

## CHINESE MINORITY POPULATIONS: GROWTH REAFFIRMATION

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### POVZETEK

#### PORAST ŠTEVILA IN PRIPADNIKOV NARODNOSTNIH MANJŠIN NA KITAJSKEM

Petinpetdeset priznanih narodnostnih manjšin ima v LR Kitajski 91.2 milijonov pripadnikov. Omenjeno prebivalstvo razpršeno poseljuje dve tretjini kitajskega ozemlja.

Rast manjšinskega prebivalstva beleži Kitajska vse od 1960. leta dalje. Pričujoča razprava želi raziskati vzroke večanja števila pripadnikov manjšinskih narodov na Kitajskem. Glavni vzroki so: izboljšanje zdravstvenega varstva v petdesetih in šestdesetih letih, zavračanje napotil o številu otrok v manjšinskih skupnostih, relativno visoka rodnost in fertilitnost in ponovno (dovoljeno) priznavanje k ustreznim narodnostnim skupnostim po letu 1980.

Manjšinsko poselitev srečujemo ponavadi v manj razvitih območjih kitajske notranjosti. V nekaterih predelih je veliko rudnin, ki pa se jih ne izrablja ustrezno. Ekološka degradacija je pogost pojav. Sodobna Kitajska zagovarja hitrejši gospodarski razvoj in strogo določeno kontrolo rojstve tudi za ta, manjšinska območja.

### Introduction

The majority of the inhabitants in the People's Republic of China (PRC) belong to the Han race. In 1990, they constituted 92 percent of the total population (The National ... 1991). The remaining eight percent, 91.2 million people are members of 55 "national minorities," the official term designating the recognized non-Han races. These peoples and their cultures are part of contemporary China and they represent part of the Chinese (used as a generic term) cultural, demographic, political and settlement histories.

The national minorities are paramount in studies of the Chinese population. Although they comprise only eight percent of the total, their number rivals those of the dozen largest countries in the world.

The distribution of the minorities is widespread albeit with relatively low densities. In China, there are 27 provincial-level administrative units (not counting the

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three independent cities of this level), of which five are designated as "autonomous regions" (*zi zhi qu*). The latter are the areas of major concentration of five peoples: Hui (Muslim), Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur, and Zhuang (Fig. 1). These regions are large; all but one are adjacent to the nation's borders. All are limited in good agricultural lands but some areas in the regions are rich in minerals. Clearly, these regions are important to the nation's economic, political and military concerns. In addition, some lower-level autonomous units of minority peoples are designated in a number of provinces; these are 25 autonomous prefectures (*zhou*) and 279 autonomous counties (*xian*) (State Statistical Bureau 1992). In sum, all levels of autonomous units occupy 64 percent of China's territories.

Since the mid-1960s, the growth of the minority population has accelerated. If China is to control its population growth, however, it must determine whether it should seriously extend the birth control polices to the non-Han peoples.

The growth of the national minorities is the focus of this paper. A number of excellent Chinese scholars have undertaken minority studies since the 1950s. As a result, recognition has been given to an increased number of races: from 41 in 1953, to 53 in 1964, and to 55 in 1979 (Zhang 1987). The number of races whose total populations were over one million also increased from 10 in 1953 to 18 in 1990; together these 18 races constituted 94 percent of the total minority population in 1990. I briefly discuss the sizes and distributions of these races and analyze the factors that have led to the rapid growth of the minority population in the remainder of this paper.

### Minority Population and Distribution

The sizes of the 18 races vary greatly; they can be divided into two groups at the 4.5 million mark. The prominence of five races is acknowledged by the establishment of the five autonomous regions. In addition, in the provinces of Guizhou, Qinghai and Yunnan, the minority peoples count as one-third or more of the total population (see Fig. 1).

The distribution patterns of most minority races shown clusters. Of the 18 large races, 11 are highly concentrated (i.e., over 60 percent of the population of a given race) in one province or autonomous region. Of the remaining races, significant numbers of the Hui and Tibetans are found in several southwestern provinces, outside their respective autonomous regions. The Hui people are particularly widespread; many also reside in central north China. Note that the Hui is a unique minority group in that they are identified not by race but by the Muslim religion. Most Koreans and Manchus are in north and northeast China. In contrast, most of the Dong, Miao and Tujia peoples are in the south and southwest.



Fig. 1: P.R. of China: Autonomous Regions and Provinces with Minority Races.

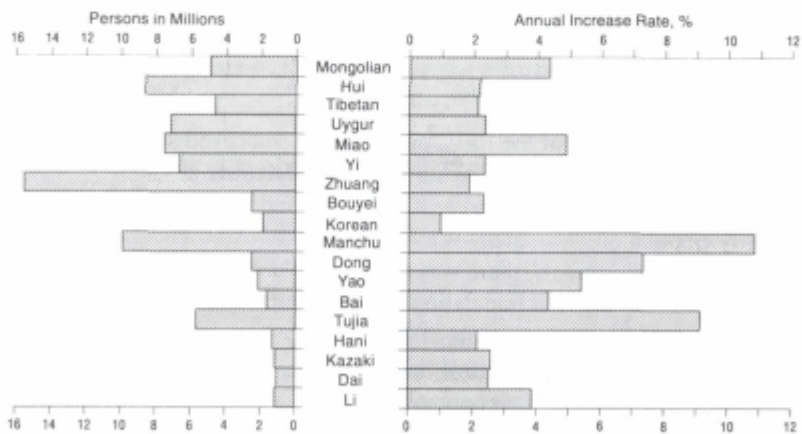


Fig. 2: P.R. China's 18 Minority Races: 1990 Population and 1982-90 Annual Rates of Growth.

## Growth of the Minority Population

Early records show that prior to 1949, when PRC was established, Chinese minorities were in a demographic stage of high births and deaths with periods of decline (Zhang 1987). A total of 35.3 million minority peoples was reported in 1953 and 91.2 million in 1990, an increase almost 2.6 times greater. The rate of growth varied over the past four decades, however (Table 1) (Zhang 1987; Yang, Liu 1992). For example, in the period 1953–64, the Han people increased faster than the minorities; the annual rates were, respectively, 1.59 percent and 1.11 percent. Thereafter, the minorities grew rapidly. The reasons for the growth of the minority population are many; natural increase is only one. A discussion of the main reasons follows.

Table 1: Growth rates of the Han and Minority Populations

	Growth in the Period, %		
	1953–64	1964–82	1982–90
Ha	19.01	43.82	10.80
All Minorities	12.95	68.57	35.52

	Average annual growth, %		
Han	1.59	2.04	1.29
All Minorities	1.11	2.94	3.87

### Growth from 1953 to mid-1960s

During the first decade of the PRC, public health improved significantly. The nation's economy also expanded under the first five-year plan in 1953–57. Progresses in health and economy occurred earlier in the cities and "core areas" of China where the minority population was small. While these places were undergoing significant socioeconomic improvements, there was not the implementation of an effective birth control program; thus the Han population increased rapidly.

Only toward the later years of the 1953–64 period, were major efforts made to improve the public health and control the contiguous and localized special diseases in the outlying provinces and autonomous regions. The mortality of the minorities declined then, but their fertility either remained high or even increased somewhat. Thus this population grew by 68.6 percent in the period 1964–82. In contrast, the Han people increased by 43.8 percent.

### Leniency in Birth Control Policies

Some degree of autonomy was granted to the administration of the designated minority areas. Local cultures and customs have been preserved, although many conflict with the notions of birth control and late marriages that are found in the rest of the nation.

The Chinese government began the birth control campaigns in the 1950s. However, these activities were initiated within minority settlements only in the mid- to late 1970s. Moreover, to date, the top-down Chinese birth control policies have not been implemented with the same vigor in minority areas as elsewhere. For example, a four-part official restatement of the one-child policy begins by declaring the country "to advocate the practice of 'one couple, one child'." The last part, however, states, "in minority areas, regulations may be drafted to meet local conditions" (Chang 1991).

Today there exists a range of "exceptions" in the localized birth control regulations in minority areas. Therefore, it is no surprise that the prevalent minority fertility rates are higher than that of the Han people (Table 2) (Zhang 1989). In 1990, the TFR (total fertility rate) of the minority group was 2.9, and that of the Han, 2.2 (Yang, Liu 1992). Only the TFR of the Korean minority has been lower than that of the Han; it is important to note that the Korean educational attainment also has been higher than the Han's.

Because of the government's leniency in implementing birth control regulations in minority communities, many couples in interracial marriages have registered themselves as minorities so they can have more than one child. Accordingly, the children born to these families accounted for 4.4 percent of the minority population growth between 1982-90 (Yang, Liu 1992). To date, this kind of maneuvering leaves a serious loophole in the government's effort to control the population increase.

Table 2: Total fertility rates of women of 16 races

Race	1981	1986	Race	1981	1986
Han	2.51	2.29	Buyi	5.14	3.98
Mongolian	3.31	2.58	Korean	1.91	1.85
Hui	3.13	2.65	Manchu	2.10	2.38
Tibetan	5.38	4.43	Dong	4.45	3.10
Uygur	5.46	4.90	Yao	5.39	3.25
Miao	5.34	3.81	Bai	3.33	2.81
Yi	4.85	3.83	Tujia	3.24	2.95
Zhuang	4.64	3.62	Hani	5.65	3.98

### Reaffirmation of Racial Identity

Many studies of national minorities have been carried out since the 1950s; increased understanding of the subject permitted the identification of new races and combination of some known ones. Often, the result has been an "increase" of the minority population.

The Chinese constitution declares that all races are equal. In 1978, after the eleventh third plenum of the Communist Party's Central Committee, the government issued rules "Regarding Reaffirmation or Correction of National Minority Identity" (Zhang 1987). Moreover, since 1978 the government also has set important policies to facilitate the development of minority areas. Young people of minority races always have enjoyed special status in admission to schools and colleges and in obtaining employment.

These government actions and policies encouraged many people who had concealed their minority origins in the past to apply for a "reaffirmation" to change their identity from the Han race to a minority race. There were also individuals who shifted from one minority race to another. Much of the growth between 1964–82 and, particularly, between 1982–90 was due to racial reaffirmation. For example, in 1964–82, the Tujia race had an annual increase rate of 9.8 percent yet its 1981 TFR was only 3.24 (Table 2). A similar growth occurred among the Manchus in the 1980s. Between 1982–90, the minority group grew by 35.5 percent and the Han, 10.8 percent. During this period 14 million newly identified minority persons were reported; they contributed 59 percent of the total growth of the non-Han population (Yang, Liu 1992). Based on this "growth trend," the minority population will be over 100 million by the year 2000 and will double itself in 19 years.

The preceding discussion suggests that the most important cause of the recent growth in the minority population was not the natural increase. If one takes a national point of view, the major portion of the growth in 1982–90, for example, was produced by moving the statistics from one column to another. Therefore, some scholars and officials have recommended lately that the government seriously verify the racial reaffirmation applications and control the abuse of the minority status and privileges, including leniency in birth control regulations.

### The Fertility Rate and Natural Increase

Finally, one must return to the examination of the demographic variables in the minority population growth. First of all, due to its unique growth process, which includes such factors as racial affirmation and corrections, the minority population pyramid bulges to show a larger group of teenagers and women in the fecund age (to enjoy the relaxed birth control quota). This observation can only mean that the potential for rapid growth exists.

Many case studies have shown that the fertility rates vary widely among the minority races as do the curves of rate decline since the 1960s. As a group, the minority races have higher birth rates and TFRs than the Han race do, and they tend to marry younger and give birth to the first child earlier.

Among the major races present in the four autonomous regions, excluding Tibet, the Mongolian's TFR declined sharply in the mid-1970s, followed by the decline of the Chuang TFR in early 1980s, and the Hui TFR in late 1980s (Yang 1992). The TFR of the Uygur in Xinjiang decreased late and slowly. Family planning has not been advocated in Tibet; the people had a natural increase rate of 1.84 percent in 1990 as compared with 1.47 percent for all of China (Liang 1991).

An example of the likely demographic consequences of the racial reaffirmation follows. The reaffirmation-induced growth of the Mongolian population brought in a large number of women in child-bearing ages and, a more serious fact, these women were more likely to bear children of higher parities (Liu, J. 1992). They also tend to have a shorter spacing between parities. Fortunately, data also show that the majority of longtime female residents in Inner Mongolia are willing to practice birth control. This and other studies indicate that urban residency and better education correlate with having a fewer children among minority women.

Early marriage and early first birth are problems associated with the minority population. A recent study shows that early marriages among young Chinese women have been on the rise, i.e., marriages took place before 20 years of age, the legal marital age for women (Liu, Q. 1992). A 1987 sample survey showed that in nine provincial-level units the percentage of early marriages was higher than the national average, 27.1 percent. All but two of these units are autonomous regions or provinces within which the proportion of minorities is significant.

### Concluding Remarks

In closing it should be noted that four decades ago minority peoples were settled in areas of low densities. Today the densities in some locales, such as oases, are so high that they challenge the limit at which the environment can provide for the people's livelihood. Most minority peoples still are engaged in primary industries, but good agricultural land (including pastures) is limited. Today, environmental deterioration is a serious problem in many parts of minority settlements.

The areas that are rich in minerals often await the capital and technology to efficiently utilize the resource. Remoteness from the coast and the more developed part of China also hinder the development of central and western China. Socioeconomic indexes repeatedly show the under-development of areas of minority settlements. Since the early release of some materials from the 1990 census, many Chinese scholars and officials are strongly advocating a faster development of the area economies,

and, simultaneously, to plan and control the minority population increase more effectively. Therefore, we may see less of the localized birth control leniency among the minorities in the future.

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