Navigating Ethnic Minority Literature in the Modern Chinese State, 1978-present

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>1910s-1970s: Modernising Chinese Literature and Constructing the Minzu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>1970s-1989: Reform and Opening in the Minzu Frontiers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>1989-2000: Staying Non-Han in China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The late 1970s and the 1980s saw several literary works penned by ethnic minority Chinese authors joining the mainstream canon of modern Chinese literature. This burgeoning genre of ‘ethnic minority literature’ signalled a turning point in the relationship between the Chinese state and its minority communities. Following the suppressive minority cultural policies that coloured the early years of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), this period saw a rejuvenation of ethnic minority cultural and national consciousness. Recovering after the nation-wide chaos of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese state re-examined the position of ethnic minorities in the social and cultural sphere of the country. Ethnic minority intellectuals were at the forefront of this project, as they sought to create a social, cultural, and political environment where they could define and express their regional identities without state regulation. Minority cultural production, especially popular literature, became one of the key channels for these intellectuals in both shaping their identity and in responding to the identity given by the state. State policies played a crucial role in the establishment and enrichment of these pluralistic ethnic minority cultural industries throughout the late twentieth century. In many ways the Chinese state celebrated the growth of non-Han cultural identities.

By 2018, the position of these ethnic minority communities, and their culture, was far more precarious. Owing to a gradual rise in constraints placed on ethnic minority rights, the previous freedom of expression given to cultural producers was scaled back to a great degree. As the state reconsolidated control over the social and cultural spheres of the country, the pluralistic atmosphere that allowed ethnic minority intellectuals to mould their national and cultural identity diminished. The dynamic between the Chinese state and its ethnic minorities

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took a hostile turn, particularly after the state’s crackdown on Uyghurs in Xinjiang after 2014. The political emphasis on restraining and controlling ethnic minority identity through culture was clear as some of the first Uyghurs to be targeted by recent anti-minority policies were the members of the literary industry: authors, poets, scholars, and editors. What changed between the 1970s and 2018? In the span of a few decades, the ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities that were previously celebrated by the nation became the justification for condemnation and persecution.

**Ethnic Minority Literature and Historical Process**

Popular literature, in its capacity as a social, cultural, and political medium, can provide valuable insight into understanding and tracing these fluctuations in the relationship between the Chinese state and its ethnic minorities. Literature has long held an important position in modern Chinese history as an instrument for and a driver of social and political change. The same can be said for ethnic minority literature, a genre that has been shaped by and has consequently shaped state-minority relations since its conception. David Der-Wei Wang points out in his book on fictional literature and historical experience in twentieth century China that literary writing in the PRC became one of the main avenues to process and understand historical turbulences and shifting national identities. As writers “flesh[ed] out [their] historical reality” in prose and poetry, they solidified their political stances and further influenced the leanings of their readers. Literature is rarely only a passive medium, as Paul Cohen emphasises the power

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4 Ibid.
of stories in fashioning and refashioning public memory and belief. Published narratives, fictional and otherwise, can reflect community responses to ongoing political and social change, and they can also be used as tools to create said change. In tracing the development of modern Chinese literature and the industry surrounding it, one can begin to understand the reasons behind and the ramifications of various historical processes through the varied perspectives of the average reader, the observant creator, and the state that houses this phenomenon.

Ethnic minority voices have long been a part of Chinese political movements and the literary canon. Even before the establishment of the PRC, and the subsequent delineation and categorisation of ethnic minorities, non-Han languages, cultures, and identities found their place under the label of ‘Chinese.’ After the fall of the Qing empire in 1911, which also marked the emergence of ‘modern Chinese literature,’ there was a move towards literary works produced in vernacular languages, by non-literate creators, and even by non-Sinophone ethnic groups. Authors in republican era China thus opened the door for ethnic minority authors to be included within a previously highly exclusive canon of Chinese literature. The student-led May Fourth Movement saw ethnic minorities further distinguishing themselves as intellectuals who had a unique identity to express. Mark Bender charts the development of major ethnic minority literary cultures in twentieth century China, showcasing the way ethnic minority writers juggled their non-Han identity with their growing integration into a Han-dominated genre of Chinese literature. While there is academic consensus on defining Chinese ethnic minority literature as works “written by a person registered as an ethnic minority,” Bender

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10 Ibid. 263
11 Ibid. 262-3
points out that in reality, ethnic minority literature was a complex genre with flexible boundaries. Authors of mixed ethnic heritage, non-Sinophone minority authors writing in Chinese, and even Han authors writing on ethnic minority-centric subjects have all sought to bend the rules of the genre over time. What, then, comprises contemporary ethnic minority literature?

The establishment of the People’s Republic, with its vision of ethnic minority categorisation, began to answer the above questions. The Chinese state began to officially recognise and classify its fifty-six ethnic communities according to cultural, linguistic, and religious identities after 1949. Intellectuals recognised as members of an ethnic minority community thus had the ability to produce ethnic minority literature, providing them with an exclusive playing field within which they could navigate and express their identity. Conversely, these policies of ethnicity-based distinction led to a tumultuous relationship between different ethnic groups, especially between the Han majority and the various minorities. By codifying ethnic difference in quantifiable terms, the Han-dominated Chinese state implicitly imposed a limited vision of ethnic identity on diverse communities. The state, and the majority ethnic group by extension, maintained and legitimised its privileged position by constructing and controlling ethnic minority identity in Chinese culture. As such, the aforementioned playing field provided to ethnic minority intellectuals in the early years of the PRC turned out to be a manifestation of the limitation placed on them as they were expected to express an identity within the bounds set by the state. In his analysis on the influence of ethnic and gender identity on the development of contemporary Chinese popular music, Nimrod Baranovitch summarises the active role of ethnic minorities in both engaging with and resisting the state-provided

constraints on identity and cultural representation.\textsuperscript{14} The Chinese Communist state has, from the beginning, controlled the definition and communication of ethnic minority identity in popular media. Despite this, minority cultural producers have displayed “some degree of agency” in influencing the local (if not the national) perception of their minority identity in ways that can directly contest the state.\textsuperscript{15} Baranovitch’s study focusses on popular music and related broadcast media, but his above thesis holds true for the literary industry as well. Ethnic minority literature, with its political salience and its relationship with history and popular memory, is the ideal vehicle for minority intellectuals who intend to engage with, expand upon, and even challenge the reality created by the Chinese state.

\textit{Who Controls Culture?}

When studying the development of state-minority relations through the lens of ethnic minority literary culture, one must account for the question of agency. Historically, Chinese popular literature and the culture surrounding it has been tied inextricably to politics on both a local and national level. As ethnic minority identity was crystallised in the early years of the PRC, minority culture became a political tool for legitimising and reinforcing this process. The Maoist state in the 1950s and 1960s tightly controlled the social and cultural spheres, and saw cultural production as an extension of policy-making and implementation.\textsuperscript{16} Ethnic minority intellectuals, as members of the state and members of their communities, would be at a disadvantaged position when facing this arrangement. Even Baranovitch admits that although ethnic minorities can display some agency and challenge state-set narratives in their works,

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid. 55
ultimately minority representation and culture on a national level is “monopolised by the state and Han majority” to a large extent.17

It was largely after the Cultural Revolution, in the late 1970s, when this tight state control on culture relaxed and ethnic minority intellectuals gained a degree of freedom in their writing. With the commencement of large-scale reforms, the most notable of which involved diminished state oversight on the public sphere, determining who controls culture became more difficult. Ethnic minority intellectuals in particular took hold of the cultural freedoms of the time to construct and navigate their national identities, often in ways that contradicted the ones provided by the state. The state, growing wary of this pluralism that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, eventually began to reconsolidate its control over culture and gradually reduced the freedoms of expression awarded to cultural producers. Developments in ethnic minority literature over time, ranging from changes in the print industry, to thematic trends and stylistic choices, can display the various ways in which ethnic minority authors displayed their agency and exercised their varying cultural freedoms. In some ways, this thesis explores the extent to which ethnic minority literature in contemporary China reflected a culture shaped by cultural producers as opposed to one defined by the state.

Main Arguments and Methodology

This thesis studies the interconnected relationship between the modern Chinese state and its ethnic minorities, through the lens of popular literature. Since its emergence in the early twentieth century, modern Chinese literature has had a strong political dimension – both affecting and being affected by political movements. Ethnic minority intellectuals, owing to their politicised identities within the PRC, thus use popular literature as a medium for

engagement with and even retaliation against state minority policies and attitudes. The thesis argues that changes and continuities in ethnic minority literature largely corresponds to parallel changes in state-minority relations in China. On a broader scale, the thesis establishes how shocks to a political system, leading to change in policy and outlook towards ethnic minorities, may affect literary culture. Conversely, by examining the way ethnic minority authors exercise the freedoms available to them, or circumvent the restrictions placed on them, through their literary works, the thesis explores how shifts in cultural trends from a grassroots level can drive political change.

Policies implemented in the central state can manifest in differing ways in the ethnic frontiers. The thesis focusses on a comparative study of two ethnic minority groups in China: the Tibetans in the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR), and the Uyghur Muslims in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Both these regions and ethnic communities, lying in the western frontiers of the PRC, share a contentious history with the rest of the country. The Tibetans and the Uyghurs both belong to non-Sinophone traditions, resulting in a bilingual culture with cultural producers alternating between Chinese and their native language. Tibet and Xinjiang likewise possess long literary traditions that existed prior to their integration in the People’s Republic. It is especially interesting to explore the way Tibetan and Uyghur intellectuals, already members of a distinct cultural and ethno-national community, approached their Chinese identity. The PRC has oscillated between tolerating ethnic diversity and pushing assimilationist policies throughout its history. By focussing on the Tibetans and Uyghurs, both ethnic minority subjects very distinct from the Han majority, one can study the shifts in the Chinese state’s minority policy aims closely. Pragmatically,

19 Ibid.
Tibetan and Uyghur literature have both received significant scholarly attention leading to several literary works being translated to English. Despite a focus on Tibetan and Uyghur cultures and the relationships of these two communities with the state, the central arguments of the thesis pertain to ethnic minority literature as a broader genre in modern China. Wherever possible, literature produced by minority authors from other minzu communities are brought in to augment the argument and to demonstrate that minority intellectuals do not respond to political change as a monolith. By comparatively analysing the relationships between Tibetan and Uyghur ethnic literary cultures and the modern Chinese state, one can gain a detailed understanding of the interrelated nature of cultural shifts and political change.

The first chapter centres around the emergence of modern Chinese literature in twentieth century China. By contextualising the origins of modern Chinese literature in the New Culture and May Fourth Movements in the 1910s, the chapter establishes the inherent political dimension of Chinese literature. It also places the intelligentsia, which involves the authors, poets, and artists of the era, at the forefront of political change. The establishment of the PRC in 1949 only furthered the integration of culture and politics as the state incorporated intellectuals, and therefore a large portion of popular culture, into its apparatus. Simultaneously, the chapter traces the origins of ‘ethnic minority’ as a political category in modern China, ending with the PRC’s minzu classification system. The stringent state oversight over the social and cultural spheres, and the imposition of an ethnic minority identity by a Han-majority dominated state, created a tense state-minority dynamic that was severely aggravated by the destructive nature of the Cultural Revolution. The chapter ends on a look at the Cultural Revolution from the perspective of the frontier regions of Tibet and Xinjiang. The suppressive policies of the early PRC and the brutality of the Cultural Revolution that closed the Maoist period in modern Chinese history gave way to a reform era where ethnic minority culture, given the resources, flourished extensively. The chapter ultimately provides a historical background
necessary to understand the contemporary relationship between ethnic minorities, the Chinese state, and popular literature.

The second chapter picks up at the beginning of this reform period after 1978. The Chinese state’s ‘reform and opening’ period under Deng Xiaoping significantly transformed the social, cultural, and economic makeup of the PRC. Ethnic minority policy underwent significant reform as the state attempted to rehabilitate its relationship with ethnic minority communities in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. Economic liberalisation, alongside the development of ethnic minority cultural institutions and industries, created the conditions required for a boost in ethnic minority cultural production. Minority intellectuals, no longer persecuted by Maoist revolutionaries, and provided with a number of resources and cultural freedoms, began to establish and expand ethnic minority literature. Uyghur literature saw both the rise of modernist poetry that detached itself from its historical precedent, as well as the ascent of historical fictions that glorified a past that contradicted PRC historical narratives. Tibetan literature, similarly, saw a trend of modernist poetry that divorced itself from its religious tradition. Given the relaxation of state oversight on culture, ethnic minority intellectuals in the 1980s had a great degree of agency in the content and form of their work. This did not last long, as the political turbulence of the 1989 Tian’anmen Square incident, and subsequent moments of crisis led to another shift in state minority policy.

The third chapter covers the cultural aftermath of the major shocks to the PRC’s political stability: the 1989 Tian’anmen Square incident and the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union. Both of these moments led to major shifts in Chinese state policies towards intellectuals, culture, and ethnic minority rights. The intellectuals who were previously active participants in the state scaled back their political membership after the intense crackdown on the 1989 protests. The PRC began to gradually reconsolidate its control over the social and cultural spheres to prevent the rise of more dissenting movements. Simultaneously, the state also
prioritised the continuation of economic liberalisation from the 1980s, which benefited greatly from the pluralistic culture that had developed at the time. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 also prompted another series of reforms to state ethnic minority policy, specifically regarding the threat of growing local ethnic nationalism in the frontier regions of Xinjiang and Tibet. The PRC was somewhat tolerant of ethnic minority literature that expressed a distinct Uyghur or Tibetan nationalism (as opposed to Chinese nationalism) in the 1980s. In the post-Soviet political environment, this tolerance gave way to a need to suppress any lingering feelings of ethnic nationalism that could threaten Communist China. Ethnic minority culture was under scrutiny internationally and domestically, and minority intellectuals had fewer chances to freely express their ethnic and cultural identities as the state censorship regime rebuilt itself. The chapter ends at the beginning of the 20th century, with the state-minority relationship deteriorating over time.

**Historiography and Literature Review**

Ethnic minorities in China have received much scholarly attention from anthropologists and historians alike. The very development of the term ‘*minzu*’ from generally meaning ‘nation’ in the late 19th and early 20th century, to today referring to ‘ethnic minority nationalities in China’ is indicative of the relative novelty of this concept of ethnic minorities constituting a separate category of Chinese people than the Han Chinese. The notion of a specific Chinese national identity is a concept that emerged largely after the fall of the Qing empire in 1911.21 James Leibold’s *Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism* provides an apt overview of the political development of twentieth century Chinese nationalism, and the role the term ‘*minzu*’ played in the consolidation of Chinese national identity.22 He defines the process of Chinese identity-

building after 1911 as one that was both derivative of the Qing empire, and novel in the way it “repositioned and institutionalised” the ethnic minority subject within the narrative of an unified ‘Chinese’ front.\textsuperscript{23} He studies the term ‘\textit{minzu}’ as it entered the Chinese lexicon in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century and became an integral part of the ethnic minority question. The early 20\textsuperscript{th} century saw the connotations of the ‘\textit{minzu}’ shift from its anti-imperial context of referring to a ‘Chinese nation’ against foreign imperialists to a term that was used to refer to the different ethnic groups within China. This historical background of the terminology with which the Chinese state refers to ethnic minorities today is indicative of the institutional otherisation of these minorities over time, which has allowed the Han majority group to centralise itself in all Chinese narratives.

The modern academic understanding of Chinese ethnic minority studies, and the growth of this field of study, has been driven largely by the works of scholars like Dru Gladney, Jonathan Lipman, and Stevan Harrell.\textsuperscript{24} Gladney and Lipman’s anthropological and historical insights on the Hui Muslim community in China in the twentieth century marked the beginning of an era of scholarship that now centralised minority subjects and narratives – often directly opposing the official state histories of the minzu groups. Dru Gladney’s seminal work, \textit{Dislocating China}, is a collection of essays that challenges the essentialist notion of the majority (Han) versus the minority (the Tibetans, for instance) wherein being Chinese and being a Tibetan represent two distinct, mutually exclusive identities.\textsuperscript{25} To be Chinese is to conform to the Han-hegemonic cultural identity, and accept the Han-led state narratives about minority identity within China. He highlights the various ways Han Chinese media propagates

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\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. 10.\\
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state narratives on ethnic minority cultural identities and histories through Han-produced film, art, literature, and media.

Having been exposed to this skewed representation, some ethnic minority cultural producers tend to adopt similar stereotypes and tropes in their works in order to fit within a Han-hegemonic society, while other works clash with the dominant narrative and attempt to reclaim and redefine minzu identities within the framework set up by the Han. This thesis will explore this phenomenon of conformity versus dissent from hegemonic frameworks in modern Chinese literature by ethnic minority authors.

Stevan Harrell’s *Cultural Encounters on China’s Ethnic Frontier* strives to synthesise the experiences of multiple ethnic minority communities in the southwestern frontiers of China, tracing the ways these communities have changed their self-perception to comply, or have retained their distinct cultural identities within a Han dominated state without compromising on their ‘Chineseness’ at the same time. A specialist of the southwestern minzu in China, his work provides a valuable new perspective to existing scholarship on the trajectories of minzu identity. His conclusions on the possible hybridisation of ethnic identity, as some populations adapt their ethnic minority identity with their Chinese national identity, can provide an important framework in studying the works of mixed heritage ethnic minority authors.

Other scholars explore the importance of the minzu classification system in the PRC as one the key reasons behind state-ethnic minority tensions in the twentieth century. Thomas Mullaney, in *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*, outlines how Han state ethnographers (leading the Yunnan classification project, 1953-54) in the early years of the PRC prioritised categorising the non-Han communities into a number of politically manageable groups – effectively ignoring the pre-established historical minzu

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identities. This furthers the notion that the state narrative on ethnic minorities, besides being a static classification that does not account for the changing perceptions of being a minzu that Lipman writes about in *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*, is also built on a flawed understanding of ethnic minority identities.

Sabine Dabringhaus concisely outlines the historical contingencies that led to the consolidation of the modern Chinese state’s classification of minorities through the minzu system. Dabringhaus argues that the PRC concept of “a multi-ethnic state derived from Qing ideology,” and it was the failure of the Republican state prior to 1949 to factor in the ethnic diversity of frontier regions that led to the rigidity of post-1949 categorisation of minorities and the “strongly assimilationist policies that created the myth of a homogenous China today.” Gao Xiaojun and Fan Ke also point out this illusionary homogeneity that that Chinese state projects, despite the realities of its multi-ethnic, multi-confessional, and multi-linguistic nature.

This illusionary homogeneity however, argues David Der-Wei Wang, inherently placed the Han ethnic majority at the centre of the ‘Chinese civilisation’. Wang’s *A New Literary History of Modern China* tracks Chinese modernity through the various changes in Chinese literary trends that reflected their historical context. He sees the growing connection of the term “minzu” with “ethnicity” as a crucial step towards ethnic minority authors distinguishing

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30 Ibid.
themselves from the broader Chinese (Han) category in the May Fourth era (following the May Fourth movement in 1919).33

These minority authors were further incorporated into tangible infrastructure such as state-run publishing houses, universities, and writer’s associations – projecting an image that they are backed by the state in their endeavours to publish ethnic minority literature.34 Timothy Cheek’s *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History* argues against this, instead saying that this inclusion of minority authors and ethnic minority literature within state frameworks is just one way of controlling and censoring the content produced by minorities – hence the ethnic minority literature produced in these conditions is still curated by the Han majority.35 This interpretation further highlights the contradictory nature of the relationship between the Chinese state and minority groups – where the state facilitates the growth of ethnic minority literature while simultaneously trying to contain it. In doing a comparative study of the Tibetan and Uyghur intellectual experience within the literary industry and state publishing infrastructure, this thesis will explore the extent to which minority intellectuals were able to possess individual agency within state frameworks over time.

Tibetan ethnic literature has received much scholarly attention by Tibetologists and literary critics. Scholar Yiyan Wang, in “The Politics of Representing Tibet: Alai’s Tibetan Native-Place Stories,” explores prominent Tibetan author Alai’s (penname) bibliography. Largely set in his native Eastern Tibetan landscape, his works from the 1980s to the early 2000s represent a diversity within the broader Tibetan identity that challenges the monolithic *minzu* label given to Tibet.36 Wang argues that literary works such as Alai’s preserve Tibetan ethnic

35 Ibid.
(and national) culture and identity in a medium that the Chinese state sponsors through state infrastructure such as minority writer’s associations and publishing houses (as explicated by Timothy Cheek). Nimrod Baranovitch also writes that Alai’s works subvert the tropes set up about traditional, mystical “Old Tibet” by the Han in their Chinese language literature.37

Scholar Lauren Hartley in Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change provides detailed insight into the development of contemporary Tibetan literature.38 She positions modern Tibetan literature (a relatively new canon of works that emerged in the late 20th century) between the traditions of “Old Tibet” and the modernity of contemporary Tibet. Alongside scholars like Alison Groppe and Howard Choy, Hartley raises important questions about what constitutes “modern ethnic minority literature” within the broader tradition of Chinese literature.39 Whether the works of an ethnic minority writer who writes in the majority language, Chinese, are still considered ‘ethnic minority literature’ is a question that is still debated in the literature. For the purpose of argument, this thesis will consider any literary works penned by ethnic minority origin authors as ‘ethnic minority literature,’ regardless of the language.

Gao Xiaojun’s article, “From the Margin to the Centre: The Transformation of the Identity Discourse of Chinese Ethnic Minority Literature” synthesises the above arguments in the context of the growth of ethnic minority literature as a genre within modern Chinese literature.40 Gao’s work, along with Zhang Yingjin’s A Companion to Modern Chinese

Literature, are key to understanding the ways ethnic minority writers themselves resolve the disconnect between the Han perception of minorities and their self-perceptions of minzu identity.\textsuperscript{41} Gao represents the view of most Chinese scholars of literary history, wherein minzu representation in modern literature (even by non-Han authors) inevitably falls under the Han “hegemonic discourse.”\textsuperscript{42} Cao Shunqing explains this concept of the “hegemonic discourse” as the notion that any scholarship on ethnic minority literatures, and minority representation in literature itself, contributes to the normalisation of the Han majority as the “default” Chinese ethnicity.\textsuperscript{43} The increased emphasis on the ethnic majority-minority divide in Chinese literature and minzu scholarship only further marginalises the minority groups and hinders any chances of their acculturation, or even acceptance. This thesis will engage with and build upon the above works as it explores the evolution of contemporary state-minority relations through the lens of Uyghur and Tibetan ethnic literature.


CHAPTER ONE
1910s-1970s: Modernising Chinese Literature and Constructing the *Minzu*

China in the early twentieth century was in the throes of political, social, and cultural change as it transitioned from the imperial Qing state to a republican nation in 1911. The traditional social and political structures that people identified with during the imperial period were upended, and later rejected by leading intellectuals. The new republican government had to piece together a new understanding of Chinese identity within a new Chinese nation-state, shifting away from the traditional Confucian ideologies associated with the now fallen Qing establishment. Chinese intellectuals in the 1910s were at the forefront of the state-, nation-, and identity-building project of the Chinese republican state.

The calls for modernisation, and the restructuring of the Chinese state had arisen in the late Qing era (1890s-1900s). The discourse on modernisation in the Qing was based on the notion of reinvigorating traditional, Confucian culture and adapting it to a modern (and Western) context. These changes initially remained largely in the social and cultural spheres, with debates occurring amongst the higher ranks of the foreign-educated literati and political figures of early republican China. Subsequently, the mid-1910s saw the New Culture Movement which sought to galvanise Chinese culture and society by providing an alternative to Confucian understanding, and urge the Chinese youth to adopt a forward-looking way of thinking. Launched in 1915, the movement promoted a version of Chinese culture that was heavily inspired by Western traditions and scientific thought.

However, attitudes towards the West and the nature of modernisation changed drastically at the conclusion of the First World War, and the end of the Paris Peace Settlement.

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46 Ibid. 45.

47 Ibid. 71.
On May Fourth 1919, student protestors led the May Fourth Movement that denounced the imperial powers of the West, as well as the imperial legacies of the Qing that continued to haunt Chinese society and literature. Chinese intellectuals and students were convinced of two things. Firstly, as articulated in the New Culture Movement, in order to modernise and develop successfully, China needed to completely abandon its Confucian tradition and any other continuities from the Qing. Second, Chinese modernisation could no longer be based on Western European or American models, and Chinese intellectuals were on the lookout for alternative models of modern nation-states to adapt. This realisation in 1919 turned many Chinese intellectuals towards the emerging Soviet Union, and there was a growing interest in Marxism as a revolutionary ideology and reform model. The Chinese Nationalist Party (GMD) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) gained political and ideological prominence at this time.

One of the key intellectual debates during the republican period was around the position of literature and art, and their role in politics. The question of “art for art’s sake” versus “art for politics’ sake” was one that not only animated many literary figures at the time, but also held political significance. The Chinese state recognised the importance of art and literature as a medium that could access and influence vast sections of society. One of the primary goals of the May Fourth Movement was to make literature more linguistically and stylistically accessible to the non-literate Chinese public. The literary movements that emerged from the May Fourth Movement shaped the contemporary genre of “modern Chinese literature,” and

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49 Ibid. 83.
50 Ibid. 83
51 Ibid. 166.
established literature as a significant political apparatus. This debate also shaped the policies of the GMD and the CCP alike towards intellectual and cultural production, and later shaped the policies of the People’s Republic of China.

The PRC in the 1950s and 1960s incorporated the Chinese intelligentsia and the field of social and cultural production within its political system. Literature and art under Mao was marked with complete state oversight, and intellectual production went through the institutional channels that the state set up. This complete cultural control further extended towards the PRC’s policies towards its ethnic minority populations. The establishment of the PRC came with an answer to the “nationalities question” that had plagued both the GMD and the CCP during the late republican period. The Chinese state in the 1950s officially categorised its various ethnic minority populations under what is now the “minzu system.” This ethnic classification project was led largely by the Han dominated state, which prioritised creating governable units out of existing minority communities over accurately representing and incorporating ethnic diversity into the state.

Many of the state policies towards ethnic minorities in the 1950s and 1960s had an assimilationist focus, accentuating Chinese national and cultural unity. This, coupled with the state’s cultural policies of the 1950s and 1960s promoting ideological harmony, turned most of the literature and art produced at the time into extensions of state propaganda. Although there were ethnic minority writers who produced literary works at this time, ‘ethnic minority literature’ and other expressions of ethnic cultural diversity in China was suppressed in favour of maintaining the state’s ideological unity. The Cultural Revolution between 1966-1976 was in a way an escalation of these policies of the state focus on ideological and cultural unity, and

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saw the persecution of Chinese intellectuals, as well as ethnic minority communities, at an unprecedented scale.

**Revolutionising Literature**

The demarcation between ‘old’ imperial China, and the ‘modern’ republican state is often also the demarcation between the ‘old’ literature, and the new revolutionised Chinese literature. The anti-Qing imperialism, and anti-traditionalism of the 1910s shaped Chinese literature quite significantly. Following the 1911 Xinhai Revolution, and the fall of the Qing state, literature both became an important medium for revolutionary intellectuals to disseminate their ideology, and also a medium that shaped and defined revolutionary thought.\textsuperscript{55} David Der-Wei Wang notes that the aftermath of large-scale historical, especially violent events (such as the 1911 revolution) often results in a spike in literary creativity rather than an expected decline.\textsuperscript{56} Such was also the case in the early republican era which saw an outpour of literary works, art, and theatre that carried the themes of war, revolution, and political and social transformation.\textsuperscript{57} This new revolutionary literature in the 1910s only took on a distinctive identity from late Qing literature after the launch of the New Culture Movement in the mid-1900s.\textsuperscript{58}

Literature was truly revolutionised from this moment onwards, as it accompanied a “wholesale rejection of traditional ethics” as well as linguistic and stylistic changes that were meant to divorce new literature from its imperial history and make it accessible to non-literati society, promoting a Chinese ‘national’ consciousness to the masses.\textsuperscript{59} The proponents of the


\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. 68.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. 68.
New Culture Movement went on to support the May Fourth movement in 1919, calling for a strengthening of the values promoted in the New Culture Movement. The ensuing “May Fourth literature,” or “revolutionary literature” also formed the basis for modern Chinese literature as a genre.\(^{60}\)

The politicisation of literature during the May Fourth movement set an important precedent for the Chinese state which recognised the importance of modern Chinese literature as a revolutionary medium. The New Culture Movement from 1915-1919 promoted a version of reformed, modernised Chinese culture that was heavily inspired by Western traditions and scientific thought, often using modern Japan as a successful model of a modernising project.\(^{61}\) This turn towards the West, which was an intellectual continuity from the late Qing era’s “self-strengthening” movement, was interrupted at the end of the First World War, and the result of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919.\(^{62}\) The Chinese republican state in the 1910s was quite unstable, and its inability to assert Chinese national interests in the Paris Settlement undermined its political legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese people.\(^{63}\) The Treaty of Versailles decreed that the Shandong Peninsula, which was then under Japanese occupation, remain with the Japanese empire rather than be returned to China.\(^{64}\) This led to mass public outrage in China against both the republican state, and the Western great powers. On May Fourth 1919, student protestors led the May Fourth movement in response to the decisions at Versailles, and mobilised the Chinese population under the banner of the Chinese nation-state.\(^{65}\) The May

\(^{61}\) Ibid. 69.
\(^{63}\) Ibid.
\(^{64}\) Ibid.
\(^{65}\) Ibid.
Fourth movement saw the crystallisation of anti-imperial ideology (specifically anti-Western, as well as anti-Japanese).66

The movement was also a strengthening of the New Culture Movement’s aim to transform Chinese culture into one that abandons all its continuities from imperial traditions, especially Confucianism.67 Thus, the May Fourth movement called for the use of vernacular language in literature, with the aim to create a new national literature that was produced by revolutionaries.68 Intellectuals such as Hu Shih, Chen Duxiu, and Lu Xun, are some important figures who engaged in this effort to create a forward-looking literature and a generation of intellectual youth that was free from “classical” associations, and appealing to the masses.69 May Fourth literature was characterised by revolutionary ideology, and depictions of war and socio-political change in post-Qing China.70 Republican-era intellectuals were beginning to debate the role of literature and art as a tool for forwarding revolutionary ideology, or as just a new form of expression that came as a result of social transformation in the 1910s.

Modern Chinese literature was thus a radical way of writing, reading, and utilising literature. It embodied and expanded on May Fourth ideology, and in the republican era marked the search for modernity within Chinese culture through linguistic and stylistic reforms. This literary modernisation and its magnitude in shaping twentieth century Chinese literature is encapsulated in an examination of the term “modern Chinese literature” itself. The phrase can be broken into its three components, each carrying significant connotations. The “modern,” for instance, referred not only to the next phase of Chinese literary development in history, but was also building upon the idea of “new literature” contrasted to old, classical Chinese

67 Ibid. 155-156.
68 Ibid. 157.
70 Ibid. 69.
literature articulated in the New Culture movement. Modernity here thus referred to both the linear progress of Chinese literature over time, and to the specific political and cultural changes of the New Culture and May Fourth eras. The term “Chinese” likewise previously alluded to the language literature in the region was primarily written in.71

The May Fourth era saw a number of non-Sinophone ethnic minority intellectuals joining the ranks of the urban literati who led these revolutionary movements.72 As such, the subject, setting, and language of Chinese literature had expanded significantly, resulting in the inclusion of vernacular Sinophone literature, and non-Sinophone works in the broad Chinese literary canon.73 This also signified the term “Chinese” in the literary context shifting from being a linguistic constraint to being a word that was applied to all literatures produced in the Chinese nation-state.74 Literary historians note that the development of modern Chinese literature in the 1920s grappled with the questions of reconciling ethnic and linguistic differences within the new national category of being Chinese; mirroring the concerns of some political figures at the time.75 The final term, “literature,” encompassed multiple genres and forms of literature, adding to the pluralistic essence of modern Chinese literature.76 It was designed to displace the elitism of imperial literature, and focussed on including more previously excluded sections of society into the new canon and thus into the nation.77 The creation and growth of modern Chinese literature in the republican era in many ways laid the groundwork for the growth of ethnic minority literature as a sub-genre in the latter half of the century. The May Fourth movement and its aftermath also defined the relationship between Chinese intellectuals and politics.

71 Ibid. 2.
73 Ibid. 2-3.
74 Ibid. 3.
75 Ibid
76 Ibid
77 Ibid
The generation of intellectuals who called for cultural reform in the late Qing, and the ones who led the New Culture movement and May Fourth literature were all intimately involved in the Chinese state-building, and nation-building project. Political interests, especially alignments with either the GMD or the CCP in the late republican era was behind a lot of heated intellectual and literary debate. The 1920s and 1930s saw a burgeoning of literary magazines, and writers’ associations in urban centres. These associations, and competing magazines, signalled the rise of intellectual networks and publication channels. Literature was no longer just an artistic medium, and by publishing literary works writers were actively engaging in ongoing political and social debates.

Art for Art’s Sake: Art for Politics’ Sake

The Chinese republican state implicitly engaged with this mobilisation of literature, either supporting or suppressing literary movements or associations at this time. The Crescent Moon Society (1928-1931), and the League of Left-Wing Writers (the League, 1929-1936) were two major writers’ organisations in the republican period. These organisations provided platforms for the literati and writers who engaged in debates about the role of literature as a tool for revolutionary mobilisation, or political statements. One major literary debate that animated most intellectuals in the early republican period was the question of whether they should practice or produce “art for art’s sake,” as in art that does not directly serve a political purpose, or “art for politics’ sake,” which dictated that art must further political ideology. For instance, the Crescent Moon took the stance of “art for art’s sake,” and directly opposed the League which emphasised the important of “art for politics’ sake.”

80 Ibid
to have Marxist ideological roots, and its members closely followed Soviet literary policy.\textsuperscript{81} The work of the League also contributed heavily to the spread of Marxist ideology amongst intellectuals and youth, and expanded the influence of the CCP.\textsuperscript{82}

Modern Chinese literature was a crucial ideological mouthpiece for intellectuals as well as the state in the early twentieth century, and literary debates in the republican era anticipated the approaches of the state policies towards literature. This led to the GMD oppressing the League, and in 1931 arresting and executing five of its members.\textsuperscript{83} This incident captured the tensions between the two political parties in the republican state. Intellectuals and their literature was recognised as an important, influential medium, and the advocacy or suppression of literary expression was an effective way to fight ideological and political battles. The debate occasionally turned into a proxy conflict between the GMD and the CCP ideologies, and their approaches towards art and literature. As the arts and literature entered the political sphere in late republican China, all cultural expression was imbued with political meaning, and all literary actors engaged with the state through their works, intellectual networks, and official associations. This politicisation of literary expression significantly shaped the PRC’s towards cultural production, especially minority produced works, after 1949. The CCP under Mao in the late republican period established the groundwork for future PRC policies that encouraged “art for politics’ sake.”

Mao Zedong addressed this debate quite clearly in a speech in Yan’an in 1942. The Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art was a decisive ideological event for the Communist Party, and established the importance of literature and art in the CCP’s political strategy.\textsuperscript{84} Drafting

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid 44-5
\end{flushright}
A cultural policy was vital for the CCP in its appeal for mass proletariat support, and for constructing specific ethnic minority policy later in the People’s Republic. The Yan’an Speech argued that modern Chinese literature must serve politics, and firmly placed literature within the political realm. All intellectuals and artists were to serve the state, and the previously independently organised writers’ societies were to come under direct Party control in the PRC.

As the scholar Timothy Cheek argues, the PRC legitimised its complete cultural control through a propaganda state and through the creation of “establishment intellectuals” who furthered Party ideology through cultural and institutional channels. This relationship between intellectuals and the state became inextricably linked, and literature produced under the PRC shifted from being “revolutionary literature” created by the individual, to “socialist literature” created to serve the state. CCP policies towards literature in the late republican period, especially following the Yan’an speech, directly informed PRC policies towards cultural production in the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, the state oversight of Chinese culture, and the creation of the PRC’s propaganda apparatus, were essential aspects of the PRC’s ethnic minority policies in the 1950s and 1960s.

**Defining Ethnicity in Modern China**

The PRC’s establishment of a quantified ethnic minority classification system, or the “*minzu* system,” in 1949 was one of the first official instances that the state attempted to answer its “nationalities question.” The growing consciousness of Chinese nationhood in the 1910s, and the endeavour to reconcile a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic, and multi-confessional

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population into this unitary Chinese nation brought the nationalities question to the government’s attention. The frontier management policies by both the CCP and the GMD in the late republican era were derived in some ways from Marxist Leninist models of national self-determination, with the Soviet Union playing a major role especially in the way the CCP dealt with frontier minority populations. The late republican era was marked by both the GMD and the CCP devising different ways of approaching the question of minorities with the purpose of mobilising them and forging a Chinese identity. The CCP had a more systematic approach, and set up the National Question Research Office in 1940, with the purpose of documenting ethnic minority characteristics of frontier communities and formulating policy outlines for the CCP. This organisation and the policy outlines from this era directly influenced early PRC minzu policy.

The CCP in the republican era took advantage of the Leninist united front model that “[focussed] on national unity over class antagonism” to manipulate ethnic sentiment on the frontier. This allowed the CCP to forge a broader Chinese national identity while accommodating and incorporating the distinct “nationalities” on the frontier under the Chinese umbrella. This Chinese identity was defined in opposition to Japanese imperialism, effectively using the Chinese landscape against a group of outsiders in a struggle for national survival. The initial CCP support for maintaining national distinction through the appropriation of the Soviet national self-determination model galvanised frontier support for the Communist Party.

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90 Ibid.
91 Ibid. 100.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid. 99.
95 Ibid.
Mao’s rise to power saw a break from this set of policies. The Leninist promise of minority self-determination was replaced by vague promises of the right to self-govern. The attitude towards ethnic minorities under Mao became more paternalistic, as Han cadres now had the “burden” of guiding minorities (“the backward minzu”) to their own national liberation.\textsuperscript{96} The rhetoric of the “Han man’s burden” allowed the CCP to create a united front that incorporated ethnic minority populations under the banner of “Chinese” people.\textsuperscript{97} Any calls for minority independence was now suppressed, and the People’s Republic embarked on a classifying mission, creating special categories for all the distinct minority groups in China.\textsuperscript{98}

The PRC in the 1950s and 1960s promoted a façade of inclusivity, and of being mindful of ethnic and cultural diversity by providing minority populations with institutional recognition and support. The state oversaw the creation of local institutions that catered to ethnic minorities, such as a series of Minzu Universities in frontier provinces in the 1950s.\textsuperscript{99} While the state was empowering ethnic minorities through institutional support; state ethnographers were tasked with the dual mission to explore the Chinese landscape and study minority culture in order to classify them into “politically manageable” categories.\textsuperscript{100} Ultimately, the PRC in its 1950s classification project prioritised creating these politically manageable units over accurately representing ethnic diversity in its political framework. The early PRC approach to managing its ethnic difference was to create its own knowledge base of its multi-ethnic population and to set the state up as the authority on ethnic minority identity through the minzu system. This practice of misrepresentation formed the core of the ongoing, increasing conflict between the Chinese state and its ethnic minority populations.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid. 150.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid 150.
The Han-dominated Chinese state legislated its ethnic minority policies with a limited understanding of the multi-ethnic, multi-confessional populations these policies ultimately targeted. The state propaganda machinery, through media and literature, further disseminated this limited understanding of non-Han culture to its populations in ways that served the Han hegemonic society.\footnote{Gladney, Dru C. "Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/Minority Identities." The Journal of Asian Studies 53, no. 1 (1994): 92-123. doi:10.2307/2059528.} In some ways, this served to maintain the Han Chinese claim to political and ideological legitimacy over the non-Han, the roots of which could be traced back to Mao’s nationalities policies in the late republican period.\footnote{Leibold, James. Reconfiguring Chinese Nationalism: How the Qing Frontier and Its Indigenes Became Chinese. 1st ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.} The representations of the ethnic minority subject in Chinese art, literature, and media production was deliberated to maintain Han cultural hegemony.\footnote{Ibid 101.}

Dru Gladney’s examination of late twentieth century minority representation in the PRC-led cultural productions, or even civilian Han-led works, showcases the exoticisation and otherising of the non-Han that was “essential to the construction of Han Chinese identity” as the sole representations of the Chinese nation itself.\footnote{Ibid 104.} Gladney highlights the image of “smiling minority dancers” that appeared on the Beijing Broadcasting System’s evening television programs under the PRC.\footnote{Ibid 105.} This image represented the quintessential “primitive,” traditional, hospitable stereotype of ethnic minorities that was juxtaposed against the modern, secular, Han populations.\footnote{Ibid 106.}

Socialist literature in the early years of the PRC explored class struggles and centred the rural proletariat and their revolutionary struggles in an attempt to break away from the
bourgeois aspects of preceding literatures. Literature became a mouthpiece for the socialist revolutionary identity to the common Chinese readers, as constructing and spreading ideology was the main focus of many literary works in the 1950s. Ethnic minority literature at this time did not take root as a genre, as the social struggle between old bourgeois thought and the new revolutionary ideology took center stage as compared to ethno-national identity-building. Works by ethnic minority cultural producers that hinted at separate, ethnic national identities that deviated from the PRC’s project of cultural and ideological unity was suppressed. Additionally, works that did contain ethnic minority characters or settings aided the Han cause through non-Han exoticisation, and legitimised the Han as the “ideal,” or default Chinese, while forcing ethnic minorities to reconcile a hyphenated identity as a Chinese citizen and a cultural minority. Ethnic tensions between the Han-hegemonic Chinese state and minority communities were exacerbated in the very institutions that the state built for its minzu, by separating the minorities from the Han politically and socially.

The PRC’s strict control over expressions of national and cultural identity, and the need to shape minority narratives within a Chinese context, and the resulting policies of Sinicisation, stemmed from a need to present China as a politically coherent nation after the collapse of the imperial and then the republican states. The growth of ethnic minority literature was stifled in this era, and the relationship between ethnic minority intellectuals and the Chinese state in the 1950s and 1960s settled into an uncomfortable status quo. The government and its propaganda instruments controlled minority representation, within the framework of Party

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ideology. Ethnic minority voices were largely side-lined in favour of promoting Chinese multi-ethnic socialist unity.

*Cultural Revolution in the Frontiers*

The Cultural Revolution beginning in 1966 disrupted the above status quo, as rising political tensions in Beijing and growing anti-intellectualism placed writers and other artists in the crosshairs of the revolutionaries. There were calls for the eradication of previous literary conventions that denoted an older, bourgeois, reactionary Chinese culture that Mao and the Red Guard wanted to eradicate and replace with a complete socialist ideological takeover. The revolutionaries under Mao persecuted elite intellectuals and local political leaders who furthered the bourgeois-proletariat divide in their works. One of the things Mao wanted to destroy through the revolution was the “Four Olds” (old culture, old customs, old ideas, and old habits). In the frontiers, the revolutionaries went about their task of destroying “old culture,” by destroying any symbols of ethnic minority, and religious culture. Violence against Tibetan and Uyghur people in Tibet and Xinjiang respectively became more common during the decade of the Cultural Revolution. This violence was fuelled by the Red Guard wanting to destroy any signs of “feudalism,” which most old/ minority culture was associated with. The ethnic composition of the frontiers further meant that the violence of the Cultural Revolution was not only by the Red Guard on the civilians, but also by the Han revolutionaries.

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112 Ibid.


on ethnic minorities.\textsuperscript{116} James Milward and Nabijan Tursun write about the cruelties of “Han chauvinism” that was unleashed on Uyghur people during the revolution.\textsuperscript{117}

The Cultural Revolution in the frontiers was “virulently xenophobic,” especially under the leadership of Jiang Qing who considered minority nationalities in the frontiers “foreign invaders and aliens.”\textsuperscript{118} The violence in the frontiers continued on for a little longer than in China proper, where the revolution was beginning to wind down by 1969.\textsuperscript{119} The fear of growing local nationalism amongst Tibetans and Uyghurs further incited revolutionary suppression and violence.\textsuperscript{120} Along with physical violence against ethnic minority people, there were mass attacks against religious institutions, burnings of religious texts (such as the Qur’an), and the prohibition of traditional clothing.\textsuperscript{121} Minority political leaders were driven out of office, and by the time new revolutionary committees took power in 1969, minority nationality representation in the local governments fell by almost 25%.\textsuperscript{122} The 1960s and most of the 1970s saw a complete halt in any cultural production coming out of the from these regions, with many Tibetan intellectuals who had survived the initial wave of persecution having escaped overseas.\textsuperscript{123} Similarly, Uyghur intellectuals who had fled to the Soviet Union before the 1960s continued to produce Uyghur literature, although Uyghur literature in Xinjiang declined.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid 97.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid. 97-98.
\textsuperscript{124} Nadeau, Kathleen; Murray, Jeremy; Murray, Jeremy; Nadeau, Kathleen. Pop Culture in Asia and Oceania. ABC-CLIO, 2016. 90.
The post-Cultural Revolution era in the late 1970s saw a generation of returnee intellectuals who were notably eager to revive their respective fields. This was, however, not the case for the intellectuals in Tibet and Xinjiang, where the material and cultural destruction of the Cultural Revolution was arguably more devastating. Minority intellectuals in the post-Mao era needed to do more than just revive their cultures, and instead were tasked with building and navigating their cultural landscape from the ground up. The ascension of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 brought about major reforms in PRC policy towards ethnic minority literature specifically, aiding the process of cultural revival. The Chinese state under Deng’s leadership had a considerably different attitude towards ethnic minorities, doing away with the forced assimilationist (Sinicisation) and ideology driven policies in place under Mao. This rise of pluralism in Chinese minority policies, combined with the rise of authors in minority regions created the conditions necessary for the recreation, development, and significant growth of a corpus of ethnic minority literature within the modern Chinese literary tradition.

CHAPTER TWO

1970s-1989: Reform and Opening in the Minzu Frontiers

The end of the Cultural Revolution and the rise of Deng Xiaoping’s regime in the late 1970s marked an era of ‘reform and opening.’ This ‘reform and opening’ generally referred to China’s economic shift towards a more open market economy in the 1980s in a bid to boost the then failing Chinese economy. However, the era also saw massive political restructuring on a state level, and a relaxation of stringent Party oversight of the social and cultural spheres. The change in the cultural and intellectual environment was drastic, as relative intellectual autonomy was restored to a standard that resembled the May Fourth era. State-controlled, institutionalised, and censored literature and art gave way to a more relaxed and culturally pluralistic environment. This, alongside the state’s rehabilitative policies towards intellectuals and artists, aimed to rebuild the Chinese cultural landscape after its systematic destruction during the Cultural Revolution. The Chinese literary scene in the 1980s seemed to make full use of this newfound freedom of thought and publication, and modern Chinese literature returned to the relative control of the intellectuals rather than the state.

The state’s cultural and social policies in the late 1970s and 1980s had profound consequences for ethnic minority populations who saw an unprecedented increase in ethnic minority literature and scholarship at the time. Deng Xiaoping and his General Secretary Hu Yaobang’s ethnic minority policies in the late 1970s marked a major shift in the state-minority relationship. Hu’s reform program for frontier ethnic minority provinces such as Tibet and Xinjiang included, alongside economic liberalisation, the development of “[ethnic minority] science, culture, and education…and to exercise national autonomy in the [ethnic minority

127 Ibid
128 Ibid 502.
129 Ibid
region].” These policies towards ethnic minorities in the 1980s often served as damage control for the strained state-minority relationship of the 1950s and 1960s. This sentiment was expressed explicitly by Hu Yaobang in his 1980 speech in Lhasa, Tibet, where he unprecedentedly admitted that “[the] party has let Tibet down… the life of Tibetan people has not been notably improved. Are we not to blame?” The PRC’s reformist political and education policies in ethnic minority regions created the conditions necessary for the birth and growth of ethnic minority literature within modern Chinese literature. Ethnic minority authors carved their own niche in the literary movements of the 1980s that aimed to reconstruct the cultural landscape of post-revolutionary China, often in their own languages.

Ethnic minority literature was in its nascent stage in the 1980s, and minority writers were tasked with the challenge to construct their ethnic cultural landscape from scratch in many cases. Tibetan and Uyghur language literature in the immediate post-revolutionary period thus saw a number of works that aimed to provide alternate histories to the PRC narratives prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s. To many minority authors ethnic minority literature was an avenue for them to represent and navigate their culture and identity away from the exoticized, propaganda-rich state representations of minorities in media. The political reforms of the 1980s equipped a generation of ethnic minority intellectuals with the linguistic ability and freedom to produce literature that inserted the minority voice in Chinese representations of ethnic minorities.

Reform and Opening in the Frontiers

Chinese state policy towards ethnic minorities was significantly transformed in the late 1970s. The loosening of state control over intellectuals, giving them a degree of cultural autonomy, brought with it the side-effect of granting minority communities that same cultural

autonomy. Thus, ethnic minority populations were no longer under the assimilationist regime of Mao that suppressed any notions of a separate ethnic or national identity in these regions. Expressing cultural identity was no longer taboo, and the 1980s saw the revival of ethnic minority intellectual activity, as well as cultural and religious practices.

Due to the complete stoppage of education during most of the Cultural Revolution, a large portion of the reformist policies undertaken by Deng targeted education reform and improvement. For ethnic minorities, this meant the construction of higher education institutions, and the reinstatement of minority languages in school curricula, provided a generation of ethnic minority students the ability to engage with literature both in Chinese, and in their non-Sinophone languages. The subsequent ethnic minority literature could therefore bridge the gap between historical ethnic minority representation in Chinese, and in non-Sinophone languages.

The first of the post-Mao ethnic minority policies targeted high rates of reported illiteracy across the country, and especially in the frontiers. Schooling in the primary and secondary levels became far more accessible to students. In Xinjiang and Tibet, however, there was the added policy of encouraging instruction in minority languages in some subjects, as well as teaching non-Sinophone scripts to ethnic minorities. This meant the return of the Arabic script for the Persian and Turkic speaking minorities of Xinjiang, and the Tibetan script in Tibet. Tibetan writer Dorje Tsering, in an interview with scholar Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani, recalls his enthusiasm in translating Chinese textbooks to Tibetan as he saw “that [the]
Tibetan language was finally acquiring some official recognition.”\textsuperscript{136} When reading the first of the literary texts that were published in by Tibetan authors in Chinese journals, he said that “it did not matter that it was written in Chinese; what mattered was that Tibetan writers had a forum… we [Dorje Tsering and his colleagues] were thrilled.”\textsuperscript{137}

The PRC’s educational reforms in the 1980s certainly came with a catch. Ethnic minority policies were not fully assimilationist, but still emphasised ethnic minority cultural subordination to Han Chinese. Mastery in Chinese was still the ultimate metric for literacy for most ethnic minorities, and ethnic minority language education was still overshadowed by Chinese cultural and linguistic hegemony in the 1970s and 1980s. The curricula in most of the new schools still included state-produced narratives of Uyghur and Tibetan histories which were mandatory subjects, and any disagreements with these versions of ethnic minority culture were suppressed. For instance, \textit{minzu} students in Xinjiang were required to pass an additional exam that tested their knowledge of the PRC approved history of Xinjiang (\textit{Xinjiang difangshi}) in order to graduate high school and university.\textsuperscript{138}

The post-revolutionary period also saw an influx of Han scholars who were curious about the ethnic minority culture into Tibet and Xinjiang, in many ways dominating the first few years of cultural freedom in these regions. The Han “cultural pilgrims” often brought with them the baggage of PRC-provided perceptions of ethnic minorities, which led them to continue the practice of exoticizing and studying ethnic minorities in ways that subconsciously reaffirmed Han superiority.\textsuperscript{139} In many ways the Han presence in these regions was crucial to kickstart ethnic minority literature, since prior to and during the Cultural Revolution there were little to no minority-authored works to build upon. Indeed, unlike Han intellectuals in China


\textsuperscript{137} Ibid 83.


proper who could pick up where they left off before the Cultural Revolution, ethnic minority intellectuals were left with very little of their cultural past and had to instead build it up after decades of suppression, and the added destruction of the revolution. In the 1970s, most Tibetan authors and artists had fled abroad to avoid being targeted in the Cultural Revolution, and most of the Tibetan authors who had either returned or begun writing in the 1980s were from a generation educated in Chinese, and thus wrote in Chinese. Similarly, Uyghur literature in the Cultural Revolution was heavily targeted by the Red Guard, with many works having been destroyed in the revolution. The surviving Uyghur authors in the 1960s had fled to the Soviet Union, taking most of the Uyghur literary culture with them. It wasn’t until the mid-1980s, a few years after the implementation of the PRC’s reforms, that ethnic minority writers emphatically took hold of Uyghur and Tibetan literatures.

Yet the reformist era of the late 1970s and 1980s was crucial to many ethnic minority intellectuals, who were rightfully enthusiastic about the option to write in their own language, and write about their own culture with a degree of autonomy. Like Dorje Tsering, a number of Tibetan writers made Lhasa the cultural and religious center of modern Tibetan literature, attracting more artists and intellectuals across China. Ethnic minority intellectuals took advantage of the Han scholarly presence in the frontier. In 1977, Han intellectuals in Lhasa published the first Chinese language journal on the Literature from Tibet. Tibetan intellectuals used the existence of the Chinese edition to argue for their right to publish Tibetan

142 Nadeau, Kathleen; Murray, Jeremy; Murray, Jeremy; Nadeau, Kathleen. Pop Culture in Asia and Oceania. ABC-CLIO, 2016. 89.
144 Ibid
language literary journals and magazines as well.\textsuperscript{145} Thus, the Tibetan edition of \textit{Literature from Tibet} was published in 1980.\textsuperscript{146} Initially, most of the works that appeared in the Tibetan version were translations of works in the Chinese edition, as many writers were still more comfortable writing in Chinese for the purposes of being accessible to audiences beyond Tibet, and because of their potential lack of education in Tibetan.\textsuperscript{147} However, over time Tibetan-authored, Tibetan-language works started growing in number, and modern Tibetan literature became a bilingual category.\textsuperscript{148}

In Xinjiang, the cultural freedoms of the 1980s restarted the literary and intellectual scene which had come to a complete halt during the Cultural Revolution, with the exception of propaganda slogans and commissioned pro-revolution works.\textsuperscript{149} The post-Mao era saw a rise in publications in Uyghur, and translations of Chinese and Western texts into Uyghur. The primary impact of the reformist era on Uyghur literature was what can be described as an outpour of Uyghur modernist and nationalist prose and poetry. Rian Thum notes at least a dozen new Uyghur led, and often Uyghur language, literary and scholarly journals that launched just between 1978-1980.\textsuperscript{150} As Uyghur modernist poetry emerged in the 1980s, so did the Uyghur language fictional novel.\textsuperscript{151} By 1985, there were at least ten Uyghur language novels published, most of which in some ways provided an alternative history of Xinjiang, or an Uyghur perspective of history that directly contrasted the PRC narrative taught in schools.\textsuperscript{152} It is important to note that there was a much more prominent ethnic nationalist element to the

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid 194.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid 194.
post-revolutionary Uyghur literary tradition. Uyghur history, unlike Tibetan history, had a transnational quality that linked Uyghurs in Xinjiang to a broader Central Asian tradition, and also a Soviet tradition. Due to the different sources of historical interpretations of Uyghur past and contemporary identity, it was likely far more common for Uyghur people to take issue with PRC narratives of Xinjiang and Uyghur history, since they would have had access to an alternative especially in the more open post-Cultural Revolution era. The PRC’s educational policies in the 1980s equipped a generation of Uyghur intellectuals with the linguistic tools to translate literatures from Chinese and Western languages; as well as gave room to Uyghur writers to explore their ethnohistory in a manner that at times directly contradicted the carefully constructed state narratives of Uyghur culture in the past.

**Ethnic Minority Literature as a Source of Alternate Identities**

Modern Chinese literature historically emerged in the political context of the New Culture Movement of the 1910s, imbuing it with political meaning, which in turn made ethnic minority literature inherently political. Ethnic minority identity in China in the twentieth century was also heavily politicised, eventually being categorised through the minzu system after 1949. State narratives about ethnic minority harmony within China, and propaganda about the multi-ethnic yet ideologically unitary Chinese population throughout the Maoist era created a legacy of ethnic minority identity being in the hands of the state. The growth of ethnic minority literature in the reform and opening era thus gave minority intellectuals the outlet to address the decades of flawed representation by the Han dominated media. Ethnic minority literature became a genre that ethnic minority writers used to explore their ethnic identities and culture in ways that were independent from Han created stereotypes.
Literary critics and philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue that minority literature is treated as a naturally political, even polemic work that goes against the majority.153 Minority writers, writing in either a minority language or in the cultural majority’s language, risked having their work seen as a political statement by the minority community as a whole by readers and critics. In the context of Chinese ethnic minority literature, literary texts authored by minorities faced a higher amount of scrutiny than Han authored works in the 1980s. This was especially true of Tibetan and Uyghur literatures, as they were non-Sinophone ethnic cultures whose literature was thus bilingual and represented cultures that were vastly different from Han perceptions of ‘Chinese culture’.

Most ethnic minority authors in the 1980s recognised the political nature of their identity and literature, and often directly engaged with and diverged from prevalent Han perspectives of their ethnic culture. Tibetan filmmaker and writer Pema Tseden encapsulates this as he claims that his bilingual knowledge of Tibetan and Chinese culture allows him to “portray Tibet from a Tibetan perspective to Chinese audiences who, for over fifty years, had been accustomed to patronising, inaccurate, and politically-motivated Chinese renderings of Tibet.”154 He further explains that he wrote Tibetan literature with a Tibetan audience in mind as well, as they too had been exposed to the flawed representations of their own culture by Chinese media.155 The post-revolution cultural revival in Xinjiang also featured similar sentiments of Uyghur intellectuals getting the chance to present Xinjiang themselves, and define Uyghur identity on their own terms.

Uyghur literary movements in the 1980s were in a sense far more political than their Tibetan counterparts, and most Uyghur poetry and prose published seemed to address explicitly

155 Ibid.
ethnic nationalist, and often separatist themes depicting Xinjiang as a distinct entity under Chinese rule.\textsuperscript{156} Uyghur nationality, national traditions, and Islamic identity play a big role in modern Uyghur literature and arts, so much so that Michael Friederich points out the prevalence of “single-nationality-mindedness” in most Uyghur works in the late twentieth century.\textsuperscript{157} Despite the consistent promotion of multi-ethnic unity by the Chinese state, and the large influx of foreign and Han intellectuals to Xinjiang following 1978, “Han Chinese authors writing about the… minority nationalities in Xinjiang and having their work translated into Uyghur is… very rare.”\textsuperscript{158} Unlike the Tibetan case, where Tibetan and Han intellectuals both played an important role in establishing modern Tibetan literature, Uyghur literature seemed to developed relatively more independently. This may be attributed to Tibet’s somewhat special position in the Han Chinese imaginary as a romanticised, mystical land, with Tibetan culture and religion being generally inviting more scholarly and artistic attention from foreign and Han intellectuals alike.\textsuperscript{159} Uyghur literature in the 1970s and 1980s seemed to continue to draw from its existing Islamic cultural past, and Central Asian connections, while expressing Uyghur ethnic identity as one deserving of its own nation.\textsuperscript{160} This is not to say Tibetan nationalism was not an element in Tibetan literatures published in the 1980s, but calls for separatism along ethnic nationalist lines were less explicit than in Xinjiang at the time.

Ethnic minority literature in the immediate post-revolutionary period empowered ethnic minority authors to write without the draconian state regulations of the Maoist era, and literature became a medium for minority intellectuals that served different political and social

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid
purposes. Tibetan authors used ethnic minority literature written in both Chinese and Tibetan
to reclaim their cultural and religious identity, with a somewhat forward looking stance wherein
they aimed to draw from folk traditions and classical Tibetan literary texts to inform their
modern works and provide Chinese and Tibetan audiences with a more ‘authentic’ view of
Tibet. Uyghur literature in the 1970s and 1980s instead looked more towards the past, and
sought to rewrite, or rectify existing historical narratives of Uyghur communities and Xinjiang.
Historical fiction, religious revivalism, and ethnic nationalism were some of the main themes
of Uyghur literature in the post-Mao period.

**Being Non-Han in Chinese Literature**

Ethnic minority authors were tasked with the dual role of navigating and presenting
their own distinct ethnic culture, while maintaining their ‘Chineseness’ in ethnic minority
literature. The cultural and intellectual freedoms of the Deng Xiaoping era were a drastic
change from the Maoist period and the Cultural Revolution, but they did not grant minorities
complete autonomy over their cultural expressions. In a period immediately following the
Cultural Revolution, many ethnic minority writers were wary of writing and publishing works
that might be considered anti-CCP in fear of retaliation. The thematic emphasis on
presenting modern China as a successful socialist nation, in contrast to the “feudal”
backwardness of non-Han, frontier cultures was still prevalent and preferred by the Party, and
thus by many publishers who did not want to disobey the Party. The traumas of the Cultural
Revolution, specifically the targeting of any dissenting voices, and the taboo on the expression

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164 Ibid.
of any “local nationalism” continued to influence literary works in the immediate post-revolutionary time.\textsuperscript{165}

This led to the emergence of “scar literature” within Chinese literature of the time, especially popular amongst ethnic minority literatures due to the concentrated targeting of minority cultures during the revolution.\textsuperscript{166} Scar literature addressed the cultural, social, and often personal loss experienced by people who had lived through the Cultural Revolution. A relatively short-lived genre (1977-1984), scar literature is used by many historians of the revolution as a testimony to the events and impacts of the revolution on individuals and societies.\textsuperscript{167} Ethnic minority writers expanded the scope of scar literature to talk about the specific experiences of the Cultural Revolution in their communities, as well as the experiences of previous PRC rule as a whole over their ethnic group. Ethnic minority literature, besides sometimes being written in non-Sinophone languages, also tended to differ stylistically from the usual work of Chinese literature. Tibetan authors drew much influence from folk tales and oral culture, often combining prose and poetic verse or invoking traditional images of Tibet that would have been familiar to Tibetan audiences.\textsuperscript{168} Uyghur authors seemed largely interested in historical fiction, and even memoir-like non-fictional accounts of Uyghur national history. Uyghur nationalism in the 1980s, as expressed through literature, seemed to be based around perspectives of the past as many Uyghur authors sought to trace Xinjiang’s history beyond historical Chinese presence.\textsuperscript{169}


\textsuperscript{166} Huang, Zhigang. "Chinese scar literature on the Cultural Revolution as testimony." PhD diss., Carleton University, 2001.

\textsuperscript{167} Ibid.


Some of the first publications of Tibetan literature in Tibetan-led journals and magazines often played it safe with the Party by focussing on the “evils of old society,” and emphasising the benefits of Communist rule in Tibet. Tsering Shakya notes that between 1980 and 1984, most of the stories published in the journal Tibetan Art and Literature tended to fit this theme of justifying Chinese rule by pointing out the evils of feudal, ancient Tibet. Indeed, author Kelzang Namdröl’s A Story of Three Sisters, was a short story that featured the lives of three sisters and their emotional and physical suffering at the hands of three men who each signified an land-owning aristocrat, a soldier, and a lama. The story portrayed the apparent oppressiveness of old Tibet, which was overpowered by a militant figures, religious leaders, and self-serving landowners until the PRC’s eventual arrival. Most stories in the first few issues of Tibetan Art and Literature explored the contrast between old, feudal Tibet and the new, modern Tibet under the Chinese. In some ways, the choice of such stories by the journal may have been because of pressure by the Party-formed Tibetan Writer’s Association (est. 1981) under which most journals in Lhasa operated. While the Party encouraged cultural expression, it hoped to have ethnic minority writers to adhere to Party propaganda and write about the “friendship of the peoples” that socialist China promoted, and especially write about the “liberation” of minority regions by the reformed CCP after the revolution. Scar literature, and especially polemic works by Tibetan authors who wanted to express their displeasure with Chinese rule or violence during the revolution was, while not prohibited, was certainly not encouraged at the time.

171 Ibid
172 Ibid
173 Ibid
Uyghur authors similarly aimed to publish works exploring Uyghur national history in a manner that avoided the eye of the Party. Historical fiction, while being a way for Uyghur minority writers to explore their present identity through a study of the past, also served in the 1980s as a disguised form of scar literature. Rather than write about the grievances of the present, changing the setting to a pre-PRC past allowed Uyghur writers some room to express their trauma from the revolution and from Maoist policies without being accused of being anti-China. Perhaps one of the most influential works of Uyghur historical fiction in the 1980s was Abdurehim Ötkür’s *The Awakening Land* (1988).175 This text is considered one of the “most widely read novel in the Uyghur language,” known for its “disguised nationalistic content.”176 The novel was set in the 1930s, dealing with the ethnic tensions and political power struggles between the Eastern Turkestanis, Tungans (Sinophone Muslims), and Han military leaders.177 By speaking of ethnic conflicts and the tense relationship between Han leaders and the Muslim ethnic minorities before the Communist era, Abdurehim managed to avoid most criticism by the Party. The implications of his work were significant, as he used Uyghur historical fiction as a way for disguising his polemics against the ethnic minority policies of the PRC during the Maoist era, and the Cultural Revolution. Abdurehim’s work informed the regular Uyghur person’s perception of Xinjiang’s past with China, and spurred on the wave of Uyghur nationalism of the 1980s.178

Poetry was a very important tradition in Uyghur literature, with the modernist poetry of the 1970s and 1980s being key in the religious cultural revivalism in Xinjiang.179 Modernist,
and avant-garde, poetry were emerging in Uyghur literature in the 1980s, as poets embraced the Uyghur language, writing whilst portraying a Xinjiang of the present. The artistic freedom of poetry allowed Uyghur writers to experiment with their styles, which were at the time possibly influenced by other Persian, Arabic, Chaghatay, and even Western and Chinese works translated to Uyghur over time. Poet Akhmatjan Osman, having studied in Syria in the early 1980s, returned to the avant-garde Uyghur poetic scene with these foreign influences, and published a poem titled “Robinson Crusoe” in the late 1980s. The title itself gives away the influence of Western literary traditions on Osman’s education and writing, and the poem itself diverges largely from the Sufi ghazal style of melodic rhymes:

“I have to leave
The echo-existence,
I want to crush all mirrors
   They can't show
My secret anymore.
I have to search for
This God to whom I will
   Prostrate.
I will rip off my skin,
I don't fit in anymore,
I am going to dress in the horizon.
I have to leave
To chain the world into my questions.
I will show all things
   Through eyes of doubts.
I am the Robinson of this time
I will build
   My island
   In another world”

It is notable that there is no mention of the past in this poem. Uyghur poetry in the 1980s tended to focus more on the bleakness and flaws of the present, rather than the historical past. The

181 Ibid
break from Sufi traditions, and classic Uyghur poetry that derived its styles a lot from the Perso-
Arabic literary cultures of Central Asia, is reflective of Osman’s educational background. It is also indicative of the influx of Western works circulating in Xinjiang at the time (mostly in translation), and the impact of this foreign influence on modernist Uyghur poetry. Rather than the carefully disguised nationalistic undertones of Abdurehim’s prose, Osman represents the boldness of Uyghur poetry that openly addresses the frustrations, pain, and isolation felt by most Uyghur people under PRC administration, especially in a time of extensive reforms and changing norms under Deng Xiaoping.

Ethnic minority literature in the 1970s and 1980s was a very new field, yet Tibetan and Uyghur authors often drew from older ethnic traditions to inform their contemporary works within the political context of a reforming Chinese state. Tibetan authors in the 1980s continued to struggle to publish Tibetan literature that allowed them to exercise complete cultural autonomy, and often writers were confined to writing on themes that would prevent Party backlash. This was a result of the bureaucracy of the publishing journals that allowed Tibetan writers to publish their works at the time, which were mostly controlled by Party-led Writers’ Associations which retained the policy of maintaining Chinese superiority in frontier provinces. Uyghur literature, on the other hand, disguised its rising Uyghur nationalist tones in genres such as historical fictions, and through modernist poetry that obscured its messages through secular styles that deviated from the Sufi-like styles of traditional Uyghur poetry.

Being non-Han and publishing Chinese literature in the post-revolutionary period was considerably easier than in the Maoist era, but there still remained some restraints on ethnic minorities and their expressions of their identities within a Chinese context. The late 1970s and

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182 Traditional ghazals consist of a number of couplets, very unlike the structure of the poem presented. Notably, there is also no overt religious imagery in the poem despite there being mention of “God.”
the 1980s remain known as one of the most ‘open’ decades in PRC history in terms of cultural and intellectual freedom.

1989

The economic reforms of the 1980s had led to the creation of a market economy, and marked the withdrawal of Party control from the social and cultural spheres. As the CCP adopted more capitalist policies, and wealth inequality was on the rise, its legitimacy as a socialist state was weakening. The late 1980s, and especially the year 1989, saw escalating protests by students and intellectuals who called for democratisation. Instead of China being nominally Communist, and capitalist by practice, democratisation and the abolition of the one-party system would have quickened the pace of economic liberalisation. The student demonstrations had spread across China by April 1989, gaining the sympathy and support of many civilians. Support galvanised further as students in Beijing launched a hunger strike, and gathered in Tian’anmen Square. Agitation reached the point where the state declared martial law and moved troops around Tian’anmen Square as a warning sign. On June 4 and 5, the army opened fire on some and arrested others in a bloody crackdown that saw upwards of 10,000 people dead and many more injured.

The events leading up to the pro-democracy movements of 1989, and the devastating aftermath of the demonstrations in Beijing led the Party in the 1990s to pull back some of its reformist attitudes. The 1990s saw the CCP regain some of its control on the social sphere, beginning by making any mention or discussion of the events of 1989 taboo in China. Chinese intellectuals saw a return of state control on literature and the arts, in an attempt to

184 Ibid
185 Ibid
186 Ibid
187 Ibid
188 Ibid
189 Ibid
better control the public opinion and crush any dissent before it escalates to the levels of 1989. This became especially crucial after 1991 and the fall of the Soviet Union, alarming the PRC which had only two years prior overcome a near collapse of its Communist regime. The 1990s thus marked a recentralisation of power in the Chinese state, resulting consequently in the close of the ‘open’ era of the 1980s in literature and arts, especially in the frontiers.
CHAPTER THREE
1989-2000: Staying Non-Han in China

The 1980s in Chinese intellectual history marked a period of pluralism and autonomous cultural production that was disrupted by the violent events at Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989. The ‘reform and opening’ of the post Cultural Revolution PRC saw policies targeting economic growth and increasing involvement in global politics. This period also saw the gradual relaxation of Party control over the social and cultural spheres, freeing Chinese intellectuals from the totalitarian and political oversight of the state. Under Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, intellectuals had claimed an important position in “speaking for the people,” to the state and likewise speaking “to the people” for the state. By the turn of the century, the role of intellectuals within and outside the Chinese political establishment had transformed significantly. The relative cultural and intellectual freedoms that writers and artists experienced during the 1980s contributed largely to the growth of ethnic minority literature in the frontier provinces of Tibet and Xinjiang. Ethnic minority intellectuals spent the last decades of the twentieth century expanding their canon of minority literature and ethnic identity within the PRC.

Throughout the 1980s, the avant-garde works of Chinese authors and artists encouraged a large number of intellectuals to pursue radical political reform. The student-led pro-democracy movement in 1989 had begun earlier in the 1980s with establishment intellectuals tied to the state who envisioned a Chinese civil society that was more democratic in nature. The lack of a stringent, state-led censorship system in the post-Mao era, combined with the opportunity for the relative free flow of media, literature, scholarship, and art that engaged in

open discourse on politics created a culture of pluralism. Without a single, state-backed orthodox view on political issues dominating intellectual debate, Chinese intellectuals had the freedom to create spaces and channels for the growth of pro-democracy factions in society through most of the country. The connection between a looser censorship regime and the spread of dissenting ideas within intellectual networks, among students, and the masses was not lost on the CCP following 1989. The 1990s saw a concerted effort by the state apparatus to implement stricter restrictions on public discourse, publications, media, and scholarly work. This would come in conflict with the state’s simultaneous goal to continue ‘opening up’ economically and culturally to a global society.

Global connections brought in through migration, open trade, and the rekindling of diasporic networks led to the growth of ideas such as liberty, democracy, multi-party systems, and free-market economic models. The pressure to catch up in terms of development aided the commercialisation of art and literature, and bolstered the cultural diversity of the 1980s. International factors played a bigger role on the social, cultural, and political developments in China, especially following further reform and economic liberalisation and its effect on culture in the 1990s. The protests in Tiananmen took a violent turn as the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) began to “clear the square” by opening fire on the unarmed protestors. In a June 9 statement following this event, Deng Xiaoping condemned the protestors on accounts of their main goal being “[to] establish a Western-dependent bourgeois republic” by overthrowing the

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socialist state. The need to contain and regulate the spread of foreign, potentially anti-Party ideas soon extended to the tightening of state supervision on the social and cultural spheres.

The 1989 Party crackdown “exposed the nature of the Chinese party-state to a new generation,” while the fall of the USSR in 1991 further prompted a series of policy changes that targeted both intellectuals and ethnic minorities in particular. The restoration of control over the intellectual, social, and cultural domains became a goal for the PRC. The role of intellectuals in being a force for social and political change and influence was lessened, with many previously establishment intellectuals withdrawing from their role in the Party system and avoiding expressions of political dissent. Ethnic minority intellectuals took this time to reconcile their gradually depoliticised roles with their still politicised minority identity. As ethnic minority policies became more restrictive regarding cultural and ethnic expression, minority intellectuals’ ability to maintain a “non-political” presence was challenged further.

Thus, ethnic minority literature itself continued to be a political entity in this era, as authors transitioned from a period of creative freedoms to one of growing political and cultural repression and state supervision.

**A Shifting Political Climate**

Immediately following the Tiananmen crisis, there was a change of leadership in the Ministry of Culture (MOC), foreshadowing a shift in state cultural policy. The leader behind many reform era policies, author Wang Meng, was succeeded by Party veteran and writer He

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Jingzhi. He was also the deputy head of the Propaganda Department of the CCP. This indicated a return of power to the “old guard in the literary establishment,” and signalled the tightening of control over nation-wide cultural activity through a combination of cultural policies, censorship, and the growth of ideology-based propaganda. This reconsolidation of power occurred alongside increasing commercialisation of cultural industries, with private bookstores and even numerous independent literary journals representing a very different view of China than the newly resumed state-led, ideologically monitored works. The shift in policy trajectories within the MOC in the early 1990s indicated that the state continued to function on the belief of ‘art for politics’ sake,’ and imbued literature with political purpose that needed to be managed.

The political repercussions of the Tiananmen Square protests led to an decline in the role of the intellectuals in the nation. The diminished political presence of the intellectual was a significant departure from the past. A number of establishment intellectuals withdrew from the political sphere by turning towards the university sector, choosing to publish not as the intellectuals who spoke to or for the people, but as academics/ experts in specific fields. Scholar Timothy Cheek claims that the establishment intellectuals of the 1980s who were “prophets to the people,” were by the mid-1990s “theologians speaking to the clergy.” This left a gap in the public sphere that the Party sought to fill. Through reforms in the education system, the reinstatement of censorship in publishing, and growing reliance on state ideological propaganda, the CCP gradually recovered some control over culture. Economic reform and development was still at the centre of policy-making in this era, which meant that the Party

203 Ibid 225.
204 Ibid
205 Ibid 228.
207 Ibid. 259-60.
ultimately competed with the increasingly commercialised, diversified media and publishing market it encouraged.

Minority-targeted policies of cultural and religious tolerance continued until the mid-1990s, which contributed to the growth of ethnic consciousness and nationalism in regions like Xinjiang, and rekindled similar sentiments in Tibet. The events leading up to, and following the disintegration of the Soviet Union led to concern over potential separatist movements and growing local nationalism within the PRC. A key cause for concern for the state was the growth of a bilingual ethnic minority society on the frontiers, fuelled by the minority education reforms of the 1980s that encouraged minority languages being taught in schools. Along with a rise in the rate of ethnic minority citizens being educated, the tolerance of ethnic and religious expression along with the encouragement of minority language education aided in the creation of an “ethnic consciousness.”

This ethnic consciousness was spurred on by the growth of ethnic minority literary culture, which by the late 1980s and early 1990s had a significant number of texts in minority languages (rather than translations from Chinese publications). Concerns over “everyday resistance” by ethnic minorities, and a diminishing “national unity” in Tibet and Xinjiang were especially amplified in the 1990s. The Party gradually phased out its tolerant religious, cultural, and education policies that benefited minority populations throughout the 1990s on account of “repeated unrest.” The sense of ethnic community that excluded the Han Chinese presence that was partly a result of the minority-friendly policies of the reform era became a cause for concern explicitly following the secession of Central Asian states across the border.

210 Ibid
211 Ibid
212 Ibid
The growing bilingual society in Xinjiang and Tibet, especially in the social and cultural spheres, raised the PRC’s anxieties as parallel cultures arose that did not include and were not led by the Han Chinese.

Since 1996, the Chinese state launched a number of campaigns targeting minorities – known as “Strike Hard” campaigns – targeting “the three evils of separatism, terrorism, and religious extremism” in Xinjiang. Similarly in Tibet, campaigns aiming to Sinicise the minority education program were on the rise after 1994. In direct opposition to the religious tolerance policies of the 1980s, the patriotic curricula being enforced in Tibet and Xinjiang aimed to promote “atheism,” reintroduce Chinese language education, encourage English language education, and boost Chinese national solidarity amongst minority students. In some ways, the downsizing of minority language education and the emphasis on Chinese patriotism in minority education institutes resulted in a growth in ethnic consciousness. The restrictions of ethnic minority religious and cultural freedoms in the 1990s fed into the growth of an ethnic identity that excluded and even opposed Han Chinese and the Chinese state as a whole.

The state’s ‘opening up’ process further contributed to growing ethnic minority unrest. On the one hand, international events such as the fall of the Soviet Union and the creation of independent Central Asian states across the border led to the implementation of more restrictive policies towards minorities. Simultaneously, the economic goals of the state, notably opening up to trading partnerships in the Middle East in the 1990s, meant that minority policies especially towards Muslim minzu were under scrutiny. The international pressures that came

215 Ibid
with China’s economic liberalisation resulted in the need for more careful handling of minority regions in order to maintain international ties. Global or transnational connections were also significant in the development of the aforementioned ethnic consciousness for many minority communities, who sought a community beyond the PRC. A stronger relationship with Chinese diasporic communities meant that ethnic minority intellectuals could establish international networks that were outside immediate state control.

Changes in the bureaucratic organisation did not reflect an immediate reconsolidation of power for the Party. The Tiananmen crackdown contributed heavily to the decline in open political dissent. The creative and social freedoms of the reform era that had created a culture of freer religious and cultural expression, and a growing sense of ethnic consciousness separate from Chinese national solidarity, challenged the state’s confidence in minority affairs. The early- to mid- 1990s saw a gradual retirement of the tolerant minority policies, as the PRC moved towards reconsolidating its control over the social, cultural, and educational spheres in frontier regions. The policies of the state tended to contradict themselves in some ways, as the restrictive policies towards minority communities tended to build up ethnic tensions in the mid-1990s.

The economic and developmental goals of the state remained at the centre of most domestic policymaking, hindering the establishment of complete state oversight and control over minority communities as culture continued to diversify at a fast pace. The increasing commercialisation of literary publishing in a pluralistic culture meant that there was a considerable audience for literature in different genres, styles, and even in different languages. In attempting to return to a cultural atmosphere that was dominated by Party ideology and non-dissenting intellectual voices, the state would risk its economic development. Thus, the public sphere of the 1990s saw both rigorous cultural diversification emboldened by the growth of the
commercial media and publishing market, as well as the gradual return to power of propaganda and censorship state apparatus.

**The Tough Legacy of Cultural Autonomy**

The emergence of ethnic minority literature, in tandem with a broader expansion in Chinese literary production in the early 1980s, aided the creation of a far more pluralist and extensive range of cultural creations than in the past. The introduction of a market economy and the dismantling of Maoist era institutions for content regulation meant that writers enjoyed an unprecedented degree of agency in their works. The audience for minority literature, especially in minority languages, had grown exponentially over the 1980s. The number of ethnic minority authors contributing to the canon of minority literature in both Xinjiang and Tibet had also considerably multiplied, as the previous generation of Cultural Revolution authors were joined by a new generation of writers who had grown up in an increasingly bilingual society.217 The state’s economic liberalisation policies, which included a number of minority cultural policies, continued to take priority even while the political tensions of the late 1980s and early 1990s moved policymakers to reconsider their stance on censorship and political oversight.218 In the case of media and literature, this created a brief paradox as culture continued to develop and maintain a sense of diversity at the same pace as at the zenith of the reform era, all the while the political situation was changing. Cultural production for most of the early 1990s retained many of the qualities of the reform era in the 1980s.

Ethnic minority literature published in the early 1990s was exemplary of the creative autonomy that many minority creators experienced during the reform period. Despite rapid economic and political changes, ethnic minority cultural production carried on many major

trends from the 1980s to the 1990s. This was likely because the broader political shifts had not yet begun to affect cultural development in significant ways. Uyghur literature notably continued its practice of drawing up alternative historical narratives and origin myths.219 The field of avant-garde Uyghur poetry also grew at a significant rate, especially as more and more amateur writers joined the ranks of established intellectuals in independent local publications. Modern Tibetan literature in the 1990s saw an intensification of a generational conflict between the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ guard, illustrating the thematic struggle between tradition and modernity that many Tibetan short stories, novels, and occasionally poetry centred around. Much like early reform era texts, ethnic minority authors in the 1990s portrayed an image of their ethnic culture and community where a broader Chinese community or polity was rarely present. An overarching Chinese identity was simply not a subject explored in many Uyghur and Tibetan poems of the era; and prose rarely featured interactions between characters of different ethnic groups.

Uyghur poetry in the 1990s continued to focus on the material realities of the present, foregoing the historical setting many novels and short stories opted for. Modernist Uyghur poets in the 1990s did not shy away from critiquing the economic changes led by the Party for disrupting the Uyghur traditional way of life. For instance, amateur poet Ablimit Samat’s poem about his native village Aqsaray (in south-west Xinjiang) portrays the way modernity in the form of minivans, asphalt roads, and an obsession with money-making bleed into pastoral Uyghur lives:

Don’t be surprised if I tell you I went to Aqsaray,  
I went there, but the place I went to is not remote.  
[…]
No president but the farmer rules there,  
Gold he piles up, and gold he sows on the fields.  
[…]

The asphalt road winds into the green,
Many there are riding steel foals.
Willows and poplars watch enthusiastically
As farmers they know pass by driving minivans.
[...] Don’t question if that might be, all the thinking, all the striving
Is now to find ways to get rich.220

On one hand, the modernisation of this village is presented in a positive light as farmers drive by in minivans, with the landscape (“willows and poplars”) watching “enthusiastically.”221 This material benefit is then offset by the final stanza. All efforts of the farmers goes towards finding “ways to get rich,” emphasising the psychological transformation Uyghur people have gone through as a result of economic modernisation.222 The sense of creative freedom that allowed poets like Akhmatjan Osman in the 1980s to write about the frustrations and isolation felt by Uyghur people under the PRC continued to influence minority writers like Samat, whose grievances took a more economic rather than nationalistic tone. It is notable that there is no direct mention of the state, or any interaction with other ethnic groups. Minority authors would face obstacles in publishing explicit polemics against the state even during the reform era. However, Michael Friederich notes that Uyghur literature, media, and music, “whether they depict people, objects, or scenery [were] almost exclusively Uyghur.”223

Ethnic minority literature as a genre was very localised, and minority authors tended to omit discussing ethnic difference or inter-ethnic relations in most of their works in favour of exploring and expanding their understanding of their own ethnic identity independent of others. This is especially evident in Samat’s poem above, where the economic modernisation is critiqued in isolation, instead of being connected to the state as a whole. The poem is an acknowledgement that the freedom of expression that poets displayed in the 1980s (such as in

221 Ibid
222 Ibid
223 Ibid. 92.
Osman’s “Robinson Crusoe” in Chapter Two) did not carry over to the cultural atmosphere in the 1990s. While issuing a similar critique of the Han Chinese state’s encroachment on Uyghur land and therefore culture, Samat’s work stays on the “safe side.” A surface level reading of the poem would mostly highlight the bright imagery of the reign of the farmer, the “gold he piles up, and [the] gold he sows on the field,” and the welcomed “asphalt road [winding] into the green.” To Friederich, this indicates Samat’s conformity to “official representations of reality.” The last stanza, on the other hand, slips in a deeper critique that clearly slipped past the censors at the time.

Concerns over slipping literary works past censors were not new in the 1990s. While the state had withdrawn almost entirely from the cultural scene, especially in non-Sinophone ethnic minority regions, it still maintained some oversight over official literary journals and major publications. By the late 1980s and the early 1990s the commercialisation and diversification of the publishing market had created room for more than just university-backed journals or big-name publishing houses and literary magazines. The overall literary environment in Xinjiang and Tibet especially, due to the novelty of ethnic minority literature, was dominated not only by intellectuals, but also by amateur participants whose works were fairly regularly published in a number of magazines, and also circulated amongst the general public through irregular publications (such as pamphlets or unpublished anthologies). The volume of cultural production in the 1990s was far greater than in the 1980s. Even as state-backed Writers’ Associations and publishing channels began scrutinising authors and their works more stringently, an alternative literary environment to the mainstream continued to

225 Ibid 95.
226 Ibid 90.
function. Poems like Samat’s were widely consumed by the general public, despite his non-establishment intellectual status.\footnote{Friederich, Michael. “Uyghur Literary Representations of Xinjiang Realities.” In Situating the Uyghurs Between China and Central Asia, 89–107. Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2007. 89-90.}

In Tibet, avant-garde ethnic minority poets continued to break from tradition and “liberate themselves from religious poetry” throughout the 1990s\footnote{Hartley, Lauran, Patricia Schiaffini-Vedani, and Matthew Kapstein. Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. 119-121}. The Tibetan literary field especially went through major demographic changes, not unlike in Xinjiang. As more “lay writers” (denoting amateur authors, people without religious or scholarly affiliations mostly) began entering the publishing market, the number of traditional monastic writers using traditional forms of prose and poetry declined.\footnote{Ibid 138} While Buddhist culture remained central to the way Tibetan authors engaged with their society and landscape in their works, they were no longer bound by the restrictions of writing in metered verse or using “ornamental” language.\footnote{Ibid 119} This led to an emphasis in the juxtaposition between modernity and tradition in modern Tibetan literature. Minority writers continued to experiment with form and writing style, as well as their subject material. Unlike many Uyghur language poems in the 1990s which used traditional poetic forms of Sufi ghazals and adapted “canonical poetic vocabulary,” modern Tibetan poetry sought to completely secularise itself.\footnote{Ibid  96} This movement against the traditional practice of looking at the world through “saffron-coloured glasses” instead gave Tibetan writers more autonomy in their creative expression.\footnote{Ibid 120} As Pema Bhum states, the “new poets” of the 1980s and 1990s did not express an outlook based on religion, but instead on other social and cultural realities of their time.\footnote{Ibid 122}
The tradition versus modern dichotomy was a thematic commonality between Tibetan literature from the reform era to the 1990s. Literary responses to economic development, or modernisation, in Tibet were more optimistic than in Xinjiang. Material goods such as the minivans in Samat’s “Aqsaray” were welcome additions to a static, traditional, rural Tibetan setting. Tashi Dawa’s short story “Tibet: A Soul Knotted on a Leather Thong” opens with the narrator listening to a Peruvian folksong “El Condor Passa” on his tape recorder. In his mind, the narrator is able to experience the serene landscape of the Peruvian Andes while being near the Pabunegang Mountains of southern Tibet. The story continues to blend in material civilisation to traditional settings, with the peaceful Pabunegang people who “still hold fast to some of their old ways,” also being the same people who have a “fleet of Mercedes Benz tractor-tailor trucks.” Tashi Dawa describes the modern narrator’s stay in a rural village, and his journey further into the natural countryside in his search for the “Lotus Master’s palm print” described in a mystic vision by an incarnate lama. Rather than shrouding this spiritual journey in a misty fog, the author opted for a representation of pastoral Tibetan life under Chinese economic reforms. “Past generations had never been so wealthy, past generations had never been so busy,” as old rural families operated electric grain mills, while the women of the family managed a few acres of farmland. This is an image of an economically transformed rural setting that directly challenges Samat’s above.

Modernist Tibetan poetry was often inward-looking, with authors rarely addressing topics that could easily be connected to the real world. Poetic license allowed many Tibetans to refrain from naming names, and so a discussion of pertinent social and cultural Tibetan issues through poetry did not necessarily include any mention of Tibet and the Chinese state.

237 Ibid 106
238 Ibid 108
239 Ibid 119
or any interaction between Tibetans and other ethnic groups. Most Tibetan poetry also pushed forward the “single-nationality-mindedness” that Friederich described with regards to modern Uyghur poetry.\textsuperscript{240} For instance, this final stanza in Dondrup Gyel’s “Morning at School” depicts an optimistic outlook on the educational reforms in Tibetan schools in the early 1990s:

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Oh, the spring morning of the school 
Illuminated by ten million good signs! 
This is the sign of the education of nationalities 
Waxing like the new moon.\textsuperscript{241}
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Scholar Riika J. Virtanen claims that themes centred around education were common in Tibetan literary works, usually as an acknowledgement of the benefits of education reform for the rural Tibetan populations.\textsuperscript{242} Both Dondrup Gyel’s poem and Tashi Dawa’s short story represent a Tibet transformed by the policies of the Chinese state, and yet they mostly refrain to mention the Han Chinese settlements in frontier provinces, or even the state at all in their works. To an extent, this tendency to ignore Chinese presence, tangible or intangible, in ethnic minority literature is because minority writers after 1978 have focussed largely on navigating their ethnic identities and constructing a literary canon true to their own unique culture. The reality of reform and opening policies in the 1980s and especially in the 1990s for the northwest provinces also meant a large inflow of Han Chinese settlers in the rapidly developing commercial centres of the region. In detaching the economic modernisation and its impact on minority peoples from the tangibly growing Chinese presence in minority regions, ethnic minority writers continued to create a more independent literary landscape.

The juxtaposition between modernity and tradition was also a source for conflict within the Tibetan literary field. Pema Bhum’s ‘new poets’ were caught in a generational conflict with the more conservative authors of an older generation. Modernist Tibetan poetry embraced

\textsuperscript{242} Ibid 243.
modernity and development in its subject matter and themes, and also resisted against
traditional forms and structures. This resistance through poetry was a continuation of a trend
from the 1980s, begun notably by Dondrup Gyel’s 1983 poem, “Waterfall of Youth:”

Look.
A pure white billowing stream of bubbles
Drops of light, patterns on a peacock feather
A parrot’s wings
A painting on silk
A rainbow.243

The poem was considered a ground breaking piece by most literary historians, as it started a
trend of free-verse poetry that went on to exemplify modern Tibetan literature that had
surpassed the decorative language and fixed meters that marked traditional poetry.244 With the
diversification of the Tibetan literary field in the 1990s, the “new poetry” of a younger
generation of writers clashed with the more traditional older generation. This generational
conflict manifested often with regards to the subject matter of the poems, rather than the
structure. For instance, expressions of passionate love in poetry was considered shameful by
some more conservative, older readers.245 Poet Jangu responded to this traditional view of
shaming a common human sentiment in the following section from “Song of Water-play:”

Oh,
No need to be surprised.
No need to feel shame.
What is happening
Is a joyous step
In harmony with the march of history.
Angry eyes and damning curses,
Do not obstruct and interfere.
What is happening
Is a blow struck by the fist of freedom
On the head of conservatism and cowardice.246

243 Bhum, Pema. “Heartbeat of a New Generation.” In Modern Tibetan Literature and Social Change,
244 Ibid. 122
245 Ibid 132
246 Ibid 132
The second half (“what is happening…cowardice”) summarises the position of the Tibetan youth who fought for greater creative agency in minority literature in terms of both themes and form.247 This debate between different generations of Tibetan cultural producers and their expressions of Tibetan identity and culture through literature continued to take place during most of the 1990s as more youth joined the literary field. In some ways, this trend of secular, sometimes pro-PRC policy ethnic minority literature was beneficial from the state’s perspective. Though the continued reluctance to actually include the broader Chinese context within many literary works still indicated that this modernising movement, with its specific conflicts, was particular to Tibetan ethnic minority literature and identity.

The cultural autonomy of the reform era that led to the emergence of ethnic minority literature continued to have a deep impact on the development of the field. The various literary movements and trends of the era, such as the shift towards free verse by modernist Tibetan poets, or the inclination of Uyghur poets to express their grievances with contemporary developments, shaped future minority writing. Even as the Chinese state began the process of reconsolidating control over cultural production, the growing literary field and a corresponding market meant that ethnic minority literature had grown exponentially. While political crises in the early 1990s marked a shift in cultural and ethnic minority policy, their implementation towards the middle of the decade meant that most of 1990s saw a continuation of reform era cultural activity. This phenomenon is likely why scholar Anne Wedell-Wedellsborg claims that, ultimately, the “Tiananmen crackdown [did] not mark a watershed in China’s cultural life.”248

**Demonstrating Ethnic Distinction**

The policies that were shaped by the events of the late 1980s and the early 1990s began to have an effect on cultural development by the mid- to late 1990s. The Party’s economic liberalisation policies and its reinstatement of cultural control simultaneously created a public sphere that was characterised by a pluralistic, relatively free culture forced to work around an increasingly active propaganda and censorship regime. Cheek calls this a “directed public sphere” as the cultural autonomy of the reform era made way for more centralised, rigorous Party control. The latter half of the 1990s also featured more restrictive policies on religious and ethnic expression in an attempt to curb social unrest in frontier ethnic minority regions. Education policies phasing out the minority language curricula from schools in Tibet and Xinjiang, combined with the incorporation of pro-Han Chinese nationalist course materials marked the acceleration of the Sinicisation process.

The growth of foreign political and economic relations, and the expansion of an active overseas community, was both beneficial to the state, and a cause for anxiety as local nationalism and separatist movements became a bigger threat to the PRC’s stability than pro-democracy factions. The censorship regime became especially tight with regards to ethnic minority literature, and authors began to develop tactics to get past censors. Expressions of ethnic identity, and representing inter-ethnic solidarity especially between minorities and Han Chinese became a key feature of minority literature in the late 1990s.

Resentment against the state and the Han was on the rise in both Tibet and Xinjiang, especially following the changes in the educational policies that switched out ethnic and cultural education for state ideology and nationalist propaganda. Non-Sinophone mother tongue language education was phased out of schools, creating a new generation of ethnic minority youth with limited exposure to their minority languages in favour of English and

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Mandarin language education. Bilingual education and the creation of a bilingual community was, to a large extent, the driver for ethnic consciousness in Uyghur and Tibetan populations. Arienne Dwyer argues that, as language was a valued part of Uyghur culture, the “encroachment by a dominant Chinese culture was perceived as an attack on Uyghur identity.” The goals of the state in implementing such policies was to imbue a sense of Chinese nationalism in its population, especially in the north western frontiers. The short-term result of such policies seemed to instead intensify anti-state sentiments. Increased Han migration, and the growth of Han-led private enterprises in Tibet and Xinjiang led to a higher degree of interethnic social and economic interaction – emphasising ethnic difference and therefore raising the chances of interethnic tension. Zang Xiaowei’s studies on Uyghur ethnic consciousness in Urumqi determined that greater Han and CCP interference in urban Xinjiang raised Uyghur ethnic consciousness instead of cultivating Chinese nationalism. The state instead laid the groundwork for spiralling interethnic tensions in the late 1990s.

Ethnic minority authors in the late 1990s began to respond to the political, social, and cultural shifts around them – as the relative creative agency they enjoyed in the early 1990s diminished. There was a brief sense of disorientation, as minority authors prepared to transition into a far more culturally and religiously repressive era. “Firewood Market” by Uyghur author Adil Tuniyaz captures this moment effectively:

The call to prayer
Behind the clay walls
Is slowly clearing
And turning into the morning dawn
[…]

255 Ibid 40
Heaps of
Ancient two-folded poplars and
Tamarisk roots
Appear to be:
A palace in ruins,
An art gallery,
Writing on wood.
A God on fire, naked, carrying a reddish amphora.
Spirits that fear Chastani Ilig Beg.
Bones with stains of blood, translucent jade
Deer, lying on the ground, raising aloft their antlers.
[...] 
Men wearing furry fringed hats,
Men tall as giants,
Throw down wood from the tractor.256

Tuniyaz presents both a vibrant yet bleak image of Uyghur society in 1996. The long-standing Uyghur cultural traditions and historical myths represented by the firewood are all but thrown from the tractor by Uyghur people. In some ways, this poem is a continuation of Samat’s critique of a transforming Uyghur society that lost its connection to the landscape – except in this case people seem to have lost touch with their culture. More significantly, the poem marks the beginning of the use of conspicuous ethnic markers in ethnic minority literature in the 1990s. Beginning from “the call to prayer” singling out the Muslim minzu, to the references to Chastani Ilig Beg (a Uyghur mythical hero), and the “furry fringed hats,” Tuniyaz makes it clear that he is referring to an ethnically and nationally distinct Uyghur people.257 Although there are no explicit mentions of other ethnic groups in the setting, by providing his characters with recognisable ethnic markers Tuniyaz implies the presence of non-Uyghurs. Later works by ethnic minority writers continue to use ethnic markers in the form of clothing, environmental cues, settings, or descriptions of customs as a way to distinguish between ethnic groups.

257 Ibid. 92.
The gradual incorporation of a foreign presence in ethnic minority physical and literary landscapes reflects a shift in minority literature, as authors are unable to continue functioning in a mostly insular culture. A more overt representation of this phenomenon is a Hui Muslim author Huo Da’s novel *The Jade King: History of a Chinese Muslim Family*. Winner of the Mao Dun Literary prize, Huo Da’s expressions of ethnic difference and interactions fit the requirements of the CCP. The novel is a historical narrative that follows a Sinophone Muslim family based in Beijing through three generations over the course of the twentieth century. Written as if it was a guidebook to Muslim Chinese culture and society, the book spends considerable time explaining Hui practices that may be unfamiliar to a Han reader, including transliterations of Arabic prayers. One of the central relationships in the story was between a Hui daughter, New Moon, and her Han professor Chu Yanchao. This interethnic relationship eventually became a model for many ethnic minority authors whose novels usually, after the mid-1990s, featured at least one interaction between a Han and a non-Han character.

Not all ethnic minority authors who used the above strategy portrayed a positive interethnic relationship. Prominent Tibetan author Tashi Dawa, known for his short stories exploring the city-village dichotomy and the clash between modernity and tradition in Tibetan culture, often used ethnic difference in his stories as a way of showing incompatibility between two cultures. In the short story “The Mysterious Years,” a Han Chinese UFO researcher encounters an old Tibetan man atop a mountain. The mountain is important for the Chinese scientist (who also represents the state by being a member of the “Chinese Association for the Study of UFOs”) in his research endeavours, but it is also religiously sacred to the old Tibetan

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259 Ibid.
260 Ibid 227
To add to this collision between modern (Han) needs of the youth and traditional (non-Han) commitments of an older generation, neither man understands the other’s language. In incorporating ethnic difference in his works, Tashi Dawa created a situation that highlighted the discord between the PRC and Tibet, the Han and non-Han communities, and scientific modernity and religious traditionalism.

Tibetan-Hui author Alai (penname) follows in Tashi Dawa’s footsteps, emphasising the presence of multiple ethnic groups in a Tibetan setting as a more direct way of defining minority identity. His 1997 novel, *Red Poppies* (alternate title: *The Dust Settles*), another winner of the Mao Dun prize, is a historical fiction centred around the destructive rise of the opium trade in Tibet in the twentieth century. The main action is set in the Ngawa Tibetan and Qiang Autonomous Prefecture, described by scholar Howard Choy as “a polyethnic grey area between the eastern edge of the Tibetan plateau and the hinterland of China.”

Ethnic difference in this heterogenous area is marked by language, religious affiliation, and ideology. Alai’s use of this multi-ethnic, yet majorly Tibetan setting portrays a hostile relationship between the Tibetans and the Chinese state, with Tibetans sympathetic to the Chinese being labelled a “[traitor] to the Tibetan people.” The narrator, son of a high-ranking Tibetan chieftain, is half-Tibetan and half-Han Chinese, adding to the complexity of claiming ethnic loyalties. One of the central conflicts for the narrator is his inability to reconcile his “hybrid” identity. Rejected multiple times by Chinese publishers over the 1990s, Alai’s novel was deemed too “Tibet-oriented,” challenging hegemonic Chinese state narratives on Tibet, and

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Tibetan identity. On one hand, the incorporation of ethnic distinction, largely for the purpose of expressing Han and non-Han solidarity, became one tactic for ethnic minority authors to publish narratives that remain, to an extent, authentic to their literary canons. On the other hand, this trend, instead of letting minority-authored texts pass through censors easily, can produce important works that challenge mainstream Chinese assumptions of ethnicity and national loyalty.

The policy shifts over the course of the 1990s were marked by restricted ethnic minority policies and a tightening censorship and publishing framework. Ethnic minority literature began to respond to these political and cultural changes both structurally through incorporating ethnic markers and acknowledging ethnic diversity, and thematically by exploring interethnic relations. The position of ethnic minority communities in the PRC worsened over the course of the decade, with the late 1990s seeing major anti-state revolts in Xinjiang. In the 1980s, the Party’s minority policies aimed to repair a damaged state-minority relationship in the aftermath of Maoist era repression and the Cultural Revolution; in the 1990s the Party focussed on reconsolidating power through the promotion of Chinese (Han-centric) nationalism. The Sinicisation of minority policies eventually managed to fracture the fragile state-minority relationship further, with the resultant regional interethnic tensions being cited as one of the reasons for further narrowing minority cultural freedom of expression.

**Looking Westward**

China’s growing involvement with its neighbours was reflected in its ethnic minority policies on its western frontiers. From the mid- to late 1990s, the state’s growing reliance on energy supplies from Central Asia and the Persian Gulf led to increased scrutiny over domestic

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minority policies towards Muslim *minzu*, most significantly the populations in Xinjiang. The increasingly restrictive religious and cultural policies in the region threatened the PRC’s relationship with its key trade partners. By the mid-1990s, the state prioritised securing its frontiers and suppressing any chances of local nationalism and separatist tendencies that could have arisen as a spill over from connections with the newly independent post-Soviet nations. A number of the CCP’s foreign policies towards the late 1990s were thus devised with the western frontier in mind. In 1996, most Central Asian governments signed agreements confirming that they would not support and shelter any Uyghur separatist groups. Border security, counterterrorism, and anti-separatism defined the late 1990s and early 2000s in Chinese relations with its western neighbours. PRC economic policy also geared itself towards the northwest, with the 2000 campaign to “Open up the West” led by Jiang Zemin. This was meant to both enhance economic development in the West, and invite further Han settlement in a rapidly expanding commercial centres in the frontiers.

In tandem with the state’s turn towards the west, Tibetan and Uyghur intellectuals began developing networks with the ethnic minority diaspora communities. In order to tackle the growing repression and censorship within Chinese borders, many ethnic minority authors in the 2000s began to look at alternative channels for publication. Traditional print culture was soon overtaken by a digital revolutions, with more and more of the new generation literary scene operating online. Many ethnic minority authors published their works overseas as a measure to avoid state censors completely, with some of these texts finding their way into

270 Ibid., 109
271 Ibid. 113-14
circulation within the PRC over time. The state’s recentralisation of its control over the social and culture spheres over the 1990s, instead of bringing all cultural production under its wing, propelled the creation of alternate, non-mainstream cultural channels that became exceedingly difficult to control over the 2000s.
CONCLUSIONS

In 1999, then Party leader Jiang Zemin announced the campaign that would inaugurate the new century. This campaign to “Open up the West,” beginning in 2000, aimed to enhance socio-economic development throughout the country, especially targeting the non-Han frontiers of the nation.274 This set the tone for two key priorities for the Party at the time – ensuring uniform economic growth throughout the country and strengthening administrations in minzu dominated frontier regions. This turn westwards in the twenty first century was unavoidable. The Chinese state was growing increasingly reliant on resources from the frontier, and as a result its ethnic minority domestic policies were coming under foreign scrutiny. This linkage between major ethnic minority provinces and the fiscal fate of the PRC solidified its resolve to eradicate regional instability by centralising authority in the area. Cultural production and producers once again became crucial tools for disseminating the message of ideological unity and maintaining societal harmony.

Given the political ups and downs of the 1990s, most of which resulted in ethnic minority intellectuals gradually losing their cultural freedoms, state-minority tensions were at a high. The pluralistic literary culture of the reform era gave way to a more subdued environment in the early 2000s, with few dissenting voices coming to the forefront. With a far stronger censorship regime in place, and plans to further integrate ethnic minority regions into the state apparatus, minority intellectuals faced hostile attitudes by the state. Under new political leadership, and with a more aggressive focus on assimilationist policies, the Chinese state began to side-line and suppress minority voices. The “Strike Hard” or “Crack Down Against Crime” campaigns of the late 1990s, enforced in Tibet and Xinjiang, highlighted the state’s unwillingness to tolerate ethnic minority cultural and national expression.275 Targeting

“splittists” – minzu individuals who support local nationalism (such as Tibetan independence or Uyghur separatism), these campaigns criminalised and punished those ethnic minorities who continued to flaunt ethnic identity instead of devout Chinese nationalism. An important by-product of these campaigns in the 1990s included “patriotic re-education” programs that were implemented in schools and colleges which reinforced ideological conformity at an institutional level. These re-education campaigns would likely form the blue-print for the more recent hostile infrastructure and policy changes in Xinjiang after 2017.

Ethnic minority literature published within China in the 2000s was no longer the same pluralistic, diverse, expanding genre. A mixture of draconian state censorship barriers, political tension, and individual uneasiness in expressing controversial opinions, meant that ethnic minority intellectuals were no longer able to exercise their cultural freedoms as they used to in previous decades. The PRC had consolidated control over the traditional print industry. However, with the extensive economic and technological development globally and throughout the country during the 1990s and 2000s, a number of alternative channels for publication became available for ethnic minority authors. The digital revolution in publication, after China connected to global internet in 1994, gave way to a number of formal and informal channels for writing and disseminating literature.

This digital revolution got another push in the 2010s with the rise of social media and personal media platforms. Ethnic minority intellectuals now had a sprawling network that connected them to other intellectuals, and their readership alike. With the accessibility and optional anonymity of the internet, urban amateur authors and poets diversified modern Chinese literature. Bloggers such as prominent Uyghur scholar and poet Aziz Isa Elkun abandoned tradition publication channels entirely – choosing to make their literary works

277 Ibid.
Elkun’s example also indicates the blurring of geographical constraints on ethnic minority intellectuals in China. Elkun himself was exiled from the PRC in 1999 after being accused of harbouring “separatist” sentiments, and sought refuge in Great Britain. Now a British citizen, Elkun has no way of returning to Xinjiang and now raises awareness on the suppression of Uyghurs in the PRC through international and online networks. Diasporic networks and international organisations, such as the International PEN Uyghur Centre, an equivalent Tibetan PEN Association, and the World Uyghur Congress all represent modern globalised strategies to subvert and condemn the increasingly violent suppression of ethnic minorities in China.

These alternative channels of cultural production and political resistance also hint towards the centre of ethnic minority literature moving overseas in the twenty first century. Indeed, minority authors within the People’s Republic have continued to publish literary works conforming to state-presented content guidelines. Uyghur author and Jun Ma Literature Prize winner Alat Asem’s *Confessions of a Jade Lord*, released in Chinese in 2013, is one such work of modern ethnic minority literature in China. Published as an eBook, the novel is widely available and follows the story of an Urumqi-born underworld jade lord. Reminiscent of late 1990s minority literature, like Huo Da’s *Jade King, Confessions* also features a token Han character and the subsequent harmonious interethnic relationship between the majority and the minority characters. In contrast, ethnic minority literature written, and published (even in print) overseas has not been bogged down by similar content guidelines. The controversial memoirs

280 Ibid.
283 Ibid.
by Tibetan author Naktsang Nulo (*When Ice Shattered Stone*) and Uyghur author Soyungul Chanisheff (*The Land Drenched in Tears*) – both published in the United States and Australia respectively, indicate an ethnic minority literary print culture thriving outside the borders of the PRC.284

In doing a comparative analysis of the relationship between the Chinese state and its Tibetan and Uyghur ethnic minority communities through the lens of ethnic minority literature, this thesis provides insight into the long-term causes behind the recent spike in state-minority tensions in the PRC. It is evident that modern Chinese literature, and minority literature by extension, has always been a deeply political entity in Chinese history. As such, by analysing the changes and continuities in the relationship between the Chinese state and its minority communities by looking at the development in *minzu* literary culture – one can gain an understanding of the way political change and cultural shifts reflect and follow each other. Beginning with the post-Mao era in 1978, ethnic minority intellectuals have been at the forefront of the resurgence of ethnic national and cultural consciousness. They have struggled to maintain their creative agency and preserve their non-Han religious, linguistic, and national identities in contemporary times. Overall, this thesis lays out a short history of minority individual and group resilience in the face of rapidly shifting currents in modern Chinese politics against the backdrop of Tibet and Xinjiang.

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