

Ethnic issues management approaches with Chinese characteristics under the inter-ethnic political perspective



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Abstract Ethnic issues are not only hotspot issues within international relations, but also one of the most prominent problems in the majority of the multi-ethnic countries all round the world. Countries of the world have various management approaches due to their respective national or ethnic conditions and the cognitions of ethnic issue solutions; there isn't any panacea that guarantee to cure all diseases. In China, the establishment of harmonious ethnic relations and societies is the substantial part of the overall situation for ethnic work. At the central ethnic work conference held in 2014, General Secretary Xi Jinping made a brilliant summary of "eight-insistences" regarding the correct road to solving ethnic problems. Coming to understand and grasp the theoretical base and implementation approach of "unswervingly following the path of solving ethnic problems with Chinese characteristics" has become an unavoidable academic issue. China has invested in and made achievements in ethnic areas so that the Chinese ethnic management model has contributed to the promotion of the global governance system revolution and offers constructive theories of ethnic issues management.

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Study background: There is no panacea that guarantees to cure all diseases in solving ethnic issues

With regard to the contemporary world, ethnic issues are not only hotspot issues within international relations, but also one of the most prominent problems in the majority of the multi-ethnic countries. Countries of the world have various management approaches due to their respective national or ethnic conditions and the cognitions of ethnic issue solutions. In summary, there are nine general approaches or modes in the whole, including citizenship mode, community mode, political party mode, parliament mode, integration mode, multiculturalism mode, indigenous reserve mode, national federation mode, and ethnic autonomy mode. Some of the modes are more along the lines of government policies based on certain theories or ideas rather than scientific systems of ethnic problem solutions; moreover, these modes are not exclusive, with some coexisting in one country. However, no mode or method has become the panacea for ethnic issues as of yet. For China, the construction and promotion of harmonious ethnic relations and societies are the major content of ethnic work. At the central ethnic work conference held in 2014, General Secretary Xi Jinping made a brilliant summary of “eight-insistences” in regards to the correct road to solving ethnic problems, including insistence on the leadership of the Party, the socialist path with Chinese characteristics, unification of the motherland, equality among all ethnicities, the system of ethnic region autonomy, all ethnicities’ solidarity struggle and common prosperous development, strengthening the ideological foundation of the Chinese national community, and ruling the country by law.¹ How to understand and grasp the theoretical base and implementation approach of “unswervingly following the path of solving ethnic problems with Chinese characteristics” has become an unavoidable and much anticipated academic issue.²

Discussion: Various management approaches to ethnic issues in the world

Countries of the world have various management approaches due to their respective national or ethnic conditions and their cognitions of ethnic issue solutions. In general, there are nine approaches or modes on the whole.

¹See, Xi Jinping: *Speech at the Central Conference on Ethnic work*, 28 September 2014.

²See, Hao Shiyuan: “The Way to Solve Ethnic Problems with Chinese Characteristics,” *Chinese Nationality*, No. 6, 2017; Zhou Ping: “Analysis of National Identity in Multi-Ethnic Countries,” *Political Studies*, No. 1, 2013; Qingjue: “China’s Ethnic Problems and Governance from the Perspective of Modernity,” *Journal of Minzu University of China(Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, No. 5, 2018. Barry, S.: “Ethnic Law and Minority Rights in China: Progress and Constraints,” *Law & Policy*, Volume 21, Issue 3, 2002; Agnes, K.: “Constitutional Definition of the Demos and Inter-Ethnic Relations,” *Politics & Policy*, Volume 44, Issue 4, 2016.

Citizenship mode

This is the most widespread mode for ethnic or racial issue solutions. Countries of any nature in the contemporary world abide by the promise of equal civil rights. This is the nature of civil society in modern countries and it includes the entitlement of equal civil rights to ethnic or racial minority members. However, with respect to the recognition of citizenship, certain countries have adopted discriminatory policies toward ethnic or racial minorities. For instance, In the United States, it was not until 1960s that the segregation system was abolished. Segregation impeded African Americans' enjoyment of full civil rights. In South Africa, the Apartheid policy was not abolished until 1991 with the fall of the Nationalist Party regime. Currently, even though ethnic or racial discrimination has been legally repealed, it still exists in reality. Moreover, granting minorities equal civil rights is only a guarantee for their individual rights, but how do we guarantee their desire for unique, collective cultural preservation? Regarding this, some countries have taken a "benign neglect" attitude, neither supporting nor opposing _____. But the result of "benign neglect" is that minority groups can barely maintain their collective cultures.

Community mode

Community mode regards minority groups as communities and guarantees their collective rights within a civil administration category. The major point of this mode is depoliticization of ethnic issues, especially detaching minority groups from local administrative management. This mode is feasible for international migrants without geographical support or for ethnic groups that live in scattered areas. It is inadequate for those ethnic groups with traditional geographical support and that are generally not satisfied with having only community status. Therefore, recognizing ethnic groups as communities can only provide them the minimum guarantee for their collective rights. It is far from satisfying to many ethnic groups, especially concentrated groups' demand for collective political rights.

Political party mode

A common phenomenon in liberal countries is the establishment of political parties on the basis of minority groups' representation and participation in national and local political life. For example, the Indian and African people of Guyana established the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and the People's National Congress (PNC) respectively, as a result of not having formed settlement areas. In some countries, ethnic groups live together in their traditional regions, but administrative divisions and management do not take ethnic factors into account. Ethnic groups may fight for and safeguard their rights and interests by forming political parties. In addition, the Spanish autonomous ruling operates in a way similar to party politics, being a factor behind the creation of such parties as the Basque Nationalist Party in the Basque Country, the Catalan Solidarity Union in Catalonia and the Galician Nationalist Party in Galicia. Ethnic political parties can function normally

in countries with relatively high-functioning democratic system (such as Guyana), and can even gain ruling power (such as in Spain) in ethnic regions, thereby safeguarding the rights and interests of the minority to a certain extent. However, in most cases, it is difficult for ethnic groups to rely on a national political party to ensure their rights and interests as a minority (as in, for example, some Latin American countries).

In some countries with unstable political situations, reliance on a national party often leads to the intensification of ethnic conflicts (for example, in some African countries); under certain conditions, a national party can also lead to national separation and regional independence, as seen in the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia. The Basque nationalist separatist organization ETA and the atrocities of racist extremist organizations in some European countries have fully proven this point.

Parliament mode

This is an application of representative democracy to ethnic relations, and there are several different types. Some are based on one ethnic group, such as the Sami Parliament in Norway, and others are jointly established by different groups, such as the National Indigenous Congress in Mexico. For many ethnic groups, and especially indigenous peoples, such parliamentary organizations are forums for ethnic representatives, and some have established various special committees and local sub-parliaments. The major function of such assemblies or parliaments is to claim the rights and interests of ethnic minorities granted by the state. Due to the principle of the representative system, the resolutions, proposals and reports adopted by such a parliament are usually taken seriously by the governments of many countries, with some parliamentary proposals submitted to legislative bodies for discussion. However, such national parliaments have no legislative or administrative powers and are not involved with social management; therefore it is difficult for them to solve ethnic problems completely. Meanwhile, such organizations are also vulnerable to the manipulation of ethnic separatist forces. For example, the Dalai clique stands on the grounds of nationalism advocating for the people's congresses in autonomous areas should be composed of purely of Tibetans, should have independent legislative power, as well as the right to form a separate government. Of course, any country that recognizes the legitimacy of a parliamentary organization will not accept such a separatist stance at present.

Integration mode

The theory was first put forward by Mexicans in the 1920s. The hypothesis of the theory is that "nationality" is not necessarily culturally homogeneous, but is complex. It suggested that inter-ethnic integration is the general trend of inter-ethnic relations and that indigenous people's social organizations and production modes affect the overall modernization of the country and should be incorporated into the overall process of social development. Emphasis was placed on the integration of minority groups while ignoring adaptation issues. Since the 1970s, people have

criticized national integration theory and policy, with some even considering it a form of national assimilation.

Multiculturalism mode

As a systematic theory of cultural relations, multiculturalism was formed in Australia, Canada and the United States in the 1970s, while it was not earlier than 1980s that it became prevalent around the world and is being used by some countries as the ideological basis for policy making. The mode solves ethnic issues from a cultural point of view, advocating mutual respect of various cultures, their harmonious coexistence, and diversity preservation. However, the understanding and especially the practice of cultural pluralism is a topic of divergent opinions. Some think that its deconstructive effect on modern countries and civil society is far greater than its positive significance. For example, some minority groups do not respect individual freedom of choice, can this be allowed? Should the state make official the symbols and traditional holidays of minority groups? Is it possible for minority groups to not receive a state-regulated education but to adopt another system and force their own members to accept it?

Indigenous reserve mode

This was a policy first adopted by former British colonial countries, such as the United States, Canada and Australia, and later applied by Latin America countries, like Chile, Panama and Brazil. This mode originated with the plunder of indigenous lands by European colonists and proceeded with government policies that transformed from permission to limitation regarding the settlement of plundered land. Indigenous people were forced by the government to move to designated places, called “reserved areas,” with poor living conditions. Each reserve has its own tribal government, however, the powers of these tribal governments are limited to the internal affairs of the reserve, and tribal governments are not part of the state or national administrative power chain. Indigenous people have no access to participate in the management of their places, and the reserve has evolved into an autonomous unit.

National federation mode

The National Federation state was designed to imitate the local federated state structure. Members of local federal states are based on regional units attributed to the feudal or colonial history, the former being prevalent in European countries such as the Netherlands and Switzerland, the latter being found in the Americas, in countries such as the United States, Mexico and Brazil. The general development of local federalism is that decentralized federalism eventually obeys centralized nationalism and develops from federation to modern “nation-state” with unified sovereignty. The primary unit of national federation is single nations; therefore, it is difficult for it to move from federation to unification. The outcome of this is often the nationalism leading to the collapse of the whole federation, as seen in such

cases as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, which once existed as national, federated states. Such a national federation has not frequently been the most commonly adopted national political model by contemporary multi-ethnic countries because its national political concept is still under the influence of the classical theory of nationalism. It is premised on the recognition of national members rights of self-determination and separation, and based on the principle of the coherence of national territory within administrative divisions, therefore it provides a convenient space for the emergence of national separatism within the federation members.

Ethnic autonomy mode

Modes favoring ethnic autonomy have some common basic features despite the various forms, that is, the political life in autonomous areas and the political behavior of autonomous local governments must abide by the basic political system and legal norms of the state. With the increasing integration power of modern countries it is almost impossible for some ethnic groups to be independent, and local autonomy has become their realistic choice and pursuit. For some multi-ethnic countries, giving a certain degree of autonomy to minority areas is at least an acceptable concession, even if it is not a conscious and voluntary measure, because it does not affect the basic requirements of the internal sovereignty of modern nations. For those multi-ethnic countries which constituted mainly of native people, local ethnic autonomy tends to become the main way to guarantee the collective political rights of ethnic groups. There will, however, inevitably be some problems in the implementation process. For instance, recognition of the local ethnic autonomy of ethnic groups as a whole or provision of single ethnic group autonomy; ethnic local autonomy may fail to guarantee the equal rights of all ethnic groups to participate in local political life; autonomous power may be entrusted only to a certain ethnic group; and the power of local ethnic autonomy is embodied in the political self-determination of local governments, etc.

China's approach: Ethnic issues management with Chinese characteristics

Some Westerners claim that China's system of regional ethnic autonomy imitates or even derives from the Soviet model. This sentiment aims to split China with ethnic issues and is an important part of the Western forces' strategies towards China. In 1957, Zhou Enlai elaborated on the differences in ethnic issues solution systems between China and the Soviet Union in his report titled "Several Issues Concerning China's Ethnic Policy." He said, "The differences are not only between terms, but also the system itself, there are as well as some essential differences."³ The system of regional ethnic autonomy in China cannot be attributed to the Soviet model. The reasons are as follows.

³Zhou Enlai: Several Issues Concerning China's Ethnic Policy, *Ethno-national Studies*, No. 1, 1980.

On the origination and features of the system

China's regional ethnic autonomy system is not an imitation of any other country's models, but a rational choice with its own characteristics made according to China's national conditions as understood through constant exploration. Between 1947 and 2003, from the establishment of the very first ethnic autonomous region, the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, to the establishment of the latest national autonomous region, Qiang Autonomous County of Beichuan, Sichuan Province, China has constructed three-level autonomous units, including autonomous regions, autonomous prefectures and autonomous counties, as well as thousands of grass-roots units, such as ethnic townships, based on the distribution pattern of "large cohabitation and small settlement" among ethnic groups. So far, China's regional ethnic autonomy system is unique in the world.

The internal and foreign affairs of the "Soviet model" are a betrayal of Marxist-Leninist and socialist democratic principles. They misjudge the process of socialist construction, ignore the essential nature of ethnic issues and simplify the management of ethnic issues. The centralization of power, the "Russianization" process of the Soviet Union and the loss of power for the allied Republic resulted in the contradiction between the Russian and non-Russian nationalities turning into class struggle, therefore the Soviet Union proceeded on the same path as the Russian Empire.

On the purpose and functions of the system design

In The Law on Regional National Autonomy, the purpose and function of regional national autonomy implementation are summarized in four aspects, that is, to encourage minority people to be their own masters, to develop socialist ethnic relations with equality, unity and mutual assistance, to consolidate the unity of the country, and to promote the development of national autonomous areas and the socialist construction of the country. The principles of the Constitution and The Law on Regional National Autonomy both ensure that "all nationalities are to be the masters of their own country," which is a realistic theoretical summary for the practice of regional ethnic autonomy in China.

In the Soviet model, the purpose and function of nationalization are highlighted. Since the late 1930s, from the allied republics and autonomous republics to the autonomous prefectures, ethnic regions and grass-roots units, the majority of the major Party leaders have been local ethnic cadres. In the construction of this political system, each ethnic group established their republics or autonomous prefectures at different levels, so that each group had its own "territory" and participated in the federation as a "representative" of its own territory. Meanwhile, Soviet countries had created writing systems for each of the fifty-two minority languages in succession. In the late 1930s, there was even a tendency of promoting Russian forcedly.

On the nature and representation of the power organs in the system

In the Law on Regional National Autonomy, the definition of the natures and representativeness of the power organs in ethnic regional autonomous areas has become a major guarantee for national solidarity. Article 3 of the Law on Regional National Autonomy provides that, “local national autonomy should set up autonomous organs, and the autonomous organs should be the first-grade national political organs.” Article 15 provides that “the people’s governments of autonomous areas shall be state administrative organs under the unified leadership of the State Council and shall be subject to the State Council.” Article 16 provides that “in the people’s congresses of autonomous areas, in addition to the representatives of local ethnic groups, there should be appropriate proportions of other ethnic groups who reside in the area.” Article 17 provides that “other members of the people’s governments in autonomous regions, autonomous prefectures and autonomous counties shall be reasonably staffed with the local ethnic groups and others who reside in the autonomous area.”

After the victory of the October Revolution, the Russian Chauvinist had been eliminated and criticized in theory. However, from the practice of the Soviet Union’s national policy, it dominated the ideological consciousness of the Russian cadres and the masses as a rule, and was present in the formulation and implementation of national policies. Stalin, along with other major party and government leaders, restrained Russian chauvinism outwardly but promoted it inwardly, this encouraged the spread of nationalism. During World War II, a confidential agreement was signed with Germany to divide the sphere of influence, forcing Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia to join the Soviet Union, violently liberating ethnic areas such as Western Ukraine, West Belarus, parts of Finland, Bessarabia of Romania and the northern territory of Bukovina, and incorporating these areas into the territory of the Soviet Union. Khrushchev, Brezhnev and other leaders repeatedly stressed the rationality of Stalin’s national colonial expansion. Based on his study, American scholar Ronald Grigor Suny has pointed out that the Soviet Union became a “national prison” for many ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, even more so than in Tsarist Russia.⁴

On the essence and principle of the system

Ensuring political and legal unification is the premise for the implementation of regional ethnic autonomy and the execution of such autonomy by autonomous regions in China. Guaranteeing “the common ownership of the country by all ethnic groups” is the basic principle of national political life in the national and regional autonomous areas. Articles 16 to 18 of Chapter II, Articles 48 and 50 to 53 of Chapter V of the Autonomy Law contain relevant provisions. For example, “In the people’s congresses of national autonomous areas, in addition to the representatives of the ethnic groups exercising regional autonomy, there should be appropriate

⁴Suny, Ronald Grigor: *The Revenge of the Past: Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1993. Pp.52–54

proportions of other minorities who reside in the area.” Also, “The cadres of the departments for autonomy organs shall distribute personnel of local minorities and other minorities properly.” And, the local autonomy organs should “educate cadres and the masses of all ethnic groups to trust each other, learn from each other, help each other, respect each other’s language, customs and religious beliefs, and jointly safeguard the unity of the country and the unity between all ethnic groups.”

In the Soviet model, the Soviet regime insisted on the selfless assistance provided by the Russian nation to non-Russian ethnic areas in the socialist construction, which promoted the economic and social development of the ethnic areas, attributed the victory of the various ethnic groups in the war of patriotism to the “great Russian nation,” vigorously propagated the central government’s investment in ethnic areas, and so on. Meanwhile, Stalin and other Soviet leaders regarded a large number of contradictions among people as contradictions between enemies, which led to the expansion of class struggle on ethnic issues. In 1930s, a large number of minority leading cadres and scholars were killed because they were regarded as class enemies. During World War II, a large population of more than twenty ethnic groups was forced to migrate due to the treasonous activities of a few individuals. At the same time, the Soviets doctrinally practiced Lenin’s principle of self-determination, which was proposed in a special historical context (aimed at uniting the forces of socialist countries against the threat of imperialist countries). After Lenin, the Soviet leaders included this principle in the Constitution, and thus allied republics enjoyed the right to separate and establish independent sovereign states. This action undoubtedly provided the legal basis for the “independence” of the allied republics, thereby awakening with national consciousness and fueling national activists to promote separatist activities.

Conclusion: Dealing with ethnic issues, stick to your own path

In truth, in dealing with ethnic issues, there is no panacea for all diseases in today’s world. As a developed economic entity, Western countries’ management of ethnic issues has inevitably demonstrated effects, to some extent. However, “we can learn from it” does not mean that we can ignore the shortcomings and copy it blindly. General Secretary Xi Jinping once pointed out that in the choice of national institution, it is impossible to suddenly appear a political “exotic”.⁵

Practice has proven that since the founding of New China, there has never been separation and division in ethnic minority areas, this is difficult to claim even for some developed capitalist countries such as Britain and Spain. Although, in the process of continuous improvement and development of the regional ethnic autonomy system, China has faced various problems, there are still many theoretical and

⁵Xi Jinping: Speech at the 60th Anniversary celebration of the founding of the National People’s Congress (September 5, 2014). Selection of Important Documents on the System of the People’s Congress (IV). China Democratic and Legal Publishing House, Central Documentation Publishing House, 2015, p. 1770.

practical approaches to explore, yet its achievements and effectiveness are also indisputable facts.

China should take its own path in dealing with ethnic issues; a rational choice proven by the practice of inter-ethnic politics at home and abroad. Looking back at the ups and downs of the construction of the regional national autonomy system, it is reasonable to insist on the confidence of theory and path.

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HL is responsible for the overall writing of the article. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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