Lessons in Being Chinese

Minority Education and Ethnic Identity in Southwest China

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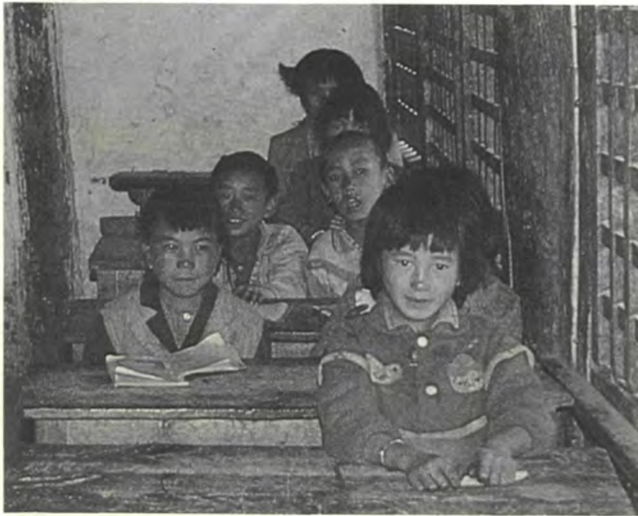

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Introduction

> As a formal institution of socialization, education is necessarily also co-responsible for and engaged in sociocultural socialization, i.e., in socialization for ethnic membership and for ethnic consciousness. The elementary school's social studies curriculum, with its emphasis on national history, civics and geography, not to mention its rituals (salutes to the flag, patriotic assembly programs and commemorations of national holidays and great leaders), is essentially an explicit and implicit course in mainstream ethnic socialization or resocialization. Mainstream education is also an arena for the discussion and explication of values and moral issues, of national virtues and dilemmas, of national accomplishments and shortcomings, of supra-national dedication, aspiration and concern.
>
> —Joshua A. Fishman
>
> *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective*

Since the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), many Chinese leaders and intellectuals have regarded institutionalized education as a means of integrating, controlling, and civilizing the various peoples who inhabit the border or peripheral regions of what was the empire, then the Republic, and now is the People's Republic of China (PRC). Especially since the reform period in the 1980s, the Chinese government has paid increasing attention to development of education among the peoples now officially classified as non-Han, the so-called minority ethnic groups (*shaoshu minzu*). In spite of government attempts to spread school education after 1949, many minority areas are still characterized by low levels of school enrollment and educational attainment. Strengthened school education among the non-Han peoples living in the vast border regions of China is now put forward as the precondition for successful

modernization of their economy. No less significant is the belief that mass education is the most efficient and extensive medium for promoting, and ultimately ensuring, integration of ethnic minorities into the Chinese state. Via the state-controlled educational system, the government seeks to transmit the message of national commitment, love of the ruling Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and cultural homogeneity. Therefore, patriotic education (*aiguozhuyi jiaoyu*) is especially high on the state's agenda for non-Han peoples living in the border areas. It preaches the common history of all ethnic groups within China since the legendary Yellow Emperor, and the common political, economic, and cultural interests of all people in the PRC. Thus, it promotes the idea of one "Chinese nation" (*Zhonghua minzu*), as a common denominator for all fifty-six officially recognized *minzu* ("nationalities").[1]

Chinese state education attempts to achieve a high degree of cultural and political homogenization for several reasons: to make communication possible among different parts of the country, to ensure the integration of peripheral areas into the Chinese state, to promote patriotism and loyalty to the CCP, and, in a broader sense, to "improve the quality" of or to "civilize" the presumably more "backward" parts of the population. These include most of the minority *minzu*, whose languages, cultural practices, and economic life are often described in Chinese media and publications as obstructing the development and modernization of the areas they inhabit. *Lessons in Being Chinese* explores how Chinese education attempts to mainstream ethnic minorities with regard to language, religion, interpretation of history, and, consequently, ethnic identification. Through the educational system powerful interpretations of what it means and implies to belong to a minority *minzu* in China are transmitted as facts beyond dispute. The national school system's representations of ethnic entities and ethnicities in China are not open to discussion or alternative interpretation in the classroom. Minority students therefore must relate to, consider, or in other ways take into account these powerful representations of themselves. My main focus is on these repre-

1. Throughout the text I use the term *minzu* rather than the standard PRC translation "nationalities" in reference to China's fifty-six officially recognized ethnic groups, including the Han and the fifty-five minorities. However, the term *minzu* in China is often used to imply only the minority *minzu* (*shaoshu minzu*). In such cases I translate *minzu* as "minority" (e.g., "minority education" [*minzu jiaoyu*] and "minority school" [*minzu xuexiao*]).

sentations and on the *responses* that state education produces in terms of ethnic identification: the degree to which education succeeds in forming national sentiment and eliminating or reducing ethnicity, and *why* different people respond the way they do. I have asked, and attempt to answer, three main questions: What do minority students in China learn about themselves as members of an ethnic group during their education? Why does standardized education, aimed at achieving a high degree of cultural homogenization, produce profoundly different reactions in terms of ethnic identity among different ethnic groups? And what role does education then actually play in directing and forming ethnic and national identities? I argue that the Chinese government's and most educators' belief in the school as an institution capable of controlling the transformation of minorities' cultural values and eliminating ethnic identities is exaggerated. For most ethnic minorities in China, school education is entirely based upon Chinese language and history. It leaves no room for the transmission of cultural values that might contradict the state's interpretation of nationalism, atheism, and the common interests of multiethnic China. However, by denying the significance of the minorities' own languages, histories, religions, and cultural values, education sometimes strengthens focus on ethnic identity.

The central and provincial governments in China have suggested and implemented various methods to increase school attendance and accomplish basic compulsory education among the minority *minzu,* such as establishment of special (mostly boarding) minority schools, experiments with bilingual education, introduction of locally edited teaching materials, and easier access for non-Han students to higher education. Very often, though, government proposals and even regulations concerning special minority education are carried out only half-heartedly, either because they are rejected by local cadres or because the government fails to provide sufficient economic support. Frequently, financial difficulties dictate the educational practice in a local area, and many special programs come to serve primarily as superficial demonstrations of good-will, such as bilingual education's affirmation of minorities' principal rights to develop their own languages. Especially in areas where most educators are Han and the level of integration is low, many cadres controlling the minority education fear that extensive experiments inevitably will result in increased ethnic diversity and identities. The general attitude among these cadres and among many Han teachers and Party and government lead-

ers is that the Chinese school has a positive civilizing effect on what is so often regarded as the culturally and economically "backward" (*luohou*) minorities.

The outcome of an education that succeeds in significantly raising the educational level of a minority group might well result in an increasing focus on ethnic identity, formulation of local political demands, and introduction of alternative forms of education. Even in the Chinese school system, where most non-Han students have to disassociate themselves from their cultural heritage in order to be successful, the influence of education on ethnic identity is to a certain extent unpredictable and depends on external factors such as the level of the group's political and cultural integration into the Chinese state, the degree to which it perceives Chinese school education to be advantageous, local educational history, religion, cross-border ethnic contacts, and economic development. Obviously, education is only one of many factors that influence ethnic identity, and it is impossible to isolate it. However, by looking into the aspects of education that are most directly related to ethnic identification and categorization, this book discusses the impact of education on the changing forms, contents, and expressions of ethnic identity among ethnic minorities in China.

When promoting the education of minority *minzu* with the combined purposes of modernizing the economy and ensuring integration and "ethnic amalgamation" (*ronghe*), the Chinese government faces the paradox that successful minority education sometimes leads to increased ethnic demands. On the other hand, failed attempts to spread education could cause an ethnic group to support local alternative education with the consequence of further alienation from the Han majority and the Chinese state. In either case, the mission of achieving cultural homogenization and "ethnic melting" through education is not accomplished. There is, however, a significant difference between the form and content of ethnicity that develops from (though not necessarily originates in) education and that which is strengthened among people who are excluded from education. The spokesmen for a revival of ethnic identity who have themselves participated in state education are better able to express and make themselves heard within the context of the state. Their ethnic identity might have been strengthened through a basically assimilative education, but, unlike those who have been excluded from state education, they have been provided with the means to strategically formulate their ethnic demands within the politically acceptable framework.

Lessons in Being Chinese is based mainly upon data collected during fieldwork in two autonomous areas in Yunnan Province and among two ethnic minorities: the Tai (Dai) in Sipsong Panna (Xishuangbanna) Tai (Dai) Autonomous Prefecture and the Naxi in Lijiang Naxi Nationality Autonomous County. These two groups have different histories and experiences of Chinese education and equally distinct reactions to and perceptions of this education. Also included in the discussion are the Akha (officially classified as part of the Hani *minzu*) and Jinuo of Sipsong Panna, who were previously under the rule of the Tai king and government. In education and response to education, these two groups have much in common because of their historical relationship to the Tai in the Sipsong Panna area. The Akha and Jinuo provide an example of a third way of responding to Chinese minority education.

The Chinese government and its civilizing envoys have not been able to spread and popularize Chinese education efficiently among the Tai in Sipsong Panna. One important reason is that most Tai fail to see any significant economic or social advantage in spending money on school education. Another reason is that the content and form of state education is in direct opposition to the traditional Tai Buddhist education of monks and to Tai values in general. The Tai in Sipsong Panna historically made up a nation separate from the Chinese empire (Hsieh 1995), and it was only in the 1920s that the area effectively became an integrated part of China. The Chinese system of education was introduced in 1911, and Chinese schools became widespread in the area only after 1949. In many respects Chinese education in Sipsong Panna resembles the education established by colonial powers for indigenous peoples in other parts of the world. The few Tai who pass through the school system need to alienate themselves from their cultural heritage (their religion, language, and history, in particular) in order to be successful. In this respect education has an assimilative effect, but only on the few. For most Tai, Chinese education has little direct bearing on their ethnic identity and cultural practices simply because they do not participate in it. This also means that they are deprived of the possibility of gaining influence in a political system that is based entirely upon Chinese language and on cultural values different from their own. If the government wanted to reverse this tendency, it would have to make education directly relevant to and clearly advantageous for the Tai, in which case most local educators would feel that they were supporting the already-strong Tai ethnicity rather than promoting ethnic amalgamation and

unity. Neither the government nor local educators are prepared to run this risk. As a result, an increasing number of Tai seek instead to extend their own traditional temple education and their cultural and economic contacts with other Tai in Thailand. These contacts support them in their religious belief and prove to them that their language and script are useful in a modernizing society, even though they are apparently worthless in the present-day Chinese state.

The Akha make up the third-largest ethnic group (after the Tai and the Han) in Sipsong Panna. They were historically regarded as inferior by the Tai, and today the two groups rarely intermarry or have close social relations. The same applies to the Jinuo, who, like the Akha, live higher up in the mountains. These groups do not have their own script, and Chinese education has developed slowly in their villages. However, whereas many Tai tend to reject Chinese education because it forces them to assimilate to mainstream cultural practices and reject their own language, religion, and history without offering economic or social advantages, these much poorer minorities from the mountains may find in Chinese education a way to escape hard labor in the villages, to occupy more important and influential positions in society, and thereby also to reject their historical subordination to the Tai. This partly explains why the Akha and Jinuo students appear, at least for the time being, to more easily accept that they learn only Chinese in school and not their own language, and to accept the school's representation of them as members of a backward group. Participation in Chinese education is thus in some respects a way of combating traditionally low status in the local ethnic hierarchy.

The situation for the Naxi is strikingly different. Except in the poorest villages, education among the Naxi in Lijiang has been successful in that most Naxi nowadays complete primary school (*xiaoxue*), and many continue on to junior secondary school (*chuzhong*). The number of students in senior secondary school (*gaozhong*) and college is as high as the average of the Han and higher than that of most other minorities. Many high cadres and influential researchers and teachers today are Naxi, even at the provincial level. Han and Naxi researchers alike agree that the early establishment of Confucian education and the long history of Han influence in Lijiang has facilitated this development. Unlike Sipsong Panna, Lijiang has for a very long time been an integrated, though peripheral, part of the Chinese empire and in recent

history has not constituted a separate nation. The content of education in Lijiang today—with its focus on Han history and language, nationalism, and Communist political training—does not deviate from the standard of the rest of China, and Naxi parents' complaints about their high educational expenses and the lack of technical or agricultural training for their children are similar to those in many rural Han areas. Generally, the state-controlled education in Lijiang is perceived by the Naxi as "their own," not as a foreign institution imposed to civilize or change them. Success in Chinese education—whether Confucian, Nationalist, or Communist—in fact constitutes an important part of many Naxis' ethnic self-perception today. In the last five years especially, the Naxi have shown a remarkable talent for expressing their own increased concern for preserving and reviving ethnic characteristics while utilizing a common Naxi identity to extend their own local political influence in areas such as education. This tendency is perhaps best illustrated by the well-trained Naxi Party cadres who are now not only calling for extended research on Naxi history and culture, but are themselves playing a central role in reviving previously vilified religious rituals. This was certainly not the Chinese state's intent in spreading education among non-Han peoples. The main point here is that successful education of the Naxi has unintentionally and unexpectedly supported their ability to develop a stronger common Naxi identity and to formulate their ethnic demands within the context of the state. Paradoxically, an education denying the value of Naxi traditions, religion, language, and history, and aimed at facilitating the disappearance of ethnic entities, has provided the Naxi with a voice and a means to express themselves as an ethnic minority in the People's Republic of China without threatening the political system.

RESEARCH

> If there is no such thing as a perfect translation or interpretation, there are still better, worse and idiotic ones.
>
> —Mark Hobart
> "Summer's Days and Salad Days"

The focus on local practices and perceptions of education and on the relationship between state education and processes of ethnic identity has to a

large extent determined my primary research methods: interviews, participation in local events, sitting in on classes, and preparatory documentary work. Fieldwork was carried out between 1994 and 1996 in Sipsong Panna, Lijiang, and Kunming. During the main part of the fieldwork, between July 1994 and September 1995, I conducted 173 formal interviews, sat in on twenty-two classes in two middle schools (*zhongxue*), talked informally to many other people, and participated in local events such as weddings, festivals, family celebrations, competitions in schools, and other school activities.

Formal interviews constituted a significant part of the fieldwork, and analysis of them has been crucial to the interpretations presented here. The interviews were formal in the sense that the interviewees were specifically told that they were participating in an interview and the purpose of the interview. Usually only the interviewee, my assistant *peitong* (an officially approved and obligatory assistant provided by my host organization), and I were present. When interviewees spoke Chinese, interviews were conducted in Chinese. Otherwise they were conducted in Tai or Naxi through the assistants' interpretation. Sometimes villagers would gather to listen, or students who shared the dormitory of an interviewee would be present. Sometimes I interviewed two or three students or teachers together. Occasionally the interview developed into an interesting discussion between students, sometimes of different ethnic groups, or between villagers. Whereas some interviewees were deliberately selected (headmasters, representatives of education commissions, researchers who had written about education or ethnicity among Naxi and Tai, etc.), most were randomly chosen according to the focus of the research: I wanted to interview schoolteachers, present and former students, parents of students, people who had never participated in education, and people (for instance monks) who were part of a learning institution outside the state-controlled schools. I also wanted to interview people from different age groups, preferably equally balanced between male and female, and from villages as well as from county capitals. In spite of my intention to avoid gender bias, I ended up interviewing more female than male students, parents, and peasants. Male students were often rather timid talking to me, and even more so with my local female assistants of approximately their age. The interviews with female students more often developed into discussions or gossiping among several students or into dialogues. However, almost all interviewed government and Party cadres and heads of schools were male, since very few women occu-

pied these powerful positions. I also interviewed a number of old people to get an impression of life in the schools before the Communist period began in 1949. The historical chapters in this volume are to a large extent informed by the presentations of these interviewees, many of whom had experienced education in recent years as well as in earlier periods.

The purpose of the interviews with representatives of government departments was to get information about local government policy and attitudes toward the education of minorities. When interviewing school headmasters I tried to get basic information about schools (ethnicity of students and teachers, differences among *minzu* in terms of enrollment and achievement, and specific measures for educating minorities) and to let them tell about their own experiences in education and their own attitudes toward minority education. In interviews with all—students, teachers, parents, peasants, old, and young—I first asked a set of "closed" questions (e.g., age, parents' occupations, level of education, participation in specific religious activities, knowledge of spoken and written languages, ethnicity of best friends) and then a number of "open" questions that prompted the interviewee to tell about school experiences, attitude toward family, cultural practices at home, religious belief, relationships with other *minzu,* hopes for the future, and so on. Each interview lasted between one and a half and two and a half hours, and many of the interviewees were interviewed several times.

During my fieldwork I sat in on twenty-two classroom hours of politics and history, as well as some geography and Tai-language training. Teachers very rarely deviated from what was written in the textbooks, which I could read for myself. However, it was very informative to observe which topics and contents the teacher emphasized and which sentences she asked the class to learn by heart and read out loud. Even after I stopped sitting in on classes, I continued to participate in special events at the schools, such as speech competitions with the subject of patriotism and various celebrations for which students wore minority costumes to dance and perform. All of these activities were important parts of the school as an institution concerned with establishing the nation as a common denominator and point of identification for all citizens of the People's Republic of China.

The task of processing interviews is of course always deeply influenced by the researcher's own experiences, analytic abilities, involvement in the project, and attitude toward the subject. My goal in interpreting what I was told

during the interviews, what I saw and heard during my time in the field, and what I read in the textbooks was to draw a picture of how state education directs or influences ethnic identity. Obviously, the interviewees decided which story to tell in each situation and which things to omit. My role as an officially approved researcher with an assistant sometimes made people feel relaxed in the interview situation because they felt sure that what I was doing and asking was officially approved. But it also sometimes prevented people from telling me in detail about politically sensitive aspects of religious and ethnic identity. I consciously chose interviewing, rather than relying on participant observation alone, because I was particularly interested in the ways people would choose to tell about their educational experiences (or sometimes lack of same), the things they had learned about themselves in school, and their memories of the content of education related to the constructions of the Han, minority *minzu,* and the Chinese nation and the relations among them. My own attempt to understand more about, and account for, the relationship between the powerful Chinese discourse of *minzu* and local processes of ethnic identity is based on my interpretation of these stories. As Mark Hobart writes, "Sharing language, in the sense of using the same words (or 'tokens'), does not entail people extracting the same meanings from them—if indeed they extract meaning at all—any more than they represent things in the same way" (Hobart 1987: 36). This insight does not rule out the possibility of providing interpretations based on thorough data. It merely opens them up to conflicting views and alternative translations—an acknowledgment of the fact that no descriptions are exclusively true since one can hope only to tell how *a* world is, not how *the* world is (Goodman 1972: 31).

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF FOREIGN TERMS

Most Chinese terms are transcribed in the standard pinyin form, and their corresponding characters are listed in the Glossary. Some names of places, people, and ethnic groups are transcribed in their most widely accepted Anglicized form (e.g., Tibet, Manchu, Mongol, Sun Yat-sen). Other ethnic groups are transcribed in ways that best reflect their self-appellation (e.g., "Premi" instead of the pinyin form "Pumi"). The most commonly used romanized transcription for the Tai people is "Tai" which is pronounced in the same way as the Chinese pinyin transcription "Dai." As with all Tai terms, I pre-

fer the transcriptions that are modified on the basis of Standard Thai transcription (and are commonly used in publications such as the *Thai-Yunnan Project Newsletter*), and therefore the area in which the Tai discussed in this book live is called "Sipsong Panna" rather than the Chinese form "Xishuangbanna." Other Tai terms are transcribed in accordance with those commonly used by scholars with a profound knowledge of Tai languages. Concerning Naxi terms, I use the Chinese term *dongba* for the name of the Naxi ritual specialists rather than the Naxi romanized transcription *dobbaq*. The reason for this is that Naxi intellectuals, as well as Chinese and foreign researchers, tend to prefer this form, especially in the phrase "*dongba* culture" (*dongba wenhua*).

1 / Education and Chinese Minority Policy

EDUCATION, CIVILIZATION, AND ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION

Traditional Chinese Confucian ideology was based upon literary and moral education, and the imperial elite consisted of the scholars most well versed in literature and Confucian moral doctrines. Chinese people around this cultural and polical center were rendered capable of being civilized through proper education thanks to family organization, religion, language, and customs that were close to those of the rulers. The further the cultural distance from the central Confucian-trained elite, the more difficult it was (though still not impossible) to achieve civilization based on Confucian values. This has been referred to as a Chinese "civilizing project" in which a center, claiming to be on a superior level of civilization, interacts with its peripheral peoples and attempts to raise their levels of civilization (Harrell 1995a: 4). The ideology of inequality is legitimized by the conviction that the dominance of the center is truly *helping* the culturally inferior peoples. Confronting Confucian ideology, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) denied that any cultural group was superior to others. The Communists granted legal equality to "peripheral peoples" who became classified and countable ethnic minorities (*shaoshu minzu*) among an overwhelming majority of Han, in a modern nation-state with fixed borders. The Communist government's classification project of the 1950s divided all people within the borders of the People's Republic of China (PRC) into five major stages of modes of production (primitive, slave, feudal, capitalist, and socialist), and, as Stevan Harrell points out, it just happened that the Han were higher on this objective scale than most of the other *minzu* (ethnic groups or "nationalities") (Harrell 1995a: 26). Since culture was regarded as a direct reflection of the mode of production, it was scientifically proven that, economically as well as culturally, the non-Han peoples were more backward than the Han. In this way the people described as peripheral

by Harrell are, in another sense and at the same time, central in the Chinese Communist ideology because it is only through the construction of a less developed minority group that a contrasting, more developed, or civilized majority group such as the Han can be constructed (Gladney 1994).

The importance of this objectified scale of development of Chinese *minzu* is reflected in its integration into national education, the main arena for reproducing the ideology of cultural inequality. As has been argued by Richard Jenkins, for instance, ethnic identity, like other social identities, is as much a product of external processes of definition and categorization as it is an ongoing process of internal definition and group identification (Jenkins 1994). The external and the internal processes are mutually interdependent, and in the relationship between state education and ethnicity among ethnic minorities in China, the external process of identifying ethnic groups—giving them a name and defining the content of this name—plays a significant role. The external ethnic definitions transmitted through the education of minorities influence the people's own internal processes of formulating and negotiating ethnic identity. While ethnic identities, as well as other social identities, are fluid, overlapping, and multifaceted,[1] the Chinese government's version of ethnic categorization, as transmitted in the state school system, is categorical and definite. Thus, the study of minority education and ethnicity is also a study of power relations and the authority to define and categorize ethnic groups.

One of the striking contradictions in the Chinese education system is the fact that it preaches the constitutional equality of *minzu* while impressing on minority students immense feelings of cultural inferiority. Education is praised by the government, educators, many intellectuals, and researchers in China as a means of "improving backward habits" or civilizing the "backward," and therefore it is maybe not so surprising that the form and content of this education often contradicts the outspoken message of national equality. This perception of education as a civilizing institution is closely connected to the idea of cultural deficiency, which dominates much of the Chinese theoretical debate on minority education. In many Western, industrialized countries as well, theories of cultural deficiencies are commonly used to explain low school achievement among minorities (Churchill 1985). In China, due

1. See, e.g., Eriksen 1993; Ong 1987; De Lauretis 1986; Williams 1989.

to the powerful and manifest belief in minority education as a civilizing institution, this is done very explicitly. It is, for instance, not uncommon to explain unsuccessful Chinese education of the Tai in Sipsong Panna by pointing to the damaging influence of religion, the habit of marrying early, and the Tai's unfortunate preoccupation with maintaining their own language and culture.[2] This way of explaining low participation in education with deficiencies related to culture has also been adopted by researchers outside of China. One article argues, for instance, that "there are problems related to cultural tradition. Some national minority groups still believe in magic and superstition" (Postiglione 1992: 324–25). In China the so-called cultural and linguistic deficiencies of non-Han peoples in education are mostly regarded and presented as objective facts, or they are implicitly understood through the very positive evaluations of cases of cultural change in the direction of the Han. One example of an objectified statement of unequal cultural relations between Han and non-Han is: "Since the Chinese are in the majority, spread out widely throughout the country, because they are most highly developed in science and culture, and finally, because Chinese characters have the longest tradition and are used in the widest area, every ethnic group has close ties with the Chinese" (Zhou Yaowen 1992: 38).[3] The argument that the Han have the most highly developed culture is directly transferred into the discussion of language, and consequently a commonly heard argument against the spread of a minority language is that it is "too backward," it belongs to a lower stage of evolution, and therefore its vocabulary is unfit for a modernizing society.

Much of the Chinese debate about minority education has been dominated by discussion of bilingual education (*shuangyu jiaoyu*). The majority of researchers in China concerned with minority education seem to agree that developing bilingual education is necessary in many areas. The argument is that it facilitates the learning of standard Chinese (*putonghua*, "Mandarin"), which in Yunnan and most other provinces is the only language of instruction, at least at the level of junior middle school and above.[4] Therefore, bilin-

2. See, e.g., Feng Chunlin 1989; Wang Xihong et al., eds., 1990; Sun Ruoqiong et al., eds., 1990.

3. The author has written this text in English and obviously translates "Han" as "Chinese."

4. Among Western sociologists debating the education of linguistic and cultural minorities as well, there has been an inclination toward emphasizing language as the prime marker

gual education among minorities in China generally is a variant of so-called transitional bilingualism, which promotes study of the mother tongue with the purpose of hastening proficiency in the majority language (Churchill 1985: 54–56). Chinese minorities whose language lacks a script are normally excluded from the discussion of bilingual education. "They do not have a script, so how could we carry out bilingual education?" was an argument I often heard from local educators and cadres. When ethnic groups with different languages are classified in the same *minzu,* it is impossible to use bilingual teaching material in only one of those languages for all the members of the *minzu.* For instance, the people classified as Hani in Sipsong Panna do not use the romanized script created for their *minzu,* because it is based on the Luchun dialect of Hani living mainly in Luchun, Honghe, Yuanyang, and Jinping. Consequently, there is no bilingual teaching for the people classified as Hani (mainly Akha, Akhe, and Phusa) in Sipsong Panna, although many publications mention the Hani as one *minzu* that has bilingual education. The development of bilingual education is legitimized in the PRC Constitution, which supports the study of minority languages in autonomous regions. However, very often local educators and government officials reject political decisions or proposals about bilingual education because they disagree with the argument that bilingual education is necessary and useful or because they lack financial support and qualified teachers.

"REGULAR EDUCATION" AND "MINORITY EDUCATION" IN CHINA

In the last four decades there has been a growing concern about the education of immigrants and indigenous peoples all over the world; educational

of an ethnic minority group and as a principal symbol of ethnic identity. Partly for this reason, much research on minority education has logically focused on language. See, e.g., Megarry et al., eds., 1981; Churchill 1985; Fishman 1989; Skutnabb-Kangas 1981.

Junior secondary school is three years of study (7th–9th grades). Normally students are between thirteen and fifteen years old, but ages vary in some areas due to starting school late. Some primary schools in Sipsong Panna had students in the first or second grade who were between nine and thirteen years old, but most of these students do not manage to continue on to secondary school. Senior secondary school is three years (10th–12th grades), with students being between sixteen and eighteen years old.

reports from various countries describe and discuss the aims and results of local education of so-called linguistic and cultural minorities.[5] Most researchers of minority education have focused on form of education, goals, bilingual education, and (in cases where the focus has been on effects) academic achievement. Fewer studies have used local research to examine how the content and form of state education influences members of different minority groups' ways of conceiving of their status as minorities, their ethnic identification, and expressions of ethnicity. This is especially so in China, where foreign educational researchers have until now largely ignored the specific problems of education among non-Han peoples.[6]

The Chinese term "nationalities education" (*minzu jiaoyu*) is in fact best translated as "minority education" because it is normally conceived of in two ways in China: either as all forms of education directed toward and practiced among the officially recognized minority *minzu,* or, more specifically, as the special educational measures adopted among some of the minority *minzu* (such as bilingual education and special curriculum). One of the broadest definitions of minority education was given by a cadre in the Bureau of Education in Lijiang County, who said, "All education here is minority education because the majority of people living here belong to minority *minzu.*" However, the term commonly covers the specific educational policies for developing and expanding state education among the minorities. Thus, minority education has played an important role in government policy toward the non-Han population in the PRC and has become a specialized area of research in China. Most Chinese studies of minority education in China focus on enrollment, retention and graduation rates of minorities, practices of bilingual education, and comparisons between different minority *minzu* (because they

5. See, e.g., Carnoy 1974; Smith 1992; Gosth and Abdulaziz 1992; Jaespert and Kroon 1991; Cummins and Skutnabb-Kangas, eds., 1988; Ogbu 1978.

6. Exceptions are Wurlig Borchiged's article about Mongolian education (Borchiged 1995), Chae-Jin Lee's study of education among the Koreans (Lee 1986), Alexander Woodside's and William Rowe's articles about Chen Hongmou's education of minorities during the Qing dynasty (Woodside 1983; Rowe 1994), and several papers in an anthology about minority education (Postiglione and Stites, eds., 1999). Other studies have focused on more general aspects of minority education policy, e.g., Kwong 1989; Postiglione 1992; Zhou Yaowen 1992; Xie Qihuang et al., eds., 1991; Feng Chunlin 1989; Chen Hongtao et al., eds., 1989; Wang Xihong et al., eds., 1990; Sun Ruoqiong et al., eds., 1990.

concentrate the research on the officially recognized minorities, not on ethnic minorities as such). They often offer suggestions for improved policies directed at increasing these rates. Thus, there is a very close connection between the ways in which the government has formulated minority education as a specific part of its minority policy in general, and the ways in which Chinese researchers tend to approach the issue. The topic of minority education by definition includes all of the highly diversified one hundred million people who happen to be officially classified as minorities. The agenda for research on these peoples is mostly directed at providing evidence of their lack of proper education and suggesting measures that will enhance their chance of eventually being able to participate in the kind of *regular* education that already exists among most Han and which, by definition, is superior. The special considerations taken by the government toward defining and practicing a specific "minority education" thus constitute a real chance for improving and adapting education to local needs, while at the same time the government supports a structural inequality between the constructed categories of the "majority Han" as opposed to the "minority *minzu*."

Chinese governments prior to 1949 also, in different ways, saw education as a means of integrating or civilizing peoples living on the geographic periphery of the state. Especially during the Qing dynasty, the Chinese empire expanded significantly in size and population, and the spread of Confucian education was part of an ambitious program to unify the empire through moral and cultural transformation of the non-Han population. The spread of Confucian education to the periphery of the empire was far from being a purely idealistic civilizing mission. It was also a means to facilitate imperial control in areas where agrarian and mineral resources were still not fully exploited.[7] Whereas Confucian learning among non-Han peoples in the southwest prior to the eighteenth century was confined to sons of local hereditary chiefs (*tusi*), Qing educators such as the zealous Chen Hongmou (1696–1771) attempted to extend education to the commoners. Chen initiated seven hundred charitable schools in Yunnan alone between 1733 and 1737 (*YMJFG* 1992: 46). During the Qing many Confucian scholars believed that not only could Confucian learning eventually provide "barbarian" peoples with proper knowledge and conduct of behavior, but disregard of education could cause

7. See Woodside and Elman, eds., 1994; Woodside 1983; Rowe 1994.

Han people to become uncivilized. This was clearly expressed by a scholar who stated in 1738 that "if savages cherish learning, they may advance to become Han; if Han people neglect learning, they may degenerate into savages" (quoted in Rowe 1994: 423).

Education in the frontier regions of the empire became sharply focused as the late-Qing government tried to strengthen its control in response to threats such as the British expansion into Yunnan and Tibet through Burma and India, and the Muslim ruler Yakūb Beg's secession of Xinjiang. In 1909 the Qing government founded a Mongolian and Tibetan school in Beijing to train local officials in the modern subjects of political science and finance in addition to language, geography, history, and so forth (Dreyer 1976: 12). In Yunnan, where at least one-third of the population was estimated to be non-Han, the Bureau of Education in Border Regions (Yanbian Xuewu Ju), the first such administrative unit, was set up in 1909 (Liu Guangzhi 1993: 68). One of the purposes of this bureau was to promote new schools in the border regions of Yunnan in order to facilitate the integration of these areas into the empire. By the end of the Qing the bureau had started 128 free "native simple literacy schools" (*tumin jianyi shizi xueshu*) with a total of 3,974 students in the province (*YMJFG* 1992: 48). These schools taught basic knowledge of Chinese characters to non-Han peoples such as the Jinghpaw, Lisu, A'chang, Akha, and Tai. One Chinese publication estimates that 10 to 20 percent of the students in these schools acquired such knowledge, but we have no information as to how this figure was reached (*YMJFG* 1992: 7).[8] Generally, the late and weakening Qing empire left the task of promoting education in non-Han areas such as Yunnan to local administrators and educators. Therefore local development of Chinese education depended very much upon the existence of a local elite prepared to create Chinese schools other than traditional Confucian ones.

The Republican government after 1911 wanted to transmit nationalist commitment via mass education in the hope that it would help to prevent ethnic conflicts from destabilizing the state. Therefore, shortly after the founding of the Republic of China, the new Ministry of Education decided to expand education of Mongols, Tibetans, and Moslems. The government considered

8. Between 1912 and 1915 the government changed the "native simple literacy schools" into normal lower elementary schools.

these groups to be part of China's "five races" (which also included the Han and Manchus), and they were now supposed to be given the education they had been denied under the Qing (Bailey 1990: 142–43). At the same time Sun Yat-sen strongly emphasized the common features of the Han people (Hanren), the absolute majority in China:

> The Chinese nation totals four hundred million people. Of mixed races there are only a few million Mongolians, about a million Manchus, a few million Tibetans, and over a million Mohammedan Turks. These foreign races do not exceed ten million people. So we can say that the greater part of the four hundred million Chinese [Zhongguoren] are Han people [Hanren] with common descent, common language, common religion, and common customs—one single race. (Sun Yat-sen 1926: first lecture on nationalism, 4)

Sun Yat-sen argued that due to the assimilative power and highly developed civilization of the Han, it would be in the interest of the other races along the periphery of China to be part of the Chinese state, to join the Han against the imperialists and ultimately assimilate with them.[9] Following the severance of Tibet and Outer Mongolia from Chinese control in 1911, the government established schools in 1913 in Beijing offering instruction in Mongolian and Tibetan. Apart from these few exceptions, the promotion of modern schools among non-Han groups was exclusively based on the standard Chinese language (or Mandarin; *guoyu*), and no specific considerations were given to the content of education for the numerous non-Han peoples in Yunnan or elsewhere. In 1931 the Yunnan government made public its first decrees concerning special education of non-Han peoples in border and mountain areas, including the establishment of special primary schools. Although this marked the beginning of a period of increasing political concern for the development of education in border regions, the practical implications of the various decrees were limited by factors such as political and economic instability, difficult or nonexistent communications, weak central government, the Japanese invasion, and fighting between Communists and Nationalists.

The government in Nanjing, led by Chiang Kai-shek after his defeat of

9. See also, e.g., Dreyer 1976: 15–43; Duara 1993; Wang Tianxi 1988: 80–87.

the northern warlords in 1928, adopted a highly politicized educational program in which inclusion of the Nationalist Party's (Guomindang) doctrine was to be mandatory (Cleverley 1991: 59–60). The Nationalist government regarded the spread of education among non-Han peoples as a means to ease assimilation with the Han and ensure their loyalty to the state. Education was in principle entirely based upon the language, culture, and history of the Han. However, for a variety of reasons the assimilative education policy did not come up to expectations. Central control was constantly disrupted, and the financing of education depended mostly on the lower administrative levels. Local teachers were to a large degree left free to teach as they pleased, and therefore many teachers in lower primary schools employed their local language for instruction rather than Chinese. Education still reached a relatively small part of the population, and women were still socialized mainly in the family and the village. In spite of the introduction of vocational schools in the early twentieth century, by far the most common way of transmitting vocational skills remained the master-apprentice relationship (Thoegersen 1997: 15).

During the 1930s and 1940s the war against Japan and the civil war between the Nationalists and the Communists resulted in serious disruption of education in many areas. Cleverley regards it as likely that by 1949 about 85 percent of the total population were illiterate, with an even larger percentage among women and the rural population (Cleverley 1991: 69). Among the non-Han population there was great diversity in the degree of literacy and the number of students in Chinese schools. Some areas resembled rural Han areas, some had no functioning Chinese schools at all, and some ethnic groups had a relatively high degree of literacy in their own language due to factors such as religiously based teaching.

With peace reestablished in the new People's Republic of China after 1949, promotion of education became a priority of the new Communist government. The CCP wanted to establish a homogenized, socialist-oriented national education system reaching all corners of China. The most important curricular change was that history was rewritten and adapted to Marxist views of the government. Courses in Nationalist Party doctrine and Sun Yatsen's Three Principles of the People (Sanminzhuyi) for the salvation of the nation were displaced by political lessons teaching communist ideology. Concerning policy toward ethnic minorities and the establishment of state

education among them, it was important for the new government to encourage support from the minorities by emphasizing their right to develop their own languages and incorporate them into education. Because the government wanted to eradicate so-called Han chauvinism (*da Hanzuzhuyi*) while promoting "a unified multiethnic country" (*tongyi de duo minzu guojia*), it maintained that non-Han populations had the right to preserve their own languages, customs, and religions over a long period of time until all *minzu* would ultimately (and naturally) "melt together" (*ronghe*). Meanwhile, the non-Han peoples should be "assisted" in developing their "backward" customs, economy, and political awareness in order to achieve, in unity with the Han, a developed socialist society. For all these purposes the new government advocated intensified education of ethnic minorities with an initial focus on the education of minority cadres (*minzu ganbu*). Furthermore the government wanted to strengthen primary education among minorities, promote literacy among adults, and train minority teachers, of whom there was a shortage.

But first the government needed to identify non-Han peoples. Therefore, shortly after the founding of the PRC, it organized a large-scale program of team fieldwork in which linguists, ethnographers, and historians were sent to minority regions to identify all *minzu* within the territory of China.[10] The teams were to define all *minzu* and identify their present stage of social development. In principle this was done on the basis of presumed objective criteria for definitions of ethnic groups formulated by Stalin in 1913—common territory, language, economy, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture (Hutchinson and Smith 1994: 20).[11] In order to decide how to implement land reforms, the government also wanted descriptions of the *minzu*'s economic and social stages of development based on Engels's and Morgan's theories of evolution. Thus many *minzu* were described as having fully or partly developed a "feudal landlord economy." These included the Han, some of the Naxi, and all or most of the Zhuang, Hui, Uygurs, Man-

10. In 1992 the total Chinese population constituted 1,130,510,638 people, with more than 91 million minority *minzu* representing 8.08 percent (*Zhongguo minzu tongji* 1992: 53–54).

11. Concerning the classification work, see, e.g., Fei Xiaotong 1981; Lin Yaohua 1987; Diamond 1995; McKhann 1995; and Wellens 1998.

chus, and others. Groups on the next broad level of evolution, for instance the majority of Tibetans and those classified as Dai (Tai) and Hani, were described as having a "feudal serf system." Lower on the evolutionary scale were societies that were believed to practice a "slave system," represented mainly by the Nuosu (classified as Yi) from Daliangshan. Finally, a number of ethnic groups in the border regions of Yunnan (e.g., Dulong, Nu, and Wa) were considered to be living in "primitive society."

In order to facilitate the integration of the minority *minzu,* the government adopted, in the early period of the People's Republic, the highly significant policy of a "united front" that implied cooperation with the bourgeois, upper strata of the minority *minzu.* Theoretically, this move was legitimized by the special economic and cultural backwardness of the minority *minzu,* which manifested itself in low class-consciousness (Dreyer 1976: 94–95). Through the education of locally accepted religious, ethnic, and political elites, the government hoped to be able to pass on ideas of patriotism, national unity, and socialism. Therefore, an important feature of early minority education was the establishment of special minority institutes (*minzu xueyuan*),[12] which trained minority cadres to work in minority regions as representatives of the CCP and government. Through these minority cadres, and through the vast number of Han who were sent as teachers, soldiers, and government workers to minority areas, the government gradually spread the message of its nonassimilationist policy, the new objectified classification of *minzu,* and the determination of stages of economic and cultural evolution. Thus, for the first time in China, the government managed gradually to consolidate an official version of the relationship between a Han majority and a group of minority *minzu* through a widespread, popular educational system. Ethnic groups all over China learned that they were minority *minzu* and younger brothers of the Han, and had equal rights with the Han, but that most, alas, were less developed than the Han.

By 1950 the government had established forty-five special minority primary schools and eight provincial minority secondary schools. In principle

12. Although the term is usually translated as "nationalities institute," the primary purpose of these institutes is to educate members of minority *minzu.* Therefore, they are also often called "minority institutes."

the minority students in these schools were guaranteed free education, books, and school supplies and were subsidized for food and, eventually, housing at the school. The First National Conference on Minority Education (convened and led by Zhou Enlai), in 1951, concluded that minority education was to further develop in line with the national plan, taking into consideration the special conditions and demands in the different areas inhabited by minorities.[13] The conference also emphasized that political and patriotic education (*aioguozhuyi jiaoyu*) should be promoted in minority areas. The language policy adopted in minority regions was one of the special features of so-called minority education. During the 1951 conference it was made clear that the content of education and the language of instruction should be adapted to special needs in minority regions. In Yunnan, for instance, the Bureau of Culture and Education issued a plan in 1951 for developing education among minorities. In line with national policy on minority education, the aim was to make private schools public, start new schools in remote areas, and grant special financial support to minority students. With regard to the content of education and language of instruction, the bureau idealistically stated,

> In accordance with the spirit of the minority policy, [we will] assist each *minzu* in popularizing its language and imbue it with the ideas of our policy. Where conditions exist we shall use teaching material that combines the scripts of our brother *minzu* [*xiongdi minzu wenzi*], Chinese characters, drawings, and pinyin. As for the *minzu* without a script, we should use pinyin based on their language and, to the best of our abilities, create new scripts. In addition to common knowledge, the teaching material should especially give consideration to *minzu* history, local customs, and strengthening of the unity of the *minzu* [*minzu tuanjie*]. (Yunnan Province Bureau of Culture and Education, "Primary School Education of Yunnan's Minority Brothers in 1951," reprinted in *YMJFG* 1992: 282–84)

With the purpose of promoting literacy among ethnic minorities by supporting education in their own language, in 1951 the Chinese government set up a national committee that was to suggest guidelines for the development of written languages for minorities. Thirty-two minority languages were

13. Ma Xulun 1952.

considered, and after years of extensive research, a plan was put forward in 1958 to create eighteen new scripts for twelve minorities.[14] In practice most local areas were not able to live up to the standard proposed in the quoted statement by the Yunnan Bureau of Culture and Education, and rapid policy changes during the 1950s and 1960s often put a stop to the creation of special teaching material for minorities.

During the early years of the People's Republic, when the total number of students and graduates increased significantly, the proportion of minorities in schools also increased. According to the official statistics, 1.4 percent of college and university students in 1951 belonged to minorities; the figure was 6.9 percent in 1991. In primary schools 2.2 percent were minorities in 1951, compared to 8.1 percent in 1991 (*Zhongguo minzu tongji* 1992: 241).

Development of higher education had a relatively high priority during the time of the Soviet influence in the early years of the PRC, and therefore the highest increase in students was in higher education and middle schools. In connection with the political conflict between China and the Soviet Union in the latter part of the 1950s, CCP chairman Mao Zedong (and later, teachers and students) started to criticize the Chinese tendency to copy from the Soviet educational system. Agricultural production in the PRC had so far been disappointing, and Mao's solution was to heighten production through mass mobilization and reorganization of agriculture. He launched the disastrous Great Leap Forward in 1958, and agriculture was collectivized in People's Communes all over China. Mao wanted basic education for the majority—education that was directly relevant to, and combined with, productive work: Based on the ideology of "education as revolution" and "revolution as education," educational change was focused on combining study with agricultural or industrial work, strengthening political awareness of students, achieving comprehensive mass education, and intensifying collectivization (Chan Hoiman 1992). The government sought to decentralize schools and establish lower primary education in all villages, higher primary education in the production teams (*dadui*), and agricultural secondary schools in the communes (*gongshe*). The goal was to be "red and expert," and often peas-

14. Finally ten *minzu* scripts were created for the Zhuang, Buyi, Miao, Dong, Yi, Hani, Lisu, Wa, Li, and Naxi. Other *minzu,* such as the Dai, had their script simplified, just as Chinese characters were simplified.

ants, workers, cadres, and soldiers acted as teachers. An increased number of young people were sent to the countryside to learn from the peasants and transmit their middle-school knowledge to the rural population. Many young middle-school graduates became teachers in minority areas, and some of them came to have a lasting influence on education there.

In the summer of 1957 a forum on "*minzu* work" (*minzu gongzuo*) decided to organize the struggle against "local nationalism" (*difang minzuzhuyi*), which was synonymous with antisocialism (Dreyer 1976: 151). In minority areas the so-called Three Statements (San Lun)—special conditions in border regions, backwardness of minorities, and special treatment of minorities—came under fierce attack. Many minority cadres were criticized for promoting "local nationalism" and harming the "unity of the *minzu*." The use of minority languages in schools also was attacked. In general, the Great Leap Forward, the Rectification Campaign (1957–59), and the struggle against "local nationalism" focused on spreading the Chinese language rather than minority languages.

Facing the economic fiasco of the Great Leap Forward, officials and teachers criticized education for emphasizing quantitative expansion, physical labor, and politics at the expense of technical knowledge and for lowering the general standards of education. Regulation and central control of education was again accepted by the government, and beginning in 1960, new elite schools, keypoint schools (*zhongdian xuexiao*), experimental schools, and boarding schools were started with the purpose of providing superior facilities for the best students and for children of senior cadres. Minority education policy again became more open toward the use of minority languages. Although Chinese language had to be strengthened, teachers were told not to ignore local minority languages and scripts. For a short time it again became acceptable to translate teaching material into local languages. On the other hand, the government's call for standardization (*zhengguihua*) of education in 1962 closed down many local "people-run" (so-called *minban*) schools, which had been started without adequately educated teachers, mostly in the poorest minority villages. Hardly any new standardized schools were opened to compensate for the closed ones, and consequently many rural children lost access to basic education.

The Cultural Revolution (1966–76) put a stop to the government's attempts to develop minority languages, experiment with bilingual education, cooperate closely with local elites, and tolerate cultural differences.

Chairman Mao declared that all ethnic conflict was the result of class conflict, and the perception of minority *minzu* as backward peoples who needed special consideration and treatment was now severely attacked. One of the slogans of the time was that "the small classroom" should be destroyed in favor of "the big classroom of society." Mobilization and participation of the masses was the core of the revolution, and education now had to be in the hands of the masses, rather than the elite, and adapt to their needs. This implied a great deal of change within the educational system, and new entrance criteria for higher education favored children with "correct" class background, such as peasants and workers. Studying was again to a larger degree combined with productive labor; the length of courses was cut; schools were placed under the administration of revolutionary teachers, students, workers, and peasants; and curriculum was directed toward study of texts by Mao Zedong. Moreover, whereas many secondary schools and colleges closed down, for months or years, many new primary schools and attached secondary schools (*fushe zhongxue*) were started.

Mao had declared that it was essential that the educated youths (*zhishi qingnian*) go to the countryside and receive their second education from the poor and lower-secondary peasants, and, according to Thomas P. Bernstein, an estimated twelve million educated youths did go "up to the mountains or down to the countryside" (*shangshan xiaxiang*) between 1968 and 1975 (Bernstein 1977: 24–25). Many of them went to minority regions that were among the poorest in the nation and in which "remnants of feudal society" were easily detected. Some became teachers in the new primary and secondary schools. The dominant ideology of the time maintained that minority *minzu* were equal to the Han and therefore should be treated equally. This legitimized a brutal suppression of all expressions of ethnic identity—of religious activities, local festivals, and use of local-language teaching material. Whereas minority students had previously learned through their education that minorities in the Chinese state had their own cultural and economic characteristics, which would eventually fade away with the helpful assistance of the Han and the CCP, they now learned that the time had come to quickly eradicate the backward customs that separated them from the forefront of the revolution.

In the years following Mao's death and the fall of the Gang of Four (Jiang Qing, Wang Hongwen, Yao Wenyuan, and Zhang Chunqiao) in 1976, China's new policy of the Four Modernizations (in agriculture, industry,

defense, and science and technology) profoundly influenced the development of education, and a number of measures have since been taken to promote education of minorities. Since state-sponsored education is regarded as a basic means to achieve economic development while ensuring loyalty to the state through teaching of patriotism, promotion of schools in minority regions has been, and still is, high on the political agenda. In 1977 the competitive examination system was reinstated, and since then institutionalized education has again been emphasized as crucial for achieving a technically and economically developed nation. Keypoint schools providing selected students with the best possible education were established at all levels. Selection was based on an examination system using curriculum-based content that favored knowledge of standard Chinese language, history of the Chinese nation, and the policy of the CCP, in addition to technical subjects. Proficiency in a minority language or substantial knowledge of a field such as local history was irrelevant. In 1980 the Ministry of Education and the Commission on Nationalities Affairs evaluated the state of education in minority areas and made suggestions for future work. They concluded that most of the minority *minzu* were "extremely backward" as to level of education, that schools were in a very bad state, that the percentage of minority students in higher education was actually dropping, and that the scope of illiteracy was worrisome.[15]

The government decided that in order to achieve modernization in the minority regions, it again had to allow for special measures within education. Therefore, central and local governments created special primary and secondary minority schools (*minzu xiaoxue* and *minzu zhongxue*), where students were subsidized, and earmarked funds for minority education. Minorities were to be given additional points in examinations to give them easier access to higher education. Furthermore, governments at different levels tried to strengthen the training of local teachers and reestablish bilingual education, particularly among Tibetans, Mongols, and Uygurs. Koreans in Yanbian have themselves established bilingual education even at the college level (Lee 1986). The Ministry of Education issued several statements saying that while the study of Chinese would greatly benefit the cultural and tech-

15. A document called "Suggestions Concerning the Strengthening of Educational Work among National Minorities" was approved by the Central Committee of the CCP and the State Council. It is reprinted in *Minzu gongzuo wenxuan* 1986: 274–80.

nical level of the minorities, those who had their own language and lived in areas where it was widely used should also be able to learn it in school (e.g., *YMJFG* 1992: 202–3). All governments of autonomous regions had to establish departments specifically dealing with minority education. The right of these governments to organize minority education in accordance with local demands and special conditions was confirmed in a 1984 law on local autonomy in minority regions. The autonomous governments of minority *minzu* were allowed to decide (based upon general national laws on education) which kinds of schools they would establish, the length of schooling, whether special curriculum was needed, which languages to teach in addition to Chinese, and how to recruit students. In poor areas, pastoral areas, or areas where minorities lived widely scattered, the governments were to establish boarding and semiboarding primary and secondary schools (Sun Ruoqiong et al., eds, 1990: 77).[16] To ensure that poor and underdeveloped rural minority areas would benefit from minority higher education, it was decided in 1978 that minority students studying in cities should be allocated jobs in their home counties after graduation.

MINORITY EDUCATION IN YUNNAN PROVINCE SINCE 1980

Since the beginning of the reform period, the central government has granted financial support to Yunnan as a border province with an underdeveloped economy, and a part of these funds is still earmarked for minority education. According to statistics from 1990, 103 out of 127 counties and cities in Yunnan depended on state financial support.[17] Of forty-one special "poor counties," 75.6 percent were "minority counties" (*YMJFG* 1992: 109). Although minorities account for only one-third of the provincial population, they represent two-thirds of the twelve million people officially declared poor.

Official Chinese statistics concerning illiteracy and level of education of minorities in Yunnan also point to a generally lower level of education as com-

16. At a semiboarding school, pupils eat at school during the lunch hour and return home when school finishes in the afternoon.

17. See also *Yunnan jiaoyu bao,* 2 Sept. 1995: 7, for a list of educational expenditures in Yunnan in 1993.

pared to the Han and to the Chinese national standard. In 1982, for instance, 45.09 percent of Han in Yunnan above the age of twelve were illiterate or semiliterate, whereas the figure was 58.53 percent for minorities and as high as 74.04 percent for minority women. Among Yao and Miao, more than 90 percent of women above the age of twelve were illiterate or semiliterate (*Yunnan jiaoyu sishi nian, 1949–1989:* 120). Of the Han, 13.53 percent had a junior secondary school education, as compared to 4.68 percent for minorities (Li Ping 1989: 74). According to the same statistics, Yunnan Province had the lowest percentage of university students and the second-lowest percentage of people educated beyond primary school (Liu Baoming 1993: 44). Statistics from eight years later, in 1990, show a remarkable drop in the number of illiterates or semiliterates, which fell to 25.44 percent of the population above the age of fifteen (*Yunnan tongji nianjian* 1991: 821). The city of Kunming had the lowest number, but Lijiang County was lower than the provincial average, with only 19.5 percent illiterates or semiliterates, whereas many other minority counties still had between 30 and 40 percent. In 1990 statistics showed that as many as 91.5 percent of all minority children in Yunnan had started school.

The official statistics concerning illiteracy and school enrollment among minorities must be read with caution. When reporting on the number of children in primary schools, schools and local governments sometimes count only the pupils who start, not those who drop out. People who have once participated in a short-term literacy course are often counted as literate, whereas those who have never been to school but have learned to read the local language in a monastery may be registered as illiterates. On the other hand, literacy in the Chinese language is not always the only measure of literacy: between 1984 and 1990, literacy campaigns in Lijiang County reportedly taught 10,946 people to read. Only 1,744 of these became literate in Chinese; a majority of 6,062 learned Lisu script (created in the 1950s) and a minority learned Naxi or Yi scipts (CLNAC 1995: 41). The illiteracy rate of the Tai (classified as the Dai *minzu*) was only 39.38 percent in Yunnan in 1982. This is relatively low because many who learned the Tai script in monasteries were counted as literate. Another more important reason for the lower rate compared to other *minzu* in Yunnan is that Chinese education is much more developed among the Tai Na in Dehong than among the Tai Lue in Sipsong Panna. All are officially classified as members of the Dai *minzu* and therefore are

included in the same statistics. Thus, in Sipsong Panna the people classified as part of the Dai nationality had a 49 percent illiteracy and semiliteracy rate for people above the age of twelve. In Mengla County alone the figure was 56.8 percent.[18]

Official statistics clearly indicate that fewer minority pupils graduate from primary school and, most important, fewer continue beyond primary school compared to the Han. Official figures from the 1990 census suggest that Koreans in China have the highest percentage of graduates at all levels beyond primary school, and that Koreans, Mongols, and Manchus are the only minorities with more graduates at all levels beyond primary school than the Han (*Zhongguo tongji nianjian* 1993: 91).

In 1980 the Yunnan provincial government made plans for the further education of the numerous poorly qualified *minban* teachers who were still working in many of the primary schools, especially in minority areas, and it emphasized the need for local governments to establish technical and agricultural vocational education. Special courses were started in all prefectures to educate *minban* teachers, and each year a quota would decide how many of those who passed the examination would become regular teachers. In 1994–95 all *minban* teachers I talked to hoped to become regular teachers through this kind of course, both because their wages would almost triple and because they felt that they had been looked down upon as irregular teachers.

The provincial government also decided to financially support the establishment of forty minority primary and secondary boarding schools. For several reasons, the boarding-school system in minority areas is still regarded very positively by the government and most local teachers and educators: the boarding school has more control over students, who cannot easily leave; students spend more time studying because they live at school; their parents have no influence on what they do in their spare time; they cannot participate in time-consuming religious activities; and they use the Chinese language more than they would at home. All minority secondary boarding schools are situated in county or prefectural capitals, where students from various minority ethnic groups and villages are gathered and subjected to a standardized education and exposed to cultural values that are often incongru-

18. See *Yunnan jiaoyu sishi nian, 1949–1989* 1990: 120; and *Yunnan Sheng Xishuangbanna Zhou Jinghong Xian di san ci renkou pucha shougong huizong ciliao huibian:* 27.

ent with those learned in the family and the village. Because boarding-school pupils' scores in examinations are generally higher than those of minority students in regular schools, educators and governments praise boarding schools for their practicality and academic success. Equally important, however, is the structure of the boarding school, which facilitates transmission of certain values and social practices to students who live far away from home for years and creates a sense of commonality and shared experience among students from various ethnic backgrounds.

The responsibility for developing and administering schools in Yunnan, as elsewhere in China, is shared in a hierarchical structure in which townships and administrative villages are responsible for their own local schools at the elementary levels, and county and prefectural governments administer the highest-level local educational institutions. Teachers in villages are paid by the county, apart from *minban* teachers, who are paid partly by the local community, which also finances school buildings and equipment. In Yunnan minority regions, villages (*ziran cun*) typically have a lower primary school (two or four years), administrative villages (*xingzheng cun*) have a full primary school (six years), townships (*xiang*) have a junior secondary school (*chuzhong;* three years), and county capitals have at least one senior secondary school (*gaozhong;* three years). Since 1993, when the central government emphasized that the national goal was to achieve nine years of compulsory education throughout China as announced in 1985, Yunnan has developed a strategy in the minority regions to gradually attain this goal. According to this plan, all minority areas must establish six years of compulsory education by the year 2000, while 70 percent must establish nine years.

At the provincial level there have been special minority classes at Yunnan University and the Teachers College, but today only one college in Kunming is specially designed to educate members of minority *minzu,* namely the Yunnan Institute of the Nationalities (the institute's own translation; YIN). In 1951 YIN started enrolling students recruited from among Yunnan's minorities. The main purpose for the establishment of YIN was to train local minority cadres who could implement government policy in minority areas and future autonomous regions. Curriculum emphasized socialism, patriotism, unity of the *minzu,* CCP minority policy, and Chinese language. Students were recruited from among local religious leaders, the local aristocracy, and secondary schools. Later in the 1950s and early 1960s, "culture

classes" (*wenhua ban*) were started to educate "cultural workers," who were supposed to improve the cultural level of the presumably backward minorities and to function as minority teachers and translators. Classes to teach selected minority languages were also started. After a period of severe criticism, periodical disruptions of education, and one-sided emphasis on political education during the Cultural Revolution, all classes and departments were restarted in 1976. Since 1977 examination results have determined enrollment. In 1979 enrollment was integrated into the national university entrance examination,[19] and education responded to the demands of the new modernization policy, so that common university subjects became relatively more important than short cadre-training courses.

In addition to teaching common university subjects, YIN offers, through the Department of Minority Languages and Literature (Minzu Yuwen Xi), classes for teachers and translators in Sipsong Panna Tai, Dehong Tai, Jingpo, Lisu, Lahu, Yi, and Wa languages. The history and anthropology departments include the history of minority regions in their curricula, and there is a special minority research department. However students (and many teachers as well) tend to regard the technical departments as the strong ones, while the department teaching minority languages is not highly valued. Many students in this department fail to enter YIN on the basis of their examination results, but are chosen and sponsored (*baosong*) by a senior secondary school or a special or technical school (*zhongzhuan*) to which they were expected to return after graduation.

Since the institute began enrolling students based on examination results, special measures have been taken to ensure that all minority groups are represented. A maximum of 5 percent Han students from poor border areas are accepted. In higher education in China a member of a minority *minzu* is preferred when scores equal those of a Han. In 1994 approximately 95 percent of the students and 33 percent of the staff at YIN were minorities. Compared to their total number in Yunnan, the Hui, Bai, and Naxi were best repre-

19. After the Cultural Revolution's abandonment of the examination system, the government announced in 1977 that university entrance again had to be based primarily on examination results. In 1978 tests were standardized, and students participating in the national exam received the same questions in each subject on the same day (see also Cleverley 1985: 223–25). In the minority institutes, additional criteria for admission remained to ensure that all minorities would be represented at the schools in spite of low examination results.

sented at the school. In spite of the special policy of allocating extra points to selected minority members, the ratio of Tai students has fallen significantly since the introduction of the examination system.[20]

The system of job assignment (*fenpei zhidu*) for graduates is an important tool in realizing the political purpose of the institution. The idea behind establishment of special education for minority people was that graduates should return to their local areas as transmitters of official government policy, as competent Communist cadres capable of acting as the indispensable link between the central government and the local minority population. Therefore the guiding principle is still "Where they come from, they should return to" (*Na lai na qu*), and the majority of graduates are still—with or without their own approval—sent back to their native places. Because this has generated growing dissatisfaction among students, the Yunnan government decided to release graduates from their obligation to be sent back if they pay a fee.[21]

Pu Linlin estimates that as many as 92 percent of students at the Central Institute of the Nationalities[22] in Beijing in 1991 wished to stay in the capital after graduation, and about one-third of the students at YIN wanted to stay in Kunming (Pu Linlin 1994: 64). This tendency is obviously of concern to many teachers and political authorities in Yunnan who need the minority graduates as a link between local minority populations and the central levels of government and to assist in modernization programs in minority areas. Consequently, students are often criticized for being more concerned about their own individual aspirations than about the common good. Clearly, the problem for political authorities and educators alike is how to teach minority students to dissociate themselves from their parents' and grandparents' worldview, religion, and customs while convincing them to return as civilizers to presumably backward areas.

20. See Li Li et al., eds., 1991: 129 for a complete scheme of all *minzu* at YIN from 1952 to 1990.

21. In 1994 students who did not want to be sent to a certain job officially had to pay between three thousand and four thousand yuan. However, even though some graduates manage to pay this fee, it is sometimes impossible for them to get household registration in the city, so that they have to return to their home county anyway. In 1994 only a very small number of YIN graduates had managed to find a job themselves.

22. Now the Nationalities University (Minzu Daxue).

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