

Regionalism versus Ethnicsnationalism in the People's Republic of China

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ABSTRACT Although a number of scholars have examined differences among members of a single nationality in different localities within the People's Republic of China, none emphasizes the impact which formal territorial administrative divisions have on ethnic identity and consequently on state–ethnic interaction. China's largest minority nationality, the Zhuang, is divided by the Guangxi–Yunnan provincial boundary. The Zhuang on either side of the boundary have been governed by different provincial institutions. This territorial division has encouraged both a pronounced difference in ethnic identity and in official discourse on the Zhuang, and has encouraged regionalist sentiment over pan-Zhuang ethnicsnationalism. This essay explores the origin and consequence of two major differences between Zhuang self-expression on either side of the provincial boundary and concludes that the central government has played regional and ethnic politics in Zhuang areas off against one another in a manner that limits both, while purportedly promoting each.

The past two decades have ushered in a new era both for ethnic politics within the People's Republic of China, and for Western scholarship of these dynamic changes. Early American studies of the more than 40 million peoples officially labelled outside the Han majority stressed the central government's efforts to integrate the various nationalities.¹ Western scholars were prohibited from conducting fieldwork until the early 1980s, however, and thus were unable to examine the complex and interactive nature of state policy and ethnic identity. As the Chinese government gradually loosened its repressive control over ethnic historiography after the Cultural Revolution, scholars within China began to publish a vast number of ethnographies, nationality histories, collections of ethnic literature and folk tales, and other cultural studies. Western scholars have utilized these rich resources and supplemented them with extensive fieldwork in minority regions over the past two decades. Scholars such as Steven Harrell, Dru Gladney, Ralph Litzinger, Charles McKhann and Shih-chung Hsieh, to name but a few, have explored the multifaceted nature of ethnic identity and contributed to the understanding not only of China's nationalities, but of ethnic theory more broadly. Among their numerous contributions has been an increased awareness of the vast differences among members of a single nationality in different localities.²

1. June Teufel Dreyer, *China's Forty Millions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); George Moseley, *The Consolidation of the South China Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

2. Dru Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Stevan Harrell (ed.), *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995); Shih-chung Hsieh, "On the dynamics of Tai/Dai-Lue ethnicity: an ethnohistorical analysis," and Charles F. McKhann, "The Naxi and the nationalities question," both in *ibid.*; Nicole Constable (ed.),

Dru Gladney's often cited work on the Hui nationality began an examination of the local nature of ethnic identity, by highlighting differences among four Hui communities. Gladney noted the "dynamic interaction between ... state hegemonic structures and local ethno-religious symbols of identity."³ Stevan Harrell has, likewise, conducted impressive studies on the regional variations in ethnic identity among the Yi, one of the 56 nationalities officially recognized by the Chinese state, as has Ralph Litzinger on the Yao. While these studies all touch upon the local nature of ethnic identity, none emphasizes the impact which formal territorial administrative divisions – including county, prefectural and provincial boundaries – have on ethnic identity, and consequently on ethnic–state interaction. Gladney acknowledges that "the basic nature of nationality identity in the nation-state is diffused – it depends on the local juxtapositions of power, constantly in flux, interacting dialogically with the significant others in socially specific contexts as well as the local state apparatus," but he does not clearly specify what he means by "local state apparatus" nor does he discuss the most rudimentary institution of state power: the territorial administrative unit. Gladney's primary unit of analysis is the Hui "community" rather than political territories containing large Hui populations. Similarly, while McKhann offers an excellent study of the regional differences among those labelled Naxi, the regions he studied do not match administrative boundaries.⁴ While McKhann explicitly acknowledges that "provincial politics is clearly a factor" in identity politics among related groups on either side of the Sichuan–Yunnan border, his essay does not delve into this intriguing proposition. Likewise, though Litzinger provides a nuanced and fascinating study of local variations in Yao identity, he specifically differentiates between place ("figures on a map") and space ("much more fluid, in that it refers to the intersection of constantly mobile signifying elements, meanings, and social processes")⁵ and pursues the impact of the latter on ethnic identity among those living in Jinxiu Yao Autonomous County, Guangxi. My study, in contrast, examines differences in ethnic identity across fixed state-defined administrative boundaries, clearly drawn on any map of the People's Republic of China.

Perhaps because anthropologists have dominated the study of ethnicity in the PRC, state structures have been under-examined in discussions of nationality identity and ethnic mobilization. Studies to date have not distinguished between unique policies carried out by different levels of the state administrative structure. China is a unitary state, but centrally

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Guest People: Hakka Identity in China and Abroad (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996); Ralph Litzinger, *Other Chinas: The Yao and the Politics of National Belonging* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

3. Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*, p. 112.

4. He examines the differences between the Mosuo "peoples centered in the Yongning basin and Lugu Lake regions of Yunnan Province's Ninglang County" and the Naxi "living mostly west and south of the Jinsha River (in Lijiang, Zhongdian, and Weixi counties)." McKhann, "The Naxi and the nationalities question," p. 48.

5. Litzinger, *Other Chinas*, p. 89.

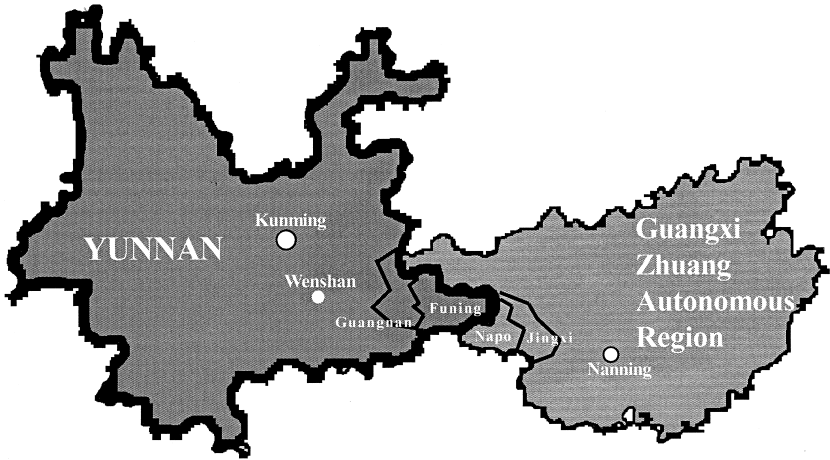
Map 1: Yunnan and Guangxi Provinces within China



determined policy is implemented by authorities within territorial administrative structures, and economic, social and political resources are distributed largely through these structures. Though there has been a great deal of attention devoted to “state policy” in the literature, the state and the centre have generally implicitly been conflated into a single monolith or otherwise been imprecisely differentiated. Likewise, though studies are emerging on the regional and local differences within a single nationality, scholars tend to look at ethnic *communities* and compare them to other communities rather than first defining the territorial divisions to be examined and then assessing whether these divisions have influenced the ethnic identity of those living within their boundaries. Such an approach allows for explanations of why territorial divisions matter and how they affect relations among members of a particular ethnic group across territorial boundaries, and relations between those minorities and state organizations. By illustrating how ethnic policy has been implemented quite differently in two different provinces, Yunnan and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, this article will show that territorial boundaries can greatly divide members of a single nationality, leading to numerous difficulties in mobilizing politically along ethnic lines.

This article examines China’s largest nationality, the Zhuang, though there is a need for similar studies in the future to explain differences among members of other ethnic groups which span county, prefectural, provincial and international boundaries. The 15.49 million people recognized by the central government as Zhuang live almost exclusively in south-western China, and are divided by the Guangxi–Yunnan provincial border. Some 15.08 million Zhuang live in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and more than 900,000 live across the border in Yunnan

Map 2: Yunnan and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region



in the Wenshan Zhuang–Miao Autonomous Prefecture. The discrepancies in Zhuang politics and ethnic identity on either side of the border are pronounced and can be directly tied to the fact that Zhuang within each territory have been governed by different provincial institutions. Local government policy is, of course, not solely responsible for the different interpretations of Zhuang ethnicity, as local authorities cannot entirely alter existing primordial loyalties among their governed population.⁶ Yunnan and Guangxi officials faced different minority contexts when the Chinese Communist Party took control of the area and began implementing its minority policy. The manner in which the policy was implemented in Yunnan and Guangxi differed, however, and exacerbated the regional discrepancies in Zhuang ethnic identity. The territorial division of the Zhuang has encouraged a pronounced difference in ethnic identity and in official discourse on the Zhuang, and has encouraged regionalist sentiment over pan-Zhuang ethnonationalism. Examining the interaction between territorial and ethnic politics in Zhuang areas clearly illustrates how the Chinese central government has played these two potentially divisive tendencies off against one another in a manner which limits both, while purportedly promoting each.

The contrast between the Zhuang in Wenshan and Guangxi, both visibly and in terms of self-identification, is striking. While conducting seven months of fieldwork in Yunnan in 1995, I was struck by the official acknowledgment and continued popular salience of *zhixi* (branch) divisions in Yunnan and their complete absence in Guangxi. In Yunnan, the

6. Paul Brass, "Elite groups, symbol manipulation and ethnic identity among the Muslims of South Asia," in David Taylor and Malcolm Yapp (eds.), *Political Identity in South Asia* (London: Curzon Press, 1979), p. 40; David Laitin, "Hegemony and religious conflict: British imperial control and political cleavages in Yorubaland," in Peter Evans (ed.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 308.

Zhuang are divided into three main *zhixi*, each speaking a unique language (which the government today defines as dialects), wearing different minority clothing, living in single-*zhixi* villages, practising slightly different festivals and rituals, and perhaps most importantly, defining their ethnic affiliation in terms of their *zhixi* rather than the broader Zhuang category. In the autumn of 2001 and summer of 1998 I returned to the region to examine the relative importance for Zhuang self-identification of *zhixi*, territorial and Zhuang ethnicalnationalist sentiment. I conducted extensive interviews within the two provincial-level capitals, Nanning and Kunming, as well as in the capital of the Wenshan Zhuang–Miao Autonomous Prefecture. I also conducted interviews and collected archival materials in five contiguous counties, two of which were in Guangxi and three in Yunnan.

This article focuses on the two major differences between Zhuang self-identification on either side of the Yunnan–Guangxi boundary: the continued perception of differences between “Yunnan Zhuang” and “Guangxi Zhuang,” and the prevalence of *zhixi* divisions in Yunnan and their complete absence in Guangxi. It begins with a brief empirical explanation of the different self-conceptions of the Zhuang, and then an explanation of why these differences occur, and why they fall precisely across administrative boundaries. Finally, it turns to what difference this makes for future Zhuang political mobilization. There has been a great deal of discussion among sinologists on the rise of “local warlordism” and regionalism. Scholars debate whether the documented rise in local governments’ authority challenges the central government and the integrity of the Chinese state.⁷ The continued importance, and even rise, of regionalism among nationalities which span administrative boundaries effectively balances the two loyalties against one another, facilitating the central government’s ability to monitor both. Because the Zhuang are little known outside China, a brief introduction to the group is in order before delving into the differences among its members.⁸

7. David S.G. Goodman and Gerald Segal (eds.), *China Deconstructs: Politics, Trade, and Regionalism* (Boulder, CO: Routledge, 1994); Jia Hao and Lin Zhimin (eds.), *Central–Local Relations in China: Reform and State Capacity* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994); Shaw Yuming (ed.), *Tendencies of Regionalism in Contemporary China* (Taipei: Institute of International Relations, National Chengchi University, 1997); Maria Hsia Chang, “China’s future: regionalism, federation, or disintegration,” *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (September 1992) pp. 211–227.

8. For the first monograph length work on the Zhuang see Katherine Palmer Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang: Ethnic Politics in China* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000); for articles on the Zhuang see Katherine E. Palmer, “Ethnicity and politics: the political impact of economic disparity in southern China,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association San Francisco, August 1996, and “The rise of ethnonationalism in the People’s Republic of China: national identity and interest articulation among the Zhuang minority of southwest China,” paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, 31 August 1995; Jeffrey G. Barlow, “The Zhuang minority peoples of the Sino-Vietnamese frontier in the Song period,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (September 1987), pp. 250–269; “The Zhuang Minority in the Ming Era,” *Ming Studies*, No. 28 (1989), pp. 15–41; Diana Lary, “Communist and ethnic revolt: some notes on the Chuang peasant movement in Kwangsi 1921–31,” *The China Quarterly* (January–March 1972), pp. 126–135; “The tomb of the King of Nanyue –

The Zhuang: a Brief Introduction

The Zhuang nationality until very recently was almost entirely unknown to Westerners. Few non-sinologists have even heard of the group, and those scholars who mention the Zhuang at all in their analyses overwhelmingly dismiss them as “fully assimilated” and essentially no different from the Han majority.⁹ Despite the dearth of information in the West, hundreds of major studies have been conducted on the Zhuang within China, both by the Zhuang themselves and by government sponsored research projects.¹⁰

The Zhuang were granted one of the country’s only five provincial-level autonomous regions in 1958, and are numerically at least a third larger than any other minority group in China. Economically, their per capita income and industrial output fall well below the Han majority average.¹¹ Though many Zhuang educated after 1949 speak enough Mandarin to converse at a basic level in the market place and urban Zhuang speak fluent Han Chinese, the vast majority of rural Zhuang, particularly older women, struggle to communicate in Mandarin and remain illiterate.¹²

The Zhuang are concentrated in western Guangxi and eastern Yunnan, with small patches of communities living in eastern Guangxi and western Guangdong. Some 92 per cent of the Zhuang population lives in the four prefectures and two cities of western Guangxi: Nanning, Baise, Hechi and Liuzhou prefectures, and Nanning and Liuzhou cities. Fifteen counties in Western Guangxi have populations of over 90 per cent Zhuang.¹³ Yunnan province has 1.3 million Zhuang, more than 925,000 of whom are concentrated in the Wenshan Zhuang–Miao Autonomous Prefecture.

The Zhuang are related to the broader Tai family found throughout South-East Asia, and speak a language similar to that of the Thai in Thailand, which the Chinese government lists as belonging to the

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the contemporary agenda of history: scholarship and identity,” *Modern China*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (January 1996).

9. F. Lebar, G. Hickey and J. Musgrave, *Ethnic Groups of Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Human Relations Area File, 1964), p. 76.

10. For a discussion on the status of Zhuang studies, see Zhuang Shengzhen, “Jianli Zhuangxue tixi dangyi,” (“A modest proposal for the establishment of systematic Zhuang studies”), *Guangxi minzu yanjiu* (*Guangxi Nationalities Research*), No. 1 (1997). For the most thorough bibliographies on Zhuang materials see Fan Qixu and Qin Naichang (eds.), *Zhuangzu baike cidian* (*The Zhuang Encyclopedia*) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1993), pp. 113–132, 193–96, 231, 306–311, 407–409, 414–15, 458–462, 491–93, 550–53, 616–17; Yang Zhihui, *Minzu wenxian tigao* (*Bibliography of Minority Articles*) (Kunming: Yunnan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1990); Chen Zuomao, *Guangxi shaoshu minzu wenxian mulu* (*Bibliography of Articles on Guangxi’s Minority Nationalities*) (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1989).

11. For a full discussion of Zhuang economic issues see Katherine Palmer, “Ethnicity and politics: regional disparity in southwest China,” paper presented at the Annual APSA Conference, San Francisco, 1996.

12. Wei Yiqiang, “Guanyu Zhuangyuwen shiyong he fazhan de jige wenti” (“A few questions regarding the use and development of the Zhuang script,”) *Minzu wenhua yanjiu* (*Minority Culture Research*), No. 1 (1986), pp. 18–26.

13. Yongning, Wuming, Longan, Daxin, Tiandeng, Longzhou, Xicheng, Tianyang, Tiandong, Pingguo, Debao, Jingxi, Napo, Donglan and Shangsi.

Zhuang–Dong branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. A written script was created for them by the central government in 1957, though it is little used because of the difficulties of using a phonetic alphabet for a language riddled with dialect differences. The Zhuang are predominately wet-rice agriculturists, living mainly in lowland plains. They are physically very similar to the Han, though the Zhuang themselves contend they can recognize each other by their darker skin colour, inset eyes and protruding foreheads.

The Zhuang were not officially recognized as a unique nationality by the Chinese government until the early 1950s. Prior to the creation of the Wenshan Zhuang–Miao Autonomous Prefecture and the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, they did not perceive themselves as a single nationality.¹⁴ The people who became known as the Zhuang spoke more than 20 mutually unintelligible local dialects. They lived in isolated valley pockets in 1949, were almost entirely self-sufficient and rarely had contact with each other.¹⁵ Most of the separate communities did not even have a word for “Zhuang” in their native language, and perceived themselves as members of separate communities rather than of some greater Zhuang nationality. Official recognition of the Zhuang greatly altered the group identity of the diverse peoples living in western Guangxi and eastern Yunnan. Determining which of the diverse groups should be included as “Zhuang” proved highly problematic, however, and the classification process was handled quite differently in Yunnan and Guangxi. Before examining the classification work in detail, however, the next section sketches the persisting differences in Zhuang ethnic identity on either side of the border.

Primary Differences in Ethnic Identity and Discourse Across the Border

A major divide exists between the Zhuang in Yunnan and those in Guangxi, both in terms of their identity within each province and in terms of official and scholarly discourse. This section briefly examines the localized nature of Zhuang identity, including the contrasting discourse of *zhixi* affiliations. The following section then attempts to show how the formal administrative boundaries influenced the development and perpetuation of these differences.

The impact of administrative boundaries on ethnic identity is visibly apparent when crossing from Guangxi into Yunnan, and immediately apparent in discussions with ethnic nationals on both sides of the border. As one travels from the Guangxi capital, Nanning, west towards the Yunnan border, one begins to see increasing numbers of people wearing “Zhuang ethnic dress.” My 1998 research trip to Zhuang areas began in Nanning, and I worked my way west to Kunming. I traveled to Jingxi and Napo counties in Guangxi, and then crossed the border into Yunnan and

14. For a full discussion see Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, chs. 2 and 3.

15. Gu Youshi and Fan Honggui (eds.), *Zhuangzu lungao (Collected Essays on the Zhuang)* (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1989).

conducted more interviews in Funing, Guangnan and Wenshan counties before heading to Kunming. I chose the five counties because all have a dense population of Zhuang and are contiguous. The Zhuang make up close to 50 per cent of the total population in the counties in Yunnan and over 90 per cent in the two Guangxi counties. Although the three counties in Yunnan are poorer than the two in Guangxi, each depends on vast sums of provincial assistance to survive and each has a large number of citizens who fall below the poverty line. The per capita income levels in the three Yunnan counties hover around only 350 *yuan* per year, while those in Guangxi approach 1,000.¹⁶ Educational levels in these areas are quite low as are health care conditions. By conducting interviews in counties directly on the provincial border and with similar socio-economic backgrounds, I was able to contrast clearly the situation on either side of the boundary.

Concentrating on these five counties offered a vivid contrast between Zhuang identity in Yunnan and Guangxi, though the dearth of written materials specifically on these areas posed some research challenges. Jingxi, Napo and Guangnan counties have not yet compiled their new county histories (*xianzhi*). Though all counties were commissioned in the early 1980s to publish local histories, lack of resources in these poverty-ridden counties has precluded their completion. I was, however, able to obtain drafts of the Funing and Wenshan county local histories as well as a draft of Funing's companion county nationality history. These histories have not yet been through the formal censor channels and contain many important findings. Another valuable source was the Yunnan and Guangxi reports from a major study of all nationality areas conducted by the central government in the late 1950s.¹⁷ The seven-volume study conducted on the Guangxi Zhuang contains a section on Napo county, though Jingxi is not covered. The Yunnan volumes one and three have excellent coverage of the Wenshan Zhuang, including detailed descriptions of the different *zhixi*, and an explanation of how the government justified grouping them together as Zhuang. In addition to these works on specific Zhuang counties and more general works on the Zhuang, I relied primarily on interviews with Zhuang historians, museum curators, Nationality Affairs Commission (NAC) officers, County Party secretaries, County People's Congress chairs and local villagers. In Nanning and Kunming, I was able to interview pre-eminent Zhuang historians and linguists, as well as participants in the Yunnan and Guangxi Nationalities Classification Teams dispatched to the regions beginning in the early 1950s, and discussed in more detail below.

16. *Wenshan ZhuangMiaozu zizhizhou zhi* (*The Zhuang–Miao Autonomous Prefecture Gazetteer*) (Yunnan: Renmin chubanshe, 2000), pp. 156–160, 147–151; *Guangxi nianjian 1997* (*Guangxi Yearbook 1997*) (Guangxi nianjian she bianji chubanshe, 1998), pp. 477–79.

17. Guangxi zhuangzu zizhiqiu bianjizu (ed.), *Guangxi Zhuangzu shehui lishi diaocha* (*Investigation of the Guangxi Zhuang Nationality's Society and History*) (Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, Vols. 1–7, 1984–87); Yunnan sheng bianjizu (eds.), *Yunnan shaoshu minzu she lishi diaocha ziliao huibian* (*Collected Documents from an Investigation of Yunnan's Minority Nationalities' Society and History*) (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1986), Vols. 1 and 3.

In Jingxi county, which is over 98 per cent Zhuang, few people wear the traditional Zhuang clothing, though in Napo county, which borders Jingxi to the west and has over 95 per cent Zhuang, some of the rural peasants wear the characteristic blue trousers and floral headdresses which are attributed to the Zhuang nationality in Guangxi. In Yunnan, however, the traditional clothing can be seen throughout the countryside. While there is a gradual increase in the number of women wearing ethnic dress as one heads west in Guangxi, once over the border into Yunnan the contrast is immediately clear.

The more frequent donning of traditional ethnic clothing reflects two of the most important differences between the Zhuang in Wenshan and Guangxi. First, the former believe that they are different from the Guangxi Zhuang, and argue that they more purely preserve “authentic” Zhuang culture. Scholars and local peasants alike point to the minority dress as a clear example of the “Yunnan Zhuang”’s preservation of historic costuming and, thus, of true Zhuang culture. Secondly, the clothing worn in Yunnan clearly reflects *zhixi* divisions, which do not exist in Guangxi. Each *zhixi* in Yunnan has a distinct costume. Again, the contrast between provinces precisely corresponds to the administrative boundary. One can walk across the border and ask people on either side which *zhixi* they belong to: those in Yunnan answer without hesitation, while even intellectuals on the Guangxi side of the border do not understand the term.

Yunnan Zhuang versus Guangxi Zhuang: territorial identity. The Zhuang emphasize their cultural and political differences on either side of the Yunnan–Guangxi border. The terms “Yunnan Zhuang” and “Guangxi Zhuang” are not ones I coined, but common self-references used extensively by intellectuals and only slightly less often by common villagers and workers. Without prompting, Zhuang, particularly in Wenshan Prefecture and Zhuang intellectuals in Kunming, will emphasize that “Yunnan Zhuang” are different from “Guangxi Zhuang.” Nearly all Yunnan Zhuang whom I interviewed contended that Zhuang living in Wenshan are the “real Zhuang” and are the “only Zhuang who preserve authentic Zhuang culture, dress and habits.”

There is much less interaction between and knowledge of Zhuang across provincial borders than within a single administrative unit. There is very little cross-fertilization in Zhuang studies, for example, an area which would seem a logical place to find extensive Zhuang interaction. Before travelling to Guangxi and Yunnan in the summer of 1998, I sent a list of five questions to a research assistant at the Guangxi NAC Nationalities Research Institute and to an assistant at the Yunnan Nationalities Institute’s Ethnography Research Centre. All five questions asked my assistants to compare *zhixi* divisions in Guangxi and Yunnan. Though both assistants have graduate degrees in Ethnic Studies, both are Zhuang themselves and scholars of Zhuang history, and one has just completed a thoroughly researched comprehensive monograph on the history of the Yunnan Zhuang, both gave me detailed responses on the situation of the

Zhuang in their respective provinces and said they “don’t have any knowledge of the Zhuang across the border.” Each was paid more than a month’s salary and had a budget to research the topic, yet neither had written or otherwise contacted scholars in the neighbouring province to explore the question.

While my experience with these two research assistants provides only anecdotal evidence of limited cross-province Zhuang interaction, their response was typical of the dozens of well-published Zhuang scholars I interviewed. Scholars on either side of the boundary expressed both discontent and unfamiliarity with the research efforts of their counterparts. Two senior scholars at the Guangxi NAC Nationalities Research Institute, for example, told me that because Yunnan has over 26 nationalities, Yunnanese “push off the responsibility to Guangxi to research the Zhuang.” One of the most prolific Zhuang scholars and most avid Zhuang activists in Yunnan, however, told me that the Guangxi Zhuang “were not interested in co-operating with Zhuang in Yunnan” and “just want to steal our research and materials and publish our findings as their own.”

In the early 1990s, Zhuang on either side of the provincial boundary established separate non-governmental Zhuang Studies Associations. Nearly 300 Zhuang intellectuals and government officials in Guangxi joined the Zhuang Studies Association at its founding in January 1991. Two years later more than 500 Zhuang in Yunnan province separately petitioned the Yunnan government for recognition of an independent Yunnan Zhuang Studies Association. Rarely do the two interact, however, and senior members of the Guangxi Association specifically told me that Guangxi Zhuang had to shoulder all of the burden of researching the Zhuang “since Yunnan doesn’t have a Zhuang Studies Association.” Each of the associations was founded in an effort to increase knowledge of the Zhuang and to promote pride in the “unified Zhuang nation,” I was informed by numerous sources using almost precisely the same terminology. Their lack of interaction and continued emphasis on studying the Zhuang within their own province illustrates the limiting role which regionalism plays against greater Zhuang ethnonationalism.

The Yunnanese Zhuang are actively carving out a cultural niche for the “Yunnan Zhuang.” The Yunnan Zhuang Studies Association has an ambitious research plan, and hopes to publish a series of books. In 1998 the group published a pictorial entitled *The Yunnan Zhuang Nationality*.¹⁸ Several members of the Yunnan Association actively petitioned the provincial and central authorities for funding, and solicited private contributions from numerous Zhuang activists. In 1988, the Guangxi Nationalities Affairs Commission edited a pictorial entitled simply *The Zhuang Nationality*, but leading members of the later Yunnan project feel that the book “entirely disregards the Yunnan Zhuang and only emphasizes the Guangxi Zhuang.” Zhuang scholar Yang Zongliang recently completed a

18. Yunnan minzu xuehui Zhuangxue yanjiu weiyuanhui bian (eds.), *Yunnan Zhuangzu* (*The Yunnan Zhuang Nationality*) (Kunming: Minzu chubanshe, 1998).

book on the Yunnan Zhuang,¹⁹ similar to the three-volume set published in 1997 in Guangxi entitled simply *A General History of the Zhuang*.²⁰ In addition, the Yunnan Zhuang Studies Association plans to publish separate volumes on Yunnan Zhuang embroidery, folk lore and traditional mountain songs.

Yunnan and Guangxi Zhuang did join together in April 1999 to participate in the First International Zhuang Studies Symposium, together with scholars from more than a dozen provinces and foreign countries. While this may prove a key event in improving communication between the provincial groups, the Yunnan Zhuang remained very active at the conference in promoting the study of specifically Yunnan Zhuang issues.²¹ Members of the Yunnan Zhuang Studies Association proudly displayed a very expensive exhibit of the newly published *The Yunnan Zhuang Nationality* pictorial, for example.²²

Yunnan Zhuang versus Guangxi Zhuang: zhixi divisions. Another important difference between the Zhuang on either side of the border, and a difference which both influences their self-identity and limits their willingness to coalesce as a single nationality to pursue common interests, is the continued salience of *zhixi* divisions in Yunnan and their complete absence in Guangxi. Official and scholarly discussion of the Zhuang in the Wenshan Zhuang–Miao Autonomous Prefecture emphasizes three major sect divisions: the Sha, Nong and Tu. Across the border in Guangxi, however, no reference is made to sect divisions, either popularly or in published sources. Officials in the county-level NACs in Guangxi counties along the border generally do not even understand the term *zhixi*, while their counterparts immediately across the border in Yunnan are not only very familiar with the term but can list with relative ease exactly where the different branches are concentrated and detail their primary cultural markers.

Members of the separate *zhixi* speak very different dialects. Although official published sources contend that there is at least a 60 per cent overlap between the different dialects,²³ I have frequently witnessed Zhuang from different *zhixi* appeal to interpreters to translate a non-familiar dialect into Mandarin.

Within Yunnan, each village generally contains a single *zhixi*, though

19. Yang Zongliang, *Zhuangzu wenhua shi (A Cultural History of the Zhuang Nationality)* (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 1999).

20. Zhang Shengzhen (ed.), *Zhuangzu tongshi (A General History of the Zhuang)* (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 1997), Vols. 1–3.

21. I was approached late one night at the conference by a delegation from the Lianshan Zhuang–Yao Autonomous County in Guangdong province who presented me with a very expensive book on the Zhuang and encouraged me to study *their* Zhuang and not just the “Yunnan and Guangxi Zhuang”! *Lianshan Zhuang–Yao zizhi xianzhi (The Lianshan Zhuang–Yao Autonomous County Gazetteer)* (Henan: Sanlian shudian chuban, 1997).

22. I was also presented with several books at the conference by a group of Zhuang from Guangdong who told me that the “Guangdong Zhuang” were even less well represented in Zhuang scholarship than the “Yunnan Zhuang.”

23. Fan Qixu and Qin Naicheng, *Zhuangzu baike cidian (The Zhuang Encyclopedia)* (Nanning: Guangxi renmin chubanshe, 1993), p. 402.

there may be a few women from different *zhixi* who have married into the village. Though no precise statistics exist on the number of inter-*zhixi* marriages either today or before 1949, interviewees agree that prior to the implementation of the Communist Party's minority policy, marriages between different *zhixi* were popularly discouraged and have become more common only over the past two or three decades.

Not all of the villagers I interviewed in Yunnan were clear of the relationship between their *zhixi* and the larger government-recognized nationalities. The village chief of a Tu village in Wenshan county, for example, knew that he was a member of the "Tu nationality" and confirmed that the Tu were the same as the Zhuang. He added, obviously pleased to enlighten a foreigner on the topic, that the Tu, Nong, Sha, Yi and Yao were all Zhuang. The county NAC director accompanying me (herself a member of the Yi nationality) corrected him and told him that the Yi and Yao were separate nationalities and had separate languages and customs. He responded with "but isn't this the Zhuang-Miao Autonomous Prefecture? We're all Zhuang or Miao." After further discussion, he sheepishly laughed off his mistake with a wave of his hand and a simple, "oh well" All government representatives are supposed to be familiar with the minority policy, and both he and the NAC director responsible for propagating the Party's policy were clearly unsettled by the blunder.

The ethnic make-up of the people living in Yunnan and Guangxi and officially classified as Zhuang is extremely complex, and cannot be analysed in detail in an article of this length. The precise origin of *zhixi* divisions is now hotly debated in intellectual circles in Yunnan province though it is not discussed at all within Guangxi. The *zhixi* in Yunnan are generally divided on the basis of their language, minority clothing, self-reference, cultural traditions and the names traditionally used by those living in the area to refer to them. When the central government dispatched work teams throughout China in the early 1950s to determine exactly which groups should be considered unique nationalities, they were faced with a complex ethnic mosaic, and each team struggled to find a satisfactory method of classifying the nationalities. What is of primary concern here is that separate classification teams were sent to Yunnan and Guangxi, both were faced with people who often referred to themselves by similar names, and yet the Yunnan classification team divided the different groups into *zhixi*, while the Guangxi classification team devoted great propaganda efforts to persuading each of the smaller subgroups that their self-reference could be directly translated into the Mandarin word "Zhuang." A brief examination of the three major *zhixi* divisions found in Yunnan should illustrate that similar terms *could* have been used in Guangxi, but were not. This is not to suggest that either of the classification teams misnamed their subjects "Zhuang" or failed to recognize *zhixi* affiliations, but is intended to show that the precise means of naming the various peoples was largely influenced by the different provincial institutions carrying out the central government's directive to place all subjects into objectively-constructed nationality categories.

The Sha. When the Yunnan classification work team travelled to Wenshan in 1956, they found two types of peoples who both referred to themselves as “Buyeyi,” yet wore different dress and were referred to by the local population by two different names: “Sha” and “Tuzu.” The term “Tuzu” means “local nationality.” The work teams determined that 46 per cent of Funing’s total population were Tuzu, but declared that they should be considered part of the Sha branch of the Zhuang.²⁴ The term “Sha” first began to appear in the Song dynasty, and was in common usage in the area gazetted by the Yuan dynasty. The word is actually a Han term used to refer to the people living in various areas within Wenshan Prefecture, though these people generally refer to themselves, as aforementioned, as “Buyeyi” or “Butu.” The term “Bu” means “people” in most Zhuang dialects. They also use the term “Heiyi” or “black clothes” to refer to themselves, a term derived from the characteristic black clothes worn by that group. The majority of Funing county Zhuang are grouped as members of the Sha branch.

Although the term Sha is not used in Guangxi, there are several groups which refer to themselves as Buyi, Buyeyi, and Heiyi.²⁵ Some groups in Jingxi county also refer to themselves as Buyeyi. Though only a few groups in Guangxi continue to wear ethnic clothing, many of those that do closely resemble the Sha in Wenshan. The Sha in Wenshan speak what is termed the Northern Zhuang dialect. The Sha in Guangnan speak a dialect which exactly parallels that spoken by the Zhuang in Laibin county in Guangxi.

The Nong. Also living within Wenshan administrative boundaries was a group which called itself “Bunong” or “Nong People.” The work teams reported that 195,000 people in Wenshan and neighbouring Mengzi county used the internal ethnonym “Bunong.”²⁶ Members of the Nong *zhixi* also refer to themselves by a wide variety of names, many of which are also used by those living across the border in Guangxi. *The Yunnan Zhuang Nationality* relates that the Nong refer to themselves as “Punung, Puban, Puna, Puhong, Jinnung, Daonong, Yangnong, Dunong and Tingnung.”²⁷ Other groups in the region also use a variety of names to refer to the Nong branch members including “Nung, Long, Longying, Heiyi, Tianbao, Longan, Danglei and Shuihu.”

The Nong speak a southern Zhuang dialect. Those in Xichou county in Wenshan speak a dialect which almost exactly resembles that spoken in Longzhou county in Guangxi, while the remaining Nong spoken in Wenshan Prefecture has what the Party now calls “dialect differences” with the Longzhou language.

24. Chen Zhiwen, *Jianguo chuqi Wenshan Zhuangzu ge zhixi diaocha shibie qingkuang* (An Investigation of the Wenshan Zhuang Zhixi Classification Work during the Early Years of the Birth of the Country), Wenshan dangshi ziliao (Wenshan Party Documents), 1998.

25. Fan Honggui and Gu Youshi (eds.), *Zhuangzu lishi yu wenhua* (Zhuang History and Culture) (Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 1997), pp. 3–7.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *The Yunnan Zhuang Nationality*, p. 38.

Within Wenshan Prefecture, the Nong are concentrated in Yanshan and Guangnan counties, though they can be found in all eight of Wenshan's counties. Some live interspersed with the Sha, though they rarely live in areas containing the third of the main Wenshan branches, the Tu. Though not common, there was some intermarriage between the Nong and Sha branches before Liberation, and wealthy Nong were known to intermarry with Han.

The Tu. The final of the three main branches in Wenshan is the Tu. The Tu also speak a southern Zhuang dialect. They are the smallest of the three branches and are subdivided into at least four smaller categories, as distinguished primarily by their different headdresses. In interviews, residents of Tu villages would first give their Tu *zhixi* when asked their nationality, and often voluntarily state to which sub-branch they belong. Though many Tu in the more economically developed villages no longer wear traditional clothing, most had at least one outfit of the sub-branch clothing for use in holidays and festivals, and would proudly display it if given an opportunity.

Though most villagers officially classified as Zhuang accept the designation, *zhixi* affiliations remain important social categories. When asked "what type of people live in this village?" respondents in Wenshan Prefecture would invariably first give their *zhixi* affiliation. Moreover, when speaking in Mandarin, respondents would use the word "nationality" (*zu*) when referring to their *zhixi*. A group of villagers in Guangnan county, for example, told me that they were "Nongzu" when I asked them what nationality they were. When I then asked if the Nong belonged to the Zhuang nationality, most would respond that, yes, they were a *zhixi* of the Zhuang. In 1995, several Zhuang specifically told me that the Nong were *not* Zhuang, and were their own nationality, though this type of response was less frequent in 1998.

Although the Yunnan authorities have allowed greater discussion of differences among the Zhuang, the interaction between *zhixi* and Zhuang affiliations is clearly still a politically sensitive topic. While I received full co-operation from county-level officials and scholars, the Wenshan Prefectural authorities seemed openly concerned with my research topic. The Wenshan county NAC vice-director would not respond to any of my questions, for example, before the Prefectural official in charge of NAC propaganda work arrived to monitor the interview. I was discouraged from arranging my own interviews at the prefectural level, particularly of those who were known for their strong *zhixi* loyalties.

Explaining Differences in Ethnic Identity and Discourse Across the Border

What accounts for the vast difference in Zhuang identity on the two sides of the border? The territorial administrative boundaries have had a great impact primarily in two ways. First, Zhuang ethnic consciousness was in effect created by the state's minority classification system and

consequent propaganda campaign, as will be shown below. The implementation of both was carried out by separate provincial governments, NACs and Nationality Classification teams. The decision to create the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region was made by the central government in an effort to integrate the numerous and scattered collectivities of people living throughout south-west China. Creating the Zhuang Autonomous Region required a unified Zhuang front, and the central government encouraged the Guangxi authorities to play down *zhixi* differences among the Zhuang. Whereas the Wenshan Prefecture's handling of the Zhuang was overseen primarily by the Yunnan provincial authorities, Guangxi's classification efforts were more closely monitored by the central government, and they received less flexibility in interpreting the Zhuang category. The Guangxi authorities were encouraged not to discuss branch divisions while the Yunnanese were left more to their own devices.²⁸

The second primary difference in Zhuang identity, the distinction between Yunnan Zhuang and Guangxi Zhuang, can be understood in part by the impact of the *zhixi* divisions, but also in the distribution of resources and the territorial focus of the CCP's minority policy. This last point is an important one, and one not examined sufficiently in the literature. The administrative division of the Zhuang into two separate provinces, combined with differences in early classification work, have encouraged stronger popular commitment to locality than to the Zhuang nationality at the grassroots level. The respective administrative regions' handling of the *zhixi* divisions resulted in the perpetuation of *zhixi* loyalties in Yunnan and their near annihilation in Guangxi.

Explaining Zhixi divisions. If the difference in discourse on and popular salience of *zhixi* divisions did not fall precisely along provincial lines, and if the people today classified as Zhuang in Guangxi had used the term "Zhuang" to refer to themselves before 1949, it might be possible to argue that the nationality makeup in the two provinces had little to do with provincial policy, but rather was a result of gradual differences evolving from centuries of social interaction among different sectors of the Zhuang population.²⁹ But prior to the government's classification efforts in the early 1950s, most Zhuang, whether they lived in Yunnan or Guangxi, did not refer to themselves as such, but affiliated more closely with members of their local community who spoke their same dialect. This can be clearly evidenced from the resistance met by the work teams in both Yunnan and Guangxi when they tried to promote the Zhuang category. The Guangxi authorities did not somehow discover the Zhuang nationality and remove the "obstacles placed on Zhuang recognition by the imperialist feudalistic exploitative rulers" as many officials in the current regime claim. The Guangxi authorities created the

28. Based on interviews with NAC officials in Yunnan and Guangxi.

29. Indeed, this was the explanation generally offered by commentators in Guangxi, though not so in Yunnan.

Zhuang nationality, certainly not out of thin air, but by grouping together disparate people and convincing them they were part of a single nationality. Part of this “convincing” process entailed discouraging discussion of *zhixi* divisions.

There are a number of reasons to contend that *zhixi* affiliations existed in Guangxi and that the government discouraged their discussion in the media and in scholarly circles. First, and quite telling, is that as ideological restrictions have eased in the post-Mao reform era, there has gradually been a re-evaluation of the *zhixi* issue among some scholars in Guangxi. In *Zhuang History and Culture* published in 1997, Xu Jieshun and Gu Youshi explicitly discuss *zhixi* divisions in Guangxi during the “300 years of the Qing dynasty and the Republican years.”³⁰ The authors contend that “with the development of the Zhuang people’s government, economics, and culture, particularly after Western Guangxi and Eastern Yunnan began to abolish the *tusi* system and instate imperial officials and dismantle the regional and feudalistic divisive attitudes, the Zhuang people’s various *zhixi* began to be closer and closer.” Although the authors maintain that *zhixi* divisions are no longer important for the Zhuang in Guangxi, they openly acknowledge their existence there prior to the Communist takeover. The abrupt end of *zhixi* divisions after the Communists took control suggests that political factors were behind their removal. Significantly, in the earlier, definitive history of the Zhuang begun by Zhuang historian Huang Xianfan in 1957 and published by his students in 1988, no mention was made at all of *zhixi*.³¹

Secondly, several scholars within China openly told me that my research topic could be interpreted as politically divisive, and for this reason, no Chinese have been willing to research the question. One prolific Zhuang author in Nanning relayed that some research was being conducted on the issue in the early 1950s “before the minority policy had been fully developed.” He went on to add that “once the government had laid down the policy, all studies had to consider whether they would be of use to the minority policy.” More than one scholar in Yunnan said they were also interested in a comparison of the *zhixi* on either side of the border, but that it was too sensitive to research.

The efforts to promote Zhuang solidarity within Guangxi began in September of 1952 and were instigated by the central government. Prior to this time, the Zhuang were rarely mentioned in discussions of minority policy, and policies specifically targeting minority areas were not applied in Zhuang areas.³² Until 1952, the Zhuang appear not to have been considered a unified nationality by the central government or by the Guangxi authorities. In late September 1952, the central government began preparations to establish a prefectural autonomous area in Western Guangxi. In November, 150 delegates from county governments and

30. Fan and Gu, *Zhuang History and Culture*, p. 151.

31. Huang Xianfan, *Zhuangzu tongshi (Overview of the Zhuang)* (Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 1988).

32. Kaup, *Creating the Zhuang*, pp. 84–85.

representatives from each of the nationality groups within Western Guangxi were called to discuss the establishment of the Western Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Prefecture. Though precise minutes from the meeting are not publicly available, all references to it suggest that there was much resistance, even from the Zhuang themselves, to establishing a Zhuang autonomous area.³³ A recent study of the meeting conducted by several of the most vocal Zhuang activists acknowledged that “since the Zhuang had been exploited and their very nationality denied for so long by the ruling class, they often thought of themselves simply as “base locals” (*turen, tulao*) and did not speak out for Zhuang self-rule.”³⁴ Few actively promoted a Zhuang autonomous unit, and many actively resisted it.

After the preparatory meeting concluded, three work teams were dispatched to each county in the proposed area of the Western Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Prefecture. The work teams comprised members from the three different administrative levels: the central government, the South-Central Military Administrative Region and Guangxi province. Their primary task was to convince “both cadres and the masses of the importance of establishing an autonomous area.”³⁵ The work teams constantly had to overcome Zhuang contentions that they were not a unique nationality, but rather “Han who can speak the Zhuang language.” One report notes that the teams often heard the question “we’re all Chinese. Why do we have to split into different nationalities?” The masses reportedly did not understand “what kind of people count as Zhuang.”³⁶

The first Western Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Prefecture (WGZAP) All-Nationalities All-People’s Congress held its first meeting from 3 to 9 December 1952. The Congress’ two major reports – “Implementation Essentials of the Western Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Area” and “Regulations on the Establishment of the Western Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Area Government” – announced that the first and most essential responsibility of the government would be the consolidation and strengthening of nationality unity.³⁷ A later article in *Renmin ribao* also reflected the Party’s proclivity to create a stronger sense of ethnic identity among groups which lacked it. The article notes that “unity must be strengthened and consolidated both between and *within the various nationalities*. This is a requisite for regional autonomy and one of the aims of regional autonomy.”³⁸ The birth of the WGZAP government was officially announced on 10 December 1952 by the newly appointed WGZAP governor Qin Yingji.

33. Zhang Shengzhen (ed.), *Zhuangzu tongshi (History of the Zhuang)* (Nanning: Guangxi minzu chubanshe, 1998), Vol. 3, p. 1128.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. Translated in US Consulate-General, Hong Kong, *Current Background*, No. 264 (5 October 1953), pp. 12–23. Emphasis added.

The establishment of the WGZAP did not resolve the issue of Zhuang self-rule, however, for many within the prefecture still refused to accept their Zhuang classification and either contended that they were Han or members of a smaller group, typically based on linguistic divisions. Moreover, in the Party's first national census, more than 400 groups demanded recognition as separate nationalities, more than 260 in Yunnan and over 30 in Wenshan prefecture alone. In early 1953, the Party began to dispatch identification teams to investigate the claims made by the various groups seeking recognition, and this work was stepped up in 1956, when 16 separate identification teams were dispatched throughout the country, with a total of more than 1,000 anthropologists, linguists, historians and political scientists participating. Separate classification teams were sent to Yunnan and Guangxi.

Even if political considerations could be extracted from the classification process, clarifying which groups should be considered separate nationalities was, and continues to be, an extremely complicated problem for the Chinese administration. The CCP broadly adopted the definition of nationality first formulated by Stalin in his 1913 monograph *Marxism and the National Question*: "A nation is a historically formed stable community of people arising on the basis of common language, common territory, common economic life, and a typical cast of mind manifested in a common culture."³⁹ The CCP instructed the Chinese work teams to utilize Stalin's criteria flexibly, however, and constantly consider "China's concrete conditions and the wishes of the minorities concerned."⁴⁰ The classification teams were instructed to make their final decisions based on the particular economic conditions, historical background and inter-nationality relations in a particular area.

The classification effort was handled quite differently in Yunnan and Guangxi. Because *zhixi* divisions are not openly discussed in Guangxi, and have been categorically denied since the time the Zhuang were recognized as a separate nationality, it is difficult to determine the strength of *zhixi* affiliations within the region when the work teams arrived. In Yunnan, however, it is quite clear that a large segment of the population actively resisted the Zhuang classification in favour of their smaller *zhixi* affiliation. The vice-deputy of Wenshan Prefecture in the mid-1950s, Long Mingchuan, suggested that the most appropriate name for Wenshan should be the Wenshan Nong-Buyi [now labelled Sha] Miao Autonomous Prefecture. Officials who relayed Long's story to me in the summer of 1998 said that his proposal was rejected because the title was "too wordy," but the fact that he was labelled a rightist for the suggestion and imprisoned indicates that more than mere semantics were at stake. Clearly Long represented a threat to those wishing to establish a Zhuang autonomous area, and suggests that there was some grassroots support for a Nong-Buyi alternative.

39. At p. 307.

40. Deng Liqun, Ma Hong and Wu Heng (eds.), *Dangdai Zhongguo de minzu gongzuo* (*Contemporary China's Minority Work*) (Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1993), Vol. 1, p. 277.

Further indications that the *zhixi* affiliations were strong in Wenshan can be found in the *Funing County History* draft. The *Common Programme*, promulgated in September 1949, detailed the constitutional structure of the new People's Republic of China. Article 51 announced that: "In places where different nationalities live together and in the autonomous areas of the national minorities, the different nationalities shall each have an appropriate number of representatives in the local organs of political power." When Funing county held its first "All Nationalities All People's Congress" in early February 1952, its nationality representatives were listed according to what are today considered subsets of *zhixi*. Ten members of the "Black Clothes (Heiyi)," for example, attended, as well as 19 Tianbao, eight Longan, 65 Tu, two Zheyuan and three Yang.⁴¹

In the mid-1950s, Yunnan began what it called *guixi gongzuo*, or "*zhixi* classification work." This was intended to convince the various *zhixi* that they all belonged to the larger Zhuang category. According to a participant in the Yunnan classification work team, it was orchestrated differently and at a different administrative level from the classification work teams (*shibie gongzuo*). It was carried out by the Wenshan Prefectural officials, and according to this source, was unique in calling its work "*zhixi* classification." My interviewee recalled with some resentment that Wenshan took the "easy way out" and did not want to exert the same level of propaganda work carried out in Guangxi. Rather than trying to strip the locals of their *zhixi* affiliation, the Wenshan campaign allowed them to keep their smaller branch names, and simply labelled them *zhixi*. In Guangxi, no similar campaign was carried out, and the government explained the discrepancies in self-reference both as the result of "historical forces which divided the Zhuang," and as differences in dialect for the same word: Zhuang.

Explaining territorial divisions. The differences in Zhuang ethnic identity on either side of the provincial border are evidenced in the concomitant and at times dominant loyalty to a specific territory rather than to the greater Zhuang nation. This is largely a result of the structure of resource distribution along administrative boundaries and also the territorial focus of the central government's minority policy.

Economic, political and social resources tend to be largely structured around provincial lines. While China's administrative system is hierarchically run, those at the county-level rarely have extensive contacts with those outside their province. Economically, particularly under the recent wave of decentralization beginning in the mid-1980s, local governments negotiate their tax and profit contracts with the administrative unit immediately above them. Likewise, political appointments are now made by superiors at the next higher administrative level, rather than two-levels up as was the case through the mid-1980s. County-level officials hold meetings with outside county officials within their prefecture, and

41. *Funing xian minzuzhi (Funing County History: Nationalities)* unpublished draft, p. 68.

occasionally will travel to the provincial capital for meetings. Rarely do they meet their counterparts across the provincial boundary. Wenshan NAC officials, for example, have little contact with NAC cadres in Guangxi, though they are well acquainted with all their counterparts in Wenshan Prefecture and know many NAC officials in other Yunnan prefectures. Though Funing NAC officials personally knew many of the Napo county NAC cadres and often met them when sending delegates or scholars across the provincial boundary, Guangnan officials said they rarely have any contact with those in Guangxi. Funing officials, likewise, do not have any contact with people in counties to the east of Napo.

Social goods are also distributed largely along territorial lines. Education, for example is vertically hierarchically structured, with exceptional students testing into key schools and universities at the provincial, regional or national level. While the top Yunnan students may encounter fellow Zhuang from Guangxi at national universities, the number of students attending national universities represents only a fraction of a percentage point of the total population within the provinces. Furthermore, once at the national schools, students tend to associate along regional rather than ethnic lines. Students I interviewed at the Central Nationalities University in Beijing, for example, said they frequently hosted parties for students from their home province, but none had ever hosted a Zhuang party or asked Zhuang from outside their province to attend their provincial parties. It is extremely rare for school students to attend provincial schools outside their resident province, but this may change somewhat in the years ahead as China moves towards a self-pay tuition system. The provincial orientation of schools is particularly important as most students I interviewed remember first gaining a sense of ethnic consciousness upon entering the higher-education system.

A final factor which has been under-examined in the literature, but which plays a significant role in balancing regionalist and ethnonationalist loyalties against one another, is the territorial focus of the Party's minority policy. Although some of the preferential policies awarded minorities are distributed to individual members of a given nationality (for example, most nationalities are exempt from the one-child policy and all receive different affirmative action benefits on university entrance examinations), most benefits are awarded to minority *territories*. The Zhuang do not receive special tax breaks, for example: the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region does. The focus of minority policy, particularly after 1978, has been on economic development. Economic benefits are awarded purely along territorial lines. Indeed, minorities are not allowed to ask for special treatment for themselves, but must instead call for benefits for nationalities in general, or for all those living within an autonomous area.⁴² Official socio-economic statistics are compiled for all those living in a given autonomous territory but the statistics are not divided by nationality. *The Statistical Yearbook of Minority Nationalities*,

42. Based on interviews with NAC officers.

for example, gives abundant statistics and comparisons of educational levels and employment rates within autonomous regions and counties, but nowhere breaks down the figures according to nationality. These types of figures can be very misleading if used to assess the status of different nationalities. Though ample statistics are available on a variety of topics for the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, for example, provincial-level figures fail to note the discrepancies between Eastern Guangxi, which has less than a 10 per cent Zhuang population, and Western Guangxi, which has over 90 per cent Zhuang.

What difference does this territorial focus serve in controlling ethniconationalism? Quite simply, the Yunnan Zhuang have little to gain from the improved status of the Guangxi Zhuang and vice versa. They may be proud to know that a fellow Zhuang is in a position of power, but once in office, a Zhuang is limited in the amount of voice he can give to “Zhuang” issues, and typically falls back to speaking on behalf of his territory. Those who do otherwise tend to be condemned as “small nationality chauvinists,” an offence still punishable by dismissal or worse.

Conclusions

The nationalities classification work sought to unify disparate peoples, limiting the number of separate groups clamouring for representation. While the policy certainly was successful in limiting the number of nationalities demanding recognition, in many instances the labelling of objectively defined ethnic categories created new focal points around which ethnic members could consolidate their ethnic identity. This was clearly true for the Zhuang who prior to 1949 did not even use the word “Zhuang” and had little sense of the larger Zhuang category. In their case, and arguably in other cases throughout China, minorities spread across administrative territorial boundaries have perhaps been easier for the government to manage as the potential strength of their new-found focus on ethnic solidarity was limited by corresponding tugs of regional loyalties. As Keith Schoppa⁴³ has so clearly argued, local sentiments do not necessarily conflict with greater nationalism (in this case, ethnic nationalism) and both regionalism and nationalism can build at the same time. During the Republican Era particularly, as Prasenjit Duara and others have argued,⁴⁴ native place associations were often the vehicle for nationalist drives, with many local leaders (including Mao Zedong⁴⁵

43. Keith R. Schoppa, “Province and nation: the Chekiang provincial autonomy movement, 1917–1927,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (1977), pp. 661–674.

44. Prasenjit Duara, “Provincial narratives of the nation: centralism and federalism in Republican China,” in Harumi Befu (ed.), *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); John Fincher, “Political provincialism and national revolution,” in Mary C. Wright (ed.), *China in Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 185–227; Diana Lary, *Region and Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

45. Mao Zedong, “The fundamental issue in the problem of Hunanese reconstruction: the republic of Hunan” (3 September 1920), in Stuart Schram (ed.), *Mao’s Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912–1949, Vol. 1* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), pp. 43–44.

himself!) arguing that only through strengthening the localities could the Chinese nation itself become strong.

The ethnic dynamic, however, is unique. While ethnic pride and regional pride can undoubtedly coexist, when competing for limited resources set aside for minorities by the central government, Zhuang on either side of the border struggle to show that *their* Zhuang – the “Yunnan Zhuang” or the “Guangxi Zhuang” – are the *true* Zhuang. While it is possible to be both a Zhuang and a Yunnanese, it is clearly not possible to be both a Yunnan Zhuang and a Guangxi Zhuang. Regional loyalties, in this case, clearly do divide ethnic unity and weaken prospects for greater pan-Zhuang activism.

What the Zhuang case also illustrates about identity politics throughout China more generally, perhaps, is that localist loyalties can easily coexist and even strengthen nationalist sentiments when local leaders are trying to achieve a greater voice in national policy-making or gain greater political autonomy within their region. If localities are vying for material resources, however, in competition with others from similar categories (be they ethnic categories or gender affiliations or some other groupings), the regional factor plays a stronger and more divisive role. This is particularly true if the central state is a more clearly defined and powerful organization than the intermediate category, in this case the Zhuang.

The striking differences in Zhuang ethnic identity and discourse on either side of the Yunnan–Guangxi boundary vividly illustrate the impact that territorial administrative divisions can have on ethnic politics, and contributes to the persistence of regional loyalties and the restriction of cross-border ethnic mobilization. Clearly, the division between the Zhuang on either side of the provincial boundary has limited their ability, or at least their willingness, to co-operate. By promoting a greater Zhuang nation and ethnic solidarity, the central government has been able to integrate the disparate peoples of south-west China. Superimposing territorial loyalties on these ethnic loyalties, however, assures that ethnic-nationalism will not grow beyond the state’s control. As Zhuang on both sides of the border frequently remind outsiders: “Yunnan Zhuang are interested in Yunnan Zhuang. Guangxi Zhuang are interested in Guangxi Zhuang.”