Becoming Chinese: The Construction of Language and Ethnicity in Modern China

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores how the standardization of language in China has been used, historically and contemporarily, as a means to unify the empire and restructure relations between citizens and the state through processes of identification. Looking in particular at the case of China's minzu (ethnic groups), I argue that the current trend instituted through policies at the top-level is to eliminate linguistic and cultural diversities through the promotion of Putonghua as the lingua franca and to eventually amalgamate all minzu of the multi-minzu state into a mono-minzu, Zhonghua Minzu (citizens of the Chinese nation). Beginning with an overview of the historical practices of language standardization, I show how the ideological nature of politically influenced terminologies in the Chinese language has contributed to this restructuring of identity. With identity tied closely to language, recently enacted laws in mainland China have brought the government a step closer to achieving its ultimate goal of creating a mono-minzu state.
I would like to thank my dear friend, Fang Pan, for many years of patience and support as I struggled to learn Chinese. This thesis is dedicated to you in gratitude for all the times you corrected my translations and encouraged me.

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Introduction

Ernest Gellner had said, “Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist”.1 Partly influenced by the words of Gellner, Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* extends the discussion of “nation” as a social construct, with nation defined as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.”2 Breaking down his definition, the nation is imagined in that everyone within the community feels that they all belong to and participate in the nation, even though they will never meet most of their fellow nationals. The nation is also limited because it has finite borders and beyond these boundaries exist other nations. It is sovereign because “nation” comes through the destruction of a divinely-ordained hierarchical dynast. Finally, it is a community in that “nation” is constructed around the concept that all within its borders share a horizontal comradeship.3

In application, this working theory on “nation” is relevant to most modern nations and the People’s Republic of China is no exception. With a revolution that had been in the making since the fall of the Qing Dynasty, and heated politics that have unified the people on their quest to strip away their traditions in their struggle to modernize, the People’s Republic of China came to fruition in 1949, not only through the blood and sweat of a violent war but also through a protracted movement to redefine their identity as “Chinese”. As China is now emerging as the economic leader of its region4, and is on the path to potentially become the next super power, the

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2 Anderson, 6.
3 Anderson, 6-7.
question of what image China wishes to project upon the world has been on the forefront of the minds of many. And when we speak of the image of China, we really mean how China wishes to identify itself. When we look at China, what is the image we see?

Comparatively, the United States, the leading world super power, projects a world image based on an identity that is strongly tied to democracy, protection of the individual through his or her human rights and freedom of speech, and an economy that is structured by free market capitalism. The United States is often perceived as having a strong sense of nationalism as well and, arguably, unity is the core to a solid national identity.

It is this sense of unity that we see more and more of with the Chinese as national identities transcend the imagined borders of foreign countries. It is not unheard of for Chinese who have immigrated to other countries, such as Thailand or the Philippines, to create a successful business, accumulate wealth, and reinvest it back on the mainland. This is a common image often found within the media, of the success of these entrepreneurs finding their niche in foreign markets. Even for Chinese families who may have lived in these foreign countries for a few generations, the strong sense of being Chinese is unwavering.

For the People’s Republic of China, however, unification has not been simply a matter of creating a sense of unity, i.e. community, among all within and beyond the imagined borders, but the government has taken it a step further using communication as a means of unification. By standardizing language, the Chinese Communist Party is partaking in an ongoing project to create that sense of fraternity among its people. Yet this project of standardization is not unique decades, China has overtaken Japan as the economic leader in the region, boasting an annual growth rate that remained above 10% of GDP for most of the last decade and an economy estimated to be valued at $1.33 trillion USD in mid-2010.
to China as language reform, led at the top level, had occurred thousands of years before the standardization of modern Mandarin. With this in mind, I intend on showing how politically led movements to standardize the Chinese language have not only shaped the politics and identity of the Chinese from as early as the government of Qin Shi Huang but is also an ongoing project that is being used for the purposes of a national consciousness, in order to create a unified identity that goes beyond cultural affiliations.

At its foundation in 1949, the CCP unified with the intent of becoming a multi-minzu, “multiple ethnicities”, state. Yet, as this thesis will demonstrate, the overall intentions of the CCP is not to continue to be a multi-minzu state but a state that is unified through the gradual integration of all minzu into a Zhonghua minzu through the spread of Putonghua. The ideological nature of Chinese characters also aids this ongoing project through the manipulation of historically constructed terminologies that have redefined the relationship between citizens and the state. The manipulation of Chinese and its forced spread in a standardized form are reshaping the nation in order to create this idea of a Zhonghua Minzu; ethnicity then becomes a secondary classification as the identity of being “a citizen of the Chinese state”, with ethnicity being defined through language, Putonghua, restructures national and cultural identity.

The four concepts of the nation discussed by Anderson: its being imagined, limited, sovereign, and a community, all are present within China; all that remains is for the Chinese people to not simply feel that a sense of comradeship should exist but to actively feel it through national consciousness, a task that is achieved in manipulating the ideological and historical constructions of Chinese characters and spreading Chinese language as the lingua franca of the state.
Chapter 1
Writing Reform and Language Ideology

The First Language Reform Movement of a Unified China (221-208 BCE)

Unlike other ancient civilizations, such as Mesopotamia and Egypt, the appearance of Chinese writing occurred quite late, estimated at around 1200 BCE. Although the age of a Chinese writing system is heavily disputed, with some scholars arguing it is around 6000 years old, the earliest documentation of a Chinese writing system is dated from the late Shang dynasty. This also disputes the belief in Chinese mythology that a scholar named Cangjie, who worked under the Yellow Emperor, was the creator of the Chinese script.

The first attempts at standardization occurred in the 3rd century BCE, and by this period, the written script had already gone through a long period of development that created disunity among its use in different states. In cases where a word did not have a Chinese character, it was often the case that another character, with a similar pronunciation, would be borrowed and used instead of creating a new character. One prime example is the character 少, “few”. It initially meant “sand” but continued usage to represent “few” gave it this new meaning. Practices such as this resulted in some characters having multiple meanings or incorrect characters being used, which made it difficult for later generations to translate earlier works. Returning again to the example of 少, the water radical, 氵, was later added to 少 to make the character 沙, “sand”, and the

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latter was used to mean “sand”. With China divided into seven states prior to the Qin unification, this also meant that different dialects and diverse forms for a single character developed independently of each other, and this hindered communication between states.

After Qin Shi Huang unified the seven states in 221 BCE, his government recognized the pragmatism in standardizing writing to help manage the new empire. With different scripts having emerged all across the country prior to its unification, the government aimed for one system that not only affected written characters but also standards in measurement and the dialect spoken in government positions. A new script was then created for use by the Qin government and this became known as 小篆, the “lesser seal script”.

Attempts to standardize this new script, however, were met with immediate backlash. Prior to Qin Shi Huang’s reign, each state had followed its own script, along with the intelligentsia who preferred using the 大篆, the “greater seal script”. This greater seal script was often associated with the Classics, and had been used by the Zhou dynasts. In retaliation to this dissent, the Qin government punished all those who opposed changes made by the government and burned Confucian classics. But the decision to destroy the Confucian classics was not only because they were written with the greater seal script. Qin Shi Huang’s high minister, Li Si, was against Confucian learning and the intellectual class and so this was one of the reasons for the elimination of the Classics. The other was based on political motivations and that was the obstruction of all documents written in the greater seal script so that the script would be wiped

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8 Leyi Li, Hanzi Yanbian Wubai Li (Beijing: Beijing Language University Publishing, 2002), 290.
9 Xu, 998.
10 Referred to as the 六国文字, “Scripts of the Six States”.
11 Xu, 998. According to Xu Shen, King Xuan (827-782 BCE) of the Zhou period had his historians compile the Greater Seal Script.
out completely.\textsuperscript{12} What this endeavour reveals, then, is not standardization of the written script for only a pragmatic purpose but a project that was as politically motivated as it was useful. Controlling the written form of the language at the highest level of government also instigated elimination of all other written forms of the language, which would then have led to restructuring of a common vernacular. From this early example of standardization, we then see how political motivations shape the process and form that standardization may take, and overall how these political ideologies impact language.

The dynasty of the first emperor, however, fell after only 13 years. The strong opposition to his reign and the chaos that erupted upon Qin Shi Huang’s death in 210 BCE, brought with it numerous obstacles that his heir could not overcome. Although his dynasty failed to survive, it influenced some of the policies attributed to the success of the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE). One was the importance of creating a standard system for language, especially in its written form, to ensure stability across the empire. Even though the Han dynasts discontinued the use of lesser seal script in favour of the preferred 黥书, “clerical script”, the latter had actually been developed by Qin scholars, despite never being used during the Qin dynasty.\textsuperscript{13} Another was the need to also simplify the written script. Compared to the great seal script, the lesser seal script was easier to write. Clerical script also was an easier script to use, with less strokes than equivalent characters in great seal script, and it is believed that the lesser seal script also influenced the form of the characters in clerical script.\textsuperscript{14}

As this analysis has shown, political ideologies shaped the form of the written script during the process of standardization. Depending on who was in power, this determined the form

\textsuperscript{12} Xu, 998.

\textsuperscript{13} Xigui Qiu, \textit{Wenzi Xue Gai Yao} (Beijing: Shangwu Yin, 2000), 104.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 113.
of character script that was used in the empire, although along with the spread of political control, there were evidently pragmatic advantages to standardization. Standardization provided an effective form of communication to make governance across the empire easier. This shows that from its inception, standardizing written Chinese was based largely on political motivations: motivations to unify and control the empire through the control of language. It is no surprise that up until the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the written script was still used in its classical, grammatical form. Standardization had been so successful that the script provided a unified means of communication, surviving diversities in Chinese dialects and even complete removal from the spoken vernacular. Since there was no successful political movement prior to the 20th century that had updated and reformed the written script to match the vernacular, dynasts had continued to look to the past to structure the cultural and political practices used in the courts. So when an uprising of scholars and peasants overthrew the last of the Qing dynasts, they brought with them anticipated long overdue reforms to the written script.

**Language Ideology in the Modern Reform Period (1949-1978 CE)**

In 1911, the Qing Dynasty fell and different political parties struggled to form a stable government over the next 40 years in wake of both of the World Wars, Japanese occupation, and a civil war. Yet by the time the Chinese Communist Party led the movement to form the People’s Republic of China, policies to significantly revise the written script had already been years in the making. In modern China, three attempts had been made at standardizing the written language. Two of these attempts occurred in 1935 and 1977 and the only completed simplification occurred
in 1956.\textsuperscript{15} The completion of the ‘Draft of the Chinese Character Simplification Scheme’ was a six year project and with its final release formed an extensive list that is still in use today.\textsuperscript{16}

The first attempt at simplification, often ignored by most scholars because it was quickly abandoned, occurred in 1935. This project lasted only 6 months due to an imminent war with the Japanese,\textsuperscript{17} not to mention the difficulties that must have arisen as the Communist Party also struggled for control of China against the Guomindang. Another argument that has been proposed for this first failed attempt in 1935 has been personal opposition to the ‘cultural demise’ of the language through its simplification.\textsuperscript{18} As a language with thousands of characters, the revival of the Simplification Scheme later became a necessity when the Chinese Communist Party came into power since they required a means of increasing literacy among the masses.\textsuperscript{19}

Yet concern for the “cultural demise” of the language, while written off by scholars such as Youguang Zhou as “nonsense” since most languages have naturally periods of standardizing their scripts,\textsuperscript{20} may not be completely unfounded. Just as standardization of language may be based on political motivations, characters within the language have been structured and influenced by prevailing ideologies. In fact, when Boltz coined the term “semantic determinative”, he was describing the purpose of some radicals and how they contribute to the


\textsuperscript{17} Zhao and Baldauf, 29.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 33. Some party members worried about the loss of culture since many Chinese characters had been in use for more than 2000 years. Although advocating the abandonment of tradition in later movements led by the CCP, the awareness of Chinese’s long history of a standard use of traditional Character forms made it difficult for some party members to get on board with earlier simplification attempts.

\textsuperscript{19} Hodge and Louie, 46.

\textsuperscript{20} Youguang Zhou, \textit{The Historical Evolution of Chinese Languages and Scripts}, trans. Liqing Zhang (Columbus: The Ohio State University National East Asian Languages Resource Center, 2003), 59.
meanings of the characters they form. These ideas are taken from Xu Shen’s “Explaining Simple and Analyzing Compound Characters”\(^\text{21}\) through his description of the six principles.

In the Chinese tradition, there exist six principles regarding the construction of writing. The third of these principles is the “compound indicative principle”, which combines multiple meanings using all of its constituent parts. The fourth is the “phonetic loan principle”, which occurs when a character with a similar sound is ‘borrowed’ to form a compound with a word that is difficult to represent graphically and by borrowing this character, suggests the pronunciation. The fifth, the “semantic-phonetic principle”, is used in compounds where a character is added to contribute to the meaning of the graph.\(^\text{22}\) It is from these principles that the concept of a ‘determinative’ was derived.

To show how these principles are applied, I will begin by breaking down the character 帝, dì, into its constituent parts. The character 帝 translates into “emperor” and consists of two primary components: 巾, jīn, and this means ‘towel’, with an original meaning ‘hand towel’\(^\text{23}\); and 立 li, often translated as ‘to stand’ and with an original meaning of “to stand on one’s feet”. In his analysis of the character, Leyi Li mentions that the graph is of a man standing with his feet apart.\(^\text{24}\) There is a third part to this character, 冖 mì, but this is not translatable and simply acts as a radical used in dictionaries to look up other characters that contain 冖.

When taken in its entirety, 帝 in its earliest uses was written quite differently than it is now. Its oldest forms pictographically represented a stool thought to have been used in imperial

\(^{21}\) A translation of the title 说文解字.


\(^{23}\) Li, 166.

\(^{24}\) Ibid, 195.
ancestral sacrifices. After having been borrowed in many instances, the meaning of the character changed over time and it came to represent “emperor”. Its ideological meaning is then the association of an object with religious implications to that of the ruler of the people.

Not coincidentally, the radical 立 contributes ideologically to the meaning that 帝 is meant to convey. In its ancient usages, the verb could mean “to establish (as heir)”, “to ascend and stand as emperor”, and even “to stand as the rightful Son of Heaven.” 中 also serves as a semantic since one of its ancient meanings was “a crown”. Thus, both may be viewed as semantic determinatives. It is important to distinguish between its ancient uses, “to stand (as emperor)” and “a crown”, from its modern day translations since these earlier meanings reveal how the character, as a whole, came to represent the Son of Heaven.

Interestingly, the Shuowen Jiezi, the earliest comprehensive dictionary that traces the etymology of Chinese characters, lists the character 帝 under the radical 上 shàng, “above”. In the entry for 上, Shen Xu mentions that “all things associated with ‘above’ have 上 as part of their character” and it lists 帝 as an example. Upon viewing the character 帝, even an individual without a background in Chinese would come to the conclusion that 上, in its ancient and current forms, is not present in the character for “emperor”. Shen Xu’s listing of 上 as a radical for 帝, thus, can be concluded as being ideological. As the dictionary was compiled during a period of language standardization, and later submitted to the court by Shen Xu’s son in

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26 Ibid, 195.
27 Ibid, 166.
28 Xu, 2. “凡上之屬皆從上.” The analysis of 上 appears on page 2 of the Shuowen Jiezi Xinding [說文解字新訂], written in its ancient form 上. 帝 appears on the same page as well. All character descriptions, in cases where simplified and traditional forms exist, appear in their traditional forms.
the Han Dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), it would only make sense to associate the character "emperor" with one whose extended meanings refer to that which is higher, i.e. heaven.

In reference to 天 tiān, "heaven", the Shuowen Jiezi states: "it is the highest point and there is nothing above it; composed of the characters 一 yī, ‘one’, and 大 dà, ‘great’." The pictograph initially depicted a man with a line being drawn horizontally above him. This line represents the freedom of heaven up above. The ideological meaning is obvious: nothing is higher than heaven and heaven is associated with that which is "free", or "great", a semantic explanation that is provided in the Shuowen Jiezi.

Although listed on its own as a radical, the character 王 wáng, "king", has a strong association with 天. The Shuowen Jiezi mentions that everything below Heaven turns towards the king. The character itself can be broken into three lines, similar to 三 sān, ‘three’, and that which connects these lines is the monarch. The three lines ideologically represent the three realms: that which is above, Heaven; that which is below, the earth; and that which resides between the two, man. Thus, the physical construction of 王 perpetuates the ancient ideology of the king being that which connects everything under 天. It is also worth noting that one of the earliest written forms of 王 is 天 with a horizontal line beneath the character (天 + __).

As my analysis has revealed, the creation of Chinese characters is not simply a case of using phonetic and semantic determinatives. Their construction perpetuated an ideology, among those who were literate. It is no accident that when one walked through the Forbidden city,

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30 Li, 328.


32 Li, 339.
images of dragons and phrases like “正大光明”33, ‘just and honourable’, littered the walls of the more ‘public’ spaces of the palace. Literally breaking apart the phrase, one is left with 正 zheng, ‘proper’; 大, earlier noted as ‘great’; 光 guang, ‘brilliant, shine’; and 明 ming, ‘bright’. The imagery of dragons associated the emperor with its attributes, such as fertility and power,34 while these common phrases propagated him as a symbol of honour and justice.

Symbols of his benevolence were not just in images but also in the very word for “emperor”. While the character 帝 means “emperor”, Chinese is a bisyllabic language and so one of the actual words for emperor is 帝王. The combination of these two characters promotes the connection between the emperor with heaven, particularly through the addition of 王 and its meaning as that which connects man to 天.

In post-revolutionary China, however, the character 帝 lost this ideological association. The revolutionary movements after the formation of the People’s Republic of China utilized “class” in order to gain momentum. With numbers in the peasant class, the political rhetoric of the time advocated reversal of traditional structures and the character 帝 became a symbol of oppression and elitism. In fact, dictionaries for modern standard Mandarin list three translations for 帝: God, emperor, and imperialism. “Imperialism” is still a relatively new word to the Chinese language. The actual characters used for the word are 帝国主义, literally, “doctrine of the emperor’s state”. Its usage does not predate the modern era.35

33 In the classical form of writing, characters were written from right to left so this phrase appears as “明光大正” in the halls of the Forbidden Palace.
34 Hodge, 15.
35 Tao Tai Hsia, China’s Language Reform (New Haven: Institute of Far Eastern Languages at Yale, 1956), 101. Tao Tai Hsia actually states that only one commonly used polysyllabic word in his list, the word for “library”, predates the Communist era. From this, one can infer that 帝国主义 was a new word that came out of the revolution.
Unlike most Chinese words, the word for imperialism in its true form is polysyllabic. As Tao Tai Hsia mentions, the Communist Chinese government discourage the use of polysyllabic words since this hinders the process of simplification: to make the language more easily accessible to the masses. This explains why took on the additional meaning of “imperialism”. As a result, though, is quite the loaded character since its modern use has multiple meanings that are dramatically different. While one could argue that the use of for “imperialism” is purely pragmatic by condensing it down to the first character of , the negative connotations of this relationship to “emperor” reflect the political rhetoric of the early Communist movement. The definition of “imperialism” is classification for an imperial system of governance but also connotes the practice of extending the power of a nation, generally through territorial gain and by use of force. Thus, the word “imperialism” carries with it associations with violence.

Considering the strength of the Communist movement and the animosity demonstrated towards tradition during the Cultural Revolution, it is not surprising that the language reform under the Communist government brought with it this new meaning for the character . carries with it the weight of oppression under dynasts whose policies resulted in failure to modernize and secession of territory during the Century of Humiliation (1840s to 1949). With this in mind, given the political culture after the establishment of the PRC, this new meaning for is a case of political ideology restructuring the character as it was initially conceived.

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36 Hsia, 100.

The character 帝 is not an exception as other characters, some even being changed completely as a result of political rhetoric, have undergone alterations during the period of language reform. One such example is 壮, “sturdy”, pronounced zhuàng, and is also the character used for the Zhuang minority living in southwest China. Initially, though, 獷, also pronounced zhuàng, had been used to describe the Zhuang minority. A quick breakdown of the character into its components reveals three parts to 獷: the first is 犭, a radical that means “dog” and does not have a pronunciation; the second is 立, lì, which means “to stand”; and the third is 里, lǐ, which means “village” in its classical use. As none of the components phonetically support the pronunciation of the character, as semantic determinatives, the character would be describing those from a village who “stand among dogs”. The controversy surrounding the construction of this character resulted in the government first revising this character as 僚, adding the more appropriate man radical 亻, and later changing the character completely to 壮. This would be another example of political rhetoric affecting the construction of characters in the Chinese language, especially since it came at a time when the CCP was trying to integrate minorities into the newly founded Chinese nation.

There are many more examples such as this and the committee that had spent six years revising the script took into account how ideology may negatively impact the characters. For ideologically charged characters, suggestions for revision were considered but not always adopted. One such case was the request to change the 女, “woman” radical to the 我, “evil”, radical in characters where use of the 女 radical were viewed as ideologically contributing to a
negative image of women.\textsuperscript{40} Some of these words include 妒, “envy”, and 奸, “adultery”. Since 女, nü, contributes neither phonetically to 妒, dù, nor 奸, jiān, it provides an ideological reading of these characters by suggesting that the meaning is related to women. The request for the change, however, has been rejected and the 女 radical is still in use in these characters.

The Use of Slogans

While this only reflects a small portion of characters within the Chinese language, I hope to have adequately shown that the government was very much aware of the role that ideology plays in conveying messages to the Chinese people. When a radical is altered for being controversial, such as is the case with 獠, this controversy stems from traditional attitudes that structured what the character had been meant to represent originally. Altering its form is stripping it from its initial cultural ideologies in favour of a political agenda that, in one of the previous examples, demonstrated manipulation of language to create a more unified nation: either through neutralizing derogatory connotations in characters or by juxtaposing the nation in its fight against a common enemy, such as 帝.

The project to create a new nation was not restricted to revision of the characters. Creating new slogans to stimulate people into action aided the CCP in spreading their message during times such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. With the spread of literacy through simplification of Chinese, these written messages reached out to peasants who were once illiterate and a new sense of belonging to the nation, a nation constructed from the ideology of the political regime at the time, spread among its followers.

\textsuperscript{40} Hodge, 46.
As the Great Leap Forward began, continued suspicion towards the intellectual class, and their ability to challenge the policies of the Communist party, made the intellectuals an easy target. While they had been granted the freedom to speak out against the party in 1956, this was revoked in 1957 and the most outspoken were deemed “rightists”.\(^{41}\) Initially, the campaign to allow dissenting voices to be heard fell under the slogan, 百花齐放，百家争鸣, “A hundred flowers bloom, A hundred schools of thought contend”. The “hundred schools of thought” is actually a classical reference to when China had many different schools of thought, such as Confucianism, Daoism, Moism, and Legalists to name a few, and when there existed an openness for these schools of thought to debate on many issues. This “openness”, however, was very short lived and critics were soon demonized for being too vocal.

By the time of the Cultural Revolution, a popular slogan appeared that mobilized the people against the authorities: 造反有理, “to rebel is justified”. People were encouraged to challenge nearly all forms of authority: teachers, parents, doctors, and party officials.\(^{42}\) In terms of the characters used in the slogan, 造反, “to rebel”, is actually very strategic. The character 造 contains 告, “to tell” as one of its components. The most important part of these two characters is the semantic 口, “mouth”, which suggests that the verb being used has something to do with speech. By using these characters for “to rebel”, 造反 is ideologically encouraging to rebel by speaking out against authority. This would encourage calling out the dissenters.

So why would 造反 be considered strategic? The first part of the answer was, again, the semantic use of the mouth radical in 造 and its ideological implications. The second would be


\(^{42}\) Ibid, 86.
the characters chosen for the verb “to rebel”. Instead of using 造反, the more common 反叛, “to rebel [against society, parents]” could have just as easily been used without misconstruing the message. In this case, word choice is politically strategic in order to form the type of rebellion that Mao Zedong encouraged.

Another popular slogan during the Cultural Revolution was 打倒美帝, “Down with American Imperialism.” As was discussed earlier in my critique of the character 帝, its new usage was adopted by the time of the official language reform period in the early years of the PRC. By combining the short form of “American”, 美, with 帝, the association of imperialism with the United States was propaganda used as a fear tactic. Fear of the United States and its intervention in East Asian affairs or, in China’s case, its continued intervention in the Taiwan Strait, enflamed a negative and distrustful attitude towards the US. Visually, this slogan is equating the Americans with the oppressive practices of the Chinese emperors of the past. By structuring the slogan in this manner, it carries with it political influence and the choice of character reflects these political ideologies. The slogan could have just as easily been written 打倒美敌, “Down with the American enemy”, a similar pronunciation but, in this case, the character used associates the Americans with a rival as opposed with the multiple ideological meanings of the character 帝.

What this has shown is how significant character choice is within slogans in conveying ideologically driven political messages during the time of China’s modern revolutions. With Mao Zedong’s death, the CCP has taken a different path to reconstructing the nation. Instead of

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43 On its own, 美 actually means “beauty” but, in this case, it is the short form of 美国, “United States of America.”
44 打倒美帝 is pronounced dă dăo měi dì and 打倒美敌 is dă dăo měi dí.
encouraging unity and disseminating political rhetoric through the written language, the government is struggling to integrate the nation under one standard form of the language as China emerges as a potential global power.

**The Problem of “Nation” and Language**

Today, the idea of “China” is undergoing profound changes. As China prepares for a new role in the world, language still poses a challenge to achieving national unity. Governmental reforms on the Chinese written script have not always been well received within some areas China. Whether it is only opposition to simplified script, or to becoming integrated into the People’s Republic of China, each case hinders the sense of fraternity that should exist among all within the nation if China is to project a strong image to the world.

As Zhou Youguang states, “having a common language is a fundamental criterion for building a modernized country.” Yet variations in the script still exist as parts of China prefer the use of traditional over simplified characters. With Hong Kong having only returned to the PRC in 1997, the task to introduce modern standard Mandarin is still underway. Taiwan also poses an issue as it is viewed as part of China and functioning under a different government. Strong reaction against the Simplified script drafted by the PRC in 1956 also makes future integration with Taiwan a challenge in terms of disseminating a unified script. Even in southeast China, where Cantonese is spoken as a first language, the use of traditional script in everyday life is still common. Regarding these instances, scholars like Zhou Youguang, who had worked on

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45 Y. Zhou, 3.
the revision committee for the simplified script, criticize the preferred usage of traditional characters as lacking in efficiency and going against “the nation’s image of being civilized”.

The lack of complete unity in use of the written script is not the only threat to the idea of a Chinese nation. Taiwan’s ambiguous status and the restructuring of identity on the island make it difficult to imagine the peaceful reunification of the island with the mainland. Politically, the continued functioning of a separate government has done little to solve tensions. As time has passed, the younger generations of Taiwan also have felt little connection with the mainland and while identifying themselves as culturally Chinese, many view Taiwan as separate from the mainland. The question of identity for those in Taiwan is still very murky, as pointed out by Richard Bush, who remarks that everyone on Taiwan views his or herself as having two, maybe even three identities: Taiwanese, Chinese, and in some cases, a dual cosmopolitan identity. It has not helped as well that there is a lack of uniformity in the promotion of a standardized language, with the mainland and Taiwan promoting different scripts, and this poses problems when trying to export Chinese culture globally. As a result, in both language and culture, Taiwan has developed differently than the mainland and lacking a standard image of what “Chinese” entails also negatively affects China’s image from a global perspective. At the national level, the People’s Republic of China view the difficulty to reunify with Taiwan as an open wound, an issue that the Communist party feels must be resolved if China is to project a strong image to the world.

46 Ibid, 71.
48 Y. Zhou, 34.
Taiwan is not the only “province” of China presenting a threat to national unity. Tibet has also become a problem in the last century, particularly because its original government, headed by the Dalai Lama, is now in exile and threatens unity by protesting the Chinese takeover. The argument has been that Tibet was forcibly made part of the PRC by the People’s Liberation Army shortly after the PRC was established. As well, current policies that have made modern standard Mandarin one of the official languages of Tibet is viewed by some as cultural genocide since this is seen as oppressing, and ultimately eradicating, the Tibetan language and way of life.

These reflect only some of the problems the PRC has had in standardizing the written script. The spread of Putonghua, or Modern Standard Mandarin, as the lingua franca of the nation, has also posed a threat to the survival of all other vernaculars within the PRC but is being used as a means of creating a common identity. Similar to the influence that political ideology has had in redefining terms such as 帝, the use of Chinese characters has also worked to politically construct the identity of members of the nation in their relation to the central state. These terminologies have been used to politically define the state’s members through words that contain historical ideology imbedded within the construction of these words and have been manipulated by the parties in power to suit the current political and ideological trends. Nowhere is the impact of this practice on the survival of the diversity of the PRC’s numerous cultures more apparent than in the state’s definition of 民族, “ethnicity”.
Chapter 2
Minzu: Its Origin and Meaning

With the creation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the challenging task of determining who was a citizen of the new state, and how these citizens would be identified by the government, presented itself early in the nation’s amalgamation. Having unified most of the territory conceived by the Communist Party as the state of China\(^5\), the government began a nation-wide census and allotted citizens the opportunity to designate their cultural/ethnic affiliation. The purpose of allowing an open ended self-declaration, lacking any categorical responses that would pressure the interviewed into affiliating themselves with a designated group, was to allow the people to determine who they were within the nation 中国 (China). The shortcomings of this census became evident very quickly as the CCP soon realized that requesting a 民族 (nationality/ethnicity), when the term was loaded with a diversity of meanings and ambiguities, could hardly be expected when the state had yet to develop its own understanding of a 民族. As the origins and history of its usage reveals, 民族 carries with it many political connotations that has always been shaped by the ideology of the people in power.

The Origin of Minzu

Scholars are divided on the origins of 民族. Within scholarship on the subject, a few general theories have been proposed regarding the beginning of its usage, both dating back to the late 19th century. Although the exact date may be debated, arguably the idea of 中国, the

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\(^5\) The territory of the People’s Republic of China includes many of the regions that made up the borders of the Qing dynasty, the exception being Mongolia whose declaration of independence in the early 20th century remained controversial up until the 1960s. The CCP conception of China also includes the highly contested Taiwan.
beginning of the modern state, began when the concept of 民族 (nation/state/nationality/people) first emerged as a political construct that would eventually replace the Qing court and reinvent the boundaries of who would belong to the new state.

One of the earliest dates for the first usage of 民族 in China has been proposed by Peng Yingming, who traced its usage to as early as 1874. Peng claims that the term was first introduced by Wang Tao (1828-1898 CE), a scholar who worked as a missionary in England for 13 years. Because of his knowledge of English, Wang Tao’s understanding of 民族 is said to have been influenced by English.① If so, 民族 would have carried with it a similar meaning to its English translation “common people”, denoting “a community of folks with a common origin”.② The key point of this rendering of 民族 is “common origin” as a shared origin would suggest that 民族 began as an inclusive term. This theory, however, is among the least popular of the origin of 民族, partly due to the complications of properly dating Wang Tao’s article. 民族 was also not commonly used prior to the last decade of the 19th century so any instances of its appearance earlier, assuming the dating of Wang Tao’s article is correct, discredits the influence English had in the meaning of 民族 as it was used by the 20th century.

A more common theory on the origin of 民族 has been proposed by Pamela Crossley, who compares it to the Japanese minzoku (the Japanese pronunciation of the kanji 民族). Introduced to China in 1895, minzoku translates into “people, race, nation” in contemporary

①Yingming Peng, “Guanyu Woguo Minzu Gainian Lishi de Chubu Kaocha,” Minzu Yanjiu, No. 2 (1985), 4-5. 民族 first appears in Wang Tao’s “Foreign Affairs in its Usage and Development” 《洋务在用其所长》. Peng Yingming has determined the date of this article to be 1874.

dictionaries. Unlike the contemporary meaning of 民族, minzoku lacks the same ambiguities and this can be traced back to its introduction to Japan during the Meiji Restoration period (1868-1912 CE). First popularized by Shiga Shigetaka in the 1880s, the term found its affiliations with a national consciousness, meant to reflect the uniqueness of Japan’s historical, cultural, and geographical context as it was embodied within the idea of “nation”. In shaping this identity, regional associations had to either be assimilated or wiped out in order to garner the ‘naturally occurring phenomena’ of race and nation occupying the same space. Those who initially were considered participants of this minzoku were those considered to be members of the new state of Japan.

In much of the scholarship surrounding minzoku, scholars point to the emphasized homogeneity of minzoku during the years of Japanese aggression in Asia (1910-1945 CE). They argue that minzoku carried with it the connotations of “ethnicity” and thus equating the Chinese 民族 with minzoku would assume this translation when it was first introduced in 1895. As I will later argue, however, minzoku was still in a process of evolution within Japanese political discourse and the way in which it evolved became very relevant in its application to how the


55 Pamela Crossley, “Thinking About Ethnicity in Early Modern China,” Late Imperial China, Vol. 11, No. 1 (June 1990), 20. Specifically, Pamela Crossley states, “Contemporary Chinese ethnologists, finally, argue that despite Japanese origin of the term minzu its true cognate is Russian narod, “people,” “nation,” with an emphasis upon “popular” (narodni) and “nationality” (narodnost); this suggests again the sense of nationality, not ethnicity, that was carried by Japanese minzoku, which was strongly associated with a populist, nativist discourse in early modern Japan”. Michael Weiner also draws a similar conclusion regarding minzoku’s strong ties to blood and race when he quotes Kada Tetsuji: “We cannot consider minzoku…without taking into account its relation to blood,” on page 3 of The Invention of Identity: ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ in pre-war Japan. Yet Kada was writing in 1940 and it is hardly fair to assume that this rendering of minzoku would have been applicable to China in the late 19th century. Although Michael Weiner never specifically addresses China’s borrowing of minzoku, his discussion on minzoku takes for granted its evolving meaning in political discourse from the Meiji restoration to the end of the Pacific War. See also Weiner, 3.
people of China, Han and minorities alike, would be defined within the imperialist doctrine of
the empire. In its initial stages, minzoku was still a new concept that attempted to bring together
‘race’ and ‘nation’. What this ‘race’ looked like in Japan was still very difficult to discern and is
beyond the scope of this paper.

Breaking down the characters that make up the word 民族 may also shed some light onto
what the word was meant to represent when it was first conceived. The first character, 民, means
“people” and originally depicted a group of sprouts, serving as a metaphor for a group of
people. 民 is made up of the radical, 氏, “clan”, and this serves as its semantic determinative.
Not surprisingly, when this radical is paired up with the second character of 民族, forming the
word 氏族, this also means “clan”.

The second character, 族, “clan”, originally depicted an arrow and a banner. The character was meant to represent not only people united by blood but also those who wished to
unite under one common flag. Made up of the radicals 方, “place, area”, and 矢, “arrow”, both
served as semantic determinatives that suggest an almost militaristic culture in its meaning. As
Zhang Haiyang notes, the characters, 民 and 族, as separate terms were reserved for the
barbarians undeserving of the title 华人, “people of glory,” i.e. those not of the civilized Han
culture.

Given the context of the respective historical usage of these two characters, this would
then suggest a modern meaning of “ethnic group” for 民族 since these characters would appear

56 Xu, 834.
57 Xu, 446. Also see Li, 496.
58 Li, 496.
59 Zhang, PE-75.
to designate people of a common group.\(^6^0\) What is most noteworthy of the characters used in the rendering of 民族 is the meaning depicted by 族. As previously mentioned, this character for “clan” was traditionally inclusive of not only those of the clan bounded by blood, but also of those wishing to be represented by the clan. If we take this into consideration in the larger context of applying meaning to 民族, or those who would be members of the “nation”, this would mean that any individual wishing to participate in the nation would be part of the nation. This line of thought discerning who were 民族, “people of the nation”, was evident in the early discourse on 民族.

In the beginning, however, 民族 also denoted strong racial overtones and it appeared to carry with it a double meaning. Prior to the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, the emergence of a revolutionary movement that called for the overthrowing of the monarchy resulted in two separate ideologies: that between the Qing dynasts in power and the Han literati who challenged them.

The ideology of the Qing dynasts had been the result of centuries of careful restructuring to create the sense of a central state, 中国, that was inclusive of its borderland territories Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Manchuria, as an active part of the empire. The people within these territories, although not of Han origin, were referred to in official documents as 中国之人 (‘people of the central state’).\(^6^1\) As the Manchu dynasts were themselves not Han, the inclusion of the non-Han as part of the empire served two purposes: the first was the legitimation of the state’s control over the territories on the borders of the empire; and the second was to officially

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\(^6^0\) Zhang, PE-75.

include non-Han as members of the state. This latter point was also a means of legitimizing Manchu rule since Manchu were also 中国之人, a term that was inclusive of Han, Mongols, Tibetans, and Hui.

For the Han literati, one that was embittered by the reign of the Manchu monarchy, 民族 came into use as a reaction against the regime. This sense of “nation/people” borrowed much of its meaning from the comparable Russian “narod”, often translated into “nation/people” and with a sense of “nationality”. Yet from early on, 民族 also developed a strong meaning of “race” because of the ethnocentric ideologies of the Western influenced, and soon to be leading, scholars of the 1911 revolution. Thus, from the turn of the 20th century, it came to be used to refer to a specific group of people in 中国, the Han culture, and that it would only be through the unity of the Han peoples that the barbarians would be expelled and China would become a modern nation.

It was through this alienation of and reaction against the Manchu that 民族 developed its racial undertones and not from its being borrowed from another language. With scholarship divided among Qing reformists, whose concept of 民族 was inclusive of all ethnic groups that would formulate a giant 中华民族 (Chinese nation), and Han revolutionaries, who believed strongly in a 汉族 (Han ethnicity), leading reformists developed separate ideologies on who would be included within the new nation. This complicated the defining of 民族 leading up to the revolution but by the time the Qing court was overthrown in 1911, much of the ire felt by

62 James Leibold, Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and its Indigenes Became Chinese (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 32. One of the leading reformists in favour of a more progressive and inclusive 中华民族 was Liang Qichao.

63 Countering the prevailing ideologies of Liang’s scholarship, Zhang Binglin proposed a new state made up of the Han majority.
Han Chinese resulted in severe bloodshed of the Manchu and racial bigotry towards non-Han peoples. This soon proved to be quite problematic since the alienation of groups affiliated in China’s recent history as part of the central state meant that the new government no longer could retain its territorial integrity.\(^6^4\) Outer Mongolia and Tibet soon ceded\(^6^5\) and the new government quickly regrouped and developed policies that extended the meaning of 民族 to be more inclusive of the non-Han cultures in order to re-stake claims to territories that had been part of the Qing empire.

This, then, is where the double-meaning of 民族 came into play and where its ambiguities would continue to be reshaped from the first half of the 20\(^{th}\) century. Although internally it denoted the Han majority who would emerge and topple the Manchu ‘barbarians’, externally it would be inclusive of the non-Han and their territories in the new, centralized state. Thus, the interplay of “race” and “ethnocentrism” held firm as the new nation was shaped by a shared identity among the Han but an adherence, or potentially a more suitable suggestion of ‘tolerance’ towards the non-Han, also factored into the sense of “nation” to include the borderland territories.\(^6^6\) It is no wonder that the first flag of the Chinese state contained 5 colors, each representative of the people who made up the Chinese nation: red, to represent the Han majority; yellow, for the Manchurians; blue, for the Mongolians; white, for the Muslims;\(^6^7\) and

\(^{6^4}\) Thomas Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 25.

\(^{6^5}\) Colin Mackerras, “Ethnic Minorities in China,” *Ethnicity in Asia*, edited by Colin Mackerras (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 20. With the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, Outer Mongolia and Tibet became independent states. However, only Outer Mongolia’s independence was recognized reluctantly by Chiang Kai-Shek in 1945 and this was after the country held a referendum and ultimately voted to remain independent of China.

\(^{6^6}\) Zhang, 75.

\(^{6^7}\) Y. Zhou, 128. In Chinese, Zhou Youguang lists 回, “Hui”, for Muslim. This is not a direct translation of the term for “Muslim” as the Hui are a specific group of people recognized as the largest Muslim minority nationality. Currently, the Hui are categorized as a separate group from other Muslim nationalities such as the Uygurs and Tatars in mainland China. However, since many minorities lacked clear distinction in the early 20\(^{th}\)
black for the Tibetans.\textsuperscript{68} This effort to be more inclusive served what James Leibold has coined as the “common spatial imaginary” of the new nation: by adopting Liang Qichao’s spatio-temporal definition of the nation, in which all within the borders of the Qing dynasty were perceived as naturally part of China, dating back to the time of the Yellow Emperor, the affiliation of the current “space” with its history, i.e. “time”, created the means by which the newly reformed state would be entitled to include these territories as part of the nation.\textsuperscript{69}

The definition of 民族 then shifted from ‘race’ into one of ‘space’ as the threat to territorial integrity weighed heavily on the shoulders of the reformers.

\textbf{The Struggle for a Nation (1912-1949 CE)}

With the formation of the Republic of China in 1912, the government under Yuan Shikai (1859-1916 CE)\textsuperscript{70} instituted the Provisional Constitution of the Republic of China. This early constitution addressed the official “status” of the borderland territories in two of its articles. The first of these, Article 3 of Chapter 1, defined the borders of China: “The territory of the Republic of China contains 22 provinces including inner and outer Mongolia, Tibet and Qinghai.”\textsuperscript{71} Chapter 2, Article 5 states: “The citizens of the Republic of China are all equal, regardless of
century in China, Hui, in this case, refers to recognition of Muslim minorities and their inclusion in the Republic of China.

\textsuperscript{68} G. Zhou, 128.

\textsuperscript{69} Leibold, 46.

\textsuperscript{70} A member of the Qing court, Yuan was influential in convincing the young Qing emperor to abdicate. Although the revolutionary movement was led by Sun Yat-sen, who had the favour of the people to represent them as the new president of the Republic of China, the emperor would only abdicate if Yuan became the new president. As a result, Sun stepped down and was replaced by Yuan in March 1912.

race, class, or differences in religion.” With Outer Mongolia’s Declaration of Independence from the Qing empire in December 1911, the new Republic of China scrambled to insert their claim to the borderland frontier and prevent other territories from ceding.\textsuperscript{73}

The inclusion of the non-Han peoples in the Republic of China, called for a rethinking of 民族, “citizens”. With the founding of Sun Yat-sen’s Guomindang party in 1912, the political discourse that emerged regarding 民族 attempted to re-imagine the nation in a way that would eliminate racial boundaries in order to construct a unified 中华民族. Liang Qichao’s work, in particular, was very influential. Approaching the question of 民族 from a social Darwinist perspective, the racial superiority of the Han was anticipated to eventually absorb the non-Han cultures in the creation of a 中华民族. Liang stressed the importance of intermarriage between the Han and non-Han and also felt that there was no pure race in China. Due to centuries of intermixing, every individual who made up the 中华民族 shared the same blood.\textsuperscript{74} However, his theory heavily stressed the Han culture as the key to uniting the nation, and not physiological theories on the blood relationship between the Han and non-Han peoples.

By the time of Sun Yat-sen’s death in 1925, the discourse on 民族 began to shift from one structured around social science to one that relied more on an anthropological understanding of 民族 within the GMD. The discovery of the Peking man in the 1920s also aided in shaping this new discourse as the Guomindang Party began claiming that all of the different cultures in the Republic of China belonged to a single race, i.e. a 中华民族. New interpretations of Sun Yat-

\textsuperscript{72} Ch.2, Article 5 in Ibid. “中华民国人民一律平等，无种族阶级宗教之区别。”

\textsuperscript{73} Tibet also declared its independence but control over Tibet constantly fluctuated between the Dalai Lama and Chinese warlords between the years 1912 and 1950.

\textsuperscript{74} Leibold, 33.
sen’s use of 中华民族 pushed for a re-thinking of 民族 in anthropological terms, in which the history of the different cultures was re-imagined as having descended from a single ancestor, most notably 黃帝, “the Yellow Emperor”. 75 This combination of recently discovered anthropological findings with mythical legends related to the Han culture to push a political agenda in support of the Republic’s territorial integrity was met with much opposition, the loudest voice coming from within the GMD party. This nationalist scholar, Gu Jiegang, argued the fallacy of manipulating science to support a political cause and felt that the different ethnic groups must experience a genuine sense of belonging if national unity is to be achieved.76

However, with a war being fought against the Japanese as they expanded beyond the puppet state of Manchukuo, and with internal conflict between the Guomindang and Communist parties, the GMD could not afford to allow discourse that was counter-productive to national unity. Believing that unity would only be achieved if everyone within the frontier felt that they were of the same race as the Han, the GMD continued to push for a 中华民族 with unforeseen consequences.

At this time, the rhetoric behind minzoku in Japan was also being re-evaluated to fit a political discourse that would allow the easy integration of colonized states into a giant Japanese empire, or the 大東亜共栄圏, “The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.” The intent of creating this empire was to have Japan take on the responsibility as the 東亜の名手, “Leader of Asia”, by uniting all Asian states and freeing Asia of Western imperialism. Regarding Japan’s forceful expansion into China, the turbulent relationship between the early Republic of China

75 The Yellow Emperor was said to have lived during the 26th century BCE. Viewed as the founder of Chinese civilization, his legacy inspired many of China’s ancient philosophers and he is credited with having invented many things such as early Chinese astronomy and Chinese calendars.
76 Leibold, 135.
and the frontier had resulted in a weakened state and left the borderlands exposed by the time of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931. It was not long before Japan renamed its conquered territory, composing of Inner Mongolia and Manchuria, Manchukuo, and placed the last Qing emperor Puyi (1906-1967 CE) as the head of the new puppet state under the pretense of “sovereignty”. Dividing the Republic of China and reinstating an ethnic Manchu as head of the new “sovereign” state served the evolving understanding of minzoku as it was reshaped within Japanese political discourse.

Early in Japanese imperialist expansion, justification for the colonization of other Asian states fell in line with the Meiji concepts of 同文, “common culture”, and 同種, “common race”. This earlier discourse placed more stress on race as opposed to ethnicity, a distinction that became important both in Chinese and Japanese renderings of the word 民族 in the 1930s. Greatly influenced by the work of German romantic interpretations of volk, Kevin Doak notes that for these Japanese scholars, “the literary and culturalist impulse behind this turn to “minzoku” militate[d] against the purely biological understanding of minzoku as “race” as these writers were nearly unanimous in arguing that “minzoku” was an ethnic and national identity that had to be produced through cultural work.” Similarly, nationalist scholars in China advocated

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77 Emperor Puyi served as the child emperor from 1908-1912, after the death of his uncle, Emperor Guangxu, in November of 1908. He briefly reigned again for the first 12 days of July in 1917, after Yuan Shikai’s death and as the Republic of China reassembled itself. Later in life, he became the Emperor of the puppet state of Manchukuo from 1934-1945.

78 Duus in Kevin Doak, “Building National Identity Through Ethnicity: Ethnology in Wartime Japan and After,” Journal of Japanese Studies, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Winter, 2001), 4-5. Doak notes that although Peter Duus’s understanding of minzoku is more racially based, even Duus acknowledges the distinction between racial theories in Meiji imperialism and the later use of cultural distinctions in wartime Japanese imperialism.

79 Footnote #14 in Doak, 7-8. The translation and explanation of volk, as “people” in a national and ethnic context, is provided by a footnote in Doak’s article “Building National Identity.” In equating volk to minzoku, Doak remarks that the German term is more closely relatable to minzoku than anything in English since volk is distinguishable from “race”.

80 Ibid, 8.
the same approach in regards to 民族, “nation”, and believed it should be viewed separate from 中族, “race”. Prior to the 1930s, these terms had been used interchangeably by men such as Sun Yat-sen and Liang Qichao and equating these terms as indivisible threatened nationalist interpretations of 中华民族.  

Returning to the discourse on minzoku, the sociologist Takata Yasuma (1883-1972 CE) was very influential in developing this new interpretation of minzoku in the wartime era. His definition of minzoku stressed the importance of subjective elements, such as the sense of national consciousness, over limitations of objective elements, such as shared culture and history. By emphasizing these objective elements, he argued that the ethnic nation, i.e. the 大東亜共栄圏, would eventually replace the concept of the collective identity of society as separate from the state. In this way, the Japanese rendering of minzoku would be more reflective of Japanese culture in opposition to Western models of individualistic society and also serve as a means to include people of conquered territories into the 大東亜共栄圏, such as in Manchukuo. In the separation of the state and the ethnic nation, there still remained an association of common blood in the rendering of minzoku but, unlike in the Meiji period, the minzoku of the 大東亜共栄圏 would not be based on a shared blood/race but on a common “blood and culture”.  

In this sense, minzoku was similar to the nationalist understanding of 民族 in that both definitions acknowledged similar blood. Unlike the nationalist 民族, the Japanese definition of minzoku, “nationality”, remained purposely fluid and better developed by focusing on subjective elements that would be more inclusive of different races under a unified empire. The

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81 Leibold, 132.
82 Doak, 12.
83 Ibid, 16.
nationalist’s reliance on anthropological “facts” to recognize the 中华民族 as a single “race” threatened to alienate the different cultures of China whenever new evidence emerged contrary to GMD propaganda. This worked to the advantage of the Japanese when the nationalist historian, Fu Sinian, challenged descent from a common ancestor and proposed plural origins for the eastern Yi and western Xia ancestors. This was upon discovery of non-Yangshao pottery in Longshan, which led Fu to conclude that more than one type of ancestor must have existed and challenge GMD rhetoric. The Japanese then used this to claim that the Yizu, believed to be the ancestors of the Manchu, were a separate race and thus entitled to their own state, Manchukuo. Catering to the racial struggles along the frontier, the Japanese emphasized the racial differences between the Han and non-Han and promised “independence” to religious leaders and tribal warlords in order to weaken the nationalist cause.

These two separate ideologies, however, were not the only prevailing theories on 民族 in war-torn China. Similar to the Japanese, the Chinese Communist Party, founded in 1921, developed its own interpretation of 民族 that was more inclusive of the other ethnic groups within the territory of China without enforcing a linear ancestral heritage. Adopting Bolshevik policy in their early constitution, the recognition of the non-Han groups as 少数民族, or “minority nationalities”, altered CCP perspective on how the differing ethnic groups fit into China proper. This Leninist policy ensured that minorities (in the context of China’s entire population) who made up the majority of the region they occupied would have the right to 自觉.

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84 In Classical Chinese, the term 夷, “yi”, referred to the non-Han people and had the connotation of “barbarian”. 夏, “xia”, on the other hand, is a reference to the Xia Dynasty, the first dynasty in Chinese history (2070 – 1600 BCE).

85 Leibold, 158-9.

86 Ibid, 137.
“self-determination.”\textsuperscript{87} In this first constitution, drafted in 1931 under the then ‘Chinese Soviet Republic’,\textsuperscript{88} Article 14 stated:

“The Soviet government of China recognizes the right of self-determination of the national minorities in China, their right to complete separation from China, and to the formation of an independent state for each national minority. All Mongolians, Tibetans, Miao, Yao, Koreans, and others living on the territory of China shall enjoy the full right to self-determination, i.e. they may either join the Union of Chinese Soviets or secede from it and form their own state as they may prefer.”\textsuperscript{89}

The importance of adopting this policy was to gain support for the Communist cause in the early days of the party. Outnumbered by the highly influential nationalists and with Chinese warlords in frontier territories being bribed to support the Japanese imperialists, the Communist party was by far too weak to forcefully push a political agenda structured around the status of non-Han groups in the formation of a unified China. If anything, the CCP was more concerned with the class struggle of the proletariat and class struggle, as a means of defining the people, transcended superficial categories such as ‘race’ or ‘ethnicity’.

This soon changed as the communist movement gained more momentum. The infamous Long March (1934-5) led by Mao Zedong, reintroduced the question of 民族 in the CCP’s political ideology. The Communist’s willingness to expand the definition of 民族, “nationality”, beyond the 5 cultural groups still used by the GMD (the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetans) to recognize groups such as the Yao and Miao as separate ethnicities, aided in the

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid, 91.

\textsuperscript{88} With Mao Zedong leading the party, the CCP formed a Chinese Soviet Republic from 1931-1937. This was to counter-balance the Republic of China, Chiang Kai-Shek’s government, which controlled most of Chinese territory.

party’s popularity. They began revising their own position on 自觉 and by 1934, the right to 自觉 became the promise of autonomy. Adopting a similar view to the nationalists, the communists felt that the assimilation of the borderland territories in China proper was necessary for China’s survival. Their own theory on 民族 reflected the Guomindang’s in that there existed a shared blood among all the Han and non-Han peoples. However, instead of a single race that comprised the 中华民族, the CCP viewed the 中华民族 as a “multi-minzu state”. Echoing the Social Darwinist constructions of 民族 made by Liang Qichao, the CCP believed that the national strength of the 中华民族 depended on the Han majority who would gradually assimilate the non-Han cultures and lead them to a unified Chinese state. The only problem with this theory on 民族 was how to consolidate it with the socialist rhetoric of the party. Recognizing the separate ethnic groups and catering to their specific needs (i.e. preservation of culture, language, etc) would be counter-intuitive to class struggle and the emancipation of the proletariat.

In light of this, a reworking of 民族, “ethnicity”, as it applied to the minority cultures, was required. Li Weihan was quite ambivalent in consolidating these discrepancies by proposing that Stalin’s definition of a nationality, which was used by the CCP, only applied to full-developed 民族 and since the minorities’ societies were underdeveloped compared to the Han, they were considered “backward minzu”. This then allowed the Soviet Republic of China to consider itself a “multi-minzu”, i.e. multiple nationalities, state. Since it was the responsibility of

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90 Mackerras, “Ethnic Minorities in China”, 20. With the earlier promises of potential secession from the Chinese state, being labelled as a separate minority would have been more appealing than having their territories assimilated under the GMD’s definition of a 中华民族.

91 Leibold, 150.

92 Stalin’s definition will be mentioned in more detail later on. For the most part, it consists of the recognition of 4 factors in the creation of a nationality: common language, territory, economic life, and culture.

93 Leibold, 154.
the Han to assimilate and aid in the development of the differing minority cultures, special treatment could then be granted to them without political backlash because they were “incomplete minzu”.

What these three different approaches on 民族 reveals is the influence that political ideology and historical context have in shaping language and how the ambiguity of 民族 remains tied to its history. In reworking definitions on 民族/minzoku, the political forces in China attempted to define the 民族 in three ways: through stressing a manipulated and forced physiological relationship tied to race between the Han and non-Han cultures, the method utilized by the GMD; through the claims of a common blood and culture, but not necessarily race, as constructed by the Japanese in their understanding of minzoku; or through the recognition of separate cultures but a long history of intermixing between the Han and non-Han peoples, resulting in mixed blood but not a single race of people, as proposed by the CCP. Ironically, all three ideologies acknowledged a commonality of blood but differed in definitions of culture and race. In all cases, the attempt was to define the “ethnic” in its relationship to the “national”, either through the justification of inclusion of the frontier in a unified China or, in Japan’s case, to create a giant empire composed of separate Asian states. Assimilation through the “superior” culture, whether the Japanese or the Han Chinese, was viewed as a necessity.

When the Pacific War came to an end in 1945, the political landscape changed in China. Peace was short-lived and a civil war soon broke out between the CCP and GMD. It was not until the GMD’s retreat in 1949 and the establishment of the People’s Republic of China that peace was finally restored on the mainland. Having finally achieved their goal of reuniting most
of China’s territory, the Communist Party began the daunting task of creating national consciousness among the minorities through legal recognition of the individual cultures that would now be included in the state. But this was no easy task as, not surprisingly, the historically constructed ambiguities of 民族 immediately hindered the process.

**What is a Minzu?**

In 1953, the CCP issued the first ever census of the People’s Republic of China. One of the questions asked required all citizens to designate their own 民族, “ethnicity”. This question was intentionally left open, lacking any groups or categories to allow citizens the opportunity to name and declare their cultural affiliations. As mentioned previously, problems arose immediately as the CCP realized that they took for granted the meaning of 民族. Many of the minority people interviewed did not appear to understand the question and even when an explanation was offered in translation, still some were unsure of what to call themselves. Since this project was intended to give power to the people in designating their 民族 as an official 少数民族, “minority group” recognized by the state, census takers were not allowed to assign a 民族 to the people interviewed. In cases where the interviewed was not sure how to respond, census takers had to resort to providing equatable terms, such as “Are you a Hui or are you a Han?” and attempt to coax a name that would be used to designate the individual.

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94 The secession of Outer Mongolia was met with much criticism from the CCP who continued to advocate for Mongolia’s return to China in the 1950s and 60s. The status of Taiwan is still an on-going issue with no resolution in sight. Inclusion of these territories in the PRC would recreate the boundaries of the Qing Empire and the China proposed by the GMD and CCP during the wartime era.

95 Mullaney, 33. Mullaney’s book on the Ethnic Classification Project provides details about how the state redefined, and in some cases “created”, the 56 民族 now recognized in the PRC.
The purpose of this question was to determine who the 民族 were in China and which 民族 each citizen would belong to. While today there are 56 recognized 民族, including the Han who make up 91.51% of the population, reaching this number has sparked controversy with many scholars quick to point out the flaws in the CCP’s definition of 民族 and their failure to recognize all the ethnic groups who adhere to this definition. Yet, as I have already shown, the historical context of 民族 reveals the ambiguities and complexities of its usage and how political rhetoric constantly reshaped its meaning. Even when the PRC attempted to declare a working definition of 民族 during the Ethnic Classification Project (1954), in order to provide a method for classification and recognition of the separate 民族, 民族 was still in the process of being reshaped by the ideologies of the ethnologists who participated in this project.

In their attempt to provide a guideline to designation of a 民族, the CCP utilized Stalin’s definition of a nationality, which is “a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture”. Using these 4 factors—common language, territory, economic life, and culture, the ethnologists visited communities of each of the separate 民族 declared in the census, and through interviews, determined if the potential 民族 fit this criteria. As there were over 400 submissions, nearly 200 of which had come from the southwest province of Yunnan alone, certain groups, such as the Hui and Manchu, would already be allotted their

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98 Mullaney, 34-36.
status since their recognition dated back to the Qing dynasty or earlier. For other
groups, narrowing down the number of recognized by the state required ethnographers to
take liberties in determining which within a region could be combined to form a larger “少数民族” and this essentially became the main task of the ethnographers during the Ethnic Classification Project.

The term 少数民族 does not have as long of a history as 民族 in modern China but is
also a relatively new term that has been carefully used in designating the non-Han citizens. Ever aware of the political ideology and historical context of Chinese characters, the Communist Party began using the term 少数民族 in the 1920s as a replacement for the Leninist phrase 弱小民族, “small and weak minzus.” 弱小, in contemporary translations, means “weak”, combining the
two characters 弱, “weak”, and 小, “small”. Current renderings of these two characters do not deviate from classical translations. Ideologically constructed to pictographically represent their literal meanings, the Shuowen Jiezi mentions that 弱 depicts a bent or twisted piece of wood. As for 小, the single line that divides the character in the middle implies the concept of being “small” or “few”, by “breaking up” the character into smaller pieces.

This ideological construction, then, is what gave the word 弱小 its derogatory meaning.

The issue that the Communist Party faced if they had chosen to designate the minority groups as 弱小民族 would be subjecting the non-Han to “Han chauvinism”, made even more apparent

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99 Leibold, 102.
100 Xu, 592.
101 Ibid, 63.
102 Minority groups are protected from “Han chauvinism” in the current constitution for the PRC. The promise to prevent ethnic groups from subjection to Han Chauvinism has always been part of the CCP’s platform, particularly when they attempted to gain support from these groups in the interwar years.
through deeming the minorities as 弱小 in the Han language. The more neutral term, 少数民族, has been favored since because it lacks the same pejorative context. As noted earlier, the first character, 少, “few”, initially meant “sand” and through its interchangeable usage with 小, came to mean “few”. Its semantic determinative is the character 小, since this traditionally also meant “few”, and the stroke 丿 acts partially as the phonetic since this is where 少 gets its tone from.\footnote{Xu, 63.}

数 is a verb that means “to count” and in Classical Chinese was written 數. The phonetic, 娄,\footnote{Ibid, 199. The Shuowen Jiezi lists this as the phonetic yet its pronunciation, “lóu” differs from 数, “shù”. The character 娄 may refer to the surname of the same pronunciation and lacks any semantic meaning.} contributes little to the meaning of the character but the character was said to have been derived from 友, “to tap lightly”.\footnote{Ibid, 199.} This would indicate a means of counting and thus act as a semantic determinative.

In combination, the characters 少数 came to mean “minority” or, literally, “few that are counted”. The appeal of 少数民族, “minority nationality”, in comparison, reveals a lack of pejorative rhetoric embedded in the construction of the characters 少 and 数.

With little else to work on besides a definition of 民族 that, at best, only vaguely addressed characteristics of an ethnic group that should allot them recognition as separate 民族 from the Han in this new “multi-minzu” state, the ethnographers had to determine factors that would be used as justification for amalgamating different 民族 into a single group. In his detailed analysis of the project, Thomas Mullaney addresses the importance of social science and its influence on the state in allowing the government a means to see ethnicity categorically.\footnote{Mullaney, 41.} For
the ethnographers who partook in the categorization of the 民族 in this 1954 project, language played a key role and heavily impacted the method of categorization as comparisons between differing vernaculars within an area was used to, in some cases, “re-imagine” a shared historical context in which these languages may have initially been similar and have since become separate dialects. For example, the ethnographers compared the language of the Shuitian with the Yi of Liangshan and Lisu of Bijiang. Using 875 words from the Yi, and 772 from the Lisu, the ethnographers compared the similarities between these two languages to the Shuitian and found that the Yi shared 52% similarity while the Lisu shared 48% similarity. This was viewed as sufficient enough to consider the Shuitian, Yi, and Lisu as belonging to a single 民族, “ethnicity”, and this large group of 民族, in what is today known as the Yi, came to include other groups initially declared as separate, including the Boluo, Bowa, Liming, and Luo, to name a few.

What this re-imagining of 民族 reveals in the categorization of the PRC’s ethnic minorities is, again, the continuing project of reinventing 民族 based on the ideologies of those in power. In this case, with the CCP having empowered ethnographers with the task of designating and defining the minorities, the commonality of “language” was used in absence of shared territory, economic life, and/or culture. In an ironic twist with half a century of lacking a concrete definition for 民族 within the Chinese language, language became the means by which an individual or group became designated as a particular 民族. This reinforces the power that language has had in China and how it has been used to create unity where unity is lacking. If anything, this reflects the ideology of the CCP in its ongoing struggle to integrate the territory of

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107 Ibid, 113.

108 Ibid, 118. Well over 30 groups that initially identified themselves as a separate 民族 became integrated with the Yi as a conclusion of the research performed by the ethnographers in the Ethnic Classification Project.
the PRC through the promotion of Modern Standard Mandarin. Similar to enforcing the
categorization of a 民族 on different, smaller groups in the creation of a larger 少数民族, the
CCP has also enacted laws for the spread of Putonghua among minorities, which in some cases
threatens the survival of the 少数民族 languages and cultures.
Chapter 3
The Constitutional Rights of the Ethnic Minorities and Spread of Putonghua

The Constitution vs. the Law

In September of 1949, the Chinese Communist party held the first meeting of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. During this conference, representatives devised the Common Program, which acted as a provisional constitution until the creation of the first constitution in 1954. Regarding the ethnic minorities of the PRC, the Common Program guaranteed their rights in Article 50 by declaring, “All nationalities within the boundaries of the People’s Republic of China are equal”. Protection of the preservation of minority languages was also stipulated in Article 53, “All national minorities shall have freedom to develop their dialects and languages, to preserve or reform their traditions, customs and religious beliefs”. In areas where minorities were concentrated, Article 51 stated that “various kinds of autonomy organizations of the different nationalities shall be set up according to the size of the respective populations and regions.” This became the backdrop on which the autonomous areas of the PRC were founded, having established the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in 1955, the Tibetan and Ningxia Regions in 1956, and the Zhuang Autonomous Region in 1958. The Mongolian Autonomous Region, which makes up what is known as Inner Mongolia, had been

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110 Article 53 in Ibid.

111 Article 51 in Ibid.
allotted its autonomy in 1947, prior to the establishment of the PRC. Today, these make up the 5 autonomous regions of the PRC, along with 30 prefectures, 120 counties, and 1 252 xiang.\textsuperscript{112}

The first constitution of the People’s Republic of China was passed in 1954. This constitution kept many of the articles proposed in the Common Program, including Articles 50, 51, and 53,\textsuperscript{113} and also added new Articles that favored the maintenance of minority languages in their autonomous areas. Article 71 guaranteed that government authorities in autonomous regions, prefectures and counties employ the commonly used minority language within the area\textsuperscript{114} while Article 77 declared that minorities have the right to use their native language in court proceedings and in cases where the court is unfamiliar with the language, a translation should be provided.\textsuperscript{115} To ensure proper representation of minorities in government, the General Programme of the People’s Republic of China for the Implementation of Regional Autonomy for Nationalities, passed in 1952, mentions in Article 12 that the government in autonomous areas would be made up of an “appropriate number of members from other national minorities.”\textsuperscript{116}

At face value, these early policies appeared quite liberal with the constitutional guarantee of the preservation of minorities’ languages and cultures providing both equality of the minorities’ languages with Putonghua and equality among all minzu. Enthusiasm for the newly

\textsuperscript{112} Minglang Zhou, \textit{Multilingualism in China: The Politics of Writing Reforms for Minority Languages 1949-2002} (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2003), 16-19. In descending order based on population size, regions make up the largest demographic and next are the prefectures, then the counties (roughly composing of a population between 100 000 to a million), and finally the xiang (population between 20 000 to 50 000).


\textsuperscript{114} Article 71 in Ibid.

\textsuperscript{115} Article 77 in Ibid.

created state, as well as practical approaches to guaranteeing complete integration of the PRC’s borderland frontier, dictated the rhetoric behind these early policies. As the first census of the PRC revealed, China’s population was 578 million people: 543 million identified themselves as “Han”, or 93.94%, while another 34.01 million, or 5.89%, identified with one of the remaining 39 ethnic groups. The remaining 900,000, or 0.17%, were unrecognized. This minority population of approximately 35 million people, who occupied 60% of China’s territory, was primarily situated in the regions that were north, northwest, and southwest in the PRC with some exceptions applying, such as the Yanbian Korean prefecture located in the northeast. Linguistic demographics also reveals the necessity of implementing policies that favored equality of minority languages with less than 20% of the minority population identified as capable of speaking or understanding Chinese in 1949, a number that still remained relatively low a decade later when it reached about 25%.

Although it is true that minorities experienced more autonomy in the first decade of the establishment of the PRC, implementation of the basic rights of the ethnic minorities as stipulated by the constitution has not always been respected at the state level. The central government’s minority language policy has undergone three periods of adjustment, shaped by the political atmosphere at the time. The first of these periods, identified by Minglang Zhou as the first pluralistic stage (1949-1957) was dominated by accommodationist practices in regards to the minorities. The second stage (1958-1977) occurred during the height of political revolutions in China and saw a reverse-course in policy where the CCP pushed for assimilation

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117 Statistics provided by Qingsheng Zhou, “Writing Creation and Nation Establishment”, Language Policy in the People’s Republic of China: Theory and Practice Since 1949, eds. Minglang Zhou and Hongkai Sun (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 55-6. It was noted earlier that the government was still in the process of identifying ethnic groups. The process of ethnic identification continued for the next few decades with the last ethnic group, known as the Jino, receiving official recognition in 1979.

118 M. Zhou, Multilingualism, 27.
of all minorities, coined by Zhou as the monopolistic stage. The final stage (1978-current), or the second pluralistic stage, involved a return of policies that favored the promotion of minority languages but also a revised agenda to push bilingual policy in the spread of Putonghua. During these periods, the Constitution was also revised in order to implement these policies.

In the first pluralistic stage, the central government enacted these laws to protect the rights of minorities and also actively promoted the minority languages. The accommodationism practiced by the state opened opportunities for minorities to seek official 民族 status and also request assistance in the creation of a written script for languages that lacked a unified writing system. It was during this period that the Zhuang script was created and that many others began their experimental stages. Many officials also acknowledged the underdevelopment of the regions occupied by the minorities and of their cultures and languages, with “Han chauvinism” often being the target. It was not uncommon for blame to shift to the recently ousted GMD party whose own minority policies, as discussed earlier, were accused of favoring “Han chauvinism” through their integrationist policies and claims of one unified race. Political figures such as Zhou Enlai were adamant about respecting the minorities’ cultures and “educating” the Han people so as to avoid all forms of “Han chauvinism.”

It is also worth noting that the spread of Putonghua in minority communities did not appear to be high on the agenda at this time. This is not to say that the promotion of Putonghua as the lingua franca of the PRC was not a top priority of the early CCP government. However, historical contexts must be taken into account. The project to simplify Chinese characters began in 1950 and was not completed until 1956. Even upon its completion, the list of 2 236 simplified

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119 Ibid, 36-7.
characters was not published until 1964, a list that was later republished and revised in October 1986.\textsuperscript{121} The pressure to include minorities and their territories into the People’s Republic of China as peacefully as possible, as well as the absence of a reformed Chinese script to promote, most likely is what resulted in the more open accommodationist practices that dictated minority language policy in the 1950s.

This period of accommodation was short-lived as China entered into its monopolistic phase in 1958. Early in 1958, Mao Zedong began his Great Leap Forward campaign (1958-1961) and this essentially halted the progress of writing reform plans for minority languages. While the Culture and Education Department of the State Commission on Nationalities Affairs acknowledged that minorities had the right to use and develop their own writing systems, they argued that minorities must also consider the prosperity of the community in the process of unification. Thus, for the next two decades, minority scripts were degraded in status and those that were still in use were revised and modeled after Pinyin.\textsuperscript{122} The intention of the government was to promote a Chinese monopolistic language policy that would accelerate the assimilation of all minorities with the nation. The use of writing systems modeled after pinyin, then, was deemed a means to make the learning of Chinese easier for these groups.

The largest backlash for this new policy came from the Muslim communities in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. In as early as 1959, a Roman-based script was created to replace the Arabic script used by the Uygurs and Kazaks in Xinjiang. This proposal was approved by 1960


\textsuperscript{122} M. Zhou, \textit{Multilingualism}, 111-2.
and immediately implemented.\textsuperscript{123} The script began its use in schools and was to spread to the wider community but interruption of schools, due to the Cultural Revolution in 1966, resulted in few learning and mastering the new script. The attempt to assimilate the Muslims through language was made even more apparent in 1960 when Xinjiang also passed a new policy declaring Putonghua a major subject for minority middle schools.\textsuperscript{124} These assimilationist policies remained until the 1980s, when the failure of the new Uygur script became apparent and protests resulted in the reinstating of the old Arabic script. The bilingual policy, however, still remains in effect.

The revision of the Constitution in 1975 also introduced a dramatic reduction in the rights of ethnic minorities. Whereas Article 3 guaranteed the minorities the right to exercise regional autonomy, which are inalienable parts of China, the right to use and develop their own languages, and also the equality of all nationalities\textsuperscript{125}, Article 4 of the revised 1975 constitution mentions the equality of all nationalities and that the minorities may freely use their own languages. The right to develop their languages had been removed and a new clause in the article declared that the state is against “big nation chauvinism” and “local nationalism.” Articles 71 and 77, the right for minorities to use their languages in government and in court, had been removed completely.\textsuperscript{126}

A large part of the rhetoric dictating the treatment of minorities came from the central state and its revisiting of the nationality question and class struggle. As China entered into the


\textsuperscript{124} Ibid, 112.

\textsuperscript{125} Article 3 in PRC, “Xianfa,” 1954.

Cultural Revolution, the nationality question was deemed a “class question”,\textsuperscript{127} and this fell in line with the Stalinist theory that in the process of communism, “nations are generally expected to converge into a single community of people”.\textsuperscript{128} Taken from the micro-level, the acceleration of the communist process was expected to be realized through the assimilation of the minorities by eliminating ethnic and linguistic differences. Or, as Minglang Zhou puts it, “the accommodation of ethnic and linguistic diversity is only a means, whereas ethnic and linguistic integration is the true end.”\textsuperscript{129}

During this period, reactions against the state’s reverse-course policies were met with hostility and violence. Those who attempted to speak out were accused of “local nationalism”, being “anti-Mao”, or supporting policy that threatened the unity of the nation. One of the most high profile victims of such accusations, Li Weihan, then Director of the Department of United Front Work for the CCP Central Committee and an advocate for implementing minority policies in line with constitutional rights, was publicly disgraced and removed from the government in 1964. The work that he promoted was said to be against socialism and those in government who supported and implemented his policies also went down with him.\textsuperscript{130} Given the hostile environment, efforts to challenge the central government were often stifled before they began and this only aided in the continued violation of minorities and their linguistic rights until after Mao Zedong’s death in 1976.


\textsuperscript{128} M. Zhou, \textit{Multilingualism}, 41.


\textsuperscript{130} M. Zhou, \textit{Multilingualism}, 74.
With the end of the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong’s death, and the downfall of the “Gang of Four”, the government entered into the third period of minority language policy known as the second pluralistic stage, or the stage of bilingual policy, and much of this rhetoric that began in the 1980s currently dictates the state’s attitude towards minority languages. Once Deng Xiaoping came into power in 1978, the central government began reversing monopolistic policies from the previous era and reinstated the constitutional rights of the minorities. The 1978 constitution returned most of these rights, with the exception of Article 77 that did not make its return to the constitution until its next revision in 1982.\(^{131}\)

What was unique about the 1982 constitution was not the return of these rights, however. It was a clause that appeared in Article 19, declaring, “The state will spread nationwide the common use of Putonghua.”\(^{132}\) Although it was decided in the 1950s that Putonghua would be the lingua franca of the nation, this was the first time that such an endeavor appeared within the Constitution and this article has survived all previous constitutional revisions since appearing in the most recent revision in 2004 as part of Article 19.\(^{133}\) With the return of minorities’ rights in the 1980s and this new clause on the promotion of Putonghua, the policy of promoting bilingualism came into full effect and more vigorous efforts to create national consciousness by uniting the nation through a common lingua franca have dictated the policy of central authorities since.

In the start of this period, most likely due to the political backlash, the bilingual policy of the 1980s heavily favored development and promotion of the minorities’ own languages over


that of Putonghua. For example, in the PRC’s Regional Autonomy Law for Minority Nationalities, passed in 1984, Article 10 guarantees the freedom of minorities to use and develop their own languages.\(^{134}\) Article 36 states that the government, “shall decide on the plans for the development of education in these areas, on the establishment of various kinds of schools at different levels, on their educational system, forms, curricula, the language used in instruction and enrollment procedures.”\(^{135}\) Article 49 in this same document encourages the multilingualism of government cadres in autonomous areas, particularly those of Han origin who manage to learn the languages spoken by the local minorities. It goes on to promise that, “Awards should be given to state functionaries in national autonomous areas who can use skillfully two or more spoken or written languages that are commonly used in the locality.”\(^{136}\) The mention of Putonghua occurs only twice in this document: in Article 37, where it mentions that schools will begin teaching Putonghua in order to “popularize” the language. However, that same article also encourages that textbooks be printed in the local language in as many areas of study as possible.\(^{137}\) The second appearance of Putonghua is in Article 49, which encourages general multilingualism of all cadres, Han or minority.\(^{138}\) Overall, although bilingualism is promoted, this document still leaned more in favor of minorities and the promotion of their languages. Revision of the law in 2001 also kept intact each of these articles.\(^{139}\)

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\(^{135}\) Article 36 in Ibid.

\(^{136}\) Article 49 in Ibid.

\(^{137}\) Article 37 in Ibid.

\(^{138}\) Article 49 in Ibid.

In 2001, the government of the PRC passed a new law known as The Law of the National Commonly Used Language and Script of the PRC and the constitutionality of this law in respect to the rights of minorities has been questioned by many scholars.\textsuperscript{140} The 3 sections and 28 articles of the law deal with in its entirety the means of promoting Putonghua as a standard spoken language, with simplified characters as the standard script, and warning for violations of this law in the process of establishing national unity. Article 1 declares that the law was formulated, “in accordance with the constitution.”\textsuperscript{141} Article 3 is very similar to Article 19 of the constitution, declaring that the state will promote Putonghua and simplified Chinese characters.\textsuperscript{142} Article 4 is interesting in that it states that the learning of the nationally used language and script is a citizen’s right. It goes on to also mention that the state will be active in supplying the conditions for citizens to learn the national language that that measures will be taken to ensure that even at the local levels, the national language is promoted and put into practice.\textsuperscript{143} While Article 8 mentions that minorities may use and develop their own languages, as stipulated by the Constitution and the Regional Autonomy Law, Article 27 declares, “Those who violate the regulation of this law, interfering with others’ study and use of the national commonly used language and script, will be ordered to make timely corrections and given warnings by the relevant administrative offices.”

Unlike the earlier bilingual policy in the 1980s, the current trend is to actively promote the standardization of Chinese in order to eventually eliminate cultural and linguistic diversities.

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\textsuperscript{140} See Rohsenow’s “Fifty Years of Script Reform” and M. Zhou “Equality and Inequality”.


\textsuperscript{142} Article 3 in Ibid. As mentioned earlier, Article 19 of the constitution declares, “The state will spread nationwide the common use of Putonghua.” The only difference between these two is that the language law clarifies use of simplified Chinese characters as well within the article.

\textsuperscript{143} Article 4 in Ibid.
and completely integrate all citizens within the nation. This language law still remains active and the pressure for the state to promote national unity is now more pressing than ever with China emerging as a global power in the 21st century. Article 5 of the Language Law reflects this pressing need, stating, “The use of the national commonly used language and script shall be beneficial to maintaining national sovereignty and dignity, be beneficial to national integrity and unity, and be beneficial to the growth of socialist material and spiritual civilization.” Since the time of the PRC’s promulgation, when the CCP actively insisted on the creation of a multi-minzu state, the Social Darwinist theories on minzu from the early 20th century have prevailed in CCP approaches to the handling of the minorities. The assumption that eventual integration will occur through the superiority of the Han culture is very prevalent in the advancing of a standard language. As Minglang Zhou states, “language is a medium through which ethnicities can be thoroughly expressed, and in return ethnicity supports the maintenance of a language from which it seeks full expression.”

This ethnicity is not Zhuang. It is not Manchu, Dai, Mongol, Korean, or even Tibetan. This ethnicity, which can fully be expressed through language, is 中华民族, or “citizen of the Chinese nation.” In 1997, at a forum held by the State Commission on Nationalities Affairs, it was officially decided that the ambiguity of 民族 in translation would be rectified by eliminating its translation of “nationality” in English to that of “ethnic group”. The purpose of this was to avoid the connotation of “nationality” in English, which would imply not belonging to the state or being outside of the state in the case of the 少数民族, i.e. “minority nationalities”. The department was thus renamed the State Commission of Ethnic Affairs.144 This again reflects ideology of the state as it entered into the 21st century. The rendering of 民族 as “ethnic group,”

144 M. Zhou, Multilingualism, 94.
i.e. ethnicity, also contributes to a translation of 中华民族 that is more inclusive: “Chinese ethnicity”. This reveals the end goal of this language policy: to eventually integrate all into one unified, Chinese nation.

As an evaluation of the progress that the state has had in promoting the national language, the Chinese Language Use Survey was conducted in December 2004. The results of the survey revealed that 53.06% of the population can communicate in Putonghua, while a total of 86.38% of the population can communicate in a Chinese dialect. Of the respondents, only 5.46% can speak a recognized minority language.\textsuperscript{145} This survey was conducted over 6 years with more than 470 000 respondents in 31 different provinces and autonomous areas. Results found a higher correlation of Mandarin speakers among the younger generations and those with a higher education, with a reported 87% of college graduates able to speak in Mandarin\textsuperscript{146} and around 70% of respondents under 29 years of age able to communicate in Putonghua.\textsuperscript{147}

The effort to create unity is a project to recreate identity, to essentially replace the identity of the ethnic minority with that of a recognized Chinese identity. The results of this survey may appear weak in terms of successfully achieving integration but a closer look at population statistics will reveal another story. Assuming that rates remained relatively the same as they had in terms of speakers capable of communicating in a recognized minority dialect in 2004, using the 2010 census results reveals that of the 113 742 211 minorities who make up 8.49% of China’s total population, only 73 149 960 of them are capable of using one of the


recognized minority dialects, or 5.46% of the total 1 339 724 852 population reported in the 2010 census. This would mean that the remaining 40 592 251 minorities, or 35.69% of the minority population, would be using Chinese only as a means of communication. Seeing as 95.25% of the people surveyed in 2004 were able to use standard Chinese to write,\textsuperscript{148} this would also mean that at least 0.71% of the total population identified as capable of communicating in a minority language also can write in Chinese even if they were not deemed capable of communicating in Chinese, or 9 509 494 people (13% of the 73 149 960 people capable of communicating in a recognized minority language, as hypothesized based on the 2010 census results).

The problem with even this hypothesis, however, is that it is being generous by assuming that levels of minority language communication have remained the same. Due to the lack of data, assuming that the 73 million who can communicate in a recognized minority language are all non-Han who make up the other 55 ethnicities is also too generous. No doubt, a small number of the 73 million are most likely Han Chinese who have learned, either due to working in government or through close proximity to minorities, a minority language. Unfortunately, these specific numbers are not available. This would then make the number of minorities who communicate in Chinese only, a bit larger than the proposed 40.59 million, or 35.69% of the minority population. Regardless, even if these numbers provided a good approximation, the level of language loss among minorities has increased since the 1950s, when only a reported 25% of the minority population could communicate in a Chinese dialect. Again, even this percentile fails to acknowledge if this 25% accounted for Chinese only, Chinese and a minority language, or any other form of variation.

As revealing as correlating the little data available may be in analyzing the minority population and their means of communication, a more in-depth analysis will provide a better critique on how the language policy of the central government has affected the minority populations and restructured the sense of identity in their communities.

The Case of the Zhuang and the Tujia

The Zhuang community was officially recognized in the first census performed under the new PRC government in 1953. With a population of 6,864,585, or 1.19% of the PRC’s reported 578 million, the Zhuang made up the largest minority. To this day, they are still the largest recognized minority in China, with a population that exceeds over 16 million, or 1.23% of the PRC’s total population of 1,295,330,000 in 2000. Although they initially made up approximately 20.19% of China’s minority population of 34 million in 1953, the decrease in their representation to 15.22% of the minority population in 2000 is attributed to the CCP’s continued re-evaluation of classification since the first classification project in the 1950s. A comparison of Zhuang population growth to that of the overall minority population can be viewed in Figure 1.

149 M. Zhou, Multilingualism, 12-3.
Similar to many of China’s other ethnic minorities, the Zhuang were without a unified, written script at the time of their recognition and also lacked a sense of being “Zhuang” prior to the classification efforts of the 1950s. Historically, the relationship between the Zhuang and the Han was defined by the Confucian constructions of 夷 and 华夏, or “barbarians” and “honorable Chinese” respectively. The belief in the superiority and virtue of the Chinese culture created general distinctions that pitted everyone who was not Han into the grouping of “barbarian”. As noted earlier, this resulted in the negative connotations of the construction of the character used to identify the Zhuang, 獷, and the CCP later changing it the ideologically neutral 壮.

Figure 1: A comparison of Zhuang population growth with the overall population of legally recognized minorities from 1953 to 2000.

Lacking any central unity, the Zhuang self-identified with their specific zhixi, or branches. Even today, many continue to do so under clan names such as Sha, Nong, or Tu. It is also not uncommon for Zhuang from one clan, say the Nong, to consider Zhuang of a separate
clan, i.e. the Tu, to be of a completely different ethnicity.\textsuperscript{154} To complicate the issue of Zhuang identity, many of the clans listed as subgroups dress differently and are culturally differentiated from other Zhuang. Linguistically, the Zhuang language contains many dialects as well, with the main northern and southern dialects being mutually unintelligible.\textsuperscript{155}

With a history of self-identifying from those viewed as culturally and linguistically different, the Zhuang identity promoted by the PRC since the 1950s looks dramatically different from how any of the identified Zhuang perceived it. As the process of classification used language as the primary link in identifying those of a related 民族, language was again used by the government in the 1950s in order to promote and justify classification, even in cases where the mutual unintelligibility and lack of interaction between subgroups signified a lack of ethnic consciousness. In order to properly promote ethnic consciousness where it did not exist, the creation of a unified writing system for the Zhuang was viewed as a means to solving any potential backlash from this method of classification. Since this was in the period when the PRC was more concerned with securing its borders and accommodating the different 民族, creating ethnic consciousness among the “Zhuang” (located primarily in the southern border provinces of Yunnan and Guangxi), and defining their relationship to the state, was a top priority for the CCP.

The creation of a writing system, however, was not without its problems. The most logical approach to create two distinct systems, for both the north and the southern dialects, was ultimately rejected in 1955 because it would obstruct communication and unity among the Zhuang.\textsuperscript{156} A system based on the northern Wuming pronunciation, using Roman letters to bring

\textsuperscript{154} Kaup, 38.

\textsuperscript{155} M. Zhou, \textit{Multilingualism}, 251.

the script closer to pinyin, was eventually created and this remains the standard Zhuang script. But differentiation between north and southern dialects later resulted in the creation of 2 more vernacular Zhuang scripts: one based on the Yanguang subdialect in Wenshan Prefecture, Yunnan; another on the Qiubei subdialect in Wenshan, a subdialect of the northern dialect. Both were created in 1984 and neither has achieved semiofficial status. To this day, the Zhuang fail to have a unified script that consolidates the differences between dialects.

The point to be made is the lack of cultural and linguistic unity and its impact on the Zhuang identity. If anything, this lack of unity has played well into the integration of the Zhuang into a larger, Chinese identity. With bilingual education being pushed in Zhuang communities from the 1980s, standard Chinese has become the language of social mobility and the appeal of learning a language that is nationally promoted, over a language that lacks even a unified writing system, has not been lost on the Zhuang. Quanxi Huang and Xuliang Li, both ethnic Zhuang scholars note that, “if members of minorities hope to receive a better higher education and broaden their opportunities for employment, they must have a good mastery of Chinese.” They go on to mention the importance of Chinese and also developing their own native culture but strongly advise that “over-emphasizing the social role of the Zhuang language may degenerate into extreme ethnic nationalism.” Overall, their account of Zhuang development panders to the idea of identity and unity being tied to the lingua franca, Putonghua. To be incorporated into the 中华民族, Chinese identity must come first, its language must be prioritized, and it must replace, or at least make secondary, ethnic consciousness that deviates from the centre. The results of this policy being put into practice can already be seen, particularly among the urban dwelling Zhuang

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157 M. Zhou, Multilingualism, 256-8.
158 Li and Huang, 254.
who either have not bothered to learn the Zhuang language, or in cases where some know it, refuse to speak it and teach it to their children.\textsuperscript{159}

Comparatively, the Tujia community in the PRC also lacks a centralized identity. Unrecognized after the first classification project was conducted, “Tujia” was not an ethnic category until the second census was administered in 1964, where their numbers were reportedly 524,755\textsuperscript{160} or 0.07\% of the population of 694 million. Their population more than quintupled in 1982, representing 2,836,814\textsuperscript{161} of the 1 billion Chinese citizens\textsuperscript{162}, or 0.28\% of the overall population at an 81\% growth rate. To date, they still remain one of the largest ethnic groups in China, making up 8 million,\textsuperscript{163} or 0.62\%, of the population of 1,295,330,000 in 2000. In a period of less than 40 years, the numbers indicate extreme growth rate, with the Tujia achieving a population size now 16 times higher than the numbers reported in the 1964 census. A comparison of the growth rate of the Tujia to the overall population is represented in Figure 2.\textsuperscript{164} The explanation for this high growth rate is, not surprisingly, linked to the concept of “Tujia”.

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\textsuperscript{159} Kaup, 177.
\textsuperscript{160} M. Zhou, \textit{Multilingualism}, 12-3.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid, 12-3.
\textsuperscript{164} All data provided from The Government of the PRC, \textit{Zonghua Renmin Gongheguo Guojia Tongji Ju}, \url{http://www.stats.gov.cn/}; accessed 22 August 2011. For specific data charts, please refer to the sources listed in the Bibliography. See also M. Zhou, \textit{Multilingualism}, 12-3.
\end{flushright}
Figure 2: A comparison of the Tujia “growth” rate with that of the PRC’s overall population growth rate. The dramatic increases in Tujia over the later decades is the result of the Tujia’s late recognition under the new government and the fluidity of Tujia identity.

In Chinese, Tujia is written with the characters 土家: 土, which means “earth, land”, and 家, “family, home”. Prior to the first classification project in the 1950s, the expression 土家, or “local families,” was often contrasted to the 客家, “outsiders,” in Tujia areas. Located primarily in the southern provinces of Hunan, Hubei, Chongqing, and Guizhou, even in communities with the largest Tujia presence, these areas were still Han dominated, so much so that many Tujia spoke a dialect of Chinese as their main language. Since many of the “Tujia” also intermarried with the “Han”, many families later recognized as Tujia identified as Han in the first census due to having Han patrilineal ancestry.\footnote{Melissa J. Brown, “Local Government Agency: Manipulating Tujia Identity,” Modern China, Vol. 28, No. 3 (July, 2002), 366.} In the areas dominated by Han where the Tujia and Han
coexisted, this then resulted in Tujia identifying with the Han culture because they were sharing the same cultural practices and language.

The recognition of a separate Tujia identity, however, made its way into the census a decade later based on the fact that in remote communities, Tujia speak a language that is distinctly different from Chinese. Similar to the Zhuang, the Tujia language also did not have a written script and the late recognition of Tujia, particularly at a time when China adopted a strict integrationist policy, delayed any attempts to create a Tujia script until the 1980s. This largely contributed to language loss by the time Deng Xiaoping implemented policies that improved economic growth and access to education, with reportedly only 200,000 out of the 5.7 million Tujia in 1990 being able to speak the Tujia language.\(^{166}\)

With many of the Tujia already well integrated into the Han culture, methods of identification relied heavily on ancestral background and this process of re-identifying accounted for the rapid rise in growth rates in 1982 and 1990. In her analysis of Enshi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture in Hubei, created in 1983, Melissa Brown poses that the creation of the prefecture was to bring in development funds from the central government.\(^{167}\) With virtually nothing to distinguish Tujia from Han culturally or linguistically in the prefecture, officials relied on surnames to reclassify citizens, sometimes without the knowledge of the individuals being reclassified.\(^{168}\) The benefits of being an autonomous prefecture for economic development drove officials to carefully reclassify the population, very often to the disgruntlement of citizens who

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\(^{167}\) Brown, 365.

\(^{168}\) Ibid, 388.
lacked any Tujia consciousness and preferred the prestige of being identified as Han.\textsuperscript{169} However, ethnic minorities also receive personal benefits and it is not uncommon today for Han in the prefecture to change their classification from Han to Tujia, a process made available due to matrilineal Tujia heritage, in order to give them an advantage when applying for university or other social benefits. It should be noted that these individuals still personally identify as “Han”, despite being legally recognized as “Tujia”.\textsuperscript{170}

Ethnic recognition for development funds is not unheard of. Another scholar interested in ethnic consciousness, Chih-yu Shih, reported his experience conducting research at an experimental school in Jishou city, located within the Xiangxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture in Hunan province. The school is made up of 90% Tujia students, the rest Miao, and receives funding for its ethnic status. At the school, students do not speak in Tujia and the faculty discourages use of the language since “the function of education is to make students competitive in mainstream society, where Tujia is not spoken.”\textsuperscript{171} Similar to the creation of the Enshi Autonomous Prefecture, this school is not actively promoting ethnic identity but uses the status of its students to gain funding from its prefecture’s Education Department.

The common thread that links these separate environments of Tujia is lack of a distinct and unified cultural heritage and absence of a distinct commonly spoken language. As Minglang Zhou notes in his study of the Tujia, “Language and ethnicity are closely related, particularly when language maintenance and loss are concerned.”\textsuperscript{172} This provides a more severe case than the Zhuang where the problem with cultural identification for the Tujia is not merely

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid, 384.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid, 369.
\textsuperscript{172} M. Zhou, “Majority language spread”, 340.
disagreement with the many subgroups comprising the Tujia but a history of integration with the Han to the point that Tujia in Han dominated areas practice the same culture and speak the same language. But the problem is not that the Tujia display apathy in maintaining their language and culture but again links back to the issue of ethnic consciousness. In this case, identity was constructed to aid the state in development by purporting “a concept of ethnicity that embraces imagined blood kinship.”\textsuperscript{173} Without a history of centralized cultural identification that posed any threat to the state, allotting Tujia recognition, or in this case creating it, offered no political repercussions and many economic gains.

Thus, from the policies dating back to the beginning of Deng Xiaoping’s movement towards economic reform, we see once again how ethnic consciousness has become a secondary classification from the state in wake of the promotion of Putonghua as the lingua franca and a restructuring of identity to promote 中华民族 . “The most convenient policy target for the government is thus an ethnic minority not too conscious of its identity, with an obscure cultural dimension to this identity.”\textsuperscript{174} Although the Zhuang and Tujia represent only 2 of the PRC’s 55 recognized minorities, comprising of 22.64% of the overall population of 106 million minorities in 2000,\textsuperscript{175} this overview has revealed the superficial, in some cases artificial, categorization of “ethnicity” in China. With the definition of 民族 largely being influenced by linguistic variations, the multi-minzu state is quickly becoming a mono-minzu nation and the imagined borders of this limited, sovereign community will soon comprise of a mono-linguistic, Chinese speaking中华民族.

\textsuperscript{173} Shih, 75.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid, 78.
\textsuperscript{175} Statistic from PRC, “Communiqué on Major Figures.”
Conclusion

From the time of China’s first unification in 221 BCE to now, standardization of language has been used as a means to unify the empire and restructure relations between citizens and the state through processes of identification. Historically, identity was based on whether one spoke and practiced the Han culture and all others who failed to integrate into this system were labelled 夷, “barbarians”. But classification and terminologies have also been restructured depending on the political ideology of those in power. Examples of this included the rhetoric of the Qing dynasts, who would apply the term 中国之人, “People of the Chinese Empire” inclusively to refer to everyone within the borders of the empire, from the Uygurs in Xinjiang to the Mongols in the north. In this case, redefining the term to be more inclusive served as a method to justify the Manchu claim to the kingdom since Manchu were also 中国之人.

This rethinking of who the 中国之人 were later manifested itself into the concept of a multi-minzu state, a 中华民族 composed of 56 different ethnicities, after half a century of ideological disputes over what is a 民族 and later, who the different 民族 were. Although ultimately the Japanese, GMD, and CCP preached a commonality, that of blood, as a means to unify all 民族 under a new state/empire, differing interpretations of race and culture and the relationship of the numerous ethnic groups to the state aided the CCP as the party survived the Pacific War, and later prevailed in the civil war, to become the leaders of the new Chinese state. Their understanding of 民族, strongly tied to language, became the means by which the ethnic minorities of China were classified and identified as citizens of the state.

Yet, whereas the state began by accommodating the 民族, it also led a state-level project to simplify the Chinese language in the creation of a lingua franca in the 1950s. The restructuring
of ideological concepts such as 帝，also led the violence in movements such as the Cultural Revolution, where ideology within language played a key role in creating a nation unified against a common enemy, a Putonghua speaking 中华民族 willing to fight imperialism and seeking liberation. From this desire for unity, the policies that have dictated the practices of the government since the 1980s, even under this overarching goal of “equality” in bilingual language learning, have become more and more integrationist as the government has actively promoted the spread of Putonghua often at the expense of the constitutionally protected minority languages. The unconstitutionality of the 2001 Language Law is heatedly debated among scholars, with Minglang Zhou noting that the success of a planned language comes at the expense of minority languages and the ethnicities of their speakers.  

Ethnicity in China has been defined by language. If ethnic identity is linked to language, the spread of Putonghua promotes a different identity, a 中华民族: a national identity, a “member of the Chinese nation”, reinvented through the national language. Ethnic classification has become secondary, is some cases “artificial” even, in order to promote a national identity, a national consciousness that transcends historical cultural segregations and unifies all members within the state. As China continues on its path to become an economic leader, its image of “nation” will also continue to infiltrate its multiple ethnicities, creating a national identity, a nationally conscious 中华民族, at the expense of its diversities.

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