

The PRC manages its ethnic and religious diversities through two basic policy measures: first, the state creates an absolute divide between the internal and the international. Religious freedom is largely tolerated and ethnic identities respected as long as they are autonomous from foreign influences, and any religious and ethnic based transnational connections are closely monitored and even curtailed, as clearly evidenced by Beijing's hostile attitude towards Vatican. Second, ethnic and religious minorities are confined to "autonomous regions" (ranging from provincial to county levels). Ethnic minorities within these territories are given special benefits as well as are subject to special surveillance. This is part of the social control system that is strictly geographically demarcated and locality-based.

Neither methods are sustainable with the increasing levels of internal and international migration. Populations of ethnic and religious minorities now appear in cities and even small towns far away from autonomous territories, and the inflows of Korean Catholics and Middle East Muslims bring the Chinese Christians (estimated to be between 15 and 100 million) and Muslims (18 million) into transnational arenas. In addition, African traders, southeast Asian laborers, North Korean wives... all complicate the Chinese social fabric. How the Chinese government, while embracing economic globalization so eagerly, manages new religious and ethnic diversities constitutes a major policy issue for the world in the 21st century.

These changes have triggered unprecedentedly open debates about China's ethnicity policies. Proponents of the so-called "second generation" of ethnicity policies criticize the PRC policies for treating ethnic groups as political entities, demarcating territorial boundaries, reinforcing separate identities, and therefore consolidating ethnic groups into nations. The Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and China were the only four countries that politicized and territorialized ethnic relations in this way. When the first three had all disintegrated, they ask, what would happen to China if the policy remains unchanged?

Although the central government insisted on the validity of ethnicity policies based on autonomous region, some noticeable changes are taking place along the line of the "second generation" argument. Jiang Zemin for instance in July 1998 stressed that ethnic relations in China should be characterized as "three inseparable," namely "the Han are inseparable from the minorities, the minorities are inseparable from the Han, but the minorities also inseparable from each other." In 2010 the CPC promote "cross-ethnic contact, communication and integration" as a general policy line. The 2014 government conference on Xinjiang and Tibet again emphasize the importance of two-way migrations, which many regard as a shift toward the assimilationist approach.

The "second generation" paradigm may help "depoliticizing" ethnic relations—as the proponents put it, it however fails to recognize a trend of the "societalization" of conflicts. Rather than fighting for territorially based separation (with the exception of Tibet), cross-ethnic tensions become trans-regional and even transnational and



Figure Typical Residential Lane in Yiwu, Full of Small Trading Companies and Muslim Traders (Photo by XIANG Biao, 2009)

primarily manifested in social life. the 2009 killing in Urumqi was particularly surprising as most ethnic tensions had been confined to rural area in relatively undeveloped southern Xinjiang and the clash was directly triggered by the perceived mistreatment of migrant Uyghur workers in Guangdong, more than 4,000 kilometers away. The attack in Tian'anmen square in October 2013 and especially the mass stabbing in a railway station in Kunming in March 2014 drive home the message that the "ethnicity question" is indeed serious and that all Chinese have to face it now. Cross region migration is exacerbating such a trend.

The second part of my paper explores the trend of "societalization" by focusing on Yiwu, a town in southeast China with 0.8 million local population and 1 million migrants from other parts of China and overseas. Moreover, the local authorities registered more than 18,000 foreigner residents from 180 countries in April 2008. Most of them have come to Yiwu to procure low-end light commodities that have been gathered from all over China. The largest nationality group is from South Korea, but the most visible ones are from the Middle East: Libya, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Iran and Iraq (many were reported to be driven away by the war at home). South Asia particularly Pakistan, Afghanistan and India are another important place of origin. The majority are Muslim. Increasing numbers of Muslims migrate to China and other parts of Asia partly because of the hostility that they face in the West.

Transnational mobility is intertwined with internal migration. Chinese Muslim traders, particularly from Ningxia in the northwest, play an active role in mediating the foreign Muslims and Chinese traders. It is estimated that there are 3,000 Chinese Muslims and 20,000 Chinese Koreans in Yiwu working for the foreign traders. Interactions with international Muslim traders enhance the Chinese Muslims' religious identity in a broad sense, as well as their ethnic and national awareness.

In response to the high level of mobility, various governance measures have been put in place:

- (1) Government developed gigantic state-of-art marketplaces; regulation over the physical space of transaction serves as the most direct means to regulate the migrants;
- (2) 20 Islamic "pray spots" approved by the local bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs, including one of 3,000 square meters. Each has at least one imam and one "manager," but none is given the official title of mosque; A mosque was built in 2005 by the local government and it attracts as many as 10,000 people for jumu'ah prayer.
- (3) A great number of cameras were installed in public spaces, special patrol teams were set up including foreign traders as members, and vigorous reporting system was introduced.

In sum, government regulation also became "societalized": it operates by reaching out to different social groups, and by facilitating as well as monitoring different aspects of social life on a daily basis, but it presents itself in a "depoliticized" manner, and even avoid articulating formal policies. For instance the pray spots and the even the 10,000-capacity mosque, although approved, are not registered as formal religious institutions.

What drives the government to undermine its earlier ethnicity policies but remain reluctant or incapable of theorizing therefore formalizing the new policy is a tacit but firm belief that ethnic differences can be contained, and eventually dissolved, through the promotion of economic development. If the faith in Communism caused the Soviet and the early CPC to emphasize self determination by nationality, the faith in material development underlines today's assimilationist approach. The faith in Communism sought to transcend ethnic difference, but held that one needed to embrace the difference in order to transcend it (thus the emphasis on ethnic language education and cadre promotion), in contrast the developmentalist doctrine hopes to *dissolve* difference by subjugating it to individual economic rationality. But individual economic rationality is itself a cultural construct, and economic activities are profoundly moral and are inevitably carried out in politically determined environments,

especially from Muslim traders' point of view. The article ends by asking: how should we think of the social meaning of instantaneous transactions and short-term wealth accumulation?

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