

Ethnic Minorities in China

Panel:	Session 6 (Lilac & Tulip Room)
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Speakers:	Hwang Jaeho (Moderator) Jin Qiangyi, Yanbian University Lee Dong-ryul, Dongduk Women's University Dong Qingling, University of International Business and Economics Shen Dingchang, Peking University
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Panel Short Summary

Jin Qiangyi

China is a multi-ethnic country. Following the significant changes in regional and political structures, a full set of issues concerning ethnic minorities have come about. Generally speaking, most of these problems exist because each ethnic group does not have mature vision to rationally understand their cultural differences. However, this will not have a disproportionately negative impact. Existing policies towards minority groups are suitable for the development of each and help to promote ethnic unity and integration. Although many foreign scholars believe that China's implementation of these policies is assimilation in disguise, Professor Jin points to the example of the Korean minority group and how their culture is clearly carrying on.

At the same time, in addressing the question of the relationship between the Korean minority group and the Korean Peninsula, Professor Jin believes that the Korean minority group and the two Koreas must explore their common cultural resources. Furthermore, they should strive to utilize their maternal ethnic culture to promote the development of China and South Korea, China and the DPRK, and North-South relations, as well as to further promote the peace process on the Korean Peninsula and lay the foundation for the further stable development of Northeast Asia.

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Lee Dong-ryul

During the 18th National Party Congress, China once again referred to the issue of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The rallying of China's ethnicities is an important factor in maintaining national unity. However, we can easily see that despite the central government's efforts to use economic growth and cooperation to promote the development of Xinjiang and Tibet, problems concerning the ethnic minorities in these two areas persist.

Professor Lee believes that compared to economic development, these two ethnic groups place greater value on their ethnic culture and religious identity. In 2001 after the events of September 11, the outside world changed from calling Tibet a group of freedom fighters to branding them a terrorist organization. The government also adopted a tougher stance towards them. Since then, Tibet demanded independence in 2008 despite the Dalai Lama having abandoned calls for independence in hopes of a high degree of autonomy.

However, it will be very difficult to realize the Dalai Lama's desire to expand Tibet's degree of autonomy. The early advocates of independence were mostly Buddhist, and their struggle for independence was accordingly of a more peaceful nature. However, with their isolation from the international community, their sense of crisis is growing and the approaches they have taken are becoming more extreme and intense. This will undoubtedly affect the stability of Chinese society. In order to alleviate their sense of crisis, Professor Lee believes that the government should adopt a more tolerant policy.

Shen Dingchang

China has always attached great importance to minority issues. In the early days of the republic, the Central Ethnic Affairs Commission responsible for minority affairs was promptly established. Since then, China has implemented a series of policies to promote national unity and common development.

First, China insists on the autonomy of distinct ethnicities, and thus endowed a high degree of autonomy to ethnic minorities. Next, the Chinese government is vigorously developing the economy for ethnic minorities. In the late 1990s, China put forward the

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strategy of large-scale development of the western region to promote economic development in the northwestern region where ethnic minorities are highly concentrated. Next, the government works to strengthen ethnic culture and education by encouraging the use and development of minority languages. Next, the government focuses on the training of ethnic minority cadres and professionals. Fifth, the government extends a variety of preferential policies towards minority groups, such as giving bonus points on college entrance exams and allowing the birth of multiple children. The implementation of these policies works to expand the spirit of respect for the cultural and religious practices of ethnic minorities, and plays a positive role in promoting national unity and social stability.

At the same time, however, Professor Shen pointed out that the problem of inequality between the large and small ethnic groups persists. This type of inequality also exists within different ethnic groups. If attention is not given to the management of inter-ethnic friction, it is possible that the severity of these problems may escalate.

Dong Qingling

As China is home to numerous ethnic groups, finding how to maintain harmony between these various groups is an important issue. In 1978, China began implementation of a strategic policy that prioritized the economic development of the east. Eastern China experienced rapid economic development, and as a result, the high concentration of Han Chinese living there experienced great improvement to their living standards. But at the same time, this also widened the economic gap between the Han and other ethnic minorities.

Therefore, in the late 1990s China introduced a new “Develop the West” economic policy to promote the regional economic development of northwest China where there is a large concentration of minority peoples. This strategy aims to promote inter-ethnic and inter-regional economic rebalancing through economic cooperation, with the end goal being to promote inter-ethnic unity. Professor Dong believes this to be the focus of China’s policies towards ethnic minorities, as well as the trend for future development. Meanwhile, for special cases such as Xinjiang and Tibet, Professor Dong pointed out that such political-ethnic conflicts generally tend to emerge in border regions and are increasingly impacted by

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international political circumstances. To address this, China should cooperate with neighboring countries to establish effective crisis management mechanisms and thereby avoid the potential for border disputes.

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