10 Ethnic minority languages and cultures

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This chapter describes and analyses the cultures of China's ethnic minorities within a multidisciplinary theoretical framework. Its coverage includes not only cultural studies, but also has a significant focus on religion, performance arts, modernization and globalization theory, and politics. It discusses the ways in which modernization influences traditions, including arts and religions. Because of the influence of ethnic histories on their culture, there is quite a bit to say about the past. At the same time, the focus is more on the reform period in China (which began at the end of 1978), and especially the twenty-first century.

For this chapter, the most important term is 'culture', and it has proved very difficult for observers to define. It is often understood as merely the arts of a society, but most observers see it as much broader in scope, encompassing much or all of what Marxists regard as the superstructure of society, as distinct from its economic base. Virtually all definitions proposed so far have been subject to criticism of one sort or another. Among relatively recent definitions, a widely cited textbook states that culture is 'a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the "meaning" of other people's behaviour' (Spencer-Oatey, 2008: 3).

Due to space limitations it is not possible to discuss ethnic cultures comprehensively here. A few specific aspects are chosen, largely because of their importance in the particular context of China's ethnic minorities in the contemporary age. These include especially language, religion, and the arts. Some potential candidates to be considered under culture, such as gender and education, are handled elsewhere in this volume and so omitted here.

Cultures are learned, passing from generation to generation. They are not primordial, let alone part of human nature. Although some cultures have proved, in their details, to be more tenacious and/or conservative than others, all of them are subject to change. In other words, cultures are, to some degree or another, dynamic. Though shared among the members of groups of people, culture is not shared equally. Elites take the lead in distributing and preserving cultural traits.

In contemporary times, identity has become of increasing relevance around the world, and culture is an important repository. With the onset of globalization, the members of various nationalities have become more concerned to distinguish their culture from that of other ethnic groups. Although influences operate in all directions, they tend to move much more from the powerful to the weaker ethnic groups or nationalities. This can readily occasion struggles by the weaker to preserve their cultural identities, to assert the local against the more powerful global. Meyer and Geschiere (1999: 2) express this concern well as follows:

There is much empirical evidence that people's awareness of being involved in open-ended global flows seems to trigger a search for fixed orientation points and action frames, as well as determined efforts to affirm old and construct new boundaries. For students of globalization it is therefore important to develop an understanding of globalization that not only takes into account the rapid increase in mobility of people, goods and images, but also the fact that, in many places, flow goes hand in hand with a closure of identities which often used to be much more fuzzy and permeable.

The desire to preserve culture identities against the forces of globalization, to preserve one's own ethnic culture against one or more others that may be powerful and influential, can become highly politicized and internationalized. This is very evident in contemporary China, especially in the case of ethnic minorities with well-organized diasporas. By far the best known of these is Tibetan culture, with Uyghur increasing its international profile in the twenty-first century.

THE MINORITY LANGUAGES IN CHINA

Language is a very important part of culture. Some people argue that national culture and language are so inextricably intertwined that the very life of a national culture depends on the maintenance of its language. This may be an exaggeration, since cultures manifest other features besides language, such as religion and arts, which in some contexts may continue to thrive, even apart from the language. But it is beyond argument that the disappearance of a language makes the long-term survival of the relevant culture difficult.

Virtually all ethnic minorities have their own languages, with many having a plurality. In the late 1990s, Chinese linguists estimated that there were about 120 minority languages at the end of the twentieth century (Zhou, 2003: 23), as against only 55 state-recognized minorities. However, Professor Ma Rong at Peking University estimated that among

the 55 ethnic minorities, 'one-third function in Chinese as well as in their own language, six of the nationalities have converted mainly or entirely to using Chinese, and a majority of the members of forty of the nationalities can use Chinese as a second language' (Ma R, 2007b: 12). In other words, by no means all the 120 minority languages are widely used.

Two of China's most populous ethnic minorities are almost entirely Chinese-speaking. The Manchus, who once ruled China and spoke and wrote their own language, have gradually abandoned its use in favour of Chinese. The Manchu language is spoken by hardly any people nowadays, Zhou (2003: 25) putting the number at the beginning of the twenty-first century at only a few hundred. The Hui, who are identified mainly through their Muslim religion, are entirely Chinese-speaking, although many clergy can recite from the Qur'an in its original Arabic.

Linguists are not in full agreement over how to classify the minority languages. For a start, Chinese linguists have some differences with those in other countries. But it would be reasonable to say that the most important language families in China are the Sino-Tibetan and Altaic. Other than the Sinitic languages, the Sino-Tibetan extend in discontinuous communities over southern, southwestern and western China; the Altaic in the regions of the north and northwest. Among the Sino-Tibetan languages, those with the largest number of speakers include Zhuang, which belongs to the Dong-Dai subgroup, Miao, to the Miao-Yao subgroup, and Yi and Tibetan,¹ both belonging to the Tibeto-Burman subgroup. The Altaic family's top languages, in terms of the number of speakers, include Uyghur, a Turkic language, and Mongolian, which belongs to the Mongolic subgroup.

One important language that has caused considerable debate over its classification is Korean. Possibilities are that it is an isolate, namely not belonging to any language family, or one of the Japonic subgroup of the family of Altaic languages. Of course, most Korean-speakers live in Korea, but there is a significant Korean minority in China, the 2010 census showing them at 1,830,929 people.

Turning from spoken languages to written, we find that most of the minority languages use Chinese characters. There are a few, however, that have adopted either a widely used script, such as Roman or Arabic, or their own scripts. The Zhuang language has adopted Roman letters, which are used in some contexts. Turkic languages like Uyghur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz use the Arabic alphabet. Among the languages of China's minorities that have developed their own scripts are the Tibetans, the Mongolians, the Manchus, the Yi, the Dai and the Naxi (Dongba script). The Manchu script has more or less died out now, and the Dongba is more a museum piece than an actively used script. However, perhaps ironically,

the Mongolian script is still used in China, but in the Republic of Mongolia has been replaced by Cyrillic script for most practical purposes.

According to a government white paper (Information Office of the State Council, 2005, III: 3), 'By the end of 2003, 22 ethnic minorities in China used 28 written languages. In China, the spoken and written languages of ethnic minorities are widely used in the fields of law and justice, administration, education, political and social life, and other areas'. Every note in the Chinese currency, from 100 yuan RMB down to 1 jiao, has 'The People's Bank of China' written in Chinese characters, *pinyin*, Mongolian, Tibetan, Uyghur, and Zhuang, the last language using the Roman alphabet.

Government language policy

Official policy on ethnic minority languages is to a large extent a function of policy on minorities themselves. One authority, writing in 2002, claims that under the People's Republic 'China's minority language has shifted back and forth between a willingness to accommodate minority languages and a determination to promote the Chinese language in their stead' (Zhou, 2003: 36). In very general terms, the period from 1949 to 1957 was accommodationist both in policy towards the ethnic minorities in general and language in particular. From 1958 to 1977, policy was much tougher, with strong attempts to promote Chinese language at the expense of ethnic languages. The period of reform has seen a return to accommodation, but the intensive pursuit of modernization has had the effect of favouring the use of Chinese over ethnic languages.

Until 1957, the CCP went out of its way to promote ethnic languages. Article 71 of the 1954 constitution required the governments of autonomous places to use minority languages in their official business and for the development of minority culture and education. Article 77 also required law courts to use relevant minority languages and to provide interpreters in cases where defendants or petitioners spoke a language different from the one prevailing in the relevant area. This aimed to give the chance to minority defendants or petitioners to promote their case in their own language.

Late in 1957 an official change took place from opposing great Han chauvinism to fighting against local nationalism. There were implications for language policy. Authorities now considered that too much promotion of ethnic languages was dangerous, because nation-building necessitated a common language that everybody could understand, and that could only be Chinese. As Zhou (2003: 62) puts it, 'language policy was an area where the CCP was searching for a short-cut to national convergence'. Moreover,

during the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong insisted that class struggle should always be paramount. The implication was that national struggle was either totally subordinate to class struggle or no longer important. This meant that there was no longer any point in the concern of ethnic minorities in preserving their own languages.

With the death of Mao in 1976 the Cultural Revolution was gradually reversed, being formally and totally negated by the CCP Central Committee in June 1981. Meanwhile, the earlier accommodationist policy on minority languages was reinstated. In 1984 *The Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy* was adopted by the National People's Congress. This law had no less than six articles entirely devoted to minority languages. Minorities should be free to use their own languages, both in the public and private spheres. Autonomous governments and law courts should use minority languages for official business, guaranteeing minorities the right to use their own language to defend their own case. Article 49 stipulated that officials of all ethnic groups should learn the languages of the area where they worked. This means that Han officials who work in a minority area should learn the language of the relevant ethnic group.

Since that time there have been no radical breaks in policy such as those that occurred in the late 1950s or late 1970s. There have, however, been less drastic swings. One of these occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the crisis of 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 caused a partial retreat from the fully accommodationist policy that had been instituted only a decade earlier.

In no case has policy declared that minority languages should not be used. However, the realities of modernization have favoured the rise of Chinese (Modern Standard, *Putonghua*), as against the ethnic minority languages. In the early twenty-first century, a study undertaken by Huang Xing of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology found that only five ethnic languages were still in active use in such areas of the public sphere as government, law, publishing, the media and education. These are Uyghur, Tibetan, Mongolian, Korean and Kazak. Yi and Dai are also active but 'more principally used in folk activities and religious activities of the two nationalities' (Huang, 2003: 2). Ma Rong (2007b: 11) expresses the realities of the situation with ethnic languages as follows:

We use our study of the situation with regard to language in Inner Mongolia as an illustrative case. There we discovered that language utilization is tilted almost entirely in one direction, that is, whereas Mongolians primarily develop proficiency in Chinese, very few Han Chinese learn Mongolian. In Lhasa the situation is the same, with Tibetans learning Chinese but Han Chinese not

learning Tibetan, and, even though Chinese and Tibetan are both considered official languages, the language actually utilized for interaction is most often Chinese. This sort of phenomenon reflects the role played by practical value in changing language utilization for processes involving social interaction, production, trade, science, culture, health, and education.

Despite this rather grim situation, the formal policy of the government remains support for ethnic languages. This is shown in the Chinese government's State Commission of Minority Affairs' sponsorship and assistance, together with the United Nations Educational and Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO), for a project to save endangered ethnic languages. The project is being carried out by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and results from the fact that, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, there were 22 ethnic languages in China with fewer than 10,000 speakers. The Institute documents the structure of the languages, researches their genealogical relationships and, using digital technology, records oral narrations and communicative scenes (Huang, 2003: 5).

Minority language use in education

The Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional National Autonomy states in Article 37 that 'schools (classes and grades) and other institutions of education where most of the students come from minority nationalities shall, whenever possible, use textbooks in their own languages, and use their languages as the medium of instruction'.

There have been serious attempts to implement this policy. However, success has not been consistent. It is perhaps not surprising that if the minority language has an established script and the students in an area or particular school all belong to the same ethnic minority, the language of instruction and of textbooks can use the relevant minority language. Textbooks are almost all simply translations from Chinese, but in a few minority areas I have visited I have heard of textbooks in a minority language that are specifically tailored to the students' particular ethnic minority.

In some areas where two-track or bilingual education is prevalent, there are schools for students of one local minority and other schools for Han. In practice, only five minority languages are frequently used in schools for students with the relevant mother tongue: Uyghur, Tibetan, Mongolian, Korean and Kazak. In such schools, the instruction and textbooks in almost all courses are in the relevant one among those five.

As an example, we might take up the situation in Xinjiang, about which there has been some controversy. Arienne Dwyer believes that bilingual

education is in fact hypocritical. She argues that such a policy is ‘designed to help pupils make a rapid and smooth transition from the native language to the dominant language’ (Dwyer, 2005: 35) and really just a cover for eventual monolingualism, that is, using only Chinese. She claims (Dwyer, 2005: 39–40) that the ‘final step of a long-term trend towards monolingualism occurred in May 2002, when it was decided that Xinjiang University would not offer courses in the Uyghur language, at least in the first two years of coursework’.

My own enquiries during a visit to Xinjiang in 2010 suggest that the two-track system of education still existed, with some schools using Uyghur for most instruction, some using Chinese. However, the higher one goes up the education system, the more the language of instruction is likely to be Chinese. Uyghur-language schools are far less common at middle-school level than primary. At university level Chinese is by far the dominant language of instruction, though Uyghur language and culture courses still exist, and they use Uyghur. The trend is towards Chinese.

Children whose parents opt to send them to Uyghur-language schools (termed *min kao min*) will retain their Uyghur culture very well. Nowadays, many Uyghur parents send their children to Chinese-language schools (termed *min kao Han*). The reason they do this is the belief that they will stand a better chance of getting a good job than if they go to the Uyghur-language schools, simply because they will have a much better mastery of Chinese. Uyghur *min kao Han* students regret their parents’ decision only if they fail to do well in the employment market or in society. On the other hand, some Uyghurs look down on their co-nationals who go to the Chinese-language schools. In many cases such *min kao Han* students may be regarded as too influenced by Han culture, but in the worst-case scenario they might suffer resentment or contempt as renegades to Uyghur culture. They themselves sometimes feel a sense of shame regarding their minority background, or a cultural lack. Others feel that their Chinese education has made them more modern, progressive or internationalist than they would otherwise have been (see, for example, Finley, 2007).

In some minority areas, a course in the students’ mother tongue may help preserve the language in the public space, while in addition this language can be used, along with Chinese, as an auxiliary language of instruction. One scholar from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences carried out research in the 1990s in Yunnan among Miao and Jingpo communities, but found resistance to this kind of bilingual education, even among the minorities themselves. Other than lack of well-trained teachers and textbooks, he analysed the reasons for this relative failure as follows (Huang, 2003: 4):

But the more fundamental cause is still that the minority nationalities lack confidence and enthusiasm in their own mother tongues. Because of the narrow domain of mother tongue use, they think that learning the mother tongue won't help them further their study or help them advance in society, whereas mastery of Chinese will help them secure more opportunities to participate in social life and social development.

Students who belong to minorities and their parents think they will not be able to compete in society, and especially in the job market, unless their Chinese is more or less equivalent to that of native speakers.

RELIGION

Under the Common Programme, introduced on 29 September 1949, the minorities' right to autonomy included that to practise and develop their own cultures and religions. During the Cultural Revolution of 1966 to 1976, all religions everywhere in China were persecuted. Since then, government policy has been to tolerate religious belief and practice, except when perceived to threaten state security. Chinese law protects 'normal religious activities' and forbids discrimination against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. However, it also prohibits the use of religion to disrupt public order or threaten the interests of the state or national unity.²

The Chinese state has a list of religions it tolerates, which includes Islam, Buddhism and Christianity, but maintains some control through such methods as CCP cells or 'democratic management committees', established in monasteries and other religious institutions. There has been a major religious revival everywhere in China since the early 1980s. Religious practice and belief have appeared to strengthen in the twenty-first century among religions with strong clergies, such as Islam, Buddhism and Christianity, but weakened among other less clergy-based faiths as modernization has gathered momentum.

In general, the minorities are more religious than the Han, both in belief and practice (Mackerras, 2011b: vol. III). Several of them, including the Tibetans and Uyghurs, are notable for the strength of the role that religion has traditionally played in their societies, and continues to do so to the present. Among the Han, the impact of the state-oriented ideology of Confucianism has always prevented religious bodies from exercising influence, let alone control, on the formal running of the state, and this continues to be the case in the modern age. Among the minorities, by contrast, several have seen strong religious influence on state polity. The Tibetan Dalai Lama was formerly the head both of the religion and the

government, while the clergy was important both socially and politically among the Muslim ethnic groups.

Among China's minorities the most significant religions are of three kinds. In descending order of importance, these are (1) Islam, (2) Buddhism, especially Tibetan Buddhism, and (3) others, including the folk religions and Christianity. All of them are of great importance in any discussion of the ethnic minorities.

Islam

It is possible to divide the Muslim ethnic minorities into three groups. These are the Hui, who are Sinic culturally, the Turkic groups and the others (Ben-Adam, 1999; Dillon, 1999; Gillette, 2000; Gladney, 2003; Jaschok and Chan, 2009; Wang, 1996). According to the 2010 census, there are 10,586,087 people classified as Hui in China. The Hui speak Chinese and are culturally the same as the Han, except for their belief in Islam. Yet historically speaking they have a separate identity through Muslims that came to China but then integrated into the Chinese community through intermarriage and in other ways. Founder of the Republic of China Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) regarded Muslims as a separate *minzu* from the mainstream Han Chinese.

Scholars have expressed the relationship between the Hui and Han over the centuries and until today in several different ways. Israeli (2002) finds more conflict than harmony claiming that even now the Hui wish to be part of worldwide Muslim community and that being Chinese matters less or much less to them than being Muslim. Lipman (1997) takes a somewhat different view. He calls them historically 'familiar strangers' but states that they are now unequivocally Chinese. Gladney (1991) points to the growth of ethnic consciousness and identity since the Reform policies of the 1980s. Zang (2007) finds that the Hui can be Chinese and assert ethnic identity at the same time, in a manner he terms 'pluralist assimilation'.

Yet under the PRC system of classification it is impossible for any Han Chinese to be Muslim. This is because if they are, they are classified as Hui, not Han. The Hui are found all over China. They vary enormously in their dedication to Islam. Some are very strict in observance, especially those in Gansu and Ningxia. By contrast, Gladney (1991: 262) researched a community in Fujian, in southeast China, which claimed Hui identity on the basis of their 'ancestral heritage', not 'their Islamic belief'.

The tenth-century conversion of the Uyghur ruler in Kashgar was the origin of Islam not only among the Uyghurs but even among all the Turkic peoples. The most populous of the Turkic Muslim ethnic groups in China

are the Uyghurs (10,069,346 in the 2010 census). The main Uyghur communities are in central and southern Xinjiang, which is the largest in area and most northwestern of China's province-level units. Although commitment to Islam varies among the Uyghurs, it is generally stronger than that of the Hui, especially in southern Xinjiang.

There are four other Turkic nationalities in China. They are, with the 2010 census populations, the Kazaks (1,462,588), the Kyrgyz (186,708), the Uzbeks (10,569) and the Tatars (3556). The Kazaks live mostly in north Xinjiang adjoining Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz in areas adjoining Kyrgyzstan. The Uzbeks are culturally and linguistically very similar to the Uyghurs; indeed in parts of Central Asia Uzbeks and Uyghurs are regarded as members of the same ethnic group (Zang, 2015: 4–5).

The Salars (130,607), who live nearby the Hui centre of Linxia in southern Gansu, have strong ethnic and historical links with the Uzbeks and Central Asia more generally. They enjoy the reputation of being the most devout Muslims in China. The only ethnic group in China to speak an Iranian language is the Tajiks (51,069), most of whom live in Xinjiang in a strip bordering on Tajikistan. Two other Muslim ethnic groups live nearby Linxia. They are the Dongxiang (621,500), who are Mongolian culturally, and the Bonan (20,074), ethnically and culturally closer to the Tibetans.

According to official figures, the total number of Muslims in China in 2010 was just over 23 million. This figure was reached by adding up the 2010 census figures of the ten ethnic minorities that are classified as Muslim and assumes that everybody belonging to a Muslim ethnic group believes in Islam. Probably this assumption is largely valid, but it is not entirely so. Especially among the Hui, there are quite a few people whose belief in Islam is anything but solid. Although the proportion of the population belonging to the CCP is lower among the Muslim minorities than the Han, there are certainly some members, including some who affirm belief in the atheism to which the CCP officially subscribes. Almost all Muslims in China are Sunni. The small number of Shi'ite Muslims belong to one of two ethnic groups, namely the Tajik and Bonan.

Buddhism

Other than Islam, the universalistic religion most important among China's ethnic minorities is Buddhism. There are two basic types of Buddhism. The earlier, and for its own adherents, purer or closer to the Buddha's teachings, is Theravada Buddhism. The other is Mahayana Buddhism, which, developing between the second century BCE and the second century CE, claimed to represent the most complete teachings of

the Buddha. In China, Mahayana Buddhism is much more widespread than Theravada. It is, for instance, the Buddhism of the dominant Han people, the Tibetans and many other ethnic groups. Theravada Buddhism is found among only a few ethnic minorities in Yunnan Province, in particular the Dai, who numbered 1,261,311 in the 2010 census. There are strong similarities between the Dai on the one hand and the Shan of Myanmar and Thais of Thailand on the other. The Shan and Thais are also strong adherents of Theravada Buddhism.

By far the most important form of Buddhism among the ethnic minorities is the esoteric form of Mahayana Buddhism introduced into Tibet in the seventh century. Often named Lamaism because some of the senior clergy are designated as lamas, it is more properly called Tibetan Buddhism. Whatever its name, it has become essential to Tibetan culture, society and identity.

In all Tibetan areas the present author has visited, Tibetan Buddhism is openly and fervently practised. Monasteries are increasing in number and prospering, with numerous pilgrims, while almost all houses have a shrine or room allocated to prayer. A survey carried out in 1996 by a team led by Professor Herbert Yee (Yu Zhen) of Hong Kong's Baptist University among 2758 Tibetans in the TAR, Qinghai and Sichuan found that 86 per cent believed in Tibetan Buddhism, 10.5 per cent did not believe in or practise any religion, and 3.5 per cent other religions, such as the traditional Bon and Islam. Most of the nonbelievers were cadres and CCP members (Yu and Guo, 1999: 46–7). The great majority of Tibetan families and people this author interviewed, both in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) and other Tibetan areas, claimed to be strong devotees of Tibetan Buddhism. Even the house of a CCP member visited in Gyantse had a shrine room for prayer. CCP members are not allowed to practise any religion, though they may attend religious festivals for social reasons.

In the past, each family was expected to give a son to the monastic order, and the proportion of the population in the clerical order was very high, both in the TAR and other Tibetan areas. Goldstein (1998: 25–6) claims that in 1951 there were about 115,000 monks in some 2500 monasteries, accounting for some 10 to 15 per cent of Tibet's male population. Although these figures declined drastically over the next few decades, they have begun to rise again since the early 1980s. Official figures for 2000, 2004 and 2010 for the TAR only, give the same figure of 46,000 people in monasteries. The figures should be taken as approximations only, since giving exactly the same number for three different years would invite suspicion about accuracy. But they do imply quite high numbers all the same, especially since the TAR is only a portion of the

Tibetan areas (Information Office of the State Council, 2000a: 49; 2004: Section 4; 2010: 229).

In a visit to the Tibetan areas of Sichuan at the end of 1996, the present writer found not only flourishing monasteries, but several families in which one of the men lived as a monk in the shrine room, having dedicated himself to religion. Several independent sources also indicated that this was a very common practice among Tibetans. It is therefore possible that the official figure of 46,000 is an undercount, and indeed that despite the identical figures for 2000, 2004 and 2010 it has continued to grow in the twenty-first century.

One very interesting phenomenon is the number of boys who enter monasteries. These were numerous in virtually all monasteries visited in Tibet and Tibetan areas since the mid-1980s. They are not allowed to commit themselves to monastic life until they reach the age of 18, and they must not only be willing but also satisfy some other rigorous conditions.

One scholar writes that, for many young intellectuals and bohemian young people, 'Tibet has come to symbolize the ultimate in spirituality'. He adds that 'increasing numbers of urban Han youths are visiting Tibet', not 'to inspire and convert "the other"', but instead 'to "gain inspiration" and "search for themselves"' (Baranovitch, 2001: 385). This comment accords with my own experience, several of my own students in China telling me that they have visited Tibet for just such purposes. It is an enormous turn-around from the past and suggests that there are quite a few Han who are quite open to seeking from Tibetans the spirituality that tends to be lacking in the lives of many urban Chinese, especially the young.

In the sixteenth century, the eastern Mongolians converted to Tibetan Buddhism. To this day, the Mongolians are, apart from the Tibetans, the main adherents of Tibetan Buddhism among China's ethnic minorities. Although there are some large monasteries in Inner Mongolia, they are dwarfed both in size and spiritual gravitas by the main ones in the Tibetan areas. Though Tibetan Buddhism survives as part of Mongolian culture, it does not exert anything like the social impact that it once did among the Mongolians and still does among the Tibetans.

Other religious faiths

Other than Islam and Buddhism, two categories of religious practice and belief worth mentioning are indigenous faiths of various kinds, and Christianity. Local faiths are widespread among China's ethnic minorities, with particular individuals or groups claiming powers not shared by others. Many of the ethnic minorities practice shamanism, with local

shamans organizing rituals that are often connected with local theatrical performances. Shamans also claim supernatural powers in healing diseases, and some people preferred their services to those of the local doctors in some ethnic areas. The Naxi of Lugu Lake on the border between Yunnan and Sichuan have their own indigenous religion called the Dongba, which they still prize as a sign of their traditional culture. However, it is no longer a vibrant part of their social life. In some ethnic areas, religious rituals are performed for tourists in return for a fee. Probably, these popular faiths are not very strong socially among the ethnic minorities. On the other hand, they do not look like disappearing either.

Litzinger (2000a: 197) notes that although the CCP does not like the popularity of the shamans among the Yao of central southern China, it concedes that it is 'futile to try to control every aspect of religious belief and popular ritual'. This comment seems to be valid in many other situations among the ethnic minorities. One point of great importance as far as the CCP is concerned is that neither shamans nor any popular faiths threaten the security of the state. This sets them apart from Tibetan Buddhism or Islam.

Finally, Christian missionaries of the past, and even today, have exerted some influence on the ethnic minorities. While the missionaries did not succeed in converting any of the ethnic minorities in toto, they did found Christian ethnic communities. A good example is the one in Shimenkan, Weining County, in the far central west of Guizhou, which is a Miao area. I visited two Catholic churches in the Korean areas of Yanbian near the border with North Korea, in both cases the priest claiming significant numbers of practising Catholics in his parish. Also, there is a Russian ethnic group in China, which still belongs to the Russian Orthodox faith.

THE ARTS

The traditional arts among the minorities range from architecture and visual arts to a wide variety of performing arts. China's ethnic minorities have created some of the great monuments of human creativity, probably the best example being the gigantic Potala Palace in Lhasa, which is set on a mountain and dominates the city. At the other end, the minorities have a range of traditional songs and dances and theatrical performances of various kinds. Because the arts are so diverse in nature, I focus here on two categories: architecture and some allied arts, and the performing arts.

Two general points may be made about the arts of the minorities. First, they have a mass appeal and tend to be interwoven into the societies

where they exist (Mackerras, 1984: 187). The songs and dances, and the theatrical performances have evolved as part of the lives of the people. Love and courtship songs and dances are very prominent, as are dances representing labour and leisure of various kinds. It is impossible to attribute a composer, choreographer, sculptor or architect to many traditional artistic items. There are few professional artists in the traditional societies of the minorities.

In the 1950s and first half of the 1960s, the government adopted a policy of fostering the traditional arts of the minorities. It sponsored the detailed knowledge of traditional artists and also encouraged professionals to create and perform new forms of art, founding schools to train painters, dancers, actors, and other artists. The folk arts remained, but underwent two important processes. One was deliberate professionalization by the government, the other specific use for propaganda purposes to serve the interests of socialism and the CCP.

During the Cultural Revolution, the government tried to uproot most of the traditional arts, including those of the minorities. Professional performance troupes, painters, sculptors and other artists were restricted in the content they were allowed to produce, which became extremely politicized. Favoured topics included love of the CCP, Chairman Mao, socialism and the homeland, and a tight rein was kept on any deviations that might show the old feudal classes and their ideas in a positive light. Old temples, monasteries and mosques were closed and in many cases destroyed, the clergy who operated them being sent out for labour or at least into the lay life.

In the Reform period, ideological strictures have weakened greatly. Mosques and other religious establishments have reopened and in some places new ones built. Traditional arts and themes, including some of the 'special features' (特色) of the minorities, returned to the performing arts (see Mackerras, 1984: 188). Modernization processes have tended to weaken how arts operate within the societies where they exist. Moreover, two important forces from outside the societies of the minorities have impacted considerably on a few of the traditional art forms and on specific minorities. One of these is tourism, which has given a commercial basis to those arts and areas affected. The other is the intervention of UNESCO, which has included various tangible and nontangible cultural forms of China's ethnic minorities among its catalogue of protected and promoted genres of art.

There are valid artistic expressions among all the minorities. Among UNESCO's World Heritage sites, several lie within the borders of the PRC and are attributable to peoples now regarded as among China's ethnic minorities. The most important is Lijiang, in Yunnan Province,

a Naxi area declared as a UNESCO heritage site in 2006 and discussed in some detail in this volume's chapter on ethnic tourism by Tim Oakes. In addition, famous sites include the Potala Palace in Lhasa, which is Tibetan; the site of Kublai Khan's capital Xanadu, which is north of the Great Wall and at least largely Mongolian in creation; and the Capital Cities and Tombs of the Ancient Kokuryo Kingdom, which was Korean and ruled of parts of northeastern China and the northern half of the Korean Peninsula from 277 BCE to 668 CE. This last one has caused some controversy, since Korea can also legitimately claim it as part of national history, even though it lies within the territory of the PRC.

Tibetan Buddhism spawned great artistic achievements. Apart from the Potala Palace, there are three great Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in and near Lhasa, these being the Jokhang right in the centre of the city, and the Drepung and Sera not far outside. There are several other great Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in and near Shigatse and Gyantse in the TAR and in several provinces. These monasteries all contain large numbers of sculptures and paintings on Buddhist themes.

Because of the prohibition against the depiction of people and animals, the sculpture and paintings so prevalent in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries are not found in mosques. Yet the Uyghurs, Hui and other Islamic ethnic minorities in China do boast distinguished architectural history in their mosques. The great mosque in Yinchuan, the capital of Ningxia, follows Arabic architectural style, while most other Hui mosques are strongly influenced by Chinese patterns and some resemble Buddhist temples.

The mosques of the Uyghurs tend to follow Central Asian style. There are two features quite characteristic of Uyghur mosques in southern Xinjiang. One is the prayer-halls, which, though roofed, can be more or less fully open to the outside; they are not domed in the traditional Arabic style. The second is that there are numerous columns along the hall, with characteristic designs at the point at the top where the column merges with the roof.

A good example of this is the great Idkah Mosque in Kashgar, which is the largest in China. Dating from the mid-fifteenth century, it has been renovated many times, including under the People's Republic. Other examples are the beautiful mosque in Yutian, southern Xinjiang. The Altun (Golden) Mosque in Yarkant, not far to the southeast of Kashgar, dates from 1533 but has been renovated many times. Quite close to the prayer-hall are the tombs of Abdurixithan Khan and his wife Amanisa Khan (1526–60). She is credited with arranging, editing and collecting what has become the accepted canonical form of the *Twelve Muqam*, which will be discussed below. These mosques are all still religiously active.

Among the ethnic minorities of southern China, the Dong are famous

for their characteristic covered bridges and multi-storey drum towers. Both these architectural forms are still fairly widespread in the Dong areas of Guangxi, Guizhou and Hunan. They are social structures, used for such purposes as holding meetings, courtship and dancing.

The performing arts

Traditional songs and dances are the most prominent performing arts among China's ethnic minorities. Some ethnic minorities practise some form of shamanism and shamans' ritual songs are among those folksongs that express some aspect of the life of the ethnic group from which they come. Drinking songs are very popular, especially on festive occasions. Among several forms of songs, epic ballads are special in being more prominent among a few minorities than among the Han. A very popular example of this form is *Ashima*, which comes from the Sani people, who are a branch of the Yi of the Southwest. Ashima is a Sani girl who is abducted and forced into marriage with a local rich man's son, but then saved by her courageous brother. Tragically, she is drowned on her way home from her victory. Yet her story is famous among the Sani and, given prominence by government authorities, has become widely known among other ethnic groups as well.

Dance is almost universal as a performance art. Although themes like courtship and other expressions of daily life such as hunting and nature (imitating animals and birds) are found among many ethnic groups and cross-influences are inevitable, a great many of the ethnic minorities have distinctive dance styles and movements, sometimes with their own stories attached. A highly developed form of dance is the *cham* of the Tibetans and Mongolians, which shows the struggle between good and evil, and is rooted in the Tibetan Buddhism that is so important to the peoples of both ethnic groups. *Cham* dances are notable for the large variety of masks used by the dancers. They are still frequently performed in the temples and monasteries of the Tibetan areas, the performers being monks and the men or boys of the local village. Government policy has also been to put selected dances and extracts on stage in a professionalized form, performed by trained dancers.

If *cham* stands at the more developed end of dance, then examples of complex forms of performance arts among China's minorities include the Uyghur *Twelve Muqam* and the Tibetan *ache lhamo*. Both have been inscribed in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the *Twelve Muqam* in 2008 and *ache lhamo* in 2009.

The version of the *Twelve Muqam* now accepted as canonical is the one attributed to Amanisa Khan, mentioned above. However, there are local

and other variants. Harris (2008: 92) writes that ‘there is no reason to assume that the particular structures of the contemporary Twelve Muqam have any historical depth at all,’ with the canonization of the Muqam an ongoing project. The *Twelve Muqam* are musical suites combining various performance arts, including musical pieces, songs, and dances. Some of the songs and music are traditional but some are also classical, played by distinctive Uyghur musical instruments, among which perhaps the most important is the long-necked bowed stringed *satar*, with its characteristic timbre. The choreography and costuming of the dances is likewise highly distinctive. Popular dances include balancing bowls on the head, while among solos are those imitating the movements of animals. The *Twelve Muqam* last about a full day if performed in full. A performance has been professionally videotaped in full, with twelve videotapes lasting some 24 hours (Tomur et al., 2002). Performances of part of variants of the *Twelve Muqam* are still given in Xinjiang, Beijing and elsewhere from time to time. The *Twelve Muqam* are also still performed at the Uyghur social gatherings called *meshrep*, but probably with declining frequency.

Ache lhamo dates from the fifteenth century and is the main genre of Tibetan drama. Over the centuries about a dozen items developed as standard. Several are set in India and almost all are anonymous. All are infused with Buddhist imagery and motifs, dealing with Tibetan history, heroes, kings, princes, and beautiful women, the introduction of Buddhism into Tibet, and mythological themes. The endings are invariably happy, sometimes with an appropriate leading character ascending the throne as king. Singing in *ache lhamo* is melismatic, and the orchestral accompaniment consists only of a drum and pair of cymbals. As with the *cham* dances, a notable feature is the use of masks for gods and demons. Human characters wear colour-coded makeup, for instance, yellow symbolizing a king. There are three parts: an introductory masked dance, the drama itself, and a valedictory ceremony with no relation to the plot (Pearlman, 2002).

Since the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama (1617–1682), *ache lhamo* has been regularly performed at the Summer Palace of the Dalai Lama, the Norbu Lingka. There are still stages in the Potala Palace and Drepung Monastery for performances. The tradition, still followed, is to put on a performance in a tent where large gatherings can sit around four sides of a central performance area. There are now established theatres where revised or reformed *ache lhamo* can be performed. To judge from my experience, the *ache lhamo* is still quite popular among Tibetans (see also Mackerras, 1990: 132–4).

Although the *ache lhamo* is probably the oldest and most developed of China’s ethnic minority dramas, it is not the only one. One highly

traditional genre is *nuo* 侗 drama, which is found among the Tujia of Guizhou, as well as several other ethnic groups. *Nuo* drama is notable for its distinctive masks, which are believed to transform the masters of this genre from humans into *nuo* gods. *Nuo* is thus a highly religious and ritualistic genre, with rather close connections with society. Since the 1980s, the *nuo* theatre has gained political favour by becoming a 'cultural marker' of the Tujia (Li, 2015: 123).

ETHNIC CULTURES AND POLITICS IN CHINA

The idea that *nuo* theatre has gained political favour through its association with an ethnic minority highlights the interrelationship between ethnic cultures and politics in China. It suggests the potential of a positive correlation between politics and ethnic arts, even a form based in religion. Until the late 1970s the CCP and government were very insistent on using the ethnic arts as propaganda to promote ideology that was socialist or at least pro-government. Traditional themes were acceptable before the Cultural Revolution, but had to have progressive content. A good example is the story of the Sani girl Ashima mentioned above, which emphasizes the courage and virtues of women and the people belonging to the poor classes and the selfishness of the feudal or bourgeois classes. As noted above, the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 saw the exclusion of all themes apart from those that emphasized revolution, class struggle, or love of one's home, such as the beauty of the scenery of the ethnic lands.

With the end of the Cultural Revolution, traditional themes and arts revived. Indeed, for a while they became stronger than ever, as exemplified by the *nuo* theatre. However, two factors connected with politics have gained in force since the 1980s, and both have tended to function as threats to traditions. The first of these is the combination of modernization and globalization, the second is the interconnection of two religions espoused by particular ethnic minorities with separatism.

Here we take up two ethnic groups that illustrate most directly the close interconnection between ethnic cultures in China and politics. These are the Tibetans, and their diasporic icon the 14th Dalai Lama, and the Uyghurs. Zang (2015: 135–64) offers a brief but excellent summation of the Tibet and Xinjiang situations.

The 14th Dalai Lama has become a celebrity figure with an immense following for his saintly and gentle personality in the West and elsewhere. He is regarded internationally as the guardian both of Tibetan Buddhism and of Tibetan culture more generally. Despite vehement opposition from Chinese authorities, the door to Western presidents, prime ministers

and other such dignitaries was usually open to him in the last decade of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first, although the acceleration of China's rise has tended to block his path more frequently since then.

The Dalai Lama appeared to get on well with the Chinese government in the first half of the 1950s, but a rebellion in 1959 led to his escape to India, where he set up a government-in-exile based in Dharamsala in the Himalayan foothills. In the early 1980s, things improved for Tibetan culture, including religion. CCP General Secretary Hu Yaobang visited Lhasa in 1980 and made a speech apologizing for the bad treatment Tibet had received, especially during the Cultural Revolution. In 1985 a non-Han Tibet CCP Secretary was appointed, the Yi ethnic national Wu Jinghua, who instituted a number of measures that encouraged Tibetan language and culture to flourish. By 1986 the situation was better than ever before. As Goldstein (1997: 74) puts it, 'great strides had been made in permitting Tibetan culture and religion to flourish in a region that was still overwhelmingly Tibetan in demographic composition'.

In the second half of the 1980s the Dalai Lama increased pressure towards 'the internationalization of the Tibet issue' (Shakya, 1999: 412). In September 1987, he made a speech to the Congressional Human Rights Caucus in the US calling for negotiations on the future status of Tibet. A few days later, monks held demonstrations in Lhasa for Tibetan independence, which were immediately and violently suppressed by the Chinese authorities. China put the blame for the disturbances on the Dalai Lama and accused him of plotting, with US connivance and assistance, to separate Tibet from China. Further disturbances followed in 1988 and 1989, climaxing in major riots in March 1989 that led to the Chinese government's imposing martial law in Lhasa. The Tibetan diaspora and its Western supporters associate the suppression of such protest movements with religious persecution and human rights abuse. Tibet looms large in the regular US Department of State China reports on human rights, as well as in the specialized reports of bodies such as Amnesty International and Human Rights in China. The last body was established in March 1989 and has an international office in New York as well as a China office in Hong Kong.

The Dalai Lama's winning the Nobel Peace Prize at the end of 1989 was a major step in convincing the Chinese authorities that the West, and especially the US, was conspiring to bring about Tibetan secession. The effect was to heighten Chinese official caution against the influence of the Dalai Lama in Tibetan religion and culture. Certainly the authorities had grounds for concern, but tended to overreact at the slightest suspicion of separatism emerging from the monasteries of other centres

of cultural influence. The combination of separatism and an iconic figure who represents Tibetan Buddhism and Tibetan culture emphasized the link with politics and politicized the Tibet issue to a degree otherwise hard to contemplate.

The Dalai Lama has many times proposed what he calls ‘genuine autonomy’ for Tibet. The most important occasion was probably in a major speech given to the British Parliament in July 1996. The meaning of ‘genuine autonomy’ is that China would manage foreign policy, but the local autonomous government everything else. Later the Central Tibetan Administration, based in Dharamsala, in India, spelt out a bit more detail. The main points were as follows (Central Tibetan Administration, 2015):

Without seeking independence for Tibet, the Central Tibetan Administration strives for the creation of a genuinely autonomous political entity comprising the three traditional provinces of Tibet:

1. This autonomy should be governed by the popularly elected legislature and executive through a democratic process and should have an independent judicial system;
2. Until the time Tibet is transformed into a zone of peace and non-violence, the Chinese government can keep a limited number of armed forces in Tibet for its protection;
3. The Central Government of the People’s Republic of China has the responsibility for the political aspects of Tibet’s international relations and defence, whereas the Tibetan people should manage all other affairs pertaining to Tibet, such as religion and culture, education, economy, health, ecological and environmental protection.

It should be explained here that the ‘three traditional provinces’ of Tibet are Central Tibet, Kham and Amdo. Kham is roughly equivalent to eastern Tibet and western Sichuan, plus a bit of northwestern Yunnan, while Amdo is roughly equivalent to Qinghai. The Central Administration of Tibet’s map shows its area as the whole of the Tibet-Qinghai Plateau or about 23 per cent of the total area of China. The proposal that a limited number of Chinese troops can stay until this area become a zone of peace and nonviolence ignores the issue of who determines when this fortunate state is reached.

Sporadic negotiations over these claims have led nowhere. The Dalai Lama cannot go back on his claim that ‘Tibet’ means not only the TAR, but also Qinghai, parts of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Gansu, while China is extremely unlikely to negotiate over the Dalai Lama’s concept of autonomy for such matters as education not only in Tibet, but also Qinghai and the other areas. The suggestion that Chinese troops will be asked

to withdraw from the area conceived as Tibet by the Dalai Lama when it becomes a region of peace and nonviolence is likely to be vehemently resisted by China.

The inclusion of 'culture' in the Central Tibetan Administration's proposal shows how strong the link with politics has become. Just as important in this context is the fact that the Dalai Lama charged the Chinese with 'cultural genocide' in his July 1996 speech in London. He has repeated this inflammatory terminology on several occasions, adding fuel to the political fire associated with Tibetan culture.

The interconnection of politics and Tibetan culture has been maintained in the twenty-first century. The most important illustrative example is the major disturbances that broke out in March 2008 in all the Tibetan areas. Chinese authorities blamed the 'Dalai clique', meaning the Dalai Lama and those associated with him, arguing that the riots were due to outside interference. On the other hand, Western academics and journalists and Western-based international bodies like Amnesty International tended strongly to blame Chinese oppression. Barnett (2009: 22) writes that 'the spreading of nationalism in Tibet [in 2008] was in large part a result of provocative policies by China such as its attacks on the Dalai Lama'.

In the twenty-first century, the politics of separatism and whether to blame riots on Chinese oppression and human rights abuse or fanning from outside has shifted away from Tibet and the Tibetans and towards Xinjiang and the Uyghurs. However, the positive connection with politics is not nearly as strong in the case of the Uyghurs as with the Tibetans. The main reason for this is that the Uyghurs lack any iconic figure in any way comparable to the Dalai Lama. There have been attempts to elevate the Uyghur diasporic businesswoman Rebiya Kadeer to that status. Chinese authorities have not hesitated to compare her with the Dalai Lama and likened her to the Tibetan when they blamed her for inciting the major riot in the Xinjiang capital Ürümqi in July 2009. They even called her a terrorist, an accusation almost all Western commentators rejected. Bovingdon (2010: 171) called it 'fruitless and, in some cases, counterproductive'. Whether associated with Chinese accusations or not, Rebiya Kadeer has not come even remotely close to the Dalai Lama in reputation and the attempt to elevate her to that status has proved only very modestly successful.

Another factor in the link between culture and politics in Xinjiang is Islam. International human rights bodies regularly charge the Chinese authorities with persecution of Islam in Xinjiang (Human Rights in China, 2005). However, in contrast to Tibetan Buddhism, Islam does not enjoy a good image in the West, where the Uyghur diaspora has put forward a

major effort to spread its influence in the twenty-first century. The World Uyghur Congress set up in Munich, Germany, in 2004, to represent the Uyghur diaspora, is secular in its focus, not Muslim. Uyghurs have also migrated in substantial numbers to the United States, where they put their main emphasis on human rights abuse and opposition to China, but not on Islam.

The link between Islam and politics is usually negative. Terrorist incidents can be attributed not to Muslims in general but to Islamic radicals. On the other hand, blame often rubs off on Muslims as a whole, a phenomenon found not only in China but in the West. The result is that the persistent disturbances and terrorist incidents in Xinjiang and other parts of China do nothing to help Uyghur culture in general, let alone Uyghur Islam in particular.

A third, a very different, example of the interconnection between ethnic culture and politics concerns the *nuo* drama of the Tujia in Guizhou. A major study has demonstrated that the CCP there has chosen to promote not only that genre of traditional theatre but even the religious practices that go with it. Because of politics, what would normally be condemned as superstition has become a positive example of cultural survival. It is politics, also, that has enabled the *nuo* theatre to play a role 'in implementing the party-state's new strategy of commercialization of culture and making it a pillar of the national economy' (Li, 2015: 17).

THE SURVIVAL OF ETHNIC CULTURES

The charge of 'cultural genocide' raised by the Dalai Lama in his July 1996 speech and the example of the *nuo* theatre both raise the important question of cultural survival among the ethnic minorities and the factors that have impacted on the extent to which they still play a role within their communities. Chinese government policy is the preservation and development of ethnic cultures. According to a White Paper issued on 1 September 1999 (Information Office of the State Council, 1999: Section V), 'China respects and preserves the traditional cultures of ethnic minorities, and all of the minority peoples are free to maintain and develop their own cultures'. This applies to such areas as folkways and customs, the arts, and cultural heritage.

A White Paper specifically on Tibetan culture, issued on 1 June 2000, speaks with great pride of the achievements of the Tibetans in 'architecture art and the plastic arts such as sculpture, painting, decoration and handicrafts, as well as music, dance, drama, spoken and written language, literature in written form, folk literature, Tibetan medicine and pharmacology,

astronomy and the calendar'. Policy is that Tibetans do and should 'develop and enjoy the traditional Tibetan culture, and jointly create modern civilized life and culture, bringing unprecedented prosperity and development to Tibetan culture'. (Information Office of the State Council, 2000b, Foreword).

Government policy is thus clearly to maintain ethnic cultures in China. But is that also reality? It is my impression from extensive travel in ethnic areas in China that the preservation of ethnic cultures varies very widely from region to region and in particular between urban and rural areas, with traditional culture stronger in the countryside than in cities. For example, young urban Zhuang do not seem to care much at all about their traditional culture, being more interested in pursuing cultural interests like the majority Han. On the other hand, rural Tibetans and Uyghurs care a great deal about it, and seem very keen to retain it.

During the Cultural Revolution there were efforts to uproot traditional cultures and to suppress traditional religions. However, these strictures applied to all ethnic groups, not only the minorities. Other than during the Cultural Revolution, I have seen no evidence whatsoever anywhere of a deliberate attempt to stamp out ethnic cultures, and consider the term 'cultural genocide' entirely inappropriate and unfair.

The religions of the ethnic minorities are practised with full permission of the authorities, unless they are perceived to be threatening the state or promoting separatism. Authorities are often far too prone to see the signs of separatism where there is none. But that is not the same as deliberate destruction of cultures. A particularly telling fact is that the proportion of the clergy in the total population in Tibet is very high. It is even high by world standards, for example higher than in Myanmar, which is known for its high concentration of monks (approximately 1 per cent of the total population). This does not point towards any kind of deliberate destruction of culture.

Harrell et al. (2000: 9) raises the challenge posed by the tension between economic development and traditional culture among a branch of the Yi people called Nuosu. He thinks it would be a great loss to the world 'if development and consumer culture finally smeared out' particular Nuosu arts he calls 'mountain patterns'. He suggests that development and modernization are actually *more injurious* to traditional culture than the ideology of the CCP or any other system of thought. It is a view I have heard frequently among members of the minorities themselves and others in China.

My own view is that modernization is necessary and to some extent inevitable in the long term. Any government that failed to modernize any part of a community would find itself resented for keeping people poor.

But I also share the view that modernization has the effect of changing and weakening traditions in the long term. An example often proposed for cultural destruction is the demolition of the old Uyghur city of Kashgar in Xinjiang. The government took a decision to demolish large parts of the city on the grounds that they were prone to earthquakes, unhygienic and unsafe. Authorities did not consult widely and met with a great deal of resentment from people thrown out of their homes. Of course much of the city will be reconstructed, keeping Uyghur culture in mind. But in the meantime ordinary people are moved to urban apartment blocks where they feel torn from their communities.

In my opinion the demolition of the old city of Kashgar is an example of slum clearance, which is desirable. It is also an example of destruction of communities, which is very undesirable. There should have been far more consultation not only with cultural elites but also other social groups before the demolition took place. But this is not an example of a deliberate attempt to destroy Uyghur culture. It is hardly 'cultural genocide'.

When such projects are undertaken it is old people who suffer most, because they are most wedded to their traditional communities. Younger people are likely to prefer the modernized apartments that replace them, and will find as much Uyghur culture as they want inside their new homes, even if it is not so visible at the outside. They are unlikely to want to return to the traditional style of building. They are likely to prefer the better social services, education, health and entertainment that go along with the modernized lifestyle to their old ways.

There are modernization and globalization processes going on all over China. They have gone much further in cities than the countryside, and along the eastern seaboard than the western hinterland. They are gathering momentum in places like Tibet, Yunnan and Guizhou, where there are many minorities, but are still far weaker there than in the eastern provinces like Jiangsu and Zhejiang, let alone cities such as Beijing and Shanghai. They are changing cultures and lifestyles all over the country, and even more in the Han areas than in those of the ethnic minorities. Changed cultures are not the same as destroyed cultures. Moreover, globalization has a way of sparking its opposite, as people of one culture refuse to be drawn into a homogenized sameness. There are signs of this happening among several of the minorities, especially the Uyghurs and Tibetans. Important aspects of ethnic cultures and patterns of thought appear to me likely to survive into the indefinite future.

CONCLUSION

It is very difficult to find a country in the world that has been really successful in handling ethnic cultural issues. The levers of cultural power are usually imbalanced, with one language and the culture or cultures that flow from it dominating politics and society. In the case of China, a long history has made one ethnic group, the Han, its language and dialects and associated cultures much more powerful than any other.

It is also important that nation building demands that everybody be able to communicate with each other, and that the government be able to speak to all the citizens of the country. That requires a common language among as many of the population as possible. In the age of globalization, more and more minorities around the world fear that they themselves, their languages and their cultures are being marginalized as the more dominant groups assert themselves more forcefully.

Cultures imply identities. One of the ways in which peoples recognize themselves and each other is through the language they speak and the cultures through which they identify both themselves and each other. So the decline of ethnic cultures implies the lessening of ethnic identities. On the other hand, the desire to establish one's ethnic identity may be a very good reason why ethnic groups wish to keep their language and their culture alive, especially when they are under pressure from a larger and culturally more powerful ethnic group. That is precisely what is happening with several of China's ethnic minorities.

The trouble is that the practicalities of life make it much more difficult for people who speak a language known to only a few people than for those whose language of communication is widely used. The question of written language is associated with culture as well. A language with a significant written literature has a better chance of long-term survival than one without.

In the big picture, China's policies on ethnic culture are reasonable and well worked out. In practice, political and international issues, such as the fear of separatism, often get in the way. If culturally strong but politically weak ethnic minorities try to assert themselves against a powerful state like that of China, they may end up in a worse condition than if they had tried to cooperate from the beginning.

The reaction against globalization that is leading to the resurgence of certain cultural phenomena among such peoples as the Tibetans and Uyghurs could ensure the long-term survival of their ethnic languages and cultures. The homogenization of language and culture in China does not seem to me to be on the horizon. On the other hand, the rise of China and the associated nationalism are unlikely to be helpful to ethnic cultures and

languages as a whole. Hence, as China modernizes more and more successfully, Han language and culture will dominate more and more. Some ethnic cultures will survive and even strengthen, but most will weaken to the point where they no longer matter.

NOTES

1. According to Zang (2015: 9–10), the idea that Tibetan belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family of languages ‘has recently been challenged as fictive, or politically based, or at least highly debatable.’ He says that, apart from many loan words from early Chinese, ‘syntax, structure and everything else are different.’
2. Laws, including articles on freedom of religion and restrictions on it, include the 1982 constitution (Article 36) and The Law of the PRC on National Regional Autonomy (1984) and its 2001 amended form (Article 11), see PRC (1982, 1984).