁶¹ This paradigm heavily influences the popular discourse regarding the goal of education and Han superiority in China, as well as state policy of modernization.

Minority education in China has been conceptualized primarily as a compensatory endeavor designed to benefit marginalized ethnic minority groups to catch up with developed Han people. In official tone, " China's education system is mainly based on Han culture, and national education is a process of cross-cultural education."⁶² The government's definition of minority education seems to provide authentic opportunities to meet local educational needs, while it supports structural inequalities between the categories of "majority Han" and "ethnic minority." The role of Han people is idealized goals to achieve idealized "others," the model of modernism for those minorities. As a result, "Local factors such as the historical relationship with central China, ethnic connections across borders, religion, language, and personalities of individuals make possible a wide range of responses to the standardized education. Standardized state-controlled education is in no way capable of eradicating the

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² *Strategic Choice for the Development of Minority Education in China*, p. 249.

importance of these factors, but it plays a role in determining the direction and form of ethnic identity processes."⁶³ Through this division, local identity began to grow. In conclusion, the concept of the Chinese nation is a binary structure between central Han and marginalized ethnic minorities, or sense of Han as "others" and Tibetan as "us," was formed.

5. The Unification of the Chinese Nation and the Ambitions of Xi Jinping

5.1 Xi's Idea of the Chinese Nation

The binary structure between central Han and marginalized ethnic minorities caused problems. The result of the otherness "Han" was those local young generations not able to resonate with Han people. That situation caused serious ethnic problems in late 2000s and early 2010s. In the 2008 Tibetan Unrest, there was a series of protests and demonstrations over the Chinese government's treatment and persecution of Tibetans. In July 2009, riots erupted in Ürümqi to attack Han people. Tibetan students protested in 2014 in Ruorgai⁶⁴, Aba, after a Chinese education official said Tibetan students and teaching should focus on Chinese language and Chinese-medium teaching rather than Tibetan. The protest was happened on November 14, led by students of the Ruorgai county's Tibetan Language Middle School, with students from other schools and members of the public joining in. A source from the Radio Free Asia mentioned, "The students shouted slogans calling for democratic decision-making

⁶³ *Lessons in Being Chinese-Minority Education and Ethnic Identity in Southwest China.*, p. 169.

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch Report, p. 87.

and for equality in education,” “They protested against the speech of a Chinese official at the conclusion of a special orientation meeting for all schools in Aba prefecture in which he said that students with better Chinese language skills have a greater advantage in their final exams.”⁶⁵

At that time, there was a discussion on ethnic policies among Chinese minority scholars like Ma Rong and Hu Angang. A lot of those scholars believed that the PRC should implement the second generation of ethnic policies to emphasize the unification of the Chinese nation. Facing all those turmoil, President Xi Jinping wants to solve minority problems more urgently, so the focus of minority education policies changes in Xi's era. The prime principle in "Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Education for Ethnic Minorities"(国务院关于加快发展民族教育的决定, 2015) is "Consolidate the ideological foundation of the community of nations in China, strengthen and develop socialist ethnic relations based on equality, unity, mutual assistance, and harmony."⁶⁶ In Xi's speech on minority education, he reveals the main task of minority education "continue to promote education in patriotism and national unity, guided by socialist core values." (2018)⁶⁷ In other words, to increase minorities' sense of being a part of Chinese nation. More explicitly, Xi had completely expressed his view of the Chinese nation in his speech at the National Ethnic

⁶⁵ Tibetan Students Protest Official's Call for Instruction in Chinese, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/tibet/instruction-11062014151550.html>

⁶⁶ 国务院关于加快发展民族教育的决定, Decision of the State Council on Accelerating the Development of Minority Education. Accessed by http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/content/2015-08/17/content_10097.htm

⁶⁷ 习近平总书记重要讲话指引民族教育事业的发展, Xi Jinping's Important Speech on Guiding the Development of Minority Education. Accessed by http://edu.cn.cn/dj/20180921/t20180921_524366958.shtml.

Unity and Progress Commendation Conference（全国民族团结进步表彰大会上的讲话，2019）

He started with the achievements of the PRC, “Seventy years ago, under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, Chinese people of all ethnic groups jointly founded the New China. The Party has creatively combined Marxist theories on ethnic groups with the specific realities of China's ethnic problems, blazed a correct path of solving ethnic problems with Chinese characteristics, established the Party's theory and policy on ethnic groups, made ethnic equality one of the fundamental principles for building the country, and established the system of regional ethnic autonomy.”⁶⁸ As a result, “For the first time in history, the people of all ethnic groups truly enjoyed equal political rights and jointly became masters of the country. This put an end to the painful history of ethnic oppression and disputes in old China and opened a new era for relations of equality, unity, mutual assistance, and harmony among all ethnic groups. We have spared no effort to help ethnic minorities and ethnic minority areas.....and have made unprecedented progress in the lives of the people of ethnic minorities and in the economic and social development of ethnic minority areas.”⁶⁹ An important point in his speech is that the goal of modernization of ethnic minorities is basically achieved, suggesting that the central goal of the national policy should change.

⁶⁸ 习近平：在全国民族团结进步表彰大会上的讲话，Xi Jinping: Speech at the National Commendation Conference for National Unity and Progress. Accessed by http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2019-09/27/c_1125049000.htm.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

After that, he specifically explained features of the Chinese nation, including four aspects, “Our vast territory has been jointly explored by all ethnic groups. Since the Qin Dynasty, both the Han people migrated to the border and the border people moved to the border. After several times of great ethnic integration, all ethnic groups were interlinked with each other, and jointly developed the land under their feet..... Our long history is written by all ethnic groups. China gradually formed a blending pattern, including Huaxia (华夏) as the core and ‘the people of the five sides’ (五方之民) as universal worldview.”⁷⁰ Xi turned back to trace the concept of the Chinese nation from ancient Tianxia system.

In the aspects of culture and spirit, Xi emphasized, “Our splendid culture is the joint creation of all ethnic groups. Chinese culture is the synthesis of various national cultures. All ethnic groups in China have written great works such as the Book of Poems (诗经), Ci of the Chu area (楚辞), Fu of the Han Dynasty (汉赋), Poetry of the Tang Dynasty (唐诗), Ci of the Song Dynasty (宋词), songs of Yuan Dynasty (元曲), and novels of the Ming and Qing Dynasties (明清小说). At the same time, they have inherited great epic poems such as King Gesar, Manas and Jangar, and built great projects such as the Great Wall, Dujiangyan (都江堰), Grand Canal, Imperial Palace, Potala Palace, and the Kanat. Our great spirit has been nurtured by all ethnic groups. In the long course of history, the industrious, simple, courteous and benevolent farming civilization, the passionate, unrestrained, courageous and vigorous grassland civilization, and the ocean civilization that inclusive have continuously infused the characteristics and talents of the Chinese nation, and together forged a great

⁷⁰ Ibid

national spirit with patriotism as the core.....during the century-long struggle in the modern history, people of all ethnic groups have been united and their sense of community has never been stronger.”⁷¹ Though he recognized the achievements of minorities, he actually put Han and “other minorities” as two supporting point among the structure of the Chinese nation, implying the leading position of the Han people. However, whether Han or minorities should follow the leading position of the CCP, under the core idea of patriotism.

Following patriotism or nationalism in essence, the outline of Chinese history could be sketched, “It is a history in which all ethnic groups have worked together to create, develop, and consolidate China's reunification. The unity and integration of ethnic groups and the integration of diversity are rooted in their cultural inclusiveness, economic interdependence, and emotional closeness, as well as in the internal driving force of the Chinese nation's pursuit of unity. It is precisely because of this that the Chinese civilization is so inclusive and absorptive that it can grow large and deeply rooted.”⁷²

In the end, He emphasized, “We insist on accurately grasping the basic national conditions of our unified multi-ethnic country and regard the maintenance of national unity and ethnic unity as the supreme interest of all ethnic groups.”⁷³ The combination and unification of the Chinese nation replace the former goal of economic development and socialism modernization.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid.

5.2 Bilingual Education Modes in Xi's Era

In the unified multiethnic China, diversity of minorities is recognized, but should be subordinated to unification. As a result, the status of the Tibetan language has been outwardly recognized but actually weakened. In September 2018, Aba Prefecture passed regulations on Tibetan language use stating that the “national language(mandarin) and Tibetan are to be the basic languages of instruction” in elementary and middle schools. All other schools also should teach Tibetan as a language.⁷⁴ In fact, the promotion of local language faced various difficulties.

An interviewee in the area told Human Rights Watch that one of the difficulties is that has been little or no training of teachers who can teach science, social sciences, mathematics, or information technology in the Tibetan language. As a result, these subjects are often taught and assessed in Aba in Chinese.⁷⁵ In addition, according to the resident, the publication and updating of Tibetan-language textbooks in Aba is said to have slowed or stopped. A Tibetan university student from Aba in Sichuan province, who interviewed several local teachers on this issue in October 2018, told Human Rights Watch that the authorities had banned Tibetan-language textbooks produced by some Tibetan schools in Qinghai and Aba, “none of the local Tibetan schools in Tibetan areas is allowed to select or edit their textbooks.” He also reported

⁷⁴Human Rights Watch Report, p. 34.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

concerns about the reduction of culturally appropriate content in the latest Tibetan-language textbooks.⁷⁶

It also needs notification that bilingual education in the new era means minorities learn from Han but also puts importance on Han's acceptance of minority culture, "To implement bilingual education in minority areas, we should face not only minority students but also Han students. Therefore, in such an educational environment, educators should give full play to their intermediary and leading roles to guide Han ethnicity students and minority students to form a sense of common origin."⁷⁷ The Sichuan government has set up pairing programs for Tibetans to help Tibetan schools change their educational methods. The Tibetan students in these partnerships are to carry out exchanges by mail, email, and texting with ethnic Chinese students in other countries connected to them from real-time computer video feeds and microblogs.⁷⁸ Similarly, introduced in 2016, the "Group For" education aid program replaced the previous system of scattered and short-term education aid and represents the Chinese government's long-term goal to cultivate the young generation of Tibetans that is patriotic and loyal to the CCP. According to a report from the Tibetan Center for Human Rights and Democracy, funded by the exile Tibetan community in India, the program requires teachers and educators from various Chinese cities and towns to spend three years helping Tibetan

⁷⁶ Human Rights Watch Report, p. 30.

⁷⁷ 切实提高少数民族地区双语教育水平, Effectively raise the level of bilingual education in ethnic minority areas, accessed by http://www.tibet.cn/cn/edu/201801/t20180123_5388306.html.

⁷⁸ Human Rights Watch Report, p 66.

areas.⁷⁹ Not only students are exchanged, but also bonds between teachers are found. 700 teachers from mainland China are to be sent every two years to teach students in Ganzi and Aba Prefectures from 2016 to 2025.⁸⁰ At the same time, Tibetan teachers are being retrained to improve both their Chinese and their political reliability. At least 400 Tibetan teachers from the TAR as well as 300 teachers from Tibetan areas of Sichuan have been sent annually to the inland China since 2016 to improve their ability at “nurturing bilingual education.”⁸¹

5.3 An Unmade Road toward Unification

In Xi’s idea, the mutual integration of culture between Han and minorities will make the individual minority culture in mutual coordination form a new entity. The combination of culture as a whole is not a simple collection of individual ethnic cultures; instead, it possesses internal relations and shared norms. Xi stressed that the CCP should fully implement ethnic theory and policy, work together for common prosperity and development, encourage ethnic groups to embrace each other like pomegranate seeds, and push the Chinese nation toward Community with a Shared Future. （命运共同体）⁸² Finally, it might lead to "The

⁷⁹ China promotes assimilation under the guise of the education aid program in Tibet Autonomous Region, accessed by <https://tchrd.org/china-promotes-assimilation-under-the-guise-of-education-aid-program-in-tibet-autonomous-region/>.

⁸⁰ 四川将选派 700 名优秀教师到 32 个藏区县支教, Sichuan to dispatch 700 outstanding teachers to the 32 counties in Tibetan areas as teaching support, <http://www.sc.gov.cn/10462/12771/2017/2/18/10414484.shtml>

⁸¹ Human Rights Watch Report, p. 71.

⁸² “多元一体”——习近平的民族观, “Unity in Diversity” -- Xi Jinping’s concept of Nationality, accessed by http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/xxjxs/2019-09/29/c_1125054038.htm.

international community is increasingly becoming a Community with a Shared future where we are all intertwined."⁸³

Though Xi depicts an ambitious picture, whether his idea of a unified Chinese nation could be achieved is still unclear. On the one hand, the interaction between Han and minorities, influenced by former unequal binary structure, would inevitably lead to conflict. There was a worry of cultural assimilation. Provincial officials in Aba prefecture suffer from the Chinese-language dimension of bilingual education, judging from media coverage of the province's first-ever conference on training bilingual teachers in the province. At that meeting, which took place in November 2018, all the leading speakers were Chinese, and photographs of the event showed that the Tibetan script on the bilingual banners in the conference room was so small that it would have been hardly visible to the participants in the room.⁸⁴ Local official believed that people's adherence to the custom was no longer follow the traditional styles in the past. Instead, it was more attached to practical and pragmatic needs.

On the other hand, there was also a dilemma of the fading of traditional Tibetan culture. For example, a January 2016 article in the *Global Times* citing the famous Tibetan historian Derong Tsering Dondrub. The scholar, who is based in Tibetan area of Sichuan, expressed a sense of crisis, that "as the proportion of the school day spent speaking Tibetan gets smaller, children's ability to use Tibetan is waning."⁸⁵ Plus on, a piece of video news posted by a

⁸³ 习近平致力倡建"人类命运共同体," Xi Jinping advocates building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, accessed by http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-10/07/c_1123525071.htm.

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch Report, p. 34.

⁸⁵ Huang, Jingjing. "Private schools attempt to keep Tibetan language alive," *Global Times*, January 28(2016),

Chinese website in April 2017 recorded random interviews with six Tibetan children and young adults in the eastern Tibetan town of Kangding, all of whom said they could only speak basic Tibetan or none at all.⁸⁶ In a survey conducted by local scholar Hongxing Yangzong, most of the students surveyed said their parents did not give them special instruction and guidance and rarely asked them about their academic performance.⁸⁷ In the end, “as the prevalence of Mandarin Chinese speakers increases, minority language speakers are increasingly denied political and socioeconomic opportunities to operate in their minority languages. The current policy of promoting Mandarin Chinese as the standard national language is driven by PRC's assimilationist language policy.”⁸⁸

In Short, the concept of the Chinese nation now is as a combination of different ethnic groups leads toward Xi's ideal Community with a Shared Future. It still deals with cultural interaction now. The outcome remains ambiguous.

<http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/966193.shtml>.

⁸⁶ 藏汉大调查之藏语” Tibetan language survey, video news item, 2017, <https://v.qq.com/x/page/s0392a3nrg4.html>.

⁸⁷ Hongxing, Yangzong. “甘孜州民族教育事业的现状调查及其分析,” [Investigation and Analysis of the Current Situation of Basic Ethnic Education in Ganzi Prefecture], Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Forum: Vol.3 No. 9(2015).

⁸⁸ Special Report on Bilingual Education Policy in Tibet, accessed by <https://tchrd.org/special-report-on-bilingual-education-policy-in-tibet/>.

6. Conclusion

China is neither a unitary entity nor a mosaic of different isolated nations. Inside China, the central government holds an orthodoxy that China is a "unified, multinational country" composed of the Han majority and other fifty-five ethnic minorities. Thus, the focus of the Chinese nation changed from isolated ones to binary structure to a unified entity, which is still in the process of making. The change of education policies implies the change of the Chinese nation concept. The self-identity in the Sichuan Tibetan area was blurred in history, as they viewed themselves alienated from both Central Tibet and inland China. Clear Tibetan identification appeared after the Ethnic Classification Project in the official scope. Before the 1990s, local people had little concern about their own Tibetan identity, so the education policies focused on the division between Han and Minority to cultivate self-identity and idealized others; in the 2010s, local people identified themselves but alienated Han, so education policies concentrated on the unification of all ethnic groups.

As Xi Jinping wants to achieve his grand goal of the unification and revival of the Chinese nation, he makes great efforts to promote mandarin education nowadays. On January 20, 2021, the National People's Congress Legal Work Committee has reviewed local laws that suggested minority schools teach in their own languages. In the end, the Legal Work Committee considered the above provisions inconsistent with Article 19, Paragraph 5 of the Constitution on promoting the national standard language. Therefore, the enacting agency

was required to make changes.⁸⁹ Though Xi firmly pushed his bold and resolute actions, the future of the Chinese nation is not clear.

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