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## **DEVELOPMENT AS EXCLUSION: ETHNIC MINORITIES IN CHINA'S WESTERN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

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## **Abstract**

Since China initiated a series of post-socialist transformations in the late 1970s, it has presented itself as a developing country, which is pursuing a challenging and ambitious project of socio-economic construction. It adopted economic development as its primary ideological denominator to complement Marxist thought. In the framework of China's recent attempts to develop the Western region, the ideology of developmentalism acquires a new meaning. When the character of Western Development Project (WDP) is closely considered, an interesting interdependence between the issues of development and ethnicity arises. Since the WDP was launched by China's leadership in 1999, in addition to being a project with ambitions to address the problems of unequal regional development, to solve increasing security concerns, and to tackle the issues of poverty, it has also been ascribed with apparent minority features. This paper discloses and analyses the ethnic minority label attached to the WDP in China's dominant discourse on development, and argues that ethnic minorities take a very specific place in China's developmental rhetoric which localises them within the West and assigns them with specific derogatory characteristics, which do not allow them to be fully recognised participants of the economic transformations taking place in China.

## **Biography**

Dr. Elena Barabantseva is an ESRC Research Fellow/Lecturer in Chinese International Relations at the British Inter-University China Centre. She is teaching and doing research in Politics Department at the University of Manchester, where she was awarded a PhD in 2006. Her research and publications explore the issues of Chinese identity politics with reference to the statuses of ethnic minorities and overseas Chinese in the national project of the Chinese state, as well as the interplay between the ideologies of development and nationalism and the practices of the nation-state and transnationalism.

## **DEVELOPMENT AS EXCLUSION: ETHNIC MINORITIES IN CHINA'S WESTERN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

### **Modernization, nation-building, citizenship**

Since Chinese government initiated a series of socio-economic reforms in the late 1970s, it has been pursuing a series of modernisation agenda which affected all aspects of people's lives in China. In the course of more than twenty years the superseding Party-proclaimed slogans and five/ten-year plans were revolving around the key goal of ensuring China's economic growth. The 'theories' introduced by three post-socialist generations of China's leadership - Deng Xiaoping's 'Seek truth from facts', Jiang Zemin's 'Three represents', and Hu Jintao's 'Building a harmonious society' - prioritized different aspects of China's transformation, but essentially have been centered on the goal of economic development<sup>1</sup>. Deng Xiaoping gave the green light to introducing the elements of capitalist economy to China's then centrally planned economy, Jiang Zemin welcomed private entrepreneurs in the Party, and recognized their contribution to China's economy, while Hu Jintao emphasized sustained and balanced development, i.e. stressed the development of the countryside and the Western parts of the country and introduced a new 'scientific concept of development'<sup>2</sup>. All above-formulated theories are claimed to build upon Mao Zedong's thought and as their ultimate goal target building a well-off society by 2020 with completing the process of modernisation by 2050. On the way to achieving this goal, Hu Jintao, who previously to his current position of the president of the state, was the party chief in Tibet, emphasizes the development of China's Western regions. Tellingly, he traditionally goes to one of the minority area during Chinese national holidays to underline their importance in the pursuit of his concept of 'scientific development' and well-off or 'harmonious socialist society'<sup>3</sup>.

Chinese leadership has essentially adopted a developmental mentality and range of policies in its pursuit of modernisation goals. The measure of the progress and success in China's official modernisation theory is the GDP rate, and as such it is centered on economic growth and economic component of development. It is often emphasized across Chinese state media that at present

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<sup>1</sup> *Xinhua*, 26 June 2005

<sup>2</sup> *People's Daily Online*, 1 March 2004.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, *People's Daily Online*, 12 February 2005 and Hu Jintao's Speech at Special Discussion Class for Principal Leading Cadres at Provincial and Ministerial Levels to Study Issues About Building a Harmonious Socialist Society on 19 February 2005, *Xinhua* in FBIS, 26 June 2005.

‘China’s per capita value of gross domestic product has reached 1,000 USD, and it is expected to hit 3,000 by 2020’ (2020 is the deadline for building a well-off society)<sup>4</sup>. It is equally frequently mentioned that the priority is to create the material base on which the spiritual advancement will be founded. For instance, during the visit of a group of lawmakers from Tibet Autonomous Region to Beijing, Hu Jintao pointed out that ‘development is the key solution of all problems the autonomous region is faced with’<sup>5</sup>. Most tellingly the political framing and significance of the Party-formulated development strategy and government’s ideological and practical position on the issue of development were stipulated in the State Council’s 2005 White Paper on China’s Peaceful Development Road<sup>6</sup>. This document reiterates the primary role of economic growth in China’s development trajectory. The rhetoric of developmentalism, in other words, dominates the leadership’s political course and programme of actions and, as will be shown further, also relates to and impacts on how inclusion in the modernisation project is formulated in modernising China.

Modernisation and economic development became essentially nation-shaping principles of China in the reform period. While modernisation has been China’s ongoing goal since the late nineteenth century, it gained a new meaning and significance with the leadership setting new economic and political objectives. All domestic and foreign-oriented policies are carried out with modernisation as a main goal in mind. The formulation and implementation of the development strategy also affects how the regime of citizenship is delineated in China. It stems from the contention that all citizens have a right to development, to take part in the economic transformations, and benefit from the country’s economic growth. This assertion relates to a qualified understanding of citizenship in Marshallian terms. Citizenship here is understood in a social and cultural as much as in a legal sense, as ‘membership and participation in the established institutions of a given community’<sup>7</sup> which provides a feeling of belonging to the country of residence<sup>8</sup>. Being part of the community and enjoying its political, social, economic and cultural rights on par with other members is a minimum condition for full inclusion in a community. Citizenship in this definition is also understood as a symbolic membership in the dominant institutions, practices and discourses of a community. Its articulation is reflected in how the prevailing discourses are inclusive of and account for certain social groups which members are often the bearers of different values to the ones prevalent in the society.

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<sup>4</sup> *People’s Daily Online*, 1 March 2004.

<sup>5</sup> *People’s Daily Online*, 6 March 2006.

<sup>6</sup> For the full text of the White Paper, see *People’s Daily Online*, 22 December, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Solinger 2003.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Marshall 1992, Ong 1996, Flores and Benmayor 1996.

This essay is aimed to examine how the discourse of development and associated with it policy orientations impact on the role and place of China's ethnic minorities in the post-socialist transformations. In particular, the analysis considers how ethnic minorities are represented and included into the official rhetoric around the WDP, the centrally taken government strategy addressing the gap in development indicators between the Western and Coastal areas of China. The elaboration of the argument is based on the earlier stated contention that the right to development is predicated upon the entitlement of citizenship which is delineated through the formulation of the discourses and practices central to the society in the particular historical period. In this essay it specifically relates to the question of what place ethnic minorities occupy in the Chinese formulations of modernisation which appear in the official and scholarly discussions around the WDP. In the first section I discuss the nature and goals of the WDP, as well as some of its intermediary effects. The second section examines the relation of the WDP to the state policies on the 'ethnic question'. The third section critically examines the minority connotation of the Western region where the WDP is being implemented by challenging the ethnic label attached to the Western part of China in the official discourse. The final section reinstates the argument that the way ethnic minorities are represented in the WDP pertains to their restricted and 'localised' role in the transformation of the Chinese society. Their fixed position in the prevailing discourse on development as localized subjects rooted in the assigned to them territory, traditions, and cultures does not allow for the very possibility of being included in the economic transformations associated with neoliberal values of mobility, adaptability, and capital accumulation engulfing Chinese society.

### **The goals and some intermediary effects of the WDP**

The initiative to develop the Western region was proposed by Jiang Zemin during the Ninth NPC in March 1999 and later that year was formulated into the official strategy of WDP (*xibu dakaiifa*)<sup>9</sup>. The vital political character of the campaign is stressed by the fact that the nominal guiding organ, The State Council Leading Group for Western Region Development, is presided by Wen Jiabao and Zeng Peiyan – two of the top figures in China's ruling establishment – and is comprised of

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<sup>9</sup> Across the English-speaking world the following translations of the name of the project are common: 'opening up west', 'great leap west', 'western development'. With regards to the use of the Chinese name of the project some Chinese scholars expressed certain concerns. Yang Tingshuo (quoted in Zhang Haiyang 2001, note 1) points to the assimilationist and discriminatory connotations of the '*kaiifa*' term. He notes that the meaning of the word implies the imposition of the Han values onto the minority cultures, which are being 'opened up' (ibid.).

members with the rank of ministers. The WDP is officially presented as a centrally-driven initiative with the central government playing the focal role in guaranteeing balanced development of the country and is directed to tackle the problem of disparity in regional development. Chinese academic and official rhetoric often refers to this government's initiative as the strategy which the state, the main provider of the common good for people, took in order to represent people's interests<sup>10</sup>. The main incentive behind the project expressed by the leading Chinese economist and director for the China studies division at the Chinese Academy of Science Hu Angang is the disparity in regional development that resulted from the reform policies of the 1980s-90s<sup>11</sup>. Some contend that the reorientation in the state's development strategy from favouring the East to stressing the role of the West was provoked by the security concerns arisen in the 1990s<sup>12</sup>. The overall goal of the WDP as stated in the official and academic publications on the issue is to make China's west richer, to harmonise the overall development (*xiediao fazhan*) of the country, to provide common wealth (*gongtong fuyu*), and stabilize frontiers (*gonggu bianfang*)<sup>13</sup>. In other words, WDP is seen as the most important structural adjustment to the country's economy which through a range of political decisions and strategic projects addresses the problems of unequal economic development. One Chinese author bluntly suggests that the project is aimed 'to reduce the difference between China's regions' (*suoxiao dique chabie*) where the exogenously-introduced objectives are aimed to turn into the internal driving force of the transformation<sup>14</sup>.

In fact, the WDP does not have a single policy line, and rather has been characterised as an 'aspirational' agenda<sup>15</sup>. There is no a single document detailing the precise planning of the WDP. Instead, the two Circulars of the State Council outlining the general framework of the project for the period from 2001 to 2010 are dominated by imperatives which are swamped with 'should' and 'are encouraged' clauses<sup>16</sup>. They are presented in line with the Central Government's 'missionary' take on the remote areas of the country<sup>17</sup> and its determination to turn the Western region into 'advanced new West'. The language of the circulars is rather general and is intended to popularise the large-scale infrastructure projects, to attract investments into the region and to a lesser extent propagate social engineering and environmental initiatives which are scarce and presented in a

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<sup>10</sup> Chen Yunhui 2000, 205.

<sup>11</sup> Hu Angang 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Tian Qunjian 2004, 621.

<sup>13</sup> Huang Zhu 2000, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Qian Ning 2003, 92.

<sup>15</sup> Goodman 2004, 319.

<sup>16</sup> State Council 2001a, b.

<sup>17</sup> One of the opening paragraphs of the Circular of the State Council on Policies and Measures Pertaining to the Development of the Western Region reads as follows: 'The Development of the Western Region is a large-scale, systemic campaign as well as a formidable historic mission'.

loose manner. Among the latter are: an initiative ‘to emancipate the mind, to proliferate knowledge about the market economy’, to ‘promote material and spiritual civilisation’, and ‘to reinvigorate our country through science and education and the sustainable development strategy’.

Infrastructure projects are the most labour and finance intensive initiatives of the WDP. In Chinese sources they are referred to as the ‘key’ or ‘big’ projects. In 2000 the State Development Planning Commission of the PRC approved ‘ten major projects’. Among them is a commitment to build twenty airports in the Western region, projects to divert natural gas and electricity from the west to the east<sup>18</sup>, to build eight national highways to connect the country’s major cities, eight inter-provincial highways, and also roads between townships and villages in the west, to construct railways (Xian-Nanjing, Qinghai-Tibet), and to realise key water conservancy projects. In 2003 China’s investments into infrastructure projects constituted 55.2 percent of its overall investment into the region<sup>19</sup>. According to Xinhua news agency, a total of about 102.4 billion US dollars have been invested in over 60 large infrastructure projects in the region from 2000 to 2005. Over this period, the government invested about 55.42 billion US dollars and allocated about 60.24 billion US dollars, as transfer payment or special subsidies for the development of the western region<sup>20</sup>.

These projects are pursued with the government’s conviction that infrastructure is a first step towards successful modernisation. Most of these projects are intended to connect the Western part of China to the East. Thus the Three-Gorges’ main energy recipient is Guangdong, the richest province in China which receives almost one third of the total yearly production of electricity<sup>21</sup>. Official publications refer to the Qinghai-Tibetan railway project as a ‘symbolic project... to link Tibet with the rest of China’.<sup>22</sup> Tarim-Shanghai natural gas pipeline is a 3,900 km construction pumping gas from Xinjiang to Shanghai, the most prosperous city in China. On the whole, the development project of the Western provinces is reliant on the exploration and opening of the region’s natural resources to the rest of the country. The official language in China celebrates these projects as they ‘have a bearing on the nation as a whole’<sup>23</sup> while some Western scholars point to the immediate short-term economic benefits, but express concerns as to whether infrastructure will

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<sup>18</sup> The Western region is a well of about 80 percent of the nation’s hydropower supply, and 58 percent of China’s natural gas reserve (Lai Hongyi 2002: 445). The state initiative to ‘open up’ the region’s mineral resource has taken three dimensions: transmission of gas from west to east (*xi qi dong shu*), transmission of electricity from west to east (*xi dian dong song*), and transmission of coal from west to east (*xi mei dong yuan*) (Ma Ping 2001: 38).

<sup>19</sup> *People’s Daily*, 23 March 2004.

<sup>20</sup> *Xinhua*, 5 February 2005 in Foreign Broadcasting Information Service

<sup>21</sup> In 2004 Three Gorges electricity production target was 30.9 billion kwh, 8.16 billion kwh. of which was planned for transmitting to Guangdong (*People’s Daily*, 9 February 2004).

<sup>22</sup> *People’s Daily*, 20 October 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Zeng Peiyang 2003.

contribute to the integration of the western regions in a coherent nation-state, and whether it will have a long term impact on the general well-being of the local people<sup>24</sup>.

Another human-related problem arising from the infrastructural and construction projects in the West is the requisition of land by the construction companies and state-endorsed developers. Compensation for land requisition in many cases is not paid, which leaves locals without basic means to provide their own living. One of the reports highlights the situation on the construction of the Kunming-Bangkok highway, which goes through mainly ethnic minority areas in Yunnan province<sup>25</sup>. Similar concerns are expressed regarding the costs and effects of the numerous dam projects which China is undertaking at the moment<sup>26</sup>. While the Ministry of Land and Resources recognised at least 168,000 cases of illegal land deals in 2003, the actual number of cases violating rights of peasants could significantly exceed it<sup>27</sup>. The approach taken by the government in the implementation of this plan is to 'ease the threat to the environment of the Yangtze River brought about by local people'<sup>28</sup>. Since 1998 a ban on forest felling undermined people's general well-being by significantly cutting their farming land and pressing them to plant grass and trees in the region. The Government is quick at placing the guilt for erosion of the environment on local people without considering the effects of earlier policies, as well as the human costs at which current strategies are implemented. However, as a result of earlier developmental experiments in 2001 in Inner Mongolia the volume of pastureland was 8,280,000 square hectares less than in 1980. The Western region is a very fragile area where 80 percent of China's eroded land and 90 percent of desertified areas are located<sup>29</sup>. In such conditions the already existing 643 heavy industry enterprises (7 percent of the country's total) including most of heavy military industry, 1285 medium industry enterprises (8.92 per cent) could be too much for the region of the highest mountain ranges and one of the biggest deserts in the world<sup>30</sup>. Although rhetorically environment protection is set as one of the project's goals, it was secondary to the strategic and economic priorities of the government at least at the start of the campaign, when the State Environment Protection Agency was made inactive in planning and carrying out of the WDP<sup>31</sup>. At the same time the chase for hard cash and high economic indicators has contributed more to the deterioration of the environment. In her critical assessment of the WDP, Xiong Jingmin gives an example of

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<sup>24</sup> Holbig 2004.

<sup>25</sup> Zhang Xisheng 2001, 9

<sup>26</sup> China is currently working on 88 dams and at least 36 more are planned (*BBC News online*, 21 June 2004).

<sup>27</sup> *China Reform Monitor* 563, 14 October 2004.

<sup>28</sup> See *People's Daily's* report, no date, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/travel/49672.htm#>.

<sup>29</sup> Lai 2002, 445.

<sup>30</sup> Long Yi 2003, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Holbig 2004, 345.

disastrous handling of the cotton production in Xinjiang<sup>32</sup>. As part of the new strategy of assisting the Western provinces to get rich in the early 2000s, Xinjiang farmers with the governmental approval supported by generous subsidised policies were encouraged to produce more raw cotton. However, when the government could not guarantee the purchase of the excessive quantities of the raw material, and there was no more incentive to produce large quantities of cotton, the abandoned cotton fields turned into desert.

One of the Central government's widely advocated incentives for initiating infrastructure and industry projects in the West was to develop productive forces in the minority region<sup>33</sup> and to provide job opportunities for local people and the official reports assert certain achievements in this area<sup>34</sup>. However, the labour force in the region increasingly consists of the migrant workers from the Han-dominated East at expense of employment of the locals. Some Chinese scholars<sup>35</sup> positively assess the tendency of the inflow of people from the East, as 'they will not only increase the level of technology, but will also train local minority specialists. A large scale inflow of population from the East brings along an advanced mode of life. Local minority groups, after learning Eastern regions advanced modes of life, can increase their own quality of life'<sup>36</sup>. The Ministry of Personnel formulated 'A Plan for Human Resource Development in the West in 2000'<sup>37</sup> to attract talents in science to the West. Together with the Ministry of Education the Ministry of Personnel proposed policies to encourage outstanding university students and young teachers to move from the coastal areas to the West. In the first year after the official launch of the campaign more than 600 thousand Han-Chinese moved into Xinjiang province<sup>38</sup>. As such, the majority of people working on the construction sites initiated as part of the WDP are Han migrants from the East, which is justified by the lack of necessary knowledge among the locals of non-Han descent<sup>39</sup>. This echoes a more recent conviction of a Chinese official who stipulated that on the road to a great power China should be led by 'an advanced culture and higher-level civilized nationality'<sup>40</sup>.

A study conducted by the team from the Asian Development Bank concluded that minorities are concerned about the availability of jobs for them with so many incoming Han

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<sup>32</sup> Xiong Jingmin 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Guan Guixia 2000, 28.

<sup>34</sup> *China Daily*, 11 December 2002.

<sup>35</sup> Ma Ping 2001, 38.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Lai 2002, 456.

<sup>38</sup> East Turkistan Information Centre 2001.

<sup>39</sup> Lim 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Zheng Bijian. 2006. 'China's peaceful development and Chinese civilized revival', *People's Daily Online*, 10 April 2006.

migrants, and especially about the reduction in urban employment opportunities for ethnic minorities<sup>41</sup>. In 1999 in Xinjiang minority people made up only 7.3 percent of the provincial construction forces<sup>42</sup>. In 2002 out of 2.5 million employees in Xinjiang only 716,000 were from a minority background. Moreover, the majority of employed minorities were working in the sphere of education, culture, farming and agriculture. Only 24,000 of them were employed in the buoyant construction sector and 4,900 in scientific research<sup>43</sup>. State-administered construction corps in Xinjiang, which control about 48 percent of Xinjiang's territory employ more than 2.4 million Han<sup>44</sup>. Key industries such as oil exploration in Xinjiang are dominated by the Han. The statistics indicate that among 20,000 oil workers in the Tarim Basin few jobs were given to the minority workers, while in the Taklamakan desert oil exploration project only 253 of 4,000 technical workers are of ethnic minority origins. This evidence is further supported by academic studies which contend that the project is more receptive by the non-ethnic populations of the region while minorities feel threatened by the possible migration of Han people from the East where the 'floating' population is estimated to reach 100-120 million<sup>45</sup>.

Tourism has become one of the main industries which the Chinese government seeks to develop in the Western region, and that ten out of twelve provinces included in the WDP declared tourism their leading industry<sup>46</sup>. Tourism is often perceived as 'a window to greater openness' (*shi dui wai kaifang de chuanghu*), which, in its turn, was one of the initial slogans of the Chinese modernisation model proliferated by the late Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Although ethnic minorities and minority sites are increasingly presented as tourist attractions in Chinese official publications, recent studies on tourism in China reveal how the state fixes a particular vision of exotic and traditional China through its active participation in the production of tourist sites and attractions<sup>47</sup>. A study by Nyíri, for example, points out that the state produced tourism promotional materials refer to Chinese ethnic minorities 'as people who have never stopped singing and dancing'<sup>48</sup>. This largely uniform and rigid official discourse on modernisation and tourism seems to run against recently documented proliferation of ethnic minority cultures through tourism, as well as the emergence of assumingly distinct local discourses of development on the ground<sup>49</sup>. Such an apparent presence of diversity in development modes, and proliferation

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<sup>41</sup> Asian Development Bank 2003, 278.

<sup>42</sup> *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook* 2002.

<sup>43</sup> *Xinjiang Provincial Yearbook* 2003.

<sup>44</sup> *The Far Eastern Economic Review*, 17 August 2000.

<sup>45</sup> Lai 2002, 432, Dillon 2000.

<sup>46</sup> Wei Xiaoan 2001.

<sup>47</sup> Oakes 1998, Nyíri 2006.

<sup>48</sup> Nyíri 2006, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Baranovitch 2001, McCarthy 2002, Goodman 2005.

of tourism can be interpreted by referring to what Wilk (1995) coins the ‘structures of common difference’, which is in fact a product of the dominant rhetoric of the Chinese officialdom. According to Wilk’s thesis, diversity can be a product of the hegemonic structure which regulates the format in which diversity is presented. Following his analogy it seems plausible to suggest that ethnic diversity celebrated in tourism and in local development discourse in China is a creation of hegemonic forces concentrated at the centre. There is, in fact, something inherently hierarchical and homogenising about how minority difference is articulated and proliferated in China: in tourism minority difference is celebrated by means of ethnic customs, traditions, national dress, folk dance, festivals, etc; in development the diversity is presented as a tool which should serve a uniform purpose of ‘a more gradual approach to development that encourages environmental sustainability, the improvement of the provinces’ internal infrastructure, and the establishment of good communication links with the rest of the PRC’ (Goodman 2004: 389). As such, there is a uniform character in how these patterns of difference are organised, presented and celebrated. The hegemonic ‘structure of common difference’ in China is constructed by the official discourse on modernisation which devises standards of diversity in China.

One of the key incentives for the initiation and realisation of the WDP often emphasized in Chinese official publications is the Government’s attempt to pacify or in Chinese expression to ‘harmonise and stabilize’ the state’s inland borders. The security imperatives for the realisation of the project are primarily associated with Xinjiang and Tibet which have been an ongoing security concern for the Chinese government. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the increased number of ethnic conflicts and instability in Central Asia the urgency to address the imminent problems has increased. The favored solution to the perceived security threats is through the realisation of the economic development programmes, extensive infrastructure projects, paralleled by the considerable military presence in the area<sup>50</sup>. These steps are undertaken with the conviction that with the increased economic indicators and people getting richer the security problems and separatist tensions will decline. As one Chinese scholar metaphorically expressed it, the WDP is aimed to make the Western border a ‘steel and iron wall’ (*gang qiang tie bi*) to prevent the forces from outside and within the country to attempt the state’s disintegration<sup>51</sup>.

Officially presented as the project for resolving the problem of unequal economic development, the WDP is also often referred to as the initiative with a clear ethnic character, which is discussed in the next section.

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<sup>50</sup> Recent reports point to the transfer of up to 40,000 troops to Xinjiang (Japan Economic newswire quoted in Moneyhon 2002)

<sup>51</sup> Yang Faren and Yang Li 2004, 27.

## **The ethnic character of the WDP**

In September-October 1999 the Second Central Conference on Ethnic Work held in Beijing pronounced acceleration of the development of the Western region as a crucial strategic task for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and a historical opportunity for minorities to develop<sup>52</sup>. At the same conference, Jiang Zemin underlined that to accelerate development of minorities and minority regions is essential requirement of the minority work of the state<sup>53</sup>. The common interpretation of the objectives of the WDP in the Chinese writings on the issue emphasises the project's ethnic connotation, with the purpose 'to liberate and develop the socially productive forces of ethnic minorities areas, decrease the gap in development between the East and the West, accelerate the development of ethnic minorities and their regions, to implement socialist modernisation and to lay a substantial base for the successful resolution of the current ethnic question'<sup>54</sup>. The ethnic aspect of the project was also emphasised by China's leaders: 'To implement the strategy of Western development is in other words to accelerate the development of ethnic minorities and minority areas'<sup>55</sup>. The poll conducted among regional ethnic affairs officials in 1994 showed that the majority of them believed that an increasing disparity in development between regions in China could have a negative effect on ethnic relations<sup>56</sup>. From the very start the WDP, at least at a rhetorical level, was presented as a tool intended to narrow the gap in development between ethnic minorities and the Han majority group. In fact, many Chinese academic writings on the project openly refer to the WDP as the 'ethnic minorities' development project. Fei Xiaotong, the country's most famous anthropologist and minority issues specialist, compared the importance of the WDP to the post-PRC establishment period, when the leaders were preoccupied with ensuring the control and support of the minority populations. In Fei Xiaotong's own words, the main objective of the early PRC years' minority work was to introduce socialist system to their areas. The WDP, in his interpretation, is the second important step in the formulation of the minority work, which gives them an opportunity to develop their economy and culture<sup>57</sup>.

On a policy front the ethnic factor as a defining element of the WDP was further illuminated when the Guangxi Autonomous region, home to China's largest ethnic minority, Zhuang, was included into the scope of the WDP. The fact that geographically Guangxi is located

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<sup>52</sup> Guan Guixia 2000, 28.

<sup>53</sup> quoted in Huang Zhu 2000, 23

<sup>54</sup> Mao Gongning 2001, 31.

<sup>55</sup> Zhu Rongji quoted in Zhou Ping 2002, 49.

<sup>56</sup> Sautman 1998, 99.

<sup>57</sup> Fei Xiaotong 2000, 11.

in Eastern China and in the 1980s was a part of the coastal developmental strategy was clearly not a barrier to the decision. In a similar mode several ethnic minority prefectures of the Central provinces, such as the Xianxi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Hunan province, the Enshi Tujia-Miao Autonomous Prefecture of Hubei province and the Yanbian Korean Autonomous Prefecture of Jilin provinces were effectively included into the government's preferential treatment of the 'western region'<sup>58</sup>. As a result, China's 'west' has been geographically extended from the Korean border in the north to the Beibu Gulf near Vietnam in the south, leaving only a narrow belt of provinces in the centre without special care from the government (See Figure 1).

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<sup>58</sup> State Council 2001a

Figure 1 PRC's Regional Division



Source: Asian Development Bank 2003, 4.

Soon after the initial introduction and formulation of the WDP, the state sponsored a collection of essays on the WDP and the 'ethnic question' by leading scholars on the minority issues complemented by the contributions from the officials dealing with minority issues. The leading article for this collection published by the main University specializing in training ethnic minorities, the Central University for Nationalities in Beijing, was contributed by the head of the National Nationalities Affairs Committee, Li Dezhu. In his essay he underlines the key aspects of the state-sponsored strategy as speeding the development of economy and culture in ethnic minority regions<sup>59</sup>. Referring to the WDP as the key strategic and political tool of the government to address the inequalities in economic developments between the East and West, between different provinces and regions in the West, and within Western provinces and regions, Li stipulates that the inequalities in development are the main restriction and barrier to China's

<sup>59</sup> Li Dezhu 2000, 2.

achievement of successful resolution of ethnic question<sup>60</sup>. Disparity in economic development is also seen by Li Dezhu as one of the most potential threats to China's unity and stability which WDP is aimed to prevent<sup>61</sup>. As such, the success of the WDP, in Li's account, has a bearing on the successful resolution of the ethnic question, which in its turn is predominately seen in developmental terms. Other scholars reassert Li's contention that if the minority question is successfully resolved in the Western part, the whole country's minority question will be basically solved<sup>62</sup>. Minorities in this formulation not only take the role of recipients of the government-provided policies, but are also made responsible for the successful realisation of the state's overall modernisation goals. Others in the volume see the WDP as the way of overcoming the gap in development between Western and Eastern regions, and as the state-granted recipe and unique historical opportunity for minorities to develop, which they are recommended to firmly seize (*jinjin zhuazhu*)<sup>63</sup>, as otherwise it may deteriorate and create economic conflicts (*jingji maodun*) with the Eastern Han areas<sup>64</sup>.

Other contributors to this volume see the biggest gaps which the WDP should address is the disparity in the way of thinking and mentality between the people in the West and East<sup>65</sup>. They urge minorities 'to open up their minds to socialist market economy', and 'not to be afraid of getting prosperous, but seek self-development' (*bu pa renjia facai, qiu ziji fazhan*). Similarly, Liu Wangqing suggests that with the economic growth which the WDP will guarantee in the minority regions, as well as with the implementation of special educational programmes in the minority areas 'the quality of the people will go up and consciousness of minority people will be strengthened' (*suzhi tigao, minzu yishi zengqiang*)<sup>66</sup>. He gives examples of the components of ethnic consciousness such as self-respect (*zi jun*) and self-reliance (*zi li*)<sup>67</sup>. But he also warns of negative aspects of ethnic self-consciousness, and calls for careful promotion of the 'legitimate' (*zhengque*) ones. Zhou Jian also points out that some aspects of traditional minority culture are not compatible with development, therefore they have to be reformed, as 'without the reform there is no development and no adaptation to modern society' (*bu gai jiu bu fazhan, bu neng shiyong xiandaihua shehui*)<sup>68</sup>. The only reservation is made for religion and minority traditions as it is

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<sup>60</sup> Li Dezhu 2000, 3.

<sup>61</sup> Li Dezhu 2000, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Yang Faren, Yang Li 2004, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Huang Zhu 2000, 23.

<sup>64</sup> Zhou Jian 2000, 195.

<sup>65</sup> Huang Zhu 2000, 26; Yang Faren and Yiang Li 2004, 4, 21.

<sup>66</sup> Liu Wangqing 2000, 186.

<sup>67</sup> Liu Wangqing 2000, 189.

<sup>68</sup> Zhou Jian 2000: 197.

claimed they are the essential part of minority identities. It is however not clear what aspects of minority cultures Zhou suggests to reform.

In a similar vein to above studies, Yang Faren's and Yang Li's analysis of the relationship between the WDP and ethnic question contends that due to the Western region's lower level of development, low level of urbanisation and consumption, and a high degree of poverty, minority populations 'enjoy the achievements of modern civilisation much less than the provinces in the East'<sup>69</sup>. Minorities' low level of development is presented by them as one of the crucial problems of the minority question, which the WDP will help to resolve. Development is essentially seen here as a panacea to all minority problems: 'the key to solving all problems is in development. Development is the main principle' (*jiejue suoyou xie wenti de guanjian quan zai fazhan. Fazhan shi que daoli*)<sup>70</sup>. Moreover, development, in their view, should be accelerated as otherwise the gap in development will not be overcome<sup>71</sup>. What is more, ethnic minorities are made responsible for guaranteeing the overall success of the project of modernisation and can only earn their trust by successfully taking advantage of the development opportunity given to them:

If there is no well-off society among minorities and in the minority areas, there is no overall country's well-off society; if there is no economic prosperity and social progress among ethnic minorities and in the minority regions, then there is no whole country's prosperity, if there is no modernisation among ethnic minorities and in the minority areas, then there is no overall China's modernisation. (*Meiyou shaoshu minzu he minzu diqu de xiaokang shehui, jiu meiyou quanguo de xiaokang shehui; mei you shaoshu minzu he shaoshu minzu diqu de jingji fanrong he shehui jinbu, jiu meiyou zhengge guo jia de xingwang fada he wengming changsheng; meiyou shaoshu minzu he shaoshu minzu diqu de xiandaihua, jiu meiyou quan zhongguo de xiandaihua*)<sup>72</sup>.

The WDP is presented in the official and scholarly writings as the strategy designed by the state to address economic and social problems faced by the Western provinces, and especially minority areas. Minority areas appear in this discourse as a collective notion which is characteristic of the West. Minority areas and China's West are made mutually defining and constituent terms, where the West is presented as an area inhabited by the minorities, while minorities are located and made belonging to the West. The discursive characteristics used to ascribe one are also employed to refer to the other. In the official discourse on Western development in China it appears that the West

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<sup>69</sup> Yang Faren's and Yang Li's 2004: 10, 11.

<sup>70</sup> Yang Faren, Yang Li 2004, 27.

<sup>71</sup> Yang Faren, Yang Li 2004, 32.

<sup>72</sup> Yang Faren, Yang Li 2004, 28.

presupposes minorities, and minorities assume the West, moulding and shaping each other's representation in China's national imaginary. The successful implementation of the WDP is presented as the sole solution to the integral problems of the West and of the ongoing 'ethnic question'. The position of the so-called 'ethnic question' in the WDP is that of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, one of the main objectives of the project, as formulated by its inspirers, is to resolve the ethnic question, on the other hand, the successful solution of the ethnic question is regarded to be one of the guarantors of success for the WDP<sup>73</sup>. The main means of resolving the ethnic question are seen in the area of improving economic indicators and enhancing communication and infrastructure systems in the Western region.

The next section turns to problematise this inseparable relationship between the West and ethnic minorities created in the dominant discourse on the development of the West in China.

### **How ethnic is China's 'West'?**

Chinese publications almost always emphasise that the Western region's main characteristic is its ethnic character. The following statistics are quoted in this regard: all five autonomous regions (*zizhiqu*), 27 out of 30 autonomous prefectures (*zizhizhou*), 83 out of 120 counties (*zizhixian*) are located in Western China, and forty six out of 55 ethnic minorities reside in the Western part of China. Some talk about 'an invisible line' going through China and partitioning the country along economic, social, climatic, and ethnic cleavages<sup>74</sup>. However, by using other sorts of official Chinese statistics a quite different picture of China's ethnic patchwork can be drawn. To begin with, there are numerous ethnic minority populations in the east, north-east, and elsewhere in China. Minorities live in *all* 'developed' coastal provinces of China: there are 134 ethnic minority townships<sup>75</sup> (*xiang*) in Liaoning, eighteen townships in Zhejiang, seven in Shandong, seventeen townships in Fujian, one township in Jiangsu, six townships in Guangdong and twelve townships on Hainan island<sup>76</sup>. In fact, there are only two administrative areas in the whole country where there are no registered minority compounds: Shanxi province and the Shanghai municipality<sup>77</sup>. Also, one can draw on the fact that in all ethnic autonomous areas in China minorities constitute only 46 percent, while the other 54 percent of the population are Han. Chinese media reports and

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<sup>73</sup> Yuan Jingxia 2002, 22.

<sup>74</sup> Glantz, Ye and Ge 2001.

<sup>75</sup> According to the SC regulations, minority autonomous townships could be set up in the areas where the nationality which is granted an autonomy status constitutes not less than 30 per cent of the population in the community. There are more than 1,200 ethnic minority townships in China at the moment, most of which were established since 1980s (Guo Xiolin 2004: footnote 17, 194)

<sup>76</sup> Yang Houdi 2001, 161-232.

<sup>77</sup> While there are no officially recognised ethnic minorities in Shanghai, the city hosts a substantial community of unrecognised Subei people (Honig 1992).

academic research suggest that in the 1990s about 24 million ethnic minorities, which is about a quarter of the entire minorities' population<sup>78</sup>, or, according to other sources, 34 percent of the total minority population did not live in autonomous areas and were on the move elsewhere in the country<sup>79</sup>. At the same time, the population of the majority Han group has been growing in the Western provinces since the 1950s when the government started exercising resettlement of the Han into the Western region. In Xinjiang, for example, the Han population grew from 30 percent in 1968 to 41 percent in the 1990s<sup>80</sup>. More recent official statistics indicate that the Han population rises twice as quickly as the Uyghur, without taking into account 'floating workers' from the East<sup>81</sup>. The government-produced statistics reveal that even in the so-called minority areas the Han nationality dominates. In Yunnan, which is home to twenty-five of China's ethnic minorities and where autonomous areas occupy 70 percent of the province, the population of ethnic minorities comprises only one third of the province's population<sup>82</sup>. Therefore, labelling the Western region as the minority area is far from reflecting ethnic distribution in China. What it manages to achieve instead is to ascribe to ethnic minorities unfavourable connotations associated with the life and economic conditions in some areas of the Western provinces, and to demarcate an artificial geographical division not only between ethnicities, but also between life styles, social conditions, and ultimately between the 'Eastern Han part' and the 'Western minority region'. By emphasising the ethnic minority character of the Western region and by stressing ethnic minorities' 'rootedness' and their belonging to the Western region, the prevalent discourse, which is mirrored in how ethnic areas are delineated, localises ethnic minorities and their areas of habitation within a rigidly defined territorial and social niche, and perpetuates their subjugated (while the official rhetoric refers to it as 'liberated') position in the Chinese nation-state. Such discursive ascriptions in their turn generate particular range of solutions formulated by the state, such as the Western Development Programme, to address the perceived problems.

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<sup>78</sup> *Xinhua*, 6 November, 1997, FBIS.

<sup>79</sup> Lai 2002, 446.

<sup>80</sup> *Xinjiang Provincial Yearbook* 2003, table 3.1.

<sup>81</sup> *The Economist* 2004: 38.

<sup>82</sup> Guo Jiaji 2003, 23; see Table 2.

**Table 2 Han and Minority Population in the Western Region (2000)**

| Region         | Total population | Han population, % of Han |       | Minority population | % of Minority groups |
|----------------|------------------|--------------------------|-------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Shaanxi        | 36,050,000       | 35,870,000               | 99.51 | 180,000             | 0.49                 |
| Gansu          | 25,620,000       | 23,390,000               | 91.31 | 2,230,000           | 8.69                 |
| Qinghai        | 5,180,000        | 2,820,000                | 54.49 | 2,360,000           | 45.51                |
| Ningxia        | 5,620,000        | 3,680,000                | 65.47 | 1,940,000           | 34.53                |
| Xinjiang       | 19,250,000       | 7,820,000                | 40.61 | 11,430,000          | 59.39                |
| Sichuan        | 83,290,000       | 79,140,000               | 95.02 | 4,150,000           | 4.98                 |
| Chongqing      | 30,900,000       | 28,920,000               | 93.58 | 1,980,000           | 6.42                 |
| Guizhou        | 35,250,000       | 21,910,000               | 62.15 | 13,340,000          | 37.85                |
| Yunnan         | 42,880,000       | 28,550,000               | 66.59 | 14,330,000          | 33.41                |
| Tibet          | 2,620,000        | 160,000                  | 5.93  | 2,460,000           | 94.07                |
| Guangxi        | 44,890,000       | 27,680,000               | 61.66 | 17,210,000          | 38.34                |
| Inner Mongolia | 23,760,000       | 18,830,000               | 79.24 | 4,930,000           | 20.74                |

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China 2001, table 20.

Related to the aforementioned issue of ascribing Western parts of China with ethnic minority characteristics is the official argument that the Western part is the most underdeveloped area of China and, therefore, needs special treatment from the government is difficult to sustain. Central provinces, which do not qualify for special help from the central government, did not demonstrate better economic results than some of the Western regions when the policies of the WDP were introduced by the government<sup>83</sup>. Shanxi province, which is officially exclusively Han, has some of the worst economic indicators in the country. Anhui province which is situated next to the 'developed' coastal areas, has a deeply seated reputation for being a poor locality and a source of beggars and maids fleeing to the prosperous neighbouring cities<sup>84</sup>. Generally speaking, the Central provinces have a higher GDP than the Western Region. However, GDP per capita indicates that people living in the Western provinces are not worse off than the population of the Central Region (see Table 3). Such a situation leaves one wondering why the Central Regions, which had not been achieving better economic results than Western provinces, were not included into the development project. It also begs the question whether the aspiration for economic development is in fact the underlying driving objective behind the project. The formulation and articulation of the WDP as a strategy to increase the development of ethnic minorities produces an artificial category of minority cultures which are negatively associated with traditional modes of culture and have the attributes of being agricultural, religious, autarchic, and feudal. On the other side of this dichotomy

<sup>83</sup> Goodman 2002, 131.

<sup>84</sup> Sun Wanning 2001.

a modern progressive collectivity of the Han is posited, which is implied to possess such qualities as consumerism, competitiveness, science, secularity (*shisu xing*), and openness. These attributes are routinely associated with an idea of the advanced modern culture. This delimitation places ethnic minorities and the Han at the opposite ends of the scale measuring the meaning of being modern.

Chinese scholars also estimate that ethnic minority people constitute 50 percent of the total population of the poor<sup>85</sup>. However, the official rhetoric automatically refers to *all* minority regions as poverty-stricken areas. The Western region is sometimes referred to as the ‘poverty belt’ of China<sup>86</sup>. The grounds for this assertion are usually drawn from the statistics indicating the proportion of the Western region’s participation in the country’s GDP. It is also often pointed out that poverty has minority characteristics, and this relationship between poverty and minorityhood is further intimately linked by linguistic means: ‘poverty alleviation funds for poverty-stricken areas and Ethnic Minority Regions’<sup>87</sup>. The survey conducted by the Nationality Commission in 2004 among 11 provinces of the Western Region (Tibet was not included in the survey) found that the majority of the poverty-stricken prefectures are located in the South-Western part of country with the largest concentration in Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan which contain 62.5 per cent of 77 prefectures designated by the government as the most poverty-stricken (*te kun xian*)<sup>88</sup>. Even this official finding makes the reference to the Western region as overall poor highly problematic.

The official sources also repeatedly emphasise that economic disparities are unavoidable and very difficult to overcome<sup>89</sup>. In other words, a gap in development is fixed as a general norm. It has been generally recognised that in mixed areas where both minorities and the majority live together, the minorities have a much lower income than the Han<sup>90</sup>. But it seems that generalisations and objectivisation of minorities’ status as poor populations do not only serve the cause of empowering them, but also do not reflect the complexity of the problem of poverty in China. The state-published statistics show that some Han-populated regions are as poor as certain minority areas, and not all minority areas are living below the poverty line. While 257 out of 592 counties included into the state’s plan for poverty alleviation were situated in minority areas, the

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<sup>85</sup> Zhang Jianxin 2000: 10; Wu Shimin 2006, 4 attributes 47.7 per cent of ethnic minorities to the total number of China’s poor in 2005.

<sup>86</sup> Moneyhon 2002.

<sup>87</sup> State Council 2001a.

<sup>88</sup> Yuan Yan 2006, 24.

<sup>89</sup> Yuan Jingxia 2002, 22.

<sup>90</sup> Asian Development Bank 2003, v271.

rest were found in the Han-populated regions<sup>91</sup>. In the mid 1990s Chinese news agencies drew attention to the impressive economic performance of the ethnic minorities in Henan province, where minorities make up only 1.24 percent of the population but contributed 4 percent to the provincial GDP<sup>92</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> In 1994 the state adopted a seven-year priority poverty alleviation programme (Information Office of the SC of the PRC 1999)

<sup>92</sup> *Xinhua* 5 June 1997, FBIS.

**Table 3 GDP and GDP per Capita in Western and Central provinces (1999, 2002)**

|                           | GDP 1999<br>(mln yuan) | GDP per<br>capita<br>1999<br>(yuan) | GDP 2002<br>(mln yuan) | GDP per<br>capita<br>2002<br>(yuan) |
|---------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Shanxi                    | 1506.78                | 4727                                | 2017.54                | 6146                                |
| Hubei                     | 3857.99                | 6514                                | 4975.63                | n/a                                 |
| Jilin                     | 1669.56                | 6341                                | 2246.12                | 8334                                |
| Heilongjiang              | 2897.41                | 7660                                | 3882.2                 | 10132                               |
| Anhui                     | 2908.59                | 4707                                | 3569.1                 | 5816                                |
| Hunan                     | 3326.75                | 5105                                | 4340.94                | 5656                                |
| Jiangxi                   | 1962.98                | 4661                                | 2450.48                | n/a                                 |
| Henan                     | 4576.10                | 4894                                | 6168.73                | 6436                                |
| <b>Western<br/>Region</b> |                        |                                     |                        |                                     |
| Guangxi                   | 1953.27                | 4148                                | 2455.36                | n/a                                 |
| Sichuan                   | 3711.61                | 4452                                | 4875.12                | 5808                                |
| Guizhou                   | 911.86                 | 2475                                | 1185.04                | 3153                                |
| Yunnan                    | 1855.74                | 4452                                | 2232.32                | n/a                                 |
| Tibet                     | 105.61                 | 4262                                | 161.42                 | 6093                                |
| Shaanxi                   | 1487.61                | 4101                                | 2035.96                | n/a                                 |
| Gansu                     | 931.98                 | 3668                                | 1161.43                | 4493                                |
| Qinghai                   | 238.39                 | 4662                                | 341.11                 | 6426                                |
| Ningxia                   | 241.49                 | 4473                                | 329.28                 | 5804                                |
| Xinjiang                  | 1168.55                | 6470                                | 1598.28                | 8382                                |
| Inner<br>Mongolia         | 1268.20                | 5350                                | 1734.31                | 7233                                |
| Chongqing                 | 1479.71                | 4826                                | 1971.30                | 6347                                |

Sources: National Bureau of Statistics of China 2000, Table C-09; National Bureau of Statistics of China 2003.

The official explanations tend to justify poverty and poor development progress by appealing to naturalist reasoning: ‘due to natural, historical and societal reasons, ethnic minorities in the project of economic culture development still drag behind developed regions’<sup>93</sup>. Another study undertaken by Chinese scholars attributes the gap in economic development between the minority West and predominately Han East to ‘specific historical and objective reasons’ (*lishi de, keguan de, juti de yuanyi*)<sup>94</sup>. Most of the Chinese writings on development in the Western region emphasise its historical dependence on the Eastern part of the country. Similarly, the formulation of favourable policies in the Western region significantly differs from the policies implemented towards the East.

<sup>93</sup> Tang Zhixiang 2001, 1.

<sup>94</sup> Yang Faren and Yang Li 2004, 15.

The Western provinces largely rely on the favourable financial model set by the Centre and financial subsidies and assistance, while the coastal provinces attracted domestic and foreign investments<sup>95</sup>. Thus in early 2000s the Western region was dependent on 34.64 per cent of the government investments while Eastern provinces on 7.12 per cent<sup>96</sup>. In the period from 2000 to 2004 the Chinese state invested 850 billion RMB in the 60 engineering projects in the West<sup>97</sup>. At the same time, foreign capital constitutes an insignificant share in the economy of the Western region – in 2003 86.2 per cent of the Actually Used FDI went to the East, and only 1.24 per cent were invested in the West<sup>98</sup>. The share of the state-owned enterprises in the Western region constitutes overwhelming 66.2 percent while it makes up less than 50 percent in the East<sup>99</sup>. In other words, the above mentioned official line of reasoning for Western underdevelopment and the framework of development work in the West do not make provisions for tackling the negative effects of the earlier government policies. But as the recent study by Naughton shows, China's West suffered significantly from economic experiments carried out by the government rather than from their absence<sup>100</sup>. Nevertheless, the implications of the earlier policies on the economy of the Western region remain largely overlooked. For instance, the fact that the majority of the Han population living in the minority autonomous areas are urban dwellers while ethnic minorities cluster in the rural expanses has not been sufficiently scrutinised by Chinese officials and their academic associates<sup>101</sup>.

The concluding section of the paper looks at how the ethnically-framed developmental rhetoric of the Western development impinges on the ethnic minorities' full inclusion into China's modernising transformations and ultimately on their citizenship.

### **Developmentalism, ethnicity, citizenship**

The WDP is presented and formulated in such a way that it juxtaposes the positions of ethnic minorities and the Han in the modernisation project, reiterating the message of a civilisational mission of the monolithic and developed Han majority towards diverse and backward ethnic

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<sup>95</sup> Dan Ping, Zhang Xiaoxu 1998, 30. The case of Shanghai is an exception as its development in the mid 1990s was characterised by the direct involvement and support from the centre (Goodman 2002: 145).

<sup>96</sup> Hu Angang and Wen Jun 2003, 112.

<sup>97</sup> Wu Shimin 2006, 2.

<sup>98</sup> Yang Faren and Yang Li 2004, 8.

<sup>99</sup> Tian 2004, 629.

<sup>100</sup> Naughton 2004.

<sup>101</sup> Xinjiang is one of the typical examples of this situation, where the Han live in the industrialised and urbanised north of the province, while ethnic minorities populate the rural south.

minorities<sup>102</sup>. Some refer to the Western region as a cradle of Chinese civilisation (*wo guo wenming de fayuandi*)<sup>103</sup>, which is now destined to support the development of the whole country with its natural resources. The Western Region is also named by some as a spring of China's culture (*zhonghua wenhua de yuantou*). However, the official and scholarly language on the Western Development and the status of minorities in it suggests that by implementing the current project the government is predominately driven by economic incentives along with the will to consolidate its political and military grip over the region, rather than by the concern to preserve and foster diversity and difference in the modes of social, cultural and economic living. It seems that the Chinese government increasingly treats the culture of ethnic minorities as 'problematic' and it is difficult to overlook the tendency of linking cultural and religious difference to economic problems in the mainstream explanations of the economic and developmental gap between the Western and Eastern parts of the country. Ethnic minorities are not only denied an alternative to the official form of modernisation and have to subscribe to the uniform mode of development exercised by the Chinese state, but are prescribed with very specific role and place in the development process crystallised in the language of official writings. In this condition the character of their participation in modernisation and mode of citizenship which they enjoy remain restricted by the very model and formulation of the modernisation project which the Chinese state advocates.

Ethnic minorities or, more precisely, how the government sees their role in modernisation strategies such as WDP, remain outsiders in this process of inclusion into the modern transformations which are often characterised by mobility. On the contrary, ethnic minorities are increasingly embedded in their exotic aura and – through the policies implemented towards them – are even more *localised*. The PRC's leadership through the developmental rhetoric and strategies tailored for and exercised towards ethnic minorities essentially demarcates them as localised elements of the Chinese nation-state. I borrow the term *localisation* from Appadurai who calls it a historically 'primary concern' of the nation-state<sup>104</sup>. It manifests itself in the attempt to exert power on the subjects and national spaces to legitimise the regime's control and domination over them. It is commonly produced and maintained by the ruling power through the formulation and interpretation of the particularities of a place, its culture and social practices. While in Appadurai's account localisation is becoming more problematic due to the changes brought about by globalisation, it seems that in the Chinese case the official discourse and practices deftly couple the

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<sup>102</sup> Chinese analysts make predictions according to which as soon as the development strategy for Western regions comes into effect, China's ethnic groups in the west will gradually lead a 'modern-day life' (*Xinhua*, 23 March 2002).

<sup>103</sup> Luo Jie 2003, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Appadurai 1997.

modes of mobility and localisation. Localisation, however, does not mean inclusion in the national project of modernisation, at least not inclusion on equal terms. The format of localisation practiced by the Chinese state distances ethnic minorities from the proliferated mode of modern practices associated with flexibility, mobility, and openness, albeit understood more in physical rather than political or ideological sense. Although the Chinese government calls all its subjects to flexibly adapt to modernisation demands, the portrayals of ethnic minorities in the official discourse would not seem to allow for that possibility even if ethnic minorities are following the government's slogans. Ethnicity in this discourse is presented in largely sedentary terms as something attached to a particular locality. As such, bearers of an ethnic minority identity are those who represent territorial and cultural spaces assigned to them by the state, and enjoy only a limited form of inclusion and citizenship.

While Appadurai argues that in the increasingly global context the production of locality by the nation-state is increasingly challenged by the growing processes which obstruct the nation-state's monopolisation of the identity forms, the position of the ethnic minorities in the PRC's contemporary modernisation practices suggests that the Chinese leadership takes measures to maintain and to strengthen its authority over ethnic minorities, not to allow their identity detachment from the Chinese state<sup>105</sup>. It remains open for further research how successful these practices are. The Chinese authorities allegedly promote minority transnational ties for the purpose of economic accumulation and development. However, by not allowing a deviation from the modernisation model pursued by the state, these initiatives seek ways of attaching ethnic minorities to the Chinese nation-state and to a secluded part, characterised by very specific qualities and features. By and large, despite the fact that modernisation tactics adopted by the Chinese state are transnational in many ways (for example their engagement with the Overseas Chinese), their ultimate goal in relation to the ethnic minorities is to mark them out as localised and dependent subjects of the Chinese nation.

Ethnic minorities' 'uniformity in diversity', to paraphrase the Party's slogan 'unity in diversity', attains an even more uniform character when it is considered against the deemed homogeneity of the dominant Han group. It essentially juxtaposes the position of the minorities against the dominant Han localising then in their uniform exoticism and organised difference. The content and meaning of diversity are made redundant in the implementation of the modernisation project in China, while the format the diversity takes is defined by the centre, excluding the periphery from taking a meaningful part in this process. This also poses the question of the role of

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<sup>105</sup> Appadurai 1997, 189.

racial factors in the foundation and reinstatement of the Chinese nation-state. Ethnic minorities as not descendants of the Yellow Emperor can only take a limited secondary role in the realisation of the goals of China's modern project. The form of identity which the Chinese nation-state adheres to and proliferates at national and, to a certain extent, transnational levels remains uniform and intolerant of diversity, and, one is bound to conclude, is of exclusive ethnic character.

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