



Ethnic Integration and Development in China

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Summary. — This paper pursues an inquiry into the relationship between ethnicity and development in the largest authoritarian country in the contemporary world, the People's Republic of China. It engages the theoretical literature on ethnic diversity and development in general, but also pays special attention to political economy logics unique to authoritarian systems. Focusing on the western part of China over a decade since the launch of China's Western Development Program (*xibu da kaifa*) in 2000, this paper utilizes the data from two censuses (2000 and 2010) together with nighttime streetlight imagery data to analyze the overall relationship between ethnicity and development provision. It also analyzes changes in such a relationship during this period. The paper finds that ethnic minority concentration negatively correlates with economic development in both the years 2000 and 2010 across the western provinces. It also finds that counties in non-autonomous provinces, which are historically more integrated with the rest of China than autonomous provinces, have a positive and systematic correlation between changes in ethnic minority concentration and changes in development during the 10-year period. The counties in autonomous provinces, on the other hand, show the opposite trend. Using three case studies of Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Xinjiang, the paper concludes that although there is in general a tendency for ethnic minority concentrated areas to be less developed, ultimately which groups prosper more or less depends upon specific economic development and which political control logics the Chinese state implements.

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Key words — ethnicity and development, China, western development program, authoritarian regimes and development, authoritarian regimes and ethnicity, East Asia

1. INTRODUCTION

How does ethnic integration explain the level of development we see in authoritarian states? While development in general entails economic growth and provision of public goods, ethnicity has also featured prominently in the literature for its role in shaping and contextualising outcome processes. When economic growth is concerned, for example, the lack of ethnic diversity has been considered a powerful indicator in many parts of the world (Alesina, Devleeschauwer, Easterly, Kurlat, & Wacziarg, 2003; Alesina & Ferrara, 2000; Easterly & Levine, 1997). In terms of public goods provision, ethnicity has also been pointed out as a crucial explanatory valuable (Alesina, Baqir, & Easterly, 1999; Berman & Laitin, 2008). The common assumption is that provision of public goods is easier in ethnically homogenous societies than in ethnically diverse ones, because in ethnically diverse societies, minorities' precarious political status and the tendency toward in-group favoritism among politically connected members of the ethnic majority lead to discrimination in public goods provision against minorities. Ethnically diverse societies may have coordination problems in providing public goods, and different communities may also have divergent preferences (Habyarimana, Humphreys, Posner, & Weinstein, 2007). In addition, much of the literature on the relationship between ethnicity and development often focuses on democracies, where the electoral process specifically incentivizes development along ethnic lines, although certainly democracies often tend to protect minority rights as well (Brown & Mobarak, 2009; Hassler, Storesletten, & Zilibotti, 2007). Few, if any, studies have explored empirically how authoritarian regimes provide development in ethnically diverse settings (Tsai, 2007). Can there be similarities or differences in development provision in ethnically diverse societies when there is a lack of electoral process and rule of law?

This paper pursues an inquiry into the relationship between ethnicity and development in the largest authoritarian country in the contemporary world, the People's Republic of China. It engages the theoretical literature on ethnic diversity and development in general, but also pays special attention to political economy logics unique to authoritarian systems. Empirically, the paper examines whether ethnic divisions between the majority Han Chinese and various other ethnic minorities have an effect on development throughout the western part of China, where the majority of China's ethnic minorities reside. For this purpose, this paper utilizes data from two Chinese censuses in 2000 and 2010, together with nighttime streetlight imagery data, to analyze the overall relationship between ethnicity and development as measured by luminosity, as well as changes in such a relationship during the 10-year period. More importantly, the year 2000 also saw the official launch of "Open Up the West" (*xibu da kaifa*) initiative, also known as the Western Development Program (WDP) (Lai, 2002). While economic development in Western part of China is likely conditioned upon several factors, including various local initiatives for industrialization, the 10-year span since the launch of the WDP creates a golden opportunity to study whether this state-led initiative, which involved the migration of the majority Han Chinese into the ethnic minority-

* This paper has not been published and is not under consideration at another journal. Earlier versions of this paper were presented at Princeton University and at the International Studies Association Convention in New Orleans, 2015. We would like to thank Jowei Chen, James Fearon, Saumitra Jha, Neil Malhotra, Jake Shapiro, Romain Wacziarg, as well as three anonymous reviewers at *World Development* for their comments. All remaining errors, if any, are our own. Dr. Enze Han would like to thank the Leverhulme Trust for the research fellowship that provided funding for the writing of this paper. Final revision accepted: December 11, 2016.

dominated western provinces, had any implication on the ethnic dimension of development in China.

The structure of the paper is as follows. After reviewing the literature, the paper introduces the politics of ethnicity in China, the background of the WDP and its ethnic characteristics. It presents a couple of operationalizable hypotheses for empirical testing, explains the research design, and then describes our data. The results of our statistical analysis offer a set of nuanced findings. Overall, ethnic minority concentration negatively correlates with development in both the years 2000 and 2010 across the western provinces. Compared to western provinces designated as ethnic minority autonomous regions (Tibet, Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Guangxi and Ningxia), counties in the non-autonomous provinces (Chongqing, Gansu, Guangxi, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, and Yunnan) have a positive and systematic correlation between changes in ethnic minority demographic concentration and changes in development during the 10-year period, when the Chinese state directed its attention at economic development in these provinces. The interaction term between the change in minority concentration and the dummy for autonomous province, on the other hand, is negative. This means that while increases in ethnic minority concentration are generally associated with increases in development in western provinces, this relationship does not hold in ethnic minority autonomous provinces. The autonomous provinces have instead benefited less from the WDP, as they have been predominantly inhabited by ethnic minorities and remained less integrated with the rest of China.

We also find that while the overall relationship between the minority concentration and development is negative for autonomous provinces and positive for non-autonomous western provinces, the relationship is much more complex among the autonomous provinces. In Tibet, there is indeed a negative relationship between changes in ethnic minority concentration and changes in the level of economic development. This means that counties with more growth of Tibetan population relative to Han population have experienced less development in comparison with those with more relative growth in Han population during the ten-year period. However, in Inner Mongolia, the relationship is positive, and the growth of ethnic Mongol population is positively correlated with economic development. We contend that because Inner Mongolia is the first ethnic minority region established in 1947, where more than 80% of the population are Han Chinese, the Chinese state perceives that the region is much better integrated than Tibet, where the Tibet autonomous region was only established in 1965 and where Han Chinese still only account for less than 10% of the local population. These findings suggest that we have to understand the ethnic dimension of economic development in an authoritarian system such as China through the lens of political control. This paper presents the two contrasting case studies of Tibet and Inner Mongolia in detail to illustrate such logics. In addition, we include a third case of Xinjiang, where rising violence from radicalized Uyghurs has rendered the Chinese government's plan to encourage development through integration of Han Chinese less successful. In the following conclusion, we present further theoretical reflections on ethnicity and economic development in authoritarian systems in general.

2. ETHNICITY, DEVELOPMENT PROVISION, AND AUTHORITARIANISM

There has been a vast amount of literature written in economics and political science on the development externalities

of ethnicity. Scholars have probed how development is dependent upon various ethnic factors in ethnically diverse societies. For example, there are many works concerned with the economic consequences of ethnic distribution in a given society. For some, ethnic diversity is shown to have a direct negative effect on economic growth (Alesina *et al.*, 2003; Alesina & Ferrara, 2000; Easterly & Levine, 1997; Gisselquist, 2014; Sala-i-Martin, Doppelhofer, & Miller, 2004). For others, it is not ethnic fractionalization but rather ethnic polarization that is believed to retard economic development. The effect of polarization on economic growth can be explained through its impact on civil wars, the rate of investment, and the proportion of government consumption over GDP (Montalvo & Reynal-Querol, 2005). Relatedly, there is also discussion about the effect of regime type on ethnicity's relations with economic growth, in that democracies prove to be able to ameliorate the negative effect of ethnic diversity (Collier, 1999).

A large body of literature related to the issues of economic development also exists; specifically, how ethnic diversity affects the provision of public goods. As one of the classic pieces on the topic by Alesina, Baqir, and Easterly argues, ethnically diverse societies tend to have fewer provisions of public goods than ethnically homogenous ones (Alesina *et al.*, 1999). Although this study is based on data from the United States, the idea has been empirically tested elsewhere (Berman & Laitin, 2008; Cooray, 2014; Miguel & Gugerty, 2005; Schündeln, 2013). For example, Baldwin and Huber, in their study of 46 African countries, demonstrate that although ethnic diversity can mean different things according to specific measurements, economic differences between ethnic groups are statistically and negatively correlated with public goods provision (Baldwin & Huber, 2010).

Additionally, scholars have probed why, instead of whether, ethnic diversity impedes public goods provision. As stated originally by Alesina, Baqir, and Eastly, the reasons why ethnically diverse societies have low public goods provision are mainly due to two mechanisms: either because people do not want to share with ethnically different others or because different ethnic groups tend to have non-aligned preferences when public goods provision is concerned (Alesina *et al.*, 1999). Adding on to these mechanisms, Habyarimana *et al.* contend that public goods provisions are better provided in ethnically homogenous societies because co-ethnics are more likely to play cooperative equilibria. Therefore, the under-provision of public goods in ethnically diverse societies is not because of innately different preference systems across ethnic groups (Habyarimana *et al.*, 2007). On the other hand, Lieberman and McClendon instead argue that ethnicity is rather used as a group heuristic for evaluating public policies, which illustrates that the relationship between ethnicity and public goods provision is in fact a strategic and political one (Lieberman & McClendon, 2013). In addition, Wimmer contends that the relationship between ethnic diversity and public goods under-provision is spurious because "both contemporary ethnic heterogeneity and low public goods provision represent legacies of a weakly developed state capacity inherited from the past" (Wimmer, 2016).

Thrown in this mix is how the type of regime can contextualize the relationship between ethnic diversity and public goods provision. Similar to the literature on ethnicity and economic development, there currently exists more of a focus on how ethnic diversity affects public goods provision in a democratic setting. Baldwin, for example, argues that in Zambia people are more likely to vote with their traditional chief if they perceive that a strong relationship between chiefs and politicians can lead to better local provision of public goods

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