

# The Gap, Cause and Solution in Pursuit of Value and Policy Implementation-A Preliminary Reflection on the Contemporary Chinese Ethnic Policies

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**ABSTRACT.** Reviewing the path taken by the Chinese Communist Party, in exploration of the policy towards ethnic minorities in China, it can be observed that the ethnic policy system, with ethnic regional autonomy at the core, is based on a top-level design that pursues three values, namely; people of all ethnic groups are masters of the country, common prosperity, and true equality. However, in the implementation of such ethnic policies, a series of problems have been manifested and exposed, which not only affects the realization of value but also the gap between value pursuit and policy implementation. The reason for this gap is the de facto power game relationship between central leadership and ethnic areas, and lack of leadership and execution of the central government in promoting the implementation of ethnic policies. The key to resolving this gap, will rely on understanding how to ensure the real and effective exercise of autonomy in this game of centralization and ethnic decentralization.

**KEYWORDS:** Chinese ethnic policies, ethnic regional autonomy, value pursuit, policy implementation

## 1. Introduction

The ethnic policy system, dependent on ethnic regional autonomy at the core, is the top-level design created by the Communist Party of China under the guidance of Marxist ethnic theory, combined with the specific national conditions and ethnic issues of contemporary China. The goal of this ethnic policy is to realize the potential for human liberation proposed by Marx through political liberation, ethnic liberation, and social liberation [1]. Recognizing this is the key to correctly

understanding and fully grasping the ethnic policy in China. However, during the implementation of China's ethnic policy, there have been many unsatisfactory aspects that have greatly affected the original policy design. This paper attempts to reflect on contemporary Chinese ethnic policy and expounds on the value in pursuing in ethnographic policy and the problems in policy implementation, and then analyzes the causes and solutions of the gap between the two.

## **2.From self-determination to autonomy: Chinese Communist Party's exploration of ethnic policies**

The Chinese Communist Party's exploration of its ethnic policy has gone through two periods. Before the War of Resistance Against Japan, the Chinese Communist Party tended to adopt ethnic self-determination and federalism to solve any ethnic problems. This is clearly reflected in the party's historical literature. On July 1922, the Chinese Communist Party put forward that "Mongolia, Tibet, and Hui Jiang implement self-governing as democratic autonomous federation; in the principle of free federalism, joined with Mongolia, Tibet, and Hui Jiang establish Chinese Federal Republic as the recent goal of the party" on the Second National Congress of Communist Party [2]. In November 1931, the Outline Constitution of the Chinese Soviet Republic was passed in the First National Congress of the Chinese Workers, Peasants and Soldiers. The outline constitution stipulates that "the Chinese Soviet government recognizes the right of self-determination of ethnic minorities in China and has always admitted that all weak and small ethnic groups have the right to separate from China and establish an independent state" [3]. At the beginning of 1934, Mao Zedong clearly stated the position in the "Report of the Central Executive Committee of the Chinese Soviet Republic and the People's Committee on the Second Soviet Congress" of "recognizing the right to self-determination of ethnic minorities in China [4]. This ethnic self-determination and federalism oriented ethnic policy is closely associated with the specific historical and international background in which China was experiencing.

After the War of Resistance Against Japan and the end of the Anti-Japanese War, the Chinese Communist Party repeatedly made trade-offs between the ethnic policies of ethnic self-determination and ethnic regional autonomy, and finally established ethnic regional autonomy as the institutional orientation of ethnic policies in China. At the Sixth Plenary Session of the Sixth CPC Central Committee held in 1938, Mao Zedong proposed "allowing Mongolian, Hui, Tibetan, Miao and other ethnic groups... under the principle of joint opposition to Japan... the right to manage their own affairs and jointly establish an unified country with Han nationality" [5]. Here, the ethnic policy thoughts surrounding ethnic self-determination to ethnic autonomy, from federalism toward a unitary system were bred; in 1940, the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region Government established the Ethnic Affairs Commission, whose main duties were related to the regional autonomy of ethnic minorities in the border areas and political, defense, economic, educational, health and construction issues[6]. Thus, ethnic regional autonomy become the dominant opinion of the Chinese Communist Party toward

solving ethnic issues; further, the Common Program was successfully passed at the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in 1940. The Common Program was equivalent to the interim constitution, and specifically stipulates China's ethnic policy. That is to say, "regions where ethnic minorities live in concentrated areas should implement regional ethnic autonomy, and establish various ethnic self-governing organs according to the population of ethnic groups and the size of the ethnic groups. In all localities and ethnic autonomous regions where ethnic groups live together, there should be a considerable number of representatives in state of organs". This marked the officialization of ethnic regional autonomy as China's basic ethnic policy.

### **3.The pursuit of political economy and social values: analysis of the design concept of ethnic policies in China**

As a proletarian party, the Chinese Communist Party has always regarded human liberation in the realization of communist society as the highest goal of its struggle. The ethnic policies centered on regional ethnic autonomy aimed to solve the ethnic problems in China, and obeys and serves this goal as well. Studies have shown that during the Long March of the Chinese Red Army, "the political propositions of the communist society, the ideals and beliefs, and the ethnic policy of ethnic equality were the key cultural factors for the Chinese Communist Party and the Red Army to win the hearts of the people and gain support in minority areas" [7]. Under the guidance of the ideals of communist society and the advanced concept of "human liberation", China's ethnic policies have formed the political, economic, and societal goals of China.

#### ***3.1 Pursuit of political values: people of all nationalities are the masters of the country***

"Adhering to the people's mastery of the country is the starting point and the foothold of socialist democracy" [8]. As one of China's three basic political systems, the system of regional ethnic autonomy provides political guarantees for people of all ethnic groups to be the masters of the country. Reviewing the process of establishing ethnic regional autonomy, we were able to find that the historical mission shouldered by the new regime is to safeguard the unity of socialist countries and defend the sovereignty of the country, and to completely break down all ethnic oppression and ethnic exploitation systems of the old society. The hard-working masses "turned over and liberated" and truly realized that people of all nationalities were to be the masters of the country. This historical mission was put forward under the historical background that the gap between ethnic minorities and Han nationality is still relatively deep and the economic and social development gap is still relatively large. Based on this background, "national ethnic autonomy is not only basic policies for new China to deal with domestic ethnic issues, but also a new political commitment of the Central People's Government to all ethnic minorities - in the new People's Republic. The basic rights of the ethnic minorities will be protected by national laws"

[9]. Therefore, realizing all ethnic groups are masters of country is the political value pursuit of Chinese ethnic policy.

### ***3.2 Pursuit of economic value: the common prosperity of the people of all ethnic groups***

The essence of socialism is to liberate and develop productive forces, eliminate exploitation, eliminate polarization, and ultimately achieve common prosperity. The essence of socialism is common prosperity, which, in China, amounts to the common prosperity of people of all nationalities. In order to achieve this goal, it is necessary to face up to the objective development gap between ethnic minorities, ethnic minority areas, the main ethnic groups, and developed regions, and strive to narrow this gap through the implementation of various ethnic policies. This is also the fundamental way to solve the Chinese ethnic problem at this stage. When talking about the economic development of ethnic minorities and ethnic areas, Deng Xiaoping emphasized that “our policy to help the development of ethnic minority areas is unshakable”; “observing ethnic minority areas mainly observe whether the region can develop or not” [10]. Based on the above understanding, if the various ethnic policies formulated and implemented by the Communist Party of China did not narrow the development gap and did not promote the common prosperity of the people of all ethnic groups, then the ethnic policy would be contrary to the essence of socialism. This is also the best illustration of economic value of contemporary Chinese ethnic policies.

### ***3.3 Pursuit of social values: true equality of people of all nationalities***

In the essence, all ethnic group being masters of country is a type of political equality, the state grants to each citizen based on the rational democratic political system. This equality is a tremendous advance in historical development, but it should also be noted that the “actual result of political liberation is to cover up the factual inequality with equality in appearance” [11]. Marx has an insight into the historical limitations of political emancipation, and then declares that “the revolution is non-stop.” “Only by continuing the socialist revolution and eliminating the foundation of personal ego for political emancipation, can complete liberation of all mankind be realized” [12]. In contrast to China, the current ethnic policies are based on efforts to ensure that the people of all ethnic groups are the masters of the country (political equality), and has always been committed to true equality (social equality) in the social life of people from all ethnic groups.

## **4. Problem and causes of the implementation of contemporary ethnic policies in China**

Professor Zhang Haiyang pointed out that “a system based on noble ideals requires two conditions to operate: one is to earnestly fulfill; the other is to take good care of it.” The Chinese ethnic policy with the regional autonomy of ethnic minorities

is of great importance. It is a policy design and institutional arrangement based on the concept of “human liberation”. It is to pursue the values of the people of all ethnic groups, common prosperity and true equality. However, currently, it has not been seriously fulfilled, nor has it been carefully cared for.

#### ***4.1 Problems in the implementation of China’s ethnic policies***

These problems mainly include: First, the implementation of ethnic policies is separated from the actualities of ethnic minorities. The “one size fits all” phenomenon is widespread, which makes it difficult to adapt to local conditions, thus effective policy implementation has been unsatisfactory.

Second, the implementation of the Law of the People’s Republic of China on Regional Ethnic Autonomy (hereinafter referred to as the Autonomy Law) is very limited. The establishment of autonomous regulations in accordance with the law is part of the legal provisions. Only when local autonomy regulations are enacted can the Autonomy Law be implemented. Today, the Autonomy Law was promulgated and implemented for more than 30 years. The autonomy regulations of the five autonomous regions have not yet been introduced. In addition, the “Autonomy Law” guarantees the exercise of autonomy and defends the core interests of ethnic minorities and ethnic areas (for example the cultural rights of ethnic minorities, ecological security in ethnic areas and resource development) is also stretched.

Third, the exercise of autonomy is difficult. The highly centralized national political power structure system has caused these self-governing organs to passively implement the decisions of more central or higher-level administration, and culminated in a loss of autonomy when dealing with the internal affairs of the nation and the region flexibly according to actual conditions. Overall, confusing the power of party and government has resulted in the fact that the ethnic self-governing organs are in fact deprived of power, which affects the full exercise of autonomy. Thus, the conflicting roles and responsibilities of other government agencies has made the power of the autonomous organizations weaker [14].

Fourth, the “critical expression” in the provisions on regional ethnic autonomy has not been clearly explained and implemented. For example, both the Constitution and the Law on Self-Government stipulate that the core of minority autonomy is that ethnic minorities independently manage their own internal affairs, and ethnic autonomous areas are a combination of ethnic factors and local factors. Then, what exactly is “internal affairs of the nation” and what are the “ethnic factors” and “local factors” of ethnic autonomous areas? There is no clear definition and explanation for these “critical statements”, such that the matter of how to self-govern ethnic and local internal affairs just appears to be perfect but no one knows the way to implement.

Based on the analysis above, we can make the following evaluations of contemporary Chinese ethnic policy: the ethnic policy system with ethnic regional autonomy as the core is the actual top-level design in line with China’s national conditions and ethnic issues, and the policy design concept with the goal of “human liberation” stands tall. However, this policy has many problems in the implementation

process, which affects the realization of the original intention of the policy design. In this regard, professor Hao Shiyuan once pointed out that “the basic policies were formulated in the 1950s, but they are compared to the international community... not weak at all, and there are even many fairly advanced designs. However, in implementation, the policies are not implemented well. This is the biggest problem” [15].

#### ***4.2 Analysis of the reasons for the poor implementation of China’s ethnic policies***

We believe that the above issues constitute the gap between the pursuit of value and the implementation of China’s ethnic policies. Ethnic policy design can be from ‘on high’, but the implementation must consider and be combined with the real local environment. It is precisely the “adaptedness” of the real environment that leads to the emergence of a gap between the two.

On one hand, both the central and ethnic areas have formed a de facto multi-party game relationship around political power and economic interests, rather than a multi-party interaction, cooperation and win-win relationship. In this game of centralization and ethnic decentralization, ethnic areas are apparently at a disadvantage. The main players in the multi-party game may include central and local departments in vertical direction and the local departments in horizontal directions. In the case of a vertical, central and local game, a very typical example comes from the development of autonomous regulations. The reason why the autonomous counties and autonomous prefectures within the provinces and autonomous regions can formulate the autonomous regulations is because they do not have direct relationships with the central government, only local and internal relationships, so it is relatively easy to proceed autonomously. The introduction of autonomous regulations in the five autonomous regions involves the relationship between the central and local governments. The autonomous region obviously does not have much capacity and resources to win in the game with the central government. In terms of the game, the typical example is that in the understanding and interpretation of the basic principles of ethnic policy, many local ethnic affairs functions are powerless. The civil affairs system itself is not a powerful functional department. They more focus on ethnic prosperity and development, commendation and celebration activities. However, in the implementation of ethnic policies, party and government departments particularly the stability department clearly have more voice and decision-making powers.

On the other hand, there is also an unavoidable problem in terms of leadership and execution at the central level and a determination to unswervingly promote regional ethnic autonomy. China’s ethnic policies have been designed and developed for a period of one hundred years. From the founding of the country to the present, the construction and implementation of the system have been very close for at least seventy years. The “Autonomy Law” has also been promulgated for more than 30 years, with the last revision in 2001. However, all of this is only one aspect of the problem. A specific analysis has found that the leadership and execution of the implementation of ethnic policies at the central level has not been as strong as imagined. From the “14th National Congress of the Communist Party of China” in

1992 to the “18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China” in 2012, there were four national party congresses (14<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>) in 20 years has not mentioned ethnic relations as well as maintenance of regional ethnic autonomy. Another study, which coded and statistical analyzed the key words of 251 ethnic policy documents since China’s reform and opening up, believes that China’s ethnic policies has good coherence and consistency, but the frequency of use of authoritative tools has declined [16]. Some time ago, both academics and officials have questioned or even opposed the tone of China’s current ethnic policies. The emergence of these voices is closely related to the central government’s leadership and lack of executive power in promoting regional ethnic autonomy.

### **5. Main way to resolve the gap between value pursuit and policy implementation**

How to ensure the real and effective implementation of ethnic autonomy in the multi-party game of centralization and national decentralization is the key to resolving the gap between the pursuit of ethnic policy values and policy implementation. To this end, we must improve and develop Chinese ethnic policies with regional ethnic autonomy as the core element and integrate the relationship between the party and government leading organs and the local self-governing organs into the overall deployment of China’s political system reform. In the meantime, progress can be made to establish and improve the legal system for regional ethnic autonomy, strengthen the financial autonomy of ethnic autonomous areas, and ensure the true and effective exercise of ethnic autonomy.

#### ***5.1 Regulation the relationship between the party leading organs and the local self-government organs***

Judging from past practices, the failure to fully play autonomous function was the main reason. The reason why these functions of self-government were not fully exerted is that the relationship between the party’s leading organs and the organs of self-government were not clear or straight forward. Therefore, clarifying the relationship between the leading organs of the party and the organs of self-government and striving to realize the democratization and scientification of the operation of these local self-governing organs is a problem that must be studied and resolved. To this end, the first is to standardize the functions of the party’s leading local organs. This function mainly includes leading and grasping the political direction responsible for the major issues, guiding public opinions and policy propaganda and safeguarding the overall situation of national and local stability, all while paying attention to autonomy. The administrative affairs of the organs should not be replaced. Second, reform and improve the Communist Party’s working mechanism, and strive to form a positive situation in which the party committee, the people’s congress, the government, the CPPCC, the mass organizations, and the democratic parties perform their duties and responsibilities. The third approach should be to follow the principle of coordination of all parties, change the way from direct intervention to indirect leadership.

### ***5.2 Establishing and improving the legal system for defending regional ethnic autonomy***

Needless to say, there are many imperfections in the Autonomy Law, such as: the lack of clarity on both the provisions of economic management and authority, and how much autonomy that ethnic autonomous areas should enjoy under the current market economy conditions; some laws themselves are not detailed on relevant issues leading to a lack of surety. Further, some laws and regulations are too flexible and difficult to grasp in terms of implementation; the legislative enforcement and supervision of ethnic laws and regulations is regarded as a matter for both national departments and ethnic areas, and there is a lack of corresponding institutions responsible for implementing ethnic laws and regulations [17]. As such, it is necessary to improve the Autonomy Law and “emphasize the ‘legalization’ of the ethnic policies, and incorporate basic and long-term policies into the legislative adjustment, so as to “legalize the policy”, that is, to ensure the legitimacy and effectiveness of the policy by legal means [18]. Specifically, the first is to strengthen the ethnic legislative work so that ethnic regional autonomy can be governed by law; the second is to enforce the law and conscientiously implement and abide by the Autonomy Law; the third is to strengthen the supervision of the implementation of the “Autonomy Law,” including strengthening supervision of state organs and the society; the fourth is to strengthen the propaganda and research work of the Autonomy Law and focus on strengthening the popularization of ethnic laws in leading cadres and scattered areas. In addition, combining the reality of Chinese society, theoretically abandoning the macro-level “political autonomy” tendency, and determining the regional integration of ethnic regional autonomy in the organic combination of local administrative autonomy and ethnic cultural autonomy provides a better approach for improving the legal system of regional ethnic autonomy.

### ***5.3 Strengthening financial autonomy in ethnic autonomous areas***

On the basis of adhering to the principle of self-reliance in the ethnic areas and vigorously developing the local economy, the state should focus on the fiscal inclination, taxation and financial policies and increased support for ethnic areas. On the financial front, preferential policies such as incentive funds, reserve fees, and national subsidy fees should be implemented to ensure that ethnic autonomous areas receive correspondingly scaled concessions as the state's fiscal revenue grows year on year. The proportion of the state's total subsidy funds, special loans, work-for-sale funds, and financial interest subsidies to the central government's total expenditure should be appropriately increased based on the original ratio. In terms of tax credit, the ethnic autonomous areas should implement a graded tax system and a graded tax rate, continue to implement the tax reduction and profit-sharing policy, further implement the financial credit preferential policies, increase the proportion of loans, and increase capital investment. Further adjustments of price system should be made as well. A reasonable price system will raise the price of raw materials and primary products and remove the drawbacks of the current price system that causes deprivation in ethnic autonomous areas and implement more equivalent exchange. In



addition, the state should also increase the mobile financial resources of ethnic autonomous areas through a series of fiscal transfers and other means, and support the construction of infrastructure in ethnic autonomous areas and the development of various social undertakings.

#### ***5.4 Ensuring the real and effective exercise of ethnic local autonomy***

First, we must rationalize the institutional obstacles in exercising autonomy. The interests of the central and local governments are fundamentally consistent, but there are conflicts in certain areas and certain areas. When the local self-governing organs exercise their autonomy, the game between the state organs and the local self-governing organs is most likely to occur. To this end, the higher-level state organs must respect the autonomy of the local self-governing organs, and the local self-governing organs must obey the leadership of the higher-level state organs; the higher-level state organs must fully pay attention to the actual and local self-governing organs of the local self-governing organs in accordance with the law or stop the power to implement its resolutions, decisions, orders, and instructions, attach importance to the particularities of ethnic minorities and ethnic areas, and prevent downward infringement. Yet, in the process of implementing autonomy, ethnic areas must resolutely safeguard the various functions and powers of state organs, the state organs must also take various measures to guarantee the autonomy of ethnic areas.

Second, improve the ability to exercise the autonomy of the main body. The regional self-governing organs are the main body of exercising ethnic regional autonomy, while the cadres of the ethnic regional self-governing organs are composed of local citizens. Therefore, on one hand, it is necessary to enhance the awareness of local citizens of their own rights. The proportioning the awareness of civil rights requires not only its own efforts, but also the promotion of the state at the institutional level. At present, grassroots democratic system in China, such as village self-government, open government affairs, and open factory affairs, objectively enhances the citizens' awareness of rights; on the other hand, it must also enhance the autonomy of the self-governing organs. The autonomy of Chinese nationalities is exercised through the organs of self-government. The organs of self-government in ethnic areas include the people's congresses and the people's governments. Their ability improvement is a key factor in the real and effective exercise of autonomy.

Third, improve the legal content and guarantee mechanism for the exercise of autonomy. Judging from the legal provisions such as from the Constitution and the Autonomy Law, there are "the Han nationality" and the scattered ethnic minorities in the ethnic autonomous areas do not have legitimate regional autonomy right, leading to the difficulty of determining the final main body of the autonomous right and power of the ethnic autonomous areas. Therefore, it is necessary to supplement, delete and improve the relevant laws. However, the changes in the legal provisions are rule-based. Its perfection should be bound by the Constitution. It should also make the autonomy of the self-governing organs greater than the power of the local government organs either at the same level and less than the power of the special administrative regions. In addition, in order for the local self-governing organs to better exercise

their autonomy, the State Council and relevant departments and provinces (autonomous regions) must formulate operational measures based on the Autonomy Law and implement the Autonomy Act in principle. To be specific, they should make detailed provisions on the support obligations of governments and departments at all levels, so that the Autonomy Act can be truly implemented.

In short, the contemporary Chinese ethnic policies with ethnic regional autonomy at the core with the basic national conditions of the country. This is indubitable and cannot be denied. What needs to be considered now is how to improve the development of regional ethnic autonomy around the three major values of ethnic policies on the basis of adhering to the ethnic policy system with ethnic regional autonomy as the core. We will better achieve political liberation and ethnic liberation, ensure the authenticity and equality of all ethnic rights should always and work hard to achieve human liberation.

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