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Representing Nationality in China: Refiguring Majority/ Minority Identities

DRU C. GLADNEY

THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT WAS MADE by a private taxi driver as I was on my way into the city from the Beijing Capital Airport shortly before the 1991 Chinese New Year's Spring Festival. It raises many of the issues addressed in this article:

I try to stay clear of politics. On New Year's Eve, I'm not going to light fireworks like everyone else, and that's how I'll show that I don't support the government. If I don't set off fireworks, all my neighbors will know that I don't give a damn about this country. I'm just going to sit at home and watch the special New Year's program on TV. They'll have a lot of acrobats, singers, comedians, and minority dances. Those minorities sure can sing and dance. . . . I really like to watch those minority girls, they're a lot "looser" (*suibian*) than our Han women. They bathe naked in the rivers and wear less clothing. Our women wouldn't act that way. . . . Some of my friends have even gone down to Yunnan . . . or was it Guizhou? . . . to see if they could meet some minority girls, they are very casual, you know. Han women aren't free like that. It's frustrating. Just like our politics, we can't do anything about it (*mei banfa*). So why try?

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This article will argue that the representation of the “minority” in China reflects the objectivizing of a “majority” nationality discourse that parallels the valorization of gender and political hierarchies. This process reverses subject/object distinctions and suggests the following parallels: Minority is to the majority as female is to male, as “Third” World is to “First,” and as subjectivized is to objectivized identity. The widespread definition and representation of the “minority” as exotic, colorful, and “primitive” homogenizes the undefined majority as united, monoethnic, and modern. The politics of representation in China reveals much about the state’s project in constructing, in often binary minority/majority terms, an “imagined” national identity (Anderson 1983). While this dichotomization may not be as meaningful in social life, it is through reading the representation of minorities in China that we can learn much, perhaps more, about the construction of majority identity, known in China as the “Han” nationality.

Following the tragedy of the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, there has been an onslaught of scholarly publications attempting to define and redefine China’s “quest for a national identity” in various terms including: Confucianism or neo-Confucianism (i.e., recent suggestions in the political economy literature that it is Confucian culture that has led to the rapid industrial successes of the East Asian economies of Japan and the “four little dragons”: Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore), language (the popular notion that those who speak and read Chinese are Chinese), Han Chinese sedentary agriculturalism (contrasted with “minority” nomadism, see Fei Xiaotong 1989), the geophysical space of the country occupied by the PRC (*Zhongguo*, the central kingdom centered in the territory of China, see Thierry 1989), or a biogenetic neoracist notion of pan-Chinese yellowness (as the Su Xiaokang 1989 television series *River Elegy* seemed to suggest).¹

By contrast, a burgeoning literature on the anthropology of the Self has argued for movement away from reified definitions of Self to emphases upon “multiplicity, contextuality, complexity, power, irony, and resistance” (Kondo 1990:43). Similarly, studies of ethnicity and nationalism have begun to move away from either culturally or primordial-based formulations, to the analysis of power relations, particularly in contemporary nation-states (Anderson 1983:16; Comaroff 1987; Hobsbawm 1990; Gladney 1991; Keyes 1981). The connection between the relationally described identities of nationalism and gender was made most clearly in the conference volume *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (Parker et. al., 1992). The authors convincingly argue that “like gender—nationality is a relational term whose identity derives from its inherence in a system of differences” (Parker et. al., 1992:5; compare also Caplan 1987:10). In this article, I wish to extend this argument to address the issue of relational identity in China through analysis of the politics of minority/majority representation.

Perceptive China scholars have noted the colorful portrayal of minorities in China as often derogatory, colonial, and useful to the state (Diamond 1988; Thierry 1989), but this extends to imperial times and is not particularly new (see Eberhard 1982). Studies of modern Chinese art have also drawn attention to the important place of

¹For recent explorations of Chinese identity, see the Dittmer and Kim (1993) collection, *China’s Quest for a National Identity*; three chapters on China in Harumi Befu’s (1993) collection, *Cultural Nationalism in East Asia*; as well as two special issues of the journal *Daedalus* (Spring 1991 and Spring 1993). The “Confucianist” argument has been most recently rearticulated by Samuel Huntington (1993:25), and more classically by Mary Wright (1957). Interestingly, none of these authors has problematized the connection between “Han” and “Chinese,” which, historically suspicious as it will be shown, nevertheless still dominates Chinese discussions of majority/minority national identity (see Yang Kun 1992).

minorities in the formation of art history in the PRC (Chang 1980; Laing 1988; Lufkin 1990). I would like to suggest here (and I believe that this is a new direction) that the objectified portrayal of minorities as exoticized, and even eroticized, is essential to the construction of the Han Chinese majority, the very formulation of the Chinese "nation" itself. In other words, the representation of the minorities in such colorful, romanticized fashion has more to do with constructing a majority discourse, than it does with the minorities themselves. This minority/majority discourse then becomes pervasive throughout Chinese culture, art, and media.

In *Woman and Chinese Modernity*, Rey Chow (1990:21) also makes the important connection between ethnicity and the construction of Chinese womanhood, but Chow's is an external argument about the Western construction of China as feminine, while I am linking internal constructions about the gendered minority Other within Chinese society. In conclusion, I also extend the argument to popular culture in general, with a reference to the interesting continuance of this discourse in the recent film, *Ju Dou*, by Zhang Yimou. Significantly, and here this study makes a contribution to those discussions that attempt to move beyond Edward Said's Eurocentric "orientalist" critique, the representation of minority and majority in Chinese art, literature, and media will be shown to have surprising parallels to the now well-known portrayals of the "East" by Western orientalists. This "oriental orientalism," and the objectification of the minority Other and majority Self in China, will be shown to be a "derivative discourse," in Partha Chatterjee's (1986:10) terms, stitched from Chinese, Western (namely Morganian and Marxist), and Japanese ideas of nationalism and modernity.

This approach rejects the traditional center-periphery construction of Chinese society, with the so-called "minorities" on the distant margins of Chinese society and nationality. It also challenges the dominant idea that "cultural change [in China] was overwhelmingly one way" (Naquin and Rawski 1987:129), or that anyone who came into China, foreigner, minority, or barbarian, was subject to "Sinicization" (Ch'en 1966, Lal 1970). In these more traditional configurations, Chinese culture functioned simultaneously, to quote James Hevia,² as both "sponge and eraser" of foreign cultures: China not only absorbed outsiders, it dissolved them, and the few that survived on the "periphery" were generally thought "marginal" to the understanding of Chinese society. During my fieldwork, I was often surprised to find that many of the reforms in China, whether they be in spheres related to the market economy, privatized agriculture, or religious and political freedom, were first allowed in minority areas, and these often directly influenced the nature and force of change among the Han (see Gladney 1990a). In this article, I want to extend the argument further and show that even in the areas of popular culture, art, film, and moral value, the so-called "peripheral minorities" have played a pivotal role in influencing and constructing contemporary Chinese society and identity. I am addressing public culture in its often state-sponsored production and reproduction, concerning myself more with representations in nationally distributed media and film, rather than with a specific field site.

I also suggest that the commodification and objectification of minorities in China represent something more than a response to Western consumer tourism, providing the state with not only hard currency, but also important symbolic capital,

²Personal communication. For my earlier critique of the "marginalizing" discourse regarding minorities in China, and its reliance upon Shils's (1975) center-periphery model, see Gladney 1991:94-96; see Appadurai (1986:745-55) for a general theoretical critique of the model and its influence upon social theory.

to use Bourdieu's (1977:6) construction. The exoticization and representation of minorities is an enterprise that took on enhanced importance with the rise of the Chinese nation-state and is central to its nationalization and modernization project: The homogenization of the majority at the expense of the exoticized minority. The so-called minorities, long confined to the margins of Western and Chinese theoretical discourse on Chinese society, are no longer marginal, and perhaps never should have been, to our understanding of contemporary China.

The Public Display and Commodification of the Minority Other in China

One cannot be exposed to China without being confronted by its "colorful" minorities. They sing, they dance; they twirl, they whirl. Most of all, they smile, showing their happiness to be part of the motherland. The four-hour Chinese New Year's program is a yearly special broadcast throughout China to its 1.1 billion population. And, even though only eight percent of that population is supposed to be minority (the *Han* majority occupy 91.96 percent of China's population according to the 1990 census), fully one-half of the evening's programming is devoted to smiling minority dancers. A brief examination of the opening minutes of the evening's program immediately reveals the crucial role minority peoples play in the contemporary construction of the People's Republic of China.

The program begins with a view of the clock tower on Beijing's Central Radio and Telegraph Building striking 8 o'clock, the time for the start of the show that lasts until midnight. It is the most popular program on television during New Year's, carried on the CCTV Central Broadcasting System that is received throughout China, including Tibet, Mongolia, and even Taiwan and Hong Kong. In my several years of fieldwork in China, I noted that most families from Beijing to Xinjiang preferred to stay at home on New Year's Eve and watch this program with relatives and a few close friends. During the 1991 broadcast, I was with Chinese friends in their apartment in Beijing, and was repeatedly told to sit and watch the program with the rest of the family, even though I preferred to catch up on local gossip. After the television clock struck 8 p.m., the doors to the elaborate stage opened to reveal a wide array of colorfully dressed minorities advancing onto the stage. After a brief introduction to the evening's program, four well-known television hosts wished the audience a "Happy New Year" and initiated the first choreographed program of the broadcast by stating: "China is a multi-national country, fifty-six different nationalities, fifty-six different flowers. The many nationalities wish to extend to all of you a Happy New Year through a special Tea and Wine Happy New Year's Toast!" The program followed with Tibetans, then Mongols, Zhuang, Uzbek, Korean, Wa, Hui, and other minority dancers presenting Buddhist "hata" (scarves), other minority gifts, and cups of tea and wine to the studio audience, singing their native songs in their native languages, with a Chinese translation superimposed on the television screen.³ The program had well over half its time

³Although the Hui do not possess their own separate language, and are known for eschewing the "songs and dances" by which many minorities are iconographically represented in China (see Gladney 1991:21-30), in this program they sing and dance like the rest of the performers. Instead of detailed lyrics from a traditional New Year's folk song (of which there are none), the Hui sing their traditional Arabic greeting, *A'salam Alei Cum* ("peace be with you"), over and over. The Chinese subtitles translated this formulaic greeting as "*Pengyou Nihao*" (Friend, hello).

devoted to minority songs and dances.⁴ In striking resemblance to the “tribute” offerings of the ancient Chinese empires, the minorities performed, sang, and presented ritualized prostrations as they offered greetings to the studio audience, who appeared to be largely members of the Han majority. They appeared so, because the studio audience was uniformly (as if in uniforms) dressed in conservative suits with ties, Mao jackets, or other formal, dark “Western” attire, in marked contrast to the “colorful costumes” of the minority entertainers. Nonminority entertainers and hosts exclusively wore Western-style suits and dresses.

After the People’s Republic of China was founded in 1949, the state embarked upon a monumental endeavor to identify and recognize as nationalities those who qualified among the hundreds of groups applying for national minority status. The question of a person’s nationality, which is registered on passports and all official documents, is decoded by Stalinist and historical criteria that determine if an individual is a member of a group that was ever linguistically, economically, geographically, or “culturally” distinct from the so-called Han majority population (see Fei 1981; Yang 1992). This recognition may make a considerable difference in obtaining certain entitlements accorded to minorities, in some cases including permission to have more than one child, obtaining entrance to a university, access to local political office, special economic assistance, and tax-relief programs. Those who were recognized by the state are always portrayed in the state-sponsored media as happily accepting that objectivized identity, as the caption for a photograph of several minorities in traditional costume pictured in a brochure introducing the “Nationalities Cultural Palace” (*Minzu Wenhua Gong*) in Beijing reads: “The Happy People of Various Nationalities” (*Minzu Gong* 1990:12). Significantly, Tiananmen, the Gate of Heavenly Peace, is bordered on both sides by the slogans: “Long Live the Chinese People’s Republic” (*Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo Wansui*) and “Working Peoples of the World, Unite!” (*Shijie renmin gongren tuanjie*). These state-sponsored signs on public buildings and in the media emphasize for the Chinese populace over and over again that China is a multiethnic and multinational state—a point that is critical to China’s representation of itself to itself, and to the international sphere. China regards itself as a multinational nation-state that must be reckoned with by other multinational, “modern” nation-states.

As multinational, China portrays itself as democratic, claiming “autonomous regions, prefectures, counties, and villages” based on the Soviet model, but in name only, since the Chinese constitution does not allow true geopolitical secession—something perhaps the conservative Russian right wing now wishes Stalin would have thought of when he approved a Soviet constitution that allowed for political secession of the (now former) republics. The myth of democratic representation is critical to China’s construction of itself as a modern multinational state, distinguishing and distancing itself from the ancient feudal Chinese empires that did not allow for representation. As Spivak (1990:105) argues, “One of the gifts of the logic of decolonization is parliamentary democracy.” Given public criticism over China’s treatment of Tibet, it is not surprising that Tibetans are often represented as the most willing subjects of Chinese “democratic liberation.” In one state-sponsored pictorial, a Tibetan is portrayed as happily voting, as if Tibetans really did control

⁴In her informative M.A. thesis, Lufkin (1990:3) observes that minority folk tales, like performers, are similarly disproportionately represented. Seventy-five percent of the more than 70 published folk tales in the magazine *Chinese Literature* from 1951–76 were by national minorities. I am grateful for her making the M.A. thesis available to me after my presentation of an earlier version of this paper.

their own destinies. The caption reads: "Happiness Ballot" (*Nationality Pictorial* 1985:10). In another published painting, several minorities are portrayed on the Great Wall, happily proclaiming in the caption, "I love the Great Wall" (*China Islamic Association* 1985:28; figure 1)—although the Great Wall was primarily built to keep nomadic peoples out. It is also interesting to note that in this figure, probably geared for school children, the figures on the Great Wall, with one exception, are clearly Muslim: the men wear Turkic and Hui (Muslim Chinese) Islamic hats, and the woman is veiled. The other man, strangely enough, is an African. Perhaps he is represented on the wall with the other minorities to represent their ethnic solidarity; more seriously, perhaps it is to emphasize their corporate "primitivity" (i.e., promoting the idea that China's minorities are like "primitive" Africans), which is key to understanding the position of the minorities in the Marxist-Maoist evolutionary scheme (see below).

The commodification of minorities is accomplished through the representing, packaging, and selling of their images, artworks, and "costumes" in the many pictorial-gazetteers, such as *Nationalities Unite* (*Minzu Tuanjie*) and *Nationality Pictorial* (*Minzu Huabao*), as well as in museum displays, such as in the "Nationality Cultural Palace," an enormous exhibition hall and conference center on Changan Avenue that houses a store selling minority artifacts and costumes as well as temporary exhibitions on minority nationalities. It is bordered by the Nationality Hotel and offices of the State Commission for Nationality Affairs, the ministry charged with administrating all dealings with minorities in China. Minority areas have boutiques, open markets, tourist stores, and even "cultural stations" (*wenhua zhan*, see Schein 1990) where minority goods are collected, displayed, sold, and modeled. Books and sets of photo cards (*minzu kapiian beji*) published by the state introduce the fifty-six nationalities of China and are widely distributed to school children, foreign students and tourists, and carried by officials on trips abroad as gifts to their host institutions. In baseball card fashion, the back of the card has each group's statistics summarizing the nationality's distinctive history, language, and culture. The nationalities themselves are portrayed on the front by a "representative" iconographic image, generally a photograph, of that group, colorful and usually female.

It is noteworthy that of the fifty-six nationalities introduced in the state-sponsored English-language pictorial *Chinese Nationalities* (1989), only three nationalities are represented in the first picture as males. All fifty-three others are represented as females, by a beautiful, alluring young woman, in a colorful "native" costume. The minorities are almost always portrayed in natural, romantic settings, surrounded by fauna and flora. Significantly, however, the Han are represented in the same book by conservative, middle-aged women in an urban setting, with what is generally thought to resemble "modern," Western-coiffured hair, dressed in Western-style sweaters, modest pants, and long-sleeved outfits (figure 2). This displays what the authors perhaps considered to be their modernity, and by extension, their normality, civility, and subjectivity. The authors of *Chinese Nationalities* chose a "modern" photo to represent the Han, not one that bears any resemblance to a "traditional" Chinese society, even though the minorities are always shown in their "traditional" dress. Instead of being represented as singing and dancing, one photo has the Han women with single infants in strollers. The caption reads: "It's good to have only one Child" (*Chinese Nationalities* 1989:20). When minority men are portrayed, and then rarely, they are generally exoticized as strong and virile, practicing strange and humorous customs, or possessing extraordinary physical abilities in sport, work, or the capacity to consume large amounts of alcohol—much more than a typical Han (*Chinese*

Nationalities 1989:16). "To drink like a Mongol" is a compliment often heard about prodigious drinking ability in China.

The state, through commodifying and representing its minorities as colorful and exotic, engages in a project familiar to the representation of colonized peoples by colonial regimes. By publishing an extraordinary collection of "orientalist" erotic post-cards, the Algerian Malek Alloula (1986) examines French observations of Algeria, and claims to be sending the post-cards back "to its sender" (Alloula 1986:5), unveiling the role of the "colonial harem" as both orientalizing the Other and subjectivizing the European Self. Through state-sponsored representation of the minority Other as exotic, much the same is accomplished in China, only in the context of what Michael Hechter (1975) has termed "internal colonialism."⁵

Essentializing the Han

The representation of the Han as "normal" and "un-exotic" is critical for understanding the construction of present-day Chinese identity. Just as Peter Worsley has shown that the discourse of First and Third Worlds helps to confirm the so-called First World's superiority (see Worsley 1984),⁶ the subordination of nationalities in China leads to the clear promotion of the Han to the vanguard of the peoples of the People's Republic. While research on the rise of Russian nationalism has been popular in Soviet studies since the 1970s, both by foreign and Russian scholars, as yet no larger studies of the creation of Han nationalism have emerged—perhaps because it is often assumed that "Han" is generally equivalent to "Chinese." Few have questioned how the Han became the 91.96 percent majority of China. Yet in China, identity papers register a person not as "Chinese" (*Zhongguo ren*), but as Han, Hui, Manchu, or one of fifty-six stipulated identities. In China, national identity is not only "imagined"; it is stamped on one's passport.

The notion of "*Han ren*" (Han person) has existed for many centuries as referring to descendants of the Han dynasty (206 B.C.—A.D. 220), which had its beginnings in the Wei River valley. However, I submit that the notion of *Han minzu* or *Han min* (Han nationality) is an entirely modern phenomenon—it arises with the shift from empire to nation. While the concept of a Han person (*Han ren*) certainly existed, the notion of a unified Han nationality (*minzu*) that occupies 91.96 percent of China's population gained its greatest popularity under Sun Yatsen. The leader of the Republican revolution that toppled China's last empire, Sun was most certainly influenced by strong currents of Japanese nationalism during his long-term stay there (the Chinese term *minzu* derives from the Japanese *minzoku*). More practically, Sun needed a way to mobilize all Chinese against the imperial rule of the Qing, a dynasty founded by a collection of northeastern nomadic peoples who became known as the Manchu. Although he certainly did not invent the idea, by invoking the argument that the majority of the people in China were Han, Sun effectively found a symbolic metaphorical opposition to the Manchu and all "foreigners," against

⁵For a discussion of Hechter's theory regarding "Internal Colonialism" and its relevance to understanding the minority situation in the former Soviet Union and China, see Gladney, *In Press*, a.

⁶In Aijaz Ahmad's (1992) controversial critique of the "Three Worlds" notion, he accuses Edward Said, Fredric Jameson, and Salman Rushdie of subscribing to an essentialized "third world" of non-Western literatures. For a response to Ahmad, see the Fall 1993 issue of *Public Culture*, especially Sprinker's (1993) critical assessment.

whom the vast majority of peoples in China would easily rally. Sun advocated the idea that there were "Five Peoples of China" (*wuzu gonghe*): the *Han*, *Man* (Manchu), *Meng* (Mongolian), *Zang* (Tibetan), and *Hui* (a term that included all Muslims in China, now divided into the Uygur, Kazakh, Hui, etc.).

It is not at all surprising that Sun would find personally appealing the idea of the Han as the national group, which included all the regional peoples and Sino-linguistic speech communities. He was Cantonese, raised as an Overseas Chinese in Hawaii. As one who spoke Mandarin with a Cantonese accent, and lacking strong connections in Northern China, he would have easily aroused the traditional northern suspicions of southern radical movements extending back to the Southern Song dynasty (960–1279 A.D.). Sun found a way to rise above these deeply embedded north-south ethnocentrism. The use and perhaps invention of the term *Han minzu* was a brilliant attempt to mobilize other non-Cantonese, especially northern Mandarin speakers, and the powerful Zhejiang and Shanghaiese merchants, into one overarching national group pitted against the Manchu and other foreigners threatening China during the unstable period following the Unequal Treaties.

In Benedict Anderson's (1983:87) poignant terms, Sun was engaged in a project of "stretching the short tight skin of the nation over the gigantic body of the empire." The "imagined" Han majority nationality and derivative minority nationalities that were created, not unlike Victor Mudimbe's (1988:23) "invention of Africa," led to the invention and legitimization of the Han. It is cultural difference between Mandarin and Cantonese, Shanghaiese and Sichuanese, that most Chinese feared would pull China apart, and the notion of the Han was one fiction encouraged to hold them together.⁷ Yet, it is interesting to note that while Sichuanese, Mandarin, Hunanese, and Cantonese restaurants are considered "ethnic" cuisines in Los Angeles, Hong Kong, and elsewhere, in China the people who produce and consume these foods are somehow not what they eat—they are not ethnic, but all considered Han. Neither the Nationalists in Taiwan nor the Communists on the mainland have challenged this generic ethnonym; it proved too fundamentally useful. The invention of Han Chinese nationalism is perhaps one of the closest realizations of Julian Huxley and A. C. Haddon's (1936) perceptive definition of a nation "as a society united by a common error as to its origin and a common aversion to its neighbors." It is surprising, however, that this concept of the Han as one "ethnic" group occupying 91.96 percent of China's population has never been seriously challenged by China scholars.

Han Modernity and the Construction of Primitivity

The Han are frequently represented as somewhere near the "modern" end of a Marxist historical trajectory upon which China's minorities must journey. Much of this derives from a continued commitment in Chinese social science to the study of minorities as "living fossils" indicating the origins of "primitive communism." Matrilineality, communal living and property holding, and even extramarital sexuality among the minorities all become "proofs" of how far the Han have come. Chinese Marxist social science has been heavily influenced by stage evolutionary theory,

⁷For a description of the rising salience of the new "politics of difference" in China, see Edward Friedman's article in this issue, and Gladney (In Press, c).

particularly as represented in the writings of the American anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan (see Yang 1992). In his famous 1878 treatise, *Ancient Society*, Morgan described in his first chapter, entitled the "Ethnical Period," the development of society from savagery, to barbarism, and then to civilization. Tong Enzheng, the Sichuanese anthropologist and museologist, criticized Chinese anthropology's heavy reliance, almost to reverence, upon this theory of societal evolution:

Because of the esteem in which both Marx and Engels held [Morgan's] works, and especially because Engels, in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, affirmed many of his views, there has been a tendency among scholars to mistakenly equate his positions with specific positions taken by Marx and Engels, positions which themselves were mistakenly equated with the fundamental principle of Marxism. As a result, Morgan's most representative work, *Ancient Society* has been canonized, and for the past 30 years has been regarded as something not to be tampered with. . . . therefore, to cast any doubt on it would be to cast doubt on Marxism itself.

(Tong 1989:182, 184)

In China, minority studies became an avenue for proving Morgan (and it was believed, Marxist thought in general) to be right, over and over again, through the examination of minorities as representatives of earlier forms of society, "living fossils" of savagery and barbarism (Tong 1989:185). The Han, as representative of "higher" forms of civilization, were clearly more evolved, and were to lead the way for minorities to follow. As if to underline the continued dominance of this theory, Fei Xiaotong (1989), China's most revered social scientist, presented a 1988 Tanner lecture in Hong Kong entitled "Plurality and Unity in the Configuration of the Chinese Nationality," which was later published in the *Beijing University Journal*. In the article, Fei traced the rise of the Han people from multiethnic origins prior to the Qin dynasty, and their almost unilineal descent down to the present day, despite absorbing and being conquered by various foreign tribes and nations.

As soon as it came into being, the Han nationality became a nucleus of concentration. Its people radiated in all directions into the areas around it and, centripetally, absorbed them into their own groups and made them a part of themselves. . . . As the non-Han rulers' regimes were mostly shortlived, one minority conqueror was soon replaced by another, and eventually all were assimilated into the Han. . . . But as the national minorities generally are inferior to the Han in the level of culture and technology indispensable for the development of modern industry, they would find it difficult to undertake industrial projects in their own regions, their advantage of natural resources notwithstanding. . . . Therefore, our principle is for the better developed groups to help the underdeveloped ones by furnishing economic and cultural aids.

(Fei 1989:39, 45, 47, 52)⁸

Fei Xiaotong's understanding of national identity and social development is based on a strong commitment to Stalinist-Leninist nationality policy, based on Morgan's theory of stage development evolutionism, and Engel's prediction of the

⁸These excerpts from Fei's 1989 article are taken from the English transcript of the Tanner lecture, which has not yet been published.

withering away of class and national identity with the removal of private property.⁹ While there are many nationalities in China, the Han are defined to be in the cultural and technical vanguard, the manifest destiny of all the minorities. While some Chinese scholars, like Tong Enzheng, are beginning to challenge the dominance of the Marxist-Stalinist-Morganian paradigm, it still heavily influences the popular discourse regarding nationalism and Han superiority in China, as well as state policy.

The popularity of this discourse is evidenced by a recent film, *Amazing Marriage Customs* (*Jingu Hunsu Qiguan*, literally, "Strange modern and ancient marriage customs"), distributed by the Nanhai Film Company. Filmed entirely in China with government approval, the film is a survey of marriage customs throughout China, with a heavy dose of minority practices, especially in Yunnan. What is noteworthy about the film is not the typical exoticization and eroticization of minorities as described below, but the deliberate structuring of the film along stage evolutionary theory. At the beginning of the film, we are shown primeval visions of a neolithic past and the emergence of primitive mankind. The narrator intones:

Getting married is natural, but during long period [sic] in history, men had no idea of "love" and "marriage." From "childhood" of human history, 3,000,000 B.C. to the end of matrilineal society in 5000 B.C., marriage history transits from group marriage, polygamy, to monogamy stage [sic]. Each stage has its own development, traces of which could be found, only three decades ago in China. . . . From 3,000,000 B.C. to 1,000,000 B.C. human society began to form. There was nothing called marriage, or it was called primitive promiscuity [*yuanshi luanbun de jieduan*, lit., "stage of primitive confused marriage"]. From 1,000,000 B.C. to 100,000 B.C. human society divided into blood families [*xueyuan jiazhu*]. Promiscuity existed, called consanguine group marriage. In matrilineal society, group marriage outside tribe [sic] started. In ancient society, nothing called marriage could be found in group marriage. The relationship was casual.¹⁰

The film then presents a succession of minorities in various stages of transition from "matrilineality" to "patrilineality," including intimate scenes of marriage and mating rites among the Naxi, Dong, Bouyi, Yao, Hani, Wa (Va), Moso, Zhuang, and Miao (Hmong). Several of these groups are described as practicing "free love" and very "open to sex." In one scene, Dong women literally become the "scenery."

⁹The "national question" was hotly debated in the Second and Third Internationals, and strong differences of interpretation about national identity, social evolution, and the relation between class and ethnicity emerged between Stalin and Lenin. China was most influenced by Stalin's conclusion that nationalist self-determination was a strategic, but temporary, necessity for the Bolshevik cause (see Connor 1984:67–101). For an excellent summary of this debate, see Blaut 1987.

¹⁰From *Amazing Marriage Customs*, directed by Suen Wan and Guo Wuji, 1992. The text cited here and below is taken directly from the English subtitles, with Chinese and some literal translations provided in brackets. A similar film survey of minority marriage customs produced in Hong Kong by Wah Ngai Film Production and King Video is entitled "The Inside Story of the Great Southwestern Forbidden Borderlands" (*Da Xinan Jinjing Tanmi*, 1990). This film, however, includes an incident in which the Bai nationality in Yunnan is described as being so "hospitable" that the host offers his wife to the guest as a sexual partner. The "custom" is then enacted explicitly on film. *Y Na Na: Woman of a Thousand Places* (1992), a film by Yvette M. Torell, replicates this exoticized portrayal of Dai, Naxi, Bai, and Tibetan women in Yunnan and Tibet, complete with the now mandatory Thai bathing scene. In a well-worn, inaccurate representation of the "Naxi" matrilineality (see McKhann's 1989 excellent critique of this characterization), Torell's introduction invites the viewer to learn from their "matriarchy." It is noteworthy that these films, like minority representation in general in China, focus almost exclusively on women and sexual relations.

They are shown bathing in the river, only barely covered by their triangular tops, and as the camera focuses on exposed breasts, the narrator states: "The (women) take a bath in the river after work, what a lovely scene. The scenery is beautiful enough, they make it more fascinating." In one particularly explicit bathing section featuring Miao (Hmong) women, the camera zooms in on a group of women disrobing completely in the river, and with long-lens shots taken through the grass in a voyeuristic fashion, the narrator notes the arrival of several men:

They've asked their lovers to come. What for? To watch! A thorough examination indeed! If he's satisfied, must do something [sic], in a very polite way of course. He present her a red ribbon, in a serious manner. Very happy indeed! The ribbon is a token for engagement. With this token she is somebody's. How romantic!

Following the "matrilineal" section, the film introduces the more conservative and covered Uygur Turkic Muslims of Xinjiang. "Islam," we are told, "respects patriarchy and husband right," and "women are subordinate," as if the Muslims represent an intermedial stage between primitive promiscuity and "modern" Han conservatism. The final scene begins with views of Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City, and, against a background of Han couples dating in the park, the narrator states:

The characteristic of modern marriage is freedom, monogamy, and equality between sexes. The law of marriage stipulates. . . . No force on either side. Or a third party interfering! Love is most essential in modern marriage. Having love affairs [*tan lianai*, lit., "speaking about love relations"] is a prelude of marriage. In the countryside of Beijing you may observe this wonderful prelude.

The film then notes that in a "modern, large city" it is often difficult to find a mate, and computerized dating is featured as a "modern" solution for finding a spouse. The film culminates with a grand mass wedding of 100 couples, dressed in formal Western attire, who were actually married at the Beijing Hotel as a result of successful computerized matchmaking. The narrator concludes: "Monogamy means equality between the sexes. This harmonious union of love, marriage, and sex life notes the result of evolution in history."¹¹

The minorities play an important role in China's official vision of history, nationality, and development. Their "primitivity" contrasts with supposed Han "modernity." Minorities become a marked category, characterized by sensuality, colorfulness, and exotic custom. This contrasts with the "unmarked" nature of Han identity. "Han-ness" for the Chinese connotes civility and modernity, and this is perhaps why the more "educated" minorities, such as the Manchu and Koreans, are never exoticized as sensual or primitive.¹² The Han, although they supposedly comprise nearly 92 percent of China's population, are rarely described or studied as Han per se, whereas whole research centers and colleges are devoted to the study and teaching of minorities in China. Anthropologists of Euro-American society have begun to

¹¹The linkage of matrilineality with existing "primitive" minorities is supported by descriptions of several groups in *China's Minority Nationalities* (Ma Yin, 1989, the translation of the standard text, *Zhongguo shaoshu minzu*). For example, "The Jino matriarchal society gave way to a patriarchal one some 300 years ago. But the Jinos were still in the transitional stage from primitivity to a class society at the time the People's Republic was founded in 1949" (Ma 1989:334).

¹²I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for bringing this point about Koreans and Manchu to my attention. The Korean minority is the most educated and one of the most economically advanced groups in China (see Lee 1986).

note a similar process in the unmarked majority category of “whiteness.” Majorities, according to Virginia Dominguez’s (1986) revealing study of Louisiana Creole identity, become “White by Definition.” It is only the so-called “ethnics” (a term in the Oxford English Dictionary that came into the English idiom denoting “heathen”) who are marked by “culture.” Majorities by extension, become denaturalized, homogenized, and essentialized as “same.” This is particularly true, according to Hobsbawm (1990:66), of Asia, where large blocks of Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans are thought to be “homogeneous.”¹³ In the West, it is “whiteness” that is beginning to be problematized in the effort to scrutinize and come to terms with minority/majority discourses.¹⁴ This has yet to be done with “Han-ness” in China.

Exoticizing and Eroticizing Minorities in China

While minorities are no longer portrayed as barbarians in China, and many of the disparaging Chinese ideographs that formerly scripted their names with “dog” and “bug” radicals were changed in 1949, their portrayal in the public the media is not only much more “colorful” and “cultural” than the Han (thanks, perhaps, to Stalin, whose four criteria adopted by the Chinese state for recognizing a people as a nationality included “culture”), but also much more sensual. One of the favorite themes is that of minority women, especially the Dai (Thai), Hani, and Li, bathing in the river.

The image of Dai (Thai) and other minority women bathing in the river has become a *leit-motiv* for ethnic sensuality and often appears in stylized images throughout China, particularly on large murals in restaurants and public spaces. School children are often encouraged to make wood-block prints of Thai bathers and other exotic representations of minorities. One of the most famous incidents regarding the public portrayal of minority nudes in China was that at the Beijing Capital Airport.¹⁵ Yuan Yunsheng returned from sixteen years of exile in Manchuria to be assigned by the state to paint a mural at the Beijing airport in 1979. He chose for his subject the Dai (Thai) people of Xishuangbana, whom he portrayed in his *Water Festival, Song of Life* on the background of a floral jungle motif, working, dancing, and, of course, bathing. However, the bathing mural on one side of the room eventually proved

¹³Eric Hobsbawm supports this widely accepted idea of Asian majority mono-ethnicity in his classic work, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 66, “. . . China, Korea, and Japan, which are indeed among the extremely rare examples of historic states composed of a population that is ethnically almost or entirely homogeneous.” Hobsbawm continues: “Thus of the (non-Arab) Asian states today Japan and the two Koreas are 99% homogeneous, and 94% . . . of the People’s Republic of China are Han” (p. 66, n. 37).

¹⁴Dominguez (1986:140ff.) chronicles the “veritable explosion” of defenses of white Creole ancestry in New Orleans once increasing polarization of white/black racial categories called attention to their identification with “blacks” despite their physical appearance as “whites.” For problematizing “whiteness,” see also Frankenberg’s (1993) excellent *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*.

¹⁵See Lufkin’s (1990:35ff.) interesting analysis of the offensive and controversial nature of this mural. Unlike most more subdued minority art, this mural, she argues, was too confrontative and too publicly exposed. For photographs of Yuan Yunsheng’s airport murals, see “Magnificent Paintings: The Murals of the Beijing International Airport,” *China Pictorial* 1980 (1):18–31; and Cohen 1987:28–36.

too problematic, and it was covered up in March 1980. Although the mural was proudly displayed in many official Chinese publications from October 1979 to early 1980, minority cadres from Yunnan began to object that the bathing mural was simply too offensive for public display and denigrating to minorities. It had also been causing a disruption in the dining room where it was exhibited because of the crowds of people who came to view it.

While the nudes eventually proved so controversial that the mural was covered up, and has since been uncovered, covered, and perhaps uncovered again, I would argue that as the murals were commissioned and approved in the first place—and displayed for nearly half a year—this indicated that the nude and even erotic portrayal of minority women was officially sanctioned.¹⁶ Partly as a result of this popular image, many northern Chinese, like the friends of my taxi driver, have flocked to minority areas to voyeuristically gaze upon this minority “custom,” to the extent that few minority women now continue to bathe this way in the more densely populated areas. From the statement of the driver at the start of this article, and the reported presence of “sex tours” to Yunnan and other minority areas, it can be argued that Thai and other minority women in China have become at a popular level, in Camille Paglia’s (1990:40) terms, the ultimate “sexual personae” for the “Eastern Eye” of the broader Han Chinese society. This objectified minority woman exudes sexuality, the very opposite of the Nefertiti-like portrayal of chaste, reserved, and bound women, which Paglia argues became the model for the Western woman, but also came to denote “modernity” for Chinese women as well, similarly restrained in their “ritual bonds” (Paglia 1990:71). While it may be argued whether the images of minority women bathers are actually “erotic” or “sensual” in the eye of the beholder, they are clearly images that do not apply to Han women, who are generally represented as covered, conservative, and “civilized” in most state publications. Nudity is often idealized and romanticized in China as being natural, free, and divorced from the constraints and realities of “modern” life. Minorities become likely subjects for such romantic yearnings. Here the audience becomes an important issue, but as in any discussion of public culture, this is difficult to assess. Suffice it to note that in official public arenas, such as airports, hotels, and government offices, images of naked Han women are rarely found. Yet representations of unclothed minority women are frequently found in the official public sphere.¹⁷

In her perceptive article on the popular David Henry Hwang play, *M. Butterfly*, Marjorie Garber (1992:123) stresses the importance of clothing in making the link between gender representation and transvestism. The link between clothing and nationality, in which minorities are generally dressed in “costumes,” while the majorities merely wear “clothes,” is clearly made in Chinese museums, popular culture, and film. The changing of clothes and the altering of a restricted Han Self is precisely the basis for the 1985 movie, *Sacrificed Youth (Qing qun ji)*. In this film by the Beijing film studio’s woman director, Zhang Nuanxin, a young Han woman from Beijing is sent down during the Cultural Revolution to the Thai (Dai) minority

¹⁶I was recently told that Yuan Yunsheng’s mural was uncovered in 1990, and has now been restored to its original eroticized form. Given the post-1989 political climate in Beijing, this may reflect another attempt to repress difference among the majority by emphasizing the erotic, exotic ways of the minority.

¹⁷The rationale for such behavior is illustrated by a comment made by a Hong Kong Chinese academic, who, appearing at a dinner party in a Hani minority costume, began to move rhythmically and sensually. When asked why she acted so out-of-character, she stated: “All of us Han from Yunnan have some minority blood in us, and the clothes just bring it out!”

region of Yunnan in Xishuangbana, near the border of Burma and Thailand, where she is confronted by more “liberated” Thai female customs. She wishes that she could be as free, and in a moment of rebellious assertion and self-transformation, she exchanges her drab, blue worker’s clothes for a Thai sarong, whereupon she is pronounced “beautiful” by her Thai hosts and girlfriends. This leads her further on the road to self-criticism and the cultural critique of repressed Han identity. In this instance of retailoring the nation, to borrow a phrase from Parker et. al. (1992:120), for Duoli, the Han woman, cross-dressing becomes a transnational political act.¹⁸

In another scene of *Sacrificed Youth*, Thai women are shown in the classic cultural trope as freely bathing nude in the river—a rare bit of soft porn for a 1985 film in China. The protagonist of the film observes the Thai women swimming from a distance and wishes that she was not so inhibited by her Han mores that she did not feel she could join them without her swimsuit. “Later,” she declares, “I learned to swim like they did, and I never wore a swimsuit again.” The bathing scene is prefaced by an encounter between a group of Thai young working women and men, who stop to sing antiphonal sexually suggestive songs to each other. Here, too, the sent-down Han observer says, “I could not join them, which made me feel inhibited and culturally behind.” Admiration for minority sexual freedom and a “natural” state of being becomes the foil by which Han majority and state-supported values are criticized. Both scenes are introduced and concluded by long shots of verdant, rushing waterfalls, suggesting perhaps that it is the natural sphere, with its cleansing element of water, that transforms what the state denigrates for Han as erotic and perhaps “pornographic” into what is natural and unfettered.

Pornography in any form is restricted in China as illegal.¹⁹ This includes any publication, foreign or domestic, that the state censors regard as morally inappropriate for its broader population. Foreign visitors in the past were regularly searched upon entry for magazines, books, and videos regarded as pornographic, and there are regular police raids upon a burgeoning black market industry of underground (literally)

¹⁸It is noteworthy that in the original book by Zhang Manling upon which this film was based, the protagonist is sent down to the rural countryside in a *non-minority* area, and the issues have less to do with dress and sensuality than with an affirmation of the naturalism of peasant life to which the Han woman must become accustomed. *Sacrificed Youth* relocates the episode to a minority area, where Han/minority issues come to the fore, further dramatizing the conservative repressiveness of dominant Han Chinese culture.

¹⁹I use the word “restricted” here because, though prohibited as pornographic for the general populace, it is possible to view foreign films with sex and nude scenes in various elite universities and training institutes. In 1983 I viewed the thought-to-be very *huang* (“yellow,” or pornographic) uncensored version of *Kramer vs. Kramer* at the Beijing Foreign Languages Institute with a group of Chinese English students, their spouses, friends, and several cadres of the university. Chinese friends frequently complained to me that literature and films regarded as pornographic and illegal for common people were readily available to elite government officials and their families. Explicit foreign films are also widely shown in the joint-venture hotels throughout China, and such access to these and other “Western” luxuries is one reason Chinese youth envy those who can obtain jobs there. Here, I must make very clear, the difference between what is erotic and pornographic in China is defined by what the state regards as legal and illegal. The point here is not about eroticism in general; it is that in China representations of Han subjects classed by the state as pornographic would not be illegal, and thus only erotic, if the Hans were *dressed* as minorities. In China, “erotic” is generally glossed as *xing aide*, (that which influences or encourages sexual love), or *xinggan* (“sexy”), whereas “pornographic” is generally translated, *seqing*, (lit. “colorful sentiment”) obliquely referring to the color yellow, which refers specifically to the pornographic press.

video parlors and markets for erotic literature.²⁰ While there has been a profusion of illicit pornographic material in the 1990s and it has become much more widely available in urban areas, it is still illegal and arrests may be made. In the mid-1980s a wide variety of magazines and books with sexually suggestive titles and scantily clothed men and women proliferated throughout the nation's bookstores and newsstands. Particularly popular was the *jian mei* ("make, or establish, beauty") genre of athletic magazines and playing cards which portrayed mainly Han Chinese and foreigners lifting weights or posing in skimpy bathing suits.²¹ State censors prohibit depiction of total nudity and these publications were frequently reviewed and confiscated. Yet despite this severe restriction upon and preoccupation with the sale of nude representations of foreign and Han Chinese women, throughout China, in state-sponsored media as well as foreign and domestic tourist shops, images of nude minority women are publicly displayed, *National Geographic*-style, in various suggestive poses. Not only are nude representations of minorities displayed in galleries and public spaces like the Beijing Capital Airport, but they are readily available for sale in hotel tourist boutiques and minority crafts shops, such as the Central Institute for Nationalities Minority Handicrafts Store and the Nationalities Cultural Palace.

Scholars of traditional China are quite familiar with the long and widespread tradition of erotic art and literature, which had little to do with minorities. In *Sex in China*, the Chinese "sexologist" Ruan Fangfu (1991:2) notes that the earliest sex manuals came from China, where one could find a classic sexological text dated in 168 B.C., *He Yin Yang Fang* (Methods of Intercourse between Yin and Yang), as well as the pre-Tang *Important Methods of the Jade Chamber, Book of the Mysterious Penetrating Master*, and other classical texts that now are found in comic book form through Taiwan and Southeast Asia, but are still restricted in China.²² After surveying this abundant traditional literature, Ruan (1991:29) groups them in three categories: descriptions of the mystical benefits of sexual intercourse; the health benefits of intercourse if following certain theories and texts; and the inherent pleasurable of sex. The Dutch sinologist, Robert Van Gulik, collected hundreds of Chinese erotic sex manuals that proliferated in the late Qing, and popular classics like *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Water Margin* are extremely explicit and rarely published in their unabridged forms.²³

²⁰Legalized "private video rooms" (*geti luxiang yuan*) are found in most cities and towns in China, showing films imported from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the West, which are frequently monitored by the local police. They are also known to show slightly risqué or even "hardcore" erotic films late at night when the authorities are not around. Even in remote rural areas, where the police are fewer and farther between, these parlors are not unusual. I recall late one night in May 1985 passing one such parlor with a long line out front, where ticket prices had been increased from 15 *fen* (cents) during the day to 5 *yuan* (Chinese currency, equivalent then to slightly less than \$2.00 U.S.) due to what I was told was the very "yellow" nature of the Hong Kong film. This parlor was quite popular, even though it was located in a Muslim minority area, within the Hezhou Hui Autonomous Prefecture in Gansu.

²¹See Orville Schell's (1989) humorous portrayal of this burgeoning industry of sexually suggestive publications, which led in part in 1989 to a widespread series of protests by Muslims offended by their depiction in a Chinese book, *Sexual Customs (Xing Fengsu)*. In response to what was termed China's "Salman Rushdie" incident, the state banned and burned the book, closed the publication house, and arrested the authors (see Gladney 1991:1-15 and In Press, a). Many of these publications have been strictly curtailed as "bourgeois liberalism" since 1989.

²²I am grateful to John Ollsen for directing me to this source.

²³The 1988 Exhibition of Nude Art (*Luoti Huaxiang Zhanlan*) shown at the Beijing Fine

If erotic images and public portrayals of Han Chinese sexuality are an acknowledged aspect of everyday life in pre-1949 China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore, why have they been so absent, so repressed, in the China mainland since 1949? George Mosse's (1985) argument linking totalitarianism and sexuality might have some bearing here. Mosse argues that unlicensed sexuality represents a threat to totalizing regimes. If Foucault (1980:24) is correct that the "policing of sex" is an important component in maintaining the unmitigated power of the central state, then China's repressive prudishness is perhaps the best example of this endeavor. The policing of sex tends also to coincide roughly with radical leftist authoritarian campaigns in China, e.g., the 1966–76 Cultural Revolution, the 1984 Spiritual Pollution campaign, and the more recent post-Tiananmen 1989–90 Six Evils campaign, in which public sexuality, pornography, and prostitution were all condemned as "feudalist" and thought to be an insidious part of the "democratic" or liberal movements that led to the crackdowns. In July 1990, the Vice President of China's Supreme People's Court, Lin Zhu, issued a new decree that traffickers in prostitution and pornography would be subject to the death penalty.²⁴ China is one of the few non-Islamic nations where prostitutes, pimps, and purveyors of pornography are routinely rounded up, imprisoned, and even, perhaps, executed under the "hoodlum offenses" statute.²⁵ Slightly explicit films, such as Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum* and more recently *Ju Dou*, all proposed, approved, funded, and produced by the state during more liberal periods, are routinely banned once more radical political winds prevail.²⁶ In other studies, Ardener (1987:114) and Mayer (1975:260)

Art Museum was the first since the founding of the People's Republic to specifically exhibit nudes. Although it also included many minority nudes, it was closed after less than two weeks, despite enormous ticket sales at more than ten times the normal price (5 *yuan* instead of 10 *fen*, equal to U.S. \$2.00 instead of the normal .03 U.S.). The state justified the early closing of the exhibition because it claimed that many of the female models had objected to the public exhibition of their nude portraits as immoral. The models' husbands publicly complained of being the brunt of others' jokes, and claimed that their wives were no longer safe from attack. The state apparently has never been worried about this problem where minority women models and their husbands are concerned.

²⁴*Sing Pao Daily*, July 18, 1990, cited in Ruan 1991:180.

²⁵Ruan (1991:83, citing a *People's Daily* February 15, 1990, article) reports that a crackdown on prostitution and pornography announced by Li Ruihuan in September 1989 netted 103 prostitutes in Beijing alone between November 25 and December 15. The Vice Minister of the Public Security Bureau reported that by January 1990, 35,000 separate cases had been prosecuted, involving 79,000 prostitutes and their customers. On April 16, 1993, Reuters reported a *Beijing Evening News* story that Wang Shuxiang was sentenced to death by the Beijing Intermediate Court for selling pornography and illegally trading in publishing quotas. A *Far Eastern Economic Review* (November 18, 1993:40–41) story, entitled "Reining in Erotica," reported on Beijing's most recent attempt to crack down on widespread pornography, including banning two books. Jia Pingao's *Fei Du* ["Defunct Capital"] and another popular book, *White Deer Park*, were both banned for their "pornographic" subject matter and "gratuitous sex scenes." The article noted that the immediate effect of the ban was to triple the sales of the books and turn the authors into national celebrities. The article also reported that Madonna was recently granted permission to perform in China if she guaranteed there would be no nudity in the show.

²⁶*The New York Times* (Kristof, February 13, 1992:A7) reported the arrest of Pan Weiming, the 42-year-old former Chief of Propaganda in Shanghai, for trying to "philander with woman." A well-known pro-democracy advocate, the Chinese Public Security Bureau managed to arrest him one year ago and give him a four-year sentence for soliciting a prostitute in Sichuan. Supporters argue it was a set-up, however, as the entrapment procedure involved videos in the hotel room and long-term surveillance of his activities, with subsequent interrogation reportedly focusing more on his pro-democracy contacts than his well-known

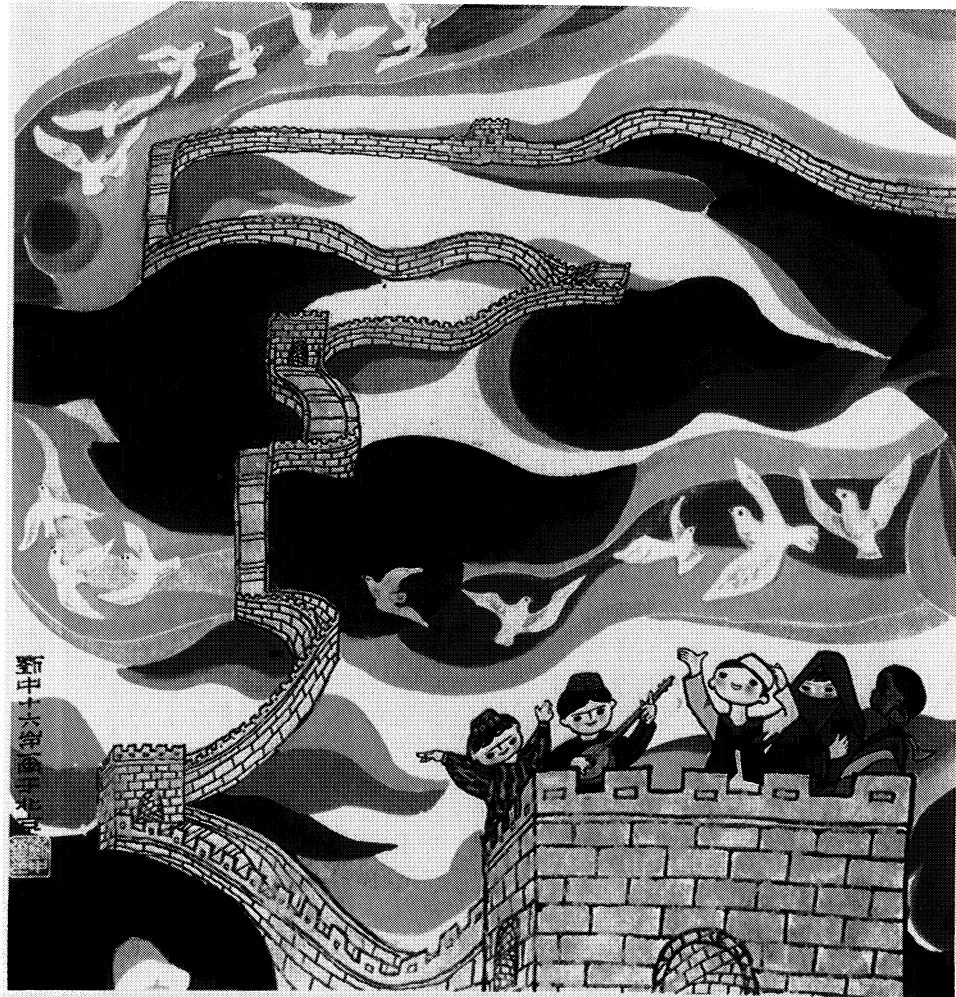
have shown how “prudery” serves to reinforce, and even invent, social hierarchies. In China, enforced prudishness and controlled fertility among the Han, as opposed to represented minority sensuality, serve the state’s national project of emphasizing Han solidarity, civility, and modernity.

Sex becomes one of the most public of private contested political spaces in China. In a state that regularly monitors the monthly menses of its women workers, engages in Malthusian birth-planning programs, and strictly regulates the age at which one can marry (21 for women, 22 for men), it is not surprising that sexuality has become highly politicized. Elsewhere, I have discussed the role that liberated sexuality played in the Tiananmen Square student protest, particularly in the students’ public attempt to wrest political control of their bodies away from the state (Gladney 1990c). Here, I am arguing that it is the repression and control of sexuality among the Han, and its open representation among the minorities, that demonstrate the important role eroticization of the engendered minority Other plays in the Han construction of Self.

Painting Minorities: The Invention of the Yunnan School

In the early 1980s, several northern Han painters were assigned to Southern China to paint minorities and other “appropriate” subjects, leading to what has since been called the “Yunnan School” (*Yunnan Huapai*) of modern Chinese painting. The Yunnan School has been regarded as one of the first distinct “schools” to emerge in contemporary Chinese art and has had a tremendous influence on the current generation of artists in China. In the early 1980s, Jiang Tiefang, Ting Shao Kuang, and He Neng became known in China for challenging accepted norms of painting, particularly including nudes with accentuated breasts in brilliant colors. This led, according to Joan Lebold Cohen, critic and dealer of Chinese art, to the founding of the “Yunnan School of Heavy Oil Painting in 1982” (Cohen 1988). It is significant that Ting Shao Kuang, one of the most prominent and successful members of the “school” has stated repeatedly that there is no such organized “school”; rather, his and other similar work represents a style of art that is new in its subject matter (mainly minorities), and style (use of heavy oil and bright colors in abstract forms). In a July 11, 1992, taping interview with Ting Shao Kuang by the Los Angeles Chinese television station, Channel 18, Ting stated: “There is no such thing as the Yunnan Art School. We are all different artists from China trying to revolutionize the repressed mainland Chinese painting through the use of minority subjects, sexuality, and heavy oil colors, in often Western-influenced styles.” It is revealing that Ting should now say this, since one of his well-known paintings is entitled “Dawn of the Yunnan Art School” (*Ting* 1990:11), and he has become one of the wealthiest and most successful representatives of the Yunnan Art School style. The “Yunnan School” may very well exist only in the West, where it has met with tremendous financial success. Cohen (1988), claiming that the school represents a

sexual dalliances. In a recent crackdown, the Sichuan Fine Arts publishing house was closed down for printing obscene books, and two others were cited (*Turkish Daily News*, April 22, 1993:2). The reporter noted: “Chinese authorities have a very broad definition of pornography that often includes just about any depiction of the human body that is not in a medical or scientific context.”



劉中十六歲

我爱长城 刘中

"I Love the Great Wall" Liu Zhong

أحب سور الصين العظيم ، ريشة : ليو تشونغ

Figure 1. Caption reads: "I Love the Great Wall" in Chinese, English, and Arabic (*China Islamic Association* 1985:28).

The Han Nationality

936.7 million nationwide



The ancestors of the Han nationality can be traced back to ancient Huaxia nationality, which lived around three rivers—the Yellow River, the Yangtze River and the Pearl River—and the Song Liao Plain. The name “Han” appeared after Eastern Han Dynasty and continued to be in use till today.

Today’s Han nationality is a result of long-time national integration with other nationalities in the long course of historic development. In China’s history, there used to be many national exodus and integration, enabling the Han nationality to be the most populous and the most economically and culturally developed nationality in China. At present, Han people living in all the provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions account almost for 94 percent of the total population, also the most populous nation in the world.



A spring outing.

Figure 2. “The Han Nationality.” Representation in *Chinese Nationalities* (1989:8).

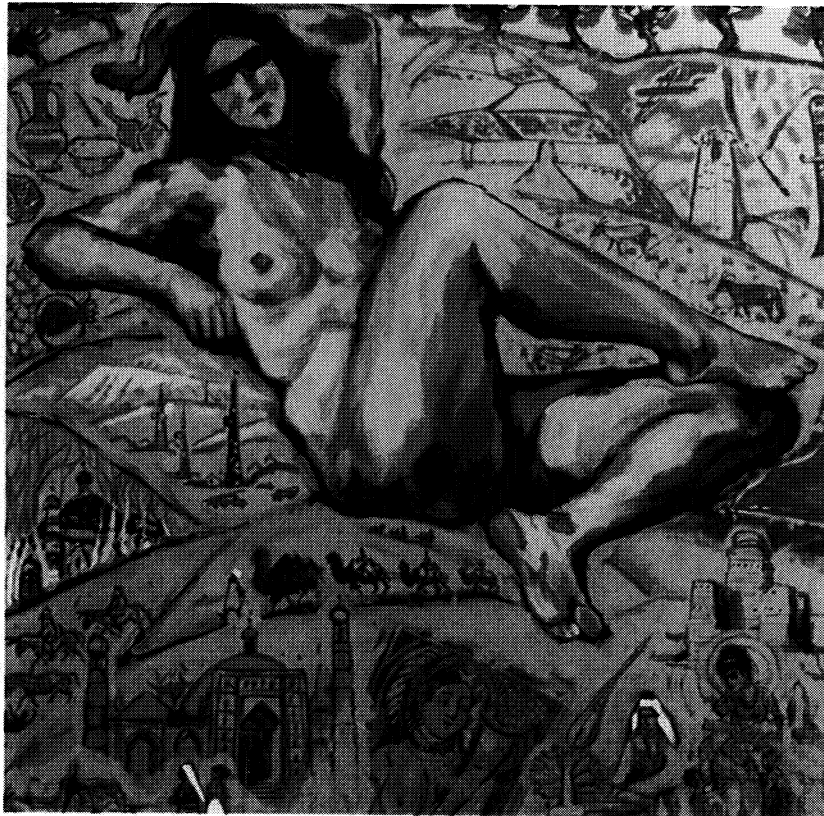


Figure 3. Muslim representation in Zhao Yixiong painting, *The Awakening of Tarim*. In Joan Lebold Cohen, *The New Chinese Painting*, 1987:54. Published with permission.



Figure 4. Ting Shao Kuang painting, *Silk Road*. In *Ting Shao Kuang*, 1990:7.



Figure 5. Uygur women in the Kashgar bazaar, traditionally covered in the Uygur *chumperdab*, September 1988. Photo: Dru Gladney



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PLAYING WATER, 1988, 32" x 32" image size, 33 color serigraph with hand-deckled edge. Deluxe edition printed on Natsume Japan paper

Jiang

Figure 6. Jiang Tiefang painting exhibit brochure. Painting entitled *Playing Water*, 1988. Published with permission, Fingerhut Group Publishers, 1992.

“renaissance” in Chinese painting, suggests that the most significant event in the development of the Yunnan School was when He Neng, Jiang Tiefang, and Liu Shaohui were commissioned to produce paintings for a documentary film project “featuring the costumes, habits and environment of the various minority peoples living in Yunnan” (Cohen 1988:5). By traveling to the minority areas, Cohen explains, the northern Han artists found that they could express many of their artistic interests through the color and style of minority representation.

Liu Bingjiang’s *Nude* (in Cohen 1987:46), shown at the Oil Painting Research Association Exhibition in Beijing 1979, is clearly a minority representation, indicative of early Yunnan School tendencies. On a colorful background, a dark-skinned female nude is realistically portrayed kneeling with her hands on the ground in a submissive posture, wearing nothing but her jewelry. Given the tapestry background, her jewelry, and most importantly, the posture, the painting is one of the earliest works in the Yunnan School style. According to Cohen (1987:46), her kneeling position is not within the officially sanctioned “academic painting repertoire” and thus suggests to Cohen a “South Asian” influence. It is important to note that the bracelets she wears clearly resemble shackles and, combined with the posture, the painting evokes erotic subservience and submission.

Unlike abstract Han figure paintings, it has been and still is officially acceptable to vividly and realistically paint, exhibit, and sell minority nude artwork. In another example, Chen Zhangpeng’s oil of a nude is appropriately titled *Innocence*. Reflecting Western influence, especially Gauguin, Picasso, and even Andrew Wyeth, this painting situates the exoticized minority subject in both the past and the present. Cohen’s caption explains: “Chen’s sketchy study of a nude kneeling next to a tiger expresses the ancient Chinese idea that the untrammelled nature of the wild creature is innocent. Likewise, *primitive* people, uncorrupted by civilization, are innocent, a concept similar to Rousseau’s romantic notion of the noble savage” (Cohen 1987:65, emphasis in original).

The “innocence” of minorities in China contrasts well with representations of Han Chinese women as the modern workers of the industrialized nation who, Chairman Mao once declared, “Hold up half the sky.” The notion that the minorities represent the “primitive” and beautiful “noble savage,” unsullied by Chinese political machinations and the degradations of modern society, is an important theme for China’s modern artists. It may very well represent a Gauguinesque romanticization of the “savage” in contrast to the modern alienation of Chinese urban life. It may also be viewed as a cultural critique, or rejection, of modern Han China; an accepted venue for criticizing the depersonalizing, totalizing state.

In an interview with the Yunnan painter, Xiao Jiahe, a former student of Jiang Tiefang, and himself a minority, the son of an intermarriage between a Han and a Jingpo, he stated that he liked to paint minorities because “They are pure and beautiful. It makes me feel peaceful when I paint them.” When I asked him why seven of the ten paintings in his exhibition, with such titles as *Ancient Girl*, *Tara’s Toilette*, *Summer Solstice*, *Blossoms*, *Morning Prayers*, and *Homage to the Spring*, portrayed minority women in kneeling, submissive poses, with voluptuous, scantily clothed figures, he said: “Because I like the human body, and I think this portrays the essence of female beauty. It’s also difficult to capture an entire woman’s body in a small painting if she is standing” (personal interview, July 30, 1991). It is significant that in later conversations, Xiao explained that when he came to the United States, he was urged by American gallery owners and agents, particularly the Allen H. Fingerhut Group, who strongly promote most of the Yunnan Art School paintings

(and published Cohen's 1988 book on the "Yunnan School"), to increase his use of motifs and colors popularized by the Yunnan Art School, since these works sold well in the U.S. "They told me to use more pastel, gold, and bright colors; to paint beautiful, large-breasted women in elongated form, and to use 'ethnic' clothing. I even included a lot of African clothing because of my interest in Africa. I tried to make my art look more erotic (*xing aide*) but not pornographic (*se qing*)" (personal interview, July 30, 1991). Though most of his artwork was enthusiastically received, comments from viewers at one of his exhibits were critical of his representation of minority women and caused him to reevaluate the Yunnan Art School style. "I have since rejected the Yunnan Art School," he told me in a later interview (February 29, 1992). "They are only interested in making money, repeating the same old salable paintings. It is too repetitious. It is not art. . . . I refuse to jeopardize my artistic career just to make money."²⁷

By objectifying minority women as colorful, exotic, and erotic, by denying them their individuality and subjectivity, these Chinese artists are engaging in an anthropological enterprise well established by Lewis Henry Morgan, Franz Boas, and other early American historicists who posited a "common psyche" shared by all "primitives." Though Boas and later anthropologists stressed individual contributions to the construction of cultural artifacts, and through painstaking ethnographic work brought to light the individual contributions of many "primitive artists," his commitment to the notion of a common cultural determinism and psyche in artistic construction nevertheless contributed to the objectification of the minority Other. In his pathbreaking 1927 study of *Primitive Art*, Boas revealingly wrote: "The same motif recurs over and over again in the tales of primitive people, so that a large mass of material collected from the same tribe is liable to be very monotonous, and after a certain point has been reached only new variants of old themes are obtained" (Boas 1927 [1955]:330). It is precisely the repetitive nature of "primitive" art construed as generic, unsigned, and anonymous, that makes it so attractive to the "modern" collector: Since primitives are all similar in their artistic representations, their artwork and thought patterns homogenized by a uniform culture, why should one piece of art need a signature? According to Sally Price, it is its anonymity and timelessness that make primitive art so attractive to the time-bound, modern individual: "In the Western understanding of things, a work originating outside of the Great Traditions must have been produced by an unnamed figure who represents his community and whose craftsmanship respects the dictates of its age-old traditions" (Price 1989:56).

Significantly, the use of "traditional" minority art, colors, and styles may be said to have paved the way for the public reintroduction of the Han nude in China, but only in a highly stylized, Picasso-like form. Western motifs, styles, and color,

²⁷Exhibition comments on Xiao Jiahe's works included the following: "Your work reminds me of Gustav Klimt's gold period, Picasso's colors after Cubism, Kokoschka's hands, Miro's organic shapes, Native American Indian women . . ." "An enthralling body of works, full of magical shapes and curves, flowing like everlasting rivers. A joy to see." "Talented, yes! Evocative, yes! But because your main subject in this exhibition is young, nubile women (one model?), I could see you having commercial success in advertising art." "I feel that the two best paintings were the one of the peasant and the weaver's daughter. You unquestionably have tremendous talent, however, what distinguishes these two over the others was the subject. The beautiful young woman in each painting offers no insights into the female human being. She is more object than an exploration of the subject . . ." (Handwritten comments from the July 5–30, 1991, exhibition, "Works by Chinese Artist Xiao Jiahe," Memorial Union, University of Wisconsin-Madison).

with minority subjects, become a thinly veiled means of challenging traditional Chinese artistic conventions. Han female nudes, when they are officially and publicly represented at all, are generally in highly stylized forms, often in the Picasso genre, as a famous oil, *Daughter of the Sea*, by Jiang Tiefang demonstrates. An exhibit brochure features a print of Jiang's 1988 *Playing Water* (figure 6), an eroticized and Picassoesque portrayal of the Yunnan Thai water festival, including black sensuous dancing figures with large breasts and nipples accentuated in bright red. The back of the promotional brochure reads:

Jiang Tie-Feng is the most influential contemporary artist of the People's Republic of China. His "Yunnan School" represents the first new Chinese art movement in 700 years, and the rebirth of artistic traditions that have been repressed since the Ming Dynasty.

(Fingerhut Group Publishers, painting brochure, 1992)

The Picassoesque portrayal of Han women and the abstract representations of the minority women have become so popular now in the West that not only have Chinese artists like Jiang Tiefang, He Neng, and Ting Shao Kuang become extraordinarily successful and wealthy, purchasing houses in Bel Air and Beverly Hills, but they have spawned a whole lucrative industry now sweeping the upscale art industry in China and abroad. After he visited a Shanghai exhibition of his work in Spring 1992, Ting told me that he was literally mobbed by his fans. "If I had painted Han that way when I was in China before, they probably would have arrested me. Now I am a hero" (personal interview, July 11, 1992).

The Austin Galleries is a series of chic art dealerships with galleries in Chicago, Detroit, San Francisco, Carmel, and Laguna Beach. At the well-appointed Chicago gallery, I was attracted in November 1991 by a large Yunnan-School painting of a minority dancer prominently displayed in the glass case fronting onto Michigan Avenue. Not only were there several Yunnan-School-style paintings by a Han Chinese immigrant, Wu Jian, but there were similar versions by a certain artist, Wong Shue, who turned out to be originally from Jamaica. The gallery consultant, Bella Cipkin, explained that the genre is the best-selling artwork in the gallery, with large paintings selling for \$8,000–\$10,000, and that many artists are beginning to copy the flowing, colorful style. Cipkin noted: "The mauve colors and liberating minority art in its breathtaking sensuality go well with the furnishings in professionals' homes." She also went on to suggest that one of the reasons the art might be becoming more popular in the U.S. was that it represented minority art: "What with the problems in Tibet and all, Americans want to support the ethnic people in China all they can." Again, it is important to note here that very little of the Yunnan-School art is produced by minorities themselves.

Marginalizing the Center of Chinese Film

"Minorities film" has followed oil painting in reforming the accepted norms of Chinese taste. Paul Clark (1987a:20), critic of Chinese film, argues that it is the "propensity of minorities film to explore normally avoided subjects" that made them so successful and influential. In a Channel 4 documentary on "New Chinese Cinema," Wu Tianming, the director of the now-famous Xi'an Film Studio, where many of

the influential "fifth generation" filmmakers were working (including Zhang Yimou, Tian Zhuangzhuang, and Chen Kaige), quoted a Chinese proverb: "When there's no tiger on the mountain, the monkey is king," indicating that it is distance from the centers of power such as Beijing and Shanghai that allowed his studio the freedom for exploration. In the Channel 4 documentary, the young director of the new, more realistic minority films, *On the Hunting Ground* (1985) and *Horsethief* (1986), Tian Zhuangzhuang, explained why he chose to film in minority areas:

I had several reasons. For one, Beijing Film Studios wouldn't let us direct when we were assigned there. . . . *On the Hunting Ground* and *Horsethief* may deal with regional minorities [lit: minority nationalities], but they're actually about the fate of the whole Chinese nation.

(*New Chinese Cinema* 1988)

According to Paul Clark in his analysis of *Chinese Cinema*, it is the search for a "national style" (*minzu fengge*) that was lacking among the Han that directors found among minorities. "Paradoxically, one of the most effective ways to make films with 'Chinese' style was to go to the most 'foreign' cultural areas in the nation" (Clark 1987b:101). The search for a national identity in China, apparently became more readily understood in opposition and contrast to minority cultures thought to be more vibrant and easily objectified than that of the amorphous, invented Han Chinese Self. Through the representation of minorities as sensual, liberated, and colorful, Chinese filmmakers and artists found a "metaphorical resource".²⁸ They were able to introduce taboo and often illegal art into the Chinese cultural mainstream. These artistic motifs then eventually influenced the broader Han majority-accepted cultural repertoire of artistic convention, leading to the establishment of a "national" style and identity.

Through the national medium of officially approved film, Han national identity becomes clearly objectified. In Zhang Nuanxin's *Sacrificed Youth*, two scenes depict an explicit rejection of sensual involvement by the female protagonist, precisely because she is a "Han." In the first instance, Duoli, the Beijing Han woman sent down to the countryside, is teased while gathering firewood in the forest by her Thai coworkers about an ox-cart ride home from a Beijing male she had met in the marketplace. When she protests that there is nothing between them, her coworkers chide, "Don't be afraid to tell us!" She replies: "We are Hans, you know, we don't start love affairs that young" [*literal translation*: "We are Han people, we don't talk about love that early"].²⁹

In the second instance, she is sitting alone with the very same Han youth late at night in the dark, romantic forest, listening to the enchanting music of a distant Thai celebration.

Duoli: What are they singing?

Male friend: Can't you tell? "My lover's hands are tender and fair."

Duoli: Don't they find it embarrassing?

Male: Why should they? Isn't it better to speak out one's feelings? Unlike we Hans, always beating around the bush.

²⁸James Hevia, personal communication.

²⁹In this article, "literal" refers to my translation of the original spoken or written text, while the translated or subtitled versions are given where available, unless otherwise noted.

Duoli: Speak out yourself then, no one tries to stop you.

Male: But can you?

Duoli: Why not?

Male: OK. What's on your mind now?

Duoli: I . . . I find . . . it's getting cold. Let's go home.

Male: Is that all?

Duoli: Yes.

Male: [while gazing at her in her sarong]: You are a Han from head to toe. (*Literal*: No matter what you say, you still are a Han).

In an interview with Zhang Nuanxin, the director of *Sacrificed Youth*, published in *Camera Obscura*, Zhang states that she made the film to encourage the expression of Han female subjectivity and beauty:

After I read the original short story by Zhang Manling, I felt there were many things in it that I'd experienced myself. I'd been down in the countryside, too. I'd felt that the older and less attractive clothes were, the better. When we were very young, we couldn't make ourselves attractive, nor could we express love.

(Zhang Nuanxin 1989:21)

Indeed, it is the need for self-discovery, awareness, and expression that Chris Berry (1991:6) has argued pervades much of "women's cinema" in China. Yet it is only by going to minority areas and contrasting the repressed, bounded Han female self to the constructed minority Other as unrestrained and beautiful that these goals can be explored on the screen. This goes against Julia Kristeva's (1986:45) utopian construction of the position of women in Confucianized Chinese society, and though it is framed as a Western critique, I agree with Rey Chow (1990:6) that it nevertheless idealizes the position of women in China to an inexcusable degree.

There are important parallels here to the *National Geographic* tradition of the sexual portrayal of the Other for a conservative readership, which generally regards such portrayals of its "own" as pornographic.³⁰ Clearly, in both cases there is a hierarchy of self: voyeurism of the Other is permissible when they are regarded as less familiar, less civilized, than one's own. As Paul Clark has argued in an *East-West Film Journal* article, "Ethnic Minorities in Chinese Films: Cinema and the Exotic," film in China from the beginning was regarded as a foreign medium, a venue for viewing the exotic and strange. When China became closed to the outside world after 1949, minorities for the first time *took the place of foreigners* as subjects of the exotic. As Clark (1987a:15–16) explains: "Film audiences could travel to 'foreign' lands without crossing the nation's borders."

But I would go farther than Clark's emphasis on fascination with the exotic. In China there is more to it than the typical *National Geographic*-style romanticization of the primitive, which one might argue is found in almost any society. Here, the state is intimately tied to, in control of, and provides funding for the politicized process of portraying the Other. In Said's (1978) terms, the state has turned its gaze upon the internal other, engaging in a formalized, commodified, oriental

³⁰For an excellent deconstruction of the eroticized, exoticized image of the "primitive" in *National Geographic*, see Lutz and Collins' (1993) *Reading National Geographic*.

orientalism, that may be focused on the minorities but represents a long tradition of fascination with the outsider in Chinese society.³¹ The real issue here is why the state should choose to explicitly support such an enterprise. I argue that the politics of this representation of the minority Other are both an extension of power-relation practices in the traditional Chinese state, as well as a product of China's rise as a nation-state.

Contesting and Coopting Otherness: Eroticizing (Even) the Muslims

While minorities appear to have had little choice in the way they have been exoticized in the media, and Han must also deal with their *de*-exoticized essentialization, there have been several attempts at contesting that restricted space. Not only did the student democracy movement emphasize the sensual, the unique, and the individual, but recent films such as *River Elegy (He Shang)*, *Sacrificed Youth*, *Red Sorghum*, and *Ju Dou* all represent various popular levels of contestation (see Wang 1989:32). Minorities have also attempted to voice their objections. The covering up of the nude bathing portion of Yuan Yunsheng's Beijing Capital Airport painting was partly due to complaints from Yunnan minority cadres. In Urumqi, Xinjiang, I witnessed a large group of Uygur Muslim artists rallying in protest in 1987 over an exhibition at the Overseas Chinese Hotel of portrayals of Uygurs and other Central Asians by Han artists that they claimed denigrated them as either too humorous or too sensual. Paintings primarily by Han artists portrayed the Uygurs singing, dancing, riding donkeys, and balancing watermelons on their heads. Worse yet, many paintings portrayed Uygur women in revealing skirts engaged in erotic dances, such as Ting Shao Kuang's *Silk Road* (figure 4), which portrays a bare-breasted minority woman on a background of deserts and camel caravans. For many Uygurs, these representations are particularly offensive, as they regard themselves as conservative Muslims.

While one might be prepared to allow for the possibility that southwestern minorities may have more "open" sexual practices than the typical Han in China today, they are not the only minorities portrayed as sensual and erotic. While Thai women did traditionally bathe in the nude (although many may fear to now), and the Moso as a possible matrilineal society may very well have allowed extramarital sexual practice at the matrilocal residence, the Uygurs and other Muslim peoples can hardly be said to be more publicly erotic or sensual than the Han in their traditional culture (see Gladney 1990b). Uygur women are widely known throughout China to traditionally cover themselves with *pardab*-like head scarves and wraps that envelop their entire faces and hair (known as *chumperdab* in Uygur, figure 5). Unlike the Middle East *pardab*, where eyes are generally exposed, Uygur *chumperdab* cover the entire face. As Muslims, they are generally much more conservative than Han Chinese in the public sexual sphere. Despite their protestations, these representations continue, underscoring the extraordinary contrast between the Han and the minority spectacle in China.

³¹Louisa Schein (1990), in a provocative analysis, uses the notion of "internal orientalism" to describe this project. In China, this fascination with the exotic has extended not only to the minority nationalities, but to representations of foreigners as well.

Like many tourist hotels, the Sheng Tang ("Flourishing Tang") Hotel in northeast Beijing has a tile mural of a Tang-dynasty minority dancer, with accentuated nude breasts, in the center of its main dining hall. On the opposite walls, erotic stylized murals from the Dunhuang Buddhist grottoes grace the dining room. Like many public places in China, the sensual "Flying *Absarases*" are an officially sanctioned art subject (Cohen 1987:17–20). I once asked a group of Han scholars viewing this mural if they thought the dancers were minorities or Han, and they all said minorities, even though the theme is from the Buddhist caves of Dunhuang, supposedly the cradle of *Chinese* Buddhist religious tradition. While Buddhism became transformed into a "Chinese" religion, its sensual representation in art and *absarases* has apparently retained the attributes of foreigners and minorities, not Han.

In the Chinese tourist pictorial, *A Picture Album of Turpan Landscape and Custom* (1985:16), a Han artist, Gu Shengyue, portrays the sensual images of the Dunhuang caves, with floating female *absarases* and their accentuated breasts, hovering above him, almost as if to say: "Though these Uygur claim to be Muslim, we know what they are really thinking about when they sing and dance." They have become yet another landscape in the national repertoire of China. In another portrait from the same pictorial, sensual Buddhist figures are portrayed hovering above ecstatic Uygur dancers (*Picture Album* 1985:18). Central Asian dance and artistic display come to represent a metaphor of sensuality and eroticism for Han China, even though the region is now dominated by Muslims.

Extremely realistic is the figure painting *Nude with Apples* (in Cohen 1987:101) by Tang Muli, a Han artist who has traveled widely abroad. With a Central Asian *doppa* hat, sitting upon a Xinjiang carpet and eating apples, often produced in China's dry, cold northwest, the realist painting of a complete frontal nude is clearly meant to portray a Central Asian minority, although the model may very well be Han. Perhaps Tang Muli knew that a Han woman could rarely be portrayed so vividly and realistically. Yet, this is despite the fact that Muslims are the most conservative of all peoples in China.

The last painting of eroticized Muslims I will note is also the most startling: Zhao Yixiong's 1979 oil, *The Awakening of Tarim* (figure 3). Of this controversial painting, Cohen (1987:54) writes: "Tarim symbolizes the beginnings of modernization on the edges of the great Takla Makan, China's most terrible desert. She awakens on a vibrant patchwork of Silk Road images: camels, mosques, oil derricks, Buddhist deities, oases, grapes, gourds, and pomegranates." While paintings of Uygur and other Muslims by Han artists such as Huang Zhou have had a long history in China, they were never so eroticized as Zhao Yixiong's. His painting makes clear the dramatic linkage between nationality, woman, and modernity: By depicting his nude Uygur female subject as "awakening" from the midst of her traditional life to a "modern" world filled with oil rigs, airplanes, and nuclear installations, Zhao Yixiong perhaps suggests that it is only in throwing off the traditional minority culture of Islam, with its covered women, mosques, and caravans, that Tarim, the woman and the region, can be modernized. With a mosque minaret, and camel caravans emerging from between her thighs, this painting would, of course, be extremely offensive to Uygurs. Nevertheless, it was commissioned to be painted by Zhao Yixiong, who, as a painter for the Chinese Museum of Chinese History and Revolution, is employed by the state to represent the Other in strikingly similar orientalist fashion to that of Alloula's *The Colonial Harem*.

Cohen informs us that Zhao's painting was not allowed to be exhibited by the Chinese authorities. One might assume this was because of its explicit, erotic nature.

Yet, according to Cohen (1987:54): "The [Oil Painting Research Association] excluded it because of the green streak on the woman's buttocks—an Expressionist gesture that was apparently thought to be offensive." Extraordinarily, *expressionistic representation* was rejected as improper for minority portraiture in favor of explicit realism. By contrast, *realistic representation* of the Han female body has been restricted by the Chinese state. Just as the subordination of Chinese women reifies the elevated position of men, so the exoticization of minorities essentializes the imagined identity of the Han and reaffirms Han feelings of superiority. Public, state-sponsored minority representation as both more sensual and more primitive than the Han supports the state's agenda: With the proper educational and economic progress they will eventually attain the modernity that the Han have attained and enter into the same civilized restrictions under the authority of the state as vanguard. Symbolic tribute by minorities becomes an important link with China's past, establishing their own feudal pasts, and a signal of who will lead the future. It also legitimates the state's authority to enforce homogeneity, morality, and "civility" among the nearly 92 percent Han majority, while difference is "temporarily" tolerated among the "backward" minorities. In a socialist society that claims to be post-Confucian, gender and ethnic hierarchies continue to be articulated in a discourse of morality—the proper ordering of the social universe. It is precisely resistance to that order that makes the film *Ju Dou* so controversial.

Conclusion: Woman as Minority and Other in China

The furor over the nominating of the film *Ju Dou* for an academy award in 1991 was primarily due to its offensiveness to Chinese moral and hierarchical sensibilities, according to the press (WuDunn 1991:B1). Not surprisingly, *Ju Dou* was made by a product of the Xi'an film studio, director Zhang Yimou, who starred in Wu Tianming's iconoclastic film *Old Well*. *Ju Dou*, a young bride, is physically abused for not being able to become pregnant by her elderly, probably impotent, husband. She is beaten repeatedly, tied, and even pinned down by a horse-saddle on which her elderly husband sits while he sexually abuses her, in what may probably be China's first, and perhaps last, bondage-style film. In order to save herself (the old man had already beaten to death two previous wives), she seduces his adopted son, and the resulting story of their infidelities is what many Chinese found offensive. Just as *Ju Dou* is expected to accept her fate, even at the point of death, so are Han Chinese women required to restrict their sexuality in the service of the state. Similarly, minority women are allowed to be portrayed erotically because that, too, serves the interests of the regime. This may also be a contributing factor in the state's general exemption of most minorities from the birth-planning program.³² Minority women are encouraged to be fecund, their bodies are less controllable than those of the ritually bound Han women. Although minority under-population is

³²Until recently, minorities were allowed to have one or more children than the Han in their area. I found that this policy in practice meant that in most rural areas, minorities had as many children as they wanted (Gladney 1991). Post-1989 attempts to institute birth-planning in Mongolia and Xinjiang have led to riots among the minorities who argue China's policy of encouraging Han "assimilation through immigration" had led to excessive Han population growth in their areas.

the main reason usually given for their exemption from birth-planning restrictions, perhaps an additional metaphorical reason is that minorities represent uncontrolled sensuality, fertility, and reproductivity; Han represent controlled, civilized productivity. Yet it is primarily not women's bodies that are at issue; it is the state's (and, by extension, the patriarchal male's) control of them.

In a fascinating parallel to the "Thai-bathers" motif pervading much of minority art, there is a critical moment in *Ju Dou* in which Yang Tianqing, the adopted son, voyeuristically observes Ju Dou bathing through a hole in the washroom wall. This scene bears striking resemblance to the voyeurism of the Miao men and film viewers of Miao women bathers in the *Amazing Marriage Customs* film and the bathing scene in *Sacrificed Youth* described above. In each case it is water and bathing that lead to the voyeuristic gaze and the construction of the sexual object. As he enlarges the hole for a better view, she discovers him and covers the hole with straw from the inside of the washroom. Later, she once again finds that he has removed the straw from the inside for an unobstructed view. This time, however, in a radical departure from traditional Chinese female modesty (but more like the Miao and Thai bathers), she actually attracts his attention by deliberately making washing sounds, and then allows him to view her naked body, savagely marked by his adopted father's beatings. The shock engendered by her beautiful but grotesquely bruised body both compels and humiliates the viewer. Similarly, Han voyeurism of minority women and the submission of Han women to the patriarchal social order are what the state, for its own self-perpetuating reasons, considers proper in China.

Zhang Yimou's reversal of those roles in *Ju Dou* delegitimizes the state's authority to objectivize the Other, both woman and minority, and this may be an important factor in the state's attempt to prevent its nomination for an Academy Award. By turning her gaze directly back on the adopted son, Ju Dou both humiliates him and establishes her subjectivity, resisting his use of her as an object of sexual desire. By taking her affairs into her own hands, and later seducing him, she establishes her own identity and asserts individuality.

Minorities, too, by allowing the objectivizing gaze of the state-sponsored media, establish their identity and right to a voice in their own affairs, appropriating and turning, whenever possible, these objectivizing moves to their own benefit. In this way, the maintenance and assertion of minority "culture," no matter how exoticized or contrived, may be seen as a form of resistance. By participating in their "training" by the Han Chinese state, supporting minority art and culture, they often find ways to promote values that may be contrary to the state's modernizing program. These glimpses of a more naturalized, colorful, liberated and sensual lifestyle, that urban Han Chinese now find so alien to their own living situations, contributes to their popularity as colonized and gendered subjects (see Chatterjee 1989:624). It also might explain why minorities and their exoticized portrayal in the Yunnan Art School are extremely popular in the West, where many long for a similar naturalized lifestyle, often as a way of critiquing China's image as a totalitarian homogenizing state. Successful marketing of these images in the global capitalist economy perpetuates minority/majority discourses in China and abroad. The appearance within and without China of books, courses, and institutions devoted to the study of "China's Minorities" reflects this homogenization: the pretense that one could draw a clear line between the minorities and the rest of "Han" China. This article has argued otherwise, attempting to directly link minority with majority discourses in the public sphere. In China and elsewhere, constructing minority identities is directly related to that of the majority. As Han-ness is related to "whiteness," so the majority in China is

invented as an unmarked category, courtesy of a subjugated, stigmatized, and identified minority.

Though alienated moderns may wax nostalgic over exoticized representations of imagined pasts, the belated arrival in China of Hobsbawm's (1991:163) universalized "nationality principle" coupled with the government's expressed desire to be reckoned as a "modern nation-state" indicates that the identification, and exploitation, of minorities for tourist dollars and nationalization programs will mean their continued stigmatization as exoticized subjects—a stigma that they may only infrequently turn to their own benefit. Minority co-optation of these motifs may help increase their own autonomy, turning the tables of representation. Yet these attempts at subjectivity and independence will always be threatening to any totalizing, objectivizing state that seeks homogeneity of the majority at the expense of the minority. It is no surprise that *Ju Dou* was banned and that minorities are encouraged to do little more than sing and dance in the People's Republic.

Glossary

Daizu	傣族	Thai nationality
geti luxiang yuan	个体录像院	private video rooms
Hanizu	哈尼族	Hani nationality
Han minzu / Hanzu	汉族 / 汉族	Han nationality
Han ren	汉人	Han person
He Shang	河殇 (殇)	River Elegy
He Yin Yang Fang	合阴阳方	Methods of Intercourse between Yin and Yang
huang	黄	"yellow," the Chinese euphemism for pornographic subject matter
Huizu	回族	Hui nationality, a term that included all Muslims in China, now divided into the Uygur, Kazakh, Hui, etc.
jian mei	健美	make or establish beauty
jianmei kopian	健美卡片	"make beautiful" cards
Jingpozu	景颇族	Jingpo nationality
luoti huaxiang zhanlan	裸体画像展览	exhibition of nude art
Manzu	满族	Manchu nationality
mei banfa	没办法	cannot do anything about (it)
Mengzu	蒙族	Mongolian nationality
minzu	民族	nationality, ethnicity, people
minzu fengge	民族风格	national style
minzu kopian heji	民族卡片合集	nationality card collections
Minzu Wenhua Gong	民族文化宫	Nationalities Cultural Palace
pengyou nihao	朋友你好	friend, hello
Qingchunji	青春祭	Sacrificed Youth
seqing	色情	pornographic
Shengtang (fandian)	盛唐 (饭店)	Flourishing Tang (Hotel)
Shijie renmin gongren tuanjie	世界人民工人团结 团	"Working Peoples of the World Unite!"
suibian	随便	loose(r) / casual

Tiananmen	天安门	the Gate of Heavenly Peace
Wuzibiekezu	乌孜别克族	Uzbek nationality
Wazu	佯族	Wa (Va) nationality
wenhua zhan	文化站	cultural stations
wuzu gonghe	五族共和	Five Peoples Policy (lit. unified five nationalities)
xingaide <i>or</i> xinggan	性爱的 性感	erotic, sexual
Xingfengsu	性风俗	Sexual Customs
Yunnan huapai	云南画派	Yunnan School (of painting or art)
Zangzu	藏族	Tibetan nationality
Zhongguo ren	中国人	Chinese
Zhongguo renmin gongheguo wansui	中国人民工和国万岁	"Long Live the Chinese People's Republic"
Zhuangzu	壮族	Zhuang nationality

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