Notion of Ethnicity as Cultural Politics: State, Ethnology, and the Zhuang

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้เป็นการศึกษาทบทวนบริบททางประวัติศาสตร์ที่กำหนด
เงื่อนไขของการเมืองเรื่องชาติพันธุ์ในจีน ความเป็นชาติพันธุ์นับเป็น
องค์ประกอบสำคัญในกระบวนการสร้างรัฐชาติจีนสมัยใหม่ และใน
ทศวรรษ 1950 กลุ่มชนหลายกลุ่มที่พูดภาษาตระกูลไทซึ่งส่วนมาก
อาศัยอยู่ในมณฑลกวางสี ได้ถูกจัดจำแนกให้มีฐานะเป็นชนชาติส่วน
น้อยของสาธารณรัฐประชาชนจีน ภายใต้ชื่ออย่างเป็นทางการว่า
"ชนชาติจ้วง" บทความนี้แสดงให้เห็นว่าอัตลักษณ์ของ "ชนชาติจ้วง"
ถูกกำหนดรูปขึ้นโดยการเมืองชาติพันธุ์ที่เน้นแสดง "ความแตกต่าง"
และวาทกรรมของรัฐเกี่ยวกับการพัฒนาทางเศรษฐกิจและการก้าวไปสู่
ความทันสมัย การศึกษาทางชาติพันธุ์วิทยาของนักวิชาการไทยและ
ตะวันตกเกี่ยวกับต้นกำเนิดของไทและความคล้ายคลึงทางวัฒนธรรม
ระหว่างชาวจ้วงและกลุ่มชนอื่นๆ ที่พูดภาษาตระกูลไทในภูมิภาคเอเชีย
ตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ มีส่วนสำคัญในการสร้างจิตสำนึกทางชาติพันธุ์แบบ
ใหม่ของชาวจ้วง นอกจากนี้ งานศึกษาในระยะหลังยังแสดงให้เห็น
ว่าการก่อตัวทางชาติพันธุ์ของจ้วงเป็นกระบวนการที่ต่อเนื่องของการ
สนทนาระหว่าง "ตัวเอง" และ "คนอื่น" ภายใต้บริบทที่เปลี่ยนแปลง
อย่างรวดเร็ว

This paper examines the historical contexts of the ethnic politics in China. Notion of ethnicity was brought in as one of the key categories in China's modern nation-building project. During the 1950s, a variety of Tai-speaking groups, who inhabit mainly in Guangxi, were officially recognized as a *minzu* (national minority) of the People's Republic of China under the collective name "Zhuang". This review paper shows how Zhuang identity has been shaped by ethnopolitical rhetoric of "difference" and by the state discourse of economic development and modernization. Ethnological studies on the origin of the Tai and cultural similarity between the Zhuang and other Tai groups in Southeast Asian countries by Thai and western scholars have contributed to the new Zhuang ethno-consciousness. Finally, it has noted on the basis of more recent studies that Zhuang ethnic formation is an ongoing process of dialogue between the Self and the Other in rapidly changing contemporary Chinese society.

Introduction

This review paper is a part of the author's ongoing study of the Buluotuo cultural tourism development of the Zhuang in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The Zhuang are one of the Tai-speaking peoples who are distributed mainly over the Southwestern part of China, along the Sino-Vietnamese frontier which James Scott referred to as 'Zomia.'[1] Since the 1950s, the *Zhuang* have been classified as the largest of the fifty-five ethnic minority groups of mainland China. Most of them are concentrated in Guangxi, inhabiting the area south of five great mountain ranges. Other Zhuang have settled in Yunnan, Guangdong, Guizhou and Hunan provinces.

Tourism promotion of Buluotuo culture began in 2002, when scholars concluded that Mt. Ganzhuang in Tianyang County was the important memorial place of *Buluotuo* and his wife *Muliujia*, the first ancestor of the Zhuang. This conclusion has led to the project of inventing a new annual Buluotuo festival at Mt.Ganzhuang, held by the local government of the Tianyang County from 2004 onwards. In 2006, the State Department of China has listed Buluotuo culture on China's national inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Accordingly, the traditional festival of the Zhuang minority in Mt. Ganzhuang area acquires a special significance and cultural meaning which can be developed for the purposes of tourism promotion.

In 2007, I had a chance to join an academic seminar on Zhuang Culture held alongside the Buluotuo festival. I was intrigued by local state agencies' strategy to emphasize that the Buluotuo culture was an important means of friendly

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[1] James Scott (2009) borrows the term 'Zomia' from Willem van Schendel and defines it as a new name for all the lands at altitudes above roughly 300 meters all the way from Central Highlands of Vietnam to northeastern India and traversing five Southeast Asian nations (Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Burma) and four provinces of China (Guangxi, Guizhou, Yunnan, and parts of Sichuan). His thesis is that Zomia is the largest remaining region of the world whose peoples have not yet been fully incorporated into nation-states. It had been the political choices that diverse peoples intended to escape from state control into the Zomia. He argues that these hill people are not the archaic remnants but the "runaways" from state-making processes in the lowland

communication between the people of China and Southeast Asia. Furthermore, when I conducted a fieldwork in Guangxi (October 2010 - September 2011), the discourse of cultural roots and cultural commonality between the Zhuang and other Tais in Southeast Asia was often addressed. Zhang Shengzhen, the chairman of the Zhuang Studies Association, emphasized the important virtue of promoting Buluotuo Culture as Zhuang ethnic identity. As shown in his speech given on 22 April 2010:

> Buluotuo is the human ancestor of Zhuang people. This is the *ethnicity* position. An ethnic group is composed of blood ties, language link and geographic link. The human ancestor is an emblem of ethnic psychology and the sense of ethnic identity. Buluotuo is the creator-god of Zhuang people and the creation spirit is the backbone of spiritual world of Zhuang people. *The descendants of Buluotuo should carry forward Buluotuo's creation spirit to serve the nation's socialist modernization effort and make Zhuang people rank among the world's advanced ethnic groups.* (emphasis added)

Zhang deliberately raised this point not only to the participants of the Buluotuo culture academic conference, but also to the Thai delegation who visited Nanning and Tianyang in October 2010. Moreover, this statement was readdressed in 2011 at the academic conference attended by international scholars from India (Tai-Ahom), Myanmar, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam. The 2011 conference was the first time that the Zhuang Studies Association invited three Tai-Ahom scholars from India and the number of Chinese participants was larger than 350.

To understand this statement, it is necessary to know that the 'Zhuang' ethnic identity emerged as a response to tremendous social and political changes initiated by the communist regime during the 1950s and accelerated through ensuing regime changes and socio-economic development since Deng Xiaoping's rise in the 1980s. Ethnic identity is complex and multilayered. Although a common definition of ethnicity is a group of people who have shared traits, such as language, cultural behavior and physical appearance (ethnic markers), a putative common descent, and a mechanism for the perpetuation of group consciousness and cohesion. When we

look at an ethnic group, we do not only find members of the group themselves but also the members of other groups who interact with them, and the state that regulates them.

In the following sections, I review how the emergence of national space shapes the existence of peoples living in border zones, and how they strategically situate themselves as members of a local community, nation, and ethnic group in national territory or between nations. I focus exclusively on the process of Zhuang ethnic formation as a result of the interaction between the emergence of the new nation-state and a major change in thinking about peoples who are culturally different from those at the administrative center. By reviewing the project of ethnic classification in the People Republic of China (PRC), we will see the prominent role of state agencies and ethnologists, especially of the urban elites and scholars of Zhuang origin, in constructing Zhuang identity and presenting Zhuang cultural heritage at national and international levels.

Notion of Ethnicity as Cultural Politics

According to Barth, ethnic groups are defined by the cultural markers that differentiate the boundaries between them, not by the cultural stuff contained within these boundaries (Barth 1969, 15). Ethnicity is situational, subject to manipulation, and often not clearly distinguished from other kinds of associations and identities such as class, religion, and regional affiliation. Ethnicity depends on many factors such as ecology, economy, and politics, and a wide range of features or circumstances can be used as ethnic markers. Ethnic markers are articulation of ethnic conciousness, which varies over time and from place to place, and is based on narratives which may or may not reflect historical facts and contemporary reality. (see Abramson 2008, 8-10). The so-called "cultural discontinuity" then forms the crucial boundary of an ethnic group since a group's ethnic consciousness arises through contact with others who are perceived as different (Barth 1994).

In the current debates about ethnicity, nationalism and the state, Appadurai (1993, 799) proposes that "the modern nation-state… has often created, revitalized, or fractured ethnic identities that were previously fluid, negotiable or nascent". In many cases, traditions are constructed for nascent nationhood, rather than "natural facts" waiting for political expression. "Nationalism and ethnicity thus feed each other, as nationalists construct ethnic categories which in turn drive others to construct counter-ethnicities, and then, in times of political crisis these others demand counter-states, based on newfound counter-nationalisms" (*ibid.*, 800). Thus, minorities in many parts of the world are as artificial as the majorities they see as their threats.

According to Appadurai, "the new ethnicities are often no older than the nation-states which they have come to resist. Ethnic nationalisms are frequently reactive and defensive rather than spontaneous or deep-rooted, as the tribalist model would have us believe". He contends that "the new ethno-nationalisms are complex, large-scale, highly coordinated acts of mobilization, reliant on news, logistical flows and propaganda across state borders; they can hardly be considered tribal" (*ibid.*, 800). "The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that can no longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models" (Appadurai 1996, 33).

In similar way, Rey Chow (1998) sees ethnicity as a relational process, a form of participation in global networks of negotiation and commodification. She argues that instead of viewing ethnicity as the demarcated boundaries of language, culture, and identity and its inventories of heritage, we rather view ethnicity as cultural politics and focus on the conditions that allow, for instance, some groups to claim positions to speak and be heard while others are denied voice and refused any kind of recognition. Chow suggests that the meanings of intellectual work in China are multiple and that different subjects have been struggling to undo histories of marginalization in ways that may not resonate with China's urban-based intellectual elite. In short, she opens a space to consider anew the politics of marginality in the Chinese context.

Furthermore, in Litzinger's work (1998, 2000) on Yao intellectuals and other members of the minority elite in China, he addresses the question of how to understand the centers and margins of power and knowledge in Chinese context. Litzinger shows how various Yao intellectuals, mostly ethnologists and social historians, who make it their business to speak for the Yao and to represent local Yao realities to national and global interlocutors, had worked throughout the 1980s and 1990s to speak back to long-standing stereotypes of ethnic primitivity and minority backwardness. This speaking back to the center has been partly accomplished by critically participating in debates about China's postsocialist present and by attempting to write Yao cultures and histories back into the time and space of the Chinese nation. With new forms of capitalist development, the ethnic other as a sign of the traditional has been appropriated as the most marketable sign of China's long history and multicultural diversity and it requires new practices of ethnological knowledge production. Litzinger (2002) notes that, in the case of Yao intellectuals, they began in the mid-1980s to work with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cadres and government officials to encourage Yao peasants to promote popular ritual, traditional practices of medicine and healing, and other 'traditional' modes of social morality. Because they believed that if these traditional practices could be mobilized and managed, then they could assist in the project of bringing development to minorities.

In the following parts, I shall delineate the historical context and geographical processes which have conditioned ethnic politics in China. A historical overview of the shifts in notion of ethnicity from Chinese Imperial state to modern nation-state reflects the transformed geopolitical boundaries of the centers and the margins. It was only during the late Imperial state period that the notion of a "nation-state" first began to appear in China. The concepts of "minzu" or minority nationality have gradually developed during the establishment of the Republic of China and the People's Republic of China as a multi-ethnic state.

Ethnic 'Other' at the Empire's Margin

Throughout the thousands years of the Chinese Imperial state, the southern region which is today comprised of the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, and much of northern Vietnam, in particular the Red River delta, was known as the "southernmost province" (*ling-nan*). With regard to the Chinese historical sources, the term *Bai Yue*, meaning literally "the One Hundred *Yue*" is a classical Chinese name for a variety of native peoples who inhabited the lowlands of South and Southeast China. Han Chinese identifies groups known as the *Yang Yue*, the *Nan Yue*, the *Wai Yue*, the *Lu Yue*, *Xi Ou*, *Luo Yue*, *Ou Yue*, etc. Furthermore, groups known collectively as being among the *Bai Yue* were sometimes known locally by a variety of terms (Barlow 2001).

The initial use of the name Zhuang in some southern Song historical records was to indicate a kind of local soldier (zhuangding). Later its usage has been broadened to refer to the minority people in the areas of Yishan and Liujiang (present-day Liuzhou municipality), roughly coincident with those areas in which the people used to call themselves *Buzhuang* (Holm 2003; Took 2005).

In general, the Chinese court and literary elites at the center viewed native peoples in the south borderland as the ethnic 'Other'. The stereotype of these groups was animalistic as we can see from the Chinese characters utilizing the "dog" or "animal" radical in the names of minority groups [2]. In the Imperial courts' view, the south borderland was the margin, or the geographical zone where nature could be imagined as wild and uncontrolled, as peripheries in which people considered insufficiently socialized into the law gathered together. The populations in borderlands were categorized into two main groups: *Min* - the registered subjects of

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[2] Barlow (2001) mentions that in 1776 the Qianlong Emperor decreed that the use of "evil and degraded" characters which referred to minority peoples be changed in the volumes of the Sigu Quanshu. After that, the animal radical was no longer use in naming ethnic minorities in China.

the state (tax-paying) and *Man Yi* - people who were "beyond the pale." The courts attempted to transform these populations into lawful subjects of the state through both force and pedagogy of conversion, which was equal to mark these indigenous people as civilizationally 'other' (Das and Poole 2004, 10).

In order to promote peaceful relations with the frontier 'barbarians', Imperial court defined the term "bridle and halter" as the border administration policy. Tang court used a policy of "using barbarians to control barbarians" *(yi yi zhi yi)*. The non-Han border peoples had been governed by their native chiefs and formed subordinate relationships with Chinese court such as trade, official titles, and imperial gifts. This was to develop into the *tusi* system under the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties. Under this system, the Chinese court officially recognized indigenous tribal chieftains who had submitted to Chinese system and the chieftains were permitted to continue their customary, autonomous rule over their peoples.

Although these people were not directly governed by Chinese magistrate, through a multitude of activities, including registration of the populace, distributing land, collecting taxes, regulating religious institutions, and promoting cultural activities launched by the Imperial governments, they were eventually absorbed as subjects of the kingdom, and acculturated to Chinese ritual and culture.

In a nutshell, during the nineteenth century, the Qing state faced several intrusions from all directions, Sino-Russo wars in the north frontier, Opium War, the Anglo-French War (1856-8), the Sino-French War (1883-5) in the south, the Sino-Japanese War (1894-5), and the Boxing Rebellion (1900). Nevertheless, many disorders and turmoil occurred in Guangxi. There was extensive drought, accompanied by plague and famine. The cycle of natural disasters which had begun in the early nineteenth century also continued. The relentless pressures of natural and man-made disasters of war and political chaos hit the west Guangxi particularly hard. These incidents led to numerous peasant uprisings in Guangxi. In the

nineteenth century alone, there were several hundred Zhuang rebellions, all of which were crushed.

The borderland space was one in which ethnic mixing prevailed and in which still independent Zhuang, Miao and Yao people negotiated favorable terms of trade with competing colonial regimes.These people went their own way and honed their skills in guerrilla warfare. They used their ability to crisscross the border for profit, such as smuggling the opium production in China and trading with French colonials. [3] The isolating mountainous terrain, poor infrastructure, self-sufficient economies, and lack of a unified religious or political leadership all contribute to the limited independence from central control.

Zhonghua Minzu:
The Rise of New Chinese National Identity

Regarding the disputes about territory with Russia in 1892, the Qing court had shaken off the view of China as unique to the Han people and created a new definition of China as a multiethnic entity that incorporated the non-Han groups in Inner Asia. In comparison with the lands ruled by the Han, Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties, the Qing conquest of Manchuria, Mongolia, Tibet, Xinjiang, and Qinhai had vastly expanded the Chinese empire. Accordingly, Kang Youwei had proposed in his 1902 article that "[The Qing government] should establish as [China's] permanent national name the Chinese state *(Zhonghua guo)*. Because the Manchus, Han-Chinese, Mongols, Muslims, and Tibetans all belong to a single state, they are all Chinese *(Zhongguo ren)* without any distinction."(quoted in Zhao [2006], 16-17)

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[3] Barlow (2001) explains that since the Manchu governments were attempting to eradicate opium production in China, there was a grave threat to the bandits of the frontier who depended upon production in Sichuan or Yunnan for their opium supplies. The French opium monopoly accounted for a significant portion of their colonial government's income, and the artificially high prices of the monopoly made smuggling both inevitable and profitable.

After the modern border demarcation had been established, the government began to disseminate its understanding of China to the Han and non-Han people nationwide through the new schools. According to the school regulation implemented in 1906, all public and private schools had to teach students the geography of China. The newly mandated geographical curriculum was deliberately employed as the most direct channel to shore up Chinese national identity and arouse patriotism. In the last decade of the Qing dynasty, publishers throughout the empire produced more than 150 textbooks that focused prominently on the geography of China. Through these, the new perceptions of China reached a wide audience and were imparted to intellectuals, nationalist leaders, and the younger generation. Many of these groups had been educated abroad and aimed to establish a "modern nation".

When Sun Yat-sen, who graduated from Japan, led the revolt and founded the Republic of China, this modern Chinese national identity was officially formed. Sun declared in 1912, "the uniting of the Han, Manchu, Mongol, Hui, and Tibetan territories into a single country" (quoted in Yu [2010], 53) and he established "the Republic of Five Peoples", which was the first time of recognizing diverse ethnic groups' contribution to the Chinese nation-building.

In the early years of building the new nation-state, the new regime was still threatened by colonial invaders. The government's ceding of German colonial possessions in China to Japan roused the anti-colonial sentiment among the intellectuals and led to the May Fourth Movement, led by Beijing University students who took to the streets to protest on May 4, 1919. These young intellectuals served to alert hundreds of thousands of Chinese, as well as a new generation of college students, about the importance of democracy, mass welfare, and, more importantly, the establishment of the modern "Chinese nation" or *Zhonghua Minzu.*

This new term *minzu* derives from the Japanese *minzoku,* meaning people or nation, and was used during the Republican Period (1912-49) as the basis of the "Five People Policy": the Han, Man (Manchu), Meng (Mongolian), Zang (Tibetan), and Hui (a term that included all Muslims in China; Gladney 1994, 98-99). For Sun

Yat-sen, a *minzu* is constituted by natural (rather than coercive) forces because he contended that members of a *minzu* "shared blood ties, a common spoken and written language, a common religion, and common habits"(quoted in Shin 2006, 192). This multi-ethnic policy and commitment to "the peaceful coexistence of the five *zu*" was created on the ground in order to enlist the support of the nationalities in the building of a new nation-state. At the beginning, *minzu* had quickly become a powerful term, frequently used to indicate majority peoples (i.e. the Han Chinese) rather than minority peoples (i.e. *shaoshu minzu*).

In sum, Guomindang's ethnic policy of "Five Peoples" allowed the academic space that intellectuals were able to discuss on *minzu* and advocated a multi-*minzu* worldview in the public sphere. Although the new nation recognized the existence of diverse non-Chinese peoples in the southwestern part of the territory, these minorities were excluded from the "Republic of Five Peoples." When the central government was weak and warlords established their power in various places, the scholars eagerly debated the essence of the Chinese nation *(minzu)* [4] and how to create policies that would define a variety of ethnic groups in borderlands. They proposed that the authorities should recognize the existence of diverse groups in China, and incorporate them into the nation building process and prevent them from being enticed by the Japanese, French, and British. These intellectuals wanted to serve the state by developing southwest China and incorporating its diverse peoples into a single nation-state to foster more coherent group identities. In other words, under the influence of nationalism in China during the war, ethnic minorities came to be included as part of the Chinese nation.

Nation Building and the Deployment of Ethnology

In response to the necessity of forging unity among their diverse people, in 1928 the first division of ethnology was founded in China and Cai Yuanpei, the

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[4] More details in Shin (2006).

director, set up a new discipline termed "*minzuxue*". By equating *minzu* with ethnos and by using the term *xue* to translate the suffix "-ology," Cai intended to distinguish the new discipline from earlier imperial studies of non-Chinese peoples which categorize the borderland populations as *Min* and *Man Yi*. Later, the term *minzu* was widely used by political theorists and authorities as a translation for "nation" and "nationality" and the new discipline *minzuxue* became central to the debate between the Guomindang and the Communists over the essence of Chinese nationhood (Mullaney 2011, 74).

In addition, in 1928 Cai also established the Academia Sinica (*Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan*) in Nanjing. He was the one who first set Chinese ethnology on the trail of the non-Han minorities. Cai did not do much fieldwork himself, but every year he sent his researchers out to research the minorities, especially the Miao, Li, She, Yao, Yi, and Hezhe. In its language section, the linguists such as Li Fanggui (or Li Fang-kuei) [5] also conducted research to create "Chinese linguistics". Li conducted research in Hainan and Guangxi's Longzhou region. His monograph "The Tai Dialects of Lungchow", which was published in 1940, is considered as the first scientific study of the Zhuang language (Guldin 1994, 32).

Among several researches on the peoples in Lingnan area, Liu Xifan's "*Ling biao ji man*" ("Record of Savage in Lingbiao Area". [1934]) is regarded as the first systematic study on the Zhuang history, language, customs, religion, family, culture, transportation and other aspects. The book still had prejudices and discriminated against minorities. Another scholar who greatly contributed to research on the Zhuang was Xu Songshi (or Princeton S. Hsu). He continuously conducted in-depth research on the minorities in Lingnan. By combining comparative language, place names and archaeology, he proposed that the ethnic groups speaking the Zhuang-Dong language (Zhuang, Dong, Bouyei, Li) have a historical relationship with the

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[5] His method of using sets of regular sound correspondences (phonological system) and core vocabulary items have influenced as a model for Chinese and Tai linguistics. (see Luo 2008, 11-12).

Thais in Thailand, Laos and Shan in Burma. However, while he contended that the Zhuang and Thai people were very close kin, he maintained that there were distinct differences between the two peoples. [6]

Both leaders and intellectual elites of this era struggled to construct a modern nation-state. The southwest borderland was considered as the poorest and most administratively disconnected from Chinese government. In the context of foreign powers such as the French, British, and Japanese forces who continuously attempted to expand their influence into the borderlands, nationalist scholars urged GMD (Guomingtang) authorities to undertake ethnological research into the social and economic conditions of the southwest border provinces and define the development plans to solve the problem of economic disparity and sociopolitical inequality in this region. In other words, scholars and statesmen cooperated in enlisting the state's power to study the borderland peoples and ascribe to them ethnic and national identities.

For example, in "The Question of Southwest Ethnic Groups in Wartime" (1938), Jiang Yingliang alerted the authorities that the exclusion of the southwest minorities from the "Republic of Five Peoples" would allow the Japanese to seduce "our forsaken southwest ethnic groups." In his view, these ethnic groups are frank, honest, hardy, and courteous but they are lacking ethnic and national consciousness which is a result of the lack of civilizing influences in the region. He therefore urged the Chinese state to educate them and "instill in them a concept of the nation-state, resolve [the difficulties] in their lives, add a form of military training, and guide them to the front line of resistance against the enemy" (quoted in Mullaney 2011, 77).

Another essay of Cen Jiawu (1938), "The War of Resistance and the Cultural Movement of the Border Ethnic Groups" also addressed the divide-and-conquer tactics of Japan and pointed that foreign scholars were developing

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[6] Zhuang scholars support his thesis and point out that Xu negated Western scholars' thesis that advocated the pan-Thai sentiment. See Fan Honggui, *The Connections of Ethnic Groups in South China and Southeast Asia*. Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 2006.

classificatory schema designed to "destroy *minzu* solidarity" and promote separatist sentiment among the Li and Miao which contribute to Japan's invasion (Mullaney 2011, 78). Moreover, scholars pointed to the activities of Japanese agitators in the north who had laid the groundwork for the invasion of Manchuria by spreading the doctrine of Manchurian and Mongolian distinctiveness.

In addition, Chinese ethnologists were cautious that the earlier studies of non-Chinese peoples at the borderlands conducted by Westerners could likewise serve the purpose of division and conquest. For example, De Lacouperie's pioneering work on *Sino-Tai genetic relationship* (1883) and later work "The Cradle of the Shan Race" (1885), A. R. Colquhoun's "Amongst the Shans" (1885), Davies (1909) "Yun-nan: The Link Between India and the Yangtze" and Dodd (1923) "The Tai race, elder brother of the Chinese: results of experience, exploration and research of William Clifton Dodd", etc. These works conclude that the regions of south China were occupied by the non-Chinese indigenous groups before the intrusion of the Chinese. According to these studies, the Tai peoples who inhabited vast areas along the river valleys of south China had their own kingdoms and civilization that contributed to the Chinese civilization before they migrated southward and westward and settled in several modern national territories. These studies contribute to constructions of transnational bonds of the Tais beyond national boundaries or the so-called "Pan-Thai sentiment".

A significant event which provoked a hotbed of discussions among authorities and ethnologists in China was the change of officially name from Siam to Thailand in 1939. As aforementioned, the Western scholars' researches have affected the Pan-Thai view and stimulated a query on the origin of the Tai race. When *Luang* Wichit Wathakan--Director of the Thai Department of Fine Arts—travelled to Hanoi in 1939, the capital of French Indochina, to visit a headquarter of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO), he brought back a version of an EFEO produced map which indicated that there were many Tai peoples, whose ethnic names varied from place to place, living in the Indochina Peninsula, in southern China, Burma and in Assam province of India.

On June 24, 1939, the Prime Minister *Luang* Phibun Songkhram changed the country's official name from Siam to Thailand. This new name contributed to formalize an ethno-nationalist bond between the nation's majority Thai ethnic group and the territorial state. Inspired by the German fascist ideology, *Luang* Phibun and *Luang* Wichit wanted to forge a heightened national consciousness among the populace and to include various Thai peoples in other countries into a "Greater Thai Kingdom." [7]

The attempt to establish a "Greater Thai Kingdom" was viewed by Chinese authorities as a part of Japanese propaganda to build "Greater East Asian Co-operation". This international politics prompted GMD authorities to worry that "the Yi [barbarian] people of Yunnan Province", who shared ethnonymic, cultural, linguistic, and religious commonalities would be influenced by 'Thai ethno-nationalism' and lay the groundwork for a joint Japanese-Thai invasion. Local authorities feared that these collaborators would "cheer on Dai chauvinism" and promote the formation of a large republic with Thai peoples living in neighboring territories (Mullaney 2011, 74, 78). At that time, the newspaper *"Da Gong Bao"* had continuously published editorials to attack the Pan-Thai doctrine and Luang Phibun's conspiracy of political expansionism to include the peoples (Zhuang, Dong, Bouyei, Sui, Lai and Dai) who speak Zhuang-Dong language family in Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, Guizhou Province, northern Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, India's Assam (Fan 2007, 24).

Furthermore, aiming to prevent parallel outbreaks of ethno-nationalism among the diverse peoples of Yunnan Province, in November 1939, Ge Sangren of the Mongolian and Tibetan Affair Commission recommended that "it should be forbidden to use names such as Miao, Yi, Man, Long, Luo, and Zhuang." Instead of calling ethnic names by their spoken language, he argued that they should be referred to according to their place of birth. By late 1940, Yunnan Provincial Chairman Long Yun adopted Ge's proposal and outlawed the use of ethnic names in the province, and

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[7] As noted by Pridi Banomyong in *My Chequered Life and My Twenty-One Years of Exile in People's China* (1972), cited in Barmé (1993), p.147-149.

ordered that the "borderland compatriots" be referred to as "persons from such-and-such a place." However, ethnonyms would continue to be permitted within the academy, but only in the context of scholarly publications. (Mullaney 2011, 74)

Mullaney (2011) points out that the eradication of the ethnic names reflects a deep contradiction latent within the GMD approach to the "nationality question". Although the GMD refused to categorize the Chinese populace into multiple *minzu,* they implicitly recognized the symbolic power of ethnic identification and were concerned about a certain psychosocial power that flowed through these designations (Mullaney 2011, 74).

In a nutshell, the development of national consciousness and the context of a political struggle to build a nation created opportunities for cultivating a body of knowledge on ethnic minorities at the borderlands. In order to win their loyalty, ethnic categorization and the symbolic power of ethnonyms were addressed through dialectic interplay between external and internal political conflicts.

After the collapse of the First United Front (the GMD - CCP Alliance) in 1927 the CCP moved into the countryside and adopted the policy of self-determination from the Leninist Soviet model. The CCP established the Chinese Soviet Republic in Jiangxi and they encouraged non-Han peoples to rebel against the GMD-controlled central government (Liu 2004).

The increased contact with the ethnic groups in western Guangxi enabled the CCP to promote the statement to "unify China and recognize national self-determination" (Kaup 2000, 67). This policy (which later was completely abandoned [8]) enabled the CCP to gain broader support from borderland minorities during the Long March (1934 - 1935). After the Long March, recruitment of minorities was carried out by the CCP in the border regions. Eventually, Deng Xiaoping established the

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[8] Mao Zedong abandoned it because Lenin's theory of self-determination was used by Japan to support the independence of Mongolia (He 2005).

Youjiang Revolutionary Base in Baise, and Guangxi became the first province in which the Communist Party declared liberation in 1949. [9]

To conclude, in the critical context of sovereignty, borderland ethnic minorities became increasingly incorporated in the process of new nation formation, which in turn resulted in increasing their ethnic awareness. Republican-era ethnopolitics became a critical concern with the outbreak of war with Japan. The strategic battle to win more support from ethnic groups in the borderlands was not only between GMD and CCP but had also become an international issue. Chinese ethnologists attempted to convince state authorities that the GMD should not deny the existence of these diverse groups. To prevent them from being enticed by the colonialist powers, the Chinese state should better recognize them and create their own taxonomy which would thereby incorporate them into the nation-building process. This commitment on behalf of Chinese ethnologists coincided with what the Communists designed for their socialist state. After the communists had won the wars, the ethnic classification project became one of the most important foundations for state-social scientific collaboration.

The Making of a Socialist "Unified, Multinational State"

In 1949, having won a long civil war, the leaders of the new People's Republic of China faced a highly fragmented country. Warlords had ruled China for decades; the country was a patchwork of localities with diverse languages, cultures, and customs. Moreover, while the new leaders aimed to reclaim the land that had belonged to the last imperial dynasty, the presence of semi-independent ethnic people all around the borders posed an obstacle. Thus, in order to build a new nation and mobilize the support of the people, the CCP needed to integrate ethnic groups along the border into a unified administration of the Chinese state.

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[9] Moseley (1973, 35) notes that the "liberation" of Guangxi meant no more than the seizure of the major towns and cities and control of the transportation system.

Chinese ethnologists were redeployed to support CCP rule. The socialist state initiated relations with ethnologists who were eager to take part in policy formation and invited ethnic minorities to register the names by which they wished to be identified; and more than 400 different ethnic groups registered. Therefore, in-depth survey work was needed to clarify the situation. Chinese ethnologists were given the task of producing a taxonomy of *minzu* for the developing Communist administration. Clarifying which groups should be considered separate nationalities was an extremely complicated problem for the Chinese administration.

The Chinese communists inherited the term *minzu* from the GMD and simply endowed it with some Stalinist overtones, reserving it for minorities. The CCP removed *Zhonghua minzu* (Chinese Nation), of the Republican and replaced it with *Zhongguo renmin* (Chinese people; Bulag [2003], 760). Kaup (2000, 88) notes that the CCP broadly adopted Stalin's definition of nationality *(natsia)*: "A nation is a historical formed stable community of people arising on the basis of common language, common territory, common economic life, and a typical cast of mind manifested in a common culture". Another component of Stalin's model involves ranking groups along a five-stage evolutionary scale encompassing primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism.

Proper identification of groups which could officially gain the *minzu* status was important because official recognition would mean that a given group would be granted the "*minzu* regional autonomy *(minzu quyu zizhi)*" at three levels: region, prefecture, and county. Moreover, the national minorities can have a number of deputy seats in the National People's Congress (Moseley 1973, 7). To fulfill this pivotal task, the state-sponsored "Nationalities Visitation Teams *(minzu fangwentuan)*" were formed and dispatched to border regions throughout the country. The CCP instructed the classification teams to use Stalin's criteria to make their final decisions based on the particular economic conditions, historical background, and internal relations in a particular area (Harrell [1989], 5, cited in Guldin [1994]).

In the Name of "Zhuang":
Problems of Ethnic classification

Mullaney (2011) refers to Lin Yaohua, an established scholars of the Ethnic Classification research team, who gave a closing remarks for his "Opinions Regarding the Problem of Ethnic Classification" on May 22, 1954 by reinstating that "Don't forget that academic research is to serve political practice. The work of minority research before us is certainly not purely for the sake of academic research. It must unite with politics, particularly with the problem of national security." (quoted in Mullaney 2011, 84)

Through this remarks, Lin reminded the team of ethnic classification researchers in Yunnan to represent the guidelines for the teams throughout country. Academic research is to serve political practice. Political authorities agreed that linguistic categorization was the most effective and economical way. Therefore, language-based taxonomic theories were officially selected as the "primary criterion of classification". The earlier works of Western and Chinese ethnologists were crucial sources to adjust the groups. Namely, that even prior to the fieldwork stage of the project, the team already had a thoroughly detailed plan about which groups it would recognize as full-fledged *minzu* (*ibid.*).

In 1950, Li Dechuan led a team to visit Guangxi. The process of ethnic identification was very arduous and complicated. The team of ethnologists, sociologists, historians and linguists traveled to remote areas to identify the names of the ethnic communities. There were problems in the classification system of many ethnic groups, but here I illustrate only the case of the Zhuang. In her report, she observed that many of the Zhuang people were unwilling to be identified as Zhuang but preferred to be called Han people (Moseley 1973, 41). Another problem was that many groups had referred to themselves as "locals" in the provincial census (*tujia, turen*, and a number of other similar terms), "the result was a proliferation of peoples scattered throughout the region with similar names, but who shared no cultural or linguistic characteristics in common" (Mullaney 2011, 88).

People who refused to be classified as "Zhuang" traced their family genealogy and insisted that their ancestors were a part of Han military settlements. Nevertheless, in Republican era chronicles, they were often known as the "former Han" *(qian hanren)*, the "old Han" *(jiu hanren)*, "the most ancient Han" *(zuigulao de hanren)*. These people also had a high social status in most of the region (Fan and Gu 1989). Kaup (2000, 127) refers to Fei Xiaotong, a famous anthropologist leading the project of ethnic classification, who expressed the difficulty of classification processes in his 1952 article:

> Guangxi has a type of people called "local people" who are widely spread across the province …. They rather refer to themselves as "Han who speak the Zhuang language."…. Since the language they speak is generally called Zhuang, we recommend calling them Zhuang. The Zhuang are a relatively large Chinese southern minority, but we still know little about them. I….hope that scholars with more expertise on nationality history will offer us their assistance, and in this way move towards a better understanding of these people.

Although the team used spoken language as the main criteria to classify them as Zhuang, many people still refused to accept their Zhuang nationality status. Many of them had lost their native language, and spoke only the local Sinitic vernacular. Like the Manchu, "these assimilated Zhuang are classified as a minority nationality, primarily on the basis of family tradition and a few lingering cultural habits that set them off from their neighbors" (Moser 1985, 226). The problem became more complicated as many of the people labeled as "Bouyei" in Guizhou are actually blood relatives of those labeled "Zhuang" across the border in Guangxi. But they got different labels because of the provincial divisions. [10]

The different *minzu* designation in Guizhou and Guangxi occurred because of the principle of "ethnic willingness". According to the original surveys made with the

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[10] The problem of ethnic classification had continued until the 1980s, see Kaup (2000, 88-91.)

aid of Soviet experts in ethnic classification, the experts visited Guizhou first in 1950 and named the Tai-speaking people of southwestern and central Guizhou *Bouyei zu*, after the people's own self-appellation. When the surveyors moved on to Guangxi in the middle of 1951, however, they found out that most of the Tai-speaking people in northern Guangxi did not want to be called Bouyei as it was an almost derogatory term that the more prosperous valley-dwellers used to call the poor living in the hills (Holm 2003, 7).

Mullaney's study on the *minzu* classification in Yunnan brings to light how the category of the Zhuang, Nong, and Sha was complicated by the ethnopolitics of neighboring provinces. Guangxi authorities had grouped the Nong, Sha, and Bouyei under the ethnonym "Zhuang." The Nong were classified as the southern branch of Zhuang while the Sha were classified as the northern branch. In contrast to Guangxi, however, the Bouyei in Guizhou were not categorized as a subset of Zhuang, but rather as a full-fledged *minzu*. To complicate matters further, the Sha in Guizhou were classified as a branch of the Bouyei while the Nong were categorized as a subset of the Zhuang (Mullaney 2011, 87).

Moreover, the group that called themselves "*Budai*" in four counties of Guangxi demanded to be recognized as Dai rather than as Zhuang. The team also considered labeling them Dai, but the Central government and Guangxi government were reluctant to acknowledge another minority within its border, because recognizing them as Dai would allow them to establish autonomous Dai counties within Guangxi. The Budai in Guangxi hence were classified as a subset of Zhuang. Political considerations played a crucial role in defining which groups would be considered a standalone *minzu* (Kaup 2000, 89). Representatives of various sub-groups speaking Tai languages in Guangxi were persuaded to adopt a common designation as "Zhuang" for a purpose of establishing the Zhuang autonomous area.

In addition, it is worth noting that a similar lack of congruence in ethnic designations also occurred on the other side of the Sino-Vietnam border. The Vietnamese communist state was also aware of the politics of national minorities

classification, and they divided Tai speakers in Vietnam into groups such as Nung, Tho, Tay and Nhang. In terms of broad linguistic affinities, the southern Zhuang share a common language and culture with the Nung, Tho and Tay (Holm 2003, 8).

As aforementioned, the *minzu* classification project was mainly conducted for political purposes to consolidate administrative control over the minority areas, especially in frontier regions having ties with the external world. The classification hence took place in strict accordance with provincial jurisdictions, and was inseparably connected to political issues in that province. The CCP instructed the team to merge together many different ethnic groups, who refer to themselves with over 20 names like *Bu man, Bu zhuang, Bu nong, Bu yang, Bu dai, Gaolan, Pu tho, Pu yai, Tho lao, Nong an,* etc., under the single rubric of the Zhuang nationality *(Zhuang zu)*. This made the Zhuang become the largest minority in China (the population of the Zhuang in 1953 are roughly 6.5 million) and they would certainly deserve to have their autonomous area.

In 1952, the CCP established the West Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Area *(Guixi Zhuangzu Zizhi Chu)*. This new administrative area would cover a population of over 6.2 million which consisted of Zhuang (67%), Han (22%), and other nationalities (11%) (Moseley 1973, 50-51). The decision to create the Zhuang autonomous area was made and promoted by the central government to marginal ethnic communities.

Kaup points out that the Zhuang autonomous units did not emanate from the grassroots level by the Zhuang themselves, since the Zhuang apparently had no ethnic consciousness of being "Zhuang". In the countryside, villagers still maintain a strong sense of loyalty to separate *zhixi* (branch) among the people because of the vast differences in local dialects and the lack of a unified written script. To overcome the lack of Zhuang consciousness, the party then began a massive propaganda campaign to build Zhuang solidarity (Kaup 2000, 87).

Later in 1958, a Zhuang autonomous region was expanded to cover the whole Guangxi province despite the fact that the Han were a majority of Guangxi's

population. Guangxi province was renamed as the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region (GZAR). The CCP cadres stressed the propaganda idea that, as the *minzu* with the largest population in China, it was appropriate for the Zhuang to have a province-level autonomous area as the Mongols and Uyghurs did (Moseley 1973, 85).

To conclude, the new Chinese socialist state has assigned ethnic labels to the peoples. The state recognition led to the creation of identities because these labels have controlled access to state affirmative-action programs and political representation for minorities. The state placed these new *minzu* on a social-evolutionary scale; inevitably, minorities were placed on the lower rungs of the evolutionary hierarchy, while the majority Han was placed on the top. The Han would assist the fraternal nationalities in progressing toward socialism. Members of the national minorities are encouraged to join the CCP, but in doing so they simply become agents of the Han Chinese for the transformation of their own peoples. Once established, these various autonomous areas were highly integrated into the socialist state (*ibid.*, 81).

For the communist regime *minzu* was fundamentally a futurological entity that the state would manipulate through the state-monopolized set of technologies such as the mass media, language planning, mass education, and so on (Mullaney 2011, 84). In the 1950s, the government's first priority was to train a corps of minority cadres to facilitate the party's administration and to improve educational opportunities for minorities at the primary, secondary, and postsecondary levels. The CCP emphasized on giving everyone a good grounding in historical materialism and Marxism-Leninism (Guldin 1994).

From Category to Identity

Language equality serves as an important symbol of China's ethnic policy. There has been extensive research conducted on languages of ethnic minorities in China. The Institute of Linguistics was set up at the Chinese Academy of Sciences

in 1950. The Advisory Committee of National Language Research was established in Beijing in 1951. This committee called for work on the creation of Zhuang writing system. The Zhuang writing system based on the Latin alphabet became the first new writing system supported and authorized for national use by the central government. After that, 14 language programs for other nine ethnic groups were launched (Zheng 2010, 96). The Zhuang writing system was used in literacy campaigns, education, administration, courts, cinema, broadcasting, and academic studies (Li 2004).

In addition to the promotion of minorities' language, the CCP also sponsored a major project to investigate and record social histories of all the officially recognized minorities. Ethnology has, indeed, played an important part in the construction of ethnic identities. The late 1950s was the time that state scholars devoted themselves to producing a local history of the Zhuang that would complement the Marxist framework of historiography. Based on oral history from Zhuang communities, a number of historical and legendary figures from Zhuang areas such as Nong Zhigao, Madame Washi, Liu Sanjie were hailed as symbols of the "great contribution" of the "Zhuang nationality" that had made to the "mother-land"(Kuap 2000, 94).

The party selectively promoted traditional Zhuang customs and festivals that do not directly challenge socialist principles, and skillfully manipulated these festivals. Festivals that were once carried out at the village level have been expanded as the clear example of the *San yue san* Song Festival, held in Beijing every year. The party was quick to utilize this traditional festival to spread its political message to the Zhuang. During the early 1950s, traditional Zhuang rhythms were given political lyrics, for example, praising land reform (Kaup 2000, 100-101). This cultural marker of Zhuang had also been widely disseminated through state media.

In the early PRC years, the CCP brought in "ethnicity" as one of the key categories in its socialist nation-building project. The CCP presents the pivotal role in promoting minority language and protecting the minorities' right to celebrate their

traditional holidays. The films about ethnic minorities were continuously produced in the late 1950s. One of the most popular minority films is *Liu sanjie* (*Third Sister Liu*, directed by Su Li, [1960]), a musical about a legendary singer of Zhuang minority origin. The film begins with the beautiful scenery of Guilin contrasting with the sad lyrics. Sister Liu has been driven out of her native place by a landlord and forbidden to sing by her brother. She manages to escape and arrives at a riverside village. She is soon welcomed by the poor villagers there, and through her songs she unites them in a struggle against the local landlord. With its picturesque scenery and its melodious folk songs, *Liu Sanjie* was praised as exemplifying the achievements of *minzu fengge* (national style) or *minzu xingshi* (national form) (Zhang 1997, 79).

However, the Great Leap Forward (1955 - 1961) had slowed down efforts to promote the Zhuang identity. The reports of large-scale investigations on the Zhuang society, history, and language in the late 1950s known as the "white-covered books" were criticized for their insufficient Marxist content (Harrell 2001, 42). Many of the senior scholars involved in their compilation such as Fei Xiaotong and Huang Xianfan (the "father of Zhuang studies") were labeled 'rightists' in the anti-rightist campaign and were removed from their memberships of the Ethnic Committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) in 1958 (Chen 2008).

The Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976 totally interrupted these efforts; the policy of national regional autonomy was condemned as creating "independent regions" and "dividing the nation". All Zhuang language schools were closed and the publication in Zhuang terminated. Minority songs, dance, folk songs, and the like were called "feudal, capitalist, revisionist, poisonous weeds." During this time, educational institutions were severely disrupted and intellectuals were criticized and limited in their scholarly activities.

Ethnologists and officials understand ethnic identity provided through the knowledge they acquired learning nationality theory, or *minzu lilun*. In China, the "nationalities problem" has long been pitched as a politics of national struggle and

survival. The final aim of the revolution is that all ethnic subjectivities are united into the larger community of the PRC (Litzinger 2000, 262). To accomplish this, the Communist Party often resorted to practices of state violence expecting ethnic minorities to give up their "backwardness" and identify themselves with the progressive nation-state. The modernizing secular Chinese state strongly disapproves religious activity, and only permits orthodox religious activity in organized form and under state supervision [11], outlawing both what it categorizes as 'abnormal' religious activities and 'superstition'. No doubts, the Zhuang ritual specialists were severely suppressed; performing their rituals was condemned and prohibited. Their ritual scripts were burnt, and the sacred places were destroyed.

Post-Mao Period: Revival of Minority Cultures

In the 1980s, state constraints on social life became relatively relaxed. Ethnology had also begun to re-emerge in 1978 with the increasing reappearance of *minzu yanjiu* (nationalities studies). Bulag (2003) recounts that "…. in the early 1990's, there has been a movement within Chinese academic and political circles to revive the notion of 'Chinese Nation' and call it 'multicultural unity of the Chinese Nation'...." Ethnic identifications were reconsidered and some reclassifications has been made. In 1984, the NPC adopted the Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy. Minority autonomous areas were granted higher budgetary freedom and special investment funds. Morover, there was a significant cultural revival with increasing interest in the distinctive cultural features of minority groups.

While it is still assumed that modernization will lead to the transformation of all society, the state has supported the idea that cultural distinctiveness, at least on a symbolic level, should be maintained among different *minzu* groups. The *minzu*

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[11] The Republican state and communist party followed the model of Christian churches in the West in the establishment of various religious associations. In China, there are only five official religions; Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism.

cultures and histories should be appreciated. New ethnographic studies thus have been given official sponsorship to a greater extent than ever before. In 1984, a huge publication project was launched, with up to 50,000 experts and cultural workers participating. They compiled folk art materials into the "*10 Collection and Annals of Chinese/Folk Literature and Arts*", including folk songs, folk stories, folk proverbs, folk ballads, local opera music, folk dance, folk instrumental music, etc. (Zheng 2010, 102).

Traumatized by the Cultural Revolution, minority scholars have played a prominent role in speaking on behalf of their ethnic groups. They simultaneously participate in debates from the legal positions of the nationalities to their territorial and other rights associated with autonomy. Harrell (2001a, 151), notes how minority scholars actively create their fields of study, such as "Tibetology or *Zangxue*, the study of the *Zang minzu* or Tibetan nationality within China (Upton 2000); *Yao xue* (Litzinger 2000), *Zhuang xue* (Kaup 2000), *Yi xue* (Bamo and Huang 2000, Harrell 2001b)", and many others. This shows that official ethnonyms took on social lives of their own and contestation took place primarily within the parameters of already established *minzu* (Harrell 1990, 519). In other words, the state designations have contributed to a growing awareness of ethno-nationalism. These legal statuses have led to the construction of identities because these label have controlled access to employment, education, residence, and food rations as well as political representation for minorities (Gladney 1998, 159).

When the Chinese government led by Deng Xiaoping launched its frontier opening-up strategy, it designated 13 open cities and 241 first-grade open ports, and established 14 border economic and technological cooperation zones, most of which are in ethnic autonomous areas. Ethnic tourism has come to China in a big way and it is often promoted in minority regions as the way to generate income for development. In addition to bringing in revenue, ethnic tourism has been a factor in the revival of ethnicity during the reform era. Some areas have seen a revival of ethnic objects from clothing to religious ceremonies in order to provide an ethnic atmosphere for tourists (Harrell 2001).

Minzu groups have been represented in several kinds of visual media like billboards, posters, currency [12], and TV programs. For example, a special television program aired on the eve of the 1991 Chinese New Year. Colorfully dressed minorities and Han appeared together on stage as "fifty-six different flowers." They sang their native songs – Tibetan, Mongol, Zhuang, Uzbek, etc., and continued with ethnic song and dance performances, took turns with those of "the Han performers who affirmed their modernity by appearing in Western-style suits and dresses" (Gladney 1998, 95-96).

In the same year, the "China Folk Culture Villages" tourist park has been opened in Shenzhen, the earliest and most successful Special Economic Zone at the east coast. This tourist park traffics in the selective cultural essence of a particular ethnic group, featuring "typical" dwellings for 21 of China's 56 official *minzu* groups. *Minzu* groups, through the representation in tourist parks, television, and other media, have come to be associated with very specific cultural markers approved by the state

Additionally, Schein (2000) demonstrates that ethnic tourism promotion is not just about bringing in money but is also about developing local self-respect among Miao cadres, intellectuals, and cultural performers. She states that in late 20th century, there were "at least five types of agents engaged in the manufacture of portraits of the self-in-negation: the Chinese state, Han urbanites, urban minority intellectuals, rural minorities, and local villagers" (Schein 2000, 105). State agents and institutions are among the producers of this discourse, but so are elites and even non-elites. She argues that instead of assuming the state to be a source of control from which individuals and groups are striving for autonomy, it is also possible to envision the state working in tandem with cultural producers who are not formal state functionaries, but who share certain ideological stances with the state.

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[12] In 1980 the images of minority peoples in distinctive costumes were printed on the face of Chinese paper currency (*renminbi*). See Schien 2000, 147-150.

Bai (2007, 255) points out that tourism in contemporary China has brought about changes in people's attitudes towards ethnicity. Discourses of evolutionary hierarchy have been replaced by discourses of authenticity, removing ethnicity from a progress-versus-backwardness continuum and its negative evaluations; 'authentic' cultural traits and practices have become highly valued. Ethnic background and ethnic cultures no longer necessarily make people feel ashamed or disadvantaged; ethnicity is something about which people often feel proud and are willing or pleased to reveal. Ethnic identity has now acquired economic value.

Making the Self: Zhuang Identity within Globalization

> Let every ethnic group have its own history book;
> Let every ethnic language have its own brief record;
> Let every autonomous region have its own overview record...

The above slogan was an unprecedented blueprint for writing and publishing projects of the CCP in the 1980s (Zheng 2010: 103). The first-hand materials obtained from social, historical and linguistic research in Guangxi in the 1950s were revised and published in the seven-volume collection of investigations on society and history of the Zhuang in Guangxi *(Guangxi Zhuangzu shehui lishi diaocha)*. Zhuang Research Centre, Guangxi Academy of Social Sciences was established in 1991. Zhuang intellectuals and cadres proudly assert their membership of an ancient and culturally rich minority group. Zhuang activists demand the right to govern their own internal affairs and to receive compensation for exploitation (Kaup 2000, 3).

In addition, the State Ethnic Affairs Commission submitted the "Request on Saving and Collating Ancient Works of Ethnic Minorities" which pointed out that ancient works of ethnic minorities are a part of China's precious cultural heritage and requested all local governments to provide manpower, financial, and material support for ancient works collation and research (Zheng 2010, 104).

During this time, Chinese scholars investigating remote villages in western highlands of Guangxi discovered the existence of Zhuang ritual scriptures. Many of

the scriptures present a mythic account of the origins of the world and their content appears to be connected with *Buluotuo* and *Muliujia*, the apical ancestors of the Zhuang. These scriptures are written in old Zhuang characters *(sawndip)* and cast in an archaic form of five-syllable verse. Buluotuo, whose name is sometimes said to mean "the old man who knew everything", was a well-known trickster figure in Zhuang folklore, while Muliujia was known as a mother-goddess figure with an enormous vulva. The scholars were excited to discover these scriptures because they connect with the Zhuang indigenous religion (Holm 2004).

For the Zhuang elites and scholars, the discovery of the Buluotuo scriptures entails the pride of scholars searching for Zhuang's unique cultural identity. The Buluotuo scriptures have been researched and evaluated under Marxist-Functionalist theoretical framework as a precious literature which reflects the historical and socio-cultural changes of the Zhuang, as well as the taboos and morality that emphasize the harmonious relationship between nature, man and society, in order to achieve their own survival. Zhuang scholars have played a prominent role in researching on Zhuang tradition and speaking on behalf of their ethnic groups.

The collections of ritual scriptures and folktales were published as the Party-approved expression of ethnic cultural identity. Zhuang intellectuals strongly demand the promotion of the Zhuang written script in an effort to "regain" control of Zhuang history (Kaup 2000, 3). Hence, they devoted several years to translate the scripts into Chinese and "The Annotation of Buluotuo Scripture" was published in 1991. Scholars consider that Buluotuo, the cultural ancestor of the Zhuang nationality, had not only screated everything, but also conquered the tough natural conditions and strong social forces with the Zhuang people who had become a civilized ethnic group (Holm 2004).

The opening-up and reform policy paved the way for international scholars to conduct research in the PRC and produce studies on Zhuang history and culture. The issue on the historical and cultural relationship between ethnic groups in

Southwest China and other ethnic groups in Southeast Asia has once again caught the attention of international academics, in particular, of Thai scholars.

As mentioned earlier, there are extraordinary amounts of linguistic, ethnological, archaeological and historical research about peoples subsumed under the rubric of "Tai." Thai scholars have discussed about various theories of the place of "Tai origin", most of which point to several areas in China. But the circumstances of World War II and the Cold War prevented field research in the PRC. Chin Yudee is the first Thai archaeologist who began to study the ethnological data to search about "Tai origin". He met Princeton S. Hsu (Xu Songshi) and translated Hsu's two papers into Thai in 1968: "The Origin of the Chuang (Zhuang)" and "The Origin of Thai people". His research interest then inspired his students at Silpakorn University to further conduct research on the Zhuang in the 1990s (Rasmi 2012).

The pioneering group of Thai scholars are linguists from Chulalongkorn University. It was a former student of Li Fang Kuei who pointed out that the Northern Zhuang dialects belong to the Northern Tai language and the Southern Zhuang dialects belong to the Central Tai, and while Gedney proposed a theory that the Tai language originated in the southwestern part of China, perhaps between Guangxi and Dien Bien Fu in northern Vietnam, Pranee Kullavanijya led a group to conduct the research project "The Relationship Between the Zhuang and the Thai" (1987-1990) in Guangxi. Consequently, scholars from Silpakorn University, Payap University, Thammasat University and several other institutes went to Guangxi. In the 1990s there were a number of research projects investigating this issue by using multidisciplinary approaches like historical linguistics, anthropology, archaeology, folklore, and genetics. As a result, the Zhuang have been seen as "the oldest of the Tai sibling group".

Among these projects, Silpakorn University cooperated with Guangxi Research Institute for Nationalities to conduct a multi-disciplinary research project on the comparison of the Thai and the Zhuang cultures from 1992 −2002. The topics studied were anthropology, archaeology, architecture, education, economics, social

science, and languages. According to informal interviews with Zhuang scholars, this project brought them the first opportunity to leave the PRC and witnessed the language and cultural similarity between the Zhuang and the Thais in Thailand. Borrowing Keyes' word, the Zhuang, thus, are no longer only a *minzu* within the borders of China; they are also a Tai people with transborder connections to other Tai peoples (Keyes 2002, 1188-9).

As part of the central government's strategy to develop economic conditions of southwestern China, Guangxi has been promoted as a port connecting between southwest China, Southeast Asia and the world. Nanning, the capital city of Guangxi has become the host city for the China-ASEAN Expo since 2004. In the 21st century, ethnic customs and folk cultural heritage have become an invaluable resource for tourism. In the areas where the Zhuang live, the traditional Song festivals often attract tens of thousands of people. In order to turn it into an economic engine for the region, Guangxi has decided to hold the "Guangxi International Folksong Festival" in Nanning, forging a commercial chain and developing a series of cultural products (Zheng 2010, 111).

In line with the increase of economic relations between China and ASEAN, scholars of Zhuang Studies shoulder a heavy responsibility of using research of Zhuang ethnicity as a bridge to deepen the mutual understanding between the ethnic Zhuang people and other Southeast Asian ethnicities, as well as to propel the opening up of Guangxi. Therefore, it is not surprising that when the Zhuang Studies Association cooperated with Baise and Tianyang authorities to promote the Buluotuo Cultural Festival, scholars from Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam have been invited. The local authority has turned the folk culture into a means to serve its politics and the economy of the ASEAN Free Trade Area. In the official language, government and cadres, therefore, promoted only some selective secularized aspects of the festival, while the religious aspects of the festival are overtly omitted.

However, this is not the place to provide a detailed account of the development of Buluotuo Cultural Festival. What I would like to address here is the

role of state and the scholars in the process of Zhuang ethnic formation in periods of rapid socio-economic change of the PRC.

Conclusion

From the case of the Zhuang, we can see that the self-ascription and cultural identity are fluid categories both geographically and historically. The elements defining the ethnic group are continuing to undergo change and rearrangement in response to shifting historical and cultural circumstances. The transformation of the Chinese empire into a nation-state that has a fixed territory has also changed the way in which the regime thinks about the peoples. The contexts of political struggle and nation-building during the World War prompted the development of ethnic minority studies around the world. Through a dialectic interplay between external and internal political conflicts, the so-called discipline of ethnology, based on the scientific premises such as historical linguistics, has been deployed to serve the politics in different periods, as we can see from the project of *minzu* identification in China.

Although Zhuang nationality, as well as other 55 nationalities, is a recent invention, the term "Zhuang" has gained general acceptance in contemporary ethnoscape. Chinese scholars have long believed that all nationalities existing today in the PRC have origins that can be traced far back into the Chinese past but the ethnic consciousness of these groups might have been shaped and constructed by the new revolutionary regime which discontinued from the past. A common collective ethnic entity is design by the CCP and the elites of each group.

To conclude, the endeavors of Zhuang studies scholars to search for the Zhuang unique identity reflects their role as the agency of ethnic actors who actively play a role in constructing or redefining their group identity from cultural elements that they perceive as an essential core that distinguishes their group from others. In the ongoing process of ethnic formation, individuals seek commonalities that can be summoned to bind them together as a group for maximum economic, social, or

political advantage. Now Zhuang peoples in the ethnic system of China see themselves and are recognized as belonging to transborder communities. With the increasing economic power in the 21st Century, the Zhuang Studies Association Others began to actively trace their historical and cultural connection with Tai peoples in other countries as they invited Ahomese scholars from India to attend the 2011 conference alongside the Buluotuo Cultural Festival.

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